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Sharing Care Work: Feminist Actions for Non-Sexist Cities

Of

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Abstract. Can projects for the city and for dwelling spaces respond to the everyday life needs of people who bear the burden of care work? The essay analyzes the relationship between domestic space and female gender in history, to unveil the process of 'feminisation' of homes that has historically forced women in their homes to perform invisible and unpaid work. Starting from the end of the 19th century, various design proposals were elaborated and realized by feminist activists, oriented towards the liberation of women from reproductive labour: from kitchenless houses to residential hotels, the domestic space has been the subject of experiments that have led to the realization of collective houses, especially in the Nordic countries, anticipating the more congenial and contemporary fo

The essay, in the first part, retraces some historical passages, from antiquity to the contemporary, useful for defining a synthetic path in the history of the domestic space, in relation to gender dynamics and the role of women. No philological claim characterizes this part of the essay, but a selection useful to show some fundamental points.

A second part reconstructs some American events relating to women's claims that began in the mid-nineteenth century on the rethinking of homes and on the collectivization of domestic and care work, as well as on the projects that these movements have produced. The essay then focuses on a series of experimental projects of collective living in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century.

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On the relationship between women and the domestic space

Domestic work, also known as unpaid care work, which consists of cooking tasks, child rearing, caring for non-self-employed people, household management - tasks considered "feminine" in the cultural imagination - are historically a key part of the work needed to make the world work. Without carrying out these activities, any kind of productivity would be impeded. Despite that,

> no industrial society has ever solved the problem that the sexual division of these jobs has created for women; nor has society overcome the problems that the domestic placement of this job creates, both for housewives, often isolated, and for working women who, returning from offices or factories, still find themselves at home a second job to carry out (Hayden 1981, p. 1).

The exploitation of domestic work, it can be argued, is a major cause of gender inequalities. As Silvia Federici argues, the deception of the confinement of reproductive work to the private, personal, and above all female sphere, as well as its exclusion from the economic sphere, are the two aspects that have contributed to making this work invisible and to "naturalize" its exploitation (2018, p.23). The problem has distant origins: as recent archaeological research has shown (Wengrow-Graeber 2015), already in 5000 BC the spatial organization of the first houses reflected the gender division of work: the spaces intended for production and reproduction were separated from those intended for hospitality,

> establishing a political and economic realm separate from that of women. Within this domestic organization, women were confined to productive and reproductive activities while men managed resources and were engaged in trade and hospitality rites (Aureli-Giudici 2020, p. 134).

The representation space typically occupied the central room of the house and defined two separate poles of the domestic space: the female space for food preparation, weaving and care of the offspring, and the male one for the storage of goods and administration of the House.

It is no novelty that, even later in ancient Greece, gender differences were reaffirmed not only in terms of the diversified rights between men and women, but also in the distribution of domestic tasks, relegated to the service areas of the house, as opposed to to the representative spaces, more prestigious and reserved for males. The distinction between the hidden space of subsistence and reproduction - typically associated with women - and the male "public" space represented by the entrance hall is a practice that recurs in the history of the design of living, to reiterate the difference between genders from the point of view of roles in the family and in society: the more work is independent of m

> The Greek house organized around a patio clearly separated the area belonging to the women who, being married, never showed up in the room called the entrance hall where guests were received; only slaves, prostitutes and foreigners had access to this. Wives and daughters lived in rooms called gynoeciums and located so as to be invisible from the public parts of the house (Muxí Martínez 2018, p. 49).

The invisibilisation of the reproductive work is, in reality, the invisibilisation of the woman herself, to whom only the husband can access as owner of the good. Starting from the 12th century, when the Christian Church established religious marriage based on mutual consent, the conjugal family model became the pillar around which Western society was structured. The union in marriage, an indissoluble sacrament until a few decades ago, joined a series of values useful for the regulation of society and its control: monogamy, conjugality and cohabitation as the main factors guaranteeing the patrimonial transmission of goods and profits.

Only after the Renaissance did the domestic space become an architectural project, coinciding with the fall of the feudal system and the birth of wage labor (Aureli, Giudici 2020, p.143): several Marxist intellectuals[1] associated these facts with the urgency of organizing the domestic space according to specific roles and behaviours, thus institutionalizing the non-productive role of women, and removing them from any control over the personal economy.

> The Renaissance gave shape to the clear division of roles according to the sexes, consolidating gender and giving each one a place in society. The man will be in the public domain and owner of the house, to which the woman will move as guardian and guarantor of order and good morals on behalf of her husband (Muxí Martínez 2018, p. 52).

It was in this phase, through the reformulation of the economic system, the new organization of work and the design of the house, that women were formally and legally enslaved in their own homes.

> In this context, architecture plays a crucial role, because economic asymmetry needs not only to be imposed and organized – for example, by relegating women to kitchens and excluding them from shops – but also and above all to be naturalised. [...] From the farmer's hut to the ruler's palace, the house becomes a ground of original accumulation in which the systematic exploitation of wage-serving servants and unpaid wives must be managed as well as staged, represented and later celebrated as "work of 'Love". It is under the pressure of these conditions that the house becomes the object of the architectural project (Aureli Giudici 2020, p. 144).

A clear example of this clear-cut division of space within the domestic environment is the birth of the studiolo, or cabinet, in the palace-houses of the Renaissance aristocracy: a small enclosed room, adjacent to the bedroom, symbolically decorated with paintings by real or imagined ancestors, access to which was forbidden to women and anyone other than the owner. This was also the space in which the family's goods and assets were controlled, from which the woman was excluded. An example of this is the study of the Duke of Montefeltro in Urbino: an empty space decorated with representations of historical figures who constituted a reference genealogy for the owner.

The work of women within the domestic walls, and more generally their condition of "enclosure", are well represented by Dutch painters of the seventeenth century: their works often portrayed female figures in domestic interiors intent on carrying out care work, such as weaving or cooking or raising children. They were also often portrayed at the window, which set itself as a limit, the limit from which the woman can look at the world to which, however, she cannot belong, and which at the same time does no

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[1] Among others Silvia Federici, Massimo De Angelis and Maria Mies.

Martínez 2018, p. 58). The reference to the advertising iconography of the "American dream" of the United States in the fifties of the twentieth century, in which the windows or doors of suburban single-family houses, together with the television, constitute the limit of public life for women, is immediate.

In the capitalist system, the domestic space represents the nuclear family, the pillar of survival of capitalist overproduction and waste. In the new imaginary of the single-family house, which is guaranteed an independent entrance and a clear distinction between the rooms, without any mingling with the other houses, one can read the intention of "replacing the typical solidarity of families and worker with the petit-bourgeois ideology of “privacy” and personal boundaries” (Aureli 2017).

“My wife doesn't work” was the male boast that reflected the housewives' separation from the market economy, and which made their work invisible. For women, indeed, the development of manufacturing meant that, while the rest of society seemed to be moving towards socialized work, they became increasingly isolated: from their husbands, who now work away from home; by their children who now went to school all day; and also by the ties of kinship and neighborhood typical of rural society, now transformed by the growth of urban centers and the wave of migration.

The typical image of the housewife in the 1950s and 1960s © Karl-Erik Granath / Nordiska 1960

It is in this context that, through a constant association with furnishings and home care as areas pertaining to women, the process of genderization of the domestic space as the only sphere of "domination" of women:

> The private home was the spatial boundary of the female sphere, and the unpaid domestic work performed in that space by the isolated housewife was the economic boundary of the female sphere. 'A woman's place is in the home' and 'a woman's work is never done' were the basic definitions of the female sphere (Hayden 1981, p. 13).

The domesticization of women through the attribution of a presumed greater propensity in the management of housework or in the definition of the furnishings of the house is an "essential process for the survival of capitalism" (Aureli-Giudici 2020, p.144). This process was reaffirmed by the design of the house which, even in the bourgeois home without domestic staff, was always equipped with less exposed working environments, in any case intended for servants, regardless of the social classes to which it was addressed. The house immediately and in an increasingly consolidated way became the nest of love and privacy, the protected place to take care of, clean, furnish and beautify:

> The ideology of female domesticity played the role of a social control mechanism that severely limited women's sphere of action. Its strength lay in its appeal to morality and its emphasis on the importance of motherhood, family and home life (Pennington-Westover 1989, p. 2).

Excluding the unpaid work of women spent for this purpose, the house is still today a reason for spending and borrowing, and helps to oil the capitalist mechanism of the need for income and its constant growth, so that household appliances, furnishings, the best finishes, as well as the house itself. It is in the home that a model of life based on the isolated nucleus of the family is expressed, desired despite the very high price it entails: debts, expenses and - especially for women - isolation and unpaid work, which for decades represented their only occupation . Despite the productive economic emancipation that has followed in recent decades, the role of women in these areas has not diminished in the imagination and in practice, thus becoming a second job in addition to wage earning. Although today the modern home has also become the place of productive work for many people - and even more so following the Covid-19 pandemic which has forced almost all human activities inside the home - the lack of socialization of care has not undergone significant transformations and, on the contrary, has further exacerbated the lack of possibility of living the home as a place of rest, bringing the dynamics of productive work superimposed on family commitments into the home. In itself, the very isolation of families in their respective homes can be seen as a condition that favors the imbalance of roles between genders, so much so that when women have taken action for their rights they have often declined the needs around to sharing, to community life, and in general to breaking this isolation, of which we are still fully active today.

If the house, therefore, is the place that most of all represents the subordination of women to men and the place of the material reproduction of one's inescapable destiny, it is precisely from the houses that one must start to write a different story that steps for the liberation of female bodies and to make care the tool for a radical social and cultural transformation:

> If the house represents the oikos on which the economy is based, then it is women, historical workers prisoners of the domestic environment, who must take the initiative to reclaim the house as the center of collective life; a life crossed by many people and by multiple forms of cooperation, capable of providing security without isolating, allowing the sharing and circulation of community goods and, above all, providing for the construction of collective forms of reproduction (Federici 2018, p. 129).

It is precisely starting from homes that women have the opportunity to rethink their lives, no longer as invisible and isolated workers, crushed by responsibilities towards others, but as activators of a social project that makes care a precious tool for building emancipated and unfragmented lives. It is in this sense that Federici declines the centrality of the feminist perspective for the construction of the politics of the commons, a project for the "creation of a society not subordinated to the logic of profit and the market"
(Idem, p. 12) on a community basis. In this vision, in fact, the so-called 'common goods' represent an alternative to the concepts of private and public property, making communities protagonists of overcoming both the patriarchal capitalist model and the equally patriarchal statist model. Looking at the commons from a feminist perspective means, on the one hand, rooting one's gaze on a terrain forged "by the fight against sexual discrimination and on the terrain of reproduction" (Idem, 119), on the other hand "recognize our essential interdependence and strengthen our capacity for cooperation" (Idem, p. 11) as the only way to survive.

To make this type of vision concrete, it is first of all necessary to broaden the concept of care, to transform it from an instrument of oppression to an instrument of emancipation. Expanding the boundaries of the nuclear family to include figures other than blood parents is an important first step in expanding the walls of the domestic boundaries that oppress women. Donna Haraway would say “make kin, not babies!” (build bonds instead of having children!) (2016) to push us to overcome the deterministic hierarchy of the traditional family and think of it as part of a wider and more promiscuous weaving of relationships; the LGBT movements of the second feminist wave would speak of “families by choice” (The Care Collective 2021, p. 47) to describe these systems of collective care. The central point remains that of pursuing a broader idea of care that through "promiscuous care" (Idem, p. 53) leads to the idea of "universal care", because "the care must go through not only our families, but also communities, markets, states, transnational relations, human and non-human life” (Idem, p. 55). After all, “innovative and egalitarian housing strategies that lead to new forms of housing cannot be developed without a reformulation of the traditional family and its gender-based division of labor” (Hayden 2002, p. 85).

This is what is at stake in rethinking the homes we inhabit and trying to transform them from places of isolation and oppression of women to spaces of mutual support. Historically, women have brought this imaginary theme to life, through design experiments of various kinds, and this legacy allows today to start again from where the discourse was temporarily suspended.

The first experiments on female collective living

The Grand Domestic Revolution, a 1981 publication by the American theorist Dolores Hayden, is an extraordinary work of historical reconstruction which sheds light on the activity of a group of 19th century American feminists, who saw in the isolation of women within the sphere domestic the main reason for their inequality in society. Those whom Hayden calls “Material Feminists” – whose proposals for communal kitchens, housewife cooperatives and new housing typologies can be considered radical precursors of 20th-century feminism – questioned two fundamental principles of industrial capitalism: the separation physics of the house from public space and the economic separation of the house from political economy.

According to the research conducted by Hayden, as early as the mid-nineteenth century the first materialistic feminists in the United States began to demand financial recognition for the work done within the home, proposing a complete transformation of the spatial organization of American homes, neighborhoods and entire cities. At the basis of their thought we can find a strong influence of the imagination of Charles Fourier and his housing prefigurations of the phalansteries, where the attempt was to maintain the balance by alternating public spaces with private spaces, so as to bring together individual life and community.

The phalanstery, in Fourier's imagination, included a central wing that housed a communal dining room, a library, and a central childcare facility, which enabled women to work. Life in the phalanstery would have been organized in a community way and the social role of women in the family would have disappeared: they would have participated in society by taking part in all occupations and sharing all the financial and social rewards of the new system. In 1865, Jean-Baptiste André Godin, a successful French industrialist, built a successful version of the phalanstery concept in Guise, which he called the Familistère[2]. Sensitive to the idea of redistributing wealth among the workers, Godin wished to create an alternative to the developing capitalist industrial society and offer workers the comforts that only the bourgeoisie could enjoy at the time. Godin, in his housing complex, forbade the individual house arguing that "The insulation of houses is not only useless, but harmful to society."

Even earlier, the so-called Beguinages are one of the first examples of female spatial organization of living, born in Europe as early as the 13th century. These were urban structures located mostly on the edge of cities that established an “independent, self-regulating and self-sufficient urban system” (Muxí Martínez 2018, p. 61), hosting in 1566 about three hundred communities in the Netherlands. Their birth was a reflection of the many wars that swept through Europe at that time, which took men to the battlefields and left women alone in the cities, often without economic and practical support in organizing daily life.

The beguinages were organized around the tasks of care, carried out in a community and professional way, by the "beguines" themselves or by those who moved there in search of of treatment or assistance. The tasks were divided among the inhabitants: "just as some could weave, write or carry out other productive activities, both inside and outside the Beguinages, others devoted themselves to cooking or common cleaning as a productive activity" (Ibidem). Some Beguinages became very large, accommodating up to 2000 women, and were configured as real cities on the edge of the city. “The fact that these enclosures contained religious buildings led them to be explained as convents, when in reality they were constituted as independent civil societies, which advocated another way of being a woman: neither mother, nor wife, nor nun, but workers and scholars” (ibidem). In these contexts the inhabitants were in fact free to self-determine their identity outside the patriarchal rules, which made them more or less tolerated by the Church according to the era. Daphne Spain points out that these places “[gave] women a public role” (2005) precisely thanks to voluntary segregation which can, in certain situations like this, improve women's access to the public sphere, unlike what which produces the involuntary gender segregation that normally occur

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[2] https://www.familistere.com/

The American translation of the ideals of female liberation from unrecognized and unpaid work generated by the domestic space took shape starting from 1869, thanks to the initiatives led in an initial phase by Melusina Fay Peirce, known for having given life to the Movement for cooperative management of the house (Cooperative Housekeeping Movement). The basic idea was the development of a female perspective on the relationship between space and domestic work: in this sense, women should have imagined new solutions for their homes, in which domestic work and childcar

Starting from this, Peirce and the other women active on this front experimented with new forms of organization on a neighborhood scale - also through the creation of housewives' cooperatives -, new forms of living - including houses without kitchens, condominiums, collective kitchens, community dining rooms in order to undermine the patterns of urban and domestic space that isolated women and made domestic work invisible.

Their initiatives prompted architects and urban planners to rethink the spatial conditions for family life, in particular some experiments were carried out starting from these assumptions. Among these, a bakery, laundry, grocery and sewing service organized by Peirce in 1868 in Cambridge, Massachusetts; a family dining club in Warren, Ohio that lasted from 1903 to 1923; and the most ambitious project carried out by Ethel Puffer Howes, active between 1926 and 1931, still in Massachusetts, consisting of a series of prototypes of services managed by the community: “a cooperative kitchen for home delivery of hot food, a school cooperative nursery, a home care office and a Smith graduate employment counseling service” (Hayden 2002, p

The Material Feminists worked for about sixty years around the central idea of collectivizing the care work carried out in the home as a prerequisite for true social equality: up to 1917, about five thousand women and men participated in feminist experiments towards the socialization of domestic work . Their campaign began in 1868 and continued until 1931, and immediately joined the promotion, by architects, of urban residential spaces collectives in the cities of the East, through the design of the first apartments built for the residents of the upper and middle class and the design of model houses for the poor.

Their theories saw industrial capitalism as an economic system that could give rise to a fully industrialized socialist society by collectivizing the technology used for mass production, so that housework and childcare were tasks performed cooperatively. . For materialist feminists, the spatial transformation of the domestic workplace had to remain under the control of women: from their point of view it was a key issue, but at the same time it continued to reiterate an association between the female gender and the tasks unpaid wages brought about by the family background.

Among the projects that were created starting from this thought, however with a different imaginary that delegated domestic tasks to paid workers (or more often female workers), the hotel-apartments built at the end of the 19th century aimed at liberation from reproductive work, as well as to provide for efficient management of the hygiene and food aspects of its inhabitants. The flexible living spaces, some equipped with a kitchen, some not, shared some services among themselves, including a common kitchen, a laundry, a bar, etc.

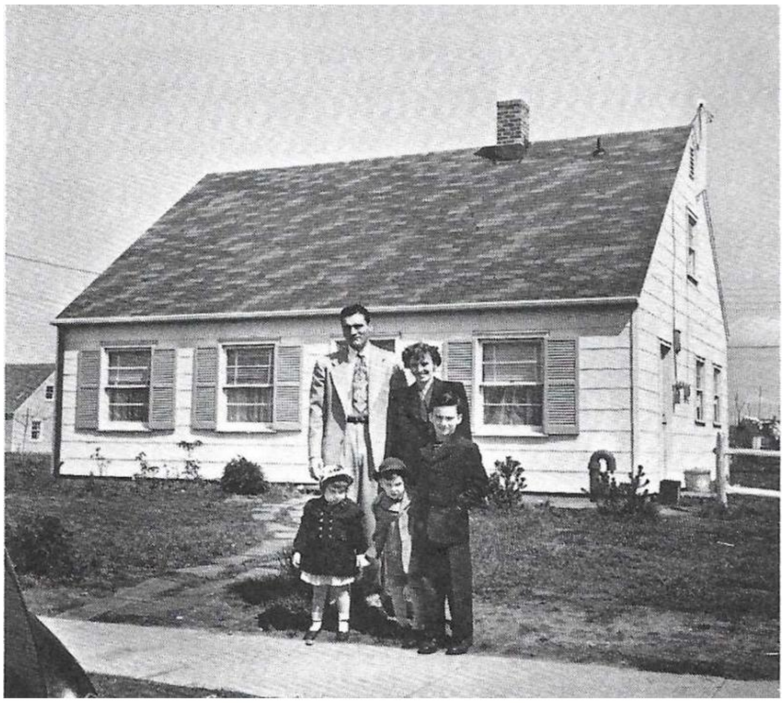
> Affordable residential hotels represented the zero degree of domestic space: sequences of all equally large rooms served by long corridors [...] Even if [...] they offered the user only one sparsely furnished room, their location in center allowed access to a wide range of services such as bars, restaurants and clubs. The residential hotel thus became the hotbed of a radically anti-domestic lifestyle (Dogma 2022, p. 29).

For a certain period, this typology in fact became the bearer of ideas and formulas of interaction between its inhabitants who were extremely supportive and capable of overcoming the traditional family model; for these reasons they were very successful among women, the elderly and people with disabilities, but only temporarily (at the end of the 1920s few of these were still in operation), as they were strongly opposed and criticized because they were morally "not suitable for women" and above all too far from the imagination of the house.

These achievements indicated a model that could be pursued, albeit experimental, although the main trend of expansion and planning of American cities indicated an opposite direction, which then established itself definitively. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, especially in the face of war dynamics that saw women at work and men at the front, trade unionists and real estate investors pushed very decisively towards the relocation of qualified males returning from the front to industries, guaranteeing a sufficient salary to cover the costs of homes, unemployed wives and children: “this would reduce the threat of wage competition by decreasing the available workforce” (Hayden 2002, p. 49), and in return would return larger, mass-produced homes, where families could have expressed their consumerist desires to make their life in the suburbs autonomous and independent.

According to the propaganda narrative also known as Home as Heaven and initiated in the 19th century mainly by Catharine Beecher, author of The American Woman's Home in 1869, women's space was the home, and their duty was to look after children and husbands; this role was even glorified, considering the woman-mother a figure on the verge of sacredness: "The status of a man depended on the fact that his wife did not go to work. The essentially Victorian and bourgeois ideal of femininity was synonymous with the sanctity of the family" (Pennington-Westover 1989, p. 2).

This public strategy of promoting real estate ownership in the most peripheral areas, based on single-family houses equipped with a housemaid who did not require a salary, continued even and above all after the Second World War, with the result that young workers and their families abandoned the city center in favor of the so-called suburbs, in search of a dream home which, despite everything, will prevail over the alternative proposals pursued by Peirce and materialistic feminists.



Postwar single-family home in Levittown, New York, 1948. Bernard Hoffman, LIFE Magazine, 1950.

The interesting aspect of observing these various initiatives and ideal drives – including the not mentioned here prefigurations and partial Soviet realizations that pushed for the presence of women in industries and the nationalization of everything that exceeded productive work – is that none of these incorporated any substantial male responsibility in respect of housework or childcare:

> In their attempts to socialize "female" work, [materialist feminists] often did not see men as responsible parents and workers. But the leaders

> feminists had a very strong sense of the possibilities for cooperation between families and of the economic importance of 'female' work (Hayden 1980, p. 179).

According to Hayden, even if the enhancement of care work was a precious aspect of these struggles, it is precisely in the exclusion of males that the actions of the first American activists for a new domestic space failed: they did not question the role of women in 'field of domestic duties, as if to believe that they were effectively innate propensities in women, and - however extensive and collectivized - the domestic sphere thus remained under their responsibility.

The birth of collective and collaborative housing

projects During the first years of the 20th century in England, both the ideological content and the design of public housing were given new form and substance by the architects of the Garden Cities, Harold Clapham Lander and Raymond Unwin, transforming the notions nineteenth-century cooperative life in arch The imaginary to be created was articulated to the limit of "absolute planning", and included agricultural activity, transport, socialization and recreational activities, education, laundry service, purchase of basic products, etc. . Cooperative life took the form of building complexes typical of early 20th century England, brick cottages arranged in a more or less open courtyard, containing apartments freed from some spaces considered useless as they were shared. The "common room", intended for evening meetings, for reading and writing, for conversation around the fire, was in fact the place that summed up this imaginary. In addition, a cooperative kitchen, a dining room and a laundry room completed the proposal.

> Even the middle and upper classes could live in communal facilities that offered the organized service and skilled cuisine of a boarding house or hotel, combined with the privacy and individuality of the private home. Meals could be eaten communally or privately, with a daily maid available as needed. In short, this was the solution adopted for Homesgarth nine years later (Parker-Unwin 1901; Parker-Unwin 1902; Unwin 1901) (Borden 1999).

Between 1910 and 1913, Ebenezer Howard, architect of the Garden Cities in England, in fact dedicated himself to the design and construction of Homesgarth in the garden city of Letchworth, 50 kilometers north of London, a courtyard building with 22 apartments without a kitchen, on the wave of the idea of women's liberation and in particular of the arguments of the American feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman[3] . The building housed inside a large kitchen/r managed by external employees, wage earners, and ideally by the women who lived there. However, children were not allowed in the neighbourhood, and therefore no service was envisaged that questioned or supported the engagement of women in the specific task of raising children.

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[3] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Women and Economics: a Study of the Economic Relationship Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution (1898) of social evolution, Moschini, 2007), is considered one of the fundamental texts on the origin of the female question and on the economic and social relations between the sexes, which have determined the social assignment to men and women of roles and activities based on gender (Scott 1985).

Howard moved to Homesgarth with his wife in 1911, self-congratulating that he had freed her and "unleashed a sex revolution":

> Howard identified Homesgarth as a place of resistance to the exclusion of women from productive and social work. Yet, in many ways, Homesgarth increased the isolation of its middle-class residents from economic and social opportunities. Although in theory they had the option of working outside the home, the "more congenial occupations" suggested by the prospectus apparently did not include wage-earning activities [...] "Mother and artist, that is all I want woman to be ultimately, not of more, and that is a lot" (Borden 1999).

If therefore the liberation of women did not take place in Homesgarth in a disruptive way, or perhaps in any way, some of the more widespread aspects of the domestic work of women as "responsible" of the house were instead actually improved, and the relationship with the servants was placed on a more contractual basis, thus reducing some of the exploitative tendencies of servitude in home.

A further cooperative housing development, Meadoway Green, in Letchworth itself was then built between 1915 and 1924. The project was aimed at working-class inhabitants without domestic servitude; therefore, the apartments were equipped with a small kitchen and a common canteen was provided in which a full-time cook and a part-time cleaner worked. The inhabitants themselves took turns taking care of the kitchen (Matrix 2022, p. 34).

In addition to the garden cities, "feminine" housing experiments in Europe began to develop in the first decades of the twentieth century in various capitals. Also in Europe the idea began to spread that technical and technological innovations could be applied to the housing sector, and at the same time that, in an era of large-scale production, domestic kitchens were becoming obsolete.

At the end of the 19th century, a debate developed in some European countries about the need for the growing middle class to find solutions to the problem of hiring domestic servants at affordable prices. An idea that emerged was that of "collectivising the maid" (maid in English is intended for women), through residential complexes in which many families could share the production of meals, the cleaning of the building, the laundry duties.

Several so-called Central Kitchen Buildings, born from this instance, were designed and built, intended for employed women and their families. The first was built in Copenhagen in 1903, called the "Central Building" or "Fick's Collective" because it was built on the initiative of Otto Fick; it was a building made up of small apartments and organized with paid collective services of food preparation, laundry and cleaning. The idea was particularly aimed at married women who worked outside the home; however, Fick felt that career and motherhood were incompatible, and because of this, too, no children were expected in the building. Despite this aspect, as well as the fact that the services were paid for in ways that were not particularly ethical for the workers involved, the project lasted until 1942.

Later, similar buildings, based on the idea of the collective kitchen, were built in several European cities. In Germanic-speaking countries they were called "Einküchenhaus" (single-kitchen buildings), in contrast to the "multi-kitchen dwellings" which dominated the production of houses.

ELEKTRICITETENS RATIONELLA ANVÄNDNING
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Cover of the September 1936 issue of ERA magazine (Rational Use of Electricity) © Okänd / Tekniska museet

Among these, in 1905 in Stockholm, the Hemgården Central Kitchen was built, consisting of 60 apartments without a kitchen. A central kitchen was instead located in the basement and served the various apartments on order by means of small tray-carrying elevators, equipped with food, plates and cutlery. The reason for the construction was that the servants continued to ask for higher wages and shorter working hours: the aim, therefore, was not to make it easier for women to work outside the home, but to save costs by employing fewer servants. In fact, these were solutions intended for a wealthy class, which did not have the objective of really making problems with the dominant social structure, and often limited themselves to re-proposing one capitalist mode

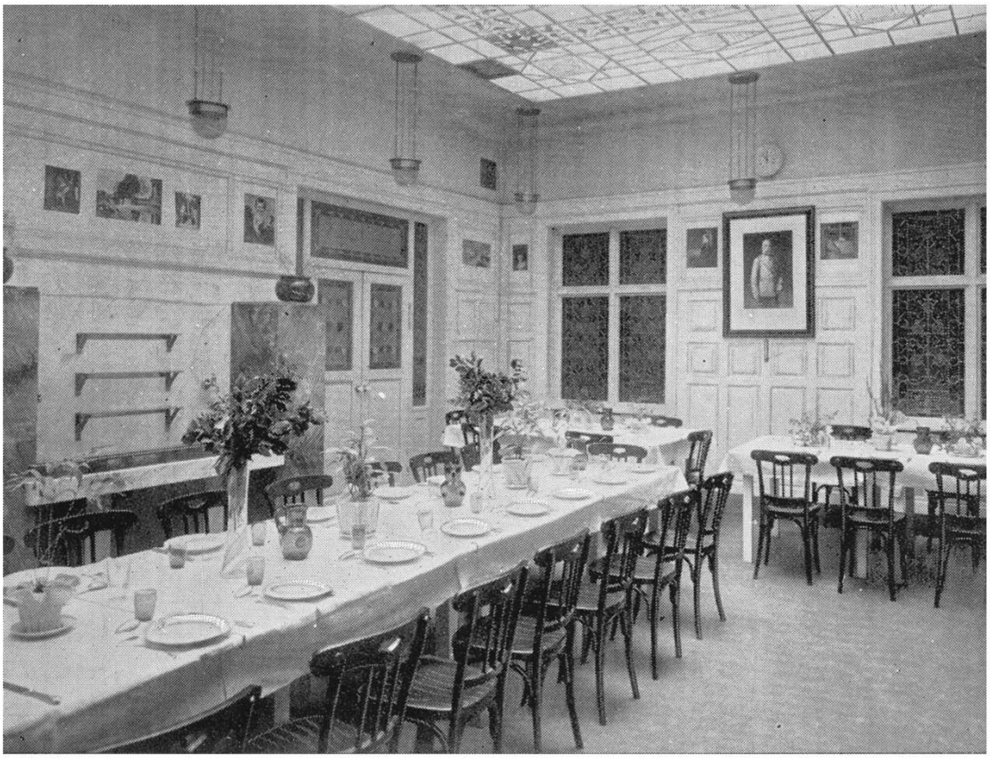
The building, run as a private limited company, filed for bankruptcy in 1918, which was followed by the installation of kitchens in the individual apartments. The central kitchen was then redesigned as a space for collective activities.

Hemgården central courtyard in Stockholm. © Anton Blomberg (1862-1936). Stockholm's stadsmuseum

Similar projects followed in Stockholm, Berlin, Hamburg, Zurich, Prague, London and Vienna. Precisely in the Austrian capital, between 1922 and 1926, in the broader context of the great expansion of public housing during the so-called "Red Vienna", the construction of the Einküchenhaus Heimhof (house with a single kitchen) represents a particularity compared to the others ongoing achievements in the Austrian capital: based not on a social democratic initiative but on bourgeois liberal ideas, the "Heimhof non-profit building cooperative" built the first courtyard building for single working women at Peter-Jordan-Straße 32-34 in 19th district on the initiative of Auguste Fickert, social reformer and women's rights activi

The architectural project, signed by Otto Rudolf Polak-Hellwig (later expanded with the collaboration of Carl Witzmann), included 25 micro-apartments, a central kitchen, a common dining room and basement laundries. Household chores related to cleaning, cooking and laundry were carried out by employees paid by the tenants, with the aim of freeing the inhabitants from household chores.

The building was also equipped with central heating, a central kitchen equipped with all the most advanced technologies of the time, a dumbwaiter that served the apartments, a central laundry, a bathhouse. Scientific and political conferences and entertainment events were also organized in the common dining room. A large roof terrace offered as a place for relaxation and socialising. Families and couples were only accepted at the Heimhof if both partners were employed. The rent was slightly higher than the average for social housing, thus targeting a more affluent class, and also included cleaning costs and energy consumption.



Otto Rudolf Polak-Hellwig, Einküchenhaus Heimhof, Vienna. Photograph of the common dining room, 1922-26 © Bezirksmuseum Rudolfsheim-Fünfhaus

The house with shared kitchen remains an isolated experiment in Vienna and in any case not well received by the press and local civil society, which is particularly conservative and unwilling to accept a reformulation of the role of women. The conclusion of this experience began in 1934, with the advent of Nazi fascism and the closure of the dining room and kitchen. The cooperative was then liquidated in 1939, and the apartments redesigned and equipped with private kitchens.

A Swiss example born of female requests and aimed in particular at unmarried women is the Frauenkolonie Lettenhof, an experiment in collective living designed by the Zurich architect Lux Guyer in 1926-27 and commissioned by three women's organizations. Located in Zurich-Wipkingen, the complex was the result of a cooperative building tradition that still characterizes the Swiss residential real estate market today.

Lux Guyer was the first Swiss architect to open her own studio and manage large-scale projects, and the Lettenhof collective residence is one of her most significant works. The Frauenkolonie was developed in four buildings dedicated to the various cooperatives involved: the Baugenossenschaft berufstätiger Frauen (female professional cooperative), the Protektorat für alleinstehende Frauen (protectorate for single women), and the Baugenossenschaft Lettenhof, the Lettenhof cooperative. A restaurant was present inside, in the central building, managed by the Zurich Women's Association for Soft Drinks (Zürcher Frauenverein für alkoholfreie Wirtschaften).

ALKOHOLFREIES RESTAURANT LETTENHOF

Lux Guyer, Frauenkolonie Lettenhof, 1926-27. Oberhänsli postcard collection

The construction was aimed at women of different ages and social backgrounds, and offered different types of housing - 12 one-room apartments, 28 two-room apartments and 10 three-room apartments - and a large common garden. Each building was equipped with large windows and custom-made furnishings, but above all with a centralized organization of the kitchen, laundry, restaurant and three dining rooms, in order to relieve the inhabitants of the complex from household chores (Guidarini 2018).

Zurich is still today a place of significant and interesting housing experiments, but none of these was created specifically to respond to the needs of women as they are weighed down by the responsibilities of domestic work and care (although many of these projects do exactly this).

In Sweden, as in other European countries, modernist architects saw housing with collective services as a natural expression of modernization. The idea of the so-called functionalist collective living – that is, that it really supported the organization of women's daily lives and that called into question gender roles – was mainly developed by architect Sven Markelius and social reformer Alva Myrdal. In 1932 sociologist Alva Myrdal wrote in Tiden magazine:

> If we consider residential buildings, where twenty families, each in their own apartment, cook their own meatballs, and small children are locked up in each house, each in their own little room: isn't this a general design request, a collective solution?

Together with Markelius, Myrdal pursued the idea that in the future residential buildings would be organized collectively, with communal kitchens, communal kindergartens, play and leisure spaces, rooftop solariums. However, this type of imagery will be the object of strong opposition from conservatives who saw in it an attempt by women to "get rid of their children, parking them in kindergartens" in order to be able to emancipate themselves through wage labour, thus leading society towards the dissolution of family

The inhabitants of these experimental apartment buildings, such as in the case of the first functionalist collective housing project at John Ericssongatan 6 in Stockholm by Sven Markelius in 1935, were not required to collaborate or interact with each other. On the ground floor, the building included a nursery – the first in Sweden – managed with modern educational methods, repair services, a laundry and a common kitchen with dumbwaiter to deliver the meals prepared in the apartments. The apartments were 57 of small size, equipped only with a bed, a desk, a wardrobe, two chairs, a bathroom and a toilet, and this aspect actually inhibited families with children from moving there, instead in favor of new inhabitants of the class intellectual, who embraced this experimentation and transformed it into a cornerstone of the radical

Sven Markelius, Asylum at the collective house at John Ericssonsgatan 6 in Stockholm, 1935 © Markeliushuset

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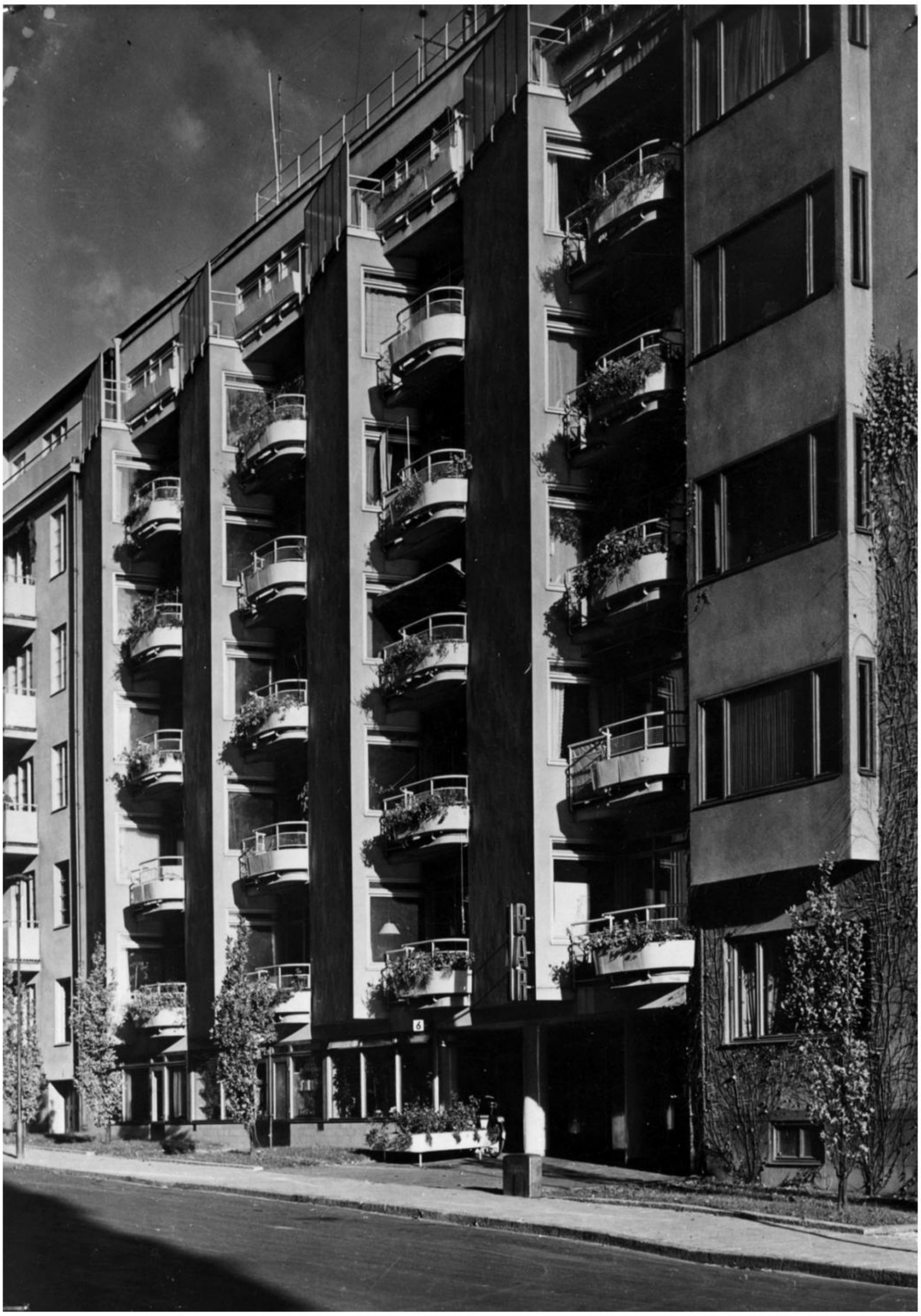
[4] See Staffan Lamm and Thomas Steinfeld, Das Kollektivhaus: Utopie und Wirklichkeit eines Wohnexperiments, S. Fischer, Frankfurt 2006, pp. 57-58.



Sven Markelius, Collective house at John Ericssonsgatan 6 in Stockholm, 1935. © Eget / ArkDes

Several other collective and collaborative housing projects were built between the 1930s and 1950s in Sweden, always as private initiatives by individual entrepreneurs fascinated by the examples created.

> Called “service houses” or “collective houses,” these projects [were] providing childcare and cooked food, along with housing for employed women and their families. This type of experimentation – also developed in the Soviet Union in the 1920s – aimed[v]on to offer services, on a commercial basis or subsidized by the State, to replace the "women's work", previously carried out privately at home (Hayden 1980, p 177).

One of the entrepreneurs who was most active in this direction was Olle Engkvist, who in this period of time created six buildings for the collectivization of living in Stockholm. Among these, in 1938 in Kungsklippan, in collaboration with the Women's Office Workers' Association, he created Kvinnornas hus Smaragden (Emerald Women's House), intended for single working women.
Signed by the Backström & Reinius studio, the building consisted of 203 studio apartments with kitchenettes, on the top floor were the dining room, relaxation room, gym and sun terrace. The apartments were rented out and the cost included one meal a day.

Backström & Reinius, Kollektivhuset Smaragden, Interior photograph, 1938 © Lange / ArkDes

A few years later, in 1944, the Marieberg Collective House was built in Stockholm, designed by Sven Ivar Lind. In this case, the entire ground floor of the building was intended for common functions (reception, restaurant, kindergarten, storage bicycles, etc.), while on the upper floors there were 198 houses, of different sizes according to need, with more or less equipped kitchens according to the wishes of the inhabitants. The relationship between private life and collective life was interesting, more mediated in this case than in the previous ones. The common dining room, which functioned as a restaurant, with service personnel and a set menu, was open only to condominiums. As the apartments were not significantly large, large families were not attracted by the offer, unlike several single mothers who saw in this solution an opportunity to improve their condition.

Sven Ivar Lind, Marieberg Collective House, Interior with adults and children in the dining room, 1944. © ArkDes

In any case, and once again, these were projects for an upper middle class that could bear the costs of maintaining these structures and their services, as well as the payment of employees.

Subsequent attempts, including the Family hotel Hässelby, built in the mid-1950s, also in Stockholm as Olle Engkvist's latest experimentation, will also be aimed at privileged families. In this case, the building was made up of 328 apartments and housed various collective services, including a grocery store that was also open in the evening, a kindergarten, a laundry, a sauna, and many other shared spaces.

From the end of the 1960s, however, the influences of the company's radical developments also began to be seen in the management of the family hotel. Hässelby became a meeting place for the radical group of women called "Group 8", and many aspects were reformulated in favor of a lower economic demand, which is why the kitchen-restaurant was closed and left to the autonomous management of its inhabitants. This passage is significant because Hässelby was radically re-imagined: this indeed led to his collaborative conception, especially as regards the use of the kitchen, from 1976 to 1979.

The very idea of collaborative living developed explosively when young people, starting in 1968, embraced the idea of living in common with all the advantages that this offered, starting with the collectivization of domestic work, and also for the possibility of seeing women and men sharing the responsibilities of the house and children. Their movement questioned the bourgeois nuclear family, which presupposed the presence of a housewife.

Conclusions

This historical excursus, made up of episodes rather than extensive historical reconstructions, aims to show how the domestic space and more generally the project for living have been the object of female and feminist claims, and have laid the foundations for a imaginary capable of reformulating traditional roles within the family nucleus. The projects reviewed demonstrate that the problem linked to the female overload of work which is not recognized either socially or economically has never really responded to a sustainable model, and has not even been freely chosen by women.

If until the end of the seventies women still ideally remained responsible for domestic and care work even in this type of construction (one should consider that not only the projects of materialist feminists claimed that this responsibility should ideally remain female, but also in the most of the workers hired in the collective residences to carry out housework were actually women), it will be precisely the rethinking of the family, from now on, that will be central to the projects that will follow in the following decades, shifting attention from idea of a house in support of women, to the idea of a house capable instead of hosting new shared roles and responsibilities.

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