Anti-work architecture: domestic labour, speculative design, and automated plenty

Research Article

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Anti-Work Architecture: Domestic Labour, Speculative Design, and Automated Plenty

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Abstract: This article presents a partial history of visions of technodomesticity in the global north, concentrating on dwellings which seek to problematize, challenge, or reorganize unpaid household labour. It is structured around three case studies, primarily drawn from the United States in the 1950s and 1960s: the single-family suburban dream house, the bachelor pad, and the fully automated future home. While these chosen examples may lend us certain resources for thinking about how best to mitigate the challenges of reproductive labour via living arrangements, they also possess a number of clear drawbacks or limitations. The article will argue that contesting these imaginaries (as much as learning from them) is likely to prove necessary in unpicking the connections between an inequitable distribution of unpaid intrafamilial domestic labour and the house itself as both a concrete site and an ideological formation – necessary, that is to say, in terms of building a meaningfully feminist conception of anti-work architecture.

Keywords: social reproduction, domestic labour, technofeminism, theories of work, anti-work politics, domestic architecture

1 Introduction

The domestic sphere has, for too long, been denuded of a sense of political opportunity. Despite a rich heritage of domestic design and community planning, contemporary feminists in the Anglosphere have largely come to accept the "spatial design of the home … as an inevitable part of domestic life."[1] More generally, the single-family residence is not only something to which people feel resigned, but an aspirational norm – an achievement to be celebrated and strived for. Beyond localized pockets of determined experimentation, this version of the home dominates the cultural imagination. Whether one embraces it wholeheartedly or attempts to resist it, the conventional family home still shapes the possibility spaces of our intimate lives. I call this state of affairs *domestic realism*[2] – a riff on Mark Fisher's concept of capitalist realism, which he famously describes as "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it."[3] Domestic realism names the phenomenon whereby the isolated dwelling (and the privatization of household labour that comes along with it) becomes so accepted and commonplace that it is almost impossible to imagine life being organized through any other form. That this should be the case, despite

1 Hayden, *Grand Domestic Revolution*, 294.
2 Hester, "Promethean Labors and Domestic Realism."
3 Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 2. Original emphases.

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many people's lived experiences of the pressures and difficulties attendant upon home-based reproductive labour (not to mention domestic violence and abuse), makes such an attitude all the more remarkable.

It is my contention that the home represents a crucial, and often overlooked, example of material hegemony in action. Domestic dwellings can be understood as contributing to the solidification of governance through their subtle closing off of options and their contribution to producing generalized consent to an existing order. But of course there are many possible forms of domestic arrangement – both spatial and relational – aside from the atomized and depoliticized family residence that many people most closely associate with the idea of home today. Indeed, it is important that we understand the built environment and its infrastructures not only as means for registering and consolidating dominant political positions, but also as potential sites for intervention and as territories for contestation.

With this in mind, the current article presents an idiosyncratic genealogy – a partial history of domesticity in the global north, concentrating on dwellings which seek to problematize, challenge, or reorganize unpaid domestic work. It is informed by recent anti- or post-work thinking – that is to say, by projects which see work as something to be reduced to a minimum. Work, such projects suggest, should be framed as a problem rather than a solution to societal tensions, and people should seek to be emancipated *from* (rather than *through*) their labour.[4] To their detriment, however, many post-work perspectives have neglected the full spectrum of work. They have tended to focus specifically on wage labour – and primarily on industries and jobs that are dominated by men. As a result, the work of social reproduction – the work which nurtures future workers, regenerates the current workforce, and maintains those who cannot work, while also reproducing and sustaining class societies – has largely been overlooked in attempts to resist the imposition of labour and the work ethic.[5] When post-work discusses the end of work, it typically envisions robots taking over factories, warehouses, and farms rather than care homes, nurseries, and domestic residences.[6] It is here that a counter-history of the anti-work home might prove instructive, then, pointing not only to the potential mutability of domestic realism, but also to a possible broadening of emerging post-work agendas.

This history could extend from the cooperative kitchens and apartment hotels of the 1900s, through European interwar mass housing projects, to corporate campuses and commercial co-living developments designed to cater for today's "digital nomads." For the purposes of this discussion, however, I've chosen to concentrate on mid-century efforts to reorganize intrafamilial social reproduction through domestic technologies and spatial design, on the basis that this period has been particularly key to the consolidation of domestic realism in the sense in which we experience it today. This is not just a nod to the continuing grip of mid-century advertising on our visions of domesticity – although, as we'll see, this was indeed crucial in the development of a certain sense of home. It can also be attributed to the related influence of post-war formulations of family, in which a particular nuclear model and its division of labour were broadly hegemonic and widely supported by states across the global north. A number of welfare regimes constructed in the wake of WWII's devastation were explicitly reliant upon the breadwinner/homemaker model, for example, and made significant efforts to enforce this approach, including through housing policy.[7]

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4 For more on this, see Weeks, *The Problem with Work*; Srnicek and Williams, *Inventing the Future*; Hester and Stronge, "Towards Post-Work Studies."

5 More precisely, we can say that reproductive labour is performed in a variety of contexts – waged and unwaged, in the home and elsewhere – and that it encompasses categories like "care work," "domestic work," and "housework," without being equivalent to them.

6 There are some recent exceptions here, grounded in attempts to reclaim the anti-work tendencies of elements of feminist movements such as Wages for Housework. For post-work accounts of the home and domestic labour, see Hester, "After Work: What's Left and Who Cares?"; Graziano and Trogal, "On Domestic Fantasies and Anti-Work Politics"; and particularly Hester and Srnicek, "Shelter Against Communism" and *After Work*, to which the present article is closely related. For an anti-work approach to gestational labour, both remunerated and unremunerated, see Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*. Finally, for a post-work treatment of sex work, see Hester and Stradust, "Sex Work in a Postwork Imaginary."

7 In the postwar period, many (though not all) welfare states took up dualistic approaches to the provision of benefits, which typically provided the best welfare to male workers while unemployed women received only the minimal assistance level. Assumptions about who was working and who was a homemaker structured everything from housing policy to pensions and benefits. See Lewis, "Gender and the Development of Welfare Regimes", 161.

I'm going to be structuring what follows around three examples, as I look to the past to help understand what the future looks like in the present. My three case studies are as follows:

1) The single-family suburban dream house;
2) The bachelor pad;
3) The fully automated future home.

My examples are primarily drawn from the United States in the 1950s and 1960s but, in the final case study, I concentrate also upon a display home designed by the British architects Alison and Peter Smithson, which was first exhibited in London in the mid-1950s. The various threads implicated within domestic realism – ideas around gender roles, proper familial organization, appropriate forms of cleanliness, ideal housing, and so on – are, in my opinion, sufficiently consistent so as to be meaningfully grouped together across the Anglosphere. Indeed, such ideas represent an incredibly successful global export, having been embedded in a wide range of systems that have worked to intensify and extend their reach: product design, research and development, marketing and advertising, journalism, academia, education, other state agencies, and so on.[8] Domestic realism is, as we shall see, a fundamentally mass-mediated phenomenon, upheld not only via economic interventions, corporate interests, and government policy making, but also by the representational and promotional industries. The result is that domestic realism is able to retain its power as an imaginary despite its lived impracticalities, and to maintain its hegemony even as people increasingly find themselves actually living in alternative domestic configurations.[9]

Whilst the three chosen examples lend us resources for thinking about how best to mitigate the challenges of reproductive labour via living arrangements, this article will also point to their failures. As I will suggest over the course of the coming pages, contesting these imaginaries (as much as learning from them) is likely to prove necessary in unpicking the connections between an inequitable distribution of unpaid intrafamilial household labour and the house itself as both a concrete site and an ideological formation – necessary, that is to say, in terms of building a meaningfully feminist conception of anti-work architecture. Throughout this analysis, we will consider the intersection of domesticity, gender politics, and unpaid labour, in the hope of better understanding the operations of material hegemony at work today. Let us begin, then, with the American suburbs, and with a moment particularly crucial in the formation and solidification of domestic realism.

2 Selling Suburbia

A huge number of dwellings were built in America in the years after the Second World War, spurred on by the so-called baby boom. This new housing largely took the form of single-family residences, often designed without input from architects, social reformers, or prospective residents, and typically offering little in the way of access to neighbourhood resources. Instead, "these houses were bare boxes to be filled up with mass-produced commodities"[10] – commodities which were supposed to offer an answer to the problems of domestic drudgery. A new understanding of the American way of life was constructed

8 See Hester and Srnicek, "Shelter Against Communism."

9 Demographic and economic changes have fostered widespread adjustments in household composition since the middle of the twentieth century, contributing towards the prominence of new forms of domestic and familial organization. As Wally Seccombe remarks, this is reflected in shifting patterns of co-residence: "Mean household size has dipped below three persons, a level without historical precedent. … There has also been a sharp rise in one-person households, doubling in the last two decades. The big factor here is an aging population, with rising numbers of widowed persons living alone in the 'empty nest' phase of the family cycle." *Weathering the Storm*, 196. Furthermore, the lived reality of households has always been more diverse than the norms surrounding domestic realism would suggest – particularly for working-class families, immigrants, and ethnic minorities, who have lived more often in extended households or closely networked groups.

10 Hayden, *Grand Domestic Revolution*, 23.

alongside these suburban tract houses – one grounded in the single-family dwelling as a pervasive, all-conquering unit of consumption. Labour-saving devices which had once "been architectural, such as built-in compartments with brine-filled pipes for refrigeration or built-in vacuum systems for cleaning, both used in many apartment hotels,"[11] were increasingly scrapped, and replaced with discrete household appliances. These consumer goods, proliferating as they did across innumerable atomized single-family dwellings, were capable of securing their manufacturers a significant profit, all while entrenching the privatization and individualization of housework.

The enclosure and separation of the suburban house – its position as an ostensibly self-contained unit, a residential island – was key to its positioning within the cultural imagination. Indeed, the architectural historian Dolores Hayden connects this move to a wider ideological shift taking place in the post-war years. In her opinion, the "dream house replaced the ideal city as the spatial representation of American hopes for the good life. It not only triumphed over the model town, the dream house also prevailed over two other models of housing, one based on efficient collective consumption of scarce resources, the other based on the model neighbourhood."[12] When it came to the domestic imaginaries of the post-war suburbs, there was precious little acknowledgement of the *social* elements of social reproduction. Many of the tasks that together maintain and reproduce life, both daily and generationally, were assumed to take place within the four walls of the domestic residence, and to fall more or less exclusively on the shoulders of the nuclear family unit.

And yet, the single-family dream house was often framed and marketed on the basis of its convenience, its ease, and its miraculous labour-saving potential – what Ellen Lupton calls "the fairy-tale narrative in which household appliances rescue American women from domestic drudgery."[13] Lupton uses a 1947 advert for a washing machine, featuring a gleaming new device and a beaming young housewife, as an illustrative example. The copy declares: "Set the dial at WASH – add a bit of soap – and your time's your own. The Bendix Automatic Washer does the work – all by itself."[14] This is the kind of techno-fantasy that suburbia claims to provide – one that recognizes domestic work as a problem, and proposes consumer electronics as a ready solution. This techno-fantasy was also a key way in which the nation's way of life was promoted in the post-war years. Indeed, as the twentieth century rolled on and the cold war intensified, American domesticity itself became a weapon in a propaganda war.

In 1959, Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev famously visited a "model ranch house containing a well-equipped kitchen that was part of an exhibition in Moscow to show the Russians how well ordinary Americans lived."[15] It was this General Electric kitchen that sparked the so-called Kitchen Debate, with the two men using the exhibit as a means via which to espouse and contrast the supposed ideologies of their respective nations. Whilst Khrushchev highlighted the in-built obsolescence of American design – "Your American houses are built to last only 20 years so builders could sell new houses at the end [...]"[16] – Nixon stressed capitalist individualism, consumer choice, and labour-saving innovation. He opens the debate by declaring that "In America, we like to make life easier for women ... What we want to do, is make life more easy for our housewives," before moving on to assert the importance of "Diversity, the right to choose, the fact that we have 1,000 builders building 1,000 different houses."[17] This particular moment served to cement the kitchen "as a symbolic site of social, technological and political cathexis,"[18] whilst foregrounding some of the ways in which the suburban dream home could be positioned as a bulwark against communism and unamerican values – starting precisely from the issue of unpaid domestic labour.

11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., 55.
13 Lupton, *Mechanical Brides*, 15.
14 See Ibid., 19.
15 Gordon, *The Rise and Fall of American Growth*, 357.
16 "The Kitchen Debate," n.p.
17 "The Kitchen Debate," n.p.
18 Faichney, "Advertising Housework," n.p.

Importantly, however, Nixon's claims about America's supposed achievements in domestic diversity and the reduction of gendered household burdens do not really hold much water, and suburbia arguably offered its residents very little in the way of labour-saving potential. Despite all the devices that had infiltrated the home by the mid-twentieth century (washing machines, tumble dryers, dishwashers, vacuum cleaners, etc.), time spent on housework did *not* decrease. This unexpected stubbornness of domestic labour was first pointed out by Joann Vanek in a 1974 article, in which she marvelled at discovering that full-time housewives spent 52 h a week on housework in 1924 and 55 h a week in the 1960s.[19] Ruth Schwartz Cowan similarly found that the amount of time being spent on unwaged domestic work was unchanged.[20] One of the core reasons for this was that work which had once been done collectively – the sharing of laundry work across a neighbourhood, for example, or the outsourcing of this labour to specialist launderettes – was instead being increasingly delegated to the figure of the individual housewife.

We can see this if we return to the Bendix advertisement discussed above. While the copy stresses labour-saving –"your time's your own," "Breakfast with the family while clothes wash super clean" – the image that goes along with it tells a rather different story. The home maker is wearing an apron, while carrying a pot of hot coffee and a tray of (presumably freshly baked) buns. Her time, it would seem, is very much *not* her own, but belongs to the family for whom she is providing sustenance. Indeed, in many adverts from the period in which domestic appliances were first popularized, "what appears at first glance to be female leisure is often another form of care-giving, from tending children to serving breakfast."[21] New domestic technologies did not necessarily save time, then, but rather enabled single individuals to take on more responsibilities. In concentrating this work into the atomized figure of the housewife, the suburban American dream home can therefore be seen to encourage and to facilitate a massive duplication of socially reproductive work.

As Cowan notes, the wastefulness of this model, and the proliferation of the work involved, was simply immense:

> Several million American women cook supper each night in several million separate homes over several million separate stoves … Out there in the land of household work there are small industrial plants which sit idle for the better part of every working day; there are expensive pieces of highly mechanized equipment which only get used once or twice a month; there are consumption units which weekly trundle out to their markets to buy 8 ounces of this non-perishable product and 12 ounces of that one.[22]

This point is further reinforced when one takes into account the amount of driving that suburban tract housing demands. Social reproduction became increasingly dependent upon personalized means of transit during the mid-twentieth century, as we can see in the case of grocery shopping. As Robert Gordon notes, there was a marked shift towards the modern supermarket between the 1930s and the 1960s; the "share of total food sales accounted for by supermarkets soared almost overnight from 28 percent in 1946 to 48 percent in 1954."[23] A key element of the supermarket's appeal at this time was the "inclusion of all food items within a given retail structure. No longer did shoppers need to wander from butcher to baker to vegetable vendor to cheese merchant. All these items could be purchased in one visit."[24] But whilst this development was ostensibly a means via which to *save* reproductive labour, it might more appropriately be seen as a mere *displacement* or transformation of this work.

The housewife may no longer be required to wander from shop to shop in search for the various items on her list, but she is required to drive for longer periods of time in order to reach this well-stocked consumer heaven. Of course, in the "late 1940s and early 1950s, not everyone did own a car … Women

19 Vanek, "Time Spent in Housework," 116.
20 Cowan, *More Work for Mother*.
21 Lupton, *Mechanical Brides*, 19.
22 Cowan, "From Virginia Dare to Virginia Slims," 59.
23 Gordon, *The Rise and Fall of American Growth*, 341.
24 Ibid.

walked to shops if they could, or begged a ride from a neighbour."[25] It was in part as a result of dispersed suburban housing plans – the long, winding roads of enormous developments across the United States – that the "demand for cars rose, including the demand for second cars and the market for used cars."[26] Human and other kinds of energy were therefore further squandered by this all-American way of life. We can see that Nixon's pitch to the Soviets hardly stands up to scrutiny, then. Capitalist America was supposed to own the Reds by providing a way of life assembled around the high-tech single family dwelling, which was capable of diminishing the burdens of unwaged domestic drudgery whilst offering an unprecedented selection of desirable consumer goods. In reality, rather than saving labour and providing choice, the suburban house was entirely standardized and excessively time-consuming. And yet, consumer interest was created and maintained despite this fact. Post-war suburbia proved to be extremely appealing to both buyers and renters, with demand for newly built houses far outstripping availability. Should this commercial success offset any concerns about the gender and labour politics of the single-family dream house? Did suburbia simply meet an existing need, and give the mid-century market what it wanted?

It would be a mistake, I think, to view the flocking of buyers to the American suburbs in the post-war years as an example of unfettered consumer choice. Indeed, it's important to note that this supposed "choice" was in fact subtly and not-so-subtly coerced in a number of ways. There were strong economic incentives steering veterans and young families towards the suburbs. Because of "mortgage subsidies and tax deductions for home owners," it was typically cheaper to buy a suburban tract house than "to rent an apartment in New York City."[27] Indeed, the "sitcom suburbs offered the cheapest housing available in the post-war years. However inconvenient, however remote from railroad stations or bus routes, families coped with them because they had few other choices."[28] Combined with the reaction against imposed wartime communalism, the still-fresh experience of post-war housing shortages, and the myth of consumerist technological plenty, these financial factors proved influential in channelling buyers towards the newly built suburban dream house. Given these various factors, it is difficult to judge what households and individuals might have chosen for themselves under different conditions, and with the possibility of genuine choice. Certainly, we can see from some of the other developments in domestic architecture from this period that the single-family suburban residence was not everybody's idea of a "dream home." Rather, it became the hegemonic form against which a number of alternative imaginaries sought to position themselves.

3 The Bachelor Pad: Living like a Playboy

Whilst the nuclear family home held sway over the collective imagination in Europe and North America throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, it is not entirely true that there were no alternatives during this period. One counter-vision, at least, chipped away at the suburban dwelling's hegemonic dominance, and tapped into shifting cultural values surrounding work, pleasure, and heterosexual relationships. We are talking here of the bachelor pad – a self-consciously oppositional space, which sought (as it were) to offer domestic accommodation without the baggage of domesticity. Jessica E. Sewell defines the bachelor pad as "an apartment for a single professional man, organized for entertaining and pleasure, and displaying tasteful consumption."[29] As we shall see, it is also built to encompass new domestic possibilities and to reject the conventional organization of reproductive labour within the nuclear family. *Playboy* magazine's experiments in architecture throughout the 1950s and 1960s provide a particularly clear

25 Hayden, *Building Suburbia*, 161.
26 Ibid.
27 Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream*, 23.
28 Hayden, *Building Suburbia*, 161.
29 Sewell, "Unpacking the Bachelor Pad," n.p.

example of the kinds of spaces to which I'm referring here, offering readers "a clearly defined alternative to the suburban model, centred on the single-family home and childrearing."[30]

Plans for a penthouse (where one might live in masculine elegance) were published in September 1956, "lavishly illustrated in an eight page spread … and continued with another six pages in the following issue."[31] More designs followed – for a weekend hideaway, a patio terrace, and so on. Perhaps most notable was the *Playboy* townhouse featured in May 1962 which, although never built, was originally commissioned for magazine founder Hugh Hefner himself. These spaces were crafted with a very particular set of affordances in mind – they were spaces of smooth seduction, intended to complement or extend the womanizing prowess of their wealthy occupants. As Paul Preciado notes of the bachelor pad,

> As soon as the female guest crossed the threshold into the apartment, every furniture detail operated as a hidden trap … a turning cabinet bar, sliding screens, and translucent drapes behave as apparatuses of rotation that constantly restructure the space of the apartment to technically assist the bachelor's efforts in defeating the female visitor's resistance to sex.[32]

The bachelor who inhabits these spaces takes on the persona of a kind of domestic James Bond – not just via no-string liaisons with desirable women, but through his arsenal of ingenious, concealable gadgets. The house is a machine for fucking in.

However, the bachelor pad is not just a backdrop for sexual fantasies – it is itself a kind of fantasy about domestic labour. It offers a very specific demographic an aspirational image of the high-tech overhaul of a traditionally gendered workplace. It is worth noting that several *Playboy* residences featured a "kitchenless kitchen."[33] This space showcased gadgetry designed to minimize the time, effort, and feminized skillset required pre- and post-meal (although perhaps "showcased" is not the right word here, given that these devices weren't always intended for display; in the case of the 1962 *Playboy* townhouse, for example, we're told that all "the sundry electric appliances … are out-of-sight built-ins").[34] Furthermore, the kitchen was itself "camouflaged from the rest of the [open-plan house] by a fibreglass screen"; behind the screen, the interior could "hardly be recognized as a kitchen" at all.[35] On the occasions when this screen was to be drawn, and the kitchen made visible, the intention was to render hospitality a kind of spectator sport. The bachelor would make a spectacle of mixing cocktails and grilling red meat, with the kitchen area serving "not as workspace but as stage."[36] Cooking is thus transformed from "part of a day's labour in caring for family" into a masculinized and hedonistic leisure pursuit.[37]

Such spatial interventions speak directly to the gender division of labour, and to the issue of who has a social obligation to perform which kinds of work (and for whose benefit). The mid-century playboy – as an able-bodied, heterosexual white man, rich in both social and economic capital – had rarely been responsible for doing his own dishes. As such, it was not necessarily his own effort that he was sparing via the kitchenless kitchen, but that of a wife, mother, or maid. (Although the townhouse does come equipped with servant's quarters, it is described as having all the "relatively carefree conveniences that an on-the-go bachelor could maintain with a minimum number of servants beating about the preserve"; we're told that the "kitchen area, with the latest in automatic cooking gear completely built into the teak cabinetry, is designed to function efficiently with a minimum of help.")[38] The playboy was less seeking to emancipate

30 Williams, *Sex and Buildings*, 113.
31 Colomina, "Radical Interiority," n.p.
32 Preciado, *Pornotopia*, 88.
33 Ibid., 94.
34 "The Playboy Town House," *Playboy*, n.p.
35 Preciado, *Pornotopia*, 94.
36 Fraterrigo, "The Answer to Suburbia," 760.
37 Ibid.
38 "The Playboy Town House," *Playboy*, n.p.

women from undesirable labour, however, than to emancipate *himself* from women, to the extent that they represented an unwarranted check upon his erotic autonomy and an unwelcome intrusion into his space.

Playboy had, in Preciado's words, "broken the last taboo, smashed the last icon of the suburban house: it had made the woman disappear from the kitchen. Cleaning, considered by *Playboy* as typical 'hausfrau manual labour' [had] been taken over by machines, transforming the kitchen into a playground."[39] Its anti-kitchen was not simply designed to eradicate domestic drudgery, but to eradicate the domestic drudge herself. The bachelor pad therefore represents something of a re-gendering of the home:

> Articulating gender difference around the opposition male-technical/woman-natural, *Playboy* magazine maintained that the new domestic environment, saturated with media and mechanical and electrical appliances, was the rightful domain of masculinity. While the women's magazines of the time made efforts to redefine the role of the modern housewife as a technician or manager of the home, *Playboy* would claim that men and not women, trained professionally as media operators, toolmakers, and machine users, were most suited for carrying out newly automated domestic tasks.[40]

With women becoming increasingly visible within the public sphere and the waged workplace during this time, the mid-century bachelor pad represents an effort to claim the private sphere – to wrest it away from the control of women and to assert its new viability as a masculine terrain. As such, it arguably undermines domestic realism, indicating not only that there are other ways of living, but also that the gender norms and power relations entangled with domestic organization in the suburban single-family house are to some extent available for reformatting.

But if the precise character of gender norms was shown to be somewhat malleable, the structural hierarchy *which is gender* was maintained and entrenched. If the bachelor of the 1950s and 1960s wished to lay claim to the traditionally feminine pleasures of running a household, he had no intention of foregoing his traditional position of privilege. The figure of the playboy represented an attempt to "restrain disciplinary sexual conventions while maintaining male hegemony."[41] On a spatial level, this involved asserting an entitlement to the home whilst avoiding an association with culturally disparaged forms of reproductive labour. The playboy did not wish to be feminized via his association with domesticity, and nor did he wish to be queered by his rejection of the nuclear family. As such, the re-gendered domesticity depicted by *Playboy* architecture depended upon aggressive (hetero)sexualization – the buttressing of other coordinates within an existing gender system – to facilitate its smooth functioning.

The bachelor pad offered a compelling idea of sexual liberation through domestic automation – but one that was not intended for everybody. As we've seen, it attempted to do away with "women's" housework as a means of doing away with women altogether (or at least, with those women who could not easily be reimagined as being themselves single-use consumer goods). Reproductive labour is willed away, partly via its technologization and partly via its transformation into status-bolstering leisure pursuits, in the service of an image of masculine self-sufficiency. This is hardly an inclusive or egalitarian answer to the problems of the single-family home. Furthermore, the high-tech, hyper-mediated, single-occupant bachelor pad is well beyond the means of all but the most affluent, today as it was in the mid-twentieth century. This was never an architectural project invested in communal abundance; there was no collective post-work agenda underpinning the re-visioning of social reproduction it performed. Rather, *Playboy* architecture offered an expensive, energy-intensive and commodity-heavy alternative to domestic realism, aimed solely at what it called "the discerning city dweller of individual ways and comfortable means."[42] The luxury offered by the bachelor pad was from the start *exclusive*, and thus unable to serve as an acceptable substitute for dominant forms of household organization. As such, its architectural imaginary is fundamentally ill-suited to any truly meaningful challenge to cultures of work.

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39 Preciado, *Pornotopia*, 94.
40 Ibid., 93.
41 Ibid., 220.
42 "The Playboy Town House," *Playboy*, n.p.

4 The House of the Future: Technodomesticities

If *Playboy* architecture offered a somewhat novel (if essentially non-scalable) counter-imaginary of the private sphere, it nevertheless drew from the same storehouse of cultural fantasies as a range of other spatial experiments from the period. This brings us to our final case study, the fully automated future home. I am using this term to refer to something that is part forecast, and part fantasy – an attempt to imagine domestic architectures to come. The bachelor pad overlaps substantially with the future home; it too was often a matter of unrealized speculation rather than concrete output. But whereas *Playboy* architecture tended to be at least theoretically possible, "houses of the future exist only in the imagination."[43] As such, they are perhaps best represented in the speculative design fictions of film, animation, and "display houses" – model homes intended for public exhibition (such as that which formed the backdrop to the Kitchen Debate). Display houses have a heritage that dates back to the nineteenth century, and as Lynn Spigel notes, they have long been used to explore and advertise ideas about technologized futures; in the 1930s and 1940s companies like General Electric started using the "the home of tomorrow as a way [of selling] a wondrous array of electronic gadgets."[44] This tactic extended its reach and took on new proportions in the middle of the century, with the future home coming to "fascinate the public through the Cold War era."[45] The Monsanto House of the Future, for example, opened in Disneyland in the mid-1950s, and welcomed millions of guests through its doors before closing ten years later.

I want to concentrate on a different fantasy home in this essay, however: Alison and Peter Smithson's House of the Future, which went on display at the *Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition* in London in 1956 – the same year plans for the *Playboy* penthouse were published. This project was a full-scale prototype of what the Smithsons imagined the home might look like in 25 years; "a speculation on a future lifestyle with automated housework, and with technologically enabled broadcasting of image and sound to the world and to Mars."[46] In certain ways, this example is at odds with those we have considered so far – the generic dream home and the bachelor pad – given that the designers involved are such big names in mid-century British architecture. It is further complicated by the fact that the House of the Future is a rather oddball addition to the Smithsons' *oeuvre*; the duo are, of course, better known for their contributions to the New Brutalism.

But despite its notable heritage, the House of the Future operated in much the same manner as the other domestic exhibits and show homes mentioned above, presenting a speculative vision of the home for the consumption of a mass audience. Attendance at the *Ideal Home Exhibition* reached an "all-time peak in 1958 of over 1,300,000," as people came to the show seeking education, entertainment, and domestic inspiration.[47] It strikes me as unlikely that the majority of these attendees were interested in the exhibit primarily for its provenance or for its potential influence on architecture as a field. The House of the Future is therefore of interest to us here less as a result of its famous architects (although some of the Smithsons' more typical work will indeed be discussed briefly below) than as a rich and thought-provoking example of a future-oriented display home in its own right – one that is contemporary with other tendencies discussed in this article, and which sits in a particularly intriguing position *vis-a-vis* both the hedonistic bachelor pad and the family-focused suburban dwelling. So, what kind of home did the Smithsons envisage?

The design was a container for a potential domesticity – a "space-age module [which] conveys the idea of the home as a standardized product,"[48] and features a proliferation of plastics, from moulded furniture and undulating walls, to vacuum-packed food. An emphasis upon disposability, non-biodegradable materials, and resource-intensive lifestyles clearly dates this and other visions-of-futures-past – twenty-first century ideas about emerging material cultures tend to be rather less smooth and shiny. As one might

43 Bell and Kaye, "Designing Technologies for Domestic Spaces," 46.
44 Spigel, "Designing the Smart House," 406.
45 Ibid.
46 Fischer, "The Sound of the Future," n.p.
47 Victoria and Albert Museum, "Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition", n.p.
48 McGuirk, "Their Rented Bit of the Socialist Dream," 77.

expect from a project that positions the house as a plasticized, mass-produced commodity, consumer convenience is key here – and this extends to the attempted mitigation of at least some of the burdens of reproductive labour. As Beatriz Colomina remarks, within this house, "every surface is obsessively cleansed of any trace of dirt, dust, or germs. [Its] continuous surface with round corners … is easily maintained with a damp cloth. The sunken bathtub fills from the bottom and has an automatic rinsing system that swills down the bath with a foamless detergent."[49] There is some attempt to reckon with domestic drudgery here, then, even if it seems more like an extension of existing ideas about conventional suburban labour-saving technologies than a radical attempt to unseat domestic realism.

Indeed, we can trace the connection between mid-century future homes and suburbia as a living American fantasy via broader trends in the display houses and interior exhibits of the post-war period. Between 1949 and 1961, for example, "General Motors held [a] stage show called Motorama," which always included a high-tech display kitchen.[50] Billed as the kitchen of tomorrow, and thus supposedly positioned at the very edge of feasibility, it typically included a range of "ultra-motorized features, including electric mixers and food blenders that [rose] out of the counter and motorized cabinets that [moved] up and down."[51] One version (showcased in 1955) featured futuristic touches such as hands-free interfaces for answering the phone and "an intercom centre" with CCTV, allowing the operator to remotely monitor the rest of the house.[52] Here, we see the display house acting as something of a hinge between the suburbia of the present and the imagined domesticity of the future; new devices are introduced, and existing ones are refined or updated, but the kitchen of tomorrow remains very obviously an extension of the kitchen as it stands. In images of Motorama included in the November 1955 edition of *Popular Science* magazine, for example, we see that this includes the continued concentration of the domestic workload upon a single figure; an individual woman, with neatly set hair and a pristine pinny, is pictured loading a refrigerator on her own, with nobody else in sight. The technologies of the home are available for transformation, it would seem, but its fundamental form (and gender relations) must remain the same.

This is also true of more overtly future-oriented speculations on technodomesticity. As with the 1950s American dream house and the *Playboy*-endorsed urban residence, projects such as the Smithsons' House of the Future imagine progressive domestic transformation emerging in the absence of conflict or explicit gender political struggle, simply via the judicious development, purchase, and operation of consumer durables (a category to which the house-product itself now belongs). Any refusal to accept housework as an unavoidable fact of life is, I would suggest, undermined by this exclusion of collective politics. Indeed, it's worth noting that the Smithsons' design is, quite literally, inward looking; sealed to the outside world by airlock-style doors, built around an enclosed internal courtyard, lacking any view out to the street.[53] This is in keeping with wider tendencies in the future-oriented display house, which has "most typically been imagined as a self-sufficient and sentient space that satisfies all the needs of its residents" without reliance on a wider community.[54] As such, the house of tomorrow has historically been pictured as "a kind of fetish space that … appears disembodied from the surrounding town and city."[55] This substantially curtails the ways in which domestic labour might be reimagined, of course (ruling out its redistribution and collectivization, for example, and reinforcing the idea of a quick spatio-technical fix) – and can in many ways be considered an intensification of tendencies already in place within the atomized suburban tract house, sitting alone in its generous lot without ready access to things like neighbourhood amenities or public transit infrastructure.

49 Colomina, "Unbreathed Air 1956," 50–1.

50 Ngo, "Archive Gallery," n.p.

51 Ibid.

52 "Dream Kitchen Almost Runs Itself," *Popular Science*, 144.

53 Robin Hood Gardens similarly gestures toward this idea of the "home as defensive mechanism." In both cases, "the shell itself is defensive, encasing a central garden and shutting out the noise and the dangers of the outside world." See McGuirk, "Their Rented Bit of the Socialist Dream," 77–8.

54 Spigel, "Yesterday's Future, Tomorrow's Home," 32.

55 Ibid.

The House of the Future is exclusionary in other ways, too. In common with images of the ultra-modern bachelor pad – and at odds with both actual tract houses and the Disney or Hanna-Barbera versions of fully automated luxury suburbanism – the Smithsons' House of the Future is conceived of as an adults-only dwelling. It was explicitly designed as a home for a childfree heterosexual couple, and the libidinized quality of the space arguably reflects this. The house has a "highly sexualized interior, with all those curved walls. The bed, the bathtub, and all the basins are red; the curtains are orange; and the partly translucent honey-coloured walls give a voyeuristic sense of X-ray vision. The bed is in the middle of the space, a theatrical stage with electronic controls."[56] An emphasis upon sexual opportunity and physical pleasure (as well as an aversion to manual hausfrau labour) connects *Playboy* architecture to the House of the Future, setting them against the rigidity of the conventional nuclear family and the mid-century work ethic.

As with the "technified enclave" of *Playboy*'s imagination,[57] the House of the Future comes fully equipped with transformable machines and Bond-like technologies (including beds that pop up from the floor). In this case, however, automated eroticized leisure is a possibility for swinging men and women alike, allowing the exclusive pleasures of the bachelor pad to be somewhat more widely distributed – though not so widely as to encompass the figure of the parent. In Colomina's view, there are "no children in this house, because the adults themselves have become children, playing with their toys, with their new electric gadgets, the peek-a-boo table and bed, the electrically operated doors, and so on."[58] As labour that cannot be rejected or glamorously automated away without substantial practical and ethical challenges, the work of supporting dependents – be they old, young, or otherwise in need of support – has no place in the Smithsons' vision. There is no room for care in a space where everybody is care-free. Like the *Playboy* Penthouse with which it is contemporary, then, the Smithsons' House of the Future is a labour-saving dwelling in which the lion's share of social reproduction is imagined as being spirited away via technically innovative design fixes, combined with an aversion to relations of dependency. Both are visions of automated plenty which simultaneously draw upon and position themselves against the suburban single-family dream house, in which care work and several other forms of domestic labour are rendered invisible. As such, their usefulness for contemporary anti-work spatial imaginaries is limited.

It's perhaps worth noting that, in their later, more characteristic projects – such as the (in)famous brutalist council estate Robin Hood Gardens, completed in 1972 – Alison and Peter Smithson further demonstrated their interest in the management and mitigation of housework. Certainly, the estate was conceived with the needs of reproductive labourers in mind. The Smithsons ensured that access decks and other play spaces were visible from windows, for example, enabling caregivers to keep a remote eye on younger residents as they played. They also deliberately designed individual flats to accommodate the trappings of a modern consumer lifestyle. This meant factoring in sufficient space to allow residents to install and store their own domestic technologies (perhaps holding a space for the eventual arrival of the remote control beds and extra-terrestrial broadcasting devices of the House of the Future).

The austere, regimented barricades of an actually existing London housing estate can hardly be compared to the zippy, space-age airlocks of the speculative future home, however, and the approach to social reproduction in evidence was notably different in each case (not least in terms of the treatment of children). Of course, one shouldn't hold Robin Hood Gardens – as a concretely realized piece of work – to the standards sketched out by the wipe-clean, fully automated House of the Future. But even in comparing it to other examples of council housing from the period, we can see that it is strikingly restrained in its attempts to confront and rethink the work of social reproduction. The notorious Hulme Crescents in Manchester, for example – completed the year before Robin Hood Gardens – was originally designed to include "a library, doctors' surgeries, communal laundry and pool, several churches and a range of pubs and clubs."[59] In this, it offered a more collective vision of what the labour-saving home might look like than

56 Colomina, "Unbreathed Air 1956," 43.
57 Precaido, *Pornotopia*, 88.
58 Colomina, "Unbreathed Air 1956," 43–4.
59 Boughton, *Municipal Dreams*, 141.

that imagined by the House of the Future, and a far more ambitious approach to reproductive labour than that put forth by Robin Hood Gardens.

For all its supposed architectural merit, then, Robin Hood Gardens achieved very little in terms of countering domestic realism, and can perhaps point to the limits of attempting to design our way out of deeply entrenched social formations. Nevertheless, however, I think the scheme is worth mentioning here, given that it can serve as an exemplar of a wider moment in the latter half of the twentieth century – one that now feels like a period of missed opportunity and a hotbed of unrealized futures. In its way, the council estate seems further from the present reality of financialized housing and the individualized home-as-asset than does the automated plenty of the mid-century dream house, bachelor pad, or future home (visions of which persist, to some extent, in contemporary promotional discourses surrounding the uber-networked, ultra-convenient "smart home"). That is to say, due to their compatibility with neoliberal capital, the imaginaries of my three key case studies have endured in a way that the visions, values, and practices associated with less commodified counter-hegemonic models of dwelling (such as public housing) have not.[60] Where does this leave us?

5 Conclusion

Over the course of this article, I've explored three examples of domestic dwellings (both real and imagined) that have recognized, in one way or another, the value in mitigating the burdens of unpaid domestic labour. The single-family suburban dream house took us to the root of contemporary domestic realism, while also pointing to unrealized fantasies of labour-saving via consumer electronics. The bachelor pad and the future home, meanwhile, offered us intriguing – but ultimately vexed – visions of resistance to drudgery within the home, proffering visions of eroticized domesticity that are luxurious and fully automated, but resolutely non-communal. None of these case studies deal with the full spectrum of reproductive labour, failing to offer satisfactory responses to the issue of care work. What can we learn from our mid-century examples, then? What help do they offer in terms of reconsidering material hegemony today, and thinking anew the conditions in which domestic labour is performed? In what ways might they enable us to better imagine a feminist future, materialized in spaces that facilitate a good quality of life for everybody? As our brief consideration of Robin Hood Gardens suggests, the failings of these projects point us towards one key factor: we must build our anti-work architectures around an idea of *public luxury*.

As George Monbiot has noted, "There is not enough physical or environmental space for everyone to enjoy private luxury: if everyone in London acquired a tennis court, a swimming pool, a garden and a private art collection, the city would cover England. Private luxury shuts down space, creating deprivation."[61] As our discussion of the dream house, bachelor pad and future home indicate, not everybody can bask in a resource-consuming, high-tech home of their own, even if they want to. Monbiot's answer is not a retreat into austerity and generalized immiseration, but instead a demand for "private sufficiency and public luxury" – some space of our own in which personal needs can be met, massively augmented by a revived commons: "wonderful parks and playgrounds, public sports centres and swimming pools, galleries, allotments and public transport networks."[62] Mike Davis offers a comparable vision of "public affluence over private wealth,"[63] pointing to a similar roster of collective resources – "great urban parks, free museums, libraries, and infinite possibilities for human interaction" – as a key means of ensuring quality of life within more sustainable cities.[64]

60 Many thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers of this manuscript for encouraging me to articulate this idea in preparation for the discussion of public luxury below.

61 Monbiot, "How Labour Could Lead the Global Economy out of the 20th Century," n.p.

62 Ibid.

63 Davis, *Old Gods, New Enigmas*, 217.

64 Ibid., 218.

In these proposals, as with "classic urban visions, public luxury replaces privatized consumption through the socialization of desire and identity within collective urban space."[65] Whilst they both forcefully foreground the ecological advantages of this perspective on living space, however, neither Monbiot nor Davis draw attention to its potential feminist or anti-work implications. A perspective that privileges public affluence offers considerable resources for the emancipatory reorganization of social reproduction. As well as the more rarefied advantages of culture and leisure pursuits, a public luxury model would enable the relocation of some forms of reproductive labour beyond the single-family home, and the mitigation of some of its worst burdens for un- and under-paid workers. This must be a basic and essential element of attempts to think about emancipatory spatial futures. We want roses, yes, but bread too.

From my perspective, this begins with the better integration of domestic residences and shared services – a line of thinking Dolores Hayden pursues in her now-classic article, "What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like?" In imagining a metropolitan cooperative made up of 40 households, she demands the following collective spaces and activities:

> (1) a day-care center with landscaped outdoor space, providing day care for forty children and after-school activities for sixty-four children; (2) a laundromat providing laundry service; (3) a kitchen providing lunches for the day-care center, take-out evening meals, and "meals-on-wheels" for elderly people in the neighborhood; (4) a grocery depot, connected to a local food cooperative; (5) a garage with two vans providing dial-a-ride service and meals-on-wheels; (6) a garden (or allotments) where some food can be grown; (7) a home help office providing helpers for the elderly, the sick, and employed parents whose children are sick. The use of all of these collective services should be voluntary; they would exist in addition to private dwelling units and private gardens.[66]

Here, we see the idea of private sufficiency and public luxury articulated from an avowedly feminist perspective. Hayden offers a vision in which the temporal burdens of social reproduction would be substantially mitigated by community-steered services and spaces, many of them operated by residents themselves – a much more appealing prospect than the organization of reproductive labour proposed by the bachelor pad or the fully automated future home.

Could we envision Hayden's metropolitan cooperative as a directional demand in a wider project of public luxury? What happens if we take up her original question, and restate it: "What would an *anti-work* feminist city be like?" Simply reducing the travel time and forward planning required to access vital community resources like childcare, elder care, and shops, would have obvious post-work benefits for those currently performing feminized reproductive labour, but there are several steps one could take to extend Hayden's vision and update it for the twenty-first century. Automated plenty could become a collective pursuit, re-envisioned as a matter of public luxury. A phone and computer repair shop, for example, with a mobile team of technology trouble-shooters might prove to be a useful resource for anyone whose printer has ever malfunctioned or whose wifi router has inexplicably stopped working. There could be high-spec, communally accessible maker spaces, including everything from screen printing facilities, sewing machines, and kilns to top-of-the-line 3D printers. Something similar could be put in place for media suites (enabling local people to produce and disseminate their own content), for music practice rooms, and studios. In this vision, the better integration of home and neighbourhood not only frees up time from some of the more onerous elements of unpaid domestic labour, but also presents a vision of social reproduction in which it's easy to imagine how this free time might be enjoyably spent.

Beyond helping us to articulate these (admittedly very broad) ideas, however, the examples I've sketched out in this article serve an important purpose. In each case, the work of the home is understood as a problem that requires new thinking. At the most general level, this willingness to push back against domestic realism is what I want to advocate for. We need not assume our current version of the household to be inflexible – we can, through political struggle, make it subject to change in the name of a more emancipatory set of labour and gender relations. Let us resist a looming future of branded corporate

65 Ibid., 216.

66 Hayden, "What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like?," S182.

campuses, atomized data-harvesting smart homes, and soulless, over-priced commercial co-housing developments in favour of ideas of public luxury. Emancipatory visions of post-work domesticity must be premised on common abundance, and this concept of common abundance must recognize that *time itself* is a resource that requires maximization and equitable distribution. Free time requires public luxury, and public luxury demands free time. Any attempt to develop a contemporary architecture of refusal must be built around this principle.

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