

Pensiero Creativo

THE FIREPLACE

kitchens, stoves, ovens as the essential to new feminist
architecture

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Introduction

We observe nature and discover architecture all around; a complex beehive, an anthill, the tunnels of mice and moles, we describe the dam that beavers have built and the nests of the birds. The vision of “the primitive hut” by Marc-Antoine Laugier imagines the exact same thing in a human scale depicted in a very famous drawing made by Charles Dominique Eisen. We can tell that with natural materials and found elements a hut in the shape of the most basic house is built. We recognize columns and a roof, a floor. I would however dare to argue that this architecture as correct as it might be does not form the bare minimum of what we consider a “home”. We are missing the element of fire.

In Greek mythology we hear about Prometheus who brought the fire to the people and therefore brought all overpowering and greedy emotions with him. I will however investigate what the fire has brought to the people.

Fire gives warmth, safety. It makes preparing meals possible and makes working with/on tools possible. It extends the awake hours into the night time and therefore transcends the law of nature. Gottfried Semper, who was severely inspired by Marc-Antoine Laugier’s “Essai sur l’architecture”, deviates from those ideas due to finding that kin gathers around fire.

It is the first and most important, the moral element of architecture. Three other elements are grouped around it, as it were the protective negation, the defense against the three elements of nature that are hostile to the fire of the hearth; namely the roof, the enclosure and the earth throw.¹

It has brought the possibility to form groups, and therefore also a culture and religion. It has made living with nature in such a way possible, that the human did not have to fright it at all times. It has made crafts possible that rely on molding material under heat. It has made foods digestible, that were formerly not. It has made the crossing of the oceans possible. It has given way to a segregation of genders.

Investigating the segregation of genders is one of the main focuses of this paper. The way we are regarding the power of fire, we are regarding it in the sense of a cooking tool, a warming tool. We connect warmth a lot with home and we connect, or have always connected home with women. Women who provide food, warmth and love. Iris Marion Young investigates how women feel as if they are “positioned into space” and are essentially therefore an object. In her text about women’s movement in space titled “throwing like a girl” she comes to the conclusion, that, yes due to patriarchal society the women feels inhibited an movement, the built space is caging and protecting her from invaders.

A woman lives the space around her as limited and enclosed, at least in part as if she were designing at least a small area in which she can exist as a free subject.²

Changing the women’s position in society also means having to change the kitchen, or the homestead. For this we will look at the kitchen designed by Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky.

¹ Texte zur Theorie des Raumes, Stephan Günzel, *Die vier Elemente der Baukunst, Gottfried Semper, 1851*, Reclam, 2013, Ditzingen, p.22

² Texts on the Theory of Space, Stephan Günzel, *Throwing Like a Girl, Iris Marion Young, 1980*, Reclam, 2013, Ditzingen, p.420



³ Frontispiece of Marc-Antoine Laugier: *Essai sur l'architecture* 2nd ed. 1755 by Charles Dominique Eisen (1720–1778), 1755



What is the Beginning of “Home” and Why do we Separate Between Humans and Animals?

Home is something one might realize is missing, when it is not intact anymore. Don Fabrizio Home is Donnafugata, Stefan Zweig called Vienna home and died from depression having to leave it, James Baldwin's Home is Beale Street and with him a whole generation of African American people call this place their home, Novecento lived on a boat, and said he had no home, though he could not overcome the fear of leaving the boat and make permanent home elsewhere, after all this, a moving vehicle might have been his home. The difference between home and shelter is an emotional one. It is a feeling that establishes itself upon experience and emotion and society. This coincidentally, I dare say, is the mere difference between human architecture and one of animal origin.

A home is a place to stay for a longer time period. Depending on everybody's individual feelings we do not consider a temporary stay at a different place a home. We might however after many visits feel at home at friends or partners' places. A home for animals looks different for each species. For example domestic animals have a very different notion of home from a wild animal. The human understanding of a home extends to the animals they keep. In a lower quality the same is provided to the animal and the notion of ownership plays a big role and is often confused with the one of home. While the home of wild animals has to do more with the complex architecture mentioned in the opening. Humans are often inspired by nature when it comes to the creation of their own surroundings. However one very strong difference is that animals don't need the extensive care and warmth that humans need. The difference between a shelter and a home is the longevity. The bees' home which is complex and has a long life, coincidentally also has a warm space. Which is where bees breed.

Going out on a limb, I would suggest, that as we regard fire as an inspirational source for human culture, which is logical as it symbolizes comfort and gives safety – important factors for any cultural development, any complex and warm place is also place for animal culture. The bees' culture once again is one good example here.

Sympoiesis is a simple word; it means "making-with." Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing. In the words of the Inupiat computer "world game, earthlings are never alone! That is the radical implication of sympoiesis. Sympoiesis is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with, in company. Sympoiesis enfolds autopoiesis and generatively unfurls and extends.⁵

The concept of a home is deeply rooted in human history, emerging from our primal need for shelter and safety. This formation can be traced back to the earliest human settlements, where the central feature was often a hearth or fireplace. The hearth symbolized warmth, nourishment, and a gathering point for family and community. It was around this essential source of heat and light that the first homes were built, serving both practical and symbolic purposes.

The distinction between humans and animals in the context of the home arises from the symbolic use of fire. While many animals seek shelter, only humans have mastered fire to create a controlled environment. This mastery allowed early humans to extend their habitat into colder climates, cook food for better nutrition, and protect themselves from predators. Fire, therefore, became a fundamental element in the evolution of human society, distinguishing human settlements from animal lairs. This control over fire and the construction of a dedicated space for it laid the groundwork for what we now recognize as a home.

⁵ Staying with the Trouble, Donna J. Haraway, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2016, p.58

The power of fire, the change society has experienced since the control over fire.

According to the Greek tales, Prometheus brought fire to humanity and since then negativity has taken over the human. Formerly only for gods, the fire in human hands would do no good. Wars have broken out. The leadership over nature has resulted in greed and unretrievable damage.

The control over fire brought profound changes to human society, marking a significant evolutionary leap. Fire allowed humans to cook food, which not only improved its taste and digestibility but also reduced the incidence of disease from raw food. This dietary improvement supported brain development and overall health, contributing to the advancement of human capabilities and societies.

Fire also enabled the creation of new materials, such as pottery and metal tools, which were essential for the development of more complex societies. As communities grew around these technological advancements, the role of fire became more specialized and central to domestic life. It was the cornerstone of social and familial bonds, as people gathered around the hearth for warmth, food, and storytelling.

The warmth of the fire has equal importance as its light:

Light created the world. Light preserves it and make it fruitful.

Light reveals the world to our corporeal eyes so that the light of our spirits might in turn illuminate the world.

Above the fixed, motionless geometry of the earth stretches the perpetually moving domain of air and light.

The Star of Life rotates, comes and goes, and so produces day and night, giving us heat and cold, showers and drought, clear and dark skies, cloud, rain and wind. The human soul rejoices in this mobile geometry of air and light which constitutes the seasons.

Light - the infinite world of form and colour - delights the soul. The soul meditates upon the hours, upon the angle of the sun's rays, the length of shadows, the disposition of rain and drought, hot and cold,⁷ the configuration of the clouds. But on this particular day what pleases me most is to concentrate on the spectacle of the ground bathed in calm, wintry light.⁶

Silvia Federici, in her seminal work "Caliban and the Witch," explores the impact of technological advancements on societal structures, particularly focusing on how control and division of labor around fire and cooking laid the groundwork for later economic and gender hierarchies. The mastery of fire, while empowering, also began to delineate gender roles within the household, with women often being relegated to the domestic sphere, managing the hearth and home.

In addition, work on the farms of the serfs was oriented towards subsistence, so that the sexual division of labor there was less pronounced and less discriminatory than on capitalist farms. In the feudal village, there was no social separation between the production of goods and the reproduction of labor power; every job contributed to the family's livelihood. Women did field work, in addition to raising children, cooking, washing and spinning, as well as tending the herb garden. Their domestic activities were not devalued and did not involve social relations that would have been different from those of men, unlike what would later be the case in the money economy, where housework was no longer considered real work.⁷

⁶ Márcia Nascimento, Nuno Costa, A Sentimental Topography (Dimitris Pikionis), (Barcelos, Portugal, KÄRÄJÄKIVET Essay No. 13, June 2022): p.9

⁷ Caliban and the Witch, Women of the body and the primitive accumulation, Silvia Federici, *german translation*, 2022, Mandelbaum kritik & utopie, Wien und Berlin, p.34f

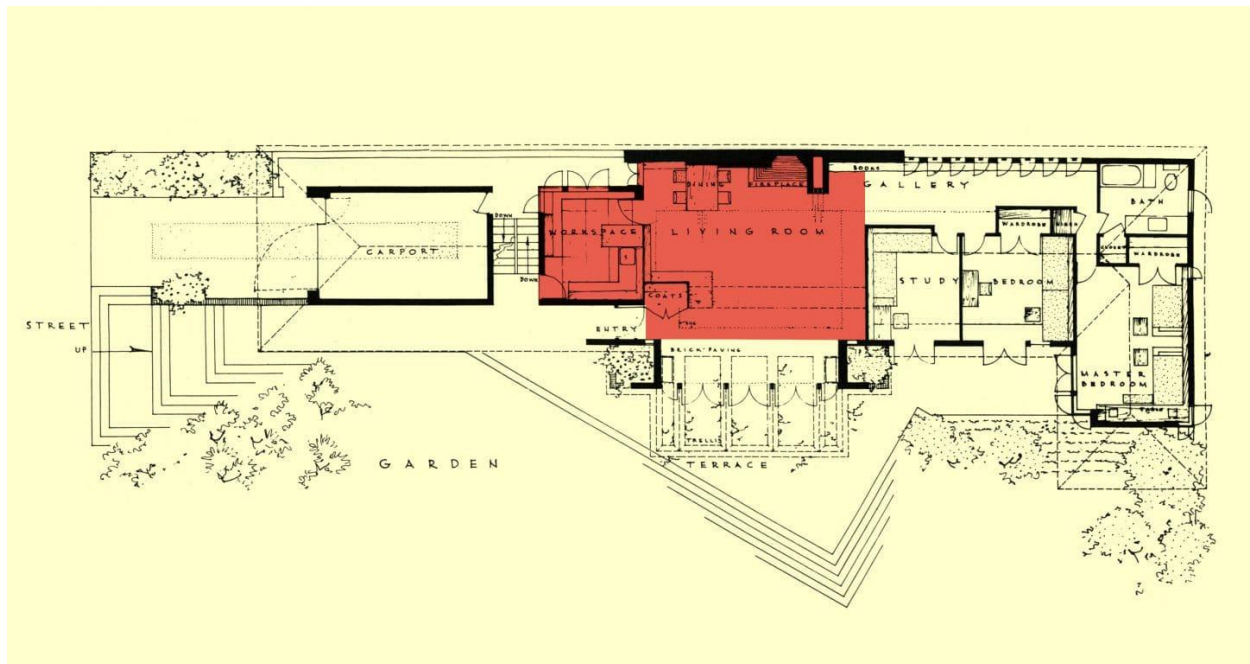
The Chimney as the Hotspot of a House

Moving towards the domestic realms of the fireplace we move towards the classic understanding of a western home. Obviously for all cultures fire holds a very important place but since my personal understanding of a fireplace has been mostly engraved by the western teaching I will replicate my knowledge like this. Frank Lloyd Wright has always constructed the houses around the chimney calling it the focal point of any home. These days when we think of a sustainable method of constructing houses we don't think of a fireplace or a chimney anymore and the living room and the kitchen often merge into one. This change in perception and also the change in energy retrieval have led to an arrangements of houses and appartements that are more atypical and that don't necessarily have the chimney in the center in order to gain warmth for the other rooms surrounding it. this new arrangement is not sustainable, because that means a big loss of energy in order to keep every room approximately the same temperature. As energy is becoming more expensive the cost of heating less affordable, the formerly logical arrangement is not as comfortable anymore. As a result the modern home might be moving back towards a central arrangement of living spaces.

The evolution of the fireplace into the chimney was a significant architectural development, marking the chimney as the "hotspot" of the house. This transition allowed for better ventilation and the ability to control smoke, making indoor spaces more habitable. Architect Frank Lloyd Wright famously emphasized the chimney as the central element of a home, around which the entire house was designed. This focus on the hearth as the heart of the home highlights its importance in both physical and symbolic terms.

The chimney represented not just a functional necessity but a focal point of family life. It was a place of warmth, both literal and metaphorical, where family members gathered. The design and placement of the chimney reflected its central role in maintaining the home's atmosphere and the well-being of its inhabitants.

Wright's architectural philosophy, which centered the hearth, can be seen as both a continuation and a transformation of ancient practices. By designing homes around the chimney, he acknowledged the primal importance of fire while adapting it to modern living. This approach underscores the enduring significance of the hearth in human society and architecture.



The revolution of gender starts in the kitchen

Gender segregation has started soon on. It meant the production of workers on the one hand and working on the other hand. According to Silvia Federici, a philosopher and theoretician, a strict segregation of gender has started with the freedom of men. After the abolition of serfdom everyone was left to fend for themselves and henceforth was forced to become as efficient as possible. Due to the fact that women carry children the segregation led to very obvious separation of roles. The church has then pushed the women further into the background, where they have stayed, either invisible or as an object of joy until the days of female revolution, that were once again due to the gain in freedom and the need to earn a living.

However, land privatization and the commodification of social relations (the response of the lords and merchants to their economic crisis) led to widespread poverty and mortality in the 16th and 17th centuries, as well as to fierce resistance that threatened to cause the developing capitalist economy to suffer shipwreck. This, in my view, is the historical context in which the history of women and reproduction during the transition from feudalism to capitalism should be placed. For the changes brought about by the rise of capitalism in the social position of women - especially within the proletariat, whether in Europe or in America - were primarily the result of the search for new sources of labor and for new forms of regimentation and division of the working class.⁹

Liberation is based on the construction of a consciousness that opens up new possibilities for action as an imaginative recognition of oppression. The cyborg as an imaginary figure and as a lived experience changes what is to be considered the experience of women at the end of the twentieth century. This is a fight to the death, but the boundary that separates social reality from science fiction is an optical illusion.¹⁰

But at least one thing is crystal clear. No matter how much he might be caught in the generic masculine universal and how much he only looks up, the Anthropos did not do this fracking thing and he should not name this double-death-loving epoch.¹¹

The understanding of a woman's place in society started to change drastically after the world wars. It was no longer unusual to see women study and have jobs. It was also no longer unusual to see women living alone and without kids or husband. A very important input to this way of living comes from the female architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky from Austria. She was one of the architects asked to work on the rebuild of Frankfurt. One of her biggest achievements was the design of a kitchen where the woman, who was cooking would not be excluded from family events. This may not sound revolutionary now, but it was the first essential step into a modern understanding of a family.

Nowadays the needs of humans are approximately the same as they were back then and therefore the arrangement of appartements and the kitchen still play a relevant role. I dare say that even when a person decides to live their life as a wanderer they always carry a cooking station or make fire, when they find a place to stay. And I dare say even more, that such a transformable home, that revolves around fire has a stronger "home-feeling" than an anonymous hotel without a kitchen. As the possibility to install oneself and to care for oneself fall flat, so does the notion of a house. So what is a home in the end? It is a place that gives you comfort and independence, that serves your needs, that is resilient over time and that does not

⁹ Caliban and the Witch, Women of the body and the primitive accumulation, Silvia Federici, *german translation*, 2022, Mandelbaum kritik & utopie, Wien und Berlin, p.85

¹⁰ The Reinvention of Nature: Primates, Cyborgs and Women, Donna J. Harraway, *german translation*, Campus Verlag, 1995, p.34

¹¹ Staying with the Trouble, Donna J. Harraway, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2016, p.47

depend on the economy to the fullest extent.

Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, a pioneering architect, and designer of the Frankfurt Kitchen, recognized the kitchen's potential as a site of revolutionary change in gender relations. By streamlining and modernizing the kitchen, she aimed to liberate women from the drudgery of domestic labor. The Frankfurt Kitchen, designed in the 1920s, was one of the first attempts to apply ergonomic principles to domestic work, making the kitchen more efficient and less time-consuming.

Schütte-Lihotzky's work highlights how the design of domestic spaces can influence and reflect gender roles. The kitchen, traditionally seen as the woman's domain, became a site of both oppression and potential liberation. By improving the functionality of the kitchen, Schütte-Lihotzky aimed to give women more time and freedom, challenging the traditional division of labor.

Donna Haraway, in "Staying with the Trouble," emphasizes the importance of rethinking traditional narratives and embracing more inclusive, non-hierarchical ways of living. Haraway's ideas resonate with Schütte-Lihotzky's revolutionary approach to kitchen design. Both advocate for a reconceptualization of spaces traditionally associated with women, highlighting how these spaces can be transformed to promote equality and empowerment.

No species, not even our own arrogant one pretending to be good individuals in so-called modern Western scripts, acts alone; assemblages of organic species and of abiotic actors make history, the evolutionary kind and the other kinds too.

But is there an inflection point of consequence that changes the name of the "game" of life on earth for everybody and everything? It's more than climate change; it's also extraordinary burdens of toxic chemistry, mining, nuclear pollution, depletion of lakes and rivers under and above ground, ecosystem simplification, vast genocides of people and other critters, et cetera, et cetera, in systemically linked patterns that threaten major system collapse after major system collapse after major system collapse. Recursion can be a drag.¹²

The kitchen's evolution from a mere functional space to a site of social and gender transformation underscores the power of design in shaping societal norms. By reimagining the kitchen, Schütte-Lihotzky not only improved domestic efficiency but also laid the groundwork for a broader revolution in gender relations.

¹² Staying with the Trouble, Donna J. Haraway, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2016, p.100



Conclusion

The journey of the hearth, from its origins as a simple fire pit to the modern kitchen, reflects the broader trajectory of human civilization and its evolving social structures. Fire, as a source of warmth, nutrition, and community, has always been central to the home. As society advanced, the hearth evolved into the chimney, and eventually into the kitchen, each transformation bringing new implications for gender roles and domestic life.

The works of Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, Silvia Federici, and Donna Haraway provide critical insights into how these changes in domestic spaces are intertwined with gender dynamics. Schütte-Lihotzky's innovative kitchen design challenged traditional gender roles and highlighted the potential of domestic spaces as sites of liberation. Federici's analysis of technological and social changes underscores the historical roots of gender inequality, while Haraway's call for inclusive narratives encourages us to rethink and transform these spaces.

By examining the role of the oven and the broader context of fire in the home, we can better understand the intersection of architecture, technology, and gender. This exploration reveals that the revolution of gender relations truly does start in the kitchen, as it is a space where the most fundamental aspects of domestic life converge and where the potential for transformative change is greatest.

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Light created the world. Light preserves it and makes it fruitful.