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Living producing reproducing.
Political projects for homes

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyse ways of life and home environments through the categories of productive and reproductive work, in order to outline new practicable solutions to some of the issues presented. The lock-down has connected the interior of the home - the private, space of reproductive work - and the exterior - the public, space of productive work - in an unprecedented way. It is precisely within the relationship between outside and inside, public and private, production and reproduction that lie many of the contradictions and the potentialities of living. These spaces could be reshaped through political and non-formal design strategies. Working on a plan encompassing both private homes and urban design, we outline options to intervene on collective residences within the city.

Keywords

Housing — Work — Social reproduction

The lock-down measures enacted to control the spread of the Covid-19 epidemic have had large consequences on people's home environments and ways of life.

In particular, the measures enacted in March and April 2020 accentuated an ongoing process, never before seen on such a wide scope, to connect the home environment - the private living space, the place of reproductive work – and the outside – the public space, the place of productive work.

Productive work here is intended as waged work. Reproductive labour or social reproduction, on the other hand, is all that work, traditionally female, that serves the reproduction of the individual and the society (Marx 1867).

The massive entry of women into the labour market following the lowering of average wages and the simultaneous downsizing of welfare have redesigned the relationship between productive work and reproductive labour, further privatising the latter in a symbolic and material sense and making women's productive work precarious and undervalued (Fraser 1996). This not only influences the market downwards, but also makes it imperative to create new conditions of work flexibility that enable domestic and reproductive labour to be taken over.

Flexibility is often demanded by women workers themselves in order to reconcile 'work' and 'life' – it also happens to be a 'productive resource' (Standing 2011) that allows companies to implement significant cost reductions.

Lower wages, minimum benefits and longer working days, in particular, are motivated and guaranteed by the exploitation of the living environment. If these trends were already visible before, the lock-down has led to their extension to almost the entirety of the employment market, blurring further

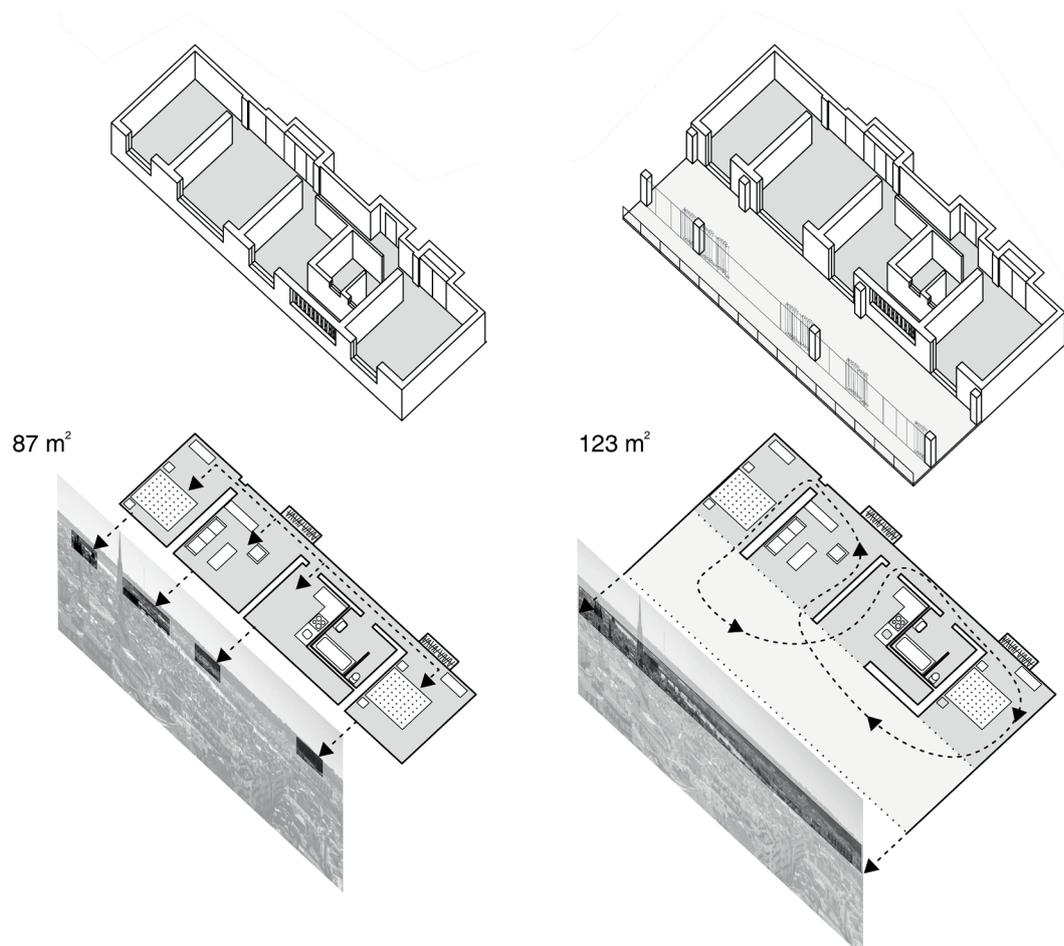
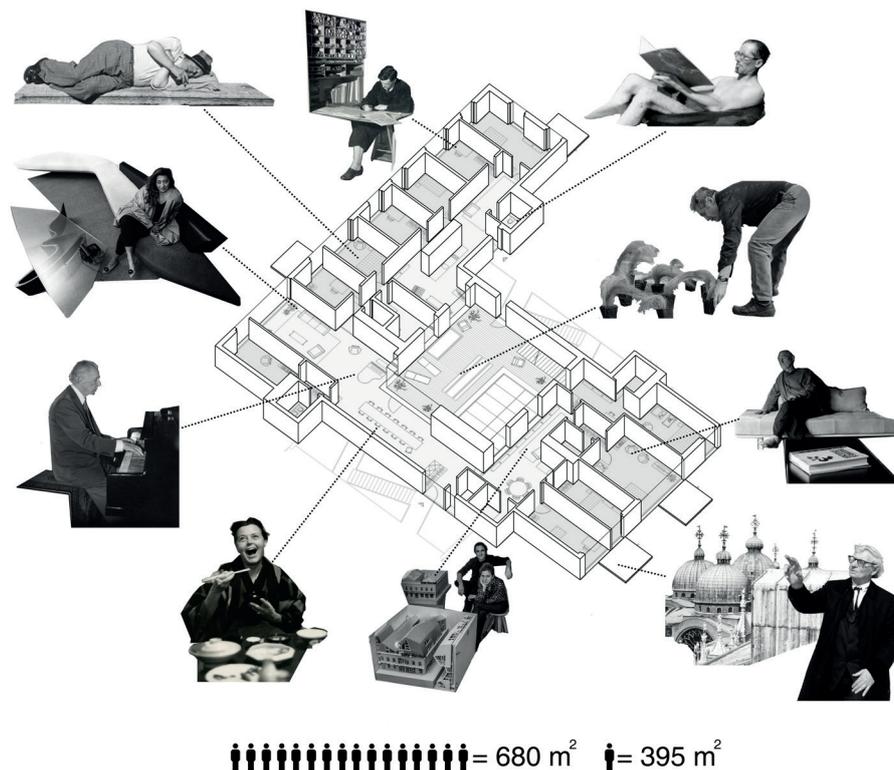


Fig. 1
530 Dwellings in Bordeaux La-
caton & Vassal 2016, existing
condition (left side), project (right
side). Drawing by the author.

the boundaries between public and private space, between production and reproduction (Martella, Enia 2020). The house, in fact, has had to accommodate unforeseen activities, transforming itself into a classroom, a gym and a meeting room. Virtual life has depended on real space, shared and disputed according to everyone's needs, which in turn have depended on the unequal roles closely linked to gender attributed by society and by the labour market. In this sense, the lock-down has acted both as a catalyst for flexibility and as a magnifying glass for the problems it generates. Among these are depression, anxiety and insomnia, which appear to have affected women twice as much as men (Campolongo S. Amore M. 2020). One of the main causes of these phenomena is the shortage of space for themselves and the absence of open areas. It is not surprising: women still carry out a large part of the reproductive work, and the imposed interruption of the paid care work (domestic help, baby-sitters, carers, etc.) has forced them to individually reconcile productive and reproductive work, but now in a living environment. Cross-referencing these data with ISTAT data (ISTAT 2020) it is possible to trace how, during the lock-down, women managed to create work spaces inside the home, especially in the rooms traditionally dedicated to reproduction, such as the kitchen. This shows that reproductive and productive tasks intertwine in women's lives, pushing them to a 'flexibility', also in terms of physical space, which is difficult to sustain.

During lock-down, the home has become for all a 'mixed' ground, in which production and reproduction merge. That mixture can have dangerous effects on certain aspects of life. It is useful, therefore, to investigate options that would mitigate these dangerous elements.

Working in parallel on both individual residences and urban scale, the pro-

**Fig. 2**

Zwicky Sud Zurigo. Schneider Studer Primas e Kraftwerk1 2016. Typical floorplan. Drawing by the author.

posed strategy aims, through the outlining of concrete examples, to define potential actions to intervene rapidly on the home environment in the context of the city.

Private space within the home

In our homes, especially in the city, each room corresponds to an activity that must be carried out with maximum efficiency, in the shortest possible time and with the minimum waste of resources. In practice, this trend is based on market laws that have compressed the available space in one's accommodation to an excessive degree.

During the lock-down, the process of undermining the specific purpose of the rooms was accentuated. The activities to be carried out at home have multiplied, and so too has the need for additional, multifunctional spaces that can accommodate more than everyday, invisible, private reproduction. The pressing need to continue working has accelerated a process of supplying specific environments – separate areas, acoustic and luminous control – beneficial to the domestication of production (Chayka 2020).

This trend changes the shape of the home, but not its nature. It conceives a space with assigned functions, and therefore does not free the residents from the related roles that depend on it, which are often gender-related. In this sense it is worth mentioning the redevelopment experiments of Lacaton & Vassal on social housing in Paris and Bordeaux.

The winter garden they have created is a neutral surface, and the opposite choice to those market logics that would have favourably seen the demolition of the property (Mayoral Moratilla 2018), and which are accustomed to making air, space and sunshine marketable, thus rendering them available only to those who can afford their price.

How essential these characteristics actually are emerged during the lock-down, when balconies and terraces, however small, acquired a new, central, role in the lifestyle of the residents.

In Zurich, the radicalisation of spatial – and economic – inequalities of this

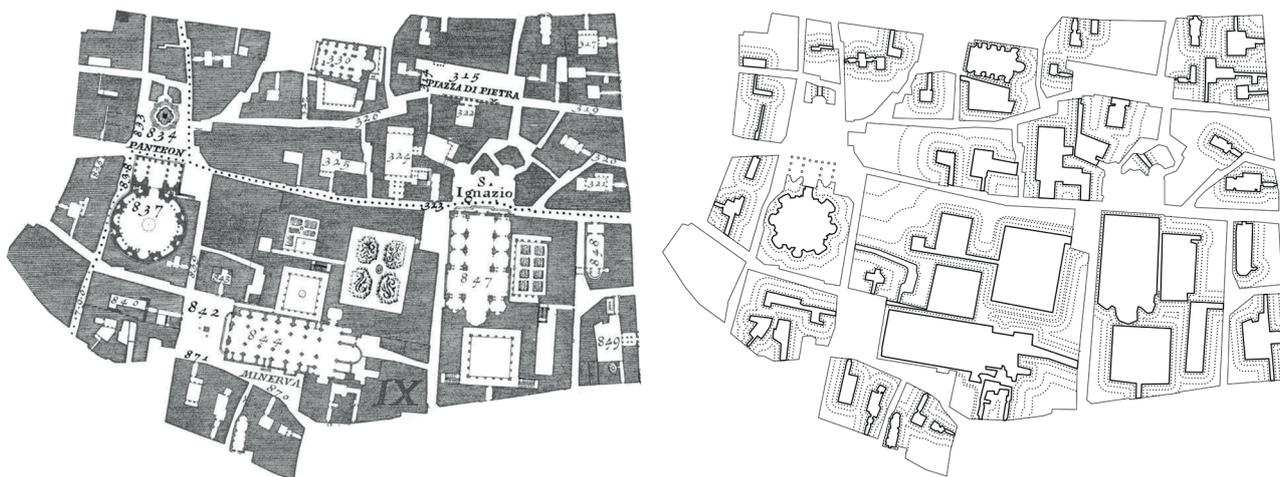


Fig. 3

Plan of Rome G. Nolli 1748. Porosity and Urban Membrane. Drawing by the author.

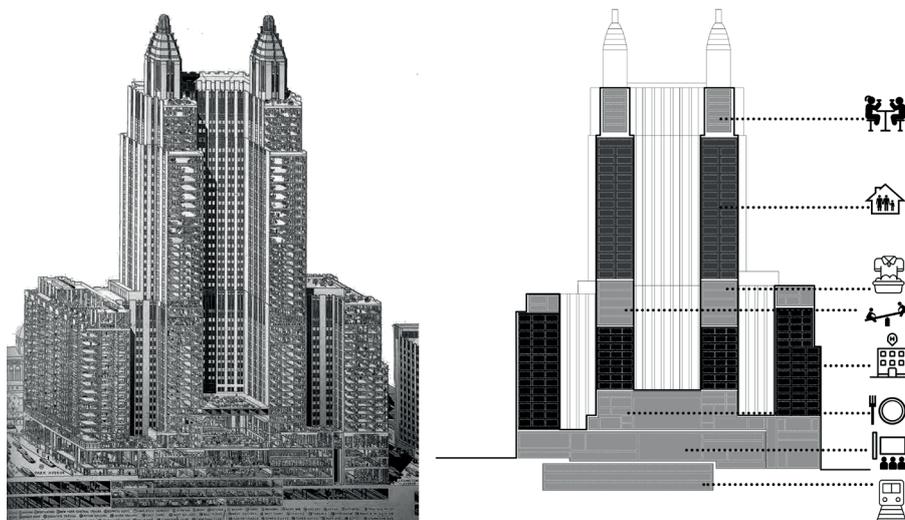


Fig. 4

Waldorf Astoria section. Crowninshield, F., The unofficial palace of New York a tribute to the Waldorf-Astoria, New York, 1939. Drawing by the author

kind has had the effect of encouraging widespread experimentation with collective residences (Bideau 2015). A significant example of this is the Zwicky Sud, designed by Schneider Studer Primas. The choice made for the conversion of the former industry into residences was to collectivize a large part of the private areas, sharing large spaces within the community. On the one hand, this arrangement is capable of redistributing surfaces, guaranteeing for everyone a very high quality of life at a minimal material and ecological cost. On the other hand, it virtuously modifies relations between the residents, favouring the development of welfare networks, and decentralising, even during a pandemic, the burden of reproductive work on a wider community, to the benefit of the population groups that suffer most from its privatisation.

The public space between the houses

The lockdown showed how some spatial configurations on an urban scale contributed to relational dynamics of assistance and mutualisation. These include housing development courtyards, common outdoor spaces where it was possible to meet and play, or the city's squares, capable of hosting open-air cinemas, fuelling communal life even during social distancing. It is therefore important to further expand the scale of reasoning on the residence through the introduction of the notion of porosity, borrowed from Richard Sennett (Sennett 2018 p.304). The definition applies, in the relationship separating public and private space, a distinction between border and membrane. The membrane has characteristics of selective porosity, capable of mediating

the quantity and quality of exchanges that take place between the two spheres of urban life. It is remarkable how Sennett emphasises the abstract and general characteristics of the membrane, starting from the concept and then condensing it into spatial outcomes. Porosity, thus, is a quality found both in historical and horizontal examples (Rome as represented in the Nolli plan) and in contemporary and vertical buildings (the New York Times skyscraper by Renzo Piano). A particularly interesting case of porosity and collectivization of the services of the residence is the Waldorf Astoria. The building, operating in the first three decades of the 20th century in New York, simultaneously housed public services for citizens – hotels, theatres, restaurants, panoramic terraces – and private homes, creating a complex system of both internal and urban relations (Puigjaner 2014). The individual residences, integrated into the system of collectivization of facilities, could actually do without private kitchens and instead benefit from the common preparation of meals. The building was a great success until its demolition.

The quest for porosity, from a practical point of view within the city, suggests a selective readjustment of the spaces available at any one time – infrastructures, public buildings, spaces interposed between private individuals and the city – aimed at opposing "the divisions that capitalism has created" on the basis, for example, of "recomposing our lives and reconstituting a collective interest" (Federici 2018 in Castelli 2019 pp.148-149) fragmented, among other reasons, by the separation between production and reproduction on which the original process of accumulation is based (Ivi).

Conclusion

The lock-down acted as a trigger on what were already socially widespread problems. One of these is "the contradiction" (Fraser, 2016) between reproduction and production and the resulting conflict over its spatial formalization. Rather than following the trend that sees in work flexibility and individual purchasing power, the solution to this contrast is to favour project examples that can collectivize and socialize this conflict.

The reading of urban space – and inevitably also of domestic space – as a place of conflict is in fact "in opposition to neoliberal dynamics" which exploit "community rhetoric" producing "gated communities, gentrification, inequality and expulsions" to ensure that "urban territory" remains "a place of extraction of ever-increasing profit margins by global capital" (Castelli 2019 p.146).

For this reason, it is pivotal to analyse the private residential sphere and public urban sphere by questioning their margins. The possibility is that of "making kin" (Haraway 2019) both inside the residence, contributing to the improvement of the intrinsic living conditions, and between the residences, through the weaving of a dense network of relationships nourished by the city and its borders. Both operations can contribute to loosening the burden of responsibility to produce and reproduce, not through the search for flexible individual balances but by contributing to the reconstitution of a sense of community based on solidarity, for which Covid19 has highlighted both the need and the desire.

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