The un-private house : [brochure] the Museum of Modern Art, July 1-October 5, 1999

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All of architecture is colored by the problem of the house.1

Jean Helion

Joan Hillon’s words point out the unique position the private house has played throughout the history of architecture. Despite its relatively small size, at least compared to other architectural programs, the house figures large in the cultural imagination. It has been and continues to be the man-made environment’s fundamental building block. Its most inevitable component, providing an essential daily need: shelter.

The private house as we know it today traces its lineage to seventeenth-century Europe and colonial New England. This new type frequently mimicked the contemporary palaces and villas of the upper classes in its architectural style, decoration, and relationship to the landscape. However, the characteristic that had the greatest influence on the private house’s development was not architectural fashion but the prerequisite of privacy itself.

Privacy in the private house, once its aspiration, has not been predicated on a discernible separation of its inhabitants and activities from both the public realm and other houses. The private house has also been from its establishment a building type that enshrines family life to the exclusion of all other activities. Furthermore, as a space so dedicated, it has been for almost four hundred years largely responsible for the creation and development of those rituals and comforts that we now associate with the domestic. What we see today, however, is that these conditions are undergoing tremendous changes.

The Presence of the Public: The Loft

The most striking transformation has been the loft, which came to see the nineteenth-century private house as not only separate from the public world but also, significantly, as a retreat from it.2 Perhaps for similar reasons, Swedish artist Carl Larsson was moved to devote a series of watercolors (A Home, 1899) to his family home, which he described as the place “experienced that unspeakably sweet feeling of isolation from the noise of the world.”3

At the end of the twentieth century, a new relationship between public and private is emerging—one in which the private is engaged with the public through media and technology. In both theory and practice, the ascendency of these digital technologies has become a catalyst for contemporary architectural innovation and experimentation. In Frank Lupo’s and Daniel Rowen’s Lipschutz/Jones Apartment in New York City, digital screens displaying financial information are visible throughout the loft, alerting the occupants to fluctuations in international currency markets. In Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron’s Kramlich Residence and Media Collection, to be built in Napa Valley, California, the interior partition of the house is screens onto which the owners’ collection of video art is projected. Earlier in this century, the philosopher Martin Heidegger expressed concern about the effects of the media in our lives, warning against what he called “distanciation.”4 He was right about this condition, however, has been replaced today by a common awareness of the distinction between the real and the virtual and an acceptance of both states.

Privacy

Privacy has always been related to political considerations and individual rights, but of late these issues involve not only physical privacy, but the increased presence of electronic media in people’s homes and daily lives as well. Writing recently, with considerable alarm, on the effects of the media on our lives, W. J. T. Mitchell commented, “It is time to reverse that terrible trend toward national naivete before it replaces privacy as an American value.”5

In contrast, Bernard Tschumi displays a nonchalance about the literal and virtual permeability of his rebuilt Hague Villa. Referring to its most transparent parts’ orientation toward a public boundary of the site, the architect remarked, “The house is to be seen as an extension of city events and a momentary pause in the digital transfer of information. The borders of the living room and work space, devoid of the camera-like emblem of ornament, expand beyond the property lines just as they [the property lines] are underlined by the electronic devices of everyday use.”6 Another example of a transparent house now under way is extensive, as might be seen in the Lipschutz/Jones Apartment. The owners of this loft are both traders on Wall Street, and, in light of the globalization of international markets, their working hours are no longer fixed. Rather, work occurs when market activity occurs. Hence, the home office is in effect a perspectivonlike trading room, its flickering digital screens visible from other areas of the loft. Six screens in addition to those in the office display information at close range in various locations: next to the bathroom mirror (so as to be visible when she (or he) needs to be visible upon waking), and so on.

Domesticity

Of typical representations from the first half of the nineteenth century of German private houses, the need for acoustic and visual privacy, as one would have with children in the house, the monumental upstairs/downstairs separation of the private and public spaces in inferior; instead, the loft model has been deemed to be appropriate; its flexibility and openness in market to the structured spaces that typify the traditional family house and reflect domestic rituals revolved around the presence of children. While none of these is literally left, Winks Rubbolina’s Millbrook Residence and Lupo’s and Rowen’s Lipschutz/Jones Apartment, both designed for young couples without children; Michael Maltzen’s Hervert Shipstead Residence in Beverly Hills, built for a gay couple without any children; and Francois de Menil’s Shorthand House in Houston, built for a divorced woman whose children are now adults, are all good demonstrations of that spatial option. Even traditional families have found such inflexible spaces to have unexpected advantages. Without carseakers, and often even without spouses to assist with child rearing, an open living arrangement means more contact and easier supervision of young children.

Work

Reversing a process begun nearly four hundred years ago, the reintegration of work into the private house now under way is extensive, with some twelve million Americans now using their homes as principal workplaces.7 How the home affects house design can be seen on a variety of scales. In one instance, a home office might be a fairly contained space that acts as an appartment or an extension of a separate place of work, such as in Thomas Hanrahan’s and Victoria Muehler’s Valley Home in New York City. In other cases, the home office might be a principal place of work, in which one or more of the occupants spends all of his or her working time. As in Cindy Tosti’s Gharudo-Rohsen House in Buenos Aires and Kazuyo Sejima’s and Ryue Nishizawa’s M House in Tokyo.

In other designs, the presence of work is no limited to a single space, instead merging with the living areas to create a new kind of space, as might be seen in the Lipchutz/Jones Apartment. The owners of this loft are both traders on Wall Street, and, in light of the globalization of international markets, their working hours are no longer fixed. Rather, work occurs when market activity occurs. Hence, the home office is in effect a perspectivonlike trading room, its flickering digital screens visible from other areas of the loft. Six screens in addition to those in the office display information at close range in various locations: next to the bathroom mirror (so as to be visible when she (or he) needs to be visible upon waking), and so on.
Michael Bell
Glass House @ 2°, Houston, projected completion 1999-2000
View of rear facade. Computer-generated image

Shigeru Ban
Curtain Wall House, Tokyo, 1995
View with curtains open
Photo: Hiroyuki Hirai

Preston Scott Cohen
Torus House, Old Chatham, New York, projected completion 2001
View into easel painting studio from terrace. Computer-generated image by Alexandra Barker and Chris Hoxie

Neil M. Denari
Massey House, Los Angeles, unbuilt, 1994
Aerial view from northwest. Computer-generated image

Diller + Scofidio
Slow House, Long Island, New York, unbuilt, 1990

Winka Dubbeldam, Archi-Tectonics
Millbrook Residence, Millbrook, New York, unbuilt, 1997
View from southeast. Computer-generated image

Guthrie + Buresh Architects
WorkHouse, Los Angeles, 1996
View from northwest
Photo: © David Hewitt / Anne Garrison

Thomas Hanrahan and Victoria Meyers, Architects
Holley Loft, New York City, 1995
View of master bedroom
Photo: Esto Photographies © Peter Aaron

Xaveer de Geyter Architectenbureau
House in Brasschaat, Brasschaat, Belgium, 1992
View of central courtyard toward entry ramp
Photo: Hans Werlemann

Herzog & de Meuron
Kramlich Residence and Media Collection, Napa Valley, California, projected completion 2000
Lower-level interior with video installations: Steve McQueen's Just Above My Head (1996) at left, Gary Hill's Viewer (1996) at back, and Jeff Wall's The Quarrel (1998) at right. Computer-generated image

Steven Holl Architects
Y House, Schoharie County, New York, 1999
Construction view from northwest
Photo: © Arch Photo, Inc., Eduard Hueber

Simon Lingers with Thomas Kinslow
T-House, Wilton, New York, 1992
View from northwest
Photo: Arch Photo, Inc., Eduard Hueber

Kolatan/Mac Donald Studio
Ost/Kuttner Apartment, New York City, 1997
View of partition pivoted to serve as dining table
Photo: © Michael Moran

Rem Koolhaas, Office for Metropolitan Architecture
Maison a Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France, 1998
View from southwest
Photo: © 1998 Todd Eberle

Frank Lupo/Daniel Rowen, Architects
Lipschutz/Jones Apartment, New York City, 1988
Living/dining area
Photo: © Michael Moran

Michael Maltzan Architecture
Hergott Shepard Residence, Beverly Hills, 1999
Principal facade
Photo: © Richard Barnes

UN Studio/Van Berkel & Bos
View from southeast
Photo: © Christian Richters

Bernard Tschumi
View from southeast. Computer-generated image

Clorindo Testa, Architect
Ghirardo-Kohen House, Buenos Aires, 1994
View of solarium and renovated house
Photo: Diego Trolliet

Joel Sanders, Architect
House for a Bachelor, Minneapolis, unbuilt, 1998
Transverse section through dressing area (above) and master bedroom. Computer-generated image

Sanford & Tschumi Architects
View from southeast. Computer-generated image

Bruno Tschumi
View from southeast. Computer-generated image

Frank O. Gehry
Shuff & Reif Haus, Munich, 1998
View from southeast. Computer-generated image

Kusama
The Private House

un-
the private
house

Steve Hall Architects
3 House, New Haven, New Haven, Connecticut, 1994
Construction view from southeast. View of principal facade. Computer-generated image

Steven Holl Architects
Cheeseweed Residence, Brentwood, CA, 1994
View of principal facade and interior house
From Home Yard

Bert TIMEOUT
View from southeast. Computer-generated image

Personals

Steve Hall

Clorindo Testa

HERZOG & DE MEURON

Shigeru Ban

Kusama
women and their later middle-class highly refined attitudes that could were not spontaneous inventions of Tudor style, the very image of the responsibility of tending their houses suggested by Richie's words, was the family. The comfort of the historian Alexandra Richie describes house as an institution devoted to the original house was designed in a unsentimental pose in opposition new forms that are as disquieting interpreted as a critique of the cult one architecture critic has called it. The most important questions relating to this field, though, are not technical but philosophical. What is it about topography that has captured the imaginations of so many architects who have created so many projects that simply could not have existed a decade ago? Their appeal is, it must be acknowledged, in part aesthetic and in part technological. There is a novelty in these new forms and the meanings of them that is compelling as well as beautiful and marvelous. Novelties have the potential role in new geometric languages the fact that it can catch up to the fundamental social and cultural changes of recent areas of contemporary architectural change, a transformation that, in fact, is inevitable. Architectural writing and more complex geometries that simply could not have projects that are inherently disposed to creations of a subjectivist kind is that of which the is compelling as well as beautiful and more complex geometries that simply could not have projects that are inherently disposed to creations of a subjectivist kind is that of which the is compelling as well as beautiful and more complex geometries that simply could not have projects that are inherently disposed to creations of a subjectivist kind is that of which the