performative insertions: interior demonstrations and the critique of planned domesticity

Lorena Quintana
Universidad Torcuato Di Tella
0009-0006-5926-490X

Florencia Vetcher
New York Institute of Technology
0009-0008-2732-8141

abstract

Performative insertions are easily and temporary assembled additions to interiors in the form of screens, modules, and units that can transform the home and accommodate the evolving needs of occupants. Experimental *mises en scène*, they characterise emerging social and cultural roles that differ from the planned domestic roles embodied in the sites where they are inserted. While performative insertions are designed by architects and artists and are therefore not unplanned, they critique the planned domesticity that in the Western world has traditionally defined the home as a permanent, static dwelling for the nuclear family. Theatrical and expressive, performative insertions demonstrate alternative ways of living.

The following essay examines a collection of performative insertions from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, foregrounding their critique of the planned domesticity of their time. On one hand, earlier insertions critique the fixity of rooms in the home and their differentiated, gendered uses. They disrupt this planned domesticity by embodying newly modern and universal values: adaptability, mobility, efficiency, and hygiene. On the other hand, later insertions expand these critiques to question the planned permanence of the home and the social composition of the nuclear family. Their disruption embodies dwellings for people who share homes beyond the nuclear family: the homeless and urban dwellers on the move. Through their design, they bring up contemporary issues of precarity and marginalisation.

Beyond their demonstrative nature as prototypes, the analysis sheds light on their capacity for replicability. Some of the twentieth century cases did, in fact, go on to transform standard Western housing. The implementation and impact of the twenty-first-century cases, however, remain mediated by their experimental nature, leaving the question open as to whether they can foster new forms of community that go beyond the nuclear family, and that are detached from the permanence of the family home.

keywords

domesticity; temporary stability; performative; interior; demonstration

cite as:
Lorena Quintana and Florencia Vetcher, 'Performative Insertions: Interior Demonstrations and the Critique of Planned Domesticity', *Idea Journal*, 22.1 (2025), pp. 22–34, doi.org/10.37113/ij.v22i1.585.

introduction

A collection of interior assemblages that upend domestic environments is examined in this essay through the concept of performative insertions. Performative insertions are defined as easily assembled, temporary additions to interiors — screens, modules, and units — that reconfigure the home and respond to the shifting needs of its occupants. Conceived as experimental *mises en scène*, the cases discussed here are deemed performative insofar as they articulate emerging social and cultural roles that diverge from the planned domestic settings they occupy. Although fully designed by architects and artists, and therefore not unplanned, performative insertions nonetheless critique the forms of planned domesticity that have, in the Western world, long imagined the home as a stable, permanent dwelling for the nuclear family. Theatrical and expressive, performative insertions propose alternative modes of living within these planned domestic frameworks.

Domestic interiors embody the values of a specific place and time. In modern design and discourse of the twentieth century, for example, architecture scholars Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley identify that 'human needs' were addressed through design as defence, which in its most radical version 'attempts to reshape the human [...] carried out under the guise of reinforcing and protecting the human.'[1] Performative insertions operate as an added layer that critiques the normative and ideological dimensions embedded in the home where they are introduced. In the early twentieth century, performative insertions critique the fixity of rooms and their differentiated, gendered uses. Gerrit Rietveld's *Schröder House* (1924), for example, inserts mobile screens that embody interior flexibility and an integration of domestic spaces that was unplanned in homes where each room was considered separate. Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky's *Frankfurt Kitchen* (1926) is an early example of modular construction that embodies standardisation, efficiency, and hygiene, aiming to reduce the time women spent in the kitchen — an aspect largely unplanned for in pre-First World War housing, when women had not yet entered the European workforce on the scale they would in the decades that followed. Hannes Meyer's *Co-op Zimmer* (1926) is an exhibition scenography of a bedroom for a newly conceived universal mobile worker, an unplanned social role in the prevailing conception of urban workers as fixed to a single place.

In the twenty-first century, performative insertions expand these critiques to question the permanence of the home and cohabitation that is limited to the nuclear family. Andrés Jaque and the Office for Political Innovation's *Rolling Architecture* (2009), for example, is a series of units for people who share homes beyond the nuclear family, including students, migrants, and the recently divorced, who are often marginalised but can capitalise from their heterogeneity through proximity. Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Homeless Vehicle* (1989) makes the homeless of New York City visible, while Winfried Baumann's *Urban Nomads* (2001–2016) conceptualises a class of single and coupled urban dwellers on the move. These projects foreground how students, migrants, the recently divorced, the homeless, and the mobile remain unplanned for in single-family housing.

Analysed in a chronological continuum, the collection of performative insertions allows us to compare their qualities and their capacity to be reproduced. Insertions range from the mass-produced, built from readily available materials, to the singular and experimental unit. This qualitative range matches existing theorisations in the realm of prefabricated ready-made interiors, which describe three construction types: planar construction (the screen), modular construction (a standardised building block), and unit construction (the singular all-inclusive piece).[2] Understanding the degree of complexity of each performative insertion is useful as experimental assemblages allow for more radical innovation, while mass-produced assemblages aim for replicability in different environments and lower production costs at scale.

performative insertions in the early twentieth century: embodying changing domestic values

The increasing pace of cultural change in the early twentieth century offers an array of screens, modules, and units that critiqued and transformed the traditional home. The following section reviews a series of performative insertions that embody the social, economic, and ideological changes of the first half of the century. The review delves into the increasingly complex qualities of the insertions and highlights the ways they enabled modern transformations of traditional environments.

In the twentieth century, sliding screens, originally used in Japanese architecture, were introduced in Western interiors to define flexible spaces.[3] The sliding screen demonstrates the transformation of the static home as it becomes a sliding wall that integrates rooms that were planned to function separately. The *Schröder House* (1924) in Utrecht is an example of this transformation. Architect Gerrit Rietveld defines a flexible interior on the upper floor of the home with eight planes of sliding walls. Designed in collaboration with homeowner Truus Schröder, the house reflects the client's modern attitude to family life.[4] When slid into place, the walls divide the floor plan into six distinct rooms, including a hall, three bedrooms, a living/dining area, and a bathroom. When slid open, the rooms are integrated into a single space, disrupting the individual privacy of each bedroom and allowing agile changes to the function and use of each part of the floor plan. The architect's drawings suggest a piano fitted into the central area of the floor plan, enabling a large social gathering space superimposed with views of beds when the screens are open. In this case, the sliding walls are generic objects, unremarkable on their own, but they become performative and embody a changing domestic environment as they are inserted to enable alternate uses of the interior.

While the screens in the *Schröder House* embody flexibility and an integration of domestic spaces previously considered separate, Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky's *Frankfurt Kitchen* (1926) is a significant example of modular construction that embodies other emergent modern values: standardisation, efficiency, and hygiene. Comprising a number of modules equipped with a swivel stool, a gas stove, built-in aluminium storage with pouring pouts and measuring bars, a fold-down ironing board, an adjustable ceiling light, and a removable garbage drawer, the *Frankfurt Kitchen* was deployed along the walls of the kitchen area of new homes, following modern theories of workflow.[5] This was a radical redefinition of the kitchen: a more efficient workflow designed for low- and middle-class urban dwellers without servants, upholding the changing domestic values of women who were no longer confined to the space of the kitchen. This changing role of women was largely unplanned for in pre-First World War housing, when women had not yet entered the European workforce on the scale they would in the decades that followed. The kitchen's modularity allowed for adaptations to different architectural configurations and ultimately enabled an interior space that, in its usage, defied tradition. The *Frankfurt Kitchen*'s impact was such that it was assembled off-site and integrated into 10,000 housing units over five years in the New Frankfurt social housing project.[6]

Hannes Meyer's *Co-op Zimmer* (1923–1926) addresses the *Frankfurt Kitchen*'s aspiration towards standardisation, but in an expanded definition of modularity for a newly conceived mobile dweller. An exhibition scenography [Fig. 01], *Co-op Zimmer* is a stripped interior mock-up of a bedroom consisting of two walls and a floor surface made of white fabric, and a set of carefully positioned industrial objects: two folding wood and canvas chairs, a cot raised on conical supports, a phonograph placed on a collapsible stool, and a wall-mounted shelf holding jars with food. The objects have a standardised, generic quality to them, and in their placement conceptualise a design that is no longer a matter of taste but one of an economy of means.[7] In his shift towards a

Marxist stance, Meyer introduces this interior as a satisfier of 'true community', where the collective demand is for a standard product, manufactured internationally and displaying a uniform design. As he describes, these impersonal objects, 'apparatuses in the mechanisation of our daily life', allow for 'the semi-nomad of our modern productive system' the 'benefit of freedom of movement, economies, simplification and relaxation.'[8] The *Co-op Zimmer* project embodies a standardised domesticity that positively propositions minimal living for mobile workers, an unplanned form of habitation in the prevailing conception of modern urban workers as fixed to a single place. The lack of context or people inhabiting the photographs of this project emphasises its call for universality: a collapsible deployment of portable objects that can turn any space into a modern standard room. Thus, a key component of *Co-op Zimmer* is the agility with which the interior set-up could be acquired and deployed, enabling the conception of a normative mobile worker whose domestic requirements are entirely embodied in a set of interior objects. A radical proposal, it disrupts traditional family living, advocating for egalitarian and communal living instead. And yet, as radical as Meyer's project was, it's worth noting that it still maintains the traditional privacy of the individual bedroom.[9]

Figure 01.
Hannes Meyer, *Co-op Zimmer*, 1926. Image courtesy of Hannes Meyer-Archiv, Deutsches Architekturmuseum, Frankfurt am Main.

Hannes Meyer's conviction that objects can support a mechanised daily life raises the notion of mechanisation in the domestic realm. In a somewhat similar manner, Siegfried Giedion has investigated the meaning of mechanisation for interior objects in the context of nineteenth century American patent furniture. Tilting chairs for the modern office and the barber shop, sleeping cars for trains, automatic sofa spring-beds, and combinations of rocking chairs and cradles for the home are some examples of patented experimental furniture that was designed to perform different, separately planned functions in conjunction. Giedion explains that patent furniture tackled the problem of motion — a characteristic of furniture that exceeded domestic planning in the nineteenth century — and that the new inventions solved the problem of flexibility and adjustability to adapt to different postures of the human body.[10] At a deeper level, however, Giedion recognises that patent furniture arose from the demands of a growing, urban middle class that wished to bring comfort to minimum living spaces, and that mechanisation supplied not only a more efficient use of limited space, but also cheaper alternatives to handicraft furniture.[11]

Mechanised, convertible furniture also embodied new aesthetic values that allowed their acceptance to a certain degree in North America, but not in Europe. Giedion describes the 'sometimes grotesque effect of things promiscuously combined': a disturbance of 'normal proportions' that in the context of mechanised furniture was adopted for the sake of efficiency.[12] In an even stronger disturbance of separate functions, some pieces of furniture were designed to combine functions traditionally ascribed to different degrees of privacy, such as the *Parlor-Bed* (1891), a folding bed located in the parlour that dispensed with a separate bedroom, and the *Piano-Bed* (1866) that contained a bed, closets and a wash basin under a piano [Fig. 02]. These mixtures proved too much for the 'ruling taste' of the nineteenth century, which stifled their development.[13] The failure to adopt these mixtures demonstrates the limits of experimentation in delivering unplanned domestic interiors through performative insertions.

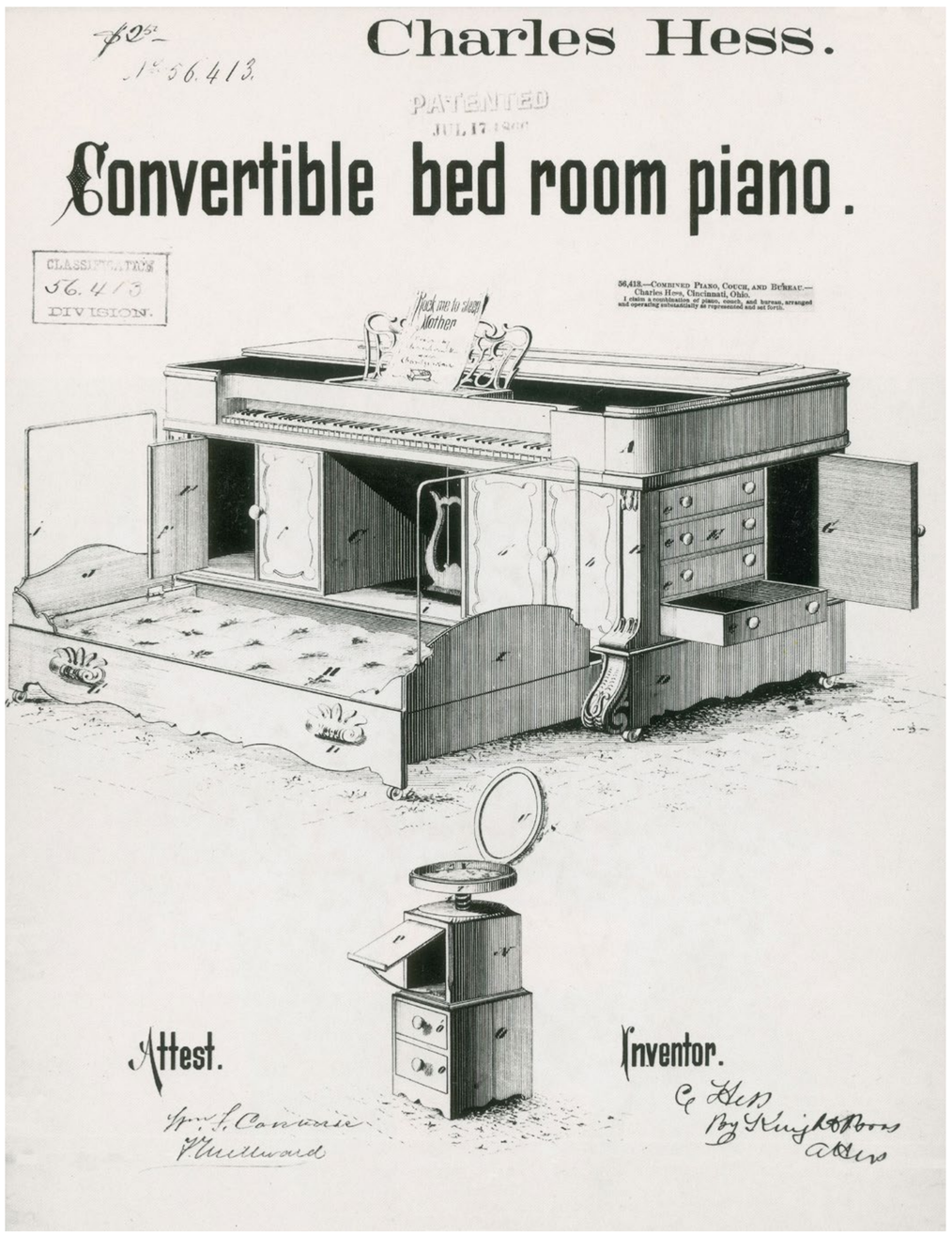

Figure 02.
Patent Drawing for Convertible Bed Room Piano, 17 July 1866. With permission from New York Public Library / Science Source.

Convertible furniture is an example of unit construction: a singular piece with a certain degree of complexity, ready to be installed in an existing room. Other examples of unit construction in the early twentieth century transformed domestic rooms into unplanned modern kitchens and bathrooms. For example, the *Hoosier Cabinet*, an early unit-based kitchen, was produced in the United States at the turn of the century: a freestanding, wardrobe-like object that housed appliances and cabinetry for dry goods.[14] As for bathrooms, Bertrand Goldberg's *Prefabricated Bathroom* (1947) exemplified an all-in-one unit that combined an industrial aesthetic, non-porous materials, and the precision of prefabricated technologies to address the modern preoccupation with hygiene.[15] Its built-in enclosure further enabled nested degrees of privacy: a new private bathroom within any existing room.

As a final case in this collection, the *raumplan* interiors of Adolf Loos of the 1910s and 1920s exemplify a combination of different kinds of insertions for a more ambiguous critique of the traditional interior. *Müller House* (1929–1930) exemplifies Loos' bourgeois home, composed of distinct rooms, each one filled with objects that embody a particular mode of habitation. Two performative insertions are particularly salient: the leather sofas in the men's smoking room and the raised seating area integrated into the women's room. The leather sofas are, on one hand, modular in their layout, and signal to the room's mode of habitation of face-to-face conversation through their placement, separated by the width of the mantelpiece. The seating area in the women's room, on the other hand, is part of a more sophisticated, singular assemblage consisting of an elevated floor level, steps, seats, shelves, and a ceiling made of wood that wraps continuously around the space. Beatriz Colomina has discussed the women's room as a more private area at the centre of the house in contrast to the men's public area, and reflects on the raised seating as a 'theatre box' that signifies an objectification of women, as well as the gendered power dynamics embodied in the house.[16] This is a case that portrays how an experimental object, the women's room seating assemblage, modern in its design, is ultimately a part of the architecture that reinforces the conventional gender values of early twentieth-century Viennese bourgeoisie. It is therefore essential to consider the usage of interior objects: the way they function, beyond their appearance, to gauge the extent to which they critique and transform planned domesticity.

The projects reviewed so far reveal a range of interior assemblages that reflect the shifting domestic values of twentieth-century modernism. Adaptability, mobility, efficiency, hygiene, Marxist radicality, and bourgeois convention: different modern values found expression in different kinds of interiors. Classifying them into screens, modules, and units helps clarify their potential for replication. The fact that sliding screens and

modular construction reshaped Western housing far more than convertible furniture or devices like Loos' 'theatre box' underscores the transformative power of mass-produced, replicable elements.

performative insertions for people sharing homes beyond the nuclear family: an alternative domesticity in andrés jaque's *rolling architecture* (2009)

Performative insertions in the twenty-first century embody a different set of issues: mobility, precarity, and homelessness. Their degree of experimentation exceeds the propriety that limited interior assemblages a century earlier. In contrast to their early twentieth-century counterparts, contemporary performative insertions no longer address a universal modern dweller, such as the gendered bourgeois or the Marxist mobile worker, but instead address heterogeneous social roles that have been unplanned for in fixed, single-family homes prevalent in the Western world.

Rolling Architecture (2009) is a speculative project and prototype by architect Andrés Jaque and his design and research studio, the Office for Political Innovation, that proposes an interior architecture for individuals who move and share homes beyond the traditional nuclear family: students, temporary workers, migrants, travellers, as well as recently divorced and elderly people.[17] Beyond seeking an alternative domesticity, members of these mobile groups are varied and often excluded from planned neighbourhoods comprised of single-family homes. Their range of variability is significant as it exceeds the Marxist single conception of universal mobile workers. Unlike Hannes Meyer's standard private bedroom for minimal living previously discussed, Andrés Jaque proposes an interior that articulates social interactions while highlighting the differences between people.

Alternatively titled *Rolling House for a Rolling Society*, or *Casa Rodante para una Sociedad Rodante* in Spanish, the title is a play on the Spanish term for mobile home: *casa rodante*, where *rodante* is not translated to English as *mobile* but as *rolling*. The title avoids the connotations of the mobile home as a consumer product planned and built for the leisure of nuclear families on the open road, as it has been primarily conceived in the United States.[18] Instead, the rolling quality of the project connotes an alternative, unplanned mobility beyond nuclear family setups: people rolling along in life, possibly high-rolling on an opportunity for a different life. This interpretation reflecting the possibility of lifestyles beyond the normative nuclear family is consistent with Jaque's rejection of the notion of home, distancing his project from an idea of coziness and belonging. Jaque has also acknowledged that the title of the project refers to the mass-produced rolling blinds that are the main components of the project.[19]

As a departure point for *Rolling Architecture*, Jaque and his team conducted fieldwork that recorded and analysed over a hundred testimonies of people who have lived in shared apartments around the world, from which the researchers distilled three principles of shared living. First, the 'public/private dialectic' loses relevance in shared houses, as the living room becomes a politicised and controversial environment in permanent dispute.[20] Second, the house is no longer a familiar home, but 'an exotic background for an uncertain lifestyle', where people are confronted with difference.[21] Third, access to usage and adaptability are more important than specialised design, functionalism, or uniformity.[22] Beyond these three principles, Jaque claims that mobile people are not solely 'vulnerable to weather, personal integrity or property maintenance, but also to social exclusion, disconnection and operational outdating.'[23] A house that upends traditional homeliness in favour of a shared space means, for Jaque, 'the place where one encounters otherness and builds up association within it', and ultimately, 'the rapid obtainment of relational capital.'[24]

The social exclusion that contemporary mobile people face is addressed through the design of the project. The *Rolling Architecture* prototype is a

series of insertions deployed in an undifferentiated, continuous interior space.[25] In this setup, the interior is not subdivided into rooms for public or private use but is instead filled with assemblages that address different functions, some of which are enclosed in blinds and awnings that, when drawn closed, temporarily yield private spaces. The insertions are of two kinds. On one hand, there are three experimental units: the 'Rolling Plastic Nest', a pod-like sleeping retractable awning enclosure that also functions as a greenhouse and includes a transportable trunk wardrobe; the 'Rolling Hut for the Rolling Intimacy', similar to the Nest but without the wardrobe and with more insulation in its enclosure; and the unenclosed 'Rolling Tub', a bathing tub elevated on stilts which couples 'water enjoyment' with 'a community of vegetal pets' by delivering wastewater from the tub to planters at the level below.[26] These insertions are meant to question the expectations of what constitutes a domestic environment. If Jaque admits that each flatmate must be assigned a 'Rolling Plastic Nest', this is not meant to be a private space, but a space to access 'specialised socialisations', store belongings, and have a greenhouse to nurture.[27] On the other hand, the project also includes mass-produced, widely available materials such as blinds and windows: generic insertions that operate as screens and become performative as they yield different degrees of opacity and spatial separation. When drawn closed, the screens create private spaces around bathrooms and living rooms, but only as temporary enclosures that don't correspond to the planned notion of permanent privacy within a home.

Both the experimental units and the screens are built from mass-produced parts. The aluminium retractable rolling blinds and awnings the architect details from Gradhermetic and Hunter Douglas refer to multinational companies that manufacture products through decentralised networks on a scale for mass consumption, making them low-cost and readily available. Used extensively since the postwar boom, they are the 'residential infrastructure' that *Rolling Architecture* defamiliarises.[28] The project uses these generic parts to fulfil alternative purposes from the ones they were designed for (like exterior wall cladding or sunscreens), rendering the domestic settings unfamiliar, and making an aesthetic claim in favour of them as 'peripheral products' that are 'scorned' by architects, but that deliver on availability and adaptability over specialisation.[29] Beyond the low cost of the generic parts, the point is, for Jaque, to transform domestic architecture 'from the protective and familiar to the rearticulative and associative', an unplanned architecture that 'results in iterative and uncoordinated action'.[30] This is, for Jaque, the way architecture operates politically. The project does not modify or define behaviours according to planned patterns but rather contributes to articulating social structures and proposing alternative social networks.[31]

While Jaque's research investigated the testimonies of migrants of different ages and global backgrounds, the project's construction in the context of an exhibition was photographed with young performers, suggesting the implementation of *Rolling Architecture* as student housing or collective living among people of a similar age [Fig. 03]. Designed for the Erasmus Programme of academic exchange for students and workers, financed by the European Union before the 2009 economic crisis, it does not address the realities of multigenerational renters, including children, the elderly, and the disabled. It is also important to highlight the reduced international cooperation and less permeable borders after 2009 that have increased housing inequality and contempt towards migrants. The value of *Rolling Architecture* ultimately lies in destigmatising domestic life beyond the nuclear family, and in the notion that mobile groups, often marginalised, can capitalise from their heterogeneity, even in a limited capacity within a certain age range.

making mobile people visible: krzysztof wodiczko's *homeless vehicle* (1989) and winfried baumann's *urban nomads* (2001–2016)

Destigmatising mobile people, particularly the homeless, has been proposed by Krzysztof Wodiczko in the *Homeless Vehicle* (1989), and more recently by Winfried Baumann's *Urban Nomads* series (2001–2016). Wodiczko proposes a 'functional and symbolic program' for the *Homeless Vehicle*: a demonstration meant as a starting point to foster collaboration between designers and homeless people who have been historically unplanned for in cities, to the degree of rendering them invisible.[32] A convertible cart prototype [Fig 04.], the *Homeless Vehicle* accommodates sleeping, washing, and storage through folding parts and different degrees of opacity and translucency of a mobile metal structure that can fit a single person inside. Meant to be used outdoors, the aim of this unit is both to fulfil the needs of homeless people for a means of transportation and shelter, as well as to make them visible and legitimise their status in New York City, where the project was designed with the input and collaboration of homeless individuals.[33] The *Homeless Vehicle* extends the genealogy of convertible furniture put forward by Sigfried Giedion, but it overcomes nineteenth-century propriety limiting the critique of planned domesticity. Wodiczko responds to homelessness as a social scandal through 'scandalous functionalism', a shocking symbolism that translates to a form that resembles a weapon: a metal nose (a folded washbasin) capping a bullet-shaped enclosure portraying the vehicle as an act of resistance for the disenfranchised.[34]

Beyond critiquing planned domesticity, Jaque's *Rolling Architecture* and Wodiczko's *Homeless Vehicle* tackle the problem of mobility and community. In these projects, the question remains whether, and to what extent, they can foster forms of community detached from the permanence of the family home. While community has been defined as a predecessor of society

Figure 03.
Andrés Jaque / Office for Political Innovation, *Rolling House for the Rolling Society*, 2009. Photograph: Miguel de Guzmán. Image courtesy of Andrés Jaque / Office for Political Innovation.

Figure 04.
Krzysztof Wodiczko, *Homeless Vehicle*, New York City, 1988. Photograph copyright: Krzysztof Wodiczko. Image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Lelong NY.

in terms of scale and organisation, and society as a predominant form of social organisation, community has also been theorised as a tool of rejection when the larger society fails to deliver on its promises.[35] In response to the failures of society towards migrants and the homeless, Jaque's *Rolling Architecture* proposes a form of experimental, communal association through proximity, while Wodiczko's *Homeless Vehicle* takes an openly political stance and serves as a tool of protest against the invisibility of the homeless in New York City in the 1980s. Wodiczko's proposition of 'assembling vehicles in groups as collective habitats or defensive

encampments against police harassment' suggests an unplanned, emergent mobile community of resistance that materialises through the gathering of people with *Homeless Vehicles*.[36]

Winfried Baumann's *Urban Nomads* project does not propose an openly political stance, although Baumann has been explicit in his interest not only in social aspects in his artistic work, but also in mobility and social changes as ongoing processes, and in his work occupying a space between art and a social project.[37] In line with Jaque and Wodiczko, *Urban Nomads* expands the functional and aesthetic possibilities of alternative domesticities through thirty-five objects that address the needs of the homeless for shelter and storage. Originally comprised of the *Instant Housing* series of fifteen prototypes, the project expands into different systems such as the *Instant Cooking*, *Instant Exhibition*, and *Dresscode* iterations to respond to the situations of people who do not live within firmly established structures, addressing mobile groups beyond the homeless.[38]

Baumann's portable units for single persons or couples — pushed, carried, or attached to vehicles — combine streamlined forms, refined materials (wood, aluminium, acrylic, synthetic fabrics), and bright colours to project a cool aesthetic that appeals to both travellers and the fashion-forward, reframing homelessness within a broader design debate. This reading is based on the objects' quality and presentation: photographed uninhabited against a blank white background [Figs. 05 and 06]. This abstraction recalls Hannes Meyer's *Co-op Zimmer*, yet, like Jaque's *Rolling Architecture*, Baumann's *Urban Nomads* make visible an alternative form of domesticity through design objects that address more heterogeneous mobile people.

Figure 05.
Winfried Baumann, *Urban Nomads* series. 'Instant Housing H-Klasse H-4 Cabin LZ1', 2005. Image courtesy of Winfried Baumann.

Figure 06.
Winfried Baumann, *Urban Nomads* series. 'Instant Housing WBF 240-Bike SLS', 2008. Image courtesy of Winfried Baumann.

Figure 07.
Atelier OPA, *Kenchikukagu Architectural Furniture*, 2008. Image courtesy of Atelier OPA.

manufacturing performative insertions at scale: atelier opa's *kenchikukagu* (2008)

An attempt to manufacture performative insertions at scale has been proposed by Atelier OPA, a Tokyo-based design practice that has developed *Kenchikukagu* or *Architectural Furniture* since 2008. *Kenchikukagu* is a series of three experimental, built-in units: a mobile kitchen, a foldaway guest room, and a foldaway office [Fig. 07]. Made of steel and aluminium, when closed, the units appear like oversized, sleek pieces of luggage on wheels that can be moved and operated by a single person. Unlike Jaque's *Rolling Architecture*, the emphasis of *Kenchikukagu* as presented by the designers is not placed on enhancing social interactions in the domestic space. Instead, they focus on the portability, convertibility, and minimal footprint of the units, highlighting their capacity to quickly turn any interior into a kitchen, a bedroom, or an office temporarily while occupying the least amount of space. A twenty-first century experimental unit that combines the portability and modularity of Hannes Meyer's *Co-op Zimmer*, the convertibility of the mechanised furniture described by Sigfried Giedion, and the sleekness of unit construction, the minimal dimensions of the *Kenchikukagu* reflect the small dimensions of Tokyo apartments and dense urban living.

The sleek unit construction of *Kenchikukagu* resumes, at an interiors scale, an iconic Japanese Metabolist project: the *Nakagin Capsule Tower* (1972) by architect Kisho Kurokawa.[39] Kurokawa's project consisted of prefabricated capsules, like Bertrand Goldberg's *Prefabricated Bathroom*, which had addressed an industrial aesthetic through the precision of prefabrication almost thirty years earlier. But the Nakagin capsules were part of a larger, more radical redefinition of architecture in Japan.[40] In Tokyo, the Nakagin capsules — plugged into the building core and theoretically removable — heralded an era of high-tech seamless interiors mechanically integrated with their host architecture, and potentially interchangeable within a broader system of compatible architectural infrastructures that would expand beyond a single building. The Nakagin capsule, a streamlined dwelling pod inspired by the Space Age of the 1960s, intended to replace family living with a system centred

on mobile individuals: it was 'a terminal for the networked cosmopolitan nomad.'[41] Beyond the *Nakagin Capsule Tower*'s eventual failure and demolition, the project served as a test case for the company that commercialised it, Kotobuki Seating Co. Ltd, that since 1979 produced 'sleep capsules' for hotels and dormitories.[42]

Compared to the utopian and expansive ambition of the *Nakagin Capsule Tower*, Atelier OPA's *Kenchikukagu* operates at a strictly interiors scale; however, it shares the same objective of large-scale manufacturing and commercialisation. Since 2008, different iterations of *Kenchikukagu* have been commercialised in Japan and Europe, manufactured by Yodoko Plus, a company that stems from Yodogawa Steel Works, Ltd, an iron and steel manufacturer in Japan since 1935, which has produced exterior products such as garages and warehouses since 1970.[43] The manufacture of *Kenchikukagu* through a steel company that produces generic parts echoes Andrés Jaque's preference for mass-produced materials that are widely available, adaptable, and outside of architects' traditional aesthetic repertoires.

conclusion

Performative insertions have historically embodied emergent social and cultural values, questioning the planned domesticity of static, single-family homes, and enabling unplanned social roles and forms of cohabitation. The cases reviewed convey how temporary or non-static insertions critique and transform the planned occupancy of dwellings. The theatricality of their presentation as demonstrations, exhibitions, and scenography foregrounds their performative quality. Classified as screens, modules, and all-encompassing units, their degree of complexity sheds light on the potential of performative insertions to be replicated in different environments and produced at scale.

During the early twentieth century, performative insertions embodied modern values: adaptability, mobility, efficiency, and hygiene. Their degree of experimentality, however, was limited by ruling tastes and bourgeois conventions. They precede twenty-first-century insertions that have exceeded the propriety that limited experimentation a century earlier. Twenty-first-century performative insertions further address mobile people who share homes beyond the nuclear family. In contrast to early twentieth-century cases, contemporary performative insertions no longer aspire to universality but instead embody a range of different needs and desires: from the need for shelter and storage, to the desire to build 'relational capital' by enhancing social interactions, and the need to be acknowledged as a community. Andrés Jaque's *Rolling Architecture*, Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Homeless Vehicle*, and Winfried Baumann's *Urban Nomads* are prototypes that make mobile communities visible and expand the functional and aesthetic possibilities of objects that embody their values. In these cases, the question remains whether alternative domestic setups can foster forms of community detached from the permanence of the family home. Unlike the early twentieth-century examples reviewed, inhabited experiments that went on to transform standard Western housing, the theoretical nature of twenty-first-century cases limits their engagement with the lived realities of mobile people and the kinds of community they might foster. While planned domesticity continues to be questioned and redefined in experimental and artistic projects for mobile people, the care of children and the elderly remains unaddressed.

Atelier OPA's *Kenchikukagu*, manufactured at scale, demonstrates a broader acceptance of performative insertions, particularly in urban contexts where space is scarce. Examining the usage of the *Kenchikukagu* can reveal whether it generates new forms of community, for example, by fostering multigenerational households or integrating short-term residents into community life. New forms of community that address contemporary issues of mobility, precarity, and access to housing within existing structures can be evaluated once performative insertions are set in place.

acknowledgements

We thank the Deutsches Architekturmuseum in Frankfurt am Main, Andrés Jaque, the Office for Political Innovation, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Winfried Baumann, and Atelier OPA for granting permission to reproduce their images. We are also grateful to the *Idea Journal* editors for their constructive feedback and valuable assistance in the development of this essay.

author biography

Lorena Quintana is a lecturer in architecture at Universidad Torcuato Di Tella. In collaboration with architectural practices in New York, Santiago de Chile, and Buenos Aires, she has developed platforms for architectural communication as a designer, editor, and writer. Her current research concerns nomadic forms of living and the history of architectural criticism.

Florencia Vetcher is Assistant Professor and Chair of the Department of Interior Design at New York Institute of Technology. Her teaching focuses on urban micro-living, adaptive reuse, and issues of mobility and privacy in contemporary living. She runs the design practice vetcher-breidfjord with partner Sigfus Breidfjord, working on small-scale projects in the United States, Argentina, and Iceland.

notes

1 Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley, *Are We Human? Notes on an Archaeology of Design* (Lars Müller Publishers, 2017), p. 127.

2 Deborah Shneiderman, Inside Prefab: *The Ready-Made Interior* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2012), p. 11.

3 The architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright in the United States, for example, was particularly inspired by Japanese architecture. Frank Lloyd Wright, *An Autobiography* (Faber and Faber Limited, 1946).

4 Marie-Thérèse van Thoor, 'Introduction', in *Colour, Form and Space. Rietveld Schröder House Challenging the Future,* ed. by Marie-Thérèse van Thoor (TU Delft, 2019), p. 7.

5 Mary McLeod, 'Domestic Reform and European Modern Architecture: Charlotte Perriand, Grete Lihotzky, and Elizabeth Denby', in *Modern Women: Women Artists at The Museum of Modern Art,* ed. by Cornelia Butler and Alexandra Schwartz (Museum of Modern Art, 2010), p. 182.

6 Shneiderman, *Inside Prefab*, p. 16.

7 Pier Vittorio Aureli, *Less is Enough* (Strelka Press, 2013).

8 Hannes Meyer, 'Die neue Welt', *Das Werk*, 13.7 (1926). Excerpts reproduced in K. Michael Hays, *Modernism and the Posthumanist Subject* (The MIT Press, 1992), p. 65.

9 This private condition is emphasised in contemporary communal manifestos, such as Karel Teige's scheme for the minimum dwelling: bedrooms or individual living cells remain private, while the rest of the functions of the house such as kitchen, dining, and bathing, are collectivised. Teige's drawings are schematic diagrams that do not address how the rooms are furnished to accommodate their functions. Karel Teige, *The Minimum Dwelling* (The MIT Press, 2002 [1932]), p. 17.

10 Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History* (Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 396–413.

11 Giedion, *Mechanization takes Command*, pp. 390–396.

12 Giedion, *Mechanization takes Command*, pp. 426–430.

13 Giedion, *Mechanization takes Command*, pp. 437–438.

14 Shneiderman, *Inside Prefab*, p. 21.

15 Shneiderman, *Inside Prefab*, p. 22.

16 Beatriz Colomina, *Sexuality & Space* (Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), p. 317.

17 Andrés Jaque, 'Rolling House for a Rolling Society', in *El Croquis 149: Collective Experiments. Spanish Architects 2010 II* (El Croquis Editorial, 2010), p. 245.

18 The mobile home was developed in the United States after the constitution of the National Park System at the turn of the twentieth century. Amy Campos, 'Mobile Interiors', in *Interiors Beyond Architecture,* ed. by Deborah Schneiderman and Amy Campos (Routledge, 2018), pp. 37–53.

19 Andrés Jaque, 'Arquitectura Transescalar', conference delivered at Universidad Torcuato Di Tella, 5 June 2025 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0yUGDfIoqk> [accessed 14 September 2025].

20 Jaque, 'Rolling House for a Rolling Society', p. 247.

21 Jaque, 'Rolling House for a Rolling Society', p. 247.

22 Jaque, 'Rolling House for a Rolling Society', p. 247.

23 Andrés Jaque, 'Sheltering the Rolling Society. A Post-Typological Urbanism of Non-Familiar Shared Homes', in *Volume 46: Shelter* (Archis Foundation, 2015), p. 86.

24 Jaque, 'Sheltering the Rolling Society', p. 86.

25 The prototype was developed by Fundació Mies van der Rohe and presented at Construmat, a trade fair and exhibition for construction products in Barcelona, in April 2009. Andrés Jaque, 'Rolling House for the Rolling Society', 2009 <https://officeforpoliticalinnovation.com/work/rolling-house-for-the-rolling-society/> [accessed 18 November 2025].

26 Jaque, 'Sheltering the Rolling Society', p. 90.

27 Jaque, 'Rolling House for a Rolling Society', pp. 244–251.

28 Jaque, 'Sheltering the Rolling Society', pp. 86–91.

29 Jaque, 'Rolling House for a Rolling Society', p. 251.

30 Jaque, 'Sheltering the Rolling Society', pp. 86–91.

31 Enrique Walker and Andrés Jaque, 'La arquitectura como instrumento político: Andrés Jaque y Enrique Walker en conversación', *ARQ*, 96 (Universidad Católica de Chile, 2017), pp. 16–31.

32 David V. Lurie and Krzysztof Wodiczko, 'Homeless Vehicle Project', *October*, 47 (1988), pp. 53–67.

33 Lurie and Krzysztof Wodiczko, 'Homeless Vehicle Project', p. 61.

34 Krzysztof Wodiczko, 'Homeless Vehicle', 1988–1989 <https://www.krzysztofwodiczko.com/instrumentation#/homeless-vehicle-project/> [accessed 10 June 2025].

35 Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, ed. by Jose Harris, trans. by Jose Harris and Margaret Hollis (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

36 Wodiczko, 'Homeless Vehicle'.

37 Winfried Baumann and Ludwig Fels, *Urban Nomads* (Institut für Moderne Kunst Nürnberg, 2013), p. 287.

38 Baumann and Fels, *Urban Nomads*, p. 285.

39 Toshihiko Suzuki is one of three members of Atelier OPA (Original, Product Design and Architecture). He worked at the office of Kisho Kurokawa from 1984 to 1990. 'Toshihiko Suzuki', n.d. <https://www.atelier-opa.com/suzuki.html> [accessed 23 June 2025].

40 Kisho Kurokawa was part of the Metabolist Movement in Japan. Rem Koolhaas and Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Project Japan: Metabolism Talks* (Taschen, 2011).

41 Koolhaas and Obrist, *Project Japan*, p. 388.

42 Kotobuki Seating Co. Ltd, 'Sleep Capsule', 2025 <https://www.kotobuki-seating.co.jp/sleep-capsule/> [accessed 23 June 2025].

43 Yodoko Plus company, 'What is Yodoko Plus?', n.d. <https://yodokoplus.com/about-us/> [accessed 23 June 2025].