

The Black Box of Everyday Life

Entanglements of Stuff, Affects, and Activities

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Abstract

Ethnologists like to think of themselves as masters of the study of the everyday, but we still know surprising little how this mundane machinery works. Everyday life remains something of a black box, our understanding is still piecemeal and fragmented. This paper explores cohabitation and circulation of objects, affects and activities in the home—seen as a workshop where raw materials, raw feelings, previously untried movements and new routines are welded into everyday patterns. The concepts of throwntogetherness, assemblage and entanglement are used to explore such transformations and co-dependencies, often naturalised into invisibility.

The home is also discussed a moral economy with strong ideas about good and bad, duties and rights as well as a space colonized by ideals and consumer dreams, which often can produce guilty feelings of “not good enough.”

Taking Turns

One of the most striking characteristics of contemporary cultural analysis is the incessant production of “new turns,” but the SIEF anniversary may be a good time for a quick retrospective look. The turn phenomenon has a history. It all began with the textual turn in the early 1970s (Chouliaraki 2008), which advocated that cultures, bodies, and people should be read as texts. One of the results of this was the strong impact that discourse analysis had over several decades. But turns create counter-turns and the hegemony of discourse analysis was challenged by new turns, such as the spatial, the material, and the affective turn. Many of these argue for greater attention to non-discursive or pre-discursive dimensions of everyday life, but also for a focus not on what people say but what they do.

So that is where we are now: twisted by a number of turns. How does this affect the ethnologic and folkloristic study of everyday life? And what could our contributions be to these discussions? In a sense, the focus on the material,

the place-bound, and the emotional aspects sits well with us—they have long formed part of our approach. Nevertheless I find the new theoretical turns refreshing and challenging in many ways. They create cross-disciplinary dialogues, but also beg the question of how they could be combined or entangled in productive ways. This paper deals with some approaches to such entanglements, drawing on empirical examples from a classic research arena: the home.

Looking back on the making and remaking of turns over the last decades it is striking how different theoretical approaches have evolved. The interest in materialities, for example, has been developed by Actor Network Theory with its focus on the co-dependence of human and non-human actors. ANT is a tradition that has been increasingly influential in contemporary ethnology (Ren and Petersen 2013). Another strand is found in attempts to revitalize phenomenological traditions, as in, for example, the more down-to-earth perspectives of post-phenomenology that attempt to bring a classic philosophical tradition closer to the study of everyday activities by developing ethnographies—by doing a concrete phenomenology of specific life-worlds, rather than interpreting texts (Ingold 2011 and Verbeek 2009). A number of ethnologists have contributed to this phenomenological turn by studying experiences as situated everyday practices (see, for example, the recent studies in Frykman and Frykman, forthcoming).

Affective theory is also helpful here, viewing affects as forces and energies which shape the interaction between bodies. It explores the in-betweenness not only between human actors but also between humans and objects. Affect is about reactions and communications, which often are unconscious, driving us toward movement or thought, overwhelming or exciting us—a passing mood, a sudden sensibility, a creeping irritation or anxiety (Gregg and Seigworth 2010).

For the ethnological tradition of the cultural analysis of everyday life, I find the development of what has been called non-representational theory especially interesting. A somewhat clumsy term, it was first developed as an umbrella term among British cultural geographers (Thrift 2008; Anderson and Harrison 2010). It combines several theoretical and ethnographic perspectives and might more accurately be termed “more-than-representational theory.” It focuses less on codes, representations, and discourses and more on everyday practices and skills, as well as sensibilities and feelings (drawing as it does on theories of materiality, performance and affect). In many ways it is grounded in the phenomenological imperative to start the analysis with “the how” rather than “the why” of social action. It means focusing on the constant making and remaking of everyday life. This interest does not, of course, exclude the

symbolic and semiotic aspects of material objects; the boundaries between the non- or pre-representational and the representational are constantly blurred.

In a sense, the most interesting part of non-representational studies is the methodological focus: an interest in a constant experimentation with methods to capture dimensions of actions that are hard to verbalize. As Philip Vannini (2015, 14) puts it, researchers “should try to dance a little more.” This is often done through bricolage, combining different materials and approaches, inviting dialogues with art, popular culture, and fiction. The result is a strong interweaving of theory and methodological approaches in an attempt to find new ways of doing ethnography and often learning from approaches outside academia, such as artists experimenting with destabilising or provoking everyday life, for example (Thrift 2008).

Maybe I am interested in non-representational studies because they strike a familiar chord. We find similar attempts at opening up new research strategies among European ethnologists, but in a less organized form.

If methodology can be said to be the strength of non-representational studies, the same cannot be said about most affective theories. Although they have developed new perspectives on the study of feelings they usually do so within



One of the artists working to destabilize notions of the orderly home is Meta Isaeus-Berlin from Sweden. Here is her installation, *The Awakening*, with cascading water overflowing the bathroom. This is one of her many art works turning the home into something uncanny. See www.metaisaeusberlin.se. Photo: Pär-Anders Allsten. Courtesy Galleri Andersson/Sandström.

a framework of cultural studies or philosophy, which means that there is a lack of contextual ethnographic analysis, but also of historical perspectives. I would like to see more of affects *at work* in concrete situations, shaped by history, gender, class, etc. This is where I think ethnologists could make a contribution.

Thinking Outside the Box?

Behind the theoretical trends I have mentioned is also a heightened interest in the study of everyday life in a number of disciplines. It is no longer a terrain where we are alone; “everybody” seems to research everyday life today. In this general interest, however, there is a great deal of discourse, even in the handbooks, on the mundane, but much less close scrutiny of actual practices or thick descriptions of the everyday in action.

The interest in everyday life is not only intense in academia, but also in the job market. Corporations, government agencies, and NGOs look for good ethnographies of everyday life; ethnologists are brought in as consultants and are expected to unravel the secrets of everyday life and make the mundane exotic and surprising. In the fast growing world of applied ethnology, it is for this skill of doing ethnographies of the quotidian that ethnologists are most often hired (see Ehn, Löfgren, and Wilk 2015).

An example of this interest is discussed in a paper by Tine Damsholt and Astrid Jespersen (2015), two Danish ethnologists who were involved in a multidisciplinary project to study present and future consumer behaviour, together with a future studies consultancy, which was eager to create innovative scenarios of new consumer behaviour. When the ethnologists presented their in-depth observations and interviews about everyday life that they had carried out in a number of households, one of the consultants said, “Thanks! This is a fine material to have, but now it is to time ‘think out of the box.’” He meant stepping outside of the constraints of everyday life that supposedly restrict our creative and innovative process.

For those consultants, and for many others, everyday life represents a box characterized by boring routines, predictable preferences, conservative or slow-changing traditions—a grey life of “more of the same,” a stale status quo. For them, everyday life does not stand for the buzzwords of “creativity” and “innovation.” The two ethnologists ask why their insights into everyday life were considered a box and a burden: what kind of box, and why a burden?

I have encountered the same attitude in an interdisciplinary attempt to create a research platform on “the mediatization of everyday life.” It struck me that in talks on the impact of new media and other technologies, the everyday

is often relegated to the role of a passive backdrop or scene-setter, but not an active actor. There is constant talk of how new technology—from digital media to 3D printing—will revolutionize everyday life. As ethnologists, we should turn the question around for a change. How does the quotidian revolutionize new technologies? Everyday life can be seen as a machinery that drastically changes the forms, functions and futures of, for example, new media. It chews and devours new technologies and some of them are spit out rapidly because they cannot be integrated into everyday practices and needs. Others are digested, tested, adapted, and changed. Many of these processes are hard to notice, difficult to verbalize and operate like slow accumulations of change.

As ethnologists we like to see ourselves as masters of the study of the everyday, but we still know surprisingly little about how this machinery works. One could argue that everyday life remains the black box of ethnology. Our understanding is still piecemeal and fragmented—a thought I find comforting—and there is still much to be discovered (to stay with a favourite ethnological metaphor). Without getting trapped in hunting for turns, the search for overlooked dimensions in the study of everyday life could help us to focus more on not only “new dimensions” but also on what Doreen Massey (2005) has called *throwntogetherness*. How do objects, people, feelings, sensibilities or activities co-exist? Her concept explores the ways in which diverse elements come to cohabit in a setting or a situation, often as unexpected neighbours. But in order to understand how these confrontations work, a few other theoretical tools are helpful. In her book *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett analyses the agency and affective power of things, from a small collection of rubbish to a nationwide electricity grid, using Deleuze and Gattari’s term *assemblage* as an example of a “confederate agency” (Bennett 2010). Maurizia Boscagli (2014) also tackles similar issues of affect and materiality. Another helpful approach can be found in the concept of *entanglement* (Ingold 2010 and Hodder 2012)—the ways in which humans and things, as well as sets of things, become co-dependent. Approaches like these explore affects as potentially energising or intensifying in the everyday life of things, but by linking feelings and materiality there is also a far better chance of contextualising affect and not seeing it as a free-floating and ahistorical phenomenon.

Doreen Massey’s examples come mainly from public spaces. I would like to take the concept into a very different arena of everyday life: that of the home. What kind of *throwntogetherness* can a home encompass? The privacy and intimacy of this place creates very different conditions of coexistence: there are close encounters and enduring relationships, which call for ongoing processes of confrontation, negotiation, and accommodation. We need new hands-on ap-

proaches and ethnographic experiments in order to understand how material, sensual, and emotional dimensions work together—or don't. Cohabitation may hide ways of non-communication, disintegration and the out-of-synch. And there is the constant battle between order and disorder.

In the following, I will focus on the material and affective dimensions in domestic life. I draw on two ongoing research projects: the first, in which I collaborate with Billy Ehn, concerns *The Invisible Home* and looks at mundane domestic activities, from routines to daydreaming, that flow like hidden undercurrents through the home. These are often invisible because they are taken for granted or elusive because they are hard to put into words. The second is an interdisciplinary project on *Managing Overflow*, a study of the ways in which people and organizations cope with "too much," with too much stuff or information, too many choices and activities (Czarniawska and Löfgren 2012). In this project my focus is on the crowded home, overflowing with objects, feelings, and activities.

My material is a bricolage based on ongoing fieldwork, interviews, observations, and a wide range of other sources, from academic research to popular culture and fiction, as well as several surveys of contemporary homemaking.

Stuff on the Move

In 2007, the Swedish artist Klara Lidén organized an exhibition at Moderna Museet in Stockholm by emptying her flat of its contents. She exhibited all her belongings piled together in a gigantic stack, as if ready for storage or destruction. Domestic objects found themselves squeezed together with new neighbours; the bike was entangled with a mattress, a skateboard leaned on the wash-basin. Dirty clothes, CDs, cables, bills, pillowcases, hospital records—all pressed together in bundles. An antique chair rested uneasily on the electric stove. The artist called the installation *Unheimlich Manöver*, playing with domestic alienation and feelings of the uncanny, as Freud once did. (There is also a word play on "heimlich manoeuvre," the technique for getting rid of unwanted objects obstructing the airway.) Her presentation turned into a very provocative *throwntogetherness*, in which domestic objects were transformed into a mass of overflowing stuff.

The growth of domestic overflow has been noted in consumer studies, often inspired by the material turn, but it seems to me that there is still too little blood, sweat, and tears in ethnographies of domestic lives. Starting with Jean Baudrillard's work in the early 1970s there has been a strong analytical focus on homes as overflowing with semiotic signs, symbolic messages, and representations, as well as dreams and longings, but in much of this research

there is little attention to the fact that that homes, above all, are full of material objects, which constantly need to be handled (Baudrillard 1998).

Intense debates on problems of excess and overflow are found in different historical situations and they are often linked to dreams of a future rational and simple everyday world (Czarniawska and Löfgren 2014). Domestic life in the twenty-first century was supposed to be cyber-light and friction-free, thanks to all the new technologies that would simplify people's lives. Most Western homes are, however, still veritable jungles of clumsy objects and gadgets, utensils and tools crammed into every available space. Cupboards and wardrobes may be bursting, cellars and attics cluttered. Little gadgets let out green or angry red blips in the kitchen, electric cords create jungles under the tables. People devote a large amount of energy and resources to handling this abundance; things are shuffled back and forth, rearranged, recycled. Every day, new objects enter and old ones are lost, forgotten or wasted, leaving by the back door.



The magic of the bowl in the window sill. Slowly, it attracts all kinds of things, bits and pieces, transforming them into “stuff.” Photo: O. Löfgren.

As Maurizia Boscagli has pointed out, this abundance means that contemporary Western homes are crowded not so much with objects but with *stuff*: non-descript heaps, bundles, piles, assemblages. She defines *stuff* as materiality out of bounds (2014, 3). In the constant battle with “too much stuff,” domestic objects are continuously changing places, but they are also redefined and charged with different affects. Taking Boscagli’s perspective into different domestic contexts, it is possible to explore some of the forms that the production of stuff takes.

Let me begin with the white ceramic bowl that someone puts on the coffee table as a pleasing design accent. There it is, simple, beautiful, and, above all, seductively empty. Suddenly there is an empty matchbox in it, next to a couple of coins. The ice has been broken, and with a magic force, new objects are attracted: a cellphone charger, an old lottery ticket, an unpaid electricity bill and some used batteries. Step by step a mountain is appearing on the table, until one day someone gives the living room a searching look: “We can’t have all this mess!”

Over time, the contents of the white bowl have turned into a diffuse assemblage of stuff. Things are joined into a “confederate agency,” or a “vibrant assemblage” as June Bennett puts it. She points out that an assemblage owes its capacity for agency to the “*shi*” effect: a Chinese term which describes something that is hard to verbalise:

... the kind of potential that originates not in human initiative but instead results from the very disposition of things. *Shi* is the style, energy, propensity, trajectory or élan inherent to a specific arrangement of things. (Bennett 2011, 35)

Stuff is a special category of *shi*, often vague, liminal and overwhelming. It is things on the move (Boscagli 2014, 5ff).

The stuff in the white bowl is a temporary arrangement, soon exposed to attempts to declutter and recategorize. As the bowl is emptied the home stands out as a complex system of order, where archival rules for kitchen drawers, wardrobes and bookcases are developed, transformed or challenged by the members of the household. “Anybody know where this thing should go?”

When objects pile up, and gadgets go into hiding under sofas, coping practices of ordering, storing, and retrieving are put into action. The production of disorder is, of course, a cultural practice, mirroring changing ideas about order, value, and taxonomies. Differences of class, gender and generation are at work here. French anthropologist Jean Paul Filiod (2003) has discussed what

he calls different modalities of domestic disorder (see also Dion et al. 2014). Some collections of stuff survive by becoming invisible—domestic driftwood in plain sight on the top of the shelf or in the garage corner but no longer noticed. This state of affairs may survive for a long time. Other kinds of messes turn into a constant eyesore or provoke feelings of guilt.

The author Karl Ove Knausgård takes a look around his overflowing kitchen and stops at the two shelves on the wall next to the window, where he notices

[S]welling coral reef-like over all the small things the kids had collected over the last years, from sweet dispensers formed like princesses or different Disney-characters, boxes with pearls, pearl boards, glue pens, toy cars, and water colours, to jigsaw pieces, Playmobil parts, letters and bills, dolls and some glass bubbles with dolphins inside which Vanja wanted to have when we were in Venice last summer. (Knausgård 2012, 260)

He reflects on the constant battle between chaos and order that goes on in Western homes and the ways that the material world is always about to take over. What he describes is not a collection of discrete elements, but, rather, a coral reef of stuff. One attempt to explore such micro-universes of stuff is an anthropological study of thirty-two Californian homes, *Life at Home in the Twenty-First Century*, in which a team of researchers made detailed ethnographies of domestic life and domestic stuff (Arnold et al. 2012). The first household assemblage they analysed had 2,260 visible possessions in the first three rooms that were documented (two bedrooms and the living room), not counting all the stuff that was out of sight in lockers, closets, or drawers. After that, they gave up counting. The people interviewed often complained about their homes “being a mess.” There were stations in which stuff piled up, or “dumping grounds” as someone called them. Storage spaces developed everywhere, often quite unplanned, like the garage, where there was no longer room for a car, or bedroom corners and other such unused in-between spaces.

In homes like these things are always on the move, both in physical and mental terms. Labels may change: precious heirlooms, fun memorabilia, cherished possessions, strange gadgets, forgotten stuff, non-descript paraphernalia, trash, rubbish, garbage. According to their position they may be handled with loving care or brusque movements, evoking affects of strange haunting, cold indifference, warming nostalgia, or acute irritation—thrown into a cardboard box or put on show on a living room shelf. One and the same object may live through many such transformations.

Feelings on the Move

The home is not only crammed with stuff, it is also overflowing with affects and emotions. Passion, boredom, guilt, longing, nagging irritation, explosions of home rage, moments of bliss—all try to coexist with and also charge material objects (like that ugly sideboard we inherited from your father) as well as normal everyday activities: Who turned down the thermostat again? Where is my cell phone charger? And what are these towels doing on the bathroom floor?!).

In the eighteenth century, artists fantasized about emotional landscapes; they imagined fictional worlds such as the sea of boredom, the island of happiness, the dark woods of despair, the road of hope (Bruno 2002, 205 ff). Such maps can be drawn of contemporary homes instead of simply furnishing plans. Where, why, and how do we find the flows of affect and changing moods in an apartment or a house—and how do they change with the rhythms of day and night, workdays, and weekends? Feelings are usually on the move, changing shapes and directions, and finding new moorings or hiding places.

Check the atmosphere or mood of the living room at night, or in the kitchen in the morning. Where do irritations gather? What are the spaces for day-dreaming or blissful relaxation, moments of happy togetherness or a creeping feeling of boredom and frustration? Feelings may be stored in kitchen cupboards or in a piece of furniture, harbouring old resentments or happy memories. Different moods change the interior and the furniture. Melancholia wraps the whole home into a grey mist instead of the rosy light of blissful moments.

In a novel by Jenny Offill, the wife finds out that her husband has another woman. She feels queasy and retreats into the bathroom:

The longer she sits there, the more she notices how dingy and dirty the bathroom is. There is a tangle of hair on the side of the sink, some kind of creeping mildew on the shower curtain. The towels are no longer white and are fraying at the edges. Her underwear too is dingy, nearly gray. The elastic is coming out a little. Who would wear such a thing? What kind of repulsive creature? (Offill 2014, 115)

The bathroom is ready to amplify her mood of decay and depression. Her body, her mind, and the material surroundings turn into a powerful assemblage. In such a manner, the home can change rapidly from being inviting and warm to drab and unfriendly. Stress may make the kitchen seem hostile. In her 2003 novel *Ta itu* (“Take apart”), for example, Kristina Sandberg describes a young mother’s nervous breakdown. The main character finds herself unable to cope with all the demands and expectations that both she and those around her are

posing. Sometimes it seems as though she is being aggressively scrutinized by everything around her. Even the dust and fluff whirl accusations into the air:

Pack, clean, make the dinner, take care of the plants, wash those dirty windows highlighted by spring's merciless sunshine. Anders will be late. Let's hope the children will behave themselves. I must clean out the fridge, then there's dinner, fish fingers and mashed potatoes. (Sandberg 2003, 30)

Everything gangs up on her. As soon as she lights a cigarette to calm her nerves, her son accusingly waves a brochure about quitting smoking. Her mother-in-law calls with unwanted advice about cleaning. The homemade marmalade cake decides to sink in the middle and the icing turns into a puddle; the fridge door is all sticky, crumbs spread themselves all over the place, and the kitchen smells of burning fat.

In his study of this struggle people have with things, Jojada Verrips (1994) argues for the emergence of modern forms of animism: "The damn thing didn't do what I wanted it to do!" Objects bought to make lives easier also make life more complicated. They put people to the test when they decide to give trouble and stop working or go into hiding somewhere. People are driven to the verge of fury or tears at one time or another when they fail to reprogram the DVD recorder, when the computer screen freezes, or when the washing machine turns whites into coloureds. Gadgets are handled roughly, furniture kicked, or kitchen utensils thrown on the floor or at other household members.

Things and affects come together in many ways. Why is it that some things attract certain feelings and become a focus of irritation, happiness or sadness? Or, alternatively, how do affects cling to certain objects? In a discussion of "happy objects," Sara Ahmed (2010) looks at such processes of "stickiness." Why do some objects acquire an aura of happiness?

In this case affect is what sticks or sustains the connection between ideas, values, and objects. In another take, Sianne Ngai (2005) explores how irritation is materialized, as a vague mood searching for objects to anchor itself in—an irritating gadget, an ugly piece of furniture, a mess in the kitchen. Ben Highmore looks at durations of affects, operating in different timeframes—from a rapidly passing reaction to an enduring mood. Resentment may colonize both the past and the present, while moments of euphoria can connect people to "an oceanic sense of time." The entire world becomes rosy (Highmore 2011, 96).

Sometimes a mood can freeze a setting, immobilize it. A Swedish author describes the kitchen of his childhood. The father has left and the mother is

haunted by her demons. She is out of work and struggles to keep her family of five children together, not very successfully. The family is always moving to new and worse apartments. Disorder and chaos reign:

The reality for the children is the room. This kitchen. They live as encapsulated in a periodical system. There is no one that wants to look into their part of the world. There is nobody that wants to look outside. Everything circles around the death star in the kitchen. There is an unpleasant feeling of poverty in the kitchen; mainly because it is so aimless (or planless?). Odd cups. Odd plates. Chipped. A sink full of dirty crockery. Overflowing trash bags on the floor next to the sink. Resignation. How she moves through the kitchen, touches objects, trying to create order in a growing chaos. Nothing works... She moves objects, lifts them up, puts them away, puts them back. (Lundberg 2013, 96)

Despair and resignation is the reigning mood in this setting, where half-hearted attempts at decluttering, broken china, smells and sounds, and unsorted and discarded objects are welded together.

Never Good Enough

An important domestic feeling and mood setter is guilt: guilt about not having a good enough home or family life perhaps, with a lack of control and order. In the interviews with Californian families mentioned above, the theme of messiness occurs frequently, mainly among the wives:

This is the office. It's a total mess. We probably should, you know, organize it better ... And here we have the garage, with everything. It is usually a total mess and it's a total mess today again. This is where we have bikes and all the old furniture, sofas and things we don't use. It is, how can I say it, it's a mess. It's not fun, it should be cleaned up and we should probably get rid of a whole bunch of stuff. (Arnold 2012, 26)

Karl Ove Knausgård talks about the stuff piling up in the apartment that could give his wife panic-like attacks:

[I]t was the feeling of chaos it gave her, which she couldn't handle. Often she came home with storage utensils, which should sort of organize everything; different boxes for different things, a tray for my post, one for hers, marked with our names, as she had seen at other people's

places who seemed to be orderly, but the systems collapsed after a few days, and everything flowed out again as before.

Knausgård embarks on decluttering projects himself, but has to give up. It was as if the things “were alive, as if they lay there and pulled stuff towards them in order to grow and be powerful.” He keeps reassuring himself that this was not a moral issue:

We were not bad people, even if we were messy. It was not a sign of bad morals. This I tried to say to myself, but it didn't help, the feelings were too strong; when I walked around in the mess, it was as if it accused me, accused us, we were bad parents and bad people. (2012, 262)



For over a century, wall hangings like this one from the 1940s have decorated kitchen walls. They often depict perfect families having perfect dinners—in a striking contrast to the actual kitchen mess with its improvised meals. Photo: O. Löfgren.

A theme running through many of the battles with overflowing stuff is a nagging feeling of being stuck with too much of it. There is the constant dream of a simpler or even a minimalist home, and there are many (often half-hearted) attempts at reform, at consuming less and getting rid of more and becoming a better organized household. There is the constant barrage of images of good or beautiful living in homestyle magazines and IKEA catalogues, or fantasies about the perfect homes of neighbours. Questions of guilt and the gap between ideals and reality are closely tied to the constant visits of invisible guests, those imaginary judges or censors that tell people what a perfect or good home should look like. In an increasingly complex world of cohabitation arrangements, the ideal of the nuclear family still stands strong. In her study of a lesbian family, Karina Luzia (2011) shows how this ideal constantly hovers in the background and has to be challenged.

Guilt is thus a good example of the agency of feelings that is often on an unconscious level. Guilt may transform the home, present it in a special light, demanding certain activities or blocking others. The power of guilt also becomes visible in attempts to fight it. In 2009, the Swedish artist Lotta Sjöberg started the Facebook project *Family living—the true story* by posting pictures of her untidy home. The aim: to create a contrast to “the ideal of the perfect home that is swamping us in newspapers, TV-shows and real estate advertisements” (Sjöberg 2014, 3). In 2014 the project had 23,000 followers who contributed photos of their untidy and at times chaotic homes as well as supportive comments. One called the site “a refuge from perfection,” others sent in specimens of their hand-embroidered wall hangings with texts like “life is too short to be dustfree,” “not coping is a human right,” and “a clean kitchen is a sign of a wasted life” (to stay true to the ambition of non-perfection, some of the embroideries were only half-finished). The many comments on the Facebook page describe different strategies for fighting guilt or bad consciences. “It has helped me to see that I am not lazy or a bad, but good and capable, making active choices doing what I want and not what I should, no longer living in different ‘shoulds and musts,’” one contributor states. Another put it like this: “I feel part of a humorous but serious rebellion against over-consumption.” Others called it “a safety valve,” “pure therapy,” or a relieving insight that “there is always someone who has a more chaotic home,” or “now I feel normal.” There is a battle of feelings going on in the comments.

The Entanglements of Multi-Tasking

The worries about clutter and overconsumption illustrate a general trend. Over recent decades, homes have become more open and boundaries between

activities and rooms more fluid. This is not only the result of open-space planning and doing away with doors and walls or opening up the kitchen to other areas. In older homes, activities and people also mingle in new patterns (which also results in a new longing for privacy and a yearning to close the door behind you).

“What is a living room?” asked the participants in Lotta Sjöberg’s Facebook project. Here are some suggestions from the long list:

A playroom, a drying-the-washing-room, a storage space, a bedroom, a work-out space, a disco room, a picnic place, a chill-out room, a catwalk, a party place, an office space, a quarrel room, a “let’s make love here as the kids have fallen asleep in our bedroom”, a docking station, a waiting room, an observation post, a children’s restaurant, a recycling space, a black hole into which everything disappears ... (Sjöberg 2014, 197)

What characterizes the home is its fantastic potential for multi-tasking, combining spaces, objects, affects and activities, which are all put to work in very flexible and sometimes surprising ways. Going through the Facebook material, as well as an extensive survey of life at home in seven nations, I am struck by the way the home works not only as a web of routines and habits, but also as a site of constant improvisation and experimenting. A tube of face cream is turned into a doorstop, the bidet becomes a storage space for shampoos, an ironing board is used as a mobile laptop work space. Such entanglements transform both objects, activities, and affects.

Multitasking constitutes a special form of entanglement, in which different activities are combined and sometimes merge into a single activity. A simple example is the ways many domestic activities are combined with listening to music: vacuuming with headphones on or a playing a favourite CD transforms kitchen tasks. We can follow how new media, from the radio in the 1920s to smartphones in the early 2000s, work as mood setters or add new dimensions to traditional tasks, as people learned to listen to the radio while having morning coffee and reading the newspaper, ironing in front of the TV set, or texting on the sofa while talking to the rest of the family. In this entanglement, both the media and the work routines at home change (see, for example, Church et al. 2010).

In order to understand the entanglements of activities or routines, the development of practice theory over the last years is helpful, as has been shown, for example, in the book *The Dynamics of Social Practices: Everyday Life and How it Changes*. Here, the authors discuss some of the mechanisms of multitasking

and entanglement as a co-dependence between people, activities, and objects. How are certain activities turned into bundles and turn from coexistence into co-dependence, complexes which no longer can be reduced to the individual practices of which they are composed? Different integrating processes such as sequencing, synchronization, and proximity are explored (Shove et al. 2012, 86).

But multitasking is not simply a technology of merging, it is also a strikingly cultural and moral field (Ehn and Löfgren 2010, 196 ff). What kinds of activities may be combined in a given context and at a given time? A good example of such tensions is found in the new forms of the *throwntogetherness* of work and leisure. In laptop families all over the world, office work has invaded the home, and work, leisure, and parenting are being mixed in new ways. On one and the same family sofa, dad can be surfing the Internet and mother answering emails from work on her smartphone while the older kids are online gaming and the toddler is trying out the iPad. All kinds of improvised workspaces emerge as the job invades the home: laptop work goes on in the bedroom or on the kitchen table, business calls are taken in the privacy of the bathroom.

In her study *Work's Intimacy*, Melissa Gregg (2011) explores the conflicts and discussions that the constantly moving boundaries of working at home can produce. When, where and how is it OK to work and for whom? "Smartphone at dinner, that's where I draw the line." or "Why is it that I will organize my 100 latest emails on the sofa at home, but never at work?" "The kids say we are hardly there, just hooked on to the screen." This is a battlefield with forceful emotional charges, a reminder of the strong moral dimensions in domestic life. What should a home be—or what should it not be?

Home as a Moral Economy

It might be helpful to borrow the historian E.P.Thompson's (1963) classic concept of "a moral economy." By looking at the home as a moral economy one important dimension of the affective and emotional processes I have discussed is highlighted. The anthropologist Mary Douglas (1991) once asked "What defines a home?" Her answer is not just a building with four walls, but an internal order with rules, rhythms, and morals. The home is a web of routines, silent agreements, and ingrained reflexes about "the way we do things here." She discusses the home as an entanglement of conventions and totally incommensurable rights and duties. What she describes is very much a moral economy, constantly tackling questions of solidarity, sharing and assistance, as well as the important issues of fairness. The home has to synchronize not only tasks and activities but also needs and longings. (This goes not only for family

homes but single households as well; it is about all that makes a home different from a lodging or a hotel).

It is a moral economy that produces many tensions, for example between individual aspirations and activities and “the family or household good.” Often there is a diffuse “we” hovering in the background. “Do ‘we’ really need a new TV, a bigger house, dessert for dinner?” The home is a site of negotiation, with constant wheeling and dealing, trying to make different priorities and interests cohabit. The author Jenny Diski describes breaking up a relationship and reclaiming her home:

It is almost as a dance, a floating self that breathes its way around the place while you only seem to brush your teeth and make cups of tea. It is a celebration of solitude—but also of control, no need to synchronize. (Diski 1999, 213)

The moral economy of the home also reflects different positions, and thus engages questions of class, gender, and generation. In some ways, the role of the home as a moral economy is becoming an increasingly important issue. There are more negotiations of what is expected of household members, of “what is fair or not,” which is linked to the processes of increasing individualization in modern homes, with a greater emphasis on “my room, my taste, my priorities, and my privacy” among both children and adults. The moral economy of a given home is rarely visible in grand declarations about rules, rights and duties; it is hidden in mundane situations, which explains why seemingly trivial objects, routines, or actions can suddenly result in a flare of affect, and power structures and hierarchies can be reinforced or challenged.

An illuminating study of such a strongly charged situation is Rick Wilk’s analysis of family meals. In the *throwntogetherness* at the dinner table we find not only the materiality of food and eating utensils but also different tastes, family habits and traditions, and ideas of good or bad manners. He shows how the table setting turns into a moral battleground where hierarchies are established or challenged and questions of class, gender, and generation hide under the cover of meal routines and are seldom made conscious (Wilk 2010).

For children in divorced families who move between Dad’s and Mum’s new homes, such hidden agendas may become more visible as they learn about the small but important shifts in moral economies, manifested not only in the table manners but also in, for example, the sleeping arrangements and cleaning chores (Winther 2015).

Conclusion

The cost of bringing the Absolute into the kitchen is to soil it. The pretensions of Good Design require us to bring the noblest concepts of the humanistic tradition into direct confrontation with scrambled egg and soiled nappies... The big white abstractions must be devalued, ultimately, by these associations with dirt and muck and domestic grottitude. (Banham 1970, 100)

There are different ways of attacking the question of *throwntogetherness*. Banham's perspective of "domestic grottitude," the persistent grottiness or mess of life at home, is one of them and reminds us that a basic domestic activity is to transform a steady stream of beautiful objects, well-designed clothes and furniture, new tools and fresh food items into something else: clutter, disorder, stuff, waste. The home is a workshop where raw materials, raw feelings, previously untried movements, and new reflexes are welded into everyday patterns. The concepts of *throwntogetherness*, assemblage, and entanglement are helpful in understanding such transformations and co-dependencies.

I started out talking about everyday life as a machinery. It is not a metaphor that should be carried too far, but I was struck by a classic definition from 1876: "a machine is a combination of resistant bodies so arranged that by their means the mechanical forces of nature can be compelled to do work accompanied by certain determinant motions" (quoted in Mumford 1934, 9). Such a statement reminds us that domestic *throwntogetherness* is not only about integration and confederacy, but also about resistance, uneasy cohabitation, and conflicting aims and interests.

My examples also illustrate different forms of *throwntogetherness*. One concerns the ways in which people simultaneously live in both the past, the present, and the future. The future is always present in the everyday dreaming, scheming, and planning for a better home. There is often the feeling of being on the road: "Just wait until we have redecorated the living room or fixed the bathroom ..." The home is crowded with half-finished projects, half-hearted attempts at reform, passing whims, and fancies. There are recipes saved that will never be tried out, new household gadgets collecting dust on the top shelf, exciting exotic ingredients never opened, boxes of puzzles with missing pieces. All such plans, half-finished projects, or nostalgic longings shuttle the home back and forth between the past and the future. Feelings also move in time; a past history may be suddenly evoked, transporting an old conflict or a happy memory right into the present, while worries colonize the future.

There is also the *throwntogetherness* of the stable and the fleeting, the mix of steady routines and stable traditions with constant improvisations and experimenting; routines that appear as given reflexes—"same procedure as yesterday"—but often hiding small and gradual dislocations.

In a similar manner, the tension of private and public is not a simple polarity but an interdependent field. The home is definitely not a life "boxed in" between four walls, protected by heavy doors and drawn curtains. The home is a site in which the outside world is always present and dealt with.

But what about the black box? The problem with the domestic everyday is that it seems so well-known that it is turned into something that is taken for granted and thus rendered invisible. There are, however, moments of alienation when the home is seen, maybe only briefly, in a new and destabilizing light. What kind of strange machinery or setting is this? A home interior can be charged with very different affects, triggering reactions of bliss, disgust, longing or boredom. A feeling of reassuring security may be transformed into claustrophobia. The one and same space is recharged. The living room or the kitchen can be changed into a junk space (Koolhaas 2003). Suddenly, like its inhabitants, it just looks tired and worn, out of fashion, out of place or out of control:

Clarissa is filled, suddenly, with a sense of dislocation. This is not her kitchen at all. This is the kitchen of an acquaintance, pretty enough but not her taste, full of foreign smells. She lives elsewhere.

Clarissa, one of the characters in Michael Cunningham's novel *The Hours*, stands in her kitchen observing all her stuff like a tourist in a museum:

She and Sally bought all these things, she can remember every transaction, but she feels now that they are arbitrary, the spigot and the counter and the pots, the white dishes. They are only choices, one thing and then another, yes or no, and she sees how easily she could slip out of this life—these empty and arbitrary comforts. (Cunningham 2003, 91-92)

In a flash the project of home is reduced to something alien, arbitrary, hollow. A well-known kitchen turns into a mysterious black box. How did this random collection of stuff, memories, feelings, and actions actually come about?

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