The Domestic Space as a Cultural Mirror: Collective Intelligence and Television Series

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Abstract

This paper investigates domestic space in television series as a cultural mediator shaping perceptions of class, youth identity, and everyday dwelling. Rather than serving merely as narrative backdrops, televised homes are understood as performative spaces where aesthetic norms and social imaginaries are constructed and negotiated. Drawing on interdisciplinary approaches from media studies, architecture, and cultural theory, the study analyzes series such as *Friends*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Maestro*, and *Archelaou 5*, exploring how they represent cohabitation, precarity, and middle-class aspirations. Particular emphasis is placed on scenographic details and the symbolic significance of domestic aesthetics. The paper ultimately argues that televised domestic spaces operate as cultural blueprints, shaping not only fictional narratives but also viewers' perceptions and expectations of real-life habitation.

Keywords

Collective Intelligence; Domestic Space; Youth Representation

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Introduction

Television, as a medium of mass communication and cultural negotiation, has for decades constructed a distinctive regime of domestic space representation. The images of dwelling portrayed in television series do not function merely as narrative settings; they also shape aesthetic norms, social expectations, and cultural imaginaries. As Fiske notes, the significance of television lies not only in what is shown, but also in the way the act of viewing becomes embedded in the everyday cultural practices of the home (Fiske 1987, 74–75). From the American suburbs of *Desperate Housewives* to the small apartments in Greek series, television fiction forms an iconography of everyday life that carries particular sociological and architectural interest.

The present study explores the relationship between the representation of dwelling in television series and the ways in which these representations are received, commented upon, and reframed by audiences. Through the theoretical lens of collective intelligence, as formulated by Henry Jenkins (2006), television is examined not as a mechanism of passive image transmission, but as a space of shared cultural processing. As Baudrillard points out, objects are not merely functional tools; they carry symbolic meanings that shape our desires and social perceptions (Baudrillard [1968] 1996). Viewers do not simply consume images of dwelling; they incorporate them into their aesthetic preferences, translate them into desires, and (at times) reproduce them in real life.

The study focuses primarily on youth habitation, as it constitutes a distinct field of fluidity, anticipation, and negotiation: cohabitation, secondary uses of space, aesthetic interventions under limited means. In contrast to the stable model of the family home, the space of youth is unstable, transitional, and often heteronomously defined. It is a temporary field in which the desire for independence coexists with economic and social constraints. As Arnett argues, the youth of emerging adulthood is characterized by mobility, uncertainty, and continuous repositioning of one's dwelling practices (Arnett 2000, 469).

Televisual representations of such forms of habitation do not merely depict a social reality; they contribute to the construction of a cultural imaginary around how these spaces ought to be.

The corpus under analysis includes a selection of television series from various national and cultural contexts: *Desperate Housewives* (Cherry, 2004–2012), *Friends*

(Kauffman and Crane, 1994–2004), *The Nanny* (Drescher, 1993–1999), *I Nta(n)ta* (*The Nanny*, Greek adaptation by Kallitsis, Psistakis et al., 2003–2005), *Ano Kato* (Exarchos, 2000–2001), *Oi Tesseris* (Papakaliatis, 2009–2010), and *Archelaou 5* (Gerogianni, Grybla, Markezinis et al., 2024–2025). By comparing these series, this paper seeks to explore two key dimensions:

1. How collective intelligence influences the reception of domestic space through television series, acting as a filter and a site of reconstruction for the cultural meanings of space.
2. How youth habitation is represented and how it is culturally received by audiences within both Greek and international contexts.

The methodology employed is based on qualitative content analysis, with particular emphasis on the scenographic and dramaturgical functions of space, as well as its sociological reading. The goal is not generaliation, but a critical interpretation of a cultural phenomenon located at the intersection of popular culture, architecture, and social performativity.

This study aims to contribute to the theoretical understanding of televisual dwelling as a cultural phenomenon and to foster dialogue between architectural studies and visual culture studies. Televisual spaces are not mere representations; they actively co-shape our collective expectations about modes of inhabitation and the significance of domestic space in contemporary everyday life.

Theoretical Framework

1.1. Collective Intelligence and the Processing of Television Content

The term *collective intelligence* was introduced by Pierre Lévy (1997) and further developed by Henry Jenkins (2006), who reexamined it within the context of contemporary digital culture. Collective intelligence refers to a distributed and collaborative form of knowledge generated through cooperation, information exchange, and the mutual participation of individuals within communities (Jenkins 2006, 4, 27). The real-time sharing of ideas and knowledge, as well as the contribution of each individual through personal experience and understanding, leads to more creative and productive interactions, enhancing the group's capacity to solve problems and generate innovation (Lévy 1997, 155–56).

As Fiske and Hartley point out, the television experience does not simply constitute a representation of reality, but functions as a semiotic system grounded in cultural and perceptual codes. The interpretation of television discourse is only possible to the extent that viewers share these codes. As they characteristically state: “Television is, however, a more conventional medium than art-film in the sense that its codes relate more closely to the normal codes of perception. It is this that gives it its position of cultural centrality, and that makes the boundary between television and reality difficult to define” (Fiske and Hartley 1978, 47). This position suggests the existence of a tacit communicative contract between medium and viewer: television addresses an audience presumed to recognize its basic codes, while at the same time allowing for differentiated and even oppositional receptions. This relative stability of codes reinforces the medium’s cultural centrality and imparts to television representations a sense of proximity to everyday life—an essential element for understanding the collective intelligence activated around its content.

According to Jenkins (2006), collective intelligence is the process through which media audiences, instead of remaining passive consumers, actively participate in shaping the meanings of television content. Through online communities, discussions, and cultural exchanges, televisual representations concerning domestic space and character relationships become the object of collective interpretation and renegotiation, shaped by the viewers’ lived experiences, social realities, and expectations (Jenkins 2006, 32, 36–38). A characteristic example can be found in thematic subforums analyzing the series *Desperate Housewives*, where users examine the spatial layouts of houses on Wisteria Lane as representations of class style and social aspiration (Yahoo Entertainment 2024). These collective processes are not limited to plot or character development but extend to the scenographic space as a vehicle of cultural imaginaries.

In line with this perspective, we may observe that American series (*Desperate Housewives*, *Friends*) and Greek series (*Oi Tesseris*, *Archelaou 5*, *Ano Kato*) produce specific representations of dwelling that audiences negotiate, adopt, or reject through their collective responses, thereby reshaping the meaning of televisual models and influencing social perceptions of habitation. This process enables a continuously evolving collective identity that reflects shifting needs and social realities in relation to domestic space.

1.2. Collective Intelligence and the Perception of Domestic Space

The concept of collective intelligence, as introduced by Pierre Lévy (1997) and further developed by Henry Jenkins (2006), refers to the dynamic collaboration and cumulative processing of information within participatory cultural frameworks. In the field of television reception, collective intelligence is manifested through the active and multilayered engagement of audiences. This engagement extends beyond narrative and character analysis and includes spatial dimensions, particularly the domestic space as it is represented and proposed by television series.

Television, due to its inherent proximity to everyday life and the privacy of viewing within the home, functions not only as a medium of entertainment but also as an agent of aesthetic socialization. The way domestic space is presented in series often shapes social desires for habitation, subtly positioning subjects within a framework of normative models.

Within this context, Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) concept of *habitus* proves especially illuminating. *Habitus* functions as a network of internalized structures that shape the aesthetics, preferences, and expectations of social subjects (Bourdieu 1984, 170–75, 206–15). As he aptly notes: "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make" (Bourdieu 1984, 6). Through continuous exposure to televisual images of forms of habitation, viewers may reconfigure their aesthetic *habitus*, incorporating new spatial and material ideals aligned with the socially mediated recharging of desire.

The representation of domestic space in television series is not confined to scenic depiction but simultaneously acts as a vehicle of aesthetic and class distinctions, which are received, processed, and at times reproduced by the audience. The televisual "kitchen" or "living room" are not neutral images; they connote lifestyles, cultural dispositions, and social distances. When collective intelligence organizes itself around the discussion of such representations—whether through forums, online communities, or everyday conversations—the represented is no longer merely consumed but is transformed into a tool for cultural constitution and aesthetic categorization.

This process may also be interpreted as a form of cultural performativity: collective intelligence does not simply comment on space– it actively contributes to its production as a field of meanings, expectations, and desires. As Michel de Certeau

observes, “space is a practiced place” (1984, 117); in other words, space is constituted through the practices of subjects. From this perspective, the viewing, discussion, and comparative evaluation of domestic settings in series becomes a way of “inhabiting” a symbolic space that materializes within desire and judgment.

The viewer does not only compare their own home with that of fiction but also compares themselves with the “classes” these homes embody. It is telling, for instance, that in public commentary and digital conversations about series such as *Friends* or *Maestro*, viewers refer to the space not only as scenery but as a “model” or benchmark. Kitchens, balconies, or apartments are discussed as attainable, desirable, or alien, indicating that the representation of domesticity is embedded within broader imaginaries of social integration, aesthetic subordination, and class positioning. Collective intelligence does not merely produce public opinion– it performs a new way of spatial thought.

This imaginary space, formed through televisual representation and collective interpretation, gains particular significance in light of Henri Lefebvre’s theory of the production of social space. According to Lefebvre, space does not pre-exist as a neutral or innocent geometry; it is a social product, a multiplicity of relations inscribed into places and material forms (Lefebvre 1991, 83). The notion of *representational space*, which encompasses lived, imaginary, and often symbolically charged space –is especially critical in the context of television reception (Lefebvre 1991, 33, 39–41, 116–17). Domestic space, as a paradigmatic representational space, functions as a site of desire and identification, but also as a bearer of normative expectations. When this space is discussed, commented upon, or evaluated through the dynamics of collective intelligence, what emerges is a new, hybrid space– not merely the space of the series, nor solely that of the viewer, but an intermediary field in which representation acquires a weight of reality and the potential for performative impact.

1.3. Televisual Representation of Domestic Space and Its Social Implications

1.3.1. Aestheticization of Dwelling and the Legitimation of the "Domestic Ideal"

The televisual representation of domestic space is intrinsically linked to processes of aestheticization and normalization. Television series—particularly those that exhibit an intense focus on set design and lifestyle—construct and promote

dwelling models that go beyond mere scenography. Through the aesthetic cultivation of the home environment, a "domestic ideal" is articulated that assumes a near-normative function, influencing audience expectations and practices.

In the American series *Desperate Housewives* (2004–2012), the suburban landscape of Wisteria Lane functions as a carefully curated space of social class, cleanliness, and artificial prosperity. The protagonists' homes—harmoniously symmetrical, aesthetically synchronized, and internally opulent—depict a domestic space that, while ostensibly ordinary, also serves as a model of hyper-aesthetic order and control. Similarly, the Greek series *Oi Tesseris* (*The Four*, 2009) by Christoforos Papakaliatis places its characters in domestic settings that bear the morphological features of urbanized middle-class habitation, with open-plan layouts, curated furnishings, and a focus on "modern" aesthetics.

The homogeneity of such representations produces a cultural paradigm of dwelling: the home is not merely a functional space but a bearer of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984, 170–75, 206–15). The dissemination of these images through television series and their collective reception—via viewer communities, social media, and private discussions—constitutes a mechanism through which specific housing models become normalized. As one respondent in a 2024 questionnaire[1] observed, "Social media users […] use scenes to create TikTok and Instagram videos, which leads to circulation, discussion, and numerous comments about the series." This observation demonstrates how collective intelligence acts as both a filter and a vehicle of aesthetic processing, consolidating a normative imaginary around dwelling.

The function of this aestheticization is not socially neutral. On the contrary, it reinforces the idea that "good habitation" is accessible only through specific material and morphological features. This process is mediated by *habitus*, as defined by Bourdieu: an internalized set of perceptions and practices that classifies space and is itself classified through it (Bourdieu 1984, 6). The adoption, imitation, or rejection of these aesthetic models is inscribed in social dynamics of differentiation.

Responses from the same questionnaire highlight the impact of these representations on the viewing itself: 96.5% of participants believe that social media

[1] Author's research, questionnaire conducted in 2024 as part of the presentation "The Impact of Social Media Criticism on the Success of Television Series," Conference on Film Criticism, Panteion University. Proceedings forthcoming. The instrument included 33 questions (closed-ended, open-ended, and demographic) and was answered by 170 participants, primarily aged 25–34 with higher education backgrounds.

create active dialogue around television series, while 91.8% acknowledge that social media criticism can influence viewership. These findings show that the aesthetics of series—and by extension, of domestic spaces—do not remain static, but are activated and disseminated through participatory audience engagement. The distinction between "good" and "bad" aesthetics often correlates with the class identity of both characters and viewers, as reflected in the comment that some series "are just awful and unwatchable, but they try to make black look like white through personal pages and content creators."

Representation, therefore, operates not only descriptively but also performatively. It produces an aesthetic desire that implicitly legitimizes a particular model of dwelling while excluding others. The aestheticization of domestic space, as composed in *Desperate Housewives* and *Oi Tesseris*, ultimately constitutes a cultural practice that organizes the audience's relationship to material space, mediating social expectations, gender, class, and youth.

1.3.2. Middle-Class Space and Imagined Social Mobility

The televisual representation of domestic space is often tied to the legitimization of middle-class culture as a universal ideal. The characters' homes function as metaphors for their social position, aspirations, and interpersonal hierarchies. Series such as *Desperate Housewives* and *Maestro* construct domestic space as a spatial reflection of a privileged or desirable social class, reinforcing the performative dimension of the home as a stage for social affirmation.

In *Desperate Housewives*, the homogeneity of the urban environment (Wisteria Lane), the tidy front yards, and the nearly cinematographically lit interiors form an image of normality that, as Bourdieu notes, operates classificatorily: "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make" (Bourdieu 1984, 6). The audience recognizes in this domestic mise-en-scène the *habitus* of social ascent: cleanliness, symmetry, elegance, and emotional security. A similar spatial function is present in *Maestro*, where the mayor's family home—opulent, luminous, and coastal—functions as a symbol of distance, exclusion, and authority, both in relation to the other characters and to the viewer.

The perception of the home as a symbol of social mobility is reinforced through portrayals of youth habitation, such as in the Greek sitcom *Oi Men kai oi Den* (1993–

1996). The morphological and decorative contrast between the luxurious apartment of the Dagkas couple and the small, chaotic studio of the Stamatis couple goes beyond comic effect. Rather, it constitutes an aesthetic representation of social disparity: order and symmetry signal elevated status, whereas disorder and chromatic excess mark marginality. As noted in the study *Inside the Three Walls*, "their apartment is a mirror of their status […]. Glass, neoclassical furniture, and symmetry denote the need to display social superiority" (Amariotakis 2021, 60).

This imagined script of upward mobility is mediated by television. The televisual home becomes not merely a representation but also a tool of identification—especially for younger viewers. Collective intelligence, through social media commentary, mimetic practices, and conversations about style, acts as an accelerator of aspiration. As several respondents in the 2024 questionnaire noted, "scenes are used to make videos on TikTok or Instagram," enabling the audience to re-enact the series' spaces within their own lives. Imagined mobility extends beyond imitation of physical space; it includes emotional inhabitation. Viewers do not merely fantasize about owning an apartment—they imagine the life that such an apartment implies. The youthful domestic space, when depicted as functional, elegant, and open to social interaction, is configured as a desired mode of existence.

According to Lefebvre, social space is not merely a product of production but also a field of desire and struggle: it is constituted through conflicting meanings, emotional investments, and symbolic claims (Lefebvre 1991, 26, 110). While this phrasing does not appear verbatim, it synthesizes the core logic of *The Production of Space*: space is not a passive backdrop but an active field of cultural conflict and imaginary projection. Television series, through their scenographic structuring, organize this space as a regime of expectations.

1.3.3. Greek Specificities and Social Contexts

The representation of domestic space in Greek television series inherently bears the trace of the social and cultural context within which it is produced. The home is not constructed as a neutral backdrop but as a dynamic vehicle of historical, aesthetic, and class symbolism. Especially in the case of Greece—where the dominant model of dwelling is structured around apartment buildings, family ownership, and social mobility through space—television series assume a role that transcends entertainment: they become instruments for negotiating the "Greek domestic imaginary."

The series *Archelaou 5* (2024), set in apartments in the Athenian neighborhood of Pangrati, constructs a mosaic of habitation forms that reflect the social and economic differentiations of contemporary Athens—from solitary living among the affluent and cohabitation as a strategy of economic survival, to informal hosting arrangements and intergenerational cohabitation driven by financial necessity rather than kinship. The scenographic space realistically reproduces the aging building stock, interior layouts with limited access to natural light, and eclectic furnishings that reflect an aesthetic of necessity rather than choice.

Everyday domestic space, in Lefebvrian terms, is thus not simply physical or designed, but a *representational space*—a lived space where material objects acquire imaginary and social functionality (Lefebvre 1991, 39–40).

In stark contrast, *Maestro* (2022–2024) presents dwellings that operate as idealized fields of "pure" middle-class life—even in rural settings. The mayor's family home does not merely represent an urban or neoclassical type of house; it structures the entire plot around spatial demarcation: the living room as a space of silencing. The scenography of domestic space in Greek series is often shaped through an aesthetic heterogeneity, where international models coexist with local references. The attempt to merge them does not always yield a coherent result but rather produces a hybrid aesthetic—at times appealing, at others ambiguous.

The series *Min Arxizeis ti Mourmoura* (*Don't Start Grumbling*, 2013–2024) uses domestic space to delineate age and class profiles. The home of the elderly couple (Minas and Voula) is furnished with heavy wooden furniture, doilies, and an old radio -representation of third-age aesthetics. By contrast, the younger couples' apartments are visibly inspired by Scandinavian design: white furniture, open-plan spaces, and chromatic minimalism. Furnishings reminiscent of IKEA styles appear seamlessly integrated into the scenographic environments of the series, precisely because they combine simplicity with the capacity to accommodate heterogeneous elements. This design "flexibility" facilitates identification and reflects a form of everyday youth dwelling. Here, domestic space functions as a carrier of youth identity and aspiration—not only in terms of design but also of cultural self-image.

In the case of Greek television, the aestheticization of domestic space engages in dialogue with the history of dwelling in Greece: the dominance of the apartment block (*polykatoikia*), suburban expansion, and the urbanization of the periphery. Series, whether portraying these elements directly or idealizing them, compose a web of

references that are translated into cultural narratives. And it is precisely collective intelligence that interprets, disseminates, and ultimately integrates them into the memory of everyday life.

1.3.4. The Power of Representation and Its Impact on Everyday Experience

The televisual representation of domestic space does not merely depict a narrative environment; it plays a crucial role in shaping viewers' aesthetic perceptions and material practices. Through their repetitive exposure, television spaces become symbolic models and often function as repertoires for the adoption of specific modes of dwelling, layout, and furnishing. This performative function of scenographic space is rooted in television's fundamental capacity to render the imaginary familiar and the everyday desirable.

The notion of *performative space* is, space not simply represented but activated through its reproduction by the audience—applies in instances where viewers imitate, adopt, or adapt elements from series into their own living environments. It has been observed, for example, that the presentation of domestic interiors in some series resembles furniture catalog covers or pages from interior design magazines (Amariotakis 2021, 70). This observation is not merely metaphorical: in the contemporary cultural economy, television series function as aesthetic platforms, constructing material fantasies and models of desire that extend into real space.

The analysis of questionnaire responses confirms that television and social media operate within a unified, interconnected aesthetic circuit. Over 90% of participants recognize that digital platforms facilitate dialogue around television series. The importance of visual imagery and the aesthetic depiction of spaces contributes significantly to the appeal of television content (Amariotakis 2021, 71). This imaginary relocation into the televisual space—the desire, in other words, to inhabit the scenography—is indicative of the power that televisual aesthetics exert on lived experience. It is no coincidence that viewers seek out furniture, lighting fixtures, or even color schemes they have seen in popular series—an effect confirmed by both consumer trends in the age of digital diffusion and the relevant international literature. As Albert Bandura notes, "most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (Bandura 1977, 22).

Representation, then, functions as a mechanism for defining aesthetic norms. It transforms the televisual home into a point of reference for ideal layout, cleanliness, intimacy, or success. Series do not simply "show" how characters live; they implicitly suggest how audiences ought to live. This constitutes an aesthetic normativity that is activated not through coercion but through collective desire—through the collective intelligence that transforms fiction into a socially applicable ideal.

The series *Archelaou 5* offers a notable example where the power of representation acquires social density not through aesthetic idealization but through its proximity to lived space. The apartment setting in Pangrati—with large windows, postwar tiling, the trace of a demolished wall edged in marble to signify renovation, and the aesthetic of "second use"—constructs a space that represents dwelling not as a condition of stability but as a field of precarity and negotiation. Rather than promoting home as a desirable model, the series presents it as a space of life in all its contradictions, rendering domesticity part of social reality rather than televisual fantasy. Within this framework, *Archelaou 5* activates a different form of collective intelligence: not that of aesthetic imitation, but of recognition and identification with the conditions of real everyday life. The audience, through its encounter with these spaces, does not seek to replicate—but to empathize

Inhabiting Youth: Cohabitation, Space, and Cultural Imaginaries

2.1. Youth and Space: Theoretical Foundations

Youth is not constituted solely as an age category but as a social and cultural field of mobility and transition (Arnett 2000). As defined by Arnett (2000), youth represents an intermediate phase—emerging adulthood—during which the individual is "neither adolescent nor adult" (Arnett 2000, 469). The experience of this "in-between status" recalls the condition of liminality described by Victor Turner, wherein subjects are "betwixt and between" stable social categories and undergo a period of uncertainty, transformation, and dynamic reordering (Turner 1969, 95). Youth, as a phase of detachment from childhood dependency without full integration into adult life, embodies characteristics of this liminal condition not only socially, but also culturally and experientially. This liminality often finds spatial expression: temporary dwellings,

cohabitation, compromises, and aesthetic deviations from "normal" habitation. For young people, space is not merely a backdrop but a tool for social positioning and performative identity construction.

Especially in terms of dwelling, youth is experienced through spatial negotiations: shared housing, provisional solutions, adaptability, aesthetic improvisation. The domestic space is not a stable stage but a temporary and continuously redefined framework of identity. Youth habitation is not inscribed only in materiality; it reveals ways of being in space when it is not owned, not entirely chosen, but made one's own through daily performance.

According to Henri Lefebvre (1991), social space is not neutral but is actively produced by social relations, experiences, and dwelling practices that confer meaning. Especially at the level of lived space, space is not merely designed or functional; it is the space of experience, emotional involvement, and everyday desire (Lefebvre 1991, 39). In the case of youth, this space is often unstable, borrowed, transitional - a microgeography of constant self-repositioning.

This dimension is further developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1984), for whom dwelling is a practice of identity: layout, furnishing, even interior details are part of the subject's habitus, a network of internalized structures that shape aesthetic judgment and preferences (Bourdieu 1984, 6, 170–75). In the context of youth habitation, this translates into aesthetic performance with limited means: use of second-hand objects, eclectic compositions, cohabitation as both spatial compromise and cultural marker.

This aesthetic performance often materializes through practices of recycling, assembling, and eclectic composition: second-hand furniture, posters, improvised storage solutions, fabrics and objects of diverse material and symbolic origins. Student cohabitation is a characteristic form of such spatial assemblage, where the domestic space is shaped not by unity or coherence, but by the performative construction of intimacy. In this context, aesthetics is not merely a marker of taste; it is a daily mechanism for self-construction under constraint. Habitus, as an internalized structure of preferences, functions not as a reflection of class origin, but as a mode of adaptive invention in conditions of transience and irregularity.

Architectural theory has approached contemporary forms of dwelling through concepts that acknowledge fluidity, precarity, and non-normativity as structural characteristics of everyday life. Jeremy Till (2009) rejects the formalist assumptions of architectural autonomy, arguing that it is not a self-contained and isolated practice, but

one continuously dependent on a network of surrounding relations and conditions. According to Till, dwelling is a contingent, discontinuous state embedded in specific cultural, economic, and social contexts. As he notes: "Architecture is dependent on others at every stage of its journey from initial sketch to inhabitation" (Till 2009, 45). In this framework, youth habitation constitutes a paradigmatic case of uncertain space, not only due to its lack of stability but because it is constantly negotiated between desire and necessity. For young people, the "home" is not necessarily a fixed geographic unit; it is a continuous construction—conceptual, practical, and symbolic.

The theory of collective intelligence (Jenkins 2006) complements this framework, as the televisual representation of youth habitation is collectively received and interpreted through viewer communities. Television offers not only character narratives but also life models—ways of inhabiting the world with limited means but an elaborated imaginary. As Jenkins notes: "Nobody knows everything, everyone knows something, and what any member knows is available to the group as a whole at a moment's notice" (Jenkins 2006, 27). These representations, when shared and processed collectively, form a socially mediated meaning of youth and dwelling. Television fiction, therefore, does not simply depict how young people live; it reveals how youth is experienced through space—as desire, as necessity, as identity in formation.

In this framework, televisual representation does not merely offer spaces; it offers dwelling models, which the audience receives, reinterprets, and sometimes appropriates. Series such as *Friends*, *Ano Kato*, or *Oi Tesseris* function not only as narratives of coexistence but as tools for imaginary elaboration on how life might look in transitional adult space. Viewers do not merely see a home; they see a possible or impossible mode of dwelling, a promise of community, a familiar place in which young people gain cultural substance. Through the process of this interpretive negotiation, collective intelligence does not simply confirm shared expectations—it co-constructs them.

2.2. Televisual Cohabitation Imaginaries: From *Friends* to *Archelaou 5*

2.2.1. Cohabitation in Greek Television: Spectrums of Precarity and Intimacy

Youth habitation in Greek society rarely appears as a privileged condition of independence or conscious self-determination. On the contrary, it is characterized by structural instability, limited financial means, and strong family bonds that often delay or circumvent full disengagement from the parental home. The prolonged dependency of young people on the family, linked to both cultural and structural economic factors, is documented in recent studies: 72.9% of young people aged 18–34 in Greece continue to live with their parents, a rate far above the European average (Radin 2024).

Greek television fiction, especially when depicting youthful forms of dwelling, tends to integrate them into narratives of transition, hospitality, or pressured cohabitation. Series such as *Singles* (2004) sketch the daily life of a young group of friends, where cohabitation appears more as a byproduct of relationships (romantic or friendly) rather than as a material focal point or a coherent domestic imaginary. The apartment functions secondarily—the emotional interiority of characters and Rania's narrative commentary dominate. Similarly, *Ano Kato* (2000–2001) attempts to imitate the *Friends* model, presenting six young people living in the same apartment building and sharing common experiences. However, despite its narrative structure, the series fails to render domestic coexistence as functional or recognizable daily life; cohabitation remains superficial, and the spaces lack dramaturgical identity.

In another direction, the series *Oi Tesseris* (2009) portrays youth not through shared living but through individual urban spaces where characters navigate private domestic spheres. Although the dwelling condition appears socially stable, the internal life of the characters is fluid and emotionally fragmented. Here, dwelling is not collective but serves as a backdrop for psychological destabilization and individual search.

Within this framework, *Archelaou 5* (2024) marks a clear departure. The cohabitation of two young women, the coexistence of men from unequal socioeconomic backgrounds, and intergenerational sharing for survival construct a portrayal where dwelling is precarious but not inert. Through spatial compromise, relationships, tensions, and forms of intimacy are formed. The space, although eclectic and realistic, gradually becomes a shared place—not in ideal terms, but through collective

negotiation. *Archelaou 5* does not offer the idealized stability of *Friends* but a recognizable model of survival and coexistence, with internal cohesion and emotional depth.

This approach aligns with Jeremy Till's (2009) view that dwelling is a dependent and contingent act, a performative condition shaped by social, economic, and situational factors. *Archelaou 5* does not depict the space of youth as an "ideal state," but as a continuous exercise in coexistence—something particularly significant in Greek television fiction.

2.2.2. Friends as an Imaginary Counterpart

The series *Friends* (1994–2004) stands as one of the most iconic cultural products that shaped the global imaginary of youth cohabitation. The apartment of Monica and Rachel—or that of Joey and Chandler—is constructed as a space of sociability, daily closeness, and emotional stability. Cohabitation is not presented as transitional or imposed but as a choice; a framework allowing identity formation through shared living. As Feasey (2008) points out, the sitcom—especially *Friends*—offers a model of cohabitation through which male and female friendship is negotiated as a spatial experience and mechanism of self-construction (Feasey 2008, 24–27).

The aesthetic character of the apartment is essential: its vibrant colors, handcrafted textures, and eclectic furnishing compose a space of recognizable freedom, far from middle-class minimalism or the "normalcy" of family dwelling. The apartment is open, shared, and fluid—inhabited not only by bodies but also by emotions, interactions, crises, and reunions. The set does not function merely as a backdrop; it is the material memory of relationships.

The series has provoked and continues to provoke widespread cultural reproduction of its imaginary: touristic revivals of its sets, aesthetic imitation on social platforms, and everyday references to the spatial and social logic of the show. As David Marc notes, "the sitcom offers a representation of the interior, the domestic, the trivial and the familiar [...] The quick resolution of conflicts confirms the illusory, yet desirable, image of structured order at the level of family, community, nation, and cosmos" (Marc 1996, 65–66). *Friends* embodies precisely this structure: a "safe" space capable of hosting the instability of young people without devaluing it.

The comparison with Greek television fiction is revealing. While cohabitation in Greek series often appears as a response to practical needs or emotional challenges,

we now observe—particularly in *Archelaou 5*—the emergence of an intermediate model: space is realistic and eclectic but acquires functional and narrative cohesion. The apartment in *Friends* functions as a space of imaginary stability and social identity. In contrast, the apartment in *Archelaou 5* serves as a place of existential and everyday processing—not ideal, but real and recognizable.

2.2.3. Between the Imaginary and the Real: Comparing Friends and Archelaou 5

The comparison between youth cohabitation as depicted in *Friends* and as rendered in *Archelaou 5* should not be framed as a simple opposition between a "Western model" and "Greek backwardness." Rather, it highlights a deeper issue of cultural translation: how a global imaginary—cohabitation as a space of freedom, independence, and friendship—is realized, transformed, or negotiated within the specific social and economic conditions of Greek reality.

In *Friends*, cohabitation is a self-contained choice, temporally stable, with aesthetic coherence and emotional depth. The apartment is not merely a set but the shared body of friendship. In most Greek series, as previously discussed, cohabitation is instrumental or circumstantial, not performative. However, *Archelaou 5* introduces a distinct rupture: although the conditions of dwelling are realistic and precarious, the series for the first time acknowledges the dynamics of cohabitation as a field of living together, relationship formation, and possibly new forms of intimacy.

Although the characters bear surreal or exaggerated traits, their domestic space remains anti-idealized: renovated apartments with visible traces of use, layouts adapted to coexistence, material remnants of past residents. The series does not construct an "ideal" environment but renders visible for the first time the spatial regime of youth in its thirties, in all its intensity and complexity. This is not a "dream home," but a viable and recognizable model.

The essential difference lies not only in aesthetics or plot but in the cultural function of space: in *Friends*, the apartment carries the imaginary of a stable youth not in a hurry to grow up; in *Archelaou 5*, that space is a continual wager of survival and togetherness—sometimes fractured, but functional. If the apartment in *Friends* operates as a space of desire, the one in *Archelaou 5* offers a form of intermediary, realistic reality: suspended, yet closer to the lived experience of youth dwelling in Greece. The visual comparison of the two spaces reinforces this distinction (see Figure 1), as the

imaginary fullness of the former contrasts with the precarious everydayness and heterogeneity of the latter.

Figure 1 *Comparative view of domestic space in Friends (NBC, 1994) and Archelaouv 5 (ERT, 2024). Screenshot from Friends sourced online, screenshot from Archelaou 5 taken from original episode. Composition by the author.*

Domestic Space as a Cultural Mediator

3.1. Domestic Space as Desire and Model: Representations of Class and Everyday Life

In television fiction, the domestic space functions not merely as a residence for the characters but as a composition of cultural imaginaries related to class, social mobility, and desire. It is not simply a set; it is a model, a longing, and a daily exercise. It is represented to be inhabited—not only by the characters but also by the viewers, in their imagination. The televised representation of dwelling produces and reproduces models that become objects of aspiration or critique. Viewers do not merely watch the rooms, kitchens, and living rooms: they absorb them, comment on them, and imagine them as their own.

The series *The Nanny* (CBS, 1993–1999) and its Greek adaptation *I Nanta* (Mega, 2003–2005) offer clear examples of the class dynamics embedded in domestic space. In the former, Fran Fine's entrance from Queens into the Sheffields' Upper East Side mansion signifies the insertion of a popular cultural code into a space of aristocratic urban aesthetics. In the latter, this model is transposed to the Greek context, where the nanny moves into the house of a wealthy family and gradually "performs" her integration into a different social universe. Notably, the Greek version of the domestic space structurally mimics the American one: "the Greek version of the nanny's residence emulates the American one and was 'constructed' with reference to the realities of 2003, translating the furniture, color palette, and layout of the original series

into the Greek context." The comparison of these two spaces reveals how social symbols are translated into space, as reflected in set design (see Figure 2).

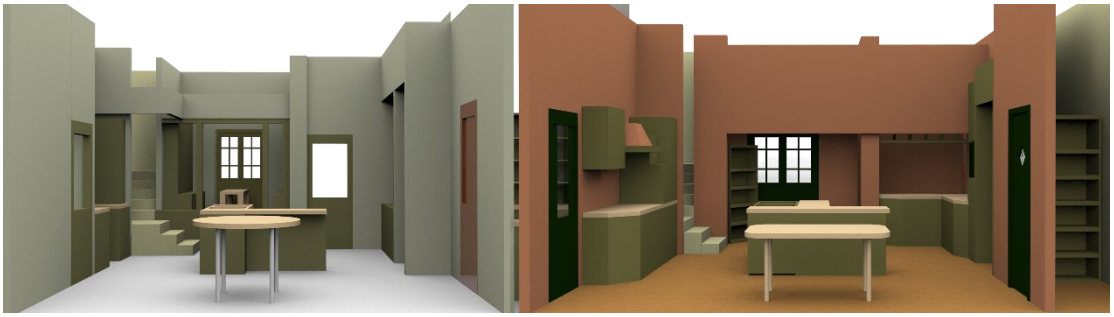

Figure 2 *Comparative analysis of domestic space in I Nanta (Mega, 2003) and The Nanny (CBS, 1993). The spaces reflect distinct cultural and social differentiations. Source: Render by the author.*

In *Desperate Housewives* (ABC, 2004–2012), the suburb of Wisteria Lane serves as the embodiment of an imaginary middle-class normativity. The tidiness of the urban space, the repetition of layouts, and the apparent order of the suburb contrast with the psychological or moral fissures of the protagonists. The home is no longer merely an expression of the "interior" self but becomes the mask of a normativity that fractures from within.

In *Lampsi* (ANT1, 1991–2005), the domestic space of the Drakos family is a central narrative axis through which social power, hierarchy, and class stability are represented. The residence, with its heavy aesthetic and strict internal organization, operates as a closed and symbolically charged space: controlled access, fixed usage of specific rooms, and the coexistence of many individuals within an architecturally static structure form a domestic microcosm of power. From 2000 onward, the domestic space gradually transforms: the color palette becomes warmer, the furnishings take on elements of everyday familiarity, and the general atmosphere shifts from austerity toward a more approachable and quotidian reality. As seen in Figure 3, the scenic evolution reflects the broader narrative turn toward the deconstruction of concentrated power and the introduction of fluidity within the plot. These changes, while not negating the symbolism of power, confer new dramaturgical functions to the domestic space: the home becomes a site of tension, emotional shifts, and limited redistribution of roles.

Figure 3. *Temporal transformation of the domestic television model from strict luxury to a more familiar and accessible environment in Lampsi (ANT1, 1991–2005). Source: Screenshots from television episodes (YouTube) and images from publicly available websites; composition by the author.*

Finally, in the series *Konstantinou kai Elenis* (ANT1, 1998–2000), the home becomes a battleground of imaginary cultural worlds. The coexistence of two contrasting characters—the conservative academic and the popular "modern" woman—is not merely a pretext for comic conflict. The domestic space is the real stake, as each seeks to displace the other in order for the space to be fully "inhabited" by a single cultural code. The set, with its postmodern eclecticism, vibrant colors, and deliberate aesthetic excess, becomes an active symbol of cultural discord (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. *Representation of domestic space in Konstantinou kai Elenis (ANT1, 1998–2000). The set combines postmodern eclectic elements, aesthetic excess, and intense color to depict the simultaneous coexistence of two oppositional worlds. Source: Render and collage by the author using screenshots from episodes (YouTube) and publicly available websites.*

From *The Nanny* to *Lampsi* and *Konstantinou kai Elenis*, the television domestic space does not function as a neutral backdrop but as a cultural mediator: it materializes class affiliations, aesthetic standards, and imaginary forms of social hierarchy. Dwelling, even in its televised form, is not a static representation but is proposed as a possibility for daily performance. As Michel de Certeau notes, "space is a practiced place" (de Certeau 1984, 117); it does not carry inherent meaning but is constituted through use.

The scenographic domestic space is therefore activated through mimetic practices, adoption tactics, and personal adaptation by viewers. To the extent that it activates expectations, aesthetic identifications, or social schemas, dwelling in television series may be viewed as a daily mechanism for the construction of imaginaries that organize not only the narrative but also viewer reception.

The connection between scenographic aesthetics and the moral or social characterization of characters is not limited to American or Greek productions. In the Mexican telenovela *María la del Barrio* (Televisa, 1995), for instance, the home of the De la Vega family—with classical elements, warm hues, and traditional furnishings—embodies the stable, generous, and traditional world of aristocracy. In contrast, the residence of Soraya Montenegro, the series' main antagonist, presents modernist and cold characteristics, dominated by metallic elements and strict lines, reflecting her ruthless and ambitious nature. The scenographic contrast between the two homes underscores the distinction between traditional aristocracy and newly acquired social status, as well as the moral differentiations between characters.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study examined domestic space in television as a carrier of cultural, social, and aesthetic meanings, with a focus on how this space is received, processed, and transformed through the collective intelligence of viewers. It has been shown that domestic space in television series does not merely function as a scenographic backdrop, but as a dynamic framework for identity, performance, and imaginary projection.

Drawing on the theoretical contributions of Jenkins and Lévy, it was demonstrated that viewers do not passively consume content but actively participate in its resignification. Representations of dwelling—whether stable middle-class geometries or precarious cohabitations—exceed fiction and enter the cultural cycle through desire, imitation, detachment, or even critical negotiation. Thus, television transforms domestic space into a field for the collective construction of dwelling imaginaries.

The comparative analysis of Greek and international series revealed the different imaginaries activated within each cultural context. In *Friends*, the apartment functions as a stable space of prolonged youth and communal life; in *Archelaou 5*, space

reflects precarity, necessity, and the constant negotiation of coexistence; in *Desperate Housewives*, the home foregrounds the rupture between appearance and social reality; while in *Lampsi*, it shifts from a symbol of power to a field of narrative and social fluidity.

The study highlighted how youthful forms of dwelling—such as cohabitation, spatial negotiation, and aesthetic heterogeneity—are not only objects of representation but also factors shaping social expectations of what it means to inhabit. In parallel, the architectural reading of the scenographic space brought to light the importance of materiality (lighting, furniture, framing) in shaping social meanings and aesthetic norms.

Ultimately, this paper revealed fiction not merely as a mirror of everyday life but as a producer of cultural ideals. Domestic space on television is not simply a reflection of reality; it becomes a factor in shaping how we imagine, inhabit, and interpret our own space. Understanding it—emerging from the intersection of theory, cultural analysis, and architectural sensitivity—requires a synthetic approach and critical attentiveness.

Recommendations

This study highlights the need to incorporate television fiction into broader reflections on the culture of dwelling. The home, as depicted in series, is not a neutral set; it is a condensation of cultural conventions, social expectations, and aesthetic codes. Understanding television dwelling can enrich how social subjects perceive, desire, and redesign their own space.

First, we propose strengthening interdisciplinary research that connects architecture with television and cultural studies. The analysis of televisual space is not limited to morphology; it is a tool for reading social transformations, performative identities, and collective expectations. Integrating such themes into architectural education could enrich the field with new research tools and sensitivities.

Second, domestic television production could benefit from a more reflexive scenographic approach to domestic space—not as a faithful representation of "realism," but as a medium of social commentary. Visual environments that depict precarity, otherness, or the complexity of social relations can convey stronger cultural messages than the imitation of homogeneous aesthetic models.

Third, at the level of cultural policy, it is important to support research and artistic initiatives that explore the relationships between space, media, and social

representation. Television scenography, particularly in the era of digital diffusion and participatory commentary, emerges as a field for understanding everyday life and a tool for generating new imaginaries of dwelling.

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Figure 1. Comparative view of domestic space in *Friends* (NBC, 1994) and *Archelaou 5* (ERT, 2024). Screenshot from Friends sourced online, screenshot from Archelaou 5 taken from original episode. Composition by the author.

Figure 2. Comparative study of the living room in *The Nanny* (CBS, 1993) and *I Nanta* (Mega, 2003). Screenshots from episodes and scene reconstructions. Render by the author.

Figure 3. Visual evolution of domestic aesthetics in *Lampsi* (ANT1, 1991–2005). Screenshots from publicly available online episodes (YouTube). Composition by the author.

Figure 4. Representation of domestic space in *Konstantinou kai Elenis* (ANT1, 1998–2000). Screenshots from television episodes and public websites. Composition and collage by the author.