Guest editorial

Living room: rematerialising home

In recent years there has been an explosion of scholarship around the concept of home. Extending well beyond traditional social and cultural geographical concerns with the public–private divide, this recent wave of home studies has teased out the complex meanings of home and its relationship to identity and subject formation. Notable here is the trend set by the journal *Home Cultures*; exemplary in this vein is the recent book *Home* (2006) by Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling, who also contribute to the themed essays that follow in this issue. Among other things, scholarship such as this shows how home is a complex field of feelings and subjectivity: an anchor for senses of belonging, a mechanism for living with, and in, the experience of transnationalism, and a site for constituting and performing selfhood.

Like other social and cultural geographies, this interest with the meaning of home is not untouched by a material turn. There has been, for example, a new appreciation of the coconstitutive relationship between the formal features of actual dwellings and the social life that inhabits them. In good part inaugurating such scholarship, anthropologist Danny Miller (1988) wrote of the way residents worked to appropriate the design features of council estates in an attempt “to transform alienable goods into inalienable culture” (page 353). More recently, geographer Mark Llewellyn (2004) has shown how the residents of Kensal House enhanced its liveability by renegotiating the dictates of modernist living embodied in its architecture. In a similar material vein is a growing interest in the deployment of objects in the home as a means of expressing and constituting the self. This approach challenges essentialised understanding of home and identity by illustrating how objects extend the reach of home through time and across space. Divia Tolia-Kelly (2004), for example, shows how British Asians use the physicality of ‘home possessions’ (ornaments, souvenirs, and sacred objects) to draw the memory of homes left behind into their experience of dwellings lived in today. Greg Noble (2004) shows, too, how the accumulation of objects into home is simultaneously an accumulation of being and a quest for recognition.

There are then already established traditions working with the materialisation of home, and we hope that the themed papers in this issue elaborate and extend that scholarship in new ways. As a means of framing these essays, which can really speak for themselves, we use this editorial to offer some suggestive thoughts on the direction and meaning of the intellectual work of rematerialising home. To do this we revisit an old materialism, engage with a new one, and conclude with an idea about what to do next.

Looking back...

Putting the words ‘history’ and ‘materiality’ together serves as a reminder that materialism is always (whatever else it conveys) about money; and of course about the power relations and emotional energies that vie for it. So our first point is that the project of rematerialising home has an inescapably financial bottom line. As Georg Simmel recognised, money itself is formless; it flows—as Gordon Clark (2005) so aptly puts it—like mercury. But it also settles out into ‘things’, like bricks and mortar, that give it presence; that quite literally lend it form and value.

The only real attempt to grapple with this in relation to housing and home is located in the all-but-forgotten notion of ‘housing classes’ developed by John Rex

and Robert Moore (1967). Whatever it subsequently became, this idea was at heart an attempt to show that the materiality of housing could intervene in the structured inequalities associated with labour migration—in this instance (Britain in the early 1960s)—to create an ‘underclass’ excluded not only from direct financial rewards but also from the in-kind benefits of the welfare state. Unfortunately, this attempt to position dwelling as a materialisation of political economy was hijacked by the turn to consumption that has dominated housing studies ever since. This of course has been a highly productive vein: we know more now than ever before about housing consumption as an exercise in ‘taste’ and ‘distinction’, as a means of engaging with cultures of consumption, of charting the mutual constitution of artefacts and subjectivity, of the relationship between lifestyles and desires, of engaging with the sentiments and the symbolism that drive the search for homes, of the acquisition of particular property styles, of the shape of domestic interiors, and so on. But any financial logic driving this remains firmly locked in a bulky black box which, until recently, has kept all things economic well away from the world of social and cultural affairs.

One inspiration for this set of papers is the possibility to open up the black boxes of economy to scrutiny, just at a time when a new financial order is linking ‘home economics’ to global flows of credit and cash to an unprecedented extent. The fixtures of old housing ‘classes’ prove increasingly fluid as the art of global economy escapes the trappings of production and labour, and is anchored instead in the circulation of money. Indeed, as everyday budgets (should we buy that lamp for the living room, why not add a fireplace to increase the value of property) get drawn into global flows of cash and credit it is worth tracing the flow of money into and out of the fabric of housing, not least to know how new materialisations of money can—as wealth accumulates into and through property—begin to eclipse the division of labour.

Charting the flow of the materials of economy (money, markets, calculative practices, valuing, and value-adding) as they travel into and out of the materials of housing and home making is a project taken up both in the papers that follow and elsewhere (Munro and Smith, 2008; Smith and Searle, 2008). Such scholarship celebrates and extends that convergence of cultural economy with material sociology which has so far been concerned mainly with sectors and sites outside the home.

...Moving on

Our turn back to historical materialism simultaneously foregrounds a set of ideas animated by more recent engagement with materiality through studies in science and technology. The “new materialisms”, as Steve Woolgar (2002, page 261) calls them, operationalise “perspectives which exhibit an increased sensitivity to the performative and integrative capacity of things to help make what we call society.” Such approaches recognise that people’s relationships with ‘things’ are as important for sociological inquiry as are their links to other people. They also variously challenge the duality between the material and the social. Applied to the context of rematerialising the home, such approaches expose a whole range of human and nonhuman relations that bring the structures and meanings of properties into being; which sustain and maintain these assemblages and reshape them in various ways. Through the lens of ‘new materialism’ the world of home swarms with the many sociotechnical associations that coproduce home life. Home is not simply the cultivation of a sense of belonging, nor merely a site of consumption, it is quite literally a fabric-ation.

Although science and technology studies (STS) routinely interrogate a range of technologies, the technology of the house, like architectural technologies generally, has received only limited attention. This is despite the fact that in its more theoretical musing STS has often taken up the metaphors of architecture and building. There is,

however, now an emergent scholarship that is taking the methodological and theoretical insights of science and technology studies and applying them to housing and home building. For example, a forthcoming issue of *Science Studies* coedited by Simon Guy and Albenya Yaneva will feature a suite of articles considering the relevance of STS approaches to urban developments of various kinds, including housing. Such scholarship takes in new directions the research trajectories marked out by Elizabeth Shove's (Shove, 2003; Shove et al, 2007) exemplary work on the sociology of everyday home technologies. Her interest has been in the practical sociotechnical choreographies that coproduce, through often quite ordinary and everyday competencies, the experience of dwelling. For example, her recent collaborative work on kitchens provides important methodological templates for charting all kinds of geographies, domestic and other. The kitchen is not conceived of as a place but as an "orchestrating concept" in which materials, images, and forms of competence "hang together" at different points in time and space (Hand and Shove, 2004, page 235). There are new imperatives for scholars to attend to the logics of this sociotechnical coproduction of domesticity. As the work of Heather Lovell (2004; 2005) has shown, policy frameworks generated by worries about climate change have implicated house design and home-life routines in novel ways. Governing the sociotechnical systems of the home in the name of sustainability not only produces new types of low-energy housing, but also seeks to constitute new kinds of domestic citizens (with compliant daily routines of energy consumption and waste management) dependent upon radically restructured frameworks of value.

The lens of STS reminds us that the house, no matter what typology, comprises a set of contingently held material and social orders (Jacobs, 2006; Jacobs et al, 2006). The acts of 'housing' and 'dwelling' are a coproduction between those who are housed and the variant technologies that do the work of housing: ornaments and decorations, yes, architecture and bricks and mortar, sanitation and communication technologies, too, but also housing policies and practices, mortgage lending and insurance, credit scores, and all the other lively 'things' of finance. The papers to follow offer varied ways to conceptualise and chart these housing orders. For example, Susan Smith (2008) investigates the new generation of financial services that render housing wealth interchangeable with the cash economy, interacting with politics and policy to turn owned homes into a hybrid of money and materials. Dowling (2008) conceives of dwelling as affective labour, honing in on the constant work required to reconcile taste-driven models of dwelling with the messier practicalities of children and clutter. Blunt (2008) materially reanimates the concept of housing biography, centre stage of which is not an ungrounded residents' history of housing but a situated house entwined with human and nonhuman life stories. And Jane Jacobs and Stephen Cairns (2008) extend the notion of an ethopolitics of housing by investigating how the state and interior design coproduce not only the modern home, but also the modern subject.

Rematerialising home

This theme issue seeks to stimulate conversation around the site of the home in order to enliven current understandings of materiality and invigorate some areas of housing studies. Our starting point is an uneasiness about the volume and enlargement of the explanatory claims of the concept of 'home' vis-à-vis other categories pertinent to the experience of dwelling, notably the idea of the house and housing. Home has grown ever expansive as a term, not only encapsulating the site of dwelling as a place for sleeping, eating, nurturing, and engaging in domestic labour, but also as the anchor for more widely scaled notions of national and transnational belonging, and of other ideas too rich and varied to enumerate. But for all that, there is something missing, and that is precisely the articulation of housing with home. Housing and home are

both nouns, but the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives us also the verb: “the action of house”, and it is to this actancy that we turn as we outline some merits of bringing these awkwardly fragmented concepts back together.

We look among other things to efforts to create a ‘material sociology’ of economy, and in particular to Michel Callon’s recent work on the constitution of value in and through markets. This provides a suggestive framework for breaking down a foundational part of the infrastructure that divides thinking about home and housing. One of the key contributions of recent scholarship on the rematerialisation of the home has been to chart the emotional-cum-material work that home making entails (decorating, tidying, cleaning, improving, designing). Bringing this work into view has fundamentally challenged drier analyses of housing and housing markets. But it has also given flesh to a binary, imputed in more philosophical accounts of home such as those of Martin Heidegger (1975 [1951]) and Gaston Bachelard (1969), in which the concept of home is understood primarily as an affective concept (an emotional sensibility, a meaning) while house as defined as a material concept (a thing, a commodity). It is our view that this binary thinking has now reached the end of its usefulness. Looking to resolve this, Callon and Muniesa’s (2005) account of markets as collective calculating devices reminds us that they are an *agencement* (an active assemblage) in which there is no single mechanism, but a dispersed and relationally arranged set of valuation processes. Similarly, if we did away with the home/housing binary and attended instead to an *assemblage of dwelling* then we would capture the dispersed and variant logics of value and valuation that actively constitute not only the field of meaning, experience and practice that is called ‘home’ but also the house that is the locus of its performance.

In short, this collection engages with the uneven distributions of calculative energies through which value is apportioned and home/housing fabric-ated. This more variable model of valuation registers the many ways in which the emotional terrain brought into view by cultural studies of the home (meaning, memory, identity) is inextricably entangled with the material, economic territory that often pre-occupies housing studies (markets, regulations, policy). In this revised rematerialisation of home, it would be possible to regard the experience of dwelling as an outcome of the differential directions and volumes of valuing: what gets invested in and what does not; what is overinvested in and what becomes invisible or beyond care; what is maintained and improved and what is let go. We see this not simply as a financial question, nor even just a question of value as a form of treasuring; it is also about utility, functionality, possession, maintenance, how something stays together or comes to fall apart.

We set off our thinking in this short editorial by noting the important advance in recent scholarship in detailing how and why home encapsulates so much more than housing. So sure footed has this adjustment been that we are now at a point where to talk only of housing is insufficient to understand the complexity of what home is, both emotionally and materially. But our sense is that if we really push the notion of rematerialising home, if we open up the idea of home to a conception of materiality that looks back as it looks forward, then we are forced to admit that in much of the current scholarship on home the valuing logics of housing, including housing markets, is unhelpfully ‘black boxed’. To rematerialise home radically is to be drawn back to the insistent but uneasy articulation between processes traditionally conceived of as pertaining to housing and processes more recently set up as belonging to home. For most people, most of the time, whether directly or indirectly, housing—the materials of accommodation, the business of dwelling—insistently occupies the site of home.

One claim that recent scholarship on home can rightly make is that it has enlivened and given meaning to the drier concept of house as property: in this respect home really is far more than ‘house’. But our plea, as we move further along the path of

rematerialising home, is that work on home cultures and housing studies each exceed their own briefs, and find new points of reconnection. How do house biographies and housing careers link up, for example; how do the ethopolitics of housing—a politics of conduct embodied in the production, distribution, regulation, and occupation of property—speak to geographies of home life; and so on. Addressing these points of intersection could, we suggest, make for styles of scholarship which better grasp not only the art of home and the practice of housing, but also the ethical parameters of what Heidegger referred to as a ‘proper dwelling’.

Jane M Jacobs, School of GeoSciences, University of Edinburgh
Susan J Smith, Department of Geography, University of Durham

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