

HouseWork

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While Ulysses was away, Penelope shunned opportunistic suitors with the oldest alibi in the book – she reiterated that a woman's work is never done. As part of her ruse, Penelope spun a robe in the day, and as night fell, started to undo what she had completed in the day. Such repetitive housework was Penelope's lifeline. It gave her a room of her own. Was Penelope doing work or housework? How would you differentiate the two?

For one thing, we all know that work is serious – it defines personality, declares allegiances and denounces the frivolous. Conversely, housework is peripheral – to maintain order and sanity, it needs to be done but strictly beyond the space, time and visibility of work. Yet, being someone who works, writes and thinks more creatively 'at home', the forced division between 'work' and 'housework' becomes fuzzy, unnecessary, even extremely problematic.

Fixing breakfast, *thinking*, sweeping, dusting, *writing*, washing, cooking, walking the dogs, *reading*, seeding, chatting, weeding, ironing, tidying, *thinking*, defrosting, sorting, cleaning, *reading*....

An observation: A lot more clothes get folded, plants watered, surfaces cleaned, shelves dusted and ironing done when an intellectual project is unfolding. Another observation: when housework suffocates, there is an intense need to start an intellectual project. Which activity spurs which activity? Is it unprofessional to be concerned about how much food is leftover in the refrigerator in the same breath as feminist methodology?

I may desperately try to confine serious thinking to the dedicated space of the study,

but it adamantly occurs in the garden, at the stove, by the laundry room, on the balcony, at the dressing table. It makes me wonder if such modes of thinking and working are gendered or if I am still harbouring the quaint desire of being an impeccable housewife? Does the crossover between work and housework affect the house as it does the work? In any case, are thoughts, words and images that germinate at the washing line different from those in the office?

