

MAKING SPACE

WOMEN AND THE
MAN MADE ENVIRONMENT

Rats Race REC

MATRIX



**'A stiff challenge to the great macho
myths of metropolitan architecture.'**

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MAN-MADE ENVIRONMENT

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Preface

The authors of this book belong to a group of feminist designers collectively known as Matrix. We are women who share a concern about the way buildings and cities work for women. We work as architects, teachers in higher education, researchers, mothers, a builder, a journalist and a housing manager. Working together on this book was for most of us a first chance to develop ideas about buildings with other women; and we have learnt a lot from each other.

In our paid jobs some of us have chosen to work with women; others work with men. Most of us live with men, three of us have children and about half of us live in collective households. We did not set out to be a consciousness-raising group, but have brought individual experience of the women's movement to a group whose common ground is involvement with buildings.

Many of us were members of the New Architecture Movement in the late 1970s. NAM was a mixed group of socialist architects together with some students, teachers and builders. It was concerned to make architects more accountable to those who use buildings and questioned the relationship between user and architect, and to a lesser extent (but important for some of us) that between architect and builder. A feminist discussion group emerged and organised a conference in March 1979 called 'Women and Space'. The conference attracted about 200 women, and some men from a variety of backgrounds. Though interest in the subject was evidently great, there was very little published work then available. This gave some of us the idea of meeting regularly and eventually to produce a book.

From unstructured exploratory discussion we moved in the autumn of 1980 to more formal meetings where we discussed in depth the ideas each woman was working on. Some women devel-

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oped themes arising from their research interests, some analysed aspects of architectural practice and others talked directly from their experience of childcare and how they lived. Three members of the group produced an exhibition called 'Home Truths', developing the theme of women and the design of houses. Partly in response to outside interest in our work, including requests for speakers, we formed an umbrella organization known as Matrix, which comprised women working on the book and the group involved in architectural design and in producing the exhibition. Some of us were involved in all the projects. Our intentions were to work together as women to develop a feminist approach to design through practical projects and theoretical analysis, and to communicate our ideas more widely. Our training and our work in Matrix have helped us to look critically at the way our built surroundings can affect women in this society. These skills have been useful to us, and we want to share them with others to help us all develop an understanding of how we are 'placed' as women in a man-made environment and to use that knowledge to subvert it.

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1. Introduction

This book is about women's relationship to buildings and to the spaces between them – our created surroundings, including homes, their arrangement in relation to one another, to public spaces, transport routes, workplaces and the layout of cities. Our built or created environment is made in accordance with a set of ideas about how society works, who does what and who goes where.

A woman's place?

Consider your own surroundings. If you are reading this at home, for instance, you are probably in almost the only place where you can impose something of your own individuality on your environment, limited of course by money, by space and time, by whom you live with and how, and by whether or not you own the place. Because home is the only place with this potential freedom we value and strive for it.

But for women there is another side. We will be judged by the quality of environment we can make, by neighbours, relations and friends – even if this is in circumstances over which we have little control, like a badly designed or 'sink' estate or a cramped 'starter' home. Behind every woman is the image of the 'ideal home'. The ideology of domesticity, which describes how things *ought* to be and *ought* to look, will always affect what we do even when we are reacting against it.

The home is also a retreat, a place removed from outside pressures where we can relax and be 'ourselves'. It makes a physical boundary between the environment we can control and the seemingly uncontrolled world outside. For most employed men, this physical boundary makes a clear mental distinction. Outside it they

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work; inside it they are at leisure. For women this division is much less clear – the world does not fall into such a neat pattern. There is, after all, a lot of work to be done in the home. As women it is assumed that we will be ultimately responsible for the upkeep and general maintenance of our homes whether we have another job or not. Again, we will be judged by the quality of our housework, however successful or hardworking we are in other spheres. Even when others contribute to this work, the primary responsibility remains with women. We are conscious of its demands at all times; responsibilities cannot be shut off by retreating into a ‘room of one’s own’ – within traditional nuclear families there is no real privacy for women. Every woman who has children knows both the pleasure of bringing them up and the isolation that passes for privacy, the constant commitment that leaves no space or time to oneself. Some do not even have a semblance of separation from other individuals and families; they have to suffer overcrowded conditions and noise booming through paper thin walls and floors.

The pleasure that many of us get from our homes carries certain contradictions. The fact that within the home women have a greater degree of power than they have outside it reinforces the assumption that a woman’s place is in the home.

Man-made world

The initial decisions to build are made by those owning or having control over large sums of money. Even such a small building as a house costs the equivalent of several years’ average earnings. A building may be commissioned by a future user – for example a firm wanting a factory or office for their own use or a client inviting an architect to design a house. It may be built as a speculative venture without a particular user in mind, or it may be commissioned on behalf of the users. The latter is the case where the state is client for schools, hospitals and council houses. The client or developer is nearly always a man or a committee consisting almost entirely of men, simply because very few women occupy positions of power in organizations and because men own or control most wealth. The client or developer will probably brief an architect – about 95 per cent of whom are men¹ – who helps them to clarify their requirements and then designs a building or scheme to meet these needs.

The architect may alter the scheme in the light of comments from the client and others, but it is extremely unusual for architects to make any attempt to consult those who will actually *use* the buildings. Professional codes of conduct and 'normal practice' do not encourage them to do so. Jane Darke in 'Women, architects and feminism' shows how difficult it is for women in the profession who are trying to establish their own credibility to challenge these norms.

The site will be subject to planning restrictions – the number of houses allowed, the floor area of an office or factory, the arrangements for access and parking, the appearance of the buildings in relation to their surroundings and so on. The scheme must also comply with building regulations. There must be proper sanitation, ventilation and means of fire escape. These constraints on the freedom of the client and architect are intended to ensure that the interests of the public are safeguarded. The planners and local councillors who make and apply these rules are, like architects, usually male. They do not necessarily promote their own interest at the expense of women's, but they may not have considered whether different sections of the population have different environmental needs. Lack of consideration may show itself at all levels of decision-making, from the layout of kitchens in council houses, or public buildings made inaccessible to people with prams or wheelchairs, to the whole relationship between home, workplace and other facilities which may affect women differently to men. Women's voices are not heard during this decision-making process which is supposed to ensure that building development takes place in a socially responsible way.

When both the client and the local authority are satisfied with the architect's proposal, arrangements will be made to build the scheme, using an almost all-male workforce. In short, women play almost no part in making decisions about or in creating the environment. It is a *man-made* environment.

Opposition to this aspect of male domination must occur in the context of other challenges to conventional views about women's roles. Demands for change have taken various forms at different times. The present women's movement can provide the stimulus for challenges to men's power to determine the environment. This book is one such challenge. An earlier example, from which we can draw lessons, of feminist influence on the arrangement of buildings occurred during the first world war. In 'Homes fit for heroines', Barbara McFarlane shows how the approach taken by a government

women's committee was influenced by the women's movement of that time and in turn modified designs for post-war housing proposed by the government.

Outside the home

Women's independence is severely restricted outside the home. If we walk on the streets after dark, we are accused of inviting violent sexual attack from men. If we do not have cheap and convenient public transport, we are physically restricted since most of us cannot afford a private alternative. If we are with our children we are made unwelcome in pubs, shops, restaurants and public buildings. Recent urban planning has provided us with a cold, alienating environment in which buildings have become free-standing 'objects' lost in a sea of unusable open space, disconnected from each other and linked by roads which merely serve the function of getting from A to B as quickly as possible. Modern cities have been planned to segregate different aspects of life; homes, shops, factories and offices are all in separate areas. This segregation has affected women more than men, because our lives have never been so neatly partitioned between the different areas of work, leisure and home in the way that men's have.

Jos Boys, in 'Women and public spaces', shows how the ideal of a home physically separate from the workplace reinforces a division of labour by gender inside and outside the home by tying women more closely to a locality than men. She shows how this idealized separation has affected the appearance and layout of contemporary housing estates even in the inner city to keep women 'distanced' from the public world.

Much of our environment has been designed on the basis of stereotypes of women's and men's work, their respective 'proper' locations and their relative importance. The arrangement of cities, the distances between homes, workplaces, and other buildings reinforce the assumption that workers are men, working for most of the day away from the home with little or no responsibility for its day-to-day running and for childcare. It is assumed that women don't work outside the home and that they do look after homes and children. But only a small number of households conform to this pattern. Less than a third of households consist of a husband, wife and dependent children, and in more than half of these the mother has a

paid job outside the home.² About one in nine of all households consists of a man *with* a paid job, a woman *without* one, and children under the age of 16.

What's wrong with modern architecture?

Our criticisms of the arrangement of buildings and cities have been influenced by ideas from two sources. One is the women's movement over the past 15 years; we assume that readers have some familiarity with feminist ideas. Our own collective assumptions are explained in a later section. The other influence is the growing criticism of modern architecture.

For about 20 years after the war there was a collective confidence among architects. New needs and social patterns, born of wartime devastation and the will to reform, required new buildings. Architects took their theories about design from the Modern Movement. The form of a building, it was believed, should be derived from its functions, and its exterior should suggest what went on inside without resorting to stylistic clothing borrowed from the past. New technologies and materials also created new possibilities for built form. Offices could be built with walls entirely of glass; the job of supporting the structure would be done by columns set back from the facade. Large, unencumbered spaces could be constructed using steel, concrete and plastics. Using concrete, buildings could be made higher than before to provide more homes within a given area. For about a generation architects were given a great deal of freedom to build their vision of the new society.

Gradually it became apparent that architects' grandiose theories did not fit the way of life that people wanted to follow. The forms of buildings were influenced by economic and political pressures rather than social needs. In the pursuit of profit, speculators tore down urban landmarks that local people had held in affection. Councillors were easily persuaded that their city needed a more modern image. Politicians believed that the massive housing problem would be solved by the use of new materials, factory-made components and mass construction of standardized units. The results were characterless office blocks and disastrous 'streets in the sky', where people were supposed to have their homes. High-rise flats were and are acceptable to some households. But the grim appearance of much high-rise housing has come to symbolize all that is

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wrong in modern architecture and its narrow view of social needs and aspirations.

The crisis in architecture was not a purely professional turmoil. Community groups started to protest about poor housing and the siting of roads and important buildings. Articles and television programmes portrayed the mistakes of architects and planners. Architects reacted to this loss of public confidence in different ways.

Some architects, aware of the danger of professional remoteness, tried to democratize design and make their skills more available to tenants and community groups. Radical groups of architects, economists and planners discussed such questions as the reason for building a particular structure, for whom and by whom it is built, how the production of buildings is connected to the workings of a developed capitalist economy and the effects of building and planning on the lives of ordinary people. These debates were important in developing our critical perspective on architectural practice.

However, we came to realize that although these radical groups accepted some of the ideas of the women's movement, there was a gap in our understanding of architecture and building design from a feminist point of view. We believe that the question of what has 'gone wrong' with modern architecture cannot be discussed adequately without an awareness of the invisibility of women's lives to the professionals who plan buildings and cities. The chapters that follow develop these ideas.

A feminist response

At the same time as small groups of socialist architects, mostly men, were discussing the relationship between the architect and society, a broadly based feminist movement was questioning assumptions about women's place in society and the 'natural division' between the sexes. This book draws on discussion and action in the women's movement. For women have also taken action which makes demands upon the environment. 'Reclaim the Night' marches have demonstrated women's anger at men's appropriation of parts of the city where women's bodies are exploited. Campaigns for community facilities have made clear women's real need to break out of the isolation and individualization of housework and childcare. Women's Aid have demanded safe places for women to go to escape from

violent male partners. During the Yorkshire Ripper murders women in Northern England protested at police suggestions that they shouldn't go out at night and instead proposed a curfew on men.

We have also drawn on the debate about the nature of housework³ and on a growing number of studies that examine the relationship between women and the environment. In Britain, Leonora Davidoff and Catherine Hall have been particularly important; so too is the work of the Women and Housing group. We were also encouraged by the publication of work by American feminists. Gwendolyn Wright and Dolores Hayden have written about women's involvement in ideal communities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and about nineteenth century feminist ideas about housing and housework.⁴ Others have written about the effects of post-war urban planning and the growth of suburbs on women, and about women and homelessness.⁵

As feminists we share the objective of challenging the subordinate position of women. Among feminists there are differences about whether the liberation of women can take place without a revolutionary transformation of society, about whether gender or class is the more significant factor in the oppression of women (and hence whether middle-class women have any identity of interests with working-class women), and about whether it is realistic to hope for a change in the behaviour of men or for men voluntarily to relinquish their privileges. Within our group there are differences of opinion on these issues, but we have some understandings in common. These are that the divisions and antagonisms between men and women are social and not biological in origin. There are, of course, physical differences between men and women. But this biological division has been transformed into social constructions of gender – 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. We do not accept that because females bear children they are unable to mix mortar and lay bricks. Nor do we accept that males who are able to design buildings are somehow incapable of cleaning lavatories and changing nappies. What men and women do for most of their lives is a product of social structures and expectations, not of biology. We believe, however, that precisely because women are brought up *differently* in our society we have different experiences and needs in relation to the built environment which are rarely expressed.

There can be little doubt that men gain in current definitions of

masculinity and femininity. Men enjoy higher status, a higher standard of living and personal service at the expense of women. We think these privileges should be undermined by giving women equality of opportunity. However, there are very positive aspects to the socializing experience of women. We think that men would gain from having a more caring role in society.

Males have dominated in almost all societies for almost the whole of recorded history, but this domination has taken different forms at particular historical times. For instance, capitalist methods of production removed some types of productive activity from the home and so reinforced the male notion that women should be protected from the harsh world of business and 'work'. 'House Designs and Women's Roles' analyses a series of plans, mostly of types of house in use today, to see what assumptions are made about family life and the role of women in the home.

In 'Housing the family', Susan Francis dissects the stereotyped image of the family, and of women in particular, that are seen in design guides written to advise architects on house planning.

Feminism and architecture

We have not produced a blueprint for a feminist architecture. When we talk to individuals and groups about our work, we often get asked what feminist design would be like, whether women design different sorts of buildings from men, or what should be done to design buildings more sympathetic to women. Some people have imagined that women design round, curving buildings, while men build phallic towers. We have come to see this as a caricature of what feminist design might be.

There are no instant answers to these questions. This book has not been written to provide architects with a do-it-yourself feminist architecture kit. We are not prescribing the solution; we are describing a problem, so as to help women understand their own relationship to the built environment and to help architects understand how the environment *is* a problem for women.

Feminist architects are trying to take account of women's experience, and to respond to other feminists' initiatives. In 'Working with women', Frances Bradshaw describes the work of the Matrix Design Group which works primarily with women's groups.

We feel that radical building design and research start from personal concerns, from a growing awareness that our man-made surroundings are not neutral, that there is some sort of contradiction between the lived experience of many women and the particular physical patterns that our built surroundings make. For instance, a chain of symbolic associations, 'private, home, warmth, stability, comfort', are literally built into a physical setting, set in direct opposition to 'public, competitive, aggressive, stimulating', in a way that does not accurately describe the realities for women and often obscures other possible relationships which might suit women better.

Marion Roberts, in 'Private kitchens, public cooking', looks at experimental communal restaurants run by the state during the second world war. She shows how these upset conventional nineteenth- and twentieth-century oppositions between public and private, by turning eating and the provision of meals into a public affair and a public service for the first (and only) time in this country.

We can learn from these alternative experiments but they do not provide any easy answers. There may for instance be a contradiction between the needs and desires of many women now, and longer term aims. For example, we argue for more childcare facilities *now* to ease the burden on women of looking after children. But this does not mean that we think women should be solely responsible for children. We look in the long run to a more equal concern between women and men for looking after children.

We do not believe that the buildings around us are part of a conspiracy to oppress women. They have developed from other priorities, notably the profit motive. The property boom of the early 1960s helped to transform many inner-city areas into single function areas, which became lifeless and dangerous when the workers returned home, and where the quality of internal and external space for users and members of the public was hardly considered. Even buildings designed by architects with strong political or social intentions have often misinterpreted women's needs. There has been a benign but false assumption that all sections of the population want the environment to do the same things for them.

Buildings do not control our lives. They reflect the dominant values in our society, political and architectural views, people's demands and the constraints of finance, but we can live in them in

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different ways from those originally intended. Buildings only affect us inasmuch as they contain ideas about women, about our 'proper place', about what is private and what is public activity, about which things should be kept separate and which put together. But this does not determine how we live. Just as language contains and perpetuates certain ideas about women, so do buildings, but in a less direct way. As feminist architects and designers we want to avoid the architectural determinism that sees building-users as puppets, capable of being manipulated according to the architect's idea of desired behaviour. The arrangement of space in and between buildings is a reflection of accepted views which may have a greater or lesser effect on the occupants – or which may have unintended effects on social life in general.

We have tried to avoid assuming that our experiences and views are universal. Even though we hope to speak of all women's experience, we are directly limited by our own history. All of us have come through higher education, mostly with a training in architecture, and thus fit into the conventional definition of the white, middle class. We have all felt angered by male domination at work and in cities and we believe that our experience is a common one for women. We hope this book will help women to understand how the man-made environment fails to work for them and will start some ideas about how things could be different

2.

Women, architects and feminism

There are two questions we are often asked: do women architects design differently from men, and if not, why not? My argument is that architects are out of touch with those who use their buildings, and that their professional training is part of the process that removes them from many of the people they design for. Architects who are women, and/or come from a working-class background, have to acquire an outlook similar to that of middle-class males, the dominant group in the architectural profession.¹ This is why we shouldn't expect buildings designed by women to have any qualities distinct from those designed by men.

The possibility of women architects adopting a different attitude depends in part on the existence of a feminist movement, and on whether the movement stresses the problems of women in general or only those of a limited group. The consciousness of women architects in the past has partly reflected the state of the women's movement at large, so the recent growth in awareness of feminist issues may offer a new potential for feminist design.

Buildings and the spaces in and around them affect women's lives both physically and through the ideas they express, that are literally 'built in' to them. The physical effects on women are clear enough. For example, a house may be awkwardly arranged, so that it creates extra work; the distance to facilities may be excessive and the route to them may expose us to danger; once there, we may not be able to use certain facilities because they are inaccessible to wheelchairs or pushchairs. Over and above these material problems, there may be social constraints on us as women – where it is 'appropriate' to be, at what time and with whom. Even if your local library is accessible to pushchairs, you may still face disapproval if you take small children in. We are allowed into pubs alone, but once

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in we have to behave in a certain way if we are not to attract unwanted attention from men. Separate zones for home and work tell us that we are meant to compartmentalize our lives in this way.

All buildings we use have particular ideas built into them about what and who is important and who is not. Some men can show their status in the home with a study – a room of their own. Often ‘women’s’ rooms, such as the kitchen, are small and placed well away from the public world of the street. The relative size and impressiveness of rooms and buildings, the relationship of spaces to each other and the people whose convenience is given priority all help to define what is normal, what is better or worse in our society. If a block of council flats looks like a filing cabinet or prison, we are right in thinking that this carries ideas about the status of people who live there.

The built environment is oppressive for many women, in ways that we do not yet know how to explain. What is more, the form of this oppression changes through time and with place, and the individual woman’s experience of it varies according to factors such as class, race, personality and sexual preference.

Who is it, then, who patterns a particular set of social relationships into the physical environment? In almost all classifications of social class, architects are placed in the highest category, along with other ‘higher professionals’ like doctors, lawyers and business executives.² Figures for architects’ earnings show that these far exceed average earnings.

Becoming an architect

To become an architect requires a lengthy period of higher education; school-leavers who pass into universities and polytechnics are overwhelmingly from middle-class backgrounds. The process of training student architects does not normally bring them into contact with building users. It is unusual for students to be brought face to face with a real client. Nor does the training encourage students to become aware of the gaps in their knowledge of a wide range of lifestyles, or to fill these gaps.

The main method of learning to design buildings at a school of architecture is to start with a small, simple building and gradually work up to more complicated problems over the five years of a course. There are lectures on aspects of building design but the

design exercises are the core of the course. The students are encouraged to work in the studios within the school, where the tutors can wander among the drawing boards and discuss the students' ideas for the building as they develop. The sources of ideas may include meetings with imaginary client, visits to other buildings or searches through magazines for relevant previous schemes, and possibly the use of design guides like those discussed in chapter 6. Talking to ordinary users of buildings is not a routine part of the process.

The tutors are similar to the groups that dominate the architectural profession in general: the majority are white, middle-class men. Talk over the drawing boards includes a hidden curriculum on how to behave as an architect, with anecdotes about the eccentricities of well-known practitioners or their cavalier attitude to clients. (Architects resent their dependence on clients, just as some doctors hate patients. The client has to be 'contended with', especially in the case of a committee-client such as a hospital board or housing committee.)³ A figure half-ridiculed and half-admired is the 'prima donna architect' (usually male) who convinces the client that it is a privilege to have secured his services and who feels free to subordinate the client's requirements to his own flights of fancy.

This arrogance may be tolerated or even encouraged by the process of evaluation of student projects, which takes place at a 'crit' where the tutors, assisted perhaps by visiting 'experts', comment on each student's proposals. The student is expected to explain and justify her or his decisions in the face of questions and criticisms; to defend the decisions made rather than to admit that they may have been based on insufficient knowledge. Students thus learn to construct plausible rationalizations rather than to recognize their own weakness. The production of beautiful drawings may become an end in itself or a means of disguising the defects in a scheme rather than a means of showing that the student has understood the problem and arrived at a reasonable solution, using particular arrangements and methods of construction.

The attitudes of architects

Once the student is qualified, the norms for discovering the needs of future building users on real projects are vague. There is no professional pressure to ensure that the designers of public sector housing, for example, have close contact with existing council tenants.

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On a research project, I asked some architects of recent, acclaimed public sector housing schemes what they thought of council tenants.⁴ Their replies revealed the tremendous gap between themselves and the users of their buildings.

I sort of wonder whether there is a kind of subculture of people about whom one knows very little . . . people that have moved out of very tough working-class areas . . . who just have different expectations, they don't have the sort of middle-class expectations that one is thinking they're going to have . . . I just don't know.

They lavish attention on their houses; they're very very good tenants, most of them, in GLC and local authority housing. I'm always being absolutely staggered at the way they occupy [a house] . . . I went into some of the big family units, one or two of the black ones and an Irish one, and they've done them up very well, I mean bizarre taste of course, most extraordinary coloured carpets and things like this, but very well. And they've covered all the lousy tiles that we had to put in with close carpeting, fitted carpets, and big television sets: you name it, they've got it . . . There's one old woman on the ground floor who's a born complainer . . . when I asked her how she liked the flat she said, 'Oh, inside it's all right but this is like a prison,' and we were in the street you see, and I thought 'Oh Christ, it doesn't look like a prison to me, but if it looks like a prison to her, she's probably got nearer to a prison than I ever have.'

Big families are a killer on these sites, they are the main source of vandalism, these big families. We've come to the conclusion that if one ever got the programme again with big families, they somehow ought to be put in a corner by themselves where almost they don't have access to the rest of the building . . . I think big families tend (to be) . . . They are just problem families.

Interviewer: Do you think there are extra problems for families like that on 'streets in the air' rather than streets on the ground?

No, I think that whatever you did with them they are problems, stop. That is, they make their own problems. I think actually

the only thing society might do to help such families is probably try and persuade them to go back to more rural areas where the unkempt kind of life can be less damaging to the younger children. You can't help feeling they'd be far better off in Ireland on a peat bog, running about with chickens.

The last speaker was more extreme than most of the architects I interviewed; the first speaker was more typical in the way that some lifestyles were seen as an uncertain, unknown quantity. Only one of the seven architects I interviewed came from a working-class background.

I was brought up in a very high density, low income, South London, typical stress area, in which I can remember the problems of pure screaming kids and prams and bad weather and balconies and railings, all those things produced, even as a child.

This architect's approach to housing design was shaped by such memories in a way that was much more difficult for the architects who lacked that experience. Their housing schemes, not surprisingly, reflected their lack of understanding. The scheme by the first speaker was carefully designed around what he assumed to be the needs of young children and their mothers, with small blocks of flats for old people scattered among the family houses. A lot of the women in the houses feel they don't have enough privacy; the old people in the flats feel isolated; and there is considerable tension between young and old. The second speaker's scheme really did look like a prison. It was based on the designer's image of gregarious, working-class street life, but the design was such that people suffered their neighbours' noise through walls and floors; again there was conflict between different age groups, and little sense of community. The third scheme was a concrete slab, ten storeys high, considered hideous by almost all the residents, most of whom want to leave. The speaker's reference to a high rate of vandalism was accurate, but there was no evidence that it was caused by large families from Ireland.

Women architects

Have women architects brought to their work a consciousness that women's socially defined role is problematic? If so, it might open the

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possibility that their schemes could recognize women's needs better, that their schemes will be perceived as less alienating and oppressive than the 'man-made environment'.

This is not likely to come about unless there is some evidence of feminist consciousness in women architects. By pursuing professional careers some have escaped at least partially from conventional women's roles. If they wish to combine a career with marriage and parenthood they are liable to experience strain in the combination of architect, mother and wife which is not usually present for architects who are also husbands and fathers. See for example the account and diaries of the husband-and-wife partnership referred to as 'The Bensons' in *Dual Career Families*, first published in 1971.⁵ The Bensons' domestic and work lives are closely interleaved, in part because the home and office occupy different floors in a single house. On a typical day Mr Benson gets up at 9 and works in the office from 10 until 7 with breaks for lunch and tea. Mrs Benson gets up at 7.55 and carries out a variety of household chores before starting work in the office at 11.40. The rest of her working day is interspersed with domestic activities. She bears by far the greater responsibility for running the home, and the nature of this work is such that it constantly interrupts her architectural work.

Mrs Benson does not appear to resent her dual burden or the fact that her participation in the work role is more limited than Mr Benson's. Marriage and children are very important to her; she 'would have died if she hadn't married'. Mr Benson had 'conventional' male resistance to being tied down. Mrs Benson dislikes machines, does not drive, and leaves technical aspects of design, 'the plumbing and structural hardware', to her husband. She specializes in interiors and colours.

Mrs Benson illustrates one way of adapting to the role of woman architect: one which challenges other aspects of the female role as little as possible. Although the combination of roles may be a strain, it is seen as a normal price to pay, a personal issue, not as reflecting a problem in the way social roles are defined. In effect this type of career woman can deny that the women's movement has any value. Mrs Benson says that she respects masculine men and 'can't stand the first whiff of a reversal situation'. Other women architects who spoke about their situation, in a special issue of *Architectural Design* on women and architecture in 1975, voiced similar sentiments.⁶ One woman thought that the 'women's issue' is altogether

overrated when it comes to architecture and other professions. In fact, she feels that undue attention paid to women in certain circumstances tends to denigrate their achievements, and she wants to have no part in the women's movement.

Later the same woman described her priorities, in a household in which a large number of individuals apparently depend on her, both she and her husband having children from previous marriages:

I know I'm lucky because I've got an enormous amount of physical energy. I rarely get tired other than nervously. The most important role I play is being a wife . . . Physical energy is no problem, doing the washing and the cooking and the shopping. OK, it's like having a dinner party every night for 8 people: it's actually just a technical problem; you alter your getting up times and you can cope with that sort of thing. It's the requirement of mental energy, I think, to make everybody feel they're important.

A former colleague of hers took a similar line:

In architecture the problems of women's lib do not exist. In short, any woman who wants to be can be, full stop . . . With two boys now 7 and 9 and a built-in aversion to au-pairs this has meant an involvement in the practice which is wholehearted but not whole time . . . There's never enough time for everything. I do indulge in jazz dancing classes, guitar lessons, movies and some, but not enough, travel. Not to mention toys like paper kites, cassette tapes and cookbooks.

Others are slightly more willing to admit the possibility of a problem:

Combining career/family has been constructively traumatic. It has meant 1) paying people to replace myself – six hours a week housework, 20 hours a week childminding . . . 2) using my friends; 3) knowing that when all seems lost, something will turn up.

I am finding career and family totally exhausting: at it seventeen hours a day and nothing really well done . . . The unplanned arrival of my third has thrown a tremendous burden on my family.

Childminding . . . is the biggest problem, for which society offers little or no help.

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Some of these designers may identify with the situation of women as users of architect-designed buildings; others would probably dismiss the suggestion that women experience particular problems, as they dismiss the problems of women as architects. Similar attitudes have been described by Margherita Rendel:

Girls who are of unusual ability and commitment should be allowed to pursue their interests, enter professions, become scholars, have careers, but they are very exceptional. This is the modern version of the Nun. To follow a career requires, it is thought, a genuine sense of vocation . . . Women who pursue careers must be careful how they do it. They must not lose their femininity or become intimidating or formidable. They must be better at the job than men, but should be content with the opportunity to have a career and the satisfaction of the work itself rather than to receive recognition.

Those women who are very exceptional may be accepted into the male establishment. Such a woman becomes, as it were, a male by adoption . . . Some women adopt this role with so much enthusiasm that they wish to be the only woman to play it . . . They have been called Queen Bees. Those women who have been co-opted to the male elite, but who are permitted to argue gently and occasionally on behalf of their sex may be called Token Women and those women whose place in the male elite is precarious – who must all the time consider whether they are going too far – may be called Precipice Women. Many of the women in the situations described by these labels believe that because they have ‘made it’, other women can too . . . These women in no way challenge the existing distribution of power or means of access to power.⁷

The consciousness of women architects must be understood in a historical and social context, in the light of changing attitudes to the role of women. ‘Mrs Benson’ and most of the women architects quoted above began their careers in the post-war period but before the revival of the women’s movement which started in the late 1960s. This was a time of consolidation of the gains made by the first women architects, but the social climate was such that to break new ground would have been extremely difficult.

Women architects in the past

There have been attempts to recover a lost feminist tradition in some areas of knowledge or branches of the arts. For example, women scholars have studied the work of women writers and artists to see how their creativity arose from their experiences and social awareness as women, and how they influenced one another. In the USA a group of women have written an excellent account called *Women in American Architecture*.⁸ In Britain the history of women architects has yet to be written. If there were women practising as designers in past centuries, their contribution has not been acknowledged. Nor do we know of any collective action by women to gain membership of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).

One of the best-known campaigns in the history of feminism is the battle of a few persistent and determined women to qualify as doctors and to have their qualifications recognized. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and then Sophia Jex Blake and her comrades finally won the right to practise. Yet for generations following their victories, women doctors were concentrated in low-status, part-time jobs without prospects. Now, as the numbers of women doctors and medical students rise, there are increasingly strong challenges to this state of affairs. In architecture, there are some parallels with the progress of women in the medical profession, although with a time lapse of about a generation. The first women were not admitted to RIBA until the late 1890s.

There may have been earlier women working as architects without belonging to RIBA, because, unlike the medical profession, registration was not compulsory. In 1898 Ethel Mary Charles had passed the RIBA examinations and, according to their statutes, was entitled to become a member. After a long debate, the RIBA Council decided that they would appear more foolish if they excluded her than if they admitted her.⁹ Ethel's sister, Bessie Ada Charles, was the second woman member and joined in 1900; but there was no great rush to follow them. A third woman joined in 1911, and three more in 1922. RIBA has no record of any buildings designed by their first women members, though Ethel Charles won their essay medal in 1905. Women continued to be a small minority within the profession. Although they may have identified with each other as 'women in a man's world', it would have been difficult for the small number of women architects to take collective action to challenge

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either male dominance in the profession, or the current assumptions about the role of the architect.

Following the winning of the vote in 1918 and 1928, the character of the women's movement changed. Sheila Rowbotham says:

The women in the thirties who continued to campaign . . . contributed to the erosion of the pre-war feminist consciousness . . . Feminism meant more reforms, more welfare, equal pay . . . It was no longer in opposition to the structure and culture of capitalist male-dominated society . . . The liberal feminists came to define success as the recognition and approval by the power structure they had opposed. They measured the progress of women in the rise of a minority to competence and the bestowal of honours upon a few.¹⁰

The professional lives of two women architects – Elizabeth Scott and Jane Drew – illustrate this change. Elizabeth Scott was one of a minority of women who gained the recognition of the male establishment; she won the competition to rebuild the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1928. Entries were anonymous; hers was chosen unanimously by the judges. The Shakespeare Theatre is one of the outstanding buildings of its time. It was conclusive evidence that women were able to perform as well as men in architecture; it did not, of course, challenge accepted ideas about what made good buildings, or whom a building of this type was for. Unfortunately she wrote nothing about her role as a woman architect.

Elizabeth Scott was 29 when she won the Stratford competition. She had a rather short subsequent career which included work for Newnham College, Cambridge. She married and took an early retirement in 1939, and died in 1972.¹¹

Jane Drew started her career in the 1930s and continued it after the war, much of the time in collaboration with her husband, Maxwell Fry. Drew resolved as a child not to change her name on marriage, and she supported other women professionals by using their services where possible and persuading her husband to do the same.¹² She is clearly at pains to be a good architect and to investigate thoroughly the requirements of those for whom she designs buildings. She and her husband were among the British avant-garde championing the cause of the Modern Movement in the 1930s.

Yet the position of an accepted and able practitioner seems to

have prevented any strong challenge to the norms of professionalism. It may be that women such as Scott and Drew perceived no need to question these norms. After all, to prove one's competence as an architect to a sceptical world must have been deeply satisfying. Why occupy the dangerous role of Precipice Women when a step over the edge could call into question not only one's own suitability to practise, but also that of other women? The post-war period was in some ways more difficult for women attempting to pursue professional careers. The ethos of the late 1940s and 1950s strongly emphasized the importance of 'family life'. The Beveridge Report told women that their work as housewives was vital to the nation,¹³ and enshrined in the social security system their dependence upon a male breadwinner. Child psychologists stressed the importance to the child of the mother's continual presence. The working mother who had latchkey children was deplored.

This was not an auspicious time for women to advance their position in architecture. Like Mrs Benson, they probably considered themselves fortunate to be pursuing a career at all. As women continued to form a very small percentage of all architects, every woman practitioner had to demonstrate anew to sceptical colleagues that she was capable of doing the job. Since the very desire for a career was seen as unnatural compared with the rival attractions of homemaking, a career woman was stereotyped as being hardbitten and masculine or pitifully unmarried and frustrated. Yet because a few women had succeeded in the profession, their presence was taken as evidence that there was no barrier to women's acceptance. Any problems were seen as individual ones, and could be attributed to a woman's 'wrong attitude'.

Is there a problem?

What is the experience of women as students and practitioners?

Although not all women feel the situation is problematic, there has been a tendency for more women than men to drop out of courses.¹⁴ Women entrants to schools of architecture have a variety of attitudes when they arrive. Some have come from schools and homes in which it is taken for granted that they would go into higher education and pursue a career, possibly irrespective of their own wishes. Others have had to struggle to establish this right, or to deal with careers advisers who discouraged girls from choosing

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architecture. They may also have felt themselves under pressure as girls not to seem too clever, especially at science or mathematics. They may not have had the chance to develop useful manual skills like woodwork or model-making.

Once in a school of architecture, many of us found it was extremely difficult to identify with a future role as an architect because we never came into contact with women practitioners. If we voiced anxieties about our future role, these were met with a brisk denial of any problem, rather than an attempt to explore our feelings. We were aware, to varying degrees, of differences in the treatment of women and men students – often difficult to pin down. We often felt that our work was not taken as seriously as the men's. Women students may find they can get away with errors that male students can't – but they will also receive less constructive criticism and help. Tutors may expect women to design 'interesting', 'sensitive' schemes rather than bold and striking ones. If they do design a bold project the designs may be reclassified as 'showing hidden sensitivity' or the designer reclassified as 'not really feminine'.

There are also pressures from male students and, later, colleagues who hope that the women they work with might change their behaviour or appearance to fit their own concept of how 'girls' should act or look. In some cases their image of women is made apparent through pin-up pictures. If joint work on projects is required, then the relationship must necessarily be closer and the task of establishing common expectations more delicate. The pressure is on women to prove that they can do as well as men, not on men to adopt qualities socially defined as feminine. The norm is a male, middle-class one.

Women are subject to discrimination in architectural practice. In private offices, a study by Fogarty and others found that the average earnings of full-time women principals in 1978 were only 63 per cent of those of men.¹⁵ The gap had actually widened since 1971. Women principals were less likely than men to work in a large office, but there was still a wide gap in earnings when size of office was taken into consideration. It is also more difficult for a woman to become a partner in a practice, since the ideal new partner is in his or her thirties, with a wide network of contacts with potential clients and a willingness to put in considerable unpaid overtime. This is the time when many women take a break to have children, with consequent loss of professional contacts and reduced capacity to

work long hours. Architecture is not an ideal occupation for part-time work. If women want to work part-time they may be confined to helping out on other people's schemes rather than designing and supervising schemes of their own, since the latter requires the designer to be constantly available to answer queries and clear up problems.

However, problems are not confined to those trying to combine childrearing with a career. The same study found discrimination was evident even against single women without family responsibilities.

Senior women architects, as well as men, insisted during the study that a woman architect who is determined to make a career in private practice, and stays with it in spite of family commitments, will find the necessary opportunities open to her. In the sense that some women can and do make their way to the highest levels of the private practice side of the profession, this is true. In the sense, however, that women, as a matter of statistical probability, have the same chance as men of reaching the top, or even of equal earnings at lower levels, it clearly is not . . .

Myths about the degree of equal opportunity available in private practice are not surprising in view of the lack over the years of systematic effort to establish what the facts of the situation are.¹⁶

There is also some evidence of discrimination against women in appointments to top levels in local government.¹⁷ The study criticized RIBA for its lack of concern to monitor the situation.

Valuable though this study is, it shows only part of the picture of the discrimination women face. The women who were receiving lower incomes or being denied promotion were practising as architects, so they had accepted at least some of the ground rules of architectural practice. It leaves out those women who dropped out of architectural education or left after a short period in the profession because of dissatisfaction with the way the profession operates. It also ignores those who never reached a school of architecture. Most importantly it takes no account of discrimination against women as building users, which is indirect and unconscious – a product of ignorance.

Future possibilities

Architects may ritually acknowledge the importance of the needs of building users, especially those who are most disadvantaged, but in the absence of understanding, contact and empathy with a wider range of people, this remains pious intention. Feminist consciousness among architects would produce a change in their approach to design, as women designers came to identify with women using the built environment.

The economic recession has had a disastrous effect on architects' work-load. Of the responses to this, only a few can be seen as progressive. The conventional and short-sighted adaptation is as follows. First cut down on recruitment to the office, whether it is in the public or private sector. For private architects, seek work abroad, especially in the oil-rich countries where the rulers are keen to build Western-style status symbols, and the population then have to suffer buildings and city plans devised by foreigners with minimal understanding of either the local climate or customs. Take advantage of the relaxation in the professional code that allows you to act as a developer or company director, and broaden your skills to grab work from those in related professions.

However, there are also more progressive adaptations to the loss of traditional areas of work. These include a small growth in architectural co-operatives, often working for community groups or organizations which would not normally employ an architect.¹⁸ This type of practice is probably more responsive to the needs of many women workers than the conventionally organized office. In addition there are now enough women practitioners who share the kinds of critical perspectives on conventional practice to allow the formation of women-only co-operatives. Some co-operatives offer construction skills as well as design skills, to break down the barriers between mental and manual work and to get away from the opponent relation between architect and contractor.

One important trend that has helped feminist design groups to survive is the growth of women's groups as clients. With the support of the women's movement and positive action taken by local authorities (for example, the GLC under the auspices of the Women's Committee) women at last have some opportunities to commission or adapt buildings to meet their particular needs. Women's groups, which have worked together using the methods developed in the women's movement – listening to each other, giving each woman

space to express her feelings, and developing theories from women's own experiences – will want to work with architects who understand and can use the same approach.

The existence of a strong women's movement is thus indispensable to the development of feminist design. Certain material conditions would help to carry such ideas back into more conventional architects' office. A commitment to equal opportunities, including facilities like creches as well as monitoring the organization's record in employing and promoting women, is the least that is required. There is a long way to go, but there are grounds for hope that the environment in future will be designed with women in mind.

3.

Homes fit for heroines: housing in the twenties

As women planners and architects think about the ways in which feminist ideas can influence the design of buildings and the urban environment, it is useful for us to look back at the early twentieth century when feminists were organizing a campaign about the way they wanted their houses to be designed.

We also want to have a say in how our environment is shaped: whether from general interest, or because we are involved in shaping policies on one of the newly formed local government women's committees, or doing feminist research, or as feminist architects working with women to change their local environment.

In 1918 the British government set up an all-women committee to report on the 'housewife's' needs in the design of new state-built houses. Traditional gender roles for women were taken for granted. In one way women were being asked for their stamp of approval. It could be said that the emphasis on women's place in the house, keeping the home fires burning, was an important selling point for the government's housing policy. However at the time women were alive to feminist ideas, and the committee approached their brief in a consciously feminist way. They asked working-class women what they wanted and in interpreting their views showed they had an insight into everyday struggles. The committee also drew upon ideas of women in the labour movement.¹

The story of the work of the Women's Housing Sub-Committee² thus throws light on the opinions of many working-class women about their housing conditions in the early twentieth century, and highlights some aspects of how women's 'place' was and is shaped by the design of housing.

With victory in sight, Lloyd George's coalition government set

up a Ministry of Reconstruction in January 1918; this drew in a number of radical individuals such as Beatrice Webb and Seebohm Rowntree. The Ministry's brief was not only to deal with the immediate emergency of large numbers of returning soldiers, but more important, to take a longer view of possible social changes. A massive building programme of new houses was one of those changes – the first time the government was to subsidize, finance and build housing on such a scale.

Some historians have shown the way this house building programme in 1918 was used to undermine potential workers' revolt³ at a time when, in the words of Beatrice Webb, 'Thrones are everywhere crashing and the men of property are everywhere secretly trembling.'⁴

At the same time, the challenge to the government by feminists was changing. The franchise was extended to women over 30. Feminist politics had been developing over the past two decades, but in 1918 there was a lull in the women's suffrage campaign. Many of the notable protagonists were still engaged in the war effort. Others had taken a positive pacifist line and were helping to improve working-class women's lives.

Some of these women were part of the Women's Co-operative Guild who had published *Maternity: Letters from Working Women*⁵ in 1915. Others were active in the Women's Labour League, which published a pamphlet in January 1918 called *The Working Women's House*. Their feminist ideas showed a departure from the older ideas of nineteenth-century feminism whose main objective had been political, economic and social equality with men, with very little class analysis. The 'new' feminists had a more 'woman-centred' view, campaigning around women's issues especially areas concerning the health and welfare of women and children. There were contradictions in this approach since it accepted a broadly patriarchal view of women as wives and mothers, but it had the support of working-class women.

The women who became members of the Housing Sub-Committee came from differing political positions. Gertrude Emmott, who chaired the committee, was a Liberal and president of the parliamentary and legislation committee of the National Council of Women. The working methods of the committee however bore the stamp of women in the labour movement and there were a number of labour women on the committee, including Eleanor Barton who

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had been president of the Women's Co-operative Guild and Averil D. Sanderson Furniss from the Women's Labour League. The committee was made up of 11 women – including Dorothy C. Peel, who had written several books on household management, and Sybella Branford who had some architectural training. They came together as women to put women's collective view.

Before the committee was set up, Christopher Addison, the Minister for Reconstruction, had received representations⁶ from many women's groups and political parties demanding that women be consulted about the 'new houses'. One such group was the Society of Women Property Managers which had established an area of housing management which was considered to be women's work exclusively. In their campaign the Women's Labour League argued:

Women ought to be the housing experts and consider what they want, and leave compromises on one side. Do not carry your flag too low. Is there any reason why all children should not have the best houses that the nation can provide?⁷

Housing provision for the working class had been debated long before 1918.⁸ Should the style of the house be a tenement or a cottage house? How many rooms should the house contain and how big should they be? What activities – such as personal washing, cooking, food preparation and laundry – should happen in the same room? Should cooking be done in the main family living room? Should every house have a front parlour? Did the house need hot and cold running water? (See chapter 5 for examples of answers to the questions.)

In July 1917, another advisory committee was set up⁹ by the Local Government Board which controlled the design of municipal council housing prior to 1918. Known as the Tudor Walters Committee, it consisted exclusively of men who were 'experts' in the field of housing – some politicians and some technical experts. Their brief was to report on methods of building the new houses cheaply and quickly.

Raymond Unwin was one of the experts on the committee. He was an influential figure in the debate of 1918. Since 1910 he had been on several committees considering the type, size and layout of municipal houses. Although removed from the day-to-day lives of working-class people, he had been a radical socialist in his youth and was sympathetic to the demands of the working class for better

housing. At the time most working-class families lived, ate, cooked and spent their leisure time in one main room. Many people wanted a room where they could escape from all the hurly-burly of daily living – a front parlour. Unwin attacked such ideas and described them as: ‘a desire to imitate the middle-class house’ and saw it as impractical to divide the house up into a series of small rooms.

By 1918, labour women had written a great deal about the conditions of working-class women’s lives, notably Maud Pember Reeves who documented the lives of working-class women in Lambeth in *Round about a Pound a Week*. She describes a typical house in Lambeth, a divided town house with two families living in it, sharing a scullery and copper on the ground floor. The house had no hot running water, and the family who lived upstairs had no cold running water. The woman had to carry water up the stairs and the slops down again. Each family had exclusive use of two rooms, one a bedroom where the whole family slept, the other a living room where the only source of heating and cooking was an open grate, kept clean and blacked with Zebra lead by the women. All personal washing was done in one or other of the two rooms; the lavatory was downstairs in the back yard.

It was an awareness of these housing conditions which shaped the demands of the Women’s Housing Sub-Committee. Consequently they demanded a separate workroom for cooking and food preparation; a separate bathroom; a front parlour; labour-saving devices (such as hot and cold running water, a kitchen range which did not involve stooping, with easy clean finishes); and play spaces for both older and younger children.

The Women’s Housing Sub-Committee first visited the housing estates, which had been built, using direct government subsidies, during the war to house munition workers: schemes such as Well Hall Estate in London and Gretna Green.

They set out guide lines for themselves about how to approach women for their opinions about their houses:

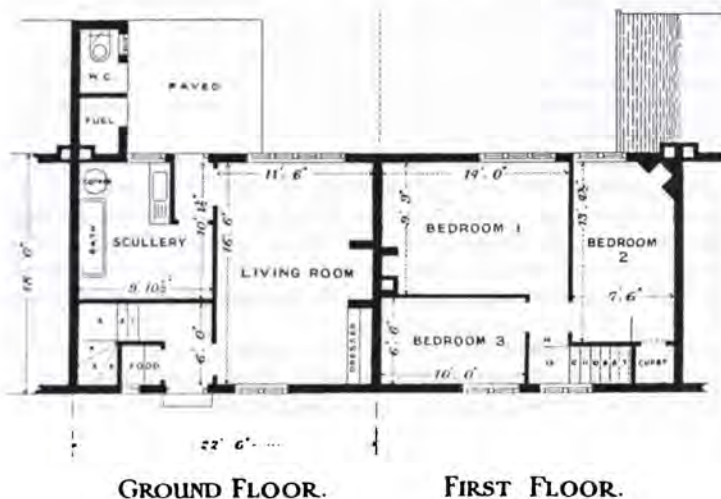
In visiting houses it is important to find out the candid opinion of the housewife as to the advantages or disadvantages of each feature in her house and also to hear the opinion of as many different women as possible on the same points, in order that the Committee’s conclusions may not be based on isolated statements from one or two women, but may take into account the

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average and representative view held by the bulk of the tenants.¹⁰

They also noted that in order to get women to talk freely and to give genuine views, it was best to speak to them without the presence of the manager or landlord. All these points are obvious, but are still overlooked by some people in housing management today.

As well as visiting housing estates which had already been built, the Committee expanded their brief to include reporting on the plans in the Local Government Board's Design Manual for Municipal Councils which had been published in 1917. They also commented on the prize-winning cottage plans for a competition which had been organized jointly by the Local Government Board and the Royal Institute of British Architects.



1. *House design, from the Local Governments Board's Design Manual, 1917.*

They produced their findings in May 1918. Their comments on the cottage plans in the Design Manual received patronizing and scathing criticism from the Local Government Board:

The Committee's want of experience in reading plans has no doubt been a serious disadvantage to them. The comments as to the indication of means of lighting in a ground plan or a section such as that given with plan No.7 could not have been made by anyone who realised that such drawings would not contain the information referred to . . . It is intended for the assistance and guidance of practical persons such as are found on local authorities to whom it is addressed and not for education of novices.¹¹

These comments are patently unfounded, for the women showed a deep understanding of the issues involved. The interim report proved to be so potentially explosive that the male officials at the Ministry of Reconstruction decided to publish only half of it. The prospect of similar attacks in the future may have been one of the reasons that the women decided to expand and deepen the scope of their work. They decided to consult with working-class women, and to research facts and figures about technical aspects of house design, such as different methods of providing hot running water.

A discussion paper set out guide line questions for meetings:¹² these ranged from whether the bathroom should be upstairs or downstairs to whether it was preferred to use the living room as a kitchen or to cook and prepare food in the scullery. Women were encouraged to organize, meet and discuss the kind of houses they wanted. Replies came from many women's groups, mothers' and infants' clinics, mothers' schools (set up as result of organized campaigns by the women's labour movement for improved health and welfare for women and children), women's suffrage societies, women's co-operative guilds and others.

Many working-class women expressed ideas that reinforced dominant patriarchal ideas about the role of women in the nuclear family, even though the war had provided an impulse towards a change in traditional gender relations. Women had taken over men's jobs; public nurseries and kitchens had been set up. In fact the replies from working-class women highlighted differences between themselves and some of the middle-class feminists on the committee about whether childcare and other facilities should be communally or individually provided.

If we look at the final report of the Women's Housing Committee and compare their findings to the Tudor Walters Committee

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Report, we can see how the women's committee's approach put over 'women's' views'.

The final report of the Women's Sub-Committee was concerned to keep costs low for the housewife, whose job was to spin out the limited household budget. By choosing to prepare tasty but often scarcely nourishing food which took the least time to cook, she saved on cooking fuel. So the most economical means of heating water and cooking had been relentlessly investigated.

They were also concerned to keep rents low whilst maximizing the size and number of rooms. The committee insisted that a parlour should be provided where the woman could relax and escape from work unfinished in the rest of the house. They argued that the state should bear the extra cost of providing women with 'good working conditions'. They asserted the need for cooking to be removed from the family living room to a separate workroom at the back – a kitchen or scullery. They said:

In the plans we have studied, and in the houses we have visited, we note that it is generally assumed that the living room shall be in the kitchen. We do not consider this arrangement desirable and in this view we are supported by a large number of working women. The living room is needed for nursery, meal and sitting room – it should not be the workshop of the home. All hard and dirty work should be done in the scullery, both to ensure the comfort of the family and to save the housewife by grouping together all the tools of her industry in one conveniently planned place.¹³

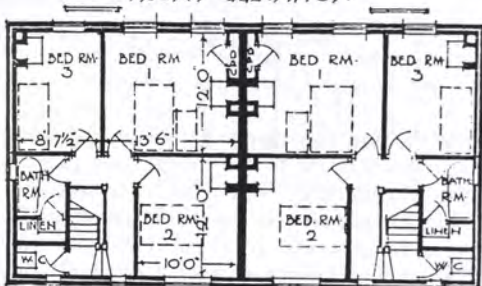
In the Tudor Walters Committee's Report their view of economy was to save costs through better design. They suggested that economies could be made on floorboards by having a long, narrow, living room plan, since the boards would not have to span so far. They suggested that by reducing the depth of the house, shorter rafters could be used, since the rafters ran from front to back. Also, by building a compact floor plan, they argued, the area that the outside walls would wrap round the building would be smaller, and would need fewer bricks.

The women were also concerned about limiting the amount of women's energy expended in housework, which was a source of much ill-health for women. They urged that it was important to find

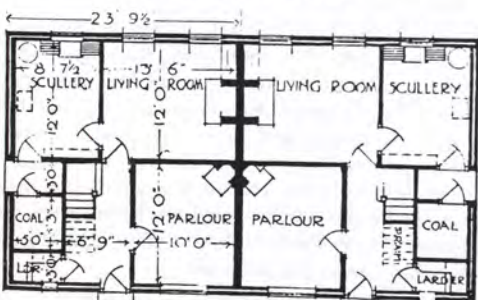
CLASS B URBAN
NORTHERLY ASPECT



FRONT ELEVATION



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

L.G.B.H.D.

2. Urban house design, proposed by the
Local Government Board's Design Manual, 1919.

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a suitable method of heating water:

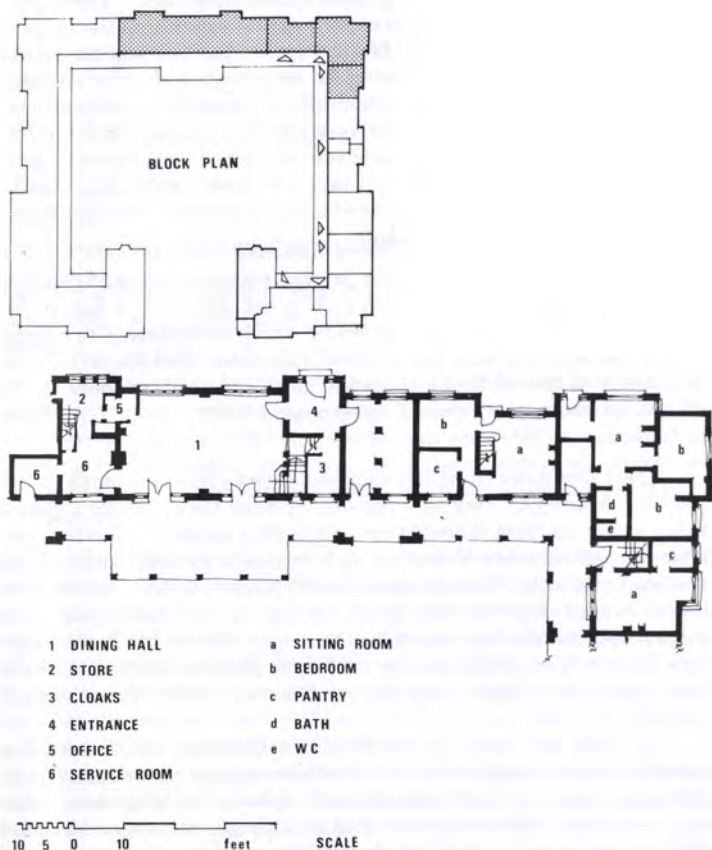
The extra time, trouble and expense involved when water must be heated in kettles and carried to the bath, wash top or sink, is a serious addition to the housewife's burden. A great part of the everyday work of the house, as well as the laundry work, is doubled by the lack of a proper supply of hot water. The extra strain on the woman's strength, coupled with the waste of time, leaves her without either the opportunity or energy to attend to other household tasks or to secure any form of recreation for herself.

We can see from their final report published in February 1919 that although some of the feminists on the committee were interested in communal housekeeping arrangements they stated unequivocally what working-class women wanted. In this they were bringing their particular early-twentieth-century feminism to bear on the information they received, perceiving women's struggle and the class struggle as one which took account of women in the weakest position.

At the same time, the Women's Housing Sub-Committee did not limit their investigations to the design and planning of nuclear family houses, they also looked at co-operative housekeeping arrangements. There had been several interesting pilot schemes for co-operative arrangements, in particular Homesgarth and Meadoway Green in Letchworth Garden City, built in 1909-13 and 1915-24 respectively. Both these schemes challenged traditional ideas of domestic work.

Homesgarth, for middle-class, childless couples, was laid out around a quadrangle with individual flats designed without kitchens. It had a communal dining room and laundry, all domestic work was done by servants. Meadoway Green was different; it was for working-class tenants and, since they had no servants, each flat had a small kitchen. The tenants ate in a communal dining room and employed one full-time cook and a part-time charwoman. The kitchen was run by the women residents themselves on a rota. Committee members who visited Homesgarth and Meadoway Green were enthusiastic about the schemes.

The women were interested in communal housekeeping arrangements, but they said, 'Successful experiments can only be made after consultation with working women and full co-operation with them.' The sceptical replies they had received to the discussion



3. Plan of 'Homesgarth', a co-operative housing scheme pioneered by Ebenezer Howard and designed by A. Clapham Landes, 1909-13.

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paper had told them of working-class women's feelings.¹⁴ Their comments were based on their own experiences of communal living, perhaps sharing a scullery like Maud Pember Reeve's working-class tenants, or memories of queueing for soup from a charity kitchen. The Women's Housing Sub-Committee showed a sympathetic understanding of the remarks of working-class women, whilst at the same time as feminists they could see the longer term benefits to be gained from pushing for housing layouts which would reflect some changes in traditional gender relations in the home. In their Final Report the Committee concluded:

English women do not under present conditions regard communal arrangements with favour. It is not, however, a reason for neglecting to consider schemes by which unnecessary drudgery would be saved, and there can be little doubt that the solution of many of the difficult domestic problems will eventually be found along the lines of co-operation rather than in isolated effort.

Their feminism came from the developed ideas of women in the labour movement. They saw the double bind that if women stated their views as 'just housewives', then they were reinforcing traditional gender roles of women as housekeepers and mothers and this excluded them from an equal role in the labour force outside the home. Indeed, the Pre-War Practices Act subsequently gave men returning from the first world war the right to reclaim their former jobs from women. Feminists in 1918 were faced with the likelihood that gains they had made during the war would be gradually eroded.

Through the work of the Women's Housing Sub-Committee, working-class women had stated their needs and made many vital criticisms about a traditional woman's role in working-class housing conditions. Their requirements for change, however, showed a desire to fit the house *better* to the traditional roles of housewife and mother rather than in questioning the potentially oppressive nature of this role.

A similar dilemma remains today. Feminists need to find new ways of organizing and designing houses to meet women's needs without reinforcing oppressive roles for us within the home and family.

4.

Women and public space

Linda MacDowell has described how British towns and cities in the twentieth century locate women's and men's work in different places:

Production based on waged labour in the marketplace is undertaken collectively in specialised locations, predominantly by men but also by women, whereas the household reproduction of this labour power, based on the unpaid labour of individual women, is undertaken in isolation in countless decentralised locations.¹

In this chapter I want to show how this idealized pattern of women in the suburbs and men in the city has affected the actual locations and 'appropriate' environments of homes, workplaces and other facilities. And I want to show some of the ways in which the makers of the twentieth-century city have served only to highlight the contradictions in the inequalities between women and men and between classes, in their attempts to adapt the physical environment to 'match' changing social patterns.

There are several strands to be unravelled, many contradictory influences to be considered. It is possible, for instance, to look at house designs of the late nineteenth century and show a direct parallel in their social and spatial standards of privacy and segregation within the home with political and social change in society at large.² The combination of a growing middle class and new bourgeois attitudes of social behaviour, together with trade union campaigns for a 'family wage' that enabled a man to earn enough to support a wife and children, conspired to keep the new 'model' woman firmly within the home. Architect-authors like Robert Kerr (see pages 64–7) offered house plans, house styles and appropriate environ-

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ments that were both a description of what these developing middle-class patterns were and what they *should be*.

On the other hand, the twentieth century, particularly since the second world war, has left us with a legacy of buildings and towns that emphasize the tremendous gap between architectural and planning intentions and social and political realities. We often feel a real disjunction between physical form and social reality (or at least what social reality might be). It is much less easy to 'read off' women's position in society from the built form of towns today than, say, to interpret a Victorian house plan. This is not, however, because the makers of the built environment have stopped building their stereotypical ideas about the 'proper' place of women into the physical fabric.

It is because, in many cases, these stereotypical ideas have come into conflict with, or sit uneasily against, shifts in the social position of women and the changing ways in which women see themselves. For instance, the stereotyped image of women as homemakers and mothers which was so strong in the 1950s has to be juxtaposed with the tremendous shift of married women into paid employment during this period. As Friend and Metcalf point out, it was the 2.2 million rise in the number of working women that was almost entirely responsible for the 2.4 million rise in the working population between 1951 and 1971.³

In house planning this problem was 'coped with' and obscured by an emphasis on 'labour-saving' machinery and layouts, an ideology of house design which had satisfactorily blurred the massive shift onto middle-class women of household tasks formerly undertaken by servants. (See chapter 6.) The housewives' role could therefore be maintained in all its shining splendour against the pressure of paid employment by the myth that it was being squeezed into less time and was easier to 'manage'. To some extent this myth was maintained until the early sixties when Betty Friedan published a book calling the isolation of the housewife and the constraining quality of housework 'the problem with no name'.⁴

Acknowledgement of women's unequal position at home and in paid work was notable only by its absence in post-1945 town planning. Towns were to be separated into their various activities, each with its appropriate location and setting. This was called zoning, which closely approximated stereotypical ideas about *man's* use of the environment:

The wage worker sells his labour power as a commodity for a definite period of time, in exchange for a money wage. The rest of his time is his own and there is a rigid separation of his life into work and leisure. His wages are spent on commodities consumed away from the workplace. Thus production and consumption are two separate activities, emotionally and physically.⁵

The 'ideal', then, was a leisured setting that contained the home, and a work environment that was physically elsewhere. This split was to be made possible by 100 per cent ownership of cars. Into this pattern the very different use of space by women, who also undertake household labour and often childcare, had to fit as best it could. And the difference in women's access to cars was ignored (as, for that matter, were class inequalities that have prevented 100 per cent car ownership becoming a reality).

In the rest of this chapter I will look at two aspects of the physical form of towns, together with some of the social changes for women since 1945 and show the interrelationships, which add up to the 'place' of women in society today. I will consider zoning and its effects on women's mobility and I will look at stereotypical ideas about 'proper' home environments and their failings.

Many of the issues here could be applied to some working-class men, particularly to immigrants and migrants who perform a similar economic role to working-class women. They too are restricted in their use of the built environment – by low incomes and by what are considered 'proper' places for them to be. This chapter focuses on women to highlight the differences between the ways women experience our physical surroundings from men – and how this difference is ultimately reinforced by all men attempting to maintain their position in society.

Women and mobility

Milton Keynes is a new town in Buckinghamshire, based on planners' predictions of 100 per cent car ownership. It has a convenient, fast-flowing grid network of roads leading to social and commercial facilities that are both placed centrally and spread evenly throughout the town. Housing estates with (mostly) village-like environments sit between these grid roads and are connected to each other

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by a system of winding, wide footpaths for pedestrians and cyclists. What Milton Keynes offers is an 'ideal' planned town, based on the home-work-leisure split – and thus, like many new towns, it exaggerates difficulties of access for the less mobile both by the separation of activities and by the sheer physical distance made between them. As in other parts of the country, women are disproportionately less mobile than men. Although 60 per cent of households in Milton Keynes possess one or more cars, about three-quarters of housewives do not have access to a car during weekdays, for two reasons. Most people travel to their place of paid employment by motor car – partly because the public transport system is quite inefficient. So, in car-owning households, the family car(s) will usually be used by the husband and/or teenage children. What is more, only 29 per cent of housewives in households owning one car, and 69 per cent in households currently owning two or more cars, know how to drive.⁶

Plainly, the mobility of women is restricted unless they live in an area with a very good public transport network, or have equal use of a private car. So women tend to lead a more 'local' existence, not just because of domestic roles and responsibilities but also because of an inequality between the genders in access to resources. Much planning takes this inequality for granted. The 'neighbourhood' unit, on which towns like Milton Keynes are based, offers particular facilities locally – a few shops, parks, primary school and health care facilities which, as McDowell says, could be 'benevolently interpreted as reducing travel times and costs for women and children, less benevolently as minimizing choice'.⁷ Such planning policies produce a self-fulfilling prophecy: women are locally based not only through their allotted role but also because the arrangement of space precludes alternatives; the physical patterning of space and activities supports, perpetuates and 'naturalizes' the difficulty of getting beyond the local neighbourhood.

The emphasis on individual mobility through private car ownership since the second world war is reflected in the way our man-made surroundings lack consideration for the less mobile – people in wheelchairs or using sticks, women carrying heavy loads of shopping or pushing prams or pushchairs over kerbs, old people negotiating a high step onto a bus – and for small children. This works disproportionately against women. We are actually less mobile because of less access to transport and resources. We are also

less mobile than men because we take the major role in caring for young children and old people who cannot go so fast or so far.

Women are also often made to appear less mobile – or less than women if they are mobile. Thus free-moving girls are designated surrogate boys (tomboys) and older girls find themselves asexual in their peer group unless they dress themselves as static and, preferably, fragile objects in clothes that inhabit free movement, focusing on characteristics of the female body (high heels that make legs look longer and hips swing, for instance) to the benefit of the onlooker rather than the mobility of the wearer.

Women live in an environment designed to enhance (and therefore reinforce) the 'norm' of individual mobility – from plans for new road networks to move cars further faster and more efficiently, to housing estates located in suburban areas distanced from places of paid employment. That this is a male, white, middle-class 'norm' (look at almost any cross-section of car drivers during rush hour) is ignored by the makers of our physical surroundings. At the same time, this 'norm' of mobility is perceived by men as a male prerogative. Many stereotypical ideas contain penalties for women who are mobile. This works in trivial ways, like jokes about female car-drivers, to more intimidating male responses to women who do not appear static or localized: women hitchhiking, or out by themselves somehow *deserve* to be attacked and raped.

This restriction on mobility has to be taught to girls – it is not a natural biological fact. Girl children are socialized off the street through an implanted fear of men, by restrictions on street games and activities and by an emphasis on activities that concern grace rather than speed. Girls soon learn to take up as little space as possible to be allowed within the category 'female'. Boys soon learn that they can prove their 'boyness' by taking up lots of room, particularly outside on the street.

These stereotypical ideas about the appropriate 'mobility' of girls and women are not unchanging. The Victorian middle classes made a clear mental and physical division between women/private and men/public which almost went so far as to define women's sexuality by their location in physical space. As all women (and not just working-class or immigrant women) have become more visible in the public sphere with the expansion of educational opportunities and forms of paid employment, so these ideas have had to shift and adapt. But just as women are still much more restricted than men in





4. Our city and town planners lack consideration for the least mobile.

the places they can go alone or with children and to 'appropriate' areas of work, so the making of the physical environment is still being affected by notions about 'proper' settings for women which come directly from the nineteenth century.

An ideal home environment?

Since the early nineteenth century, social reformers, planners and architects have emphasized the importance of the home environment and home life as an antidote – almost an exchange for – the ugly excesses of capitalist development. Early town planning, for instance, concentrated on removing housing from the pollution and noise generated by work environments rather than on improving the latter. Whilst this emphasis on a particular type of home environment offers many material gains over nineteenth-century housing conditions, it nonetheless makes assumptions about the role of women which have not been entirely beneficial.

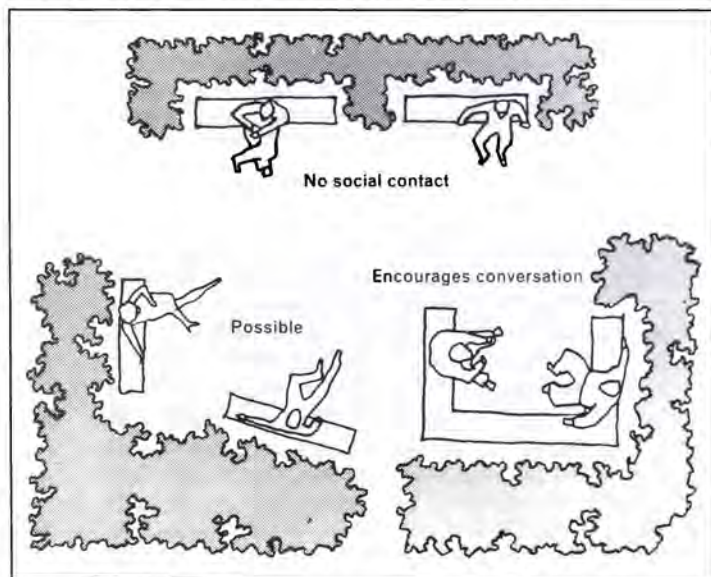
Most contemporary housing layouts are built on a set of assumptions about appropriate imagery and the physical arrangement of space. Currently these are that houses should be grouped around a series of protected outside spaces enclosing 'nature' which are linked informally and which together make a separate territory visually divided from the surrounding environment. Several housing manuals have been produced in recent years which codify these ideas into physical patterns and imagery. The four illustrations that follow come from one such guide for architects, *An Introduction to Housing Layout*, produced by the Greater London Council Department of Architecture and Civic Design in 1978.⁸

These layouts seem 'appropriate' to the makers of the built environment because they are based on overlapping ideas that reinforce and justify each other. Such layouts offer the appearance of a protected home rural environment, suggest a leisured home life based on village-like rural settings, and are a real attempt to respond to the visual monotony and coldness of much housing built in earlier periods. What results have these notions had on the actual design of contemporary public housing schemes and how, in turn, has the 'place' of women been affected?

These housing estates are an extension of nineteenth-century ideas about the proper segregation of home and work and of women and men – but combined with a developing awareness by social

reformers through the twentieth century of women's isolation within individual homes (described, for example, in Spring Rice's survey of the 1930s.⁹ The answer was a simple spatial metaphor. A *community* of women was formed merely by extending the home environment out to encompass a number of homes together. This intermediate space between the house interior and the outside world has, theoretically at least, a double function. It is the space that brings women and families 'together' to make friends, share tasks, and so on; it is also a protected outside space for women and children to enjoy at leisure away from the dangers and difficulties of the outside world beyond. Unfortunately, the isolation many women suffer, from taking sole charge for domestic labour and childcare, is not

The design of sitting areas and the positioning of benches can encourage or inhibit conversation. The designer should be aware of these possibilities.



5. A design guide's mechanistic view of open space and social interaction, from *An Introduction to Housing Layout*, 1978.

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necessarily relieved by the mere proximity of other women in the same position – and is anyway inadequate compensation for the lack of alternatives to solitary work. Similarly, the mechanistic arrangement of the physical space, with for instance a bulge made in the pavement for two mothers with prams to stop and talk (see Illustration 6, page 48), or the seating arrangement proposed in illustration 5 to ‘encourage or inhibit conversation’ make spatial and architectural metaphors of social interaction which ignore the actual realities for women. No woman engages unthinkingly in idle conversation with an unknown man just because he sits on a facing bench rather than alongside. Whilst these housing layouts do offer some benefits by being separated from the outside world (a pleasant landscape and no traffic, for instance) they *do not* protect women from male behaviour outside the home – a point I will come back to.

Outside spaces on housing estates are designed around ideas of a rural, village-like setting. This again is a nineteenth-century notion, criticized by Davidoff, L’Esperance and Newby:

What has occurred has been the blurring of the aesthetic, particularly the physical environment, and the social, because it was assumed that the village or home could be aesthetically pleasing, it was assumed that they contained an equally valued social existence. Consequently the model stimulated a particular perspective on the problems of poverty and exploitation. Where the poverty of the farm labourer (or servant) was acknowledged – and it occasionally was – its importance was overruled by the alleged metaphysical delights of working within such a culturally approved environment. The farm labourer, or servant, or the wife or child, was therefore not regarded as being exploited, not because their subordination was not at least sometimes acknowledged but that this subordination did not matter when set beside the domestic and rural idyll.¹⁰

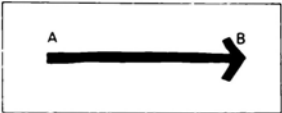
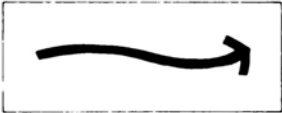
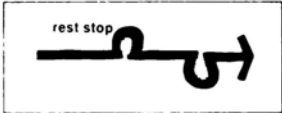


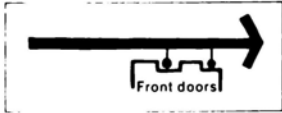

Some housing estates seem also to use nature to enhance the ‘picture’ of domestic and village bliss, sometimes, for instance, expending much energy on the external village-like setting at the expense of space standards within the houses and flats themselves. But the partial truth that a ‘natural’ setting *is* a better environment than other parts of our urban surroundings has obscured the very real differences in the use and usability of this ‘estate’ space for working-class women and men.

Space works differently here from the way it does in the owner-occupied rural idylls of suburb and village. Tenants do not have the resources to maintain this intermediate space, which neither belongs to them nor is properly 'public' property. Many estates have deteriorated, partly because the population densities involved mean they suffer much more intense use than any suburb or village and partly because working-class people have often been expected to somehow generate resources spontaneously and collectively to maintain their 'natural' setting when they can neither afford time nor money or see a tangible gain from their efforts. Alison Ravetz in her book about Quarry Hill estate in Leeds shows the extent to which the local authority expected the local community to 'manage' their estate whilst giving them no real control in decision-making or resources to maintain open spaces. Tenants not only had to suffer the resulting deterioration in their environment but were blamed for it as well.¹¹ Because of its appalling condition, Quarry Hill was recently demolished.

In its reduced form the 'rural' environment can become just a shorthand label for 'ideal home environment' rather than providing actual usable space for children's play or relaxation.

The physical patterning of this 'natural' setting contains many assumptions about women's role outside the home. It leads, for instance, to housing layouts based on 'rural' meandering paths which imply that the journeys of women, children and old people are without purpose. (See Illustration 6). These paths are meant literally to map the ways women with children and old people move. At the same time there is a confusion between slowness of journey and its purposefulness. The implication is that journeys that are not fast or in straight lines are not really going anywhere. The resulting layouts only serve to underline the physical distance between homes and shops or workplaces, in turn making journeys for women with children or old people even longer. Many different housing forms seem to work in a similar way to exaggerate the distances of facilities from women at home, whether in the lifts, stairs and lobbies of high-rise flats or the cul-de-sacs and winding roads of suburban layouts. Physical space can add to the isolation of childcare and domestic labour. The spatial arrangement of high-rise flats or new towns did not create the condition we now call high-rise or new-town blues. By worsening the difficulties in getting out with small children or transporting heavy shopping up steps around endless corners and

The purpose

Hurrying		Brisk walk from A to B
Meandering		Out for a stroll
Resting		The shopper, old people
Playing		Children running, skipping, jumping.
Viewing		Stopping to admire the view
Socializing		Footpath adjacent to front doors - stopping for a chat
		Widening in path for two mothers with prams to stop and talk

6. Meandering path patterns for women and children imply lack of purpose; from *An Introduction to Housing Layout 1978*.

ramps, these estates must sometimes seem the last straw – making childcare a pressure instead of a pleasure. These ideas which see the occupants of the protected home environment as leisured – or at least without any sense of purpose or urgency – are also contained in another aspect of the preferred physical setting: stringing out an informally connected set of spaces with vistas blocked and then reopened. The occupants are perceived almost as tourists (or children) who meander from space to space *because* objects and architectural elements en route catch their interest.

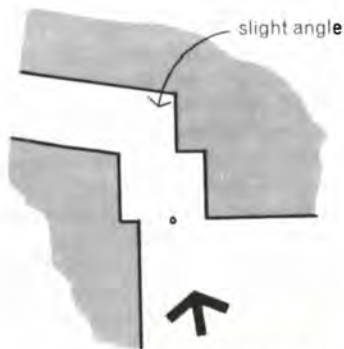
Although this informal patterning is partly a response to the monotony of many housing schemes in earlier periods¹² it focuses on a particular response – ‘visual amenity’ which in its preferred organization of space ignores women’s experience of space outside the home – and contains some ambiguities for the designers themselves. On one hand, visual interest is seen to ‘lead’ people on from place to place as if they might be sightseeing. These blocked views make people curious about what lies beyond. On the other, such restricted views somehow simultaneously define areas of private territory from which people should keep out. For women it tends to be much more simple. Spaces where mystery figures lurk, or could easily hide, feel dangerous.¹³

This ambiguity around who has access to the public/private space on public sector housing estates has dogged designers since the early days of council house building, especially since they tend to ignore its gender basis; it has resulted in many estates that are no-man’s, or rather no-woman’s lands. The contemporary housing layouts I have been describing build the theoretically opposed and separate ‘woman’s place’ and ‘man’s world’ into one overlapping area. And it is the women who suffer – and the working classes generally for whom this environment has been made and re-made through history.

This so-called protected environment, which is meant to be an extension *out* from the home, is in too many cases an extension into the estate of the ‘ownership’ of public space by men and boys. No amount of mechanistic plans for communities or villages or social interaction can prevent men from dominating the space outside the home – and keeping women in from fear.

This is so for two reasons. Many men still perceive women’s sexuality as partially defined by their location, and therefore attempt to enforce and perpetuate those definitions. Whilst male violence

7. No woman is invited by a blind alley;
from An Introduction to Housing Layout.



It says to us "come in, this might lead somewhere, there may be an exit".

8. Inviting corners simultaneously mark territory symbolically to keep people out;
from An Introduction to Housing Layout.



Upon entering the mews proper there is still a change in direction leading ... ?
 It is the sense of mystery about what lies around the corner which causes a visitor to question his right to be there - symbolic territory.

and behaviour 'on the street' is not condoned, it is often seen simultaneously as extreme or delinquent behaviour in individual boys and men, and as essentially continuous and therefore natural and allowable with *normal* male 'growing up'.

These attempts to describe female sexuality spatially do not stop at public space but extend right into the workplace. Cynthia Cockburn, in her book on the newspaper printing industry, showed how the men she talked to thought of women as 'pure' or 'sullied' depending on their location. The women who were mentally contained within the home environment, the man's wife and daughters, were to be kept in the first category. But the women at the workplace and outside the home were described in the second, their perceived sexuality constantly discussed and routinely joked about among the men. As Cockburn says:

The pleasure of this [latter] process, though, (and it is of course only partly pleasurable, being partly also a fear of women) comes precisely from the contrast between the pure and the sullied. This becomes an unresolvable contradiction for men if women share the same workplace in *unsegregated* occupations, on equal terms, in the same room. To hold in tension *both* of the two meanings ascribed to women depends on the separation of the spheres of home and work.¹⁴

In the space beyond the home, attempts to maintain these two incompatible meanings cause considerable ambivalence among men towards women, often with potentially contradictory meanings being held simultaneously. Thus women learn from an early age that men, in seeing them as 'other' define women as frightening/unknown and mysterious/attractive at one and the same time. Casual comments often made at women alone in the street underline this ambiguity. These are, so men say, both complimentary and trivial. Yet the remarks are an everyday reminder of the bounds of appropriate behaviour – at the same time making them impossible to achieve, being a combination at one and the same time of the pure and the sullied. Thus women must appear sexually attractive to the gaze of men outside the home *without attracting men sexually* and therefore taking the blame for the ultimate enforcing mechanism by which women are still kept in the home – sexual attack by force.

The implicit threat of rape is conveyed in terms of certain prescriptions which are placed on the behaviour of girls and women

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and through 'commonsense' understandings which naturalise gender-appropriate forms of behaviour. Both the implicit threat of rape, couched in terms of prevalent social stereotypes, and the conventionally accepted ways to avoid such an experience, being in some places rather than others, doing some things and not others are conveyed, are continually reinforced along with a whole range of values concerning female (and male) sexuality.¹⁵

Women know that at base these prevalent ideas about appropriate behaviour and locations are not adequate protection against attack. Despite media and male 'surprise' when 'inappropriate' women in 'inappropriate' places are raped and assaulted, most women feel that they are not safe anywhere. Women must therefore resort to remedial devices, either by not going out, or by going out only with men or by staying in and around places that feel safe. We need to know much more about how the design of space makes some places feel safer than others, and/or actually be safer, and the extent to which our man-made surroundings might ameliorate the lack of safety outside the home for women, just as, currently, they exaggerate it.

Contemporary housing layouts are a response to many problems – to the unsuccessful forms and styles of previous housing schemes, to the inadequacy of financing and to changing social conditions and aspirations. But whilst the benefits and truths contained in stereotypical ideas about 'proper' home environments should not be ignored or forgotten, much of the imagery of new housing estates merely attempts to paper over the cracks caused by the differences in use of outside space by women and men (and inequalities between classes). The results, I suggest, of the actual chosen pattern – continued separation, meandering paths and blocked views – have been in many ways unsatisfactory for women. Thus these estates serve to highlight in physical space the contradiction between woman's place and 'man's world'.

Making out

It is true that women are not so restricted to the home nowadays as they were in Victorian Britain, at least not by explicit social rules preventing women from leaving the house or gaining access to public places, work places and social facilities. In a society that values

'freedom' of mobility, women are still much more localized than men who continue, to some extent, to maintain women's 'out-of-placeness' outside the home.

To sum up: what are the mechanisms by which towns and cities reinforce a gender division of labour and a gender division of experience in the use of space outside the home? Firstly, the physical arrangements of activities and space (which categories of activity go together, which are kept apart, the patterns by which they are connected) combine with individual freedom of movement, allotted roles and tasks, and access to resources, to either limit or expand the usability of the built environment to women and to men. Many town planning policies expand the usability of our surroundings for the white, middle-class male at the expense of others, particularly women. Secondly, the built environment makes 'appropriate' settings for different activities which contain 'messages' about 'proper' gender roles in those places. Finally, there is the way in which stereotypical ideas about female and male behaviour are connected to particular locations which can proscribe women's movement outside the home and their 'appropriate' behaviour from street to workplace.

These three mechanisms are not all-encompassing or totally effective in maintaining women's 'place' outside the home. They, and the ideas behind them, are always being challenged and the contradictions coped with or reassessed. Similarly, in criticizing 'appropriate' ideas about the home environment, I am not suggesting for instance that homes are 'oppressive' to women *because* they are surrounded with trees. However, our homes and our lives could be arranged in many forms different to the way they are now. What many people consider 'appropriate' environments and relationships between activities are based on priorities overwhelmingly determined by men, which often ignore the different experiences of many women, or place them in a 'picture' that is more romantic than actual.

Feminists are now looking both to ways of making the existing environment better (more safe, less difficult to get about) and at new ways of defining categories of home and work, caring and paid employment which will have long-term effects on the physical arrangement of facilities and the spaces in between.

For instance, the Greater London Council's Women's Committee, Woman and Planning Working Group, have made recom-

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mendations for planning policies that discriminate in favour of women and for more involvement of women in the planning process. They suggest that women's groups monitor the effectiveness of policies for women. They have recommended policies giving priorities to safe, convenient and cheap public transport, to safe streets and the design of public space accessible to all, including the disabled, older people and parents with children. They want improved accessibility for women to non-traditional jobs and forms of employment opportunities that take into account people's roles outside of work. Finally, they have suggested planning policies that acknowledge the importance of caring employment by creating paid work in this area, by providing financial support for it, by ensuring that public facilities provide childcare, and by the provision of local centres which meet the needs of women.

The more we can understand about how stereotypical ideas are made solid in the built environment, the more we can criticize them by showing up the ambiguities and difficulties for women living in these man-made surroundings, and begin to suggest alternatives.

5.

House design and women's roles

The plan of a house tells us lots of things about how women are expected to organize their lives. For instance: How big is the kitchen? Is there room for more than one person to work in it? How many living spaces are there? What activities are catered for in each? In fact the design of houses in Britain reflects the oppression of women in society; by using plans we can graphically illustrate this, showing the relative size and position of rooms. We have limited this selection to urban houses in Britain in order to make some simple comparisons. (Despite the chronological order these house plans are not presented as a comprehensive historical survey.) The houses were designed and built between the early nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. The plans are chosen from these periods because they are still common today. Enough is known about contemporary social conditions to show the way plans reinforced ideas about women's place within the house.

The most striking theme of the plans is the privatization of family life. Accommodation for each household became self-contained as a family unit. While very little privacy is provided for individuals within the family, families as a whole were increasingly expected to be private from each other. The dominant household form – almost the only one that has been designed for – is that of the nuclear family. Yet there are subtle shifts in relationships within households which vary from decade to decade and from class to class.

The status and visibility of domestic work changed during the twentieth century. The mechanization of domestic tasks, whereby the middle classes replaced servants and the working classes considerably reduced heavy labour, made domestic work more respect-

able. The kitchen is compared to a science laboratory and kitchen equipment has become something to show off.

The homogeneity of family life also alters so that at some periods families are expected to live in one space, and at other times more differentiated spaces are provided. In working-class households the living room becomes separated from the kitchen whilst in middle-class households in the nineteenth century there is a separation not only of functions but also of classes. The servants' rooms are separated from those of their employers. The status of different activities such as sleeping and eating is clearly shown in the plans by the size of the space allocated to these activities, their relationship to each other, and their relationship to the world outside. Finally, there are notable omissions from the plans, for instance the lack of separate play areas for children.

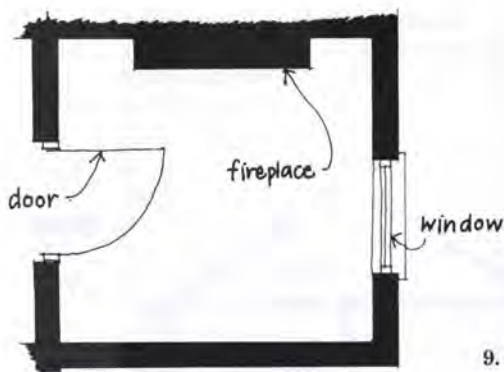
How to read plans

Plans are necessary tools for understanding and talking about buildings. People whose work involves building have been taught how to read drawings. Others are often presented with drawings and made to feel incompetent if they cannot understand them. The following is a brief explanation of what plans describe.

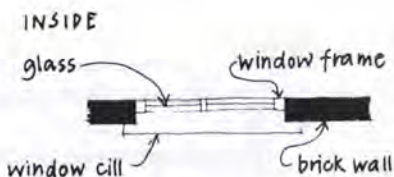
Plans are like maps; they are a bird's-eye view of a building. They do not show what a building or a town looks like in real life. Their purpose is to describe the *relationship* between buildings, or parts of a building, in the same way as a map shows the relationship between places.

Plans show a building at a particular plane. They show a slice through the building, usually about waist height above floor level. For instance, the plan of a room in a typical nineteenth-century terrace house will look like Illustration 9 (page 57). Each element – door, window, staircase, wall etc. – is drawn in a particular way. Each line represents the edge of something. For example, a wall is drawn with two strong parallel lines; if there is a window in the wall there will be faint lines for the wall below the window and possibly the window sill, strong lines for the frame of the window at the sides and strong lines for the glass which the slice cuts through. All the strong lines represent elements the cut passes through; the faint lines represent the planes below it (see Illustration 10, page 57).

Where the cut goes through a door, the wall and door frame will



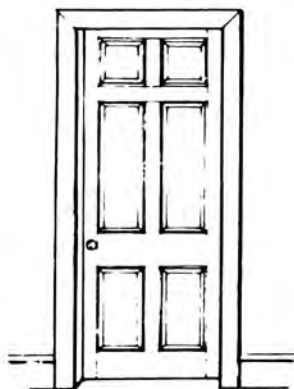
9. Typical plan of a room.



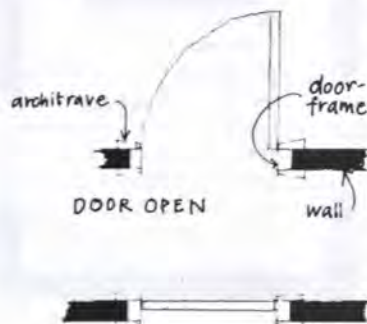
10. Plan and sketch of a window.

be in strong lines, one or two lines show the door open, and a faint curved line shows the line of the door swing. This shows which way the door opens and that it does not hit anything when it closes or opens (see Illustration 11, page 58). Stairs are shown like Illustration 12 (page 58) on plans.

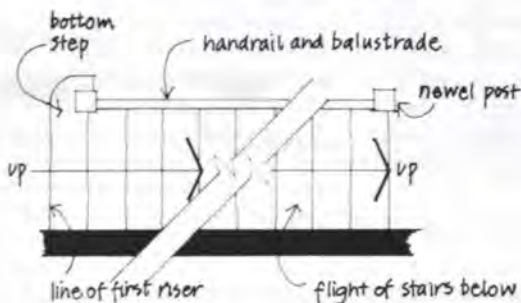
Each line represents the end of each tread (or step) of the staircase. Beside the stairs is probably a handrail which runs from newel post to newel post. These are usually shown too. They are important because they support the staircase. An arrow shows which way the stairs are going. Usually the arrow points upwards, and often it will have 'up' written beside it to make sure. One problem with stairs is that, sooner or later, because they are going up they will meet the



11. Plan and sketch of a door.



DOOR CLOSED

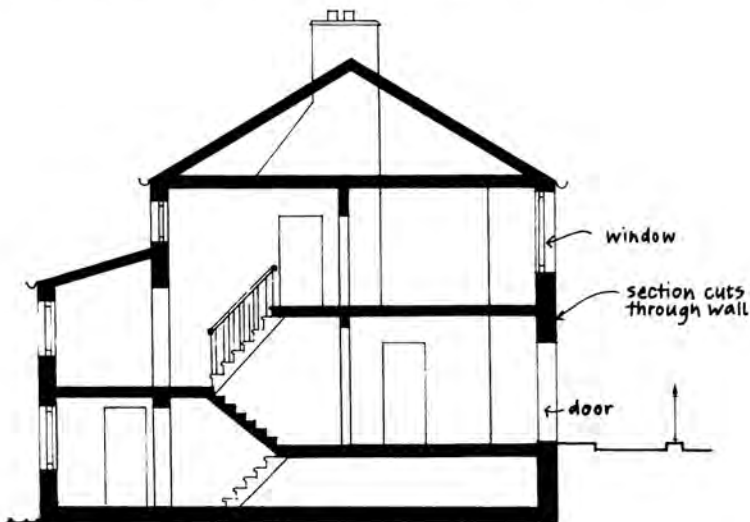


12. Plan of stairs.

line of the cut of the plan. When this happens a diagonal line is drawn across the stairs, and from that point on what you see on the plan is what is below the stairs – a cupboard, or the flight of stairs below.

You can also show a vertical slice through a building. This is called a section, and it tells us how high the ceilings are, the shape and construction of the roof, and foundations. As with a plan, the

parts of a building you are looking onto (for example, a staircase or a door on the wall opposite) are shown by faint lines, and the parts that are cut through are shown by strong lines.



13. *Vertical slice through a house – called a section.*

Weavers' cottages

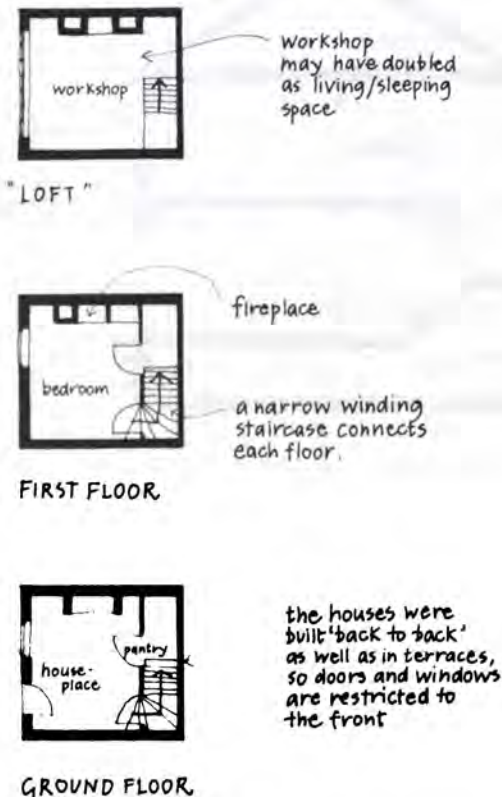
Modern houses are divided into rooms with specific functions and are generally intended to accommodate only one family; these are both fairly recent innovations. Houses built for working people in the era prior to industrial capitalism were simple structures, which accommodated both activities relating to survival such as eating, sleeping, cooking and so on, as well as tasks associated with family and trading. People who were not related to one another lived together as one household.

As industry developed in the eighteenth century, a special part of the house became a workshop. The average household included not only the mother, father, children and other relatives but also

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household servants and apprentices. In weavers' cottages the weaving was done on the top floor and the household lived below. Sometimes the loft was also lived in as the looms could only be worked during daylight.

The plans shown in Illustration 14 below are typical of weavers' cottages built in Nottingham between 1784 and 1830. Each house has a workshop and living spaces consisting of a bedroom, 'house-



14. A typical weaver's house, built in Nottingham at the beginning of the industrial revolution. 1784-1830.

place' and pantry. Anyone moving up through the house would pass through each room in turn – an arrangement hardly ever made today. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideas about privacy have led to houses with a central 'circulation system' off which most, if not all, rooms can be reached separately.

Model Dwellings

Model dwellings were built by philanthropic housing societies throughout the nineteenth century. They were intended as housing for the urban working class. Many nineteenth-century social reformers, such as Lord Shaftesbury, believed that better housing would improve the morals and character of the working classes:

The people who were formerly savage and ferocious, because they supposed themselves despised and abandoned, are now perfectly quiet and docile . . . Lady Shaftesbury has walked alone, with no attendant but a little child, through streets in London where, years ago, a well-dressed man could not have passed safely without an escort of the police.

Lord Shaftesbury, who was also a campaigner against child labour, voiced an almost religious view of women's 'place' in the home. He said at the end of a debate on protective legislation for women:

The moral effects of the . . . system are very bad, but in the female they are infinitely worse not alone upon themselves but upon their families, upon society and I may add upon the country itself. It is bad enough that you corrupt the man, but if you corrupt the woman you poison the waters of life at the very fountain.

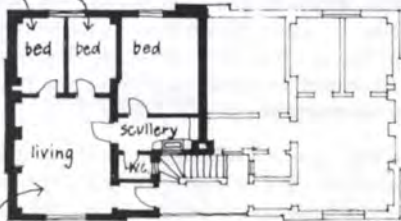
Model dwellings were built mainly in city centres and particularly in inner London, by, for instance, the Peabody Trust and the East End Dwelling Company. There was a debate within the philanthropic housing movement about which form of housing was best: whether minimal shelter should be provided at a low rent or better accommodation at a high rent. The plan in Illustration 15 (page 62) was a design prepared for the 1851 Exhibition. It was intended to set a good example, which other reformers were expected to follow.



The architect said of these flats :-

"Balconies are for the preservation of each distinct family and disconnection of their apartments to effectively prevent the communication of contagious diseases"

separate bedrooms for children of opposite sexes



FLAT ONE

FLAT TWO

The living room housed the kitchen range for cooking, a drying cupboard, and was the main room for eating and living.

the scullery was carefully planned to make housework easier. Cold running water, a rubbish disposal shaft and a ventilated larder

15. 'Model Dwellings', designed by Henry Roberts. These flats were built for the 1851 Great Exhibition as examples of good housing for the working class.

Robert Kerr, who also designed model dwellings, said, of buildings for the 'labouring classes':

The most rigid economy of arrangement, consistent with accommodation sufficiently spacious to be convenient and healthy, and the utmost attention to cheapness of construction, consistent with durability and comfort, are essential elements of a really good and suitable plan.

The improvement to the morals and characters of the inhabitants would take place through a particular sort of planning based on segregation and privacy. The working classes were to be organized into 'proper' family units:

Balconies were for the preservation of domestic privacy and independence of each distinct family and the disconnection of their apartments so as to effectively prevent the communication of contagious diseases.

The reformers were especially worried by what they saw as the sexual morality or depravity of working-class people living in overcrowded slum conditions. In this plan three bedrooms were provided to prevent different sexes and ages from sleeping together in the same room. The boys' and girls' rooms are 'controlled' from the living room, whilst the parents' room is given privacy by being located off the scullery.

Conveniences such as the scullery and toilet in each dwelling were a definite material improvement for many working-class people. At the same time these were intended to prevent the spread of contagious diseases through communal facilities and to stress family privacy by keeping households separate from each other in their day-to-day activities. However this proved to be expensive, so that some model dwellings had shared washing and laundry facilities.

Most model dwellings also had a set of rules and regulations to govern 'respectable' behaviour, and attempted to prevent both non-family lodgers, and paid work such as laundering being done in the home. This last rule prevented women from pursuing what had been among their traditional occupations. In their design and management, model dwellings proved to be the forerunners of modern council housing. For example it is only since 1980 that council tenants have been allowed, as a right, to have lodgers in their own homes.

Victorian gentleman's urban house, c. 1864

The plan on page 65, Illustration 16, is for one of a row of London town houses built for the Marquis of Westminster. It is taken from *The Gentleman's House* by Robert Kerr published in 1864, an influential work in its time. In this plan Kerr tried to translate the principles of order and status set out in his book: modest elegance, extreme propriety in personal behaviour, a sharp division between master and servant and between women and men. Kerr probably derived these ideals from an ancient Greek manual on household management for gentlemen, Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*. Xenophon was primarily a military historian. A ruthless concern for efficiency, more suited to the management of an army than a household, pervades both works.

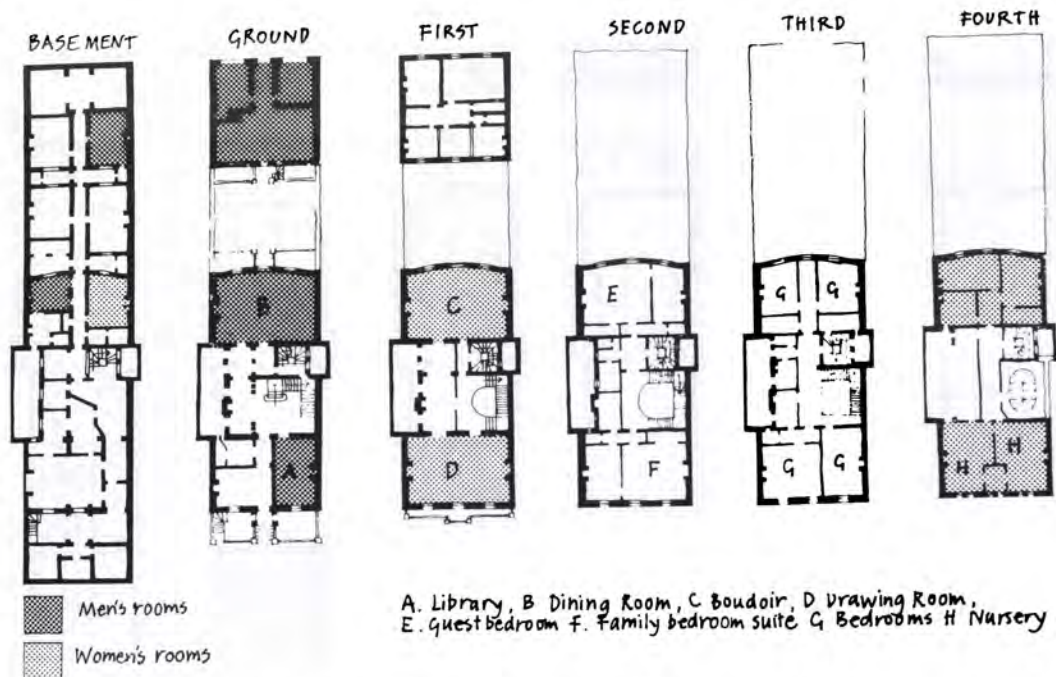
In classical Greece, households were part of the economy, making cloth and food from wool and crops. Xenophon advised rich women to be active managers, leading the servants by example. But the Victorian house was a retreat from the workplace, and upper-class women were encouraged to be indolent, thereby falling prey to the fears and diseases condemned by Xenophon more than 2,000 years before.

In his book Kerr attempts to set up a complicated hierarchy of age, sex, class and household activities by their placing within the plan. As a rule of thumb status decreases from front to back and by increasing distances away from the two main floors (ground and first). Segregation is maintained between servants and family by separate staircases.

Kerr was very concerned with privacy, which he considered the primary concern of the house:

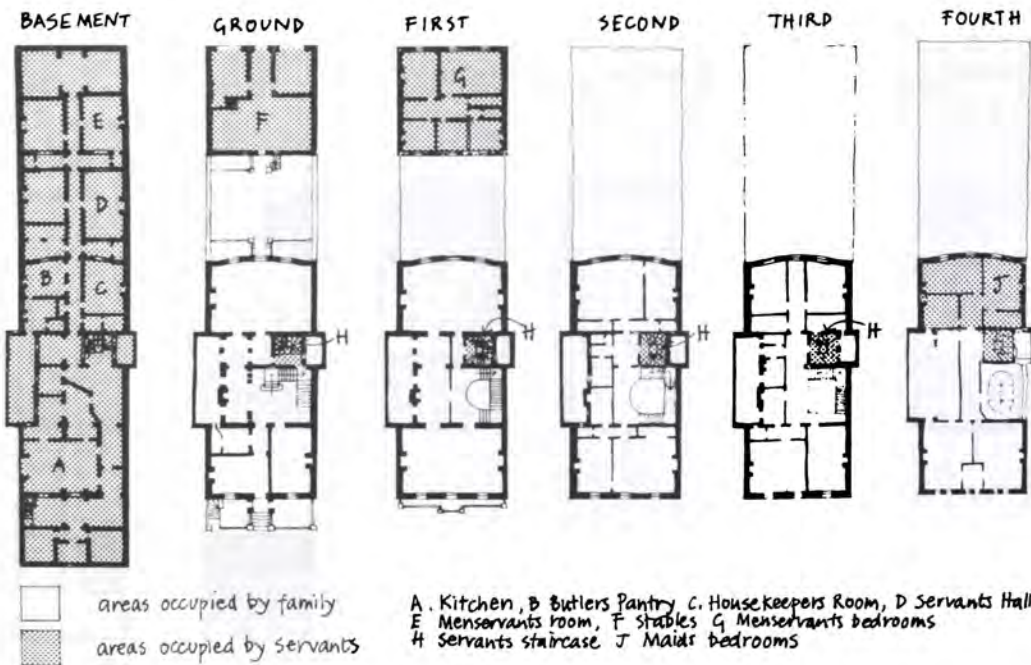
It is a first principle with the better classes of English people that the Family Rooms should be essentially private, and as much as possible the Family Thoroughfares. It becomes the foremost of all maxims, therefore, that however small the establishment, that the Servants' Department shall be separated from the Main House, so that what passes on either side of the boundary shall be both invisible and inaudible on the other.¹

When Kerr refers to the importance of the family rooms, however, he is describing the private withdrawing rooms of husband and wife on the first floor (with the man at the front, the woman at the back), not the rooms that children would normally use. At this



16. 'A Gentleman's Town House', designed by Robert Kerr in 1864. This redrawn plan shows the separation of men's and women's realms.

17. 'A Gentleman's Town House', 1864. This redrawn plan shows the segregation of the servants from the family.



time and with this class, children are still placed about parallel with servants:

The principle of Privacy which was laid down at an early stage of our investigation, whereby in every Gentleman's House a distinct separation should be made between the Family and the Servants has a similar application [for children] – that is to say, the main part of the house must be relieved from the more immediate occupation of children.²

For the middle classes at least, the boundary of privacy was not yet drawn around the outside of the house, incorporating family as mother, father and children together. Pride of place in the house remains with the entertaining rooms. Although squeezed onto one main floor (squeezed compared to grander country house plans) Kerr uses a sequence of small spaces, of halls and lobbies, to give a sense of dignity and procession. One of Kerr's 'extra' masculine rooms, the library, is provided at the front for status and to visually separate any other workings of the house from the world outside.

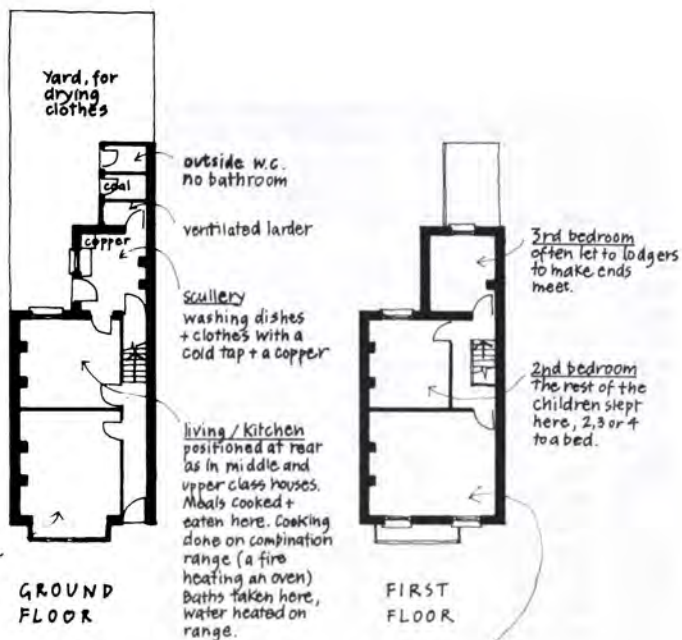
Finally Kerr emphasized the importance of planning the working areas on a different basis to the rest of the house (which was to focus on comfort). In contrast the kitchens and other servant spaces were to be based on efficiency and function. (See Illustration 17.)

Even today there are echoes of these Victorian ideas in modern semi-detached houses with ground floors focused on entertainment and status. Of course, from the 1930s all the working activities of the house from pantry to laundry had been fitted into one room – the kitchen – often small and tucked away at the back. At the same time the servants were being replaced by the wife. The suburban house still confirms status and middle-class respectability and, as Burnett says:

Physically, the minimal five-roomed semi made civilised life, in middle-class terms, possible for a small family. It allowed for a proper separation of eating and living, for a proper separation between the sexes for sleeping, for cleanliness, order and recreation.³

Late nineteenth and early twentieth-century urban terrace

The most basic form of 'through' house was the 'two up, two down'. Most of these have been demolished as there was no room for



Front room / Parlor
The only room visible from the street, it contained the best furniture. It was used for Sundays, family occasions and perhaps courting couples.

Front bedroom
with double bed probably for baby + toddler as well as mother and father.

18. A typical terraced house, built extensively by speculative firms from the end of the nineteenth century.

improvements such as bathrooms, and the stairs in particular were often steep, narrow and dangerous.

The example shown in Illustration 18 is more substantial and still makes up a large part of our present housing in inner urban areas, often modernized with grants. Although they appear to be in the inner city now, when they were built they were on the edge of the city, in the suburbs. This meant that it was only better off workers who could afford them, those who were not dependent upon a wife's earnings to supplement the family income.

As soon as houses had both back and front, the kitchen was put at the back, just as in the elaborate Victorian town house the kitchen occupied an interior position. In the early decades of this century (apart from wartime) few married women went out to paid work. But the task of caring for husband, children and home was demanding and exhausting, involving a good deal of heavy work such as the carrying of coal or water.

A scullery was provided for washing clothes, pots and pans, and facilities like a ventilated larder and running water made domestic work much easier. Cooking and eating meals took place in the back room, along with most other everyday activities. The Womens' Housing Sub-Committee report of 1918 which surveyed the opinions of working-class women (see chapter 3) showed that they would have preferred a separate workplace as well as this back room. However, these women also wanted to retain the parlour or front room. Although this could be kept for special occasions, it could also be used as a quiet room.

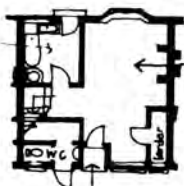
Plans like this make a clear distinction between back and front: friends come to the back door via an alley, acquaintances are received at the front and are met in the parlour where the best possessions are kept.

Early twentieth-century garden city cottage

These houses were designed by Raymond Unwin and his brother-in-law, Barry Parker, following the publication of Ebenezer Howard's *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* in 1898. In his book Howard described a new type of environment, urban settlements with a village-like character. There were to be fewer houses to the acre so that houses had gardens, not just yards. The garden cities were planned to incorporate factories as well as houses, but the homes would be kept separate from the workplace. They perfectly express the ideology of



The scullery had limited space for laundering, preparing food and washing. A small coke furnace heats water for the bath, sink and wash copper.



GROUND FLOOR

In the 20th century garden cottage shown here the living rooms is used as sitting room, dining room, and sometimes kitchen. The architect, Unwin seemed to see the single living room as a descendant of the medieval great hall, and here emphasises the ideal of family unity. Cooking still took place here.

Unwin romanticised "the hearth" as the focus of family life, but at the same time wished to banish all "dirty" domestic work to the scullery.



FIRST FLOOR

One large and two smaller bedrooms allow for "decency" in separating parents, girls and boys.

19. 'Garden City' cottage, designed by Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin in 1909, was a new model for urban settlements with a village-like character.

women as keepers of the domestic sphere in the 'natural' setting, unsullied by the noise, grime and ugliness of the urban environment. This plan was very influential in housing reformers' thinking and the Tudor Walters Committee of 1918 based many of its recommendations upon it. It set a pattern for municipal suburban houses for the next 30 years.

These architects thought houses should be designed to let in sun and air; they hated the deep, narrow houses with back extensions such as those shown in Illustration 18, where the sun might hardly ever penetrate the living room. However, their planning was sometimes 'rational' to the point of ignoring the sentiments of the workers who occupied their 'cottages'. As chapter 3 shows, many of these model plans removed the parlour, replacing it with a front-to-back living room which emphasizes the 'togetherness' of the family rather than the separate needs of each of its members. These houses were designed at a time when the concept of the 'family wage' had gained strength. The man participates in the labour market in order to support himself and his family. The woman is seen as the dependent 'full-time' housewife. These house plans are among the earliest to assume a nuclear family. Even the relationship of the houses to each other focuses on the quality of light and air that will be received in the interior of the dwelling (using layouts based on the distances between dwellings to prevent overshadowing and so on). The plan shown here was used by the Rowntree company in a garden suburb for their workers, at New Earswick, York. Here the external appearance and setting of the house is carefully contrived to recall the pre-industrial village with its supposedly harmonious social life.

Later versions usually maintained the concern with lighting and ventilation conditions within the dwelling, but state economies led to increasing densities, a cutting back on the natural setting and the omission of communal facilities (which had been an essential component of the garden city movement); thus many suburban estates were very poorly serviced by shops and other facilities and were visually monotonous.

Thirties semi-detached suburban house

Variants of the plan shown in Illustration 20, page 73 were built in virtually every town in the country, in the sudden expansion of

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home ownership to the middle class and a few of the better paid members of the working class. The typical thirties plan represents the ultimate paring down of the status-conscious large Victorian town house. Minor touches of individuality served to distract attention from the underlying conformity and concern for correctness and respectability.

Raphael Samuel says that:

The ideal home of the period, whether a bungalow or semi-detached, was a haven of peace and quiet, a modest retreat for the 'little man' (the pipe-smoking, slipper-loving archetype . . .), a nest-like security (or prison) for his wife. It was built on low density 'ribbon' developments . . . and symbolically protected from the gaze of strangers by the well-trimmed privet hedge. The middle class who flocked to take up mortgages on the new estates lived a life that was more purely domestic than perhaps at any other time.⁴

Conservatives were delighted at the rise in home ownership, since it was believed that:

The man who has something to protect and improve – a stake of some sort in the country – naturally turns his thoughts in the direction of sane, ordered, and perforce economical government. The thrifty man is seldom or never an extreme agitator. To him revolution is anathema.⁵

Houses built for sale retained a kitchen so that cooking and eating could be separated, with the possibility of employing domestic help in the kitchen. Whilst middle-class women discussed 'the servant problem', however, working-class women were voting with their feet against domestic service. Even so, domestic service was to remain the largest area of employment for women in the inter-war period. Through the use of contraceptives or self-restraint, family size decreased in the middle classes in the thirties. This reduced the amount of childcare and housework middle-class women had to do.

The builders of semi-detached houses used modern bathrooms and kitchens as the selling point for their houses. Advertisements for the period show photographs of housewives who appear delighted with their new chromium-plated bathrooms. Of course, for many this was probably the first time they had had a fitted bath, or many of the other improvements in heating, plumbing and cooking



The kitchen is a cramped room at the back of the house, not planned as a space in which one might enjoy spending time.

These two rooms were used as dining & sitting rooms, or as living room and parlour. There was still a sense of the front room as "best"

GROUND FLOOR



Like the front room downstairs the 'master bedroom' was also furnished to impress, with dressing table & 3 panelled mirror in the bay window

FIRST FLOOR

20. A semi-detached suburban house built in the 1930s. Aimed at the rising class of owner occupiers. this design retained elements of the status-conscious Victorian town house.

Making Space

facilities. In this period consumer durables such as electric irons and vacuum cleaners became available for a mass market. Builders often gave these away too, as an inducement to buy. Middle-class women became associated with the consumption of goods within the house.

Later developments towards more open-plan houses, whilst perhaps using available space more effectively and breaking down traditional divisions between formality and informality in behaviour, nonetheless often also meant that women had to keep much more of the ground floor tidy, clean and ready for 'show' and that many more consumer durables might become part of the display of 'best' possessions for status and dignity.

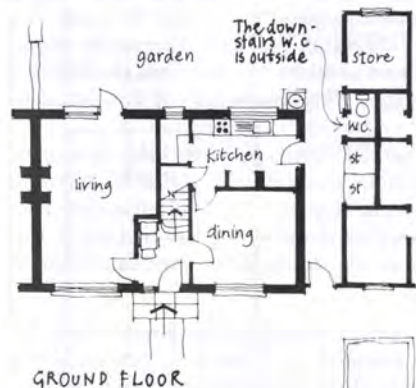
Post-war council house

Council house building in the immediate post-war years was given high priority. The houses were much more spacious than any council housing built before or since, and council houses were intended to appeal to all sections of society, living side by side in 'mixed communities'. At the same time, these houses strongly reflect the post-war idealization of family life, seeing the house as a cheerful and comfortable place where wives would find homemaking a pleasure and not a burden.

The Dudley Committee, consisting of eight women and 12 men, recommended in their report published in 1944 that: 'Local authorities should have greater regard to the views of housewives and should make use of their powers to co-opt suitable women to their Housing Committee.'⁶ The secretary to the Dudley Committee, Judith Ledebor, who was an architect, said that 'The standard set was what the committee thought was the minimum at which a woman could bring up a family while doing the housework herself.'⁷ So women's views were seen as important but only in their capacity as housewives.

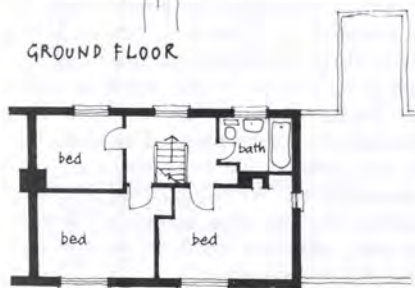
The plan shown in Illustration 21, page 75, continues the single front-to-back living room from the 1920s, but by now cooking has been removed to the kitchen, so this room is purely for family relaxation and leisure. The plan also offers a separate dining room, in order to remove eating from the housewife's major workplace, the kitchen.

By the 1950s, space standards and amenities were being severely cut back in council housing. There was a drive to produce



The working kitchen. Despite aiming to provide a convenient workspace, many of these houses had inconveniently small kitchens. The needs of women doing housework + looking after small children, are considered less important than the need for a separate dining room. Despite the larger space for a wash boiler and fridge there is very little useful workspace.

The living room has windows both ends, which is typical of its time.



The bedrooms are larger than most modern council houses. They aren't heated except by an open fire in the large bedroom.

FIRST FLOOR

21. This council house, designed in 1949, reflects the post-war idealization of family life.

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as many houses as possible, and more attention was paid to quantity than to quality. Much of the flexibility offered by the sheer space of the forties plan was lost. Attitudes to the 'proper' location of the eating of meals varied (as they still do today). As space was cut from these plans, the dining room became part of the circulation; it was usually incorporated into a hall at the bottom of the stairs or as an alcove over the kitchen. The formal dining room of the forties plan was the first to go. The parlour was also on its way out for good. The Dudley Report thought, 'the expression "parlour" carries an implication which is old-fashioned and obsolete.' By the time the Parker-Morris Report was written in the 1960s (see below), it was not mentioned at all.

Finally, the kitchen remained small, in some local authority areas, despite continuing demands through this period for families to eat here. The Parker-Morris Report again admitted to this demand and commented on earlier plans which saw eating in the kitchen as a working-class habit, and deliberately tried to prevent it by not allowing enough space:

Even in a kitchen which is not planned for the family to eat in, and which is primarily planned as a working centre, there should be somewhere two or three people can sit down and eat; because we are convinced that, whether or not there is room, that is what they will do. We have heard it said on more than one occasion that the kitchen should be planned so that it is impossible to take meals in it, with a view to raising the social and living standards of the occupiers. We believe that this is an unsuitable motive on which to choose a plan; and even if it were not it would be necessary now, after ten or fifteen years of trying it out, to recognise that it is misconceived.⁸

The sixties and the seventies

The amount of space provided in housing declined steadily throughout the 1950s. In 1961, a further report on housing standards was published, written by a committee chaired by Sir Parker-Morris and entitled *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*. This noted trends such as the greater demand by single people for separate homes rather than living with their families or as lodgers, and the need for housing to provide more than a minimal 'roof over the head' – to cater for a collection of individuals with aspirations and with differing and some-



The kitchen is designed as an efficient workspace for one person. It looks into both living room + dining area.



GROUND FLOOR

The family living room overlooks the back garden.
The hall/dining area is a residual version of the front parlour.

FIRST FLOOR

A "master" bedroom and two children's bedrooms are kept privately to the first floor.

22. This 1960s design for a five-person nuclear family is still in current use.

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times conflicting interests. (The report remarked, somewhat optimistically as it turned out, that husbands were sharing domestic work in an increasingly egalitarian fashion!)

In order to allow individuals to follow more fully their own lives within the family house structure, the Parker-Morris report recommended more space and better heating – including heating in the bedrooms. This would allow all rooms to be used during the day; children could use their bedrooms as ‘own rooms’ for study, play or entertaining friends. At the same time, Government design guides such as *Housing the Family* (see chapter 5 above), which architects used for guidelines in designing actual houses, perpetuated a very traditional picture of the nuclear family and women’s role within it.

The house plan from *Housing the Family* shown in Illustration 22, page 77, reflects some of these ambiguities in attempting to describe and fulfil the needs of many different individuals within a small, narrow frontage, family house. It provides, for instance, a small ‘spare’ room at the front of the house to be used as an extra bedroom, sewing room and so on. Of course this room also serves (rather like the library in the Kerr plan) to hide the more ‘private’ family areas behind.

The plan also tries to provide space both for separate dining and for eating in the kitchen (at least half in and half out of the kitchen) without providing either a proper, separate dining room or a kitchen big enough for the whole family to eat in comfortably.

It offers a small hall as the residual version of the parlour: ‘a neutral space in which to deal with visitors whom one wishes neither to leave on the step nor to invite to meet the family’, but which looks straight into the dining area and beyond to the kitchen putting this whole area potentially ‘on display’.

The kitchen acts as a hub to the plan, looking into both the living room and dining area. It is therefore neither a separate workplace (to contain noise and smells) nor physically part of the other rooms in the house. It is still planned on the workbench principle advocated by Kerr and designed around one person, almost certainly presumed to be the wife.

The living room at the back is still the largest room in the house and has a large picture window overlooking the small back garden.

The Parker-Morris Report set compulsory space standards for public sector housing, and was abolished by the government in 1981. It was the last government manual to describe how the inter-

iors of houses and flats should be laid out (although many local authorities still use design guides of 'preferred' plans). During the last 20 years there has been an overall decline in the number, constructional quality and space standards of council houses. This has affected women particularly badly. Women with families have to take primary responsibility for the consequences of damp, inaccessible or tightly and badly planned homes. At the same time, the convergence in space standards of middle-class and working-class women's homes, and to some extent a convergence of their roles, means that all women who work in the home as wives and mothers experience similar problems and contradictions in the way these houses are designed.

Conclusion

We have tried to show how the plans of houses have changed, reflecting and refracting changes in society. Over this period, the house has become synonymous with the nuclear family unit, although 60 per cent of households no longer match this model. The house now takes for granted a separation between paid work outside the home and leisure within it, which would be difficult for an eighteenth-century weaver to comprehend. Our attitudes to privacy have changed since Kerr's primary classification. It now incorporates the whole family, and is not just the prerogative of the middle classes.

Class divisions in housing have decreased, especially since the second world war. Middle-class women have taken on the tasks that were previously done by servants. With the introduction of new technologies, housework has become less physically exhausting, but with new standards of cleanliness and order has expanded to fill the time of all classes of women responsible for it. As class distinctions have diminished, tensions and conflicts have arisen in ideas about the 'proper' use of the house, for example in the placing of meals or domestic services. Women's traditional working activities have removed from the living room to the kitchen, leaving the former solely for recreation and relaxation. Patterns of formality and informality in the treatment of guests and friends have also influenced spatial divisions. Middle-class children are no longer banished to the nursery in the daytime and childcare patterns have changed.

All of these factors have had ramifications for the design of

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houses and for women's work and position within the home. Many of the house plans we have used here are explicit models of how houses ought to be, and the way people should live. Even in cases where women's voices have been heard, priorities about what is built into the house and what is left out have been predominantly chosen by men. Thus, a strong demand from working-class women at the turn of the century for a parlour was given a low priority. Demands for space to eat comfortably in the kitchen have been reiterated in design manuals such as Parker-Morris, but again and again, the actual houses have had tiny kitchens. In the final decision-making, women's real needs, desires and aspirations are not taken as seriously as male-dominated ideas about the 'appropriate' house for the family.

6. **Housing the family**

In the family, woman's perspective of day-to-day life is set by the experience of caring for children, husband and family and looking after the house, sometimes combined with going to work outside the home. In addition, there is a constricting framework imposed on the woman from outside our experience – the conventionally accepted view of family life. The role of the woman in this family is a housewife and loving wife/mother. If she works, then she must be able to do her housewife job more efficiently. The man goes out to work, drives the car, needs to be fed, and has a space for do-it-yourself activities which are his contributions to home life. Her world is less significant than the public world of work, money and male exchange of views to which he goes.

This patriarchal view is a synthesis of all the parts of family life which reinforce the nuclear family: the loving couple of cornflakes adverts and Sunday colour supplements, with 2.2 contented children. There is no conflict and no change in relationships – all that happens is that children grow up.

This stereotype typifies the 1950s, and we might expect people who design houses now to have a more sophisticated notion of family life. However, the state manual of housing design, *Housing the Family*,¹ to which all council and many private houses are meant to conform, is based firmly on this view of women's lives. Underlying the text of *Housing the Family* runs a particularly clear summary of the ideology of the family that is the basis of all current housing design – men's and women's roles, and the relationship of spaces to these roles and assumptions about women's subordinate position. This chapter examines these assumptions in detail in order to understand how all housing design promotes them.

Detailed studies of how people use dwellings (the basis for

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design guides) shows that researchers have asked questions which in some ways have led to improvements in the quality of women's lives. It is now accepted that women with children stand in front of kitchen sinks a lot, so there should be a window to look out of, and that if there is a garden, the window should look on to the garden so that children's play can be watched. However, this research is based on particular questions, and the choice of questions determines the answers – and produces a window by the kitchen sink. The researchers asked: 'How can life with your hands in the sink be a little more pleasant?', not: 'Why do women spend so much time at the kitchen sink?'. *Housing the Family* contains a whole checklist of such questions: 'Is there a convenient place indoors where small children can play within sight of the kitchen working area?' 'Does the kitchen have some view of the outside world, callers, passers-by, etc?'

Women's experience of living in houses is incorporated into housing design by a sort of remote control process. The dynamics of everyday life for women are profoundly misunderstood because questions such as these emerge from the stereotype view of nuclear family life so vividly portrayed in *Housing the Family*.

The 1961 Parker-Morris Report, *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, set out to describe the way people live and to make recommendations for the design of housing.² It proposed a new way of setting housing standards by outlining design *problems* rather than providing 'standard' plans, as earlier housing manuals had, and was intended to free architects from stereotyped planning prevalent in the 1950s. In this way, it was also more liberal in outlook than many of the subsequent design guides such as *Housing the Family* and *Space in the Home*, which offered one, particular, conventional interpretation of how the design problem might be solved.

Housing the Family is a collection of bulletins reprinted in 1974 and is in current use for both public and private housing. It covers various aspects of housing design, including the arrangement of internal space, site considerations, safety in the home and children playing. Other design bulletins, such as *Space in the Home*,³ concentrate on particular rooms and their functions, for example, kit chens and bathrooms. The stated intentions of these bulletins, which are compiled by teams of experts including architects, sociologists, quantity surveyors and administrators, are to improve 'both the convenience and efficiency' of the use of spaces and to 'promote

higher standards and better value for money'.⁴ They appear in every architect's and builder's office and are extremely influential in the planning and designing of houses.

Most designers use them selectively, picking at information here and there, not questioning the ideology behind the information. They are used as if they provide 'objective' information rather than value-laden assumptions about women's social role and family life. The text is written from a masculine viewpoint – by men, for men, and about women and children. It reinforces the identification of the designer with the male breadwinner by referring to him as 'you'; the housewife is referred to as 'she'. For example: If *you* come home in dirty working clothes, can you get direct from the main door to a place where they can be kept and to a place where you can wash? And, 'How far does *the housewife* have to carry the rubbish from the kitchen to the bin store, and can *she* manage without going through living areas?'⁵ (my emphasis)

Design guides stress the separation of work (a means of earning a living) and survival (activities necessary to stay alive) by emphasizing both their different locations and the gender stereotyping of responsibility for them. The head of the household – man and wage-earner – spends most of his day in paid work to support himself and his family, and for him the home is a place of comfort and rest. The woman, the wife and mother, even if she also has paid employment,

- 1200** When the children play indoors Mother needs to be able to see them from the kitchen, but they should be away from the kitchen equipment and not under her feet.



- 1430** The baby needs a place where it is quiet to sleep. The toddler needs a place for play, where toys and other playthings can be concentrated, so the housewife does not have to be forever tidying up.



- 1900** When Father makes or repairs something, he needs to be out of Mother's way in the kitchen and where he will not disturb sleeping children.



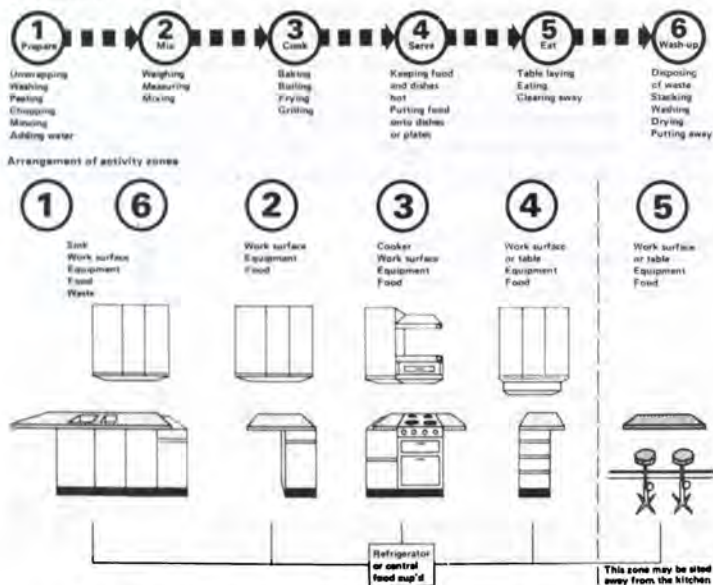
23. 'Mr and Mrs Average' as portrayed in
Housing the Family, 1974.

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is expected to assume the role of housewife, and for her the home is the place where she does work. The conventional assumption that a 'woman's place is in the home' is clearly perpetuated in design guides.

In contemporary Western society, acknowledgement of the individual's right to privacy is not extended to women. Whilst thought to be tied to the house more than any other member of the family, the housewife spends her time in spaces that service the family: that is, the kitchen and the 'master bedroom'. The privacy, and in Virginia Woolf's words, 'a room of one's own' that everyone needs to establish any kind of independent identity in the nuclear family, seems to be denied to her.

People and activities are packaged in a standardized format where they bear little resemblance to human beings. Mr and Mrs Average and their children have become mere emblems in plan and elevation.



24. Activity sequences and arrangement of activity zones. from *Spaces in the Home*, 1972.

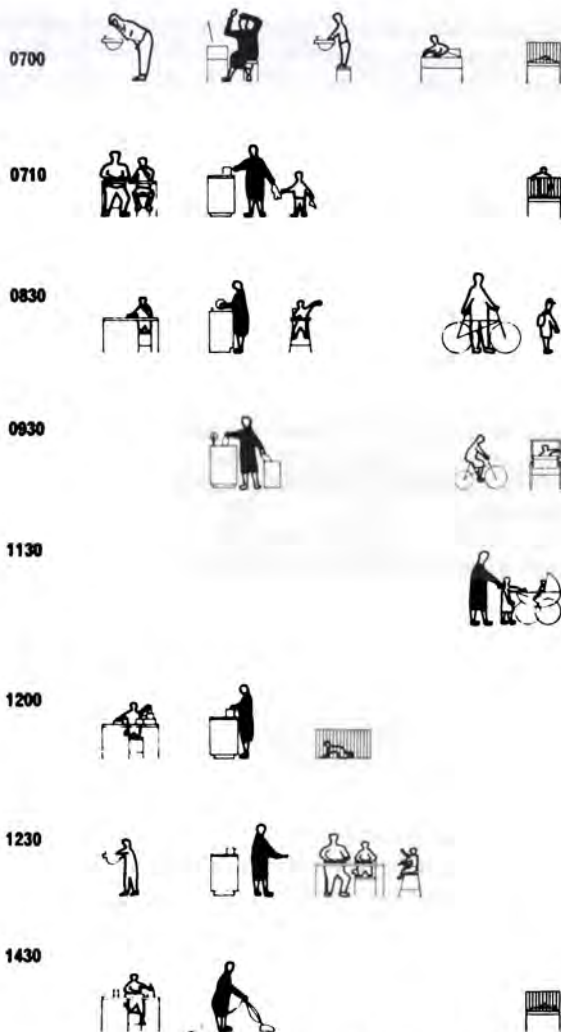
This design guide definition of the family excludes many people – single parent families, communal households, old people – and refers only to the ‘nuclear family’ which is not a reality for most people anyway. Within that very limited definition, roles are described in a very conventional way, for example, there are no signs that men cook, children clean or that women repair houses.

Spaces and activities are described so as to seem scientific, and therefore objective. Charts and graphs indicate the ‘optimum’ work-top height, and ‘activity sequences’ represent the ‘meal preparation process’. Spaces are divided into ‘zones’ with specific functions: the kitchen includes ‘zones’ for preparation/wash-up, mixing, cooking, serving, eating; each described separately and as a sequence in great detail, with illustrations even of the fittings by which tea towels can be hung. Possible layouts for bathrooms are drawn as a table of ‘combined appliance and activity spaces for one-, two- and three-appliance layouts’. The houses themselves are distinguished by categories of physical space with either a wide or narrow frontage, and by occupants in numerical groups of one- two- or three-person dwellings.

Time and activity charts document a typical day in the life of The Younger Family (parents and three children – a boy aged 7 and girls aged 3 and 1) and The Older Family (parents – mother working part-time, boy aged 23, girl 20 and boy 14). The day is divided into activities which occur at half-hourly or hourly intervals and involve some, and occasionally all, the members of the household in activities related to particular spaces.

The neat divisions of jobs into regular intervals of time describe an unrealistic routine: this rationalization of time and tasks does not relate to most women’s daily routine, especially those with small children.

The assumption that the drudgery of housework can be eliminated simply by providing efficient, easy-to-clean surfaces and easy-to-reach storage permeates these design guides. Whilst the intention is laudable, their analysis shows a significant misunderstanding about the nature of housework. Research shows that women spend an average of 77 hours of week doing housework.⁶ Most women would agree that whilst some labour-saving devices can relieve ‘heavy’ work and save time, housework still takes this long because expected standards of cleanliness have risen. It is in the nature of housework that it expands to fill the time available and



25. Time and activity chart – documents the 'typical' day: from *Housing the Family*, 1974.

that it is never done; no sooner has the floor been cleaned than it starts getting dirty again.

Design guides assume that housework is not an activity shared by all members of the household, but is done by the woman. The recommendations conclude that the house must be 'easy to run to reduce the burden on the housewife' and in order 'to give working wives a better chance of doing both jobs without too much strain.'⁷

The kitchen is categorized as a space which does not need to change as the family develops. Preparing food is not a sociable activity in which everyone can participate, and the kitchen is designed to be used by one person – the wife and mother. The work-tops resemble laboratory benches; she is assisted only by a range of consumer durables such as the cooker, washing machine, spin drier, tumble drier, and dish-washer.

Design guides describe the kitchen as the 'work centre' of the house – once the realm of the domestic servants in the more affluent Victorian houses, it is now assumed to be the realm of the housewife. The guides recommend that the kitchen be a separate room, designed to make cooking and serving food as efficient and convenient as possible, without the rest of the family and especially visitors being able to see, hear or smell them. Drawings show optimum worktop heights, circulation patterns through and around the kitchen, and storage facilities. Although eating in the kitchen is mentioned in some guides, it is not considered to be of central importance as it is by many women.

Design guides are only a part of a way of thinking that divides the business of living into hermetic compartments. *Housing the Family*, for instance, does not deal with the relationship of the home to the immediate locality for the necessary support services: shops, schools, health centres. These are deemed to be the province of other design guides.

The relationship between the home and the 'world immediately outside' is reduced to the patterns of circulation and access of the family and visitors, and callers who fall into two main categories, the regular and the intermittent: 'The milkman, the postman, the dustman, the meter reader and the fuel delivery man come into the former group; the deliverer of garden materials or the man coming to repair the roof fall into the latter.' (my emphasis)⁸ The house requires servicing from a range of specialists. There is no mention of the importance of social relationships and communal activities for

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women and children. Baking, washing, bathing, which were once communal activities, have been privatized within the child-centred nuclear family.

The houses, separate from one another, symbolize the importance of individuality, and stress the self-containment of family life. They are illustrated only in plan form, from which it is very difficult to imagine the quality of each room and of the house as a whole.

Many of the design guide recommendations are embodied in the plan of a house illustrated in *Space in the Home*. This house is divided into separate rooms for specific functions and is designed to accommodate one household (see chapter 5 for illustrations and more detailed description). The graduation of rooms from public to private is represented in their placing within the house; the most private rooms for the family are at the back of the house and upstairs. Visitors to the house may be confined to the ground floor; the kitchen (accessible from the back door) and hall are separate from the living and dining rooms.

In this it represents the sequestering of the nuclear family, and the domestication of all the activities associated with survival. There are no public or communal facilities; it accommodates an introverted family lifestyle, in which household duties are confined to a small space set deep within the plan, and protected by the private back garden and boundary walls.

This critique has tried to expose some of the assumptions made about women and houses in design guides, not simply to add to the checklist of things designers should take notice of, but to begin to suggest house designs that reflect the richness and value of women's experience. Such designs would neither assume that women are part of nuclear family units with children and husband, nor would they try to contain and confine women who do care for children.

7. Working with women

In 1978 the Feminist Design Collective was formed. Its purpose, loosely defined, was to understand and develop a feminist approach to architecture through discussion and architectural work. Two of the projects I am going to describe were undertaken by this group. In 1980 the Feminist Design Collective split and Matrix was formed. Groups within Matrix formed to undertake different projects: an exhibition on housing design called 'Home Truths', this book, and architectural work for women's community groups. The ideas outlined in this chapter are based on lots of discussion. This is my interpretation of our shared experience.

Women working in Matrix (and in the Feminist Design Collective between 1978 and 1980) have been attempting to develop a way of designing buildings together, which values women's involvement in all the stages of the evolution of a building. The stages include recognizing the need for a building, obtaining finance for it, organizing it, designing, building and finally using it. Working together as a group, and working with other women's groups, have been among our most important experiences. Working and making decisions collectively has developed our confidence and ability to pursue and articulate elusive ideas.

We have all been trained conventionally by and with men, who have often devalued or ignored our work, describing it as 'emotional' or 'confused'. As practising architects we have often felt alienated and marginalized. In order to revalue our ideas and feelings, we have always tried to do work together, to go to meetings and give talks in pairs and to discuss work in progress with a larger group. We have learnt from working with women who have not been trained as architects. They have questioned conventional assumptions about design and have been excited by the possibilities of cre-

ating buildings that suit their needs.

The re-emergence of the women's movement over the last 15 years has meant that women have seen the need for, and started to make, new kinds of buildings. Places to live in together, refuges where women can be safe from men's violence, women's centres that are both meeting places and advice centres, places for teaching and learning skills previously inaccessible to women. Women have also been involved in creating places for children which are not formal state institutions, but which respond to the differing needs of children and grown-ups. New buildings need to be evolved which appropriate for these new ways of organizing and living our lives. At present most women's centres and refuges, for instance, are housed in old and badly repaired buildings. Yet buildings help or hinder the development of new ideas in all sorts of subtle ways. The projects described in this chapter are not ideal women's buildings but they are a beginning. Except for Stockwell Health Centre in South London they were all conversions of existing buildings.

People often ask us, 'If women design buildings, will the buildings be different or better?' If women collectively organize, design and make buildings that suit their needs rather than having to fit into what exists already (buildings created by a patriarchal culture) then the buildings are bound to look and feel different. We have to begin by being clear about our needs and not just wanting buildings to *look* different. Conventionally, great stress is put on the external appearance of buildings; this especially undervalues the experience and knowledge of women who use them. Buildings are for the most part just background, not important for what they look like but for how people can live and work in them.

We are trying to enable women to make buildings that are like good clothes. They should do the job they are there for, be useful, comfortable, likeable, and then every now and again they should be just a little bit special.

Designing with women's groups

A new health centre was to be built in Stockwell, an area desperately lacking health facilities, and Stockwell Health Centre group came together through a meeting of community representatives. The group was concerned with the sort of health care the community needed, placing emphasis on preventive medicine, community use

and self-help. Drawings had been made long ago by the local authority architect for the Area Health Authority, and the health centre group very quickly realized that they needed a different kind of building. 'When we were thinking about it, we kept having to look at this horrible plan and feeling irritated with it, so we thought, "Let's have one of our own."'

The Feminist Design Collective became involved at this point. For the health centre group it was important that we were a group of women, rather than one individual, so that we would understand the process of working in groups. They did not want 'an expert coming in and taking over' but wanted to retain control of the ideas for the building as it developed. 'We were feeling insecure enough already. We wanted help expressing our own ideas. Having people around showing how our ideas could be translated into a building made us more confident.'

The group had written a report for the health authority describing the kind of centre they wanted. They saw clearly that the type of building would strongly influence the possibility of implementing their ideas. They knew from experience in local community campaigns that the design of buildings affects women's lives in all sorts of ways. They had also learnt that loose and informal ways of organizing the health centre could be just as effective as the rigid ones imposed by the health authority; their ways of organizing would enable the community to have control of the building.

We all found it extremely difficult to define what a radically different kind of health centre would be like. Two principles emerged, reiterated in endless meetings with the health authority: that the centre should fulfil the needs of the community as a resource, and that it should feel open, inviting and easy to use. These principles were to be demonstrated clearly and simply by a building.

We worked out a design with the health centre group by imagining how the building could be used, discussing which activities could overlap, how the space would affect the way people relate to each other. These discussions suggested various arrangements and we made several different sketch designs. For instance, in one suggestion there was a cafe at the centre of everything, and all other spaces were arranged around it. In another the building was to have a street running through its centre, with all the drop-in facilities along both sides. Both of these ideas had disadvantages, but they were useful because each one expressed spatially an idea we had dis-

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cussed about how the building could be used.

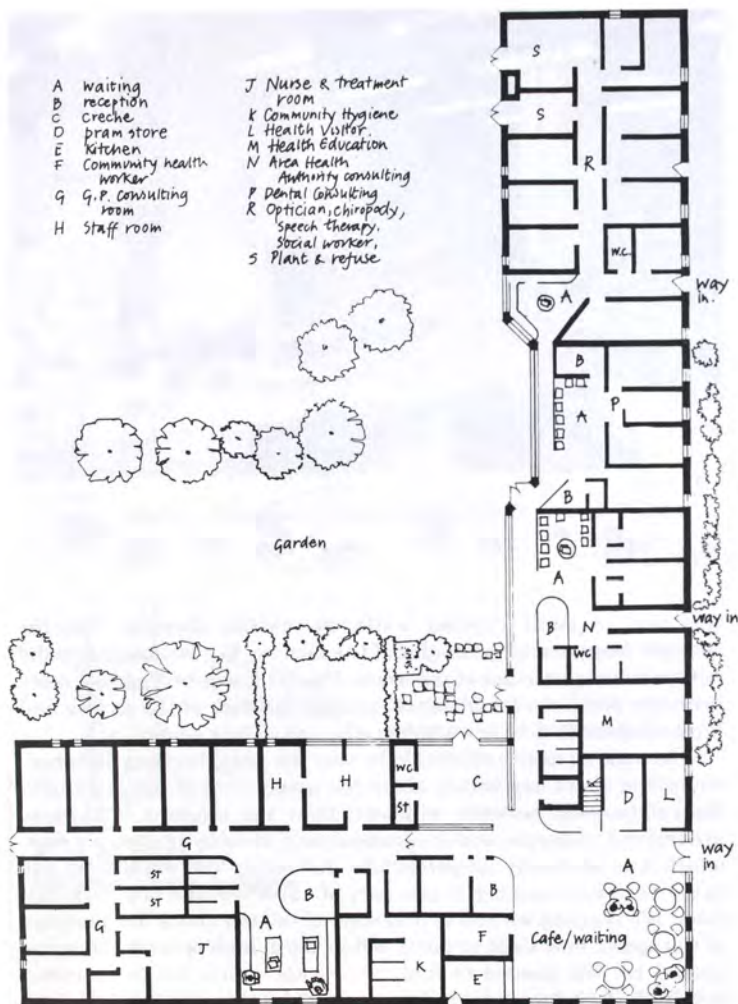
The health centre group discussed these sketches with other local groups and at a public meeting. As well as involving people not centrally working on the campaign, this consultation process also meant that women in the health group explained and discussed the various possibilities and in that process clarified and extended their own ideas.

The final design was L-shaped, with a cafe/meeting place on the corner, and creche and community health worker's office (who is the centre's co-ordinator) behind. The creche opened onto the garden enclosed by the 'L'. One arm of the 'L' along the existing main street housed the 'drop-in' facilities where people could get information and the services related to health care. These were to include chiropody, childcare clinics, osteopathy, as well as rooms for a dentist and optician. The other arm was to contain the more private offices and consulting rooms. The cafe and related spaces were intended for use in the evening as a more general community resource.

The alternative design for Stockwell Health Centre (Illustration 26, page 93) was part of the ammunition the health centre group needed in the struggle for a locally controlled health centre. It was never actually built although some suggestions were incorporated into the local authority designed building. Our job was to discover *with* the group how a health centre, democratically run and open to the community, could be designed, and to help the group convince the Area Health Authority that the community's ideas were realizable.

Lambeth Women's Workshop (Illustration 27, page 94) is a carpentry and joinery teaching workshop in South London. It runs beginners' courses aimed especially at women with children, black, and working-class women. It came into existence through discussions in a Women's Aid group about women's employment. It was organized, designed, and converted by women, and is run by women now. We looked at possible spaces with the Workshop group. The place that finally seemed most appropriate was a unit in a large industrial building. The space chosen had the advantage of being already weatherproof, with good natural lighting and adequate service lifts for bringing up materials; however, it had an inhospitable atmosphere, reminding one of harsh working conditions.

The women on the management committee wanted the workshop space to assert a friendly working atmosphere. One way to do



26. Plan for the Stockwell Health Centre, south London – a proposed design based on community needs.

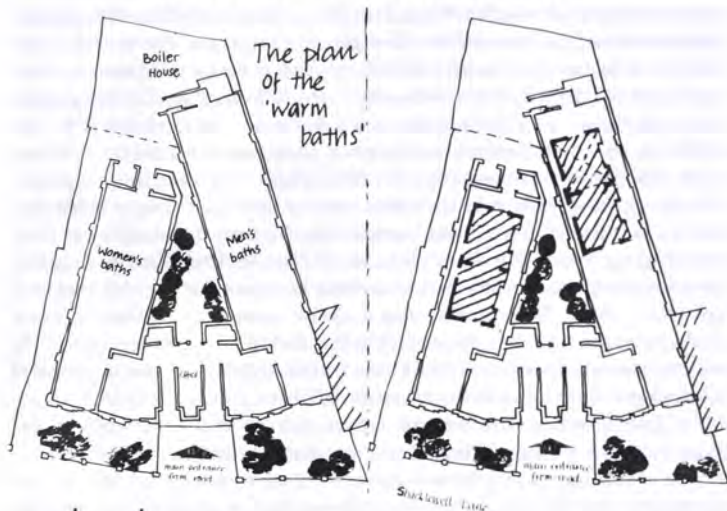


27. Interior of the Lambeth Women's Training Workshop, south London.

this was to make curving walls, to contrast directly with the straight lines and right angles of the factory. But we found this did not make economic use of the space. Finally it was broken into more intimate areas by, for instance, raising the floor of the sitting and kitchen space to give low window sills and ceiling height.

In making decisions about the way the workshop was designed, we talked about aesthetics, about the proportions of the space, and the relationship between windows, light and columns. Architects are trained to discuss and think about such ideas in an abstract way, which was obviously inappropriate, distancing the world from our experience and making it less part of ourselves and our everyday lives. We realized we had to find ways of talking about the qualities of the space: how light or dark, soft or hard, high or wide the space should be. We needed to find a language accessible to everyone involved. We have continued thinking about this. It means starting from feelings about the spaces women know and their everyday experiences in them, and using that information to gradually build up a picture of the new space.

THE SIZE OF THE WARM BATHS
 COMPARED TO 112 GREENWOOD ROAD.



YOU
 ARE IN
 A ROOM
 THIS BIG

28. Drawings that compare the building used by the east London Dalston Children's Centre with its new premises, a former warm bath house.

Plan of present
 Children's Centre building

Dalston Children's Centre was set up by a group of women in Hackney, North London, and provides facilities for women and children which are not normally available. Women with pre-school children can 'drop in' and either be with or leave their children for a few

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hours. It runs daytime classes for women, and children of school age can go there before and after school, to specific classes like music, theatre, swimming, or just to play. The centre also runs classes and play schemes at weekends and in the school holidays. The centre had been housed in various temporary premises for three years. Matrix was involved both in making the present temporary premises usable (they moved in September 1982) and in finding permanent premises and doing the architectural work necessary. The building that will be their permanent premises is an old bath-house, very different from the house the Children's Centre is in at present.

Imagining how a bath-house can be changed into a children's centre is not easy. We tried comparing the new building with their existing building. We drew pictures of how we thought the building could be, and worked with the various groups who use the centre to get their ideas. Matrix also ran a short course for the women who were to be particularly responsible for making design decisions. The course included sessions about the building programme, discussing which decisions have to be made at different times, and about drawings. For instance, the women measured the room we were in and drew it to get an idea of how scale drawings relate to real spaces.

In each of these jobs we have wanted to spend far more time designing the building than is conventionally allowed for: talking, trying out possibilities and finding ways women can become more confident about expressing their ideas about buildings. The more people are involved in the process the more time is needed for everyone's ideas to be expressed and considered seriously.

Drawings and other design tools

We learnt a lot about using drawings through working on Lambeth Women's Workshop. At first we did not realize how difficult it was for women on the management committee to get a feel of the building from the plans, of where the windows and doors and walls were, how big or small the space was. Next we tried drawing proposals with work benches and people in them, which seemed to be even more confusing.

The management committee felt that we were presenting 'fait accompli' choices, 'TV dinner drawings', for instant consumption or rejection. At that point we all started again. This time we used cut

out bits of paper for all the work benches and machinery and walls and windows. Everybody moved the bits of paper around trying out different arrangements and seeing how big things were in relation to each other. This really seemed to work. Women's experiences in different workplaces became relevant and useful and each woman felt involved in the process. We did not necessarily come to conclusions about the design, but everyone understood the problem.

With Stockwell Health Centre the first thing we did was to write on existing plans with big arrows pointing out all the criticisms different women had made. The group involved women with different experiences of health care, as 'patients' and as health workers. The comments varied from descriptions of what it is like being in a waiting room using an electronic call system if you are deaf or blind, to what sort of atmosphere is needed for giving family planning advice to women who are nervous.

Next, we did bubble diagrams showing the relationships between different activities. It was in general discussion that the idea evolved for a cafe around which the building could informally focus. This proved to be a key idea for the alternative scheme. On this first relationship diagram the cafe was drawn in a circle, relating to the other activity places in circles with arrows to them. Immediately the cafe became circular in people's minds. While we had made a distinction between diagram and building shape, others had not. When we later drew a square cafe on a plan, several women were disappointed and we were then able to discuss our different mental pictures. This seems quite a good example of accidental miscommunication which provoked useful ideas by chance, rather than carefully thought-out use of drawings. We were trying to find ways the group could get a feel of manipulating the spaces and take an active part in the process. We found we needed to do drawings that looked as throwaway as possible. We used scrap paper, and unruled lines – anything to overcome the feeling that once something was drawn it could not be changed.

A different experience of using drawings came from working with Balham Food and Book Co-operative, to redesign and build their new shop, an old four-storey house and shop in Balham High Street, South London. They had already been in existence for a year, and wanted to move to a more public shop, and to be able to open a cafe, provide meeting rooms etc. They wanted to work with another co-operative.

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Two women from Matrix were working with the Women's Building Co-op, so we were able to function as a 'design and build' group. The design was evolved with the Balham Food and Book Co-op; drawings and 'a specification of works' (that is the description of work to be done) were done by a combination of designers and builders. Particularly successful were drawings of how the shop would look. These were colour sketches done by women trained in building, not architecture. We wanted to challenge the idea that only designers can imagine what spaces will be like. Builders are used to working three-dimensionally and understand how spaces relate to each other through specific and detailed experience. The drawings did not use complicated or formal drawing techniques and so were very immediate. They made the Balham Food and Book Co-op enthusiastic about the building and it was then much easier to discuss details of the proposal.

When working on Dalston Children's Centre, we started making models which could be taken to pieces and reassembled differently. Lots of different groups use the centre and so we had to find ways of involving as many women as possible in imagining what the building would be like. As well as doing sketches of different parts of



29. *A model, with moveable parts, of the Children's Centre.*

the building converted in different ways, we made a rough cardboard model in which all the parts of the building that could not be changed were fixed and all the rest could be moved around. We found this model very useful during discussions. The relative size and position of spaces could be judged and women could immediately show what they meant when suggesting how the space could be used.

The buildings

Dalston Children's Centre has from the first had a comfortable friendly atmosphere because creating that feeling has been a priority for the group. In discussions about the bath-house conversion, the group expressed concern that a newly converted building with large spaces, although more flexible in use, could feel cold and institutional. It has been important to find ways of making sure that does not happen.

The same issue has been confronted over all the buildings or proposed buildings I have described. They are all in different ways places where people, women especially, can meet and share experiences. This is not their primary function, but the 'client' group in each case emphasized that the place should be welcoming, comfortable and easy to find your way around. Each building involved a quite complex picture of activities and functions that were to remain closely interconnected. For instance, spaces where women could sit and talk had some link with the other activities going on in the building.

The health centre group wanted a cafe instead of a large waiting room, so that people could go to the health centre informally. Also a woman might get reassurance about a child's health, for instance, simply by talking to others in this space.

The entrance to the Lambeth Women's Workshop is an informal space, which includes a sitting area, a kitchen, and an office. Each area is distinct but not separated by walls. The group did not want the workshop space to be completely cut off, but it is noisy and has potentially dangerous machinery in it. Two large windows allow you to see who is in the workshop and watch what they are doing. Without getting in the way, women who are new to the workshop can get a feel of the work that goes on there.

To say that buildings should feel friendly and be able to accommodate different sorts of social exchange may sound curious. It is

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obvious that they should. Yet if you think of the public buildings you know, from hospitals to workplaces, you will find there are few you could describe as either friendly or accommodating. They are intimidating to all except those who control them.

Making buildings where most people can feel at home involves changing who controls buildings. It also involves thinking about qualities that are hard to define and would be considered sappy on an architectural brief but are nonetheless important.

Being an architect

We have learnt that it is important to explain on each job what an architect does, because so much of her work is invisible, unlike the builder's work, for instance. Conventionally, an architect's role is to find out what kind of building is wanted, what money is available and how it can best be used, then what spaces are needed in the building, how people are going to use the building and what it should feel like.

Listening to what people want can be complex, depending on how many people are involved in making decisions about the building. The accumulated information will come in various forms – and it has got to be made into usable information related to the proposed building. This means architects need to know how to organize information. They are taught techniques for doing this which are assumed to be universally applicable.

'Designing' is used to describe thinking out the possible ways of organizing and shaping the building according to all the gathered information. This process is more or less creative depending on the job; often the design decisions being made are quite small in themselves, especially in conversions, and may be limited by all sorts of regulations so that 'designing' may be rather like doing a jig-saw puzzle.

Once the design for the building is agreed, it has to be checked with *all* the authorities who control drainage, fire regulations, structural details, etc. The architect has to produce 'working drawings', rather like maps, which tell the builder where doors and windows and walls are to be. Also there is a written document (either a 'specification of works' or a 'bill of quantities', depending on the size of the job) that describes which materials to use, and other details that cannot be drawn. The builder will use this information to work

out the cost of the building. When building work finally starts this information tells the builder exactly what to do. However, there are always some details that change, or cannot be decided beforehand. The architect is there to make sure the builder has all the necessary information, to ensure that the work is done as specified and to a 'reasonable' standard, and to mediate between the builder and the client. Arguments between them will be either about money or the standard of work, and until such a dispute gets so bad that it is taken to law, the architect's professional role is to say what is a 'reasonable' standard, and to act as a kind of adjudicator between the two parties. It is an ambiguous role because the architect is paid by the client, not the builder.

The whole process of designing and getting a building built is conventionally described as only a technical process. The ideology underlying how information is organized, whom you listen to, what questions you ask, which parts of the process could be open to group involvement – these are not generally discussed by architects or by those who employ them.

Nonetheless, a large part of the architect's job is a technical job and this means the architect does have technical skills. These skills are:

- obtaining information;
- organizing information, being able to juggle spaces and their relationship to each other, either within an existing building or by creating a new one;
- understanding the consequences of practical decisions, the effect on the drainage layout of where the bathroom is positioned, or whether it is possible to knock a wall down without the building collapsing etc.;
- being able to make assessments about what a building will feel and look like, before it exists;
- knowing what is feasible – financially (how much will it cost?), structurally (will it fall down?), functionally (how big does a bathroom have to be?), constructionally (keeping the rain out), environmentally (keeping the heat in);
- knowing enough about building materials and services like plumbing to know what works and how;
- knowing and being able to deal with the building, planning and environmental health regulations;

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- providing information (drawings, writing) for the builders;
- organizing and running the contract between builder and client.

The question for us as feminist architects is, how do we use these skills to further the liberation of women?

Architects, builders and 'clients'

I want to describe our experience of the relationships between architect, 'client' and builders. I am not trying to write a radical critique of the building industry, or to suggest a blueprint for architectural practice. The experiences I am describing have come not from a conscious plan to work in a predetermined way, but from a personal sense of unease about how architects are supposed to work. For me and for others in *Matrix* this attempt to find a more appropriate way of working had led us to learn a building skill, and to work on site as builders or on design-and-build projects. This has given us an understanding of the realities of day-to-day building, but also has made us conscious in very practical ways of how divided the building industry is.

The relationship between architect, client and builder has always been a class relationship. The client has the money, the builder the craft skills, and the architect (from an educated middle-class background) is paid by the client to provide the design and to manage the job. Nowadays the building industry is extremely complex, and management at different levels, from 'foreman' to contract manager, has been created in response to the increased size of building projects, but the fundamental relationships are the same. There is a hierarchy of status within the building industry, with building workers (I have usually called them builders) at the bottom.

The architect (still from a predominantly middle-class background) works either for a private architectural practice or private building firm, or is a salaried employee of the state. It is only on fairly small-scale work that architect and building worker come into direct contact. Nonetheless, when they do, as on the projects I have described, the class and status differences are obvious.

The architectural profession (like other professions) has attempted to define an area of work and gain control of it. It has been aided in this by the growing complexity of legislation, regulations and bureaucracy around building, which have developed as buildings have become technically more complex. Architects and

builders are mutually dependent on each other in the production of buildings, while both are dependent on the client for finance. Examining the relationship between architect, builder and client also involves questioning the way their individual roles are defined. Is it appropriate that we should automatically adopt the profession's idea of the architect as I have described it above? For a while the builder's skills are at least as essential as the architect's, they are not valued in the same way. Architects are paid more than building workers, and they usually have more control over how they do their work.

Our attempts to create a more equal relationship between builder, 'client' and architect are by no means the first. Both women and men have discussed and explored these possibilities in the past and are doing so now. The jobs I have described, however, were thought-provoking because they allowed a group of women designers to work with women on women-centred buildings. They all involved working with sympathetic women 'clients', not all with women builders. Projects have been funded by the state and/or a local authority, rather than directly by the 'client' group. This has made it easier to establish an egalitarian relationship between architects and 'client' group than between architects and women builders. It is our shared politics and feminist intentions that make an equal relationship possible, but this can be very easily undermined when one group assesses the quality and value of the other group's work, and pays them. Relationships between women architects and women builders are much more difficult because to some extent the architect's job always includes supervising the builder's work, and authorizing payment for work completed.

The conventional relationship between architect and builder, where the builders are all men, is an uncomfortable one for most women architects. Whereas middle-class men are socialized to use the rational detachment required of their assigned role as adjudicator between client and builder, women's socialized role is to sympathize with people and to understand and be supportive to the problems of others.

This may mean that women tend to give everybody concerned more thought and the job more care. Women tend to consult and ask for participation in decision-making more than men. However, the architect's role is more stressful for women since it is usually difficult to please both client and builder. It is also a contradictory role.

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Women architects are in an authoritative role, which class differences reinforce, yet as women they do not normally have authority over men. Male architects and builders can overcome class differences to some extent by sharing male camaraderie, but women cannot do this. Thus women architects are isolated by both sex and class. Because of this it has been particularly important for us to be able to work with women builders. The building work for Lambeth Women's Workshop, the temporary premises for Dalston Children's Centre and the shop for Balham Food and Book Co-operative were done by women builders. These projects have brought up more questions than they have answered; however, I think it is worth outlining the questions.

Because of differences in status, class and decision-making roles, and because the contract normally used between client and builder assumes no trust between them, there is usually some degree of tension between architect and builder. If women architects work with women builders within the conventional framework this tension is in direct conflict with the expectations of working in a sisterly way, that is, supportively and co-operatively. How do we find a framework for working together which is based on mutual trust in order to resolve these contradictions?

What do we expect from skill sharing? Four of us in Matrix have learnt building skills in order to work on site. It is far easier to us to do that than it is for builders to learn design skills, because builders are trained in a more ad hoc way than architects, and the training is shorter. It is obviously not possible or desirable that everyone should be able to do everyone else's job, but it is necessary to understand and be able to relate to others' skills. Because architects' skills are less visible than builders', it is even more important that architects' skills should be de-mystified and made clear and accessible. How do we do that?

Because women do not have a history of being builders or architects, every project is like pioneering. Women want it to be really good because they do not have mothers and grandmothers who have done it before, and who prove they will be able to do it too. This question of confidence affects day-to-day work. In many ways women expect more of each other than they do of men, and worry lest others should think they are not doing a good enough job. How do we establish standards of our own, ways that suit our skills and expectations?

The constraints of money and time mean that on site there is continual pressure to keep working. Finding ways of working more equally involves making time to discuss ideas and work out problems. While architects are paid enough to be able to choose to some extent how to spend their time, this is not the case for builders.

There are no obvious answers to these questions. Exploring ways of working together takes place within a divided and exploitative building industry. We tried one way of working more closely together when two women architects worked on site with the Women's Building Co-op. The advantages of this design-and-build process are usually described functionally— it is more efficient to have designers and builders working closely together. Everyone knows more about what is going on, fewer mistakes are made of the kind that happen on conventional sites due to bad communication. These *are* advantages. But it is also important that the status differences between designing and building work are broken down.

The assumptions that go with conventional roles within the building industry are powerful. The definition of jobs, which skills are considered necessary in the creation of buildings and how they are relatively valued and paid for – these are all issues of vital importance. We cannot expect to avoid these hierarchies, except perhaps on particular projects, but neither can we accept them. How women are involved in the building process affects the buildings we create as much as involvement in the design does.

During the time we have been working together as Matrix we have continued to feel that more and more women are exploring the same ideas, wanting to learn how we can mould the physical environment around us.

I have been trying to describe ideas and feelings about women and buildings which I think we are only beginning to understand clearly. It is a process of unravelling all the ways we are conditioned to think about the places around us, and then creating our own ways, our own spaces. It is a tentative, lurching process, sometimes making us feel trapped by endless trivial matters, sometimes giving us feelings of great excitement and discovery. What we have learnt is how much there is to discover, and that it is possible to make spaces that respond to women's needs. If we can become more aware of how the buildings we live and work in relate to how we live, then we can create buildings that work with women's struggle for liberation rather than against it.

8.

Private kitchens, public cooking

Discussions of housing often proceed from a consideration of a list of such basic human needs as clothing, food, warmth and shelter, in which housing is seen to satisfy the last need, that for shelter. However housing is intimately related to another human need, that for food. The meaning and value of meals in our culture and time appear to depend not on an abstract consideration of starch and fats, proteins and vitamins, but upon where they are cooked, by whom, and for whom.

The phrase 'home cooking' carries a meaning far beyond the preparation of meals in a house. It suggests security, nurturance, warmth. Delicious meals might be eaten in a restaurant, if you can afford it, but good food is eaten at home.

In advertising, pictures abound of women/wives serving meals to their brightly expectant families. In this imagery it is not only sex stereotyping that is important but also the notion of service. In television commercials and on hoardings it is clear that the woman/wife is not buying a particular product or cooking a particular dish so that she can have a good meal for herself. Her pleasure is in the rumblings of contentment from her man, and at the delighted expressions on her children's faces. Clearly the meaning of home cooking is associated with the value of a wife and mother's love.

Since the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act boys may now be taught cookery. This has not had the effect of producing TV commercials where men's and women's roles are reversed within the family. Rather a bachelor is seen cooking the latest in convenience foods as a preliminary to the (presumed) seduction of his girlfriend.

Has this particular vision of the domestic idyll always been so generally with us? Before the second world war many upper-class and upper-middle-class women had cooks. Although they had

responsibility for menu planning and style, it was their less fortunate sisters who did the work. Meanwhile many working-class women struggled with appalling housing and employment conditions and it was only with the greatest difficulty that they could produce hot food. Much of the housing stock lacked such basic amenities as hot water and places to store food, such as larders and cold stores.

Since the second world war fitted kitchens have appeared in the houses of working-class owner-occupiers and council tenants. Modern kitchens were promoted as a way of increasing the 'housewifely arts' and, paradoxically, of reducing the housewives' burden. The architect Jane Drew voiced this opinion in an article in *Women's Illustrated* when she said: 'I feel that every woman agrees that household drudgery must be banished after the war and that's why I'm concentrating on kitchens.'¹

However even in 1945 the value of modern kitchens in reducing housework was being questioned. An anonymous 'Housewife', in an article in a professional journal entitled 'Hopes and fears for the kitchen: a straight talk to architects' made the point that:

This super-kitchen idea wants debunking. It has come to us from America, and is presented to our eyes in ultra-smart advertisement illustrations, where there's a place for everything and everything in its place. The surfaces on either side of the sink have no more than a banana or two, a few small china pots, and an electric mixing bowl with a ten-pound look. And presiding over this streamlined work place is a young lady alluringly chic, with three-inch Louis heels, a perfectly sweet little apron, and a coiffure that a Hollywood star might envy. She is never doing anything more onerous than stirring a saucepan in the most ladylike manner.²

The anonymous housewife's fears have been confirmed by research which shows that instead of the numbers of hours spent by housewives doing housework declining since 1945, they have, if anything, increased.³ Much of this housework time is spent in preparing meals, and clearing up after them. This is not to suggest that cooking is itself an unpleasant activity. Many women get great pleasure from some kinds of cookery. But having to plan, shop for, cook and wash up after a main meal every day is hard work. It is an

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assumption in the marriage contract that this work will be the responsibility of women.

It could be argued that the mere provision of a kitchen does not, by itself, force a woman to cook in it. This is obviously true. If all women were to refuse to participate in meal provision except on a reciprocal basis with men, the problem for women of having prime responsibility for domestic work would be solved. To do this would require a revolution in society: not only would work within the house be equally distributed between men and women, but work outside the house as well. Does this mean, then, that the meanings of 'home' and its physical container, the house, cannot be challenged until such a revolution occurs?

Recent feminist history has been concerned to uncover reformist experiments that have made these challenges. Dolores Hayden has discovered a history of feminist designs for cities, districts and houses. Most of these experiments were run for and by middle-class women as purely private ventures. For this reason, this chapter will focus on what was for me, and I am sure for most of my generation, an unknown experiment which took place during the second world war.

Between 1940 and 1950 restaurants or cafeterias known as British Restaurants were run by local authorities on a non-profit-making basis. The restaurants were primarily organized to meet working-class need; commercial establishments catered for the rich. British Restaurants set out to provide well-balanced, nourishing meals in places convenient for people to eat in.

The second world war caused immense disruption to the totality of everyday life. Single women were mobilized and sent off to work where necessary. By June 1940 over 5 million women were in civil employment.⁴ Women who had children or other dependants to look after were urged to do voluntary work. About a million women were active as voluntary workers in civil defence, the WVS, and other organizations.⁵ Family life was further disrupted by the evacuation of children and expectant mothers. Millions were evacuated in 1940, only to return to their dwellings later in the war.

State intervention occurred in every aspect of life. Rationing was introduced in January 1940 for ham, bacon, sugar and butter. It was to continue ever more stringently throughout the war and was not lifted until 1951. The mainspring for the inception of British Restaurants was a desire to ensure that everybody had enough to

eat. Concerned individuals and pressure groups before the war had produced evidence to show that mothers and children in the lowest income groups were undernourished.⁶ These children would have become workers and soldiers on which the war effort had to depend. Lord Woolton, who became Minister for Food, had been deeply affected by this problem earlier in his life. When working as a social worker in Liverpool, his next door neighbour had quietly died of starvation.⁷

Community feeding became an accepted part of government policy. It was announced that:

The development of Community Feeding is settled Government policy, the object of which is to ensure that people who find difficulty for any reason in obtaining food should, as far as possible, have the opportunity of getting at least one hot meal each day. For a variety of reasons, e.g. the rise in the cost of living, the evacuation of womenfolk, the transference of male labour, and the expansion of female labour in industry, real difficulties are being experienced and it is of paramount importance in the interests of public morale and as part of the war effort that everything possible should be done by the Government to meet the problem.⁸

Community feeding was developed by the Ministry of Food in four ways. Regulations were introduced which obliged factories over a certain size to provide canteens. A schools dinner service was initiated. Volunteers for the Women's Voluntary Service took pies to land workers in country areas. A plan for communal feeding centres was formed.

A circular was sent around to local authorities in 1940 which permitted them to set up centres. They were to be called British Restaurants. Churchill had decided on the name, as he thought the term communal feeding centre 'odious' and remarked that it was suggestive of 'communism and the workhouse'.⁹ The first British Restaurant opened in September 1940. As the government offered further assistance in the form of interest free loans for capital expenditure, and a promise to make good losses, the programme gained momentum. By September 1941, a thousand British Restaurants had been opened. The numbers rose until there were 2,000 by 1943.

There was no uniformity in the location of British Restaurants.

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The scale of the experiment was not large. In January 1944 when the number of restaurants was at its peak it was estimated that nearly 2 per cent of the population could have had its main meal served in a British Restaurant.

British Restaurants served 'simple meals at simple prices'.¹⁰ A typical menu in the Elephant and Castle restaurant, London, reported by a Mass Observation reporter, consisted of soup, brown stew, potatoes, cabbage and marmalade pudding. The soup cost 2d, the meat and vegetables 6d and the pudding 2d. The price of a cup of tea was 1½d. An entire meal would have cost one shilling.¹¹ The meals were intended to be of a high nutritional quality and they were two-thirds of the price of the nearest comparable equivalent. Mid-day meals were also served. Some restaurants also served afternoon tea and snacks, and a few provided suppers as well. A small proportion, particularly in the North-east, operated a cash-and-carry service.

The restaurants were self-service, and often housed in makeshift buildings. These might be anything from a school or church hall to the Pitt Club, Cambridge (an exclusive gentleman's club).



30. *Interior of a British Restaurant (Londoner's Meal Service).*

The Ministry of Food developed a special 'Nashcrete' concrete hut, made in a range of four types, which housed approximately 200 of the restaurants.

Efforts were made to make the surroundings in all the restaurants as pleasant as possible. They were clean and simple. In some, wartime propaganda was displayed; others were more cheerful with murals and art exhibitions. In 1942 a professional artist was retained by the Ministry to advise on improving the interiors and kitchens in the restaurants. The British Restaurants run by the London County Council arranged a scheme for lunch-time music.¹²

Private caterers were opposed to the restaurants, which they thought would steal their custom. They also resented the element of state support. Although their complaints were vociferous it is doubtful whether they could have dealt with the needs met by British Restaurants. Even though profit margins allowed by the large industrial caterers tended to be low, their prices were higher and their standards inferior to British Restaurants. In the only instance where a private firm put in a competing bid to open up an establishment instead of a British Restaurant, the Ministry of Food turned down the proposal as inadequate.¹³

The protests of the caterers had two interesting effects. The first was to increase the difficulties in opening a British Restaurant. In each case the Ministry and the local authority had to consider carefully whether private caterers met existing needs, and an assessment had to be made as to whether the restaurant could be self-supporting. The second effect was to discourage the use of voluntary labour in the restaurants, as this would have constituted unfair competition with private industry. An internal Ministry of Food memorandum in 1942 set out the complexities of the situation (and revealed the author's own prejudices):

Whilst we cannot in so many words say that we do not want voluntary help in British Restaurants we should do what we can gently and tactfully to discourage it. This will not be easy because in some areas organisations like the WVS are constantly seeking more outlets and canteen work for some reason or other seems to appeal very much to women.¹⁴

Although women who wanted voluntary work may have wanted to work in canteens, it seems that women who required pay

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for their services were not so keen. One of the difficulties reported in setting up British Restaurants was finding skilled cooks, because many had left catering for the higher wages in other industries. The prices charged by the restaurants were not kept low at the expense of the staff. By the end of the war three-quarters of British Restaurants were paying wages at the nationally agreed union rate for the job.¹⁵

The division of labour by sex operated in classic fashion in the hierarchical organization of British Restaurants. The Divisional Food Officer who was in overall charge of a number of restaurants was usually a man, whereas the restaurant cooks and workers were women. It is possible that some women may have been able to increase their status within the hierarchy by becoming cook-advisers.

The National Council for Social Services brought together two surveys on British Restaurants. One, carried out in Birmingham, found that whilst the customers were predominantly industrial or factory workers, the restaurants served all ages and social groups. There were regional differences in the proportions of the sexes using the establishments. In London almost as many women were customers as men, but in Birmingham the proportion was reversed to two or three times more men than women.¹⁶ The Ministry of Food also noted that whereas in Birmingham only 4 per cent of the customers were housewives, this figure rose to 20 or 30 per cent in rural areas.

It is difficult to account for these differences, but the figures do suggest that the restaurants catered for a variety of need. What does seem important is that while the restaurants took the burden from women by catering for married and single men, they also seemed to serve a significant proportion of women. A remark overheard by a Mass Observation reporter, which was made by a woman in a British Restaurant in Vincent Street, London, illustrates the point: 'And take a woman at home – there's nobody coming in till evening; she can come across here and get a meal and save gas and like as not she wouldn't *have* a proper meal.'¹⁷ For women who were spending long periods of time of their own, and who would be unlikely to take the time and effort to cook a meal for themselves, British Restaurants could provide a unique service.

The National Council for Social Services, who wrote a report in favour of the continuation of British Restaurants after the war, gave

a somewhat rosy view of the egalitarian nature of the establishments.

More often the office worker, the director, the student and the industrial worker are to be found, not only eating at the same table, but discussing the day's news with each other when they reach the cup of tea and cigarette which is often the conclusion of their meal.¹⁸

This idyll is amended by other evidence. For example, a Mass Observation reporter records the example of the woman who, after an initial venture into a British Restaurant, refused to go into one again, because the first time some youths had sat opposite her, made a lot of noise and eaten with their hats on. So some of the genteel middle classes may have been put off by the prospect of a working-class clientele eating with them, in somewhat utilitarian surroundings.

Among the people who lived near a British Restaurant, who could find it, and who ate in it, the restaurants were reasonably popular. A Gallup poll taken in 1944 found that, of their sample, 53 per cent had eaten a meal in a British Restaurant, and 43 per cent said that they would do so again. When asked if British Restaurants should continue after the war, 60 per cent said that they should, 17 per cent said that they should not, and 23 per cent did not know.¹⁹ The comments recorded in Mass Observation's archives are mainly favourable, perhaps the most enthusiastic being: 'And they have to wait for a war to start places like these. Why can't they think of it in peace time?'²⁰

From 1944 onwards the number of British Restaurants declined. The question of whether the restaurants should continue after the war was discussed in newspaper articles, women's organizations, trade union branches and political parties. Opinion was sharply divided between the political parties. The Conservative Minister for Food, J. Hunt Crowley, spoke out against continuation in 1944. He argued that after the war women would leave industry and go back to 'look after their homes'. The Labour Party was in favour of the restaurants, and their 1945 manifesto included a pledge to continue them under democratic control, an idea supported by sections of the labour movement. Their concern was with the service provided to workers in industry. The Electricians' Trade Union recommended: 'This Conference, recognizing the value of

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British Restaurants and Industrial Canteens and the service they have rendered to workers during the war, urges their continuance under democratic control in the post-war period.'

Some women's groups were in favour of the restaurants. The basis of their support was a concern for women's health. The Conservative Women's Reform Group argued for the continuance of the meals service on a voluntary basis because it would free mothers for part of their busy day.²¹ A sub-committee of the Women's Group on Public Welfare proposed state-run restaurants, milk and potato bars, and pubs that served hot food as well as alcohol. This recommendation was made in a report describing in detail the difficulties families experienced living in slum conditions. The anonymous author of the report argued her case from the needs of working-class women.

Humanity must be faced as it is; it is bad psychology to expect all women to be domestic, or even if they are, to make the continual sacrifice of time and energy necessary to compensate for shocking domestic conditions. The lesson of the fish and chip shop is that everyone not only wants, but needs, often imperatively, the possibility of getting meals without having to prepare them.²²

Fear about the effects that a state-run meals service would have on family life often surfaced. For example the National Council for Social Services cited a survey that suggested:

It would seem that if a wife does not cook her husband's main meal she loses an important function in his life; there is a fear that the extension of these restaurants would disrupt family life.²³

The survey did not specify whether this anxiety was voiced by the husband or the wife!

At this time, the sexual division of labour was taken so much for granted that it was inconceivable to propose that men should do their share of the cooking. At the same time wartime experience had suggested that communal eating could be economically advantageous. However in a period of rising divorce and illegitimacy rates, family life was seen as being both fragile and precious. An Army Bureau of Current Affairs bulletin, the voice of the liberal establishment, posed the dilemma raised by British Restaurants:

In wartime most of us eat in community, such as in a mess, a British Restaurant, a canteen, a club. What are the merits of this procedure, and what are the drawbacks? Is it a procedure which should be encouraged after the war, or not? By eating in community we effect economies of large-scale production, we save time, we save labour in the home and in the shops. Against that we sacrifice privacy and we neglect the housewifely arts. But, above all, we lose that singular opportunity which a family gets, by eating together, of building a sort of family *esprit de corps*. And, after all, no matter how much we develop the wide community sense we must remember that the basic social unit is, in fact, the family. What is the answer to this complicated problem?²⁴

Following the Labour Party's general election victory in 1945 several local authorities promoted a parliamentary bill to enable them to set up restaurants. In 1946 the Minister of Food introduced the Civic Restaurants Bill in the House of Commons. Whereas public discussions had centred on the future participation of women in the waged labour force, working-class needs and family life, the parliamentary debate concentrated on fears that local authority restaurants would provide unfair competition with private caterers. It was also felt that if the restaurants were licensed, women with children or without a male escort would feel discouraged from using them.

The need for the restaurants was argued in terms of reducing the burden of housewives' work at home, rather than (as had been proposed at the restaurants' inception) to resolve the contradictions between women's responsibilities for domestic work in the home and the expansion of the female labour force. So the way was left open for the opponents of state provision to argue that housewives' needs were already catered for in the expanded housing programme. A Conservative MP, Sir William Darling, observed:

If His Majesty's Government are building kitchens in which domestic cooking is to be raised to a higher standard, the need for civic restaurants, surely, disappears. Are we engaged in the encouragement of the domestic arts and in the building of kitchens? I suggest it would be a waste of public money to engage, at the same time, in the provision of municipal restaurants. If adequate facilities are supplied to the housewife, with all these

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labour saving devices of which we have heard so much, there would be no need for this collectivised socialised soup kitchen that is being offered to them today.²⁵



31. Interior of a purpose-built London County Council civic restaurant as it opened in 1949.

The Civic Restaurants Act was passed in 1947 and empowered local authorities to set up municipal restaurants provided that there was a need and that the restaurants could be self-supporting. In 1948 770 civic restaurants were in operation; by February 1949 the number had fallen to 678.²⁶ Few, if any, civic restaurants have survived. The last civic restaurant in Sheffield was sold to a private contractor in 1963.²⁷ Nowadays the vestiges of the wartime meals service reside in the school dinners service, and meals-on-wheels and lunch clubs for the elderly.

British Restaurants had been an emblem of 'fair shares' in a time of national stress. In 1951 food rationing was lifted. In the economic boom which followed, it was thought that poverty had been eradicated. Poverty did not become a matter for public concern again until the mid-1960s.

The immediate post-war period was one of compromise and contradiction in state policies towards women. On the one hand women, the last industrial reserve of labour, were to be drawn into employment; on the other, family life was to be supported and the emotional well-being of children ensured. By implication women were meant to be in the home and at work.

At the same time there was a tremendous drive to increase public housing. It would seem likely that the large municipal authorities who were most enthusiastic about continuing civic restaurants were also those most committed to public housing. After the war there was a shortage of building materials and labour as well as an acute lack of housing. Possibly these pressing issues of accommodation took priority over what would have been seen as a risky political experiment.

Furthermore male prejudice cannot be discounted. In a radio broadcast of this period men spoke disparagingly of the 'mass produced belly fodder' of Army life and talked longingly of home-cooked meals.²⁸ Hilary Land has suggested that it is no coincidence that wartime services such as nurseries and restaurants were set up when men were called away to the front and, in their absence, their wives' services were no longer required.²⁹ A choice was posed in the post-war period between anonymous public institutions and a personal service given by women to men within the sanctity of their homes.

British Restaurants could be related to a whole series of proposals for socializing aspects of domestic work. It could be argued that such ventures are merely exercises in fuel economy. Arguments about economy are important because, as Dolores Hayden suggests, the isolated household uses large resources of human labour and time. It has been estimated that women with young children spend a staggering 77 hours a week doing housework.³⁰ Even splitting this weekly amount with men would only bring it down to 36½ hours – a full working week! In an ideal future socialized and mechanized household tasks could release women and men's energies for more stimulating activities.

A problem remains: the 'materialist feminist' tradition which Hayden uncovered did not propose socializing housework by redistributing it to men. Rather the materialist feminists' plans for kitchenless houses, co-operative housekeeping and feminist cities attempted to put housework as 'women's sphere' on a sounder foot-

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ing, independent of men, but not in opposition to them. Proposals for socializing housework after the second world war also appeared with suggestions of communal kitchens, nurseries, play rooms and sewing centres. Elizabeth Wilson points out that these proposals did not conflict with the idea of domestic work as women's work, rather they formed part of a concept of home-making as a female career.³¹

The danger, then, of such communal experiments is that they can represent an alternative strait-jacket for women. The sexual division of labour has not been questioned by them. It has simply been transformed. The conditions of women's work might have changed, but not necessarily for the better. Ann Oakley found that the aspect of their role housewives enjoyed most was their autonomy.³² This aspect might disappear if housework were done communally.

British Restaurants did go some way, however, towards recognizing the value of work women normally do unpaid. That the staff were paid union rates is important. However a state-run meals service could never be a revolutionary endeavour in itself. After all communal restaurants exist in Sweden now, and women there say that they have a long way to go in ending sexual discrimination and oppression.

The most significant aspect of the British Restaurants experiment lay in its challenge to the responsibilities the state which ascribes to women in the marriage contract. British Restaurants took some of the responsibility from wives in servicing their husbands. Furthermore they were a non-coercive service. People could choose to use them or not, and if they did use them they did not lose entitlement to other benefits or services, nor were they stigmatized.

British Restaurants were set up when women were needed to work outside the home, and when family life was disrupted. Since the second world war housing policy has been constructed around the premise that women do unpaid domestic work in the home, and are dependent upon a male breadwinner. However an increasing number of married women have been drawn into the waged labour force, so that now approximately half of all married women are in waged employment. Moreover the 'ideal' family of male breadwinner, dependent wife and children now forms a minority of households. There are different types of household – single people, old age pensioners, single parents, couples in waged work – none of whom have a full-time wife to service them.

Cooking for one person, or two, can not only be expensive and inconvenient, but can also be a lonely affair. British Restaurants aimed to provide a homely, friendly environment. The options for single people today who want to eat outside their homes are restricted. The choice tends to lie between cafes of the 'greasy spoon' variety, and soulless fast-food places which, in any case, project themselves at a family market.

That a need for cheap hot food cooked outside the home exists is evidenced by the growth in fast-food take-away services. The quality of the food provided by these private caterers is questionable, particularly if regarded as a staple part of a diet, and not a supplement to it. In the current recession nutritional problems are resurfacing. There are reports of children with rickets, and of undernourished pregnant women on supplementary benefit. The problem of poverty remains, and is, if anything, getting worse.

The assumptions behind state policies towards housing, welfare benefits and health are now being criticized by feminists and socialists. The British Restaurants experiment combined an approach to issues of poverty and malnutrition with an implicit challenge to women's unpaid labour in the home. As such, the experiment could, to use a well-worn cliché, provide us with food for thought.

9.

House and home

How does the experience of bringing up a baby change women's attitudes to their homes? Are there any particular requirements of which housing policy makers, designers and architects should be aware? What follows is a report of conversations with several women friends touching on various issues connected with life in the home. It draws on our experiences and talks about the day-to-day details of our lives with young children. These details and feelings may appear trivial, routine and unworthy of examination and they therefore become invisible and invalid.

That they appear so may be a reflection of the way the world of the baby seems to shrink to a size that can be accommodated by an infant constantly facing new experiences, watched by the mother with excitement and pleasure, as it acquires recognition of people and places. The world shrinks too for the mother, forced to adapt herself to the baby's pace. However, the invalidation of the mother's experiences is part of the way society ignores the situation of women with young children – an extension of its lack of concern for the needs of women generally.

The house as a type of building is particularly interesting for the richness of associations embodied in what often appear to be straightforward solutions to mundane requirements. Perhaps for this reason, talking about our homes and our feelings round the idea of 'home' and 'the family' is extremely personal and can be very difficult and threatening. Often we feel guilty and defensive. Sometimes we do not see any alternative to what we've got. Can we visualize a new furniture arrangement? Can we imagine a household set-up beyond our current one? Are our homes really mirrors of our inner personalities? Should we keep them like our mothers would?

Because the ideas discussed here are personal and exploratory,

I found that it was necessary to talk to friends, and easier to have long conversations, rather than conducting a series of interviews. So I talked with friends including several architects who were trained to visualize buildings and spaces and can imagine using their homes in different ways. All of us are middle-class professional women living in converted nineteenth-century houses in central London. We are a privileged group with an unusual degree of control over our environment. Three of us are single parents. All of us work outside the home in professional jobs and therefore have relinquished sole care of our children. The group is hardly a representative sample. The aim was not to investigate a statistical norm but to spark off a different way of thinking about our homes. I am taking it as read that many women bring up children in conditions of grinding poverty and extreme hardship, with no chance to choose and control their environment. My intention is not to go over this ground but rather to recount the equally valid experiences of some women who have been able to be conscious of their changing requirements.

The women quoted in this chapter are:

Alexi, who has a young baby, Andre, is an architect teaching and researching in architecture and planning, and is married to Michael. They live in a three-storey terrace house.

Linda, a single parent with a 3-year-old daughter, Ellie, who at the time was working part-time as an architect in a local authority. They live in a ground-floor flat.

Caroline, also a single parent, with a 5-month-old son, Barney. She is a supply teacher for English as a second language, and they live in a large, communal house of 12 people, including,

Sue, who has a 2-year-old son, Ossie, and was about to have her second child. She is an archaeologist and married to Mike.

Val, who has a 14-year-old son, Jud, and a 6-year-old daughter, Jess. She is a modeller and makes models for films. She lives in the top three floors of a terrace house. Her marriage had broken up about two years before the conversations.

Benedicte, the author, has a 3-year-old son, Kim, and a 6-month-old daughter, Kate, and works full-time as an architect in local government. They live with the father, Mike, and Ann, who looks after the children when Benedicte and Mike are out at work, in the top three floors of a terrace house.

The comments in this chapter should be seen against a cultural background of the privatization of childcare and housework where

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women almost always carry the real responsibility for young children, for even communal households are merely individual attempts to find an alternative way of life, like islands in an ocean of nuclear families.

A prisoner in her own home

After the birth of a baby, many women find themselves feeling isolated and depressed, perhaps because of the interruption in a routine of going out of the house to work, exacerbated by the physical difficulties of getting about with the new-born baby. The mother is terribly bound up in the young baby, and her focus is changed from a range of relationships and experiences to a concentrated one-to-one intimacy with the baby.

Being pregnant is like being old and infirm; now after the birth I feel like I'm disabled, trying to get around loaded down with baby, pram, nappy bag, change of clothes, bottles etc. etc.

There are lots of places I avoid going to now I've a young child. When he was a baby there was a problem about breastfeeding and changing nappies, then I was worried that he'd throw a tantrum, and now there's the awkwardness of his being just out of nappies but every now and then being in urgent need of a toilet.

Public transport is excellent as far as getting to work goes – a train journey and it's only 20 minutes door to door – but for other trips, well, I need the car for visiting friends as I don't have very many friends locally and without a car it would entail a struggle with British Rail, tube and bus which would have been virtually impossible when Ellie was little. I park the car as close outside the flat as possible.

Even women who can drive, have easy access to a car, and recognize that the car allows them to travel with the baby, feel reluctant to drive on their own.

I'm terrified she'll wake up and cry and I can't stand that.

There is the added dimension of psychological distance. We are not just talking about the time required to ferry babies about, nor about the problem of work and efficiency in a speedy culture, though clearly these are real problems, but about increased tensions in

getting to the place of work, separation from the child, and childcare arrangements.

Work is a 20-minute cycle ride away. But now if I have to take Andre with me I have to use the car and struggle with rush-hour traffic and mess about finding somewhere to park. If I'm leaving him behind I'm also very conscious of how long it takes to get to work as I'm constantly aware that 5 hours' childcare by someone else equals only 3½ hours of work by me at the most. So psychologically work is actually a lot further away now.

The design of a house can positively discourage people from attempting to go out. The ideal arrangement is a front door at pavement level with a large and warm hall where a pram, and later a tri-cycle, can be kept.

Our hall is particularly narrow, so I knew a normal pram was out of the question and I bought one of those pram-buggies, and when Kim was very tiny he spent most evenings with us in the kitchen while we cooked and ate and we'd have the pram set up and take it in turns rocking it with one foot so we'd have some peace and quiet while we ate. When I wanted to go out I would have to 1) take the bouncing chair down to the hall, 2) come upstairs to the kitchen (two flights) and dress Kim in his outdoor clothes and take him down and strap him in the chair, 3) go upstairs and dismantle the pram and take the buggy wheels down to the hall, 4) go upstairs and carry the carry-cot and blankets down to the hall (very difficult to manoeuvre this quite heavy object down the narrow stairs), 5) take the buggy wheels down the steep front steps to the pavement and set them up, 6) take the carry-cot down to the pavement and fix it to the wheels, shouting through the open front door to Kim so he didn't feel abandoned, 7) rush in and get Kim (hoping no one was wheeling the pram away) and carry him down the front steps and put him in the pram and at last set out on our expedition.

What kind of house do I want?

It is a truism to say that people have brought up children in all sorts of houses, but how has the use of the spaces altered as people's lifestyles have undergone the violent changes involved in having children? How have people, with apparent ease, adapted their approach and their routines to allow for the quirks of their homes?

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I live in a garden flat in what looks like a two-storey house; in fact there are two flats, one above the other. I have changed the use of the rooms several times since Ellie was born. For six months she slept in my bedroom, then I moved her into my dressing room and put my clothes in what had been the junk room. Then, after she was one year old, we did a complete turn around and my bedroom, which looks onto the back garden, became the living room and the old living room at the front of the house became my bedroom with the room next to it becoming officially Ellie's room. The idea is that that's large enough to be a playroom too and I switched my bedroom so that I could be sure of hearing her in the night.

The access to the back garden is through the kitchen unfortunately, because it's all too narrow for her to rush in and out with toys. I'd like to make the living room and dining room one space with a door to the garden from it.

The flat is almost on the street. There are three steepish steps to the pavement which was a bit of a struggle with the pram. Also I stored the pram under the stairs and always fell over it; now Ellie's in a buggy and that's OK. Ellie's outdoor clothes are put away in the cupboard half-way down the corridor, so although the hall is long and narrow it's not impossible.

But except for switching the use of the rooms around I haven't had to make any major changes, and the flat has worked really well. We do have central heating and as Ellie was born during a very cold spring I kept the heating on very high and constantly blasting away for the first three or four weeks. Also I bought a dimmer switch so I could turn the light down low in the bedroom when she was asleep, but that's all the adaptations I made.

Our house is a three-storey terrace house which opens at the front straight onto the street and goes straight through to the garden at the back.

We haven't made any alterations to the house since having Andre, rather we've adapted existing arrangements in a very small way. For instance in the bedroom I've adjusted my bedside light to reflect on the wall and give a soft diffused light which is very calm and restful for feeding (though not so good for reading!). We now have the radiator on in the bedroom so that I can feed at night naked and it's also warm enough to change him in a relaxed way. I bought a small electric blow heater so I can plug it in in any room we want to be in and I can leave him to kick without his nappy.

The kitchen used to be the centre of the house but it isn't anymore, partly because as Andre doesn't eat solids yet he doesn't eat in there and as it's a cool room he can't be left to kick. In fact it's the bathroom, which contains the washing machine and tumble dryer, which feels like the centre of the house now.

For Linda and Alexi then, the arrival of their babies did not cause any outbreak of complaints against their homes; if anything, the reverse.

I actually appreciate this flat more now with Ellie. It's very convenient being on one level and the fact that we're so near the shops and don't have to cross any major roads to get to them is excellent.

It is worth noting that Linda's flat has the extra flexibility that decent-sized rooms on one level provide. For instance she has four rooms, any one of which could be used as a living room. Alexi's house on the other hand has the more traditional arrangement of living rooms on the ground opening onto the garden with bedrooms upstairs.

In the non-traditional, communal house too there were no direct complaints about the house plan:

We live in a communal household – basically it's two adjacent terrace houses made into one large one. There's now a total of 12 rooms with two bathrooms, three WCs and the communal kitchen and 'Big Room' where we sit and also eat.

Mike and I share two rooms which open into each other and Ossie has a room upstairs. The idea in this house is that each person, child or adult, has their own room though a couple might share both rooms or have a separate room each.

There are difficulties about having children in a shared house; for example, there's no peaceful teatime because I feel I have to quickly clear up the mess before the others get back from work. Also because the house is big and Ossie's room is upstairs from ours, we have to use a baby alarm, but now Caroline's had Barney the two alarms seem to cut each other out.

This household had been through some major policy changes in the previous year.

There's no longer any income sharing. Everyone has to contribute at the same fixed rate. Also the house has given up shared childcare so

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now it's the total responsibility of the parent or parents. So although it's a wonderful place to have a baby, being clean, warm, spacious and with a garden, I feel in a way very much on my own even though Sue's been a fantastic help both during pregnancy and at the birth.

In fact, it emerged that slight alterations in the form of the plan, to handle the boundary between public and private space more subtly, would have helped the two mothers significantly:

In addition to the Big Room, we're making the small room downstairs into a communal but child-free and quiet room and I think this will help because at the moment it's impossible to feel very relaxed about having Barney or even his little bouncing chair out in the evening. And when I went into mixed feeding because my milk supply was running low, I had to go through the Big Room to the kitchen to heat the bottle up and I felt everyone was watching me and witnessing my inadequacy.

For Val, having children marked a drastic change in her life for, unlike the rest of us, she and Julian found they had to move after they had their first child. Eventually they bought a terraced house and spent the next 12 years adapting it to meet their changing needs.

After a year with the baby in a cockroach and mouse infested basement, we bought this house. There were some sitting tenants and we had the ground floor with a big room at the front and a largish bedroom at the back and a big extension at the rear with a small sitting room and kitchen. The house was neat and in good condition but awkwardly planned. We shared a bathroom with upstairs.

After a year we altered the plan. We made an opening between the front sitting room and the back room which became the kitchen/dining room with a door onto the garden. We put in a small bathroom in the back extension and the rest of it was our bedroom with a space behind the cupboard for Jud. It was very compact, and good for having lots of people in for meetings. It worked very well while we just had Jud but when he was 5 or 6 it became really overcrowded. It didn't bother me having him sleep in our bedroom, but he needed his own room and missed out because he didn't get that till he was 8.

When Jess was born we shifted around. The elderly tenants couldn't manage the stairs well any more, so they moved down to the ground floor but didn't want the back extension so that room is now

rented out to someone else and he has use of the garden and comes upstairs and shares the kitchen and bath. We put in a spiral staircase from upstairs to the garden but don't use it much.

When we moved upstairs the relationship between Julian and me had become hairy and decisions about the plans for the house were important for how we were going to live. We needed a plan we could all live in together, but it had to be adaptable in case I was to be on my own with the kids and, as I would have to work, I would need a studio in the house; so I reckoned we needed a kitchen and a living room and then a room for each of us.

At this stage I wanted space and privacy and was totally opposed to the open plan. My room was the studio in the back extension and our bedroom at the top was nominally Julian's room. But we had a big fight over dividing one of the big rooms so that the children had a room each.

My own experience has been that the way various rooms relate to each other is critical, that the ideal arrangement changes with the advent of the baby, as it grows up, and that it continues to change as the number of children alters.

We had lived in this house quite a long time, five years, before having Kim. When we moved in we were literally camping, carrying water up the stairs, boiling kettles and scrounging baths off friends. I used to be very excited about the house and all the work we were doing converting it. I liked learning how to lay bricks and what it felt like physically to break up a 3-inch concrete slab in the backyard. I found it amazing that we could change the shape and the feel of the rooms with our own hands.

Also we were very involved outside the house with work, trade union meetings, politics. If we were at home we were either working, cooking big meals for friends or sleeping. I have never been house-proud either in the sense of working very hard to sustain an image of myself through my home nor of being concerned about what the house represented in terms of investment, comfort, stability.

When we were expecting Kim people shook their heads and said how difficult it would be. The piles of crockery on open shelves were predicted for early smashing. The stairs were pronounced a potential danger. The lack of central heating would lead to miserable night feeds and bouts of coughs and colds. And although we – and the children – are surviving (and it gives me quite a lot of pleasure to know

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we can get by) I think my attitude to the house has changed a lot since having children. This is partly a result of spending more time at home and therefore being forced to be aware of discomforts and inconveniences. But it is also because my needs have changed, both in terms of simple functional requirements (Is there room for the baby's cot plus extra furniture? Can I clean the floor adequately after the baby has thrown up? Where can I bathe the new-born?) and also in terms of some newly conscious emotional desires.

Our maisonette is at the top of a narrow Victorian terrace house. There are only two rooms on each floor with a small back extension which contains the utility room and spare bathroom on the half landings. We have five rooms, all thought of as quite separate. We decided to make all the rooms feel very private so when we rebuilt the staircase we made a solid wall up the middle instead of banisters which does make each landing feel more cut off. Also for privacy, because we tended to share our place with someone and because we often had friends coming to stay for quite long periods, we decided to separate our bedroom from the spare bedroom rather than having the traditional grouping of all the bedrooms, so that we could all listen to music or make love or quarrel in our rooms without feeling too conscious of disturbing someone else, so the spare room and our bedroom are separated by an intermediate floor containing the study.

But this arrangement is not so good when there are young children around. As there are no adjacent bedrooms the study had to become the nursery, and as it is a steep flight of stairs from our bedroom, I was terrified I wouldn't hear Kim if he cried, so, even armed with a baby alarm, it took me more than four months before I dared move Kim out of our bedroom. And as he was a light sleeper, this created a lot of tension.

I was concerned to be in the room when Kim woke (nervous first-time mother) so I spent a lot of time sitting on the bedroom floor trying to work or attempting to carry on a quiet phone conversation. As I only felt happy at leaving him when he was well and truly asleep I think I often picked him up to take him downstairs with me when he was probably just on the verge of falling asleep. I think now if we'd had rooms which opened into each other more so that I could have been in the same space as Kim but not too near him, he might have had the amount of sleep he needed and I might have had more time to myself.

Interestingly enough, with Kate I had a different sort of difficulty.

She is an incredibly relaxed baby and could go to sleep anywhere. We started off with a Moses basket in the kitchen but Kim and his friend Joseph got too excited standing on chairs and trying to tip over the basket to get a better view. So, I sort of retreated upstairs with her and had some lovely sunny November days up there while Kim felt more and more left out.

I think if there were more spaces, more easily linked together, it would be possible for Kim to be not too close to Kate without actually rejecting her by going into another room and shutting the door. (This is made worse by the fact that, for fire escape reasons, all our doors have to be self-closing.) And if we had more bedrooms closer together we'd have been able to put Kate in her own room and then Kim probably wouldn't have gone through his recent phase of refusing to go to bed in his room and insisting on sleeping with us.

The other interesting point is our kitchen, which consists of work-tops made of doors on bricks and with open shelving – it's been temporary for years and in fact has gone through three different metamorphoses. It is certainly not child-proof. What is fascinating is that Kim and Joseph have always played with the crockery as well as the pots and pans and as a result have learnt how to handle things carefully.

The flights of steep stairs did rather shock one of the domiciliary midwives and I think having to get me to go down three flights of stairs to answer the doorbell put off some neighbours from dropping in. However I do feel the exercise was rather a good thing as after both labours I felt fine and quite energetic and, once I'd got confident about holding Kim, negotiating the stairs didn't seem dangerous any more.

Once Kim started to crawl though, another danger appeared. We contemplated getting stair gates (five would have been needed) and decided it would actually be safer to teach him to crawl up and down himself. It was a very slow and laborious process and it was tempting most of the time to just pick him up and carry him but it was amazing how early – 9 months – he learnt to cope.

I am quite sure that the changes in preferred room relationships continue until the children are grown up and leave home. Should we be pressing then for dwellings to be designed to fit the needs of a family's life at a particular moment, with easy opportunity to move house? Or do we look for designs for homes which allow enough elbow-room for some degree of flexibility? What are the additional costs of this and who pays?

Fridges, freezers and other magic

Babies seem to bring with them the need for a battery of equipment, all of which requires storage space and a suitable place to use it. Toys aside, there are cloths and piles of nappies, changing mats, cots, plastic baths, bottles and sterilizing tanks (even breast-fed babies might want a suck of water) and the dustbin seems to have to be twice as big as before. Shops are full of specialized bits of equipment, all requiring outlays of money. But many prospective parents manage to avoid purchasing huge quantities of things, and not just for reasons of economy.

I suppose I was superstitious so I didn't buy any of the layette. I was given some hand-me-downs by friends and the family baby cot and plastic bath and we went off and bought some terry nappies in a sale. I felt quite adamant that I wouldn't buy all these plastic toys but took great pleasure in rigging up bits of mobiles from coloured paper, corks and things and producing pots and wooden spoons instead of toy drums. Likewise you don't really need a huge sterilizing tank – a large plastic yoghurt carton and lid will do for a small bottle.

As far as normal household electrical equipment goes there were no great changes in attitude:

The fridge was useful as it always has been but I discovered the freezer was really good for storing expressed milk and later for ice-cube sized lumps of pureed food when solids were started. Also as I'm too tired to do much cooking in the evenings, I take a cooked dish out of the freezer and heat it up.

But the washing machine was generally considered essential.

I can't imagine how people manage without a washing machine if they've got a baby. Well, I know you can because I've got a friend who didn't have a machine and washed all her first baby's clothes by hand and she said it was OK because you only had to soak and rinse out six nappies a day. So I guess she stuck to a four-hour interval between changing nappies but I know I can get through 12 a day sometimes. Anyway, it's not just the nappies – there are all the clothes which have been sicked on or leaked on and the bedding and my clothes as well.

Both the washing machine and tumble dryer are invaluable. They were really liberating even before having kids and more so after. It's very good to be able to rely on the clothes being washed, and dry,

ready for re-use, regardless of the vagaries of the weather, and it's essential if there's a run on nappies. Also it saves a lot of sheer physical work.

On a larger scale, the daily routine of filling nappy buckets and putting nappies in the washing machine meant that having the bathroom in a central place in the house and near the washing machine simplified the job. And bathrooms that were spacious and warm were much appreciated.

The top bathroom is very good as it's got a heater with a wide top over it and I can put him on it on a double towel and he can kick about while I get dressed because I know he won't fall off.

If there were enough room in the bathroom for a changing mat and the nappy bucket, I could sluice the nappy in the loo and put it straight into the sterilizing solution and then wash my hands instead of trailing about from the bedroom to the loo and back to the bucket with dripping nappies and dirty bums and hands.

Chained to the sink: attitudes to housework

Among the people I spoke to there was great variation in arrangements for coping with the housework. What difference does a young child make besides creating more chores to be done in less time by a rather tired parent?

The key thing to emerge was a feeling of reduced control over one's own time (and therefore the need to find simpler and quicker ways of achieving ends) and over one's environment (and hence a tendency to become more anxious about untidiness).

The shopping I do in one go, usually on Friday night or Saturday morning at Sainsbury's with Ellie and in the car. Shopping used to be a strain in case Ellie had a tantrum in the shop. When Ellie was tiny I used the sling; once she could sit up I put her in the front of the trolley. At Putney there's a car-park attached and you can take the trolley to the car – this really determines where I shop now. But shopping has become a chore.

I used to do house maintenance and decorating myself but since Ellie I've paid people to come and do some decorating. Short jobs such as laying lino or putting up light fittings I can still do myself in the evenings or when Ellie's at Jeanne's. I used to like DIY and regret I can't do more of it now.

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I do all the cooking, mainly on Saturdays and Sundays. I enjoy cooking and would really like more time in the evenings to do it. I miss it. But the washing up tends to pile up. These days I do pretty basic English food and lots of spaghetti. The emphasis now is on speed and simplicity. Sometimes I do a more complicated meal and get Ellie involved – which of course takes longer! We use the dining table and that gets filthy and the carpet gets covered.

One of us goes on Saturday and buys crates of vegetables and fruit from the cash and carry. Then we do a bulk cook-in and freeze it all. There's a cool store at the back of the kitchen to keep the fresh fruit in.

I think ironing is a waste of time but I don't mind laundry, cleaning and shopping. In fact, I've discovered I quite enjoy the local shops and exploring my neighbourhood and also now with Andre I've a tendency to use the odd free moments for housework and feel pleased because I can achieve something in a short time.

I'm bad at housework and hate it but if anything I hate other people's mess more. Probably it's a question of not being in control of it. It's the difference between calm and panic – it's a real physical thing but only in regard to my own house – I don't care in other people's houses.

As I get older I manage to keep one room reasonable and I try to keep it as empty as possible.

Central heating is a boon and also fitted carpets which are warm, quiet, easy to clean and a unifying thing.

With Kim's arrival I started to worry about the dust which would be bad for his lungs. I suppose I did get more concerned with cleanliness especially when he started on solids and I began for the first time to be worried about the make-shift nature of our kitchen and the difficulty of cleaning it properly. We had a kind of matting on the floor and when Kim started feeding himself and dropping bits of food on the matting, it was impossible. I'm now very keen to build the proper kitchen with cupboards with doors and lots of easy clean surfaces.

The other aspect is my attitude to mess and untidiness as opposed to dirt. I remember when Kim was just a couple of weeks old Mike came back from work one evening to be greeted by a barrage of fury because the house was a mess, the dishes hadn't been done the night before, the nappies hadn't been washed and the place was in chaos. He was quite surprised. We always had lived in chaos so what was new? I realized then that what was new was that I no longer had com-

plete control of my time: with a very new baby (and a first one at that) I felt I had to be available whenever needed so that I couldn't just put aside two hours to blitz the mess when it got more than I could bear and I realized then that what was upsetting me was not the mess but my lack of control over my time.

Castles in the air

My ideal would be to live in the country and have a garden if my kids were still small and I was living on my own with them. But I'm happy with what I've got now because to tell the truth I can't envisage an alternative.

I don't believe in Ideals.

I would like to be very centrally located in London and lack of money would certainly prevent the achievement of the location if not the rest! The situation would be in an urban but green area with mature trees around, preferably close to a square or park. Also very close to shops and the tube with car-parking not too difficult.

I'd like a front garden and a really large back garden not too overlooked. I should like a ground floor flat – I like single-level living especially with a child. It should have a very large living room with a high ceiling and a dining/kitchen although if it's really huge enough I'd like a single living/dining/kitchen space with direct access to the garden. Then there'd be a good sized bedroom for me and the same for Ellie plus a study and a spare bedroom. Lots of built in storage. And central heating is essential.

I think with young kids it's good to have one really large room with a floor that can be mopped and cleaned, with space for them to run up and down or ride their tricycles or little cars, where they can play with water, paints or play dough and leave out some of their toys. Also the traditional disposition of bedrooms makes sense with your children. However when they get older and more independent, the ability for the parents to have some privacy from the kids and vice versa is important.

Though I'd never previously missed having a garden, I now feel it's very useful with young children – space for running, shouting, bicycles; being able to wheel tiny babies outside to sleep in the fresh air; and of course the introduction to bugs, plants and flowers.

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Does this suggest that the ideal is a suburban semi-detached house with the happy nuclear family getting on with its own affairs? These middle-class professional women living in London are naturally aware of lack of green space, but implicit in the way each of us had chosen to organize our lives and our childcare was a need to step outside the traditional pattern of mother at home with children while father goes out to work – a tradition now no longer the norm. All of us are aware of isolation and loneliness and how they are affected by arrangement of space within a house and to the location of the house itself:

My ideal is next door houses, with neighbours who are friends, with kids, and through doors in the living rooms and a shared garden. And I would like my parents and sisters to be at walking distance, or even a short driving distance away.

I think with young children it's almost impossible not to feel immobilized and isolated in the home. Fortunately a few friends live near enough so that I could ask them to pop in for a cup of tea or a very simple supper – I kept thinking how nice it'd be to have a really huge house with lots of friends.

In fact, though, I think everyone needs privacy too and especially now I have young children I wouldn't like to live in a totally communal house. I need the opportunity and the space to be private both with the kids and with Mike. So my ideal would be a grouping of fairly private houses and flats of different sizes (for people with and without children) with several communal facilities: a common kitchen and dining room, a library, possibly some studies and studios, a nursery, a laundry – where the communal kitchen and nursery would each be run professionally. The whole thing would be quite big, say about 30 adults. The problem is the whole situation would require a lot of surplus money first to finance the capital cost of building the individual homes plus the communal bits and then to finance the running of the communal services.

Postscript

Two parallel strands emerged. Firstly, there are real factors in the size and relationship of rooms in a dwelling that can make life with a young child more or less relaxed, more or less easy, at the emotionally taxing period when a new mother might be trying to convince

herself that she is adequate. Secondly, these physical constraints are overridden by less tangible but more fundamental issues.

I felt upset after hearing about your really pleasant Saturday shopping expeditions en famille and I realized that what upset me is not that I can't shop in the same way because of managing with a young child on my own, but that I am on my own and don't have someone to go shopping with.

I have a strange disembodied feeling being on maternity leave as if I've no business round here. I bump into neighbours in the street and that's nice but it's a bit artificial as I know I'll soon be back at work and away from this neighbourhood for a whole day.

This separation between home and work goes much deeper than the physical distance between the two domains:

I'm pleased to be back at work. I miss the children and I get exhausted but I'm glad to be doing my own thing again. And I mean just that: doing my own thing, being myself.

This society does not properly cater for the needs of women with small children. The lack of provision for babies and toddlers in shopping centres, restaurants, art galleries, theatres and pubs shows the physical aspect of this problem. The lack of tolerance of babies and toddlers in these public places is another dimension of the problem, and this other dimension caused this group of women to discover difficulties and emotions within us, attitudes that surprised us.

It may be that the nuclear family is the most 'economical' way for capitalist society to reproduce itself. And in a privatized society the suburban semi is probably the most 'efficient' solution for housing the nuclear family, for its plan, the relationship to the garden and access by car, and for a reasonable feeling of spaciousness. But leaving aside the costs of this form of housing, it does not fulfil the needs of the woman – the mother, lonely and hampered in getting about – to develop her own interests. Modern Britain pays lip service to the importance of mothering but does not cherish its mothers.

It is only when the activities of bringing up children and running the home become socialized that the fundamental problems of loneliness and alienation, which often accompany responsibility for young children, will begin to be overcome. Although realignment of rooms in a house might improve life for mothers with young chil-

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dren, it is often hard to disentangle the problem of use of space in a house from that of attitudes of the household towards children. These attitudes may need to be reassessed. Similarly, the attitude of one family to another may need to be radically changed. In the meantime designers, administrators and builders can merely ameliorate many of the physical difficulties by the thoughtful and sensitive production of safe houses.

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