A Relational Conception
of Living Together ∕ Apart

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Despite all good intensions, a history of apartments has never been written. History books may be full of specimens of evolving forms of flatted living, but they never tell the story of their *speciation,* that is, the process in which apartments came about as a specific form of residential architecture. This lacking formational history was first pointed out by nineteenth century architect Sydney Perks in his progressive design manual for *Residential Flats.*[1] Yet even a hundred years later, American social historians who investigated how apartment living had transformed urban life, noted that although apartments had been the subject of ample scholarly studies, the history of apartments remains "a story in need of telling".[2] In her study *Alone Together*, Elizabeth Cromley stresses that the real virtues of apartments are namely "not ones that architectural historians have usually identified as significant."[3] As she argues, contrary to the art-historical concern with stylistic, or periodic distinctions, the history of apartments calls for a more affirmative attention to the socially emancipating relationships that architecture historically enabled; a social history of the differences apartments made for women. But beyond being simply a female or feminist concern, this approach implies to also understand more generally the differences apartments made within our forms of living together and relating to another. This essay briefly maps a possible starting point to advance the historical formation of apartments in such a relational approach to architecture, arguing that it hinges on a fine difference in the very conception of our relation of living together/apart.

The Cellular Architecture of Apartments

In pursuit of such a machinic approach, let me start from Peter Sloterdijk's call to put the apartments back on the historico-theoretical agenda in his well-known *Spheres* trilogy.[4] In repositioning Heidegger's existentialist concept of 'enframing' as the essence of technology, *Spheres* offers a comprehensive phenomenological theory of modernity, developed through the concept of soap bubbles, globes, and foam, that emblematize for Sloterdijk the part-to-whole-relations of modernity. Its discussion of the progressive

technological encapsulation of human life features an interesting reading of apartments and their tendency of 'cell formation', which Sloterdijk presents as an illustrating existential technique of "co-isolation".[5] This technological reading advances a compelling 'immunological' approach to apartments as (self-)protective spheres forming specific "anthropogenic islands".[6] Often invoking (and in fact inspired by) Michel Foucault's analyses of modern cellular architectures their 'heterotopic' spaces and their 'biopolitical' function[7], Sloterdijk thus reconsiders apartments as a 'topological analogue' to modern individualism, portraying especially the modern one-room apartment as the ultimate 'manifest of modernity'.[8]

This relation is yet to be explored in more depth. Architectural theorists have long embraced Foucault's approach to the emergence of modern institutional building types (such as asylums, hospitals, and prisons) and their characteristic cellular spatiality. His genealogies pioneered a renewed materialist approach that avoided reading architecture as simple products of modernization or social practices, by revealing instead how built forms are equally 'productive' formations and thus an actual substance of these practices. Here, Foucault completely re-framed our understanding of modern space and architecture and its relation to subjectivation processes, as he argued that modern societies have 'produced' the Western individual as a discrete self, through a likewise discretely organized modern world. From the 1980s onwards, this productive reading inspired a renewed attention to modern architectures and their underlying power structures. In this focus, these studies continued Foucault's initial focus on public building types, ignoring that residential architecture, remaining strangely neglected in these studies, takes form in likewise cellular arrangements. Theory thus not only failed to put apartments on the list of modern architectures; it ignored a much more ubiquitous cellularization pattern in the modern habitat!

If not a public building type in a strict sense, aristocratic residences and their *appartements* were also formations tied to highly political or institutional functions. Therein, architecture had long served as a complex *device to draw distinctions.* as aristocratic apartments became a socio-spatial system of discrimination within courtly ceremonials of receiving guests.[9] Yet, as Michael Dennis conceded in his influential study on the morphological development of the French *hotels* and their *appartement*s, these spatial systems remain largely "seen as the symbol of a previous social order, rather than a prelude to [something] new."[10] Therefore these apartments are not part of our genealogies. Strangely enough then, the historical formation of apartments remains a remarkable 'blind spot' in our understanding of the modern built environment. Given their worldwide propagation, are apartments not the most significant concretization of modernization processes and thus prime assemblage of subjectivation in the modern urban environment?

Having put apartments on the historico-theoretical agenda, Sloterdijk's spherology—in contrast to Foucault's genealogical approach—skips the complex history through which their architecture *became* more cellular. This process was long in the making. Sharon Marcus' *Apartments Stories* (1999) here highlighted a crucial transformation of Parisian apartment houses during the Restoration and July Monarchy, and their capacity "to make urban and domestic space continuous", her comparative literature analysis thereby brilliantly problematized, how these initially open structures, whose 'fluid spatiality' 'dissolved the boundary' between private and public spaces, or residential and collective spaces, came to be gradually turned into enclosed cells during the 1830s by a reactionary, patriarchal urban ideology taking form in new internalized structures.[11] Before Marcus, many female historians had highlighted historically changing residential relations and their liberating effect on women from a post-Foucauldian perspective.[12] In recognizing residential space not only as a site of oppression and domination

but also as a site of liberation and emancipation, these works approached the cellular architectures not in its eventually delimiting function (as male colleagues usually did) but from its initial *potential for transforming relationships.*

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This leaves us with a great opportunity—and a larger task—to finally bring these stories together. I like to approach this through Sloterdijk's own suggestion to approach apartments in topological terms. This suggestion is perhaps most valuable to clarifying that apartments themselves—as opposed to apartment houses or buildings—are fundamentally no building type *per sé*, because rather than constituting any closed, discrete, or geometric forms, apartments are *implicit forms (i.e., relationally defined or reciprocally determined ones).* As the study of connections, topology defines spaces and spatial formations plainly by connectivity and proximity. If we respectively start from connection structures and relationships, we could say that all dwellings constitute forms of cohabitation. Apartments are defined by a specific form of living together apart.[13] This implies a degree of disengagement, but no full separation. Foucault already pointed out that residential spaces are never closed sites, but 'semi-closed' ones. Similarly, Sloterdijk's derives the concept of 'co-isolation' from the notion of 'connected isolation' that architectural firm Morphosis used to express "the simultaneity of adjacency and separation."[14] This is also how we use the phrase 'together and apart'.

But as forms of relationality combining parthood structures with specific connections, the terms *together and apart are—in themselves—already at once quantal and proximal*. From a theoretical angle, there appears a rather complex conceptual problem in how these relations are conceptualized. The concept of "co(nnected) isolation" combines parthood structures with connection structures in a first step. But its defining action of 'isolation' remains conceptually limited to one-sidedly foregrounding the resulting parthood structures, while conceptually erasing the *productive relations* bringing about these structures. Philosophically speaking, in these conceptions boundaries are simply not "on par" with parts.[15] One problem is that foregrounding parthood structures led recent architects such as Pier-Vittorio Aureli to approach cellular built forms in some 'hyper-Foucauldian', and certainly more Agambian fashion, and rather formalistic, operative, and (bio)politic*ized* readings of heterotopic spaces of enclosure, separation, existential conditions, and forms of life.[16]

In reiterating a highly reductive notion of part-to-whole relations, terms as 'isolation' or 'separation' are inadequate to start from the emergent capacity of *part-to-part* relations. Thereby, Kiel Moe argued, these concepts prevent us from approaching architecture as an open (not closed) system, and thus from ever questioning architecture's defining production of *boundaries*.[17] To approach architecture as an *open* system, requires then to carefully resituate what Bernard Tschumi exposed as the inherent "disjunction that exists in the process of architectural production".[18] Boundaries (like walls and partitions), Thomas Nail reminds us, are no secondary result of a spatial ordering placed 'between' preexisting things (like spaces). They are instead the *prime site of a production of socio-environmental organizations,* through the way boundaries constitute specific flows of exchange, movements, and circulations.[19] More than separating elements, *boundaries have hence a binding function*. In contrast to understanding boundaries as a secondary formation; we would need a conception of bodies, things, or architectures as 'intensive formations' of a material milieu, where formations only *become* individual forms through the boundaries that set them apart and *differentiate* them. A key to understanding form-taking processes in general and differentiation processes in par-

ticular, lies then in accepting that relations gain a primacy over the resulting parthood structures that historical formations bring about. Analytically then we must always start from emergent relations; not already constituted parts.

From Co-Isolation to Condividuality

The idea that the notion of 'apart' is at once quantal and proximal, hence adds very little, as long as we continue to articulate connection structures *in terms* of parthood structures. By approaching the notion 'apart' as a form of relationality, we inversely foreground a specifically differentiated connection structure (i.e. topology). This conception, I want to argue, allows going much further in both Foucault's heterotopological or Sloterdijk's 'immunological' approach to cellular structures. Apartments prove here a great case in point to advance a conception of built structures not simply as devices to draw distinctions but *at once* as an environmental technique to *draw bodies near*.

To do so in the following, let me begin by displacing the common (but misleading) perception of immune systems as defensive bodily war-machines, in favor of understanding immunization as what Paul Rabinow had called a 'biosocial technique'.[20] This technique is based on systems of interiorizing external complexity or heterogeneity. It thus enables encounters of different lifeforms within existential territories where—such as in the urban habitat—*community is the condition*.[21] In contrast to exclusive processes of isolation, it thus concerns an inclusive mode of coexistence. Art theorist Gerald Raunig has commented on the extent to which the notions of community and immunity remain stuck in an oppositional relation, highlighting either individual parts or totalizing wholes. To avoid this dualism, he calls "for a new terminology that takes both components into consideration as explicit conceptual components: the component of the singular, an affirmative mode of separation, and the component of composition, of concatenation, of the con-."[22] He here respectively coins the notion of "condividuality", in developing Gilles Deleuze's observation that the individual as a unitary subject may no longer adequately represent the increasingly 'dividual', or *non-unitary* subjectivity within current societies.[23] Such critiques of the individual have entered the field of architecture repeatedly. Recently, the House Vision 2016 Tokyo exhibition—themed "Co-Dividual: Split and Connect/Separate and Come Together"—presented architectural visions for forms of shared living and co-housing.[24] These are a celebrated topic of contemporary discourse, given the recent rise of micro-apartments. Several authors approach this development towards shared living critically, however, by questioning the kind of subjects this form of living presupposes and uncritically reproduces. Novel forms of shared living are not simply an extension of reformist/socialist debates on *Existenzminimum* spaces and collective forms of living. Quite different, shared forms of living must be approached through the (neoliberal) political economies (and ecologies) in which their capsular spaces facilitate a newly capturing form of relationality, which may well be at the verge of turning into a new kind of captivity.[25]

I believe that much potential to engage with this trend critically and creatively, rather than blindly following it, lies in reclaiming a non-reductive view of the differentiated part-to-part relations that architectural production is based on. To move in this direction, let me first emphasize a fine conceptual difference that goes easily unnoticed; too easily in fact. In these critiques, the notion of 'co-dividual' living (manifesting itself in the ever-smaller privately-owned, or individually-occupied spaces) seems to only rhetorically displace the emphasis on *in*dividual forms by foregrounding newly *co*llective or inter-*co*nnected, hence, *shared* structures. By thus still foregrounding parthood structures this view does not transgress what Raunig targets at to arrive at a more performative notion

of 'con-' itself (in the sense of "with/through", "by means of which", "in which/as"); one offering a more explicit conception of the productive *relations* through which these matters take form. This way, rather different from the notion of co-isolation or co-dividual living, 'condividuality' implies subjectivation *processes* (and not objectified forms of subjectivity) that involve changing spatial arrangements 'in which' and 'with which' (*cum*) subjectivation processes take form through changing relationships. The notion of condividuality thus finally transgresses the fine conceptual line between *forms of separation* (addressed in terms of living 'alone together') and *modes of relationality* (as living 'together apart').

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To highlight emergent part-to-part relations over reductive part-to-whole relations, I thus avoid seeing apartments as individual spaces within apartment buildings as collective structures, but as a condividual mode of living together apart. Not only would this changing conception inform a critical engagement with the ongoing dividualization of our urban habitats; it would also be vital to arrive at a more affirmative conception of how the historical formation of apartments *established new (non)relations that made our urban togetherness possible.*

 A relational view initially replaces forms of exclusive disjunction ('either (private)/or(collective)') conceptually with forms of inclusive disjunction' ('and, and, and, …') ; that is, a more creative and relational production of spatial arrangements facilitating, or assemblages holding together modes of living together apart. Inclusive disjunction is namely that what, within assemblages, holds heterogeneous elements together in dynamic states.[26] This assemblage-theoretical view avoids re-iterating the term 'together and apart' as if meaning 'together yet separate', in favor for a reciprocal notion of 'together/apart' emphasizing inclusive disjunctions in which parts are *on par* with the boundaries that enables them to exist as such in proximity to another. Thus, more than implying new forms (of shared living) this calls for new practices (or modes of engagement) enabling relations of difference.

 Next, this notion of a reciprocal determination of subjects, gives us another perspective on Sloterdijk's immunological dimension of apartments. In this view, theorists as Bernard Cache, Elizabeth Grosz, and Brian Massumi have respectively long called for reconsidering architecture through its production of 'interlocking frames'. Respectively, if "the wall is the basis of out coexistence", it is less for its function of separation than its capacity to select and bring in.[27] Thereby we re-conceptualize built forms beyond an enclosing, or separating function as "a technology of movement [that] functions topologically, [by] folding relational continua into and out of each other to selective, productive effect".[28] In this relational view, rather than being an apparatus of enclosure, or having the function to separate, architecture works as a 'machine' "determining what is related to what".[29]

 This *determination of part-to-part relations through selection* (and not separation) within architectural production must then be rethought and analyzed assemblage-theoretically as a *cultural technique*, whose instrumentality (or 'technicity' as Gilbert Simondon would call it) lies in materializing specific 'filters of relations' that 'cut together apart' specifically entangled social, technical, cultural, economic, and ecological systems.[30] The characteristic capacity of architecture as a self-organizing system, relies thus on its material (re)configurings of the world. This approach to how architecture sets up reality, is then not simply 'a' (new) way to think about historical formations, nor specific to apartments. It is *the* way to go about analyzing the materially-mediated 'machinic' pro-

cess in which architecture continuously reorganizes multiple sets of social, environmental, and mental regimes.

Conclusion: Towards a Genealogy of Apartments

Having here shortly outlined what I see as some theoretical advantages of a relational conception of the architecture, I shall conclude in sharing my intuition that the historical formation of apartments would be a great case to further study how their architecture has drawn people together within urban milieus. A relational conception forces us to reconsider the formation of apartments as a boundary-drawing practices that produced a specific relationality making our urban togetherness eventually possible, by topologically transforming how we relate to another. And it continues to do so. But because apartments are implicit forms, and not geometric ones, they urge us to approach their produced socio-environmental figurations conceptually not as (already produced) enclosed or encapsulated spaces, but in much more immanent terms; namely, as an (always productive) open system of environmental transformation.

A relational conception would finally allow a history of apartments to be written not only on its own terms, but it also offers new conceptions, in return, to creatively intervene on our present forms of cohabitation. Thereby we can understand the built environment more generally as an open system of reciprocal self-organization through its production of constitutive boundaries. In this view, Claire Colebrook, recently reconceptualized the organization of the city and its formation of bodies machinically as a "milieu of mutual self-distinction" operated through thresholds, in which sheer intensity of urban proximity entails "a complex creation of increasing difference".[31] This condividuality, I want to argue, is then exactly where a genealogy of apartments would have to start: by attending to how their emergence has fundamentally transformed how we relate to another, not simply in terms of socio-spatially setting up progressively apart, but in terms of how this 'apartmentalization' process (as an environmental rearrangement) historically 'cut us together apart'.

Notes

1   Sydney Perks, *Residential Flats of All Classes* (Huddersfield, JM Classic Editions 2007 [Orig. pub. 1905]), i.
2   Elizabeth C. Cromley, *Alone Together: A History of New York's Early Apartments* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990), 8.
3   Elizabeth Hawes, *New York, New York: How the Apartment House Transformed the Life of the City (1869-1930)* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), xiii.
4   See Peter Sloterdijk, *Spheres*, trans. Wieland Hoban, 3 vols (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011, 2014, and 2016), esp. Vol. III: 476–564, Excerpts from *Spheres* III were previously published as "Cell Block, Egospheres, Self-Container: The Apartment as a Co-Isolated Existence", trans. Daniela Fabricius. *Log*, no. 10 (Summer/Fall 2007): 89–108; and "Excerpts from Spheres III: Foams", *Harvard Design Magazine* 29 (2009): 38–52.
5   Id., *Spheres III*: Chapter 2, 467–626, here 501, 529.
6   Ibid., 333–456.
7   See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London/New York: Routledge, 2010), and id., *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Penguin, 1991). Foucault's spatial histories where also derived in part from a reworking of Heiddeger. For a detailed elaboration see, Stuart Elden, *Mapping the Present: Heidegger, Foucault and the Project of a Spatial History* (London: Continuum, 2001).
8   Ibid., 529–42; here 529–30. Doris Weigel, *Die Einraumwohnung als räumliches Manifest der Moderne: Untersuchungen zum Innenraum der dreißiger Jahre* (Schliengen: Argus, Schmitt, 1996).
9   Richard Etlin, *Symbolic Space: French Enlightenment Architecture and its Legacy* (Chicago: Univ of Chicago Press, 1996), 127–34; and Patricia Waddy, *Seventeenth-Century Roman Palaces: Use and the Art of the Plan* (New York/Cambridge: Architectural History Foundation/MIT Press, 1990).
10 Michael Dennis, *Court and Garden: From the French Hôtel to the City of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 3–4.
11 Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-century Paris and London* (Stanford, CA: Univ of California Press, 1999), 2–3.

12   Among others see the above-mentioned studies by Cromley and Hawes.

13   Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", newly translated in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society* ed. Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter (London: Routledge, 2008), 13–29, here 21, 27(n.29)

14   Sloterdijk, *Spheres* III:237.

15   Roberto Casati and Achille C. Varzi, *Parts and Places: The Structures of Spatial Representation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 5.

16   Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), ix–x. For critiques of reductive readings of Foucault, see Stuart Elden, *Mapping the Present: Heidegger, Foucault, and the Project of a Spatial History* (London: Continuum, 2001), 3–6, 28; and Sven-Olov Wallenstein, "Foucault and the Genealogy of Modern Architecture", in *Essays, Lectures* (Stockholm: Axl, 2007), esp. 384–6.

17   Kiel Moe, *Insulating Modernism: Isolated and Non-Isolated Thermodynamics in Architecture* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2014), 11–53.

18   Bernhard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1996), cited after Gordana Fontana-Giusti, *Foucault for Architects* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 39.

19   Thomas Nail, *Theory of The Border* (New York, Oxford UP, 2016), 9, 21. See also Martina Löw, *The Sociology of Space: Materiality, Social Structures, and Action* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

20   Paul Rabinow, "From Sociobiology to Biosociality: Artificiality and Enlightenment", in *Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone, 1992).

21   Roberto Esposito, *Terms of the Political, Community, Immunity, Biopolitics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 11, 39–46.

22   Gerald Raunig, "After Community: Condividuality", in *Dance, Politics & Co-Immunity*, ed. Gerald Siegmund and Stefan Hölscher (Zurich and Berlin: Diaphanes, 2013), 271–280, here 271.

23   Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control", October 59 (Winter 1992): 3-7. For Raunig's elaborate reading, see Raunig, *Dividuum: Machinic Capitalism and Molecular Revolution Vol.1,* trans. Aileen Derieg (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2016), eps. 182–92.

24   See the website, http://house-vision.jp/en/exhibition.html. See also Salvator-John A. Liotta, Fabienne Louyot, "What is Co-Dividuality? Japanese architecture and the shared house of Farm Cultural Park", domus web (16 October 2017).

25   For these studies, see Lieven De Cauter, "The Capsule and the Network: Preliminary Notes for a General Theory", *OASE* 51 (2001), and id., *The Capsular Civilization: On the City in the Age of Fear* (Rotterdam: NAi-publishers, 2004); and Hélène Frichot and Helen Runting, "In Captivity: The Real Estate of Co-Living", in *Architecture and Feminism*, ed. Hélène Frichot, Catharina Gabrielsson, and Helen Runting (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 140-9.

26   Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia Vol. II*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ of Minnesota Press, 1987).

27   See here Bernard Cache, *Earth Moves: The Furnishing of Territories* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 24; cited after Elizabeth A. Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (Columbia UP, 2008), here 14.

28   Brian Massumi, *Parables for The Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2002), 203–4.

29   Levi R. Bryant, *Onto-Cartography: An Ontology of Machines and Media* (Edinburgh UP, 2014), 9.

30   See Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real* (Oxford University Press, 2015); and Simondon, "The Genesis of Technicity", in *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects,* trans. Cécile Malaspina and John Rogove (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2017), 176–90.

31   Claire Colebrook, "Sex and the (Anthropocene) City", *Theory, Culture & Society* 34, no. 2–3 (2017): 39–60; here 41, 46–7.