University of Nottingham

# Negotiating “Privacy” in the Digital Age:
# A Study on the New Live/Work Home

By

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# Abstract

In the digital age, working from home has become a widespread trend. As public and productive activities enter the home, our private and family lives, in turn, increasingly extend throughout the city. This trend challenges the concept of the "private home" and the idea of the "home as a sanctuary away from productive activities", which we have taken for granted since the 19th century. This study examines recent changes in living patterns and spatial experiences brought about by digital home-working in contemporary urban homes. Building on this, it reimagines new models of public and private realms in the digital age, as it revisits Robin Evans' classic discussion of the "invention of the corridor."

To reconsider the concept of privacy in the digital age, the study begins with a detailed historical review of the evolving public-private relationship. It traces the spatial configuration of domestic architecture across various periods, revealing how the concept of privacy has materialized in space and how it interacts with the outside world. The study argues that the public-private relationship has continuously shifted but has never been entirely separate. Public and private realms have always intertwined and maintained a certain tension. One of the key mediators connecting these realms within the home, the study finds, is domestic objects. It conducts a literature review on the "meaning" of domestic objects, highlighting that something entirely "private" cannot, in itself, be considered meaningful. The meaning of an object depends on the context of publicly or collectively constructed definitions. Thus, domestic objects always embody a relationship between public and private spheres, thereby giving rise to various spatial, symbolic, personal, and familial meanings.

The hypotheses drawn from the historical literature are further tested through case studies of contemporary live/work homes. These case study focuses on the spatial experiences and living scenarios of creative industry professionals working from home in London, UK, and Beijing, China. This group was selected because the history of live/work homes is closely tied to the rise of the creative industries and freelancers, who have a long-standing tradition of working from home. Their remote working and organizational models also represent contemporary forms of knowledge-based home working.

The research is based on field work, interviews, photographs and drawings of the live/work homes. The case study does not just focus on the home spaces, or the inhabitation activities in isolation; rather, it examines them in conjunction. Using a layered drawing method, it constructs multiple connections between the housing/house, rooms, furniture, objects, and aesthetic forms, along with the active role of inhabitants in the homemaking activities, and their living trajectories, territories, and perceptions. As such, This study offers a contribution not only to the history of interior but also to the way we discuss interior spaces.

As a result of the case studies, the thesis identifies the living and spatial patterns of live/work homes in contemporary urban settings, which exhibit notable "ecological diversity." In all of these spatial patterns, domestic objects play an important spatial role. The study focuses on several typical new spatial patterns and their corresponding new "corridor" models, including: a) an intimate, intertwined, fluid, and continuous domestic landscape, b) a domestic pattern of leaping, small territories, c) an aggregated, shared, mixed, and multicultural experimental space, d) a "porous vessel," where pores function as new "corridors", e) a multi-centred network, with urban corridors connecting dispersed live/work territories, and f) the digital home, where interfaces function as "digital corridors".

The findings suggest that the spatial patterns of live/work homes in the UK and China are far more similar than different, with the aforementioned patterns coexisting in homes in both countries. This is primarily because the physical configuration of space is no longer the most crucial factor in shaping living patterns. Digital technologies now play a key role. While housing types in China and the UK differ significantly, housing layouts, including corridors and other architectural elements, are no longer the primary factors organizing domestic life or defining the boundaries between public and private realms. Instead, the more critical factor influencing and reshaping public-private relationships today is digital media. This study views the digital workspaces centred around screens and cameras in homes as a kind of (semi-)public "digital corridor" inserted into private homes, a phenomenon that is increasingly universal. These "digital corridors", contrary to Robin Evans' critique of the corridor as a device for social isolation, enhance interaction between different systems, groups, and spaces, thereby offering new distinctions between public and private spaces.

The thesis concludes by discussing the subtle tensions between private and public life that have been reshaped in the digital age. It highlights the coexistence of various configurations of the public-private relationship, including: a) no clear boundary, where the two realms are fluidly intertwined and flexibly coexist, b) controlled interactions, where the two realms invades or penetrates each other within defined boundaries, c) clearly divisions between public and private realms, and d) overlapping, reconfiguring, and evolving public and private realms across both virtual and physical dimensions. These different interpretations and configurations of the public-private relationship coexist in contemporary urban homes, arising from each inhabitant's unique living practices and ongoing experiments, eventually stabilizing into a personally comfortable arrangement. From this perspective, live/work homes can be seen as a site of cultural regeneration and creative responses to political and social issues.

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# INTRODUCTION

### 0.1 Research Context

Nowadays, working from home has been a widespread trend, not only as a temporary solution, but also as an integral part of a sustainable work and living culture. This transformation has been catalysed by technological innovations and evolving work preferences, and it has been further solidified by the necessities imposed by the pandemic[1]. Data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) indicates that by early 2024, approximately 4.5 million workers in the UK had adopted their homes as their primary place of work.[2] Moreover, a substantial 14.9 million UK workers, representing 28% of the total workforce, have embraced a hybrid work model, flexibly arranging their work time between home and office. People seek or create workspaces within their homes. The boundaries between the spaces of professional life have blurred with those of the domestic and the intimate. Digital screens serve as portals to the broader public world. Our images, along with our carefully curated or untended home environments, appear on screens and enter the public eye. Such interactions prompt us to re-examine the relationships between living practices, domestic spaces and the public world.

In the broader context of this research, the rise of the digital nomad and nomadic freelancer represents a notable societal trend[3]. Freelancers today are no longer bound by traditional roles such as the nuclear family or permanent employment contracts. Instead, they navigate their careers without the constraints of a fixed workplace or family responsibilities. This shift reflects a growing movement toward flexibility and mobility in both professional and personal lives, where freelancers and remote workers operate across diverse environments rather than a single, static location. In this context, the house and the office have expanded beyond their fixed physical boundaries to include various spaces like studios, cafes, streets, and outdoor areas. As a result, the division between home and city becomes increasingly blurred, with the city itself sometimes serving as an extension of the home.

With these changes, the spatial and temporal arrangements within contemporary home lives have shifted significantly. Contemporary domestic life is no longer strictly organized around traditional task divisions or family structures. The lines between work and personal life have

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[1] Sparke, Penny, Ersi Ioannidou, Pat Kirkham, Stephen Knott, and Jana Scholze, eds. *Interiors in the era of Covid-19: interior design between the public and private realms*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023.

[2] Office for National Statistics. (2024). 'Labour market overview, UK Statistical bulletins', and also 'Dataset: Homeworking in the UK labour market'. Retrieved from https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/previousReleases, https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/homeworkingintheuklabourmarket

[3] Makimoto, Tsugio, and David Manners. *Digital nomad*. John Wiley & Sons, 1997.
This early work coined the term "digital nomad," predicting the rise of mobile work facilitated by technology. It discusses the social and cultural implications of a workforce no longer tied to fixed locations.
See also, Woldoff, Rachael A., and Robert C. Litchfield. *Digital nomads: In search of freedom, community, and meaningful work in the new economy*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2021.
This book takes a sociological approach to understanding the digital nomad lifestyle. The authors explore the motivations behind digital nomadism and how it intersects with the changing nature of work and society, focusing on community, independence, and the evolving relationship between work and leisure.

become increasingly blurred, both spatially and temporally, as new forms of production and digital tools have permeated the home environment.

Simultaneously, the relationship between public and private realms is undergoing a transformation[4]. The traditional illusion of domestic space as a refuge from the public sphere seems increasingly difficult to maintain. Today, the public gaze inevitably penetrates the once-private domain of the home, turning it into a permeable space where public and private realms merge. At the same time, concerns about personal information and digital surveillance in the internet environment are growing[5]. These new shifts have brought the issues of privacy and the boundary between public and private lives back into our attention.

These interconnected trends—the rise of digital nomadism, the reconfiguration of home as a worksite, changing work-life dynamics, and the evolving relationship between public and private spaces—form the context of my research. Together, they illustrate the profound shifts occurring in contemporary home, highlighting the need to investigate the recent changes in living patterns and spatial experiences brought about by digital home-working and the shifting models of public and private realms in the digital age.

### 0.2 Research Aims and Questions

Based on the context and preliminary understanding, this thesis focuses on the living patterns and spatial experiences within the new live/work home in the digital age, particularly the changing relationships between the public and private realms. Therefore, my research will concern various aspects of spatiality within the live/work home, such as the layout of the house, the ways inhabitants appropriate the space, the spatial patterns of daily use, and the spatial agency of domestic objects.

The aims of this research are:

1. To investigate the living patterns and spatial experiences within contemporary live/work homes in the UK and China.

2. To explore a specific approach to analyse and diagram the live/work home.

3. To challenge the conventional understanding and conception of “privacy.”

To achieve these aims, this research is organized around three main research questions:

Firstly, what are the patterns of living in contemporary live/work homes within general urban housing?

[4] See Sparke et al. (2023)

[5] Lyon, David. *The culture of surveillance: Watching as a way of life*. John Wiley & Sons, 2018.
Lyon is a prominent scholar in surveillance studies, and in this book, he explores how surveillance has become embedded in everyday life. He examines the social and political consequences of constant monitoring, both by governments and corporations, and how this changes the way we experience privacy.

Domestic culture manifests in the physical environment in two main ways: one is the spatial structure constructed in everyday use, and the other is the furniture, objects, and soft decorations within the interior. Therefore, this research question can be further divided into two sub-questions:

1. How do the floor plans and spatial patterns of the house/apartment change in the context of new live/work, particularly what new roles do corridors (or digital corridors) play?

2. What roles do domestic objects play, and what new meanings do they produce in daily living and working—how do they reflect certain relationships between the public and private realms?

Secondly, how can this study develop a spatially specific approach to draw and analyse the living patterns and spatial arrangements in contemporary homes?

Thirdly, based on an understanding of the preceding knowledge, how can new models of public and private realms be re-envisioned in the digital age?

## 0.3 Research Method 01: The Ethnographic Method

### 0.3.1 Case Selection and Representativeness

#### 0.3.1.1 Selection of Research Subject: Knowledge-Based Live/work Home

This study explores live/work homes—residences that also serve as workplaces, effectively blending domestic and professional spheres. With the growth of remote work, freelancing, and flexible labour models, these homes have gained prominence in modern urban life. They come in diverse forms, ranging from traditional craft workshops to high-tech home offices.

Among these, the study specifically targets knowledge-based live/work homes, where residents are primarily engaged in creative or intellectual professions. This focus is intentional, drawing on both historical origins and contemporary trends.

Historically, creative industry professionals—including artists, designers, and freelancers—have a long-standing tradition of working from home. The origins of modern live/work spaces, such as studios and lofts, are closely linked to the rise of creative industries and independent work. These spaces allowed professionals to integrate their living and working environments, which will be further explored in the literature review (Chapter 1). The post-Fordist shift towards home-based work can be seen as a continuation of these traditions.

In the contemporary context, knowledge-based professionals—such as writers, consultants, and designers—are at the forefront of flexible work arrangements. The rise of the gig economy and the expansion of remote work have further solidified home-based labour as a defining feature of modern professional life. The work and labour organization models of creative industry professionals are particularly representative of contemporary knowledge-based

home working, making them an ideal group for this research. By analysing their live/work practices, this study aims to capture the evolving spatial and social patterns of home-based work in the digital age, providing insights into the broader relationship between work and domestic life.

For the case selection, I prioritized a diverse pool of occupants to reflect the varied ways live/work spaces are used. Participants range from single professionals to families, with ages spanning from their twenties to their sixties. This wide age range captures perspectives from young adults starting their careers, middle-aged individuals balancing work and family, and senior residents adapting to shifting professional needs. Gender distribution was intentionally balanced, with a near 1:1 ratio of men and women. This balance ensures that the study remains unbiased and inclusive, allowing for a comprehensive examination of how gender intersects with spatial practices and live/work demands. Occupations within the sample are equally varied, encompassing architects, interior designers, textile designers, illustrators, curators, journalists, and scholars, among others. Most participants selected for this study belong to the urban middle class, with a subset identified as lower middle class. This focus is intentional, as these social groups not only form the core demographic in knowledge-based home-workers but also provide a representative sample that reflects contemporary urban trends. On the one hand, they possess the financial capacity to purchase relatively modest properties and have sufficient resources to adapt their living spaces—whether through rearranging furniture or undertaking minor renovations—to accommodate their professional needs. On the other hand, these resources are limited, precluding the possibility of fully customized modifications. It is precisely these adaptive spatial strategies, employed under conditions of constrained resources, that form the core of this study. Moreover, as mentioned before, this group is predominantly engaged in the creative industries and the gig economy, with nearly half operating as freelancers or supplementing their primary employment with occasional projects. Consequently, they serve as a critical indicator of how labour instability in the post-industrial era is manifested within the domestic environment. Thereby, those cases could offer critical insights into the evolving interplay between home space and professional practice.

Despite its strengths, this selection has inherent limitations. Other forms of live/work arrangements—such as those of artisans or manual craft workers—are not considered in this study. These groups may utilize their spaces in fundamentally different ways, prioritizing workshop areas over digital workstations, and their exclusion constrains the broader applicability of the findings. Additionally, the focus on the urban middle class overlooks rural and working-class perspectives, which could offer alternative models of live/work integration.

While these limitations do not diminish the study's contributions, they highlight potential avenues for future research. By centring on knowledge-based live/work homes and this specific demographic, this study provides a focused and analytically rigorous foundation for understanding how knowledge work reshapes domestic life.

#### 0.3.1.2 Selection of Country and City: UK [London] and China [Beijing/Shanghai]

This study selects China and the UK as case study countries to investigate home-based work, as they offer distinct yet complementary perspectives on the transformation of domestic workspaces. Rather than drawing a binary contrast between Western and Eastern cultures, this selection enables a comparative exploration of how different socio-economic, cultural, and spatial conditions shape the evolving relationship between work, domestic space, and public/private boundaries. Both countries have undergone significant shifts in work-from-home practices due to technological advancements, changing labour structures, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, differences in urban form, housing systems, and socio-political frameworks provide a nuanced understanding of how these global trends unfold in varied contexts.

London, Beijing, and Shanghai have been chosen as case study cities due to their roles as economic and cultural hubs, where knowledge-based industries and creative economies are particularly concentrated. London, with its history of adaptive reuse of industrial and residential spaces for live/work purposes, provides a valuable case for understanding the long-term evolution of home-based work environments. Meanwhile, Beijing and Shanghai, as China's leading urban centres, represent key sites where rapid urbanization, housing transformations, and digital labour shifts intersect. Second, the marked disparities in population density and housing systems across these cities create fertile ground for comparative inquiry. For instance, London's housing landscape—comprising a mix of (semi-)detached houses and apartments—contrasts sharply with the prevalence of high-rise apartment complexes in Beijing and Shanghai, directly impacting spatial considerations within domestic settings. Examining these cities offers insights into how different regulatory, economic, and spatial conditions influence live/work arrangements.

Far from emphasizing divergence, this comparative lens underscores convergence, revealing that despite differing cultural milieus, pressing issues such as digital homeworking and the demand for spatial adaptability resonate globally. By examining the UK (represented by London) alongside China (represented by Beijing and Shanghai), this study not only elucidates how distinct locales respond to analogous global pressures but also contributes to broader scholarly discourses on digital nomadism, urban lifestyles, and the future trajectories of home-work ecosystems. Consequently, the selection of these countries and cities establishes a robust analytical framework that balances depth and breadth, advancing a comprehensive understanding of the restructuring of contemporary domestic spaces in a globalized world.

#### 0.3.1.3 Selection of Housing Types

#### 1) London Cases

The selection of case studies for this research focuses on residential buildings in London, specifically targeting three historical periods—Georgian, Victorian, and modernist—and two primary types of residential buildings: (terraced and semi-detached) houses and apartments. This focus is grounded in their crucial role in shaping domestic culture, their spatial adaptability, and statistical prevalence within both London and the broader UK housing stock. Below, I elaborate on the rationale for these choices.

### *Crucial role in shaping urban living culture*

Georgian and Victorian housing have long defined London's urban fabric, shaping its domestic culture through periods of rapid expansion and social change. Georgian terraces, with their regimented facades and spacious layouts, set a precedent for high-density yet adaptable urban living. Victorian houses, responding to industrialization and shifting class structures, introduced greater architectural variation and incremental modifications over time. These housing types have continuously evolved, shaped by post-war reconstruction, and housing policies that encouraged homeownership and subdivision. Today, these historic homes are being reconfigured once again—offering flexible spaces that accommodate both domestic life and professional activities.

Modernist housing has also played a crucial role in shaping London's living culture, emerging as a response to the housing crises of the 20th century. Initially driven by post-war reconstruction efforts, modernist apartment blocks embodied the welfare state's vision of high-density, efficient, and standardized living. These developments, such as the Barbican Estate and the Brunswick Centre, redefined urban housing by integrating communal spaces and mixed-use planning. Over time, neoliberal housing policies transformed many of these estates through privatization and market-driven redevelopment. Today, modernist housing remains a key component of London's residential fabric, often repurposed to accommodate contemporary live/work arrangements. The adaptability of these spaces—through internal modifications, or flexible workspaces—demonstrates their continued relevance in addressing the evolving demands of urban life.

### *Spatial Constraints as Drivers of Innovation*

In semi-detached and terraced houses, as well as apartments, limited floor area necessitates careful spatial planning to accommodate both living and working functions. For instance, a typical Victorian terraced house in London averages 80–100 square meters, while modernist apartments range from 40–120 square meters depending on bedroom count. In contrast, larger detached houses (often exceeding 150 square meters) offer ample space, reducing the need for such adaptations. This study thus prioritizes smaller typologies to explore creative spatial strategies under constraint.

### *Statistical Prevalence*

The *English Housing Survey 2021-22*[6] reveals that flats, including apartments, constitute approximately 54% of London's housing stock, a significantly higher proportion than the 17% seen in the rest of England (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022). Within this category, modernist apartments represent a major subset. Additionally, terraced houses account for 21.3%, and semi-detached houses make up 18.6% of London's housing stock—both largely originating from the Georgian and Victorian periods. The least common are detached houses, comprising only 6.1%, which are excluded from this study due to their ample spatial resources, which make them less representative for studying spatial adaptations

[6] See: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. (2022). *English Housing Survey 2021 to 2022: Headline Report.*

under constrained conditions. By focusing on these prevalent housing types, the selected cases ensure that the findings are representative of London's wider housing context and can be widely applicable across the UK.

***Exclusion Criteria***

To ensure a focused investigation into conventional urban housing and the specific challenges associated with spatial adaptation, this study excludes several housing types beyond the previously mentioned detached houses. The following outlines the excluded categories and the rationale for their omission:

- **Detached Houses**: These properties are frequently linked to higher socioeconomic groups and are characterized by generous indoor and outdoor space. This abundance of space alleviates the spatial constraints, making detached houses less relevant with the study.
- **Rural Housing**: Housing in rural settings does not encounter the same density or urban pressures that define the housing landscape of London. As a result, these properties fall outside the urban-centric scope of this research and are excluded.
- **Specialized Spaces**: This category encompasses converted warehouses, lofts (e.g., prevalent in areas like Shoreditch or Hackney), and co-living spaces (e.g., found in Southwark or White City). These housing types serve unconventional living arrangements, which deviate from the study's emphasis on mainstream, privately owned housing. Their exclusion ensures the research remains aligned with its focus.

By excluding these housing types, the study narrows its scope to conventional urban housing, enabling a deeper exploration of the creative strategies residents employ to address spatial adaptation challenges in such settings.

Based on the reasons provided, this study primarily targets Georgian and Victorian terraced and semi-detached houses, as well as modernist apartments, in its case selection. This choice is carefully made to ensure representativeness of both London's and the broader UK's residential landscape. Also, this selection offers a wide and diverse range of housing typologies. This diverse selection provides a well-rounded foundation for examining the spatial patterns and living arrangements across different housing typologies in London, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of how residents adapt their living spaces to meet their needs.

**2) Beijing–Shanghai Cases**

The architectural parameters of housing in Beijing and Shanghai reflect distinct urban development trajectories shaped by socio-economic policies and rapid urbanization. In China's megacities, standardized apartment complexes dominate the housing landscape, accounting for approximately 85–90% of urban residential stock, while independent housing types such as villas constitute less than 5%[7], reflecting strict land-use policies and high-density development priorities. These apartments, constructed primarily from the middle 20th to

[7] Data source: Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of China and National Bureau of Statistics of China, June 2022.

early 21st century, are products of standardized design and mass urbanization. Their compact layouts, ranging from 35 to 100 square meters, prioritize efficiency over flexibility, posing challenges for integrating living and working spaces in contemporary hybrid lifestyles.

The selected cases in this study encompass two distinct types of apartments, each tied to specific historical periods and urban development policies in China:

***Pre-reform Apartments (1949–1978):***

Built during the planned economy era, these apartments were developed by state collectives or worker unions, often referred to as "old public housing" or "workers' new villages." They emerged in the post-1949 period as China industrialized and urban populations surged, requiring efficient, low-cost housing solutions. Their design is utilitarian, prioritizing functionality over comfort. A typical layout features a small entryway opening into a combined living and dining area, followed by one or two modest bedrooms and a toilet/bathroom. In some cases, residents shared communal facilities like kitchens or toilets. Floor areas generally range from 35 to 60 square meters. The residential complexes housing these apartments, often part of "*danwei*" (work unit) compounds, consist of low-rise buildings arranged in rows or around courtyards. This layout reflects the era's focus on collective living and maximizing limited urban land during a time when housing was state-allocated rather than individually owned.

***Post-reform Apartments (1978–present):***

Following the economic reforms of 1978, housing shifted to a market-driven model, with private real estate developers constructing commodity housing. This period, spanning the late 20th and early 21st centuries, coincided with China's housing boom and rapid urban expansion, doubling the annual construction of urban residential space since the 1990s[8].

These apartments offer slightly larger floor areas (50 to 100 square meters), though standardization persists due to mass production demands. A common layout includes an entry hall leading to a living room and a dining-kitchen area, with two or three bedrooms and one or two bathrooms. Residential complexes, known as "*xiaoqu*" (gated community), typically feature multiple mid- or high-rise buildings arranged in grid or courtyard patterns, often equipped with shared amenities like gardens, playgrounds, or small shops. This design balances the need for high-density housing with basic community services, a response to the growing urban middle class and rising homeownership rates.

Both types of apartments share key traits that define their significance for this study. They are housed within standardized apartment buildings and have limited floor areas. Their original layouts are rigid, reflecting a focus on efficiency rather than flexibility. This rigidity poses unique challenges for residents attempting to integrate complex modern needs, such as homeworking spaces, into these compact designs.

[8] Data source: Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of China and National Bureau of Statistics of China, June 2022.

The representativeness of these Beijing and Shanghai cases lies in their reflection of broader urban housing trends in China. As two of the country's largest and most economically vital cities, Beijing and Shanghai have been at the forefront of urbanization. The selected apartments are typical of the housing stock accommodating the majority of urban dwellers, highlighting the spatial constraints and standardized designs prevalent across Chinese cities. By focusing on these cases, this study captures the challenges and adaptations associated with live/work needs within limited living spaces.

### 0.3.2 Fieldwork Methodology

#### 0.3.2.1 Ethnographic Data Collection

For an in-depth understanding of the live/work home cases, this study employs the ethnographic method for data collection. Ethnography, through its immersive engagement in the environments of residents, offers rich and contextual insights, making it particularly well-suited to capture the intricate ways in which individuals interact with and adapt to their living and working spaces. This research utilizes a range of ethnographic techniques—including in-depth interviews, participant observation, visual documentation, and architectural drawings.

Interviews serve as a cornerstone of the data collection process, providing direct insight into the lived experiences and personal narratives of residents. Two formats are employed: face-to-face and online interviews. Face-to-face interviews, conducted within residents' homes, allow for deeper engagement by enabling me to observe subtle non-verbal cues and the physical context of their living spaces. This setting enriches the data by grounding residents' narratives in the material realities of their environments. Online interviews offer a practical alternative for geographically inaccessible participants in China during the pandemic. These interviews follow a semi-structured format, combining predefined questions with opportunities for open-ended responses. This approach ensures that participants can share detailed reflections on their daily routines, spatial practices, and the challenges of adapting to living spaces, allowing them to articulate their experiences in their own terms. A more detailed discussion of the interview process and question framework is provided in the following section.

In addition to interviews, participant observation was employed to document everyday routines, spatial practices, and subtle, non-verbal behaviours. By observing how occupants adapt limited spaces to meet their needs, I was able to identify patterns of behaviour that often remain unspoken, but are critical to understanding the lived experience within these settings.

Visual ethnography enhances the dataset by providing a tangible record of the physical and material conditions of residents' living spaces. This method encompasses both photographs taken by the researcher and drawings produced by both the researcher and the residents themselves. The photographs capture the textures, layouts, and living traces of the spaces, preserving details that might be overlooked in narrative accounts. Meanwhile, the drawings offer a unique window into how individuals perceive and prioritize their environments.

Together, these visual elements enrich the analysis, bridging the gap between abstract descriptions and the concrete realities of the domestic settings under study. (For more information, see *Appendix B- Raw Data Examples*.)

Moreover, architectural drawings provide a structured, technical perspective on the spatial configurations of the houses and apartments examined in this research. Other than the detailed floor plans, the study also collects sketches of renovations and modifications designed by the residents themselves. These resident-initiated drawings are especially revealing, as they illustrate how occupants actively alter their environments to better align with their needs. By comparing these adaptations to the original designs, the research highlights the agency residents exercise in response to spatial limitations.

In conclusion, the ethnographic data collection strategy of this study is deliberately comprehensive, putting together diverse information and data to capture the richness of residents' interactions with their living environments.

#### 0.3.2.2 Fieldwork Engagement Process and Ethical Considerations

The successful implementation of the ethnographic methods discussed above relies on carefully structured fieldwork strategies. Establishing trust with residents, gaining access to their homes, and sustaining long-term engagement are fundamental to the research process. Thus, before conducting interviews, observations, and visual documentation, a phased engagement strategy was developed to facilitate meaningful interactions with participants. The process was structured into five sequential phases and it balanced systematic data collection with sensitivity to participants' privacy and agency.

In Phase 1, I gathered publicly available online information and collaborated with interior media outlets. These partners were already in contact with individuals preparing for or welcoming in-home visits. In addition, recommendations from open house event organizers helped identify potential participants. Together, these sources facilitated initial outreach through email inquiries and community events. This preliminary phase was crucial for identifying potential cases for further study.

Phase 2 involved the first on-site evaluation, typically conducted during open house events. At this stage, I assessed the architectural characteristics and occupancy patterns of the house or apartment to determine its representativeness and suitability as a research case. This evaluation provided essential context for the subsequent, more in-depth phases.

In Phase 3, I approached residents to gauge their willingness to participate in interviews. During these interactions, I provided detailed information about the research process, including ethical considerations such as informed consent and anonymity agreements. I also scheduled home visits, prepared interview questions, and obtained basic floor plans, establishing a clear foundation for ethical and systematic data collection.

Phase 4 focused on building trust through initial in-home interviews. I expanded the participant base by engaging directly with residents and using referrals from key informants

through a snowball sampling technique. This approach also helped build rapport, which was essential for gathering reliable data.

Finally, Phase 5 extended the engagement longitudinally over a period of six to twelve months. This sustained interaction allowed for follow-up interviews and ongoing observation of any changes in occupancy patterns, reinforcing trust and enabling a more dynamic understanding of the living environments under study. Preliminary research findings were shared with participants for verification, ensuring that anonymization of personal data was properly handled.

Throughout these phases, several challenges had to be navigated. Establishing trust while ethically observing private spaces and discussing personal aspects of domestic life required careful negotiation. Ethical protocols were rigorously applied throughout this study to protect participants' rights and dignity while maintaining research integrity. Informed consent procedures formed the cornerstone of ethical practice. All participants received detailed explanations of the study's scope, data usage, and their right to withdraw at any stage, as outlined in the standardized consent forms approved by the institutional ethics committee (see Appendix D for approval documentation and consent templates). Verbal consent was re-confirmed before each data collection activity, particularly when documenting sensitive domestic spaces.

#### 0.3.2.3 Case-study List: Architectural & Ethnographic Parameters

Through the fieldwork process, this study selected a range of case studies that reflect typical live/work homes in UK and China. A total of 35 cases were chosen: 20 from China, predominantly in Beijing and Shanghai, and 15 from the UK, all located in London.

This section outlines the final list of case studies. Each case study is documented with a set of architectural and ethnographic parameters. Architectural details include the type of residence, approximate building age, and postcode district, while ethnographic data encompass occupant demographics (e.g., number of residents, occupation), ownership type (rented or owned), gender and age of the primary participant, and the date of interview. These parameters provide a comprehensive framework for comparing how different housing types and occupant characteristics intersect with the demands of knowledge-based work conducted within the home. Table 0-1, 0-2 below present lists of the cases.

Table 0-1 Case-study List 1: China Case

| Num. | Participant Code | Gender | Age | Occupation | Occupant Demographics | City/ Postcode District | Type of House | Building Time | Ownership Type | Date of Interview |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | CN01 | Male | 26 | Student | Shared housing | Shanghai | Apartment | 1990s | Rent | 21/07/20 |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | CN02 | Male | 24 | Designer | Single occupant | Beijing | Apartment | 1970s | Rent | 22/07/20 |
| 3 | CN03 | Female | 27 | Young Architect | Shared housing | Shanghai | Apartment | 2010s | Rent | 25/07/20 |
| 4 | CN04 | Female | 35 | Designer | Couple | Shanghai | 2 identical Apartments | 2015 | 1 Owned + 1 Rent | 01/08/20 |
| 5 | CN05 | Male | 30 | Writer | Multigenerational (5 adults) | Beijing | Apartment | 1980s | Owned | 03/08/20 |
| 6 | CN06 | Female | 31 | Architect | Couple | Shanghai | Apartment | 1990s | Rent | 05/08/20 |
| 7 | CN07 | Female | 29 | Young Scholar | Retired Couple + Daughter | Beijing | Apartment | 1990s | Owned | 05/08/20 |
| 8 | CN08 | Female | 28 | Young Scholar | Retired Couple + Daughter | Shanghai | Apartment | 2010s | Owned | 07/08/20 |
| 9 | CN09 | Male | 35 | Architect | Single-parent family | Beijing | Apartment | 2000s | Owned | 08/08/20 |
| 10 | CN10 | Female | 30 | Designer | Single occupant | Shanghai | Apartment | 2000s | Owned | 09/08/20 |
| 11 | CN11 | Male | 50 | Scholar | Couple + child | Beijing | Apartment | 1990s | Owned | 11/09/20 |
| 12 | CN12 | Male | 56 | Architect | Couple | Shanghai | Apartment | 2006 | Owned | 13/09/20 |
| 13 | CN13 | Male | 54 | Architect | Multigenerational (4 adults) | Shanghai | Apartment | 2000s | Owned | 13/09/20 |
| 14 | CN14 | Female | 39 | Architect | Couple + child | Shanghai | Apartment | 1940s | Owned | 15/09/20 |
| 15 | CN15 | Male | 50 | Architect | Single occupant | Shanghai | Apartment | 1990s | Owned | 16/09/20 |
| 16 | CN16 | Male | 48 | Architect | Couple + child | Shanghai | Apartment | 2000s | Owned | 21/09/20 |
| 17 | CN17 | Male | 51 | Architect | Couple | Beijing | Apartment | 2010s | Rent | 23/09/20 |
| 18 | CN18 | Female | 42 | Architect | Couple | Beijing | Apartment | 2010s | Owned | 27/09/20 |
| 19 | CN19 | Female | 44 | Architect | Couple + child | Shanghai | Apartment | 2000s | Owned | 27/09/20 |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 20 | CN20 | Male | 45 | Architect | Couple | Beijing | 2 Apartments | 1990s | Owned | 07/10/20 |

Table 0-2 Case-study List 2: UK Case

| Num. | Participant Code | Gender | Age | Occupation | Occupant Demographics | City/ Postcode District | Type of House | Building Time | Ownership Type | Date of Interview |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | UK01 | Female | 30 | Curator | Single occupant | E1 | Georgian House | 1830s | Owned | 11/03/21 |
| 2 | UK02 | Female | 29 | Freelance illustrator | Couple | SE22 | Victorian House | 1900s | Owned | 14/03/21 |
| 3 | UK03 | Female | 41 | Design consultant | Family of five (couple + three children) | SE22 | Victorian House | 1910s | Owned | 15/03/21 |
| 4 | UK04 | Female | 65 | Painter | Couple | SE22 | Victorian House | 1900s | Owned | 15/05/22 |
| 5 | UK05 | Female | 63 | Half-retired Journalist | Couple | SE4 | Modernist House | 2003-2006 | Owned | 03/07/22 |
| 6 | UK06 | Female | 37 | Fashion designer | Couple | SE22 | Modernist House | 1900s | Rent | 20/05/22 |
| 7 | UK07 | Male | 39 | Book designer | Couple + 2 children | SE22 | Modernist House | 1900s | Owned | 20/05/22 |
| 8 | UK08 | Female | 35 | Writer | Couple + child | SW11 | Victorian House | 1890s | Owned | 08/08/21 |
| 9 | UK09 | Male | 33 | Architect | Single occupant | N1 | Victorian House | 1900s | Owned | 08/10/21 |
| 10 | UK10 | Female | 55 | Scholar | Couple + child | E1 | Georgian House | 1830s | Owned | 13/10/21 |
| 11 | UK11 | Female | 68 | Fashion designer | Retailed Couple | EC2Y | Modernist Apartment | 1976 | Owned | 08/09/22 |
| 12 | UK12 | Male | 45 | Journalist, Writer | Single occupant | EC2Y | Modernist Apartment | 1976 | Owned | 08/09/22 |
| 13 | UK13 | Male | 32 | Freelance illustrator | Shared housing | EC2Y | Modernist Apartment | 1976 | Rent | 08/09/22 |
| 14 | UK14 | Male | 29 | Photographer | Single occupant | NW3 | Modernist Apartment | 1934 | Owned | 15/09/22 |
| 15 | UK15 | Female | 28 | Young Scholar | Single occupant | SE1 | Modernist Apartment | 2017 | Rent | 16/09/22 |

These tables are essential for the comparative analysis in later chapters. They help examine how architectural forms and occupant characteristics interact in knowledge-based live/work homes. The selection of cases focuses on representativeness across housing types, urban settings, and demographic diversity.

For the Chinese context, the study identified 20 cases, distributed as follows: 8 in Beijing and 12 in Shanghai. These include 7 old public housing apartments (4 in Beijing and 3 in Shanghai) and 13 commodity housing apartments (4 in Beijing and 9 in Shanghai). In the UK, 15 cases were identified, comprising 2 Georgian terraced houses, 5 Victorian terraced houses, 3 modernist terraced houses, and 5 modernist apartments. This combination reflects a balanced representation of different historical periods and architectural typologies while keeping the scope manageable for detailed study.

It should be noted that not all 35 cases will undergo detailed analysis in the case study chapters. Instead, an initial overview of the full set will be conducted to pinpoint particularly representative cases, which will then be explored in greater depth to derive meaningful insights. This approach allows for a focused and effective discussion within the constraints of the research.

### 0.3.3 Interviews and Questions

The following section provides a detailed discussion of the design, implementation, development, and iteration of interviews and questions conducted in the case studies, along with reflections on the process.

#### 0.3.3.1 Interview Design and Implementation

***1) Overview of Interview Design***

The interview design for this study was structured to accommodate cross-cultural and contextual differences between Chinese and UK households, while maintaining methodological consistency through an iterative ethnographic framework. Interviews were conducted in two distinct phases: online sessions in China (constrained by pandemic restrictions and cultural norms) and on-site visits in the UK and also in China later (post-pandemic). Both phases adhered to a semi-structured format, balancing predefined questions with emergent themes, and employed multimodal recording techniques.

As previously mentioned, in China, interviews were conducted remotely via video conferencing platforms (e.g., Tencent Meeting, Zoom) during the pandemic, followed by supplementary post-pandemic in-home visits to validate initial findings and conduct additional interviews on new themes. Chinese households, even outside pandemic contexts, exhibited cultural hesitancy toward hosting external researchers, necessitating a hybrid approach. In contrast, UK interviews were conducted entirely in person, with participants welcoming direct home visits. Interviews lasted 60–90 minutes and were conducted in participants' native languages (Mandarin in China, English in the UK), prioritizing colloquial language to establish rapport and encourage candid responses.

To capture spatial, behavioural, and narrative data, multiple recording methods were employed:

Digital recordings: Audio and screen recordings for online interviews; audio for on-site sessions.

Spatial documentation: On-site sketches by researcher, annotated floor plans, and photographs to contextualize house layouts, domestic objects and living practices.

Transcription: Verbatim transcription of audio recordings, supplemented by observational notes and timestamped annotations for nonverbal cues (e.g., gestures, spatial interactions).

***2) Online Interview Process in China***

The Chinese segment of the study was initiated during the pandemic, drawing heavily on my observations and experiences as a basis for formulating the initial interview questions. The process unfolded as follows:

Version 1: An initial set of questions was developed based on early observations of home work practices during the pandemic. This version focused broadly on spatial usage, domestic arrangements, and work-related adaptations. These questions were then tested through pilot interviews with two architect families.

Pilot Study and Revision: Feedback from the pilot interviews revealed areas that required further refinement. Based on this feedback, the questionnaire was adjusted—yielding Version 2—wherein questions were fine-tuned to better capture the nuances of household spatial practices without intruding on private matters. (For specific modifications to the questionnaire content and the reasons behind them, please refer to the detailed description in the following section).

Formal Interviews: With Version 2 in hand, formal online interviews were conducted with a broader group of Chinese architect families. During these sessions, cross-case validation and comparisons were performed to identify common themes and divergent practices across different households.

Post-Pandemic Supplementary Visits: After the easing of pandemic restrictions, additional in-person visits were arranged. These supplementary, non-structured discussions provided further insights into evolving home work practices. Ultimately, the final questionnaire—Version 3—integrated the revised questions from the Chinese phase with emerging insights from ongoing fieldwork in the UK.

***3) On-site Interview Process in the UK***

The UK phase of the study was conducted entirely through on-site home visits, following a similar iterative cycle:

Initial On-site Observations: The process began with extensive on-site observations in London, during which initial impressions of domestic spatial practices were recorded. These

observations informed the adaptation of the questionnaire originally developed for the Chinese online interviews.

Preparation and Revision of Questions (Version 3): Building on the insights gathered from the Chinese pilot studies, the questionnaire was re-examined and further modified. This revision involved reflecting on the initial online questions, adjusting them, and incorporating unexpected themes that emerged from preliminary field observations. The revised instrument, Version 3, included additional questions to emphasize home renovation and expand focus on domestic objects and digital technology, etc.

Formal On-site Interviews: With Version 3 finalized, formal interviews were conducted during home visits in London.

Iterative Validation: As with the Chinese phase, the UK interviews underwent an iterative validation process, where feedback from one case informed further modifications, ensuring that the final questionnaire effectively captured the complexities of home-based work in London.

#### 0.3.3.2 Question Development: Iterative Ethnographic Refinement

In the iterative development of the questionnaire from Version 1 to Version 3, several key transformations occurred. The evolution illustrates a clear trajectory from broad, exploratory inquiries to more nuanced, context-specific questions, as documented in *Appendix A: Questionnaires Versions 01–03*. Some of the most significant refinements are:

***1) From Descriptions to Walkthroughs: Evolving Questions of Daily Routines***

Initially, my approach was grounded in online structured interviews accompanied by self-drawn floor plans. The progression moved from general questions to those incorporating spatial specifics, and finally to an immersive, on-site methodology that emphasizes rich, narrative accounts.

Versions 1 to 2, conducted with online respondents in China, primarily relied on structured descriptions and self-drawn floor plans. The initial approach in Version 1 was exploratory, featuring broad, open-ended questions such as:

- *“Please describe the key areas in your home space during the pandemic, and how these areas supported your daily living and work.”*

Version 2 further introduced visual representation:

- *"Please draw a floor plan of your home and mark the usage of different spaces and your daily routine. Indicate the area where you felt most ‘at home’ during the pandemic, along with 3-5 keywords describing how the functions of these areas changed."*

This combination of drawings and keywords facilitated a comparative analysis of spatial practices before and during the pandemic. However, due to the online nature of these interviews, responses depended largely on verbal descriptions and self-produced drawings, which were convenient for remote data collection. (*For examples of this drawing-based*

*interview method, see Appendix B - Raw Data Examples - 03. the respondents' drawings of their live/work home.*)

In contrast, Version 3, conducted on-site with participants in London, introduced a biographical narrative approach, leveraging the advantages of in-person observation. Rather than relying on self-drawn diagrams, respondents were asked to physically guide me through their homes while narrating their daily spatial routines:

- *"Please give me a tour of your home, explaining your daily spatial routines as you move through different areas. Describe in detail how you experience and use these spaces throughout the day."*

This methodological shift was driven by two key considerations. First, the immersive nature of on-site walkthroughs allowed for real-time observation of spatial practices, capturing nuances that might have been lost in verbal or diagram-based descriptions. Second, this approach addressed the researcher's initial unfamiliarity with British domestic life, enabling a more contextualized understanding of how living spaces are experienced and navigated.

Additionally, the self-drawing exercise was removed in Version 3. Given the ability to document spaces directly through photographs, walkthroughs, and real-time dialogue, this revision reduced the burden on respondents while avoiding biases introduced by conventional drawing practices, such as the tendency to conform to architectural representation norms. By allowing participants to articulate their experiences through movement and direct engagement with their environment, this adaptation yielded richer ethnographic insights into the evolving relationship between domestic space and everyday work-life.

***2) Emphasizing Home Renovation***

In the iterative refinement of our questionnaire, a second critical evolution emerged: the heightened focus on home modification and renovation. For Versions 1–2, which were administered to online respondents in China, the primary inquiry was,

- *"Please describe how you used the spaces in your home during the pandemic."*

At this stage, the questionnaire primarily aimed to capture residents' experiences of space utilization during the pandemic. Given that many Chinese apartment typologies are relatively fixed and residents rarely engage in substantive modifications, the questionnaire did not specifically target the subject of home renovation. Respondents provided valuable insights into their spatial usage without an explicit emphasis on reconfiguration.

In contrast, Version 3—designed for in-person interviews with London respondents—introduced new questions to capture experiences related to residential modification. One added question asked,

- *"Describe a time when the design of your house impacted your work experience or interactions between family members."*

It invited participants to reflect on how specific design elements influenced their live/work life. Additionally, a speculative co-design question was incorporated:

- *“How would you reconfigure these spaces if given full agency to redesign them to better meet your needs?”*

This question aimed to explore residents' agency in reshaping their living environments, inviting them to envision possible spatial reconfigurations that align with their evolving needs.

These targeted questions were introduced in recognition of the fact that, in London, practices of home modification and self-design are considerably more prevalent—particularly in houses where conditions for self-renovation are more favourable. By incorporating these inquiries, the revised questionnaire sought to capture how residents actively engage with their living spaces, utilizing limited resources to reconfigure and adapt their homes in ways that reflect their daily work and life requirements.

Furthermore, in the follow-up in-person interviews conducted in China after the pandemic, the research also incorporated questions on home modification in China cases. As discussed in Chapter 4, Chinese respondents also reflected on their apartment renovation processes, with some households having undertaken multiple rounds of renovation over the past decade. This expansion allowed for a comparative perspective, illustrating how home adaptation practices evolved in both UK and Chinese contexts.

### *3) Integrating Structured and Open-ended Questions*

In the iterative refinement of our questionnaire, a third key evolution was the integration of both structured and open-ended questions to capture a more comprehensive range of insights.

During the initial stages - Version 1–2 (Online Interviews with Chinese Respondents), the questionnaire predominantly employed structured questions to facilitate data comparability. For example, respondents were asked:

- *"What are the functions of the different areas in your home? (e.g., living, working, dining, etc.) Please list them accordingly."*

This structured approach was adopted to ensure uniformity in responses, making it easier to compare data across different households.
In contrast, the in-person interviews conducted in London later - Version 3 - incorporated more open-ended questions to allow for richer, narrative responses. An example of such an open-ended question is:

- *"Could you discuss your overall experience of using the spaces in your home, and what details do you feel best reflect your family’s character? Which elements best capture your unique work habits?"*

Despite the increased emphasis on open-ended inquiries, a subset of standardized structured questions was retained. This balanced approach was implemented because, as a foreign researcher with limited familiarity with British domestic life, allowing respondents to articulate their experiences in their own words yielded deeper, more nuanced insights. At the same time, maintaining some structured questions enabled effective comparison of key variables across cases.

### 4) *Avoiding Intrusion into Household Privacy*

In response to concerns regarding the intrusion into private family matters, the questionnaire underwent some revisions to address these concerns while still capturing essential information on household spatial patterns.

Version 1 (Online Interviews with Chinese Respondents)

- *"Please describe the individual space domains of each family member in your home and how they are used."*

Initially, the questionnaire focused on gathering detailed accounts of how each family member utilized distinct areas within the home. However, some respondents indicated that this question was inappropriate and intrusive, particularly because it delved too deeply into private matters—especially regarding couple relationships—thereby raising concerns over intrusiveness and sensitivity.

Version 2 (Online Interviews with Chinese Respondents)

- *"Please explain how family members shared or allocated different areas of the home during the pandemic, and whether this allocation affected family interactions."*

Recognizing the need to protect individual privacy, the question was revised to shift attention from personal territoriality to the collective dynamics of shared spaces. This modification aimed to capture the overall pattern of spatial allocation within the household and its influence on family interactions, thereby providing a more balanced perspective without overemphasizing sensitive personal details.

Version 3 (On-Site Interviews with London Respondents and Follow-up Interviews in China)

- *"Please describe how your household has flexibly adapted the use of your home spaces to accommodate the demands of work and family life. If it's okay, please detail any reconfigurations of shared areas and explain how these changes have influenced your family life."*

In the final iteration, the question was further refined to focus on overall household spatial usage patterns rather than individual domains. This broader inquiry not only safeguards privacy by avoiding overly specific probing into personal territories but also yields representative data on how households have dynamically reconfigured their living environments.

### 5) *Expanding Focus on Domestic Objects and Digital Technology*

A significant evolution in the refinement of our questionnaire was the increased emphasis on the role of domestic objects, including both traditional household items and digital devices.

In the initial versions (Versions 1–2, Online Interviews with Chinese Respondents), the questionnaire primarily centred on spatial configurations and modifications, without explicitly addressing the impact of objects within the home. It overlooked the material and technological elements that mediate daily life and work practices.

During the final phase of on-site interviews in London (Version 3), it became evident that household objects—both physical and digital—play a crucial role in shaping home-based work environments. As a result, a dedicated section, Domestic Objects and Digital Technology, was introduced. This section included more targeted questions, such as:

- *"What is the significance of one specific furniture or household object in your home? How does it contribute to the overall ambiance and functionality of your home space?"*
- *"In what ways do these domestic objects influence your daily routines and work practices? Please provide specific examples of how particular items have impacted your productivity or well-being."*
- *"Could you discuss the role of digital devices—such as smartphones, computers, touch screens, and iPads—in mediating your work and personal interactions? How have these technologies transformed the way you live and work?"*

By incorporating these new questions, the revised questionnaire allowed respondents to articulate how material and technological elements contribute to their productivity, creativity, and sense of home. This adjustment not only enriched the qualitative depth of the study but also provided a more holistic understanding of the relationship between work, space, and material culture within contemporary domestic settings.

#### 0.3.3.3 Positionality and Reflexivity in Research

Positionality and reflexivity are crucial to the integrity of this ethnographic method, shaping how my identity—as an architect-researcher, a Chinese scholar living in the UK, a woman, and a home-based worker—influences every stage of the research process, from data collection to interpretation. Recognizing these influences does not compromise objectivity; rather, it strengthens the analysis by making visible the interplay between my own perspectives and the lived experiences of participants.

My background in architecture and design provides a specialized lens for examining domestic workspaces, allowing me to notice subtle spatial practices such as patterns of use, modifications, and material choices. However, this expertise also comes with the risk of imposing preconceived frameworks that may overlook aspects of home life beyond architectural concerns. To mitigate this, I have remained reflexive throughout the research process—suspending design-centred assumptions during interviews, remaining open to unexpected spatial practices, and prioritizing the context-specific interpretations of participants over disciplinary conventions.

As a Chinese researcher studying British households, I occupy a position that is neither fully inside nor outside the cultural context. My initial lack of familiarity with British domestic life created gaps in interpretation, but my time living and studying in the UK provided essential cultural context. At the same time, my "fresh eye" allowed me to notice and question everyday domestic practices that might be taken for granted by local researchers. This dual perspective has proven valuable in identifying spatial patterns and work habits that might otherwise go unnoticed.

My position as a woman has also shaped my approach, particularly in understanding gender dynamics within home-based work environments. I have been especially attentive to how power operates within domestic settings—a dimension often overlooked in studies that treat space as neutral. In designing my interviews, I intentionally avoided questions that reinforce gender stereotypes, such as those about work-life balance, which are commonly asked of women but rarely of men. However, I remained focused on key gendered aspects of home-based work, such as whether women take on more invisible domestic labour, whether their workspaces and schedules are more fragmented due to caregiving responsibilities, and whether working from home offers them greater autonomy or reinforces traditional gender roles.

Finally, my own experience of working extensively from home in both China and the UK has provided me with a personal understanding of the challenges and possibilities of adapting domestic spaces for professional use. This shared experience has helped me build rapport with participants and interpret their responses with greater nuance, while also ensuring that my own familiarity with home-based work does not overshadow the diversity of experiences reflected in the study.

In sum, this critical reflexivity emphasizes that all ethnographic knowledge is collaboratively constructed, shaped by the researcher's intersecting identities. Rather than chasing a false neutrality, the study uses positionality as an analytical tool to examine how power, culture, and embodiment influence the production of space. By clearly mapping these intersections, the study transforms these partial perspectives into the foundation for a more inclusive, multi-voiced understanding of domesticity.

### 0.4 Research Method 02: Drawing the Interior

#### 0.4.1 Why the Drawing Method?

The drawing method constitutes a cornerstone of this research due to its unique capacity to synthesize diverse case study materials—interviews, floor plans (CAD drawings), photographs, and field observations—collected from live/work homes. These materials, while rich in detail, remain fragmented without a method to integrate them. Layered drawings address this challenge by establishing connections among discrete pieces of information, revealing the intricate relationships between the physical structure of the home (housing layout, rooms), its material contents (furniture, objects, aesthetic forms), and the inhabitants' lived experiences (homemaking activities, living trajectories, territories, and perceptions). This integrative process transforms raw data into a cohesive representation, offering a holistic understanding of domestic life in these hybrid spaces.

Beyond synthesis, the drawings serve a critical function by foregrounding inhabitation, an aspect often overlooked in conventional architectural representation. The scaled drawings in this thesis overlay housing plans with data on domestic inhabitation and material culture, adhering to professional drawing conventions while celebrating the "traces of living"—the everyday objects and activities that define a home. This approach contrasts sharply with the

orthographic projections typically produced by architects, which prioritize spatial production over lived experience. Similarly, architectural photography frequently excludes signs of inhabitation, depicting buildings as empty shells or staged with minimal designer furnishings, devoid of people or daily clutter. While the omission of inhabited environments in photography has been critiqued, the parallel absence in architectural drawing remains underexplored. This thesis seeks to redress that gap, using layered drawings to honour and analyse the tangible traces of domesticity.

Moreover, the drawing method proves particularly effective for a comparative study of live/work homes in China and the United Kingdom. By visualizing how houses are adapted to meet the unique needs of their inhabitants, the drawings reveal the underlying design tactics and personal strategies that transform a mere structure into a home. They capture the negotiation between architectural form and the spatial practices of daily living, offering insights into how residents arrange their possessions, appropriate their spaces, and ultimately shape their domestic environments.

### 0.4.2 Methodological Precedents and Inspirations

The interior drawing methods employed in this study are informed by a diverse range of theoretical backgrounds and practical precedents. The diagram below (Figure 0-1) presents a structured framework of these influences, distinguishing theoretical backgrounds (green text) from drawing precedents (black text). It illustrates the dual foundation of my drawing methodology—rooted in critical theory while advancing through innovative drawing approaches.

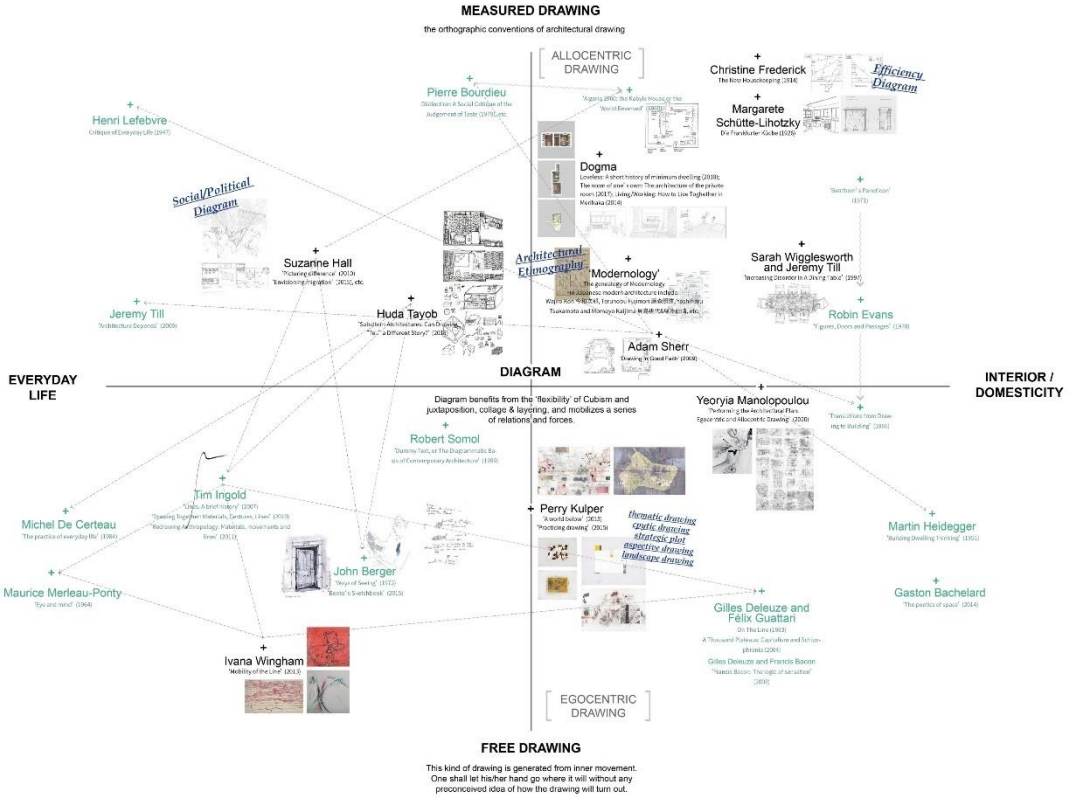


Figure 0-1 A diagram presenting the methodological background and precedents of interior drawing

The diagram organizes various methodological precedents along two axes:

**Vertical Axis: Measured Drawing ↔ Free Drawing**

- Measured Drawing (Top): This end of the axis represents the orthographic conventions of architectural drawing—plans, sections, and elevations that are typically precise, technical, and used to communicate objective spatial information. At this end, references can be found to those who rely on systematic, often quantitative methods to record and analyse built environments (e.g., Christine Frederick and Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, who examined domestic workspaces through functional and ergonomic lenses).

- Free Drawing (Bottom): This end represents more exploratory, subjective, and often hand-drawn approaches, which capture the lived, temporal, and qualitative dimensions of space. Scholars like Tim Ingold[9] or Perry Kulper[10] may fall here, as they advocate drawing as a process of thinking, imagining, and revealing social or phenomenological aspects that standardized architectural drawing can overlook.

[9] Ingold, Tim. *Lines: a brief history*. Routledge, 2016.
Ingold, Tim. *Making: Anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture*. Routledge, 2013.
Ingold, Tim, ed. *Redrawing anthropology: Materials, movements, lines*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2011.
[10] Kulper, Perry. "A world below." *Architectural Design* 83.5 (2013): 56-63.

**Horizontal Axis: Everyday Life ↔ Interior/Domesticity**

- Everyday Life (Left): The left side emphasizes the social, cultural, and anthropological dimensions of how people actually inhabit space. Scholars like Pierre Bourdieu[11] and Suzanne Hall[12] can be positioned in this context for their focus on lived experience and cultural practices in everyday environments, particularly in urban spaces.

- Interior/Domesticity (Right): The right side highlights methods and theories specifically concerned with interior design, domestic organization, and the psychological or poetic dimensions of home life (e.g., Gaston Bachelard's[13] reflections on domestic space, or Yoryia Manolopoulou's[14] explorations of how drawings mediate interior experience).

By intersecting these two axes, the diagram creates four quadrants that situate different scholars and practitioners according to the nature of their work: from highly measured and functional representations to more free-form, interpretive depictions of lived domesticity.

**Four Quadrants and Their Focus**

- **Top-Left Quadrant (Measured Drawing + Everyday Life)**

  This quadrant combines precise, measured drawing techniques with the context of everyday life, focusing on how structured drawings can represent daily activities and socio-political environments. For instance, Pierre Bourdieu's sociological methods illuminate how spatial arrangements reflect social structures[15]. Similarly, Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984)[16] examines how people navigate and appropriate everyday spaces, offering a theoretical basis for drawing practices that map these behaviors with precision. When applied to architectural drawing, this approach ensures that "measured" diagrams also capture the sociocultural nuances of inhabitants' daily routines. For example, Suzanne Hall (2015)[17] employs precise drawings to visualize social differences and diversity in everyday settings, such as urban spaces.

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[11] Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Logic of Practice.* Stanford University Press, 1990.
Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.* Harvard University Press, 1984.
[12] Hall, Suzanne. *City, street and citizen: The measure of the ordinary*. Routledge, 2012.
Hall, Suzanne. "Picturing difference: Juxtaposition, collage and layering of a multiethnic street." *Anthropology matters* 12.1 (2010): 1-17.
Hall, Suzanne M., Julia King, and Robin Finlay. "Envisioning migration: drawing the infrastructure of Stapleton Road, Bristol." *New Diversities* 17.2 (2015): 59-72.
Hall, Suzanne. "Drawing as listening." *ARCH+* 238 (2020).
[13] Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Beacon Press, 1958.
[14] Manolopoulou, Yeoryia. "Unformed drawing: notes, sketches, and diagrams." *Journal of Architecture* 10.5 (2005): 517-525.
Manolopoulou, Yeoryia. "Drawing on chance: extracts from Drafting Pier 40." *The Journal of Architecture* 11.3 (2006): 303-314.
Manolopoulou, G. "Performing the architectural plan: egocentric and allocentric drawing." *De Gruyter*, 2021. 294-309.
[15] Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Logic of Practice.* Stanford University Press, 1990.
Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.* Harvard University Press, 1984.
[16] Certeau, Michel de. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. University of California Press, 1984.
[17] Hall, Suzanne M., Julia King, and Robin Finlay. "Envisioning migration: drawing the infrastructure of Stapleton Road, Bristol." *New Diversities* 17.2 (2015): 59-72.

This inspires my methodological approach: incorporating ethnographic detail into precise, orthographic drawings—using measurements and scales while ensuring that everyday practices and cultural contexts remain visible.

- **Top-Right Quadrant (Measured Drawing + Interior/Domesticity)**

This quadrant applies measured drawing techniques to interior and domestic spaces, emphasizing precision in both designing functional and socially significant home environments and documenting everyday domestic activities and phenomena. The diagram showcases a series of figures who use rational, technical drawings to address domestic organization. For example, Christine Frederick's *The New Housekeeping* (1914)[18] and Margaret Schütte-Lihotzky's *Frankfurt Kitchen* (1926)[19] employed technical, measured drawings to optimize and rationalize domestic workspaces for efficiency, particularly through kitchen designs based on time-motion studies. Similarly, Dogma's projects, such as *Loveless: A Short History of Minimum Dwelling* (2018)[20], *The Room of One's Own* (2017)[21], and *Living/Working: How to Live Together in Merihaka* (2014)[22], use precise architectural drawings to critically examine domesticity and interior space. Through measured plans, sections, and axonometric projections, these works analyze historical housing models, spatial typologies, and the socio-political dimensions of dwelling. By merging historical research with speculative design, they employ systematic representation to reveal spatial patterns and propose alternative living arrangements.

The methodological implication for my study is that the emphasis on accuracy and functional logic could help to systematically plan and represent domestic interiors. This drawing tradition underscores the importance of precise data—such as dimensions, circulation patterns, and ergonomic considerations—in the drawing and investigation of interior spaces.

In the lower part of this quadrant, other precedents combine measured drawing with free drawing, offering equally significant insights for this study. For instance, Sarah Wigglesworth and Jeremy Till's *Increasing Disorder in a Dining Table* (1997)[23] is an analytical drawing that records the evolving state of a dining table over time. The drawing illustrates how a seemingly structured space—initially set for a meal—gradually transforms through human interaction, accumulating objects, traces of use, and shifting arrangements. This project demonstrates how line drawings can serve as a tool for documenting the temporality of everyday life, emphasizing the interplay between structured spatial organization and the spontaneous, unpredictable nature of human

[18] Frederick, Christine. *The New Housekeeping: Efficiency Studies in Home Management*. Doubleday, Page & Company, 1914.
[19] Schütte-Lihotzky, Margarete. *The Frankfurt Kitchen*. Designed 1926–27. Museum of Modern Art, New York.
[20] Tattara, Martino, and Pier Vittorio Aureli. *Loveless: The Minimum Dwelling and its Discontents*. Black Square, Milan, 2019.
[21] Tattara, Martino, and Pier Vittorio Aureli. *The Room of One's Own. The Architecture of the (Private) Room*. Black Square, Milan, 2017.
[22] Aureli, Pier Vittorio, and Martino Tattara. *Living/Working: How To Live Together in Merihaka*. L'Esprit de l'Escalier, Helsinki, 2014.
[23] Till, Jeremy, and Sarah Wigglesworth. "Table manners." *Architectural Design*, 1998. 31-36.

activity. It also challenges the conventional architectural tendency to depict space as static and uninhabited, instead offering a way to visualize lived experience through a temporal sequence of changes.

Another important precedent is Architectural Ethnography, which combines measured with hand drawings to document and analyse everyday human habitation. Originating from Wajiro Kon's[24] studies of urban life in early 20th-century Japan, this approach has been further developed by architects such as Terunobu Fujimori[25], Yoshiharu Tsukamoto, and Momoyo Kaijima[26]. Their work employs observational drawings and analytical diagrams to capture spatial adaptations, personal belongings, and transient behaviours, revealing how people shape and negotiate their environments. By integrating ethnographic methods with architectural representation, their practices highlight the dynamic relationship between built space and daily life.

A more recent example is Adam Sharr's *Drawing in Good Faith* (2009)[27], in which he examines case studies of architectural drawings to advocate for a more ethical and socially responsible approach to representation. He highlights the responsibility of architects to represent inhabited spaces with sensitivity, reinforcing the role of drawing as a means of engaging with lived experiences rather than merely documenting static forms.

These precedents, which integrate precise measured drawing with freehand techniques, have influenced my drawing methodology by demonstrating how architectural representation can capture both the structural logic of space and the fluidity of lived experience. Rather than treating architectural drawing solely as a tool for technical documentation, these examples highlight its potential as an analytical and narrative device—one that can reveal the evolving relationships between people, objects, and spaces over time. Inspired by these works, my drawings aim to bridge the gap between abstraction and everyday reality, making visible the patterns of habitation, adaptation, and transformation.

- **Bottom-Left Quadrant (Free Drawing + Everyday Life)**

This quadrant highlights approaches that treat drawing as an exploratory and anthropological act, capturing fluid social interactions. Free drawings, in particular, reveal ephemeral traces of inhabitation—such as movements, daily rituals, and personal narratives.

Several important theoretical perspectives inform this approach. In *Lines: A Brief History* (2007)[28], Tim Ingold examines the concept of lines across various human activities,

[24] Wajiro, Kon. *Modernologio: Observations on the City and Everyday Life*. (『考現学入門』) Waseda University Press, 1930.
[25] Fujimori, Terunobu. *Adventures in Architecture*. Toto, 2007.
[26] Kaijima, Momoyo, Tsukamoto, Yoshiharu, & Karin Reiger (Eds.). *Architectural Ethnography: Atelier Bow-Wow.* Japan Pavilion, 2018.
Kaijima, Momoyo, Tsukamoto, Yoshiharu, & Junzo Kuroda. *Made in Tokyo.* Kajima Institute Publishing, 2001.
Atelier Bow-Wow. *Behaviorology.* Rizzoli, 2010.
[27] Sharr, Adam. "Drawing in good faith." *Architectural Theory Review* 14.3 (2009): 306-321.
[28] Ingold, Tim. *Lines: a brief history*. Routledge, 2016.

including drawing. He proposes that drawing is not merely a representational act but a process akin to "going for a walk with a pencil," thereby emphasizing the fluid and dynamic nature of lines. Ingold contrasts freehand sketches, which convey movement and life, with the rigid, straight lines typical of technical drawings, thus highlighting how freehand lines can capture the vitality of lived experience.

Similarly, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's[29] phenomenological approach to understanding the body's relationship with space has significantly influenced drawing methods. His ideas encourage me to focus on the sensory and experiential aspects of spaces, fostering drawings that represent the embodied experience of the residents.

In addition, John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972)[30] explores how societal norms and contexts shape our perception of art. Berger argues that our understanding of images is molded by learned assumptions about beauty, truth, and cultural values. This perspective suggests that drawing practices—for instance those depicting interiors in my study—should be conscious of these cultural constructions and strive to challenge traditional interpretations.

More recently, Ivana Wingham's *Mobility of the Line: Art Architecture Design* (2013)[31] further deepens our understanding by exploring the dynamic nature of lines in art, architecture, and design. Wingham also emphasizes that lines are not only representational but also embody movement and fluidity. Her work underscores the potential of lines as a trans-disciplinary critical tool, opening up possibilities for new forms of drawing.

Together, these theories and perspectives on free drawing have influenced my own drawing practice. They inspire me to adopt a dynamic approach that goes beyond static representation, allowing me to capture the fluidity and vitality of lived space—such as traces of movement, pauses, and daily rituals. I hope that viewing these drawings can evoke embodied memories in the observer.

- **Bottom-Right Quadrant (Free Drawing + Interior/Domesticity)**

This quadrant applies free drawing techniques to interior and domestic spaces, focusing on imaginative and emotional representations of home environments. The theoretical background is grounded in seminal works such as Martin Heidegger's *Building Dwelling Thinking* (1951)[32] and Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1958)[33], which provide a philosophical exploration and poetic lens on dwelling, thereby encouraging expressive drawings that evoke memory and imagination in personal spaces. Moreover, representative practitioners in this field include Perry Kulper[34], renowned for his

[29] Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1945
[30] Berger, John, and Mike Dibb. *Ways of Seeing*. London: BBC Enterprises, 1972.
[31] Wingham, Ivana. *Mobility of the Line: art, architecture, design.* Birkhäuser, 2013.
[32] Heidegger, Martin. "Building, Dwelling, Thinking." *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper & Row, (1951)1971, pp. 143-161.
[33] Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Beacon Press, 1958.
[34] Kulper, Perry. "A world below." *Architectural Design* 83.5 (2013): 56-63.

speculative and layered drawings that combine planimetric precision with imaginative overlays—demonstrating how multiple narrative and functional layers can coexist in a single image and pushing beyond standard orthographic conventions. Similarly, Yoryia Manolopoulou's[35] work emphasizes the subjective and temporal qualities of drawing, capturing ephemeral, personal aspects of inhabitation such as traces of memory, movement, and emotional resonance through freer, hand-drawn techniques that highlight the fluid nature of domestic life. Notably, she often invites multiple collaborators to join in the hand-drawing process, fostering a collective creative environment that integrates diverse perspectives and fostering mutual inspiration.

Inspired by their work, my drawings take into account the ephemeral traces of inhabitation—capturing subtle details such as the light, textures, fragmented objects, and even the seemingly insignificant marks of wear. Additionally, inspired by Perry Kulper, I have adopted a layered drawing approach that overlays diverse sources of information with equal importance. This method enables me to depict the multifaceted activities of occupants across various spatial and temporal dimensions, revealing the home as a dynamic, lived construction continuously shaped by everyday living.

### 0.4.3 How do I Draw? Methodological Choices and Originality

Building on these theoretical background and precedents, this study develops a set of case study drawings through various methodological experiments. Early drawing tests can be found in *Appendix C- Early Drawing Exploration Examples*. After some iterations, the final drawing method was established as overlaying scaled architectural plans with traces of everyday living and material culture. The originality of the drawing methodology lies in the following aspects:

#### *1) Scaled Plans with Inhabitation: Negotiations Between Structure, People, and Objects*

This drawing approach employs conventional orthographic projection but integrates everyday objects, furniture, and occupant activities. It addresses the sparseness typically seen in architectural drawing, which often neglects actual inhabitation. These drawings illustrate how dwellings meet the needs of inhabitants and how people arrange their belongings to transform a house into a home. They emphasize the spatial and social negotiations that occur when objects and people interact with architectural structure.

#### *2) Combining Precise and Imprecise Drawing*

The drawings in this study combine precise and imprecise techniques to capture the complex conditions of interiors. The precise, measured drawings—scaled floor plans created using two-

[35] Manolopoulou, Yeoryia. "Unformed drawing: notes, sketches, and diagrams." *Journal of Architecture* 10.5 (2005): 517-525.
Manolopoulou, Yeoryia. "Drawing on chance: extracts from Drafting Pier 40." *The Journal of Architecture* 11.3 (2006): 303-314.
Manolopoulou, G. "Performing the architectural plan: egocentric and allocentric drawing." *De Gruyter*, 2021. 294-309.

dimensional CAD drafting—serve as an objective record of spatial conditions. Meanwhile, the imprecise hand-drawings capture details of domestic objects and traces of living, such as placemats, power outlets, tablecloths, rugs, discarded bags, and the activities of inhabitants' everyday lives. These imprecise details function like snapshots in time, capturing momentary possibilities of inhabitation and forming part of personal stories, acknowledging that they will inevitably change over time.

***3) Equal Line Weight and Non-Hierarchical Representation***

In terms of drawing technique, apart from the thick black outline marking the exterior walls, all furniture, objects, people, and activities are intentionally drawn with the same line weight, without hierarchical distinction. This approach evokes the simultaneous presence of people, spaces, and objects, all contributing to the live/work life. A person checking their email, a keyboard, a chair, and a door are all treated with equal importance, recognizing them as part of an integrated spatial order.

***4) Adopting Various Drawing Traditions***

Building upon the overlaying drawings of each case, this study also selectively adopts various established diagrammatic traditions to represent several distinct spatial pattern diagrams. For example, by drawing on Bill Hillier's space syntax techniques, the study illustrates a conventional private home characterized by elaborate functional divisions. In contrast, to highlight an emerging pattern of fluidity and openness within a Victorian house, the research adopts a diagrammatic style reminiscent of modernist fluid space representations. By thoughtfully drawing on these diverse diagrammatic approaches, the study not only elucidates the varied spatial modes across the case studies but also positions them within broader architectural discourses.

***5) Drawings as Critical and Interpretive Tools***

The drawings organize relationships, focusing on the interaction and integration of different agents in domestic life. As scholars like John Berger have emphasized, drawing is both spatial and relational, and thus never simply technical or neutral. The drawings in this thesis are not neutral; they not only present selected information but also offer new, often unexpected perspectives on socio-spatial relations through the process of drawing.

Edward Tufte, in his work *Envisioning Information*, highlights that drawing is part of an imaginative and systematic research process:

> "The world is complex, dynamic, multidimensional; the paper is static, flat. How are we to represent the rich visual world of experience and measurement on mere flatland? [...] To envision information is to work at the intersections of image, word, number, and art." [36]

Influenced by John Berger and Edward Tufte, this thesis treats drawing not as a neutral technical exercise but as an imaginative, systematic, and relational process. By bridging

[36] Tufte, Edward R. *Envisioning Information*. Cheshire, Conn.: Graphics Press, 1990: 9.

sociocultural theory and innovative drawing methods, the research contributes to an expanded field of interior representation, one that honours the lived realities and personal stories that conventional plans often overlook.

## 0.5 Contribution

By reviewing the literature and analysing the cases, this thesis aims to contribute to the following areas:

**Contribution to Research Content:**

**Identifying Current Living Patterns in the UK and China's Contemporary Live/Work Homes**

This research identifies the current patterns of living in live/work homes in the UK and China, focusing specifically on two aspects: the patterns of spatial usage and the meanings of domestic objects. The study reveals significant changes in the living patterns in contemporary homes in both countries.

**Contribution to Research Perspective:**

**A Physical-Virtual Perspective of Thinking 'Live/Work'**

This study advances the ongoing discourse on live/work environments by offering a novel perspective that integrates the physical and virtual dimensions of home-based work in the digital age. While previous discussions have often focused on the spatial aspects of live/work environments, the interplay between physical and virtual spaces have not been fully explored. This research examines how the engagement of digital tools and virtual spaces has reshaped the concept of live/work spaces.

**Theoretical Contribution:**

**A Re-envisioning of the 'Corridor' Model**

This research revisits the original definition of the 'corridor' model by Robin Evans, reconceptualizing the private and public relationships within the home. It proposes several new "corridor" models that connect the internal and external, the self and others, the home and the city, the public and the private, facilitating the flow of information, relationships, emotions, and memories between these domains. It contribute to a re-conceptualization of the public-private relationship in today's urban living.

**Contribution to Research Methodology:**

**A Diagrammatic Approach to Interior Study**

This research introduces a diagrammatic approach for the detailed observation and spatial analysis of interior spaces, which allows for a more nuanced understanding of living patterns. By employing a layered drawing method, the study reveals intricate relationships between the house, rooms, furniture, objects, and residents' living trajectories, territories, and perceptions.

These drawings are crucial because they provide insights that would otherwise remain hidden. Without them, we would not fully grasp how the spatial role of corridors has changed in contemporary housing, nor would we recognize that, despite differences in floor plans, certain social classes in both the UK and China share remarkably similar lifestyles today. This drawing approach enhances the way interior studies are conducted by emphasizing the complex, interwoven nature of physical space and human interaction.

### 0.6 Thesis Organization

The main thesis is organized into two parts: literature reviews on public/private and live/work relationships and case studies on emerging living patterns in contemporary live/work homes.

Part I comprises chapters 1 and 2. To reconsider the concept of privacy in the digital age, the study begins with a detailed historical review of the evolving public-private relationship, which is divided into four distinct phases, in Chapter 1. Since the history of the separation between public and private life parallels the evolution of the live/work relationship, this review also establishes a historical context for analysing the live/work dynamic. Throughout the review, the study recognizes that one of the key mediators connecting the public and private realms within the interior is domestic objects. Chapter 2 surveys the literature on the "meaning" of domestic objects and highlights that something entirely "private" cannot, in itself, be considered meaningful, and the meaning of an object depends on a context of publicly or collectively constructed definitions. Based on the understanding that domestic objects always embody some relationship between the public and private spheres, this chapter provides an overview of the various spatial, symbolic, personal and familial meanings of objects.

Part II includes the next four chapters. Building on the historical and theoretical context of public/private and live/work relationships, Chapter 3-5 conduct three groups of case studies. They investigate new patterns of living within live/work homes in the UK and China, as well as in digitally mediated live/work homes. The case studies are based on field work, interviews, photographs and drawings of the homes. They pay particular attention to two aspects of home culture: the organization of space and the meaning of objects, and the interactions between these two. Chapter 5 delves deeper into how digital media impacts family spatial patterns and fosters new interactions between the public and private realms. Chapter 6 expands upon the previous case studies and conducts a reciprocal comparison of the UK and China cases. Ultimately, it identifies a series of new models of public/private relationships, grounded in an understanding of emerging domestic cultures.

The Conclusion summarizes the main arguments and addresses the limitations of this thesis.

# CHAPTER 1

## Negotiating “Privacy”:
## A History of the Relationship Between Public And Private

## INTRODUCTION

To better understand the newly emerging privacy issues within our homes, as well as the relationship between domestic life and productive work, it is essential to revisit the historical emergence and evolution of the concept of privacy.

Privacy is not something given in nature from the beginning of time. Although it is precisely defined in the dictionary - "the quality or state of being apart from company or observation: seclusion" - the term privacy is a thoroughly relative one. It is a historical construct that has been defined, maintained and evolved in different socio-cultural contexts over centuries and will continue to do so. Its history is primarily a history of its definition.

With the rise of modern capitalist cities, the distinction between public and private realms initially aimed to separate the boundaries between production and reproduction. Since then, the evolution of the concept of privacy has been closely linked to the dynamic changes in the relationship between living and working. Through a review and analysis of key literature, this chapter interprets the construction of the modern concept of privacy from the perspective of the transformation of the relationships between living and production, and between domestic spaces and workplaces, outlining the history of 'public-private' relationships across four distinct phases:

1) no separation; 2) the separation of private from public made possible by specialization of craft skills; 3) a clear separation of private and public life made possible by industrial production; 4) a new intrusion of the public into the private in the digital age.

The research approach is twofold: firstly, the evolution of the concept of privacy at the levels of ideology and social values is traced through detailed readings of historically and theoretically significant texts and buildings; secondly, by tracing the spatial configuration and typological evolution of domestic architecture in various historical periods, this study aims to reveal how the concept of privacy has materialized and embodied in physical spaces, and to understand the coevolving relationship between the idea and the space of home.

### 1.1 No Separation of Private and Public

As noted earlier, the concept of privacy is not something given in nature from the beginning of time. In order to understand why this particular attribute appeared within the home, it is necessary to first look at an earlier period.

In traditional "tribal" or village life, society was typically organized around collective or communal living and working, where members were closely connected, forming a tightly knit social group. In this social structure, people shared resources, engaged in labour together, and relied on each other in their daily lives. This was evident in all aspects of everyday life, from farming the land to sharing food and holding religious or cultural ceremonies—almost all

activities were conducted within the group. While people might have had separate sleeping spaces at night, these spaces were not fully distinct or permanent family homes and private domains; rather, they were more like temporary resting places. In such an environment, the concept of privacy was not yet known, and the boundaries between family members, as well as between the family and the larger community, were often fluid and unfixed.

### 1.2 The Separation of Private from Public Made Possible by Specialisation of Craft Skills

The initial separation of private and public spaces occurred during the specialization of craft skills. Beginning with traditional craft-based and artisan cultures, people engaged in low-tech, home-based work such as textiles, woodwork, and pottery. This form of home-based work represents the “first phase” of “domestic” life. During this period, the home evolved into a distinct “family unit,” separate from the larger social collective, functioning as a live-work space. Although these homes were distinct from collective gathering and ritual spaces, the boundary between private and public was still blurred, and the modern concepts of “private space” and “private life” had not yet fully developed. Work and trading practices often blurred the lines between the private and the public, as “public” work took place within the “private” home, leading to a unique overlap of personal and professional spaces. This early blending of spaces can be seen as an initial form of work “invading” the proto-home, illustrating the complex interplay between personal life and broader social activities.

#### 1.2.1 Medieval multi-purpose home

Traditional home-based craftwork primarily took place during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In the early medieval period, there was little to no division between different activities within the house. This was especially true for the houses of peasants and low-income families, which were typically made up of one or several simple, multi-purpose transformable spaces. Witold Rybczynski, in *Home: a short history of an idea*, notes that an important characteristic of the medieval house was "the crush and hubbub of life within them. These houses were not necessarily large-except compared to the hovels of the poor-but they were full of people. This was partly because, in the absence of restaurants, bars, and hotels, they served as public meeting places for entertaining and transacting business, but also because the household itself was large. In addition to the immediate family it included employees, servants, apprentices, friends, and protégés—households of up to twenty-five persons were not uncommon. Since all these people lived in one or at most two rooms, privacy was unknown”[1].

Pier Vittorio Aureli and Martino Tattara analyse the typology and layout of medieval dwellings. “Medieval homes often consisted of rectangular enclosures with a minimum of internal subdivision”. For example, in the rural homes from the 11th to 15th centuries (Fig. 1-1), most

[1] Rybczynski, Witold. *Home: A short history of an idea*. Penguin, 1987.

residents inhabited unobstructed narrow and long dwellings whose form and orientation derived from the parcel of cultivable land known as a croft.[2] “The core of the houses was the hearth, often located close to the entrance on the long side of the house. Both entrance and hearth provided a sense of orientation for the residents, whose indoor life would unfold around the hearth's light and heat...With an increase of agricultural production and the consequent possession of more goods and animals, peasant households could expand and develop some form of partitioning that subdivided the longhouse type into two or three rooms in order to separate the spaces reserved for people from those reserved for animals.[3]” In rural England, this form of dwelling is known as a longhouse. Figure 1-2 is based on the excavation of a cluster of longhouses in a medieval village, Wharram Percy in North Yorkshire. According to Holliss, within such longhouse, animals lived at one end and people at the other, separated only by a cross-passage[4]. All the activities of daily life, including cultivating the ground, tending animals, spinning wool, weaving and making clothing from the wool of their sheep, making leather from the hides of their cattle, preserving food for the winter months, cooking, cleaning and looking after their children, were woven seamlessly together in and around this single space.

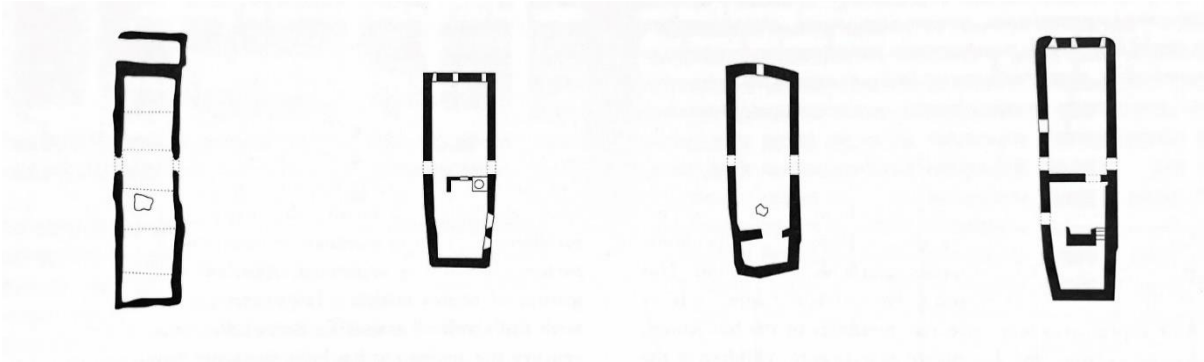

Figure 1-1 The medieval rural houses, Wharram and Widecombe, England, 13th century

Source: Adapted from Dogma, 2022

[2] See Philippe Contamine, "Peasant Hearth to Papal Palace: The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in A History of Private Life: Revelations of the Medieval World, ed. Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1988), 448-449.

[3] Aureli, Pier Vittorio, and Martino Tattara. *Living and working*. The MIT Press, 2022.

[4] Holliss, Frances. *Beyond Live/Work: The architecture of home-based work*. Routledge, 2015.

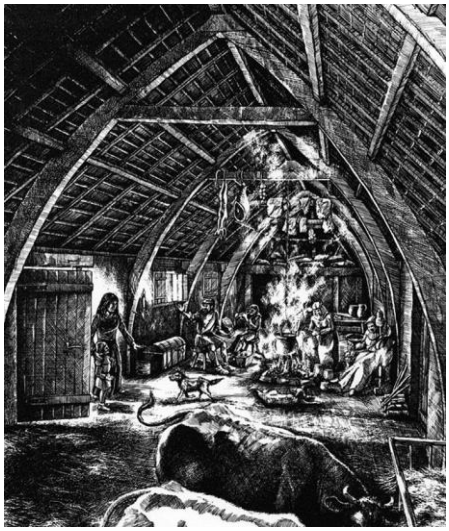

Figure 1-2 Reconstruction of daily life in a medieval longhouse in the deserted medieval village of Wharram Percy, North Yorkshire

Source: Adapted from Holliss, 2015

As the economy developed, more spatial subdivisions arose in the tall, compact townhouses of the emerging bourgeoisie in medieval towns and cities, although generally the working space and living space remained integrated. Figure 1-3 presents the layout and elevation forms of a group of multistorey townhouse from the 13th century city of Pisa, Italy. As medieval town was densely constructed, the street frontages of building plots was restricted. The building form of townhouses was based on the extrusion of small land parcels. The most important feature of this housing type was its relationship with the street, mediated by the façade, whose architecture—its openings, balconies, or loggias—built the connection between the domestic space and the public space of the city. The ground floor was occupied by the workplace or a shop which opened onto the street with porticos or large doors. The living quarters consisted of a single large chamber—the hall— which was open up to the rafters. People cooked, ate, entertained, and slept in this space. The productive and reproductive activities happen side by side. From a contemporary perspective, its domestic life was promiscuous.

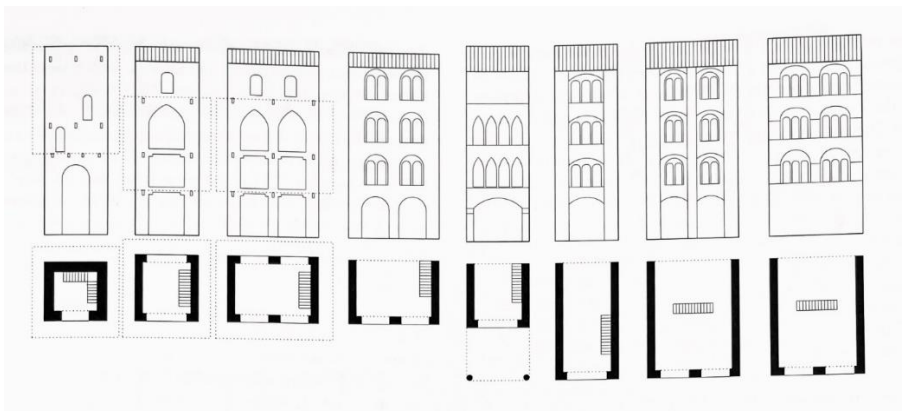

Figure 1-3 Townhouses, Pisa, 13th century, reconstruction by Giovanni Fanelli

Source: Adapted from Dogma, 2022

The townhouses of medieval England also integrated workspace with living accommodation. Ralph Treswell, an early seventeenth-century map-maker, drew surveys of a series of London buildings, medieval in layout and crammed together in tenements, that show that even the smallest tended to have a ground-floor shop, workshop, warehouse, inn or bake-house, and living spaces above (Fig. 1-4). Individual craft workers inhabited workhomes like this, clustered together on the streets of market towns, in which they made, stored and sold their goods. The form and inhabitation of these buildings continued virtually unchanged for centuries. Samuel Pepys was born in 1633 in one, his father's tailor's shop. The household, his biographer Claire Tomalin tells us, centred on the ground-floor shop and cutting room, a rear kitchen opening onto a yard: '… older children, maids and apprentices slept on the third floor … or in the garret, or in trundle beds, kept in most of the rooms, including the shop and the parlour; sometimes they bedded down in the kitchen for warmth'.[5]

Figure 1-4 Ralph Treswell survey plan, Cowe Lane, London, 1612

Source: Adapted from Holliss, 2015

Tension between promiscuity and subdivision is at stake in one of the earliest sophisticated forms of bourgeois houses: the English timber-frame houses built since the thirteenth century by well-to-do merchants and craftsmen (figure 1-5). Unlike most medieval houses, which often consisted of one-room habitations, English timber-frame houses were built as compounds subdivided into specialized rooms such as the shop—often located at the ground floor— the aula devoted to eating and socializing, and the camera for sleeping. Taking the example of this house at 58 French Street, Southampton, mentioned in Holliss' study, it was built for a wealthy 13th century wine merchant (Figure 1-6). It was entered through a narrow entrance passage that led past a shop where goods were displayed. Passers-by were served over a fold-down counter that acted as a shutter when not in use, protecting the building from theft and bad

[5] Tomalin, Claire. *Samuel Pepys: the unequalled self.* London: Vintage, 2007.

weather and indicating when the establishment was closed for business. The front shop and rear counting house, where the merchant made his most important transactions, opened off a large central, semi-public double-height space (the 'hall'), where customers were offered hospitality and meals were eaten. Family and guests slept in small front and rear first-floor rooms. It is very likely that the maids and apprentices were also members of the household and slept here as well. In this house, there is a certain degree of spatial division between commercial and domestic life, but there is also a mix of activities. For example, the main living room was a workspace where the master and his apprentice can conduct business and entertain customers, but it is also a space for children to play and servants to prepare food.

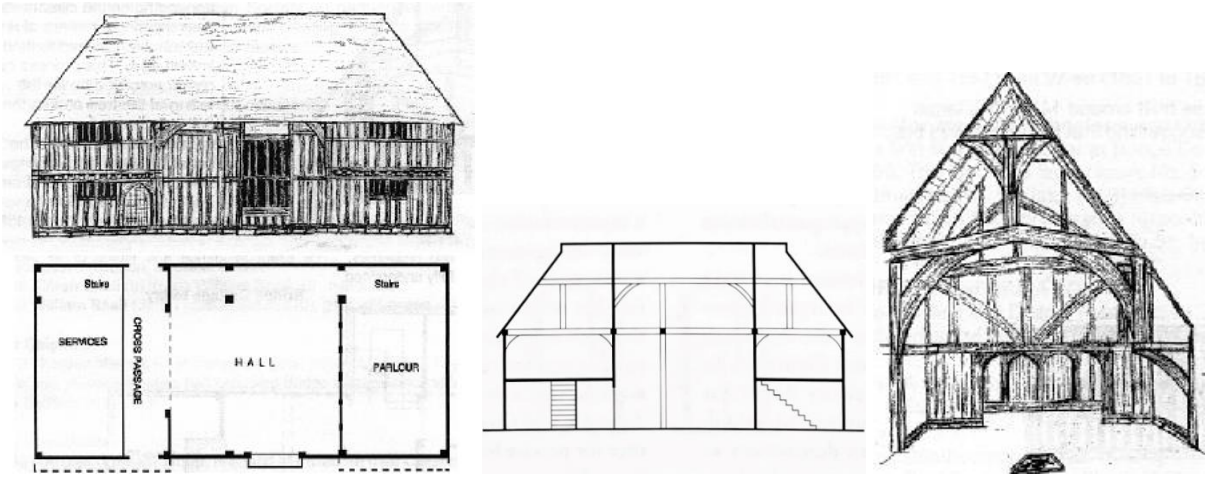


Figure 1-5 Example the English timber-frame houses built since the thirteenth century by well-to-do merchants and craftsmen: Bridee Cottage, Uckfield, England, fifteenth century

Source: adapted from Bridge Cottage Heritage Centre

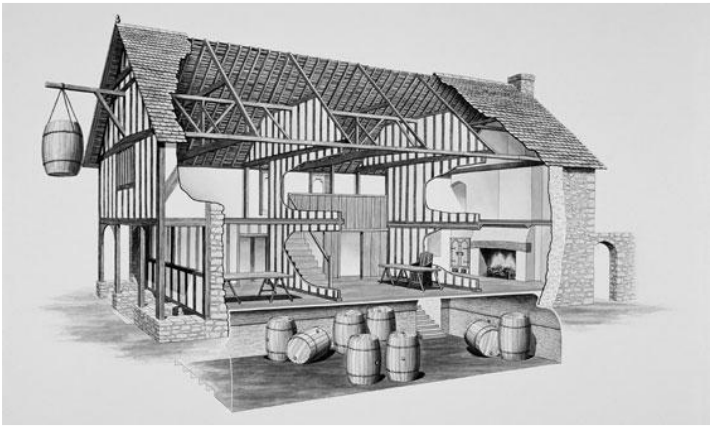

Figure 1-6 Cutaway drawing of medieval merchant's house at 58 French St, Southampton

Source: Adapted from Holliss, 2015

### 1.2.2 Live/Work Homes of the 17th to 19th Century

By the 17th century, although most people still worked within or around their homes, the spaces in these live/work houses became more differentiated, with work increasingly

allocated to a separate space. Technological innovations facilitated this shift: the invention of the fireplace with a chimney meant that different activities could take place simultaneously in independently heated spaces. Advances in glass manufacturing also lowered the cost of glass, allowing even ordinary workshops to have large glass openings leading to purpose-built workspaces. Holliss studied the homes of various craftsmen in UK during this period—such as textile workers, silk weavers, and watchmakers—focusing on how these two functions were separated yet coexisted within a single house. In some of the typical cases, it is possible to recognize how their living and working spaces were organized:

Small, simple live/work homes, such as those illustrated in Figure 1-7 , were occupied by less skilled piece-working silk-weavers. They often had a small upper-floor loom-shop lit by an oversized window that dominated the building's elevation. A contemporaneous interior view gives an idea of how the cramped space may have been inhabited (Fig. 1-8). A man weaves at a well-lit loom while a woman sits beside him at a table with an unfinished meal on it.

Figure 1-7 Early nineteenth-century weavers' live/work homes, Crossland Square, Bethnal Green, London

Source: Adapted from Holliss, 2015

Figure 1-8 Interior of early nineteenth-century Bethnal Green weaver's live/work home, 1894

Source: Adapted from Holliss, 2015

Larger, specialised family weaving businesses occupied more formal live/work houses, such as the one at 16 Elder St, London, in 1724 (Fig. 1-9). Wide arched windows lit large loom-shops at the second and third floor level, the two floors of living accommodation below having smaller more domestic-scale windows. Family members, employees and apprentices would

all have worked the looms, lived, worked and eaten together as a large extended family, with employees and apprentices sleeping in the workshop.

Figure 1-9 Weaver's live/work home, No. 16 Elder Street, Spitalfields, London, 1724

Source: Adapted from Holliss, 2015

Another type of craftworkers' home with a clearer division of work and living space is known as a 'top-shop' because they had top-floor workshops. They were commonly found in Coventry (Fig. 1-10). Number 32 Queen St, Hillfields, Coventry was built for a small ribbon-weaving master. It was a classic street-facing top-shop with a large rear workshop (Fig. 1-11). The whole building was organized around the business of making silk cloth, from taking orders to production. It included an office, separate workshops for winding and warping, a warehouse and a front room where customers were received, as well as a kitchen and bedrooms. A separate entrance and staircase for the master, his family and customers reinforced the underlying class structure (Fig. 1-12).

Figure 1-10 Nineteenth century Coventry top-shops

Source: Adapted from Holliss, 2015

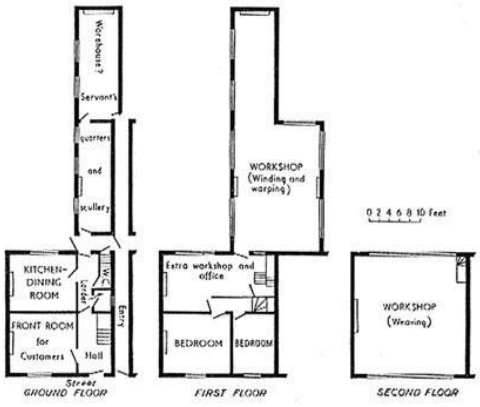


Figure 1-11 32 Queen St, Hillfields, Coventry. Street elevation

Figure 1-12 32 Queen St, Hillfields, Coventry. Plans

Source: Adapted from Holliss, 2015

Another type of working home looks like a family house from the street, with the workshop often located at the rear. These are commonly watchmakers' homes, perhaps for reasons of security or status. They had big windows, as the fiddly work of watchmaking involved the manufacture and assembly of tiny components and required high levels of natural light. But unlike those of the weavers, these workshops were single aspect; the watchmaker's workshop was designed around a single narrow well-lit bench at which a number of craftsmen worked. The master-watchmaker's live/work home at 61 Allesley Old Road, Chapelfields, housed a substantial business (Fig. 1-13,1-14). Family and customers used the formal front entrance and sitting room, while a separate back door used by employees led to workshops, warehouse space and offices on two floors. Apprentices and some employees slept in the workshops.

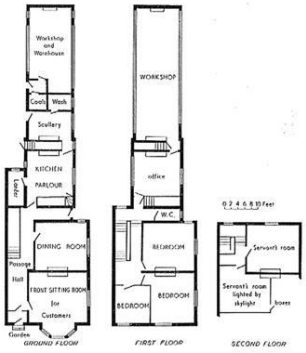


Figure 1-13 master-watchmaker's live/work home at No. 61 Allesley Old Rd, Coventry, Street elevation

Figure 1-14 master-watchmaker's live/work home at No. 61 Allesley Old Rd, Coventry, Plans

Source: Adapted from Holliss, 2015

Overall, the shape, size, and spatial organization of these live/work homes varied, depending on the nature of the resident's work, their status, and their relationship to the means of production. However, generally, as the level and scale of production increased, the spatial divisions of their house became clearer. This arrangement was highly convenient for worker families, as it allowed them to seamlessly combine paid work, household chores, and childcare while also fostering a sense of solidarity and community among households.[6]

### 1.3 A Clear Separation of Private and Public Life Made Possible by Industrial Production

#### 1.3.1 The Separation of Living and Working

In contrast to the previous model of home-based work, starting from the 18th and 19th centuries with the onset of the Industrial Revolution, production activities gradually shifted from home-based workspaces to independent workshops, factories, and offices, and the mode of production shifted from manual production to large-scale mechanised production. This differentiation was evident not only spatially but also normatively: households were no longer constrained by the work rules previously implemented within the domestic environment, and workplaces began to operate independently of the household order, adhering instead to collective contracts and public norms. Moreover, during the process of separating the production space from the reproductive space, wealthy classes started to cultivate the idea of an independent, quiet, and private domestic space and family life, viewing the home as a refuge from the promiscuity of working relationships. This can be viewed as the beginning of the privatization of the family.

Changes in economics and commerce facilitated this differentiation and specialization of space. The family of Cabdury, a Birmingham shopkeeper at the end of the 18th century, are cited in Volume 4 of the History of Private Life as an example of the spatial changes. In 1800, he and his wife were living above their store on one of Birmingham's main streets. It was common practice at that time for middle-class families to live above or next to their business premises. Whereas for their next generation, the space for business of their sons and daughters-in-law is separated from their suburban homes. It seeks to separate the "the sweet caresses and endearments of wife and children" from the "the cares and anxieties of business."[7]

At first glance, with the bourgeoisie's increasing pursuit of privacy, the evolution of the family seems simple: it gave up its "public" functions and retained only "private" ones. Hence, it is possible to speak of a “privatization" of the family. However, this view is not accurate or thorough enough, because although work leaves the home, the “unseen hand” still reaches in.

[6] Frances Hollis, Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work (New York: Routledge,2015), p 18-19.

[7] See Volume 4 of A History of Private Life, p 71

The lyrics of Bruce Springsteen's "Factory," released in June 1978, vividly depict the reality of working life during this historical period, especially the "intrusion" of work into family life:

> *Early in the morning factory whistle blows,*
> *Man rises from bed and puts on his clothes,*
> *Man takes his lunch, walks out in the morning light,*
> *It's the working, the working, just the working life.*

As people began to work in centralized factory spaces, their lifestyles and daily rhythms were profoundly altered. Workers resting at home could still clearly hear the factory whistle blowing in the distance, marking the beginning of a new daily rhythm. Their everyday activities—waking up, getting dressed, and packing lunch—were all structured around the factory's work schedule. This regimented life reflects the industrial control over personal time and the redefinition of the boundaries between work and life.

Therefore, even though the workplace had shifted from the home to the factory, family life was not entirely free from the influence of external economic forces. The "invisible hand" continued to operate within the household. The home became a place for workers to rest and recover while also preparing for labour in the factory. Relationships and roles within the family were also transformed by industrialization, with the family economy shifting from self-sufficiency to dependence on wage income. Overall, individuals and families did not become private units independent of production; rather, they became more deeply embedded in the operations of the capitalist economy.

### 1.3.2 The Modern Definition of Privacy

With the industrialisation of the 18th and 19th centuries, large-scale production activities and public affairs were removed from the home, and people's demand for a calm, independent family life became stronger, and the modern definition of privacy began to emerge.

In order to understand the broad category of private, let us first look at the etymology of the word "private". According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "private" in English has several meanings: In the 14th century, it referred to something "pertaining or belonging to oneself, not shared, peculiar to an individual only;" it also referred to a thing, "not open to the public, for the use of privileged persons;" and to a religious rule, "not shared by Christians generally, distinctive;" from Latin privatus "set apart (from what is public), belonging to oneself (not to the state), peculiar, personal," used in contrast to publicus, communis. This word is a past-participle adjective from the verb "privare," which means "to bereave, deprive, rob, strip" of anything; "to free, release, deliver" from anything, and is also derived from "privus," meaning "one's own, individual."[8]

Due to the complexity and multidimensionality of this concept, it has long been discussed in various theories of political philosophy. This chapter mainly references the theoretical models developed by Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas. Their research suggests that the concept

[8] Hoad, Terry F., ed. *Oxford Concise Dictionary English Etymology*, 2000:370.

of the private, as it is currently understood in Europe, being the product of a process directly related to the rise of the market society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[9] Relying on Habermas in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, the modern meaning of "privacy" is intimacy and seclusion, the desire to withdraw from social exchange, and at the same time implies the luxury to do so, which is identified with the bourgeois social status.[10]

In this concept, the term "private" is organically confined to specific individuals and encompasses a sense of subjectivity, meaning that individuals have control and exclusivity over their private space, information, or life. This confinement is "organic," indicating that it naturally forms and is closely bound up with an individual's identity and social role. The concept of privacy is not only limited to abstract personal subjectivity but also manifests concretely in physical and spatial forms, which means that privacy involves a spatiality. It is defined and experienced through the configuration and occupation of physical spaces. Its emergence coincided with the first opposition between the home and the workplace, and it developed along with the concept of the domestic interior.[11] After the 19th century, homes was increasingly seen as the providers of privacy and independence. The bourgeoisie further established the private realm by personalizing interior decorations through the practice of material possessions (decorations, furniture, clothing). Ultimately, "the multiplicity of experiences, conditions and behaviours related to these subjects and spaces (privacy) or the institutions and mechanisms that assign this character to them (privatisation), are conceived as parts of a greater whole and induce further abstraction – a retrospective impression of the whole as having pre-existed the multiplication of its parts,"[12] thereby constructing the concept of privacy.

### 1.3.3 The separation and blurring of the public and private within the house

The concepts of public and private realms were further articulated in the interior spaces of homes during this period, where the relationship between these two realms was characterized by both separation and complex patterns of mutual intrusion, penetration, or ambiguity.

First, the practice of separating the public and private spheres within the home gradually matured between the 16th and 19th centuries. Robin Evans's seminal essay, "Figures, Doors and Passages," provides an insightful analysis of the historical emergence of the corridor in upper-class and bourgeois houses—a device that separates the public function from the private rooms[13].

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[9] Arendt, Hannah. *The human condition.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958. and Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989.

[10] "The Bourgeois Family and the Institutionalization of a Privateness Oriented to an Audience," in Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, p43-50.

[11] Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity*, London: Routledge, 2007.

[12] Ioanna Piniara, PhD thesis, We Have Never Been Private: The Housing Project in Neoliberal Europe, 2020:43.

[13] Evans, Robin. "Figures, doors and passages." *Architectural Design*, 1978,48(4): 267-78.

Evans's article examines the evolution of European villas and dwellings from the 16th to the 19th centuries, using Italian and English cases as primary examples for the early and the late periods respectively. In describing this historical transformation, he identifies five key stages, each illustrated with a set of examples. The first case is the Villa Madama (1518–1825), a large villa, a rich matrix of interconnected chambers; the second comprises Beaufort House(1597), Coleshill House (1650-67) and Amesbury House (1661), where a central corridor emerged, but sometimes coexisted with a partial matrix of interconnected rooms; the third case is Bearwood Mansion (1864) by Robert Kerr, where the corridor plan was fully established in the mid-nineteenth century (Fig. 1-15); The fourth case is the Red House (by Philip Webb and William Morris) of 1859, confirming the dominance of the corridor plan (Fig. 1-16). While clearly separating spatial domains within the house, it also reveals the characteristics of Victorian domestic life: privacy, passivity, and decorum. In the fifth case are a Russian Club and a German 'Functional House', both of 1928, which push further the functional division of rooms and spaces.

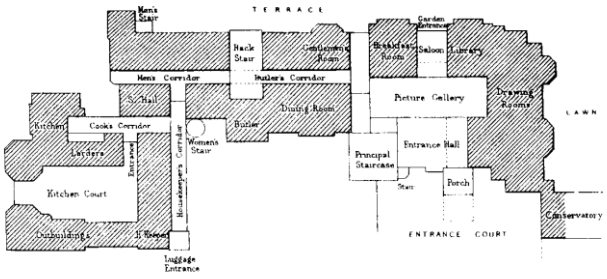


Figure 1-15 Bearwood Mansion, by Robert Kerr (1864)

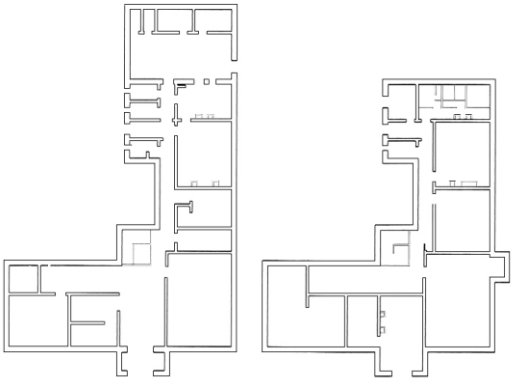

Figure 1-16 The Red House, by Philip Webb and William Morris (1859)

Evans's main discovery is that, in this historical evolution, the plan of the house has transformed, from a matrix of interconnected rooms (so one has to pass a few rooms to reach anywhere and most rooms have more than one door each), to a “corridor plan” where most rooms have one door each linking to a central corridor (and one can reach any of these rooms directly without passing through other rooms). A typical "corridor plan" house was generally divided into two domains: an inner sanctuary of inhabited but sometimes disconnected

rooms—or known as the private space; and an unoccupied circulation space — known as the relatively public space within the house. These traffic spaces were initially designed to eliminate the disturbance of servants to the master and guests, making it difficult to justify entering any room where you had no specific business. Therefore, along with this spatial evolution was a social change in domestic life from integrated to segregated. The emergence of corridors also witnessed the division of public and private spheres and the formation of the individual.

The terraced house, a key example of the corridor-based plan, emerged and saw extensive development in UK during the 18th and 19th centuries[14] (Fig. 1-17). Terraced houses were often developed within estates whose landowner prohibited the creation of any kind of working space in order to guarantee the high-end status and thus the value of their property. On a neighbourhood scale, the planning technique of segregating functions (especially housing and workplaces), originated in the very by-laws that London landowners imposed on their residential estates. In the internal layout of the house, as an offspring of the medieval townhouse, the terraced house was compact and functionally distinct and it centred on the life of the nuclear family. They were typically two to three stories. They had a narrow frontage, usually between 4 to 6 meters wide, while the length could extend up to 10 meters or even longer. The main entrance was usually positioned in the centre or to one side of the front facade, leading into a hallway that typically ran straight through to the back of the house, connecting various functional rooms. Typically, the front is the living room for meeting and entertaining, and the rear is the kitchen and dining area. The corridor layout was often closely integrated with the staircase, which was usually located in the middle or rear of the corridor, providing access to the upper floors where bedrooms and bathrooms were situated.

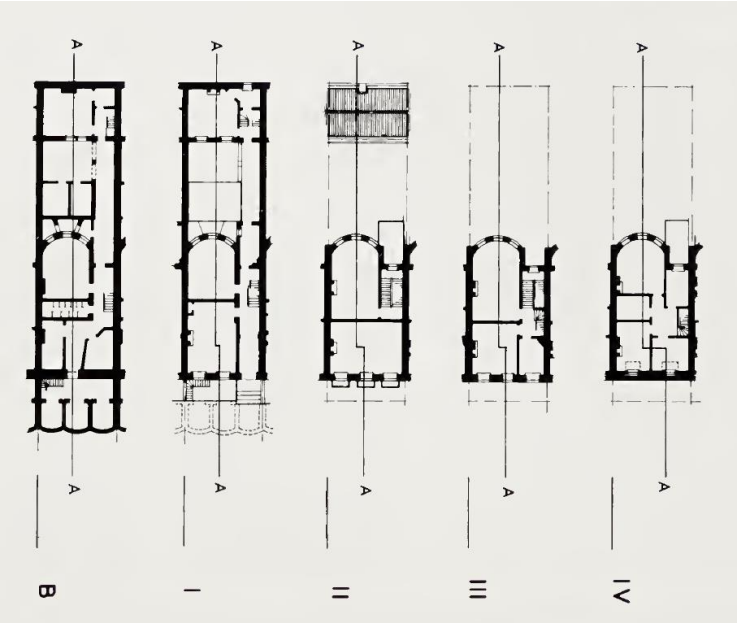


Figure 1-17 English terraced house, Bedford Square, London, 1775-1780

Source: adapted from Stefan Muthesius, 1982

[14] Muthesius, Stefan. *The English Terraced Houses*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.

However, this predetermined spatial order is not static and is often blurred in everyday living, with public and private spheres interpenetrating each other. Roger-Henri Guerrand studied 19th-century urban bourgeois dwellings in France, represented by multi-storey, multi-family apartment buildings. He describes the organisation and use of space within the apartments, and finds that some spaces are both public and private, functional and decorative. First is the foyer, just inside the door. It is the threshold between the urban space and the domestic space, between the public and private realms. Unless invited, visitors cannot pass beyond the foyer. In the foyer callers were sorted out and directed to their proper destination. Then there is the dining room. "Here the family put itself on display for its guests. It displayed its silver and exhibited the centerpiece it had commissioned from a fashionable goldsmith. Mealtimes were a highpoint of social intercourse: "It was at table that deals were done, ambitions avowed, and marriages concluded."[15] The dining room was a place for social occasions and also the place where family members gathered daily. "When dinner was over and the tablecloth had been removed and the oil lamp had been set up, the wife took up her embroidery, the husband took up his book or newspaper, the children gathered their toys, and everyone talked freely."[16] It has both a public side as well as some private hours and scenarios of use, such as the lady of the house reading and doing needlework there. Another social space in the home is the salon, which sees scene of the ritual that linked the new society to the old: the regularly scheduled reception, the "day" on which the lady of the house was "at home" to visitors. The salon held significant symbolic importance: it signified membership in a class. It symbolized urbanity and sociability, two characteristics of the bourgeoisie. Also, the staircase in the apartment had multiple attributes. Initially designed as a purely functional space for circulation, it became a focal point for display in the later use. For example, staircases in upper-class apartment buildings was intended to create an immediate impression, hence the elaborate banister, the lamps, and the statues of various materials carefully placed (Fig. 1-18).

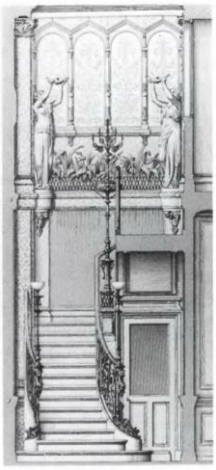

Figure 1-18 the staircase in upper-class apartment buildings, Daly, L'Architectureprivée au XIXe siècle

[15] Aron, Jean-Paul. *Le Mangeur du XIXe siècle*. Paris: Laffont, 1973.
[16] Cardon, Emile. *L'Art au foyer domestique*. Paris: H. Loones, 1884.

Source: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale. Adapted from *A History of Private Life*. Vol. 4, 1987)

Additionally, certain figures often disrupt and blur the boundaries of public and private spheres within the home, such as servants and neighbors. For the bourgeoisie, who increasingly valued privacy, the presence of servants posed a threat to privacy. Their close surveillance could be embarrassing, particularly in intimate spaces like bathrooms and bedrooms. French historian Jules Michelet remarked on the surveillance by servants: " The rich ...live before their domestics [read: before their enemies). They eat, sleep, and make love under hateful, mocking eyes. They have no privacy, no secrecy, no home." Servants, whom Michelet referred to as "our enemies," were always eager to discover their masters secrets. Many paintings from the time depict "domestic espionage" activities. Figure 1-19 portrays two servants spy on madame through the keyhole, and a chambermaid avidly reads her mistress' mail and is in turn caught in the act by the lady herself. These acts of peeking and eavesdropping broke the predefined boundaries. As a result, servants were required to avoid any unnecessary contact with the family. House designs increasingly isolated work areas from the living spaces of the owners, with the invention of the corridor embodying this need. Viollet-le-Duc, in his Histoire d'une maison (History of a House, 1873), lavished a great deal of attention on vestibules, corridors, and stairways, considering them not only as avenues of circulation and communication but also as escape routes. Meanwhile, Jeremy Bentham's brother, Samuel, designed a system for English households that allowed the master to call servants from a distance. By the 19th century, the use of call bells for summoning servants had become widespread. With the bell system in place, servants no longer needed to sit on hardwood chairs in the hall, becoming increasingly invisible. This rejection of servants as intruders into the private sphere eventually led to the gradual disappearance of servants and domestic service from bourgeois households.

Figure 1-19 Domestic espionage

Left: two servants spy on madame through the keyhole, Remy Gogghe, Madame Is Receiving. (Salon of 1908); Right: a chambermaid avidly reads her mistress' mail and is in turn caught in

the act by the lady herself, Mistress of the House and Her Indiscreet Chambermaid. (Salon of 1904-), Source: Adapted from *A History of Private Life*. Vol. 4, 1987

### 1.3.4 'Domestic Symbols': A Private Appropriation and Display of Public Meanings

Beyond the spatial practices of dwelling, another significant medium for mediating and negotiating between public and private realms within the home is domestic objects—such as collections, decorations, and furniture. With the emergence of bourgeois private homes, the interior became a key site for self-expression. Many scholars have pointed out that the bourgeois increasingly expressed and cultivated its identity through material elements within the interior[17]. This act of collecting and displaying "domestic symbols" can be seen as a private appropriation and display of public meanings. However, to truly understand the meanings of these symbols, we must reflect on the inherent logic of the concept of "meaning" itself, and the necessary connection between the private and public spheres.

The reason why the display of symbols and objects in this private space can have 'meaning' is that 'meaning' itself is a relational concept. The generation and understanding of meaning depends on publicly or collectively constructed contexts and value systems, and cannot be separated from the common socio-cultural definition of what is 'meaningful'. If something is entirely private and not connected to the external public world, then its meaning cannot be described or conveyed. In other words, the existence and transmission of meaning depends on public, collective recognition and interpretation. Therefore, the display of domestic objects actually connects the private space to the public context, giving these objects a socialised 'meaning'.

In this sense, the arrangement of objects, the choice of decor styles, and symbolic representations within the home are not merely expressions of personal preferences but reflect broader social value systems and cultural contexts. Benjamin's *The Arcade Project* and Volume 4 of *The History of Private Life*, among many other works, are important texts on this topic. It will be further explored in the next chapter.

## 1.4 A new public-private integration

In contemporary living patterns, we have witnessed new intrusions of the public realm into the private domain and a renewed merging of the two. This is evident in three significant trends: The first is the "co-living" experiments and various types of "co-housing" for urban young professionals, which have evolved from anti-domesticity traditions and the collectivization of domestic labour. The second is the development of "live-work" units and

[17] See Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999; Ariès, Philippe, Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot, eds. *A history of private life. Vol. 4.* Harvard University Press, 1987; Rybczynski, Witold. *Home: A short history of an idea*. Penguin, 1987; Miller, Daniel. *The Comfort of Things*. Polity Press, 2008.

other forms of flexible, decentralized home-based work in the post-Fordist era, stemming from the trend of reintegrating living and working, production and reproduction. The third is the "digital home" model that has emerged after the public world invades conventional private homes in the form of virtual media. The subsequent discussion will elaborate on these three new models that further integrate the public and private realms within domestic spaces.

### 1.4.1 Anti-domesticity: Collectivization of Domestic Labour

Since the separation of public and private spheres, cooking food, taking care of children, and cleaning rooms—often considered "women's work"—have been performed unpaid within the domestic environment. The kitchen is viewed as a symbol of the exclusive sphere of women's occupation, which includes domestic and affective labor. Also the spread of household appliances further reinforced the solitary confinement of housewives in the realm of cooking. This issue was widely discussed around the prototype of the Frankfurt Kitchen[18], designed in 1926 by architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, which aimed to anticipate every move of the housewife. One of the central topics was the problems brought about by the gender division of labor for women. As Dolores Hayden noted in her seminal book *The Grand Domestic Revolution*[19], material feminists—those who focus on economic and spatial issues as the basis of material life—challenged the so-called "women's sphere" and "women's work." They challenged two characteristics of industrial capitalism: the physical separation of household space from public space, and the economic separation of the domestic economy from the political economy. In order to overcome patterns of urban space and domestic space that isolated women and made their domestic work invisible, they developed new forms of neighborhood organizations, including housewives' cooperatives, as well as new building types, including the kitchen-less house, the day care center, the public kitchen, and the community dining club. The goal was to free women from the narrow bonds of one-family domesticity through collective domestic services. They also proposed ideal, feminist cities. By redefining housework and the housing needs of women and their families, they pushed architects and urban planners to reconsider the effects of design on family life.

The tradition of anti-domesticity and the experiments in the collectivization of domestic labour can be traced back to utopian socialism. In his social treatise *The Theory of the Four Movements and the General Destinies* (Théorie des quatre mouvements et destinées générales, 1808)[20], Charles Fourier proposed a community of about 1,600 residents called a Phalanx, which served as a pioneering example of anti-domestic space. The Phalanx (from the Greek term indicating a compact body of troops) was to be a group of peers living in a

[18] The Frankfurt Kitchen, designed in 1926 by Austrian architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, is often regarded as one of the first modern kitchens specifically designed for efficiency in small urban apartments. As part of the social housing project in Frankfurt, the kitchen was conceived based on ergonomic principles and influenced by Taylorist ideas of industrial efficiency. The compact design sought to optimize space and minimize movement, improving the workflow of everyday domestic tasks.

[19] Hayden, Dolores. *The grand domestic revolution: A history of feminist designs for American homes, neighborhoods, and cities*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982.

[20] Fourier, Charles. *Théorie des quatre mouvements et des destinées générales*. Paris: Les Presses du réel, 1998 (1808).

communal palace known as the Phalanstery and surrounded by agricultural and industrial facilities. The Phalanstery was made of wings of apartments enclosing communal gardens and served by generous indoor galleries (Fig. 1-20). Both gardens and galleries were imagined by Fourier as a way to encourage social relationships among the inhabitants. Life in the Phalanx was obsessively scheduled by working and leisure activities, aiming to socialize all aspects of life from production to reproduction. As Dolores Hayden argued, Fourierist communities and religious communes, as critiques of traditional single-family homes and their social values, advocated a collective lifestyle in which domestic activities would be socialized, freeing inhabitants from the burdens of property and repetitive daily labor.

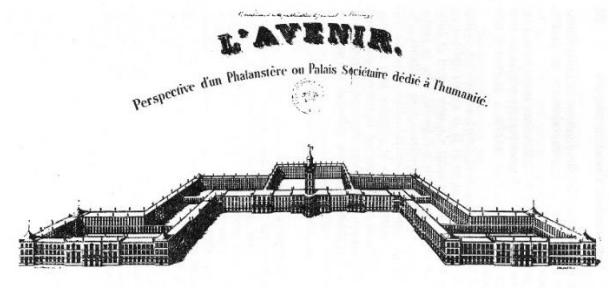


Figure 1-20 Perspective view of Fourier's Phalanx

Inspired by Fourier's concept of the Phalanstère, French social reformer Jean-Baptiste André Godin established an innovative social housing project called the Familistère (1859-84) (Figure 1-21). This project provided hygienic housing for workers near his factory and achieved a certain degree of social reform and collectivized living. It consisted of three rectangular multi-story buildings, each arranged around an interior courtyard with a glass roof. The community featured public laundries, communal kitchens and dining halls, as well as nurseries and schools for the workers' children.

Figure 1-21 the Familistère, established by Jean-Baptiste André Godin (1859-84)

Besides these radical initiatives, alternatives to family life were also advanced in a more commercial way, such as hotels. An early and popular form of hotel living took place inside private homes in the form of boarding rooms. These rooms were offered by private residents to men and women at a price that included both meals and housekeeping. Boarding-houses commercialized reproductive activities and were often run by women, thus professionalizing domestic labor and challenging the common view of women's work as a labor of love for her family. Later, entrepreneurs built a dedicated type of accommodation, known as residential hotels (Fig. 1-22). The most outstanding examples of this typology, which proliferated in the second half of the nineteenth century, were the "palace hotels" built as sumptuous palazzi, as in the case of the Palace Hotel in San Francisco (1875) which comprised rooms for single occupancy, apartments for families, and a plethora of collective amenities such as lobbies, halls, saloon, and restaurants. In these hotels, housekeeping was centralized and efficiently managed, making them profitable for their owners and attractive for those who wanted to avoid the burden of domestic chores. For example, the elderly and disabled dwellers could count on networks of mutual aid self-organized by hotel residents. Overall, residential hotels became hotbeds for radical anti-domestic lifestyles. They were not just homes for transient people, but also a sort of communal houses that fostered solidarity among residents beyond the scale of the family. Hotel life became so popular among the upper and middle classes that this typology influenced even forms of long-term accommodation such as the kitchenless apartment and home clubs (Fig. 1-23), which offered various housing units for singles and families, marking the first appearance of cooperative housing in the United States.[21]

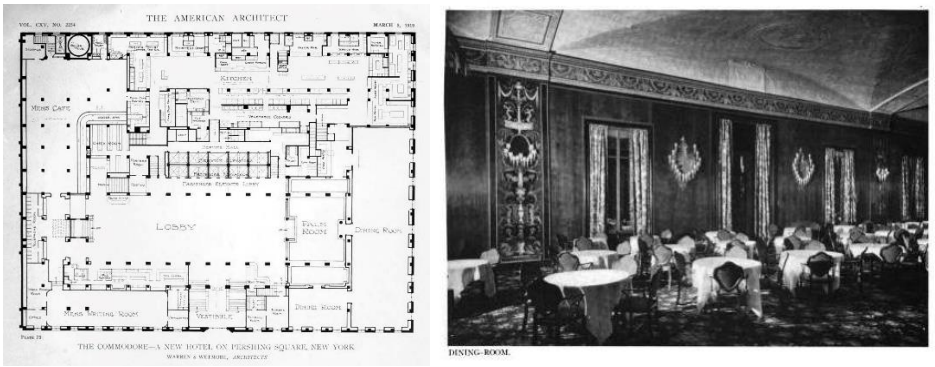


Figure 1-22 Commodore Hotel, New York, 1919, ground floor and dining room, architects: Warren and Wetmore

[21] Dogma. 2019. *Loveless: The Minimum Dwelling and Its Discontents*. Milan: Black Square, 2019: 56-57.

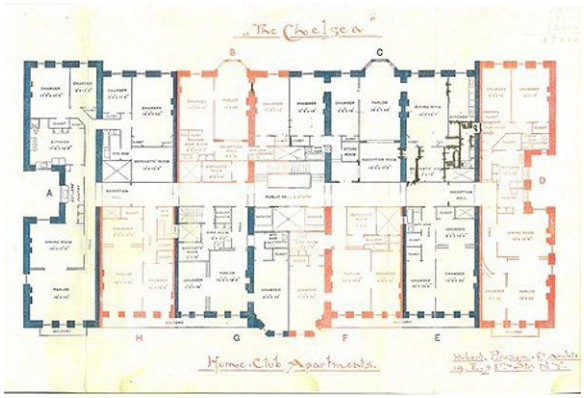


Figure 1-23 Chelsea Hotel, New York, 1883. typical floor. architect: Philip G. Hubert

In the 20th century, the exploration of anti-domestic living models is exemplified by the collectivization of minimal housing for the working class. Critic and poet Karel Teige, in his 1932 book *The Minimum Dwelling*, argued that new minimal housing should be envisioned in a fundamentally different way[22]. His exploration was a polemical response to the concept of Existenzminimum proposed by CIAM architects at the 1929 Frankfurt conference. Teige argued that given the fact that since proletarian families did not really have a family life anyhow – because the reality of production conditions forced them to devote too much time to commuting and working hours, so that the only time they spent at home was for sleeping – this situation should be taken as an opportunity to develop a new way of collective living. Teige thus proposed a model of minimal housing (Fig. 1-24) where each individual would have a private room—a universal living unit with a bedroom annex sitting-room. All aspects related to domestic labor (cooking, housekeeping, childcare, services) would be collectivized and centralized. The traditional domestic space and its subject, the nuclear family, would thus be dismantled, and the pattern of domesticity would be broken up. Each individual, man as well as woman, could free him- or herself from this burden in order to exploit fully his or her potential for participation in public life.

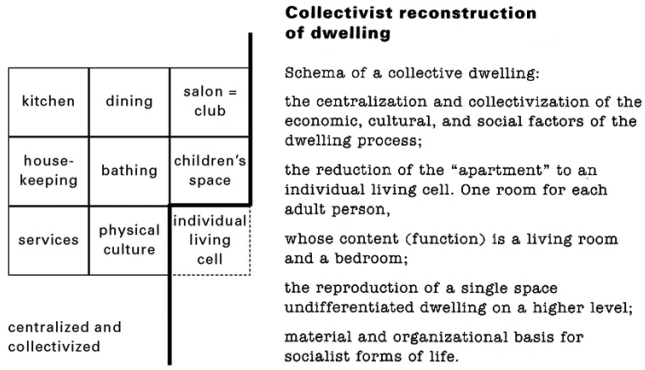


Figure 1-24 The collectivist reconstruction of the dwelling, Teige, 1932

[22] Teige, Karel. *The Minimum Dwelling*. Translated by Eric Dluhosch. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press; Chicago, Ill.: Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, 2002(1932).

Unlike Klein, Teige's focus in the design of minimal housing was not on rationalizing domestic labor within the family home but on the real political possibility to liberate life and dwelling from domestic labor. The collectivization of all aspects of family life was a radical strategy. Teige's historical basis and architectural precedents for proposing this new form of collective living included: the historical and modern hotels, and the Soviet Dom-Kommuna (communal housing) — where domestic labor and work in general was organized as social labor and living was reduced to a mere sleeping chamber.[23] The sequence of these examples in Teige's text also reveals the gradual evolution towards the total collectivization of living.

Overall, single-room occupancy disintegrated the traditional nuclear family and disrupted the distinctions between private and public life, production and reproduction. It offered workers the possibility of living in close proximity to their workplaces, thus integrating life and work. These concepts were carried forward in later collective housing experiments. The book *Together! The New Architecture of the Collective*, edited by Ilka & Andreas Ruby, Mateo Kries, Mathias Müller, Daniel Niggli[24], illustrates this historical context, outlining various co-housing movements and projects across different backgrounds. This includes not only the aforementioned utopian-socialist workers' settlements and central-kitchen residential hotels but also various 20th-century cooperative movements, garden city movements, modernist housing experiments, and participatory design, as well as new cooperatives, autonomous housing projects, and architectures of sharing emerging around the world today.

Especially now, with economic turbulence, demographic changes, and new forms of communication emerging, a social movement supporting collectivity, sharing, and participation is on the rise. Tired of being confined to monadic dwellings, more and more people are looking for new types of housing that allow them to experience themselves as a part of a community. They want to know their neighbours and to share activities and services with them. This paradigm shift in social values is also leading people to seek new architectural types. The book *Together!* points out that the reinvention of collective housing is occurring primarily on three levels.

At the level of the individual apartment we are seeing the emergence of cluster apartments. A cluster apartment is one very large apartment with a living area of between 250 and 400 square metres. It consists of a number of small studio apartments of about 20-35 square metres, each with a bedroom and a small kitchen and pantry, which are organised around a generously proportioned shared living area with a large kitchen. This type of accommodation enables singles to share part of their daily lives with other people while guaranteeing them a private space to which they can retreat whenever they need to.

At the level of the apartment building, individual apartments are being supplemented by an eclectic mix of shared domestic facilities that can be used collectively by all inhabitants. The new housing cooperative projects in Switzerland, for instance, typically include a laundry, a

[23] Teige, 2002, p 323–393.
[24] Kries, Mateo, Mathias Müller, Daniel Niggli, Andreas Ruby, and Ilka Ruby, eds. *Together! The New Architecture of the Collective*. Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum and Ruby Press, 2017.

library, seminar spaces, workshops, play areas for children, and, most importantly, a collective kitchen employing a cook who prepares meals daily for anyone who does not want to cook in their own home but prefers to eat together with others.

At the level of urban space, apartment buildings are being constructed that offer public programmes catering explicitly to people living in the neighbourhood. The celebrated Kalkbreite housing cooperative in Zurich (Fig. 1-25), which has dedicated 50 percent of its programme to non-residential functions, offers public facilities such as a cinema, a packaging-free supermarket, three restaurants/cafés, doctors' surgeries, a number of office spaces and a public courtyard with playing areas for children. These programmes bring the city into the building and, conversely, make it a genuine part of the neighbourhood. Here, housing literally creates the city. The architecture of shared housing inspires ways to enhance the quality of urban life in our cities by recalibrating the relationship between private and public space. It envisages a city with a highly mixed programme combining housing, working, and leisure environments and furthering an inclusive social stratification, whereby people from different income groups live side by side rather than being spatially segregated. It enhances the quality of the environment and activates the community while avoiding gentrification.

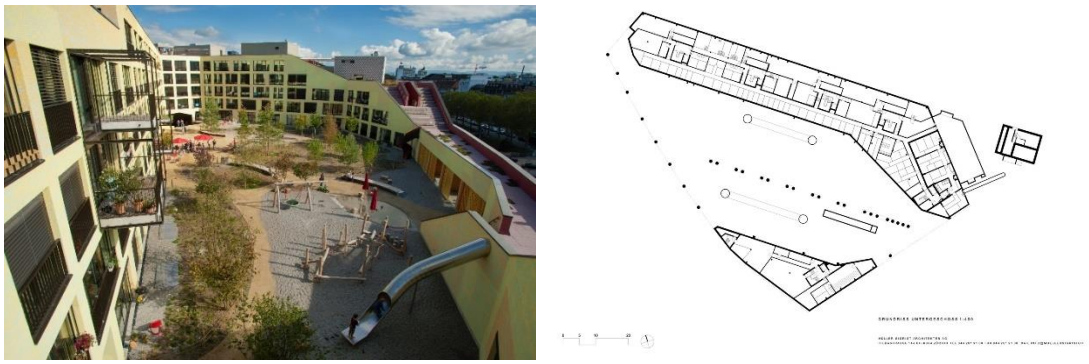

Figure 1-25 Kalkbreite housing cooperative, Zurich, 2014. Architect: Müller Sigrist Architekten

Overall, spatial experiments across different contexts can be observed, attempting to escape the constraints of the single-family home. Reformers and architects have sought to provide solutions that balance collective belonging and individual living, as well as public participation and private emotions, from both spatial and institutional design perspectives. These explorations suggest that privacy and domesticity can be reimagined through collectivization and shared spaces, breaking down the rigid distinctions between private and public life, production and reproduction. The ongoing shift towards cooperative housing, shared facilities, and integrated urban spaces reflects a broader movement toward collective living, where privacy is negotiated within a framework of community engagement and shared resources. These trends point to a future where domesticity is less about isolation within private realms and more about active participation in a collective urban fabric.

### 1.4.2 Contemporary Live/Work

In addition to collectivization efforts, another trend in contemporary home life is work-at-home. Contrary to the separation of live and work that began with the Industrial Revolution, it is now very common to reintroduce work into private homes. The live/work unit has become one of the most representative non-family housing typologies of our time. It refers to a dwelling that combines living and working spaces within the same unit. To some extent, this mirrors the traditional model of a craftsman‘s workshop. For some people, home-based work retains the characteristics of handmade craft, but for most, it increasingly relies on digital media and technology. The rise of work modes driven by digital technology, which can be termed as the emergence of the "digital craftsman," marks a new way of working and living. This trend can be seen as a modern version of the "working life" described in Bruce Springsteen's lyrics, where work once again "invades" the domestic sphere.

Compared to the aforementioned traditional craftsmen's workshop, Dogma points out that the more direct progenitor of the contemporary live/work type is actually the "studio," a purpose-built space for artists who lived and worked within the same premises[25]. The reason it is more closely linked to the contemporary context is that the artist's studio is associated with the rise of the freelance, self-employed entrepreneur. Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, first in Europe and later in the rest of the world, the traditional master artist was replaced by the freelance artist, and when this type of artist became widespread, developers started to build studio spaces targeted to this specific subject. A remarkable example of this type of habitation is the St. Paul Studios on Talgarth Road in London, which were designed by Frederick Wheeler in 1890 (Fig. 1-26). Each unit included a large double-height space lit by a generous window and placed on top of two floors of living space, which included a reception room where the artist could receive customers as well as a basement for the kitchen and the housekeeper's room. A more economical example of studio space for artists was those built on the north side of Pembroke Garden in London by speculator Charles Frederick Kearley around 1890 (Fig. 1-27). Compared to the St. Paul studios, the Pembroke studios were conceived for moderate- or low-income artists. This status is reflected in their modest scale and in the fact that living space is reduced to the mezzanine and a small bedroom, so that the workspace becomes the main program of the house. Moreover, they were conceived for a bachelor artist, thus reinforcing the bohemian stereotype of the artist detached not only from any form of professional association, but also from any form of family relationship. The artist studio as live/work accommodation inaugurated a precarious and radically individualized form of living and working that would become widespread with the rise of the more flexible, decentralized, and diverse modes of production in the post-Fordist era.

[25] Dogma. *Living and Working*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2022.

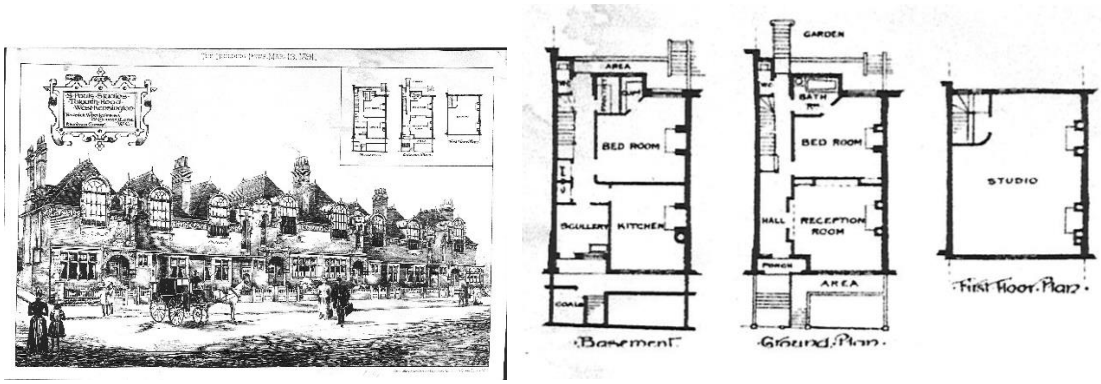


Figure 1-26 Street view, St Paul's Studios, Talgarth Rd, Baron's Court, London. Frederick Wheeler, 1890

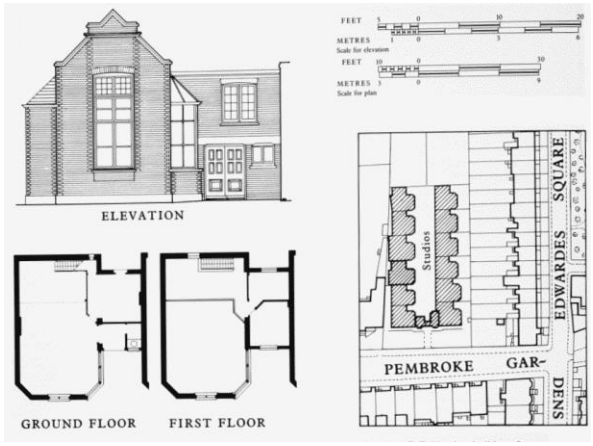


Figure 1-27 Pembroke Studios, site plan, and typical studio plan and elevation. C. F. Kearley, builder, 1890–1

Another historical reference for the contemporary live/work unit is the loft. Dogma traces the interesting history of this spatial type: it originated when New York City authorities banned homework in the garment industry. The city administration pushed the construction of small manufacturing spaces that were larger than houses but smaller than factories as replacements. Lofts were designed as stacked, unobstructed spaces, functioning as true "vertical factories" and served by the earliest electric-powered elevators. Starting in the 1930s, under the pressure of more restrictive zoning laws, many loft spaces were left vacant. From the 1950s, many artists began to rent lofts. The artists' appropriation of the loft as space for both living and working can be considered the first reuse of an industrial structure, pioneering what would become a dominant trope of post-industrial metropolises. The empty and generous floor plan offered an unscripted space: artists' appropriation of lofts coincided with the rise of new forms of art that transcended the customary differences between painting, sculpture, and performance, and the loft became the ideal space for unbound experimentation. With no partitions, lofts became spaces where living and working, production and reproduction, were completely blended. However, living in lofts was illegal at the time. Paradoxically, the legalization of loft living by the city government in 1964 resulted in a reduction of artists' living

space. Real estate speculators turned loft living into a new form of luxury accommodation, altering its spatial layout to fit more traditional domestic life.

Different from the live/work home of the artist, home-based work in the digital age places new demands on domestic space. In recent decades, a number of architects have customised new types of homes for home-based workers or digital nomads. Terence Riley[26] showcased a series of such live/work homes in The Un-Private House exhibition and its related publications. These houses symbolise the seamless integration of live and work through the openness, flexibility, continuity, and transparency of various spatial dimensions. For instance, the Lipschutz/Jones Apartment (1988) in New York City for Wall Street traders reflects this integration. In light of the globalization of international markets, their working hours are no longer fixed. Rather, work occurs when market activity occurs. Hence, the architect designed a workspace that seamlessly integrates with the living area. The core office area resembles a "fully transparent" trading room, where the flickering digital screens are visible from other parts of the loft at all times (fig. 1-28). Six screens in addition to those in the office display information at close range in various locations: next to the bathroom mirror (so as to be visible when shaving), next to the bed (to be visible upon waking), and so on. In a more sculptural way, Ben van Berkel's "Mobius House" (1998) in the Netherlands symbolises the potential continuity and integration of living and working in both spatial and temporal dimensions (fig. 1-29). It seamlessly integrates pprogram, circulation, and structure with two intertwined paths. Dubbeldam conceived of a similar seamless expression of her clients' daily lives in her design of the Millbrook Residence (1997) for a young professional couple. The various work and living functions—as well as the interior and exterior of the house—are woven together like the strands of, in the architect's words, ‘a Celtic knot’. Though the couple will work separately on different levels of the house when built, the ‘knotted’ structure guarantees that they will constantly crisscross each other as they move through the house.

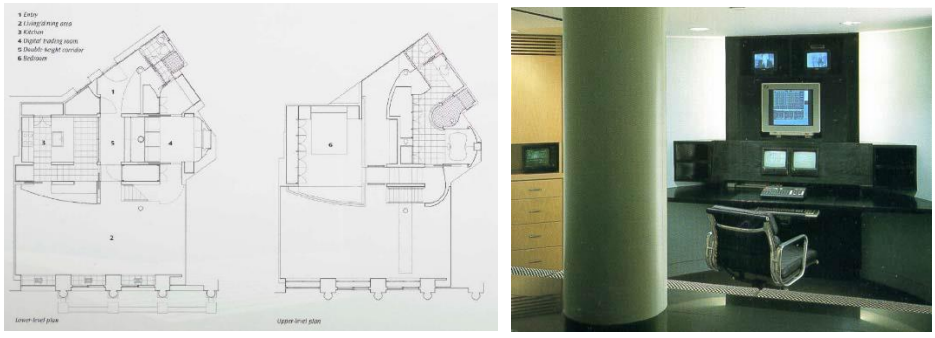

Figure 1-28 Frank Lupo and Daniel Rower, Lipschutz/Jones Apartment 1988, view of digital trading room

[26] Riley, Terence. *The Un-Private House*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999.

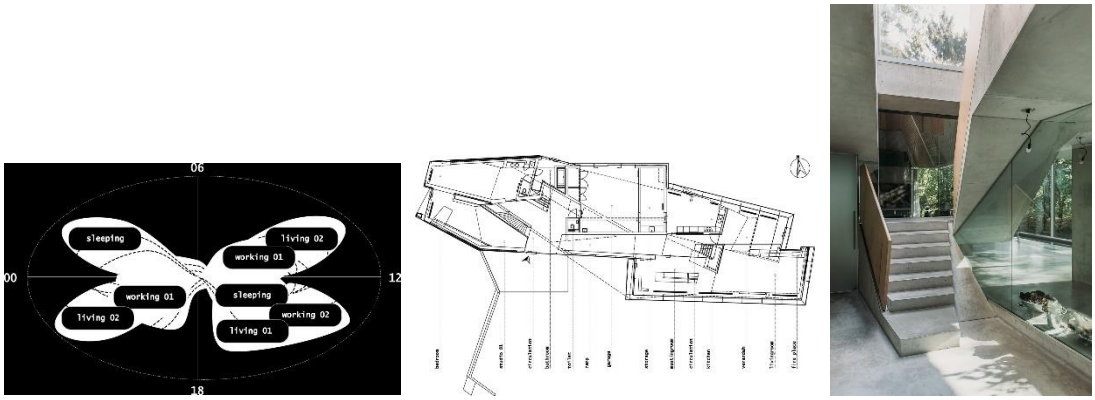


Figure 1-29 Möbius House - Time use diagram and floorplan

Besides the aforementioned residences that allow occupants to "seamlessly" transit between living and working, other alternative solutions to private homes take a more radical approach by rejecting traditional domesticity and aiming to create a series of living units tailored for digital nomads with non-traditional family structures. These solutions reject any sort of allusion to traditional house design, often creating spaces with a profound sense of unfamiliarity. The intention is to liberate people (especially women) from the bindings of traditional domesticity and housework, thereby providing men and women with equal opportunities to develop their talents and ambitions in both public and private realms. Representative projects of this type include Toyo Ito's "Pao I" and "Pao II"—dwellings for Tokyo nomad girls (1985-1989; fig. 1-30). The "Pao" is a temporary installation: a simple transparent tent loosely furnished with custom furniture. It sits as a parasite on the roofs of existing buildings sheltering its inhabitant, a single working woman. This project challenges all the categories we adhere to when we design a ‘normal’ dwelling. It is merely a generic enclosure, with no kitchen, no bathroom and almost no architecture, just furniture, as the city itself can serve as her dining room, her kitchen, and her living room. Similarly, the "Platform I" and "Platform II" projects designed by Kazuyo Sejima between 1987 and 1990 (fig. 1-31) are also a set of living installations using lightweight industrial materials, with no internal partitions, and transparent envelopes. In these projects, the distinctions between production and reproduction, office and home, do not mean anything any longer.

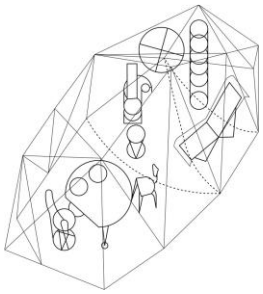

Figure 1-30 Toyo Ito, Pao II (1985-1989)

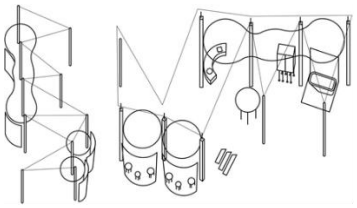

Figure 1-31 Kazuyo Sejima, Schemes for Platform Houses (1987– 1990)

The above cases show that as work enters the home, the spatial logics of workspaces, such as openness, flexibility, and fluidity in horizontal or vertical dimensions, and transparency on physical or virtual levels, also enter our domestic spaces. However, it would be overreaching to suppose that the popularity of the traditional private house is now on the wane, and that eventually will be replaced by the transparent live/work units or anti-domestic nomadic tents.

While it is clear that private houses designed for a fairly static nuclear family are not necessarily suitable for all households, a significant portion of non-traditional families with diverse work and living needs still choose to live in conventional housing types on the market. There are many reasons for this, such as the accessibility, affordability, and stability of these housing options, as well as their good infrastructure and familiar communities. More importantly, these seemingly traditional housing types are actually highly adaptable to diverse lifestyles, with spatial constraints and implications for inhabitants being much smaller than often assumed, while the creativity of people in appropriating space is much greater than commonly perceived.

Building on this adaptability of conventional housing types, we also see a significant transformation in how traditional private houses are being reconfigured to accommodate modern work needs. In one instance, a home office might be a fairly contained space that acts as an appendage or an extension of a remote place of work. On a larger scale, the home office might be a principal place of work, in which one or more of the occupants spends all of his or her working time. Usually, homeworkers do not have fixed working hours or workspace. Undoubtedly, this notion of seamlessly moving between life and work will bring some anxiety, especially in a hyper-capitalist world where this could represent an endless work life with no start or end. We are both the victims and the villains in this story. Working from home eliminates the traditional nine-to-five schedule, blurring the lines between leisure and production and forcing us to accept low wages in exchange for the "love" of entrepreneurship and creativity. However, for others, remote work is a deep cultural shift that makes life easier. It can make life easier for people with a life outside work and who love other things equally or more than work, most notably family caregivers. Moreover, working in a global virtual office enables workers to escape the problem of in-person offices becoming “interruption factories,” [27] thereby better enabling “meaningful work, creative work, thoughtful work, important work.” Being able to focus and work alone to gather one’s own thoughts are arguably more possible when working away from the office through enabling an alternative

[27] Fried, Jason, and David Heinemeier Hansson. *Remote: Office Not Required*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2013: 10.

form of relaxed productivity. This does not mean that remote work from home or elsewhere cannot have their own distractions, but people have the capacity to control them either by limiting doing other domestic duties or moving to another site that is less distracting.[28] Thus, on the optimistic side, the live/work home also carries the somewhat romantic notion of the reintegration of the dualities that have characterized the private house: public and private, male and female, action and stillness. And even the city has become an infinite domestic interior, formally and socially, as the traditional boundaries between production and reproduction, home and workplace are increasingly blurred.

### 1.4.3 The Media and The Digital Home

None of the potential reintegration in the live/work home would be possible without the digital media bringing information from the outside world. It actively, passively, or interactively participate in constructing the space and time of contemporary live-work.

Many scholars have discussed how digital and mobile technologies have been embed in the environments and routines of everyday life[29]. To understand the consumption and use of information technology in household practices, Silverstone et al. sketch out a framework of a model that articulates four non-discrete phases: appropriation, objectification, incorporation and conversion. They trace lines of ownership, usage and display – the complex ways that domestic things become active parts of spaces, relationships, routines, identities and social worlds. The four phases capture the various processes by which technological objects and media form part of a household's continuing efforts to become a home.[30]

As media increasingly penetrate our homes and everyday lives, the ever-unstable politics of privacy become even more turbulent. In his survey of late-twentieth-century architectural design for houses, Terence Riley has identified a condition of the "un-private house" consequent upon the infiltration of electronic media. To support this claim, Riley develops a conception of domestic privacy through accounts such as *A History of Private Life*[31], and *Witold*

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[28] Ibid., 10.

[29] Chambers, D. (2016). *Changing media, homes and households: Cultures, technologies and meanings*. Routledge.
Christensen, T. H., & Røpke, I. (2010). "Can practice theory inspire studies of ICTs in everyday life?" In B. Bräuchler & J. J. Postill (Eds.), *Theorising Media and Practice* (pp. 233–256). New York: Berghahn Books.
Silverstone, R., & Hirsch, E. (Eds.). (1992). *Consuming technologies: Media and information in domestic spaces*. London: Routledge.
Morley, D. (2000). *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*. London: Routledge.
Morley, D. (2003). "What's 'home' got to do with it?" *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6, 435–458.
Pink, S., Horst, H., Postill, J., & others. (2016). *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. London: SAGE.
Wajcman, J., Bittman, M., & Brown, J. (2009). "Intimate connections: The impact of the mobile phone on work-life boundaries". In G. Goggin & L. Hjorth (Eds.), *Mobile Technologies* (pp. 9–22). New York: Routledge.

[30] Silverstone, R., & Hirsch, E. (Eds.). (1992). *Consuming technologies: Media and information in domestic spaces*. London: Routledge, p,17.

[31] Ariès, Philippe, and Georges Duby, ed. *A History of Private Life. Vol. 4: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War.* Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990.

*Rybczynski's Home: A Short History of an Idea*[32]. Following these, he argues that the house has been associated with privacy since the seventeenth century. He argues that although homes have been associated with privacy since the 17th century, they have never entirely cut the public world off from the private. Indeed, various media form a link between them. In the 19th century, bourgeois maintained a natural fascination with the outside world, despite their quest for a private home. The development of rooms such as the study and the library became the context for the bourgeoisie to engage with the media in the form of books, newspapers and magazines. Those rooms were not uncommon in upper-middle-class households. They mitigated the inward nature of private homes. Riley's historical account leads towards the characterization of a contemporary situation where the boundaries of the private are put in dispute via the presence of media in new, electronic form: "Today, the private house has become a permeable structure, receiving and trans-mitting images, sounds, text and data."[33] Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the interactive public gaze of the media poses a certain threat to the private parts of family life. Many have expressed concerns about this invasive surveillance, while others have observed the positive reshaping power of digital media on domestic interiors. Inga Bryden, using the example of virtual meeting scenarios in homes, proposes that the framing of virtual meetings disrupts the conventional narrative of the domestic space, activates specific sites such as particular rooms, and allows familiar objects to be seen in unfamiliar ways. As if they have taken on a new agency. And just "as the symbolism in Renaissance portraits might be analysed, so the interiors and bookshelves behind the Zoom sitter can be curated – or downloaded – and read."[34] Similarly, in the field of social science research, David Morley, in his discussion of electronic media in the home environment, claims that the home has become an "electronic landscape"[35]: "These [media and communications] technologies must be understood as both transgressing the boundaries of the household – bringing the public world into the private – and simultaneously producing the coherence of broader social experience, through the sharing of both broadcast time and ritual."[36] As the boundaries between public and private are dramatically altering and blurring, the figure to the possible inhabitant of this new, un-private house is also undergoing significant changes. Donna Haraway, in her *A Cyborg Manifesto*[37], introduced the image of the "cyborg," a hybrid of human and machine. She notes that, "no longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the oikos, the household."

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Prost, Antoine, and Gerard Vincent, ed. *A History of Private Life. Vol. 5: Riddles of identity in modern times.* Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991.

[32] Rybczynski, Witold. *Home: A short history of an idea*. London: Penguin, 1987.

[33] Terence Riley, *The Un-Private House*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999, p. 11.

[34] Bryden, Inga. (2023). Lockdown portraits: Resituating the self. Interiors in the Era of Covid-19: Interior Design Between the Public and Private Realms, 155.

[35] David Morley, Home Territories: Media, Mobility, and Identity, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 3.

[36] Morley, Home Territories, p. 3. See also Roger Silverstone and Eric Hirsch (eds), Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces, London: Routledge, 1992, an earlier study of electronic media and domesticity.

[37] Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century', in Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature, London: Free Association Books, 1991, p. 151. Quoted in Riley, The Un-Private House, p. 13.

Scholars like Riley, who approach from a humanistic perspective, have investigated the effects of electronic media infiltration in the domestic sphere, a sphere which pre-exists such an infiltration, and as such offers the essential qualities of privacy, purity and stability, no matter how the formation of these qualities relies to a large extent on the presence of "traditional" media. Consequently, the uptake of electronic media is then about the ways in which they threaten these qualities—such as through invasive surveillance— or might themselves be naturalized and accommodated to this conception of domesticity. Different from them, Christopher Hight offers another perspective on the relationship between domesticity and media. He makes this argument in an analysis of the television series 24, and the way its particular storyline and montage techniques relate to television as a domestic technology par excellence. Hight argues how a television series such as 24 does not simply infiltrate the domestic space of its reception, or become accommodated to it. Rather, it offers material by which to reconceptualize the relations between spatial configurations of domesticity and the effects of electronic, and specifically montage, media. In this case, communication technologies such as mobile phones and the internet establish connections between discrete, interiorized action locations, presenting the entire city as an interior network. All of these relationships are communicated by the programme's montage. As Hight states, " Throughout the programme, the oikos no longer possesses a formal organic unity; instead, domesticities are continually divided into smaller pockets of space orchestrated by the interaction between various members. Although each of these spaces is coded as domestic, the characters orbit each other in an escalating claustrophobic estrangement. In each episode, characters move through half a dozen or more social networks, each time folding one into another and multiplying connections."[38]

Therefore, as Hight has shown, the production of interiors through electronic media does not rely on or merely corrupt, conventional concepts or manifestations of domesticity. Rather, digital media offer us an opportunity to reconceptualize the interior, and to rethink the future orientation of the relationship between the public and private spheres.

## 1.5 SUMMARY

This chapter interprets the construction and evolution of the concept of public and private in the modern sense, from the perspective of the shifting relationship between living and working, domestic space and work space. Based on literature analyse, it also uses floor plans (and interior photographs) as research materials to visualize and spatialize the concept of privacy in different historical contexts. This approach helps us understand the relationship between the ideology of privacy and the housing layouts.

The chapter outlines the historical transformation of 'public-private' relationships into four distinct phases. Initially, in traditional tribal or village life, there was no separation between

[38] Hight, Christopher. "Inertia and interiority: 24 as a case study of the televisual metropolis." The Journal of Architecture 9, no. 3 (2004): 373.

public and private life. People lived and worked within a social group, characterized by a communal and collective state. Later, with the specialization of craft skills, private space began to separate from public space. Domestic spaces for living and working gradually became distinct from communal gathering and ritual spaces. However, the boundaries between private and public remained blurred; for example, 'public' work often took place within the 'private' home.

Third, in the 18th and 19th centuries, as craft production transitioned to industrial production, a clearer separation between private and public life emerged. This separation was facilitated, or perhaps enforced, by the large-scale production associated with factories. When factories and offices became the public domains of production activities, the home ceased to be a place of work and gradually evolved into a private sphere focused on family life, rest, and emotional well-being. The invention of the "corridor" in domestic architecture further reinforced the privacy of the domestic space. Yet, even during this phase, public and private realms were not entirely separate; they continued to interact. For instance, factory bells became time markers for the working life, and the "invisible hand" still reaches into the home. The material "symbols" in the home space also served as a form of mediation between private and public, representing a private appropriation and display of public meanings.

Finally, in contemporary living patterns, we witness a new intrusion of the public into the private and a renewed blending of the two. This is manifested in three significant trends: First, the "co-living" experiments and various types of "co-housing" for urban young professionals have evolved from anti-domesticity traditions and experiments in the collectivization of domestic labour. Second, the development of "live-work" units and other forms of flexible, decentralized home-based work in the post-Fordist era has emerged from the trend of reintegrating living and working, production and reproduction. Third, the "digital home" model has arisen after the public world invades traditional private homes in the form of virtual media.

Overall, across these four phases, the relationship between public and private realms has continuously changed but has never been absolutely separate. They have always invaded, intertwined, and maintained a certain tension, defining each other. The following case studies will further examine how the relationship between living and working, public and private realms, has changed in new ways in the contemporary home.

# CHAPTER 2

## The “Meaning” of Domestic Objects: Mediating Between Public and Private

## INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on the spatial aspects of public and private realms, while this chapter focuses more on the important material medium that serves as a link between the public and private spheres within the domestic interior - the household object. Because domestic objects are usually not unique or one-of-a-kind objects crafted by individuals; rather, they are often mass-produced items and chosen by inhabitants to enter the house. The meaning of these objects is thus founded on the relationship between the personal world and the external world. Something entirely "private" cannot be described as meaningful in itself. Meaning, by definition, is a relational concept that relies on the context of publicly or collectively constructed definitions of what is considered meaningful. Therefore, this study argues that, based on the public-private relationship, domestic objects embody various spatial, symbolic, personal, and familial meanings.

This chapter takes the perspective of objects to examine how they participate in the process of transforming a residential space into one's home. It explores the intricate relationships between a house as an architectural space and the objects within it as carriers of daily life. It also investigates how these objects embody certain relationships between public and private realms and thus generate some kind of meaning.

The approach taken here involves identifying key viewpoints from leading scholars in fields such as architecture, anthropology, and material culture studies, as well as analysing the evolution of relevant discourses. Each section will highlight a specific meaning or value of domestic objects, as seen through their interactions with both the external world and the architectural space of the home.

### 2.1 Objects: Scope of Discussion

The term "object" serves as a broad container encompassing many categories of things. In this thesis, I focus on objects within the domestic sphere, specifically man-made products. These objects can either be temporarily fixed, such as those attached to a home's walls, floors, or ceilings, or they can be mobile and portable. They have a scale and physical integrity that allows circulation and removal from a specific site. Examples range from cups and saucers to luggage, furniture, and paintings on the wall. Domestic objects encompass both luxury goods and everyday items. They are simultaneously personal and intimate, yet also subject to collection, consumption, and eventual disposal.

Objects have recently drawn increasing attention. As the trend towards theoretical abstraction disappears and both cultural and spatial studies move more and more towards materiality, so has its manifestation in objects attracted greater interest. This trend is evident in fields ranging from social studies to anthropology, philosophy, and notably, architecture. In architecture, the exploration of objects has predominantly concentrated on their creation, design,

manufacturing processes, and aesthetic considerations. This study focuses more on the creativity and agency of objects in the process of their use. This "process of use" specifically refers to how objects, as artifacts, are selected from the world of commodities, taken possession of, and appropriated by individuals or families. Following this, they are displayed, arranged, and exhibited within domestic spaces, finding their own place within the routines and temporal rhythms of domestic life [1]. In this context, homemaking is viewed as a process of "curation," combining tasks such as the selection, arrangement, creation, display, dissemination, collaboration, and appropriation of objects. This chapter will delve into the symbolic and cultural messages that objects carry in this process—the "spatial-symbolic" significance of objects.

### 2.2 Traces and Fragmentation

Firstly, scholars, led by Walter Benjamin, have explored the implications of the traces of inhabitation preserved in objects. This exploration has led to the analysis of the relationship between traces and transparency, interior and modernity, since the 19th century. It also examines the relationship between the soft envelopment of domestic objects and the structural framework of architecture. These studies point out that one of the important implications of complex and diverse objects lies in their recognition of the critical value of discontinuity, fragmentation, and provisionality.

> ‘Ever since the time of Louis Philippe, the bourgeois has shown a tendency to compensate for the absence of any trace of private life in the big city. He tries to do this within the four walls of his apartment. It is as if he made it a point of honour not to allow the traces of his everyday objects and accessories to get lost. Indefatigably, he takes the impression of a host of objects; for his slippers and his watches, his blankets and his umbrellas, he devises coverlets and cases. He has a marked preference for velour and plush, which preserve the imprint of all contact. In the style characteristic of the second empire, the apartment becomes a sort of cockpit. The traces of its inhabitant are moulded into the interior. Here is the origin of the detective story, which inquiries into these traces and follows these tracks.’[2]

With these lines from *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin gives a distilled account of the fabrication and inhabitation of the mid-nineteenth-century bourgeois domestic interior. The clear traces on the fabric surfaces serve not only as the inhabitants' attempts to hold onto the past but also as their efforts to reinforce the impression of him being a host of objects. Volume

[1] The framework of the usage process of objects, referencing *Consuming Technologies: Media and information in domestic spaces*, Edited by Roger Silverstone and Eric Hirsch

[2] Walter Benjamin, ‘Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century (exposé of 1939)’, in The Arcades Project, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 20.

4 of *A History of Private Life*[3] by Michelle Perrot and Roger-Henri Guerrand is the major historical work on the rise of privacy and domesticity through the nineteenth century. It takes up the idea that the traces of inhabitation can be found in—and indeed constitute—the interior. It further notes that this heightened attention to preserving one's own traces sets up a charged and ambivalent relation between an inhabitant's objects and their subjectivity. One indicator of this relationship is the desire for a private space in which to define and cultivate one's individuality.

In addition to discussing the relationship between traces of inhabitation and bourgeois identity in 19th-century homes, scholars have broadened their focus to the entire city, examining the situation in the wake of 20th-century modernism. "The twentieth century, with its (the dwelling) porosity and transparency, its tendency toward the well-lit and airy, has put an end to dwelling in the old sense," [4] Benjamin argued. Architectural space made of transparent glass erases all traces[5]. Transparency on the physical material level corresponds proportionally to social transparency[6]. Along with the erasure of living traces, the connections to traditional social structures and symbolic labels are also wiped away.

However, when anonymity and transparency become prevalent in the city, the significance of everyday objects becomes more pronounced. They both confront and engage in dialogue with the cold, smooth, and transparent urban environment. Walter Benjamin noted the relationship between interiors and cities, public and private:" Against the armature of glass and iron, upholstery offers resistance with its textiles.[7]" In this single line, arcade and domestic interior come together. Charles Rice, an architectural academic particularly interested in the intersections between architecture, domesticity, and modernity, later elaborated, "Arcades offer a structural armature and a hardness of material finish that upholstery and textiles resist in their stuffing and covering. Arcades figure the wedded advance of technology and commerce, the emblem of the modernizing city; upholstery and textiles figure the domestic interior as a site of refuge from the city and its new, alienating forms of experience. Yet this resistance heightens their mutual entanglement."[8]

Rice further explores the relationship between domestic objects and architectural order: " Against the stability of an architectural ordering, a form of surfacing and filling which privileges a complex, non-hierarchical weave (emphasized through a shuttling, a back-and-forth motion), resists, offering a different possibility." [9] Such possibility stand in opposition to the solid,

[3] Ariès, Philippe, and Georges Duby, ed. *A History of Private Life. Vol. 4: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War.* Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990.

[4] Walter Benjamin, 'The Arcades Project', The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 865.

[5] 'Erase the traces!' is the refrain in the first poem of German poet Bertolt Brecht's book Lesebuch für Städtebewohner [Reader for City-Dwellers]. As Walter Benjamin argued in 'Experience and Poverty', This has now been achieved by Scheerbart, with his glass, and the Bauhaus, with its steel. They have created rooms in which it is hard to leave traces.

[6] Walter Benjamin, 'The Arcades Project', The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 465.

[7] Benjamin, The Arcades Project, p. 218 [I3,1].

[8] Rice, Charles. *The emergence of the interior: Architecture, modernity, domesticity*. London: Routledge, 2007:10.

[9] Rice, ibid., 32.

complete, and immovable features of architecture. Domestic objects allow their positioning to be provisional in both time and space, and their number to be indefinite and flexible. When soft-textured furniture and objects cover the interior, they loosely wrap around the inner walls, rather than being rigidly fixed like mortar.

The interplay between hard, smooth materials and soft, absorbent ones, both distinct and cooperative, also symbolizes the diverse ways individuals engage with the world. Jonathan Hale, in his 1996 essay[10], taking the art-deco skyscrapers in Manhattan as an example, analysed the combination of reflective materials at street level in cities (such as glass, polished metal, mirror, black marble/granite, etc) with non-reflective or absorbent materials at higher levels (concrete, brick, wood, painted render). He notes that in the public space, buildings are almost hiding themselves behind a reflective screen, like those black Ray-Ban sunglasses, whereas in the space above street level, they seem comfortable revealing more of their individual identity and 'personality', through more textured, absorbent (and visually 'softer') materials which carry the distinctive traces of age, weathering, and history etc.

When shifting our focus from the city to the interior of a home, the distinct gestures and actions of objects compared to architecture demonstrate their power to both construct and break down existing spatial hierarchies. This aspect is particularly evident in the distribution and arrangement of objects within domestic spaces.

Robin Evans provides a compelling example in his essay *The Developed Surface: An Enquiry into the Brief Life of an Eighteenth-Century Drawing Technique*[11]. Throughout the 18th century, the arrangement of furniture, especially chairs, typically formed a peripheral ring against the walls. Despite the ease with which the chairs could be moved into the open floor of the room, the magnet of convention was still strong. When the room was empty the chairs would revert to the wall. Humphrey Repton, a champion of variety within the room in England, noted that "the circle of chairs had to be broken, redolent as it was, he said, of dull, obsequious, outmoded conversation directed at one senescent, overbearing figure, the matriarch." His intention in moving the chairs was to destroy the remaining instrument of spatial hierarchy and liberate the room.

Moreover, inhabitants have the greatest agency in arranging and selecting home objects. Mainstream perspectives from architecture to anthropology emphasize that everyone can and should have the autonomy to shape their own domestic interiors. This contrasts with the period since the Renaissance, when architects considered objects and decorations to be subordinate to the overall organization of the house, and part of the design project. The modernist dissolution of ornamentation and fragmented objects can be interpreted as an extreme form of this desire for control, with architects acting as agents of this authority. Today, this power is being dismantled, and the belief in the aesthetic coherence and unified design among all the components within a building is opposed.

[10] Hale, Jonathan. "Reflections on City Clothes: Building, Body, and Mask." (1996).
[11] Evans, Robin. "The Developed Surface: An Enquiry into the Brief Life of an Eighteenth-Century Drawing Technique." In *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays*. London: Architectural Association, 1997.

In summary, in the face of the stability and unity of architectural spaces, objects highlight the values of traces, absorbency, fragmentation, and temporality. In the face of the hierarchical order of space, the distribution and arrangement of objects possess significant power to both construct and break down, beyond merely being of "tactical value"[12]. However, it's also important to note, as Rice emphasized, that the domestic interior is not in opposition to modernity, nor is it threatened by it. Rather, it serves as a unique response to crucial questions of modernity.

### 2.3 Ever-unfinished, Ongoing Practice

In everyday life, the use of objects is often associated with domestic practices, such as cleaning, maintenance, and repairing of household items. Architectural anthropologist Ray Lucas notes that while these studies on cleaning and tidying may initially appear irrelevant to architecture, they actually introduce the notion of the home as an ever-unfinished, ongoing project, proposing a view of architecture as a continuum rather than a completed entity[13].

A number of studies have been done by anthropological scholars addressing the maintenance of household objects and homes. Anthropologist Sarah Pink conducted research on families in Spain and the UK[14], discovering during her fieldwork that respondents would describe their homes through the activities or practices they engage in there. There is a depth to even the simplest tasks, such as cleaning, repairing items or washing and drying clothes. In keeping rooms tidy, householders engage their bodies and senses, often fostering social interactions among neighbours. She further notes that either by reinforcing or challenging specific cultural norms, domestic labour participates in the production of gender and identity. Ray Lucas, in his book *Anthropology for Architects*, interprets Sarah Pink's series of studies, suggesting that to describe a home through its domestic activities is to see it as an "ongoingly made" process[15]. This perspective on the inhabiting process is also vital for understanding the role of architects. The ways in which we maintain our homes—keeping them clean, orderly, and with everything "in its place"—indicate that a home is perpetually in the making, rather than a completed entity once construction is done. The study argues that a home consists of a continually unfolding, knotting, and tangling set of social relations and practices; it is not a fixed place or static structure. The home is constantly produced through the practice of dwelling. Likewise, this study views architecture as a dynamic process closely related to its use or appropriation; it is a continuum, not a fixed, final product.

[12] Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. London: Routledge, 1979.
[13] Lucas, Ray. *Anthropology for Architects: Social Relations and the Built Environment*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020.
[14] Pink, Sarah. *Home Truths: Gender, Domestic Objects and Everyday Life*. Oxford: Berg, 2004.
[15] Pink, Sarah, Kerstin Leder Mackley, Roxana Morosanu, Val Mitchell, and Tracy Bhamra. *Making Homes: Ethnography and Design.* London: Bloomsbury, 2017: 31.

These domestic works also activate our experiences and memories associated with objects. Anthropologist Irene Cieraad notes in her paper *Memory and Nostalgia at Home*[16], "In a person's successive material reinventions of home, objects will play an ever-more-important intermediary role, not only in reviving memories of past homes, but also in linking present homes to future homes. Furniture items, decorative objects, paintings, photo albums, and to a lesser degree household items are the most likely objects to play such an intermediary role. Inherited objects are even more special in fulfilling their intermediary role, as they keep the memory and narrative of meaningful relationships alive…when inherited objects are integrated into the decor of one's present home, they are subjected to cleaning practices. In performing mundane maintenance practices, like dusting, cleaning, or polishing, it could be argued that we both activate the related memories and recharge the cherished objects."

### 2.4 Ornament and Object

The issue of decoration has always been an important topic in the home space that cannot be avoided. Many household objects are decorations, and also the functional elements within interior spaces often incorporate "decorative" aspects. These elements carry meanings on multiple levels, both material and symbolic.

The relationship between the material and the symbolic aspects of decoration is discussed in Joseph Rykwert's book *The Dancing Column: On Order in Architecture*, using the column as the example[17]. Rykwert does not see columns as static, purely functional architectural elements, but rather as alive and dynamic. They interact with light, space, and form to create a sense of rhythm, elegance, and even narrative in the architectural composition. In some cultures or historical periods, columns might be adorned with carvings, paintings, sculptures, or other decorative elements to convey symbolic messages or represent cultural beliefs. These decorations are not merely ornamental; they are part of ritualized customs, adding layers of meaning and significance to the architecture. Thus, Rykwert emphasizes the ability of architectural elements to embody cultural, social and symbolic meanings beyond their functional role.

This relationship between decoration, form, and culture is reflected in the history of home decorating over the centuries. In her book *The Modern Interior*[18], Penny Spark traces the historical changes in domestic decoration: "The desire to embellish interior spaces has characterized the entire history of civilization. For centuries people have applied patterns, colours, and textures to structural surfaces, and arranged non-fixed items within their interior spaces. In the modern era, decoration moved from being a communally understood symbol of shared values – familial, religious, political, national and civic among them – to have the

[16] Cieraad, Irene. "Memory and Nostalgia at Home." In *International Encyclopedia of Housing and Home*, edited by Susan J. Smith, (2012): 262-7.
[17] Rykwert, Joseph. *The Dancing Column: On Order in Architecture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996.
[18] Sparke, Penny. The Modern Interior. London: Reaktion Books, 2008.

potential of becoming an expression of individualism."[19] Personalized decoration in modern interiors is believed to take shape in middle-class Victorian homes. "Typically, the spaces of Victorian domesticity were filled to the brim with items of comfortable, upholstered furniture, textiles on every available surface, bibelots on the mantelpiece, patterned carpets and potted plants."[20]

This bourgeois approach to interior decoration is considered by several scholars, most notably Walter Benjamin and Jean Baudrillard, to be closely associated with the capitalist values of property, ownership, and ostentation. Perrot and Guerrand also point out in Volume 4 of *A History of Private Life* that, the significance for the Parisian bourgeoisie of decoration as 'trimming' or covering was in its symbolic protection from the violence and danger of the streets of Paris, and as a way of banishing the look of poverty[21]. Furthermore, Spark emphasizes that the ideology of the separate spheres at the time made the domestic space a primary arena for negotiating modern feminine subjectivity, where women could express themselves through their new role as 'decorators' and demonstrate their sense of fashion[22].

Perrot and Guerrand extend their observations on decorative practices from the bourgeoisie to working-class families. They describe the initial attempts at decoration by the French working class of the nineteenth century: "Sometimes a meager symbol of pleasure or privacy turned up in one of these bare apartments: a birdcage perhaps (birds were the poor man's pet of choice), or a lace curtain manufactured in Calais, so widely used that they even turn up in the wretched shanties of the Cité Jeanne-d'Arc photographed by Atget at the turn of the century. The walls might boast a color print cut out of a weekly picture magazine or a family photo. The walls were the first surface to be appropriated. Moving meant changing wallpaper; low-priced wallpaper had as dramatic an impact as did low-priced cotton fabrics for women's clothing…Although 'nearly everything in Agricol Perdiguier's world was repulsive and hateful, when he returned home it was as if he were entering another world'."[23] Here, domestic decoration serves to create a personalized, pleasing space distinct from the unpleasant external world. They argue that, when it comes to establishing a separate domestic sphere, the arrangement of objects and decorations is more important than the inherent physical nature of the space itself.

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[19] Sparke, ibid., 92.

[20] Sparke, ibid., 21.

[21] Ariès, Philippe, and Georges Duby, ed. *A History of Private Life. Vol. 4: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War.* Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990.

[22] This perspective can be linked to the rise of women writers in the 19th-century novel, reflecting a broader shift in the roles and visibility of women in society. During this period, female authors were confined by societal expectations and used their writings as a form of expression and escape. Women began to assert their intellectual presence and influence through literature, parallel to their emerging role in shaping domestic aesthetics. They expressed their individuality and social status through the art of interior decoration. This parallel underscores a broader societal reevaluation of women's roles, both in the public sphere of literature and the private sphere of the home.
For more information, see "The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination" by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, etc.

[23] Perrot & Guerrand 1990: 354.

However, at the threshold of modernism, ornament was associated with regimes of viewing of "old" art. It, along with its symbolic metaphors, was decisively rejected. Interestingly, the most resolute break and disappearance of ornament coincided with a turning point where the importance of objects sharply increased.

Art historian Alina Payne's book *From Ornament to Object: Genealogies of Architectural Modernism*[24], a history of the theory that developed around objects and their interaction with architecture, discusses this matter.

The battle cry for the elimination of ornament was first sounded in 1908 when Adolf Loos published his influential essay *Ornament and Crime*[25]. What followed is well known: “the vocabulary of architecture discarded ornament, and buildings became more and more abstract, shedding surface embellishment—representational or geometric, incised or sculptural, applied or integral to the structure”.

In 1925, some twenty years after Loos's seminal critique, Le Corbusier published *The Decorative Art of Today*[26], one of his four manifestos on art. This publication coincided with his collaboration with Amédée Ozenfant for that year's Paris Exposition of the Decorative Arts, where they presented the Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau (Fig. 2-1). The design of the pavilion served as a manifesto itself, advocating for simplification, economy, mass production, and the standardization of the “living machine.” It was characterized by an absence of adornment, ornamentation, and decoration.

Figure 2-1 Interior of Pavillon de l’Esprit Nouveau,1925

Source: Almanach d’architecture moderne.

The objects were the principal actors on this stage. The space was inhabited by a few, seemingly simple objects: several bentwood Thonet chairs, a plain table, a couple of basic

[24] Payne, Alina. *From Ornament to Object: Genealogies of Architectural Modernism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.
[25] Loos, Adolf. *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays.* Translated by Michael Mitchell. Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1998.
[26] Le Corbusier. *The Decorative Art of Today*. Translated by James Dunnett. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987.

leather armchairs, a patterned Oriental carpet, and a bank of drawers. “Each one of these objects was a sign about uncluttered living, body habits, and basic gestures, describing a way of sitting, of lounging, of occupying space, of leaving few traces”. Without the objects in it, the message of the pavilion would have been unclear. These objects “explained” the architecture, representing its most tangible rhetorical dimension.

In addition to the Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau’s powerful statement about the relevance of objects for architecture, Payne cites several more examples, including the Bauhaus, where the focus was on house/housing and the full range of objects of daily use. Gerrit Rietveld's Schroeder House (1925) (Fig. 2-2) is another extreme case of collapsing architecture and objects[27]. The most radical precedent is Hannes Meyer's Coop Zimmer (Fig. 2-3), designed in 1926, which completely abandons traditional architecture for a tent-like interior where all displayed objects—beds, bookshelves, chairs, tables—are collapsible and light, portable and transient, fit for modern man's nomadic condition. It is a dramatic statement about impermanence, mobility and portability. It is also a signal that objects are gaining architectural significance and power. This suggests a new regime for architecture in which essential objects of daily life performed as architecture, replacing it.

Figure 2-2 Gerrit Rietveld, Schroeder House, Utrecht, 1924.

Source: Hay Kranen, Wikipedia Commons.

Figure 2-3 Hannes Meyer, Coop Zimmer, 1926.

[27] Gerrit Rietveld's Schroeder House in Utrecht (1925) is another icon of modernist architecture. A modernist box intersected by a colored grid, it functioned like a giant Rubik's cube in which stairs, doors, walls, and balustrades moved, collapsed, expanded, and contracted, as if it were an articulated piece of furniture, an armoire or an extendable table.

Source: Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin.

Payne believes that objects thus gain a sense of self-awareness and open up a new theoretical space:

> "These are only a few examples, but, central as they are to the discourse on modernism—indeed, they are some of its most sacred cows— they signal ad prominence for objects that was unprecedented. This is not to say that architecture and objects had not 'conversed' before. In every historical period objects and architecture had existed in profound synchronicity. But what seemed new here was the self-consciousness of their deployment, the subtle because nondiscursive theoretical attention they received, a form of coming of age as subjects of reflection in and of themselves. They were not just functional and mass produced; they were not just made to 'go' with the architecture as an effort toward aesthetic coherence, nor were they embedded in it. One has the sense that architecture needed them. A theoretical space had opened up just as another, the millennial one of ornament, had imploded" (Payne, 2012).

She further suggests that with the demise of ornament, its functions—including serving as a symbolic metaphor, enveloping and materializing abstract architecture, and acting as an intermediary layer to communicate with the body inhabiting the building—did not disappear. Instead, these rhetorical roles have been taken up by the objects within the space.

This chapter aligns with this perspective and further underscores the necessity of reevaluating the symbolic, interpretive, and intermediary roles of objects, which have been long overlooked or dismissed in architectural studies. These roles need reconsideration, regardless of whether they are conveyed through ornament or objects.

### 2.5 Objects in the flow

In the process of the global dissemination of design discourse, the movement of individuals and objects play a crucial role in the spread and exchange of architectural and design concepts. As subjects move across geographical spaces with their belongings, they contribute to a broader narrative that interweaves national, social, and cultural connections within a geographical framework.

In Chapter 4 of *The Emergence of the Interior*, Rice situates such "personal" practices of inhabitation in relation to an architectural and cultural discourse operating in an international context. He posits that interior decor and personal objects might act as a kind of linking space between the individual's private sphere and the possibility of the individual participating in a larger, collective sense of identity formation.

This perspective of object-based relational geohistory recognizes that the trajectories of exchange can be multiple, questioning the conventional architectural historical narrative that often portrays peripheral practices simply as outcomes of diffusion from central areas[28]. This approach also enhances our understanding of modernity, as noted by British geographer Peter Taylor:

> "Modernity does not just appear as the result of any 'natural' evolution; there are many discontinuities, with both the rise and the development of the modern world creating quite different forms of what it is to be modern. Similarly, the modern does not simply exist as a continuous geographical gradient from high to low: there are discontinuities between core and periphery zones of the system creating quite different forms of what it is to be modern."[29]

Architectural scholar Robin Schuldenfrei's recent book, *Objects in Exile: Modern Art and Design across Borders, 1930-1960*, further explores the contributions of objects on the move[30]. From the prewar era to the 1960s, many modern artists and architects emigrated from continental Europe to the United States and Britain. The book explores the objects the émigrés brought with them, what they left behind, and the new works they completed in exile. It reveals how the process of migration was crucial to the development of modernism, charting how modern art and architecture was shaped by the need to constantly face—and transcend—the materiality of things.

Beyond the global movement of objects, the flow of domestic objects on a micro scale is equally profound, steering us towards a more relational view.

From this perspective, the home is conceptualized not as a static material structure or a mere container for domestic activities, but as a dynamic interplay of material and social flows, undergoing continual negotiation. Cultural sociologist Rachel Hurdley, in her examination of domestic displays on mantelpieces and other focal points within the home, argues that these "seemingly static tableaux are processes, bound up in the on-going politics of identity, memory, home and family".[31]

Firstly, the process of creating a home entails extensive negotiations that include interactions, disputes, or compromises, among various parties, such as spouses, family members, and neighbors. Everyday objects serve as significant mediators in this context. For example, Jean-Claude Kaufmann[32], a French sociologist, described how new couples established their relationship by reaching agreement on seemingly trivial laundry practices, not only on the definitions of cleanliness and dirt but also on the topic of ironing—whether or not shirts and

[28] For example, in the historical story emphasized by Nikolaus Pevsner, where the baton of progress in design is seen to be passed between England and Germany around the turn of the twentieth century – and eventually to peripheries which come under the sway of centres of power.
[29] Taylor, Peter. *Modernities: A Geohistorical Approach*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999:12.
[30] Schuldenfrei, Robin. *Objects in Exile: Modern Art and Design Across Borders, 1930-1960.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024.
[31] Hurdley, Rachel. *Home, Materiality, Memory and Belonging: Keeping Culture*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013:104.
[32] Kaufmann, Jean-Claude. *La Trame Conjugale: Analyse du Couple par Son Linge*. Paris: Éditions Nathan, 1992.

jeans had to be ironed. Past-home laundry practices, more in particular their mothers' laundry practices, had to be integrated or abandoned, to create a lasting relationship. Irene Cieraad also pointed out that creating a home together could be one of the most challenging negotiations any couple has to make. Each person has his/her own set of spatial and aesthetic preferences that will influence decisions about a range of issues about home, including location, size, form, style, decoration, furnishings, privacy, territory, and use. Confrontations are likely to occur on all levels of the homemaking process, especially when different social or ethnic backgrounds are involved[33]. Architecture scholar Clare Cooper Marcus, in her book *House as a Mirror of Self: Exploring the Deeper Meaning of Home*, also explores how the placement or presence of these objects might change as relationships evolve[34]. For instance, after a breakup, someone might remove or replace objects that remind them of their former partner. Anthropologist Jean-Sébastien Marcoux found in his research that after failing to change the social and political structures of certain domestic relations that disadvantage the resident, one might instead hope to alter the material structures of these relationships, such as architectural spaces or household items[35].

Secondly, existing literature addresses the issue of sorting and selecting objects during the process of moving and creating a new home. This act is considered a metaphor for organizing memories and relationships.[36] Marcoux explores what people bring with them when they move, what are the things that matter, why they matter and how they come to matter. He believes that "moving becomes a means to reshuffle relationships and memories, making us explicitly aware of and decide which to reinforce, which to abandon or set aside. He elaborates: "moving becomes a means to reshuffle relationships and memories by bringing them back into consciousness, by making them explicit and for deciding which ones to reinforce, which ones to abandon or put on hold. It allows people to keep track of their relationships and memories, keep a map of these and transform this map. In other words, moving allows people to order their relations and memories. It may even become a means for reflecting on one's self-narrative". [37] Other scholars have also noted that for immigrant families, objects themselves can be a "contact zone"[38] between two kinds of experiences across cultures, and can acquire new meanings in the new setting. Objects can serve as tracers of identity narratives[39] and as mediators of identity as retold and displayed in narratives.[40]

More specifically, during the process of moving, some things are abandoned, sold, or thrown away. However, getting rid of things is not an easy task; it's akin to sacrificing a part of oneself

[33] Cieraad, Irene. "Homes from Home: Memories and Projections." Home Cultures 7, no. 1 (2010): 89.
[34] Marcus, Clare Cooper. *House as a Mirror of Self: Exploring the Deeper Meaning of Home*. Rochester, VT: Nicolas-Hays, Inc., 2006.
[35] Marcoux, Jean-Sébastien. "The Refurbishment of Memory." In Home Possessions: Material Culture behind Closed Doors, edited by Daniel Miller, (2001): 77.
[36] Marcoux, ibid.
[37] Marcoux, ibid.
[38] Clifford, James. *Routes, Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.
[39] Shankar, Shalini. "Metaconsumptive Practices and the Circulation of Objectifications." *Journal of Material Culture* 11, no. 3 (2006): 293-317.
[40] Hurdley, Rachel. "Dismantling Mantelpieces: Narrating Identities and Materializing Culture in the Home." *Sociology* 40, no. 4 (2006): 717–31.

and giving up the social relationships built around these artifacts.[41] British artist Micheal Landy echoed this sentiment, saying, "It was like witnessing my own funeral." He recalled that after destroying all 7,227 of his objects in his performance art exhibition "Break Down," "This experience gave me some very dark moments. I didn't make any work for about a year afterwards—I found it very difficult to move forward creatively."

Meanwhile, some objects acquire a certain "patina" because they are retained and carried through multiple moves. McCracken argues that these objects are valued for having 'survived' various changes of residence, displacements, and multiple crises.[42] After moving to a new home, the objects that people take with them, those 'aide-mémoires',[43] help preserve a certain consistency and continuity. It is around these objects that the home is symbolically recreated and rebuilt. These objects serve as the central medium for creating a sense of place and for reproducing nostalgia.[44]

Additionally, the flow of presents is another important topic in material culture studies. Giving and receiving presents represent the bonds a person has with others and help sketch out an individual's social world. French sociologist Marcel Mauss's 1925 book *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* is an important work in this field[45]. He delved into the concept of the "gift economy," positing that gift exchange is not merely a simple transfer of objects, but a complex social and economic act involving honour, power, religion, law, and economics. In the context of East Asian culture, anthropologist Inge Daniels explored the strategies for the flow, storage, and display of objects in Japanese homes[46]. She elaborated that the practice of giving and receiving presents in Japan have strong social functions, tied to social status and obligations. When a present enters a home, it must be carefully stored or displayed in an appropriate place. This imposed obligation exposes certain contradictions and challenges in the ideology of Japanese inhabitants: they must not only find a space for these objects or gifts in their homes, but also maintain an almost religious level of order and cleanliness.

In summary, the home, as a special category of space—deeply embedded in social and cultural contexts— demonstrates a great deal about the position an individual or family relates to the broader world.[47] Viewing objects in motion as a medium, the study conceives of the home as

[41] Marcoux, Jean-Sébastien. "The Refurbishment of Memory." In *Home Possessions: Material Culture behind Closed Doors*, edited by Daniel Miller, (2001): 69–86.
[42] McCracken, Grant. *Culture and Consumption.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.
[43] Rowlands, Michael. "The Role of Memory in the Transmission of Culture." *World Archeology* 25, no. 2 (1993): 141-51.
[44] Marcoux, 2001.
[45] Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies.* Translated by Ian Cunnison. New York: WW Norton, 1925.
[46] Daniels, Inge, and Susan Andrews. *The Japanese Home: Material Culture in the Modern Home*. Oxford: Berg, 2010.
[47] Lucas, Ray. Anthropology for Architects: Social Relations and the Built Environment. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020:48.

a dynamically negotiated space, where its material culture is the product of shared inhabitation and ongoing social relations.[48]

### 2.6 An image-based phenomenon

In the book *The Emergence of the Interior*, Rice explores the concept of the interior's "doubleness," which encompasses both the reality of the interior's spatiality, and its condition as an image, one that can be imagined, dreamed, and inhabited. The doubleness implies an interdependence between image and space. Rice notes that the first use of the word "interior" already emphasized its image-based connotations. By the early nineteenth century, the word "interior" had evolved beyond its original meaning of "inner character and a sense of individual subjectivity" to signify "the inside of a building or room, especially in reference to the artistic effect; also, a picture or representation of the inside of a building or room; also, in a theatre, a 'set' consisting of the inside of a building or room." In this context, the interior serves both as a physical, three-dimensional space and an image, whether it be a two-dimensional representation such as a painting, a print in a portfolio of decoration, or a flat backdrop that could conjure up an interior as a theatrical scene.

This section will discuss the image-based characteristics of interior arrangements and objects.

The interior image is not a singular flat image, but a composite image formed by the collage of various displays, objects and decorations. American poet and art historian Martha Holland discusses the presence of images on various surfaces within a room, such as wallpaper, landscape paintings, and mirrors on the walls. These elements intertwine with other features in the room or with distant window views, forming "a remarkably complex play of meanings." She describes this situation in terms of a "diagrammatic arrangement of images across a flat surface".[49] The interior decor, as visual images, doubles people's perception of domestic space by "setting up a play of relations within this doubled situation."[50]

Sociology, psychology, and media studies have also shown interest in this topic. Scholars have remarked on the effects of childhood objects, posters and decorations in bedrooms. American photographer Adrienne Salinger has produced a series of photos featuring the teenagers' bedrooms (Fig. 4).[51] Media scholars Steele and Brown[52] have examined the display of media images in adolescents' rooms in North America, describing it as an active process of cultural engagement that, in turn, contributes to a sense of self. Studies have shown that these

[48] Newson, Carey. "Co-Constructed Space and The Power of Presents: Unwrapping Relational Identity in the Teenage Bedroom." Home Cultures 14, no. 3 (2017): 279-306.
[49] Hollander, Martha. An Entrance for the Eyes: Space and Meaning in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002:3.
[50] Hollander, ibid., 119-29.
[51] Salinger, Adrienne. *In My Room: Teenagers in Their Bedrooms.* San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1995.
[52] Steele, Jeanne R., and Jane D. Brown. "Adolescent Room Culture: Studying Media in the Context of Everyday Life." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 24, no. 5 (1995): 551-76.

domestic objects carry significant meaning, both in materializing the past[53] and in creating curious juxtapositions.[54] Through the combination of these images or objects, memories or imaginations of distant places are brought together.


Figure 2-4 Adrienne Salinger's photos featuring teenagers' bedrooms

Source: *In My Room: Teenagers in Their Bedrooms*

Due to the imagery characteristics of interior décor and objects, the representation approaches of interiors differ significantly from traditional architectural drawings. Architectural historian Robin Evans notes that traditional architectural drawing struggle to adequately represent room interiors. The "room" became a new subject matter for architectural drawing from the mid-eighteenth century. This occurred with the emergence of what he calls the "developed surface drawing"(Fig. 2-5). Evans observes that the technique "became a way of turning architecture inside-out, so that internal rather than external elevations were shown."[55] As a result, this provided "a more comprehensive representation of internal decorative schemes than could be achieved through the traditional architectural section drawing."[56] It is worth noting that the developed surface drawing emphasizes the decorations on the inner walls, while making the space between them void-like. Evans used the developed surface to argue that architectural drawing, far from being conceptually autonomous, was a historically and socially porous artefact that "makes it possible to see some things more clearly by suppressing other things: something gained, something lost. Its power to represent is always partial, always more or less abstract. It never gives, nor can it give, a total picture of a project."[57] The house planning, the method of representing interiors, and the distribution of furniture are mutually reinforcing, with their innovations emerging,

[53] Lincoln, Sian. *Youth Culture and Private Space*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Lincoln, Sian. "I've Stamped My Personality All Over It: The Meaning of Objects in Teenage Bedroom Space." *Space and Culture* 17, no. 3 (2014): 266–79.
[54] Salinger, 1995.
[55] Evans 1997: 203.
[56] Robin Evans, 'The Developed Surface: An Enquiry into the Brief Life of an Eighteenth-Century Drawing Technique', in Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays, London: Architectural Association, 1997, pp. 200–3. On this drawing technique, see also Laura Jacobus, 'On "Whether a Man Could See Before Him and Behind Him Both at Once": The Role of Drawing in the Design of Interior Space in England, c. 1600–1800', Architectural History, no. 31, 1988, pp. 148–65.
[57] Evans 1997: 199.

evolving, and transforming together. Since the advent of developed surface drawings in the 18th century, many turns in interior drawing have occurred. More will be discussed in the next chapter.

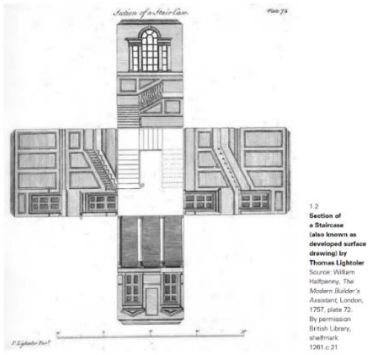

Figure 2-5 “developed surface drawing”, Section of a Staircase by Thomas Lightoler

Source: William Halfpenny, The Modern Builder’s Assistant, London, 1757, plate 72.

In addition to methods of representation, the relationship between interiors and images also involves their presentation in media. Visual media serve as a crucial platform for architecture to address issues related to domestic life. In her book *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, architectural historian Beatriz Colomina uses the works of Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier as examples to explore this issu.[58] Colomina argues that modern architecture, especially in its domestic manifestations, only became modern in relation to mass media. Rice further elaborates on this discussion later.

Colomina notes that for Le Corbusier, various forms of media played a crucial role in articulating a modernist sense of spatial organization. According to her, Le Corbusier used photography as a means for architecture to achieve a kind of “post-interior” domesticity, where the interior as the provision of soft furnishing, as the covering of an inside space with pliable, impressionable stuff, is seemingly obliterated. In the case of Loos, Colomina argues that his interiors involve a complex interaction between representation and spatial condition. “Looking at the photographs, it is easy to imagine oneself in these precise, static positions, usually indicated by the unoccupied furniture. The photographs suggest that it is intended that these spaces be comprehended by occupation, by using this furniture, by ‘entering’ the photograph, by inhabiting it,” she says. Rice adds that with Loos, the photographs of his interiors are not simply mechanical, subject-less copies; rather, they manipulate and mask the experience of interior space through framing and reflections, generating a new reality. As a result, the owners of Loos houses do not recognize their interiors through photography because there is no link to the long experience that the interior should nurture. The photographs become external, circulating images, losing any association with the special memory of the domestic.

[58] Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994.

Scholars have not only reflected on the significance of professional images in the emergence of modern architecture and interiors, but in recent years, an increasing body of literature has also considered the impact of mass media and advertising on domestic lifestyles. Since the advent of industrial modernization, mass media has packaged domestic objects and settings as idealized lifestyles. Through the dissemination of these images and videos across various media platforms such as magazines, television, advertisements, and exhibitions, consumers are encouraged to construct their own modish domestic interiors through the purchase of a new armchair or a piece of curtain fabric, thereby creating a large-scale consumer culture.[59] For example, in her essay *Playboy Architecture, 1953-1979*[60], Colomina explores how the homes and decorations featured in magazines were more than just backgrounds; they were active contributed to the creation of Playboy's identity and the ideal bachelor lifestyle. Penny Sparke further emphasized that as modern domestic interiors become idealized phenomena through their engagement with mass media, the interior itself became a mass medium, a vehicle for the transmission of modern values of various kinds.

This is particularly evident in IKEA's promotion images. Scholars such as Sara Kristofferson[61] and Rebecca Carrai[62] argue that the multinational's geniality doesn't lie in the morphology or features of a specific furnishing set but in its conception of domesticity. The main object on display is also not material – it is an idea. The primary means of dissemination is a vast collection of curated and sanitized digital images. Through these colorful and vibrant images, IKEA projects a positive and optimistic view of family life, suggesting an idyllic lifestyle and fashion trends. Whereas the realities of domestic disorder and the tensions of everyday life are avoided, pausing critical thoughts and allowing consumers to distract themselves with the act of consumption.

### 2.7 Objects as Media

As various digital devices become integrated into our everyday environments and routines, the topic of the mediating role of domestic objects has richer implications in the digital age.

Take the screens, for example, which are both objects and media. They are the nodes at the intersection of the digital and material worlds. In the so-called digital age, our daily routines at home are actually structured in a large part by various fixed or movable screens (e.g. on television, iPad, home security system, etc.). Our perception, knowledge and productive work

[59] Baudrillard, Jean. *Consumer Society*. Paris: Editions Denoël, 1970.
Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. London: Routledge, 1979.
Douglas, Mary, Richard Wilk, and Baron Isherwood. *The World of Goods*. London: Routledge, 1979.
Miller, Daniel. *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987.
McCracken, Grant. *Culture and Consumption*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.
[60] Colomina, Beatriz. "Playboy Architecture 1953-1979." *Volume* 33 (2012): 49.
[61] Kristoffersson, Sara. *Design by IKEA: A Cultural History*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014.
[62] Carrai, Rebecca. "Fiction: IKEA's Saleable Living for Pandemic Life." In *Interiors in the Era of Covid-19: Interior Design Between the Public and Private Realms*, 2023.

are mediated more and more through the manipulation of touchscreens (e.g. on mobile phones, computers, e-readers, etc.). They provide, actively, interactively or passively, links between households, and individual members of households, with the world beyond their front door.

Recent studies have shown that mobile media can be seen as integral to how everyday life is lived out at home, part of its habitual and routine elements.[63] For instance, as Pink[64] have shown, often people would check their smartphones just before going to sleep and first thing on waking up in the morning. Other usage scenarios include: during meals/snacking, while watching TV, during short breaks, during work meetings, while on the toilet, while bathing, and so on. Teenagers were reported to interweave homework with digital gaming. When people habitually use mobile devices at home, they also improvise with them, such as using an iPhone as a flashlight[65]. Some scholars also note that some people would actively limit the use of digital technologies by controlling the movement of devices within the home environment to compartmentalize life and work boundaries[66]. For instance, using a mobile phone predominantly as a social tool and associating the laptop mostly with work, actively separating the two. Or setting aside time to read paper books in the evening and resisting the use of these digital technologies at the dinner table. Or deliberately placing mobile devices out of immediate reach, in another room, or even locked away in a drawer.

Furthermore, digital devices, particularly screens and cameras, have the potential to reshape our perceptions of other objects. British cultural studies scholar Inga Bryden's essay explores the ubiquitous screens in our homes and our interactions with them, indicating that memory, familiarity with the interior space of a home and the dynamic between people and things are becoming further complicated with those screens.[67] She specifically analyzes the post-pandemic shift to working from home using webcams, which has brought a preoccupation with self-presentation and the appearance of one's backdrop, the objects and spaces of the home interior. Bryden argues that the agency of domestic objects is both diminished and heightened by their appearance on screens. On one hand, they are reduced to flat, and

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[63] Chambers, D. (2016). *Changing media, homes and households: Cultures, technologies and meanings*. Routledge.
Christensen, T. H., & Røpke, I. (2010). "Can practice theory inspire studies of ICTs in everyday life?" In B. Bräuchler & J. J. Postill (Eds.), *Theorising Media and Practice* (pp. 233–256). New York: Berghahn Books.
Silverstone, R., & Hirsch, E. (Eds.). (1992). *Consuming technologies: Media and information in domestic spaces*. London: Routledge.
Morley, D. (2000). *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*. London: Routledge.
Morley, D. (2003). "What's 'home' got to do with it?" *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6, 435–458.
Pink, S., Horst, H., Postill, J., & others. (2016). *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. London: SAGE.
Wajcman, J., Bittman, M., & Brown, J. (2009). "Intimate connections: The impact of the mobile phone on work-life boundaries". In G. Goggin & L. Hjorth (Eds.), *Mobile Technologies* (pp. 9–22). New York: Routledge.
[64] Pink, S., & Leder Mackley, K. (2013). "Saturated and situated: Rethinking media in everyday life". *Media, Culture & Society*, 35(6), 677–691.
Pink, S., Hjorth, L., Horst, H., Nettheim, J., & Bell, G. (2018). "Digital work and play: Mobile technologies and new ways of feeling at home". *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 21(1), 26–38.
[65] Pink et al., 2016.
[66] Pink et al., 2018.
[67] Bryden, Inga. "Lockdown Portraits: Resituating the Self." In *Interiors in the Era of Covid-19: Interior Design Between the Public and Private Realms*, 2023.

undifferentiated shapes on the screen; on the other, in virtual meetings, the objects, the place (home environments or surroundings), and the positioning of subjects all play significant roles. She draws a parallel with Renaissance portrait, suggesting that just "as the symbolism in Renaissance portraits might be analysed, so the interiors and bookshelves behind the Zoom sitter can be curated – or downloaded – and read." Bryden proposes that the framing of virtual meetings disrupts the conventional narrative of " the domestic space," “activates” specific sites such as particular rooms, and allows familiar objects to be seen in unfamiliar ways. As if they have taken on a new agency.

## 2.8 SUMMARY
### ‘Domestic Symbols’: A Private Appropriation and Display of Public Meanings

This chapter provides an overview of the spatial-symbolic meaning of domestic objects, revealing how they manifest relationships between the public and private realms from multiple dimensions. It explores the following interconnected themes:

In response to the cold, smooth, and transparent urban environment, ‘soft’ objects emphasize the value of the traces of life, time, and history, viewing the home as a never-finished, ongoing project. In contrast to the stability and coherence of architecture, objects underscore the values of discontinuity, fragmentation, and temporariness. Confronting the hierarchical order of space, the placement and arrangement of objects have the power to both construct and deconstruct spatial hierarchies. In light of architecture's long-standing neglect or rejection of the symbolic, interpretive, and mediating functions of ornament since modernism, objects have assumed these roles, stressing the need to re-evaluate ornament and its functions. Through the movement of objects, the home can be understood as a series of flows of material and social relations, even participating in the broader geographical circulation of global architectural and design discourse. Due to the image-based nature of interior arrangement and decoration, in a mass media environment, the interior image becomes a tool for disseminating modern values or consumer culture. Lastly, the ubiquitous presence of digital objects in contemporary homes introduces new forms of agency—active, interactive, or passive—further connecting the household and its members with the world beyond.

Overall, this chapter argues that the collection and display of ‘domestic symbols’ performs the important mediating function between private and public: i.e. a private appropriation and display of public meanings. In the subsequent chapters, the case studies of new live/work homes will further elaborate on the evolving spatial power of objects today, particularly their ability to connect the domains of living/working, private/public, and individual/collective.

# CHAPTER 3

## The New Live/Work Home in UK

## INTRODUCTION

Working from home has become a widespread trend. As public and productive matters penetrate the domestic sphere, the way we use and demand our home spaces has undergone significant changes. To better address the various issues that may arise from working at home, home workers often adapt conventional housing models available on the market. They appropriate the space, redefine its meanings, and create settings that make the domestic space more suitable for everyday practices and personal identities. This has led to significant changes in the form of domesticity, the pattern of space, the meaning of objects, and the relationship between public and private spheres in contemporary live/work homes, very different from those found in the aforementioned historical literature. Therefore, this chapter examines the changes in space and meaning in these homes.

The respondents of this chapter are London's creative industry professionals who work at home. As stated earlier, the choice of the respondents is due to the historical emergence and development of studios and lofts—direct predecessors of contemporary live/work spaces—being closely linked to the rise of the creative industries and freelance professionals. Also, the remote work and labour organization models of creative industry workers are representative in the context of contemporary knowledge-based home work, making them an ideal subject for our study.

For this study, families from the creative industry who live in general urban housing types were selected as case studies. Those living in more specialized spaces, such as converted warehouses or lofts—popular in areas like Shoreditch or Hackney—or co-living spaces found in areas like Southwark or White City, are excluded from the scope of this research. This is because our focus is on how people creatively adapt conventional "private" housing. Common types of housing in London fall into two broad categories: houses and apartments. In London, houses—particularly detached, semi-detached, and terraced—are predominant in both the older parts of the city and the suburbs, while apartments tend to be more concentrated in city centres and high-density areas. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, representative cases from each housing type were chosen.

Field surveys and interviews were conducted at these live/work homes. The research, based on interviews, field observations, photographs, and drawings, highlights their homes, their appropriation of domestic spaces, and their living and working patterns. The research questions for this chapter are as follows: how do remote workers adapt conventional housing available on the market; how do they appropriate these spaces, redefine their meanings, and create environments that make domestic spaces more suitable for live/work activities? And, how does home-based work foster the development of a new culture of domesticity and further influence the evolving politics of privacy?

### 3.1 Overview of UK Cases and Case Selection Rationale

The UK component of this research comprises 15 case studies of live/work homes in London (see *Table 0-2 Case-study List 2: UK Case*), strategically selected to reflect the architectural, socio-economic, and occupational diversity inherent in contemporary knowledge-based domestic environments. These cases span three predominant housing typologies—Georgian terraced houses (2 cases), Victorian terraced houses (5 cases), modernist apartments (5 cases), and modernist terraced houses (3 cases). Geographically distributed across postcode districts including E1, SE22, SW11, and EC2Y, the sample captures variations in urban density, historical context, and housing policies. Participants range in age from 28 to 68, with occupations encompassing curators, illustrators, architects, writers, and scholars, ensuring representation across creative and intellectual professions central to the study's focus on knowledge-based home-work.

The selection criteria prioritized representativeness, contrast, and analytical depth. First, cases were chosen to align with statistically prevalent housing types in London, as evidenced by the *English Housing Survey 2021–22*, ensuring findings resonate with broader urban trends. Second, occupational diversity was critical: participants' professions (e.g., freelance illustrators, architects, retired journalists) reflect the spectrum of home-based creative and intellectual work, enabling cross-comparison of spatial strategies under shared constraints. Third, demographic variance—including single occupants, couples, and multigenerational families—highlighted how household dynamics shape live/work configurations.

From this pool, five cases were selected for detailed analysis in this chapter due to their exemplary articulation of core themes:

- Case 1 (Georgian House) exemplifies the fluid integration of work, social, and creative activities, challenging traditional front/back spatial hierarchies.
- Cases 2 & 3 (Victorian Houses) show adaptive renovation and reuse strategies—open-plan fluidity and nomadic territoriality.
- Cases 4 & 5 (Modernist Apartments) reveal tensions between modernist anti-domestic ideals and the resurgence of conventional domesticity or aesthetics.

These cases were further prioritized for their rich ethnographic data—combining interviews and visual documentation—which illuminate how residents negotiate spatial constraints, redefine privacy, and enact agency through material and digital adaptations. By juxtaposing historical architectural frameworks with contemporary practices, the selected cases collectively advance the study's central thesis: that live/work homes are sites of cultural innovation, where global trends in digital labour intersect with localized spatial improvisations to reshape contemporary domesticity.

### 3.2 Live/Work Home in Georgian Terraced House

The first case is a live/work home of a young artist in an early 19th-century Georgian terraced house. Georgian terraced homes are typically narrow and tall, with a vertical layout designed to fit into the compact urban grid of rapidly expanding cities like London in the 18th and early

19th centuries. The layout of our study house follows a similar pattern, with a maximum width of 4.88 meters and a length of nearly 20 meters. These houses often featured more open and flowing layouts compared to corridor-dominated layouts of Victorian homes. They had rooms that connected through one another, with less emphasis on strict separation between family members, servants, and guests, allowing for more interactions. The rigid compartmentalization and specialization of spaces were less pronounced; many rooms were multifunctional and could be repurposed based on the time of day or the household's needs. This possibility of mobility and flexibility inherent in the interior space is perfect for today's home-based workers, who conducts many types of work, social, and living activities at home.

Although the layout is relatively open and interconnected, privacy in Georgian homes was still valued, with clear distinctions between public and private spaces. The front of the house, particularly the ground or first-floor reception rooms, such as the dining room or parlour, was used to host guests and project a respectable image to the outside world. These areas were often richly decorated and signalled the family's social standing. The rear rooms, by contrast, were more private and functional, with kitchens, scullery, and servant quarters located at the back or in the basement. The dual function of Georgian homes—as both a private retreat from the bustling city (in the back of the house) and a stage for social interaction (at the front)—has been explored in various works, such as Mark Girouard's *Life in the English Country House* (1978) and Amanda Vickery's *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (2009)[1]. However, from the case study in this research, it can be observed that the "front-back" spatial division and the practice of decorations to display the homeowner's taste and social status have faced significant challenges today. This section will explore the contemporary live/work scenario within a Georgian house based on a case study.

### 3.2.1 CASE 1: An Shared, Mixed, and Multicultural Experimental Space

The first respondent is Liu, a Chinese-British artist and curator who lives and works in an early 19th-century Georgian terraced house.

The most significant architectural alteration in this case is the reconfiguration of the original three-story Georgian terraced house into separate units, with Liu occupying the ground floor and basement. The upper unit occupying the first and second floors. The entrance hall and staircase are therefore shared communal areas between the two households. Liu also carried out some architectural modifications herself to accommodate the dual demands of artistic production and curatorial work. The basement, accessible through its own entrance, was strategically adapted to accommodate visiting artist friends for short-term stays. Internally, Liu's renovation focused on removing all unnecessary partitions, replacing the traditionally rigid, vertically stratified Georgian layout with a horizontally flowing, open-plan arrangement.

[1] Girouard, Mark. *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History*. Yale University Press, 1978.
Vickery, Amanda. *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England*. Yale University Press, 2009.

Apart from the bedroom, all primary functions—including living, kitchen, dining, entertainment, and workspaces—are seamlessly integrated, fostering spatial continuity. To further accommodate professional needs, three dressing rooms and a dedicated photography space were added on the ground floor, enhancing the home's role as a multifunctional creative hub.

Although Liu lives alone most of the time, the house serves as a space where she collaborates with others, working alongside her assistant and engaging with artist friends to create art or plan events. This study draws scenarios of their home spaces and use activities (Fig 3-1, 3-2).

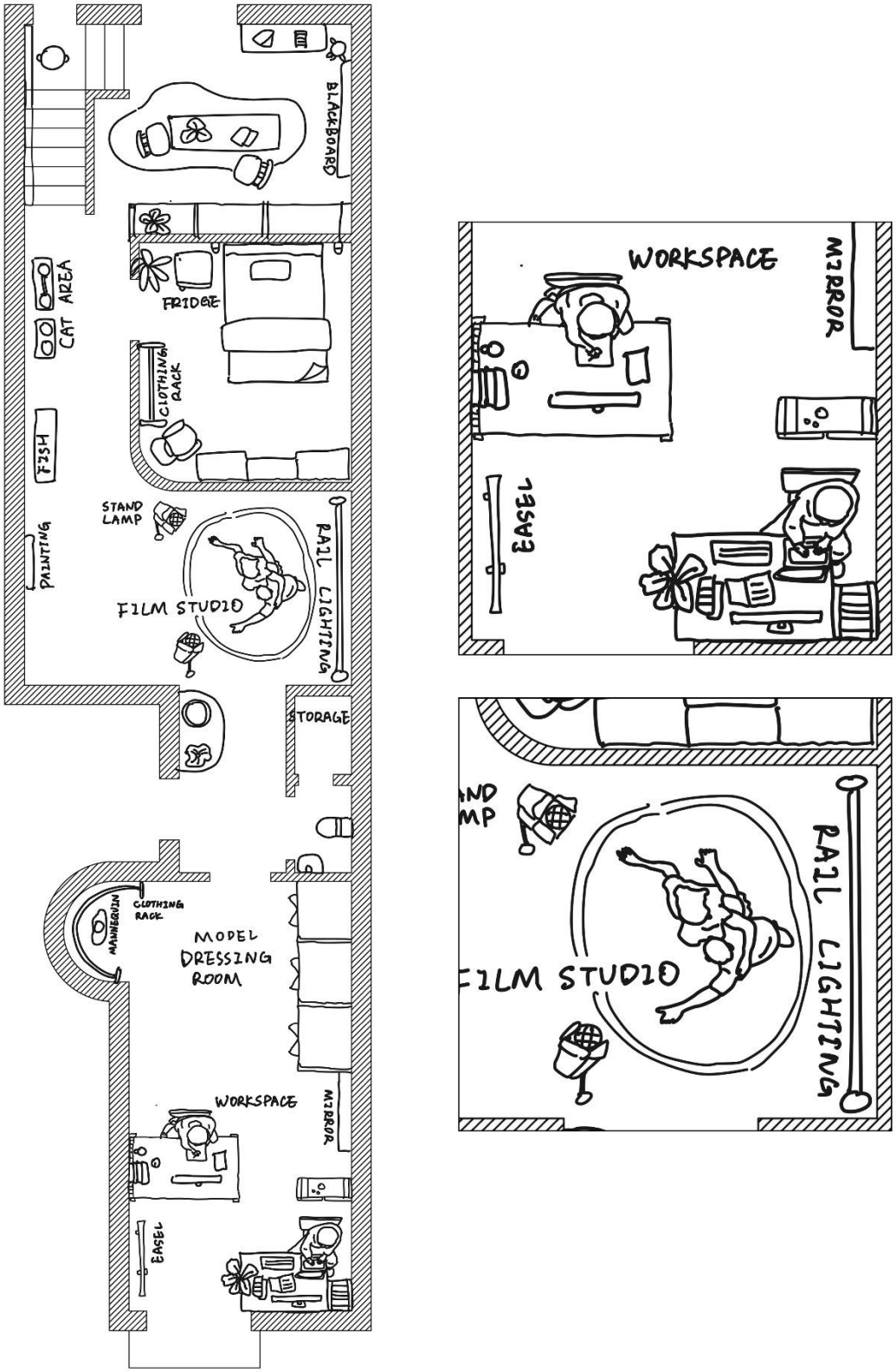



Figure 3-1. Drawing of the Living Scenarios: Case 1, Ground Floor

Source: drawn by the author

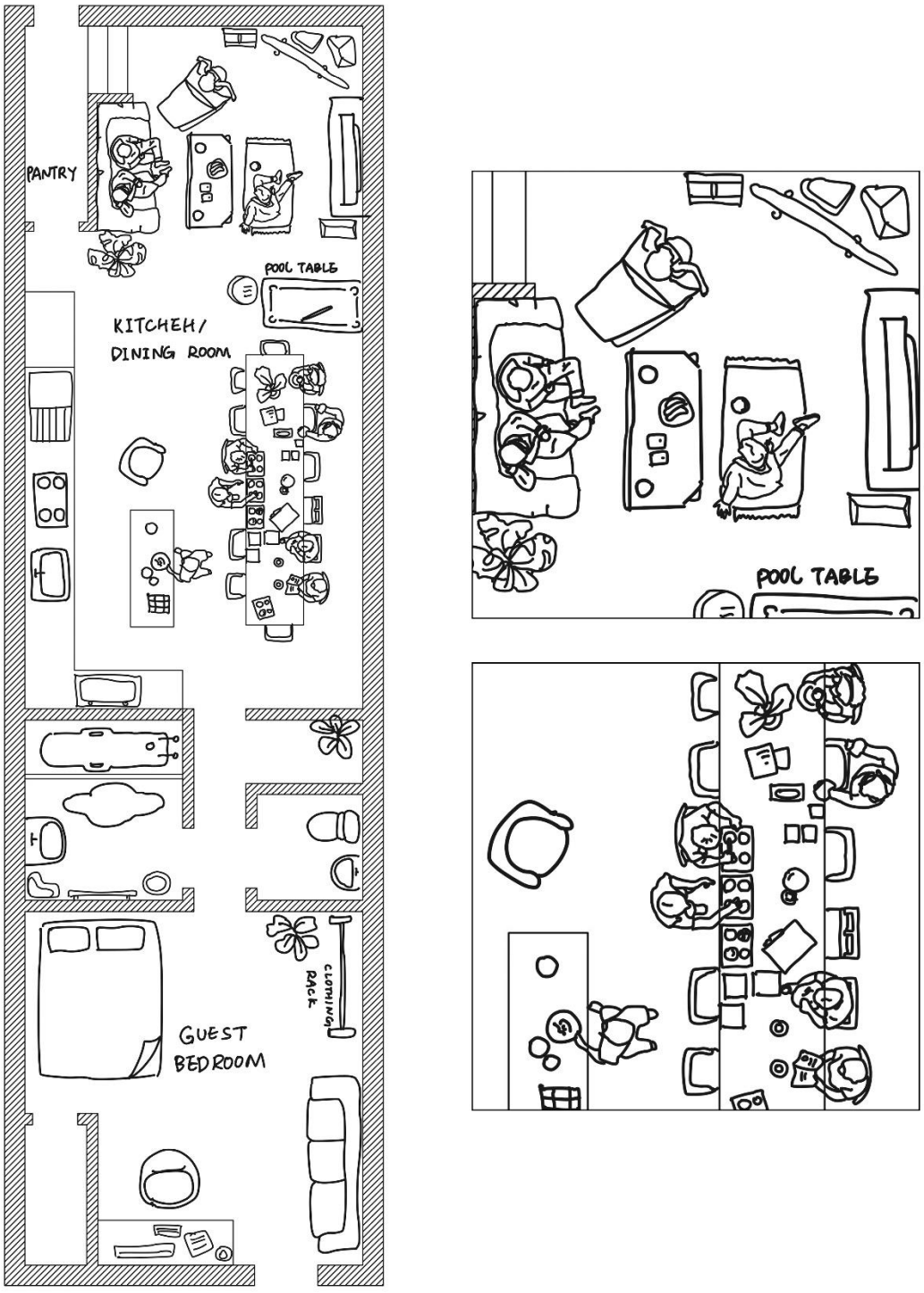



Figure 3-2 Drawing of the Living Scenarios: Case 1, Basement

Source: drawn by the author

The layout of the ground floor is centred around the entryway, which also includes a toilet and storage room. The floor is roughly divided into two zones. The front, street-facing area serves as the primary office space for digital and paper works (Fig 3-3, left). Liu and her assistant each have their own desks, and they work here on a daily basis. The front room transitions seamlessly into the rear area, which is dedicated to more creative tasks. At the back of the office space is a model preparation zone defined by three small model dressing rooms, curved drying racks that fit the floor plan, and a mannequin. Moving past the entryway, there is a small film studio equipped with professional stand lamps, rail lighting, and photography equipment, where Liu and others film and shoot images. Further toward the back is Liu's own bedroom, and just outside it is an area for her cat, complete with food and water bowls, mats, and toys. At the very back, facing the rear alley, is Liu's relaxation space, where she reads, plays the keyboard and guitar, and jots down notes on a large blackboard (Fig 3-3, right). The most recent note reads a quote from contemporary French writer and filmmaker Marguerite Duras: "If I weren't a writer, I'd be a whore." The ground-floor spaces are almost entirely open, with the only real separation being a door between the front room and the entryway, which is usually left open. Without solid partitions, the definition of each area is rather blurred, and the activities that might take place in a given area are largely determined by what objects are available there.

Figure 3-3 Left: the office space at the front for digital works; Right: the relaxation space at the back

Source: courtesy of the author

The basement follows a similar pattern of openness (Fig 3-2). It primarily consists of an audiovisual entertainment area centred around a television and karaoke machine (Fig 3-4, left), a pool table, and a dining area with a long table that seats up to 20 people, alongside a near-professional-level kitchen with open-flame cooking facilities (Fig 3-4, right). These areas are completely open, with no divisions between them, making it the most public part of the house. As a curator and event planner, Liu often hosts gatherings here, ranging from intimate group gatherings to larger events with friends and professional colleagues, blending social interactions with work-related discussions. The basement has become a key meeting place for Asian artists in the Brick Lane area, with many innovative ideas emerging from these

gatherings. Scattered throughout the house are remnants of past projects, including banners, posters, balloons, photography lamps, backdrops, Chinese lanterns, festival decorations, dolls, sculptures, easels, disco balls, projection screens, and mannequins (Fig 3-5). Unlike the carefully curated decorations of traditional Georgian homes meant to display the owner's taste, these objects are left in a seemingly chaotic state. Liu, rather than discarding them, embraces this disorder. She prefers seeing objects from various cultural contexts juxtaposed or even piled together in a seemingly random fashion, a reflection of the intimate relationship between her life and creative work. It's not uncommon to find freshly laundered clothes mixed with models from her recent exhibitions. This speaks to both her prioritization of professional pursuits over maintaining a "stylish" home and her rejection of the notion of domestic "elegance." Through these domestic actions, she resists the traditional notions of social performance, household order, spatial control, and gender roles that were so integral to the culture of Georgian homes.


Figure 3-4 Left: the entertainment area centred around a television and karaoke machine; Right: the dining area with a long table, alongside an open kitchen

Source: courtesy of the author

Figure 3-5 The domestic objects are left in a seemingly chaotic state

Source: courtesy of the author

This study further maps out Liu's domestic pattern in a diagram (Fig 3-6), in which the dashed circles indicate areas where people are engaged in various activities—working, socializing, or

living—or a combination of these. The connecting lines between them illustrate the movement, communication, and interaction between these activities. Overall this live/work home is characterized as “a shared, mixed, and multicultural experimental space”. On the one hand, the relatively open and flexible layout of the Georgian house, with its interconnected rooms and lack of rigid partitions, supports the fluid, multifunctional use pattern seen today. On the other hand, contemporary living practices challenge the cultural norms of traditional Georgian homes. The overlap between personal, professional, and creative life in Liu’s home contrasts sharply with the traditional Georgian emphasis on clear distinctions between formal social display and private family retreats. In Liu’s case, this division is deliberately minimized, reflecting her rejection of the traditional notions of domesticity and privacy that once defined Georgian houses. Her home is not a rigidly maintained hierarchy of spaces for social status and family life. Instead, it supports collaboration and spontaneous interaction between different individuals and activities. This aligns with her work as an artist and curator, where the integration of life and work creates an experimental environment that fosters artistic creation and cultural exchange. The “shared” nature of the interior is also essential. In this case, the basement serves as the primary gathering and shared space, transcending the conventional boundaries between domestic and public life, blending them into a communal experience. Work, creativity, and social life converge here in a shared space that accommodates multiple functions and perspectives. Additionally, Liu’s home is filled with objects from various cultural contexts, creating an ongoing dialogue between different narratives, reflecting her multicultural identity and artistic practice. The eclectic mix of objects challenges the Georgian home's traditional inclination towards refined, socially appropriate decoration, replacing it with a more fluid, improvised aesthetic.


Figure 3-6 Spatial Pattern Diagram: a shared, mixed, and multicultural experimental space

Source: drawn by the author

In summary, Liu's home presents a unique spatial model—a shared, mixed, and multicultural experimental environment where work, social, and personal life intertwine and merge. While this model retains some alignment with the layout of traditional Georgian houses, it more significantly challenges conventional notions of domestic culture and privacy.

### 3.3 Live/Work Home in Victorian Terraced House

The following stories focus on live/work homes in typical Victorian terraced houses. Victorian culture, as a hallmark of Western industrial civilization, made a significant contribution to the Western concept of home. Central to Victorian beliefs about the home was the idea that it was a private retreat where personal life could be enjoyed in peace and security. In contrast to the relatively open and flexible Georgian houses, the traditional Victorian houses were characterized by two essential elements in their layout: segregation and specialization[2]. These elements embodied the dominant middle-class beliefs about "proper" social relationships and the different roles and capacities of men and women in culture and society.

The Georgian focus on interconnected rooms and multifunctional spaces gave way to a stricter "corridor plan" in Victorian homes, where each room had one door connecting to a central corridor, allowing access to any room directly without passing through other rooms[3]. Consequently, the houses were broadly divided into two areas: an inner refuge composed of individually accessed rooms, known as the "served space," and a more public circulation area, known as the "service space," which included corridors, staircases, and halls. The corridors were initially designed to minimize disturbances from servants to the master and guests, making it difficult to justify entering any room without a specific purpose, thus ensuring smooth and frictionless family life.

A key similarity between Victorian and Georgian homes lies in the attention to privacy, though it was achieved differently. Both styles maintained separate public-facing front spaces for social display and private rear areas for family use. In Victorian houses, the internal spaces were further divided based on the status, roles, and (asymmetrical) needs of the home's occupants and visitors—the husband, wife, guests, children, and servants, in that order. The front of the house, especially the parlour, was the meeting point between the external potentially threatening world of strangers and the internal domestic sphere of intimates. Historian Karen Halttunen observes: "Geographically, the parlour lay between the urban street where strangers freely mingled and the back regions of the house where only family members were permitted to enter uninvited. According to the cult of domesticity, the parlour provided

[2] Ariès, Philippe, Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot, eds. *A history of private life. Vol. 4.* Harvard University Press, 1987

[3] EVANS Robin. Figures, doors and passages. *Architectural Design*, 1978,48(4): 267-78.

the woman of the house with a 'cultural podium' from which she was to exert her moral influence"[4]. Besides the outward display at the front of the house, Victorian families also carefully maintained the privacy at the back regions of the house. This was not only a physical retreat and closure but also a symbolic moral barrier, reflecting the Victorian pursuit of moral standards, manners, and social order. Overall, the Victorian home could be seen as a kind of battleground: a place of constant struggle to maintain privacy, security and respectability in a dangerous world.

To further explore what contemporary live/work lives are like in Victorian houses, this study investigated two homes:

### 3.3.1 CASE 2: An Intimate, Intertwined, and Continuous Domestic Landscape

This is a family of five—a couple and their three children—living in this Victorian terraced house. The couple are both designers, and all the family members engage in some form of work or study at home. Unlike the previous case, they mainly work remotely using digital devices, such as conducting online meetings, dealing with emails, and working with digital files.

In this case, the architectural renovation involved the removal of internal partitions between the kitchen and dining space, transforming them into a single, open-plan area. This intervention not only improved spatial fluidity but also fostered greater interaction among family members by integrating cooking and dining activities into a cohesive social experience. To address the common issue of insufficient daylight in Victorian homes, a skylight was installed above the dining space, channelling natural light deep into the interior. Additionally, the original doors facing the backyard were expanded and replaced with glass doors, enhancing ventilation and strengthening the visual and physical connection between the dining space and the back garden. The walls in the dining space were repainted in a warm butter-yellow tone, further contributing to a bright and inviting atmosphere. By dismantling enclosed compartments and maximizing natural light, this renovation redefines the traditional Victorian layout, creating a more fluid and interactive domestic environment.

This study maps out their live/work scenarios, overlaying their everyday activities onto the ground floor plan of the house (Fig. 3-7).

[4] Halttunen, K. (1982) *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle Class Culture in America, 1830–1870*, New Haven: Yale University Press. p 59.

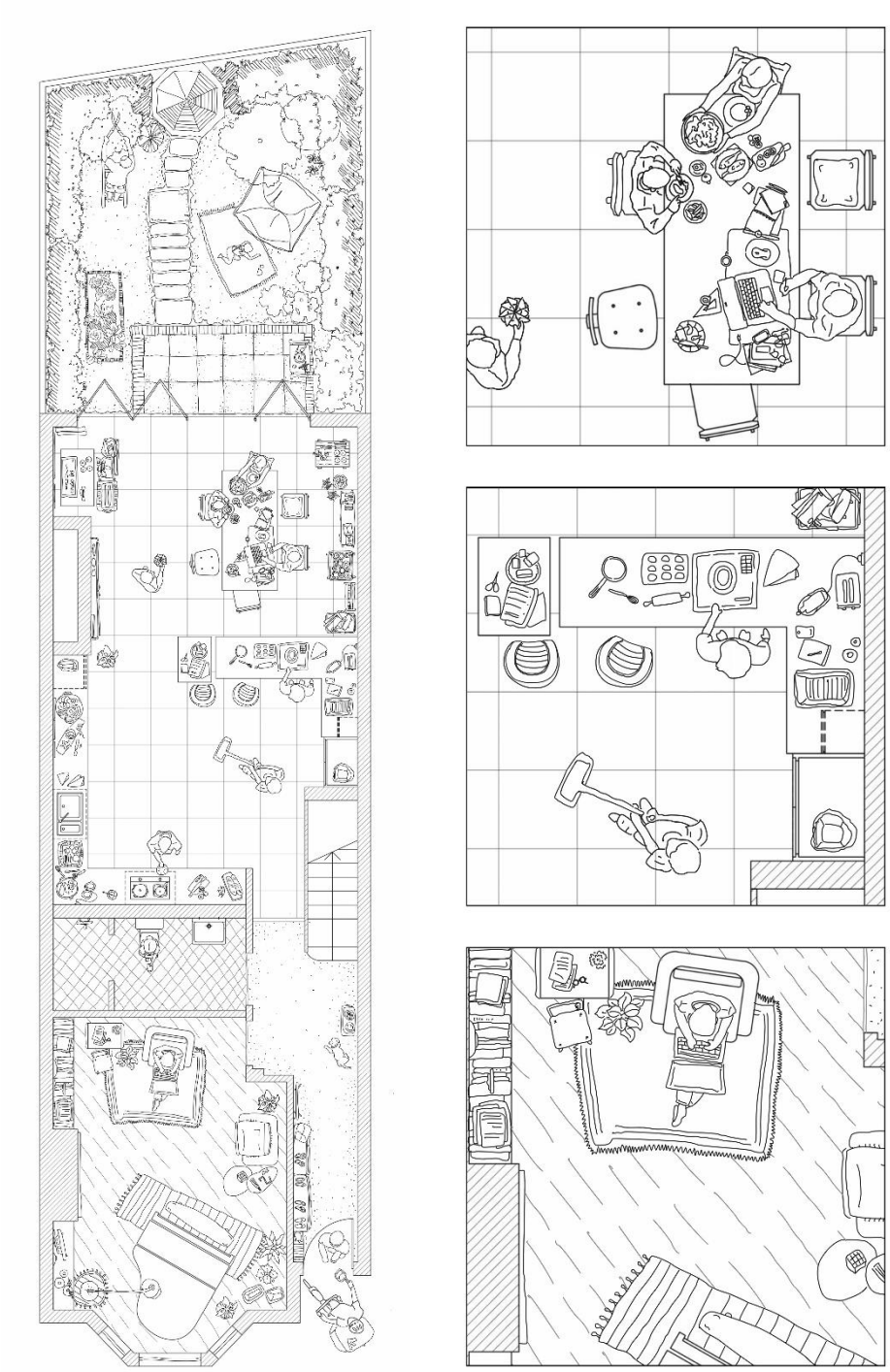


Figure 3-7 Drawing of the Living Scenarios: Case 2

Source: drawn by the author

As shown in the drawing, family members are active throughout the house: working on the sofa in the parlour, checking their phones in the bathroom, vacuuming the kitchen, having meals at the dining table, or trimming hedges in the backyard. The wife further described her home-based work routine:

She works in various parts of the house—sometimes at the large dining table, other times on the sofa in the parlour, and occasionally walking around while handling emails. For online meetings, however, she usually sits in the parlour with the bookshelf as her background, and the family makes an effort not to enter that room. When worked at the dining table, looking up towards the entry porch, she can observe her pet dog running around; looking towards the backyard, she can spot corner of the yard and the children "camping" out there; and the dining room door that opens out to the backyard is also an important source of light and air for the live/work space.

She then described a detailed evening routine in their home that included a variety of home-based work activities. Centred around the kitchen area, the live/work activities of different family members extended throughout the entire house. The interplay between bodily movement and living habits in daily routines can be observed in her case.

> 7:00 PM - Return Home
>
> In the evening, as family members return home one after another, we each begin engaging in different activities, usually centred around the kitchen. Some prepare dinner in the kitchen, while others continue unfinished work or play around. The kitchen plays a central role in this process, becoming a natural gathering point for the family. As dinner preparation progresses, family members gradually come together. Despite everyone having different tasks and rhythms, we express emotional support for each other during the dinner.
>
> 8:30 PM - Work Lingers On
>
> After dinner, I clear the food and utensils from the dining table. My husband opens his laptop on the dining table, catching up on a late-night work-related webinar. Our youngest son sits across from him, drawing with oil pastels on paper, frequently glancing up to see what his dad is doing. I settle on the parlour couch, working on my design sketches. The middle kid, moving between rooms, occasionally pauses to show his latest findings to anyone who'd give him a moment.
>
> 10:00 PM -The Late-Night Digital Stretch
>
> My husband is still at the dining table, working while relaxing. He multitasks with several screens open, including his phone, watching movies and sketching ideas in his notebook. He has a particular fondness for silent films, preferring them at night to prevent disturbing us with noise. I remind everyone to prepare for bed, and they begin to retreat to their bedrooms.

It is evident that today's living culture in Victorian houses have changed dramatically. First, most areas of the house can now accommodate various activities. Independent work by home workers or gatherings of family members and visitors can be dispersed throughout the house. Notably, the kitchen often plays a significant role. The contemporary kitchen needs to have the capacity not only to nourish but also to entertain, provide space for leisure and be the world’s smallest start-up incubator. A "kitchen-centred work home" is quite typical, as seen in this case. In the combined kitchen and dining area, various activities and perceptions intersect,

juxtapose, and collage, including cooking, digital work, childcare, and leisure. Although laptops and wireless networks allow people to work almost anywhere in the home, people tend to choose the kitchen space for practical reasons: it is centrally located, spacious, well-lit, and conveniently close to food and coffee. The "kitchen table" appears in many successful startup stories and symbolizes the ideal of side hustles in late capitalism. The kitchen table can be a place for deep independent thinking with a pile of documents spread out or an ideal spot for small meetings or brainstorming sessions with friends or family. It represents flexibility, creativity, the democratization of entrepreneurship, and the integration of personal and professional life. Of course, other spaces like the parlour or bedroom can also seamlessly blend work and rest. Even so-called service spaces, such as the staircase, can be utilized as an independent reading nook, or the porch, as seen in this case, is not just an entryway but also the territory of the pet dog, equipped with food, water, and a soft cushion. Although the dog roams freely around the house, the porch is its safe and comfortable retreat. Perhaps with the exception of the bathroom, every room or space can be multifunctional. However, even this special fortress can be transformed. Architectural scholar Cynthia Rock mentioned a case where a working couple expanded and redesigned their bathroom, placing plants, wicker chairs, soft lighting, and exercise equipment inside, as many important conversations took place between the bathtub and the sink[5].

The hierarchical order and gender roles in traditional Victorian houses—such as women's rooms being at the back, away from the street and strangers' eyes, and the male head of the household's rooms being at the front, near circulation areas or public entrances, in contact with the more diverse public world—have been completely broken and eliminated. All spaces are continuous and gender-neutral, with almost all spaces being used for multiple purposes, blurring the boundaries between different functions, and seamlessly intertwining work and leisure cultures. To achieve multifunctionality, each space in the house is often furnished to accommodate various uses, creating suitable environments for both social interaction and solitude. Since each family member may have vastly different ideas about work or entertainment, the house presents itself as a rich kaleidoscope of options, with each choice in organization and decoration reflecting different personalities.

Moreover, although these home workers still live in Victorian houses with corridors and clearly defined functions, the associated culture of pursuing morality, etiquette, and order, as well as the efficient, frictionless use of space, no longer applies. Today, family members move, meet, and interact within the home, bringing interesting frictions back into our houses. The living trajectories of this family are shown in the following diagram (Figure 3-8). It represents the movement trajectories of different family members with different coloured lines. The lines flow and intertwine together, which suggests that the domestic situation is evolving towards a state of bodily intimacy, intertwined routines, and potential crossovers between different activities. This bears some resemblance to the interconnected rooms of 16th-18th century European villas in terms of the mixing of work and life functions, the social blending of public and private, and the multiple connections and spatial transitions. There are also some

[5] Rock, Cynthia, Susana Torre, and Gwendolyn Wright. "The appropriation of the house: Changes in house design and concepts of domesticity." *New space for women*. Routledge, 2019. 83-100.

similarities with the spatial situation in the previous Georgian house case; although the floor plans of the two homes are quite different, they both exhibit a similar living pattern of openness, fluidity, and multifunctionality, suggesting that the correlation between spatial usage patterns and architectural floor plans is decreasing. In other words, the isolation and functional division of rooms in the corridor plan are weakened, and their implications for the living patterns are also diminished. When Robin Evans described the emergence of corridors from the 16th to the 19th centuries, he critiqued the increasing atomization of individual relationships and the hierarchical order interpreted by the housing layout[6]. However, in these cases, contemporary domestic spaces and living patterns have, to some extent, returned to what Evans favoured: a living condition that fosters intimate interactions, that brings people's bodies together, and where one activity may encounter another, constituting a continuous, endless domestic landscape.

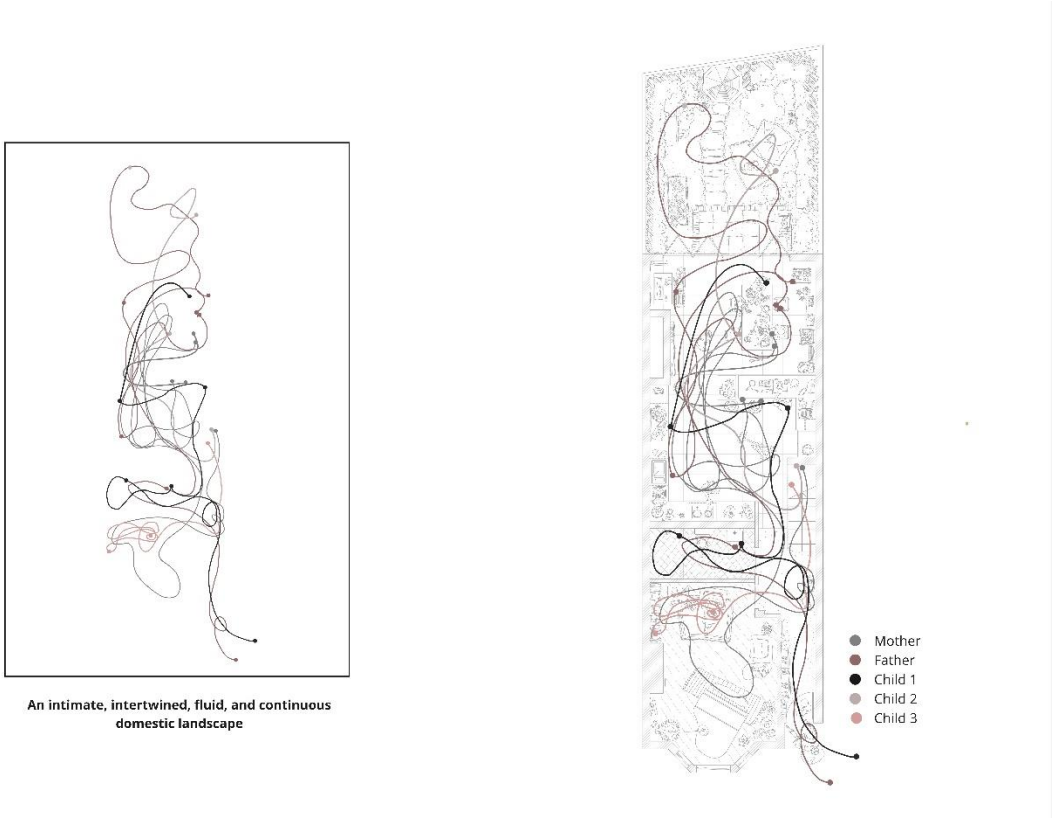



Figure 3-8 Diagrams of the living trajectories: An Intimate, Intertwined, and Continuous Domestic Landscape

Source: drawn by the author

### 3.3.2 CASE 3: A Domestic Pattern of Leaping, Small Territories

[6] EVANS Robin. Figures, doors and passages. *Architectural Design*, 1978,48(4): 267-78.

However, people might further question whether the integration of production and reproduction, and the continuous interaction among family members could conflict with personal development and professional pursuits. An individual's autonomous development inevitably requires uninterrupted time to focus on personal undertakings, be it studying, working, developing a skill, or simply reflecting on one's life and planning for the future. The need for privacy to nurture self-identity implies limiting temporarily our interaction with others, and is usually associated with a specific location, a place of retreat. The control of such a specific space is one of the most obvious ways of asserting territoriality. The traditional Victorian house model valued having "one's own private room," promoting the idea that we need a space free from others' influence, where we have full control over our work or living environment. However, the contemporary adaptations and usage patterns of domestic spaces suggest the possibility of sharing living spaces with others. In this context, how space is used and how territories are established become critical issues. The question is whether coexistence and personal achievement have to be at odds. The following case may provide some insights.

The respondent in this case study is a painter who lives with her partner in a Victorian house in London. The research mapped out her domestic settings and the scenarios of her working at various locations around the house (Fig 3-9). She often paints in different areas of the house, enjoying the freedom of not having a fixed workstation. *"I like chair hopping - to hop from place to place whilst I paint. Watercolour is so versatile that I can luckily do it pretty much anywhere."* Her preferred workspaces include a second-hand desk in the parlour, by the window facing the street, where she can *"peer out the window at that perfect blue sky."* She has added a wooden shelf to this desk for her art supplies, and paired it with a matching wicker chair. She also enjoys working from the couch with Netflix on in the background or painting at the corner of the dining table, although she "*often have achey shoulders from sitting in funny positions."* On good weather days, she paints or relaxes in the backyard, sometimes joined by her partner to enjoy the sunshine. Above that, she also has her own studio in the backyard.

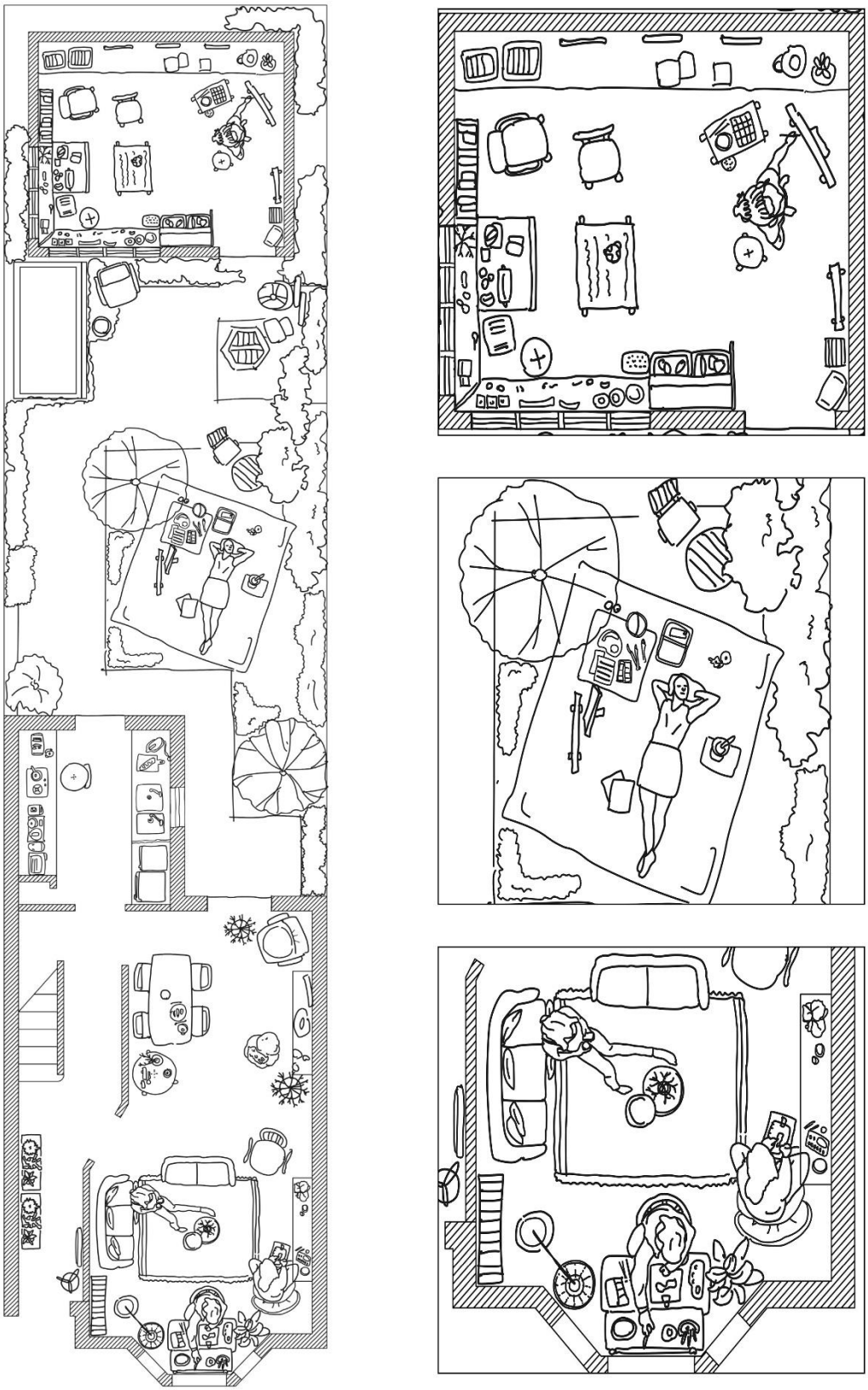


Figure 3-9 Drawing of the Living Scenarios: Case 3, Ground Floor

Source: drawn by the author

The yard itself is cluttered with various objects, decorations, and old furniture, leading to the painting studio at the far end (Fig 3-10). The studio's roof consists of wooden beams topped with twin-wall polycarbonate sheets, and it is enclosed by recycled wooden doors and window frames, some of which are reused from discarded materials. With large windows on the south and west sides, and a semi-translucent roof, the studio enjoys excellent natural light throughout the day. Thin white curtains are hung on the west, while shutters on the south block out the direct afternoon sunlight. Inside, the studio is furnished with shelves and cabinets filled with art supplies, books, and miscellaneous items. The walls are decorated with images and works of varying sizes, both complete and in-progress, along with reference photos. The studio is impressive for its abundance of inspiring elements and textures, creating a space where every glance offers rich information and inspiration for creativity.

The most transformative adaptation in this case was the construction of this backyard studio, self-built using reclaimed materials. This addition not only expanded the functional capacity of the home but also embodied a low-carbon, resource-conscious approach to construction. By integrating a self-sustained workspace within the confines of a traditional terraced house, the resident effectively blurred the boundaries between domesticity and creative practice. By combining a Victorian terraced house with a self-built, eco-friendly workspace, this adaptation exemplifies an alternative model of domestic architecture that prioritizes sustainability, adaptability, and creative autonomy.

The respondent describes it as her *"small, but loved studio."*

Figure 3-10 The backyard studio, which is furnished with shelves and cabinets filled with art supplies, books, and miscellaneous items

Source: courtesy of the author

Regarding the current state of her studio, she notes:

> "I feel like I should be working from a small wood shop with all of my chisels and planes (paintbrushes and palettes) hung from the walls - with so many tools that even the smallest glimpses of light are blocked out!" She adds, "I always pine for a big studio space. It's not that I actually need that much room to work, or that I have heaps of artwork supplies (though I do have quite a lot of stock stored around the house!), but I would love to have a space that I could fill with all my favourite little nick-nacks and items that inspire me! I try to be quite neat and tidy around the house (yes, I try! haha) but I just want to have everything out so that I can see it all the time and so that it can bring me joy! Not that I'm a hoarder… but I find it hard not to collect items or to see their beauty, even if they're not the prettiest of ornaments."

Although she works from home a lot, she also talks about her love for working in public spaces like coffee shops, as she enjoys *"lots of background noise"* and "*love(s) to hear people getting on with their day and hate to work in silence".* She also works a lot in the Horniman Museum in South London, where she draws natural specimens of plants and animals, or along the Thames River, where she found a spot under one of the jetties *"where a tree had lodged itself between the wood and iron joists… the perfect spot to sketch while watching the sunset and the tide slowly come in."*

Based on her home working patterns, this research creates a diagram (Fig 3-11) that illustrates how home workers be nomadic within their homes, no longer following established spatial arrangements. This diagram represents "a domestic pattern of leaping, small territories." It means that people can set up a camp anywhere, creating small personal territories for living or working - marked in the diagram with curved enclosures, and easily jump between these zones - indicated by lines connecting them. For contemporary families, where love and labour, needs and ambitions, and cooperation and competition are intertwined, shifting from the obsession with enclosed private rooms to enjoying temporary control over small territories may be a more effective model. Temporary control over these small territories might simply mean occupying a desk or table for ongoing tasks, homework, or reading without disturbance. This could mean not having to clear your work from the table for family meals, which would otherwise disrupt work continuity. It might also mean temporarily limiting interaction with family members during work. Of course people can also have their own separate workspace, such as a backyard studio, where they can close the door, get away from the distractions of family and social activities, be surrounded by their favourite objects and a rich source of information, and focus fully on their creations. Yet this control over a certain space is neither static nor closed—it is flexible, adjusting with time and activity. Overall, it suggests that our vision of the possibilities for living together and the pursuit of personal values are not only non-conflicting but should also complement each other.

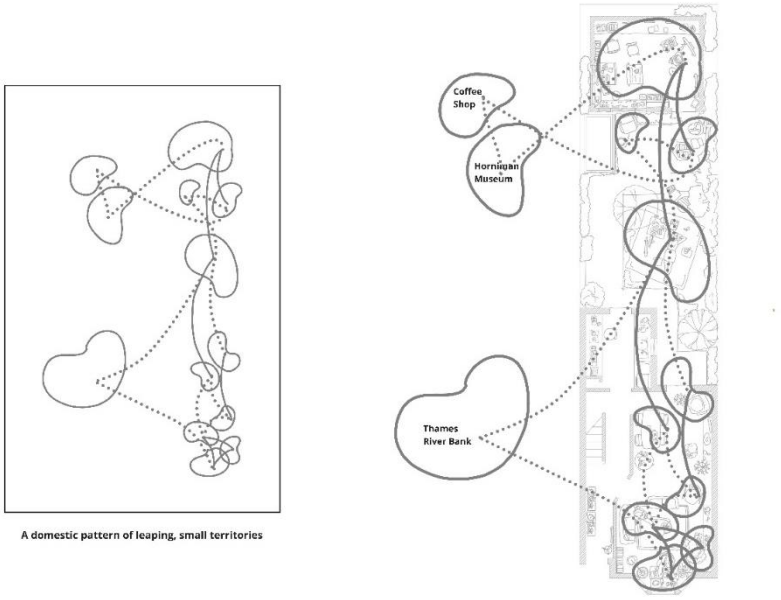



Figure 3-11 Spatial Pattern Diagram: A Domestic Pattern of Leaping, Small Territories

Source: drawn by the author

### 3.4 Live/Work Home in Modernist Flats

Another major type of housing in the UK market is modernist housing. In contrast to Victorian houses, the traditional sense of domestic space is disrupted and displaced, and domesticity is suppressed in modern houses/housings. As Christopher Reed observed, modernist architectural theory and practice are fundamentally "anti-bourgeois" and "anti-domestic."[7] Modernist architects, notably Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and Walter Gropius, strongly rejected the homey values, national character, and decorative aesthetic of the Victorian period and defined modernism against domesticity. The modern home was reconceived as a machine—a “machine for living in”: standardized, impersonal, and scientific[8]. Modernist architectural language was itself “objective,” stripped of any lingering Victorian sentimentality or domesticity. In contrast to common usage, home was not a term generally used in mainstream architectural discourse in the twentieth century. Its scientific (“male”) terminology and “rational” spatial and material practices were considered more appropriate for the modern house than the idea of home with its connotations of femininity, emotionality, and decoration.

Nevertheless, as Gwendolyn Wright has observed, “Domestic architecture, whether mass-housing or single-family house, has been, it seems, the favourite design problem of 20th century American architects. Here they can explore personal visions, proposing formal

[7] Reed, Christopher. *Not At Home: The Suppression of Domesticity In Modern Art and Architecture*. Thames and Hudson, 1996.
[8] Le Corbusier. *Towards a New Architecture*. Trans. Frederick Etchells, London: The Architectural Press, 1998 (1927).

innovations”[9]. Modernist architects often challenge bourgeois family notions—such as strict hierarchies and gender role divisions—through the use of spaces that are indeterminate, fluid, and transparent. However, the effectiveness of these spatial reconfigurations was later questioned by many theorists[10]. They argued that modernist architecture failed to escape the relations of capitalist production and, to some extent, reinforced these relations. Additionally, open, transparent, and free spaces could become new means of control and an extension of power structures.

So, what's the current state of living and working for residents in these modernist flats? Has the modernist pursuit of an 'anti-bourgeois' and 'anti-domestic' life been actualized in real use, or has a new domestic culture emerged instead? This study delves into the contemporary live/work lifestyles within the Barbican Estate, one of the UK's most distinguished post-war modernist housing projects, to investigate the relationship between current domestic culture and its original design principles.

The Barbican Estate is a special case of a 1950’s council estate in the City of London’s east end[11], designed by a partnership of three ambitious young architects, Peter Chamberlin, Geoffry Powell and Christoph Bon[12]. The architectural design, with the weightiness of its rough concrete[13], the grandeur of the residential towers, and the innovation and variety of floor plans, illustrated a deliberate break from the uniformity and standardization of the council housing tradition [14] (Fig 3-12). Notably, the diverse and personalized housing types emphasized variation as a form of luxury[15]. The 1959 plan consisted of a collection of

[9] Wright, Gwendolyn. *Building the dream: A social history of housing in America*. MIT press, 1983. P.13.
[10] Tafuri, Manfredo. Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology. *Architecture Theory since 1968*, edited by K. Michael Hays, MIT Press, 1969, pp. 6-35.
Tafuri, Manfredo. *Architecture and utopia: design and capitalist development*. MIT press, 1979.
Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space.* Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell, 1991(1974).
Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Blackwell, 1989.
[11] The City of London is a local government district in the County of London founded within London’s medieval walled settlement initially constituted by the Romans in the 1st century AD. The area, which is also colloquially known as the Square Mile, contains the historic centre and the primary central business district of London. The modern city has since grown far beyond the formal City of London borders, but this area remains a notable part of central London, which became a focal area of post-war redevelopment. David Mills, Dictionary of London Place Names, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
[12] Chamberlin Powell & Bon Architects, *Barbican Redevelopment: Report to the Court of Common Council of the Corporation of the City of London on Residential Redevelopment within the Barbican Area*, Bolton and London: Tillotsons Bolton Ltd, 1959.
[13] The stylistic intention, however, was neither a temporally specific modernism nor the emerging Brutalism, with which the project has diachronically been identified. The original intention for monumentality was to be incarnated in the white marble cladding of the whole complex, an idea that was abandoned due to its cost and reached its compromise in the weightiness of exposed concrete.
[14] Architecture critic Jonathan Glancey, who spent four years living at the Barbican, argues that “there is nothing like [it] in scale, intelligence, ingenuity, quality, urban landscaping and sheer abstract artistry anywhere else in Britain, perhaps even the world.” See Jonathan Glancey, “Barbican: the critics’ verdict,” Time Out, February 6, 2007.
[15] The Barbican housing scheme aimed at providing a wide-ranging catalogue from a market point of view, which resulted in the 1959 residential plan of over 100 different types. The idea of differentiation removes the stigma of standardised housing and supports the claim for a better life. It encapsulated in the most refined way the subjection of the welfare state housing project in the service of the upper middle classes. Each of the different types of dwellings was meant to signify luxury and modernity in an exclusive manner.

residential forms: three 43-to-44-storey tower blocks, 13 eight-storey terrace blocks, a row of townhouses (a type of terraced housing with a small footprint on multiple floors), a cluster of 14 “mews” (terraces of small two-story houses) and a crescent block (Fig. 3-13). Overall, there were more than 100 different types.

Figure 3-12 View of the Barbican from the penthouses on the upper floors of mid-rise blocks

Source: courtesy of the author

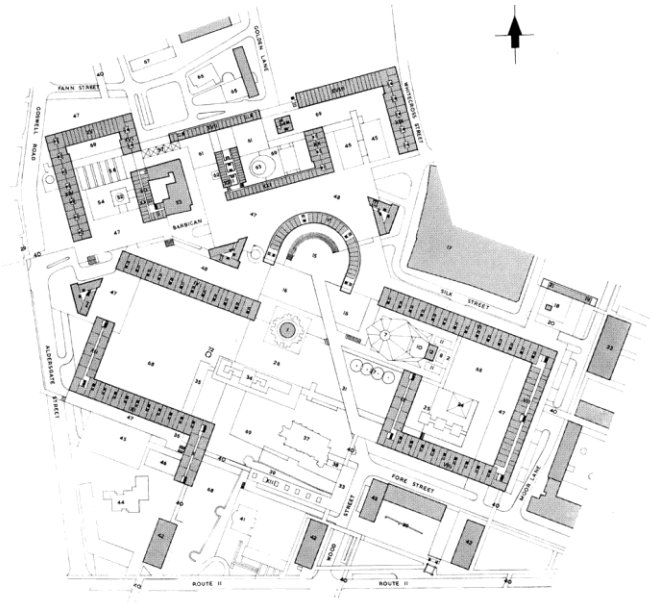



Figure 3-13 Layout of flat types in the residential blocks

Source: Chamberlin Powell & Bon Architects, *Barbican Redevelopment: Report to the Court of Common Council of the Corporation of the City of London on Residential Redevelopment within the Barbican Area*, Bolton and London: Tillotsons Bolton Ltd, 1959.

These flats were designed with a focus on avant-garde luxury. All flats offered large, open-plan living rooms able to accommodate high culture equipment like grand pianos, functional kitchens isolated with sliding partitions as well as individual loggias on both sides. The tower flats offered the most dramatic spaces with their irregularly shaped living areas and the continuous, latticed balconies running the full-length of the flat perimeter. The largest bedroom and the living room occupied the dramatically pointed corners of the flat with breath-taking views of the city. Services, both internal (bathrooms) and external (lifts), were individualised to the extreme. If tower flats symbolised the idea of living above all at the top of the City, the penthouses on the upper floors of mid-rise blocks enhanced the uniqueness of the building through terraces, creating an exotic feel and creating a unique view looking down from the towers.

Therefore, I selected a live/work home from each category: a tower flat and a penthouse within the medium-rise terraces that surround the courtyards, as my study cases.

### 3.4.1 CASE 4: A Conventional Private Home of Elaborate Functional Divisions

This case involves the home of a retired couple living in a 4-bedroom flat on the 26th floor of Cromwell Tower in the Barbican Estate. Their apartment, categorized as Type 1C. It includes a spacious living room, dining area, four bedrooms, a kitchen, utility room, bathroom with a WC, and a separate shower room with a WC. The living room opens onto a rectangular balcony space, with the dining area extending into it and featuring its own access door. This study draws their home settings and living scenarios overlaid on the floor plan (Figure 3-14).

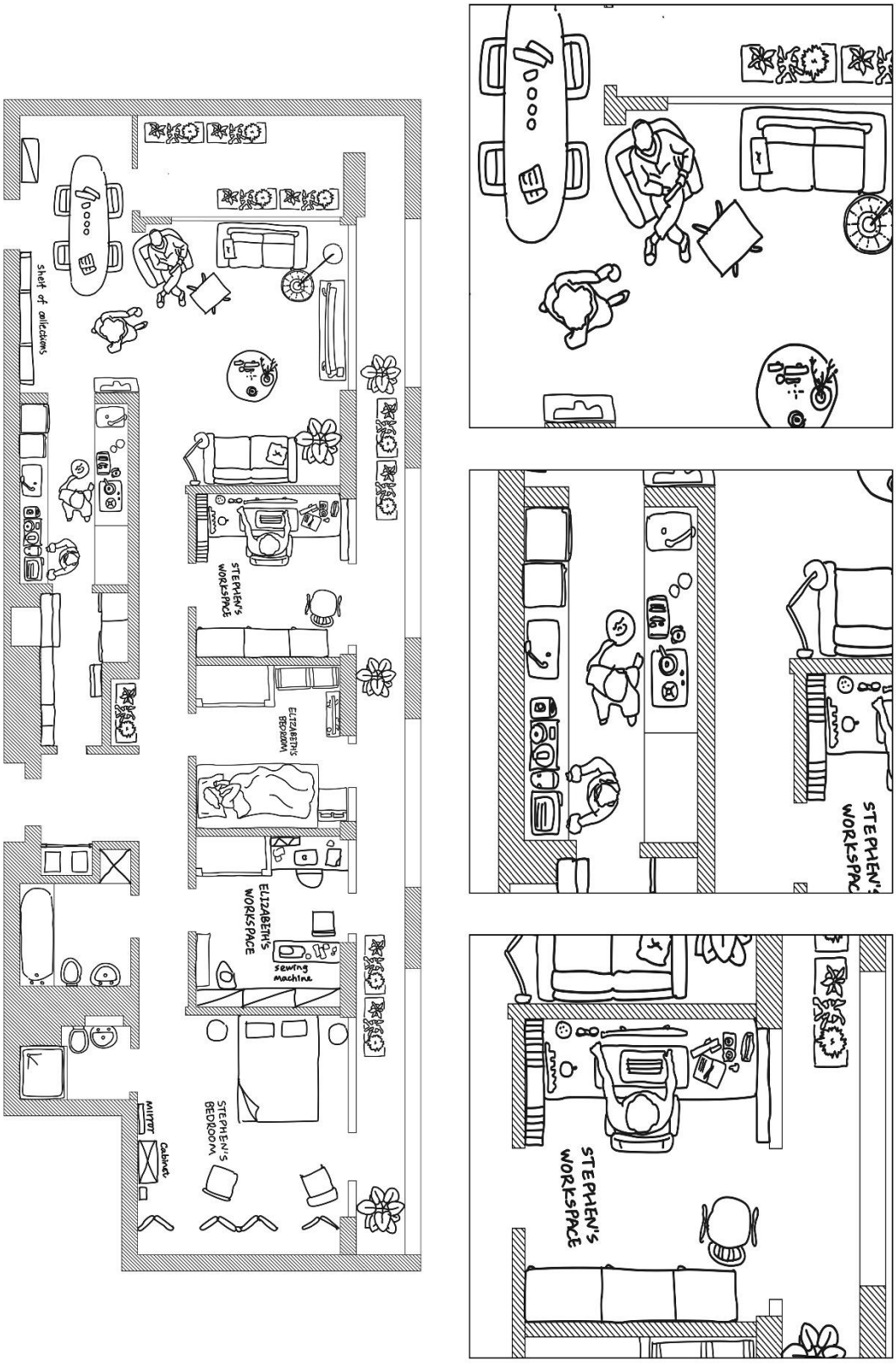



Figure 3-14 Drawing of the Living Scenarios: Case 4

Source: drawn by the author

Stephen Rothholz and Elizabeth Evans, a couple of designers—specializing in knitwear—purchased this tower apartment in 2018. After clearing out the previous owner's belongings, they began a new chapter. They had previously lived near the Barbican for over 30 years, but as commercial development grew, their old home became increasingly noisy. After a bar opened across the street, they decided to move.

The apartment comprises four bedrooms, two of which are used as individual workspaces for Stephen and Elizabeth. The other two serve as their separate bedrooms.

Elizabeth's workspace is centred around her sewing machine (Fig 3-15, left), functioning as a small knitting and sewing studio. Although semi-retired, she still takes on custom orders. On my first visit, she was using scissors to measure out fabric, preparing to make a pair of green shorts for an old friend. The shelves behind the sewing table, are stacked with books, fabric, sewing tools, and trinkets. Next to the shelf is a mannequin, now primarily serving as a clothing rack, holding various accessories and outfits (Fig 3-15, right).

Figure 3-15 Elizabeth's workspace, left: the sewing machine, right: the shelves and a clothing rack

Source: courtesy of the author

In contrast, Stephen's workspace feels like a typical home office (Fig 3-16). His desk is dominated by a desktop, surrounded by notebooks, with a row of sticky notes listing to-do tasks pasted beneath the monitor. Around the desk are a printer, a bulletin board, and bookshelves filled with stationery and books.

Figure 3-16 Stephen's workspace, a typical home office

Source: courtesy of the author

The couple each have their own bedroom (Fig 3-17). Stephen occupies the master bedroom, which includes an en-suite bathroom, offering more space and better views. Elizabeth's bedroom, smaller and adjacent to her workspace, is adorned with fabric toys by her bedside, and she has her own television in the bedroom—a smaller, older set than the large LCD TV in the living room.

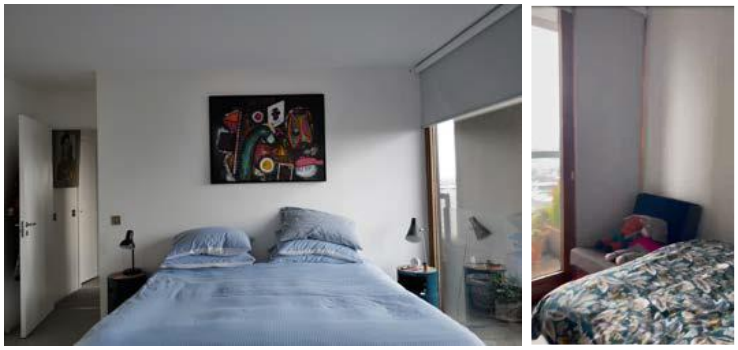


Figure 3-17 Two bedrooms, left: Stephen's bedroom, right: Elizabeth's bedroom

Source: courtesy of the author

The living and dining areas are at the far end of the flat. Before I took photos of the living room, Stephen pointed out that they had already purchased the artwork on the wall, so there would be no "copyright issues" (Fig 3-18, left). In the dining area, the most striking feature is a wooden display shelf, filled with an eclectic collection of art pieces and objects that the couple proudly curated (Fig 3-18, right).

Figure 3-18 Left: The living room; Right: The dining room

Source: courtesy of the author

A hand-drawn perspective drawing published in 1968 [16] (Figure 3-19) illustrates the anticipated home arrangement and living situation for the combined living-dining area in a flat with a floor plan similar to the one in this case. The intention behind this drawing was to highlight the overlay of conventional domestic values with modern ideals: the wife sets the table in the open living room, with St. Paul's Cathedral visible through the window. However, upon revisiting this image today, this study realizes that the open concept of the living room space has not delivered the anticipated shift in social and familial power structures by the avant-garde modernist architects; it remains a purely approach in architectural form. The concept of gender roles went unchallenged at the time, and unfortunately, not in today's domestic life as well. In a 2021 Uniqlo publication, an interview with Elizabeth and Stephen, the residents of this case study, is accompanied by a photo (Fig. 3-20) showing an "ideal" family life: Elizabeth sets the table in the dining room while Stephen relaxes in an armchair in the living room, seemingly unaware of any potential obstruction he might cause to others moving through the space. Despite both being accomplished designers in their respective fields, the traditional gender roles within the household remain firmly in place, unquestioned by either the photographer or the interviewees.

[16] David Heathcote, *Barbican: Penthouse over the City*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

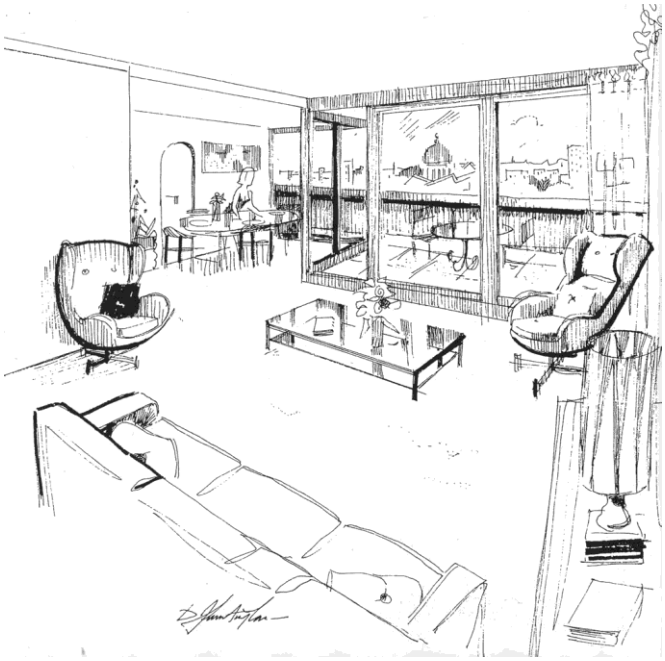


Figure 3-19 Traditional and modern ideals captured in the lifestyle at the Barbican flats: the wife is setting the table in the open plan living room while a view of St Paul's cathedral is framed by the window (published in 1968)

Source: David Heathcote, Barbican: Penthouse over the City, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

Figure 3-20 Photos of Elizabeth and Stephen in their flat from Uniqlo's interview

Source: Barbican Neighbours, LifeWear Magazine by Uniqlo, 09.2021

This preconceived notion of gender roles also extends to the kitchen layout in the flat. Similar to many other flats in the Barbican Estate, the kitchen is not part of the public space but is rather a narrow, enclosed functional corridor—what might be described as a "dark passage" (Fig. 3-21)—tucked away from the primary living areas. In this case, kitchens are seen as efficient workspaces where people can increase the efficiency of their domestic work in an industrially productive way. This design robs the kitchen of its potential as a social, emotional,

and creative space, reflecting a broader modernist architectural stance that undervalues domestic labour and reinforces binary gender norms. Additionally, according to Barbican Estate management rules, residents are prohibited from modifying the space layout themselves. They can only decide how to arrange the interior furnishings, leaving structural elements like partition walls unchanged.

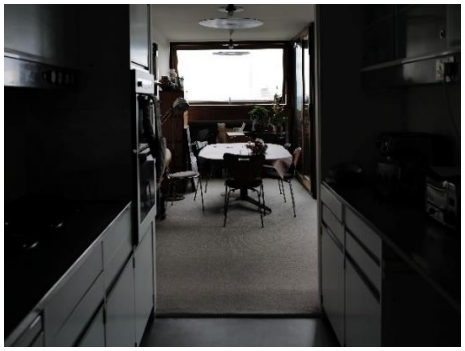


Figure 3-21 The kitchen is not communal but reduced to dark functional corridors

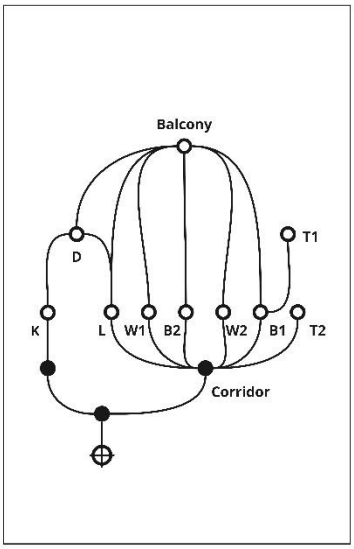
Source: courtesy of the author

This study suggests that, as much as the Barbican flat catalogue was meant to nominally allow inclusivity and differentiation—with an extremely varied range of flat types and customized service areas—it illustrated a highly suggestive condition of lifestyle. This lifestyle is rooted in traditional family values, prioritizing privacy and upholding conventional family structures, including social relationships and gender roles. It also showcases social status and personal taste through the comfortable, elegant, and artistic curation of the home's interior.

A diagram (Fig. 3-22) created for this study, employing a structuralist diagramming method inspired by Bill Hiller's space syntax cell map[17], illustrates the spatial structure of the flat in this case and its corresponding living patterns. In a cell map, each spatial unit is represented as a cell, with the connections between adjacent spaces (whether visible or accessible) depicted as lines. Since the cell map is topological (it can be stretched without altering relationships), it is often redrawn in research as a "justified cell map"—as seen on the left side of this diagram. In a justified cell map, the entrance cell is placed at zero depth, and all cells that are one, two, or three steps away are arranged in the first, second, and third layers, respectively, allowing for a visual representation of increasing spatial depth. In this study, the cell map is not used to explore the spatial depth from the entrance point. Instead, it emphasizes the alignment between the current occupants' use of the space and the pre-configured spatial structure. The diagram reveals “a conventional private home of elaborate functional divisions”, where work and living spaces are clearly separated, as are the spaces occupied by different family members. It can be viewed as a certain return to traditional spatial segregation and specialization, with the corridor playing a crucial role in dividing public

[17] Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson, *The Social Logic of Space*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984

and private spaces. The space usage and living pattern contrast sharply with the more fluid, intimate arrangements observed in previous case studies.




A conventional private home
of elaborate functional divisions

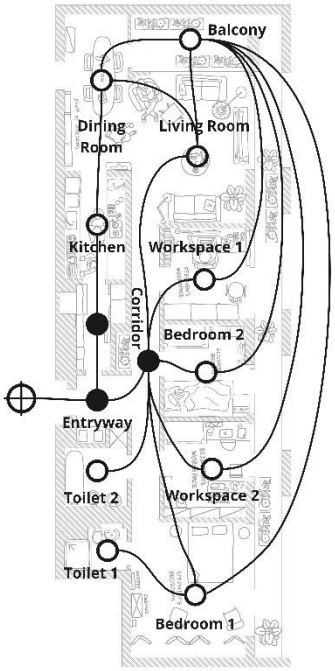



Figure 3-22 Spatial Pattern Diagram: a conventional private home of elaborate functional divisions

Source: drawn by the author

Although the housing design in Barbican was generally aimed at embodying the typical modernist principles of openness, fluidity, and flexibility, the case studies have actually uncovered a rather contrasting scenario—a return of traditional domesticity. This includes a return of conservative values of comfort, security, and privacy, a return of gender roles and conservative values, a return of spatial segregation and specialization, and a return of decorative and symbolic elements.

This desire for strict separation between public and private spaces is similarly reflected in the Barbican's community spaces and public life. The Barbican, literally meaning a fortified outpost or defensive tower, aimed at being a safe haven that encompassed anything the inhabitants would need[18]. Its formal layout took on the self-referential character of a palace, or in urban terms, *a precinct*, which had everything within or close at hand.

[18] Piniara, Ioanna. *We Have Never Been Private: The Housing Project in Neoliberal Europe*. Open University (United Kingdom), 2020.

From its original design intention, the entire neighbourhood emphasized the concept of restoring domestic privacy, high-quality comfort, and security in the city centre. The exclusivity of the space is achieved through the estate's overall isolation from its surroundings. In this case study, this spatial intention is mirrored in the residents' everyday experiences:

> "It can be strange here at the weekend, being butted up against all the office blocks, but it also means that it's so peaceful and quiet. I open my door and step onto my terrace on a Sunday morning and can hear birds, the bells of St Pauls ringing and residents playing tennis in the courts downstairs. I even have the occasional duck visiting from the Barbican lake; it can have the soundtrack of living in the countryside. "

The public spaces in Barbican are both hidden and exclusive. By incorporating unintuitive thresholds, imposing walls, and hidden entrances, the architecture discouraged passers-by from wandering in. The contradiction between the exterior impenetrable impression and the interior oasis, enhanced the quietness, spaciousness, and privacy of the neighbourhood. All Barbican residents hold a special key, known as the 'Magic Key', which grants access to private gardens, walkways, and certain areas of the complex where they can "unwind in private."[19] This reflects the residents' exclusive privilege. "I know most people get lost in the Barbican, but once you have the key and figure out the pathways, it's simple." Stephen said.

This pursuit of "privacy as privilege" indicates that the domestic culture in Barbican, while embracing traditional domesticity, also fosters a capitalist notion of living. This concept is not only compatible with its modernist spatial model but is also intricately intertwined with it. The Barbican's design emphasizes the dramatization of space, illustrated by elements such as the latticed balconies enveloping the entire flat, open living spaces, and stunning cityscape views. The apartment in this case study, located on the 26th floor, overlooks the skyline of the City of London (Fig. 3-23). Stephen proudly remarked, "To afford this apartment, you'd have to work for 50 years!" Throughout the Barbican, better views and more refined privacy have always been regarded as symbols of privilege and luxury. Consequently, a new social hierarchy has emerged, such as the division between homeowners and renters, or between residents on the lower and upper floors. Living in larger, higher-up units has become a widely shared aspiration among residents. David McKendrick, the owner of a studio flat in one of the terrace blocks, when asked about his dream home, responded,

> " I feel like I already have my dream flat to be honest. It would be nice to have a separate bedroom but if I won the lottery I would definitely stay in the Barbican. I would like to stay here for the rest of my life and buy a penthouse in one of the towers – fingers crossed."[20]

[19] Interview with Max Fraser, Barbican resident, in Anton Rodriguez, Residents: Inside the Iconic Barbican Estate, London: Barbican Centre, 2016, 'Foreword'.
[20] House Style with David McKendrick: Barbican life at its best. *The Modern House*. https://www.themodernhouse.com/journal/house-style-david-mckendrick/

Overall, the spatial character of the Barbican contributes in part to this capitalist conception and ideal of the home, thereby shaping market demand, a process that in turn further drives capital growth.

Figure 3-23 The view of the City of London from the flat at 26th floor

Source: courtesy of the author

### 3.4.2 CASE 5: A Mediated, Visualized, and Aestheticized "Ideal" Home

The following case study focuses on a one-bedroom penthouse located in the Speed House in the Barbican. It's layout provides one bedroom and a living room in a simple rectangular-shaped unit. The layout goes from front to back of the building and so it is only found on the top floors of the north-south-facing terraces fronting the lake or the adjoining gardens in the South Barbican. This type is the most common layout for a penthouse flat in the South Barbican area.

Tom Morris, the sole occupant of this flat, has lived in the Barbican for 11 years. In 2018, after working as a design editor at Monocle magazine, a British lifestyle magazine, he established his interior design studio, Morris Studio, making his own home one of his first major projects. He shared his renovation process:

> "It was a total white box when I bought it, with the original 1970s kitchen and bathroom still intact… My flat is not a huge one, but things like a wide hallway, separate loo, long sightlines and the big half-moon windows make it feel airy. The architects were also incredibly generous with the proportions and spatial design of all the flats and managed to make a high-density estate feel spacious inside and out… I often take on interior design projects for clients, alongside writing about design, and have deliberately built this interior up slowly. I like earthy, moody colours and natural materials to counteract all the glass and steel outside."

Regarding the arrangement of domestic objects (Fig 3-24), Tom Morris states:

"the flat is full of things I collect on my travels: books, magazines, model aeroplanes and lots of ceramics. This tapestry was purchased at a market in Yangon, the former capital of Myanmar, on a visit several years ago. I also have an interest in Japanese culture. This is a Happi coat I found at a Harajuku market, on a visit to Tokyo. I started collecting pottery a few years back and wrote a book, New Wave Clay: Ceramic Design, Art and Architecture, in 2018. I try to run a one-in-one-out policy on pots, which can be difficult as I also make them. I wouldn't call myself minimalist, but I think often things need space around them to be properly appreciated. "

Figure 3-24 the arrangement of domestic objects in the living room (1-2), the toilet (3), and the bathroom (4)

Source: courtesy of the author

From the professional perspective of an interior designer, Tom also elaborated on his considerations for the colour of the flat,

"Living so central, I'm surrounded by glass and by concrete and by metal and I felt it necessary to bring some nature inside, which led me to bring in more earthy colours. I like earthy, moody colours and natural materials. Recently, I changed the colour of my main living space from a muted-terracotta to a 'Salon Drab'. The shade lacks brightness but, as such, works as a 'dark neutral' that quietly backdrops my other collections. In contrast, I chose 'De Nimes' and 'Stone Blue' for the kitchen and bathroom respectively to add concentrated moments of more vivid colour in the smaller-scale spaces. I've also gradually hung some artworks, posters, and old photos that I love in both places."

Tom's presentation of his interior space extends well beyond our interview—it regularly appears on his company's website, social media, and in design features. Based on his descriptions and on-site observations, a drawing of his home was created (Figure 3-25). Unlike other drawings, this one excludes any daily activities, and the kitchen appears almost devoid of utensils, tableware, or food. Although Tom claims he cooks and keeps everything neatly stored, the pristine condition I observed invites skepticism. Similarly, he mentioned frequently working at his dining table, yet during our visit it held only a candlestick, with no signs of papers, laptops, or design tools. This absence suggests a deliberate curation aimed at media

publicness, staging the home as an aesthetic ideal for photographs and interviews. Overall, traces of everyday activities are rarely seen throughout the house, and functional inhabitation is obscured by its mediated image. In my drawing, the only figure depicted is Tom posing on the terraces; he specifically guided us there to showcase the unique views—St. Paul's Cathedral's dome from the living room terrace and the Barbican from the bedroom terrace (Figure 3-26).

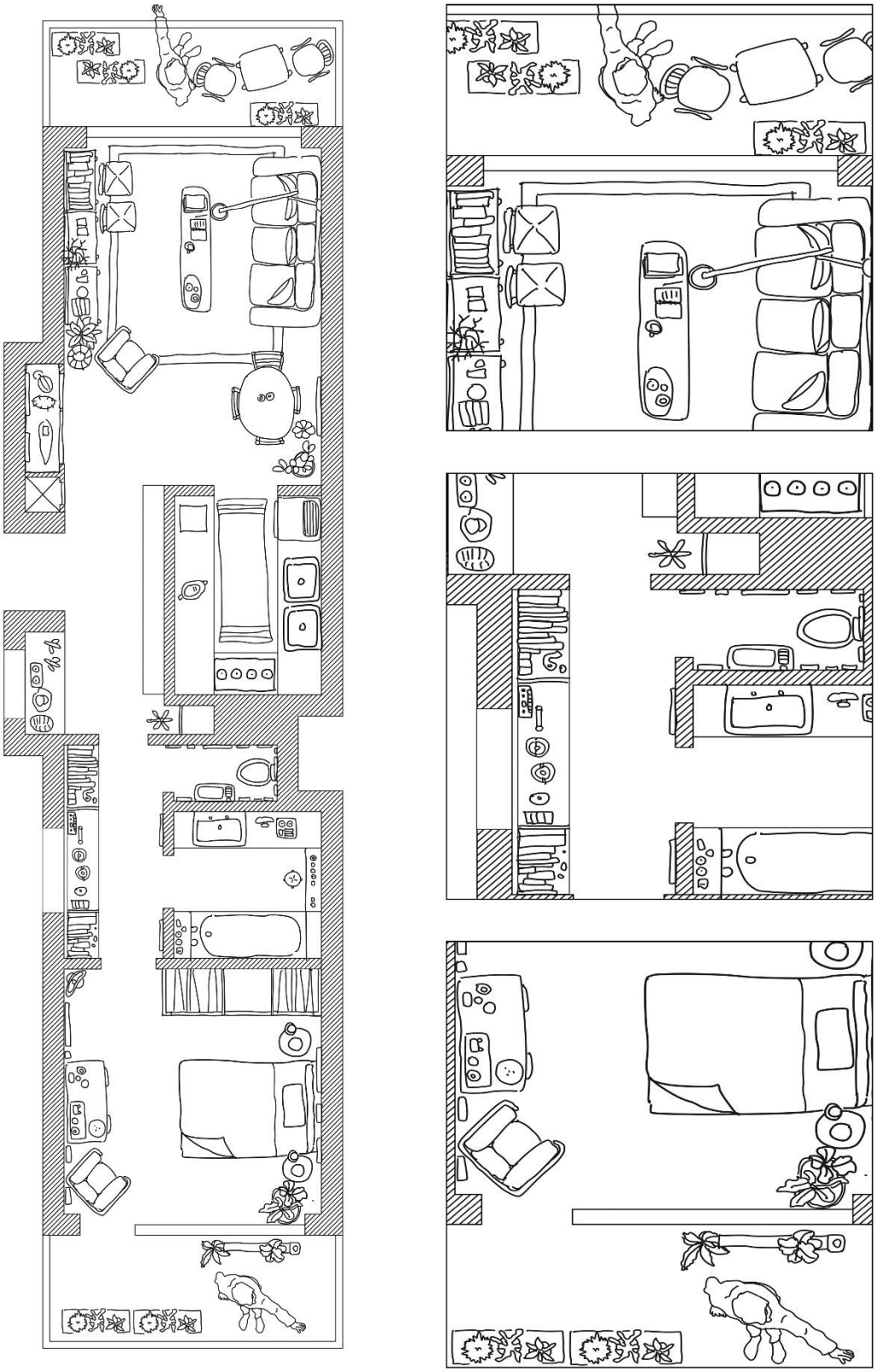


Figure 3-25 Drawing of the Living Scenarios: Case 5

Source: drawn by the author

Figure 3-26 the view of St. Paul's Cathedral's dome from the living room terrace (Left), and the view of the Barbican from the bedroom terrace (Right)

Source: courtesy of the author

This study argues that, rather than engaging in traditional home-based tasks such as writing or drawing, Tom's primary work at home revolves around continuously refining his interior arrangement and frequently participating in interviews and photo sessions for various media outlets. This mode of working at home is fundamentally different from all the previous cases, not just opening up part of the domestic space to a few familiar colleagues-physically or virtually-for a short period of time in a controlled way, but rather showcasing the entire home to a completely unknown public, aiming to reach a broader group of customers.

This study posits that Tom's domestic space operates less as a site of lived publicness—where daily activities organically shape the environment—and more as a stage for media publicness. The stylized interior, meticulously curated for visual consumption, prioritizes aesthetic coherence over traces of quotidian life. For instance, the absence of kitchen utensils and the pristine dining table reflect a deliberate erasure of lived publicness, where functional clutter might signal authentic inhabitation. Instead, the space is optimized for photography and media features, aligning with cultural ideals of 'perfection' disseminated through design platforms.

From this drawing, the study then creates a spatial diagram of his home (Fig 3-27). This diagram is based on interior photos of his home, which are publicly shared on social media, in magazines, and on his interior design company's website. The drawing mapped the angles from which the photos were taken onto the floor plan using translucent, radiating shapes. The entire floor plan is nearly covered, with the highest density of images in the living room, though the corridor, toilet, bathroom, bedroom, and terraces each have their own photos taken. In other words, every act of his homemaking, even the most mundane daily activities—like arranging a new souvenir from a trip, replacing a wilted plant, or tossing a jacket onto the sofa—may be subconsciously influenced by the awareness of this public gaze. It is akin to a writer composing a "personal diary" with the intent of publication.

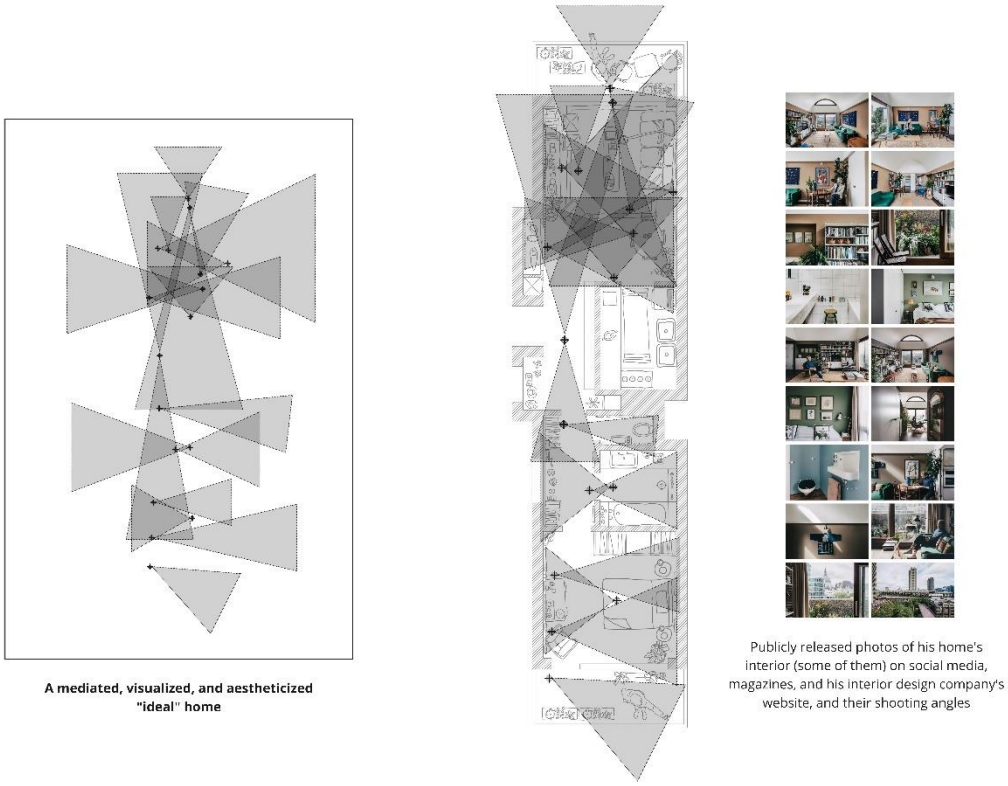



Figure 3-27 Spatial Pattern Diagram: A Mediated, Visualized, and Aestheticized "Ideal" Home

Source: drawn by the author

The spatial diagram reveals that the media publicness dominates here, as every photographed angle strategically frames the apartment as an aspirational commodity. Conversely, lived publicness—evident in unscripted moments like cooking or relaxing—remains excluded from this visual narrative. In the end, the space emerges as an "ideal" home that is curated, visualised, and aestheticized.

## 3.5 SUMMARY

This chapter explores how people inhabit the two main types of housing available on the market: Georgian/Victorian terraced house, and modern flats. The study focuses on how these living spaces are reappropriated, given new meanings, and transformed into settings that accommodate home working. This adaptation makes these domestic spaces more suited to our live/work lifestyles and, consequently, fosters the emergence of new home cultures.

We normally assume that the spatial layout and design intentions of living spaces might suggest certain living patterns, but in reality, this influence can be weak or almost negligible. In this study, the living patterns in different layouts of Georgian and Victorian houses exhibited a similar openness, fluidity, and intimacy. However, the spatial patterns in modern flats, which aimed for openness and fluidity, ended up being more traditional, emphasizing the separation of public and private spaces. In other words, a well-designed house doesn't necessarily ensure a fulfilling life any more than a restrictive house is solely responsible for a frustrated one. This is clearly illustrated in our case study, where many residents use their living spaces in ways that completely contradict the original design intentions. These personalized adaptations effectively and pragmatically address their current political, social, professional, and cultural needs.

From the perspective of postmodern diversity and differentiation, contemporary homes demonstrate a significant "ecological diversity" in terms of user groups, contexts, and spatial configurations. This chapter highlights various live/work scenarios and spatial patterns that may appear conflicting or contradictory but collectively embody the complexities and contradictions of contemporary domestic life. These examples reveal a rich diversity of new domestic cultures and evolving relationships between public and private life. Objects play a crucial role in shaping these various patterns.

The new spatial patterns identified in this chapter are as follows. Although we still live in conventional houses with corridors, the overlap of productive and reproductive activities has reintroduced an interesting friction into our homes. Domestic scenarios are evolving towards a state of bodily intimacy, intertwined routines, and spatial openness with multiple functions. This bears some resemblance to the spatial layout of 16th-18th century European villas, characterized by multiple connections and flexible transformations between different rooms. Furthermore, as the flexible home space no longer follow established choreography, we can be nomads in our own homes, creating small "territories" for living or working at any time and place—whether within the home or the city—and being able to jump freely between them. Moreover, contemporary live/work homes are not just spaces where family members work remotely, but also can be shared, mixed, and multicultural experimental spaces that foster spontaneous collaboration and interaction among different individuals and activities.

In contrast to this fluidity, this study also found that, while some housing designs aim for openness, fluidity, and transparency, the domestic patterns can revert to more conservative values, traditional domesticity, and a clear separation between public and private spaces. Homes in these cases are seen as pursuits of comfort, security, and privacy, as well as symbols and carriers of cultural taste and social status. The quest for “privacy as a privilege” could further nurture a capitalist concept of living ideals.

Additionally, this study discovered that when media promotion becomes closely intertwined with one’s homemaking practices, and when the home is opened—either consciously or unconsciously—to the public eye through mediated images, the living pattern might evolve into a "mediated, visualized, aestheticized" state. The home turns into something to be "performed" or "displayed" for external audiences. In this context, everyday living traces or private information are often hidden, and the home becomes a space for visual consumption.

Based on the study of various new forms of domestic cultures, this research rethinks the concept of privacy. It reveals that in contemporary homes, the concepts, boundaries, and relationships between public and private spheres are diverse. Based on the case studies, this chapter identifies several typical modes of public-private relationships in contemporary live/work homes:

1) No Clear Boundaries between Public and Private: Fluid Interweaving, Flexible Coexistence

For example, in Case 1, Liu, the artist-curator, emphasizes a lifestyle of social engagement and collective participation. There is no clear boundary between public and private spheres inside and around her house, but rather a smooth interplay between them.

2) Managed and Controlled, Mutual Invasion or Permeation within Defined Boundaries

For example, in Case 2 and Case 3, working from home allows public affairs to partially penetrate domestic life's space and time. The relationship between the two realms is allowed to some extent but with careful management and control.

3) Clear Division of Public and Private Spheres, Emphasizing the Importance of Personal Privacy

This mode is closer to the Victorian understanding of public-private relationships. An example can be found in the home of the retired couple in Case 4, Barbican.

4) Complete openness of the private sphere to the public

For example, in Case 5, the home is entirely open to the public gaze, turning the private space into part of the visual consumption space.

These different interpretations and configurations of the public-private relationship coexist in contemporary urban homes, arising from each inhabitant's unique living practices and ongoing experiments, eventually stabilizing into a personally comfortable arrangement. From this perspective, live/work homes can be seen as a site of cultural regeneration and creative responses to political and social issues.

# CHAPTER 4

## The New Live/Work Home in China

## INTRODUCTION

The multiple contemporary modes of domesticity in the UK discussed in the previous chapter carry a certain universal relevance, with most of the observations also holding true in the Chinese context—such as the intertwining of production and reproduction, and the multiple connections and flexible transformations within home spaces. However, a closer examination reveals a different complexity of the domesticity and the public-private relations in another cultural context.

At the collective level, the past 50 years have witnessed significant changes in the living patterns of Chinese people[1]. Whether in urban or rural areas, housing has gradually shifted from single-story houses and courtyard-style living to multi-story buildings and apartment-style living[2]. As courtyard life faded, so too did traditional neighbourhood relationships and social interactions[3]. The traditional clan-based, and mutual-aid living experiences have given way to a more nuclear-family-oriented and commodified approach. In this context, the pursuit of private homeownership and more personal spaces has become a significant priority, with individual consciousness greatly strengthened over the past 30 years[4]. In commercial housing estates, a sense of community is virtually non-existent, and there is little interaction among neighbours—something people actually prefer, as it represents a rejection of the nosy neighbours who pried into each other's private affairs[5]. This shift permeates all aspects of life, from clothing and food to housing and transportation. On the one hand, the boundary between "public" and "private" has become increasingly clear[6]. On the other hand, while individualism strengthens, there is no corresponding decline in collectivism; in fact, the past decade has seen an increase in both soft and hard "fences, access controls, and boundaries" in society[7]. Not only are public spaces closely monitored by big data, but private lives are also continuously infiltrated by collective relationships. For example, during the pandemic, the daily collection of health data and the government's transfer and relocation of infected individuals from their homes illustrate this trend. As a result, the tension between the individual and the collective has grown in ways unprecedented in Chinese history, and this is especially evident in the new domestic lives of the younger generation.

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[1] Lü, Junhua, Peter G. Rowe, and Jie Zhang, editors. *Modern Urban Housing in China 1840-2000*. New York: Prestel, 2001.
[2] Fu, Chonglan and Wenming Cao. *An Urban History of China*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.
[3] Fei, Xiaotong. *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society.* University of California Press, 1992.
[4] Yan, Yunxiang. *The individualization of Chinese society*. Routledge, 2020.
[5] Zhou, Ying. *Urban Loopholes: Creative Alliances of Spatial Production in Shanghai's City Center*. Birkhäuser, 2017.
[6] Zhang, Li. *In Search of Paradise: Middle-Class Living in a Chinese Metropolis.* Cornell University Press, 2010.
[7] Tomba, Luigi. *The Government Next Door: Neighborhood Politics in Urban China.* Cornell University Press, 2014.
Huang, Youqin, and Setha M. Low. Is gating always exclusionary? A comparative analysis of gated communities in American and Chinese cities. In *Urban China in transition* (2008): 182-202.

On an individual level, the ethos of frugality and making the most of what one has has been a guiding principle for generations of Chinese households[8]. For many years, in the struggle to prioritize production over living, the pursuit of personality, feelings, poetry and beauty have been significantly suppressed[9]. Before the collective ideal of "a house for everyone" was fully realized, the more personal ideal of "a house with a view" was often seen as an unattainable luxury, or even as a betrayal of the hard-earned achievements of previous generations. In the Western context, the homes of ordinary people often reflect the average aesthetic level and cultural sophistication of an era or society—a phenomenon rarely observed in the homes of ordinary Chinese people. Over the past few decades, the wave of commercialization has led to a distressing homogenization and vulgarization of urban homes[10]. This has sparked a strong backlash in the digital age, with a flood of articles, images, and videos promoting "lifestyle aesthetics." People have come to see exotic lifestyles as fixed images. When people set out to create a home of their own, they are keen to superficially copy and graft foreign styles—whether Victorian, Scandinavian, Japanese-Korean, or Memphis—onto their own home. A well-known Chinese entrepreneur's mansion, for example, features a New Chinese-style basement, a European-style ground floor, and a Japanese-style second floor, making it feel more like a showroom in a building materials market. Chinese homes are increasingly becoming sites for the imagination of foreign cultures. Yet, people fail to realize that the so-called "styles" we recognize from images are, in fact, testimonies to the lives of ordinary people in specific times and places, just like us. What, then, should define the living aesthetic of our time and place? Can it have a unique formal language? And what new possibilities and changes might the digital age bring?

From a professional perspective, the discourse on Chinese architecture has largely overlooked the domestic culture of ordinary individuals, particularly the issues of personal will, imagination, and the formal language corresponding to the lifestyles. The housing records of contemporary China mostly consist of impersonal, mass-produced residential buildings. Academic discussions on housing have either treated it as a collective commodity[11], focusing on social equity or public goods, or as a specialized technical issue, such as the adaptation of housing for the elderly[12]. The notion of housing as a personal living space that carries emotional and poetic significance has been virtually ignored.

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[8] Wu, Hung. 《*物尽其用：老百姓的当代艺术*》(*Making the best of things: contemporary art for the ordinary people*). Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2011.

[9] Lü, Junhua, Peter G. Rowe, and Jie Zhang, editors. *Modern Urban Housing in China 1840-2000*. New York: Prestel, 2001.

[10] Zhang, Li. *In Search of Paradise: Middle-Class Living in a Chinese Metropolis.* Cornell University Press, 2010.

[11] The following literature focuses on the issue of mass housing and social equity.
Zhu, Jieming. Local growth coalition: the context and implications of China's gradualist urban land reforms. *International journal of urban and regional research* 23.3 (1999): 534-548.
Wu, Fulong. Housing provision under globalisation: a case study of Shanghai. *Environment and Planning A* 33.10 (2001): 1741-1764.
Fang, Yiping, Zhilin Liu, and Yulin Chen. Housing inequality in urban China: Theoretical debates, empirical evidences, and future directions. *Journal of Planning Literature* 35.1 (2020): 41-53.

[12] A certain group of Chinese scholars, represented by Zhou Yanmin (周燕珉), treat housing as a technical challenge, especially in the context of aging populations. These studies focus on the functionality and adaptability of homes for the elderly but often neglect the emotional and cultural dimensions of housing.

In this context, the primary issue facing urban homes in China today is the conflict between the limited and rigid spaces of standardized apartment units and the vast, complex demands of living and working within these spaces. This chapter seeks to explore the various possibilities of interior space and domestic culture within Chinese urban housing, particularly in the context of digital home-based work. The case studies also focus on live/work homes of professionals in creative industry. These homes, common in China's major cities, share several basic characteristics: they are situated within standardized apartment buildings, have extremely limited areas ranging from 35 to 70 square meters, and their original layouts are rigid, lacking detailed consideration of complex living needs. When residents attempt to renovate the apartment, they face challenges such as low-skilled contractors and tight budgets. Despite these "hard" realities, China's home-based workers have engaged in extensive experimentation: within the confines of limited space and rigid layouts, their homes have evolved to accommodate ever-changing living and working functions; under the impact of Western domestic culture and modes, their interiors have developed new adaptability. These new situations are particularly worth discussing. In the case studies of live/work homes in China, two new patterns of home culture and public-private relationships have emerged. Within these models, new forms of "corridor" also appears, linking the inside and outside, self and others, home and city, public and private, allowing information, relationships, emotions, and memories to flow between these domains.

### 4.1 Overview of China Cases and Case Selection Rationale

The Chinese component of this study comprises 20 live/work home cases across Beijing and Shanghai (see *Table 0-1 Case-study List 1: China Case*), selected to capture the socio-spatial dynamics of urban knowledge-based professionals within standardized apartment typologies prevalent in China's megacities. These cases encompass two distinct housing categories: *pre-reform public housing* (7 cases: 4 in Beijing, 3 in Shanghai), constructed between 1949–1978 under state-planned economies, and *post-reform commodity housing* (13 cases: 4 in Beijing, 9 in Shanghai), developed post-1978 through market-driven urbanization. Participants span ages 24 to 56, with occupations including architects, scholars, designers, and writers, reflecting the study's focus on creative and intellectual professions. Household demographics range from single occupants and couples to multigenerational families, ensuring insights into diverse spatial adaptations under China's high-density urban constraints.

The selection criteria prioritized typological representativeness, adaptive innovation, and ethnographic richness. First, cases were chosen to align with China's dominant urban housing models—compact, rigidly planned apartments averaging 35–100 square meters—which impose unique challenges for integrating live/work functions. Pre-reform apartments,

Zhou, Yanmin, and Chen, Yu. 养老设施空间设计的实践经验总结 (Summarizing the Design Experience of Care Facilities for the Elderly). *建筑学报* (*Architectural Journal),* 2 (2019): 38-43.
Zhou, Yanmin, and Qin, Ling. 老龄化背景下城市新旧住宅的适老化转型 (On the Transition of Old and New Urban Housing against a Background of Population Aging). 时代建筑 (*Time* + *Architecture*), 2016 (06): 22-28.
As well as a special issue of the *Architectural Journal* *（建筑学报）* 2015/06 on " Design and Practice for the Elderly", eight papers on this topic have been published.

characterized by communal facilities and utilitarian layouts, exemplify historical responses to collective living, while post-reform units reflect neoliberal commodification and rising middle-class aspirations. Second, occupational diversity within the sample—from young architects to established scholars—enabled cross-comparison of how professional demands intersect with spatial limitations. Third, demographic variance highlighted generational and familial adaptations.

From this cohort, two cases were selected for in-depth analysis due to their exemplary articulation of emergent domestic patterns and contrasting approaches to spatial agency:

- Case 1 (Beijing Pre-reform Apartment): Demonstrates the transformation of a rigid, state-era apartment into a "porous vessel" through strategic material and spatial interventions, embodying controlled permeability between domestic and urban realms.
- Case 2 (Beijing Post-reform Apartment): Explores a "multi-centred network" model, where live/work activities extend beyond the physical home into dispersed urban nodes, redefining privacy through digital and community engagement.

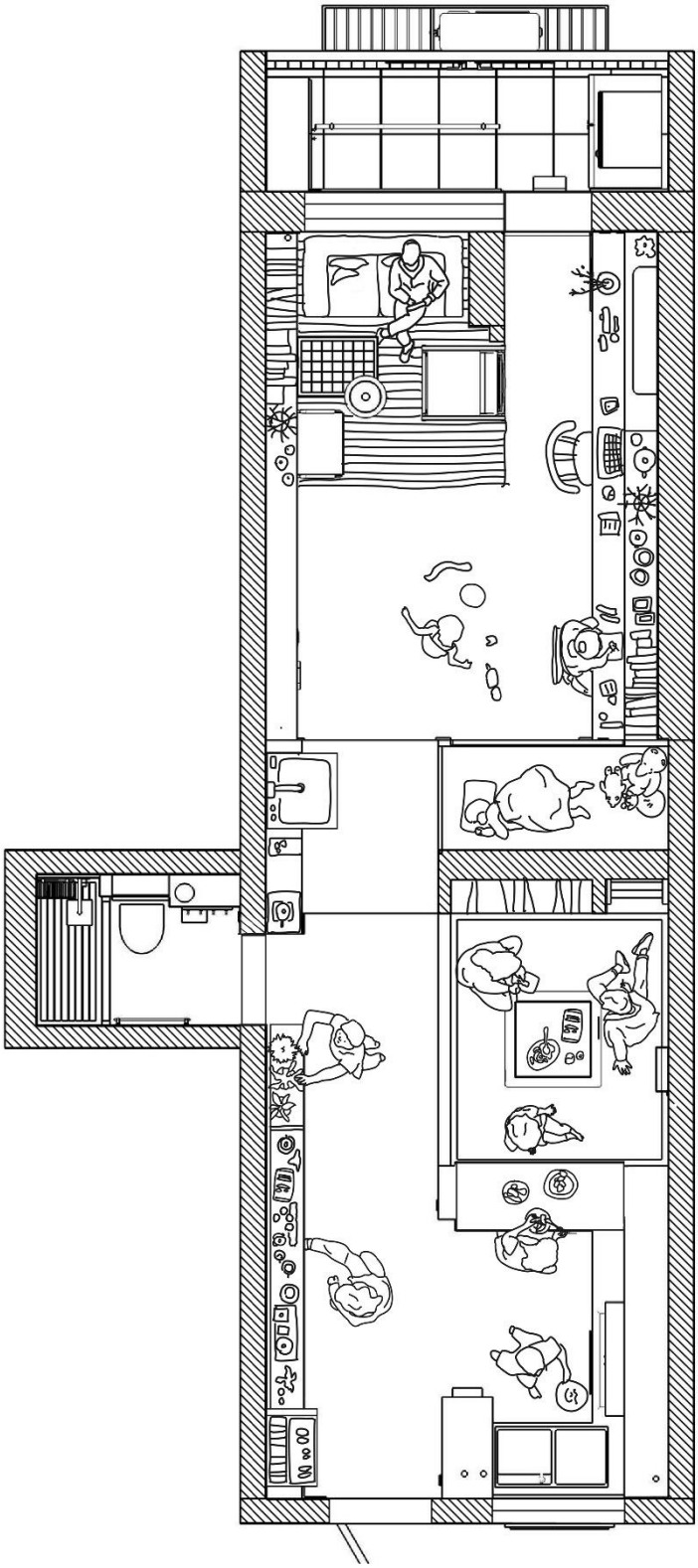
These cases were prioritized for their rich ethnographic data—including resident-generated sketches, renovation records, and longitudinal interviews—which illuminate how occupants negotiate standardized layouts to foster hybridity, resilience, and cultural identity. Case 1 exemplifies micro-scale improvisation under material constraints, while Case 2 reflects macro-scale urban integration, collectively addressing the study's core themes: the reconfiguration of public-private boundaries, the agency of domestic objects, and the impact of digital labour on spatial practices.

### 4.2 CASE 1: A Porous Vessel - Pores as a kind of Corridor

The first case demonstrates one way in which Chinese home-based workers explore new patterns of domestic life. Faced with "less than ideal surroundings" including noisy and chaotic environments, neighbours of different social identities and classes, and poor neighbourhood management, instead of rigidly separating the home interior from the surrounding environment, the occupants transformed the standardized apartments into personalized "porous vessel". This porous space allow controlled flows and exchanges between the internal and external environments—of light, air, or thoughts, and emotions. Through these various pores, residents engage in a controlled dialogue with the larger outside world while preserving the integrity and intimacy of the home.

The case is architect JIN's live/work home. His residence is a 36-square-meter apartment in an old neighbourhood near Beijing's Second Ring Road, a compact unit in a corridor-style collective housing complex. The narrow hallways are cluttered with residents' belongings, bearing the marks of communal living. But once the door of his apartment is opened, an entirely different scene unfolds inside. This study draws the floor plan of their home and overlays their living scenarios on it, around which the later discussion will be centred (Fig 4-

1). The original layout of the apartment consisted of two interconnected 3x5 meter rooms and a bathroom. The decision to purchase this small apartment was driven by its proximity to the university where JIN works and its location near a primary school for his daughter. This allowed them to end the exhausting commute and begin to walk to work and school. One of the core features of this live/work home is its small size, but JIN sees this as a positive: "Only in a small space can you achieve fullness, exquisiteness, and intimacy." He devoted significant time to designing and renovating the apartment himself: "I wrote a 5,000-word task outline, summarizing the living and working habits of our family of three." The renovated apartment now features a sequence of spaces starting from the entrance: a kitchen, a breakfast table, a *kang* (a multifunctional piece of northern Chinese furniture serving as a dining table and bed), an archway, a living room area, and a balcony (Fig 4-1). These functional spaces are arranged along one side, connected by a longitudinal corridor that runs through the apartment. The renovation began in 2017, and the family of three (JIN, his wife, and daughter) moved in by 2018, living there for almost six years now. Their everyday life is gradually becoming richer(Fig 4-1).



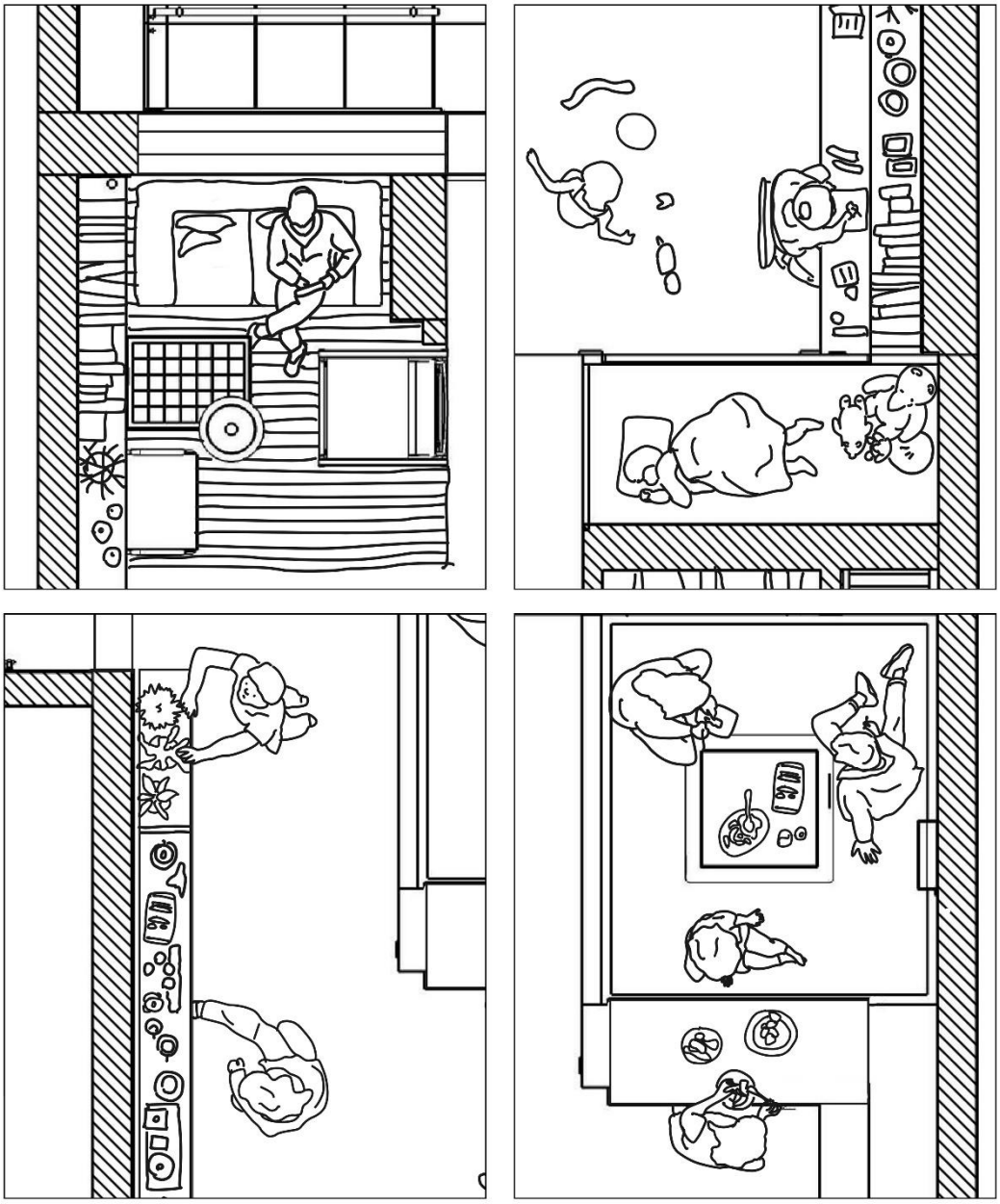


Figure 4-1 Drawing of the Living Scenarios, case 1

Source: drawn by the author

### 4.2.1 Porou Walls and Small Objects

Upon entering the main entrance, one encounters a corridor that runs through the entire apartment, with particular attention to the wall on the left side (as seen in the figure 4-2). This is a continuous wall that has been deliberately thickened by 25 centimetres. It extends through the kitchen, dining table, *kang*, archway, and ends at the wall shelf in the living room area. This thickened wall transforms into various forms over its nearly 10-meter length, including open shelves, continuous wall surfaces, niches, archway, sink area, short wall, partial ceiling, and wall shelves, maintaining continuity only at the upper part, where the ventilation system ducts are concealed, making their presence almost imperceptible. These shelves and niches house various objects that are commonly used in their daily life and also possess aesthetic qualities. The process of arranging these objects is, in itself, a design process. "It takes a long time to properly arrange the items in the home, just like how a garden requires trees, flowers, vines, and moss to nurture it, gradually washing away the harshness. Selecting suitable items for the empty shelves, arranging them appropriately, and finding the right place for each is a necessary process of mutual adaptation between people and their environment," as JIN says.

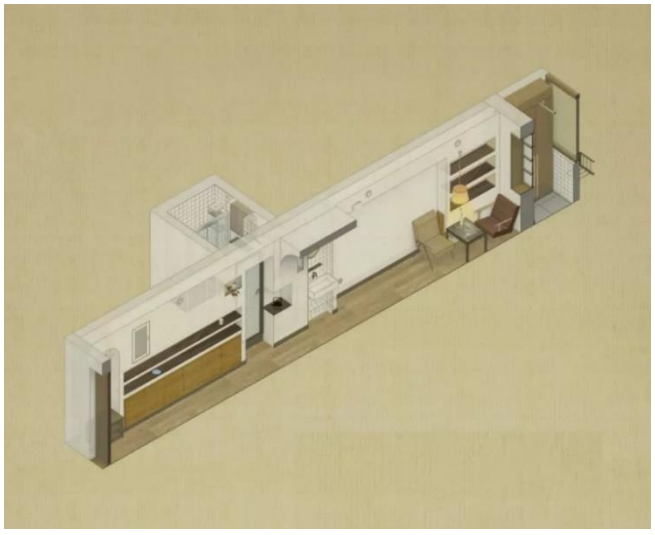


Figure 4-2 The Porous Wall on the left side of a corridor that runs through the entire apartment

source: courtesy of the resident Jin Qiuye

As I gradually observe this thickened and porous wall from the entrance (Fig. 4-3), the first things I see are the recessed shoe cabinet and coat rack at the porch, followed by two long shelves facing the kitchen, displaying cups and containers collected by the homeowners from various places, used for drinking tea, alcohol, and water—such as a pair of emerald green glass coffee cups, a brass incense bottle, a tea pet, a Chinese-style purple clay teapot, a galvanized

tea canister, a celadon gourd-shaped vase, and a Japanese-style glass sake bottle. Above these two shelves is an electrical box, which cannot be covered up due to regulations, so a square hole had to be made. After much deliberation, they placed a bonsai tree in a bean-green ceramic pot inside, with its branches hanging down, creating a cliff-side landscape. Moving further down the corridor, there is the bathroom with a frosted glass door, the only door in the entire apartment. To the right of the bathroom door is a niche housing an elegant black Chinese-style teapot with a long spout and a metal handle, paired with an inverted pyramid-shaped trivet, which also functions as a heating and insulation device. Further on is the original partition wall between the two rooms, where the door has been expanded into a 1.4-meter-thick arch. The side wall has been hollowed out by 60 centimetres to accommodate a sink. This creates an intriguing spatial transition related to the body. Under the arch, beside the sink, is a small niche containing a small figurine symbolizing family life—a warm-coloured resin sculpture depicting a couple cradling and gazing at an infant, from the American brand Willow Tree, with customizable skin and hair colours for the figures. Beyond this is the living room/work area, where they read, write, and the child does homework. On the bookshelf are their recently used books, including thick volumes on the works of Alvar Aalto, reflecting JIN's current research interest. On the coffee table, seasonal flowers are replaced regularly. The couple has collected a few finely crafted vases, containers, and sculptures during their travels, all placed on the bookshelf. This marks the end of the porous wall. Looking back at the entire wall, with its various forms of openings and the arrangement of everyday objects, it feels like "unfolding the facade of a small city, or showing an ecological community of various materials, textures, and forms," as a visiting friend of JIN's home once described it. With the constant replacement of everyday objects and books, the interior maintains a sense of visual renewal.

Figure 4-3 The Porous Wall and the various objects on/within it

source: courtesy of the resident Jin Qiuye

### 4.2.2 Three Sets of "Large Furniture" and Partial Openings

In contrast to the numerous small objects within the framed spaces are the more substantial items on the right side of the corridor—three sets of "large furniture" (as seen in the figure 4-4). Upon entering the home, the first is a combination of kitchen cabinets and a breakfast table, followed by a *kang* with sleeping, dining, and tea room functions, combined with a wardrobe and a child's bed. Lastly, there is the living room and work area combination. While these three combinations don't allow for complete visual penetration, they aren't rigidly separated either. Each pair of spaces maintains partial connectivity, giving the entire apartment a sense of spatial continuity.

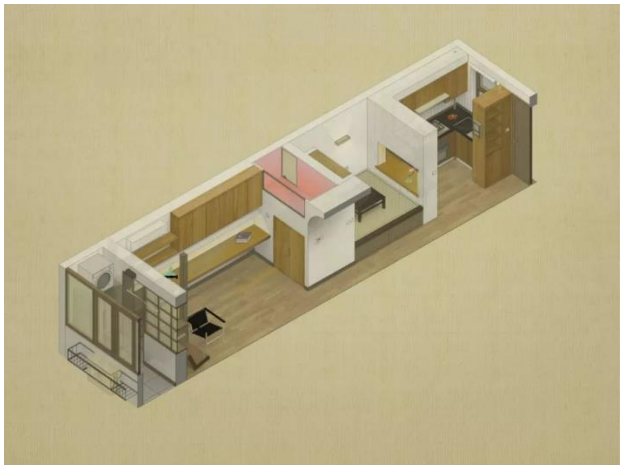


Figure 4-4 three sets of "large furniture" in the apartment

source: courtesy of the resident Jin Qiuye

First, the kitchen area at the front is connected to one side of the *kang* by an opening. A wooden board is placed under the opening, extending the breakfast table and kitchen prep area, where the family has their breakfast everyday. This opening serves as a thickened yet transparent boundary, reminiscent of the traditional food pass-through window between the *kang* and the kitchen in rural China, with echoes of a distant life. Passing through this opening, one enters a small recessed space called the *kang*, a unique family living domain that replaces the modern bedroom (Fig 4-5). The traditional *kang* is a heating and sleeping facility in northern China and some other cold regions. The *kang* is usually made of brick or clay, with channels underneath where wood or coal can be burned for heating. In traditional northern Chinese homes, the *kang* was the absolute center of family life, covered with mattresses where people could sleep, eat, or entertain guests. Family members would take off their shoes to sleep or eat on the *kang*, while visitors doing so indicated a warm welcome from the host. The *kang* had *kang* cabinets, window paper cutouts, and shelves under the beams, creating a scene that was secular and functional. Before the Republican era, the integration of the kitchen and bedroom was almost universal in northern China. In Jin’s home today, during the day, the bedding had to be folded and put away in the *kang* cabinet, with the space

transitioning between public and private uses. In modern bedrooms, leaving the bedding on the bed all day seems to declare the space as off-limits to outsiders, resulting in a significant waste of space during the long daytime, which is not really acceptable in minimal homes. Limited spaces require functional convergence, preferring integration over differentiation. Therefore, the multifunctional nature of the *kang* is well-suited to this small apartment.

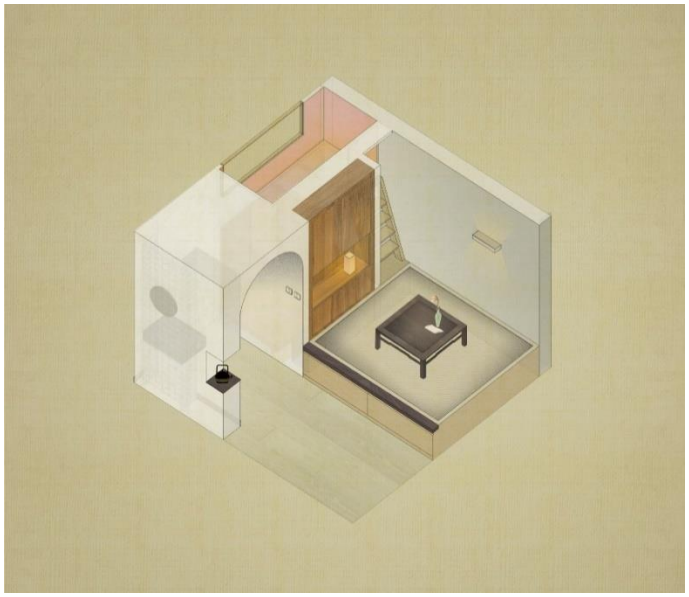


Figure 4-5 The Kang, where the family can sleep, eat, or work

source: courtesy of the resident Jin Qiuye

During the day, the JIN couple stores their bedding in a kang cabinet and sets up an old rosewood *kang* table sourced from Japan, transforming the space into a serene and orderly tea room. The *kang* is covered with Japanese tatami mats instead of traditional Chinese reed mats. While reed mats are fine, they become cumbersome when lifting the bed boards. It should be mentioned that the key difference between a northern Chinese *kang* and a Japanese-style tatami room is that the *kang* offers a combination of sitting with legs hanging down and sitting on the floor, rather than strictly adhering to a traditional floor-seating lifestyle. When three or four people dine together, those seated on the outer edge of the *kang* can sit on its edge, with legs hanging down, while those on the inside sit cross-legged. The advantage is that a room with a *kang* retains the essence of a modern room with high seating furniture, maintaining a consistent style with rooms that use modern beds. The *kang* has introduced two different lifestyles into the JIN family's home: sitting and standing, fundamentally changing their living habits. The family often gathers around the *kang* for various activities. The child do her homework and crafts on the *kang* table, while the adults drink tea, read, and write here. Meals and conversations naturally revolve around this 4-square-meter space. The *kang* has become a cherished part of their family life, providing a warm and intimate core. In winter, the heater beneath the bedding and the brazier on the *kang* table turn it into a cozy little universe, the Eastern equivalent of a fireplace. The close-knit seating arrangement around the *kang* fosters a sense of intimacy that is unmatched by

the casual movement of walking around in shoes. This *kang* area, which bridges different eras and cultures, is compact yet richly layered, providing a warm and inviting atmosphere. It not only serves as a unique space for the JIN family but could also inspire modern Chinese households more broadly.

Adjacent to the *kang* is a large 1.4-meter-thick "furniture piece" that extends from a wall between two rooms which is originally 10 centimetres thick. It incorporates several functions into one. One side facing the *kang* houses a 30-centimeter-thick *kang* cabinet, while the opposite side facing another room houses a full-height wardrobe. Above this is a small bed for their daughter, measuring 90 by 180 centimetres, with a height of 90 centimetres—perfectly sized for an elementary school child. The bed is open on both sides. "At the daughter's request, this small space is painted pink, and at night, with the lights on, it becomes the most mysterious corner in our home."(Fig 4-6) The bed is accessed from the *kang*, with a 50-centimeter gap at the corner where a small wooden ladder is placed. "Our daughter delights in climbing up and down; the ladder can be removed, revealing a storage space underneath for various suitcases." This compact space efficiently combines two large cabinets, a small storage area, and a bed, demonstrating the ultimate in space compression and utilization without sacrificing materiality, seamlessly integrating into the continuous interior scene.

Figure 4-6 Their daughter's bed,

source: courtesy of the resident Jin Qiuye

At the far end of the apartment is a 12-square-meter bright living room that also serves as a study (Fig 4-7). This area subtly merges into two distinct spaces, defined by furniture and objects. One part is framed by a large wooden-framed glass window connecting to the balcony, flanked by a bookshelf, a low wooden cabinet, a standalone wooden post, and a tall snake plant, creating a 2-meter-square living room area. The linen rug and the warm yellow lighting from the pendant lamp further enhance the sense of territory. The main furniture here includes a Karimoku-60 chair, a Le Corbusier LC-1 chair, and a vintage Danish coffee table inlaid

with colourful tiles. These pieces keep the overall seating height around 40 centimetres, making the room feel more spacious despite its low ceiling. The family often gathers here in the evening to read, think, and chat. The other side of this space is the work area, centred around a nearly 4-meter-long desk. The seating height of the work area is 46 centimetres—although they can basically work everywhere around the home, this place will be ideal for long period of working. The family of three completes their daily works here, with calligraphy tools and a horizontal scroll painting displayed on the shelf by the window. Two laptops often occupy the centre of the desk. The daughter's dedicated seat is on the right near her small bed, where she practices writing. Her toys and crafts are stored on the shelves beneath the bed, occupying a small corner.

Figure 4-7 The living room that also serves as a study

source: courtesy of the resident Jin Qiuye

At the end of the room, a thick wooden doorway leads to the balcony. "At dusk, the sky outside turns a deep blue, creating a unique atmosphere. Standing on the balcony at night, you can glimpse the kitchen light through a corner of the small bed," as said by Jin (Fig 4-8). The overall atmosphere of the home is seamlessly connected.

Figure 4-8 Looking back at the apartment from the balcony

source: courtesy of the resident Jin Qiuye

### 4.2.3 A Porous Vessel

Based on previous discussions and drawings, this study further created a diagram (Fig 4-9). It encloses the porous spaces within the flat with square boundaries. Arrows and curves were used to indicate how communication between the interior and exterior occurs through these porous spaces, as well as the flow between different parts of the interior. Solid black arrows represent the physical passage of people or objects, while dashed black lines signify visual connectivity. Red dashed lines indicate a virtual or cultural dimension of connection with the outside world. Overall, the study suggests that this spatial pattern can be summarized as a "porous vessel", where a micro-dwelling is organized as a semi-permeable container that allows for controlled exchanges between its internal and external environments. These “pores” can take the form of physical elements such as windows, balconies, doorways, bed alcoves, niches, recesses, and arches, or more abstract elements like visual connections, shared atmospheres, or ambient sounds. They not only allow for the flow of air and light but also for the exchange of ideas, emotions, and memories. In this model, the various "pores" within the home, regardless of size, act as metaphorical corridors. Unlike traditional rigid boundaries separating the inside and outside, the porous structure encourages continuous yet selective flow between the home's interior spaces and its external surroundings. Through controlled permeability, these pores create a dynamic dialogue between home and the outside world, fostering a hybrid living form that integrates privacy with urban engagement.

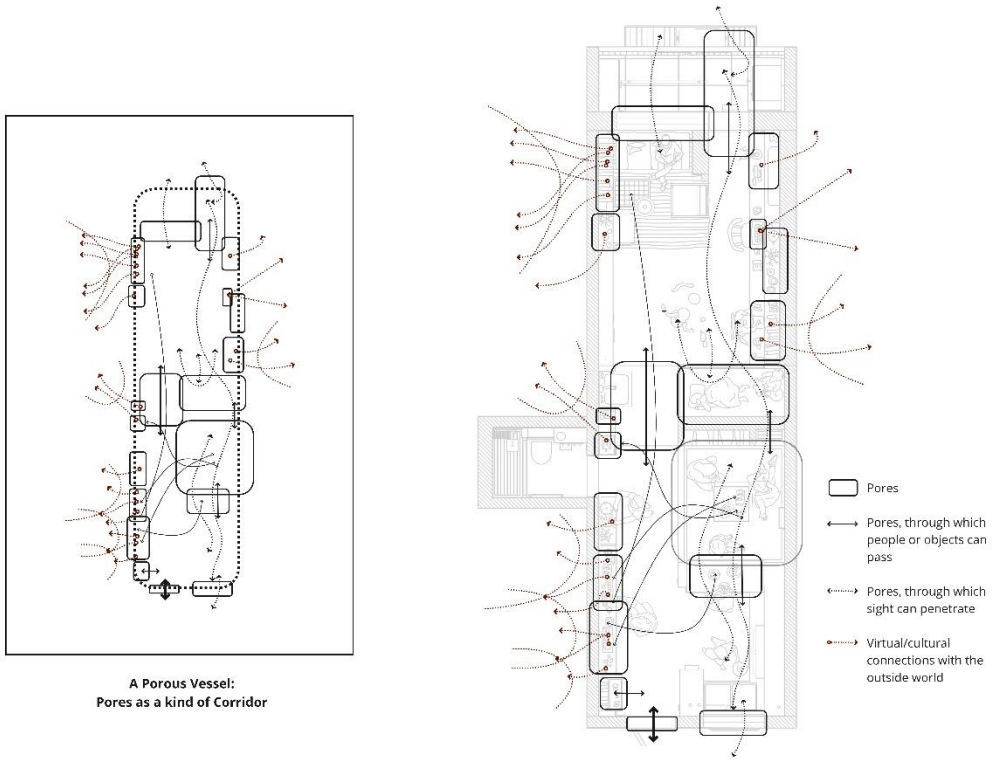



Figure 4-9 Spatial Pattern Diagram: A Porous Vessel

Source: drawn by the author

### 4.3 CASE 2: A Multi-centred Network - Urban Corridors Connecting Dispersed Live/Work Patches

For another architect/artist couple in Beijing, the question of how to better arrange their bodies and their living/work objects and break free from mundane, homogeneous home models has been a matter of ongoing exploration and adjustment over the past decade. This led to a unique, more dispersed form of live/work arrangement. In this model, a home is not a singular, fixed location but is more distributed across heterogeneous community and urban spaces, and the home-workers skilfully navigate between different roles, relationships, and communities.

The Live/Work home of architect Li Han and graphic designer Hu Yan is a quintessential example of this kind of domestic culture. Their home is located in a standard multi-story residential building from the 1990s. It represents a common layout in the Chinese market: one living/dining room, two bedrooms (one large, one small), a kitchen, and a bathroom, totalling about 58 square meters (Fig 4-10). What's a bit unusual is the 17-meter-long, 1.1-meter-wide fire escape that runs along the perimeter of the apartment. Originally a shared external corridor connecting all the units, it has been sealed off by the residents, transforming it into a

private balcony. The couple returned to Beijing from abroad in 2007 and have lived here for 17 years, changing the arrangement and furnishings of the apartment every two to three years to accommodate changes in their lifestyle and work needs.

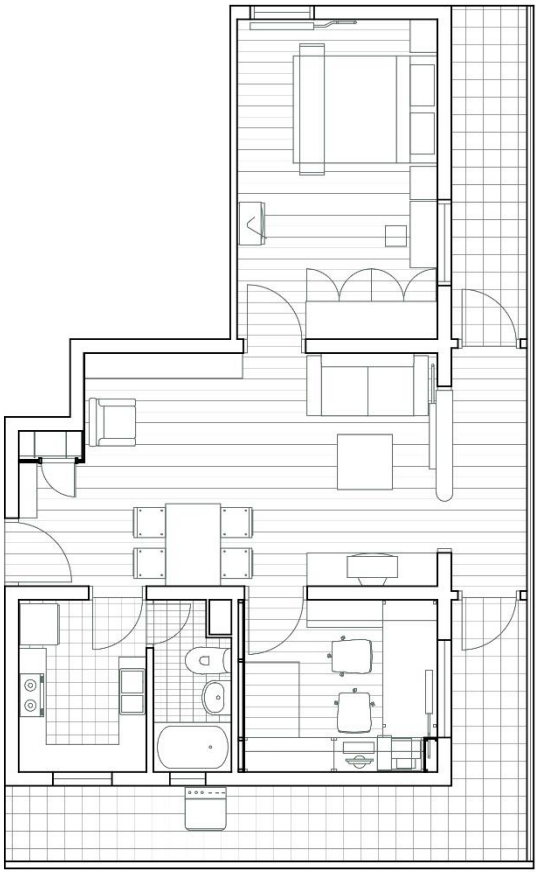


Figure 4-10 The layout of the apartment in 2007, case 2

Source: courtesy of Li Han and Hu Yan, redrawn by the author

### 4.3.1 Three Renovations: Struggling with Homogeneous Home Styles

Their first renovation of the home took place in 2007. At that time, the main walls in the living room and bedrooms were painted in a low-saturation green, with some walls covered in high-saturation red wallpaper featuring small white floral patterns (Fig 4-11). For instance, the protruding storage room to the left of the entrance, covered in red wallpaper, seemed like an independent object growing out of the rectangular living room. The furniture was mainly of two types: dark brown wood-grain furniture and white IKEA-style furniture. In the living room, these pieces created three main areas: a reading area with a white bookshelf designed and custom-made by Li, paired with an IKEA POÄNG birch veneer armchair and a reading lamp; a dining area adjacent to the kitchen with a four-person table and white IKEA metal-framed plastic dining chairs, topped with a popular white MELODI pendant lamp also from IKEA. The

inner most part of the living room is a central area - the TV area - consisting of a white fabric sofa, a wooden coffee table with a stainless steel frame, a deep red carpet, and a 40-centimeter-thick wooden TV cabinet with a TV in the middle.

Figure 4-11 the interior view of the living room in 2007, case 2

Source: courtesy of Li Han and Hu Yan

The custom-designed bookshelf by Li himself caught our attention. Li recalls: "When we first renovated, I wasn't very skilled at handling space. The apartment was small, and the load-bearing walls limited what we could do. But since I had just started my career, I was excited to finally have control over something and designed this bookshelf myself, which even won an Italian furniture design competition." This bookshelf, named BOOX by the couple, is located to the left after entering the hallway. It consists of a 2-meter-high, 2.3-meter-wide, 3.6-centimeter-thick white rectangular frame with five layers of freely arranged white boxes inside (Fig 4-12). According to them: "BOOX is a piece of furniture to store and display books and miscellaneous items. Simplicity, as the essential quality of the BOOX, is explored in two aspects: affordability and flexibility. The basic component of the BOOX is box, one of the simplest forms to manufacture. It results in low cost in production and therefore more people can afford it. Simplicity is further integrated with flexibility by the BOOX's simple assembling method: free-stacking. It allows everyone to create the BOOX in the way they want. Simplicity generates diversity and playfulness. I made the first prototype of the BOOX with the cost less than 300 Euros. Every month I will reassemble it by myself. Simplicity creates more possibilities". For a designer, creating furniture for one's own home satisfies a certain desire to craft. Interestingly, this piece fits seamlessly with the surrounding standardized IKEA furniture, sharing a similar design philosophy, making it not seem out of place. In fact, one might even mistake this modular, easily disassembled, self-assembled, affordable yet modest-quality bookshelf as an IKEA product.


Figure 4-12 The bookshelf call BOOX designed by the residents

Source: courtesy of Li Han and Hu Yan

However, when these standardized, industrially produced pieces of furniture are juxtaposed with other elements intended to make the space feel warm and inviting, the result is often discordant. Like many people, the goal of their homemaking was to soften the home's rigid structure, to cover the harsh vertical joints, and to mask the awkwardness of industrial production. Therefore they introduced rich colours (green paint and red wallpaper) to create a cozy atmosphere, along with artistic and human touches (decorations, books, audio equipment). They tried to soften the environment (wooden floors and fabric sofas), make it warmer (warm-coloured lighting, semi-transparent curtains), and bring a touch of nature indoors (plants and flowers). The use of affordable materials and textures to mask and soften the apartment's original structure, combined with the "Nordic style" furniture, resulted in a space that was ultimately disjointed.

During the second renovation in 2011, possibly to address these issues, all previous attempts to enrich the space with colour and personal touches were abandoned in favour of a more streamlined IKEA style. The walls were repainted in a cooler, more neutral light grey with a slightly warm undertone. The wooden floors were replaced with darker, more austere grey cement. The dining and TV areas were merged, and all dark wood furniture (including the dining table and TV cabinet) were replaced with white "Nordic modern style" furniture (Fig 4-13). For instance, the dining table was topped with one of IKEA's best-selling pinecone-shaped pendant lamps, and the chairs were high-quality replicas of the beechwood Wishbone Chair, originally designed by Danish designer Hans J. Wegner in 1949. The geometric metal fruit bowl in the centre of the table was from ALESSI, designed by Italian designer Mario Trimarchi. The fabric sofa in the living room was paired with an IKEA LINDVED side table. The third renovation in 2013 saw only a few pieces of furniture replaced, with most being retained and rearranged (Fig 4-14), resulting in a space atmosphere that felt similar to the previous two versions.

Figure 4-13 the interior view of the living room in 2011

Source: courtesy of Li Han and Hu Yan

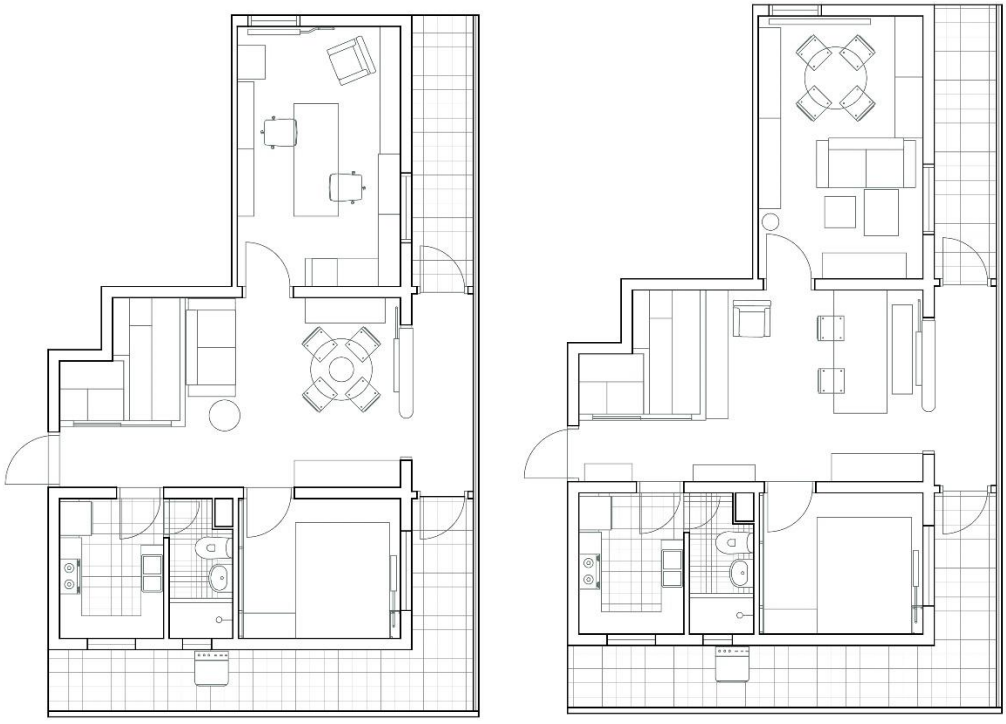


Figure 4-14 The layout of the apartment in 2011 and 2013

Source: courtesy of Li Han and Hu Yan, redrawn by the author

When asked about his thoughts on these renovations, Li commented: "Looking back at the materials and quality from over a decade ago, it's almost unbearable to see. Back then, I was quite pleased with it, but now it just feels incredibly tacky. I think to myself, wow, I really had such rough moments back then (laughs)." He pointed out the poor quality of the environment due to rough materials and craftsmanship. However, this study suggests that the core issue is actually a sense of fragmentation and collage that has always been present in the interior. This sense of collage refers primarily to the relationship between the following three elements: first, the crude and rigid spatial structure of the 1990s collectivist apartment building; second,

the affordable standardized furniture, particularly the simplified "Nordic modern style" pieces that imitate the form but lack the essence; and third, the couple's live/work life. These three elements were forcibly juxtaposed, without clear relationships or mutual support.

In other words, the essential question remains: when all we can afford are standardized, personality-lacking pieces of furniture, and when the quality of materials and craftsmanship is not ideal, how do we break free from homogenized home templates? How do we find a true mode of living and self-expression that suits our work and life needs?

To answer this question, or to find a possible solution in Li's case, this study first carefully observe the various spatial needs and conditions of their life and work.

### 4.3.2 TV: The Focal Point of Home Space

In the everyday life of Li and his wife, the TV holds a crucial role. Therefore it often occupies the central position in the home space. For instance, during their first renovation, the TV area was situated in the innermost, most exclusive part of the living room, comprised of a fabric sofa, wooden coffee table, floor lamp, rug, and TV stand. Allowing the television to occupy the centre of the family time and space system was prevalent in Chinese homes from the 1980s to the early 2000s. The television, being a source of entertainment for all family members, was deemed deserving of a prominent spot in the home.

Once the TV was turned on, it instantly altered the atmosphere in the room. Its sound, moving images, and light converged to create a dynamic focal point, making it the centrepiece of the room. A household could have several appliances running simultaneously—refrigerator, air conditioner, washing machine, microwave—but these devices operated independently, without attracting attention. They functioned silently, almost invisibly, much like loyal servants. In contrast, the TV demanded attention; it was designed to engage people’s senses. It required human interaction, forming a specific viewing relationship—it couldn’t operate in isolation. A home may be filled with various machines, but they can be broadly categorized into two functions: those that manage tasks and those that engage with people. The TV and computer fall into the latter category—they are devices intended for human interaction, serving as companions that provide information and entertainment within the home.

Before the internet became widespread, the TV was the focal point of spatial arrangements in Chinese homes. It could even be said that the TV created the spatial focus of late 20th-century Chinese households—wherever the TV was placed, that was the heart of the home. The TV replaced the traditional shrine, becoming the new object of veneration. It reorganized the structure of the home. The sofa, dining table, wardrobe, and wall decorations all revolved around the TV, establishing an organic relationship. When arranging the home space, the placement of the TV had to be decided first, with all other furniture and accessories maintaining a specific spatial relationship to it. Watching TV was the most frequent yet profound activity in the household, and the home space, as well as its layout, had to accommodate and adapt to this activity. Among all the arrangements, the connection

between the sofa and TV was the closest—they seemed to exist for each other, forming an inseparable viewing setup. There were no obstacles between them, creating an empty space that was both the most tension and the most stable in the home. This space dominated the other areas and objects in the room. The TV acted as a hub within the home; its movement signified a shift in the entire furniture arrangement, leading to changes in the home's structure.

During the second renovation of this case, the independent TV area was cancelled. To some extent, this could be seen as a slight weakening of the TV's centrality. This time, the dining and TV areas were combined: a round glass table with steel legs, four beechwood Y chairs, a 40cm-high cabinet opposite the table, which housed not only the TV, sound system, and VCD player but also some Thai terracotta carved vases. Above the TV hung several decorative paintings. However, these cultural items were clearly secondary—they hung quietly, serving as accents and background, unable to command attention like the TV screen.

This combination of dining and TV areas is also a common practice in Chinese homes. Before the TV entered the household, the dining table was usually the center of the home's spatial arrangement. At the table, family members would sit close together, sharing the same food and engaging in pleasant conversation—an awkward, silent dinner table was something to be feared. The conversation at the table was different from other types of talk—it was casual and enjoyable, a light-hearted byproduct of the meal, which itself was a joyful experience bringing the family together. The conversation did not carry substantial information or involve significant decision-making—serious discussions were usually reserved for formal talks at other times. Table talk was once the dominant atmosphere of family life, a time of relaxation and communication. Eating and chatting were natural companions, the most routine yet most delightful moments in family life.

However, with the introduction of the TV, dining and watching TV started happening simultaneously in many households, including Li's. As the TV entered the dining space, it disrupted the previous connection between eating and talking, drawing attention away from the dining table. Eating was no longer accompanied by conversation but by watching TV. Even when conversation continued, it was often influenced by the content on TV—discussions became less about personal matters and daily lives, and more focused on the external world presented by the TV. The intrusion of external events broke the serenity of the home, altering its temporal and spatial stability: not only did outside events enter the household, but also a moving, noisy image disrupted the peace. The TV added sound and light to the home, occasionally leading to debates or conflicts over the ideas it presented.

In addition to the dining and TV area, during this renovation, a small, movable TV stand and a small TV were placed in one of the bedroom, which now served as a home office. In a household, any place where people can stay comfortably for long periods tends to include a TV.

This reliance on TV continues in Li's home today. In the later two renovations, the TV area was again becoming an independent space. It is not only key to the spatial structure of their home but also to their temporal routine. Li mentioned, "For me, the main functions of home now are to sleep and watch TV. I have a habit of watching TV with my wife, eating a snack, and then

going to bed, no matter how late I work. I don't even care what's on—often it's some old TV drama—I just watch to relax. I used to eat fruit while watching TV, but then I realized it would make me gain weight, so I switched to cucumbers or tomatoes. It satisfies my urge to eat without consuming too much sugar or calories. If I skip this ritual, I can't fall asleep—it's become a habit."

For many people, TV is just background noise, something to glance at occasionally; they aren't constantly watching the screen. People watching TV can get up frequently, eat snacks, chat briefly, or even doze off in front of the screen (some even use the TV as a sleep aid). In such cases, the TV isn't really for watching or listening—it's not a mere audiovisual device. Instead, the TV serves to create a lively atmosphere, warding off loneliness. As contemporary family sizes shrink and social interactions decrease, home spaces have become quieter, and the TV has increasingly become a vocal companion, a source of indistinct human sounds, especially for the elderly. The people on TV are distant yet feel like close companions.

Since there's no binding mechanism for watching TV, viewers are free. They can immerse themselves in the various images on the screen, then quickly disengage, constantly switching between the TV and reality. TV (like film) may have introduced a one-sided viewing experience for the first time: people can freely watch someone without being watched themselves. In this sense, watching TV is a form of public snooping. It's gratifying but carries no risk. Even the most timid person can relax while watching TV because they're in their own familiar environment without the pressure of being observed by others. This relaxed, reclining-on-the-sofa watching is true relaxation and entertainment. After a busy day, what could be more enjoyable than watching TV?

### 4.3.3 The Home office

Unlike many other families, the workspace in the Li's home plays a crucial role, to the extent that work itself provides the backbone and focus of the home, making it lively, dynamic, and unique.

"When we first renovated in 2007, we were both working outside the home. After work, we would continue with projects we were passionate about, mainly creative work, at home. So, we converted the small bedroom into a home-office." The walls of the home-office, unlike the red and green colour wallpaper of the other rooms, were painted in a more serious and subdued deep grey, echoing the atmosphere of a traditional office. Three white desks were arranged along the walls, forming a U-shaped continuous workspace. On these desks were laptops, a desktop computer, a printer, a landline phone, speakers, desk lamps, books, and coffee mugs. They usually did their drawings on the widest desk (80cm) facing the window and used the narrower desks (50cm) on either side for digital modelling or writing. On the other side, against the wall, was a filing cabinet, and above it, a large corkboard where the couple pinned their latest work plans and achievements. With its sharp corners, cool colours, and efficient layout, the small room resembled a mini-office. Most of the time, they worked

back-to-back, but on some afternoons, they would pull out a small wheeled cabinet from under the desk to serve as a makeshift coffee table, where they could relax with tea, fruit, and seeds while chatting (Fig 4-15).

Figure 4-15 The home-office and two working/living scenario, 2007

Source: courtesy of Li Han and Hu Yan

"After the first renovation, I quickly realized a problem. The bedroom was too large to be of any practical use—we don’t need that much space to sleep. But the small room wasn't big enough for a home-office. So, during the second renovation in 2011, we converted the smallest room into a bedroom and made the largest room into an office." With this change, the importance of the workspace in their home grew even more, taking up the largest, brightest room, which had both east- and south-facing windows. This time, a large desk (80x120cm) was placed in the centre of the room, allowing the two of them to work face-to-face (Fig 4-16). Along the walls were narrow desks (40/50cm in width) and filing cabinets (30/40cm in width). The corkboard remained, but it was widened (240x80cm). While such a board might serve as a noticeboard in a traditional office, in their home office, it was more of a reminder for their life and work plans. The combination of a BOOX bookshelf, a single armchair, and a floor reading lamp was moved from the living room to the office, and a small TV was added, creating a new reading and media area.

Figure 4-16 The home-office in the big bedroom, 2011

Source: courtesy of Li Han and Hu Yan

"By the time of the third renovation in 2013, I had quit my job to work from home on my book 'A Bit of Beijing.' We then started our own practice and considered renting a separate office. However, since our team was very small—just the two of us and 1-2 regular members—renting an office didn't seem appropriate. So, I thought of renting an apartment instead. But in Beijing, it's hard to find an empty apartment; they all come furnished, and you can't just remove someone else's furniture. In the end, we took out a loan and bought another old two-bedroom apartment in our neighbourhood as our office." "At that point, we no longer needed an office in our original apartment. The large room that had been used as an office was rearranged, and we started using it to watch TV and eat." Although their main workspace was moved out, the newly added multifunctional long table in the living room allowed them to entertain guests, chat, or do light work—occasionally responding to emails, discussing a design, or flipping through a large book.

### 4.3.4 The Studio as an Extension of Home

> "Although it seems like our office has been moved out of our home, the studio is like another home for us."

Their studio was transformed from a two-bedroom apartment in the same residential estate, and in their view, it serves as an extension of their living space. For this research project, Li created a digital illustration depicting the daily activities in the studio (Fig 4-17).

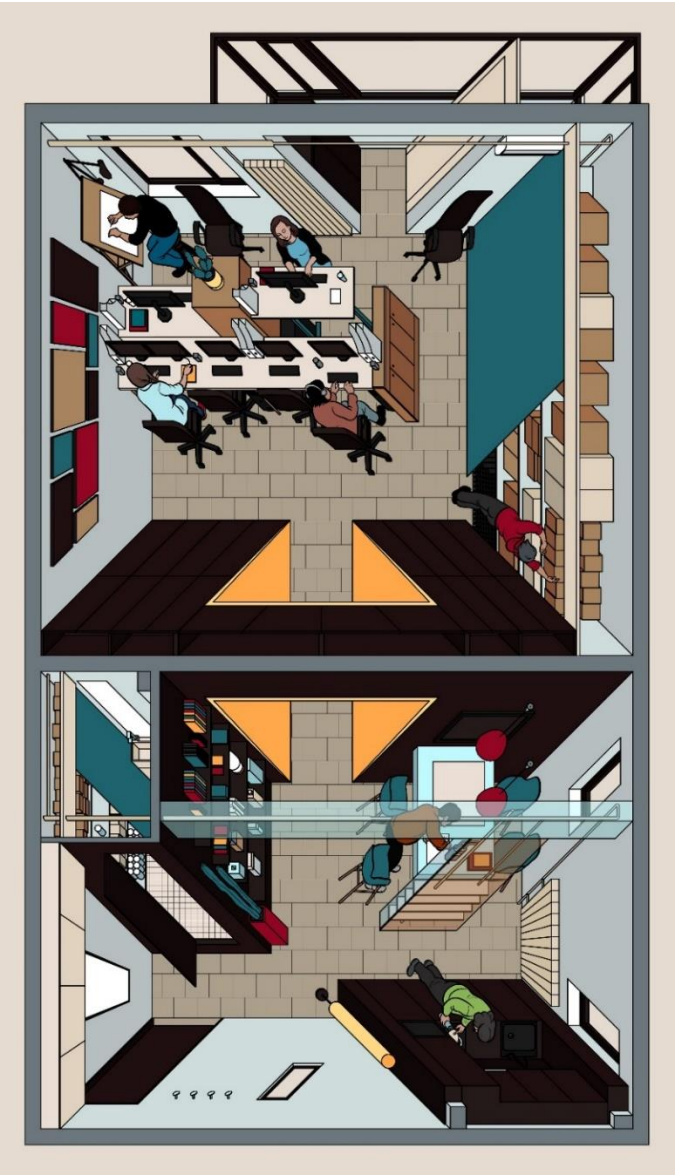


Figure 4-17 A digital illustration depicting the daily activities in the Drawing Architecture Studio

Source: courtesy of Li Han and Hu Yan

In the illustration, we can see that the space is mainly composed of two rooms, an inner and an outer one, and it also includes a tiny kitchen (with a sink, coffee machine, etc.), a bathroom, and a small balcony. In the outer room, next to the bathroom, there is a large bookshelf integrated into the wall. On the opposite side, facing the window, there is a one-meter-high standing workbench. This workbench is positioned between two walls: one separating the two rooms of the studio and the other, a thin, standalone wall that matches the width of the workbench and has shelves underneath. This wall partially divides the workspace from the adjacent kitchen, offering a sense of separation without fully closing off the space. When needed, this workbench can double as a dining table or bar, with four high stools allowing Li, Hu, and their assistants to sketch, make models, or have a working lunch or afternoon tea.

Passing through the bright orange doorway in the black partition wall, here's the main workspace. In Li's illustration, this partition and doorway are accentuated by a dual perspective that draws focus to the central point of each room, almost suggesting that stepping through this unique passage brings you to where all the magic happens. Every detail and object within the rooms is depicted using axonometric projection, providing a flexible perspective while maintaining spatial continuity. In this core workspace, two rows of workstations face each other in the center of the room. The outer desk accommodates four assistants, while the inner desk, separated by a square cabinet, is where Li and Hu work. Both of their desks are height-adjustable, allowing them to alternate between sitting and standing. In one corner, there is a set of drafting materials where Li frequently do hand-drawings. The walls of this workroom are adorned with numerous drawings of various sizes, while the opposite wall features a thick hidden storage space, tightly packed with the team's work files and archives from over the years.

When asked about the evolution of their workspace over the years, Li explained:

> "One of the biggest trends in my life has been the gradual expansion of my workspace, getting larger and larger. From a small room to a big room, as the scope of work grew, the workspace at home could no longer accommodate it, so it became independent. But, it's an extension from the home, always a part of it."
>
> "When we first moved to the studio, it was purely a workspace, and we would even go home for lunch. But over time, I found that the short distance became inconvenient, and eventually, I stopped going home for lunch. Since this office was originally a two-bedroom apartment with gas and plumbing, we left one stove burner for boiling water and making coffee. Gradually, it really became a kitchen. We've boiled dumplings and steamed buns there. Eventually, the office started to serve as a dining space, with the home's dining room function moving into the studio, blurring the boundaries between the two."
>
> "On one hand, I see the studio as an extension of my personal world. In another sense, my work has increasingly encroached on my family life, even filling it completely. My work is my life, and my life is my work. But I still feel that work and home can't truly merge. For example, I visited the studio of Tsukamoto Yoshiharu, where the bottom two floors are his office, the middle is a living room, and the top two floors are his bedroom. I found that quite novel. But for me, having work and living spaces so close feels a bit too much. For example, if I were in the bedroom, I might be in pajamas and suddenly find myself in a public area, blurring the boundary between working and living. But with my studio being separate from my home, I have to cross a bit of public space in the residential estate, which forces me to change into more formal clothes before going to the studio, and I think that's better."

Regarding the relationship between these two "homes" and the distance between them, Li also created another watercolour drawing to illustrate the story (see fig 4-18). In this painting, more detailed information can be seen. The bottom left and top right corners of the painting depict two similar multi-story residential buildings, each drawn from opposing isometric

angles. The buildings are cut open to reveal the rich, warm activities happening in each room within the two apartments. In the home, there's a detailed scene of the couple watching TV, while in the studio, the team members are depicted working on their computer screens, perhaps hinting that these are the most important scenes in their life. The scenes in the outdoor space of the residential area between the two buildings are equally engaging. That is the public environment they pass through every day on their way to and from work. Since it's within a gated community, it can be considered a semi-public space, and thus the scene carries an intimate, cozy atmosphere. The painting depicts a winter setting, with bare branches in various shapes surrounding the two apartment buildings. In the bottom right corner is a fitness area with two blue ping pong tables—ping pong is a very popular sport in China—along with a row of fitness equipment for seniors, including machines for waist-twisting, leg exercises, and back stretching, similar to what you can find in almost any typical Chinese urban neighbourhood. The middle of the painting shows the internal roads of the community, with various manhole covers of different sizes on the ground. In a slightly wider section of the road, there's the outdoor parking spaces, with reflective rubber road cones placed around. We can imagine a security guard managing the area. The top left corner of the painting shows a green space within the community. During Beijing's winter, there's not much vegetation, so the overall tone of this green space isn't very green. However, the long benches, S-shaped walking paths in the lawn, and brick and metal fences create small, inviting scenes, making the area a place where residents can stop and wander. In the painting, there's a middle-aged woman sitting on a bench chatting, a curly-haired lady holding a small shopping cart with one hand and walking a dog with the other, a man standing and enjoying the view, one taking out the trash, and another man just coming home from work with a briefcase. There's also a cat wandering around.

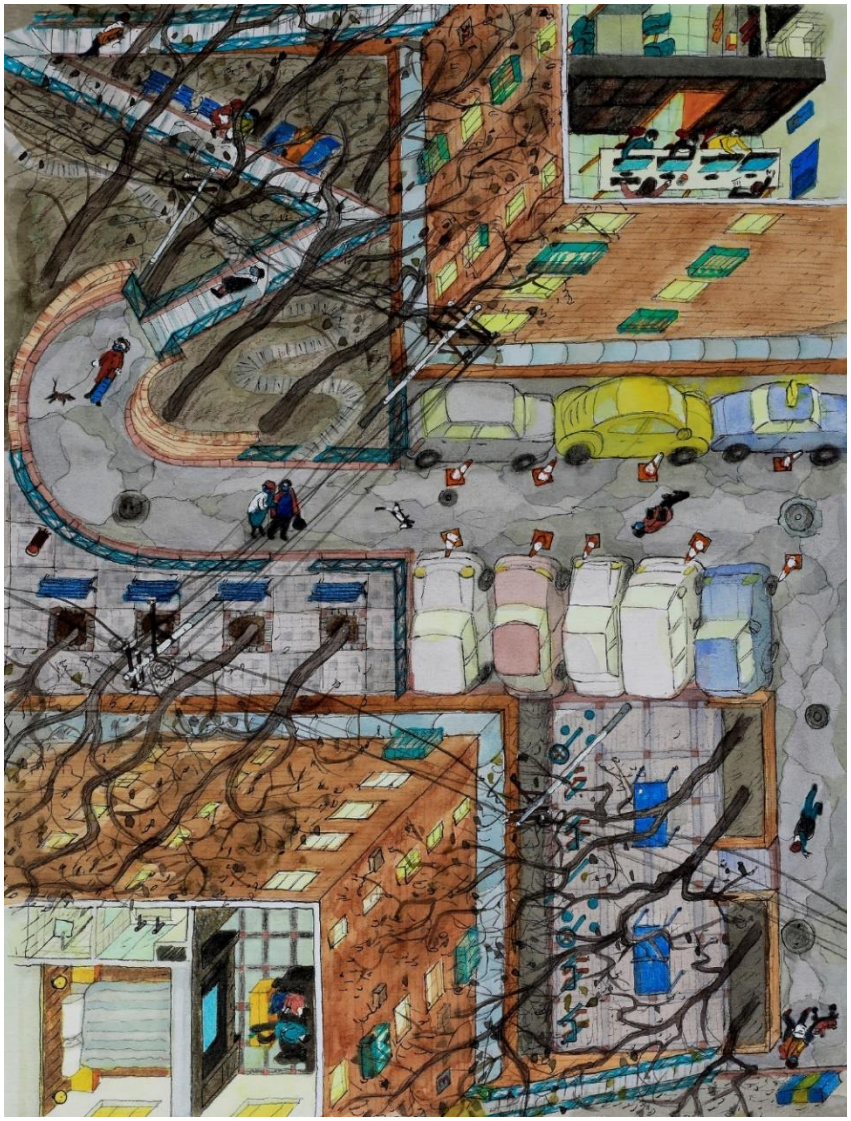


Figure 4-18 Li's drawing of the home of two units and the semi-public space in the neighbourhood

Source: courtesy of Li Han

By looking into the context of their home and studio, we can better understanding their living and working culture. Their studio, compared to a typical office, is more like a hidden, semi-private workshop nestled within the city's alleyways, a space where life and work, production and innovation, work and "non-work" are completely intertwined. On the one hand, because this architecture studio doesn't open up to the public like a traditional office, only familiar acquaintances can find and enter this place with the owner's guidance, giving it a strong sense of privacy. Moreover, this privacy, coupled with the compact interior space where various living and working activities are blended, makes the relationships between people—whether between family members or between work partners—feel more intimate, relaxed, natural, and free from hierarchical order. This creates a good, liberating atmosphere for unleashing creativity and imaginative design. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, both their home

and the studio, as an extension of the home, are sustained and centred on rich intellectual pursuits, holding vast potential for reaching outwards. The content produced in these two intimate spaces often appears in exhibitions, publications, or public spaces, continually interacting with the external world and opening up to the world of cultural and artistic communication. Therefore, their combined work/living spaces can be said to be both private and public.

### 4.3.5 Home and the City: Collecting the Vanishing Elements of the Urban Landscape

The most distinctive feature of this living arrangement is the close relationship between the internal and external, between home and city. Their daily work and life are not confined to a single space but are spread across two residential units and also the community spaces. Their focus is not limited by the four walls of their home but extends to the entire city. They are not content with merely collecting trinkets within their rooms; instead, they aim to document, collect, and capture the material elements and disappearing landscapes of the city. Their daily work primarily involves using CAD software to study and explore urban spaces, resulting in grand and complex urban landscape images[13]. The drawing takes an engineering style in terms of visual language, but what it tries to express in the content is not limited to the architecture itself, but also includes the urban life in and outside the architecture. So besides the large-scale elements like buildings, roads, squares, greenery, and pipelines, we can also find furniture, mechanical equipment, plantations, billboards, displays, and even tableware in the restaurants. The purpose of such documentation is to reflect the complexity and diversity of urban life through an objective recording process without missing the smallest details (Fig 4-19). In principle, the approach of creating this piece is to be elaborate rather than general, and to stay close rather than keep distance. Their primary goal is to document the rare, naturally formed neighbourhoods in Beijing (and later other cities in China and around the world). Their drawings are more serious than a painting, yet not as precise as architectural surveys. They do not put emphasis on an artist's subjective opinion, and not emphasize on the objective properties of the architectural construction either. What they care about is how the whole space is used and its atmosphere, and the interaction between the city and its inhabitants. Sometimes, by the time their drawings are completed, parts of the spaces they documented may have already disappeared or been replaced due to urban renewal. Thus, intentionally or unintentionally, their recording on reality has become a recording on history.

[13] Quote from the introduction of *Drawing Architecture Studio* website, www.d-a-s.cn

Figure 4-19 Their drawings to reflect the complexity and diversity of urban life

Source: courtesy of Li Han and Hu Yan

Like all the other cases in this study, they too focus on the role and agency of objects in daily life. However, while others may still be focusing on organizing domestic objects, they have extended the definition of objects to the scale of the city. Their urban drawings emphasize how found objects may play a more powerful role in the community public space than architecture. Compared to architecture, objects are independent from their surroundings and are not bound to a fixed location. Objects are usually easer to make, more convertible, mobile, or sustainable, and they can bring more resources together. For example, in their drawing of a suburban community in southwest Chicago, titled "Still Life of the Windy City"[14] (Fig 4-20), eight scenarios are depicted around different objects that transform their environment, including a tent that becomes a vegetable farm, fitness equipment that becomes an outdoor gym, furniture that creates a carpenter workshop. Additionally, markets sprout up in car trunks, various recycled items – such as furniture, home appliances and other discarded things – are used to make a garden, an inflatable device becomes a playground, a tricycle is used as a food stall, and a shipping container transforms into a stage. These functional objects become a series of hubs in the community, connecting people in the neighbourhood.

[14] For more, see their website page: http://www.d-a-s.cn/en/showprojectbyitem.php?art_no=0088

Figure 4-20 Their drawings depicting around different objects that transform the environment in southwest Chicago, titled “Still Life of the Windy City”

Source: courtesy of Li Han and Hu Yan

These intriguing objects, which connect people and places and embody the vanishing aspects of everyday life, are at the core of Li and Hu's daily work. They view the city as a sensory laboratory, where they cherish every item and incorporate the bustling joy of urban life into their own lives. In their living story, private life and public life have grown together.

This kind of live/work life organization that extends from the home to the city is not only a feature of this case, but can also inspire a wider range of contemporary living. In the context of remote work and digital nomadism, this mode is becoming increasingly common, offering a new solution to housing and social issues. In this new domestic culture, our home expands and extends into urban spaces as our lives evolve. It constantly divides like cells, from one unit to two, and so on. Importantly, each "cell" isn’t defined by a single function but contains all necessary functions. In other words, our concept of home is no longer centred around a single house or specific interior; instead, it’s a multi-centred, ever-changing network. Various urban spaces can serve as extensions of our homes. When the home interacts with urban resources, home-workers can create a productive and satisfying life even in economically challenging times. If borrowing terminology from urban ecology, this study might consider the contemporary live/work home as an ecological network composed of interconnected or hopping patches, corridors, and matrices within urban space. The study draws a diagram (Figure 4-21) based on the living pattern of this case to illustrate how such multi-centred network is dispersed throughout the city, and how it is effectively organized through urban corridors. This network of connections not only allows for physical mobility but also fosters a sense of emotional and social fluidity, enabling individuals to navigate between different roles, relationships, and communities. Due to its structural complexity, such a contemporary home possesses greater resilience and self-healing capacity.

As Argentine-American architect Susana Torre said: "Our home is not a house, but a place made of multi-functional spaces waiting to be completed by the community, the village, and also the sky and the Mediterranean Sea".

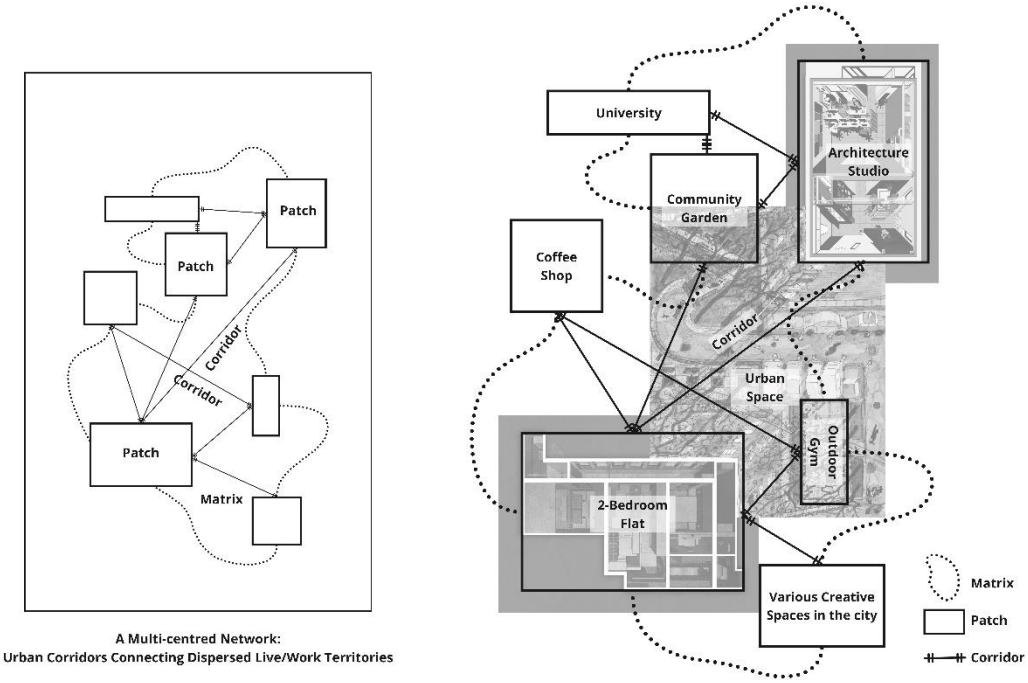



Figure 4-21 Spatial Pattern Diagram: A multi-centred network

Source: drawn by the author

### 4.3.6 The Formal Language Corresponding to the New Living Model

Now that some understanding of Li and Hu's work and lifestyle has been established, it is possible to reconsider the question at the beginning of this section: how do they break through the homogeneous home template, establish their own work/life arrangements, and find the corresponding formal language?

In terms of overall structure, driven by their intellectual pursuits, they reshaped the relationship between their home and the city, and naturally developed a multi-centred living model in their live/work life, which is mainly composed of two living units, supplemented by the community and the public space of the city. This new living arrangement is also reflected in the aesthetics and formal language within their home. In their most recent renovation, the Li couple tried a series of new form strategies (Fig 4-22):

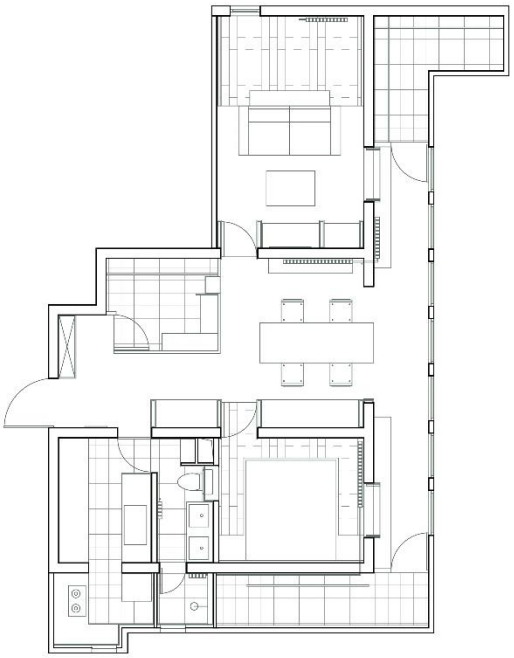


Figure 4-22 The layout of the apartment in 2019

Source: courtesy of Li Han and Hu Yan, redrawn by the author

First, in terms of materials and details, they used two contrasting surface materials (Fig 4-23). One is dark, hard, smooth and slightly reflective materials, such as gray marble with all-black rock slabs - used in living rooms and the large room, black aluminum door and window frames, black paint panels, glass and mirrors, brushed matte stainless steel panels. In contrast, they used lighter, natural, textured materials that absorb light and offer a softer, warmer appearance, such as chestnut oak wood-paneled walls and bedroom floors, raw oak and chestnut veneer cabinetry, rounded warm-light fixtures, light gray textiles, and potted plants.

Figure 4-23 Two contrasting materials in the interior, 2019

Source: courtesy of Li Han and Hu Yan

Normally, dark, hard, and slightly reflective materials are more often used on the exterior surfaces of urban buildings, presenting a strong, abstract, and indifferent image to the city. These materials are rarely used extensively in interior home settings. Conventionally, textiles and soft furniturings have been used in the interior to cover up and fill the hard structure of the house, creating a refuge from the external city and public forces. The goal has often been to make the home a comforting retreat, a space where one can relax their senses. In this case, however, the coexistence of soft and hard, dark and light, smooth and textured materials within the live/work home challenges the dichotomy between interior and exterior, production and reproduction. This juxtaposition of materials merges the spatial experiences of home and city, creating a new, unified experience.

Moreover, the use of materials here goes beyond mere surface color and texture to address spatial issues. In this case, materials are not distributed based on the boundaries of surfaces (walls, floors, ceilings) or the confines of rooms. Ceiling materials extend onto walls, wall materials flow into the flooring, and floor materials continue onto furniture like dining tables and beds. This approach reintroduces classical spatial elements like wainscoting and dado rails into contemporary homes, not merely as decoration, but as a way to integrate everyday use experiences. Materials that are "soft" and “warm” are used in areas within reach, not only meeting functional needs (easy to clean) but also enhancing tactile perception.

In addition to surface materials, the various pieces of furniture and objects in this case also play a significant spatial role. They establish symmetrical compositions within the three main rooms, a classical layout rarely seen in contemporary homes (Fig 4-24). In a sense, it abandons the efficiency-first layout model since modernism, bringing a different kind of interest to daily routines. For example, the living room centers around a long black-panel dining table. The three vertical black-framed windows on the balcony, the open doorway between the balcony and living room, the dining table, dining chairs, and three round pendant lights align along an

axis, giving dining a sense of solemnity. In the large room, the front half is dedicated to a television area, crucial for the family, while the back half is a tea space that blends elements of traditional Japanese aesthetics with modern living needs. In this alcove space, the floor is raised by about 30 cm, and stepping into it, the body is enveloped by wood-panelled walls. This room also follows a symmetrical composition, with the central axis featuring a black TV cabinet integrated into the wall, a TV area coffee table, a dark gray sofa, a wooden tea room frame, a round pendant light, and a tea room table, all arranged symmetrically. Even the marble flooring is symmetrically laid along the central axis. The smaller bedroom retains its function, with the bed, bedside tables, wall lamps, and headboard panelling forming a symmetrical layout. Additionally, the walls dividing the living room and two bedrooms are integrated with floor-to-ceiling wooden storage cabinets (or TV cabinets), increasing storage efficiency and thickening the partition walls. As a result, the doors in these walls become deep doorways, providing a sense of spatial depth when transitioning between rooms.

Figure 4-24 symmetrical compositions within the main rooms

Source: courtesy of Li Han and Hu Yan

This case explores contemporary living spaces with an open attitude towards various formal languages—interior and exterior, classical and modern, past and future, local and foreign. It embraces a variety of spatial strategies. Looking back at the previous times when they appropriated the Nordic style to decorate this apartment, it seemed very fragmented and could not establish an effective relationship with the contemporary live/work life in Beijing. However, the strong contrasts in materials and forms now do not create a sense of collage. This is because the complexity and contradictions in this form have naturally grown out of their living activities, and therefore it is full of vitality. In this context, the exploration of furniture, objects, and materials is no longer a discussion of superficial decoration or stylistic appropriation, but a discussion of architectural issues—exploring the spatial possibilities of live/work life within standardized residential buildings in contemporary China. Here, the exploration of classical layouts is geared toward the future, while the incorporation of foreign

design elements seeks to broaden the possibilities for local living. It's important to recognize that this case is not an isolated example; its repeated explorations of domestic living over the past decade are quite representative. Many Chinese families have undergone similar experiences and still face a long journey in developing formal languages that resonate with contemporary, local lifestyles.

## 4.4 SUMMARY

This chapter examines the live/work homes in China through case studies. It reveals many parallels with the spatial patterns and domestic culture observed in prior UK examples. For example, despite residing in standardized apartments with corridors, residents are increasingly experiencing a transformation towards an intimate lifestyle, where routines are interwoven and work and life blend seamlessly. Furthermore, home can evolve into shared, versatile, and multicultural experimental zones that foster spontaneous collaboration and interaction among diverse individuals and activities.

This chapter also identifies two new patterns of home culture and public-private relationships—patterns that are, of course, also present in the UK. Within these spatial patterns, new forms of "corridor" appears, linking the inside and outside, self and others, home and city, public and private, allowing information, relationships, emotions, and memories to flow between these domains.

The first one is a spatial pattern of “porous vessel”. It organizes a micro-dwelling into a semi-permeable vessel, allowing controlled exchanges between its internal and external environments. The “pores” of the apartment can take the form of physical elements such as windows, balconies, doorways, bed alcoves, niches, recesses, and arches, or more abstract elements like visual connections, shared atmospheres, or ambient sounds. They not only allow for the flow of air and light but also for the exchange of ideas, emotions, and memories. In this model, the various "pores" within the home, regardless of size, act as metaphorical corridors. Unlike traditional rigid boundaries separating the inside and outside, the porous structure encourages continuous yet selective flow between the home's interior spaces and its external surroundings. Through controlled permeability, these pores create a dynamic dialogue between home and the outside world, fostering a hybrid living form that integrates privacy with urban engagement.

The second one is a spatial pattern of "a multi-centred network," representing a more dispersed form of live/work arrangement. In this model, the boundaries between home, workplace, and public space are continuously renegotiated. The home is no longer a single, fixed place but is instead a series of live/work patches scattered throughout the city. These patches can be seen as nodes in a network, connected by a system of urban corridors—streets, digital networks, public transportation, and shared spaces. This type of corridor is an essential infrastructure for creating flexible, adaptable, and multi-centred living patterns. This multi-centred network not only allows for physical mobility but also fosters emotional and social

mobility, enabling individuals to navigate between different roles, relationships, and communities. This living model can also be reflected in interior design strategies— For instance, in the case of this chapter, the inhabitants integrate experiences from both domestic and urban spaces in their choice of materials, decorations, and objects. At this point, interior decoration and object placement are no longer merely aesthetic concerns but become architectural issues that engage with spatial relationships.

Overall, these patterns, along with those identified in the previous chapter, are prevalent in both countries and even globally. They provide an innovative framework for understanding the evolving relationship between public and private spheres in contemporary live/work environments.

# CHAPTER 5

## The Digital Live/Work Home:
## the “Space” of the Zoom Meeting and the Reinvention of the Corridor

## INTRODUCTION

In the previous two chapters, this research conducted case studies on live/work homes in the UK and China, revealing some common features in contemporary domestic experiences, as well as the diverse ways in which different families appropriate their home spaces. Among other things, it finds out is that digital technology has become a central tool in contemporary live-work practices. In both countries, and globally, almost every home-based worker relies on digital media and devices to perform remote tasks. Digital work has become not only the predominant form of homeworking today but also its most representative one. Given its prevalence and importance, it deserves a more in-depth analysis. Therefore, this chapter focuses on digital home-based work, with particular attention to how it shapes and transforms our domestic spaces and living experiences.

Among the many forms of digital homeworking, this chapter specifically highlights the activity of Zoom meetings. Zoom meetings have now become an activity almost every office worker has experienced. Unlike more traditional forms of remote work, such as doing paperwork or sending emails, Zoom meetings profoundly change the original setting of public-private relationships in the domestic space, further complicating the relationship. During Zoom meetings, smooth screens provide us with a portal to the broader public world. Our figures, along with either carefully curated or untended home environment, become digital images on the screens, entering the public eye. Such digital interactions prompt us to re-examine the relationships between inhabiting practices, domestic spaces and the wider public world.

Zoom meeting is therefore of particular research value as a key context for studying the latest changes in the digital live/work home experience, potentially revealing new dimensions of the dynamic interplay between public and private realms. This chapter develops a study in this regard.

### 5.1 Screen: the “Digital Corridor”

One of the most crucial tools for those working from home in the digital age is various digital screens.

Screens are both objects and media. They are the nodes at the intersection of the digital and material worlds. In the so-called digital age, our daily routines at home are actually structured in a large part by various fixed or movable screens (e.g. on television, iPad, home security system, etc.). Our perception, knowledge and productive work are mediated more and more through the manipulation of touchscreens (e.g. on mobile phones, computers, e-readers, etc.). They provide, actively, interactively or passively, links between households, and individual members of households, with the world beyond their front door. Screens are playing an increasingly important role in both domestic live and work, but the specific definition of this role still deserves further exploration. This chapter attempts to propose the hypothesis of the

screen as a new kind of corridor to give a new understanding from the perspective of public-private relationships in our homes, a topic that has been insufficiently discussed before.

Just as the corridor has reshaped the layout of the houses, the charged spaces centred around screens and cameras in contemporary homes are also causing significant changes of the domestic spaces. Like the corridor, it is a narrow (semi-)public space that is inserted right in the middle of the our private home, bringing the urban, global, and the virtual world into our domestic setting. This chapter suggests that the digital space surrounding screens could be viewed as a "digital corridor," enabling interactions between different systems, groups, or spaces, and thus dramatically reshaping the domestic sphere. However, this time, instead of separation, it reintegrates the duality of the home since the 19th century: the public and the private, work and life, home and city.

Figure 5-1 is a diagram of the framework of this chapter, which is mapped onto the structure of the Zoom meeting. At the centre of the diagram is a screen that serves as an interactive interface. The "subject" speaks on the left side of the screen, facing the audience on the right. The screen connects the participants and also their interiors on both sides. The shallow space centred on the screen, the camera and the subject is situated at the intersection between the virtual and physical worlds. This chapter draws on Robin Evans's 1978 paper "Figures, Doors and Passages"[1] and his discussion of the historical process of "the invention of the corridor" to explain this new spatial relationship within our home. This study propose the hypothesis that the screen and the digital workspace around it can be seen as a kind of "digital corridor" that enables interactions between different groups of people and reshapes the domestic space. Taking the Zoom meeting scenario as an example, the study discusses what this "digital corridor" consists of, how it works, and how it affects the organization, curation, decoration, and representation of the domestic space. This serves as an entry point to understand the contemporary live/work home. In the live/work home, the digital corridor connects the private realm and domestic life surrounding the subject (shown on the left side of the diagram 5-1) with the urban public space and many agents within the city (shown on the right side of the diagram 5-1). The role of the digital corridor is not only to allow the virtual space to enter—or invade—family and urban spaces but also to allow these physical spaces to re-invade the virtual space. Through mutual penetration, virtual and physical spaces intertwine, ultimately redefining the spatiality of our homes.

[1] EVANS Robin. Figures, doors and passages. *Architectural Design*, 1978,48(4): 267-78.

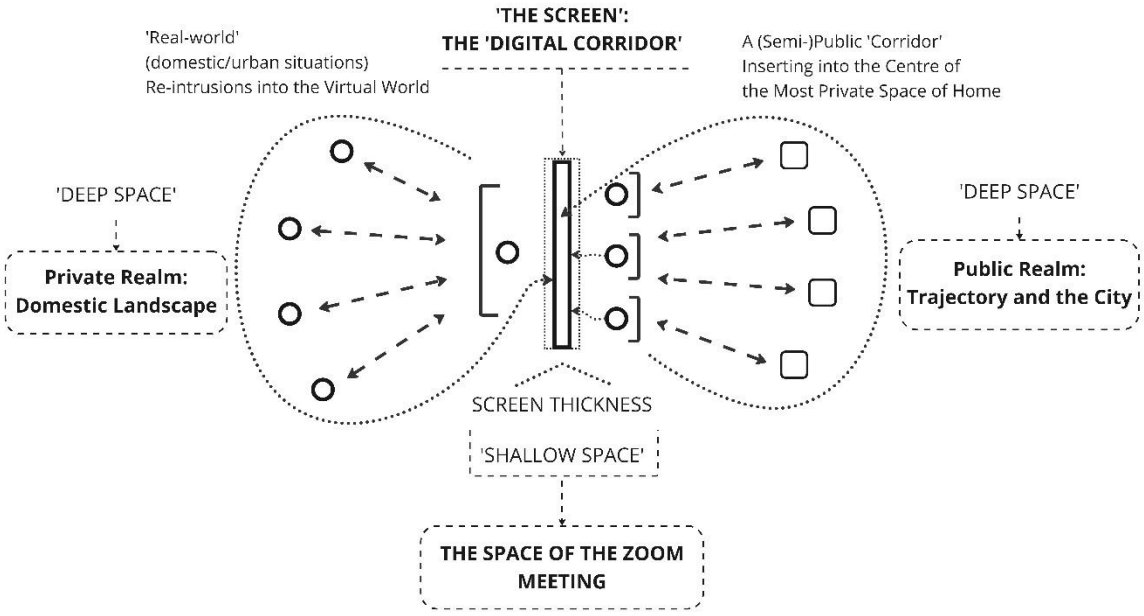



Figure 5-1 The diagram of the chapter's framework, which is mapped onto the structure of the Zoom meeting

Source: drawn by the author

## 5.2 The "Space" of the Zoom meeting

Taking the Zoom meeting, one of the most typical tasks in home-based work, as an example, the study will explore how the "digital corridor" operates and how it alters the public/private relationships within our home. Zoom meeting is an extended version of the traditional meeting room, where everything is concentrated within the thickness of the screen with the aim to bring people together. Online meetings and social media seem to reinvent the campfire and water-cooler technology (or the more recent photocopy machine) around which people gather and social groupings begin to coalesce[2]. However, online meetings differ significantly from the traditional face-to-face meetings.

### 5.2.1 A digital device

[2] For more about the activities or objects, through which individuals can connect deeply with their environment and community, and the essential to rediscover those things in a technologically dominated age, see: Borgmann, Albert. Technology and the character of contemporary life: A philosophical inquiry. University of Chicago Press, 1984. Borgmann introduced the concept of "focal things and practices" in this book, which refer to the activities, objects, or rituals that are rich in meaning and inherently rewarding. They are characterized by their ability to centre and engage individuals and communities in a profound way. Campfire and water-cooler technology are examples of focal things that can create opportunities for networking and resting.

Before joining a Zoom meeting, homeworkers would first find a suitable working space at home. The most common choice is the space in a dining room, study, or bedroom, where we sit at a desk with a computer, a phone, and a few items on the table, with a bookshelf or wall behind us (Figure 5-2). Choosing a shallow space is usually considered appropriate, as deeper spaces tend to imply richer, more public spatial information and are more likely to have unrelated people or sounds intruding into the meeting "space." An informant highlighted that “when the other person was in a deep space, I felt that they were not entirely with us; whereas when they were in a shallow space, like in front of a bookshelf, I felt much closer to them, as if they had come to my place, or I had gone to theirs, or we met in the middle”.

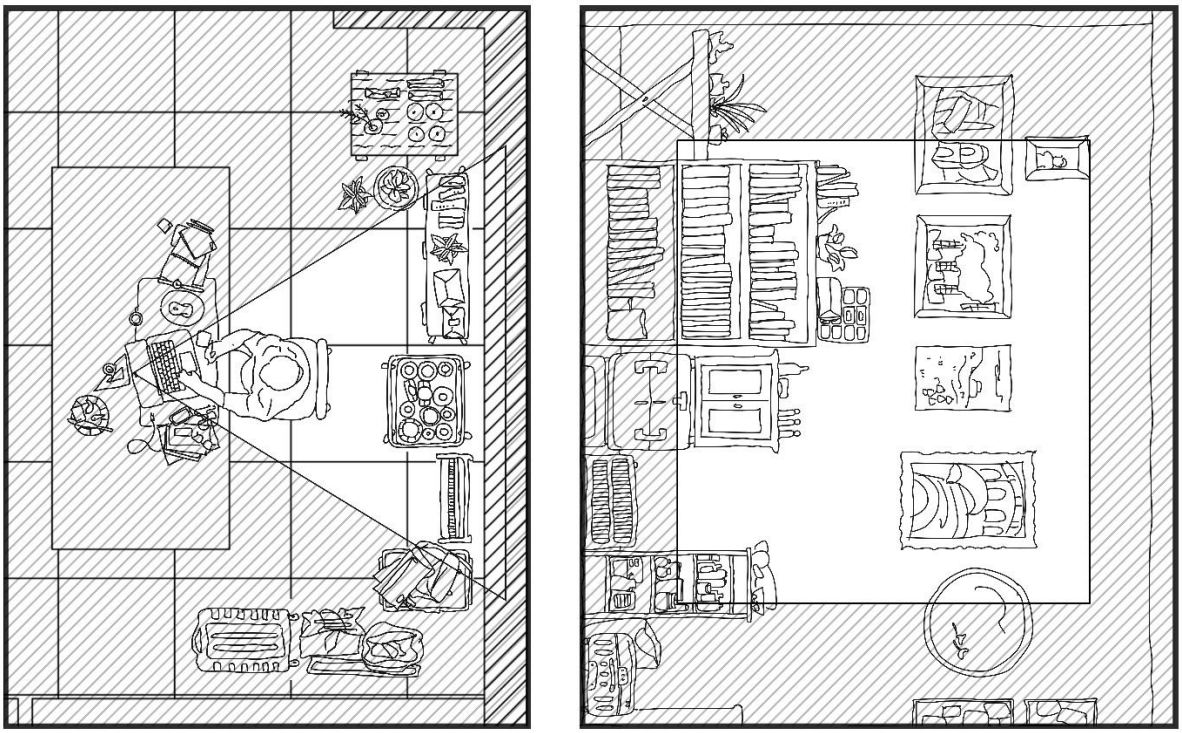


Figure 5-2 A typical Zoom meeting space at home

Source: drawn by the author

Normally, a digital "device" centred on a screen and camera, with a wall or bookshelf as the background, defines the "space" of Zoom meeting in the home. It is called an " device" because it serves as a tool for spatial representation and interaction, projecting onto the screen an orthographic representation of the interior space and the figure. This evokes the origins of painting. Painting itself originated from a type of projection involving a light source, a subject illuminated by the light, a surface behind the subject, and tools to trace the shadow. It forms the basis for linear perspective and architectural representation.

Albrecht Dürer’s woodcut “Man Drawing a Lute” (1523) (Figure 5-3) further illustrates the process of drawing a perspective. It shows the relationship between subject, object, apparatus

and projection, of producing a perspective drawing through a device. As noted by architectural scholar James Craig, the artist's eye is no longer aligned with the viewpoint as indicated by the hook and weighted string behind him[3]. Instead, the artist's line of sight is focussed on the drawing apparatus rather than the lute and the surroundings. This approach even allows a blind person to create a perspective drawing, signifying a detachment of the artist from their own subjectivity.

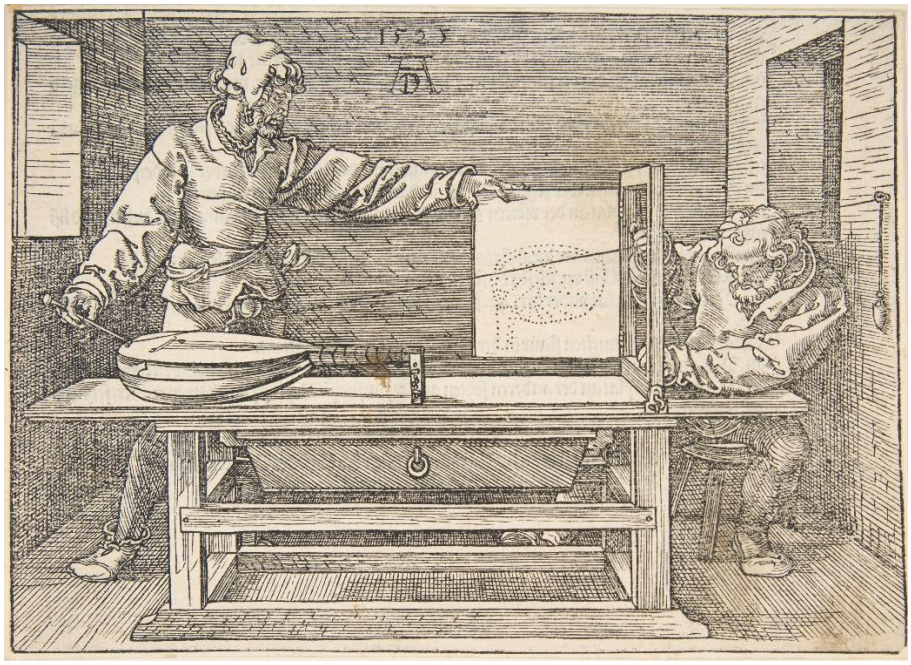


Figure 5-3 Man Drawing a Lute, woodcut, 13cm x 18cm. (Albrecht Dürer, 1523).

Source: Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, San Francisco.

A similar detachment can be observed in today's online meeting, where another framing device, a digital one, is imposed. Our attention is entirely focused on the screen, concerned more with the digital apparatus and the perfection of our projected image. In Dürer's experiment, the subject is confined to viewing and drawing solely within this framework. Similarly, our connection with the world today is mediated exclusively through the digital framework. There's always a screen interposing itself between us and the world, whether it's a phone capturing a child's first steps or a concert of a favourite singer. The logic of the digital world is shaping and normalizing our spatio-temporal understanding of the physical world.

### 5.2.2 Mutual Gazing and Self Gazing

[3] CRAIG James A., KAKALIS Christos P., and OZGA-LAWN Matthew. On Disjointed Bodies: Emergent spaces between the body and screen in pandemic-era architectural education. *Charrette*, 2021,7(1): 41-58.

This device enables mutual gazing of the Zoom meeting participants, which is a matter of circular embodied process of seeing and being seen involving mutual affording between self and other/s (Figure 5-4). However, gazing at each other online differs from real-space experience. In the virtual context, the circularity of seeing and being seen is disrupted[4]. Our faces and movements become more rigid than usual, sometimes even temporarily frozen, with delays or lags in responses. Moreover, without being able to ascertain the direction and duration of the gazes of others, participants tend to experience feelings of being constantly looked at or eyeballed, which engender feelings of anxiety. In such cases, non-speakers may choose to mute themselves and turn off their cameras to seek a more relaxed environment or to disengage from the meeting to some extent. This separation of mutual gaze allows participants to manipulate what and who they see, as well as control the extent to which their bodies are temporarily visible. But this control occasionally fails, such as one forgetting to turn off the microphone or camera could result in private conversations or behaviour being unintentionally compromised. This is akin to how servants wandering the corridors of a country house used to overhear disputes in the master's room. Such eavesdropping or voyeuristic acts temporarily blur the boundaries between public and private spaces, creating disturbing uncertainty.

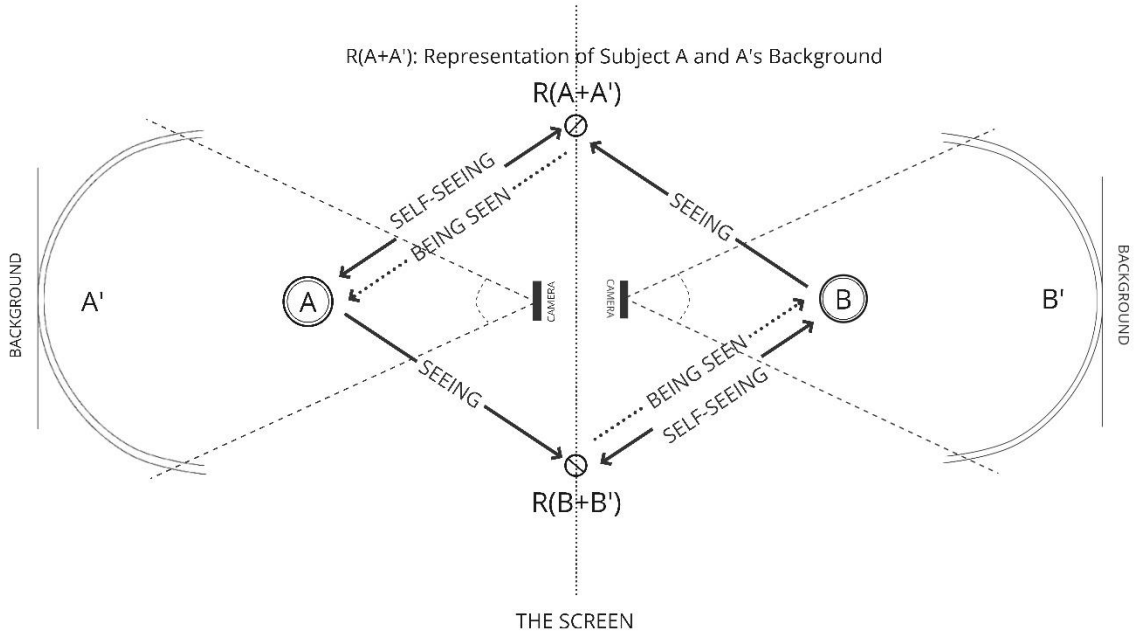



Figure 5-4 Mutual gazing and self-gazing in online meetings

Source: drawn by the author

In online meetings, we can not only see others but also ourselves, thanks to the self-view function provided by the platform. Confronted with our own, supposedly familiar faces,

[4] VIDOLOV Simeon. Uncovering the affective affordances of videoconference technologies. *Information Technology & People*, 2022,35(6): 1782-1803.

individuals often experience unease[5]. This sense of disorientation comes from an unfamiliar experience: viewing one's own body from a distance through the screen and digital media extends self-awareness beyond the physical body. Some people will pay attention to their facial expressions and make appropriate adjustments accordingly: “I keep the window with my face in the upper right corner and sporadically will have a look at myself. Sometimes, I’m surprised by the emotion my face is expressing and try to adjust to something more positive [...] move my look at my interlocutor but usually it is difficult to know if he noticed the change, or the initial emotion in the first place."[6] This can be understood as a form of self-monitoring, which introduces a degree of self-consciousness and regulation of one’s self-expression that inevitably leads to different self-feelings. Indeed, this self-viewing process starts even before entering the virtual meeting space, where we evaluate our appearance and backdrop in the preview window, deciding if any modifications are necessary. This mirrors the act of inspecting one's attire in front of a full-length mirror located in a home's corridor or porch (Figure 5-5). Positioned on the boundary between private and public realms, we frequently assess ourselves before stepping into the public world.

Figure 5-5 Mirrors for self-examination at a corridor or a porch

Source: courtesy of the author

Overall, the small windows of virtual meetings appear as if they were "self-portraits," having the "chameleonic potential," and can accommodate “expanding definitions of identity and

[5] WISEMAN Eva. Zoom Meetings Mean You Have to Face Your Own Face. *The Observer Magazine*, 2021-09-05:5.

[6] VIDOLOV Simeon. Uncovering the affective affordances of videoconference technologies. *Information Technology & People*, 2022,35(6): 1782-1803.

shifting notions of selfhood"[7]. Between mutual gaze and self-gaze, we carefully curate our identities, a complex identity in which ideals and realities are intertwined.

### 5.2.3 Digital Representation of Domestic Space: A Public Display

Interacting with the screen not only draws our attention to self-presentation but also reconnects the self with the materiality of the domestic interior, complicating our perception of the home interior. As the symbolism in Renaissance portraits might be analysed, so the interiors and bookshelves behind the Zoom sitter can be curated – or downloaded – and read[8]. This section focuses on the domestic backgrounds in the digital realm, exploring how individuals use material curation of their homes to achieve silent public expression.

The practice of public presentation through home curation has a certain historical continuity. Looking further back, homes often contained specific spaces, such as certain rooms or areas, designated for (semi-)public presentation. Unlike other "private rooms," these spaces were intended for (semi-) public viewing such as entertaining close friends and family members and sometimes also casual visitors. These rooms were specifically designed for activities such as gathering, eating, singing, sitting and talking, and are little used at other times, such as the 'front parlour' in traditional English working class homes. In these dedicated spaces, homeowners often engaged in public displays and identity expression through visual images and material objects within the home[9]. For example, the owner collects art, paintings or furniture from around the globe and decorates the walls and interior with the aim of creating a cozy atmosphere and symbolically reflecting the family's elegance and ambitions[10] (Figure 5-6). This practice of conveying identity through a carefully curated interior can also be seen in other semi-public spaces, such as the domestic corridor or street cafés (Figure 5-7).

[7] RUDD Natalie. *The Self-portrait.* London: Thames and Hudson, 2021:7.
[8] BRYDEN Inga. Lockdown portraits: Resituating the self. In *Interiors in the Era of Covid-19: Interior Design Between the Public and Private Realms*, London: Bloomsbury, 2023: 155-66.
[9] LUCAS Patrick Lee. Changing scenes: Image-making from parlour to screen. In *Interiors in the Era of Covid-19: Interior Design Between the Public and Private Realms*, London: Bloomsbury, 2023: 209-20.
[10] LOGAN Thad. *The Victorian parlour: a cultural study.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.


Figure 5-6 Walter Crane, frontispiece to The House Beautiful, Essays on Beds and Tables, Stools and Candlesticks by Clarence Cook, 1881, depicting a hostess preparing coffee in a meticulously decorated front parlour

Source: Clarence Cook, *The House Beautiful, Essays on Beds and Tables, Stools and Candlesticks*. New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Company, 1881.

Figure 5-7 Family photographs and paintings hanging on the walls of the corridor and staircase

Source: courtesy of the author

In the context of virtual meeting, the practice of self-presentation through home curation takes on deeper significance, and the dynamic relationship between people and objects becomes more complex. The agency of home backgrounds and objects is both diminished and heightened by their appearance on the screen. On one hand, the screen presents a flat surface. All the objects visible are, similarly, held in an equal, somehow “allover” plane; the lamp behind me is as important as my face. The space and volume of the room are dissolved, and the shape, depth or spatial relationships of the room are barely visible in the video. The boundaries between our image on the screen and the background become blurred. On the other hand, home environments and objects are endowed with new roles by appearing on the screen. We start to view the interior from an unfamiliar perspective, "the camera makes exotic things near, intimate; and familiar things small, abstract, strange, much farther away. It offers … both participation and alienation in our own lives and those of others"[11]. Moreover, as the virtual workspace overlaps with the actual domestic settings, domestic objects not only present the domestic narrative as in the 'front room', but also intervene in the articulation of professional identities. When the living of daily life bleeds into work interactions in unexpected and sometimes uncanny ways, it often provokes discomfort: “lately, certain realities of my home have appeared as if pasted to my flesh, and not always with my consent. Things I sought to occlude have become evident, and this is uncomfortable…What truly unnerves me is the fading illusion that I am able to construct personae that are distinct from my possessions and the ambient qualities of my home”[12]. We are compelled to conceal or alter our interior to better align with our professional self-image. Almost every home worker has experienced selecting, arranging, or decorating their background space, displaying the beautiful, tasteful, and relatively public aspects of their home while excluding the unprofessional, cluttered, and more private parts from the camera's view. Common choices for backgrounds include bookshelves, posters, paintings, family photos, decorations, or plants, with bookshelves being one of the most frequent options.

One interviewee showed me the large bookshelf he used as a background for online meetings (Figure 5-8), densely packed with books and adorned with family photos, travel souvenirs, handicrafts, and landscape pictures on each shelf. Despite the decline in paper book reading as a daily activity in the digital era, employing bookshelves and books as a backdrop for work and domestic life remains a strong convention, whether it is real books, imitation vintage book covers, or virtual wallpapers depicting bookshelves. This likely stems from the traditional association of books with intellectual elitism. Western media and popular culture have long emphasized the structure and symbolism of bookshelves. Historically, books and bookshelves have been symbols of knowledge, while organized studies and libraries have represented order. They also serve as a way to "read" the dwelling or its inhabitants. "The Library" by illustrator Elizabeth Shippen Green in 1905 (Figure 5-9) portrays the domestic life of a woman, depicting a cozy mix of decorative items and books, suggesting her intellectual and aesthetic pursuits at home. In the home office context, there is heightened scrutiny of the bookshelves and books visible in the background onscreen, leading to a new development in the

[11] SONTAG Susan. *On Photography.* New York: Penguin, 1977:167.
[12] MAPES Richard. A Guide to Zoom Self-Portraiture. *Places*, 2020-08. https://placesjournal.org/workshop-article/a-guide-to-zoom-self-portraiture/

interpretations of the displayed books. In April 2020, a Twitter account named "Bookshelf Credibility" (@BCredibility) [13] was created, wittily critiquing the bookshelves behind various public figures in virtual meetings (Figure 5-10). The account's description, "what you say is not as important as the bookcase behind you," intriguingly detaches individuals from the process of value negotiations and the books from their reading function, thus treating the bookshelf as a form of mute language. It underscores that in the context of Zoom meeting, the symbolic significance of personal images and environmental settings may even transcend the actual content and the essence of communication itself.

Figure 5-8 Zoom background settings, left: The home-working space, right: the details of the background bookshelf

Source: courtesy of the author

[13] Twitter account @BCredibility (https://twitter.com/BCredibility). It has over 100,000 subscribers by now.


Figure 5-9 The Library, Elizabeth Shippen Green (1905), one of a series of paintings for an article published in Harper's Magazine in 1905

Source: Delaware Art Museum

Figure 5-10 Selected images retweeted and commented on in the Twitter account "Shelf Credibility", 2020-2024

Source: Twitter feed @BCredibility (https://twitter.com/BCredibility)

Overall, in the "space" of a Zoom meeting, our identity is shaped by three interrelated components: our bodies, our minds, and our surroundings.

Our identities can hardly be separated from the qualities of the objects and environments which we inhabit; what we can do is to actively or passively curate our home settings to shape or control the identity information we convey. Yet, this ability to curate our home environment is in fact a privilege not available to all remote workers, who might lack the resources to conceal, manage, or modify their physical surroundings. For them, the ultimate solution might be to use virtual backgrounds to entirely separate themselves from any potentially embarrassing objects, while hoping that the artificial intelligence tracking figures within the space doesn't accidentally expose elements of the background.

### 5.3 Digital Live/Work and Urban Trajectories

Not only in zoom meeting spaces, our digital live/work homes also interact with the external world in a variety of ways, physically or virtually.

In Chapter 3, this study discussed a case of a family living in a Victorian house and mapped the living trajectories of each family member (Figure 5-11). Now, this study will further examine how, with the support of digital media, their daily trajectories extend beyond the house and across the entire city. Figure 5-12 zooms in on a small area of the dining space, showing the various activities of a home-based worker sitting at the dining table over the course of several hours. She works on her computer at the table, and also eats, drinks coffee, and checks her cell phone, all from the same spot. This diagram further maps out how these aspects of her live/work are connected to the urban space through digital interactions, like moving a mouse or swiping on a smartphone screen. While these trajectories may initially appear to be simple individual movements within a confined indoor space, they actually have extensive impacts in both the physical and virtual realms of the city, involving many participants. An instance is when a user orders food delivery on her phone, it triggers a sequence of actions by a delivery person in the urban space, from collecting the meal at the restaurant to traversing the city and ultimately delivering the meal to the user’s doorstep. Through the process, not only does the virtual space invade the physical space, but the physical space - such as the city and the house – re-enter the virtual space. The physical presence of individuals becomes evident in the virtual space and can sometimes be visually observed, such as when delivery personnel are GPS-tracked, allowing users to monitor their real-time movements and current locations on a city map via their phone screens. This mutual interaction weaves together the virtual and real domains, creating a seamless, integrated hybrid space.

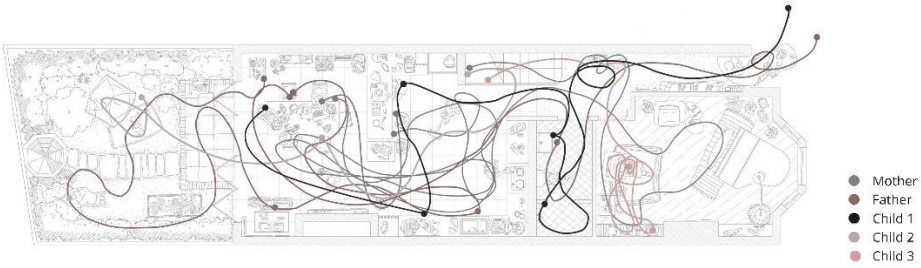



Figure 5-11 Diagrams of the living trajectories

Source: drawn by the author

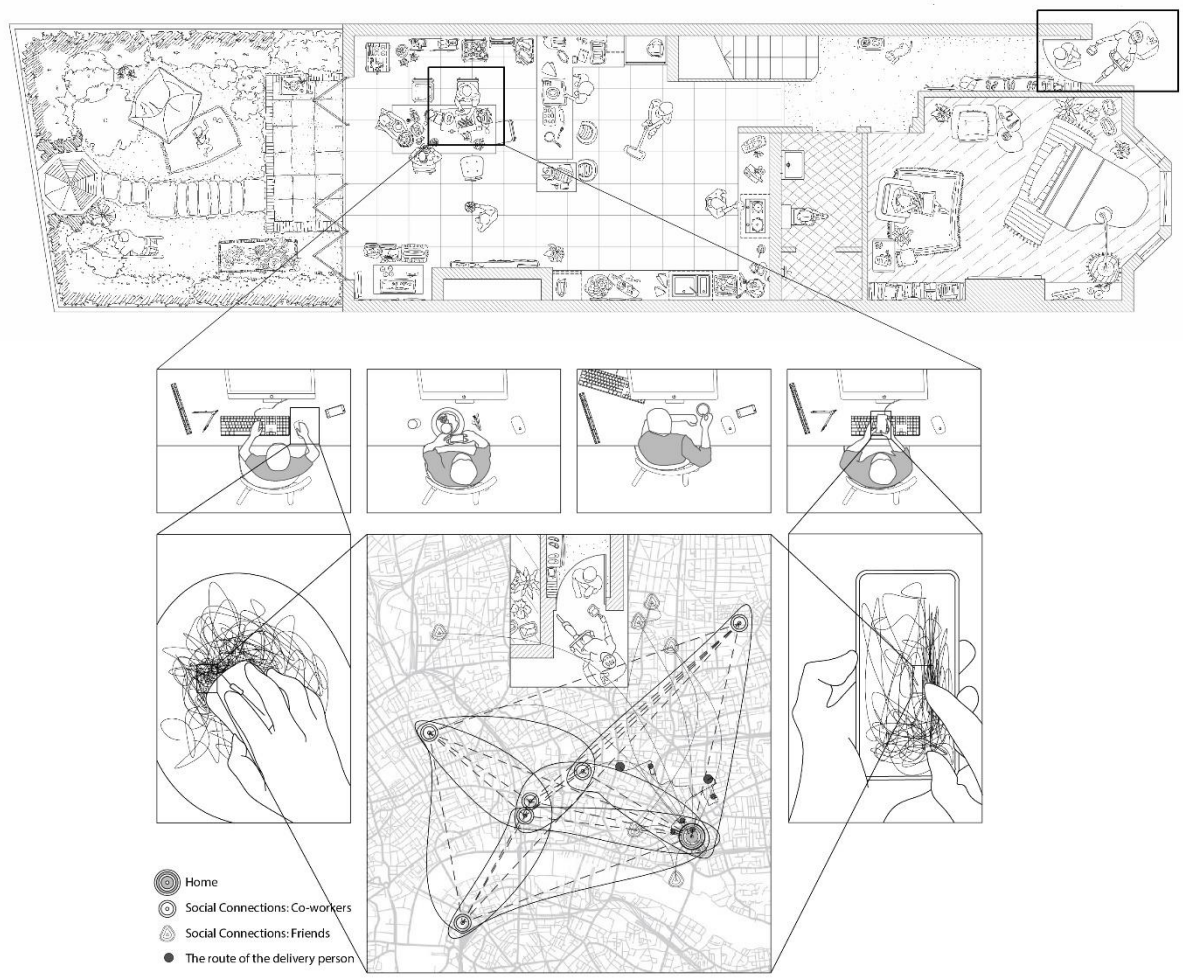



Figure 5-12 Home-based workers' living trajectories are intertwined in physical and virtual space, domestic and urban space

Source: drawn by the author

Such an effortless gesture can transmit a command, initiating physical actions by another person (or several people) at a distance, and bring them from an unseen location to face-to-

face interaction. This situation harkens back to how the bell system worked in British country houses from the late 17th to the 19th century (Fig 5-13).

According to Mark Girouard, in his 1978 book *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History*, the bell system began to appear in the 1760s and '70s[14]. The invention of the bell-rope and bell-pull made it convenient for servants to attend to their masters in their rooms. Back then, "the bells outside the servants' hall… are suspended in a row on the wall, numbered so that it is immediately seen in what room any-one has rung : a sort of pendulum is attached to each which continues to vibrate for ten minutes after the sound has ceased, to remind the sluggish of their duty."[15] Houseowners and servants often established specific commands, such as two short rings for a cup of tea. The bell system was continually improved. In the 19th century, another efficient technology was introduced: the electric bell, with a panel indicating in what room the service of the domestic was required. Soon afterwards, the whole house was wired up, connecting all the main rooms and bedrooms to the bell-board outside the servants' hall. By the late 19th century, with a speaking-tube, the precursor of the telephone, madam – seated in the dining-room upstairs – was able to give orders and communicate with her servant downstairs. It's very efficient and step-saving, for the speaking tube spared the servants the pain of extra walks up and down the stairs to receive their orders.

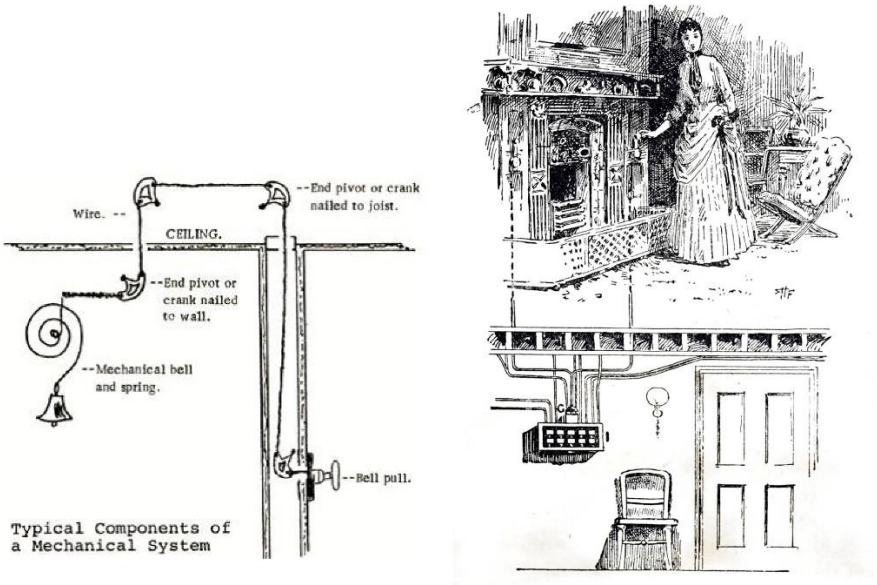



Figure 5-13 Illustrations of the bell system, left: Components of a Servant Bell System; Right: Engraving depicting a lady summoning a servant by means of a bell, in this case a pneumatic (compressed air) one which was operated by squeezing a small rubber balloon

Source: Tom H. Gerhardt, Old-House Journal, 1979.10;, Source: World History Archive, 1888.

[14] GIROUARD Mark. *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978.
[15] PÜCKLER-MUSKAU Hermann Fürst von, AUSTIN Sarah. *Tour In England, Ireland, And France: In the Years 1828, And 1829. With Remarks On the Manners And Customs of the Inhabitants, And Anecdotes of Distinguished Public Characters. In a Series of Letters*. London: E Wilson, 1832:44.

However, when the entire house was wired up, the connections between different areas of the house and various groups of people didn't become closer, but rather were more distinctly separated. With the bell system, there was no longer any need to have servants hanging around on hard wooden seats in the hall. Servants were expected to remain as invisible as possible, minimizing unnecessary interactions with the family. Houses were increasingly designed to keep staff out of sight and separate from the household except to the point of absolute necessity. Servants had their own separate area, often at the back, in the basement, or in a wing of the house, which included the kitchen, other service rooms, their bedrooms, and a separate staircase. The homeowners' growing need for privacy led to the necessity of a clear separation between public and private spaces within the house. The corridor, functioning as a "device", relocated circulation area from inside the room to outside, helping to establish a division between the serving and the served space. With the advent of the corridor and the evolution of house layout, domestic life underwent a change from integration to division, a process that also witnessed the formation of class, privacy and individualism.

Thus, we are back to the narrative of the "invention of the corridor". However, the function and use of corridors did not become fixed from that point onward. In the twentieth century, following the demise of the servants in households — or, to put it another way, the “agents” between the home and the outside world, the occupation or inhabitation of corridors and staircases began to take shape. The “occupation or inhabitation” means that corridors and staircases gradually became part of the living space, not merely passageways connecting different areas. For instance, corridors were used to place bookshelves, display artworks (see Figure 7), or set up as small work areas. Spaces under stairs were often converted into storage areas or private studies. Thus, spaces within the home that were once (semi-)public have been increasingly appropriated for private purposes. Furthermore, the distinctions between private and public spaces are not static; they change over time and context. Eventually, the public, semi-public, and private areas within homes blended together, forming complex, fluid spatial relationships.

At the same time, some functions previously performed by servants and corridors - such as connecting the home to the outside world - have taken on new forms within our domestic spaces. For example, through digital media – like screens and cameras the expanse of urban public spaces is now integrated into our homes, facilitating communication and interaction with groups across spatial and temporal distances. These digital interfaces act as new types of "corridors" in contemporary homes.

### 5.4 Digital Corridors: Reinventing the Subtle Tension Between Private and Public Life

This chapter focuses on recent changes in the living experience of live/work home supported by digital media, with particular attention to the interaction between the virtual and physical worlds.

The chapter takes the activity of conducting a Zoom meeting as an example. Firstly, the study suggests that the ubiquity of screens in the home and people's interactions with them carry profound implications. Then, building on Robin Evans' concept of the "invention of the corridor" as discussed in *Figures, Doors, and Passages*, this study proposes a new spatial pattern in the home: digital interface as virtual corridors. In other words, the digital workspaces centred around screens and cameras, set against bookshelves or walls, can be considered a kind of "digital corridor": a (semi-)public interface space inserted into the middle of a “private” home. Opposed to Evans critique on the corridor as device of social separation, the study argues that it multiplies interactions between different systems, groups, and spaces, while also transforming the structure of spatial arrangement and family life. The contemporary live/work home, then, presents an endless domestic landscape shaped by technological media, everyday objects, and lived practices. Most importantly, today's digital live/work home reintegrates family life and paid work – the domestic interior and the wider city – while reinventing the subtle tensions between private and public life.

# CHAPTER 6

# DISCUSSION

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyses and interprets the results from the case studies in the previous three chapters, highlighting the main findings of this research—the various new patterns of spatial inhabitation that emerge from the interaction of space, objects, and living activities in contemporary live/work homes. It also compares these findings with the expectations based on existing literature at the start of the study, explaining the reasons why the findings either meet or deviate from these expectations Furthermore, the chapter points to another layer of conclusions based on these spatial patterns—how the relationships between the public and the private in contemporary homes can be re-envisioned. Finally, the research methodology, particularly the drawing method, is critically reflected upon, discussing its contributions and limitations.

### 6.1 New Patterns of Spatial Inhabitation

First, this research identifies various new patterns of spatial inhabitation that arise from the interaction of space, objects, and living activities in contemporary live/work homes.

#### 6.1.1 Identifying Eight Spatial Patterns

Evidence:

The evidences are gathered from: 1) original floor plans of the studied cases, sourced from urban planning archives, online databases, or published drawings of its architect, which were corrected through on-site surveys by the researcher; 2) the interviews with home-based workers. The inhabitants talked about their family members, daily work and living activities, lifestyles, and spatial appropriation practices; 3) my field investigations of their homes, gathering evidence of their inhabitation from the material traces of their living environments, especially focusing on the spatial consequences of how objects are arranged.

Findings:

Causal Relationship: The evidence shows that changes in technology and society have impacted how people live and work. Due to new living demands and scenarios—such as increased home-based work and the deep involvement of digital media—people are modifying or appropriating their conventional home space to achieve some balance. These adaptations aim to meet individualized needs and to find a more comfortable relationship between private and public spaces.

Correlative Relationship: After their appropriation, their houses/apartments show some new patterns of spatial inhabitation, indicating that the organization of living is no longer

constrained by the predetermined spatial structures of the original layout. The significance of corridors in spatial structures is also notably diminished. More significant elements in spatial organization include domestic objects and digital media. Unlike the rigidity of walls, these objects are more flexible and adaptable to increasingly mobile and dynamic domestic activities.

Argument:

This study identifies the patterns of living in contemporary live/work homes within general urban housing. Here are several typical new spatial patterns (and corresponding new "corridor" models) that present various relationships between the private and the public:

a) An intimate, intertwined, fluid, and continuous domestic landscape

Although people still live in conventional houses with corridors, the overlap of productive and reproductive activities has reintroduced an interesting friction into our homes. Domestic scenarios are evolving towards a state of bodily intimacy, intertwined routines, and spatial openness with multiple functions. This bears some resemblance to the spatial layout of 16th-18th century European villas, characterized by multiple connections and flexible transformations between different rooms.

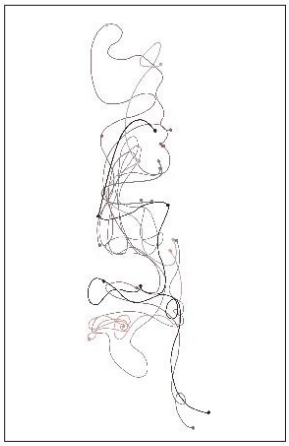



Figure 6-1 Patterns of Spatial Inhabitation: Diagram A

b) A domestic pattern of leaping, small territories

As the flexible home space no longer follow established choreography, people can be nomads in our own homes, creating small "territories" for living or working at any time and place—whether within the home or the city—and being able to jump freely between them. The setting of small territories, or the potential for certain activities to take place in these zones, largely depends on which objects are placed there and how they are arranged.

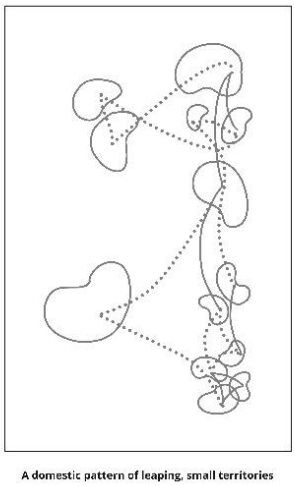



Figure 6-2 Patterns of Spatial Inhabitation: Diagram B

c) An aggregated, shared, mixed, and multicultural experimental space

Contemporary live/work homes are not just spaces where family members work remotely, but also can be shared, mixed, and multicultural experimental spaces that foster spontaneous collaboration and interaction among different individuals and activities. This spatial pattern evokes the lifestyle of 19th- to 20th-century artists residing in small-scale factory-turned-living spaces, commonly known as lofts. Within the loft, various living activities and creative work were unrestricted. Artists freely engaged in painting, sculpting, performing, and experimenting, without being constrained by traditional family relationships. This study shows that such hybrid experimental living/work modes can not only occur in open, vertical lofts but are increasingly prevalent in many conventional urban houses today.

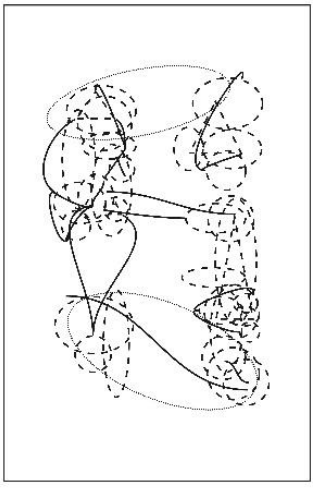



Figure 6-3 Patterns of Spatial Inhabitation: Diagram C

d) A Porous Vessel: Pores as a kind of Corridor

The “porous vessel” allows controlled exchanges between its internal and external environments. The “pores” of the house can take the form of physical elements such as

windows, balconies, doorways, bed alcoves, niches, recesses, and arches, or more abstract elements like visual connections, shared atmospheres, or ambient sounds. Even a single object can serve as a "pore"—due to the cultural, historical, or social meanings it carries. These pores not only allow for the flow of air and light but also for the exchange of ideas, emotions, and memories. In this model, the various "pores" within the home, regardless of size, act as metaphorical corridors. Unlike traditional rigid boundaries separating the inside and outside, the porous structure encourages continuous yet selective flow between the home's interior spaces and its external surroundings. Through controlled permeability, these pores create a dynamic dialogue between home and the outside world, fostering a hybrid living form that integrates privacy with urban engagement.

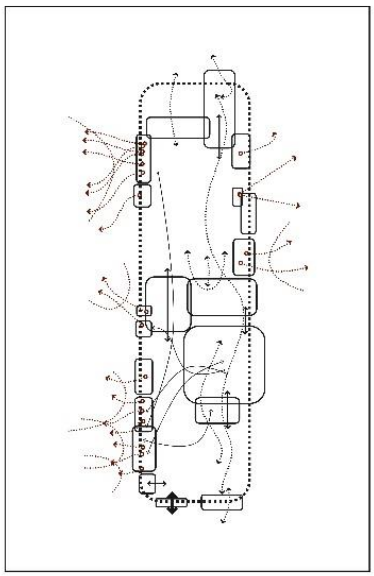



Figure 6-4 Patterns of Spatial Inhabitation: Diagram D

e) A Multi-centred Network: Urban Corridors Connecting Dispersed Live/Work Territories

In this model, the boundaries between home, workplace, and public space are continuously renegotiated. The home is no longer a single, fixed place but is instead a series of live/work patches scattered throughout the city. These patches can be seen as nodes in a network, connected by a system of urban corridors—streets, digital networks, public transportation, and shared spaces. This type of corridor is an essential infrastructure for creating flexible, adaptable, and multi-centred living patterns. This multi-centred network not only allows for physical mobility but also fosters emotional and social mobility, enabling individuals to navigate between different roles, relationships, and communities.

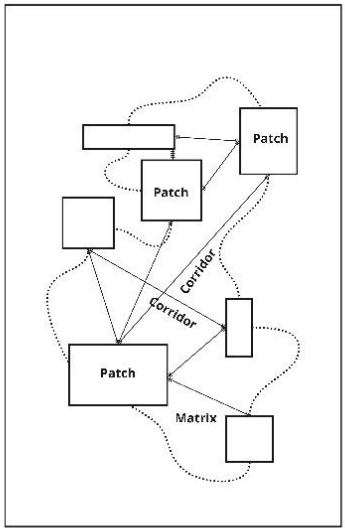



Figure 6-5 Patterns of Spatial Inhabitation: Diagram E

f) Digital Interface as a Virtual Corridor

In this model, the digital workspaces centred around screens and cameras, set against bookshelves or walls, is considered a kind of "digital corridor": a (semi-)public interface space inserted into the middle of a “private” home. Opposed to Evans critique on the corridor as device of social separation, it multiplies interactions between different systems, groups, and spaces, while also transforming the structure of spatial arrangement and family life. The contemporary live/work home, then, presents an endless domestic landscape shaped by technological media, everyday objects, and lived practices. Most importantly, the digital corridor reintegrates family life and paid work – the domestic interior and the wider city.

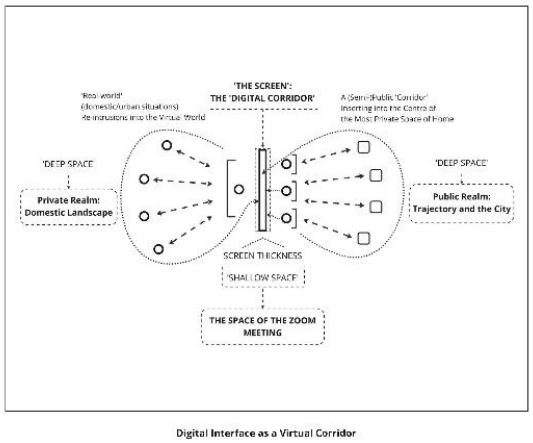



Figure 6-6 Patterns of Spatial Inhabitation: Diagram F

In addition to these new living patterns that break through the limitations of conventional home space, the study has also observed some conventional or rigid domestic patterns:

g) A conventional private home of elaborate functional divisions

While some housing designs aim for openness, fluidity, and transparency, the domestic patterns can revert to more conservative values, traditional domesticity, and a clear separation between public and private spaces. Homes in these cases are seen as pursuits of comfort, security, and privacy, as well as symbols and carriers of cultural taste and social status. The quest for “privacy as a privilege” could further nurture a capitalist concept of living ideals.

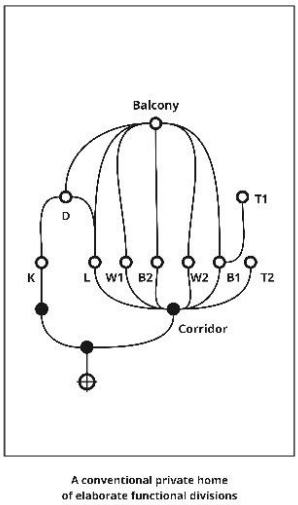



Figure 6-7 Patterns of Spatial Inhabitation: Diagram G

h) A mediated, visualized, and aestheticized "ideal" home

When media promotion becomes closely intertwined with one’s homemaking practices, and when the home is opened—either consciously or unconsciously—to the public eye through mediated images, the living pattern might evolve into a "mediated, visualized, aestheticized" state. The home turns into something to be "performed" or "displayed" for external audiences. In this context, everyday living traces or private information are often hidden, and the home becomes a space for visual consumption.

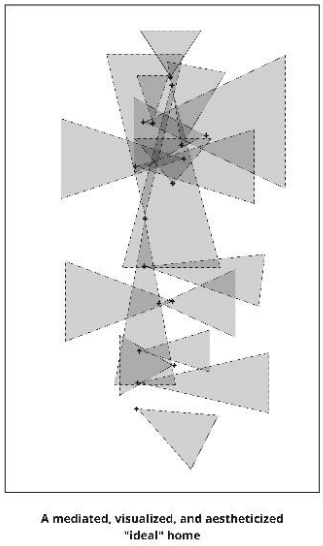



Figure 6-8 Patterns of Spatial Inhabitation: Diagram H

### 6.1.2 Comparative Reading on the UK and Chinese Cases Regarding Spatial Patterns

Although these models (from a to h) were summarized from UK and Chinese cases separately, they are universal and coexist in digital live/work homes in both countries (and even globally). For example,

- Example 1: The small-territory pattern (b) or the intimate and fluid pattern (a) can also be observed in many other cases. Most contemporary home-based digital workers have experience working in various spots around the home, such as the living room sofa, dining table, bedroom, or even the bathroom.

This is also the case in China, for example, in Chinese architect JIN's case. Their daughter moves between different spots in the minimal home, like the *'kang'* bed, working desk, and living area, for reading, studying, and drawing. The couple also works or rests in various spots within the limited space. The porous interior allows for continuous visual interaction among family members, presenting an intimate and fluid living state.

- Example 2: The multi-centred network pattern (e), characterized by nodes scattered throughout the city and community, is evident in many (almost all) cases. For instance, in the UK case, illustrator Katie's daily life often involves sketching plants and fungi at museums, by the Thames River, and in cafés and parks. Similarly, for residents of the Barbican Estate, the community's rich infrastructure and garden landscapes are significant factors in their choice of residence. Each resident has a master key to access all the community gates, and their daily lives revolve around important nodes like the Barbican Arts Centre, garden spaces, and neighbourhood cafés. In another UK case, like art curator Liu's case, her home is open to artist friends, and she also runs a creative store within walking distance on Brick Lane, which is another vital node for her life and work. She also meets clients and collaborators in nearby

cafés and restaurants. Thus, the multi-centred network pattern can be seen in almost all contemporary urban homes.

- Example 3: The rigid, imaged aesthetic appropriation (h) is also evident in many homes where the interior space or background is set up for Zoom meetings. Sometimes the arrangement is for showing off, like large bookshelves, and sometimes for aesthetic appeal, such as paintings or fresh flowers. Regardless of the motivation, the placement of objects is intended to be seen, implying the potential presence of a public audience. To some extent, this can turn the home, or parts of it, into something to be "performed" or "displayed" for external audiences.

- Example 4: The concept of digital interfaces as a virtual corridor is evident to varying degrees in almost all contemporary homes and urban life, as long as people continue to use digital devices.

Initially, this study anticipated pronounced differences between the UK and China, given their divergent housing types and cultural histories. Yet, the findings indicate that diverse spatial patterns coexist in both regions, prompting a deeper exploration of the underlying causes of this convergence. Three primary factors emerge, each warranting further elaboration:

1) ***Globalized Cultural Exchange***

The increasing interconnectivity of global cultures facilitates the mutual influence of living practices, eroding traditional distinctions. Digital platforms, international media, and professional networks expose inhabitants in both the UK and China to similar lifestyle aspirations and spatial solutions. For example, the adoption of Zoom as a global workplace tool standardizes how homes are staged for visibility, as seen in both Liu's multicultural displays and the Barbican residents' curated bookshelves. This cultural exchange suggests that globalization acts as a homogenizing force, aligning domestic behaviours across disparate regions. Future analysis could deepen this by examining specific vectors of influence—such as Western design trends in Chinese urban homes or British adoption of minimalist aesthetics—and their impact on spatial convergence.

2) **Diminished Role of Physical Configurations**

The study underscores that contemporary spatial patterns are less dependent on physical housing layouts than on how inhabitants adapt spaces to their needs. Victorian terraces in the UK and compact apartments in Beijing, though architecturally distinct, host similar patterns like fluid landscapes or leaping territories. Within Victorian houses alone, diverse uses emerge—some residents create continuous domestic landscapes, while others carve out small, mobile workspaces—demonstrating that occupant agency and lifestyle demands override structural constraints. This shift diminishes the significance of traditional architectural elements like corridors, as digital tools and movable objects (e.g., laptops, screens) redefine spatial boundaries. To expand this insight, future research could quantify how much physical layouts influence spatial patterns versus behavioural adaptations, perhaps through comparative floor-plan analyses across more housing types.

3) **Dominance of Digital Technology**

The most compelling driver of similarity is the pervasive role of digital technology, which standardizes spatial practices across cultural and economic divides. Digital devices—laptops, smartphones, and video interfaces—function similarly worldwide, enabling patterns like digital corridors that connect homes to external networks irrespective of location. In Jin's case, reliance on digital storage over physical books reflects a practical response to limited space and mobility, a trend echoed in UK cases where digital workflows dominate. This technological convergence likely accelerates the adoption of fluid, networked living patterns globally, as digital tools prioritize connectivity over physical separation. A deeper investigation could explore whether this homogenization masks subtler cultural resistances or adaptations, such as differing attitudes toward digital privacy or device dependency.

Despite these similarities, differences persist, offering a counterpoint to the convergence narrative. China's rapid urbanization fosters a quicker embrace of new technologies and lifestyle shifts, as seen in Li's multiple renovations and Jin's shift to a fully digital workflow. In Jin's case, the couple primarily relies on laptops and smartphones for work, having largely abandoned physical books in favour of digital storage. This decision is not only shaped by spatial constraints but also by the anticipation of frequent relocations, making a minimal, digital-based lifestyle more practical. This pattern is common among Chinese families, where traditional habits of reading physical books and newspapers have largely faded, further reflecting a broader cultural shift toward digital work and living.

In contrast, UK cases like the Barbican residents often retain conventional values, favouring privacy and traditional domesticity despite living in modernist housing. While digital tools are integrated into daily life, there is a greater tendency to maintain physical books, personal archives, and distinct living-work separations. These divergences suggest that while digital technology and globalization align spatial practices across cultures, local contexts—such as the pace of urbanization, housing availability, and cultural norms—still exert significant influence. To deepen this analysis, future research could explore how socioeconomic factors (e.g., income inequality, housing costs) or historical legacies (e.g., the UK's post-industrial urbanism vs. China's post-reform growth) shape the adoption and adaptation of these evolving spatial patterns.

Overall, this forementioned convergence challenges assumptions about cultural specificity in domestic design and usage, positioning live/work homes as sites of globalized adaptation rather than localized tradition. The similarities likely reflect a broader shift in the digital age, where technology and mobility redefine home as a flexible, interconnected space rather than a fixed cultural artifact. Future studies could build on this by testing these patterns in additional contexts—such as rural settings or less digitally saturated regions—to assess the limits of this convergence and uncover the interplay of global forces and local agency in shaping contemporary domesticity.

## 6.2 Re-envision the Relationships between the Public and the Private

### 6.2.1 Verification some of the Hypothesis

Through historical research and literature analysis, the study concludes that the relationship between the public and private spheres has never been completely separated, even though it has constantly evolved at different historical stages. They always intertwine with each other, maintaining a certain tension between each other. Even during periods of mass industrial production, when there was a clearer distinction between private and public life, an "unseen hand" still intervened in private homes.

The findings of this study reveal that the interwoven relationship between public and private spheres has deepened further in contemporary homes and become more complex and diverse due to the involvement of digital media.

### 6.2.2 New Findings Beyond Expectations

Finding 1:

Initially, this study assumed that in a certain period and under a specific socio-economic context, there would generally be only one dominant concept and setting of public and private spheres. However, through subsequent case studies, this study discovered that in contemporary homes, the concepts, boundaries, and relationships of public and private spheres are diverse. Based on the case studies, the thesis indicates that there are several typical models of public-private relationships in contemporary homes:

1) No Clear Boundaries between Public and Private: Fluid Interweaving, Flexible Coexistence

For example, in the case of London art curator Liu, her home becomes an open, multicultural, and experimental space, emphasizing social interactions and collective participation in her living. There are no definite boundaries between the public and private domains within and around the home; instead, they are fluidly interwoven.

2) Managed and Controlled, Mutual Invasion or Permeation within Defined Boundaries

For instance, the "pores" in domestic space serve as areas where public and private spaces permeate each other. They allow for connection between the two realms while also providing privacy when needed.

3) Clear Division of Public and Private Spheres, Emphasizing the Importance of Personal Privacy

This model is closer to the Victorian understanding of public-private relationships. An example can be found in the home of the retired textile designer couple at Barbican.

4) Complete openness of the private sphere to the public

For example, in the interior designer Tom’s case, his home is entirely open to the public gaze, turning the private space into part of the visual consumption space.

5) The Virtual Space and the Physical Space of Public and Private Spheres Overlap, Influence, and Change Each Other Constantly

This situation is observed in cases of digital live/work home in Chapter 5.

Different interpretations and configurations of public-private relationships exist in contemporary urban homes. Based on each inhabitant's unique living practices and repeated experiments, a comfortable state is eventually stabilized for them. Therefore, this study also reflects on our interpretation of the historical relationships between public and private spheres. The relationship may not have developed linearly but rather as a diverse and nuanced phenomenon where various models could coexist at different times. This hypothesis can be tested in future historical research.

Finding 2:

The configuration of physical space, including architectural elements like corridors, no longer play an essential role in constructing public and private spheres. Instead, the more critical factor influencing and altering public-private relationships today could be domestic objects or digital media.

First, the organization and arrangement of domestic objects are increasingly playing a critical role in defining spatial interactions. More mobile and flexible objects have a closer and more direct relationship with living activities. Unlike static walls or other physical spatial elements, objects can be repositioned at any time to meet changing needs. The arrangement of objects (including lighting) can create multiple spatial layers within a room, suggest different zones, or establish temporary partitions—practices necessary for visual and partial sound separation in digital work scenarios. In the meantime, objects can also blur the rigid boundaries between different spaces within a home—between public and private spaces—so that even with physical separations like walls and corridors, the interior remains continuous, open, and fluid.

Secondly, digital technology is also beginning to play a significant instrumental role. For example, with the help of digital devices, people can instantly retreat into their "digital private space," even in crowded environments, finding a certain "safe haven" in the virtual world. Taking the setting of a smartphone as an example, the moment one sit down on the couch and take out their phone to enter the digital realm and interact with the world, they're in their own world, disconnected from the person sitting right next to them.

On the other hand, digital media can also bring the “private” home into the public view. Therefore, this study sees digital media as a kind of "digital corridor." It multiplies interactions between different systems, groups, and spaces, thus transforming the structure of spatial arrangements and family life. Overall, these digital media reintegrate the domestic interior with the wider city, while reinventing the subtle tensions between private and public life.

## 6.3 Reflections on the Methodology

### 6.3.1 Studying Interior by Integrating Housing, Rooms, Furniture, Objects, Inhabitation Activities, Trajectories, Territories, and Perception

This conclusion pertains to using the integration of multiple types of information—such as housing, rooms, furniture, living trajectories, and narratives—in case studies as a research methodology for interior and housing studies. The case analysis in this thesis does not just focus on the houses, rooms, furniture, or the inhabitants in isolation; rather, it examines them in conjunction. This approach envisages the multiple engagements between the housing/houses, rooms, furniture, objects, and aesthetic forms, as well as the active role of inhabitants in the homemaking activities, and their living trajectories, territories, and perceptions. It provides detailed depictions and descriptions of these aspects and concerns them together. As such, this thesis presents an innovative tool to study environments rich in inhabitation and inspired by lived experiences, which have been difficult to examine by conventional architectural approaches.

This study posits that when writing about housing in the future, particularly when aiming to highlight the culture of inhabitation, an alternative approach can be adopted: rather than considering only architectural history, it is beneficial to overlay it with a history of inhabitation.

However, although this research method has a certain degree of universality and can be applied to cases of habitation across various regions and eras, the availability of sufficient research material to reconstruct a complete, continuous inhabitation story becomes a major limiting factor. The meticulousness required for this approach is very high—it demands continuous and complete narratives of family life, detailed information of domestic objects, and inhabitation activities. When dealing with historical cases where information is often fragmented, accurately reconstructing the state of habitation becomes difficult, making it challenging to derive precise conclusions using this method.

Moreover, different residents or cultural contexts may require some modification on this research methods. For instance, in a case called "Empty" from Daniel Miller's book *The Comfort of Things*, the resident's home is devoid of any objects[1]. Here, our method of focusing on material elements loses its effectiveness because the key point of this case is the "absence of material elements." For such cases, it is necessary to explore alternative research methods to materialize the traces of everyday living.

### 6.3.2 The Role of Drawing

[1] Miller, Daniel. The Comfort of things. *Polity* (2008). See “Portrait 1 Empty”.

To better achieve the aforementioned integration of information in the analysis, this thesis employs a detailed drawing method. Reflecting on the drawing method used in this study, it becomes clear that without these drawings, many of the nuanced spatial patterns of inhabitation—the interactions between architectural structures, inhabitants, and their material culture— would remain invisible. The ability to go beyond the layout of the house and observe how individuals negotiate and appropriate their living spaces is a crucial contribution of this method. By overlaying housing plans with the material realities of everyday life and scenes of inhabitation, these drawings transcend the static, sanitized representations commonly produced by architects. They reveal the dynamic, evolving relationships between people, objects, and space, which are crucial for understanding contemporary live/work homes.

Specifically, by incorporating both precise and imprecise drawings, the method captures not just the measurable dimensions of space but also its lived, momentary qualities. The precise CAD-based plans provide an objective foundation, while the hand-drawn details evoke the dynamic and fleeting nature of domestic life. Moreover, the drawings in this study give equal importance to walls, furniture, objects, and people—represented with the same line weight—challenging the typical hierarchical distinctions in architectural representation. This approach reflects the reality that these elements are interdependent in creating the lived experience of space.

However, this method is not without its limitations. As mentioned, it requires a high level of detail about the inhabitant's story, object arrangements, and living scenes to accurately build an understanding of their living culture, which many cases may not provide. Additionally, while the drawings in this study richly describe the current usage of the home space, they do not convey the passage of time or the evolving nature of inhabitation. Future research could explore how drawing might trace the changes in spatial inhabitation over longer periods. This would offer a deeper understanding of the relationship between home culture and broader social and cultural contexts.

In summary, the drawing method used in this study offers a unique lens through which to view domestic spaces, emphasizing how the interactions between architecture, objects, and people are organized. These drawings not only document the interior settings but also interpret and reimagine it, providing both analytical and creative tools for understanding contemporary live/work culture.

# CHAPTER 7

# CONCLUSION

In the digital age, working from home has become a widespread phenomenon, blurring the lines between public, productive activities and the private sphere of the home. This shift challenges the traditional notion of the home as a sanctuary insulated from work and public life, prompting a re-examination of domestic living patterns and spatial experiences. This study investigates these changes within contemporary live/work homes in urban settings, focusing on creative industry professionals in UK and China. By revisiting Robin Evans' discussion of the corridor, the research explores how digital homeworking reshape spatial organization and the boundaries between public and private realms.

Utilizing a layered drawing method, this study mapped the intricate relationships between housing layouts, rooms, furniture, objects, and inhabitants' daily activities in live/work homes. The findings reveal a striking "ecological diversity" in spatial patterns, underscoring the pivotal role of digital technologies in transcending traditional physical constraints and redefining domestic life.

## 7.1 Conclusion by referencing back to the original research questions

This conclusion section synthesizes the key findings and arguments by directly linking them back to the original research questions, demonstrating how they have shaped the study's insights while also paving the way for further inquiry.

### 7.1.1 Patterns of Living in Contemporary Live/Work Homes

**Original Question:**
*What are the patterns of living in contemporary live/work homes within general urban housing?*

**Findings:**
This research identified a variety of new spatial inhabitation patterns in contemporary live/work homes, driven by the integration of work and living activities and the influence of digital technology. They exhibit notable "ecological diversity." These patterns, observed in case studies from London and Beijing/Shanghai, include:

- Intimate, intertwined, fluid, and continuous domestic landscapes: Spaces are reconfigured to support overlapping work and personal activities, reducing rigid functional divisions.
- Leaping, small territories: Inhabitants create flexible, temporary workspaces throughout the home, shifting between areas based on need.
- Aggregated, shared, mixed, and multicultural experimental spaces: Homes serve as collaborative hubs, reflecting diverse lifestyles and interactions.
- Porous vessels: Features like windows and balconies act as "pores," enabling controlled exchanges between private interiors and public exteriors.

- Multi-centred networks: Urban corridors link dispersed live/work nodes across the city, extending the home beyond its physical walls.
- Digital interfaces as virtual corridors: Screens and devices create semi-public interfaces within private homes, enhancing connectivity.

**Sub-question 1a:** *How do the floor plans and spatial patterns of the house/apartment change in the context of new live/work, particularly what new roles do corridors (or digital corridors) play?*

**Specific Findings for Sub-question 1a:**

The study revealed that conventional floor plans and spatial patterns are significantly altered in live/work homes. These transformations emerge primarily through two interconnected mechanisms: residents' autonomous modifications of physical spaces and evolving patterns of space usage even when the physical structure remains largely unchanged.

**1) Physical Renovations**
Firstly, the changes in spatial configuration originate from residents' own modifications of the physical environment.

For instance, in Victorian terraced houses in the UK, common modifications include:

Demolishing internal walls to create open-plan living areas, which foster a sense of spaciousness and fluidity.

Installing skylights to address the typical Victorian issue of poor natural lighting, thereby enhancing the comfort and functionality of the space for both living and working.

Adding glass doors to connect kitchens directly to back gardens, blurring the boundaries between indoor and outdoor spaces and aligning with contemporary desires for a closer connection to nature.

These physical changes not only improve the spatial flow and lighting but also reflect a broader trend toward creating environments that support the flexible, intertwined nature of contemporary live/work practices.

Similarly, in apartments, such as the Beijing case study, residents may undertake multiple renovations over time to adjust the home's layout, materials, colours, and functions in response to evolving live/work requirements. In one particular example, the inhabitants renovated their home four times over several years, each iteration reflecting their changing professional and family needs. These repeated modifications underscore the dynamic nature of contemporary living and working.

**2) Shifts in Spatial Usage Patterns**
Secondly, even when the physical structure of a space remains relatively unchanged, the

patterns of usage undergo substantial transformation. The initial design assumption—that each space is designated for a single function—no longer applies. Instead, domestic spaces are increasingly used in an interwoven, mixed, and fluid manner. As career trajectories and family structures evolve, the functional requirements of these spaces continuously change, leading to a diverse array of usage patterns.

A particularly representative example of this shift is the transformation of the corridor's role. On one hand, the traditional function of corridors, which once played a key role in separating spaces, has diminished in importance. In many cases, the strict public-private division characteristic of conventional private residences no longer persists. In the mixed live/work model, the spatial and temporal needs of various activities for home workers become more fluidly interwoven.

On the other hand, the study identified multiple new forms of "corridors" that no longer act as dividers but rather as connectors. Examples include:

- **A Porous Vessel:** where subtle openings or "pores" within the structure function as transitional corridors;
- **A Multi-centred Network:** wherein urban corridors connect dispersed live/work territories, reinforcing an integrated spatial experience;
- **Digital Interface as a Virtual Corridor:** an increasingly common phenomenon observed in live/work homes in the UK, China, and globally.

This shift is primarily due to the fact that the physical configuration of space is no longer the most crucial factor in shaping living patterns. Digital technologies have begun to play a key instrumental role. Although housing types in China and the UK differ significantly, the layouts—including corridors and other architectural elements—are no longer the primary determinants of how domestic life is organized or how the boundaries between public and private realms are defined. Instead, digital media now exerts a more critical influence on reshaping public-private relationships. This study views digital workspaces, centred around screens and cameras, as a form of (semi-)public "digital corridor" integrated into private homes—a phenomenon that is increasingly universal. Contrary to Robin Evans' critique of the corridor as a tool for social isolation, these digital corridors enhance interactions among different systems, groups, and spaces, thereby establishing new distinctions between public and private domains.

Collectively, these findings underscore the profound reconfiguration of domestic spaces in response to evolving live/work demands. They highlight a dual transformation: one that is physically tangible through renovations, and another that is intangible through shifts in spatial usage patterns and digital mediation. Such insights call for a re-examination of traditional architectural paradigms and signal that future housing models must integrate both physical adaptability and digital connectivity to fully address the complex dynamics of contemporary live/work.

**Sub-question 1b:** *What roles do domestic objects play, and what new meanings do they produce in daily living and working—how do they reflect certain relationships between the public and private realms?*

**Specific Findings for Sub-question 1b:**

This study reveals that domestic objects in contemporary live/work homes have evolved beyond their conventional purposes, taking on expanded roles as multifunctional tools, mediators, and interfaces. These objects actively reshape spatial patterns and social dynamics, reflecting a renegotiation of the boundaries between public and private realms in the context of hybrid living and working practices. The findings highlight their significance as active agents rather than passive elements, offering fresh insights into how material and digital objects redefine domesticity in the digital age.

**Key Roles and New Meanings of Domestic Objects**

**1) Hybrid Surfaces supporting Work-Life Integration**

Domestic objects such as dining tables, kitchen islands, sofas, and desks now serve dual or multiple purposes, adapting to the overlapping demands of professional and personal life. A dining table, for instance, transforms into a workstation during the day and reverts to its domestic role for meals, embodying the fluidity of live/work environments. This multifunctionality blurs the traditional separation between public (work-related) and private (home-centred) domains, creating hybrid spaces where activities intermingle. These objects symbolize a cultural shift toward integrated living, where the home accommodates both productivity and leisure, challenging the notion of fixed spatial roles.

**2) Boundary Mediators: Negotiating Visibility and Access**

The rise of remote work has elevated the performative role of domestic objects, particularly through platforms like Zoom. Bookshelves, artwork, and plants are strategically arranged as backdrops to project a curated image to external audiences, as observed in both UK and Chinese households. This staging transforms the home into a semi-public stage, where objects mediate the intersection of private spaces and public scrutiny. This role underscores how objects shape social perceptions and negotiate visibility in virtual contexts.

Furniture and objects like bookshelves, plants, and screens also act as flexible markers of territory, redefining spatial boundaries within the home. Unlike static architectural features such as walls, these objects enable dynamic control over privacy and interaction. For instance, strategically placed foliage or a bookshelf might obscure a cluttered corner during Zoom meetings, transforming private chaos into public professionalism, while a portable screen creates a temporary workspace. This adaptability highlights their role as active agents in managing the balance between openness and seclusion, reflecting individualized approaches to public-private boundaries.

**3) Facilitators of Fluid Inhabitation**

Domestic objects enable new patterns of spatial use, supporting a more nomadic and adaptable form of domesticity. Portable desks, mobile partitions, and portable devices allow inhabitants to reconfigure spaces spontaneously, accommodating the unpredictable rhythms of work and leisure. This flexibility marks a departure from traditional single-purpose rooms, fostering environments where the home is continually reshaped. Objects thus become enablers of "leaping small territories," where inhabitants move fluidly between zones, reflecting a broader transformation in how domestic space is experienced.

**4) Data Interfaces Bridging External World**

A novel contribution of this study is the identification of digital objects as "digital corridors" that connect the private sphere to external world. These devices facilitate constant connectivity, channelling information into the home while simultaneously exposing it to surveillance and data exchange. This role complicates the public-private divide, as the home becomes permeable to global networks.

**5) Agents of Power Relationships**

Domestic objects serve as agents of power relations within the home, revealing asymmetries in labour, control, and resistance. Women, in particular, disproportionately manage the "emotional logistics" of object-mediated boundaries, undertaking tasks such as tidying shared workspaces and adjusting lighting for video calls. This reinforces historical associations between femininity and domestic labour,. Meanwhile, the spatial organization of work areas further reflects underlying power dynamics. While some family members adapt to flexible, temporary, and mobile workspaces, others assert dominance through fixed installations such as built-in desks, claiming stable and permanent territories that signal their authority over domestic labour distribution.

At the same time, domestic objects also become instruments of subversion, as some inhabitants actively resist digital surveillance and technological intrusion. Strategies such as covering smart speakers with fabric or repurposing bookshelves as physical barriers highlight an ongoing negotiation between control and autonomy. These small yet deliberate acts reclaim agency in an era where digital infrastructures increasingly shape patterns of domestic life, positioning objects as tools of both compliance and resistance within evolving power structures.

In live/work homes, domestic objects have transcended their traditional roles, emerging as mediators, curators, thresholds, facilitators, and digital interfaces. These functions produce new meanings—flexibility, visibility, connectivity—that reflect and shape the evolving interplay between public and private realms. By negotiating boundaries, enabling adaptability, and linking the home to external systems, objects underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of material culture in the digital age.

### 7.1.2 Visualizing and Analysing Spatial Patterns: A Drawing Approach

**Original Question:**
*How can this study develop a spatially specific approach to draw and analyse the living patterns and spatial arrangements in contemporary homes?*

**Findings:**
To tackle the second research question, this study developed a diagrammatic approach that integrates multiple layers of spatial data—floor plans, furniture arrangements, object placements, and inhabitants' trajectories. This layered drawing method provided a nuanced lens to analyse living patterns and spatial arrangements, revealing insights invisible through conventional architectural or ethnographic methods. For instance, it illuminated how digital devices create virtual corridors that link the home to external networks, fundamentally altering spatial experiences. This methodological innovation stemmed from the need to capture the complex spatial patterns identified in the first research question, yielding a tool that enhances the study of contemporary interiors.

This study demonstrates that drawing is not merely a representational tool but an analytical and interpretive method that reveals the spatial and social dynamics of contemporary live/work homes. By overlaying scaled architectural plans with traces of everyday living and material culture, the drawings in this study articulate the negotiations between structure, people, and objects, illustrating how dwellings are continuously adapted to accommodate evolving live/work practices. The integration of both precise CAD-based drawings and imprecise hand-drawings allows for a nuanced depiction of domestic life, where fixed spatial frameworks intersect with transient and dynamic acts of inhabitation. This methodological approach not only challenges the abstraction and neutrality of traditional architectural drawings but also underscores the relational nature of domestic space, treating furniture, objects, and human activities as equally significant agents in spatial production.

Ultimately, by engaging with drawing as both a systematic and imaginative process, the study contributes to an alternative mode of architectural representation—one that foregrounds the lived realities, fluid inhabitation, and socio-spatial negotiations that define contemporary domesticity.

### 7.1.3 Re-envisioning Public-Private Models

**Original Question:**
*Based on an understanding of the preceding knowledge, how can new models of public and private realms be re-envisioned in the digital age?*

**Findings:**
Building on the insights from the previous questions, the third research question led to a re-envisioning of public and private realms in the digital age. The study proposes that the traditional binary distinction is inadequate for capturing the complexity of live/work

homes. Instead, it identified several coexisting configurations of the public-private relationship:

- No clear boundary, with fluid intertwining and coexisting of public and private spheres
- Controlled interaction, where each sphere invades the other within defined limits
- Clear division, maintaining distinct public and private spheres
- Overlapping and evolving spheres, reconfiguring in both virtual and physical dimensions

These configurations arise from inhabitants' unique practices and experiments, stabilizing into personalized comfort zones. This multiplicity challenges conventional notions of privacy and positions live/work homes as sites of cultural regeneration and social negotiation.

The progression from identifying living patterns (question 1) to developing an analytical method (question 2) and re-conceptualizing public-private models (question 3) illustrates how each question built upon the last. The observation of home-based work and digital technologies reshaping domestic life sparked questions about their spatial implications, leading to methodological innovation and, ultimately, a broader theoretical contribution.

## 7.2 Research Contributions

**1) Contribution to Research Content:** Identifying Current Spatial Patterns in the UK and China's Contemporary Live/Work Homes

This research identifies the current patterns of living in live/work homes in the UK and China, with a particular focus on the various new patterns of spatial inhabitation that arise from the interaction of space, objects, and living activities. The study not only reveals significant changes in contemporary living patterns in both countries but also offers insights into global home cultures. By emphasizing cross-cultural similarities between the UK and China—shaped by digital technology and homeworking trends—this research highlights the worldwide applicability of these spatial patterns.

**2) Theoretical Contribution:** A Re-envisioning of the 'Corridor' Model

This research revisits the original definition of the 'corridor' model by Robin Evans, reconceptualizing the private and public relationships within the home. It identifies several new "corridor" models that connect the internal and external, the self and others, the home and the city, the public and the private, facilitating the flow of information, relationships, emotions, and memories between these domains. It contribute to a re-conceptualization of the public-private relationship in today's urban living.

**3) Contribution to Research Perspective:** A Physical-Virtual Perspective of Thinking 'Live/Work'

This study advances the ongoing discourse on live/work environments by offering a novel perspective that integrates the physical and virtual dimensions of home-based work in the digital age. One key contribution is the introduction of the "digital corridor" concept. This reimagined spatial element challenges Robin Evans' critique of the traditional corridor as a device of separation, instead positioning the digital corridor as a facilitator of interaction between different systems, spaces, and people. This conceptual framework deepens the understanding of how physical and virtual realms are intertwined and negotiated in contemporary domestic settings.

**4) Contribution to Research Methodology:** A Diagrammatic Approach to Interior Study

This research introduces a diagrammatic approach for the detailed observation and spatial analysis of interior spaces, which allows for a more nuanced understanding of living patterns. By employing a layered drawing method, the study reveals intricate relationships between the house, rooms, furniture, objects, and residents' living trajectories, territories, and perceptions. These drawings are crucial because they provide insights that would otherwise remain hidden. Without them, we would not fully grasp how the spatial role of corridors has changed in contemporary housing, nor would we recognize that, despite differences in floor plans, certain social classes in both the UK and China share remarkably similar lifestyles today. This drawing approach enhances the way interior studies are conducted by emphasizing the complex, interwoven nature of physical space and human interaction.

**5) Contribution to Practice:**

The identified spatial patterns offer valuable design references for creating flexible live/work spaces, particularly in compact urban dwellings where spatial adaptability is essential. By highlighting how domestic objects, furniture arrangements, and spatial configurations facilitate fluid transitions between work and everyday life, this study provides insights into optimizing limited space for multifunctionality. These findings can inform architects, interior designers, and policymakers in developing housing solutions that accommodate evolving patterns of inhabitation in contemporary urban settings.

## 7.3 Research Limitations

**1) Limitations in Case Study Diversity**

This study faces certain limitations, particularly in the diversity of its case studies. Due to pandemic-related restrictions at the time the research plan was formulated, on-site investigations were constrained, preventing the inclusion of a broader and more varied set of cases. This restriction limited the range of housing types, family structures, and home-working models examined. As a result, the findings may not fully represent the spectrum of live/work environments.

To address this, future research could explore a wider array of contexts, such as live/work models in converted warehouses or lofts—prevalent in areas like Shoreditch or Hackney in London, where artisanal production and residential spaces coexist. Similarly, co-living spaces, which blend shared living and working areas, offer another avenue for

investigation. Additionally, examining living patterns in China's commodity housing—home to much of the country's middle class—could provide valuable insights into diverse ways people balance work and life at home. Expanding the case study scope in these directions would enrich the understanding of spatial adaptations across different cultural and architectural settings.

**2) Narrow Focus on Knowledge-Based Work**

A notable limitation of this study is its exclusive concentration on knowledge-based work, defined as intellectual, often digitally mediated work typically performed in home settings. This narrow focus sidelines other forms of domestic work—such as manual, artisanal, or service-oriented work—that may occur in homes functioning as workshops or small production hubs. The emphasis on knowledge work is a product of the pandemic context, during which remote work predominantly involved this sector, influencing both the selection of case studies and the spatial analysis. As a result, the study's findings—centred on spatial patterns and object arrangements associated with knowledge work—may lack applicability to homes where physical or craft-based activities predominate, thereby constraining their broader relevance.

Even within the realm of knowledge work, the study fails to account for significant variations. For instance, workers collaborating across time zones might establish dedicated night-time workspaces equipped with specialized lighting to minimize disruption to cohabitants, while those reliant on professional setups—such as microphones, acoustic treatments, or multi-monitor configurations—may necessitate specific spatial or electrical modifications. Moreover, the research overlooks roles that integrate cognitive and physical labour. Consider, for example, a ceramicist who designs digital models while simultaneously crafting physical prototypes; this hybrid labour generates unique spatial demands that bridge digital and material domains, yet such complexities remain unaddressed. These examples highlight the heterogeneity within knowledge work, suggesting that the spatial dynamics of live/work homes are more diverse than the study's framework implies.

The analysis further neglects how sociocultural factors—such as gender, class, and caregiving responsibilities—intersect with knowledge work to shape spatial practices. Caregiver-workers, for instance, may face distinct challenges in reconciling professional obligations with domestic duties, potentially leading to spatial adaptations not captured in the current findings. Additionally, while comparisons between UK and Chinese cases revealed unexpected similarities, cultural nuances within knowledge work were underexplored. British participants frequently maintained rigid 9–5 schedules, enforcing clear boundaries between work and personal life, whereas Chinese participants exhibited greater fluidity between work and family time—a divergence likely rooted in differing work cultures rather than merely the affordances of digital tools. Compounding this limitation, some individuals rejected smart technologies outright, adopting "low-tech" or resistant live/work strategies that challenge the study's technology-centric perspective.

To overcome these shortcomings, future research should expand its scope to encompass a broader spectrum of home-based work, including manual and artisanal activities, while delving into the nuanced variations within knowledge work. Exploring how gender, class, caregiving roles, and cultural contexts influence spatial practices would further enhance

the analysis, providing a more comprehensive understanding of live/work homes. Such an approach would yield a richer, more holistic perspective on how diverse homeworking practices and personal circumstances shape the spatial and material dynamics of contemporary domestic environments.

**3) Limitations in Research Methodology**

The research methodology employed in this study also presents limitations. The drawing method used relies heavily on detailed information about inhabitants' stories, object arrangements, and living scenes to construct an accurate picture of their home culture. However, such granular data may not be available in many cases, restricting the method's applicability beyond this study. Furthermore, while the drawings effectively depict current spatial usage, they fail to capture the temporal dimension—how inhabitation evolves over time. This static perspective limits insights into the dynamic nature of home environments. Future research could explore how drawing might trace the changes in spatial inhabitation over longer periods. This would offer a deeper understanding of the relationship between home culture and broader social and cultural contexts.

## 7.4 Future Research

This study provides a foundational analysis of live/work homes within the context of knowledge-based work, yet its scope—both geographical and conceptual—reveals limitations that future research can address. The following directions highlight opportunities for further investigation, with an emphasis on broadening the geographical lens and expanding the thematic framework.

**1) Expanding Geographical Scope**

The current research centres on the UK and China, yet a broader geographical scope could enrich our understanding of live/work homes globally. Future studies might examine regions such as North America, continental Europe, or Southeast Asia to uncover similarities and differences in spatial patterns. For instance, how do cultural attitudes toward privacy, economic conditions, or urban density shape domestic adaptations and spatial patterns in these contexts? Investigating the mechanisms behind these variations—whether rooted in policy, technology, spatial, or cultural norms—could reveal universal trends as well as region-specific dynamics, providing a more nuanced global perspective on live/work home.

**2) Broadening the Definition of Knowledge Work**

This study focuses on intellectual, digitally mediated work, but future research could redefine knowledge work to include roles that blend cognitive and manual tasks. Professions such as digital artists, who design via software yet produce physical artworks, offer untapped potential for analysis. How do these hybrid roles influence the use of domestic spaces, such as the need for dual-purpose areas accommodating both screens and tools? Expanding the scope to encompass these diverse forms of knowledge work would deepen insights into the spatial and material demands of contemporary home.

### 3) Beyond Knowledge Work

Moving beyond knowledge work, future studies could explore how other labour types—such as material production or gig economy activities—reconfigure domestic environments. Artisans crafting goods for platforms like Etsy or gig workers like Uber drivers and delivery personnel may adapt their homes in distinct ways, such as creating workshops or storage zones. How do these configurations differ from the screen-dominated setups of knowledge workers? Examining these practices would illuminate the diversity of live/work arrangements and their implications for domestic spatial culture.

### 4) Intersectional Analysis

An intersectional lens could further enhance this research by exploring how gender, class, and caregiving responsibilities shape spatial practices within live/work homes. For example, women or lower-income workers balancing professional tasks with childcare may face unique challenges in carving out functional workspaces. How do these factors influence the negotiation of public and private boundaries or the allocation of domestic space? Such studies would reveal the hidden social dynamics of live/work adaptations, offering a more inclusive perspective on who inhabits these spaces and how.

### 5) Decentring Technology

While this study emphasizes digital tools as enablers of live/work homes, future research could decentre technology by examining "low-tech" or resistant models. Some individuals may reject smart devices, prioritizing simplicity or privacy over connectivity. How do these choices alter spatial arrangements, and what do they suggest about agency in the face of digital determinism? Investigating these alternative approaches would challenge assumptions about technology's inevitability and highlight diverse ways of integrating work into domestic life.

### 6) Temporal Extensions

The static snapshot provided by this study could be complemented by longitudinal research tracking how live/work spaces evolve over time. Following households over years or decades could reveal the durability of these adaptations and their responsiveness to life transitions, offering a dynamic view of domesticity's relationship with work.

### 7) Additional Directions

Beyond these core areas, future research could explore the influence of external factors such as policy shifts (e.g., remote work regulations or housing laws) or economic trends on live/work homes. Architectural design also warrants attention: how do different building layouts enable or constrain different types of work? Additionally, sustainability considerations—such as energy-efficient spatial adaptations—could intersect with live/work practices, aligning this research with broader societal challenges.

By addressing these limitations and pursuing these directions, future studies can build on this thesis's contributions, charting paths toward a more inclusive and critical exploration of domesticity in the digital age. This expanded scope, particularly through a wider geographical lens, will illuminate the diverse ways in which work continues to reshape the home across contexts and cultures.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A- Questionnaires

### Questionnaire Version 01

**Working at Home during the Pandemic: Questionnaire**

**Part One: Background Information**

- **Personal Information** :
    - What is your occupation?
    - How long have you been working from home during the pandemic?
    - Where is your home located?
    - Who do you live with?

**Part Two: Experience of Living and Working at Home**

- Please describe your overall experience of living and working at home during the pandemic.
- How has your daily routine changed compared to before the pandemic?
- What are the main challenges you have faced while working from home?
- How have you adapted to these challenges?

**Part Three: Use of Home Spaces**

- Please describe the key areas in your home that you have used for work and living during the pandemic.
- How have these areas supported your daily activities?
- Have you made any changes to the way you use your home spaces during this period?

**Part Four: Impact on Home and Work Life**

- Have you experienced any changes in your relationships with family members due to the pandemic and working from home?
- What do you think are the long-term impacts of the pandemic on the way we live and work at home?

Note: This questionnaire is designed to gather initial insights into the experiences of living and working at home during the pandemic. Your responses will help us understand the challenges and opportunities of

working from home and inform future research. Thank you for your participation.

## Questionnaire Version 02

### Working at home during the Pandemic in China: the architects' perspective

### Background

Since the end of 2019, severe COVID-19 outbreaks swept across China and the whole world. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic. Countries around the world have taken unprecedented mandatory measures in response to the epidemic, starting in China. On 23 January 2020, the central government of China imposed a lockdown in Wuhan and other cities in Hubei province in an effort to quarantine the centre of the outbreak. In the following days, travel restrictions and lockdown were also imposed on other provinces and cities. On the community scale, "closed management" was implemented. This entailed that communities and villages would only keep one entrance and exit point open, and each household is allowed to leave the house a limited numbers of times per day. People entering and leaving the neighbourhood are required to have their temperature taken and to wear masks. All these measures entailed a collective experience in China: 'Co-isolation' at home for nearly two months. It might be the first time in human history that public life has been shut down on such a large scale during peacetime.

While the economic and social circulation is slowing down, the connection between people in virtual space is accelerating rapidly. Supported by new information technologies, telecommunications, online payment, express delivery, etc., in many sectors working comes to be located at our home and many public activities are transferred into cyberspace. Ready or not, almost everyone starts to work from home, and many are surprised to find that in fact, every day gathering and frequent face-to-face communication is not always necessary. A large amount of work can be done as well at home, if not better. People posted a large number of photos and short videos on various social media, reflecting the multiple overlapping uses of home in this extreme situation. Now that our experience of living and working at are being reshaped and redefined, how should we transform our dwelling unit, block, neighbourhood and the city to better integrate workspace and domestic space?

While industrial capitalism depended on a spatial separation between workplace and dwelling, informational capitalism tends to bring these spheres back together. Therefore, it's time to investigate home-based work and virtual social interactions during the quarantine and the consequent shifts in domesticity. By re-examining the functional transformation of contemporary

urban housing, we could design and regulate the built environment better to accommodate new types of everyday life, at both the building and the urban scale.

**Project Outline & Its Aims**

The aims of the study are the following:

1. to show how architects' own experience of being at home during the Pandemic informs their understanding as design professionals and how the conception of the home has shifted
2. to explore how the home is inhabited by the family as a collective and as a unit of individuals
3. to investigate the conceptual and practical implications of intermeshing the world of work and the world of home
4. to propose the lessons that can be learned from the pandemic regarding the design of the home, as well as its relationship to the scale of the block, the district and the city
5. to identify the Chinese architects and scholars who intervene in contemporary urban housing, to observe their critical design practice and research, and to look into the possible constitution and trends of an 'academic community'.

There will be two main sections of the project.

The first section will consist of the hand drawings of participates' own homes and viewpoints regarding the conception and design of the home from senior architects and architectural scholars. The author's name will be indicated on his works.

The second section will be my analytical drawings and research findings regarding collective-individual territory and the public-private territory in the dwelling unit based on the data and materials provided by young architects. The participates who take part in this section will be anonymous.

Hence, the research questions and main contents of each chapter are:

1. What does home mean to architects?

- How does architects' own experience of being at home during the Pandemic inform their understanding as design professionals?

- Has the conception of the home shifted?

Architects will be asked to conceptualize their understanding of their own home through a drawing, then describe what they have drawn around 3-5 keywords.

2. Collective and individual territories in the family unit

- How is the home inhabited by the family as a collective and as a unit of individuals?

- How are relationships enacted, activities accommodated, and belongings distributed?

- How has working from home redistributed actual and symbolic space?

These questions will be explored by mapping (1) actual spatial layout and belonging distribution; (2) the time spent and the activities throughout the day/week; (3) the perceptual sense of territory in different spaces at home. As Clare C. Marcus pointed out that 'the one who claims a particular space (to be his/her territory) tends to either spend more time in it than the partner or to have done more work on it, or both.' So it is possible that the length of time (alongside with other factors) is related with the sense of territory and control over a specific space, which will be explored in this study.

3. Private and public territories at home

- What are the conceptual and practical implications of intermeshing the world of work and the world of the home?

- How has working from home redistributed private and public territory within the dwelling unit?

The former and current situation of the complex relations between public and private, inside and outside, virtual and physical will be explored by identifying and mapping space usage, in order to see how two different ways of engagement with people, places and things coexist at home.

4. Future homes

- What lessons can be learned from the pandemic regarding the design of the home, as well as its relationship to the scale of the block, the district and the city?

- As architects, how could we design and regulate the built environment better to accommodate new types of live-work life?

**Cases and Materials**

The participates includes two groups:

(A) 10 senior architects and architectural scholars who are active in contemporary housing design or research in China

(B) 10 young architects who experienced long-time home-working during the pandemic

Materials:

1. The built form and visual experience of ‘home’ in architect's drawings

2. Narrative of domestic life in language or text

3. The spatial structure of the dwelling plan; The temporal structure of everyday life

4. Photographs, plans, and text descriptions of architects' independent housing study or housing design

By juxtaposing the photos of those architects' housing designs with the drawings of their own homes, this study tries to represent the relationship between their outward-facing design strategy and their inward-facing living state, which may show some contradiction and consistency.

**Interview questions**

(The following questions are for both group A and B, except for those specially marked.)

**PART ONE**

**Background Information**

Everyday Life during quarantine:

How long were you under home quarantine?

Where were you staying during the quarantine?

Who did you live with?

How was quarantine controlled/managed in your neighborhood?

Is there any change in neighbourhood relationship?

**PART TWO**

**What does home mean to architects?**

Could you conceptualize your understanding of your own home through a drawing? Could you describe this drawing? (What did you draw? How did you draw it?) (For group A only)

Please describe your home in 3-5 keywords and explain those words you chose.

How did you experience self-isolation/being-at-home during the pandemic? How did it differ from former times?

Could you talk about a housing design/research project you did before? (Provide photos, plans, texts, etc.) Why did you do research on urban housing/community? How would you do it differently now, if given the chance? (For group A only)

While you live in the commodity housing estate, which are usually mass-produced, socially pervasive and lack of spatial characteristic, the designs you did are trying to oppose or transcend the mainstream conventions and shows a strong self-consciousness and critical thought. What is the relationship between your outward-facing design strategy and inward-facing everyday living? (contradiction and consistency) (For group A only)

**PART THREE**

**Collective and individual territories in the family unit**

Could you sketch a plan of your home? Including spatial layout and belonging distribution (For group B only)

How long have you lived in your current home? How many times has it been renovated? Please describe the major/minor transformations.

Are there any changes in your apartment during the pandemic? (The change of function, position of a furniture or users; Physical renovation)

What would you like to change about the apartment, if possible?

How do you spend your day? Could you map the time spent and the activities throughout the day in different spaces at your home? (For each family members) (For group B only)

Do you think you need some privacy and a certain territory of your own at home? What are your solutions?

Asking each family member to classify each room and piece of furniture in terms of who it belongs to. Could you please describe your mapping a little bit? (For group B only)

**PART FOUR**

**Private-public territory at home**

How was your working mode before/during/after the quarantine? (full virtual/combination of virtual and real space/return to normal)

Do you think you have enough space to have workspaces in your home?

Thoughts on homeworking: Is it harder to maintain a work-life balance?

Did showing your work status in front of your family, or your domestic life to your colleagues (such as a sudden intrusion into a video conference by a family member) cause any discomfort? Have you taken any spatial separation measure to prevent such situation? Or you think it's OK to happen occasionally.

Have you changed home decoration to suit working needs, e.g. for online meeting?

Could you identify the more public and more private space at your home before/during/after the quarantine? What is the difference in the distribution of private and public territory over three periods of time? What factors affect its public or private attributes in your point of view? (For group B only)

Could you describe the view from your study at home and your office? What can/can't you see? Could you provide some photos or sketches? (For group B only)

**PART FIVE**

**Future homes**

Now that the restrictions have lessen, what is the legacy of this period? What lessons can be learned from the pandemic regarding the design of the home, as well as its relationship to the scale of the block, the district and the city?

How will we inhabit differently? How should we transform our urban built environment to better accommodate new types of live-work life? And more specifically, how should we consider our housing provision to better integrate workspace and domestic space?

How would the public health crisis and the information revolution affect your practice as an architect?

**Questionnaire Version 03**

**Knowledge-based Home Work in London**

This survey is designed to explore how knowledge workers—including architects and creative professionals—use and adapt their home environments to support both professional activities and personal life, while ensuring that sensitive personal information is not disclosed.

**Part One: Background Information**

1. **General Demographics and Work Context**
    - What is your occupation?
    - How long have you been working from home?
    - In which London borough or area is your home located?
    - Who do you live with?

**Part Two: Home as a Workspace**

1. **Guided Home Tour and Spatial Usage**
    - *"Please give me a tour of your home, explaining your daily spatial routines as you move through different areas. Describe in detail how you experience and use these spaces throughout the day."*
2. **Defining 'Home' in a Work Context**
    - *"How do you define the concept of 'home' when it serves both as a domestic space and a workspace?"*
3. **Overall Spatial Experience and Personal Expression**
    - *"Could you discuss your overall experience of using the spaces in your home, and what details you feel best reflect your family's character? Which elements best capture your unique work habits?"*
4. **Key Functional Areas**
    - *"What are the key areas in your home that support your work or/and everyday life?"*
5. **Additional Open-ended Inquiries**
    - *"Are there any moments when the physical layout of your home significantly influenced your workflow or creative process? Please elaborate."*

**Part Three: Spatial Modification**

1. **Home Modification Practices**
    - *"Have you made any modifications or adjustments to your home to better accommodate your work requirements? If so, please describe these changes."*
2. **Impact of Home Design on Work Experience**
    - *"Can you describe an instance where the design of your home had a notable impact on your work experience or on interactions within your household?"*
    - *Or "Can you describe any specific design features in your home that enhance your productivity or creativity?"*
3. **Envisioning Spatial Reconfiguration**

- *"If you had full agency to redesign your home, how would you reconfigure the spaces to better support your work and personal needs?"*

4. **Future Design Aspirations**
    - *"In your opinion, how could your home be better designed to support knowledge-based work and daily life? What specific features or elements would you like to see integrated?"*

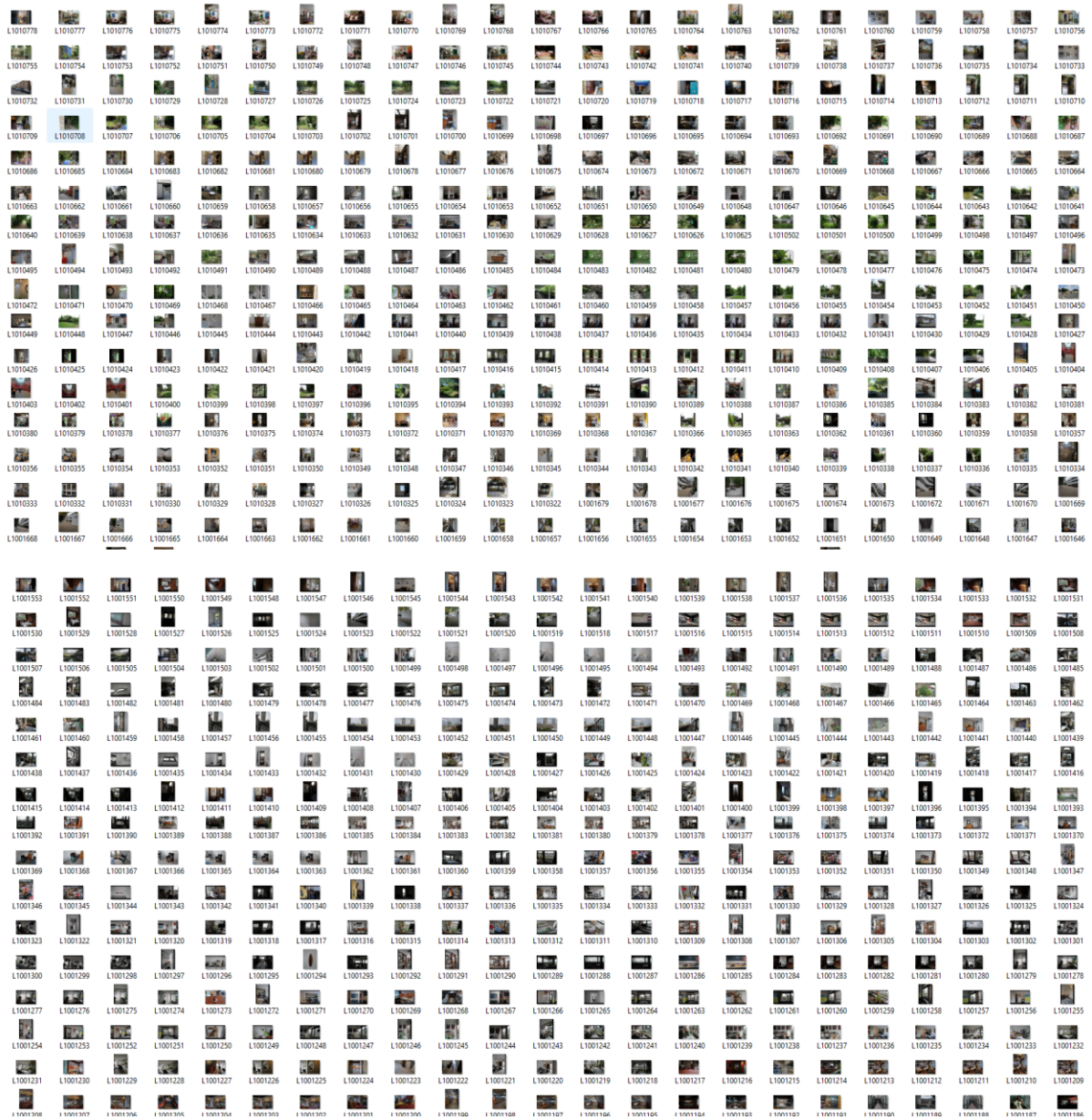
**Part Four: Domestic Objects and Digital Technology**

1. **Significance of Domestic Objects**
    - *"What is the significance of one specific furniture or household object in your home? How does it contribute to the overall ambiance and functionality of your home space?"*
2. **Impact on Daily Routines and Work Practices**
    - *"In what ways do these domestic objects influence your daily routines and work practices? Please provide specific examples of how particular items have impacted your productivity or well-being."*
3. **Role of Digital Devices in Mediating Work and Life**
    - *"Could you discuss the role of digital devices—such as smartphones, computers, touch screens, and iPads—in mediating your work and personal interactions? How have these technologies transformed the way you live and work?"*
4. **Personal Significance and Creative Impact**
    - *"Are there any objects or pieces of furniture in your home that you feel hold a special significance for your creativity, productivity, or personal well-being? Please elaborate on their impact."*

*Note: This survey aims to gather insights into home-based work among knowledge professionals in London without requiring disclosure of sensitive personal or intimate details. Your privacy is highly respected, and your cooperation is greatly appreciated.*

## Appendix B- Raw Data Examples

### 01. Photo documentations of the home interiors



## 02. Sketchup models of the cases

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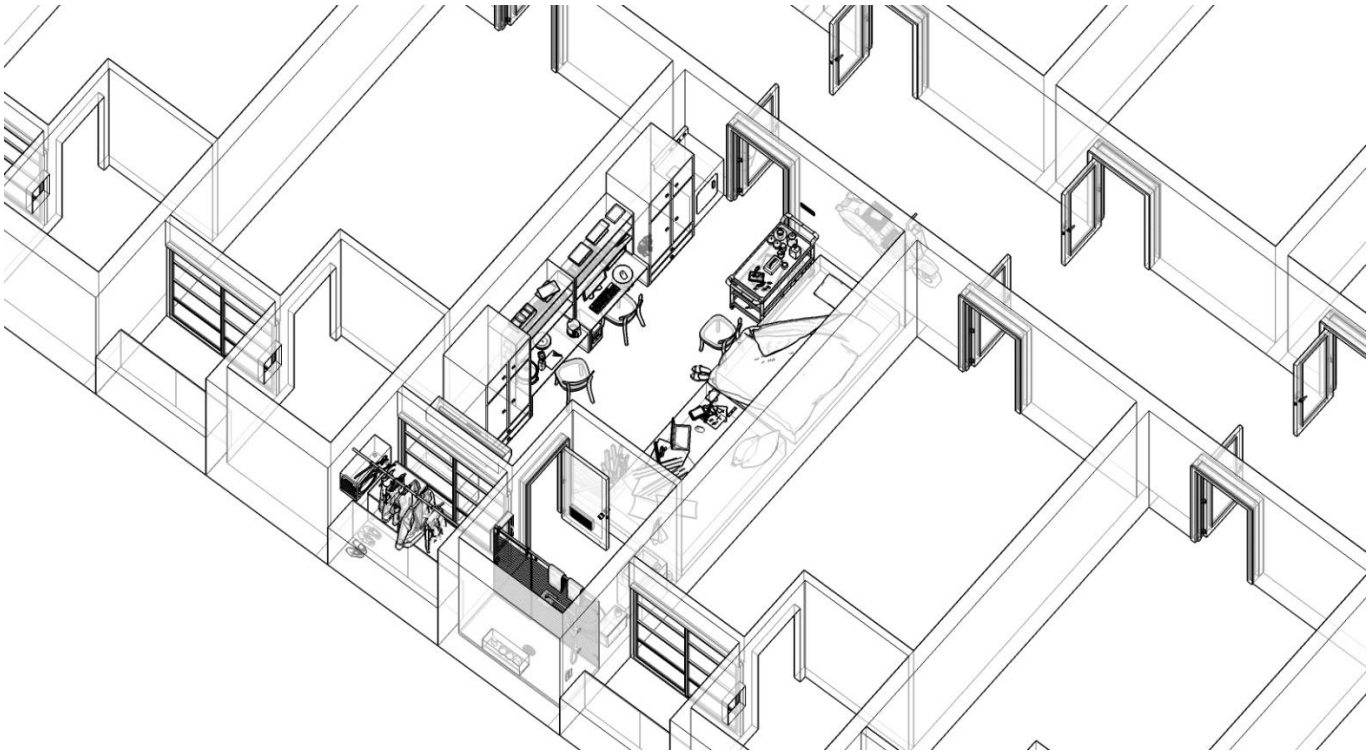

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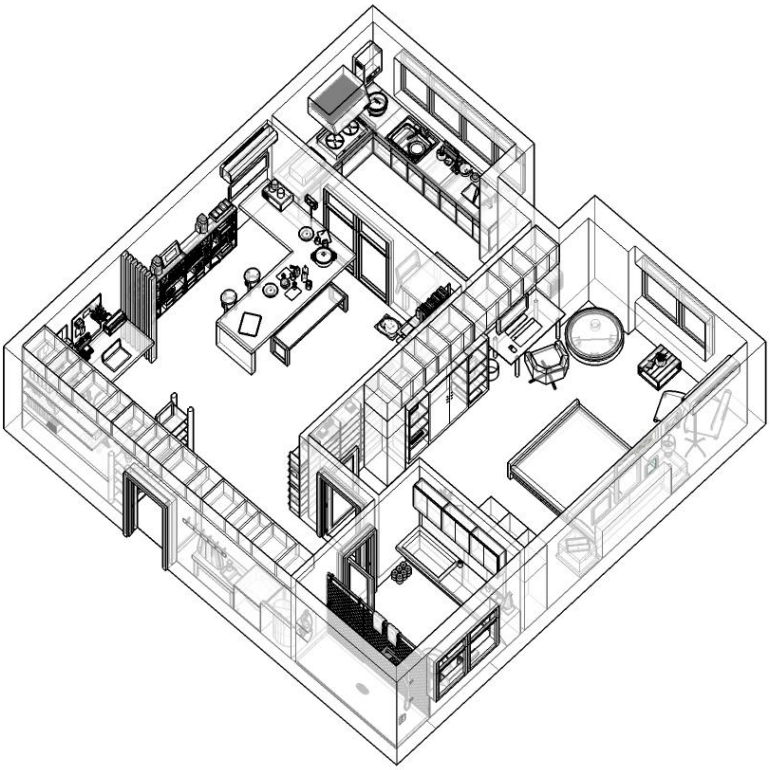

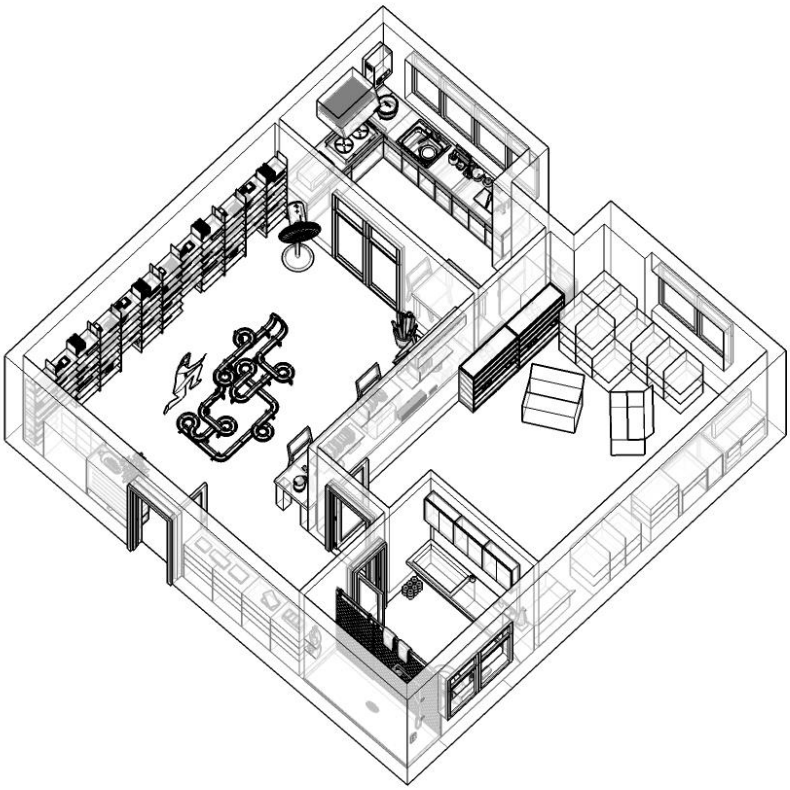

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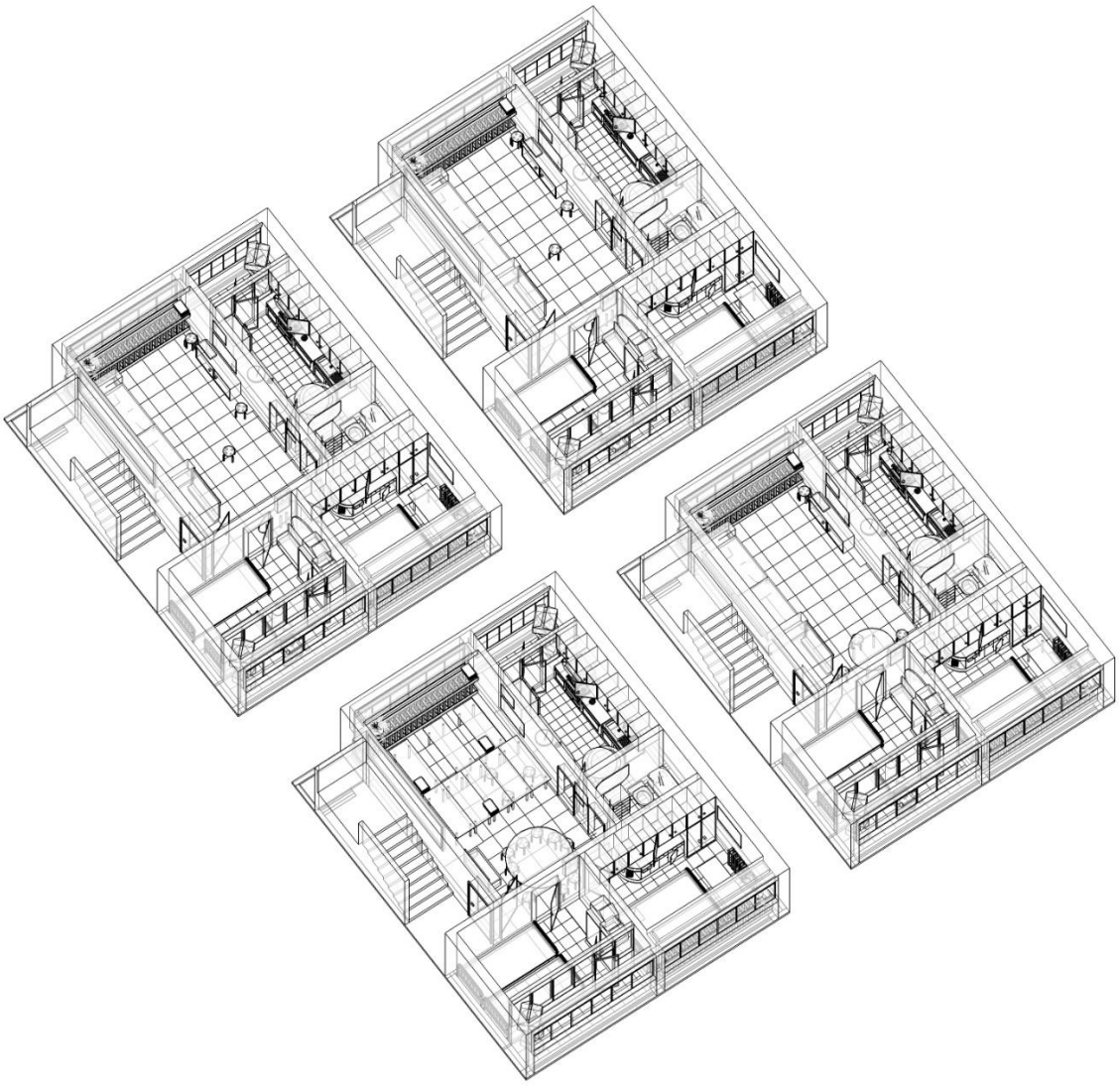

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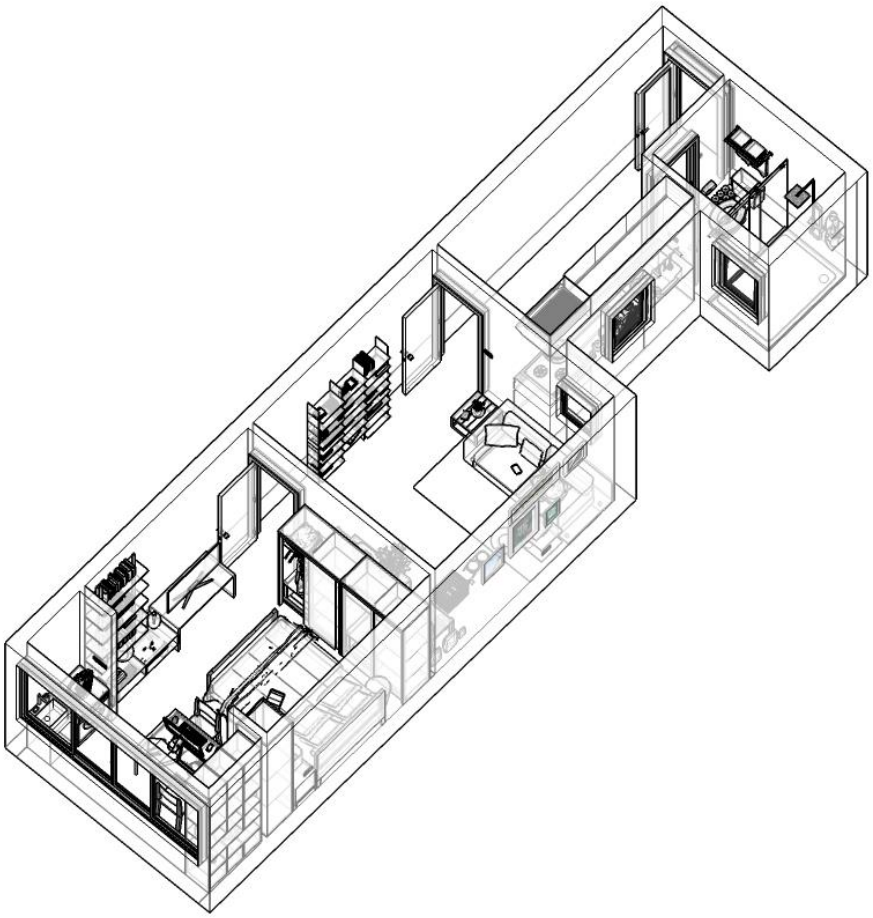

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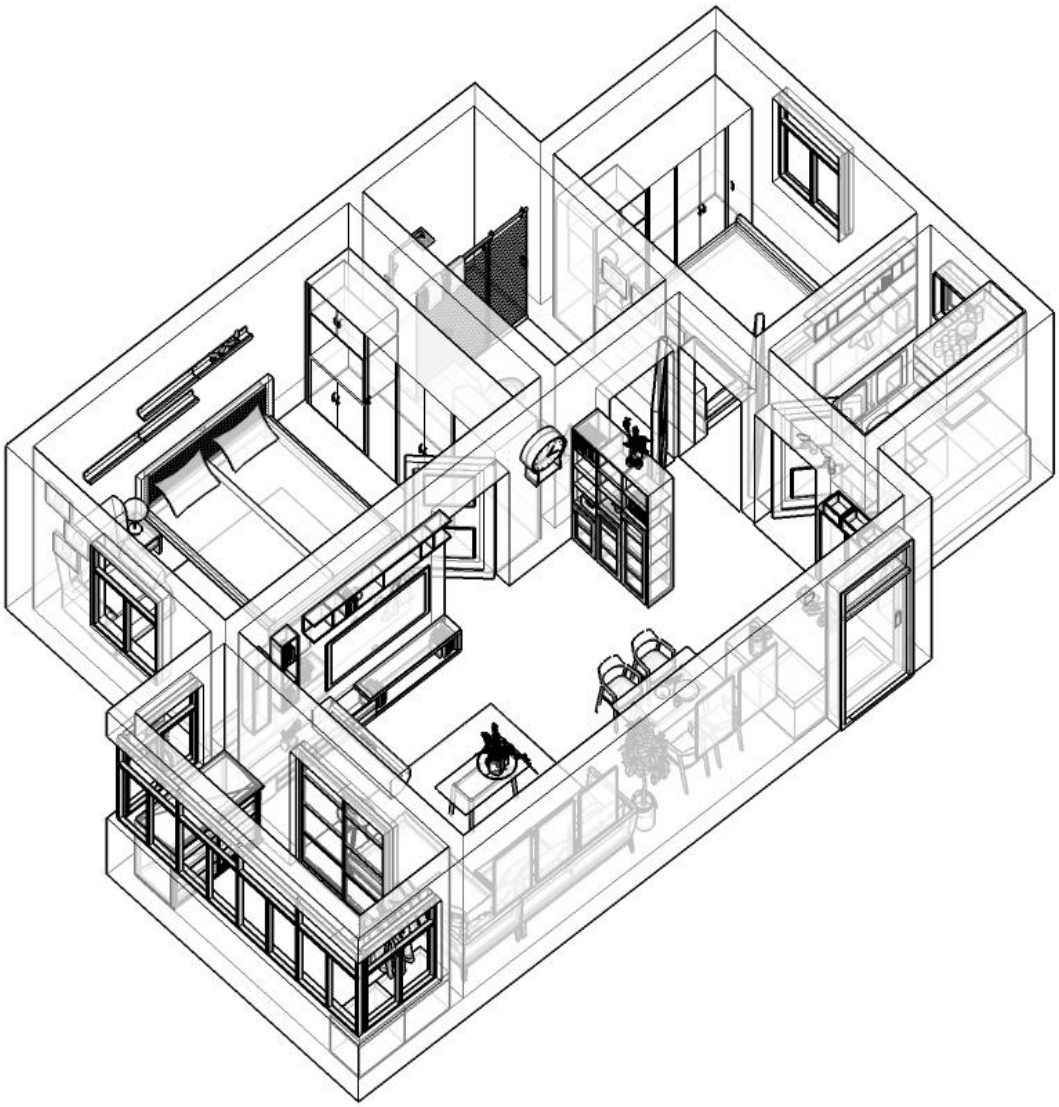

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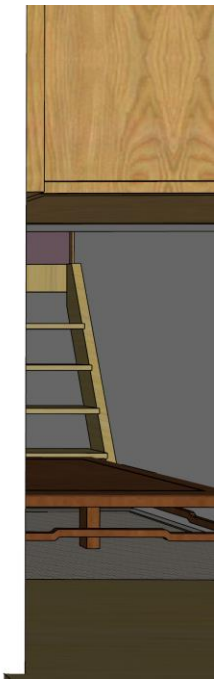

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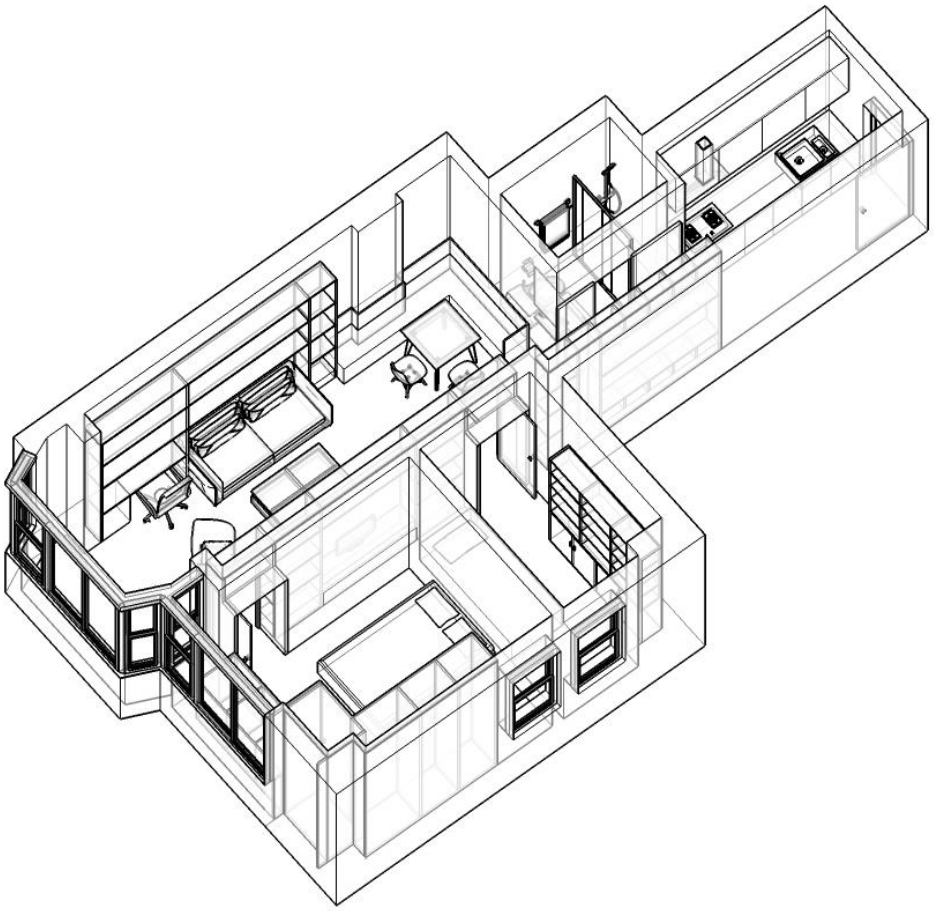

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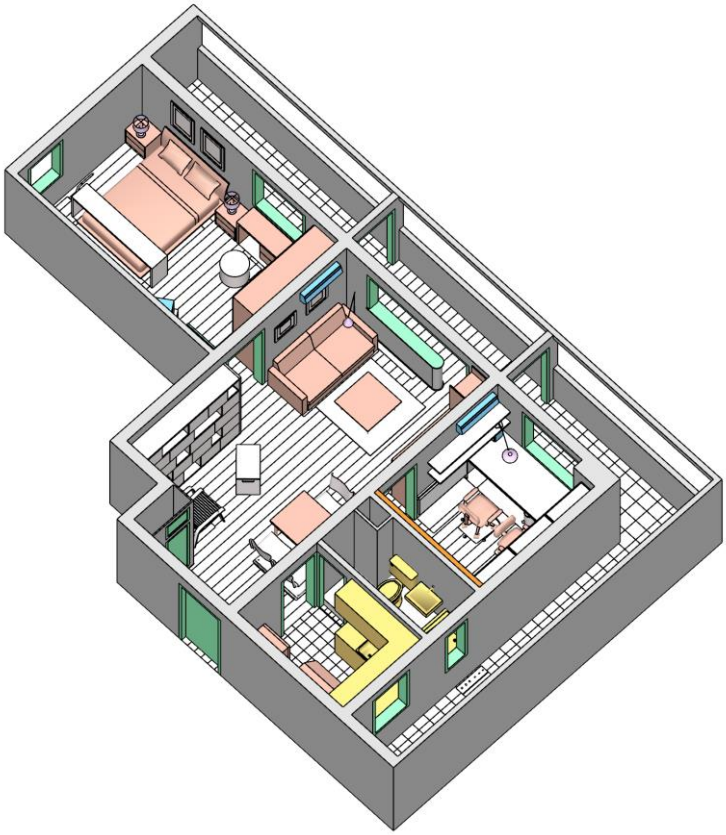
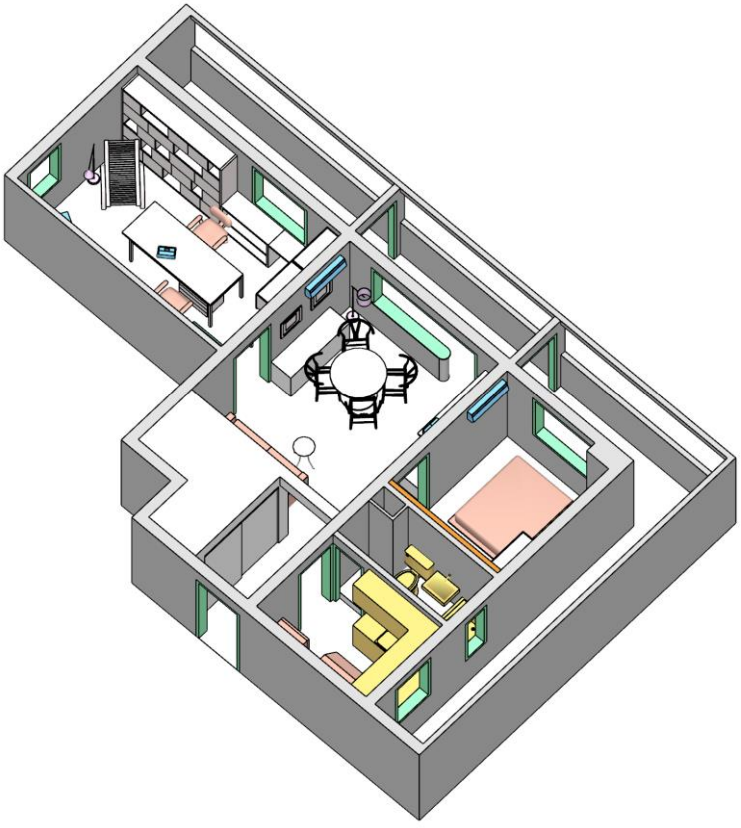
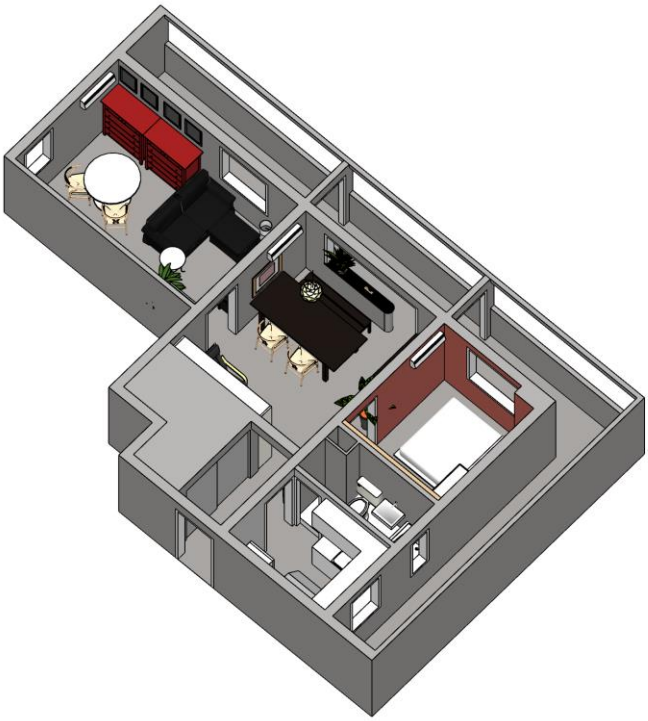
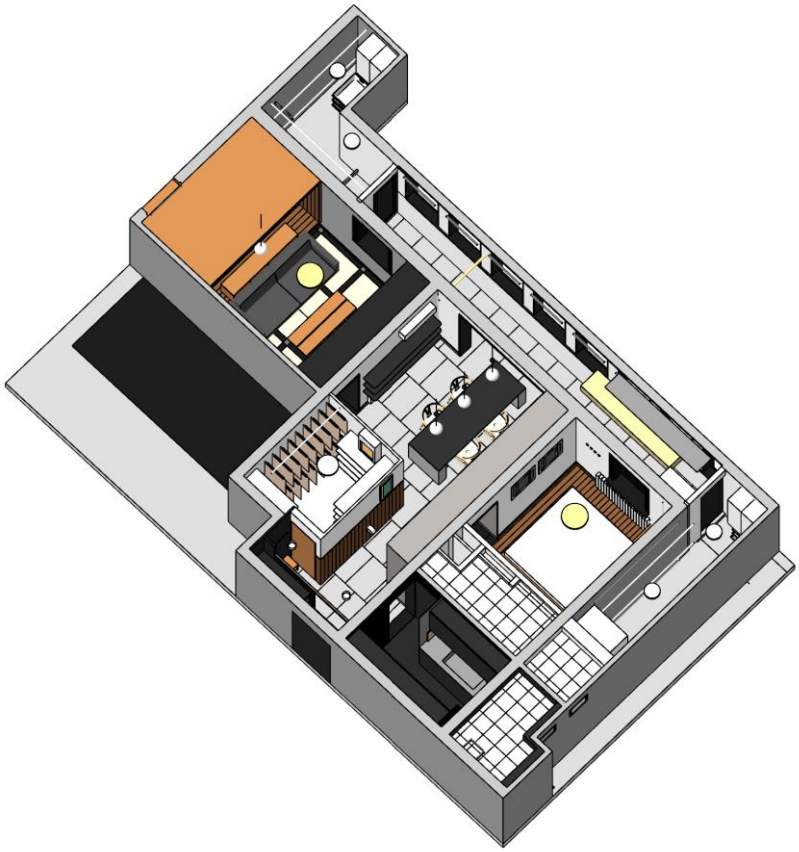










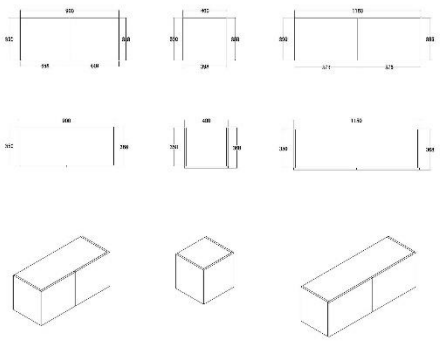


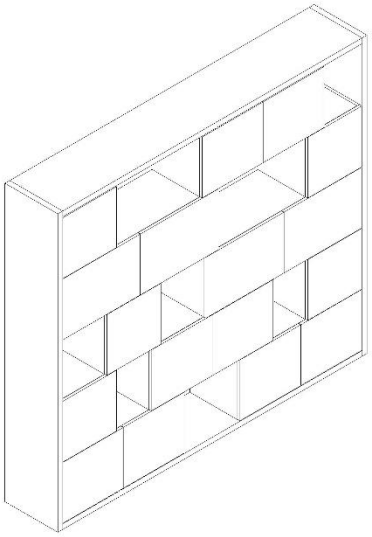




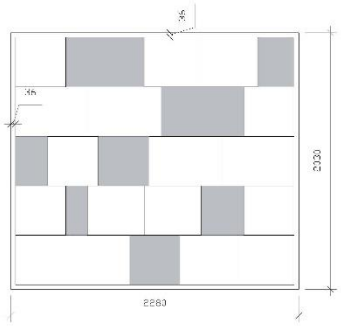


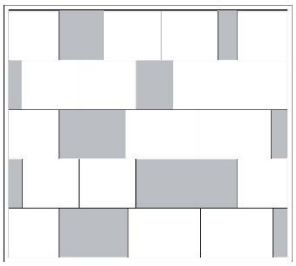

Basic elements: boxes of three different sizes

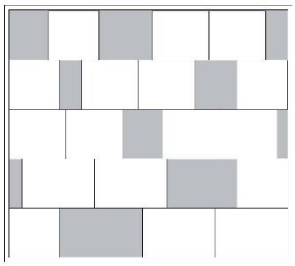


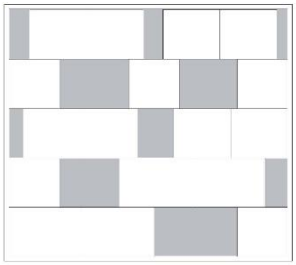


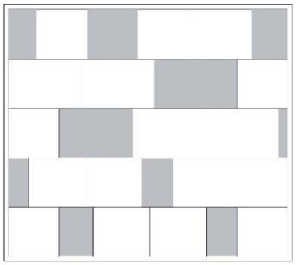
Various compositions of boxes

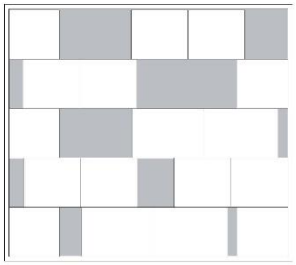


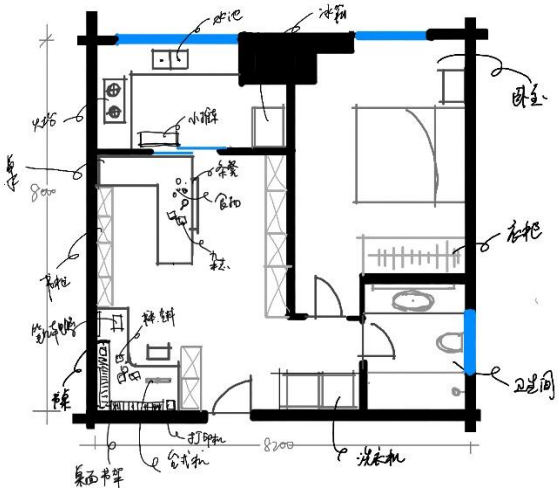


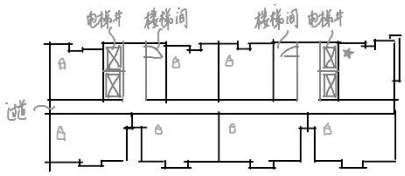


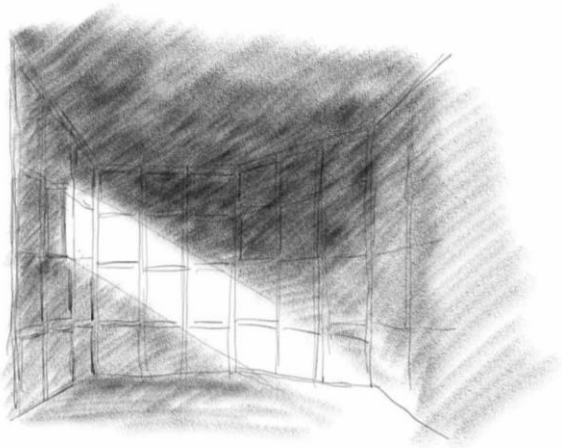


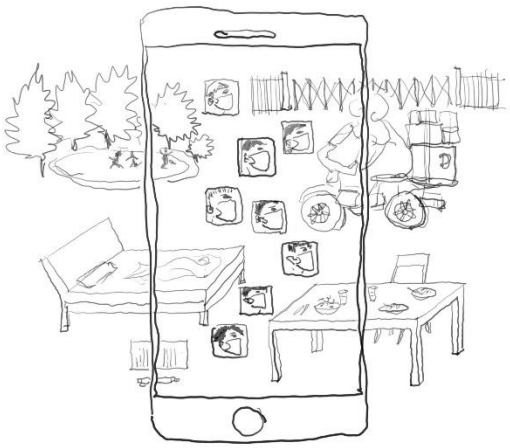


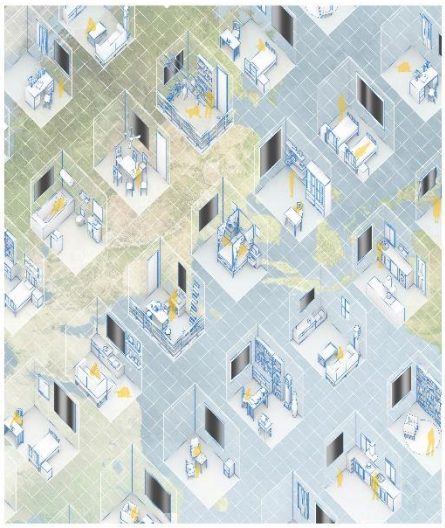
## 03. The respondents' drawings of their live/work home



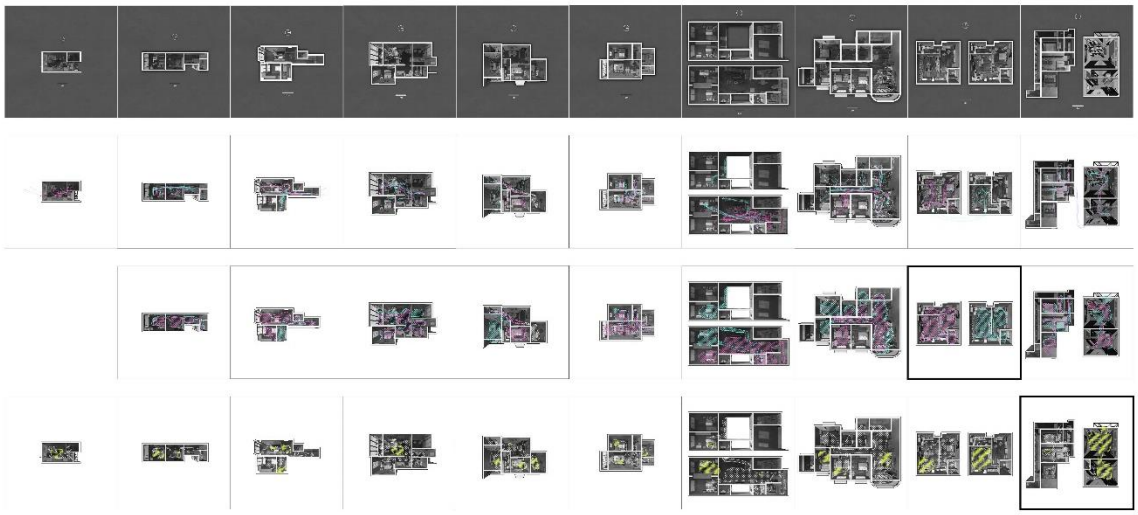



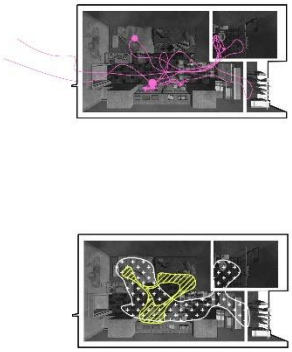




## Appendix C- Early Drawing Exploration Examples

01

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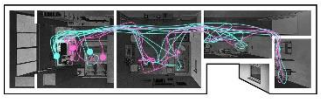

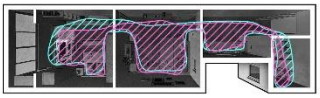

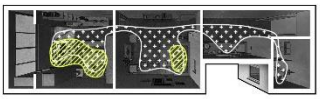

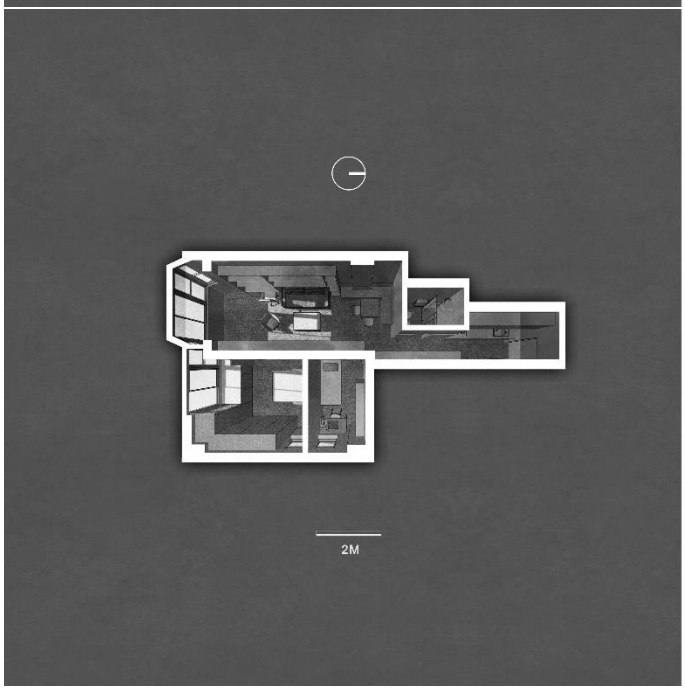
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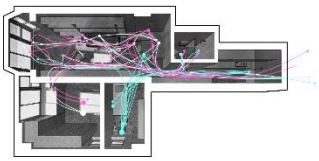

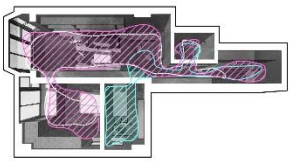

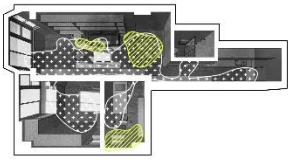


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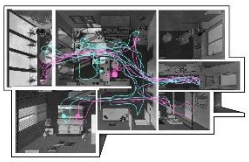

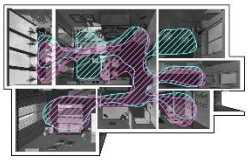

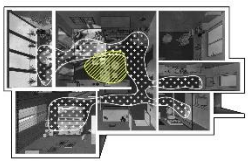


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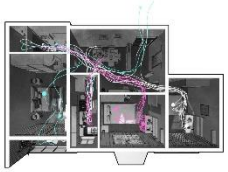

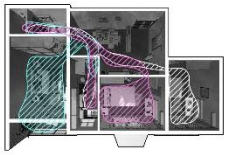

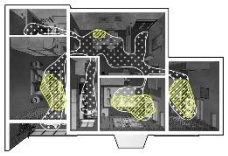


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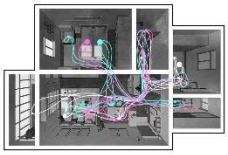

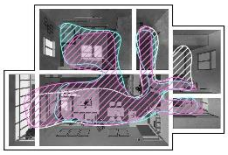

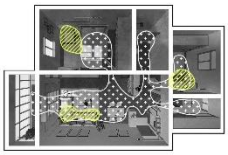


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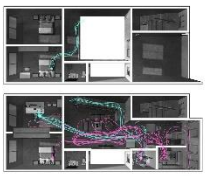

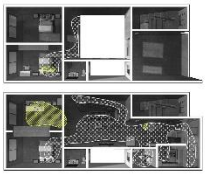

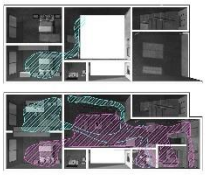


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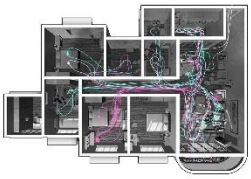

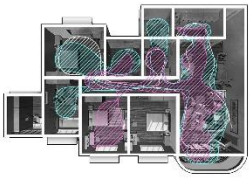

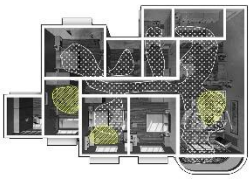

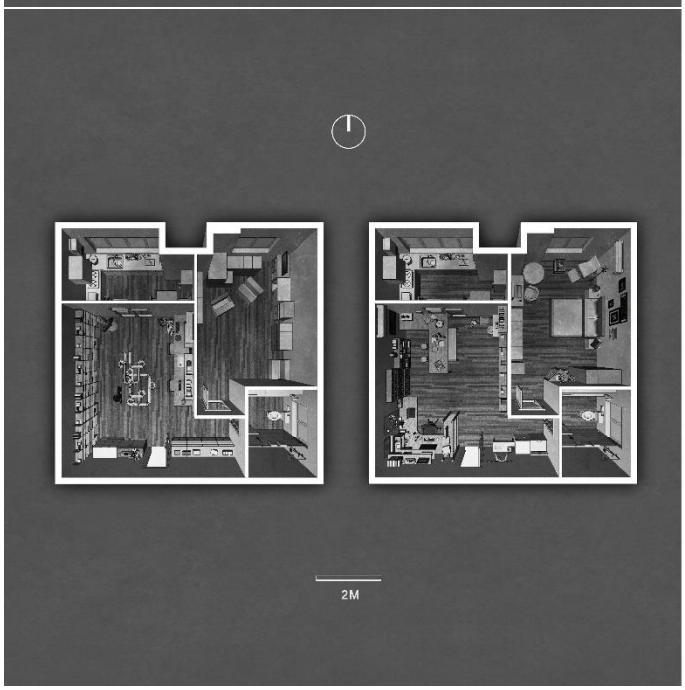
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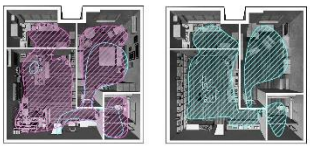

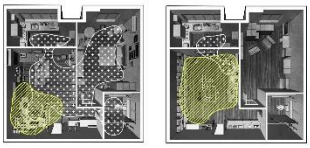


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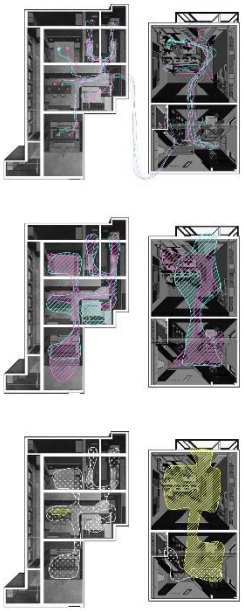
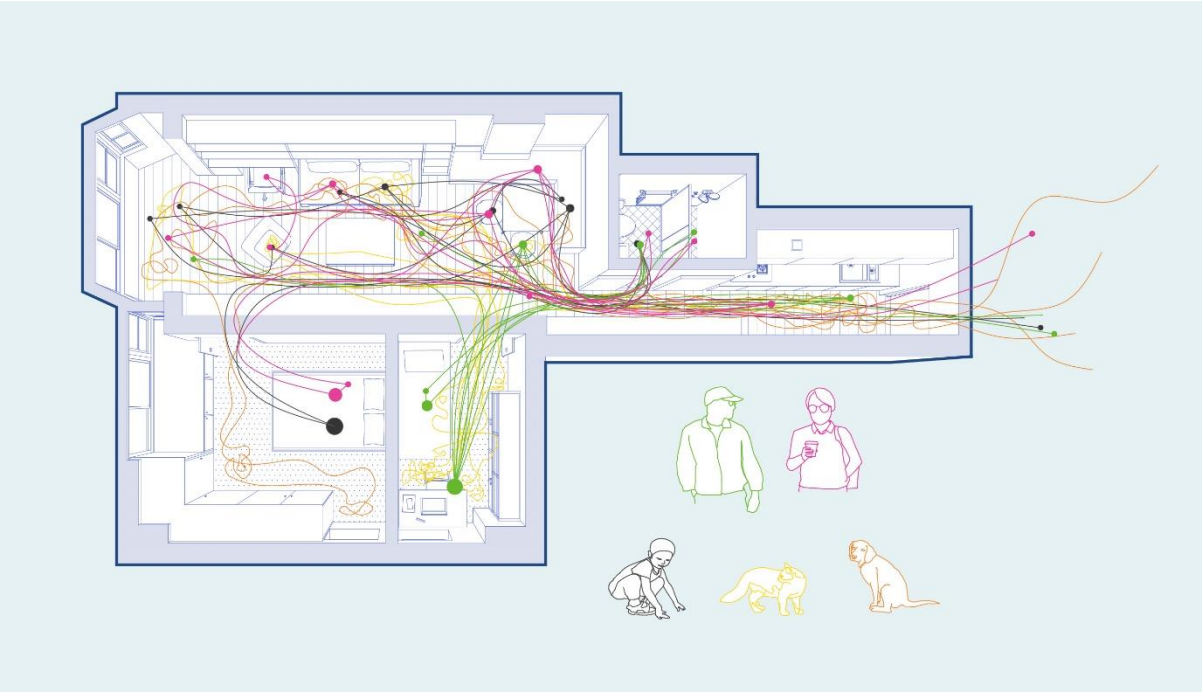


02.

The behavioural trajectories of the family members over 24 hours of the day

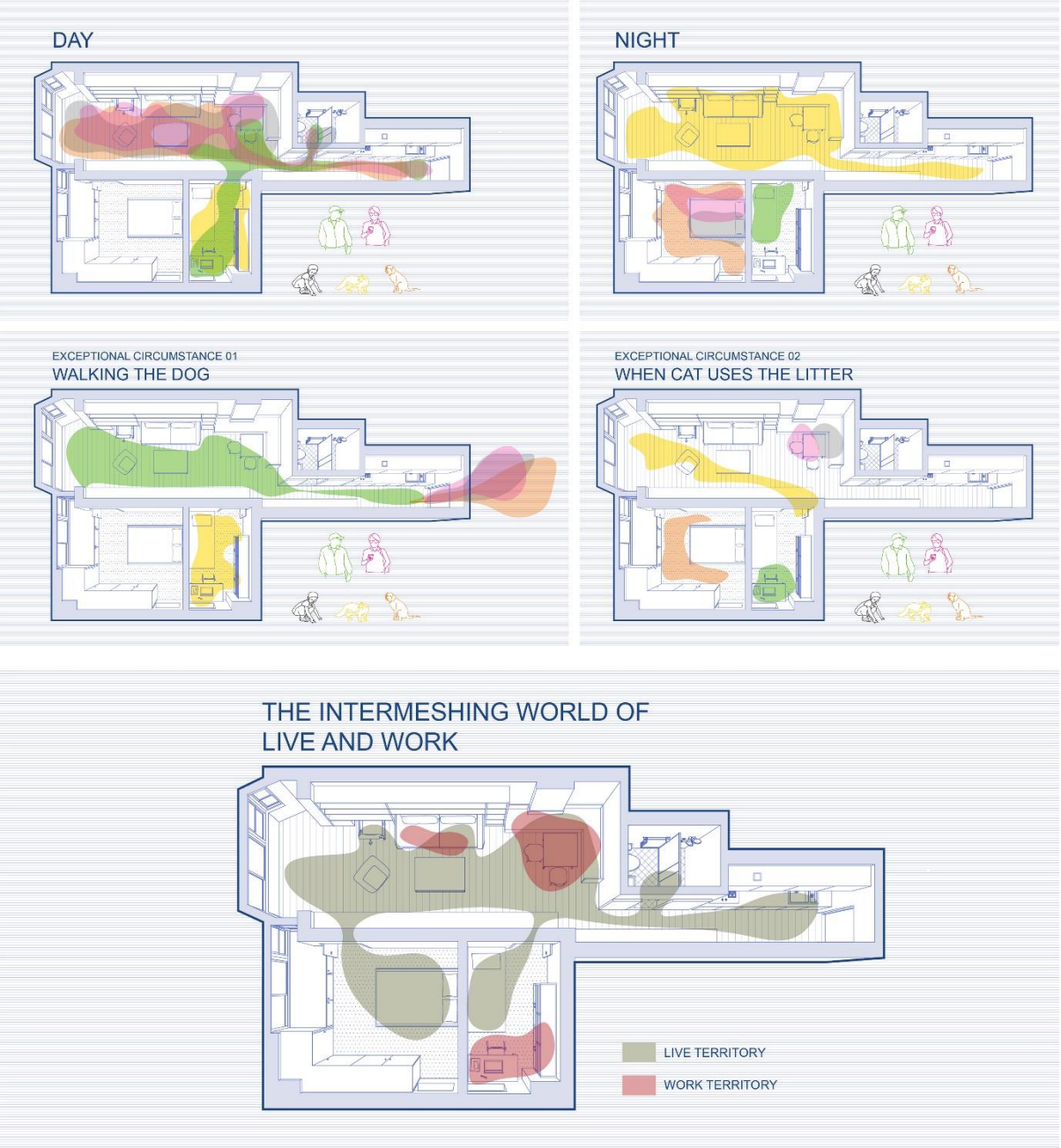


This is the home of two Shanghai architects.

The family consists of two adults, a 6-year-old son, a cat (Luca) and a dog (Wang Cai) who is temporarily staying during the epidemic. Because the cat and dog fight all the time, they must be separated spatially. The husband and Luca work in the small bedroom during the day, while all the activities of the wife, the son and the dog take place in the living room. When the cat needs to go to the living room to use the cat litter, it will scratch the door. They have to lock the dog in the large bedroom when the cat goes out. But the dog cannot be left alone in the bedroom for a long time, otherwise it will get anxious.

They walk the dog twice a day and it is when the cat could finally be free to wander in the living room. During the night, the dog sleeps in the large bedroom, the door is locked, and the living room will be the cat's space. The cat and the dog cannot use a room together, but they share a space by time difference.

The distribution of collective-individual and live-work territories within the dwelling unit



## Appendix D- Ethics Approval and Consent form Samples

**Ethics Committee Reviewer Decision**

This form must be completed by each reviewer. Each application will be reviewed by two members of the ethics committee. Reviews may be completed electronically and sent to the Faculty ethics administrator (Donna Astill-Shipman) from a University of Nottingham email address, or may be completed in paper form and delivered to the APM Hub.

Applicant full name Ye Xu
What does home mean to architects? Home Working of Chinese Architects During Pandemic

**Reviewed by:**

Name D12

Signature (paper based only) .....

Date .....8.6.2020.....

- ☐ Approval awarded - no changes required
- ☐ Approval awarded - subject to required changes (see comments below)
- ✓ Approval pending - further information & resubmission required (see comments)
- ☐ Approval declined – reasons given below

Comments:

In principle, this should be okay. However, a few points to address/clarify-

I am unclear why the senior architects would require their name on the drawings etc., when the results are published at AHRA. Obviously, not having to do so removes these concerns over anonymity, and would therefore be preferable. This point requires clarification.

Given the target population, confirmation/clarification that participants will be able to read and understand all documentation is required.

How will participants sign and return the consent form? Is this to be done electronically? Please specify.

Information sheet states– "unless you advise us that you do not wish to be contacted". Consent to keep contact details etc. should be 'opt-in' and not 'opt-out' (i.e. assumed not, unless participants confirm that they are happy to be contacted), although I am not clear why you might need to contact participants again. Please change and clarify.

In part 3 of the questionnaire, you ask for "Photos/ Videos of your home if possible)". Given the focus of the study, photographs of other household members' "territories" may also require their consent, particularly if other household members, or artefacts from their work, are present. I would therefore recommend avoiding photographs (unless absolutely essential) and use sketches instead.

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**Please note:**

1. The approval only covers the participants and trials specified on the form and further approval must be requested for any repetition or extension to the investigation.
2. The approval covers the ethical requirements for the techniques and procedures described in the protocol but does not replace a safety or risk assessment.
3. Approval is not intended to convey any judgement on the quality of the research, experimental design or techniques.
4. Normally, all queries raised by reviewers should be addressed. In the case of conflicting or incomplete views, the ethics committee chair will review the comments and relay these to the applicant via email. All email correspondence related to the application must be copied to the Faculty research ethics administrator.

**Any problems which arise during the course of the investigation must be reported to the Faculty Research Ethics Committee**

**Ethics Committee Reviewer Decision**

This form must be completed by each reviewer. Each application will be reviewed by two members of the ethics committee. Reviews may be completed electronically and sent to the Faculty ethics administrator (Jo Deeley) from a University of Nottingham email address, or may be completed in paper form and delivered to the Faculty of Engineering Research Office.

Applicant full name Ye Xu

**Reviewed by:**

Name M03

Signature (paper based only) .....

Date 01/06/2020

- [x] Approval awarded - no changes required
- [ ] Approval awarded - subject to required changes (see comments below)
- [ ] Approval pending - further information & resubmission required (see comments)
- [ ] Approval declined – reasons given below

Comments:

**Please note:**

1. The approval only covers the participants and trials specified on the form and further approval must be requested for any repetition or extension to the investigation.
2. The approval covers the ethical requirements for the techniques and procedures described in the protocol but does not replace a safety or risk assessment.
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**Ethics Committee Reviewer Decision**

This form must be completed by each reviewer. Each application will be reviewed by two members of the ethics committee. Reviews may be completed electronically and sent to the Faculty ethics administrator from a University of Nottingham email address, or may be completed in paper form and delivered to the Faculty of Engineering Research Office.

Applicant full name Ye Xu - resubmission

**Reviewed by:**

Name D12

Signature (paper based only) .....

Date 18/07/2020

- [x] Approval awarded - no changes required
- [ ] Approval awarded - subject to required changes (see comments below)
- [ ] Approval pending - further information & resubmission required (see comments)
- [ ] Approval declined – reasons given below

Comments:

**Please note:**

1. The approval only covers the participants and trials specified on the form and further approval must be requested for any repetition or extension to the investigation.
2. The approval covers the ethical requirements for the techniques and procedures described in the protocol but does not replace a safety or risk assessment.
3. Approval is not intended to convey any judgement on the quality of the research, experimental design or techniques.
4. Normally, all queries raised by reviewers should be addressed. In the case of conflicting or incomplete views, the ethics committee chair will review the comments and relay these to the applicant via email. All email correspondence related to the application must be copied to the Faculty research ethics administrator.

**Any problems which arise during the course of the investigation must be reported to the Faculty Research Ethics Committee**

The University of Nottingham

HOUSING AND THE CITY

**Consent for participation in research and exhibition**

Research Project "What does home mean to architects? Home Working of Chinese Architects During Pandemic" Funded by University of Nottingham and Architectural Humanities Research Association

I agree to participate in a research project conducted by Ye Xu, under the supervision of Dr. Katharina Borsi and Prof. Jonathan Hale, from University of Nottingham, UK.

| | |
|---|---|
| I can read and understand all the documentations. | ☑ |
| My participation as an interviewee in this project is completely voluntary. There is no explicit or implicit coercion whatsoever to participate. | ☑ |
| I have received sufficient information about this research project and understand my role in it. The purpose of my participation as an interviewee in this project and the future processing of my personal data has been explained to me and is clear. | ☑ |
| Participation involves being interviewed by the researcher (Ye Xu) from University of Nottingham. The online interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. I allow the researcher to take notes during the interview. I also may allow the audio recording of the interview and subsequent dialogue. It is clear to me that in case I do not want the interview and dialogue to be recorded I am fully entitled to withdraw from participation. | ☑ |
| Participation also involves taking part in an online exhibition related to AHRA 2020 conference. I will provide hand drawings of my own home, which along with my professional viewpoints will be exhibited and published under my own byline. I will be listed as the exhibitor of the exhibition. I have the right of authorship and give the AHRA curatorial team the right to use and publish the drawings and interview contents. I will be in control of the whole publication process of the information/images I provided. Any image or text will be first confirmed with me before publishing. | ☑ |
| I have right not to answer questions or provide any images. If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to withdraw from it and ask that the data collected prior to the withdrawal will be deleted. | ☑ |
| I was assured that this research project has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Faculty of Engineering, University of Nottingham. The committee may be contacted through ez-eng-ethics@nottingham.ac.uk for any questions concerning ethics. | ☑ |

| | |
|---|---|
| I have carefully read and fully understood the points and statements of this form. All my questions were answered properly, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. | ☑ |

Participant's Signature [signature] Date 2020.08.14

Researcher's Signature YE XU (许晔) Date 15/08/2020

Please sign the consent form by attaching your electronic signature to it and return it via email to ye.xu@nottingham.ac.uk. For further information, please also contact this email address.