



Challenging Domesticity: Disruptive Representations of Domesticity in Women's Art, Literature and the Architecture during the 20th and 21st Century

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Received: 14/07/22. Accepted: 21/08/2023.

ABSTRACT

This article aims to reflect on how the current changes in the context of domesticity are the result of multiple contributions from women working in different fields. It is a collective effort that began to bear fruit in the second half of the 20th century, when an open war against former traditional standards already existed. In that respect, there is a reference to female artists, writers and architects from the last two centuries which calls that notion into question: from artists present at the *Women House* exhibition celebrated in 2018 at the National Museum of Women in the Arts (Washington D.C., USA), where many described the domestic realm as a trap to female writers and architects who equally defy and revise previous conceptions of domesticity. All in all, it seems clear that the theoretical approach that supports the need to reshape old domesticity standards works in conjunction with many hands-on efforts, some of which will be shown below.

KEYWORDS: Domesticity; Space; Hostility; Ecofeminism; 'Gynecotopy'; New architectural conceptualisation

1. INTRODUCTION

Challenging domesticity aims to contribute to the scholarly debate on domesticity by alluding to female artists, writers and architects from the last two centuries which calls that notion into question. Most of them were either born in the USA or gained their reputation in that country. Exceptions are writers such as Virginia Woolf, British; Simone de Beauvoir, French; Margaret Atwood, Canadian, and architects such as Eileen Gray, Anglo-Irish, and Lilly Reich, German,

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who have been included in this study due to the relevance of their contribution regarding dwellings and domestic life.

About encounters and possible influences among the women selected, we are aware that the writers Joanna Russ and Ursula K. Leguin, chosen for our study, coincided during the 'Women in Science Fiction' symposium held in 1975, where the tone of their exchanges turned combative, and Russ accused Leguin of refusing to write as a woman, as a response to Leguin's criticism against Russ's radicalism, hostile stance and unwillingness "to find other alternatives to act out" (McClay [newyorker.com/books/under-review/joanna-russ-the-science-fiction-writer-who-said-no](https://www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/joanna-russ-the-science-fiction-writer-who-said-no)). We also know that Louise Bourgeois and Yayoi Kusama's works have been exhibited together a number of times. In 2001 the New York dealer Peter Blum held a show in his SoHo gallery where the physical aspects of both artists' work were the main focus of attention. Later on, in 2017 Sotheby hosted a joint exhibition of Bourgeois and Kusama, "Traumata", revealing the complex relationship that both artists had with their mothers, their fight with mental illness and the connection between sex and violence in their lives. Other artists whose work has been displayed simultaneously are Lilly Reich and Eileen Gray. The last exhibition, "Women in Design, 1900-Today" took place at Vitra Design Museum (Weil am Rhein, Germany) in September 2021. But except for these academic meetings and formal exhibits, the women under study did not coincide in their lives. Apart from these encounters we are not aware of further connections.

Nevertheless, the aim of this paper is not to make these women connected because of their coetaneity, birthplace, sexuality, race, or art creation, but to demonstrate the fact that, regardless of their own origin or other personal conditions, they share a common interest expressed consciously or unconsciously, in architecture, photography, literature or any other art creation. In fact, it is particularly this disconnection what makes our study more relevant: without links of any kind, they lead a common course. We are especially concerned about demonstrating their imprisonment in a social frame, and in many instances, within a patriarchal frame that seemed to suffocate them.

2. ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF DOMESTICITY

The term domesticity has always been associated with housing and traditionally, with women. For Carl Gustav Jung, the house is an archetypal image that represents the return to our origins. In that respect the concept of 'domesticity' is a primordial image that has remained constant over time and that has lasted for thousands of years (Samuels, 1986: 20). On the contrary, for Christopher Reed "the idea of domesticity is an invention of the modern age" (1996: 7) and for Walter Benjamin, the cultural historian, domesticity is a modern concept, product of the convergence of capitalism, the first advances in technology and the notion of individuality as inherited from the Enlightenment. Therefore, for Benjamin, only in the 1800s the living space became distinguished from the space of work (1973: 167). In any case, and despite the different

theories with regard to the notion of domesticity since very early in history there are references to women's resistance to be constrained into their household.

In the literary realm, for instance, traces of women's representations with feminist overtones do exist from Medieval Ages. From Guillermine de Bohemia, who in the late 13th century proposed to create a church for women, or the preconceived idea that witches are part of the feminist struggle to Christinne de Pizan's *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* (1405), they all show a feminist perspective. In her poem *L'Epistre au dieu d'Amours* (1399), Pizan claims, in cupid's voice, women to be abused by male writers, and the patriarchal frame of education is criticized (Dinshaw, 2007).

Later on in time, the characteristics of the ideology and ideal of femininity known as the "Cult of True Womanhood" or "Cult of Domesticity" were defined by historian Barbara Welter in her 1966 article, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860." According to Welter, "true femininity" held that women were designed exclusively for the roles of wife and mother and were expected to cultivate piety, purity, submission, and domesticity in all their relationships. Their "sphere" of influence was confined to the home and arguments of biological inferiority led to the belief that women were incapable of participating in politics, business, or public service. The woman was the *angel of the house* but confined in home: "What have women to do outside their house, since they are not equipped with any of the requisite talent which public affairs demands?" (Aldaraca, 1992: 29). In exchange for the security and protection that their husbands offered them, women would assume the obligations at home and the whole society would benefit from it.

But the 60s would suppose a revolution for women's sexual life and expectations. Betty Friedan's influential study *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) would severely criticize this "Cult of Domesticity" and since the second half of the 20th century this concept would openly be challenged by female artists, writers, architects, etc., that demonstrated in their work its negative effect on women.

In this sense, both cultural historians and literary critics have long considered domesticity as a separate sphere socially constructed for women, dividing the world into the household and what is beyond and attainable. This aspect has led us to focus the analysis of this article on the dimensions of gender, not only from a sample of women's realities but also from the symbolic representation of the domesticity they provide (Kelley, 2017). And, as concerned as we are with the gendered features that help understand the feminine codes, the connections established in the present study aim to demonstrate how necessary it is to investigate domesticity from a wide range of disciplines and show that such an unsolved concept still provokes discussion all around.

It cannot be refuted that, for modernist women writers, there existed a spatial segregation structuring the ideology of separate spheres, i.e., private and public spaces, where both "binary gender categories and bounded inner and outer spaces function as metaphors for one another"

(Foster 2002: 4), and that the relationship between “domestic space and the feminized” did exist. However, from a post-modern perspective, home still functions “as a metaphor for the very possibility of being ‘placed’” (Foster 6) in order to strive for openness, spaces free of confinements, and natural environments. Not only writers, but also architects such as Scott Brown explains how a design needs be created by women who know how to meet their needs and avoid the inconveniences caused by male architects.

3. DOMESTICITY IN WOMENS’ ART

Louise Bourgeois’ oeuvre was present at the ‘Women House’ exhibition celebrated in Washington D.C. (USA) in 2018, in which thirty-six global artists portrayed the domestic realm from non-conventional perspectives and depicted it often as a trap. Bourgeois (Paris, 1911- New York, 2010) was 71 years old when she became well known after holding an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1982. Until then, she was almost unknown to the general public. Bourgeois’ first drawings and paintings, her *‘femmes-maison’* in the 40s; her ‘Cells’ or small-room installations in the 90s; the sculptures in plaster or latex in the 60s or the dismembered bodies of the 80s, are all influenced in one way or another by the memory of domestic life at home during childhood. This included her father's persistent infidelity towards her mother (Mayayo, 2002: 10), a drama for which a sensitive child like Bourgeois, marked her for life.

Bourgeois’ work was generated as the result of the spaces she inhabited and the memories these brought her. Through her writings we get to know about her life living near Paris as a child and as an adolescent, first in Choisy-le-Roy and then in Antony; and we also find out about her country house in Easton (Connecticut, USA), her studio in Brooklyn and finally, her apartment on West 20th Street (New York) in which the artist stayed until her death. According to Beatriz Colomina, all the places Bourgeois described in her writings are domestic and all of them are associated with trauma (1999: 17-20).

In the introduction to Bourgeois’ exhibition at the Museo Reina Sofía de Madrid, in 1999, the artist was described in these terms: “Louise Bourgeois ... defines herself as a fugitive who runs away from home, from the notion of home, both in the sense of place and identity. Even so, or perhaps for this reason, all her life and work is generated from the spaces she inhabits and from their memory” (louise-bourgeois-memoria-arquitectura). Jerry Gorovoy and Danielle Tilkin went even further when they affirmed that Bourgeois used architecture as a means to build a new life working on memories from the past in order to overcome traumatic episodes (louise-bourgeois-memoria-arquitectura). In fact, the spaces she created in the series ‘Lairs’ in the 60s and 80s, or in her ‘Cells’ in the 90s seem to be reconstructions of painful moments. According to Nancy Spector, she reconstructed those domestic settings precisely to overcome her pain and fear and in doing so she imitated her mother whom she deeply loved and admired and who used to repair all the broken things at home (Structures of Existence,

2015: 77). Works such as 'Arch of Hysteria' (1992-1993), 'Precious Liquids' (1992) and 'Red Room' (Parents) (1994) tell us about her psychological pain while living with her parents.

While Lalla Essaydi (1956), a photographer who also rebels against traditional standards and will be mentioned later on in this article, travels back in time by going to Morocco in search for the domestic places she inhabited as a child, Bourgeois does not return to her childhood places but reconstructs them over and over again in her work. "These works suggest that she felt both trapped and exposed by the domestic responsibilities that consumed her life as she wrestled with finding her artistic voice" (www.theartstory.org/artist/bourgeois-louise/artworks/). In 1943, she painted a woman inside a bell jar. The woman is bodiless and unable to communicate with the rest of the world. She is imprisoned but smiling. This enigmatic drawing reminds us of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963) and her description of the domestic trap, at the same time it recalls Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, a key milestone for the Women's Liberation Movement. Published in 1963, Friedan's book portrayed the oppressive nature that domestic life had for middle-class housewives and explained how many women, mobilized during the Second World War, had to return to the sphere of the home once the war was over. In so doing, the identity of women was once again connected to the domestic sphere and the "feminine mystique" became consolidated. In that sense Bourgeois' '*femmes-maison*' can also be interpreted as an expression of the domestic femininity that Friedan described so well in *The Feminine Mystique* twenty years later.

With her '*femmes-maison*', the artist describes the complexity of the domestic realm in her oeuvre: on the one hand it is the place where women can meet and create a sense of community, but it is also a space of seclusion that recalls women's expulsion from public affairs. It constitutes a warm maternal space and a shelter, but it is also a place from where women cannot escape. In Bourgeois' case the houses where the artist lived have a very prominent place in the stories she wrote. They are present not only in innumerable interviews, but also in photographs, drawings, sculptures and even the titles of her works. Bourgeois describes herself as a "collector of spaces and memories," and offers countless descriptions of the spaces she inhabited since her childhood (Colomina, 1999: 17-20).

Another artist that offers a revision of domestic life in her work is Yayoi Kusama. Born in Matsumoto (Japan) in 1929 she is an extraordinarily prolific artist that has worked in many different fields: collage, painting, sculpture, performance and installations. At 92 years old, the artist was going to celebrate an exhibition at the Botanic Garden in New York (May 09-November 01, 2020) that was finally canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was just one among other exhibits scheduled for 2020 in Berlin, Cologne or Basel. Well-known for her use of psychedelia and repetitive patterns, Kusama is considered as a precursor of pop art, minimalism and feminist art, becoming influential for artists as relevant as Andy Warhol (Turner, bombmagazine.org/articles/yayoi-kusama). Family conflicts (her mother wanted her

to marry and be an obedient housewife) and her own desire to become an artist and achieve fame, made her move to New York in 1957.

Most of the artist's oeuvre is connected to the hallucinations she suffered during her childhood, that of multiplying dots and nets. Her obsessive neuroses and psychological instability are the origin of her continuous work. In fact, her effort to show what she describes as “the astonishing mystery of universe” (Yayoi Kusama Interview: “Let's Fight Together”, 4'23'') and her obsession to become part of the cosmos, are the origin of most of her recent work and of “Cosmic Nature” the 2020 immersive installation thought for New York's Botanic Garden According to Jo Applin, Kusama's “Solitude of the Earth” (1994) makes reference to domesticity and the monotonous work of sewing or knitting (80). She explains how Kusama's works attack the standardized norms of the domestic interiors by inviting the public at her exhibitions to interact with them. By doing so she subverts the difference between private and public and between order and disorder (80). In her recent works, she invites visitors to participate in her installations by either asking them to add polka dots (stickers) to her domestic spaces or by inviting them to watch her oeuvre through a peephole. Her particular psychedelic vision of domesticity transforms these spaces into rooms full of light and color where everyone can participate. Moreover, the artist frequently explores the physical and psychological boundaries of painting, often creating a hypnotic sensation to the viewer and to herself. In her work, the cosmic world seems to be a refuge and a way to escape from domestic issues, too boring for Kusama's intense creative and imaginative mind.

Frances Morris states that Kusama needs her madness as much as Bourgeois needs her memories (Frances Morris, 1'29'') as, in each case, they are their drivers and principal source of inspiration. By rejecting family and home (the artist lives in a mental institution in Japan since 1973), Kusama presents herself as a self-made persona in the world, which is why some feminists have used her as a reference as she clearly anticipates the changing role of many 21st century women, no longer defined, exclusively, by domestic values.

Another artist that likes to represent domestic spaces is Lalla Essaydi (1954). Born in a harem in Marrakech, Morocco, her pictures portray the world of her youth by means of the space, or the lack of it. Essaydi admits on her website: “... my work is haunted by space, actual and metaphorical, remembered and constructed. My photographs grew out of the need I felt to document actual spaces, especially the space of my childhood” (lallaessaydi.com/6.html). As the artist confesses, it is especially those domestic spaces that have conformed her personality and given reason to her photographs.

Like in Bourgeois' case, Essaydi needs to give a tangible shape to those memories, as they explain her present existence. In this process, the artist focuses on the spaces inhabited by women and explains how, in the traditional Arab culture “the presence of men has defined public spaces: the streets, the meeting places, the places of work. Women have been confined to private spaces, the architecture of the home” (lallaessaydi.com/6.html). In fact, if it is typical

of the Arab world to make "space" a classifying mental category it is also usual in the Western culture too, and it has been persistent throughout history. Even now, the conviction that not all spaces are specific to both genders is deeply rooted in our culture and guides our behavior (Trachana, 2013: 118), a conviction that is much stronger in Arab countries.

In Essaydi's art, architecture plays a crucial role: "In my photographs, I am constraining the women within space and also confining them to their "proper" place, a place bounded by walls and controlled by men", says the artist (lallaessaydi.com/6.html). In fact, the women she photographs seem to be on the verge of disappearing into the framework where they are inscribed. There is a reification of the persona which is blatant in the case of her odalisques that appear completely camouflaged inside rooms or courtyards, as if they were part of the architectural setting. As the photographer herself affirms: "Odalisque, from the Turkish, means to belong to a place" (lallaessaydi.com/6.html), and she adds: "Many Arab women today may feel the space of confinement to be a more psychological one, but its origins are, I think, embedded in architecture itself" (lallaessaydi.com/6.html). In that sense, the architectural framework of many of Essaydi's photographs is similar to Bourgeois' Cells, as they not only represent pieces of memory but also prisons that are sometimes physical, psychological or both. Essaydi's work presents different strategies to subvert the order imposed on Arab women: first she uses calligraphy, which traditionally is only accessible to men, and in second place she often uses collective portraits where Essaydi's women appear in groups supporting each other. This "subversive twist", as she calls it, allows her to make calligraphic writing accessible to women. (lallaessaydi.com/6.html). By making the Kufic style she uses deliberately unclear, she may want to express the fact that it is forbidden for women.

In her photographs women remain passive, doing nothing, and in some cases not even looking at the camera. But Essaydi explains that many of them are family or family friends that consider themselves to be feminists and actively look for change: "We do not demonstrate in the streets. ... We work in a quieter manner suited to tradition and mores ... in our culture, change ... has to come little by little" (Brooks, 2014: 19).

Another artist whose work was present in the 'Women House' exhibition at the National Museum of Women in the Arts is Mona Hatoum (1952). She makes reference to home as a trap and a place for domestic violence while, in her own words, it should be "a space for nurturing and caring" (Hatoum, "Exposition" 4'12"). The artist emphasizes the feeling of uncertainty and instability in some of her works like in 'Light Sentence' (1992) where the metallic cells she employs remind us of Bourgeois' menacing structures. She also describes home as a place where common objects and situations may turn uncanny and even threatening, as if affected by some kind of trauma (Hatoum, "Terra Infirma", 5'39").

This tension between familiar and unfamiliar objects and the feeling of violence you can find in everyday items was already present in Martha Rosler's 'Semiotics of the Kitchen' (1975), a video Rosler recorded to present usual kitchen objects from a sometimes-menacing

perspective. The same feeling of uncanniness can be observed in Bourgeois' oeuvre and in more artists from the 'Women House' exhibition.

Other artists present at the NMWA such as Leticia Parente (1930-1991), Cindy Sherman (1954) and Francesca Woodman (1958-1981) make reference to space by using their own body. In the first case, Parente has a video of herself sewing the word 'Brasil' into the sole of her own foot as a way of protest against the military regime in Brazil at that time ('Trademark', 1975). On the other hand, Sherman is the only model in the thousands of photographs that comprises her artistic production, and Woodman (1958-1981) is the main character of the hundreds of pictures she left behind after committing suicide at 22 years old.

The work of the artists mentioned so far is closely connected to trauma, prohibition, confinement and violence. In some cases, the artists reproduce the domestic spaces to overcome these feelings (Bourgeois, Kusama, Essaydi, Hatoum), while in others they transform them completely and use art to express the reaffirmation of their own self, that is connected to the new role women want to acquire in society.

In the following section we explore the literary work of some women. They are, indeed, the forerunners of present women writers whose contemporary discourses explore queer and trans ecology, eco-sexuality, and new materialism, and where the agency of nature goes one step further into the lesbian embrace.

4. DOMESTICITY IN WOMEN'S LITERATURE

Private space has historically been the retreat home for women to reinforce the values associated with marriage, motherhood, family life, children, health, and also a space limited by their own body imprisonment. In *The Second Sex* (1953) Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) alluded to the concept of space by claiming that woman's space is limited by her own body, thus becoming her own obstacle or prison. By criticizing men's vain behavior, she states that "He grasps his body as a direct and normal link with the world that he believes he apprehends in all objectivity, whereas he considers woman's body an obstacle, a prison, burdened by everything that particularizes it" (Beauvoir, 1953: 25).

There is no doubt that Beauvoir's words about women's body constraints have also led us to the concept of private space that Margaret Atwood (1939) uses in her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Her protagonist Offred claims that in her imprisonment, the room where she is condemned to live, there must be some space. It is her own space, even in the most adverse moment of life: "My room, then. There has to be some space that I claim as mine, even in this time" (Atwood, 2008: 60). Such a personal dimension is also claimed by Joanna Russ (1937-2011) to break the female physical and psychological limits: "There is no one who can keep you from going where you please ... no one will follow you and try to embarrass you by whispering obscenities in your ears ..." (*To Write like a Woman* 141). In respect with the dimensions of gender of women's realities and the symbolic representation of the domesticity

that Kelley (2017) suggests, these are evidenced in Margaret Atwood's own life episodes. Her first vocation would be to become a biologist, rather than a writer, and in fact, at the age of seven she wrote her first story entitled "Anni the Ant" (2008). In this story she shows a great concern about the natural environment and the survival of the ants, by claiming they deserved to be immortalized. Not only is her literary proximity to ecological activism evident but also her involvement in human rights and equality for women movements.

From Medieval ages to the 20th and 21st century, we can find an endless list of women writers claiming their necessity to escape from the private space and hopelessness to stop living as the *angel of home*. To describe it, writers create new societies and public spaces by themselves and only for themselves. We do believe that it is not relevant whether any links exist among them or not, the relevance lies particularly in their necessity to claim their social agency in addition to being mothers, housewives and in some cases, delicate adorns devoted to kid's raising and home chores. Ecofeminism on the one hand, and Science Fiction (SF for short) genre on the other, are a proof of women wittily expressing their desire to run away from their private space, and most importantly from the patriarchal sphere they are forced to live.

For the present literary contribution, we aim at analyzing a small sample of American women writers of the 1970s, such as Joanna Russ (1937-2011) and Ursula K. Le Guin (1929-2018), who, differences aside, offer excellent representations of domesticity in terms of the literary uncertain spaces described and caused by gender construction and identity conceptions. By adhering to natural environments, they feel the need to run away from the domestic and patriarchal frame.

These space manifestations that took place along the American feminist movements of the last 20th century represent eco-spaces where women could freely express their own uncertainties. Not only is uncertainty thrown out, but also a certain degree of hostility as a clear response to women's long social and personal marginalization. Particularly, in the words of Elaine Showalter, "the 1970s produced an explosion of speculative and allegorical fiction", caused, as she points out "when the genre of the feminist utopia was recast in the scientific and political terms of women's liberation movement" (Showalter, 2009: 458).

All in all, and differences aside, we advocate for the influence of *ecofeminist* movements and Rachel Louise Carson (1907-1964), who was claimed to be the first voice after the publication of her first book *Silent Spring* on 27th September 1962. In her book, Carson denounced how technological advances caused an ecological crisis and paved the way to the risk of agrochemical industry giving birth to a silent spring, where birds could not sing, or insects could not make noises. Little could she have imagined the COVID crisis we have recently gone through, most probably caused as a result of having turned our back on nature.

Ecofeminism had an evident impact on SF literature, and vice versa. Inspired by this ecofeminist literary genre, SF women writers express a deep sense of wonder to refer to natural and open spaces or *sensawunda* (McCaffery, 1990: 203). Such a new natural awareness or love

for natural spaces so far from domestic ones, has been raised in Joanna Russ, who echoes the natural environment by drawing female characters increasingly closer to natural ecosystems. Although the origins of the biological connection are one of the first principles for feminist movements, Russ adheres to ecofeminism stirred up by the nature per se to create a constraint-free space. It is a space where sexuality is not linked to procreation, and most importantly, a space where the women in her stories find natural obstacles rather than the social barriers imposed by men and the political establishment (Morales, 2017: 322). From “Nor Custom Stale” (1959), *The Female Man* (1975), *We Who Are About* (1977) to *Kittatiny: A Tale of Magic* (1978), women are adapted and linked to the natural environment, whereas men are left out or diminished for being destructive and harmful to women. This ecofeminism search for constraint-free spaces reminds us of Kusama’s communion with the cosmic world and Bourgeois’ reconstructions of painful episodes of her life by means of her cells, all of which are strategies to find alternative places to their domestic spheres.

In the case of Ursula K. Le Guin, she creates women’s communities known as *gynecotopies* (qtd. in Esteva 36). These are imaginary (either utopian or dystopian) natural and open spaces where female protagonists can live on their own and break free from domestic confinements. Such a space is Gueden, the planet inhabited by androgynous individuals becoming bisexual in glacier eras that Le Guin creates in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969). In this planet women have broken up their confinements to claim their physical, social and psychological spaces, in the same way as Joanna Russ (1995) declares in her critical essays. She describes women communities as “classless, ecology-minded, politically and socially ungoverned and sexually permissive (i.e., homosexuality, heterosexuality, promiscuity). ... not to break taboos but to separate sexuality from questions of ownership, reproduction and social structure” (*To Write like a Woman* 139).

In Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed, An Ambiguous Utopia* (1974) a similar situation occurs that, as the subtitle implies, two contrasting social organizations coexist: on the one hand, a messy but lively capitalist society which oppresses its underclass, and on the other, a classless utopia. In Gueden, the natural colony of mutated hermaphrodites of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, its inhabitants’ sex changes either voluntarily or involuntarily, which is a way to express women’s uncertainties. Instead of painting separate traditional and cultural marked spaces, where men and women take up their own places apart, Le Guin manipulates biological female nature and pursues maximum uncertainty by eliminating human division. As she puts it, “There is no division of humanity into strong and weak halves, protective/protected, dominant/submissive, owner/chattel, active/passive” (69).

The same as Joanna Russ was influenced by ecofeminism describing women and their connection with outer space and natural environments to escape from men’s social frames, Virginia Woolf in *Three Guineas* (1938) proposed a solution to environmental crises if we changed our modes of thinking, and our actions (Swanson, 2011). Woolf describes women

within the private social anonymity, i.e., the domestic space, and refuses to enter a male society advocating for the defense of individual liberties and alluding to the difference between the feminine and the masculine, the passive and the active, the negative and the positive, the outside and the inside (Míguez, 2020).

In SF narratives such as *The Female Man* (1975), Russ wittily recreates and symbolizes differentiated worlds: a utopian only-women community living in ‘Whileaway’, and two dystopian worlds in constant conflict, ‘Womanland’ and ‘Manland’. Ecofeminism is also present in the quiet life of Freda, the mature female protagonist of Russ’s short story “Nor Custom Stale” (1989), apparently living a happy marriage with her husband, Harry. This is the first short story that Joanna Russ published in 1959 in which, using a naïve literary style far from her habitual radical writing style, she describes a downhearted isolated woman locked down in her constraining and destructive domestic space.

“Nor Custom Stale” deals with the tenets of closed and open spaces to force the couple to live within the limits of their own home and tyrannized by the latest technology. It is a very special house indeed, and “They had discovered immortality. Oh not for people, not at all it was Houses that were immortal” (*The Hidden Side of Moon* 124). With such words, Russ introduces the reader, right from the beginning, into an ironically immortal space. A space of confinement that symbolizes a long-traditional family, whose real immobility and ‘statism’ reflect the limitations of housewives and mothers tied to the domestic space of a conservative family.

Tradition and well-being are two recurrent aspects in the story that are closely related to the domestic space, or the house that means everything for the elderly couple. It is a domestic and ‘destructing’ space that Freda, captivated by nature, wants to escape from and avoid ending up in an irreparable failure and destruction. If they remained in the house, they would irremediably die. However, the lack of contact with nature and the excessive confidence in technology inside a space impossible to leave behind, lead to the marriage’s death, the destruction of the house and the end of the story: “Freda had time only to say, “Oh, Harry!” and he, “Freda, what—“ when the house gave a little tentative shake and then another and then shivered into a hundred—no a million—no many many more atoms, atoms that threw the airy snow up in a great billowing rise” (*The Hidden Side of Moon* 137).

As seen in the previous lines, ecofeminism is, therefore, straightforwardly linked with breaking up domestic spaces to help women writers run away from family ties, using nature as a symbol of open spaces where women can find their own limits. In their anonymity, women become heroines of their own existence (Morales, 2017: 128), whether they are adolescent women, frustrated wives, daughters, professionals, artists, or intellectual academy women. And, along that process, they make up a community of women that can tell a story. Literary spaces lead to think up how women recreate domestic spaces in another area long owned and dominated by men, that of architecture.

5. DOMESTICITY IN WOMEN ARCHITECTS

Regarding the physical frame where women have moved and lived, it is undeniable that the indoor domestic space configuration has evolved over the centuries from open and public spaces to more closed, divided and private ones. Industrialization brought with it the eight-hour shift and the radical separation between the home and the office or factory, between rest and work, night and day. As Beatriz Colomina brilliantly explains, post-industrialization collapses work back into the home and takes it further into the bedroom and into the bed itself (Colomina [essays/pyjama-party-what-we-do-in-bed/10041105.article](https://www.colomina.com/essays/pyjama-party-what-we-do-in-bed/10041105.article)).

In this context, this section focuses on the role that women played in the conceptualization of these domestic spaces in the 20th century by making reference to the professional and personal paths of five different disruptive female architects of this period. It is not until practically the 20th century that women began to be recognized as architects and started to have certain visibility. Before that period the active participation of female architects was overall denied. And this is a particularly critical moment because we need to remember that at the down of the 20th century the distinctly unhomey International Style aesthetic with their cold storage warehouse cubes started to gain prominence (Reed, 1996: 8). It is what Beatriz Colomina would define as houses that excluded family life (Reed: 1996: 9). In that respect, women participation in domestic spaces' configuration and design would help give them a distinctive touch.

The first architect to analyze, Eileen Gray (1878-1976) was born in an Anglo-Irish aristocratic family and in 1902 she emigrated to Paris where she lived until her death. Professionally, she first started working as an artisan, later on as an interior designer and only at fifty years old as an architect. For her, everything was only a matter of scale, and she found no difference between designing a lamp, a piece of furniture or a house. Gray worked in everything with the same degree of detail and perfection, filling the usual gap between architecture and interior design.

Despite the type of decoration and interior design produced at the Art Deco in Paris, Gray stood out for her 'luxury content'. In the Exhibition 'Salon d'Automne' in 1922, she showed her lacquered screens in black. By that time, her work in furniture had already attracted the attention of Jan Wils from the De Stijl group, due to its architectural quality and sculptural sophistication (Garner, 1993: 27). At this Exhibition in Paris she met Le Corbusier, among other architects of the Modern Movement, and began to become well aware of the role of architecture as the basis of all applied arts.

In 'The house on the edge of the sea: E.1027' ('Maison en bord de mer: E. 1027', built between 1926-1929), Gray designed her first house with the support of her friend, architect and future owner, Jean Badovici. The house was designed and built for someone who likes working, playing sports and meeting friends. From the beginning, Gray was willing to deal with such a complex program as balancing between outdoor and indoor spaces, the relationship between

architecture and furniture and the control of light and orientation. The house played with inclusion and exclusion principles simultaneously, always trying to give the impression of being isolated.

By applying logical thinking, Gray's constant concerns were to understand the place (surroundings) and the human needs, questions that the International Style often overlooked to take into account. For these purposes, she managed pathways and used permeability between interior and exterior as well as exquisite lighting and natural ventilation of the different areas, which facilitated both physical and mental activities. She understood that human beings have body and spirit simultaneously, and that a person who lives in a modern home can greatly benefit from a healthier, more hygienic and freer way of living than someone who does not. Gray went beyond functionality in an attempt to dignify the human being. For her: "A house is not only a machine to live in. It is the shell of a human being, his extension, his release, and his spiritual emanation ..." (Goff, 2014: 251). In this sense, we need to remember that 1929, when Gray's house was finished, was precisely the year when Virginia Woolf published her feminist tract, *A Room of One's Own*, which described women's oppression in a patriarchal society where space was denied to women. As Christopher Reed explains, "alienation from the conventional home and the determination to imagine new forms of domesticity are recurrent themes in Bloomsbury's letters, memoirs, and fiction. "I feel desperately homesick, -but for what home" was how Lytton Strachey phrased the problem" (1996: 147). The female architects we deal with in this section were concerned about such matters and tried to find a solution for them.

Lilly Reich (1885-1947) was also a self-taught architect like Gray, and worked as an interior and exhibition designer. She belonged to the Bauhaus, although at that time, women were only allowed to participate in the field of interior design. In 1927, Reich met Mies Van der Rohe at the exhibition 'From fiber to fabric', and it was Mies who suggested Reich to organize and assemble the Exhibition 'The house' in the city of Stuttgart. This was how the modern residential colony was built on a hill at Weissenhof with the participation of well-known architects of that time such as L. Corbusier, P. Behrens, Gropius, Oud, Scharoun, the Taut brothers and Mies. In such an exhibition, the first revolutionary modular kitchen known as 'Frankfurt kitchen' was shown, as designed by Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky (1897-2000). The same year in Berlin, in the exhibition called 'Female fashion', Reich and Mies designed 'velvet and silk coffee'. They used suspended fabrics, colored glass objects and chromed steel tube frames for fabric suspension and hangings. This was the beginning of a successful collaboration between them as later on they would participate together in the International Exhibition held at the Barcelona Pavilion in 1929. Reich contributed to Mies' works by dealing with the sensuality of materials, especially in fabrics, silk, velvet or pleats, in contrast with the "Less is more" of Mies' austere architectural spaces.

During the Modern Movement, that spans the entire half of the 20th century, men-architects mainly focused on pure lines and spaces stripped of objects, while women-architects instead provided flexibility, functionality and pragmatism to the domestic space. In the 1960s, while Modernism defended that architects should build glass-window buildings, Denise Scott Brown (Nkana, Zambia, 1931-) was already “over-Modern”, and more interested in the identity of buildings. Having studied in Johannesburg, London and Philadelphia, she became one of the forerunners of the Post-Modern Movement together with Robert Venturi, her later husband and partner.

Scott Brown stated that “Purist architecture was partly a reaction against 19th eclecticism”. She understood symbolism of form as an expression or reinforcement of content” (Scott Brown et al., 1977: 7) and was very interested in “Las Vegas Strip phenomenon”, which she had first visited in 1965. Las Vegas was gaining popularity at that time and the book that Scott Brown, Venturi and Izenour wrote, *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), derives from her original ideas that buildings should be designed with people, not only for people.

Scott Brown's observation and analytical ability also covers the smallest details of everyday life. In her essay “Planning the Powder Room” (1967), (Scott Brown, *Having Words*), she analyses the shortcomings that a woman finds in the ladies’ toilets in order to use these places properly and without having to find herself clumsily holding the belongings between her legs. In the same essay, Brown continues showing how a simple good design can finish with the daily impracticalities caused by male architects.

In the second half of the 20th century, a new architectural style emerged from the Modern Movement, the ‘Brutalism’, which comes from the term *béton brut*, raw concrete. In this style, buildings were characterized by the use of exposed materials, i.e., concrete, brick, steel, stone, and their repetitive angular geometries. In 1965, Mary Otis Stevens (New York, 1928-), a non-conformist and visionary woman who had graduated from MIT, built a house for their own family together with her husband, Thomas McNulty, in 1962-65 in Lincoln, Massachusetts. The brutalist house was made out of concrete and had no doors except for bathrooms and a small guest room. As *Life* magazine said, it was ‘a sculpture for living in’ (Gomel, 1965: 124). The space for movement and the spaces for activities were negotiable, as the house played with changing boundaries. It was considered as a hippie dwelling by the neighbors and the result of the 60’s idiosyncrasy. But in 1999, only fifty years after its construction, the house was demolished, and the experiment completely forgotten.

A further example of how women have intervened in practical space to physically challenge conventions can be found in Susana Torre’s oeuvre. A feminist activist and an architect born in Argentina in 1944, Torre has lived in the States most of her life and has always searched for spaces traditionally masculine that could be used by women. Through her practice, she has always sought to improve the status of women, focusing on the way users occupy the spaces designed, and how they play the roles defined by gender, ethnicity or age. We find two

clear examples in her 'House of Meaning' (1971) and the 'Fire Station Five' (1987) that she built in Columbus, Indiana. She describes the first one in the following terms: "Like the city, the home is one of culture's most powerful 'symbolic forms'. It embodies specific, usually dominant ideologies about how people should live, what kinds of values and hierarchies should be fostered within the family, and how its occupants should relate to the public world. (...). We can thus understand why, just as at the turn of the century, feminists today are attempting to create their own home images to promote the idea of a non-sexist egalitarian society" (susanatorre.net/the-house-of-meanings/).

Torre's 'House of Meaning' was not meant as a specific house, but as a matrix combining the formal completeness of an architectural object with the temporary patterns that arise in the process of dwelling. With regards to Fire Station Five in Columbus, Indiana (1984- 1987), the architect tried to prevent women firefighters from quitting, which was common at that time, by replacing the traditional dormitory with individual bedrooms and restructuring kitchen and dining areas to facilitate collaboration between women and men. Her architecture, "with a great theoretical background, starts from the analysis of the concrete role of women in space to disrupt their organization and hierarchy" (noticia/feminismo-individuo-y-colectividad-la-arquitectura-de-susana-torre).

It is through these five women architects that we can see the valuable contribution that many women have made to domestic architecture and, furthermore, how their more domestic vision of the immediate environment has been transferred to the design and creation of all kinds of spaces outside the domestic sphere. Women who have gone beyond the styles or ideologies of their time, providing an 'out of box' vision to capture that part of humanity and domesticity in the resulting ensemble, which can be seen in the care for details and specific functional or aesthetic elements. In that sense, they have gone much further than what Tristan Tzara called "that aesthetic of castration called modern" when referring to the International Style (1933: 84). All these women have given priority to the people who inhabit the spaces, putting themselves in the user's place in order to identify needs or absences and develop new proposals. This has been seen in Reich's collaborations with Mies, in the attention to details in the interior design of Gray's homes, in the more inclusive vision of the city design that Brown expresses in *Learning from Las Vegas* or in the more familiar and human creations that Mary Otis Stevens and Susana Torre give to the brutalist minimalist architecture.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has demonstrated how the current criticisms towards domesticity come from a plurality of women who have implemented changes from many different disciplines. The theoretical approach supporting the need to reshape domesticity standards goes hand in hand with many practical efforts, some of which have been shown above.

As we have seen, since the First World War many women artists, writers and architects have shown in their work their discomfort at having to live their lives within the confinement the patriarchal society has historically imposed on them. As a reaction to this, and although masculine representations have been predominant for more than twenty centuries, many women from different fields have managed to add a female touch by creating all types of spaces either real or fictional where natural obstacles and social barriers imposed by the political establishment could be at least partially overcome. Because the type of spaces that women need today are versatile and indivisible either by gender, class, ethnicity or culture, the inclusion of their perspective in the design of domestic and urban spaces, even if very recent, is a basic need to improve the quality of life of women and to allow them to develop the multiple roles imposed by today's society (work-home-social life). In fact, the space occupied by women in different social systems has historically been a shared space (Trachana, 2013: 11) and it is this cooperative space of equal opportunities and mutual solidarity that is currently needed. Women definitely want to make of their homes no longer a jail but the space for professional development and personal growth.

In that respect, their collective effort to take a step forward in creating more inclusive domestic spaces deserves our full appreciation. In fact, we would like in this varied review to acknowledge their valuable and inspiring contribution and their non-stop work throughout their entire lives.

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