

Pornotopia

An Essay on Playboy's Architecture and Biopolitics

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The Male Electronic Boudoir: The Urban Bachelor Apartment

We should not shrug off the excesses of those who make the design of this year's Playboy apartment.

—Peter Cook, *Experimental Architecture*

Walter Benjamin describes the advent of the bourgeois interior as a “box in the theater of the world”:

The interior is not just the universe of the private individual; it is also his *étui*. Ever since the time of Louis Philippe, the bourgeois has shown a tendency to compensate for the absence of any trace of private life in the big city. He tries to do this within the four walls of his apartment. It is as if he had made it a point of honor not to allow the traces of his everyday objects and accessories to be lost. Indefatigably, he takes the impression of a host of objects; for his slippers and his watches, his blankets and his umbrellas, he devises coverlets and cases . . . the apartment becomes a sort of cockpit. The traces of the inhabitant are molded into the interior. Here is the origin of the detective story, which inquires into these traces and follows these tracks.¹

As the boudoir was invented by French libertine literature in the eighteenth century to rethink the relationship between architecture, femininity, and pleasure production, in the middle of the twentieth century Playboy invented the urban penthouse to reorganize the relationship between white heterosexual masculinity and the domestic space.² Whereas the boudoir created the

conditions for the emergence of modern domesticity, *Playboy's* penthouse designed the framework in which the contemporary postdomestic space would come to exist. The penthouse was a Cold War male boudoir, a mechanized and electrical "petite maison" that, like Jean-François de Bastide's niche and Vivant Denon's "petit cabinet," was designed for heterosexual seduction. But unlike in the case of Bastide and Vivant Denon, the boudoir within *Playboy's* narrative is no longer a female cell, but rather a totally masculine space.

If you want to change a man, change his apartment. If you want to modify gender, transform architecture. If you want to modify subjectivity act upon interior space. This could be *Playboy's* motto as it embarked on its campaign for social change in the 1950s.³ Just as the Enlightenment believed in the boudoir for enhancing femininity and in the single-person cell as an enclave for the reconstruction of the criminal soul, *Playboy* relied on the bachelor pad as a niche for the manufacture of the new, modern male. Whereas the disciplinary regime was characterized by a "strict discipline as an art of correct training,"⁴ within the pharmacopornographic regime, training itself takes the form of media arousal. Whereas disciplinary power "separates, analyses, differentiates, carries its procedures of decomposition to the point of necessary and sufficient single units," training the "moving, confused, useless multitude of bodies and forces into a multiplicity of individual elements—small, separate cells, organic autonomies, genetic identities and continuities, combinatory segments,"⁵ pharmacopornographic power links the previously separated cells and autonomous bodies into a larger media network. Whereas disciplinary power invented large institutions that worked as "observatories of human multiplicity,"⁶ within the pharmacopornographic regime the domestic cell becomes the main media observatory and broadcasting unit where new techniques of subjection act upon the body and its pleasures. Whereas discipline made "individuals," the specific techniques of power of the pharmacopornographic regimes produce "dividuals," as

Deleuze puts it, that can act only when enabled by multimedia and prosthetic technologies.⁷ For Deleuze, the "dividual" is the fragmented effect of representation and information technologies and control apparatuses of the second half of the twentieth century. Constructed by the market and by visual culture, the "dividual" is an image before being a body, an affected consumer before being a citizen. The playboy is the *dividual* of the Cold War years, and the penthouse apartment, his multimedia cell.

In two articles dedicated to the Playboy penthouse apartment published in September and October 1956, the magazine presented the bachelor apartment as a theater of masculinity in which men could shed their former habits and learn the game skills of the playboy rabbit—an amoral consumer represented as white middle class urban adult. The penthouse was more than just an advertising stage set; it was a gender-performative machine capable of transforming the existing man-stag into a playboy-rabbit. The apartment functioned as a gender training ground where the former deer-man could become familiar with the playful ethos of the rabbit through the use of a series of *apparatuses* of rotation that stressed the flexibility, reversibility, and circularity of the gender, sexual, social, and political norms that dominated American postwar society. "Apparatus" is here the translation of the French word *dispositif*, used by Michel Foucault during the 1970s to refer to a series of "discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions" that work as a "technologies of power and subjectivation."⁸ Giorgio Agamben has stressed the similarity of the notion of *dispositif* to Heidegger's concept of *Gestell*, understanding the *apparatus* as "the gathering together of installation that installs man, this is to say challenges him to expose the real in the mode of ordering."⁹ Following both Heidegger and Foucault, for Agamben an apparatus is "anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control or secure the gestures, behaviors, or discourses of

living beings."¹⁰ In governmental terms, apparatuses work at the junction of anatomopolitics and biopolitics, between techniques of body regulation and techniques of control and production of population. Within the Cold War regime, interior design, gadgets and multimedia techniques become "pharmacopornographic apparatuses," new governmental technologies of gender and sexual subjectivation.

Designed to endlessly convert work into leisure, dressed into undressed, dry into wet, homosexual into heterosexual, monogamous into polygamous, to transform the black into white and vice versa, the interior design of the 1956 *Playboy* penthouse apartment, its visual devices, furnishings, and household appliances, behave as apparatuses of subject production. The penthouse apartment itself is a meta-apparatus for endless playing. Nevertheless, there was no real danger involved in playing, since the option to "go back home" was always there. The game was neither a free network of relationships nor a totally open system. It was a controlled, safe exercise involving a temporary suspension of the moral validity of the social norms that weighed upon the obsolete male subjectivity of the middle-aged American man-stag, at least at the imaginary level. Beyond the sexual arousal that the images timidly invited, this moral suspension produced an erotic "surplus value" that fueled the emerging "rabbit" subjectivity. *Playboy's* success consisted in putting the American suburban male reader—who remained embedded in the postwar economy's logic of consumption and leisure, and complicit in the social structures that segregated gender, class, and race—in the role of a player, and granting him a brief taste of moral transgression before inviting him to return to his life of worker-deer, his suburban house and his lawn.

The *Playboy* article promised readers a key that would allow them to enter the bachelor penthouse through the pages of the magazine. The management of interior space was the precondition for the playboy's sex life. The guided tour—an instruction manual aimed at readers as potential future users of the new space

and its functional objects—introduces the sexually inexperienced middle-class American male to the management of multiple sexual encounters in a single space, and it presents sex as the ultimate consumption object among a deluge of designer objects that are also consumed erotically.¹¹ As critic Bill Osgerby has shown, what was unusual here was not the space—which wasn't that different from the "bachelor pads" presented in other male interior design magazines at the time—but the discourse put forward by *Playboy*, the ability to "animate" architecture through the construction of an erotic narrative.¹² In fact, the Borsani flip-flop sofa could be also understood as a postwar pop version of the *fauteuil d'amour* that made the boudoir of Madame Gourdan famous in the eighteenth century: "when a woman sits down on the back of the chair bent backward... with the legs open and almost tied, ready to become the object of all kinds of shameful practices."¹³

Playboy attempts to train the sexually unsophisticated American male in the skills required to manage multiple sexual encounters within a single interior space, which is no longer purely private or totally domestic. This sexual-architectonic pedagogy equates management of one's interior space with management of one's sex life. The penthouse's particular value was its ability to produce a gender economy alternative to the one promoted by the single-family home. Through its unusual erotic interpretation of interior architecture, *Playboy* suggested that the "multiple functionality" of open space, the "flexibility of the modules" and the playful, "flip-flop" character of its furniture, embodied in the designs of Eero Saarinen, Osvald Borsani, and Ray and Charles Eames, made it possible to host as many women as was deemed necessary to satisfy the bachelor's (or better still, new divorced man's) sexual desire while at the same time protecting his space from what *Playboy* called "female domestication."

For *Playboy*, the biggest threat to a male urban bachelor apartment is a young woman eager to get hitched and move to the suburbs. Thus, the bachelor apartment is obviously a heterosexual theater, but to evade the clutches of matrimony it must

also be fastidiously gender-segregated. While the female home is characterized as a natural space that privileges reproduction tasks, the playboy's postdomestic space is a technified enclave, ultraconnected to communication networks, and given over to the production of pleasure=work=leisure=capital. The apartment (not the playboy) works like a male externalized sexual organ that attracts women and, just as effectively, as a household appliance that gets rid of them afterward. For the first time, thanks to the apartments "flip-flop" devices that mechanize flirting, the bachelor could afford to be flippant about women. As soon as the female guest crossed the threshold into the apartment, every furniture detail operated as a hidden trap to help the bachelor get what the magazine calls "instant sex."¹⁴ Mechanical gadgetry changes the old ways of hunting the stag into new forms of sexual management proper to the playboy-rabbit.¹⁵ Saarinen's Tulip chairs, a turning cabinet bar, sliding screens, and translucent drapes behave as apparatuses of rotation that constantly restructure the space of the apartment to technically assist the bachelor's efforts in defeating the female visitor's resistance to sex. The furniture in the penthouse becomes a series of machines for making out. The *Playboy* article maintained: "Speaking of entertainment, one of the hanging Knoll cabinets beneath the windows holds a built-in bar. This permits the canny bachelor to remain in the room while mixing a cool one for his intended quarry. No chance of missing the proper psychological moment—no chance of leaving her cozily curled up on the couch and returning to find her mind changed, purse in hand, and the young lady ready to go home, dammit."¹⁶

The penthouse was presented as a domestic office or a professional pad in which the bachelor could organize his multiple sexual encounters, but also as a recycling station in which the playboy gets rid of his prey once he has consumed them. It is precisely the rotating apparatuses and "flip-flop" objects that simplify the operations involved in getting the women into the house and out again. *Playboy* claimed that in addition to assisting with

the management of time, these technical accessories prevent two female guests from encountering each other within the space of the apartment and prohibit the "wanting-to-be-a-wife girl" from taking it over: the phone, for instance, is equipped with "on-off widgets . . . so that the jangling bell or, what's worse, a chatty call from the date of the night before won't shatter the spell being woven. (Don't worry about missing any fun this way: there's a phone-message-taker hooked to the tape recorder.)"¹⁷

The anti-female domesticity training given by *Playboy*, first to get rid of women after sex, second to eliminate their traces, and third to prevent women from taking back the kitchen (until now their domestic headquarters), radically transformed the image of the bachelor. The playboy was no longer a future husband, but rather a serial seducer, technically assisted by media and appliances in his never-ending work of hunting and cleaning. Driven by the constant need to remove the traces of his previous evening's sexual conquests and defeminizing his space as though he were purging or disinfecting, the playboy rabbit behaves like a double agent or spy.

With its vision of technology and modern design as natural accessories of the male body, *Playboy* endows furniture with supernatural qualities, presenting it as bachelor prostheses that enhance his ability to pick up without being snapped up. On one side of the living room, the article went on, the Saarinen Womb chair could be moved to the right or to the left, transforming a working area into a cruising area (and vice versa) and minimizing the bachelor's waste of time and effort. Saarinen's and Eames's attempt to create a "comfortable chair, which would allow several sitting positions rather one rigid one, and [incorporate] a number of loose cushions" fit perfectly within "work is leisure" agenda of the Playboy rabbit.¹⁸ The "flip-flop couch," praised in the *Playboy* article for its ability to mechanize seduction, was Borsani's Divan D 70.¹⁹ With the D70, and also the P40 chaise lounge, Borsani brought into industrial design a rhetoric of camouflage, mutation, mobility, and flexibility that would become central to *Playboy's*

spatial and sexual economy. Thanks to a transverse steel mechanism, the divan could be transformed into a bed, a transformation *Playboy* saw as a physical expression of the almost metaphysical leap from vertical to horizontal values: "The rest of the living room is best seen by utilizing a unique feature of the couch. It flips, literally: at the touch of a knob at its end, the back becomes seat and vice versa—and now we're facing the other way."²⁰ No need for convincing the guest; the flip-flop couch converts a casual talk around the table into a romantic tête-à-tête in front of the fireplace. This apparatus of rotation enabled the bachelor to transform his female visitor, with charm and delicacy, from the vertical to the horizontal position, from woman to bunny, from dressed to nude. With just one more flip-flop movement, the playboy could take his guest/prey from divan to platform bed—the "final trap," the ultimate apparatus.

As we will see later in detail, the reclining couch and the bed (architecture of privatization of sexuality, traditionally associated with marriage) have been transformed into highly technified platforms fitted out with a telephone, remote control, and radio (anticipating Hefner's famous rotating bed) that bring to mind a military observatory or a control room more than a traditional bed:

Now we've sipped the nocturnal dram and it's bedtime. Having said "night-night" (or, "come along now, dearest") to the last guest; it's time to sink into the arms of Morpheus (or a more comely substitute). Do we go through the house turning out the lights and locking up? No sir: flopping on the luxurious bed, we have within easy reach the multiple controls of its unique headboard. Here we have the silent mercury switches and a rheostat that control every light in the place and can subtly dim the bedroom to just the right romantic level. Here, too, are the switches, which control the circuits for front door and terrace window locks. Beside them are push buttons to draw the continuous, heavy, pure-linen, lined draperies on sail track, which can insure darkness at morning.²¹

The bachelor penthouse operates as an office and a gatehouse simultaneously, in a curious superimposition of a new space of production of capitalism — the office — and an old space of sexual consumption and production — the brothel. The Playboy Mansion was to be an even more intense and literal instance of this porno-topian superimposition.

Cinematic Solutions for Moral Dilemmas

To look at magazines and films of the period, American post-war popular uses of architecture were caught between a romantic and an economic meaning. On one hand, architecture was the external solidification of sexual and social identity, a sort of exoskeleton crystallized upon and around subjectivity that made interior psychology visible. Within this logic (not far from Giedion's theory and somehow the base for his argument against "Playboy Architecture"), architecture was supposed to be a material inscription of political and moral differences. According to this distinction (and this time against Giedion himself), for the *Ladies Home Journal* traditional and vernacular architectures conveyed normative social and sexual values, on the contrary, modern and urban architectures were signs of social and sexual deviance. Whereas suburban and traditional houses shelter white heterosexual and stable families, modern architecture and design were codes of individual immorality, luxury, perversion, homosexuality, pornography, and crime. This moral psychology of architecture is clearly reflected within American cinema of the period. Analyzing popular films produced right before or immediately after the Second World War, such as *Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise* (1931), *Dark Victory* (1939), and *Christmas in Connecticut* (1945), historian Joseph Rosa concludes,

There was a significant differentiation made between the portrayal of those living in apartments and those living in penthouses. The apartment-dweller was generally young, naïve, ambitious, in a precarious financial situation, and on his or her own for the first time. The

penthouse was typically reserved for the wealthy older, well educated and sentimental. The penthouse-dweller lived in the present and looked toward the future with little concern for the past—with the exception of its bearing on this or her social status. It was almost never the home for a married family with children, though a typical story line had a penthouse-dweller coming to his or her senses, falling in love, and relocating to a more traditional home.²²

On the other hand, architecture and design were presented within exhibitions and magazines (from *House Beautiful* to *Playboy*) as the most significant objects of consumption and success markers of industrial capitalism. But whereas for *House Beautiful* the relationship between individual morality and economic success was a conflicting one, for *Playboy*, modern architecture worked as a material swivel between two domains yet to be connected: the masculine moral soul and the market non-moral fluxes. During the late 1950s, *Playboy* managed to change the popular image of modern architecture creating an equation between the rejection of the domestic heterosexual regime and financial success and glamourized masculinity. As Joseph Rosa underlines, this relationship is paradigmatically represented by the cinema sets designs by art director Kem Adams at Pinewood Studios for James Bond's movies.²³ In *Diamonds are Forever* (1971), for instance, the poured-in-place concrete house where Bond hides, with sweeping views of what is supposedly the Nevada desert, is actuality the 1968 Arthur Elrod Residence, the ultimate bachelor pad designed by John Lautner and located at 2175 Southridge Drive in Palm Springs. Significantly enough, it is in this movie that James Bond reveals that he is a Playboy Club member. To end up the cycle of becoming-image of architecture, the Lautner house would be the object of a photo-reportage within *Playboy* magazine the same year.²⁴

The opposition between domestic normality and the perversion of modern architecture would be intensified with the advent of the neoliberal and conservative politics at the beginning of the 1980s. Whereas during the 1950-70s period, the association

with the "International Style" denoted social and sexual disruption, but also economic and masculine success (as in *Playboy* and the Bond films), from the early 1980s on, modern architecture would no longer denote technological sophistication, futurism, and human capital; rather, the modern-architecture popular icons (such as the Farnsworth House or the Elrod Residence), suspended within space and time, suggest simply moral perversion, social exclusion, and criminality. This is the case of the Malin Residence, better known as Chemosphere (built by John Lautner in 1960), which appears in Brian de Palma's *Body Double* (1984), where the inhabitant is an addicted voyeur who witnesses the staged killing of a porn actress. In the 1980s, modern penthouses, following a transformation from *Playboy*'s soft porn into *Hustler*'s hardcore, would become sites of sexual perversion and felony.

***The Kitchenless Kitchen: Defeminizing the Domestic,
Dedomesticating the Feminine***

Playboy appeals to our architectural imaginary, shows us its theatrical and performative side constructed by arbitrary cultural conventions, in order to bring about a shift in traditional ways of inhabiting space and conceiving masculinity. Articulating gender difference around the opposition male-technical/woman-natural, *Playboy* magazine maintained that the new domestic environment, saturated with media and mechanical and electrical appliances, was the rightful domain of masculinity. While the women's magazines of the time made efforts to redefine the role of the modern housewife as a technician or manager of the home,²⁵ *Playboy* would claim that men and not women, trained professionally as media operators, toolmakers, and machine users, were most suited for carrying out newly automated domestic tasks.

The design of the "Kitchenless Kitchen" in *Playboy*'s penthouse apartment, which the magazine's editors repeatedly evoked until it became a classic in the 1960s, signaled this redefinition of a traditionally female space as masculine. The kitchen is camouflaged from the rest of the penthouse—an almost totally open

space—by a fiberglass screen. Behind the screen, the interior can hardly be recognized as a kitchen: it has become a stage for performing postdomestic masculinity. Within this theatrical setting surrounded by the screens, every cooking and cleaning appliance has taken the form (at least to the period observer) of a highly sophisticated piece of technology:

The kitchen walls consist of six Japanese-style Shoji screens, which can slide to completely close or completely open the kitchen. Frames are of elm, covering its translucent fiberglass. . . . Now let's roll back those Shojis and enter the kitchen. Your first thought might be, where is everything? It's all there, as you shall see, but all is neatly stowed and designed for efficiency with the absolute minimization of fuss and hausfrau labor. For this is a bachelor kitchen, remember, and unless you're a very odd-ball bachelor indeed, you like to cook and whomp up short-order specialties to exactly the same degree that you actively dislike dishwashing, marketing and tidying up.²⁶

The surprised exclamation of the visitor, "Where is everything?" does not result from the technical character of the appliances, which was a constant in American advertisements for the kitchen at the time.²⁷ Rather, the word "everything" replaces the word "housewife" in a Freudian slippage. The real question is, "Where is the housewife?" *Playboy* had broken the last taboo, smashed the last icon of the suburban house: it had made the woman disappear from the kitchen. Cleaning, considered by *Playboy* as typical "hausfrau manual labor" has been taken over by machines, transforming the kitchen into a playground for the "young connoisseur of meat and wines."²⁸ All the redefinition of kitchen activities in terms of technical efficiency and male skill safely eliminate any risk of feminizing or emasculating the bachelor (which the article describes as the danger of being an "odd-ball bachelor").

Rejecting at once the "antiseptic medical look of so many modern kitchens" and the feminine character of kitchen appliances, *Playboy* succeeded in making the technical kitchen a necessary

accessory, as important a component of the urban seducer's lifestyle as the automobile. The "kitchenless kitchen" takes over the traditional feminine tasks of transforming dirty into clean, raw into cooked, not through the efforts of the housewife's working hands but through the utopian effectiveness of modern industrial technology recounted by *Playboy*. The kitchen's ultrasound dishwasher uses inaudible sound frequencies to clean its contents, pretending to eliminate the need for manual dishwashing. The morning after a successful conquest at home, breakfast is supposed to be prepared by the flick of a remote-controlled switch installed on the bachelor's bed panel. *Playboy* describes the bachelor's routine: "Reaching lazily to the control panel, you press the buttons for the kitchen circuits and immediately raw bacon, eggs, bread and ground coffee you did the right things with the night before...[s]tart the metamorphosis into crisp bacon, eggs fried just right and steaming-hot fresh java."²⁹ Whereas within the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow, the same kitchen was promoted as a technical aid for the female heterosexual housewife, *Playboy* dared to get rid of the housewife, replacing her with technology. In *Playboy*, technical appliances not only come to stand in for the figure of the housewife but also help the serial seducer eliminate all traces of the women who visit the penthouse. Thus, the dishwasher is not only convenient because it is noiseless but also because it removes "the imprints of the lipstick kiss" from the night before.³⁰ Like the sliding screen of the kitchen, the bachelor's female guests operate as the object of the same visual law: now you see it, now you don't.

Playboy interpreted the process of transforming the private domestic space of the kitchen into a public showroom—a process generalized in American architecture during the fifties—as a direct effect of transforming the kitchen into an exclusively male territory. The woman had lost her leading role on the kitchen stage and become a spectator in a theater of masculinity. With regard to the male user of the "radiant broiler-roaster," *Playboy* wagered, "It is our bet that the manipulation of this broiler, and

the sight through the dome of a sizzling steak, will prove for your guest a rival attraction to the best on TV. And you'll be the director of the show."³¹ It is as if, for *Playboy*, the transparent dome broiler—like the apartment itself, with its glass windows and undivided spaces—would imitate the structure of the TV set or the show. Once again, both the broiler and the penthouse operate as peep-show display mechanisms that offer the desired object (the roasted meet, the pink flesh of the young female guest) to the male eye, creating the effect of realism and proximity while still protecting the spectator from direct contact.

Although women could visit, stay overnight, and witness a virtuoso culinary exercise in the kitchen, privacy—meaning total female exclusion—was preserved within two enclosed spaces inside the penthouse: the study, “a *sanctum sanctorum* where women are seldom invited,” and the lavatory, a sort of media-pod, which includes “john, bidet, magazine rack, ashtray and telephone,” and which *Playboy* describes English-style as the “throne room”—the ultimate retreat, where the bachelor-king “gets away from everything.”³² The ultimate privatization of brain and anus in the form of the study and the lavatory indicates the limits of the bodily gender construction of the playboy: whereas his eyes, hands, and penis are totally devoted to the maximization of sexual pleasure—and thus subject to a constant process of publicizing—his reasoning and anal functions, as superior male faculties, are protected from the menace of feminization and homosexuality. Study and lavatory, male intelligence and anality, are the only enclaves that escape the theatrical display, publicizing, and exhibition process that otherwise spreads throughout the entire domestic realm.

Backing Away from Glass Dresses: Inventing Vikki Dougan

The penthouse's mechanical gadgets were not the only things to operate as rotating and flipping devices. The same *apparatus* of rotation that enabled the Borsani couch to become horizontal, the round bed to turn 360 degrees, and the kitchen to become

a theater was behind the production of one of the most famous Playmates of the fifties, known as "The Back." In June 1957, *Playboy* published photographs taken by Sam Baker of Vikki Dougan's nude back.³³ One month later, the magazine dedicated a three-page story to the new Playmate sensation: "At the Hollywood Foreign Press Association's 1957 award banquet, Vikki turned up in a gown that was not only backless but virtually seatless too—cut down to reveal several startling inches of reverse cleavage. "Eyeballs popped," as did the flashbulbs of the United Press, who caught Vikki with her rearguard down and sent the wires a fascinating photo that has to be judiciously cropped for newspaper publication."³⁴

In the article, Dougan denounced the hypocrisy of what she called "people in glass dresses" (an expression that had already been applied to the International Style architecture), a criticism of the models who posed dressed in transparent tissue, which was the most common way of showing a female nude in the classic pin-ups by George Petty or Alberto Vargas. Dougan argued for a different way of showing and concealing the female body. She was portrayed wearing an opaque fabric dress that revealed not just the usual décolletage but also its posterior, something *Playboy* judged to be "wild." Once the "hidden parts" of Dougan were selected, photographed, and cropped, the metonymic process could begin: Dougan became "The Back."

The possibility of "looking at things from behind" was not only a consolation for women such as Vikki Dougan who, claimed the magazine, "were not busty"³⁵: turning the bustless girl to discover the back of a Playmate was another rotation game through which *Playboy* inverted the laws of the gaze. What was back became front, exactly in the same way that, through the use of the TV camera, the "private" rooms of Hefner's house became public and what was hidden became exposed, and all without the need for "glass dresses" (that is, without windows or glass facades).³⁶ Like the cropping of Dougan's back, the visibility of the Playboy Mansion was regulated through a very precise selection of images,

staged for the public eye. In fact, Hefner used his television show as a way of "focusing in" and "opening" to the public eye some of the staged scenes already published in the magazine, offering what he called (in a phrase that underscored the production of the "private") "a behind-the-scenes view of America's most sophisticated magazine."³⁷ The mansion's devices would later come to intensify the multimedia feedback between the house, the magazine, and the TV show.

Just like the rotating bed, which Hefner literally used as a game board on which he moved the images that would make up the magazine, the pornographic language created by *Playboy* magazine can be understood as a horizontal plane, an ideal grid upon which all the fragmented body parts captured by the many technical recording systems relate to each other, like in an anatomic variation of Saussure's structuralist system. Within this plane in which a particular cropped organ referred to another by homology or by difference, not only did Dougan's back establish a "flip-flop" relationship with the bust of another prominent Playmate, June Wilkinson, but the blonde hair and smiling face of the as-yet-unknown girl-next-door Stella Stevens were analogically linked to those of Marilyn Monroe and Kim Novak. The two-dimensional space of the photograph, which provides the possibility of cutting and combining different body parts endlessly, and the Photoshop techniques that would come later, served to emphasize this abstract visual economy. The pornographic body is constructed through collage as architecture. The space extends itself without relief toward the past and the future equally, embracing every woman that ever existed or will ever exist ("woman" here has no content other than as a visual sign). It is within this plane of analogies that the girl next door, innocent or unlovely as she might be, is already connected in an abstract and timeless way to some other feature of Brigitte Bardot. Moreover, in this visual chessboard, Bardot herself becomes merely a gracious combinatory formula of Gina Lollobrigida, Jayne Mansfield, Anita Ekberg, and later—Paris Hilton.

As the pairing of "The Back" and "The Bust," shows, the *apparatus* of rotation establishes a relationship between two objects or body parts that do not necessarily belong to the same owner, in exactly the same way as the pornographic and architectural montage cuts hands, mouths, and genitals from different sources and pastes them together as part of a sexual narrative. The transformation of Vikki Dougan into "The Back" exemplifies a strategy of multiple composition out of which not only the Playmates but also their position in the Playboy Mansion are constructed.

Pin-Up Architecture

Architecture is to establish emotional relationships by means of raw materials.

—Le Corbusier, *Toward a New Architecture*, 1923

In the late 1950s and '60s, only one other article published in *Playboy* managed to match the popularity of the Playmate nudes: the foldout of the second feature on the Playboy penthouse published in 1959.³⁸ Relying on the same visual and consumption economy of striptease, the chaste watercolor illustrations of the apartment aroused as much fascination as the Marilyn Monroe and Bettie Page nudes. The interior of the penthouse unfolded just as the bodies of the pin-ups had done. By turning the pages, readers opened and closed doors and windows, walked along corridors, and created transparencies that invited them to travel endlessly back and forth between the private and the public.

We could argue, following Colomina, that nowhere has this process been more intense and influenced by popular-culture image-production techniques (including pornography) than in *Playboy*. It is important to note that the urban bachelor-pad drawings and models did not intend to be documents of projects to be built. Later on, Playboy Houses (from the Chaskin House to the Playboy Mansion) would not follow the design directions found at the penthouse drawings. In fact, the power of *Playboy* architecture was to exist only *as* media or (even when it was built) *within* media connections.

Playboy decided to follow up the success of the 1959 report on the fictional bachelor penthouse by transforming an actual physical space into photographic images, and coined the term "Playboy House" for the occasion. Nevertheless, the Chaskin house did not share architecture style or interior design with the urban bachelor apartment. In May 1959, it published a ten-page color report by Bunny Yeager shot inside the bachelor house of Hefner's friend Harold Chaskin in Biscayne Bay, Miami.³⁹ The focus was no longer on the furniture, but on the lifestyle that the architecture of the house made possible. The report also turned into a kind of "adver-torial" publicizing the floor tiles that Chaskin manufactured in his Florida factory. And, in Chaskin's house, tiles covered everything: bathrooms, terraces, solarium, swimming pools. The use of tiles extending from indoor spaces such as the bathrooms and the indoor pool to outdoor spaces such as the solarium and terraces created a homogenous, uninterrupted surface, a continuous clad-ded skin that made no distinction between inside and outside the house, transforming everything into an acclimatized interior—regardless of whether the climate was natural or generated by air conditioning.

"The center of the house," the article explains, "is an indoor swimming pool with a retractable roof and a sliding wall that, when open, connects to the living room and turns the whole area into a games zone."⁴⁰ Yeager's photographs of Chaskin's indoor pool are a paradigmatic example of the architectural and photographic (but also pornographic) devices used by *Playboy* to produce domesticity as a visible interior. The glass-walled indoor pool in the living room functioned like a home peep show, creating an exhibitionism/voyeurism dialectics and allowing visitors to observe the bodies swimming half-naked without getting wet.⁴¹ Guests looked through a window that instead of leading to the outside in the usual way, it looked into another interior space: the blue-tiled pool and its naked girls. Likewise, a two-way mirror in the solarium allowed the occupants of the house to look at the sunbathing bodies outside without being seen. Readers of the

magazine repeat this specular consumption, observing without getting their feet wet and looking without being seen.

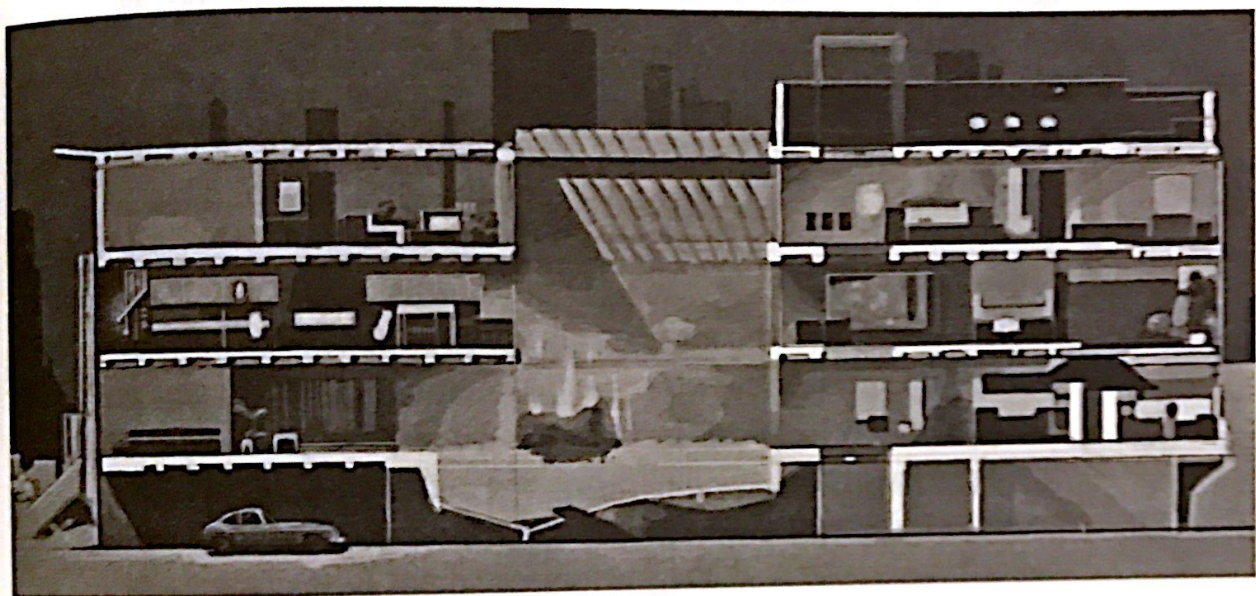
Perhaps because the United States was starting to move away from McCarthyism's "witch hunt" against communists and homosexuals, or maybe as a reaction against these repressive policies, the 1959 issue of *Playboy* containing the report on the Chaskin House sold more than a million copies, overtaking *Esquire* for the first time. The success of the Chaskin House piece showed Hefner that *Playboy* readers liked nothing better than to inhabit architecture visually, to dwell within images. Photography and publications were making possible a new relationship to domesticity, since for the first time the interior could be produced and exhibited as pure image. Probably, the success of the Chaskin reportage encouraged Hefner to retrieve the idea of producing his own domestic interior as an ongoing visual narrative to be displayed within the magazine pages, as he had first done at *Chicago Daily News* in 1952.

On his return from Miami, Hefner began developing a plan to build a house in Chicago modeled on the Chaskin House in Florida, in spite of the much different climates of the two cities. He bought a block of land at 28 Bellevue East and commissioned the architect Donald Jaye to renovate and redesign a multistory house around an indoor swimming pool.⁴² Meanwhile, through the influence of either the local Catholic church or the Mafia, Hefner was denied permission to set his building among the venerable bourgeois buildings of East Bellevue.⁴³ Although the house was never built, in May 1962 *Playboy* achieved another hit when it published the unbuilt designs in one of the most famous articles of the period. The color illustrations by Donald Jaye showed the facade, a cross-section and some interior details of the house. It was the first time that interior architecture was used as more than a mere backdrop for articles of a more or less pornographic nature. Even the girls were no longer necessary. The naked interior space had become the pornographic object par excellence.

The almost cartoonishly modern three-story building, designed to be built with concrete walls and a clear glass facade,



Figures 5.1 and 5.2 Donald Jay's design for "The Playboy Town House" published in *Playboy*, May 1962. Building façade and section (drawings by Antonio Gagliano).



The building is a modern, multi-story structure with a central section that features a large, angled, glass-enclosed structure. The building has multiple levels with balconies and large windows. A car is parked on the street in front of the building.

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appeared pasted between two traditional Chicago houses dating from the turn of the twentieth century, producing a sandwich of architectural styles, an abrupt montage of historical regimes of visibility and modes of accessing interiority. The most striking thing was the contrast between the opacity of the adjacent houses and the transparency of Donald Jaye's design. And taking the effect of the glass facades even further, several exterior lights seemed to illuminate the house during the night, rendering the interior even more visible. The second story, housing a living room with a spiral staircase, was totally open to public view. The ground floor was also visible from the street and sheltered a bright-blue Porsche.

The piece of furniture that created the greatest sensation among *Playboy* readers was the round, rotating, and shaking bed, equipped, as it had been in the 1956 paper penthouse, with a control panel, telephone, radio, bar, and nightstand.⁴⁴ The cross-section reveals that the house is symmetrically divided by a large central open space, at the bottom of which is an irregularly shaped swimming pool, or rather a natural cave, as if the house had risen up on the very edge of a water source. Although the rooms seem identical and rather repetitive, as if multiple and similar scenes could be happening in many places simultaneously (the same living room, with its Eames armchairs, is reproduced three times), the sharp split that the swimming pool creates between the front and back of the house operates as a transfer and exchange passage that modifies and unsettles the building as a whole.

This division reinforces the duality of the playboy's lifestyle, articulating the transition from work into leisure, dressed into nude, the professional visit into the sexual encounter. Here, the swimming pool simultaneously functioned as the *dispositif* of rotation that enabled the playboy to move between the front and back sections of the house, and as a liquid frontier that separates two irreconcilable "stages," where different (and even incongruous) actions can take place. This dual structure of the house, as

the advertisement for Porsche suggests "lets the playboy lead a double life."⁴⁵

The vertical cut reveals a bisected structure, with the building split symmetrically in two by a pool that seems to connect the house to an underground spring. As we will see, in keeping with the classic utopian tradition such as Plato's Atlantis and Thomas More's islands, the Playboy houses are built upon watery foundations. Here, the swimming pool seems to simultaneously connect and separate two neighboring but disjointed houses. And this dual program seems to permit the chameleonic life of the playboy who, like a modern-day Sisyphus confined in his own domestic space, is doomed to move endlessly from one to the other.

Donald Jaye's drawings no longer represented a plan for a future house, which in any event was never to be built, but a utopia without a time or a place. By the time the article was published in 1962, Hefner had moved into the Playboy Mansion, an enormous renovated building that, at least on the outside, was totally unlike the concrete and glass designs envisaged for the urban playboy.