

The house for doing everything

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The Amphitheater House is a 2007 project by Greek architect Aristide Antonas. Built in Hydra, a small town on an island close to the Piraeus, the port of Athens, the building is mostly used for short-term stayings. Humble, yet subtle in its exterior features, the house is a parallelepiped constructed on a pre-existing quasi-orthogonal foundation wall, seemingly relying on a predetermined element in order not to indulge in any compositional or stylistic preconceptions. With the same attitude in accepting the existing conditions, the construction materials are excavated from the stone laying under the site. An equally unassuming wooden roof covered in traditional tiles surrounds the walls.

Internally, the main domestic space is a 9m-high-ceilinged room defined by several high and wide steps. Blowing up the size of the staircase, Antonas turns the steps into an effective interior amphitheater, allowing it to embody the main physical support for the human existence (seating, reading, resting, loving). The other — secondary — areas of the house (kitchen, bathrooms, and sleeping rooms) are concentrated in a narrow zone on the side of the building.

Almost freed from fixed and heavy furniture, the house becomes a device able to overcome the idea of domesticity and to propose collective uses, whilst symbolically and physically interpreting the common archetype of democracy represented by the amphitheater. Drawings produced by the architect and photographs of the built structure document the central stepped area as a natural habitat for a humanity



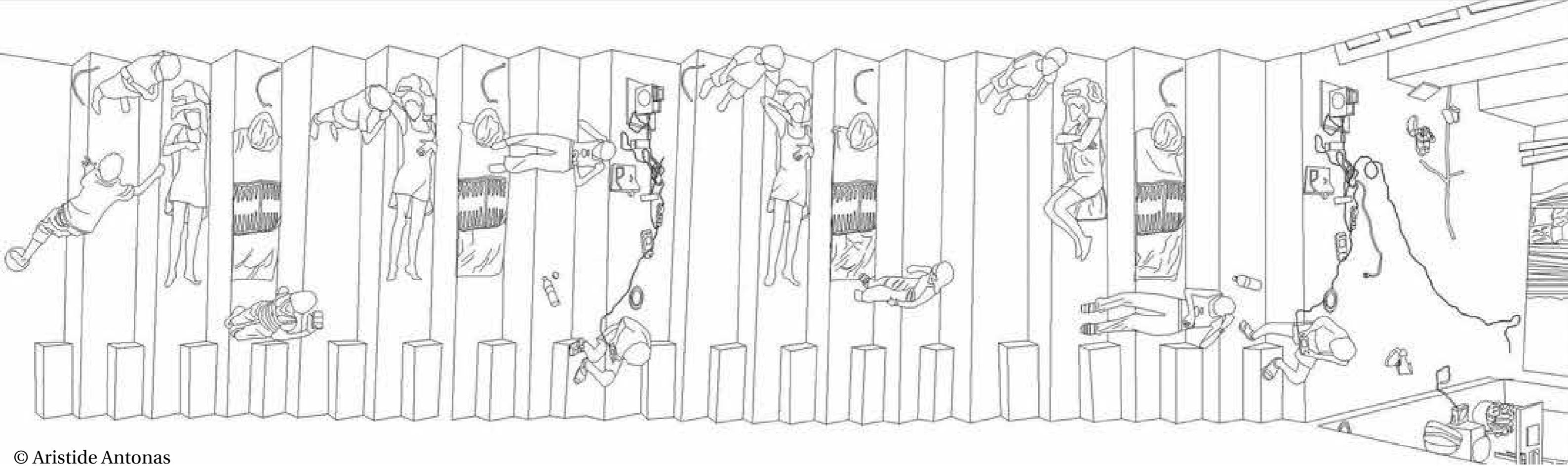
immersed in the life of electronical devices: laptops, printers, speakers, projectors, surrounded by cables symbolizing their interconnection. Overturning a recurrent cliché, technology is not presented here as a means to isolate the individual from the physical reality, but to rather become the main gathering agent for people in space.

Several pictures show the volume of the amphitheater become an indoor cinema (with projections on the facing wall), a lunchroom or a workplace, without ever losing its essential features. These images hint at a diffuse condition of recent years where the domestic often coincides with leisure and working, both progressively revolving around the presence of digital devices. Amateurism turns to professionalism, time spent on social networks becomes as much as production time as leisure, work-related communications swallow every instant of the worker's life as he is often requested to be constantly available. Unsurprisingly, corporations are exploiting this blurring of lifetime and working time through fancy interior makeovers in order for the offices to look like "creative" playgrounds or comfortable domestic scenographies.

Conversely, as public space gets progressively privatized, securitized and, consequently, erased, we might ask ourselves which are going to be the future *loci* for meeting and discussing. Which will be the centers for human interactions beyond the places of consumption and mass events if we exclude the immaterial territory of the internet? Antonas seems to suggest that the house might not only embody and enhance the blurring of the existential limits between lifetime and working time but might also incorporate an unsettling condition in the dialectics between these spheres: the presence of the place for the collective within the private interior.

The current status of the immaterial worker, someone who produces informational, cultural and intellectual content, is a recurring preoccupation for Antonas, as his built and theoretical projects relentlessly focus on the spatial impact of this condition. As stated by the archi-





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tect in a text¹ accompanying his “(A) House for doing nothing”, «the immaterial labor of cognitive functions detaches the working man from the workplace». In this sense, questioning about labor today for an architect does not necessarily involve the design of a conventional workplace, because any place where human life unfolds is potentially able to become a space for production.

The amphitheater room, configured as a physical materialization of human connections through the web, presents a new spatial model for the place where digital communication and production happen in the tangible space, no longer occurring upon a single desk, in a cubicle or at the corner of a cafe, but rather within an intimate environment serving as the physical support for a community. As the workplace gets dematerialized, a new condition opens for architects to explore the consequences of this dissolution and interpret the physical surroundings as well as the inner space of a person connected to the web and producing immaterial content. From a state of isolation, where

contemporary immaterial workers are competing against each others, reduced to individuals and thus unable to negotiate better working conditions, the workers in the amphitheater might symbolize a new community, living and working together and able to organize and propose its own rhythms of life and production.

As the configuration of the family has evolved from a multi-generational organism, to a nuclear one, to an even more fragmented and variable entity, the house cannot respond any longer to its unpredictable needs, but will become the minimal unit which is going to absorb, at its core, more and more functions: from working place, to space for leisure, to assembly arena, hotel, school, or even a museum, in a progressive de-specialization of its own environment.

Left bare and empty, the Amphitheater house appears like an effort in asceticism. Renouncing to style and to possessions, refusing any layer of interior design and rejecting the need for mirroring the taste



of a specific class, the House floats on an atemporal aura where the digital devices of today will be replaced by those of tomorrow while the domestic infrastructure will be able to remain the same. Asceticism in the Amphitheater house, thus, not only does not exclude the presence of the other but allows for the creation of an appropriate background for exchange and socialization through the removal of needless layers of decoration.

Whereas the single detached house has arguably become the most isolated sphere across the contemporary urban landscape, the Amphitheater model assumes the role of a central node, a place of production for an enlarged community suspended between the physical sphere of a reinvented domesticity and the immaterial condition of the web.

1.

Aristide Antonas, *The House for Doing Nothing*, 2011 <http://antonas.blogspot.fr/2011/07/house-for-doing-nothing>