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# The revolutionary kitchen

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The kitchen as a catalyst of changes in the USA

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## Synopsis

Feeding has always been linked to a specific area where this ritual is held. Primitive bonfires were the place where kitchen as a main space where food is either treated or cooked emerged. Feminist revolutions, globalization and technological developments have been the main reasons of kitchen developing in typologies, shapes and locations.

Women desires to abandon kitchen slavish space almost made the kitchen area disappear in favor of communal kitchens located in each residential complex.

Kitchen space has always been changing its size, appearing and disappearing depending on how society evolved. This is why we, as an organized society, should focus our attention on how this space will evolve. Will communal kitchens be the solution for a society whose relationships are constantly on the verge of disappearing? Will small kitchenettes be the winner and let us save either money or space?

**Key words:** Ritual, space, kitchen, relationships, society.

## 1. Introduction

Feeding is indispensable for survival. Before learning how to cook, humans used to spend almost the day hunting and recollecting, but it was only when fire emerged when the cooking activity reached a social status.



Figure 1.

Revolutions and the desire of society to enhance women rights affected how domestic space was understood (Fig. 1). The evolution of this space was directly affected by feminist revolutions and it is possible to ascertain the connection between this new social approaches and design. Women desire to abandon the slavish domestic space makes it possible to rethink this restrictive area and to expand the way it is either understood or lived.

## 2. The domestic revolution

Until the first feminist revolutions the public space, related with work and production, was linked to men and private space, home, linked to women.

Thanks also to the utopic ideas<sup>1</sup> that were being widespread all around the world many women in the USA began to rethink how domesticity should evolve and to plan new strategies that should be taken into account.

One of the most representative American women that tried to change the way home was understood was Catherine Beecher<sup>2</sup>. Her feminist ideas and her desire to enhance women importance made possible to spread new possibilities that have never been thought before.

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<sup>1</sup> Utopians such as Fourier and Tomas Moro hardly influenced the revolutionary women by focusing their attention on planning new idealcities and neighbourhoods.

<sup>2</sup> American educator known for her forthright opinions on female education.

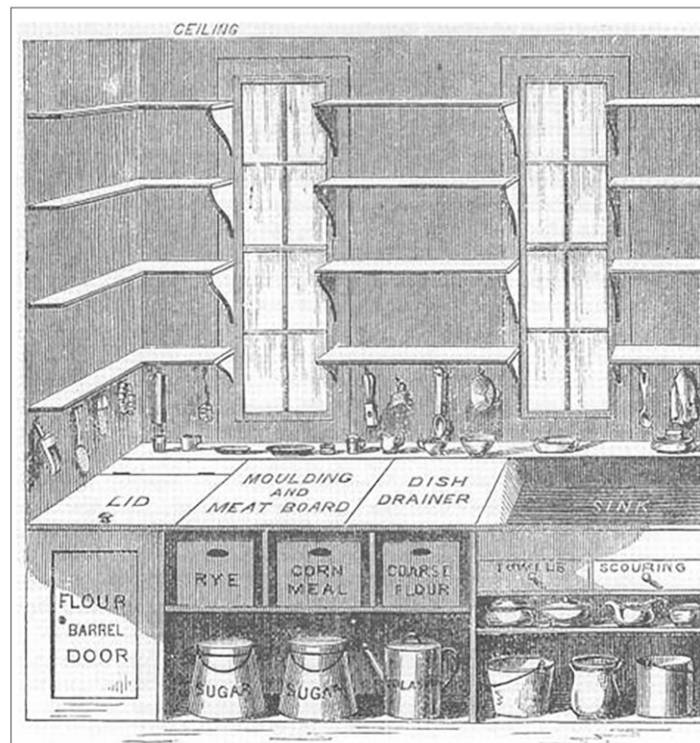


Figure 2.

She designed the ideal Christian House where women could do their domestic work without feeling absorbed. In this ideal house every domestic area was consciously studied and the kitchen was the most important area in the house. Due to the importance given to cooking the kitchen had to be designed following strict rules such as the amount of light it might have, the location of each wardrobe and also the height and length of doors and windows (Fig. 2).

Catherine Beecher was the first to try to change women condition but she was not the only one. Another important American figure was Melusina Fay Pierce<sup>3</sup> who spent all her life trying to defend women rights and fighting for equality between women and men. She created the Cooperative Housekeeping, a women organization where it was possible to do domestic labours with other women in a communal space.

Both of this women tried to break the chains that hardly tied women to the private domestic space in favour of new communal areas where this task could be done but always helped by the community.

### 3. Domestic independency

The new architectural approaches coming up made possible to rethink the domestic space and new approaches to collective areas where studied.

Population in the USA started in this moment changing their lifestyle and routines. Workers started leaving rural areas and cities began to grow faster so new building typologies had to be built.

<sup>3</sup> American feminist who believed that gender equality would only come with women's economic independence

### 3.1. First communal buildings

One of the most representative buildings that first included communal kitchens and diners was Dakota building<sup>4</sup>. The first floors of the construction were dedicated to communal areas such as restaurants, kitchens and shops whereas the top levels where the place where servants used to live. The apartments were located in the middle part of the construction and they were equipped with all the basic items a normal citizen would need.

### 3.2. New typologies for new generations

In 1870 125.000 single men lived in New York City what in this moment was a huge number compared with the total population in the city.

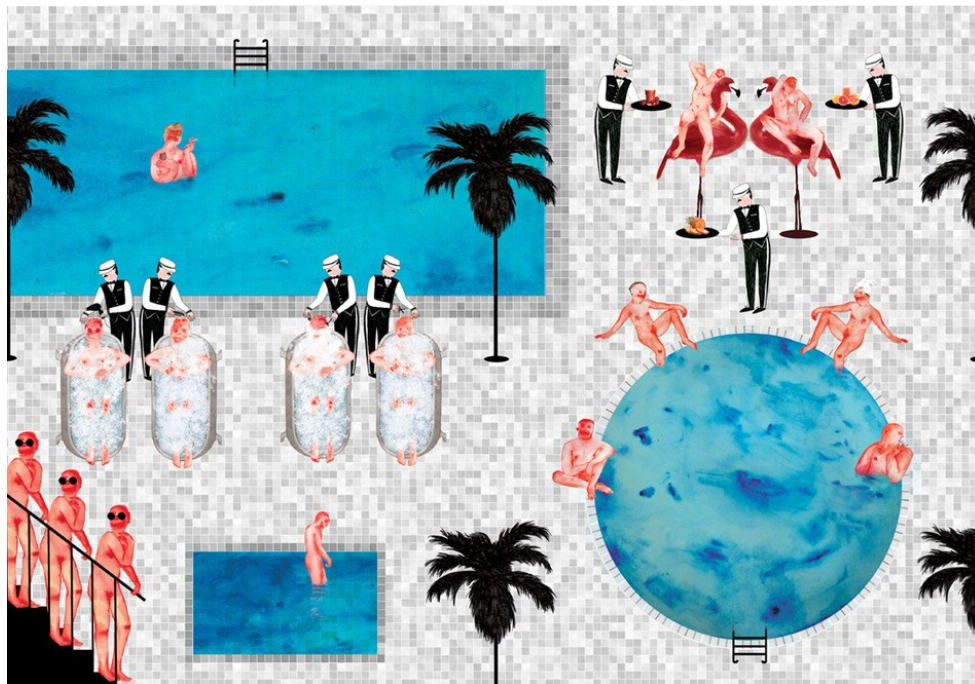


Figure 3.

This social group used to spend their free time in restaurants and theatres and also used to have job positions that let them spend money if desired. With this new reality investors found a new way of earning money and it was by building apartments for this singles what was efficient at that moment.

This constructions included not only small apartments fully-equipped but also communal laundry, libraries, book shops, shops, swimming pools, kitchens and dining rooms<sup>5</sup> where this men could spend their leisure time (Fig. 3).

Single women also where a new social group that emerged due to the new arrival of working women that had to leave rural areas and started working in offices and shops. New building typologies for them also emerged and they also include communal spaces that fits all their requirements.

<sup>4</sup> Due to the population growth and thanks to the development of the train in Manhattan was it possible to build the Dakota building that was the first construction to be built on the Upper West Side.

<sup>5</sup> Single men were not into cooking so communal dinners and kitchens were the solution for a new social class whose interest were not related with the domestic kitchen atmosphere.

#### 4. Domestic decline

It is true that all the new communal typologies that emerged had many positive effects on how society evolved. It helped to establish new relationships and make society aware of the importance of domestic labours being shared.

But this communal approach also had disadvantages as it debilitates family relationships as now it was possible to prepare food in a collective kitchen instead of sharing these valuable moments with family or closer friends.

Due to this fact, a new independency desire emerged and cooking and eating was considered to be trendy if done in privacy.

The new buildings that were equipped with small non-kitchened apartments have evolved so that cooking was possible inside and there was no necessity for using the communal kitchen. This was the reason why the kitchenette<sup>6</sup> appeared. A kitchenette (Fig. 4) was a small kitchen located in the small apartments and hidden in wardrobe but equipped with the basic furniture so that cooking was possible.



Figure 4.

Kitchenettes not only affected architecture and design but also how society used to buy products and consume them. Packed food emerged and it was now common to buy food that only had to be re-heated in the small kitchenette and eaten alone. It also affected food portions sides so that in the past steaks and packages used to be bigger.

<sup>6</sup> The kitchenette was hidden in wardrobes as the Tenemet Law House didn't let residents to have their own kitchen at the apartment.

## 5. What's next?

As we can see the domestic kitchen space have been continuously evolving as time has passed.

New domestic devices, such as the oven and the microwave, made cooking easier and cleaner (Fig. 5).

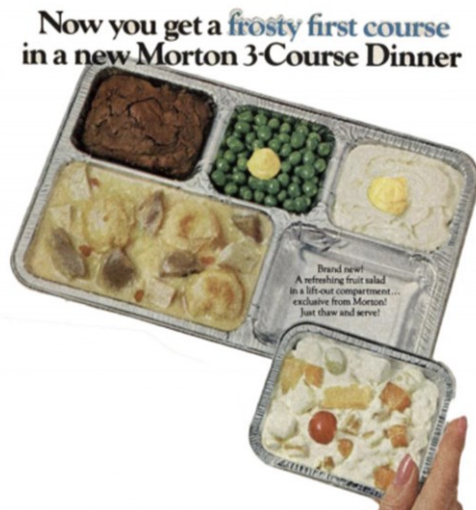


Figure 5.

Society has also evolved (Fig. 6). As we can see at first the desire to share domestic labours almost made the domestic private space disappear. Then a new trend approached so that privacy embrace it importance so that this task were preferred to be done without strangers besides.



Figure 6.

What would be the next step? Will new feminist revolutions be the beginning of new domestic approaches with more communal spaces where this task could be done by either women or men? Or will by the contrary a new self-



privacy emerged so that we will all prefer to develop this task alone? Are we ready to take the risk?

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## Biography

**Angela Molina Calzada.** Architecture student from University of Alcala, Madrid, where at the moment she is doing her Final Master Project.

Angela has been interested in domesticity since her first working experience in Paul McAnearny Architects, London, where she realized how living spaces design not only affect our habits but also our inner personality and feelings.

The way society interacts and establishes relationships is totally linked to domesticity and this was something she discovered when she studied at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston, as a research student.

At this moment she is working in By More architects, an architecture studio based in Madrid focused mainly on housing projects. There she is continuously learning new approaches and has started taking part in interior design projects.

All this experiences have made her personal interest on domesticity grow making her eager to keep on learning how domestic solutions can make society evolve.