

Smart Home Masculinities

Sarah Pink, Yolande Strengers, Rex Martin & Kari Dahlgren

To cite this article: Sarah Pink, Yolande Strengers, Rex Martin & Kari Dahlgren (2022) Smart Home Masculinities, Australian Feminist Studies, 37:112, 117-133, DOI: [10.1080/08164649.2023.2197155](https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2023.2197155)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2023.2197155>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 10 Apr 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 4888



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 34 View citing articles [↗](#)

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Smart Home Masculinities

Sarah Pink, Yolande Strengers, Rex Martin and Kari Dahlgren

Emerging Technologies Research Lab, Monash University, Clayton, Australia

ABSTRACT

Existing research has shown dominant smart home imaginaries to be gendered visions of technologically deterministic lives of affluent young white men and middle-class hetero-normative white cultures. Instead, we argue, a more realistic, plausible and ethical approach to smart home design needs to originate from the different starting point of gender diversity and equality in the home. To demonstrate this, we situate smart home design within the dominant masculine and colonising narratives of industry and science. We then develop a design anthropological analysis of the everyday experiences as reported by four middle-class white Australian men living in heteronormative family households. We propose that existing masculinist imaginaries of smart home futures are not only limited because they fail to account for the diverse experiences and aspirations of heterogeneous households but because they also fail to recognise the messiness, contingency and processual nature of the social, material and experiential circumstances of the very heteronormative households they appear to be aligned with. A feminist approach to the smart home would need to be designed from and with gender-equal relations in the very site of the home.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 6 March 2022
Accepted 27 March 2023

KEYWORDS

Smart homes; future imaginaries; everyday masculinities; digital housekeeping; Australia; feminist design anthropology

Introduction

Everyday life in the home has long since been regarded as a key site through which gender relations and identities are constituted and lived, and it has demonstrated that domestic tasks can be performed and narrated in ways that are distinctively masculine (Pink 2004). This is no less the case as smart home systems and devices become increasingly ubiquitous. However, our research suggests, and we demonstrate below, once everyday masculine narratives of home become combined with the masculine and colonising narratives of smart technologies, a new issue emerges. On the one hand, by aligning with a masculine rendering of the home, smart technologies are not always inclusive (Berg 1994; Strengers and Nicholls 2018). Yet, the particular masculinities they represent do not always align with how masculinity is performed at home, as demonstrated by

CONTACT Sarah Pink  Sarah.Pink@monash.edu  Emerging Technologies Research Lab, Monash University, Clayton, Australia

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

ethnographic studies that have complicated narratives of smart home masculinities (Kennedy et al. 2015; Sinanan and Horst 2021).

In this article, we argue for a shift in paradigm for smart home conceptualisation and design. This involves moving away from the masculine gendered dominant imaginaries which align the smart home with the technologically determined lives of affluent young white men and middle-class hetero-normative white cultures critiqued by feminist science and technology studies (STS) scholars (e.g. Spigel 2005). Instead, we call for a more realistic, plausible and ethical approach to smart home design, which would originate from the different starting point of gender diversity and equality in the home. This means overturning the gendered and colonising narratives which drive and fund science, industry and policy, towards the ethics of a feminist approach that values collaboration, diversity and equality and engages in the sites of the everyday to constitute these inclusively. To begin to shift smart home design towards an approach that attends to real experiences of everyday life, our strategy, as played out in this article, involves demonstrating what happens in the everyday and why this complicates the dominant narratives about smart homes that industry and government tend to subscribe to. We do this through a design anthropological analysis of the detail of the everyday experiences reported by three middle-class men living in heteronormative family households in Australia, which is a common and successful presentation method in anthropological studies of home (e.g. Miller 2001; Pink 2004). We have specifically selected these examples for our discussion because we wish to make the point that even those men whose domestic arrangements and sexualities conform with heteronormative masculinity are unlikely to live out the masculinities that many existing analyses have shown to correspond with the smart home visions represented in dominant narratives. The examples are intended to demonstrate the consistently occurring principles through which this occurred across our sample (rather than to stand for specific actions, technologies and materialities consistently repeated across our sample): how men improvise through contingency in taking responsibility for digital housekeeping; how men 'prove' the value of technologies to women; how masculine ways of knowing emerge through digital housekeeping; and how men maintain levels of control over smart home systems. These principles are subsequently discussed in the penultimate section of this article.

A design anthropological analysis is suited to this task precisely because it brings close attention to the everyday, understanding the home as an ongoingly emergent site, and attending to the sensory and affective modes through which gender, home and technology are experienced and enacted (Smith and Otto 2016; Pink et al. 2017; Pink et al. 2022). Conceptually it invites us to consider how people improvise with new technologies in the contingent circumstances of their everyday lives, to maintain a sense of familiarity, routine and order (Pink et al. 2017). Therefore, it makes a particular contribution that takes existing everyday modes of approaching everyday uncertainties and possibilities as its starting point. A feminist design anthropology of emerging technologies and home contributes a focus on the gendered dimensions of how these relations play out and raises the question of how by shifting the gender balance within these relations we might advocate for better, more ethical, realistic and plausible smart home design. This builds on feminist critiques of smart home narratives by STS and media scholars (e.g. Spigel 2005; Strengers and Kennedy 2020), and advances them through an ethnographic focus on men's situated engagements with smart home technologies.

Design anthropology itself seeks to change anthropological practice, towards an ethical and interventional ethnography, and as argued elsewhere (Pink et al. 2022) this means seeking radical change in both how academic disciplines work and in societal approaches to design and where design happens. As feminist anthropologist Mahmud (2021, 354) argues, anthropology itself ‘needs rewriting’, towards an ‘antiracist, anticapitalist, antifascist, decolonial and abolitionist feminist project that we would want to be part of’ (2021, 354). Bringing this together with design anthropology’s focus on signalling ways forward towards interventional approaches for bringing about possible futures of this kind, offers us not simply a way to study the gendered narratives and relations of smart homes, but to consider where and with whom a feminist design anthropology suggests they might be ethically and inclusively designed.

Differently to conventional scholarship it does not simply ask a research question and seek to respond to it but rather aspires to identify misalignments that lead to modes of exclusion and to unrealistic future visions, and to propose interventions that could lead to more inclusive and plausible futures. The research discussed here takes a novel step. Much existing research – including our own – has focused on those groups of people who are more obviously excluded in dominant narratives about smart home futures (e.g.). Instead, while acknowledging such exclusion, this article surfaces the realities of those who superficially appear to be included in dominant narratives – heteronormative men. However, it finds that these men’s experiences of and engagements with smart home technologies vary from the dominant narratives when they are investigated further. By better understanding these nuances of gendered engagements with smart home technologies, we argue, we gain a much more powerful vision of how dominant narratives are misaligned with everyday realities. That, while on one level they can be critiqued because they represent gendered narratives and hegemonic heterosexual techno masculinities, on another the masculinities they represent, are hard to find in everyday life. Thus we argue that a feminist approach needs to advocate for inclusive design not simply as a counter narrative to the images of masculinity that are designed for, but rather should account for the ways that smart home technologies are entangled with gendered identities and relations in everyday life.

Australia as site

Australia provides a key site through which to explore these issues, for several reasons. First, Australia has long since been an important site for the study of gender. In the 1990s RW Connell’s pioneering work on masculinities (Connell 1995) provided what was arguably the most insightful analysis of how gender and diversity were situated within a complex society. More recently, and in contrast to social commentary regarding the crisis of masculinity and rise of toxic masculinity, academic scholarship originating in Australia has highlighted the emergence of more inclusive masculinities (Roberts 2014). This article is not intended to be an empirical update on the state of masculinities in a digital Australian society, but it highlights the enduring point that we need to understand everyday masculinities as diverse and contingent, a point that pushes back against the dominant gendered narratives of smart home futures. Australia, has also, as accounted for in more detail below, emerged as a key site for scholarship about and empirical studies of how people live with smart technologies at home, ensuring a dynamic existing literature and set of insights to dialogue with (Dahlgren et al. 2021; Duque et al. 2021;

Kennedy et al. 2015; Maalsen 2022; Sinanan and Horst 2021; Strengers and Nicholls 2018; Strengers and Kennedy 2020; Strengers, Dahlgren, and Nicholls 2022).

We specifically draw on online ethnographic research, undertaken with 72 Australian households across the states of Victoria and New South Wales in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. We had at least two online meetings with each household, including interviews, discussions of energy use data visualisations, future scenario comic strips, participant-led photographic video and written exercises, and online participant-led video tours of their homes. We also undertook a series of five short follow-up video-recorded documentary filmmaking in-person visits in 2021. To a lesser extent, we refer to our review of 64 industry reports relating to technology and energy in the home. Our methods were reflexive and collaborative; they involved deep, intensive and empathetic short-term ethnographic immersions (Pink and Morgan 2013) in participants' lives, through which we sought to understand how they lived with new and emerging technologies and how this figured in relation to their everyday energy use.

Anthropologists who study households typically use the method of the home visit (Miller 2001), including the home video tour, through which to engage with people in their everyday lives in their homes (Pink 2004). In the research discussed here, we followed the established method of 'short-term ethnography' (Pink & Morgan 2013), which has been developed for and used over many design anthropological household ethnographies over more than two decades, to investigate in depth through the camera. Such deep investigations with families in their households would be impossible through traditional anthropological long-term ethnography, in part due to the intensity of the encounters that short-term ethnography creates and in part because it would be unrealistic and excessively costly (in researcher time and financially) to visit 72 households repeatedly over, for example, 12 months. In this article, we focus specifically on participants' relationships to smart home technologies, but note that this is also a prism through which to understand household energy use. Participants were invited to lead the online video tours of their homes, maintaining control of what was revealed in these live activities as well as in the self-reported materials they created for us, and to contemplate the future comic strip scenarios with us. They were also asked if they would like us to use their real names or pseudonyms, and if they would like to check identifiable representations of them before publication.

The conceptual and critical question we pursue in this article involves how smart home masculinities are constituted in dominant narratives, the hegemonic masculinities that these narratives embody, and how we might respond to them through feminist design anthropology that is capable of critiquing the narratives of innovation that frame the smart home, showing how the gendered identities of people who live with smart homes are negotiated through everyday improvisatory actions. Our analysis reveals that not only is smart home technology not designed for diversity, but in addition, those for whom it most aligns tend to either continually question or troubleshoot it, or they improvise to redesign it to suit their lives. It is therefore not surprising that globally the smart home market has failed to come about as expected, or that Australians tend to be more interested in separate smart home devices than in full predesigned systems (Strengers et al. 2021).

Consequently, if we were to switch smart home design and the assumptions about what it can offer, towards real people in their homes, and argue for the home as the

site of inclusive design, then we might be able to better constitute feminist future smart home narratives.

Dominant Narratives of the Smart Home

The smart home has long been a contemporary imaginary and aspirational ideal. Early representations, which highlighted how electricity and home appliances would liberate people from housework, promising new levels of luxury and leisure (Horrigan 1986), continue to permeate representations of the aspirational smart home (e.g. Darby 2018; Strengers and Kennedy 2020). The smart home can be defined as ‘a residence equipped with computing and information technology which anticipates and responds to the needs of the occupants, working to promote their comfort, convenience, security and entertainment through the management of technology within the home and connections to the world beyond’ (Aldrich 2003, 17). While there have been significant advances in technology since the initial concept of the smart home, its definition and vision (for seamless and anticipatory control of one’s environment) have remained largely unchanged. Importantly, and like many technology visions, this definition is still yet to be realised, remaining a proximate future (Dourish and Bell 2011). Rather than serving as a definition of real-life smart homes then, definitions for the smart home can be more productively understood as anticipated and continually performed imaginaries.

Feminists of technology have critiqued these narratives for both their lack of realism, and their highly gendered and heteronormative visions of domestic roles, labour and life. Combining ‘a curious mixture of nostalgia and futurism’, Spigel (2005, 219) argues that ‘the promotional rhetoric for smart homes offers a technological fix that allows women to be everywhere and everything at once’; while the man becomes ‘a superworker who does three jobs at once’ the woman becomes ‘a superwoman who combines motherhood and career’. Early feminist analyses of the smart home and domestic technologies cite the absence of housework from design visions and prototypes, and the undervaluing of feminine skills and knowledge, with ‘the technically-interested man’ implicitly positioned as the target consumer of smart devices (Cockburn 1997; Berg 1994, 176). More recent analyses have emphasised the smart home’s focus on creating ‘more time for father’ to engage in leisure with smart home entertainment and security systems (Strengers and Nicholls 2018, following Schwartz Cowan’s (1985) analysis of the industrial revolution of the home as freeing up ‘more time for mother’ through labour-saving domestic technologies). Other feminist analyses have highlighted the problematic positioning of smart technologies as housewives (Spigel 2005), ‘smart wives’ (Strengers and Kennedy 2020) or aesthetically white servants (Phan 2019) that reinforce stereotypes about gendered labour in the home.

More broadly, research suggests that smart home imaginaries enduringly promote technologically determinist and solutionist narratives that are aligned with a series of heteronormative personas. In a 2020 review of 64 technology and energy industry reports, Kari Dahlgren and colleagues found these reports’ future visions: treated people as individual technology consumers, and failed to acknowledge the messy and contingent elements of everyday life; excluded economically poorer and culturally and linguistically diverse households; saw futures through the prism of continuations of existing trends, and improvement of existing technologies; and tended to make claims about the

impact of emerging technologies and systems such as AI, 5G, and blockchain, which failed to account for the possibility of uncertainty and failure (Dahlgren et al. 2020, 23). Thus presenting a future where emerging technologies can be seamlessly integrated into the lives of individuals, who will adopt and reap benefits from them. Moreover, in such narratives smart homes are pitched as offering solutions to a range of societal and environmental 'problems', which are however often dubiously defined, giving rise to the common criticism of smart home technologies as 'solutions in search of a problem' (Strengers and Kennedy 2020). The gendering of industry narratives about smart home devices and systems, and how their visions gender the people they imagine as using them forms a further layer to how they are both set within existing paradigms and relations of power. But as we develop further below, doing so simultaneously limits their capacity to deliver the technological solutions that they promise, precisely because they fundamentally misunderstand how gender and technology are constituted in everyday life.

What this reveals is an unreflexive or self-critical scientific paradigm. What the anthropologist Tim Ingold refers to as 'big science', which 'believes it can already deliver the answer - or if not already, then in a future within its sights' (Ingold 2021, 336). Where such big science believes that it can solve problems in the home by, for example, optimising energy use, creating greater convenience, and delivering personalised services to individuals, it follows the logics of an innovation paradigm that launches what is seen as finished products into the home-as-a-landing-site (Pink 2021); an approach that fails to account for how people improvise with new technologies beyond their designed-for use. Thus, whereas revised anthropology, in the 1990s, moved away from its masculine narratives of fieldwork, rendered in the symbolism of the male anthropologists penetrating the feminised (and often exoticised) 'field' (see Kulick and Willson 1995), the penetration of the otherwise analogue home by digital and emerging technologies, to be 'accepted' by users, which persists in dominant industry narratives is unfortunately anachronistic. It is typical of the gendered and colonising narratives that have endured in research, science and innovation for many years (Abdilla 2018). However while social scientists have sought to revise their approaches by critiquing the gendered (Kulick and Willson 1995) and colonising narratives of extractive fieldwork methods, often revolutionising whole disciplines, dominant (but not all) science and technology narratives tend to lag behind, reframing their ambitions towards 'social good'. In Australia CSIRO's 'AI Roadmap for environmental and social good' blog post tells us that 'Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the power to change life itself. We're using it to transform economies, unlock new societal and environmental value and accelerate scientific discovery' (CSIRO'S DATA61 Editorial Team 2019). Unfortunately, however, things as significant as changing life itself, when *done to* people, rather than performed in collaboration with them, might change the sentiment but do not change the narrative. While using AI, automated and smart home technologies is for good well meaning, until they are used to generate good with people in everyday life situations, they might not be that good.

Indeed in the case of the smart home, we are also left wondering who these technological applications are good for. Internationally, Adam Richard Rottinghaus' analysis has found the dominant narratives of smart homes to be framed by a 'new white futurism' (Rottinghaus 2021) and Thao Phan argues that 'the figuration of domestic [voice] assistants in the image of domestic service speaks more to the historic dehumanization

of working-class men and women of color than to the contemporary anthropomorphism of these digital assistants' (Phan 2019) (see Lupton, Pink, and Horst 2021). Other scholars have unpacked these narratives to characterise personas that correspond with, or challenge, dominant industry visions. Four characters stand out about the energy sector – Strengers (2013) Resource Man, Johnson's (2020) Flexibility Woman, Strengers and Kennedy's (2020) Smart Wife and Kari Dahlgren and colleagues' Techno-Hedonist (2021). In brief, the analyses that construct these personas reveal a set of gendered narratives and relations that reproduce common techno-rationalist and -optimistic tropes about how people use smart devices in their homes (Resource Man, Techno Hedonist), how the devices are imbued with gendered stereotypes and biases (Resource Man, Smart Wife), and how they are strategically proposed by researchers to reveal the nuances of other ways in which people pursue energy reduction and management in their homes (Flexibility Woman). Whether proposed as imaginaries of the smart home and energy sectors or grounded in the realities of everyday life these characters do important work in both critiquing dominant consumer assumptions and opening up the field of smart technology design, development and use to a much broader set of actors and dynamics.

In addition to these critical perspectives on smart home narratives, there is moreover a vibrant field of research about how people live in their homes with new and emerging media and technologies, which also reveals the cracks in industry assumptions. This literature has not least developed about technology in Australian homes (including Kennedy et al. 2015; Strengers and Kennedy 2020; Strengers and Nicholls 2018; Hjorth et al. 2020; Duque et al. 2021; Lupton, Pink, and Horst 2021; Sinanan and Horst 2021). In particular, as digital technologies have started to become implicated in gendered relations of home, researchers have been concerned with the gendered nature of the new 'digital housekeeping' (Tolmie et al. 2007) which new technologies constitute in practice, or as Jenny Kennedy and colleagues put it: 'how transformations within household media configurations give rise to new opportunities for 'digital expertise' under conditions of persistent gender inequalities' (2015, 410). Jolynna Sinanan and Heather Horst have found in research about how diverse Australians organise their digital data, that the impacts of digital housekeeping go beyond simply the gendered division of household labour, but are also 'intertwined with cultural and generational ideals of familial roles' (2021, 1241). In short, anyone with access to the minimal resources required could become a 'digital housekeeper' and therefore the category opens up possibilities of accommodating diversity, and thus becomes a useful category to mobilise in considering inclusive design. As this work implies, digital housekeeping is always contextual, and in the case of heterosexual households, can be interpreted as both legitimate housework or as a non-essential hobby involving tinkering and play (Strengers and Nicholls 2018). Taking on board these existing findings, in this article we engage the concept of digital housekeeping to comment on how masculinities and relational gendered identities are being constituted relationally with smart home technologies and systems. In doing so we contribute to this emerging discussion of how digital housekeeping is coming about as an Australian phenomenon. However, our wider objective is to build on this discussion to identify how the smart home is implicated in masculinities as they are performed through digital housekeeping. Ultimately we

are interested in what it would mean to design differently with diverse gendered identities in households.

Smart Husbands at Home

As noted above our online and documentary filmmaking ethnographies involved 72 Australian households. In this section, we account for our findings through a close discussion of our encounters with three households, which have been selected precisely because they demonstrate the wider findings of and issues raised by this project. That is to say that gendered digital housekeeping was evidenced across our sample, in many, but not all households, and different ways. This section aims to demonstrate how it manifests, by way of example, to demonstrate the principles by which it occurs, which are discussed in the penultimate section of this article.

Bob

Bob lived in the coastal area outside a small Australian city, with his wife, Kylie, and four children aged 2, 6 and 8. Both white Australians, from this same part of the country, they had bought a spacious suburban house about a year ago and drove two big cars. They both worked from home for 1 and 3 days respectively, and shared looking after the children and many domestic tasks, which he generally considered himself to be more effective at, and said found it 'a bit frustrating' because, he said, 'I'm a bit neat and she's very messy'.

Once they had moved in, Bob had some time off work and had spent part of this getting the house set up. The previous owner of their house had been in the domestic technologies business, so that house was set up with more appliances than they needed, and an extensive indoor and outdoor lighting system. As Bob described, invoking enduring agency of the previous owner: 'he's got a big commercial aircon unit so it's a massive unit with two big fans', going on to explain that 'you can set it in zones but if you're doing zones in the lounge room for example, it goes all the way up the stairs'. Bob had kept in touch with the previous owner and his presence was clear during our interview as Bob described how he would go back to him to understand how the home technology was set up.

Bob had also installed solar panels about a year before our interview, and often used the solar energy to power the pump, filtration and heating for the outdoor pool and the spa underneath the house. Over time Bob had learned how to set these technologies to come on automatically and to optimise his use of solar energy. As he described it:

it's got a sensor that can tell how warm the water is up in those panels, up on the roof, so it detects what the temperature is on the roof, and I'll set the timer from 12 o'clock through to 5 o'clock ... so really, they sort of work in together and so when the solar in the house is working well and most efficient, that's when the solar for the pool's running, and if it's an overcast day, the solar for the pool just won't run.

He had also put some work into getting the right internet connection set up for his family, consulting with someone responsible for IT systems in a company he used to work for. Other remnants of the presence of the previous owner were that 'he's got the sprinkler system which runs on a timer' and the home security system, including a security camera, which

Bob was planning to speak to him about as they hadn't yet used it. Yet however well he had researched the Wi-Fi set-up, this could still be messed up by power outages.

Bob and Kylie's smart home system connected some of their appliances, and in an area where there were sometimes power outages, this created difficulties. Bob described how this impacted on family routines 'because your Wi-Fi, because it goes out and, yeah, you can't open the fridge doors'. The first time it happened at night and Bob had just arrived home from soccer training with his son, he recalled how: 'I just said, let's just go out for dinner, so we went out for dinner instead'. The home also had a smart security system, which he was engaged with but Kylie was not. Bob described how in a recent power outage, Kylie had called him up just as she was leaving to collect the kids from school in a panic, 'going, "the door won't open, the garage door won't open"' he explained that the front door was also automatic, and 'she didn't know how to get out of the house. And you know, I just said, you've just got to pull the cord on the garage door and lift it. ... And I had to take her through it'.

Another legacy from the previous owner, and this time his wife, involved the way the outdoor lights were organised. Bob said that 'It's almost like day time, so there's three lots of floodlights – over the clothesline, over the pool, and just outside the laundry, and his wife is a bit OCD. She's labelled everything, so you know what everything is' which was something he personally thought had 'been handy'. Kylie, in contrast, Bob felt, had a different relationship to the lights, she would just switch all the lights on, whereas he considered himself to use them more thoughtfully.

Murphy

Murphy, an engineer, and his wife Gemma, both white Australians, lived in a townhouse in the CBD of a small Australian city, with their two children – a baby and a preschooler aged 4. Both worked part time and shared the childcare and domestic responsibilities; the only division that he mentioned was that his wife would tend to write their (digital) shopping lists and he had the more 'gross' task of emptying the litter for their four indoor cats. Murphy, with his interest in technology was also responsible for the smart home devices and system, which he set up himself with an Apple Home Kit platform, which he described as: 'It's a home automation platform so basically everything in the house is controllable from an app on the, on your phone or via Siri voice control'. He also regarded Apple Home as 'somewhat more private to a point than say Google or Amazon systems'. In some instances where he had wanted smart technologies that the platform didn't offer he had developed them himself, using a bridging package to make them compatible, and had collaborated with online tech communities. They also had solar panels and a battery which Murphy was responsible for. When we asked Murphy how his wife felt about the technologies he said:

I mean as long as it's entertaining me I don't think she minds. She finds some utility in it. Like so it's handy for her to be able to turn all the lights off with one click of a button on a particular app or to open the blinds by just asking, telling, you know saying on her watch open all the blinds without having to like physically go to each one and yeah so she finds some utility in it but she's probably thinking it's not worth the effort.

Their relationship with the system involved a mixture of automated processes which they had set themselves and their hands-on operation of their technologies via the app, In

Murphy's words: 'Lots of stuff going on in the background but lots of interaction with the app to, you know, check room temperatures, what's best with his room temperature because that's the only thing we can control'. Their lighting system was another good example of this mixed mode of use. Murphy said that while 'turning lights on and off we use the app for that a lot', the lights 'we've got a lot of hue lights around the house that would just come on automatically ... as dusk approaches', as well as material light switches on the walls.

Murphy had also set up a heating and cooling system, for which he had 'set up themes in certain scenarios to come depending on the day of the week' with 'individual sensors in terms of temperature in most of the house'. For instance, when his son was younger they had 'the little controller if you like that you can program themes into and I'd have it monitoring his room and when it dropped below say 19 or 18 degrees it would come on in winter and then once it got above say 23 the air conditioner would shut down'. Although more broadly, Murphy said 'a lot of the time we just use it manually', in ways that involved using the technology 'we'll go oh it's a bit chilly in here, what's the temperature in the pool room for instance or the living room, we'll look at the sensor and it'll tell us and we'll go yeah that's a reasonable time to turn the air conditioner on'.

Murphy explained how the system worked, frequently backing up all his data in the cloud and on a hard drive. He had set up many smart devices within this system, including speakers all over the house so that music could be played simultaneously in different rooms through the app. He planned to install motorised automated blinds on a balcony renovation that he hoped would go ahead post-pandemic, as well as water leak sensors for pipe leaks and bathroom flooding.

We asked Murphy if his wife was also 'techie and confident about the house?' he told us that he 'wouldn't say so, no ... but it's set up in such a way that anyone could get a handle on how to use it'. She didn't have any issues controlling the house but would sometimes call him to help with the 'TV and stuff. I don't know why but sometimes she has a bit of a struggle with that', but he continued, 'fortunately I don't really go away, so it's never an issue'.

Murphy had also set up a smart system to open and close the garage door, showing us around his garage he explained how a module 'interfaces between Siri and the internet and the garage door ... [to] electrically push the button of a standard garage door'. He explained that this could be installed with no programming, noting that his 'wife wouldn't be able to do it but it's not exceptionally hard'. Prompted by the experiences that Bob had described, we asked if Murphy's wife would need to worry about losing power and not being able to open the doors. Murphy explained how 'No, my wife doesn't have to worry about it' since if they lost power 'the alarm system's got a battery back-up, so that's not an issue' and 'even if she lost her phone or whatever ... , it's manually possible to disarm and arm it'. The door locks (including the garage door) had keypads to 'actually operate it normally'. More broadly he had set the system up so that 'everything sits in conjunction or next to your standard means of operating, so there's no issue there'.

The automated and connected washing machine was something that they were both more engaged with, particularly in using the smartphone notifications sent to both of them when it was finished and ready for the laundry to be hung out, to ensure that they both knew and would not forget and have to do it again. But Murphy also had his limits, reflecting that:

Although you may think I'd make everything smart in this house, I don't really see the point in a smart fridge or a smart oven or anything like that. Generally, I'm going to be right next to the device when I'm operating it. I wasn't that interested in that sort of stuff.

Paul

Paul and his wife Mags, originally from overseas and had moved to Australia a few years ago from a third country, lived in a large new suburban house outside a big Australian city. At the time we interviewed them they both worked from home as consultants, Paul in IT and his wife in finance. They had two young primary school-aged children. Both were keen on automation, as long as, as Paul put it, he had the override button. When they made decisions about technology purchases, as well as things like having their solar panels installed, they followed their professional expertise, with Paul's focus on technology being balanced by Mags's financial expertise.

Paul and Mags had many smart home devices, including, for example, a robotic vacuum cleaner, and a complex set of smart lights which they used to create mood, as Paul put it 'The movie mode is the whole house dark ... and for ... guests it's more vibrant ... we have different colours setting as well'. Paul explained that the smart lights are managed by sensors, most of the time, which helps them to save energy, and when they have guests they 'override the rules'.

The couple shared the domestic and childcare tasks and used smart technologies to connect to their domestic schedule, where their Alexa voice assistant reminds them to do anything from changing the beds to charging the camera. They also used a smart system to access weather forecasts for them daily so that they can plan for when they will use other appliances such as the dishwasher and washing machine in relation to their solar energy.

Mags usually needed to be convinced of the merits of new smart home devices, and when we met them Paul was arguing for installing automated blinds. Mags told us '... and I'm thinking, wow, you know, that's going to be our next project. Take your time. [laughs]'. Paul responded that it would be very easy for him to make a device that pulled the blind up and down and, to back up his argument he pointed out how 'we have the northern sun that really destroyed our leather sofa' and this could be prevented by a device that was tracking the sun's movement, and operated the blinds so they would stop the sun from shining on the sofa.

When Mags outlined how she found Alexa's reminders to be helpful, Paul told us that this was a 'strong statement' for her, since she had not always been so keen. According to Paul, when they had first put the smart lights in Mags 'was, 'oh what a waste of time Paul, because the time you have to spend to work with it, optimise it and me adapt to it''. He explained that this had taken about 3–6 months, and hadn't worked for Mags, since as an accountant she would want an immediate result. It had taken him 'a few optimisations' to get the lights working in sync with the sunset, but that finally, everyone had been happy with it.

Paul as the person responsible for setting these systems up was also responsible for their maintenance, sometimes this involves the ongoing fine adjustments as above, and others the more laborious tasks of, for example when having to change Wi-Fi

passwords for every device. For Paul, as a software engineer who had originally been an IT device engineer, meant that he spent ‘a lot of my hobby time on it’, as he put it, ‘my wife can vouch for it because when I telling her, “I don’t have time for this” and she say “Oh, but you have time for all your device” and I say “Well ...”’.

Smart Home Husbands

In this section, we draw out the insights and implications from these ethnographic cases, and where wives are situated about digital housekeeping masculinities. Four relevant themes emerge across these three cases.

First, all of the men took responsibility for the smart technologies and systems in the family home, they undertook the digital housekeeping, including the installation, setting up and maintenance of the system. They had all committed time to working on their homes, including getting new technologies set up. Bob had not worked for the first months in his and Kylie’s new house and had spent this time getting their solar energy system and the modes of automation connected to its set up. Paul prioritised time in his life for smart home technologies, as his hobby. Murphy also dedicated significant time to designing and developing his smart home systems, beyond the possibilities offered by the manufacturers. All three men also had other men to talk to about technology systems, in Bob’s case the previous owner, while Murphy’s participated in online techie communities, and Paul worked in the field. In this sense, although their wives were not completely isolated from their smart home developments, they can be seen as something these men did, usually with other men, in a kind of masculine hobby space, or what might be seen as a digital version of the shed (Strengers and Nicholls 2018; Strengers, Dahlgren, and Nicholls 2022).

The contingent and improvisatory nature of their engagements with smart home technologies and systems stands out. Bob’s smart home technologies depended on the legacy of the previous owner, and the set-ups created by installers. His actions tended to be contingent on these existing devices and infrastructures, and his troubleshooting when they went wrong. Murphy’s approach to the smart home was often responsive to needs and opportunities that arose at home: the smart baby devices, and heating and cooling technologies they used were derived from wanting their baby, who was a bad sleeper, to get a good night sleep and the plans for smart blinds on the balcony were made possible by the balcony renovation. In this way, Murphy participated in caring masculinities (Elliott 2016) involving expressions of technical femininity (Rode 2011). Murphy improvised within what was possible to create the smart home that he wanted, collaborating in online communities to do so at times. Paul had improvised to make his system work as he would like, buying the equipment he needed, and negotiating with Mags to create the automated systems that would benefit their family. These dimensions of their digital housekeeping have a particular hobbyist element to them as found in past studies (Kennedy et al. 2015; Strengers and Nicholls 2018), but did not occur in isolation from the rest of their families, rather they were undertaken in dialogue with the family and home (Sinanan and Horst 2021).

Second, in each case, although different for each family, the men portrayed their wives as not sharing their interest or competence in using smart home technologies and systems but in finding them useful to some extent. Murphy had intentionally set up everything so that his wife could easily use it, and so that a manual option was always available,

and commented that he never went away so she would not need to confront any challenges of using it on her own. Paul told us how Mags had been sceptical about the technologies until the practical or financial benefit of having them was evident. Bob described how Kylie, who was not that interested in their smart home technologies, had found herself locked inside and unable to get out of the house on her own when there was a power outage. Thus, here digital housekeeping enabled these men to perform, and continuously develop and reinvent their spheres of expertise in the home, in such a way that needed to be navigated with, and sometimes sounded like something that was tolerated or indulged by, their wives. This described as the ‘wife acceptance factor’ by a smart home industry professional (in Strengers and Kennedy’s 2020), highlights how women in heterosexual couples are often positioned as the gatekeepers of smart technologies, ensuring that men ‘prove’ the worth of smart devices before they are accepted into the main dwelling (Strengers, Dahlgren, and Nicholls 2022).

Third, all of the men shared, or perceived that they shared, an equal balance of domestic tasks with their wives. In two cases they used smart home technologies to organise and schedule some domestic tasks, or the rhythms of domestic life. For instance, Murphy had set up their smart washing machine to ensure that he and Gemma remembered to hang out the laundry, and Paul had set up Alexa to remind him and Mags to follow their task schedule. Bob, who had no such system, felt frustrated that Kylie was messy and, for instance, didn’t do the laundry to the same rhythms as he would like. This is one of the most interesting findings as regards gendered modes of organising and rationalising housework, and must also be understood in the context of sharing domestic chores. This is not to say that women do not find digital scheduling of this kind useful, rather it signals a very different way of knowing and engaging with the everyday routines of the home, to that associated with traditional feminine sensory and embodied modes of knowing and performing housework (Pink 2004).

Fourth, all of the households were keen to keep control over their smart home technologies, in fact none of them had simply installed an existing smart home system but rather they had selected technologies that suited their own lives, or in the case of Bob, that had suited the life of the previous owner of their home. Further, none were aiming for the smart home aspirational definition of seamless and intuitive control of normal household activities by the home and technology itself, either because they did not see this as a realistic aspiration, or simply did not find it to be desirable.

Collectively these findings indicate that in these homes (and by implication across many Australian homes) smart home systems and devices have become available to participants through a masculine narrative, relationships between men, and subsequent or relational dialogues between couples. They have been situated and justified as hobbyist, indulged or tolerated, but appreciated for their practical benefits, when these become evident, and are implicated in co-parenting and domestic task sharing. Importantly they are designed, or maintained and further developed within the home, by men who live in these households.

This creates an interesting configuration for smart home design. Here design is resituated in the home, rather than being driven by whole-of-system industry-produced smart home installations. Yet, because they arrive in the home through masculine hobbyists, techie forums and are often installed at home by men who have expertise in engineering and IT, they are inevitably shaped by the masculine narratives that inform the industry

development and design of the technologies, and those that characterise the lives of the men concerned. As such, there emerge a series of questions around how and why women are less involved and engaged in these processes, why smart home systems and technologies are less accessible to women, and other diverse groups, and what the implications of this are for equitable smart homes.

Re-thinking for Feminist Smart Home Design

The fact that scholars like Strengers (2013), Strengers and Kennedy (2020), and Dahlgren et al. (2021) have been able to work backwards from dominant discourses about smart home systems and devices to demonstrate the kinds of personas they open up technology futures for, or to propose currently unaccounted for alternatives (e.g. Johnson's (2020) Flexibility Woman), is concerning. It suggests there has been a failure to acknowledge that smart homes will be constituted and experienced through gendered relations, and that how smart homes are currently designed are better aligned with particular masculinities.

Feminist design anthropology requires us to view the role technologies play in people's lives from the ground up, that is from the sites of everyday life where they become part of roles and relationships. Our research suggests that a key way in which this comes about can be conceptualised through the idea of digital housekeeping. This as we have shown is an inevitable facet of installing, living and learning with, and maintaining smart home systems and devices, needs to be acknowledged for the place it has in making smart home living a reality. Once we do recognise digital housekeeping as a facet of everyday life, and correspondingly as a valid and relevant category for analysis, then we can open up the important question of how it might be *designed with*, in such a way that makes it open and accessible to different, more diverse and equitable gender configurations. Therefore, once we can identify what is happening in people's lives and how gendered relations are implicated with technologies we can set about considering how and where forms of exclusion lie and where the possibilities for making technologies more inclusive could be developed.

While we contribute to literature about digital housekeeping, however, we emphasise that we are proposing a mode of scholarship that goes beyond a simple empirical-conceptual interest in the emergence of this phenomena. Rather our interest in digital housekeeping is in mobilising this concept within a wider agenda to inform inclusive smart home design. The case of digital housekeeping in the smart home invites us to consider what a feminist smart home technology and system design process might look like. It would, we propose, go beyond the simple idea of responding to the masculinities of the dominant techno solutionist narratives by calling for diversity and inclusivity in design, to instead ask how contemporary masculinities themselves defy these narratives, and subsequently how by including men in a category of 'digital housekeepers' which can equally be occupied by people of other genders, we can move towards an approach that acknowledges diversity. This means a process of design that is created in the sites of the everyday where smart home technology is encountered; developed collaboratively and iteratively with all the people in the home who may wish to use it, to be open to a range of gendered experiences and processes; be installed as a living process, rather than a *fait accompli* with benefits.

Future research is needed to create a model for inclusive home-based smart home technology design. In this article, we have set the ground for this, by demonstrating what the problem space is and how it might be shifted towards a new set of possibilities.

Acknowledgements

First, we thank all our research participants, since without them this article would not have been possible. The research discussed in this article is supported by the Australian Government through the Australian Research Council's Linkage Projects funding Scheme ('Digital Energy Futures' project number LP180100203) in partnership with Monash University, Ausgrid, AusNet Services and Energy Consumers Australia. The ethics for the Digital Energy Futures project were approved by Monash University's Human Research Ethics Committee.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by Australian Research Council [Grant Number LP180100203].

Notes on Contributors

Sarah Pink is Professor and Director of the Emerging Technologies Research Lab, Monash University, Australia. Sarah is a design and futures anthropologist, a methodological innovator and documentary filmmaker, specialising in questions related to the relationship between people, environment and emerging technologies in possible futures. She is an advocate for bringing together academic and engaged scholarship and interdisciplinary collaboration towards a future-focused approach to social science research and practice. Her gender-focused research includes her books *Women and Bullfighting* (1997) and *Home Truths* (2004). Her recent works include the books *Design Ethnography* (2022), *Energy Futures* (2022) and *Emerging Technologies / Life at the Edge of the Future* (2023) and the documentaries *Smart Homes for Seniors* (2021) and *Digital Energy Futures* (2022).

Yolande Strengers is Professor of Digital Technology and Society in the Emerging Technologies Research Lab, Monash University, Australia, where she leads the Energy Futures research program. Yolande is a digital sociologist and human-computer interaction scholar who investigates the inclusion and sustainability outcomes of smart and emerging technologies. Her work on gender and technology is informed by feminist science and technology studies. She has investigated the effects of the feminisation of digital voice assistants and robots (*The Smart Wife*, MIT Press, 2020 with Dr Jenny Kennedy) and identified the ideal masculine energy consumer, "Resource Man", who shapes energy policy and industry interventions (*Smart Energy Technologies in Everyday Life*, Palgrave Macmillan 2013). Yolande has published extensively on smart homes, including gendered industry visions and imaginaries; digital housekeeping and the changing division of labour; and gendered interest, uptake and use of smart home technologies. She is also a vocal advocate for gender equity in STEM and is advancing collaborations between the social sciences and the field of artificial intelligence.

Rex Martin is Research Fellow at the Emerging Technologies Research Lab at Monash University. Drawing on sociology, human geography and ethnography, Rex's work explores the everyday experiences and knowledge of people living with renewable energy technologies and tools, including solar PV, battery storage and energy feedback. His research explores smart (energy) technologies, lay knowledge, gendered 'energy housekeeping', and experiences of changing weather and climate.

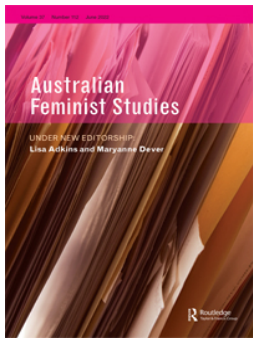
Kari Dahlgren is Research Fellow in the Emerging Technologies Research Lab at Monash University. Kari is a social anthropologist and ethnographer with a PhD from the London School of Economics. Her work is situated at the intersection of environmental and digital anthropology, with a particular interest in the anthropology of energy, climate change, and transition and how these fields are entangled with digital technologies and future imaginations of technological change. Kari's

research speaks to the possibilities and limitations of imagining and crafting futures and contributes to the building of diverse and sustainable digital futures.

References

- Abdilla, A. 2018. "Beyond Imperial Tools: Future-Proofing Technology Through Indigenous Governance and Traditional Knowledge Systems." In *Technology as Cultural Practice*, edited by J. Harle, A. Abdilla, and A. Newman, 67–81. Sydney: Tactical Space Lab.
- Aldrich, F. K. 2003. "Smart Homes: Past, Present and Future." In *Inside the Smart Home*, edited by R. Harper, 17–39. Springer-Verlag London Limited.
- Berg, A. J. 1994. "A Gendered Socio-Technical Construction: The Smart House." In *Bringing Technology Home: Gender and Technology in Changing Europe*, edited by C. Cockburn and R. Furst Dilic, 165–180. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Cockburn, C. 1997. "Domestic Technologies: Cinderella and the Engineers." *Women's Studies International Forum* 20 (3): 361–371. doi:10.1016/S0277-5395(97)00020-4
- Connell, R. W. 1995. *Masculinities*. Berkley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- CSIRO'S DATA61 Editorial Team. 2019, November 18. "AI Roadmap for Environmental and Social Good." CSIRO Blog. <https://blog.csiro.au/using-ai-roadmap-for-good/>.
- Dahlgren, K., S. Pink, Y. Strengers, L. Nicholls, and J. Sadowski. 2021. "Personalisation and the Smart Home." *Convergence* 27 (5): 1155–1169. doi:10.1177/13548565211036801
- Dahlgren, K., Y. Strangers, S. Pink, N. Nicholls, and J. Sadowski. 2020. *Digital Energy Futures: Review of Industry Trends, Visions and Scenarios for the Home*. Melbourne, Australia: Emerging Technologies Research Lab (Monash University). https://www.monash.edu/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/2242754/Digital-Energy-Futures-Report.pdf.
- Darby, S. J. 2018. "Smart Technology in the Home: Time for More Clarity." *Building Research & Information* 46 (1): 140–147. doi:10.1080/09613218.2017.1301707
- Dourish, P., and G. Bell. 2011. *Divining a Digital Future*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Duque, M., S. Pink, Y. Strengers, R. Martin, and L. Nicholls. 2021. "Automation, Wellbeing and Digital Voice Assistants: Older People and Google Devices." *Convergence* 27 (5): 1–18.
- Elliott, K. 2016. "Caring Masculinities: Theorizing an Emerging Concept." *Men and Masculinities* 19 (3): 240–259. doi:10.1177/1097184X15576203
- Hjorth, L., K. Ohashi, J. Sinanan, H. Horst, S. Pink, F. Kato, and B. Zhou. 2020. *Digital Media Practices in Households: Kinship Through Data*. Amsterdam University Press.
- Horrigan, B. 1986. "The Home of Tomorrow, 1927–1945." In *Imagining Tomorrow: History, Technology and the American Future*, edited by J. J. Corn, 137–163. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Ingold, T. 2021. *Imagining for Real: Essays on Creation, Attention and Correspondence*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Johnson, C. 2020. "Is Demand Side Response a Woman's Work? Domestic Labour and Electricity Shifting in Low Income Homes in the United Kingdom." *Energy Research & Social Science* 68: 101558. doi:10.1016/j.erss.2020.101558
- Kennedy, J., B. Nansen, M. Arnold, R. Wilken, and M. Gibbs. 2015. "Digital Housekeepers and Domestic Expertise in the Networked Home." *Convergence* 21 (4): 408–422. doi:10.1177/1354856515579848.
- Kulick, D., and M. Willson, eds. 1995. *Taboo: Sex, Identity and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork*. London: Routledge.
- Lupton, D., S. Pink, and H. Horst. 2021. "Living in, with and Beyond the 'Smart Home': Introduction to the Special Issue." *Convergence* 27 (5): 1147–1154. doi:10.1177/13548565211052736
- Maalsen, S. 2022. "'We're the Cheap Smart Home': The Actually Existing Smart Home as Rented and Shared." *Social & Cultural Geography*, 1–20. DOI: 10.1080/14649365.2022.2065693.
- Mahmud, L. 2021. "Feminism in the House of Anthropology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 50 (1): 345–361. doi:10.1146/annurev-anthro-101819-110218
- Miller, D., ed. 2001. *Home Possessions*. Oxford: Berg.
- Phan, T. 2019. "Amazon Echo and the Aesthetics of Whiteness." *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 5 (1): 1–38. Available at: <https://catalystjournal.org/index.php/catalyst/article/view/29586/24799>. doi:10.28968/cftt.v5i1.29586

- Pink, S. 2004. *Home Truths*. Oxford: Berg.
- Pink, S. 2021. "Digital Futures Anthropology." In *Digital Anthropology*, edited by H. Geismer and H. Knox, 307–324. London: Bloomsbury.
- Pink, S., V. Fors, S. Sumartojo, M. Duque, D. Lanzeni, and Y. Strengers. 2022. *Design Ethnography: Research, Responsibility and Futures*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Pink, S., K. Leder Mackley, R. Morosanu, V. Mitchell, and T. Bhamra. 2017. *Making Homes: Ethnographies and Designs*. Oxford: Bloomsbury.
- Pink, S., and J. Morgan. 2013. "Short Term Ethnography: Intense Routes to Knowing." *Interaction* 36 (3): 351–361.
- Roberts, S. 2014. *Debating Modern Masculinities: Change, Continuity, Crisis?*. Berlin, Germany: Springer.
- Rode, J. A. 2011. "A Theoretical Agenda for Feminist HCI." *Interacting with Computers* 23: 393–400. doi:10.1016/j.intcom.2011.04.005
- Rottinghaus, A. R. 2021. "Smart Homes and the New White Futurism." *Journal of Futures Studies* 25 (4): 45–56.
- Schwartz Cowan, R. 1985. *More Work For Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth To The Microwave*. New York, USA: Basic Books.
- Sinanan, J., and H. A. Horst. 2021. "Gendered and Generational Dynamics of Domestic Automations." *Convergence* 27 (5): 1238–1249. doi:10.1177/13548565211030451
- Smith, R. C., and T. Otto. 2016. "Cultures of the Future: Emergence and Intervention in Design Anthropology." In *Design Anthropological Futures*, edited by R. C. Smith, K. T. Vangkilde, M. G. Kjærsgaard, T. Otto, J. Halse, and T. Binder, 19–36. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Spigel, L. 2005. "Designing the Smart House Posthuman Domesticity and Conspicuous Production." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 8 (4): 403–426. doi:10.1177/1367549405057826
- Strengers, Y. 2013. *Smart Energy Technologies in Everyday Life: Smart Utopia?* London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Strengers, Y., K. Dahlgren, and L. Nicholls. 2022. "Emerging Technologies' Impacts on 'Man Caves' and Their Energy Demand." *Buildings and Cities* 3 (1): 503–517. doi:10.5334/bc.222
- Strengers, Y., K. Dahlgren, L. Nicholls, S. Pink, and R. Martin. 2021. *Digital Energy Futures: Future Home Life*. Melbourne, Australia: Emerging Technologies Research Lab (Monash University). https://www.monash.edu/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/2617157/DEF-Future-Home-Life-Full-Report.pdf.
- Strengers, Y., and J. Kennedy. 2020. *The Smart Wife: Why Siri, Alexa and Other Smart Home Devices Need a Feminist Reboot*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Strengers, Y., and L. Nicholls. 2018. "Aesthetic Pleasures and Gendered Tech-Work in the 21st-Century Smart Home." *Media International Australia* 166 (1): 70–80. doi:10.1177/1329878X17737661
- Tolmie, P., A. Crabtree, T. Rodden, C. Greenhalgh, and S. Benford. 2007. "Making the Home Network at Home: Digital Housekeeping." In *ECSCW 2007*, edited by L. J. Bannon, I. Wagner, C. Gutwin, R. H. R. Harper, and K. Schmidt. London: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-84800-031-5_18.



Homelessness as a Feminist Issue: Revisiting the 1970s

Anne O'Brien

To cite this article: Anne O'Brien (2022) Homelessness as a Feminist Issue: Revisiting the 1970s, Australian Feminist Studies, 37:112, 134-151, DOI: [10.1080/08164649.2023.2173140](https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2023.2173140)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2023.2173140>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 03 Feb 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 7449



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 3 View citing articles [↗](#)

Homelessness as a Feminist Issue: Revisiting the 1970s

Anne O'Brien

School of Humanities and Languages, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

ABSTRACT

Homelessness among women is a pressing social problem and the barriers to solving it are difficult to shift. A number of scholars have argued that, in addition to the gender pay gap, unpaid labour and family violence, the problem lies in the fact that responses to homelessness are still shaped by conceptualisations that developed when it was seen as a problem of white adult men. And yet there has been no close analysis of how and why these conceptualisations took root, and how they were reinforced and perpetuated. Focusing on the pivotal 1970s, when homeless women were first constituted a 'problem' in Australia and feminism became a compelling political force, this article examines how feminists both challenged and reinforced those conceptualisations. It argues that feminist responses were shaped by different forms of professional knowledge which led to divergent outcomes, and it uses a rare cache of interviews to show how homeless women's narratives refute the assumptions on which old ideas were built.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 25 February 2022

Accepted 23 January 2023

KEYWORDS

Feminism; homeless women; vagrant; refugees; violence; social work; interviews

Introduction

Every now and again women's homelessness is rediscovered. We are arguably witnessing one such moment now, judging by the increased media coverage of the issue, and there have been similar moments in the past: in the 1930s depression homeless women 'tramped the road', and in the early 1910s women in rooms identified as 'homeless' (O'Brien 2018). But perhaps the most significant discovery was that of the 1970s when, for the first time, professionals recognised homeless women as 'a problem' in need of research. In broad terms, this can be seen as a product of two major shifts – the explosion of feminist consciousness particularly, but not only, among young women; and the Whitlam government's establishment in 1974 of the Homeless Person's Assistance Program (HPAP), the first intervention into homelessness by an Australian government, and one that effectively marks the foundation of the contemporary homelessness 'sector'.

These two shifts stemmed from different political positions. The HPAP was something of an anomaly within the Whitlam government's ambitious attempts to address structural inequality because it mainly funded city missions and charities – most of which were for

CONTACT Anne O'Brien  anne.obrien@unsw.edu.au  School of Humanities and Languages, University of New South Wales, Kensington, Sydney 2052, Australia

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

men – to provide shelter along lines they had followed since the nineteenth century. To most feminists, charities made insufficient provision for homeless women and most were judgemental to the point of harm. Some feminists went further, challenging the male-centred understanding of homelessness used by the HPAP, arguing that it took no account of the fact that homeless women's vulnerability to violence and shame meant they practised strategies of concealment not required of men. But there was no unified feminist position: some influential voices replicated and reinforced older individualistic understandings of the causes of homelessness while arguing a feminist interpretation of its effects. The highest profile and most radical feminist contribution to understandings of women's homelessness came from the feminist refuge movement, which drew domestic violence to public attention and saw its victims as 'the invisible homeless' (Johnson 1981, 17). But refuge workers saw the needs of women leaving violence as distinct from those they described as 'chronically homeless', though some tried to reform the HPAP. It was complex political terrain. Over the next decades, the stakes in these debates were raised as the homelessness sector came to pick up the pieces of other shifts: accelerating deinstitutionalisation, the continuing decline in public housing and the growing dominance of free market ideology.

This article explores the congruities and tensions between diverse feminist understandings of 'chronically homeless' women as homelessness became a 'sector' in order to shed light on the gendering of homelessness policy. A number of scholars have noted that responses to homelessness are still shaped by conceptualisations that developed when it was seen as a problem of white adult men but there has been no close analysis of how this occurred (Bretherton 2017). Focussing on feminist contributions to this moment is telling because they not only challenged existing understandings, but in some ways reinforced them as the system developed. In exploring these complexities, I draw on the extensive scholarship on 1970s feminism, including the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) and Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), the influence of feminists in the bureaucracy, feminist theory, housing activism and particularly activism against domestic violence (e.g. Curthoys 1992; Lake 1999; Arrow 2019; McFerran 1990; Kevin 2020; Watson 1988; Ramsay 2007; Simic 2020). Here Jacqui Theobald's research on the refuge movement's engagement with homeless women at the policy and practical level is particularly relevant (2011, 2015). But none of this work focuses specifically on feminist ideas about 'chronically homeless' women. Analysis of these ideas, and the practices they supported, takes us closer towards explaining how and why the barriers to addressing homelessness among women are so difficult to overcome.

Central to the analysis are two unpublished reports: one was written by Leslie Fraser in 1977, a counsellor at Elsie, Australia's first feminist Women's Refuge in Sydney's Glebe and commissioned by government – very likely by the Department of Social Security (DSS) (Fraser 1977).¹ The other was conducted by recent graduates of the Social Studies Department of the University of Melbourne in 1977 and edited by Carolyn Novarra, a lecture in that department (Novarra et al. 1977). Why these reports? As two of the first and most substantial research papers on homeless women, they enable analysis of how and why this new group came to be identified as 'a problem' in this period, denaturalising what might otherwise seem self-evident (Scott 2007). Since one was a government commission and the other was the product of a university, they were well placed to exemplify and amplify understandings of homeless women.

Neither report has been subject of historical analysis and yet, read together, they act as an entrée into the different ways that feminism and professional knowledge intersected to produce different understandings of homeless women. The Melbourne report is particularly rich because it contains transcripts of interviews with 18 women. Such a full primary source for this period, and with women as subjects, is rare. Providing first hand accounts of the material and subjective experience of women experiencing homelessness, they refute the assumptions of deficit and deservedness that beset the discourse in their own time, and continue to beleaguer it in ours.

Contexts

Why did homelessness become a subject of policy in the 1970s and how was it understood? The broad context was the 1960s rediscovery of poverty. Homeless men featured in journalist John Stubbs' book *The Hidden People*, which has been credited with drawing to public attention the 'weird blend of generosity and cruelty' that marked the Menzies' government's social security system, and contributing to the establishment of an inquiry into poverty chaired by economist Ronald Henderson in 1972 (Stubbs 1966, 136). The need for more and better accommodation for homeless men was also related to the movement to decriminalise vagrancy, which accelerated in the late 1960s and 1970s, a period jurist Michael Kirby has described as a 'golden age' of law reform: for all its austerity, charity was assumed to be better than jail (O'Brien 2021, 4).

But homelessness was not just a problem waiting to be discovered and dealt with in the 1970s. It was sustained and expanded by government policies that, over time, led to the HPAP becoming a catch-all for other problems. One of these was deinstitutionalisation, a post-war reform whose originally idealist aims were stymied by the insufficient funding of alternatives (MacKinnon and Coleborne 2003). Shifts in the allocation of public housing also had unintended outcomes. In response to research conducted by Michael Jones of the ANU's Urban Research Unit showing that public housing was not accessible to people who needed it most, the Whitlam government devised a new Commonwealth State Housing Agreement that targeted those most in need rather than perpetuating the privatisation that Menzies had promoted. The downside of this shift was that 'public housing' became 'welfare housing' – with all the stigmatisation that entailed – and, over the next decades, as government funding for housing declined, there was never enough for all who needed it (Hayward 1996).

Feminists made a distinctive contribution to the rediscovery of poverty. The issues taken up by the two major feminist organisations of this period – the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) and the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) – were grounded in women's vulnerability to poverty: abortion rights, equal pay, divorce law reform, child care and domestic violence (Lake 1999). WEL played a decisive role in the election of the Whitlam government in 1972 and this government went a considerable way towards improving women's economic welfare by raising pensions and unemployment benefits, introducing supporting mothers' benefits and legislating for equal pay (Mendes 2019).

But the HPAP showed few signs of feminist input. There was little research on homeless women to draw on when it was introduced. The *Report of the Working Party on Homeless Men and Women* (1973), which outlined the rationale of the HPAP, was informed by the post-war research commissioned by organisations that provided facilities for men and

used their residents as subjects. This research was strongly influenced by North American under socialisation theory and, while not personally unsympathetic to the men who were its subjects, ended up pathologising them as social isolates – unable to sustain relationships, ‘extremely dependent’ and with very low tolerance for stress (O’Brien 2021). The definition used in the *Report* (1973) replicated their ‘otherness’, describing them as ‘extremely isolated from conventional society’ and participating in ‘a culture or community of their own’ (6).

Women were nevertheless on the periphery of researchers’ vision in the early 1970s, as the full title of the *Report* (1973) suggests. They were among the ‘city drunks’ that the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research found sentenced to goal, and they briefly featured in sociologist John de Hoog’s participant observer account of Pitt Street’s wine bars (NSW Bureau 1972; De Hoog 1972). Traditional charities were certainly aware of homeless women and of the range of circumstances that put them at risk. They had long provided shelter for sex workers, unmarried mothers, immigrants, the aged and the young. In the interwar years hostels for working women expanded considerably to cater for that simultaneously threatening and vulnerable urban phenomenon – ‘the modern girl’. Hostels offered shelter across the class spectrum, including to ‘transients’, and sought to prevent all women from travelling down the path to vagrancy. But such charities were fewer than institutional supports for men. Women without homes were more likely to be dispersed – staying with family or friends, or lodging in rooms; as one advocate observed in the 1930s, they ‘hide their want’ (O’Brien 2018). Male itineracy was rendered ordinary by the demands of the rural labour market, and the infrastructure of temporary accommodation that developed in the late 19th cities made it visible. And, however, removed from real life, ‘the swaggie’ has been a figure central to Australian cultural nationalism (Mayne 1981; Ward 1958). There was no such concentration of facilities for women and no comparable literary figure.

Feminists became conscious of the vulnerabilities of homeless women from the early 1970s. The influence of WEL can be seen in the shift in orientation of the homelessness committee of the NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS): it was set up in 1969 in response to medical, police and business concerns about ‘Skid Row’ but by 1975 a new committee, including prominent WEL member Bridget Gilling, was promoting ties with women’s health advocates and the organisers of International Women’s Day (O’Brien 2021; NCOS 1975). Members of the WLM were also concerned about homelessness in women. In her account of the origins of Elsie women’s refuge, Anne Summers, one of its founders, describes two chance encounters that were pivotal in her growing awareness of shelter as a political issue: one with a frail, elderly woman living in a tiny room that was ‘no better than a rats’ nest’, the other with a young woman who banged on Summers’ door one night to escape her violent boyfriend. To Summers, these incidents were connected: homelessness for women could result from immediate danger and long-term inequality (Summers 1999, 317). Several months before Elsie was founded, Sydney’s WLM held a meeting to establish a night shelter for homeless women (Ramsay 2007). After the 1974 Women’s Commission on ‘Women in a Violent Society’ drew together women whose testimony revealed ‘the dark underside of patriarchy’s attitudes to women in marriage’, the focus on women leaving violence became more sharply defined (Johnson 1981, 1). As we will see, feminist refuges were constrained in the shelter they could provide to

'chronically homeless' women, but some refuge workers, notably Leslie Fraser, were strong advocates for them.

Researching and Representing Homeless Women

Two of the first and most substantial reports on homeless women were produced in 1977, after the Fraser government had cut a number of the Whitlam government's programmes and when it was clear to many feminist refuge workers that 'chronically homeless women' needed specific help. While the provenance of the Sydney report is not totally clear, the fact that it was distributed by the DSS reflects WEL's influence in the bureaucracy; the fact that it was conducted by Leslie Fraser, a member of the first Elsie collective, reflects the impact of the WLM (Greenleaf 2017). The Melbourne study, conducted by four social work graduates and edited by academic Carolyn Novarra, speaks of feminism's greater presence in social work education in the 1970s than is generally recognised. Most accounts of 'radical social work' argue that feminism was a 'belated' addition in the 1980s; indeed feminists in the refuge movement were critical of professional social work and the bureaucratic and institutional approaches it perpetuated (Healy 1993; Bullen 2010a). The authors of this report were insider critics: they concluded that the social work profession and welfare policy had 'failed dismally' in relation to homeless women (Novarra et al. 1977, 126).

The reports differed in their conceptualisation of homelessness, in their methods and in how they represented homeless women. At eight typed pages, the Sydney report was short, and Fraser considered it a 'tool for discussion' rather than 'an adequate work of research'. She was conscious of starting from scratch – 'not one person had an overall perspective' on the problem when she began.

One of the significant features of this report is Fraser's acceptance of the main premises of the earlier studies – that homelessness meant rough sleeping and was the result of under socialisation. She focussed on women who used night shelters, hospitals and clinics, most of whom she found to be drug or alcohol dependent or suffering from psychiatric illness. She concluded that homeless women could be 'any age and colour' and were 'generally of working-class background' – though some 'started out as middle class' – but what they had in common was an inability to integrate because they lacked the personal 'resources' to do so (Fraser 1977, 2).

The Melbourne authors were concerned that the focus on rough sleepers left undressed the pressures on women that pushed them to practice strategies of concealment; they took women in rooms as their subjects. In class, age, cultural and family backgrounds these women conform to Fraser's findings: most were from working class families; they ranged in age from 15 to 73; three identified as Indigenous and one as a migrant. The decision to make interviews the basis of this report provided more information about the women's backgrounds. Most were working or had worked in low-paid jobs – in shops, hospitals, factories, canneries, mills, hotels, dry-cleaner, crèches and milk-bars. Some were on pensions. Almost all were in relationships, or had been in the past, or envisaged a future relationship. Almost all were familiar with violence. They were children of violent families, partners of violent men and some had experienced violence in state institutions. Most knew 'great unhappiness' as children, if not due to violence, then to the death, desertion, poor health or addiction of parents without 'private solutions' in the

form of extended family to assist them (Wells 2011, 2). Not all had unhappy childhoods. Some were non-committal and three recalled their early years with pleasure.

One of the most significant things about these reports is the extent to which they diverge in their culminating representations of their subjects. The narrative high-point of Fraser's report was her statement that their 'vulnerability in the world' had made homeless women 'deeply brutalised and injured' – 'more suspicious, angry, defiant, self-denigrating and guilt ridden than skid row men' (7). The Melbourne authors took a different view. They thought that most of the women they spoke to were making a go of extremely difficult circumstances and that some had 'great strengths', though they noted that some of the young women were very depressed (125). How can we explain this difference? It may reflect that, as each report accessed women via different facilities, the women themselves were different. But women using shelters and women renting rooms were never discrete categories: a number of the Melbourne women had experienced shelters and some had slept out; some had moved twice in the last 6 months; about half had been heavy drinkers – four still drank heavily. It is also likely that the women in Fraser's report used rooms, though she did not access them there. The prior relationship between interviewer and interviewee may also have played in. Fraser's views may have been influenced by direct experience of the anger of women turned away from Elsie, which ceased accommodating them while the report was being conducted. The Melbourne authors, on the other hand, had known some of the interviewees through their work as volunteers and the intimate detail shared suggests mutual trust.

The training and backgrounds of the authors were also likely to have influenced the texts. As a community nurse who had run a clinic for alcoholics, Fraser saw the women through a medical lens (*SMH* 19 August 1975). Her main categories were medical and under socialisation's starting point was deficiency. Critics were starting to challenge the labelling of people without homes by the mid-1970s – the Melbourne authors among them (O'Brien 2021). Fraser's text reflects its continuing credibility.

While Fraser deployed this individualising theory as her main explanation for homelessness in women, her analysis of its consequences was gendered and structural. She was deeply concerned about homeless women's vulnerability to sexual assault: every woman interviewed 'had sold their bodies for alcohol, shelter and protection'; all had been raped at least once; all women suffered under the phrase 'there is nothing worse than a homeless woman' but it was 'thrown at homeless women constantly' (8). In a context where open acknowledgement of violence against women was relatively new in public discourse, this was an important statement that distinguished the experience of homeless women from that of most homeless men. It also reflected the totalising understanding of patriarchy that dominated feminism at this time. This was before the cultural turn and before research on the 'agency' of oppressed peoples drew Foucauldian understandings of the complex operation of power into the mainstream. It was not unusual for feminists to see working class women primarily, if not only, as victims – Miriam Dixon's description of Australian women as 'the doormats of the Western world' is a memorable example (Kevin 2020; Dixon 1976). But while Fraser attributed the consequences of women's homelessness to patriarchy, her representation of them as irreparably damaged opened the way for the sort of disparagement long directed towards the 'woman vagrant'. The women Fraser met may well have been 'more suspicious, angry and defiant' than the men – they had reason to be – but her linking of

these qualities with 'brutalisation' speaks to the entrenchment of gender ideology, which rendered such qualities in women aberrant and offensive. As we will see, Fraser came close to representing homeless women in ways perpetuated by traditional charities, and which she deplored.

The Melbourne report reflected a different blending of feminism and professional knowledge. The authors explained that the impetus for a project on women's hidden homelessness came from the writings of 'Mitchell, Firestone and Greer' who argued that women's 'unquestioned role' as 'homemaker' made the homeless woman 'unknown and unaccepted' (Novarra et al. 1977, 5). Their main concern was rendering faithfully the individual's experience so there was little discussion of context. They argued that focussing on statistics to identify 'shared characteristics' could obscure the uniqueness of individual experience – thus the inclusion of extensive transcripts. They favoured a non-hierarchical approach, taking up British author David Brandon's call to abandon labels such as 'alcoholic' which provided 'an emotional armour' that maintained the difference between 'them and us' (Novarra et al. 1977, 2). In their desire to invert power relations and validate experience they owed a debt to the 'expressive revolution' of the late 1960s (Hilliard 1997).

The focus on the individual in this report was in keeping with social work's origins in case work and, coupled with the lack of context, could leave the impression that the authors saw homelessness as a product of 'the problem family' (Peel 2011). But individual testimony made the personal political in this decade, as the feminist practice of consciousness raising attests (Arrow 2019). In any case, the authors eschewed explanations based on individual deficit, arguing that under socialisation theory was a form of 'injustice' because it located the cause of homelessness 'within the individual' without acknowledging poverty's structural causes (3, 124). Further, the cumulative effect of the individual stories laid bare how economic inequality and gendered fear shaped the lives of homeless women: they were constantly at risk, for any reduction in resources could precipitate 'a major crisis' and leave them 'out on the streets' (123). Unlike most contemporary studies this report refuted the assumption that people without homes were a separate 'class or category' and it treated them as subjects of housing: one of the questions asked about their preferred accommodation (22).

Emergency Accommodation and its Discontents

The direct impact of Fraser's report is not clear but it presumably had some influence in the corridors of power. The urgency of her tone, her forthright, disturbing discussion of the vulnerability of homeless women, and her use of under socialisation theory made the case for action in terms that were recognisable. Former refuge worker, Ludo McFerran recalled the DSS 'exhibiting hostility' to feminist refuges but here Fraser was making a case for the department's main clientele and her recommendations were largely in keeping with what the HPAP was already doing – providing temporary accommodation (McFerran 1990, 192). She wanted more, and better, for 'chronically homeless women'.

Fraser argued that the need for emergency accommodation was urgent. The working estimate of homeless women in Sydney was 500, but there were only 50 beds in shelters so it was 'absurd' to think their needs were being met (2). All the medical professionals Fraser interviewed found it hard or impossible to place women following treatment,

whereas they did not have the same problem placing men. Though she did not mention deinstitutionalisation, its on-going processes doubtless exacerbated long-standing insufficiency. But she thought the existing services were not just insufficient, they were not coping. The problems of women at the St Vincent de Paul's Butler Lodge were so complex that workers needed to call on the Health Commission for help; nor could workers at the Salvation Army's Samaritan House cater for 'a hard core of women' who were 'violent and anti-social' (4). Further, she thought that the ethos of the charities was harmful because it exacerbated the guilt these women felt as 'failed mothers'; they felt like 'damned whores fronting God's police' (4, 7). The Melbourne report confirms that this dichotomy, and the power imbalance it authorised, was deeply resented. The women described being patronised and checked up on by a network of providers in close contact; most hostels were stifling – 'too many rules' (p?). Dianne's testimony was searing. Aged 15, she was 'chucked out of the Salvation Army' because she did not have enough money and 'a couple of Christian Associations just didn't want to know [her]': 'I just held so much against these people'. Vivid in her memory was a night sharing smack: 'each time I hit up I thought 'that's for the Salvation Army', 'that's for the Christian Association' (Novarra et al., 57).

The whore/god's police dichotomy has a virulent history in the discourse of women's homelessness. When Gordon Moyes, Superintendent of the Central Methodist Mission (CMM), described homeless women as 'extremely difficult to rehabilitate' because they 'have usually been failures as mothers, as wives and even as prostitutes', he was reflecting the deep-rooted fear and disdain directed towards 'the woman vagrant' (*SMH* 9 August 1980). Such views were not confined to churchmen. Sociologist John de Hoog described the few women in his study of 'Skid Row' as 'warn-out harlots ... the most obscene and noisiest' (De Hoog 1972, 57). Nor were religious organisations all the same. The Wayside Chapel was cited approvingly by Fraser, and community houses based on ideals of egalitarianism and collectivity were opened at this time: some of the Melbourne interviewees spoke well of these (Fitzroy History Society 2017). But the large grants in this period went to established church organisations, and for them maintaining a moral hierarchy among women had long been the rationale for providing accommodation (O'Brien 2018).

1970s feminism sought to eradicate this dichotomy. Jacqui Theobald's interviews with workers in Melbourne's refuge movement show that the majority objected to the judgementalism associated with traditional charity (Theobald 2015). Fraser's report suggests their approach struck a chord. In her view, homeless women so preferred Elsie over existing shelters that when it opened 'a vast number' of homeless women came forward who were 'wary' of agencies that judged them 'more moralistically than men' (4, 7). But while feminist refuges were initially open to all, providing on-going accommodation for 'chronically homeless' women proved difficult. A number of workers in Melbourne told Theobald they regretted having to alter their rules – some recalled needing to prioritise women in 'immediate and real physical harm' due to domestic violence; others put it down to lack of resources (Theobald 2011, 105). In Adelaide, workers found that women with 'fairly incapacitating problems' needed 'more care than we could offer' (Otto and Haley 1975, 120). At Elsie the collective accepted 'chronically homeless' women for the first 18 months then reluctantly changed the rules: it was 'the only realistic decision to make, as goodwill and kind intentions were not enough' (Fraser 1977, 4).

Feminist refugee workers were in an almost impossible situation, struggling for resources to combat and deal with the consequences of domestic violence and pushed to make invidious decisions in the process. They nevertheless played a part in improving the visibility of homeless women. The Elsie collective collaborated with the Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development on a seminar on alcoholism and drug dependence in women and supported the opening of a Half-way House for women in Woolloomooloo (*SMH* 19 August 1975). A radio programme based on Fraser's report was broadcast on a special session of the ABC's feminist show 'Coming Out Ready or Not' in 1976 (ABC Radio 1976). But they improved the visibility of those already likely to be seen. Further, the urgency of providing shelter to women leaving violence reinforced emergency accommodation as the primary form of shelter for all homeless women.

Rooming and the Problem of Visibility

Women in rooms were hardly seen in this period. The authors of the Melbourne report sought to change this but, unlike Fraser, they were not writing for the government. Indeed, they thought 'little' would come of their study but saw value in 'our own increased awareness and hopefully that of our readers'. (Acknowledgements, np). In one sense they were right: it was not until the early 1990s that people in boarding houses were included in a new 'cultural definition' of homelessness (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2014). But women in rooms were not entirely invisible. The *Report of the Working Party* recognised that some of the 81,257 boarding house residents at the 1971 Census might be homeless, though it did not consider that many may have been women (*Report* 1973). In fact, a strand of North American sociological research on women in rooms stretched back to the 1940s (Hanover 1976); and in 1969 a study by the Sydney charity, the Smith Family, found that 'thousands' of 'solitary women' were living in acute poverty in rented rooms within a couple of miles of the centre of Sydney – but it did not consider them 'homeless' (AIPS 1969, 31). The Melbourne report linked the problem of the room with the problem of women's homelessness.

Boarding houses were not all the same but the Melbourne narratives suggest that at their worst they were dangerous and potentially harmful. They had been a respectable, even fashionable option in the early twentieth century but were in decline by the 1970s – though deinstitutionalisation provided the opportunity for entrepreneurs to open new ones for former patients of psychiatric hospitals (Stansfield 2007). Lodgers did not have the legal protections of private tenants, including 'exclusive use and occupation'. Landlords were entitled to hold duplicate keys to all rooms, on the grounds of cleaning and servicing, and could enter at any time (CURA 1979).

The Melbourne narrators were invested critics, and some knew where there were better rooms, but their main experience was of dirty, run down houses. 'Most of them smell', said Donna, 15; 'bathrooms are real dirty'; 'toilet for everyone' (41–2). Dot, 73, complained of having no locks on kitchen cupboards so your things got stolen, rooms so tiny it was 'standing room only' once you were out of bed. Public space was always negotiated: Anna, 70, used the kitchen 'after the prostitutes get home' (92). Boarding houses were also dangerous, and the narratives reveal the ways in which women who may well have been traumatised by past experience were liable to retraumatising. They tell of intimidating landlords and menacing residents: in one place the landlord let

himself into Dot's room when she was in bed to accuse her of stealing; in another she was blamed for spots on the carpet that were there when she moved in. Just last night a man had come into the kitchen 'with his thing out' and she couldn't 'get rid of him' (97). Lucy, 72, told of being 'punched ... in the eyes' by a resident (95). Dianne felt safer sleeping out. Rooming could mean living with surveillance, from the prison-like rules of hostels, to the heavy police presence in boarding house precincts. Rhonda liked St Kilda but there were 'always cops coming' when 'you just walk down the street' (45).

And yet they needed these rooms with their affordable rents, which may explain why most kept their criticisms to past experience. Dot was the only informant openly critical of her current arrangements and she was insistent that the interviewer not tape her words. She thought she had a reputation for complaining and worried it would 'get in the papers and they'd know'; 'Always complainin', that's what they'd say' ... 'I'd be thrown out on the streets wouldn't I?' (97). She may have been 'paranoid', but paranoia may have been the product of years of having no real privacy and having to perform in semi-public spaces, rituals that most people performed in safety, free from scrutiny.

Deficient and Self-hating?

The interviews can be read as a counter-narrative to Fraser's assumption that homeless women were lacking personal resources and that their 'vulnerability in the world' had led them to internalise self-hatred. Before exploring the narratives, however, it is important to clarify the context of their construction. As oral historians have shown, no interview produces undiluted 'fact' – it is a one-off conversation, drawing on social and personal memory and shaped by participants' expectations (Murphy 1986). Something of the authors' expectations can be read in their descriptions of the women's appearance and demeanour. A couple were 'distant' or 'apathetic' (47, 52, 70) but most were presented positively: quite a few were 'friendly'; one 'came across with overwhelming sincerity' (64, 56) another had 'a wicked sense of humour' (94). These sympathetic descriptions reflect the authors' commitment to a non-judgmental approach and the conviction that the difficulties the women faced were not of their own making. After all, this was before the discourse of choice and personal responsibility that came with neoliberalism threatened to obscure 'the extent of choicelessness' (Johnson 2003). One description of an Indigenous woman as having 'a rather furtive sideways look' and owing board to one of the hostels, however, points to the racist limits of white idealism. It stands out from the other comments, and may reflect what the authors acknowledged as differences in the 'personal style' of each researcher – the descriptions of the other two Indigenous women show no such disapproval (67, 33). But it also reinforces Indigenous women's critique of 1970s feminism as largely a white middle-class movement (O'Shane 1976).

There is no space to do full justice to all the narratives here but they can be read to show something of the gendered workings of settler colonialism, migration, violence and sheer serendipity in the lives of their authors. In terms of settler colonialism, the narratives are limited because race was not a category of analysis in the study: the interplay of low paid work, child-care and violence in the lives of the Indigenous women interviewed is similar to that encountered by the white women, though it was very likely experienced differently. Two broad, inter-related patterns do emerge, however. Indigenous women were over-represented in this group: at 3 out of 18, they were considerably

more than their 1% of the population at the time (ABS 2007). In addition, they all experienced the premature death of one or both parents: of 6 Indigenous parents, 5 died prematurely, compared with 8 of 30 non-Indigenous parents. The sample is small but it goes some way towards countering the assumptions of disfunction that have long beset Indigenous families, highlighting instead the relationship between parental mortality and homelessness. Indeed, one Indigenous woman made a point of how happy she was in her childhood home – ‘gee I was happy at the station’ – but both parents died when she was 19, when she had just had a baby to a violent man, and when she greatly needed their support (73-4).

The one migrant narrative evokes the impacts of war, displacement and state surveillance. Anna, born in Russia and aged ‘about 70’, was a chance encounter in the street. Hers was more ‘an outpouring’ than a linear story. She said nothing about when and how she came to Australia but repeatedly referred to how happy she was living with her grandmother as a child. Born at the turn of the twentieth century, her life spanned the October revolution, Stalinism, and two world wars: ‘my life is different to everyone else’s – very different. I can’t speak about it’ (91). She made several references to the police knowing ‘everything’ and did not want the interview to go on too long because ‘they see if you pass anything’. She was the only older woman who spoke openly about suicide – saying that she would go to the ‘dangerous place’ in the river if she could not find a job after her money ran out. But she presented herself as in control: ‘I have had a good life – all my family died young – I join them’ (91).

Almost all the women had experienced violence. Their stories are unique but continuities were strong, despite the wide age range. Mary, a 46-year-old white woman, presented a detailed account of her life that points to themes many shared. She was described as ‘at ease and friendly’ and ‘matter-of-fact’ except when her children were mentioned when she became ‘visibly upset’. Unlike most of the sample she was ‘very happy’ as a child but she had wanted to marry at 16, after which her mother put her in Abbotsford convent for ‘wayward’ girls. When she was released she married someone else ‘to get away’ but this man cheated on her so she left him even though she was pregnant (83). She took a job as a cook for a timber miller, married him and had two more children; she left when he started ‘to get violent’. She moved to Fitzroy with her children, worked as a barmaid and took in boarders; one of these would ‘go off the planet – you know. Bash me – wanted me to hop in bed’. When she was hospitalised by this man she decided it would be better for her children to be with her ex-husband: ‘it was heart-breaking, but I thought it would be better for them’ (84). This was a turning point. Her health started to suffer, her asthma got worse, and she started drinking heavily. Her last partner would catch up with her so she’d move: ‘he’s still around – never lets up’ (84). She was in and out of rooms, in and out of rehab: ‘when I get too sick with drink I get admitted’ (85).

Like many of the others, Mary’s life story highlights the intersections between gendered violence and feminised poverty. Born in the depression and with limited education, she experienced an institution that punished self-assertion in young women as ‘wayward’. She repartnered in the context of low paid work, was twice a victim of partner violence and was still being stalked. She relinquished her children after being hospitalised by her partner because she saw it in their interests to do so – it was after this that she started drinking heavily. Whatever personal resources she lacked is not clear, but what does emerge is that the cards stacked against her became weightier over time.

This is not to suggest that all the narratives followed an unremittingly downward trajectory. Luck can be seen playing out in the lives of some. Lucy, for example, married four times and though her first husband was a coercive controller and her fourth deserted her, she was happy with her 2nd and 3rd husbands – sadly, both died. But poverty meant they were all vulnerable – at worst, to a self-perpetuating cycle of state violence. Pat, aged 42, was described by the authors as ‘very neatly dressed’ with ‘a lovely smiling face and dancing eyes’: between adolescence and early adulthood she had been locked in a padded cell in a girls’ home, bashed by police after escaping from Pentridge, put into ‘the dungeons’ on bread and water at Fairlea prison and raped by a taxi driver: when she reported the rape, the police took no notice ‘because I’d been in gaol and had convictions and that’ (79–80).

The narratives call into question Fraser’s generalisation that, as ‘failed mothers’ homeless women had internalised self-hatred. Most of the older women had children who were, or had been, in care and most expressed their determination to get them back, or resume a relationship with them. This is not to deny that they suffered a stigma that may have engendered ‘shame and rage and self-defeating behaviour’, as social psychologist Kathleen Wells has put it: identity is always layered (Wells 2011). But their narratives emphasise that relinquishing their children was in the child’s best interests and are clear about the external factors that lead them to it. The dominant emotion they expressed was grief not shame.

Their awareness of the external factors working against them is also clear in their responses to a question about what changed their lives. For Therese it was her husband ‘playing around’ (89); for Kerry it was being sent to the Oakleigh reformatory; for Lisa it was her father’s violence. Lucy answered the question positively: her life changed when she got the pension (96). A few women articulated the lack of affordable housing as currently working against them. ‘Why doesn’t the government or the local Brotherhoods buy [houses], put people in them?’, Joan asked (78). Looking back on her life, Mary was the only respondent to this question who showed any ambiguity – and there were multiple layers in her response.

What changed my life was my mother putting me in Abbotsford instead of letting me get married. But I brought myself undone, I suppose, nobody else. But I believe in myself, I mean well and I’m pretty happy. (86)

Far from mired in guilt she recognised her own strengths and took responsibility for her own actions while recognising she had little control over the pivotal event in her life.

Concluding in Context

Homeless women were constructed as a problem population in Australia 30 years after homeless men, but there was a significant difference in the stance the later researchers took towards their subjects. Homeless men had been represented as broken individuals, inimical to progress, pitiable at best (O’Brien 2022). While some of this infused some research on homeless women, the larger structural framework within which feminists worked recognised that homelessness was a gendered experience and that women were vulnerable to dangers and shaming that men did not face; they were critical of women’s marginalisation in the government’s new programme and recognised that

the judgmentalism of those providing support was actively harmful. However, the strand of feminist research that reinforced the older male-oriented understandings of 'cause' and accepted homelessness as rough sleeping, played a part in obscuring the range of ways women could experience homelessness and the range of long-term responses needed.

The reports discussed in this article provide an entrée into the complex understandings that feminist advocates brought to homeless women at this pivotal time. The Melbourne study broadened the orthodox view of homelessness and appreciated the strategies women developed to minimise their vulnerability. It showed that women in rooms were not necessarily safe, it assumed they had a right to housing and, in elevating their voices, it refuted deficit theories of homelessness and produced a document that points to the intersecting impacts of colonialism, war, migration, class, and misogyny in the intimate lives of women. But it was not written to the government and the broader definition it posited remained largely peripheral. The Sydney report shows that the dominant understandings of homelessness as personal deficit were not just difficult to shift, they could be renewed by the terminology of addiction and by a totalising interpretation of patriarchy. Homelessness as deficit had long assumed that temporary shelter was the best homeless men could expect: this report's awareness of women's vulnerability gave the need for such shelter a heightened sense of importance without considering that they might be subjects of housing. At the same time, the urgent needs of women leaving violence heightened the appeal of temporary accommodation as a viable mode of support.

A short history of the following decades suggests the government preference for the older framework. Temporary accommodation, with all its insecurity and distress, remained the primary response to homelessness (for men as well as women) until 2008. Refuges for a range of women – including young women, Indigenous women, and women with 'special needs' – grew rapidly but they were never sufficient to need (AHRC 1980). In 1985 the Hawke government streamlined and regularised funding for the homelessness sector through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), confirming temporary accommodation and services as its core functions. It was only in 2008 that the Rudd labour government sought to introduce measures that would significantly reduce homelessness, rather than only manage it (Parsell and Jones 2014). These measures were not sufficient to stop homelessness increasing, however, and the election of the Coalition in 2013 saw housing and homelessness recede as government priorities (MacKenzie 2017). All through this period scholars and service providers decried the lack of 'exit points' for people using homelessness services (Coleman and Fopp 2014). They did not deny the need for crisis accommodation for people with high and complex needs but argued that transitional housing should be accompanied by rapid permanent housing (Bullen 2010b). As the homelessness sector grew, however, public housing became increasingly residualised and underfunded. The number of households on public housing waiting lists almost doubled between 1982 and 1992 and, as a percentage of all housing stock, public housing dropped from 5.7 in 1984 to 3.8% in 2010 (Hayward 1996; Toohey 2014).

Old gender paradigms and the focus on rough sleeping also persisted, working against women's chances of being rehoused in the context of profound under-supply. A recent study found that 'chronically homeless women' continue to use strategies of concealment, such as couch surfing, or sleeping in a car or in a place they feel more safely

unseen. They also continue to avoid some services because of limits on their autonomy or because they feel unsafe, which means they are literally not 'counted' as homeless and often overlooked for housing (Bullen 2021). In a system where service organisations play an important role in assisting their clients to housing, some women, such as older single women, lack such services (Darab and Hartman 2013). Nor can services ensure their clients' housing: victims of domestic violence remain in or return to violent relationships because of the lack of social housing in some areas (Flanagan et al. 2019).

The feminists who argued for more refuges for women in the 1970s can hardly be blamed for the on-going preference of successive governments for temporary accommodation, much less for the decline of public housing. Indeed, over the next decades feminists lobbied for women's housing in the refuge movement, in squatting campaigns, and in the peak body 'Shelter' – and with some success (Watson 1988). The appeal of temporary accommodation to governments in a 3-year election cycle is clear: less expensive and more flexible than large-scale housing projects it was also in keeping with the ethos of self-help that came to infuse welfare. But feminists were important players in this field where women had long been overlooked, and the Sydney report was a passionate call for them to be seen. In construing 'the homeless woman' as a unitary figure, inherently damaged, it shows, not just the intersection of different forms of professional knowledge, but how they could be shaped by and reinforce old tropes of 'the woman vagrant' as aberrant and 'brutalised'. The salient point is how deeply embedded those tropes were, how readily they could be redeployed and how resilient they remain: contemporary media representations of homeless women still reinforce a dichotomy between the 'undeserving' addict and the 'deserving' woman with children (Lyons and Smedley 2021).

The ideas encapsulated in the Melbourne report also live on. The approaches it advocated – more equal relationships between client and practitioner, a focus on personal strength rather than pathology, and 'therapeutic techniques' such as empathy and decreasing self-blame – came to be seen as basic to feminist social work over the next decades (Fook 1986). Its privileging of the voices of homeless women also foreshadowed more recent attempts to counter the institutionalised silencing of homeless women by professionals and the media (Speer 2021). More than this, the report and the narratives it has preserved, provide a methodological reference point for contemporary studies of 'homeless identities'. They clearly underline the importance of gender as a category of analysis in such studies, but also point to the value of analysing 'the interview' as a product of its time. Some housing theorists have rightly argued that an historical sensibility reminds us that 'current policies and theories do not occur outside time' but are 'temporally situated, contingent and contextual' (Flanagan and Jacobs 2019, 196). Of relevance here is the pattern emerging from recent studies in which interviewees seem to express more ambiguity, more self-blame and negativity, a greater desire to take 'personal responsibility' for their own choices, than those in the 1970s Melbourne study (Parker and Fopp 2004; Zufferey and Kerr 2004; Parsell 2018). Indeed, a study of Centrelink recipients published in 2011 found that the largest group of those with views about the welfare system thought it was too lenient and encouraged dependency, even as they required its support (Murphy et al. 2011).

To note this is not to query the authenticity of the recent interviews, nor deny the 'agency' of those being interviewed by assuming they had unthinkingly imbibed some sort of fixed 'neoliberal' orthodoxy. It is to suggest that, since 'the interview' is inevitably

shaped by its time, being alive to the context in which it was constructed may provide a clearer understanding of its value. The 1970s interviews were conducted when social democratic idealism still had currency and, since its precepts infused most interviews, the narrators revealed the constraints on their agency in a context where they felt free to articulate them. They had a knowledge of homelessness and housing that was not just intimate and profound but clear-sighted: they speak to our time. In this, they add a new dimension to the growing recognition that people experiencing homelessness are the real 'experts' despite their 'epistemic displacement' (Speer 2021, 1). They provide insight, not only into what homelessness means, but into how and why it is perpetuated.

Note

1. I have not been able to verify that the DSS commissioned this report but, since the copy in the State Library of NSW is attached to a covering letter from the DSS to the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), it seems very likely.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by Australian Research Council: [grant number DP180100354].

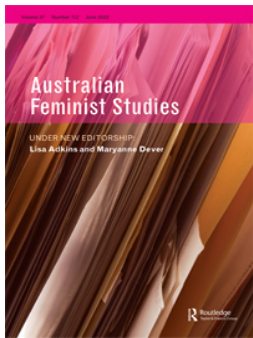
References

- ABC Radio. 1976. "A Nobody Going Nowhere." *Coming Out Ready or Not Show*, no. 56. ABC Archives.
- Arrow, Michelle. 2019. *The Seventies: The Personal, the Political and the Making of Modern Australia*. Sydney: New South.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). 2007. "ABS Celebrates 40 Years Since Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Included in Population Estimates." Accessed August 16, 2022. <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbytitle/454D4207EA2C3FBDC2572E5007FB33B?OpenDocument>.
- Australian Housing Research Council (AHRC). 1980. *Women in Last Resort Housing*. Canberra: Department of Housing and Construction.
- Australian Institute of Political Science (AIPS). 1969. *Poverty in Australia: Proceedings of the 35th Summer School*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson.
- Bretherton, Joanne. 2017. "Reconsidering Gender in Homelessness." *European Journal of Homelessness* 11 (1): 1–21.
- Bullen, Jane. 2010a. "Governing Homelessness: The Discursive and Institutional Construction of Homelessness in Australia." PhD thesis, University of Technology Sydney.
- Bullen, Jane. 2010b. "From Transitional Housing Models to Permanent Housing Models for Homeless People: A Paradigm Shift." *Parity* 23 (7): 5–7.
- Bullen, Jane. 2021. "Chronic Homelessness - What Women's Experiences Can Tell Us." *Housing Studies*. Advance Online Publication. doi:10.1080/02673037.2021.1941791.
- Centre for Urban Research and Action (CURA). 1979. *Landlords and Lodgers: A Study of Rooming Houses in Melbourne*. Melbourne: CURA.

- Chamberlain, Chris, and David. MacKenzie. 2014. "Definition and Counting: Where to now?" In *Homelessness in Australia*, edited by Chris Chamberlain, Guy Johnson, and Catherine Robinson, 71–99. Sydney: UNSW Press.
- Coleman, Anne, and Rodney. Fopp. 2014. "Benign Neglect or Regulation and Control?" In *Homelessness in Australia*, edited by Chris Chamberlain, Guy Johnson, and Catherine Robinson, 71–99. Sydney: UNSW Press.
- Curthoys, Ann. 1992. "Doing it for Themselves: The Women's Movement Since 1970." In *Gender Relations in Australia*, edited by Kay Saunders, and Raymond Evans, 425–447. Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Darab, Sandy, and Yvonne. Hartman. 2013. "Understanding Single Older Women's Invisibility in Housing Issues in Australia." *Housing, Theory and Society* 30 (4): 348–367. doi:10.1080/14036096.2012.746944.
- De Hoog, John. 1972. *Skid Row Dossier*. Melbourne: Sun Books.
- Dixon, Miriam. 1976. *The Real Matilda: Women and Identity in Australia*. Ringwood: Penguin.
- Fitzroy History Society. 2017. Transcript of Interview with Val Noone and Mary Doyle. Accessed August 7. <https://fitzroyhistorysociety.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/fhs-val-noonemary-doyle-2015.pdf>.
- Flanagan, Kathleen, Hazel Blunden, kylie valentine, and Jane Henriette. 2019. *Housing Outcomes After Domestic and Family Violence*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. Accessed Dec 11, 2022. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3372009.
- Flanagan, Kathleen, and Keith Jacobs. 2019. "'The Long View': Introduction for Special Edition of Housing Studies." *Housing Studies* 34 (2): 195–200. doi:10.1080/02673037.2019.1558592.
- Fook, Jan. 1986. "Feminist Contributions to Casework Practice." In *Gender Reclaimed: Women in Social Work*, edited by Helen Marchant, and Betsy Wearing, 54–63. Sydney: Hale & Iremonger.
- Fraser, Leonie. 1977. Enquiry Into the Condition of Homelessness in Women, Papers, NSW Council of Social Service, MLMSS2929, add-on, 1388.
- Greenleaf, Kaye. 2017. Interview, Pride History group Oral History. Accessed August 8, 2022 https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b4d8eda620b85efd8bc7a05/t/62c164ceed3f530d5d2d04d0/1656841425233/log_greenleaf_kaye.pdf.
- Hanover Welfare Services. 1976. *Melbourne's Homeless Population*. Melbourne: Hanover Welfare Services.
- Hayward, David. 1996. "The Reluctant Landlords? A History of Public Housing in Australia." *Urban Policy and Research* 14 (1): 5–35. doi:10.1080/0811149608551610.
- Healy, Bill. 1993. "Elements in the Development of an Australian Radical Social Work." *Australian Social Work* 46 (1): 3–8. doi:10.1080/03124079308410648.
- Hilliard, David. 1997. "The Religious Crisis of the 1960s: The Experience of the Australian Churches." *Journal of Religious History* 21 (2): 209–227. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9809.1997.tb00486.x.
- Johnson, Vivien. 1981. *The Last Resort: A Women's Refuge*. Ringwood: Penguin.
- Johnson, Walter. 2003. "On Agency." *Journal of Social History* 37 (1): 113–124. doi:10.1353/jsh.2003.0143.
- Kevin, Catherine. 2020. "Tyrants, Heroes, Sex and Secrets: Foundational Histories of Domestic Violence, Turning Points in Historiography and the Legacy of Judith A. Allen in Australia." *Australian Historical Studies* 51 (2): 127–145. doi:10.1080/1031461X.2020.1735458.
- Lake, Marilyn. 1999. *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Lyons, Georgia, and Charlotte Smedley. 2021. "The New Face of Homelessness? Examining Media Representations of Women's Homelessness in Five Australian News Sources." *Journal of Social Distress and Homelessness* 30 (1): 28–40. doi:10.1080/10530789.2019.1709269.
- MacKenzie, David. 2017. "Homelessness Policy: Where to now?" *Parity* 30 (6): 17–20.
- MacKinnon, Dolly, and Catharine Coleborne. 2003. "Introduction: Deinstitutionalisation in Australia and New Zealand." *Health and History* 5 (2): 1–16. doi:10.2307/40111450.
- Mayne, Alan. 1981. "Sydney Sojourns: An Approach to Geographic Mobility." *Australia* 1888 8: 3–12.
- McFerran, Ludo. 1990. "Interpretation of a Frontline State: Australian Women's Refuges and the State." In *Playing the State: Australian Feminist Interventions*, edited by Sophie Watson, 191–205. London: Verso.

- Mendes, Philip. 2019. *Empowerment and Control in the Australian Welfare State*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Murphy, John. 1986. "The Voice of Memory: History, Autobiography and Oral Memory." *Historical Studies* 22 (87): 157–175. doi:[10.1080/10314618608595742](https://doi.org/10.1080/10314618608595742).
- Murphy, John, Suellen Murray, Jenny Chalmers, Sonia Lea Martin, and Greg Marston. 2011. *Half a Citizen: Life on Welfare in Australia*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Novarra, Carolyn, Julie Edwards, Yvonne Zammit, Hansie Hakendorf, and Helen Gayton. 1977. *A Study of Homeless Women in Melbourne*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne, Department of Social Studies.
- NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR). 1972. *Drunks who go to Goal. Statistical Report 5 Series 1*. Sydney: Department of Attorney General and Justice.
- NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS). 1975. Minutes of Council of Social Service of NSW and the Council for Homeless Persons in Victoria, c. 1971–1977. ML MSS 2929, add-on 1388.
- O'Brien, Anne. 2018. "'Homeless' Women and the Problem of Visibility: Australia 1900–1940." *Women's History Review* 27 (2): 135–153. doi:[10.1080/09612025.2018.1392275](https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2018.1392275).
- O'Brien, Anne. 2021. "'Archaic Laws' and the Making of the Homelessness Sector." *Housing Studies*, doi:[10.1080/02673037.2021.1928007](https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2021.1928007).
- O'Brien, Anne. 2022. "Housing the Homeless: How Revisiting the 1940s Assists the Struggle." *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 57 (4): 798–811. doi:[10.1002/ajs4.225](https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.225).
- O'Shane, Patricia. 1976. "Is There any Relevance in the Women's Movement for Aboriginal Women?" *Refractory Girl* 12: 31–34.
- Otto, Dianne, and Eileen. Haley. 1975. "Helter Shelter: A History of the Adelaide's Women's Shelter." *Refractory Girl* 9: 11–16.
- Parker, Stephen, and Rodney Fopp. 2004. "'I'm the Slice of Pie That's Ostracised ...': Foucault's Technologies, and Personal Agency, in the Voice of Women who are Homeless, Adelaide, South Australia." *Housing, Theory and Society* 21 (4): 145–154. doi:[10.1080/14036090410011415](https://doi.org/10.1080/14036090410011415).
- Parsell, Cameron. 2018. *The Homeless Person in Contemporary Society*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Parsell, Cameron, and Andrew Jones. 2014. "Bold Reform or Policy Overreach? Australia's Attack on Homelessness: 2008–2013." *International Journal of Housing Policy* 14 (4): 427–443. doi:[10.1080/14616718.2014.967923](https://doi.org/10.1080/14616718.2014.967923).
- Peel, Mark. 2011. *Miss Cutler and the Case of the Resurrected Horse: Social Work and the Story of Poverty in America, Australia, and Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ramsay, Janet. 2007. "Policy Activism On A 'Wicked Issue'." *Australian Feminist Studies* 22 (53): 247–264. doi:[10.1080/08164640701364661](https://doi.org/10.1080/08164640701364661).
- Report of the Working Party on Homeless Men and Women. 1973. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.
- Scott, Joan W. 2007. "History-Writing as Critique." In *Manifestos for History*, edited by Sue Morgan, Keith Jenkins, and Alun Muslow, 19–38. Florence: Taylor & Francis.
- Simic, Zora. 2020. "From Battered Wives to Domestic Violence: The Transnational Circulation of Chiswick Women's Aid and Erin Pizzey's *Scream Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear* (1974)." *Australian Historical Studies* 51 (2): 107–126. doi:[10.1080/1031461X.2019.1707243](https://doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2019.1707243).
- Speer, Jessie. 2021. "Subalternity as Displacement: Memoirs of Homelessness and the Struggle to be Heard." *Society and Space* 39 (4): 627–644. doi:[10.1177/02637758211028241](https://doi.org/10.1177/02637758211028241).
- Stansfield, Charlie. 2007. "The Words to say it." *Griffith Review* 15: 99–107.
- Stubbs, John. 1966. *The Hidden People: Poverty in Australia*. Melbourne: Cheshire-Lansdowne.
- Summers, Anne. 1999. *Ducks on the Pond: An Autobiography 1945–1976*. Ringwood: Viking.
- Sydney Morning Herald (SMH). 1975. 19 August.
- Sydney Morning Herald (SMH). 1980. 9 August.
- Theobald, Jacqueline Lee. 2011. "A History of the Victorian Women's Domestic Violence Services Movement: 1974–2005," Ph D Thesis, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.
- Theobald, Jacqui. 2015. "The Beginnings of the Victorian Women's Refuge Movement: Difference, Equality and Protectionism, 1974–1979." *Lilith (fitzroy, Vic)* 1: 49–64.
- Toohy, Sarah. 2014. "The Failure of the Housing System." In *Homelessness in Australia*, edited by Chris Chamberlain, Guy Johnson, and Catherine Robinson, 71–99. Sydney: UNSW Press.

- Ward, Russell. 1958. *The Australian Legend*. Melbourne: Oxford.
- Watson, Sophie. 1988. *Accommodating Inequality: Gender and Housing*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Wells, Kathleen. 2011. "A Narrative Analysis of One Mother's Story of Child Custody Loss and Regain." *Children and Youth Services Review* 33 (3): 439–447. doi:[10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.06.019](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.06.019).
- Zufferey, Carole, and Lorraine Kerr. 2004. "Identity and Everyday Experiences of Homelessness: Some Implications for Social Work." *Australian Social Work* 57 (4): 343–353. doi:[10.1111/j.0312-407X.2004.00164.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0312-407X.2004.00164.x).



Disrupting the Architectural Line: Wandering Domestic Objects in Public Spaces

Cathy Smith, Ainslie Murray, Demet Dincer & Eva Lloyd

To cite this article: Cathy Smith, Ainslie Murray, Demet Dincer & Eva Lloyd (2022) Disrupting the Architectural Line: Wandering Domestic Objects in Public Spaces, Australian Feminist Studies, 37:112, 152-168, DOI: [10.1080/08164649.2023.2196706](https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2023.2196706)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2023.2196706>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 12 Apr 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 2941



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Disrupting the Architectural Line: Wandering Domestic Objects in Public Spaces

Cathy Smith, Ainslie Murray, Demet Dincer and Eva Lloyd

School of Built Environment, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

ABSTRACT

With a particular focus on the construction and occupation of space, we will engage and trouble habitual distinctions between the interior as a site of private domestic occupation and the street as a public domain. Drawing from philosophical and cultural discourses about nomadism, mobility and everyday life that prioritise the dissolution of boundary conditions, the article will develop a feminist lens through which to interrogate three architectural practices and projects by the essay authors. Notably, each of the three case projects – *Fence Parasite*, *Streetlife*, and *Public Beds* – involve the placing of domestic objects and actions in different public or non-residential urban settings, thereby unsettling their usual associations with the home and thus the boundaries between the inside-outside and, by extension, private-public space. From the dynamic overspill of domestic labours and artefacts into the urban streets through to the deliberate breaching and co-option of footpath boundaries, these projects support a wider conception of both the location of the home and its political agency, particularly in considering what is urban and architectural within design practice.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 18 March 2022

Accepted 26 March 2023

KEYWORDS

Interior architecture; architecture; nomadic; urban space; urban mobilities; public space; domestic artefacts

Line, Linearity and Power in Architecture

Our support structures – houses, self-identity, property, proprieties, bones, walls, scaffolding – are almost isomorphic with one another. As such, they speak to each other – not, however, in the interest of unity. (Ingraham 1998, 153)

In her key architectural text *Architecture and the Burdens of Linearity* (1998), architectural theorist and feminist Catherine Ingraham draws attention to the important, though arguably infrequently discussed focus on the line and linearity in architectural theory and practice. She posits the line as ‘crucial to the construction of an architectural epistemology’ (1998, 4) that is based upon the conceptualisation of architecture as the creation of boundary conditions, ranging from physical walls and property thresholds through to the more intangible aesthetic geometric considerations. Ingraham presents

CONTACT Cathy Smith  cathy.smith@unsw.edu.au  School of Built Environment, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

the line as a problematic construct in architecture: focusing attention on the building envelope as 'bounded, owned entity' (1998, 130) which by extension, becomes a tool of power and exclusion – particularly for women and other groups struggling to own, control or access buildings, and residential buildings specifically. To overcome this inherently exclusionary focus on architectural boundary conditions, she suggests we concentrate instead on notions of 'temporality and spatiality' (1998, 147) which force us to confront and question our relationship to buildings as bounded, static, immutable objects disconnected from the places in which they are located, rather than spaces to be freely occupied.

Ingraham's essay and notion of the architectural line was posited over two decades ago and a time when more inclusive theories of space and architecture were yet to fully infiltrate the architectural canon. Nevertheless, it must be said that it continues to be relevant in the post-pandemic context of real-world cities where housing precarity continues to exclude our most vulnerable. To this end, this article revisits Ingraham's notions of the architectural line as a frame for exploring three projects by the authors. Each explicitly challenge the boundaries between home and public space, triggered through the relocation of artefacts associated with private domestic environments and women's labour into atypical, non-residential settings; artefacts that could be described as 'wandering objects' (Rendell 1998, 243). The selected projects are drawn from a combination of the authors' own practice-led research and pedagogical practices within a university context – itself a limit and boundary of sorts. Yet in drawing attention to specific examples of boundary limits within built urban environments, these projects are presented as particular instantiations of the ongoing relevance of the notion of the architectural line within architectural discourse, and feminism more broadly. The first project, *Fence Parasite* explores the fence as a contestable built instantiation of the proprietary, that is, the line between private and public space. It was conceived and constructed by Cathy Smith and Rowan Olsson as a series of low-cost, foldable, re-deployable stools and a table that temporarily sit atop a standard height domestic fence or balcony, but which can also be redistributed across the footpath and adjacent residential garden space. Nonetheless, as a privately constructed and operated work, *Fence Parasite* does not ultimately alter the property binaries it questions. Accordingly, the article then turns to a second project, *Streetlife*, in which public space is more freely reimagined through domestic occupation. It involves a series of student-created analytical diagrams of nomadic 'gray spaces' (Yiftachel 2009) in southwestern Sydney and a related site in central Phnom Penh in which domestic objects and acts inhabit footpath spaces, spilling from commercial and residential interiors to roam freely, so to speak. Generated as part of an interuniversity course exploring street conditions across diverse socio-cultural and spatial settings in Sydney and Phnom Penh, the student-produced images and diagrams investigate lively, heterogenous and everyday exchanges intertwining domestic objects, labours and bodies with architecture and the urban realm. The third and final project, *Public Beds* explores the domestic affordances of discarded mattresses placed in public urban settings. While *Fence Parasite* explores the shifting physical line between private and public, and *Streetlife* looks at the domestic inhabitation of public space and objects, *Public Beds* focusses on one domestic object out of its domestic environment. The project title, *Public Beds*, references mattresses which are out of place. Though the widespread association of mattress with domestic space and private,

sanitised home environments, the seemingly haphazard placement of these mattresses in weather-exposed public footpaths challenges the distinction between the interior and exterior, and private and public spaces. The project follows ‘public beds’ in action through a collection of photographs. Collectively, these three projects recast the notions and practices of everyday dwelling in urban space and challenge the dualistic consideration of private and public. In doing so, they also support and illustrate long-standing extant feminist discourses that overturn the distinction between domestic private and public space, albeit through an architectural and spatial lens.

Through its wandering across case project and discourses, it could be argued this article itself demonstrates a conceptual or theoretical breaching of sorts, loosely aligned with historical feminist and architectural discourses of the nomadic as they relate to spatial occupation (late twentieth century through to the present): particularly those discourses that challenge habitual and often misleading distinctions between binary conditions in cities (public-private, home-public, women-men), including Deleuze and Guattari’s (2005 [1980]) poststructuralist philosophical invocations of the nomadic, through to Grosz (2001) and Braidotti’s (2011) respective explorations of nomadic thought. Collaborating feminist geographers Gibson-Graham similarly foreground places and/or objects as simultaneous sites of nomadic becoming and belonging which: ‘move beyond the divisive binaries of human/nonhuman, subject/object, economy/ecology and thinking/acting’ (Gibson-Graham 2011, 1). Within architecture, the notion of the nomadic has provided a conceptual frame for challenging disciplinary, practice and conceptual boundaries, thus opening alternative considerations for spatial occupation (Ingraham 1988, 1991, 1995, 1998, 2004; Ballantyne and Smith 2011; Ballantyne 2013; Burns 2013; Brott 2016; Smith 2016; Kovar 2019). These discourses challenge the recognised ‘anti-domestic tenor of avant-garde architectural theory’ (Reed 1996, 9). More specifically, these theories explore the relationships between the occupation of architecture and the crossing of property boundaries through a focus on discordant occupations. As Ingraham mentions: ‘there is also no human movement across or within frontiers and borders – with documents of identity in hand – that is not consequential for architectural movement and no architectural movement that is not consequential for human movement’ (Ingraham 2004, 79).

To this end, each project, while individually initiated by the respective co-authors within the last decade and for the most part located in the greater Sydney region, are specific instances of the ways in which lines, thresholds, and boundaries in architecture are productively unsettled. Aligned with Erin Manning’s thinking around the ‘everyday’ in a domestic context, we worked with the premise that each case invokes a dynamic mix of improvised occupation and established domestic habits in which occupants not only *populate* environment, but *form* it through dynamic occupations (Manning 2012, 13). Our attention to wandering domestic objects and the lines they produce is also considered through this feminist lens, not only because these projects form part of our lived experiences as women caregivers, authors and practitioners, but because this focus accords with a feminist desire to unravel the boundaries that render our domestic lives mute.

Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative mixed-method approach, applying a critical theory lens to each case study, thereby grounding the discursive framework in the authors’ lived experiences and ‘the diversity of realities that are multiple and socially

constructed' (Sarvimäki 2018, 25). These projects are therefore thematically rather than chronologically linked, with a focus on how the domestic artefacts complicate the ownership of public spaces and its behaviours, whilst noting that we understand 'objects as processes defined by their potentials, and society as constituted primarily by actions' (Graeber 2001, 52). Finally, the authors are intimately connected to each of respective projects discussed below, in recognition 'that there is an interactive link between the investigator and the investigation [...] the researcher is one of the research tools' (Sarvimäki 2018, 25). The mix of individual authors, communities and projects is intentionally diverse when considered from the perspective of conventionally narrow research parameters; however, this is because we aspire to an 'agency as always distributed and at work in "heterogeneous assemblages"' (Muller and Langill 2021, 3). Indeed, our overall research approach is similarly exploratory, questioning the notion of the architectural limit (built and metaphoric) rather than providing definitive solutions. Borrowing from the words of Deleuze and Guattari, the article is 'dependent upon sensitive and sensible evaluations that pose more problems than they solve: problematics is still its only mode' (2005 [1980], 373). Although the projects of focus in this article did not physically alter property boundaries and spatial thresholds, the observed liveliness of their occupations suggests that the binary conditions of buildings and their limits may be largely illusory, reinforcing an extra-legal conception of property 'as socially constructed, plural and performative' (Thorpe 2018, 766).

Lines that Wander: The Discursive Context

Lines are used in architectural drawings to create order and render visible boundary conditions, particularly those relating to property ownership, and in order to demarcate inside from outside, public from private space. According to Ingraham, the use of lines in architecture is significant within the architectural profession, to such an extent that it could constitute 'an architectural epistemology' (1998, 4). She suggests the popularity of linear boundaries and forms derive from the historical desire to create geometrically pure or ideal forms using 'Euclidean geometry' (Ingraham 1998, 81). In architectural drawing and practice, the line has is synonymous with the construction of property itself, thus is also a technique of power and exclusion. Accordingly, Ingraham (1998, 130) suggests that the line (and therefore the architectural boundary condition it represents) is inherently problematic within architecture as: it implicates the profession in the construction of buildings as 'bounded, owned' objects rather than spaces to be freely occupied by broader publics.

Despite the longstanding use of 'architectural line' as a drawn and built boundary condition delineates an architectural envelope, it is still approached as malleable and negotiated construct by some architectural theorists and practitioners, sometimes (but not always) in domestic settings. This malleability is illustrated, for example in architect Bernard Cache's invocation of the mobius strip, a linear yet infinite condition in which the inside and outside conditions are indivisible, such that 'the interior is only a selected exterior, and the exterior a projected interior' (Deleuze as quoted in Speaks 1995, xvii). In a similar vein, anthropologist Tim Ingold (2015), who dedicates an entire book to lines and linearity, invokes actions and artefacts that breach or trouble 'interior containment' (41).

Drawing attention to domestic objects and practices in public spaces is an important task of feminist architectural discourse. Even when the notion of the domestic has been historically recognised as an idea and construct (Reed 1996, 7), the notion of the home with which it is conflated has often been 'the main area for the enforcement of conventional divisions of masculinity and femininity (along with their complement, heterosexuality) – [... even if] the modern home has also been staging ground for rebellion against these norms' (Reed 1996, 16). To this point, the perceived contamination of public footpaths with 'wandering [domestic] objects' (Rendell 1998, 243) serves to highlight how norms of domesticity and gender are often founded upon flawed assumptions about the private character of domestic life. If we become accustomed to living life primarily through an 'experience of containment' (Ingold 2015, 41), then actions or artefacts that breach that containment not only unsettle our experience of those objects, but also the very world in which we live. Accordingly, the focus is less on the contained object, and more on the effect of the object for the inhabitants (Rice 2007, 17). Ingold (2015, 155) similarly prompts us to consider domestic space as a concentration of materials and potential energy from which lifelines emanate beyond it into the milieu of the earth and air, where they tangle with the lines of other living things. In conventional architectural discourse and practice, an over-focus on architectural structure, property boundaries and envelope conditions can lead to the minimisation of inhabitants and specifically, inhabitations that move seamlessly between them (Ingraham 1998, 54). Focusing on inert, immutable, hard property lines works to (consciously or unconsciously) constrict and control wayward bodies. Indeed, with its established focus on inert structure and property envelope, the architectural discipline often works to support the construction of the bounded:

Architecture is, in some sense, the name of what acts in opposition to the animate. It is the embodied principle of the inert [...] architecture controls or attempts to control this divide in order to maintain the proprietary, the seemliness, of the body in space. We know that the body is prone to improprieties – indeed, it is not only prone to but thrives on the tension between proprietary and impropriety. (Ingraham 1998, 54)

Conversely, focusing on domestic artefacts and their associated spatial settings both renders visible and simultaneously troubles binary conceptualisations of architecture, the home, public space, and domestic labour. To this end, the following projects involve placing domestic artefacts in unexpected non-residential spaces to draw attention to what Ingraham describes as the 'architectural breach' (1998, 24), that is, an interference with cultural, disciplinary and spatial norms. These breaches also rely on locating and leveraging examples of the 'noncapitalist household economy' (Gibson-Graham 2006 [1996], 12), domestic caregiving and social labours in other, non-residential spaces. It is to the first example of breaching – that is, the breaching of the line between property and the proprietary – that the article now turns.

Fence Parasite (2014+)

Though *Fence Parasite* has already been discussed as an example of exploratory, feminist architectural practice (Smith 2016), it is included here as a brief primer, showing how the foregrounding of artefacts rather than fixed built forms productively unsettles a proprietary understanding of the domestic-public spatial relationship. This creative research

project centres upon the delivery of an ‘architectural breach’ whereby a table and accompanying stools are located on a front property fence and can be folded out and used to occupy the adjacent domestic garden and public footpath areas simultaneously. The configurations of the table and stools are determined by the occupants at the time.

Fence Parasite takes the proprietary and its contestations quite literally as a project site, rendered visible particularly when the stools and fence are in their closed resting position straddling the existing fence – an otherwise-invisible legal bounding line between private and public space (Figure 1). When opened and spatially activated, the distributed furniture components create a physical condition that supports the introduction of other domestic artefacts (food, plates, drinks, condiments) drawn internally from the adjacent private home as well as externally from the nearby local shops. These artefacts, and the table-stools, temporarily enter into the public realm and return thereafter to their seemingly ‘proper’ locations, as if an ‘architectural power can be newly located in this moving recapitulation and temporary recovery of the object’ (Ingraham 1998, 147).

First installed in 2014–2015 on an inner urban fence in the post-industrial regional Australian city of Newcastle, north of Sydney, the table and stools are themselves in a state of flux, materially and spatially (Figure 2): the steel hinges holding together the plywood planes of tables and stool are now rusted, the plywood itself chipped and weathered by the storms that regularly visit the regional coastal street in which it is located. They continue to operate as a much-loved scaffold for impromptu neighbourhood gatherings, but ultimately rely upon willing neighbourhood actors to perform the breach. The next case study project, *Streetlife*, considers the way in which more densely occupied urban footpaths are regularly invaded by domestic acts and actors, acknowledged or otherwise.

Streetlife (2015+)

The pedagogical project, *Streetlife*, involves student observations and visual outputs exploring temporary domesticised spaces in the footpaths of Sydney and Phnom Penh. In an interuniversity fieldwork course, students examine socio-spatial practices that flow, adapt and leak, much like Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘lines of flight’ (2005 [1980], 415). Through student-created analytic diagrams, attention is drawn to fluid, ordinary,



Figure 1. *Fence Parasite*, Cathy Smith and Rowan Olsson (2014+). Source: Cathy Smith (2014).



Figure 2. A wandering *Fence Parasite* stool leg discovered one morning on the footpath. Source: Cathy Smith (2016).

and often-unnoticed exchanges between urban and domestic objects, actions, and bodies. This course posits both space and learning as ‘parts of the ‘becoming world’, where everything is interconnected and learning happens in a stumbling, trial and error sort of way’ (Gibson-Graham 2011, 4).

Street studies in Sydney’s Lakemba and Phnom Penh’s Sangkat Phsar Kandal Ti Pir reveal bottom-up examples of seemingly ‘messy’ public-private and domestic-urban boundaries. Hou and Chalana describe messiness as ‘urban conditions and processes that do not follow institutionalised or culturally prescribed notions of order’ (2016, 3). Extending this is Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘rhizomatic’ system of organisation which ‘has not beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo’ (2005 [1980], 25).

Lakemba and Sangkat Phsar Kandal Ti Pir have diverse social, economic, political, and cultural settings. They are examined here as two instances of one larger study whilst allowing the complexities of each location to mutually unfold as a way of ‘seeing better’ the other (Livingstone 2003, 484). Students, staff and community members from Sydney and Phnom Penh are the projects transcultural agents (Hou 2013, 12), providing ‘insider’ skill and knowledge in each location.

Streetlife’s first location is Haldon Street in southwestern Sydney’s Lakemba. It hosts transnational communities from Lebanon, Bangladesh, China, Vietnam, Pakistan and

Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016), coalescing in what could be described as a diverse 'ethnopolis' (Laguerre in Cairns 2004, 18). Frequently demonised by the media, and subject to disproportionate surveillance during COVID-19 lockdowns (Shad 2021), Haldon Street residents demonstrate a 'quiet encroachment of the ordinary' (Bayat 2000, 547), through an architecture-by (not for)-migrants that holds the aesthetics of possibility (Cairns 2004, 21). The occupation of public and private space in Haldon Street embodies Ingraham's 'architectural breach' as the straddling of two or more trans-cultural worlds where 'subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture' (Pratt 1992, 6). In their dynamic, and quietly defiant, occupation of public space, Lakemba's transnational community members invoke the nomadic, not as travellers but through their 'consciousness-raising and the subversion of set conventions' (Braidotti 2011, 26).

Haldon Street defies the typical consumptive sites of 'domestication by cappuccino' (Zukin 2009, 4) found in Sydney's urban milieu. Instead, it is characterised by unique local street phenomena, generated by community members, whereby everyday objects (furniture, plates, food, cooking utensils, clothes) seep from the interior to comfortably occupy the exterior urban realm. Many of these objects emerge from adjacent hospitality and retail venues, thus may not initially appear to be domestic themselves. However closer inspection reveals the ways in which their uses support domestic occupations of the public realm, and where 'familiarity and intimacy converge across space and time for the reconstructed atmosphere of domesticity to empower its inhabitants to [...] to feel at home' (Mace 2016, 76).

Shopfront thresholds (Figure 3a) see clothes racks occupy the footpath, turning the interior 'wardrobe' out whilst simultaneously disrupting the once linear path of pedestrian movement. Similarly, the sensory and olfactory effects of mobile food stands spilling from shop interiors (Figure 3b) thicken and distort the private-public thresholds. Tenants adorn their shopfront awnings with decorative elements: swaying plastic Islamic motifs, layers of bunting with Arabic phrases, a sea of metallic wind chimes (Figure 3c). Often conceptualised as subservient to fixed built structure, here ornamentation transgresses the interior boundary to subvert urban form, gender and culture politics. Ornamentation is historically analogous with both femininity and the domestic interior, thus seen to be superfluous to architecture and the urban realm (Zamberlan 2013, 106). Adornments on Haldon Street's urban awnings indeed evoke a home-like intimacy, becoming a powerful 'site in which the exploration of cultural politics occurs' (Lewis, Lewis, and Tsurumaki 2006, 20).

Studies of street life in Sydney's Lakemba are repeated in Phnom Penh and examined again through the lens of nomadism. Following Livingstone's (2003) methodology, Cambodian students, educators, and community members are brought into intimate dialogue with 'outsider' perspectives from Australian students and educators. In central Phnom Penh's Sangkat Phsar Kandal Ti Pir, on Preah Ang Yukanthor Street (as in Lakemba), the domestic does not oppose public life. Rather, it is here that we explicitly see that the boundaries between public-exterior-urban / private-interior-domestic are culturally, socially, politically and economically generated and re-generated, noting also that the city was 'remade from scratch after being almost totally evacuated under the Khmer Rouge regime in 1975–1979' (Simone 2008, 188). Footpaths are a particularly fluid space for paid and domestic labour, community connection and social networking, where 'everything is to be negotiated ... because everything seems to be changing

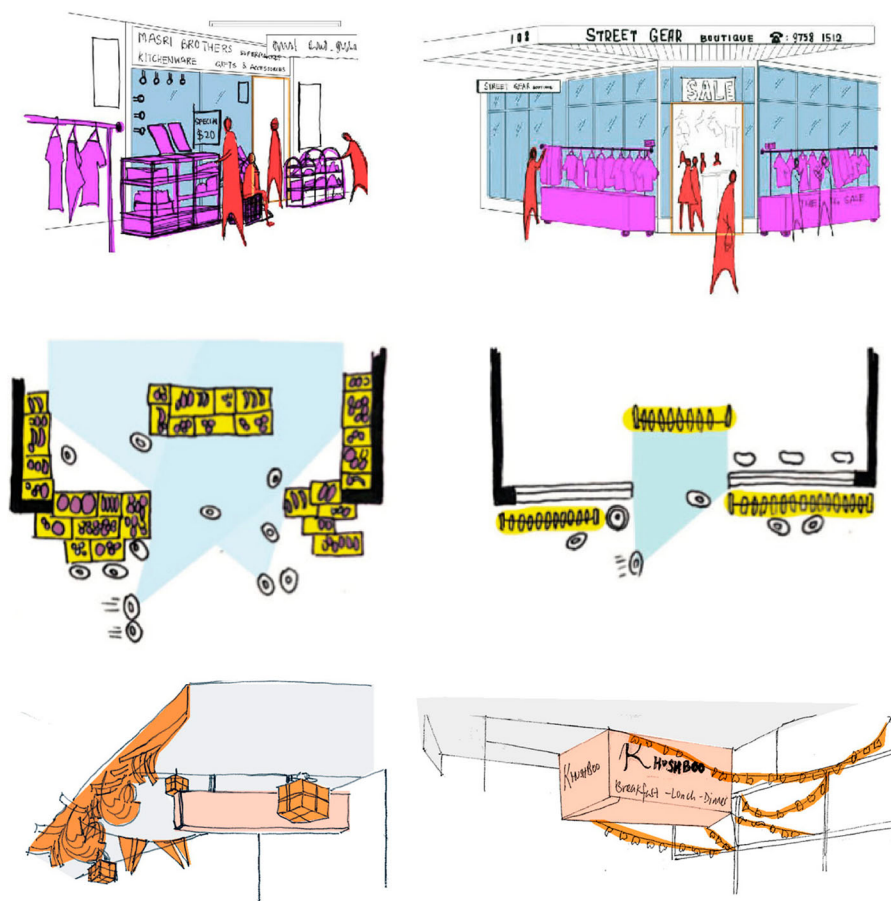


Figure 3. (a–c): *Streetlife: Sydney*. Composite of student-created threshold diagrams from the ‘Streetlife Studies’ course, UNSW Sydney, RUFA Phnom Penh. Top to bottom, (a) clothes racks turn the inside out, source: Andrea Picones (2019), (b) food stands evoke threshold as smell. Source: Tandia Hardcastle (2019), (c) adorned shopfront awnings. Source: Anina Carl (2018).

around us all the time’ (Simone 2008, 196). According to Simone (2008, 201), Phnom Penh is a ‘so-called inclusive city’ where inclusion is not driven by a policy of integration but ‘as a by-product of residents having access to diverse spaces of operation through which they can come in contact with each other and do something with that contact other than participating in shared consumption’. Architecture and the city exist here as ‘the furniture we are forever rearranging’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2005 [1980], 21).

The collective and dynamic inhabitation of street space in Phnom Penh has nonetheless been under threat since the late 1990s, due in part to urban beautification agendas (Hughes 2003) which disproportionately impact the vulnerable and dominantly female street vendor population (IDEA & APWLD 2021). Authorities in Cambodia have referred to informally occupied spaces and those who inhabit them as *anatepadei* or anarchy (Strangio 2014); ‘orderly’ property lines are increasingly being enforced, aiming to clear footpaths of non-pedestrian activity (Rachna 2017). This is a ‘beautification’ through a process of othering (Hou 2013, 4).

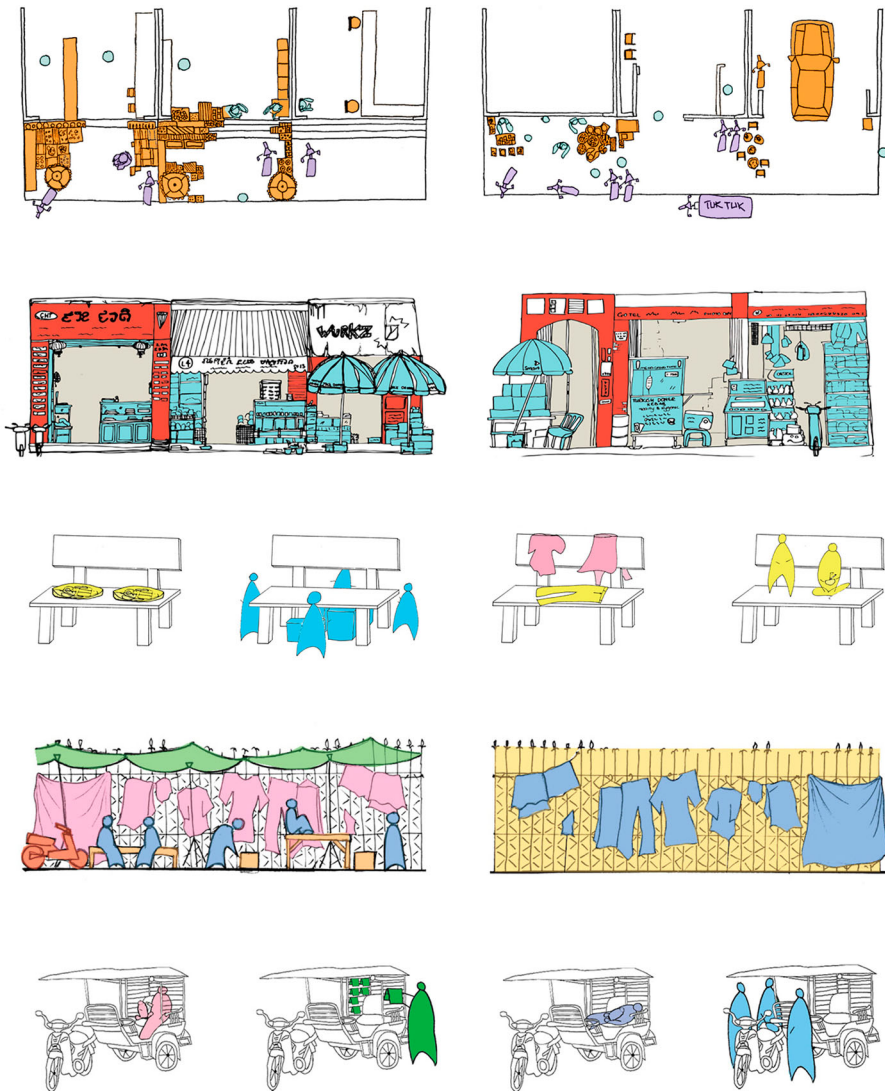


Figure 4. (a–e): *Streetlife: Phnom Penh*. Composite of student-created diagrams from the ‘Streetlife Studies’ course, UNSW Sydney, RUFA Phnom Penh. Top to bottom, (a) threshold dynamics, source: Sara Clipperton (2019), (b) threshold dynamics, source: Emma Hastie (2018), (c) bench as domestic host, source: Michelle Ly (2017), (d) fence as domestic host, source: Farros Ghazi Fatih Djodjohardjo (2018), (e) tuk tuk as wandering domestic host. Source: Daniela Novakovic (2018).

For now, footpaths in Phnom Penh are a seemingly exaggerated version of Lakemba. Loose retail objects, furniture, ornaments, and bodies unfold onto footpaths whilst the urban realm pushes inwards, with motorbikes and cars sidling up and crossing the thresholds of stores and homes (Figure 4a and b). Everyday objects are unhinged from their disciplinary roots (Muller and Langill 2021, 10) to muddy the binary conditions often accepted in cities of the Global North. Domestic objects and acts are also entirely decoupled from interior-external thresholds. In one example, a bench

adjacent a shopfront is a place for the shop owner's domestic labour of drying fish, storing food, washing clothes, sleeping, and monitoring child's play (Figure 4c). Phnom Penh's fences are also appropriated in an amplified version of the *Fence Parasite* project. They host hybrid commercial-domestic urban rooms for street vendors and their families (Figure 4d). Articulated material surfaces afford the hanging of tarpaulins for shelter, hammocks to rock young ones, clothes for drying, pots and pans for food vending, and tiny nooks for personal knick-knacks. Wandering domestic acts also intersect with wandering urban objects. The tuk tuk of a paratransit driver is a domestic node; for day napping and night sleeping, feeding, and breastfeeding children, hanging laundry to dry, eating, and socialising with friends over a game of cards (Figure 4e).

Celebrating these footpath and streetscape boundary breaches, it is important to neither romanticise (Dovey 2012, 385; Lombard 2014, 49) nor 'gloss over' (Devlin 2010, 132) the very real threats that street vendors face in their use of footpath space as a livelihood necessity. Predominantly women, street vendors often come from provinces outside of Phnom Penh, setting up temporary homes on the street and subject to facing harassment threats in the early and late hours. As informal workers, they are unprotected by social security and charged 'fuzzy fees' for use of space, umbrellas, sanitation, security, and police bribes (Economic Institute Cambodia 2006). Phnom Penh's urban poor communities demonstrate a quiet resistance and resilience similar to that seen in Lakemba. Despite unjust conditions, 'residents with limited economic means, through their configuration of space, social relations and infrastructure continuously attempt to construct the conditions that enable the city to act as a flexible resource for the viable organization of their everyday lives' (Simone 2008, 1).

Streetlife, in both Sydney's Haldon Street and Phnom Penh's Preah Ang Yukanthor Street, demonstrates an alternative mode of socio-spatial practice where moving objects, actors and actions defy the definitive lines, disciplinary norms and power relationships of architecture and urban planning (Kabachnik 2012; Petrescu 2013). Both locations arguably embody Yiftachel's 'gray space' of urban informalities that are expanding from the global South-East to North-Western cities, particularly in transnational communities (2009, 97). Entangled in the undeniable challenges faced by community members in Lakemba and Sangkat Phsar Kandal Ti Pir is the breaching and blurring of private-interior-domestic and public-exterior-urban boundaries, thus 'making visible urban possibilities that have been crowded out or left diffuse or opaque' (Simone 2004, 14). Both the temporary domesticised spaces of *Fence Parasite* and *Streetlife*'s wandering objects involve the purposeful relocation of domestic objects and attendant behaviours. From 'temporary domesticised spaces' to objects out of their domestic environment, the following case project, *Public Beds*, focuses on disposed mattresses left on streets, serving an active role in their own *Streetlife*.

Public Beds (2019+)

Public Beds is an ongoing research project (2019+) examining domestic objects' social and political roles when located beyond their usual domestic environment. The project is a visual database of discarded bed mattresses discovered in footpath locations

across Sydney. The images focus on the beds as displaced domestic objects without an active human presence, thus exploring 'the potentialities of three-dimensional space in a two-dimensional medium' (Shields 2014, 2).

A mattress refers to a large fabric pad usually placed on a bed base (or bed frame) and described as a fabric case filled with resilient materials (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, [undated](#)). Thus, a mattress could be considered as a bounded object with composed of many hidden layers from straw, hair, feather, cotton or foam rubber. Historically, these inner layers were held in place by various forms of wire mesh, chain-link, and vertical coil-springs (Wright 1962, 238–240). 'Making the bed' is a phrase originating from medieval times, when it referred to taking a sack and filling it with hay (Worsley 2011). Contemporary bed mattresses are ready-made and more durable than their medieval forebears, but nonetheless still function as a container in the same manner as their predecessors. Even in private dwellings, mattresses are typically hidden under other layers such as bed-sheets and quilts.

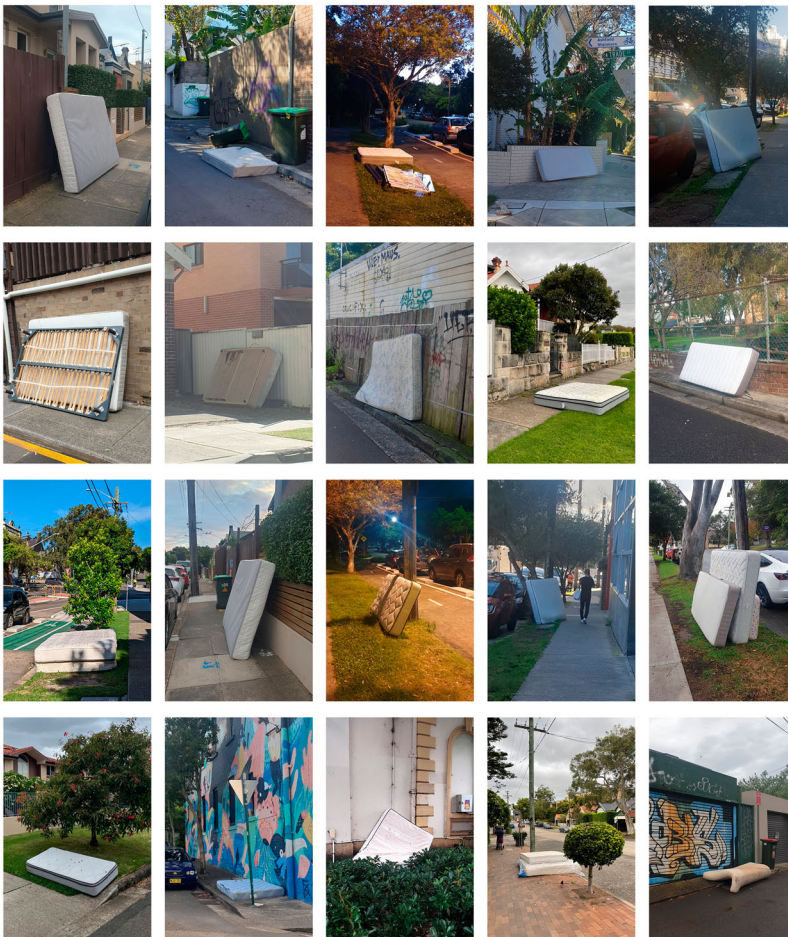


Figure 5. Disposed mattresses in non-domestic space, as public encounters. Source: Demet Dincer (2019–2022).

Unlike the street furniture and domestic objects described in previous projects, mattresses are rarely considered to have an afterlife once removed from private domestic dwellings, primarily due to health and safety concerns. When discarded on public footpaths, they typically wait to be collected by government refuse collection services (Figure 5). The shifting domestic status of each mattress renders it part of the ongoing 'vast uncontrolled experiments' (Gibson-Graham 2011, 1) within a city. Due to its intimate association with domestic privacy and bodily intimacy, the mattress has also become an artistic medium for questioning norms about female bodies, domestic settings and society, in a genre described as 'bedroom-as-artwork' (Genç 2019). A case in point is Tracy Emin's 1998 seminal and provocative *My Bed* in which the artist reconstructed her own bedroom as a public exhibition. It consisted of her bed frame and mattress replete with wrinkled and stained dirty bed sheets, and other private objects spread across the floor (stained underwear and a used condoms). In 1999, the artist Semiha Berksoy's bedroom was exhibited in the Bonn Museum, alongside her intimate personal objects. Both artists included powerful statements about 'private reality' and 'the agency of the body in the cultural realm' (Baydar 2012, 33). These infamous public beds breach traditional boundaries between the intimate spaces of the body and broader publics.

Though far more quotidian than the aforementioned gallery mattresses, those discovered in Sydney streets are arguable instances of Ingraham's 'architectural breach': they interfere with the spatial norms by breaching the lines between property and the proprietary, between sites of private domestic occupation and the public domain. The mattresses in Figure 6 typify the ways in which discarded mattresses disrupt public contexts, akin to 'unmade beds' for unexpected guests. When left open to the gaze of the public, a mattress still invokes the privacy of its domestic environment. Placed in open air and public settings, these *beds* both 'contain' traces (literal and figurative) of the intimate relationship between a body and a bed, while forming new and temporary urban thresholds of their own.

Conclusion

For us, challenging the physical and conceptual limits of what constitutes the home and public civic, as well as architecture and its practice more broadly, is a feminist act: it draws attention to the intangible soft lines of space, particularly those labours, materials and occupations that are rendered invisible through the privileging of the hard lines of structure and

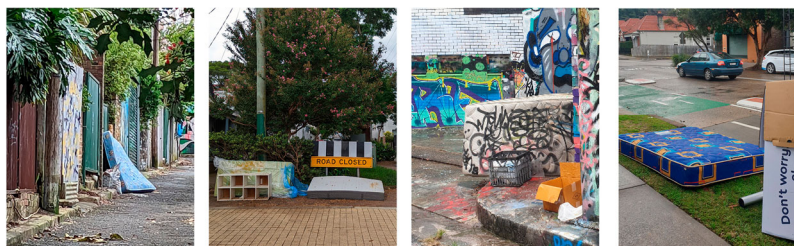


Figure 6. Mattresses placed in a public square, street, and/or on a footpath. Source: Demet Dincer (2022).

property boundaries. Through these three projects we have considered how, through the wandering of domestic objects – that is, being with domestic objects – we encounter a liveliness that actively challenges the singularity of the architectural line and its associated power structures. *Fence Parasite* took the domestic property line as a theme and site for productive intervention; *Streetlife* further explored urban footpath conditions augmented and transformed by domestic artefacts, actions and bodies, acknowledging the socio-political complexities of a multicultural and multi-sited project; *Public Beds* considered the implications of placing a ubiquitous domestic artefact in the public realm by documenting disposed mattresses where they shift the boundaries between private and public, and where traces of human bodies themselves became the elements that displaced the urban, non-residential settings in which they were documented.

Our approach, both to the article and the respective design projects, is akin to a line turned over itself. It is a conscious and directed feminist inversion in which the domestic, which has been hidden, marginalised, quashed and simply ignored, is awarded its place in architectural discourse. Our discussion of these three projects provokes acknowledgement of an expanding, elastic threshold of exchange between the domestic interior and the urban street in which we may question ingrained assumptions concerning what is public and what is private – and in turn how we may design architectural space to nurture complex, messy, feminist lives.

Acknowledgments

Fence Parasite was supported by a University of Newcastle New Staff Grant (2014, grant number 1031772) with research assistance by Rowan Olsson.

Streetlife Studies is collaboratively convened through an academic-practitioner network in Australia and Cambodia, including Kong Kosal, Chhay Karno, and Phal Piseth (Royal University of Fine Arts, Phnom Penh), Vuth Lyno (Sa Sa Art Projects), Pen Sereypagna (nk-a), Tia Vannvera, Richard Briggs, and Giacomo Butte. This project is conducted according to the University of New South Wales' *Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) requirements for the conduct of research*, Approval Number HR191056, 30 March 2022. Funding for this project is provided by the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan Mobility Program (grant number 29619) and the Southeast Asia Neighborhood's Network (core funding from the Henry Luce Foundation, UNSW grant number PS66736), with past philanthropic support from Design Tribe Projects and Action Change.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by a 2014 University of Newcastle New Staff Grant (grant number 1031772), an Australian Government New Colombo Plan Mobility Program grant (number 29619), and a Henry Luce Foundation Asia Program grant (grant number PS66736).

Notes on Contributors

Cathy Smith is a registered Australian architect, interior designer and academic whose transdisciplinary research and practice seeks to understand and promote inclusive built environments. Her

scholarly research on DIY production methodologies, creative placemaking and meanwhile property use has been widely published in sector and scholarly journals.

Ainslie Murray is an interdisciplinary artist and academic trained in architecture. Her practice-based research explores the formation and inhabitation of architectural space in everyday life through attention to atmosphere, motion and itinerancy. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally.

Demet Dincer is an award-winning international architect and academic who applies transdisciplinary approach to her research and practice, with an emphasis on nonhuman agencies in design.

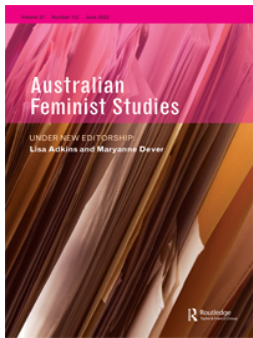
Eva Lloyd is an interdisciplinary educator with professional qualifications in architecture and interior architecture, and a particular interest in social justice through community-centered design practice. She specialises in education collaborations connecting academia, civil society, and creative practitioners, in local and international contexts.

References

- Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2016. Lakemba. 2016 Census All Persons QuickStats accessed 15 September 2022.
- Ballantyne, Andrew. 2013. "Deleuze, Architecture and Social Fabrication." In *Deleuze and Architecture*, edited by Hélène Frichot, and Stephen Loo, 182–196. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Ballantyne, Andrew, and Christopher Smith. 2011. *Architecture in the Space of Flows*. London: Routledge.
- Bayat, A. 2000. "From Dangerous Classes' to Quiet Rebels' Politics of the Urban Subaltern in the Global South." *International Sociology* 15 (3): 533–557. doi:10.1177/026858000015003005.
- Baydar, Gulsum. 2012. "Bedrooms in Excess: Feminist Strategies Used By Tracey Emin and Semiha Berksoy." *Woman's Art Journal* 33 (2): 28–34. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24395286>.
- Braidotti, Rosi. 2011. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory, Second Edition*. 2nd ed. City: Columbia University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/brai15388>
- Brott, Simone. 2016. *Architecture for a Free Subjectivity*. London: Routledge.
- Burns, Karen. 2013. "Becomings: Architecture, Feminism, Deleuze-Before and After the Fold." In *Deleuze and Architecture*, edited by Hélène Frichot, and Stephen Loo, 15–39. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Cairns, Stephen. 2004. *Drifting: Architecture and Migrancy*. London: Routledge.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 2005 [1980]. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. London: Athlone Press.
- Devlin, Ryan Thomas. 2010. "Informal urbanism: legal ambiguity, uncertainty, and the management of street vending in New York City." Doctoral dissertation. Berkeley: University of California Berkeley.
- Dovey, Kim. 2012. "Informal Urbanism and Complex Adaptive Assemblage." *International Development Planning Review* 34 (4): 349–369. doi:10.3828/idpr.2012.23.
- Economic Institute of Cambodia. 2006. Decent Work in the Informal Economy in Cambodia: A Literature Review. International Labour Office. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-asia/-ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_bk_pb_132_en.pdf.
- Genç, Kaya. 2019. "Semiha Berksoy." *Art in America*, Reviews, (1 May). <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/aia-reviews/semiha-berksoy-62682/>.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. 2006 [1996]. *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. 2011. "A Feminist Project of Belonging for the Anthropocene." *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 18 (1): 1–21. doi:10.1080/0966369X.2011.535295.
- Graeber, David. 2001. *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Grosz, Elizabeth. 2001. *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT.
- Hou, Jeffrey. 2013. *Transcultural Cities: Border Crossing and Placemaking*. London: Routledge.
- Hou, Jeffrey, and Manish Chalana. 2016. "Untangling the "Messy" Asian City. Messy Urbanism: Understanding the "Other" Cities of Asia." In *Messy Urbanism: Understanding the "Other" Cities of Asia*, 1st ed., edited by Manish Chalana, and Jeffrey Hou, 1–21. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Hughes, Caroline. 2003. "Phnom Penh: Beautification and Corruption." *IIAS Bulletin* 31: 13–13. https://www.iias.asia/sites/default/files/2020-11/IIAS_NL31_13.pdf.
- Independent Democracy of Economy Informal Association (IDEA) & Asia Pacific Forum on Women, law and Development (APWLD) Labour Programme. . 2021. Organising women street vendors in Phnom Penh to demand labour rights. <https://apwld.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/IDEA-FPAR-Briefer.pdf>.
- Ingold, Tim. 2015. *The Life of Lines*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Ingraham, Catherine. 1988. "The Faults of Architecture: Troping the Proper." *Assemblage* 7: 7–13. doi:10.2307/3171072.
- Ingraham, Catherine. 1991. "Animals 2: The Problem of Distinction." *Assemblage* 14: 25–29. doi:10.2307/3171097.
- Ingraham, Catherine. 1995. "Speakers for the House." *Assemblage* 27: 95–98. doi:10.2307/3171434.
- Ingraham, Catherine. 1998. *Architecture and the Burdens of Linearity*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Ingraham, Catherine. 2004. "Architecture as Evidence." In *Drifting: Architecture and Migrancy*, edited by Stephen Cairns, 61–81. London: Routledge.
- Kabachnik, Peter. 2012. "Nomads and Mobile Places: Disentangling Place, Space and Mobility." *Identities* 19 (2): 210–228. doi:10.1080/1070289X.2012.672855.
- Kovar, Zuzana. 2019. *Architecture in Abjection: Bodies, Spaces and Their Relations*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Lewis, David, Paul Lewis, and Marc Tsurumaki. 2006. "Forward: Decorative Dilemmas." In *Decoration 10*, edited by Emily Abruzzo, and Jonathan Solomon, 20–21. New York: 306090 Inc.
- Livingstone, Sonia. 2003. "On the Challenges of Cross-National Comparative Media Research." *European Journal of Communication* 18 (4): 477–500. doi:10.1177/0267323103184003.
- Lombard, Melanie. 2014. "Constructing Ordinary Places: Place-Making in Urban Informal Settlements in Mexico." *Progress in Planning* 94: 1–53. doi:10.1016/j.progress.2013.05.003.
- Mace, Valerie. 2016. "The Transfigured Phenomena of Domesticity in the Urban Interior." *Idea Journal* 15: 16–37. doi:10.37113/ideaj.vi0.53.
- Manning, Erin. 2012. *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Undated. "Mattress". *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. Accessed 02.03.2022, <https://www.merriam2.03.-webster.com/dictionary/mattress>.
- Muller, Lizzie, and Caroline Seck Langill. 2021. "Introduction: How Lively Objects Disrupt Disciplinary Display." *Curating Lively Objects*, 1–19. New York: Routledge.
- Petrescu, Doina. 2013. "Losing Control, Keeping Desire." In *Architecture and Participation*, edited by Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu, and Jeremy Till, 43–63. London: Routledge.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. 1992. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge.
- Rachna, Thim. 2017. August 10. "Phnom Penh Plans to Clear Shops from Streets, Sidewalks." *The Cambodia Daily*. <https://english.cambodiadaily.com/news/phnom-penh-plans-to-clear-shops-from-streets-sidewalks-133445/>.
- Reed, Christopher. 1996. "Introduction." In *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, edited by Christopher Reed, 7–17. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Rendell, Jane. 1998. "[d]Oing it, (un)Doing it, (Over)Doing it: Rhetorics of Architectural Abuse." In *Occupying Architecture: Between the Architect and the User*, edited by Jonathan Hill, 229–246. London: Routledge.
- Rice, Charles. 2007. *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity*. London, New York: Routledge.

- Sarvimäki, Marja. 2018. *Case Study Strategies for Architects and Designers*. New York and Abingdon: Routledge.
- Shad, Saman. 2021. "Like we're children: Show of force in Sydney's south-west will put community offside." *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 9. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/like-we-re-children-show-of-force-in-sydney-s-south-west-will-put-community-offside-20210708-p5882l.html>.
- Shields, Jennifer. 2014. *Collage and Architecture*. New York: Routledge.
- Simone, Abdoumalik. 2004. *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Simone, Abdoumalik. 2008. "The Politics of the Possible: Making Urban Life in Phnom Penh." *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 29 (2): 186–204. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9493.2008.00328.x.
- Smith, Cathy. 2016. "Body-Building-Becomings." *Australian Feminist Studies* 30 (86): 402–417. doi:10.1080/08164649.2016.1158688.
- Speaks, Michael. 1995. "Folding Towards a New Architecture." In *Earth Moves: The Furnishing of Territories, Writing Architecture Series*, edited by Bernard Cache, and Translator Anne Boyman. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Strangio, Sebastian. 2014. Phnom Penh is Arresting the Poor and Sending Them to Abusive "Vocational Centres". *Next City*, July 10. <https://nextcity.org/urbanist-news/phnom-penh-is-arresting-the-poor-and-sending-them-to-abusive-vocational-cen>.
- Thorpe, Amelia. 2018. "Pop-Up Property: Enacting Ownership from San Francisco to Sydney." *Law & Society Review*, 23 (3), 740–772.
- Worsley, Lucy. 2011. *If Walls Could Talk: The Bedroom*, video, 54:4, <https://search.informit-org.wwwproxy1.library.unsw.edu.au/doi/10.3316edutv.1001230>.
- Wright, Lawrence. 1962. *Warm and Snug: The History of the Bed*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Yiftachel, Oren. 2009. "Theoretical Notes on Gray Cities: The Coming of Urban Apartheid?" *Planning Theory* 8 (1): 88–100. doi:10.1177/1473095208099300.
- Zamberlan, Lisa. 2013. "Eye Candy: The Manhattan Residence of Joseph Holtzman." *Idea Journal* 13 (1): 100–113. doi:10.37113/ideaj.v0i0.83.
- Zukin, Sharon. 2009. *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



'Persistent' Migrant Kitchens: Spatial Analogies and the Politics of Sharing

Anoma Pieris & Kelum Palipane

To cite this article: Anoma Pieris & Kelum Palipane (2022) 'Persistent' Migrant Kitchens: Spatial Analogies and the Politics of Sharing, *Australian Feminist Studies*, 37:112, 169-187, DOI: [10.1080/08164649.2023.2199909](https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2023.2199909)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2023.2199909>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 12 Apr 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 2960



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 2 View citing articles [↗](#)

'Persistent' Migrant Kitchens: Spatial Analogies and the Politics of Sharing

Anoma Pieris^a and Kelum Palipane^b

^aMelbourne School of Design, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia; ^bFaculty of Architecture Building and Planning, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia

ABSTRACT

Using the spatial analogy of the migrant kitchen this article makes an argument for diversifying Australian feminist architectural practice and disciplinary inquiry to anticipate other culturally plural framings and experiences of the built environment. Its parallel focus on four ethnographic vignettes offers insights into the ways in which migrants mobilise familial culinary traditions for building ontological security in new environments, examining how constituent parts of kitchen spaces migrate and are adapted by Lankan-Australians in Melbourne and Canberra. It argues that the 'transmigration' of kitchens and their hybrid reincarnation uncovers nuanced, temporal, socio-political dimensions of migrant origin and experience indecipherable to host communities that frequently reduce them to ethno-cultural traits. We discuss the assimilatory practices that migrant women of colour daily navigate as revealing the unavoidable complexities within normative constructions of the Australian home. We posit the migrant kitchen as a site of adaptation and persistence in the face of diffused processes of assimilation.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 18 March 2022

Accepted 3 April 2023

KEYWORDS

Kitchens; migration; domestic labour; domestic architecture; women of colour

'Persistent' Migrant Kitchens: Spatial Analogies and the Politics of Sharing

By addressing an intense material site of migrant ontological persistence – the kitchen – this article seeks to explore practices through which migrants negotiate assimilation. It builds upon recent scholarship on migrant dwellings in Australia as culturally differentiated spaces, despite being constrained by Anglo-Australian house forms and values (Lozanovska 2019). The spatial analogy helps us, as Sri Lankan diasporic scholars, articulate our personal struggles with the assimilatory Anglo-Australian spatial systems and institutional values we inhabit. Our intellectual interrogations are inspired by the efforts of Sara Ahmed (2012) and Divya Tolia-Kelly (2017) at institutional decolonisation within the Western academy as well as Chandra Talpade Mohanty's (1988) seminal critique of the discursive colonisation of 'the third-world woman' by western feminist scholarship.

CONTACT Anoma Pieris  apieris@unimelb.edu.au

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

We aim to challenge the gender-centric universalisation of Anglo-Australian interpretations of home by describing our efforts at traversing differences based on race, class and affective subjectivity with which, in particular, kitchen spaces are imbued. Our approach is both ethnographic (based on interviews with Lankan diaspora) and auto-ethnographic. Borrowing Annelise Morris's (2017) conceptualisation, we argue that the four vignettes of kitchen spaces we present here offer narratives of *persistence* rather than of *resistance* to systems of oppression, our reactions to living in a social system that is not of our own making. In the case of Australia, it is one that reconfigures us as minority and migrant settlers imbricated in overwhelmingly white settler environments, but with limited agency. Inspired by Morris's conceptualising in relation to Black farmsteaders in south-eastern Illinois (2017) and her critical reading of bell hooks's essay 'Homeplace: A Site of Resistance' (1990), we explore the possible conceptual salience of the socio-spatial and material practices of *defensive persistence*. We argue that tactics of persistence in the kitchen, brokered under pressures to assimilate, provide ontological security through the continuity of socio-spatial and material practices. These sites, as guarded spaces of culture, resist erasures associated with assimilation, they humanise (hooks 1990), replenish and sustain. They are meaningful in ways that are not contingent on the host culture. However, the ethnographic vignettes illustrate that these gains are underpinned by considerable labour signified in the recreation of objects, layouts, patterns of use, labour-intensive culinary practices, and the continuous realignment of sensibilities. The consideration of *defensive persistence* allows us to foreground this labour, a type that is quotidian and typically negotiated by women that could be easily overlooked when considered through the lens of resistance.

Morris further argues that framing such placemaking practices in narratives of persistence helps avoid binary frameworks of analysis and allows for nuanced, multiple interpretations. It is a multiplicity that is also concomitant with the Chicana feminist theorising of *la facultad*, described by Gloria Anzaldúa and theorised by Chela Sandoval as 'survival skills' deployed by certain marginalised people in the face of ontologically insecurity (Moya 2002). Our work is grounded in the considerable scholarly attention given to narratives of resistance in critical race theory, black feminist scholarship and postcolonial subaltern studies. However, the expectation of one-sided absorption into a majority culture's norms is our main concern. Australia's co-location with Asian-neighbours and immigrant populations, suggests a tension-filled regional porosity evocative of the settler-migrant-race relations that Chicana feminists explore for the American continent. Among the concepts tested and elaborated on later is whether normative feminist spatial tropes in architecture such as *parlour* and *the kitchen table* can be rethought to accommodate lenticular habitations of multiple entangled and transnational diasporic realities (Hage 2021).

The above-mentioned theories addressing specific narratives of discrimination resonate with Sri Lankan experiences both of decolonisation and of migration to a formerly settler-colonial space alongside associated challenges of occupying predefined intellectual/institutional and physical conceptions of space. More importantly, the above intellectual framing helps us enrich narratives of persistence from an architectural perspective on how migrants simultaneously negotiate multiple, historically conditioned, lived realities.

The article argues that the 'transmigration' and hybrid reincarnation of kitchens as settings for culinary practices uncover nuanced, temporal, intersectional (Crenshaw 1989)

dimensions of migrant origin and experience often indecipherable to host communities that receive them as and reduce them to ethno-cultural traits based on static culinary traditions. These in turn are largely encountered only as ethnically coded consumer practices and commodities with scant awareness of the dynamic socio-spatial and material practices and environments they signify. This article posits the migrant kitchen as a site of adaptation and persistence in the face of diffused processes of assimilation.

Transmigration of the Kitchen

The literature at the intersection of home space, culinary cultures, eating and migrancy is interdisciplinary and varied; however, the significance of home space, culinary cultures, and eating for diasporic ontological security is a recurrent theme (Mannur 2022; Divya Tolia-Kelly 2010), alongside sensitisation to the sensory and material cues that give them relevance and meaning (Pink 2004). Whereas several scholars have described the embodied, haptic and kinetic attributes of memories related to food preparation and consumption as mediated by nostalgia (Sutton 2009), Meah and Jackson's framing of kitchens as conduits to a past (2016, 517, 520), illustrates the potential of such spaces as analytical tools for unlocking both positive and negative recollections.

The architectural lens on home, migrancy and Asian racial subjectivity additionally raises issues of assimilability into the Anglo-Australian architectural cultures core values. The pressure to assimilate through domestication conjectures an unhomely and unequal environment (bell hooks 1990) resonant of exploitative or patronising settler-colonial relations of Indigenous servitude (Haskins 2019). In such examples, Indigenous women enter the parlour or kitchen in relationships of subservience to be domesticated and civilised by their women employers; relations that parallel colonial-era racial servitude in Asia (Haskins 2022). Beyond relations of racialised exploitation, expressive formal and aesthetic departures from normative taste values in post-world World War II refugee and labour-migrants' homes in Australia suggest nuanced contestations of inter-European cultural absorption of the non-Anglophone into Anglophone value systems (Lozanovska 1997, 2019). By exploring migrants' design preferences Mirjana Lozanovska challenges the discipline's unquestioning advocacy of elite Euro-American and British spaces and values. Such disciplinary value-constructions that seamlessly elevate colonial and then Western values have embedded implicitly racialised notions of a universal modernity in Asian built environments, something that is being questioned by the growing feminist architectural focus on situated forms of domesticity (Chee and Park 2013; Chee and Seng 2017; Desai 2007). Among diasporic Lankan scholars, however, theorisations of domesticity have tended towards political entanglements of home, homeland and nation (Thiranagama 2011; Kandasamy, Perera, and Ratnam 2020); analogies for communicating the amplified war-related traumas twisted into the warp and weft of multi-generational Lankan diasporic families, including in Australia.

The physical transformation of gendered domestic spaces within Sri Lanka and their ramifications for Lankan diasporic ontologies warrant analysis not least because of the high degrees of familial displacement during the last four decades. This article seeks to overlay Lankan diasporic experiences on Sri Lanka's historically transformed kitchen spaces, the changing meanings and associations of which travelled with migrants as embodied spatial practices retrofitted to Anglo-Australian assimilatory norms.

Transmigration becomes evident through locational echoes of certain objects, spatial practices and materialities recurring across time and place. Our method for exploring this borrows in part from Lozanovska's idea of the 'twin house' (2019), recognising that for some transnational diasporic populations – including both economic migrants and refugees – villages, family homes, or those of relatives left behind continue to be part of the affective ontologies of dual and partial belonging. The intimate impacts of these spatially dispersed affective ontologies can be understood through Sara Ahmed's evocation of 'patterns of estrangement' related to 'a splitting of home as a place of origin and home as the sensory world of everyday experience', which prompts her to pose the question, 'how do bodies reinhabit space?' (1999, 341–342). Writing of her own family's journeys from India to Pakistan after Partition, to England, and then migration to Australia, Ahmed describes the complex and contradictory relationships to colonialism, social antagonism, privilege and marginality that stories of dislocation mediate. 'Home', she observes, is often presented as an analogy for memory.

Acts of remembering hence are felt on and in migrant bodies in the form of a discomfort, the failure to fully inhabit the present or present space. Migration can hence be considered as a process of estrangement, a process of becoming estranged from that which was inhabited as home. (1999, 343)

Most recently, Ghassan Hage (2021) has described the 'lenticular condition' of inhabiting multiple entangled and transnational realities that challenge dominant conceptions of social reality and spatial fixity (7–8). By exploring migration as an existential condition coterminous with modernity, Hage offers a new way of theorising 'diasporic lenticularity' as simultaneously evoking multiple spatial and material imaginaries of geographically dispersed home environments which migrants may allude to or draw on. The labour of maintaining families as an organic transnational totality across multiple spaces is equally challenging (125). Those transnational women migrants typified as care givers internalise these multiple modalities of belonging; prioritising one reality over the other in emotional tug-o-wars between familial obligations and different attachments to parents, partners and children split by geography. They speak of guilt, fear of reprehension and the inherent instability of the temporal demands of maintaining divided and distanced obligations simultaneously while combating everyday racial prejudice. In many examples, labour-intensive culinary practices are cited as being cathartic tools of psychological comfort and cultural recovery (86–90).

We discuss here as examples two spatial tropes, *parlour* and *the kitchen table*, both of which have afforded institutional opportunities for feminist architectural praxis in Australia but argue that even as they create discursive spaces to broach difficult topics in the discipline and for the profession, we join with a certain unease. *Parlour: Gender, Equity, Architecture* (<https://archiparlour.org/>) – which describes itself as 'Expanding the spaces for women in Australian architecture' – is an important online institutional platform and forum curated and edited by women professionals/academics that evolved from an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant project, 'Equity and Diversity in the Australian Architecture Profession: Women, Work and Leadership.' The term 'Parlour', though signalling a kind of gendered gentility, has a broader etymology from the French word 'parler' or 'to speak', and has both public and private associations with reception and conversation. The parlour was used in Victorian private dwellings to describe a formal sitting

room, until replaced in mid-twentieth century modern homes by the living/sitting room or lounge, an association that has travelled with the migration of Anglophone immigrant groups to be assimilated as an Australian norm.

In colonial Ceylon (officially named Sri Lanka after 1972), the parlour was described as 'issaraha kamaraya' (the front room), an Anglophile racialised space created during the early twentieth century, late colonial period when British wives and children migrated to the colony provoking rigid lines of segregation between the front (family) and back (servants') quarters. In the homes of Colombo's aspiring indigenous elites, the rarely used parlour with upholstered furnishings, the drawing room for entertaining family members and the shaded and colonnaded front verandah were the main areas of socialisation the latter used for informal gathering and conversation, across class and with acquaintances. Colonial officials maintained this last linear threshold as a racial boundary. As with the Parlour's class association, these historical distinctions we associate with its nomenclature and use, colour our [the authors'] reception of these spaces and their meanings. But, ignoring the parlour's spatial pedigree, the *Parlour* online platform's value is for advancing professional women's empowerment, and we can see that conversations, even difficult ones, enter this domain. In a powerful *Parlour* opinion piece published on 14 July 2016, Sonia Sarangi criticised the profession's unconscious bias asking, 'Who's afraid of ethnic diversity?'. She observed that attrition of diversity in the profession is due to entrenched discriminatory practices that exclude ethnic minorities from senior roles. She notes,

Over the course of my career I have occasionally been made to feel that my ideas were 'too different' or 'not how we do things' – or I've been told 'the client probably won't like it ... [...] ... More damaging was the insinuation that certain clients, teams or consultants would not be able to 'connect' with me, and that I was better off letting someone else do the talking/ presenting (Sarangi 2016).

Pervasive monocultural structural boundaries in her workplace's professional culture hampered Sonia's social mobility as a woman of colour on the basis of her physiognomic features rather than her institutionalised assimilation through tertiary education in Australia.

Spatial analogies, like spatial typologies, are inflected by the cultures that produce them, and may translate poorly in a multi-racial society. Anecdotal evidence suggests that for many post-war non-Anglophone labour-migrants, especially for Southern Europeans, the parlour was a relatively untouched formal space with stuffy, plastic-covered furniture and heavily embroidered curtains, unused except for funerals as the only space large enough to accommodate a coffin. Festivals and weddings were held outdoors under marquees using summer kitchens for outdoor cooking of fish, or lamb on a spit. Gatherings around the kitchen table, a space reserved for servants in Victorian middle-class households served migrants and working-class Australians in place of the parlour. 'Writing Around the Kitchen Table', a critical-spatial writing practices workshop curated by Hélène Frichot and Esther Anatolitis in June 2010 adopted methods simulating critical minor material practices 'deploying make-shift and readily available materials, and how together these processes and materials can participate in creating new, even if provisional identities for peoples and places' (see Frichot, Grillner, and Preston 2017). The framing was adopted from Maud Lavin's (1993) book, *Cut with a Kitchen Knife: Weimar*

Photomontages of Hannah Höch, a member of the Berlin Dada group whose art practice involved reconstructing representations of women and contemporary life by cutting and pasting images from popular media sources. The theme built on Jane Rendell's *Site Writing* (2010) praxis. The confidence and flourish with which feminist creative practice has brought explorations of intimacy and domesticity into public discussions have created a platform that also enables our reflections on migrant homes and labour, in this case, the welcome or unwelcome labour required to sustain culinary traditions. Add to that the implements and vessels used, modified or discarded and the physical capacity of the space to accommodate them, as well as socio-spatial practices and sensorial effects that translate poorly into environments that impose practical limits on immigrant activities.

But even the kitchen table with its open class-consciousness poses problems for the Lankan lens. Ceylon's colonial kitchens were highly racialised spaces, split into two discrete domains as *dunkussiya* (smoke-kitchen. Tamil *kusini* from the Portuguese *cozinha*) with its raised open hearth and firewood stove employing native servants, and the butler's pantry or servery. The twinning of these two spaces persisted past political Independence in 1948 because elite aspirants to colonial status who employed rural migrants as domestic staff adopted a similar class politics. During this period the kitchen migrated from being a soot-and-smoke-filled room extending out from the back verandah at the end of a long storage corridor for sacks of rice, coconuts and large ceramic jars of preserves, to a space abutting the pantry, thus signalling the dissolution of racialised segregation but the retention of class differentiation between householder and employees. Historically, the pantry was the space in which *issaraha kema*, literally 'front food', but more accurately Western dishes and desserts, were prepared by the British wife of the colonial official and later the upper-middle-class 'house-wife', in a space designed to store away precious and expensive electrical appliances that native 'servants' could not be trusted with. Here was the meat safe, a lockable porous cabinet, and the refrigerator, a wooden box fed with ice blocks until the mid-twentieth century when these appliances became affordable to the country's limited middle class. Colonial families employed men as cooks and village women as ayahs (nannies) but indigenous families were more likely to employ women for cooking. White employers, unable to pronounce vernacular languages, gave native 'servants' Western names, like John or Sally, a practice their staff later internalised and continued to identify with up to the 1950s. Village women, unused to furniture, used the kitchen floor for food preparation as in their vernacular dwellings, preparing raw ingredients with bulky implements too heavy for a table top. Food was consumed either at a separate dining table or on a large woven mat.

A troubling teleology of progressive civilisation emerges across the trail of architectural idioms. It equally exposes the divisive colonial, patriarchal or feudal norms that have complicated these societies' reception of Western spatial practices. In Japan, for example, the soot and smoke filled *kamado* (traditional hearth), symbolic of the household, underwent numerous adaptations until the Taishō period (1912–1926) when food preparation and cooking moved from the floor level to the bench top. This movement from the crouching to the upright position has come to represent an internal modernity forced by exogenous influences in an uncomfortable approximation of Darwinist evolutionary discourse overlaid by colonial notions of health, hygiene and European racial superiority. The associated hierarchies were internalised by Asians, notably in interwar Japan when the government

advocated for Westernised chair-based living spaces; and so the post-war *danchi* suburban apartments were designed to have a centralised living-dining and kitchen area after the dependents' housing built by the post-war American occupation forces (Daniels 2010, 31–33). Although the sofa-set and dining table were among the first pieces of furniture to be adopted, the latter was favoured over the former, which was rarely used (Daniels 2010, 31, after Miyawaki 1998, 26–28).

Politicising our liminality – strategically essentialising our outsider status around our differentiated race or colour identities – offers an alternative to rather than a shareable means for understanding the diasporic condition's multilayered and multi-spatial ontological complexity; useful for demanding inclusion, but not in itself an inclusive structure. Hage writes that diasporic subjects,

... have always seen themselves as being subjected to or having to negotiate with, confront, submit to, or move in the shadows between the cracks of an already Western-occupied world organized by laws not theirs ... [...] ... to settle for the crumbs, leftovers and marginal spaces within ordinary colonised nations (Hage 2021, 28).

Among the concepts, Hage introduces is that of anisogamy, or relations between persons of unequal status, and the reciprocity required for maintaining those relationships (52). Viewed in retrospect, the various above-mentioned central and marginal feminist spatial analogies being mobilised by our discipline were partitioned from one another like incongruously coupled culturally different and socially distinct colonial kitchen spaces in a hierarchy of cultures implicit within Australian identity. Focusing beyond these divisive phenomena to common experiences of postcolonial modernity, this next section leads us to the politics of sharing.

Four Kitchens

V's Kitchen

When, in 1965, my grandmother left her bungalow home on the foreshore of the Lunawa estuary, in a township south of Ceylon's former colonial capital Colombo, for a new industrial suburb closer to the city, she incorporated residual elements of her former home into a draftsman-designed American Style house. She also travelled across the temporal watershed of political Independence from a home space defined by colonial ideas of distinction to one that was self-governed, but equally influenced by post-war American notions of modernity. During this journey she shed several entitlements cultivated through mimicry of colonial and feudal status, signifiers by which Lankan elites sustained leisurely lifestyles, such as a retinue of impoverished domestic helpers performing labour-intensive services for the landed gentry in their spacious villas. Unsettled by dislocation, she simulated the habits associated with colonial and feudal architectural features within the confines of her new suburban home by combining the two spatial thresholds of her former house. The colonial porch built for accommodating horse carts was integrated as one 3.6 m garage space in a four-bay two-storey concrete frame structure, with a breezy open balcony above it, large enough for a suite of verandah furniture. The most persistent element of the former home was the *dunkussiya*: a lean-to single storey structure, about 3 m by 5 m internally, clumsily attached to the rear end of the building and entered through a partially screened doorway from a pristine modern kitchen-and-pantry in the main house (Figure 1). Its wood-fed hearth and soot-blackened walls evoked

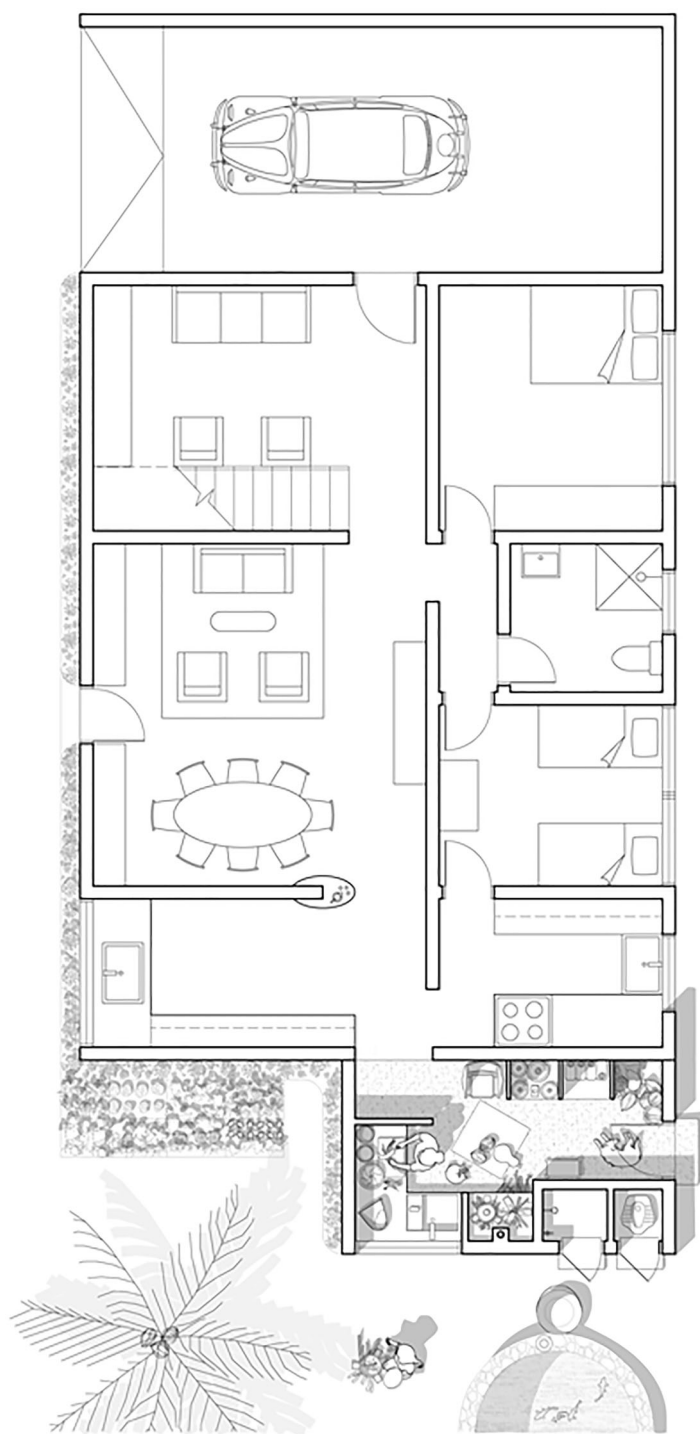


Figure 1. V's Kitchen: Ratmalana House Plan locating the kitchen. Drawn by Dhanika Kumaheri

centuries-old messy preparatory processes that offered forms of sensorial stimulation – of heat and damp and odour – that were being banished from modern homes. Magylin, my grandmother’s ‘servant’, would perch on a low stool balancing a curved cleaver between two toes, dextrously chopping sheaves of leaf-vegetables, and using large woven baskets of various shapes to dry, winnow, gather or sift raw ingredients (Figure 2). The deep throbbing base of the pestle pounding the stone mortar, accompanied by the straining roll of grinding stones produced a unique harmony against the hiss of the fire and clatter of pans. There were other task-specific utensils for sorting rice, for grating coconut and various clay pots and cast iron pans adapted for specific food preparations as well as the various-sized coconut-shell spoons used for cooking. Magylin’s kitchen had a built-in hearth, a concrete bench top with a deep ceramic sink, shelving, storage spaces and wall tiles up to shoulder height. The ‘Western’ pantry and kitchen were equipped with a refrigerator, an ice cream churner, and glass cabinets showcasing modern appliances. The brick partition that relegated the *dunkussiya* to an unsightly past outside sanitised modernity was equally a concession to its ontological centrality to the culinary culture and familial traditions of the house, since relatives, dependents and servants still flowed through the house. My third unmarried aunt, designated housekeeper, shouted instructions past the kitchen’s brick partition, rarely penetrating Magylin’s domain where a menacing dog on a clanking chain and a black soporific cat guarded the hearth.

My relatives depended on village women-helpers to prepare raw ingredients for the multiple sophisticated dishes that relatively affluent Lankan families demanded. Families milled their own rice-flour, dried, pounded and roasted curry powders, boiled sweets, fried snacks, and made pickles, chutneys and preserves. Coconuts used daily as a

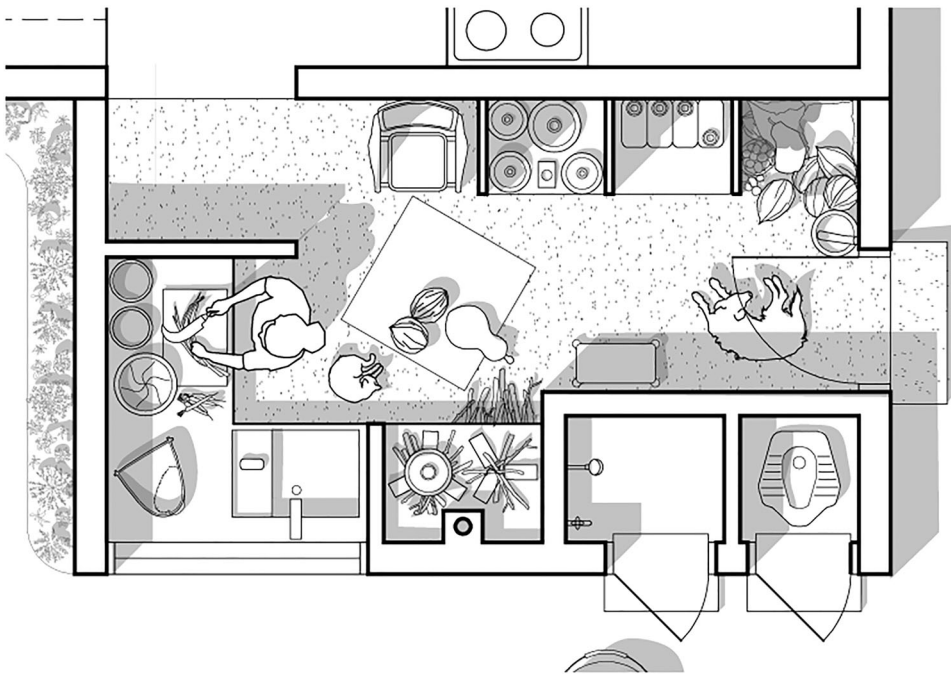


Figure 2. Ratmalana House, *Dunkussiya*. Drawn by Dhanika Kumaheri.

substitute for dairy products had to be grated and squeezed for their milk. Manufacturing processes for dehydrating wet condiments for domestic use were as yet unavailable. Such dependencies were exacerbated with land reform and import substitution during the 1970s when raw staples were rationed and many food stuffs had to be home grown. But the awkward migration and hidden persistence of my grandmother's kitchen in Colombo's outer suburbs was a residual anomaly illustrating my grandmother's refusal to adapt to and my aunties' desire to preserve her from this inexorably middle-class life. Not until marketisation during the 1980s – occurring incongruously alongside escalation of the civil war and increasing exoduses to countries such as Australia – did culinary practices and expectations coalesce as pre-prepared ingredients released women from labour-intensive cooking. These packaged foods travelled overseas to serve populations fleeing the country's political turmoil, facilitating their transition to a differently dislocated and modified migrant kitchen where both the space and its users were equally disembodied. Many of the class distinctions that helped perpetuate elaborate culinary traditions for elite families narrowed. Meanwhile, employment of village women as overseas guest workers in Southeast Asia and the Middle East and related rise in wages and expectations at home forced middle-class women entering the workforce to become dependent on instant foods. The transnational dispersal of cooks and commodities carved pathways through associated and remembered spatial practices for the Lankan kitchen's incremental material migration to Australia.

K's Kitchen

At home, they're confined to a drawer: the spices and condiments that make a meal worthwhile. I worry about their escape, as smells, infusing the soft materials of my apartment or being carried outside with me on my clothes. This sets in motion a familiar regime of chores and practices – opening windows while cooking to displace the droplets of oil suspended in the air, discarding outerwear to be washed just after, regularly washing soft furnishings around the apartment before smells settle in, bleaching away the patina of stains that build up on the white benchtop. There is labour involved here, an exhausting surveillance.

My apartment is one of six in a 1970s exposed brick block in inner-city Melbourne. There is an apartment above mine and one on either side. My kitchen is 10 square metres. My childhood home is a double-storey, 5-bed-room house in the suburbs of Colombo. In comparison, my mother's kitchen spaces include a wet kitchen and a pantry that faces a spacious open-plan dining and living space. Together they are 20 square metres.

Goods and equipment from my mother's kitchen have reincarnated in mine. Unthinkingly, I've even arranged and grouped them as she has. These sub-assemblages of items – a bowl holding bulbs of onions and garlic, the drawer full of spices and aromatics (hers sit on the benchtop), and the kitchen sink with a grinder, rice cooker crowded around it – form points of reference around which my spatial movements primarily occur. It sits at odds in a kitchen designed according to the 'work triangle', a concept developed and touted for efficient kitchen design in the US in the 1940s where the reference points were the sink, stove, and refrigerator.

A mapping of spatial movements and their durational aspects across the two kitchens reveals an implosion in movement possibilities and of reach ([Figure 3](#)). My mother's

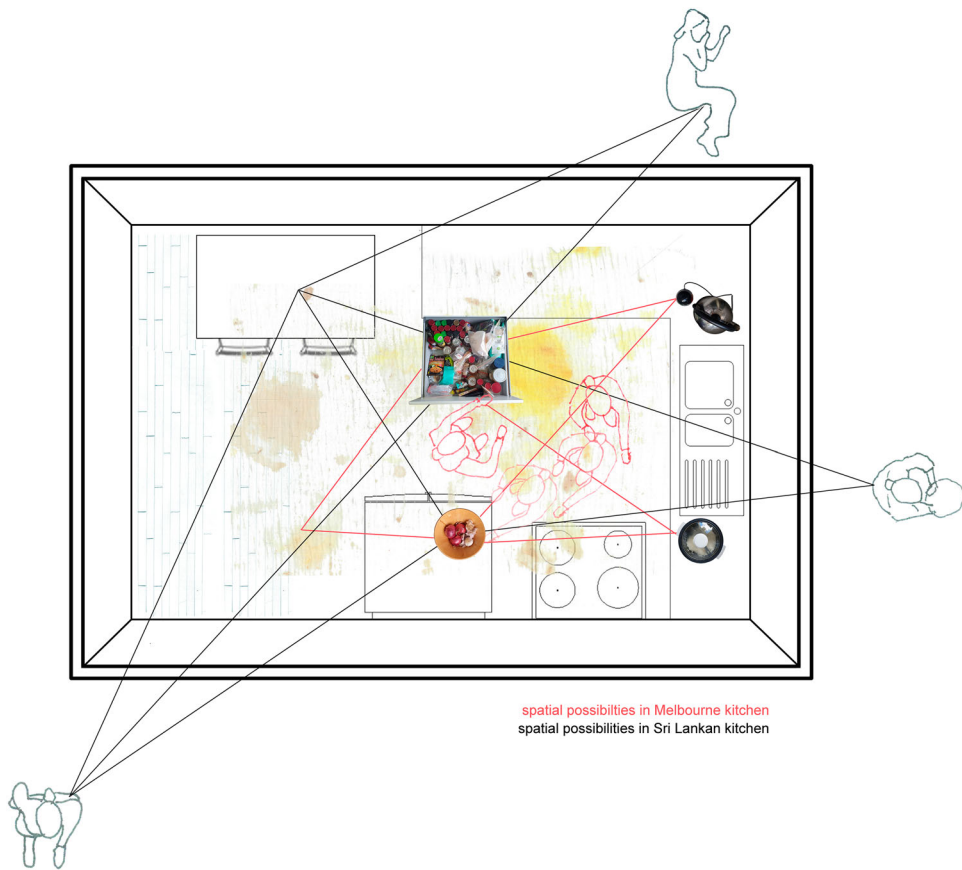


Figure 3. K's Kitchen. A collapsing and containment of spatial possibilities. Colour image. Drawn by Kelum Palipane.

kitchen have allowed for a seamless expansion outdoors into a covered verandah and appropriation of the floor for messy chopping and preparation. Access to goods pre-washed, pre-cut and pre-packaged means I spend less time cooking in my kitchen, but this is offset by the energy and time I spend in containing and removing evidence of the material realities of cooking Lankan food. The overlaying of the two kitchens makes apparent the collapsing of space, of temporalities (durations), and also, of status. It suggests a forfeiting of class status during the migration process.

Western feminist scholars have identified domesticity as a valid site of women's labour, because the kitchen has been a locational necessity for many women due to caring duties, and the gendered and uneven divisions of labour in maintaining families and homes (Federici 2012; Heynen and Baydar 2005). Their efforts to expose and legitimize women's situated knowledges, allowing for their participation as complete citizens in the political sphere. However, non-western domesticity in a migrant context can use its hidden and ignored status defensively to its own advantage. The importance of these guarded spaces of culture is theorised by Chicana feminist scholar Emma Perez as *sitio y lengua*, (Perez 1999), a place where space and language converge, where cultural practices inscribed in bodies can be enacted and re-enacted confirming the identities of specific

social groups. This is a site of unprogrammed socially produced behaviours; where immigrants can 'live inside with a difference' (Perez 1999, 78). She writes that power for these groups lies in this difference; 'In the difference is the diasporic subject's mobility through and about, weaving interstitially to create, always create, something else – whether music, food, clothes, style or language' (Perez 1999, 79). Creative practice has, however, explored the radical potential and potency of typically hidden and unpalatable aspects of migrant food cultures, wresting them into the public realm. Sita Kuratomi Bhaumik's installation, 'The Curry Institute' (2011, Sheehan Gallery, Whitman College, <http://www.sitabhaumik.com/the-curry-institute>) uses curry powder as a tactile and olfactory agent in a gallery space to assert an uncontained multisensory presence that is unruly and disruptive.

The kitchen is also a critical place where I participate in helping my daughter navigate her dual identities as a Sri Lankan (private) Australian (public). Hoping to recalibrate her sensibilities, I tentatively introduce her to dishes (that she often perceives as unpalatable and malodorous), away from the 'gastronomic surveillance' she may experience from her peers (Halloran 2016). Halloran writes, 'The institutionalized surveillance of an environment such as the school cafeteria promotes the normativity of assimilation through the overt policing of what (and how much) people eat. Students and co-workers monitor one another's lunches, searching for clues to culinary non-compliance' (51). When we step outside of our kitchen, our home, we re-align our sensibilities with the mainstream. We become vigilant and self-censoring in an attempt to pass ourselves off as Australian as best we can.

S's In-law's Kitchen

Among diasporic scholars, both Sharika Thirangama's *In My Mother's House* (2011) and Kandasamy, Perera and Ratnam's anthology *A Sense of Viidu* (2020) explore the familial and generational dislocation and trauma that Lankan minorities have faced. In the absence of inclusive forms of public engagement and recognition for these Lankan minorities, the home becomes an intensified and layered site of precarious ontologies, defended and preserved by various strategies both by internally displaced persons and also by Lankan diasporas in Western countries. In these examples, memories and cultural values are mediated by everyday materialities and spatial practices, and spaces mobilised for forms of cultural continuity become layered or compressed. Particularly evocative in *A Sense of Viidu* is S. Shakthidaran's (2020) account of how his grandmother transported physical components of her family home to Australia, the front doors, window grills, and staircase. He writes powerfully of the sentiments associated with these acts,

It was, and still is, an act of defiance. Of pride. A bittersweet act, for in building us a home she was acknowledging what she could never get back, acknowledging where we were not going back to, even as she unleashed new possibilities for the future, built fresh hope into the very foundations of the place that would house the future generations of our family. It was not an act of kindness. Or generosity. It was an act of willpower. Of steadfastly maintaining control, when all other choice had been taken from her. [156]

The bifurcation of kitchen space into 'Western' and 'Eastern' or dry and wet components in strategies replicated in many parts of Asia responded as in the example above to the heat and odours generated by Lankan cuisine, especially with ingredients like dry fish and roasted condiments used to flavour curries. While this luxury of space was not afforded to



Figure 4. Extruded Section of S's In-law's Kitchen and Wet Kitchen. Drawn by Dhanika Kumaheri.

apartment dwellers, detached houses typically appropriated or even built spaces to accommodate these differences, whenever possible.

When S's in-laws rebuilt their home after the 2003 Canberra bushfires they attached a wet kitchen at the back (pers. comm. 27 February 2021). Prompted by Sri Lanka's linguistic nationalism that badly affected Tamil minority jobs, S's mother-in-law, a doctor, had migrated with her family during the 1970s, first to the United Kingdom, where they faced considerable racism and later to Australia to the Northern Territory to work as a Flying Doctor servicing the Australian Indigenous Community. Her husband, formerly a bank manager, drove a bus. When the opportunity arose, they moved to Canberra, he for work in the Federal government and she as a doctor in the public service. Desperate for the familiar foods which were unavailable in Canberra at the time, they would make monthly trips to Sydney for raw ingredients and cook on a stove in a back verandah clad in woollen caps and sweaters in the winter months; in a display of persistence unsupported by either their home or their locality. Returning to Sri Lanka around 1987 they sold their house and shipped its contents to Australia, redistributing the largest pieces of furniture – settee, armchairs, dining table, bed, folding chair, dressing table, screen, stools supported by three elephants, etc., among the three children, now adults. 'She treasured her memories of a very happy childhood with her mother (her father died when she was 14) through letters and furniture,' S observes. The shipment from Sri Lanka included a grinding stone, new hopper pans (used for making bowl shaped savoury breads) and a Noritake dinner set, a status symbol in Lankan material culture. Removal of furniture and, in particular, the heavy kitchen implements underlined the realisation that they were unlikely to return. When her sister in law's family was migrating to Australia, S recalls, they too travelled with granite pestles and mortars and *thosai* (another kind of bread) and chilli grinders causing the Australian customs officials to joke, 'Crickety, these people have even brought their tomb stones with them!'

S's in-laws were aged in their 80s when the possibility arose of this physical change to their destroyed Canberra home (Figure 4). They built,

The standard kitchen that is visible to and a part of the dining room and family room, a covered (heated, external kitchen, separated from the fancy kitchen with sliding doors) and outside the kitchen in a patio – a log of wood was planted upright. A big chunk of meat could be placed on it and my father-in-law could swing hard with his cleaver and chop it up!

Food could be prepared separately in a weather-proof space, preventing curry odours from entering the house and clinging to soft furnishings. S observes that her in-laws were frugal, reluctant to eat at restaurants, and suspicious of takeaways. They adjusted to these practices very late in life finally embracing the convenience of the microwave and accepting orders made by Tamil community chefs by then settled and part of the growing Sri Lankan community in Canberra. S notes,

It was only in their later years that they recognised that saving their energy and ordering from outside was Ok and not an immoral waste of money or an indulgence. He would always buy cheaper cuts of meat, never buy pre-cut meat and pre-cut vegetables (more expensive), and being a banker, he had a sharp mind for mental arithmetic to the very end and he would convert prices to Sri Lanka rupees and exclaim how expensive things were.

While reminiscent of my grandmother's vernacular kitchen, the choices made by S's diasporic family were compounded by forced dislocation first into an assimilatory spatial container designed for Australian cooking that initially inhibited the sought-after cultural resilience; and the determined continuation of culinary traditions, enabled later as an exterior practice, a back-stage behaviour, if we adopt Erving Goffman's term (1959). Their example is indicative of ways in which migrants negotiate spatial or material barriers to integration by creating alternative performative spaces and strategies. The exteriority of this example differs from the internal (to Lanka), rural-to-urban and temporal migration of the *dunkussiya*, although essentially, in both cases, comparable spaces are juxtaposed.

The cost and labour involved in sustaining familiar culinary practices includes the trans-national transportation of equipment, journeying to Sydney for ingredients, and extending and expanding their kitchen quite apart from the hard work of sustaining a moral economy around food preparation from raw materials rather than pre-prepared ingredients; although construction and maintenance of an additional kitchen burdens their purse.

A's Kitchen

Integrating these two spaces without assimilating one into the other becomes possible only by making certain compromises to propriety, allowing the signifying odours to cling to the furniture, as in this fourth, and final example, where the Lankan home is nested within the Australian building envelope and spatial plan. My sister's first proper home in Canberra, a red-brick row house with an open-plan kitchen cum living and dining area telescopes the visitor and her extended Canberra family into aspects of Sri Lanka which she has effectively recreated by transporting pieces of living room furniture, paintings and pottery evocative of Lanka to Australia. Her house in Canberra is suggestive but also a projection of an idealised Lankan home, because her house in Colombo was gloomy and constricted by the multi-storey commercial developments that surrounded it, stealing its light. Her Canberra home leads onto a timber deck wrapped around a Melaleuca tree with views to a carefully planted garden she takes pride in. Her Colombo

house had an alley-kitchen in which her live-in domestic help prepared all meals for the family because my sister's demanding corporate sector job gave her no time for cooking. In Canberra, across a string of Australian public service consultancies, my sister has achieved a work life balance through which she has regained control of her life and her domestic environment primarily through cooking. She chats with family or visitors over a dividing partial island bench top during food preparation against the backdrop of hissing and sizzling and pungency of curries, to serve directly onto her dining table, or in the adjacent living space, of white covered settee, Dutch style cane-backed reclining chairs, antique large timber chest and large ceramic storage jars (used here as ornaments) brought in a cousin's shipping consignment from Colombo to Australia (Figure 5). An antique Indonesian table and stone Buddha head purchased in Australia amplify the interior's Asian theme. This domestic tableau further conjures her Colombo home because individual interior walls flanking her kitchen were painted in vibrant tones of mustard, maroon and avocado, by the former artist owner of this house, in a gesture reminiscent of the indigo garden wall of its Lankan counterpart. The paintings, removed from their frames in the former locality and transported and reframed in the latter, are works of the 43 Group of Lankan modern movement artists whose paintings romanticised and abstracted that country's rural landscape, in defiance of colonial landscape painting traditions of the early twentieth century. Through them, scenes depicting Lanka's village and coastal settings and life enter Australia. The lenticular condition described by Hage (2021, Chap. 5) is pervasive in this example; multiple realities are creatively configured

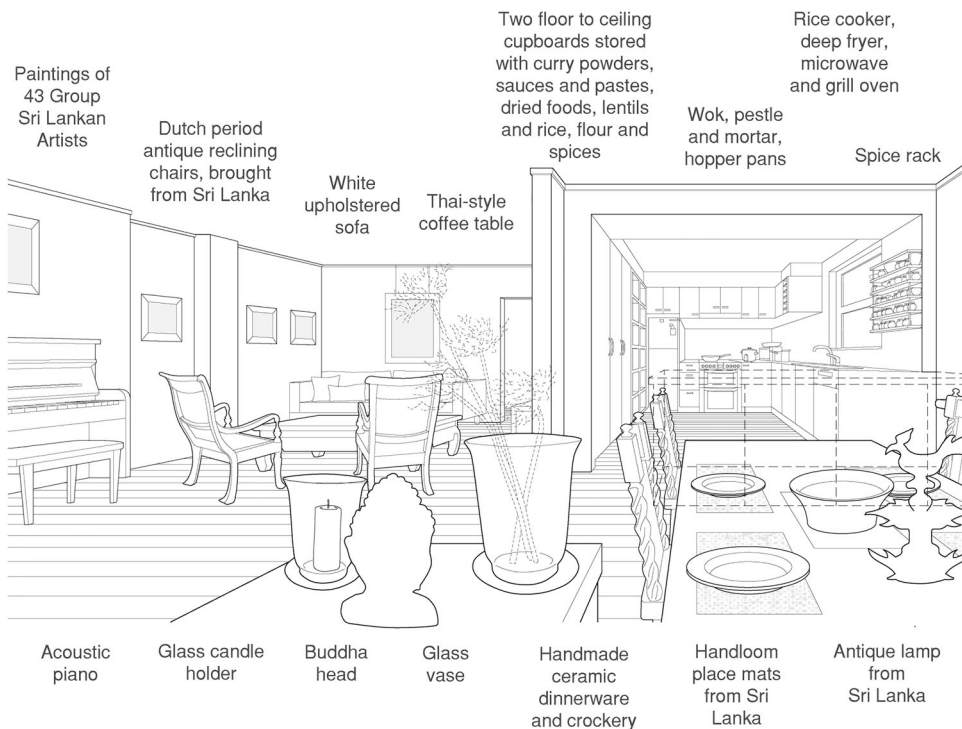


Figure 5. A's Kitchen and Living Room. Drawn by Dhanika Kumaheri

through varied forms of labour; in transportation, purchasing, crafting and reorganising interior spaces to produce affects that offer my sister and her family the desired ontological familiarity. Indeed, but for the native foliage glimpsed through the glazed facade, this carefully crafted material ensemble transcends its Australian setting. Her persistent adaptation of the space displays degrees of the kinds of ambivalence and fragmentation discussed by Hage (8), and yet it also liberates my sister from the class inhibitions of her Lankan peers and gives her a greater sense of individuality and ownership.

Brought up in a society where cheap domestic help was abundant, professional women of my sister's generation were forced upon migrating into self-reliance and the associated labour. Her late introduction to the rigour of Lankan cooking is reflected in her kitchen's hidden chaos. Two floor-to ceiling height cupboards occupying one wall of her kitchen spill over with Asian condiments, an inherited spice rack is heavy laden and large cooking vessels and appliances, the wok, the hopper pans, the rice cooker, the pestle and mortar, the food processor, and the deep fryer, signal the regional proclivity of this home. My sister has gone to even greater lengths to own the culinary rituals that gather her family together by throwing clay and making her own dinnerware – plates, serving bowls and cups – which have incrementally replaced all her shop-bought crockery. At mealtimes, she lays them out on Sri Lankan handloom place mats. Her friend from the previously recounted kitchen has helped her repair her arm chairs' cane woven seating designed to receive the reclining sitter's body-curvature. This all-encompassing aesthetic ambience lit by the garden's dappled light is deceptively evocative of that idealised but unattainable other urban setting where space is premium and gardens are a rarity.

Conclusion

We began this article by expressing our discomfort with assimilating into prevailing and laudable feminist efforts at curating dialogic and egalitarian forums named after spaces associated with women's activities, like the 'parlour' or the 'kitchen'. Despite their good intentions, our associations with these representative spaces derived from culture-specific spatial norms that are universalised both in design practice and representation cannot be taken for granted. Interpretations of these spaces fail to consider the lens of feminist intersectionality as internally differentiated by discrimination based on race, culture and other identity categories – or, from the Lankan viewpoint, as racialised distinctions associated with colonial and Western (economic and cultural) authority. These in turn translate to notions of modernity expressed through Western modern spaces and practices that foreclose and delimit other culturally situated and accumulated interpretations of space, and modernity. Advocating for greater sensitivity in applying culturally inflected readings of seemingly 'universal' spatial norms, we offered a discussion of how postcolonial and diasporic women of colour interpret normative culturally attenuated home space-attributes. Across four short vignettes that tracked migrant kitchen trajectories, we argued that the vernacular kitchen's encounter with modernity begins in the home country's adaptation to new modes of living and is transported incrementally as migrant communities become more numerous and complex. The vignettes described narratives of persistence, consisting of micro practices that mediate affective citizenships to Australia and temporally specific generational notions of Sri Lanka related in part to

conditions in that country which prompted the decision to migrate. They are suggestive of a fragmented minority that is unable to mobilise as a group due to a lack of critical mass and proximal advantage, and the consequent labour involved in sustaining familiar forms of ontological security.

Although most starkly evident in the Lankan example the four kitchens described in this article suggest different responses to assimilation mediated by postcolonial subject positions, whether in Australia or Sri Lanka. Aida Hurtado describes one of the key ways in which Chicana feminist theorising differentiates from white middle-class feminisms through its ability to hold together differing realities (1998). She attributes this to the exposure to multiple borders and with it, comes an ‘oppositional consciousness’, or *la facultad*, (as introduced by Anzaldúa and theorised by Chela Sandoval) ‘... the ability to hold multiple social perspectives while simultaneously maintaining a core centre ...’ (1991, 150). This she says is essential to Chicana feminisms ability to form collaborations and political coalitions across diverse, sometimes ideologically incompatible movements. The kitchen narratives of the Lankan women featured here speak of similar exposures to multiple borders, but also to *multiple temporalities and sensibilities* that have sharpened their ability to mobilise different identity categories as needed. V’s kitchen demanded the shedding of some colonial and feudal practices of domesticity (even while retaining others), as it encountered a sanitised modernity in 1960s Sri Lanka. K’s kitchen confronts her with a change in class status and brokers aspects of her identity by orienting her to multiple aesthetic sensibilities that need careful curation. Meanwhile S’s kitchen and A’s kitchen are demonstrations of reasserting and reclaiming material practices (partitioned and somewhat contained in S’s kitchen but acknowledged and accepted with some ease in A’s kitchen). Anzaldúa describes *la facultad* variously as a ‘vestige of a proximity sense,’ an ‘acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak,’ and a ‘shift in perception’ (1987; as cited in Moya 2002, 88). This is a skill that not only allows us to ‘live inside with difference’ but it is also how we’re able to build coalitions with other people of colour, minorities and align ourselves with broader feminist agendas. This is how we are able to join our Australian counterparts in the parlour or at the kitchen table, with the hope that they will reflexively reciprocate our spatial sensibilities across the unequal cultural relations that are structurally embedded in Australia’s Anglophone system and manifest in its spatial preferences.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by ABP Research Outreach Grants Scheme from the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, The University of Melbourne.

Notes on Contributors

Anoma Pieris is a Professor of Architecture at the Melbourne School of Design. Her most recent publications include the anthology *Architecture on the Borderline: Boundary Politics and Built Space* (2019) and *The Architecture of Confinement: Incarceration Camps of the Pacific War* (2022), co-

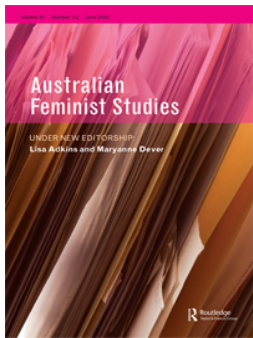
authored with Lynne Horuchi. Anoma was guest curator with Martino Stierli, Sean Anderson and Evangelos Kotsioris of the 2022 MoMA exhibition, *The Project of Independence: Architectures of Decolonization in South Asia, 1947-1985*.

Dr Kelum Palipane is a Lecturer in Architectural Design at the Faculty of Architecture Building and Planning, University of Melbourne. Kelum is a graduate of architecture from the University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka with experience in practices across Melbourne and Colombo. She was awarded her PhD by Creative Works from the University of Melbourne in 2016. Through her research and teaching, Kelum investigates how creative ethnographic methods can inform design in demographically complex urban conditions.

References

- Ahmed, Sara. 1999. "Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2 (3): 329–347. doi:[10.1177/136787799900200303](https://doi.org/10.1177/136787799900200303)
- Ahmed, Sara. 2012. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute Books.
- Chee, Lilian, and Melany Sun-Min Park. 2013. *Home + Bound: Narratives of Domesticity in Singapore and Beyond*. Singapore: Centre for Advanced Studies in Architecture.
- Chee, Lilian, and Eunice Seng. 2017. "Dwelling in Asia: Translations Between Dwelling Houses and Domesticity." *The Journal of Architecture* 22 (6): 993–1000. doi:[10.1080/13602365.2017.1362145](https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2017.1362145)
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *The University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1: 139–167. Article 8.
- Daniels, Inge. 2010. "Chap 3: Feeling at Home." *The Japanese House: Material Culture in the Modern Home*. Oxford: Berg.
- Desai, Madhavi. 2007. *Gender and the Built Environment in India*. New Delhi: Zubaan.
- Federici, Silvia. 2012. *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle*. New York: Common Notions.
- Frichot, Hélène, Katja Grillner, and Julieanna Preston. 2017. "Feminist Practices: Writing Around the Kitchen Table." In *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice: Materialisms, Activisms, Dialogues, Pedagogies, Projections*, edited by Meike Schalk, Thérèse Kristiansson, and Ramia Mazé, 171–198. Baunach: AADR – Art Architecture Design Research.
- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Woodstock, NY: Overlook Books.
- Hage, Ghassan. 2021. *The Diasporic Condition: Ethnographic Explorations of the Lebanese in the World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Halloran, Vivian Nun. 2016. "Diasporic Inventions: Reclaiming Family Culinary Traditions." In *The Immigrant Kitchen: Food, Ethnicity, and Diaspora*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Haskins, Victoria. 2019. "Domesticating Colonizers: Domesticity, Indigenous Domestic Labor, and the Modern Settler Colonial Nation." *American Historical Review* 124 (4): 1290–1301. doi:[10.1093/ahr/rhz647](https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhz647)
- Haskins, Victoria. 2022. "Mrs Browne and the Bengalis: An Early Transcolonial Story of Domestic Service." In *Asian Studies: The Twelfth International Convention of Asian Scholars (ICAS 12)*, vol. 1, edited by Paul van der Velde, Martina van den Haak, and Narutai Riangkruar, 216–224. Amsterdam University Press: Amsterdam.
- Heynen, Hilde, and Gülsüm Baydar. 2005. *Negotiating Domesticity*. London and New York: Routledge.
- hooks, bell. 1990. "Chap 5: Homeplace: A Site of Resistance." In *Yearning, Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End Press.

- Hurtado, Aida. 1998. "Sitios y Lenguas: Chicanas Theorize Feminisms." *Hypatia* 13 (2): 134–161. doi:10.2979/HYP.1998.13.2.134
- Kandasamy, Niro, Nirukshi Perera, and Charishma Ratnam. 2020. *A Sense of Viidu: The (re)Creation of Home by the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora in Australia*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lavin, Maud. 1993. *Cut with a Kitchen Knife: Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Lozanovska, Mirjana. 1997. "Abjection and Architecture: The Migrant House in Multicultural Australia." In *Postcolonial Space(s)*, edited by Wong Chong Thai and G. Nalbantoglu, 101–129. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press.
- Lozanovska, Mirjana. 2019. *Migrant Housing: Architecture, Dwelling, Migration*. London; New York: Routledge. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Mannur, Anita. 2022. *Intimate Eating: Racialized Spaces and Radical Futures*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Meah, Angela, and Peter Jackson. 2016. "Re-imagining the Kitchen as a Site of Memory." *Social and Cultural Geography* 17 (4): 511–532. doi:10.1080/14649365.2015.1089587
- Miyawaki, Mayumi. 1998. *Miyawaki Mayumi no ii ie no hon-Motto ie nit Suite Kangaete Mimasen ka? (Miyawaki Mayumi's Book About Good Houses – Let's Try and Think More About Homes?)*. Tokyo: PHP kenkyusho.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 1988. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Feminist Review* 30 (1988): 61–88. doi:10.1057/fr.1988.42
- Morris, Annelise. 2017. "Materialities of Homeplace." *Society for Historical Archaeology* 51: 28–42. doi:10.1007/s41636-017-0006-6
- Moya, Paula. 2002. *Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles*. Berkley, LA: University of California Press.
- Parlour: Gender, Equity, Architecture. <https://archiparlour.org/>.
- Perez, Emma. 1999. *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas Into History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Pink, Sarah. 2004. *Home Truths: Gender, Domestic Objects and Everyday Life*. New York: Berg.
- Rendell, Jane. 2010. *Site Writing: The Architecture of art Criticism*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd.
- Sandoval, Chela. 1991. "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World." *Genders* 10 (Spring): 1–24. doi:10.5555/gen.1991.10.1.
- Sarangi, Sonia. 2016. "Who's Afraid of Ethnic Diversity?" *Parlour: Gender, Equity, Architecture*, July 14. <https://parlour.org.au/intersections/whos-afraid-of-ethnic-diversity/>.
- Shakthidaran, S. 2020. "Chapter 11: Bittersweet." In *A Sense of Viidu: The (re)Creation of Home by the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora in Australia*, edited by Niro Nirukshi Perera Kandasamy and Charishma Ratnam, 155–157. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sutton, D. 2009. "The Mindful Kitchen, the Embodied Cook: Tools, Technology and Knowledge Transmission on a Greek Island." *Material Culture Review* 70: 63–68.
- Thiranagama, Sharika. 2011. *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Tolia-Kelly, Divya. 2010. *Landscape, Race and Memory: Material Ecologies of Home*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Tolia-Kelly, Divya. 2017. "A day in the Life of a Geographer: 'Lone', Black, Female'." *Area* 49 (3): 324–328. doi:10.1111/area.12373



Mapping Relational Intensities and Care in the COVID-19 Pandemic Home: Understanding Carers' Practices Through Cultural Probes

Gretchen Coombs, Kelly Hussey-Smith, Larissa Hjorth & Julianne van Loon

To cite this article: Gretchen Coombs, Kelly Hussey-Smith, Larissa Hjorth & Julianne van Loon (2022) Mapping Relational Intensities and Care in the COVID-19 Pandemic Home: Understanding Carers' Practices Through Cultural Probes, Australian Feminist Studies, 37:112, 188-211, DOI: [10.1080/08164649.2023.2243646](https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2023.2243646)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2023.2243646>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 09 Aug 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 788



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Mapping Relational Intensities and Care in the COVID-19 Pandemic Home: Understanding Carers' Practices Through Cultural Probes

Gretchen Coombs^a, Kelly Hussey-Smith^b, Larissa Hjorth^c and Julienne van Loon^c

^aSchool of Design, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia; ^bSchool of Art, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia; ^cSchool of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia

ABSTRACT

This article explores the complex emotional geography of contemporary domestic spaces and invisible forms of care during periods of working and caring from home (WCFH) during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic lockdowns and restrictions carers and creatives were disproportionately impacted. In June 2020 we developed an open call for creative responses under the title of 'Work, Care and Creativity Study (WCCS): value and visibility'. Our study sought to explore the lived experiences of creatives working at a university who were also carers WCFH and to capture the complexity of care responsibilities, their affects and effects on wellbeing, mental health and career disruptions. Through cultural probes our study sought to render visible some of the overlooked emotions, perceptions and practices that were emerging for carers during the pandemic. We were interested in how playful approaches to cultural probes could invite creative workers and carers to 'map' the materialities of the home as a way of expressing the relational, emotional, and material entanglements of WCFH. Our research illustrates the value of creative prompt techniques for articulating the constant (re)negotiation of the relational intensities and compressions of work, care and creativity at a time of COVID-19.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 5 February 2022
Accepted 30 July 2023

KEYWORDS

COVID-19; working from home; creative workers; cultural probes; primary carers; care; gender

Introduction

In many parts of the world – particularly in Melbourne, Australia – the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and lockdowns of 2020–2021 saw working and caring from home (WCFH) become a mundane practice. In Melbourne, 262 days of lockdown were experienced which included home schooling and the closure of many services and geographic restrictions (Boaz 2021). The digital became embedded with most quotidian moments – confining work, play, sociality and care to a 'domestic postage-stamp' (Hjorth and Lammes 2020). Melissa Gregg's prescient notion of work's intimacy (2011) – whereby

CONTACT Gretchen Coombs  gretchen.coombs@rmit.edu.au  School of Design, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

digital media enables and accelerates a collapse of boundaries between work and life – became extraordinarily visible (Hjorth et al. 2022). For those WCFH, almost all movement was situated in the rhythms of the domestic which encompassed informal care of older parents and young children, home-schooling, the gendered nature of care work and other ‘invisible’ forms of labour around working from home (WFH). The crowded relational aspects of these ‘domestic materialities’ (Goodwin et al. 2021, 3), that is, the physical and sensory elements of the home, are illustrated poignantly below in Figure 1, in which one of the participants in our recent study maps the experience of working and caring in her own home during Melbourne’s rolling COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020-2021.¹

This illustration is one of more than fifty creative responses submitted to our research team as a result of our call for responses under the project title *Work, Care and Creativity Study (WCCS): value and visibility*. Respondents are creative practitioners who work at a university in Melbourne and had an experience WCFH during the pandemic. All but one participant identifies as female. Our project commenced in June 2020, soon after the end of the Victorian government’s first COVID-19 related lockdown of the Melbourne metropolitan area (43 calendar days) and shortly before its second (111 calendar days). Citizens of Melbourne, from among who our research participants were drawn, would go on to experience a total of six lockdowns across 2020 and 2021, a total of 262 calendar days (Lockdown Stats Melbourne 2021). We collected data from mid 2020 until the end of 2021.

In this article we discuss selected creative responses solicited by our study as cultural probes (Gaver, Dunne, and Pacenti 1999) – that is, methods deployed to elicit discussion

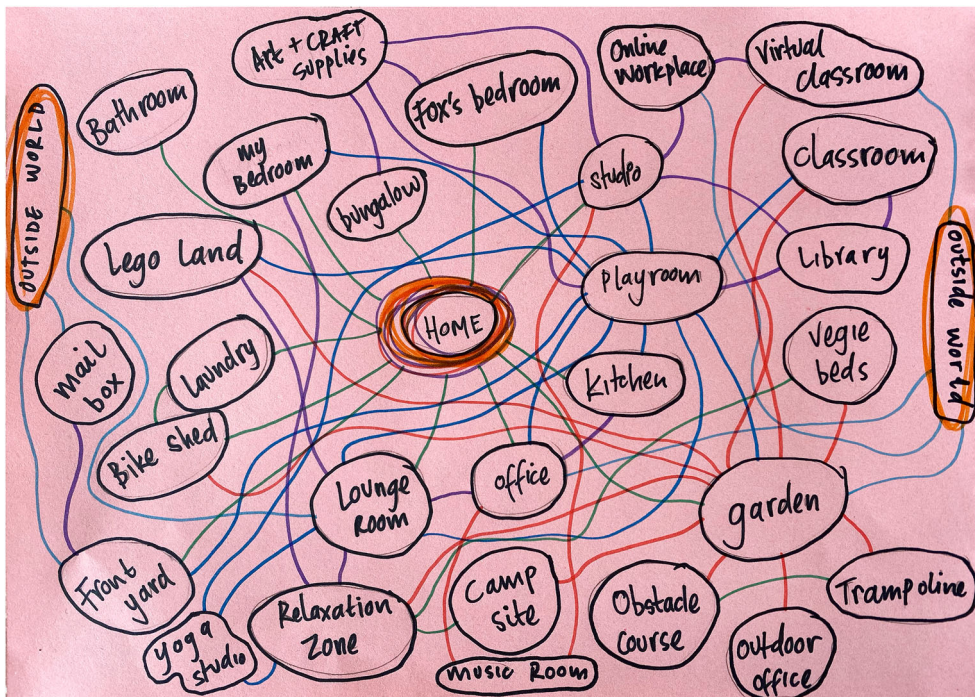


Figure 1. Participant C’s map of their domestic space while working and caring from home.

around often tacit forms of informal care and labour – to capture and explore some of the complex lived experiences, domestic materialities, mundane intimacies and relational intensities of contemporary home contexts. We also draw on ethnographer Phillip Vannini's (2015) 'ethos of animation' that seeks affinities between the analysis of events, practices, and the affective atmospheres and performance of everyday life through which domestic and caring relations unfold. Other concurrent studies about life under COVID have used cultural probes to emphasise the relational nature of research and relative challenges faced during this time. As Annette Markham, Dan Harris, and M.E. Luka (2020, 1) discovered in a concurrent study, 'we were able to shift from reflections on the self-in-the-pandemic to deeper investigations of the privileged-self-in-the-pandemic'. It is in a similar vein that we were able to identify that the personal reflections on domestic caring revealed ongoing structural issues about gender, technology, creativity and academic work (Nash and Churchill 2020; Craig and Churchill 2020; Duncanson et al. 2020; Gewin 2020; McDonald, Malone, and Charlesworth 2021; Moodley and Gouws 2020) made more visible during the pandemic through the shifting terrain of the home.

Elsewhere we have written about the implications of Gregg's presence bleed for creative working parents caring for others at home during the pandemic (Hjorth et al. 2022). In this article, we are interested in how these creative professionals – who are also working parents and carers – visualise, express and articulate their emotional responses to WCFH. We focus on the affects produced by the spatial and material ruptures in the home during this time and explore how cultural probes can be used to surface these relational intensities. Deploying creative responses from twenty-two participants, our project asked: how might we render visible some of the overlooked emotions, perceptions and practices that were emerging during the pandemic? Additionally, what value might creative prompt techniques bring to articulating the constant (re)negotiation of the relational intensities and compressions of work, care and creativity so keenly experienced by those WCFH during COVID-19? The results, which include the selected creative responses presented in this article along with our analysis of those works, provide insight into the complex emotional geography of contemporary domestic spaces and commonly obscured or invisible forms of care.

The article begins with outlining how the pandemic has impacted areas such as the creative industries and academia and the gendered nature of work and care. We then locate and outline our research and methods. Next, we turn to discussing the creative responses from our participants within the context of the affective dimensions of WCFH. We do this by studying how the creative responses – photographs, hand drawn maps and written responses – map the relational, spatial and material conditions of the home during periods of lockdown. We propose that these creative responses – that largely focus on the shifts, compressions and changes in domestic space – communicate the tacitly experienced relational intensities of caring practices during COVID-19.

Working and Caring from Home

The rolling lockdowns in Melbourne during 2020–2021 dramatically impacted people's lives and many people's homes became everything – work, school, childcare centre. Jenkins and Smith (2021) describe how the transition to WFH brought into focus how 'requisitioning' the home positioned pre-existing care-work within the home as largely

unaccounted for by the government or acknowledged by society. National and international lockdowns and subsequent disruptions to quotidian domestic life unveiled huge challenges: juggling home schooling, caring duties and paid work, and notably, increasing the visibility of unpaid labour in the household (Craig and Churchill 2020).

Data from a survey *Women, Work, Care in the Time of COVID-19* conducted in Victoria during late 2020, indicated that domestic caring and working from home garnered mixed outcomes: some women experienced increased caring duties, but others found their partners did more work and they were able to spend more time with loved ones (McDonald, Malone, and Charlesworth 2021). However, early data indicates that women mainly absorbed the additional caring labour exacerbating existing collective and structural 'gendered inequalities associated with caring and paid work' (Nash and Churchill 2020, 834). Sophie Leroy, Aaron Schmidt, and Nora Madjar's (2021) survey of households during the pandemic reveals women experienced increased interruptions (intrusions, distractions, breaks, and surprises) and therefore more multi-tasking and less focus on specific tasks.

The initial promise of working from home that peaked during the multiple lockdowns, may have been 'game-changing for many women, and [has] present[ed] significant opportunities to create a more flexible, equitable working life' (Moyle and Helen 2021, n.p). Yet, such 'freedoms' may have been short lived without clear structural and policy reform that take into account domestic care and invisible labour and address gendered labour practices. Certainly, the broader landscape of caring practices as they relate to housing and gender equality were not resolved by the pandemic (Bowlby and Jupp 2021). Many female academics with caring responsibilities, including those who occupy the role of parent/guardian/carer, artist and academic were left to navigate the significant pressures and precarities of academic and artistic life – publishing, leadership, exhibiting, grant writing – with little to no support or concessions. Research conducted in the early months of the pandemic demonstrated a decrease in submissions to academic journals from women academics (Flaherty 2020). For many women, increased personal responsibilities inhibited their creative practice and outputs, affecting their 'research productivity and career momentum' (McDonald, Malone, and Charlesworth 2021; Moodley and Gouws 2020).

Having incompatible or inadequate home-work environments (domestic disruptions or inadequate home space for work) and home schooling (Smith and Watchorn 2020) exacerbated this tension and created new affects of domestic compression. As Lewis et al. argue the Zoom experience of WFH was an experience of 'liminality – of being on/off screen and ambiently in between' dominated by 'disjointed, blurry, or confusing experiences, atmospheres, and affects' (2021, n.p). Despite this, and as demonstrated by our participants, many carers creatively adapted their material environments to attend to these new spatial and temporal dynamics in the home.

During COVID-related shutdowns such as those experienced in Melbourne, domestic spaces overflowed with competing forms of attention – multiple screens, platforms, devices and modalities, as exemplified in Participant C's 'mindmap' above (Figure 1). Often rooms like lounges or dining rooms became multi-functional spaces – moving from office and school spaces to eating and socialising and back again. For some, a distinction was created by moving devices such as computers from the table to represent movement from one activity to the next. For others, the distinction between work and

home was made by ‘curating’ their backdrops – that is, physically moving objects, humans and non-human out of ‘screen view’.

Beyond the digital, Brittany Goodwin et al. (2021, 4) observe that the materiality of working from home has been neglected in the literature despite material objects (such as mobile devices, headphones, clothing, curated zoom backgrounds) largely facilitating what they call ‘boundary transcendence’ – the movement between professional, creative, and domestic life in the home. The conditions of WCFH during the lockdowns exacerbated and exposed the porosity of these boundaries that saw material objects being used to separate work from domestic life – often in numerous ways. Many of the responses from participants observed the conflicts that arise when work and domestic roles are simultaneously performed – a reality for most carers during extended periods of lockdown.

Locating the Research and Methods

As creative academics working and caring from home from one of the longest locked down cities in the world (Cassidy 2021), our lived experiences have influenced the framing and interpretation of our research. Our use of creative practice methods both accentuates and complexifies the data while translating it into accessible forms. In addition, our reflections on the data we have collected acknowledge our affective attachments and attunements to the experiences of participants and our own lived experiences. Recognising this, we are particularly interested in participant responses that employ humour to describe the complexities and challenges of this time. We draw on feminist sociologist Maud Ceuterick’s (2020) reflection that humour can be usefully understood as an affirmative approach to gendered inequities, helping to shift conversations about inequity from the domain of the private to matters of public concern.

While there were many research projects underway during the pandemic looking at gender and WFH (Ceuterick 2020; Craig and Churchill 2020; McDonald, Malone, and Charlesworth 2021; Moyle and Helen 2021; Nash and Churchill 2020; Smith and Watchorn 2020) we were particularly interested in participants working in and around creative industries, the arts and the academy, as an overlapping sector that had been severely impacted by the rolling COVID lockdowns in our home city of Melbourne. Our study was mobilised quickly in ‘the thick’ of the pandemic during mid 2020 to collect evidence of the challenges and disruptions to life and career we were experiencing ourselves, and that we could see having an impacting on our peers, colleagues and doctoral students. Two methods of data collection were used: cultural probes and semi-structured interviews and members of our research team were also participants in the study.

As a cohort, creative practitioners working in and connected to the academy, tend to be highly qualified professionals who excel in their chosen fields, but also experience high levels of job insecurity and income precarity (Welch 2022; Throsby, Petetskaya, and Shin 2020). Recent research also indicates that as a group, they engage in large amounts of invisible and unpaid labour (Sholette 2011). Individuals with caring roles are already disadvantaged in these industries due to the unpaid care labour they perform – with women over-represented in this group (Malisch et al. 2020). For the creative carers in our study (all but one who are female identifying) the lack of dedicated and

focused creative time caused by WCFH has caused stress, anxiety, loss of income, and concerns for the future.

Figure 1 exemplifies of the kinds of creative responses we received from our visual artist participants. Here digital, social and material worlds blur, as Participant C impresses upon us the power of the line to help us to map and to know, to understand the ‘inhabited world’ as a ‘meshwork of trails ... continually being woven as life goes along on them’ (Ingold 2016, 85). Participant C’s roles as carer and worker are in close and intimate proximity to one another. It is the proximity and intimacy of the entangled lines that highlights the challenges she faces in navigating multiple tasks during a WCFH day.

Participant C’s ‘mindmap’ includes two portals – ‘home’ and ‘outside world’ – the first in the centre, and outlined in thick, multi-coloured lines, the second placed at the margins or limits of the page, both left and right, and perhaps more conceptual than actual, for entering the outside world during Melbourne’s strict COVID lockdown required strict codes of conduct. For extended periods, for example, only one person per household could go out to shop for daily supplies, and then only once per day. Participant C’s map is busily sensorial, moving from Lego land and obstacle courses to the online workplace and virtual classroom. These different imaginaries and affective cartographies of domestic space become a complex space of material encounters and digital wayfaring – a process of digital, social and material overlays (Hjorth and Pink 2014). Here, relational intensities in the form of complex temporalities and spatialities must constantly be (re)negotiated. Through exploring people’s creative responses to their experience in the home during the 2020 and 2021 lockdowns, we reflect on the idea of space as evolving story (Massey 2005) and home as a space of affective and material relations (Gorman-Murray and Dowling 2007).

Creative and arts-based methods have increasingly become deployed by non-art researchers to elicit tacit practices and lived experiences of participants (Leavy 2020). Techniques like ‘research creation’ encompass the multiple ways creative methods like theatre, writing and photography can be used to engage participants and activate publics and policy makers for social change (Chapman and Sawchuk 2015). As Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk note, research creation is about using creative techniques as a form of critical making to understand complex environments (2015). For Sarah Truman and Stephanie Springgay, research creation is about the methods reflecting the entangled relations in which ‘thinking-making-doing’ is crucial (2018, 204–5). As Deborah Lupton and Ash Watson argue, methods like creative writing prompts can ‘generat[e] insights into lived experiences, sense-making, relational connections, and affective forces’ (2021, 470). This dimension of critical making as ‘thinking-making-doing’ was key in our study.

In our call on social media, we received images, creative writing passages, maps, and a host of photographs from twenty-two primary care givers who identify as creative practitioners – writers, photographers, artists – and who work either wholly or partly (including casually) within a university context. The call was circulated on social media, through the professional networks of our research team and using snowballing techniques (contacts of contacts).

As Table 1 shows, our investigation draws on creative responses provided to us as part of this study by established writers and performing and visual artists with links to the academy. Our participants were living predominantly in and around Melbourne, Australia,

Table 1. Participant details.

Pseudonym	Artform	Relation to the academy in 2020
A	Visual arts	Casual tutor & PhD candidate
B	Visual arts	Casual tutor & PhD candidate
C	Visual arts	Casual tutor & PhD candidate
D	Writing	Continuing academic
E	Visual arts & writing	Short term contract
F	Visual arts	Short term contract
G	Writing	Continuing academic
H	Writing	Continuing academic
I	Visual arts	Occasional guest lecturer
J	Visual arts	Short term contract
K	Writing	Casual research assistant & PhD candidate
L	Visual arts	Continuing academic
M	Visual arts	Occasional guest lecturer
N	Visual arts	Continuing academic
O	Writing	Continuing academic
P	Performing arts & writing	Short term contract
Q	Visual arts	Casual tutor
R	Writing	Continuing academic
S	Writing	Continuing academic
T	Writing	Continuing academic
U	Visual arts	Short term contract

at the time of the study, and more than half of our participants were employed either on a casual basis or on short-term contracts within the higher education sector that year, with the remainder being in continuing academic roles at that time. All our participants were vulnerable to massive funding cuts and job losses affecting higher education in Australia during 2020 and 2021: Welch (2022) estimates that some 17,000 jobs were lost in the Australian higher education sector during this period.

The study's cultural probes (Figure 2) were designed to capture the complexity of care responsibilities and their affects and effects by asking respondents to describe their WCFH environment in writing or to sketch or photograph aspects of their daily lockdown life in the domestic/WCFH setting. Recognising that our potential participants were time poor, stressed, and exhausted, we incorporated play, creativity and humour into the prompts, so they felt less like 'more work' and more like an opportunity to creatively, or even light heartedly respond to the complex emotional cartographies (Nold 2009) of WCFH. While cartography is traditionally used to discuss maps of spaces, with the rise of mobile technologies and maker cultures (Perkins, Hind, and Gekker 2018; Nold 2009) the concept has been taken on as a more expansive creative notion, and it is the latter context that we employ here. Humour was encouraged, as were representations that acknowledged the presence of failure, whimsy, accident or exhaustion. The diverse responses illustrated how domestic spaces had been transformed during COVID-19 lockdowns to enable education, play, and work, often at the expense of privacy and productivity.

Deploying creative practice ethnography techniques which use prompts such as photos, drawing and writing responses to elicit participant's quotidian experiences and emotions, has afforded us an opportunity to delve deeper into the affective experiences and translate these in a manner that reflect the contingent, performative, and corporeal elements of quotidian rhythms during several lockdowns. Drawing on the idea that experiences and expressions of oppression and resistance can be found in the rhythms

Mapping Prompt: Working from home not only brings a new level of familiarity with our domestic space but also prompts us to use it in different ways. For example, a hallway becomes a gym, a bedroom a private office, or a living room a school. Draw a map of how your home was used while working and caring from home.

Work, Care, Creativity: value and visibility

PROMPTS

choose one or more:
writing, mapping,
photography

Photo Prompt 1 DIY Office: Take a photograph of your workstation that includes the surrounding domestic environment and/or have someone photograph you 'at work' (being sure to include the wider domestic environment). Examples [here](#) and [here](#). We are interested in what is not visible through the webcam.

Photo Prompt 2 Work/Life Balance: Photograph your work/life balance. Look for juxtapositions of objects in the home that you feel represent the challenges and realities of working and caring from home. This might be a photo of a laptop nestled amongst toys, multitasking in the kitchen, or working at a local park.

Writing prompt 1: a paragraph that describes your current 'workplace' to someone who has never seen it before.

Writing prompt 2: a humorous set of six instructions on how to get through your day at home while balancing work, care and domestic and emotional labour.

Writing prompt 3: Employ a humorous take on a paragraph beginning with the phrase, "This week, I failed at..."

Writing prompt 4: Employ a humorous take on a paragraph beginning with the phrase, "This week, I failed at..."

Employ a humorous take on a paragraph beginning with the phrase, "This week, I failed at..."

This week I failed at keeping my voice down, at following the link provided, at taking out the kitchen garbage. I can't help but think that everything from this period qualifies as some sort of failure. I couldn't manage to upload the child's half-finished schoolwork. I went to bed without feeding the cat. On Tuesday I'd done none of the tasks to prepare for that day's meetings. I completely forgot to shower. On Wednesday I ciew my top with my son ("Why must you continue to interrupt?"), on Thursday we went without lunch. Have I been striving to care, but failing to do so with anything you might call quality? Have I been striving to work out failing to do so with anything like the focus required? Perhaps there are some failures that are black and white while others dwell in more murky territory. I know I've failed at my creative work. I've not even attempted it once. ("Rule number one: show up!"). Then there are the failures in grey, a more textured series of near misses and occasional wins – there was that week I jogged three mornings in a row. Great! I've managed nothing since. Nothing from home is ever pure-cardio, is it? The teaching semester too, seems like a series of failures punctuated here and there with a modest class ("breathe on mute"). Can you cook three family meals a day, seven days a week on budget? Fail. Out walking with a friend on Sunday, I've decided. "I've only ordered a meal delivery once during the whole of lockdown." "Cook them up, sweetheart: small victories, many battles lost. Sometimes I think of a string of women, from across the city, asked to one another by a tired series of hyphens: working-from-home-single-parent-home-schooling-during-lock-down. It's a discrete conga with a long tail, the whole lot of us failing gloriously, simultaneously at whatever we can manage.

Figure 2. Examples of some of the cultural probes deployed in the study.

of everyday life (Foster 2015) this study has sought to render visible some of the overlooked experiences, perceptions and practices emerging for creative workers and carers over the course of the pandemic.

Interestingly, and as Thilde Langevang et al. observe, studies about creative work and workers have been reluctant to embrace the 'embodied, sentient and sensory' aspects of arts-based methods as a form of data generation (2021, 3). Thus, our approach uses creative techniques to conceptually dig; to collect and curate the stories and then translate them into alternative forms of knowledge (Hjorth et al. 2019). Our methods and analysis are also informed by work in the field of creative practice research, where a creative work that is deliberately crafted by a practitioner in response to a particular set of research questions, can be understood to embody an answer or set of answers to those questions arrived at through the making or practice (Milech and Schilo 2004; Candy 2020). While some of our participants responded to our prompts in a rapid, fleet-of-the-moment documentary fashion, others spent considerable time framing, curating and giving their attention to the aesthetic, material and sensorial dimensions of the spaces they were photographing, sketching by hand, or crafting through paragraphs. In this way, many participants have brought professional expertise to our arts-based methods.

What we received and learned through this process has revealed insights and nuances about life as a carer under COVID that are less likely to occur in more traditional qualitative research methods. Vannini's (2015) 'ethos of animation' is useful here to connect our analysis of images and creative writing with the affective domestic and material

performance of everyday life. For Vannini – much like anthropologist Ingold (2007) – the lifeworlds of the researcher are a crucial element of the data translation. Our lifeworlds as researchers and our research communities gave way to new forms of relationality that pivoted around shared experiences of WCFH.

Mapping Relational Intensities: Discussion and Analysis

Artist Linda Knight uses the rubric of ‘Inefficient Mapping’ as a methodologic protocol to explore speculative, immanent, and critical theories. As she notes ‘Inefficient mapping uses mapping techniques and drawing strategies as an ontological practice for theorizing on the world’ (2021, 1). Like Vannini, Knight views maps as non-representational suggesting they are attunements to wayfaring attendant to affective atmospheres and sensory experiences. In this section of our paper, we discuss and analyse several participants’ responses and consider how each speaks to our central question: how might we render visible some of the overlooked emotions, perceptions and practices that were emerging during the pandemic? And how might we understand these compressions through the domestic materiality that is referenced (through writing, photographs and hand drawn maps) in our creative submissions?

Knight’s notion of inefficient mapping is evident in many of our participants’ responses to the prompt to sketch their WFH space during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown. In Participant R’s mapping of the overlapping intensities of teaching, doctoral work and home-schooling, for example (see Figure 3), conventional material and digital objects of the domestic space (couch, kitchen table, kid’s bed, iPad, kid’s TV) crowd together with

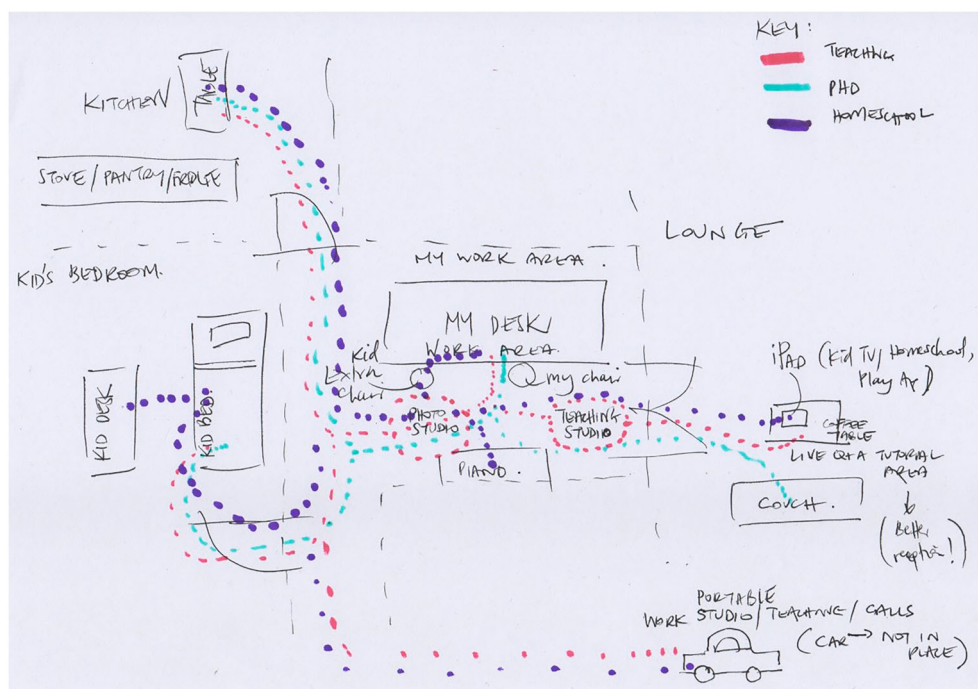


Figure 3. Participant R’s map of their domestic space while working and caring from home.

digital and material objects and tasks we more commonly associate with the creative and professional workspace (photo studio, teaching studio, piano, live Q&A tutorial area, teaching, calls). Wayfaring is represented by dotted lines, turning the sketched maps into a performative site – enacting and reinscribing the performative (Verhoeff 2012) as a series of routines which have become habitual in the cartographic space of the sketch. Attempts to seal off or isolate particular sites on the map (e.g. ‘teaching studio’) by encasement in a circular dotted line are prone to failure, for the dotted lines of each wayfaring journey are inherently discontinuous. The loop around the ‘photo studio’, for example, is ignored, and trammelled across by homeschooling, PhD work and teaching, perhaps simultaneously.

Where Participants C and R (Figures 1 and 3) offer visual representations recognisable as forms of mapping that fuse images and text, providing us with keys that figure the journeylines of the wayfarer, whether literal or conceptual, Participant N (Figure 4, below) offers a cartography completely devoid of text. Here the lines and loops that perhaps began as a sensical ‘bird’s eye’ mapping exercise intersect and thicken: crowdedness and compression is almost all there is. We could not ‘follow’ Participant N’s twinned maps even if we tried.

Notably, the two black markers used by Participant N to shape her paired maps, above, producing lines as thick as fencewire, are applied to the thinnest of materials, translucent sheets of paper through which we can make out other attempts at similar line drawings, layered behind on additional sheets. The way the ink has been applied to the page is

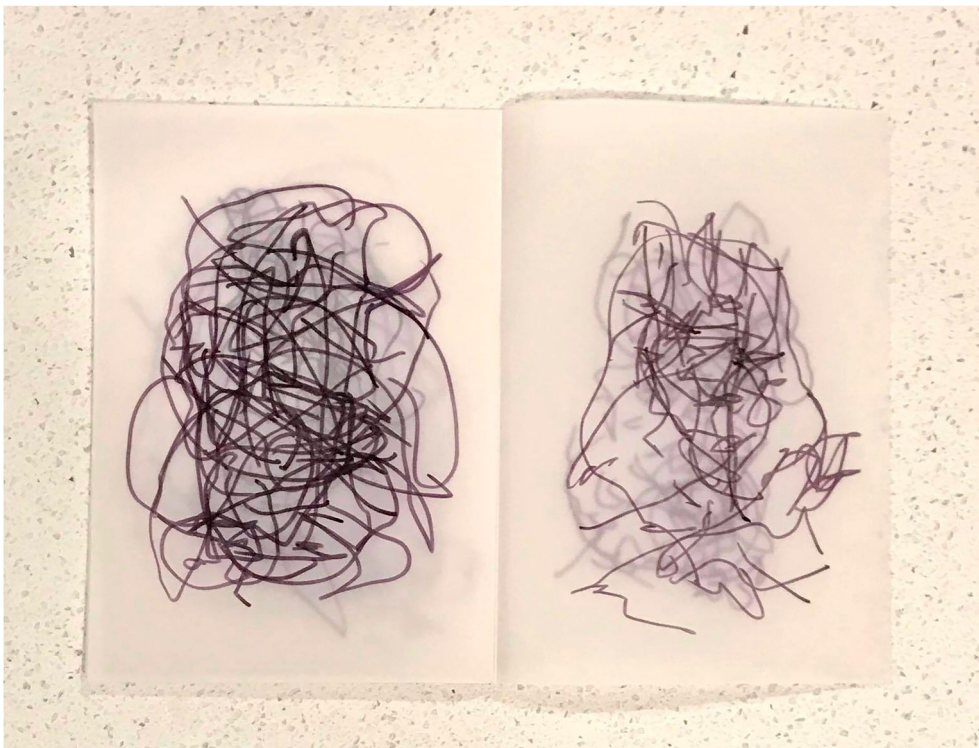


Figure 4. Participant N’s map of their domestic space while working and caring from home.

suggestive of a child's hand: is this the ultimate act of trespass, the pre-school child taking over the artist/maker's canvas, or is the artist/maker more deliberate here?

For each sketch, though a black mess of lines, is reminiscent of a head-and-shoulders portrait. Participant N's drawings could almost be seen as two human figures, head-and-shoulder portraits, placed side by side. As a translation of the affective experience of working and caring from home during lockdown, these paired sketches, photographed against a slate background, perhaps a kitchen bench-top, blur the domestic and the intellectual, the carer and those cared for. Who is who? What is what? Each panel is too full of competing forms of attention to be navigated with anything like grace; and yet there's a joyful play at work here. As if to say: so what? This participant's response brings to mind Ceuterick's point that the COVID-19 motto of being 'in this together' might be usefully co-opted through feminist humour and irony to serve a 'community building function' (2020, 4). Such an approach enables us to look at the crisis in an affirmative light, 'creating resistant forces while also displaying a certain anxiety over the unthinkable: namely that the status quo will remain' (Ceuterick 2020, 4).

Another group of participants in our study chose digital photography as their preferred medium, and we wish to consider their photography as an alternative way of approaching cartographies of everyday life. Here too, mapmaking in the domestic space while WCFH allows participants to attune to the intensities of their experience (Gaver, Dunne, and Pacenti 1999). As part of the call out for participants we offered three photography prompts that asked participants to: share images of their workstations, interpret the phrase 'work/life balance' and/or map their 'commute to work'. The photography prompts were designed to elicit creative and affective responses to the tacit forms of informal care and labour experienced during the pandemic (Hjorth et al. 2022).

The immediacy of mobile photography has given more people access to devices that allow them to record the mundane and familiar aspects of domestic life (Rubinstein and Sluis 2008). As a form of cultural mapping, photography can help users interpret the material and relational forces that construct their realities and the affective tensions that emerge as a result. Participants welcomed the accessibility and immediacy of mobile photography, expressing that working and caring from home meant they had limited time to engage in reflective or creative work. The immediacy of mobile photography also enabled participants to share the material, temporal and emotional shifts in their lives through images of their homes, workstations, and human and more-than-human dependents – often in humorous ways.

Many participants drew on deadpan humour to show the precarity of their lives through animating the material conditions of the home (Goodwin et al. 2021; Harris, Brickell, and Nowicki 2020) – the reality of life 'beyond the screen'. In Participant J's photograph (see Figure 5) a laptop balances on a stack of research books. Here the books appear to support the performance of professional life rather than the generation of ideas. Adding to this temporary and do-it-yourself (DIY) aesthetic are three mismatched towels hanging listlessly from the blinds. The lamp is positioned to create a 'fill light' – a lighting technique that uses the qualities of reflected light to create a 'softer' image. This photograph not only references the 'platformativity' of the screen (Lamarre 2017) but also the temporary nature of the workstation, as if to say; *This situation isn't permanent. This workstation*



Figure 5. Participant J's workstation during Melbourne's first Covid lockdown, 2020.

will be dismantled soon. In this case, we might understand the image as a refusal to seamlessly integrate the professional into the domestic in protest of the unsustainable working conditions of the pandemic.

As photography theorist Ariella Azoulay (2015) points out, our 'civil imagination' is activated when the circumstances and events that precede the event of photography are factored into its reading. Drawing on Azoulay's prompt to imagine the events proceeding the image, and the idea that relational intensities and 'emotional cartographies' (Nold 2009) can be developed through cultural probes, we propose that rather than didactic descriptions of the material conditions of the domestic, the photographs in our study map affective, material and relational responses to the conditions and compressions of WCFH. Surfacing these states of liminality and temporality through photographic mapping allows the affective and tacitly felt impacts of WCFH to be recorded. Recording this liminality – that is, the affective experience of how the material conditions of the home support and enable the transcendence of roles and boundaries (Goodwin et al. 2021) – challenges the expected 'platformativity' of digital working cultures (Lamarre 2017).

Entanglements of domestic, creative and work objects feature in many of the submitted photographs, demonstrating both the material shifts in the home during the pandemic, and the tensions generated as a result. For example, submitted photographs of shared workstations, devices, cords, books and power points help to locate the competing modes of co-presence within the home (Hjorth et al. 2022). These layered 'emotional

cartographies' reference the 'bleed' of the professional into the domestic (Nold 2009) and show how various objects both obstruct and create 'boundaries' in the home.

In a series of photographs submitted by Participant L (see Figures 6–8), the incompatibility of the domain of the professional and domestic is highlighted through the compression and co-presence of bodies and objects in space. These photographs reference the rapid increase in 'domestication technologies' – that is, screens, platforms, devices and modalities – in the home and the subsequent compression of the relational, technological and professional aspects of daily life. In these images tangled cords pile up near power sources, and pets and children compete for space. One image shows a child about to leap from a living room cubby. Here the cubby exists as both an obstacle to professional life and domestic order, and a place of joy, imagination, and care.

In this home Goodwin et al.'s idea of boundary transcendence (2021) seems less concrete with school, work, care, play and leisure bleeding into each other. In this entanglement of relational and material intensities, neat boundaries and role modulation seem out of reach. Drawing on cultural geographer Doreen Massey's (2005) observation that bodies and relations transform domestic space, these photographs show the diverse ways that domestic spaces were transformed during intense periods of WCFH. They show how enforced intimacy and co-presence in the home generate different forms of emotional, domestic, and caring labour and offer an affective cartography of domestic relations that highlight – as Ceuterick argues – the 'irreconcilable juxtaposition' of working and caring from home (2020, 3).

Another reoccurring theme in participant responses was the idea of interruption. Many of the submitted photographs reference the interruptions that arise when the boundaries of domestic and professional labour collapse (Leroy, Schmidt, and Madjar 2021). Images submitted by Participant B (Figures 9 and 10) show a home office blooming with ideas. In this office, drawings, handwritten reminders, and post-it notes cover every surface. Are the notes business as usual, or are they a record of interruption? Inscribing ideas and thoughts into material form may be a defense against the intrusions of the domestic into the professional – a form of wayfaring through the circuit breaking affects of interruption.

The pandemic has brought carers and their children into closer proximity which has created multiple and complex forms of informal caring labour. These new forms of domestic labour extend Gregg's (2011) concept of 'work intimacy' by producing a new kind of 'intimacy work' caused by the almost total collapse of the boundaries between work, school, care and creativity. In photographs submitted by Participants E and J (see Figures 11 and 12) we see the outcomes of this labour through the shifting terrain of the domestic. Azoulay's (2015) prompt to imagine the events and contexts that precede the photograph reveals the multiple forms of labour 'beyond the frame'. Here carers support their children to build new worlds, moving between the roles of worker, teacher, builder, collaborator, engineer, and more. The trails of this labour are mapped by imagining the events that proceeded the photograph. Despite not being directly imaged, the boredom, problem solving, exhaustion, and achievement are present in the photograph. As Massey (2005) reminds us, 'invisibility' is structural – it is simply a way of seeing. These images highlight the colliding worlds and rhythms of the domestic during the pandemic and challenge the longstanding rhetoric that mobile devices are all that are required to WFH (Gregg 2011).



Figure 6. Participant L's response to 'work/life balance' while working and caring from home, 2020.

As with participants who responded to our cultural probes through digital photography, those who responded in the form of creative writing emphasised the problem of constant interruption. Passages they wrote to represent their WFH experience during COVID lockdowns echoed the visual representations of compression, clutter and complexity represented in the sketches and photographs of other participants exemplified above.



Figure 7. Participant L's response to 'work/life balance' while working and caring from home, 2020.

Trespass and the repeated failure to defend one zone over another was a common feature, as demonstrated in this passage from Participant P:

My office space right now is a desk in the back room of our house ... I set it up nicely about a week ago, yet still there is a play mouse on my desk, as well as a bubble-omatic (an electronic bubble machine I found on the side of the road and which, we found out this morning, does



Figure 8. Participant L's response to 'work/life balance' while working and caring from home, 2020.

not work). There is also a 'pillow' that my daughter and her friend made for our kittens, which the kittens have rejected ... In the background of my 'office' – which cannot be shut to the rest of the house – is the noise of two seven-year-old girls. It is the last day of school holidays and I feel like a husk. They are supposed to be keeping quiet, but they are not. Some sort of argument is bubbling and so my ears are pricked up, my body coiled for intervention.

Here, again, what is happening 'off screen' during a work-related Zoom meeting for Participant P is difficult, if not impossible, to mask. Not only does the noise of the nearby children travel into the virtual meeting, but the participant's inability to concentrate, on

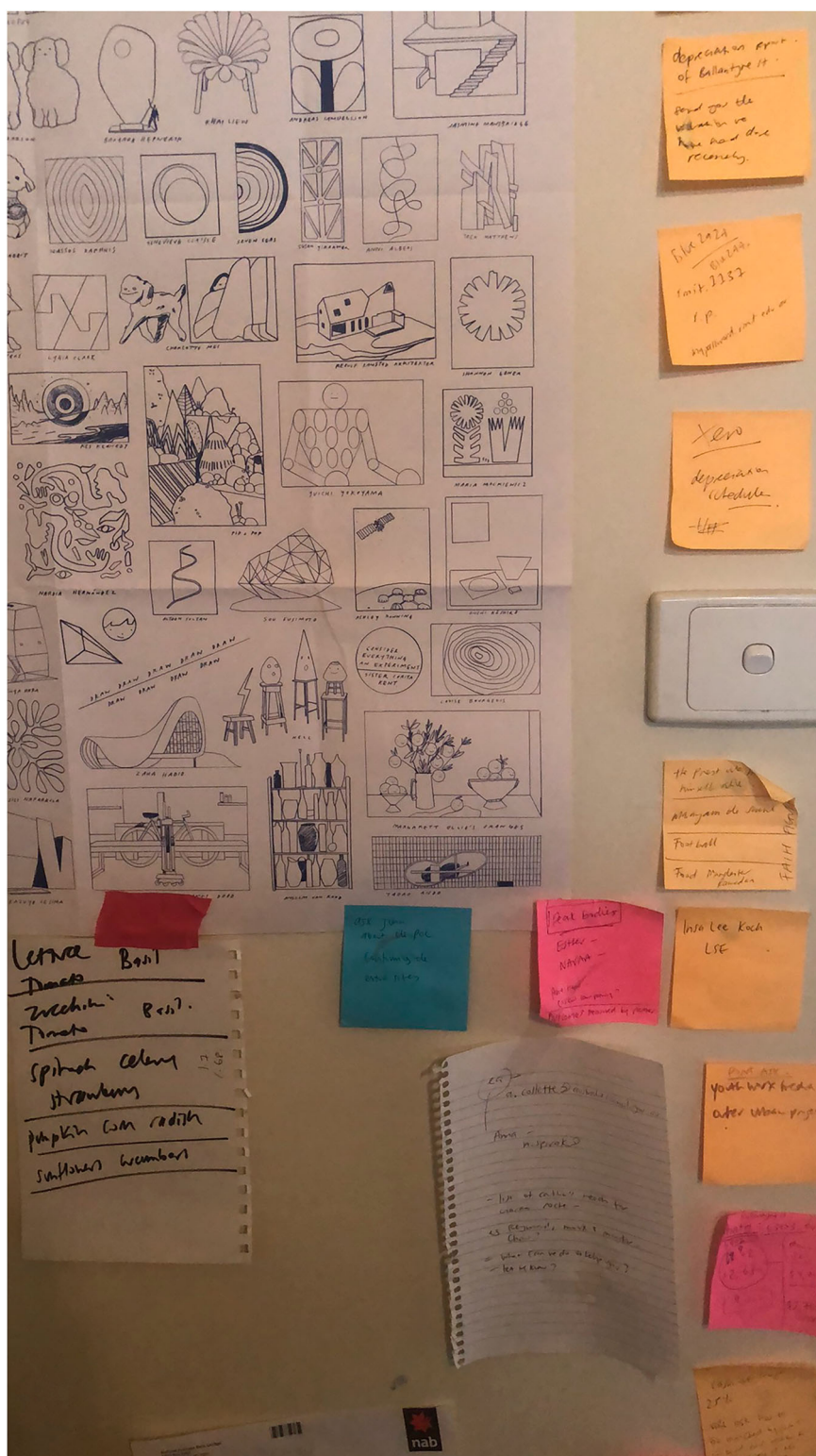


Figure 9. Participant B's workstation during Melbourne's Covid lockdown, 2020.

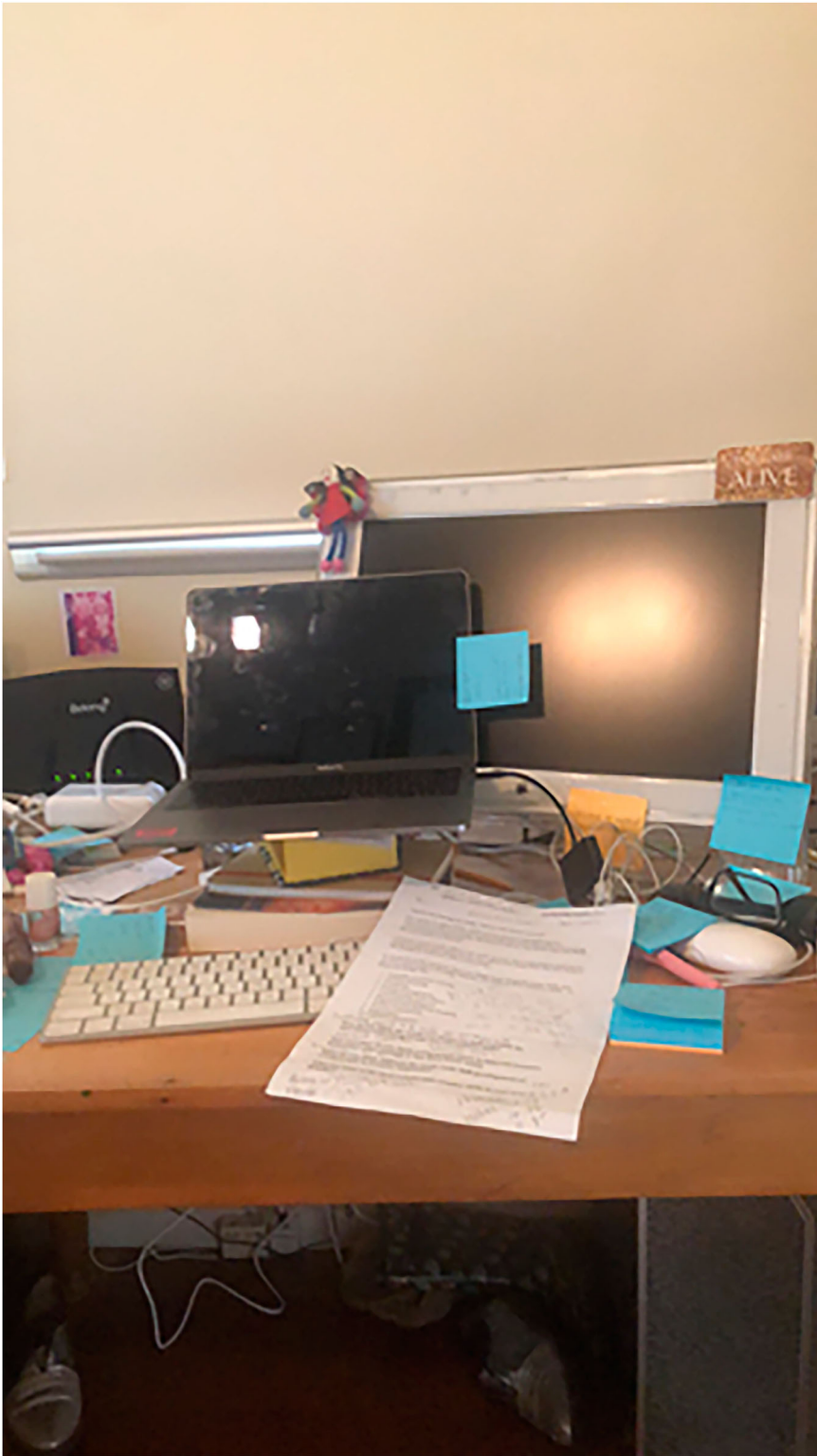


Figure 10. Participant B's workstation during Melbourne's Covid lockdown, 2020.



Figure 11. Participant E's response to 'work/life balance'.

account of her caring responsibilities, prevents her from being fully present in the virtual workspace 'room.' Similarly, in the response (below) from Participant T, proposed borders between workspace and care space are constantly under attack:

I have a door. I have a look. But sound carries. There's a big gap at the bottom of my door that my eldest slips notes under. They can't write yet, but there'll be letters and drawings. The gist of the note is always come out. Sometimes the notes are angry, with a picture of me at my desk with a cross through it. Sometimes the notes have love hearts, things that say I love you, I miss you. Sometimes they just yell at the door. If I have my headphones on, I can't hear them.

During follow up interviews with several participants, their imperfect or failed attempts to 'close off', defend or adequately demarcate spaces in which to work remained a key concern, often a source of outright anxiety. Several participants discussed the effect constant interruption was having on their capacity to carry on with intellectual and creative work, and relatedly the impact this was having on their well-being. Challenges to career continuity, especially as weeks of lockdown turned into months with no clear indicator of



Figure 12. Participant J's response to 'work/life balance'.

when the improvised situations at home might resolve, were also raised regularly as a key concern during unstructured interviews with participants. As journalist Calla Holquist notes, 'Melbourne's thriving arts sector [was among] the worst effected' (2021). It is within this context that our participants' concerns about well-being and career progression should be understood.

Another creative writer responding to one of our cultural probes, Participant K, wrote, 'my office is a magic trick, an illusion,' highlighting the precariousness of a caring creative workers' capacity to labour at all during intense lockdowns. Participant K's phrasing of the working and caring from home challenge also speaks to the way in which the categories 'worker' and 'carer' – and it could also be said 'parent' and 'child' – may indeed have been a willed form of 'magic trick' all along. Again, as Ceuterick (2020) has said, this 'irreconcilable juxtaposition' can produce both anxiety and humour simultaneously, precisely because we fear the unthinkable: that the status quo may never change.

As stable categories collapse in the intense and crowded maps and sketches of domestic space supplied to us by our participants, humour and the forced inventiveness of 'making do' regularly give way to knowing and wry forms of resistance through creative practice, sometimes producing an outright subversive take on Gregg's notion of 'presence bleed' (as discussed in relation to Figure 4). In those domestic spaces presented to us through participants' sketches, photography and creative writing, failure is inevitable, most days: everybody is failing splendidly, and as the failures are shared on screen – via Zoom, via social media – the whole dream that was productivity, efficiency and career success is shown up as another form of illusion. As if to say: who were we

kidding, anyway? Certainly not the child, whose note under the door implores us: *Come out! Come out! There are better things to do!*

Conclusion

Our rapid deployment of the cultural probes as method has sought to explore some of the ways creative workers and their care responsibilities shifted during the pandemic. It sought to give a sense of vitality – through photos, creative writing and maps – to the domestic materialities and relational intensities experienced in the home during the extended lockdowns in Melbourne, Australia during 2020 and 2021. Our project asked: how might we render visible some of the overlooked emotions, perceptions and practices that were emerging during the pandemic? Further, we explored the considerable value of arts-based techniques to articulate the constant (re)negotiation of the relational intensities and compressions of work, care and creativity experienced by those WCFH. The creative responses by our participants made visible how the shifting terrain of the domestic has contributed to the complex relational intensities experienced by many creative workers and carers during the pandemic.

Drawing on creative practice ethnography (Hjorth et al. 2019) and the sensory turn in the broader humanities, our study has mapped the affective experiences of those working and caring from home *in real time*. Our arts-based methods created a framework for interpretation and analysis that privileged creative practice knowledge and allowed creative practice academics and researchers to communicate in forms that were familiar and playful, capturing the sensorial and affective aspects of WCFH. Further, our analysis of their responses, informed by Vannini's emphasis on the fleeting, lively and material undercurrents of contemporary ethnographic practices (2015) and Goodwin et al.'s emphasis on the lively domestic materialities of the home that come to light when we focus on physical and material realities (2021), has provided critical reflection on how the domestic conditions of the pandemic, especially for those with care responsibilities, can be understood as actively shaping structural inequalities.

The creative submissions provided by our participants form a repository of embodied, sentient and sentry 'answers' to our research question. Our data exposes and complicates the labour of the carer working from home, providing 'sketch maps' (Ingold 2016) as alternative forms of knowledge that have been drawn alongside our participants everyday experiences of WCFH. The affective impacts of constant interruption, competing demands and responsibilities are evident in our data.

The lively materialities of the domestic – such as tangled laptop chords, devices, discarded art projects and snacks, cubbies, and DIY workstations – show the boundary transcendence of WCFH (Goodwin et al. 2021). The hand drawn maps and sharp prose describe the labour of care through the intrusions that arise in the spatial, relational, and material realities of WCFH. Our research provides further evidence of the uneven impacts of the pandemic on carers. Our (mostly) female identifying participants from both creative industries and higher education provide new insights into the experience of WCFH in a pandemic and its impact on their creative continuity.

As categories such as work collapsed under the increased pressures of lockdown, forms of creative practice offered our participants the opportunity to express humour, irony and small acts of resistance that acknowledged failures, tensions and competing subjectivities

under difficult conditions. Modes of humour that found expression through this project made possible a shared recognition of collective fears and anxieties about the status quo, particularly the potential that these working and caring conditions would become permanent. These representations of the tacit or invisible labour of the compressions of work, care and creativity in a time of COVID-19 animate the 'everyday life' of carers. They reveal the gendered nature of care work as it collides with uneven and unreasonable expectations around WCFH through an extended period of heightened anxiety, uncertainty and career insecurity.

Note

1. RMIT University ethics approval number:2020-23705-11447. All participants' images are reproduced with permission.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

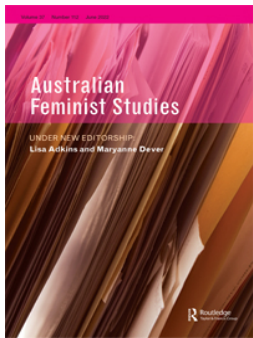
This work was supported by DCP ECP; RMIT's Design & Creative Practice Enabling Capability Platform.

References

- Azoulay, Ariella. 2015. *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*. London: Verso Books.
- Boaz, J. 2021. "Melbourne Passes Buenos Aires' World Record for Time Spent in COVID-19 Lockdown." *ABC News* 4 October.
- Bowlby, Sophie, and Eleanor Jupp. 2021. "Home, Inequalities and Care: Perspectives from Within a Pandemic." *International Journal of Housing Policy* 21 (3): 423–432. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2020.1840901>.
- Candy, Linda. 2020. *The Creative Reflective Practitioner*. London: Routledge.
- Cassidy, Caitlin. 2021. "Melbourne Freedom Day: World's Most Locked Down City Takes First Cautious Steps to re-Opening." *The Guardian*. 21 Oct.
- Ceuterick, Maud. 2020. "An Affirmative Look at a Domesticity in Crisis: Women, Humour and Domestic Labour During the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Feminist Media Studies* 20 (6): 896–901. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2020.1789396>.
- Chapman, Owen, and Kim Sawchuk. 2015. "Creation-As-Research: Critical Making in Complex Environments." *RACAR: Revue d'art canadienne| Canadian Art Review* 40 (1): 49–52.
- Craig, Lyn, and Brendan Churchill. 2020. "Dual-Earner Parent Couples' Work and Care During COVID-19." *Gender Work and Organisation*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12497>.
- Duncanson, Kirsty, Natasha Weir, Pavithra Siriwardhane, and Tehmina Khan. 2020. "How COVID is Widening the Academic Gender Divide". *The Conversation*. 6 October.
- Flaherty, Colleen. 2020. "No Room of One's own: Early Journal Submission Data Suggest COVID-19 is Tanking Women's Research Productivity." *Inside Higher Ed* 21.
- Foster, Victoria. 2015. *Collaborative Arts-Based Research for Social justice*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Gaver, Bill, Tony Dunne, and Elena Pacenti. 1999. "Design: Cultural Probes." *Interactions* 6 (1): 21–29. <https://doi.org/10.1145/291224.291235>.
- Gewin, Virginia. 2020. "The Career Cost of COVID-19 to Female Researchers, and How Science Should Respond." *Nature* 583 (7818): 867–869. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-020-02183-x>.

- Goodwin, Brittany, Nicholas Webber, Tom Baker, and Ann E. Bartos. 2021. "Working from Home: Negotiations of Domestic Functionality and Aesthetics." *International Journal of Housing Policy* 23 (1): 1–23.
- Gorman-Murray, Andrew, and Robyn Dowling. 2007. "Home." *M/C Journal* 10 (4). <https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.2679>.
- Gregg, Melissa. 2011. *Work's Intimacy*. New York: Polity.
- Harris, Ella, Katherine Brickell, and Mel Nowicki. 2020. "Door Locks, Wall Stickers, Fireplaces: Assemblage Theory and Home (Un)Making in Lewisham's Temporary Accommodation." *Antipode* 52 (5): 1286–1309. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12639>.
- Hjorth, Larissa, Gretchen Coombs, Kelly Hussey-Smith, and Julienne van Loon. 2022. "Work, Care and Creativity in a Time of COVID-19: Creatively Mapping Presence Bleed in the Home." *Digital Creativity* 33 (3): 1–15.
- Hjorth, Larissa, Anne Harris, Katrina Jungnickel, and Gretchen Coombs. 2019. *Creative Practice Ethnographies*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Hjorth, Larissa, and Sybille Lammes. 2020. "Playing with the 'New Normal' of Life Under Coronavirus". *The Conversation*. May 6. <https://theconversation.com/playing-with-the-new-normal-of-life-under-coronavirus-137481>.
- Hjorth, Larissa, and Sarah Pink. 2014. "New Visualities and the Digital Wayfarer: Reconceptualizing Camera Phone Photography and Locative Media." *Mobile Media & Communication* 2 (1): 40–57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157913505257>.
- Holquist, Calla. 2021. "How Melbourne's Short Sharp Lockdowns Became the Longest in the World." *The Guardian*. 2 Oct. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/oct/02/how-melbournes-short-sharp-covid-lockdowns-became-the-longest-in-the-world>.
- Ingold, Tim. 2007. "Materials Against Materiality." *Archaeological Dialogues* 14 (1): 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1380203807002127>.
- Ingold, Tim. 2016. *Lines*. London: Routledge.
- Jenkins, Fiona, and Julie Smith. 2021. "Work-from-home During COVID-19: Accounting for the Care Economy to Build Back Better." *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 32 (1): 22–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1035304620983608>.
- Knight, Linda. 2021. *Inefficient Mapping*. Melbourne: Punctum books.
- Lamarre, Thomas. 2017. "Platformivity: Media Studies, Area Studies." *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 4 (3): 285–305. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22142312-12340081>.
- Langevang, Thilde, Rashida Resario, Ana Alacovska, Robin Steedman, Dorothy Akpene Amenuke, Sela Kodjo Adjei, and Rufai Haruna Kilu. 2021. "Care in Creative Work: Exploring the Ethics and Aesthetics of Care Through Arts-Based Methods." *Cultural Trends* 31 (5): 1–22.
- Leavy, Patricia. 2020. *Method Meets art: Arts-Based Research Practice*. New York: Guilford Publications.
- Leroy, Sophie, Aaron M. Schmidt, and Nora Madjar. 2021. "Working from Home During COVID-19: A Study of the Interruption Landscape." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 106 (10): 1448. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000972>.
- Lewis, Tania, Annette Markham, and Indigo Holcombe-James. 2021. "Embracing Liminality and" Staying with the Trouble" on (and off) Screen." *M/C Journal* 24 (3).
- Lockdown Stats. 2021. <https://lockdownstats.melbourne/>.
- Lupton, Deborah, and Ash Watson. 2021. "Towards More-Than-Human Digital Data Studies: Developing Research-Creation Methods." *Qualitative Research* 21 (4): 463–480. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794120939235>.
- Malisch, Jessica L., Breanna N. Harris, Shanen M. Sherrer, Kristy A. Lewis, Stephanie L. Shepherd, Pumtiwitt C. McCarthy, Jessica L. Spott, et al. 2020. "In the Wake of COVID-19, Academia Needs new Solutions to Ensure Gender Equity." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117 (27): 15378–15381. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2010636117>.
- Markham, Annette, Dan Harris, and M. E. Luka. 2020. "Massive and Microscopic Sensemaking During Times of COVID-19." *Qualitative Inquiry* 27 (3): 1–8.
- Massey, Doreen B. 2005. *For Space*. New York: Sage Publications.
- McDonald, Paula, Jenny Malone, and Sarah Charlesworth. 2021. "Women, Work Care and COVID". <https://cpow.org.au/new-research-report-women-work-care-and-covid/>.

- Milech, Barbara, and Anne Schilo. 2004. "Exit Jesus: Relating the Exegesis and Creative/Production Components of a Research Thesis." *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*. Special Issue 3.
- Moodley, Keymenthri, and Amanda. Gouws. 2020. "How Women in Academia are Feeling the Brunt of COVID-19". *The Conversation*. 7 August. <https://theconversation.com/how-women-in-academia-are-feeling-the-brunt-of-covid-19-144087>.
- Moyle, Sally., and Innes Helen. 2021. *Working from Home: Opportunities but Also Risks for Supporting Gender Equality*. Centre for People, Organisation and Work (CPOW), RMIT University. <https://cpow.org.au/working-from-home-opportunities-but-also-risks-for-supporting-gender-equality/>.
- Nash, Meredith, and Brendan. Churchill. 2020. "Caring During COVID-19: A Gendered Analysis of Australian University Responses to Managing Remote Working and Caring Responsibilities." *Gender, Work & Organization* 27 (5): 833–846. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12484>.
- Nold, Christian. 2009. *Emotional Cartography: Technologies of the Self*. <http://www.emotionalcartography.net/>.
- Perkins, Chris, Sam Hind, and Alex Gekker. 2018. *Time for Mapping*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Rubinstein, Daniel, and Katrina Sluis. 2008. "A Life More Photographic: Mapping the Networked Image." *Photographies* 1 (1): 9–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17540760701785842>.
- Sholette, Gregory. 2011. *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*. New York: Pluto Press.
- Smith, Chris, and Deirdre Watchorn. 2020. "The Pandemic is Making it Harder for Researchers but Women are hit the Hardest. Findings from 80 Countries". London School of Economics. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2020/09/17/the-pandemic-is-making-it-harder-for-researchers-but-women-are-hit-the-hardest-4-findings-from-80-countries/#:~:text=Conducted%20over%20May%202020%20across,responsibilities%20were%20struggling%20the%20most>.
- Springgay, Stephanie, and Sarah E. Truman. 2018. "On the Need for Methods Beyond Proceduralism: Speculative Middles, (In)Tensions, and Response-Ability in Research." *Qualitative Inquiry* 24 (3): 203–214. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417704464>.
- Throsby, David, Katya Petetskaya, and Sunny Y. Shin. 2020. *The Gender Pay Gap Among Australian Artists: Some Preliminary Findings*. Sydney: Australia Council for the Arts.
- Vannini, Phillip. 2015. "Non-Representational Ethnography: New Ways of Animating Lifeworlds." *Cultural Geographies* 22 (2): 317–327. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474014555657>.
- Verhoeff, Nina. 2012. *Mobile Screens*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Welch, Antony. 2022. "A Plague on Higher Education? COVID, Camus and Culture Wars in Australian Universities." *Higher Education Quarterly* 76 (2): 213–229. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12377>.



Remaking Home: Creative Practice as Part of Domesticity's Changing Significance

Susie Elliott

To cite this article: Susie Elliott (2022) Remaking Home: Creative Practice as Part of Domesticity's Changing Significance, Australian Feminist Studies, 37:112, 227-241, DOI: [10.1080/08164649.2023.2183488](https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2023.2183488)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2023.2183488>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 05 Mar 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1263



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Remaking Home: Creative Practice as Part of Domesticity's Changing Significance

Susie Elliott

Digital Ethnography Research Centre (DERC), RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

ABSTRACT

While the home has a history of being overlooked as a site of great social impact, this is clearly shifting as it becomes a site for diverse and significant social participation. Technological connectivity is reshaping the household towards an increasingly public life, remarkable for a domain that until relatively recently had been thought of primarily in terms of privatised care and leisure. This article brings together literature from creative industries, feminist and new domesticity fields with empirical data from interviews with home-based creative practitioners to generate insights into new work models, the coincidence of paid work and unpaid care work, and creative work at home as a locus for connecting to surrounding communities and natural environments. These lived examples are explored as signs of an altering domestic space where paid work and non-economic values are more balanced and the home itself is moving from the periphery towards the centre of social life.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 2 May 2022

Accepted 18 February 2023

KEYWORDS

Home; domestic creative practice; new domesticity; productivity; public/private spheres; Creative practice

We're experiencing an era in which the home is shifting its social value and character: in terms of public interest not only in domestic spaces but also, importantly, in the ways in which we inhabit our homes (Gregg 2011, 39-55; Taylor 2015; Luckman 2015, 1-3; Matchar 2014, 3; Scott and Keates 2004; O'Connor 2017; Saunders and Williams 1988). With COVID-19 rapidly accelerating a transition that has otherwise been building over many decades, social understanding of domestic spaces as diverse and interesting to the wider world has heightened. This is particularly so with the technological capacity to publicly share personal lives (Abidin 2014; Calfas 2018; Hunter 2015; Kennedy et al. 2020; Scott and Keates 2004) and a deepening of the global north's fixation with lifestyle (Lewis 2008; Raisborough 2011; Martens and Casey 2016). These changes stand out against the sustained attempt to split life into private and public spheres that characterised industrial-era capitalism and which, particularly since WWII, framed the home as a peculiarly female space (Felski 2000, 86; McKeon 2005). In being feminised, the home was also seen as populated by 'low-value' activities extrinsic to the marketplace, politics and cultural life (Felski 2000, 8; McKeon 2005; Bratich and Brush 2011; Padilla Carroll 2016;

CONTACT Susie Elliott  elliott.susie.l@gmail.com  Digital Ethnography Research Centre (DERC), RMIT University, Melbourne 3000, Australia

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

Scott and Keates 2004). The demarcation of supposedly independent public and private realms tended to not only underestimate the value of activities performed at home, but it also shrunk the range of these as well – for women it was seen as a space for affective labour (Hardt 1999; Oakley 1985; Huws 2015; Barrett 1988) and for men, leisure and ‘clocking off’ from the outside world of work (Cowan 1989). This separation has always been artificial and contested by a range of voices who have fought to bring attention to the integral role the household has always had in economic functioning (Best 2021; Waring 1988). However, it is the cultural and political success of ‘splitting’ spheres that now seems to be giving way, such that the home is commonly understood as a more complex space – as diverse, productive, and compelling, if also conflicted and problematic (Gregg 2011; Gurstein 2002; Hochschild 1997; O’Connor 2017; Luckman 2015, 1–3; Padilla Carroll 2016). It is clearly interdependent with the rest of the economy (Gregg 2011; Luckman 2013; Taylor 2015) and where once they might have been considered surplus to civic participation, formerly private lives are increasingly integrated into our public identities (Scott and Keates 2004; Raisborough 2011). These changes are significant in re-prising an underappreciated site whose goings-on can now be understood as of value in and impactful on wider society, as the home becomes increasingly central and co-constituting within the broader social body (Padilla Carroll 2016, 52–4; Luckman 2013; Matchar 2014; Bratich and Brush 2011).

It’s the varied productivity now seemingly intrinsic to contemporary homelife that is a central point of interest here, and creative practice in particular as a good example of one such type. By taking a closer look at home-based contemporary creative practices we can gain insight into how these behaviours are part of a larger reshaping of the home’s perceived function and value.

In this article, I draw on material I gathered during a collaborative art project undertaken in 2020 to make observations about the shifting function and status of the home in contemporary life.¹ In the following sections, I explore several themes that arose during conversations a colleague and I filmed and presented publicly during an art festival that exemplify the muddled ‘separation’ of social spheres. In this project, we were inquiring about the topic of creative practice at home, which is relevant here in a number of ways. First, the cultural and creative industries are a rapidly growing trillion-dollar global economic sector (OECD 2021, 4; Luckman 2015, 1) that offer prominent examples of ‘self-actualising’ work models increasingly adopted over conventional workplace ones (Taylor 2011; Luckman 2013) and which are reconfiguring the role of the domestic space in modern-day working life (Kramer and Kramer 2020; Reid-Musson et al. 2020). Extending from this, creative work at home is often highly intermingled with domestic life generally but particularly so with care work, due to it often being performed by women, largely freelance, fragmented, and requiring much flexibility (Taylor and Littleton 2012, 32; Taylor 2011; Gill and Pratt 2008; Luckman 2013, 263). Its propensity to ‘boundary cross’ within domestic spaces (Conor, Gill and Taylor 2015, 14; Taylor and Littleton 2012, 32–7; Taylor 2011; Luckman 2013, 263) means home-based creative work challenges discrete, restrictive categories of roles and behaviours within the home, particularly those placed on mothers – although it’s acknowledged that this can also create tremendous strain for women.

Other themes of interest that arose from our empirical work surround the possible greater sociality of domestic creative work – which Bratich and Brush (2011) argue creativity has a unique tendency to foster – as well as work from home as a locus for

reconnecting to the surrounding environment. As a final point, we consider words spoken in one of our conversations that stand in stark relief in the way they describe home within Indigenous Australian traditions. In them, we heard a clear sense of the home's importance and centrality within these traditions, its embeddedness within the natural environment, and its sociality mixed with meaningful productivity. With this and our other descriptive examples, the article pursues this special issue's interest in how the contemporary home is transitioning in social status and meaning, through an intimate, innovative research approach into the lived experience and nuance of this. By taking a look at this detail, we can learn more about reframed domesticity, which, while no doubt incomplete and beset by difficulties, can nonetheless gesture to the political and social potency of its rebalanced status in the world.

While 'creative practice' is a notoriously expansive term, here it is used to refer to labour that generates new aesthetic content or products that may or may not involve remuneration but crucially that are intended for an audience or market outside the home. It is therefore distinct from a hobby or similar activity primarily for personal interest. This article will consider literature on creative industries and its social impact (Taylor 2011; Taylor and Littleton 2012; Conor, Gill and Taylor 2015; Luckman 2013, 2015), and feminist literature on creative work at home, as well as literature on new domesticity that examines creative work as part of an altering private realm (Padilla Carroll 2016; Matchar 2014; Bratich and Brush 2011). By interspersing this scholarship with elements from my own creative work, I seek to focus specifically on the changing status of the home with an inclusive, experiential exploration of the impact of home-based creative practice.

Methodology

For this article, I draw on a blend of qualitative interviewing with creative practice methodology. The art project referred to in this article was one conducted by myself and a colleague Helen Mathwin. The project itself was a public installation of an urban projection space as part of the Get Lost arts festival in 2020 in Castlemaine in Central Victoria, with funding support from the local council. The projected material shown explored the home and its connection to the creative practices of eight individuals, most of which were conversations between participants, my colleague, and myself. For these conversations, we sought as diverse a group as possible of creatives, artists and makers in the regional area. Six of these identified as female, one as male, and one non-binary. Discussions sometimes spanned several hours and were conducted in situ in participants' homes/work spaces to also allow observation of the behaviour and environment being discussed, and hopefully seeing some creative work taking place in real time. These were video-recorded with the final creative installation in mind and then analysed after the event for themes.

Creative practice methodology allows for inclusiveness in research materials used to gather data, such that creative works and more 'plurivocal' interactions might be mined for insight, including the use of aesthetic and sensory material alongside the spoken word (Haseman 2006; Batty and Berry 2015). The use of images and descriptive reflection is also in keeping with dialogic qualitative interviewing techniques, allowing for 'the visible (what is seen), the auditory (what is heard) and the sensory (what is felt)' (Denzin 1997, 38; Borer and Fontana, 2012). The dialogic approach also reflects the

free-flowing, relational format of our conversations (Denzin 1997, 38). We wanted participants to shape a significant amount of the direction of discussions, although we still used prompts to return to key themes and queries. We pursued an up-close, intimate sense of making creative work at home, while at the same time showed interest in broader issues such as participants' ideas and ideals of home. This included connection to place and how all these ideas interacted with their creative work. We asked them not only about the pragmatics of how they managed their arrangements, but also how it helped resituate these spaces as productive hubs from which to engage with the world.

The Creative Home

The growing economic sector of home-based creative work has been attributed to a more profound cultural and economic shift away from mass-scale production towards economies of individualised, responsive, and 'authentic' goods and services (Luckman 2013: 254–5; Howkins 2018; see also Taylor and Littleton 2012: 2). The opportunity to make creative work has expanded rapidly with this demand, alongside the evolution of technology and work culture to support working from home (Gregg 2011; Miller 2007; Luckman 2013, 2015; Padilla Carroll 2016; Kennedy et al. 2020). The emerging domestic creative economy might be understood, then, in terms of a shift in both our models of consumption and production. Luckman suggests applying Adkins explanation of 'organised' industrial economies – under which we have mostly wanted to purchase and own goods – tending towards advanced capitalism's 'disorganisation', where the market permeates the most common, personal, and un-corporate spaces of everyday life and where lifestyle, identity, and cultural capital are the more desired ends (see Luckman 2020, 38–9; Adkins 2005).

Along similar lines, the self-actualisation argument suggests that creativity was always going to become intermingled with modern work ideals due to the human need to have free personal expression as a goal for labour, especially in a post-Floridian era where creativity and self-actualisation are closely linked (Taylor 2011; Luckman 2013; Howkins 2001; Taylor and Littleton 2012; Gill and Pratt 2008; Florida 2002; McRobbie, 2011; Huws 2015). Taylor's 'contemporary identity project' (2012, 5) here combines with the need for women in particular to have flexibility, often leading them away from office or studio settings to situate their careers at home. For Taylor and colleagues, this choice carries risks which women may not be aware of, discussed below. Arguments emanating from the new domesticity literature, however, see the intermingling of creative work with traditional home-based settings as a promising shift in social power and value for the home space and its occupants who up until now have been undermined in their social influence (Padilla Carroll 2016, 58; Matchar 2014; Bratich and Brush 2011). These arguments observe that a new more visible role for the home has emerged as it increasingly becomes the locus for people to enact their civic participation (Soper 2004: 112; Lewis 2008, 9). As the choices we make at home become more infused with our values, the choice to work at home, in this case, helps to reconfigure the home space as *of* the world and *in* the world. In turn, the value and status of traditional domestic activities, such as relationship work, care work, and housework, also become more socially relevant and impactful (Padilla Carroll 2016; Bratich and Brush 2011, 236–7).

New Ways of Working

Despite the increasing professionalisation of women, the struggle to make conventional work models fit with care obligations and an awareness of their structural inequality led to some women 'opting out' of the office and work altogether in the early 2000s, and now to what Taylor calls 'the new mystique' of freelance or self-employed work from home, particularly so with cultural and creative industries (Taylor 2015, 175–7; d'Arcy and Gardiner 2014).

When we met Cassie, a magazine-editor-cum-ceramicist, in her tiny studio in her garden, she seemed very confident about all the drawcards Taylor describes regarding her decision to leave the city with her partner to work from home. Her studio was incredibly quaint, glass-panelled French doors, linen aprons, modernist clay vases ... The greater freedom, control, efficiency, and convenience sounded too good to pass up, as well as a utopian mix of paid labour intermingled with everyday life.

I get to work exactly how I know I like to work ... I think in terms of the output of work, I'm maybe even more efficient, and [have] more time and opportunity to explore ideas because I literally can go here [into the home studio] and just go 'oh there's an idea I have' and just quickly mock that up while it's fresh in my head. Whereas if I was probably back in Melbourne, you know, it might be a 20-minute drive to the community studio, and late at night it probably wouldn't even be possible to do that ... There's almost nothing in my way of me coming here and being myself, I have nothing to inhibit that ... Everything in this [space] is designed by me ... Especially during lockdown, I've spent a vast amount of my time here. I have a kettle in here, I don't even have to leave ... [Of the home and the studio] it's all just an extension of me, it really is.

Cassie offered a ringing endorsement of the appeal of home-based work, which is part of the mystique Taylor says is drawing more people to leave the workplace. Certainly, Cassie's practice appeared to be doing very well; however, scholars like Taylor are concerned that this type of success is the exception rather than the rule. Taylor argues the precarity, isolation and marginalisation of these types of workers within the neoliberal economy is a real concern, and that women are particularly likely to be drawn in and caught up in these types of conditions (Taylor 2015, 178; see also Dawkins 2011). She notes that the romanticism and promises of creative work at home – as compared to the reality – can exploit women who are prepared to 'tolerate difficulties and uncertainty' due to reduced options (Taylor 2015, 174). This is not to mention technological and digital barriers, resource restrictions, and barriers to child care, material tools and physical space, and so on (Dawkins 2011; Gurstein 2002, 16; Luckman 2015, 87–111). Taylor describes:

... [a] discursive drift [that] is neither the 'fundamentally masculine' (Ahl and Marlow, 2012) figure of the successful entrepreneur nor the masculine artist but a novel, feminized (though not inevitably female) figure, who works on a small scale, mostly alone and from home, motivated by the hope of self-fulfilment and freedom as alternative rewards to a steady income and secure employment. (Taylor 2015, 174)

The draw of working from home remains strong, however, which as mentioned above, refutes the idea of the space as inactive, unproductive, or neatly parcelled off from public life. McKeon's historical work provides a broader perspective, arguing that any categorical sectioning off of the private realm has actually been part of the West's project of social modernisation. This, he says, can be understood as an economic as well as

ontological drive for Western culture's abstracted, hyper-rationalised, and masculinised dominion over the material world. In this context, the home was too closely bound to personal, embodied experience and therefore has needed to be excised from collectively held ideals (McKeon 2005, xix–xx). In this way, a neatly separate private sphere can be historicised as a modernising fabrication, and while domestic life traditionally may have been somewhat distinctive from public life, McKeon argues it was not separate from or outside of it (McKeon 2005, xix–xx). 'Like labor, the public and the private are thrown into distinctive relief against what had been a relatively homogenous plane of existence and has become a heterogenous landscape of semiautonomous structures' (McKeon 2005, xx).

Care and Other Productivity

Work based at home has for a long time had negative associations for women (Taylor and Littleton 2012), 'de-professionalised' due to its location. However, as we see the clear division between public/private fall away, so too are the boundaries 'shifting, morphing, even disintegrating ... [between] home and work; paid work and unpaid work; production and reproduction' (Conor, Gill and Taylor 2015, 14). When we sat around the kitchen table with Hermione, a photographer and artist, the conversation turned almost immediately to the daily interlacing of work and family in her house. The vintage pine table not only had the paint splatters and grooves of a workbench, but also coffee cup rings and saucepan marks, as she explained it was her studio as well as breakfast area. The background were kindergarten-style watercolour paintings of the alphabet sticky-taped to the wall and a freshly wiped sink. Motherhood, she explained, had pivoted her working life away from theatre production and the city towards work that could be performed in the same location, sometimes simultaneously, as caring for three children. It has meant reorganising the way she uses her home and her expectations of how and where she will produce work. There was lament in Hermione's voice as she explained:

I think I would feel really strange if I went to a studio ... Well I couldn't go to a studio in the evenings to make my work ... because my littlest is three so I will never be able to have a studio ...

This speaks to the lack of mobility women often experience, in terms of place and space, after having children (Alesina and Giuliano 2010; Charlesworth, Baird and Elliott 2014, 4), but Hermione also notably conveyed pride, even excitement, when describing her decision to reclaim her home and surrounds as a workplace, as well as inspiration and subject matter:

But at the same time ... [working at home] has really informed some of the work I've made ... A lot of the early works we were making, if we couldn't get what we wanted from home, it was about going for drives or walks at night and shooting stuff in the local landscape so you weren't far from home if one of the kids woke up and needed to be breastfed or something.

This entanglement of tasks and integration of care work with professional creative work in Hermione's life sounded extreme, challenging, but also like a thrilling combination. Women can be nurturing their babies while shooting artwork at night? It taps into the freedom narrative of creative work, where particularly for women, the recombination of unpaid reproductive work and 'self-actualising' paid work has been described as *the*

utopian goal (Huws 2015). But also utilising the home and the everyday as a subject matter as well as a professional location, is a subversive reclamation of it as an entity worth studying, whose goings on are interesting and relevant (see Bratich and Brush on the *unheimlich* [2011, 237]; Burton 2019, 1332).

Jewellery maker and artist Selby also spoke evocatively of her unwillingness to relegate parts of herself: 'I mean with children, and life, and art, and all of the things you need to maintain – relationships ... There are so many expectations that are individualised onto each [of these aspects of life]. [But] you need to keep the things that keep you alive going too.'

For Hermione and Selby, there seemed a purpose in reprising motherhood, particularly at such an intensive phase of rearing small children, as a role that can and should co-exist with labour on projects for the world. Taylor and Littleton (2012, 138) contrast this with more conventional thinking on the world of work as something that exists outside the home as a 'non-work site of personal life and relationships', as depicted in conventional sociological texts for example (see Burkitt 2008, 143; also Marx 2016, 110–11). They argue that creative work is particularly suited to overriding these distinctions due to the personalised nature of the work, especially when there is a pre-existing sense of greater importance to public life (Taylor and Littleton 2012, 110–11). Both Hermione and Selby spoke of the symbolic significance of enacting this productivity for their children to see and understand as 'normal', despite the challenges of doing so. The interplay between demands sounded rhythmic – or spasmodic – and demanding, giving us a sense of the tensions involved. It is obviously still a process that Hermione felt necessary to justify:

When I'm heading into presentation or exhibition mode, basically my work takes over the entire house and basically everyone else gets pushed aside, so there may be some enormous, half-built sculpture on the kitchen table and just for that week or whatever and the kids are eating breakfast in another room! [My art] for so long just exists in the background and then coming to crunch time it will dominate whatever space in the house is needed to make it ... I think I feel a lot of guilt when it's happening in my house, because, you know, I won't be as neat and it's just a really clear representation of what my priorities are at that time, which I feel guilty about ... but at the same time I wouldn't want it to be happening anywhere else. ... [The kids] definitely notice [my work in our home] but they're also quite excited by it. But also I get quite tense because of course they're curious and want to touch things and investigate and I want to stop them doing that! So I feel like it certainly makes my adrenaline a bit higher. [laughs] But I also like that ...

As Selby sat at her family's dining table skewering tiny squares of black leather as part of her fabric bust of a human head – textural, wild, and yet quietly contained – she spoke of the mixing of her roles and tasks within her home. It was clear that the muddying of boundaries was something she felt was ultimately positive for her three daughters to see and experience:

[My 3-year-old daughter] Sunday helps me with the threading of my leather, [5-year-old] Marley likes to chop. I mean, it obviously slows the process down. However I think witnessing outside materials and ideas ... Art is a really informative way for them to express themselves at a time when they are little and they are learning to develop a language of their own and how they see the world. I know that it has been really positive for them to just witness it. They don't really ask me about what it is but they ... 'Oh no, not another exhibition!' [laughs].

Whether accidental or planned, this type of domestic environment is one where parental and particularly maternal work can introduce children to the wider world and, ideally at least, begin unifying the idea of a mother at once working and caring. This is not to dismiss the difficulties and at times extreme stress this undoubtedly places on women. Selby nonetheless seemed clear that it was progressive in shaping her daughters' understanding of women's capabilities from within the home space:

But they get really excited about it, it's like there's definitely a level of ... like they understand there's a process involved with the exhibiting and making and doing ... But I don't want them to suffer also because of my practice so there's an inclusion that happens – I'm hoping – with the domestic and the creative. Because I do think they can ... I'm getting better at getting them to work together.

In this, we can see a feminist project to redefine domestic spaces and everyday life that takes place there as a platform upon which progressive politics are lived out (Luckman 2015, 144; Padilla Carroll 2016, 52; Jeremiah 2006). Second-wave feminism has been accused of participating in the subordination of the home by advocating women 'repudiate' housework and domestic life in pursuit of equality through the workplace and worldly pursuits (Martens and Casey 2016, 34; Felski 2000; Giles 2004; Jeremiah 2006, 22, citing Beauvoir 1972; Firestone 1979; Friedan 1963). Some contemporary scholars identify some older feminist thought as inadvertently supporting a hierarchical valuation of social zones; where, as Felski observes, it too ascribes values of mobility, dynamism, impact, and intellect to the wider world (like the Lacanian symbolic order) and the home becomes a 'quasi-uterine space' of stasis, dullness, and ahistoricism (Felski 2000, 86; Martens and Casey 2016, 35). Jeremiah describes a feminist 'recuperative' impulse from the 1970s that has sought to reincorporate domestic life and motherhood into a 'poststructuralist feminist perspective' allowing for multiple subjectivities with regards to mothering and for the home to be 'diverse, multifaceted, and shifting' (2006, 22; Padilla Carroll 2016, 51). One way is through the 'spatial phenomenon ... [of] creatively building businesses around the sociospatial routines of daily childcare', suggests Ekinsmyth in her work on mumpreneurism (Ekinsmyth 2012, 2). Taylor says on the topic: 'the key space would seem to be home as the double site of living and earning', as part of the 'humanisation' of work in prioritising, or at least elevating, non-economic values (2015, 177).

Homes Surrounded by Other Homes

Our conversations brought up other activities that might confront twentieth-century depictions of the nucleic and passive home. Several participants described a greater sense of connection to the surrounding community resulting from their creative work being at home, with the drive to forge social ties. Bratich and Brush have enthusiastically written of the revival of 'village and community' through domestic creative work because they say it to some extent reappropriates both the means and relationships of production. That is, sole creative producers based at home are not only often self-employed but also often highly likely to elicit collaboration or at least networking (Bratich and Brush 2011, 234; Luckman 2015, 85; see also John-Steiner 1992). Domestic spaces used for creative practice, they say, invite more opportunity for social connection, not least because of the way these situations can reinstate older, often pre-capitalist methods and modes of working while at the same time being digitised or digitally enabled to some extent.

This is the idea of the home as a hive, as inherently social spaces connected and facilitating relationships with the surrounding social context.

Collaboration and strengthened local networks as a result of home-based practices were a thread throughout most of our conversations. In several cases, it was women embarking on projects with other women so their partnership could accommodate care responsibilities. In others, it was making work while involving the family, or creative practices evolving to incorporate more contact with neighbours and the local township. When we sat in Klare's cosy dining room, we drank tea and listened intently as she told us her story of moving to regional Victoria. A poet and performance artist, she had us captivated as she described the 2011 floods in the region and how that both shaped her creative work and forged a stronger connection to the people living around her:

[Y]ou know when you move to a place and you kind of hide and you just kind of watch the garden grow so you know what to plant wherever, and so yeah I'm like that ... and then suddenly we did lose everything in the floods and I nearly lost my son as well so it was quite full on. But I actually pretty much met, I think, everyone in town ... and so there's really amazingly good positive community-based activities that occur out of these kinds of events ...

Klare set up several locally based creative projects that listened to people about their experiences of the floods, creating soundscapes and a singing performance using people's words. Her description of these processes is 'expanded listening', a device to tap into an 'expanded collective experience'. The conversation we had with photographer and artist Jessie also brought up how situating a practice at home, combined with the pandemic in 2020, intensified their desire to forge ties with their local neighbourhood. They described the way being embedded in the physical location of a community and working drove them to get out and meet neighbours to offer mutual aid to anyone nearby in need.

It's interesting that during COVID I found more connection with community and more people around ... Just finding out, like, 'Oh I live on that street', 'Oh I live on that street', and just the process of slowing down, there's more of a collective sense of care. That's been created during this time, being able to see people more one-on-one ...

Research on the link between working at home and a sense of embeddedness within a surrounding community is uncertain, and the digital nature of much home-based work as well as the use of online communities does not mean experiences like Jessie's are the norm. However, Gurstein suggests such work models can create greater community stability with diminished need for worker mobility (Gurstein 2002, 120). For Bratich and Brush, the important shift is the political dimension of reuniting domestic spaces with sociality, so the home can perform functions that don't fit within a capitalist rationale. Of the groups of people coming together in their homes, particularly women and particularly surrounding creative activities, they say it has been '[s]een as idle work, a waste of time, and unproductive activity from the perspective of capital and masculinized value' (Bratich and Brush 2011, 240), and so urge its reclamation to resist such dismissive assessment.

Homes Within a Natural World

'Home' is of course often more than a dwelling, but embedded in a surrounding environment and therefore a point of connection to a physical landscape. This was a consistent theme in our conversations. Artist Eliza described her art practice and her native grass restoration on a large property in regional Victoria as virtually indistinguishable in their sense of purpose. A complex mix of family and cultural history and aesthetic and environmental connection have for twenty years kept her 'magnetised to this place'. Jessie also spoke of the way working at home has facilitated a connection to a physical and environmental location, which in turn continues to shape the nature of their work. They describe how creative work can insist on the artist becoming familiar with their environment, as a part of a sharpening of one's senses and a slowing down and listening.

We sat in Jessie's backyard studio, admiring the tall gums of the national park that neighboured it. The morning air was still and beautiful and studded with bird song:

When you're an artist and you're a photographer, you know, you are responding to what's around you and I think everyday you're noticing changes. You're noticing the birds and you're noticing the animals and it becomes very much a part of your work. Like here [gesturing to a desk], we can hear all of these birds, and this is crown land at the back here, it's an old mining site, these are dams left over from the Royal Gully site that's at the top of the hill. And I don't know, I think it just naturally becomes part of the work. If it's not necessarily literally part of the work it's very much about how I'm experiencing the landscape and the place I'm at.

Environmental psychology has long grappled with the complex interplay between creativity and natural environments to suggest, for example, that attention within the creative process can be externally moderated by the natural setting (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989), in affecting and redirecting the brain's functioning and creative responsiveness (Williams et al. 2018; Atchley et al. 2012; McCoy and Evans 2002). Such literature explains that creativity does not take place in a vacuum, and indeed, many of the people we spoke to spontaneously brought up some kind of sense of simultaneous disconnection or at least awkward awareness of making a home in Australia given the dispossession of its original custodians. All acknowledged it as a troubling part of making themselves 'at home', and described the small, daily ways they faced up to this unsettledness: acknowledging it in conversation, preserving and restoring native plants and vegetation, active observing, respecting and learning about the area in which they live, for example.

One conversation we had was with Ron, a musician and maker of Indigenous artefacts. He invited us into a mudbrick bungalow at the back of his bush property and we were riveted by his stories of making. Much of what he described in his making practice showed compelling connection to place and landscape as well as a clear priority of people and tradition over the made object itself. Rather than the modernist history of abstracted value of a thing, he described making as seamlessly joined to being in a landscape, a community, and a home:

Ron: Most of [the making process] is the history [rather than the maker or the object]. ... And I make that important, I make [the Indigenous boys I teach] know that. I'm handing it down to you but you're going to hand it down to your kids and then your grandkids will learn. So it's that oral tradition.

Susie: So you're not the owner of it ... [the making process, the knowledge, and the object]

Ron: Spot on. Caretaker.

Ron spoke of evenings with his family and community coming around for music and making together. Home as he described it was inseparable from being part of a larger family and community, and the land and ecology they are tied to. But home was also intrinsically a place for working with your hands, acts that resonate and are vital in the larger social tasks of storytelling and passing on knowledge, wisdom, and tradition. The home sounded like a synthesis of many different but connected functions, and certainly more than exemplified the vibrance, activity, and relevance of a re-awakened domestic space discussed here.

The other thing I learned was how to etch. When I was little we had an amazing artist in our community called Uncle Sam Kerr, he was probably another one that I would sit and watch, and he was a funny old guy, he used to carve emu eggs with a knife. Four of his eggs are in Buckingham Palace, that's how good he is, the best in our community, and there was another guy, Hilton Walsh. But you're just sitting around listening. So the etching part which is burning wood, I picked that up from him, sitting and watching him, and my dad making boomerangs, and we get together, and when my uncles came over they all made boomerangs and all their kids could throw them so we'd have massive big competitions that were pretty serious down on the lake. ... [In my home growing up] all the materials were there [in the local environment] to work with, and my aunty ... and my nan, they were full on artists, they would make feathered flowers – you couldn't tell the difference between real flowers and their flowers ... My mother was a Tatiara Ngarrindjeri from South Australia, so her nan wove baskets with that style, and they were seen as the best basket weavers in Australia ... So all around me was these amazing artists. And again, sitting and watching, that's the Aboriginal way of learning.

Conclusion

Rather than a static concept and social entity, we can see that the home is always shifting – as much about ideology as it is about household behaviours and practices (Lacouture 2019, 1278). Recent decades have produced technological and social conditions that now emphasise the home as a site of varied productivity and as a platform for people to contribute to civil society – counter to ideological constructions of a private realm cordoned off from the wider cultural, economic, and social world. Home-based creative practice is a useful example of emerging trends in work choices, and here I've drawn from creative industries, feminist and new domesticity literature to explore some of the ways it is helping to reshape domestic spaces. This is also while making use of empirical material I collected with a colleague as a blend of creative practice methodology and dialogic qualitative interviewing. These methods pursue an inclusive use of aesthetic material and incorporate aural, sensory, and visual information when performing and analysing interviews.

We can understand the increase in home-based creative practice as a shift in the nature and location of economic activity, as well as the pursuit of work that fulfils individual ideals of creative potential. New domesticity analyses are useful in emphasising the redefinition of domestic spaces and occupants as integral, active elements within wider society, and insisting on the revaluation of home-based creative work *and* traditional domestic activities. Our conversations with artists and makers brought up issues surrounding new work-from-home norms and their advantages like flexibility, convenience,

accessibility, and control. However, it is also acknowledged that these same traits can create significant problems for women in particular who often seek out this work, potentially leaving them in difficult, marginalised positions. We encountered examples of creative work mixing with domestic care work, out of necessity but also as a reclamation of mothering as a diverse and mottled role, and we heard about the tensions and rewards of demonstrating this for participants' children.

It has also been argued that home-based creative work revives the potential of the home as a hub for socialised productivity, collaboration, and connection. We encountered many examples of this in our conversations, involving family, partnerships, and the surrounding community. Here again, domestic spaces are being reconfigured away from restrictive ideas of private sanctums towards those of it as alive with activity, connection, and potential. Likewise, we heard about home-based creative practice generating opportunities for connection to the surrounding environment and engaging and grappling with participants' sense of geographical place. Creative work and inhabiting a location were not disconnected factors in most of the stories we heard, bearing out research on the ways the two interact and affect us as mediating entities.

Through our conversations and considering the literature, this article has sought to give some detail to the example of more modern, creatively productive domestic spaces. It presents this micro-level information as a way of supporting the claim that the home is changing in the ways it functions but most importantly in how its value is rebalancing when compared with the idea of the traditional 'real world' of economic and cultural activity. There is some promise in this that as traditional work is humanised somewhat by being situated at home and often altered by relational, social, and geographical embeddedness, so too will the value and impact increase of previously devalued non-economic domestic goings-on such as care, relational work, and connecting to the broader community and environment.

Note

1. This research was conducted under RMIT University ethics project number 2020-23526-11806 within College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN), College of Design and Social Context (DSC), NHMRC Code: EC00237.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This work was supported by Mt Alexander Council.

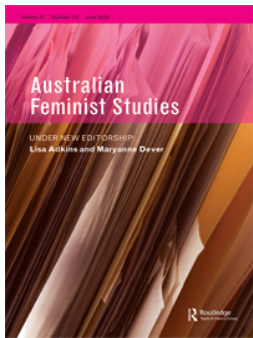
References

- Abidin, Crystal. 2014. "# In \$ TagLam: Instagram as a Repository of Taste, a Burgeoning Marketplace, a war of Eyeballs." In *Mobile Media Making in an age of Smartphones*, edited by M. Berry and M. Schleser, 119–128. Springer.

- Adkins, Lisa. 2005. "The New Economy, Property and Personhood." *Theory, Culture & Society* 22 (1): 111–130. doi:[10.1177/0263276405048437](https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276405048437).
- Ahl, Helene, and Susan Marlow. 2012. "Exploring the dynamics of gender, feminism and entrepreneurship: advancing debate to escape a dead end." *Organization* 19 (5): 543–562.
- Alesina, Alberto, and Paola Giuliano. 2010. "The Power of the Family." *Journal of Economic Growth (Boston, Mass.)* 15 (2): 93–125. doi:[10.1007/s10887-010-9052-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10887-010-9052-z).
- Atchley, Ruth Ann, David L Strayer, and Paul Atchley. 2012. "Creativity in the Wild: Improving Creative Reasoning Through Immersion in Natural Settings." *PloS one* 7 (12): 1–3. doi:[10.1371/journal.pone.0051474](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0051474).
- Barrett, Michele. 1988. *Women's Oppression Today: The Marxist/Feminist Encounter*. Rev. ed. ed. London: Verso.
- Batty, Craig, and Marsha Berry. 2015. "Constellations and Connections: The Playful Space of the Creative Practice Research Degree." *Journal of Media Practice* 16 (3): 181–194. doi:[10.1080/14682753.2015.1116753](https://doi.org/10.1080/14682753.2015.1116753).
- Beauvoir, Simone de, H M Parshley. 1972. *The second sex*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Best, Beverley. 2021. "Wages for Housework Redux: Social Reproduction and the Utopian Dialectic of the Value-Form." *Theory & Event* 24 (4): 896–921. doi:[10.1353/tae.2021.0052](https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.2021.0052).
- Borer, Michael Ian, and Andrea Fontana. 2012. "Postmodern Trends: Expanding the Horizons of Interviewing Practices and Epistemologies." In *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*, edited by James A. Holstein, Jaber F. Gubrium, Amir Marvasti, and Karyn D. McKinney, 45–60. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Bratich, Jack Z., and Heidi M. Brush. 2011. "Fabricating Activism: Craft-Work, Popular Culture, Gender." *Utopian Studies* 22 (2): 233–260. doi:[10.5325/utopianstudies.22.2.0233](https://doi.org/10.5325/utopianstudies.22.2.0233).
- Burkitt, Ian. 2008. *Social Selves: Theories of Self and Society*. London: Sage.
- Burton, Antoinette. 2019. "Toward Unsettling Histories of Domesticity." *The American Historical Review* 124 (4): 1332–1336. doi:[10.1093/ahr/rhz643](https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhz643).
- Calfas, Jennifer. 2018. "The New Mommy Blogger: Instagram Famous, Highly Paid, and Sponsored by Minute Maid." *Money* 11.
- Charlesworth, Sara, Marian Baird, and Susie Elliott. 2014. "Intersections of Regulation, Space and Gender: Retail Banking in an Australian Regional Town." *Community, Work & Family* 17 (1): 1–19. doi:[10.1080/13668803.2013.862213](https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2013.862213).
- Conor, Bridget, Rosalind Gill, and Stephanie Taylor. 2015. "Gender and Creative Labour." *The Sociological Review (Keele)* 63 (S1): 1–22. doi:[10.1111/1467-954X.12237](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12237).
- Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. 1989. *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*. London: Free Association.
- d'Arcy, Conor, and Laura Gardiner. 2014. "Just the job—or a Working Compromise." In *The Changing Nature of Self-Employment in the UK*. London: Resolution Foundation.
- Dawkins, Nicole. 2011. "Do-It-Yourself: The Precarious Work and Postfeminist Politics of Handmaking (in) Detroit." *Utopian Studies* 22 (2): 261–284. doi:[10.5325/utopianstudies.22.2.0261](https://doi.org/10.5325/utopianstudies.22.2.0261).
- Denzin, Norman K. 1997. *Interpretive Ethnography Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE.
- Ekinsmyth, Carol. 2012. "Family Friendly Entrepreneurship: New Business Formation in Family Spaces." *Urbani Izziv* 23 (1 Spec): 115–125. doi:[10.5379/urbani-izziv-en-2012-23-supplement-1-011](https://doi.org/10.5379/urbani-izziv-en-2012-23-supplement-1-011).
- Felski, Rita. 2000. *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Felski, Rita. 2000. *Doing time: Feminist theory and postmodern culture*. Vol. 11. NYU Press.
- Firestone, Shulamith, and Rosalind Delmar. 1979. *The Dialectic of sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. London: Women's Press.
- Florida, Richard L. 2002. *The Rise of the Creative Class: And how It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Friedan, Betty. 1963. *The Feminine Mystique*. London: Gollancz.
- Giles, Judy. 2004. *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity*. Oxford: Berg.

- Gill, Rosalind, and Andy Pratt. 2008. "In the Social Factory?: Immaterial Labour, Precariousness and Cultural Work." *Theory, Culture & Society* 25 (7-8): 1–30. doi:[10.1177/0263276408097794](https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276408097794).
- Gregg, Melissa. 2011. *Work's Intimacy*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Gurstein, Penny. 2002. *Wired to the World, Chained to the Home: Telework in Daily Life*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Hardt, M. 1999. "Affective Labor." *Boundary 2* 26 (2): 89–100.
- Haseman, Brad. 2006. "A Manifesto for Performative Research [Paper in: Practice-led Research. Green, Lelia and Haseman, Brad (eds).]" *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture & Policy* 118: 98–106. doi:[10.3316/ielapa.200603420](https://doi.org/10.3316/ielapa.200603420).
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 1997. *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*. 1st ed. ed. *When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Howkins, John. 2018. *Creative ecologies: where thinking is a proper job*. Routledge.
- Hunter, Andrea. 2015. "Get off my Internets: The Audience Commodity and the Mommy Blog Backlash." Proceedings of the 2015 international conference on social media & society.
- Huws, Ursula. 2015. "When Adam Blogs: Cultural Work and the Gender Division of Labour in Utopia." *The Sociological Review (Keele)* 63 (S1): 158–173. doi:[10.1111/1467-954X.12247](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12247).
- Jeremiah, Emily. 2006. "Motherhood to Mothering and Beyond: Maternity in Recent Feminist Thought." *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement* 8 (1-2): 21–33.
- John-Steiner, Vera. 1992. "Creative Lives, Creative Tensions." *Creativity Research Journal* 5 (1): 99–108. doi:[10.1080/10400419209534426](https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419209534426).
- Kaplan, Rachel, and Stephen Kaplan. 1989. *The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective*. New York: Cambridge university press.
- Kennedy, Jenny, Michael Arnold, Martin Gibbs, Bjorn Nansen, and Rowan Wilken. 2020. *Digital Domesticity: Media, Materiality, and Home Life*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Kramer, Amit, and Karen Z. Kramer. 2020. "The Potential Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Occupational Status, Work from Home, and Occupational Mobility." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 119: 103442–103442. doi:[10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103442](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103442).
- Lacouture, Elizabeth. 2019. "Translating Domesticity in Chinese History and Historiography." *The American Historical Review* 124 (4): 1278–1289. doi:[10.1093/ahr/rhz644](https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhz644).
- Lewis, T. 2008. *Smart Living: Lifestyle Media and Popular Expertise*. New York, USA: Peter Lang.
- Luckman, Susan. 2013. "The Aura of the Analogue in a Digital age: Women's Crafts, Creative Markets and Home-Based Labour After Etsy." *Cultural Studies Review* 19 (1): 249–270. doi:[10.5130/csr.v19i1.2585](https://doi.org/10.5130/csr.v19i1.2585).
- Luckman, Susan. 2015. *Craft and the Creative Economy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Luckman, Susan, and Jane Andrew. 2020. *Craftspeople and Designer Makers in the Contemporary Creative Economy. First Edition, 2020. ed. Creative Working Lives*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Martens, Lydia, and Emma Casey. 2016. *Gender and Consumption: Domestic Cultures and the Commercialisation of Everyday Life*. London: Routledge.
- Marx, Karl. 2016. *Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844. [1st American ed.]. ed.* New York: Routledge.
- Matchar, Emily. 2014. *Homeward bound: why women are embracing the new domesticity*. First Simon & Schuster hardcover edition.. ed. Place of publication not identified]: Place of publication not identified: Simon & Schuster.
- McCoy, Janetta Mitchell, and Gary W Evans. 2002. "The Potential Role of the Physical Environment in Fostering Creativity." *Creativity Research Journal* 14 (3-4): 409–426. doi:[10.1207/S15326934CRJ1434_11](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15326934CRJ1434_11)
- McKeon, Michael. 2005. *The Secret History of Domesticity Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- McRobbie, Angela. 2011. "Reflections On Feminism, Immaterial Labour And The Post-Fordist Regime." *New Formations* 70 (70): 60–76. doi:[10.3898/NEWF.70.04.2010](https://doi.org/10.3898/NEWF.70.04.2010).
- Miller, Kerry. 2007. 'Etsy: A Site for Artisans Takes Off', *Bloomsberg Businessweek*, 12 June 2007.

- Oakley, Ann. 1985. *The Sociology of Housework. Reprinted with a new Introd. ed.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- O'Connor, Paul. 2017. "Home." 1st ed. In *Contemporary Liminality Ser.* Milton: Taylor & Francis Group.
- OECD. 2021. *Economic and social impacts of cultural and creative sectors.* Note for Italy G20 Presidency Culture Working Group. <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/OECD-G20-Culture-July-2021.pdf>.
- Padilla Carroll, Valerie. 2016. "The Radical Possibilities of New (Feminist, Environmentalist) Domesticity: Housewifery as an Altermodernity Project." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 23 (1): 51–70. doi:10.1093/isle/isw013.
- Raisborough, J. 2011. *Lifestyle Media and the Formation of the Self.* 1st ed. 2011.. ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan. UK: Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Reid-Musson, Emily, Daniel Cockayne, Lia Frederiksen, and Nancy Worth. 2020. "Feminist Economic Geography and the Future of Work." *Environment and Planning. A* 52 (7): 1457–1468. doi:10.1177/0308518X20947101.
- Saunders, Peter, and Peter Williams. 1988. "The Constitution of the Home: Towards a Research Agenda." *Housing Studies* 3 (2): 81–93. doi:10.1080/02673038808720618.
- Scott, Joan Wallach, and Debra Keates. 2004. *Going Public: Feminism and the Shifting Boundaries of the Private Sphere.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Soper, Kate. 2004. "'Rethinking the "Good Life": The Consumer as Citizen.'" *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 15 (3): 111–116. doi:10.1080/1045575042000247293.
- Taylor, Stephanie. 2011. "Negotiating Oppositions and Uncertainties: Gendered Conflicts in Creative Identity Work." *Feminism & Psychology* 21 (3): 354–371. doi:10.1177/0959353510386095.
- Taylor, Stephanie. 2015. "A new Mystique? Working for Yourself in the Neoliberal Economy." *The Sociological Review (Keele)* 63 (S1): 174–187. doi:10.1111/1467-954X.12248.
- Taylor, Stephanie, and Karen Littleton. 2012. *Contemporary Identities of Creativity and Creative Work.* 1 ed. Milton: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.
- Waring, Marilyn J. 1988. *Counting for Nothing: What men Value & What Women are Worth.* Wellington, N.Z: Allen & Unwin.
- Williams, Kathryn J. H., Kate E. Lee, Terry Hartig, Leisa D. Sargent, Nicholas S. G. Williams, and Katherine A. Johnson. 2018. "Conceptualising Creativity Benefits of Nature Experience: Attention Restoration and Mind Wandering as Complementary Processes." *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 59: 36–45. doi:10.1016/j.jenvp.2018.08.005.



Domus, Dream, Domicide: Home as Limit Point in the Pyrocene Lessons from the 'Black Summer' Australian Bushfires

Scott Webster & Fiona Allon

To cite this article: Scott Webster & Fiona Allon (2022) Domus, Dream, Domicide: Home as Limit Point in the Pyrocene Lessons from the 'Black Summer' Australian Bushfires, Australian Feminist Studies, 37:112, 242-258, DOI: [10.1080/08164649.2023.2177829](https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2023.2177829)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2023.2177829>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 14 Feb 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1494



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 3 View citing articles [↗](#)

Domus, Dream, Domicide: Home as Limit Point in the Pyrocene

Lessons from the ‘Black Summer’ Australian Bushfires

Scott Webster^a and Fiona Allon^b

^aSydney Environment Institute, The University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia; ^bGender & Culture Studies, School of Humanities, The University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

ABSTRACT

This article explores the way in which bushfires challenge our theoretical frameworks for comprehending both ‘home’ and ‘home destruction’. Disaster scholarship has long argued that the very idea of ‘natural disaster’ remains inadequate as a term of description for the entanglements of the human and natural – acutely so for the entanglements that are at the heart of a changing climate and its consequences. The article proposes a new conception of ‘home’ as an intimately affective space where there is more at-stake than human-centeredness; rather, it is suggested here that ‘home’ is better reconceptualised as a site of multispecies connection that reframes the conventional understanding of the individual free-standing dwelling as a place where Australian modernity triumphs over the natural environment. The destruction wrought by catastrophic bushfires in turn also needs to be reconceptualised beyond a narrow focus on human-centred loss of life and property. When homes are destroyed the ecological entanglements that comprise the lived experience of the human home are also painfully severed.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 21 March 2022
Accepted 1 February 2023

KEYWORDS

home; home loss; domicile;
climate change; bushfires;
natural disaster; more-than-
human

Domicide – the ‘deliberate destruction of home’ (Porteous and Smith 2001, 12) – is a fundamental feature of Australia’s colonial history and present. Even the site of the most iconic of Sydney landmarks, the Sydney Opera House, is intrinsically tied to it. Well before those world-famous ‘sails’, indeed well before Federation, it was the site of a modest dwelling: Bennelong’s hut. Governor Arthur Phillip ordered it built in 1790 for his captive-cum-friend, Bennelong, a Wangal man who served as mediator between the nascent Sydney colony and the local Aboriginal peoples. Bennelong’s hut did not last; it had been torn down by the time of Bennelong’s return from London in 1795. The only clue of what once stood there can be found in the modern place-name – Bennelong Point – which replaces the original Aboriginal placename of Djubuguli (Hinkson and Harris 2010, 27).

CONTACT Scott Webster  scott.webster@sydney.edu.au

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

Bennelong's hut is not typical of the domicile Indigenous Australians endured as British colonies encroached further inland over the next two centuries. The building adhered to European notions of domestic space, not Indigenous ones, and was situated within the heart of the first colony. It was one feature among many that transformed Sydney Cove's waterfront from a seemingly 'untamed' coastline into a supposedly 'ordered' space. In its own small but significant way, domestic space contributed to realising a 'civilised' presence on a land that appeared (to European eyes) as bereft of civilisation, as *terra nullius*. In the process, ideas of dwelling as domestication – of nature, of animals, of unruly bush and wildlife – eroded existing Indigenous cultural landscapes and contributed to further Aboriginal dispossession. The individual free-standing home performed a key role within this civilising settler-colonial project, one which has persisted into the present, popularly re-imagined as 'the Australian Dream'.

This colonising role was laid bare in the reactions against the restitution of Native Title following the Mabo and Wik court rulings in 1992 and 1996 respectively. Prime Minister John Howard (1997) claimed that Indigenous Australians would have 'the potential right of veto' over development on land in excess of three-quarters of Australia's total land mass. Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett (as quoted in Harvey and Coffey 1993) warned that 'every property in Australia could be at risk'. Pauline Hanson (2019), leader of the far-right One Nation party, extended these themes erroneously claiming that 'a lot of people have been dispossessed of their lands in Australia because of it [Native Title]'.

Central to this apparent reversal of *terra nullius* was the perceived threat to the dominant Australian concept of 'home' – the near birthright expectation of one day owning 'the suburban ideal of a freestanding house on a quarter-acre block' (Allon 2008, 17). Robert Menzies, Australia's longest serving Prime Minister (1939–1941 and 1949–1966), declared that the Australian aspiration for home ownership was all about claiming 'one little piece of earth with a house and a garden which is ours: to which we can withdraw ... into which no stranger may come against our will' (Warhaft 2004, 157). Howard (2007) invoked Menzies throughout his own term in office (1996–2007), repeatedly characterising Australia as 'a great home-owning society ... where the dream of home ownership remains at the heart of the Australian experience' (our emphasis; see Allon [2008, 84–109]). In these articulations, home was explicitly conceived as a place 'where the modern defeats the natural' (Schlunke 2016, 219), a concrete manifestation of still resonant colonial ideas of modernity and progress. For Menzies, moreover, the Australian home was also a refuge from all kinds of strangers and strangeness. But what of the stranger that now appears as 'strange weather' – the volatile and extreme weather events that punctuate this era of climate emergency?

The 2019–2020 bushfire catastrophe, now known as 'Black Summer', profoundly unsettled such national mythologies and the predominantly white Australian lifestyles they underpin: house and home; domesticity and nature; bush and beach. Among the wreckage were 3,500 homes lost primarily across New South Wales (2448), Victoria (396) and South Australia (151) (AIDR n.d.; Gourlay et al. 2020). Small coastal towns – Mallacoota, Rosedale, Malua Bay – made international headlines as locals sought refuge on beaches under blood-red skies and amidst thick haze. 'Sacred' Australian symbols of distinctly native species, such as kangaroos and koalas, were similarly profaned in widely circulated images of their burned bodies. The Australian bush, normally 'a tamed space of leisure and pleasure', became host to an uncontrollable and monstrous firestorm (Allon

2020, 29). The certainties of modern living, including all its appurtenances in the form of safely dwelling in a domesticated natural landscape, came undone. As Danielle Celermajer (2021, 2–3) puts it, ‘the very idea of being “safe” ... is one of the many casualties of the climate catastrophe’.

Australians have been told by the latest in a long line of bushfire inquiries to ‘expect fire seasons like 2019–2020 or potentially worse to happen again’ (NSW Bushfire Inquiry 2020, iv). This is the ‘new normal’, according to Ken Pimlott (as quoted in O’Malley 2019), who in 2018 commanded the response to California’s devastating fires. Fire historian Stephen Pyne (2019, 3–6) has dubbed this dramatically inflamed epoch the ‘Pyrocene’, calling for a ‘fire-centric perspective’ within ongoing debates over geological epochs dominated by anthropogenic influences. Katrina Schlunke (2016, 223) argues that, with the home ravaged by bushfire, ‘one can see the ruination of a Western (and a very Australian) ideal of conquering space with location’. Our argument in this article is situated within a feminist tradition that has long advocated for critical scrutiny of home and dwelling practices with an explicit purpose of reconfiguring them differently. Our contribution to this body of work suggests that these perspectives can also be brought to bear fruitfully on more recent understandings of home and domicile, especially within the context of the destabilising conditions of global warming. With the Black Summer bushfires, the human home – metaphysically loaded as a site of risk insulation against various threatening strangers from ‘outside’ – is both materially and figuratively turned inside-out. With it, so too is domicile as a theoretical framework for comprehending home destruction, entangled as it is within dominant cultural narratives invested in the human home. Their undoing, we argue, bears the potential for transformed imaginaries that better attend to more-than-human dimensions.

Feminist Conditions of Possibility

Neimanis, Åsberg, and Hedrén (2015) argue that feminist concepts are central to the emerging scholarly field ‘environmental humanities’ but rarely acknowledged. One consequence of this omission, they suggest, is that it effectively neutralises ‘feminist politics and undermines the potential for environmental humanities to build alternative worlds’ (Hamilton and Neimanis 2018, 510). It also enables assumptions that environmental and social causes are disconnected, which in turn obfuscates how *environmental and social issues are deeply entwined*.

The risk of a neutralised social politics within environmental concerns is highlighted in the very idea of the ‘Anthropocene’, a term that etymologically embeds a universalised humanity to name a geological epoch dominated by human influences (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000; Crutzen 2002; Lewis and Maslin 2015, 171).¹ As feminist, anticolonial and antiracist critiques have argued, complicity in and responsibility for climate change is not equal nor will its impacts be evenly faced (Probyn 2016, 12; Tsing, Mathews, and Bubandt 2019, S188; Yusoff 2018; Verlie 2022).

Anthropocentrism refers to taken-for-granted notions that humans are separate from and prioritised over what is conventionally understood as ‘nature’. Val Plumwood (2003, 42) observes that the nature-culture dualism, in which humans are perceived as separate from nature, exists alongside other ‘mutually reinforcing dualisms’ (see also Ortner [1972]). These hierarchised oppositions – man/woman, mind/body, reason/emotion,

human or culture/nature – underpin multiple, imbricated power structures. As such, they reify the category of human and ‘the unique benefits afforded’ it, which are not afforded to the ‘groups of humans and beings other than humans associated with the devalued side’ (Celermajer et al. 2021, 124).

The possession of consciousness and other connotations of rational intelligence and agency figure as distinguishing characteristics that underpin such human exceptionalism. Rather than human-centred ways of being in and perceiving the world, researchers within environmental humanities generally foster relational and ecological approaches that are attentive to how other-than-human beings experience and know the world (Tsing, Mathews, and Bubandt 2019, 5188). In terms expressly conceived as a continuation of feminism’s critical denaturalisation of conventional kinship ties, Donna Haraway (2016, 102–103) proposes ‘to make kin mean something other/more than entities tied by ancestry or genealogy’. This recasting of the common-sense bonds between kinship, same-species, genealogy and ancestry invites ethical considerations ‘like to whom one is actually responsible’ (Haraway 2016, 2; Franklin 2017, 60).²

Home, Domesticity and the Everyday

Feminists have long argued for serious critical scrutiny of home and its affective investments. Dominant ideals casting home as a place of warmth, safety, belonging and freedom have been thoroughly critiqued as universalising claims that conceal sexist oppression and exploitation (de Beauvoir 1952; Friedan 1963). The demystification of dominant cultural narratives on home extends to their anchorage in anthropocentrism. The home, frequently represented as bounded, impermeable and secure, unsurprisingly entails the conquest of ‘nature’ as an esteemed value. It is therefore no coincidence that anthropological and archaeological interest had fixated on the search for the ‘first hut’, the moment when humanity ‘stepped out of nature’ (Ingold 2022, 226–227). A clear distinction is drawn between the building activities of humans – assumed to be conscious and intentional – and those of nonhuman animals – assumed to be actions of instinct (Rapoport 1994, 488; Rolston 2001, 267; Rykwert 1991, 54). Thus, the home *as a physical manifestation of intent* was and remains central to a division between human and nature.

Iris Marion Young (Young 2020), drawing on Martin Heidegger’s (1971) notions of ‘dwelling’ and ‘building’ as complementary aspects of ‘the way of being that is human’, explores how home is reified as a site of patriarchal ascendancy through its anthropocentric investment. Building, in Heidegger’s sense, is underpinned by a duality of construction and preservation: the *making* of place that materially re-orders the environment into ‘a meaningful presence’ and the remaining in-place that cultivates and cares for that meaningfulness respectively. However, despite Heidegger (1971, 149) claiming that preservation is ‘the fundamental character of dwelling’, Young observes that construction seems to be prioritised within his framework. Noting that male dominance persists within the practices and industries that entail construction, Young surmises that ‘if building is the means by which a person emerges as a subject who dwells in that world, then not to build is a deprivation’ (137). This conforms to patriarchal delineations that gender the active, intentional and rational re-ordering of natural space as the domain of men and masculinity.

Feminist critiques are not limited to wholesale rejections of the home-as-haven ideal but are nonetheless concerned with radically reinventing ways of being at-home.

Young argues for home's 'liberating potential' through re-configuring and re-valuing Heidegger's notion of preservation with particular focus on women's meaning-making activities within domestic work:

Is it possible to retain an idea of home as supporting the individual subjectivity of the person, where the subject is understood as fluid, partial, shifting, and in relations of reciprocal support with others? (141)

This remains a pertinent question, not only in deconstructing home as a patriarchal idea and institution, but also as a key site that upholds and materially extends anthropocentric and colonial power structures. In this sense, its invocation of relationality and reciprocity should extend to the ecological array of multispecies and more-than-human entanglements that comprise the lived experience of the home and home loss.

Domicide Inside-Out

On 8 November 2019, the first day of 'Black Summer', Fiona Lee's family home on the New South Wales coast burned to the ground (Singhal 2019). After hearing politicians repeatedly say that 'now is not the time to talk about climate change', Lee staged a protest by depositing the ashes of her house outside the NSW Parliament building (Singhal 2019). Home destruction and climate change became entwined in the view of this woman made homeless by the bushfire crisis: 'for me, there has never been a better time to talk about climate change' (quoted in School Strike 4 Climate 2019). If a house's ashes can become the symbolic remains of life and dwelling, does this mean that the home destroyed by bushfire is also a representative site of 'domicide', the deliberate destruction of home?

Porteous and Smith (2001, 12) define 'domicide' as 'the deliberate destruction of home by human agency, in pursuit of specified goals, which causes suffering to the victims'. Importantly, domicide is both meaningful and common. It is *meaningful* in the sense that home resonates, for a variety of reasons, and having that attachment ruptured can be affective in personally intimate ways beyond economic hardship and compromised safety. Home destruction is *common* insofar as it is not limited to the extreme scenario of war. Porteous and Smith (2001) identify its role within the mundane processes of infrastructure projects, economic development and urban redevelopment strategies (among other examples) underpinned by narratives of 'the greater good' and 'progress'. In this *everyday* domicide, the destructive consequences for homes 'in the way' become acceptable if not disguised entirely – except, of course, for its victims. Intent is central to Porteous and Smith's definition: *deliberate, by human agency, pursuing specified goals*. It relies upon the rational and bounded, self-knowing 'I' as perpetrator, defined by consciousness and conscious action; in other words, it is tied to the actions of the Western liberal subject in humanism and philosophy, a figure that has been thoroughly challenged as a heteropatriarchal and anthropocentric construct within feminist, queer, antiracist and postcolonial critiques.

When placed in the context of the entangled reality of human-induced climate change, 'intent' becomes significantly more complicated, and certainly more difficult to locate in one easily identifiable source. 'Natural disasters' are necessarily (and explicitly) excluded from domicide's original scope: 'the loss of home is deliberately engineered: somewhere,

someone is to blame' (Porteous and Smith 2001, 19). Without clear human intention and subsequent causality (i.e. fires for land clearing), involuntary home loss cannot be held as domicile. In other words, 'victims can normally blame only nature or God' (Porteous and Smith 2001, 17). That is clearly *not* the case for Fiona Lee and, as will be explored in this section, her protest was not an isolated act either. The emotions generated by Black Summer among bushfire survivors and other community perspectives certainly emphasised distinct human responsibilities. Indeed, it seems that somewhere, someone *is* to blame.

Furthermore, the very idea of a 'natural disaster' is woefully inadequate as a term of description given the deep entanglements of the human-made and the natural at the heart of climate change. While long-term shifts in weather patterns are intrinsic to the nonlinear fluctuations of all climactic systems, theories of anthropogenic climate change have presented overwhelming evidence that the global warming currently accelerating the frequency of extreme weather events such as droughts, bushfires and floods is directly caused by human activities, and primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels. The conventional explanatory frameworks employed in much disaster scholarship, notably that disasters occur when physical phenomena originating in natural systems have sudden, nonroutine catastrophic impacts on social systems, are unable to respond satisfactorily to such transformed environmental conditions. More recent scholarship on the social construction of 'natural disaster' has challenged such 'naively realist' approaches (Tierney 2018, 81) arguing convincingly that disasters are discursively framed, produced through cultural and institutional processes, and inseparable from power dynamics, ideological norms, and the actions of elite social groups (see Tierney 2018; Button and Schuller 2016; Gorman-Murray et al. 2014).³

Mike Davis (1998), for example, examines the way in which flood, fire and earthquake tragedies in California that were largely avoidable have been coopted by religious and pseudoscientific discourses as well as by elite interests promoting real-estate development and presented as evidence of a hostile nature that requires further acquiescence through market-driven urbanisation. As a result, the essential land use issue – the rampant, uncontrolled proliferation of firebelt suburbs – [is] camouflaged in a neutral discourse about natural hazards and public safety (146). Given the greater frequency of climate-change induced 'natural disasters', it has become imperative to examine both their social construction *and* their social consequences. Nancy Tuana (2008) argues that living through disasters can be a potent means of confrontation with our enmeshed states, exposing both the illusion and fragility of a presumed nature/culture divide. In addition, the Australian bushfire catastrophe belies any simplistic divide between 'extreme' and 'everyday'. In his role as Deputy Prime Minister, Michael McCormack (2019), said as much: 'Yes, these fires are severe. Yes, in some cases, they are unprecedented but in other cases, they are what happens in Australia'.

Climate Inaction, 'Coal-o-Phobia' and Incendiary 'Others'

The location of Lee's protest – outside the NSW Parliament – purposefully drew attention to political decision-making and inaction on climate change. Former Prime Minister Tony Abbott who lost his seat in 2019 to an Independent candidate running on a climate policy agenda, argued during Black Summer that the world 'was in the grip of a climate cult'

(quoted in Readfearn 2020). Scott Morrison (2017), Abbott's successor, coined the phrase 'coal-o-phobia' while mockingly brandishing a lump of coal in Parliament, extolling the virtues of coal mining for delivering 'prosperity' and 'jobs' for 'generations of Australians'. Such approaches to climate change policy (or a lack thereof) resonates with the 'greater good' discourse of everyday domicile; the 'prosperity' and 'jobs' offered by fossil fuel mining industries, alongside lower costs-of-living, held favourably against the need to act on climate change.

Mike Davis (1998, 130) observes that 'incendiary "Others"' are consistently constructed along ideological lines to assign speculative blame for wildfires which conversely distracts from scientific accounts of causes. Climate change activists, arsonists, and Islamic State were among the 'incendiary Others' posited during Black Summer (Knaus 2020). The positioning of environmentalists, and by extension environmental protections and the other-than-human beings they protect, as incendiary Others sees further resonance between Australian and Californian contexts. Davis (1998, 133–134) notes how the protected habitats of endangered species – Stephens's kangaroo rat and the California gnatcatcher – were subject to attacks that opposed them to property rights and development interests. This discourse witnessed 'a bizarre syllogism that equated any undeveloped landscape or protected habitat with an ipso facto fire hazard' (134). In Australia, blame centred on so-called 'green tape' obstructions that hinder hazard reduction. Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce (quoted in Goodall 2020), for example, attacked the 'green caveats that impede people's capacity to fight fires': '[f]uel reduction, access to water [dams], keeping roads clear, making sure we don't have tree clearing guidelines which basically make it impossible for people to take the protective action they need to'.

Pyromanic Suburbanisation and a 'Big Cultural Shift'

Commissioned in the wake of the devastation left behind by Black Summer, the final report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry (2020, vi), notes that future property losses are inevitable as a consequence of both historic and ongoing settlement patterns. The report calls for a 'big cultural shift' in 'accepting what can be defended' during extreme fire seasons (NSW Bushfire Inquiry 2020, vi).

Meanwhile, suburbanisation and settlement fundamentally alters the conditions for hazard reduction and firefighting. As Davis (1998, 107–108, 143) argues, suburbanisation of fire-prone regions has 'magnified the natural fire danger while creating new perils for firefighters'. It has also significantly shifted firefighting practices, with prescribed burns becoming more difficult to perform due to the proximity (and sometimes opposition) of nearby residences, as well as firefighting efforts 'dispersed into house-by-house defenses' which entail 'a dramatically increased risk of firefighters' being trapped by erratic and rapidly moving fire fronts' (143). The 'greater good' of feeding an insatiable real-estate market by developing fire-prone regions – what Davis (134) terms 'pyromanic suburbanisation' – justifies the consequent domicile of homes built in the inevitable path of fires as well as other homes elsewhere through the flow-on effects of stretched resources, obstructed disaster preparation and drastically altered firefighting conditions. Unlike Shane Stone (quoted in Karp and Murphy 2022), the former coordinator-general of the National Disaster Response and Recovery Agency who sought to victim blame those 'who want to live among the gum trees' for the loss of their homes in disaster-prone areas,

Davis' argument recognises the power structures and capital interests that animate those compelling domestic imaginaries (such as the Australian Dream) for profit.

In this sense, we argue that the original exclusion of 'natural disasters' from the framework of domicile must be rethought to account for the ideological drivers of human-induced climate change and their legitimating narratives – economic prosperity, urban development, human progress and so on. The 'big cultural shift' the Inquiry calls for requires a rethinking of where and how we build 'homes'; indeed, this shift must echo demands within pyrogeography (Pyne 2007; Roos et al. 2014) to seriously consider the cultural dimensions of fire regimes which, in an Australian context, certainly includes the material effects of cultural narratives like the 'Australian Dream' of home ownership on the settlement patterns at the urban/bushland interface on the outskirts of major cities.

Domus Inside-Out: 'Techno Fixes' and More-Than-Human Homemaking

In 2021, Suncorp Insurance (2021) launched a marketing campaign entitled 'One House to Save Many'. It introduces a collaborative project with the CSIRO, James Cook University and Room 11 Architects which aimed 'to design, build and test a home resilient to fire, flood, storm and cyclone' (Suncorp 2021a). The resulting prototype – the titular 'One House' – is presented as a three-bedroom suburban family home which appropriates and modernises the 'Queenslander' architectural style. The Queenslander's key features – a wraparound verandah, central staircase to the front door, ground level carport and elevated living area with natural ventilation – are combined with already-standard and cost-effective technologies to produce a building more capable of withstanding extreme weather events (Suncorp 2021b). The advertisement depicts this house undergoing intense 'stress-testing' as machines replicate catastrophic weather conditions in a controlled environment. Concerned (predominantly white and heteronormative) families and couples observe from a viewing gallery as debris and gale-force winds, surging flood waters, sparks and flames pound the structure. However, despite the elemental forces thrown at it, 'One House' emerges from the smoke seemingly unscathed and ready to be lived in.

'One House' stages a dramatic and defiant return to Menzian themes of home (and thus humanity) as mastering and repelling nature. Close-ups of machinery – a wall of high-powered fans; manually turned release valves, pressed buttons and flicked switches; pressure metres and temperature scales; gas pipes, water pumps and furnaces – accompany the introduction of extreme weather scenarios. It draws attention to itself as a *simulation* and, in so doing, labours the point that humans *can* control, predict and reproduce these conditions. The pursuit of climate-adaptive technologies and practices in construction and architecture is, no doubt, vital and necessary.

In appropriating the Queenslander style, the project reveals how a distinctly Australian style of home was seriously 'maladapted' to its environment, with conventional decorative flourishes and close-hugging door and window meshing providing entry-points for fire and limited protection from debris projectiles (Suncorp 2021b). It demonstrates how lifestyle(s) can and should adapt to their surroundings without having to fully retreat. As Kate Phillips of Room 11 Architects states in the campaign's documentary, 'anyone can build a concrete or steel bunker – but nobody wants to live in that' (Suncorp 2021b).

In its exaggerated commercial framing, however, 'One House' leans into a particular narrative about house and home that reifies the metaphysical divisions that underpinned the now maladapted lifestyles. The advertisement closes with a montage of families smiling in front of their suburban homes, underscoring the way in which the marketing and design of homes often reinforces not only gender norms but also hegemonic heterosexuality (Gorman-Murray 2008). The documentary reveals that these families are not actors but are, in fact, 'real' families that were displaced by different extreme weather events, invoking the Australian Dream with its imagery, and once again binding 'One House' to restoring (and thus reaffirming) the national mythos and the cultural narratives that sustain it.

The mutually imbricated dualisms central to anthropocentrism are also on display. Justin Leonard, CSIRO's research leader in bushfire adaptation, claims that 'One House' would alter how we relate to nature: 'We would feel closer to nature because we would be in awe of it rather than in fear of it' (Suncorp 2021b). This, however, is not a new relationship. 'One House', shown to be bounded, secure and impermeable, restores a status quo in which nature can be admired and enjoyed *at a distance*, now that (once more) humanity can carve out a place that reveres it but 'holds it back'. In other words, it restores us to a relationship with nature that is strictly on our terms, and which assumes it can *always* be strictly on our terms, as opposed to seeing an opportunity to reconfigure that relationship as one of *being in and of nature*.

'One House to Save Many' echoes the NSW Bushfire Inquiry in calling for a cultural shift – 'a change in mindset' – that centres individuals and households. John Doolan, Director of James Cook University's Cyclone Testing Station, casts this as a move from 'someone else is looking after it' to 'I must be aware of my own situation' (Suncorp 2021b). This shift is nestled within the auspices of collective responsibility with Cath Stewart, Suncorp's Head of Disaster Response, maintaining 'it's not the government, it's not the industry, it's not the community; together, we need to come up with what the longer term solution is' (Suncorp 2021b). This follows the move toward a model of 'shared responsibility' in emergency management policy in Australia which has been critiqued for generating confusion over where responsibilities lie, placing disproportionate burden on individuals without recognition of structural and material disadvantage, and creating grounds for politicisation between levels of government and other actors during disaster response and recovery (Maguire et al. 2022; Rawsthorne, Howard, and Joseph 2021). 'Shared responsibility' is nebulous, contested and difficult to put into practice as repeatedly witnessed with the 2022 floods in Queensland and NSW as well as the previously covered responses of Black Summer bushfire survivors.

Interestingly, 'One House' avoids explicit references to Black Summer ('fires so fierce the whole world took notice'), and climate change itself is re-framed as 'weather becoming increasingly extreme'. This allows the campaign to carefully straddle a line between implicitly acknowledging a changing climate, but without its human-induced connotations which invite notions of responsibility and blame, while also situating Australia as a land of natural extremes: 'Australia is no stranger to extreme weather – and it's only getting worse' (Suncorp 2021b). This ambiguity is key for the campaign's central theme of 'resilience' which is upheld as innate within Australia's national spirit ('we Australians are a resilient bunch') (Suncorp 2021a). 'One House' is bound to this national character in achieving its counterpart in home design ('now as our weather becomes more

extreme, we need homes as resilient as us') (Suncorp 2021a). Or, put another way, 'One House' makes for a *more Australian* Australian Dream. It certainly demonstrates the resiliency of Australian cultural narratives on home and the anthropocentric norms they reify. But in doing so, and while eschewing direct reference to climate change, any discussion of broader actions is abandoned in order to simply reaffirm the question of the human home as a 'techno fix' for living in the climate crisis.

The longstanding Australian mythology of 'a home among the gum trees' is one of but many examples of what Gillon and Gibbs (2019, 107) describe as 'the successful performance of idealised home cultures'. The marketing of 'One House' and real-estate developments in desirable natural locales share an obfuscation of the labour involved in dwelling there. However, such homemaking is always *more-than-human*, 'a shared process: between humans, nonhumans, materials, elements, and cultures' (109).

Habitat-as-Home

Koalas have a contemporary salience that is entangled with the 2019–2020 catastrophic fires. They form part of Black Summer's emblematic imagery with widely circulated footage of rescues, sometimes as co-survivors of bushfires, which has been followed by reports of their extinction threat by 2050 in NSW, Queensland and the ACT due to habitat loss accelerated by the bushfires (Portfolio Committee No. 7 – Planning and Environment 2020), public tensions within the NSW Government over proposed protections (Nguyen 2020) and the Federal Government officially listing the native marsupial as endangered in February 2022 (Ley 2022). NRMA Insurance's 'Every Home is Worth Protecting' campaign is situated within this context. This conservation campaign was launched in August 2019, in partnership with Conservation Volunteers Australia and as part of 'The Lion's Share' initiative,⁴ and initially ran until January 2020, effectively coinciding with Black Summer (NRMA Insurance 2019a). It included a series of advertisements which tell the story of a young boy, Ranger Sammy, who one day notices a koala (Arlo) atop a power-line pole in the middle of town (see NRMA Insurance 2019b, 2021). He helps relocate the marsupial to more suitable habitat but encounters a bulldozer in a field of cleared trees on the way. The sequel series sees Sammy join forces with a girl called Ruby. Together, they discover that Arlo's eucalyptus trees have been marked for clearing and set out to prevent this by establishing a makeshift koala sanctuary. Ultimately, their efforts are shown to be successful with the construction workers departing with the trees left standing and intact.

The campaign leverages the affective resonance of 'home' – as fixed, comforting and secure – as a means to promote the conservation of koala habitats. Each ad closes with a shot of Arlo, sitting in the bow of a tree, with the campaign's slogan 'Every home is worth protecting' imposed over the image. In this way, the series seemingly undercuts how we tend to understand 'habitat'. Thom Van Dooren (2014, 79) writes that habitat is underpinned by assumptions of interchangeability; so long as a space provides the ideal living conditions for a specific non-human species then *any* such space will suffice for that species. By enfolded habitat-as-home, 'Every Home' suggests a different relationality with place. In fact, studies have observed philopatric (philopatry, 'love for one's home') behaviours among koalas under different conditions (Mitchell 1990; Phillips 2016). As such, it is worth being cautious about too readily accepting this framing simply as

strategic anthropomorphism or, rather, with assuming that humans *alone* develop affective relationships with place. Might recognition of a shared 'love for one's home' unlock meaningful common ground in site fidelities across species?

The enfolding of home and habitat prompts another question: if we can affectively recast habitat as 'home' for koalas, then, is the deliberate destruction of koala habitat-homes also domicide? Koala habitats are situated within intersecting concerns anchored in 'the greater good' with tree clearing being necessary for various infrastructure and development projects, including the construction of human homes, as well as 'incendiary Others' within arguments for bushfire risk mitigation. In other words, koalas' 'homes' are destroyed through purposeful human actions to achieve specified goals for the 'common good'. 'Every Home' reveals its everydayness. Human actions, not the recent fires, are positioned as the causes of Arlo's habitat loss and, importantly, these actions are not embellished as especially villainous either. There is nothing to suggest that these actions are out-of-the-ordinary. The perpetrators are anonymous (as is their purpose; any construction project could be inserted into the scenario), glimpsed at-a-distance and depart without resisting Sammy and Ruby's efforts.

'Ecocide' seems the appropriate term to account for and intervene upon such ecological damage and, if so, 'Every Home' presents how it, like domicide, must account for everyday modalities (Burke and Celermajor 2021). However, home is 'a multidimensional concept of which the physical dwelling is only one aspect' (Reid and Beilin 2015, 96); it bears 'a cluster of meanings' across multiple scales, as Porteous and Smith (2001, 32) note. Fundamentally, what underpins both concepts is recognition of *connection to place*. Perhaps, then, domicide could be extended to other-than-human beings as potential victims at a time where continuing to separate and disentangle human and non-human is increasingly being questioned?

This proposed extension of domicide might draw concerns about anthropomorphism as well as the collapsing of clear conceptual scopes for itself and ecocide. After all, the etymologies of domicide and philopatry are informed by a particular human notion of home as opposed to a broader range of place-based connections that might not all be suitably labelled as 'home'. In this sense, extending domicide to other-than-human beings might risk ascribing human ways of knowing a certain connection to place (home) that overrides other non-human ways of knowing and being. For example, must non-human connection to place *be philopatric* – as a set of particular, observable and routine behaviours – to be recognised as domicidal destruction when ruptured? Does this risk creating division between non-humans where those that are not philopatric remain vulnerable to the potential violences underpinning notions of habitat interchangeability?

What is clear, however, is that 'Every Home' highlights how domicide and ecocide are deeply entwined. The story of Bennelong's hut that opened this essay also presents how intrinsically knotted these '-cides' can be, while also including other modes of killing like cultural genocide and memoricide ('the killing of memory'), especially within settler colonial contexts. Further, Bhiemie Williamson, Jessica Weir and Vanessa Cavanagh (2020) explain that 'the experience of Aboriginal peoples in the fire crisis ... is vastly different to non-Indigenous peoples'. Lorena Allam (2020), descendant of the Gamilaraay and Yawalaraay Nations, writes that the fires are 'taking everything with it – lives, homes, animals, trees – but for First Nations people it is also burning up our memories, our sacred places, all the things which make us who we are'. The fires entail the ongoingness

of colonisation's immeasurable destruction as they compound its ecocide, domicide, memocide and cultural genocide; the undoing of connection to place, to Country, particular to First Nations peoples.

Celermajer (2021, 185) proposes 'omnicide' to name the limitless and boundless killing that characterises this age. The killing 'cannot be delimited', it subsumes all human and non-human beings as well as *ways of being*, such as living safely in connection to place. In this sense, omnicide enfolds all killing – genocide (including its cultural guises) and ecocide, domicide and memocide – in recognition of their interconnectedness especially through the shared forces and legitimising narratives that underpin them. This does not mean that omnicide overrides these other terms (nor is this suggested in Celermajer's work); these '-cides' are modalities through which omnicide occurs. Moreover, in specifically addressing connection to place, omnicide may also accommodate the manifold ways of being and knowing connected to place that domicide would perhaps flatten if applied to other-than-human beings.

To return to 'Every Home', then, and pose a related question: if we can speak in terms of habitats-as-home then perhaps we can also contemplate the inverse: homes-as-habitats? Menzies may have conceived of the Australian home as keeping strangers at-bay. But our homes are always already full of strangers – and they are all non-human. They are habitats for 'many and diverse animal inhabitants – more, perhaps, than we are inclined to recognise' (Ingold 2022, 223).⁵

Home's more-than-human dimensions include other multispecies entanglements with non-human co-dwellers: the welcome, the tolerated, the unnoticed and the intrusive. These beings dwell in liminal spaces – the walls, the ceilings, beneath the floorboards – as well as the air above, the soil below and everything in-between (Power 2009). They may not even come near the home but contribute to its atmosphere through other senses (Sou and Webber 2021).

The human home then is best conceived as an interface for multispecies life-worlds. These relations, however, do not only entail what Emma Power (2009, 50) describes as 'the necessarily more-than-human character of home'. As emphasised earlier, it includes materials as well as the materiality of elements, including the materiality of the climate itself. All these multi-sensory relations – human, other-than-human beings, materials and elements – are generative for our senses of home. Their absence, then, might also be significant within the experience of home or home loss post-disaster, in the sense of why a home rebuilt or returned to may feel uncanny. Sou and Webber (2021) observe how such sensations can be produced when disasters disrupt the routinised smell, taste- and soundscapes that comprise home. Van Dooren (2020) speaks of 'the presence of an absence, the silence of birds' following the bushfires, highlighting how the sensory home can incorporate multispecies connection and conversely signal its loss. Celermajer (2021, 66) reflects that, when evacuating from a bushfire, 'you cannot take the trees, the native animals, the grass, the soil, the river and the relationships that sustain us all'. Nor can these necessarily be rebuilt with the restored home. This recognises that there is more at-stake than human-centric conceptions of home; rather, a (not always harmonious) overlapping of multispecies and more-than-human relations can bear upon (even co-constitute) human senses of home and home loss, a consciousness of which might mark the 'liberating potential' (Young 2020, 134) for transformed home-making in climate changed futures.

Conclusion

During the 2019–2020 bushfires in Australia, the human home – the material reordering of natural space that confirms humans (some more so than others) as separate from and above ‘nature’ – was turned inside-out. Bushfires are traumatic events, whose repercussions extend far beyond the material debris of individual houses left in their wake. Here we suggest that the embers of homes lost to bushfires might yet serve as kindling for reconceptualising both *domus* (home) and *domicide* (the destruction of home) as deeply entwined with the more-than-human. Although ‘natural disasters’ were originally excluded from the theoretical framework for understanding *domicide*, global warming and the increasing frequency of environmental hazards such as bushfires prompt a reassessment of how both ‘risk’ and its commonsense corollary ‘responsibility’ should be addressed, especially within the context of anthropogenic climate change and the spectre of climate catastrophe. It also necessitates questioning the very notion of ‘responsibility’, asking not only *who* is responsible but to *whom* and to *what* we are responsible.

The inquiry that was conducted in the aftermath of the bushfires calls for ‘a big cultural shift’ in where and how Australians live. In other words, it invites a reconceptualisation of the Australian ‘home’, extending from settlement patterns and building practices to dominant cultural imaginaries. The ‘pyromanic suburbanisation’ that Mike Davis (1998) has identified, is underpinned by an assemblage of powerful vested interests, real estate boosterism, environmental amnesia, planning ideals, land supply mechanisms, economic conceits, asset inequality, and dominant cultural narratives. It is this assemblage that continues to animate the Australian desire for ‘a home among the gum trees’, while simultaneously working to disavow the power structures and elite groups that maintain and benefit from it and instead reify the solitary individual responsible for arbitrary hazard reduction. Feminism’s unmasking of longstanding androcentric discourses about home reveals the dynamics of power and oppression they naturalise. As we have demonstrated here, the insights of feminism can, yet again, be usefully employed to deconstruct the anthropocentric basis of the human home and, in its place, position home as a place of multispecies connection. These insights can also provide much-needed responses to the various anthropocentric techno-fix scenarios that offer nothing more than an intensified restoration of the settler-colonial Australian Dream.

Notes

1. *Anthropos* meaning ‘human’ in ancient Greek (Franklin 2017, 54).
2. Importantly, as Vanessa Cavanagh (2020) notes, ‘Indigenous people have shared this story [of more-than-human kinship] for millennia.’ In grieving a grandmother tree that was part of her childhood home, a casualty of Black Summer, she explains that ‘she, like me, is part of human and non-human kinship networks that connect us to Country.’
3. In this article, the authors bring the concept of *domicide* into conversation with ‘natural disasters’ as socially constructed phenomena. They focus on how constructed marginalisation can be compounded through disasters and recovery efforts to produce what they call ‘queer *domicide*’.
4. ‘The Lion’s Share’ is an initiative endorsed by the UN whereby advertisers designate 0.5% of their overall media spend on a campaign featuring an animal for conservation purposes (NRMA Insurance 2019a). By partnering with Conservation Volunteers Australia, NRMA

Insurance pledged to plant a new tree for every new home insurance policy purchased between the initial 2019–2020 campaign period (NRMA Insurance 2019a).

5. 'Pets', while non-human, are not strangers; we *consciously and intentionally* bring them in to become part of home. We can also extend this to forms of plant-life that we, again *intentionally*, bring into our domestic spaces and attend to for various meaningful reasons.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

- AIDR. n.d. *New South Wales, July 2019–March 2020*. Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience. Accessed 12 March 2022. <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/black-summer-bushfires-nsw-2019-20/>.
- Allam, L. 2020. "For First Nations People the Bushfires Bring a Particular Grief, Burning What Makes Us Who We Are." *The Guardian*, January 6. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/06/for-first-nations-people-the-bushfires-bring-a-particular-grief-burning-what-makes-us-who-we-are>.
- Allon, F. 2008. *Renovation Nation: Our Obsession with Home*. Sydney: UNSW Press.
- Allon, F. 2020. "Safe as Houses: Climate Change & the Australian Dream." *Advocate* 27 (1): 28–30. https://issuu.com/nfeu/docs/advocate_27_01.
- Burke, A., and D. Celermajer. 2021. "Human Progress is No Excuse to Destroy Nature. A Push to Make 'Ecocide' a Global Crime Must Recognise This Fundamental Truth." *The Conversation*, August 31. <https://theconversation.com/human-progress-is-no-excuse-to-destroy-nature-a-push-to-make-ecocide-a-global-crime-must-recognise-this-fundamental-truth-164594>.
- Button, G. V., and M. Schuller, eds. 2016. *Contextualizing Disaster*. New York: Berghahn.
- Cavanagh, V. 2020. "Friday Essay: This Grandmother Tree Connects Me to Country. I Cried When I Saw Her Burned." *The Conversation*, January 24. <https://theconversation.com/friday-essay-this-grandmother-tree-connects-me-to-country-i-cried-when-i-saw-her-burned-129782>.
- Celermajer, D. 2021. *Summertime: Reflections on a Vanishing Future*. Sydney: Penguin Group Australia.
- Celermajer, D., D. Schlosberg, L. Rickards, M. S. Harawira, M. Thaler, P. Tschakert, B. Verlie, and C. Winter. 2021. "Multispecies Justice: Theories, Challenges, and a Research Agenda for Environmental Politics." *Environmental Politics* 30 (1–2): 119–140. doi:10.1080/09644016.2020.1827608.
- Crutzen, P. J. 2002. "Geology of Mankind." *Nature* 415: 23. doi:10.1038/415023a.
- Crutzen, P. J., and E. F. Stoermer. 2000. "The Anthropocene." *IGBP Global Change Newsletter* 41: 17–18.
- Davis, M. 1998. *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- de Beauvoir, S. 1952. *The Second Sex*. Translated by H.M. Parshley. New York: Random House.
- Franklin, S. 2017. "Staying with the Manifesto: An Interview with Donna Haraway." *Theory, Culture & Society* 34 (4): 49–63. doi:10.1177/0263276417693290.
- Friedan, B. 1963. *The Feminine Mystique*. London: Gollancz.
- Gillon, C., and L. Gibbs. 2019. "Coastal Homemaking: Navigating Housing Ideals, Home Realities, and More-Than-Human Processes." *Environment and Planning. D, Society & Space* 37 (1): 104–121. doi:10.1177/0263775818811140.
- Goodall, H. 2020. "Shane FitzSimmons Dismisses Barnaby Joyce's Claim Bushfires Caused by 'Green Caveats'." *Sunrise*, January 8. <https://7news.com.au/sunrise/on-the-show/shane-fitzsimmons-dismisses-barnaby-joyces-claims-bushfires-caused-by-green-caveats-c-637354>.
- Gorman-Murray, A. 2008. "Masculinity and the Home: A Critical Review and Conceptual Framework." *Australian Geographer* 39 (3): 367–379. doi:10.1080/00049180802270556.
- Gorman-Murray, A., S. McKinnon, S. and, and D. Dominey-Howes. 2014. "Queer Domicide: LGBT Displacement and Home Loss in Natural Disaster Impact, Response, and Recovery." *Home Cultures* 11 (2): 237–261. doi:10.2752/175174214X13891916944751.

- Gourlay, C., T. Leslie, M. Martino, and B. Spraggon. 2020. "How Heat and Drought Turned Australia into a tinderbox." *ABC News*. Accessed 12 March 2022. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-02-19/australia-bushfires-how-heat-and-drought-created-a-tinderbox/11976134>.
- Hamilton, J., and A. Neimanis. 2018. "Composting Feminisms and Environmental Humanities." *Environmental Humanities* 10 (2): 501–527. doi:10.1215/22011919-7156859.
- Hanson, P. 2019. "Pauline Hanson Slams 'Welcome to Country' Ceremonies on Planes." *Wake Up Australia with Michael McLaren*, July 12. <https://www.2gb.com/podcast/pauline-hanson-slams-welcome-to-country-ceremonies-on-planes/>.
- Haraway, D. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Harvey, M., and M. Coffey. 1993. "Kennett Mabo Storm." *Herald Sun*, July 20: 3.
- Heidegger, M. 1971. "Building, Dwelling, Thinking." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Translated by A. Hofstadter, 143–159. New York: Harper and Row.
- Hinkson, M., and A. Harris. 2010. *Aboriginal Sydney: A Guide to Important Places of the Past and Present*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- Howard, J. 1997. "Transcript of the Prime Minister the Hon John Howard MP Television Interview with Kerry O'Brien." *The 7.30 Report*, September 4. <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/original/00010469.pdf>.
- Howard, J. 2007. "Address to the Coalition Campaign Launch – Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Brisbane, November 12." *Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House*. <https://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/2007-john-howard>.
- Ingold, T. (2000) 2022. "Building, Dwelling, Living: How Animals and People Make Themselves at Home in the World." In *Chap. 10 in The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, 213–233. London: Routledge.
- Karp, P., and K. Murphy. 2022. "Labor Calls on Disaster Relief Boss to Resign for Criticising Flood Victims Who Want 'to Live Among the Gumtrees'." *The Guardian*, March 4. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/04/labor-calls-on-disaster-relief-boss-to-resign-for-criticising-flood-victims-who-want-to-live-among-the-gum-trees>.
- Knaus, C. 2020. "Disinformation and Lies are Spreading Faster than Australia's Bushfires." *The Guardian*, January 12. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jan/12/disinformation-and-lies-are-spreading-faster-than-australias-bushfires>.
- Lewis, S., and M. Maslin. 2015. "Defining the Anthropocene." *Nature (London)* 519 (7542): 171–180. doi:10.1038/nature14258.
- Ley, S. 2022. "Media Release: Increased Protection for Koalas." February 11. *The Hon Sussan Ley MP – Minister for the Environment*. <https://minister.awe.gov.au/ley/media-releases/increased-protection-koalas>.
- Maguire, R., A. Kennedy, A. Bousgas, B. Lewis, and M. Bull. 2022. "Governments Love to Talk About 'Shared Responsibility' in a Disaster – But Does Anyone Know What It Means?" *The Conversation*, March 21. <https://theconversation.com/governments-love-to-talk-about-shared-responsibility-in-a-disaster-but-does-anyone-know-what-it-means-179459>.
- McCormack, M. 2019. "Transcript: Sky News Interview with Eliza Edwards, 18 December 2019." *Michael McCormack MP – Federal Member for Riverina*. <https://www.michaelmccormack.com.au/media-releases/2019/12/18/transcript-sky-news-interview-with-eliza-edwards-18-december-2019>.
- Mitchell, P. 1990. "Social Behaviour and Communication of Koalas." In *Biology of the Koala*, edited by A. K. Lee, K. A. Handasyde, and G. D. Sanson, 151–170. Sydney: Surrey Beatty.
- Morrison, S. 2017. "Scott Morrison brings a chunk of coal into parliament." *The Guardian*, February 9. <https://www.theguardian.com/global/video/2017/feb/09/scott-morrison-brings-a-chunk-of-coal-into-parliament-video>.
- Neimanis, A., C. Åsberg, and J. Hedrén. 2015. "Four Problems, Four Directions for Environmental Humanities: Toward Critical Posthumanities for the Anthropocene." *Ethics and the Environment* 20 (1): 67–97. doi:10.2979/ethicsenviro.20.1.67.
- Nguyen, K. 2020. "The NSW Government is Split on Koala Policy – This is Why John Barilaro Hates It." *ABC News*, September 10. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-09-10/koala-protection-policy-and-the-nationals-party-split-explained/12649290>.

- NRMA Insurance. 2019a. "Every Home is Worth Protecting." <https://www.nrma.com.au/koala/home>.
- NRMA Insurance. 2019b. "NRMA Insurance – Every Home is Worth Protecting (90 Sec)." YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_grpNHlhX5A.
- NRMA Insurance. 2021. "Ranger Sammy – Every Home is Worth Protecting (60")." YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfhbRbXyuo>.
- NSW Bushfire Inquiry. 2020. *Final Report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry*. <https://www.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government/projects-and-initiatives/nsw-bushfire-inquiry>.
- O'Malley, N. 2019. "These are the Future Fires': Californian Fire Chief Says Australia is Facing the 'New Normal'." *Sydney Morning Herald*, November 12. <https://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/these-are-the-future-fires-californian-fire-chief-says-australia-is-facing-the-new-normal-20191112-p539tl.html>.
- Ortner, S. 1972. "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" *Feminist Studies* 1 (2): 5–31. doi:10.2307/3177638.
- Phillips, S. 2016. "Aversive Behaviour by Koalas (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) During the Course of a Music Festival in Northern New South Wales, Australia." *Australian Mammalogy* 38 (2): 158–163. doi:10.1071/AM15006.
- Plumwood, V. [1993] 2003. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. New York: Routledge.
- Porteous, J., and S. Smith. 2001. *Domicide: The Global Destruction of Home*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Portfolio Committee No. 7 – Planning and Environment. 2020. *Koala Populations and Habitat in New South Wales – Report 3*. <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=2536#tab-reportsandgovernmentresponses>.
- Power, E. 2009. "Border-Processes and Homemaking: Encounters with Possums in Suburban Australian Homes." *Cultural Geographies* 16 (1): 29–54. doi:10.1177/1474474008097979.
- Probyn, E. 2016. *Eating the Ocean*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Pyne, S. 2007. "Problems, Paradoxes, Paradigms: Triangulating Fire Research." *International Journal of Wildland Fire* 16 (3): 271–276. doi:10.1071/WF06041.
- Pyne, S. 2019. *The Pyrocene: How We Created an Age of Fire, and What Happens Next*. Oakland: The University of California Press.
- Rapoport, A. 1994. "Spatial Organisation and the Built Environment." In *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology: Humanity, Culture and Social Life*, edited by T. Ingold, 460–502. London: Routledge.
- Rawsthorne, M., A. Howard, and P. Joseph. 2021. "Normalising Community-Led, Empowered, Disaster Planning: Reshaping Norms of Power and Knowledge." *Onati Socio-Legal Series* 12 (3): 506–521. doi:10.35295/osls.iisl/0000-0000-0000-1258.
- Readfearn, G. 2020. "Tony Abbott, Former Australian PM, Tells Israeli Radio the World is 'in the Grip of a Climate Cult'." *The Guardian*, January 2. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jan/03/tony-abbott-former-australian-pm-tells-israeli-radio-the-world-is-in-the-grip-of-a-climate-cult>.
- Reid, K., and R. Beilin. 2015. "Making the Landscape "Home": Narratives of Bushfire and Place in Australia." *Geoforum* 58: 95–103. doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2014.10.005.
- Rolston, H. 2001. "Natural and Unnatural: Wild and Cultural." *Western North American Naturalist* 61 (3): 267–276.
- Roos, C., D. Bowman, J. Balch, P. Artaxo, W. Bond, M. Cochrane, C. D'Antonio, et al. 2014. "Pyrogeography, Historical Ecology, and the Human Dimensions of Fire Regimes." *Journal of Biogeography* 41 (4): 833–836. doi:10.1111/jbi.12285.
- Rykwert, J. 1991. "House and Home." *Social Research* 58: 51–62.
- Schlunke, K. 2016. "Burnt Houses and the Haunted Home: Reconfiguring the Ruin in Australia." In *Housing and Home Unbound: Intersections in Economics, Environment and Politics in Australia*, edited by N. Cook, L. Crabtree, and A. Davison, 218–231. London: Routledge.
- School Strike 4 Climate. 2019. "This is Fiona." Facebook, November 12. <https://www.facebook.com/StrikeClimate/photos/this-is-fiona-she-her-partner-and-their-three-year-old-lost-their-home-to-the-fi/585221958973520/>.
- Singhal, P. 2019. "'The government has Abandoned its Own People': Bushfire Evacuees Call for Climate Action." *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 12. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/>

- the-government-has-abandoned-its-own-people-bushfire-evacuees-call-for-climate-action-20191112-p539q2.html.
- Sou, G., and R. Webber. 2021. "Un/Making the "Sensory Home": Tastes, Smells and Sounds During Disasters." *Social & Cultural Geography*, 1–19. doi:10.1080/14649365.2021.1984554.
- Suncorp. 2021a. "One House to Save Many." YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHqvrpGXugQ>.
- Suncorp. 2021b. "One House to Save Many Documentary." YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDaC8dvyX1s>.
- Suncorp Insurance. 2021. "One House to Save Many." <https://onehouse.suncorp.com.au/#explore>.
- Tierney, K. 2018. "Disaster as Social Problem and Social Construct." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Social Problems*, edited by J. A. Trevino, 79–91. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tsing, A., A. S. Mathews, and N. Bubandt. 2019. "Patchy Anthropocene: Landscape Structure, Multispecies History, and the Retooling of Anthropology." *Current Anthropology* 60 (20): S186–S197. doi:10.1086/703391.
- Tuana, N. 2008. "Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina." In *Material Feminisms*, edited by S. Alaimo, and S. Hekman, 188–213. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Van Dooren, T. 2014. "Urban Penguins: Stories for Lost Places." In *Chap. 3 in Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction*, 63–85. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Van Dooren, T. 2020. "Smoke and Song: On the Unravelling of Regent Honeyeater Life." *An Endangered Menagerie – Plumwood Mountain*. <https://plumwoodmountain.com/smoke-and-song-on-the-unravelling-of-regent-honeyeater-life/>.
- Verlie, B. 2022. *Learning to Live with Climate Change: From Anxiety to Transformation*. New York: Routledge.
- Warhaft, S. 2004. *Well May We Say: The Speeches That Made Australia*. Melbourne: Black Inc.
- Williamson, B., J. Weir, and V. Cavanagh. 2020. "Strength From Perpetual Grief: How Aboriginal People Experience the Bushfire Crisis." *The Conversation*, January 10. <https://theconversation.com/strength-from-perpetual-grief-how-aboriginal-people-experience-the-bushfire-crisis-129448>.
- Young, I. M. [1997] 2020. "House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme." In *Chap. 7 in Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy and Policy*, 134–164. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Yusoff, K. 2018. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.