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Figures, Doors and Passages

Ordinary things contain the deepest mysteries. At first it is difficult to see in the conventional layout of a contemporary house anything but the crystallization of cold reason, necessity and the obvious, and because of this we are easily led into thinking that a commodity so transparently unexceptional must have been wrought directly from the stuff of basic human needs. Indeed, practically all housing studies, whatever their scope, are founded on this assumption. 'The struggle to find a home', declares a prominent expert, 'and the desire for the shelter, privacy, comfort and independence that a house can provide, are familiar the world over.' From such a vantage-point the characteristics of modern housing appear to transcend our own culture, being lifted to the status of universal and timeless requisites for decent living. This is easily enough explained, since everything ordinary seems at once neutral and indispensable, but it is a delusion, and a delusion with consequences too, as it hides the power that the customary arrangement of domestic space exerts over our lives, and at the same time conceals the fact that this organization has an origin and a purpose. The search for privacy, comfort and independence through the agency of architecture is quite recent, and even when these words first came into play and were used in relation to household affairs, their meanings were quite different from those we now understand. So the following article is a rather crude and schematic attempt to uncover just one of the secrets of what is now so ordinary.

#### THE PLAN AND ITS OCCUPANTS

If anything is described by an architectural plan, it is the nature of human relationships, since the elements whose trace it records – walls, doors, windows and stairs – are employed first to divide and then selectively to re-unite inhabited space. But what is generally absent in even the most elaborately illustrated building is the way

human figures will occupy it. This may be for good reasons, but when figures do appear in architectural drawings, they tend not to be substantial creatures but emblems, mere signs of life, as, for example, the amoebic outlines that turn up in 'Parker-Morris' layouts.

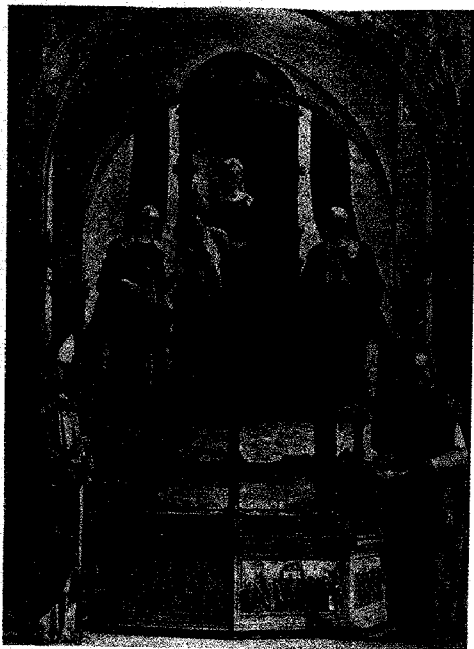
Surely, though, if the circle were widened to take in material beyond architectural drawings, one might expect there to be some tally between the commonplaces of house-planning and the ordinary ways in which people dispose themselves in relation to each other. This might seem an odd connection to make at first, but however different they are – however realistic and particular the descriptions, pictures or photographs of men, women, children and other domestic animals doing what they do, however abstract and diagrammatic the plans – both relate back to the same fundamental issue of human relationships.

Take the portrayal of human figures and take house plans from a given time and place: look at them together as evidence of a way of life, and the coupling between everyday conduct and architectural organization may become more lucid. That is the simple method adopted in what follows, and that is the hope contained in it.

#### THE MADONNA IN A ROOM

The work of Raphael as painter and architect offers a convenient opening into the subject, if only because it gives a clear indication that the ideal of secluded domesticity is rather more local than we are inclined to think. Of course this is not an attempt to review Raphael's entire work; the intention is simply to extract from his art and architecture the evidence of a particular *temperament towards others* which is implicit in it and indicative of the time, not just in art but in daily transactions.

During the Italian High Renaissance the interplay of figures in space began to dominate painting. Previous to this, the fascination with the human body had centred on physiological detail: the



2. *Virgin and Saints* (Ravenna Altarpiece), by Ercole de' Roberti, 1480. Figures, naturalistic enough in themselves, are isolated within a hierarchical space indicating degrees of spiritual purity.

articulation of limbs, the modelling of sinew, flesh and muscle, and the rendering of individual comeliness. It was only in the sixteenth century that bodies were attenuated into the graceful or magnified into the sublime, then brought together in peculiarly intense, carnal, even lascivious poses by Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael and their followers. Subject-matter, too, was often modified in favour of this new conception. The treatment of the Virgin and Child illustrates this well. Already in the fifteenth century the posture of the traditionally enthroned matron with demure infant raised above the rest of the world, both staring fixedly out into nothing, had become less hieratic, yet they still retained their holy and untouchable tranquillity (Fig. 2). In the sixteenth century they descended from their pedestal to be engulfed by animated groups of familiar figures sharing their company, as in Raphael's *Madonna dell'Impannata* (Fig. 3), typical of so many 'Holy Family' portraits. These gatherings were a figment of the artistic imagination, with no basis in any biblical text. Nevertheless, it was a fiction that



3. *Madonna dell'Impannata*, by Raphael, 1514. In early Raphael Madonnas, figures are distinct and composed, while in his mature works they are crowded and mobile. In some later Holy Family portraits, particularly from Parmigianino and Correggio, the implicit sensuality of touching bodies would become explicitly sexual.

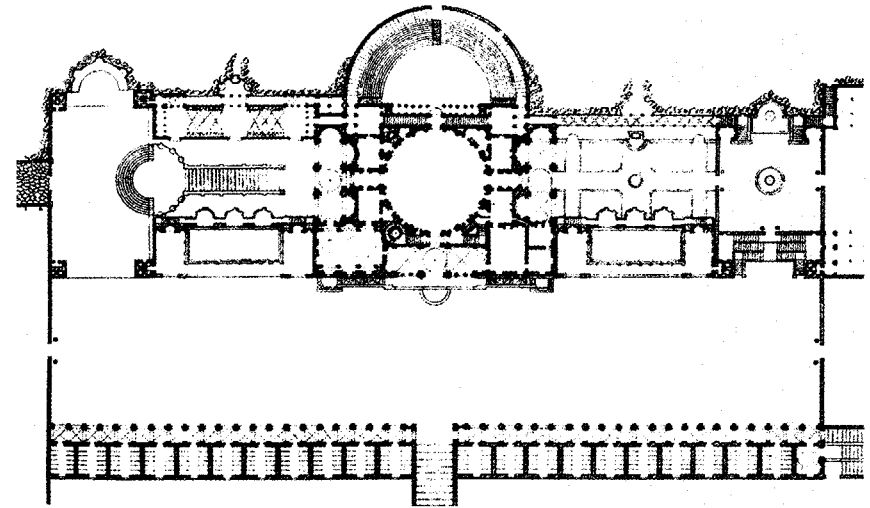
served to populate a painting with characters whose mutual adorations were distinctly sensual in destination, however spiritual their origin. In Raphael's *Madonna*, the figures are not so much composed in space as joined together despite it. They look closely on one another, stare myopically into eyes and at flesh, grasp, embrace, hold and finger each other's bodies as if their recognition rested more firmly on touch than on sight. Only the child St John breaks this intimate circle of reciprocity by acknowledging the observer. And these figures are more than the subject of the picture; they *are* the picture, they fill it. The individual physiological perfection of each body was now lost in a web of linked embraces and gestures; something not entirely new to painting, but reaching a climax of accomplishment at this time.

So if the tally between figures and plans is to be sought anywhere, it might as well be sought here, in a painting where personal relationships were translated into a compositional principle transcending subject-matter, and where solicitations between saints

and mortals alike seem so exaggerated to us – or rather they would do so if we were to think of them as plausible illustrations of conduct.

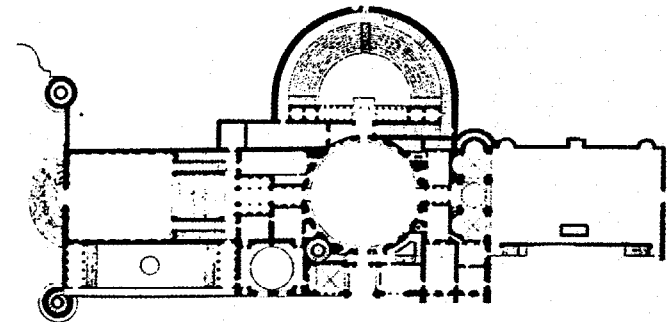
In 1518 or 1519 Cardinal Giuliano de' Medici commissioned an ambitious project for a villa sited on the slopes of Monte Mario in Rome. Only part of this vast scheme, later to be called the Villa Madama, was completed. The supervision of the work was carried out by Antonio da Sangallo, but the conception was unquestionably Raphael's. Here, then, was a sumptuous setting for daily life produced by an artist who had helped to desecrate the Virgin in his paintings. A laboured reconstruction of the villa published by Percier and Fontaine in 1809 emphasized axial symmetries, making the whole complex into one unified pile of building stuck into the hillside, adjusting the layout of rooms to fit what was, at that time, the established idea of strict classical conformity (Fig. 4). How could Raphael have designed it any other way?<sup>2</sup> Yet the portion that was actually built, and the earliest surviving plan (Fig. 5),<sup>3</sup> show something quite different.

Overall symmetry would have created repetitions, with each room and each situation having its mirrored counterpart on the other side of the building, but in the early plan this never occurs. Although most spaces within the villa were symmetrically composed, there were no duplications; every room was different. Uniformity was restricted to the parts where it could be immediately apprehended; the building as a whole was diverse. Yet, despite this striving to create singularity of place, it is very difficult to tell from the plan which parts are enclosed, and which are open, as the relationship between all the spaces is much the same throughout. The chambers, loggias, courts and gardens all register as walled shapes – like large rooms – which add up to fill the site. The building seems to have been conceived as an accumulation of these enclosures, with the component spaces being more regular than the overall pattern. This could not have come from the

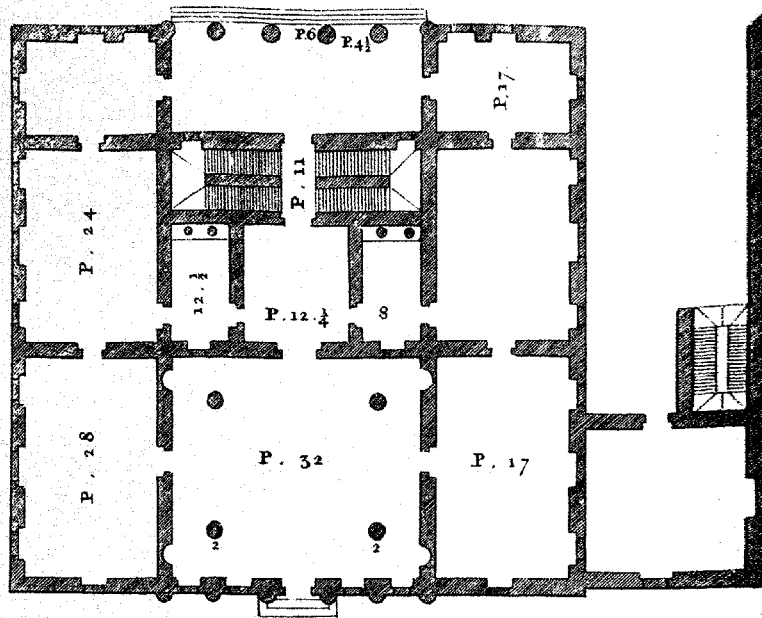


4. Reconstruction of the Villa Madama by Percier and Fontaine, 1809. The drawing is less the reconstruction of an original plan, more the reaffirming of a principle of composition:

symmetry prevails and repetitions abound. One thing it does show, however, is that the systematic division of circulation space from occupied space occurred only in the stables.



5. Villa Madama, Rome, by Raphael and Antonio da Sangallo. Plan by da Sangallo (redrawn).



6. Palazzo Antonini, Udine, by Andrea Palladio, 1556. Palladio's villa and palace plans are sets of connected rooms. The peculiarity of this one is that lavatories were brought within the main building. In pairs they flank the square ante-room at the very centre of the plan (ventilated from above). They, too, could be used as thoroughfares.

ultimately classical Raphael dreamed up by eighteenth-century academicians and preyed upon by nineteenth-century romantics.

Percier and Fontaine's rectified reconstruction, with its asymmetrical space inside a symmetrical envelope, illustrates the point at which the original Raphael ceased to make real sense; the point at which the latent structure of inhabited space burst through the confines of classical planning in his architecture. It had its parallel in his paintings, too; the point at which carnality shone through the vacuous signalling of gestures in his figure compositions.

## DOORS

Looking at the Villa Madama plan as a picture of social relationships, two organizational characteristics become apparent. Though numbered amongst the things we would nowadays never do, these are crucially important evidence of the social milieu the villa was meant to sustain.

First, the rooms have more than one door – some have many have three, others four – a feature which, sin years of the nineteenth century, has been regarded domestic buildings of whatever kind or size. Why? The given at great length by Robert Kerr. In a characteristic reminded readers of *The Gentleman's House* (1864) of t inconvenience of 'thoroughfare rooms', which made and retirement unobtainable. The favoured alterna terminal room, with only one strategically placed door of the house.

Yet exactly the opposite advice had been furnished l theorists who, following ancient precedent, though doors in a room were preferable to fewer. Alberti, for i drawing attention to the great variety and number Roman buildings, said, 'It is also convenient to place such a Manner that they may lead to as many Parts c as possible.' This was specifically recommende

buildings, but applied also to domestic arrangements. It generally meant that there was a door wherever there was an adjoining room, making the house a matrix of discrete but thoroughly interconnected chambers. Raphael's plan exemplifies this, though it was in fact no more than ordinary practice at the time (Fig 6).

So, between the Italians and Kerr, there had been a complete inversion of a simple notion about convenience. In sixteenth-century Italy a convenient room had many doors; in nineteenth-century England a convenient room had but one. The change was important not only because it necessitated a rearrangement of the entire house, but also because it radically recast the pattern of domestic life.

Along with the limiting of doors came another technique aimed at minimizing the necessary intercourse between the various members of a household: the systematic application of independent access. In the Villa Madama, as in virtually all domestic architecture prior to 1650, there is no qualitative distinction between the way through the house and the inhabited spaces within it. The main entrance is at the southern extremity of the villa. A semicircular flight of steps leads through a turreted wall into a forecourt, up another flight of steps into a columned hall, through a vaulted passage into the central circular court; thus far a prescribed sequence through five spaces preliminary to the more specific and intimate areas of the household. From the circular court, however, there are ten different routes into the villa apartments, none with any particular predominance. Five lead directly off the court or its annexes, three go via the magnificent loggia with the walled garden beyond, and two via the belvedere. Once inside it is necessary to pass from one room to the next, then to the next, to traverse the building. Where passages and staircases are used, as inevitably they are, they nearly always connect just one space to another and never serve as general distributors of movement. Thus, despite the precise architectural containment offered

by the addition of room upon room, the villa was, in terms of occupation, an open plan relatively permeable to the numerous members of the household,<sup>6</sup> all of whom – men, women, children, servants and visitors – were obliged to pass through a matrix of connecting rooms where the day-to-day business of life was carried on. It was inevitable that paths would intersect during the course of a day, and that every activity was liable to intercession unless very definite measures were taken to avoid it. As with the multiplying of doors, there was nothing unusual about this; it was the rule in Italian palaces, villas and farms – a customary way of joining rooms that hardly affected the style of architecture (which could equally well be gothic or vernacular), but most certainly affected the style of life.

From the Italian writers who described contemporary events, nothing is more evident than the large numbers of people who congregated to pass the time, watch, discuss, work or eat, and the relative frequency of recountable incident amongst them. At one end of the spectrum of manners, Castiglione, a close friend of Raphael, recorded in *The Courtier* four consecutive evening conversations supposed to have taken place during March 1507 at the Ducal Palace of Urbino (itself an example of the matrix planning described above). Nineteen men and four women participated and apparently there were similar gatherings every day after supper.<sup>7</sup> No doubt *The Courtier* was a purified, elaborated and sentimentalized account of actual events, but the portrayal of the group as a natural recourse for passing the time is in perfect accord with other sources. It is known that the majority of characters were palace guests at the time.

The nether end of the spectrum was described by Cellini (1500–71) in his autobiography. The passionate, violent and intemperate creatures in this work hardly resemble the refined, witty conversationalists in the other: so vivid is the contrast, they could easily be mistaken for separate species. Yet Cellini, like Castiglione,

required an active flow of characters on whom to impress his own illimitable ego. In both, company was the ordinary condition and solitude the exceptional state.

There is another telling similarity which at first seems to contradict the gist of this article; neither writer ever described a place. In *The Courtier* a few hyperbolic sentences suffice to eulogize the Urbino Palace, one of the great works of Italian Renaissance architecture, and not one word is said from beginning to end, either directly or indirectly, about the appearance, contents, form or arrangements of the apartments which serve as the setting. This is all the more strange because Castiglione likened himself to a painter of a scene in his preamble. Cellini's autobiography, too, is so packed with relationships of enmity, love, ambition and exploitation that they entirely fill the space of his book. He locates events by saying where they occurred, but these indications are like references to a mental map. No landscape or cityscape is mentioned in even the most cursory terms. Topography, architecture and furnishings are likewise absent, not even raised as backdrops to the intrigues, cabals, triumphs and catastrophes that he recites. Here are the most explicit references to architecture outside of his solitary confinement in the Castello S. Angelo. The first is an account of the circumstances surrounding a robbery:

... as was only fitting at the age of twenty-nine, I had taken a charming and very beautiful young girl as my maidservant ... Because of this, I had my room at quite a distance from where the workmen slept, and also some way from the shop. I kept the young girl in a tiny ramshackle bedroom adjoining mine. I used to sleep very heavily and deeply ... So it happened when one night a thief broke into the shop.

The second is an attempt to engineer a reconciliation with a patron while bedridden:

I had myself carried to the Medici Palace, up to where the little terrace is: they left me resting there, waiting for the Duke to come past. A good few friends of mine from the court came up and chatted with me.

The third describes a confrontation with a potential assassin:

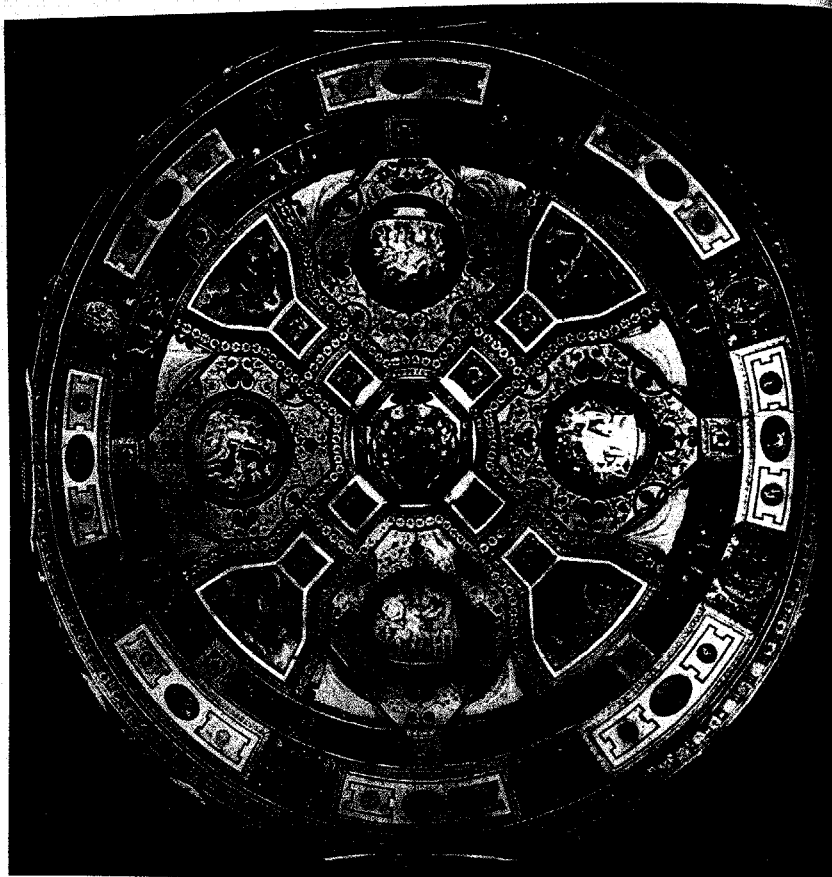
I left home in a hurry, though as usual I was well armed, and I strode along Strada Giulia not expecting to meet anyone at this time of day. I had reached the end of the street, and was turning towards the Farnese Palace - giving the corner a wide berth as usual - when I saw the Corsican stand up and walk into the middle of the road.<sup>8</sup>

Rarely did architecture penetrate into the narrative and then only as an integral feature of some misadventure or encounter. The Cellini autobiography and *The Courtier* share a total absorption with the dynamics of human intercourse to the exclusion of all else, and that is why their physical setting is so hard to discern.

The same predominance of figure over ground, the same overwhelming of objects by animation, can be observed in painting. The figures of the *Madonna dell'Impannata* occupy a room, but apart from the recessed window at the right-hand edge of the painting there is no indication of what the room is like. The shape of the room does not appear to affect the distribution or interrelation of the figures. This is the case also in Raphael's most architectonic fresco, *The School of Athens*, where the vaulted loggia is accorded as much detailed attention as the throng of philosophers who occupy it (Fig. 7). The effect of the building here (in an arrangement which could well have been the inspiration for the loggia at the Villa Madama) is, if anything, to concentrate the assembly, but otherwise the architecture leaves no decisive mark on the shape of society. Only the more peripheral and self-concerned figures use the building to support their bodies, whether on steps, the odd block of marble, or pilaster bases.

All of this raises an unexpected difficulty: it is not easy to explain how, when the Italians were so wrapped up in human affairs, they developed a refined, elaborate architecture which they hardly had time to notice and which seemed to lie outside the orbit of social life. Perhaps that is an exaggeration, but the paradox remains. The marvellous modelling and exquisite decoration of the Villa

7. *The School of Athens*,  
by Raphael, 1510-11.



8. Villa Madama, fresco on  
loggia vaults, by Raphael,  
Giulio Romano and  
Giovanni da Udine,  
1518-25. What the eye  
can feast on, the hand  
cannot touch.

Madama loggia (Fig 8), based on Nero's Golden House and the combined work of Raphael, Giulio Romano and Giovanni da Udine, cannot be explained by the urge to impress or in terms of iconography alone. These must have played their part, but such sensibility to form does not issue from status or symbolism like water from a tap. However, it could be that the incidental and accessory nature of architecture was precisely what led it to become so visually rich. Of all the senses, sight is the most appropriate for things at the boundary of experience, and that is exactly what a room, particularly a large room, provides; an edge to perception. In the immediate precincts of the body, the other senses prevail.

The examples given above, though hardly furnishing a proof, serve to indicate that the fondness for company, proximity and incident in sixteenth-century Italy corresponded nicely enough with the format of architectural plans. It is perhaps too easy for historians of domestic architecture to look back and see in the



matrix of connected rooms a primitive stage of planning that begged for evolution into something more differentiated, since little attempt was made to arrange the parts of the building into independently functioning sets or to distinguish between 'serving' and 'served'. But this was not the absence of principle: for all the different sizes, shapes and circumstances of the rooms in the Villa Madama, the connectivity was the same throughout. This did not happen by accident. It, too, was a principle. And maybe the reason why it was not thrown into high relief by theorists was simply that it was never put in question.

### PASSAGES

The history of the corridor as a device for removing traffic from rooms has yet to be written. From the little evidence I have so far managed to glean, it makes its first recorded appearance in England at Beaufort House, Chelsea, designed around 1597 by John Thorpe.<sup>10</sup> While evidently still something of a curiosity, its power was beginning to be recognized, for on the plan was written 'A longe Entry through all'. And as Italianate architecture became established in England so, ironically enough, did the central corridor, while at the same time staircases began to be attached to the corridors and no longer terminated in rooms.

After 1630 these changes of internal arrangement became very evident in houses built for the rich. Entrance hall, grand open stair, passages and back stairs coalesced to form a penetrating network of circulation space which touched every major room in the household. The most thorough-going application of this novel arrangement was at Coleshill, Berkshire (c.1650-67) built by Sir Roger Pratt for his cousin (Fig. 9). Here passages tunnelled through the entire length of the building on every floor. At the ends were back stairs; in the centre, a grand staircase in a double-storey entrance hall which, despite its portentous treatment, was really no more

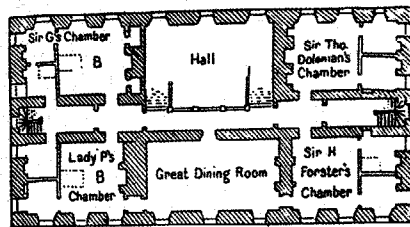
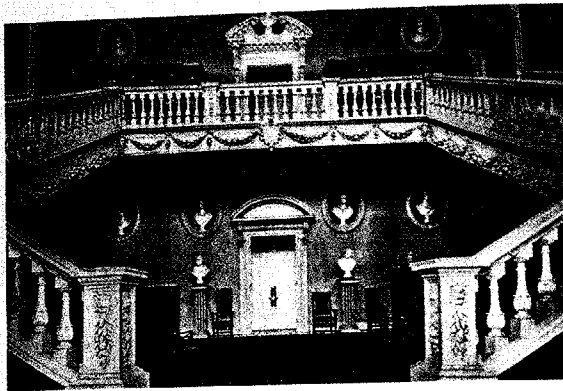
than a vestibule, since the inhabitants lived their lives on the other side of its walls.

Every room had a door into the passage or into the hall. In his book of architecture Pratt maintained that the 'common way in the middle through the whole length of the house' was to prevent 'the offices [i.e. utility rooms] from one molesting the other by continual passing through them' and, in the rest of the house, to ensure that 'ordinary servants may never publicly appear in passing to and fro for their occasions there'.<sup>11</sup>

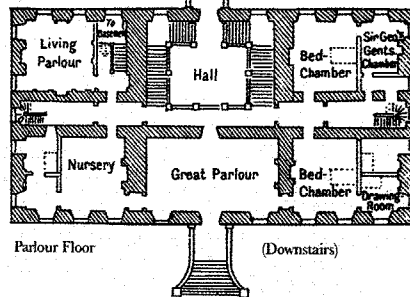
According to him, the passage was for servants: to keep them out of each other's way and, more important still, to keep them out of the way of gentlemen and ladies. There was nothing new in this fastidiousness, the novelty was in the conscious employment of architecture to dispel it – a measure in part of the antagonism between rich and poor in turbulent times, but also an augury of what was to render household life placid in years to come.

As to the main apartments, they were to be enfiladed into as long a vista of doors as could be obtained. The corridor was not, therefore, an exclusive means of access at this time, but was installed parallel to interconnecting rooms. Even so, at Coleshill the corridor predominated to the extent of becoming a necessary route through a large part of the house. A more elegant plan, balancing the two types of circulation, was John Webb's Amesbury House, Wiltshire (Fig. 10), where the central passage served the whole house, while all the rooms, on the principal floor at least, were also interconnected. From these plans it can be seen how the introduction of the through-passage into a domestic architecture first inscribed a deeper division between the upper and lower ranks of society by maintaining direct sequential access for the privileged family circle while consigning servants to a limited territory always adjacent to, but never within the house proper; where they were always on hand, but never present unless required.

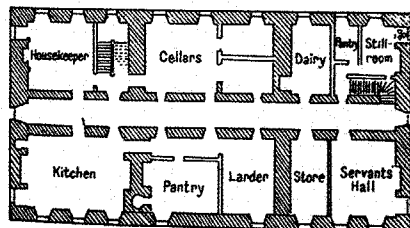
Its effects were even more pervasive than this would suggest. The



Dining Room Floor (Upstairs)



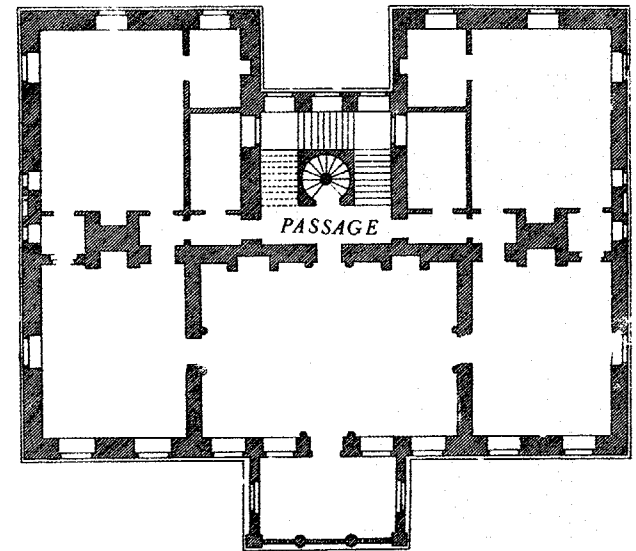
Parlour Floor (Downstairs)



Coleshill House - Basement

9. Coleshill, Berkshire, by Sir Roger Pratt. 1650-67. Stairs hold the body captive in movement more completely than any other element of architecture, and there would seem to be a close correspondence between the architectural aggrandizement of staircases and the application of corridor planning. The corridor after all, does the same job nearly as well.

10. Amesbury House, Wiltshire, by John Webb, 1661. First-floor plan. Though the space for movement was centralized and made less emphatic, the organization differed little from Coleshill. The spiral stair-within-a-stair was for servants.



architectural solution to the servant problem (the problem of their presence being part of their service, that is) had wider ramifications. With Pratt a similar caution can be detected in all matters relating to 'interference', as if from the architect's point of view all the occupants of a house, whatever their social standing, had become nothing but a potential source of irritation to each other. It is true that he made the magnanimous gesture of putting doors between some of the rooms at Coleshill, as noted above, but then he did so explicitly to obtain the visual effect of a receding perspective through the whole house:

As to the smaller doors within, let them all lie in a direct line one against another out of one room into another so that they being all open you may see from one end of the house to the other; answerable to which if the windows be placed at each end, the vista of the whole will be so much the more pleasant.<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, the integration of household space was now for the sake of beauty, its separation was for convenience – an opposition

which has since become deeply engraved into theory, creating two distinct standards of judgement for two quite separate realities: on the one hand, an extended concatenation of spaces to flatter the eye (the most easily deceived of the senses, according to contemporary writers); on the other, a careful containment and individual compartments in which to preserve the self from others.

This split between an architecture to look through and an architecture to hide in cut an unbridgeable gap dividing commodity from delight, utility from beauty, and function from form. Of course in Raphael's work the distinction between those aspects of architecture affecting daily intercourse and those concerned solely with visual form can just as easily be made. What is so different is that in his work they were in general accord with one another, whereas at Coleshill they began to pull in quite contrary directions.

Why the innovation of independent access should have come about at all is not yet clear. Certainly it indicated a change of mood concerning the desirability of exposure to company; whether exposure to all in the house, or to just some, was at this point a matter of emphasis. Its sudden and purposeful application to domestic planning shows that it did not turn up at the end of a long, predictable evolutionary development of vernacular forms, as is often alleged, nor did it have anything to do with the importation of the Italian style or Palladianism, though these were its vehicles. It came apparently out of the blue.

These were the years when the puritans talked of 'armouring' the self against a naughty world. They of course meant spiritual armour, but here was another sort, outside of body and soul: the room made into a closet. The story of Cotton Mather, a New England puritan, gives some idea of how hard it is to distinguish morality from sensibility in this voluntary sequestration. He was said to have made it a rule 'never to enter any company ... without endeavouring to be useful in it', dropping, as opportunities arose, instructive hints, cautions or reproofs. He was later portrayed as a

domestic paragon, 'doing all the good in his power to his brothers, sisters and servants'. But in order to do so much good he found it best to avoid the paying or receiving of any unnecessary or 'impertinent' visits. To prevent useless intrusions, he inscribed in large letters above the door of his room these admonitory words: 'BE SHORT'.<sup>13</sup>

Dividing the house into two domains – an inner sanctuary of inhabited, sometimes disconnected rooms, and an unoccupied circulation space – worked in the same way as Mather's sign, making it difficult to justify entering any room where you had no specific business. With this came a recognizably modern definition of privacy, not as the answer to a perennial problem of 'convenience', but quite possibly as a way of fostering a nascent psychology in which the self was, for the first time, felt to be not just at risk in the presence of others, but actually disfigured by them.

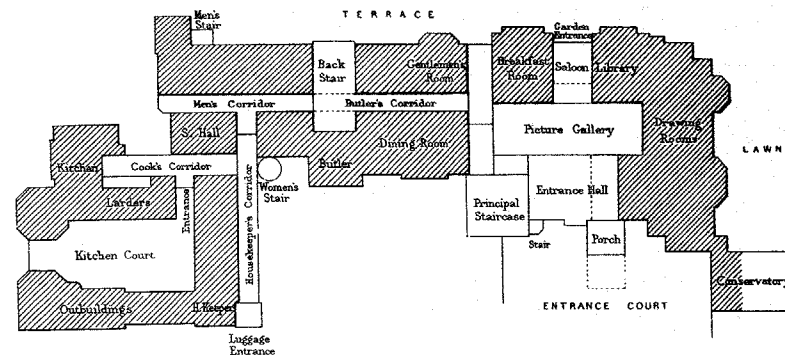
There was a commonplace analogy in seventeenth-century literature that compared a man's soul to a privy chamber,<sup>14</sup> but it is hard to tell now which became more private first, the room or the soul. Certainly, their histories are entwined.

All the same, the logic of containment was not pursued with any rigour during the eighteenth century. Large households tended to follow the pattern of Amesbury, attempting to reconcile independent access and interconnection by providing both, though rarely in as methodical a way. Only at the approach of the nineteenth century was there a move back toward greater systematization of access, observable for example in the plans of Soane and Nash. In this respect Soane's work, perhaps more than that of any other architect, lies on the edge of modernity.

Soane, like Pratt, contrived vistas from his interiors, only he was not content with the aligning of doors. He also layered space upon space, so that the eye was no longer constrained into a telescopic recession of portals and could wander wide, up, across and through from one place to another. Or to be more exact, this was the archi-



11. The great parlour at Coleshill, by Sir Roger Pratt. The connecting doors to adjacent rooms (one of which would have been to the right of the fireplace) have been removed, a small but significant change since it transforms a seventeenth-century room, with both corridor access and interconnection, into a nineteenth-century room with corridor access alone.



12. Bearwood, by Robert Kerr, 1864. Thoroughfare plan. As Kerr's most ambitious country residence this took its place with five other plans similarly analysed in *The Gentleman's House*.

tectural effect he was able to achieve in his own house at Lincoln's Inn Fields: in other people's houses, the yearning for extension was often held in check by an equal persuasion that all rooms should be sufficiently enclosed to be independent of one another for the purposes of daily use. As the room closed in, so the aesthetic of space unfolded, as if the extensive liberty of the eye were a consolation for the closer confinement of body and soul; a form of compensation which was to become more familiar and more pronounced in twentieth-century architecture. Thus, when characteristically Soanian vistas occurred, they did so most often in circulation space or out of windows, not in occupied space. As at Coleshill, the most studied and impressive parts were generally stairs, landings, halls and vestibules – spaces which housed nothing but the way from one place to another, together with ensigns of occupation in the form of statuary or paintings.

Half a century later, when Robert Kerr was informing his readership of the perils attending thoroughfare rooms, the issue had been

resolved once and for all: the corridor and the universal requirement of privacy were firmly established and principles of planning could be advanced with more or less equal application to all dwellings in all circumstances: large houses, small houses, servant quarters, family apartments, rooms for business, for leisure – these discriminations were subsidiary to the key distinction between route and destination that would henceforth pervade domestic planning (Fig. 11). Kerr made diagrams that reduced house plans to these two categories of trajectory and position, proposing that their proper arrangement was the substratum upon which both architecture and domesticity were to be raised (Fig. 12).

On the face of it, there would seem to be little difference between the complaints made by Alberti, who valued privacy far more than did the sixteenth-century theorists, and those in Kerr's book about the irritations of daily life. Both deplore the mixing of servants and family, the racket of children, and the prattle of women.

The real difference was the way architecture was used to over-

come these annoyances. For Alberti, it was a matter of arranging proximity within the matrix of rooms. The expedients of installing a heavy door with a lock, or of locating the household's most tiresome members and most offensive activities at the greatest distance served his purpose, and these were conceived of as secondary adjustments to bring harmony to the cacophony of home life rather than silence it. Kerr, for his part, mobilized architecture in its entirety against the possibility of commotion and distraction, bringing to bear a range of tactics involving the meticulous planning and furnishing of each part of the building under a general strategy of compartmentalization on the one hand, coupled with universal accessibility on the other.

Oddly enough, universal accessibility was as necessary an adjunct to privacy as was the one-door room. A compartmentalized building had to be organized by the movement through it, because movement was the one remaining thing that could give it any coherence. If it were not for the paths making the hyphen between departure and arrival, things would have fallen apart in complete ir-relation. With connected rooms, the situation had been quite different. There, movement through architectural space was by filtration rather than canalization, which meant that although great store might be set on sequential passage from one place to the next, movement was not necessarily a generator of form. Considering the difference in terms of composition, one might say that, with the matrix of connected rooms, spaces would tend to be defined and subsequently joined like the pieces of a quilt, whilst with the compartmentalized plans the connections would be laid down as a basic structure to which spaces could then be attached like apples to a tree.<sup>15</sup>

Hence, in the nineteenth century, 'thoroughfares' could be regarded as the backbone of a plan not only because corridors looked like spines, but because they differentiated functions by joining them via a separate distributor, in much the same way as the

vertebral column structures the body: 'The relation of rooms to each other being the relationship of their doors, the sole purpose of the thoroughfares is to bring these doors into a proper system of communication.'<sup>16</sup>

This advanced anatomy made it possible to overcome the restrictions of adjacency and localization. No longer was it necessary to pass serially through the intractable occupied territory of rooms, with all the diversion, incidents and accidents that they might harbour. Instead, the door of any room would deliver you into a network of routes from which the room next door and the furthest extremity of the house were almost equally accessible. In other words these thoroughfares were able to draw distant rooms closer, but only by disengaging those near at hand. And in this there is another glaring paradox: in facilitating communication, the corridor reduced contact. What this meant was that purposeful or necessary communication was facilitated while incidental communication was reduced, and contact, according to the lights of reason and the dictates of morality, was at best incidental and distracting, at worst corrupting and malignant.

## BODIES IN SPACE

Since the middle of the nineteenth century there have been no great changes in domestic planning – only accentuations, modifications and restatements, at least until very recently. Neither the radical Victorian medievalists nor the modernists made any noticeable attempt to go back or forward from the accepted conventions of the nineteenth century, despite reams of bombast from each quarter on the great improvements in daily life that would ensue either from the complete rejection of industrial production or from its wholesale affirmation; it did not matter much which, because medievalists and modernists shared a conviction that deliverance lay in the way the house was built. Thus the social aspect of archi-

ecture, which surfaced for the first time as an integral feature of theory and criticism, was more concerned with the fabrication of buildings than with their occupation.

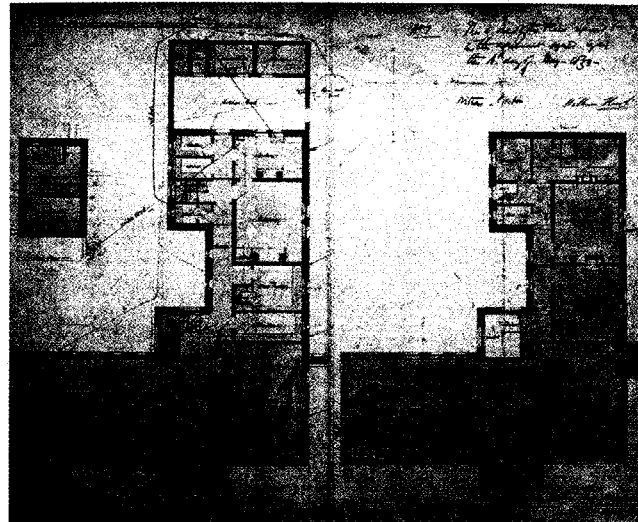
And so with the house considered first and foremost as an item of production, the stage was set for the arrival of 'housing' in the current sense of the term (housing, as has recently been pointed out, is an activity, not a place).<sup>17</sup> Emphasis shifted from the nature of the place to the procedures of its assembly. Nevertheless, beneath this or that revolutionary, workmanlike programme of reconstruction, the house itself remained unaltered in all its essentials. Because of the undeniable dynamism of the modern movement and the crusading utopianism of the arts and crafts movement, this has tended to be overlooked.

The Red House at Bexley Heath by William Morris and Philip Webb is the set-piece of craft revivalism. It was begun in 1859, not long after Morris had completed his only easel painting, *La Belle Iseut* (Fig. 13). The real subject of both these works was Morris's new wife, Jane. Isolde was her portrait and the Red House was to be her setting, an altogether romantic project in which Morris sought a medieval authenticity to replace the stylistic shams of contemporary gothic and Elizabethan. Yet his commitment to past practice only went so far. The morality of craft and beauty might transform the procedures of building and the appearance of the finished work, but medievalism did not percolate into the plan, which was categorically Victorian and utterly unlike anything built in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries (Fig. 14). Indeed the Red House illustrates the principles laid down by the bourgeois Robert Kerr better than Kerr's own plans: rooms never interconnect, never have more than one door, and circulation space is unified and distinct.

So even though Morris was regarded as a bohemian, a radical leading an unorthodox life, flaunting bourgeois standards, the planning of the Red House was perfectly contemporary and conventional: its eccentricities lay elsewhere.



13. *La Belle Iseut*, by William Morris, 1858. There are two figures in the painting – Isolde, and a minstrel in the background. Not only are they physically separate, but neither recognizes the presence of the other. Although Morris had trouble with oil-painting, this was not just the result of limited technique.



14. The Red Bexley Heatl Webb and W Morris, 1859 plans, which reproduced, radical medi invisible.

Not that Morris refused to pursue medievalism to the point where it would change men's lives. Even at this early date the idea was at the core of his work. What he envisaged, however, was not so much a change as a transfiguration; a fulfilment of medieval literary idealizations rather than a recreation of medieval conditions of life. These were idealizations of extreme spirituality, so it is not altogether surprising that the more carnal aspects of medievalism, such as interconnecting rooms, had been subtracted from his architecture. When he later moved to a genuine medieval house at Kelmscott he accepted such things with a show of bravado:

The first floor ... has the peculiarity of being without passages, so that you have to go from one room into another to the confusion of some of our casual visitors, to whom a bed in the close neighbourhood of a sitting room is a dire impropriety. Braving this terror we must pass through...<sup>18</sup>

But though it may have been a good test of squeamishness, he found nothing else to commend it.

Similar expurgations were made in his poetry and painting. In *La Belle Iseut*, as in a great deal of Victorian art, the body was treated as a sign of its invisible occupant. Jane, in the guise of the legendary heroine, was turned into a languid effigy of an overwrought spirit, radiating that peculiar Pre-Raphaelite loveliness through her listless, distracted expression and lethargic posture. The soul might overflow with febrile energy but the body had been abandoned to lassitude. Everything in the painting is emblematic, more like a still-life than an illustration of an event. As in Raphael's *Madonna*, the room is barely decipherable, but now for quite different reasons. The space has not been eclipsed by a tangle of figures. In Morris's picture, furniture, fittings, drapes, ornaments and other objects, not figures, stand in the way. They, too, are there as emanations of an exquisite psyche, symbolizing a life but not engaging with it in any way. In the heroine's absence this display of lovingly embellished articles would represent her well enough. Her

physical isolation from others was in any case complete, and these items served as her proxy.

Morris believed that the great sin of the Middle Ages was violence, though art had been in abundance, whereas the great sin of the nineteenth century was philistinism, plain and simple. The Red House contained both art and the conditions of a peaceful life. The pity was that their combination could only magnify the value of objects and diminish carnality, till the body appeared as little more than a heavy shadow of the spirit.

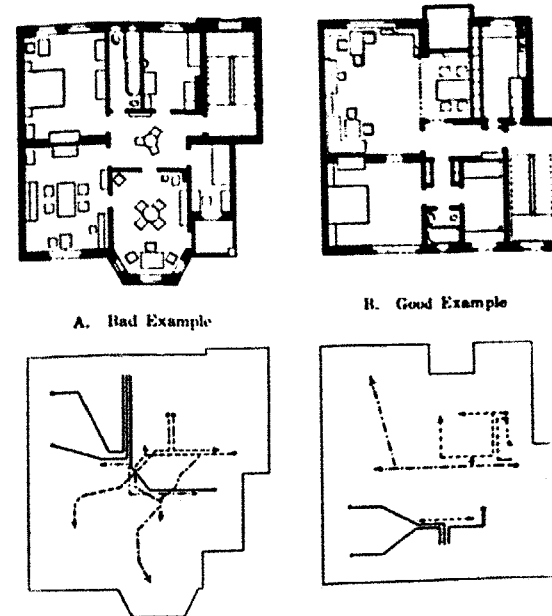
The retreat from the body was widespread and took many forms. Morris himself was immensely physical. He loved company, hated puritans, tore down curtains, flung unpalatable food out of the window, hit furniture, broke chairs, rammed his head against walls, shouted, swore and wept, to the consternation of more restrained contemporaries,<sup>19</sup> but he nevertheless worked within – and so confirmed – the prevailing sensitivities to decorum, passivity and privacy. Others who professed no great love of nineteenth-century domesticity were also caught within it. This is true of Samuel Butler who, in *The Way of All Flesh*, set out to lay bare the deceits of family life. He did so as if he were dissecting a corpse that became more and more revolting as the knife cut deeper. The following passage describes the intimacies of a mother and son on a sofa:

'My dearest boy', began his mother, taking hold of his hand and placing it within her own, 'promise me never to be afraid either of your dear papa or me; promise me this, my dear, as you love me, promise it to me', and she kissed him again and again and stroked his hair. But with her other hand she still kept hold of his; she had got him and she meant to keep him ... The boy winced at this. It made him feel hot and uncomfortable all over ... His mother saw that he winced and enjoyed the scratch she had given him. Had she felt less confident of victory, she would better have forgone the pleasure of touching, as it were, the eyes at the end of the snail's horns in order to enjoy seeing the snail draw them in again, – but she knew that when she had got him well down into the sofa, and held his hand, she had the enemy almost absolutely at her mercy and could do pretty much what she liked.<sup>20</sup>

The thing to notice is that when flesh touched flesh a subtle style of torture was taking place. The yearning for sensation had been turned back on itself to provide a refined method for the suffocation of free spirits. Yet such unscrupulous, cloying advances against freedom, individuality and integrity did not find a place in the general run of nineteenth-century domestic illustrations, where passivity, propriety and politeness held court, as they did even in Butler's own charmless caricature of his family, rigid to the point of petrification. The shameful exploitations on the sofa were a rearguard action fought to maintain the conditions of a far less demonstrative normality. The alternatives were either to admit these violations of the body as a necessary, occasional manipulation of sensuality, or to rid human relationships of passion altogether. Either way, the body would have to be considered as the easy dupe of a facile emotional subterfuge.

No wonder that the apostles of modernity, who also expressed an unfathomable distaste for the stultifying oppressiveness of nineteenth-century family life, were left with only two possibilities. The first was to dissipate the clammy heat of intimate relationships by collectivizing them; the second, more applicable to the house, as it turned out, was to atomize and individualize and separate each person yet further. Here were two solutions, the one ultimately politic, the other ultimately private. From a certain angle they appear remarkably alike, so it was quite logical for Le Corbusier, Hilberseimer and the constructivists to use the individual private cell as the basic building block for entire new cities in which all other facilities would be collectivized.<sup>21</sup>

After the brave rhetoric and utopian visions, more pedestrian investigations with less exalted aims would continue, in the name of modernity, the effort undertaken a century earlier – only now even the Victorians were taken to task for their salacious domestic arrangements. 'The Functional House for Frictionless Living' was designed from researches carried out for a German housing



15. 'The Functional House for Frictionless living, by Alexander Klein, 1928. Klein's methods and conclusions were highly praised by Catherine Baur in her influential work, *Modern Housing* (1935).

agency in 1928 by Alexander Klein, who compared his proposal with an odious, if typical, nineteenth-century layout (Fig. 15).<sup>22</sup> Flow-line diagrams revealed the superiority of Klein's improved plans. In the nineteenth-century example, the 'necessary movements' of persons from room to room cross and intersect like rails in a shunting yard, but in the House for Frictionless Living they remain entirely distinct and do not touch at all; paths literally never cross. The journey between bed and bath – where trod the naked to enact the rawest acts of the body – was treated with particular caution and isolated from all other routes. The justification for Klein's plan was the metaphor hidden in its title, which implied that all accidental encounters caused friction and therefore threatened the smooth running of the domestic machine: a delicately balanced and sensitive device it was too, always on the edge of malfunction. But however attenuated this logic appears to be, it is nevertheless the logic now buried in the regulations, codes, design methods and rules-of-thumb which account for the day-



to-day production of contemporary housing.

There is not much difference between Klein's terror of bodies in collision and Samuel Butler's description of the nausea of touch, except that Butler records experience while Klein defines it. Nor is there much distance between Butler's sour point of view and the condemning of all intimacy as a form of violence, all relationships as forms of bondage – and it is really in this direction that we have advanced from the nineteenth century, finding liberty always in the escape from the tyranny of 'society'. It is exactly the word 'bondage' that Dr R.D. Laing now uses to describe, in terms of radical psychiatry, the knots and binds that tie us to other people.<sup>23</sup> What better than to untie them? And it is the above passage from *The Way of All Flesh* that Edward Hall now uses to examine, from the standpoint of proxemics,<sup>24</sup> the psychological response to intrusions into personal space, a territorial envelope in which we are said to shroud our bodies against the assaults of intimacy.<sup>25</sup> What better than to design things so that no such violations would ever occur? In these and in many other behavioural and psychological studies, attempts are being made to categorize only recently conceived and nurtured sensibilities as if they were immutable laws of an incontrovertible reality. But perhaps before they are definitively classified by the 'Linnaeus of human bondage',<sup>26</sup> those same sensibilities will have sunk once more into oblivion, taking with them their counterparts in architecture.

As yet, however, no way of altering the modern arrangement of domestic space has been found; true, there are some very interesting recent projects which flaunt the principles, rules and methods that combine to fix the normal dwelling; true, there are many more which extrapolate the same principles, rules and methods, either for the sake of irony and parody or in the vain hope of discovering their ultimate value, but they tend to be offered as commentaries on reality, as alternatives to convention, as eccentric investigations or as momentary escapes from the necessary ban-

ality of ordinariness. We still do not have the courage to confront the ordinary as such. Yet for all that, the increasing number of attempts to circumvent it signify that we may well be approaching the outer edge, not just of the modern movement in architecture (for of that there can hardly be much doubt), but of a historical modernity which extends back to the Reformation. It was with a decisive shift of *sensibility* that we entered that phase of civilization, and it will be with an equally decisive shift that we shall leave it.

Perhaps this alteration of sensibility could begin to explain why Raphael, of all the great Renaissance artists, has been the least kindly received by posterity, gaining the unique distinction of lending his name to a movement which, three hundred and fifty years after his death, vilified him as the fount of Art's corruption. Pre-Raphaelitism aside, he is still generally thought to have been lacking in spirituality and intellect. The Soviet poet Mayakovsky also singled him out for specific denunciation: 'If you meet a White Guard, you pin him to the ground, but you have forgotten Raphael.'<sup>27</sup> So he wrote in the heady days of 1918 when it seemed that the destruction of repressive political institutions was only the first in a series of annihilations that would culminate in the liquidation of regressive culture. Maybe Raphael was best forgotten, for certainly it would have been contrary to the New Spirit to remember him as anything but an obstacle in the way of progress – those paintings of his, with their rich courtly saints and delectable madonnas in silk and damask, taking part in some grandiloquent, purposeless mime of gestures, figures always reaching, holding and advancing into such elaborate postures. What his compositions illustrated, over and above their obvious subject-matter, made no sense in the nineteenth century or the first half of the twentieth. They made visible a corporeal attraction that drew people together for no real reason outside of desire; an inclination that could encompass the most violent antagonisms as well as the tenderest affections, yet throw no light into the private soul. There is nothing

represented in these antiquated relics except infatuation with others, which in a society devoted to morality, knowledge and work could seem only a slender pretext for indulgence. The modern conscience found this kind of sociability suspect, thinking it an excuse for promiscuity or a sign of degeneracy, and replaced it with socialization, which is something quite different.

## CONCLUSION

The matrix of connected rooms is appropriate to a type of society which feeds on carnality, which recognizes the body as the person, and in which gregariousness is habitual. The features of this kind of life can be discerned in Raphael's architecture and painting. Such was the typical arrangement of household space in Europe until it was challenged in the seventeenth century and finally displaced in the nineteenth by the corridor plan, which is appropriate to a society that finds carnality distasteful, which sees the body as a vessel of mind and spirit, and in which privacy is habitual. This mode of life was so pervasive in the nineteenth century that it coloured the work even of those who recoiled from it, as did William Morris. In this respect modernity itself was an amplification of nineteenth-century sensibilities.

In reaching these conclusions architectural plans have been compared with paintings and various sorts of literature. There is a lot to be said for making architecture once more into art; rescuing it from the semiology and methodology under which it has largely disappeared. But too often this restitution has been attempted by taking it out from under one stone and putting it back under another. This is sometimes done in a rather guileless way, by equating architecture with literature or painting so that it becomes an echo of words and shapes; sometimes in a more sophisticated way, by adopting the vocabulary and procedures of the literary critic or art historian and applying them to architecture. The result is the same:

like novels, like portraiture, architecture is made into a vehicle for observation and reflection. Overloaded with meaning and symbolism, its direct intervention in human affairs is spuriously reduced to a question of practicality.

Yet architecture is quite distinct from painting and writing, not simply because it requires the addition of some extra ingredient such as utility or function, but because it encompasses everyday reality, and in so doing inevitably provides a format for social life. In the foregoing I have tried to avoid treating buildings as if they were paintings or writings. A different kind of link has been sought: plans have been scrutinized for characteristics that could provide the preconditions for the way people occupy space, on the assumption that buildings accommodate what pictures illustrate and what words describe in the field of human relationships. This, I know, is a broad assumption, but it is the article of faith around which all these words have been wrapped.

This may not be the only way of reading plans but, even so, such an approach may offer something more than commentary and symbolism by clarifying architecture's instrumental role in the formation of everyday events. It hardly needs to be said that giving architecture this kind of consequentiality would not entail the reinstatement of functionalism or behavioural determinism. Certainly it would be foolish to suggest that there is anything in a plan which could compel people to behave in a specific way towards one another, enforcing a day-to-day regime of gregarious sensuality. It would be still more foolish, however, to suggest that a plan could not prevent people from behaving in a particular way, or at least hinder them from doing so.

The cumulative effect of architecture during the last two centuries has been like that of a general lobotomy performed on society at large, obliterating vast areas of social experience. It is employed more and more as a preventive measure; an agency for peace, security and segregation which, by its very nature, limits the

horizon of experience – reducing noise-transmission, differentiating movement patterns, suppressing smells, stemming vandalism, cutting down the accumulation of dirt, impeding the spread of disease, veiling embarrassment, closeting indecency and abolishing the unnecessary; incidentally reducing daily life to a private shadow-play. But on the other side of this definition, there is surely another kind of architecture that would seek to give full play to the things that have been so carefully masked by its anti-type; an architecture arising out of the deep fascination that draws people towards others; an architecture that recognizes passion, carnality and sociality. The matrix of connected rooms might well be an integral feature of such buildings.

#### NOTES

1. D.Y. Donnison, *The Government of Housing* (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 17.
2. This is especially true of Bafle's reconstruction, but it applies also to that of Percier and Fontaine.
3. Ground plan drawn by Antonio da Sangallo.
4. Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Meaning in Western Architecture* (London, 1975).
5. L.B. Alberti, *The Ten Books of Architecture*, translated by Leoni, edited by Rykwert (London, 1955), book i, chapter xii.
6. An interesting study of a cardinal's household has been made by D.S. Chambers. See *Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institute*, vol. 39, 1976, pp. 27-58, 'The Housing Problems of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga'.
7. Baldessare Castiglione, *The Courtier* (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 44.
8. *The Life of Benvenuto Cellini, written by himself* (London, 1956), pp. 110, 161, 138.
9. W.E. Greenwood, *Villa Madama* (London, 1928).
10. *The Book of Architecture of John Thorpe*, edited by J. Summerson (Glasgow, 1966).
11. *Sir Roger Pratt on Architecture*, edited by R. T. Gunther (Oxford, 1928), pp. 62, 64.
12. Ibid. p. 19.
13. William Davis, *Hints to Philanthropists* (Bath, 1821), p. 157.
14. A collection of these can be found in the OED under 'Privy'.

15. Only after writing this did it occur to me how similar the matrix of connected rooms is to the multiple connectivity proposed for the city by Chris Alexander 'The City is not a Tree', *Architectural Forum*, vol. 122, April 1965, pp. 58-62 May 1965, pp. 52-61.
16. Robert Kerr, *The Gentleman's House* (London, 1864), concluding paragraph.
17. John Turner, *Architects' Journal*, 3 September 1975, p. 458.
18. Morris, *Gossip About an Old House on the Upper Thames* (Birmingham, 1895), p. 1.
19. See, especially, R.C. MacLeod, *Morris without Machail (as seen by his contemporaries)* (Glasgow, 1954).
20. Samuel Butler, *The Way of All Flesh* (London, 1903), chapter 40.
21. Collectivization, far from being the opposite of privatization, is just another way of obtaining the same psychic homogeneity. Peter Serenyi ('Le Corbusier, R. and the Monastery of Ema', *Art Bulletin*, vol. 49, no. 4, pp. 227-86) has called attention to the similarities between Le Corbusier's early proposals for housing and the monastic organization of daily life, where solitary and collective represent renunciation of worldliness.
22. Catherine Baur, *Modern Housing* (New York, 1935), p. 203.
23. R.D. Laing, *Knots* (London, 1970).
24. Proxemics is the study of the spatial organization of behaviour.
25. Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (London, 1969), pp. 89-90.
26. As predicted by Laing in the introduction to *Knots*, op. cit.
27. Thus translated in Anatole Kopp's *Town and Revolution* (New York, 1979), p. 10.

AA DOCUMENTS 2

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*Cover: Barcelona Pavilion by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, (reconstruction), 1986. Photograph by Robin Evans.*

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