



LA CASA
ESPACIOS DOMÉSTICOS
MODOS DE HABITAR

ABADA EDITORES

LA CASA

ESPACIOS DOMÉSTICOS

MODOS DE HABITAR

II CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL CULTURA Y CIUDAD
GRANADA, 23-25 ENERO 2019



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Biopolíticas de interior: la domesticidad como mass media en la socialdemocracia sueca

Interior Biopolitics—Domesticity as Mass Media in the Making of Swedish Social Democracy

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Resumen

El interior doméstico ha funcionado como extensión de autoridad estatal y moral en Suecia desde principios del siglo 20. En concreto, adquirió un papel protagonista durante los años 30, en la construcción de la 'Folkhemmet'. Las 'domesticidades teatralizadas' configuraron un dispositivo *mass media* tridimensional de aplicación de las nuevas técnicas de gobierno sexual y espacial. Así, la triada compuesta por la arquitectura, el diseño, y las políticas corporales, produjo una nueva heteronorma que se convertiría en un significante global de progreso, salud y civismo a lo largo del siglo 20. El caso sueco ilustra la relación existente entre la arquitectura moderna y la producción del género donde la domesticidad emerge como fenómeno arquitectónico de gran fuerza biopolítica capaz de modelar la vida y la sexualidad, señalando así el nexo interestcalar que siempre existió entre las realidades cotidianas a pequeña escala y las relaciones de poder que dan forma al mundo.

Palabras clave: domesticidad, arquitectura, género, Suecia, *mass media*

Bloque temático: El proyecto doméstico como núcleo de la modernidad: casa singular y vivienda colectiva, del Movimiento Moderno al siglo XXI

Abstract

The domestic interior has been used as an extension of state authority and morale since the beginning of the 20th century. Chiefly, it acquired an explicit and unquestionable weight in the construction of the Swedish Social Democratic project in the 1930s. 'Staged domesticities' worked as 3D, mass media sites of application of the new techniques of sexual and spatial governance. The triad of architecture, design, and body politics defined and effectively produced a new heteronormativity that would become a global signifier of progress, health, and urbanity over the 20th century. The Swedish case is a very helpful way to underline the existing relationship between modern architecture and the production of gender. Domesticity emerges here as an architectural phenomenon with great biopolitical power: the power to model life, politics and sexuality, signalling the interscalar nexus that always existed between small-scale domestic realities and power relationships which give shape to the world.

Keywords: domesticity, architecture, gender, Sweden, *mass media*

Topic: *The domestic project as the heart of modernity: the single, one-off house and collective housing, from the Modern Movement to the 21st century*

1. Introduction

1.1. Domesticity as a national project in Swedish Modernity: The 1930s

The Swedish Social-democratic rule (1930-1974) is commonly known in Sweden as the *Folkhemmet*, or ‘People’s Home’. It was Per Albin Hansson, the leader of the Swedish Social Democratic party, whom, in a 1928 meeting, first articulated his vision of Sweden as a big, open home, a metaphor for a society living under one common roof, sheltered by equality, solidarity, and welfare.

Far from being just a metaphor, the *Folkhemmet* years chiefly situated domesticity as a privileged site of political, economic, cultural, and subjective production. The Swedish 30’s saw the development of a vastly dimensioned, all-encompassing modern project that, unlike the attempted projects from neighbouring European countries, which were thwarted by social disengagement and/or war, successfully put modernist ideals into practice. During these years, a new interest in the human body, sexuality, and the home fused the disciplinary and enabling aspects of power in a very particular way: policies on all levels and scales were implemented in the context of a political agenda that increasingly came to understand the *life* of the citizens, the *bios* in all of its dimensions, as a vital concern. Life and the individual became the main targets of the policies directed at producing and administering life,¹ and, in turn, architecture and design became the most effective tools for the implementation of these new values.

1.2. Private becomes Public: The Stockholm Exhibition of 1930 and the Functionalist Manifesto *acceptera!*

In the beginning of the 1930s, two events took place which set the foundations for modern Swedish culture: The 1930 Stockholm Universal Exhibition of Architecture and the subsequent publication of the functionalist manifesto *acceptera!* [accept!] in 1931. Both stated that architecture and design were not to be seen as expressions of individual artistic genius but as solutions to collective social issues, thus visibilising the importance of architecture in society through domesticity. The six authors of *acceptera!* (architects Gunnar Asplund, Wolter Gahn, Sven Markelius, Eskil Sundahl, Uno Åhrén, and art historian Gregor Paulsson) saw domesticity as a form public property, a productive nucleus, a national emblem of modernity, and a pedagogical tool.

Through the 1930 Stockholm Exhibition, the home became a living archive of Swedishness in a Derridean sense: a site of consignation, production and distribution of the new national values. The Exhibition, which was attended by 4 million Swedes² - then amounting to half of the nation’s population - integrated a new vision for housing within an entirely functional urban and leisurely display (Figure 1) in which every aspect of life and construction element was susceptible to undergo a pedagogical exercise Restaurants, fast-food stalls, newsagents, fountains, product displays, crèches, and even a faux cemetery with life-scale modernist tombstone models (Figure 2) accompanied the visitor in their spectacular modern journey from the cradle to the grave.

¹ Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Yonki* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 2008), 56.

² Thordis Arrhenius, ‘The Vernacular on Display: Skansen Open-Air Museum in 1930s Stockholm’, in *Swedish Modernism: Architecture, Consumption, and the Welfare State*, ed. by Helena Mattsson and Sven-Olov Wallenstein (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010), 134.



Figure 1: Gustaf Wennerström Cronquist, outdoor view of Villa 43. Owned house type XII
Architect: Ture Rydberg. Stockholm Exhibition, 1930
Source: Digitalmuseum.se



Figure 2: Gustaf Wennerström Cronquist, Cemetery model installation. Stockholm Exhibition, 1930
Source: Digitalmuseum.se

Architecture as mass-media emerged here as a mediator of ideologies and affections which intervened reality through connecting archetype, materiality and identity in a trans-scale logic which opened up hitherto ‘private’ arenas - such as the home, the healthy body, grieving, or leisure time - thus disrupting traditional notions of ‘privacy’ and ‘publicity’. The different interior ‘dwelling types’ were walkable displays of homes and apartments at scale 1:1. Designed for different family configurations and economies, they submerged the visitors in an uncanny, oneiric, aspirational familiarity which they temporarily inhabited, swaying over from desire to recognition, shock, and acculturation.

2. Building the type

2.1. Marriage is architecture: the Swedish family home and the architectural ‘type’



Figure 3: Erik Holmén, Press Image, couple with model house, date unknown
Source: Nordiska Museet

It is not coincidental that *acceptera!* begins by linking the private sphere with the public through relating research on marriage to architecture.³ At the very core of this seemingly odd comparison lies the notion of ‘type’: the manifesto argues that both housing ‘type’ and family ‘type’ need to be produced and developed in relation to one another in order to serve the higher, common interests of society. On the notion of architectural ‘type’, Swedish philosopher Sven-Olov Wallenstein claims that

One of the significant outcomes of this shift [the emergence of biopolitics in modern architecture] is the new idea of “type” [...] The type is not an image of a thing that should be copied, but rather, it is an element that itself has to serve as a rule for the model [...] In this way it can, unlike the model, produce works that do not resemble each other [...] [Whilst] everything is exact and pre-given in the model, everything is more or less vague in the type.

³ Uno Åhrén et al. *Acceptera!*, 1931. English translation. In Creagh et al., *Modern Swedish Design: Three Founding Texts* (New York: MoMA, 2008), 145.

The 25 model houses and apartments designed by the authors of *Acceptera!* - and seen at the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930 - were created according to 'need types' determined by the number of inhabitants of each dwelling and its annual costs (Figure 4) - calculated at 20 to 25 per cent of yearly income. Implicit in this development of 'types' was the notion of economy through mass production, and a constituent part of the presentation was plans that showed how these dwelling types could be arranged in the new suburbs of Stockholm.⁴ Interestingly, they all 'designed' a very specific family 'type' which essentially consisted of a married heterosexual couple and a number of children.



Figure 4: Owned House 1, living room. Stockholm Exhibition, 1930

Source: Digitalmuseum.se

2.2. Inside the Functionalist Home: The 'Typification' of Taste

Through the notion of 'type', the functionalist philosophy of *acceptera!* implied the neat conception and division of domestic space by function. The modern home was conceived as a standardised, mechanized, mass-produced unit, a tool for 'readjusting' the institution of the family so it could meet modern demands and standards. Following this logic, apartment layouts became highly regulated, standardized, and typologized. Each room was studied in detail according to its function and designed thereafter. All possible configurations of movement, furniture, proportions of rooms, and lighting conditions were analyzed in regard to function. The results were puzzled together (organized and ordered) as 'type-plans' to be used in planning multi-family housing.

However, some elements were present in all possible configurations. For example, the kitchen, now seen as the *hemmet's hjarta* [the home's heart in Swedish] sits at the very heart of a new logic of production that engaged directly with female housework and the growing expectation for her to partake in paid labour outside the home: along with tinned foods, modern household appliances, and a reduced number of children, the well-planned kitchen was seen as one major

⁴ Creagh et al., *Modern...*, 128.

improvement in the daily lives of women. Furthermore, children would sleep in small, well-lit bedrooms with just enough space to fit a bed (Figure 5) and play and work together in common areas. The traditional use of the *finrum* - [parlour] as the only ‘public’ space in the house, only used for exhibiting family memorabilia or receiving guests - a tradition derived from the Italian *sala* in the Renaissance family home - was vigorously discarded in favour of the *vardagsrummet* or living room (lit. ‘the everyday room’), a sparse, central space whose function is to contain the entire family during leisure time.



Figure 5: Gustaf Wennersson, A twin bedroom for children. Stockholm Exhibition, 1930
Source: Digitalmuseum.se

In becoming ‘type’, both the modern home, with its *everyday objects*, and the modern woman, with her newly acquired relative autonomy, became a product of technology, of architecture, and, above all, of masculine genius. Through the application of ‘rational’ residential solutions, the triumph of light, clean and spacious homes, over superfluous, frowzy, ‘feminine’ decorativeness, the home as a space of care and reproduction was posited as a site for the enactment of a change that had taken place *outside it*. Echoing the manifesto’s overarching argument, the home was conceived as an artifact, and like all artifacts, ‘it reflected the formative principles of the society that produced it’:⁵ the unstoppable modernising force of the architects of the Folkhemmet.

⁵ Gregor Paulsson, “Arkitektur och politik”, *Architektur och samhälle*, n.º 1 (1933): 16. Translated in Helena Mattsson, ‘Designing the Resonable Consumer: Standardisation and Personalisation in Swedish Functionalism’, in Mattsson and Wallenstein, *Swedish Modernism...*, 75.

3. From the Sanitarium to the Functionalisation of Sex: A Swedish Technosexual History

3.1. Just What Is It That Makes Swedish Homes so Wonderful, So Appealing? The ‘Sanitarium’ as Swedish Architectural Type

Acceptera! modelled an entire society in relation to one architectural principle: a form which in itself embodies standardisation and variegation, the limits of which are clearly defined. The applied ‘type’ was a crucial development because it created an abstract, generative structure that resembles and precedes software: like grammar, it is a self-contained, all-encompassing language, a system, an arithmetic combination of pre-given possibilities.

Through creating a standardised set of possibilities, the type and its possible variegations simultaneously design a set of ‘unprogrammed’ impossibilities. When applied to the notion of the modern family home, the ‘type’ retained the basic hierarchies and gender difference structures which would allow for the reinstatement of modern patriarchy. I argue that the ‘architectural type’ as generated by the architects of the Swedish *Folkhem* is a technique of subjectivation that is embodied in the architectural paradigm of the sanitarium, itself a variant of the Foucauldian hospital - the *machine-à-guerir* or ‘healing machine’.⁶ The sanitarium is an institutional, corrective domesticity aimed at the production of wellbeing and a healthy lifestyle through the *mise en pratique* of the essential national values: (sun)light, order, heterosexuality, activity, temperance, willpower, rationality, simplicity, hygiene, honesty, nature, and health.

The sanitarium is the first modern facility that is conceived not solely as a hospital, but also more generally, as a health resort. Sanitariums were typically built in remote areas surrounded by nature, and they were designed to enjoy sunshine and open air as a health cure. Patients had to adapt to severely regimented schedules that included physical exercise, rest, and a variety of health treatments or cures, and were expected to acquire health through discipline, willpower, and work. The living conditions in sanitariums were comfortable and resembled, in some ways, those of contemporary resorts: some sanitariums were also thermal waters or spa resorts, and they offered a wide range of healthy foods and nutritional treatments and assessment for patients.

Beyond their literal existence, the simultaneously surveilling, coercive and enabling technologies of power embedded in the sanitarium became an abstract generative structure which was subsequently echoed and reproduced throughout the structural tissue of Swedish society, from domesticity outwards, increasingly permeating all spheres of life. In correcting deviance through the *public production of health* – and the simultaneous isolation, invisibilisation or eradication of perversion - the white, abled, cisgendered, heterosexual naked Swedish body emerged (Figure 6).

A signifier of national health and authenticity, it became an emblem and an achievable ideal; a new culture of the body was produced in which this naked body was ‘true’ healthy, pure, trim and as free of decoration as Modernist buildings and household goods.⁷ Thus, the architectural

⁶ Michel Foucault, ‘Les machines-à- guérir (aux origines de l’hôpital moderne)’ in Sven-Olov Wallenstein, *Bio-politics and the Emergence of Modern Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009), 109.

⁷ Gertrud Sandqvist and Michael Garner, ‘Art and Social Democracy’, *Afterall, A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, n.º 0 (1999): 40-49.

logic of the sanitarium became the productor of a new national landscape of *healthy* (white, cisgendered, heterosexual, middle-class) bodies existing in a mental landscape of wood, cornfields, cold baths in the lake and the modern home. Producing at once discipline and agency, the role of ‘scenographies of domesticity’ such as the 1930 Stockholm Exhibition display is key in the implementation of the logics of the sanitarium or ‘healthy State machine’: along with the architecture of the sanitarium itself, they function as experimental arenas where these techniques can be tested and projected onto the population, and subsequently applied to their everyday lives.



Figure 6: Paul Sandberg, Young people bathing outdoors in Uppsala, 1944

Source: Upplandsmuseet

3.2. The Functionalisation of Sexuality and Other ‘Somatic Fictions’

«The truth about sex is not unveiling, but sex design».⁸

Through designing the modern home, sexuality becomes a public matter whose ‘harmonious’ functioning is essential for the national, collective body. Indeed, the production of the white, heterosexual, Swedish body was a complex process that, through architecture, directly involved sociological, pedagogical, medical and legal systems: during this decade, the emergence of institutions such as the Institute for Home Research (Figure 7), the ‘chartification’ of the body through the exhaustive measurement of its movements and the production of a myriad government reports on issues such as sexuality, maternal leave insurance, medical care for mothers and children, housing, abortion, domestic servant education, nutrition, children’s clothing, married women and the right to work, or birth control⁹ illustrates the political-medico-

⁸ Paul B. Preciado, ‘Farmacopornografía’, in *El País*, January 27, 2008, accessed 7 november 2018. https://elpais.com/diario/2008/01/27/domingo/1201409559_850215.html.

⁹ Some of these government reports are listed in Yvonne Hirdman, ‘The Happy 30’s: A Short Story of Social Engineering and gender order in Sweden’, in Mattsson and Wallenstein, *Swedish Modernism...*, 68.

legal productive process of the national collective body, a process which is ultimately inscribed within the modern family as an institution, the feminine body, and the heterosexual home.



Figure 7: Unknown author, Institute of Home Research, ca. 1950
Source: Nordiska Museet

Government reports produced during this decade also tackled the so-called 'ethical view of the population question'.¹⁰ In their 1934 seminal work *Kris i Befolkningsfrågen* ('Crisis in the Population Question') the Folkhem ideologues and Nobel-winning sociologists Alva and Gunnar Myrdal actively suggested that in order to achieve balance, the production of the family must adhere to the same principles of efficiency that dominated the rest of industrial society. They considered sexuality and sexual education as a public and common subject¹¹ primarily aimed at the incorporation of woman to the workforce and the optimal balance between motherhood, caregiving, and productive work. One main concern, or, as Alva Myrdal herself put it, the 'general problem' to be solved in society through the combined action of all fields of 'modern knowledge' was the situation where 'a married woman, deprived of her functions in productive life, is imprisoned in a small flat where she often becomes fat, lethargic, and self-centred':¹² in other words, modern architecture and society must put in place a productive system (of paid labour for women and institutionalized care for non-productive 'others') that eradicates *female hysteria*¹³ whilst still inscribing womanhood within domesticity and reproductive labour.

¹⁰ Hirdman, 'The Happy 30's...', 68.

¹¹ Sandqvist and Garner, 'Art and Social...'

¹² Alva Myrdal in Hirdman, 'The Happy 30's...', 68.

¹³ See, for example, Didi Hubermann, *The Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic iconography of the Salpêtrière* (Chicago: The MIT Press, 2004).

Thus, functionalist housing solutions should be designed to cater for the ideal family – which, the Myrdals argued - should have two married parents, and three to five children. However, whilst ‘exceptional citizens’ were encouraged to reproduce further, there was no place for the non-productive other in the Swedish welfare state:¹⁴ the spatial segregation, institutionalised care, and sterilisation of ‘the mentally feeble’ and people who were ‘clearly not apt to have children’, which was actively encouraged in the Myrdals’ theoretical work, and was subsequently forced upon individuals during this time. Indeed, as part of its modernisation programme, Sweden effectively carried out an ableist, racial and sexual hygiene eugenic policy of forced sterilisation affecting tens of thousands of people from 1941 to 1975,¹⁵ which peaked during the 1940’s, its numbers only rivalled by those of Nazi Germany,¹⁶ whose remnants were active in Swedish law, directly affecting transgender individuals, up to 2012.¹⁷

In this ‘sexopolitical’¹⁸ logic, heterosexuality as a ‘somatic fiction’¹⁹ is produced through the territorialisation and coding of the body within the space of the family home: ‘male’ and ‘female’ nakedness and genitalia are neatly divided and celebrated as two complementary parts within a logic of engineered production, and thus emerge as public assets in a completely unprecedented way. In other words, through the prioritization of reproduction and the binary coding of genitality, the sexed, domestic body is also neatly defined by function. Indeed, the dual concern with architecture and body politics that characterised Functionalist architecture implied a parallel process of production of heterosexuality as a political system that has its roots in 19th century taxonomies and history of sexuality.²⁰ In the words of Paul B. Preciado:

The heterosexual body, one of the most governmentally successful artifacts in 19th century sexopolitics, is the product of a division of labour of the flesh in which each organ is defined in relation to its function, be it reproductive or as a producer of masculinity or femininity, of normality or perversion. Sexuality implies the precise territorialization of the mouth, the vagina, the hand, the penis, the anus, or the skin. In this way, the ‘straight mind’ – if we take the term as used by Monique Wittig in the 80’s in order to define heterosexuality not as a sexual practice, but as a political regime – assures the structural relationship between the production of gender identities and the production of certain organs (in the detriment of others) as sexual and reproductive organs.²¹

Through these techniques, the production of gender in Modern Sweden becomes a architectural-medico-technological endeavour. Through the production of sex as an

¹⁴ See Urban Lundberg and Mattias Tydén, ‘In Search of the Swedish Model: Contested Historiography’, in Mattsson and Wallenstein, *Swedish Modernism...*, 40.

¹⁵ Compulsory sterilisations were carried out in Sweden, without a valid consent of the subject, during the years 1906–1975 on eugenic, medical and social grounds, peaking during the 1940s and remaining active with the forced sterilisation of trans people’s bodies as a compulsory condition for legally undergoing sex reassignment surgery up to 2012. See, for example, Mattias Tydén, *Från politik till praktik: de svenska steriliseringsslagen 1935-1975* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International), 63.

¹⁶ In August 1997, *Dagens Nyheter*, one of Sweden’s leading newspapers, initiated a domestic and international debate around the forced sterilisation campaigns in Sweden during most of the 20th century. See Lundberg and Tydén, ‘In Search of the Swedish Model: Contested Historiography’, 41.

¹⁷ See, for example, ‘Good News For Sweden’s Transgender Residents’ in *The Huffington Post*, January 14, 2013, accessed June 6, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/14/sweden-transgender-sterilization-law-overturned_n_2472925.html?guccounter=1.

¹⁸ Preciado, *Testo-Yonqui*, 56.

¹⁹ Preciado, *Testo-Yonqui*, 57.

²⁰ This is one of the overarching arguments of Foucault’s last seminal work, *The History of Sexuality*. See Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (London: Penguin Books, 2006).

²¹ Preciado, *Testo-Yonqui*, 59. (my translation)

individuating force and the inscription of these techniques of subjectivation within the ensemble of mediatic/curatorial displays of domesticity, the modern family home becomes the main site of (re)production of the body politic, and the main site of exchange between individuality and collectivity, in a manner which has remained the archetypal image of Sweden-as-Western-progress well into the 21st century.²²

4. Conclusion

Through the Swedish example, I aim to underline the characterisation of architecture as a productive, networked force which is heavily influenced and pierced by the mediatic, medical, visual and discursive technologies of production of ‘truths’ – or ‘somatopolitical fictions’ around gender and race. As I have argued, the new Swedish identity as conceived by functionalist architects in dialogue with sociological and medical discourse throughout the 1930s is contained within the spatial tactics of architecture but extends well beyond walls and bricks: it encompassed an indisoluble triad between body, objects and buildings where gender and race were produced as ‘somatic fictions’, to use Paul B. Preciado’s term, according to one architectural notion: that of *type*.

Through the notion of ‘type’, *Acceptera!* effectively created an active gender and racial policy in which domesticity became the fundamental point of application of a series of biopolitical processes and techniques of governance which marked the advent of Sweden’s golden age, an era which was seen as ‘masculinely healthy’ and whose core ideologies sought to reinstate and reinscribe gender hierarchies through the production of a ‘modern binary’. Because of the ‘successful’ implementation of its agenda, the neat alignment of capitalist, medical, racial and social-democratic discourses, and the preponderance of its visual regimes in the later stages of global capitalism, the case of Swedish modernism constitutes a paradigmatic example of the biopolitical power of architecture and its weight in the construction of the sexopolitical and visual regimes which dominated early 20th century Western societies. The topic remains particularly relevant today: far from being defunct, and using Zygmunt Bauman’s terms, these regimes have evolved into more subtle or ‘liquid’ forms of subjectivation, control and governance, yet despite their contemporary currency and intense metamorphosis, their idiosyncratic elements are still based on 19th century ‘somatic fictions’ around the purity of race, gender, sexuality, and nation.

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