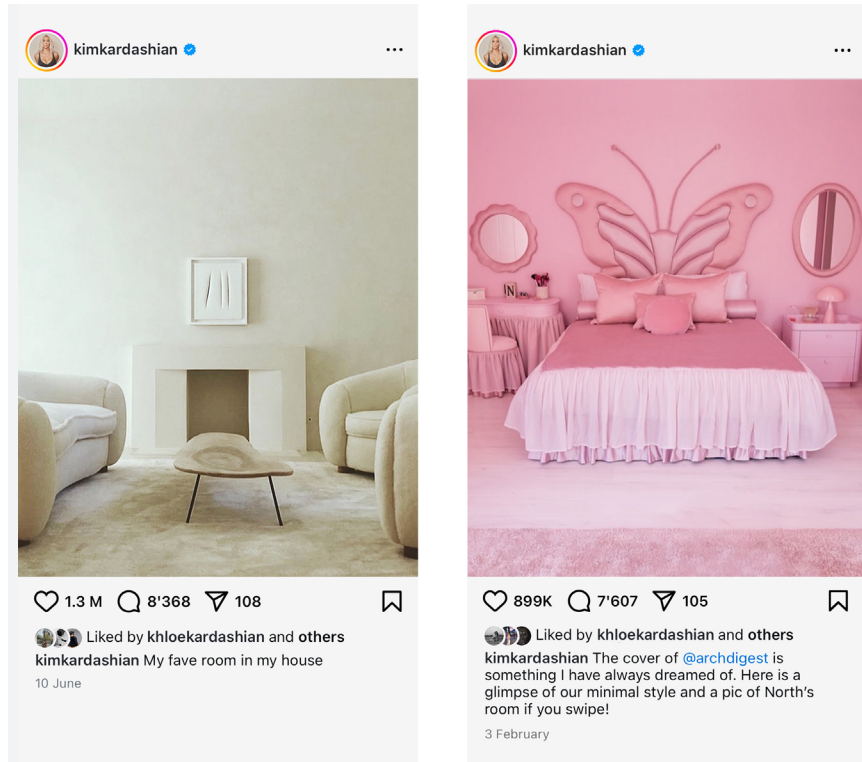


# Instagram, Typology and Architecture

## The Interiors of Social Media

*Javier Fernández Contreras, Paule Perron*



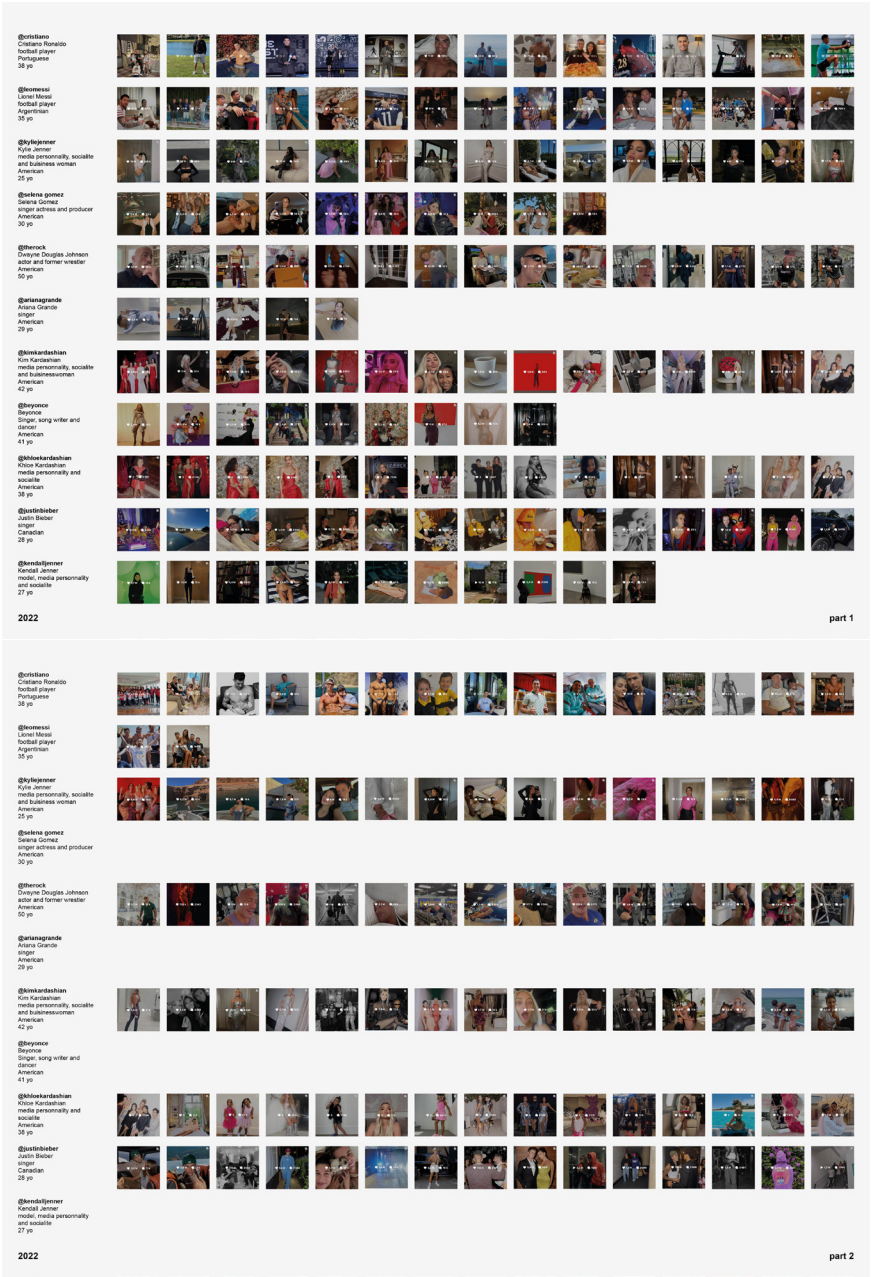
Instagram posts by Kim Kardashian showcasing the interiors of her own house. Kim Kardashian's account is one of the 11 most-followed accounts world-wide.

To raise the question of typology in architecture is to raise a question of the nature of the architectural work itself. To answer it means, for each generation, a redefinition of the essence of architecture and an explanation of all its attendant problems. This in turn requires the establishment of a theory, whose first question must be, what kind of object is a work of architecture? This question ultimately has to return to the concept of type.

Rafael Moneo, "On Typology," 1978.<sup>01</sup>

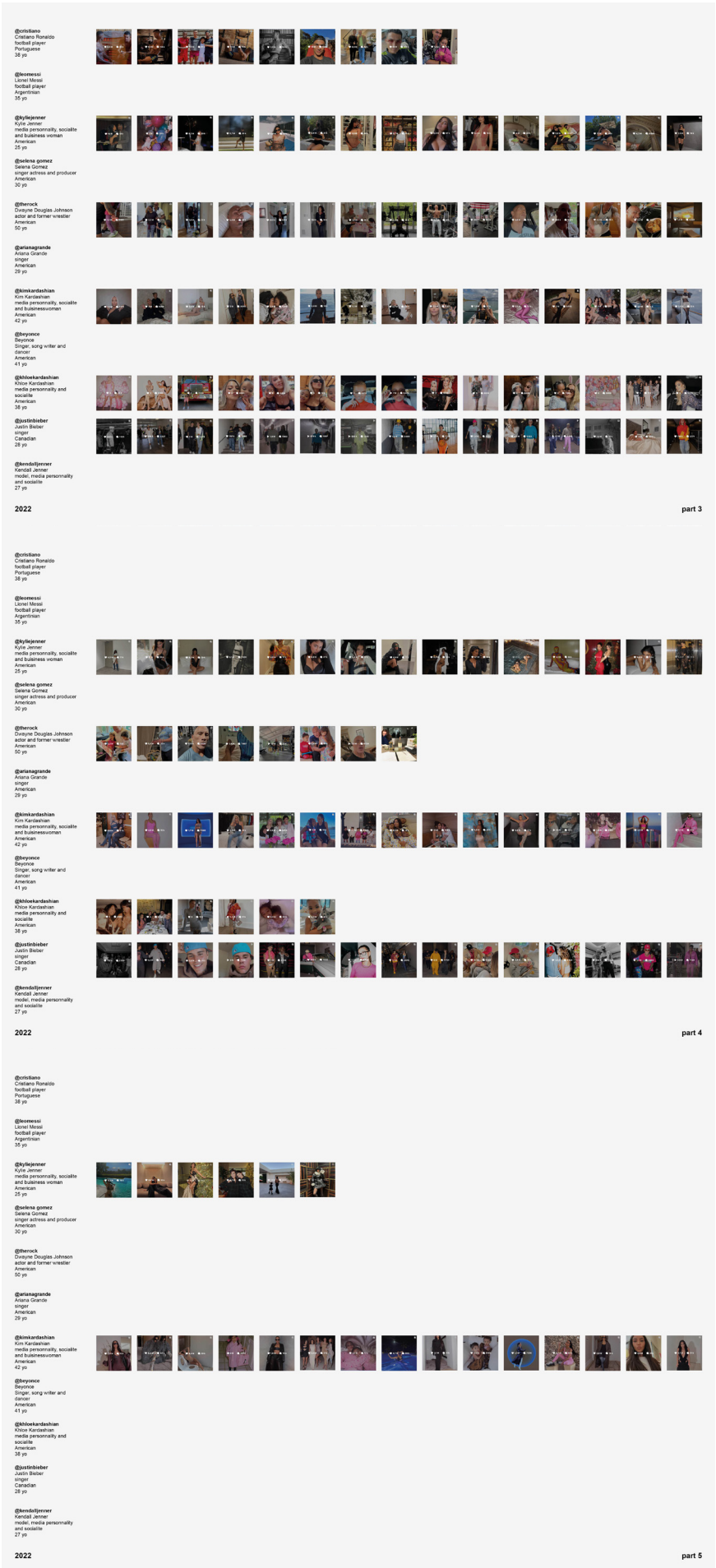
Few concepts reflect more accurately the ethos of architectural discourse throughout history than that of "type." From Quatremère de Quincy's and Jean Nicolas Louis Durand's emphasis on tectonic and geometric elements in the nineteenth century to Le Corbusier's functionalist approach and the cultural and historicist perspectives of Giulio C. Argan, Aldo Rossi, and Alan Colquhoun in the twentieth century, the understanding of type and typology in architecture has undergone significant changes in the last two centuries. With the emergence of mass media, these concepts expanded to include mediated and multimedia spatial types, as explained by different authors such as Beatriz Colomina and Penny Sparke, arguing that media such as photography, cinema, or commercial catalogs created new spatial patterns that informed the architectural ethos and, in partic-

ular, the design of interior spaces.<sup>02</sup> Additionally, the emergence of social media platforms such as Instagram in the twenty-first century has created new types of space of an ephemeral, performative and commercial nature, further bolstered by the user’s identity and ability to perform within the platform’s algorithmic structures.



Analysis of the 2022 posts without explicit commercial purpose from the eleven most-followed Instagram accounts worldwide (part 1 and 2)

02 See: Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996)./ Penny Sparke, *The Modern Interior* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008).



Analysis of the 2022 posts without explicit commercial purpose from the eleven most-followed Instagram accounts worldwide (continued, part 3, 4 and 5)

This essay examines the new architectural types mediated by social networks, with a special emphasis on Instagram as one of the dominant applications shaping contemporary architectural episteme through its production, editing, and massive circulation of images and videos. In 2024, Instagram is one of the most popular platforms in the world, ranking fourth with two billion monthly active users, behind only Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp.<sup>03</sup> Analyzing the top eleven Instagram accounts worldwide in 2022, the essay questions the role that social media play in the contemporary redefinition of our domestic realm and its blurred boundaries, namely how their representation directly impacts the material environment. Four of the most followed accounts belong to members of the Kardashian-Jenner family, who became famous by staging their daily lives since 2007 on the American television show *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. Most of their posts on Instagram take place within their homes, presenting scenarios of domesticity and mediated interiors. In addition to Kim, Khloé Kardashian, and Kylie Jenner, the usual scope of the top ten is expanded to eleven to include Kendall Jenner, a needed member of the family for understanding their collective staging strategy of their homes, and indeed the only one in the ranking who claims to be an interior designer.

The other accounts belong to famous soccer players, singers, and actors, such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Leo Messi, Beyoncé, Selena Gomez, Ariana Grande, Justin Bieber, and The Rock.<sup>04</sup> Operating within a framework of production/consumption, Instagram establishes hierarchies based on the success of content, and therefore defines both the most valued body types, and their *topos*, presented for public consumption. These results reflect an immaterial market of social networks permeating homes worldwide. The most followed accounts predominantly feature heterosexual American celebrities, reinforcing norms and stereotypes that are daily framed and circulated within interior architecture. From an iconographic perspective, we can define specific spatial figures that can be classified into architectural types, categories of sale of this immaterial market: the sofa, the elevator, the hallway or hotel room, the bathroom, the dressing room, private transportation (car, plane, or limousine), the backstage of an event or show, the gym, or the VIP area of a nightclub are types of spaces with their own architectural language that we will find in the majority of the most followed accounts of 2022.

## RENEWED DOMESTICITY: THE STAGED EVERYDAY

The analysis focuses on the 2022 posts from the top eleven Instagram accounts worldwide, excluding those with an explicit commercial purpose. It focuses on the representation of ‘staged everyday life’ or the supposed ‘behind-the-scenes’ of their professional lives portrayed in interior spaces.<sup>05</sup> Instagram’s media features suggest that all information communicated on the platform is taken ‘on the go’ from the celebrity’s own phone, and shared personally by the account owner. The entire process of photo and video production is integrated into the app, allowing work on a single device, the smartphone.<sup>06</sup> Users are sold the idea of democratic access to the initiation, production, and appreciation of these media cultures without any distinction. This has radically transformed social and urban

03 Statista, “Most popular social networks worldwide as of January 2024, ranked by number of monthly active users,” January 31, 2024. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>

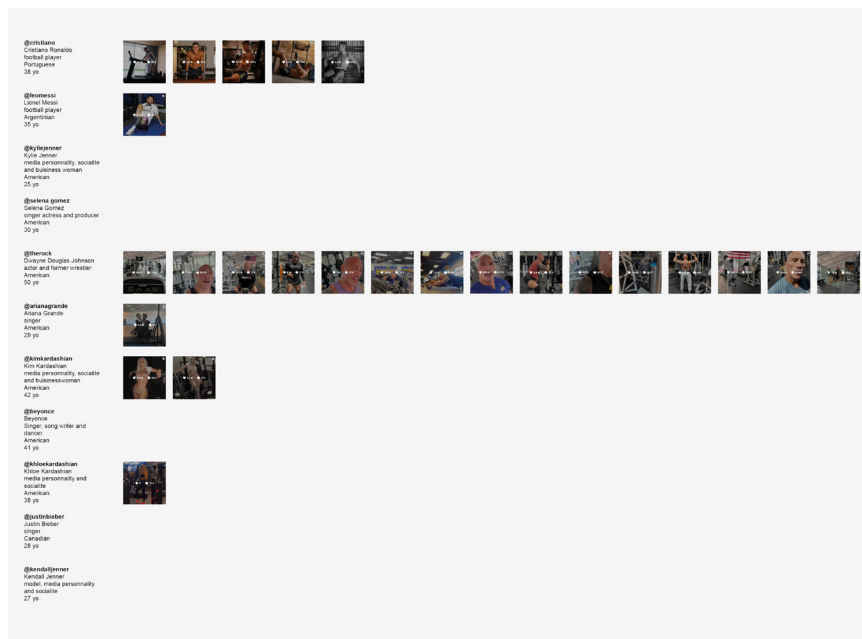
04 The top eleven at the time in descending order were: @cristiano, @leomessi, @kyliejenner, @selenagomez, @therock, @arianagrande, @kimkardashian, @beyonce, @khloekardashian, @justinbieber, @kendalljenner.

05 In this study, “interior space” is understood as a place with the following qualities: on one hand, its material boundaries must be visible in the image (walls, ceilings, vegetation, etc.); on the other hand, the perspective of the photograph or the protagonist of it (the body itself) must be within these boundaries; finally, the interior is not freely accessible, both for physical, economic, or social reasons.

06 Lev Manovich, *Instagram and Contemporary Image*, Part 1 (online: open access, 2015), 11, <http://manovich.net/index.php/projects/instagram-and-contemporary-image>.



experiences of photography and audiovisual production, eliminating the need for a photo studio, editing studio, printing room, gallery display, and magazines and books as necessary spaces or devices for the existence of these activities. However, this supposedly inclusive immateriality has made the networks a powerful capitalist center over the years, developing its own processes of social distinction. Instagram generates a hierarchy in the type of content that is most successful (number of likes, most followed accounts, collaborations with brands, etc.), in the type of body most valued (based on the eleven accounts considered, it remains predominantly heterosexual, American, white, and hypersexualized),<sup>07</sup> and in its material environment exposed to public consumption. All of these are products of this immaterial market, infiltrated into households worldwide.



The private gym: 2022 posts from the most-followed Instagram accounts worldwide.

The change in media culture generated by social networks has produced its own spatial and aesthetic references, its own background scenographic trends for the bodies of the analyzed accounts, in which domestic spaces play a fundamental role. Domestic spaces are not only where social media celebrities live their private lives but the core of their public existence. In a post, Kendall Jenner appears on the cover of *AD* in her home, in front of a work of art by James Turrell. Her sister, Kim Kardashian, is well known for the beige, light pink, and muted tones color palette of her interiors, with no distinction between her home, her office, or the interior of her car or private plane. Cristiano Ronaldo, whose Instagram account has the highest number of followers, shares his routine outside of work, whether in the living room of his house with his wife and children or inside his gym. The homes of these celebrities, extensively documented architectural products in their own right, are equipped with weight rooms, gyms, dressing rooms, stages, and photo studios. On one hand, the delimited area of the house, once defined, allows both public and productive activities to enter. It has become a capitalist production center, with all the

07 The majority of the most-liked content from the eleven accounts analyzed in 2022 shows heterosexual patterns. As an exception, the presence of Caitlyn Marie Jenner, the transgender mother of Kendall and Kylie Jenner, while qualitatively significant, is quantitatively minimal in the total number of posts from her daughters in 2022 and, above all, in likes, alerting to a certain sociological behavior that prioritizes and perpetuates heteronormative patterns.

necessary technical devices to generate a domestic interior that performs a routine represented and recorded daily. On the other hand, the documentation of the everyday life of these famous people has exported these domestic activities outside the home. Their cars, private planes, or friends' houses are external domestic units that act as performative and expanded wrappers of their bodies, just like their homes.

### THE BODY, THE FIRST ARCHITECTURAL TYPE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Our material environment is directly affected by the evolution of technologies, as well as the rhythms and processes used to represent it. In the book *Pornotopia*,<sup>08</sup> Paul Preciado showcased the radical change that *Playboy* magazine brought about in domestic spaces and interiors in the mid-twentieth century through simple yet infinitely reproducible images of female bodies in the Playboy Mansion. Through the mediation of sexualized bodies staged in architectural spaces, Hugh Hefner managed to physically impact American homes, profoundly transforming them by generating a new masculine ideal based on its interior spaces. In the twenty-first century, Instagram has further expanded this access to staged intimacy and bodily representations, accelerating their distribution pace in media. The affects produced are no longer the result of a unidirectional interaction between a published magazine and the domestic space of isolated readers. Physical and emotional affects now arise through interactions—deceptively equivalent—between celebrities' smartphones staging their bodies in their everyday spatial context, and the devices of multiple viewers who can directly react to this content.

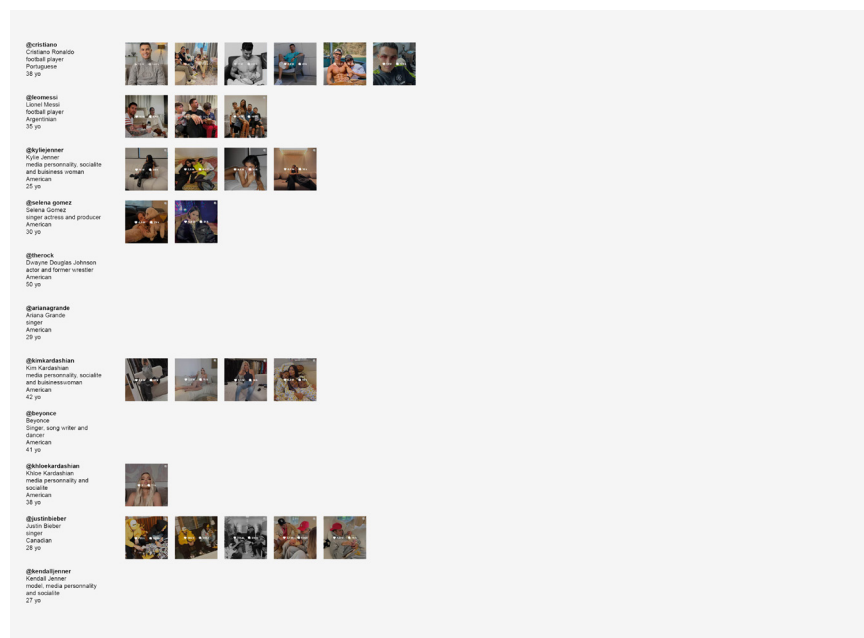
The eleven accounts analyzed present mediated bodies as the main object of their messages. Their representations are amplified, completed, modeled, and staged through a series of material devices that contribute to spreading an expanded definition of their executed bodily identity. Cosmetics, surgical implants, clothing, body prosthetics, gym machines, furniture, and interior spaces are the complements of this theatrical everyday life, and the eleven most followed individuals each possess at least one commercial brand for them. They understand that in order to construct their own public persona, it is apparently necessary to develop the spatial conditions of this narrated identity. To do this, they design their own bodies as the primary material object, the primordial space from which this identity is emitted. Utilizing Michel Foucault's notion of utopian corporality, the material equipment they use "makes of this body a fragment of imaginary spaces,"<sup>09</sup> a place where utopias crystallize, materialized in their flesh, with their own codes, hierarchies, and idealized models. Through their representation on social networks, bodies like those of the celebrities from the top eleven Instagram accounts become utopian, infinite spaces, distanced from their aged, rough, and imperfect liveliness, which can be analyzed as a unique architectural type of social media: an immaterial space that supports the construction of the public visual identity of its owners.

08 Paul Preciado, *Pornotopia: An Essay on Playboy's Architecture and Biopolitics* (New York: Zone Books, 2019)

09 Michel Foucault, *Le corps utopique / Les hétérotopies*. (Paris: Éditions Lignes, 2019), 15.

## UTOPIAN INTIMACY, SPACE AND GENDER

In this context, one could speak of an expanded domesticity sphere, where celebrities increasingly use domestic-like spaces on social media platforms to showcase their supposedly private lives through the staging of their bodies. The expression of this intimacy is depicted in a series of isolated spaces, a territory of domestic islands. Extracted from the archetypes of Western bourgeois homes of the twentieth century, the living room sofa or the bedroom bed are devices that display a normative and ideal conception of domestic life, a lasting utopia of late modernity.<sup>10</sup> In staged scenes of comfort and relaxation, celebrities like Kylie Jenner and the Kardashian sisters, for example, use their sofas to display their designer homes, luxurious lifestyles, and closeness to their children. Similarly, both Cristiano Ronaldo and Leo Messi use their sofas to showcase their heteronormative family lives and connections with their wives and children.



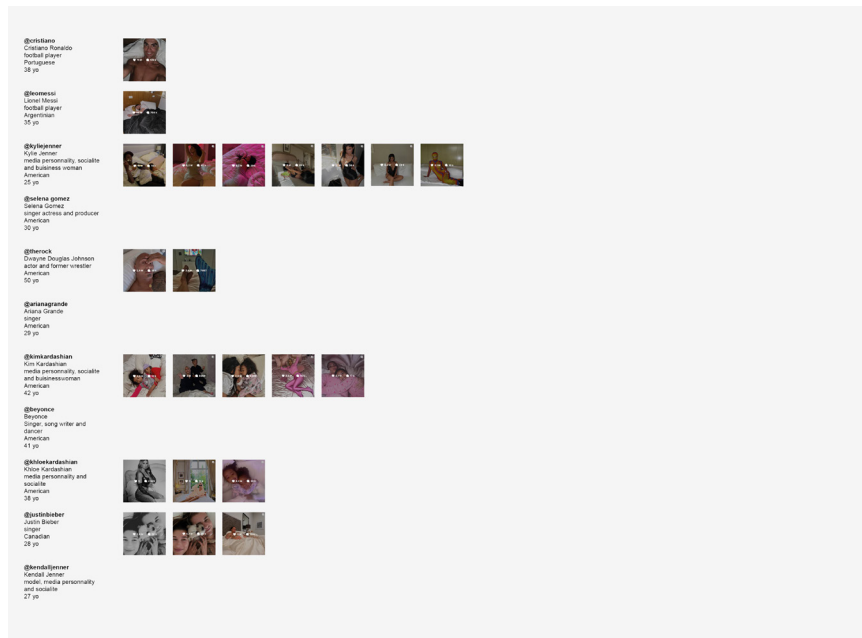
The couch: 2022 posts from the most-followed Instagram accounts worldwide.

Quoting Gilliam Rose, family photographs become “embedded objects in social practices, producing specific social positions, relationships, and effects”<sup>11</sup>; they corroborate the normative social definition of family and are composed or staged based on specific spatial characteristics. The sofa is the material element that represents and stages the living room of the traditional heterosexual and bourgeois Western home. It is portrayed as a place of gathering and performative family love. If Rose has noted that family photographs were traditionally exhibited by women, Instagram now points to another spatial gender differentiation. While sofas in photographs of women from the top eleven accounts function as public stages for the bonds of love they maintain with their children, women are almost never accompanied by a man. They construct their image as strong, independent, heterosexual, and wealthy cisgender women, independent of the family nucleus. Without questioning the capitalist ideal and the masculine idea of success, they highlight their autonomy to achieve it by themselves. On the other hand, the men from the most followed accounts, Cristiano

<sup>10</sup> Rosa Hartmut, *Alienation and Acceleration: Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality*. (Copenhagen: NSU Press, 2020), 10.

<sup>11</sup> Rose Gilliam, *Doing Family Photography: The Domestic, the Public and the Politics of Sentiment*. (London: Routledge, 2016), 20.

Ronaldo and Messi, use their sofas to exhibit their nuclear family, a public guarantee of their heteronormative private life. Amid a feed full of images from the entirely male professional world in which they operate (which is also heavily homophobic)<sup>12</sup>, the sofa is depicted as a performative space of their heteronormative masculinity.



The bed: 2022 posts from the most-followed Instagram accounts worldwide.

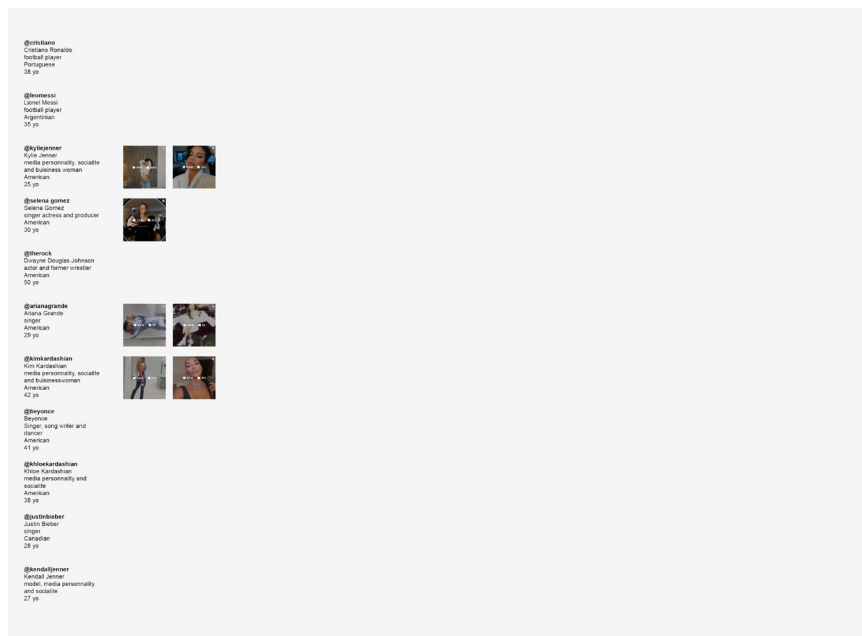
The bed, on the other hand, appears in ten of the top eleven most visited Instagram accounts as a place of individual and intimate privacy. Its recurrent representation underscores the ambiguity between a place of rest and hedonism, tranquility and action, sleep and sexual activities, vulnerability and power. It is the preferred place for the Kardashian-Jenner family to showcase their private life. It also appears in the accounts of Cristiano Ronaldo or Leo Messi, providing a significant boost in the number of likes. Its representation, coming from the account—and perhaps the smartphone—of the famous owner, allows the viewer to peek through their own Instagram account into the most private sphere of celebrity life, an illusion of closeness and intimacy with them. In the photographs, we can see that space and clothing directly dialogue with the body. The atmosphere of the bed (through lighting, color, and texture of the sheets, pillow shape, or mattress) defines and is defined by the visual characteristics of the body. If its lighting is dim, the bed may be white to highlight it by contrast; if the clothing is of a strong pink tone, the sheets will be light pink to accentuate the body shape. Before social media, these domestic types were understood and conceptualized as places where private life was lived, behind the facade of buildings, where the most valued activities of normative Western domesticity took place within the room as an intimate space. Through social media, they have become places of individuality and privacy executed publicly. Although still separated from the physical public sphere by walls and doors, their delimited interiority is redefined thanks to their wide public dissemination. The bed and the sofa have become two architectural types of public domesticity, conceptualized as accessories for the hypersexualized heteronormative body.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Herbinet, “Homophobie : Pourquoi le sport a un problème à régler,” RMC Sport, September 16, 2019. [https://rmcsport.bfmtv.com/football/homophobie-pourquoi-le-sport-a-un-probleme-a-regler\\_AV-201909160376.html](https://rmcsport.bfmtv.com/football/homophobie-pourquoi-le-sport-a-un-probleme-a-regler_AV-201909160376.html).



## NETWORK TYPOLOGY: INHABITING THE GLOBAL POCHÉ

As we immerse ourselves in the architectural interiors of Instagram, the transformation of domestic spaces over the past decade challenges the common conception of their hierarchical relationships. Spaces that in the twentieth century were identified in architectural theory as servants are now venues for public performances. Places of domestic vulnerability once shielded from public view, places attentive to multiple and imperfect corporealities, are now publicly exhibited and represented. Building on the specificities of their architectural program, the first eleven accounts publicly explore intimate vulnerability through the representation of these spaces. For example, Kylie Jenner often uses her bathroom to showcase her beauty routine and makeup products—which she also sells—dressed in her bathrobe, without visible makeup, and looking in the mirror. Selena Gomez, on the other hand, posts videos in the bathroom discussing her mental health issues. Spaces that were once considered service spaces, unworthy of public attention, now become the theater of spatial performance on social media, staging bodily vulnerabilities.



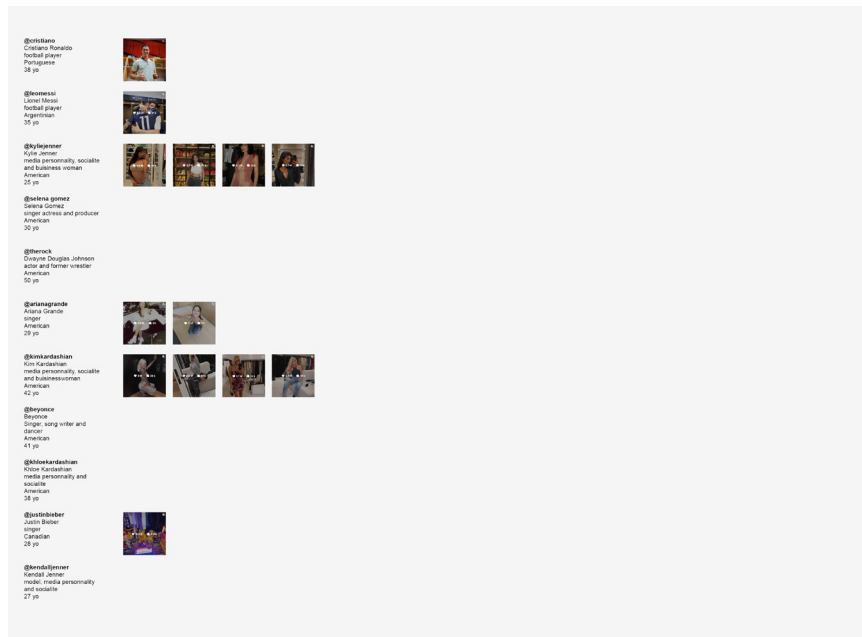
The bathroom: 2022 posts from the most-followed Instagram accounts worldwide.

Speculating on Jacques Lucan's concepts,<sup>13</sup> the ideas of closed *poché*—residual ancillary spaces that justify the differentiation between the interior space of a room and the exterior form of an architectural work—and open *poché*—the urbanity created by the dialogue between interior servant spaces and exterior served spaces—could now be digitally extended to the spaces of social networks to define a 'global poché.' Outside the scope of this essay, one might recall the famous bathroom selfie at the 2017 Met Gala, taken by Kylie Jenner with the presence of Kim Kardashian and Kendall Jenner among a crowd of celebrities. As analyzed by *The Guardian*, "the photo is clearly a family affair."<sup>14</sup> Far from the frenzy of the most famous but invisible (or unphotographed) party of the year, the bathroom—once a place for the isolated transformation of the body in preparation for public appearance—becomes here, above all, a place of public

13 Jacques Lucan, "Généalogie du poché – de l'espace au vide." *Matière*, no. 7: 41–54.

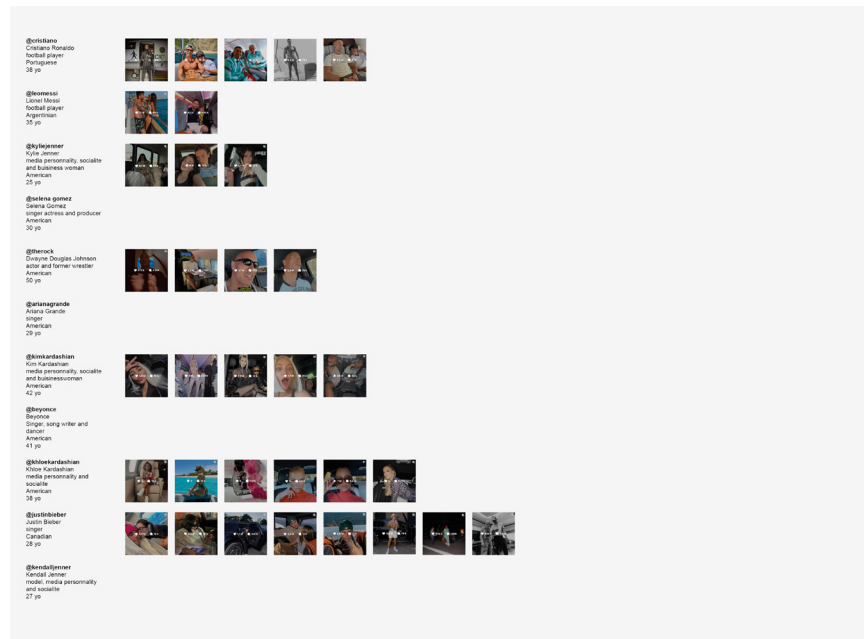
14 Jess Cartner-Morley, "Kylie Jenner's bathroom selfie and Diddy's stairway nap: power moves at the Met Gala 2017," *The Guardian*, 2 de mayo de 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2017/may/02/kylie-diddy-power-moves-met-gala-2017>.

visibility. The careful inversion between what most people experience daily and materially as servant spaces, when displayed as served spaces for a few, generates repetitive and non-contextual domestic islands floating within an unlimited and undefined network territory. In this sense, the Kardashian-Jenners, as well as Ariana Grande or Cristiano Ronaldo, also use their dressing rooms to showcase both exclusive clothing and the transformation processes through which they become their public selves. They offer the public a glimpse of their seemingly unofficial appearance and private lives behind the doors of their non-situated private spheres.



The dressing: 2022 posts from the most-followed Instagram accounts worldwide.

In a progressive shift outside the home, circulation spaces have also come to dominate Instagram's interior spaces. The hotel hallway and elevator convey transition and movement, serving as a backdrop for quick exchanges with Instagram communities, between places and events of the busy, luxurious, and international public lives of the top eleven accounts. For example, Beyoncé repeatedly uses elevators in her Instagram posts to showcase her lifestyle. The Rock also regularly inserts himself in elevators, displaying his muscular body and fitness regimen. Selena Gomez and Ariana Grande use hotel hallways to showcase their behind-the-scenes moments, often exploring them as a backdrop for their elegant dresses before entering events. In the city, the space of private transportation, whether a car, a plane, or a limousine, generates an inverted sense of empathy through luxury and exclusivity. Celebrities like Justin Bieber and Beyoncé often use their private transportation to show a moment of solitude and introspection. As also observed in Cristiano Ronaldo's posts reflecting on his life and career while traveling, offering privileged access to this private and seemingly less glamorous part of his existence. We can observe the same strategies developed in photographs and videos of performing artists like Ariana Grande or Justin Bieber. All the spaces behind the walls of the posted places, and behind the camera that captures them, are the invisible and contemporary servant spaces of Instagram, in which the owners are producing voids to be publicly inhabited.



The private transport: 2022 posts from the most-followed Instagram accounts worldwide.

Social media culture has blurred the boundaries between the public and the private, the domestic and the professional, the everyday environment and staged advertising. It has generated its own interiorities, its own language, and its own architectural rules. “Playboy may die: we are all Playboy,”<sup>15</sup> declared Paul Preciado in the postface of *Pornotopia*, emphasizing how recent radical changes in Western societies have transformed our media culture, turning us into ‘horizontal workers’ staged in our own *topos*. Through the repetition of representations of these spaces, the eleven analyzed Instagram account owners are encoding contemporary domesticity as a networked territory, made up of fragments of interior typologies, infinitely reproducible and ready to be consumed like the performative spaces of their utopian bodies. This article emphasizes the domestic transformations that this shift in media culture is producing and questions how an unlimited domestic territory is represented by and about the body of its inhabitants. Addressing these interiorities through a typological classification is to recognize the fact that they are producing space and architecture through online categories, and therefore spatial behaviors and norms. Its ultimate goal is not only to understand but to conceptualize these domestic spaces to thwart, through architectural action, the power relations they perpetuate.

## AUTHOR

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