THE DOMESTIC LAIR

The Spatial Framing of Feminine Labor and Lotus Eating in Cinema

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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Abstract

THE DOMESTIC LAIR investigates the objectification and confinement of the feminine body through its framing via camera and architecture across five contemporary films. The architectural frame and its innate ability to objectify has been of disciplinary importance since the advent of architecture. The project traces formal strategies of framing and traditions of film to the theater and its architectural frame—the proscenium—a built representation of the enclosure, spectacle, and commodification of women's bodies.

By analyzing cinematic architecture through modes of archiving, respatialization, and projective design, the project situates architecture within the context of film and gender studies to dissect how the disadvantaging of women under patriarchal and capitalist structures is spatialized for narrative's sake. The archival body of knowledge crafted under this project records the current practices of scenographic architecture to establish a normative condition of cinematic domesticity and domestication. Historically, to be a woman was to be a housewife, laborer or lotus eater. She was an objectified commodity in her own home, trapped by the patriarchal expectation of her to either be domesticated by unpaid housework or sexual reproduction. The project challenges the precedent set by cinematic spaces by designing a space that is transfixed with representing the domestication of women at an extreme to further critique the ideological, societal, and economic forces that produce domestic lairs from the perspective of architectural discourse.

Executive Summary

There exists no stronger representation of gender dynamics and their effect upon the built environment than domestic space. Male architects of the 19th Century

> …such as Robert Kerr (1867) set spatial standards of privacy and segregation within the home for the middle-classes in a way that directly paralleled social change in Victorian life…thus middle-class women were very firmly 'placed' in the home by many social forces which reinforced one another.[1]

Even prior to the Victorian Era, women were confined to the border of domesticity. Western culture has predominantly been defined by patriarchal ideology, thus maintaining an increased and inequitable position of power not only based on gender, but also upon class, race, and sexuality, placing the straight white male at the center of the societal web. This project situates a discursive architectural preoccupation with gendered frames in the home within the context of film to explore architecture's capacity to communicate narratives and critique the systemic forces that domestically disadvantage women writ large.

By initiating the efforts of this project with the founding of an online archive, The Archive of The Architecture of The Feminine Body in Contemporary Film, the motive for this research can first be understood as analytical. The Archive compiles over 350 film stills, resulting in a categorized body of knowledge that documents the historical methods of set design which exemplify the spatial objectification of women via the framing of their bodies within space. The five films which currently

[1] JOS BOYS, "Is There a Feminist Analysis of Architecture?," *Built Environment (1978-)* 10, no. 1 (1984): 27, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23286005.

comprise the archive's contents were selected for both their narrative and architectural content. Each movie depicts a story of the spatial and psychological effects of domestication and commodification upon women. They each depict the domestic realm as a space of inner turmoil and strife rather than respite, directly contrasting the pastoral, soft, and nurturing depictions of feminine domesticity engineered by men like Robert Kerr. While this stage of research focuses on the framing of the feminine body, the infrastructure of the archive was designed to facilitate future explorations into and documentation of how cinema depicts women as they occupy space and films with different thematic and narrative foci.

The *Cinematic Storyboards* continue the analytical component of the project by respatializing nine key stills across the five featured films through the production of a 2.5 dimensional model for each still. By removing the feminine figure (or primary subject) and rendering each frame in monochromatic white, the spatial framing techniques present across each model/scene become more apparent and are prioritized. This design exercise also takes inspiration from the historical technique of forced perspective in the design of *scaena*[2] to create more immersive and dynamic environments for audiences. This physical design output contributed to my further understanding of how filmmakers, set designers, and architects alike have framed the feminine body in cinema thus far.

Pulling from the writing of architectural theorist Beatriz Colomina, the project understands that architecture is a viewing machine. It inevitably frames subjects, transforming bodies into objects formally

[2] Stage and set designs of antique Roman Theaters, but the term has grown to also encompass historical set designs as well. See Appendix 1-3 for precedents.

confined by *visi-physical*[3] borders.[4] With *The Hours: A Proposal For a Lotus Eater*, I intend to utilize the body of knowledge developed in the analytical phrase of the project to design a set proposal for a new film adaptation of Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway.* The proposal stretches the conventions of traditional film set design and architectural frames to a hyperbolic worst-case scenario, producing a warped and wicked depiction of the architectural and psychological consequences of feminine domestication.

Ultimately, the goal of the project, analytical and projective, is to explore and critique current architectural narrative practices within the context of film and their relationship to the continued disadvantaging of women under capitalism. By overexaggerating the spatial confinement of Clarissa Dalloway, an aristocratic housewife who has been domesticated to the point of depressive and entitled indolence, the design proposal critiques the capitalist structures which enable the architectural exploitation of women through the objectification of their bodies.

[3] The use of visi-physical here describes the simultaneously visual, as in a figural border can be defined and seen, and physicall, as in three-dimensionally delineating spaces from one another, nature of architectural frames.
[4] Beatriz Colomina, "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism." In *Sexuality & Space,* (Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 83.

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Preface

THE DOMESTIC LAIR first rooted itself in my mind while studying abroad in London. As I studied the catalogue of James Bond films through the lens of British masculinity in the Spring of 2023, I was also questioning the objectified role of women and how 'evil' is literally constructed in the films. The flatness of the women on the screen, I felt, was being reinforced by their entrapment in swanky, modernist spaces—lairs or not—constantly objectified as prisoners within the tales of espionage and male-dominated spaces in each film.

This project lies at the intersection of a long-standing personal admiration of film and my experience as a student of the architectural discipline. The ways in which architecture and gender are intertwined is not a revolutionary thought, but it is of critical importance for us as designers and architects to remain acutely aware of how space reinforces the exploitation and objectification of women under global systems of capitalism, even if the spaces are figments of a Hollywood imagination.

The project does not arrive at a design solution to the architectural framing of feminine bodies; architecture will never be able to eliminate the frame entirely. While some contemporary architects continue to believe that architecture can be a mystical remedy for deep-rooted systemic issues, I acknowledge that architecture can only do *so much*. What I can provide to the discipline is an interdisciplinary meditation upon the definition of domesticity and a proposal that challenges both how cinematic space has been configured thus far and our understanding of architecture's impact on the capitalist objectification of women.

Acknowledgements

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My friends who attended the film screening series, thank you for carving the time out of your own research endeavors to support my own. You push me to be my best.

My family, who supported me through the B. Arch program. More specifically, I thank my mother and maternal grandmother for instilling in me early the understanding that women have more to contribute to the world than motherhood and that seeking further intelligence is the most important thing I can pursue.

Domestication — Labor and Lotus Eating

There exists no stronger representation of gender dynamics and their effect upon the built environment than domestic space. Male architects of the 19th Century

> …such as Robert Kerr (1867) set spatial standards of privacy and segregation within the home for the middle-classes in a way that directly paralleled social change in Victorian life…thus middle-class women were very firmly 'placed' in the home by many social forces which reinforced one another.[5]

BOYS is speaking to the increased division between "front" and "back" of house, between masculine and feminine, between relaxation and labor in the domestic realm. At the time, the 'Cult of True Womanhood' aimed to isolate and domesticate women based upon religious pretenses. With the understanding that the American Republic was founded upon the desire of religious extremists "to worship God in the way they believed to be correct,"[6] it is unsurprising that worship and womanhood were ideologically intertwined as a means of othering and control. True Women, as determined by themselves and their husbands, were expected to be pious, pure, submissive, and domesticated — mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives.[7]

The Cult of True Womanhood demanded that women be mystical angels, a "…better Eve, working in cooperation with the Redeemer, bringing the world

[5] BOYS, "Feminist Analysis of Architecture," 27.
[6] "America as a Religious Refuge: The Seventeenth Century, Part 1," Exhibitions, Library of Congress, accessed March 7 2025, https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel01.html.
[7] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1966): 152. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/2711179.

back 'from its revolt and sin.'"[8] This sainthood was primarily mediated by her dedication to family and the home; domestic cleanliness and perfection were equated to religious purity. If her home was tidy and well-maintained, she brought salvation to herself and her family.

Gender-based segregated spatial standards developed by men like Robert Kerr only reinforced the isolation of women because domestic labor and religion could be practiced simultaneously from within the home. Women could care for their children, cook, clean, and commit themselves to a pious life under God from their kitchens: "Unlike participation in other societies or movements, church work would not make her less domestic or submissive, less a True Woman."[9] Knowledge of and participation in emerging sociopolitical movements such as socialism and suffrage were seen as sin. A well-educated woman was no longer submissive, no longer True. She would have possessed the intellectual tools to liberate herself from her objectification by the systemic patriarchy which ensured her husband's independence from the home. A socially enlightened woman abandoned the domesticated lifestyle which she was told was the only thing that gave her happiness and worth in both Western society and God's eyes.[10]

The ideology of The Cult of True Womanhood effectively domesticated, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "the process of making someone fond of and good at home life and the tasks that it involves,"[11] feminine bodies for the foreseeable future in its equating of housework, religious salvation, and womanhood. Feminine domestication was maintained

[8] Welter, "True Womanhood," 152.
[9] Welter, "True Womanhood," 153.
[10] Welter, "True Womanhood," 173.
[11] "Domestication," Oxford English Dictionary, accessed March 7 2025, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/domestication_n?tab=meaning_and_use.

further by the architectural and spatial manifestation of True Womanhood. Women occupied kitchens to feed their families, drawing rooms to maintain the company of other women and to sew, bathrooms and dressing rooms to sustain her pure beauty and external appearance, bedrooms to meet her husband's 'sexual needs' or the societal expectation to reproduce or to rest and repeat the cycle of domestic servitude. All other spaces in the home became liminal, rooms that she only passed through to clean or was deliberately kept out of, such as a study, to ensure that she remained submissive and not possessive of the knowledge entitled to men. A woman's occupation of domestic space was then on defined by her duties as a housewife, a tamed commodity, uncompensated for her labor because it was expected of her.

The religious expectations of The Cult of True Womanhood applied and were disseminated to women of all classes. Feminine domestication was not only reserved for women of the middle class. Wealthy, aristocratic women have also been tamed through means of objectification. Even though economically privileged women, predominantly white women, benefitted from patriarchal systems of slavery under which people of color, predominantly women of color, were hired to relieve the bourgeoisie from domestic labor, they were still bound to the home due to 'separate spheres' social and architectural ideology.[12] With their access to capital, wealthy women became lotus eaters, "…a mere shadow of her husband…,"[13] a phantom stuck in the home without a purpose outside of her uterus (especially post-menopause) because of her economic avoidance of domestic labor outside of

[12] Racial dynamics in domestic spaces will be addressed further as a component of the analysis of *Diamonds are Forever.*
[13] Miranda J. Brady, "'I Think the Men Are Behind It': Reproductive Labour and the Horror of Second Wave Feminism," In *Mother Trouble: Mediations of White Maternal Angst after Second Wave Feminism* (University of Toronto Press, 2024), 23-4.

childbirth. The women of the aristocracy, in their domestication, became almost crystalline, glimmering examples of the luxury accessible via capital, but a commodity nonetheless; they were simply another token of the wealth and privilege their husbands were able to amass under systems of white supremacy and patriarchy.

Not coincidentally, the broadly cited origin of capitalism, the Enclosure Movement, coincides with the advent of the Victorian Era and The Cult of True Womanhood. Ian Angus, in *The War Against The Commons,* writes that "For almost all of human existence, almost all of us were self-provisioning … For wage-labor to triumph, there had to be large numbers of people for whom self-provisioning was no longer an option…Through force and fraud, common land was privatized."[14] As public land became privately owned, even more domestic labor was expected of not just women, but marginalized beings, to maintain said property. The drawing of borders to privatize land and the enclosure of women to interior, domestic lives occur parallel to each other during the emergence of the Industrial Revolution, thus fabricating a symbolic fastening between the demarcation of boundaries, property ownership, capital production, and the objectification of women.

Immutably connected to the proliferation of capitalism is the objectification and commodification of the feminine body:

> ... [Marx] believed that, in time, distinctions based on gender and age would dissipate, and he failed to see the strategic importance, both for capitalist development and for the struggle against it, of the sphere of activities and relations by which our lives and labour power are reproduced,

[14] Ian Angus, *The War against the Commons,* (Monthly Review Press, 2023), 9-10.

> beginning with sexuality, procreation and, first and foremost, women's unpaid domestic labour.[15]

As Federici outlines, women, in their societal damnation to perpetual unpaid domestic labor, are also exploited as a means of maintaining global capitalism via reproduction—a reality ignored by most until the mid-20th Century during the Second Wave of feminism. Miranda Brady reminds us that "Critical readings of the themes raised during the second wave are as relevant as ever. Continuing to remember them will help us make interventions in contemporary feminist agendas…"[16] especially as women's rights continue to be stripped away and political rhetoric in the global West becomes more mimetic of antediluvian Christian sensationalism and patriarchal propaganda. The conservation of gendered borders in the home perpetuates the exploitation of women in the domestic realm by maintaining spatial means of othering and objectifying feminine bodies through housework. As long as domestic spaces continue to carry historical connotations of femininity, women will always be commodified by their conceptually programmatic and literally architectural frames.

This multi-millennia long history of feminine objectification through architecture can also be observed in contemporary media outputs such as painting, theater, and film. *THE DOMESTIC LAIR* investigates the objectification and confinement of the feminine body through its framing via camera and architecture across five contemporary films. The project aims to defend the symbolic linkage proposed between the objectification of women in the domestic realm, boundary-making, and global systems of

[15] Silvia Federici, "Capital and Gender," In *Reading "Capital" Today: Marx after 150 Years*, edited by Ingo Schmidt and Carlo Fanelli (Pluto Press, 2017), 80.
[16] Miranda J. Brady, "A Long Way from Liberation," In *Mother Trouble: Mediations of White Maternal Angst after Second Wave Feminism* (University of Toronto Press, 2024), 100.

capitalism. Otherwise discreet and inconspicuous elements of domestic architecture are hyperbolized and transformed into symbols of the spatial oppression of the feminine body in the architecture of contemporary popular film through the framing of the feminine figure as a confined object in domestic space.

Film, as a broadly consumed form of visual art, continues the traditions and attitudes of European oil painting as outlined by John Berger in *Ways of Seeing*. He posits that "...men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at."[17] Across not only the history of painting, but also the broader history of the global West, the feminine body has been objectified for men (and women) to observe and act upon and for women to constantly scrutinize. The persistent internal dissection of one's body in the minds of women has been ingrained into the female psyche through broader cultural outputs and objects such as paintings, or in the context of *THE DOMESTIC LAIR*, film. This body of research, like oil painting and film, reads the body as the architectural manifestation of our psyches, making the cerebral weight of domestic confinement physical and exponentially more interior.

The project traces formal strategies of framing and traditions of film to the theater and its architectural frame, *the proscenium*, a built representation of the enclosure, spectacle, and commodification of women in their othering and framing of feminine bodies as distant objects of visual pleasure and entertainment. Film co-opts architectural frames and proscenic spatial techniques to communicate the systemic exploitation of women visually and environmentally. Beatriz Colomina, a pioneer of

[17] John Berger, "Chapter 3," In *Ways of Seeing* (1972.)

feminist architectural theory, claims that "Architecture is not simply a platform that accommodates the viewing subject. It is a viewing mechanism that produces the subject. It precedes and frames its occupant."[18] Architecture will never be free of the frame or proscenium — surfaces and implied boundaries will always produce readings of othering and objectification of the subject they bound — but we as designers can be critical and conscious of what the frames we produce communicate. Rather than taking Colomina's proclamation as fact, we can reclaim the frame as a means of critique and resistance against systemic oppression instead of its current use as an architectural condition which reinforces patriarchal ideologies. The Domestic Lair contends not only with the framing of the feminine body via borderous, gash-like cuts the skin of the home and their allegorical relationship to capitalism, but also with how cinematic lairs represent the psychological impact of domestic objectification on the feminine body, laborers and lotus eaters alike.

[18] Beatriz Colomina, "The Split Wall," 83.

***Diamonds Are Forever* (1971)**

Plot Summary

James Bond infiltrates a diamond-smuggling ring in Guy Hamilton's 1971 *Diamonds Are Forever*. Bond's primary antagonist thus far, Ernst Blofeld, devises a plot to decimate Washington D.C. with a diamond-powered laser; Bond's mission—to conspire with American intelligence agents and diamond broker Tiffany Case to foil Blofeld's terrorist plot—takes him to Amsterdam and Las Vegas, Nevada.

Bond first meets Tiffany, his love interest in the film, in her Amsterdam apartment. Impersonating Peter Franks, another member of the smuggling ring, Bond intercepts the diamonds before they can reach Blofeld. While securing the diamonds, he kills the real Peter Franks and fakes his own death by planting his ID on the corpse; Tiffany and Bond escape to Los Angeles, storing the diamonds discreetly in Franks' dead body. The couple is separated upon their arrival to the United States. Bond is instructed by his contact in the CIA to bring Franks' corpse to Las Vegas where it will be cremated to retrieve the diamonds. Bond is double-crossed at the funeral home and successfully avoids being cremated by Mr. Wint and Mr. Kidd, two other members of the diamond smuggling ring. Unbeknownst to Wint and Kidd, the diamonds in Franks' body were fake per Bond's instructions to his American allies.

Bond stays in Vegas after his near-death experience, visiting The Whyte House Hotel and Casino for a night of gambling. He meets another woman, Plenty O'Toole, while playing craps and brings her to his room. Plenty and James are bombarded by henchmen from the funeral home, upset that the diamonds they expected to intercept via cremation were not real.

Plenty is thrown out of the hotel room window into the pool below during Bond's scuffle with the henchmen.

Bond reunites with Tiffany and convinces her to help in ensuring the safety of the real diamonds; he tells Tiffany to seize the real diamonds at the Circus Circus Casino. Tiffany tries to flee with the diamonds but decides to stay and help Bond after realizing that her life is in danger as more members of the smuggling ring turn up dead. The pair oversee the real diamonds being passed off to the casino manager of The Whyte House; Bond follows the diamonds and Tiffany stays back. In his pursuit of the diamonds, James discovers that they have been given to a scientist and infiltrates a remote laboratory owned by Willard Whyte, namesake and billionaire owner of The Whyte House, in the Nevada desert. Here, a group of scientists are developing a satellite laser whose beam is concentrated and strengthened by diamonds. Bond is caught in the laboratory before he can intercept the diamonds, escapes unscathed, and is able to reunite with Tiffany in Vegas.

Bond goes to confront Whyte about his involvement with the laboratory and is instead met by two Blofelds, one a clone and one the real man. Bond manages to kill the clone but is incapacitated by gas before he can reach the real Blofeld. Mr. Wint and Mr. Kidd bring Bond to the desert to die, but he escapes and tracks down Willard Whyte's home, also in the desert. At Whyte's bachelor pad, he encounters and subdues female bodyguards Bambi and Thumper and frees Whyte from his house arrest and ties to Blofeld.

Whyte cooperates with Bond and helps him discover Blofeld's plan to destroy nuclear weapons across the globe with the diamond-powered laser. Bond and the CIA track Blofeld down to an oil rig off the coast of

California and Bond attempts to deactivate the laser. Bond is unable to destroy the laser but is successful in wrecking the satellite's control center on the rig; Blofeld escapes the chaos on a submarine. Bond reunites with Tiffany on a romantic cruise back to England and the film concludes with Tiffany jokingly asking Bond if they will ever be able to retrieve the diamonds with Blofeld's satellite still orbiting the Earth.

Selected Still Analysis

The selected still from *Diamonds Are Forever* captures Bambi, Thumper, and James Bond during their scuffle at Willard Whyte's bachelor pad, which in reality is better known as the Elrod House, designed by John Lautner. The wide angle of the camera in this scene exaggerates the flatness and vertically compact living room space that becomes the implied boxing ring of the fight. The choreography of movement and flattening of depth in the still both frame Bambi and Thumper as mid-century modern caryatids[19], objectified pillars of femininity petrified in space through their homogenizing with the furniture that frames the space around them.

The cylindrical form of the living room harkens back to Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon[20], allowing for the constant surveillance of Bambi and Thumper's bodies by the camera, audience, and Bond. Bond's occupation of the center of the ring forces Bambi and Thumper into his orbit, defensively revolving around the perimeter of the room with no opportunities for camouflage outside of the furniture scattered throughout the space. The women strategically perch upon the furniture at various

[19] For reference of caryatid, see Appendix 4.
[20] For reference of panopticon, see Appendix 5.

instances throughout the scene, taunting Bond to attack with their bedroom eyes, but in their lounging are framed no differently than the objects they are resting upon.

The Elrod House absorbs Bambi and Thumper in its framing of their bodies, objectifying them as another piece of décor for Willard Whyte to display in his home. As women in the 1960s and 70s were advocating for increased autonomy over their bodies, pop culture outputs such as Playboy Magazine exploited the feminine body as an object of sexual desire to men. The framing of Bambi and Thumper's bodies as architectural elements themselves within this scene reproduces the commodified view of women Playboy was disseminating to its readers. In the mid-20th century, Playboy was able to repackage the ideals of patriarchy into its characterization of the eligible bachelor as a man who was 'modern,' successful in his career and able to have sex with any woman he wanted to because of his knowledge and participation in emerging discussions of design and culture. Playboy Magazine even published a story on Lautner's Elrod House and what inspired its design in 1971, the same year that *Diamonds Are Forever* was released.[21]

The publication of the Elrod House by Playboy Magazine inherently ties the architectural aesthetics deployed in the design of the home with Playboy's construction of the bachelor. Bambi and Thumper are depicted as the ideal object of home décor to the Playboy reader in the cinematic flattening of and constructed parallel between their bodies and the other architectural elements occupying the living room. Their violent seduction

[21] J. Yoder, No Title, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 68(2), 2009, pp. 283-288.

of Bond results in their figural framing of Bond himself, centered perfectly between two caryatid forms as they attempt to subdue/duce him. They become both lifeless pieces of modern furniture representative of Willard Whyte's 'cultured' world view and sex toys ready to play (or fight) at a moment's notice. The lifelessness of their bodies is not only spatial, but ideological. Thumper, a black woman, is not only seen as non-human because of the architectural framing and homogenization of her body with the space within the Elrod House, but by the patriarchal, British society that James Bond symbolizes. Historically "…women of color [have been] categorized as genderless and dehumanized by Western society as a result of the imposition of colonization…"[22] and that very same ideology is upheld and reproduced visually in the framing of Bambi and Thumper as non-human statues, standing in direct contrast to the patriarchal, modern, Playboy world they are surrounded by.

In addition to the transformation of Bambi and Thumper's bodies into a quasi-proscenium, specific elements of their bodies are othered and exploited through their costuming. Both Bambi and Thumper wear revealing garments, but of particular interest here is Thumper's bikini. Paul Preciado describes the significance of the bikini as a textile architectural framing device:

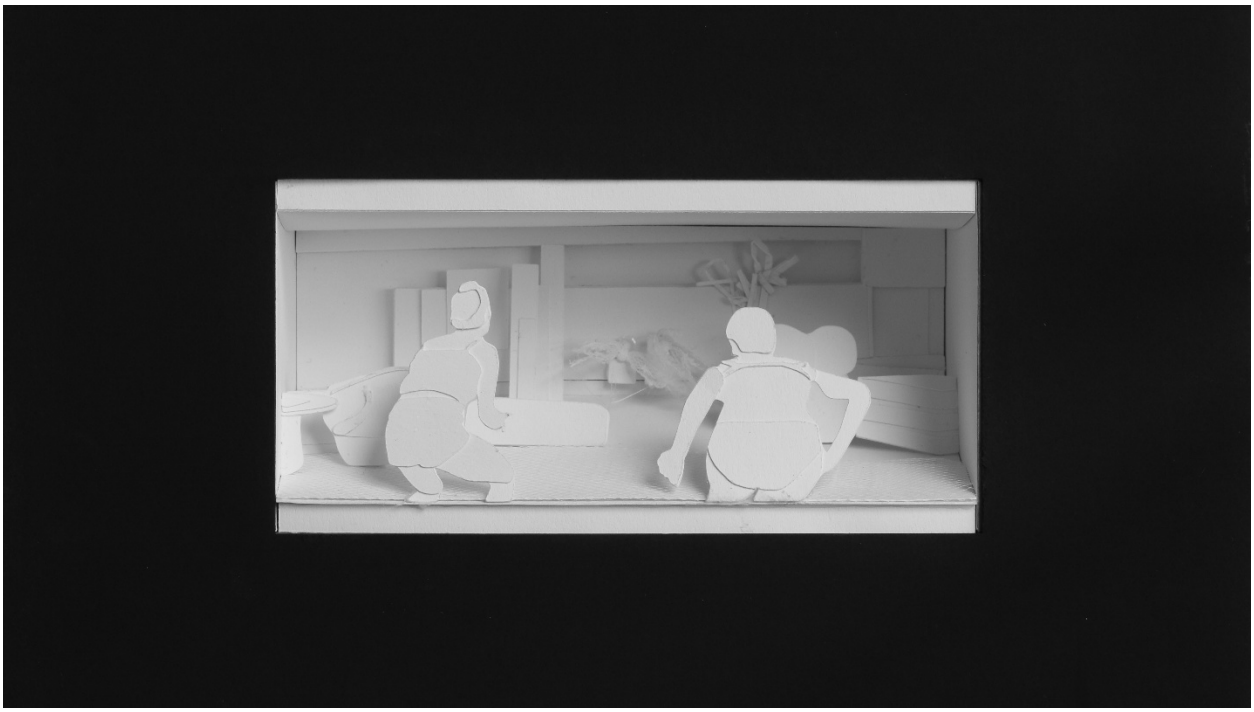
> …the bikini was the representation within the public space of the paradoxical status of female sexuality: a disruptive energy that must be governmentally controlled and kept within the borders of domesticity, but also a seductive energy and the object of heterosexual male desire… a technique for strategically revealing certain parts of the female body while concealing others….[23]

[22] Maria Antoinette Norris, "Understanding Colonization's Role In The Social Construction of Gender & Race." *An Injustice!,* August 28 2020.

[23] Paul B. Preciado, *Pornotopia: An Essay on Playboy's Architecture and Biopolitics* (Zone Books, 2014), 74.

In this particular scene, Thumper's donning of a bikini makes visual the tension between the domesticated housewife and Playboy Bunny archetype. Bambi and Thumper only exist within the confines of the Elrod House in *Diamonds Are Forever*, eternally exploited as mid-century caryatid keepers of Willard Whyte's tranquility at home. Their roles as henchwomen and implied prostitutes are their form of domestic labor, still exploited under a patriarchal master, Whyte, who has restricted their existence to the borders of his home. Bambi and Thumper exist at the intersection of the mid-century tension between housewives and sexually liberated women, tethered to the domestic realm through their labor but also objectified as promiscuous 'playmates' ready to please.

Storyboard



DIAMONDS-ARE-FOREVER ELROD-HOUSE LIVING-ROOM-2

The Stepford Wives **(1975)**

Plot Summary

Joanna Eberhart, her two young daughters, and her husband Walter move from New York City to Stepford, Connecticut, a sleepy suburban town in direct juxtaposition to the liveliness of Manhattan. Joanna, an outspoken and artistic young woman, dreams of being a photographer and finds the move to Stepford stifling. Upon her family's arrival in Stepford, she meets many of the other wives in town, all of whom are the epitome of 'perfect' housewives: youthful, beautiful, and obsesses with housework.

Walter joins the mysterious Stepford Men's Association shortly after the move and Joanna is appalled by the sexist exclusionary practices of the men in town. Despite the perceived oddity of the women of Stepford, Joanna meets and becomes friends with Bobbie Markowe, another younger woman who finds the submissiveness and docility of the other Stepford wives deeply unsettling. They learn that Carol Van Sant, the most pristine of the Stepford women, used to act as president of a Women's Liberation group in town but suddenly ceased its operations, arising more concern from Joanna and Bobbie. Determined to enlighten the other women to their misogyny-laden, oppressive lifestyles, Joanna, Bobbie, and another of their friends Charmaine organize a Women's Liberation meeting for the women of Stepford. The meeting is ultimately unsuccessful as it devolves into a discussion about the most effective cleaning products amongst the women in attendance.

As Joanna becomes more suspicious that something sinister is occurring to cause the women of Stepford to act so submissively, Walter

becomes more engrained into the operations of the Men's Association, even hosting them at his and Joanna's house. The men in the organization, with the help of Walter, profile Joanna, collecting recordings of her voice and producing portraits of her under an innocent guise.

Charmaine returns to Stepford after a weekend getaway with her husband and begins to act exactly like the other Stepford wives, alarming Joanna and Bobbie. Bobbie believes that the growing technology industry in Stepford might be polluting the town's water supply, somehow eliciting this behavior in the women. The pair bring a water sample to an old lover of Joanna's in New York City, but he is unable to find any harmful contaminants in the water.

After returning to Stepford, Bobbie asks Joanna if she can watch her kids over the upcoming weekend because her and her husband will be celebrating their anniversary; Joanna agrees. While watching not only her own children, but also Bobbie's, Joanna is overwhelmed with the brunt of the domestic labor in the house. She eventually tells Walter to entertain the children so that she can continue to work on her photography work because she believes she has made a breakthrough. Joanna yet again returns to New York, this time to pitch her work to a prestigious art gallery and they offer to display her work. She immediately heads to Bobbie's house when she returns to Stepford, excited to share her good news, but is met by a submissive, almost foreign version of Bobbie.

Joanna experiences a psychological break, realizing that she is the last wife in Stepford not to conform to purely domestic life, and accidentally crashes into the Van Sant's mailbox. Walter orders her to see a psychologist and tells her that she is simply paranoid, that nothing

sinister is making the wives of Stepford become perfect housewives, and critiques Joanna for not assimilating into the lifestyle of the other women because it reflects poorly on himself. Joanna sees a psychiatrist outside of Stepford and confesses to her that she believes the men and their Association are the reason for the docility of their wives. The psychiatrist believes Joanna and recommends that she moves from Stepford to safety with her daughters.

Joanna returns home to gather her children but discovers they are not home. When Walter cannot tell her the location of her children, the two fight with each other, ending with Joanna locking herself in their bedroom and later escaping to Bobbie's house for support. Joanna, hoping to break through to the Bobbie she once knew, grows frustrated when Bobbie will only speak to her about housework. Desperate, Joanna cuts her palm with a kitchen knife, showing Bobbie that she is able to bleed, and then stabs Bobbie in the stomach. Instead of bleeding herself, Bobbie begins acting erratically, repeating herself and colliding with cabinets in her kitchen, revealing that she has been replaced by a robot along with the other Stepford women.

Joanna returns home one final time and attacks her husband with a fire poker before heading to the Men's Association to find her children. Joanna secretly enters the mansion clubhouse of the Men's Association, following the screams of her children to the main office of the building. Instead of finding her children, she finds the leader of the Association. She asks the man why they replace their wives with robots and he replies "Because we can." Joanna attempts to escape the mansion but eventually stumbles into a recreation of her and Walter's bedroom. Robot Joanna stops brushing its hair and approaches Real Joanna while holding a pair of

pantyhose, emotionless. She strangles Joanna with the pantyhose as the leader of the Men's Association watches.

Later, Robot Joanna aimlessly strolls through the local grocery store, emptily interacting with the other Stepford Wives as they carry out their duties as housewife robots.

Selected Stills Analysis

As Joanna Eberhart balances investigating the 'utopian' microcosm of Stepford with resisting her domestication, the spaces around her frame her body to visually symbolize her imprisonment within suburbia. More specifically, Joanna's body is continuously obstructed by vertical members and compressed into architectural frames smaller than the film's aspect ratio, both symbolizing her entrapment within both her home and the societal expectations of women to perform as perfect housewives that the Stepford community enforces. The two respatialized stills from *The Stepford Wives* highlight these framing strategies to further dissect their connection to broader critiques of feminine domestication raised in the film.

Throughout the film, Walter attempts to domesticate Joanna. He removes her from New York City, severing her from opportunities to continue practicing photography professionally. He isolates her in a silent idyll, making her solely responsible for taking care of their children and their new home while he commutes back into the city daily for work. Joanna resists Walter's taming of her spirit, she consistently tries to liberate herself from the role of housewife that both Walter and

Stepford have imposed onto her. Miranda Brady explains that "…[Joanna] insists she will never become an 'asking-to-be exploited patsy' like the 'hausfrau' who lives next door, she, like all the women around her in the suburbs, will become a Stepford wife… This seems to be a condemnation of marriage and the suburbs, which Friedan referred to as 'the comfortable concentration camp'…"[24] Joanna's failure to escape is the linchpin to the central feminist argument of both *The Stepford Wives* and the second wave of feminism in which the story was written, that the societally adopted expectation for women to perform as mothers, wives, and housekeepers simultaneously holds them prisoner to their homes.

Joanna's domestic incarceration by both her husband and the suburban social norms of the mid-20th Century embodied to their extreme by Stepford becomes architectural during a scene in which Joanna is preparing breakfast. Joanna volunteered to watch Bobbie's children for a weekend, filling her house to the brim with beings relying on her to care for them. A window into the kitchen frames Joanna as she flips pancakes for a tableful of children and her husband, all beckoning her to feed them faster.

The sizzling griddle, whistling kettle, barking dog, crying children, and shouting husband already make this scene tense via cacophony, but the narrowing of the frame in which Joanna is visible adds to the anxiety depicted. Joanna is flanked on all sides, sandwiched between the oven range and kitchen table, unable to move from her position in the space. Her body is bound to the kitchen not only by the spatial blockades in front of her, but also by their symbolic representation of

[24] Miranda J. Brady, "'I Think the Men Are Behind It': Reproductive Labour and the Horror of Second Wave Feminism." In *Mother Trouble: Mediations of White Maternal Angst after Second Wave Feminism* (University of Toronto Press, 2024), 33.

the restricted life of the housewife. Joanna not only *feels* entrapped by the domestic environment but also is architecturally restricted within it.

The framing of Joanna within a window frame also places the audience just beyond the threshold of the domestic world the Eberharts occupy, forcing a voyeuristic role upon us as viewers. We, in the framing of this scene, become no better than the men of Stepford, finding pleasure in watching Joanna complete domestic chores. We transform into the societal eye which surveils Joanna, making sure she performs like a perfect housewife and shaming her when she fails. We adopt the mindset of the patriarchy, the broader force which imprisons Joanna within her home. Pioneers of the second wave of feminism advocated against this ideological equating of ourselves with patriarchal masters:

> We want and have to say that we are all housewives, we are all prostitutes and we are all gay, because until we recognize our slavery we cannot recognize our struggle against it, because as long as we think we are something different than a housewife, we accept the logic of the master, which is a logic of division, and for us the logic of slavery.[25]

Silvia Federici, like Betty Friedan, recognized and critiqued the patriarchal ideals which exploited women's bodies as domestic laborers and incarcerated them within their own homes, slaves to their husbands and children because they had historically been expected to as housewives. The inherent voyeurism of the framing of Joanna's body within the kitchen window uses architecture to make us aware of the broader societal acceptance of patriarchal ideology. We see her from the point of view of the 'outside,' the masculine eye that aims to domesticate women by separating them from the world outside of suburbia.

[25] Silvia Federici, "Wages against Housework," 1974.

The multi-layered compaction and framing of Joanna's body within the kitchen and the window frame makes her domestication consequential not only of the patriarchal ideology present in Stepford, but also by the architecture she occupies. Another scene in which Joanna's imprisonment and exploitation as a housewife becomes architectural occurs when Joanna and Walter engage in a physical fight as she attempts to leave her domestic jail forever. Their tussle takes place on the main staircase of their home. The balustrade of the staircase in tandem with the upwards camera angle creates a foreboding image of a prison that Joanna is framed behind. Completely caged in visually and spatially, we understand that Joanna is being held against her will in her own home and will never escape so long as Walter is involved because "…Forbes therefore likens her escape from the house to a prison escape and Walter to her jailer."[26]

Walter, throughout the film, acts as Joanna's master, dictating every occurrence of her life in an attempt to tame her for his own benefit. He sees Joanna as an entity to be conquered, an object to make eternally beautiful, docile, and doting in service to him for his own personal gain. Walter ultimately succeeds, replacing an effervescent Joanna with a lifeless robot slave wife "Moreover, Joanna, through her death and replacement with a robot, will be "…no longer the biological offspring of a mother and father, but the product of a group of men… she represents all those women who are trapped by a feminine mystique that (in this case, literally) kills women."[27] By imprisoning and replacing Joanna,

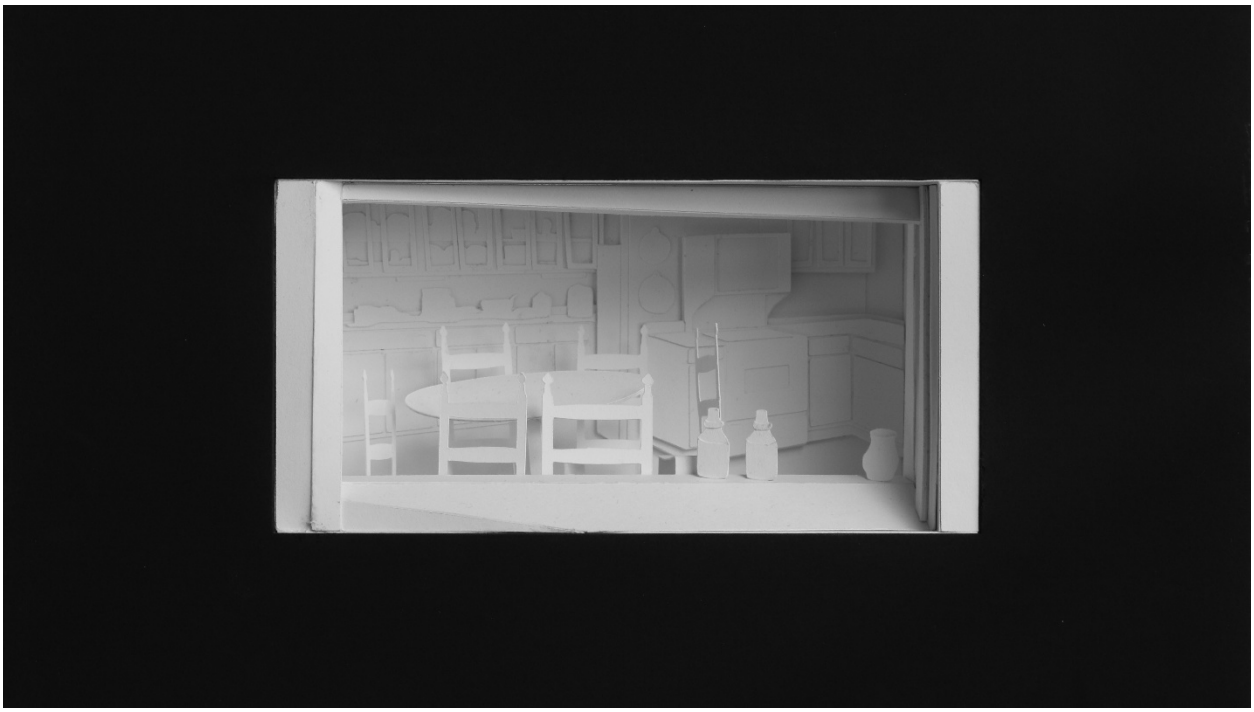
[26] Anna Krugovoy Silver, "The Cyborg Mystique: 'The Stepford Wives' and Second Wave Feminism," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 1/2 (2002): 67, JSTOR.

[27] Krugovy, "The Cyborg Mystique," 68.

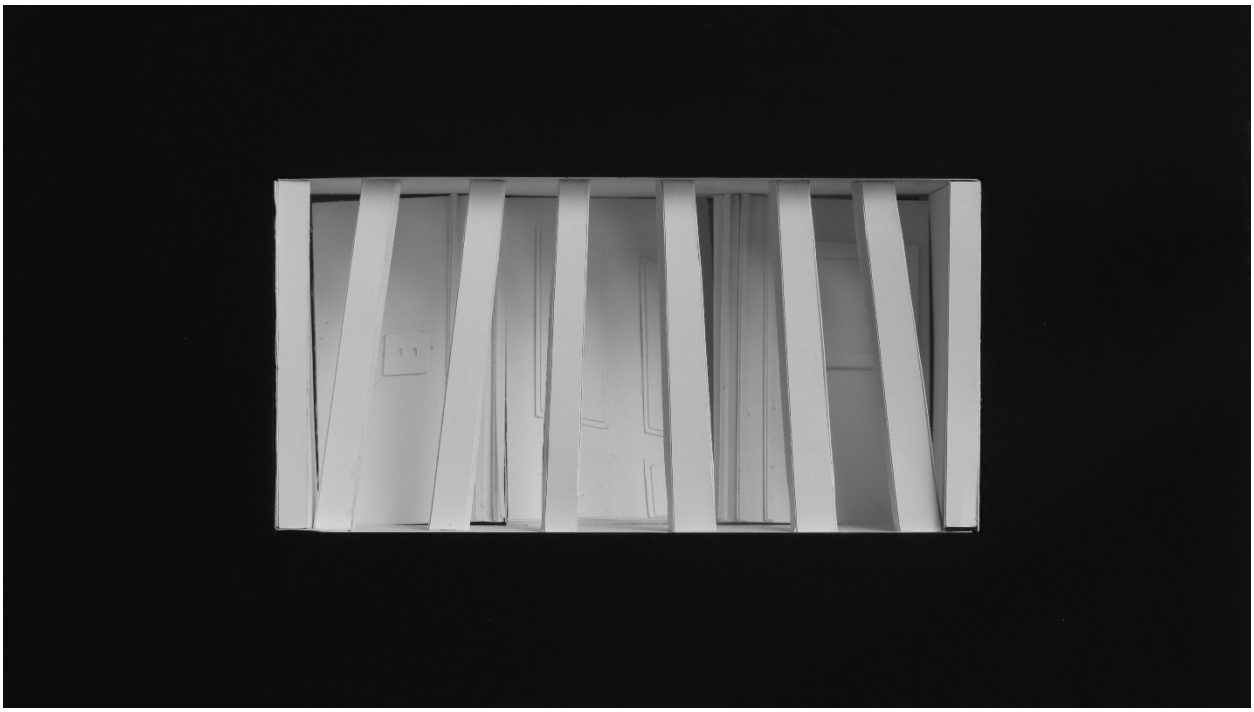
he keeps her subdued and forces her into the robotic role of housewife expected of women at the time, he domesticates her.

The framing of Joanna's body throughout the film represents her domestication as a product of both the patriarchal expectations of the Stepford community and the architecture she calls home. The metaphorical prison of life as a housewife becomes a spatial reality for Joanna in the ways the domestic spaces she occupies frame and constrict her body from escaping. The objectification, exploitation, and incarceration of Joanna's body architecturally stems from the patriarchal ideology adopted in the suburban dystopia of Stepford; an ideology which disadvantages and oppresses women by perpetually bounding them to interior lives as unpaid domestic laborers rather than as independent, autonomous beings equal to their husbands.

Storyboards



STEPFORD-WIVES_EBERHART-HOUSE_KITCHEN-5



STEPFORD-WIVES_EBERHART-HOUSE_STAIRCASE-2

***Parasite* (2019)**

Plot Summary

Parasite revolves around two families from Seoul, South Korea—the Kims and the Parks—and their reciprocal parasitic relationship. The Kim Family hails from Aheyon-dong, an impoverished and densely populated neighborhood in Seoul; they live in a banjiha, a semi-basement apartment that is a common housing typology in the area. As the Kims face job insecurity, the son of the Kim family, Ki-woo, is encouraged by his friend Min to take over his job as an English tutor for the daughter of the wealthy Park family by falsifying his educational records. Ki-woo, with the help of his sister Ki-jung, forges a transcript from the prestigious Yonsei University and secures the job.

The Park Family lives in Seongbuk-dong, an incredibly wealthy neighborhood in Seoul. When Ki-woo visits the Parks for his job interview, he learns of the naivety of Park Yeon-gyo, the mother of the family, and devises a plan to find jobs for all of his family members as domestic servants of the Parks. Ki-jung is hired as an 'art therapist' for the Parks' son Da-song, who has been traumatized after seeing a 'ghost' in the kitchen on his birthday the year prior. Ki-woo and Ki-jung work in tandem to frame Mr. Park's driver as a pervert and Moon-gwang, the Parks' housekeeper, as secretly suffering from tuberculosis to open new positions for their parents to find employment within the Parks' home. In this moment, the Kims and the Parks are both parasites; the Kims secretly invading the home of and relying on the Parks for financial stability and the Parks leeching off the domestic labor provided by the Kims to account for their own inability to take care of themselves.

The Kim Family captures a glimpse of the posh lifestyles of the Parks' while the family is away on a camping trip for Da-song's birthday, enjoying the lavish amenities their employers are accustomed to. The Kims' weekend of opulent relaxation is interrupted when Moon-gwang unexpectedly visits the Parks' mansion claiming to have forgotten something in the basement. Moon-gwang immediately runs to the basement pantry to reveal the entrance to a secret bunker built by the architect and former owner of the home. Her husband, Geun-sae has been living in the bunker for the duration of Moon-gwang's employment to the Park Family to hide from debt collectors; he was the 'ghost' seen by Da-song, leaving the bunker to steal food from the upper areas of the house. Moon-gwang tries to make a deal with Chung-sook to allow her husband to stay in the bunker, but the rest of the Kim Family tumbles into the bunker, revealing their secret familial connection, while eavesdropping on the negotiations. Moon-gwang and her husband instead decide to blackmail the Kim Family by threatening to reveal their duplicity to the Parks.

The Parks call the house, telling Chung-sook to start preparing dinner because the camping trip was cancelled due to a severe rainstorm. While Chung-sook frantically cooks, Ki-woo, Ki-jung, and Ki-taek destroy all evidence of their struggle with Moon-gwang and her husband, locking them in the bunker. Chung-sook serves dinner while her family hides under a table in the living room, later overhearing Mr. Park belittling Ki-taek's scent which he links to the impoverished area the Kims are from. Ki-woo, Ki-jung, and Ki-taek eventually flee from the Parks' mansion, but return home to their banjiha flooded with sewage water because of the rainstorm.

The following morning, Mrs. Park plans a surprise birthday party for Da-song to be held at their house, ordering Chung-sook and Ki-taek to work at the party and inviting Ki-woo and Ki-jung as guests. Upon returning to the Park residence, Ki-woo heads to the bunker to kill Geun-sae and Moon-gwang. He finds Moon-gwang already dead from the previous night's injuries and is incapacitated by Geun-sae before he can kill him. Geun-sae emerges from the bunker and stabs Ki-jung in front of the party guests, leading Da-song to seize upon seeing the 'ghost' again. Chung-sook kills Geun-sae with a metal skewer while Mr. Park begs Ki-taek to rush Da-song to the hospital. As Mr. Park approaches Geun-sae, he holds his nose, provoking Ki-taek to kill him after remembering the comments Mr. Park made about his own scent the night before; Ki-taek escapes without a trace.

Ki-woo survives his injuries and discovers that he and his mother have been convicted of fraud upon regaining consciousness weeks after the birthday party. Ki-jung passed away and Ki-taek still has not been found. Ki-woo, now enlightened to the existence of the bunker, watches the Parks' home after they move out hoping to find evidence that his father is still alive. He eventually observes morse code messages emanating from light fixtures in the house from his father, revealing that he has been hiding in the bunker since the events of Da-song's birthday party. Ki-woo writes a letter to his father in response, promising to earn enough money to lift himself and his mother out of poverty through the purchase of the Parks' old home, liberating his father in the process.

Selected Stills Analysis

In *Parasite*, the architectural framing of bodies represents the oppression of the Kim Family under capitalist economic structures which restrict them to lives as domestic laborers in the home of their employer and in their own home. In this film, the definition of 'feminine body' extends to Ki-taek and Ki-woo because of their employment as domestic laborers, a profession historically reserved for women and gendered as feminine as discussed previously. In South Korea, "Girls and women aged 15 or older spent about two hours and 26 minutes on housework in 2019, about 3.6 times longer than men who devoted 41 minutes, according to the Seoul gender statistics report on residents' work-life balance;"[28] Within the broad class commentary presented in *Parasite* lies an equally as important discussion about the gender disparity in housework responsibility, especially for women who are also employed as housekeepers of the upper class, and the capacity of architecture to symbolize this oppressive divide. Ki-taek and Chung-sook's bodies are viewed through prison-like grates and slivers of compressed space in the film, framing their bodies as stuck and restricted to spaces in which they can perform domestic labor tasks.

The establishing shot of the film cements the framing capacity of architecture as paramount to its argument on class disparity in South Korea by depicting the grim reality of the Kim family's living arrangement. They live in a small, cluttered semi-basement apartment with one primary large horizontal window in the main living space. This window is the Kim family's only view of the outside world, but because their

[28] Hyun-ju Ock, "Seoul women spend nearly four times longer than men on housework: report." *The Korea Herald*, January 20, 2021. https://www.koreaherald.com/article/2542206.

apartment is partially underground, it only frames a small portion of the street beyond their living quarters. Through this window, the family regularly argues with a man who relieves himself on the stairs into their apartment, emphasizing the lack of respect and unawareness others have for the lives of the impoverished in Seoul.

The window multiple screen layers comprise the window unit—the window panes, a tattered bug screen, and a metal security grate, further restricting the Kims' view out of their apartment. Symbolically, this restricted view represents the inaccessible version of Seoul the Kims are barred from because of their economic background. The poverty they face firmly places them below ground, always looking up at a partial image of a 'better' life. Ki-taek is framed behind these screens at the beginning of the film, visually imprisoning him within his home and the impoverished conditions he lives under. The downwards angle of this still recreates the perspective of an outsider, looking down on Ki-taek, the Kims, and their living conditions. The camera and its framing of Ki-taek situates audience members as other residents of Seoul, viewing the economic struggle of the Kims with contempt and an air of superiority; after all, we as the audience are physically placed above the Kims in this scene.

The window which frames and imprisons Ki-taek and his family directly juxtaposes a window in the home of the Parks. While the screens and obstructed views in and out of the Kims' window architecturally represents their entrapment within a system of patriarchal capitalism which devalues household labor and service industry jobs because they are women-dominated fields. The large horizontal window in the living room of the Parks' modernist, concrete compound is unobstructed, framing a perfect landscape planted within their backyard. Each window in *Parasite* frames a

view into the outside world, but the Kims' window depicts a real, ever-changing view of their environment, while the Park's window frames an artificial landscape which shields them from the city they live in. The juxtaposition of the views framed in these windows, despite their similar shapes, highlights *Parasite*'s commentary upon the blindness of the wealthy class to the circumstances of the working-class world around them, even as they welcome working-class individuals into their home to aid in the education of their children and daily household chores, relieving the wealthy of their domestic duties while adding more labor responsibility into the lives of the impoverished Kim family. No matter which domestic space the Kim family occupies, they are unable to escape the constriction and exploitation of domestic labor, caged in by their own apartment. Conversely, the Parks' access to capital allows for them to lead indolent and ignorant lives, unaware of the privilege they hold in relation to the conditions of the reality of the world outside of their home.

Chung-sook, the matriarch of the Kim family, in particular is unable to break free of domestic labor responsibilities; the framing of her body within a compressed doorway makes this restraint architectural. During the film, Chung-sook is seen cleaning a rock, framed within the entry threshold and corridor of the family's banjiha. Even though she is at home, she is unable to escape domestic labor; Chung-sook is still expected to cook and clean for her family because of her role as a mother despite the fact that she is also employed as a housekeeper for the Parks to provide for her family economically. Furthermore, the space dedicated to Chung-sook's housework at home is minimal at best (in this instance needing to leave the bounds of the apartment to clean the rock properly),

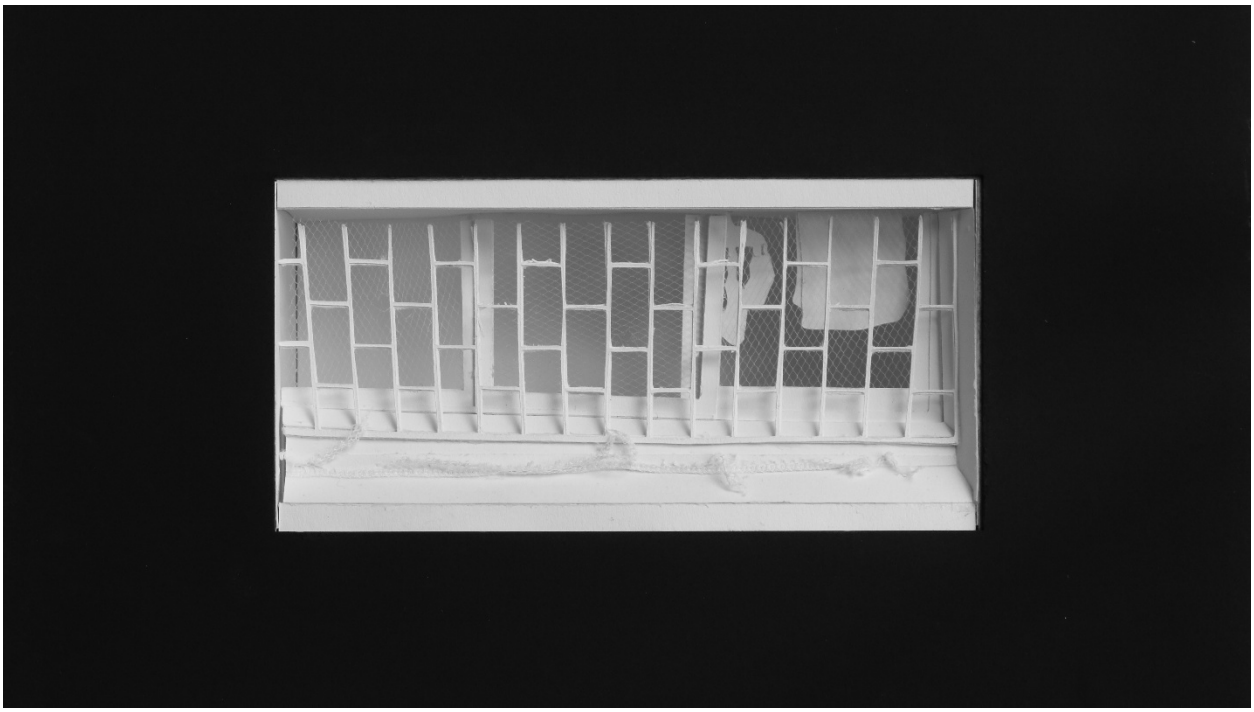
again emphasizing the architecturally restrictive nature of domestic labor required of women and people in more 'feminine' lines of work.

Chung-sook becomes an object within the threshold of her home, a woman and mother commodified by the wealthy and her own family as a way for them to escape from domestic labor themselves. Miranda Brady emphasizes that the delegitimization of motherhood as a profession deserving of a wage, a critique shared with the second wave of feminism, stems from capitalist structures which value laborers in industry over laborers who sustain human life[29], in this example mothers.

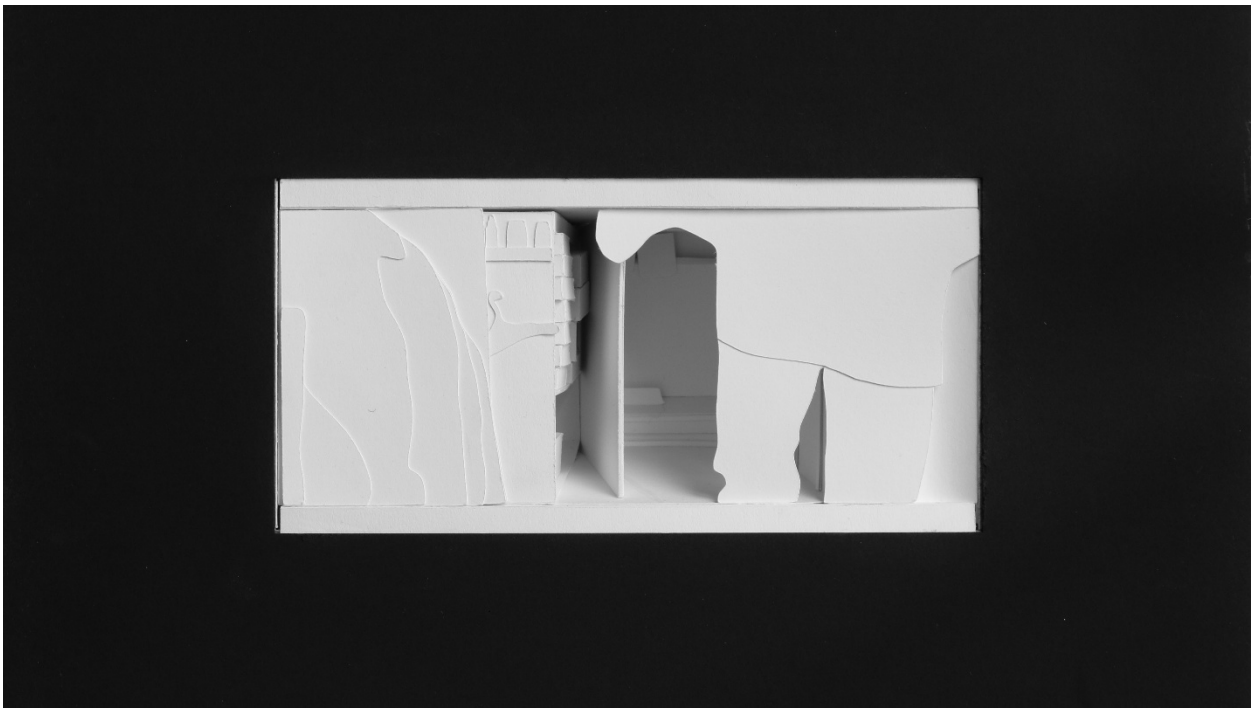
Chung-sook and her family are victims of capitalist structures and the patriarchal ideology embedded within them. To support themselves financially, they seek employment outside of their home as domestic laborers for the Park family, but because of the devaluation of housework as a legitimate line of work, the Kims are unable to escape poverty and domestic labor at home, all of which is symbolized by the architectural framing of their bodies as imprisoned and constricted within the domestic realm.

[29] Miranda J Brady, "A Long Way from Liberation." *In Mother Trouble: Mediations of White Maternal Angst after Second Wave Feminism*, (University of Toronto Press, 2024), 100.

Storyboards



PARASITE_KIM-BANJIHA_WINDOW-3



PARASITE_KIM-BANJIHA_HALLWAY-2

Mean Girls **(2004)**

Plot Summary

Cady Heron, 16 years old, has been homeschooled until her junior year of high school. Her and her family have recently moved back to Evanston, Illinois, an affluent suburb of Chicago, after living in Africa for the past twelve years. *Mean Girls* follows Cady through her first year at North Shore High School as she encounters American teenage girlhood and social cliques for the first time. Cady struggles to make friends on her first day but ultimately meets and befriends Janis and Damian, two other outcasts who outline North Shore's ecosystem of popularity to Cady. They warn her to steer clear of 'The Plastics,' led by Regina George, a callous queen bee who rules over the dynamics of the school.

Regina unexpectedly invites Cady to join her and the other 'Plastics', Karen Smith and Gretchen Wieners. Despite her initial apprehension, Janis and Damian encourage Cady to remain friends with the group to gain intel on the inner workings of Regina and her friends, especially because Janis claims that Regina "...ruined [her] life;" Cady agrees. During her calculus class, Cady meets Aaron Samuels and is immediately infatuated with him. She confesses her new crush to Gretchen at lunch the next day and is advised to stay away from Aaron because he is Regina's ex-boyfriend; Regina learns about Cady's crush and tells her that she no longer cares about Aaron and that Cady is free to pursue him.

After a visit to the mall, The Plastics indoctrinate Cady by showing her their 'Burn Book,' a diary-esque journal in which they write scathing critiques of their classmates and teachers. As she grows closer to The Plastics, she is invited to join them at a Halloween party. Regina offers

to talk to Aaron on Cady's behalf at the party but instead kisses him and rekindles their romance. Cady, feeling betrayed, decides to sabotage Regina with the help of Janis and Damian.

Cady learns from the social manipulation techniques of The Plastics and uses them to create conflict amongst the other girls in her favor. Gretchen reveals that Regina has been cheating on Aaron, allowing Cady to break up their relationship so that she can pursue him herself. She also preys on Regina's own insecurities about her already thin figure and gives her Kalteen bars, a high-calorie protein bar from Sweden, under the guise that they are weight-loss inducing. As Regina begins to gain weight and become distraught over her body image, she wears sweatpants to school, breaking the dress code she set for The Plastics. Regina is excommunicated from the clique, leaving Cady as the leader of the two other girls.

Cady hosts a party while her parents are out of town at which she admits that she's been lying to him about needing calculus tutoring in order to spend more time with him. Aaron delivers a sharp wake-up call to Cady, she has become no different from Regina, manipulating everyone around her to get her way. Janis and Damian ridicule Cady for throwing a party instead of going to Janis' art show, endorsing Aaron's claims that she has become 'plastic' herself.

Regina discovers that Cady has been sabotaging her and devises a plot to pin the writing of the Burn Book onto Cady. Regina litters images of the book's contents through the halls of North Shore High School, instigating fights amongst the student body. The junior girls are gathered into the school's gymnasium and encouraged to either take responsibility for writing the Burn Book or discuss the toxic social dynamics between

themselves. Janis confesses to plotting against Regina to the other female students' chagrin, making Regina flee. Cady follows her, attempting to apologize, but is interrupted as Regina is struck by a bus in front of the school.

Cady takes responsibility for writing the entirety of the Burn Book, becoming an outcast again. After purposely failing calculus to spend time with Aaron, Cady joins the Mathletes to earn extra credit to remedy her grade. She leads the team to winning the state championship and they attend the Spring Fling, a school dance, together. At the dance, Cady is crowned Spring Fling despite the turmoil she instigated. She atones for her past actions and breaks the crown she is given, emphasizing that its "just plastic" and amends her relationship with Aaron. Regina and the other Plastics find peace through ridding themselves of spiteful clique dynamics by finding friends and other outlets that allow them to be themselves.

Selected Still Analysis

Regina George is objectified and sexualized by the frame produced by the silhouette of her mother's body and the doorway into her bathroom as she gets ready for the Halloween party in *Mean Girls*, architecturally representing her restriction to a role of complacency within patriarchy as a white woman who benefits from the oppression of others. Regina's mother, similar to Bambi and Thumper in *Diamonds are Forever*, is objectified past interpretation as human, she is simply a figure that further frames Regina within the center of the camera's view. Mrs. George is also complacent within systemic patriarchy; she benefits from the preferential treatment

of white women and the expectation that they be domesticated stay-at-home mothers while their masters (husbands) earn a wage to support their households. Mrs. George is no more than a house bunny, a means of sexually reproducing the next generation, Regina and her younger sister, to perpetuate white male hegemony over their suburban domain.

Mrs. George pushes Regina to sexualize herself in her adolescence, encouraging her to have sex with her boyfriend and to dress as a Playboy bunny for Halloween. The framing of Regina between her mother's body and the architecture of her bedroom, uncoincidentally the master bedroom of the George's mansion, represents her constraining between maternal influence, adolescent innocence, and patriarchal master ideology.

In western cultural spheres, women are either angelic Madonnas or whores, there exists no morally ambiguous space for women to occupy with no external scrutiny. Mrs. George's framing of Regina precariously thrusts her adolescent daughter towards sluttiness; she wants her daughter to be attractive because she knows that in her sexualization and objectification, Regina holds power over her social circle because she is more appealing to men and reaps more benefits from misogynistic, patriarchal ideology. Mrs. George's raising and framing of her daughter juxtaposes the traditional domestic education of young women. In England and the United States, many teenage girls were enrolled in 'home science' courses at schools and universities, studying "…cookery, laundry work, needlework, housewifery, applied science, hygiene, economics and 'home problems.'"[30] These educational opportunities were designed for young women who were destined for housework, preparing them for the

[30] Ann Oakley, "Teaching Girls about Housework." In *The Science of Housework: The Home and Public Health, 1880-1940,* 1st ed., (Bristol University Press, 2024), 32.

domesticated, interior lives men expected from them as 'pure' women, 'angels in the home.' The objectification of Regina's body via framing by her mother exemplifies the 21st Century iteration of home science training for the upper class. Instead of teaching Regina how to cook and clean, her mother teaches her how to pose and present herself as an object of male desire because their economic privilege liberates them from all conventional domestic labor tasks. Now, their housework becomes solely sexual, their role is to reproduce the next generation; in teaching Regina how to seduce, her mother prepares her for contemporary life as a housewife where her value is directly tied to her youth, attractiveness, and child-bearing abilities. The compression of Regina's body within the frame of the camera as a result of her mother's body makes this generational adherence to patriarchal dogma spatial. Regina George is physically objectified in the space that equates her to a patriarchal master and by the most important feminine influence in her life, her mother.

Regina, in her occupation of the master suite, adopts the role of patriarch in the household, reigning over her parents and friends from the most powerful space in the home. Throughout the film, Regina exploits her friends into believing that the men around them are the sources of their anguish, when in reality she is the one orchestrating the social conflict between all of the main characters through her writing of the "Burn Book." In doing so, Regina attempts to absolve herself of all responsibility of the misogyny-laden diary she creates, blaming its ideological content on women of color and men. bell hooks highlights this repudiation responsibility as common amongst white women in the real world when confronted with issues of sexism, racism, and classism:

> Male supremacist ideology encourages women to believe we are valueless and obtain value only by relating to or bonding with men. We are taught that our relationships with one another diminish rather than enrich our experience. We are taught that women are 'natural' enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another.[31]

Rather than recognizing the privilege afforded to them by association with white men, white women would rather play the role of victim, ignoring their role in the oppression of women of color through their complacency and comfort under patriarchy, claiming that the power men hold over them is still oppressive despite the fact that women of color are demonized and dehumanized while white women are still mortal in the eyes of men.

The interior fashioning of Regina's bathroom also frames her as a product and commodity of patriarchal ideology and wealth. Regina is framed by an opulent, marble bathtub fitted out with decorative ionic columns, reminiscent of interiors of 18th Century France. At that time, French interiors "…[were] an apparatus that produced performances of sociability in accordance with culturally specific ideals of cultivated behavior. It was… an arena for a complex and paradoxical enterprise that… became a key means of defining elite cultural reality."[32] Furniture at the time was used as a means of defining appropriate social behaviors in the home, encouraging lounging, indolence, and egocentrism in the upper classes by creating spaces tailored to personal comfort, pampering, and opulence; Regina's bedroom and bathroom are no different. The luxury which surrounds Regina's body in the selected still all serves the purpose of the cleansing of her body and her physical appearance. Maintaining her

[31] bell hooks, *Political Solidarity between Women* (1984), 293.
[32] Mimi Hellman. "Furniture, Sociability, and the Work of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century France." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, no. 4 (1999): 437-8, JSTOR.

attractive, young appearance is another way in which she makes herself appealing to men, and as long as she is an object of male desire, she will hold power over the other beings in her life.

In sum, the perfected central framing of Regina's body as she gets ready for the Halloween party suspends her within a web of conflicting patriarchal dictations of acceptable feminine behavior. Historically, women were expected to be docile, domesticated, flawless housewives ever dedicated to their husband's comfort and pleasure. Contemporarily, wealthy women like Regina and her mother have increasingly faced domestic objectification and sexualization as capital relieves them of domestic labor. Regina, then, is first framed between maintaining her youth and becoming a hyper-sexual vision of patriarchal desire. Additionally, Regina's occupation of and compression within the master bedroom of her family's home spatializes her adoption of a 'master' mentality. She has become the most powerful person in her household because of the space she lives in and exerts her authoritarian, patriarchal, master privilege over not only her family, but also her friends as she manipulates them to achieve all of her desires and total hegemony over all of her social circles throughout the film.

Storyboards

MEAN-GIRLS_GEORGE-MANSION_REGINAS-BATHROOM-4

***The Substance* (2024)**

Plot Summary

Elisabeth Sparkle is a former A-list, Academy Award winning actress living in Los Angeles. She has hosted *Sparkle Your Life*, a dance-aerobics exercise television program since the beginning of her career, but on her fiftieth birthday, she is unexpectedly ousted from her show. Harvey, the producer of the show, exclaims to someone over the phone that Elisabeth is 'too old,' a conversation that she accidentally overhears. Elisabeth, shattered and frenzied, crashes her car on her way home from the production studio, distracted by a billboard advertisement for her show already being taken down.

While at the hospital after the accident, Elisabeth is given a flash drive by a nurse with 'THE SUBSTANCE' written on it. At home, she watches the contents of the drive, learning about the black-market drug guaranteeing the creation of a "younger, more beautiful, more perfect" version of the user, the only caveat being that the two consciousnesses must switch every seven days, no exceptions, because in actuality they are two parts of one being. Elisabeth places an order for The Substance, despondent after the cancellation of her show and collects the first dose from a remote warehouse in the outskirts of Los Angeles. After injecting The Substance for the first time, a second, younger body crawls out of her spine. The younger being, Sue, connects Elisabeth to the IV drip food package provided in The Substance Starter Kit, stitches the gash in Elisabeth's back, and extracts 'stabilizer fluid', injected into Sue daily to sustain her life, from Elisabeth's spine.

Sue auditions to replace Elisabeth on the aerobics show and receives the part, becoming an adored star overnight and eventually being offered the role of hosting the network's New Year's Eve Show by Harvey. During one of her weeks conscious, Sue discovers an empty space beyond the bathroom in her and Elisabeth's apartment and transforms it into a secret self-imprisonment dungeon, dragging Elisabeth's body into its darkness for storage during her cycle. Sue lives hedonistically during her weeks while Elisabeth slips deeper into isolation, reclusion, and self-hatred. Sue eventually abuses the stabilizer fluid, extracting more from Elisabeth's spine to prolong her consciousness for a few more hours while she was hosting a man she hoped to have sex with.

When Elisabeth regains consciousness after Sue's stabilizer misuse, she discovers that her index finger has begun to age exponentially faster than the rest of her body. She contacts The Substance and they inform her that abuse of stabilizer by the younger self causes rapid, permanent aging in the 'matrix' the original body. The two consciousnesses develop feelings of hatred and bitterness towards each other as they continue to see each other as independent spirits. Elisabeth binge eats during her weeks 'on' which disgusts Sue while Elisabeth's self-loathing grows because of Sue's persistent abuse of stabilizer and disregard of their switching schedule. When Sue wakes up to the apartment in utter disarray, she decides to extract as much stabilizer from Elisabeth's body as she can and refuses to switch again.

On the night before the New Year's Eve Show, Sue discovers that she has run out of stabilizer fluid. Desperate, she calls The Substance; they inform her that she must switch with Elisabeth to regenerate the stabilizer fluid. Sue finally switches and when Elisabeth wakes up, she

discovers that she has become her worst fear: a hairless, hunchbacked, elderly woman. Elisabeth elects to terminate Sue to avoid aging any further, but in the process of injecting Sue with the terminator fluid, realizes that she still desires the fame and adoration Sue was able to accrue by taking her former job. Elisabeth resuscitates Sue before delivering the whole vial of terminator fluid and once conscious, Sue realizes that Elisabeth had tried to kill her. The two consciousnesses fight, ending with Sue killing Elisabeth and departing to fulfill her duties as host of the New Year's Show.

Sue begins to lose her teeth without any stabilizer left to inject and out of desperation, injects the rest of the original Substance fluid despite it being advertised as single use only to create a new version of herself for the show. A mutilated amalgamation of herself and Elisabeth emerges instead, named Monstro Elisasue. Monstro Elisasue dons a mask of Elisabeth's face and returns to the production studio to host the New Year's Show. The audience is frightened by the monster and decapitates her, but like a Greek Hydra, grows an even more grotesque head and floods the studio with blood from one of her broken arms. Elisasue runs from the studio and during her escape, implodes on herself, dispelling blood and organs. Elisabeth's fifty-year-old face emerges from the wreckage and slithers to her star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, smiling as she dissolves into a slimy puddle of blood, cleaned by a custodian the following morning.

Selected Stills Analysis

Throughout *The Substance*, domestic architecture serializes the framing of Elisabeth Sparkle and Sue's bodies, othering their bodies in space from every angle. The design of monotonous, uniformly flattening, compacting, and episodic frames produce readings of Elisabeth Sparkle and Sue as objectified, commodified, isolated, and contained bodies within their own home while also crafting a spatial language of representing the critique of patriarchal beauty standards and the treatment of the feminine body in media present in the film.

Elisabeth and Sue's bathroom epitomizes the film's critique of feminine self-loathing encouraged by a societal adoption of patriarchal misogyny in its design. The bathroom is sterile. Stark white, perfectly square tile covers every surface of the space. Aside from the living room, the bathroom is the largest space in the apartment, giving it hierarchical importance in Elisabeth and Sue's lives. The bathroom in *The Substance* acts as Elisabeth and Sue's personal lab, an uninviting environment in which they can endlessly dissect their appearance in the mirror against the neutralized white void that envelops them.

This monotony of the surface treatment in the bathroom already frames the women's bodies within a non-descript vacuum of self-loathing, but the addition of a secondary frame—the mirror—adds to the framing of the feminine body within an exploitative lens. Through their scrutiny of their bodies in the mirror, Sue and Elisabeth reproduce the patriarchal equating of a woman's beauty with her worth. John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* emphasizes that this behavior is engrained into the cultural feminine psyche:

> She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another.[33]

Elisabeth creates Sue because she has been told by both the men in her life and herself that her aging body no longer has societal worth because she no longer fits the youthful, Hollywood beauty standards for women.

As they occupy the bathroom, Sue and Elisabeth are often naked, viewing and critiquing every inch of their bodies. Their vanity is destructive, leading themselves to self-imprisonment within their bathroom later in the film. The selected still in which Elisabeth analyzes her appearance in the bathroom mirror also references the fine art tradition of depicting Vanity as a naked feminine figure as a means of chastising women's 'self-absorption.' Berger again describes this practice:

> You painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her, you put a mirror in her hand and you called the painting Vanity, thus morally condemning the woman whose nakedness you had depicted for your own pleasure. The real function of the mirror was otherwise. It was to make the woman connive in treating herself as, first and foremost, a sight.[34]

Elisabeth becomes Vanity, judging whether her body is sightly enough to the men who dictate her commercial success as a Hollywood actor. The framing of this particular still also places us as audience members in the role of the masculine voyeur. Elisabeth is not only frames within the view of the bathroom mirror, but also within the further compacted frame of the

[33] Berger, "Chapter 3."
[34] Berger, "Chapter 3."

doorway into the space, juxtaposing the white, sterile bathroom with the darkness of the hallway where the camera is positioned. Elisabeth's body is thus framed and objectified twice, once by herself in the mirror, and again by the camera and audience beyond the bathroom. Not only is Elisabeth practicing vanity through the personal, internal scrutiny of her own body, but we are the societal expectations depicting her body as nude object rather than as a naked human. She transforms her body into a nude image for herself through her dissection and unhappiness with her appearance, all done so through the architectural framing of her body as an object against a spatial void.

Elisabeth's body is further objectified architecturally in a still capturing her as she sits at her kitchen table. The episodic, consecutive, serial framing of space and feminine bodies in this still represents the constant and multilayered framing and exploitation of Elisabeth and Sue by themselves, the Hollywood entertainment industry, and the patriarchal ideology that governs their careers and lives. Elizabeth is framed against the blank, white kitchen wall, then, a large photo of Elisabeth in her living room is seen through a puncture in the wall of the kitchen. In the photo, Elisabeth is wearing her costume for her recently cancelled exercise show *Pump It Up,* an outfit that further objectifies her body in its minimal covering of her body. Framed through a second puncture in the kitchen wall and the large, 16:9 cinematic window in the living room is a billboard advertising Sue's new show, *Sparkle Your Life,* Elisabeth's replacement.

Both Elisabeth and Sue have been exploited as objects and commodities by the Hollywood entertainment system. They have been used as a means of visual pleasure to broad audiences and economic gain for the

men presiding over their commercial success, but are easily replaced by an even younger, more attractive, more 'worthy' woman as soon as they cease to bring success to their male Hollywood overlords. They can't escape the result of their commodification. It follows them home and is visible from every corner of their apartment. The billboard ad and poster are quasi-mirrors, taunting Elisabeth with the beauty she 'once had' and the success Sue has achieved, leaving her worthless in the eyes of the men once in charge of her career. This enveloping by images of Elisabeth's own body again connects to the writing of John Berger:

> Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.[35]

Elisabeth is surrounded by objectified and exploited images of her own body and her 'more valuable' replacement, Sue. The architecture of her apartment exacerbates the self-loathing she feels by framing her body as an image to be surveyed by the societal misogynist engrained within her psyche by the men presiding over her life.

The psychological impact of Elisabeth and Sue's diffidence is most dramatic in the final selected still from *The Substance.* Sue finds herself surrounded by a mess of Elisabeth's gluttony resulting from her declining mental state. Plates of half-eaten food litter the living room and Elisabeth has fully blocked out the window in the space with yellowing newspaper. The uniformity of the disorder around Sue frames her body within a void, similar to the strategy implemented in the design of the

[35] Berger, "Chapter 3."

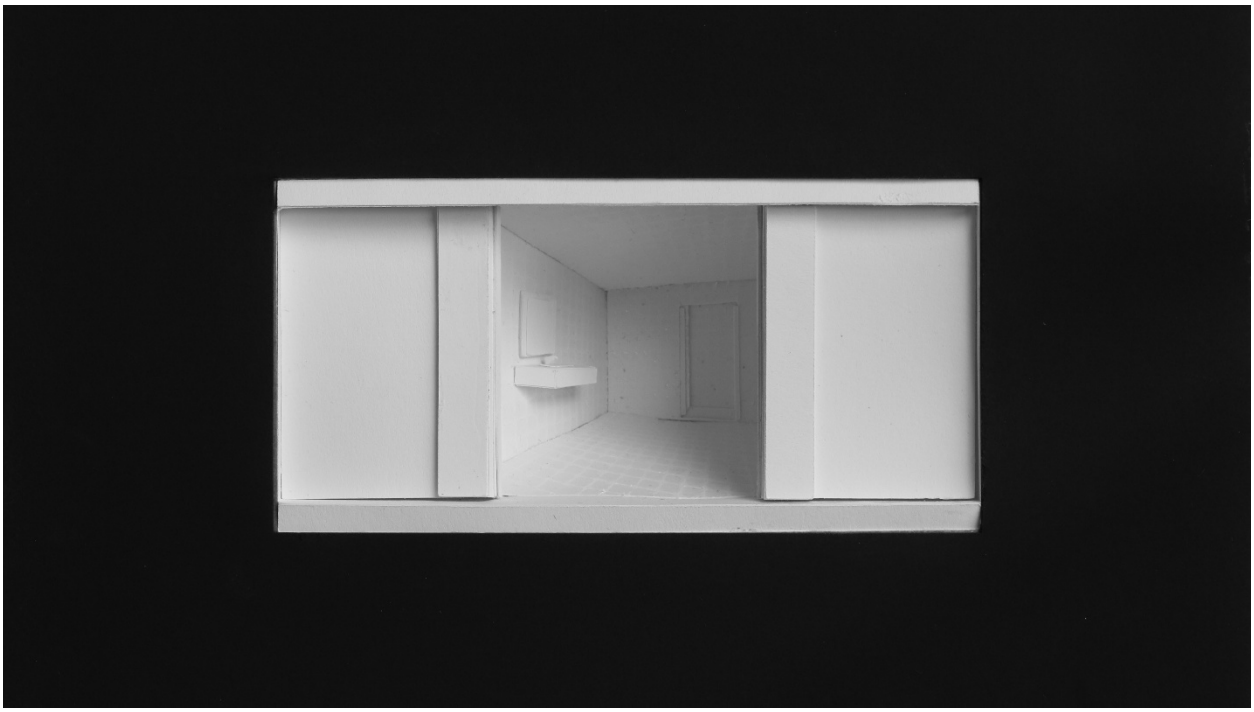
bathroom in their apartment. Elisabeth's sense of worthlessness has become all-encompassing at this point and Sue is flanked on all sides by its spatial manifestation. Sue herself is disgusted by Elisabeth's littering of their home, mirroring Elisabeth's own feelings about herself and her aging body. The misogynistic standards she has been held to for her entire career have thrust Elisabeth into a deep depression. She self-sabotages, she imprisons herself, she no longer cares for her body and its health because she, like the men in her life, view it as worthless now that she is older. Elisabeth's madness effectively domesticates her, entrapping her within a space with no external contact. When writing about *The Stepford Wives,* but still applicable to *The Substance,* Samantha Lindop describes the historical origins of restraining mental anguish to the domestic realm:

> Instead of confinement and brutality, behaviour was organised around surveillance and judgement, guilt and self-consciousness. As long as inmates restrained themselves, were agreeable, and did not break the rules (things that all require awareness about one own madness) they would not be subject to constraint.[36]

Elisabeth practices self-restraint, reinforced by her consciousness of the misogynistic beauty standards she is constantly held to by herself and the Production Company she used to work for. Throughout the film, Elisabeth and Sue represent both surveyor and surveyed woman, the two parts of this psyche molder by patriarchy, both repressed and constrained by the societal expectations of themselves as women and spatially restricted in their domestic space through the way it objectifies their bodies.

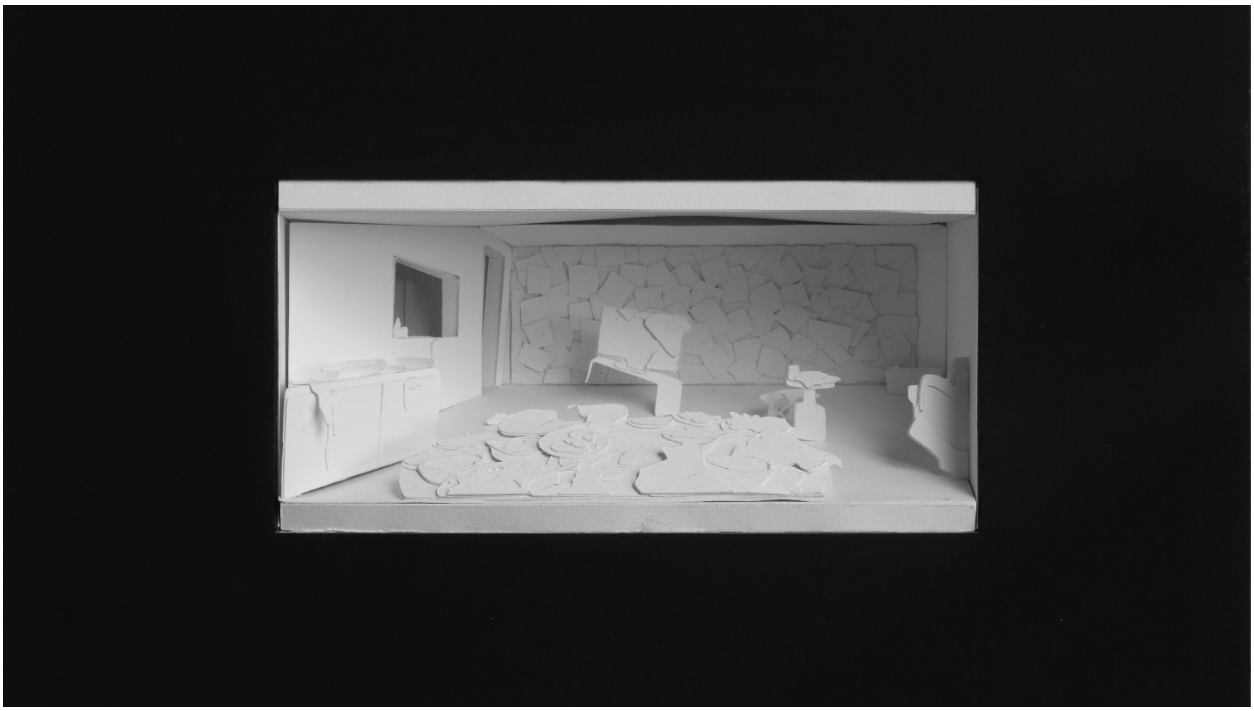
[36] Samantha Lindop, "The Stepford Wives and Liberal Feminism." In *The Stepford Wives*, (Liverpool University Press, 2022), 78.

Storyboards



THE-SUBSTANCE_ELISABETH-SPARKLES-APARTMENT_BATHROOM-8

THE-SUBSTANCE_ELISABETH-SPARKLES-APARTMENT_KITCHEN-3



THE-SUBSTANCE ELISABETH-SPARKLES-APARTMENT LIVING-ROOM-6

The Archive of The Architecture of The Feminine Body in Contemporary Film

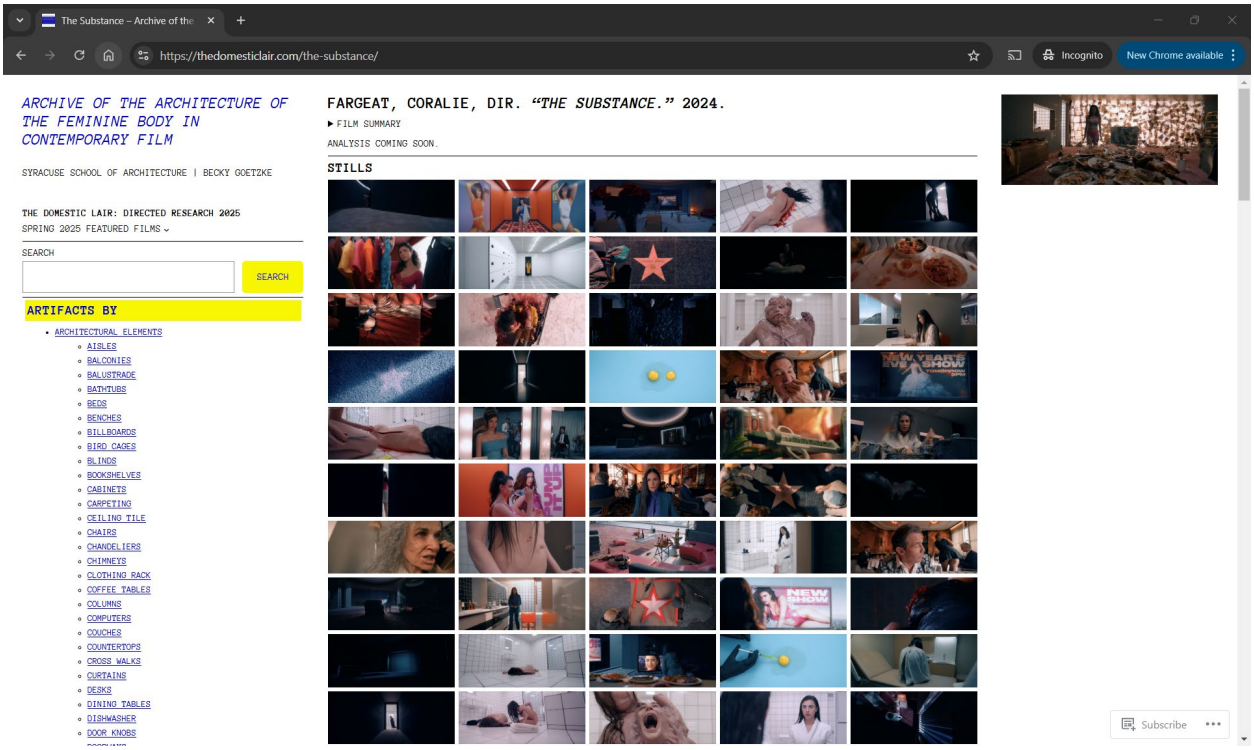
The Archive of The Architecture of The Feminine Body in Contemporary Film compiles over 350 film stills and other cinematic artifacts from the five films given analytical precedence in the project. The result is a categorized body of knowledge that documents the historical methods of set design which exemplify the spatial objectification of women via the framing of their bodies within space. The five films which comprise The Archive's contents currently were selected for both their narrative and architectural content as discussed previously in this Thesis. Each movie depicts a story of the spatial and psychological effects of domestication and commodification upon women. They each depict the domestic realm as a space of inner turmoil and strife rather than respite, directly contrasting the pastoral, soft, and nurturing depictions of feminine domesticity engineered by men like Robert Kerr. While this stage of the research focuses on the framing of the feminine body, the infrastructure of The Archive was designed to facilitate future explorations into and documentation of how cinema depicts women as they occupy space and films with different thematic and narrative foci.

Each of the five films was given its own page where all relevant stills, scenes, summaries, and analytical writing find a consolidated home. Each still image archived was further organized within a categorical framework that groups the archival material by decade, film, architectural element, filming location, and more; these categories are accessible and searchable via the side navigation of the archive web page.

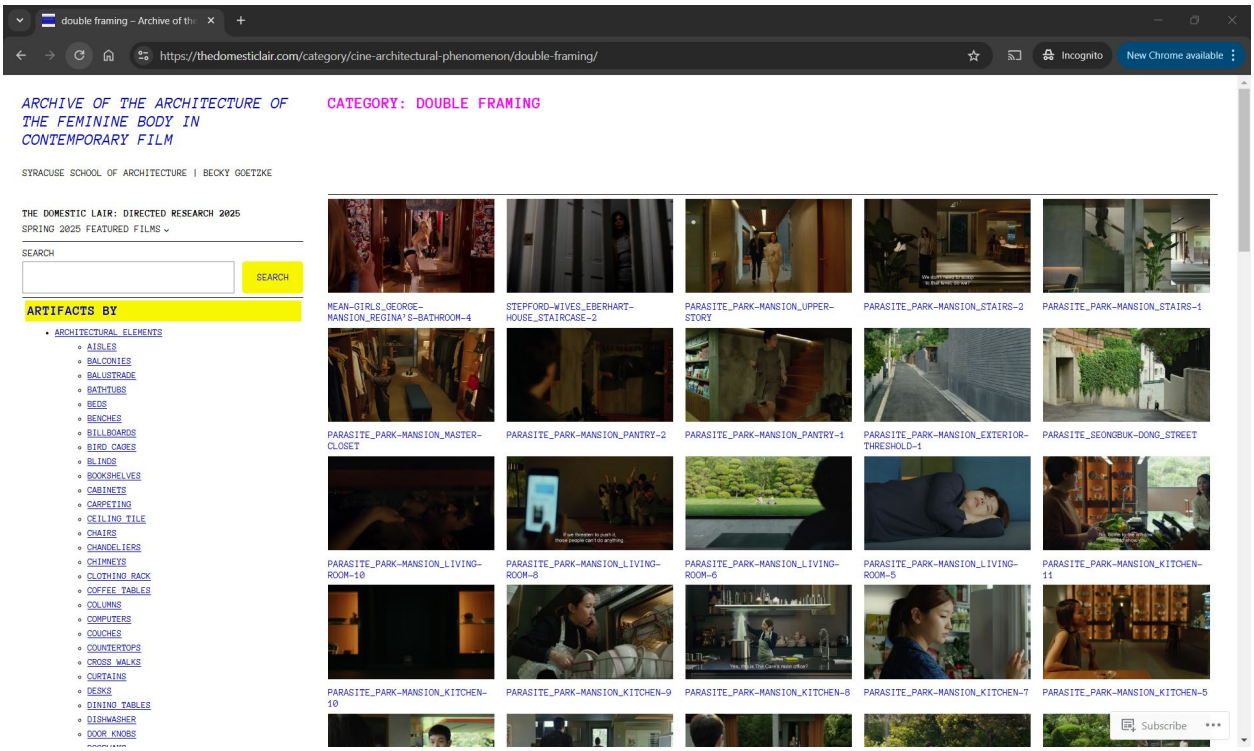
As an extension of the goal of The Archive to record and inform a larger audience of the architectural objectification of the feminine body in film, a public screening series was also organized and hosted at Slocum Hall, the home of Syracuse University's School of Architecture.

Archive Home Page

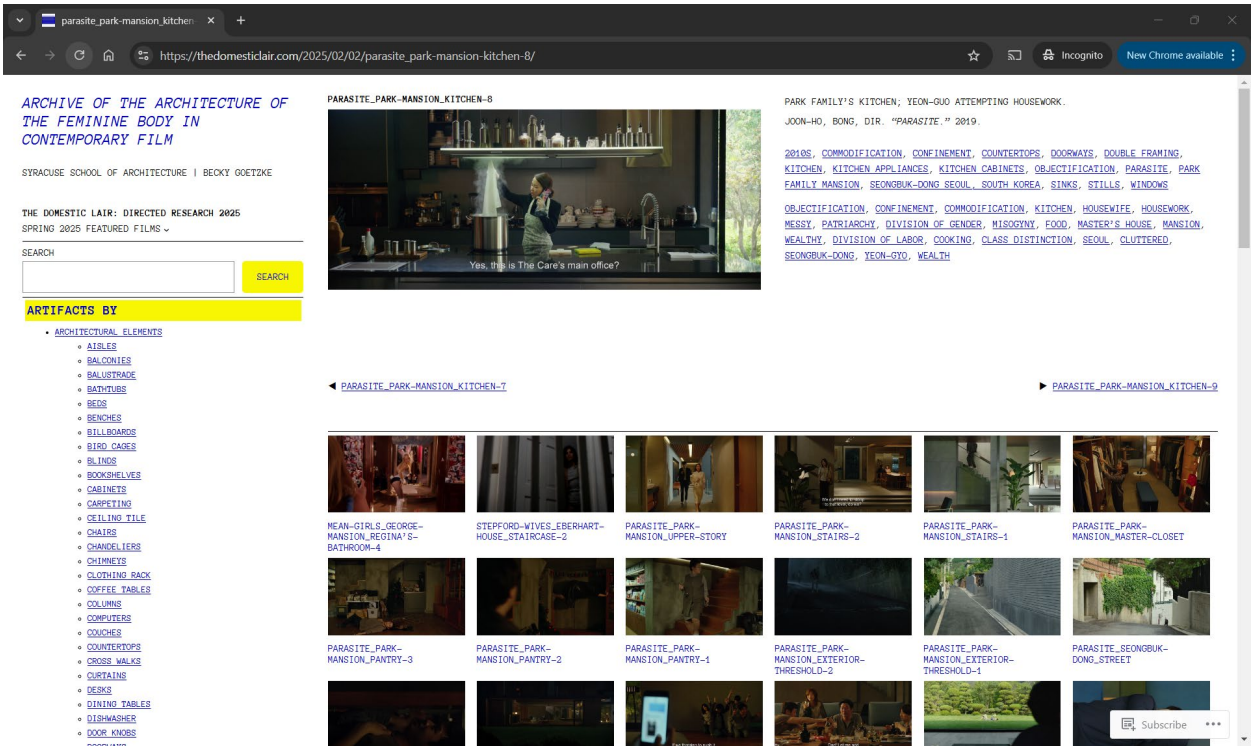
Project Manifesto



The Substance Film Page



Category: Double Framing Landing Page

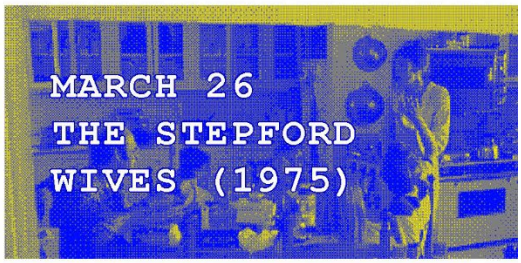


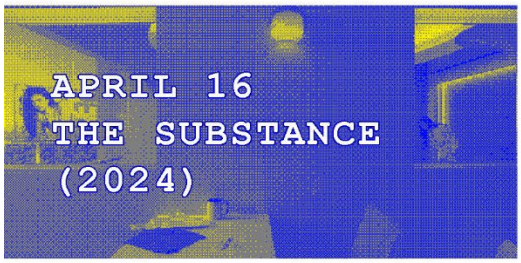
Sample Still Page; PARASITE_PARK-MANSION_KITCHEN-8

THE DOMESTIC LAIR

wednesdays
7 PM - 10 PM
slocum 214

film screening series





syracuse university school
of architecture
directed research spring 2025

becky goetzke; b. arch 2025
advised by edgar rodriguez

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The Domestic Lair Film Screening Series Poster

The Hours: **A Proposal for A Lotus-Eater**

After analyzing the five films and the framing techniques they implement through the storyboard models, it became apparent that completely removing the frame from the equation of film sets/cinematic architecture was not the solution. As exemplified by stills from *The Substance, The Stepford Wives,* and *Parasite*, voids still carry the ability to frame the feminine body within negative space. These abysses in the sets of the three aforementioned films present some of the most extreme conditions of objectifying framing and othering because they offer no escape, no respite for the subjects within their view; the feminine body in these examples is swallowed whole by the nothingness surrounding her. Because of this and with the understanding of Colomina's theories of how domestic space and architecture operate as viewing mechanisms, the project elects to conclude with a hyperbolized, worst-case scenario design for a set. By representing a highly constrictive, objectifying, and othering space, the proposal critiques the systemic oppression of women that reinforces gender dynamics in the domestic realm.

The project's final proposal remains within the context of film and cinematic architecture so that the narrative content of the space depicted can also reinforce the argument made against Western patriarchal systems of capitalism *and* spatialize an argument for rethinking how we conceive of frames, film sets, and their design. The proposed design can be read as both new set imagined for a film adaptation of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and as a house for Clarissa Dalloway inspired by the spaces she encounters in the novel.

Clarissa Dalloway is a 'lotus-eater,' an indolent woman so domesticated that she only relaxes at home, sews, writes to friends, and throws parties. She does not labor in the home outside of her duties as a mother. Because of her luxurious lifestyle, her only worries are related to her social status and aging as a woman (reminiscent of *The Substance*, *Mean Girls*, and *Parasite*), and slips into an identity-based depression because she has no outlets outside of the home. Even when she leaves its bounds to purchase flowers for a party, she's tethered back to interiority; she has no independence to roam freely and feels drawn back to the 'safety' of the domestic as she explores London.

Clarissa's story is told through stream-of-consciousness and takes place over the course of a single day. Its literary structure implies that Clarissa will experience a day just as restrictive the following day. The clock will keep moving and Clarissa will continue to live hauntingly as a near apparition because society sees her simply as an extension of her husband. At the end of the novel, Clarissa learns of a young soldier who committed suicide earlier in the evening. She relates to him and his struggle for acceptance and release from his mental strife. Clarissa longs for change but is unable to attain it because the rigid social structure and expectations of women to be submissive, docile housewives and mothers in the Victorian Era.

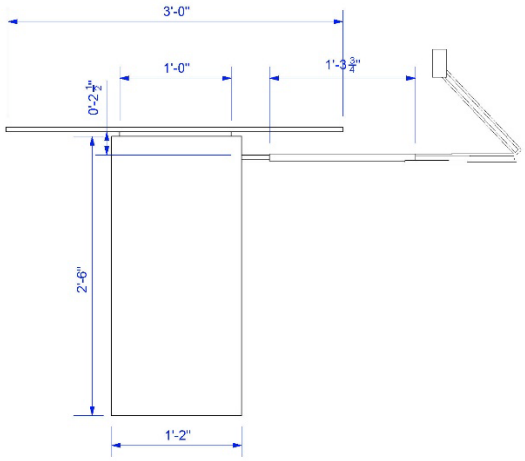
The design proposal's name comes from Woolf's working title for the novel: *The Hours*. It spatializes the temporal nature of Clarissa's story and struggle as a lotus-eater by conceiving of the domestic realm as a moving time piece, a clock, that she and the other characters float through as it revolves. The restriction of Clarissa's movement by societal

expectations is made architectural in her inability to escape from the path outlined as appropriate for her. If she stepped out of the bounds of her new domestic space, she would plummet to her own demise and cease to exist. The form also refers to another theater tradition free of prosceniums: theaters in the round. Theaters in the round and this imagined film set surround actors on every side, objectifying them from every angle. This set places the camera and watchers in the role of Victorian Society, constantly monitoring and scrutinizing Clarissa's every action.

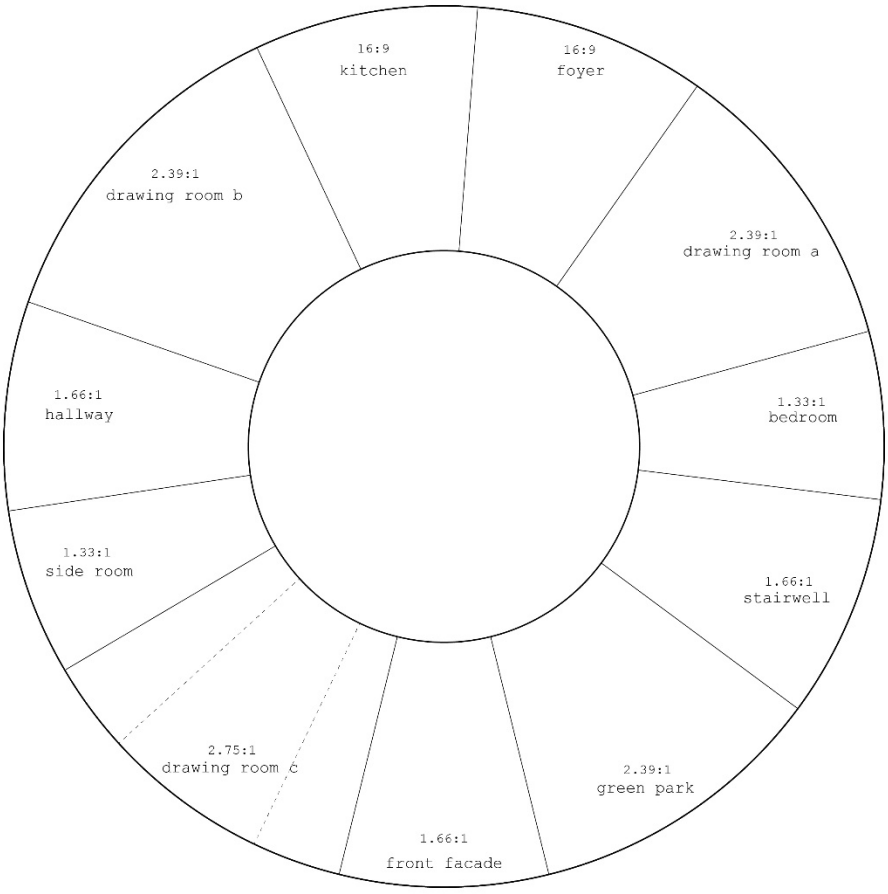
The design proposal takes the form of a physical model, a 3' in diameter rotating table that represents Clarissa's new domestic realm spatially. Comprised of 11 individual rooms, each space is defined by an aspect ratio commonly found in film, ranging from 4:3 to 2.75:1. The rooms of *The Hours* depict a domestic space that is even more constrictive, objectifying, and othering than the Victorian Era home her story is originally set in to emphasize and critique the capacity of architecture to frame the feminine body as a commodity and object to be viewed rather than as a human being, full of spirit, able to exist outside of the domestic realms she has been contained within thus far.

The Hours: A Proposal for A Lotus-Eater: Model Photos and Mock-Ups

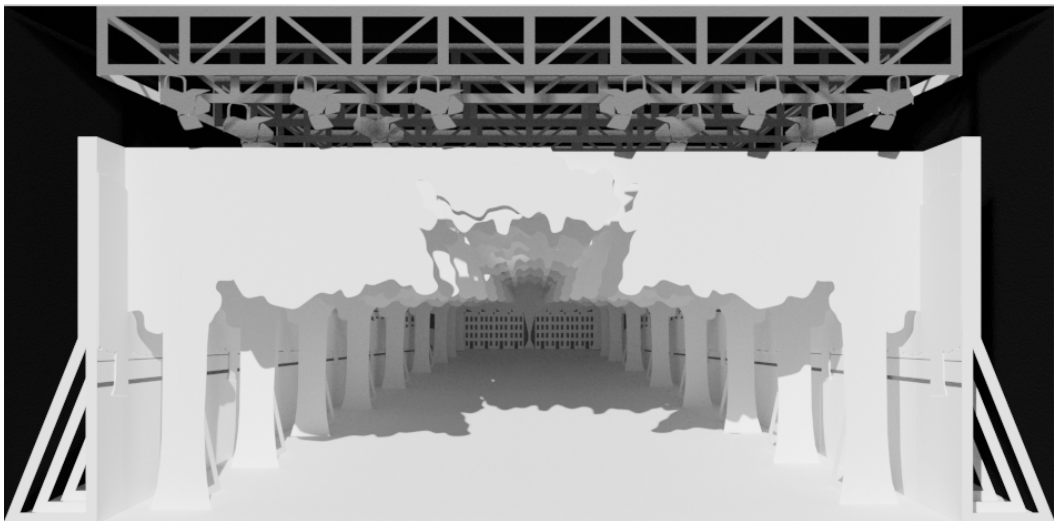
Draft Rendering of Primary Threshold



Dimensioned Side Elevation of Model Base



Plan of Model Rooms



Draft Rendering of Green Park Room

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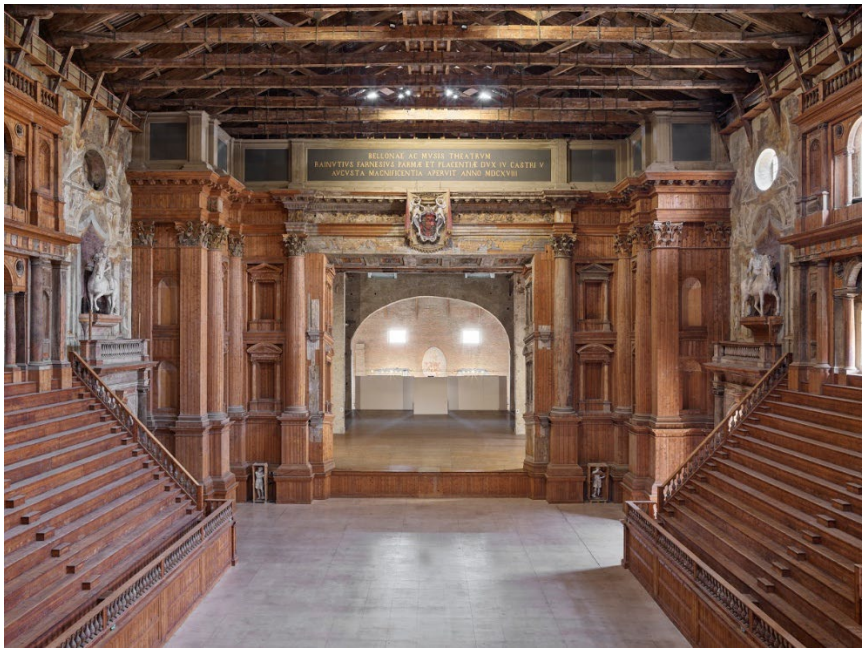
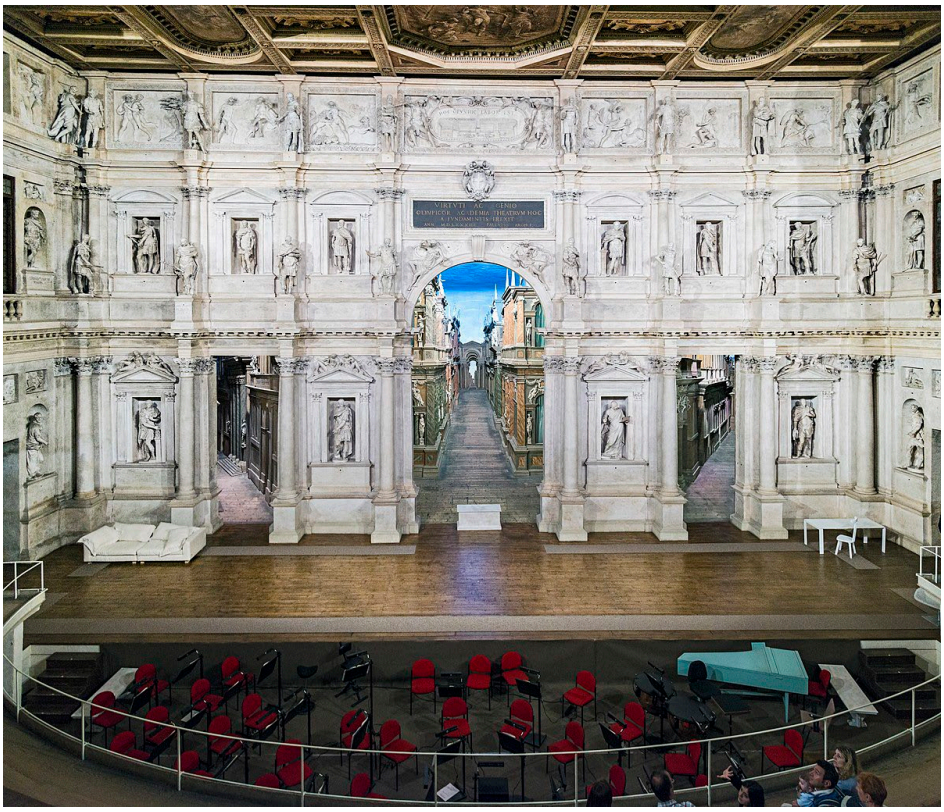
Appendices

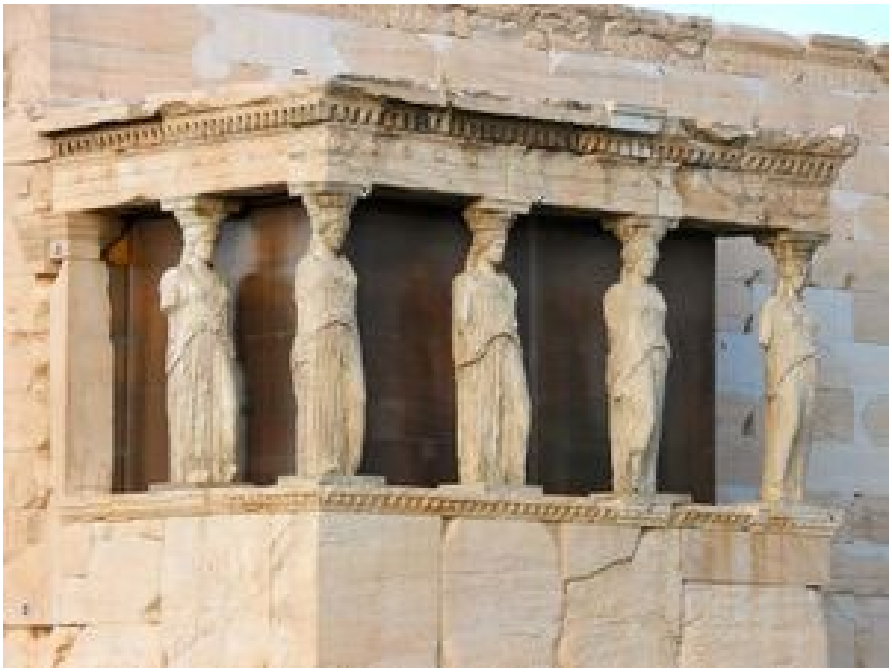
Appendix 1: Roman Theater of Palmyra



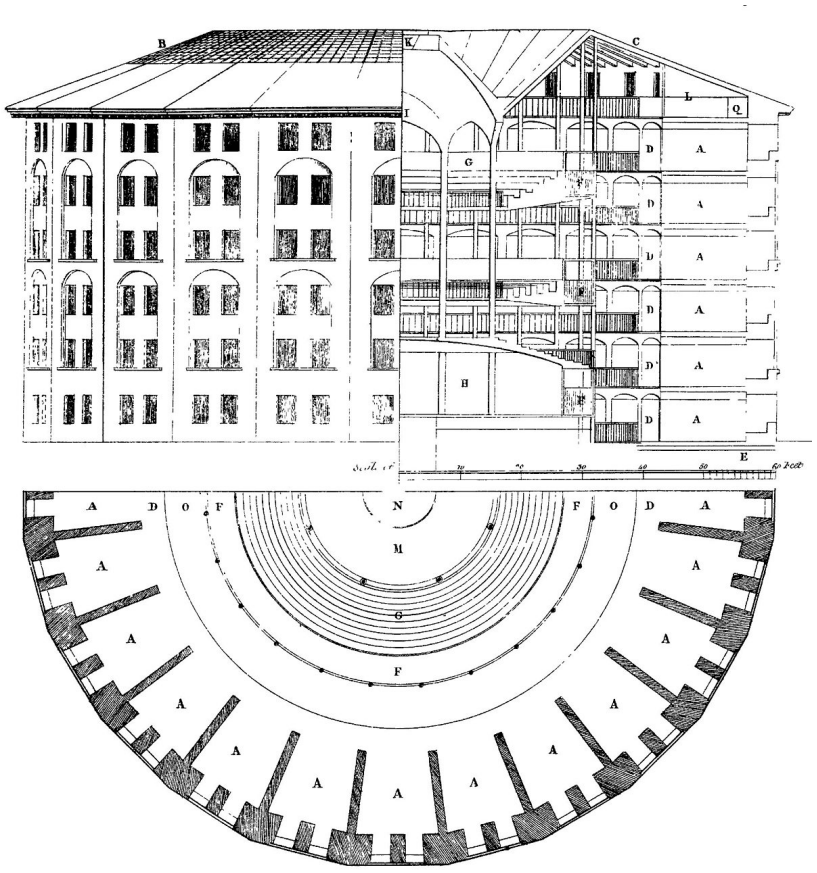
Appendix 2: Teatro Farnese



Appendix 3: Interior of Teatro Olimpico, designed by Andrea Palladio



Appendix 4: Caryatids; Athens: Erechtheum



Appendix 5: Plan, Section, and Unrolled Elevation Drawing of Bentham's Panopticon