

## **Planning For Privacy: Zoning in Jacques-François Blondel's *Maisons de plaisance***

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While paradoxical in our contemporary context, the phrase “public domestic space” is singularly appropriate for a certain type of eighteenth-century French housing, the grand *hôtel* with its endless *appartements de parade* and *de sociabilité*. It is evident, however, that the concept of “public” is meaningless in the absence of the reciprocal concept of “private”—that the one is made evident only through the existence of the other. For that reason, this paper investigates the self-conscious creation of privacy in the domestic space, a socio-architectural development that can be traced directly to the eighteenth-century French architect, Jacques-François Blondel.<sup>1</sup>

Blondel believed it was important that a dwelling be planned to serve the needs of those who live and work within its walls. This is something we now take for granted; but it was a new idea in 1737, when Blondel published the *Traité de la distribution des maisons de plaisance*....<sup>2</sup> The work presented five paradigmatic houses, and Blondel's *explication* of their architectural text. None of the plans is fanciful, all are designed for an elite clientele. There is no evidence that any was ever built. This study focuses on the fourth and fifth proposals, which are similar enough that their dissimilarities reveal how, by the end of this exercise, Blondel had developed the concept of zoning, and had used it to introduce a level of privacy previously unknown in French residential architecture.

First, some definitions.

A *maison de plaisance* is a luxurious country retreat, a building type that has disappeared from the lives of all but the very rich.<sup>3</sup>

*Zoning* is the division of space into activities that are functionally compatible, socially compatible, or both. These relationships are not always made explicit. In fact, among pre-Modern architects, they are rarely made explicit.

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Blondel is an exception.

*Privacy* represents seclusion, whether from others or with others. There is no inevitable relationship between zoning and privacy, which can happen by accident as well as by design. Blondel, however, not only planned for privacy but introduced in his fifth *maison* privacy of a kind that, in *Le propre et le sale*, Georges Vigarello calls “[l’]intimité personnelle,” a privacy that permits, again in Vigarello’s phrase, “des relations de soi à soi.”<sup>4</sup>

Blondel designed his *maisons de plaisance* so that “chacun suivant son rang, ses Charges & ses moyens, [peut] goûter avec ses amis & sa famille l’innocente volupté qui regne à la campagne” (1: 7). But if the delights of the country were innocent, they were not necessarily simple. Here, as in town, there were the competing rituals of upper-class life: entertaining, relaxation, contemplation, *les affaires*. So that each could run smoothly, it was imperative, as Blondel said in an article written for the *Encyclopédie*, that “les pieces de société, de parade, celles qui sont destinées au repos, à l’étude, soient suffisamment dégagées....”<sup>5</sup>

In today’s terminology, Blondel approached the dwelling as an integrated system, arranging spaces so that the total household—family, friends, and constellations of servants—could function efficiently and harmoniously. A modern architect might meet this objective by creating spatial opportunities for collaborative encounter. Blondel did not. Instead, his ideal dwellings were zoned to fulfill the primary goal of space as architectural historian Anthony Vidler has defined it, that is: “to set boundaries, establish limits, and resist encroachment.”<sup>6</sup>

But encroachment by whom?

When we follow Blondel through his plans, we see that he distinguished the populations who lived and worked in his *maisons de plaisance* by age, gender, activity, and class. Of these factors, the most important was that of class, especially the division between masters and servants.

The days were long past in France when these two groups shared a common hearth.<sup>7</sup> Michel Gallet reminds us in *Paris Domestic Architecture* that the eighteenth-century aristocracy was beginning to be “haunted by its concern to escape the critical eyes of its servants”; Cissie Fairchilds reminds us that domestics were becoming “domestic enemies.”<sup>8</sup> Reacting to these social changes, Blondel employed adjacency and circulation in order that “les domestiques puissent faire leur service sans troubler leurs maîtres.”<sup>9</sup>

“Adjacency” refers to the juxtaposition of spaces, “circulation” to the routes that can be taken to move from one space to another. In the typical eighteenth-century dwelling, the major rooms of the *appartements d’apparat, de parade*, and *de société* were arranged *en enfilade*; that is, they fronted on an implied corridor that ran along the window wall like a street, and they functioned like a series of vignettes, or displays, visible to anyone passing by.

Only the *appartements de commodité*—the *petits appartements*—escaped this oversight.<sup>10</sup> Blondel could celebrate the *enfilade* “[qui] annonce la magnificence du propriétaire”<sup>11</sup> but he could also mitigate its effects with circulation patterns, zoning, and room adjacencies.

With one exception, the formal entry to Blondel’s *maisons* was a centrally located vestibule, a space from which a visitor beheld, but was not necessarily allowed to enter, the *salon*. Someone who had business with the master might be escorted from the vestibule to “un lieu destiné à recevoir les personnes qui auroient affaire au Maître, & à attendre avec distinction l’heure de lui parler” (1: 128; cf. 1: 24)—in other words, to an anteroom. Like other architects to the rich, Blondel could multiply the number of anterooms, a socio-structural conceit useful in a hierarchical age, and one that allowed the *maître* to meet high-ranking visitors between antechamber and *cabinet*, or to lead them beyond the *cabinet*] to the “Salle d’assemblée, où peuvent être reçues les personnes qui sont plus distinguées” (1: 24).

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A low-ranking visitor, on the other hand, might be shown only to a second antechamber (although in order for this to indicate his standing effectively, the *enfilade* had to reveal a *cabinet* that was, like the *salon*, in sight but beyond reach). As Rémy Saisselin has so cogently noted, “The anterooms were not without a certain implied pleasure, namely that of....making an entrance, or, reciprocally,.... that of making others wait.”<sup>12</sup>

The routes taken by servants in the exercise of their duties were planned for efficiency and separation of social classes. Blondel felt domestics should neither gather in nor circulate through spaces located along the *enfilade* (1: 105).<sup>13</sup> But because their duties required that they have access to these rooms, he created passages and stairwells between the walls, so that workers could move unseen, entering individual rooms through doors hidden by the paneling. While masters might also use these corridors in order to “passer d’une aile à l’autre pour se visiter, sans être obligé de traverser les anti-chambres” (1: 47), the primary purpose of these intramural hallways was to inhibit servants from moving freely through the larger space.<sup>14</sup>

Blondel did not intend to denigrate or confine those who serve, however, for he believed that a successful plan required that everyone living or working on the estate be considered in the planning process. The architect, he said, had to consider “ce qui est non-seulement nécessaire pour la commodité personnelle du Maître, mais encore pour celle de ceux qui sont ou à son service ou en relation avec lui” (1: 5). Indeed, his province extended to “la quantité des grains & des bestiaux qu’il faut loger” (1: 121). Thus, Blondel acknowledged differing ranks within the servant population with separate dining rooms for stewards and their staffs; and he acknowledged their need for rest and physical comfort with beds and windowed rooms for sleeping rather than giving them a pallet in an airless cupboard as was more common.<sup>15</sup> More importantly, he gave them commodious and well-articulated work spaces so that they “ne puissent

être troublés dans leurs différentes fonctions ni s’embarrasser les uns les autres” (1: 121); and although his interior passages and stairways kept servants out of sight, they also served to “leur procurer la commodité” (1: 109), shortening the distances they had to travel to perform their tasks.

This general introduction to Blondel’s approach to planning facilitates the comparison of his fourth and fifth *maisons* (figures 1 and 2).

The two-storey fourth house, located in Brie and some 1600 square meters in size,<sup>16</sup> was intended to be a permanent residence for “une personne aisée” (1: 145). The *maisons du village* hugged the walls of its estate, and it had both ornamental and vegetable gardens. Social and reception spaces were at ground level. The upper storey was given over to bedrooms, although not the bedrooms of the children, who slept in an unconnected wing that contained their schoolroom, library, and chapel. To protect the *maison* and its family from fire, the kitchens, with their stoves, braziers, and boilers, were in a second wing; but unlike the children, house servants had access to the main house through an underground passage that shielded themselves and the food they carried from the weather.

The fifth dwelling was a single-story *maison à l’italienne*, at 512 square meters, much smaller than the preceding house. Located in a river valley, it was designed to shelter a noble client escaping the pressing affairs of town. It had extensive ornamental gardens that included an open-air ballroom decorated with busts and other sculpture, and only a miniature vegetable garden. Its kitchens were also in a separate building, one again connected to the main house by an underground passage.<sup>17</sup> There was no provision for children.

Although the fourth house had two levels and the fifth only one, although the fourth was some two-thirds larger, the two proposals resemble one another more closely than either resembled the other three *maisons*. This is

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particularly evident if we ignore the upper storey of the fourth dwelling, with its multiple anterooms, bedrooms, *cabinets*, and *garderobes*, and consider only the two *rez-de-chaussées*.

What do the dwellings have in common? They are similarly proportioned, twice as long as they are deep. They contain similar types of rooms; and these are similarly distributed along either side of the central vestibule and *salon*. Their principal rooms lie in two parallel tiers aligned along longitudinal axes. Their *salons* are entered from the vestibule, while their *cabinets d'assemblée* or *de compagnie* are entered from the *salon* and play off the *grandeur* of the larger room against the intimacy of the smaller.

Both provide a room off the dining room, “un Cabinet où l'on se retire quand on veut se recueillir. C'est aussi là que l'on peut venir prendre le Caffé après le repas” (1: 178). Both plans provide bedroom suites with private entrances.

Their differences are more interesting, not least because they reveal that Blondel, like most designers, is more imaginative when he operates under constraint than when he has complete freedom. In this case, the constraint is that of reduced size.

The fourth maison relies on the traditional *enfilade*. Its rooms are aligned along their exterior boundaries; and in plan view, their lateral separation from one another is emphasized by the thick walls that demarcate the internal service corridors and *dégagements*. The *maison à l'italienne* is spared much of the rigor of the *enfilade*: in the lower tier of rooms, it is the mid-points rather than the exterior walls that are aligned.

As Rodolph el-Koury has said of *la petite maison* in Jean-François de Bastide's architecturally libertine novella of the same name (1758, 1763), the fifth dwelling provides a “compact plan [that] maximizes communication across tightly clustered rooms.”<sup>18</sup> It is an arrangement that anthropologist Edward T. Hall would have characterized as

sociopetal, meaning that it tends to bring people together, unlike the sociofugal *enfilade* which tends to keep them apart.<sup>19</sup>

This cluster of rooms creates recognizably modern patterns of circulation. In the fourth plan, people must traverse rooms at their perimeters and move in a straight line between openings. In the fifth, they enter the rooms at their centers, and move across them in diagonal and curving patterns that increase opportunities for conversation. In the fourth plan, residents and guests reach the dining room by retracing the route from *cabinet* to *salon* to vestibule, a path that redirects them through the highly decorated *salon* and reiterates the formality of the occasion. In the fifth plan, they can move directly from the *cabinet de compagnie* to the *salle à manger*, just as we today move from living room to dining room, or they can pass through the *cabinet* for a preview of the space in which they will take coffee after their meal. The equally attractive routes can be used to modulate the formality of the occasion, and by providing a choice of route, they increase the perceived size of the smaller dwelling.

The placement of the two *cabinets* relative to their adjoining dining rooms also has resonance. It is in these *cabinets* “qu’on se détermine le plus souvent sur les occupations de l’après-midi & sur ce qu’on fera après le souper”; but if the rooms have social purpose, they have a practical one as well, for they provide “la liberté aux Domestiques de desservir la table” (1: 33), a necessary act so disliked by the upper classes of eighteenth-century France that the few who could afford it installed *tables volantes* that rose through the floor or descended from the ceiling with all their tableware and food in place.<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that although it provides refuge from this sight, the *cabinet* in the fourth *maison* has an interesting flaw: it is a dead end, and because it is a dead end, diners must remain there until the servants finish their work; in other words, they must wait on their servants while their servants wait on them. And

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while this dwelling is better, or more specifically, planned than the typical *hôtel* of the period, in which almost any activity might take place in almost any room, it fails to comfortably accommodate those using the ground-floor sleeping quarters, for in order to reach their rooms, or to circulate between bedroom suites, residents must traverse the reception rooms, use the interior corridors designed for servants, or exit the house and walk around it to get to the other side.

The fifth *maison*, on the other hand, creates social, service, and private areas. There can be no doubt that this is deliberate, for as Blondel explains, “dans une Maison de cette espece....les pieces d’honneur....doivent être séparés de celles qui sont destinées au repos, afin que le bruit & les mouvemens qui se font dans les premieres ne puissent troubler la tranquillité de celles-ci. C’est avec cette précaution que j’ai distribué ce Plan” (1: 176-77).

Blondel’s greatest advance in zoning, and provision of privacy, is seen in the suites located to the right of the reception rooms. These are arranged so that their inhabitants can communicate easily, gaining access to one another’s *appartement* through the vestibule they share. Because there is no direct passage from one bedchamber to another, the arrangement not only preserves but enhances the gender separation customary among married couples in this age. Moreover, the mistress’s suite at the upper right of the plan is given “toutes les commodités nécessaires” (1: 176), in other words, a *cabinet de toilette* that functions like a second antechamber, and a *garderobe* with elaborate sanitary facilities that include flush toilets. It is a retreat within a retreat; and, to borrow a phrase from Vigarello, “C’est sur cette intimité que porte la différence entre chambre d’apparat et chambre privée.”<sup>21</sup>

It is evident, however, that privacy was interpreted differently in the eighteenth century than it is in the twentieth, for in the forefront of the house, adjacent to the *cabinet* and with *vue sur la terrasse* are four more of the

valve toilets that clean with the turn of a spigot.

Locating the toilets near the dining room allows one, Blondel noted with only minimal circumlocution, to “se soulager des nécessités que le repas peut avoir fait naître” (1: 34). True. *Mais quel soulagement !* We may in fact be seeing the prototype for Bastide’s *petite maison*, in which “a valved basin of marble and fragrant wood marqueterie” so impressed Méliete that it contributed to her seduction first by the little house, and then, through it, by the Marquis de Trémicour.<sup>22</sup>

Analysis of the plan for the fifth *maison* demonstrates clearly that it is planned to protect the privacy of its residents and to differentiate their activities; that it is, in short, zoned. The zones are not yet explicit—Blondel did not, as designers do today, distinguish living from dining from sleeping quarters *on the plan*. He would move in this direction, however. In a layout produced around 1740, he not only labelled the rooms, he used an alphabetical code to designate the zone in which they were located, and recognized through double coding the mediating spaces that occurred when zones converged.<sup>23</sup> But although the zones are not explicit in the *maison à l’italienne*, they exist nonetheless, allowing its putative residents a privacy unknown in the polyvalent and interconnecting rooms of the typical eighteenth-century French *hôtel*. More than one architectural generation would be required before zoning—before privacy and its differing view of self—would become the architectural norm. Eventually, however, the approach pioneered by Blondel in 1737 would lead to what Vigarello describes as, “une division plus tranchée entre diverses parties du logement: les appartements de parade et ceux de bienséance, où se déroule l’essentiel de la sociabilité noble, s’agrémentent des zones plus reculées, faites pour les gestes plus familiers” (Vigarello, Le Propre 121).

### Bibliographical Notes

1. For the most recent biography of Blondel, see Frank and Serena Kafker, "The Encyclopedists as Individuals: A Biographical Dictionary of the Authors of the *Encyclopédie*," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 257 (1988) s.v. "Blondel, J.-F." I have discussed Blondel's work as an educator in "Continuing Education and Other Innovations: An Eighteenth-Century Case Study," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 15 (1985): 67-76; "Cours publics: Elective Education in the Eighteenth Century," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 241 (1986): 365-76; and "The Education of the Architect in Eighteenth-Century France," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 12 (1989): 187-99.

2. Jacques-François Blondel, *Traité de la distribution des maisons de plaisance, et de la décoration des édifices en général*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1737, 1738; reprint ed: Farnborough: Gregg P, 1967). Further references are given in the text. For other plans of eighteenth-century French dwellings, see Michel Gallet, *Paris Domestic Architecture of the Eighteenth Century*, trans. James C. Palmes (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972) 133; Peter Thornton, *Authentic Decor: The Domestic Interior, 1620-1920* (New York: Viking, 1984); Cissie Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies: Servants and Their Masters in Old Regime France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984); and Annik Pardailhé-Galabrun, *La Naissance de l'intime: 3 000 foyers parisiens, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: PUF, 1988) (the translation by Jocelyn Phelps (*The Birth of Intimacy: Privacy and Domestic Life in Early Modern Paris* [Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1991] is not illustrated).

3. The "cottages" built by the Vanderbilts in nineteenth-century Newport, Rhode Island, are an American example.

4. Georges Vigarello, *Le Propre et le sale: l'hygiène du corps depuis le Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 1985) 122; translated as *Concepts of Cleanliness: Changing Attitudes in France Since the Middle Ages* by Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988).
5. *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris: Le Breton, 1751-72), s.v. "Distribution, (*Architecture*)". Blondel contributed nearly 500 articles to the *Dictionnaire*.
6. Anthony Vidler, "Preface," in Jean-François de Bastide, *The Little House*, trans. Rodolphe el-Khoury (New York: Princeton Architectural P, 1996) 11-12.
7. Some historians—and poets—date this social revolution to the invention of the fireplace; cf. Lynn White, Jr., *Medieval Religion and Technology: Collected Essays* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1978) 270-71, and Mario Praz, *An Illustrated History of Furnishing from the Renaissance to the 20th Century* (New York: George Braziller, 1964) 79-80, both of whom quote William Langland.
8. Gallet, *Paris Domestic Architecture* 114; Cissie Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies* (n. 2, above). Cf. Sara Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983) 253-54, 324-26; and W. H. Lewis, *The Splendid Century: Life in the France of Louis XIV* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1957) 199.
9. Blondel, *Encyclopédie*, s.v. "Distribution."
10. *Appartements* fell into four types: *appartements d'apparat* (elaborate reception rooms), *appartements de parade* (elegant guest suites, or the private quarters of a noble owner), *appartements de société* (used for

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entertainment), and *appartements de commodité* or *petits appartements*. Most consisted of at least five rooms: *antechambre*, *salon*, *cabinet*, *garderobe*, and *chambre à coucher* (Jacques-François Blondel, *Architecture françoise...*, 4 vols. [Paris, 1752; reprint ed. Paris: Librairie Centrale des Beaux-Arts, 1904-05], 1: 26-27; cf. Thornton, *Authentic Decor* 91-97, and Rémy G. Saisselin, "Architecture in the Age of Louis XVI: From Private Luxury to Public Power," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 155 [1976]: 1958-59).

11. Blondel, *Architecture françoise* 1: 26.

12. Saisselin, "Architecture in the Age of Louis XVI," 1962.

13. Cf. Blondel, *Architecture françoise*, 1: 26: "on doit distribuer ces appartemens [de société] de façon qu'il ne se trouve dans leur alignement aucunes pièces destinées aux domestiques."

14. I discuss this more fully in "Parallel Walls, Parallel Worlds: The Places of Masters and Servants in the *maisons de plaisance* of Jacques-François Blondel," *Journal of Design History* 7 (1994): 1-11.

15. Maza, *Servants and Masters* 184-86.

16. The plans are scaled in *toises* [1.949 meters].

17. With its left and right sides flipped, the fifth *maison de plaisance* appears as Pl. 45 in Blondel's edition of Da Vignola's *Regola delli cinque ordini d'architettura* (1767).

18. Rodolphe el-Koury, "Introduction," *The Little House* (n. 6, above) 24.

19. Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (Garden City:

Anchor/Doubleday, 1969) 104, 108, 146. Hall borrowed the terms from Canadian physician Humphrey Osmond.

20. Such a table was part of the seductive interior of Bastide's *petite maison*; actual examples were built for the royal residences at Bellevue and Choisy (Bastide, *The Little House* 99-100, and translator's n. 3, p. 112).

21. Vigarello, *Le propre et le sale* 122. See *Traité*, 2: 138-39, for detailed drawings of valve toilets; the fifth was not the only *maison* to be so equipped but Blondel generally located the *lieux à soupape* in unshielded locations along service corridors and in stairwells (cf. 1: 22-48, 86-91, plates 1-3, 10, 12, 87).

22. Bastide, *The Little House* 86; cf. el-Koury, "Introduction" 24.

23. In Thornton, *Authentic Decor*, fig. 115, p. 95. The plate is from Blondel's unpublished "Abrégé d'Architecture concernant la distribution, la décoration, et la construction des bâtiments civils" (c. 1740), a title so similar to that of the *Traité* that it implies that this was to have been a sixth *maison de plaisance*; unlike Blondel's other plans, this example has no internal service corridors.