

THE BOUNDARIES OF LABOR

Domestic Space in the Crisis of Care

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THE BOUNDARIES OF LABOR
Domestic Space in the Crisis of Care

Theoretical Statement TPOD EPFL 2024–2025

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INTRODUCTION

Domestic work, including care work and affective work, is extremely isolating, being performed in a way that separates us from each other, individualizes our problems, and hides our needs and suffering. It is also extremely laborious, [...] performed mostly by women as unpaid labor, often in addition to a full-time job.

- Silvia Federici, *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*

1 Ceylan Yeginsu, "Britain Tackles Loneliness.," *New York Times*, January 18, 2018, 7.

The "crisis of care", a term coined by Nancy Fraser, is present in public debates in various ways. Among other things we lament a lack of kindergarten places, a lack of staff for hospitals and nursing homes, and hardships in the upkeep of social connections that, for instance, lead to an increase of loneliness, with the government of the UK even appointing a minister of loneliness in 2018 to fight the issue.¹ The crisis of care is affecting populations worldwide on a physical and psychological level. Although care work has been discussed and theorized for decades, the interdependence of the issues we are faced with today and their origin in the sexual and international division of labor are often obscured in these debates. Financialized Capitalism has created a crisis in reproductive work (the paid and unpaid work that reproduces the workforce) that is starting to threaten capital accumulation on a level that, to deal with the crisis, can't be sidestepped much longer.

2 Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Chicago: PM Press, 2020), 138.

One of the phenomena drawing most attention is demographic change which is accelerating at a pace that care facilities and services can't keep up with. The populations of the member states of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are becoming increasingly older, which puts the productivity and economic growth of the states at risk. Reproductive work and care work for elderly people (a much younger phenomenon) is historically mainly, but not exclusively, performed by women. With women more frequently entering the labor market since the eighties their time spent for reproductive work, and thus care for the elderly, within their families has been drastically reduced.²

Furthermore, in capitalist societies the elderly are no longer treasured for their decades of experience and memory. From a capitalist perspective, the care or reproduction of subjects that have become unproductive (in contrast to childcare which reproduces the future labor force), absorbs

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Film stills from *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*. Film by Chantal Akerman.

“Jeanne, a young widow living with her son in Brussels, lives a double life. Doing daily chores as a housewife by day, trading sex for an income by night. When her routine is disrupted by a violent act, the stability of her seemingly perfect domestic life unravels.” Screenshots from Arte.

value instead of contributing to accumulation. As such, elderly care work is systematically devalued (socially and culturally) and deemed suitable for the sphere of the (nuclear) family. As there is no revenue to be expected, elderly care work is preferably assigned to the unwaged domestic work that is ‘naturally’ done by women.³

3 Federici, 138.

The sexual and international division of labor and the exploitation of women through unwaged reproductive work imposed by capital has been theorized by writers like Maria Mies, Silvia Federici and Nancy Fraser. Drawing on their cunning analyses, this theoretical statement will attempt to apply their ideas to the realm of architecture by utilizing an initial historical analysis to investigate the most common place for elderly care: the home. For this, the main focus will be on Germany, as it was a pioneer in Europe with the introduction of statutory social insurance schemes such as health and pension insurance.

As women (still) “provide the general majority of practical care work” and generally live longer than men, the discussion concerning recipients and providers of elderly care is a highly gendered issue.⁴ The contradictions that the home is holding for carers will be explored in an exercise of visualization and narration. The intention of this exercise is to learn from the experience and memory of two women that were responsible for elderly care work within their families and attempt to visualize the beautiful, painful, exploitative, profound and lonely aspects of care work, thus emphasizing its political relevance. Based on the historical analysis of the emergence of the crisis of care and the narration, the theoretical statement intends to draw conclusions on the spatial implications of the crisis of (elderly) care. The first chapter will discuss some of the key elements and their respective entanglements for the analysis: care, home, place and a general introduction into the problem with elderly care.

4 Agneta Stark, “Warm Hands in Cold Age - On the Need of a New World Order of Care,” in *Warm Hands in Cold Age: Gender and Aging*, ed. Nancy Folbre, Lois B. Shaw, and Agneta Stark (London: Routledge, 2007), 8,12.



Capitalism also Depends on Domestic Labour. In Feminist Posters 1974-1990.
Poster from See Red Women's Workshop.

THE SUBTLE VIOLENCE OF THE HOME

In the most general sense, care [is] a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.

- Joan C. Tronto and Berenice Fisher, *Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring*

Care and Capital

This relatively broad definition of care that Joan C. Tronto and Berenice Fisher provide⁵ is useful for this research as it emphasizes that the practice of care reaches into every part of human life (including our immediate built environment). In the discourse on this definition Tronto elaborates on the mentioned “life-sustaining web”. While general care practices might differ from each other, they are connected through the same activities. Caring for children is different from caring for elderly parents, but for both the maintenance of a household and cleaning services are integral. The various care practices are just as interdependent as the different subjects involved. Tronto argues, for instance, that caring is as much a practice as receiving care.⁶ In the case of elderly care this is especially important as enhanced dependency on others for basic needs and the generally negative perception accompanying loss of independence can stand in the way of a good practice of care. The standards for good care are dependent on the corresponding society and community and are thus highly political.⁷ Moreso, since at the heart of many crises we currently face is the struggle with previously created binaries (such as dependence and independence) that demand a redrawing of the corresponding boundaries within capitalist societies.

In her 2016 essay “Contradictions of Capital and Care” Nancy Fraser outlines how, time and again, crises in care have forced capitalist regimes to redraw the boundaries that differentiate “‘economy’ from ‘society’, ‘production’ from ‘reproduction’, and ‘work’ from ‘family’”.⁸ She describes the “crisis of care” as capitalist societies’ declining ability to accomplish the reproductive work that encompasses material and affective acts of care. Historically, this work was mainly performed by women, but the numbers of “those available for birthing and raising children, caring for friends and family members, maintaining households and broader communities, and sustaining connections more generally” are shrinking.⁹ Her thesis is that capitalist society, since the very beginning, is inherently prone to crisis as especially the current system of financialized capitalism with its “orientation to unlimited accumulation tends to destabilize the very process of social reproduction on which it relies.”¹⁰

Although these processes of (social) reproduction are often devalued, as they are performed in the home (or neighborhood) without pay, capital-

5 Berenice Fisher and Joan C. Tronto, “Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring,” in *Circles of Care*, ed. Emily K. Abel and Margaret K. Nelson (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990).

6 Joan C. Tronto, “Caring Architecture,” in *Critical Care: Architecture and Urbanism for a Broken Planet*, ed. Angelika Fitz, Elke Krasny, and Architekturzentrum Wien (Vienna [Austria]: Cambridge, MA: Architekturzentrum Wien; MIT Press, 2019), 29.

7 Tronto, 29.

8 Nancy Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” *New Left Review*, no. 100 (August 2016): 103–4.

9 Fraser, 99.

10 Fraser, 99–101.

ist production cannot function without them. Since the institutionalization of the “domestic sphere” spatially split productive from reproductive work, the significance of women’s reproductive work has been made invisible. This “division of household from workplace” stood at the end of a long and violent process of robbing women of their sexual and, hence, economic autonomy.¹¹ Enclosing women in the home of the nuclear family and assigning them the unpaid tasks within it is “the subtlest violence that capitalism has ever perpetrated against any section of the working class.”¹² The enclosure or domestication of women significantly increased their structural subordination to men, not only because money “became a primary medium of power.”¹³ Also, by caring for others as unwaged or, through the devaluation of reproductive work, poorly paid care workers, women face significantly more hardship when entering old age as social insurances such as pensions are calculated in relation to the amount (years and level) of waged employment. Family members that provide care are thus “penalized for their work”: “[A]lmost everywhere women face old age with fewer resources than men, measured in terms of family support, monetary incomes, and available assets.” They also make up “the largest group of elderly who are poor”.¹⁴ In the introduction to the book “Critical Care: Architecture and Urbanism for a broken planet” Angelika Fitz and Elke Krasny point to the fact that the “provision of care directly links to rising inequality and the conditions of exploitative labor [...]”¹⁵

While categorizing it within a broader analysis of the (international) sexual division of labor, this theoretical statement will focus on the crisis in elderly care work as it offers a poignant perspective on where capital draws (and redraws) the boundaries between productive and ‘unproductive’ (reproductive) labor. Although women’s entrance into the workforce and thus into the public sphere has given them visibility, elderly care is still primarily performed within the boundaries of the home. When we consider the increasing immobility of elderly people and the direct connection between the performance of ‘unproductive’ tasks and the workers’ spatial isolation within the home, resulting in invisibility, elderly and their caretakers can be considered some of the most disregarded subjects of society.

Home and Place

Urban planning and architecture played a significant role in these developments as the spatial networks that fostered visibility, support and with it “forms of mutual aid” have been destroyed through gentrification specifically in neighborhoods inhabited by the working-class. These were essential for elderly people living alone, relying on those living nearby to care for their emotional and bodily needs. Instead, many elderly gain a longer lifespan but in turn are confronted with “loneliness, social exclusion and increased vulnerability to physical and psychological abuse.”¹⁶ Neoliberalist forms of space production that reinforce class divides by separating the poor from the rich(er) further stand in the way of caring about each other and recognizing each other’s needs.¹⁷ The development and dissemination of ideologies of ‘good family living’ and the rise of more individualist modes of domesticity have amplified these tendencies on scales from the city to the home. David Harvey notes that “[u]nder

11 Fraser, 102.

12 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 30.

13 Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” 102.

14 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 146.

15 Angelika Fitz, Elke Krasny, and Architektur Zentrum Wien, eds., *Critical Care: Architecture and Urbanism for a Broken Planet* (Vienna [Austria] : Cambridge, MA: Architekturzentrum Wien ; MIT Press, 2019), 13.

16 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 138.

17 Tronto, “Caring Architecture,” 30.

18 David Harvey, “The Right to the City,” *New Left Review*, no. 53 (October 2008): 32.

19 Jesús Molina-Mula, Julia Gallo-Estrada, and Antonio González-Trujillo, “Self-Perceptions and Behavior of Older People Living Alone,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, no. 23 (November 24, 2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17238739>.

20 Molina-Mula, Gallo-Estrada, and González-Trujillo, 2–3.

21 Molina-Mula, Gallo-Estrada, and González-Trujillo, 8.

22 Molina-Mula, Gallo-Estrada, and González-Trujillo, 4.

23 Molina-Mula, Gallo-Estrada, and González-Trujillo, 5.

24 Molina-Mula, Gallo-Estrada, and González-Trujillo, 2–3.

25 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 142–46.

26 Albert Sydney Hornby and Sally Wehmeier, eds., *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English*, 7. ed., [Nachdr.] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 744.

these conditions, ideals of urban identity, citizenship and belonging—already threatened by the spreading malaise of a neoliberal ethic—become much harder to sustain.”¹⁸

As suggested by Harvey, the conditions that lead to the material forms of domestic space also influence related notions such as identity and belonging. The aim of this work is to showcase the interdependence of social (affective) and material aspects of the domestic sphere, specifically the home, and the reproductive work carried out within it, and why affective aspects distinguish it as a place in contrast to the surrounding space. This analysis is central to deduce the spatial implications of the crisis of (elderly) care as most elderly people live and receive care at home, with a strong desire to stay in that place as long as possible even though they may face obstacles through disabilities and increased loneliness.¹⁹ The correlation between housing and the risk of isolation has been well studied, with the “configuration of the city [being] a factor to explain loneliness.” With limited mobility public facilities and family members become inaccessible and, more generally, the proximity necessary to establish or maintain relationships is lost.²⁰ This makes an investigation into the attachment of elderly people to their home, although it might have a negative impact on the care they receive, very significant.

For one, elderly people prefer to live at home because it is the place where (a self-designed) order and habits have been established and, with these, a feeling of “control, freedom and capacity for self-realization” can be maintained.²¹ The habitus, internalized by social reproduction, comprises their daily reality and results in the comfort they feel at home but is also what might “hinder change in behavior.”²² This interrelation of the home shaping daily habits and vice versa leads to a reciprocal accumulation of meaning for both.²³ As the ability to attain new skills and process new information might decrease with aging, elderly people are more affected by their environment than younger people. Considering this, the home is perceived as safe and the relationship between it and the outside environment is considered to have already been established.²⁴

The material and affective aspects that comprise the work of caring for a person can hardly be distinguished from each other.²⁵ In a similar way, it is important to understand the meaning and importance of the home as a field of care. A home is not just a house or apartment, a factual location, but rather a place that combines material and affective significances. It can be associated with the inhabitants or owners’ desires, hopes, financial security (in old age), their general well-being and even identity. This is reflected in our general understanding of ‘home’ as it is laid out in the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of current English:

house, etc. the house or flat/ apartment that you live in, especially with your family: [...]

town/ country the town, district, country, etc. that you come from, or where you are living and that you feel you belong to: [...]

family used to refer to a family living together, and the way it behaves: [...]

for old people/ children a place where people who cannot care for themselves live and are cared for by others: [...]²⁶

The themes around which our imaginary of the home seems to revolve, and which arise from this definition are family, origin, belonging, behavior, and care.

In human geography ‘home’ is often discussed in relation to the notion of place. The discourse on place holds a distinct significance in the field and was discussed by geographers like David Harvey, Tim Cresswell, Gillian Rose and Edward Relph. Here, the concept of place is utilized to emphasize the entanglement of domestic architecture with the previously identified themes and the contiguities between the care performed for (social) human subjects and the (material) home itself. In his book “Place and Placelessness” from 1976 Edward Relph offers a definition of place (as distinct from space):

[T]hose aspects of the lived-world that we distinguish as places are differentiated because they involve a concentration of our intentions, our attitudes, purposes and experience. Because of this focusing they are set apart from the surrounding space while remaining a part of it. [...] The essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centres of human existence.²⁷

With this definition Relph highlights the importance of agency, but also of everyday life for place-making and the development of attachment to place. Even more extreme, Relph states that the attachment to places is a human need.²⁸ What is present in Relph’s book, but also in the writings of feminist critical theorist bell hooks, is that when humans don’t have or lose a “sense of place” it puts them in a state of crisis.²⁹ The memories and experiences created through everyday life significantly influence our relation to our home.

To assess the level of attachment and care-responsibility a person might feel towards a place, Relph invents the dialectic of outsideness and insideness in different gradients, with existential insideness being the experience and meaning one might unconsciously have in everyday life within one’s home, region or community. Seamon and Sowers describe Relph’s concept of insideness as signifying that a person is “here rather than there, safe rather than threatened, enclosed rather than exposed, at ease rather than stressed.”³⁰ With its language and concepts, Relph’s book provides the groundwork to distinguish social processes from place while acknowledging their importance for an attachment to it. The level of insideness or outsideness a place evokes can be used as a tool to assess it and the corresponding attachment to it. This distinction is extremely important as the next chapters will provide context for the historical evolution of the home and the subsequently very different implications of this evolution depending on class, gender and race.

Besides this, Relph is also convinced that the level of attachment is essential for the care humans may provide for a place:

The places to which we are most attached are literally fields of care, settings in which we have had a multiplicity of experiences and which call forth an entire complex of affections and responses.

27 Edward C. Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, Repr, Research in Planning and Design 1 (London: Pion, 1976), 43.

28 Relph, 38.

29 bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 1; Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 6–7.

30 David Seamon and Jacob Sowers, “Place and Placelessness, Edward Relph,” in *Key Texts in Human Geography*, ed. Phil Hubbard et al. (Los Angeles, London: SAGE, 2008), 45.

But to care for a place involves more than having a concern for it that is based on certain past experiences and future expectations – there is also a real responsibility and respect for that place both for itself and for what it is to yourself and to others. There is, in fact, a complete commitment to that place, a commitment that is as profound as any that a person can make, for care-taking is indeed “the basis of man’s relation to the world”.³¹

31 Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, 38.

This last sentence points to a tendency that Relph’s writing cannot fully evade, with geographer Gillian Rose pointing out that many “humanistic geographers are working with a masculinist notion of home/place” and treat these notions as “conflict-free, caring, nurturing and almost mystically venerated”.³² David Harvey equally emphasizes the ambiguity of place as it might limit the power of globalized capital but is, in turn, often used to distinguish communities from “threatening others who are not included in the particular vision of place being enacted.”³³

32 Gillian Rose in Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction*, Short Introductions to Geography (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2004), 25.

33 Cresswell, 62.

Before we can draw more detailed conclusions on the spatial implications and contradictions that the home holds for care workers, paid and unpaid, in the crisis of (elderly) care today, it is necessary to examine the historical context to establish the instrumental role the home, as the place for reproduction and care, holds in the distribution, performance and implications of this work. For this, the evolution of the institutions that organize care in capitalist societies as well as the evolution of the architectural practice and certain material forms that the home has taken throughout recent history in Germany will be relevant.



Film still depicting a scene from the 2002 movie “The Hours” by Stephen Daldry inspired by Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. Dan tells his wife Laura and his son: “And, I tell you, sometimes when I was in the South Pacific, the fact is that I used to think about this girl. [...] I used to think about bringing her to a house. To a life. Pretty much like this. And it was the thought of the happiness. The thought of this woman, the thought of this life. That’s what kept me going. I had an idea of our happiness.”

Julianne Moore, John C. Reilly, and Jack Rovello in *The Hours*. Film Stills from IMDb.

A PROPER PLACE FOR WOMEN

But often now this body she wore [...], this body with all its capacities, seemed nothing – nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them [...], this being Mrs. Dalloway, not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway.

- Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway

The Creation of Separate Spheres

In the book “Critical Care” Elke Krasny lays out how care has been separated from architecture in line with the creation of binaries within western thought that have “separate[d] nature from culture, craft from art, independence from dependence”. Considering the general understanding of these words she concludes that one of the terms is always perceived superior to the other.³⁴ Krasny threads her argument along the lines of important moments in architectural history, illustrating the violence that binaries create. According to her statements the divide between architecture and care began with Vitruvius distinguishing dwellings, informed by nature, that shelter humans (which may be considered an act of care) from architecture that is informed by culture, thus negating that “dwelling is part of nature”. The dangers in erasing human’s regard for nature are tangible in the accelerating climate crisis.³⁵

At the center of this chapter will be the binary, or spatial divide, of productive and reproductive spheres and the motives and institutions that steered this development. In the long history of the sexual division of labor, this is the moment that redefined the home as the central place for (social) reproduction which was decisive for its current relevance in the crisis of care. The analysis begins in the middle of the nineteenth century during liberal competitive capitalism³⁶ with what Maria Mies has called housewifization in the book “Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale”. Housewifization describes the process in which the ruling class of the bourgeoisie applied its family imaginary to the petty-bourgeoisie and, after that, the working class:

The bourgeoisie declared ‘family’ a private territory in contrast to the ‘public’ sphere of economic and political activity. The bourgeoisie first withdrew ‘their’ women from this public sphere and shut them into their cosy ‘homes’ from where they could not interfere with the war-mongering, moneymaking and the politicking of the men.³⁷

The transfer of this ideal wasn’t only of moral interest to the bourgeoisie but also motivated by the lack of working-class women who were willing and able to produce new (strong and healthy) workers and soldiers

34 Elke Krasny, “Architecture and Care,” in *Critical Care: Architecture and Urbanism for a Broken Planet*, ed. Angelika Fitz, Elke Krasny, and Architekturzentrum Wien (Vienna [Austria] : Cambridge, MA: Architekturzentrum Wien ; MIT Press, 2019), 34–35.

35 Krasny, 35–36.

36 Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” 104.

37 Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*, Critique Influence Change Series (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 104.

for the capitalists. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, women and children were frequently working in the industries as they were considered easily manipulable and exploitable workers. The accompanying working conditions led to women's insufficient health and their reduced (material) interest in procreating.³⁸ With the heavy exploitation of the entire poor and working-class, capitalists endangered production by overlooking the importance of reproduction processes that included workers "capacities for sustenance and replenishment". In her historical analysis on "boundary struggles" within capitalist societies Fraser identifies this as the first crisis in social reproduction that initiated a change of boundaries.³⁹ "[T]he state had to interfere in the production of people" and create the necessary legislative, ideological and political framework to enforce the ideal of the nuclear family.⁴⁰

"This family, which was put under the specific protection of the state, consists of the forced combination of the principles of kinship and cohabitation, and the definition of the man as 'head' of this household and 'breadwinner' for the non-earning legal wife and children."⁴¹ Policies in nineteenth-century Germany had tied the right to marriage to property which reserved the 'family' model for the bourgeoisie.⁴² Meanwhile, the propertied classes had begun to worry about the morally reprehensible living standards of the working class that often included the subletting to non-family *Schlafgänger* (people that would rent an empty bed or room while a member of the family did not use it). Instead, the home was to serve for the raising and education of children and recreation.⁴³ The state therefore changed its policy in 1868 and, with the criminalization of abortion and sexual relations outside of marriage, forced the propertyless working class into the newly institutionalized 'family'. While the state gave the legislative framework for housewifization, the church propagated it as the morally correct way to life. These two institutions largely stripped women of their bodily autonomy to create "the housewife as a social category"⁴⁴ and her place in the domestic sphere of the family.⁴⁵ Through institutional and ideological programming, which was facilitated and maintained by the church, state and the family, the restriction to the household was internalized by women, finally resulting in self-repression. These institutions attributed women's motivation to work for their husbands and families to feelings such as love, or values like virtue which were simultaneously expected to suffice as compensation for that work.⁴⁶ With these positive connotations the ideological programming towards self-repression attempted to ensure that the enclosure was not perceived as oppression and thus did not necessarily lead to women's resistance or detachment from the home.

Another reason for the housewifization of working-class women was the "creation of housework and the housewife as an agent of consumption [which] became a very important strategy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." By creating ideals such as extreme cleanliness and scientific-home-management capitalists used housewives not only to create new needs but also to reduce the cost of men's labor (as with good management of her husband's wage a housewife could make said wage last longer).⁴⁷ The bourgeois reformers propagated property and the single-family home with a kitchen garden as the perfect site for

38 Mies, 104–5.

39 Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care," 103–4.

40 Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, 104–5.

41 Mies, 104.

42 Mies, 105–6.

43 Michael Schimek, "Schloss, Villa, EFH. Zur Geschichte des Einfamilienhauses in Deutschland," in *4 Wände: von Familien, ihren Häusern und den Dingen drumherum: das Einfamilienhaus in Deutschland seit 1950: Begleitbuch zur gleichnamigen Ausstellung im Museumsdorf Cloppenburg - Niedersächsisches Freilichtmuseum vom 15. April 2018–31. Januar 2019*, ed. Cai-Olaf Wilgeroth, Michael Schimek, and Museumsdorf Cloppenburg, Kataloge und Schriften des Museumsdorfs Cloppenburg, Heft 36 (Cloppenburg: Museumsdorf Cloppenburg - Niedersächsisches Freilichtmuseum, 2018), 32.

44 Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, 105–6.

45 Mies, 105–6.

46 Mies, 70–71, 104.

47 Mies, 106.

48 Schimek, “Schloss, Villa, EFH. Zur Geschichte des Einfamilienhauses in Deutschland,” 32–34.

49 Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, 109–10.

50 Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” 105–6.

51 Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, 110.

52 Until the end of the nineteenth century there had been a tendency for support schemes such as widows’ and orphans’ insurance to be local, but gradually they were merged into federal state-wide insurances. But the variety of providers, level of compulsion and form of administration these insurances (including e.g. pension insurances) took was vast and charged with conflict. For more detail see Phillip Hellwege, *From Guild Welfare to Bismarck Care: Professional Guilds and the Origins of Modern Social Security Law and Insurance Law in Germany*, Comparative Studies in the History of Insurance Law / Studien Zur Vergleichenden Geschichte Des Versicherungsrechts, v. 8 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2020).

53 Hellwege, 277–78.

54 Deutsche Rentenversicherung, “Die Geschichte Der Deutschen Rentenversicherung,” accessed December 15, 2024, https://www.deutsche-rentenversicherung.de/DRV/DE/Ueber-uns-und-Presse/Historie/historie_detailseite.html#doc84f53049-eb89-4342-a98c-aa17a3272338bodyText2.

55 Schimek, “Schloss, Villa, EFH. Zur Geschichte des Einfamilienhauses in Deutschland,” 34.

56 Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, 109–10.

good and healthy family life. The garden city movement initiated by Ebenezer Howard towards the end of the nineteenth century was of great significance for this. During the German Empire the supply with better housing served as a counterbalance to socialist ideas fostered within the working class.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the organized working class frequently used the family as a leverage to demand higher wages as they had to financially support their household with dependent wives and children. Moreso, while Mies argues that women had no material interest in their own domestication, working-class men did. Within the capitalist system a monopoly on waged-work, and therefore money, also meant a monopoly on power within the nuclear family.⁴⁹ Thus, women and children being precluded from the productive sphere also served to amplify and solidify male dominance over them.⁵⁰

With housewifization capitalists ensured that the non-waged wives of their workers would provide services that they would have been obliged to pay for otherwise.⁵¹ Still, as a certain level of the workers’ well-being was integral to ongoing accumulation, there were rapid developments in the provision for social security. These became inevitable due to the changing working fields and conditions that industrialization brought, but also by the changes in the family constellation of the working classes which meant that workers had to insure their families against the case of the male breadwinner’s death. When the strain on the German population through the intensified exploitation in the heavy industries reached a tipping point at the end of the nineteenth century, the Imperial Chancellor Otto von Bismarck introduced compulsory health and accident insurance for the whole German Empire.⁵² In 1889 he enacted the workers’ Invalidity and Retirement Insurance Act (*Invaliditäts- und Altersversicherung*), the foundation for Germany’s current pension insurance (*Deutsche Rentenversicherung*).⁵³ The surviving dependents of the insured worker were only included in this legislation and had a right to the workers’ pension after 1911. The pension funds were self-administered by the employees and employers. Thus, state-insurance-offices frequently decided to put their assets into real estate such as *Arbeitersiedlungen*.⁵⁴ In these settlements the employers doubled as landlords which made their workers highly dependent on them.⁵⁵ Housewives received no pension in return for their domestic work.

By normalizing that the freedom of men to engage in waged work (and receive the social security that is tied to it) is made possible by an unfree woman that performs unwaged work for him in the domestic sphere, women’s housework (and the waged work of women until today) is systematically devalued:

This means women’s labour is considered as natural resource, freely available like air and water. Housewifization means at the same time the total atomization and disorganization of these hidden workers. This is not only the reason for the lack of women’s political power, but also for their lack of bargaining power.⁵⁶

Circling back to the first paragraph of this chapter, we can observe that in the creation of this boundary (or binary) between two spheres the productive henceforth seemed to embody and valorize “masculine” val-

ues like autonomy, while the reproductive devalued “‘feminine’ ideals of nurture”.⁵⁷ Due to the creation of separate spheres this first crisis of social reproduction seemed mitigated. But the wages that men earned for their work in the factories rarely sufficed to support their families, especially as women’s lost wages weren’t compensated. Living conditions in the worker’s tenement buildings prevented their housewives from achieving the “ideals of domesticity” that the bourgeois reformers had imagined.⁵⁸

Support schemes by the state helped to erect a few big settlements of single-family homes, mostly for veterans of the First World War or their widows. In 1919 the *Weimarer Verfassung* (Weimarer Constitution) first allowed imperial legislation to administer settlements and land and tie them to social status. One of the erected settlements is the *Siedlung Goldstein* in Frankfurt am Main, initially designed by Ernst May. The beneficiary owners that worked on the construction of this settlement were mostly unemployed, which enabled them to make high self-contributions. They became members of a *Siedlergemeinschaft* (settler community) with “strict rules that prevented any self-enrichment from the increase in value of the property”.⁵⁹ During the *Weimarer Republik* the endorsement of single-family homes shifted from a tool to pacify workers to a need for low-wage workers’ self-proficiency. Under the Nazi regime these support efforts were reserved for those that conformed to the regime.⁶⁰ Despite this and the idealization of the single-family home three-quarters of the population still lived in tenement buildings.⁶¹ Finally, low economic and employment security led to increased class conflict that escalated with two World Wars and the resulting “international financial chaos”.⁶²

Welfare and the Democratization of Consumption

Fraser locates the next era that had to bridge the widening trench between capital accumulation and social reproduction in the era after “the Great Depression and the Second World War”. These periods had been a strain on populations in the capitalist core (Europe, USA and Japan⁶³) and had led to mass unemployment, the collapse of the working classes’ social life and general dissatisfaction, leading to mass mobilization. The elites of this time were convinced that to secure a continuous (instead of short-term maximum) accumulation, the workforce had to gain a “stake in the system”. To pacify the poorer classes state-managed capitalism was introduced and, together with the welfare state, intensified “[p]ublic investment in health care, schooling, childcare and old-age pensions”, thus internalizing social reproduction processes that the working classes had been unable to uphold due to the level of exploitation they were submitted to.

As mentioned before, this affected social security services such as pensions. During the first years after the Second World War there was a high poverty rate among retirees as they had been dependent on their deceased children. Originally, their pensions were only supposed to supplement this support. Consequently, the state raised its provisions.⁶⁴ In 1957 the dynamic pension was introduced, calculating pensions according to years of membership (not amount of paid contribution) and giving retirees access to the general prosperity of the German population, thus ena-

57 Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” 107–8.

58 Fraser, 106–8.

59 Uwe Höger, “Wohn-Vermögen. Zur wohnungswirtschaftlichen, politischen und biographischen Bedeutung des Einfamilienhauses in Deutschland,” *Ethik und Gesellschaft*, June 26, 2023, 4, <https://doi.org/10.18156/EUG-1-2022-ART-1>. translation by author.

60 Schimek, “Schloss, Villa, EFH. Zur Geschichte des Einfamilienhauses in Deutschland,” 34.

61 Schimek, 34.

62 Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” 106–8.

63 Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, 113; Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” 105.

64 Deutsche Rentenversicherung, “Die Geschichte Der Deutschen Rentenversicherung.”

65 Deutsche Rentenversicherung.

66 Jörg Althammer, "Altersarmut in Deutschland: Stand, Entwicklung Und Reformoptionen," in *Armut Und Soziale Gerechtigkeit in Deutschland*, ed. Martin Dabrowski and Judith Wolf, *Sozialethik Konkret* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 2018), 101.

67 Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care," 108–10; For details on the "historical gendering and racializing of citizenship" see Krasny, "Architecture and Care," 38.

68 Schimek, "Schloss, Villa, EFH. Zur Geschichte des Einfamilienhauses in Deutschland," 35.

69 Höger, "Wohn-Vermögen. Zur wohnungswirtschaftlichen, politischen und biographischen Bedeutung des Einfamilienhauses in Deutschland," 5. translation by author.

70 Stark, "Warm Hands in Cold Age," 17.

71 Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, 101.

72 Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care," 109–10.

73 Schimek, "Schloss, Villa, EFH. Zur Geschichte des Einfamilienhauses in Deutschland," 36.

74 Höger, "Wohn-Vermögen. Zur wohnungswirtschaftlichen, politischen und biographischen Bedeutung des Einfamilienhauses in Deutschland," 5.

bling them to secure their standard of living. This was financed through an *Umlageverfahren* which entails that the productive generation pays for the pensions of the retirees, often described as *Generationenvertrag* (generational contract).⁶⁵ However, this new responsibility assigned to the younger generations led to a change in perception of the elderly from a vulnerable to a privileged group within capitalist societies.⁶⁶

Not to be underestimated is the working-classes' agency in this process of "valorizing social reproduction". Democracy and the German Basic Law (*Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*) were (re) established after the end of the Nazi regime and the working classes demanded their recognition as democratic citizens which gave them human rights.⁶⁷ With these rights also came the demand for material well-being and adequate housing. Many tenement buildings were destroyed in the Second World War. While the GDR supported the construction of rationalized *Plattenbauten*, the BDR quickly shifted its ideology back to the single-family home in the countryside.⁶⁸ The acquisition of property and the "industrially undemanding" construction of single-family homes was supported by the state and aimed at accelerating reconstruction after the war.⁶⁹ After the Second World War the Constitution of Germany designed the "family as the antithesis of the state". To prevent the rise of another totalitarian regime and limit the power of the state, the family (not the individual) was to be the smallest societal unit and was designed to hold a certain power. A person in need is therefore initially dependent on assistance from their family and only afterwards turns to social organizations and finally to the state.⁷⁰

While it is argued that the capitalist market had its origins in the trade with luxury goods for the rich⁷¹, now consumption was democratized to stabilize accumulation and reach a class compromise. The capitalists were willing to give their workers higher wages so that, in return, they could participate as consumers. "Linking the assembly line with working-class familial consumerism, on the one hand, and with state-supported reproduction, on the other, this Fordist model forged a novel synthesis of marketization and social protection." The private household became the designated place to fill with these "mass-produced objects of daily use". Access to these goods contributed to the material well-being of families.⁷² Household appliances such as freezers and refrigerators, as well as stocked supermarket shelves, made the kitchen gardens of single-family homes redundant, replacing them with green spaces whose function revolved around representation and recreation.⁷³ But the goods for the household weren't the only things which were democratized. In Germany, the economic boom since the sixties and the introduction of funding opportunities made the construction of single-family homes, as the materialized ideal for good family living, accessible for more classes, specifically the middle class which in turn contributed to economic growth. This growth was closely intertwined with the expansion of the automobile industry in Germany. Owning a car was a prerequisite for access to a single-family home in the countryside⁷⁴ (a condition that continues to this day). State subsidies to facilitate construction and the acquisition of property were, for instance, provided through *Bausparverträge* (home loan and savings contracts) but also the construction of



The election poster of the German party CDU reads: We can't do magic. But work. Help us! Vote CDU. This is about Germany! [translated by author]
1949 Bundestagswahlen Wir können nicht zaubern. Election Poster from Stiftung Bundeskanzler-Adenauer-Haus and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

75 Schimek, “Schloss, Villa, EFH. Zur Geschichte des Einfamilienhauses in Deutschland,” 35–36. translated by author.

76 Peggy Deamer in Fitz, Krasny, and Architektur Zentrum Wien, *Critical Care*, 14.

77 Tronto, “Caring Architecture,” 26.

78 Tronto, 32.

79 Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” 111.

80 Fraser, 111–12.

81 Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, 110.

social housing. In contrast to the GDR which fostered collective living imaginaries, the BDR aimed to create “loyal citizens striving for happiness in their private lives”.⁷⁵

With the conditions of its production as a practice that relies on great amounts of time and (economic) resources, architecture is dependent or even an expression of those in power and their economic system, with Peggy Deamer even stating that “the history of architecture is the history of capital.”⁷⁶ Considering the vast (material and immaterial) resources needed to create it, architecture also becomes a way of expressing power.⁷⁷ This may also apply to small-scale architecture like single-family homes as they are the expression of a system that subsidizes architectural structures that elevate the family bond and spatially isolate domestic workers. Men’s monopoly on the resources that can buy these forms of shelter guarantees women’s dependence on a husband to care for them through providing housing. Just like architecture, care is subject to relations of power. This can mean either, on a systemic level, the patriarchal structures that assign unpaid acts of care to women, or, more directly, the relationship between the carer and cared for. These relations are often, but not necessarily, asymmetrical.⁷⁸

State-managed capitalism didn’t surpass the boundary of the separate spheres, the emphasis on gender difference within the heteronormative family or dissolve the idea of a family wage (valorizing the male wage worker over the housewife). Rather, “[p]ublic investment in social reproduction reinforced these norms.”⁷⁹ Fraser concludes that here, emancipation was sacrificed for a stabilization of social reproduction⁸⁰ and the “internal colony” of the “Little White Man”, as Mies describes the nuclear family in the capitalist core, remained intact⁸¹.



The banner reads: Wages for Housework, Committee London
“They say it is love. We say it is unwaged work.” Photo from LSE Library on X.

WOMEN 'HERE' AND WOMEN 'THERE'

I'm just like any other modern woman, trying to have it all: loving husband, a family. It's just I wish I had more time to seek out the dark forces and join their hellish crusades, that's all.

- Morticia Addams in *The Problem with Work* by Kathi Weeks

The Globalization of Elderly Care

- 82 Mies, 110–12.
- 83 Mies, 112.
- 84 Mies, 112.
- 85 Mies, 110.
- 86 Mies, 112–13.
- 87 Mies, 118–19.
- 88 Mies, 114–15.
- 89 Mies, 120–21, 125.
- The wealth of the countries that form today's capitalist core has its origin in and still relies heavily on the exploitation of the (former) colonies. Maria Mies argues that the emergence of the capitalist world economy was enabled by the interdependent processes of housewifization (sexual division of labor) and colonization (international division of labor, IDL).⁸² As we have similarly discussed before, inherent to these divisions is "the contradictory relationship between the progress of one pole and the retrogression of the other."⁸³ In the context of the old IDL, whose beginnings can be traced back to the colonial period, this meant that, via low wages or unfree work in the colonies, cheap raw materials were transported to the capitalist core and, via mechanized processes, were transformed into goods that workers there with continuously increasing wages could afford. While this process led to pauperization in the (former) colonies, the populations in the capitalist core were indoctrinated to expect constant growth and accumulation of wealth.⁸⁴ According to Nancy Fraser, Fordist regimes were only able to finance their welfare programs in "defence of social reproduction" with the expropriation of the (former) colonies and the periphery of the capitalist core.⁸⁵
- Especially due to the economic boom after the Second World War, general access to consumption had become an integral factor for securing social order. When this "boom period" was threatened by (permanent) recession in the seventies the capitalist core (organized by the OECD) decided that "labour-intensive – and hence labour-cost-intensive – production processes should be exported to the colonies, now called developing countries, the Third World, [...]."⁸⁶ To reduce production costs in these relocated industries and produce cheap goods for import capitalists specifically targeted women. Women in 'Third World' countries were re-branded as housewives and dependents who would only contribute a "supplementary income" to the ones of their husbands⁸⁷ who in turn "may gain access to money, new skills, technology, wage-labour, and productive property". Thereby, women became the cheapest labor-force in agriculture, industries and other export businesses.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, housewives in the capitalist core were mobilized as consumers of these goods.⁸⁹

Moreover, by defining women universally as housewives, it is possible not only to cheapen their labour, but also to gain political and ideological control over them. Housewives are atomized and isolated, their work organization makes awareness of common interests, of the whole process of production, very difficult. Their horizon is

limited by the family.

Henceforth, the “good woman” in the (former) colony was responsible for lowering production costs and the “good woman” in the core was responsible for consuming for capital.⁹⁰ The interdependence of (re)productive work, “enslavement and exploitation” of women in ‘Third World’ countries and women in the capitalist core seems indirect and opaque when in fact, “[o]ne is the condition as well as the consequence of the other.”⁹¹ This circumstance is much more (spatially) direct in the case of elderly care. It remains hidden in the home, however, alongside those who perform elderly care work. These caregivers are often unpaid female family members or paid women from ‘Third World’ countries and the European periphery. The globalization of elderly care is tightly intertwined with women in countries such as Germany surpassing the boundary between productive and reproductive labor.

90 Mies, 126.

91 Mies, 121.

While, after the seventies, the new IDL was put in place by the OECD, women in the capitalist core had been starting to organize against their invisible oppression in the home (through, for instance, the network “wages for housework”) and more commonly demanded and gained access to the public sphere by entering the job market.⁹² This move was initiated by the structural change that accompanied deindustrialization and feminist movements and their critique of the “family wage”.⁹³ Another reason for the “growth of the female labor force” was the drastic reduction of welfare benefits.⁹⁴ The won liberation from all-embracing unpaid reproductive work might be perceived as emancipation, when in fact, it doesn’t weaken the violence that the division between productive and reproductive work imposes. In the book “Revolution at Point Zero” Silvia Federici points out that the ““career woman” [...] escapes from her oppression not through the power of unity and struggle but through the power of the master, the power to oppress – usually other women.”⁹⁵ Additionally, this emancipation was and remains incomplete. While the traditional (sexual) division of labor might be empirically dissolved⁹⁶, Federici arguments that a “second job” even increases the exploitation of women:

92 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 52.

93 Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” 112.

94 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 56.

95 Federici, 36.

96 Stark, “Warm Hands in Cold Age,” 28.

[...] [T]he jobs women perform are mere extensions of the housewife’s condition in all its implications. Not only do [they] become nurses, maids, teachers, secretaries – all functions for which [they] are well trained in the home – [they] are also in the same bind that hinders [their] struggles in the home: isolation, the fact that other people’s lives depend on [them], and the impossibility to see where [their] work begins and ends, where [their] work ends and [their] desires begin.⁹⁷

97 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 31.

In contrast to the unionized work during industrialization many of these service jobs are characterized by precarity and often not proficient to cover the “socially necessary costs of reproduction”.⁹⁸ Although some reproductive tasks may be externalized, complete freedom of them is illusory. While women workers gain visibility through their waged work, they are still the one’s performing (social) reproductive tasks in the home,

98 Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” 112.

99 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 36.

100 Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, 117.

101 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 56.

102 Federici, 56.

103 Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care," 112.

104 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 139.

105 Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, 126.

106 Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care," 112–13.

107 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 139.

108 Federici, 139.

109 Fitz, Krasny, and Architektur Zentrum Wien, *Critical Care*, 12–13.

110 Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care," 113.

effectively doubling their workload.⁹⁹ Maria Mies draws on numbers from the UN Conference on Women in nineteen-eighty stating "that two-thirds of all labour in the world is done by women."¹⁰⁰

What this development has achieved is a change in women's relations with the government which now must deal with them directly and not through wage-earning husbands as mediaries. The possibility for women to earn wages has also shifted (or rather increased pressure on) the institution of the heterosexual (nuclear) family with divorce rates going up extensively and more and more heads of family being made up of women.¹⁰¹ Apart from that, there has been a decline in the amount of housework related to the care for children through a major decrease in birth rates in capitalist societies and the marketization of services formerly performed within the (boundaries of the) home.¹⁰² Neoliberalist Policies in the member states of the OECD have, since the nineteen-eighties and nineties, insisted on the individual's responsibility for reproduction. In this economic logic the access to (reproductive) services outside of the home is thus significantly dependent on the economic situation of the subjects. Fraser deduces that "[the] result is a new, dualized organization of social reproduction, commodified for those who can pay for it and privatized for those who cannot, as some in the second category provide carework in return for low wages for those in the first."¹⁰³

Such developments pushed elderly care into the home, with states and private firms offering flexible hours and counseling opportunities for workers.¹⁰⁴ The increase of women's housework through privatization that Mies foresaw in the late eighties¹⁰⁵ becomes highly dependent on a woman's class affiliation. In contrast to the previous regimes Fraser identifies, the power dynamic between state and private firms shifts in financialized capitalism, with debt becoming a central mode of control. Henceforth, private firms can discipline states, not the other way around, enabling them to pursue their individual interests and accumulate capital unhindered. This also gives them power to control the boundaries, ideological worth and distribution of reproductive labor, for instance, "by demanding public disinvestment from social reproduction".¹⁰⁶ Through this disregard and lack of governmental support the responsibility to care might hinder a person's waged employment and more easily leads to poverty for those who provide care.¹⁰⁷ If the crisis is dire, even children or teenagers might take up (elderly) care work¹⁰⁸ with often serious consequences for their bodily and mental health.

Not only did the decline of welfare in the seventies and eighties affect "care concerns in health, education, culture and housing" but a "progressive" neoliberalism took over. It, for example, marketized care as self-care¹⁰⁹ but most importantly took advantage of emancipatory notions. Fraser points out the complicity of many activist movements in this marketization of emancipation which results in a "dismantling [of] social protections and re-externalizing [of] social reproduction"¹¹⁰.

Like each of its predecessor regimes, financialized capitalism institutionalizes the production–reproduction division on a gendered basis. Unlike its predecessors, however, its dominant imaginary

is liberal-individualist and gender-egalitarian—women are considered the equals of men in every sphere, deserving of equal opportunities to realize their talents, including—perhaps especially—in the sphere of production. Reproduction, by contrast, appears as a backward residue, an obstacle to advancement that must be sloughed off, one way or another, *en route* to liberation.¹¹¹

111 Fraser, 113–14.

Efforts to achieve this have led to an increased globalization of elderly care, shifting “a large amount of care work [onto] the shoulders of immigrant women”. After the rise of the new IDL this “new international division of reproductive work” has been highly beneficial for governments as it has severely reduced their (economic) responsibility for the services needed to care for elderly¹¹² while continuing its “entanglement with racial hierarchy”¹¹³. In Germany care workers moving from the Eastern European periphery, predominantly (but not exclusively) from Poland, has enabled many elderly to stay within a familiar environment, their homes, under conditions that they can cope with financially.¹¹⁴ Usually, these female care workers move into the home of the elderly person.

112 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 139.

113 Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” 110.

114 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 139.

Women from the periphery migrating to another country within the OECD to take up reproductive work there become unable to care for their families at home which leaves a hole in the reproductive web. This, consequently, must be mended by relatives or women of lesser means, leading to the formation of a “global care-chain” and a “global transfer of care and emotions”.¹¹⁵ As immigrants these women are often exposed to precarious working conditions, as waged reproductive work is systematically devalued, and as they are confronted with discrimination based on their race and gender.¹¹⁶ The reliance on immigrated care workers is enhanced by migration movements within the countries of the OECD. It has become rather common for family members to live far away from each other, preventing children from providing daily care for their aging parents and weakening family bonds.¹¹⁷

115 Arlie Hochschild in Federici, 139.

116 Federici, 139.

117 Stark, “Warm Hands in Cold Age,” 8, 11.

The alternative to staying at home and receiving care from either family and kin or hired care-workers is a (publicly funded) nursing home. However, understaffing and inadequate funding often lead to poor living conditions. “These institutions provide minimal care” and thus, strip many elderly of “basic elements in their maintaining a sense of their sense of identity and dignity and still feeling alive and valued.”¹¹⁸ If nursing homes are privately owned and thus most likely profit oriented a good quality of care services may not be guaranteed as the fixed insurance benefits limit profit. Profit only becomes possible through cost-cutting.¹¹⁹

118 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 139.

119 Stark, “Warm Hands in Cold Age,” 19.

Silvia Federici points out that the term of “care work” since its emergence in the nineteen-eighties and nineties, and compared to the definition offered by Tronto, is utilized in a rather reductive way, at least in a professionalized context. This is the result of paid care workers trying to manage expectations towards them by distinguishing the physical from the emotional aspects of their work. But the division between physical and emotional tasks is rather impossible when it comes to reproductive and care work such as elderly care: To tend to someone’s basic bodily needs is (at its best) a holistic task that considers the “‘affective’ response” of the other person and (at its worst) without this consideration, an alienating

120 The theory of “affective labor” (AL) emerged in the mid-1990s to describe “new forms of work” caused by major economic shifts which led to “the commercialization of reproduction”. Although it is useful in some respects, it is criticized by Silvia Federici because it obscures the exploitation of women. It fails to recognize the significant share of AL that they perform through their unpaid domestic and reproductive work. Although the theory tries to “ungender” labor, Arlie Hochschild points out that systematized interactive (and emotional) work e.g. in the service sector is still mainly performed by women. For more detail see Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 71–87.

121 Federici, 142–46.

122 Deutscher Bundestag in Stark, “Warm Hands in Cold Age,” 10.

123 Stark, 9, 10; The norm seemed to be the composition of the population during the nineteen-seventies. This falls together with the enactment of several changes in the social security system during that decade like the pension reform of nineteen-seventy-two that added, for example, a mother’s pension for raising children and gave housewives the possibility of a voluntary pensions’ insurance. Deutsche Rentenversicherung, “Die Geschichte Der Deutschen Rentenversicherung.”

124 Deutsche Rentenversicherung, “Die Geschichte Der Deutschen Rentenversicherung.”

125 Stark, “Warm Hands in Cold Age,” 17.

126 Stark, 18.

experience. “The theory of ‘affective labor’¹²⁰ ignores this problematic and the complexity involved in the reproduction of life.”¹²¹

The Current Conditions of Aging

Since the turn of the century governments increasingly directed their attention towards demographic change with the German Parliament specifically addressing the challenges resulting from plummeting birth rates and higher life expectancies for the individual and politics with a commission. This commission found itself confronted with *Überalterung* (over-aging) and proclaimed that the population pyramid of the country “stands on its head”¹²², reflecting a “strong normative view of what the age composition of national populations should be”.¹²³ The pensions reform of nineteen-ninety-two was the first to react to demographic change and the increasingly old population.¹²⁴

In addition to these reforms a universal nursing care insurance with a detailed assessment process was put in place in nineteen-ninety-five. The elderly person or their family may apply for the assessment at a *Sozialstation* (health and advice center). The subsequent process is performed by an independent physician who determines the level of support a person in need can expect.¹²⁵ “A fundamental precept of the insurance is that help should primarily be given in the home and principally arranged by relatives, neighbors, and volunteers.” Only when the family of the affected person is overwhelmed by their care needs may outside resources be consulted. The most common (and least expensive) mode of support that the insurance provides is money for a helper. This helper may, but doesn’t need to be, a family member. These care workers don’t count as economically active and only receive “rudimentary social insurance”. In two-thousand-and-one three-quarters of elderly people who still lived at home received care from their relatives, eighty percent of these being “wives, daughters, and daughters-in-law”. The monetary help that the nursing care insurance provides is not a wage for the care workers but rather a benefit.

The German system has been criticized by feminists and others for putting pressure on women to stay at home as housewives, for conserving old gender patterns, and for the low remuneration of the relatives who perform care; the system is set up so that hourly wages decrease when care needs increase.¹²⁶

This may also result in families in bad economic situations continuing to care for elderly relatives at home as they rely on the insurance money even though the elderly person might profit from the care services provided in a nursing home. As a result of care work being a strain on relatives, elderly people are more vulnerable towards abuse in their own homes. Besides this, further problems are, for instance, that immigration from Eastern European care workers is not intense enough to satisfy the country’s high demand (this being a generally questionable solution). As in many other countries of the OECD the general “shortage of labor” leads to governments counting on women entering the labor market while they care for an aging population, further increasing the “pressure on [...]”

women's time".¹²⁷ Past reforms of the social security system (1992, 2005) amplified this by increasing the retirement age to 67 and eliminating the security to maintain the standard of living. Henceforth retirees can only achieve this through income from investments, real estate and company pensions.¹²⁸ At the same time, the number of working hours is increasing as wages effectively decrease.¹²⁹

These problems are compounded by the fact that the responsibility of care work can cause responsible relatives "nervous and physical exhaustion" over the course of years.¹³⁰ As a result, even though family bonds often guarantee the highest quality of care, a tendency towards less (female) family members being attracted by care work for their elderly relatives can be observed.¹³¹ In Germany one third of relatives reject the responsibility to care for aging parents, a high percentage compared to other countries of the OECD. Studies have shown that respondents would prefer the state to take more responsibility. Additionally, elderly people would rather accept help from a partner than from their adult children. Although "generalizations should be made with caution" as preferences are dependent on the individual, these findings show a high discrepancy between the norm and the formal system in place compared to people's actual preferences. In the book "Warm Hands in Cold Age" Agneta Stark compares three different support systems in place for elderly care (Spain, Germany, Sweden). From her analysis we can conclude that emotional bonds between relatives (or other kin) are often weaponized to reduce public spending and in an effort of privatization more responsibility is given to the institution of the family. For these states the fact that "[families] are changing rapidly" might become an enormous difficulty as they are counting on this institution to provide care services.¹³² And, as has been established, the ability to perform care work is essential to the accumulation of capital.

Since the late nineteen-eighties the funding for social housing has dropped far behind the funding of property. Low-income households were disregarded in the housing question and if they desired home ownership they had to realize it with a high share of self-contribution.¹³³ After the German reunification in 1990 the shares of single-family homes in the old (BDR) and new (former GDR) federal states have evened out. In two-thousand-and-six two-thirds of all buildings in Germany were made up of single-family homes while they only accounted for one-third of all residences.¹³⁴ The advantages generally seen in a single-family home are the increased living space, the freedom of self-realization and fulfillment of individual ideas (which might lead to higher levels of belonging and identification with the home) and material security especially in old age. This, however, is only given when the relationship which was the foundation for the acquisition of the home remains intact. In cases of divorce, both parties might lose the home due to economic difficulties.¹³⁵ Despite these financial risks and decades of debt, the single-family home remains a life achievement, goal and dream for many. Criticism of its sustainability in terms of resources and spatial planning cannot diminish its popularity.¹³⁶

In two-thousand-twenty-one, sixty-three percent of elderly living in Germany relied on their family, an additional twenty-one percent on pro-

127 Stark, 16–17, 20.

128 Althammer, "Altersarmut in Deutschland: Stand, Entwicklung Und Reformoptionen," 101.

129 Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care," 114.

130 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 139.

131 Stark, "Warm Hands in Cold Age," 20, 25.

132 Stark, 26.

133 Höger, "Wohn-Vermögen. Zur wohnungswirtschaftlichen, politischen und biographischen Bedeutung des Einfamilienhauses in Deutschland," 7–8.

134 Schimek, "Schloss, Villa, EFH. Zur Geschichte des Einfamilienhauses in Deutschland.," 37.

135 Höger, "Wohn-Vermögen. Zur wohnungswirtschaftlichen, politischen und biographischen Bedeutung des Einfamilienhauses in Deutschland," 8; Michael Schimek, "Das Einfamilienhaus: 6 1/2 x mehr. Zur Spezifik einer ambivalenten Wohnform.," in *4 Wände: von Familien, ihren Häusern und den Dingen drumherum: das Einfamilienhaus in Deutschland seit 1950: Begleitbuch zur gleichnamigen Ausstellung im Museumsdorf Cloppenburg - Niedersächsisches Freilichtmuseum vom 15. April 2018-31. Januar 2019*, ed. Cai-Olaf Wilgeroth, Michael Schimek, and Museumsdorf Cloppenburg, Kataloge und Schriften des Museumsdorfs Cloppenburg, Heft 36 (Cloppenburg: Museumsdorf Cloppenburg - Niedersächsisches Freilichtmuseum, 2018), 12–18.

136 Schimek, "Das Einfamilienhaus: 6 1/2 x mehr. Zur Spezifik einer ambivalenten Wohnform.," 12.

137 Statistisches Bundesamt, “Mehr Pflegebedürftige,” accessed December 16, 2024, <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Querschnitt/Demografischer-Wandel/Hintergruende-Auswirkungen/demografie-pflege.html>.

138 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 139.

139 Stark, “Warm Hands in Cold Age,” 11.

140 Stark, 7.

fessional care-workers, for care in the home. The forgoing of ‘outside’ help is often due to the economic situation of the family.¹³⁷ If the elderly (and their families) can’t afford help they are faced with a discrepancy between the care that is received and the care that is really needed.¹³⁸ The conducted historical analysis was utilized to trace the emergence of the crisis of care generally but above all showcase the entanglement of issues concerning reproductive and care work inside and outside of the domestic sphere with the accelerating crisis in elderly care work in the home. We can deduce that “[t]he physical, financial, medical, and emotional conditions of aging are [...] the result of class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc., and in addition they reflect the life the old person has led and the resources to which she has had access.”¹³⁹ In public debate the financial discussion around elderly care often prevents a focus on the practicality that care work requires.¹⁴⁰ The subsequent narrations will attempt to re-focus on this practicality with all its affective and material implications.

WHO CARES? AN EXERCISE IN VISUALIZATION

The following narrations are based on my conversations with two women who were responsible for (elderly) care work within their families, Elisabeth and Amy (changed names). This exercise is separate from the essay but informs its conclusion.

Inspiration for this work is drawn from Allan Sekula who has used many mediums such as filmmaking, writing, photography and combinations of those to criticize societal grievances and redirect attention to create political relevance. For Sekula, the intertwining of photography and text becomes a “social practice”.^{*} In this spirit, the document is understood as an artistic exercise. The narrations are placed before the conclusion of the main essay and intend to foster discourse and visibility for the issues and stories of women carers. They consist of photographs and passages from our conversations.

The places of care we talked about are both situated in single-family or two-family homes in rural Germany. I was able to visit the home of Elisabeth’s parents in the North-West of Germany and, during our conversation, take photographs of her parent’s home. The houses in which Amy performed care work, located in the South-West of Germany, have been rented since which made a visit impossible. The narration will be accompanied by one photograph showing the outside of the homes we talked about which was provided by Amy.

Although I brought a catalogue of topics to our conversations it was important to me to leave room for the issues that both women wanted to talk about. Our conversations weren’t restricted to care work but focused on broader life circumstances. Here, I have compressed our very extensive conversations that each spanned between two and three hours. I recorded our conversations and transcribed them with the AI-tool “turboscribe”. After a correction, I translated the conversations from German to English with the translator “deepl”. Although my intention is to let the women carers be at the center and ‘narrate’ this exercise, the decisions on what passages to choose and the choices regarding the general form of the narrations were mine. I hope to visualize the intricate complexity and the material and affective entanglements of care with a whole life, inspired by, for me, incredibly enriching conversations.

Both narrations will begin with a short paragraph to introduce the situations of both women I talked to.

^{*} Allan Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973-1983*, Second edition (London: Mack, 2016), xi–xii.



02/12/2024

Elisabeth and I start our conversation in the house of her parents, a two-family home. The house is empty as her father has passed away and her mother moved to a nursing home earlier that year. Elisabeth, who has recently retired, intensively took care of her parents for six years. When the health of her parents deteriorated, she hired professional care workers from Poland that moved into the home of her parents and accompanied their everyday life. However, Elisabeth continued to be responsible for the bodily care of her parents, assisted by an outpatient care service (Caritas). She leads me through the home that she has started to empty, now that it is uninhabited. After, we continue our conversation in her kitchen. Elisabeth and her husband live in the single-family home next door.

We start our conversation with a visit to Elisabeth's parents' house, which is currently unoccupied.



This is a bit primitive, but this railing... Yes, the railing was there before. And then my father built this system - *we laugh* ...so that my mother could hold on to both sides. She wouldn't have been able to get up and down the stairs. And the washing machine is in the cellar.

Is that a pipe?

It's just a drainpipe. [...] Well, my father was always good at tinkering. But you can't look at the electrical wiring either. My father pulled wires everywhere. [...]



There was no shower, just a bathtub. And then I said, Gosh, let's get rid of it as a first step. That wasn't possible. [...] I was incredibly upset that [my father] was so inflexible. But I just didn't have the courage to be so... *pauses* radically dogmatic. I have... they are still parents. [...]



Then my parents had two small children's rooms, this is a small children's room of mine, for example, where the *Polin** lived temporarily.

* *Polin* is the German word for polish woman.



And then my parents had a bathroom built into a children's room here.
Now that's a great example, in contrast to the other one... [...]





So this is where the... the beds were here. At first my parents were still together and then when mother fell, father moved into the living room with his bed. We put mother's bed here sideways. So that we could reach it from both sides. And mother had needed a lifting aid for a long time. [...] Did you want to take a photo of that too? Hang on, I'll push it out of the corner. [...] Well, without it, my mother wouldn't have been able to get out of bed on her own. [...]



Rollator is clear, right? You need it in the house, outside. This is the indoor rollator. It's a bit lighter. [...] And the ones from the health insurance are quite crummy. We said straight away, mother needs something else.

Ah, [...] they don't give you any information about things like that, you have to know what you want yourself?

Yes, of course. [...]





Yes, the tiny steps are... [...] And then we just put the ramp on there. Just like we used to do. And mother wouldn't have been able to get outside otherwise. [...] And mother is someone who likes fresh air. And she likes to have a look around. [...] But at least it was better than without the ramp. [...]

Then it was clear that this wouldn't last much longer... but neither of my parents wanted a Polin. They were usually so divided, but that was absolutely clear.

They didn't want any outside help, just from the family?

Well, a care service was okay, but no Polin in the house...although my parents always said that- we have another apartment upstairs. That's where the Polin will live. [...] But my father didn't take care of the tenancy agreement, for example. The woman had lived here for ten years, she had one year's notice. [...] Yes, and then my mother fell, [...] my father was already suffering from dementia [...]. Then it was quite clear that they could no longer stay alone. [...]



These are all such changes *points to handrail*, you can still conceal them a bit. But if you put a ramp there, then everyone knows immediately that nothing works anymore.

So these elements were actually a bit about [...] how it looks?

Also very important, very important for my mother. But also remaining independent on her own, as little help as possible and staying in the house. Staying here and it shouldn't be too noticeable. [...]



So [my mother] could [...] only get up very slightly. [...] And it would have been really awful for her to always lie in the bedroom. So we had a little living room here - she called it a *séparée*. It used to be a children's room too. And then we put a makeshift daybed here, a wide, a high daybed, so that my mother didn't always feel like she was in bed during the day, but... and my father [...] installed a television. My mother used to lie here all the time. [...]

And it was, because my mother had her room here. And the whole wall was full of pictures. And then we cleared it out. And I took the pictures down. I thought, huh, no Polin can move in here, that's not possible. I mean, what does it look like in here? [...] So I called our painter. Really, I was crying on the phone. Elisabeth, he says, I'm coming, we'll get it done in a day. And then your help can move in. We didn't move the wardrobe at all. And then we put a bed in here, a nice one, and a table, a desk. We installed an internet connection. The television was already there. [...] You have to offer a bit of something. Otherwise they won't come back. [...]

I was so exhausted. I couldn't sleep any more. My mother's arm was broken. My father had dementia. [...] And then I was reading the paper very early on a Saturday morning. And read an ad. We are looking for a new job for our long-time Polish care worker. [...] I called directly, at a reasonably convenient time. [...] And then it was a family. So, the daughter [...] was now looking for a new family for the Polish care worker. And the Polin had been there for a long time and wanted to stay [here in the village]. And so of course I was in a good position. [...]



For example, I didn't know how much money existed. I cleaned out the cupboard here, it was packed full of clothes. My mother was just hoarding. And I think I found 4,000 euros in cash, or 5,000. The first thing I did was take it to the bank very nicely and properly. [...]



Yes, the whole house is empty. [...]

Okay, that means there's a shared entrance here and then you go upstairs.

Yes, and upstairs was rented out, and then the Polin moved in, or rather, they always take turns. [...] After all, they have to go home sometimes. [...]



So we've only furnished it modestly. [...]

You didn't see that, did you? How they set themselves up here.

Yes, yes, I visited them regularly. [...]





Yes, well, toilet chairs, things like that have to be handed in. They're no longer here. Because things that you bought yourself, like the ramp, [...]. These things are still here, of course. [...]

And these are also things that you would prefer to sell?

Yes, well... Sure.

But then you can't get rid of them? [...]

Well, I haven't done that yet... but I tried this, the senior citizens' beds, that didn't work at all. Then what did I try recently? Furniture, for example... The big table from the dining room. It's not gray and white. People only want gray and white these days. They don't want walnut or cherry or things like that.

What? Walnut or cherry?

No chance... Only gray and white.



By the way, the bench, that was a great story when my mother was really in such a bad state. The last summer they spent together, my parents practically always sat here on the bench. Before my mother fell. And then they drank tea in the morning. Someone always passes by to chat and stuff. [...] And at least a bit of social contact, and - that was great.

We finish our visit of the house and continue our conversation in Elisabeth's kitchen, in the house next door.

So I think it's important to look at [...] what I want as a person when I'm old. I want to stay in my home. I think that's the credo. And if that's my top priority, what do I have to do so that I can stay at home? [...] So we've already thought about that. [...] When we built the house [...]

That means before building the house... through your experience with your parents?

No, I come from a nursing background. I'm an intensive care nurse. But the bathroom, you can look at it, it's not small, but it's not big either. Then our daughter, our eldest, said to me, Mom, how do you imagine things will be? [...] I said, no problem, I've already thought of everything beforehand. Because behind it is the wardrobe, that's going. The wall will be knocked out, a large sliding door will be put in, and then we'll have a huge, ground-level bathroom that's suitable for the elderly and disabled. [...] If my top priority is to stay at home, I can't shy away from making changes. Like with my parents, for example. [...]

But where did it come from that they didn't want to change anything in the house?

Well, I think my father is someone who doesn't like change anyway. [...] And for my mother, I think the outward appearance was always very important. She didn't like driving through [the village] in a wheelchair either.

For fear that someone would see her and that-?

Yes, so pride.



Carpets. You probably didn't even notice that. There's no carpet anywhere.

True.

And the house was full of carpets, full of carpets. [...] And I spoke with the tongues of angels, the carpets have to go. [...] In the house, when old people live there and have to use a rollator, carpets have to go. [...] I always told my father, if you don't want your wife to fall, you have to get rid of the carpets. Yes, he did put them away, but he put them all in the cellar under the cellar stairs [...] he couldn't part with them. [...]



But did you have the feeling - or where did that come from, that there was this [...] attachment to things - so did they [...] somehow self-realize a bit through it?

Well, my mother comes from a family, really poor, really poor. [...] And then they simply had nothing during the war, my father was a carpenter. And even later, when my mother tells me that they built the house, that's an incredible achievement. They did a lot themselves, a lot, a lot. And my mother, I think, always liked furnishing and thought fabrics and colors were beautiful. It was a kind of self-realization. And the older my mother got, also due to health restrictions, her home was of course "my home is my castle", you know that. And that fit my mother like a glove. She let off steam at home. [...] So for my mother, I think it's about covering up the other with the beautiful. [...]



But [...] the two care workers who now lived in the house with your parents, did they also have a social network here?

Yes, they were already here [in the village] before. [...] One of them had a friend [here]. She went there in the evenings. She also had visitors. I was also very generous. The son-in-law somehow also had jobs here, many Poles work here. Then he lived there too. With my parents upstairs. I didn't mind that either. The main thing was that my parents were looked after and that they came back. [...]

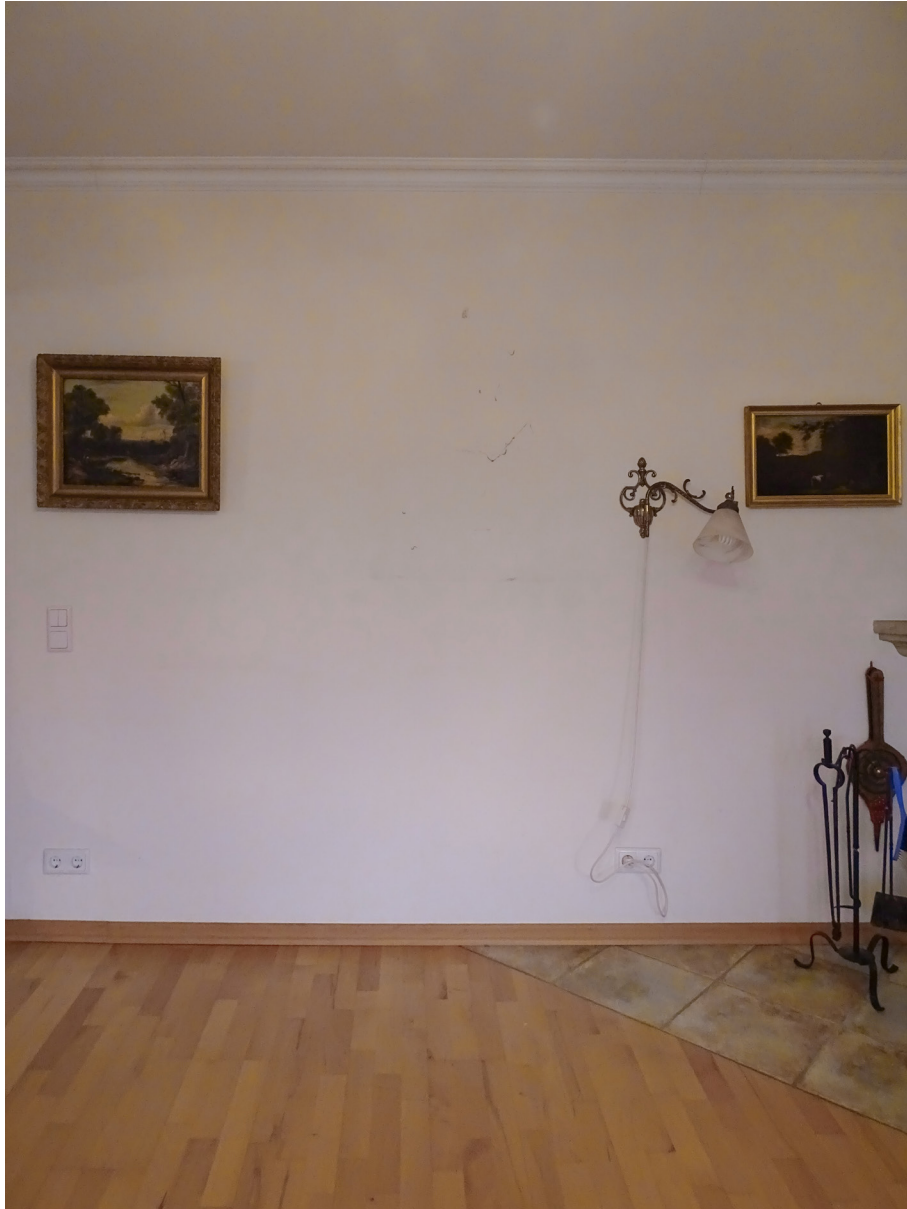
Do you have the feeling that there are people around you who understand that very well? In other words, how socially connected you are. Maybe for your parents, who are less and less mobile and are very housebound. [...] Or also for you, that you have the feeling that there is such a support...

network. [...] Well, it depends on your character. My father was a complete loner. [...] My mother is a completely different person. Sociable, communicative, interested. [...] So I think that, if she's completely honest, she has more social contacts [in the retirement home] now than when she was at home. [...]

But you still have the feeling that she felt more comfortable at home?

That - I know my mother. She would never say that. [...] But I can just feel it. [...] Well, no, I think if she could do magic, she would conjure herself back. [...]

I can sell the house. Sure. [...] But I have to drive past the house. And I know what my father has invested. And my mother. [...] Not only here *signals money*, but also physically. [...] Yes, so it's also a moral obligation, somehow. So I'd prefer that our son, he's married now, that he says I'll take it over. And he could tear it down, I wouldn't care. The main thing is that it continues well. [...]



The picture *points to a picture on the kitchen wall*, for example, comes from my parents' living room. I would have never hung it here at the beginning of the year. [...] And at some point my husband said - of course we always go next door regularly. It needs airing, heating, water. Wow, he says, that picture isn't bad at all. Do you like it? [...] But my mother doesn't ask, what are you doing with the pictures? [...]

Can you somehow define for yourself what home means?

hesitates [...] I think it also depends on the person. [...] But for my mother, it really was my... my home is my castle.

So [...] this attachment to this place and this house.

Yes, nothing can happen to me there... and for my father it was a house of his own. [...] So my parents built the house out of nothing. And that's why it was so important. I think it blurs, the emotional blurs with the material value. [...]

Of course I would also like to stay here. But I don't think we have any other choice. My generation. And be flexible, make visions, how can I imagine my old age? [...] Or, can I start a flat share with our best friend here when we're both alone. We don't have to share the bedroom. But we can support each other. He can do things that I can't and so on. We have to be flexible in a completely different way. [...] I can come up with ideas about the way I live.

[...]



13/12/2024

Amy and I meet for a phone call. Our call is interrupted every thirty minutes. As we are not able to visit the homes that we talk about, I ask her to give me descriptions of the premises. The home of her grandparents (left) and her parents' house (right) are next to each other. Due to the big size of her family, her parents' house was later extended. Amy, who is in her fifties now, took care of her grandmother (who suffered from rheumatism) when she was a child (during the seventies and eighties). This responsibility was traumatic for her and had dire physical and psychological consequences, which is why I include this as a disclaimer here. Amy's mother also suffered from rheumatism and was later mainly cared for by her husband, Amy's father. When both of her parents' dependency increased, the family hired professional care workers from Poland who moved into their parent's home.

What should I do? Just describe how it used to be here? [...] Then I would start with grandma. [...] Well, the old house where she lived [...] was a semi-detached house. [...] The kitchen had a table in it. I think there used to be a bigger table when the children were still at home. But in my day there was a table that could seat six people. [...] Grandma always sat with her back to the inside wall of the house. Behind her was a kitchen cupboard, a small, old built-in cupboard. [...]

Yes, Grandma sat - I only knew her in a wheelchair. [...] And I practically only knew grandma with this severe rheumatism, just like my mom had, she could hardly walk. [...] I can still vaguely remember her occasionally going down the stairs backwards and leaving the house. But that also stopped when Grandpa died. [...] Well, when grandpa died, how can I put it, there was talk among the adults that grandma couldn't stay there alone and... see what we could do. And I felt terribly sorry for my grandma that she was alone in the house and offered to sleep at her place. [...] Of course, as a child I didn't know that this meant that I had to take grandma to the toilet at night, help her get out of bed, that she could sit in the night chair and so on. I didn't know that. I was eight years old at the time. [...]

That is, [my sister] came over at about 10, half past ten, put grandma to bed, and I lay in bed. [...] And then it just started [...] No continuous sleep at night, but waking up every night. And helped grandma to go to the toilet. [...] In other words, I no longer had continuous sleep in any way. [...] It was just really overwhelming without end. And my therapist thinks it was child abuse, and she's absolutely right. It was absolute abuse. [...]

[...] Yes, so again, mom. So [then], after [my youngest brother] was born, the rheumatism came back with a bang. And it became increasingly difficult for her to work properly with her fingers and hands. And that meant that from the time [my sister] left, I more or less spent my weekends with grandma at night and always cooked for the family with my mom at the weekend. [...] And yes, the boys then had to help build the house, i.e. wallpaper something, lay the floor, do the stairs and so on. I always admired them because I thought it was great and I always had to do the kitchen and ugh. [...] And then it was [many years later] that [mom] had vertebral collapses due to osteoporosis. And that put her in bed - so she had to stay in bed until it healed. [...]. [...] Then I went down to 25 hours for three quarters of a year until mom was better again. [...] And then, practically at the same time, I finished building the living room upstairs and the kitchen and dining room upstairs. [...] Yes, I just completed it myself. [...]

I was more or less alone at home. And then there was always the suggestion, oh yes, you're at home, you can do it. [...] Then I told them how I felt as a child. And that I couldn't manage it. [...] And then I talked to [a colleague] in the kindergarten about it, she had just started as a director at the time, I got on well with her. And she said, you have to get out of this house. If you continue to live there, you'll end up in this thing, there's nothing you can do about it. Yes, then I looked for an apartment and moved out in December. And that gave this thing the reality that nursing care had to be looked after differently. [...]

And then, at some point, it was clear that father couldn't manage it any more. And I don't know why, but in any case the *Polinnen* came. So we had Polinnen who took over the care for both of them. [...] [They lived] in my old room, that's right. They painted it differently, painted over my beautiful landscape. I mean, it was always nice, I could always be creative at home. I painted my room with the mountains from the landscape and Trallala and moonrise and sunset and, yes. [...]

Do you have [...] rooms or places in your house or in your grandmother's house that you particularly associate with these tasks, i.e. with either care or housework?

[...] I mean, there was just a striking thing - mom, when she had the vertebral collapses, she had a hospital bed for the first time and it was in the living room because everything was just too cramped in the bedroom. And then it was in the living room for three quarters of a year, the hospital bed. And later, when the hospital bed was also in the bedroom, it was rearranged so that it fitted in better. And then the beds were also separated, so Dad slept in his bed facing the window and Mom had the hospital bed on the other wall, yes. [...]

Mom was actually someone who approached people a lot and was very well integrated socially. Her illness isolated her. But she was actually someone who was in the women's association, who took part in things with dad. In terms of the political party, she always baked cakes and did things for the church, etc., until she fell ill. [...]

Do you have the feeling that traditions or rituals that you had also determined the order of the house a little? Or had an influence on the furnishings or something?

Yes, well [...] at the weekend we always had breakfast together, ate lunch together, had dinner together. When we were at school during the week, the children who were there from school always ate together. I think that's a nice thing. So that's definitely something I miss. Eating together like that. Eating alone is no fun. [...]

Did you eat in the dining room or where did you eat?

Yes, we always ate in the dining room, so the kitchen was the narrow thing. And in the past, the kitchen was practically a dining kitchen. So the original kitchen was a dining kitchen. [...]

And later, when the extension was built, the kitchen was separate and the dining room was in front of it. And that means [your mother] also sat in the dining room during the day?

Yes, in the dining room. The living room was only for special occasions. The living room was a sanctuary only for special occasions. [...]

But special occasions were then visitors and such, or...

Visitors, birthdays, Christmas and things like that, yes. Exactly. Everyday life actually took place in the dining room. [...] And then when mom was there with the hospital bed, the living room became the living space. So we actually stayed with mom...

It kind of actually followed [your mom] then.

Exactly, exactly. When she came out again, it was the dining room again. [...]

What was the relationship like with the carers who lived in your house?

It was very sincere. It was very warm. The Polinnen - so [a relative] is still in contact with them, she talks to them regularly on the phone. [My sister] was in contact with [one of them] for a long time and they are there every now and then, at least the younger one, [in the village] at other people's houses and then they always come to our parents' graves and go there. We practically had three sisters and a friend of theirs who always took turns. [...]

But of course it was also practical that the house was so big that people could just move in, right? Without having to...

Yes, of course, that was good. Then, as I said, they furnished the room the way they wanted and rearranged and painted it and made themselves comfortable there. [...]

Can you define a bit for yourself what home is to you [...]?

Well, I'd say home for me was [the village] as long as my parents lived there. The parents were "home", in the end. Now that the house is rented out and [my brother] has remodeled it, it's still - sure, it's a bit like coming home again, but it's - the soul is missing, I'll put it that way. That was the parents, after all. [...]



Mierle Ladermann Ukeles, *Dusting a Baffle*, from *Private Performances of Personal Maintenance as Art*, 1970-73, black-and-white photograph, 10 x 8 in. Photo: Jack Ukeles. printed in Angélil and Siress, "Who Cares? From Matters to Fact to Matters of Concern to Matters of Care," 59.

TOWARDS NEW FORMS FOR CARE

[...] I pay tribute to the past as a resource that can serve as a foundation for us to revision and renew our commitment to the present, to making a world where all people can live fully and well; where everyone can belong.

- bell hooks, *Belonging: a culture of place*

141 Elisabeth, Conversation 1, December 2, 2024.

142 Conversation 1.

143 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 146.

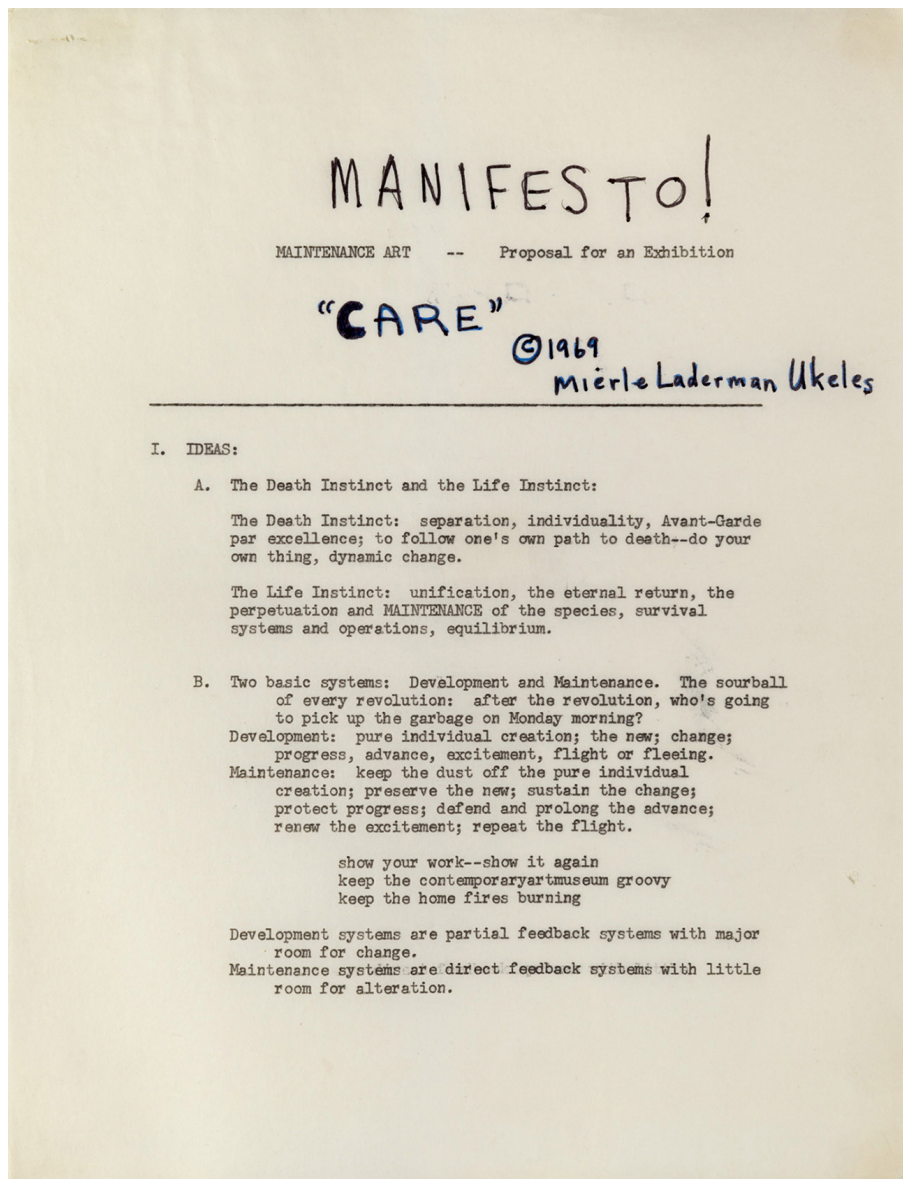
144 Conversation 1.

145 hooks, *Belonging*, 147–48, 151–52.

146 Marie José Mondzain, “Loneliness in the Crowd, The Loneliness of Exile, and Welcoming,” in *The Architecture of Loneliness: Reflections on Displacement and Welcoming*, ed. Mieke Bal (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2024), 62.

“But you know, with nursing care... Not everyone can understand that either. People who haven’t done nursing care can’t understand what it means.”¹⁴¹ The reality of care work in the intensity that elderly care work often takes is unknown to those of us who have never performed it, especially the possibly physically and psychologically consuming tasks of caring for elderly people or one’s aging parents. Care work can become all-embracing.¹⁴² While privacy can be integral to guarantee dignified aging, the people involved in elderly care are often confronted with spatial isolation which makes their work and the harsh realities of this stage of life even harder. “[S]ocializing, collectivizing the experience of illness, pain, grieving and the ‘care work’ involved”¹⁴³ might foster entanglements with a wider community of care and thus counter the sensation of being alone in caring and alone in being cared for. For us to collectivize these ‘ugly’ realities we need spaces where they can gain visibility. If even elderly people avoid visiting their familiars in nursing homes¹⁴⁴ because these places are charged with the realities of illness, dependency and decay, how can we learn to make this state of human life more familiar to us and lose fear of it?

The importance of enhancing our regard for the needs and struggles of others has been touched upon in the second chapter. Our capacity for this regard is influenced by the production of space. bell hooks writes of the “practice of civility” she was raised with “which included learning respect for one’s elders.” In the south of the US, where she grew up under segregation, communities were built through the “cultivation of civility, of respect for others and the acknowledgement of their presence.” Speaking to her neighbors was ritualized and regarded as necessary. So, when she passed someone sitting on their porch, she was obliged to perform this ritual. To hooks, civility is an ethical practice and serves as a constant reminder of her “interconnectedness and interdependency” with all those around her. In her writing, civility and hospitality are marks of a responsible citizen and “a place where one can be seen” is necessary to practice them.¹⁴⁵ Contrary to this, some people feel the need to distance themselves (spatially), because they “consider themselves invaded and threatened”. For protection, they may build a “fictive community” through similarities based on “blood and soil”.¹⁴⁶ As established in the second chapter, origin is relevant for our imaginary of the home. But its primacy and possibly xenophobic tendencies are questioned by the current realities of rapid change, migration and globalization. In turn, “[b]elonging is constructed by others through sharing signs, and those signs are both symbolic and material. Constructing hospitality is building the



Mierle Ladermann Ukeles, *MANIFESTO FOR MAINTENANCE ART, 1969! Proposal for an Exhibition: "CARE,"* written in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, October 1969. Four typewritten pages, each 8 1/2 x 11. Detail: Page 1 of 4. printed in Angélil and Siress, "Who Cares? From Matters to Fact to Matters of Concern to Matters of Care," 59.

147 José Mondzain, 59–60.

148 Molina-Mula, Gallo-Estrada, and González-Trujillo, “Self-Perceptions and Behavior of Older People Living Alone,” 10.

149 Seamon and Sowers, “Place and Placelessness, Edward Relph,” 44.

150 Seamon and Sowers, 45.

151 Stark, “Warm Hands in Cold Age,” 32–33.

152 Conversation 1; Amy, Conversation 2, December 13, 2024.

153 Marc Angélil and Cary Siress, “Who Cares? From Matters to Fact to Matters of Concern to Matters of Care,” in *On Architecture and Greenwashing*, ed. Anne-Charlotte Malterre-Barthes, *The Political Economy of Space*, Vol. 01 (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2024), 64.

154 Stark, “Warm Hands in Cold Age,” 7.

155 Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” 116–17.

156 Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 13.

157 Stark, “Warm Hands in Cold Age,” 32–33.

158 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 30.

159 Seamon and Sowers, “Place and Placelessness, Edward Relph,” 47–48.

home of the host, the home of the one who welcomes and the one who is welcomed”¹⁴⁷.

For elderly people, belonging and attachment to their home are significant factors in maintaining their identity and well-being¹⁴⁸, an important need reaching so far that enabling the stay in the home could be perceived as an act of care. Integral to Relph’s study on place is “his firm belief that such understanding might contribute to the maintenance and restoration of existing places and the making of new places.”¹⁴⁹ To understand, what the place of the home signifies now also makes its maintenance and its evolution towards a more common organization of reproduction possible. In reference to the concepts of insideness and outsideness Relph invents which were discussed in the second chapter and considering the historical analysis done prior, we cannot presume that a care worker feels what is described as existential insideness in their home. Existential insideness is associated with notions such as safety, enclosure, recreation and belonging.¹⁵⁰ While caring for one another can be a very satisfying experience, care work can also become a heavy burden.¹⁵¹ The notions that have been listed before can therefore contradict each other: What if enclosure in the home causes physical and mental stress? In the context of the (international) sexual division of labor, enclosure might be perceived as antagonistic and restricting. Although women in the capitalist core gained visibility by engaging in waged work, care workers (paid and unpaid) for elderly people still predominantly act within the home. As the care work intensifies, so does their isolation. The all-embracing attention care and reproductive work demand of women and care workers¹⁵² more generally, and the invisibility of their work (that stands in the way of an organized struggle), begs the question if certain parts of (and work within) the home must go beyond the enclosure determined by the boundaries of the nuclear family, rather, must be exposed to trigger social and cultural change. “Understood as performative agency, care is hardly just a sentimental, touchy-feely affair. On the contrary, care has the power to subvert, disrupt, and unsettle all that is supposedly settled [...]”¹⁵³ Furthermore, Agneta Stark¹⁵⁴ and Nancy Fraser¹⁵⁵ argue that care work must be combinable with safe and interesting work. For this, a demand for shorter working weeks, or simply, less work¹⁵⁶ and better economic conditions for carers and cared-for are integral.¹⁵⁷ These changes might lead to a higher probability for care work to be carried out with “great skill and creativity” leading to “satisfaction to the care worker herself and to the person needing care.”

Here, the dualism of insideness and outsideness is used to point towards the home as a place where care workers and women are exposed to the violence that capitalism imposes on them. This subtle violence, as Silvia Federici calls it¹⁵⁸, might make carers feel a sense of outsideness and thus alienation from the home, which is grave in that this violence has changed in form but has generally been maintained over centuries. As Relph is basing his dualist concept on the experiences of “a typical human being” (which might point to an androcentric view and oversimplification¹⁵⁹) and he creates yet another asymmetrical binary, the efforts to collectivize care and change the spheres of productive and reproductive work might also question this binary. Overcoming the asymmetry of

these binaries, care relations that “foster solidarity and trust” might lead to more equal relations between the involved subjects and could function as a signifier for the quality of care.¹⁶⁰ “Connectedness through care can counteract and [...] overcome the toxic devaluation of nature, craft and reproductive labor.”¹⁶¹

With the current realities of demographic change and the general crisis of reproductive work it becomes more and more important to create places that foster kinship relations that surpass the bonds of the nuclear family. This may enable forms of mutual aid and drive change, “when liberation from stereotyped gender roles frees women and men [and people of all genders] to fully express their caring abilities.”¹⁶² Policies are still not proposing men as care workers.¹⁶³ But for decades, the realities of aging have been able to dispel the patriarchal structures that create the sexual (and international) division of labor and the boundaries which assign the responsibility for care. The women I spoke to bare testimony to the devoted care that their fathers provided for their mothers until their physical and psychological condition wouldn’t allow it anymore.¹⁶⁴ The same is accounted for by bell hooks: her father, a model patriarch, learned how to care for her mother after she had served his every need her whole life.¹⁶⁵

Preferences of elderly and care workers show that the home might have to adapt to a desired professionalization and externalization of elderly care. The women carers I spoke to are certain that they do not want family members to care for them in old age. For this, the spatial boundaries that define reproductive and care work as private might have to be moved to a certain extent. Since there is a great shortage of professional care workers, both women already give thought to alternative living constellations and, despite a close attachment to their current longtime homes, a determination to make the places they might (have to) move to their home. This willingness to and acceptance of inevitable change was a significant theme in our conversations.¹⁶⁶ For this, it might be important not to think of architectural objects as something finished but rather grant them the potential to change and be malleable as well. This applies to the responsibility to care which might be given within the home but also regarding the general material order of it.

In the book “The Adaptable House” Avi Friedman advocates for homes to be designed in a manner that they can easily be adapted to the ever-changing life of owners and inhabitants and develops corresponding strategies. Homes today are often seen as fixed and unchangeable, so to enable them to react to change, “new strategies need to be a combination of design approaches, an imaginative sequence of tasks, and innovative products.”¹⁶⁷ For instance, designing for change may involve anticipating future and evolving needs of the inhabitants materializing in the conscious placement of load-bearing walls.¹⁶⁸ Friedman criticizes the tendency to design elements of the home, for example room sizes, constellations or even window sizes and placements, in a way that assigns a room one pre-fixed function.¹⁶⁹ This may shorten a “home’s useful life.”¹⁷⁰ Many of Friedman’s suggestions are concerned with the initial design and building of a house. However, current sustainability issues require us (inhabitants

160 Tronto, “Caring Architecture,” 32.

161 Krasny, “Architecture and Care,” 40.

162 Stark, “Warm Hands in Cold Age,” 33.

163 Stark, 32.

164 Conversation 1; Conversation 2.

165 hooks, *Belonging*, 229.

166 Conversation 1; Conversation 2.

167 Avi Friedman, *The Adaptable House: Designing Homes for Change* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2002), ix–xi.

168 Friedman, 13.

169 Friedman, 14–15. For design strategies concerning this topic see the pages 125–32.

170 Friedman, 11.

171 Friedman, xii.

172 Conversation 1.

173 Conversation 1.

174 Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 138.

175 Angélil and Siress, "Who Cares? From Matters to Fact to Matters of Concern to Matters of Care," 45–47.

176 Krasny, "Architecture and Care," 33.

177 Krasny, 37.

178 Tronto, "Caring Architecture," 28.

and planners) to focus our attention and efforts on the existing building stock. This applies in particular to the high proportion of single-family homes in Germany, whose sustainability is in question. Here, Friedman's emphasis on adaptability as a "state of mind" is very important.¹⁷¹ As people become more comfortable with adaptability, this can lead to a creative approach to the form of their homes. This cultural change is also integral for changes being made to improve care for elderly people. Elements that signify dependency are often related to emotions like shame and are thus resisted. With rising life expectancies, the willingness to accept dependence becomes integral.¹⁷² A creative and destigmatized approach to auxiliary elements (for elderly care) and changes in the home thus become essential.

The change of the premises according to the needs of the elderly people or external care workers moving into the home does not seem to be perceived as a nuisance or alienating by their caring relatives. These feelings seem to set in once the house empties. Either with the siblings moving out or after the parents are deceased or move into a nursing home. As the responsibility for care work might be given due to spatial proximity the relative that was providing the care work might also inherit the responsibility to care for the home after it is empty. This work is not only material, but also affective, as the attachment of the relative herself, but also the attachment of her parents to the home, demands a (morally) responsible dealing with it.¹⁷³

Marc Angélil and Cary Siress write about the observations of Portuguese architect Álvaro Siza made on the maintenance and daily care for a house in his short paper "Living a House". Just as Silvia Federici points out that aging is not an "optional" stage of life,¹⁷⁴ Siza suggests that "everything eventually breaks" and needs repair. These ("coordinated") acts of repair and care become a prerequisite for the inhabitation of a house.¹⁷⁵ Similarly criticizing the predominant importance given to design, Elke Krasny emphasizes the harm of architects seen as singular geniuses and artists.¹⁷⁶ The autonomy of the architectural genius, promoting independence, has obscured the fact that reproduction is necessary for 'autonomy'. In contrast to the independence historically promoted by the architecture practice, care is conditioned by connectedness and interdependence of subjects.¹⁷⁷ To create architecture and places that make collectivized care and reproduction possible, the practice of architecture must change accordingly. In her essay "Caring Architecture" Joan C. Tronto calls for an architecture that plans beyond the "thing" or material object that is the result of the production process and thus considers the effect of architecture on the ones that engage in relationships with it, including the environment and multispecies ecologies. She declares that "we now need an architecture that fulfills the basic tasks of sharing responsibilities for caring for our world."¹⁷⁸

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NOTICE

I acknowledge the importance of positionality and the standpoint that underlie this study and informed my research methods. I am a white cis gender woman who has had access to education through her privileged family background. It is important to note that the standpoint of this essay is primarily Western-centric, which is reflected by the literature on which it is based.

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Collective Rampart, Jean Richter

Gay Apocalypse, François Mégret

Mechanical Symphony, Paulina Ornella Beron

Murder on the Floorplan, Léo Perrin-Livenais

Peasant-Mania, Julia Maraj

Speculative Coastlines, Emile Iacopo Jourcin & Melina Schechinger

The Architecture of the Superblock, Michelle Mortensen

The Boundaries of Labor, Lea Marzinzik

Typological Mestizaje, María Ruiz Medina

Work It Home, Emilie Hamel

