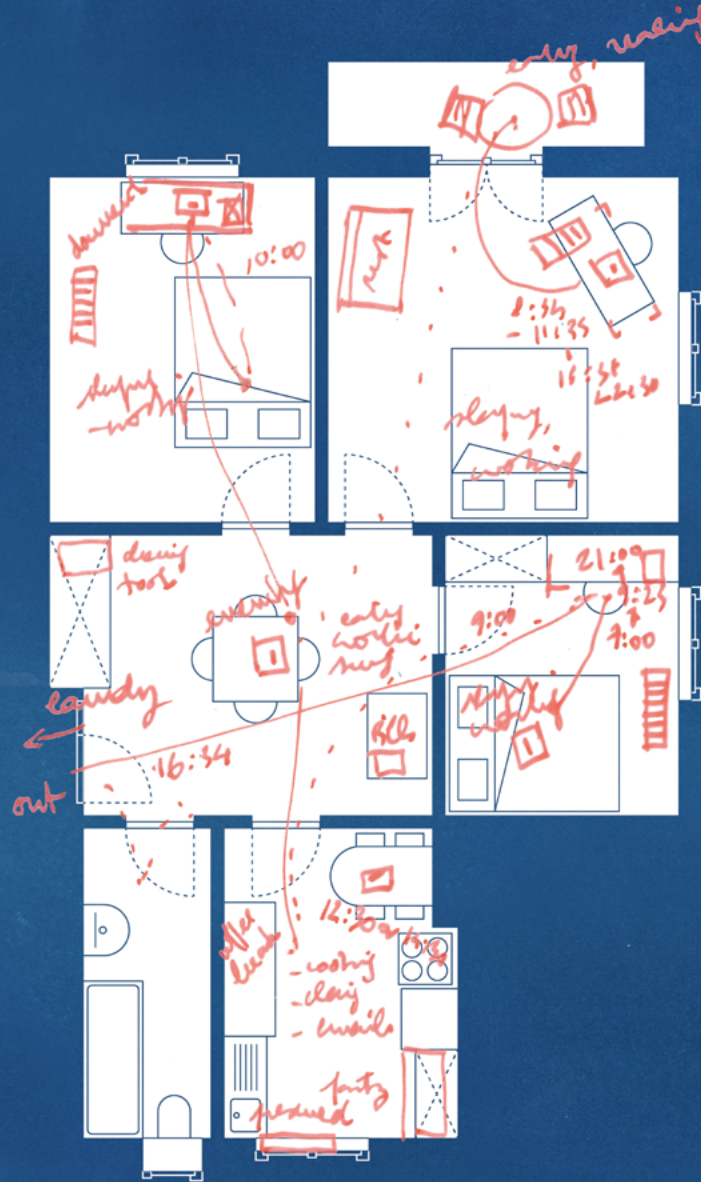


WORK IT HOME

a Concise History of Labor in Domestic Spaces



Emilie Hamel

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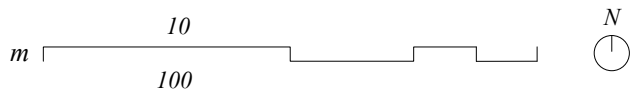
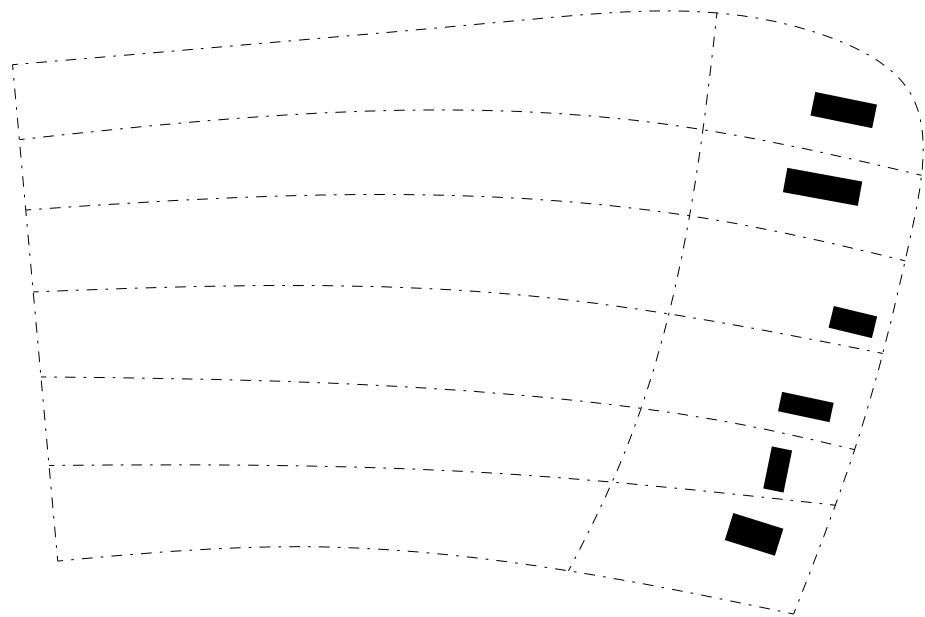
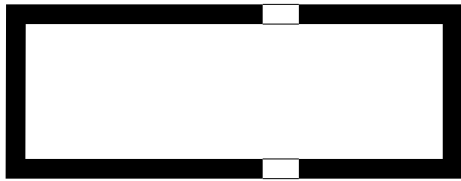
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INTRODUCTION

As Hannah Arendt describes it, the human condition is fundamentally tied to “labor to produce whatever is necessary to keep the human organism alive” as much as to “work to create whatever is needed to house the human body”. While labor refers to the perennial activities sustaining and perpetuating life, work is defined as the act of fabrication of objects that may outlive its creator. This distinction has been long institutionalized in capitalist societies, as the marxist concepts of reproduction and production. The latter, associated with the creation of commodities, is politically recognized and compensated with wages, while the former is traditionally unpaid and invisible. Architecture plays a central role in the construction of this hierarchy, through the enclosure of labor in the domestic sphere, and the rejection of work toward the external world.

The possibility of a large-scale reintroduction of work in homes was brought to prominence in recent years through the crisis of the covid-19 pandemic. What is experienced as a personal struggle for many, reveals structural tensions between a long-standing political framework and a changing reality.

This thesis will explore the normative relationship between work and the architecture of domestic spaces, through a study of dwelling types, tracing its trajectory from past to present. Each is representative of their era and contributes to the understanding of the genesis of the contemporary home. The first chapter focuses the peasant cottage of the late Middle Ages, a formative moment in the development of the ideal of home as a place of familiarity and belonging. The household, centered around the hearth, becomes the focal point for all aspects of life, with boundaries between different activities remaining fluid. The second chapter examines the terraced house, during the transitional period of the Second Industrial Revolution. It marks the pivotal point of the solidification of the home around the nuclear family, and the normalization of the division between domestic labor and waged work. The third chapter explores the persistence of the mix-use typologies, such as the craftsman’s top-shop, and its later continuation as the artist studio. The image of the independent, mobile, and self-sufficient worker remains an ideal, despite the social norms. The final chapter aims to offer a contemporary overview of the individual responses and compromises made to the reintegration of work into homes.



Typical plan of the medieval cottage and organization in the village of Wharram Percy. Drawn by the author, from Gie & Gies, *Life in a Medieval Village*, 21.

1 Gimpel, Jean, “The Agricultural Revolution” in *The Medieval Machine: The Industrial Revolution of the Middle Ages*, (Middlesex, England: Penguins Books, 1976).

2 Gies, Frances, and Joseph Gies, “The Villagers: Who They Were” in *Life in a Medieval Village*, (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, New Delhi, Auckland: Harper Perennial, 1989), 40-50.

3 Chapelot, Jean, and Robert Fossier, “House Typology” in *The Village & House in the Middle Ages*, (London: B.T. Batsford, 1985).

4 Gies & Gies, “The Villagers: How They Lived” in *Life in a Medieval Village*, 51-59.

5 Chapelot, Fossier, “House Typology” in *The Village & House in the Middle Ages*.

6 Goldberg, P.J.P, and Maryanne Kowaleski, “Introduction Medieval domesticity: home, housing and household” in *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household in Medieval England*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1.

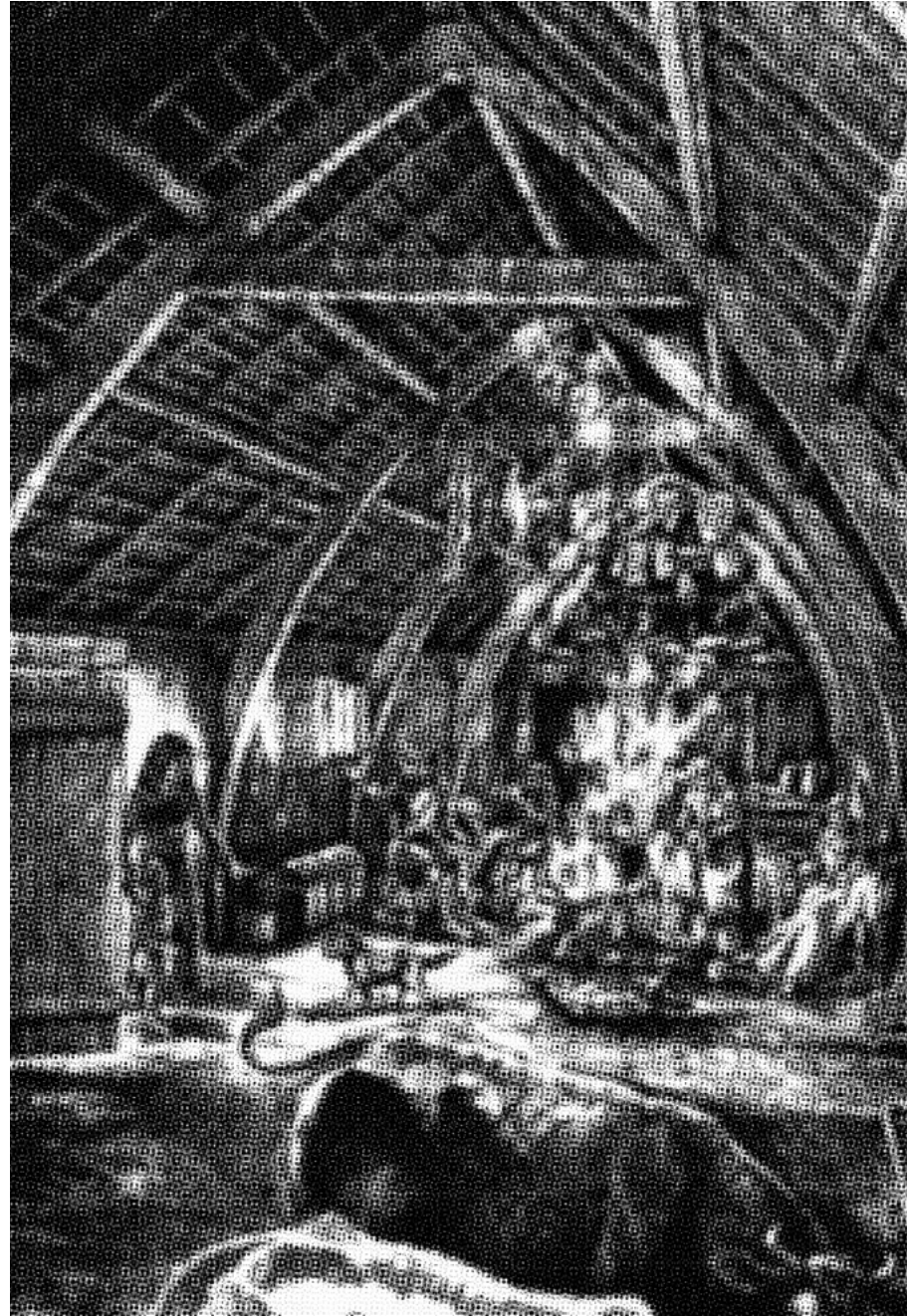
The productive landscape of the Middle Ages consisted of a regular constellation of villages, that housed the vast majority of the population. These villages were the first stable form of settlement in centuries, solidified around land cultivated more efficiently with recent agrarian revolution (iron horseshoes, iron plow, shoulder ox or horse collar, and three crop field rotation).¹

Every social or political moment of life happened in the village, but the land was the real center of the community. The villagers were farmers, each cultivating a part of the land, a fraction reserved for the lord, and practicing a large variety of crafts, mainly for subsistence and additionally for exchange. The boundaries of the land were clear, divided in shares for the families, to cultivate for the lord or as commons (wood-cutting, foraging, pastures).²

The archeological site of Wharram Percy is the most important place of study of the medieval house in Europe. The village, situated in England, in the region of York, was deserted in the sixteenth century, a period of a global population decline and growth of the urban centers. The traces of the village remained untouched until the first excavation work conducted in the fifties. Over three centuries, between the twelfth and the sixteenth, corresponding to the high medieval period, the houses appeared to have been laid perpendicularly to the street, demonstrating a form of central planning authority.

The houses all belong to the same typology, the hall. They were all rectangular and devoid of any internal partitions, similarly to every other main medieval building, including the barn, the mansion, and the church. Their size is however insubstantial. The larger ones were up to 23 meters long and 6 meters wide, and the more modest 15 meters by 4.5.³ The form and size were the direct result of the number of bays, supported by a timber frame. Made of fragile materials, thatched roofs of straws, dirt walls, and later with lime and stone base, the houses were regularly rebuilt. At Wharram Percy, nine transformations of a house can be traced back over three centuries. All had a yard at the front on the street and a garden in the rear.⁴ The houses were shared between animals and humans, usually each occupying a side of the house and providing warmth to each other during cold nights and winters. This rough division was emphasized by two facing doorways, in the center of the longer axis of the house. The hearth was situated in the middle of the house, adding another nuance in the use of space: the heated spaces were the designated area of housework and crafts, the sleeping area.⁵

The village and the work were divided in households, a word that appeared in the late fourteenth century. It referred mainly to the inhabitant of the same house, and a group of people sharing routines such as eating, sleeping, and working together, often overlapping with ties of kinship of the nuclear family.⁶ Historical records indicate that the average household in the thirteenth century consisted of five members. Each household works a field independently, not as a free enterprise, but following a pattern agreed on by the community. Work was also divided within the household, between inside and outside. A popular song of the late fifteenth century transcribed as “The Ballade of the Tyrannical Husband” describes an ideal order in society, where the husband plows the fields and his wife takes care of the other necessary tasks of “brewing, baking, weaving, milking, dairying, preparing flax, tending poultry, caring



Reconstitution of the daily life in a medieval cottage in the village of Wharram Percy. From Hollies, *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*, 7.

7 Goldberg, P. J. P. "Space and Gender in the Later Medieval English House." *Viator* 42, no. 2 (2011): 205.

8 Goldberg, Kowaleski, "Introduction Medieval domesticity: home, housing and household" in *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household in Medieval England*, 1.

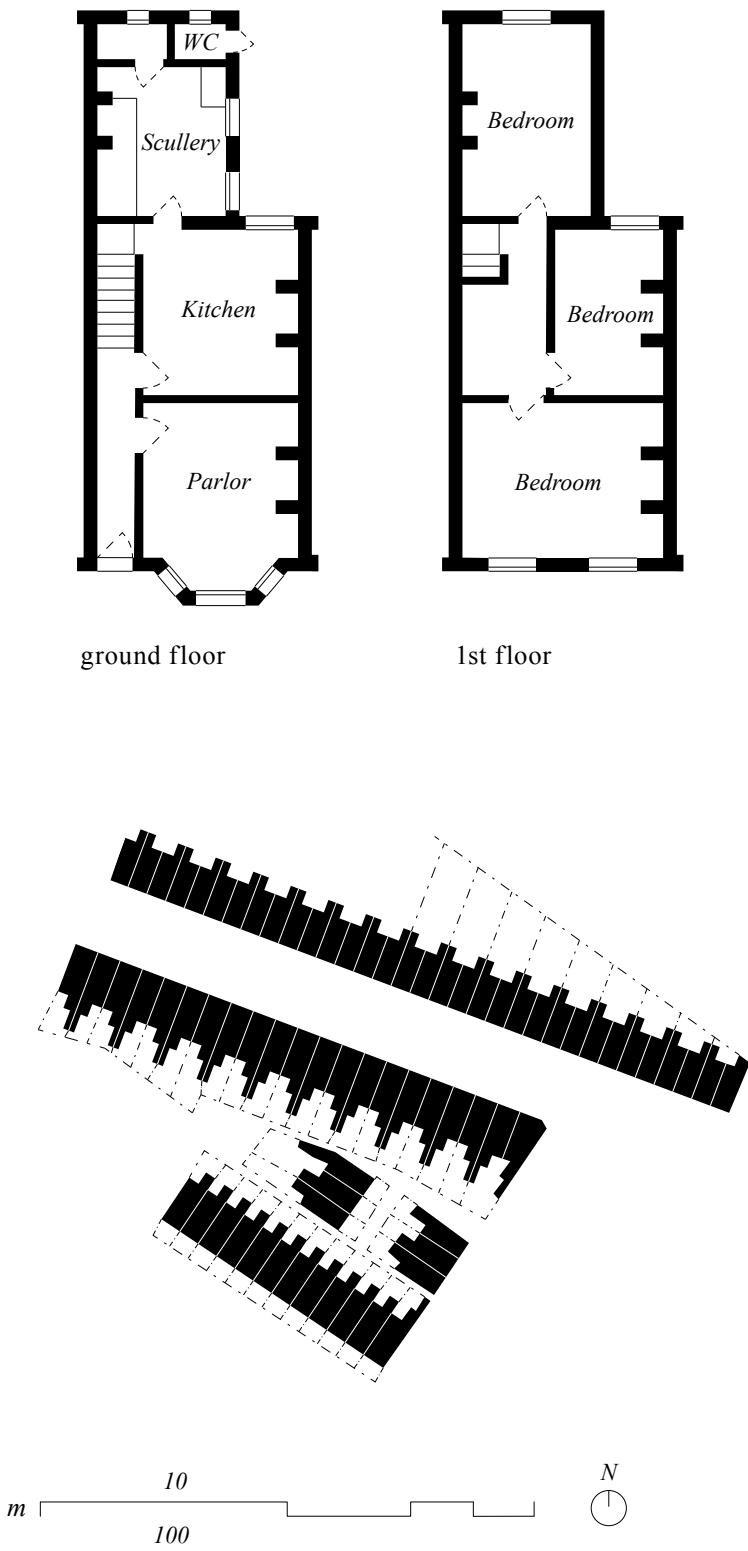
9 Gies & Gies, "The Villagers: How They Lived" in *Life in a Medieval Village*, 51-59.

10 Gies & Gies, *Life in a Medieval Village*, 51-59.

for livestock and children as well as preparing food and other household chores".⁷

We have to be cautious as to take this text as a fair representation of the medieval gendered division of work, as written by literated elites willing to teach the masses about a certain moral ideal. However, it gives us an idea of the organization in space of the work, in and outside the house. It appears that if the work division is already gendered, the concept of domestic labor is not yet ossified. Taking the cattle to pasture, milking and leading the cows, and gleaning are outside tasks performed by the women. Wood-turning, leather working, are performed by men inside the house.

The plan of the medieval cottage reflects the structure of the society itself. By the fifteenth century, the concept of *home* became associated with meanings of familiarity, friendship, nurturing, and intimacy.⁸ The structure of the households suggests a kind of unity within the village community. The house itself is not segmented, but rather materializes a spectrum of intimacy, ranging from the animal side to the sleeping area. The two doorways seamlessly connect the field, the inside of the house, and the streets. As Frances and Joseph Gies, described it, "for the medieval villager, work was the ruling fact of life".⁹ While much of the villager's work happened outside the house, as at dawn every member of the household and the animal would leave the village in a procession that was "sort of reverse of the analogue of the modern city, with its downtown office tower where people work and its suburban bedroom communities where they eat and sleep"¹⁰ it also happened in the inside. Work was substantial; there was no boundary between inside and outside, domestic labor and productive work. This fluidity contrasts with the dichotomy we will explore in the later chapter.



Typical plan of a terraced house and street arrangement at Plaistow, London.
Drawn by the author, from Muthesius, *The English Terraced House*, 94.

The segregation of domestic and productive work ossified during the Second Industrial Revolution. The Enclosure Acts changed the city. During the nineteenth century, London’s population grew six times. The majority of the population was employed in the factories in the outskirts of cities, whereas the dwelling type of the working class didn’t evolve much from the medieval cottage. The urban condition became intolerable. Sylvia Federici described the shift, around 1870, in the Anglos Saxon world, that later propagated in the rest of the Western World, transforming the capitalistic model and solidifying it in the social and political world. Federici explains that the production model of the first Industrial Revolution was based on the stretching of the workday and the reduction of salary to its minimum. This system is reaching its growth limits by the middle of the 1850s; the worker, employed up to 16 hours per day is almost unable to reproduce its strength. The laboring class has a very low life expectancy, with a very high infant and maternal mortality.¹¹

The condition of living of the laboring classes becomes a major interest of the governance during the Victorian periods. A description of a visit of George Street, in a poor neighborhood published in Roberts work states: “about 22ft. by 16ft., the ceiling of which could be easily touched with the hand, without any ventilation, excepting through some half-patched broken squares of glass; here were constantly lodging from forty to sixty human beings, men, women, and children, besides dogs and cats. Further details it is unnecessary for me to describe; their very recital would disgust you”.¹²

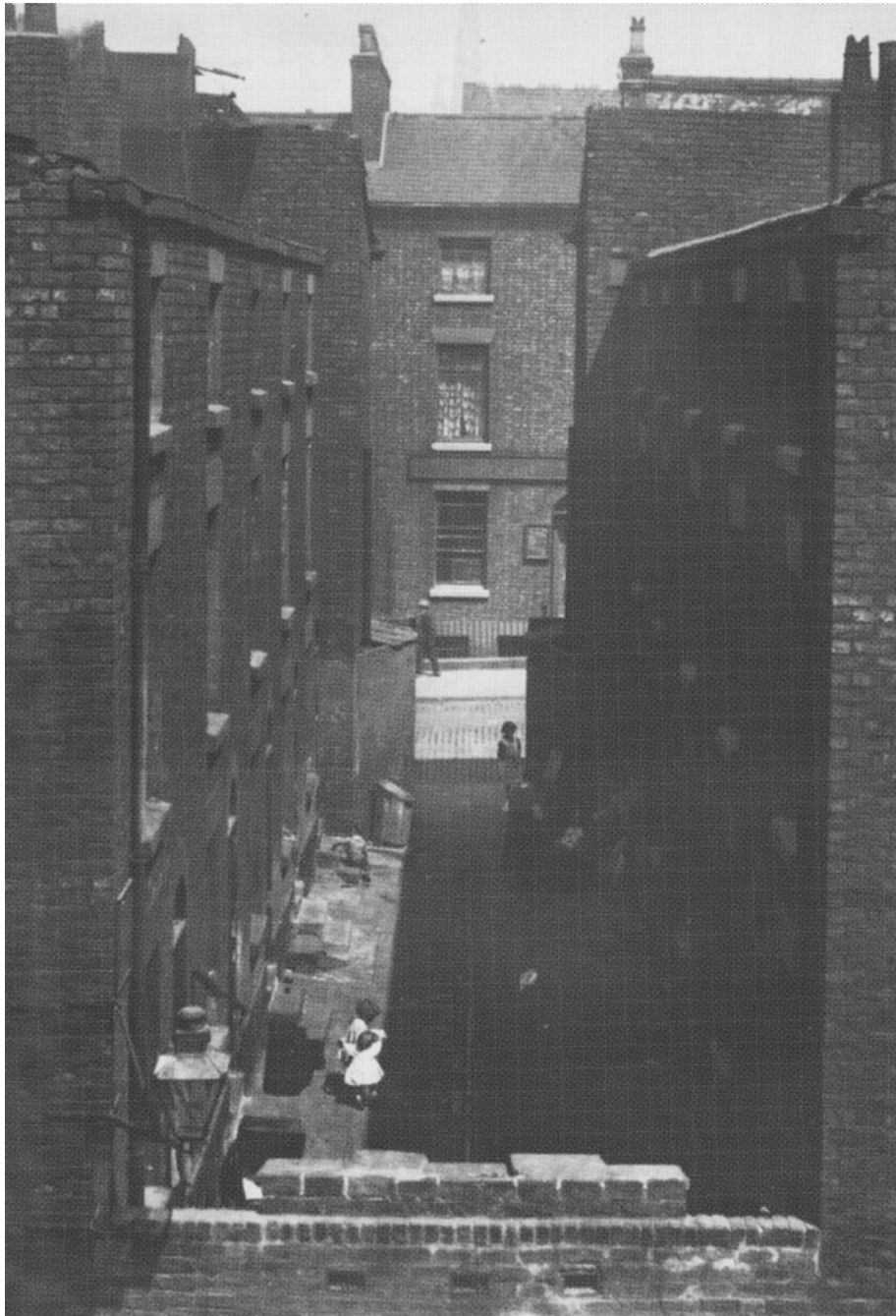
The 1889 *Descriptive Map of London Poverty* of Charles Booth highlights the Victorian conjoined conception of physical health and morality in its legend, ranking the neighborhood from “Upper-Classes”, wealthy, to “Lowest Class, Vicious, Semi-Criminal”. The concerns of the institutions were double. On one hand, diseases like cholera regularly plagued London regardless of the class of its victims were a cause of worry. On the other, an ill and dissipated worker was an unproductive worker in the factory. Indeed, the new industry, transitioning from the light textile industry to the heavy industry of coal and metallurgy required a new type of worker; strong, healthy, and capable, not the feeble and famished worker under the regime of absolute exploitation. A new organization of work is introduced through a series of reforms reorganizing the working class family, first with the introduction of the family wages system, reducing the pay of women and increasing the men’s (it more than doubled, between 1860 the first decade of the twentieth century), then by limiting women workday hours, and producing moral incentives for the women to stay in the domestic space.¹³ The last step of this reform and its enforcement is the creation of a home for the working-class nuclear family.

It is in this precise context that Henri Roberts presents his model of the *Model House for families* at the exposition of the work and industry of all nations of 1851. This prototype, later rebuilt in Kennington New Park Surrey, in the south of London, is part of the work of Robert, *The Dwelling of the labouring class*, patronized by the Prince Consort, and financed by philanthropic organization in which he proposes model plans for every type of demographic: single women, men, families. To the modern eye, the plan seems rather banal; the reason is, it is the most influential model on the modern dwelling in Europe and maybe beyond. The plan of the *Model House for Families* is an application of every principle he enun-

11 Federici, Sylvia, *Le Capitalisme patriarcal*, (Paris : La Fabrique, 2019), 14-15.

12 Roberts, Henry, *The Dwellings of the Labouring Classes*, (London: The Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes, 1853), 8.

13 Federici, *Le Capitalisme patriarcal*, 16-18.



Typical backstreet in Burlington Street, Liverpool, with group toilets down the wall, around 1930. From Muthesius, *The English Terraced House*.

14 Roberts, *The Dwellings of the Labouring Classes*, 57.

15 Ibid., 58.

16 Giudici, Shéhérazade. “Counter-Planning from the Kitchen”, *Burning Farm*, 32 (2024).

17 Muthesius, Stefan, *The English Terraced House*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1982), 3.

18 Muthesius, “Control” in *The English Terraced House*, 34.

ciates in his writings destined to a family from the “manufacturing and mechanical operatives, who usually reside in town and their immediate vicinity”.¹⁴ Indeed, the question of the scarcity of space in the city is a major interest for Robert. He aims to “combine every point essential to the health, comfort, and moral habits of the industrious classes and their families, particular attention being paid to ventilation, drainage, and an ample supply of water”¹⁵ to create dense but separated housing to preserve “moral and decency”. The number of sleeping areas must be proportional to the number of inhabitants, with no less than a room for the parents, and two for the children, separated by sex, each with an independent access. The superficialities are clearly specified; Robert states that the parents’ bedroom should have a minimum surface of 100 square feet (9-meter square), the children’s rooms 50 feet each (4.5-meter square), opening out directly on the living-room, for the parents to monitor and control the children, even in their rooms. The recess in the wall room provides a closet for linen. The day quarters are organized around a living-room, no less than 140 square feet (13-meter square). The provision of sanitary equipment is also a major point of the design: the kitchen is in a dedicated separated room from the living room, with a small scullery fitted under the sink, and a ventilation system. The main decisive element in the design of these four units, two on each floor, perfectly symmetrical, is the central staircase, opening on a gallery. This gallery serves the two doors of the lobbies of the units, each at an end of the corridor. The main innovation is the repeatability of the units that impacted the city on an urban scale.¹⁶

This model was in the inspiration of the terraced house model, a semidetached house organized in rows. Its globalization propagated all the ideals developed in house for the model families. In the nineteenth century London, 99 percents of the houses were built speculatively, in other words, not to a specific, built to be rented. Houses were both for the builders and inhabitants a mere commodity, price measurable by the quantity of bricks laid by unskilled builders. Construction details were described in catalogs of building enterprises. The standardization of the plan also allowed economies of scale.

The terraced houses were also developed with the new desire of living away from work.¹⁷ The process of suburbanization, (or the separation of life and work at an urban scale), started in the nineteenth century in the Anglo-Saxon world, primarily in the bourgeois milieu, and became a social marker. By 1830 in London, it became uncommon for a merchant to live above his shop. Mobility thus increased (with the introduction of transportation systems such as the omnibus). The terraced house then became accessible to the lower working classes. The special separation of productive work and life then became, not only enforced by the social convention, but by the political apparatus. The subsequent *Building Act* and *Building Byelaws* respectively solidified the planning system distinguishing housing and productive neighborhood and banishing productive work from the home specifying this term in the renting contract. The deed specified that the house should be for “dwelling only” and nothing else was permitted. Further precision indicates that the house should be not used for, “low-trades”, such as bone-boiling, brickmaking, lime burning or pig rearing. The list could be as long as sixty professions such as not leaving any loopholes. The exception is made for “woman work”,¹⁸ such as hat-making, sewing...etc. because it needed no specific room.



Aerial view of the city of Preston around 1930.
From Muthesius, *The English Terraced House*.

19 This expression was popularized in an opera by John Howard Payne in 1823. Ibid., 42.

20 Roberts, Henry, *Home Reform: Or, Advice to the Labouring Classes on the Improvement of Their Dwellings, and the Keeping Them in Good Condition*, (London: The Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes, 1860), 3.

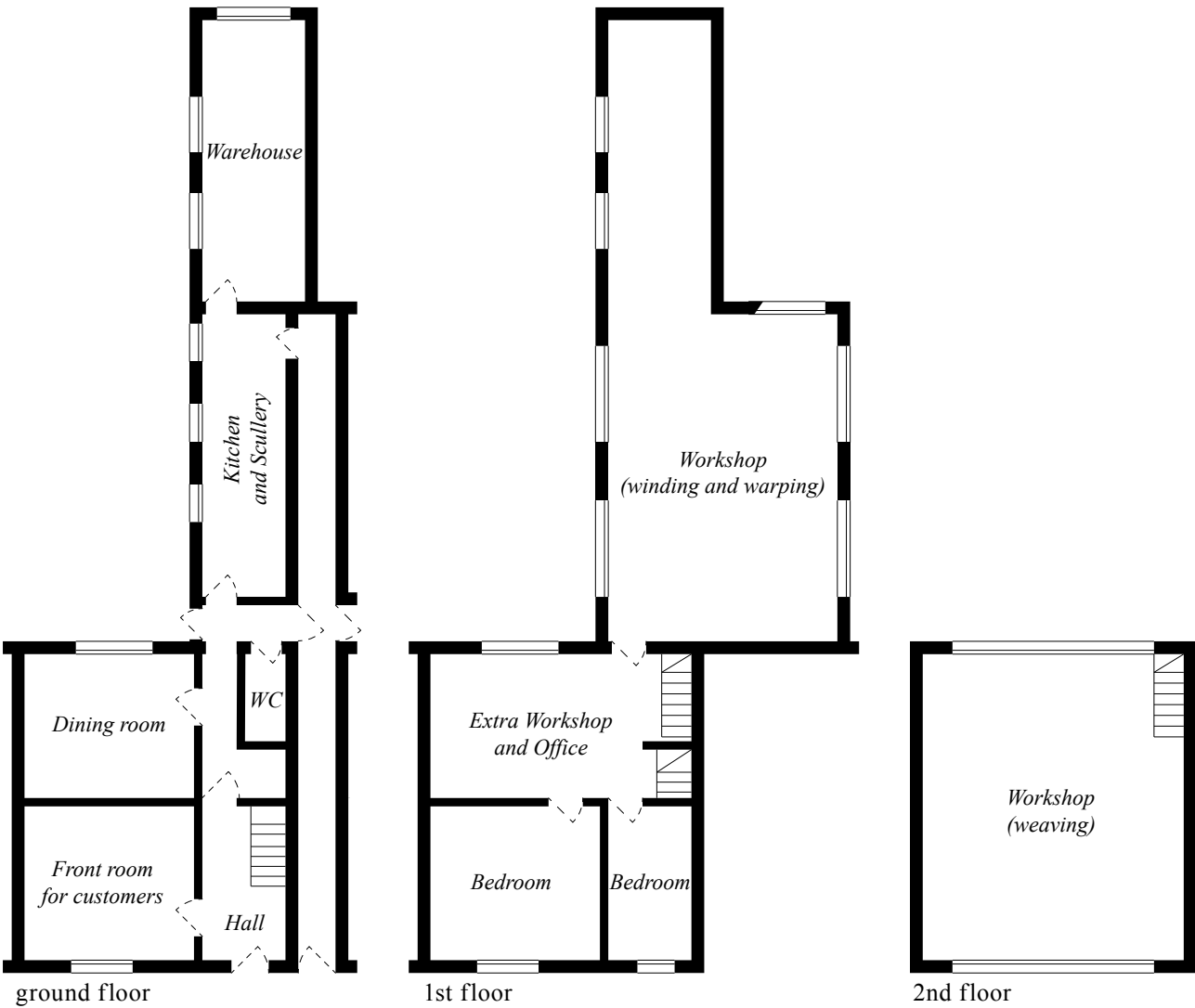
21 “The average rate of mortality in the model houses in London has in no case exceeded 13 to 14 in 1000; whilst in the districts in which those houses are mostly situated, the average has been 27 to 28 in 1000. Typhus fever, one of the most constant causes of premature death among the working classes, is unknown in the model houses.” Ibid., 5.

22 Ibid., 11.

This set of rules and the plan of the house created a precise framework of domesticity.

The home and domesticity also became the site of moral stakes beyond the separation of bodies. Social commentators, such as Henri Roberts, associated the virtues of sobriety, cleanliness, and the notion of “*Home, sweet Home*”.¹⁹ In addition to his proposal, Roberts published, a few years later, a guide for the tenants, in which he describes the proper maintenance and conduct of “a sober, industrious, and cleanly couple”²⁰. He also underlines the efficiency of the model house already built, as effectively limiting the spread and mortality of diseases.²¹ Giving clear examples of finance management, ventilation habits, or proper use of the rooms, he stresses the responsibility of the tenant in their own happiness, drawing a direct link between a clean home, moral respectability, and productivity at work; “Alas, alas! in how many cases does the health, the happiness, and the character of the working man gradually sink, from utter neglect of his own interest and well-being”. It is also the responsibility of the housewife to create a “welcoming home and keep her husband and the family finance away from the beerhouse”.²²

In the same period, many books about the managing of the domestic economy were published, such as one signed by Mrs. Beeton, in 1861, stating; “As with the commander of an army, or the leader of an enterprise, so it is with the mistress of the house”. To ensure the smooth operation of this ideal domesticity, the plan of the house acts like a spatial script. The kitchen and wash-house were kept private to avoid contention and contagion, but also as to remain nonsocial places. Throughout the nineteenth century, the rooms dedicated to domestic work tended to be compacted in size. They were initially situated in back extensions, opening in the backyard devoid of fences. By the end of the century, the extension disappeared, the backyard shrunk to the size of a leisure garden and was enclosed, and the utilitarian spaces were reabsorbed into the inside of the home. On the contrary, the social rooms of the house multiplied and specialized: the living room, dedicated to recreation became the center of the house in place of the hearth. In larger houses, it was replicated by parlors, drawing-rooms, studies, breakfast rooms, ante-rooms, *boudoirs*, libraries... etc. each with a precise designation and social rituals associated. Tea time became the social reunion of the family in place of the beer house. The Second Industrial Revolution was rooted in the homes. The plan of the Model Houses for the workers is an enclosure of the nuclear family, creating an asymmetry and control. The space is strictly divided into a multiplication of rooms, segregating the social and reproductive activities, and excluding productive work. Through providing a single dwelling for each family Roberts was aiming at shaping people’s habits, not emancipation. The terraced house is the institutionalization of a domestic script; all happy families should be the same.



Plan of the weavers top-shop of Queen Street, Coventry.
Drawn by the author, from Hollies, *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*, 17.

23 McKeon, “Outside and inside Work, The Domestic Economy and Cottage Industry” in *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 174.

24 Muthesius, “The House and the Home” in *The English Terraced House*, 38.

25 Hollis, Frances, “Tradition” in *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 13-24.

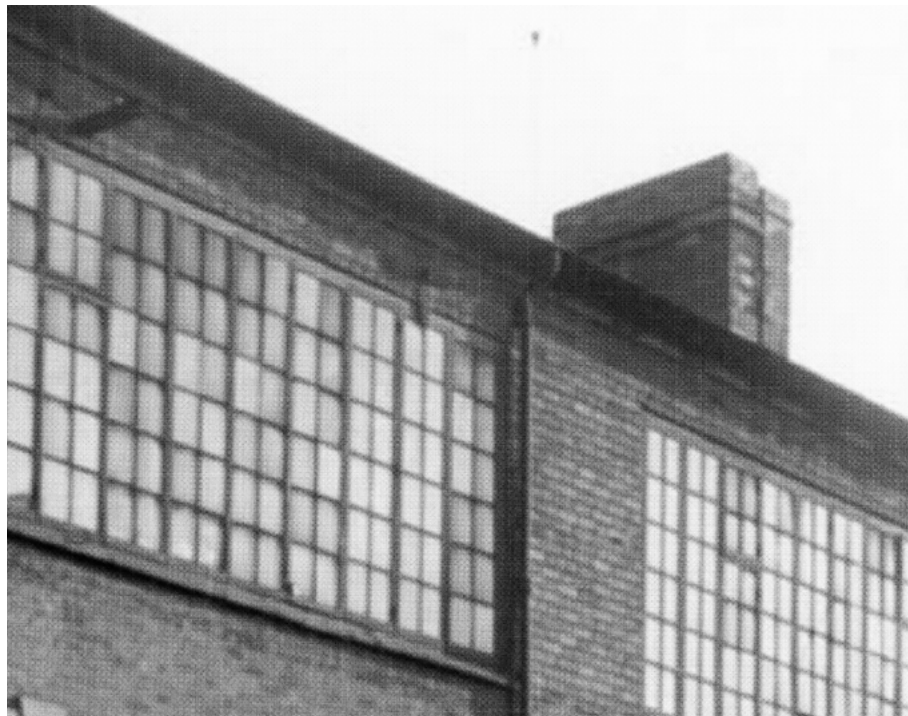
26 “There was a struggle in the mid-nineteenth-century Coventry silk industry between highly skilled weavers who wanted to continue to work

If the domestic revolution of the second part of the nineteenth century seems to have fully segregated productive work and life, some mixed typologies persisted—both institutionalized as acts of resistance. These typologies are inherited from the cottage factory system, where production took place within the worker’s home, and the master would deliver raw materials, collect the finish product and pay for the work.

The transition from the cottage economy to its concentration by the industry was neither instantaneous nor without resistance. The exploitative system of the early industrial period was brutal, particularly toward the vulnerable population, such as children. However, because it was applied equally to all workers, it also offered opportunities for emancipation, especially for women. As the weaving industry shifted from smaller machines that could be worked at home to large, heavy looms in the factories, resistance grew. A charge recorded against wool spinner in 1687 stated that “many young women, healthful and strong, combine and agree to cot and live together without government, and refuse to work in time of harvest”. Crowds of weavers, particularly women, destroyed the large spinning jennies of the factories.²³

The mid-nineteenth century top-shops were a form of institutionalization of the mixed cottage industry typology. They were like the terraced houses in every way, with the addition of an extra story, intended as a workshop. The row typology also allowed to power all the loom by a single central shaft, powered by machines at the end of the row. The workshops were recognizable from the street because of their large windows, a necessity to bring light to a delicate work.²⁴ Their form can be explained by the fact that they were originally designed as dwellings but later adapted to appeal to skilled workers, such as the Huguenot silk weaver refugees who found employment, under a master weaver’s patronage on Fournier Street in London. The top-shop model also sometimes offered a more economical solution for the construction of a factory. In Coventry, the top-shop of the number 32, Queen Street, Hillfields, was intended for a family business of ribbon weaving, from the production to the distribution. On the ground floor, facing the street, a room was destined to receive customers; the kitchen, scullery, and warehouse were placed in the back extension. The first floor was divided in a first workshop, an office and bedrooms. The last floor was dedicated to the weaving.²⁵ A picture of a modest weaver interior, in early-century Bethnal Green, shows a small interior, almost completely occupied by a loom worked by a man and a table, a women seated at her meal. What is evident is that the cohabitation of a home and handlooms was not without consequence; the process creates dust, vibration, and racket, as shown by the silk found packed in the floor joints, in a tentative of sound-proofing.

Unlike the Victorian ideal home, the top-shop was a work-dominated house; the day was ruled by the patron, owner of the machine, who would turn it on and off. But all the family members were involved in the weaving and could take turns, enabling them to combine childcare, leisure, and domestic work with the paid work. The top-shop row was also a community, of extended family, that supported each other. By 1859, the silk industry was powered equally between the top-shops and the factories.²⁶ All of the textile industry workers could not defend their rights through the possession and transmission of rare know-how like the silk-weavers. For the knitters, the opportunity for self-determination was valued and



Façade of the top-shops of Queen Street, Coventry, and interior of a top-shop in Bethnal Green, London in 1984.
From Hollies, *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*, 15 & 17.

from home and the less skilled workers who were prepared to work in factories: ‘...detesting the factory system as an infringement of their time-honoured liberty to work when they chose, and despising the lower class of improvident weavers with no looms of their own, who had already taken work in the factories, they were determined to preserve their way of life, and their respectable, propertied virtues. If steam was inevitable – and competition made it that – then they would not be driven out of their homes to work in factories. Why should they journey to the steam-engine when the steam engine could be brought to them?’ ”

Hollis, “Tradition” in *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*, 18.

27 In the twentieth century, a luddite became a term for a person critical of new technologies.

28 Banham, Reyner, “Progressive building in Paris: 1918-1928” in *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, (New York, Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1967), 16.

29 Zukin, Sharon, “Living Lofts as Terrain and Market” in *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*, (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 1-20.

30 Zukin, “Living Lofts as Terrain and Market” in *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*, 1-20.

defended in violence. In 1811, they protested against the introduction of powerlooms, menacing the sovereignty of their handlooms on the wool craft. As the *Luddite* movement²⁷—named after a mythical leading figure of the *General Ned Ludd*—grew in power, the British government deployed 14,000 soldier is country to protect factories from the handloom workers. This deadly episode remained in the common memory, and knitters were able to maintain their independence as a notoriously well organized and unified communities.

The mixed typologies persisted beyond the weaving workshops, in the form of the artist’s studio house. In the nineteenth century, the status of the artist underwent a transformation: from being a collective work performed in studio under a master, it became a solitary work where the value of the piece came to rest on the name of its creator. Like the top-shop, the artist’s studio house is a work-dominant typology, shaped like a traditional building but focused on production.

Philip Webb’s 1876 studio house for the Royal Academician Valentine Prinsep, at 1 Holland Park, takes the form of a terraced house divided into a living part in the lower part, and a studio with north-oriented windows at the top. On the façade, a tall slit window allows to take large canvas out. The kitchen is relegated to the basement, with the housekeeper’s room, and the ground floor is used as a reception room for the artist’s client.²⁸ In Paris, the artistic hub of the twenties, the studio house evolved into a studio apartment, designed by the leading modernist architects of that time.²⁹ Again, the top floor is well-windowed and north-oriented, the living part is sometimes separated into a sleeping mezzanine, sometimes as rooms in the rear. Both of these studios adhere to the strict planning policies of their respective cities and are intended for sale to artists. The studio space itself became a symbol of success—whether as a reception room or a gallery for prospective clients.

However, the studio is a speculative typology, designed by architects, while still maintaining a degree of separation between life and work. In the fifties, in New York—the new hegemonic artistic center of the time—artists began to craft their own spaces within lofts, rehabilitating the workhouse type that we know today. The loft is a large, open space, typically situated in multi-story manufacturing or warehouse buildings. Artists sought out well-lit spaces in the heart of the city, and settled in Manhattan, an area slowly deserted by a dying industry. Rent was cheap, but lofts lacked basic amenities like heating or running water. In the sixties, as more and more artists settled, the occupation of industrial buildings became a source of contention with the local authorities, as it was against the city zoning. But in 1974 a change in legislation, pushed by the artists but foremost by real-estate companies, allowed the conversion of loft into residential space.³⁰ The rational argument behind is shift was twofold: firstly, it did not represent any tax revenue for the city, as it would appeal to well-to-do middle class. Secondly, it would not cost anything, except for the necessary infrastructures, as the renewal would be covered by real estate companies. In fact, because the renovation of lofts required a significant initial investment, it was ultimately a speculative operation. Overtime, its gentrifying impact became evident: residential conversion not only replaced vacant manufacturing spaces once occupied by dying businesses, but also displaced small business owners, craft workers, and the first generation of artists that pioneered the area, as the



Interior of an artist loft on Interior Canal Street, Soho, New York, in 1972, and interior of a fashionable loft in Soho, from a lifestyle magazine, 1970. From Hollies, *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*, 15 & 56, and Dominis, John, "Living Big in a Loft.", *LIFE*, 68, no. 11, (March, 1970): pages 62-63.

property owners prioritized the higher rental income of residential.

The factor of supply in the new market of the loft was vastly covered by all the available surfaces. However, the appeal of living in an industrial city center, rather than in the more conventional sought-after suburbs is not immediately obvious. It raises the question of why this type of mixed living in an open space became a common dwelling type.

The demand for lofts emerged from the "urban homesteader" trend, which eventually grew into a movement. Over time the middle class developed an appeal for culture, and the loft represented this blend of authenticity, history, and a. Its potential was exemplified by people working high-end creative jobs, and commissioning architects for their renovation. The generous space, abundant light, and a dramatic absence of any transition from the outside to the main space—often, the elevating platforms open directly into the space—made lofts perfect for showcasing art, designer furniture, avant-garde décor, and hosting parties. This distinctive lifestyle was illustrated several times in magazines, including *LIFE* in 1970, in the article "Living big in a loft".³¹

This appeal of the exposed wooden structure, brick walls, cast iron façades, open spaces, and mix-use of the loft can be seen as a response to the crisis of meaning in the suburban neighborhoods. The separation of work and life, which had its origins in the nineteenth century, reached its peak in the division between the city offices and the suburban single-family homes was increasingly viewed as alienating by the contemporary psychologists. In contrast, living and working in a former manufacturing area, surrounded by a dynamic demographic—numbers showed that the population of Manhattan lofts belonged to the top 20-25 percent of New York City population in terms of education, profession, and social capital—was seen to experience urban vitality. The environment helped affirm the middle-class identity, connecting it to a lively past.³²

However, this exciting lifestyle could only be achieved by minimizing the time spent on domestic chores and concealing the necessary tools from view. The domestic should not be part of the loft aesthetic. High-tech washing machines, dryers, and vacuums, were easily accommodated in the space, and in the "American-style" kitchen, cooking robots were hidden behind a bar. Exception was made when these chores became a hobby: a Cuisinart semi-professional oven could be proudly integrated into the kitchen to give the experience of chef cooking to guests. Appealing to the single bachelor, to the feminist housewife, who refused to be secluded in the kitchen, these appliances provided a sense of control over life, even if it did little to diminish the actual time spent on these tasks.³⁶

The image of the craftsman's workshop and the artist's loft created an appeal for the freedom offered by the mixed-use typology. This type of living became highly valorized, obscuring the precarious living conditions and the lack of choice these workers had in their housing, whether imposed by their employer or by rising rents. The mixed-use space, once a stage for the artist to consciously reinvent and experiment with new ways of living, eventually became a commodity for cultural consumption. Rents were no longer cheaper than for classical dwellings, and the space, which has been synonymous of creative freedom, became life-dominated with everyday life. It was only occasionally used as a home office by service employees or freelancers in creative professions, unconsciously inheriting the legacy of the top-shop and the loft.

31 Zukin, "The Creation of a 'Loft Lifestyle' " in *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*, 58-70.

32 Ibid., 70-76.



Home-based curator dining table/desk and a home-based policy researcher's spare bedroom workspace.
From Hollis, *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*, 91.

The medieval cottage, the terraced house, and the top-shops are key milestone in the history of the relationship of our contemporary house and work. The layout of our homes has not evolved much since the late nineteenth century; almost every suburban pavilion or city flat, adheres to the model of the single-family house. As the population grew, the housing offered was often not more than “bare boxes to be filled up with mass-produced commodities”,³⁶ a shelter for leisure to escape the harsh reality of exploitative work.

The nature of domestic labor didn't evolve either, but attempts were made to ease the life of the housewife, through the invention of a myriad of electronic appliances —tumblers, dryers, vacuum cleaners, dishwashers—. In fact, this innovation has little to no effect on the time effectively spent on domestic tasks. A study published in 1974 showed that full-time housewives spent 52 hours a week on housework in 1924 and 55 hours a week in the sixties.³⁷ The kitchen, the main place of domestic labor, and once the center of the home, as the hearth, was reduced to the status of a servant space, subordinated to the other living spaces. In flat buildings, the inclusion of individual kitchen for every flat was rendered possible by the invention of the compact multi-stove oven and the chimney.³⁸ Every collective aspect of domestic labor disappeared, including the shopping. All the goods were concentrated in supermarkets from the thirties, losing the social aspect of the city market.³⁹

The twentieth-century dream was to imagine the ideal home as a place of leisure, but it failed to encompass the irreducible nature of the reproductive activities. The care and emotional work cannot be mechanized or commodified, and the rest of the reproductive work became a solitary activity in the enclosure of the house.

Unlike domestic labor, the nature and modalities of productive work have undergone major changes in the Western world. Today, men and women are both expected to take on the breadwinning role. 75% of the population now works in the tertiary sector, and mainly in office settings. Since the eighties, digitalization has made it possible to work efficiently, part-time, or independently from home. While industrial capitalism separated the workplace and dwelling, informational capitalism tends to bring these spheres back together. In Switzerland, the percentage of the active population spending at least half of their working hours at home increased from 1% in 2001 to 50% in 2020.⁴⁰ The context of the Covid-19 pandemic raised awareness of these new possibilities. Projection predicts that this number will settle at 40% for the next decade.⁴¹

The dwelling typology did not react to the changes in work patterns; instead, it has been squeezed into the existing type. A kitchen table became an office desk, the bedroom, formerly a place of reproduction and rest only, a place to answer emails on a mobile phone.⁴² Reading, emailing, writing, browsing social media only require a device and internet connection. Moreover, the image of home-based work—as long as it is not physical or care work—has become increasingly positive for the middle class. The archetype of the artist of Soho became a marketing object, commodified as the loft, associated with an idea of boho freedom, creative qualities, and cultural capital.⁴³ However, the people working from home remained invisible. Firstly, because they do not necessarily identify as home-based workers.⁴⁴ Secondly, because they often go unnoticed,

36 Hayden, Dolores. *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminism Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press), 1981, 23.

37 Hester, Helen. “Anti-Work Architecture: Domestic Labour, Speculative Design, and Automated Plenty.” *Open Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 2023): 5.

38 Giudici, “Counter-Planning from the Kitchen”.

39 Hester, “Anti-Work Architecture: Domestic Labour, Speculative Design, and Automated Plenty.”, 7.

40 “Télétravail et logement : évolution et perspectives”, Communiqués, Le Conseil Fédéral Suisse, last modified May 12, 2023.

41 Ibid.

42 Giudici, “Counter-Planning from the Kitchen”.

43 Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*.

44 Hollis, “Sustainability” in *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*, 179-185.



45 Hollis, “Everyday Realities” in *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*, 81.



A child minder in her living room/nursery and an architect’s kitchen/technical library.
From Hollies, *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*, 87 & 193.

sometimes on purpose: because of decades of planning policies and social norms that enforced the strict separation of work and life.

Very few studies have focused on this growing population of home workers and their living conditions. France Hollis conducted in 2015 one of the first surveys in the United Kingdom, in London, with a sample of 76 home-based workers.⁴⁵ This sample includes a panel of people with a large variety of ages, social backgrounds, skill and education level, with men and women in equal parts, and from different ethnic groups. They live very different lifestyles. While this sample cannot encompass the full spectrum of home-workers, it offers an overview of the situation in post-industrialized societies. Hollis attempts to classify these home-workers into types. Some work jobs are inherently embedded in their neighborhood. She refers to this type as the “backbones of communities”. These individuals inhabits beer houses, corner shops, funeral parlors, lodging houses, or bakeries. Some others are “craftworker”, living in their workshop—similar to the Top-shops weavers, but are most often self-employed—examples include a furniture maker, a mechanic, a carpenter, a plumber, a curtain maker. A third category gathers those in a situation of “live-in”. Living on the place of their employment is part of their work, including a manager of a historic building, a residential care-worker, a security agent, and a school caretaker. The “24/7 artists” is a category we encountered in the previous chapter. Their lifestyle is integrated into their work and feeds it. The “Top-ups” category refers to individuals who work an additional job at home to supplement the low income of their household. These activities are most often hidden, and a necessity: a childminder works to complement her pension, and a young website designer tries to stay active despite his disabling illness. Another significant category, including people from every social background, is the “family caregivers”. They chose to conduct their work from home to be able to care for the elderly, disabled family members, or pick up children from school and help for their homework them in the evening. People in the “professional and managerial” category are independent workers, freelancers or employees, working part-time or entirely remotely. They are photographers, architects, academics, translators, psychotherapists, and managers. They typically only require a desk and an internet connection to work, but some need an extra space, such as a studio or consultation room. The last category is similar but limited in time. The individuals from the “start-up” category work at home to lessen their operating costs. Examples include a needlewoman, a website designer, and a financial advisor.

Across these categories, every individual is working for a combination of financial necessity, the advantages of having a flexible schedule to take care of domestic tasks, and personal preferences. These situations are extremely diverse, yet almost none of these home-based works live in purposely designed buildings. They adapt their activity in studios, small-scale industrial buildings, and some even in historic houses, designed, as we have seen, precisely to prevent work inside the home. Many of them face pragmatic problems directly linked to their living space. A photographer uses her living room as a studio space; once or twice a week, she needs to move all the furnitures to set the background and lightnings. The children need to be taken out by her friends or husband, also working full time. She cannot afford the rent of a separate studio, so



A furniture maker's first floor living room and his ground floor workshop. From Hollies, *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*, 150-151.

46 Hollis, "Governance" in *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*, 152.

47 Hollis, "Everyday Realities" in *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*, 94.

48 Ibid., 91.

49 Ibid., 92.

50 Ibid., 88-92.

51 Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*.

52 Hollis, "Governance" in *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*, 153-155.

53 Ibid.

54 Hollis, "Everyday Realities" in *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*, 93-98.

55 Ibid., 93-95.

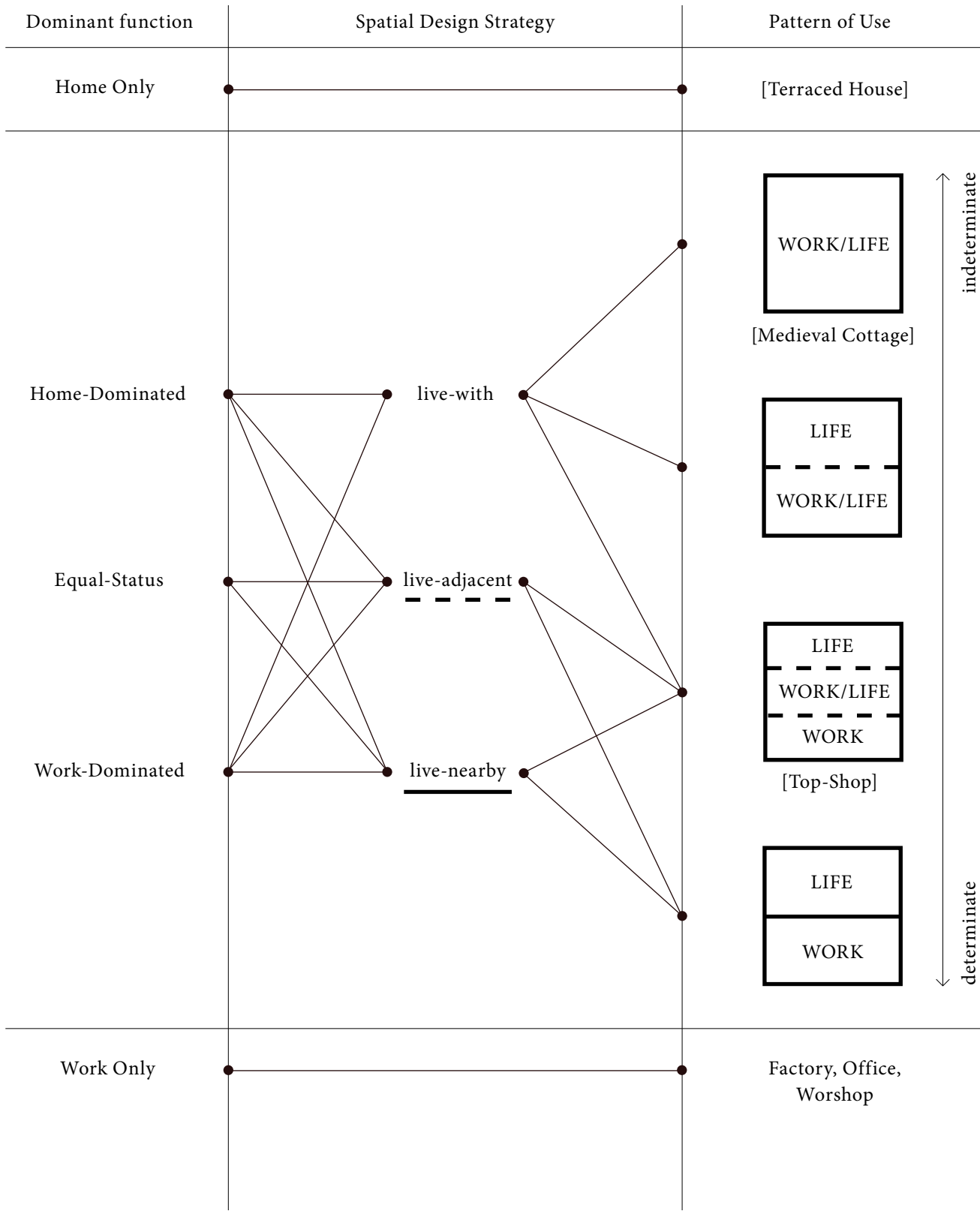
56 "Most businesses start from home to minimize overheads and ease the long hours that are often required to get an enterprise off the ground. Walt Disney started up in his uncle's garage in Los Angeles in 1923 [...] Apple Computers, Hershey's chocolate empire and the Ford

she organizes to concentrate all her shooting appointments on the same day.⁴⁶ A fish shop owner is living above his shop, but the shop and his flat entry are different. While he enjoys having separated spaces, he is worried when taking the cash register up, each evening, and has to go outside.⁴⁷ A home-based curator has to clear her paper off the dining table each time her children come back home, and lacks a stable workspace.⁴⁸ A translator working in the guest bedroom does not know how where to go when the family has visitors.⁴⁹ Today, most work/live units marketed are designed with a loft-style layout, for singles or couples with office jobs. These spaces fail to meet the variety of needs of the home-based workers. In response, Hollis proposes some broad design principles, in an effort to create a satisfying type that caters for more specific activities, avoiding the pitfall of a pseudo-universal solution.

First, the author suggests determining the dominant function of the home. Home-dominated workhomes include cottages, houses, and flats,⁵⁰ where people work in the living room, on the kitchen table, or in a spare bedroom. Work-dominated workhomes include workshops, converted light industrial units, live-in spaces, or work/live units. Some homes, such as adjacent houses are a mix of both. This distinction can be confusing when it comes to planning policies. It is one of the reasons behind the gentrification of light industrial areas, such as Soho in New York,⁵¹ or later Hackney in London and San Francisco South Market Area.⁵² Changes in regulations are made, driven by the desire of the new local inhabitants of vacant industrial spaces—mainly artists and craftworkers—to relax the policies and authorize the use of the industrial surfaces as workhomes. But little to no control is made of their use. Over time, the line between a work dominated workhome and loft-style dwellings is blurred, and the buildings are gradually inhabited by people working IT-based works. Real estate companies make enormous profits from the trend of development of light industrial areas into quasi-residential neighborhoods.⁵³

Another key criterion for determining the type of workhome needed is the degree of spatial separation desired between living and working spaces.⁵⁴ On the "live with" side of the spectrum, people may work in a mezzanine, on the dining table, or in an office room. The workspaces and the living space share an entry door and the spaces overlap. "Live-adjacent" work homes present a juxtaposition of the two functions, such as two houses door-to-door, or living and working spaces separated on two different floors. This type of layout is particularly interesting when the work requires receiving clients or employees. On the other end of the spectrum lies the "live nearby" type, which is preferred when the close cohabitation of living and working is problematic. For example, a furniture maker work creates dust and noise.⁵⁵ In this cases, the living and working spaces are linked by a subsidiary road. The last criterion is less dependent on the spatial arrangement of the building and determined by the user. The "pattern of use" of the space can be very different from one individual to another.⁵⁶ Some professionals like to create two very different "worlds" by keeping their spaces well-defined, allowing them to mentally switch from one task to another. Some prefer to maintain some connection, to be able to execute some domestic tasks while working. In the case of the artists, this line is often totally blurred.

To design workhomes that accommodate the diverse situations people experience, Hollis recommends focusing on three key aspects of the ar-



Drawn by the author, from Hollies, *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*.

Motor Company also started from home.” Hollis, “Sustainability” in *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*, 173.

57 Hollis, “Everyday Realities” in *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*, 99-100.

58 In Switzerland, the separation of the territory in residential zone and zone of activity is particularly strict.

59 “While most studies of teleworkers travel habits show a reduction in overall travel, a few report the opposite. This is because some people spend the money they save by not commuting on activities that involve high carbon emissions, such as holidays in the sun, while others replace regular short work-orientated journeys with longer, less frequent trips. [...] Geographically isolated home-based workers can find that trips that would previously have been part of their journey to work, such as driving to the shop, taking kids to school or visiting the doctor, still have to be made.” Hollis, “Sustainability” in *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*, 172.

60 Ibid., 171-172.

61 “Doctors prescribed Valium and Librium over 47 million times for United States women in 1978 and drug company advertisements of ten showed a frowning housewife with apron, broom, and child. One such ad read: ‘You can’t change her environment but you can change her mood.’ ” Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminism Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities*, 26.

62 Ibid., 23-24.

63 Hester, Helen. “Anti-Work Architecture: Domestic Labour, Speculative Design, and Automated Plenty.”, 12.

chitecture. First, maintaining a degree of flexibility in the design means that the inhabitants can take control of the space, and ensure that the building can be adjusted to different demographics overtime. It also limits unworkable situation for the users. Secondly, the degree of determinacy is also reflected in the architecture. A “determinate” building can take the form of a workshop and house superposition, and an “indeterminate” building is more enigmatic from the outside, more suited to dual-use patterns. It is important to note that the determination of the building can do a lot for the sentiment of identity of a home base worker, by advertising—or not—the activity to the outside. Finally, the relationship between public and private needs to be defined. A home worker can be expected to receive clients, or employees. The way people enter the space, the room they have access to has to be defined accordingly, to the tolerance of the workers.⁵⁷

Currently, governance and regulation remain a major obstacle to the effective design and use of workhomes. Historically, the institution managing work and housing were kept separated in different “silos”. The application of commercial or residential often leads to confusion in taxation rates for utilities such as water and electricity. Additionally, craftwork activities sometimes encounter issues with the city zoning law, complicating the establishment of workhomes.⁵⁸

The generalization of home-based work already impacts the city and its sustainability. On the environmental aspect, home-based work can help to reduce travel, densify space use, and reduce heating costs. By eliminating the daily commutes, carbon emissions linked to transportation are reduced (even when considering the rebound effect).⁵⁹ Companies can also reduce their real estate needs, as activities are concentrated in the homes. Houses are thus occupied all day long, contrarily to the office spaces occupied half a day, four days a week. The case of badly insulated homes remains problematic regarding energy consumption, but people are usually more mindful of their energy use when they bear the cost.⁶⁰

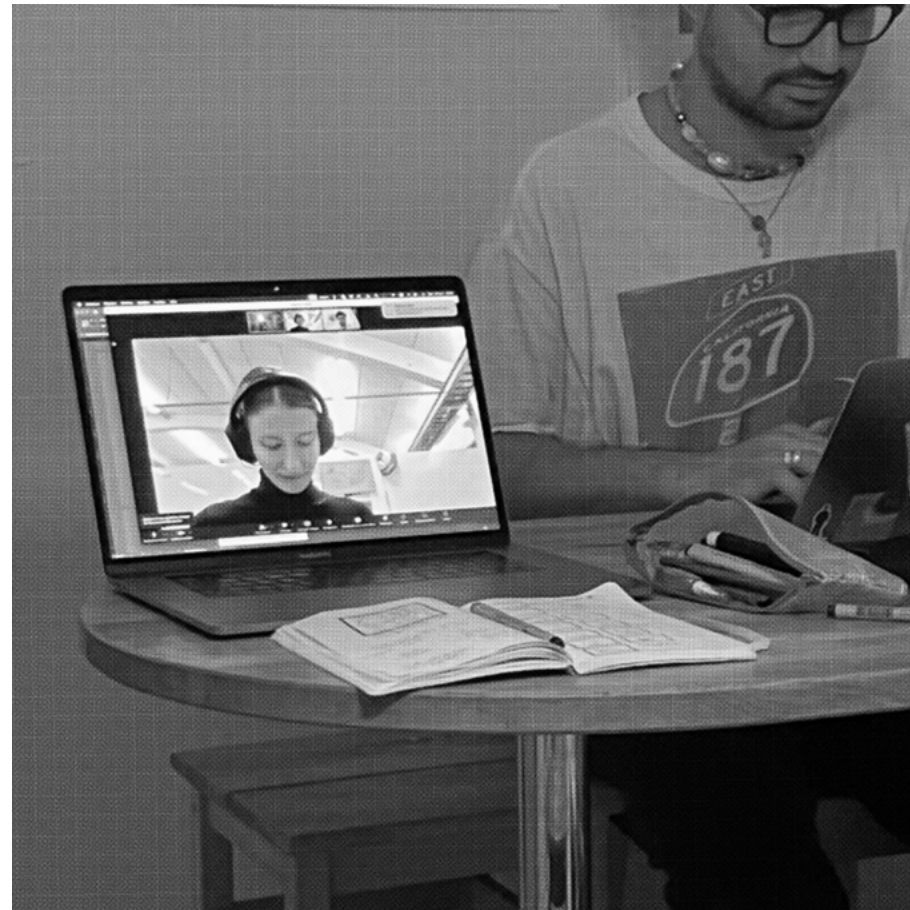
The social benefits of home-based work might be the most significant aspect. From creating lively local life and economy, giving means of subsistence to people in between employments, fosters connection within neighborhoods, and allowing people to subtract themselves from discrimination in the workplace based on physical attributes (gender, age, disability), the advantages are numerous. Among the sample studied, caregiving appeared to be the primary reason for preferring home-based work. Its erratic demands can be more easily integrated into the workday: cooking, helping for children’s homework, and doing the laundry. Indeed, what was once a full-time job is now something to accomplish in addition to the workday, and its integration lessens its burden.

The main challenge encountered by the home-workers might be the sense of isolation that can arise enclosure of their home. The issue is very similar to the feeling of invisibility experienced by the twentieth-century housewife and can lead to real psychological distress.⁶¹ Material feminism already sought an answer to the issue, by transforming the public environment: creating shared facilities (laundry rooms, communal kitchen, local stores), places of encounter (cafes, parks, benches), and working spaces (tool-lending rooms, shared offices).⁶² An answer to this experience of austerity could be “private sufficiency and public luxury”.⁶³ Despite diverse manifestations of discontent, only 5 of the 76 workers of the sample

declared that they would prefer to work in a separate space.⁶⁴ It seems that the control people have over their life is highly valued, similarly to the self-determination valued by the weavers of the Top-Shops, and thus independently of their status. The epidemiologist Michael Marmot found that: “Autonomy – how much control you have over your life – and the opportunities you have for full social engagement and participation are crucial for health, wellbeing, and longevity”.⁶⁵ The opportunities of a new-work life balance in the home is an area still to be explored.

64 Hollis Frances, “Sustainability” in *Beyond Live/Work: The Architecture of Home-Based Work*, 180.

65 Ibid.



Working in the kitchen. Lausanne.
Photo by the author, October 30, 2024.

CONCLUSION

The three typologies studied trace the genesis of our modern domestic spaces in relation to work and labor. The medieval cottage marks the first moment of solidification of the house into a home, while the terraced house establishes the border between the domestic and productive spheres. The top-shop, and its continuation into the loft, embodies the persistence of the figure of the independent worker, self-determined, which remains a powerful image today. The architecture of these types has played a crucial role in shaping the norm of each era, influencing the daily life to the broader city dynamics.

Reintegrating work and the domestic within the house opens up many potential benefits. It could help create more stable and sustainable economies, reduce the environmental impact of the cities, and foster tight-knit communities. However, we cannot ignore the problems this shift raises—from minor neighborhood nuisances to loneliness, from feeling cramped in the living spaces to the worsened health damage caused by insalubrious buildings, and new difficulties in managing work/life balance. Unforeseen issues are bound to arise, as evidenced by personal experiences since 2020. Nevertheless, the possibility of finding a balance between work and labor, alternatively alienating and emancipating, makes this it worth to explore this possibility further.

Hannah Arendt's reflection on labor and work remains relevant today:

“For it is in the nature of the human condition that contemplation remains dependent upon all sorts of activities — it depends upon labor to produce whatever is necessary to keep the human organism alive, it depends upon work to create whatever is needed to house the human body, and it needs action in order to organize the living together of many human beings in such a way that peace, the condition for the quiet of contemplation is assured.”⁶⁶

Designing a new organization of life and work requires action: the will to craft a new framework, supported by political direction, planning policies, and social habits. The architecture of the home must respond to a wide diversity of situations and aspirations, as well as restrictive pre-existing built conditions, to offer solutions that are not merely commodities for the privileged few. A critical understanding of the history, the “why” and “how” of the shapes of our homes, is a first step toward action.

⁶⁶ See introduction. Arendt, Hannah. *Labor, Work, Action*. (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), 29.

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The Boundaries of Labor, Lea Marzinzik

Typological Mestizaje, María Ruiz Medina

Gay Apocalypse, François Mégret

The Architecture of the Superblock, Michelle Mortensen

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