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HOME

CULTURES

 **BERG**

AIMS AND SCOPE

Home Cultures is an interdisciplinary journal dedicated to the critical understanding of the domestic sphere, its artefacts, spaces and relations, across timeframes and cultures.

Whether as a concept or a physical place, 'home' is a highly fluid and contested site of human existence that reflects and reifies identities and values. The journal aims to promote a conversation about the domestic sphere across the many disciplines in which 'home' forms a key unit of analysis. By generating a site for interdisciplinary discussion and comparative approaches, *Home Cultures* provides a vital and diverse forum for our general understanding of this vital sphere of human activity.

Towards this aim, the editors invite submissions from a broad range of scholars and practitioners, including: design practices, design history, social history, literary studies, architecture, gender studies, cultural/social history, anthropology, sociology, archaeology, urban planning, legal studies, contemporary art, geography, psychology, folklore, cultural studies, literary studies and art history.

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KATE CHURCH, JENNY WEIGHT,
MARSHA BERRY, and HUGH MACDONALD

AT HOME WITH MEDIA TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT People's engagement with media devices in the domestic sphere varies greatly, as do the decisions they make regarding when, where, and how the devices are utilized. How do we organize our houses for media consumption and/or creation? How do our houses' spatial configurations affect our media consumption and habits? How does time play a role in media engagement? These questions directly relate to design—our homes are both spatially and temporally designed—by us, and for us. The design issues of creating and maintaining a "home" are compounded by the various media devices we use—telephone, TV, stereo, Internet-enabled computer, and so on. We not only "design" how we use these devices, but where and when they are used. In this context, media devices are not passive objects, but rather through our engagement with them, they alter domestic space/time, and may

ultimately challenge how we understand and define domesticity. Media technology simultaneously constructs new, and interrupts existing, domestic territories. We will explore the reciprocal impact of domestic space/time and media technology, with a view to revealing the ways in which this nexus becomes a question of design.

KEYWORDS: mobile technology, domestic space, media, design, hertzian

INTRODUCTION



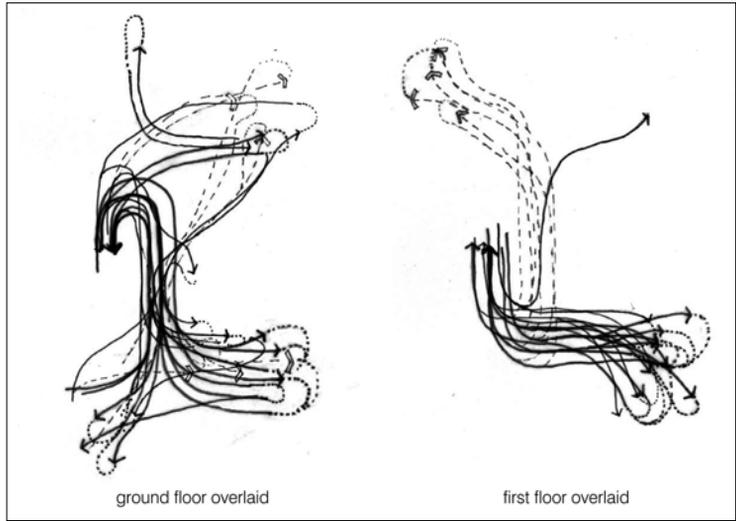
The way we live in our houses is the result of many small and some large decisions—some retrospectively, in response to media gadgets we have purchased, while others are more proactive, to “make room” for media gadgets. As a lived environment, “home is perceived as an intersection where ideals and practices of architecture, industry, policy, advertising and media texts come together with private activities and interpretations of dwellers” (Soronen and Sotamaa 2004: 223). Whether it is a matter of proactive design, or a retrospective retro-fit, incorporating media technologies in the home impacts on domestic space and time.

Although often so ubiquitous that it goes unacknowledged, media engagement in the domestic realm is fraught with many issues. In this article we wish to unpack and interrogate some of the decisions that we make about domestic media technology, and what they do to our understanding and engagement with “home.”

In particular, this article focuses on revealing and articulating the tensions and solutions that result from the increasingly complex engagement with media and media devices in the early twenty-first-century Australian home. Domestic media technologies are an intrinsic part of contemporary life; they impact upon our personal relationships and the way we structure our day. Some media technologies seem to predetermine the space they must inhabit (because, for example, they are too large to move around or they require a power cord). However, fixed technologies are giving way to more portable devices such as notebook computers and MP3 music players—if you have a portable music device, not only can you listen to music anywhere, but also at any time. As advertising campaigns from the 1960s about portable television imply (Spigel 2001: 393), portable devices seem to evade the technological determinism inherent in larger devices.

Although there is a trend towards the portable and the personal, few of us live in houses that do not require some negotiation or redesign to accommodate media engagement. Issues may include noise control, censorship, access, surveillance, notions of place (what home is for?), use of space (how do we organize the available rooms?),

Figure 2
Overlaid mappings of case study 1 (ground and first floor) for the entire period documented in the media consumption journal, revealing routines and behaviors.



A third set of mappings (Figure 4) operated across all four case studies and provided generalized information about where key technologies and activities took place in each house. These mappings enabled a different scale of comparison across the data set.

In combination, the data collected by these research interventions create what Silverstone *et al.* (1991) term a “methodological raft”

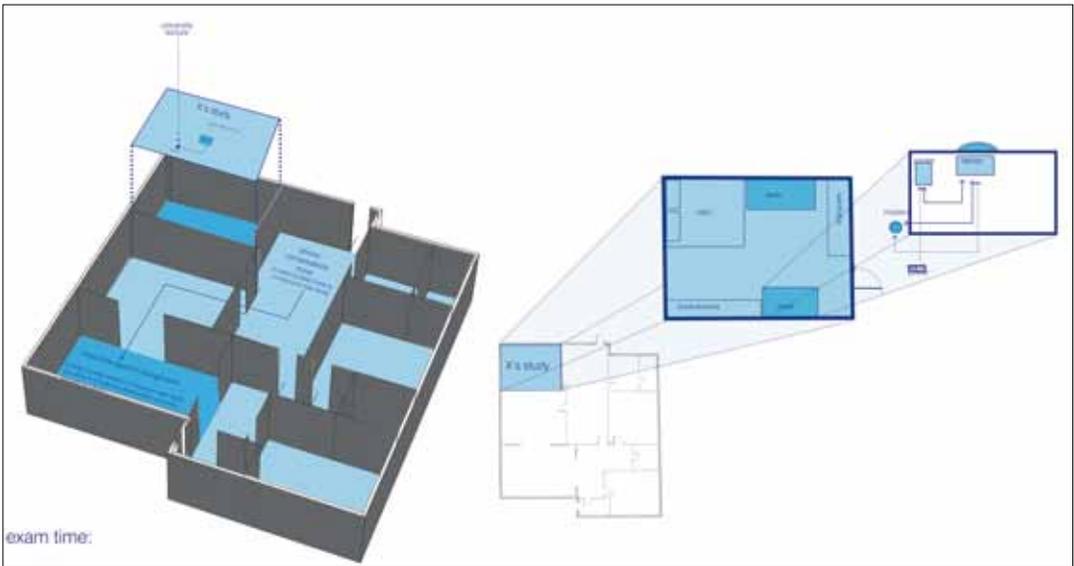


Figure 3
Example of a mapping technique responding to an anecdote: “X’s study takes priority this week, as it always does when she is approaching exams... She listens to i-lectures on the computer—she prefers it aloud rather than through headphones. This impacts on conversations in the kitchen... we spend more time in the kitchen and dining room and use other phones” (case study 2).