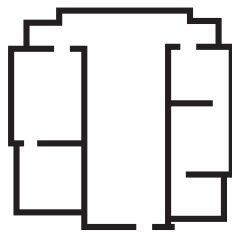


Familiar Horror: Toward a Critique Of Domestic Space

1. Paolo Virno, *E così via, all'infinito: Logica e antropologia* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2010), 79.
2. Richard Bradley, "A Life Less Ordinary: The Ritualization of the Domestic Sphere in Later Prehistoric Europe," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 13, no. 1 (2003): 5–23.

The house as a specific mode of dwelling originates in part from a desire for stability. Unlike other species, the human animal lacks specialized instincts and is thus permanently uprooted from its environment. As Paolo Virno has noted, humans are subject to a sensory overload that often compromises self-preservation.¹ If there is a fundamental character of the human being, it is its feeling of not being at home. For this reason, we can argue that the invention of the house as an architectural apparatus is motivated not only by the need for protection from a hostile territory but also by a desire to settle and to give ritual form to life. A ritual is a set of actions performed according to a prescribed order. Its function is to provide an orientation and continuity on which patterns of behavior can be established and preserved. If for early nomadic societies to live meant to confront extreme environmental conditions, the house offered a way to crystallize a routine against the chronic unpredictability of existence. For this reason, the first forms of housing were also temples where humans and gods were supposed to live together.² The ritualization of life fused material existence and spiritual transcendence within the same place, making early forms of domestic space a fixed point within the open-ended space of the natural environment. Once the house became a fixed point, it also became a burial place for its members. This practice demonstrated a desire for occupational rights and the reproduction of social relationships across generations.

As a temple for the ritualization of life, the house inevitably becomes a way to occupy and claim ownership of a place, as well as a space for the care of its members. Archaeological evidence indicating that the ritualization of ownership was the main purpose of the house has been found in clay figurines produced by the first horticultural communities in the Fertile Crescent during the ninth millennium BCE. In his seminal article "The Changing Face of Clay," archaeologist David Wengrow argues that the production and ritualized use



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3. David Wengrow, “‘The Changing Face of Clay’: Continuity and Change in the Transition from Village to Urban Life in the Near East,” *Antiquity* 72, no. 278 (December 1998): 783–95.

4. *Ibid.*, 787.

5. *Ibid.*, 790.

of these clay figurines “provided a performative language of negotiation in which transactions could take place.”³ The clay figurines represent humans, animals, and a range of geometric figures, but the majority depict women, many with full breasts and hips and protruding bellies suggesting pregnancy. Lacking a centralized authority, early communities drew on these clay figurines to lend weight to property rights and contractual proceedings. Following Wengrow’s interpretation, it is possible to associate the making of these figurines with the sexual division of labor whereby women became tools for production and reproduction and, as such, exchangeable as animals or goods necessary for the maintenance of life. The organization of early houses reflected this gendered division of labor by separating spaces devoted to production and reproduction from those devoted to hospitality and storage, as seen in the rectangular and circular structures found in the Balikh Valley in northern Syria. Archaeological evidence suggests that circular buildings were used for food preparation and weaving while rectangular buildings were created to store goods and clay figurines, establishing a political and economic realm apart from that of women. Within this domestic organization, women were confined to productive and reproductive activities while men managed resources and engaged in trade and hospitality.

As Wengrow suggests, the segregation of domestic realms meant that the hearth no longer served as a shared locus of production, exchange, and ritual. “Instead we see a process of fission in which circumscribed spaces, symbolically elaborated to reflect the disparate economic functions of men and women, provided discrete realms for the performance of activities perceived as socially incommensurate.”⁴ In later dwellings, domestic spaces were internally segregated by gender, as illustrated in Wengrow’s diagram of a typical tripartite house of the late Ubaid period (5000–4300 BCE).⁵ Here the representational space of the house, devoted to ritual and hospitality, occupies the central room and defines two separate poles of domestic space: the female space for food processing, weaving, and nurturing infants and the male space for storing goods and administering the house. This tripartite model is an archetypal form in which multi-room aggregation both divides and unites the different functions of the house within a clear hierarchical logic. As such, it foreshadows the representational role of the house as a place of mastery and hospitality while hiding and diminishing its reproductive functions.

Hypothetical model of a tripartite house from the Late Ubaid period (5000–4300 BCE). Plan redrawn from David Wengrow, “‘The Changing Face of Clay’: Continuity and Change in the Transition from Village to Urban Life in the Near East,” *Antiquity* 72 (1998).

6. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

7. On the distinction between *bios* and *zoe*, see Giorgio Agamben, "Form of Life," in *Means Without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 3–12.

8. Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. T.A. Sinclair (New York: Penguin, 1957); Arendt, "Labor," chap. 3 in *The Human Condition*, 79–135.

9. Aristotle, *The Politics*, 68.

10. *Ibid.*, 69.

Labor

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt describes human life as consisting of three spheres: labor, work, and political action.⁶ While labor is concerned with the biological reproduction of the species (cooking, eating, sleeping, taking care of the household), work produces objects that may outlast the life of a human being. In antiquity, the more that work was independent of mere survival, the more it was considered worthy. Political action, on the contrary, concerns the meaning of existence as independent from life. For Arendt, the difference between existence and life can be described as the difference between *bios* and *zoe*. The first refers to human life as individual, finite, sentient, and political, while the second denotes bare, physical, animal life.⁷ For this reason, according to Arendt, the political sphere should be autonomous from the necessities of bare life and concern only the unexpected and the possibility of radical change. Arendt's partitioning of the human condition was inspired by her understanding of the ancient Greek polis, especially as described in Aristotle's *Politics*.⁸ For both Aristotle and Arendt, politics should be independent from labor, from the burden of reproduction. This is reflected in the layout of the Greek polis, which enforces a separation between the private space of the house and the shared spaces of the city. While the house is the space of reproduction and production, the agora is the space of political life delivered from those necessities.

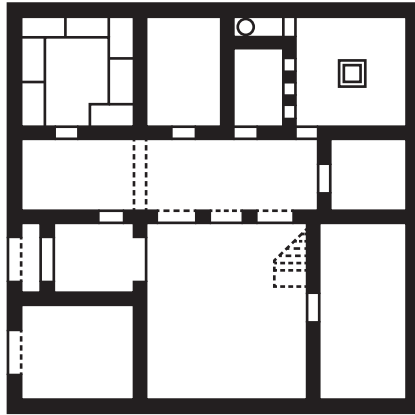
The house is thus the *oikos*, the place of *oikonomia*, or household management. The household is made of three kinds of relationships: the despotic relationship between master and slave, the conjugal relationship between husband and wife, and the parental relationship between parent and child. For Aristotle, the defining relationship of the *oikos* is the despotic relationship between master and slave, wherein the slave's purpose is to answer the master's command.⁹ Aristotle defines domestic laboring activities as those for which "the use made of slaves hardly differs at all from that of tame animals: they both help with their bodies to supply our essential needs."¹⁰ Because the condition of labor addresses both man and animal, it is the least distinctly human activity and thus the most generic. The sphere of labor addresses what is most essential in the living bodies of both man and animal in order to enlist these bodies in processes of production. In the enclosed space of the house, this form of production is the maintenance of the inhabitants' lives. Following this reasoning, it becomes clear that the emancipation of politics from the necessity of labor is easier said than done, if not

11. Bradley A. Ault, "Οίκος Καλός: The Environmental Logic of the Greek Urban House Forms," in *Housing and Habitat in the Ancient Mediterranean: Cultural and Environmental Responses*, ed. Andrea di Castro, Colin A. Hope, and Bruce E. Parr (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 123–31.

impossible. In order to participate in politics, the citizen requires an *oikos* for the management of subsistence and reproduction. Thus economy is the prerequisite for politics. This is reflected in the first two chapters of Aristotle's *Politics*, which are devoted to the *oikos* and the necessities of life. Reproduction and the maintenance of biological life are the foundation of political life, and yet since antiquity they have been hidden in the silent and enclosed space of the *oikos*, excluded from the public visibility of political life. This is reflected in the architecture of many ancient houses, especially the ancient Greek house, in which the main spatial datum is its introverted form. The most important space is the courtyard, a place for gathering the elements essential for subsistence – thus featuring basins for rainwater, wells, or cisterns – and above all a means of circulation.¹¹ The courtyard is the hub of a radial structure, providing access to all of the spaces that comprise the domestic unit. The courtyard is thus the core of the *oikonomia*, as it organizes the distribution and functioning of the household. Further, the ancient Greek house is a single-entry courtyard house, which means that the courtyard is a space not only of circulation but also of surveillance.

In the ancient Greek polis, both citizenship and the right to own domestic premises were based on ethnicity and gender: only men native to the city-state in which they lived could be considered citizens, which in turn gave them the right to own property. The preservation of ethnic identity was thus linked to the right of property, and for this reason the possibility of surveillance inside the house was crucial. The citizen/homeowner's greatest concern was the possible contact between non-kin-group males and kin-group females, since such contact could compromise the integrity of the household's patrimony and its right to own the domestic premises it inhabited. This was a particularly strong concern for households that rented part of their premises, a common practice as the ancient Greek city was inhabited by many alien residents.

The house functioned as a distributive machine used to manage not only life itself but also the integrity of property, and thus contact between the inhabitants. Here we see the origin of the idea of privacy as a condition of the household. Privacy is not just the seclusion of the household members from the outside world but also the safeguarding of the household as an integral economic property rooted in the inner sphere of the family. The plans of the houses of Olynthus illustrate the division of the average domestic space in the ancient Greek polis into two functionally defined spaces: the *oecus* complex,



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12. The *andron* could also host other activities when it was not used as a banquet hall. See Lisa C. Nevett, *House and Society in the Ancient Greek World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 53–79.
13. Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, trans. Ralph Doty (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1998).
14. Nicholas Cahill, “Household Industry in Greece and Anatolia,” in *Ancient Greek Houses and Households: Chronological, Regional and Social Diversity*, ed. Bradley A. Ault and Lisa C. Nevett (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 54–66.
15. Ault, “The Environmental Logic of the Greek Urban House Forms,” 130.

the infrastructural core of the house that included a kitchen equipped with a central hearth, and the *andron*, a space reserved exclusively for male dining, hospitality, and banquets, and which was considered the most exalted space of the house.¹²

The *oecus* complex and the *andron* were the two poles of the ancient domestic space: the hidden space of subsistence and reproduction, and the open space of hospitality and representation. The relationship between these rooms was mediated by intermediary spaces such as porches and transit rooms. The use of these intermediary spaces as buffers between the different rooms demonstrates a concern for distributing the *oikos* as smoothly as possible. In his book *Oeconomicus*, Xenophon affirms that the measure of the usefulness of a house is its layout, the syntax through which the various rooms are assembled into a cohesive and efficient ensemble.¹³ Xenophon compares the administration of the house to a dance ruled by a carefully orchestrated choreography. The house must establish the conditions of perfect harmony through frictionless cohabitation.

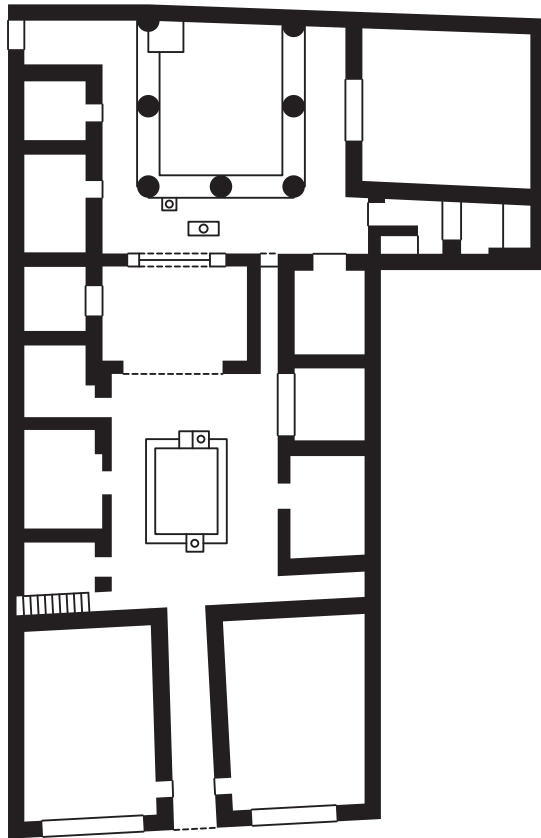
The strict interdependency of the *oikos* and the Greek polis was reflected in the way houses were built. Like the city walls, houses were a communal enterprise shared by the city’s inhabitants. Although construction itself was organized through links of kinship and social affinity, financial support often came from taxes levied on the wealthy.¹⁴ The external walls of a house, considered part of public space, were rarely pierced by windows. As the archaeologist Bradley A. Ault notes, the ancient Greek house is thus a paradox in that it was supposed to be a self-sufficient realm enclosing the family in its own private space while at the same time representing an integral aspect of the organization of the polis with its public exterior walls.¹⁵

The institution of the polis thus presupposes the *oikos*; politics is a function of reproduction. Yet in the house, politics is suspended and rendered meaningless by the demands of the reproduction and nourishment of life. For this reason, the ancient Greeks, not in spite of but rather because of the sophistication of their thought, accepted slavery as a way to assure a minority of the population the *bios politikos*, the only life they deemed meaningful.

Domestic

It is telling that we identify the space of the home as “domestic” space but rarely question the meaning of domesticity. The word *domestic* comes from *domus*, whose Greek root *demo*

Plan of a house in Olynthus, Greece, ca. 450 BCE. The room on the top left corner is the *andron*, or reception room. The top right corner is occupied by the *oecus* complex, comprising three rooms equipped with a chimney, a well, and cooking equipment.



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means “to build.” But while these origins might seem neutral, the same root also gave rise to words denoting potentially violent control, first and foremost *dominus*, “the head of the house,” and its various declensions: *domination*, *dominion*, and so on. In essence, the domestic sphere refers to a set of power relations that constitute a specific hierarchy. In a domestic space there is always a paterfamilias, owner, or landlord. Domestic space is thus organized around a vector of command that implies a subaltern relationship to power. Such a subaltern relationship is naturalized as a necessity in the very concept of the family. *Family* comes from the Latin word *familia*, which describes a congregation of slaves and relatives headed by a paterfamilias. As such, the family is not simply a biological or affective unit but rather an economic and juridical construct whose goal is to ensure both the reproduction of the population and the general order of society. We could go so far as to say that our contemporary Western understanding of family was established by Roman law, which primarily bore on the paterfamilias and his relationship to his subordinates and his property.¹⁶ The house was understood not simply as a space of reproduction but also as the ideological embodiment of the family as an estate, an all-embracing institution ruled by the paterfamilias as a king would rule a state. The Roman house collapsed the distinction between public and private space by becoming a microcosm of the city that on certain occasions even welcomed public interaction. Writing about elite houses, Vitruvius recommends peristyles, libraries, and basilicas as a way to offer adequate settings for public gatherings.¹⁷ Of course, this idea of domesticity applied only to families who could afford to own a large house, but their example was emulated on a smaller scale by the rest of society as soon as their means allowed them to acquire something more than a small apartment in a housing block, or *insula*.

Architecture provided the Roman family with a set of devices that formalized and made explicit the ideology of domesticity in communication and action.¹⁸ While the ancient Greek house was a self-sufficient cluster organized around the courtyard and sealed off from the space of the polis, the Roman house was often organized along a main axis that linked the entrance, the atrium, and the peristyle.¹⁹ Not only would the house’s doors often remain open to the street, but the axial sequence of the atrium and peristyle resembled a forum open to the public. A visually dominant position on this axis is occupied by the *tablinum*. Before the introduction of the peristyle, the *tablinum*, the master bedroom and place of

16. See Shelley Hales, *The Roman House and Social Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1–8.

17. Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, ed. Ingrid D. Rowland and Thomas Noble Howe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 78–79.

18. Hales, *The Roman House and Social Identity*, 19.

19. The best-conserved examples of this organization are the houses of Pompeii.

Plan of the so-called House of the Tragic Poet, Pompeii, ca. 79 CE. The room at the center of the house, between the entrance atrium and the *peristylium* garden at the back, is the *tablinum*, the space of the paterfamilias.

the marriage bed, was the most important room in the house, later becoming an office where the paterfamilias preserved the family records. While the axial composition of the house celebrated the authority of the paterfamilias, just as the ceremonial space of the basilica celebrated the authority of the emperor, the spaces that flanked this axis were arranged more freely to fill the area within the property lines. Service spaces such as the kitchen were pushed away from the central axis, and rooms could be adapted to accommodate any of the family's unforeseen needs. Rooms were defined by their use rather than by their space. The plethora of small vestibules, cubicula, and triclinia that surrounded the atrium and the peristyle suggest that in the Roman house the gendering of space was far more relaxed than in the ancient Greek house. Roman slaves, moreover, were not segregated spatially from their masters. Since they were part of the *familia*, their place was everywhere. Such fluidity in the organization of the domestic space reflects the fluidity of the Roman family, whose only defining limit was the idea of the family as private property. As such, the concepts of domesticity and family were defined not by custom but by law, especially by those laws that distinguished *res publica* from *res privata*.

Roman-law scholar Yan Thomas argues that the inclusion of things in the domain of law, and thus their transformation into a process (or business, as we would say today), has its origins in the designation of sacred things as *res publica*.²⁰ Sacred things were offerings to the gods that, as such, could not be commercialized. The institution of a *res publica* necessarily created the condition for a *res privata* in which everything was exchangeable. This implied that the Romans' legal strategy of exclusion and inclusion defined things according to whether it was possible to exchange them. Whether *res publica* or *res privata*, when things attain exchange value, they can only be understood as a transaction between different parties. Once things enter the domain of law, they become objects whose purpose is no longer simply their use but rather their commercial potential: things as estate. Given that the family was thus defined more by law than by biological heredity or kinship, a paterfamilias was legally allowed to adopt adult persons into the family or to change the status of family members just to ensure the best economic conditions for his property. Economic value is a legal abstraction insofar as it presents people or things not for their intrinsic qualities but for their exchange value, itself a construct that does not necessarily correspond to reality.

20. Yan Thomas, "La valeur des choses: Le droit romain hors la religion," *Annales* 57, no. 6 (November/December 2002): 1431–62.

21. Yan Thomas, *Fictio Legis: La finzione romana e i suoi limiti medievali* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2016). See also Richard Mohr, "Living Legal Fictions: Constituting the State or Submerging the Signifier," *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 19, no. 3 (September 2006): 237–58.
22. See James S. Ackerman, *The Villa: Form and Ideology of Country Houses* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 35–61.
23. Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 149.

Thomas calls this ability of Roman law to construct concepts unmoored from material reality *fictio legis*, the fiction of the law.²¹ This fiction could apply both to the value of things – where, for instance, a house is no longer defined by its concrete use but rather by its commercial potential – and to the human relationships contained within the home. In this way, the house becomes a symbolic device whose principal functions include not just the accommodation of people but also the representation of their status in society. The idea of homeownership finds one of its most potent manifestations in the archetype of the villa as a microcosm completely separated from the rest of society. The villa expresses not only the pastoral and idyllic understanding of the family but also the appropriation of land as the primary act of domesticity.²² Domesticity is, then, not only power over subalterns but also over the space and land in which this power is realized. Thus the architecture of the house is, above all, a fiction whose manipulation of reality parallels the way law manipulates reality.

The *fictio legis* made it easy for Romans to acquire, through a legal act, family roles we consider today to be strictly natural: the titles of father, mother, son, or heir had nothing to do with biology and everything to do with the rationale of preserving the ownership, and thus the order, of the house. When we talk about domestic space, we are not simply talking about a space of intimacy and affective refuge but also about a sphere driven by economic conditions that radically compromise the possibility of individual and collective autonomy, of an escape from the rules that structure society.

Separation

The condition of homeownership as we know it today was consolidated in Europe during the slow transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. As a new urban mercantile class arose in the 13th and 14th centuries, complex ownership structures began to shape the development of cities. Yet only in the 15th century did the organization of domestic space become an architectural project, as Leon Battista Alberti's writings testify. Alberti maintains that a well-off couple should have two separate bedrooms, as the bedroom was not only a space for rest and sex but also the epicenter of various other activities, from child-rearing to business.²³ The two bedrooms should be joined by a private passage to allow the couple to enjoy their intimacy – an arrangement indeed visible in Florentine palazzos of the time, including Giuliano da Sangallo's Palazzo Corsi. Alberti never suggested that an architect was needed to lay out a

proper plan, but his work – and his insistence that specific roles and behaviors should be enforced within the house and that different rooms should be defined by their use – signals a shift in attitude from that of the Romans.

It is no coincidence that the urge to manage and compartmentalize life within the house arose at precisely the moment when the demise of the feudal system and the rise of wage labor was profoundly changing the economic landscape of Europe. Marx describes this dynamic as “primitive accumulation,” the systematic construction of a class deprived of the control of their means of production through institutionalized theft and violence.²⁴ This violence was perpetrated by enclosing the commons, privatizing resources, and driving dispossessed people to urban centers where they would have only their own labor power to sell. Much less discussed is the way primitive accumulation also occurred within the sphere of the family, redefining the role of women as nonproductive, separating them from any control over the economy of their existence, and constructing a legally acceptable form of slavery.²⁵ This is not to say that asymmetrical power relationships had not existed before, both within the domestic realm and outside of it, but it was only at this historical moment that these asymmetries were formalized. Marx argues that this dynamic generated the critical mass needed for the creation of a capitalist system. Yet as political theorists such as Silvia Federici, Massimo De Angelis, and Maria Mies have noted, if this dynamic started at a specific moment in time, it has never ended. For Mies especially, primitive accumulation is an ongoing process that is essential to the survival of capitalism.²⁶

In this context, architecture comes to play a crucial role, for economic asymmetry needs not only to be enforced and organized – for instance, by relegating women to kitchens and barring them from workshops – but also, and most importantly, *naturalized*. Alberti attempts to put forward a “natural” and “rational” division of tasks that is to be seen as accepted, even desired, by all parties. From the peasant’s hut to the sovereign’s palace, the house becomes a terrain of primitive accumulation where the systematic exploitation of waged servants and unwaged wives has to be managed as well as staged, represented, and later celebrated as a “labor of love.” It is under the pressure of these conditions that the house became the target of the architectural project.

Perhaps the first extant trace of an influential architect’s interest in the domestic project is the work of Sebastiano Serlio. Partially published in the mid-15th century, Serlio’s

24. Karl Marx, “So-Called Primitive Accumulation,” pt. 8 in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1990), 871–940.

25. Perhaps the most influential book written on the subject is Silvia Federici’s *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).

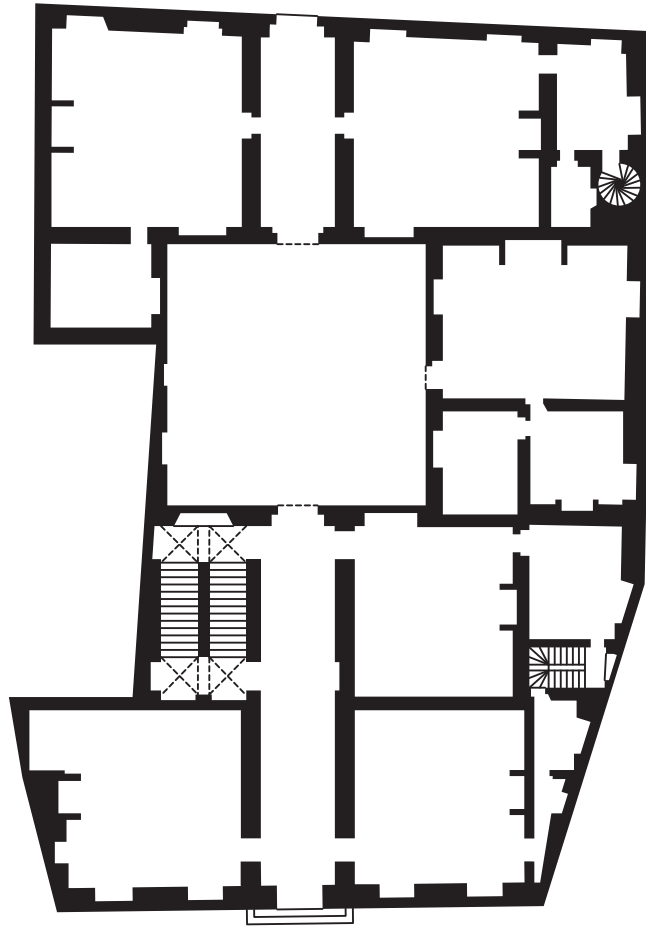
26. Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 145–46. Many other contemporary thinkers support the thesis of ongoing primitive accumulation. See, for instance, David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

27. Two manuscripts of Sebastiano Serlio's *On Housing for All Kinds of People* exist. The older one, compiled between 1541 and 1549, belongs to the Avery Library at the Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation and is partially reproduced in *Serlio on Domestic Architecture*, ed. Myra Nan Rosenfeld (New York: Dover, 1996).

28. Mario Carpo argues that the book is ultimately targeted at the middle classes. See "The Architectural Principles of Temperate Classicism: Merchant Dwellings in Sebastiano Serlio's Sixth Book," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 22 (Autumn 1992): 135–51.

research on the design of houses marks the beginning of a process that turned the interior of the house from an informal product to a highly choreographed machine. Serlio's unpublished treatise *On Housing for All Kinds of People* is entirely dedicated to residential architecture and details dozens of housing solutions for a variety of users, from the peasant to the prince.²⁷ The breadth of this social spectrum is surprising since at the time no houses, not even large and expensive ones, were designed by architects, save for their facades. Yet at the moment the articulation of the house's plan became important, it was somehow immediately clear to Serlio that the project of domestic space was not only a luxury for the upper class but also a necessity for all of society.²⁸

It is plausible that Serlio proposed a project on housing because one of the greater governmental concerns of the 15th century was the growth of the laboring population. The house became a project of accommodating all classes and reinforcing class differences, the ultimate goal of which was not simply to order society but to ensure the reproduction of life in the most orderly and secure manner. The definition and strengthening of class differences has been the unspoken goal of much modern architecture, and Serlio was no exception: he organized his examples by the owner's occupation and wealth, using the building's architectural language to express the "character" associated with each class, from the thatched roof of the peasant to the classical orders of the aristocrat. What is striking about Serlio's attitude, though, is that a number of aspects are common to all proposals, together suggesting consistent statements on domestic space applicable to all social classes. The first of these concerns ownership: the house is a commodity to be owned, and the stylistic differences of the facades mask the fact that all of Serlio's subjects are homeowners. Ownership is the precondition for a subject's ability to express himself in a building. Second, Serlio separates productive activity from the solely reproductive function of the house proper. Animal husbandry, craft workshops, and storage are relegated to outbuildings, reflecting a refined division of labor. The relatively loose internal organization of the houses suggests that the process of defining functional roles is not yet completed: halls often double as reception rooms, dining rooms, and master bedrooms, and members of the household sleep almost anywhere they can lay a cot. There is no specific typological definition of the rooms of the house, only a budding interest in the distribution of subjects in different spaces. In principle, Serlio's proposals start from a regular, defined outline, further



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29. *On Situations* is book 7 of *Tutte l'opere d'architettura et prospetiva*. The "propositions for off-square sites" are republished in *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture*, ed. Vaughan Hart and Peter Hicks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 2:282–309.

subdivided into rooms of different sizes and shapes. While it is evident that the architect is interested in creating hierarchy and difference, the rationale behind specific design choices is based simply on geometric floor plans, as highlighted by the symmetry of the layouts.

Where Serlio's work becomes particularly interesting is in his speculative projects for a series of irregular sites in his book *On Situations*.²⁹ In these cases, the skill of the architect lies in managing three design constraints at once: the irregularity of the site, the search for a symmetrical arrangement based on a recognizable figure, and the attempt to divide the interior into a sequence of hierarchically differentiated rooms. Serlio's solutions mirror the design methods typical of French and Italian architects of the time, who used regular courtyards to impose a figural character on misshapen sites and exploited *poché* elements to compensate for irregularities. An influential example is Baldessare Perruzzi's seminal Palazzo Massimo alle Colonne in Rome, built on a deep, virtually triangular plot and bounded by two party walls and a curved street facade. Like Serlio's paradigmatic examples, Peruzzi's palace is a purely residential building, presenting a mediated transition between the publicity of the street and the intimacy of the domestic space. In the Renaissance house, as in the Roman house, the courtyard is a representational space, an interiorized public space. The domestic layout is organized around this courtyard in such a way that the visitor would perceive the building as a proper palace with a legible form, even if the interior presented a warren of irregular rooms.

The tension between figural order and typological differentiation remains unresolved in these examples, as architects still operated under two different mandates: on the one hand, the construction of a regulated architectural body, and on the other, the accommodation of a domestic choreography. It is this latter task that is of particular interest to us, since we have seen that the very existence of such a choreography is not a given but rather a symptom of the ongoing subjugation of the family as a consequence of primitive accumulation. As Alberti understood, it would not be enough to rethink the house as a nonproductive domain and design it accordingly; the system also needed to be naturalized. This required not only that the roles of the family members be accepted as an unspoken and universal covenant but also that the character of the different rooms of the house be equally fixed and uncontested. As De Angelis has articulated, the key act of primitive accumulation is separation, first and foremost the

Sebastiano Serlio, proposal for a house on an irregular site. Plan redrawn from *Tutte l'opere d'architettura et prospetiva*, book 7 (1575).

30. Massimo De Angelis, *Marx's Theory of Primitive Accumulation: A Suggested Reinterpretation* (London: University of East London, 2000) and "Marx and Primitive Accumulation: The Continuous Character of Capital's 'Enclosures,'" *The Commoner* 2 (September 2001), <http://www.commoner.org.uk/02deangelis.pdf>.
31. Minimal plumbing and chimneys would mark the specific technical qualities of a few rooms, and generally only one space per building would be used as kitchen, regardless of the social class or economic standing of the owners.

separation of the producer from his or her means of production.³⁰ Manufacturing, baking, laundering, child-rearing, and retail enjoyed a close proximity and even a degree of fluidity in the premodern house, but by Serlio's time they had to be separated for symbolic and cultural reasons as much as for technical ones. Naturalizing this separation became the primary task of the architecture of housing.

Composition

When approaching a domestic project, the biggest problem for the Renaissance architect was one of subdivision, separation, and distribution, but for later architects it became how to organically compose functional fragments so complex and idiosyncratic as to threaten the coherence of the house. From the viewpoint of the history of architecture these methods might seem opposite, but from the viewpoint of the history of economy their continuity can be seen. Serlio, Peruzzi, and their contemporaries faced a relatively undefined typological differentiation of the rooms of a house, which allowed them to subdivide a building primarily according to geometric and spatial concerns, with an ideal *parti* in mind. And as services were very rudimentary, there were few pragmatic constraints as to the actual purpose of each room.³¹ The term *parti* is often associated with *parti pris*, which can be loosely translated as "starting decision," but the word itself is also the participle of *partir* in the sense of *re-partir*, "to subdivide," and it shares the root of the English word *part*. In the *parti* methodology, a building is organized as a figure, of which all parts are subdivisions. This enables complex and multiscale arrangements, as well as a legible spatial hierarchy, qualities that architects from Serlio onward valued in the design of residential buildings. The *parti* method also produces buildings whose logic departs from their relationship to the urban morphology, as exemplified by Peruzzi's Palazzo Massimo delle Colonne: the *parti* can negate or enhance the specificity of the found condition but cannot ignore it, since the *parti* develops the specific quality of the rooms from the overall arrangement rather than the other way around.

The weakness of the *parti* method is that its relationship to the functional specificity of the different rooms is not guaranteed, and in many cases the two might not work together at all, leaving underused spaces or necessitating additional adaptations. The *parti* method could work to give the residential interior a character only as long as the actual requirements in typological and functional terms were

relatively loose; the more the individual room gained a typological clarity and specificity, and the more this specificity was refined by sophisticated building and servicing techniques, the less the geometric logic of the *parti* could accommodate domestic life.

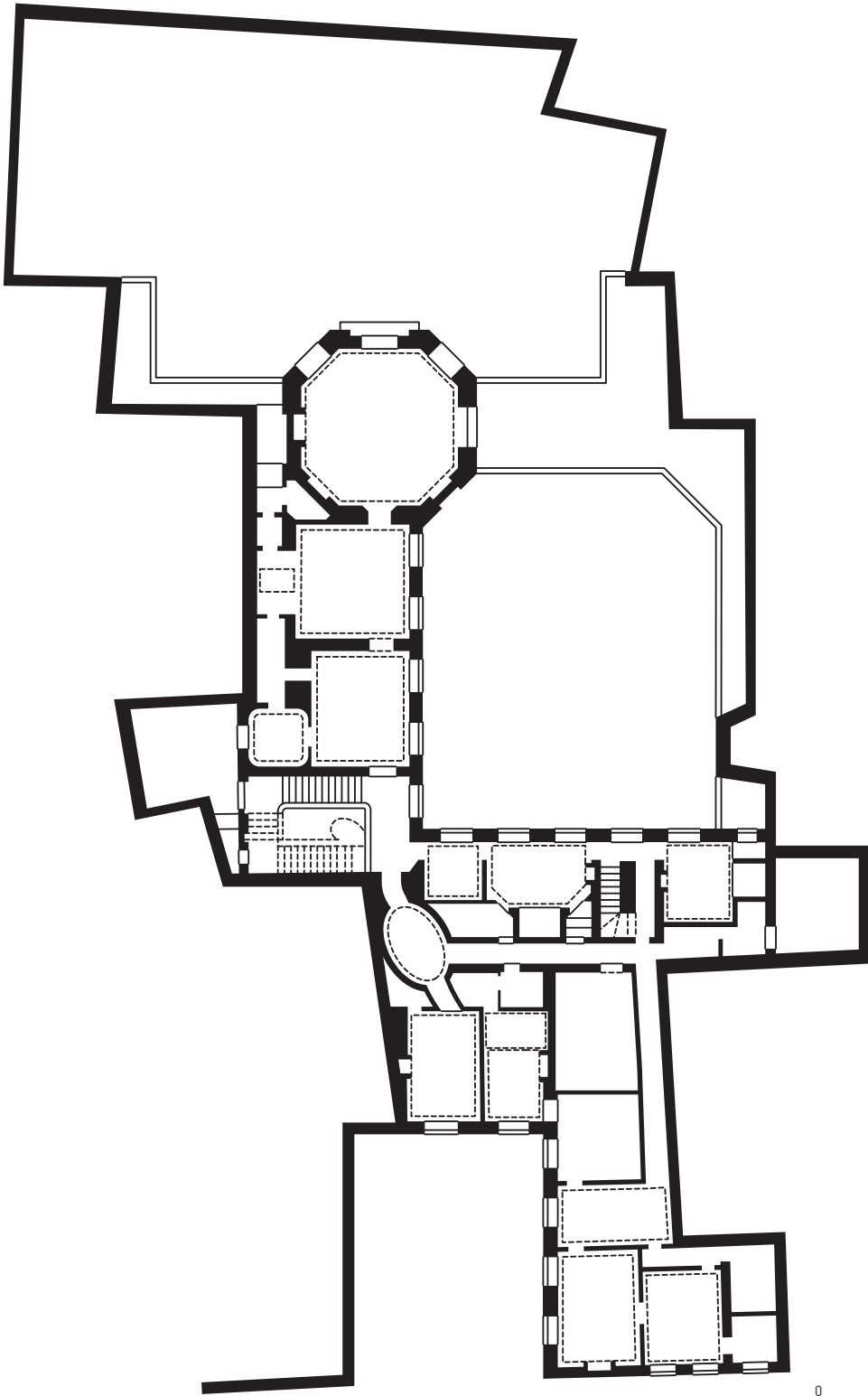
In the 18th century, houses could potentially have a stove or fireplace in every room, both allowing each family to have an individual kitchen and enabling rooms that were previously bound to a seasonal rhythm to be used year-round. The relationship between adults and children and masters and servants also changed, making it more important to define separate sleeping places for the members of the household, first in aristocratic dwellings, then for the middle class, and, for 19th-century reformers, ideally for the working class as well. Once the process of separation, definition, and subdivision evolved into the full-fledged micromanagement of domestic space, architects had to devise another strategy that would allow them to do what the *parti* could not: aggregate disparate rooms, each with its own function. Again, the architect's task was not simply to accommodate this dynamic but also to naturalize it and give it an acceptable social and aesthetic form – in short, to introduce a new paradigm that would replace the one created by the *parti*.

This new method was referred to as *composition*, a word that endures in the architectural vocabulary.³² Composition is, in the most literal sense of the term, the art of composing different parts into a seemingly harmonious whole. While the *parti* was concerned with symmetry and legible relationships between parts and whole, composition strives for a balanced formal ensemble that nevertheless can dispense with symmetry and organic part-to-whole relationships. Unlike the *parti*, which starts with a figure and then defines its parts, composition starts from parts that are joined through an additive process to form a whole. It cannot be dismissed as a purely artistic technique, for it perpetuates the same ideology that gave rise to the *parti*: a system of asymmetrical relationships embodied by the division of space into rooms of different hierarchical value, size, shape, and ease of access. Composition starts from an understanding that individual spaces can be more effectively attuned to an ultimate choreography, which they not only accommodate but also accentuate and celebrate.

The term *composition* became popular in 18th-century France, where it supplanted the older and more prosaic term *distribution*.³³ This was not only a shift in vocabulary but also a change in the way *hôtels particuliers* were designed

32. In a seminal essay, Colin Rowe notes how composition became a popular theme among architects and landscape designers at the same moment that the “ideal” principles of classicist architecture were no longer adaptable to the emergence of new domestic typologies. He defines composition as an empiricist method for accomplishing not the metaphysical order of classicist architecture but a pleasing “picturesque” order of things. Following Rowe’s definition of composition, we can see how composition’s implicit agenda was to validate an architecture devoid of a definitive order. See Colin Rowe, “Character and Composition; or, Some Vicissitudes of Architectural Vocabulary in the Nineteenth Century,” *Oppositions 2* (1974), reprinted in *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa, and Other Essays* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976), 59–118.

33. For a discussion of the historical meaning of the term *composition*, see Jacques Lucan, *Composition, Non-Composition: Architecture and Theory in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Oxford: Routledge, 2012).



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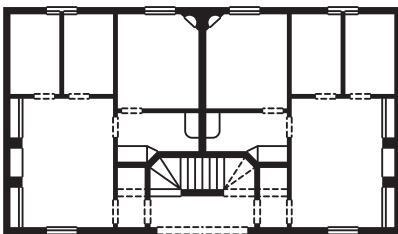
and organized. If in Serlio and Peruzzi's day architects had been primarily concerned with the construction of an overall figural order, the new paradigm encouraged complex aggregations of differently shaped rooms. These spaces could be composed in plan to fill the building envelope. Whereas the *parti* worked by subdividing the plot into a pattern that strived for regularity and consistency, composition works in an additive way by clustering an accumulation of individually conceived rooms. The legacy of the *parti* era was the persistence of a geometrically defined courtyard that allowed the rest of the plan to be colonized by heterogeneous spaces.³⁴ The *hôtel* designed by François Franque for the Marquis de Villefranche is a striking example of this technique, consisting of an elaborate sequence of specialized rooms bearing little geometric relationship to each other. Doors, thresholds, corridors, and closets proliferate, creating a floorplan that is a piece of rococo choreography to be followed by servants, masters, and guests. The picturesque tastes of the time only served to mask as pleasing the rigid and strongly hierarchical character of this type of plan.

The transition from *parti* to composition affected residential design all across Europe, but in London it found its most readable and radical application. The London terrace house is a particularly interesting urban type in that it accommodated a range of social classes by virtue of the simplicity of its basic principle: the subdivision of an urban block into equally sized slices with narrow frontages.³⁵ This principle of subdivision – of the city into blocks, of the block into properties, of the properties into rooms – also shaped the early London terrace house. The main building element of this type is the party wall, which served as a load-bearing element, property boundary, and technical spine. But throughout the Georgian era, terrace houses started to grow behind their regular facades with the addition of outhouses, kitchens, storage rooms, and eventually secondary rooms, to the point that the original logic of subdivision was perverted into an aggregation of diverse cells bound on three sides by facade and party walls but sprawling toward the interior of the block, as exemplified by the work of Robert Adam. By the time Sir John Soane acquired three terraces on Lincoln's Inn Fields at the beginning of the 19th century, it was not uncommon for houses to span multiple plots and to annex, as his did, other properties by piercing the party walls. An additive logic had prevailed over the original strategy of subdivision.

34. On the importance of the courtyard as the main figure of the *hôtel particulier*, see Michael Dennis's fundamental study *Court and Garden: From the French Hôtel to the City of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986).

35. For an overview of the history and architecture of the terrace house, see Stefan Muthesius, *The English Terraced House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

François Franque, House of the Marquis de Villefranche, Avignon, 1762. Plan.



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36. See Henry Roberts, *The Improvement of the Dwellings of the Labouring Classes through the Operation of Government Measures* (London, 1859), 37.

Two crucial shifts happened at this time: on the one hand, the idea that all housing for all classes should be designed by architects became widely accepted, and on the other, the transition from a *parti* design method to a compositional one was completed. The best example of this convergence is the work of Henry Roberts, whose “Model Houses for Families,” presented at the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, provided a model for apartment living that is still applied today with few modifications.³⁶ Roberts’s model is essentially the aggregation of a suite of function-specific rooms: a living room, a master bedroom, two smaller bedrooms for children of each gender, a kitchen, a scullery, and a water closet. Each room has a different size, shape, and equipment, apart from the twin bedrooms of the children. Again, this model is a strategic attempt to divide genders, ages, and activities to better institutionalize domestic labor. This is the endpoint of the strategy of separation that began during Alberti’s time. The terrace works at one scale – that of the apartment – and remains supremely indifferent to its impact on the urban morphology, at which scale it is simply articulated in multistory linear slabs.

The concept of architectural type was debated long before the 1850s, but only after the Industrial Revolution did it become key to the project of housing. Housing is not simply residential architecture; it is the act of providing living space for the labor force at large. Typological thinking is a fundamental design tool that allows architects to apply the logic of composition to large numbers of dwellings. Roberts called his proposal a “model” for further application, and the model indeed went on to extraordinary success. The type it puts forward is not merely a spatial product but also a social one: the nuclear family, to be reproduced ad infinitum. Regardless of class, the typological archetype of the “house for a family” is still the standard throughout the Western world and its former colonies, enforcing sleeping, living, and working patterns that we have come to take for granted. After all, the very idea of type is to construct a commonality: in housing, that commonality is our daily routine.

Roberts conceived his well-intentioned prototype to offer a socially and hygienically salubrious environment to the working classes. Yet such an architectural product could be criticized for institutionalizing unfair power relationships and ultimately reinforcing women’s status as mere chattel by encouraging even the working classes to aspire to the ownership of an apartment fully furnished with every convenience, even an unpaid live-in maid.

Henry Roberts, proposal for a Model House for Families, 1851. Plan.

Horror

It is possible to argue that the further partitioning and functional engineering of the home was not only the product of social reform and rationalization but also the consequence of ramping up strategies of primitive accumulation, from the enforcement of hierarchy to the complete introjection and acceptance of these hierarchies as natural. The results of this condition were two models that, starting in the second half of the 19th century, became dominant with the rise of the industrial city: the apartment and the single-family house. While the first model evolved from types such as the *hôtel particulier* and the terrace house, the second finds its origins in the patrician villa, only reduced to an affordable cottage for all families. Both models were intended for the nuclear family and contributed to the individuation of its members. Their proliferation supported a full-fledged ideology of “the domestic” that, not by chance, flourished exactly at this time. As the industrial city (the locus of production, the place of men) became threateningly machinic, dirty, and hectic, the interior of the home (the locus of reproduction and feminine comfort) overcompensated by turning into an introverted haven.

The idea of privacy, which had arisen as the justification for the segregation of household members in ancient times, became the *sine qua non* for modern life. But the cult of the interior and the obsession with privacy offered no respite from the unbearable rhythms of the metropolis.³⁷ In fact, they fed the myth of ownership – both of a house, newly the most prized commodity, and of the goods needed to furnish one’s haven and make it cozy, “personal,” and as different as possible from the impersonal, repetitive character of the urban realm. Roberts’s model fully endorses this ideology of the interior, offering the lower-class housewife the illusion of a parlor to furnish, and her husband the ambition to be master of his own home.

For roughly four centuries architecture has worked to institutionalize primitive accumulation in the house through the elaboration of plans. In doing so, architects have turned living space into an increasingly specialized and typologically defined construct, wherein every space is defined in order to individuate each member of the family and make dwellers the masters of their own home. This condition went beyond even the traditional difference between public and commercial housing. Though often seen in opposition, the social housing estate and the suburban home were based on similar premises, including the selective democratization of homeownership for (white) families headed by a breadwinner and the

37. Walter Benjamin saw the 19th-century interior as giving dwelling a new purpose, when the latter had become emptied and abstracted by life in the industrial metropolis. As he notes in his famous essay “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire,” since the days of the Citizen-King Louis-Philippe the bourgeoisie had desperately sought compensation for the inconsequential nature of private life in the big city by indulging in interior design of the private apartment. In this way, domestic space for the dweller becomes the illusion of personality against the anonymity of the city. It is precisely against this form of dwelling that Benjamin imagines a way of living that would be “traceless” and thus would liberate the city dweller, not only economically and politically but above all anthropologically, from the trap of a tyrannical sense of ownership of a place – that is, domesticity. See Walter Benjamin, “The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire,” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 1938–1940, ed. Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland, and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 3–92.

cultivation of the dweller as consumer. Indeed, we should not forget that most social housing was produced not only to cater to a nonaffluent population but also to turn this population into a docile mass of middle-class consumers. In both cases the interior – that safe haven sealed off from the promiscuous world of production – becomes both the place for citizens to vent their frustrations and the very source of those frustrations. Designed to be cleaned, refurbished, and beautified, the house or apartment incurs expenses, encouraging workers to earn more to improve it and further forcing women into unpaid labor to maintain it. Ideally, the house, if not the apartment, must be *owned*, sinking workers into debt.

A perfect act of primitive accumulation is thus accomplished, one from which nobody escapes, regardless of gender, age, or, to a certain extent, class, since the middle class is most prone to the consumption anxiety engendered by the ideology of the interior.³⁸ Ironically, the system is at its most exploitative precisely when domestic architecture presents itself as a soothing alternative to the pressures of working life, as exemplified by the 2008 subprime-mortgage crisis in the United States. The house projects a model of life and a set of ambitions and desires that we do not freely choose: the desire to own property and the desire to form a nuclear family. In the case of women, emancipation in the workplace and in politics has not dissolved the constructed desire to excel at cooking, cleaning, and decorating that is enforced by the very architecture of our homes, and the final goal of this constructed desire is to hide the fact that all these efforts are unpaid labor to be done on top of one's contribution as waged workers.

This condition can be defined as “familiar horror,” a term coined by Virno.³⁹ This is the horror that arises when one realizes how the domestic has been constructed as the very root of many social and economic issues: it is the horror of realizing that society is caught in a tangle of psychological constraints and needs that are not natural or unavoidable at all, a tangle in which people are subjugated through their very desires.

In his essay “Das Unheimliche,” Sigmund Freud analyzes how a generic sense of anguish and fear emerges from what is most familiar. The term *heimlich* refers to the intimacy of what is familiar. According to Freud, it is within this intimacy that the most powerful sense of terror can emerge at any moment. Paradoxically, this terror arises not in spite of but because of familiarity and intimacy. The more familiar things are, the more vulnerable one is to them. Literature is full of ghosts that arise from the domestic sphere, as seen in Kafka's short story

38. An important contribution to the study of the ideology of the interior is Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (London: Routledge, 2007).

39. Paolo Virno, “Familiar Horror,” *Grey Room 21* (Fall 2005): 13–16. For a similar interpretation of the domestic through the lines of Virno's concept of familiar horror, see Platon Issaias, “War within Four Walls: Familiar Horror and Domestic Architecture in Athens,” in *Beyond the Informal City: Athens and the Possibility of an Urban Common in Athens* (PhD diss., TU Delft, 2014), <http://thecityasaproject.org/2015/12/war-within-four-walls-familiar-horror-and-domestic-architecture-in-athens>.

“The Cares of the Family Man,” in which the most forgotten and useless object – a flat star-shaped spool for thread – becomes an animated presence that unsettles and defamiliarizes the domestic. Virno recently revisited Freud’s “Das Unheimliche” within the context of postindustrial modes of production, noting that the concept of *heimlich*, by referring to the habitual, addresses nothing less than an ethos. Commonly understood as the guiding principles and beliefs of a society, an ethos can be identified with the pattern of daily routines that defines the structure of a way of life. While today politics is often reduced to caricatures of political representation such as elections or protest, the ethos – the habitual – is the most accurate seismograph for the political condition of contemporary society. And yet how can we possibly discuss the habitual when our way of living is no longer organized according to unchanging habitual patterns but is constantly responding to increasingly precarious conditions? Virno argues that it is precisely when the habitual is drastically unsettled by the aggressive corrosion of newer modes of production that a longing for the habitual in the regressive forms of roots and origins emerges as a powerful ideology. Domesticity as a retreat from the world, as a place where it is possible to reconstruct authentic social relationships, becomes an ideology whose function is to hide how life, both as *zoe* and *bios*, is put to work. Domesticity is invoked as a place of respite from production at the same moment that it has become the model for production at large. For the logic of unpaid labor, which domestic space has helped to naturalize, is today replacing the wage system that for two centuries has excluded work at home from the sphere of remunerative occupation. If separating the work done in the home from its monetary value was once a way to dispossess women of the control over their labor power, today the same logic of dispossession is extended to workers at large, regardless of gender.

The efforts of the housewife include not only manual tasks but also a variety of social and affective duties linked to managing, teaching, establishing relationships, and planning. These duties have also become the primary baggage of “precarious,” or freelance, workers, and remain largely uncompensated.⁴⁰ That work in general resembles the logic of domestic labor is reflected in the way contemporary workspaces are increasingly domesticized. Think of the lounge furniture, gadgets, toys, and pets whose dissemination within the workplace functions to make it familiar, casual, and natural, like the house itself.

40. For a critique of affective labor, see Christian Marazzi, *Capital and Affects*, trans. Giuseppina Mecchia (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011).

For this reason, a radical reconstitution of domestic space is not merely the reform of one aspect of life, but the point of departure for a larger reform whose goal is to envision an alternative form of life, one finally freed from the familiar horror of domestic space. How to dispel this familiar horror becomes the fundamental question for the project of housing today – in addition to the provision of affordable housing, which, though a priority, cannot ignore the ways in which domestic space has always been a space of exploitation and dispossession. The focus of this reform is therefore not the invention of new, “smarter” homes but the possibility of a different ethos within and against the contemporary domestic landscape. It goes without saying that this responsibility does not fall only to architects. But since architecture has contributed to the spatial definition of the domestic realm, architecture may also offer the means to undo this realm.

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