AAC Colloque international - Call for Papers International Conference

Housing Caring Land
Housing through Gender Studies
22, 23 and 24 November 2023, Brussels
UCLouvain, ULB, Angela.d

Habiter le care
Le logement et ses abords au défi des gender studies
22, 23 et 24 novembre 2023, Bruxelles

The second wave egalitarian feminism established the link between housing and gender studies, by claiming “the Private is Political” which allowed the spatial analysis of “domestic exploitation”. Thus, gender studies were able to open up the “black box” of domestic space, by conceptualizing housing as the place of household work and male domination, which until then had been limited in French-language literature to social class. This perspective brought light mechanisms of exploitation and oppression between the sexes that were otherwise protected from the public sphere some examples include: women’s mental burdens, domestic violence, inequalities in employment in a context of difficult reconciliation between professional and private life, the dichotomy and hierarchy between productive and reproductive work, etc. (Friedan, 1963; Delphy, 1970; Franken, 1974; Oakley, 1975; Hayden, 1982; Haicault, 1984).

Almost fifty years separate us from these scientific contributions, and since then, gender studies have largely been renewed by a whole range of theoretical frameworks, such as postmaterialism, ecofeminism, intersectional and decolonial perspectives, queer and care theories. However, it is necessary to recognize that housing and domestic work remain poorly studied within these theoretical renewal (Dussuet, 2017). Care theories have filled this gap by proposing new ways of understanding the ways in which the public sphere and the private world are linked, which have often been considered as two separate elements. On the one hand, these theories provide us with an essential analytical framework for thinking about relations of domination in and through housing. And on the other hand, care theories enable us to consider the anthropological dimensions of the forms and uses of space and their variations - inhabiting, founding, distributing, transforming (Segaud, 2010).

the concept of care appeared in American feminist literature from the 1980s onwards (Finch and Groves, 1983; Gilligan, 1982; Tronto, 2015; Daly and Lewis, 2000). It allows us to jointly consider all the work performed (paid or unpaid) and to respond to our reciprocal vulnerabilities understood within a set of interdependencies. Based on Joan Tronto’s definition, care is “a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (Tronto, 2015, p. 13). While the concept of care first emerged to describe a new conception of political morality proposed by the John Rawls’ theory of justice (Brugère, 2011), French-language literature quickly linked this notion to elements of health and social care. This new perspective allowed confining the concept of care to the poorest professionalized care professions or to the sphere of “good feelings”. Tronto’s contribution allows questioning major contemporary issues, such as population aging, health crisis and transformation of family models, energy precariousness. It also invites us to think about the spatial dimensions of social relations, both in terms of residential practices and the logic of production and management of housing and their surroundings. By focusing our attention on vulnerabilities and interdependencies to analyze our societies, the care perspective opens up new ways of thinking about cohabitation between beings (whether human or non-human), and of apprehending the processes of “work of producing living together” (Hirata and Zarifian, 2000). From an intersectional perspective, this invites us to read social relations in inhabited spaces as complex processes of social, sexual and international division of domestic labor (Avril and Cartier, 2019; Hirata, 2021). The challenge, then, is to examine the spatial dimensions of these power relations, following on from the work on the gender relations at play in and rooted in housing (in domestic accounting, occupancy status, uses, etc.) (Lambert, Dietrich-Ragon and Bonvalet, 2018).

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1 Schematically, housing has been thought of above all as a protective space for the working classes in the face of the relationships of domination exercised in other spheres of social life (work, school...) (Schwartz, 2012), or at the opposite end of the social hierarchy, as a space of symbolic power demonstration for the upper classes (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot, 1989).
To address those gaps, this conference intends to establish a dialogue between care, housing and gender studies. We try to answer, how do the perspectives of care allow us to renew the relations between gender and housing? What are the ethical, epistemological, methodological and theoretical implications of this inter-disciplinary approach? How does care challenge the binary between public and private? Does analyzing housing from a care perspective necessarily involve “doing fieldwork as a feminist” (Clair, 2016)? To what extent does the application of care to housing studies make it possible to grasp the socio-spatial and trans-scalar roots of the articulation between productive and reproductive tasks? What do we learn by thinking about the practices and modes of production and management of housing and its surroundings through the prism of processes of social, sexual, racial and international division of domestic labor?

This colloquium aims to answer these questions through four main themes, presented separately in this call for papers, but which contributors will, of course, be able to articulate.

1) **From caretakers to producers of living together in and around the home: the social, sexual and racial division of care work**

This first section looks at transformations in the work of care in the lived environment, based on the notion of caretakers. While in the French-speaking world, care work is often confused with "cure" in the common sense (Laugier, Molinier and Paperman, 2009), the translations offered by the English noun caretaker capture the relational and interdependent dimension of inhabitation: caretaker literally means “concierge” or “guardians of care” in French, and “vigilant” in Spanish. This ensemble illustrates the extent to which care unfolds at the interface between practices of caring for others and the environment - built or unbuilt, tangible or intangible. Looking at who provides care in and around the home implies an interest in the forms – lay, institutional or professional – of habitat management at all these levels. This may involve questioning the social meaning of forms of mutual aid, neighborhood social relations and the ways in which housing populations and their environment are managed, or any social or political activity contributing to the maintenance of collective life.

This section looks at the different caretakers that operate at different scales of inhabitation, and which spatial supports they mobilize to implement their practices. Do we observe recurring identities in terms of class, race, age and gender in the work of facilitating modes of cohabitation and co-presence in the spaces of housing and its surroundings? To what extent does the day-to-day, ordinary management of living spaces contribute to the construction of social and gendered identity? What roles do intermediary housing players play? Can we question the effects of the current situation and historicise the power relationships observed, as the research on the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of the “domestic confinement of mothers” invites us to do (Lambert et al., 2021; Lambert, Girard and Guéraut, 2021)?

Questions could also be raised from moral and ethical considerations. In what way can forms of cohabitation with people in vulnerable situations support practices based on an ethic of responsibility in the face of the world’s needs? To what extent does this ethic clash with a rational and logical conception of social life, in which items such as “social success” or the “merit” of a few are achieved at the cost of the invisible, gratuitous or quasi-gratuitous work of care producers? Conversely, if we look at care from a negative perspective (I don’t care), what do we learn in terms of neglect, indifference and mistreatment in the residential environment?

The notion of *coveillance*, which is defined as “mutual care of individuals [in a] neighborhood” (Rosenberg, 1980, p. 80), can also be used to understand the differentiated abilities of individuals to
mobilize care practices. It even allows us to understand forms of internal stratification between populations in the same environment. Some people can easily mobilize kinship networks or have a capital of autochthony to get help, others struggle to find the help they need to cope with their dependency. Based on this, the analysis could consider how the unequal ability to receive and request care can be a marker of inequalities in the inhabited space. It could also take a geographical perspective, by looking at the commuting involved in providing care, particularly when this is outsourced. While the consequences of the globalization of the care labor market and the international migrations, have already been demonstrated\(^2\) (Avril and Cartier, 2019), the effects of care migrations at finer scales (metropolitan, communal, infra-communal) remain to be grasped. This question targets professional caretakers also referred to as “front-line” occupations (domestic workers, cleaners, social workers...). Unlike executives or senior professions, these professions have little room for maneuver in their time use (Avril, 2018). What are the implications of caretakers who look after habitats and/or occupants other than those in which they live? Are we seeing “care crises” in Northern countries, and particularly in certain metropolitan areas?

2) The space of care: the architecture and gendered distribution of work

This section looks at the space of care and the material conditions that make it possible. In French-language literature, care work is often reduced to a set of household tasks or care for those considered most vulnerable - notably children and the elderly, whether assigned to one or more people in the household, or outsourced to family carers or domestic workers. However, from a feminist point of view, this definition of care to the space of the home is insufficient because it does not allow us to consider the articulation of scales between public and private space. The notion of caresupport allows to fill this gap. It enables us to define spaces which, on the scale of the home and its surroundings, support the production of care practices (Courbebaisse and Salembier, 2022, forthcoming). This includes communal spaces for childcare, cooking, shopping, social or medical activities, laundries, and so on. If we consider space as an element that allows individuals to socializem (Cayouette-Remblière, Lion and Rivière, 2019), then we need to grasp both the dwelling and its surroundings as shaped by caretakers including how these spaces shape them in return. In other words, can the architecture of our living spaces encourage, facilitate or hinder care? What are the spatial processes of care work? How can the architecture of our living spaces support care work? Conversely, care work can also help to transform space. What strategies of spatial appropriation do caretakers mobilize in their practices? How do these care providers experience the different scales of inhabitation, and how do these different scales impact their work? From a post-materialist perspective, can we hypothesize that architecture influences or transforms the logics of social, sexual and racial division of care work? How can care help us to think about the way in which architecture conveys (or, conversely, diminishes) gender stereotypes?

Proposals may also draw on a historical approach that focuses on the diachronic evolution of the material conditions of care (Fleury, 2022). Are there architectural models or typologies that take care into account, and in what ways? How have the “needs” of care made these models and typologies evolve, and in what ways? Can we propose a history of architecture through the prism of social and spatial assignment to the production of everyday life? Postcolonial, decolonial and subaltern perspectives, which question the history of architecture through the prism of the social and spatial assignment to the production of everyday life, are also of interest.

\(^2\) Some authors speak of a “care crisis” in the South countries caused by the migration of caretakers (Borgeaud-Garcianía, Araujo Guimarães et Hirata, 2020 ; Ibos, 2020).
3) **For a politics of care: the public housing problem seen through the lens of care**

This third theme will examine public housing policies within theories of feminist care. This conference has two main goals: the first goal is to discuss the relevance of the concept of care as a grid for analyzing gender relations in and through housing; and the second goal is to debate the ethics of care as a political project, i.e. the advent of a society based on the social and institutional recognition of care providers (Tronto, 2015; Brugère, 2011). This dual ambition leads us to question the creation of public housing policies from the perspective of care and gender. To put it another way, is it possible to propose a political sociology of housing through the prism of the ethics of care? What are the theoretical, methodological and epistemological implications of public actions based on this ethic? From another disciplinary perspective, if we accept that care and inhabitation are anthropological invariants (Tronto, 2015; Segaud, 2010), can we envisage a political anthropology of the maintenance or upkeep of our living spaces?

This theme proposes to bring together proposals that question the public problem of housing and housing policies from the angle of care and its connection with social relationships. For example, we could look at the way in which care is addressed by public policies and by the actors who define or implement it, and also at how these actors appropriate, translate, negotiate and transform this ethic in their proposals and practices. So, who are those actors or entrepreneurs of the care ethic in housing policies? What role do researchers play in disseminating, promoting and updating this ethic, and what dialogue do they maintain with housing stakeholders? What role do associations and egalitarian activists play? Are we witnessing any forms of collusion or circulation – international and/or multi-level – of this ethic in the various levels of public action? How, and by whom, is this ethic translated operationally?

Proposals may question legal definitions and legislative translations of the ethic of care, as well as the meso-scale of organizations and interactions between professionals and users. For example, how can care and its associated ethics be used to analyze housing policies? Can it constitute a territorial planning tool for tackling the housing “crisis”, and in particular the structural shortage of affordable housing in the world’s cities? Work that takes a “multi-sited” ethnography approach (Marcus, 1995), or an international comparative perspective, would thus be particularly welcome.

It also involves questioning the commodification issues to which care practices within the home are increasingly subject (meal delivery, cleaning, body care and toileting, leisure and ambience, etc.). This marketing of care is all the more worthy of attention because it is accompanied by the development of residential products that aim to meet these ‘needs’ (senior residences, coliving for affluent young professionals, etc.). These products offer rented accommodation, the price of which includes a range of services integrated into the accommodation, which are then privatised and outsourced (Casier, 2023). Are these new products, some of which stem from the financialisation of the housing market, ‘compatible’ with a society based on the ethic of care?

Another way of looking at the relationship between housing policy and care is to take the economics of housing as the object of analysis. Therefore, housing policies become a pillar of capitalist economies (Zittoun, 2001; De Keersmaecker and Zimmer, 2019), whose definition and implementation could again be questioned from the perspective of gender and care. What forms of care do players in the housing economy assign to construction methods, the materials they use and working conditions on building sites (Fitz et Krasny, 2019)? How do they reason, or not, within environmental justice issues
raised by advocates of the ethic of care (Laugier, 2015)? Is it even possible, to promote an ethic of care that reconciles technical, regulatory, temporal and budgetary constraints in housing production?

Questioning housing policies from the perspective of gender and care also means questioning their articulation with other directly or indirectly related public and social policies. For example, research could focus on the allocation of social housing or housing subsidized by public authorities, hence they can question the ways in which housing policies are linked to social and family policies. How can using care in housing policy provide a framework for analyzing social and family policies (Letablier, 2001)? How can this analysis lead to a rethinking of the gender conventions associated with public policies?

Finally, proposals could focus on the effects of local democracy policies and the use of the voluntary sector to manage residents’ living environments and produce care practices. Can the care approach help us rethink the gender of the “participatory and deliberative imperative” that marks out our contemporary democracies (Blondiaux and Sintomer, 2002; Paoletti and Rui, 2015)? To what extent does the participatory injunction contribute to reinforcing, maintaining or combating unequal conditions for living together (Leclercq, 2021)? In what way do these care practices, carried out in the name of “resident participation”, lie at the crossroads between free work and civic engagement (Simonet, 2010)?

4) **Saying care is doing care? The performativity of care in and through the architecture of our homes**

The fourth theme explores the dialogue between care, gender and housing from the angle of the discourses, narratives and discursive production that tell the story of housing and its surroundings. This theme can be broken down into several entries.

We start by questioning the practices of architects and those involved in the making of the city, as they produce representations and projections of reality that are likely to create different social and gendered roles to individuals, and lead to an over-determination of the division of care work. Do the modes of representation and projection of reality inherent in architectural production have a gender? How are men and women represented in architectural projects? What gender performances are conveyed in project narratives or representations, and how do they assign or predetermine differentiated social and gendered roles for individuals? To put it another way, does the concept of care make it possible to “denaturalize” architecture?

Another way of posing these questions is to look at the discourses and representations of the city and domestic space, and how these discursive productions do or do not speak of care. So, how do the discourses of users, decision-makers, spatial designers or anyone else with easy access to media make the work of care visible (or invisible)? Throughout the history of architecture and the professionalization of the art of building, what conceptions of care have been defended or favored by designers, and how can we analyze them? What role do or did the media give to care providers? How does this treatment differ according to gender, age, “race” or sexual orientation? If “saying the city is doing the city” (Fijalkow, 2017), can we say that “saying care is doing” when studying housing as a feminist point of view? Do we observe any surreptitious forms of instrumentalization of discourse, of “carewashing” or “genderwashing” in the way we talk about domestic space and its surroundings? Conversely, can we access the “hidden transcript” (Scott, 1992) of care providers, and under what conditions? What methodological tools and precautions can be mobilized to capture their words? What historiographical tools can be mobilized to make a history of architecture through the prism of
care and/or gender? Does care make it possible to write a “feminist history of architecture” (Dadour, 2022)?

Finally, proposals may directly question the place of archives and collective and/or individual memory in the social world. Can and should we apply an ethic of care to the way we (re)write architectural history? What kind of care, maintenance and upkeep can we give to our archives and the way we exploit them in our academic or operational work?

**Practical information**

This conference aims to integrate academic audience – students, doctoral students, young or experienced researchers – activist and general audience. Proposals may be empirical, theoretical, epistemological or methodological. Papers focusing on the experience of housing projects or experiments involving a feminist and/or care-aware perspective will also be welcomed. Proposals may include an intersectional or overlapping perspective, attentive to the articulation of relations of domination.

Proposals should not exceed 3,500 characters including spaces, excluding bibliography, and may be submitted in French or/and English. We also foresee a publication project following the colloquium. Presentations should be accessible to a broad, non-academic audience.

The deadline for submission of proposals is **20 August 2023**.

Proposals should be sent to the following address: genre-logement@uclouvain.be

Applicants will receive a reply around mid-September.

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Bibliographie-References


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