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Abstract

This paper documents the findings of a study of the influences of some cultural, social and architectural factors upon the meaning and use of domestic space. It attempts to promote an understanding of the history of ideas which are invested in the spatial form and the use of houses; and, it establishes the principle that the meaning and use of domestic space is not intrinsic to a set of physical characteristics, nor the nomenclature of rooms and their facilities.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper documents the findings of a study of the influences of some cultural, social and architectural factors upon the meaning and use of domestic space. It attempts to promote an understanding of the history of ideas which are invested in the spatial form and the use of houses; and, it establishes the principle that the meaning and use of domestic space is not intrinsic to a set of physical characteristics, nor the nomenclature of rooms and their facilities.

Each section of this essay endeavours to describe how houses are the material expression of a matrix of socio-cultural influences, and that these influences vary between two societies stemming from the same Anglo-Saxon culture. Apparently, these influences are often implicit in the activities of household life, yet, as Banham (1973, p.19) has illustrated, they order the use of available resources in prescribed ways. Banham's parable cleverly illustrates the association between possible forms of building shelter and the 'predisposing cultural habits' of people. It is these socio-cultural predispositions which have provided the framework for this study, particularly as they are expressed by social ideas and meaning, and the spatial form and use of domestic facilities for cooking and eating food.

It is possible to explain the meaning and use of these domestic facilities by comparing those provided for families of the same socio-economic rank in different cultures. Facilities for cooking and eating food have been chosen for some very important reasons. Firstly, as Lévi-Strauss (1966) has explained, the fact that the preparation and eating of food in spaces associated with the dwelling is common to ALL cultures and societies provides the necessary ingredient for comparisons between different cultures. This would not be the case, however, if bedrooms had been chosen. Secondly, those activities involved in the preparation and eating of food reveal the socially and culturally defined demarcations (if they exist) between male and female, and parent and child roles, which

are not as evident in the use of other spaces and facilities inside the house. Finally, the development of facilities for the preparation and eating of food is largely related to the history of ideas and values upheld by different groups of people in specific socio-cultural contexts.

METHODOLOGY

The first settlement of Australia at Sydney Cove in January 1788 was the genesis for the future development of the English penal colony. The development of that colony into a nation need not be described here. However, the model of culture change used to understand the derivation of Australian domestic architecture will acknowledge that the history of house forms has been an indetachable component of a specific socio-cultural, political and geographical context. This model can be illustrated by the study of the interaction between the images and ideas of the primary parent culture — British society — and the specific requirements of the settlers who were transplanted to this completely different place. In the Australian context, the nomadic aboriginals, unlike the Boers, for example, had a social and cultural heritage without a substantial material culture: furthermore, the interaction between the settlers and the aborigines was, and still is, minimal. This study is therefore different from the explanation of 'how two different cultures have interacted at the Cape' (Lewcock, 1963).

In the Australian context, the important concept to grasp is the adaptation and transformation of specific European cultural predispositions, according to economic, social and political circumstances in the colony. In this respect the content of the colonial culture, and notably its architecture has unique attributes. It is a culture which is founded upon its own institutions, which have regulated the structure, actions and social relations in Australian society. This interpretation contrasts with the widely accepted viewpoint that Australia became a provincial British society following the importation of immigrants, institutions, and material culture from Britain. Such an interpretation fails to account for many other influences: for example the integration of ethnic groups from Germany during the earliest years of settlement in South Australia; the granting of political rights to most men prior to 1850 and to women after 1894, and the specific economic growth of Australia in which the majority of the population have participated. These and other influences have produced a society and culture different from that in Great Britain.

These differences have been expressed in Australian speech, dress, and social customs. A distinct culture has developed during the last two centuries and the dissimilarities between it and the British prototype have become more evident as each decade has unfolded.

Given this interpretation, this paper acknowledges that the development of domestic architecture in Australia ought to be discussed within the wider framework of colonialism, as Gubler (1980) noted:

Colonialism ... involves a complex set of interactions between the 'mother country' and the overseas territories. In matters of architecture, this relationship cannot be reduced to a simple shuttle movement: the importation of picturesque exotic styles would correspond to the exportation of the 'mother country's' schemes of composition.

The principle is ably illustrated by the provision of reticulated water supply in the majority of residential suburbs in the main Australian cities many years prior to the same provision in the main towns in England.

Finally, the importance of a temporal dimension ought to be stressed, because the culture of both the parent and the colonial societies changed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A study of the evolving relationship between domestic architecture and economic, social and political factors is crucial, because the parent and colonial cultures served as normative models until the influence from North America became significant during the last half of the nineteenth century, and again after the Second World War.

The method of study adopted in this paper addresses each of these themes. It is founded upon a dual approach that includes both spatial and ethnographic analyses which employ an historical or temporal perspective. Such a method acknowledges that the study of the development of Australian domestic architecture poses two methodological problems: firstly, the endurance of buildings enables people to experience their physical and symbolic characteristics during a relatively long period of time; secondly, during the course of time buildings not only undergo physical transformations but also their meanings and uses change. *In other terms, in architecture the relationship between space and time is a transactional process between building form and social factors, between continuity and change, between permanence and flexibility.*

Having established this important principle the spatial and ethnographic analyses are founded upon:

- i. fieldwork studies of the design, the construction and furnishing of dwellings built at various dates since the settlement of Australia; and
- ii. analysis of diverse documentary sources, which not only consider the design and construction of houses but also record how they were used by their residents in bygone years.

Diverse sources used throughout this study have helped to reveal those explicit social, political and economic factors, as well as those implicit socio-cultural factors, which have influenced the development of government financed houses for families in Australia and England during the last two centuries. The serial of health and housing legislation, the evolution of domestic technology and family life, the intentions of social reformers and the ideas of architects and planners have been scrutinized in many public, professional and government publications. Moreover, with respect to the novel, writers such as D.H. Lawrence have provided vivid descriptions of the design and use of domestic space. From these accounts an understanding of the meaning of facilities and activities in the dwelling can be provided: Hence, in *Sons and Lovers* (1913, p.2) the use of specific rooms for particular domestic activities in some houses in an English mining village is lucidly portrayed:

The Bottoms, consisted of six blocks of miners' dwellings, two rows of three, like the dots on a blank-six domino ... The houses themselves were substantial and very decent. One could walk all around seeing little front gardens with auriculas and saxifrage in the shadow of the bottom block; seeing neat front windows for the attics. But that was outside: that was the view on to the uninhabited parlours of the colliers' wives. The dwelling room, the kitchen, was at the back of the house facing inward between the blocks, looking at the scrubby backgarden, and then at the ashpits ... So, the actual conditions of living in the Bottoms, that was so well built and that looked so nice, were quite unsavoury because people must live in the kitchen, and the kitchens opened on to that nasty alley of ashpits.

The analysis of these documentary sources has been complemented by ethnographic studies of the design and appropriation of space in two samples of houses in each country. These studies have been completed at two housing estates constructed by local governments in the western suburbs of Adelaide, South Australia, and at Cherry Hinton, Cambridgeshire, England. In each community a sample of thirty houses not more than 10 years of age were compared with a sample of thirty houses 25-35 years of age. Within each group of houses there were three

different floor plans, each variant being related to the design of space and facilities for cooking and eating food. It is necessary to note here that the sample of houses in each community has provided a temporal dimension to this cross-cultural study for the following reasons. On the one hand, the influence of the evolution of domestic technology in houses of this age difference can be related to the design and use of facilities for cooking and eating food; on the other hand, the broad age difference of one generation between the inhabitants of each group of houses has permitted a study of the different values that may exist between different age groups in the same society.



Fig. 1: The backs of houses at Fulbourn Road, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge, included in the ethnographic approach in this study.

In each sample the age groups of the family/households can be clustered into the following three groups: those thirty per cent of households in which the married couple were 55-65 years of age; those forty per cent of households in which the married couples were 35-45 years of age; and the thirty per cent of households with married couples less than 30 years of age. The predominant household structure was the nuclear

family; however, there were four one-parent families, two being older respondents who were widows. Each family had one, two or three children and in all but a few cases at least one of the children was living at home. In each country the sample was homogeneous in terms of race and socio-economic rank; there was only one immigrant parent in each community and the heads-of-households had similar wage earnings.

The ethnographic approach in this study has primarily been concerned with how the residents in each group of houses experienced and appropriated facilities for cooking and eating food. A structured interview was used to direct a discussion of this subject with each household. Furthermore, emphasis was given to direct observation: photographs, sketches and notes were used to record the arrangement and style of furniture as well as those changes which the residents had made to the physical fabric of the house.

In each country, the residents were contacted personally and asked whether they would like to discuss the design of their house, and specifically the way they used the space and facilities. In all cases the housewife was the respondent. The discussion usually lasted an hour and frequently coffee or tea were served. Although the sample size in this cross-cultural study has been relatively small, the personal element of an in-depth study has yielded a richness of detail which would otherwise have been lost if the sample size had been large and quantifiable survey techniques had been employed. Hence, it was possible to develop an understanding of the classification of spaces and objects with precision: for example in England the 'kitchen' is not synonymous with the 'scullery'.

Given the gamut of historical and ethnographical data which this study has provided, the meaning and use of domestic facilities for cooking and eating food is considered in this essay according to an ecological approach, whereby the culture of domestic life is considered as a single interacting whole. The intention of this study is to illustrate how the home and household life can be considered in terms of a structural framework, using the term 'structural' in the sense used by Lévi-Strauss (1968). In essence this framework has been employed for the following reasons. If the spatial form and use of domestic space (or another socio-cultural phenomenon) has a social meaning, then there ought to be an underlying system of constitutive rules or conventions which make this meaning possible. For example, an observer with no knowledge of a specific culture when confronted with a ritual food ceremony could present a description of the activities which occurred, but he would be unable to grasp their meaning and so would not be able to treat them as socio-cultural phenomena. The activities would only become meaningful

to the observer when he had been made aware of all the rules and conventions involved with the food ceremony. Thus, if a particular dinner guest was considered impolite by others eating food, it would be the knowledge of those relational features which differentiate impolite from polite behaviour which the observer would need to know before he could understand why certain activities were considered impolite.

As this example illustrates, it is not the intrinsic qualities of socio-cultural phenomena but their differential features which are the bearers of social meaning. Therefore, in this study a distinction will be made between the space, objects and activities of household life, and the sets of distinctive or differential features which invest them with meaning. In this sense, the design and use of facilities for the preparation and eating of food, those customs associated with food, and the roles of the housewife and other persons in the kitchen will be considered as sets of complementary information which, as a whole, can provide an understanding of the meaning and use of these domestic spaces and facilities in two different cultures. After an historical review of the evolving design and use of domestic facilities for cooking and eating food in Australia and England, some of the most important findings of this study will be discussed in terms of the classification of space and activities, the social customs associated with the preparation and eating of food, and domestic roles, routines and rituals.

THE ORGANIZATION OF ACTIVITIES AND OBJECTS

When a housewife in Australia washes her children's clothes in the laundry, her counterpart in England usually undertakes the same activity in the kitchen and often in the kitchen sink. It is apparent that in most houses built in Australia during the last two centuries the kitchen has been classified as a space solely for cooking and eating food, and there has usually been a separate room for washing clothes and linen. Moreover, current building legislation in some States of Australia has made the provision of a separate room for clothes washing obligatory. In England, however, cooking, eating and clothes washing activities usually have been associated together in the same room. Furthermore, the health and housing legislation in England, including current standards related to housing subsidies, have not placed an obligation on the house owner or builder to provide a room separated from the kitchen (or bathroom) for washing clothes.

This distinction may not seem significant but it provides evidence that the same domestic spaces and activities in each country are associated with culturally defined social codes and customs which are reflected in the design and use of houses indigenous to each country; these codes and customs are illustrated in figure 2.

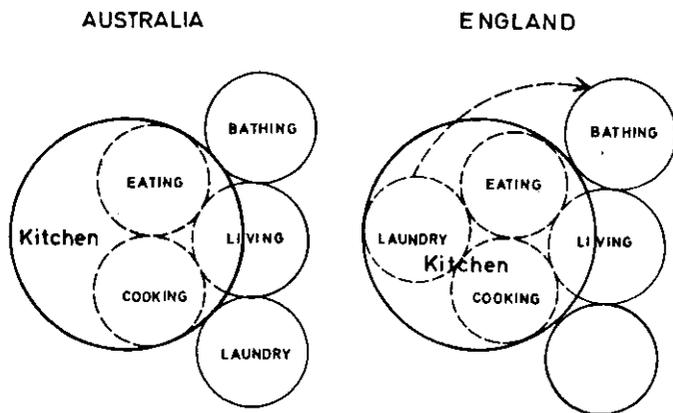


Fig. 2: The diagrammatic representation of activities and facilities that are associated or demarcated in the domestic kitchen in the Australian and English houses in the case study.

There are now several historical case studies of the design and use of houses in Britain. From the evidence collated by Chapman (1971), Sutcliffe (1974), Tarn (1973) and others, it is apparent that the spatial character of basic dwelling types has not changed significantly during the last century.

Since the industrial revolution in Britain, the family unit has been allocated an independent dwelling for household life. Apart from the humblest accommodation for the 'working classes', which often had shared cooking and washing facilities, the dwelling sometimes had a parlour, a 'withdrawing room' adjacent to the front door, with a kitchen room behind, and until the Second World War there was often a small scullery for all domestic washing activities near the back door. There were two or three bedrooms with a separate bathroom and toilet (commonly provided upstairs after the First World War), completely demarcated from the living rooms.

Irrespective of the floor area of the house the organization of space followed the same pattern. The interior of the house was divided into a number of strongly demarcated spaces, each classified according to a particular use and the objects it contained. Hence, it was common to differentiate between spaces for living and spaces for sleeping by placing them on different floors; and, it was common to delimit one room, the parlour, at the front of the house, from the kitchen and all its associated daily living activities at the back of the house. In houses which had a minimal floor area, this system appeared to many observers as an under-utilisation of space. However, although the parlour was rarely used, it served important symbolic and social functions, on occasions such as weddings, birthdays and funerals, when everyone wore their 'Sunday best'. While it remained demarcated from the daily household activities the parlour contained ancestral furniture and cherished ornaments, photographs and heirlooms as if analogous 'to the shrine in a Chinese peasants cottage'.

From the historical case studies of the design and use of houses in Australia presented by Butlin (1964), Barrett (1971), Herman (1970) and others, it is evident that since the earliest months of settlement in Australia the family house has usually been one-storeyed and detached. The acceptance of this house type can be related to those social ideas in colonial society about privacy and private possession, egalitarianism (Ward, 1958), the romantic image of the villa, and to technical reasons such as the availability of land and building materials. The family house has usually been double fronted with four, five or six main rooms, including two or three bedrooms, a 'front' living room and a kitchen, and a separate bathroom, toilet and laundry.

During the nineteenth century it was common for the kitchen, bathroom and laundry to be detached at the rear of the house. Apart from climatic and technical reasons to reduce the risk of fire and the amount of heat in the living room and bedrooms, this spatial demarcation expressed another idea in colonial society: the social rule that 'tainted' servants, who were usually convicts or ex-convicts, should be physically separated from the family and their guests. However, as domestic servants declined in number in the last half of the nineteenth century, and as articulated water supply, gas and electricity were commonly introduced for domestic consumption, the design of new houses in Australia underwent some significant changes.

From about the 1860s, it became increasingly common for the kitchen to be placed under the back verandah with the bathrooms, as illustrated in figure 3. Yet the kitchen still remained a separate room until the

influence of further changes in family life, and the concept of the functionally efficient kitchen were expressed in the design of houses in this century. The laundry has and still remains a room demarcated from the kitchen and while it cannot be assumed that the kitchen has not commonly been used for clothes washing there is no historical evidence to suggest that it was.

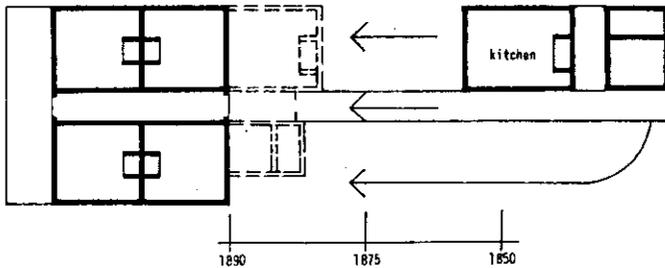


Fig. 3: The transformation of the detached kitchen, wash room and toilet into service rooms integrated under the main roof of the house, via the back verandah.

Hence, the common house form in Australia was characterized by a number of clearly defined spaces, with an explicit system for classifying the activities and objects in them. Although rooms for living were demarcated from rooms for sleeping, they were not usually placed on different floor levels as in England. The most significant difference between the organization of domestic space in England and Australia has been the association and separation of clothes washing with the preparation and eating of food.

The classification and spatial zoning of these domestic activities can be considered from a viewpoint which analyses the interrelationships between social ideas and spatial forms. Thus certain social ideas have generated household chores and rituals, notably where, when and how household activities ought to be undertaken. For example, Douglas (1966) has defined and described the classification of domestic activities and objects by employing the social concept of dirt:

Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.... We can recognize in our own notions of dirt that we are using a kind of omnibus compendium which includes all the rejected elements of ordered systems. It is a relative idea. Shoes are not dirty in themselves but it is dirty to place them on the dining table; food is not dirty in itself but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bathroom, or food bespattered on clothing; similarly bathroom equipment in the dining room, clothing lying on chairs, outdoor things indoors; upstairs things downstairs; underclothing appearing where over-clothing should be, and so on. In short, our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications.

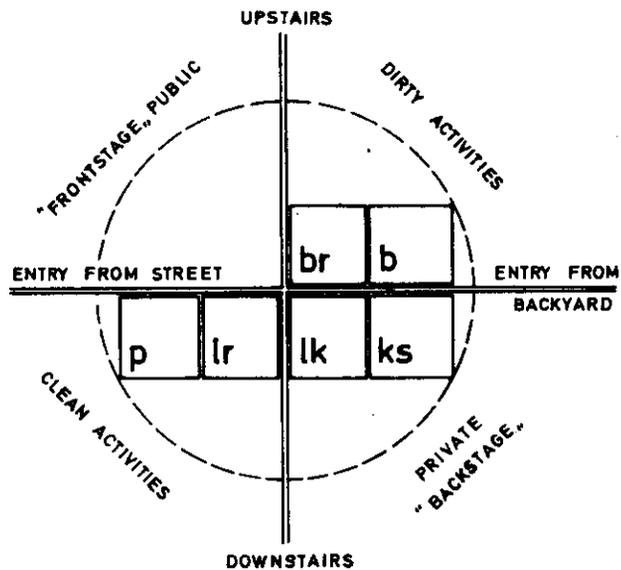
A bipolar concept of dirty/clean has been employed by Haumont and Raymond (1966) in their socio-spatial analysis of the suburban house in France. The conclusion of the authors is interesting in the context of this cross-cultural analysis of domestic space. They have found that interior spaces in the suburban house have commonly been classified and appropriated by the inhabitants according to 'du sale au propre'. Hence, the living rooms in the house have usually been classified as clean whereas other rooms, such as the laundry and storerooms (which are frequently located in the basement), have usually been classified as dirty. Furthermore, it has been noted that the demarcation between spaces classified as clean and dirty has been associated with the position deemed appropriate for sets of household chores and activities: The concept of a relative position for domestic spaces and activities can be related to the social image of the front and back of the house. The front is considered as the public domain, decorative and agreeable, whereas the back, being hidden or screened from public view, is reserved for activities such as clothes drying and household repairs. This socio-spatial model of the suburban house in France does seem to be similar to the organization of domestic space in suburban houses in Australia and England. Yet, there are subtle but important differences between the meaning and use of domestic space in each of these countries which is worthy of explanation.

While the placement of objects and activities in the house has been regulated by social ideas about dirt, nevertheless other factors such as the evolution of domestic technology and social changes related to the preparation and eating of food have been influential. For example, in the English case study it has been noted that dishwashing, clothes washing and sometimes bathing have been considered as one set of activities, and they have commonly been spatially associated. These activities, which aimed at removing dirt from an object, were brought into conjunction and undertaken in one space. The scullery served this

purpose until the advent of the gas cooker, and then a different classification system was employed. According to the findings of the Tudor Walters Committee in 1918, it was an acceptable social practice for the bath to be placed in the scullery and this custom was still evident, but not as common, when the Dudley Committee published its findings in 1944.

In the corresponding Australian case study, however, the historical evidence has suggested that the kitchen has been reserved for food preparation, eating and dishwashing, and that a separate laundry and bathroom have been provided for clothes washing and bathing. An analysis of the recommendations of the Commonwealth Governments War Housing Programme, published in the *Australian Housing Bulletins* from 1944 has indicated that it was a social custom that clothes washing would not be associated with other domestic activities usually undertaken in the kitchen. In all of the model house plans in these publications the laundry was classified with the bathroom and toilet in a category nominated as 'ablutions' whereas the kitchen was classified as a 'living' room. Hence, dishwashing, laundering and bathing have traditionally been considered as three different types of activity. It was not the removal of dirt which provided the signification, but the object — crockery, clothes, the body — which was being cleansed. Thus three separate spaces were provided for the removal of dirt from three sets of objects.

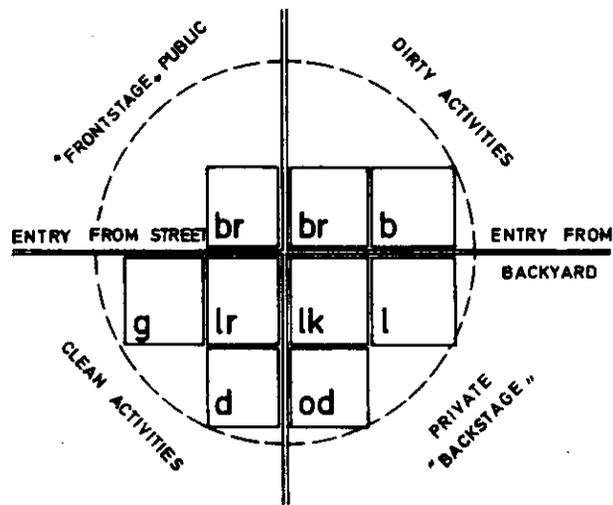
It has been observed that all houses in the contemporary Australian study had a separate laundry. Furthermore, ALL respondents in all house types said that they would *never* wash clothes in the kitchen, and in one house type in which the laundry was accessible from the dining-kitchen, this feature was the most disliked design detail of that room for (6 of 8) respondents. There was a consensus amongst all respondents that clothes washing activities (but not ironing clean clothes) should be clearly segregated from cooking and eating activities. In extreme contrast, ALL the respondents in the English case study did their clothes washing in the kitchen irrespective of the possession of a washing machine. Hence, it is apparent that two opposing systems of classification have been revealed by both the historical and ethnographical research in each country: on the one hand, in Australian houses, cooking and eating activities have and must be demarcated from the laundering of clothes and linen; on the other hand, in English houses these activities are not only associated in one room, the kitchen, but (apparently) there has been no alternative to this ordering of household activities.



DOWNSTAIRS

br = bedroom, lr = living room, d = dining room, lk = dining/kitchen,
 b = bathroom, l = laundry, od = outdoor dining, g = garden, p = parlor,
 ks = kitchen/scullery

The organization of domestic space in England.



DOWNSTAIRS

The organization of domestic space in Australia.

Fig. 4. The organization of domestic space in Australia and England.

During this century numerous socio-economic changes have occurred in each country which have had influences upon the design and use of houses, and upon family life. One notable change has been the impact of architectural ideas through the publication of design manuals, model house plans, and planning theories such as the Garden City Movement. Other changes have included official housing policies and government housing subsidies. There have also been important developments in the design of domestic appliances, the evolution of domestic science, and the social role of women in the workforce and at home. Each of these changes had far-reaching consequences upon domestic chores and rituals. Yet the spatial organization of activities and objects in the house in both England and Australia has retained a structural coherence: thus the distinction between living and service activities in English houses continues to be less obvious than the same distinction in Australian houses. The social meaning of the relative position of activities and objects has remained steadfast: the social image of 'front' and 'back' continues to be related to the design and use of houses in spite of the contradictions introduced by some architects who have upheld the Radburn planning principle.

Hence, it is apparent that there are social ideas about the rooms in a house, and perhaps especially the kitchen, which are not strictly controlled by a set of intrinsic physical properties. The meaning and use of domestic space is associated with the social classification and coding of activities and objects. These social ideas permit an active interdependence between the spatial form and the use of the dwelling.

SYNTHESIS

Given these findings it is possible to represent the organization of domestic space in each country according to the accompanying diagrams presented in figure 4. This schema accounts for those bi-polar codes for the classification of space, which include front/back; symbolic/secular; clean/dirty; public/private. It also accounts for domestic spaces and activities related to this system of classification. Hence, in the diagram for houses in England the parlour is clean/symbolic/public and above all at the front, whereas the kitchen is dirty/secular/private and at the back. In the houses in Australia the laundry replaces the position of the kitchen/scullery and there is no parlour in the strict sense of that space in English houses. Hence, there would seem to be spatial codes related to

domestic activities and objects which are context-dependent in each country.

The social meaning and use of domestic space is associated with the social classification and coding of activities, and these social ideas permit an active interdependence between the spatial form and the use of domestic space. It is suggested that this interrelationship can be expressed by a set of social codes which include:

- a) *a code for the classification of space, activities and objects.*

The label which is given to an activity or room encodes that event with a meaning. These significations vary between different cultures, and perhaps between different groups of people in the same culture. Hence, the kitchen, a room with the same label in Australia and England does not have the same meaning or range of uses in each country.

- b) *a code for the relative position of space, activities and objects.*

There is a set of social ideas and images which suggest the location of activities and objects in the dwelling, relative to the street or public facade. Such a code, for example, distinguishes between the 'front' and the 'back' of the dwelling in both Australia and England. This code suggests that those activities which are public and social are related to the street and the entrance door, whereas those activities which are private are placed behind.

- c) *a code for the association or demarcation of space, activities and objects.*

There are customary social systems for the classification of sets of activities and objects. Hence the binary pairs of public and private, day and night, or clean and dirty may be used to associate or demarcate domestic activities. In Australia and England it has been noted that the removal of dirt has a specific meaning in each country, which has ordered the position of dishwashing, clothes washing and bathing activities relative to each other in the dwelling.

- d) *a code for domestic activities which indicates the meaning of one activity, a specific meal, in the total set of domestic food activities.*

The significance of a food event not only indicates what food is eaten, how it is embellished, when it is served, and who is present at the table, but also *where* the food is served and eaten.

The classification and coding of activities and objects not only provides an understanding of the social ideas which influence the meaning and use of domestic space, but it also permits the analysis of activity patterns and object systems in the dwelling and how these systems generate spatial forms.

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