IN SEARCH OF THE NEW EDEN. FROM LE CORBUSIER'S BOITE TO SEJIMA'S CURTAIN

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ABSTRACT

Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation in Marseille established the relationship between an old man and a new world that arrived. This old self found in the interior of a long rectangle a domestic Eden that was once lost. The exterior was still a place for waiting, a place to be seen, writes Beatriz Colomina. But this modern Eden could not last forever: his indoor paradise had to move. In 1999 Terence Riley inaugurated at the Museum of Modern Art of New York the Un-private House. In it, he discovers a new dweller that does not occupy the interior of that domestic laboratory, but its own limits. Contemporary man is a social being, Jose Pardo asserts. His public self is moved to a liminal threshold, writes Victor Turner, that Kazuyo Sejima turns into the new house. Architecture is no longer the air volume contained within its limits, but that which prowls said limits. The new domestic home of contemporaneity becomes a porosity line: a curtain that publicizes domestic life. The house is converted into a habitat of borders, where man discovers his new domestic Eden.

Keywords: Eden; intimacy; Le Corbusier; Sejima; threshold

In 1945, after the end of the war and under the orders of the minister Raoul Dauntry, Le Corbusier was commissioned to design a multi-family residential housing project for the people of Marseille. The contract was no coincidence. Le Corbusier had turned the domestic question into his best spatial laboratory. His houses turned the interior of a simple box into the domestic homeland of the nascent twentieth century.

Its name -Unité d'Habitation- was a guide to its accommodation, since it was designed for the social life of a small community. In addition to 330 flats for 1600 people it was to have a post office, a shopping centre on the 7th and 8th floors, a library and restaurant, an hotel for guests, clubrooms, a clinic on the top floor and a running-track and gymnasium on the roof. Its architecture was the physical expression of certain sociological precepts. Kenneth Easton[1] described this building as "an elegant rectangle raised up on pilotis, housing 1,600 people in two-storeyed flats and providing most of the amenities of a neighbourhood unit… it was clearly the fusion of ideas of two men-Corbusier the social philosopher and Corbusier the modern romantic architect" (Fig.1). A new form of inhabitation surged from a renewed intimacy.

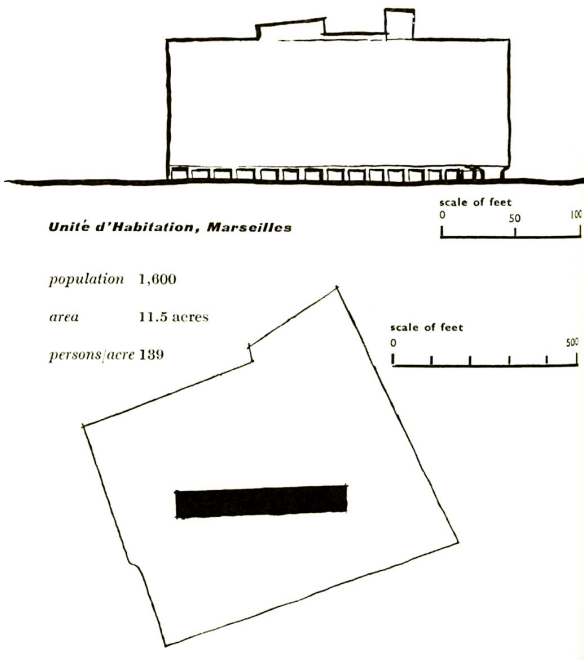

Figure 1. Sketch plan and elevation of Unite d'Habitation.
Architectural Review, 1951

A MAGIC RECTANGLE TO SEE AN UNKNOWN WORLD

Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles established the relationship between the old Europe that the war had destroyed and a new world that had arrived, almost unexpectedly. That old Europe found in the interior of the elegant rectangle a domestic eden that was once lost. On the other side of the rectangle was all that was to come: a new time and with it a new man. The exterior is still a place for waiting, a place to be seen, writes Beatriz Colomina[2]. Seeing, for Le Corbusier, is the primordial activity in the house. The house is a device to see the world, a mechanism of viewing. Shelter, separation from the outside, is provided by the window's ability to turn the threatening world outside the house into a reassuring picture[3]. This wait and this look might unlock a future path into that new world. The interior of this modern rectangle supposed the expectancy of an unknown world.

The rectangle drawn on paper and built like a heavy concrete prism was separated from the ground and the unknown world by thirty heroic pilotis, which gave way in the elevated box to a structure of orthogonal geometric reason. This structure determined an ambitious hierarchy that organised the dwellings like bottles in a perfect bottle-rack. The Unité d'Habitation was installed in a heaven where the old man kept his memory and intimacy, waiting to be able to conquer that new world that Le Corbusier announced as a rediscovered and optimistic nature. Le Corbusier had in many respects, writes Easton, relied on intuition rather than scientific method and analysis in order to create a building which will fulfil its anticipated social functions.

The domestic organisation of the Unité is based on a system of interlocking dwellings, which generates a clear domestic hierarchy. In the centre are the single-height servant spaces; at the ends are the double-height served spaces with magnificent views over the mountains and the Mediterranean. Its interior space emerged like a void that the spirit of the modern man would fill with everything he dreamed of [4].

The interior space of each of the 330 flats that comprise the Unité d'Habitation is, therefore, the modern Eden of a renewed destiny. In that interior space, the luminous rooms illuminate the promise of a new world for an old man wanting to be modern. From the large windows, that allegedly modern man bids farewell to the old city destroyed by war, where the tragedy of a wiped out society is still in agony. A society that only a new man, the man who inhabits the Unité d'Habitation, can found again.

Time stops in the windows of the new Eden, waiting for that new world and that yet-to-come new city. For this to be so, the Unité d'Habitation, raised above the ground plane, entrusts the old city to a hygienic nature that should heal its battered destiny; its unknown exteriority then becomes the wish and domestic hope of the new man. Now, from that window, the modern Eden dreams of the new city and the new world that serves as a homeland for it.

The modern Eden is now the "community" that Turner defines as "an area of common living"[5]. A place for a new community structured and hierarchically organised around a man that can be recognised as unity and measure of a new human organisation.

Meanwhile, the old society has disappeared and relinquished responsibility for its own destiny to each of the 1600 men and women who inhabit that box raised onto the sky. The man -inhabitant of an Eden limited to each of the dwellings that comprise the Unité d'Habitation- becomes the new hero of a community devoid of a lost past that embraces the ideology of modernity as the soul of its own destiny.

The inhabitation of the interior of its modern houses therefore supposed the best advancement of that new world, a place as yet impossible to inhabit. The exterior remained a space waiting for containment. Meanwhile the long rectangle, half magical and half laboratory, housed the dreams of that new world of which almost nothing was known (Fig. 2).

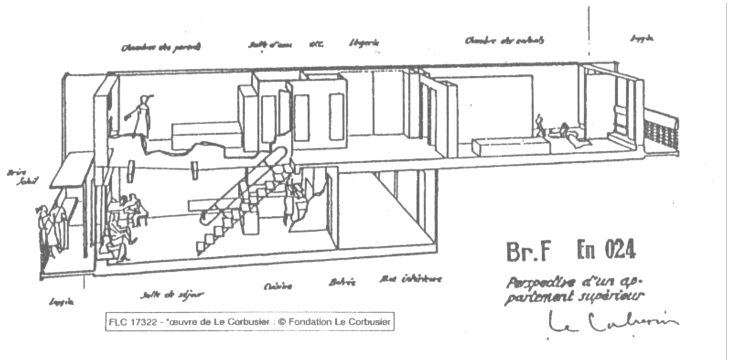

Figure 2. Unite d'Habitation, apartment model.

The Unité d'Habitation sheltered within it a man straddling two homelands. Inside it, modern man kept his past, his time and perhaps his very self. On the outside, the changes that had brought on the inside of the box awaited. Between both worlds, the inherited and the following one, the rectangle was defined as a space and a time of interlude. The interior of the box enabled a space of intimacy with its own world. From within it, man observed an unfamiliar exterior that didn't seem to belong to him just yet. This situation illuminated the possibility of making the dreams of that man Le Corbusier announced come true (Fig. 3). The Unité d'Habitation was a boîte a miracles.

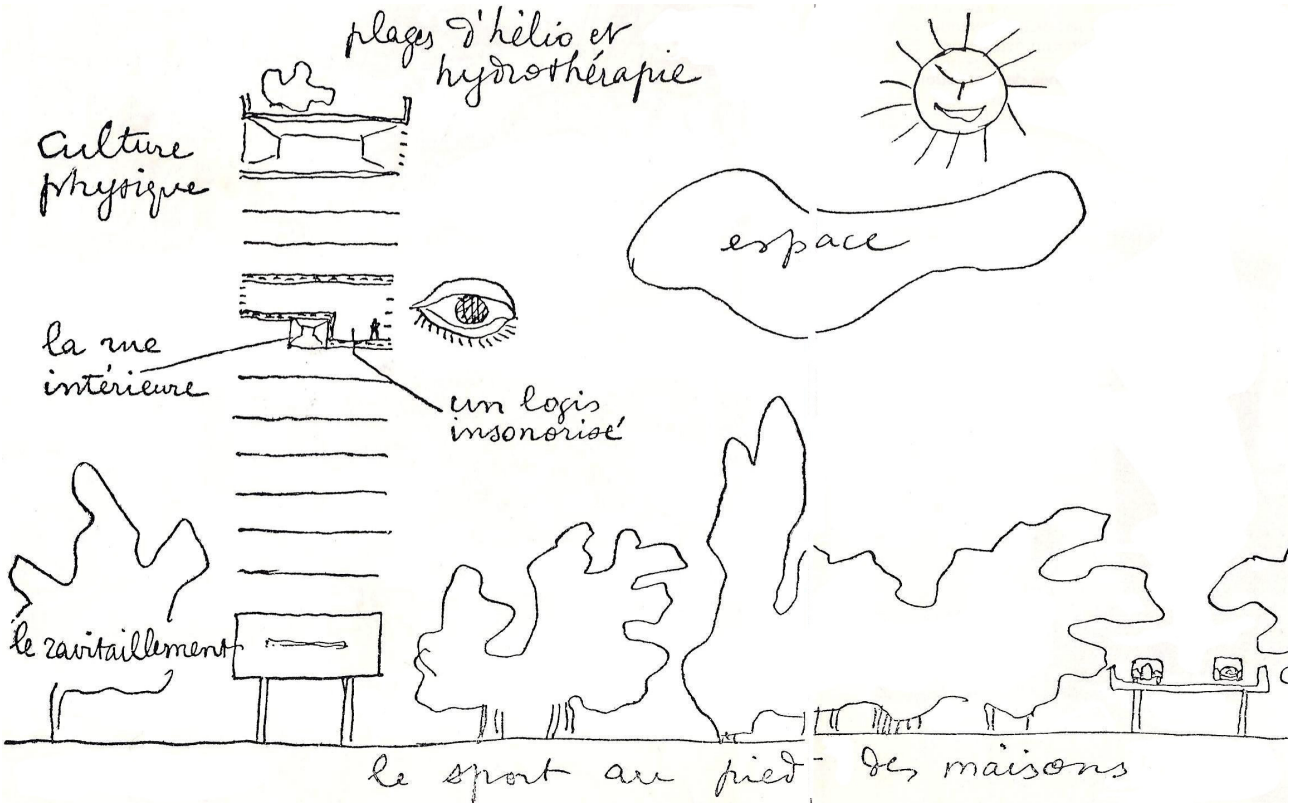

Figure 3. Unite d'Habitation. Le Corbusier, sketch.

Nonetheless, the modern man sheltered in that boîte did not inhabit the exteriority of his life (Hesse, 1970, p.49). His life was not satisfied fully without that world that remained outside. How, Kenneth Easton wondered, could 1,600 of this essentially 'agora-minded' and volatile community ever be happily contained in this great rectangle on the outskirts of the town? The attempt at completeness made by the inclusion of shops, post office, library, clinic, etc., within one single building is a limitation to the social life of the inhabitants; one can well imagine that the housewife will have little need and less inclination ever to leave the building at all for days on end. And this seems particularly unfitting to the temperament of such people as the Marseillais. The conception seems to dominate rather than to liberate, the British architect answered himself later[6].

Armed with his own individuality, man decided to penetrate that public exteriority. On the other side of the long rectangle, and with modernity going on, he discovered the reasons of that unexpected world. From the interior of that boîte a miracles, modern human discovered on that outside once feared, his new world and his new being. A being-in-public.

The boîte and the presence of that exterior world transformed modern man into a new man. Maybe into the same man that he once feared. A man increasingly pleased to be in public, a place where he exhibited his new individuality. A man abandoned to the drunkenness of community, and with it the loss of his personality, once kept safe, within a crowd[7].

This new man was not satisfied with the interior of that modern boîte as the house of his new being-in-public. On the contrary, he found in its exterior the best place to house a new intimacy. The journey from the inside to the outside became a route to be travelled and, of course, inhabited. The contradiction then arised between the desire to protect the interior space and to open it up as much as possible[8].

The interior of the modern house was progressively pushed towards an exteriority, resulting in its own limits. The frontier of the house turned into the best habitation. The interior occupancy of the house was diminished, until it became a limit. The passage of time disappeared the interior of that modern laboratory, bringing it forth in its own limits. This limit is now a passage area: imaginary exterior space as interior space, a facade with exterior architecture pulled inward[9]. That new limit became that elegant rectangle in an inhabited line that we will discover in Sejima's architecture.

THE UN-PRIVATE HOUSE

In 1999 Terence Riley inaugurated at the MoMA of New York, and under the same title, the Un-private House. In it Riley discovers for us a new dweller that does not occupy the interior of that domestic laboratory, but its own limits. Interior space, converted into a domestic eden, had moved places[10]. Contemporary man was revealed as a new public being. His public self had been displaced, moved by a new intimacy, an intimacy that gave public space the best place and turned the old house into a public place. That modern house, guardian of an interior self, had been exteriorized. Its interior had become a public room and its limit the necessary place for a new intimacy. Houses turned inhabiting into a liminal being. And within them, man built his new domestic eden. Dwelling had become the new individual expression of a public being.

This man, an enjoyer of the public, has abandoned the intimacy of that box to move to its frontier. This domestic move has transformed the spatial anatomy of that modern laboratory. The house of contemporary man has settled in a single line: an open line, where man straddles a permanent liminal existence. This line is, in fact, an exteriorized interior. Inhabiting the limit, this new house dialogues with in-between spaces, converting its occupancy into a permanent exteriority. Fred Koetter defines this in-between zone that is the liminal as "the realm of conscious and unconscious speculation and questioning –the 'zone' where things concrete and ideas are intermingled, taken apart and reassembled– where memory, values, and intentions collide"[11].

In German, Walter Benjamin called it a "Schwelle", usually translated as "threshold". He explains its significance by precisely demarcating the word from what "threshold" would generally be taken to imply, and elucidating its meaning by referring to the verb, schwellen, cognate with the English, swell: The Schwelle must be radically distinguished from the limit or border (Grence). Schwelle is a zone. Change (Wandel), passage, flooding lie in the word "swelling" (schellen)[12].

This exteriority is a privileged way of naming everything that it deems other, alien, different, and weird[13]. The line has become the best possible domestic homeland for this public dwelling man. This line is now the new spatial laboratory of our contemporaneity. A laboratory that promotes a liminal occupation for a man that desires to be in public. Public space does not necessarily mean 'collective' any more, since a new space offers 'discrete' settings that provide the individual with the possibility of acting separately in the public realm[14].

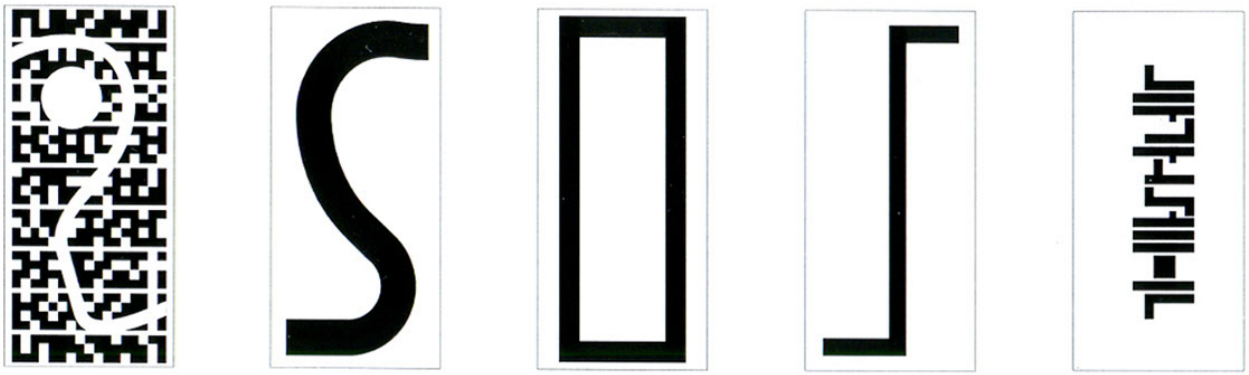

Figure 4. Metropolitan Housing study process.

Between 1996 and 1998, almost simultaneously to Terence Riley's inauguration of The Un-Private House, Kazuyo Sejima (Ibarki, 1956) had begun a parallel process of investigation. She designated the line as the homeland of a new collective housing, now for the Japanese metropolis (Fig.4). The purpose of her research, wrote Sejima, was the privatization of exterior space. Sejima denounced that the majority of collective housing schemes result from only taking into account interior space. The number of rooms, the living room, dining and kitchen are the only immutable parts of the domestic program. This manner or proceeding, Sejima finally claims, has perpetuated a typology that has made equal any form of habitation[15].

It is not by chance that Riley included a house by Sejima and Nishizawa in his catalogue of those un-private houses. Their house M (Tokyo, 1997) is enveloped by a metal chain curtain system that reveals even its innermost room, turning it into an exterior one. The same catalogue includes the Curtain Wall House by Shigeru Ban (Tokyo, 1995), another house that changes the old wall system in favour of white fabric curtains that also publicize domestic life.

Sejima's investigation searches for a new prototype of collective housing. The housing schemes in her laboratory clearly strive for exteriority and a relationship with the city context. The result, far from being a mere paper operation, wanted to become a possible alternative to the inherited modern model.

For this research, Sejima works with lines (Fig. 4a). Her linear laboratory, with its impossible geometric interior, responds to a contemporary dweller's vocation of exteriority. Lines become then an inhabited landscape. Sejima's lab changes space for place, interiority for exteriority, object for landscape, and the modern box for a line.

From the processes of this laboratory three typologies of lines arise: low-rise, mid-rise and high-rise. They all provide 120 housing units per hectare. From these three typologies the architect develops five prototypes. The low-rise prototype inserts the line as an open space in a two-level extension of houses. A broad and hollow line achieves an open and public room for all of the housing units (Fig. 4b).

The typology of mid-rise lines is further developed into two prototypes. The first is the result of the positive of the former open space. This change is not anecdotic. Sejima converts that open public room into the homeland of her new domestic program. Its width suffices to warrant the stability of the line in four levels. The geometry used makes it easily adaptable for almost any site. The second mid-rise prototype settles into the perimeter of a rectangle. In this way, its exterior space transits between the patio that the line encloses and its exterior (Fig. 4c).

The third typology, perhaps the most interesting one, develops two prototypes. The first one, an inverted double L, is situated in the center of the site laboratory, thus securing the most exterior open space (Fig. 4d). Housing has contracted to the limits of its own interior to render it the antechamber of the maximum place, that is, the maximum exterior. Each housing volume has four exterior walls. Therefore, exteriority is at the maximum; interiority, at its minimal. From its addition we obtain an open interior occupancy.

The second prototype is even more (Fig. 4e), augmenting that process of exteriorization. To this end it multiplies the partition of the last proposal, achieving a new exteriority from its discontinuity. The prototype rises eleven floors, which allow for further compression of the scheme. The line becomes an inhabited curtain, a sum of lesser interior traces, much in the form of oriental sewing (Fig. 5). A stitch unites both sides, without enclosing a space for itself. As Kazuyo states, an uninterrupted open space is attained. Their terraces are converted into the visibility of a new exterior that end up inhabiting the next trace.

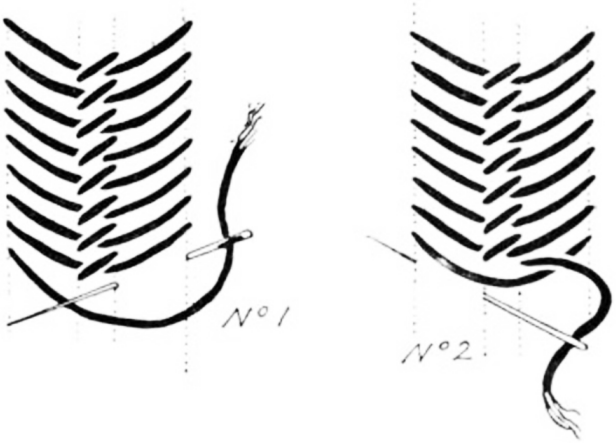

Figure 5. Oriental-stitch sampler. Art in Needlework.

SEJIMA AND NISHIZAWA´S APPROACH TO DEFINITION OF THRESHOLD

The body of work developed by Kazuyo Sejima with Ryue Nishizawa shows the transformation of the modern boundary into a contemporary threshold. Their research has affected residential and other typologies of buildings. We visit some of their housing experiences, which unveil their definition of contemporary threshold as the room of a new intimacy and the line as an inhabited curtain.
In order to define this threshold and its intimacy, we will identify four ways of relationship in Sejima and Nishizawa's architecture that weaves this new inhabited curtain: concavity, lightness, transparency and hollowness. We will discover these four key ways of relationship in four of Sejima and Nishizawa's houses, in chronological order, and with them we will encounter a new way of inhabitation.

The first one, the villa in the forest of 1992, is defined as the space in-between two circles: one placed off-centre within the other, conforming a ring (Fig. 6 left). This ring is a visible concave threshold that houses the living space, including kitchen, dining room and bedrooms. Thanks to this circular geometry, the space looks itself in its movement.

Its concave shape that seems to have no end, is enriched by several apertures providing different relations with the forest. This threshold is discovered as a room in permanent motion that it is characterized by its function as a transitional space. In other words, it is a "passage space" which distributes and redirects. This means it is primarily perceived as we stroll through it, as opposed to a "place space", which serves as a place to stay or rest[16]. Its motion transforms the ring into an open place. The concave geometry of this thick line offers us a long room which always looks outside. At the same time, its intimacy is revealed as an interior movement opened to the others.

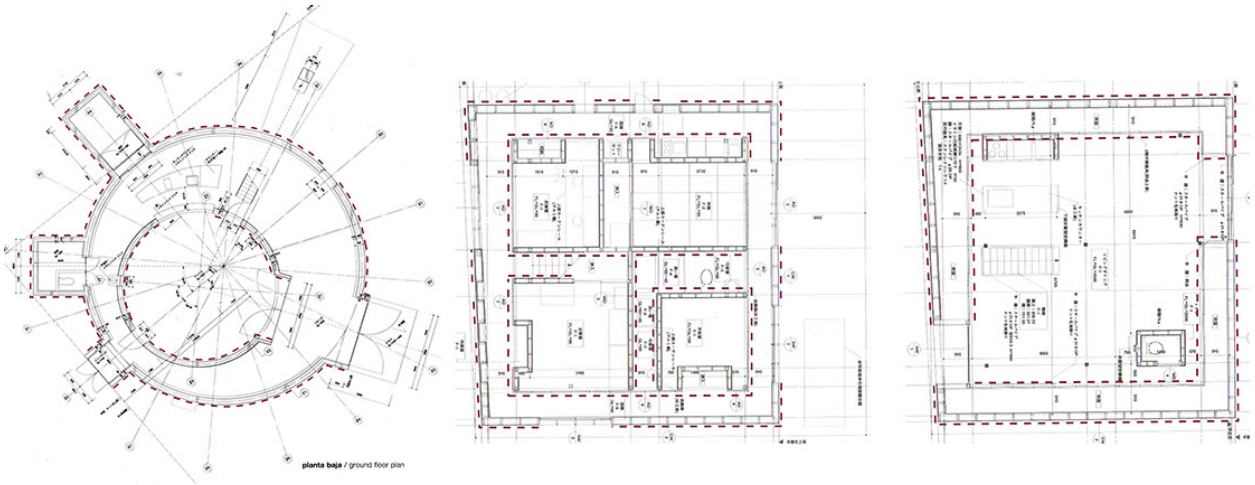

Figure 6. Villa in the forest. Kazuyo Sejima, 1994 (left); House S. Sejima and Nishizawa. 1997 (middle and right).

The second one is the S-House, built up by Sejima and Nishizawa in 1997 (Fig.6 right). This is a house for two families: parents and grandparents. They have private rooms for each member, a kitchen and a bathroom for each couple and a large living and dining room for the entire family. The volume is a two-storey cube that contains a two-storey core surrounded by a thick line that is twice as high as the others. Sejima and Nishizawa[17] defined this thick line as a "semi-external space". This elongated space is the external passageway where each room is connected to the others. It is through the implementation of a boundary and a connection that it ultimately has the ability to turn a space into a place[18]. The corrugated polycarbonate panel on the outdoor gives to the house and this external room a delicate lightness. This lightness transforms the visual relationship into a soft and ambiguous intimacy.

The third one is a small house in Tokyo: a house in a plum grove (Fig. 7 left). Kazuyo Sejima built it up in 2003. The family and the architect decided to relate the rooms with the grove. To do this, Sejima reduced the built volume in order to preserve the periphery of trees. The different rooms are interconnected with openings to each other. The exterior and interior walls that define the rooms are structural walls minimized to a thickness of 50mm and 16mm respectively. The interconnection of the openings in the walls transforms the previous volume into the permanent relationship between rooms and trees.

From this kind of relationship emerges a new type of transparency that defines intimacy as a frame of visibility. All the relations between the parts are in sight, explains Nishizawa: nothing is hidden, it is all very clear. Everything is clarified, defined. These kinds of things create a transparent feeling in the space[19].

The thin walls are the lines where habitation is framed. The lines emerge as threshold when it is crossed by those relationships. These thresholds, that Brooks defines as line of tension, can be seen as the result of dynamic relations between aspects such as; architecture and landscape, public and private, work and recreation, they resist closure in terms of meaning and space[20].

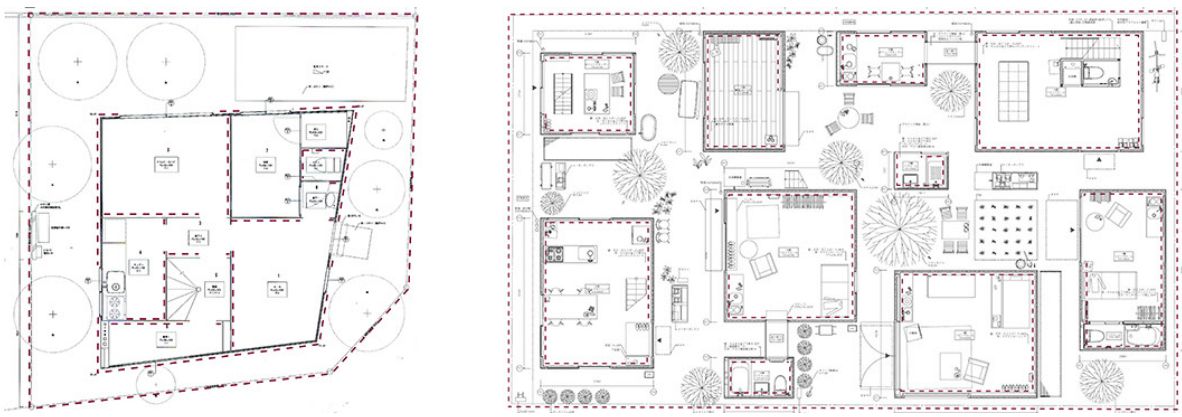

Figure 7. House in a plum grove. Sejima, 2003 (left). Moriyama House. Ryue Nishizawa 2005 (right).

The last one is Moriyama house, built up by Ryue Nishizawa in 2005. The house is the result of the sum of ten hollow boxes inside of a visible place: the garden (Fig. 7 right). Every one of those boxes gives habitation to different parts of the house including a guest room. This addition of boxes draws a domestic cosmos of rooms inside of a new and huge room: the garden itself. The garden is the threshold that emerges in-between that hollows boxes. This space of the in-between is that which is not a space, a space without boundaries of its own, which takes on and receives itself, its form, from the outside, which is not its outside (this would imply that it has a form) but whose form is the outside of the identity, not just of an other (for that would reduce the in-between to the role of object, not of space) but of others, whose relations of positivity define, by default, the space that is constituted as in-between[21].

The hollow boxes are thin opened lines that inhabit at the same time the garden and the room interior. In the same way, the garden is the external thick line that breathes into the boxes. We can find out different pieces of furniture in that thick line -tables, chairs and carpets- that transform the external line into an inhabited space. This line defines a new intimacy that reveals a permanent exteriority.

APARTMENT BUILDING IN GIFU: AN INHABITED CURTAIN

Gifu apartment building (2000) follows the prototype of high-rise housing previously investigated by Sejima. The Japanese architect transforms the orthogonality of the prototype into a polygonal stroke. The irregular geometry is the result of the oblique sum of two L schemes. The trace is not capricious. It follows the limits of the masterplan proposed by Gifu City Prefecture. The masterplan, designed by Arata Isozaki, places housing along the perimeter of the site.

The scheme delineates a convexity towards the exterior of the ordinance, and a concavity facing the great interior space. The line is thus an open curtain between both worlds (Fig. 8). Between its convexity and its concavity, between its interior and open world, the domestic line is situated. What interests us, Sejima says, is not just the difference between exterior and interior, but also the definition of what lies in the seam of both spaces[22].

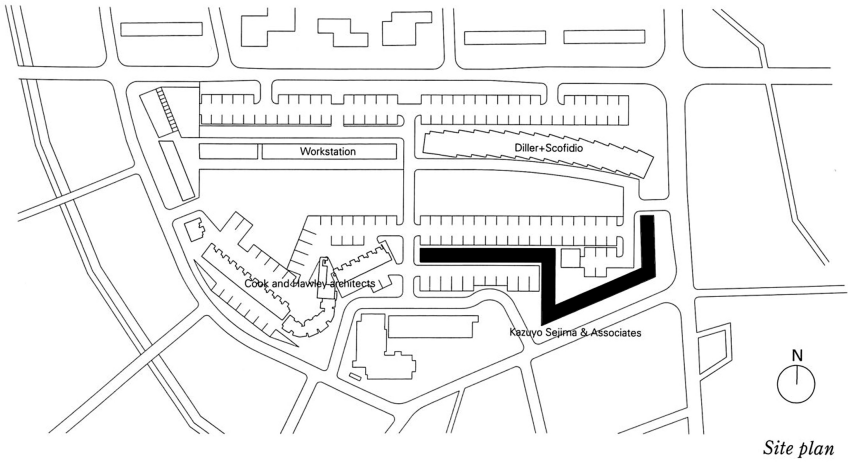

Figure 8. Metropolitan Housing study process.

The footprint of this metropolitan and domestic line houses the bicycles and vehicles of its dwellers. The upper ten floors house 107 residential units, its vast majority consisting of two level schemes. A reading of the plans of this open line needs a look that goes beyond its simple irregular and almost random appearance. An expanded look, an almost microscopic one, which juts into the stroke itself. This enhanced glance then discovers a hidden inner structure.

The line is the result of an infinite amount of lesser segments. These practically invisible segments are the walls of the 107 residential units. This multitude of hidden lines, like the oriental sewing fabric, is complex and occupiable. The apparent absence of an organizing structure is false. An expanded interior vision of the line reveals a new spatial anatomy. The line has its own hidden structure, the result of the sum of those infinite hidden traces. The walls and structure of the domestic programs have merged. The sum of almost invisible lines produces an inhabitable stroke, only visible to our contemporary eyes.

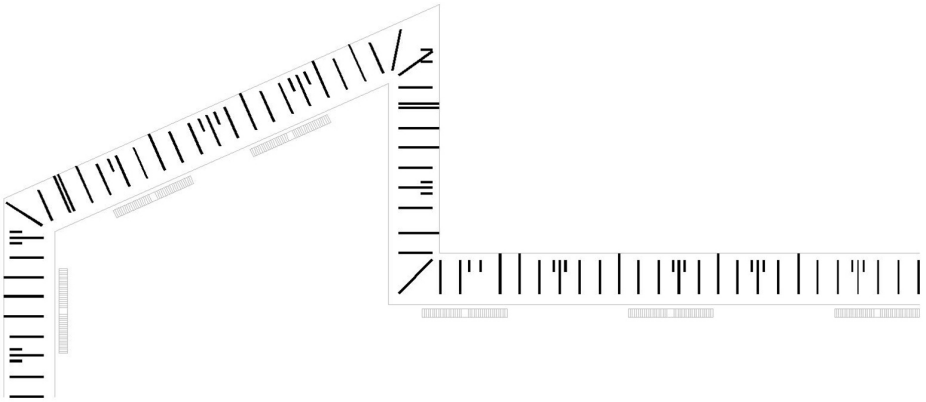

Figure 9. Gifu Apartment building. Structuring walls.

The hierarchy between structure and walls has been dissolved to perhaps achieve a new structural form, lightweight, thin and complex like the society that we live in. Each wall works towards the total structure. The structure is distributed across those segments with little thickness and a visual presence throughout the line (Fig. 9). The hierarchical sameness of structure and walls speaks of the equality of uses it houses. The domestic hierarchy that Le Corbusier carried out in his Unité d'Habitation has been diluted in an interminable transition of rooms. Each one ceases to be an extraordinary and identifiable place that boasts a clear habitational autonomy. The continuity of lines becomes a continuous transit of related and habitable spaces, a transparent transit in permanent exteriority. From this succession of lines a new housing form emerges, whose interminable continuity places interior and exterior in direct contiguity.

Dwelling now means transiting between adjacent spaces that construct a new habitational itinerary. This laboratory of lines establishes a new relationship of different levels, between the nature of a space and its structure. Kazuyo's domestic investigation takes then a transparent condition, one that solves as an equation habitational adjacency and spatial contiguity (Fig. 10).

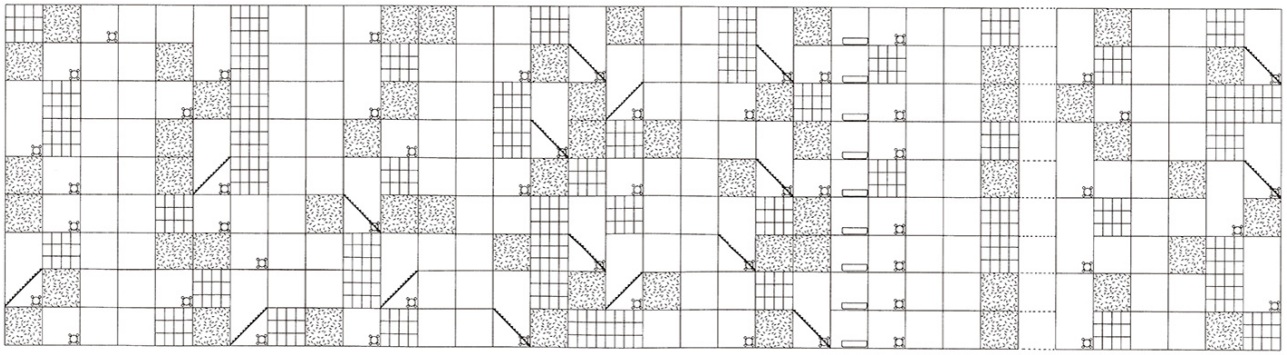

Figure 10. Gifu apartment building. Interior of the inhabited line.

The new housing anatomy of Gifu avoids a predictable and visible geometry in favour of organizing around an invisible presence, at least for the eyes of modernity. Its gaze emerges from a science that penetrates the internal structure of the smallest and thinnest elements, like a line. The topological organization of its interior displays then new laws of occupancy.

The discovery of this hidden weaving discovers for us the inhabitable structure of contemporary man. Interior and invisible lines are distributed in orthogonal form to the tracing line, rendering an interior of concatenated occupancy. But this does not happen on both sides of the line. In its convex side, only the strokes that delimit a house reach the limit of the line itself. Between them, an interior corridor is housed. This corridor is in fact one more room of the house. A frontier and open space where the public interiority of the other rooms concurs. On the other side, the traces are separated from the concave line at the same distance. This separation forms a new room, one that is open and continual in its entire length. This room in permanent motion responds again to the desired exteriority.

In the interior of the line, betwixt orthogonal strokes, multiple housing units traverse both corridors. From one side to the other, the line has become an inevitable exterior. The diversity of individuality is cast into an unlimited horizon[23]. In this new horizon, contemporary man finds himself in a real and intense way.

The interior and almost invisible structure of Gifu's apartments reveals a permanent domestic transit, one that displaces the interior occupancy of modern life to a permanent exteriority. Le Corbusier's rectangle, eden of an interior intimacy, has turned into the voluptuous collective experience of a liminal line.

Underscoring the sense of the liminal is the perception of unmediated encounters with other individuals also momentarily stripped of their social status[24]. Its domestic genetics erases the limits between private and public, inside and out.

Traversing between houses fragments the line. In its impossible interior, rooms coexist in an almost frontierless community. It is difficult to know to what house these fragmented spaces belong to. It may even be that, even though we know it must belong to one or another, it belongs to all of them.

In the border of the convex side of the curtain we find fourteen stairs. Their paths link the ten heights of its stroke. The lines of stairs become new rooms. As the innermost parts of the line itself, these rooms are also moving. Their appearance seems to be explained as the last traces of a line, which is more open than the modern eye believed it saw.

The choice of the line as housing topography and the reconsideration of the domestic program reveal a new collective housing phenomenology. Faced with the clear modern interior of that rectangle, in Gifu there is a border occupation which makes living an open and collective liminal being. The thinness of the housing line brings a new type of boundary, which defines a new intimacy. Facing the old intimacy that speaks of a needed inwardness, this new intimacy speaks of a new interior that is externalized. In Gifu, the housing line does not show only what lives inside, but what happens outside. Its thin geometry determines a new role of the limit, which remains a home to a world that appropriates a room which reveals the city.

The exteriority of the line turns its anonymous inhabitants into a new collectivity, gathered in a permanent public scene. The line has become the curtain of a domestic life imprinted on itself, the Eden of a desired exteriority on which this new collectivity looks at itself. The observation of this endless domestic scene, which narrates the permanent adjacency of rooms, heralds the triumph of the public condition of a contemporary society that has turned into an actor of its own time and Turner calls "communitas"[25]. In the words of the British anthropologist, the men and women who inhabit this porous and open line have become "threshold people" or "liminal personae", and their "attributes ... are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space"[26].

The time of this new Eden is the time of the domestic, of the everyday. Inhabiting the house, says Kazuyo, means to start always anew. Nothing remains but the scene itself. Society becomes a collective event in continuous change. The community looks at this scene and recognises itself, thus dissolving the presence of that modern man of the Unité d'Habitation and his exalted individuality.

The public scene of this place in permanent transit turns the contemporary domestic Eden into the dream of an egalitarian and unstructured society. The anonymous inhabitant of this new Eden, the one who has achieved a desired equality and has escaped from all social structures, now longs for their lost identity. This identity, once recovered, will only be the original sin of a new social structure and, with it, the end of this achieved "communitas".

THE NEW EDEN: THE WORLD THAT IS JUST OUTSIDE

The recognition of a new housing form for contemporary man and woman in Gifu has been followed by a desire to know more of its new geometric geography: the porosity line. Its impossible interior is revealed as a permanent spatial iteration that has permanent aperture as its ultimate destination. Its new and almost invisible structure has matched, and thus abolished, the domestic hierarchy of Le Corbusier's modernity into a new relationship of continuity. Domestic and collective space abandons a reasoned interiority to access a new poetry of externality. An externality that allows the disclose of man as a being-in-public. That unknown world just outside the box is now the home of new domestic spaces.

Dwelling means in Sejima's line, occupying an interior that is made possible by the exterior of a room. Modern houses are hollowed until they become their periphery. The void of Le Corbusier's rectangle becomes a cavity and its limit is transformed into habitation.

Sejima's domestic laboratory reformulates then its genetic geometry. Architecture is no longer the air volume contained within its limits, but that which prowls said limits. The new domestic home of contemporaneity becomes a porosity line. Or better yet, an open and inhabitable curtain. To both sides of it, and even in its hidden interior we discover an impossible interiority. This spatial impossibility yields an absolute exteriority.

The contemporary room is deployed at the edge of the line. Domestic architecture happens then, in a liminal homeland. The term "liminal" (from Latin limen 'threshold') relates to an intermediate state condition. During this state, it emerges a special type of community that anthropologist Turner[27] called "communitas". This achieved "communitas" abandons the modern Eden of the Unité d'Habitation conceived as an "area of common living" to transform the new Eden into a type of social relationship.

If Le Corbusier's "community" contained the structure and reason of a world it coveted, Sejima's "communitas" speculates on a social totality of absolute equality -without properties or organisational structures- that evades the private representation of the domestic fact itself in its domestic scene. Existing in the domestic representation of this society for which Sejima provides habitation is to "be outside" any social system other than society itself. From it, it becomes possible that our new world is displayed today just as it is[28].

The line as collective housing reveals the borderline nature of contemporary man. Inhabiting the line situates a new man in a border gap, linking private and public, and community with individuality. Inhabiting the line means being-in-public. Shelton[29] describes this new relationship between inside and outside as integrative. The building becomes part of the street by blurring the limits between interior and exterior and displaying its contents.

The line as an open place discovers for its inhabitant the logic of a new limit that opens the possibility of inhabiting in a new eden: that world that was just outside the magic rectangle of Le Corbusier, a place that was once just a place to be gazed upon. Its impossible "inside" and permanent "outside" then emerge as the new realm of the inhabitable. As such, in the new collective housing the line appears as the geometric home capable of housing an open existence. The line then founds a new spatial grammar that reconquers the aesthetic of a new limit: a limit that turns forms into the landscape of a public being. A landscape that binds and cleaves that which it encloses.

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