

BEYOND THE CLOSET

A Queer Reappraisal of Individualism

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INTRODUCTION

Individualism is studied in this research in the context of domesticity and is analysed through the work of Absalon, a homosexual Israeli artist born in 1964. He crafted a critique of social conventions and suggested domestic interiors of emancipation to counter social relations of domination. His architectural proposal, the “Cells,” were meant to function as a means for voluntary withdrawal¹ and stand as a model to explore the question of identity in a radical manner. His architectural project includes six distinct residential units made for six different cities, driven by the intention of inhabiting them. They question the standards in which we live and do not seek to adapt to the dimensions of an average person but rather to those of Absalon. Therefore, his work invites one to delve into the concept of voluntary withdrawal and elaborate on what a queer use of space could be through the lens of individualism. The duality of withdrawal, drawn from Absalon’s life trajectory, plays a pivotal role in this research. The “Cells” were conceived during a period when the AIDS epidemic compelled mainly queer individuals to withdraw involuntarily. But despite its seemingly unprecedented nature, voluntary withdrawal finds historical grounding in the history of the closet, which was originally created as a space for privacy and seclusion from the seventeenth century onward. The development of this room echoes Absalon’s work and expands on the right to private life and the understanding of personal identity.

Contemporary discourses of the twenty-first century tend to speak about collectivity, where withdrawal is seen as a negative symptom of external agents. Consequently, architectural concerns often neglect the question of individualism. This term is commonly associated with a negative undertone, being perceived as a selfish behaviour that disregards the limits and needs of others. However, *individualism* has been used in different epochs and comprises different meanings that evoke diverse phenomena. The French philosopher Michel Foucault, gives a distinct definition of the term.

“Three things in fact need to be distinguished here: (1) the individualistic attitude, characterised by the absolute value attributed to the individual in his singularity and by the degree of independence conceded to him vis-à-vis the group to which he belongs and the institutions to which he is answerable; (2) the positive valuation of private life, that is, the importance granted to family relationships, to the forms of domestic activity, and to the domain of patrimonial interests; (3) the intensity of the relations to self, that is, of the forms in which one is called upon to take oneself as an object of knowledge and a field of action, so as to transform, correct, and purify oneself, and find salvation.”²

In certain contexts, the second definition, described as the positive valuation of private life, was highly valued, meticulously protected and

1 Guillaume Désanges; François Piron. *Absalon Absalon* (Paris: Paraguay Press, 2021), 11.

2 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 3: The Care of the Self* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1896), 42.

organised. A heightened intensity in the dynamic among fathers, mothers, and children became apparent, particularly among bourgeois classes, with the rise of suburbia in Western countries during the eighteenth century.³ However, for this very reason, the relationship to one’s own self was hardly considered a priority.⁴

Individualism, conceived as a practice of self-care, offers a perspective through which a queer use of space can be delineated. Queer theory plays a crucial role in this analysis, as it critically examines the social construction of identities and the importance of self-knowledge. A distinct and universal standpoint has shaped the construction of social truths and realities — the privileged white, cisgender, heterosexual male vantage point. Donna Haraway defines this perspective as “the modest witness.”⁵ She claims what is considered objective in contemporary societies is the product of masculinist thinking, which, in its universality, loses its own self-critique and discernment. The responsibility then falls upon sexual, racial, and class minorities to construct their identities, always in relation to the dominant norm and thus within a pre-established hierarchy. This transcendence directly impacts the production of women and non-cis male subjectivity. The heterosexual norms determine the construction of what is taken for granted and how the world is organised. These invisible injunctions do not appear to be constructed but come through as natural.⁶ Twenty-first-century feminists and queer theorists, including Teresa De Lauretis and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, expanded on the terminology of “construction” to denaturalise sexual identity. They assert that identity is socially constructed rather than an inherent biological pre-determined trait.⁷ Similarly, queer theorist Judith Butler suggests that gender operates as a form of imitation of pre-established norms and does not pertain to a true origin.⁸ Absalon appraised the idea of individualism during a period when the definition of what constituted an individual was still an open question posed by queer theorists and negotiated from the 1980s until the present day. Architecture does not escape from heteronormativity and is significantly influenced by the dominant norm. These aspects underscore the interdependence of gender and architecture as heterosocial creations. In this sense, domesticity embodies the intersection of gender, sexuality and space. The queer perspective unveils the influence of heteronormativity on shaping cultural narratives and power dynamics. Viewing domestic spaces through this perspective serves as a means to comprehend broader social and cultural relationships and evaluate how they integrate into both progressive and more traditional discourses.

Beginning in the eighteenth century within the Western context and later during the Victorian era, a distinctive suburban housing model emerged, amplifying the heteronormative performative dimension of the nuclear family.⁹ In the nineteenth century in London, a new relationship emerged between residence and the city, driven by the middle class’s migration to the suburbs. Suburbia, during this period, represented a new life ideal, characterised by the nuclear family and traditional masculine/feminine domestic gender roles. Individuals arguably experience themselves in relation to others primarily through the spatial organisation of their bodies.¹⁰ The suburban dynamic imposed a dichotomy on middle-class women, segregating them from the realms of power and productivity located in the city centre and influencing their roles in both work

3 Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 34.

4 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 3*, 43.

5 Donna Haraway, *Manifeste cyborg et autres essais. Sciences-Fictions-Féminismes* (Paris: Exils, 2007), 312-316.

6 Ibid., 310.

7 Joel Sanders, *Stud : Architectures of Masculinity* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 12.

8 Judith Butler, *Imitation and Gender Insubordination* (London: Routledge, 1993), 313.

9 It was not until the 1840s that the word “suburb” lost its primarily elitist bourgeois association and became firmly attached to the middle-class residential neighborhood. See: Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, 62.

10 Matt Cook; Andrew Gorman-Murray, *Queering the Interior* (Londres: Routledge, 2017), 31.

11 Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, 4.

12 The concept of the “American dream” centred around heterosexual marriages, represented a desire for a conventional and ordered domestic existence amidst the changes brought by industrialisation and urbanisation.

13 Maria S. Giudici, “Counter-Planning from the Kitchen: For a Feminist Critique of Type,” *The Journal of Architecture*, no 23 (2018): 1204-1205.

14 John Nash envisioned the creation of suburban areas in 1823. He aimed to convert the land into what he called “the apex of metropolis” and applied picturesque adaptations to traditional English cottage architecture, in Clapham. See: Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, 69.

15 Ibid., 117.

16 Dolores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 25.

17 Georgina Downey, *Domestic Interiors: Representing Homes from the Victorians to the Moderns*. London (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 2.

18 Cook; Gorman-Murray, *Queering the Interior*, 1-2.

19 Ibid.

20 Downey, *Domestic Interiors*, 3.

21 Maria Shéhérazade Giudici, “Counter-Planning from the Kitchen: For a Feminist Critique of Type,” *The Journal of Architecture* 23, no. 7-8 (November 2018): 204 -1205.

and family life. Accordingly, a notable division of labour crystalised.¹¹ This housing paradigm not only established the foundation for the concept of the “American dream”¹² but also operated as a model that could be reproduced. Henry Roberts’ “Model House for Families,” presented at The Universal Exhibition in London in 1851, served as a notable example of how a modest architectural proposal on a small scale can, due to its replicability, significantly shape the way housing has been conceived for the past 150 years.¹³ The initial model was subsequently materialised through John Nash’s¹⁴ suburban planning tailored for middle-class families.¹⁵ This approach later reached the United States, exemplified in the post-World War II context by the conception of Levitt’s town, created by the real estate developer and housing pioneer William J. Levitt.¹⁶ In reality, the perpetuation of Victorian-based house planning tendencies in our contemporary interiors is a heritage of suburban houses. It plays a crucial role in shaping the heteronormative perception of today’s urban inhabitants. Georgina Downey refers to a “jet lag” between the architectural domestic typologies, where barely evolution contrasts sharply with the exponential advancements in underlying construction technology.¹⁷ This conventional way of living undermines the connection to oneself — what is called individualism — and compels us into a collective existence where an oppressor and an oppressed persist.

Navigating the concept of queering domesticity and perceiving it as a space that can be experienced in a queer manner is a complex endeavour. Queer space theory does not construct itself in direct opposition to the heterosexual spatial norms but rather engages in a critique of it.¹⁸ Within most households, homemakers invest in their interior spaces with prevalent normative ideas and configurations of a given time, coupled with elements that lean towards the singular, the odd, or the distinctly queer. In this intricate interplay, intentional and unintentional actions interweave, reflecting a dual desire to conform and establish a distinctive identity. The domestic interior becomes a medium through which queer individuals articulate their distinctiveness or exhibit a conventional investment.¹⁹

Growing up queer involves facing the absence of an accessible queer history, especially in the context of architectural discipline. Spaces that can be used in a queer manner are vital environments that have been and continue to appear in various forms. They serve as terrain for self-expression, allowing individuals to assert their identities, resist societal norms, and foster a sense of community. In embracing a queer manner of experiencing space, individuals seek to question heteronormative structures and actively contribute to the cultivation of pride and a strong sense of identity. These spaces respond to queer communities and individuals across different countries, cultures, and historical eras. A critical trajectory affects long-held beliefs about home as a “refuge” from the external world by unravelling the connection between spatial and social diagrams.²⁰ Feminist thinkers such as Dolores Hayden, Georgina Downey, and Maria S. Giudici devoted their work to the analysis of the house as a social apparatus and diverse interpretations of the domestic space.²¹ In a similar manner, this study delves into the interference between dominant standardised norms and the individual, prompting one to envision what a queer use of space could be.

The Origin of Queer Theory

Individualism, understood as the practice of self-knowledge, is intimately entwined with the concept of identity that represents queer theory's primary concern. Teresa De Lauretis, a key figure in queer theory, significantly influenced discussions on gender and sexuality. She thinks of gender as a fluid, non-binary and socially constructed concept produced by a number of social apparatuses.²² She claims that a starting point may be to think of gender along the lines of Michel Foucault's theory of sexuality as a "technology of sex"²³ and to propose that gender, as both representation and self-representation, is the product of various social expectations, institutionalised discourses, epistemologies, critical practices, as well as daily rituals.²⁴ The understanding of identity, thus of individualism, constitutes the epicentre of queer theorists' writings such as Judith Butler, Sam Bourcier and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Gender and identity underscore the importance of exploring the term "queer" and the inherent ambivalence surrounding its meanings. The conceptualisation of "queer" in the context of sexuality is characterised by fluidity and ambiguity. Notably, at least three concurrent interpretations exist, each indicating distinct empirical and theoretical orientations. The primary concern associated with the term "queer" has been the emergence and inscription of homosexual and heterosexual binarism, as evident in various works of literature and theory. The term "homosexual" emerged in Euro-American discourse in the final decades of the nineteenth century, predating the widespread use of the term "heterosexual".²⁵

Firstly, "queer" was the prevalent term in Britain and, to a lesser extent, in other English-speaking nations until the widespread acceptance of "gay" following the advent of gay liberation in 1969. It served to describe both the condition of homosexuality and individuals identifying as homosexual. During the 1950s and 1960s, claiming the phrase "I am queer" was a declaration that revealed not only one's identity but also articulated their statement to the dominant social norms. It signalled a conscious positioning in contrast to the established, heterocentric societal expectations. Queer was a generalised description of otherness and an emerging identity. Post 1970, many from the gay liberation generation willingly discarded the use of the term, considering it a symbol of oppression. Retrospectively classifying historical archives initiated in the 1970s as "queer" is anachronistic.²⁶

The second definition of "queer" denotes the surge of new forms of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender activism in the late 1980s, particularly in the United States. "Queer" served as a broad characterisation of a developing sense of identity. Its original stigmatised undertone induced a reclaiming of the term "queer" as a confrontational aspect. Militantism, what Foucault refers to as "counter-discourse", is described as one of the resistance methods against a dominant power structure.²⁷ Jeffrey Weeks underscores the transformation in the connotation of the term as follows: "What was different from earlier uses of queer, however, was the reversal of the term's meanings. It had shifted from being a negative, individualising description to a signifier of collective agency and militancy, as represented by Queer Nation and Act Up!"²⁸

The third understanding of "queer" closely aligns with the second in-

22 Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 1-2.

23 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 3*, 119.

24 Ibid., 3.

25 Jeffrey Weeks, "Queer(y)ing the 'Modern Homosexual'," *Journal of British Studies* 51, no. 3 (2012): 526.

26 Weeks, "Queer(y)ing," 525.

27 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 100.

28 Weeks, "Queer(y)ing," 525.

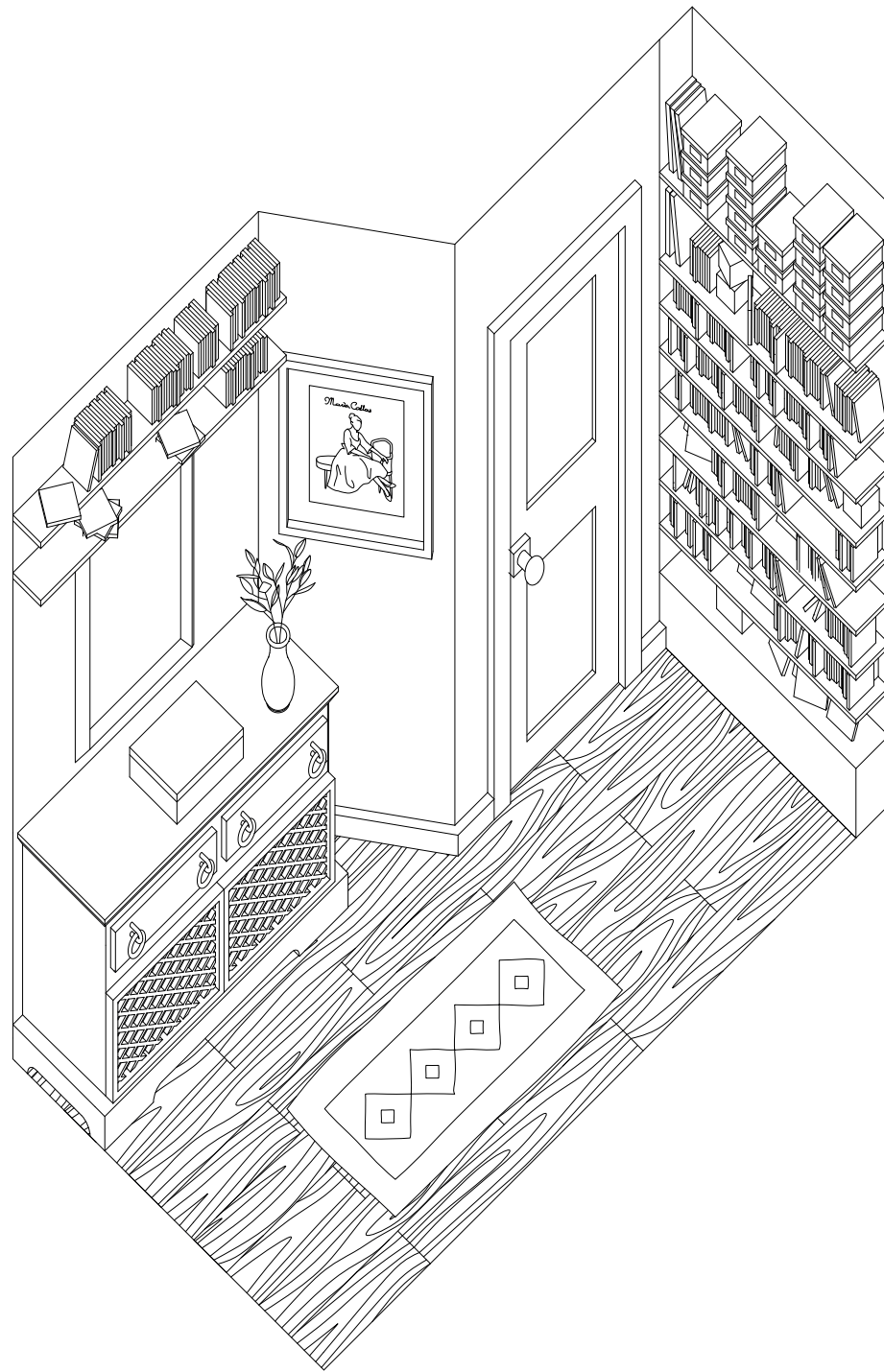


fig 1. Axonometric view of a London house's hallway, 2011. Based on a photo taken by Brent Pilkey. From Andrew Gorman-Murray; Matt Cook, *Queering the Interior* (Londres: Routledge, 2017), 40. Drawn by the author.

The Question of Queer Space

terpretation. Both fundamentally question the stability and arbitrary aspects of lesbian and gay identities, endorsing a political position marked by subversion. However, they diverged in their orientations. While both concepts were instrumental in reshaping ideas, queer theory primarily revealed itself as a discourse within academic realms rather than resonating directly in the streets. The frequently overlooked origins of queer theory can be traced back to social constructionism, poststructuralist theory, or the analyses of discourse and power by Michel Foucault. According to his demonstration, modern Western civilisation has placed what it calls “sexuality” in a more and more distinctively privileged relation to our constructs of individual identity.²⁹

Unravelling the intricacies and origins of queer theory reveals the need to understand its foundational roots. Queer theory did not evolve in isolation from feminist movements but rather emerged within their continuum, as an integral part of a broader academic and activist movement, shortly following the third wave of feminism. The initial wave addressed legal matters, particularly women’s suffrage — the right to vote — from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century.³⁰ The second wave, spanning from the 1960s to the 1980s, widened its scope to address issues beyond legal rights, tackling concerns such as reproductive rights, work discrimination, and societal expectations.³¹ Third Wave Feminism, spanning from the 1990s to the present, went on to redefine feminism, expanding its boundaries to be more inclusive. This wave recognised the diversity of women’s experiences, considering factors such as race, class, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Queer theory challenges the enduring nature of binary sexual and gender categories and explores subjectivities as performatively ritualised.³² Queer theory advocates for emancipatory models and emphasises the significance of self-identification. As a pivotal concept in twentieth-century Western culture, it addresses the enduring challenge of considering crises in defining homo-heterosexual categories.³³

Recognising and acknowledging the dominance of narratives from the middle and upper classes is crucial when examining queer history. Privileged people, men in particular, have left more evidence of their lives in archives, literature, culture and landscape. The elitist and patriarchal society in Western countries has ensured that it is rare for the historian to be able to access working-class queer voices, as Foucault asserts: “There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.”³⁴ Nevertheless, criminal records and newspaper reports have been used by historians who subverted this material and used it to fill the silence. Journals mostly used the tactic of naming and shaming people — mainly men — who had been arrested for homosexual acts. They sometimes even printed their addresses. A largely mediated incident happened to a queer individual named “G” who lived in Sheffield, England, in a working-class area. Since that moment, G’s neighbourhood has been scrutinised as a queer area and continues to be so due to its history. Working-class queer households remain subtle, much like the men who resided in them. These were regular homes situated on typical streets, often shared with families.³⁵

29 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, 27.

30 Patu Schrupp; Antje Schrupp, *A Brief History of Feminism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017), 25-38.

31 Silvia Federici, *Le capitalisme patriarcal* (Paris: La Fabrique Éditions, 2019), 11.

32 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990), 259.

33 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick directed a queer critique towards the second wave of feminism and the assumption of a homogenised “we.” This movement relied on a universalising category — “Women” — which denied the complexity of identity and became the source of multiple exclusions, primarily related to race and class. See: Sam Bourcier, *Queer Zones: La Trilogie* (Editions Amsterdam/Multitudes, Amsterdam, 2018), 138-139.

34 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, 27.

35 Adam Nathaniel Furman; Joshua Mardell, *Queer Spaces: An Atlas of LGBTQ+ Places and Stories* (Londres: RIBA Publishing, 2022), 18-19.

36 Downey, *Domestic Interiors*, 4.

37 Olivier Vallerand, “Home Is the Place We All Share: Building Queer Collective Utopias,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 67, no. 1 (2023): 64-75.

38 George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 227.

39 Cook; Gorman-Murray, *Queering the Interior*, 3.

40 Ira Tattelman, “Reviewed Work(s): ‘Stud: Architectures of Masculinity’ by Joel Sanders; ‘Mapping Desire’ by David Bell and Gill Valentine,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 51, no. 2 (Nov. 1997): 138.

41 Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 1.

42 Ibid., 179.

43 Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York: William Morrow, 1997), 142.

The domestic interiors in which we dwell present a possibility to either embrace or defy familial, gendered conditions that we otherwise cannot control. This implies that creating interiors provides scope to recognise one’s personal needs, analyse one’s daily gestures, become aware of one’s rituals, and care for oneself. These acts cultivate a relationship with the self and enable the process of defining oneself.³⁶ In the early 1990s, scholars in queer architecture studies undertook the task of perpetuating feminist challenges, such as Dolores Hayden’s writings, that critique conventional architectural discourses. They went beyond exploring how space is influenced by gender and sexuality and suggested new ways of inhabiting space.³⁷ Some incite queer practices by creating spaces of desire and non-normative experiences, among many other subtleties, such as Georges Chauncey,³⁸ Matt Cook and Andrew Gorman-Murray.³⁹ The common denominator is that queer space, or space that is used in a queer manner, emerges through the disruption of heteronormative curatorial methods. These spaces offer fluctuating positions through the flexible identities of the queer subject experiencing them. Queer individuals reject the paradigm created by dominant heterosexual power structures; instead, they develop their own rules, as the upcoming approaches unveil.⁴⁰

A multidisciplinary exploration of historical documents such as newspapers, legal records, and personal accounts marks George Chauncey’s contribution to queer space theory. Through this approach, he maps the social and cultural landscapes of gay communities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He explains how space can be subverted through queer subjects or a queer use of space. During the fifty years spanning from 1890 to the onset of the Second World War, a noticeable, intricate and evolving gay male community emerged prominently in New York. This community comprised various gay neighbourhoods, social gatherings like dances, and a plethora of establishments where gay men congregated. These meetings ranged from casual saloons and bars to affordable cafeterias and fine restaurants.⁴¹ Public spaces also served as vital meeting grounds for men who lived with their families, as Chauncey explains: “Streets and parks were where many men- “queer” and “normal” alike-went to find sexual partners, where many gay men went to socialise, and where many men went for sex and ended up being socialised into the gay world.”⁴² He describes how privacy could be found in public. Within the urban landscape, marginalised individuals became noticeable to each other. They gained confidence by finding other men who liked what they liked, and as a result, the socially constructed boundaries of public space were contested. The most fundamental characteristic of the queer use of space is its ephemerality. It appears through an act of transformation and becomes a “counter space.”⁴³

Another exploration of what a queer space is was articulated by scholars Matt Cook and Andrew Gorman-Murray. They assert that there isn’t a distinct “queer space” per se. Instead, there are spaces used by queer individuals and reclaimed for queer uses. The two editors identify two aspects that queer an interior. One is through the queer subject’s presence and rituals, and the second appears subtly through the arrangement of specific collected objects. Although, the process of identifying physical

elements as queer depends on one’s subjectivity. In this sense, one could define an object as odd, but that does not mean that this oddness is inherent in the object.

The two editors meticulously examine the micro-geographies and micro-histories in domesticity and focus on the activities within queer homes. A diversity of homemaking practices and domestic lives can be found; some examples are unconventional, while others correspond more closely to social norms. The multiple singularities in queer happenings illustrate how homes are used and created to mirror the varied and changing beliefs, desires, and identities of those who inhabit them. Queer interiors are not replicable and correspond to the singularity of each queer individual.⁴⁴

Sometimes, queer identity can be implied through collectable objects and can hint that a queer individual uses a certain space. What is collected is a representation of one’s knowledge, and some objects may provide information about one’s queer identity. The example of a queer English man named Dean unveils a rich layering of meaning in his entry hall.⁴⁵ His collection of artworks, music and books, relates to his sexual minority subjectivity and sensibility. For example, his “divahood” and love for opera are presented in his entrance hallway with a painting of the Greek singer Maria Callas. Personal material objects shape and provide information about his identity. This demonstrates that queer subjects can, in a subtle manner, through the conscious selection of objects, formulate an extension of their own identities. Dean’s entry hall reflects subtle layers of himself and is constructed of subjectivity framed by the way he experiences the world.⁴⁶ (See Fig. 1) Consequently, homes are continually undergoing a process, sometimes visibly through alterations in ornaments, decor, and furnishings. The extent of control in this evolving concept of the home depends on many factors, including fortune, political affiliation, religious beliefs or the use of the closet. Queer-making and queer uses are not necessarily visually perceptible, and they sometimes take place even in domestic spaces that are most intrinsically associated with heteronormativity.⁴⁷

Adam Furman and Joshua Mardell incorporate a different perspective on this matter. The notion that queerness thrives within an ecosystem becomes crucial in elucidating the fundamental significance of queer spaces. It is not just a physical building where people connect; instead, it constitutes an alternate universe that circumnavigates the world and can be found everywhere. Any space can be turned queer, and as the editors claim: “Each has its own unique and specific circumstances, its own story, urban and architectural contexts, needs, aesthetics, tribulations and joys.”⁴⁸ Queer space can be private, intimate and secretive, or it can be communal, public and shared. It happens in a specific moment and makes a way of life that has been brutally repressed visible. It comes and goes, sometimes enduring in the same place for decades, and sometimes it is so brief it lasts only for a single encounter. Spaces can be queered by investing them and by making use of them in a queer way, which implies that queer space can be perceptible in its architectural and physical expression.⁴⁹ “A la Ronde,”⁵⁰ a cottage located in Devon in England, cultivates its homosocial aspect through ornamentation. Both editors emphasise the formal dimension of queer space, seeing it as something that can be per-

44 Cook; Gorman-Murray, *Queering the Interior*, 3.

45 Ibid., 39-42.

46 Ibid., 46.

47 Ibid.

48 Furman; Mardell, *Queer Spaces*, 10.

49 Furman; Mardell, *Queer Spaces*, 10.

50 “A La Ronde” a national Trust property, is a cottage that was inhabited by two cousins, Jane and Mary Parminter, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They extensively ornamented their home with diverse collection of souvenirs. See : Furman; Mardell, *Queer Spaces*, 20.

51 Furman; Mardell, *Queer Spaces*, 20.

52 Katarina Bonnevier, *Behind Straight Curtains: Towards a Queer Feminist Theory of Architecture* (Stockholm: Axl Books, 2007), 21.

53 Ibid., 45.

54 Cook; Gorman-Murray, *Queering the Interior*, 2-3.

ceived even from a straight perspective.⁵¹

Lastly, Katarina Bonnevier presents a theatrical interpretation of architecture, representing it in the process of being enacted. As she claims in her thesis, “It is an attempt to stay close to the physical matter with a continuous involvement of actors.”⁵² She perceives architecture as a theoretical metaphor and a concrete material practice interrelated with subject positions. Bonnevier analyses architecture through the interconnectedness of material containers, such as the setting, the deeds, and the actors. She portrays an enactment of architecture, perceiving domestic spaces, like Eileen Gray’s E-1027 villa, as performative scenes. Queer implies interchangeability, excess, fluidity, multiple interpretations and repositionings. Bonnevier argues that queerness should not be perceived as an inherent essence or the exclusive truth. She asserts that cultural prejudices, rooted in heterocentric and homophobic perspectives, hinder broader recognition of the queerness present in these architectural examples.⁵³ Bonnevier perceives queer space through appropriation and physical investment, treating it as a performative object. Her analysis separates the queer subject from the notion of individualism since the queer subject is placed in a performative posture.

Queer space theorists like Georges Chauncey, Matt Cook, and Andrew Gorman-Murray portray queer space as something sensitive, emerging through subtle gestures at specific moments. They do not endorse the idea of an inherent queer space; instead, it is something one can barely perceive in interiors. It unveils through histories, happenings, and carefully chosen objects.⁵⁴ They emphasise the importance of one’s subjectivity and how, by collecting specific objects, individuals can subtly imply their queerness in a home. Their approach resonates with Absalon’s perspective on domesticity and similarly echoes the creation of nuanced layers of identity. His thoughtful selection of collectables within the “Cells,” constrained by the spatial limitations of his domestic units, transforms the architecture into an extension of his identity and inner self. The ephemeral dimension of queer spaces evokes the emptiness perceived in Absalon’s cells during his absence, resembling vacant shells. Queer spaces offer a chance to curate specific objects that subtly reveal information about the individual. This narrative paves the way for the exploration of the closet’s topology that originally served as a room allowing for the expression of the self.

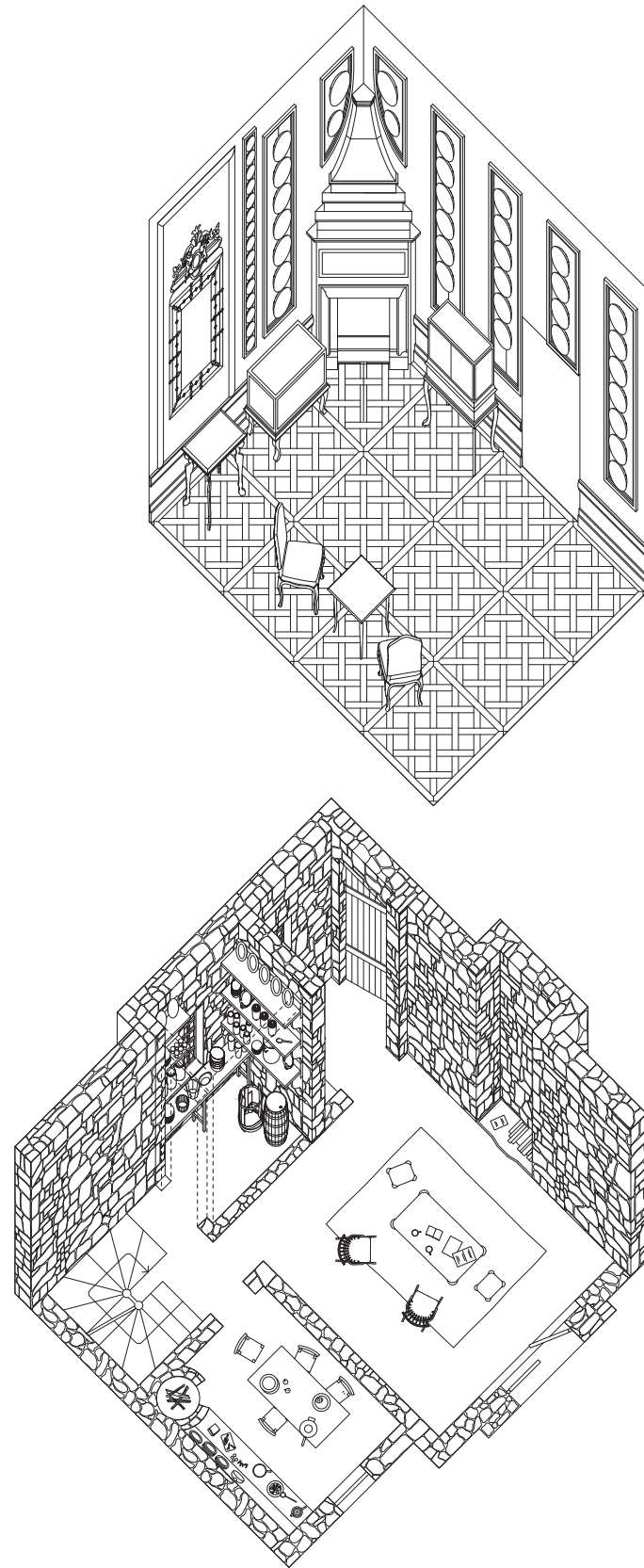


fig 2. Axonometric view of Chatsworth House's closet, 1549. From Hannah Obee, "The Golden Age Returns," *Apollo: The international magazine of arts* 165, no. 555 (2008), 65-67. Drawn by the author.

fig 3. Axonometric view of a cottage with a pantry, 1849. Based on Henry Goddard's plans in John Agnew, "Cottages for farm labouring families," *Cambridge University Press* 33, no.2 (May 2022):164-165. Drawn by the author.

The History of the Closet from the Sixteenth Century to the Present Day

Queer architecture theorists have meticulously analysed the relationship between queer and domestic space, viewing interiority as the celebration of one's authentic identity and offering opportunities for individualism. One can trace this desire throughout history, particularly with the conception of the closet, intended, among other things, for retreat and self-reflection. Prior to its role as a concealed storage area or as a symbolic metaphor for queer shame, the closet held significant importance within architecture. This secluded space served various purposes, including intellectual practices, praying, dressing, collecting, engaging in intimate relations⁵⁵ and having private conversations with carefully chosen individuals. Within these closets, monarchs and noblewomen divulged secrets to their favourites, and affluent individuals broadened their social connections. The closet unveils the intricate bonds between status, self-awareness, and interpersonal dynamics. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it unfolded progressively in diverse forms: courtly closets, prayer closets, studies, offices, libraries, boudoirs, galleries, oratories, and finally transformed into a more functional piece of furniture. Since the closet was often connected with bathing facilities or privies, it also evolved into bathing chambers and water closets. In these new iterations, they carried the potential for interaction, where physical proximity and the exchange of knowledge fostered a sense of connection among the occupants. In the nineteenth century, it emerged as a symbol of intimacy and evolved into a symbol of secrecy.⁵⁶

In medieval to early modern houses, a room was designated for trade practices or, in the context of royalty, for hosting guests. Architectural privacy was primarily defined by the act of withdrawing from public household spaces. According to Michael McKeon, the terminology "drawing room" for a private chamber attached to a more public room illustrates the architectural concept that produced privacy as a desirable experience. Homeowners began to take pleasure in solitary withdrawal without thinking of this experience as a break from more significant activities, such as entertaining guests, conducting business, or managing servants.⁵⁷ The English closet originated in the sixteenth-century palace apartments. Located at the end of an enfilade. It was a lockable private room that offered a secluded space for reading, writing, and storing valuables, fostering a medium of private power. Admission to this space depended solely on the approval of the royal owner.⁵⁸ (See Fig. 2)

Multiple studies and literature from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries emphasised the increasing importance of privacy in domestic architecture. Closets had started to infiltrate through social hierarchies and, by the mid-eighteenth century, were incorporated into rural cottage designs. In these contexts, their use significantly changed and comprised a more functional purpose. These spaces were no longer exclusively a chamber conceived for the elites.⁵⁹ (See Fig. 3)

The curiosity cabinet was another closet variation. Comparable to the library, it was a place that allowed the creation of new circuits of knowledge and storing private objects. The collectors halted the ceaseless flow

55 Extrafamilial intimacy, sometimes queer intimacy, occurred often in closets.

56 Danielle Bobker, *The Closet: The Eighteenth-Century Architecture of Intimacy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2020), 10.

57 Ibid., 14.

58 Ibid., 10.

59 John Agnew, "Cottages for farm labouring families: plans, exhortations and realities (1825–50)," *Cambridge University Press* 11, no.2 (May 2022):164.

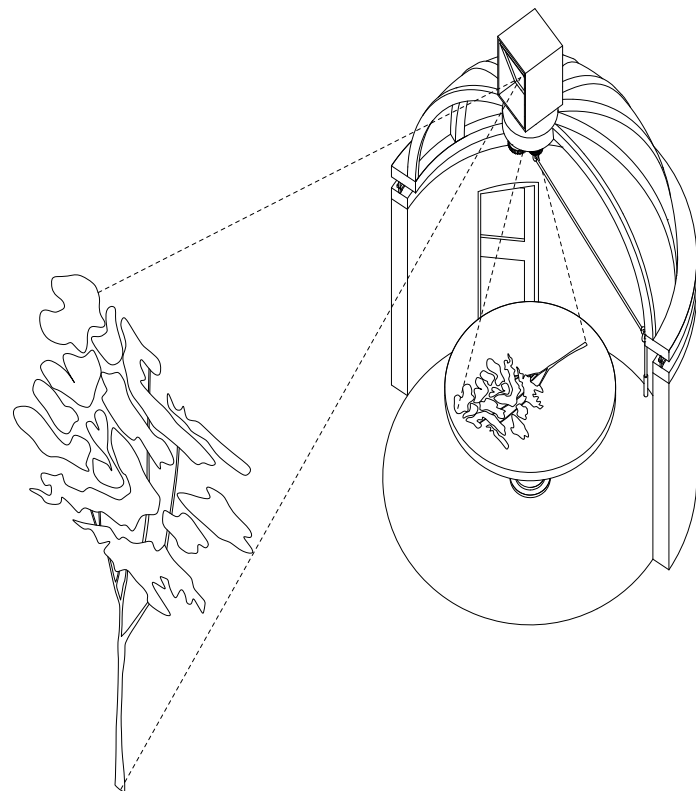
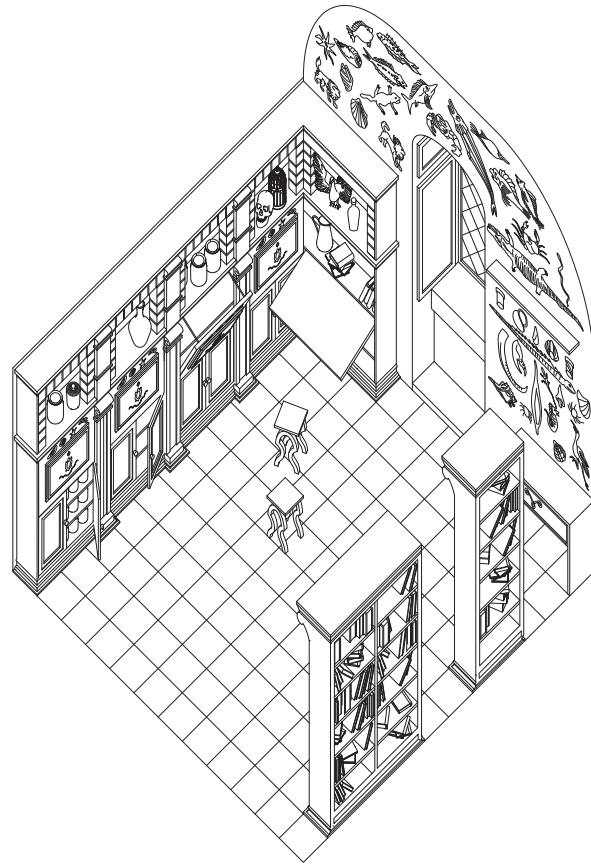


fig 4. Axonometric view of a curiosity cabinet, 1599. Based on the drawing of Ferrante Imperato. From Ferrante Imperato, *Dell'Historia Naturale* (Naples: MDIC, Per Costantino Vitale, 1599), 4-5. Drawn by the author.

fig 5. Axonometric view of a camera obscura, 1817. Based on a copperplate engraving by Wilson Lowry after a drawing by John Farey Jr. From Abraham Rees, *Cyclopaedia or Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences and Literature* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1817). Drawn by the author.

of history by extracting objects from their context, and due to the physical seclusion of the closet, a feeling of stillness and timelessness was brought. The act of collecting serves as an expression of the collector's unique identity. By accumulating selected objects, one can perceive this act as an extension of the self, thus a form of self-awareness and individualism.⁶⁰ (See Fig. 4)

Similarly to the curiosity cabinet, the camera obscura — known in England as the “dark closet” — allowed for the accumulation of ideas and facilitated the process of acquiring and preserving knowledge through experience. This dispositif is an entirely closed space except for a small opening. Light travels through the aperture, projecting a detailed image of the external surroundings onto the inner wall or table.⁶¹ (See Fig. 5)

Within the extensive English household during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the term closet could denote an oratory where the entire family and any visitors could engage in collective prayer. Some other prayer closets were more private and solitary. Protestant theologians insisted that private prayer was a more significant religious act than going to church. They argued that the solitary practice eliminated hierarchical mediations, especially the clergy, which, in their perspective, had corrupted Catholicism. The prayer cells represented an initial iteration of the closet as an autonomous piece of furniture. Studies of such religious withdrawals underscored how spiritual self-reflection supported the development of the way individuals perceive and reflect upon their inner selves. In the seventeenth century, men's private confessions to God and Jesus were perceived as revealing that their most hidden desires and passions determined their personal identity.⁶² However, patriarchal constraints limited women's autonomy in their prayer closets. For a married woman, this secluded space could be seen as both a prison cell and a space of freedom. This duality arises from the Christian doctrine that encouraged women to self-reflection while simultaneously requiring them to share their thoughts with their husbands. (See Fig. 6)

In the later half of the seventeenth century, discourses emerged concerning the gendered use of the term “closet.” While the English closet, along with the Italian studiolo, had built a reputation over at least two centuries as a space for thinking, writing, and masculinity, women's closets were more explicitly associated with activities such as dressing and undressing.⁶³ Nevertheless, historical evidence from the mid-sixteenth century demonstrates that some privileged English women did possess private libraries. Even though women engaged in solitary reading were often negatively assigned to notions of sexual autonomy. In Western society, the boudoir historically served as the initial domestic space exclusively designated for women. It reinstated women in the body and sensuality, carrying connotations of sexual pleasure and privacy. This nurtures the traditional dichotomy where men were associated with the mind and rationality, while women were associated with eroticism.⁶⁴ From an architectural perspective, the boudoir symbolised personal autonomy and individualism, serving as a sanctuary that reflected women's desires and offered space for individual expression within the domestic sphere. Its architectural features often prioritised personal comfort, embodying a separation from societal norms and celebrating an escape into one's own world. (See Fig. 7)

60 Bobker, *The Closet*, 20.

61 Ibid., 26.

62 Ibid., 22.

63 Ibid., 39-40.

64 Bonnevier, *Behind Straight Curtains*, 45.

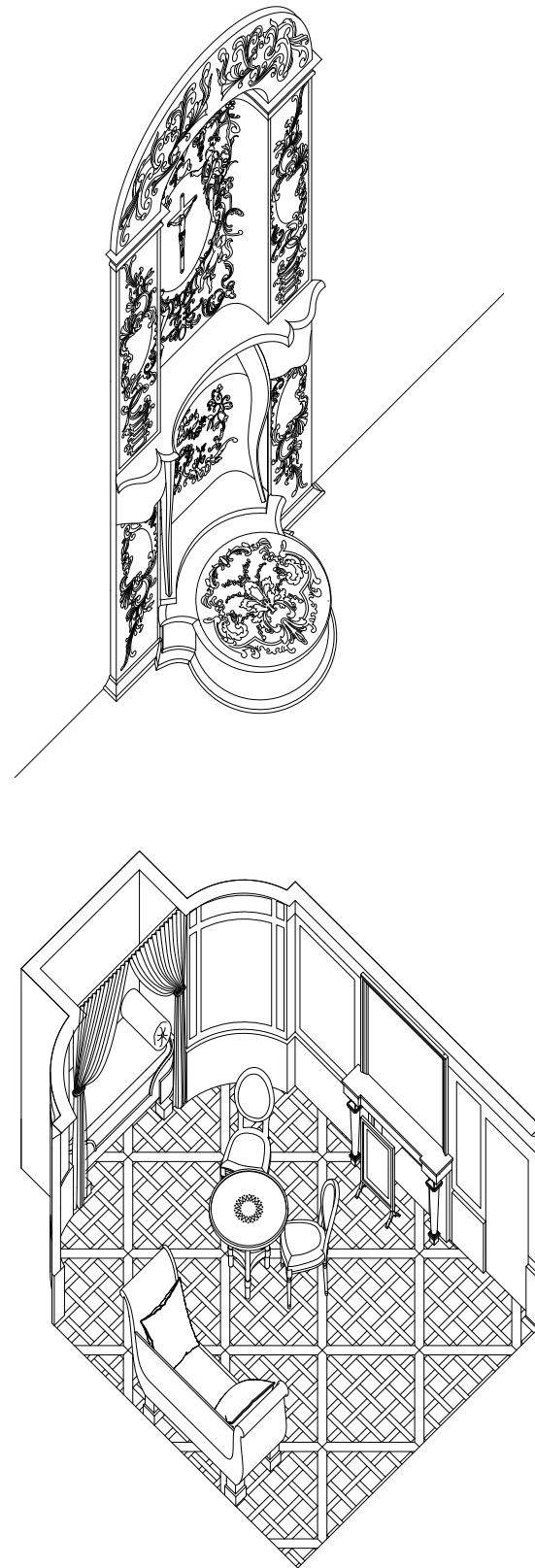


fig 6. Axonometric view of a prayer closet, 1749. Based on Pietro Piffetti's design. From "Pregadio con decorazione," *Catalogo Generale dei Beni Culturali*. Drawn by the author.

fig 7. Axonometric view of Marie-Antoinette's Turkish Boudoir, 1777. From Vincent Cochet; Alexia Lebeurre, *The Turkish Boudoir* (Saint-Remy-en-l'Eau: Monelle Hayot, 2023), 22. Drawn by the Author.

Starting from the mid-sixteenth century, the term "cabinet" emerged as the diminutive form of the English word "cabin" and gained popularity as a synonym for "closet". The French term "cabinet" further influenced its semantic nuances, which denoted both a private room and a chest of drawers. The interplay of these linguistic influences persisted throughout the eighteenth century, wherein "cabinet" and "closet" were frequently used interchangeably to denote private rooms. As time unfolded, these private spaces gradually transformed into a piece of furniture. This evolution led to a distinct refinement of the term "cabinet," which progressively came to signify a movable wooden storage unit.⁶⁵ (See Fig. 8)

The aristocratic and middle-class homes underwent significant changes during the industrial and consumer revolutions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The closet evolved into an essential storage space used for storing linens, cleaning supplies, and necessities. It played a central role in the overall arrangement of the bedroom. Armoires, chests, and similar items maintained their volumetric presence, contrasting with the earlier discreet built-in closet. These standalone cabinets — wardrobe, trousseau chest, bureau-cabinet, and armoire — emerged adorned with locks and ornate embellishments, serving as symbolic representations of the clothed human body.⁶⁶ Within this domestic evolution, these prominent furniture pieces distinguished themselves with features such as veneer, mirror glass, brass, and moulding. However, the variety of furniture available varied not only with one's income but also with individual taste.⁶⁷ (See Fig. x)

From the mid-nineteenth century onward, the closet evolved from a purely functional space to an integral, secretive component of the bedroom, solidifying its connection with sexual deviancy and freedom. Beyond concealing excess in a general sense, the closet, specifically designed for the diversity of a wardrobe, ensured that only the garments worn at any given moment remained visible. The closet curates one's socially physical representation, concealing secrecy within the walls and shielding one from undesired external gazes. Downing articulates the idea that: "The great secret of safe and comfortable living lies in keeping yourself and everything about you in the right place."⁶⁸ This intimate space gradually transformed into a metaphorical symbol. An uncanny echo of the eighteenth-century language of the closet resonates in twentieth-century coming-out narratives and bridges the historical context with contemporary perspectives. The closet becomes a space where one can define oneself and construct an identity out of the clothes one collected.⁶⁹ The metaphorical significance, such as the history of the closet, denotes a lens through which Absalon's "Cells" are scrutinised. The act of voluntary withdrawal and emancipation from social constraints in order to discover and experience one's identity is what characterises the artist's ambition.

"Coming Out of the Closet!"

The historical approach not only unveils varied desires for self-knowledge, self-definition, and individualism but also raises a crucial question: How did a room once highly esteemed in domestic architecture transform into a metaphor encapsulating the experiences of invisibility, shame, and

⁶⁵ Bobker, *The Closet*, 19.

⁶⁶ Henry Urbach, "Closets, Clothes, Disclosure," *Assemblage*, no. 30 (1996): 64.

⁶⁷ Judith Flanders, *The Victorian House : Domestic Life from Childbirth to Deathbed* (New York : Harper Perennial, 2004), 3-4.

⁶⁸ Andrew Jackson Downing, *Victorian Cottage Residences* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2013), 3.

⁶⁹ Urbach, "Closets," 65-66.

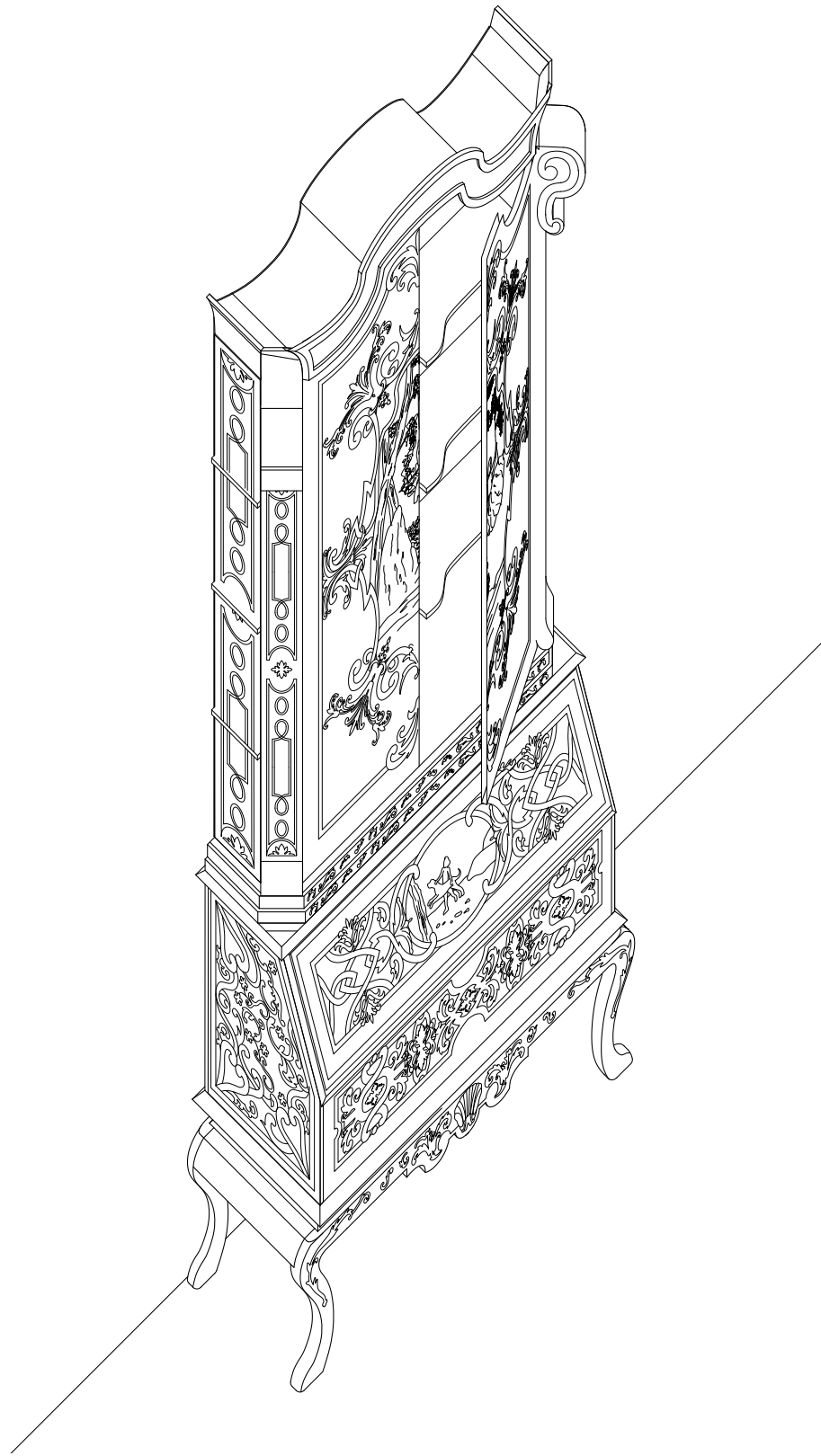


fig 8. Axonometric view of an Italian cabinet, 1787. Based on Pietro Piffetti's design. From "Collezione Accorsi-Mobile a due corpi," *Catalogo generale dei Beni Culturali*. Drawn by the author.

fear among sexual minorities? These aspects, which are considered disturbing and undesirable, invite reflection on the contemporary use of the metaphor. The etymology book *The Insect That Stole Butter?* provides the following definition for the term closet:

"Although closet is now the usual word in American English for a cupboard or wardrobe, it originally referred to a small private room, such as one for study or prayer. This idea of privacy led to the sense of hiding a fact or keeping something secret, which goes right back to the beginning of the seventeenth century. A person who is hiding the fact that they are gay has been described as "in the closet", or as a "closet homosexual", since the late 1960s. To out someone, meaning to reveal that they are gay, is a shortened way of saying "to force them out of the closet". Closet comes from close, which both in the sense "near" and "shut" goes back to Latin *claudere* "to shut," also the source of recluse, someone who shuts themselves away"⁷⁰

As the above definition emphasises, the closet serves as a highly evocative metaphorical location, and its meaning derives from the idea of intimacy. The evolution of discourses about the closet and its association with identity and its queer inflexion stems from its persistent presence in both historical and contemporary culture. This term carries far-reaching ramifications that extend across instances of liberation and positions regarding sexuality, gender, race, and class.⁷¹ The closet is portrayed as an expression of sexual nonconformity and rebellion, making it a radical object for queer architecture.⁷²

The closet has become a structure of gay oppression in the modern era and a place for a much wider organisation of power in twentieth-century culture.⁷³ Nowadays, when one says that someone has been "in the closet" for years, it refers to the way that identity, especially gay identity, has been concealed and disclosed. The historian George Chauncey points out that the term "coming out" for gay men originated from a cultural practice associated with young ladies introducing themselves to society, symbolising their readiness for social activities and potential relationships. Unlike the modern understanding of "coming out" as disclosing a hidden truth, during that time, it represented proudly joining and affirming one's place within the gay community.⁷⁴ The metaphor of the closet didn't emerge until the 1960s. Prior to this, it was absent from gay movement records, as well as gay and lesbian literature. Chauncey suggests that the metaphor "coming out of the closet" could have originated from the idea that numerous men who hid their homosexuality perceived it as a symbolic "skeleton in the closet." During that era, being gay and in some regions of the world, even today, was associated with shame and fear. Disclosing this "skeleton" could, and in some cases still does, lead to the loss of family or friends, exposure to violence, or other forms of seclusions.⁷⁵ The closet's location in the contemporary interiors — the bedroom — not only suggests that its content reveals the identity of the home's possessor but also emphasises the unreliable nature and potential danger of unveiling one's sexual identity. All this paints a picture of what it is like to conceal one's true self: difficult, unnatural, dark, and isolating. Remaining in the closet could be considered safer than coming out.

In the late nineteenth century, Victorian domesticities constituted performative spaces in which individuals had to accomplish carefully

⁷⁰ Julia Cresswell, *The Insect That Stole Butter?: Oxford Dictionary of Word Origins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 90.

⁷¹ Cook; Gorman-Murray, *Queering the Interior*, 191.

⁷² Betsky, *Queer Space*, 14.

⁷³ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 190.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 181.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 375.

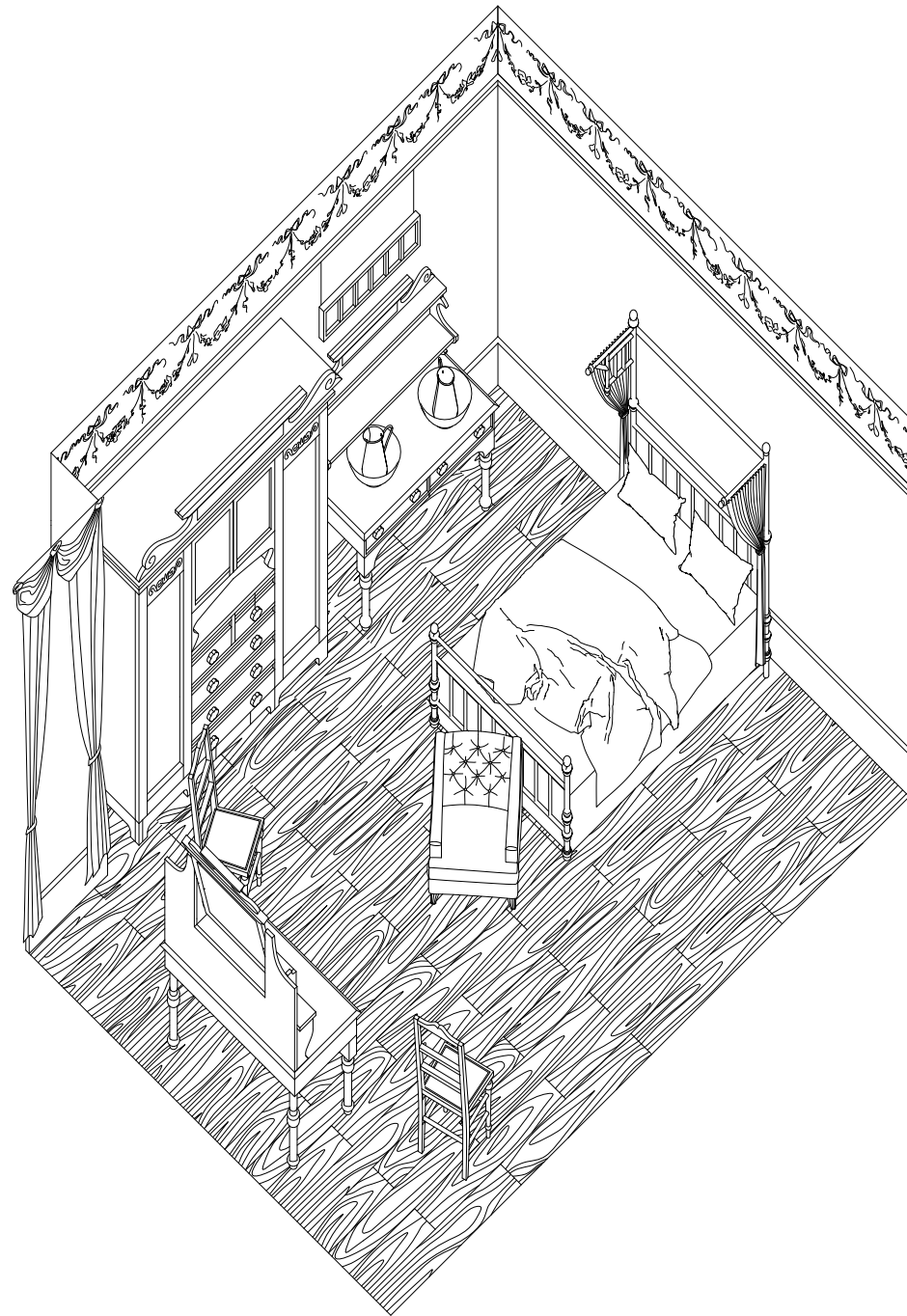


fig 9. Axonometric view of an Edwardian bedroom, ca. 1880. Based on the illustrations by *The Army & Navy Stores company*. From Evangeline Holland, "Edwardian Housekeeping: Furnishing the Home," *Edwardian Promenade* (July, 2013). Drawn by the author.

76 Bobker, *The Closet*, 193.

77 Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 190.

78 Cook; Gorman-Murray, *Queering the Interior*, 192.

79 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 3.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 Urbach, "Closets," 63-64.

normalised and standardised tasks. A closet room for private practices was perceived as highly controversial.⁷⁶ It embodied elements of antagonism and hidden anxieties.⁷⁷ In the following century, the closet was recognised as the safest space for withdrawal and self-discovery due to its discreet nature. This coincided with the emergence of intricate public debates surrounding the regulation of homosexual desire and interactions taking place in public spaces.⁷⁸

Referring to the closet and its isolating influence, the act of being "closeted" is essentially a performance induced by the speech act of silence.⁷⁹ Thus, "coming out of the closet" invokes one to speak the truth of one's sexuality. If one dares not to speak about their sexual identity, then one is forever forced to live "in the closet" as a silent, non-existent being.⁸⁰ There are very few gay individuals who are not "in the closet" concerning someone important to them. Moreover, new barriers continue to emerge. Each encounter with a new person raises new closets with specific laws that demand gay individuals to make new assessments, new strategies, and the necessity for new secrets. Even those who are 'out' find themselves daily facing new interlocutors about whom they are unsure whether or not they are aware. Similarly, it is difficult to ascertain whether this matters to the interlocutor. Few are those who no longer see the presence of the closet shaping their lives.⁸¹

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick traces the discourse of "coming out" back to the medical pathologisation of homosexual acts in the late nineteenth century. The queer theorist underscores how the concept of "being in the closet" — the act of concealing one's sexual identity or desires — functions as a mechanism that moulds the cultural understanding of sexuality. It also points to a relation between sexuality, power and knowledge. In Michel Foucault's writings, sexuality is treated as a form of knowledge that society produces, categorises, and regulates. The emergence of queer theories and the importance given to sexual identities challenge the concept of binarism and produce a form of resistance against power dynamics. The closet, as the concealing of truth, allows one to discern the power relations within sexual identity development.

The closet holds two distinct yet related meanings that echo each other within an interconnection of linguistic and material representations. It shapes the interrelation between storage and display, as well as between secrecy and withdrawal. The physical, built-in closet serves as a concrete representation of the closet of identity, while, in turn, the closet of identity transforms the metaphor into a literal interpretation of its architectural counterpart.⁸² The metaphorical mode of queer disclosure mirrors the private interactions within architectural closets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It resembles more of an act of inviting someone into the closet than leaving it oneself. Both, whether material or metaphorical approach, underscore the significance of individualism in the quest for self-knowledge, unravelling how the closet acts as a locus for understanding oneself better. Absalons inhabitation cells not only show formal and architectural similarities to the closet but also broaden the concepts of privacy and identity. The omnipresence of the idea of identity relates directly to queer theory.

Knowledge-power and heteronormativity

Individualism resonates as a form of resistance towards heteronormative conditions. However, spaces that allow self-agency, such as the closets, are perceived as potential threats since they exist outside any oppressive and governing structure.⁸³ The liberal-inspired model locates power in judicial institutions and laws, while Marxist analyses identify oppression in the economic sphere based on the benefits of the dominant class. In contrast, Foucault asserts that power relations occur everywhere, even at a micro-level, and especially where one might not expect to find them.⁸⁴ The concept of power leads one to question its origins and to explore the idea of truth. For Foucault, power is not a substance to be possessed but a relationship to be exercised. It operates not in a repressive and prohibitive manner but rather in a productive way. In this sense, sexuality results from a set of power relations produced in bodies through social constructions. Thus, it stems from disciplinary power-knowledge structures and is intrinsically politicised.⁸⁵ In the scope of this research, the power structure that is questioned is the dominant norm identified as heteronormativity. From this perspective, if knowledge-power occurs everywhere and is pervasive, how can one respond? What could the counter-practices be?⁸⁶

It stands that one will not be able to free oneself and deconstruct power-knowledge structures except at a considerable cost. For example, by the transgression of laws, the lifting of prohibitions, or the creation of new discourses.⁸⁷ In this sense, resistance is contained within power. Consequently, fighting against power does not mean freeing oneself from it but rather confronting it with resistance. According to Foucault it is, therefore, illusory to position oneself outside of power: “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.”⁸⁸

The first form of resistance involves countering the path to knowledge. A renewed approach to archives and truth can be established by constructing a different relationship with knowledge. This involves questioning rituals, history, and heritage that are commonly perceived as neutral and perpetuate certain perspectives. It also involves acknowledging the subjectivity inherent in these aspects. By identifying various mechanisms of production of truth and understanding how knowledge is produced, it might be possible to detach from these aspects and perceive them differently. Countering the will to know and building a different relationship with the notion of truth involves questioning the circulation and dissemination of knowledge. It prompts one to attempt to subvert it. This entails creating new circuits of knowledge capable of altering a particular configuration of power relations. An example of alternative approaches to knowledge and production of truth about sexuality is endowed in erotic art — *ars erotica* — produced in societies such as China, Japan, India, Italy and the Arabo-Moslim.⁸⁹ In these representations, pleasure is not put in relation to what is permitted or forbidden but is represented in terms of its intensity, sensibility and truth. The idea is to identify and access the most individual form of truth — sometimes unconventional — and to unveil muted or unheard voices. (See Fig. 10)

A second way to counter the will to know is to intentionally practice

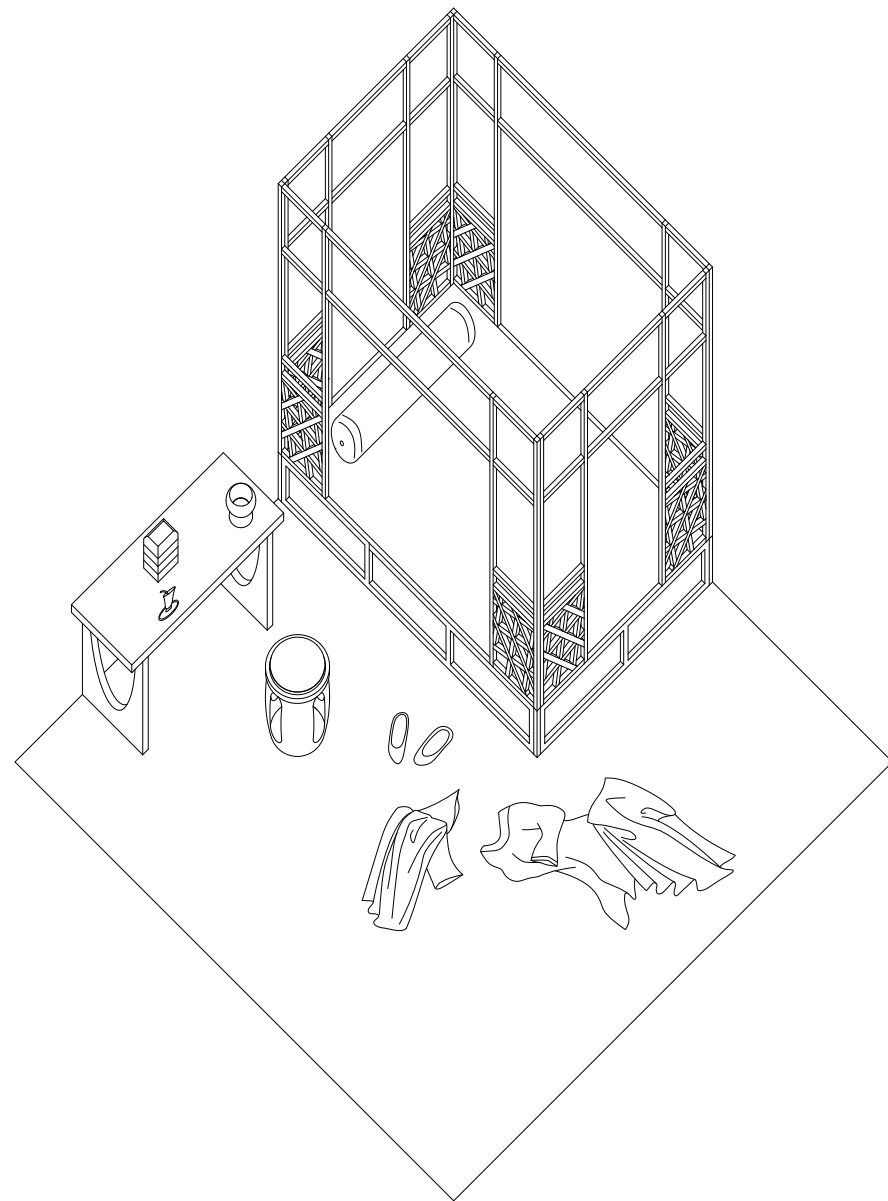


fig 10. Axonometric view of a Chinese bedroom, ca. 1800s. Based on an unknown artist's painting in Edward Lucie-Smith, *Ars Erotica An Arousing History of Erotic Art* (London: Rizzoli, 1997), 189. Drawn by the author.

83 Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 100.

84 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, 93.

85 Bourcier, *Queer Zones*, 139-140.

86 Ibid., 140.

87 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, 5.

88 Ibid., 95.

89 Ibid., 57.

the reversal of disciplinary discourses.⁹⁰ According to Foucault, discourse is both an effect of power and a point of resistance. The popular advocacy group “Act Up!”, formed in 1987, addressed issues related to the AIDS epidemic and exemplifies a counter-discursive form of resistance.⁹¹

After deconstructing knowledge and engaging in the practice of counter-disciplinary discourses, an important Foucauldian theory concerns the continuous construction of the self — a specific relationship with oneself. It emphasises the necessity to invent oneself and to take care of the self. This ethic is described as a “technology of the self” as an art of living, a *téchnê* that should lead to a relationship of reflexivity. It involves work that allows one to escape social and psychological determinations.⁹²

Expanding the notion of self-awareness to the realm of architecture unveils its intricate link with the closet both as a metaphorical and literal space. These spaces stand as a paradigm for self-exploration and embody a potential form of resistance. This reflection leads one to perceive the potential of domestic interiors to provide scope for resistance and nourish the imagination of what a space for one’s own could be. Drawing from Foucault’s theories, a room that undeniably nurtures the celebration of one’s identity and right to privacy plays a crucial role in the queer narrative.

Individualism as a form of Resistance

Individualism appears to embody an important political role that has drawn the path to queer theory.⁹³ This paper contends that individualism can function as a strategy for tending to a more inclusive way of living and embodies a form of resistance against oppression nurtured by heteronormative social and political constraints. Foucault defines techniques of the self or arts of existence as the reflective and voluntary practices by which individuals not only set themselves rules of conduct but seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being.⁹⁴

A foundational principle of self-cultivation inherent in individualism demonstrates the necessity of “taking care of oneself.” This concept holds a profound historical significance rooted in ancient Greek culture — 470 BCE to 340 BCE.⁹⁵ This idea, anchored in antiquity, gained prominence through Socratic consecration and subsequently found resonance among philosophers. Individualism epitomised the cornerstone of the philosophical art of existence.⁹⁶ Plutarch — 45-120 CE — encapsulates this ethos by stating: “He who wishes to come through life safe and sound must continue throughout his life to take care of himself.”⁹⁷ Plutarch’s affirmation echoes the Epicureans’ idea that philosophy should be an enduring self-care practice during one’s whole life. The call is to transform existence into a perpetual exercise, a commitment to continuous self-improvement. Together, these sentiments underscore the timeless significance of attending to oneself in the journey of life.⁹⁸ There is also no designated age for attending to oneself.⁹⁹ It is never too early nor too late to care for the soul’s well-being. Furthermore, this phenomenon was exclusive to limited individuals within culturally affluent social groups, for whom a *technê tou biou* held meaningful and practical significance.¹⁰⁰

Historically, during the Hellenistic — 323 BCE to 31 BC — and Ro-

90 Ibid., 100.

91 Weeks, “Queer(y)ing,” 525.

92 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 3*, 140-143.

93 Bourcier, *Queer Zones*, 27.

94 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 10-11.

95 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 3*, 43.

96 Ibid., 44.

97 Plutarch is quoted in Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 3*, 46.

98 Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self* (London : Tavis-tock Publications, 1988), 26-27.

99 Ibid., 48.

100 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 3*, 45.

man periods — 27 BCE to 476 CE — the growth of individualism accorded exponential importance to the private aspects of existence and to the interest that people focused on themselves. By being more reliant on themselves, less attached to the cities, more detached from one another and less dependent on external agents, political and social frameworks were weakened within the lives of individuals. Philosophy rules of conduct were highly personal.¹⁰¹

In the writings of the first centuries, the careful attention one should give to oneself is described as a specific and precise form of vigilance, addressing concerns related to both the body and the mind. It requires a preventive approach through a disciplined regimen, reflecting an anxiety that underscores the importance of self-respect. The practice of self-knowledge involves, for example, refraining from sexual pleasures, with such pursuits restricted to the realms of marriage or procreation. Essentially, the emphasis on sexual austerity is not only a reinforcement of prohibitions; instead, it deepens the process of self-constitution, where individuals actively shape themselves as agents of their actions. Consequently, it gives rise to a distinctive form of knowledge. Foucault explored the evolution of the art of living and designated the first two centuries of the imperial era as a sort of golden age in self-cultivation.¹⁰²

Explicit methods are delineated for pursuing an introspective analysis and engaging in self-knowledge and construction of the self. The morning self-examination primarily serves to contemplate forthcoming tasks and obligations, ensuring adequate preparedness. Conversely, the evening examination possesses a distinct focus, predominantly directed towards a reflective review of the day’s happenings. Sextius, a Roman Stoic from the second or third century, emphasises the main focus of practice on evaluating personal development at the day’s conclusion. When retiring for the night, he would engage in introspection, asking his soul: “What undesirable habit have you overcome today? What flaw have you resisted? In what way have you improved?”¹⁰³ This practice resembles a small-scale judicial drama, wherein the subject, before bedtime, assumes the roles of both a judging authority and an accused individual. One should ritualise the inspection of the entire day that has just unfolded. The examination is not intended to reactivate the fault, determine culpability or provide a feeling of remorse. Instead, it aims to reinforce, through a recapitulated and reconsidered verification of a failure, the rational foundation that ensures prudent behaviour.¹⁰⁴ In a broader context, the term *epimeleia* (“ἐπιμέλεια”) encompasses a more holistic approach to care, extending beyond pure self-care. This care is described as a complete set of occupations. The activities of the master of a household, the tasks of the ruler who looks after his subjects, the care that must be given to a sick or wounded patient, or the honours that must be paid to the gods and to the dead are called *epimeleia* (“ἐπιμέλεια”).¹⁰⁵ This holistic perspective not only makes one aware of one’s individual needs but also unveils the reciprocal relationship between self-care and the harmonious functioning of societal and spiritual dimensions.

The examination of engaging in a series of explicitly outlined exercises for self-testing, self-examination, and self-monitoring underscores the significance of truth in shaping the ethical subject. This truth pertains to comprehending one’s identity, actions, and abilities. Despite

101 Ibid, 41-42.

102 New methods of self-awareness can be observed in the first and second centuries. During that period, both physical and intellectual rural retreats occurred. Various intellectual activities, such as discussions on erotic art — *ars erotica* — and the significance of homosexual love, coexisted with engagement in physical peasant activities. See: Foucault, *Technologies of the Self*, 29-30.

103 Ibid., 61.

104 Ibid., 62.

105 Ibid., 50.

this, the outcome of this process is, to some extent, altered by the individual’s self-governance. However, this governance transforms into an experience wherein the relationship with oneself evolves beyond pure domination, embracing a form of enjoyment without desire and disturbance.¹⁰⁶ Foucault asserts that identities are culturally constructed and emanate from disciplinary knowledge-power structures. The concept of power initiates an exploration of the body and truth and unravels their modes of production. This self-dedicated activity surpasses simple solitude, constituting a social practice within various institutionalised structures.¹⁰⁷ Individualism extends to a communal practice, as exemplified by neo-Pythagorean communities and Epicurean groups. In these contexts, a hierarchical structure assigns the role of mentoring to the most advanced members, leading one to a collective commitment to self-care. According to Foucault, “The care of the self, or the attention to others’ self-care, emerges as an intensification of social relations.”¹⁰⁸ A similar observation can be made in the context of the closet, where privacy was sometimes shared with a select number of people. Cultivation of the self is thus not a self-centred endeavour pursued only for personal benefit; rather, this practice also contributes to the well-being of the entire society.¹⁰⁹

Absalon embraces the practice of self-care in his unfinished project titled “Cells”, designed in the late twentieth century. Through the process of self-examination, coupled with voluntary withdrawal, he builds an architecture of resistance. These micro-universes were designed according to the artist’s own body, daily rituals, needs and desires, emerging as the purest expression of his self. Absalon’s claim can be interpreted as an ambitious one; the key to communal engagement and interaction with society lies in prioritising self-care.¹¹⁰ He describes a unique way of engaging with society; self-care thus can significantly improve societal inclusivity.

106 Foucault, *Technologies of the Self*, 68.

107 Ibid., 51.

108 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 3*, 53.

109 Ibid., 54.

110 Sirrine Laalou; Marine Morin, *Absalon, zone d'art habitée* (Paris: Dilecta Eds, 2014), 51.

Queer Use of Space, Withdrawal and the Self

One can argue that a queer space cannot be reduced to a physical object; it’s a continuous act of appropriation of self-construction and self-awareness. It relates to homes and homemaking rituals of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, trans people and other sexual and gender minorities. A queer use of space disrupts domestic norms and provides scope for authentic living.¹¹¹ Through the cultivation of self-awareness, domesticity transforms into an extension of our identity, mirroring instances like Absalon’s architecture does by aligning with his daily rituals. Rooms sometimes barely show distinct and conscious layering of self. It is not really the physical appropriation of space, but rather its subtle investment, that queers it. A queered interior is mostly not built but implied and ephemeral.¹¹² No type, nor physical rules, nor objects are predefined to determine whether a space is queer or not. According to Georges Chauncey, it is the subjective experience of a space that makes it queer. These spaces allow non-heteronormative activities, free from social repression and provide scope for safety and inclusivity. Adapting to changing needs, queer use of space redefines contemporary norms and shapes new social contracts that align with the complexities of present societal realities. Interiors become at once both spatial and conceptual and are constituted in the body of the queer subjects in his/her/their gaze.¹¹³ But that also does not mean it entirely disappears when a queer subject leaves; hints may persist, suggesting that a queer subject has left subtle objects at certain places.¹¹⁴ Thus, domestic spaces no longer represent institutionalised social relations but can be places of a sensuous gathering where bodies might find each other. They formulate architectural proposals based on the individual, thereby reversing the way space tends to be constructed.

Self-knowledge finds resonance in queer spaces, where individuals often find an affirming environment to explore their identities. In queer spaces, individuals may find the freedom to express themselves authentically, free from judgments and prejudices. This can facilitate a more authentic and self-reflective process. Furthermore, these spaces can serve as places of knowledge production and dissemination. Queer communities often generate and share knowledge about their own histories, experiences, and endeavours, which contributes to the heritage and history of queer identities. They provide new access to new forms of truth and liberate voices that might have been in the closet for years. They unquestionably embody a form of resistance against heteronormativity and epitomise the interplay of power, knowledge, and identity. Absalon’s work presents a radical model of queer domesticity by creating inhabitation cells that deviate from conventional ways of living.

111 Christopher Reed, “Imminent Domain: Queer Space in the Built Environment.” *Art Journal* 55, no. 4 (Winter 1996), 64-65.

112 Betsky, *Queer Space*, 21.

113 Downey, *Domestic Interiors*, 3.

114 Reed, “Imminent,” 64.

Absalon's Cells: A Counternarrative for Rethinking the Closet

115 In the *Old Testament*, Absalon's name is related to an impatient and ambitious character. He is portrayed as the son of King David, rebelling against his father and meeting a tragic fate through assassination. See : Désanges; Piron. *Absalon Absalon*, 9.

116 Désanges; Piron, *Absalon Absalon*, 9.

117 Ibid., 11.

118 Ibid., 10.

119 Vergne, *Absalon*, 2.

The case of Meir Eshel, who adopted the pseudonym *Absalon* in 1987,¹¹⁵ allows one to expand the relationship between the self and architecture. In fact, his work can be seen as a radical questioning of social orders based on what the home represents and reinforces. He conceived acts of resistance based on radical concepts of self-awareness, voluntary withdrawal, and experimental interiors. Through his art, Absalon delves and searches to encounter his true identity and facilitate access to his mental space. He arrived in France at 22 in 1987 and decided to leave Israel, where he had grown up, after a military service that deeply affected him. His uncle Jacques Ohayon, an art critic and professor of art history, recommended him to his friend, the artist Christian Boltanski, who was a professor at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris.¹¹⁶ Since 1990, Absalon knew he was HIV-positive, and in the absence of therapies, AIDS took his life in 1993 at the age of 28. Few people were aware of his illness, including his partner, the artist Marie-Ange Guillemot, the gallery owner Chantal Crousel, and his assistant Philippe Picoli, with whom he shared the studio that another of his uncles, François Lasry, had acquired for him in Boulogne, a suburb of Paris, in a building designed by Le Corbusier. This studio served as the space where the majority of Absalon's projects took shape.¹¹⁷

He presented himself as an individual who questioned societal norms and actively pursued a path of individualism by referring to his own body, using it as a unique measurement unit. In a way, he was subverting social expectations to approach a true form of self-agency. This aspect becomes evident in the deliberate posture of resistance he adopts in the video titled "Noise," 1993, where he screams until he loses his voice. It conveys his commitment to challenging the prevailing power structure within which we exist. The only documented lecture by Absalon, held at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1993, sheds light on his deliberate ambition of pursuing a voluntary concealed life. In his self-portrayal, he positioned himself as an iconoclast, aspiring to live a utopian life in resistance against prevailing cultural norms. This lecture stands out for his audacity and awareness of his threatening mortality — Absalon was already aware of his AIDS diagnosis. In this way, it revealed that his ideas were profoundly personal and did not strongly incline towards engaging with the art world.¹¹⁸

Four groupings of artworks exhibited at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris in 1988 revealed an experimental character. Absalon produced a series of fragile furniture objects of modest dimension, positioned between models and proposals. They did not imply realisation at a human scale or have a clearly denoted function. One of them, titled "Nine Cells" — made of cardboard, wood, and white paint — consisted of nine boxes on a white wooden table. The tops of the boxes were opened, offering a bird's-eye-view of a series of simple models of daily furniture. The furnishings occupied all the available space, thereby neutralising their function. The "Nine Cells" represent one of the initial iterations of what would eventually evolve into his final project, the "Cells."¹¹⁹ Beginning in 1989, Absalon turned towards the understanding of everyday objects

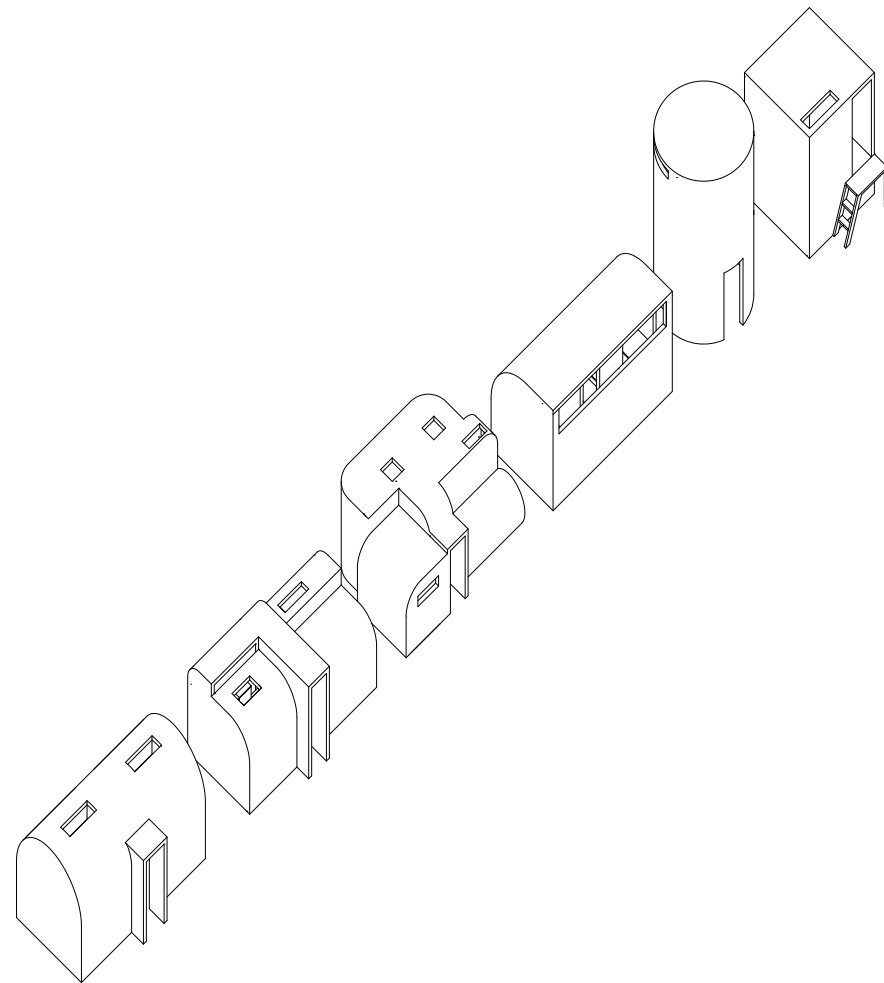


fig 11. A reconstruction of all Absalon's Cells, as originally envisioned by the artist in 1993. The cells, are arranged from left to right, are numbered from one to six. Based on photos taken by Arthur Péquin at the CAPC Museum in Bordeaux. From Guillaume Désanges and François Piron, *Absalon Absalon* (Paris: Paraguay Press, 2021). Drawn by the author.

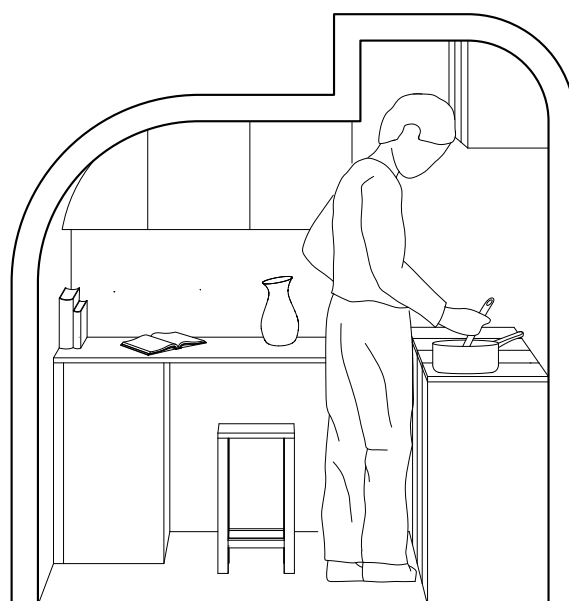
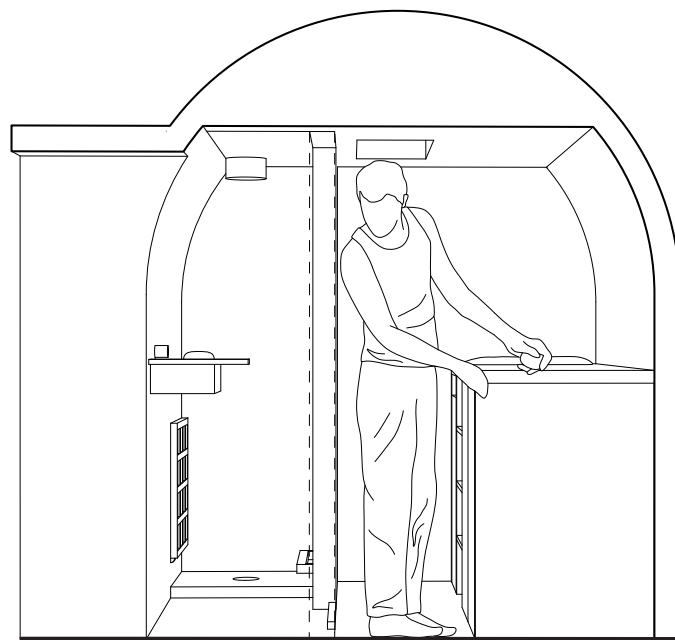


fig. 12 A perspective section of Absalon's *Cell No. 1*, illustrating the bed and bathroom arrangement. Drawn by the author.
fig. 13 A perspective section of Absalon's *Cell No. 2*, illustrating the kitchen cabinets and workspace. Drawn by the author.

120 Ibid., 2.

121 Ibid., 3.

122 Ibid., 3.

123 Ibid., 4.

124 Désanges; Piron, *Absalon Absalon*, 19.

125 Laalou; Morin, *Absalon, zone d'art habitée*, 50.

126 Ibid., 56.

127 Ibid., 64.

128 Absalon is often associated with modernist architectural models and the machine aesthetic of Le Corbusier. Nonetheless, it is needed to differentiate between them. By rejecting the generalising criterion of the *modulor* in favour of an absolute specificity of scale, Absalon's work turned to a radical incarnation of non-standardised architecture. See: Vergne, *Absalon*, 5-6.

129 Désanges; Piron, *Absalon Absalon*, 11.

and their interaction with space. His investigation demonstrated that he was attempting to create furnishings that would not appear as intrusions in space but rather should intend to blend seamlessly into their respective interiors.¹²⁰ The study of furniture and the analysis of its formal properties led him to the conception and realisation in 1990 of "Proposals for Habitats," made out of wood, cardboard, plaster and white paint on a 1:1 scale. This experimental artwork presented an inventory of recognisable and abstract forms arranged in a room.¹²¹

Absalon's work was a continuous progression; each step was nourished by the preceding one. Two videotapes, "Proposal for Habitats" (1991) and "Solutions" (1992), drew the path for his final project the "Cells." The first video, "Proposal for Habitats," featured generic objects resembling furniture but lacking functionality. Absalon explores various positions implying the use of these objects. Similarly, the first iteration of the "Cells" (1991) comprised geometric abstract volumes.¹²² The following year, "Solutions" clarified what was hinted at in the first video. Absalon performs domestic tasks, and the furniture finally accommodates his body dimension.¹²³

In the spring of 1993, he constructed the second version of life-sized prototypes of the "Cells" for an exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris. His entire body of work was inherently projective, even though his ultimate ambition was to inhabit his units, as he expressed: "That is to say, these houses are anything but utopian; they are real houses in which I will truly live."¹²⁴ Treated as 1:1 scale prototypes, these spaces, devoid of water and electricity, were open to the public. Confined to a few square meters, the interiors were meticulously tailored to the artist's size; he stood at 1.89 meters tall. Consequently, the "Cells" were not conceived for the size of an average person.¹²⁵ Visiting him would position individuals just forty centimetres apart, producing a denser and closer connection between the artist and the visitor. His architecture involved a reconfiguring of the body in space and hindered him from any inclination to collect material possessions or adhere to conventional bourgeois family life. Absalon had to measure his movements, actions, and activities like eating, reading, washing and sleeping. The "Cells" led to the development of new movements and habits, which Absalon referred to as a daily choreography.¹²⁶ He drew a parallel to the way using a fork and a knife might seem counterintuitive at first and becomes a habit over time. Beneath their minimalist appearance, his work raises multiple questions concerning the emancipation of the physical body from the social body. His viewpoint encapsulates a Foucauldian understanding of existence, influenced by readings such as *Discipline and Punish*. His cells can be seen as an interpretation of a mode of self-governance.¹²⁷ From an external perspective, they may appear to impose a very restrictive way of living, but for Absalon, they represented a form of self-agency. Their pure whiteness offer mental space that goes beyond what can be physically perceived.¹²⁸ The final stage involved the actual construction of the domestic cells, which were planned to be strategically placed in locations where he used to travel — Paris, Zurich, Frankfurt, New York, Tel Aviv, and Tokyo. Echoing his health situation, he perceived each one of them as "a virus in the city." Regrettably, he didn't witness the installation of the "Cells" in the cities he aspired to inhabit.¹²⁹

In this context, vulnerability, resistance, and resilience play a crucial role. Absalon’s autonomous units unveil a persistent and strong commitment to a rigorous material economy that results from the curation of essential needs. This commitment does not entail self-deprivation but aims to intensify life. Queer interiors are mostly implied, suggested and rely on the queer subject’s presence and perception. Similarly, Absalon’s cells are activated throughout his body and remain as vacant shells in his absence.¹³⁰ Within his interiors, he transforms into an extension of his environment, crafting spaces that are easily accessible and function as a prosthesis.¹³¹ Owing to Absalon’s queer identity, no probability of replicating normative rituals could be envisioned.

Most of the pieces of furniture arranged in the cells have been standardised. Cells No. 1, No. 2, and No. 4 share the same bed with a wardrobe underneath. Additionally, all cells feature a consistent bathroom system, incorporating the water closet within the shower. The sink in the bathroom also appears to be uniform across all cells. Nevertheless, the replicability of these elements doesn’t affect the singularity of each unit. They all present denoted ways of living and witness the impact that domestic interiors can have on our daily rituals. (See Fig. 18) Cell No. 1 was created for Zurich and features one of the most modest interiors among all six cells. Two walls separate the bathroom from the other interconnected programs. The ceiling maintains a consistent height throughout the entire space (See Fig. 12). Cell No. 2 exhibits various non-conventional architectural features that closely adhere to Absalon’s body and movements. When seated, the ceiling adjusts to accompany his movements and lowers accordingly. The architecture aligns with his choreography while engaging in different rituals, such as cooking, working, or reading. (See Fig. 13) Cell No. 3 exhibits a comparable approach to ceiling height in both standing and sitting areas. His rituals are discernible from the outside, particularly in this cell. A distinct cylinder exemplifies this aspect, indicating the space where he sleeps. (See Fig. 14) Cell No. 4 reveals a distinction in the partitioning of the daily ritual, a form of stratification in the arrangement of the programs. A daily choreography can be discerned. Starting at the far left of the perspective section, he rises from his bed in the morning, attends to his body in the bathroom, and concludes in the kitchen and working space at the far right. A horizontal opening illuminates each step of the ritual. (See Fig. 15) Cell No. 5 reveals a dichotomy between household and daily activities. The kitchen and bathroom are situated on the bottom floor, while the bed and the office table, accessible by a ladder, are located on the top floor. (See Fig. 16) The final unit, Cell No. 6, presents a radical minimalist exterior while unveiling deeply interconnected programs in the interior. Half-floors separate the kitchen and the table from the bed and the bathroom, creating a cohesive integration of each program. A horizontal opening brings light to bed height. (See Fig. 17)

130 Vergne, *Absalon*, 15.

131 Désanges; Piron, *Absalon Absalon*, 14.

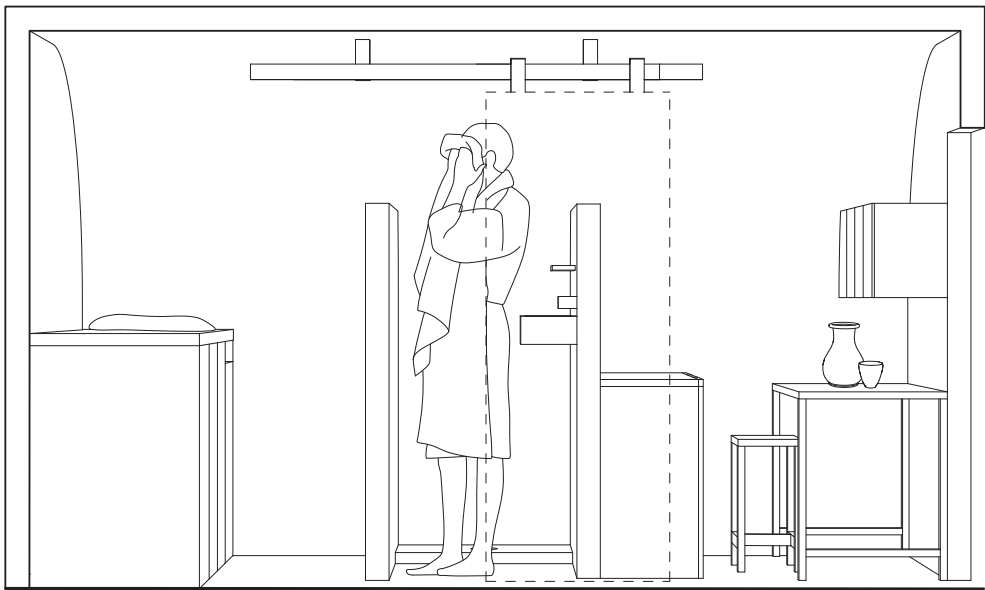
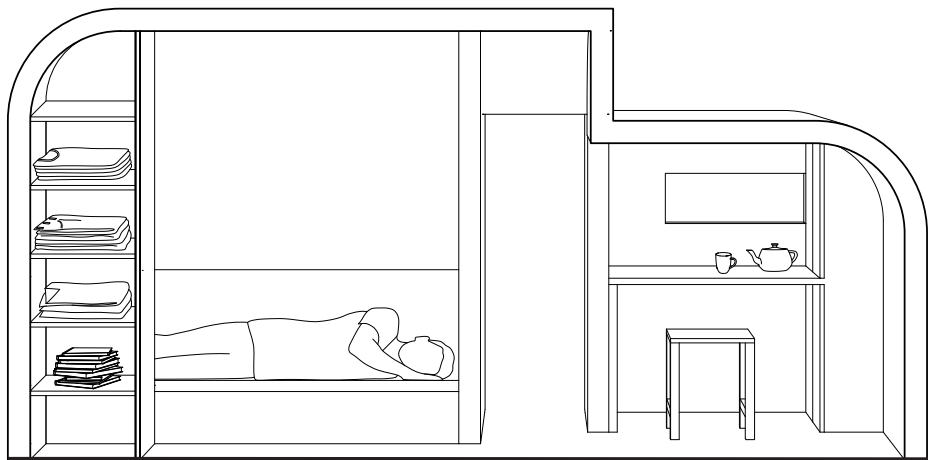


fig 14. A perspective section of Absalon’s *Cell No. 3*, illustrating the storage space, bed and workspace. Drawn by the author.
fig 15. A perspective section of Absalon’s *Cell No. 4*, illustrating the centralised shower. Drawn by the author.

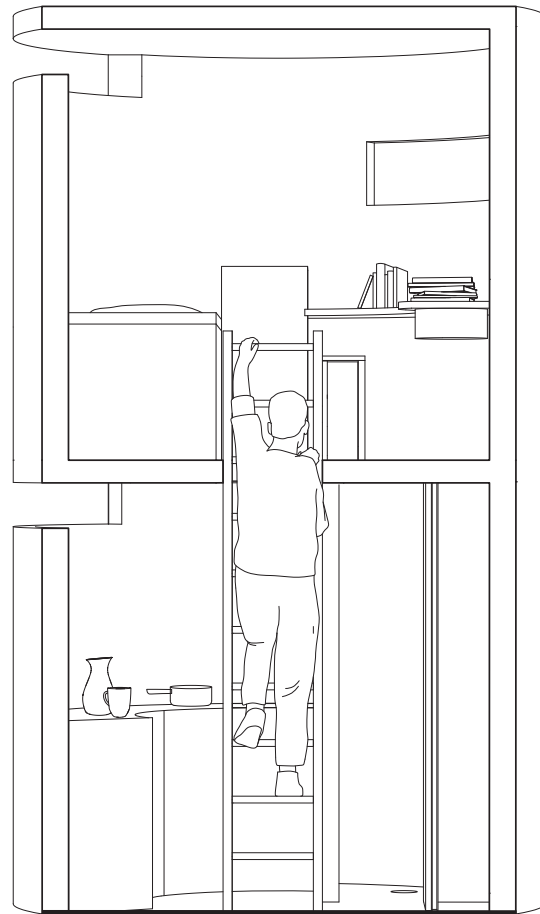


fig 16. A perspective section of Absalon's *Cell No. 5*, illustrating the separation of functions on different levels, accessed by a ladder. Drawn by the author.

fig 17. A perspective section of Absalon's *Cell No. 6*, illustrating the vertical compartmentalisation of functions. Drawn by the author.

A significant resemblance to seventeenth-century closets is evident. Both architectural elements, the closet and the cells, aspire to enhance one's life, transcending modest existence to confer a deeper understanding of oneself. Additionally, they both share the common characteristic of voluntary withdrawal. This way of performing one's own life can be found similarly in sexual minority claims, which have recently started to subvert domestic architecture. Queer space theories have acknowledged the need for spaces that align better with social and sexual minorities in the last three decades. In this regard, Absalon's radical practice is fundamentally emancipatory. The "Cells" political dimension is nonetheless absolutely personal, such as niches of resistance sewn into the heart of a system. He sought not to "change the world" but to "change his life," in this sense, his approach was genuinely personal.¹³² Absalon's inhabitation cells can be characterised as a solo performance and a manifestation of individualism. The end of the twentieth century is associated with an era of transition towards individualism over collectivism, influenced by queer theory. This transition necessitated a reevaluation of one's relationship with the body and a reassessment of politics, shifting from an externalised, open approach to a more individual perspective.¹³³

¹³² Désanges; Piron, *Absalon Absalon*, 15.

¹³³ Ibid., 76.

A Queer Perspective on Individualism and Domesticity

This research stresses the importance of reconsidering the role that individualism can play in reimagining domestic space beyond today's standards. While this may seem unprecedented, historical and intellectual imprints of individualism are evident in the works of early queer thinkers such as Foucault or Sedgwick, as well as in the discipline of architecture with the case of specific room types such as the closet. The significance of queer theory is fundamental, as it places an essential emphasis on identity and self-awareness. The queer perspective has shown that this path has various interpretations since individualism is acknowledged diversely in questioning what a queer use of space can be. Queer architecture theorists such as Adam Furman and Joshua Mardell acknowledge queer space as something that can be defined through appropriation, while others, such as Matt Cook and Andrew Gorman-Murray, describe it as an individual perception.

Absalon's work stands apart when one looks at it in the scope of the broader domestic sphere. The "Cells" present a form of resistance to a society that prevents the artist from becoming his true self.¹³⁴ They result from a desire for self-realisation and represent an extension of a body that is no longer here. Absalon's case carves a radical paradigm for a marginalised life and embodies the rejection of all standardised norms.¹³⁵ His perspective paves the way for discussions on the contemporary relevance of individualism and raises multiple analyses.

Absalon's way of perceiving the home aligns with current domestic concerns. His ideation of domesticity goes beyond stationary life and embraces an alternative, transient perspective. His will to locate the "Cells" in diverse urban landscapes resonates with the dissolution of the out-moded eighteenth and nineteenth-century suburban housing paradigm, which currently faces essential crises.¹³⁶ In this sense, Absalon's work explores the consequences of evolving in a society prioritising perpetual globalisation over individual self-definition. It invites one to explore the idea of individualism within a contemporary architectural context shaped by heteronormativity. The artist's main stipulation lies in adhering to self-chosen constraints that give him the freedom to ascribe functions to objects — such as furniture objects — at his own will. His perspective unfolds within a realm governed by self-generating principles, separated from societal norms and external frameworks.

Individualism tends to be dominated by discourses on the collective, which invisibilise the vital need for the practice of self-knowledge.¹³⁷ From the modern era to the present, the globally under-recognized housing affordability crisis and inadequacy in meeting societal needs are continuously increasing. Amid the expanding general demography and growing urbanisation, Western societies are facing housing shortages. Thus, the evidence is becoming compelling that these housing crises are global in scope.¹³⁸ A commonly accepted belief posits that a correlation exists between happiness and a sense of community. As a response, some attempts have been made through new shared equity homeownership schemes and collective developments.¹³⁹ These endeavours embody participatory intentions and aim to summarise non-cooperative individual

134 Laalou; Morin, *Absalon, zone d'art habitée*, 51.

135 Vergne, *Absalon*, 3.

136 Downey, *Domestic Interiors*, 2.

137 Björn Petersson, "Collectivity and Circularity," *The Journal of Philosophy* 104, no. 3 (Spring, 2007) : 141.

138 Steffen Wetzstein, "The Global urban housing affordability crisis," *Urban Studies* 54, no. 14 (Spring 2017), 3160.

139 Wetzstein, "The Global," 3162.

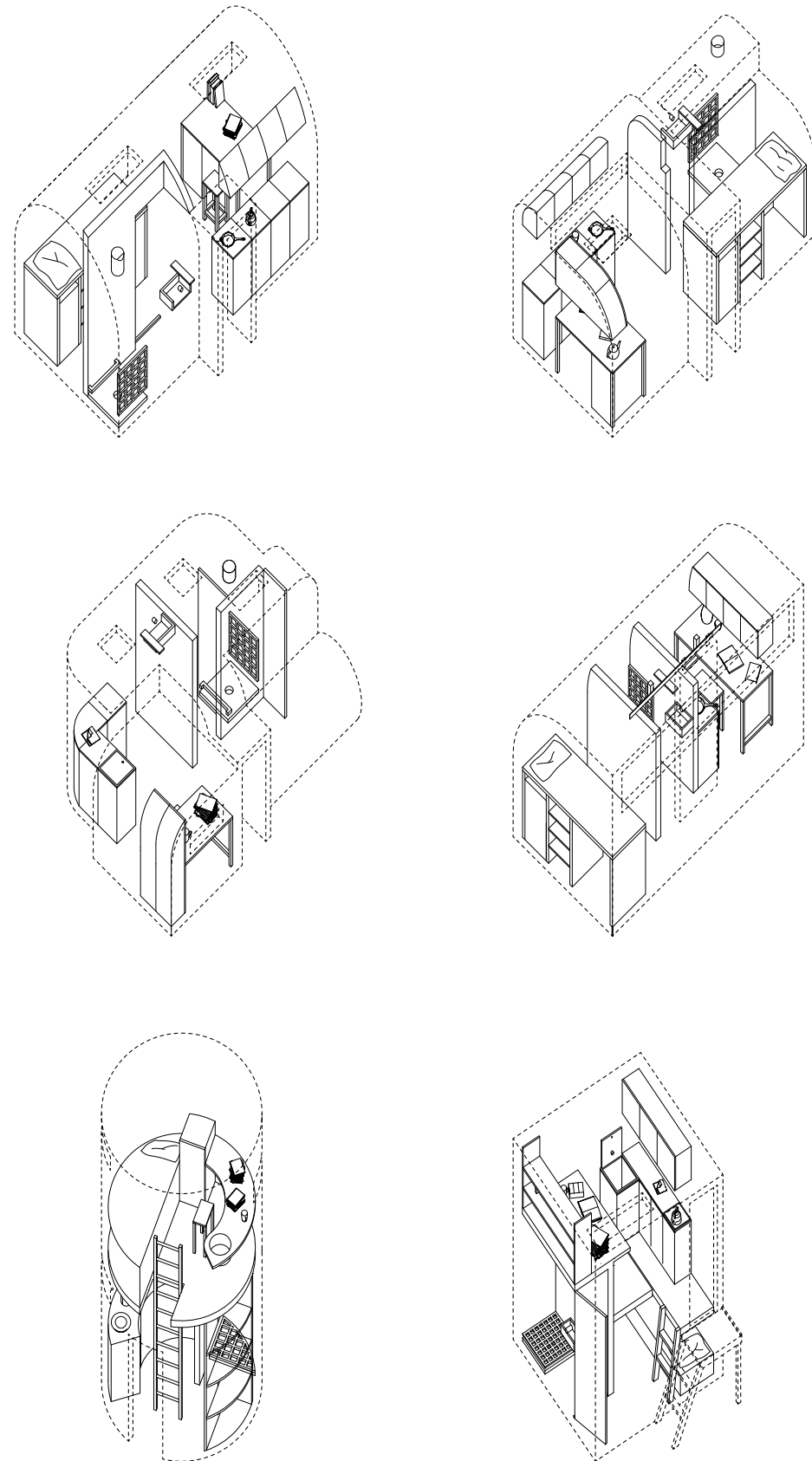


fig 18. Axonometric views of Cells No. 1 to No. 6, arranged from the top left to the bottom right. The illustration highlights the interior organisation of functions tailored to serve the single occupant, 1993. Based on photos taken by Arthur Péquin at the CAPC Museum in Bordeaux. From Guillaume Désanges and François Piron, *Absalon Absalon* (Paris: Paraguay Press, 2021). Drawn by the author.

needs and dilute them into a shared intention. However, they may not facilitate the path to self-knowledge.¹⁴⁰

Individualism facilitates an awareness of daily rituals, drawing one closer to an authentic self. Consequently, distinctly unique interiors must be created to explore the self in domestic realms. This paper proposes a new social contract wherein domestic interiors could serve as an extension of the self and liberate one from dominant norms. Absalon’s living paradigm accentuates the value of authenticity, echoing Virginia Woolf’s perspective: “I find myself saying briefly and prosaically that it is much more important to be oneself than anything else.”¹⁴¹ Subverting heteronormativity through the cultivation of self-knowledge unveils a method that not only speaks to the experiences of queer individuals but encompasses those diverging from societal heteronormative expectations. This inclusive approach extends to single-parent families, blended families, fragmented families, open couples, polyamorous couples, and various other scenarios.¹⁴² Sociocultural and demographic global changes unveil the significance of perceiving domestic spaces in correlation with these evolving realities.

Absalon’s work also sheds light on the concept of constraint. Through his approach and the elaboration of highly unique spaces, one might question the feasibility and application of his cells on a larger scale. This research is not much about evaluating whether his work can satisfy a significant part of society but rather about questioning the standardisation of domestic spaces. This underscores that the creation of highly singular spaces could better satisfy distinctive and unique individual needs. If this was applied at a larger scale, society would no longer be compelled to live in spaces that were created for an average standardised individual. Consequently, there is a need for a diverse range of heterogeneous domestic spaces to be introduced to the market. One could argue that unique spaces lead to significant construction costs, but this is where the question of constraint becomes relevant. By proposing non-heteronormative architecture, it is possible to identify deep personal needs that may be prioritised over other domestic requirements. Thus, one might choose to favour a specific architectural quality and set aside other costly elements one considers less important. Just as Absalon made the choice to live in highly restricted spaces but, in return, enjoys a form of freedom.

The “Cells” epitomise a radical paradigm, similar to the function of the closet of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that served as a means of voluntary withdrawal. The single occupancy homes nourished the creation of new circuits of knowledge, which also happened to be true in the closet practices, notably in studies and cabinets conceived for retreat, reading, and writing. Many similitudes can be drawn between the two objects, even in a formal aspect.

Finally, what becomes evident in this research is the fact that discipline¹⁴³ will always veil and obscure access to oneself. Inducing that individualism is impervious to the influence of power structures is, essentially, utopian. The self cannot completely liberate from social constructions and heteronormative injunctions. The body and mind remain malleable, continuously shaped, trained, and adaptable.¹⁴⁴ It is uneasy to discover a pure self and acknowledge a perfect, essential form of truth. In this sense, as radical as Absalon’s cells might appear, they still emerge as a conse-

140 Petersson, “Collectivity,” 138-139.

141 Woolf, Virginia, *A Room of One’s Own* (London : Grafton, 1977), 119.

142 Alan Marvell, “Housing in Crisis,” *Geography* 92, no. 3 (Autumn 2007) : 189 .

143 Foucault refers to discipline as a form of power that operates through surveillance, normalisation, and the regulation of individuals within societal institutions. He often uses the term “disciplinary power” to describe the mechanisms by which modern societies control and mould individuals and behaviours through various institutions such as schools, prisons, and hospitals. See : Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison*, (New York : Vintage Books, 1995), 139.

144 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 136.

quence of power and knowledge. They formulate a radical re-questioning of social orders based on what domesticity represents and reinforces. Nonetheless, it is possible to come closer to a form of truth through the practice of individualism. From a queer perspective, this research addresses numerous aspects related to identity and space, thereby posing multiple questions that remain open. How can one envision the dwellings of tomorrow, beyond heteronormative constraints, centred on the individual and their own sense of identity? How can one address individualism within a larger societal framework or observe it within familial contexts? Furthermore, how does individualism, as this was expressed architecturally by Absalon, play a significant role in reconsidering domestic space beyond the oppressive nature of standardisation?

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Thematising this research has been nothing less than an absolute pleasure. Exploring the realms of queer theories, identity, and space not only prompted my curiosity but also nourished my will to delve deeper into these compelling subjects. This paper significantly influenced my thoughts and revealed new perspectives I intend to explore further.

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NOTICE

This research responds to my growing interest in domesticity as an area of research and as an architectural domain. It is significant both to accomplish a shift in how architecture can be understood or analysed and to my ambition to contribute to a transformation in future architectural projects. Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge the concept of positionality and the standpoint that underlies my present discourse. I am a white cisgender woman who grew up in a privileged familial configuration that gave me access to education. It is noteworthy that what I am addressing holds a predominantly Western-centric viewpoint, reflecting the influence of the majority of the books I have read.

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Factory of Lives, Serena Mazzetti
First Struggle Then Housing, Antoine Ricard-Gauthier
From Hard to Soft, Julie-Anna Barès
Housewifization, Meryl Louise Barthe
Persistent Community, Melchior Dechancé
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