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Making Home

**Domestic Rituals and Forms of Dwelling
at the Turn of the 21st Century**

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Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at IUAV University of Venice, International Doctoral Programme Villard de Honnecourt in Architecture, Theory and Design.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my doctoral supervisors Giovanni Corbellini and Pippo Ciorra, whose thoughtful criticism and intellectual demands never ceased to challenge my assumptions. I am particularly thankful to my co-supervisor Stavros Kousoulas, for his unwavering support and encouragement which endure since long before the start of this journey. Thank you for the invaluable time dedicated to dialogues and reflections that have been a great source of inspiration.

A sincere thank you goes to all my colleagues at ETH and IUAV, for all their insights and the challenging conversations. To all the friends with whom I have shared a home and a piece of life, and who keep supporting me whether far or close. A special thanks goes to Eleonora, for her unshaken patience and kindness which have accompanied me in these last three years, and to Federico, for being the best ally, critic and adviser I could ever wish for.

I dedicate this work to my grandfather, Augusto, who is enduring the great challenge of living collectively at an elderly age after a lifetime of married isolation.

To my grandmother, Paola, in the hope she has found a new home.

To my sister, Caterina, who has just started looking for hers.

And to my parents, Enrico and Elisabetta, who have always been mine.



0.1 Dinner scene from Tim Burton's movie *Edward Scissorhands*, 1991.

Abstract

Drawing from different interdisciplinary vantage points, the thesis aims to retrace the complex evolution of domestic spaces, specifically looking at how different ways of living translate into architecture. The ritualisation of everyday life, while being an essential object of analysis in anthropological and archaeological studies, seems to elude the current architectural discussion on home. Yet, rituals, habits and cycles have always played a crucial role in shaping the way houses are inhabited, domestic hierarchies are formed, and spaces are designed.

Especially today, urban living is confronted with persistent conditions of uncertainty, scarcity and contingency, which translate in the continuous fluctuation of groups of coexistence and of domestic relations of cohabitation. In this context, domestic rituals offer a method of measuring time and space, defining a framework to establish relationships with other human beings in the attempt to form communities and societies.

Moving across different temporal and geographical contexts, the research examines the evolution of rituals and cycles and their respective spatial responses in the attempt to frame their influence on the domestic environment. The inquiry critically assesses built and unbuilt projects, uncovering what legacies of thought endure today, what are the new emerging habits, and what is their significance in the evolution of contemporary forms of urban dwelling.

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Introduction

Introduction

Object and aim of the thesis

“We should therefore have to say how we inhabit our vital space, in accord with all the dialectics of life, how we take root, day after day, in a ‘corner of the world.’ For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word.”¹

With these words from the first chapter of *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard identifies two of the most important questions related to the concept of human habitation: “to take root, day after day,” to occupy time, and to layout time in a controllable way, to occupy space. This duality of meaning, which permeates the processes of making a house a home, holds particular importance within the architectural discipline, as it addresses the essential correlation between the form of dwellings and the practice of inhabiting them. In all societies, the domestic realm — the design of the spaces which compose it, their organisation, as well as the disposition of furniture and objects — is deeply intertwined with a set of social norms, hierarchies and rules, which define social relationships and terms of use. While allowing the performance of ordinary activities of sustenance, homes reflect personal and socio-cultural values, familiar and non-familiar configurations, interpersonal and environmental relationships, embedding them in the spatial layout. As argued by social psychologist Irwin Altman, “These relationships have histories and futures as well as a present, they involve change and stability, recurrence, and rhythm.”² In this sense, home does not merely refer to a space, but also to a structure in time, materialised in the recurrent repetition of activities and in the succession of cycles. Drawing from different interdisciplinary vantage points, the thesis analyses the evolution of domestic spaces in relation to rituals and habits. In doing this, I propose to look at ordinary, often neglected, everyday practices as fundamentally architectural and technological endeavours, which come together to define a spatial ethos, or what Anthony Giddens calls a “temporal geography of the home.” Here, the significance of different spaces emerges from the combination of data relating to time of

¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 44.

² Irwin Altman and Carol M. Werner, eds., *Home Environments* (New York: Springer, 1985), 6.

use, type of activity undertaken, objects employed, and identities of the people involved.³ The ritualisation of everyday life, while a crucial object of study in anthropology and archaeology, seems to elude the current architectural discussion on home, rather focused on matters of spatial and economic efficiency. Yet, rituals, habits and cycles have always played an essential role in shaping the way houses are inhabited, domestic hierarchies are formed, and spaces are designed. Here, the concept of ritual holds a fundamental significance: at the centre of numerous scholarly discussions, its meaning often revolves around a precise, and, one might argue, limited notion of ritual, addressing it as something separated from daily life and mainly concerned with religious practices and beliefs.⁴ However, as claimed by anthropologist Bradd Shore and historian Richard Bradley, between others, there exists another kind of ritual, that is not the grandiose public spectacle linked to religious or civic traditions, but the very way in which humans mark the cycle of the day, of the month, the so called rites of passage, and the way in which individuals engage with each other.⁵ In this sense, ritual is addressed as a practice which takes place following a repetitive pattern in a specific temporal and spatial situation, and extends from the private to the public sphere, from the individual to the collective. Differently from routines, which Shore defines as “behaviour in autopilot,”⁶ the term ritual is used when there is an additional layer of meaning which can be associated with the actions performed: rituals have a value and a resonance in life patterns, they cannot be reduced to mere practices of sustenance. Similarly, the word “habit,” despite its meaning in contemporary language might be misleading, comes from the Latin *habitus*, which indicated a piece of clothing, but also a manner of conducting oneself, a way of living and being. Habit, in its original sense, could be used interchangeably with *ethos* to symbolise the ensemble of diverse ritual practices giving shape to a specific form of life. In this context, the study of rituals and habits, their evolution and perpetuation within the home, represent the starting point to interpret the transformation of domestic frameworks in relation to current cultural, social and economic conditions.

Framework and methodology

Today, urban living in the Western world is confronted with persistent conditions of uncertainty, scarcity and contingency, which translate in the continuous fluctuation of groups of coexistence and domestic relations of cohabitation.⁷ Over the past decades, we have witnessed profound changes to our ways of living. The development of new technologies has altered the relation between work and leisure, while the

³ Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 118-19, 132-3.

⁴ Richard Bradley, “A Life Less Ordinary: the Ritualization of the Domestic Sphere in Later Prehistoric Europe,” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2003): 5-23, 12.

⁵ Bradd Shore, *The Hidden Powers of Ritual: The Journey of a Lifetime* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2023). Together with Shore and Bradley, several other scholars expand on the analysis of secular rituals, those that have been particularly relevant for this research are mentioned here. Peter Blundell Jones, *Architecture and Ritual: How Buildings Shape Society* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016); Ronald L. Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Spiro Kostof, *A History of Architecture. Settings and Rituals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Irwin Altman and Carol M. Werner, eds., *Home Environments: Human Behavior and Environment*, vol. 8 (New York: Plenum Press, 1985); Kari Jormakka, *Heimlich Manouvers: Ritual in Architectural Form* (Weimar: Verso, 1995); Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory and Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁶ The word routine comes from the old French *rute*, “road” (from Latin *rupta (via)*, meaning a way, a passage opened by force), and it is not until the 18th century that it is used to indicate the sequential and, to a certain extent, mechanical performance of duties or actions.

⁷ David Hernández Falagán, “Review of Design of Collective Housing in the 21st Century,” *Buildings*, vol. 11, no. 4 (2021).

current housing crisis, the evolution of family structures and of gender roles, the rising cost of living, mass migration and the growing elderly population have prompted questions related to sustainability, privacy and coexistence. A renewed interest in communal living, based on ideas of resource sharing and mutual support, is at the centre of the architectural discourse, encouraging us to re-frame our basic assumptions on what housing is and what it should be able to provide. While it is clear that the research addresses what we could call the “middle class,” the systematic uncertainty permeating the liberal market, particularly concerning the generations that followed the 2008 economic crisis, has expanded the concept of “middle” to include more or less wealthy people alike, people of different ages and with different backgrounds, making it ever more difficult to provide an exhaustive definition. If, on one side, this might seem confusing, on the other, it liberates the research from the necessity of categorisation, overall highlighting the obsolescence of canonical definitions when analysing matters related to the contemporary housing situation. While it is certainly impossible to compare and contrast without taking into account the relative socio-political and cultural backgrounds, the present condition encourages us to put side by side distant and sometimes contradicting objects, in the attempt to unveil unexpected similarities and draw unforeseen paths which could enrich the current discussion with new perspectives. In this sense, while the research is situated in the middle of two socio-economic extremes, it willingly claims that this middle concerns a very large and varied part of the population currently inhabiting cities, which, for various reasons, and during different life stages, converge in certain communal forms of dwelling, whether social or collective, whether state assigned or cooperatively owned.

These new models of habitation are being tested in different countries as alternatives to conventional apartments — mainly built following the codes of the traditional nuclear family — proposing re-envisioned social, economic and domestic structures.⁸ In order to limit the scope and extension of the research, the focus is mainly on Europe: here, cultural contamination has greatly influenced the evolution of housing models, while globalisation has contributed to generate a shared understanding of the urban realm. Clearly, certain cases, such as Switzerland, Austria or Germany, present a richer history of collective living, rooted in past experimentations and supported by current economic frameworks. However, since the end of the 20th century, many projects addressing the same issues and sharing similar aims are being built across the entire continent. Japan and the USA are also included in the study, even if just as points of reference. Japan has, since always,

⁸ Already before the rise of the pandemic, domestic programs and hierarchies were put under severe re-evaluation, revealing the rigidity and obsolescence of standardized housing production. Countless exhibitions have addressed these issues, such as the recent Venice Biennale of 2021 *How will we live together?*, the Seoul Biennale of 2019 titled *Collective City*, and the Lisbon Architecture Triennale of 2010 *Let's Talk About Houses*, to mention a few. The same intensity was dedicated to the study of historic examples of collective living, and numerous books have been published on the subject: *A History of Collective Living* by Susanne Schmid (2019), *Dogma's Loveless* (2019), and *Together! The New Architecture of the Collective*, edited by Mateo Kries (2017). Alongside these examples, other scholars have been mapping emerging alternative modes of living, while rethinking the very meaning of home: *ReHab: Living, Inhabitants, Houses*, edited by Fabrizio Paone and Angelo Sampieri (2022), Jack Self's *Home Economics: New Models of Domestic Life* (2016), and *In-forme Habitare* edited by Blanca Lleó (2006), between others. It is interesting to point out that many of these works, both in the form of written speculations or exhibitions, dwell on the theme of housing specifically focusing on the practices that constitute domestic living, highlighting how the diversity of these practices and the plurality of possible answers is what could enrich the ongoing discussion.

greatly inspired the development of alternative forms of living, as the ritual organisation of collective life is beautifully expressed in the architecture of the traditional Japanese house. Furthermore, urban overcrowding in Japanese metropolises at the turn of the 20th century has spurred the development of new housing forms which challenge Western concepts of privacy and private property, and which is therefore paramount to consider. Similarly, experimentation in the USA, especially in Modern times, has heavily influenced the European discourse; typologies such as that of the residential hotel are of great relevance when addressing the relation between architecture and ways of living, and were not unknown to architects and planners working overseas.

Moving across different temporal and geographical contexts, the research examines the evolution of rituals and cycles and their respective spatial responses in the attempt to frame their influence on the domestic project. This does not in any way attempt to be a history of domestic space, but rather an exploration into its multiple facets and meanings. In stressing the importance of long-term analysis, the aim is not to deny the relevance of context and difference, but rather highlight how, even spanning generations or crossing geographical boundaries, home builders have shared certain common approaches in the definition and design of domestic spaces. Critically assessing built and unbuilt projects pertaining to different time periods, the aim is to uncover what legacies of thought endure today, what are the new emerging habits and what is their significance in the evolution of contemporary forms of urban dwelling. The projects addressed do not represent an exhaustive survey but rather function as exemplary cases and anchor points in the construction of a discourse. A certain arbitrariness in the selection is justified by the vastness of the subject: many more cases could be construed as interesting, and only a fraction of the data I have collected is presented in the following pages. Yet, while attempting to construct compelling opposition, the cases under scrutiny contribute to compile a varied overview of the many ways in which ritual has come to influence, and in some cases define, domestic architecture, in ancient, Modern and contemporary times. In dealing with such variety, the tools used are mainly bibliographical, while the analysis of cases is developed through the observation and critical interpretation of design principles and outcomes. Through the redrawing of plans and sections, while attempting to reconstruct the practices of habitation unfolding within, the enquiry follows a contemporary archaeological methodology, combining external sources of contextual observation with the personal analysis of architectural forms.⁹ The relationship between in-

⁹ This approach refers to the methodology employed by anthropologists Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas in their experimental study "The Archaeology of Alienation: A Late Twentieth-Century British Council House," carried out in 1997, where they analysed the remnants of a recently abandoned British council house. While drawing from secondary sources to gather contextual information, conclusions are drawn mainly from the remains of material culture. See Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas, "The Archaeology of Alienation: A Late Twentieth-Century British Council House," *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past*, ed. Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas (London: Routledge, 2001), 156-68.

dividuals and household, the rituals that are formed to structure a collective way of living, and the role of architecture in acting as mediator, constitute the object of this study.

Structure

The research develops intersecting spatial and temporal axis, classifying different types of rituals in relation to their repetition in time, and paying particular attention to the moments of threshold these establish between private and collective life. Chapters are organised following this temporal scansion, each of them addressing rituals performed daily, weekly, seasonally, or across an entire life. The aim is not that of categorisation, rather, within chapters the discourse advances through correspondences and juxtapositions, inviting the reader to trace connections throughout the whole. The core hypothesis of the thesis — that ritual lays at the root of the domestic project — recurs in each chapter following different perspective themes, deliberately dismissing questions of authorship and the conventional understanding of certain projects, in the attempt to position the analysis within an autonomous field of enquiry.

The first chapter deals with daily rituals. While countless actions are performed on a daily basis, the research engages with the practices that define the ways of sleeping, eating, leaving and returning home, and with those related to personal hygiene. Despite being necessary for the sustenance of everyday life, the formalisation and performance of such apparently trivial affairs holds great significance in the way different models of cohabitation are formed or dismantled. Spatially, the focus is on the domestic spaces that host these activities: here, in particular, the negotiation taking place between closure (private) and openness (common) is fundamental to allow the concept of “domestic” to expand outside the individual or familiar sphere. Opening with an introduction on the meaning of “everyday,” drawing from Lefebvre and Teyssot, where the body is investigated as a tool for establishing boundaries through rhythm and measure, the enquiry develops analysing historical and contemporary examples. Starting at the edge, the study looks at corridors, staircases, doors and entrances, as eternally “in between” spaces. In these thresholds, the negotiation between the self and the other is materialised, as the crossing is always accompanied by a set of ritual acts and symbolic gestures which define the nature of the socio-spatial interaction. The second part, *Mealtime*, looks at the ways of making and sharing food. In trying to chart a development of the social ritual of dining, the study goes from Henry Roberts’ Model Houses

for Families, or the Astor Hotel in New York, to contemporary examples such as MAIO's 110 rooms, or Delhay's 87 cuisines, analysing how different hierarchies and roles have altered the arrangement and location of kitchen and dining room within the home. The third part, *Bedtime*, considers how different configurations of sleeping — collectively, alone, or as a couple — have been paramount to the definition of the bedroom and its related uses. The act of sleeping, as well as the place of sleeping, are rarely addressed in conventional housing architecture: the bedroom is seen as a given data, making it one of the few rooms within the household that seem to endure in its 19th century form despite the changing habits of dwellers. Looking at projects that challenge this conception, the research highlights how changing domestic configurations are transforming the bedroom into a flexible space, capable to appear and disappear following necessity. The chapter concludes investigating how the ways of cleaning one's own body have evolved following the emergence of modern ideas of decency, turning the bathroom from a simple wooden closet into one of the most intimate and secluded rooms of the house. This last part journeys through projects such as Pierre Chareau's *Maison de Verre*, Yves Lion's *Domus Demain*, and more recent Japanese examples from Kazuyo Sejima and Riken Yamamoto, which, more than their European counterparts, are questioning the bathroom's boundaries.

The second chapter looks at the week not only as a way to organise time but also as a social construction. Differently from the day, the month and the year, which respond to the natural cycles suggested by the movement of sun and moon, the week is an artificial creation. The introduction of the seven-day cycle has a long and multifaceted history, but even before that, the opposition between work and rest days was at the base of the organisation of the week. Starting from a historical introduction illustrating the evolution of the week from taboo and market days, to the Jewish and planetary week, the research develops investigating the establishment of the weekend and its related activities, and how these influenced the transformation and invention of certain domestic spaces. The chapter treats three specific weekly activities: gardening, recreational hobbies and laundry. Some of these can be interpreted also as utilitarian practices, and not necessarily pleasurable, but it will be clear how, also thanks to technological advancement, they have come to imply not only enjoyable pastimes but also a certain ritualistic conviviality. The garden is studied as a place of recreation, from the allotment movement to the contemporary domestic garden which is proliferating in collective housing projects. Existing in opposition

to linear time, gardens and gardening remind us of the importance of cycles, allowing the implementation and experience of a different rhythm than the one established by conventional working hours. The domestic garden is conceived as a collective refuge and an occasion for building community. The second part looks at those activities related to DIY and recreation which, especially from after the Second World War, gain more importance within the home — the introduction of the rec-room as a space divided from the main household is emblematic of such a phenomena. From the garage to the contemporary workshop, the study follows the evolution of recreation spaces in relation to different rituals. The last part, laundry, addresses the collectivisation of cleaning facilities, such as washing and drying machines, which is often sought in collective housing, analysing how this has generated the possibility to connect domestic labour with conviviality. Here, attention is given to those spaces and practices that bring laundry back to its pre-modern configuration, when it was perceived both as a duty and as a fundamental social ritual.

The third chapter starts with an analysis of the ways in which seasonal cycles have been appropriated and translated into codified systems in different cultures. While technological development has allowed us to live disregarding natural cycles, seasons continue to influence social and cultural life around the world. Attempting to retrace the presence of seasons within the home, the research considers three seasonal activities which present a set of tangible spatial implications: the migration within the home following temperature variations, the storage of goods related to seasonal necessity, and the migration from one home to another in accordance with the holiday season. Through this analysis, the aim is to study how architecture responds to the physical and cultural limitations imposed by seasonal variations, a theme that is gaining renewed attention within the discipline. The first part looks at how, before the onset of modern comfort, domestic layouts were conceived in relation to temperature, sun and wind. Starting from Vitruvius and Palladio's treatises, and from built examples such as Robert Smythson's Hardwick Hall, the research moves to the contemporary experiments of Lacaton & Vassal, Philippe Rahm and TAKK architects, analysing the impact of seasonal rituals on the design of domestic spaces. Storage, the second part, is concerned with all the processes of storing goods and resources that take place within our homes. The research examines the evolution of storage furniture from mobile to built-in cabinets, following the transformation in the ways of conceiving personal possessions and inhabiting the home. In the rise of the

current fever of accumulation, the study then considers those examples where storing becomes a ritualised practice, and storage an active part of the house, such as in the Smithson's Put-Away House, or Jack Self's experimental apartment unit, where storage is conceived as a social act. The last part looks at how the holiday season has contributed to the establishment of a specific culture of *villeggiatura*. Analysing the diverse typologies that, through time, were invented to accommodate such habit, the enquiry spans from the worker's cottage to the master's villa, ending with boarding houses and holiday retreats. In conclusion, the research looks at the spread of "cellular" designs which cater to the middle class of vacationers who cannot afford villas but still aspire to the individualisation of the holiday experience.

The fourth and last chapter deals with the so called rites of passage — particularly those relating with growing up, being ill and growing old — examining how they influence the ways in which homes are conceived and inhabited throughout the life cycle. As claimed by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, who pioneered the study of such rites, the passage is intended not just as a figurative but also as a physical movement, which takes place in a specific threshold or space. This is the case of the children's room, the adolescent's room, the room for the sick, or that for the dying. Each of these rooms represents a different life stage and is planned and furnished accordingly. From the cradle to the room and from the room to the house, the first part follows the evolution of childhood and adolescence within the home. Drawing from Modern and contemporary examples, the research analyses how the occupation and appropriation of a room of one's own, a dislocated room, or a joker room, represents a process of transition and self-affirmation through which young adults establish their place in society. The second part studies how illness, or rather the attempt to get rid of it, has influenced the production of architectural form. The emergence of modern ideas on hygiene, as well as the efforts for the containment of infectious diseases, have transformed the organisation of dwellings and cities during the long 19th century. The research addresses the rituality related to the treatment and confinement of the sick in the home, from the Victorian sick room, to the questions generated by the recent SARS epidemic. In the last part, an attempt is made to consider those processes of decay related to growing old which still have an important influence on the use and configuration of domestic spaces. Addressing the ways in which obsolete concepts of ageing are dismantled in contemporary society, the research approaches the idea of care as a ritualised behaviour, reflecting on how it affects care givers, care receivers

and the community around them.

Without the aim of tracing a chronological evolution, the research looks at those spatial inventions that, today and through time, allowed certain domestic spaces to be continuously redefined, accommodating, supporting, constraining, or dictating the modes of coexistence of different bodies and their relations of proximity.

Daily

Chapter I

Daily

1.1 Everyday

The “everyday” is not an abstract concept. Every day, a series of actions are performed within the walls of our homes: we cook, we eat, we take a shower, we clean, we sleep, we sit on the sofa, we speak with our neighbours. The traces of our daily activities, together with the structure of familial relations, hierarchies and contradictions, are embedded in the floor plans of the traditional household: a room for sleeping, a room for eating, a room for cleansing, a room for being together, doors for separating, windows to look outside. Yet, as opposed to the rigidity of the architectural layout, everydayness is mutable and transitory: on the one side regulated by the inexorable progressing of linear time, on the other constantly renewed by its cyclical nature; simultaneously monotonous and playful. This dialectical approach to everyday life was strongly supported by Henri Lefebvre, whose thought is permeated by the belief that everyday life cannot be restricted, nor defined, by bureaucratic systematisation, being, instead, the very locus of potential transformation:

“The everyday is situated at the intersection of two modes of repetition: the cyclical, which dominates in nature, and the linear, which dominates in processes known as ‘rational.’ The everyday implies on the one hand cycles, nights and days, seasons and harvests, activity and rest, hunger and satisfaction, desire and its fulfilment, life and death, and it implies on the other hand the repetitive gestures of work and consumption. In modern life, the repetitive gestures tend to mask and to crush the cycles. The everyday imposes its monotony. It is the invariable constant of the variations it envelops. The days follow one after another and resemble one another, and yet — here lies the contradiction at the heart of everydayness — everything changes.”¹⁰

While his theories must be read in close consideration of the French political and social context of the time, Lefebvre’s *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947, 1961, 1981), as well as *The Everyday and Everydayness* (1972), offer a poignant analysis of the quotidian, its relevance

¹⁰ Henri Lefebvre, “The Everyday and Everydayness,” trans. Christine Levich with the editors of Yale French Studies, in *Architecture of the Everyday*, ed. Steven Harris and Deborah Berke (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), 32-38, 36. The essay originally appeared as “Quotidien et Quotidienneté,” in *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, vol. 13, ed. Claude Grégory (Paris: Encyclopaedia Universalis, 1972).

in the political life of the individual and in the definition of domestic spaces and structures, which is still of great significance nowadays.¹¹ Lefebvre speaks of a world of objects where the relation between form and function is always declared: “visible and readable, announced and displayed,”¹² the Modern object always wants to state what it is and what is its role and place. In this context, he defines the everyday as “the most general of products in an era where production engenders consumption, and where consumption is manipulated by producers. (...) the everyday constitutes the platform upon which the bureaucratic society of controlled consumerism is erected.”¹³ On the other hand, Lefebvre refers to the Premodern everyday as regulated by scarcity: the scarcity of means, of resources, was precisely what allowed the everyday to be permeated by symbols, meanings, references. But if on one side the everyday has collapsed in the planned opulence of Modernity, on the other it comes back as a necessary construct in a world increasingly menaced by the possibility of exhaustion.¹⁴ In this sense, the Modern tendency to encompass every aspect of daily life devoting it to consumption is countered by the belief that “everyday life cannot be contained by bureaucratic regimentation, that it harbours the desire that generates transformation. Nature, love, simple domestic pleasures, celebrations, and holidays all erode any prospect of total, static systematization.”¹⁵ The role of built space is only apparently that of anonymity: linking once again architectural discourse to direct experience, buildings become potential sites for direct experimentation.

Quoting historian Mary McLeod in her analysis of Lefebvre’s critique of everyday life:

“Architecture’s ‘star system’ validates novelty and arrogance (...) at the expense of what Lefebvre saw as the initial value of modernity: its relentless questioning of social life. In this context, Lefebvre’s desire to ground philosophy and culture in the everyday — in the ethics of ordinary choices — offers an important check to the deracinated rhetoric and mystical claims that continue to be propagated by the neoavant-garde. His critique of everyday life reveals a world of conflicts, tensions, cracks, and fissures — a shifting ground that continually opens to new potentials — and at the same time it presents a historical picture that posits distinctions, hierarchies, and causality in a commitment to political agency and action.”¹⁶

It is specifically to this world of conflicts that the gaze is turning to nowadays, celebrating rather than rejecting the trivialities and banalities that constitute domestic everyday life. As mentioned by historian

¹¹ In “Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism” (1967), Edward P. Thompson argues that industrialisation in the 19th century brought about a new way of understanding and measuring time in relation to production (labour) and everyday life. In his essay, he highlights how pre-industrial work was governed by seasonal rhythms, aiming at an integration between work and life, to which he juxtaposes the time of machines, an abstract, man-made system (the “rule of the clock”) which relies on linear rather than cyclical repetition. This interpretation offers an insight to a better understanding of the process of rationalisation that transformed the nature of domestic tasks and spaces in the Modern world. See Edward P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past & Present*, no. 38 (1967): 56-97.

¹² Henri Lefebvre, “The Everyday and Everydayness,” 33.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁴ McLeod notes that while being elusive to a certain extent, Lefebvre’s concept of everyday life refers to the “real life,” the “here and now,” and identifies with “sustenance, clothing, furniture, homes, neighbourhoods, environment.” The material life, but with a “dramatic attitude” and “lyrical tone.” See Mary McLeod, “Henri Lefebvre’s Critique of Everyday Life: An Introduction,” in *Architecture of the Everyday*, ed. Steven Harris and Deborah Berke, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), 9-29, 13. See also Henri Lefebvre, *La Vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968); *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, trans. Sacha Rabinovitch (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 21-22.

¹⁵ Mary McLeod, “Henri Lefebvre’s Critique of Everyday Life: An Introduction,” 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

George Teyssot in *A Topology of Everyday Constellations*, next to the undeniable increase of individualism, sociologists have been studying the emergence of “novel types of attraction and binding that can coagulate groups while crossing old barriers,”¹⁷ a phenomenon which Teyssot refers to as “neotribalism,” clearly connecting with Lefebvre’s understanding of the Premodern everyday as juxtaposed to that of Modern times. The merging of new forms of subjectivity with what Teyssot refers to as a “fluid kind of sociability”¹⁸ might lead to a further stratification of everyday life, a comeback of symbols and references reintroduced to give meaning to the complexity of interpersonal relationships, with the other, with non-human entities and with the meta-physical. Therefore, to study current housing architecture in relation to everyday practices means, first and foremost, to acknowledge how the use of certain domestic spaces changes following the different configuration of users and their movements within the house throughout the day. Contemporary domestic spaces evade programmatic standardisation. Notwithstanding the impossibility to outline one single model of everyday living, certain necessities are emerging as recurrent in the context of today’s discussion on housing: the possibility of being together and alone, the capacity of the house to adapt to the changes in the household composition over time (shrink or grow according to necessity), and the provision of spaces which can allow the maximum variation of possible uses, especially within the context of increasingly small habitable surfaces.

¹⁷ Georges Teyssot, *A Topology of Everyday Constellations* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 284.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ The field of architecture and planning was permeated by a shared feeling of disillusionment towards the theories of the CIAM and Modern development (particularly encouraged by the “Townscape” movement), while Post-Modernism and Pop Culture were on the rise thanks to the work of architects such as Aldo Rossi (*L’Architettura della Città*, 1966) and Robert Venturi (*Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 1966, and *Learning from Las Vegas*, 1972).

²⁰ Paul Barker, “Thinking the Unthinkable,” in *Non-Plan: Essay on Freedom Participation and Change in Modern Architecture and Urbanism*, ed. Jonathan Hughes and Simon Sadler (New York: Routledge Architectural Press, 2000), 2.

These questions are certainly not new to the discipline, and it is especially from the 1960s that the idea of “undetermined” becomes the object of study of several academics and professionals.¹⁹ Amongst the varied forms of criticism and the multiplicity of experimental proposals which emerged during these years, such as Rowe’s Collage City, Constant’s New Babylon and Friedman’s Ville Spatiale, one publication, in particular, well summarises the preoccupations of the time: written as a collaborative article by Cedric Price, Reyner Banham, journalist and deputy editor Paul Barker and urban geographer Peter Hall, *Non-Plan: an Experiment in Freedom* came out in 1969 on *New Society*, a magazine of “social inquiry”²⁰ founded in 1962 with the aim of assessing the current social, political and cultural situation in the UK. In 1967, Barker and Hall shared the general sentiment of discontent towards Modern urban planning methods and systems that had been implemented from the 1950s, when the Welfare State was dictating much of the design requirements and constraints, and sought to find a new freedom in architectural practice and to understand how



1.1 Cedric Price, *24 hour Living Toy*, published in *Architectural Design*, no. 1/71 (1971): 28-29.

this could reflect on the everyday life of people:

“Between us, Peter Hall and I floated this maverick thought: could things be any worse if there was no planning at all? They might even be somewhat better. We were especially concerned at the attempt to impose aesthetic choices on people who might have very different choices of their own. Why not, we wondered, suggest an experiment in getting along without planning and seeing what emerged? We called it ‘Non-Plan’.”²¹

Fittingly, the subtitle of the article stated that while the discipline of town and country planning were gaining much recognition, very few between the approaches and procedures had any sound basis. “Why not have the courage, where practical, to let people shape their own environment?”²² In the attempt to present an alternative to current UK planning legislation, which was identified with an obsolete bourgeois culture, the Non-Planners looked at the theories of neoliberal thinker Friedrich Hayek, who claimed that “social planning for given outcomes (...) was insufficiently flexible to deal with the myriad needs and desires of a large population,”²³ and developed the same questions in relation to the physical planning of urban and domestic environments. However, rather than with Neoliberalist policies and planning deregulation, Non-Planners were mostly engaged in the effort of rethinking architectural practice in relation to participation, performance, protest, sharing with the International Situationists the desire of working with indeterminacy as opposed to the rational planning mechanisms of the modern city, calling for the return of a certain urban unpredictability. At the time, Reyner Banham was academically involved at the Bartlett School of Architecture, while Cedric Price had recently ultimaded his projects for the *Fun Palace* and the *Potteries Thinkbelt*. It is especially in the work of Price that one can see how the theories of Non-Plan evolved into a genuine work philosophy, which will deeply influence Price’s ideas on housing and domestic living.

Price was between the first architects to think of the everyday as something that could be designed. In his *Housing Research* (1967-71), the reader is constantly confronted with the idea that house and everyday life should be thought of as one, designed in synchrony, specifically taking into account how the former could accommodate, rather than limit, the flexibility of the latter. At the end of the 1960s, he would already be claiming that it was essential to confront new housing with the major changes in social patterning, related to increases in personal affluence, mobility and “free will.”²⁴ In 1971 Price published the *24*

²¹ Ibid., 4.

²² Reyner Banham, Paul Barker, Peter Hall and Cedric Price, “Non-Plan: An experiment in freedom,” *New Society*, vol. 13, no. 338 (1969): 435-443.

²³ Friedrich Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960). See also Friedrich Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973).

²⁴ Cedric Price, “A change is required in our current attitude to ‘Housing,’” *Architectural Design*, no. 37 (1967): 522.

hour Living Toy, a development of the *Steel House* competition entry (published in AD 11 67), which presented a possible design solution to “enable an increase in the frequency and particularisation of individuals personal servicing (urinating, making love, etc.) through a separation of necessary physical zoning through a 24h cycle.”²⁵ A series of plans show the evolution of eight different housing typologies at various times of the day (1:00 in the morning, 11:00, 18:00 and 22:00), highlighting how spaces respond to the changes in the household configuration: children coming back from school, parents cooking together, adults working at home and so on. The design is based on the interlocking of diverse shared activity areas, which contribute to enrich the occupants’ activity pattern over 24 hours, to allow alternative access routes and acoustic conditioning to provide a higher degree of privacy in certain zones, and to strengthen the fragmentation of cleansing services and the possibility of internal partitioning of the house into self-contained units. Opening the explanatory text to the project, Price claims that “The house is no longer acceptable as a pre-set ordering mechanism for family life,”²⁶ he denounces the rigidity of traditional domestic programming in relation to the ways of living of contemporary users, pointing out, as examples of frozen volume, the guest bedroom, empty most of the time, or the scullery, unused for most of the day. As opposed to that, he stresses the importance of architecture immediate cyclic performance, its capacity to respond to users’ need on a daily, hourly basis, in a context where “space has become a greater premium than hardware.”²⁷ In doing so, Price looks directly at inhabitants’ recurrent performances: he questions what are those daily activities that require a fixed technical space and what are those that migrate through the house; how can space offer occupants the chance to come together at certain times of the day, and be alone at certain others; what design, materials, technical equipment, allow the house to be able to change over time, making space for one more room or shrinking into a smaller unit. Dutch architect John Habraken well summarises the importance of this new temporal awareness:

“At the time [in the 1960s] we naturally realised that the idea of separating support and infill was actually the first introduction of the dimension of time in architectural thinking. (...) ‘Change’ is the key to grasping the essence of the built environment. By recognising changes as an essential characteristic of architecture, we were in fact acknowledging the significance of the dimension of time in the built environment.”²⁸

The question of change as related to the progressing of time perme-

²⁵ Cedric Price, “24 hour Living Toy,” *Architectural Design*, no. 1:71 (1971): 28-29.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁸ Klaske Havik and Hans Teerds, “Define and Let Go: An Interview with John Habraken,” in *OASE 85 – Productive Uncertainty: Indeterminacy in Spatial Design, Planning and Management*, ed. Hans Teerds, Klaske Havik, Véronique Patteeuw (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2011), 8-16.

ates the entirety of Price's work, to the point that Juan Herreros (at the time Iñaki Ábalos' partner) — commissioned to curate an exhibition on Cedric Price in 2000 — presented it with the title *An Architecture of Calculated Uncertainty*. What is interesting nowadays in Price's housing research is not flexibility per se, but the idea that the everyday can become an object of study, that there are certain recurrent domestic rituals (recalling Lefebvre's cyclical measurement of time), whose form changes in respect to cultural and social context. These rituals influence how the house is constructed, hierarchised, privatised, and, most importantly, can offer ground for experimentation in the process of making the domestic realm surpass the idea of familiar domesticity that has been predominant during the most part of the 19th and 20th century but that does not respond anymore to the demographic and social developments of Western societies.

Performative space

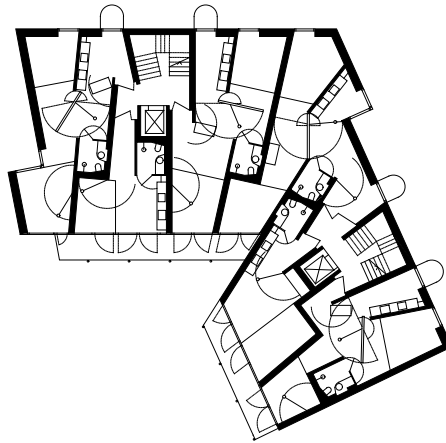
Price's designs for a "calculated uncertainty" find their resonance within the current architectural discourse on housing: while the idea of home multiplies and changes form, it is imperative to reconsider what its architecture is made of, to abandon the search for formal uniqueness and to look at the unfolding of everyday life as the most trivial and yet most inspiring source for reinterpreting and redefining domestic space. In 1967 John Barr wrote on *New Society* that "Cedric Price (...) thinks that there is too much emphasis on caravans as an answer to the housing problem; 'it should be the housing potential'."²⁹ The question of "housing potential" seems to be once again a pivotal one: how to accommodate domestic patterns of cyclical renovation into contemporary housing design? EMI's apartment building in Stampfenbachstrasse (2022, Zurich), develops the concept of performative space: "Much like a gown, it wraps around the human body, can be opened and closed, and offers various 'pockets' and spaces to store miscellaneous household belongings."³⁰ In a small scale complex of apartments, the Swiss office, composed of Ron Edelaar, Elli Mosayebi and Christian Inderbitzin, proposes a series of living spaces that seek to operate "beyond a 'downsized' family apartment and beyond an ordinary single-room loft."³¹

The identification of such spaces with a gown is paramount to understand the relation of performative architecture with the concept of everyday life. Teyssot and Agamben draw the link between clothing and dwelling through the Latin word *habitus*: the term comes from the verb *habitare*, present active infinitive of *habito*, meaning dwelling, and it was used to indicate both a piece of clothing and a manner of

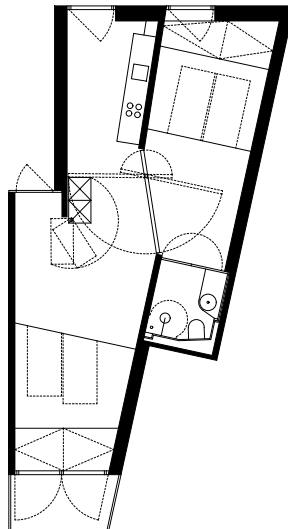
²⁹ John Barr, "Homes on Wheels," *New Society*, vol. 9, no. 228 (1967): 189-191.

³⁰ See the architects' website, www.emi-architekten.ch [accessed 29 December 2024].

³¹ *Ibid.*



2m



1m

1.2 EMI Architekt*innen AG, Wohnhaus Stampfenbachstrasse, Zürich (Switzerland), 2018-2022. Above: typical floor plan. Below: floor plan of an apartment unit.

conducting oneself. A way of clothing, being and living. As Teyssot explains, relating the interpretation of *habitus* to Bourdieu's structuralist theories, the term refers to the practices of everyday life, and it is, to a certain extent, improvisatory and unconscious, it defines the "dispositions that shape the actions, bodily behaviours, and experience associated with a particular social class or group."³² Following this definition, one's own "disposition" and way of dwelling are two faces of the same medal: "the act of habitation consists in grasping routines that help to organize life, and in rethinking and transposing customary modes of action in response to the need to adapt to unfamiliar circumstances."³³ To dwell is therefore compared to the act of dressing: clothes respond to the movements of the body, they are fitted to its measures and facilitate the performance of certain actions, as much as spaces do. In order to allow such performativity, the basic architectural elements of EMI's project have been rethought to become operable appliances: floor, ceiling, doors and walls take the place of furniture, supporting the possibility of daily transformations of domestic structures and hierarchies.

³² Georges Teyssot, *A Topology of Everyday Constellations*, 8.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Holl refers to those theories of design that are openly opposing the idea of flexibility, such as those of Dutch architect Herman Hertzberger, who thought the implementation of indeterminacy coincided with the annihilation of the thought of the architect, the negation of a clear and fixed position. "The flexible floor plan starts from the conviction that the correct solution does not exist, because the problem that requires a solution is in a permanent flowing state, that is, it is always temporary." In opposition to the "unplanned" house regulated only by the presence of an adaptable grid system, he proposes a series of small, equally sized, multi-purpose rooms, compartmentalising indeterminacy in a series of standardised spaces. See Herman Hertzberger, *Lessons for students in architecture* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2009), 146-49.

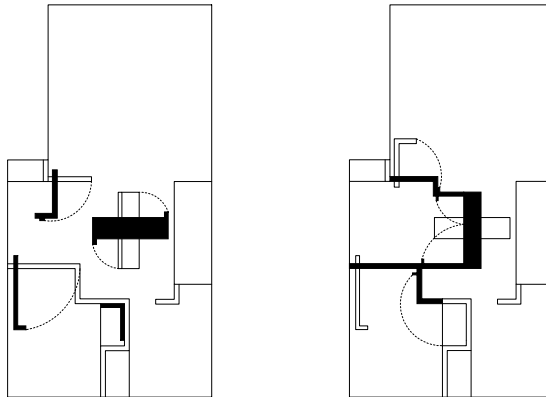
³⁵ Steven Holl, *Parallax* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000), 226.

³⁶ El Croquis Editorial, ed., *Steven Holl: 1986-2003* (Madrid: El Croquis), 80.

The design recalls Steven Holl's idea of "hinged space," a partitioning system based on the integration of fixed walls and hinged panels that can rotate on their vertical axis rearranging domestic space according to different uses:

"Beyond autonomous, room-by-room space is interactive space,³⁴ where 'participating walls' reorder domestic environments. Adjustable space comes alive, especially in the domestic spaces of Manhattan or Tokyo, where every square meter is a universe. Unlike the cumbersome 'moveable partition' system of the 1960s, participating walls are a hybrid of fixed and hinged walls. Space becomes dynamic and contingent."³⁵

The plan of XYZ apartment at MoMa Tower in New York (1985) well explains the concept: the drawing consists of a series of lines, arrows and dots, no traditional walls or windows can be recognised, the focus is on the movement, on the different possibilities of spatial variation that the hinged partitioning system can offer. In this way, Holl altered the perception of the created spaces, which change in relation to a change in the "parallax," explained as "the change in the arrangement of surfaces defining space due to the changed position of a viewer."³⁶ The attempt to be closer to the viewer, to the inhabitant, can be equally perceived in the plans of EMI's apartments: here, the variety of typological alternatives does not hinder the development



1m

1.3 Steven Holl, housing at Fukuoka (Japan), 1989-1991. Diagram of an apartment interior conceived as "hinged space." Redrawn from *El Croquis – Steven Holl 1986-1996*, no. 78 (1996).

of a precise technical system. One or two pivoting doors allow for the compartmentalization of spaces, usually dividing quiet areas from the communal core of the apartment, therefore introducing a gradient of privacy; a raised platform defines the boundaries of the bedroom and provides it with storage space; one movable cabinet, usually located next to entrance and the cooking block, functions as an additional element of partitioning. The possible configurations, as well as the opening and closing direction of storage spaces, are portrayed in plan through the use of dashed lines which superimpose as in a time-lapse of uninterrupted use. The idea of smallness here is of paramount importance: as in Holl's concept where every square meter is a universe, EMI plays with the current spatial limitations imposed to the design of domestic spaces and turns them into the starting point of the design. Price's "housing potential" is translated into a series of performative possibilities, which link spatial adaptation to the trivial unfolding of everyday rituals: the apartment opens up in the occasion of a communal lunch or dinner, it closes to provide quiet time, it splits in separate sections to accommodate the different rhythms of inhabitants. In the presentation website of the apartment dwelling, the plan is presented as a GIF drawing, where different elements (doors, cabinets, drawers, lamps) rotate, open and close, showing the extent of possible variations. Clicking on each element it is also possible to zoom in on the technical peculiarities of such a system: every movable object is represented with an axonometric drawing and accompanied by a text which explains its use and function.

It is clear how the exercise of accommodating the everyday into an architectural layout is not just an imaginative one, but also, and mostly, a technical one: performativity requires a certain degree of simplicity, as mentioned by the architect themselves, "new behavior is only accepted when the change is easy to implement (ability), it evokes positive emotions (motivation) and is prompted."³⁷ Aesthetic, which Teyssot defines as "shared emotions,"³⁸ and technology enter into an alliance. The proposed architecture is, before anything else, technological, it is operable and it can operate.

Daily conviviality

If, on the one hand, performativity introduces the dimension of time within architectural design, on the other, it serves to address aspects of conviviality. Joseph Bedford, in his essay concerning Robin Evans's never completed book titled *The Empty Room*, reports Evans' notes on his analysis of the evolution of domestic space from a convivial, almost "carnal," setting, to an extremely puritan one, obsessed by

³⁷ Elli Mosayebi, explaining her research on Performative Spaces carried out at ETH Zurich, quotes behavioral scientist Brian Jeffrey Fogg.

³⁸ Georges Teyssot, *A Topology of Everyday Constellations*, 284.



1.4 Jan Steen, *Fantasy Interior with Jan Steen and the Family of Gerrit Schouten*, ca. 1659-1660.

ideas of decency and privacy.³⁹ In the first chapter, Evans refers to Dirk Hals's painting *Woman Tearing up a Letter* (1631), which, in his view, masterfully portrays the indeterminacy of pre-modern domestic space; he goes on in the second chapter, *The Household Company*, quoting a passage taken from a letter by Denis Diderot to Sophie Volland (written in the second half of the 18th century), which offers an insight into how domesticity and conviviality would be typically experienced:

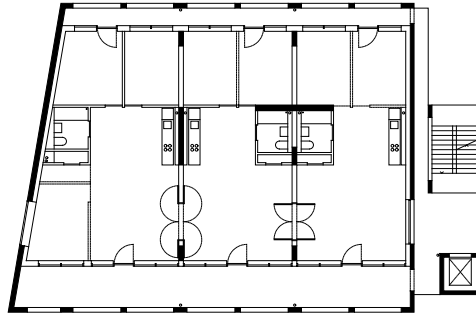
“We were all at that time in the gloomy and magnificent drawing room; at our various occupations, we made a very pretty picture. By the window which looks on to the gardens, Grimm was being painted and Madame d’Epinay was leaning on the back of the painter’s chair. Someone was sitting on a stool lower down and drawing his profile in pencil. It is a charming profile. Any woman would be tempted to see if it is a good likeness. Monsieur de Saint-Lambert was sitting in a corner reading the latest pamphlet which I sent you. I was playing chess with Madame d’Houdetot. Good old Madame d’Esclavelles, Madame d’Epinay’s mother, was sitting surrounded by all the children and talking with them and their tutors. Two sisters of the person who was painting my friend were doing embroidery, one in her hand, the other on a frame. And a third was trying a piece by Scarlatti on the harpsichord.”⁴⁰

Evans notes that sixteen people in total were together in the room, all performing different activities yet seemingly not disturbing one another. Today it seems that such a condition of togetherness in a domestic environment is only desirable if the possibility of solitary retirement is provided, and, most importantly, if the shift between the two can be implemented as easily as the pulling of a handle. Halfway between the convivial nature of the medieval hall and the extreme individualization of the Nakagin Capsule Tower, contemporary homes need to offer the possibility to be living in both conditions simultaneously.

Composed by a total of 12 flats arranged on four floors, *A House for Artists*, designed by the British office Apparata Architects and completed in 2021, attempts to address the formation and maintenance of community both at the urban and domestic level. Together with shared entrance patios and street facing studio spaces located at the ground floor, each floor is provided with a communal oversized terrace, which offers the possibility to extend the interior space. Yet, most relevant within this discourse, is the design of the second-floor plan: here, a set of sound insulated double doors, located in the party walls dividing the living rooms of the three apartments, allow for the creation of one large longitudinal space which can accommodate different activities

³⁹ Joseph Bedford, “Robin Evans’s Empty Room Collective Living in the 1970s and the Problem of Domestic Realism,” *Burning Farm* (2024).

⁴⁰ Denis Diderot, *Diderot’s letters to Sophie Volland*, trans. Peter France (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 55.



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1.5 Apparata Architects, A House
for Artists, London (UK), 2021.
Plan of the first floor.

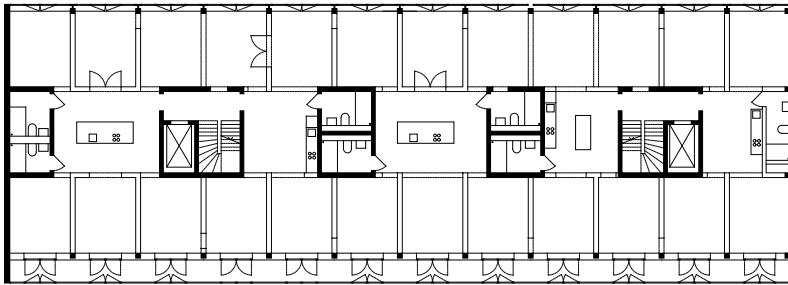
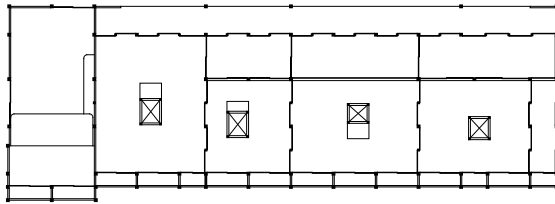
throughout the days. As in Price's *24 hour Living Toy*, the architects imagine different scenarios: two apartments can be linked from 15:30 to 18:00 on weekdays to allow shared childcare, or at needs be to allow for the performance of caring activities in the case of assisted living, or on weekends for the setting up of shared meals; a continuous room can be implemented for big shared dinner parties happening once a year, or daily to achieve one generous co-working space. The architecture becomes the backdrop that facilitates the performance of conviviality, while still providing enclosed individual spaces. The overall design also addresses the possible evolution of the building through its life span: the kitchen is composed of modular elements that can be easily dismantled and reassembled in a different location, services are routed through a raised floor therefore simplifying modifications, and additional partitions can be added to arrange for extra rooms.

⁴¹ Cedric Price, "The Industrial Designer," *Architectural Design*, no. 39:2 (1969): 61-62.

⁴² Andrew Rabeneck, David Sheppard, and Peter Town, "Housing Flexibility/Adaptability," *Architectural Design*, no. 2 (1974): 76-91. Rabeneck published two articles in AD magazine concerning housing flexibility, one in 1973, the other, mentioned above, in 1974. The piece in AD 1973 presents an extensive exposé of projects dealing with the topic. Located in different European countries and mostly coming from the period between 1950 and 1970 (with very few exceptions such as Rietveld's Schroeder House from 1924), they show different solutions for the construction of "the house of the future." Of particular interest is a Swedish project from an unknown architect, Tensta, a housing complex built near Stockholm which uses a partitioning system named "Boro," developed by a state subsidised company. An advertisement picture shows a traditional family, two parents and a child, building a new partition wall together, an image that was very much part of the company's campaign stressing the simplicity of the partitioning element, to the point that building and dismantling could become a "family activity." See Andrew Rabeneck, David Sheppard, and Peter Town, "Housing Flexibility?," *Architectural Design*, no. 11 (1973): 698-727.

A similar experiment has been carried out by Summacumfemmer, a German office based in Munich, who recently completed San Riemo cooperative housing (2020). The competition brief asked for the development of a "breathing house," where conventional apartment boundaries are rethought in favour of a flexible layout, which can shrink or expand according to necessity both in the long and in the short term. To achieve this, the office proposed the implementation of two rows of equally sized rooms (fourteen square meters), separated by a central spine of services which includes stair cores, bathrooms and kitchens. As in the project by Apparata, rooms can be linked longitudinally and transversally through single or double doors, or, in the long term, through the addition or removal of light partitions walls, allowing for the creation of great typological variation, and even the possibility of connecting the entire length of the floorplan. As for Price, the idea of "housing as a process" is inextricably linked to the specific understanding of time as a sequence of events, a succession of cycles. Rather than perceiving architecture as an "end product," efforts are directed towards the implementation of "life/performance and sequential operational capacities,"⁴⁴ of which the communal represents a crucial part.

Concepts of adaptability and flexibility in housing have been a peculiar product of industrialization: exploiting the rapid advancement of construction technology, architects were fascinated by the promise of endless movement offered by ships, aeroplanes, sleeping train cars, and proposed movable walls as a response to the rapid social changes they were experiencing.⁴² In *Elements of Architecture*, Koolhaas individuates in the birth of the American office cubicle the ultimate archetype of the temporary partition used in combination with the free plan,



2m

1.6 Above: Nasu house, Kyushu Island (Japan), 19th century.
 Below: Summacumfemmer, San Riemo, Munich (Germany), 2017. Typical floor plan.

the Modern way to provide employees individuality, to appropriate indeterminate space:

“At last it is in the office where the dream of the solid wall as modular accessory emerges and then runs aground. During the libidinal 1960s the United States’ high-tech capitalism yields up the ultimate device of light-weight en-closure: the office cubicle. Like many epoch-making design innovations, this one is conjured up by a progressive vision. (...) The cubicle claimed dignified private space for employees within the open sea of productivity.”⁴³

Yet, the technological fascination of the 60s and 70s, with its experiments on mechanization, the free plan and the movable wall, from the end of the 20th century was sided by a general concern about the efficiency of space, especially in increasingly overly densified urban settings, where life was supposed to take place in as little as thirty-two square meters.⁴⁴ This is the dimension of Gary’s Chang apartment in Hong Kong, which later became his well-known project titled *Domestic Transformer*, where he was born in 1962 and lived until 1987 with his parents, three younger sisters, and an additional unrelated person who was subletting a room. After his family moved out, he purchased the apartment which became a sort of personal playground for experimentation: five significant stages can be singled out, coded M-1976, M-1988, M-1989, M-1998, M-2007, and corresponding to Chang aged 14, 26, 27, 36 and 45. In 2007, fixed partitions were replaced with movable elements which allowed the implementation of twenty-four different rooms able to accommodate each a different activity, from social to intimate. It is not a surprise that, if initially this issue was mainly being addressed in mega cities such as Hong Kong and Tokyo, nowadays it is becoming an equally critical questions for Western countries.

European cities such as Paris, Milan, London, are faced with the same problematic imbalance between housing demand and the economic sustainability of living. It should not be surprising how easy it is to draw a connection between Chang’s *Domestic Transformer* and EMI’s performative apartment. But, if the issues addressed by these two projects are undoubtedly similar, other experiments such as Apparata’s *House for Artists* or Summacumfemmer’s San Riemo, prove that a new focus has secured its place alongside the quest for spatial efficiency, addressing the very way in which domestic life is carried out outside one’s own box: the formation of social relationships, the collaboration between inhabitants, the negotiation of privacy.

It is interesting to note, as mentioned by Andrew Rabeneck in the context of his research on housing flexibility and adaptability, that

⁴³ Rem Koolhaas, *Elements of Architecture* (Taschen, 2018), 3.

⁴⁴ A UN report from 2018 states that: “today, 55% of the world’s population lives in urban areas, a proportion that is expected to increase to 68% by 2050. Projections show that urbanization, the gradual shift in residence of the human population from rural to urban areas, combined with the overall growth of the world’s population could add another 2.5 billion people to urban areas by 2050.” Available at <https://www.un.org/uk/desa/68-world-population-projected-live-urban-areas-2050-says-un> [accessed 30 December 2024].

examples of traditional vernacular flexible housing in Western architectural tradition are extremely rare.⁴⁵ For cultural, climatic, and technical reasons it seems that the topic was not deeply explored before the 60s. This explains why Modern architects turned their gaze to the East when confronted with such questions, to the numerous examples present in domestic Japanese architecture and to the transient homes of nomadic communities. Rabeneck refers in particular to a Japanese construction dating back to the 19th century, located on Kyushu Island. The Nasu house, is composed of a series of multifunctional rooms and a kitchen divided by *fusuma* sliding doors sized between two and three meters and located in the central axis, which allow the house to be entirely opened or divided into four autonomous units. Each room can be accessed via an external outside space which leads into a sort of antechamber that can be connected or divided from the larger room, and is equipped, on the opposite side, with wall cabinets used to store beddings and possessions. As noted by Rabeneck, the flexibility of such a layout disposition is given by the absence of circulation space per se: connections are made between rooms, while buffer spaces provide the possibility of accommodating different activities.⁴⁶ It is clear now why Evans, dwelling on the reasons behind the disappearance of domestic conviviality, retraces the emergence of the corridor — which he individuates in Coleshill House, designed in 1650-67 by Roger Pratt in Berkshire — the purpose of which, he argues, was linked to the implementation of a new puritan morality which would greatly affect the relationship between individual privacy and collective sociality and consequently the design of domestic space.⁴⁷ The fascination with the Japanese way of living, which inextricably links the organisation of domestic spaces with time and the performance of everyday life, will appear to be an important aspect in the design of contemporary housing, as we will see in the following chapters. For now, reading the above-mentioned projects in plan, section and technical detailing, one starts to read the architecture of the 21st century home as a “time machine,” where an operable layout, balancing openness and intimacy, work and leisure, regulates the interaction between users and accommodates the passing of time during the day.

1.2 In and out

It could be claimed houses start at the edge: corridors, staircases, doors, entrances, occupy an eternally “in between” position, where the

⁴⁵ Andrew Rabeneck, David Sheppard, and Peter Town, “Housing Flexibility/Adaptability,” *Architectural Design*, no. 2 (1974): 76-91.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Joseph Bedford, “Robin Evans’s Empty Room Collective Living in the 1970s and the Problem of Domestic Realism,” *Burning Farm* (2024). See also Robin Evans, “Figures, Doors, and Passages,” in *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 54-91.

end of what is considered public is, simultaneously, the beginning of what is perceived as private. In today's urban context, the canonical definition of private and public, as two realms in opposition to each other (city vs. house), seems to have become obsolete, at least when applied to the domestic sphere, where a thousand different nuances have emerged to define the degrees of publicness or privateness that characterise spaces. Particularly, the introduction of the term "collective" to address one of such nuances is crucial: not public neither private, a collective space addresses a community, a variable entity that stands in between the genericness of the public (the citizens), and the hyper specificity of the individual (the single dweller or the household). It is somehow impossible to precisely define the boundaries of a community or its size — even if it has been concluded that it cannot be too large nor too small — yet, the components of such a group, regardless of their number, are supposed to form with each other certain bonds of trust and cooperation which allow them to live, in fact, collectively. These bonds are, in the first place, spatial:⁴⁸ by ways of repeatedly encountering, gazing at each other, occupying space, perceiving presence, intimacy is formed; people get to know each other almost unconsciously. In this sense, space can be conceived as a formative element, rather than a container, it has the possibility of encouraging the formation of different social relations.⁴⁹ It is especially in the architectural element of the threshold — created where the boundaries of two different spatial entities meet — that this negotiation between the self and the other can take place and be orchestrated, as the crossing is always accompanied by a complex set of ritual acts, symbolic gestures and movements which define the nature of the socio-spatial interaction.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ In the words of geographer David Harvey: "The relations between 'self' and 'other' from which a certain kind of cognition of social affairs emanates is always...a spatiotemporal construction." David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), 264.

⁴⁹ Stavros Stavrides, *Towards the City of Thresholds* (Common Notions, 2019), 13.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵¹ See Ruth Westgate, "The Greek House and the Ideology of Citizenship," *The Archaeology of Equality*, *World Archaeology*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2007): 229-245.

⁵² Alexandra Coucouzeli, "From megaron to oikos at Zagora," *Building Communities: House, Settlement and Society in the Aegean and Beyond*, British School at Athens Studies, vol. 15 (2007): 169-181.

In the Greek city, the classical *oikos*, the private realm composed of family, servants, supplies and assets, was thought of in opposition to the *polis*, the stage for public life. Several historians identified in the typology of courtyard houses the embodiment of familiar autonomy, where a male citizen, taking the lead of the household, thus gained the authority to participate in the political community.⁵¹ At the same time, the house was in this way protected from the outside: rooms faced a central, almost completely enclosed court accessible via a narrow single entrance (in some cases doubled to provide separate access for men and women), often occupying a secondary position, set at a corner, or even screened in order to minimise visibility from the street into the house.⁵² Building on the same premises, the architecture of the Roman house gives further definition to the Greek spatial and social

hierarchies: in this context, the *domus* functioned as a visual and architectural representation of the household within society, and the performance of domestic rituals, in and around the house, manifested the family's Roman identity.⁵³ Even if they could be equipped with several entryways, Roman houses always had a main entrance, the physical and symbolic point of transition from outside to inside. As explained by Yvone Thébert in the first volume of *A History of Private Life*, the entrance was often emphasized by the construction of a porch projecting onto the street, but the decisive threshold consisted in a series of gates, usually two or three, arranged following a clear hierarchy. If a visitor was admitted to the house, he would be led into the vestibule, another transitory space still subject to the control of a slave guard who would keep watch of comers and goers.⁵⁴ Such a performance was held to guarantee safety and privacy within the house, as well as to control and perpetuate ritualised norms of access. The architecture of entrances was, in both cases, finalised at the protection of the household, and contributed to its identification as an independent unit existing in opposition to the public realm.

The theme of security has been a pivotal one throughout history, but with time it came to embody certain social and economic boundaries: it was the rich who needed gates and guards to protect their wealth, while, amidst the common people, the boundary between the public street and the domestic space was rather labile. Let us think of the medieval town, where workshops and house formed one entity, usually in close contact with the street to facilitate commercial operations, or to the Renaissance city, where the street served as the backdrop to the inhabitants' daily activities.⁵⁵ This trend persisted even with the advent of industrialisation, when urban alleys and courtyard, soiled and overcrowded, still functioned as support spaces for the performance of domestic chores, which were often carried out in company, whether willingly or not. With the gradual individualisation of services such dynamics started to evolve: the implementation of familiar privacy over conviviality and the standardisation of dwelling inevitably led to the intensification of the separation between private and public realm, with consequences on the quality of threshold spaces. In the Post War period, architects and scholars start to interrogate themselves on such questions, especially in response to the perceived failure of previous planning strategies. In her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, published in 1961, Jane Jacobs analyses the crucial role of the street within the urban fabric: diversity, ownership, visibility, are all factors that, according to Jacobs, contribute to generate that pub-

⁵³ Shelley Hales, *The Roman House and Social Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3.

⁵⁴ Yvone Thébert, "Private Life and Domestic Architecture in Roman Africa," in *A History of Private Life: I From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, ed. Paul Veyne (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 353-355.

⁵⁵ On the topic see Fabrizio Nevola, *Street Life in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).

lic identity necessary for people to care about their surroundings and foster a feeling of mutual belonging. In opposition to Modernist approaches, Jacobs advocates for the potential of density, and how it is such conditions of proximity that create the prerequisites for collective life:

“People gathered in concentrations of city size and density can be considered a positive good, in the faith that they are desirable because they are the source of immense vitality, and because they do represent, in a small geographic compass, a great and exuberant richness of differences and possibilities, many of these differences unique and unpredictable—and all the more valuable because they are.”⁵⁶

Dealing with similar questions, in the early 70s, architect and urban planner Oscar Newman develops the theory of “defensible space,” which dwells on the relation between housing design and crime rate. As claimed in the homonym book, according to Newman, it is more likely for criminal activities to emerge in high rise developments rather than low rise, where a smaller scale allows people to feel more connected with their surrounding and with each other. Newman defines “defensible space” a sociophysical phenomenon, “a model for residential environments which inhibits crime by creating the physical expression of a social fabric that defends itself.”⁵⁷ In the book, he offers several architectural examples to further explain his theory: a Pompeian street, an 18th century Dutch town, and a row house street typical of 19th century America, all implement a similar house to street relation, where the position of windows in the façade allow inhabitants to survey the public realm from the safety of their dwelling, reinforcing what he defines as “territorial claims.”⁵⁸ Criticising 20th century developments, the design of which completely ignores such issues, Newman argues for a shift in focus, from the living units to all those areas beyond the doors of individual apartments: hallways, lobbies, grounds and surrounding streets.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), 288.

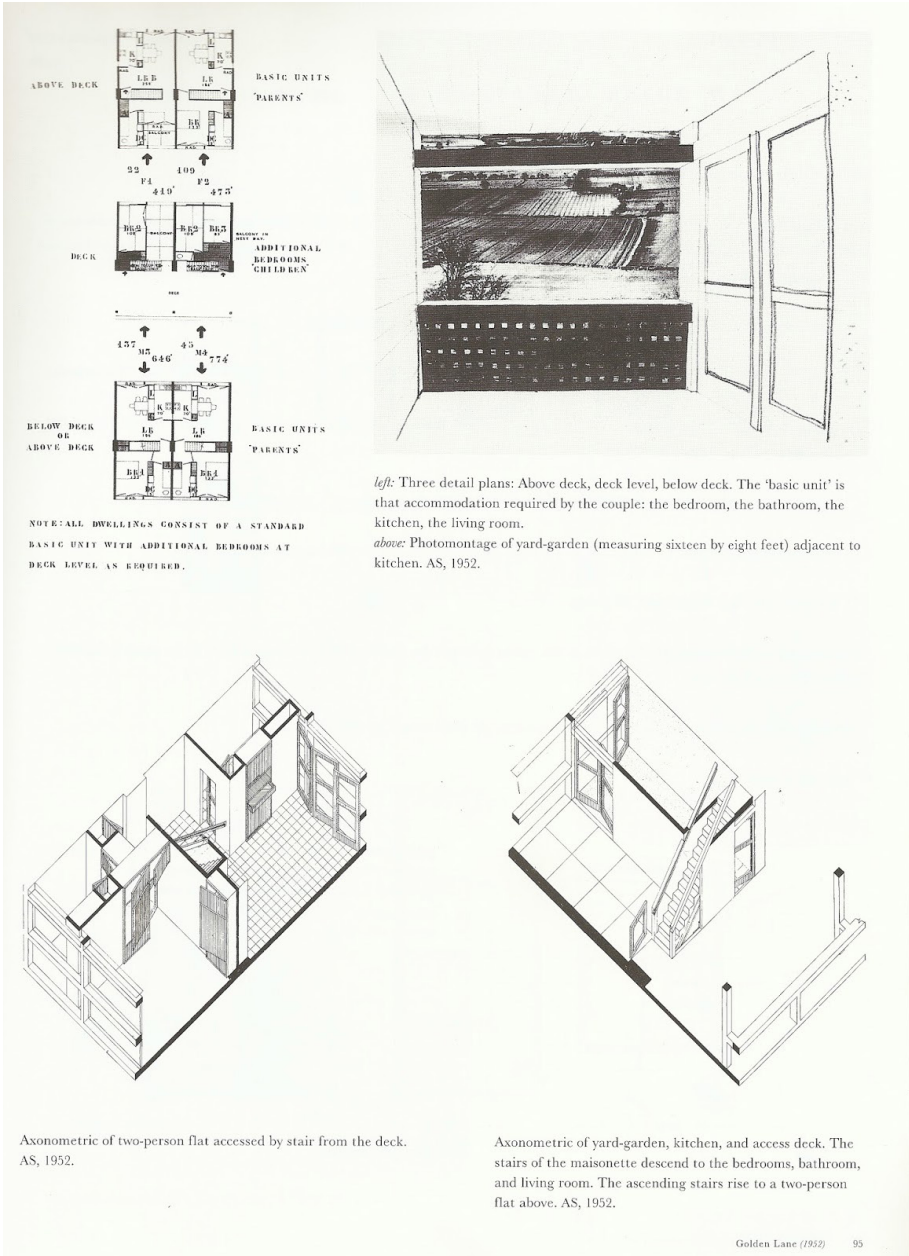
⁵⁷ Oscar Newman, *Defensible Space* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁰ Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson, *Urban Structuring – The Studies of Alison and Peter Smithson* (London: Studio Vista, 1967), 25.

Design wise, such theories were largely appropriated by British architects Alison and Peter Smithson, who, between the 1950s and 70s, systematically worked on the idea of “streets in the sky.” Their first proposal, never built, was developed in the context of the Golden Lane estate competition, organised by the City of London in 1951. Access to the apartments would be provided via a shared system of decks located every third floor, which, unlike traditional galleries, were “wide enough for two mothers with prams to stop and talk and still leave room to pass.”⁶⁰ Apartments were organized on two levels, extending



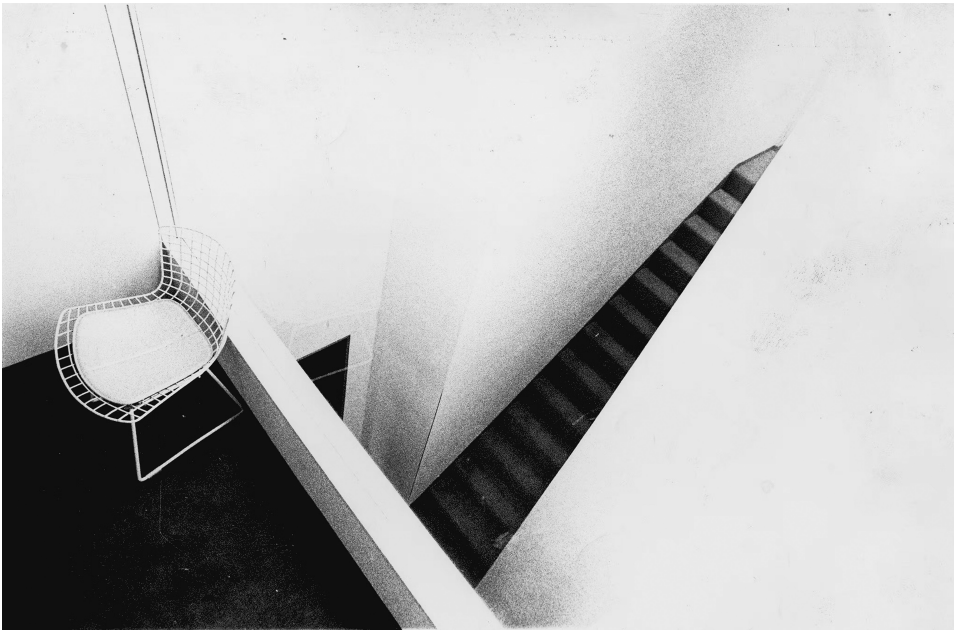
1.7 Alison and Peter Smithson, drawings for Golden Lane housing complex, London (UK), 1952.

above and below the access deck; here, separated from the deck by the staircase, the Smithsons added an ambiguous space, a sort of open terrace which they refer to as “yard-garden,” which could be appropriated by residents in different ways (and be used as a workshop, an extra room, or kept as a terrace). Even though this garden was specifically thought to exist in between the private and the public, the majority of the collective functions of the household, such as kitchen and living rooms, were located in the lower or upper floors. If on one side this allowed privacy to be maintained within the units, on the other, it led to an inevitable distinction between the life on the deck and the life in the apartments, which, unless one were to consider the small terrace placed at the deck level, did not come together in any other part of the project. The second attempt to experiment with the “street in the sky” concept was in the housing complex of Robin Hood Gardens, completed in 1972 and currently under demolition. Here, a similar layout is implemented, with duplex apartments and service spaces facing the deck access. Differently from Le Corbusier’s idea of *rue intérieure*, the Smithsons wanted to provide spaces “which seem to offer escapes,”⁶¹ a flexible, unrestricted circulation system, which will later become one of the estate’s heavily criticised aspects. Indeed, even if the Smithsons proposed innovative solutions for the implementation of collectivity in multi-story buildings, it is on such examples that Newman built his theories, as, like Robin Hood Gardens, many of these housing developments ended up becoming social issues. Nevertheless, it is important to contextualise such a perceived failure in a precise historical and political context, as, not disregarding the fact that, as stated by Newman, defensible space is sociophysical, it is also inextricably linked to the specific development of both the social and the physical spheres, and a lack of attention to the former inevitably leads to the collapsing of the latter, no matter how good the design. However, it would be naïve not to recognise the value of such typological experimentations in the organisation of collective life, and short-sighted not to draw a connection with the current situation, where spaces of access and circulation are gaining once again a pivotal role as incubators of a new kind of expanded domesticity.

Domestic streets

Alongside the rise of single households and the growing attention dedicated to individual forms of living in planning and architecture, a new awareness seems to have emerged, shifting the focus from the individual to the community, and questioning whether the individual project is at all possible, in the context of the contemporary city,

⁶¹ Peter Smithson, “Simple Thoughts on Repetition,” *Architectural Design*, no. 41 (1971): 481.



1.8 Kōji Taki's view of the interior of Shinohara's Repeating Crevice, Tokyo, 1971. © Kōji Taki, courtesy of The Kazuo Shinohara Estate at Tokyo Tech.

without the presence of a support net. The sociological question finds immediate resonance in design practice, as the problem of balancing communal versus particular is a fundamental one, even more when the particular is constantly being reinvented to cope with increasingly challenging political, social and economic dynamics. Habraken offers an appropriate interpretation to the question: “Of constant importance is the shaping of the communal, while the particular is set free. (...) My definition is: the support is the communal. The collective space, the entrances, the corridors, the stairwells, spaces for meetings, you name it.”⁶² It is these very spaces that allow for mutual acknowledgment to happen, and for collective life to realise itself. The same questions addressed by Jacobs in relation to urban space are transposed to the domestic realm: how do visibility, proximity, and unplanned encounters support the creation of community? An example of such a spatial investigation is to be found in Kazuo Shinohara’s *Repeating Crevice* house, designed to separately accommodate two generations of the same family. Completed in 1971, the project is representative of Japanese architects’ renewed sensibility towards the form of their cities, until then largely controlled by the dynamics of investment and administration. Looking back at the traditional *roji*, a narrow alleyway usually located within low-rise neighbourhoods, large enough only for one person to walk through, Shinohara conceived an “urban interior”⁶³ where the central circulation space serves as connection between the different units. As in the *roji*, which functioned as a public yet intimate theatre for daily life, hosting a variety of private and public activities related to adjacent shops, shrines and bathhouses,⁶⁴ Shinohara’s domestic alley encourages flexible degrees of awareness between the residents, who inevitably see each other when climbing the staircase to their entrance door. To reinforce this feeling, the project creates moments of connection: the landing of the first staircase overlooks the second, while a window in the bedroom of the top unit looks down on the entrance hall, in this way engaging space in a process of continuous reciprocal observation. In an interview between Shinohara and the philosopher Kōji Taki, which took place in 1975, even if the architect refuses to talk about the role of urban space in his projects, Taki mentions a “feeling of town” when speaking of Shinohara’s designs, stating that “the city in the metaphysical sense (...) becomes visible in [Shinohara’s] residences.”⁶⁵ A similar concept was famously employed by Le Corbusier in the *Unité d’Habitation*, built in Marseille between 1945 and 1952; here the *rue intérieure*, a term that defines the corridors which lead to apartments, is presented as a kind of domestic street, addressing simultaneously the question of access and that of goods sup-

⁶² Klaske Havik and Hans Teerds, “Define and Let Go: An Interview with John Habraken,” in *OASE 85 – Productive Uncertainty: Indeterminacy in Spatial Design, Planning and Management*, ed. Hans Teerds, Klaske Havik, Véronique Patteeuw (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2011), 8-16.

⁶³ Hiroshi Hara was the first to use the urban *roji* as an element of domestic interiors (see for example the Ito House, 1967, and Hara House, 1993).

⁶⁴ Theodor Bestor, “Rediscovering Shitamachi: Subculture, Class and Tokyo’s ‘Traditional’ Urbanism,” in *The Cultural Meaning of Urban Space*, ed. Robert Louis Rotenberg and Gary Wray McDonogh (London: Bergin and Garvey, 1993), 47-60.

⁶⁵ Kisa Decor (Hg.), Seminar Series Nr. 1, “Housing and the City: Koji Taki Dialogue Collection, Conversations with four designers,” *Heft 3* (1975).

ply. In the context of the *Ville Radieuse*, when the *Unité* is described for the first time, such interior passages are also defined as *rues en l'air*, *rues horizontales intérieures* and *rues horizontales superposées*⁶⁶ (terms which clearly inform the Smithsonian idea of “streets in the sky”), highlighting the nature of the *Unité* which is conceived as a vertical city. In this sense, the elevators are also part of such an extended distribution system, which allows to connect all floors and to place the “gallery street” not at the ground floor, as custom would require, but on the seventh floor. The gallery represents the new commercial backbone of the entire building: equipped with a double height and placed close to the East façade to allow generous openings (and to differentiate it from the central access corridors), it recreates the conditions of an urban street where residents can purchase different products for their households.⁶⁷

The questions related to such systems of communal support are still pivotal in many of the collective housing projects that are built nowadays: concepts such as *rue intérieure*, domestic alleys, streets in the sky, rather than being just phantoms of a utopian past, are rediscovered in all their architectural complexity and appropriated in different ways. In the *Kalkbreite*, a residential complex recently completed by Müller Sigrist on top of an old tram depot in the area of Assersihl (Zurich), the *rue intérieure* becomes a central feature of the project, connecting vertically and horizontally various apartment typologies with the collective, commercial and cultural spaces that are scattered throughout the building, as well as with the roof terrace.⁶⁸ Larger than a traditional distribution corridor, the *rue intérieure* in *Kalkbreite* spans 2.5 meters and is enriched with double heights and light wells which contribute to make the space inhabitable in various ways. In the words of the *Genossenschaft Kalkbreite*:

“It is a meeting, exchange and residence point and thus the main artery of life in the house. Starting in the hall with the desk, it leads past the cafeteria, the mailboxes, the Laundromat and the library up to the community bulletin board, on to the community offices. Then it winds its way over the residential floors past all the stairwells up to the various roof gardens, the sauna and the garden kitchen.”⁶⁹

In order to maintain affordable rents, the generosity of collective circulation and spaces is balanced by a general reduction of private living surface, which is six square meters lower than the Zurich average. It is clear how the project plays with such a compromise: if on one side the *rue intérieure* is an important functional element of the

⁶⁶ Le Corbusier, *La Ville Radieuse* (Boulogne-sur-Seine: Éditions de l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui, 1935), 158, 166.

⁶⁷ For an extended analysis of the concept of “street” in Le Corbusier’s works see Xavier Monteys Roig and Pere Fuertes Perez, “Le Corbusier: Streets, Promenades, Scenes and Artefacts,” *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism*, vol. 40, no. 2 (2016): 151-161.

⁶⁸ Susanne Schindler, “Kalkbreite,” *Bauwelt*, no. 39 (2014): 24-31.

⁶⁹ See the website of Genossenschaft Kalkbreite, <https://www.kalkbreite.net/kalkbreite/gemeinsam-nutzen/allgemeine-raeume/> [accessed 29 December 2024].

design, addressing issues related to light and fire regulations, on the other, it is specifically thought to encourage the building of an extended collective network between residents, it operates as the social heart of the project, both on a physical and a psychological level. A comparable strategy has been adopted by German architects ifau and Heide & von Beckerath for the design of IBeB, a mixed-use housing complex located in the historic Südliche Friedrichstadt in the district of Kreuzberg (Berlin), completed in 2018. Here the domestic street, located at the second floor, is structured around small courtyards which function also as light shafts. The wideness of such spaces is enriched by the presence of benches, dining tables and by the possibility of performing diverse activities one would normally do in the open such as sports or gardening. Several apartment rooms overlook the common spaces, strengthening the relation between public and private areas. Pushing even further the idea of domestic streets, MVRDV and Blanca Lleo's Mirador (Madrid, 2005) draws on Shinohara's idea of "urban interior," adding to the so called "vertical alleyways," which serve to solve internal circulation, an elevated public plaza, accessible by both residents and external visitors. To reinforce the feeling of a vertical city, the circulation is left open and is equipped with several small meeting rooms placed at the intersection of stair landings and corridors, which individuate spaces for public gatherings while still being outdoors.

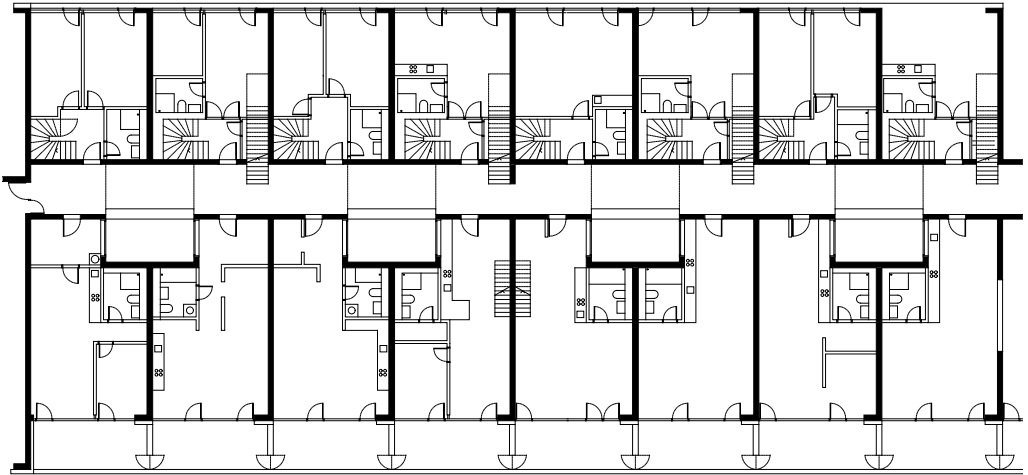
In all the mentioned projects, the implementation of what could be defined as a domestic urbanity is vital in supporting the creation of a communal life outside the singular living units, which unfolds in the so-called "transition spaces." Domestic streets are interpreted and appreciated as features of a certain form of sociability which specifically emerges in the context of collective housing. Clearly, collective domestic spaces demand communal management and rarely function if their uses are not sketched out in advance. Here, the gradient of thresholds between private and public spaces contributes to expand the idea of property beyond defined boundaries, engaging inhabitants in acts of spontaneous care.

⁷⁰ Fourier drew inspiration from the *Grande Galerie*, built in the 17th century under the drive of Henry IV of France, and consisting of an elevated passage which connected the *Palais du Louvre* with the *Palais des Tuileries*.

⁷¹ Stanislaus Von Moos, *Le Corbusier: elements of a synthesis* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2009), 159.

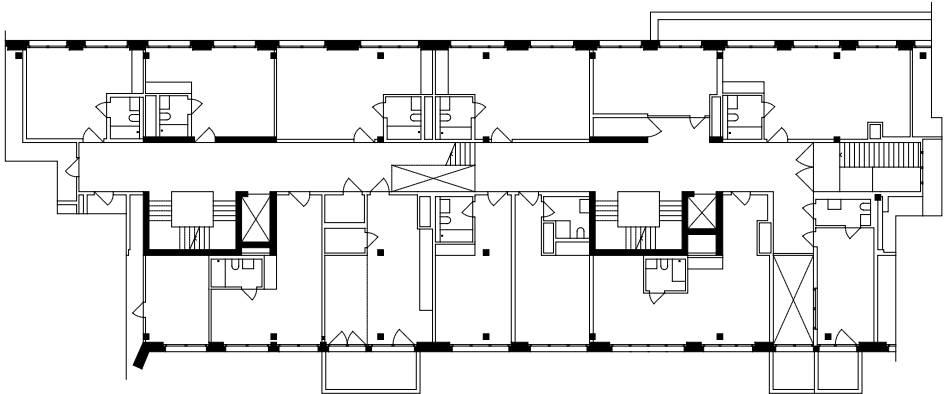
The corridor is a room

In his analysis of Le Corbusier's work, Stanislaus Von Moos draws an analogy between the commercial street of the *Unité d'Habitation* and the *rue galerie*⁷⁰ of Fourier's *Phalanstère*, stating that "both are miniature towns but without open streets."⁷¹ However, there is one main difference between the gallery at the *Unité* and Fourier's *rue galerie*: if the former is consecrated to a specific moment in the life of



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1.9 ifau and Heide & von Bec-
kerath, IBeB, Berlin (Germany),
2018. Detail of a typical floor
plan.



1.10 Müller Sigrists Architekten,
Kalkbreite, Zurich (Switzerland),
2014. Detail of a typical floor
plan.

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the inhabitants, that of commercial exchange, the latter is conceived as the main circulation system, it is an omnipresent architectural element, which accommodates as many uses as the inhabitants can imagine at any hour of day or night. All the rooms and living units of the *Phalanstère*, starting from the first floor, are connected by such covered galleries: heated in winter and ventilated in summer, they occupy a central role in the functioning of the entire social structure as they allow residents to simultaneously satisfy their needs of movement, exchange and encounter, acting as a direct extension of the domestic space.⁷² Quoting Anthony Vidler:

“Fourier gave the gallery (...) a primary constructive role, for the society as for the building; running above the ground-floor service arcades, continuously around every courtyard and along every wing, the gallery would unite, in plan and section, all the functions of the commune. Taking up the full three stories to the roof, it would literally combine all the apartments that looked down into it, as well as become a huge, enclosed glass winter-garden for promenades and dances.”⁷³

It is important to recall that for Fourier and the *fouréristes*, as much as for Le Corbusier, architecture was an active agent in the definition of social relationships; within the *Phalanstère*, therefore, the spatial organisation represents the direct translation into built form of the interactions that are expected to take place between individuals. In this sense, it is not surprising that, if to a certain extent the *rue galerie* greatly inspired the design of many collective buildings, ultimately, Modern corridors find their origin in military architecture, where the term would be used to indicate passages in fortifications which allowed rapid communication with troops.⁷⁴ Here, the architectural layout became to signify the creation of a new social order, materialising into built form the military command structure. As much as in later hospitals and schools, the corridor was a purpose-driven space, serving only the need to move from point A to point B with as little interference as possible.⁷⁵ The same logic was then implemented into multi-storey buildings, with the corridor acting as a separating rather than connecting element, to the point that, as stated by Robin Evans, “The cumulative effect of architecture during the last two centuries has been like that of a general lobotomy performed on society at large, obliterating vast areas of social experience.”⁷⁶ If the aim of the corridor was to reduce contact and reinforce privacy and familiar segregation, that of the *rue galerie* was to encourage it by means of spatial generosity, and it is towards this interpretation that a large number of architects building collective housing are turning their gaze to nowadays.

⁷² Charles Fourier, *Théorie de l'Unité Universelle*, tome II (Paris: Les Presses du réel, 2001 [1822]), 342. See also Charles Fourier, *Le Nouveau Monde Industriel et Sociétaire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1973 [1829]). For an in-depth study of the *rue galerie* in Fourier's *Phalanstère* see Nathalie Brémand, “La rue-galerie et les relations adultes-enfants chez Fourier et les fouréristes,” *Cahiers Charles Fourier* (2007): 29-50.

⁷³ Anthony Vidler, *The Writing of the Walls: Architectural Theory in the Late Enlightenment* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Architectural Press, 1987), 112.

⁷⁴ Mark Jarzombek, “Corridor Spaces,” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 36, no. 4 (2010): 728-770, 732.

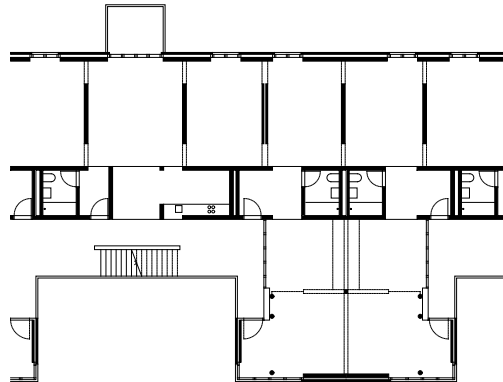
⁷⁵ Mark Jarzombek, “Corridor Spaces,” 750.

⁷⁶ Robin Evans, “Figures, Doors, and Passages,” in *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 89.

A pioneering example is certainly the Siedlung Helmutstrasse, realised in 1985 in Zurich by the Swiss office A.D.P. The layout is organised in three consecutive bands which host respectively common areas (living rooms, kitchens, staircases, terraces), services (bathrooms, kitchens, storage spaces) and private rooms. The functional arrangement allows for the implementation of a generous flexibility: rooms can be combined in different ways, shrinking or enlarging apartment units following variations in the household composition (apartments can include two, three, four rooms, up until six, or can even become larger shared flats occupying the entire floorplan). As in the *rue galerie*, the circulation is conceived in close connection with the domestic spaces: it supports a precise idea of living, which is finalised at increasing the moments of exchange between inhabitants, while expanding the boundaries of the single units. The corridor, the distribution space per antonomasia, that which can host only one function (movement), is here conceived as a room, which can be used in different ways, and which leads into other rooms, recreating the formal conditions of the classical Italian villa with its matrix of interconnected chambers.⁷⁷ Open staircases lead into large terrace areas at every floor, onto which two to three kitchens overlook, turning the most transient space into the very heart of collective life. In the original project, a series of doors, connecting the terrace with the individual rooms through the service band, provided different possibilities for passage: one could decide to go directly from the terrace to one's own room, or to go through the kitchen, or through the bathroom; every space reachable directly from the stair landing.

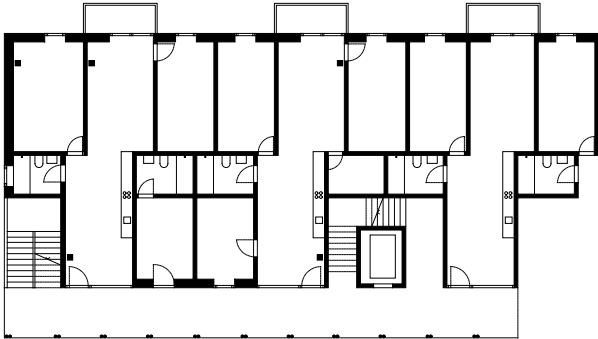
A similar programmatic organisation is implemented in the housing complex StadtErle, realised by Buchner Bründler in Erlenmatt East (Basel, 2017), on the site of a former freight railway station. The spaces are layered following a gradient of increasing privacy with a service band in between, as in the Siedlung Helmutstrasse, with the exception that here the pair kitchen-living room is positioned transversally so that it crosses the entire width of the building, connecting the shared gallery to the private terrace on the opposite side. As a consequence, two kinds of rooms face the gallery: a large, traversing kitchen and a smaller room, which could be used as a study or a bedroom. Both rooms open to the gallery with generous, full height windows, which contribute to fade the boundary between the collective distribution and the private space of the household. It is fairly easy to imagine how these rooms can expand in the terrace during the warm season and turn the circulation system into an additional domestic space. In the words of the architects:

⁷⁷ Ibid., 64.



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1.11 A.D.P., Siedlung Hellmutstrasse, Zurich (Switzerland), 1985. Detail of a typical floor plan.



1.12 Buchner Bründler Architekten, StadtErle housing complex, Basel (Switzerland), 2017. Detail of a typical floor plan.

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“The aim was to create a community through the residential house and to encourage a natural exchange among residents. (...) Living is private towards the Erlenmattpark, and socially active towards the Erlenmatthof, because the apartments can be reached via access balconies. These are intended for social interaction and are to be frequented by the residents, much like a personal veranda. The extension of living spaces to public areas will make the access balconies attractive to spend time in. The rather small-sized apartments are supplemented by central communal spaces such as a lobby, roof terrace, workshop, music and laundry rooms as well as guest rooms.”⁷⁸

It is evident how close the concept is to the Smithsons’ “streets in the sky” and yet how distant. One of the main differences in terms of type, notwithstanding the different scale of community which the project is addressed to (social housing vs cooperative), lies in the relation engaged between collective and domestic space. In Robin Hood Gardens, the layout of the apartment inevitably generated a spatial and social gap between the two: the collective street was ultimately divided from the domestic space, and once accessed through the main door, the house functioned as an independent, autonomous unit, which relied on the external system of suspended decks solely for circulation purposes. In Buchner Bründler’s StadtErle, which is just the exemplary case of an ongoing trend in collective housing, domestic spaces open directly to the collective one, with a certain disregard to possible privacy issues; the absence of a filter, due to the specific spatial distribution, as well as the generosity of the gallery, allow the house to expand beyond traditional defined borders, its configuration encouraging the intermingling of passers by on the doorstep.

“We don’t think enough about staircases. (...) We should learn to live more on staircases. But how?”⁷⁹ With this statement written in 1974, Georges Perec summarised the contemporary disquietude which permeates spaces for circulation; under-used, under-designed, uninhabitable, in a time when even the smallest piece of surface has the greatest value, staircases and corridors are put under question. If, as argued by Evans, during the 19th century corridors served the purpose of achieving an organised distribution of people and their movements through the house, where “the connection [between rooms] would be laid down as a basic structure to which spaces could then be attached like apples to a tree,”⁸⁰ nowadays it seems that the reverse operation is sought, and that climbing up and down a staircase is just another excuse for a casual encounter with a neighbour. Distribution spaces are enlarged, enriched with the possibility of hosting collective activities,

⁷⁸ From the website of Buchner Bründler Architekten, <https://bbarc.ch/genossenschafts-haus-stadterle> [accessed 7 November 2024].

⁷⁹ Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (New York: Penguin Edition, 1997; First published by Éditions Galilée, 1974), 38.

⁸⁰ Robin Evans, “Figures, Doors, and Passages,” 78.

while corridors within apartments are reduced, favouring solutions to a certain extent recalling a pre-modern way of living “which recognises the body as the person, and in which gregariousness is habitual.”⁸¹

1.3 Mealtime

The making and sharing of food have been core social activities since ancient times; even more since fire made its way into the house, defining, in the only fixed source of warmth, the main locus of domestic conviviality. This is true for most rural households, where life took place mainly in one large room, as well as for dwellings in urban residential buildings which, until the 1800s, had to rely on a communal kitchen due to technical limitations related to the supply of water or the evacuation of smoke. Yet, if mealtime in lower classes remained for a long time an unscripted activity, the meals of the wealthy were often the occasion to reinforce hierarchies and social structures, and unfolded following precise ritualized sequences. In ancient Greek the banquet was associated with the practice of hospitality and conversation: the host would invite friends or affiliates in his house for dinner — considered the main meal of the day — which was followed by the symposium. In the seventh book of *Quaestiones convivales*, Plutarch outlines the importance of dining practices during his time:

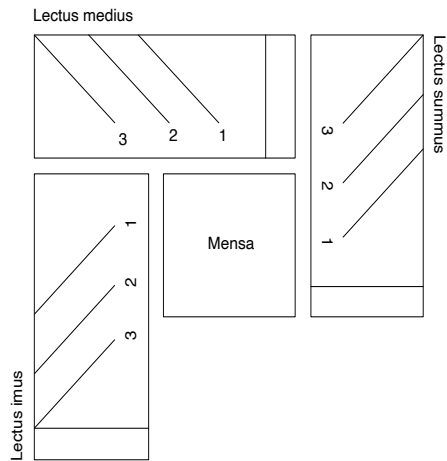
“...the most truly godlike seasoning at the dining-table is the presence of a friend, an intimate and well-known companion – not merely because he eats and drinks with us, but because he participates in the give and take of conversation, at least if there is something profitable and reasonable in what is said...Wherefore, it is right that discourse, no less than friends, should be welcomed to the dinner only if of proven quality.”⁸²

The way Plutarch introduces the practice of dining in company provides a clear understanding of how seating at one’s table was not only a display of friendship but also of social status, and required a certain orchestration in respect of customs and conventions. For the Greeks and later for the Romans, to eat lying down, with servants taking care of bringing and clearing a variety of dishes, was a sign of power and prestige, which embedded in the practice of hospitality the complexity of interpersonal exchange and social structure.⁸³ In her book *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality*, Katherine Dunbabin gives a detailed account of the typical arrangement of the Roman *triclinium*

⁸¹ Ibid., 88.

⁸² Plutarch, *Quaestiones convivales*, Book VII (697 CE).

⁸³ Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 12.



1.13 Layout of the typical Roman *triclinium* in the late Republic and early Empire. After H. Thédénat, *Pompéi* (Paris 1910). In Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 43. Redrawn by the author.

during the late Republic and early Empire. Basing the reconstruction on archaeological evidence found in Pompeii, Dunbabin describes the *triclinium* as a “three-couch room,”⁸⁴ a long and narrow space where three couches were arranged around a small table, usually with the fourth empty side facing the entrance door. The diagram in fig. 1.11, shows the hierarchical setting of a traditional dinner: nine people would recline on the couches, the three places on each assigned following strict rules of precedence; number three in the central couch was the place of honour, usually reserved for guests with a high social status; next to it would be the host, accommodated on the top corner of the left couch.⁸⁵ While dining in close proximity, the arrangement of seating would influence the exchange between guests, highlighting how everyone’s role in the conversation was deeply related with social rank. This synergy between dining and domestic hierarchies would influence the architecture of the dinner table, and that of the house, for centuries to come.⁸⁶

In the 16th century, dining together was an activity reserved for special occasions, but the understanding of mealtime as a tool to perform and reinforce hierarchies was still dictating the practice of eating and daily meals would be set up in specific rooms of the house depending on who was supposed to eat them. Taking as an example the plan of Palladio’s Villa Foscari (1555-60), the central hall, dividing the two apartments where the Foscari brothers resided, was normally used for banquets and formal dining; secondary meals, such as *merenda* or *desinar* (lunch), were served in the smallest room of the apartment, and were eaten most often by the master alone, rarely in the company of his spouse.⁸⁷ Children would eat in the *tinello*, a small room located at the ground floor (below the apartments), next to a larger square one which would host kitchen and pantry, the place where maids would meet to cook, talk or take care of children.⁸⁸ In Villa Foscari, the domestic layout reinforced the distinction between the place where food was prepared and the place where masters would eat, engraving in the plan the dynamics of servitude. This division anticipates the structure of the bourgeois house, where the dining room becomes a symbol for representing the status of the family within society and is mainly used for formal lunches and dinners, while the kitchen, often equipped with the so called “breakfast table,” is dedicated to the informal meals women and children. A similar, if not more exasperated choreography was staged in 17th century cardinal palaces, where, as recalled by historian Patricia Waddy, dining requested a great amount of orchestration: depending on who the host would be dining with, the service would be

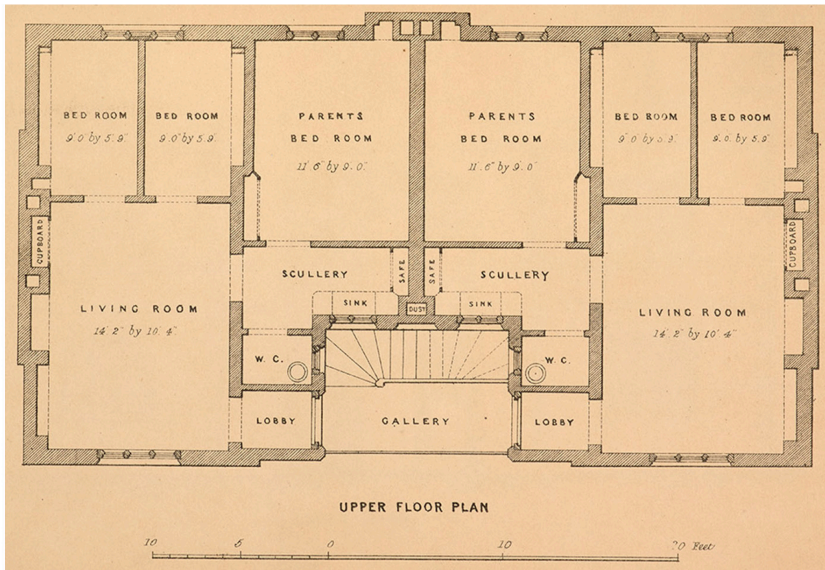
⁸⁴ The term comes from the Greek *triklinion* (τρικλίνιον), composed of *tri-* (τρι-), “three”, and *klinē* (κλίνη), a particular type of long bench normally used in Ancient Greece for seating during a symposium.

⁸⁵ Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet*, 39-40.

⁸⁶ As highlighted by Dunbabin: “The more idealized Roman view of dining is expressed by Cicero, when he makes the aged Cato commend the early Romans for choosing the term *convivium* (literally ‘living together’) to describe ‘the reclining of friends at a banquet, because it implies the conjunction of life’, in preference to the Greek terms ‘drinking together’ or ‘eating together’ (i.e., *symposion* or *syndeipnon*).” See Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet*, 13.

⁸⁷ Antonio Foscari, *Vivere con Palladio nel Cinquecento* (La Malcontenta, 2020), 36.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.



1.14 Henry Roberts, Model Houses for Families, 1851. Source: Henry Roberts, *The Dwelling of the Labouring Classes: Their Arrangement and Construction; with the Essentials of a Healthy Dwelling* (London, Society for the Improvement of the Labouring Classes, 1867).

set up in the outer anteroom, the loggia, or the *sala*; tables and chairs would be brought by only to be stored once again at the end of the performance.⁸⁹ The same layout organised following the “reception enfilade” is to be found in the French *hôtel particuliers*, which in turn had a great influence on the development of the Haussmanian apartment,⁹⁰ and gradually spread from wealthy to lower classes, shaping domestic space following the principles of aristocratic morality.

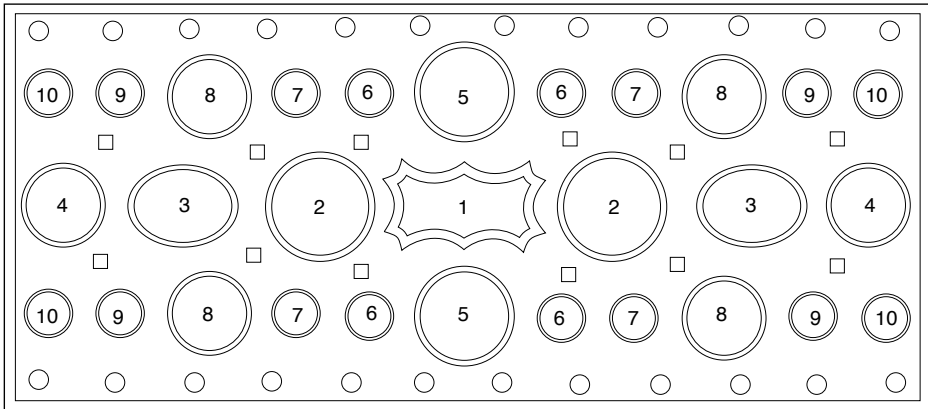
By the mid 1700, the division between kitchen and dining room is definitive, as shown in the several manuals compiled at the time offering indications on the proper way of building houses.⁹¹ From the 1800s, new conditions of urban living, technological advancement, paired with the Victorian concerns on hygiene and decency, fuelled a new-found interest for the design of workers’ housing. While the reception enfilade was in large part lost due to spatial limitations (rooms change functions or are merged into one), living room and dining room (sometimes together in one space), are still conceived as a small sized reception area, while the kitchen, the most used room and the heart of conviviality, especially in lower class families who could not afford servants, is increasingly reduced and relegated to a secondary position, highlighting the main contradiction of such a typical plan, the construction of which does not respond to the habits and uses of residents. The model house for families, designed by Henry Roberts in occasion of the Universal Exhibition that took place in London in 1851, is a clear representation of such a discrepancy. At this point every flat could be equipped with a private scullery, but its size and location in the plan make evident its subordinate function: a space of passage squeezed between the living room and the parents’ bedroom. The late 19th century is also when the industrial workday and the nuclear family are institutionalised: if before 1800 lunch was the main meal, while “supper” was a lighter evening meal, at this time the family dinner becomes a symbol of familiar love, health and domestic stability. The role of the woman as caring housewife and that of the man as master of the house are engraved in the dinner table, in the seating chart, in the order of serving, in the discipline demanded to children, crystallised in a standardised ritual which will persist throughout all of the 20th century. In this context, Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky’s *Frankfurt Kitchen*, while sustained by emancipatory ideals, can be read as an optimisation of Roberts’ scheme: the kitchen is the realm of the woman, her movements must be facilitated, technology is exploited for the maximization of efficiency, while space and disruptions are minimised.⁹²

⁸⁹ Patricia Waddy, *Seventeenth Century Roman Palaces: Use and the Art of the Plan* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 6.

⁹⁰ François Loyer gives a detailed account of the evolution of the Haussmanian apartment in the book *Il Progetto domestico – La casa dell’uomo: archetipi e prototipi*, edited by Georges Teyssot and published in occasion of the homonym exhibition held at the XVII Triennale di Milano in 1986.

⁹¹ See, for example, Charles-Étienne Briseux, *Architecture moderne ou L’art de bien bâtir pour toutes sortes de personnes tant pour les maisons des particuliers que pour les palais* (Paris: Claude Jombert, 1728).

⁹² For an analysis of domestic space and norms from a feminist perspective see Maria S. Giudici, “Counter-planning from the kitchen: for a feminist critique of type,” *The Journal of Architecture*, 23: 7-8 (2018): 1203-1229.



1.15 Diagram of table setting from Ménon, *New Treatise on Cooking* (Paris, 1739). In his *New Royal Cook* (1742), French cook François Massialot stated that "Nothing is more disagreeable than confused and disorderly service." Redrawn by the author.

This narrative was reinforced during and after the second World War, when the portrait of a family gathered around the dinner table became an icon of social stability in the face of displacement and turmoil, and, it could be claimed, is still present in people's cultural imagery, in the ways housing is conceived and lived. However, contemporary social and economic conditions have spurred the emergence of alternative forms of aggregations in addition to the traditional nuclear family, and, while production and reproduction cannot be so easily separated in two distinct realms, the link between family values, domesticity and the dinner table is put under question. If, to some extent, eating together every day at the same time has become almost unfeasible for the members of the same household due to the increased flexibility of working hours, the facilitated access to leisure, the diversity of diets, and the increase in people's mobility, dinner rituals, transformed and expanded, still represent a powerful tool to perform relationships and strengthen community.⁹³ As anthropologist Mary Douglas argues in *Food in the Social Order*:

“Many of the important questions about food habits are moral and social. How many people come to your table? How regularly? Why those names and not others? There is a range of social intercourse, which is based on food, on reciprocity, on frequency of exchange and other patterns.”⁹⁴

Yet these food habits are not only a sociological question, as the patterns of reciprocity and exchange Douglas talks about, deeply influence the planning and use of domestic architecture, in the kitchen and at the table.

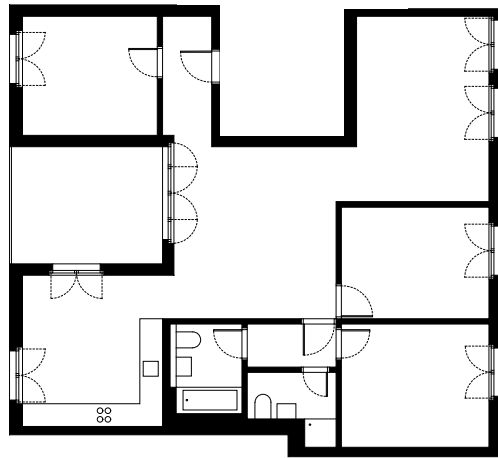
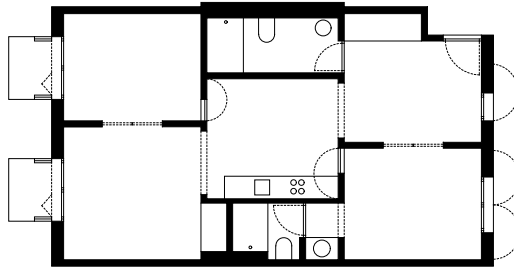
The diagonal enfilade and the central dining room

In 1998, in the context of the publication *The Everyday and Architecture*, British architects Sarah Wigglesworth and Jeremy Till published an article titled *Table Manners*, analysing how living and working, both taking place in the same domestic realm, come together precisely at the dinner table.⁹⁵ They describe their own table, its many uses and facets: a surface where everyday objects accumulate throughout the day, the site for meals but also office meetings, showing the traces of both spilled drinks and pen marks, defining it as the trope of contemporary living, the locus where the contradictions and evolution of domesticity can be appreciated in their tangible material form. Equal consideration must be then given to the dining room, whose ambiguous position, between home and office, domestic and collective, places it at the centre of the household as the fulcrum of communal

⁹³ A series of initiatives are spreading in cities to facilitate coming together at the dinner table beyond the familial realm. In Bologna (Italy), *Focolare* is described as a collective kitchen: in between the traditional practice of restaurant dining and a cooking course, the host welcomes guests in her own house, inviting them to cook together and share food. In the UK, the Eden Project has initiated *The Big Lunch*, a program that helps interested parties in setting up a get together with their neighbors, take property of streets and public spaces, and get to know each other over a shared meal.

⁹⁴ Mary Douglas, ed., *Food in the Social Order: Studies of Food and Festivities in Three American Communities* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1984), 13. For an in depth reading of British mealtime see also Mary Douglas and M. Nicod, “Taking the biscuit: The structure of British meals,” *New Society*, no. 20 (1974): 744-747.

⁹⁵ Sarah Wigglesworth and Jeremy Till, eds., *The Everyday and Architecture* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 1998), 31-35.



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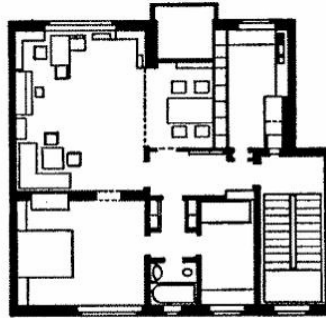
1.16 Above: MAIO, 110 Rooms, Barcelona (Spain), 2016. Floor plan of a typical apartment unit. Below: Knapkiewicz & Fickert, Klee residential complex, Zurich (Switzerland), 2011. Floor plan of a typical apartment unit.

life, the space where inhabitants meet at different times of the day. The relevance of Wigglesworth and Till's anthropological self-analysis is evident when looking at the spatial evolution of kitchens and dining rooms from the late 20th century, their location within the house and their topological relation with other rooms. In the plan of MAIO's 110 rooms, a residential building completed in Barcelona in 2016, one can see how the enfilade has taken the place of the distribution corridor: entering the apartment, the gaze can traverse three equal sized rooms arranged diagonally. Yet, differently from the "reception enfilade," the rooms do not offer any indication on their function or suggested use, only the kitchen is placed in the central piece, opening onto the other two. The kitchen is voluntarily presented as an unambiguous social space: large enough to host a variety of other programmes, it serves as the connecting point between all the rooms of the apartment. Additionally, the possibility of linking rooms diagonally or horizontally dismantles the binary opposition between day and nights spaces, opening to the reality that a bedroom is not used solely at night-time, nor that a dining room is used mainly during the day. The "diagonal enfilade" with a joker room located in the centre seems to be a recurrent substitute of the corridic distribution; in the residential complex Klee, designed by Knapkiewicz & Fickert's (Zurich, 2006/2008-2011), this same layout configuration is paired with a terrace, sometimes equipped with a double height, which is linked with both the kitchen (located in the last room of the enfilade), and the central living/dining room. The balanced juxtaposition between collective and private spaces, which gravitate around the central space, allows the rooms to function as autonomous elements that can be used indifferently for both nightly and daily activities. This flexibility is not, however, deprived of a certain directionality: from the kitchen towards the centre, or from the centre towards enclosed rooms. While employing a similar structure in plan, Sophie Delhay's dwelling units in Dijon (completed in 2018), are characterized by a stark un-directionality, where the central room becomes both a space to gather and the topological node linking all the other rooms of the apartment. The position and architectural quality of doors offer a great meter for comparison: if in Knapkiewicz & Fickert's apartment one can still notice a differentiation between the doors of private rooms (traditional doors), and the thresholds from one collective room to the other, which are generated only by the diagonal shift of the spaces and are not equipped with a physical partitioning mechanism, in the Unités, the oversized sliding doors are the epitome of intersectionality, their aim is to offer opportunities for linking different rooms, rather than divide them. The very possibility of perceiving



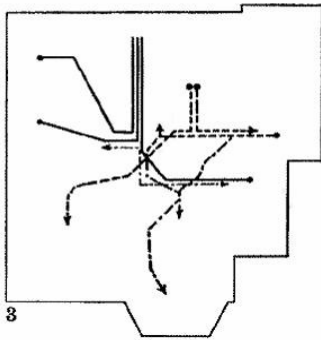
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A. Bad Example

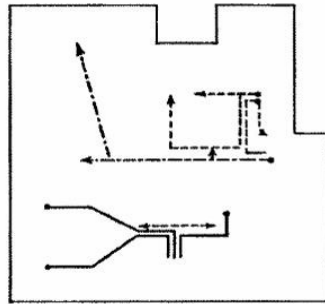


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B. Good Example



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4

1.17 *The Functional House for Frictionless Living*, by Alexander Klein, 1928. From Robin Evans, "Figures, Doors, and Passages," in *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 85.

complexity in one glance is the most fitting representation of a certain acceptance of domestic contradictions, an appreciation of frictions as the inevitable inhabitants of any domestic environment. We imagine noise overflowing from one room to the other, when children come back from school and play around the house, or when a fight breaks out, or when different activities take place at the same time, showering, cooking, listening to music.

A completely opposite approach, aimed at the reduction of domestic friction, was sought out during the largest part of the 20th century. The experimental approaches of collectivisation and atomisation developed by le Corbusier and Hilberseimer were counterbalanced by more “pedestrian” investigations, which, in the name of Modernity, would look back at the Victorian ideals of morality in the household.⁹⁶ In the study for *The Functional House for Frictionless Living*, which Alexander Klein developed for a German housing agency in 1928, his proposal for an efficient, modern apartment is compared to a typical 19th century layout. In the drawings Klein shows the flows of inhabitants, their movements throughout the house, to prove the superiority of one example over the other. A clear distinction emerges: in the 19th century apartment, the so called “bad example,” flows intersect in a small room placed at the centre of the plan, which act as the distribution device of the house. In Klein’s “good example,” residents’ paths never cross, ensuring the “smooth running of the domestic machine.”⁹⁷ Robin Evans, in his famous essay *Figures, Doors and Passages*, interprets the intention behind Klein’s scheme as symptomatic of a fear of intimacy, a disgust towards the images of bodies touching, bumping into each other, an insult to the “proper” way of living.⁹⁸ Typologically, one can notice how certain features of the bad plan have been transformed in the good plan: the central room has disappeared, replaced by a smaller distribution corridor; while rooms sizes and proportions have become more diverse, linking dimension to predefined functions and therefore suggesting uses and ways of inhabiting spaces. It is clear that the projects discussed above tend to follow the bad example of spatial organisation, embracing and even enhancing domestic frictions and accidental encounters. The central room becomes a fundamental feature: already in Klein’s representation of the bad plan, one could notice how this room was not represented as a space for merely passing through: a little table with three chairs is placed at its centre, suggesting that the room could serve other uses, its dimension allowing for the simultaneous happening of different activities. At the same time, the neutrality of the plan is stressed through the implementation of equal sized rooms;

⁹⁶ Robin Evans, “Figures, Doors, and Passages,” 84.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

as an example, rooms in the Unités are all of 13.8 square meters, a size that allows to disassociate space and function, bypassing the rigid demands of housing regulations which would normally require a differentiation between primary and secondary bedrooms, living room and dining room. The capacity of the plan to accommodate both nuclear and other household types is translated in the formal definition of rooms, equal sized squares, which allow the implementation of mid or long-term changes to the layout.

The double kitchen: from Residential Hotels to Cluster Apartments

So far, we have seen how the dining room has lost its function of representation in favour of a more flexible and multilayered interpretation in response to the changing needs of contemporary inhabitants. In a similar way, the kitchen has also been the object of extensive speculations that have influenced its spatial configuration through time and particularly in recent years. As a space, the kitchen seems to be regaining a more collective value: from the realm of the housewife to that of the community, not only in political but also in social terms. The domestic practice of food making is expanding outside the familiar territory, and the habit of making food for each other is coming back as part of the social ritual. Collective kitchens experienced a period of great success in New York during the late 19th century, when new types of residential buildings emerged to accommodate the demands of the growing middle class. Different families were used to share the same roof, but the period of economic depression that followed the American Civil War (1860-65) led to conditions of poverty and insalubrity in many tenements. Combining European and American apartment types, Residential Hotels were built providing a series of collectivised domestic services, allowing residents to be freed from the burden of having to run the household themselves. In addition to cooking and cleaning, this building type provided several cultural and social facilities. As an example, the Astor Apartment House was equipped with a salon, a library, a common dining room, a series of living units (all comprising a fireplace and a bathroom), as well as a small dormitory and an office.⁹⁹ It is important to note that while, in this case, the act of cooking was performed by dedicated staff and therefore not by the community of residents themselves, Residential Hotels were conceived as public hubs: dining rooms were located at the ground floor and functioned as real social condensers, allowing and encouraging the exchange between residents and visitors. Looking at the plan of the Astor Apartment House, one can see how modest the scale of the dining room is in relation to the number of units it is supposed to serve,

⁹⁹ Anna Puigjaner, "Kitchenless City – The Waldorf Astoria: Apartments with Collective Housekeeping Services in New York 1871-1929" (PhD diss., Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (ETSAB-UPC), 2014, 45.

different from that of a restaurant as we would think of it nowadays. In addition, the living units facing the street are organised in such a way that from the furthest room one could reach the salon and the dining room passing through an uninterrupted enfilade (paired with a public circulation system), highlighting how the typology was interpreted as a large house rather than as an aseptic hotel, in which certain dynamics of conviviality still persisted.

In the first decades of the 20th century, collective kitchens in Apartment Hotels started to be paired with small kitchens located in the private units, the so called “kitchenettes,” in order to offer permanent residents the possibility of cooking independently in some occasions and therefore reduce daily expenses.¹⁰⁰ With the implementation of the kitchenette we witness a return to familiar domesticity, the pleasure of cooking, for oneself and for others, the freedom of not being dependent to a fixed meal schedule, and successively, of being able to cook what one desires, will lead to a process of optimisation culminating in Schütte-Lihotzky’s *Frankfurt Kitchen*, the archetype of the modern kitchen. However, while the modernisation of kitchenettes led to the disappearance of collective kitchens, at the end of the 20th century, and especially during the first decades of the 21st century, this building type, providing both private and collective cooking facilities, make their comeback as social devices.

In *A History of Collective Housing*, Susanne Schmid quotes a study from 1984 which demonstrates that:

“The economic benefits of collective living were valued less than the desire for personal relationships, rejection of the bourgeois way of life, the dismantling of learned roles of men and women, the desire for personal development, and the search for support and security in a group.”¹⁰¹

In this context, the majority of apartment typologies responded to a changing trend in the way of living, which prioritized shared management and the creation of community over familiar isolation. Community Households and Clusters Apartments originated in the 80s and built on the principles of the American Residential Hotel: reduced facilities within individual households were compensated by generous collective services and spaces. Cooking, eating, and leisure activities moved outside the apartment to different communal rooms characterised by a varying degree of publicness.¹⁰² Here, much more common than the “kitchenless” plan is the double kitchen feature, which allows the coexistence of different layers of intimacy in relation to the organ-

¹⁰⁰ As noted by Anna Puigjaner in her research about Residential Hotels, even before the official establishment of kitchenettes, many tenants used to install improvised cooking appliances in a corner of the room, or a cupboard, for economic reasons. This highlights why the kitchenette emerged as a temporary, provisional appliance, conceived to occupy the minimum amount of space and therefore deeply related to questions of efficiency. See Anna Puigjaner, *Kitchenless City*, 217.

¹⁰¹ See Lothar Bertels, *Gemeinschaftsformen in der modernen Stadt* (VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften Wiesbaden, 1990), 88. In Susanne Schmid, *A History of Collective Living* (Birkhäuser, 2019), 21.

¹⁰² Interestingly, Schmid observes that “For the first time since the inter-war years, apartments were once again built without having usable private kitchens.” Susanne Schmid, *A History of Collective Living*, 232-233.

isation of meals. One of the early examples of this kind of planning is the Tanthof Settlement, built in Delft (The Netherlands) in 1981 by the Dutch Association *Centraal Wonen*. The building is composed of 171 private rooms, some of which are equipped with a private kitchenette and/or bathroom, divided in thirteen clusters where the associated communal areas, such as shared kitchens and bathrooms, lounges and dining rooms, are located.¹⁰³ The individual units develop on three levels and are all served by shared facilities of various sizes, the distribution of which unfolds along access routes. Here, we can observe how two different kitchen designs are employed according to their role as facilitators of privacy or collectivity: kitchenette or cupboard kitchen within the private unit, and a much larger L shaped kitchen within the common space. From the 2010s, Cluster Apartments start to be consistently implemented as a viable market alternative, especially in Switzerland, where a strong culture of cooperative living facilitates the emergence of such building types both in the private and public sectors. In 2007, in occasion of the anniversary of *100 Jahre gemeinnütziger Wohnungsbau* (100 years of non-profit housing construction), an open idea competition was held, titled *Wie wohnen wir morgen?* (“How will we live tomorrow?”), which resulted in the publication of a manual for the construction of qualitative housing written by the Swiss office Futurafrosch. The manual, advocating for new housing typologies which rethink the relation between building, district and city, and fostering the implementation of new modes of collective living, encouraged the formation of the *Mehr Als Wohnen* (“More than Living”) housing cooperative, with the objective of further developing Futurafrosch’s visionary ideas in the area of the ex Hunziker cement factory, located in Zurich north. The project by Duplex Architekten *House A* in Dialogweg 6 (2015), is built around the concept of “satellite apartments:” in every floor, eleven autonomous living units, each equipped with a small kitchenette and a bathroom, are grouped around two communal areas, which include an office, a living zone, a large kitchen, as well as storage and cleaning facilities. Access to the units is possible only through the shared areas, which, despite being separated by a central circulation and service core, are linked through the visual axes generated by the shifting position of satellite apartments. The kitchen is interpreted as the core of collective life: in the satellite apartments it is always located near the entrance, providing continuity between shared and private spaces, and expanding the traditional threshold from the door to the kitchen itself. In the common room, the kitchen is positioned in the middle of an open space stripped of any kind of partitioning (visual divisions are once again provided by

¹⁰³ Ibid., 236.



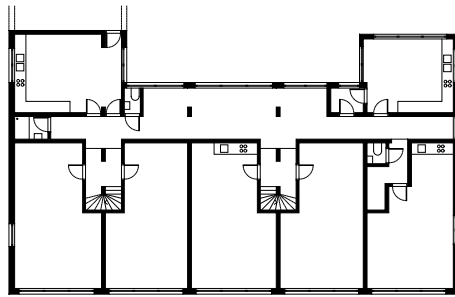
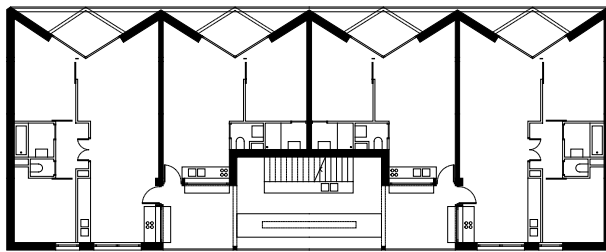
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1.19 Duplex Architekten, Mehr
Als Wohnen, Zurich (Switzer-
land), 2015. Typical floor plan.

the shifting position of the living units), fading the boundary between cooking, dining, relaxing, working, and allowing for maximum interaction between users while performing any of such activities.

The “cooking island,” especially, stands in contrast to the imaginary generated by the Modern kitchen, dissipating the four walls of the cubicle and opening the task of meal preparation to any member of the household. Interestingly, the island configuration is inherited from the 19th century apartment, where the stove would be usually paired with a large table placed in the middle of the room, providing space for the actual preparation of meals. Cooking, however, lacked the kind of performative quality that characterises it nowadays, and the kitchen was normally located in the back of the house, conceived rather as a service space, while the act of dining would take place in the formal dining room. One of the first kitchens where spatial requirements were merged with performativity was the Willey House, realised in the 1930s by Frank Lloyd Wright. A contemporary of Schütte-Lihotzky, Wright was building for the emerging middle class, wealthy, to a certain extent, but unable to afford the luxury of domestic maids and servants. The design for the Willey’s kitchen is exemplary of their social habits and routines: as a young couple, they would often invite friends over and entertain them with dinners and parties. Mrs. Willey would be preparing meals herself and the open kitchen, separated from the dining room only by a row of low cabinets and semitransparent shelves, would allow her to remain in contact with her guests while cooking, to keep the conversation flowing. If on one side, in the early 1930s, home economists advocated for the reduction of the kitchen and its efficiency in terms of appliances and tools in order to minimize the required effort related to food preparation, on the other, Wright’s project for the Willeys is representative of a new wave of domestic modernism, where cooking was interpreted as a convivial activity.¹⁰⁴ Building on the same premises, Delhay’s unbuilt project for 87 residential units in Dijon brings together the questions addressed by Wright concerning the theatrical and social aspects of cooking with the contemporary “double kitchen” feature. In the design, four units are arranged around a central communal access terrace, which is equipped with an outside kitchen and a table. The threshold between shared and private unfolds gradually: the central terrace expands horizontally into semi-private areas, which connects to the kitchens of the private units, two per side, through generous windows. Under the windows are placed double sided counters, which, on the inside, are used to accommodate kitchen appliances, while, on the outside, offer a large support surface

¹⁰⁴ In a series of articles written for the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation since 2017, architect Steve Sikora recalls a comment Lewis Mumford made after visiting the Willey’s house: “The touch I liked best — I speak as a cook — is the wide glass window that separates the kitchen from the living room; to see the pots and pans hanging in serial pattern at the far end of the kitchen (...) was to have a grateful sense of intimacy with one of the most important parts of a house; it was like being in a farmhouse kitchen. It took a man of Wright’s sensibilities to give Cinderella a glass window instead of the usual glass slippers.” See Lewis Mumford, “At Home, Indoors and Out,” *The New Yorker* (1938), in Robert Wójtcowicz, ed., *Sidewalk Critic: Lewis Mumford’s Writings on new York* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), 206-208.



2m

1.20 Above: Sophie Delhay Architecte, 87 Cuisines connectées, 87 logements, Dijon (France), 2022. Typical floor plan.

Below: Tanthof Settlement, Centraal Wonen, Delft (The Netherlands), 1981. Detail of a typical floor plan.

to prepare food or place dishes waiting to be brought to the table. The table itself is not a mere piece of furniture but a structural element (a concrete beam runs below the top making it impossible to modify its placement or configuration), stressing the importance of that one uninterrupted surface around which people can gather in the occasion of communal meals.

Towards a kitchenful city

The very idea of clustering, one could claim, is rooted in the act of sharing a kitchen and, by extension, a meal. If New York in the 70s was the “kitchenless city,” as argued by architect Anna Puigjaner, nowadays we witness an overabundance of kitchens, which emerge in various parts of the home, inside and outside, declined and assembled in different ways to accommodate the need for both autonomy and conviviality. The family dinner as a static, hierarchical, social convention is being replaced by a new collective approach, which individualizes in the preparation and sharing of food the ultimate act of parity and collective care. Historian Elizabeth Cromley in *The Food Axis*, an analysis of food practices in relation to the evolution of the American home, argues that the tendency to expand the kitchen towards other areas of the house, such as the dining room and the living room, was spreading already during the 80s and 90s. She points out that a “fluid” terminology was invented to portray these new types of kitchens, such as the “great room” or even the “rec-room,” a term normally used to indicate playrooms for children, and therefore highlighting how cooking was also perceived as a moment of recreation and not just as a chore.¹⁰⁵ Cromley claims that spatial continuity among zones for cooking, eating, food storage, entertainment, inside and outside, is sought in contrast to the privatisation of individual rooms and that “kitchenful” dwellings might be the next house form.¹⁰⁶ The kitchen, freed from its physical boundaries, turns into a floating furniture piece, an event stage: in the most radical examples technical networks are designed so that cooking blocks can be moved around the room, further in the middle of the space when the act is on, closer to the wall at the edge of the room when not in use.¹⁰⁷ The dining room collapses into the figure of the table, an informal surface used for many things in addition to eating: working, studying, gathering.

The mentioned examples all represent different responses to the general desire of going beyond the typological limitations of the modern apartment, referring back to some conditions of conviviality and togetherness that were to be found mostly in vernacular settings. Spaces are conceived and lived in accordance with their environmental char-

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Cromley, *The food axis: cooking, eating, and the architecture of American houses* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 215-216.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 240-241.

¹⁰⁷ See Peter Märkli's Studio House in Ruimsberg, or Sam Chermayeff's Free Kitchen.



1.21 Illustration of a medieval sleeping room. From the Ninth Tale of *Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio, 14th century.

acter and architectural qualities, mostly disregarding their pre-assigned function. Robert's model family has ceased to be the overarching paradigm in favour of more dynamic configurations: the dweller becomes a nomad, constantly re-inventing unknown rooms in the house.

1.4 Bedtime

Not only a vital function, sleeping takes an important part of our lives: patterns and habits of sleep evolved in several ways, and with them the architecture of the bed and the bedroom. Going to sleep involves an infinite number of personal rituals, for which different devices were invented: bed lamps, bed trays, bed clothes and so on. As much as it is ritualistic, the act of sleeping, as well as the place where one sleeps, are rarely addressed in conventional forms of residential architecture: the bedroom is seen as a given data, making it one of the few rooms within the household that maintains its 19th century form despite the changing living habits of inhabitants. However, alongside more conservative tendencies at the large scale, since the 90s, new voices are claiming the role of sleep and that of its related devices to be increasingly more important within the current discussion. Building on the precedents developed during the Modern Movement,¹⁰⁸ these projects reconsider the role of the bed and the bedroom especially in relation to different notions of privacy and familiarity within the house.

What do we do when we sleep? Where do we sleep? How do we sleep? The tales around the theme are infinite, spanning from sleep as an act of protest, sleep as a synonym for escape, sleep as the most intimate act, sleep as eternal rest, the modes and the architectures related to sleeping practices vary greatly in relation to historical moments and geographical locations. In medieval times, sleeping together was a common practice for the working class, as it was one of the cheapest, most effective ways to deal with the scarcity of space and the cold night hours. The bed could occupy diverse locations within the house and rarely had its own place: one could sleep on a pile of straw, on a blanket, or a mat laid on the ground. Often, the bed was folded and put aside during the day, so that the main room could be free to host other activities. Farmers would normally break the sleep in two during winter, inserting between the first and second slot, some time to take care of one's own personal affairs, read, have sex, eat. During the Renaissance the bed starts to become a symbol not only of healthy sleep, but

¹⁰⁸ In his book, *Introduction to Modernity*, Lefebvre makes an important distinction between the meaning of modernism and that of modernity. Modernism referred to "the consciousness which successive ages, periods and generations had of themselves" and in his view was permeated by "triumphalist images and projections of self," therefore offering little critical insight. On the contrary, modernity represented "the beginnings of a reflective process, a more-or-less advanced attempt at critique and autocritique." See Henri Lefebvre, *Introduction à la Modernité* (Paris: Minuit, 1962), and *Introduction to Modernity: Twelve Preludes, September 1959 – May 1961*, trans. John Moore (New York: Verso, 1995), 1.

also of wealth: new forms were invented to make the bed a grandiose place of sleep, a place of opulence, enclosed in velvet curtains and even having its own roof, a miniature shelter within the larger one that is the house itself. The industrial revolution sanctions the radical separation between home and place of work, encouraging the emergence of the interior as the locus of private life. Walter Benjamin, in his text *Louis Philippe ou l'intérieur*, dwells on the relation between the affirmation of the individual in relation, and to some extent, opposition to the world:

“Under the reign of Louis Philippe (1830-1848), the private individual makes his entry into history. For the private individual, places of dwelling are for the first time opposed to places of work. The former come to constitute the interior. Its complement is the office. The private individual, who in the office has to deal with realities, needs the domestic interior to sustain him in his illusions. This necessity is all the more pressing since he has no intention of grafting onto his business interests a clear perception of his social function. In the arrangement of his private surroundings, he suppresses both of these concerns. From this derive the phantasmagorias of the interior – which, for the private individual, represents the universe. In the interior, he brings together remote locales and memories of the past. His living room is a box in the theatre of the world.”¹⁰⁹

The bed becomes the incarnation of the couple, while the bedroom emerges as the locus of family life, a private space, dedicated mainly to the act of reproduction, hiding sexual practices from the rest of the household. In modern times, the bed takes on a completely new face, shifting between the personal and the collective: “More than any other piece of furniture, and beyond its manifest form, it marks out a space that oscillates between the mediality of a societal stage and the notion of inviolable refuge.”¹¹⁰ The tentacles of capitalism reach within any kind of intimate space, merging once again work and home, bringing production in the bedroom, colonizing sleep, leisure and love. In the post-industrial society the bed is a place of work, of rest, a place to eat, to sleep, to protest, it takes on new functions, merging the opposites: the archetypal place of rest and the possibility of endless production: “to lie down is not to rest anymore but to move.”¹¹¹ Historian Beatriz Colomina recalls the figure of Hugh Hefner, director of Playboy Magazine, who in 1960 turned his bed in his personal office, where he would work and receive people, without almost never getting out of his nightgown, for the following nine years. Hefner, anticipating the SARS pandemic of 2019, gave a face to the practice of tele-working, or the

¹⁰⁹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project (Das Passage Werken)*, originally composed between 1927 and 1939, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Harvard University Press, 1999), 19.

¹¹⁰ Rike Frank, “Shimmering,” in *The Century of The Bed*, ed. Beatriz Colomina (Vienna: Verlag Fur Moderne Kunst, 2014), 123.

¹¹¹ Beatriz Colomina, “Pyjama party: what we do in bed,” *Architectural Review*, no. 1459 (2019). Available at <https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/pyjama-party-what-we-do-in-bed> [accessed 3 January 2025].

possibility of working anywhere anytime. In this context, the bedroom is gradually losing definition: while familiar structures disintegrate and change form, and the spaces of urban living shrink to the extreme, one can only wonder what do we need the bedroom for. Eventually, the more it can disappear the better, freeing space, opening possibilities to perform different activities in the same room. This leads to the bedroom's main contradiction: on one side, the permanence of the idea of the bedroom as a mono functional room, representative of the marital union, in terms of building regulations but also in people's cultural imaginary; on the other, the contemporary quest for multi functionality, open ended intimacy, loveless personal time and most importantly, the possibility of reverting from any of these given conditions.

The intimate cell

While the modern Playboy bed is fundamentally the bachelor pad, coinciding with a precise understanding of the male figure and his role within the house (he lives alone and rely on external services for cooking and cleaning), fully charged with the logic of capitalist production, today this same conception of bed as living surface is often to be situated amidst the complexities of shared living, embedded in the dynamics of increasingly complex households. The bed comes to coincide with one's own personal space, it becomes an island, at times isolated from the rest of communal spaces, at times opening onto them. Quoting L. Mayeur and D. Renaud's explanatory text for their competition proposal in the context of PAN 14 (1987):¹¹²

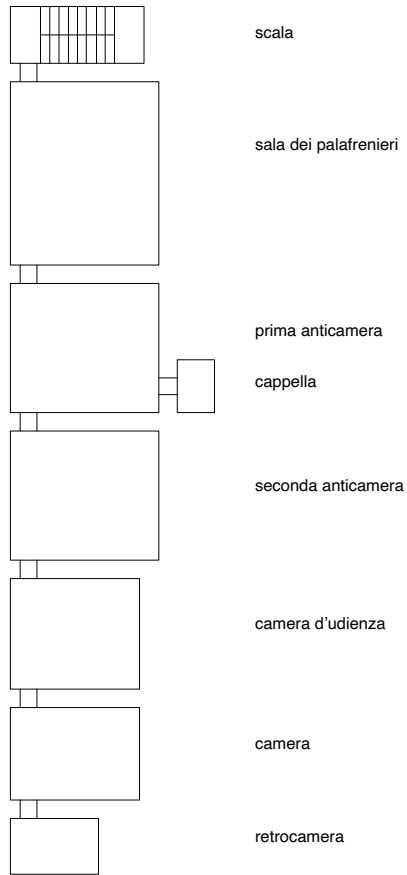
“The bedroom is no longer just a room to sleep in, it is also a place of meeting, during the day, where to be alone to read, rest, or meet up in intimacy with a friend to talk quietly, it is this place of individualized withdrawal... Its spatial conformation allows to break this isolation any time and open up to other rooms.”¹¹³

Today, the bedroom is recognised as both a locus of solitary retreat and individual emancipation, as in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, and simultaneously, as the facilitator of a certain intimate sociability, that can happen beyond the boundaries of domestic structures and arrangements. Because of such an understanding, the thresholds between private and public zones within the home are reconsidered, with the goal of achieving a spatial division that allows for being together alone: the member of a defined domestic group and an autonomous individual.¹¹⁴ In this idea of bedroom as a space of individualised yet collective retreat we find a transposition of its common interpretation during the 17th century, when the expansion of the boundaries of

¹¹² The acronym PAN stands for *Programme d'Architecture Nouvelle*, a competition organised by the French Plan Construction et Habitat, open to young architects, with the objective of gathering innovative ideas on the current modes of living and building. The competition run from 1972 to 1987, only to be replaced by the well-known Euro-Pan, expanding the scene to new audiences and themes.

¹¹³ “*La chambre n'est plus seulement la chambre à coucher, elle est aussi espace où se retrouver, le jour, seul pour lire, se reposer, ou se retrouver seul avec un ami pour parler tranquillement, elle est ce lieu de repli individualisé...Sa situation spatiale permet à tout moment de rompre cet isolement et de communiquer avec d'autre pièces.*” In Monique Eleb Vidal, *Penser l'Habité: Le logement en questions* (Liège: Pierre Mardaga éditeur, 1988), 72.

¹¹⁴ Monique Eleb Vidal, “Emerging Modes of Living and Habitat,” in Joaquín Arnau Amo, Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de la Comunidad Valenciana, *New Ways of Housing – Nuevos Modos de Habitar* (COACV, Valencia, 1996), 50.



1.22 Diagram of the “reception enfilade” in the 17th century Roman *appartamento*. Redrawn from Patricia Waddy, *Seventeenth Century Roman Palaces: Use and the Art of the Plan* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 5.

social life brought by the cultural revival of the Renaissance, together with the increasing pressure of state control and the separation of living and working, contributed to increase the need of self-affirmation, of individuating a refuge to protect oneself from the public eye and where to cultivate one's own interests and affections. This change in the "forms of sociability," shifted the main locus of interaction from the street, the castle court, or the village square, to the house: people met in "intimate private rooms, or around a lady's bed," to converse or read together.¹¹⁵ Writer Henri van Laun, in a note to his translation of Molière's *Les Précieuses Ridicules* (1659) explains how the French word *ruelle*, originally meaning narrow street, was then used to indicate the resulting space between the wall and the bed where ladies usually met to socialise:

"The *Précieuses* at that time received their visitors lying dressed in a bed, which was placed in an alcove and upon a raised platform. Their fashionable friends (*alcovistes*) took their places between the bed and the wall, and thus the name *ruelle* came to be given to all, fashionable assemblies."¹¹⁶

Especially in 18th century France, the structural organization of the apartment came to reflect a certain conception of individuality, which recognised the necessity for each household member to have a personal space — a room with different annexes such as boudoir, cabinet, garde-robe — to retreat in solitude but also to meet with others in private. This specific relation between visibility and invisibility, intimacy and sociability, takes the form of the *enfilade*, the nature of which is explained by Patricia Waddy in her study of 17th century Roman palaces, where she gives a detailed account of its role in the construction of ecclesiastical domesticity at the time. Within the *appartamento*, the main compositional unit of the palace, the linear disposition of rooms would follow a precise sequence, mainly dictated by the rituals of hospitality:

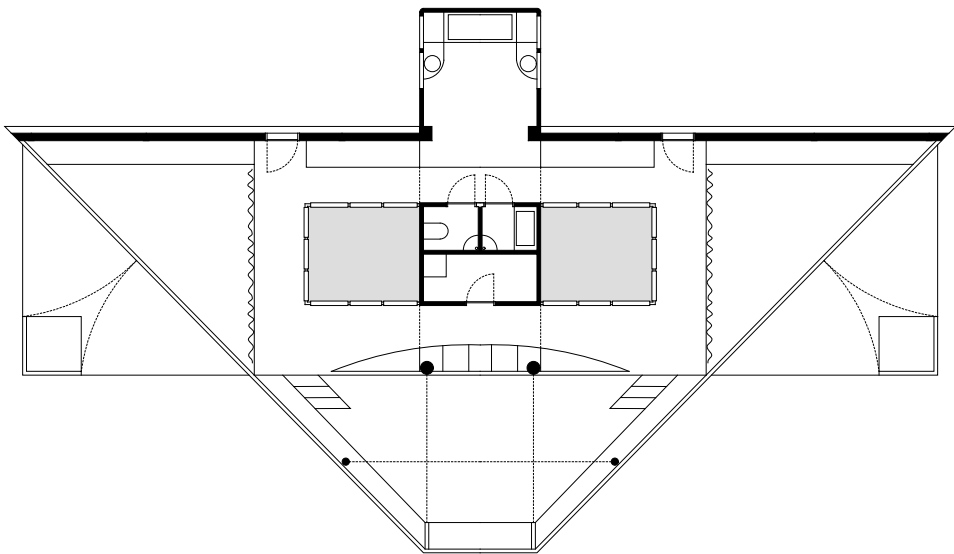
"The guest arrived at the foot of the stair, delivered there by his carriage. (...) The guest ascended the stair and advanced through the *sala* and anterooms to the audience room. (...) A private room beyond the audience room was set aside for the cardinal's sleeping and toilette."¹¹⁷

The spatial performance would be accompanied by a series of guest specific rules (changing according to the guest's social rank), that would regulate the position of chairs, the moment at which the guest would have been greeted respectively by the attendant gentleman or the master of the apartment, the dining fashion, and so on. Overall, the apartment was considered to be a private territory, and the sequence

¹¹⁵ Roger Chartier, ed., *A History of Private Life: III Passions of the Renaissance* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 8-9.

¹¹⁶ Molière, "Les Précieuses Ridicules," in *The Dramatic Works of Molière*, vol.1, trans. Henri Van Laun (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barrie Publishers, 1878), 154.

¹¹⁷ Patricia Waddy, *Seventeenth Century Roman Palaces*, 4-7.



■ Bed

1m

1.23 Atelier BCDE competition proposal for PAN 14, 1987.

of spaces, from the most public to the most intimate, would only add to the logic of such a narrative, as not only guests, but also servants and helpers would have to follow precise rules on the time and occasion to be present in a certain space.¹¹⁸ The enfilade thus provided the framework to ritualise movement through the house, accommodating a spatial system of class distinction (the greater social prestige, the deeper one was allowed to go in the apartment), highlighted by clearly marked points of reference such as stairs, doorways and windows, in respect to which the position of furniture and people was defined.¹¹⁹ Such a division of domestic space was an important reference for Le Corbusier who, in 1930, during the conference *Le Plan de la Maison Moderne* describes the “cellules” of *monsieur* and *madame*, recalling the composition of the 17th century apartment:

“*Monsieur* will have his cell, and so will *Madame*...Each cell opens onto an alley that constitutes the boundary between the three apartments. Once through the door, one finds a complete living unit, consisting of a vestibule, a changing room (where the wardrobes for underwear and clothes are located), a gym, a boudoir or office, a bathroom, and eventually the bed.”¹²⁰

It is interesting to note that Le Corbusier introduces his drawings as a scheme that corresponds to “a particular way of life,” thus directly questioning the universality of the conjugal room and its hierarchical connotation, highlighting how the traditional model of the bedroom, seen as the locus of nuclear love, was a cultural product of the 19th century and by no means had to be forcefully reproduced.

Nevertheless, if in the 17th century palace the reception sequence was somehow mono-directional, highlighting differences in class and social status, at the end of the 20th century the question of gaze starts to influence the apartment’s spatial organisation. Intimacy is thought of as a negotiation with the other, rather than just as an imposition engraved in the life of inhabitants by aristocratic protocol. Recalling Le Corbusier’s idea of *cellules*, Atelier BCDE’s proposal for PAN 14 presents the bedrooms as soundproof individual spaces of only six square meters; these are placed at the centre of the house, mirroring each other and with service spaces in between. This central core expands in two opposite directions with semi-private undefined spaces, which can be enclosed by a curtain, and, as the drawing suggests, provide access to the outside. In conclusion, perpendicular to the central horizontal axis is the most communal space, accessible from both the semi-private areas yet divided from them by storage spaces. The sequence is again

¹¹⁸ “Chamber attendants entered the room only in the absence of the cardinal to perform such services as cleaning, making the bed, bringing water for washing, removing wastes, and bringing the clothes to be worn that day.” *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹²⁰ “*Monsieur aura sa cellule, Madame aussi...Chaque cellule ouvre par une porte sur une allée qui fait frontière entre les trois appartements. La porte passée, on est dans un organisme complet, formé d’un vestibule, d’un déshabilleur (endroit où sont les armoires à linge de corps et à vêtements), d’un lieu de sport, d’un boudoir ou d’un bureau, d’une salle de bain et enfin le lit.*” Le Corbusier, *Précisions sur un état présent de l’architecture et l’urbanisme* (Paris: Georges Crès & Cie, 1930), 130. Translated by the author.

a layering of different states of privacy, leading from communal to individual spaces through a carefully orchestrated gradient that takes care of protecting individual isolation. In Atelier BCDE's project, the bedroom is conceived as a piece of furniture rather than a room in the canonical sense: it individuates a niche, a nook, a capsule, which overflows in a sequence of spaces that lead from the most intimate to the most collective, hidden from each other through the careful disposition of corners, screens and vistas. Together with the domestic reinvention of private space, a careful consideration is given especially to questions of sound insulation, so that when the *cellule* is closed it is not only the visual field that is affected but also the auditory one. Often overlooked, the problem of noise caused the failure of many modern projects which, embracing the emergence of the free plan in a collective praise of lightness and airiness, understood partitions as functional furniture elements rather than as technical devices for regulating conviviality. An example is Marie Jaoul's account on the life in the Maison Jaoul, built by Le Corbusier for her parents, Michel and Nadine Jaoul, between 1951 and 1952. Located in the outskirts of Paris (Neuilly), the project consisted in the design and construction of two houses positioned perpendicularly on the same plot: Marie's one, and that of her grandparents, André Jaoul and his wife Suzanne. In both houses, Le Corbusier attempts to merge the core principles of Modernism and the actual needs of the Jaoul families and their limited means. In Marie's house the ground floor is quite permeable, with the kitchen facing the dining room and only the stair to act as separation between the entry hall and the rest of the house. In the two floors above, a series of bedrooms and bathrooms, often divided by built-in furniture pieces rather than walls — "*meuble de separation*" as defined by Le Corbusier in a letter to his carpenter Charles Barberis, sent in 1955). These architectural choices clearly reflect Le Corbusier's statements regarding the nature of living in the modern house:

"I draw the Modern arrangement in plan and in section: windows, walls and built-ins. I have created a large empty space; you can move around easily; your gestures are rapid and precise; tidying up is automatic. Minutes are saved every day."¹²¹

Marie recalls how Le Corbusier had expressed his feeling regarding their housekeeper: "No more maid, it's over, it's the wife's duty to take care of the kitchen, everything is open, she can communicate with her family while she prepares their meals."¹²² While the words come from Marie's memory, the position is in line with the general post-war tendency of returning to family life as an antidote to the great

¹²¹ "*Je dessine le plan d'aménagement et la coupe d'une chambre traditionnelle. La grande armoire normande, la commode de style ne permettent qu'un mauvais rangement fort inefficace (...) Je dessine en plan et coupe un dispositif moderne: fenêtres, cloisons et casiers. J'ai gagné une place considérable; on peut circuler à l'aise; les gestes seront rapides et exacts; le rangement automatique. Ce sont des minutes gagnées chaque jour.*" From Le Corbusier, *Précisions sur un état présent de l'architecture et l'urbanisme*, 109-111. Translated by the author.

¹²² "*Plus de domestiques, c'est terminé, c'est la femme qui fait la cuisine, tout est ouvert, elle peut communiquer avec la famille pendant qu'elle fait ses petit plats.*" François Barre's interview with Marie Jaoul in "La maison Jaoul," *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (1979): 85-86, 85. Translated by the author.

displacement and loss of moral caused by the war. An inhabitant of the house between the age six and nineteen, Marie was fiercely against this new openness, which she compared with their previous traditional apartment, where she could seek shelter in her room in a corner of the house, far from where other activities were taking place:

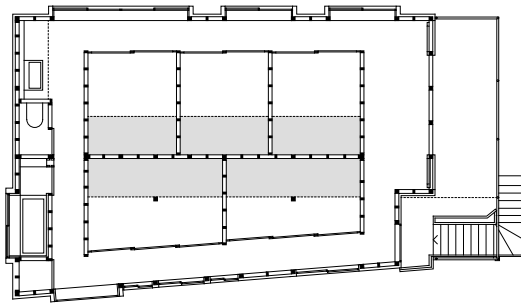
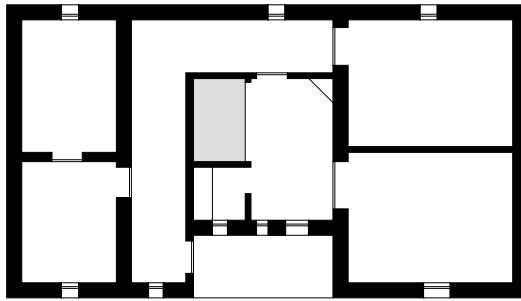
“In Corbu’s house I had no secret life. (...) I could hear everything my parents did because I was only separated from them by a cupboard. (...) I hated this intimacy. To know who did what and when. (...) In my house there were no secret corners. A love story would have been unimaginable as everything was under surveillance. Everyone lived constantly under the watch of others in this space where everything was connected.”¹²³

She complained that the slit window in her room allowed her parents to know whether she had the light on at night, claiming that she had lost her territory even though she had her own room: “It was the house itself which dictated the law. The place of everything was determined in advance, even that of people. (...) We lived in it like sculptures.”¹²⁴ Marie’s childhood was undoubtedly influenced by the severe discipline imposed to her by the parents, and in some part she was also unlucky as, being the only daughter (she had two brothers), she got the room closer to that of her parents. One could wonder if the brothers coved the same gloom. Yet her experience of constant visibility is not uncommon nor difficult to understand: the value Maire saw in the possibility of hiding, in a place where one could be secret, is still a value in today’s society, and, more than ever, in today’s home.

The question of encounters between inhabitants, of boundaries between intimate and common spaces, is further developed in the project for a shared house by mnm, completed in 2013 and located in the district of Chiyoda, Tokyo. Conceived for seven people, with no specific familiar link between each other, and with the perspective that the first configuration of inhabitants could easily change through time, the house deals with proximity in a similar way as the project by Atelier BCDE. The house is a renovation of an existing building and is organised on two levels, each providing private rooms, service and communal facilities. While the ground floor, where the kitchen is located, is thought of as a continuation of the street, with the exception of the two private rooms located in the back, the first floor is a sequence of concentric circles that lead from collective to intimate. Here again, we find the cell as the locus of private life: placed at the core of the building, five cells, each equipped with a mezzanine, are disposed with

¹²³ “Dans la maison de Corbu, je ne pouvais pas vivre secrètement. (...) J’entendais tout ce que faisaient mes parents parce que je n’étais séparée d’eux que par un placard. Je détestais cette intimité. Savoir qui faisait quoi et quand. (...) Chez moi je n’avait pas des coins secret. Une histoire d’amour y était inimaginable tant tout y été surveillé. Chacun vivait constamment sous le regard des autres dans cet espace ou tout communiquait. (...) Je détestais la vie communautaire et j’avais perdu mon territoire à moi alors que j’avais une chambre. (...) Dans l’appartement précédent personne ne me surveillait. Là, dans cette maison, on voyait tout. (...)” Ibid. Translated by the author.

¹²⁴ “C’est la maison qui faisait la loi. La place de chaque chose y était désignée en avance et même celle des personnes. Il est difficile d’y être vivant. Nous y étions comme des sculpteurs.” Ibid., 86. Translated by the author.



■ Bed

1m

1.24 Above: Plan of San Romualdo's cell in the monastery of Camaldoli (Italy), founded in 1046. Below: House for 7 people, mmm, Chiyoda (Tokyo), 2013. Plan of the first floor.

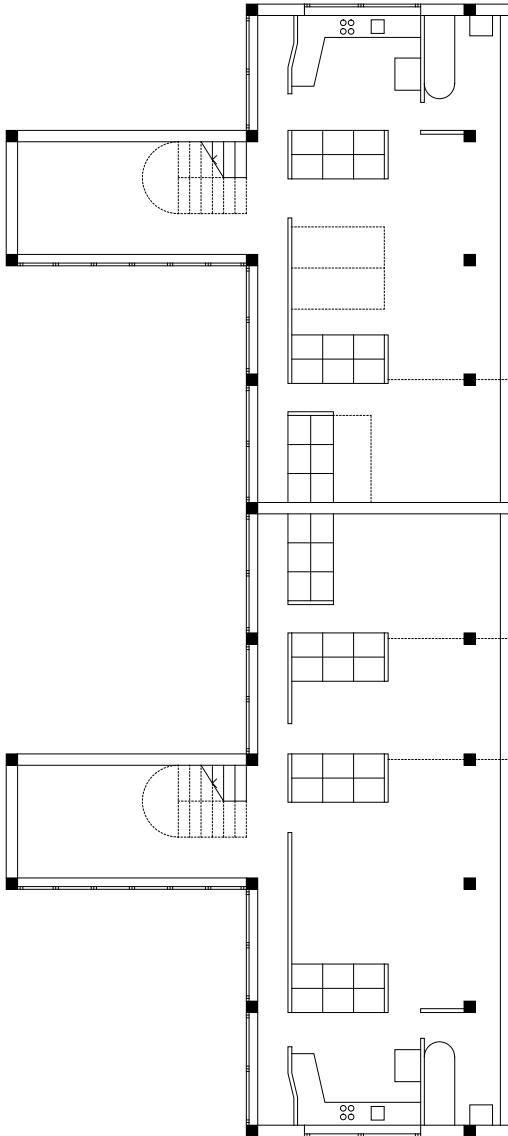
the back to each other, closed on three sides and open on the fourth to a shared corridor that, like a ring, leads also to the bathroom and the loggia. The cell itself is conceived as a device for intimacy: the first most intimate level being the mezzanine, which can be screened through sliding panels or a curtain; the second being the main floor, divided from the corridor by glazed doors; the third being the fragment of corridor in front of the cell, which opens to the outside, simultaneously private and common. In its simplicity, the plan of the first floor retraces the structure of the Camaldolese monastic cell: organised as a sea shell, from the garden, the inhabitant is led through a series of spaces (storage, latrine, woodshed), connected by an interior corridor, only to arrive at the core of the cell, where the bed, the little *studiolo* and the chapel are placed in close proximity to the only source of warmth, a fireplace located in the corner of the room. But, if in the monastic cell the sequence is thought to enhance the solitude of the monk, in mnm's house it serves as a mechanism to organise the coexistence of different individuals in the same space, providing them with places for refuge and conviviality which unfold through a subtle gradient constructed on the basis of constant negotiation. The technology of the bedroom is therefore at the core of the problem, a way of dealing with communal living that tackles the trivial, the ordinary, the daily problems arising from a life in close proximity.

The disappearance of the bedroom

While the "cellularisation" of the bedroom gave way to an architecture of capsules, where the minimum private space is compensated by generous communal and semi-communal spaces, this trend put under scrutiny the nature of the bedroom itself, questioning its role and programmatic utility within the household's spatial structure, and its traditional interpretation as a piece enclosed in four solid walls.¹²⁵ This process implied the radical transformation of the relation between bedroom and living room: the two programs, once rigidly distinct, start to overlap in different ways, fading the separation between day and night spaces, active and passive moments of the day, solitude and togetherness. Already in 1927, Le Corbusier urged a shift in the conception of the bedroom as a definitive space, proposing, in the Weissenhof project, an open plan collective house, where the only spatial definition between private and communal areas was given by the presence of sliding walls that could be closed at night to make the house a sort of "sleeping car."¹²⁶ During the day, life took place in one large room; all the necessary equipment for sleeping, such as beds and closets for the storage of linens and duvets, would be hidden in functional blocks

¹²⁵ In "Figures, Doors and Passages," Robin Evans further explains why the cell was an appealing architectural element for modernist disciples: fueled by the rejection of 19th century family life, modernists acted on two fronts. If, on one side services and facilities were to be collectivized, on the other each person was to be anatomized, individualized and separated yet further. The cell becomes the basic "building block" for the construction of new cities. See Robin Evans, "Figures, Doors, and Passages," 54-91.

¹²⁶ Willy Boesiger, ed., *Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret, Oeuvre complète 1910-1929*, vol. 1 (Zurich: Les Éditions d'Architecture, 1970), 150.



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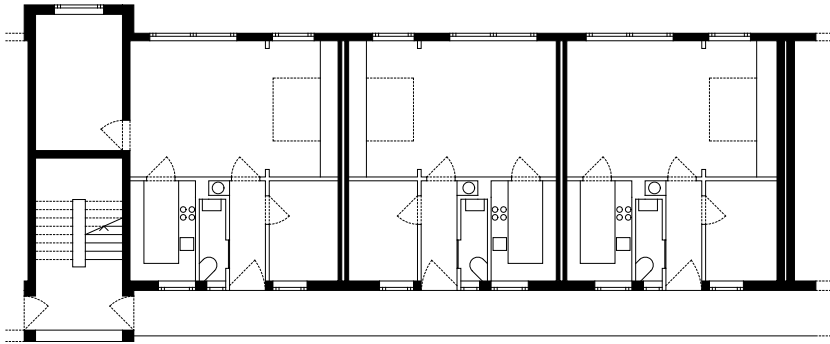
1.25 Le Corbusier, Weissenhof, Stuttgart (Germany), 1927. Typical floor plan.

located in each *cellule*. Domestic services were located at the two opposite edges of the plan, while study spaces could be found at the top floor, on the roof garden. At night, circulation would take place through a narrow corridor, the dimension of which was exactly the same as that in the trains of the *Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits*, which, from the late 19th century, played a crucial role in bringing to Europe trains equipped with sleeping wagons and dining cars based on the American Pullman model. Le Corbusier's fascination with the railway sleeper appears several times in his work and embodies his conception of the modern dweller as a nomad:

“One could say by this token that the modern man has become a nomad, a nomad inhabiting apartments with common services, different lodgings conforming to the crucial stages of his life. War, bombings, have destroyed homes and furnishings; the new generations can set themselves up in housekeeping without bearing the burden of inherited ‘family furniture.’ Henceforth they shall be able to enter their apartment with their valises in hand, their bookcase, their bedding and their clothing. All that remains is to provide beds (and what simplified beds!), tables (and what kind of tables, what size, combinations, and possible juxtapositions?), and finally some chairs (what kind of chairs?).”¹²⁷

In the Weissenhof, the very definition of the main room as *wohnraum*, living space, and of the sleeping niche as *schlafkabine*, sleeping cabin, challenges the traditional bourgeois interpretation of the bedroom as the private space of the couple, opposed to the living room as the public space of reception. Instead, Le Corbusier merges the two into a single uninterrupted room, which can be rearranged according to whether it is day or night. A similar operation was done by Ernst May who introduced in the apartments type Mefagang 2.41 (Frankfurt, 1930), the possibility of changing the configuration of the main room according to different times of the day. One of the walls perpendicular to the façade was equipped with a continuous closet which included two beds that could be pulled down when needed. While concerned more with experimenting with minimum dwelling standards and equipment, May's Mefagang and Le Corbusier's Weissenhof anticipated by some years the questions that will occupy a central position in the architectural debate from the end of the 80s. At that point, the functional and programmatic re-conceptualisation of the bedroom in relation to new modes of habitation had become a paramount task of the architect. The de-compartmentalisation of the house led to the development of the “operable bedroom,” a space that can appear and disappear within the

¹²⁷ Willy Boesiger, ed., *Le Corbusier et son atelier rue de Sèvres 35, Oeuvre complète 1952-1957*, vol. 6 (Zurich: Les Éditions d'Architecture, 1970), 208.



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1.26 Ernst May, Minimum flats,
type Mefagang 2.41, Frankfurt
(Germany), 1930. Typical floor
plan.

household layout according to necessity.

Building on these questions, Spanish architects Maria Aranguren and José Gallegos developed extensive research on the nature of interior space, its renovation, actualisation and the rethinking of dwelling norms. In the housing complex for Bentaberri, presented in the context of PAN 14, the requirements of the Official Apartment Protection ordinance — minimum 90 square meters equipped with four bedrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchen — were reinvented starting from the possibility of implementing a double use of the house, respectively during the day and during the night:

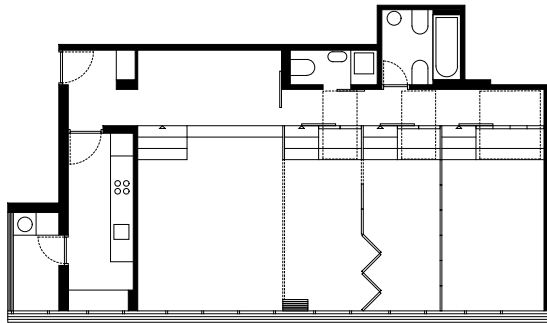
“The elements that break up the space can disappear during the day so that the apartment becomes a large, long space with one end communicating with the other (...). During the night out come the necessary separations so that the apartment can be used in its nocturnal function of resting. The challenge was to create some sponge elements that compress and expand in function of the apartment’s activity: night-day, activity- rest, communication-isolation....”¹²⁸

This attempt to break conventional domestic structures translates into two main spatial types that are alternated in the floor plan: a long uninterrupted open space that can be divided with mobile partitions when necessity arises, and a back spine, a service wall, which simultaneously divides different areas of the apartment and absorbs all the technical functions necessary for living (electricity, plumbing, heating, as well as cooking and cleaning facilities). Quoting Maria Aranguren in explaining the concept:

“Not only did this conceptual clarity interest us about what should be a house, we also wanted to find a space that best fits with the way of living of our generation and that had, at the same time, sufficient flexibility for adapting itself to more conventional or more specific situations. Our way of living is already substantially different than that of our parents. (...) For this reason, our pieces are transformable, are able to convert practically all of them of 50, 70 or 90 sqm and at the same time able to be into a single space subdivided into absolutely private mini spaces. (...) The master bedroom is no longer an institutional sitting room where there is the bureau, the closet.... Today our life is not like that. It is fine that there be a large room for accommodating another bed of a small child that has to sleep nearby... But this large space can visually and functionally incorporate itself during the day with the living room, practically doubling in this way the common area of the apartment.”¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Maria Aranguren and José Gallegos, “The European Experience,” in Joaquín Arnau Amo, *Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de la Comunidad Valenciana, New Ways of Housing – Nuevos Modos de Habitar*, (Valencia: COACV, 1996), 256-269. Translated by the author.

¹²⁹ Ibid.



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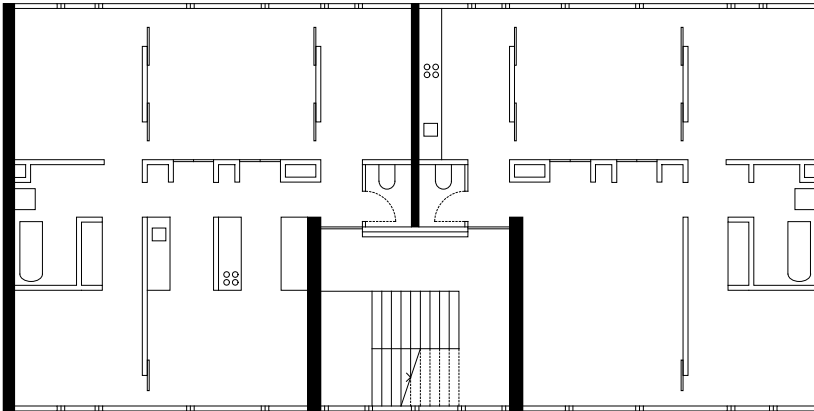
1.27 Maria Aranguren and José Gallegos, Carabanchel housing complex, Carabanchel (Madrid), 2005. Floor plan of a typical apartment unit.

Following Bentaberri, which was never realised, the duo further explored the question of interior organisation in the Carabanchel housing complex. Completed in 2005, the project is a direct reference to another study by Le Corbusier for a rental apartment building, which in turn was a further development of the Weissenhof. In Le Corbusier's design, the relation between time and use is addressed through the development of two different apartment variations: in the apartments located on even floors, a central large strip contains kitchen, bathroom, and a pair of foldable beds; each room is accessible through a corridor equipped with closets, and divisible by the others via sliding panels as in Stuttgart. In the apartments located on odd numbered floors, Le Corbusier introduces an "elevated corridor," raised of about 85 cm from the general floor, under which sliding beds can be stored during the day so to maximise usable space. Similarly, Carabanchel is developed on two levels: a raised perimeter, containing all fixed facilities such as bathrooms and kitchen, under which beds can slide, and a central mono-oriented room, which can be subdivided through folding partitions. Differently from Le Corbusier, however, where all the rooms are designed with the same qualities, Aranguren and Gallegos organise the span of the partitions so to have two different room sizes, one larger and two smaller, implementing in this way the traditional differentiation between room for the parents and room for the children. Such a design solution was intended at making apartments look more accessible to the general public, closer to the traditional language of home living, in contrast to Bentaberri which radically expunged any kind of spatial hierarchy. Nevertheless, in both projects, like in Pullman's train wagons, sleep becomes a transitory activity, the bed is something that is present only at night, or is pulled out specifically to rest. In this sense the bedroom loses its quality as a clearly defined space, both in physical and moral terms.

If in the 1930s this entailed a certain level of liberation from the constraints of the bedroom as the heart of private life, within the capitalist economy the disappearance of a locus specifically dedicated to rest reinforces the ubiquitous presence of work within the home. Building on the idea of indetermination, in Florian Riegler and Roger Riewe's housing project for Graz-Straßgang (1994), spaces are constantly redefined by their use, while the traditional hierarchical organisation of the household is decomposed in a system of interconnected spaces, ultimately framing the complex flow of layers of utilisation.¹³⁰

Before being given direct commission, the project was rejected multiple times by the local government as it was supposedly destroying the traditional structure of local families, attempting to subvert given

¹³⁰ *Determined / Non-Determined*, lecture given by Roger Riewe at Melbourne School of Design, March 2023.



1m

1.28 Riegler Riewe Architekten, housing Graz-Straßgang, Graz (Austria), 1994. Floor plans of two apartment units showing the different location of the kitchen.

assumptions on family life. In Straßgang, all the rooms are connected with sliding doors and intentionally lack any hint to functional definition. To the traditional layout of two and four rooms apartments the architects added half a room more, a space to be occupied freely; the idea was implemented for half of the apartments, while in the other half, per government demand, the kitchen was located in the half room, inevitably establishing a fixed spatial hierarchy. The deconstruction of the master bedroom is, again, a pivotal aspect of the project: while questioning the way domestic space is determined, there is a clear attempt to eradicate traditional dogmas on hierarchy and privacy. Who is the bedroom really for, and what activities is it going to host are questions left purposefully unanswered. The bed disappears not only on the representational level, but also on the technical one: playing with the distribution of power plugs the architects work against the German convention of having one room with plugs positioned at 1.4 meters apart, between which one would usually place the marital bed, and instead spread them evenly throughout the house, depriving inhabitants of any predefined scheme dictating furniture disposition.

Despite being realised or conceived at a distance of several years one from the other, Le Corbusier's Weissenhof, the competition entries of PAN 14, and the projects by Aranguren&Gallegos and Riegler Riewe, all share the goal of rethinking given domestic structures rooted in the dynamics of the nuclear family, and conceiving spaces in relation to variable uses rather than on programmatic functionality. In this way, they provide the possibility of implementing different levels of privacy, of being together or being alone, stressing the importance of the continuity between these two states and their interchangeability at different times of the day. As historian Kenneth Frampton points out, questioning the "tradition of the new" in the entries of PAN 14,

"What was genuinely new in the best of these projects was not so much the specific strategy adopted towards the reorganisation of space as the particular self-awareness of the architect to the emergence of new needs, either in terms of emergent group patterns or in terms of a totally different appropriation of the built domain by the traditional, above all through what one might call the oriental transformation of sleeping space into living space or through such ingenious devices as sliding walls and beds that slide away into podia."¹³¹

This design tendency is translated by Frampton in a series of paradigms, which, integral to the language of the Modern Movement, are re-emerging nowadays as a response to the changing configuration of

¹³¹ The quote is taken from a conference given by Kenneth Frampton in occasion of the symposium *New Ways of Housing – Nuevos Modos de Habitar*, which took place in Valencia in 1995 as part of a course organised by the Cultural Department of the Centre of Services of the Regional Association of Architects, with the aim of re-considering the rigid structures of domestic settings, and assumed stereotypes and attitudes in the context of contemporary dwelling projects. The results of the conference are published in the form of a book: Joaquín Arnau Amo, Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de la Comunidad Valenciana, *New Ways of Housing – Nuevos Modos de Habitar* (Valencia: COACV, 1996).

urban living. Referring specifically to the fading boundaries between living and sleeping, living room and bedroom, he individuates in these transformations the Japanisation of the Western home, where typical elements such as the *shoji*, or the thick wall as servant space, become fundamental devices within the contemporary household. Rooms in the Japanese house are not defined by function or size, but by the use one makes of the *tatami* mat: rolling out a futon means setting up a room to sleep in, laying down a *zabuton* (floor pillow) and a *zen* (small tray), means preparing to have a meal, everything happening on the *tatami* floor. Vertical partitions, consisting in light weight sliding doors built with a wooden frame and rice paper do not comply with the bourgeois idea of privacy, room division and hierarchy, and it is rather the different patterns of *tatami* mats that define spaces within a continuous interior. While providing a structural unit to daily life, the *tatami* does not respond to any predefined definition of use, leaving inhabitants free to occupy space in continuously different ways.¹³² Building on these ideas, spaces in the post-domestic home are determined by use rather than function. Here, the unfolding of everyday life becomes the only tool of spatial definition, highlighting the inextricable relation between ways of living and domestic architecture. Teyssot further explains this tendency referring to the description of New York apartments towards the end of the 20th century, which evolved from “map” to “tour.” If the first focused on highlighting the typological distribution of rooms, “next to the kitchen there is the children room,” the second gave more importance to the operations performed in the spaces, being closer to a form of narration.¹³³ Space in this case, he explains quoting de Certeau, is thought of as “topological,” concerning the deformation of figures, and not “topical,” where the word “topica,” in ancient rhetoric, was used to indicate a certain locus, an abstract space, from which it was possible to draw the premises of the discourse.¹³⁴ It is in this way that we can start to understand the different domestic perceptions of the contemporary inhabitant, constructed on the succession of positions in space and time, decentralised and mutable.

1.5 Personal hygiene

Not only related to the obvious question of hygiene and technological development, the evolution of the bathroom is inextricably linked to the changing notion of privacy. Bathing, an activity that normally took place in the warmest, and therefore most inhabited, room of the

¹³² It is interesting to note that before the 19th century, when the nuclear family was established in Western culture as a spatially bounded concept, and a mechanism for operating citizenship, inevitably spreading to Japan a precise idea of domesticity, Japanese households were composed of servants, apprentices, lodgers, and often included members of extended family. These all coexisted in a socially and physically porous domestic environment, often embedded in the larger network of the village community, to the point that “before the 1880s, no one in government, religious office, or the world of letters identified the physical site of family life as a special locus of moral meaning.” See Jordan Sand, *House And Home in Modern Japan: Architecture, Domestic Space, And Bourgeois Culture, 1880-1930* (Harvard University Press, 2005).

¹³³ Here Teyssot is quoting Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du Quotidien, tome I: Arts de Faire* (Paris: U. G. E., 1980), 210; who in turn is quoting C. Linde and W. Labov, “Spatial Networks as a site for the study of language and thought,” *Language*, no. 51 (1975): 924-939.

¹³⁴ Georges Teyssot, ed., *Il Progetto domestico – La casa dell'uomo: archetipi e prototipi* (Milano: Electa, 1986), 26; quoting Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du Quotidien, tome I: Arts de Faire*, 225.

house, from the second half of the 19th century is understood as the most intimate of domestic rituals. The bathroom becomes a sanctuary and swiftly starts its migration from the kitchen to the bedroom. While a history of communal washing facilities could also be traced, the chapter focuses mainly on their domestic evolution, analysing the transformation of the bathroom from a piece of furniture to a room, its movement within the house, and the development of related practices of use. As Professor Alexander Kira argues in his anatomical analysis of customs in the bathroom, while available technology has certainly played a role in the development of cleaning habits, “the most important determinants have been our various philosophical, psychological and religious attitudes regarding the human body and its processes and products.”¹³⁵ Kira also highlights how the question of personal hygiene goes hand in hand with the maintenance of community: living in close proximity implies the administration of certain group regulations, as one’s own hygiene habits have the potential to affect social dynamics as well as the collective well-being.¹³⁶ It is especially in this dichotomy between individual hygiene and its collective ramifications, that architecture plays a paramount role as mediator, strengthening ideas of privacy or togetherness in response to changing cultural and social values.

In medieval times, washing was a convivial moment shared by household members. From the rich to the poor, people would bathe in company: wives would help husbands setting up the water basin, normally in the midst of morning hustle and chores; matrons would be aided by servants to wash and dress; mutual delousing was a common activity, to the point that among the ladies of Ravenna, a thirteenth-century regulation forbade anyone from engaging in such an endeavour under public arcades.¹³⁷ Several pictorial representations of domestic life in the 14th century confirm the written testimony, such as that from the famous *Tacuinum Sanitatis*, showing three women helping each other bathe in a wooden tub, or the one from Tuscan painter Memmo di Filippuccio (ca. 1320), who portrays a couple bathing together in the presence of a maid assisting them. These illustrations suggest that bathing, and in general taking care of one’s own personal hygiene, were commonly impromptu activities, which did not require that much orchestration in relation to who was allowed to attend, the time of performance, or the location, and rarely did they single out a moment of privacy in the life of individuals.

This approach did not really change until the half of the 19th century; even with the advent of industrialization and the exodus from

¹³⁵ Alexander Kira, *The Bathroom* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 5.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³⁷ Charles de La Ronciere, “Tuscan Notables on the Eve of the Renaissance,” in *A History of Private Life: Revelations of the Medieval World*, vol. II, ed. Georges Duby (Massachusetts, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1988), 201.



1.29 Memmo di Filippuccio, *Couple Bathing*, ca. 1320. A maid assists the couple in their private bath; she will also be present when they go to bed (located in the town hall of San Gimignano, Tuscany).

countryside to city, conditions of insalubrity persisted in most housing tenements, and people had little concern for where they would be able to wash or defecate, things would just happen, in courtyards, alleys or rooms. Accounting for the life of the French working class between 1871 and 1890, historian Michelle Perrot mentions that “The [common] people do not ask for bathrooms in their apartments,” but were rather concerned with having access to a modest space that looked dignified both inside and outside, “so that no one can say that they live in a workers’ housing project,” in this way confirming a dread of regimentation as opposed to a yearning for individualised housing.¹³⁸ Water started to gain attention concurrently with the breakout of the first cholera epidemics in London and Paris: a new approach to hygiene was necessary, and not only at the individual level, the entire city had to be rethought, water had to become universally accessible. As stated by the first French missions in visit to London which was already addressing the issue in the 1830s: “It is about transforming our habits, changing the petty way in which we make use of water through a widespread implementation of such an element of life and domestic health.”¹³⁹

The first attempts to bring running water in multi-storey housing were mostly offering shared facilities: water would be available only in the ground floor (in Paris, water will reach the upper stories only in 1865 on the Right Bank and in 1875 on the Left Bank¹⁴⁰), where bathroom and kitchen were forced to merge in one space, their location dictated by economy and the necessary simplification of the new system of pipes. Such a room was usually pushed at the back of the apartment, highlighting the separation between “representation” areas, such as living room and dining room, which would face the street, and working areas, which would still be connected to the courtyard, or more precisely the air shaft, a space – “filled with acrid fumes and odors, where the heat of the oven was bad for the complexion”¹⁴¹ – that since then had been used for the discharge of domestic and personal waste. Historian Roger-Henri Guerrand, in *A History of Private Life*, notes that, while upper classes filled their houses with porcelain pitchers and bowls and the objects pertaining to the fashionable “cabinet de toilette,” common people did not bathe every day and were not concerned with gaining comfort in the bathroom.¹⁴² Not yet a room per se, the bathroom was still perceived as a temporary construct: a basin, a screen, brushes and towels, could all be retrieved according to necessity and stored away a moment later. Yet, towards the end of the century, the spread of a certain bourgeois modesty, the shared quest for domestic comfort, and the technical development of plumbing systems, pushed the bathroom

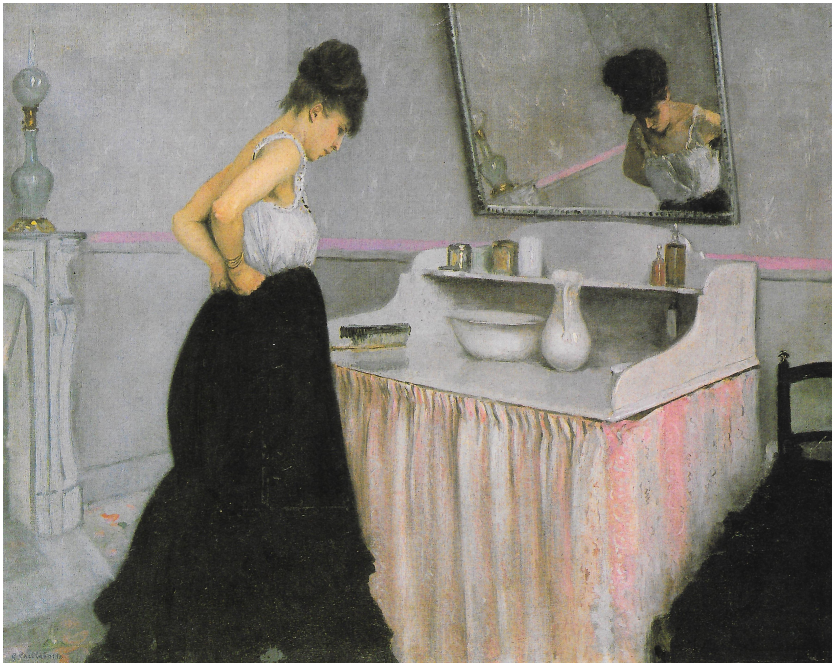
¹³⁸ Michelle Perrot, “At Home,” in *A History of Private Life: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, vol. IV, ed. Michelle Perrot (Massachusetts, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), 354. See also Michelle Perrot, *Les Ouvriers en grève. France 1871-1890*, tome 1 (Éditions de l’École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2001), 28.

¹³⁹ “Il s’agit ici de modifier nos habitudes, de changer la manière mesquine dont nous employons l’eau contre un large usage de cet élément de la vie et de la salubrité domestique (...).” Translated from C. F. Mallet, *Notice historique sur le projet d’une distribution générale d’eau à domicile dans Paris* (Paris: Carilian-Goeury, 1830), 23.

¹⁴⁰ Roger-Henri Guerrand, “Private Spaces,” in *A History of Private Life: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, vol. IV, ed. Michelle Perrot (Massachusetts, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), 370.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*



1.30 Gustave Caillebotte, *Femme à sa toilette*, 1873.

from the kitchen to the vicinities of the bedroom, crystallizing the canonical opposition between private and public, night and day, which we still experience nowadays in the two clusters bathroom-bedroom and kitchen-living/dining room.¹⁴³ This migration, while contributing to bring together two functions that had been until then kept separate, the bathroom and the latrine, marks a fundamental change in the very conception of the bathroom as a private space. The process is well described in a passage taken once again from *A History of Private Life*:

“In the early modern era architects created new private spaces in the homes of the well-to-do, or, rather, they increased the amount of private space by transforming into rooms what had previously been mere objects of furniture. In the various languages of Europe, words such as study, cabinet, *bibliothèque* (shelf or library), and *ecritoire* (writing desk or writing room) [to which we could add *cabinet de toilette*] may still refer to items of furniture, but they also designate rooms serving a particular, often private, function.”¹⁴⁴

The transformation of the bathroom from object to designated room, and the mutation of self-care from a convivial to an intimate activity, gain further significance if we take into consideration Norbert Elias’ interpretation of privatisation, which, he argues, is consubstantial to civilisation. In this context, the implementation of a precise sense of decency, which could not have taken place without the support of the Church, as well as of the governmental and educational institutions active at the time, contributed to physically transform the spatial configuration of domestic life so that certain acts such as washing, defecating, making love — once performed in public without concern — could by then take place only behind closed curtains.¹⁴⁵ As stated by the Baroness Staffe in her treatise on the cabinet de toilette, described as *le sanctuaire de la femme*,

“There are always one or more spaces of the house where the woman impresses her own particular trace, which recall her moral and physical traits. There is the intimate salon where she carries on her intellectual and artistic life, where she enjoys social life in its highest form of expression: elective affinities, friendships, sympathies. There is the bedroom which contains the souvenirs of familial bliss: maternal and conjugal tenderness. Eventually, there is the saint of saints, the cabinet de toilette, where common people (laymen) are not allowed, where she keeps at a distance even her dearest affections (...).”¹⁴⁶

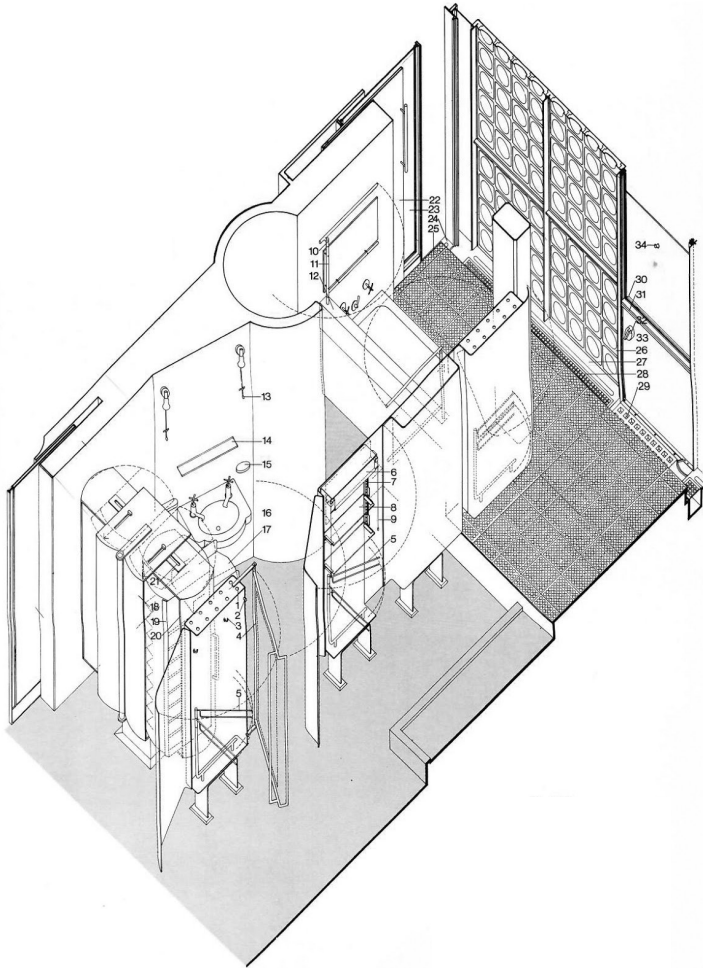
The bathroom embodies the bourgeois logic of decency, and it is not without a certain pedagogical intent that this model started to spread

¹⁴³ In 1885, the French magazine *La Semaine des Constructeurs* presented a recently built private residential complex, which offered several bathrooms located all the second floor and adjacent to the bedrooms, as a strikingly progressive model. See “Hôtel particulier à Paris,” *La Semaine des Constructeurs* (1885): 463.

¹⁴⁴ Orest Ranum, “The Refuges of Intimacy,” in *A History of Private Life: Passions of the Renaissance*, vol. III, ed. Roger Chartier (Massachusetts, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 211.

¹⁴⁵ See Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (New York: Urizen Books, 1978).

¹⁴⁶ “Il y a toujours une ou plusieurs pièces de la maison ou la femme imprime sa marque particulière, qui sont faites at sa ressemblance morale et physique. C’est le salon intime où elle vit de la vie intellectuelle et artistique, où elle jouit de la vie sociale dans sa plus haute expression: affections d’élection, amitié, sympathie. C’est sa chambre à coucher où se concentrent les souvenirs du bonheur familial: tendresse, maternelle et tendresse conjugale. Enfin, c’est le saint des saints, le cabinet de toilette où elle n’admet pas de profanes, dont elle éloigne les plus chers (...).” Baroness Staffe, *Le Cabinet de Toilette* (Paris: Victor Havaud Éditeur, 1891), 1. Translated by the author.



1.31 Axonometric diagram of the parents' bathroom in Pierre Chareau's Maison de Verre, Paris (France), 1928-1932.

among the working class. The development of cleaning standards and habits corresponded, therefore, to the broadening and strengthening of the domestic private sphere.¹⁴⁷

In Modern times, architects' attention shifts to the technology of hygiene: more than who is allowed in the bathroom or when, the question is how the bathroom can be rethought as a noteworthy architectural element, its bowels exposed, its functioning revealed, in the attempt to explore the sensuality of such a space and challenge traditional bourgeois morality. In an essay titled *Toilet Architecture*, Colomina and Wigley argue that:

“The toilet is the most psychosexually charged room in any building. But to speak of it as a room is already to speak too quickly. The toilet is technology. More precisely, it is a pipe that has been shaped into a piece of furniture so it can be occupied. It is the space where the hidden interior of the body comes into intimate contact with the hidden interior of the building, two plumbing systems temporarily connected.”¹⁴⁸

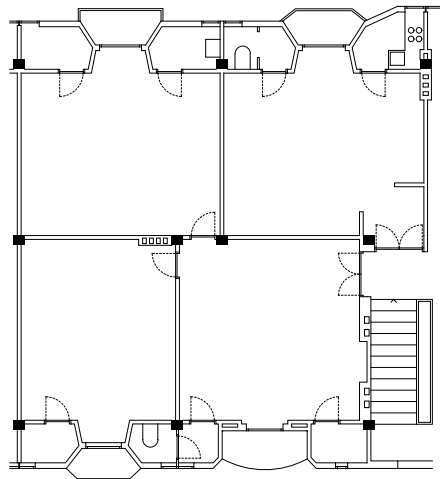
The modern house is considered to be a “machine for living in,”¹⁴⁹ a tool for the engineering of life. How the confluence of domestic control and engineering influences the design of bathrooms can be observed in the *Maison de Verre*, the studio and family house of gynaecologist Jean Dalsace, built between 1928 and 1932 in Paris to accommodate the doctor himself, his wife, and their two children. The house was realised as a collaboration between Pierre Chareau, Bernard Bijvoet and Louis Dalbet, whose different fields of expertise allowed them to carefully design every architectural element, from the door handle to the glass façade. Every room in the *Maison de Verre* is at the service of a certain character: the master bedroom with private bathroom for the parents, the rooms for the children (both equipped with washing facilities with the addition of a bathtub for the girl), the doctor's consultation room, the wife's sun-room, the familial dining room, the servants' quarters. Spreading on three floors, each function is distributed and architecturally defined “in regard to who is doing the work (madame, doctor, nurse, maid), enjoying free time (wife, husband, son, daughter, maid) or sleeping (parent, child, maid).”¹⁵⁰ Partitions are rarely fixed and rather consist of built-in closets and hidden passageways that lay-out inhabitants' paths in the attempt to reduce the chance of casual encounters. The walls dividing the bedrooms from the service corridor are in fact double sided closets, which can be used by servants to provide clean linens without having to enter the room; the linen room is conveniently located between the house and the staff's room, which

¹⁴⁷ Advertisement in *Domus* or *La Casa Bella* in 1932-1933 addressed an increasingly vast and varied public, and looked rather similar to the kind of ads which would appear in popular newspapers: “In your apartment the bathroom cabinet does not only represent an indispensable hygienic necessity, but it is also the expression of your elegance and good taste.” Washing becomes a social obligation. See Mario Tinti, “Orientazioni: Arredamento moderno e ‘intimità’,” *La Casa Bella* (1931), and Georges Vigarcello, “Lo spazio intimo della sala da bagno,” in *Il progetto domestico – La casa dell'uomo: archetipi e prototipi*, ed. Georges Teyssot (Milano: Electa, 1986).

¹⁴⁸ Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley, “Toilet Architecture: An essay about the most psychosexually charged room in a building,” *PIN-UP*, no. 23 (2017/18).

¹⁴⁹ The first edition of *Vers une Architecture* was published in 1923, even though many of its constituting essays appeared on *L'Esprit Nouveau* already in 1920.

¹⁵⁰ Emma Nilsson, “Inclusive Design. Discriminating Architecture,” *Metode*, vol. 2, *Being, Bathing and Beyond* (2024): 2-8, 5.



1m

1.32 Plan exhibited at the CIAM of Frankfurt showing social housing (*alloggi ultrapopolari*) with services located in the façade. Floor plan of a typical apartment unit. Redrawn from C. Aymonino, ed., *L'abitazione razionale. Atti dei Congressi CIAM (1929-1930)* (Venice: Marsilio, 1980), 151.

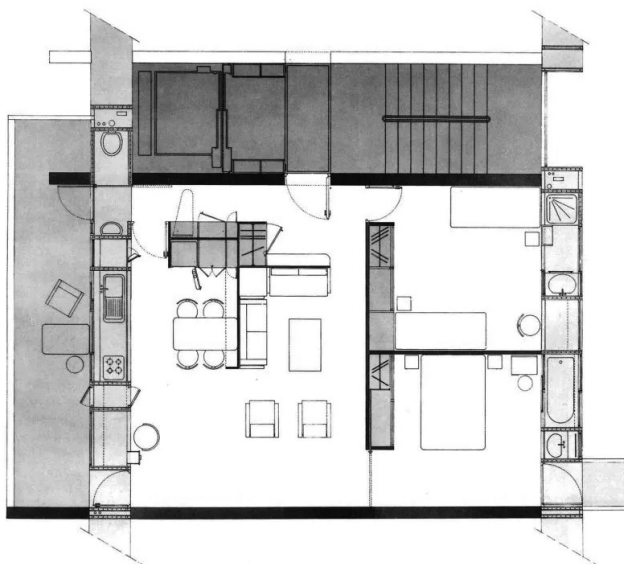
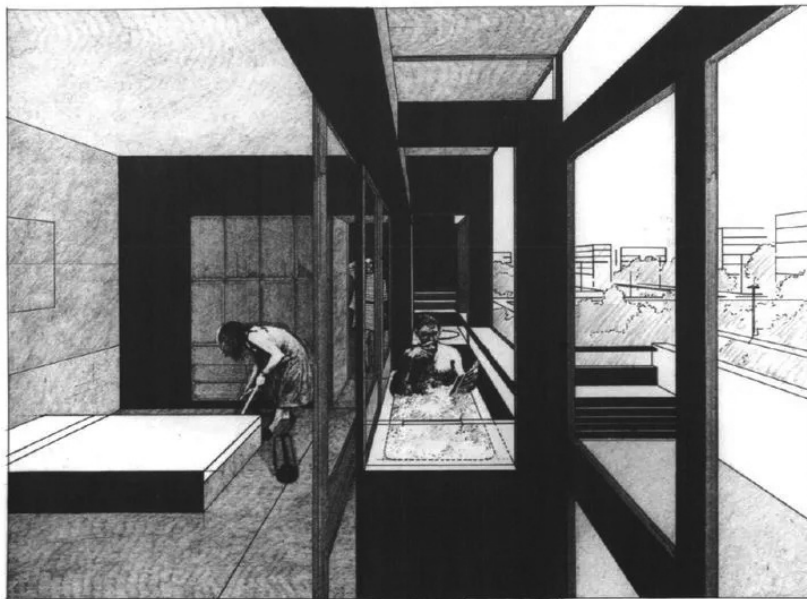
is vertically stacked on top of the kitchen, accessible from the floor below through a secondary staircase; the main bedroom is equipped with a retractable staircase leading to the sun room. Mimicking the life of Jacques Tati's Mr. and Mrs. Arpel in their villa, one can imagine a number of figurines frenetically climbing up and down, closing doors, opening closets, storing, preparing, cleaning, each following a precise frictionless liturgy which the house simultaneously imposes and accommodates. The bathroom explodes in an excess of handles, turning mirrors, shelves, drying racks, retractable screens, all contributing to hide or show the body, to go unseen or provide a stage for a theatre performance. The bathtub becomes the centrepiece of such a performance: facing the outside, a window, a glass wall, or another room, nakedness is exposed, and the bathroom turns into a public space.

The bathroom as a threshold

While Modern architects challenged the conception of the toilet during the first and second half of the 20th century, much of this debate did not find a concrete response in mass housing: the Post-Modern bathroom retreats back into the intestines of the house, hiding once again the user from the gaze of others. Today the bathroom is a battleground, the very locus of domestic negotiation, where different cultures, entities, genders, are forced to meet and share intimacy and diverse hygiene habits, willingly or not. Yet, despite such premises, the bathroom remains on the margins of the main architectural discussion, its walls seem as solid as they have ever been, and a serious spatial reconfiguration of its borders, nooks and technical apparatuses has not been undertaken in the large scale. Nevertheless, a few pioneering examples attempt to reconcile the bathroom with its domestic role and programmatic requirements, two aspects that often do not coincide, particularly questioning its relationship with the outer and the inner worlds of the home.

Domestic hygiene represented a fertile ground for discussion already in 1930s Milan, when the problem of providing affordable workers' housing in large quantities prompted architects to invent alternative solutions to economise construction. Here, the question of the service block and its location within the house was related with matters of utility and decency: since the "*case popolarissime*"¹⁵¹ were following the principle of the minimum dwelling, therefore reducing the inhabitable surface and optimising spatial organisation, luxury consisted in having access to a private latrine and drinking water in the house. While working for the *Istituto per le Case Popolari di Milano*, architect Giovanni Broglio developed a vast typological research, proposing diverse

¹⁵¹ The name refers to a mass housing typology for the working class conceived and developed by the *Istituto per le Case Popolari di Milano* in the Inter-war period.



1.33 Yves Lion, Domus Demain,
unbuilt, 1984.

solutions for the location of services in the façade, which were in large part built during the 30s. If, on the one hand, such an investigation was motivated by economic reasons, on the other, it openly challenged traditional domestic conceptions: the placing of services such as latrines and washing facilities in the façade, facing public streets, was often frowned upon, as it would have implied that common people would perform their most scandalous, dirty, physical functions on display for the city to see. The discussion was clearly ahead of its time, but this opposition between privacy and publicness in the bathroom will keep resurfacing in the years to come, especially in the 70s and 80s, when a new interest towards sociology, collectivity and ways of living, started to stir the discussion on housing.

Yves Lion's *Domus Demain* (1984) is conceived, once again, in the context of the PAN programme. Together with the unflinching faith in mechanisation and standardisation which permeated housing design during those years, what Yves Lion and François Leclercq's competition proposal highlights is a firm attempt to escape from the traditional tendency of hiding the bathroom in the most unflattering corners of the house. In their apartment plan, small WC cabinets, sinks, bathtubs, as well as cooking facilities, colonise the façade, creating a buffer zone between rooms and the outside world, which they refer to as *bande active*. This systematic re-organisation of domestic facilities would render the corridor unnecessary, improve natural ventilation of service spaces, and facilitate access to technical systems in the event of replacements or adjustments. The standardisation of components would allow every room to be equipped with autonomous washing appliances, therefore guaranteeing the proposal's affordability. In one of the images, a man reads a paper in the bathtub, while a woman cleans the floor in the adjacent room, and another seems to be approaching the scene from the background. Nothing is screening one figure from the other, the *bande active* works as a funnel, allowing the gaze to wander undisturbed across the length of the entire apartment. A similar layout was adopted by Jan Neutelings, Alex Wall, Xaveer De Geyter and Frank Roodbeen in their entry for the *Competition Habitatge i Ciutat* (Housing and City), organised in 1990 by the review *Quaderns of Barcelona*. In what they call *The Filter House*, the clustering of services in the façade allows the development of a continuous domestic surface, which can be subdivided by light partitions of furniture pieces and where a raised floor allows for the storage of beds, electronic devices and other appliances.

While these experiments have remained mostly on paper, it is in Japan that the *bande active* has found its concrete application. In 1998, Kazuyo Sejima completes the Gifu Kitagata building, a social housing complex located in the city of Gifu, as part of a masterplan designed by Arata Isozaki. The linear building hosts a total of 107 units, comprising 30 different typologies that span from 49 to 80 square meters. Each apartment is only 5.8 meters wide, a dimension that is given by the main room module, plus the two distribution bands: a collective circulation band facing north, and a “sun corridor” facing south. The bathroom is placed here: two small modules, containing respectively toilet and shower, open to a glazed passage which is equipped with a sink encapsulated in a long thin table. There is no bathroom per se, its boundaries fade in the distribution space, but the sink, which spans exactly the length of the two modules, individuates a sort of invisible threshold: two curtain rails are installed on the ceiling at its edges, indicating the possibility of enclosing that fragment of corridor. However, the space has no walls, no definite beginning or end, anybody can cross it at any time. Throughout her work, Sejima strived to challenge preconceived typological thinking: in her projects for two houses developed between 1987 and 1990, which she titled Platform I and Platform II, domestic space is thought of as a permeable environment, pierced by the continuous unscripted movements of inhabitants. Talking about these projects in an interview for *El Croquis*, she states: “I wanted to challenge the notion of architecture as a thing in which to wrap people up. My response was to create a place through which people could pass quite frequently.”¹⁵² Undoubtedly, Sejima’s work draws on Japanese traditional architecture, which, in her words, is seeking “another kind of privacy” compared to that imposed by western culture; yet, her own interpretation of transparency does not only imply unobstructed visibility, but rather the possibility of providing different experiences, a porous relation between body and built space.¹⁵³

A few years later, Riken Yamamoto will in turn experiment with the *bande active* in the Ban Building, a housing complex of studio apartments built in 2001 in Nigata. Kitchen and bathroom are both placed along the façade, opening towards the city through a generous, continuous window, and towards the inner room through a partially glazed partition which can be screened via roller shutters. In this way, light is ensured in all rooms, with the bathroom occupying a primal spot in the house, projecting towards the outside, revealing what is supposedly kept hidden. The design is, to a certain extent, a reaction to the typological characterisation of the studio apartment: conceived as an independent unit for a single person or a couple at best, providing

¹⁵² Kazuyo Sejima in conversation with Koji Taki, in “Kazuyo Sejima + Ryue Nishizawa,” *El Croquis* (2001): 25.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

access to all necessary services, it is often inward looking, facilitating the isolation of inhabitants. Locating facilities along the façade has a double purpose: on one side, it allows to keep the area near the entrance flexible and open so that the access corridor is perceived as part of the house and used in different ways; on the other, it urges residents to reformulate their personal relation with their neighbours, and wonder about what could happen if anyone could see them naked through the window. Kira links questions of intimacy specifically to the design of the bathroom, highlighting how “The Primary determinant of the kind and extent of our hygiene facilities is psychological, in terms of our various attitudes towards the body, elimination activities, sex, privacy and modesty.”¹⁵⁴ In this sense, the spread of open bathrooms, enclosed toilet niches, and the variations in the dimensioning and positioning of such facilities, respond to the way in which people relate to their own bodily functions. Whether permeated by disgust or desire, discretion or hedonism, these determine the nature of bathrooms and the way they are used.

Living (bath)room

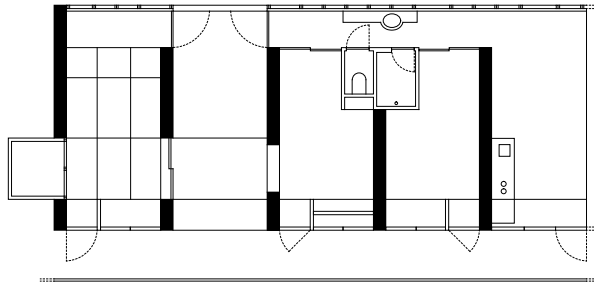
Opening up the bathroom to the house, it could be claimed, represent the attempt to recreate the conditions for pre-Modern washing rituals to take root, rethinking certain practices related to hygiene, which we now consider as inherently private, as convivial acts. In Casa Hourré, a renovation project of a French barn completed by Collectif Encore in 2015, the architects coin the term “living bathroom:” a room of 25 square meters, with no partitions in between, which becomes at times a library, a playroom, a living room, or anything else the inhabitants can imagine. The bathtub is located almost in the centre, aligned with a large window that faces the garden, next to it, a sink and a toilet; on the opposing wall, multiple hooks hold a series of bathrobes, indicating that this bathroom is anything but an individual space. A similar name, *sejour de bain*, had been given to the bathroom in several of the entries of PAN 14, which, as explained by Monique Eleb Vidal, attempt to reconfigure the bathroom as a “pleasurable space,” rejecting strict spatial functionalism and the traditional connotations related to property and gender.¹⁵⁵ As one of the participants writes: “The bathroom, as well as the W.C., are not anymore closed boxes. Their conditions of intimacy are not incompatible with a certain relationship with the life outside them.”¹⁵⁶

While the open bathroom is often perceived as a trademark of hotel suites or villas, the fact that these ideas were developed in the context of the design for affordable housing forces us to question such

¹⁵⁴ Alexander Kira, *The Bathroom* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 164.

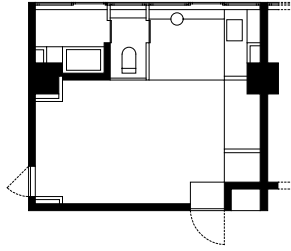
¹⁵⁵ Monique Eleb Vidal, *Penser l'Habité: Le logement en questions* (Liège: Pierre Mardaga éditeur, 1988), 152-159.

¹⁵⁶ “La salle de bains, de même que les W.C., ne sont plus des boîtes closes. Leurs intimités ne sont pas incompatibles avec un certain rapport avec la vie extérieure.” *Ibid.*, 152. Translated by the author.



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1.34 Kazuyo Sejima, Gifu Kitagata social housing complex, Gifu (Japan), 1998. Floor plan of a typical apartment unit.



1.35 Riken Yamamoto, Ban Building, Nigata (Japan), 2001. Floor plan of a typical apartment unit.

1m



1.36 Sir Nicholas Grimshaw,
Service Tower for Student Housing,
London (UK), 1968.

assumptions on luxury and intimacy. Yet, the collectivisation of the bathroom is still perceived as taboo, especially in the Western world, and if some examples are to be found, those are mainly addressed to students and young professionals, categories that more than others, according to the general belief, can bend the rules of traditional domesticity and constantly challenge their way of living in the name of economic efficiency. One of the examples (now demolished) that radically rethink the spatial configuration of the bathroom was developed by Sir Nicholas Grimshaw, who in 1968, is commissioned by the Anglican International Student's Club with the conversion and retrofitting of six nineteenth-century terraced houses into student accommodation. The houses, unequipped of the most basic services are converted into a series of bedrooms, while bathroom and laundry facilities are accommodated in an independent tower located at the rear of the complex. The tower, providing several bathroom units per floor, is developed on six levels interconnected by a continuous ramp running along the façade. Washing facilities are detached from the main buildings and questions such as circulation, access, privacy, use, are addressed in complete autonomy: the bathroom is a house. From the architect's website we read that "The continuous, sloping helical ramp allowed the user to travel up or down searching for an available facility."¹⁵⁷ It is clear how such an organisation, rather than dividing facilities per floor and therefore suggesting which rooms could use which bathrooms, encouraged interactions between inhabitants and an unbiased used of space. As visible in the pictures, the continuous handrail was used to hang towels or drying clothes, things which, as much as the people going in and out of bathrooms, could be clearly seen from the outside through the full-length semi-transparent façade.

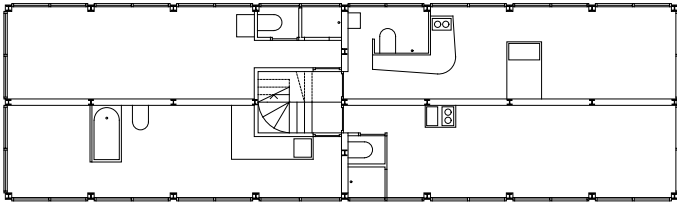
¹⁵⁷ From the architect's website, <https://grimshaw.global/projects/residential/service-tower-for-student-housing/> [accessed 6 September 2024].

¹⁵⁸ J. H. S. Bosshard and E. S. Boll, *Ritual in Family Living* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950), 113-114; quoted in Alexander Kira, *The Bathroom* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 165. See also Marilyn Langford, *Personal Hygiene attitudes and practices in 1000 middle-class households* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, Agricultural Experiment Station, New York State College of Home Economics, 1965), 23-25.

The idea of the collectivised bathroom, however, does not come without its questions. It is again Kira who explains why, historically, individual facilities were generally preferable to shared ones:

"The fact that the middle-class family rises almost together, and has few bathrooms, has resulted in a problem for it, which has been resolved by a very narrowly prescribed ritual for many of them – a bathroom ritual. They have developed set rules and regulations which define who goes first (according to who must leave the house first), how long one may stay in, what are the penalties for overtime, and under what conditions there may be a certain overlapping of personnel."¹⁵⁸

Such domestic frictions, not surprisingly specific to the traditional nuclear family, even if still present and often source of concern, are



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1.37 Takahashi Ipppei, House for
8 people, Tokyo (Japan), 2018.
Plan of the first floor.

certainly less significant today. In a time when remote work is taking over, and when the people sharing a household often elude the category of family with children, bathroom rituals are increasingly more varied and scattered throughout the day. That is why, in relation to the specific conditions of our time, it makes sense to question once again privacy and property in the bathroom.

In Tokyo, a house for eight people designed by Takahashi Ippei between 2016-2018, challenges these very ideas as related to domestic space. The issue of surface maximisation is here addressed in parallel to the possibilities of social expansion that shrinking might bring forth: the house is thought of as a transient space, where different functions are scattered between inhabitants and therefore available to use only if willingly shared. To achieve this, the house is organised in units, each one providing only one kind of facility: the kitchen, the bathtub, or the access to the courtyard. Each of these units, always equipped with a toilet and a bed, is home to one person. Therefore, to make use of the different facilities throughout the day, residents are forced to negotiate property:

“The person in the apartment with the bath might visit the one who has the kitchen to make dinner or vice versa. (...) People visit each other in order to fulfil individual needs, in this way they gather and get to know each other.”¹⁵⁹

Rather than offering traditional “one person spaces,” the house encourages interaction, functioning as a facilitator for the creation of both an immediate and an expanded community.¹⁶⁰ Here the bathroom has no boundaries: if in some units the toilet is still perceived as enclosed, separated, in most of the cases the bathroom is the room, bathtub, sinks, showers, are just scattered around like furniture pieces, placed next to the kitchen counter or under the loft bed, responding to questions of light and air rather than privacy. If on the one hand this is undoubtedly a response to square footage constraints, on the other, the achieved spatial quality highlights the potential of subtraction in challenging predefined domestic norms. In this sense, redrawing boundaries, reassessing property limitations, rethinking priorities, are all operations that contribute to the expansion of the home beyond its physical borders. A clear tendency seems to emerge: we move backwards towards a topological definition of domestic space, prioritising relations between spaces and users over standardised classification.

Un-building the walls

Colomina and Wigley claim Modern architects “spent a lot of time

¹⁵⁹ Takahashi Ippei talking about his project in Giovanna Borasi’s documentary *When We Live Alone*, directed by Daniel Schwartz and produced by the Canadian Center for Architecture (Canada, 2020). The film is the second of a three-part documentary series examining the influence of economy, social change, and population increase on the ways of building houses, living and forming communities. This episode’s focus is the increasing diffusion of solo living in mega cities such as Tokyo.

¹⁶⁰ Giovanna Borasi refers to the concept of “immediate” and “expanded” community while talking about Takahashi Ippei’s house in her conversation with Federica Zambelletti (KoozArch), <https://www.koozarch.com/interviews/alone-again-or-two-projects-exploring-life-in-tokyo-evolving-fabric> [accessed 26 October 2024].

in the toilet,” trying to understand “not so much what it meant to enter the toilet as what it meant for the toilet to enter architecture.”¹⁶¹ From the famous “bidet on display” by Le Corbusier to Paul Rudolph’s mesmerising floating bathtub, it is clear how Modernity tried to transcend traditional bourgeois morality. Yet, such radical experiments took place in the context of mansions and villas, addressing a class of refined, educated intellectuals, who had the time and economic resources to play with domesticity. It is a completely different question when we consider today’s cleaning facilities, which need to be rethought especially in relation to their economical, as well as social, programming. If on one side, the appeal of including communal steam rooms and hot baths within domestic environments is evident, on the other, sharing intimacy seems to remain the largest obstacle to overcome. While the house opens and becomes increasingly “dispersed,” fading the boundary between the interior and the city, the bathroom is still mostly designed as a solid enclosure, the stronghold of private life. Without trying to define what is right or wrong, or if one direction is preferable to the other, what the examples above demonstrate is that there is a potential in de-constructing certain inherited bourgeois traditions, especially in the context of the current domestic crisis. Concepts such as “filter bathroom” and *sejour de bain*, offer an alternative understanding of standard domestic layouts, where technical and social issues are addressed simultaneously, and contribute to the implementation of a new collective way of living that is both economically and socially sustainable. Inevitably, together with privacy comes property: the very idea of “aloneness” is intrinsically linked with the concept of possession of time and space:

“...through habituation and teaching, the mother reproduces in the child her own needs, in this case the need for privacy which inevitably brings with it related needs. Now the child grows up needing time to himself, a room of his own, freedom of choice, freedom to plan his own time, and his own life. He will brook no interference and no encroachment. He will spend his wealth installing private bathrooms in his house, buying a private car, a private yacht, private woods and a private beach, which he will then people with his privately chosen society.”¹⁶²

This short quote, in its excessiveness, highlights how much of such cultural constructs are naturally embedded within our own daily life and influence the very way in which such life is organised and reproduced. As argued by Kira, privacy and privateness contribute to sustain our sense of individual identity. Dismantling privacy is, therefore, a

¹⁶¹ Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley, “Toilet Architecture.”

¹⁶² Dorothy Lee, “Are Basic Needs Ultimate?,” in *Personality in Nature, Society and Culture*, ed. Clyde Kluckhohn and Henry A. Murray (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 339.

delicate process, which needs to balance the will of individuality with a new understanding of conviviality, a way of being together which goes beyond traditional bourgeois principles and morals. If, right now, the bathroom remains the most intimate space of the house, it seems a priority to keep questioning what happens behind the curtains, to keep re-inventing the definitions of shame and modesty, as well as the relation with our own bodies and those of others, in the attempt to unbuild the bathroom's walls.

Weekly

Chapter II

Weekly

2.1 The week

From rest days to the seventh day

Differently from the day, the month and the year, which responded to the natural cycles suggested by the movement of sun and moon, the week is an artificial construct. The introduction of the seven-day cycle has a long and multifaceted history, but before delving into that, it is imperative to understand the role of rest days, and how their establishment led to the formulation of the canonical opposition work versus rest, which is one of the fundamental principles of the week. In ancient times, rest days did not occur following a precise cycle; anthropologist Hutton Webster claims that for primitive tribes, rest days were linked with taboos,¹⁶³ where taboo indicated something abnormal, uncanny. During such days, it was advisable not to engage in labour or other productive activities as they were considered unlucky, so it was for reasons of superstition rather than practical utility that they came to be defined as extraordinary.¹⁶⁴ Abstinence from work, however, came to be recognised as a way to express reverence to the divinity in many cultures:

“Now this is common both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, to perform their sacred rites in connection with the relaxation of a festival, these rites being performed sometimes with religious frenzy, sometimes without it; sometimes with music, sometimes not; and sometimes in secret, sometimes openly.”¹⁶⁵

In the same way as tabooed days, Roman *feriae*, which were celebrated on *dies religiosi*, were seen as occasions for supernatural propitiation; they dealt with the unknown, the incomprehensible, and did not necessarily indicate moments of collective joy. It is only later that the custom of jubilant festivals, as it is familiar to us, started to overlap with such otherwise gloomy rites. In agricultural societies, rest days followed the cycle of the land: periods of continuous work in the fields were interspersed by so called “market days,” when farmers would gather to sell or exchange their produce. In ancient Rome, market days

¹⁶³ The word *tapu* in Polynesian languages, referred to something sacred, holy and inviolable, or something accursed and polluted; it had no moral meaning, it rather implied a connection with Gods, or a separation from ordinary purposes.

¹⁶⁴ For a more detailed account of the meaning of taboos among the natives of the South Seas see Hutton Webster, *Rest days: a study in early law and morality* (New York: Macmillan, 1916).

¹⁶⁵ *The Geography of Strabo X*, trans. Horace Leonard Jones (London: William Heinemann, 1925), 93.

were referred to as *nundinae*: they followed an eight-day cycle and were celebrated as festive occasions, accompanied by banquets and demanding the interruption of labour. Webster, together with several other scholars, claims that the Roman *nundinae* is one of the ancient rites that contributed to the development of the Christian Sunday. Through time, the *nundinae* came to overlap with other festivities dedicated to Pagan deities, such as the day of the Sun, but with the establishment of Christianity these were merged and subsequently substituted with the traditional Sunday.¹⁶⁶ However, it is firstly among the Hebrews that the seventh day acquired a fundamental significance, as it coincided with the Sabbath, a day consecrated to the deity, in honour of whom abstention from work was practiced.¹⁶⁷ As noted by philologist Francis Colson, different reasons for the observance of Sabbath are given respectively in the Decalogues of Deuteronomy and the Exodus: in the former, the commandment sanctions the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, while, in the latter, which coincides with the narrative of the Bible, the Sabbath is God's day of rest after having created the world in six days.¹⁶⁸ The Jewish Sabbath clearly had an influence on the formation of the Christian week, however, the seven-day cycle has a much more complex history, as its roots could also be investigated in astrology and symbolism: seven days for seven godly planets, and seven as a recurrent sacred number. In different forms and at different times, the Roman, the Jewish and the planets, all contributed to the construction of the week as we know it nowadays (the Sabbath becomes Saturn's day), where most of it is dedicated to work and it is only the seventh day that is conceived, instead, as the day of rest. Witold Rybczynski, architect and writer, highlights how the seven-day cycle, more than celestial movements or the wills of the divinity, served to give a measure to ordinary life, establishing a rhythm for everyday activities: the seventh day was not solely dedicated to worship, people would normally bake bread, wash, clean the house, go to the market and rest (In Scandinavian, the word for Saturday means washing day; in Hungarian, Sunday means market day).¹⁶⁹ For common people, a series of activities start to be linked with the seventh day, they become inseparable from a specific understanding of Sunday as an institution, regulated by rituals as much as the ancient *tapu* days. The Sunday paper, spreading during the end of the 18th century, is emblematic: different from the weekly paper, it included book reviews, travel articles, novels, a women's section, a science column;¹⁷⁰ it addressed the members of a family leisurely gathered on the carpets and chairs of a comfortable living room.

Today, Sunday still holds an important meaning: if on one side the active practice of religious worship is fading, especially amongst

¹⁶⁶ Hutton Webster, *Rest days*, 120-123.

¹⁶⁷ Francis Henry Colson, *The Week: an essay on Origin and Development of the Seven-Day Cycle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 4.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶⁹ Witold Rybczynski, *Waiting for the Weekend* (New York: Viking, 1991), 49.

¹⁷⁰ "Joseph Pulitzer's *Sunday World* was a great success (...), for Pulitzer realised that on Sunday readers wanted something different. The weekdays were for news; Sunday was for leisure." *Ibid.*, 14.

the younger generations living in cities, on the other, new activities are spreading in substitution of Sunday mass. The Sunday Assembly movement, for example, was initiated in London in 2013 by Sanderson Jones and Pippa Evans, as a way of “doing church without god,”¹⁷¹ while videos of Sunday reset practices (cleaning, self-care, restocking) are colonising social media, re-instating the role of Sundays as both the end of a cycle and the beginning of a new one. Yet, one day was never enough, and from the end of the 19th century workers start to demand an increase in labour-free time: industrialisation, the spread of literacy, and the introduction of the concept of free time, all contribute to increase the availability of leisure and the possibilities of practicing it. The end of the week expands from one to two days, and the institution of Saturdays has a crucial role in the establishment of the weekly work/rest cycle, influencing the emergence of new spaces in the house capable to respond to the many demands of domestic leisure.

The history of the weekend is a history of travels, Saturday nights out, holiday houses, cinemas and theatres, but it is not the only one. From the half of the 19th century, the reorganisation of work rhythms linked to the industrial revolution began to impose a redistribution of social time: until then, the workday of the common peasant was discontinuous, punctuated with unexpected or recreational interruptions. In opposition to such a malleable time, work in the factory introduced the concept of calculated time, of productive efficiency, of time wasted. It is from such a strict re-conceptualisation that emerges the need of individuating a time for oneself, capable to break away from the rigid set of production-based structures. But the desire for free time, paradoxically produced a new emptiness to be organised, managed, and filled with activities revolving around new values.¹⁷² If, on one side, leisure developed greatly outside the home, facilitating, through the construction of new public facilities, the collective entertainment of all social classes, on the other, it has never really left the domestic walls. Seurat’s portray of a *Sunday afternoon at the Grande Jatte* (1884-86), seems to be emblematic of the new culture of *otium* practiced by the French middle class at the time, undoubtedly representational and to a certain extent rigidly staged. This clearly contrasts with the image of domestic entertainment as portrayed by Mary Cassat in the painting of her brother and his son (1885), comfortably sitting in an armchair, reading a paper, almost unaware of the gaze focused on them. The weekend follows a different rhythm, it stands in opposition to the ordinary time of work, an opposition that is mirrored by that existing between the place of work and the home: before anything,

¹⁷¹ Robert Pigott, “Doing church without God,” *BBC News* (2013).

¹⁷² See Alain Corbin’s introduction to *L’Avènement des loisirs: 1850-1960* (Paris: Aubier, 1995), 8.



2.1 Mary Cassatt, *Portrait of Alexander J. Cassat and His Son Robert Kelso Cassat*, 1885.

absence of work in the industrialised world meant being able to enjoy the pleasures of the domestic interior. With technological development the home is populated with a series of pastimes that gradually grow and spread, as we will see, eventually demanding their own spaces.

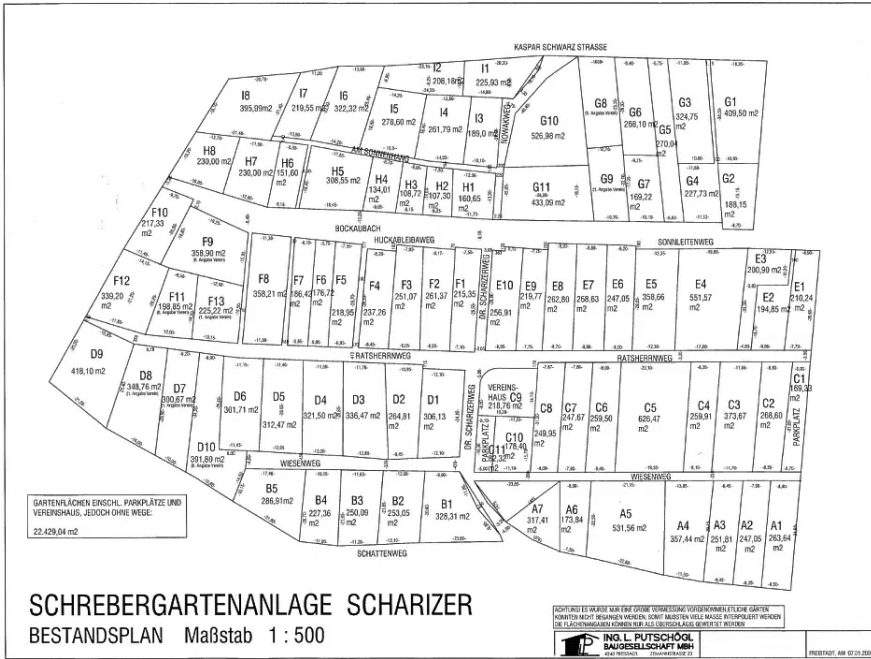
The word “weekend” first appeared in the English language in an 1879 issue of the magazine *Notes and Queries*, and it was used to indicate the, by then, legally established weekly suspension of work between Saturday afternoon and Monday morning.¹⁷³ If Sunday was still mainly regulated by the rhythms of religious practice and rest, Saturday functioned as a day of preparation, which included practical tasks needed to ensure the reproduction of the household, but also the performance of social and leisure activities. The emergence of the weekend was inextricably linked with a general demand for the reduction of working hours: towards the end of the 19th century, American workers were protesting under the slogan “Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, eight hours for what we will,”¹⁷⁴ stressing the importance of establishing personal time, one that was not dedicated to God, but that could be disposed of as one willed. The idea gradually spread to Europe, becoming quite popular especially in the aftermath of World War I. Britain was the first to implement the half Saturday holiday in the 1870s; a few years later, around the 1920s, the French introduced the five-and-a-half-day work schedule, referring to it as *la semaine anglaise*; in 1935, the Italian Fascist regime approved a nationwide law that established the *sabato fascista*, moving the end of the work week to one o’clock on Saturday.¹⁷⁵ At the start of the 20th century, the popular idea of the weekend was largely influenced by the practices of high society, but it was also radically different: it did not envisage improvised gateways to summer estates or along the seaside; the weekend was populated by informal social gatherings at home or in the neighbourhood, to drink together, play games, read, eat and chat. Such were the activities available to the lower classes, simple and inexpensive, and yet the myriads of ways in which free time was used is precisely what allows us to trace the development of domestic leisure. Indeed, even if contemporary society can be defined as “non-religious,” in the sense that it believes in a de-sacralised and demythologised world, Mircea Eliade reminds us that our cultural roots rely on a religious past and that these roots resurface, even if in disguise, in the ways we inhabit, furnish and use our homes.¹⁷⁶ In his book *Waiting for the Weekend*, Rybczynski proposes to find a parallelism between the cyclical repetition of week end weekend and the ancient opposition of profane and sacred time. In doing so, his goal is to highlight the

¹⁷³ Witold Rybczynski, *Waiting for the Weekend*, 109.

¹⁷⁴ Alain Corbin, “La fatigue, le repos et la conquête du temps,” in *L’Avènement des loisirs: 1850-1960*, ed. Alain Corbin (Paris: Aubier, 1995), 300-323.

¹⁷⁵ See the work of Victoria de Grazia on the institution of the *sabato fascista* and its related organisations tasked to control the *dopolavoro* (after work) and the quality of leisure. Victoria de Grazia, *Consenso e cultura di massa nell’Italia fascista. L’organizzazione del dopolavoro* (Roma/Bari: Laterza, 1981).

¹⁷⁶ See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1959).



2.2 Allotment gardens in Freistadt, Kaspar Schwarz Strasse (Germany).

linearity of week time as opposed to the weekend, a time that exists on its own, pointing out that, as much as religious days, taboo days and market days — despite representing an opportunity for personal freedom — the weekend is also permeated by that sense of re-enactment that characterises sacred time. Just as sacred time was ruled by ritual, the weekend is governed by its own set of rules and conventions.¹⁷⁷

The chapter will focus on three specific weekly (we could even claim weekend) activities: gardening, crafts and recreation, and laundry. All of these can be interpreted also as utilitarian practices, and some as not necessarily leisable, but we will see how, in part also thanks to technological development, they have come to imply not only pleasurable pastimes but also a certain ritualistic conviviality. Today, such mundane endeavours have acquired a new meaning in the context of collective urban living, as their presence and ritualised practice within the home contribute to the establishment of new spaces and encourage the emergence of non-familiar interpersonal relationships.

2.2 Gardening

Allotment gardens: from utility to leisure

It is no coincidence that in *L'Avènement des Loisirs*, when historian Alain Corbin outlines the first instances in the development of personal free time, gardening holds a prominent position. Between 1860 and 1950, we witness the “invention of gardening” among the working classes, altering forms of production, consumption and exchange, as well as the ways of popular expression:

“Gardening offers a summary of all the ambiguities of ‘popular cultures’: it is both pleasure and obligation, pastime and means of sustenance. The garden, a space of production, is also a space of one’s own, where to feel good and at ease.”¹⁷⁸

In this sense, growing flowers and vegetables is perceived as a chosen occupation, a way to employ free time that is not an extension of professional activity.¹⁷⁹ Differently from what happens in the aristocratic garden, made primarily to be walked through or observed from a distance, and in the farmer’s field, entirely subject to the demands of a commercial enterprise, the worker’s garden appears as an example of “good leisure.” In opposition to the tavern, the brothel and the public square, the garden is presented not without a certain moralising intent, where the connection to nature and the implementation of a

¹⁷⁷ Witold Rybczynski, *Waiting for the Weekend*, 228-230.

¹⁷⁸ Manuel Pluvinaige and Florence Weber, *Les Jardins populaires: pratiques culturelles, usages de l’espace, enjeux culturels. Éléments d’histoire et d’ethnographie* (Paris: Ministry of Culture, 1992), 3.

¹⁷⁹ Alain Corbin, *L’Avènement des loisirs: 1850-1960*, 365.

“soft” solitude are seen to favour self-consciousness and the responsible development of the individual.¹⁸⁰ British historian and gardener Edward Hyams, in *A History of Gardens and Gardening*, claims that the suburban garden firstly emerged in 17th century Netherlands. These small gardens were common in the countryside and were usually located in front of houses; they were there for display, not for recreation, and that is why they played a secondary role within the domestic life of the time. It is only from the 19th century that the garden acquires an important role in the life of urban dwellers. The mass exodus of rural populations to industrial centres brought about a reconfiguration of the habits related to the accumulation and consumption of food: this was not anymore readily accessible but was increasingly imported, usually preserved in frozen form, and subject to different parameters of availability than those of the farmer’s field.¹⁸¹ In London, allotment gardens and public parks were implemented in the 1920s to provide residents access to land located in the city. In Germany, allotments spread with the Schreber Movement in Leipzig; already in 1926, the *Schreber-Gärten*, or *Kleingärten*, grew to a number of four hundred thousand plots beyond the Rhine. In this context, the gardens initially emerged as a solution for providing lower classes with additional food sources: municipal authorities acquired underused plots of land and made them available for the working class to grow vegetables and fruit trees. The movement, however, was also encouraged by the decline of living standards in cities, alcoholism and the general deterioration of health conditions. Allotment gardens increased exponentially during World War I and II; in order to combat the scarcity of food supplies, many countries promoted “Victory Gardens” or “war gardens:” public plots which were given to citizens to be cultivated and used as recreational spaces. The garden becomes a remedy to the consequences of war, battling poverty and low morale; but it is also a school for home economics, and, especially in periods of social unrest, a welfare project, which favours manifestations of charity and solidarity.¹⁸²

However, already from after World War I, the garden starts to emancipate itself from its original moralistic objectives, and the possessors of allotments recognise themselves as members of an association rather than as the recipients of charity work. From here, gardening clearly takes on the role of a recreational activity, where the garden is not only used to produce edibles, but also serves as a place where to gather on Saturdays and play bowls or drink in company.¹⁸³ Allotments provided an opportunity for healthy recreation, and, notably, the peak of their success coincided with the reduction of the working week and

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 373.

¹⁸¹ Simon Bell, Runrid Fox-Kämper, Nazila Keshavarz, Mary Benson, Silvio Caputo, Susan Noori and Annette Voigt, eds., *Urban allotment gardens in Europe* (London: Routledge, 2016), 1-2. See also Birgit Wahmann, “Allotments and Schrebergarten in Germany,” in *The Architecture of Western Gardens: A Design History from the Renaissance to the Present Day*, ed. Monique Mosser and Georges Teyssot (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 451; and Béatrice Cabedoche, “Les jardins ouvriers et banlieue: le bonheur aujourd’hui?,” in *Les Premiers Banlieusards*, ed. Alain Faure (Paris: Créaphis, 1991), 279.

¹⁸² Alain Corbin, *L’Avènement des loisirs: 1850-1960*, 374-375.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 376.

the establishment of the weekend (with the half holiday on Saturday). This highlights how these gardens soon exceeded their merely utilitarian role to become part of a new culture of entertainment.¹⁸⁴

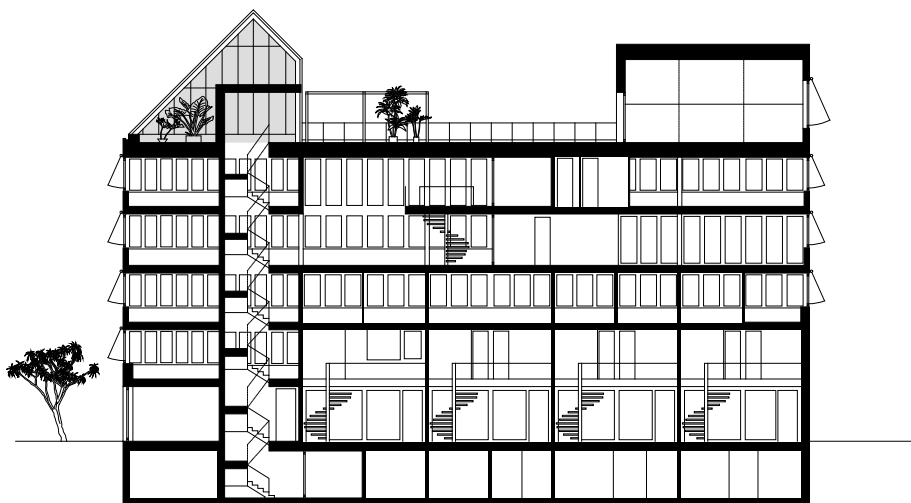
The contemporary garden as a collective refuge from linear time

Over the course of the 20th century the value of gardens gains a social and cultural dimension relevant to both the individual and the community. If, on one side, modernism rejected the poetics of gardening as it did not meet the functional standards of modern architecture, on the other, projects such as the Unité d'Habitation show how the garden affirms itself as a collective space for leisure. Le Corbusier's idea of roof garden ultimately aims to elevate open communal spaces from the ground to the sky: the operation is based on the reconfiguration of the roof from the archetypal element needed to construct a shelter, to a collective, uncovered and habitable space. In the Unité, the roof becomes a place for the community's open-air activities: here one can run, sunbathe, use the swimming pool, play, read, walk, or gather in a small auditorium. From the 1990s, the garden becomes a crucial element in the design of cities, a necessary public function to achieve biodiversity and a healthy urban environment. In recent years, worsening climate conditions and the awareness generated by the pandemic towards the significance of open space, have stressed the importance of gardens and gardening within our society. Once again, the garden takes on the double role of recreational and healthy retreat, a contemporary sanatorium, as it was defined already in 1903 by the French doctor Gustave Lancry in his published brochure titled *Le Sanatorium à domicile par les jardins ouvriers*. Today, the garden has many faces: it may be a symbol of wealth, but it also represents a collective refuge, a place where to implement genderless forms of care and a different experience of time. As curator and critic Laurie Cluitmans notes in *On the Necessity of Gardening*:

“The garden is a social space for family, friends, and companions in adversity and, therefore, has an emancipatory and liberating power. As an affective space, the garden transcends its own boundaries. As an experiential space it represents a place in which the world can be known and understood. (...) In the garden, time passes with a certain slowness, which contrasts with the acceleration of global consumer and commercial culture. (...) In a time of climate change, we see (...) the garden as a place to experience a different rhythm than the 9 to 5, where gardening is a hopeful form of labour in which, through care, plants and flowers are brought to blossom.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Witold Rybczynski, *Waiting for the Weekend*, 205.

¹⁸⁵ Laurie Cluitmans, ed., *On the Necessity of Gardening. An ABC of Art, Botany and Cultivation* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2021), 11-13.



■ Shared garden

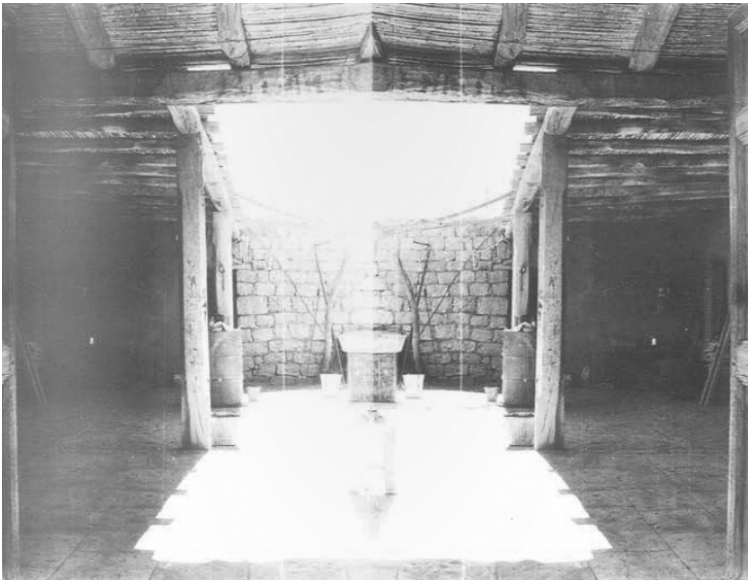
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2.3 Clauss Kahl Merz Atelier,
Lyse-Lotte Cooperative housing,
Basel (Switzerland), 2023.

Cluitmans compares the contemporary garden to the Persian one, a refuge in the desert, the ancient archetype of paradise. Yet, in the context of this research, it is especially interesting to look at a specific kind of garden, that is not the public park, but that falls in the realm of the domestic, and more particularly in that in-between category of spaces that we refer to as collective. In recent years, gardens have rapidly spread among projects of collective housing, being introduced as spaces that are still part of the domestic environment, but that, at the same time, can be accessed and used by an indefinite number of people (residents, clearly, but also guests, friends, occasional visitors). In several of these projects, the character of such spaces lays halfway between that of the allotment garden, used both for sustenance and recreation, and the idea of a collective platform as introduced by le Corbusier in the *Unité d'Habitation*. They are part of that cohort of spaces that gravitate around the main domestic functions and that mainly refer to the temporal cycles related to recreation. Corbin refers to a genealogy of forms that assume the different desires of rest, silence, distraction, relaxation, evasion, adventure, and that recognise the importance of such activities not only in opposition to work, but also as pivotal steps in the process of invention of the self.¹⁸⁶ These weekend gardens are thought of as refuges where to cultivate personal time, a time that is not regulated by the demands of production, but that allows the development of new abilities and new social relations.

In the Lyse Lotte cooperative housing complex (Basel, 2024), designed by architects Clauss Kahl Merz in collaboration with Martina Kausch, different desires, needs, and ways of living are brought together in a collage-like architecture. A commercial space is combined with ateliers, duplexes, shared entrances and loggias, jolly rooms, multifunctional rooms, and a greenhouse located on the roof. Rather than being clearly defined, the boundaries between such spaces and individual units are labile, stressing the importance given to the creation of a shared habitat and to the implementation of a communal way of living. The greenhouse and the roof garden, however, as we will see happens in many other projects, stand on their own, separated from the daily routes of residents: they act as added spaces, that, while freely accessible, are thought to host activities that mainly take place outside the working week — such as tending to plants, gathering with fellow residents, organising events and so on. This type of space has a completely different quality than the traditional balcony, it is not part of the everyday routine but stands outside it, adding a supplementary temporal layer to the home. Derek Jarman, artist, film maker and writer, well explains this idea while talking about his garden and his activity as a

¹⁸⁶ Alain Corbin, *L'Avènement des loisirs: 1850-1960*, 11.



2.4 Glenda Kapstein, *Espacios Intermedios. Respuestas arquitectónicas al medio ambiente*, trans. Plan Común (Antofagasta: Universidad del Norte, 1988).

gardener at Prospect Cottage, the fisherman's house on the beach of Dungeness which he bought in 1989:

“The gardener digs in another time, without past or future, beginning or end. A time that does not cleave the day with rush hours, lunch breaks, the last bus home. As you walk in the garden you pass into this time – the moment of entering can never be remembered. Around you the landscape lies transfigured. Here is the amen beyond the prayer.”¹⁸⁷

The fact that the greenhouse is located on the roof recalls the isolation of Prospect Cottage: it is not a readily accessible space, one to stumble into, it requires a certain intentionality, the will to enter a different spatial and temporal realm. Similarly to Lyse Lotte, Plan Comun's project for Maison Comun (Pantin, 2023), is built around the idea of providing a series of collective spaces, from the ground to the roof. The house is composed of five units in total, equipped with a communal room and garden located at the ground floor, in direct connection with the street, and a greenhouse terrace located on the roof. The two spaces are linked by an open staircase, which also acts as a vertical gathering room, which is linked to living units through semi-transparent doors. In a lecture given at EPFL in 2024, titled “Architecture of Commons,” Plan Comun refers to the concept of “intermediate space” as developed by Chilean architect Glenda Kapstein in her analysis of Chilean vernacular houses. Kapstein defines intermediate space as

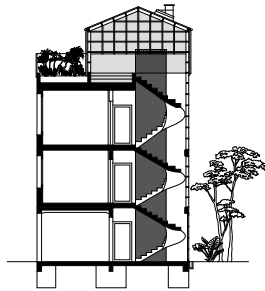
“...a place that can reflect the lives of its inhabitants, where they can be as free as in a controlled interior, but which incorporates the natural elements – sun, wind, rain and landscape – in a small world that can be ordered, transformed and domesticated. Its scale and character allow for personalization and appropriation, coexisting the identification-projection relationship between inhabitant, habitat and habitation.”¹⁸⁸

A controlled interior which incorporates natural elements; the description well fits the roof greenhouse of Maison Comun, a space of life and freedom, where, as claimed by the architects, form follows attitude. Felipe De Ferrari, one of the founding members of Plan Comun, often refers to the emancipatory power of architecture, the capacity to provide inhabitants with the possibility to dwell “outside the market.”¹⁸⁹ not only providing spaces for independent food production or renewable energy sources, but also allowing life and community to emerge following alternative socio-temporal patterns, based on networks of solidarity. This brings us once again to the opposition between linear and cyclical time: community needs cycles, ritual occurrences, which

¹⁸⁷ When he retired to live at Prospect Cottage in 1989, after being diagnosed with HIV, Jarman began writing a diary which was both a botanic account of local flora and fauna, and a reflection on his past and youth. While recounting his experiences, Jarman shares his thoughts and feelings on the process of building a garden, and on the very meanings this process can acquire in one's own life. See Derek Jarman, *Modern Nature* (New York: Overlook Press, 1994) 30.

¹⁸⁸ Glenda Kapstein, *Espacios Intermedios. Respuestas arquitectónica al medio ambiente*, trans. Plan Comun (Antofagasta: Universidad del Norte, 1988).

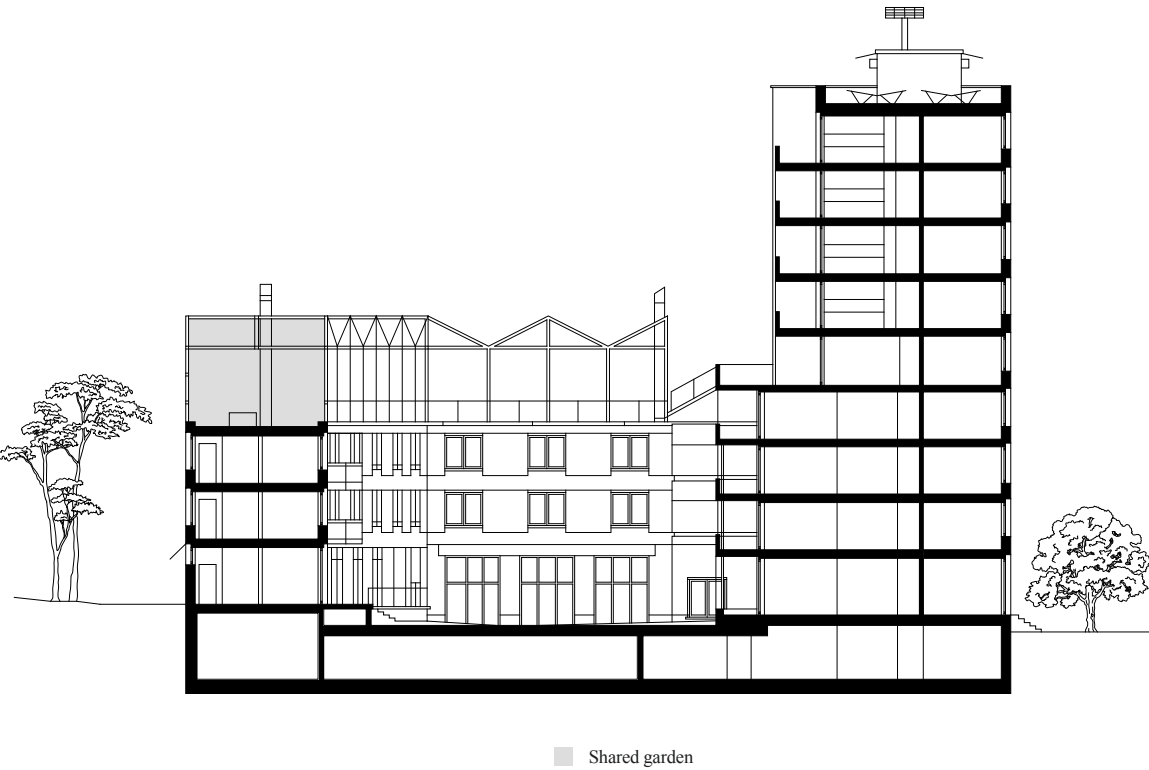
¹⁸⁹ Felipe De Ferrari, “Outside the Box: On Dogmas, Property and Alternative Models,” *ARQ* 98, *Masividad/Massive* (Santiago: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, ARQ Ediciones, 2018).



■ Shared garden

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2.5 Plan Común, Maison Com-mune, Pantin (France), 2020.



2.6 Conen Sigl Architekten,
Westhof Dübendorf, Zurich
(Switzerland), 2023.

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shape and materialise through architecture. Within this framework, the practice of gardening allows us to forget artificial “clock time,” forcing us to focus instead on natural time and its circular, cyclical movement. Swiss architects Maria Conen and Raoul Sigl spent a great deal of their academic and professional practice in exploring such a concept. In 2024, Maria Conen led a design studio at ETH titled *Living in Cycles*, where the temporal concept of cyclical time was investigated in relation to housing. As claimed in the studio reader:

“The same way a tree provides a habitat for thousands of species, architecture should become a framework supporting a network of pluralities. Circular thinking should trigger a paradigm shift in architectural planning. Circularity should not only be applied to the responsible use of materials, but also in the act of housing as a whole. Our aim is to (...) seek for balance between energy production and consumption of resources, to enhance biodiversity and to craft innovative ways of inhabiting spaces.”¹⁹⁰

The office philosophy found ground for implementation in the Hochbord project in Dübendorf (Zurich, 2017-2022), a housing complex conceived as a refuge not only for a diverse range of human beings but also for many different living species. The complex consists of three buildings arranged in a U-shape, enclosing a communal courtyard. Opposite to the main building facing the street, a three-story structure shields the courtyard from the noise of the railway line running next to the site. The last floor is set back, leaving space to a generous terrace protected by a pergola-like steel structure which pays homage to the history of the site, previously occupied by cultivated fields and greenhouses where the Kohler family ran a gardening business for generations. Both the garden and the terrace emerge from a thorough study of the existing flora and fauna, as Dübendorf is located right next to the nature preserve Allmend Stettbach. The architects worked together with Jörg Kohler, a member of the family that owned the plant nursery formerly located on site, to develop nesting aides along the terraces in order to provide shelter to local bird and insect species. Both the courtyard and the terrace are equipped with planters, highlighting the fact that the spaces are not just designed for decorative purposes, but are an inherent part of the project, with a direct influence on the domestic life of the residents. The study of plants, mushrooms, animals, and colours recalls Jarman’s interpretation of the garden as *pharmacopoeia*, a term that, in its literal sense, indicates a collection of medicines presented as a pharmaceutical directory, but that, in Jarman’s mind, referred to a collection of symbols, whose purpose was

¹⁹⁰ Studio Maria Conen, *Living in Cycles*, ETH Zurich (Spring Semester 2024).

to reconnect man's identity with natural phenomena, re-establishing a contact with nature.¹⁹¹

Longing for a garden has become a common sentiment for a large number of urban dwellers. Not merely an antidote to the overcrowding and greyness of the city, it follows a narrative that does not resolve in the archetypal juxtaposition between urban and rural. The contemporary domestic garden is first of all a temporal refuge, where the very act of caring for the life of plants, vegetables and flowers, impose a different rhythm on the life of humans. Differently from allotments, where solitude and individuality were stressed both conceptually and spatially, these gardens found their organisational principles on collective enjoyment: no plot is defined, no flower bed is personal, gardening becomes a communal activity, where both knowledge and resources are shared between users. Psychiatrist Sue Stuart-Smith, in her book titled *The Well-Gardened Mind*, analyses historical and present forms of gardening therapies. Particularly interesting is her account on the life of soldiers during World War I: to combat the horrors of war, soldiers would grow gardens in trenches, alternating vegetables, flowers and graves.¹⁹² She claims gardening to be associated with play, a statement that is emblematic, as it allows us to further strengthen the link between gardening and recreation, where recreation is understood not in its original sense — referring literally to the re-creation of the working force to achieve higher efficiency in production — but to a state of being that supposedly leads to happiness; a temporary state, which, as much as the movement of sun and moon, needs a cyclical alternation with its opposite in order to exist.

¹⁹¹ In *On the Necessity of Gardening*, Jonny Bruce, gardener at Prospect Cottage since 2014, reports a quote from Carl Jung's *Man and his Symbols* (1964), one of Jarman's favourite readings, which well portrays Jarman's relationship to his garden: "Man feels himself isolated in the cosmos, because he is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional 'unconscious identity' with natural phenomena...No voices speak to man from stones, plants and animals, nor does he speak to them believing they can hear. His contact with nature has gone and with it the profound emotional energy this symbolic connection supplied." See Jonny Bruce, "The Garden as Pharmacopoeia," in *On the Necessity of Gardening. An ABC of Art, Botany and Cultivation*, ed. Laurie Cluitmans (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2021), 155-157.

¹⁹² Sue Stuart-Smith, *The Well-Gardened Mind: The Restorative Power of Nature* (London: William Collins, 2017), 207-209.

2.3 Crafts and recreation

The birth of hobbies

Hobbies emerged as a phenomenon in the 19th century. With the advent of industrialisation, work and leisure were split into separate spheres: the domestic realm affirmed itself as the locus of privacy and intimacy in opposition to the social space of the street or the factory. As much as labour, time became a commodity, to be orchestrated, sold or withheld respectively for work or recreation. In this sense, leisure emerged in a time of its own, where the pursuit of any productive or unproductive activity had to be both voluntarily undertaken and, to a certain extent, pleasurable. At this time, hobbies were advertised as



A Corner in the Author's Home Workshop, Showing the Bench, Circular Saw and Bicycle Grindstone

(256)

2.7 Home workshop with treadle-driven circular saw in a converted den. Most workshops, however, were in basements. From A. L. Hall, "My Workshop at Home," *Suburban Life* (1908): 256.

In Steven Gelber, "Do-It-Yourself: Constructing, Repairing and Maintaining Domestic Masculinity," *American Quarterly*, vol. 49, no. 1 (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 66-112.

morally uplifting activities, an antidote to the dangers of boredom. In 1855, American educator Catharine Beecher, well known for her numerous treatises concerning the education of women and the organisation of domestic life, urged fathers to “subtract time from their business, to spend at home, in reading with their wives and children, and in domestic amusements which at once refresh and improve.”¹⁹³ Plainly said, the home acted as a social softener, where harmless hobbies could keep the population occupied, discouraging activism and unionism, while praising the superiority of home-bound entertainment. The very nature of hobbies, however, was soon put into question: in 1865 a piece entitled *Hobby Horses* presented hobbies as a varied and often odd range of activities (the list included fishing, fox hunting, collecting art, gardening, cultivating friendships, studying philosophy, self-pity, homeopathy, religious fanaticism, punning, talking about dreams, and giving parties).¹⁹⁴ A few years later, in 1890, the same magazine published a second piece on the topic, stating that hobbies were to be enriching activities, actively battling idleness and mischief, and advocating the establishment of “a central office for the recommendation and distribution of hobbies to all kinds of people.”¹⁹⁵ At this point hobbies were established in clear opposition to work: a relief at the end of the working week, the antidote to a boring job, “a safety-valve for the escape of nervous excitement,”¹⁹⁶ as stated in the *New York Times*. Historian Steven Gelber, in his analysis of hobbies and leisure in America, argues that the culture of pastimes had much success in the industrialised world because it managed to bridge the realms of work and home:

“They allowed women to practice, and therefore to understand, work like activities, and they allowed men to create a business-like space for themselves inside the female-dominated house. As leisure, hobbies provided a respite from the normal demands of work, but as a particular form of productive leisure they expressed the deeper meaning of the work ethic and the free market.”¹⁹⁷

This duality in meaning is of fundamental importance: hobbies can be simultaneously recreational and work like, pleasurable and productive, they stand in opposition to the working environment yet build on the logics of the market. Whether one identity has priority over the other, as we will come to see, depends on the different economic and political context in which hobbies are practiced and the way they appear in mass advertisement. In Gelber’s words: “During times of prosperity advocates promoted hobbies as a morally safe haven from work, and during the depression they became a way to affirm the importance of

¹⁹³ Catharine E. Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy for the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1855), 256.

¹⁹⁴ “Hobby Horses,” *All the Year Round* 14 (1865): 163.

¹⁹⁵ “About Hobbies,” *All the Year Round* 67 (1890): 441.

¹⁹⁶ “Home Pastimes,” *New York Times* (1879): 10.

¹⁹⁷ Steven M. Gelber, *Hobbies, Leisure and the Culture of Work in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 2.

productivity in a period of enforced idleness.”¹⁹⁸

It is particularly in the Post War period that hobbies gain new values: if in the 19th century they spread mainly to cope with the problem of idleness, from the 50s they became possible sources for additional income. Before then, magazines often warned hobbyists of the dangers of turning their recreational activities into profit maker tools, this, they claimed, would spoil the core principles of leisure, with the risk of transforming hobbies into a second job. Postwar magazines, on the contrary, stressed the potential of such a scenario: turning hobbies into profitable activities could imply a higher money gain and consequently a better quality of life.¹⁹⁹ One should not forget, however that much of the advertisement was done to benefit the market, as, with the new hobby fever, came a deluge of tools, kits and aids that were supposed to help the hobbyist work better and faster. Crafts, especially, gained new momentum at the turn of the century, climaxing with the Do-it-Yourself movement which spread after World War II. If in the 19th century the culture of craft was common amongst women, no such thing existed for men: for the first time, in the aftermath of the war, men were encouraged to engage in craft activities, particularly when concerning house improvements. Gelber claims that:

“Long before ‘do-it-yourself’ became a common term in the 1950s, male householders began to take on the obligation of repairing and improving their houses as part of the rise of ‘masculine domesticity.’ Moving from the position of a somewhat remote *pater familias*, the new suburban husband was, according to Margaret Marsh, willing ‘to take on increased responsibility for some of the day-to-day tasks of bringing up children’ and make ‘his wife, rather than his male cronies, his regular companion on evenings out.’”²⁰⁰

Crafting soon gained its own role in the realm of hobbies, expanding in meaning and complexity: new spaces started to emerge specifically to host craft related activities, simultaneously distinct from the defined domestic sphere while still being part of it.

Third wave DIY

A complete history of the transformations and development of hobby rooms still has to be traced; the information gathered here remains fragmented but highlights the importance of pursuing further research in this direction. The presence of leisure within the home has been crucial for the typological definition of the domestic realm, giving life to a series of spaces that could respond to the changing meanings and interpretations of leisure: from the sewing room to the garage-workshop, to

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 296.

¹⁹⁹ See for example “Hobby Huddle,” *Profitable Hobbies* 6 (1950): 1; and “Handicrafts Are Both Hobbies and Big Business,” *Domestic Commerce* 34 (1946): 65-66.

²⁰⁰ Steven M. Gelber, *Hobbies, Leisure and the Culture of Work in America*, 205.

the rec-room and the man cave. As much as for other domestic spaces, even hobby rooms built on a clear gender division, as certain activities were expected to be performed by either the wife or the husband, seldom by the two together. However, at different times, such spaces were consecrated to the family, rather than the individuals composing it, implementing a timid domestic neutrality which has been further strengthened in the design for such type of rooms in recent years. Compared to what Robin Evans defined as “the empty room,”²⁰¹ a space devoid of any moral hierarchy and modern functionalism where people could simultaneously engage in different activities, the increasing complexity of crafts, paired with the necessity of giving man a place within the domestic realm — the home was the woman’s territory — led to the definition of a dedicated space with clearly defined scope and boundaries. In the Interwar years, DIY literature directly addressed husbands and family men prompting them to take on their new role as house-carers: the house was transformed from a place “in” which to do things to a place “on” which to do things.²⁰² Maintenance and repair work became source of masculine pride, especially, for obvious reasons, in the suburban context, where the population of homeowners had the possibility and the space to improve their properties. The workshop is born as the male sanctuary: most often located in the basement or in the converted garage, at times constructed anew as a garden shed, equipped with a series of tools for working wood and metal, material supplies and leftovers.

Soon enough the trend started spreading outside the suburbs, and already towards the end of the 1930s, The New York Times reported that:

“Tucked away in a closet of one of the swankiest of New York’s apartment hotels there happens to be a woodworker’s bench, a power lathe and an amazing assortment of hand tools ready, at a moment’s notice, to make the sawdust fly!”²⁰³

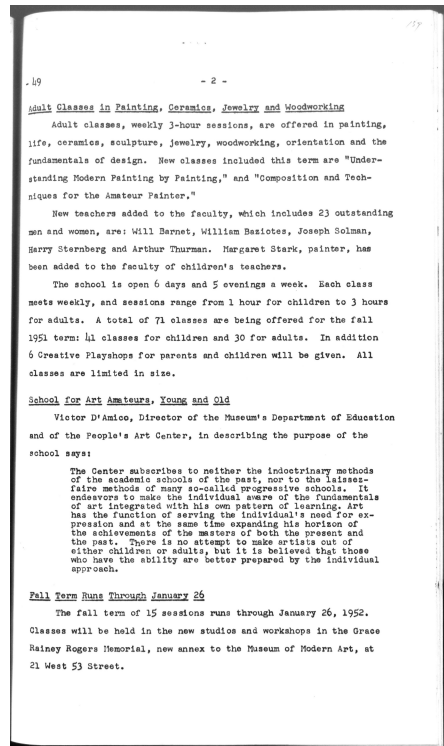
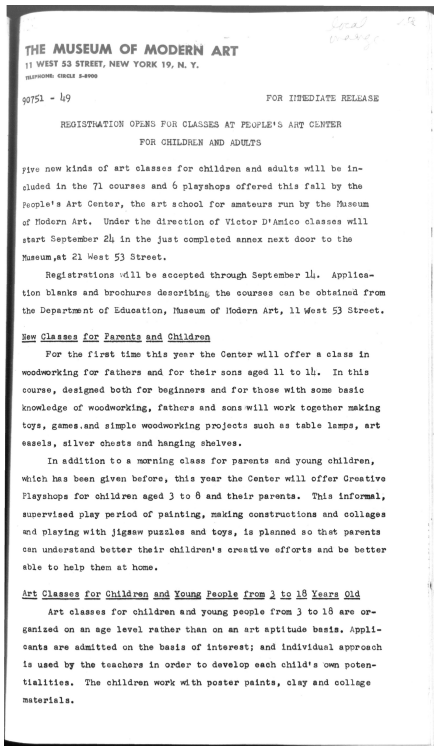
After the war, as a consequence to the many women leaving the workforce, the increased natality and the harsh economic conditions, crafts and DIY became a family matter. As anthropologist Margaret Mead noted in 1957, husbands and wives were working together on their houses: the do-it-yourself movement was not just a hobby but a pleasant and meaningful contribution to family life.²⁰⁴ Yet, the workshop was still classed as the man’s space par excellence and, by the 1950s, being handy was synonymous of being a good husband. The familial aspect found an outlet mainly in the relationship between father and sons: as an example, the New York’s Museum of Modern Art,

²⁰¹ Joseph Bedford, “Robin Evans’s Empty Room,” see more in Chapter 1, p. 37-39.

²⁰² Steven M. Gelber, *Hobbies, Leisure and the Culture of Work in America*, 220.

²⁰³ *New York Times*, sect. 11 (1937): 9-12.

²⁰⁴ Margaret Mead, “The Pattern of Leisure in Contemporary America,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 313 (1957): 11-15.



2.8 The Museum of Modern Art "90751-49." Untitled Media release for the registration at the new classes given at People's Art Center, MoMa, New York City (NY), 1951.

between 1951 and 1952, set up a wood workshop in its “People’s Art Center,”²⁰⁵ especially dedicated to apartment tenants, so that even without the generous means provided by suburban homes, urban dwellers could have the chance to strengthen familial relationships through the art of crafts. The course was specifically introduced for “fathers and sons aged 11 to 14” and, as stated by MOMA in a 1951 media release, it provided bonding opportunities through DIY projects of various nature: “fathers and sons will work together making toys, games, and simple woodworking projects such as table lamps, art easels, silver chests and hanging shelves.”²⁰⁶ This example attests the crucial role craft played in the definition of familial dynamics, while also showing how such dynamics managed to expand from the familial to the public domain, gaining collective recognition. DIY brought in the home what Gelber defines as “productive leisure,” an idea that contrasts with the original understanding of hobbies as eccentric occupations:

“Hobbies were not a recognized pastime until industrialism and commercialism separated production from the household and made the family a unit of consumption. Hobbies domesticated the ideology of capitalist industrialism by providing a way to safely bring the practice of (...) production (crafts) into the household and thereby helped bridge the gap between home and workplace that had been opened by the Industrial Revolution.”²⁰⁷

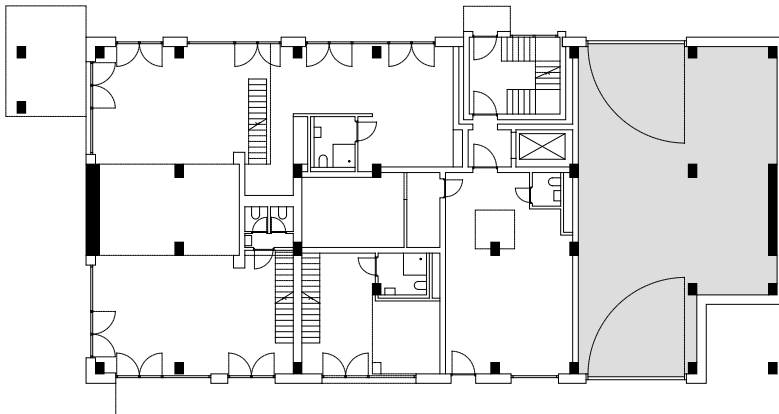
Crafts represented a positive way to spend time, guaranteeing an economic as well as a cultural (and moral) return.

²⁰⁵ The People’s Art Center, inaugurated in 1948 and closed in 1969, was one of MOMA’s educational projects that provided art and craft classes for children and adults – f.e. A School for Art Amateurs, Young and Old; Adult Classes In Painting, Ceramics, Jewelry; and Woodworking Classes for Parents and Children. The Museum of Modern Art “90751-49,” untitled Media release. Available at http://www.moma.org/docs/press_archives/1541/releases/MOMA_1951_0059_1951-09-07_90751-49.pdf?2010 [accessed on April 24, 2025].

²⁰⁶ The Museum of Modern Art (1951): 2.

²⁰⁷ Steven M. Gelber, *Hobbies, Leisure and the Culture of Work in America*, 299.

It could be claimed that DIY is currently experiencing a revival, coming back in the contemporary society as a solution to the increasing prices of design products. After a first wave, where people resorted to DIY for subsistence, a second wave, based on the production and promotion of DIY kits of pre-designed products, this third wave proposes DIY as a solution to economic constraints, a collective action of resistance against mass production and a way to promote cultural enrichment. Digitally driven design manufacture facilitate accessibility to production, while the workshop as a physical space becomes a gathering point for the community to share resources and know-how. In Spreefeld (2013), a cooperative development for affordable housing located near the river Spree between Mitte and Kreuzberg in Berlin, together with a communal sauna, a greenhouse and a series of multifunctional rooms, the ground floor hosts a spacious wood workshop open to the entire neighbourhood. The workshop contributes to strengthen the core values of the cooperative, which operate Spreefeld implementing



■ Workshop

2m

2.9 Fatkoehl Architekten,
BARArchitekten and Carpaneto
Architekten, Spreefeld coopera-
tive housing, Berlin (Germany),
2011-2013. Ground floor plan of
Haus 2.

energy efficient and resource saving practices, allowing residents and visitors to produce their own furniture thanks to the provision of a basic infrastructure and salvaged materials. Similarly to the educational programme carried out at MOMA's People's Art Center, contemporary DIY is simultaneously a response to a tangible problem and an occasion for the implementation of ritualistic conviviality; furthermore, locating the workshop in continuity with the living spaces strengthen its perception as an extension of the domestic realm, rather than an industrial production station.

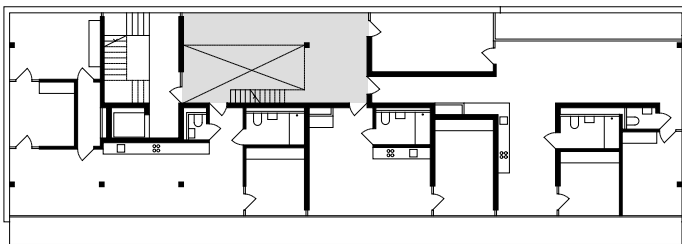
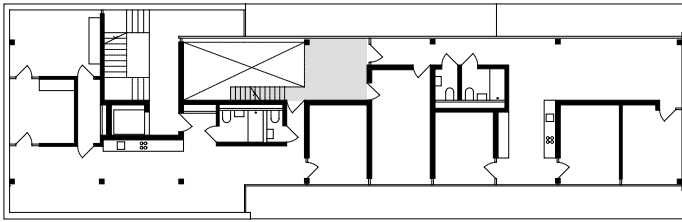
A room for everything

During the Postwar period, alongside the development of the DIY movement, a new technology was claiming its place likewise in the houses of the high, middle and lower classes: the television. The TV represents one of the most widespread forms of domestic entertainment and, if, on one side, it merely colonised existing spaces (such as the living room), on the other, its introduction within the domestic environment spurred the design of tailored made rooms. Professor Mattias Kärrholm, in his study of residential room types, reminds us that the definition of domestic types “play an important part in how we behave in everyday life (for example, justifying certain restrictions, such as ‘quiet, this is a reading room’),” and influence the transformation of objects and cultures at different scales. Therefore, “types of rooms participate in the controlling and ordering of movements and behaviour.”²⁰⁸ That is exactly the context in which we should consider the emergence of rec-rooms: at a time when the domestic and the familiar were praised in opposition to the public and the social, the presence of a space completely dedicated to home entertainment, equipped with a TV, sometimes a small cinema-like setting, a pool table and comfortable couches, is of critical importance in the definition of the ways certain moments of recreation are enjoyed, whether alone or collectively.

Rec-rooms have countless names according to geographical location and cultural context²⁰⁹ but the general definition is that of an informal space, to a certain extent democratic, not reserved to any specific member of the household, expressly dedicated to the performance of domestic leisure. With the spread of mass production, DIY partly succumbed to the possibility of comfort promised by such spaces and many basement workshops were converted into rec-rooms, to the point that, in the 70s and 80s, they had developed their own stylistic character. A melange of plaid covers and carpets, paired with wood panelling and cheap furniture of diverse provenance made the rec-room lose any specific gender or moralistic connotation: in its traditional

²⁰⁸ Mattias Kärrholm, “The Life and Death of Residential Room Types: A Study of Swedish Building Plans, 1750–2010,” *Architectural Histories*, 8(1):1 (2019): 1-18.

²⁰⁹ The Italian *taverna*, the Swedish *hobbyrum* and German *hobbyraum*, and the American rec room.



■ Common room

2m

2.10 Clauss Kahl Merz Atelier, Lyse-Lotte Cooperative housing, Basel (Switzerland), 2023. Plans of the third and fourth floors.

form, it was a space with no specific use and for no one in particular, and that is what made it precious in the context of the overly defined Postwar domestic environment. Its popularity prompted the realisation of several objects specifically conceived to furnish it, such as the Poker Table designed by Joe Colombo for Zanotta (1968), featuring a rotating plate at every corner which incorporated removable ashtrays. The rec-room appeared in many TV shows and movies as integral to the typical layout of the suburban American house, as in the basement of *The Brady Bunch* (1969-1974), or that of *Wayne's World* (1992). From the 90s, technological development and the spread of individual devices throughout the home contribute to make the type obsolete: the clear distinction between the rec-room and other domestic spaces starts to fade, and the entire house takes the form of an entertainment centre.

Considered in the context of today's housing discussion, the informal nature of the rec-room is of particular relevance. Limited by the constant quest for surface maximisation, such kind of spaces, with no specific use and therefore no clear market value, have in large part disappeared, transformed into guest apartments or underused. Yet, the concept comes back in several contemporary collective housing projects, where the value of "the empty room" is understood in relation to a communal way of living and is reinforced by the demand for spaces that are simultaneously inside and outside the boundaries of the traditional household. An example is the already mentioned Basel housing cooperative Lyse Lotte:²¹⁰ here, the apartments on the third and fourth floors share a common room that acts as a buffer between the main circulation core and the entrance doors of individual units. Organised on two levels, the room links together a total of six apartments, which can dispose of its use in different ways: a playroom for children, a communal dining room, a small workshop. Its location, generous height and dimension, allow for multiple interpretations. Differently from the rec-room, hidden in the basement and separated from the main routes of circulation, Lyse Lotte's common room is thought of as a crossing space, a meeting point, but still not entirely a space of passage, so that in terms of safety and use, it can truly be perceived as a room. It could be claimed that this is the contemporary evolution of the hobby room, a space designed for hobbies that have no specifications nor requirements, that are genderless and that are voluntarily left undefined.

²¹⁰ See more at p. 135.



2.11 Lavatoio della Grada in Bologna at the turn of the 20th century. Collezione Brasa, Bologna (Italy).

2.4 Laundry

The evolution of laundering practices

It is imperative, when talking about laundry, to position such practices in the broad context related to the conceptions and conventions of cleanliness that have shaped social habits over time.²¹¹ Anthropologist Mary Douglas reminds us how laundering, as much as bathing, retains a symbolical significance, which contributes to the reproduction of a certain social order. Different practices related to the washing and changing of clothes materialise the moral and social meanings of cleanliness, while simultaneously influencing the division of domestic labour and establishing conventions and standards within and beyond the walls of our homes. Long before the introduction of hygiene standards in domestic environments, cleansing held a fundamental role especially in relation to religion and the purification of the soul from sin:

“(...) most pollutions have a very simple remedy for undoing their effects. There are rites of reversing, untying, burying, washing, erasing, fumigating, and so on, which at a small cost of time and effort can satisfactorily expunge them.”²¹²

But holy rites were accompanied by a series of trivial customs, such as wearing the “good dress” for Sunday mass, which in time contributed to embed the idea of cleanliness with that of respectability. Laundering practices hold particular relevance in relation to certain anthropological questions, as they define the standards to judge what is proper and what is not; but, at the same time, especially since the advent of industrialisation, they have also played a crucial role in establishing boundaries related to both class and gender. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the accessibility to washing facilities was a privilege: it was mainly the rich who could resort to cleaning services whether performed by their maids or washer women, while laundering habits of the common people were infrequent, as they required consistent amounts of time and means. Laundry often took a week to complete: families would start boiling, washing and ironing clothes on Monday (usually referred to as “wash day”), in order to have them ready for Sunday mass.²¹³ As noted by social historian Lawrence Stone,

“Because of the cost of soap, the lack of facilities for washing, and from traditional habit, the poor were very much dirtier than the rich. Francis Place recalled that among the lower-middle and lower classes in the late eighteenth century, bed sheets were changed three times a year at most. Women wore stays made of bone or leather, which

²¹¹ “Cleanliness is next to godliness. Ancient Egyptians laundered not only their own clothes, but those of idols representing *ka*, a spirit they believed resided in the body and survived after death. The Vedas, sacred Hindu books, decreed the washing of clothes essential to physical and moral well-being. Muhammad commanded Muslims to keep their clothes clean, and Moses furnished the Israelites with detailed laundering instructions (...). In the Bible, people are washed in butter, in wine, in blood, in milk, in tears.” From Maureen Stanton, “Laundry,” *The Iowa Review*, vol. 34, no. 3 (2004/2005): 8. See also Christina Hardyment, *From Mangle to Microwave: The Mechanization of Household Work* (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 1988); Susan North, *Sweet and Clean? Bodies and Clothes in Early Modern England* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2020); Peter Ward, *The Clean Body: A Modern History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 2019).

²¹² Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 136.

²¹³ “Wash on Monday, Iron on Tuesday, Mend on Wednesday, Churn on Thursday, Clean on Friday, Bake on Saturday, Rest on Sunday.” This short poem, composed by the American writer Laura Ingalls Wilder, and included in her autobiographical novel *Little House in the Big Woods*, well represents the sequence of actions which would follow wash day and their relation to the unfolding of the week up until Sunday. Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods* (New York: Harper Collins, 1932).


A step ahead

Why Mrs. Webster can afford a new one every 8 years!

The minute it enters Mrs. Webster's house, this new Heavy Duty Laundromat starts paying for itself. The Westinghouse Laundromat automatic washer pays back part of its purchase price every wash-day, because it uses only half the bleach and detergent that agitator washers do. (Every detergent maker says it right on the box!) Mrs. Webster puts her Laundromat through its paces ten to twelve times a week. By simply following manufacturers' directions, she will save enough in eight years to buy herself a new one.

The Laundromat not only pays for itself, but it gets clothes cleaner too. It's so powerful, it can breeze through a 12-pound load of the toughest problem wash. The Laundromat's tub actually harnesses gravity to do the dirty work. No sluggish back-and-forth motion here. The tumbling tub pulls your clothes up through the wash water. Then gravity drops them down for another dousing... up and around... fifty-seven times a minute.

A Laundromat saves on hot water, detergent, bleach. Visit your Westinghouse-dealer soon and put one to work saving money for you.

We never forget how much you rely on Westinghouse

2.12 Ad for a Westinghouse washing machine from the *American women magazine McCall* (1963).

lasted for decades and were worn day in and day out without ever being washed. They also wore quilted petticoats which were also never washed and were worn until they disintegrated.”²¹⁴

This inevitably meant that clean clothes, as much as a privilege, were also a marker of high social status, linking the conditions of the physical body to those of the self as a social subject. It was only at the dawn of the 19th century that dirtiness, which up until then had been considered inevitable and was, to a certain extent, socially accepted, turned into a stigma: the cult of respectability established itself as completely dependent on cleanliness (both moral and physical), while industrialisation allowed the production of cheap manufactured clothing, encouraging the spread of faster and easier ways to launder. These improved conditions led to a switch of roles between the rich and the poor as compared to what was described above: higher classes had access to larger wardrobes and could therefore change their clothes frequently without the need to wash them right away; lower classes, on the contrary, were compelled to launder at a steady pace in order to cope with the paucity of clothing and social demands. Up to this point, laundry was generally perceived as a public practice: washing clothes implied, first of all, access to a stream of water, which meant that common people would gather on riverbanks, around fountains or in collective wash establishments. Architect and historian Mireille Rodier gives a detailed account of *lavoirs*, collective washing sites particularly common in 19th century rural France, both in terms of their architecture and use. Rodier notes that, originally, *lavoirs* were used only twice a year in occasion of a communal event referred to as the *bueés*: in the course of three days (respectively called “Purgatory,” “Hell” and “Heaven”), families would gather to clean six months’ worth of linens, sheets and shirts. The third day, “Heaven,” mixed work with social pleasure: women would give a last rinse to the clothes, which were then hung to dry or spread on the surrounding lawns and conclude the ritual with feasting in the company of their children.²¹⁵ This practice was abandoned when, due to the increasing frequency of washing, women advocated for the construction of *lavoirs* in each neighbourhood so that laundry could be done daily or weekly. Yet, the social ritual which accompanied laundering practices persisted until the availability of running water and electricity in domestic settings allowed for the introduction of individual washing appliances, reinforcing the association of laundering habits with ideas of familiar intimacy. Gradually, doing laundry became a symbol of domestic care, an act performed solely by the lovingly mother or wife, becoming part of those chores that defined

²¹⁴ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 306.

²¹⁵ Mireille Rodier, *Lavoirs: Washhouses of Rural France* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003), 17.

domestic labour as the so-called “labour of love.”²¹⁶ During the 18th and 19th centuries designs for washing machines proliferated:²¹⁷ even if still hand-operated, these experimental models represented a great step forward in the domestic life of women, and were commonly referred to as “The Housewife’s Darling” or “Hired Girl.”²¹⁸ The shift from collective to private was obviously encouraged by the spreading bourgeois morality and the implementation of rigid standards to define what is “proper” and what can or cannot be shown in public. Indeed, laundry is inherently an intimate affair: as writer Maureen Stanton recalls in her personal account of laundering practices,

“Laundry reveals who you are: Were you kneeling in the garden? Eating barbecue? Painting? Do you wear synthetics or natural fibres? Do you have a baby, a husband? Does he work in a gas station, in construction? Does he wear boxers or briefs? Are you gentle-cycling your lingerie? Is there romance in your life? Are you airing your dirty laundry? It will all come out in the wash.”²¹⁹

Today, the modern obsession of hiding dirt has exacerbated this particular aspect of laundering to the point that, now, the majority of homes are equipped with an individual washer, sometimes a dryer, and, where means and space permit, even with a laundry room, furnished with ample storage, a gigantic sink and floor drains. Within the current economic and environmental context, however, especially in cities, the necessity and sustainability of individual washing machines is being questioned: is there really the need to sacrifice precious liveable surface to yet another form of domestic labour? Can laundry be rethought in a way that can benefit both the community and the planet? Can it become a genderless practice?

From laundromats to communal laundry rooms

The introduction of automatic washers took place in the early 1900s, but washing machines as we know them started to become common household appliances only from the mid 1950s. There has been a moment, in between wars and right after, when, despite the availability of automated machines, the difficult economic conditions prevented the majority of the population to access such goods. This was the time of laundromats. The first coin-operated laundry was inaugurated in Bayswater, West London, in 1949; as reported in a local newspaper, “Britain’s first self-service, coin-operated launderette opened, for a six month trial... All that housewives have to do is bring the washing, put it in the machine and come back 30 minutes later.”²²⁰ Laundromats’

²¹⁶ In her article “Ritual, Embodiment and the Paradox of Doing the Laundry,” anthropologist Maryann McCabe further analyses the relation between laundry rituals and motherly love: “In laundry rituals, cleanliness signifies both the transformation of dirty clothes into clean clothes and metaphorically the emotions of caring and nurturance that mothers feel during the laundry process.” Maryann McCabe, “Ritual, Embodiment and the Paradox of Doing the Laundry,” *JBA*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2018): 8-31, 11.

²¹⁷ In “The Weekly Wash,” Christine Zmroczek states that “The earliest mention of a machine for washing clothes appears in 1677 in the diary of Sir John Hoskyns, a Fellow of the Royal Society, and the first patent was taken out in 1691.” Christine Zmroczek, “The Weekly Wash,” in *This Working-Day World. Women’s Lives and Culture(s) in Britain 1914-1945*, ed. Sybil Oldfield (UK: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 11.

²¹⁸ Maureen Stanton, “Laundry,” 5.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

²²⁰ Andy Jackson, “May 9, 1949: Britain’s first launderette sets a revolution in motion,” *BT*, available at <http://home.bt.com/news/on-thisday/may-9-1949-britains-first-launderette-sets-a-revolution-in-motion11363980035442> [Accessed on March 30, 2025].

success rapidly grew, and they were soon integrated with a range of different utilities (many establishments, especially in the US, offered ancillary services such as coffee corners, shoe repair, play areas for children and mailboxes). Shared laundering facilities took up centre stage especially in Postwar housing developments, where spacious rooms for washing could be found at the ground floor of each residential complex. With their bright, new and shiny floors, such spaces were not only there for obvious utilitarian reasons, they were also considered as community assets, places where residents could gather and interact. In Sweden, laundromats developed a series of unwritten codes and rules which would allow users to exchange both directly and indirectly: an example is the custom of writing down notes pointing to behaviours that violate the code of conduct, implementing a very peculiar form of social control.²²¹ From the 60s, economic recovery and rising wages, together with a steady campaign encouraging women to buy new cooking and washing appliances that would improve efficiency in their domestic lives, transformed the nature of laundromats from first-class collective facilities to secondary services, used only by that part of the population who could not afford a personal washing machine at home. By the end of the 20th century, many Postwar estates versed in critical conditions due to lack of maintenance and overcrowding; in such contexts, laundromats became targets of vandalism and crime, gaining the stigma that we are still familiar with nowadays.²²²

In recent years, however, a heightened environmental awareness paired with a renewed interest in sharing resources as a way to tackle economic hardship, have highlighted the financial and cultural obsolescence of individual washing appliances. As advocated by the curators of the British Pavilion at the 2016 Venice Biennale:

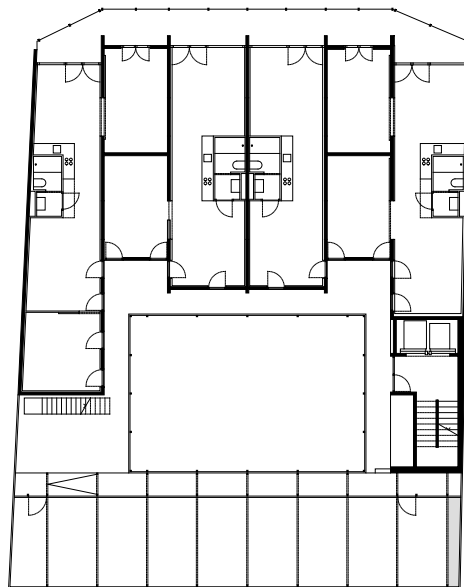
“In the context of housing there is an ecological dimension too: if we pool our resources together we can have a better quality of life by dramatically reducing our material requirements. We might not be able to afford a home with a large room for special occasions. But if we chip in with a number of others we could afford to collectively buy a house with a large room, then share its occupation. The same is true of even the most banal domestic object: it is really necessary for each apartment to have a vacuum cleaner, when a single one between us would do? If we split the cost it will be cheaper, consume less resources, and be just as efficient. If we are prepared to share, we can have more.”²²³

It is in this ideological framework that we have to consider the design of laundry rooms in collective housing projects: if financial profits are undoubtedly one end of the spectrum, the ultimate goal is to

²²¹ Marcus Knutagård, “Tvättstugan, mellan smutstvätt och social kontroll” (trans. “The Laundry room: between dirty laundry and social control”), *Antropologi*, no. 53 (2006/2007): 125-138.

²²² The phobia for laundromats that took over the population during those years is well conveyed by Bruce Robinson’s novel *Paranoia in the Laundrette*, where the British writer expressed his aversion to collective laundering practices, where he would be forced to witness others’ dirt in what was, for him, the worst display of filthiness. Bruce Robinson, *Paranoia in the Laundrette* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), 20-21.

²²³ Shumi Bose, Jack Self and Finn Williams, eds., *Home Economics. Five new models for domestic life*, Publication of the exhibition at the British Pavilion (Venice Architecture Biennale 2016), 79.



■ Washing facilities

2m

2.13 Lacol, La Borda Cooperative Housing, Barcelona (Spain), 2018. Plan of the first floor.

revitalise the cultural benefits of collectivisation. Laundry, while being ubiquitous, is rarely perceived as an active agent of change: as stated by sociologist Sarah Pink, it holds a paradoxical status in the everyday life of people, where, despite often going unnoticed, it actually occupies a fundamental role in the materialisation of home and how the everyday is organised.²²⁴ In this sense, laundry represents a thread that holds together a series of social, technical, material, and intangible elements that constitute domestic life: how, when and with whom we choose to do our laundry contribute to define a precise way of living.

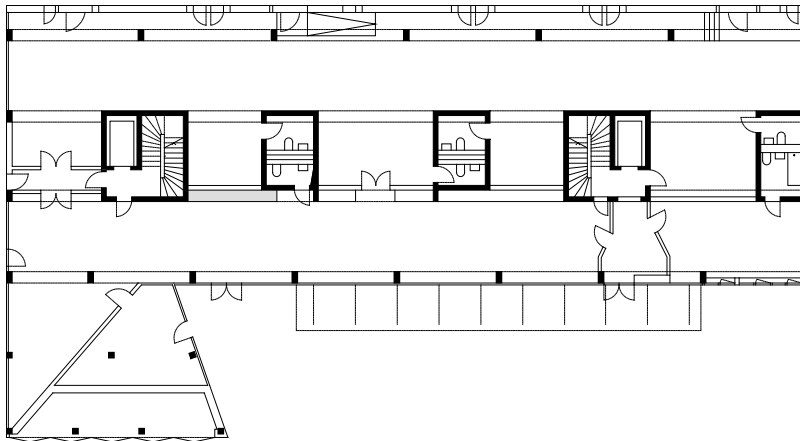
This is particularly true if we look at projects such as La Borda cooperative housing (Barcelona, 2018), designed by Lacol. The initiative emerged in 2011, when the residents of the neighbourhood of Sans occupied the former industrial site of Can Batlló after 30 years of awaiting its transformation as a way to tackle the issue of housing affordability in the city. Composed by a matrix of sixteen square meters units, the residential complex offers multiple apartment typologies that range from 40 to 135 square meters. Here, the laundry room occupies a central position: rather than being relegated into the basement or hidden from sight, washing, drying and ironing equipment is located in the main common area of the building, a generous double-height terrace which occupies part of the first and second floor, overlooking the central court. No screens nor partitions divide laundry machines from the rest of the room, the two are conceived in continuity. It is evident how the design encourages a kind of conviviality that is far from the polished image of constructed domesticity: the intimate becomes part of the collective and through this very process new forms of sociability emerge. If the meaning of laundering depends, in large part, upon the technologies available and the accepted conventions, it is clear that change in La Borda is generated through the very act of design. The placement of the washing machines (in what kind of room, where within the household layout, and so on), challenges established habits and assumptions in many ways: they require users to commit to conviviality, especially encouraging the pairing of laundry with other activities. Shove notes that compared with old semi-automatic models,

“modern washing machines ‘create’ time that can be put to other uses while the programme runs its course. (...) In allowing users to ‘store’ time, defer activity or manage and minimize interruption, tools of this kind enhance capacity for autonomous organization.”²²⁵

Moreover, being external to the living unit, they fall out from the list of appliances we encounter daily, their use has to be planned in consideration of both energy consumption and working schedules, and

²²⁴ Sarah Pink, “Hanging out at home: Laundry as a thread and texture of everyday life,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2015): 209-224.

²²⁵ Elisabeth Shove, *Comfort, cleanliness and convenience: the social organization of normality* (New York: BERG, 2003), 154.



■ Washing facilities

2m

2.14 Summacumfemmer, San Riem, Munich (Germany), 2020. Plan of the ground floor.

becomes therefore a weekly task. It is rather intuitive to imagine how residents could turn laundry time into a social ritual, taking the washing of clothes as an occasion to gather for a Saturday meal or share childcare over the weekend. Similarly to what happens at La Borda, the architects of San Riemo (Munich, 2023), Florian Summa and Anne Femmer, included a large communal laundry space at the ground floor, located right next to the shared café and with a direct access to the outside. On their website they explain the project with the following statement: “We were interested in how everyday care work, such as laundry washing, can find its way out of the flats and directly into the community.”²²⁶ It is a way of designing that connects time, uses and spaces, an effort to imagine how the personal and collective scheduling and performance of different practices have the power to transform collective habits and conventions.

For the French sociologist Jean Claude Kaufmann, laundry reveals the dynamics of being and becoming a couple: the intimate agreement on purchasing and using the machine symbolizes the creation of a new home and its joint organisation. The drawing of such a contract constitutes, according to Kaufmann, the character of the couple’s emerging relationship, and especially the mutual adaptation of habit.²²⁷ As much as it defines the couple, it could be claimed, shared laundering practices define a community: establishing rules, times and modes of usage and maintenance, represent an exercise of domestic negotiation which translates into a form of identity. In this sense, the ways of laundering are inseparable from the ways homes are formed, they are at the base of domestic negotiations, deceptions and moralities, especially in relation to gender and labour.²²⁸ Looking at the shift in laundering customs, from seasonally, to daily, to weekly, allows us to understand the practice as a historical, spatial and temporal phenomenon, a tangible way of managing time and resources that is fundamental for the reproduction of homes and the communities living within them.

Finding time

This analysis of laundering practices and facilities, which, as we have come to realise, is of crucial importance for the definition of different modes of living together in collective housing projects, allows us to touch on a broader field of discussion, that of time management. Once again, it is Elisabeth Shove who well explains the importance of time control in today’s society:

“How socially necessary activities are fitted together, and how the dynamics of integration are managed in space and time, is itself signifi-

²²⁶ From the website of Summacumfemmer <https://summacumfemmer.com/027-2/> website [accessed on March 29, 2025].

²²⁷ Jean-Claude Kaufmann, *Dirty linen: couples and their laundry* (London: Middlesex University Press, 1998), 57. Quoted by Elisabeth Shove in *Comfort, cleanliness and convenience: the social organization of normality* (New York: BERG, 2003), 141.

²²⁸ Sarah Pink, “Dirty laundry: everyday practice, sensory engagement and the constitution of identity,” *Social Anthropology*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2005): 275-290.

cant for the (re)specification of normal and necessary ways of life. (...) Recent research into household scheduling (...) suggests that people structure and manage their time around core, non-negotiable activities or injunctions. In other words, it is the ambition of maintaining standards in the context of an increasingly fragmented temporal environment that drives the pursuit of convenience. (...) concepts of service are revised and redefined as a consequence of the measures people take in coping with the ever-increasing challenge of ‘keeping on top of things’ and ‘holding it all together’.”²²⁹

Shove refers to sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel’s studies of the institutionalisation of time,²³⁰ where he argues that temporal constructs such as the working day, the week and the weekend, while often taken for granted, define the rhythmic structure of social life. Being shared and accepted, such patterns constitute “social facts” that exist beyond individual lives and experiences, they are precisely the corner stones around which individual experiences unfold.²³¹ Within this framework, we can see how contemporary economic strategies, following the principles of capitalism and the free market, encourage the individualisation of time and its fragmentation, shifting the task of time management from the community to the individual, in this way strengthening the impression that we are constantly running out of time. Quoting Shove:

“This suggests that there might be political, social and technological scope for intervention with respect to the temporal organization of society. In addition to advocating (...) the introduction of technical systems that promise to restructure the use of time, environmental policy makers could take steps to fix working hours, holidays and socio-temporal rhythms so as to cut down the personalized fine-tuning of social coordination.”²³²

If, on one side, the meanings of “clean” and “dirty” change according to historical and social contexts, on the other, our approaches to cleaning are emotional as well as logical: never innocent, laundering practices are rooted in the effort of defining and managing domestic economies, rhythms and social schedules.

The collectivisation of leisure related spaces in the home, requests, as for the performance of any communal activity, the definition of a set of rules which define certain times of use and modes of sharing. This, in turn, leads to the emergence of a series of rituals, which, most often, coincide with moments of conviviality: the very fact that ob-

²²⁹ Ibid., 170.

²³⁰ Eviatar Zerubavel is professor of sociology and psychiatry at the Rutgers University (New Jersey). His work focuses on analysing time patterns in everyday life, rhythm and socio-temporal conventions. Among his many publications are *Hidden Rhythms: Schedules and Calendars in Social Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), *The Seven Day Circle: The History and Meaning of the Week* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), *The Fine Line: Making Distinctions in Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

²³¹ Eviatar Zerubavel, *Patterns of Time in Hospital Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 106.

²³² Elisabeth Shove, *Comfort, cleanliness and convenience*, 185.

jects and spaces must be shared encourage people to find ways for coming together. While this is not aiming to be a behavioural analysis, we can see how the definition of domestic spaces influences the way these are experienced and lived. As claimed by Altman and Werner in their seminal book *Home Environments*, “The home supports and sustain familial relationships, while simultaneously representing them. Thus, the meaning of home derives in part from these familial and cultural relationships.”²³³ Being published in 1985, it is clear why their research focused on the nuclear family, but it is fairly easy to translate the same reasoning to the context of contemporary collective housing: these homes sustain and represent the social relationships that materialise within them, and they differ from traditional domestic typologies especially because they implement forms of aggregation that are not necessarily familiar.

The domestic rituals analysed here support different values and meanings; they are rooted in the idea of sharing, which inform, and is informed by, the design of spaces, in a twofold relationship. It is clear that without a common laundry room there cannot be shared rituals of washing, and that if the laundry room was located in a dark basement, users would not be encouraged to spend their time there, nor to engage in social activities. It might seem simple, it might seem that such dynamics are naturally created, but they actually emerge from the convergence of thoughtful design and social intention. What links these two realms, that of built matter and that of social experience is time: through the management of time, social interactions are controlled and organised in space. This necessary orchestration, which, as we saw in the previous chapter, applies also to daily temporal frames, is even more evident when we look at the cycle of the week, and when we consider the opposition the week is constructed upon, that between work and leisure. Even more than daily, weekly rituals call for heightened forms of conviviality as they refer to a dimension that stands outside the realm of pure necessity: their nature is twofold, simultaneously productive and recreational. While, in the past, leisure was charged with moral meanings, it seems that, nowadays, its core values lie in the practice of togetherness. The home defines how and when to be together: objects and places take on new psychological meanings that set the rules of the performance. Collective domesticity emerges as the art of orchestrating disorder, of linking together, through the shared execution of domestic tasks, different bodies, habits and cultures.

²³³ Irwin Altman and Carol M. Werner, *Home Environments*, xxi.

Seasonally

Chapter III

Seasonally

3.1 The seasons

Who made the world?
 Who made the swan, and the black bear?
 Who made the grasshopper?
 This grasshopper, I mean-
 the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
 the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
 who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-
 who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
 Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
 Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
 I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
 I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
 into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
 how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
 which is what I have been doing all day.
 Tell me, what else should I have done?
 Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
 Tell me, what is it you plan to do
 with your one wild and precious life?²³⁴

With these words, American poet Mary Oliver celebrates the miracle of being alive: while looking at a grasshopper, kneeling into the grass and strolling through the fields, she portrays the joys of a summer day, the pleasure to be idle and blessed under a warm sun. The feelings she recalls are overly familiar: all of us who grew up in temperate climates have had the chance to experience August's stillness or January's asperity, as well as the succession of one season after the other in the quadripartite canonical cycle of spring, summer, autumn, winter. While varying in form depending on geographical location, seasons constitute an essential natural pattern which dictates the annual cycles of life for humans, animals and plants. The seasonal cycle is generated by the changing relationship between sun and earth throughout a year-

²³⁴ Mary Oliver, "The Summer Day," in *House of Light* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

long orbit: the axial tilt of the earth implies that, at different times of the year, the Northern and Southern hemispheres will be respectively closer or further from the sun, modifying the duration of night and day, the temperature and the general climatic conditions. The four seasons are marked by summer and winter solstices — when each of the hemispheres is respectively most tilted towards and furthest from the sun (around June 21st and December 21st) — and the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, when day and night are virtually equal in length in both hemispheres (around March 20th and September 22nd).²³⁵

Not merely an environmental phenomenon, seasons offer a cultural and temporal framework which shapes the way we relate to the environment and to each other: festivals, seasonal activities, certain ways of eating and being, are all practices suggested and coordinated by the change of seasons, pivotal to the establishment of a sense of community. In anthropology, seasons are inextricably linked to the interpretation of time, as they shaped the ways in which humans have appropriated natural cycles and established templates for the performance of certain activities.²³⁶ These activities are simultaneously tied to and constitutive of seasons, they become part of the seasonal pattern, providing a way to materialise cycles through their symbolic meaning.²³⁷ In *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre gives a detailed account of Greek rural festivals and religious ceremonies, the dates of which were fixed by the country calendar. Most of them were celebrated at the beginning or at the end of winter “the *Pyanespis*, in autumn; the *Anthesteria*, when spring came; the *Thalysis*, a festival for the local goddess in which all the inhabitants of the village participated (...).”²³⁸ He argues these festivals were occasions for the community to come together, essentially functioning like large meals:

“The peasants feasted, lying on the στριβάδες²³⁹ or swaths, and in specific places: near woods, mountains, springs, rivers. Everyone brought a contribution to the communal meal. Each village constituted a community: a large family of people linked by blood, a way of life, and also by a practical discipline and a fairly strict collective organization of work (dates when tasks were performed, etc.).”²⁴⁰

Lefebvre claims that this kind of celebrations scarcely differed from those of modern Greece, certain parts of Italy or France, and indeed this is true as, still today, in cities like Venice or Zurich, we can witness the performance of propitiatory rites related to the advent of the new year or spring.²⁴¹ Despite the indisputable importance of seasonal rhythms in the organisation of everyday life, these are not always reflected in calendric systems; as an example, the nomenclature

²³⁵ Luke Fischer and David Macauley, eds., *The Seasons: Philosophical, Literary, and Environmental Perspectives* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2021), 7.

²³⁶ See Susan Alexandra Crate and Mark Nuttall, eds., *Anthropology & Climate Change: From Encounters to Actions* (New York: Routledge, 2016). See also Nancy D. Munn, “The cultural anthropology of time: A critical essay,” *Annual review of anthropology* (1992): 93-123.

²³⁷ Scott Bremer and Arjan Wardekker, eds., *Changing Seasonality: How Communities are Revising their Seasons* (Berlin, Boston: de Gruyter, 2024), 13-16.

²³⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, vol. I, trans. John Moore (London, New York: Verso, 2014), 201.

²³⁹ The ancient Greek word refers to mats made of straw or leaves: in modern Greek the word στριβάδα means “layer.”

²⁴⁰ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, 201.

²⁴¹ The reference is to *Festa della Befana* and the *Sechseläuten*. The *Festa della Befana* is a traditional festivity celebrated in the Veneto region (Northern Italy) on the night between January 5th and 6th: a gigantic puppet made of straw is burned in several town squares to celebrate the beginning of the new year and forget the negativities of the past one. The *Sechseläuten* is a century-old festival held in Zurich on the 28th of April to celebrate the arrival of spring; here too, a straw puppet shaped like a snowman (to symbolize winter) is burned in the middle of Sechseläutenplatz.

of months in the Gregorian (and Julian) calendar, currently in use in the majority of the world's countries, derives from diverse sources such as the names of Roman deities (January, March, April, May, June²⁴²), or emperors (July, August), festivities (February) and simple numeric sequence (September, October, November, December). Before adopting the Julian calendar, Germanic populations used a nomenclature that was closely related to both seasons and agriculture (*Wintarmanoth* "winter month," *Lentzinmanoth* "spring month," *Winnimanoth* "pasture month," *Heuuimanoth* "hay month," etc.) and which persisted until the 15th century. The same was true for Eastern European territories, where seasonal months names continued to be used throughout the 19th century and, in some cases, are still in use today. Calendar reformations played an important role in revolutionary movements: this is the case of the French Revolution when Republican reformers criticised the Gregorian reference to Roman emperors, considered as "oppressive tyrants," and supported a new nomenclature which consecrated the agricultural system through the calendar.²⁴³ Poet Fabre d'Églantine proposed to rename those days of the year previously dedicated to Christian Saints after the names of trees, plants, fruits, seeds, roots, etc. and months after seasonal phenomena (*Brumaire* "mist," *Frimaire* "frost," *Nivôse* "snow," *Pluviôse* "rain," etc.).²⁴⁴ As claimed by Eviatar Zerubavel in his book *Hidden Rhythms*, where he analyses the relation between calendars and social life, such an operation had an important educational purpose: d'Églantine recognised the power of symbolism associated with names, and used it to manipulate the collective perception of French society at the time.²⁴⁵ Despite d'Églantine's failed attempt, it is clear that the interpretation of seasons and their temporal framing has always played a paramount role in the definition of frameworks and laws that could structure collective life. Calendars, therefore, present a dual nature: on one side, they help codify and measure time, on the other, they outline a "temporal order" that already exists in the natural world.²⁴⁶ While charged with specific political and religious connotations, the Gregorian calendar has managed to become an almost universally valid system for all time-reckoning and dating purposes, a symbol of Western civilisation.

Yet, if the calendar endures untouched since the 16th century, the same cannot be said of seasons. In opening their seminal collection of essays which explores the cultural meanings of seasons, philosophers Luke Fischer and David Macauley argue that today "we are living in a time in which we are likely more alienated from seasonal rhythms than in any other period of history."²⁴⁷ Technological development has

²⁴² In *Fasti*, Ovid provides a different interpretation claiming that May and June were respectively the months of the elders (*maiores*) and of the younger (*juniores*). See Ovid, *Fasti* VI, 88.

²⁴³ J. Guillaume, ed., *Procès Verbaux du Comité d'instruction Publique de la Convention Nationale*, vol. 2 (Paris: Imprimerie National, 1894), 698-699, 703-704.

²⁴⁴ Eviatar Zerubavel, *Hidden Rhythms: Schedules and Calendars in Social Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1985), 92.

²⁴⁵ Zerubavel also notes how a similar attempt to replace traditional naming related to pagan archaisms with seasonal aspects of nature was made, a century and a half later, by the Nazi regime. *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁴⁶ See Anthony Aveni, *Empires of Time: Calendars, Clocks, and Cultures* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1990), 6. See also LeRoy Elsworth Doggett, "Calendars," in *Explanatory Supplement to the Astronomical Almanac*, ed. P. Kenneth Seidelmann (Mill Valley, CA: University Science Books, 1992), 575-608.

²⁴⁷ Luke Fischer and David Macauley, eds., *The Seasons*, 1-16.

stripped us from constraints related to food, light or warmth:

“During long winter nights, we switch on electric lights and thus, as it were, artificially extend the day. Through indoor heating and air-conditioning, we sequester ourselves from the bitter cold of winter or the oppressive heat of summer. Modern technology enables us to control the temperature of our homes, shops, public buildings, and transport vehicles.”²⁴⁸

At the same time, climate change is not only disrupting our individual and cultural senses of the seasons but also the seasons themselves — one of its many outcomes is precisely the occurrence of “unseasonal” phenomena within a particular season. If, on the one hand, we have convinced ourselves we can live disregarding the rules of the natural world, and to a certain extent, control it, on the other, especially in the last twenty years, we have come to realise the danger of such a belief: depleting resources and careless consumption are simply not sustainable anymore. Furthermore, seasons continue to influence social life around the world: the existence of sports seasons, holiday seasons, shopping seasons, highlight how seasonal cycles, constituted in large part by and through geography, are also the product of culture, society and material conditions. In re-assessing the importance of seasonality in our time, Macauley singles out two main values of such a framework: firstly, he claims, “seasons provide us with social and ecological narratives in an ecologically challenged world.”²⁴⁹ They strengthen the relation between our bodies and the natural elements which we perceive on a daily basis: warmth, humidity, dryness, cold, light, darkness. Secondly, they refer to an emotional dimension which links human temperaments (feelings and disposition) with temporality (time) and temperature (weather).²⁵⁰ In this sense, seasons actively affect our lives, both on the individual and collective planes, and architecture is the medium through which this affect is directed and controlled. In *Qualities of Inhabiting*, a short publication comprising the work of Studio Anne Lacaton at ETH Zurich, several contributions significantly dwell on the relevance of seasons in architecture. Belgian architect Jan de Vylder asks himself how can architecture enhance real life, even orchestrate it, both the trivial tasks and the special occasions that occur in the home: in recalling the atmosphere of a Sunday afternoon, he describes the light cascading over the kitchen counter while preparing dinner, the shimmers on the ceiling, the shadows of the trees outside projected on the walls.²⁵¹ We can picture the low sun of an early summer evening shining through the windows overlooking the garden, the mild temperature and the promise of a chill night. “This is Sunday,”

²⁴⁸ Ibid. 1.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 4.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 43–46.

²⁵¹ Studio Ann Lacaton, Lacaton & Vassal, *Qualities of Inhabiting* (Zurich: ETH Zurich D-ARCH, 2020), 50–51.

he writes, a claim that, while being entirely subjective, strengthens the premises of this thesis: the idea that domestic rituals, those activities that we habitually perform in our homes at different times of the day, the month or the season, have had, and still have today, a great influence in the definition of the spaces we inhabit, and in the establishment of domestic hierarchies and geometries.

The chapter will focus on three seasonal activities which present a tangible set of spatial implications: the migration within the home following temperature variations, the storage of goods related to seasonal necessity, and the migration from one home to another in accordance with the holiday season. Through this analysis, the aim is to study how architecture responds to the limitations imposed by natural seasonal variations, a theme that is gaining renewed attention within the discipline in response to climate change, and to those variations that are instead sanctioned by social and cultural rhythms.

3.2 Migration

It is quoting Vitruvius that Swiss architect Philippe Rahm opens his book *Histoire Naturelle de l'Architecture*, which tries, in the author's words, to chart an "objective history" of architecture, one that unveils the physical, biological, chemical, material and climatic elements that have played a crucial role within the architectural field and have triggered the emergence of certain forms and construction techniques.²⁵² The origin of architecture, Rahm claims, lays in our being homeotherm organisms, which, in order to survive, have to maintain their body temperature at a constant level through metabolic activity; this temperature oscillates between 35,5 and 37,6° C. Architecture is, in this sense, an artificial extension of our thermoregulatory mechanisms, which allow us to achieve thermal comfort even in regions with very diverse, and sometime harsh, climatic conditions. In book VI, chapter I, titled *On Climate as Determining the Style of the House*, Vitruvius claims that houses should be built according to the specificities of cultures and climates, respecting the constraints given by local temperatures and the strength of the sun. Houses in the north should be roofed over and sheltered, with a warm exposure, while houses in the south should be built in the open, with northern exposure.²⁵³ Given these premises, Vitruvius proceeds to consider questions of symmetry and proportion, until chapter IV, titled *The Proper Exposure of Different Rooms*, which consists in a concise set of principles instructing the reader on the ideal

²⁵² Philippe Rahm, *Histoire Naturelle de l'Architecture: comment le climat, les épidémies et l'énergie ont façonné la ville et les bâtiments* (Paris: Pavillon de l'Arsenal, 2020), 8.

²⁵³ Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, book VI, trans. Morris H. Morgan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), 170.

disposition of rooms within the house in relation to their uses.

“We shall next explain how the special purposes of different rooms require different exposures, suited to convenience and to the quarters of the sky. Winter dining rooms and bathrooms should have a south-western exposure, for the reason that they need the evening light, and also because the setting sun, facing them in all its splendour but with abated heat, lends a gentler warmth to that quarter in the evening. Bedrooms and libraries ought to have an eastern exposure, because their purposes require the morning light, and also because books in such libraries will not decay. (...) Dining rooms for Spring and Autumn to the east; for when the windows face that quarter, the sun, as he goes on his career from over against them to the west, leaves such rooms at the proper temperature at the time when it is customary to use them. Summer dining rooms to the north, because that quarter is not, like the others, burning with heat during the solstice, for the reason that it is unexposed to the sun’s course, and hence it always keeps cool, and makes the use of the rooms both healthy and agreeable. Similarly with picture galleries, embroiderers’ work rooms, and painters’ studios, in order that the fixed light may permit the colours used in their work to last with qualities unchanged.”²⁵⁴

It is clear that Vitruvius is thinking about a specific kind of house, one where spatial generosity allows for the implementation of a number of rooms with similar function, or no function at all, to be used according to temperature variations. We can imagine how this seasonal movement required a complex orchestration and would involve the entire house in its performance: closing the winter dining room at the end of the cold season, covering tables and chairs with white cloths, moving chandeliers and table sets, silverware and decorations, in a collective migration from southern to eastern rooms. Conversely, peasants’ houses, which disposed of scarce means and surface, entailed completely different ways to cope with heat and cold: families would live together in one room, and it was through elements of furniture, such as the box-bed, curtains and screens, that inhabitants enhanced thermal comfort. In today’s Western culture, the tie between behaviour and thermal environment has weakened: in modern housing, the possibility to achieve and maintain a uniform temperature in all indoor spaces without exception²⁵⁵ has outmoded many of the traditional habits which linked spaces and the ways of inhabiting them with the change of seasons. However, despite the development of modern comfort, many simple thermoregulatory behaviours persist nowadays, such as choosing clothing according to season, and moving within the house

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 180-181.

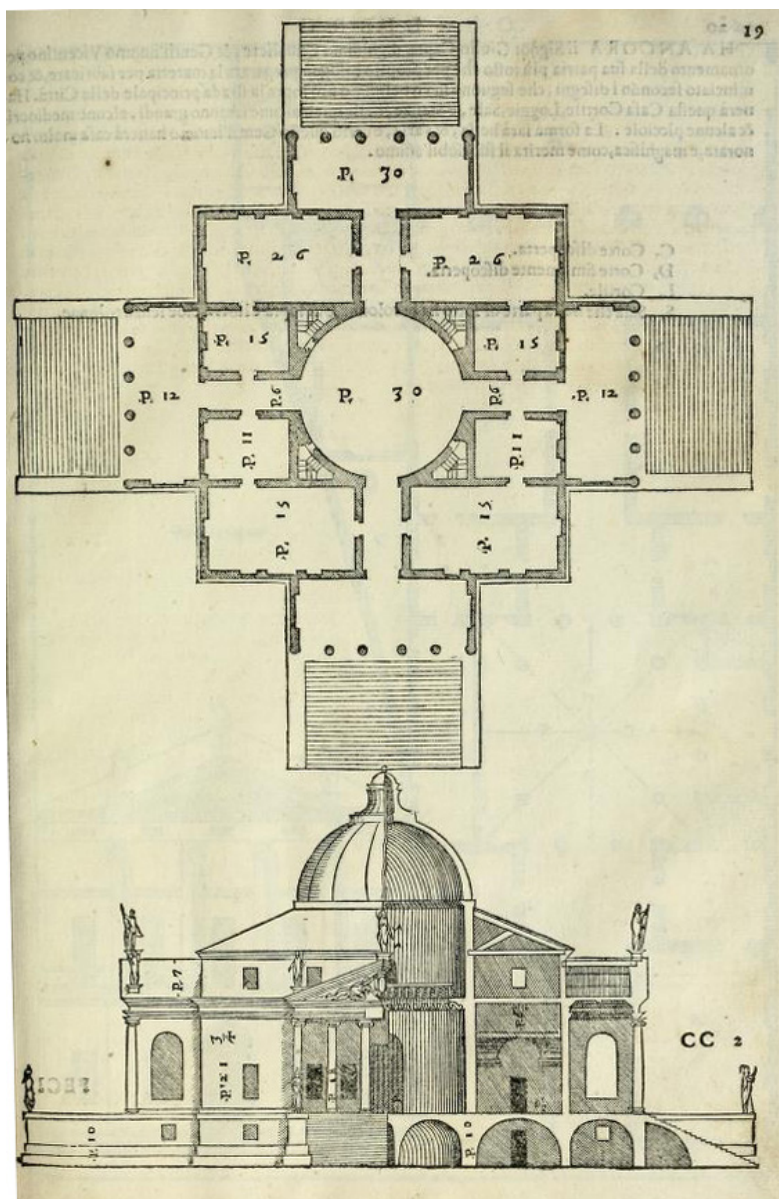
²⁵⁵ As an example, the 2015 International Residential Code as adopted by New York State reads: “Where the winter design temperature in Table R301.2(1) is below 60°F (16°C), every dwelling unit shall be provided with heating facilities capable of maintaining a room temperature of not less than 68°F (20°C) at a point 3 feet (914 mm) above the floor and 2 feet (610 mm) from exterior walls in habitable rooms at the design temperature.” Available at <https://codes.iccsafe.org/content/IRC2015NY> [accessed on May 25, 2025].

to profit of the freshness of a concrete wall, or the warmth of a sunlit windowsill. These two coping mechanisms go hand in hand, either making use of external aids or engaging with physical displacement, and several examples provide us with ample material to understand their translation into spatial matters.

Moving within the house: from hot to cold and in between

During the second half of the 17th century, Bernini spent around five months in Paris, working on the project for the new *Palais du Louvre* to be built for Luis XIV. One of the main challenges he encountered was certainly Jean-Baptiste Colbert, superintendent of buildings for the king, who would consult with Bernini almost daily on diverse design matters. Several conversations gravitated around the theme of the king's apartment: Colbert expressed insistently his concerns regarding Bernini's design, which consisted of an enfilade of spatially and functionally neutral rooms. As a representative of the French bureaucratic system, Colbert wanted architecture to answer precise questions of hierarchy, temporality and use: the king's apartment was not just "any apartment," it was a representation of the ruling power and, as such, should have respected certain rules of organisation and access that were as rigid as the rituals that were supposed to take place within it. To Colbert's preoccupations Bernini replied that this was not the work of the architect, but of the *Maréchal de Logis*, who was in charge of managing the king's living quarters, in this way avoiding to address the questions. Towards the end of his stay, Charles Perrault, king's minister and Colbert's collaborator, exposed to Bernini a number of issues to be clarified before his departure. One of these concerned the arrangement of the quarters below, a "trifling matter," as reported in de Chantelou's diary, in response to which Bernini stated that "...it was quite enough if he made a plan for the *piano nobile*, as he had said in the beginning, when he and signor Mathie were working on it," adding that "Every time there is a new pope all the apartments in the Vatican are rearranged, according to the wishes of the new papal officials who want everything changed to suit them."²⁵⁶ This quite anecdotal account is relevant here because it represents a pivotal transition in the interpretation of the relationship between architecture and the life that unfolds within it: while Bernini advocated for an architecture that provided the possibility to be appropriated and lived in different ways, and where external conditions such as light, orientation, temperature, influenced the very use of spaces, Colbert asked for a building that responded to the imposed order of an arbitrary system of predefined functions. Bernini fought for the autonomy of architecture against its technocratic

²⁵⁶ "...qu'il lui suffisait pour lui de s'attacher al piano nobile, comme il nous dit d'abord que l'on y travailla avec le signor Mathie, et comme il l'a répété à M. Perrault, et a ajouté 'A chaque fois qu'il se fait un pape, l'on refait toutes ces choses au Vatican, à la fantaisie des officiers du pape nouveau, qui veulent les choses à leur mode.'" Paul Fréart de Chantelou, *Journal du Voyage du Cavalier Bernin en France*, ms. inédit publ. et annoté par Ludovic Lalanne (Paris: Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 1885), 205-206.



3.1 Andrea Palladio, drawings for the Villa la Rotonda, as reported in *I Quattro Libri dell'Architettura*, Book II (Venezia: Domenico de Franceschi, 1570), 19.

transformation: to him, form and spatial definition influenced movements regardless of programmed activities.²⁵⁷

Such an understanding of the discipline is rooted in the teachings Bernini inherited from Renaissance architects: building on the principles set out by Vitruvius, concerning climate and seasons, and by Hippocrates, focusing on health and disease, Alberti, Serlio and Palladio designed their villas as climatic machines, where the disposition and quality of spaces would allow residents to live comfortably in every season. Particularly in the Veneto region, villas proliferated during the 16th century due to a series of factors such as the growing urban density, the intermittent outbreaks of plague, and the renewed interest for agriculture.²⁵⁸ Palladio found here a fertile ground for his domestic architectures, deeply rooting the design of his villas in the climatic conditions of the Venetian territory. On a general level, the rooms were organised in clusters, linking together respectively public rooms, semi-private ones and servants' quarters. The servants' working spaces were typically located on the lower level together with kitchens and cellars; the main rooms were grouped above the ground level, in the *piano nobile*, and arranged around the central *sala*; the attic was used as storage or as servant's rooms.²⁵⁹ The *portego* (loggia) and the *sala*, located at the heart of the house, were important elements of traditional Venetian houses: the loggia functioned as a transitional space between inside and outside, while the *sala*, cool and dimly lit, provided shelter from the heat of Italian summers, when the villas were mostly used.²⁶⁰ Sizes, proportions and orientation of rooms responded to the constraints of different climatic moments. As Palladio writes in *The Four Books on Architecture*:

“It would also contribute to comfort if the summer rooms were large and spacious and oriented to the north, and those for the winter to the south and west and were small rather than otherwise, because in the summer we seek the shade and breezes, and in the winter, the sun, and smaller rooms get warmer more readily than large ones. But those [rooms] we would want to use in the spring and autumn will be oriented to the east and look out over gardens and greenery. Studies and libraries should be in the same part of the house because they are used in the morning more than at any other time.”²⁶¹

Palladio carefully established rooms dimensions and orientation to facilitate their occupation during different seasons and times of the day: this moving from one room to other was vital for the functioning of the house itself, and informed the nature of the furniture that was to

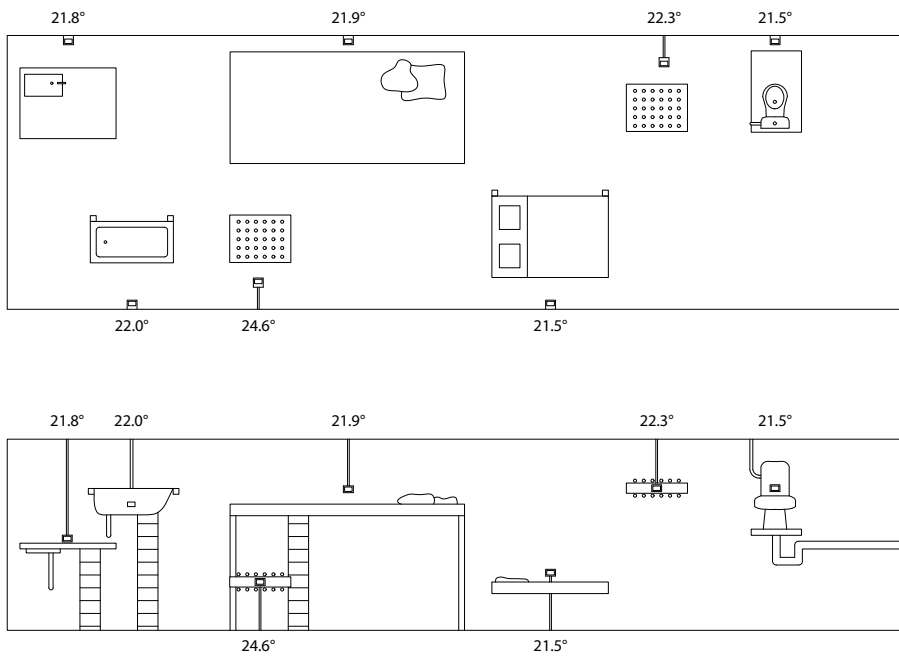
²⁵⁷ Pierpaolo Tamburelli, “Italian Cowboys go France: Some Remarks on the Diary of the Cavaliere Bernini’s visit to France,” in *HUNCH 14. Publicity*, ed. Salomon Frausto (Rotterdam: Berlage Institute, 2010).

²⁵⁸ Matthew Hardy, “‘Study the warm winds and the cold:’ Hippocrates and the Renaissance villa,” in *Aeolian Winds and the Spirit in Renaissance Architecture*, ed. Barbara Kenda (London, New York: Routledge, 2006), 48-69.

²⁵⁹ Paul Holberton, *Palladio’s Villas: Life in the Renaissance Countryside* (London: John Murray, 1990), 206-209, 229.

²⁶⁰ On his eighth house to be built in the Italian Countryside, Serlio notes that: “This house is very liveable, and convenient, and on the other hand good for the summer: the *sala* will be very cold for being hardly struck by the Sun.” And, while describing another, he mentions that: “Some will doubt, that this house will be well lit in the middle, due to the great length of the passage. Of this there is no [need] to doubt, because the doors will be open all day: further because there will be windows above it. Next, this dwelling is the sort you inhabit in summer. Because of that this [house] will be very cool, and the middle parts retired from the sun.” See Giovanni Domenico Scamozzi, ed., *Tutte l’opere d’architettura et prospetiva di Sebastiano Serlio bolognese*, book VII/6 and VII/19 (Venice: Giacomo de’ Franceschi, 1619), 240, 46.

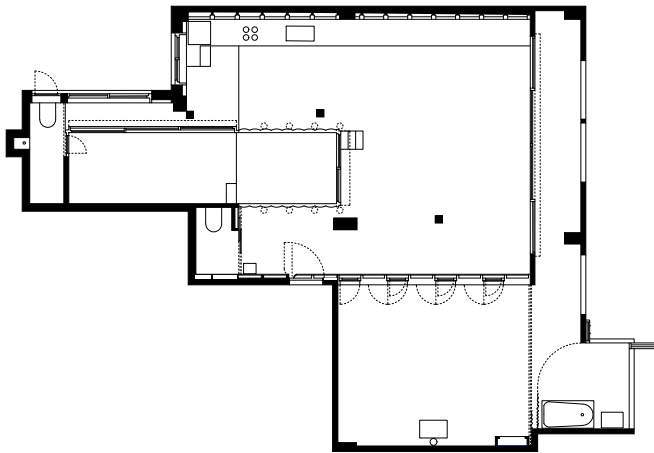
²⁶¹ Andrea Palladio, *I Quattro libri dell’Architettura di Andrea Palladio*, Venice, 1570 (reprinted Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1990), 55; Andrea Palladio, *The Four Books on Architecture*, trans. Robert Tavernor and Richard Schofield (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1997), 60.



3.2 Philippe Rahm, Domestic Astronomy, project for the exhibition *Green Architecture for the Future* at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk (Denmark), 2009.

populate such spaces.

It is evident that the configuration of the villa as an autonomous object was rather exceptional and that, in most dwellings located in urban areas, different solutions had to be found to cope with temperature fluctuations. These, as we will see later, entailed the use of insulating layers applied to internal surfaces of buildings: elements such as carpets, screens, curtains, *boiseries*, played a crucial role in attenuating the climatic faults of construction at the time. With modernism, however, mainly thanks to the increased use of fossil fuels in the second half of the 19th century, these elements disappear in favour of a “naked” architecture, stripped from any form of decoration, where thermal comfort was guaranteed by new heating and cooling systems. Towards the end of the 20th century, a revived awareness concerning the energetic expenditure of buildings leads to the employment of new insulating materials for façades and roofs, a reconsideration of glazed surfaces in relation to thermal dispersal, and the use of more efficient ways to heat and cool different rooms. If, on one side, this led to the emergence of several regulations, awards, and standard ways of building mainly focused on achieving a greater material and technical performance, on the other, it encouraged the exploration of alternative ways of living, which, like in the Palladian villa, make use of different spatial qualities to ensure thermal comfort. Notably, Philippe Rahm’s work, in both dwellings and public buildings, deal precisely with such questions. In one of his prototype apartments, Rahm imagines how domestic space could be organised following the natural distribution of warmth and cold, stabilising according to certain temperatures in relation to the body, clothing, and activity, rather than mere programmatic functionalism. He mentions the SIA, Swiss building standards, which recommends different temperatures for each room of the house so to optimise energy consumption in accordance with inhabitants’ activity and clothing (precisely, toilets to 15° C, bedroom to 16° C, kitchen to 18° C, living room to 20° C, and bathroom to 22° C): “accordingly, the spaces where one is naked will be heated more intensely, while the spaces through which one merely passes or those where one is dressed more warmly must be colder.” Following SIA indications and Archimedean law, as warm air rises, so do those activities which require higher temperatures (bathing), while others, (sleeping or cooking), are placed in the lower cold areas. Thanks to such an organisation, no partitions are needed to divide rooms and their respective temperatures, air flows naturally through the space, becoming the defining programmatic criteria over privacy, access, or hierarchy. Rahm notes that a great disparity of temperature can be perceived between floor and ceiling, going



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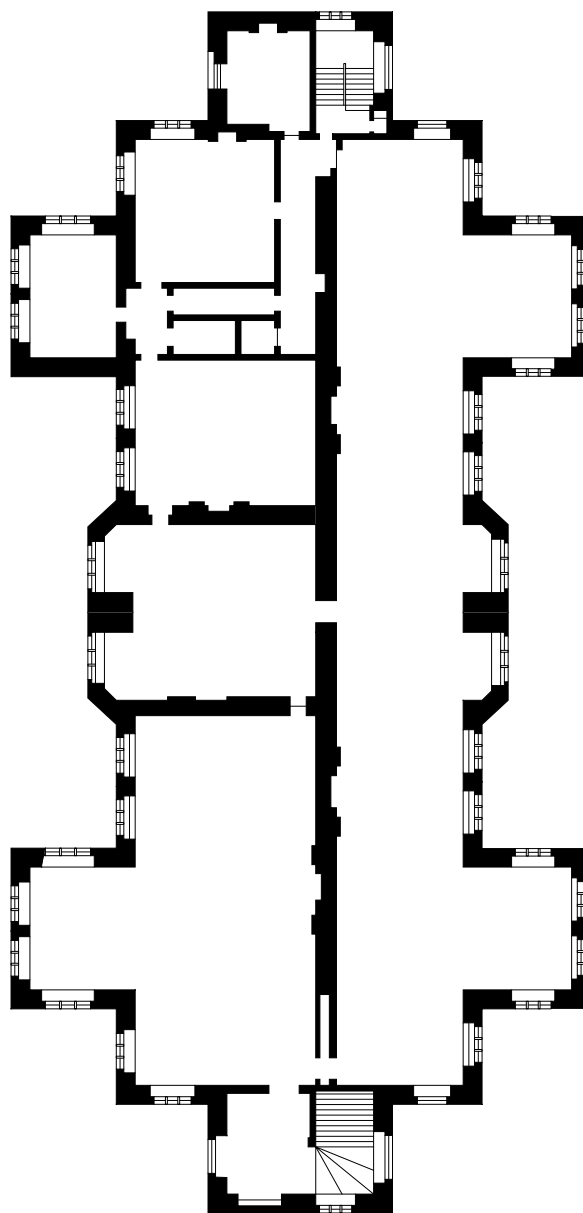
3.3 TAKK Architects, The Day After House, Madrid (Spain), 2020.

from around 19° C at the feet level, to as much as 28° C right under the ceiling: while such a temperature difference would normally be considered useless if not problematic, Rahm's design takes advantage of it, abandoning the exclusivity of a horizontal mode of habitation in favour of a vertical one, where residents can occupy different thermal zones, different strata, different altitudes.²⁶² Without the pretence of reintroducing a kind of natural experience in the home, Rahm exploits those very means that allow modern indoor climate to exist, proposing, through their re-interpretation, a new way of inhabiting space which follows its own artificial seasonality.

Starting from the same premises, the Spanish office TAKK, in their project for the renovation of a 110 square meters apartment in Madrid, question the validity and sustainability of modern thermal comfort, particularly its homogeneity within the domestic environment. Rather than aiming to achieve a uniform indoor climate, they work with thermal gradients: considering the house as composed of layers defined by different temperatures, they implement three different zones which take into account the continental climate typical of Madrid, with strong heat waves in summer and intense cold periods in winter. The first is a permeable open layer running along the main façade, defined by the architects as the "Summer House:" being exposed to the north and not insulated, this is the colder area of the house with a temperature oscillating between 10 and 22° C according to season. The second layer, the "Winter House," is protected by a new glazed façade and insulated with wooden walls and floors, which allow a mildly warm climate with a temperature ranging from 16 to 24° C. The third and last layer is a wooden box located at the heart of the "Winter House:" like a nest, it stands on stilts and is equipped with heavily insulated walls which allow an interior temperature of 20 to 24° C.²⁶³ Domestic functions are organised following the thermal qualities of each space: the "Summer House" hosts a planted terrace, a bathtub (protected only by a light curtain), and a room equipped with a wood stove, which can be enclosed with a foldable glazed door. Here, the insulation on walls, ceilings, and floors was removed and the surfaces were finished with cement mortar which, compared to the wood used in warmer spaces, has a great inertia to capture heat during summer months. The "Winter House" contains the kitchen, the main dining and working space, as well as two bathrooms. The central box is home to the communal bedroom where inhabitants share an elongated sleeping space organised on different levels; communal sleeping, the architects argue, brings countless advantages both for climatic and energy-saving reasons and in reinforcing emotional links. It is evident that TAKK's apartment share many of

²⁶² From Philippe Rham's website, available at <http://www.philipperahm.com/data/projects/domesticastronomy/index.html> [accessed on May 31, 2025].

²⁶³ From TAKK's website, available at <https://takksarchive.cargo.site/the-day-after-house> [accessed on June 1, 2025].



2m

3.4 Robert Smythson, Hardwick Hall, plan of the second floor. Redrawn after Mark Girouard, *Robert Smythson & the Elizabethan country house* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 155.

the concerns addressed by Palladio in his villas: even though it is obviously not possible to match the orientation of rooms with their function, the architects implement an idea of seasonal living that tries to follow, exploit and even reinforce natural temperature variations. Ways of inhabiting, therefore, transform according to season: the “Summer House” will be highly populated in spring, summer and autumn, with residents taking a bath in the terrace during warm months, or laying near the wood stove when cold approaches. In the same way, the “Winter House” will be inhabited during the cold season, when cooking will warm up the space, and the warmth of wood will feel like a blanket. Clearly, the boundaries between one house and the other, one season and the other, are not rigidly fixed but rather labile: curtains, carpets, glazed walls, facilitate the overflow of one space in the next and allow the flexible use of the house during the whole year. As we will see, the use of such elements, “*l’ennobilier*,” which Rahm, quoting the French art critic Jean-Max Colard, defines as those things that are classified as being in between the *immobilier* (the building) and the *mobilier* (the furniture),²⁶⁴ is paramount in allowing spaces to adapt to seasonal variability, even more today when, as mentioned earlier, the canon of the four seasons is increasingly disrupted by climate change.

Moving within the room: screens, carpets and curtains

On the 16th of November 2001, Peter Smithson gave a lecture at ASU (Arizona State University), touching themes such as storage and the use of furniture within the domestic environment. While talking about the Put-Away Villa, a project he developed together with Ana Iglesias González from 1994 to 2000, Smithson stops to dwell on the configuration of Hardwick Hall, a famous Elizabethan country house built between 1590 and 1597 for Bess of Hardwick following the design of architect Robert Smythson. During Elizabethan times, in England, the grand houses built for the new wealthy middle class were equipped with a long gallery used for walking when the weather outside was bad, as well as for displaying paintings. Looking at the plan of Hardwick Hall, one can immediately recognise the thick spine wall, where the fireplaces were located, and, opposed to that, the generous bay windows scattered along the entire perimeter of the house. Smithson then describes the domestic life as it would unfold in such a space:

“In the wintertime the family would pull back to the fireplaces. The organization of the house was based on the available coal. (...) Fuel found formal expression in the organization of houses, so that in the winter you have screens around the gallery against the fireplaces, and

²⁶⁴ Philippe Rahm, *Histoire Narrative de l’Architecture*, 99.

in the summer you moved into the bay windows. The organization of the plan was a consequence of thinking about the way that it could be used — that is, the pleasures of winter and summer.”²⁶⁵

Contrarily to contemporary buildings, where a constant temperature is maintained throughout day and night, winter and summer, sunny or cloudy weather, and where the inhabitant is anaesthetised by the comfort of an artificial indoor climate, in Hardwick Hall, the occupant actively participates in the definition of the domestic environment, contributing to give shape to diverse moments of comfort in relation to weather, either living with the climate or far from it.

“Appropriating the envelope, opening the window, feeling the fresh air coming in, choosing the cooler floor and the colder wall when one is feeling hot. Drawing the curtains; setting oneself apart from the window, feeling sheltered on a rainy evening; choosing the warm carpet next to the fireplace when it’s getting cold out there; sitting in the sun, gazing outside.”²⁶⁶

While speaking about the architecture of the building, namely the position of windows and fireplaces, the example of Hardwick Hall in the words of Smithson and architect Florencia Collo, also speaks about the qualities of the building’s skins, how carpets, curtains, claddings, play a role in allowing the building to adapt to different seasons. German architect Gottfried Semper, in his seminal work, *Die Vier Elemente der Baukunst (The Four Elements of Architecture)*, published in 1851, presents the hearth (fire), the roof (the making of a tectonic structural framework), the enclosure (the textile wall) and the mound (those elements separating the ground from the walkable floor), as the four main “motifs” laying at the very core of architecture, all emerging from the human need of seeking shelter from the weather.²⁶⁷ Considering, in particular, the enclosure and the mound, we will see how these notions, despite having been in large part rejected by Modern architects as part of those “decorative arts” which succumbed to technological advancement, occupy a renewed central role in the design of contemporary domestic architectures.

The enclosure first makes its appearance as a textile wall, stretched between two posts, serving to screen inhabitants from cold or warm winds. In medieval castles, hanging tapestry contributed to reduce the cold brought in by stone walls. During the Renaissance, the same function was performed by wooden *boiseries* and draperies hung in front of windows to stop drafts. One of the most notable elements that made

²⁶⁵ Florencia Collo speaking about Hardwick Hall, “The Pleasures of Summer and Winter,” in *Qualities of Inhabiting*, ed. Studio Anne Lacaton, Lacaton & Vassal (Zurich: ETH Zurich D-ARCH, 2020), 37.

²⁶⁶ Catherine Spellman and Karl Unglaub, eds., *Peter Smithson: Conversations with Students. A Space for Our Generation* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), 62.

²⁶⁷ Gottfried Semper, *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave and Wolfgang Herrmann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 23-24.

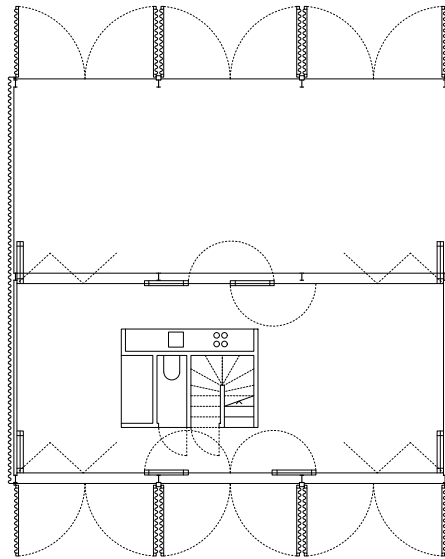
use of the textile wall was the box bed. Commonly seen in the homes of both aristocrats and peasants, from the Middle Ages until the 19th century, it could take different forms: a wooden bedstead upon which a mattress was laid and that was then wrapped in curtains; or an entirely closed cupboard, inserted into a niche and accessible only through a wooden door or a foldable curtain. Rahm observes how, fundamentally, the function of the box bed would be similar to that of present insulation layers,²⁶⁸ with the difference given by the position of the insulation line within the home: the former being temporary, insulating a precise space used only in certain moments of the day or the night and according to season; the latter fixed, a constituent part of the building. If we look once again at the apartment designed by TAKK, we can see how the bedroom essentially works as a box bed: a raised platform, clad internally with wood and externally with insulating material, the curtains of the canopy bed replaced by a sliding window. Following the same principles, the concrete floors of the Summer House are covered with carpets which can be stored away when temperature rises, the glazed façades are equipped with foldable bamboo screens, and the interior wooden flooring of the Winter House provides a thermally neutral walkable surface throughout the year. It is as if the contemporary concept of insulation, a compact package of thermally efficient materials to be used as a coat covering the entire dwelling, is exploded into a series of layers which can be separated and employed in a concentric way from the heart of the house to its perimeter, generating different climatic zones and expanding the possibilities of domestic uses.

²⁶⁸ Philippe Rahm, *Histoire Naturelle de l'Architecture*, 107.

²⁶⁹ Semper individuates the origin of architectural form in the braided or woven wall mats hung vertically, which, according to some ethnographic accounts were invented even before clothing. The motive, Semper argues, first emerged in the intertwining of tree branches for fences and pens and evolved into the art of weaving with bast, wicker and woven threads. Later, with the growing need for warmer, more solid, or more durable walls, the textile hanging became a "dressing," and subsequently it was replaced by other "surrogate dressings," such as stucco, wood and metal plaques, terracotta facings and other stone paneling. In all cases, the motive and spatial essence of the wall were enacted by the dressing, not by the supporting and contingent wall-prop behind. See Harry Francis Mallgrave's introduction to Semper's *The Four Elements of Architecture* in Gottfried Semper, *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, 24.

The textile wall is also one of the main motifs employed by French architects Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal: in many of their projects thermal curtains and polycarbonate sheets are used to "dress"²⁶⁹ the building structure, giving life to new domestic spaces which appear and disappear, flowing with weather and temperature. In an interview given in occasion of the Fourth International Architecture Congress titled *Architecture: Change of Climate*, organised by the *Fundación Arquitectura y Sociedad* in Pamplona in 2016, Jean-Philippe Vassal talks about the work of Lacaton & Vassal in relation to his own experiences and influences growing up and while studying architecture. Vassal explains how important for his formation was the time spent in Niger, where he worked for five years following his graduation:

"What's interesting is that there, everything was very clear-cut. Things are direct, the climate is hard, so is the landscape, always horizontal and naked. There, every move is directed at survival. When it's



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3.5 Lacaton & Vassal, Maison Latapie, Floirac (France), 1993.
Plan of the ground floor.

very warm, you instinctively look for shade, an air current. One lives in a constant situation of extreme conditions. Means are limited. In the battle against the rigours of the climate, people's inventiveness is indispensable."²⁷⁰

The harshness of African conditions allowed him to understand the influence climate has on people's ways of living, how greatly it shapes behaviours and techniques, and urged him to explore how the same questions, applied to the European environment, could enrich the way architecture is conceived and designed.

"For example, you see someone in Africa who, in a situation of extreme heat, tries to cover his head with a piece of cloth. That same gesture, but with other objects or means, can be reproduced in Europe. It's the idea of transcription. What in Africa was a piece of cloth can, in Europe, be a sail with which to cover and shade an exterior space. There is a leap in scale, naturally. But these elemental solutions surely have an application in our immediate environment, duly modified, on an urban scale. If my relationship with Africa has marked my entire career, it's because there I learned to recognize simple gestures of survival strategies that can be adapted to our needs."²⁷¹

At the same time, Vassal speaks about his parents:

"My mother was a sewing teacher. I think of clothes as a first dwelling. A dress is a first home. (...) My father (...) worked with climate, air, wind, the sun or rain, all that which passes between life and our naked body. Meteorology is something which has many scales. And indeed I have always been very interested in everything related to climate, and therefore also in galleries, greenhouses, the great 19th architecture of the *jardin d'acclimatation*."²⁷²

It is from these references and considerations that Lacaton & Vassal discern their architectural language. The greenhouse, particularly in its 19th century declination, when it starts to be an integral part of the bourgeois domestic environment,²⁷³ is a crucial element in their designs: it transcends its original technical and agricultural purpose of providing a favourable climate for plants to grow, and equips the home with a new realm, alien to its traditional configuration. One of the first experiments was the Maison Latapie, built in Floirac in 1993 for a couple with two children. The house consists of two entities, a polycarbonate clad conservatory, and, within it, an insulated and heat-ed wooden volume:

"The conservatory faces east and gets the early morning sun. It's an

²⁷⁰ Conversation between Jean-Philippe Vassal and Llätzer Moix, in *Architecture: Change of Climate*, ed. Luis Fernández-Galiano (Pamplona: Fundación Arquitectura y Sociedad, 2017), 51-53, 51.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁷³ The following extract is taken from landscape gardener John Claudius Loudon's (1783-1843) publication, titled *The Greenhouse Companion*. Here, Loudon, emphasised the social importance of the greenhouse as a new room within the domestic realm: "According to our ideas of the enjoyments of the green house, it is essential that it be situated close to the house; not merely near, but immediately adjoining; and attached to it either by being placed against it, forming a part of the edifice; or by means of a *corridore*, veranda, or some other description of covered passage. The most desirable situation is unquestionably that in which the green house shall communicate with, and form as it were an additional apartment to the library, or breakfast parlour. If it communicates by spacious glass doors, and the parlour is judiciously furnished with mirrors, and bulbous flowers in water-glasses, the effect will be greatly heightened, and growth, verdure, gay colours, and fragrance, blended with books, sofas, and all the accompaniments of social and polished life." See John Claudius Loudon, *The Greenhouse Companion* (London: Whittaker, Treacher and Co., 1824), 5-6.

inhabitable part of the house, equipped with ample ventilation panels for comfort in summer. The mobile nature of the east and west façades enables the house to change from its most closed to its most open state according to the need and desire for light, transparency, intimacy, protection and ventilation. The inhabitable part of the house can vary according to the seasons, from the smallest (living room and bedrooms) to the largest area, by integrating the entire garden in high summer.”²⁷⁴

Later on, in 2005, they developed the Cité Manifeste in Mulhouse, where the greenhouse becomes the main organising principle of the entire housing complex. Here, every apartment is complemented with a terrace clad with sliding polycarbonate panels, equipped with multiple layers of thermal and shading curtains, hanging both vertically and horizontally, which allow the space to be operated by the users, closed or opened, shaded or sunlit, according to seasonal necessity. In both projects, the modulation of the layered envelope allows residents to customise the indoor climate and shift the boundaries of the house: the inhabitable surface varies according to changes in light, ventilation and precipitation. The continuity of the curtain wall is replaced by the complexity given by the superimposition of separated operable layers: sliding glass, panels, windows, curtains, awnings, shades, screens, all fall in the category of “dressings” as defined by Semper, which, far from being simply decorative elements, are actually at the core of the relationship established between humans and architecture.

Drawing on the same principles, Summacumfemmer’s San Riemò, a cooperative residential building completed in Munich in 2020, implements the idea of thermal layers through the provision of a winter garden spanning all along the west façade. Built with a cheap wood and polycarbonate system, the space functions as an uninterrupted corridor: during the warm season, all west-oriented rooms can extend in it thanks to generous floor to ceiling sliding windows. Interestingly, linking design to the character of the building, whose goal is that of enhancing connection and sociability amongst residents, the summer corridor does not only function as a thermal gradient but also as a collective space: devoid of physical separations between one unit and the other, it can be appropriated equally by adults and children, who use it “as a sneaky way” to visit neighbours living on the same floor.²⁷⁵

It is clear how the concerns that informed the production of Renaissance architects, and that today guide the work of TAKK, Lacaton & Vassal and Philippe Rahm, amongst others, emerge from an in-depth analysis of the way people live in their houses, looking to find in them

²⁷⁴ From Lacaton & Vassal’s website, available at <https://www.lacatonvassal.com/index.php?idp=25#> [accessed on June 4, 2025].

²⁷⁵ From Summacumfemmer’s website, available at <https://summacumfemmer.com/027-2/> [accessed on July 2, 2025].

familiar rhythms, shelter and comfort, and lead to the consideration of how architecture can enhance such qualities while promoting diverse declinations of domestic life. This results in “a big amount of little questions,” as Anne Lacaton observes, such as: how much should a glass door reveal? Can you open that door and put a chair outside? Can you have lunch on your balcony?

As a filmmaker would work in a movie script, the building is composed out of fragments, creating a frame around actors: “For us, the strengths should not come from the form or the complexity of the architecture, but much more from the capacity the space can produce for life, for relationships.”²⁷⁶ The examples treated in the chapter portray an architecture where spaces are not defined by their function, but by their climatic qualities and the relations between them. Taking the time to change way of inhabiting the home according to season or temperature symbolises a moment of joy, of celebration, it creates space for acknowledging the existence of an environment, and the possibility of bringing it into the home.

3.3 Storage

As much as through the construction of a roof, walls and windows, a home is made through the organisation, disposition and use of the material possessions that are contained within it. More than ever in the 21st century, living in a “world of goods,”²⁷⁷ where consumption is part of the way of life, material objects figure as anchor points in the establishment of the domestic realm. “Being at home,” implies co-existing with these objects. Anthropologist Daniel Miller makes it clear by defining “accommodation” as “the appropriation of the home by its inhabitants and of the inhabitants by the home,” an agreement to compromise, he states, a “constant reciprocal process of accommodation, involving houses, people and the things within them.”²⁷⁸ The use of objects, and particularly the efforts related to making them manageable — in other words, the everyday practices of storage — are at the heart of the conceptualisation of time and space in the home. It was already Xenophon, in the *Oeconomicus*, to state, in a conversation between Ischomachus and his newly-wed wife, how important was the implementation and maintenance of orderliness in the house, so that any particular object might be found easily and quickly.²⁷⁹ Storage practices not only reveal one of the most hidden material aspects of the home related to the life of objects, they also speak about the very nature of

²⁷⁶ Interview with Anne Lacaton in David Hubers, “Lacaton & Vassal: Housing,” *Metropolis – Game Changers*, vol. 35, no. 6 (2016): 81-87.

²⁷⁷ Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

²⁷⁸ Daniel Miller, “Accommodating,” *Contemporary Art and the Home*, ed. Colin Painter (London: Routledge, 2020), 23-24.

²⁷⁹ Xenophon, *Memorabilia, Oeconomicus, Symposium, Apology*, trans. E. C. Marchant and O. J. Todd. (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1923), 361-525, 439-443.

domestic space and influence its evolution. Despite the crucial role storage plays in domestic environments, the amount of research dedicated to the theme is surprisingly scarce. Mainly analysed in the context of queer studies, the closet becomes the object of a metaphor, part of a history that contributed to the social recognition of homosexuality in the second half on the 20th century, while its architectural evolution as related to storage practices is critically overlooked. Amongst the relevant works, very few engage with the exercise of linking closets' architecture with domestic practices, failing to recognise the link between the design of storage spaces and the ways of living the home. However, especially when it concerns seasonal variation, the internet overflows with ads and articles providing advice on how to properly organise material possessions according to seasonal necessity, from clothes, to beddings, to Christmas decorations. Clearly, the processes related to storing and retrieving objects are not solely a matter of seasons; yet, looking at such practices with a seasonal lens provides the possibility to read storage as part of the broader array of domestic cycles: how things are made available, hidden, shown within the home at different moments, accounts for much of our everyday life. The ritual of seasonal re-organisation of closets, which takes place usually at the beginning of spring and autumn, links storage habits with symbolism related to ideas of renewal and rebirth, while also materialising the very nature of storage in the act of making certain things available while putting away others. The two aspects, and the way they influence architectural production both of furniture and of the home itself, will be studied in the attempt to unveil the multiple forms and meanings of contemporary domestic storage.

From mobile cabinets to built-in storage

The uses and customs related to the act of storing are varied and numerous, changing according to geographical location and temporal context. A few moments in the history of storage are key to understand its development, even though these just represent partial accounts of a much larger overview. In medieval times, the homes of the poor were composed of one room, which would host all the main activities of the family, from eating and cooking, to sleeping, to bathing and washing. Furniture was sparse and generally mobile: objects like trunks and chests were common items in the dwellings of all social classes, while jewel cases and *forzieri*, used to store lines and valuables, could be found in the houses of the wealthy. In the 15th century, the majority of bourgeois homes were also equipped with storage rooms to stock provisions, crops, wood and other household supplies.²⁸⁰ Increasingly

²⁸⁰ Charles de La Ronciere, "Tuscan Notables on the Eve of the Renaissance," in *A History of Private Life: Revelations of the Medieval World*, vol. II, ed. Georges Duby (Massachusetts, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1988), 178-183.

common during the following century was also the *armoire*: originally designated to the storage of armours and weapons, in time it became a symbol of social status, a charged ornamental object often decorated with paint, carvings and mouldings. While it might seem intuitive to associate the *armoire* with the modern closet, the two actually bear very distinct meanings for the most part of the Renaissance. The word closet, from the Latin *clausum*, meaning “closed,” appeared in the late Middle Ages to indicate a room, usually of modest size, where its occupant could be entirely alone, a place of privacy and withdrawal from the public sphere of the household and the prying eyes of servants. Early usage of the term suggests that the room was used as a retreat for solitary repose, but by the 1580s it had become associated with the idea of secrecy, indicating a space where users could take care of their affairs or arrange private meetings.²⁸¹ This thesis is supported by many architectural and literary accounts: David Hume notes in his *History of England* that in the late 17th century, “private conferences were called closetings;”²⁸² similarly, a series of drawings by Robert Smythson “for a closet or business room,” dating back to around the 1600, represent a room labelled “*the Clossette*,” equipped with a fireplace, a window, fold down desks placed side by side and space to store ink and papers. The design suggests that the room was used as a study more than as a storage space, and possibly by more than one person at a time, considered the presence of multiple desks.²⁸³ The closet was an intimate sanctuary but also functioned as a special repository for the storage and display of books, paintings, and other treasured objects. In 16th century England, it came to indicate a room used for religious activities: at Hampton Court, “holy-day closets” were built to provide the king, queen, and their invited guests with semi-private spaces of worship apart from the court.²⁸⁴ It is only with the consumer revolution of the 18th and 19th century that the closet starts being used as a storage space for clothes and other objects. Yet, a pioneering example that merges both the concepts of closet as space and closet as storage, comes from the experimentations of a Dutch hydraulics engineer, Cornelius Meyer, who, in 1689 published *Nuovi Ritrovamenti*, a compendium of innovative projects which include proposals for bridges, carts, automobiles, observations on the movement of comets and the breaking of glass, as well as designs for hydraulic systems. Here, Meyer illustrates his idea for a one room apartment: presented through four annotated etchings — portraying respectively the four walls of the room — the apartment builds on Vitruvius’ principles of *stabilità*, *fermezza* and *commoda*, which, according to Meyer, can be best and fully satisfied within the confines of a restricted space.²⁸⁵ All the walls, apart from the third

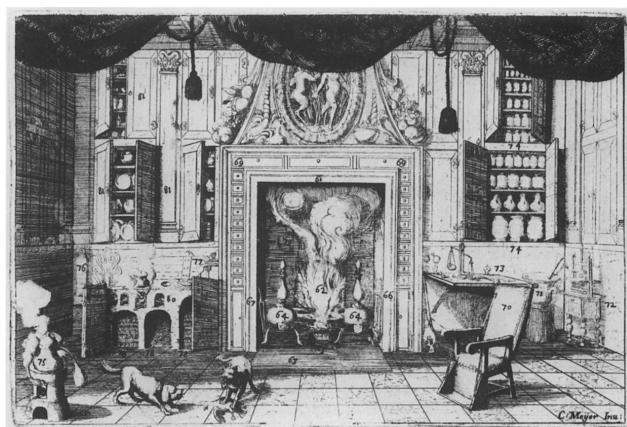
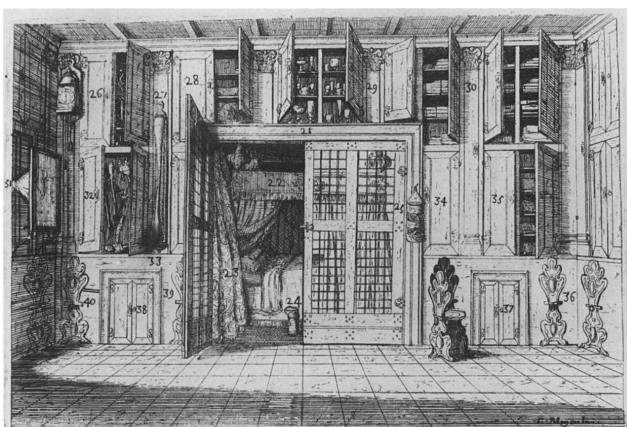
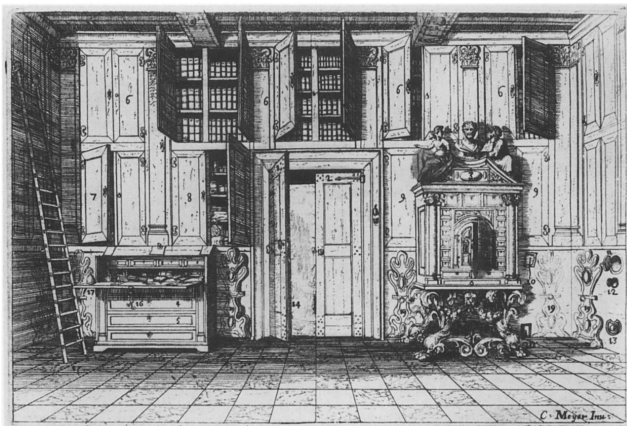
²⁸¹ Christopher Breward, “The Closet,” in *Queering the interior*, ed. Matt Cook and Andrew Gorman-Murray (New York: Routledge, 2020), 188.

²⁸² David Hume, *The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, 5 vols. (London: printed by T. Bensley for Robert Bowyer, 1806), 5:264.

²⁸³ Alan Stewart, “The early Modern Closet Discovered,” *Representations*, no. 50 (1995): 76-100, 84, 90. In the article, Stewart is quoting Mark Girouard, “The Smythson Collection of the Royal Institute of British Architects,” in *Architectural History*, vol. 2 (1962): 23-184, 42, 111.

²⁸⁴ Henry Urbach, “Closets, Clothes, Disclosure,” *Assemblage*, no. 30 (1996): 62-73, 70.

²⁸⁵ Robin Middleton, “The One-Room Apartment,” *AA Files*, no. 4 (1983): 60-64, 60.



3.6 Three of the four elevations of the one room apartment by Cornelius Meyer as published in *Nuovi Ritrovamenti* (Roma: Giacomo Komarek Boëmo all'Angelo Custode, 1689).

which is punctuated by the rhythmic openings of the main façade, are actually conceived as full height, full length closets. Through a series of doors, drawers, niches and shelves, Meyer organises all the equipment necessary for the “*virtuoso*” to carry on his comfortable life. In the first wall-closet are mainly things related to intellectual activity and house management: cupboards for books, diaries and letters, a foldable desk with bench for writing and reading, listening and speaking tubes to connect with other rooms and the outside, as well as the service bell and the master key for all the locks. The second wall-closet seems to be of more intimate nature: right at the centre we find the alcove with the bed, surrounded by linen and clothes cupboards, the brush and comb rack and a storage space for valuable items. The fourth and last wall is dedicated to cooking: around a generous fireplace are located iron plates, spices, boards, kitchenware, as well as storage spaces for food, wood and charcoal, and another foldaway table paired with a reclining chair. Rather than adhering to the typical 17th century domestic layout based on the rules of visitation (in Baroque Roman palaces people would be allowed in according to their social status²⁸⁶), Meyer strives for the condensation of the living environment into one room, which serves as any and every space. Such a spatial congestion is only possible thanks to the perfectly balanced relationship between the presence of objects, their storing tactics, and the space which allow for their use. In this sense, every door is supposed to be opened only at certain times of the day to facilitate the accomplishment of specific tasks; its unruly operation would imply an unnecessary reduction of the available space. As much as an exercise in spatial economy, Meyer’s proposal addresses the nature of domestic practices, indissolubly linking them to the life of those objects necessary for their performance.

Many resemblances can be pointed out between the Renaissance closet and its modern counterpart which emerged in mid 19th century America: compared to cupboards or wardrobes — free-standing objects which occupied a space within the boundaries of a room — the modern closet manifests a perceivable spatial quality, it is not just a piece of furniture but rather “a wall cavity,” usually located “beyond the room’s edge.”²⁸⁷ In line with its original nature, the closet tends to be hidden in the room, concealing its content rather than displaying it. In his precise analysis of closets’ evolution, architect Henry Urbach claims that, at the end of the 19th century,

“For Americans of the period, encountering an expanding industrial economy alongside the resurgence of Christian morality, wealth had

²⁸⁶ See Chapter 1.3, p. 57.

²⁸⁷ Henry Urbach, “Closets, Clothes, Disclosure,” 64.

come to represent both virtue and decadence. It could be amassed but not comfortably shown.²²⁸⁸

The parallelism between the orderly organisation of possessions and a general idea of domestic well-being, will persist throughout the 20th century and, to a large extent, is still valid today, as efficient storing practices are advertised to combat the dangers of clutter. In its modern declination, the closet exists in co-dependency with the room it is supposed to serve: it rarely presents lateral or rear expression and it usually opens towards one single space, regardless of its position, even if it is next to or in-between rooms. As reported in a domestic planning manual from the 1940s: “Closets should not interfere with main areas of activity in a house. They should be accessible but inconspicuous.”²²⁸⁹ In this sense, the closet functions as an extension of the room, containing those objects which cannot be left in sight, therefore reinforcing the moral quality of cleanliness: by keeping the room proper, the closet is allowed to be messy. While being subject to different rules, the closet is still an essential part of the domestic landscape: it is a place of secrecy, a place of concealment, of clutter and disorder, but most of all, it is the place from where the entire household is managed, it allows for the house to exist in the form that is known to us, and for activities to be continuously carried on within it without disturbance.

Between architecture and ritual

Peter Smithson explains the concept beautifully while talking about the Smithsons’ project for the Two Gables House: “You might ask” he says referring to himself, “why is he worrying about children’s parties or an aunt dying and what you do for them?” Because that’s what the house is for. That’s it. And the emptiness is achievable by a way of storing the objects.”²²⁹⁰ Compared to Modernist masters, such as Mies or Le Corbusier, who sought to design houses as perfect machines which would simultaneously shape and serve their occupants,²⁹¹ the Smithsons believed the house to be a particular — as opposed to universal — place, which should be suited to its location and able to accommodate its inhabitants’ individual patterns of use.²⁹² As Professor Diana Periton observes commenting on the Smithsons’ work: while being fascinated by Le Corbusier’s ideas, the couple rejected Modernist universalism, for them the relationship between space and objects was not in the service of a universal synthesis, “but in the search for an ordering of background and foreground that could allow the things we take for granted to be transformed into events that are literally remarkable.”²⁹³ Within this framework, the relationships between house and

²²⁸⁸ Ibid., 65.

²²⁸⁹ Maud M. Wilson, “Closets and Storage Spaces,” *Farmers’ Bulletin*, no. 1865 (1940): 1.

²²⁹⁰ Catherine Spellman and Karl Unglaub, eds., *Peter Smithson: Conversations with Students*, 65.

²²⁹¹ An extensive account is given in Iñaki Abalos, *The Good Life: A Guided Visit to the Houses of Modernity* (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2001). Here Abalos describes, between others, the superman who inhabits Mies’ House with a Patio (1934), or Warhol’s impersonation of the artistic movement which will pave the way to the proliferation of lofts in New York, in an attempt to narrate some of the most iconic houses of the 20th century and the characters who shaped them.

²²⁹² As stated in the introduction of the catalogue of the exhibition *Alison and Peter Smithson: From the House of the Future to a House for Today*, held in 2003 at the Design Museum in London.

²²⁹³ Diana Periton, “Alison and Peter Smithson: From the House of the Future to a House for Today,” *Home Cultures*, vol. 1, no. 3, (2004): 307-313, 308.

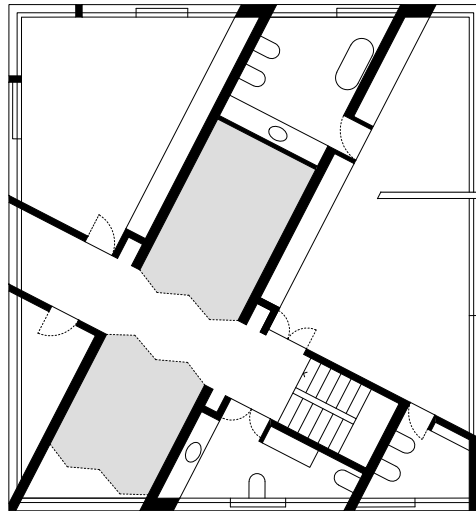
objects, inhabitants and objects and amongst the objects themselves, are of paramount importance as they define not only the character of domestic space but also the way of living in it.

The Smithsons saw the house as a container of things, deemed to respond to certain “select and arrange techniques,”²⁹⁴ while also leaving space for interpretation and appropriation. The project that most exemplify this approach is the Put-away Villa, the prototype for a house, commenced between 1993-94 and continued in the 2000s, “where storage generated the plan.”²⁹⁵ Introducing the project, Smithson observes how the acquisition of goods had increased by nearly ten times in the previous twenty years (so from the 1980s until the 2000s), and that the dwelling had been overwhelmed by a series of “not-at-present-in-use-maybe-never-again” objects, which added to the already conspicuous set of accessories and tools needed for the sustenance of everyday life. In trying to imagine a space for this amount of accumulated objects, the layout of the Put-away Villa is organised around two storage spaces located at the heart of the plan, accessible from every room without the need to pass throughout another. This allows, in Smithson’s words, to create the opportunity for bareness in the rest of the house, a quality sustained precisely by and through the process of putting away.²⁹⁶ Important to note is that Smithson differentiates between “long-term storage” and “day-to-day storage,” the latter provided via cupboards located in each room, which are supposed to cater to the room’s specific function. The long-term storage space, filled with an array of objects, some of them possibly forgotten, is key to understand the relation between architecture and seasonality in storing practices: the kids’ plastic pool to be retrieved and placed on the sun deck in summer, the ski gears hidden behind the stack of winter duvets, the boxes filled with coats and wool garments or, vice versa, with light dresses, swimsuits and summer lotions, the stock of frozen tomato soup, prepared in summer to last through winter. All these objects are linked with specific activities which, through their unfolding, influence the way the household is used. For this reason, in the drawings for Put-away Villa, the storage rooms dominate the space, while the so called “living rooms” are left almost empty, equipped only with a few pieces of furniture. Emptiness, which actually means spatial availability, is achieved through the planning and organisation of storage, in this way, the home is capable to respond to seasonal changes, be they related to climate or life happenings. Smithson recalls the *Casa de Pilatos*, an Andalusian palace he visited in Seville (Spain), where an empty room and an empty loggia well portrayed the qualities he’s referring to in the project:

²⁹⁴ Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric* (London: Latimer New Dimensions, 1973), 47.

²⁹⁵ Catherine Spellman and Karl Unglaub, eds., *Peter Smithson: Conversations with Students*, 56.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.



■ Storage

1m

3.7 Alison and Peter Smithson,
Put-Away House, 1993-2000.
Plan of the first floor.

“In its way it was fulfilment — which is a ridiculous word to use — the fulfilment of the emptiness. Bringing out for the seasons — much in winter, little in summer. Bringing out for festivals — of the church, or of the family. Putting away for renewals, putting away for sadness. Thinking about it now, the empty room is the same as the empty stage. You furnish it with those things necessary.”²⁹⁷

It is clear that the Smithsons’ projects are rooted in the trivialities of ordinary life, it is those occurrences such as homecomings, festivals and birthdays which give shape to the architecture of the home.

Equally building on the relationship between architecture, storage and ritual is the practice of the Shakers.²⁹⁸ One of the many utopian religious communities which believed in Christ’s second appearing, the Shakers sect was founded in England in 1747 and relocated to the US in the 1780s. The name originates from the appellative “Shaking Quakers,” used to indicate their provenance from a similar religious current, the Quakers, from which they eventually detached due to disagreements in the ways of practicing faith. A source of inspiration for many architects and artists such as Donald Judd, Oswald Mathias Ungers and Peter Smithson himself, the Shakers developed a unique approach to design for both their buildings and furniture, which was supposed to reflect their quasi-monastic way of living. Rooted in the principles of harmony, discipline and order, of particular interest is their design for storage solutions. While allowing only a small amount of personal material possessions, the Shakers immersed themselves in hard work both as farmers and carpenters (they are known for their many agricultural innovations). Tools and material stock, but also everyday equipment such as pots and pans or cleaning supplies, were to be properly stored in an orderly manner after every use, materialising in the physical world the spiritual purity the Shakers aimed to achieve. Cleaning was especially important, dust and dirt were despised as stains of the soul, and the practice of cleanliness influenced not only the Shakers’ way of living but also the design of their architecture. The typical Shaker storage is floor to ceiling high, fitting perfectly with the dimension of the room in which it is located to avoid leaving gaps that could be hard to clean or gather dust (like the top surface or the space below the bottom); these monumental closets were equipped with a series of doors and drawers, each designed to store specific items, from gloves, to hats, to clothes, and were always labelled. The Shakers also pioneered the peg rail, which in most cases would take over entire walls, and was used to facilitate cleaning procedures (chairs would be hung up on the hooks)

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 64.

²⁹⁸ On the history and architecture of American utopian communities and the Shakers see Liselotte and Oswald Mathias Ungers, *Communes in the New World, 1740-1972*, trans. Winston Hampel, ed. Winston Hampel and Jack Self (London: Real, 2020); Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790-1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979); Scott T. Swank, *Shaker Life, Art, and Architecture: Hands to Work, Hearts to God* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1999); John T. Kirk, *The Shaker World: Art, Life, Belief* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997).

and for storing cleaning tools. What is especially relevant in Shaker architecture, despite its premises and context being distant from our present society and therefore hard to relate to, is how a specific way of living could directly give shape to those objects and spaces realised to support it. The Shakers lived through their architecture, their ways of being together, working, praying and eating, could not have been sustained without the help of specifically designed surroundings. As much as the Smithsons, the Shakers architectural production is finalised at celebrating certain moments of daily life, certain rituals, which are not just self-imposed rules to live by, but essential defining acts in the processes of making home.

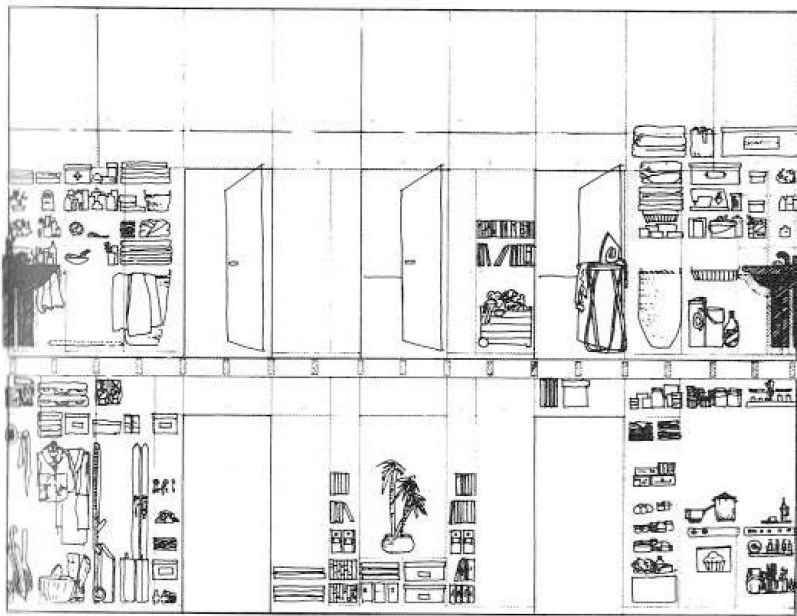
Shifting boundaries: from storage units to shared possessions

The last phenomenon to be considered when talking about home and storage is the separation of the latter from the former. The constant rise of storage units from the second half of the 20th century speaks about a dramatic change in storing practices, linking profit to material accumulation. A self-storage unit is essentially a volume of rentable space situated within a purpose-built facility used for the storage of private belongings.²⁹⁹ The first self-storage facilities started to appear in the US around the end of the 50s, and catered to both residential tenants, who would store their domestic belongings, and workers, who would store tools and supplies. In the 70s, their construction boomed and their demand kept on increasing steadily, spreading from the US to a large part of Europe. From a merely economic point of view, storage units have been defined as a product of consumerist and clutter culture: often placed at the margins of urbanised areas, they are spaces of transit, designed for the smooth circulation and accommodation of a compelling array of things. Yet, while physically detached from the actual space of the home, these facilities are, for the most part, domestic storages. From a survey carried out by the American Self Storage Association in 2013, it emerged that the majority of tenants use units as extensions of their residential space.³⁰⁰ The need for such spaces arises particularly in conjunction with certain important life events such as moving home, divorce, the departure or relocation of a loved one. It is evident that there is a strong reflexive relationship between the domestic realm and the self-storage unit, and that, while being largely understudied, this relationship concerns questions of privacy, identity and domesticity. Archaeologist Julia Hendon, in her essay “Having and Holding: Storage, Memory, Knowledge and Social Relations,” defines storage as a situated practice through which groups construct identity, remember and control knowledge as part of a moral economy.³⁰¹ While

²⁹⁹ Emma Filippides, “Self Storage: A Contemporary Archaeology of Domestic Interiority,” *Interiority*, vol. 2, n. 1 (2019): 5-23, 6.

³⁰⁰ The study singled out four main categories: residential (70.4%), commercial (17.1%), student (6.3%) and military (6.2%). See Self Storage Association, 2013 Self Storage Demand Study, available at <https://www.selfstorage.org> [accessed on June 20, 2025].

³⁰¹ Julia Hendon, “Having and Holding: Storage, Memory, Knowledge, and Social Relations,” *American Anthropologist*, vol. 102, no. 1 (2000): 42-53.



3.9 Interior elevation of the project proposed by X. Fabre, V. Speller and M. Simmonet in occasion of PAN 14, 1987. In Monique Eleb Vidal, Anne-Marie Chatelet, Thierry Mandoul, eds., *Penser L'Habité: le logement en questions* (Liège: Pierre Mardaga éditeur, 1988), 129.

focusing on the analysis of archaeological sites from Neolithic Europe and Mesoamerica, Hendon's approach to storage highlights the moral dimension that is generated by the juxtaposition between the utilitarian and mundane, and the personal and ritualistic.³⁰² Going to the storage unit following a more or less defined cyclical pattern, organising things according to self-determined rules, deciding who to go to the storage with and what to share, what to bring back home and for which occasions, are all actions that contribute to the construction of both the domestic environment and the social relations taking place within and around it. In comparing the storage of goods with other kinds of storage such as burial sites, Hendon argues that:

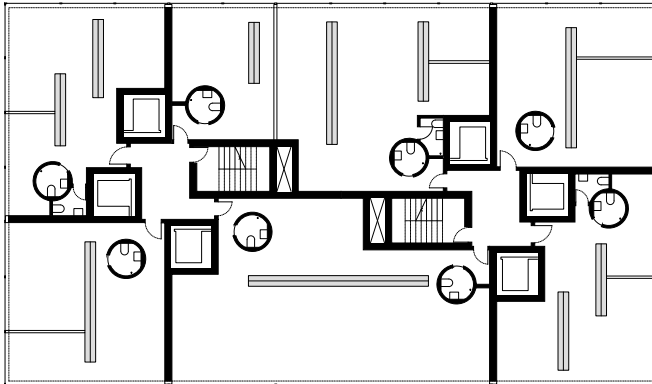
“Constructed space becomes a dynamic container for structuring social interaction. It is not a fixed and inert backdrop or a constraining frame. Just as ‘the spatial [is] socially produced...social life...is always spatially dependent (rather than spatially determined)’.”³⁰³

In the self-storage unit this tends to happen within the unit itself rather than around it, as the objects stored are carriers of deep private emotional meanings, which could be hardly shared with a large community. Yet, the phenomenon of storage units crucially points out to two specific aspects related to domestic storage that are vital for its current and future evolution: the possibilities and implications of expanding storage beyond the boundaries of the home, and the intrinsic ritualistic nature of storing activities. If we are to consider these premises in the context of collective housing at the turn of the century, we can see their relevance in relation to questions of surface minimisation and the sharing economy. Already during PAN 14 in 1987, a competition which, as we have already seen, managed to address many of the questions that interest housing today, and key to this research, storage is addressed as both a spatial and social matter. In their project proposal, the team composed by X. Fabre, V. Speller and M. Simonne, define the ensemble of storage nooks, organised on two levels, not only as a functional space, but as an important place for domestic sociability, defined by moments of intense simultaneous utilisation, and conceived as a repository for all the domestic “sleeping mysteries” with their familiar smell of lavender and naphthalene.³⁰⁴ In recent years, Jack Self, Finn Williams and Shumi Bose, in occasion of Self's curatorial project for the British Pavilion at the 2016 Venice Biennale, further developed the question through the design of a prototype apartment under the slogan “Own nothing. Share everything.” Here, storage is required, once more, to trespass the boundaries of the private domestic unit: moving from the individual room to the common one, and from the apartment

³⁰² Emma Filippides, “Self Storage,” 15.

³⁰³ Hendon is here quoting Allan Pred, *Making Histories and Constructing Human Geographies: The Local Transformation of Practice, Power Relations and Consciousness* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 10.

³⁰⁴ “L'ensemble organisé des placards, aux deux niveaux de l'habitation, ne constitue pas seulement un espace fonctionnel mais aussi un lieu. Ce lieu, nous souhaitons qu'il puisse devenir un des plus beaux de la maison. Tout d'abord parce qu'il sera un des lieux les plus collectifs de celle-ci, avec des moments d'utilisation intense. Ensuite parce-que ce lieu est le plus travaillé formellement, les autres étant plus banalisés. Les images convoquées pour les projeter puisent dans les couloirs de l'habitat bourgeois, des offices, des épicerie fines, des archives, des bibliothèques.” Monique Eleb-Vidal, Anne-Marie Chatelet and Thierry Mandoul, eds., *Penser l'Habité: Le Logement en Questions* (Liège: Pierre Mardaga Éditeur, 1988), 129-130.



■ Storage

2m

3.10 Jack Self, Finn Williams and Shumi Bose, *Hours: Own Nothing, Share Everything*, project presented at the British Pavilion in occasion of the Venice Biennale 2016. Typical floor plan. In Jack Self, Finn Williams and Shumi Bose, eds., *Home Economics* (The Spaces, 2016), 73.

unit to the shared areas. Rather than aiming to achieve better conditions for endless accumulation, however, storage is used as a pretext to question the validity of private property and the extent to which personal material possessions can still be considered sustainable. The taboo of concealment is replaced by the quest for visibility: the common wardrobe, which contains practical things that are infrequently used (like power tools), as well as objects which can be better afforded together (like clothes or cleaning appliances), is a totally transparent, acrylic structure whose scale and density allow it to act simultaneously as a wall element and as a storage facility.³⁰⁵ Collectivising storage, the authors claim, would foster the creation of new relationships between residents and their objects, and between objects themselves. By putting prized possessions next to the most banal domestic utensils — artwork abuts appliances, heirlooms alongside laundry, mops meet mixers and medicines³⁰⁶ — the communal wardrobe subverts traditionally established domestic hierarchies, implementing alternative dynamics of access and use, while fostering unforeseen contaminations between different house spheres. The private and the common, the clean and the dirty, the valuable and the worthless, the forgotten and the overused, all find each other stored in the same place, in an attempt to reinvent the very meaning of Home Economics.

If, on one side, it is clear that the matter of storage has yet to breach into the mainstream production of housing, on the other, it is evident that the topic holds inexhaustible potential for experimentation. Not merely a standardised necessary equipment, rethinking storage as an intrinsic part of the house, capable to influence everyday habits, could encourage the development of new ways of designing and living the home. As argued by sociologist Saulo Cwerner:

“The materiality of things is central, for this means that as objects are moved and require being moved around and stored, they open up for analysis the multiple nature of time and space in the home. Thus objects, as they are stored and as they fall into the gaps and crevices of our habitual practices as well as the spaces of the home, are integral aspects of our dwelling in the contemporary world. It is a world full of things that can say so much about us, but so often get in the way whilst doing so.”³⁰⁷

Storing is an activity, it implies a selection process which contributes to the construction of the self, the family and the household; storage is a location, it gives a place to material possessions, it allows to hide or show certain objects of everyday life. As in Meyer’s one-room

³⁰⁵ Jack Self, Finn Williams and Shumi Bose, “Hours: Own Nothing, Share Everything,” in *Home Economics*, ed. Jack Self, Finn Williams and Shumi Bose (London: The Spaces, 2016) 71–81, 80.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁷ Saulo B. Cwerner and Alan Metcalfe, “Storage and Clutter: Discourses and Practices of Order in the Domestic World,” *Journal of Design History*, vol. 16, no. 3 (2003): 229–239, 237.

apartment, storage could take over the house, and, we could claim, it would not be bad at all.

3.4 Holiday

The holiday season is generally defined by two major factors, which vary according to geographical location and cultural context: the change of weather and climatic conditions, from most favourable to unfavourable, and the institutional time frames related to education and labour. While the former are only partially predictable, the latter are fixed in the social and cultural structure of the calendar, as a representation of broader economic, religious and ethnic factors. Despite the growth of fast tourism, in many European countries the habit of taking long holiday breaks, of three to five weeks, especially concentrated in winter and summer, persists. This specific kind of vacation has ancient roots, and carries with it a unique set of habits and narratives which have influenced the production of architecture and urbanism and the ways of living. What has often been defined as “seasonal home” is, in fact, a second home, differing from the first in terms of size, location and layout, but still allowing a kind of permanence related to the implementation of a new rituality. Whether this home is rented, bought, borrowed or shared, we will see how its architecture represents but another declination of seasonality within the domestic environment.

The solitary pleasures of villeggiatura: ville, cottages and bungalows

Seasonal homes originally emerged as related to nomadic pastoralism, to follow the transhumance, that is to say, the movement of livestock in mountainous regions from lower pastures (in winter) to higher ones (in summer). Shepherds lived for alternate periods respectively in the valley and the hills, which implied having both a house in the village and a cabin in the mountains. In Classical Rome, wealthy Romans appropriated this principle of seasonal migration, turning it into an occasion to escape the hassle and bustle of life in the city. The villa emerged in this context as an idyllic refuge located in the countryside. While also being the centre of an agricultural enterprise, it was essentially distinguished from the farm and the farmhouse, as its main purpose was that of allowing its owner to focus solely on the pursuit of enjoyment and relaxation:

“Defined as an antithesis to urban life, its essential elements were the

simplicity and the informality of country living, the healthfulness of the air and the opportunity for exercise (...), the scope for undisturbed intellectual and creative activities, leisurely conversation with friends, and the delights of contemplating the natural and cultivated landscape in different seasons and conditions.”³⁰⁸

The love for *otium* in the countryside as opposed to the urban *negotium*, would emerge once again during the 14th century, spurred by literary works such as Francesco Petrarca’s *Vita Solitaria*, which, despite praising a rather monastic rural life, distant from the leisurable one carried out by the Romans, contributed to the revival of living in nature as beneficial to body and spirit. These ideas would persist throughout the Renaissance, especially in the Tuscan and Venetian regions, where the term *villeggiatura* was coined to indicate the vacation period spent by aristocrats in their rural properties with the purpose of enjoying the country life while also supervising the production activities of the estate. Through the 17th and 18th century, holiday homes were customary in the most part of Europe: the English aristocracy spent the summer in villas located around London, as did the Swedish nobility in Stockholm, while in France the *maison de campagne* was widely used by doctors, lawyers, merchants and in some cases, even if in a more modest form, by shopkeepers and tradesmen.³⁰⁹ The economic transformations brought by the advent of industrial capitalism generated a great change in the social organisation of time and a differentiated, functionally specialised built environment, defined not only in relation to social class, but also to seasonal fluctuation.³¹⁰ In Corbin’s *L’Avènement des Loisirs*, historian André Rauch argues that the present tourist season is an extension of the ancient *villeggiatura*, with the difference that the appeals of autumn and spring have gradually been overshadowed by the primacy of summer.³¹¹ Rauch observes how, up until the 19th century, schools would close only in occasion of religious festivities or in those periods of intense agricultural production which would require the participation of students. By the end of the century, holidays are structurally emancipated from the ecclesiastical and rural calendars and concentrated around the longer summer break, reinforcing an already ingrained habit. Holidays gain their own social time, opposed to that of production and governed by certain codified uses and customs: within this framework, the modern vacation house can be understood as a specialised dwelling type designed for a particular function, location, social group, time and, when possible, with a distinctive form and appearance.³¹² This is the case for buildings such as cottages and bungalows, which emerged respectively at the end of the

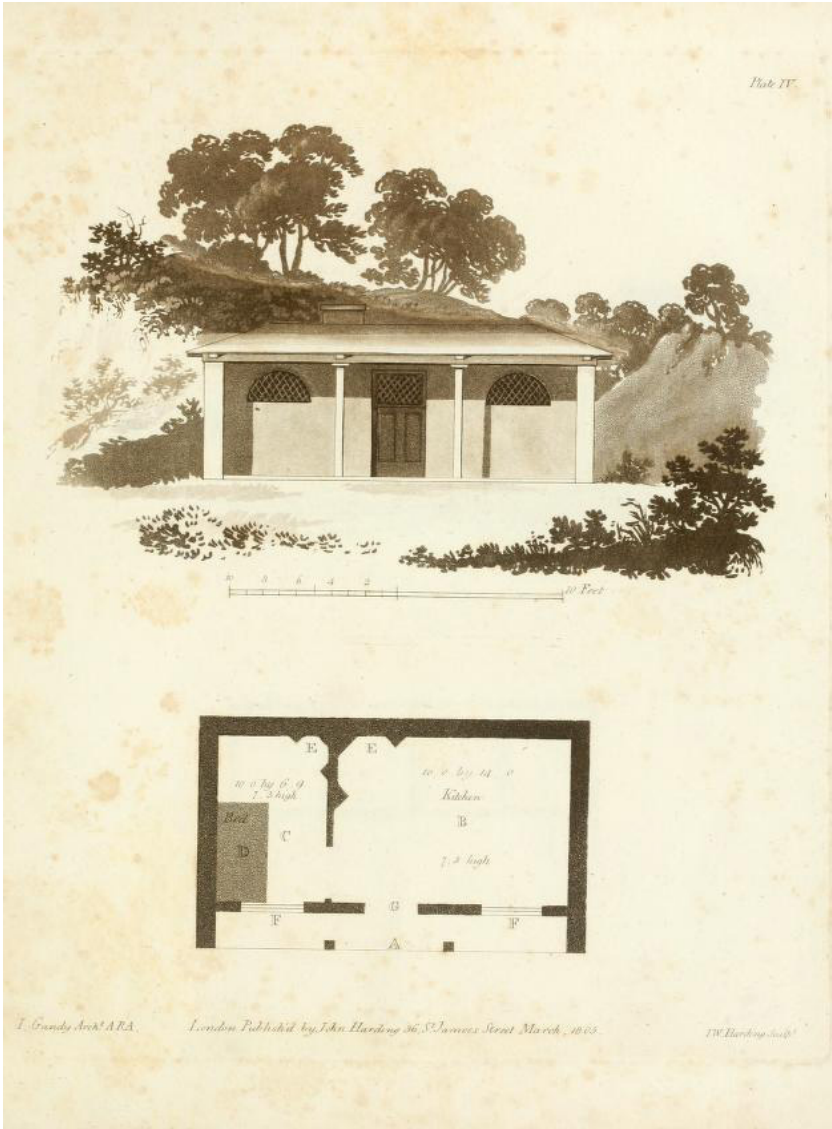
³⁰⁸ James S. Ackerman, *The Villa: Form and Ideology of Country Houses* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 10, 37.

³⁰⁹ Anthony Douglas King, “A time for space and a space for time: the social production of the vacation house,” *Buildings and Society: Essays on the Social Development of the Built Environment*, ed. Anthony D. King (London: Routledge, 1980), 106-124, 106.

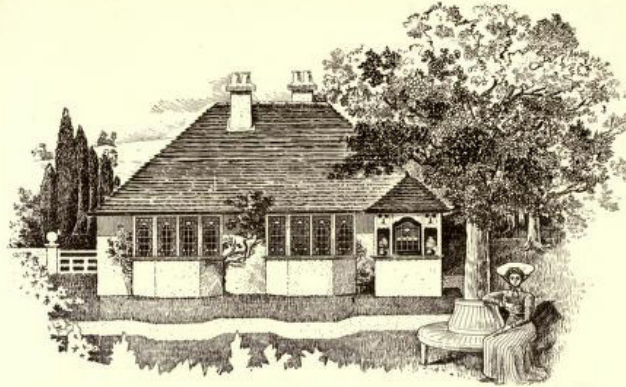
³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

³¹¹ André Rauch, “Les vacances et la nature revisitée (1830-1939),” in *L’Avènement des loisirs: 1850-1960*, ed. Alain Corbin (Paris: Aubier, 1995), 108-153, 114.

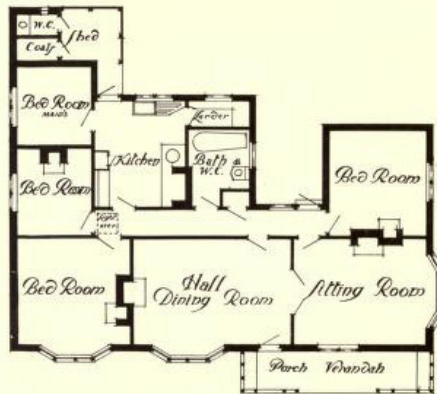
³¹² Anthony Douglas King, “A time for space and a space for time,” 109.



3.11 Cottage for a peasant. From Joseph Michael Gandy, *Designs for cottages, cottage farms, and other rural buildings* (London: Printed for John Harding, 1806), plate IV.



VIEW OF BUNGLOW COSTING £300, IN THE OETZMANN SERIES.



PLAN OF BUNGLOW COSTING £500-£550. SPECIALLY DESIGNED FOR MESSRS. OETZMANN & CO.
 H.W. RENTY WHITE, Architect.

Built of brick, rough-cast, with red tiled roof, and wrought iron casement windows with leaded lights. See p. 66.

3.12 Design for a bungalow costing £500-£550. From John Hudson Elder-Duncan, *Country cottages and week-end homes* (London: Cassell and Company Limited, 1912), 56.

18th and 19th century, to accommodate the needs of different classes. The term cottage originally indicated a modest house, composed of one or maximum two floors, located in the country and built to house agricultural and industrial workers. The rural simplicity and aesthetic quality of such buildings, started to appeal to the higher classes which appropriated the type and transformed it into a new kind of vacation house. As described by historian Anthony King, the modern cottage is defined by both its location and by the occupational status of its inhabitants; moreover, the association of the term cottage with “country,” in place of “rural,” suggests a changed perception not only of the building itself but also of the environment surrounding it, inextricably related to the new use and the new people it was supposed to serve.³¹³ Next to the cottage, the bungalow emerges as a seasonal second home suitable for people with moderate means: mainly built with prefabricated components, it represented a compact, easily transportable and quickly built alternative to the early 19th century resort. If the latter was rooted in a shared, social vacation culture made of collective occasions enforcing proximity among residents, the bungalow provided a solitary retreat, where to enjoy holiday time with a small circle of family and friends. Few architectural elements are essential to the design of both building types: the veranda, already present in some examples of peasant cottages, becomes a fundamental feature of later designs, offering a comfortable, sheltered space specifically dedicated to the enjoyment of nature. Interior spaces were shaped to suit a different kind of domestic life than that carried out in the city: the intermittent presence of friends, and the subversion of conventional gender roles, had direct design consequences: generous dining rooms, an integrated kitchen rather than secluded at the back of the room, a bar, a hobby or billiard room, a sauna, were all spaces considered to be necessary for the enjoyment of free time. As reported in the *Book of Holiday and Weekend houses* (1968), “the main difference between normal and holiday domesticity is the diminished importance of the bedroom...the living room becomes the sole raison d’être of the house when life is a series of fourteen-hour outdoor days.”³¹⁴ Here, the refusal to comply with traditional schedules and routines translates into a particular kind of spatial organisation: the average bedroom is replaced by couches, rugs and cushions where residents can “talk the night away before going to sleep at six or seven on Sunday morning.”³¹⁵ In a cunning analysis of the relation between “vacation life” and the architecture of holiday homes, King states that:

“The vacation house as a special building, for use at a particular time and in a particular location, is a good illustration of the propensity for

³¹³ Ibid., 110.

³¹⁴ Robert Harling, Alex Kroll, eds., *House and Garden. Book of Holiday and Weekend Houses* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1968), 9.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 36.

modern society to create organisational patterns and then for people to live within the strictures that such organisation imposes.”³¹⁶

This is the case especially for those houses built in the first half of the 20th century by Modern architects such as Eileen Gray in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin (France) and Marcel Breuer at Cape Cod (USA), between others. These projects are deeply linked with the rhythms and conventions of free time, but, simultaneously, they address trivialities such as changes in weather conditions, or the number of people in the room. In Gray’s villa Tempe à Pailla, located on the French riviera and realised between 1931-1934, a few architectural elements are conceived specifically with this aim. An example is the bedroom *oculus*, a truncated cone which cuts the plane of the roof and the ceiling in slightly different positions to allow the rays from the mid-afternoon summer sun to directly enter the room.³¹⁷ The *oculus* is equipped with an obscuring disk which, operable through a steel handle, can be used to partially or entirely cover the opening, altering the amount of light passing through. In his analysis of the project, Professor David Leatherbarrow notes that:

“Two factors operating in conjunction (...) determined the plate’s position along the arc of its possible orbit: Gray’s preference for more or less light and the passage of the sun and clouds. Each had their patterns, but neither her habits nor the intensities were so definite or recurring that they could be predicted. Instances of divergent schedules would not have been rare – sleeping late, nighttime reading, afternoon storms, and so on – which is why the horizontal arm had no fixed positions or stops and could be rotated freely.”³¹⁸

Clearly, the house is built following the rules of leisure time, while enhancing the presence of seasons and natural elements.

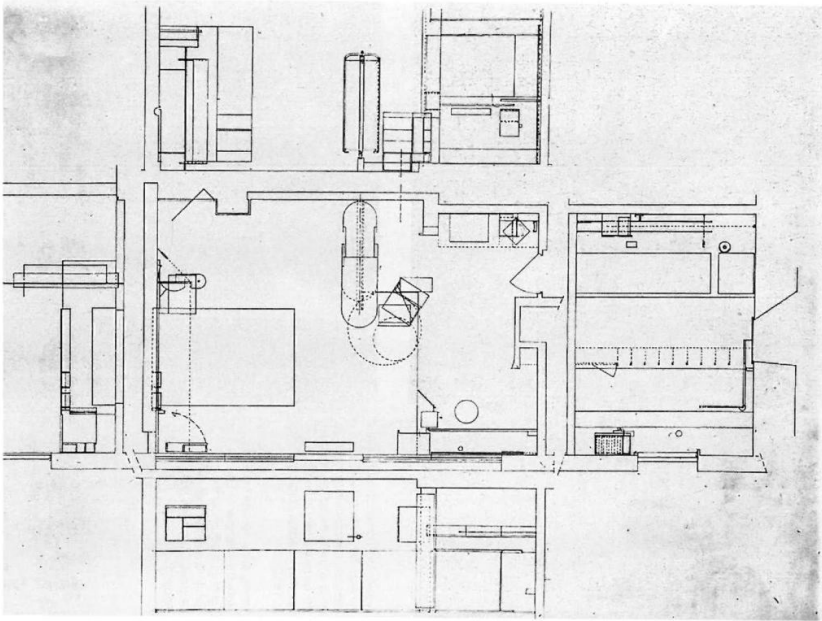
Collective enjoyment: boarding houses, hotels and holiday villages

The distinction between mundane season (winter and spring) and *villeggiatura* (summer and part of autumn), as well as the comforts of owning an individual dwelling, will remain for a long time a prerogative of the wealthier society, and it would not be until the turn of the 20th century that similar leisure opportunities would be accessible to mass culture. Already from the second half of the 18th century, collective facilities for vacation, such as spas and hotels, spread in equal amount on coasts and mountains, marking a fundamental turn in the history of holiday homes. Their emergence was much indebted to the publication of health treatises which praised the benefits of spending

³¹⁶ Anthony Douglas King, “A time for space and a space for time,” 119.

³¹⁷ David Leatherbarrow, *Building Time: Architecture, Event and Experience* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 32.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.



3.13 Eileen Gray, *Tempe à Pailha*, Castellar (France), 1931-1934. Plan of the bedroom. In David Leatherbarrow, *Building Time: Architecture, Event and Experience* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 32.

time on the seashores or the hills to cure the ill effects of polluted city air. Locations such as Nice, Brighton and Bath pioneered the concept of the bathing holiday as both therapeutic and fashionable: from June to September, aristocracy and gentry would relocate to such establishments as alternatives to the expensive high society life that was normally carried out in country houses. As noted by Corbin in *The Lure of the Sea*, which maps the emergence of the seaside as a preferred holiday location within the Western world, life in coastal and inland resorts was regulated by a strictly codified and ritualised social life which would directly affect the architecture. Both types were equipped with bookshops, reading rooms, ball rooms, and would offer guests a series of organised social activities such as excursions, events and concerts.³¹⁹ A Danish novel from 1802 reports a typical dinner scene at a boarding-house:

“The new people sharing the table (...) inspected each other with furtive glances to see how high they could value each other. The situation was not a little reminiscent of the way in which, at children’s balls, the boys gather along one wall and the girls along the other before the dance begins. They had a burning desire to speak to each other, but they did not know how to set about doing so.”³²⁰

It is clear how the proximity between strangers, brought together by pre-defined social occasions, would generate a certain kind of domestic intimacy where families had to learn to live together with other families, adapting each other’s routines to the shared rituals of vacation time. For both men and women, life at the boarding house or the hotel was liberating from the burdens of labour and domestic work, and it allowed social interaction to expand beyond familiar boundaries.

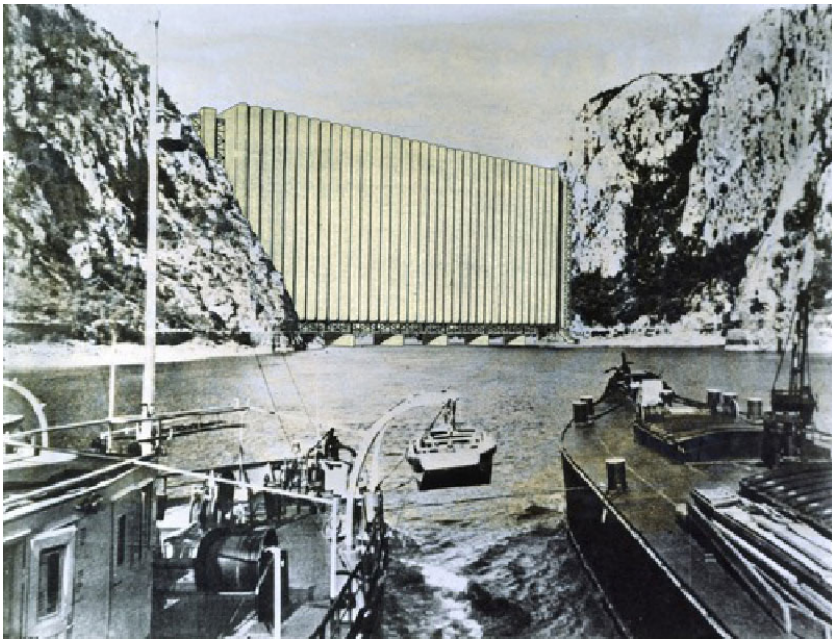
From the start of the 1800s, bathing establishments were built all around Europe, and by the half of the century, thanks also to the development of the railway network, they became the meeting place for manufacturers and wealthy craftsmen, and an attraction for the working class.³²¹ However, it is only in the post-war period that mass tourism would consolidate as an emulation of aristocratic habits. As claimed by historian Ellen Furlough, this turning point in the culture of holidays was inextricably linked to a specific European understanding of the relationship between leisure, vacations, and politics:

“From the 1930s and accelerating in the post-war period, paid vacations came to be understood as a right of citizenship bound up within a European standard of living, part of a new social contract. Unlike in

³¹⁹ Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea: the Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 254-255.

³²⁰ Orvard Löfgren, *On Holiday: a History of Vacationing* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999), 121.

³²¹ Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea*, 278.



3.14 Cristiano Toraldo di Francia
(part of Superstudio) Macchi-
na per le Vacanze, Tropea, Italy
(1967). Diploma project.
© Georges Meguerditchian, Cen-
tre Pompidou.

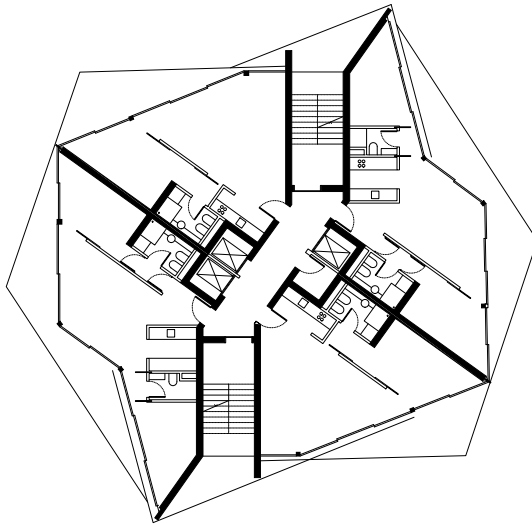
the United States, for example, where modern vacations developed as a ‘privilege’ accorded salaried and waged workers as part of their employment ‘package,’ access to vacation time in France and in most European states has been politically secured. The vast majority of Europeans are guaranteed as much as five weeks of paid vacation by virtue of their status as citizens, rather than as a result of employee benefit.”³²²

Exemplary of such a popular turn are the vacation facilities built by companies such as Eni (National Hydrocarbons Authority) in Italy, the *Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund* (Free German Trade Union Federation) in Germany, or the *Villages Vacances Familles – VVF* (Family Vacation Villages) in France. These holiday villages focused on encouraging a new kind of social life between residents, and were therefore equipped with several collective facilities which far exceeded those provided in the boarding house. However, in the attempt to cater to a different crowd, rather than ballrooms or game rooms, such buildings would provide spaces for children, religious practice, as well as recreation. The Borca di Cadore village, built between the 50-60s in the eastern Alps by entrepreneur Enrico Mattei with architect Edoardo Gellner, provided residents with diverse dwelling options — a camping site, a residence, a colony, as well as 263 single family houses — enriched with a church, a supermarket, a bar, tennis fields and skating rings. In a video realised by Eni in 1963 to advertise the new village, the narrator praises the idyllic winter landscapes, while noting how the noise of the city and the rhythms of work are but a distant memory.³²³

The second half of the 20th century witnesses the spread of “holiday machines,” where the exclusive character of vacation villages is replaced by the quest for efficiency of mass commodification. During this period, sea coasts experience the most intense growth: from an aristocratic destination to a source of health and well-being, the sea eventually affirms its role as the predominant summer retreat, particularly for the lower classes. The great modernist resorts such as Jean Ballardur’s La Grande Motte (1960s) on the French riviera, as well as those populating the coasts of Portugal, Greece, Croatia and Bulgaria, are representative of a new holiday architecture, one completely dominated by the rules of economy and consumer culture. A Holiday Machine in Tropea (*Macchina per le Vacanze*), Cristiano Toraldo di Francia’s final diploma project completed in 1967, well exemplifies the main preoccupations leading the design of vacation resorts: the tourist-citizen, now accustomed to the hyper controlled Modern environment, lives as a voluntary recluse within the sterilised boundaries

³²² Ellen Furlough, “Making Mass Vacations: Tourism and Consumer Culture in France, 1930s to 1970s,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 40, no. 2 (1998): 247-286, 249.

³²³ Giuseppe Taffarel, *Un villaggio per le vacanze*, 1963, Archivio Nazionale Cinema Impresa, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0HddwflO_A&ab_channel=ArchivioNazionaleCinemaImpresa [accessed on June 30, 2025].



2m

3.15 OAB, Torre Aquileia, Jesolo (Italy), 2004-2008. Typical floor plan.

of the hotel, sacrificing the pleasures of nature and landscape in favour of the possibility of uninterrupted comfort. The living space is reduced to a minimalistic capsule, embedded in the frame of the megastructure like a portable component. In trying to escape everyday routine, the resident eventually ends up in an environment much close to that of the modern urban office than that of a holiday house.

Today, the explosion of Airbnb and practices such as home swapping, caused a decrease in the demand for second homes, especially among younger generations, who lack the financial and geographical stability for such an economic venture. Hotels and boarding houses (bed and breakfasts) persist, even if the Modern monumentality has been in large part replaced by a softer, humbler kind of architecture. Yet, in between the cottage and the hotel a new economic and domestic model has emerged in response to the changing needs of holiday architecture: the apartment unit within the condominium block. The condominium, an affordable housing type which became widespread in Postwar Italy, with roots in the 19th century American residential hotel, turns into a tool of speculation, colonising Italian seashores, as well as Eastern European and American ones. Aimed at maximising economic return as related to investment, holiday condominiums consist in the stacking of differently sized apartments whose value changes according to location and services provided. It is interesting to note how, despite responding to different conditions, the architecture of the vacation unit in the condominium, as much as the cottage or the villa, is based on the implementation of a specific kind of domestic life. Looking at the plan of Torre Aquileia, realised by the Spanish office OAB between 2004 and 2008 in Jesolo, located on the Italian Adriatic coast in the vicinity of Venice, it is clear that the layout and organisation of spaces is conceived in relation to its economic flexibility. Housing units are composed of one to two bedrooms — each equipped with an en-suite bathroom, allowing the rooms to be used independently — a living room and a kitchen. The kitchen, enclosed in a tight cubicle without openings towards the outside, is not supposed to be used. The plan is emblematic of contemporary vacation culture, where the aristocratic rituality rooted in sociability which has influenced the design of holiday architecture from villas to cottages, to boarding houses, has been sacrificed to comply with the demands of individualism and the culture of appearance. If, on the one hand, vacations seem to be territories of freedom, from responsibilities, work and regulations, on the other, they come with a set of well-established expectations and habits, which, while changing and adapting following culture and economy, invariably affect architectural production.

A life

Chapter IV

A life

4.1 Rites of passage

In his seminal book *Rites de Passage*, French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep develops an analysis of the ceremonies which accompany the changes in the life status of an individual. In what is, by now, a commonly accepted theory, van Gennep defines three main transformative phases within the cycle of life: separation, transition and incorporation, which correspond to well-known collective rituals, such as marriages, funerals, births, initiations, and so on. These events have the power to alter the life of the group or the individual, and that is why, van Gennep claims, they are met with rites of passage which “cushion the transition.”³²⁴ In van Gennep’s words:

“The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another. Wherever there are fine distinctions among age or occupational groups, progression from one group to the next is accompanied by special acts. (...) Among semicivilized peoples such acts are enveloped in ceremonies, since to the semicivilized mind no act is entirely free of the sacred. In such societies every change in a persons’ life involves actions and reactions between sacred and profane – actions and reactions to be regulated and guarded so that society as a whole will suffer no discomfort or injury.”³²⁵

What is especially interesting in this context, is the interpretation van Gennep gives to the spatialisation of such rites: in defining what he calls “territorial passage,” he points out the importance of the transition moment in all these ceremonies, which he claims to be both a physical and a symbolic one. This spatial passage from one place to another, at the scale of the territory, the village, the temple, and the house, condenses the very nature of the ritual in the attempt to link time and space through the movement of the body: “The neutral zone shrinks progressively till it ceases to exist except as a simple stone, a beam, or a threshold.”³²⁶ While it might seem that rites of passage are gradually disappearing from contemporary society, it is actually

³²⁴ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), ix.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

more correct to say that they are changing form: ceremonies like the American *débutante* ball, or the European 18th birthday are representations of the individual passage from adolescence to adulthood, while marriages and funerals are still milestones which seal the passing from single to familiar life, or from life to death. Ronald Grimes, expert in ritual studies, actually claims that the past decades have witnessed a renewed interest towards rites of passage, especially in what concerns their reinvention. According to Grimes, this need emerges from the disorientation generated by the current lack of rituals:

“Without rites that engage our imaginations, communities, and bodies, we lose touch with the rhythms of the human life course, just as we become temporally disoriented without seasonal and commemorative rites that recreate our connections to the natural world and the course of human history.”³²⁷

The reinvention, however, is not completely arbitrary, on the contrary, it builds on culture and tradition, and it is through this very reinterpretation that we can assure the survival of rituals. In defining rites of passage, Grimes argues that compared to other rites which merely imply a performance, rites of passage are rooted in transformation:

“The effect of ritual passage is to transform both the individuals who undergo them and the communities that design and perpetuate them. Rites of passage change single people into mates, children into adults, childless individuals into parents, living people into ancestors. Rites of passage are stylized and condensed actions intended to acknowledge or effect a transformation. (...) when effective rites of passage are enacted, they carry us from here to there in such a way that we are unable to return to square one. To enact any kind of rite is to perform, but to enact a rite of passage is also to transform.”³²⁸

These rites, as explained by van Gennep, are often connected with transitory spaces: thresholds, doors, passages, where it is the very act of passing through which gives a physical dimension to the rite. However, going from one state to the other, implies also a permanent dimension, which often goes unnoticed, where the transformation is embodied into the stay in a specific space or room. This is the case of the children’s room, the adolescent’s room, the room for the sick or that for the dying. As much as thresholds, each of these spaces represents a different life stage and it is planned and furnished according to it.

³²⁷ Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 3.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

4.2 Growing up

In the chapter dedicated to “rites of initiation,” van Gennep starts by demonstrating that, amongst a vast number of societies, physiological puberty and “social puberty” are essentially different and only rarely converge.³²⁹ He cites examples from several Indian, Asian and African tribes, classifying their rites of admission as related to age, gender and social context. While van Gennep considers different kinds of initiation rites — such as those for the consecration of prostitutes in antiquity, or the rites of incorporation to become part of a caste, or the ceremonies of enthronement and crowning of kings and chiefs — my enquiry will be focused on the rites punctuating children’s evolution from childhood, to adolescence, to adult age. Needless to say, this journey materializes through important spatial transformations, which mimic the different stages of personal growth, and which, in accordance with what stated by van Gennep, represent a social rather than a physiological marker. British American architect and professor Clare Cooper Marcus, in her book *House as a Mirror of Self*, analyses the relation between our evolution as human beings and the spaces we live, especially when it concerns childhood related spaces:

“As we change and grow throughout our lives, our psychological development is punctuated not only by meaningful emotional relationships with people, but also by close affective ties with a number of significant physical environments, beginning in childhood.”³³⁰

Let us think of a child’s room, how it can evolve from a private sanctuary to a shared space due to the arrival of a brother or a sister, how the configuration can change again when the child has outgrown said room, or when a new room is sought outside the parental household as studies or work require it. In this sense, spatial transformations mainly respond to the succession of life stages.

From the cradle to the room

However, the ideas of childhood and adolescence as they are familiar to us took a long time to come into being. The concept of childhood did not begin to form until at least the 14th century; as historian Philippe Ariès argues in *Centuries of Childhood*, in medieval society childhood was not recognised as a particular phase of growth, and as soon as the child could live without the constant care of the mother or nanny, he or she was considered to be part of adult society.³³¹ Following Ariès’ account, from the 14th century a new concept of childhood appears, according to which the child is seen by the adult or the parent as a source

³²⁹ Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 65.

³³⁰ Clare Cooper Marcus, *House as a Mirror of Self* (Berkeley, CA: Conari Press, 1995), 2.

³³¹ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), 128.



4.1 Salt selling scene representing a child in the *Tacuinum Sanitatis*, ca. 14th century.

of amusement, love and relaxation. During the 17th century, such an attitude is repulsed by the majority of educators and pedagogues who, instead, highlight the importance of teaching children discipline and manners, while striving to improve their hygiene and physical health. During the 18th century, the child takes central stage within the family, becoming simultaneously a motherly preoccupation and a resource to cultivate both mentally and physically, eventually gaining recognition as a member of the household, and therefore being assigned a defined space within it.³³²

For a child, to have a room of their own was indeed a conquest, and it wasn't until the 20th century that the matter became of general interest. Until then, in middle class households, children left the parents' room only to sleep with the servants on improvised straw mattresses that could be set up in a nook, a closet, or, rarely in a little room, and no one, within the design field, thought to accord them any particular relevance when planning the layout of the home.³³³ The *Château de Versailles* is one of the first examples where great consideration is given to the design of children's living quarters. As reported by French historian William Newton, in his detailed analysis of the royal palace between 1682 and 1789, *l'aile de Princes* was completed to accommodate Louis XIV's closest family members. The first-floor apartments were occupied solely by the d'Orléans family until the reign of Luis XV, when most of the space was then reserved to host the *Enfants de France* (Louis XV's legitimate and illegitimate off-springs) and their governess.³³⁴ Historian Michelle Perrot retraces the evolution of the children's apartments during Louis XV's reign: initially, the space was designed as a kind of nursery, children would sleep in a cradle until the age of three, after which they were moved into a bed surrounded by a balustrade. Three beds for the children were placed in each room, together with two additional ones respectively for the wet nurse and for the governess. In 1741, the apartments were extended to eight rooms, of which six had fireplaces; in 1764, a wood-burning stove was installed to improve thermal comfort, and, shortly after, the walls were covered in padding so the children could play safely.³³⁵ Perrot argues that such an awareness towards the presence of children, as it could be observed in Versailles, was paradigmatic of a general tendency which would spread quickly in the following years. Spaces such as the nursery or the *Kinderstube* started to appear in English and German bourgeois houses, both to accommodate and "contain" children, so that they would not disturb other household members in their daily duties.

The children's room affirms itself as a crucial domestic space, nec-

³³² Ibid., 129-133.

³³³ Michelle Perrot, *Histoire de Chambres* (Paris: Seuil, 2009), 42.

³³⁴ William Ritchey Newton, *L'espace du roi: la cour de France au Château de Versailles, 1682-1789* (Paris: Fayard, 2000), 194.

³³⁵ Ibid., 246.



4.2 Camera di Lucia, in Mario Praz, *La Casa della Vita*, (Milan: Adelphi, 1979).

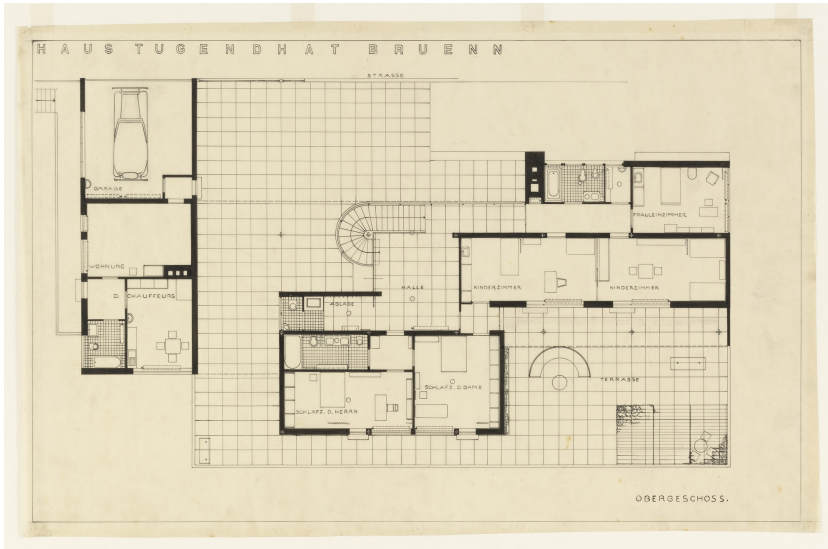
essary to guarantee their correct upbringing and shape their personality and their habits. Perrot quotes Emile Cardon's 1884 treatise on domestic decoration, where, even though the topic is treated just briefly, Cardon states that "As early as possible, each child should have his own room, where he can adopt orderly habits, putting aside and taking care of the things that belong to him – his toys, his books, his images."³³⁶ At this point, the child is seen as a human being in constant development, with evolving needs and requirements. Particular importance was given to privacy and self-representation, especially when concerning female children, following the belief that changing the room configuration following the child's growth, as well as the location and quality of furnishing, would help the young lady to develop her taste and disposition. An example of such a spatial evolution is given in Mario Praz's book *The House of Life*, where he describes in length and detail the room of his daughter, Lucia, as it grows with its occupant.³³⁷ Praz, an art collector, writer and literature critic, acquired his Roman apartment in *Palazzo Ricci* in 1934, and, together with his family, spent most of his life there. Despite belonging to an already modern time, Praz's love for the Empire style and antique furniture made the apartment look like a 19th century bourgeois home, and, interestingly enough, it followed the same rules too. Lucia's room, previously his wife's boudoir, was transformed to welcome the new child: walls were covered with pink wallpaper, and existing furniture replaced with custom made maple crib, bed, closet, and an elegant small sized dressing table. Ten years later, the room underwent a second update, to match the needs of a young girl: a sober Empire bed, a mahogany night stand, a round worktable with multiple drawers. In addition, the walls were filled with 18th century paintings portraying idyllic feminine scenes of women with children. It is clear that the room transformations coincide with particular moments in Lucia's life: her birth, her turning into a young woman and, eventually, her leaving the father's house.

³³⁶ "Il est bon que le plus tôt possible chaque enfant ait sa petite chambre particulière, où il prenne des habitudes d'ordre, en mettant de côté et soignant ce qui lui appartient, ses jouets, ses livres, ou ses images." Émile Cardon, *L'Art Au Foyer Domestique: La Décoration de l'Appartement* (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1884), 116.

³³⁷ See Chapter 19, "La Camera di Lucia," in Mario Praz, *La Casa della Vita* (Milan: Adelphi, 1979).

³³⁸ Małgorzata Balcer-Zgraja, "Architectural Design and Methods Inspired by Children's Culture and Creativity," *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering* 960 (2020): 1.

Particularly the question of adolescence, which was not formally recognised until the end of the 19th century, becomes central during the 20th century. As a result of the social and demographic conditions, paired with the development of disciplines such as psychology and social sciences, a great deal of importance was given to the study of children and adolescence, to the point that the 20th century is often referred to as "the Century of the Child." Consequently, the theme became crucial within architecture theory and practice, influencing the formulation of specific requirements concerning the design standards of dwellings and public buildings.³³⁸ Compared to previous examples,

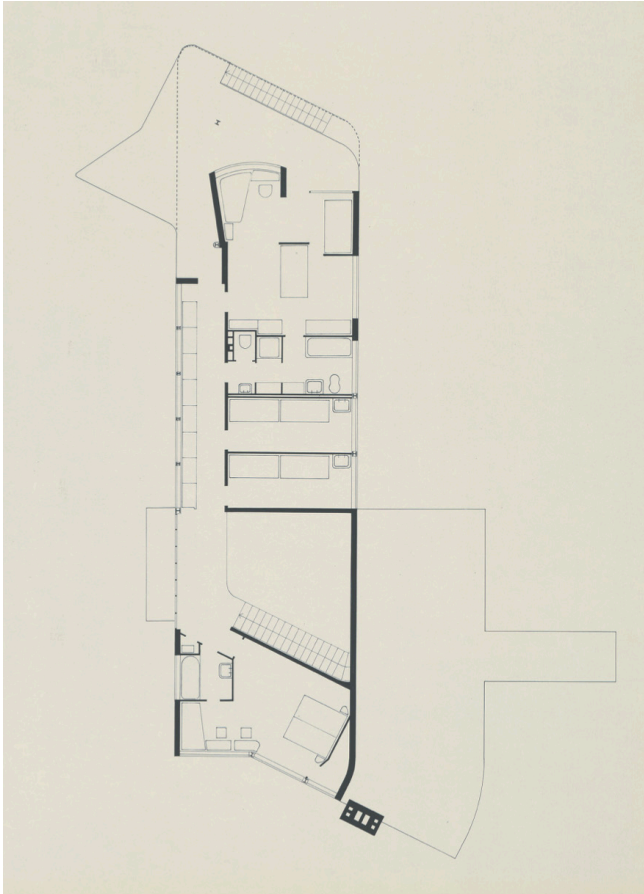


4.3 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Tugendhat House, Brno (Czech Republic), 1928-30. Plan of the second floor. © 2025 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

the children's room in modernist houses is built around the ideas of efficiency and neutrality, in line with basic modern principles. White furniture, steel bed frames, little or no decoration but rather the provision of sinks, foldable beds, desks, and generous storage spaces. In their analysis of children's spaces in some of the most famous modernist houses, researchers Julia Jamrozik and Coryn Kempster bring out an often-overlooked aspect in the history of such projects: the experience of the dweller.³³⁹ By interviewing the former children who, for varying periods of time, inhabited Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation, Mies van der Rohe's Tugendhat House or Hans Scharoun's Haus Schminke, the authors develop a compelling reading of their domestic spaces, highlighting how, in the good and the bad, these responded not only to the transformation of the household and its components, but also to the current zeitgeist. In Mies' Tugendhat House, built in 1930 for Grete Tugendhat and her husband Fritz in Brno (Czech Republic), the layout of children's spaces directly responded to the configuration of the family and to Grete's particular requests. The upper floor, located at street level, contained the sleeping quarters separated in two wings: one for the children, two boys and a girl, and their governess, and one for the parents. The boys would sleep together in the same room, while the girl would sleep by herself in the room directly adjacent, separated only by a sliding door. The girl's room was equipped with a small table where the children would have their evening meal. Interesting to note is the vestibule with passage doors connecting the boys' room with Grete's bedroom, something Grete requested Mies after seeing the plans of the house for the first time. Clearly, the configuration is conceived to accommodate the early stages of childhood, when the children need the close supervision of their nanny and their mother. It is difficult to imagine how the rooms might have been adapted for the boys' adolescence, as the family left the house only eight years after they moved in to escape the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia. Compared to Lucia's room in *Palazzo Ricci*, here the spaces are beautifully bare: white walls, smooth, easily washable surfaces, sparse furniture; no pink wallpaper, no paintings, but generous sinks in the nursery and the boys' room to facilitate care work. In the modern revision of values Le Corbusier talks about in *Vers une Architecture*, children play a crucial role, their environments designed to mould their habits, starting from the basic unit of the room.³⁴⁰ This is evident in Hans Scharoun's *Haus Schminke*, realized for Fritz and Charlotte Schminke in Löbau (Germany) in 1933. Here, the children's playroom occupies a prominent position right next to the main entrance of the house. The central placement, as noted by Jamrozik and Kempster, elevates the position

³³⁹ Julia Jamrozik and Coryn Kempster, *Growing up Modern: Childhoods in Iconic Homes* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2021).

³⁴⁰ "Architecture has for its first duty, in this period of renewal, that of bringing about a revision of values, a revision of the constituent elements of the house." In Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (1931; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1986), 6.



4.4 Hans Scharoun, Schminke Haus, Loebau, Saxony (Germany), 1930. Plan of the second floor.

of the children within the hierarchy of the home, celebrating their presence rather than hiding it.³⁴¹ This idea that the children should be free to wander and play throughout the entire house is also reflected in the layout of the small upstairs bedrooms, the design of which resemble that of ships' sleeping cabins. The two bedrooms are each equipped with two foldable beds, a foldable desk and a sink. Soon after the family moved in, one of the bedrooms was reserved for the older son, aged nine, while the three daughters slept together in one room; to achieve the necessary sleeping spaces, a niche was subtracted from the boy's room so that an additional bed could be placed in the adjacent room. As much as by gender, in both cases, sleeping arrangements were defined by age: the oldest daughter or son had the right to a private room, while youngest siblings were still expected to share their space.

“As soon as I had my own room, I no longer recognized myself. From the child I had been the day before I suddenly became a young man...As soon as I had my own room, I had an interior life...It separated me from the universe, and I discovered the universe there. It's there that my mind took shape, where my mind was teased by — at first vague and far off, later frightening — simulacrums of love and beauty.”³⁴²

From the room to the house and in between

The widespread recognition of life stages, and the idea that the change from one stage to the other would imply a transformation in domestic configurations, greatly influenced architectural production in the following years. Particular attention has been given to the role of adolescents within the house and their gradual entrance into adulthood. Patterns of leaving the parental home vary considerably in relation to social and geographical context: in the 18th century, children would leave home at a very young age to become servants or to take on other jobs, while during the war, male off-springs would be called to the front, often never to return. In the 20th century, the prolongation of the educational enrolment and the facilitated access to education in general, the postponement of the entry into the labour force, and the loosening of social rules in terms of marriage and union, are all reasons that contribute to favour a longer stay in the parental home.³⁴³ In this context, keeping children at home until quite an advanced age became of general use. One of the first declinations of this tendency in the modern age can be found in some of the proposals developed for PAN 14 (1987), which have been gathered and studied by Monique El-eb-Vidal in the book *Penser l'Habité*, edited together with Anne-Marie

³⁴¹ The authors mention that such a reading of the space was put forward by Klaus Kürvers in his 2012 film *Built with Light: A Ship of Life from Hans Scharoun*, directed by Kerstin Stutterheim and Niels Bolbrinker. See Julia Jamrozik and Coryn Kempster, *Growing up Modern*, 170.

³⁴² Anatole France, *Le Petit Pierre* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1919); the scene takes place around 1855 to 1860. Quoted in Michelle Perrot, *Histoire de Chambres*, 45.

³⁴³ Martine Corijn and Erik Klijsing, eds., *Transitions to Adulthood in Europe* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 319. For an in-depth overview on the topic see also Frans van Poppel, Michel Oris and James Lee, eds., *The Road to Independence: Leaving Home in Western and Eastern Societies, 16th-20th Centuries* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004).

Chatelet and Thierry Mandoul. One of the chapters in the book, titled “*Remise en question du dispositif complet de l’appartement*,” focuses on questioning the integrity of the traditional apartment: instead of perceiving it as a unitary system, organised and clearly delimited, the competitors attempt to de-construct such a rigid totality by playing with the connections between central living unit and external devices, and by proposing to equip the main apartment with annexes of different sizes. In the project by H. Fontenas, for example, the need to provide a separate space for adolescents, grand parents, or friends, becomes the starting point to challenge traditional apartment configurations:

“Rather than trying to re-organise the interior of the dwelling, or to re-arrange its relationship with the environment as dependent on new constraints, which means, rather than perfecting the construction of the dwelling’s integrity through different techniques (looking for certain spatial qualities, new dispositions of spaces in relation to each other, a more or less deceptive flexibility) it seems more interesting to work on the deconstruction of the dwelling’s integrity.”³⁴⁴

The house is conceived as an assemblage of dissociated spaces, which work together only according to the specific uses inhabitants make of them. In Fontenas’ project, a “main dwelling” of modest size is combined with several “satellite spaces:” the two entities together give form to a “habitable network,” which replaces the material integrity of traditional apartments with a symbolic unity, created primarily through the transitional meanings that are assigned to each detached space. The design of the “main dwelling” is traditional, varying in size according to the number of people in the household, and equipped with bathroom and kitchen. On the other hand, the “satellite spaces,” located at varying distances from the main apartment, and in some cases equipped with sanitary services, serve as additional rooms for children, as a temporary accommodation for a family member, or as a small office. Eleb-Vidal cunningly points out that, for what concerns young adults, it is about being independent while still maintaining that familiar bond which seems crucial since the age at which young adults leave the family home continues to increase.³⁴⁵ Such a stance, enunciated in 1988, seems to still be of great relevance at present time, when, economic hardship and the housing market crisis accentuate the phenomena, with young adults finding themselves unable to completely leave the parental roof, while, at the same time, striving for independence. The premises put forward in Fontenas’ proposal, while not entirely translated into an architectural prototype, demonstrate a particular sensibility towards the theme of life stages: the social passage

³⁴⁴ “*Plutôt que de chercher à réorganiser l’intérieur du logement, à repenser ses relations avec son environnement en fonction de nouvelles contraintes, c’est-à-dire que plutôt que de perfectionner la construction de l’intégrité du logement par diverses techniques (recherche de certaines qualités spatiales, nouvelles dispositions des espaces entre eux, flexibilité plus ou moins illusoire) il semble plus intéressant de procéder à une déconstruction de l’intégrité du logement.*” Monique Eleb-Vidal, Anne-Marie Chatelet and Thierry Mandoul, eds., *Penser l’Habité: le logement en questions*, PAN 14 (Liège: Pierre Mardaga éditeur, 1988), 101.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

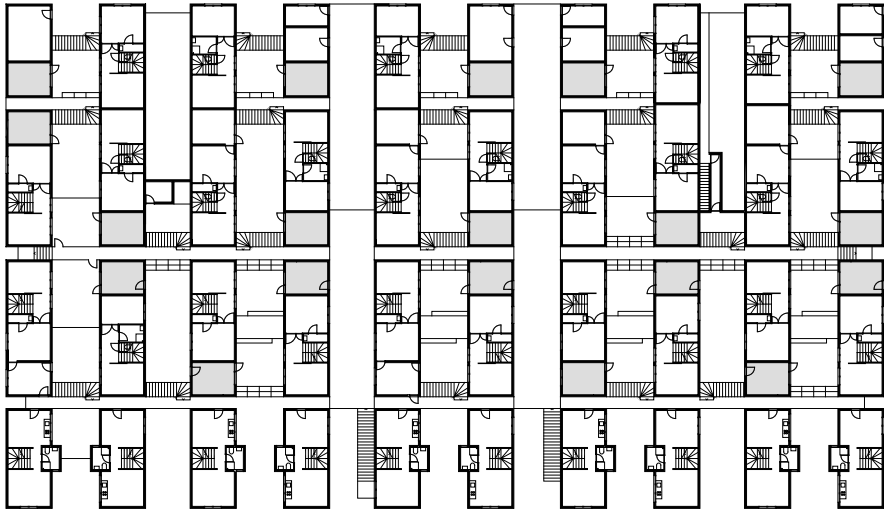
from one stage into another corresponds to an architectural passage, a transformation of the surroundings. In this case, the ritual shaping architecture is not a single gesture imbued with meaning, but a fluid evolution, which, through a series of scripted and very concrete actions — moving, buying new furniture, deciding what to leave and what to take from the childhood home — formulates a collective approach to change, allowing communities to move beyond increasing individualisation. As Swiss architect Bernard Zurbuchen states in relation to the design of collective housing in Switzerland,

“In any household forms, only one aspect counts, that is, adjusting the relationship between an individual and other(s), and maybe the fact that this individual claims a growing attention, a consequence of individualization concerning our society (that is our western and industrial society). This aspect does not contradict the search for more communicative housing forms: individualism is not claiming loneliness but rather controlling the relation degree with others.”³⁴⁶

Building on the same principle of juxtaposing a reduced domestic nucleus with a series of additional spaces, *La Sécherie* is a housing project built by Boskop architects in 2008. Located in the suburbs of Nantes, the project is designed as a “collection of rooms,” each of sixteen square meters, which present little to no pre-defined function. The basic dwelling unit is composed of either four or five rooms organised on two levels, equipped with two bathrooms — a smaller one at the first floor, including only a bathtub and a sink, and a larger one at the ground level — and a kitchen. To these, a sixth “dislocated” room is added: a simple square space, unprovided with either washing or cooking facilities. In between the apartment unit and the room is a garden which serves to both connect and create privacy. One of the residents, a single mother living with her two children respectively sixteen and twenty-four years old, answering to a survey conducted in 2018, described the use her family made of the extra room. In the attempt to contribute to her older son’s independence, the room had been turned into his personal retreat, where he was able to sleep or study without being disturbed by the mother carrying out her daily chores and, in general, where he could follow his own rhythm and schedule.³⁴⁷ While this is not the only use the room can serve, it is evident that this condition of semi-autonomy — the room is isolated but it’s not completely self-sufficient and still relies on the main dwelling for basic facilities — is particularly well-suited to accommodate the need of an adolescent, equally semi-autonomous and still reliant on the parental care. It is this situation of transition, as much spatial and symbolic, that van

³⁴⁶ “Dans toutes les formes de ménage, il n’y a qu’un seul fait qui compte, c’est le réglage du rapport entre un individu et le ou les autres, et peut-être le fait que cet individu réclame une place croissante, conséquence de l’individualisation qui caractérise la société (c’est-à-dire notre société occidentale et industrielle). Ce fait n’est pas en contradiction avec la recherche de formes d’habitation plus communicatives: l’individualisme ne réclame pas la solitude mais le contrôle du degré de relation avec les autres.” In Jacques Lucan, Bruno Marchand and Martin Steinmann, eds., *Construire des logements: l’habitat collectif suisse 1950-2000* (Lausanne: Presses Polytechniques et Universitaires Romandes, 2000), 24.

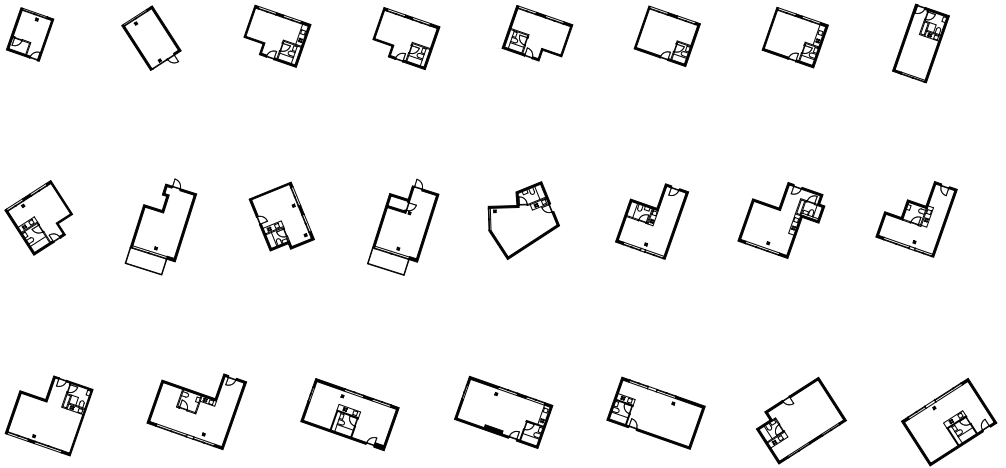
³⁴⁷ Gérald Ledent, Chloé Salembier and Damien Vanneste, “Dwelling past the limits of housing. Housing facing the individualization of society, the cases of Kalkbreite and La Sécherie,” in *Sustainable Dwelling. Between Polyvalence and Empowerment*, ed. Gérald Ledent, Chloé Salembier and Damien Vanneste (Louvain-la-Neuve: Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 2020), 49-75, 23.



■ Joker room

5m

4.5 Boskop, La Sécherie, Nantes (France), 2008. Plan of the ground floor.



4.6 Muller Sigrist Architekten,
joker rooms in Kalkbreite, Zurich
(Switzerland), 2014.

5m

Gennep defines as formative to all the ceremonies which accompany the transition from one social position to another. While reporting several examples of rituals related with the architecture of portals and doors, van Gennep claims that:

“In order to understand rites pertaining to the threshold, one should always remember that the threshold is only a part of the door and that most of these rites should be understood as direct and physical rites of entrance, of waiting, and of departure — that is, as rites of passage.”³⁴⁸

Entrance, waiting and departure: a door to enter, a room to wait in and a door to exit, being the pure architectural representation of the passage.

In recent years, the concept of the dislocated apartment has gained public recognition, and has been developed following different declinations. One of the projects that make extensive use of this system is certainly the Kalkbreite, a cooperative housing complex designed by Müller Sigrist and built in Zurich in 2014. The project comes from the conversion of a tram depot (still present at the ground floor level) into a multifunctional urban block, where housing, offices, commercial and cultural spaces, all come together around a generous central courtyard. What is interesting about the Kalkbreite is that the requirements and guidelines for the project were set in close collaboration with citizens, members of the cooperative and future residents, who clearly shaped the building according to very concrete needs and wishes. The design process involved nine working teams of fifty people, each in charge of different aspects of the final project, and tasked with the overall goal of maintaining a social mix, providing outdoor space and spaces for children, and build a structure to facilitate management. Different in form and size, dwelling typologies provided range from traditional units, to cluster apartments and studio spaces, all challenging the traditional spatial standards of the City of Zurich. The reduction of private space to a minimum is compensated by the generous provision of communal facilities such as a collective kitchen and dining room, a library, a roof garden, shared laundries, a sauna, and so on. In addition, a series of “joker rooms” are scattered all around the building; these spaces, measuring approximately twenty-nine square meters and equipped with a bathroom but no kitchen, can be assigned to housing units for limited periods of time ranging from six months to four years. Differently from the “dislocated room,” the “joker room” can be used almost independently, as a hotel room, but the fact that it is always considered in relation to a main apartment, highlights that its use is

³⁴⁸ Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 25.

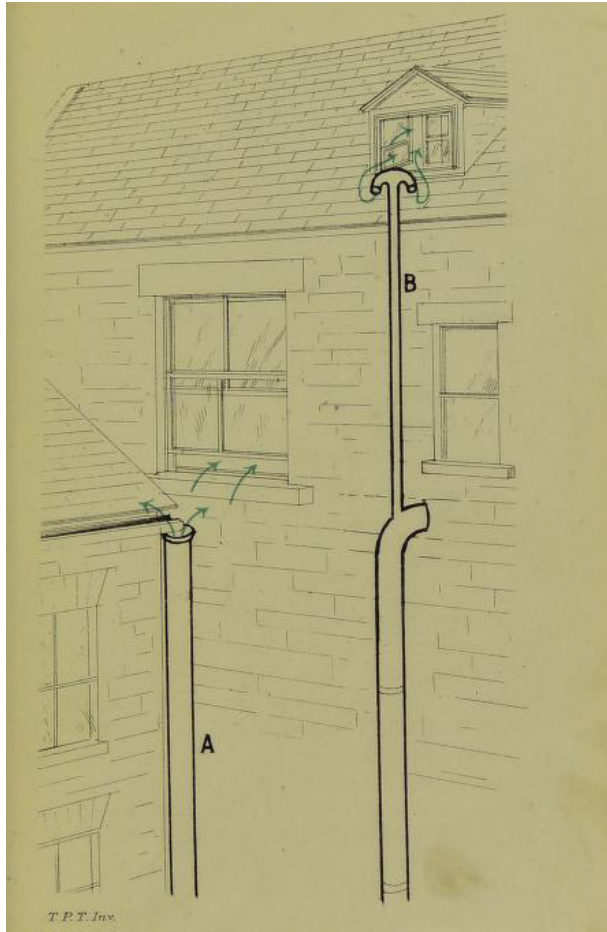
inextricably linked to the happenings and transformations taking place in the managing household. Similarly to the resident of La Sécherie, in Kalkbreite, a family of five makes use of the joker room as a temporary home for one of their young daughters. In this case, the family moved from a 250 square meters house in the Swiss countryside, to a 62 square meters apartment in Zurich. The choice was informed by the need of acquiring a more flexible housing configuration, one that could accommodate the departure of children and the parents' old age. Indeed, only one of the three daughters still lives with the parents but, as she would not fit in the main apartment, she occupies one of the joker rooms located in a different part of the building. Here, she can develop her own independence while still maintaining ties with the family, facilitating the transitional period before eventually finding her own home.³⁴⁹

While it might seem that, today, rites of passage play an increasingly less crucial role within the organisation of society, the projects studied above confirm the opposite. In both cases, it is the process of initiation, the accompaniment of a child or a young person through different stages of growth until adult age, which suggests specific architectural solutions. Clearly, current rites of passage do not assume the same finality of ancient rituals, where only through scripted celebration a certain happening would be recognised by the community. Today, everything happens the same, whether it is formally witnessed or not. But a certain ritualistic nature persists even in our contemporary society, and, in some cases, it serves to give order, to create meaning and shared experiences. As much as Mario Praz periodically changing the furniture in Lucia's room following and shaping her personal development, the occupation and appropriation of a room of one's own, a dislocated room or a joker room, represent a process of transition and self-affirmation through which young adults establish their place in society. While there is no stone portal to cross, a room with a different floor, a special wallpaper, posters or curtains, all contribute to symbolise a territorial passage, an architectural moment which represents a transition in life.

4.3 Illness

³⁴⁹ Gérald Ledent, Chloé Sallengier and Damien Vanneste, "Dwelling past the limits of housing," 70.

Illness, or rather the attempt to get rid of it, has greatly influenced the production of architectural form. The emergence of modern ideas



4.7 “A” fall pipe communicating with sewer opening just below the bedroom window; “B” ventilator of soil-pipe opening below attic window. From Thomas Pridgin Teale, *Dangers to Health: A Pictorial Guide to Domestic Sanitary Effects* (London : J.&A. Churchill, 1879), plate XXII.

on hygiene has changed the way to look at everyday spaces, linking the health of bodies to that of their environment. Together with the urban transformations finalised at the containment of infectious diseases, in the second half of the 19th century, a great deal of attention was given to the architecture of dwellings. Already in the 1830s and 1840s, the work of health reformers in various parts of Europe and the United States, contributed to raise awareness on health issues as related to recurring epidemics, especially pointing to the poor living conditions of the working class. In this context, new methods were employed to support the development of a healthy urban environment, and the entire educated class, including architects, doctors and engineers, collaborated in the design of model houses. As British historian Annmarie Adams claims in her book *Architecture in the Family Way*, the domestic sanitation movement considered “the house as an extension of the body and the body as a reduction of the house.”³⁵⁰ In this context, a number of treatises were published to inform the dweller of the proper way to build, organise and live houses, in order to avoid overcrowding and unsanitary conditions. Referring to the British situation at the end of the 1800, Adams argues that:

“Rather than imposing urban improvements from above through municipal controls, they tried to convince educated middle-class householders to regulate their own physical health through the sanitary regulation of their houses.”³⁵¹

The analysis of the house was carried out in two directions. Firstly, through the physiological examination of the dwelling: building materials, the quality and quantity of air and light, the occupancy rate; and, secondly, through a mass campaign of site surveys which could provide the doctor-architect with accurate information on the actual living conditions. Very well known among such treatises was certainly that of British surgeon Thomas Pridgin Teale *Dangers to Health: A Pictorial Guide to Domestic Sanitary Effects* published in 1879, where the author, through elaborate section drawings, dissects the dwelling in the same way a physician would have dissected the body. Yet, as much as on doctors and architects, the responsibility for achieving health in the home was given to women, the motherly masters of the household. Tasked with guaranteeing the well-being of the family, women not only had to assure the cleanliness of the domestic environment, they were also the designated carers of the ill, as sickness and dying were much more of a private affair than they are today, and “sick nursing” was seen as a natural extension of domestic labour.³⁵² Indeed, being ill was a condition imbued with meanings and rituals: together with pro-

³⁵⁰ Annmarie Adams, *Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses, and Women, 1870-1900* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 3.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 81.



4.8 Edvard Munch, *Death Struggle*, 1915. Statens Museum for Kunst Copenhagen (Denmark).

pitiatory rites and remedies, a series of actions were to be performed in a specific order, at a specific time every day, to ensure a proper recovery. Furthermore, the ill subject was to be isolated from the rest of the household so to avoid contagion, and it is specifically the problem of isolation, that, we will see, triggered precise architectural responses.

The sick room

It was especially in Victorian England that health awareness treatises called for the reorganisation of domestic spaces, and, once again, it is the bedroom, as the quintessential private space, that is placed at the centre of the discussion. Mary Ann Barker, an English author interested in studying domestic spaces and practices, wrote that:

“However skilfully designed the arrangements of a house may appear to be, it is impossible to know whether a great law of common sense and practical usefulness has guided such arrangements, until there has been an illness in the house.”³⁵³

And that “Many smart and pretty-looking bedrooms are discovered by their sick owner to be very different abodes to what they seemed to him in health,”³⁵⁴ Thus highlighting how sickness had the power to reorganise the relationships between household members, as well as their perception of everyday spaces. In her book, *The Bedroom and Boudoir*, published in 1878, an entire chapter is dedicated to the provision of indications on how to transform the bedroom in the sickroom. As explained by Adams, it was women’s responsibility to care for the sick at home, while ensuring their complete isolation in the sickroom; this was either a spare room, or an ordinary bedroom especially furnished in anticipation of illness in the house. Adams quotes Lady Catherine Gladstone who, in the book she authored in occasion of the International Health Exhibition held in London in 1884, wrote that it was necessary to provide, in every dwelling house, the possibility to set up a sickroom, ideally, entirely isolated from the rest of the house, or, alternatively, opening onto another room, “with windows, doors, and fireplaces where they should be, with hot and cold water supply within easy reach, and a closet properly placed.”³⁵⁵ The specifications concerning the sickroom were infinite: it was advisable for it to be located at the top of the house, even better if it could be accessed via an interior passage, the door of which should be made of plate glass so that the mother can keep an eye on her sick child, and an exterior one, from where the doctor would get in. Furniture would have to be cheap, disposable and simple, not to create confusion, and of course, easy to clean and disinfect.³⁵⁶ Then, in relation to the type of illness, differ-

³⁵³ Lady Mary Anne Barker, *The Bedroom and Boudoir* (London: Macmillan, 1878), 94-95.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁵ Catherine Gladstone, *Healthy Nurseries and Bedrooms, including the Lying-in Room* (London: Clowes, 1884), 124-125. Quoted in Annmarie Adams, *Architecture in the Family Way*, 89.

³⁵⁶ Annmarie Adams, *Architecture in the Family Way*, 89-90.

ent architectural configurations would be advised: a fever required the sickroom to be equipped with only a small fire, essential furnishings and thorough ventilation; measles, on the other hand, called for closed windows and an open door.³⁵⁷ John Gardner, British physician, goes so far as specifying the thickness of the room's window bars, of the door and of the external walls, which would have to be thicker than usual to ensure thermal protection and perfect sound insulation.³⁵⁸ In being moved to the sickroom, the individual was stripped of all familiar things, and, to a certain extent, of an identity: the sickroom was defined by others, not by the ill themselves. In this sense, the sickroom alters the interiority of both the home and of the ill person, it represents a transition territory, from which one can emerge only cured, or dead. In his treatise on the domestic management of the sick room, Antony Todd Thomson, a Scottish doctor, organises his directives in four chapters: two of them, the first and the second, are of particular importance.³⁵⁹ The first gives advice on the most suitable kind of furnishings to be used in the room, as well as on ventilation, temperature, cleanliness and the occasional darkening of the space. The second chapter, rather than providing general suggestions, directly addresses the "attendants" of the sick room, stressing the importance of self-control, judgement and intelligence in caring for the sick. Such a subdivision highlights the fact that, as much as a dedicated space, the sick require a dedicated behaviour: the carer, in crossing a threshold, would have to step into a different role, abiding by its rules and codes of conduct. As much as for rites of initiation, being ill also implied occupying a specific place, one that, in the Victorian case, isolated the individual, and constantly reminded them, and the other household members, of their debilitated status.

While being a peculiar product of the Victorian era, the sickroom was present in many different cultures, being the subject of both art and fiction, and was only the first instance in the development of the "healthy home," a topic that, from the start of the 20th century, became one of the main premises of Modernism. On the other hand, the practice of confinement, all but forgotten, came back in our own homes, during the recent pandemic, encouraging us to question their adeptness in coping with a condition we thought only pertained to the past.

Homes for the quarantined and isolated

As history teaches us, however, the 21st century pandemic was only the latest of a very long list. The word *quarantena* originates from the Italian sentence "*quaranta giorni*," which used to indicate the amount of time a ship suspected of carrying contagious diseases would be

³⁵⁷ Pye Henry Chavasse, *Advice to a mother on the management of her children* (New York: G. Routledge & sons, 1868), 215-220.

³⁵⁸ John Gardner, *Household Medicine and Sick-Room Guide: A Familiar Description of Disease, Remedies, and Methods of Treatment, Diet, Etc.* (London: Smith, Edler, & Co., 1861), 90.

³⁵⁹ Antony Todd Thomson, *The Domestic Management of the Sick-room, necessary, in aid of medical treatment, for the cure of diseases* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1845).

kept in isolation at the port, with the prohibition, for its crew, to touch ground. The restriction was firstly applied in Venice towards the end of the 14th century as a way of contrasting the spread of plague. It was specifically in Venice that quarantine developed into an architectural science: the *lazzaretto vecchio* (old lazaretto) was established in 1423 to isolate those who had contracted plague, while the *lazzaretto nuovo* (new lazaretto) began to operate in 1471 specifically as a quarantine facility to accommodate those suspected to have had contact with the disease, or those recovering from it.³⁶⁰ It is interesting to note that the forty-day period had a strong spiritual significance: in the Bible, it coincides with the period of flood in the Old Testament, the number of days Moses spent in the desert of Sinai before receiving the Ten Commandments, and those that took Jesus to appear to his disciples after crucifixion.³⁶¹ As argued by Renaissance historian Jane Stevens Crawshaw, this highlights how early modern responses to diseases were still greatly influenced by religious symbolism. Quarantine was seen as a period of purification to be spent in devotion, and was therefore linked to a series of both spiritual and practical rituals. While the majority of studies focus on the architecture and functioning of lazarettos, portraying them as early examples of state hospitals, a few sources investigate the nature of household quarantine during plague pandemics, a practice which was in use when people were believed to have had very limited contact with the ill and did not develop symptoms. Strict restrictions were implemented to coordinate domestic quarantine, following which the duration of confinement could also vary: those who had entered a house which was subsequently shut up were quarantined for eight days, while the houses where a quick death had occurred were closed for fourteen days; if a servant died and worked downstairs, custom would call for twenty-two rather than forty days of quarantine, but if a servant was ill and worked above stairs, then a full quarantine would have been necessary.³⁶² Indeed, both in the home and in the lazaretto, quarantine prevented individuals from joining many of those communal activities which structured their days, weeks and months; during such times of suspension, domestic life would be regulated mainly through prayer and religious rites. Crawshaw notes that regular religious services were held in places as visible as possible to those quarantined in their homes, while audible signs of devotion, such as the ringing of bells, would be performed regularly to mark the passage of time and the recurrent collective prayer.³⁶³ Carlo Borromeo, Milan's cardinal in the second half of the 16th century, instructed that "Bells across the parish were to be rung seven times a day, approximately every two hours, to call the households to prayer. Once begun,

³⁶⁰ Jane L. Stevens Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals: Public Health for the City in Early Modern Venice* (London: Routledge, 2016), 3.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 82.

³⁶³ Jane L. Stevens Crawshaw, "A sense of time: experiencing plague and quarantine in early modern Italy," *I Tatti Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2021): 269-290, 18.

the bell would be rung again every quarter hour, until the fourth bell signals an end to the hour of prayer.”³⁶⁴ It is again Borromeo who invites citizens to consider quarantine as “another holy time of Lent,”³⁶⁵ a comparison which aimed to portray the altered time of the epidemic as a new liturgical season, with its rules and cycles, in which people could recognise familiar religious practices. While it is not our purpose, here, to develop an extensive analysis of the plague epidemic and its repercussions on people and architecture, it is important to observe how the presence of illness, or even the suspect of its presence, had the power to reorganise domestic activities and the functions of spaces for a limited period of time. During the plague, this meant rearranging chairs near windows to attend public mass, or restricting access to specific areas of the household, or even having to completely replace furniture and personal belongings if they were considered to be infected. These rituals would be performed cyclically and collectively and would contribute to shape different modes of cohabitation.

Variations in domestic settings equally appear in response to subsequent pandemics, as, for example, following the spread of tuberculosis in the second half of the 19th century. After the discovery of the infectious origin of the disease (beforehand it was believed to be hereditary), German physician Hermann Brehmer was between the first to claim that tuberculosis could be cured with the right amount of fresh air, sun, rest, exercise and a balanced diet, and went on to open a dedicated treatment facility in Görbersdorf (Silesia). Brehmer’s theories took hold and sanatoria spread quickly all around the continent in the course of the following decades. Differently from lazzaretti, sanatoria are not to be seen as hospitals, but rather as temporary refuges, a sort of alternative form of *villeggiatura*. Located in mountainous regions, to profit of the healthy air, life in the sanatoria followed a rigid daily routine, composed of prescriptive activities, defined according to one’s own state of health, to be carried out in precise succession: waking up early in the morning, washing and breakfast, rest or exercise in the outdoors, rest in bed, first meal, rest in the sun terrace, once more rest or exercise in the outdoors, second meal, socialisation, sleep. Especially important was the time spent outside in the sun — in many cases a period of at least two hours was obligatory — for which particular architectural elements were introduced, such as sun porches and sun decks, verandas, balconies and garden shelters, all equipped with reclining chairs. Even though rest and silence were essential for the effectiveness of the cure, patients would have the chance to socialise during walks or meals, and it was especially these recurring moments

³⁶⁴ Remi Chiu, “Singing on the Street and in the Home in Times of Pestilence: Lessons from the 1576-78 Plague of Milan” in *Domestic Devotions in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Maya Corry, Marco Faini and Alessia Meneghin (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 27-45.

³⁶⁵ *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis*, II 1318 (1846).

that would contribute to generate a sense of familiarity amongst guests, who would learn to recognise each other, mourn for losses or rejoice for someone's departure, as in the most consolidate community. This interpretation of the sanatorium as an oversized, healthy, and very organised household, is well portrayed in Thomas Mann's renowned novel *The Magic Mountain*, which follows the story of Hans Castorp, a young man who plans to pay a visit to his sick cousin, resident at the Davos sanatorium in Switzerland, and eventually ends up a patient himself and stays there for seven years. French philosopher Roland Barthes, describes Mann's sanatorium as the perfect autarkic community, where a relatively small amount of strangers, united by a shared condition and allowed to live autonomously — separated from the rest of society — end up constructing ever-lasting social bonds.³⁶⁶ In this context, the moments of conviviality, such as collective meals, which Castorp finds “diverting and full of interesting episode,”³⁶⁷ are essential to reinforce those bonds, contributing to the creation of a common habit, a way of being and living that is adopted by all the members of the community, and that defines them as such.

The idea of the sanatorium as both a locus and a lifestyle did not go ignored, and many of the Modernist masters drew on these premises to develop their architectural language. After the First World War, it was clear that the Sanatorium system would not be able to cure all the cases of tuberculosis, as treatment was often elitist and too expensive for the vast majority of the population. In this context, to address the persisting issues of insalubrity which affected urban environments, architects transferred the principles of the sanatoria into the single dwelling: the house was to become a “domestic clinic,” conceived and designed following the same theory of “light and air,” and, consequently, its inhabitants would develop a new and healthier way of living. This link has been analysed and proven by many scholars; exemplary is the work of historian Paul Overy who, in his book *Light, Air and Openness*, investigates how the concerns related to air circulation, sunshine and hygiene, influenced the emergence of a new architectural movement. The fifth chapter, titled *The domestic clinic*, focuses precisely on the Modernist home of the early 1900, which he defines as a “clean and hygienic domestic factory.”³⁶⁸ Here, in addressing the introduction of revolutionary domestic designs, such as Schütte-Lihotzky's Frankfurt kitchen in place of the traditional *Wohnküche*, where the family used to gather together, Overy illustrates how much Modern domestic environments owed to the organisation of hygienic facilities in sanatoriums and hospitals.

³⁶⁶ Barthes defines the state of autarky (*autarkeia*) as self-sufficiency, contentedness, plenitude, a structure made up of subjects that requires nothing beyond the internal life of its constituents. In Roland Barthes, *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations on Everyday Spaces* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 36.

³⁶⁷ Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1919), 135.

³⁶⁸ Paul Overy, *Light, Air and Openness. Modern Architecture between the Wars* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 89.



4.9 Device for room disinfection. From G. Sobernheim, ed., *Sonderkatalog der Gruppe Desinfektion der International Hygiene-Ausstellung* (Dresden, 1911). In Didem Ekici, “The Physiology of the House: Modern Architecture and the Science of Hygiene,” in *Healing Spaces, Modern Architecture, and the Body*, ed. Sarah Schrank and Didem Ekici (London: Routledge, 2016), 47.

“Most modernist architects and designers,” he claims, “believed in the application of ‘scientific’ methodology to the design of housing and the layout of the interior. Like their colleagues in other professions they favoured the intervention of ‘experts’ at every level of society, from attempts to restructure industry on the basis of work-study and time-and motion studies to the reform of women’s work in the home (household management).”³⁶⁹

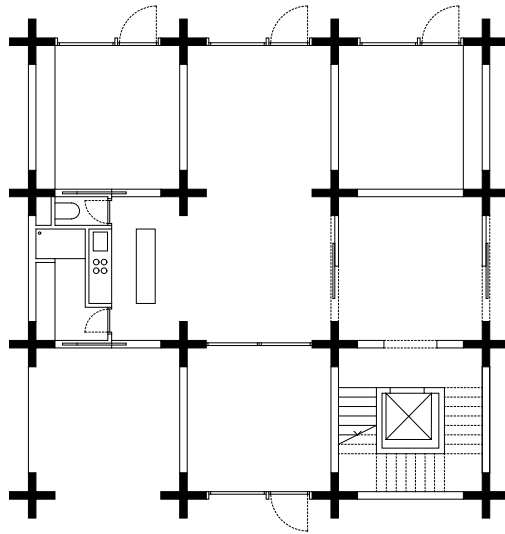
More than an attempt to criticise lower classes or shed light on their living conditions, Modernist architects were effectively trying to transform living patterns and domestic habits through the use of spatial design.

In trying to draft a framework to interpret the events related to the recent pandemic, it is important to broaden the scope of the research: situating such events in historical continuity allows us to understand that SARS was neither an isolated case, nor innovative in its development. As we saw in the context of the Victorian sickroom, the lazaretto, the sanatorium and the Modern house, illness, the ways of treating it, confining it, and coexisting with it, have deeply influenced domestic architecture and encouraged the emergence of new ways of living. With these examples in mind, it is time to shift the gaze to the contemporary situation, in the attempt to interpret the many questions and responses that emerged during and after the SARS pandemic.

Quarantined and isolated at home

At the end of 2019, the virus broke out in the Chinese city of Wuhan and began to spread worldwide at an incredibly rapid pace, to the point that, in 2020, the World Health Organisation declared the status of global pandemic. As much as during plague epidemics, different measures for cure and confinement were implemented: convention centres were transformed into temporary emergency units, hospitals were reorganised into covid and non-covid wards, while the slogan “stay home” prompted citizens without severe symptoms to self-isolate in their houses. Suddenly the home had to accommodate every private and public function without distinction: mainly through the use of digital technology, it became an office, a gym, a school, a supermarket, a restaurant, sometimes even a hospital. What emerged was that the majority of dwellings in urban environments were not equipped to sustain enforced long-term cohabitation: in both the traditional apartment and the loft, the complexity of implementing further spatial subdivisions, the lack of access to outside space (for all those without

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 93.



1m

4.10 Studio Belem, Aula Modula, research project, 2024. Floor plan of a typical apartment unit.

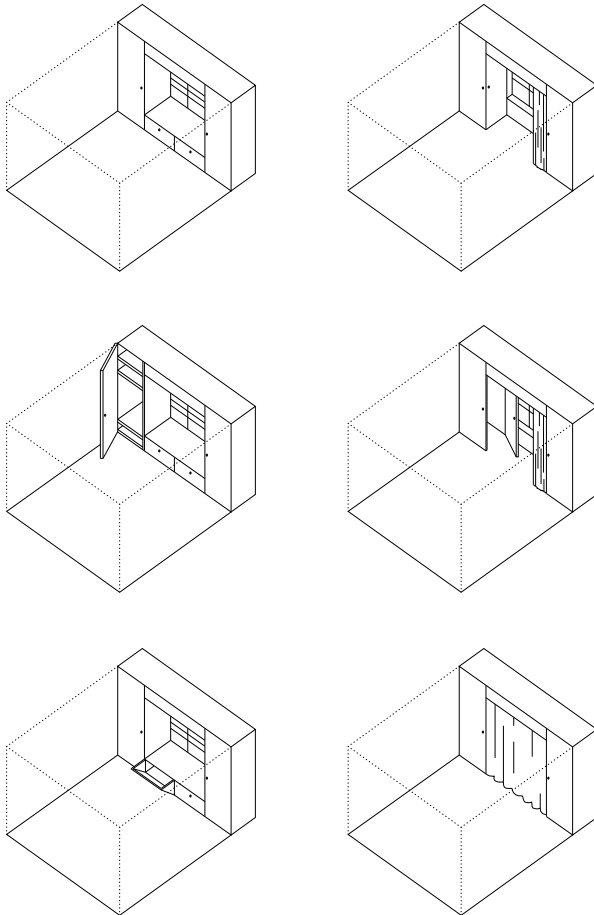
a balcony), the impossibility of complete isolation from noise or the presence of others, or, conversely, the excessive isolation caused by the absence of informal meeting places, highlighted the inadequateness of available housing layouts, equally at the level of the household and of the dwelling. The rigid plan of the former lacked the spatial flexibility and generosity which became essential during lockdown, while the fluidity of the latter made it almost impossible to achieve the desired level of visual and acoustic isolation. Confronted with the unprecedented necessity to forcefully merge private and public, most apartments resulted unsuitable to accommodate the simultaneous performance of diverse activities.

Faced with such questions, architects promptly responded with a range of visionary solutions. Imagining social life after the pandemic, Berlin office *Plastique Fantastique* created *iSphere*, a wearable transparent head bubble, possibly equipped with an air filter, a sunshade, a microphone and a ventilator, inspired to the sci-fi comics of the 50s and the utopian movements of the 60s. Other examples propose to transform the apartment into a care unit, equipping it with complex purification systems, medical devices, isolation doors and plastic chambers. This process of mechanisation builds on the Modern obsession of merging hygiene concerns with domestic design, which transformed the house into “a veritable networks of pipes, supply-pipes and waste pipes, pipes of every kind, for hot water, heating, electric light, for the news service, so that they resemble complex organisms with arteries, veins and nerves like the human body,” as claimed by German architect Hermann Muthesius in 1904.³⁷⁰ Clearly, as it happened in the case of early Modern technology, even if proving effective in the short term, these new machines are doomed to become obsolete surprisingly fast, failing to exert any relevant influence on domestic spatial arrangements in the long term. What the SARS epidemic might have brought to light is precisely the rapidity and the unpredictability of the world we live in: the increasing complexity and accumulation of activities within the home, paired with the fluidity of domestic arrangements, have been exacerbated by the pandemic but will persist long after it. In addressing the post-Covid world, French Moroccan office *Studio Belem* conceived *Aula Modula*, a research project attempting to reconsider the premises for housing design. Especially focusing on proposing solutions to accommodate teleworking and flexible forms of non-familiar aggregations (single parents, room-mates, etc.), the project deliberately ignores standard norms and codes related to traditional housing layouts, offering spaces that do not respond to pre-established functions but that are rather capable to support continuous societal changes. The

³⁷⁰ Hermann Muthesius, *The English House*, ed. Dennis Sharp, trans. Janet Seligman (New York: Rizzoli, 1979), 163.



4.11 Jacobus Wrel, *An Old Man in his Study*, The Musée d'Orsay Collection, Paris (France), 1653/1655.



4.12 Sophie Delhay, Unités, Dijon (France), 2018. Diagram of window niches.

typical layout consists in a grid of 130 equally sized square rooms, arranged around an interior courtyard, sometimes equipped with stairs, kitchens or bathrooms. Living units are composed of a series of rooms, called “modul-R,” which are reversible, neutral, and adaptable to any requirement, so that inhabitants can choose to schedule activities according to different time-scales (day, week, year), without being limited by programmatic function. Each apartment is also equipped with a “modul-O,” an individual workspace, facing the courtyard, with direct access to the shared terrace. The position of the room allows residents to decide whether to connect it to the rest of the house, or to isolate it, orienting it solely toward the courtyard. As explained by the architects, the project creates virtuous spaces that complement and enrich one another: while allowing individuals to connect with the community, inclusive and intergenerational programs break the isolation of vulnerable people and promote social reintegration.³⁷¹ Interestingly, the project is illustrated with a sequence of plans showing possible spatial evolutions at different times of the day and the week as inhabited by diverse groups of people: from the traditional family, to the group of young professionals, to the divorced couple. Although not directly addressing the matter of illness, the project deals with the issues of separation and independence within the domestic realm, as well as its social declination and the spatial possibilities for allowing multi-functionality. If having a sickroom today is unthinkable due to spatial limitations, the prospect of being able to easily re-arrange the domestic layout in the event of sickness or confinement is undoubtedly promising.

Another question that emerged when life was bound to fit in three or four rooms, and human contact was reduced to digital communication, concerns the relation between inside and outside. If, on the one hand, many social activities migrated to the virtual dimension, on the other, it became evident that genuine contact was still sought within and beyond the home. Places like balconies, flat roofs, windowsills, fire staircases and such, often seen as irrelevant and underused, provided the rare occasions to enjoy a sociability otherwise forbidden. Similarly to what happened during plague, when people in isolation gathered around doors to hear church bells and attend mass, social life during lockdown took place on the edges of the house: countless videos document people squeezed on windows and balconies singing and applauding together in a show of mutual support. While completed a year before the breakout of the pandemic, Sophie Delhay’s Unités, the housing complex she realised in Dijon, expressly dwells on this question. As much as in Aula Modula, rooms in the Unités are de-

³⁷¹ “Pour une Architecture Vivante: L’Aula Modula,” interview to Studio Belem published on the website of Pavillon de l’Arsenal (May 2020), <https://www.pavillon-arsenal.com/fr/et-demain/11663-pour-une-architecture-vivante-laula-modula.html> [accessed 7 September 2025].

fined and organised in relation to their use: in the main apartment type, the central core accommodates a common room, a semi-closed kitchen, washing and storage facilities; the two opposite facing sides are equipped with two rooms each, directly looking into the common room and equal in size. One of these rooms is a terrace, the other three can be used for sleeping, working, or leisure, and can be closed or opened according to necessity. Each of these three rooms culminates with a niche, the features of which differ slightly according to its orientation. If located in the street facing façade, the niche is full height and has the possibility of being separated from the room by a curtain. If located in the courtyard facing façade, the niche is equipped with a low bench, framing the view rather than secluding it from the adjoining room. In all the apartment variations the niche is never defined as a private space and is indifferently located in any room facing outside, be it private or common. In all cases, the niche is always thought in relation to the window, to the point that the use of the former always determines the use of the latter, and its relation with the room. Dutch painter Jacobus Wrel well portrays the imaginative role of this niche and the way it mediates the relation between inside and outside. In Wrel's works, the theme of the window is a recurrent one: in his numerous paintings of domestic interiors, often showing women sitting, working or reading, the window is always a prominent feature of the room's composition, as if the protagonist's activities inevitably gravitate around it. In *An Old Man in his Study* (dating back to around 1653), Wrel paints a particularly interesting scenery: a man is sitting at his working desk, which is placed right below the window, occupying its width almost perfectly. Regardless of the obvious lighting reasons, it feels like the position and size of the table are such to highlight the privileged relation that exists between sitting person and outside view: an intimate affair. The fact that in Delhay's Unités a curtain can be drawn behind the chair to enclose this private moment intensifies this impression: the niche becomes a world where the inhabitant is screened from domestic commotion and can project to the outside. In this sense, the curtain plays a pivotal role: neither structural, nor necessary, the decision to place it could have easily been left up to the residents. Yet, that curtain is there for a specific reason, which has little to do with screening light (the two façades facing the street are oriented towards north and east), and everything to do with the will of providing an additional space to the household, to some extent an indefinite one, that is not entirely a room, not entirely a storage space, and that does not have a fixed owner. The niche is defined only by its use, and while seemingly insignificant, it is actually the manifestation of a precise ritualisation of domestic life,

one which gives to the house the task of providing spaces for alternative forms of intimacy and for new ways of communicating with the outside world.

It is certainly too soon to draw conclusions on how the recent pandemic will influence the planning of domestic space. But if the lockdown seems to us already so distant and alien, sickness is not, and neither is the condition of confinement related to it. As part of the life cycle, it is a recurring event, one which has the right to be recognised as relevant and capable to actively reconfigure the way we inhabit our houses. Firstly, lockdown forced the mixing of public and private, of work and rest, which called for the reconsideration of the traditional division between individual bedrooms and common living spaces; in the attempt to allow multiple uses and varying degrees of separation, the house is de-constructed into a series of generic rooms. Secondly, the thresholds between inside and outside acquire a new identity: not just spaces for passing through, they become the permanent locus of exchange with the outside and with the other, encouraging both moments of introspection and sociability. Shared terraces, loggias, bow-windows and inhabitable windowsills, enrich the dwelling envelop with an additional layer of intermediate spaces which add to the possibilities of domestic contaminations.

4.4 Growing old

In the past, it was commonly accepted that giving birth and dying would take place at home. Both happenings were accompanied with a series of propitiatory and practical rituals, as well as spatial modifications: preparing, linens, towels, the nursery and the newborn bed in the former; practicing silence, drawing curtains and preparing the house for the wake in the latter. Clearly, thanks to the development of medicine and caring practices, most of these rituals are often seen as obsolete: giving birth at home is still practiced but it is most often discouraged given the risks implied, while dying at home seems to have become a luxury reserved to a few, as many elders find themselves in care homes (if not hospitals), long before the hour of their death. It can be observed that growing old, and therefore approaching death, is a process accompanied, in many cases, by a domestic transformation which can be limited to the boundaries of the household, or exceed them, bringing about a change in the location of the home itself. As

much as for holidays, old age represents the ultimate season, a different cycle than that of the recurring *villeggiatura*, but a cycle nonetheless, which has its own spatial requirements. The same goes for birth: rather than the moment of birth itself, it is about the time before and after it. This is when the mother and the child are in the most delicate state and need a space of their own. Before the child develops his or her own identity, this is shared with the mother: the nursery, in this sense, belongs to neither of them, it is the place where a relationship is formed, where the child is welcomed into the world. Grimes argues, quoting previous anthropological studies, that:

“In some societies, a newborn is not regarded as a person. People are made, not born—constructed by social recognition rather than by biological gestation alone. Social recognition of personhood, he [another anthropologist] said, is conferred by naming or initiation ceremonies rather than by birth rites.”³⁷²

Concerning the mother, van Gennep highlights how the custom of seclusion in special huts or in a particular space of the home before giving birth, was common in many societies, and with it, would come a series of taboo implying dietary and sexual restrictions.

“It has been established,” he writes, “that at the onset of pregnancy a woman is placed in a state of isolation, either because she is considered impure and dangerous or because her very pregnancy places her physiologically and socially in an abnormal condition. Nothing seems more natural than that she should be treated as if she were ill or a stranger.”³⁷³

This estranged condition, coming into being when approaching both birth and death, is what informed the definition of spaces such as the “borning room,” typically found in the homes of American settlers between the 17th and 18th century. As described in an article published in the *New York Times* in 1982, the borning room was a small space located at the ground floor right next to the kitchen.³⁷⁴ Here, babies were born and nurtured, always in proximity of their mothers, but the room also served to house sick members of the family until their recovery or death.³⁷⁵ The name borning room, however, appeared only in the second half of the 19th century in romantic novels, and it is indeed in literature works that we find the richest accounts about its uses and connotations. It somehow escaped architectural planning to exist mainly in people’s imaginary and in the tales about their lives, especially in conjunction with certain life events. This interpretation is much more fitting than what it seems, as still today, a space for birth

³⁷² Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone*, 19.

³⁷³ Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 41.

³⁷⁴ Frances Phipps, “Change in Rooms’ Terms and Use,” *The New York Times* (1982).

³⁷⁵ Jaci Conry, *A History Through Houses: Cape Cod’s Varied Residential Architecture* (Charleston: The History Press, 2010), 18.

and death is not considered to be a requirement within the domestic layout, yet, births and deaths keep happening, and homes inevitably undergo a transformation when they do. In trying to convey the point, I would like to share a personal anecdote. In 2024 my grandmother was diagnosed with cancer. She had lived since 40 years, together with my grandfather, in a small country house, composed of a large kitchen and living room, two bedrooms (one for guests), and two bathrooms. A few years before, my grandfather got diagnosed with Parkinson and soon was not capable anymore to move by himself, requiring continuous assistance. It goes without saying that soon my grandmother could not take care of him and that a carer was to be brought in. In the span of a year, a house which had remained unvaried for more than 20 years, underwent the following modifications: the guest room became my grandfather's room, almost entirely occupied by his new orthopaedic bed; the master bedroom became my grandmother's room, as well as her sick room, where she rested almost until the end of her life; one of the bathrooms became the carer's room, a single bed was put in, and a screen was built to separate it from the wc; the other bathroom had to be made wheelchair friendly and was therefore remodelled, the bathtub replaced with a large shower. Luckily, the house was all on one level, and, most importantly, it did not lack in space. It is evident, however, that the life changes caused by illness and old age could not be met by the traditional layout if not with heavy modifications. Clearly, the spatial freedom given by a 150 square meters house with a garden located in the countryside, are not the same as those given by a 40 square meters apartment in the city; spatial privilege in this case played an important role. But the story of my grandparents is the same as that of many elderly people whose homes are frozen in time, incapable to evolve following their inhabitants. The last part of the chapter will look at those projects that address the issue and challenges related to ageing at home: questions of care, accessibility, loneliness, are here given an important place within the design process, actively shaping the domestic layout.

Ritualising care

The question of “how to grow old,” especially within one's own home, emerged only in recent decades. The increasing life expectancy, especially in central and northern Europe, has contributed to make this one of the main issues in contemporary society.³⁷⁶ Differently from Modern times, when the elderly were considered as a special category, separated from the other stages of life, and were therefore mainly displaced, when the time would come, and placed into nursing homes,

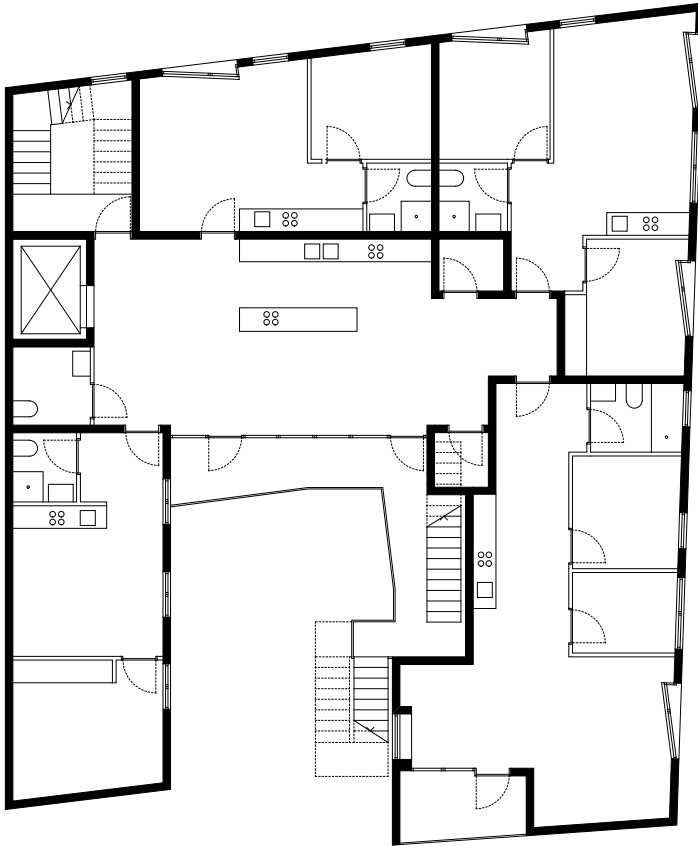
³⁷⁶ As reported by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, in 2000, there were 600 million people aged 60 and over; by 2025 they will become 1.2 billion, and 2 billion by 2050. At this point, the number of elderly people will exceed the number of young people. Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division – United Nations, World Population Ageing: 1950-2050 (New York: United Nations Publications, 2002), xxviii.

today, a renewed awareness towards one's own well-being and personal evolution has spurred the implementation of multiple alternative forms of care to accommodate old age. Simon(e) van Saarloos, Dutch American writer and curator, published the book *Against Ageism. A Queer Manifesto*, just in 2023, confirming that a wider transformation is undergoing. In the book, it is not only the concept of ageism that is dismantled, that is to say all the stereotypes and prejudices which contribute to form our Western idea of what it means to be young or old, but also the very patriarchal and supremacist structures which regulate the processes of growing and, in particular, of growing old. Van Saarloos uses the lens of queerness to reconsider assumptions related to age-specific characteristics, in the attempt to "recognize life without any categories of similarity and belonging."³⁷⁷ However, if to a certain extent it is true that ageism is built on limiting assumptions, it is also true that old age comes with its own needs and wishes, which in many cases (surely not all), are different from those manifested in other phases of life. The practical and emotional consequences of reduced mobility, the possible loss of loved ones, and therefore the question of solitude and isolation, illness, reduced income, and so on, are more present and likely to happen towards the end of one's own life. For architectural practice, it could be fruitful to understand how these events influence everyday life, as related to many different situations and not just for the elderly, what new habits and rituals can be fostered to deal with such issues, and how these can inform the birth of new design methodologies and a new conception of the domestic layout. In this context, the fight to categorisation as a means of exclusion is fundamental: it should be recognised that while conditions of dependency and the need of additional care are certainly more present in old age, the possibility of them happening in other phases of life should not be excluded.

In tackling this matter, principles such as that of Universal Design, or the Adaptable House have emerged. Universal Design broadly concerns "the design of products, information, environments, and systems to be usable to the greatest extent possible by people of all ages and abilities,"³⁷⁸ while being a socially focused design methodology which supports non-discriminative architecture. Edward Steinfield, director of the Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access (IDEA) at the University at Buffalo in New York, in his essay "Introduction: Universal Design Defined," argues that: "Universal Design does not claim to accommodate everyone in every circumstance. Rather, it continuously moves toward this goal of universal usability. Consequent-

³⁷⁷ Simon(e) van Saarloos, *Against Ageism: A Queer Manifesto* (Vancouver: Emily Carr University Press, 2023), 15.

³⁷⁸ Ronald Mace, Graeme Hardie and Jaine Plaice, "Accessible Environments: Toward Universal Design," *Design Intervention: Toward a More Humane Architecture*, ed. Wolfgang F. E. Preiser, Jacqueline Vischer and Edward White (New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1991), 156.



1m

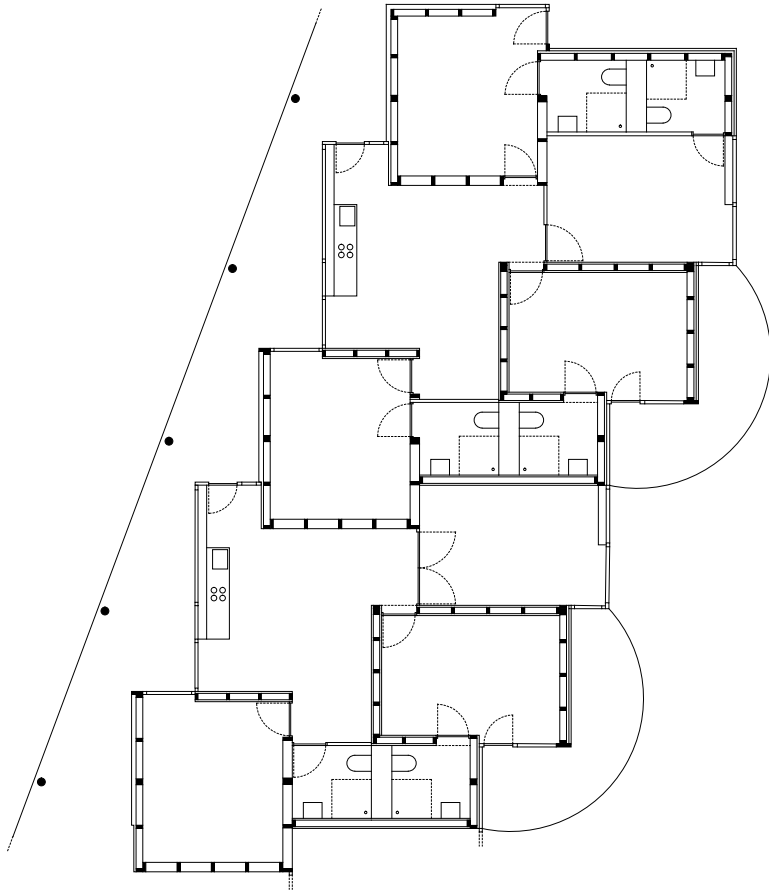
4.13 Rafi Segal Architecture Urbanism, with collaborating artist Marisa Morán Jahn, Carehaus, Baltimore (Maryland), 2020-in progress. Plan of the third floor. Courtesy of Rafi Segal Architecture Urbanism.

ly, a more appropriate term may be universal designing, a verb rather than a noun.³⁷⁹ In claiming that, Steinfeld highlights how Universal Design is a “human-centred” practice, comprising a set of practical solutions to issues that actively affect people’s quality of life in all its different stages. Following the same line, already in 2002, architect Avi Friedman in the opening lines of his book titled *The Adaptable House: Designing Homes for Change*, claimed that “A conflict exists between the dynamic nature of people’s lives and the homes in which they choose to reside,” and that “Residences can be designed and constructed to become life-cycle houses where changes are achievable and ongoing.”³⁸⁰

This is something Mies van der Rohe already experimented with in the design of his steel-framed apartment house for the Stuttgart Deutscher Werkbund of 1927. Indeed, the theme of adaptability in design was at the centre of the architectural debate during those years, but it was put on the back burner after the Second World War, only to resurge in the 60s and 70s. Yet, what is sought after in design when keeping in consideration the challenges of old age is not flexibility per se, nor the implementation of very general design principles. One of the main overlooked aspects is that, when confronted with conditions of fragility, what is valued the most is the possibility to retain a well-known, familiar, rhythm of living, which accounts for the vitality of ordinary day to day activities in both private and social situations. Disregarding this, most 20th century providers of elderly homes, built their offer mainly imitating two equally unsuitable systems of care, respectively the college model of clustered rooms and shared services, and the health care one, in the form of the hospital. In addition, these models are often implemented as separated from other forms of dwelling, inevitably posing the premises for social exclusion. Currently being built in Baltimore (Maryland), Carehaus, a project developed by architect and MIT Professor Rafi Segal, is presented as an inter-generational care-based co-housing project. Here, the idea of care is not limited to the fragile residents, which include disabled and older adults, but also to caregivers and their families, a category whose well-being is rarely considered but that is fundamental to allow the development of at-home care practices. The building is composed of twenty independent units: twelve for elderly and disabled people, four reserved to caregivers and their families, and four more to house a site manager and a team of health experts who contribute to enrich life in the house. Each apartment is equipped with a small private kitchen and dining area but, on every floor, units are clustered around a larger kitchen and other shared spaces which give access to a terrace over-

³⁷⁹ Edward Steinfeld, “Introduction: Universal Design Defined,” *Universal Design: New York*, ed. Gary Scott Danford and Beth Tauke (New York: Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities, 2000), 2.

³⁸⁰ Avi Friedman, *The Adaptable House: Designing Homes for Change* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), ix.



1m

4.14 Balissat Kaçani, housing for communal and assisted living, competition proposal, 2025. Typical floor plan.

looking the courtyard. The configuration allows the implementation of an intergenerational system of mutual care, where the exchange between the caregiver and the care receiver takes place at the level of the community rather than on the one-to-one. Mixing different types of accommodations, the house provides the caregivers the opportunity to swap shifts and share domestic tasks, while also benefiting of child-care services, and, at the same time, includes fragile residents into a dynamic environment, closer to that of an expanded house than that of an institutional care structure. The placement of dining-living areas of single units in close connection to the shared kitchens, contributes to foster a sense of intimacy: even just leaving the doors of the units open, residents who are bedridden or momentarily indisposed can take part in the life of the house, listening to the sounds of people cooking, coming back home with groceries, or just talking in the room next door. In doing this, the house provides the possibility to still perform or witness the rituals described in previous chapters, whether they be individual or collective, allowing residents to age “in continuity,” without witnessing major transformations in their habits.

Another strategy which seems to be broadly adopted in contemporary designs is that of including the question of ageing within general housing projects, rather than designing specifically for old age. In projects such as Hertzberger’s famous elderly home De Drie Hoven (built in 1971, now demolished), or Zumthor’s Home for Senior Citizens (1993), it is clear that the design responded to the challenges of old age with hospital-like solutions, such as the implementation of shared bedrooms, or through clustering services, with the consequent creation of an elderly-only community. Differently, latest projects addressing these questions, develop the design following two main base points: the provision of functionally neutral rooms, and the implementation of structural adaptability, facilitating future configurations of assisted living. An example of the former strategy is ASIR architecten’s Stadtcarré, a residential complex built in Bad Rappenau (Germany) in 2007, which mixes traditional apartments with 36 assisted living units for the elderly, as well as with a series of public amenities such as shops, a communal room, and a care office for extra assistance. Units are organised around a generous loggia which functions as an additional room, connecting the large space in front of the kitchen with that of the bedroom, only separated through a sliding door. Similarly, in Palladiumflat, built in Groningen (Netherlands) in 2006, as a residence for people above 50 years old, apartments are equipped with a south facing-conservatory, which can be closed or open according to the season, and provides the

possibility to inhabit an additional undefined space. Dwelling on the second base point, Swiss office Balissat Kaçani's recent competition proposal for a housing complex merging communal and assisted living, implements structural adaptability through the adaptable placement of entrances and the clustering of sanitary ducts. Looking at the plan, one can see how the disposition of bedrooms placed in-between living, paired with a light timber frame structure, allows doors to be opened on each side according to necessity. This means that a room can be part of a four bedroom apartment, a three bedroom one, or function as a joker room which can be added to either one or the other should the need for assisted living arise. Such configuration allows the dwelling to function as a system of cluster apartments, a collection of rooms, if organised following the hospital model, or a series of traditional apartments of various sizes. The same strategy was adopted by the Belgian office Dogma, in a research project developed for the CLTB (Community Land Trust Brussels), in 2019. The CLTB is a non-profit association which strives to provide solutions for affordable living proposing alternative models of ownership and land acquisition. In this research project, the CLTB sought to investigate new forms of collective living especially taking in consideration the transient nature of familiar structures through time. In plan, the project is structured on the alternation of bands which accommodate respectively living spaces and services (kitchens, bathrooms). The living spaces, rectangular rooms of the same size, can be linked to one or the other living unit thanks to predisposed cuts in the cross laminated timber walls, which can be opened if the need arise, allowing the units to grow from one to four rooms apartments.

It is clear that these projects do not address ageing as an issue *per se* but rather extrapolate from a condition of need certain design principles which can be adapted to support different configurations of care. In this sense, care takes the place of young age or old age in the life cycle, allowing us to focus on the passage between conditions where care is needed and conditions where it is not, or in different ranges, rather than hypostatising life stages risking to limit their definition. In this case, it is important to note how the majority of projects dealing with such questions is un-built, or still at a research level. At this time, they might represent the exception, the work of a few sensible architects who feel deeply in touch with the contradictions and challenges of the 21st century, but they might also represent a new tendency, the guidelines that mainstream design will eventually follow in the next 10 to 20 years. In conclusion to this chapter, one could advance a theory,

or rather an understanding: if indeed prowess and decay represent inherent stages within the life cycle, this does not mean that they always follow a predefined order, or that their succession is mono-directional. Illness, young age and old age, fundamentally imply varying configurations of care: recurrent, evolving, and different for everyone. If we were to go back to the beginning of this enquiry, and imagine what forms do rites of passage take in the contemporary world, we might notice that their boundaries are fading: van Gennep's classification into rites of separation, transition and incorporation is much less definitive than it was for ancient communities. In progressing from rites of passage to rites of care, the architectural representation also undergoes a transformation: rather than a two-dimensional threshold, the territorial passage acquires a three-dimensional quality, from a portal to a room, a place in which the experience of the "passage" is expanded temporally and spatially.

Epilogue

Epilogue

Four Questions

What do we speak about when we speak about home? It could be argued that the very idea of home as an architectural construction does not solely emerge from the need to seek physical shelter but also from the will to settle and give form to life. This form appears when a human activity becomes stable and is ritualised, that is, when it is situated in time and space, and performed according to certain rules. Ritual is therefore the tangent point between the worlds of form and that of activity. As monasticism teaches us, ritual is also what allows communities to establish ways of living together, defining degrees of proximity which are materialised in the built form. Throughout time, different rituals, emerging in response to social concerns and constraints, have contributed to establish forms and uses of domestic spaces, many of which have crystallised into dogmas. Specifically, there seems to be a certain idea of home, established between the 19th and 20th century, which, regardless of changing economic and social conditions, persists almost untouched in people's imagery. Sharon Marcus, Professor at Columbia University, in her book *Apartment Stories*, pictures this idea of home first and foremost as an interior, with many rooms abounding in furniture, decorations, and material goods that make it a self-contained world.³⁸¹ The traditional family, protected by external influences and secluded from the public eye, thrives in it, constructing an idea of domesticity based on rigid gender roles and hierarchies. Today, this home is but a mirage. Living in the contemporary city demands the dismantling of assumptions and preconceptions that permeate the very idea of what a home is and how it should serve us. While searching for alternatives to the bonds established by blood ties, city dwellers look for community in the face of individualisation, flexibility as opposed to rigidity, and sharing as a way to deal with the economic crisis and the depletion of resources. Here, architecture plays a crucial role: mediating between the collective and the individual, it mirrors the development of an alternative form of life. As claimed by Superstudio in their seminal work *Gli Atti Fondamentali*, our life is but an ensemble of rituals, which, to avoid the religious reference, they decide to call

³⁸¹ Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 1.

“ceremonies.” We live through an uninterrupted ceremony from birth until death, and all our actions, even the most biological aspects of existence such as nourishment, excretion, sex, and so on, are inextricably rooted in ceremonial frameworks which allow us to give order to our individual and social lives.³⁸² Our homes are built on these grounds.

While it would be presumptuous to attempt a categorisation of universally performed rituals, the research has highlighted the emergence of certain tendencies within current housing production, where rituals originate from acts of mutual acknowledgment and support in the face of hardship, or from strategies that conciliate conditions of solitude and togetherness. The establishment of such rituals affect the way domestic spaces are planned and organised: communal meals require an extra-large kitchen and a generous dining table; shared domestic labour and childcare demand the collectivisation of equipment, and the establishments of synergies between housing units; practices favouring energetic and economic sustainability influence the relation between windows and walls, and the ways of moving within the house. In this context, four questions emerge, translating the current zeitgeist into key design principles which synthesise a new way of conceiving domestic architecture in the urban realm.

1. *The extra room*

A room without function, which can be used in many ways and does not belong to anyone: an extra bedroom, a sick room, a workspace, a room to practice sport, a room for an adolescent son, a room for an elderly parent. This room is surely not an innovative device, on the contrary, as we have seen, it has asserted its presence in many kinds of homes and historical contexts. At present, one of its most important spatial features, which can be observed in projects such as Kalkbreite, is that this room has now become an autonomous entity, to be connected with one living unit or the other according to necessity. Rather than being just another part of the household, it has come to indicate a typology in itself, materialising transiency. The extra room might acquire a specific connotation when applied in the context of collective housing. Here, the provision of an extra space, in addition to the possibility of acting as a satellite to the main apartment, can function as the link between two or more units. Challenging the boundaries of private property, its location makes it impossible to be completely appropriated by one person only, acting as both a buffer and a gathering space. The architectural quality of this room recalls that of great medieval halls, which represented the household as a community of people, an expression of bonds and hierarchies at play within a group.³⁸³ As Evans

³⁸² Superstudio, “Gli Atti Fondamentali. Life Without Objects (1971-1973),” in *Superstudio Opere, 1966-1978*, ed. Gabriele Mastrigli (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2016), 368-508, 431.

³⁸³ For an in-depth study on the social meanings of the medieval hall see Mark Gardiner, “Conceptions of domestic space in the long term – the example of the English medieval hall,” *Medieval Archaeology in Scandinavia and Beyond: History, trends and tomorrow*, ed. Mette Svart Kristiansen, Else Roesdahl, James Graham-Campbell (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2015), 313-333.

described in *The Empty Room*,³⁸⁴ the use and organisation of this space was based, as much as it is now, on the collective agreement of inhabitants on certain ground rules of what activities it is acceptable to perform within it and at what times. Characterised by sparse furniture, a certain spatial generosity and rough finishings, which recall the feel of industrial workshops, the room is thought to host afternoon childcare, hobbies, as well as special events such as birthdays or annual celebrations, which would hardly fit within the limitations of contemporary housing plans.

2. *The common kitchen*

Throughout history, common meals have represented crucial social performances, defining occasions for coming together while establishing roles and hierarchies amongst both guests and members of the household. The still from Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* (1991) which opens this dissertation is emblematic. It shows Edward's host family gathered for dinner: the father at the head of the table, the mother sitting close to the kitchen, the young child, Kevin, opposite to her. This idyllic picture is disrupted only by the presence of Edward's hands in the foreground, highlighting the strength of a ritual which persists unvaried even when confronted with the most absurd of situations. Yet, the research shows that, before becoming the representation of the nuclear family in the course of the 19th and 20th century, common meals were embedded with different meanings and represented diverse social configurations. Today, the proximity between kitchen and dining table, as well as their collectivisation, are but a new declination of what eating together means in current times.

3. *The niche*

It is sometimes forgotten, in today's hyper performative society, that hiding, like for any other animal, is a fundamental human instinct; to find tranquillity, to escape from threats, to observe without being observed. While the home expands beyond familiar boundaries and the bedroom opens up to all sorts of different activities, one is left wondering if the possibility of being completely screened from the other even exists at all. The concept of privacy initially emerged as intrinsically linked with that of private, from the Latin *privatus*, used to suggest something that did not belong to the state but to oneself, as opposed to the *publicus*, that belonged to the collective. In the 18th century, its meaning evolved to indicate the realm of the family as juxtaposed to the public sphere, being associated with a certain understanding of the household that would oppose the domestic to the socio-political di-

³⁸⁴ See Chapter 1, p. 37-39.

mension, individuating the bedroom as the core of private life. However, privacy could also be interpreted as the will to retreat, whether alone or with someone, to establish the boundaries of more or less intimate forms of introspection or exchange. After detaching its meaning from that of private possession, it is evident that the concept of privacy is as much an individual as a collective matter. During a conversation investigating the meaning of “negotiation,” Derrida claims: “I do not believe in the conceptual value of a rigorous distinction between the private and the public. There can be the singular and the secret, but these resist the ‘private’ as much as they do the ‘public.’”³⁸⁵ In the singular and the secret we find two concepts that are helpful in going beyond the cultural construction of normative privacy. Simmel further defines secrecy as consciously willed concealment, claiming that it is a universal sociological form, and, as such, it should be separated from the moral validity of its content.³⁸⁶ In describing the construction of society, he states that the very alternation between proximity and distance is what allows relationships of intimate character to exist and survive: without moments of distance and intermission, the charm and the content of such intimacy would be lost.³⁸⁷ In collective dwellings, where these boundaries are constantly being redefined, working with different gradients of secrecy is necessary in order to provide inhabitants with the feeling of isolation. Niches and cabinets, hidden behind curtains or movable panels, allow to create hyper private spaces within semiprivate ones. These small ravines recall ancestral habits, as Christopher’s Alexander notes when reminding us how much children love hiding in cave-like places.³⁸⁸ Having the possibility to be truly alone, in a controlled, enclosed environment, gains new significance in the context of a society where constant connection has almost erased the possibility of seclusion.

4. *The collective home*

If, on one side, secrecy should have its place in the contemporary home, on the other, understanding living as a shared experience requires dismantling the traditional opposition between domestic and public sphere. Such divergence, rooted in the idea of privacy that took hold over the past three centuries, is rethought in the context of collective housing, where a group of people agree on a certain way of living which prioritise the well-being of the community over the individual. While much of life happens without following a script, the contract between parties over how and when things should take place, especially when concerning shared environments, is at the base of the very possibility of coexistence. In transcending differences in age, gender and

³⁸⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, ed. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford University Press, 2022), 17-18.

³⁸⁶ Georg Simmel, “The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies,” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 11, no. 4 (1906): 441-498.

³⁸⁷ “The strenuous organizing forms which appear to be the real constructors of society, or to construct society as such, must be continually disturbed, unbalanced, and detached by individualistic and irregular forces, in order that their reaction and development may gain vitality by alternate concession and resistance.” *Ibid.*, 448.

³⁸⁸ Christopher Alexander, *A Pattern Language. Towns, Buildings, Construction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 928.

socio-cultural backgrounds, rituals are the core of this shared contract: while mutable, they allow communities to fix certain rules of conduct, either for short or long-term periods, and establish practices for sharing both spaces and resources. It goes without saying that a special kind of architecture emerges in order to accommodate the institution and perpetuation of these collective living practices, which, if analysed, can provide us with invaluable insights on the making of the contemporary domestic project.

Architecture in time

In conclusion, this research is but an attempt to analyse domestic space as an architecture in time; to consider the temporal dimension of living, and the succession and repetition of simple acts and habits, as fundamental space-making devices. What can be discerned from the study of temporal structures and rituals which take root within the home, is that there is a difference between institutional, individual and collective time. The first is an imposed arbitrary structure devised to regulate, at an almost universal level, the activities of business and production: school time, factory time, travel time (functioning hours of public transport), or commercial time (opening hours of shops). The second follows individual needs when they arise: hunger, thirst, cold, and so on; actions are performed at certain times and are regulated by bodily rhythms. The third, and most interesting for this thesis, refers to shared time: those moment of the day, the week, or the year, when a certain amount of people decide to bend personal and institutional time in order to create time for being together. These moments can be cyclical, the celebrations of festivities, or recurring events such as shared meals, birthdays or holidays; or they can be punctual, individuating special occasions which happen sporadically, if not once in a lifetime, like births, deaths and marriages. Kevin Lynch, in *What Time is this Place*, provides us with an incredibly accurate analysis of the different ways time is embedded in the physical world, and how behavioural patterns and human activity influence architecture:

“Until recently environmental design was preoccupied with the permanent physical artifacts: buildings, roads, and land. But the human activities occurring among those artifacts are of equal or greater importance to the quality of a place. With this principle in mind, physical design has been broadened to become spatial design, planning the form of behavior and things in space. But if it is to deal with behavior, it must consider the temporal as well as the spatial pattern, and it becomes an art of managing the changing form of objects and the standing patterns

of human activity in space and time together. Activities shift cyclically and progressively within their relatively unchanging spatial containers. The form of those containers cannot therefore ‘follow function’ unless the use of a space is reduced to some single, invariant type of behavior. And allocating spaces to a single use (which seems to be an increasing tendency today) is usually inefficient and often socially isolating. The timing of an action or a physical intervention has as much to do with the good functioning and style of a place as does the location of that action or intervention.³⁸⁹

In doing this, he highlights one of the most crucial questions that emerge when considering the planning of time in relation to the variability of ways of living. On the one hand, he recognises the current tendency to fragment temporal frames: especially today, the allocation of time is generally much less rigid than before the industrial revolution and can greatly vary from person to person. Furthermore, an increased awareness towards the natural times of the body — attention span, mood, fatigue, health, excretion, exercise — and how they might clash with the hours of work or the organisation of the week, is encouraging us to rethink established timings and artificial temporal divisions, which might be ripe for modification.³⁹⁰ On the other, he highlights how time patterns are fundamental for both social coordination and collective expression, and that, their complete absence might cause disorientation even in individual behaviour. “We want to celebrate time, not simply to organize it,” Lynch states, adding that temporal meaning is always accompanied by spatial meaning, that distinctive events in our lives find resonance in distinctive places, and that “Places and events can be designed to enlarge our sense of the present, either by their own vivid characters or as they heighten our perception of the contained activity.”³⁹¹ Spaces can therefore transform together with time, supporting special and ordinary occurrences, whose scale can vary according to whether they are addressing an entire city or just a limited group of people. As Lynch argues, we should increase the density of such events, rather than letting them disappear, as they enrich our individual and collective lives. Consequently, the built environment should be able to follow these transitions, alternating between dramatic and gradual shifts: “New rituals of time might arise: letting in the light, celebrating the solstice, dramatizing a residential move, marking birth and death,” in the attempt to create a more human calendar.³⁹²

The research developed in these pages, confirms that current hous-

³⁸⁹ Kevin Lynch, *What Time is this Place* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972), 72.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 86.

ing architecture is dealing with the need of building for a continually changing time, which, however, does not disavow the desire for permanence and structure. In attempting to accommodate a new dimension of shared time, and to relate it with individual and institutional times, homes expand beyond traditional boundaries, new spaces are invented, while forgotten room types make their comeback as places for conviviality. Ultimately, it is clear that domestic spaces and practices are contingent and cannot adhere to a fixed structure; however, in organising days, weeks and months we seek order, we establish cycles and recurring events, trying to form a shared ethos and an idea of community. Reforming domestic space means, first and foremost, envisioning an alternative form of life, one that does not respond to traditional familiar codes but that supports, instead, the complexity and mutability of contemporary home environments. There are infinite ways in which this study could be further developed, and it is evident that many aspects could have been explored further. However, in being a framework more than a complete work, the research points to certain precise questions which have as much to do with domestic architecture as they have with the ways we live our lives, matters that touch all of us. What is sought here is no conclusion but a beginning: any gaps and all the stones left unturned will hopefully become inputs for future investigations.

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Back cover: illustration from Christopher Alexander, *A Pattern Language*.
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