Imagined futures of the everyday: middle class households in south-east London

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Abstract

Discussions of hope and the imagined future have thus far focussed on grand ambitions at the expense of the more mundane, modest wants that are the preoccupation of everyday life. Studies of the home have demonstrated the role of material culture in embodying memory and household pasts but little has been said of household futures and their impact on household presents. This ethnographic study of the lives of three middle class households in south-east London addresses these gaps through an exploration of the role of imagined futures in orienting everyday life in the household. The ways in which householders work to make household life what they want it to be, and to secure the longer-term futures they imagine for their children, are explored through the frustrations, disappointments and anxieties that stem from the frequent failures of these efforts. Objects are demonstrated to be both the means through which householders attempt to make household life what they want it to be – their potentiality shaping and enabling imagined futures – and the means through which these imagined futures are reconfigured or derailed. The period of maternity leave, that all three of my women participants were in the midst of, is shown to be one in which the work of bringing the household's imagined futures, and children's imagined futures to fruition falls disproportionately to mothers, often at the expense of their own wants. Finally, a broader lens is used to explore how middle class householders' efforts to live the life they want contributes to and shapes the processes of gentrification credited with bringing dramatic change to south-east London.



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Introduction: hopes, wants, disappointments

I. The imagined future in everyday life

There was water everywhere.

Not just water, but slightly brown water forming an ever-growing pool of dingy liquid that threatened to engulf the Spencers' newly fitted and until now unblemished white kitchen work top. The brown water was steadily seeping out of the coffee machine, although it wasn't clear where from or crucially, how it could be stopped. Jenny was irate.

'I just wanted a cup of coffee! One cup of coffee! Is that too much to ask?!'

The morning had started badly and gone downhill from there. Will, Jenny's husband, had leapt up from the breakfast table, and run from the room in a haze of profanities, still clutching a slice of toast. He returned a few minutes later, dressed for work but dishevelled, and explained, as he threw his coat on and cursed his mobile phone's continued refusal to issue reminders about impending appointments, that he had forgotten an early meeting and was already at least half an hour late. Tilly, Jenny and Will's two-year-old daughter, was somewhat alarmed by her father's sudden outburst and apparent distress, and burst into tears at the sound of the front door slamming in Will's wake. While Jenny had managed to console her eventually with the promise of a trip to the garden centre later that afternoon to buy some flowers to plant in their currently somewhat bare garden,

this assurance was later rescinded when Tilly mimicked Will's anger at his phone earlier that morning. Jenny told Tilly, in no uncertain terms, that it wasn't acceptable for her to shout 'why don't you work you stupid piece of crap?!' at her trundle toy, no matter how infuriating it might be when it got tangled up in the legs of her high chair. Tilly did not take this well, and proceeded to scream loudly enough to wake Archie, her baby brother, from his morning nap.

By the time Jenny had managed to get Archie back to sleep, and to persuade Tilly that it would be fun to sit down and make a model of Floppo, her beloved stuffed rabbit, out of play dough, Jenny was in need of some caffeine to see her through the rest of the morning. Jenny – the only one in the household who drank coffee – had bought herself a new coffee machine to go in their new kitchen, opting for one that used 'pods' on the basis that it would allow her to make coffee quickly and easily at the press of a button rather than having to faff about with coffee grounds and kettles. She had even managed to source some 'off-brand' refill pods at a considerably lower price than those made by the maker of the coffee machine which she proudly told me offset the cost of the coffee machine to make it a very cost effective way of delivering her greatly needed morning coffee.

This morning, as usual, she had popped a fresh pod in the specially-shaped slot on the top of the machine, and positioned a cup underneath the spout ready to be filled with coffee, but when she pressed the button to start the brewing process the machine proceeded to shudder violently while the cup remained empty. Confused, Jenny again pressed the button and this time was rewarded with only the tiniest dribble of coffee in her cup. It was then that Jenny felt water against the hand she

was resting on the worktop next to the machine, and noticed the brown puddle that had formed around the machine and was now spreading to the edge of the worktop where it would soon begin to drip onto the floor. Forgetting her earlier admonishment of Tilly, Jenny swore loudly and shoved the nearby toaster roughly to the side, out of the way of the creeping water. She grabbed a cloth from the sink and set about attempting to stop the flow of water, but Tilly had noticed the commotion and come over to find out what was going on. 'What's THAT?' she exclaimed, immediately patting both hands against the surface of the liquid so that it splashed off the work top and onto her and Jenny's clothes. Jenny shouted at Tilly to please stop it – which Tilly ignored – and persevered in mopping up the water, which continued to emerge, albeit at a steadily slower rate. Eventually, after four or five wrung out cloths, the puddle was reduced to a few streaks of faintly brown liquid and Jenny set about trying to work out why, instead of much needed coffee, the machine had produced mess. Before she could diagnose the problem, however, Archie awoke from his nap with a loud wail so that Jenny had to abandon the coffee machine – and the caffeine hit she so desperately craved – in order to tend to the baby.

***

This ethnography is disappointment from start to finish. It is the story of three families trying and failing to live the lives they want, to do the things they want, to live the way they want. At times it makes for uncomfortable reading – scenes permeated with stress, frustration and despair. Most of the time, however, these disappointments are minor, their repercussions minimal, their occurrence

serving only to reinforce the knowledge that things hardly ever turn out the way we want them to. That this piece of research should be coloured by disappointment is ironic, perhaps, given the relatively charmed life led by my respondents. A study of the middle class household should, in theory, be a counterpoint to the lives of hardship and difficulty that are the subjects of much anthropological work. When I embarked on my fieldwork, living with three households for between three and four months each, I expected to witness the highs and lows of household life. I hadn't expected there would be so many lows. I hadn't anticipated how much of everyday life would be filled with moments like the above, in which simple things seem like a struggle and life feels like an uphill battle. But this ethnography contains no absolute disasters, no major crises, no life-threatening illnesses and no tragic accidents. No one loses their job or home. No one finds themselves facing poverty, disease, prison or exclusion. No one is depressed. Everyone would, I believe, have described themselves as happy, their lives as satisfying. These are the lives of well-off, well-employed, healthy, loved and loving young families who consider their lives, on the whole, to be a success. And yet, in the process of living their daily lives, they are often stressed, angry, irritated, guilty, unhappy or any combination of these emotions. This thesis investigates the source of this stress and frustration, addressing the rhetorical question asked by all of my (adult) respondents at least once during the time I lived with them: 'why is life so bloody stressful?'. Through this question I explore the role of the imagined future in orienting household life – the ways in which householders work to make everyday life what they want it to be, what happens when those efforts fail.

My respondents, the Harpers, Spencers and Wests – are all middle class households living in south-east London, consisting of a married couple in their thirties with at least one young child. I argue that the stress and disappointment that coloured their everyday lives in the home grew out of the separation between what they wanted to happen and what actually happened. Not only this, their everyday stresses also grew out of the fear that this separation may occur – the worry that things might not go the way they wanted them to. This point seems if not banal then blindingly obvious. Except that the lives of the households I lived with were formed in the gap between what they wanted and what they didn't. The result of these failed attempts was the lived reality of household life. In his introduction to Gullestad's ethnography of the everyday lives of working class women in urban Norway, Miller argues that her work illustrates '…how contemporary social life continues – not functions – but muddles through with its contradictions and partial and temporary resolutions' (in Gullestad 2001: 11). In a similar vein, my study explores how household lives – largely happy household lives – are created through attempts to make them something different to what they are.

While a flurry of ethnographic studies of hope in recent years, and a longer history of studies of aspiration, have demonstrated the power of imagined futures as orienting points in the lives of those in the grips of illness, poverty or other forms of hardship, there has been little attention paid to small hopes, mundane desires and imagined futures that take very little imagining, yet which guide much of the behaviours that make up everyday life. These studies, which I will discuss in greater detail below, focus on lives a far cry from those of my

respondents – middle class households living in some of the more 'gentrified' areas of south-east London. Hope, in these circumstances of despair, has a tenuous relationship to reality, spurring people to almost Herculean efforts in its pursuit, despite the very real risk of failure. Crapanzano's essay on the subject of hope characterises it as 'like a dream', a 'construction of the beyond' (2004: 21). Hope, in these studies, represents the promise of radical change, a grand departure. This thesis explores hopes that are too small to be called hopes, aspirations too modest to bear the term. In their study of consumer 'daydreams' conducted in the South of England, Jenkins et al. found that the imagined futures their participants described as the subject of their daydreams were 'surprisingly "ordinary", lacking imaginative ambition' (2011: 270). The dream homes of their participants' daydreams were modest farm houses rather than grand mansions, their imaginings were focussed on 'simple pleasures' of 'nicer weather' and 'being more active' rather than lottery wins and fame and fortune (2011: 275). The imagined futures that oriented the everyday lives of the Harpers, Spencers and Wests were similarly low-key. This is not to say that they didn't have grand ambitions, that they didn't harbour dreams of one day being 'discovered' and making a life on the stage, or that the futures they imagined for their children didn't display 'imaginative ambition', but rather that these grand ambitions weren't those that they spent their daily lives attempting to fulfil. The imagined futures that preoccupied much of everyday life in the homes of my respondents were moderate. Some of these imagined futures were immediate, close at hand – taking the kids to playgroup, or having toast for breakfast – while others stretched farther into the future – that their children would be healthy, would

one day go to university, would be good at sport – and yet all of them were 'realistic', seemingly possible to bring to fruition

So, I have chosen to speak not of hope, but of wanting. The language of hope and aspiration doesn't fit neatly into a study of the quotidian practice of household life. My respondents didn't talk about hope when they mentioned their imagined future of a trip to the shops, or making lasagne for dinner, or getting their daughter to nursery on time. They didn't refer to their aspirations when they told me they were considering buying a sewing machine, or going on holiday, or calling their mother. I considered using the term desire, one typically used in relation to consumption (see for example, Wilk 1997), but which Josephides uses in her study of young women in the Kewa Highland area of Papua New Guinea when discussing their broadening conceptions of what their lives might hold, and how they wish their futures to unfold (1999). And yet, to describe the most quotidian activities in terms of 'desire' feels incongruous – too sensational, too exciting to use in a discussion of chores and naptimes. But these were the activities that filled their days, the prospects of which populated their imagined futures. When my respondents articulated their imagined futures they used far less lofty, more prosaic language – wanting, and not wanting. Anna wanted to take Lottie for a walk at lunch time because she wanted Lottie to have a good nap and Lottie slept much better when she was in motion. Peter wanted to play football on the morning of Emma's birthday party but Claire didn't want him to because there were lots of preparations to be made. Tilly wanted to go outside and play but it was raining so she couldn't. I have chosen to use the word 'want' when discussing the content of my participants' imagined futures because this is

the word they used, and because 'want' is a suitably mundane word to discuss the mundanity of everyday life. These wants drove action, so that householders worked to do what they wanted, to make what they wanted to happen, happen. These wants framed householders' attitudes toward goings-on in the home. A puddle of brown water was definitely not what Jenny wanted when she purchased her coffee machine, or when she set out to make herself a cup of coffee. Rather than talk about failed hopes, or crushed aspirations, my respondents complained about unwanted events, or rejoiced in welcome but unintended consequences – when everything 'worked out for the best'.

Of course, it isn't always clear what you want. Wanting and not wanting are not always the polar opposites of one another. Wants can be contradictory. Often it was not clear to my respondents what they wanted, and what they didn't. Woodward demonstrates something similar in her study of women's dressing practices, when she discusses her respondents' difficulty in identifying what looked good on them, and what they would feel good wearing (2007). Jenny wanted Tilly to be happy and in a good mood, especially after her distress at seeing Will so upset. But she also wanted Tilly to learn the difference between 'right' and 'wrong' behaviour, so that in parenting Tilly she was forced to negotiate these two sometimes conflicting wants. Even when householders knew what they wanted, their fellow householders might not share their certainty. Chapter three demonstrates how the wants of householders were often misaligned so that they were working at cross-purposes, creating conflict and tension that often had the power to make household life distinctly uncomfortable.

One way of framing my respondents' disappointments and stresses would be to say that they were attempting to live the normative ideal of household life, and that their dissatisfaction stemmed from their failure to do so. Anyone with any doubt as to the power of the normative in everyday life in England need only pick up a copy of Kate Fox's *Watching the English* which, although making no explicit reference to the normative, sets out in the detail the many 'rules' – the 'grammar' – that determines what constitutes appropriate, and inappropriate behaviour (2004). Fox picks apart the minutiae of social interactions to expose the 'rules' that underlie them: the necessity to denigrate one's DIY efforts to demonstrate one's modesty, the necessity to wait until one's neighbour is spotted in their front garden to talk to them rather than intruding on the privacy of their home by knocking on their front door, and of course the necessity to make plain one's commitment to 'fairness' by forming an orderly queue. Here, at length, Fox illustrates the extent to which the normative shapes everyday life in England. In a Norwegian context, Gullestad highlights the power of normativity in guiding the behaviours and attitudes of the working class women whose lives are at the centre of her study, arguing that, across the many domains of their lives, her respondents worked to 'present themselves as plain, respectable ordinary folks' (2001: 88). Miller has argued that shopping practices are a means through which his respondents attempted to bridge the gap between the normative ideal and the reality of those they were shopping for (2001a). The normative undoubtedly shapes householders imagined futures and guides what they do. In practice, however, an attempt to live the normative ideal can take many different forms. Relations between Claire and Peter would often become tense at the dinner table

because Peter felt that Claire was too willing to pander to Emma's 'fussy' demands. On one particular occasion, when Peter had roasted new potatoes in their skins with a sprinkling of herbs and Emma refused to eat them because of the 'green stuff', Claire proceeded to eat the outside of the potatoes and give the plain, soft inside of the potatoes to Emma, who happily ate them up. Peter was horrified, seeing this as not only gross and an egregious transgression of table manners, but also an indulgence of Emma's 'picky eating' that would only encourage it further. For Claire, this was a means by which she could ensure that Emma ate and enjoyed as much of her dinner as possible, and a demonstration of her ability to know and understand her child's preferences. Both Claire and Peter were guided by the normative ideal of what it means to be a good parent, but their behaviours were very different. My point is that to speak of householders imagined futures is not granular enough, it does not allow for the multiplicity of ways that householders can seek to fulfil the normative ideal, for the complexity of householders' preferences and their divergences. Speaking more simply of what householders want allows for a greater degree of specificity when discussing the minutiae of household life.

Hoping and wanting are two sides of the same coin. Or perhaps it would be better to say that they occupy points at opposite ends of a continuum. They share an orientation toward an imagined future. Wanting, at least in the way that my respondents used the term, was more grounded, a graspable possibility. Wanting is related to hoping – Jenny wanted Tilly to learn to read soon, because she hoped that when Tilly reached school age she would be a successful student – but the frequency with which my respondents declared that they wanted

something suggests that wanting is more ordinary, wanting is what characterises the everyday life of the home that I discuss here, rather than the grand ambitions of hopes that play out over a vista of years. Failed hopes suggest existential disappointment, while failed wants bring stress and irritation but at manageable levels. The way in which hoping and wanting play out is the same, however – both motivate the work of their attainment. Because of this, the literature of hope and aspiration is useful as a basis upon which to form my discussion of the work of enacting imagined futures in the household.

Small hopes and modest aspirations in uncertain times

With hope comes the possibility of hopes dashed. Mattingly, in her ethnography of African American parents and health professionals brought together in the care of children with severe health problems or disabilities in urban North America, characterises hope as oriented toward a future that may be joyful or painful: 'Its direction is toward what may come to pass. It cannot be predicted – it is a future of "what if." Paradoxically, hope is on intimate terms with despair. It asks for more than life promises. It is poised for disappointment' (2010: 3). Hope, she argues, is what makes life liveable in the face of misery, but it takes work and effort to maintain and as such must be regarded as a practice rather than an idle musing. Through the story of Andrena, a woman whose daughter was diagnosed with and subsequently died of cancer, Mattingly demonstrates how parents and doctors work to create a common ground upon which hope can be built, using humour and play to carve out 'spaces of hope' amongst suffering (2010). Mattingly's study underlines, heart wrenchingly, the effort that even

those with precious little hope are willing to invest in ensuring its continued presence.

Hope is an orientation toward the future, as made plain by Pine's discussion of migration amongst the residents of Podhale in rural Poland (2014). Pine tells how migrants go abroad to work, usually extremely hard for relatively low pay, living in uncomfortable circumstances, in order to earn money to send back to their families in Podhale. The decision as to who should leave their home and travel to find work is taken collectively within families, and plans for how this money should be spent are also taken collectively. This migration, and the money that flows from it, funds hope for the future as families are able to consider and plan for futures that would otherwise be characterised by limited resources and opportunities. Pine goes on to illuminate an important aspect of hope, one that is echoed in my respondents' wanting – that hope brings together multiple temporalities. She argues that migrants who travel abroad from Podhale occupy both the present and a vague point in the future. In their host country they might labour in the present, yet at home in Podhale they occupy a position in the future, the point of their return when they will bring much needed funds that enable plans made to come to fruition. Migrants are therefore working in the present to effect a hoped-for future.

I give a lot of space to the consideration of this idea. The Harpers, Spencers and Wests worked hard in the present to shape the future, both their own and that of their children. All three of the families I lived with included small children, whose seemingly rapid progression toward adulthood made the future feel imminent,

and the actions of today especially significant. Parents in Britain are issued with a book entitled *My Personal Child Health Record* for each of their children (Royal College of Paediatrics & Child Health 2009), in which they are encouraged to chart the progression of their child through a series of developmental stages. Eagerly watching for their child's next step on the path to adulthood, for parents the future is always close at hand. The tendency amongst middle class parents in Britain – my respondents included – to regard the early years of a child's life as 'make or break' for their child's future, in which labour-intensive parenting is necessary to set a child on course for a healthy, happy and successful future brings an added weight to the responsibility to everyday parenting (see Hays 1996). The message that one's child's future can be shaped by one's actions today is hammered home by purveyors of parenting advice – including the government – who emphasise the importance of certain practices and habits for ensuring the lifetime health and normal development of a baby. Most famously, government guidelines and groups such as the National Childbirth Trust advocate for women to breastfeed their children, but recommendations for anything from toys to cups to bath time routines are made on the basis of their benefit to a child's progression and future. Beyond their physical and mental development, parents are also identified as responsible for their children's future emotional health, with popular psychology books arguing that a child's emotional wellbeing is in the gift of their parents (see James, 2016). As I explore in chapter four, the understanding that the success of their child's future was dependent on their parenting in the present was a source of anxiety and stress for the parents in my study. Here, the consequences of things not going the way they wanted – late bedtime, arguments at dinnertime – were not just irritation in

the moment, but had the potential for even greater disappointment in the long term. The risk that making the wrong decision might jeopardise their child's future added to the stress of daily life in the home. Parents' hopes for their children were articulated in everyday life through mundane and seemingly minor wants. The immediate consequences of failing to satisfy these wants may have been small, but, with one eye on the future, parents considered and worried about the many possible ramifications they may have for their child's future.

Anagnost's discussion of parenting in China explores similar risks and the anxieties they produce. She describes how Chinese parents, so concerned about their children's abilities to compete in the 'global marketplace', invest time and energy in improving the 'quality' of their children through nutritious food and educational play (2008). This improvement in quality has the aim of 'speeding up' a child's progress, cramming more development in to the period between childhood and adulthood and thereby creating a 'surplus' that will put their child in a better position to compete in the global marketplace that they see as the realm in which their child's imagined future will play out. In the latter half of her argument Anagnost brings us back to Mattingly's assertion that hope is always 'poised for disappointment' (2010: 3), as she states that narratives of failure have emerged in Chinese discourse demonstrating the risks of parents' efforts: children whose mental health has been made fragile by pressure to succeed, whose social skills have failed to develop in line with their education, and whose bodies have been made soft and weak by the sedentary lifestyle associated with long hours at a desk (Anagnost 2008). Here we encounter yet another problem with wanting that preoccupied the lives of my respondents – not that they might

try and fail to do what they wanted, but that they might be trying to do the wrong thing.

Crapanzano frames hope as defined by a level of passivity: '…hope depends on some other agency – a god, fate, chance or other – for its fulfilment'(2004: 100). I suspect this is why, when discussing what parents want for their children's futures, or what children or young people want for their own futures, there is a tendency to use the term 'aspiration'. Like hope, aspiration is too lofty a term to use to discuss the quotidian ins-and-outs of life in the home, yet its discussion has highlighted certain aspects of the work of enacting imagined futures. Made horrifically plain in Chua's study of suicide in Kerala is the pain of unrealised aspirations, and the risk that, in the end, what you want might be bad for you. Chua begins by detailing the paradox of Kerala – a region of India often hailed as a development success story, but which has seen its suicide rates grow to alarming rates as it has become more affluent. She describes how growing affluence has heightened aspirations and expectations, bringing with it the greater possibility of failure. While the good life has become both more glittering and more within reach, for some an inability to grasp it has made life unliveable. These 'aspirational horizons' are the imagined futures toward which lives are oriented (2014: 191), often at great cost and with knowledge of the risks inherent in banking so much on a particular vision of the future coming to pass. Chua closes her discussion with the example of Manju and her daughter Neethu. Neethu had recently become engaged to a young man who was working in Canada. Neethu had always hoped to emigrate, so the probability that she would be starting her married life on a different continent was, in some senses, a dream

come true. Manju, however, feared for her daughter. If Neethu's fiancé turned out to be cruel or abusive, Neethu would have no one to turn to for help. Manju feared that in that circumstance Neethu would be driven to suicide. Neethu recognised the risk she was taking in deciding to marry a man who lived so far away from India and her family, she understood that in driving forward toward her imagined future, she was setting in motion a train of events that could end in her own suicide. Yet she remained undeterred.

Chua's work demonstrates how powerful aspiration is as an orienting force, so that great risk and great sacrifice will be endured in its pursuit. In chapter five I discuss how, perhaps predictably, it was the mothers in my study whose own wants were sacrificed time and again in the name of their children's care needs and future. All three of the women in my study were on maternity leave for some or all of the time that I was living with them. This decision to put their careers on hold to care for their babies had been taken voluntarily, but represented a decision to temporarily adopt the role of housewife, caring for their children while their husbands went out to work – a role that neither Claire, Jenny or Anna had any desire to occupy. All three had successful careers that they had worked hard to secure, and which they enjoyed, but which were put on hold in order to care for their children. While Ben, without a job while he waited for the premises of his soon-to-be opened shop to become available, cared for Lottie when Anna returned to work after her year's maternity leave, Jenny and Claire's willingness to put their own lives on hold for the sake of their children was not matched by similar sacrifices on the part of their husbands.

The terms hope and aspiration, especially as they are used in these examples, are too big, too heavy, too loaded with meaning and too associated with situations of desperation, dreams of radical change, and with a relationship with reality too tenuous to be used convincingly in relation to a discussion of the everyday practice of life in the home. At the other end of the spectrum, Shove has explored the means by which householders try, and sometimes fail, to induce certain specific practices as part of household life. In her study of householders in Britain redesigning their kitchens, Shove argues that householders attempt to induce behaviours and practices they want their household to engage in through design decisions and object choices. These attempts are both facilitated and hindered by what she refers to as the 'dynamics of having and doing' – the idea that for desired practices to be enacted, both a conducive 'physical landscape of material possibilities' and a willingness on the part of householders are required (2007: 37). Significantly for my research, Shove highlights the role that imagined futures have in shaping decisions – specifically consumption decisions – made in the present, stating that 'future images are materialised in the present' (2007: 37). In attempting to induce behaviours, however, householders often create dissatisfaction and guilt when these behaviours remain elusive. Kitchen designs might form a 'template for action' (2007: 32), but often serves only to highlight the fact that it is a lack of willingness and effort on the part of householders that is preventing desired behaviours – that householders only have themselves to blame.

Shove's work demonstrates how concepts like hope and desire can be considered in the context of the mundane activities of the home. Here, imagined

futures relate to meals eaten around a dinner table or cooking soups from scratch, yet the pattern is essentially the same: orientation of thought and action toward an imagined future that may come to pass, but is more than likely not to. Shove's assertion that householders work in the present to materialise imagined futures is something that the literature of hope and aspiration has done little to explore, but which is a theme that occupies much of this thesis. Consumption was indeed, as Shove suggests, one of the ways in which householders attempted to induce certain futures. These attempts had varying degrees of success, with the presence of objects that had proven that they hindered rather than helped householders do what they wanted to do acting as a reminder either of householders' 'failure' as consumers, or that things had not turned out the way they were meant to. Beyond consumption, acts of storage were means by which householders sought to keep certain behaviours 'in hand' – something that is explored in chapter two. Most notably in relation to children's toys and clothes, attics and cupboards were full of things that had been part of practices and processes parents looked forward to seeing repeated, this time with younger children, or children yet to come. Will, one of my respondents, was a former musician turned accountant who had sold most of his guitars, seeing little point in letting his collection go to wrack and ruin when someone could be getting use out of them. He kept one, however, which he stored in a plush padded box, and which he would periodically take out and tend to, dusting it off and seeing to the health of its wood and strings. This was the guitar upon which he played Tilly the songs she loved, and that he sang along to while she joined in – or rather, shouted along – and that he wanted to play songs for Archie on when he was old enough to enjoy it. This was the guitar that he wanted to use to teach Tilly, or

Archie, or both to play the guitar with. Yet, storage was also a means through which my respondents attempted to manage the burden of caring for things, putting the necessity to care for things 'on hold'. When objects emerged from storage covered in dust, or smelling of damp, or rusted, the futility of these attempts were underlined. Without care, objects could not be relied upon to enable imagined futures. When Claire, preparing to return to work, decided to repair the fraying hem of the expensive trousers she had bought to wear to work before she had gone on maternity leave, and that she wanted to wear on her first day back to work, she found they had deteriorated beyond repair. The basket of 'sewing things', clothes awaiting repair, into which she had dropped the trousers a year previously and which had been languishing on the floor in a corner of her bedroom ever since, had become infested with moths. When she went to retrieve the trousers, she found them riven with holes, unrepairable and unwearable. Ringel has argued that, rather than being defined by dramatic changes and the promise of something radically different to present existence, for many, hope and its promise lies in 'the tedious maintenance of things held dearly in the present' (2014: 63). Ringel discusses the efforts of various clubs and societies in the German city of Hoyerswerda, Germany's 'fastest shrinking city', to ensure the renovation of beloved buildings and their continued use, and to prevent their demolition. In a city for which the norm is continuous change brought by decline, and uncertainty as to what aspect of life the forces of decline will claim next, the work of hope is in the ongoing struggle to make things endure – to make sure that at least some things stay the same. For my respondents, the work of enacting imagined futures often took the form of caring for things to ensure their continued service, a failure to do so placing these imagined futures in jeopardy.

The kind of uncertainty described by Ringel seems a far cry from prosperous London. But who knows how long this prosperity will last? The future is an uncertain place, and sociologists have been keen to argue that it is getting more so: 'Biographies are losing their footholds of old; temporal guarantees of long standing are diminishing; uncertainty is becoming normalized…' states Blatterer in his study of Australian young adults' attitudes to their futures (2007: 7). Bauman argues that, with the retreat of the state, responsibility for one's life trajectory has fallen to the individual – eager to take the credit for our own successes we must also shoulder the blame for our own failures (2000). Precariousness has come for the middle classes. Stewart and Knight note how the brutal effects of financial crisis and subsequent austerity currently being felt by Southern Europe have affected those who had previously enjoyed relative financial security and a high standard of living (2016). Knight describes how, in the sixth year of Greece's economic crisis and austerity measures, his Greek respondents have lost faith in a post-apocalyptic future, becoming resigned to living in a constant state of hopelessness. A kind of 'temporal vertigo' has taken hold, in which the present is characterised by its similarity to the past – as reminiscent of various past national crises from across history. At the same time, the arrival of the future is heralded by 'hyper-modern' technical advances such as the government's promise to provide free Wi-Fi throughout the country. The result is a present that is an amalgam of past and future, creating the sense of a country unmoored from time, compounding uncertainty and anxiety for an unknown future (Knight 2016).

The future is hardly more certain in Britain, especially today at the birth of Brexit Britain, an unanticipated act that has brought and will continue to bring unanticipated consequences, whether they be positive or negative. The morning after the UK voted to leave the European Union, a New York Times's article on the subject began by stating: 'No one really knows what happens now. The collective imagination goes to dark places' (Goodman 2016). Alongside news of plummeting market values and political upheaval came the realisation that there was no map for the political terrain now to be navigated – no one had any real idea what would happen next (Cooper 2016). Aside from the political ramifications, the vote seemed to reveal how little people in Britain understood each other, and how divided the nation had become. Analysis of the result seemed to demonstrate a divide along the lines of age – the young voting to stay in the EU, the old voting out. The perception that the referendum's vote was divided along class lines obscured the fact that along with those in social housing, it was those who owned their own homes outright who tipped the balance to a victory for the campaign to leave the EU. In short, the uncertainty of Brexit was welcomed by those for whom uncertainty is a way of life, and those who feel confident they can weather the storm (Williams 2016). In the aftermath of the referendum, newspapers ran columns discussing the family rifts that had appeared in the wake of Brexit, young adults angered at their parents' and grandparents' decisions to vote for a process that would, they believed, cast their future adrift (Cosslet 2016). A comment written for the Financial Times by a young journalist named Nicholas Barrett 'went viral' shortly after it was published, hailed as summing up the feelings of the large section of 'millennials' who had voted to remain in the EU. Barratt wrote that: 'We will never know the

full extent of the lost opportunities, friendships, marriages and experiences we will be denied' (Barratt in Raptopoulos 2016). Hyperbolic language perhaps, but the comment, and its subsequent popularity, highlights the impact of this uncertainty on imagined futures, making the hoped-for seem further away.

Of course, Brexit is only a few months old and wasn't yet on the horizon at the time I was conducting my fieldwork between 2013 and 2014. Back then the country had different sources of uncertainty. Discussions of uncertainty in the modern age invariably quote Jane Guyer's statement that: '…in formal and informal daily life I perceive a…rising awareness of a time that is punctuated rather than enduring: of fateful moments and turning points' (2007: 416). Few, however, consider the context of this statement, in which she argues that the 'near future', or the foreseeable future, has become somewhat defunct, replaced by 'both very short and very long sightedness' (2007: 410). Guyer argues that this shift is due in part to the rise of monetarism, in which governments have sought to stabilise the value of money in order to free up the market forces of demand and supply. On the basis of faith in market forces, the 'long run' becomes a 'viable working horizon', and market fluctuations become mere ripple effects from the perspective of the distant long-run future. While the present is increasingly characterised by dramatic shifts, faith in the market results in an expectation of long-run equilibrium. In essence, the near future has given way to a dual perspective that sees dramatic change in the very short term and ongoing stability in the very long term. Guyer's essay was published in August 2007, when the first signs of an impending financial crisis were beginning to emerge. During that month, French bank BNP Paribas announced that, due to a lack of

liquidity, investors would be unable to withdraw funds from two of its funds, forcing the first of many large scale monetary interventions by national banks (BBC News 2009). The ensuing financial crisis that, in the UK, saw major banks nationalised at spectacular cost to the taxpayer, the economy slide into recession, and a rise in unemployment, led to the election of a Conservative-led coalition government that instituted an 'austerity budget' that radically cut public spending in the name of reducing the nation's budget deficit (Pimlott et al. 2010). The UK's economy, reeling from a dramatic shock that proved a turning point into recession, duly restructured in the name of long-term stability.

The economic uncertainty that followed the recession, sweeping government spending cuts, and the ongoing financial crises in the Eurozone created a political and economic backdrop of uncertainty and unpredictability to my fieldwork. My respondents, relatively financially secure and comfortably positioned, viewed the nation's future with some level of trepidation. Economic growth could not be guaranteed, nor could the continued existence of national institutions upon which they relied. As it was, trust in these institutions seemed fragile. When Claire and Peter's son Jack began to show signs of developing a visual impairment, Claire steeled herself for months of waiting for appointments, and resultant worrying and confusion created by unclear and unconvincing opinion and advice from health professionals. Her fears were based on previous experience – when their daughter Emma had vomited with alarming frequency in her early months, to the extent that she was unable to gain weight and had come close to becoming dangerously underweight, it had taken months of visits to the doctor and false diagnoses before the cause had been identified. This

experience had been a traumatic one for Claire and Peter and had made them especially vigilant over the health of their children and possible risks they might encounter. It had also convinced them that the state could not be trusted to care for their and their children's wellbeing, and when Jack's illness became evident they paid privately for appointments with multiple senior doctors to get second and third opinions. Jenkins et al. have argued that 'health seeking' is one of the ways that individuals attempt to mitigate against the uncertainties of everyday life (2005). For Claire and Peter, the state could not be relied upon to help them navigate uncertainty.

Just as the economy seemed to be falling apart, so did Britain's social stability. My fieldwork took place two years after London and other urban centres in Britain had experienced one of the worst periods of rioting and unrest in recent history. Although relatively short lived, the 2011 riots had – like Brexit – made plain the fact that anger and resentment was building amongst sections of the British public. Rioters, most of whom were young, and most of whom lived in areas with high levels of poverty, were motivated by anger at their perception of harsh treatment and lack of respect that they received at the hands of police (Lewis et al. 2011). The riots began in Tottenham in North London before spreading across London to other parts of the country over a period of days. Peckham, lying in the heart of my fieldsite, saw some of the worst violence. At the time of the riots I was living in Camberwell in south-east London, only a few streets away from the house that Jenny and Will would later buy and which I would join them in. Walking into Camberwell on the evening the rioting spread to south-east London was an eerie experience, the usually buzzing streets empty,

the roads free of the multitude of buses that usually clog the streets. The unsettling silence was broken only by the sound of six heavily armoured police cars speeding toward Peckham, where later that evening plumes of smoke rose into the sky from shops and cafes that had been set alight. The smoke would have been visible from the homes of my respondents, the knowledge that scenes of violence and unrest were taking place only a few minutes' walk from their front doors inescapably evident. The riots lasted less than a week, with the government assigning blame to 'problem families' and vowing to fund new initiatives to 'turn around' those families they identified. Research conducted in the wake of the riots, however, revealed the sense of hopelessness that drove them, the sense that, for many young people, there was nothing to lose. *Reading the Riots*, a report produced in collaboration between the London School of Economics and *The Guardian*, quoted a young man who had taken part in the riots, arguing that the riots were the result of a lack of jobs and a lack of opportunity: 'All I can tell you is that me, myself and the group I was in, none of us have got jobs, yeah? I been out of work now coming up two years … and it's just like a depression, man, that you sink into … I felt like I needed to be there as well to just say "Look, this is what's gonna happen if there's no jobs offered"'(Lewis et al. 2011: 25).

The riots made plain the instability of British society, and of London, and proved that this instability had the capacity to effect radical change almost instantaneously. The riots had seemingly erupted out of nowhere, and who is to say that they won't erupt again at any moment? A recent study has suggested that the underlying causes of the riots have become even further entrenched in

the intervening period, inequality rising even further and resentment toward the police and the government becoming even more heightened (Williams and Fishwick 2016). In gentrifying south-east London, where the middle classes live side by side with those living in varying degrees of poverty, the stability in the city often feels especially tenuous. Walking through Peckham on their way to a favourite coffee shop or butchers, my respondents walked past burnt out shops, now boarded up but still baring the scars of 2011's unrest. The fear of crime, while by no means a major preoccupation, would periodically be raised by reports of nearby incidents. Claire berated herself for days over her failure to investigate further when she saw the flashing lights of a removal vehicle outside her window in the middle of the night one night. The vehicle had belonged to thieves, using the official-looking vehicle to steal cars off the street. Burglar alarms and doorbell cameras allowed my respondents to trust in the security of their homes, but the streets were another matter. The knowledge that the anger and resentment that had fuelled the London riots might reappear and suspend the status quo once again was part of my respondents' experience of everyday life in the city.

This is not to paint a picture of the Harpers, Spencers and Wests as living in a state of deep anxiety at the threat of losing their jobs or in constant paranoia at the threat of crime or societal disorder. The three families I lived with went about their daily lives without mentioning these possibilities, or, I suspect, considering them with any degree of seriousness. My point is, rather, that these factors contributed to an expectation that things might not, or probably wouldn't, turn out the way they wanted them to. When Ben was informed the

owners of the property he wished to rent as the premises of his new shop had decided they didn't want to rent it to him after all, he seemed to regard it as almost an inevitability – of course his attempts to secure a premises would fail the first few times, this was only to be expected with the economy the way it was. Blatterer, in his study of young people in Australia's attitude to the future, argues that the uncertainty surrounding the future has led to a fatalist refusal among young people to make plans. Blatterer goes on to discuss how having children impacted on this fatalist attitude, through the experiences of Gavin, who became a father a few years previously. Gavin begins by saying that becoming a father has helped encourage him to be more driven, to work harder to ensure the financial security of his children. These efforts do not mean that he now has more faith that the future will turn out the way he wants it to, however. Gavin states that: 'You can't plan, it seems impossible to know what to plan for anyway' (2007: 109). Blatterer's work was published in 2007, and his interviewees were in their mid-twenties, so would now be roughly the same as the adult members of the three families I lived with. Gavin's statement seems to echo the attitudes and expectations of my respondents – that it was hard to know what to want, and even if they did they probably wouldn't get it.

The Harpers, Spencers and Wests had hopes and aspirations, but in everyday life these big imagined futures played out as small ones – as wants and not wants. The work of making life what they wanted it to be was the preoccupation of everyday life in the households I lived with; the reality that things didn't turn out the way they wanted them to the source of frustrations and anxieties that made everyday life feel like a struggle. While the immediate consequences of these

disappointed wants were minor, householders' belief that the success of their children's futures were decided in the present allowed these disappointments to generate disproportionate amounts of stress and anxiety. These efforts were made against a backdrop of uncertainty and unrest that threatened the stability of the future upon which householders' imaginings were built. In this context, wanting became a problematic pursuit, and daily life was constructed out of failed wants and their consequences.

Materialising wants and unwanted materials

Claire and Peter were at war over the living room. They hardly used the room, in part because Claire considered it too cold for habitation during the winter time, which helped to ensure that the white leather sofa they had bought for it remained almost pristine. Even though there was a large TV on the wall and the large sofa and two matching armchairs offered many more seats, and far more comfortable seating, than could be found in the kitchen, it went unused – other than as a place for Peter to store his bicycle – from one week to the next. I came home one afternoon and was surprised to hear Emma shouting a greeting to me, not from the kitchen where she could invariably be found, drawing at her little table, or watching Peppa Pig on the TV, but from the living room. Claire had brought the kids into the living room to get them out of the way of the cleaner who was working her magic on the oven, and while Emma was distracted by the novelty of the new environment, had set about reorganising the furniture – moving the two armchairs so that they were positioned next to each other in the bay window, rather than opposite one another on either side of the sofa. When I arrived Claire made me sit

in one of the armchairs so that she could sit in the other and assess whether she felt it would be 'weird' to hold a conversation while sitting on chairs so close together. It would be a bit odd, she concluded, but better than trying to talk to someone on the other side of the room, which one would have to shout to do.

Even with the reorganisation, Claire wasn't happy. The room was always cold she said, the draft from the two windows at either end of the room making it chill, even in summer. And it was too stark to be comfortable, too dark for day time, with too many hard corners for the children to bump in to. The main problem, she said, was that Peter was adamant the living room should be a 'grown up' space. Claire wanted to put some colour in there, some toys, some of the kids' reading books and get rid of the coffee table in the middle of the floor, but Peter wouldn't have it. He argued that the sitting area in the kitchen was devoted to the children, so the living room should be reserved for adults – for after dinner conversation and watching the football with his Dad when he came to visit. The white sofa was expensive and it would only get marked if the kids spent time in the living room. Yes it was cold, but a fire in the marble fireplace would soon warm the room up, and once the kids were old enough to sleep through the night in their own rooms, Peter was looking forward to throwing dinner parties again in the evening and having friends to stay for the weekend, so that the living room would become a space for adult conversation and for relaxation away from the kids.

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Claire and Peter's differing opinion as to the best way to organise and decorate their living room serves as a jumping off point to explore the complex relationship between mundane material culture and the workings of everyday life in the home. To begin with, and most obviously, it highlights the fact that, while Claire, Peter, Emma and Jack have been my focus of the Harper household so far, they are only four amongst numerous occupants of the Harpers' home. Their everyday lives in the home were shared with numerous objects, materials, substances, elements, organisms both living and dead, all of which were involved or implicated in the work of enacting imagined futures. Things were the means through which householders attempted to materialise their imagined futures, and the architects of their disappointment. Things didn't do what they were meant to, weren't where they were meant to be, and made plain the fact that householders wanted different things. Yet beyond the frustrations of living with things – well-documented in the existing literature of the material culture of the home – are the risks and burdens of the necessarily intimate nature of this life together and the mutually constitutive nature of the things that inhabit the home, risks and burdens shaped by social norms and power differentials.

There has been no shortage of studies setting out to explore the home and its material culture (see Bourdieu 1984; Miller 1988; Wood and Beck 1994; Cieraad 1999; Garvey 2001; Clarke 2002; Gregson 2007; Miller 2008; Daniels 2010; Arnold et al. 2012 for a small selection), but the one that has had the greatest influence on my own research is Gullestad's *Kitchen-table Society: a case study of the family life and friendships of young working-class mothers in urban Norway* – despite the fact that it does not explicitly set out to take material culture as its

focus (1984). Gullestad set out to provide an insight into the lives of working class women in urban Norway, a group until then considered insufficiently interesting to have received much interest from anthropologists, but whose lives were a mystery to many of their middle class countrymen. Gullestad sought to move beyond discussions of class and gender that relied on stereotypes by adopting a method that brought her into the confidence of her participants – becoming part of a friendship group of women, joining them when they got together for coffee at each other's homes, or going out to dancing restaurants and discos at night. By becoming part of these women's inner circle, party to their confidences and complaints, hearing the details of their daily lives on a daily basis, Gullestad created a study with an intimacy of perspective to match that of her subject matter. Here minor, mundane events are used to shed light on big issues, political issues, through their playing out in the everyday lives of her respondents. In exploring how the women at the heart of her study attempt to make their way through life, dealing with frustrations, disappointments and joys, things are present – their contribution to the playing out of daily life taken for granted rather than explicitly highlighted. Things emerge as implicated in the 'practices that create and maintain normativity' (Miller 2001b: 84), shaping the home and those within it. Better, perhaps, than many studies that have come in its wake, *Kitchen-table Society* gives a template for considering how things materialise the mundane hopes of the household, and the classed, gendered nature of this materialising.

A few pages ago I drew on Shove's concept of the dynamics of having and doing to argue that householders attempt to induce imagined futures through their

manipulations, or attempted manipulations, of the physical landscape of the home, and that these attempts often resulted in unwanted or unexpected outcomes (2007). Shove's approach sidesteps the issues of taste (see Bourdieu 1984; Woodward 2001), and identity (see Reimer and Leslie 2004) and allows for a discussion of the design and arrangement of the home that considers behaviour rather than aesthetics – how householders want to live in their home, rather than what they want it to look like. My findings often echoed hers. In some cases the failure of imagined futures came about because householders lacked the will to match material possibilities with their own efforts. When Ben's parents came to visit a few months before I moved to the Wests' house, they had helped Ben build a large barbecue in the back garden. The unsociability of cooking at the end of the garden, away from everyone else in the house, and the necessity of acquiring and preparing specific barbecue foods meant that this new barbecue was used only once during the summer after it had been built, less frequently than Anna and Ben had used their low-tech but easily moveable freestanding barbecue. In other cases, objects proved incommensurate or incompatible with imagined futures. Their inability or seeming unwillingness to facilitate imagined futures was a source of householders' frustration or irritation – chapter three is devoted to a discussion of this subject. Objects would frequently break or malfunction, creating an outcome that householders had not wanted or expected. I give the example of Claire and Peter's toaster which, when used by Peter's mother to prepare breakfast one morning suddenly emitted a large volume of smoke that set off the loud fire alarm and woke a sleeping Jack. In the vein of Latour's black boxes – objects which appear 'stable' but upon becoming 'agitated' reveal themselves as not a single entity, but an assemblage of

constituent parts, brought together in a seemingly complex and incomprehensibly mysterious process (1999) – the toaster went from unnoticed to viscerally hated in seconds, revealing itself as an obstacle to the fulfilment of wants. For all the academic discussions of agency, householders' repeated irritation at their possessions' behaviour was predicated on a stubborn refusal to acknowledge the fact that things are more often mediators than they are intermediaries (Latour 2005).

Sometimes things became a cause of frustration, not because they had ceased to perform as expected, but because in doing what householders wanted they also did things householders didn't want. Claire liked the fact that the fire place in the living room offered the potential for cosy fires in the winter time that warmed the room and made for an inviting atmosphere, but she didn't like the hardness of the marble the fireplace was made from as she worried the children would seriously hurt themselves if they were to trip and fall on to one of its corners. Here the multiple physical properties of things allowed them to be a source of both pleasure and anxiety, to be both wanted and unwanted. This mirrors Keane's concept of 'bundling', in which the multiple properties of things allow them to index a multitude of ideas or concepts (2005). Things are, in that sense, 'open', their possibilities cannot be limited according to householders' wants. Often, things became a source of irritation because they fell out of step with family life – they materialised past wants now unwanted, or were not where they were wanted when they were wanted. No longer facilitating household life, these things seemed to clog it up, to provide unnecessary obstacles and make life more difficult then it needed to be. Studies of the home have explored such frustrations

and the work that goes in to managing the multitude of things that inhabit the home (see Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003; Daniels 2010). My respondents, constantly fighting through things in the way, or searching for things that weren't where they should be, found their wants frustrated not only by things that no longer performed as they were meant to but by what Jenny referred to as 'the constant battle against the inertia of things'.

Claire and Peter's respective wants for their living room were guided by their respective imaginings of differing futures, and the conflicting nature of these wants was a source of tension. Peter wanted the living room to stay as it was – cool tones, neat, softly lit – because he imagined it as a space of conversation where he and Claire could reclaim a little of what they were before they had children. Claire wanted it to become more 'child friendly' – brighter, lighter, warmer – because she imagined her children's future days spent in there. She wanted it to be a room the children enjoyed spending time in, to give them a space to play in other than the small carpeted area in the kitchen. The toys and children's books Claire wanted to bring into the living room would have altered the 'physical landscape of material possibilities', providing the material capacity for the afternoons of play and family-together-time she wanted. Claire was irritated by Peter's refusal to allow the movement of toys and books into the living room, and her futile attempt to reorganise the room to make it a more pleasant room to inhabit was her only recourse, done in expectation of Peter's irritation at returning home to find the living room reorganised without his consultation. While previous studies of householders' conflicting preferences as to the decoration of their home have framed these kinds of disagreements as the

result of conflicting aesthetic visions for the home (see Clarke 2002), I argue instead that such disputes are the means through which differing wants and conflicting imagined futures come to the fore and are either resolved or continue to act as a source of tension. Objects thereby become embroiled in ongoing disputes, their presence, position, or some aspect of their materiality suggesting possibilities that are wanted by some but unwanted by others.

These same dynamics of hope and disappointment are writ large and materialised on the city, the state or the nation through infrastructure. The networks of roads, wires, pipes, tracks, cables and so on that criss-cross the city – and which connected the three households in which I lived to the resources that sustained them – keep matters moving, guiding the flows of liquids, gases and bodies that power everyday life. Larkin argues that infrastructural systems 'operate on the level of fantasy and desire…encod[ing] the dreams of individuals and societies' (2013: 333). The flows that infrastructure aims to facilitate promise to carry life with it, faster, into an imagined future. Echoing the resounding theme of my thesis, these promises only too often end in disappointment, with daily life constructed in the management of unwanted outcomes. Schwenkel uses the example of water pipes in her apartment block in Vinh City, Vietnam, pipes installed as part of a 'utopic infrastructuralism' during the early days of Vietnam's socialist governance (2015: S22). These pipes, part of a system designed by engineers on loan from the GDR, were meant to provide a constant supply of, clean running water to every home, enabling, amongst other things, the shift of washing and cleaning out of the public sphere and into the private domestic environment. This vision of the 'transformation and betterment

of daily life', materialised in the new system of pipes, faded from view as water refused to flow. The limited capacity of the water pumps required to move the water along the pipes, meant that the water did not have enough pressure to reach apartments located above ground level. People were forced to rise from their beds during the night when water was running to retrieve water from communal spigots, and tasks of washing and cleaning were conducted in communal areas close to communal sources of water. Instead of the self-contained domesticity envisaged in the system's inception, the empty pipes pushed domestic tasks into communal areas and ensured that neighbours had to share resources if all were to have access to water.

Schwenkel's water pipes demonstrate both the allure and impossibility of materialising imagined futures. The householders in my study similarly, albeit on a smaller scale, attempted to construct and alter the infrastructures of their homes to materialise imagined futures, attempts which invariably ended in either disappointment or unforeseen repercussions. Claire, having despaired at the impossibility of filling a kettle while holding a small baby when she was on maternity leave after giving birth to Emma, had decided that they should install a special tap that produced boiling hot running water at the touch of a button. Tea, and lots of it, was Claire's only means of mitigating the exhaustion of long nights of disrupted sleep and she looked forward to being able to make herself a cup with ease whenever she wanted, without having to wait until Jack was napping. The special tap – giving out both chilled water and boiling water at the touch of buttons very close to each other – had a safety feature to prevent the user accidentally pouring boiling water rather than cold. This safety feature was a

loud beep that sounded when the hot button was pressed, a beep so loud that Claire dared not use the tap while Jack was asleep for fear of waking him. Instead of allowing Claire to make herself a cup of tea whenever she wanted, the new tap simply meant that Claire could now not make a cup of tea when Jack was asleep. Her attempts to materialise an imagined future had instead created new and unwanted consequences. These consequences did not end with the further limiting of her tea drinking – the new tap also leaked, its continued dripping creating a permanent mark on the wooden kitchen work surface it was affixed to. The view of infrastructure as 'out of sight, out of mind' until it makes its presence known through disruption – bursts onto the scene as it were – has been criticised for its failure to acknowledge the many parts of the world where infrastructure is not only visible and audible but sought out, investigated and tinkered with almost constantly (Trovalla and Trovalla 2014). Yet, for my respondents, infrastructure was confined to the background, with attention paid only to possible indications that it was about to become inescapably present. The sudden realisation that the sound of running water, which had been dismissed as that of the next door neighbour watering their plants, had extended beyond the usual duration of such activity alerted Anna to the fact that the outdoor tap had suddenly burst, spraying water all over the decking in a continuous stream; the flashing numbers on the timer of Jenny and Will's oven indicated that the electricity had disappeared and then returned in the night; the slow draining of Claire and Peter's shower indicating that the drain was becoming blocked and might soon become impassable for water. These small indications demonstrated that the infrastructure that was tucked away within and around their home might be about to halt, accelerate or divert the flows of energy and fluids upon

which the household relied. In their rupture or blockage, infrastructure makes clear the silent connection between things and their indivisibility, when faulty electrical goods 'trip' electrics so that one not-working thing makes everything not-work, or when the Wests' boiler broke down so that no hot water came out of their taps, the boundaries between things become blurred and their interdependence becomes inescapably evident. Here, infrastructure was taken for granted in householders wants, their imagined futures predicated on the smooth running of their systems. Yet when these systems behaved unexpectedly, chaos ensued. Householders wants were denied, and unwanted happenings were instigated by the very fabric of their home and the very fabric of their city.

The imagined futures that guided Claire and Peter's conflicting wants for their living room were somewhat hazy – characterised not so much by a specific behaviour, but by a kind of spatial disposition, an attitude – an atmosphere. Bille, Bjerregaard and Sørenson have characterised atmosphere as 'the cultural, economic or even political premises that lay the ground for the sensuous and emotional feel of a place' (2015: 31), a definition that I think is complemented by Stewart's: 'It is an attunement of the senses, of labours, and imaginaries to potential ways of living in or living through things' (2011: 452). Here we have the idea of the constitution of a space that invites us to feel and to do, that encourages certain ways of being. Bille, Bjerregaard and Sørenson focus on the fact that atmospheres are constructed, their 'flavour' determined by their constitutive parts. Gullestad hints at this idea in arguing that Norwegians attempt to design and organise their homes so that their interiors create feelings of 'wholeness' and 'unity' (1992). Bille, explores how a similar aim is pursued by

people in Denmark in their pursuit of an atmosphere of *hygge* – cosiness. Light, specifically candlelight or low lighting, is used to create this feeling of cosiness. Candlelight signifies a relaxed atmosphere, a shift between the stark lighting of the day and the workplace and the relaxation of home. Candlelight's relationship with the darkness – a bleeding from one into the other – lights some areas and casts shadows over others, creating a sense of intimacy, of somethings included and others excluded (2015). Atmosphere lends space to a certain type of behaviour and the management of this atmosphere was a means through which my respondents sought to induce not specific behaviours, but ways of behaving and ways of living.

Part of what made the atmosphere of the living room so poorly disposed toward playtimes and relaxation, in Claire's view, was the chill breeze that moved through it. Stepping into the living room from the hallway one was greeted by a noticeable drop in temperature. This was due in part to the two large windows at either end of the room, but also to the fact that Claire and Peter had decided to turn off one of the two radiators in the room, as they worried the heat would cause the white leather that covered the sofa to dry out and crack. This process had already begun despite Claire and Peter's attempts at temperature control, so that small cracks had begun to appear on the otherwise smooth white surface of the leather. Ingold, in critiquing anthropological discussions of material culture that seek to demonstrate the shared sociality of objects and subjects, and the distribution of agency across networks of objects and subjects, calls for an 'ecology of materials' that speaks not of objects and their materiality, but of materials (2012). He argues that to focus on objects rather than materials, and to

thereby relegate non-human lifeforms and the elements to 'pseudo-artefacts', allows us to treat things as closed and complete and to thereby ignore their 'potential – for further making, growth, and transformation' (2012: 436). Materials, unlike objects, are in a continual process of becoming – here studies that consider the consumption of objects, or subsequent processes of maintenance, destruction or recreation through recycling, impose arbitrary divisions within this continuous process. From this perspective, the cracks in Claire and Peter's sofa become not an indication of its impending break down, but the latest phase in the leather's continual transformation. Ingold's ecology has a second implication for our understanding of Claire and Peter's living room. To consider materials, rather than objects and subjects, is to regard both as one and the same, to do away with the object/subject dichotomy once and for all – 'people are things too' (2012: 438). Ingold points out that things are both porous and leaky – absorbing matter and emitting it. This 'interchange' is where Ingold's ecology becomes ecological, in the observation that things are inseparable from one another, indistinguishable from one another, co-existing and mutually constitutive.

I find Ingold's argument both compelling and infuriating. On the one hand, it allows for an acknowledgement of matter beyond the object – the cold breeze in Claire and Peter's living room that makes for such an un-cosy atmosphere so unconducive to play and relaxation, the air that dries out the leather to the point that it begins to crack, the water that burst through Anna and Ben' pipe to spray continuously on the garden and drown Ben's tomato plant. It also necessarily confuses the issue of agency even further. Shove, Walker and Brown, in a

discussion of room temperature and temperature control, demonstrate how the temperature of a room impacts upon the workings of the things within it. Using the example of a hospital ward, into which air cooling systems had to be fitted when monitoring equipment repeatedly shut down because they became overheated, they detail the process by which heat produced by things like computers and screens raise the ambient temperature in a room, in turn causing these same things to shut down as they become unable to function as expected at temperatures well above the generally accepted level of room temperature – 22 degrees (2014). Here Latour's black box gets heat treated, thermal energy contributing to its agitation and subsequent lack of stability.

On the other hand, Ingold's 'web of life' of mutually constituted things seems a far cry from the homes and lives of my respondents and their attitude toward the things in their home. Ingold might regard the cracks in Claire and Peter's sofa as evidence of continual becoming, but to them these cracks were irritating, lamentable, evidence of a broken object that isn't what it should be. I am reminded of Miller's argument that while philosophical discussions of the futility of an opposition between objects and subjects are necessary to guard against reification and 'tyranny of the subject', as ethnographers we must acknowledge that our participants use this distinction largely unproblematically in their day-to-day lives and follow their lead (2005: 45). And while the artisan at the heart of Ingold's story of correspondent materials may couple 'his own movements and gestures – indeed, his very life – with the becoming of his materials, joining with and following the forces and flows that bring his work to fruition' (2012: 435), the householders in my study – primarily the female householders to whom the

responsibility for caring for things primarily fell – approached the work of living with things as somewhat less of an act of beautiful communion. As the literature of infrastructure has demonstrated, the leakiness of things can herald the death of a dream, or at least the advent of unwanted happenings. The work of maintaining and caring for objects – attempting to minimise their leakiness, or at least to minimise the evidence of it – required time and effort and was in itself a source of frustration. Sorting through piles of laundry, wiping down surfaces with disinfectant to neutralise germs or 'bugs' that might be lurking, and scrubbing at pen marks on sofa cushions were the type of time-consuming activities that were required to attend to the leakiness of things, and which householders did not enjoy in the slightest (contra Pink 2004). The flows of elements and energy that Ingold rightly argues have been wrongly side-lined in the focus on objects, subjects and their relationship with one another, while life sustaining, are not always so benign. Gregson et al. have highlighted this in their discussion of the processes by which asbestos is removed from ships that are being broken (2010), while in a domestic context, Shapiro discusses the presence of airborne formaldehyde in American homes (2015). Formaldehyde is slowly released into the atmosphere from the things that fill the home – furnishings, the fabric of buildings, cosmetics and many others – and is inhaled by human inhabitants for whom it is toxic. He describes the experiences of Harriet, who suffered for decades with symptoms that wracked her body before finding the formaldehyde that was emitted by the material composition of her home, and which filled the air she breathed, was poisoning her. These chemicals are found at their highest rates in factory-built homes – trailers – so that the majority of Shaprio's respondents were poor, elderly, isolated, or in other ways precariously

situated. The majority of his formaldehyde suffering respondents were women, in part because of their increased exposure to formaldehyde through their work caring for the home. Shapiro's discussion gives a perspective on the 'leakiness' of things, and the mutual constitution of things within the home, that demonstrates what Ingold fails to, and what became clear through my own research, that these ecologies are both political and as life-sapping as they are life-giving.

And so with the classed and gendered nature of life in the home we end up back in Gullestad's territory, and with the realisation that the home and its material culture shape and are shaped by these factors. My study is one of middle class households, one that, like *Kitchen-table Society*, looks to move past generalised discussions of how the middle classes behave en masse, and how these behaviours impact on the lives of the working classes with whom they live side by side in London, to explore how the middle classes live and how they work to live the life they want.

II. Middle class households in south-east London

The middle classes and their south-east London

Sociologists argue about the definition of the 'middle class' and how its members can be identified. Roberts argues that, if the middle classes share a common characteristic, it is their heterogeneity – their individualism is what defines them (2011). And yet in spite of this lack of coherency, the categories of 'working' and

'middle' class continue be the reference points that structure debates over issues of inequality, social (im)mobility, and the political economy of Britain. The place of class as the 'private hobby of British academics' was secured through the efforts of early social scientists whose surveys of British society 'class-ified' the population as a means through which to 'order' the society they studied (Savage, 2000). National upheavals refresh the discussion of class and assign new significances. The recent referendum about the UK's membership of the European Union has thrust discussions of class onto the front page of newspapers once again, as commentators use class to explain major divisions in UK society (Jeory 2016).

The sociological understanding of class has – broadly speaking – an economic basis, using profession as a way of inferring levels of income and education. Classes are, therefore, '…composed of people with common experiences of making their living' (Roberts 2011: 9). The working, middle and upper class structure that broadly shapes our understanding of class today is historically contingent, however. Things have not always been this way. The traditional view positions the transition from 'the middling sort' to the middle class as a 'product of the twin processes of industrialisation and urbanisation that radically overtook English society between 1780 and 1850' (Gunn and Bell 2002: 17). This view has fallen out of favour, however, as the industrialisation process has been reframed as an extended process that took place throughout the 18th and early 19th century rather than a moment of revolution, and because the 'middling sort' – the middle rank of society – was already populated by the professionals and merchants that would come to be associated with the early middle classes (Gunn

and Bell 2002). This middle station, those who were neither the landed gentry nor the labouring masses, were defined by their propensity for 'accumulation, self -improvement, and the employment of labour and capital' (Earle 1989: 17). Historians of these 'middling sorts' have detailed at length the role of consumption in defining this group, through both buying and selling consumer goods. The middling sort, Berg writes, were fashion leaders who embraced consumer goods as an expression of modernity and respectability, and as a means of access to 'polite society' (2005). Consumption as a defining characteristic of the middle classes is a theme that runs through discussions of the middle class from their earliest beginnings to the present day.

In their narrative of the history of the middle classes in Britain, Gunn and Bell argue that it was the development of the middle classes' political clout that marked the emergence of the middle classes as we know them today (2002). The 1832 reform act gave the vote to the propertied middle classes but not to the working classes, a deliberate move to align the middle classes with the upper rather than the lower echelons of society. The rise of non-conformism and evangelicalism during this same period defined the middle classes as moral reformers with a devotion to the idyll of domesticity. It wasn't until the Victorian period that the term 'middle class' came to be associated with a specific economic position and style of living. Suburbanisation brought a separation between the home and the workplace, and with it the gendered division of labour. The domestic sphere, positioned in contrast to the place of work, became a bastion of morality – domestic work the responsibility of women who remained in the home while men travelled into the city for work. This process of

suburbanisation intensified in the twentieth century as the ranks of the middle classes were swelled by the rising number of white-collar workers. Gunn and Bell go on to argue that though white-collar work and home ownership were the defining characteristics of middle class status during the inter-war years, in the latter half of the twentieth century this status was supported by differentiation in the education system in which middle class parents are able to secure places for their children at higher performing schools, or by removing them from the state school system entirely and opting for fee-paying education, as well as through the creation of physical distance by opting to live in areas with fewer working class residents. Gunn and Bell conclude by assigning the middle classes in Britain to history. They argue that in the second half of the twentieth century, class has ceased to be a meaningful concept for understanding British society, and that 'middle class' has ceased to be a useful term. For Gunn and Bell rising incomes in real terms, a declining proportion of working class workers and the '…long-term tendency for the patterns of consumption of *all* social classes to converge over time' has weakened the differentiation between the classes and their lifestyles to such an extent that they are impossible to characterise in any meaningful way (2002: 179).

In positioning middle-class-ness as a way of life that entails 'a whole cluster of attributes and attitudes, either inherited or acquired', Gunn and Bell are able to trace the emergence of a group of people who inhabited this way of life, and shared these attitudes, and to observe their eventual decline. Stewart critiques this perspective, arguing that the middle classes are not defined through the specificities of their lifestyle – as these are fluid and change over time – but

through their power, both economic and political. Stewart argues that to tie the middle classes to a specific time period obscures the ongoing societal inequality of which the middle classes are beneficiaries. It is the fact that the middle classes have more resources than many others in society which binds them together, and given that inequality is alive and well in British society, the middle classes are as relevant a concept for the study of British society today as they have ever been.

These conflicting views of the middle classes as both powerful and in decline come together in Butler and Robson's discussion of the middle classes as gentrifiers in London. They draw on Richard Sennett's argument, set out in *The Corrosion of Character* (1998), that the 'new capitalism' and its short-termism and focus on flexibility has brought uncertainty to the lives of the middle classes – '…the basic insecurity of an increasingly flexible world dominates their lives directly or indirectly' (Butler and Robson 2003: 24). One of the 'coping mechanisms' deployed by the middle classes to deal with the effects of this 'new capitalism' and its way of life is gentrification. The centring of professional work on central London has meant that the middle classes are keen to live as centrally as possible and the eagerness of these new young professionals to lead lives less staid and 'boring' than their parents has made them drawn to areas of the city that have historically been less well-off. And yet when these young professionals have children and 'settle down' they are caught between their contradictory desires to live a life less staid than that of their parents, and to ensure that their children are able to live the kind of safe and secure childhoods that they themselves are nostalgic for. Gentrifying middle classes households in London –

households like the three families I lived with – become focussed on grappling with the risks they see for their children's future growing up in the city. Butler and Robson focus on schooling, and London's reputation for failing schools – a reputation that has improved in the thirteen years since their discussion was published – as the key threat that gentrifying households perceive. My study demonstrates how householders' desires to ensure the successful future of their children, and to keep them safe from threats far more diffuse – poor health, anxiety, poor social skills and many others – were negotiated through in their use of the city. In chapter six I explore how householders use of their local area, and their support of local businesses was guided in large part by their desire to ensure their children grow up to have the happy, successful lives they want for them. Here gentrification, specifically retail gentrification, is demonstrated to be driven in part by householders' attempts to safeguard the future of their children from the threat of the future's uncertainty.

The most recent British Social Attitudes Survey found that 60% of the population of Britain consider themselves to be working class, despite 48% of those self-identified working class respondents having professional or managerial jobs (Evans and Mellon 2016), demonstrating that the British public are apparently unsure as to what makes you middle or working class; or that being middle class is something many are loathed to admit. Fox argues that class difference is inscribed in the attitudes and behaviours of the English, however. No matter what people might claim to be, the way they speak and the way they behave will give them away. In the introduction to *Watching the English*, she argues that it is impossible to regard class as a separate category of social analysis, that it

'pervades all aspects of English life and culture…' (2004: 15), and is expressed in virtually every aspect of everyday life. The fact that the three households in my study are middle class is significant, then, not only for determining what my study is, but also for determining what it is not. The life lead by my respondents belies their middle class status and their imagined futures have been shaped by their middle class status. Had my respondents not been middle class, had they been less well-off or working class – indeed had they been 'upper class' or members of London's growing contingent of the super-wealthy – their lives would have been very different, their preoccupations would have been very different, their imagined futures would have been very different.

The three households in my study live within a few miles of one another, concentrated in the south-east London borough of Southwark (see fig. 1). London is often described as characterised by huge discrepancies of wealth – a city in which the poor and the rich live side by side. Southwark contains these two poles and everything in between. As of 2015, Southwark had a population of 310,642. Modelled household median income is £48,000 while the median house price is £420,000. 37.2% of residents rent their home from a local authority or housing association, outnumbering those who own their home either outright or with a mortgage (Greater London Authority 2015). Southwark is a diverse borough, with 36% of the population having been born abroad and 46% defined by the census data as belonging to 'black and minority ethnic groups' [BAME] – although these proportions are roughly in line with those of inner London and London as a whole. Southwark is a 'young' borough – 92% of its population are aged below 65 (Greater London Authority 2015).

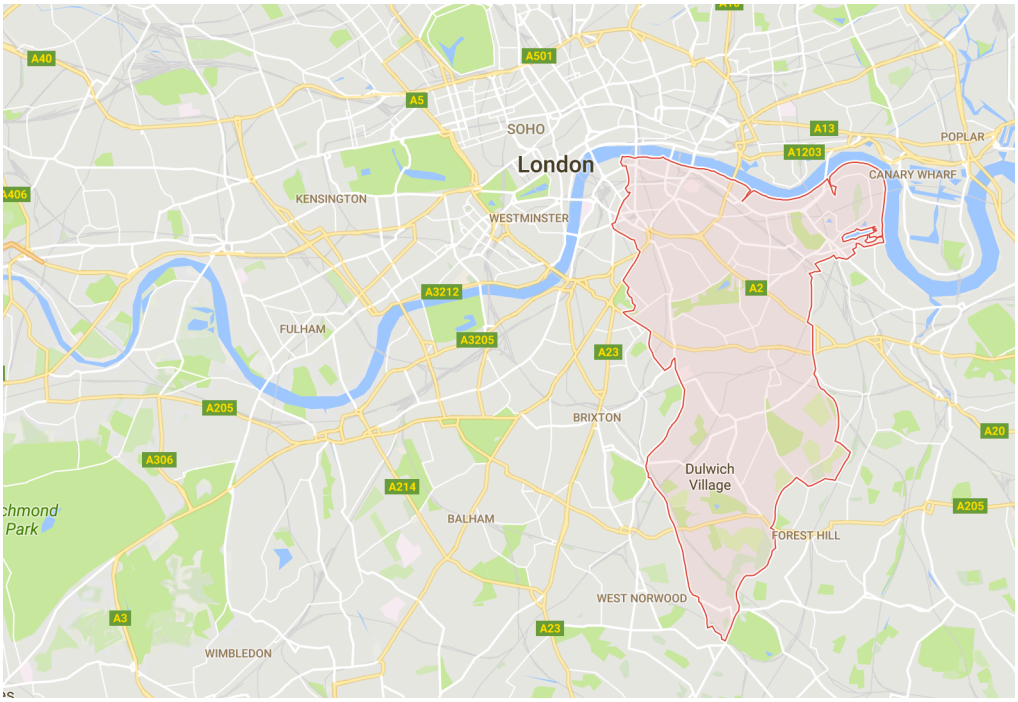

Fig. 1: Map of London showing London Borough of Southwark (Google 2016a)

These statistics give an overview of the demographics of the borough as a whole, but these figures vary greatly across the borough. Southwark stretches from the River Thames at its most northerly edge – where it encompasses famous London landmarks like Shakespeare's Globe, Tower Bridge and Borough market, along with The Shard and the dozens of other sleekly modern office blocks that populate the area around London Bridge – down to Crystal Palace at its most southerly tip. Amongst the varied districts that lie between these two points are Camberwell, Nunhead, East Dulwich and Peckham, where my respondents lived and spent the majority of their time when not at their places of work.

Although all three of the households in my study lived in different parts of Southwark, the short, mostly walkable, distances between them meant that the

Harpers, Spencers and Wests moved between these three areas for different activities and to take advantage of their differing resources. The south-east of London is largely unconnected to the London Underground network of train lines. While over-ground trains and buses provide easy routes in to central London, not being 'on the tube' has kept property prices low in some areas, while others have become desirable because of the 'village-y' feel of a place slightly detached.

Claire and Peter live on a quiet street of terraced houses off the main road that runs through East Dulwich, a relatively smart, well-to-do area (see figs. 2 & 3) Although less salubrious than its prestigious neighbour Dulwich Village, East Dulwich is an eminently desirable place to live and property prices command a premium with the average house being £550,000 (Greater London Authority 2015). Lordship Lane, the road that runs through the centre of East Dulwich, is a busy shopping street populated mostly by independent shops, delis, bars and restaurants. The area is buzzing on a Saturday morning with people drawn to the baked goods and vintage stalls at the North Cross Road market. Positioned between two large parks – Dulwich common and Peckham Rye – East Dulwich is popular with young families who appreciate its 'village-y' atmosphere and preponderance of family-friendly cafes and restaurants.



Fig. 2: Map of south London highlighting East Dulwich (Google 2016b)



Fig. 3: East Dulwich, the area in which the Harpers live (author's own photograph 2016)

East Dulwich is overwhelmingly populated by middle class and wealthier residents – the average household income is estimated to be around £50,065, around £15,000 higher than the average for the borough of Southwark as a

whole. It's also overwhelmingly white British; with only 28% of residents self-defining as BAME (Greater London Authority 2015). The many attractions of East Dulwich – its family friendly cafes and delis stocked with expensive chutneys and organic cheeses – are a draw for middle class families across the surrounding area who come for days or afternoons, combining their visit with a trip to Dulwich common.

A couple of miles' walk down the hill from East Dulwich in a northerly direction will take you to Camberwell, where Jenny and Will live (see figs. 4 & 5). Camberwell has its share of high-priced real estate but also a large contingent of council and social housing. Centred on Camberwell Green, a small patch of parkland surrounded by a busy road junction, Camberwell is a bustling place, with people out and about on the streets at all times of the day and night. The main shopping drag is taken up with slightly down-market chain stores and fast food outlets. The one supermarket, a cramped Morrison's, is always busy. In recent years, however, the fast food joints and chain stores have begun to give way to gastropubs, third-wave coffee houses and artisanal food shops catering to local young professionals and students at Camberwell College of Arts – a branch of the University of the Arts in London that specialises in teaching fine art.



Fig. 4: Map of south London highlighting Camberwell (Google 2016c)



Fig. 5: Camberwell, the area in which the Spencers live (author's own photograph 2016)

The presence of the college means that while the general population of Camberwell is far less well off than that of East Dulwich – average household income is estimated at around £25,000, much less than the average for

Southwark – in amongst the mostly working class residents of the area are scattered middle class art school students and relatively well-off professionals attracted by the slightly 'bohemian' vibe that this presence creates (Greater London Authority 2015). The population of Camberwell is very 'diverse' – with 61% of the population identifying as BAME – but venturing into any of these new cafe's or pubs that have been bought up and 'renovated' means encountering an almost entirely white middle class clientele (Greater London Authority 2015).

A couple miles to the west of Camberwell is Nunhead, where Anna and Ben live (see figs 6 & 7). Nunhead is a mainly residential area, noticeably quieter than East Dulwich or Camberwell, probably most famous for its large cemetery. At its centre is an understated stretch of shops and cafes that isn't as resolutely upmarket and chi-chi as East Dulwich, despite the period of 'regeneration' it has undergone, as part of which empty shops are being used for community projects and pop-up markets are held on weekends. Walking into Nunhead from the surrounding area, the relative lack of bustle is striking, yet unlike Camberwell which has no dedicated train or tube station, Nunhead is well connected by overground train to the centre of London, making it an attractive area for commuters. Average household income is estimated to be around £26,000, lower than the national average, but house prices average around £350,000, far in excess of the national average of around £195,000 (Greater London Authority 2015). The housing stock is a mix of smart terraces interspersed with the occasional block of council housing. The quietness of the area, large houses and proximity of high performing state schools have made it an attractive place for young families to settle. Walking through Nunhead during the working day it

isn't unusual to encounter no one but young women pushing buggies or holding toddlers.

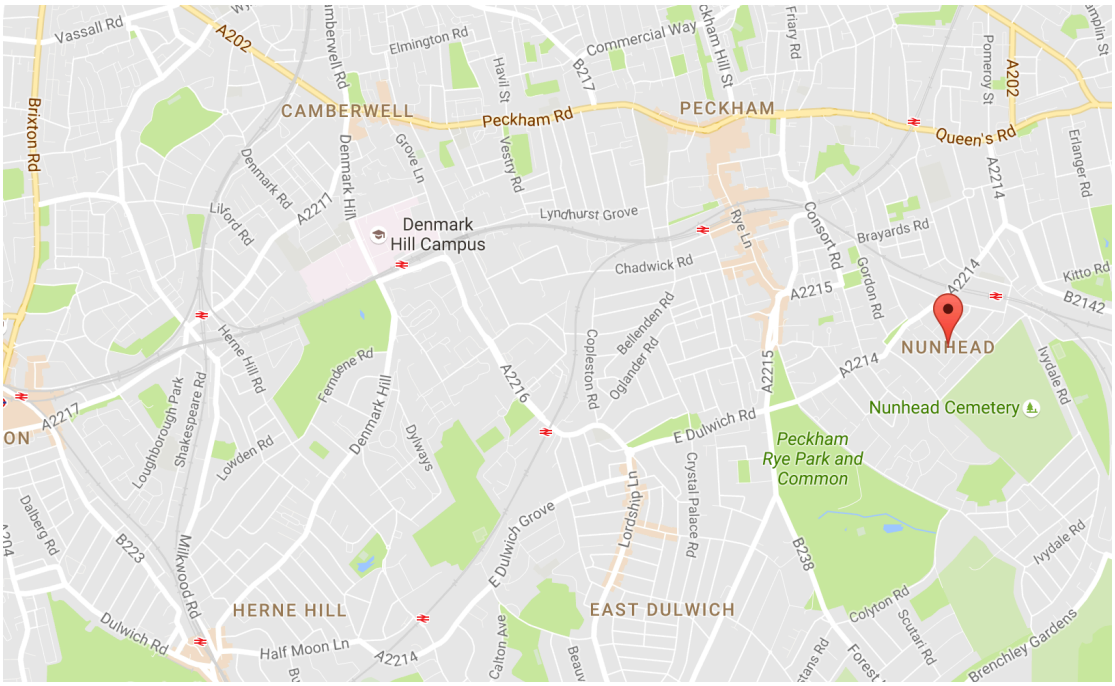

Fig. 6: Map of south-east London highlighting Nunhead (Google 2016d)



Fig. 7: Nunhead, the area in which the Wests live (author's own photograph 2016)

Lying in the centre of these three areas, connecting them all, is Peckham (see fig. 8). Known as one of the 'grittier' areas of London, Peckham experienced some of the worst disruption during the 2011 riots, with shops set ablaze and fights on the street [BBC news 2011]. It is famously diverse – 70% of the population are defined as 'BAME'. It is also relatively poor, average household income is estimated at around £23,500, well below the average for the borough and the national average (Greater London Authority 2015).



Fig. 8: Peckham's Rye Lane (author's own photograph 2016)

Currently, however, Peckham is experiencing a well-publicised and much discussed wave of gentrification and 'hipsterfication'. Peckham's gentrification is of a different style to that of East Dulwich, led by a younger, 'artsy' community associated with Camberwell's nearby art school. Led by the opening of Frank's

Campari Bar and Grill, a bar, restaurant and art space that took up residence on the roof of the multi-story car park in the middle of Peckham in 2008. Since then, a string of bars, cafes and small shops have sprung up in amongst the beauty shops, fast food outlets and shops selling produce imported from Africa, Asia and the West Indies that populate much of Peckham's high street. Disused buildings and factory spaces have been converted into arts spaces and venues for club nights drawing large crowds of young people to the area, attracted by its buzzing nightlife.

The boundaries between these four areas are fluid and porous, the personalities of each seeping into the others. One of the few studies of this area of London is Jackson and Benson's study of the Bellenden Road 'village', positioned on the cusp between Peckham and East Dulwich. In recent years Bellenden Road has undergone a period of regeneration. Its row of shops now features a collection of upmarket butchers, delis and well-reviewed restaurants. Jackson and Benson interviewed residents of the Bellenden Road area to understand how middle class residents – gentrifiers – draw and maintain a distinction between themselves and the 'others' that surround them. Jackson and Benson describe how their respondents distinguish between the exotic but sometimes unsettlingly unfamiliar nature of 'multicultural' Peckham and the 'suffocating', homogeneously middle class East Dulwich. These residents of Bellenden Village characterised it as occupying a middle ground between these two identities, more bohemian, more of a 'Little Berlin' than East Dulwich, less 'dirty and crazy' than Peckham's main retail centre Rye Lane (2014, 1202). For Jackson and Benson, these distinctions are evidence of the 'social tectonics' of this part of

south-east London, demonstrative of the social boundaries that ensure the middle classes keep themselves removed from the non-white, non-middle class others with whom they live almost side by side. I don't doubt the strength of their argument – there is no doubt that, by and large, middle class residents of south-east London stick to its middle class areas. For me, however, Jackson and Benson's research demonstrates the fluidity and variegated nature of the character of these areas, the extent to which they bleed in to each other so that it is impossible to say with any level of definitiveness that East Dulwich is like this, or Nunhead is like that.

A tale of three households: The Harpers, Spencers and Wests

This thesis draws on the everyday lives of three households. Here I give a brief description of them, and the homes I shared with them during my fieldwork.

The Harper household

The first time I met the Harpers, Claire had just gone in to labour. When I moved in with them a few weeks later they were still adjusting to life as a family of four. Claire and Peter had met more than a decade earlier while they were both studying for their PhDs, waiting until they were both settled in stable careers before they got married and started a family. They had both decided not to stay in academia, instead moving in to more lucrative careers. Neither had been in any doubt of their desire for children, however, and not long after Claire turned 30 Emma was born. Emma's early years had not been easy, as she had suffered

from allergies and health problems that had taken time to diagnose, during which Claire and Peter had been frantic with worry. When Emma began nursery Claire had returned to work, cramming her work into nursery opening hours and rushing home to pick Emma up at the end of each day. When she became pregnant with Jack she had stopped working a few months before she was due to give birth as the stress of work made her fear for her own health and that of the baby.

Claire was part of a large family and she liked the idea of having a large family of her own. As one of the eldest, Claire had helped to pick up some of the slack of childcare so that she was no stranger to caring for small children. Claire's father had died when she was young, leaving her mother to bring up six children and manage their family business on her own. Claire was fiercely protective of her family and her mother in particular, worrying about the stress of the heavy workload of owning a business and often exasperated by her refusal to slow down or accept help. Claire was in frequent contact with her sisters – two of whom also had multiple children. The sisters swapped news, stories and annoyances through a constant stream of WhatsApp messages and phone calls. Claire would take the children back to the family home for weeks at a time for Christmas, Easter and during the summer where Emma would be kept entertained by games with her many cousins.

Peter had only one brother but also loved the idea of a big family. His parents doted on their sons and were overjoyed at the arrival of grandchildren. Peter's parents would come to East Dulwich for day trips and longer visits to spend time

with Emma and Jack, treating Emma to ice cream from the artisanal gelateria in East Dulwich and cooing over Jack's adorable face and cute outfits. A few months after Jack was born, Peter's brother and sister-in-law had a baby boy and soon Claire and Peter's email inboxes and WhatsApp message threads were full of news of the new baby and complicated plans for a family gathering to welcome all the new additions.

Peter had just started a new job when I moved in with the Harpers and it proved to be demanding and labour intensive. While he had planned to work from home one or two days a week to allow him to spend more time with Claire and the kids while Jack was small and before Emma started school, in reality he often worked twelve hour days, not returning home until after everyone else in the household had been in bed for hours. The new job also required that he travel to his firm's head office in America on a regular basis and these trips often lasted for weeks at a time. Both he and Claire were distressed by these long absences, but if Peter were to be promoted to a level that would enable him to financially support the family on his own – allowing Claire the freedom to leave her own job, or move to one with fewer working hours – he needed to prove himself and his commitment to his new company. When Peter wasn't at work, he was often out running, playing football or at hot yoga classes. Although sometimes frustrated when, after a week of long days at work, Peter would head out to spend much of his Saturday at football, Claire was generally encouraging of Peter's full exercise schedule. Peter had to be busy, she said, and if he didn't get plenty of exercise he became restless and generally impossible to live with. Peter had already begun involving Emma in his sporting hobbies, taking Emma to Dulwich Common to

ride her tricycle, and to the local swimming pool to practice her swimming on a Saturday morning.

The Harpers live in a mid-size terraced house (see fig. 9). The path that runs from the street to their front door is tiled with neat brown tiles and their front door is a smart, shiny pillar-box red. Inside, the house is decorated in soft muted tones, with cream walls and plush beige carpet. At the front of the house is a living room that has, at some point in the recent past, been knocked through to the dining room to make a single room that runs from the front to the back of the house. Even though the partition wall between the two rooms has been removed, the division is maintained by the differing furniture in each section – a soft white leather sofa and matching arm chairs with a coffee table and large TV in the living room section, and a large oak dining table and chairs with matching dresser in the dining room area. At night and on weekends Peter's bicycle was tucked at the side of the dining table where he stored it off the street to ensure it wasn't stolen. At the end of the entrance hall is the kitchen, which was extended by the previous owners so that it incorporates a sitting area with French windows that open out onto the paved garden at the back of the house. The kitchen has stone tiles on the floor, and the walls are lined with oak kitchen cupboards. A row of small appliances sits on the wooden work-top, pushed to the back to make way for bowls of fruit, piles of letters, small piles of miscellaneous things waiting to be taken upstairs. In contrast to the sophisticated neutral tones of the living room, the sitting area in the kitchen has been decorated in bright colours and prints. The sofa is cherry red and the tiled floor is covered by a large multi-coloured rug over a layer of soft foam tiles that make for a softer landing

when Emma occasionally trips over. A tiny child-size dining table with two tiny chairs – one pink, one blue – sits next to a jungle-print patterned baby chair that swings and plays music at the touch of a button. A large TV is mounted to the wall in a corner of the room and underneath this sits a large basket overflowing with toys and dolls. This is the area in which Claire and the kids spend the majority of their waking hours and, although Claire does her best to keep it neat, it bears the marks of constant use – a small collection of children's clothes draped over the arm of the sofa, a packet of wet wipes and a fold-away change mat on the floor next to the sofa, and a toy or story book abandoned by Emma on the tiny table when she inevitably lost the battle of bedtime.

Upstairs the neutral colour palette resumes, the only decorative features being family photographs that positioned along the wall of the staircase. The master bathroom, positioned on a mezzanine floor, is large and light, filled with large pot plants and a bath full of brightly coloured bath toys. The family's bedrooms are both on the first floor – Emma's occupied by a pink 'princess bed' piled high with soft toys and a small wardrobe that was packed full of children and baby clothes but kept in meticulous order by Claire. Claire and Peter's bedroom is large, although half of the space is taken up with a super-king size bed. Although it has two large windows, the curtains were usually kept drawn, ready for one of the kids to be taken upstairs for a nap. In the corner of the room there is a wooden changing table stacked with piles of carefully folded baby grows and vests, the shelves below filled with muslins, nappies and other baby paraphernalia. A small guest room is located on another mezzanine floor beneath the attic, which is made light and airy by French windows and a tiny balcony that look out over the

garden. The attic room has been made into a study with a large desk and computer monitor for Peter to use when he works from home. In practice, the attic is most often used for hanging clothes out to dry and a large section of the room is occupied by laundry and its apparatus – a self-warming clothes drier, a dehumidifier and boxes of hangers. Hidden behind two folding doors next to the bathroom is a built-in closet where Peter stores his suits, shirts and accessories that he wears for work, so that during the week the attic also functions as Peter's dressing room.

At the edges of the room the roof pitches toward the floor and at the point where the roof becomes so low that it is no longer possible to stand up, built in cupboards occupy the remaining floor space. Manoeuvring things in and out of these cupboards requires crouching or lying on the floor and shimmying items through the relatively small doors into the awkwardly-shaped space behind. Large suitcases and out-grown toys are piled up near the cupboard doors, waiting to be put away in the cupboard when someone finds the time and energy to do so.

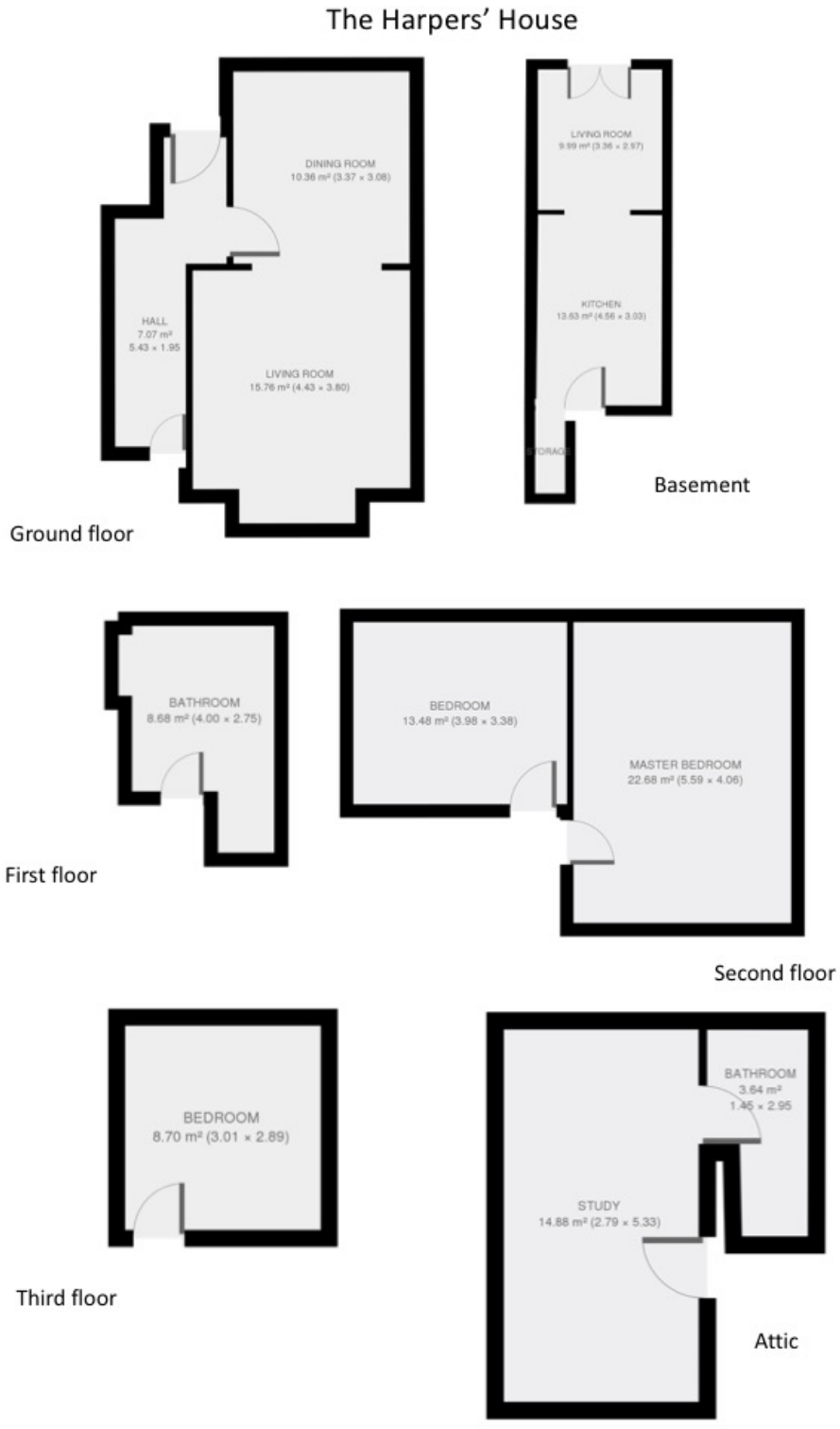

Fig. 9: A floorplan of the Harpers' house (author's own 2014)

The Spencer household

Jenny and Will's builders were leaving just as I arrived at the Spencers' house. Jenny, Will and Tilly had moved from their flat on the border between East Dulwich and Peckham to their new house in Camberwell just before Archie was born and began renovating it a few weeks later. Jenny, on maternity leave, oversaw the work in which the ground floor of their home was entirely remodelled. For weeks the family had lived in mess and disorder, but when I moved in, the work was done, the builders gone and Jenny and Will were in the process of getting their house back in order.

Jenny and Will both worked in the same industry, although Will had only recently moved into it after Jenny encouraged him to leave his previous career and do something he felt more passionately about. Dinner table conversation usually revolved around their work, and was sprinkled with inside jokes about the habits and foibles of the industry's 'big names', the vast majority of which went over my head. Conversation was Jenny and Will's favourite past time, the TV going largely unwatched for weeks at a time. They were both prodigious readers and news followers, however, and the kitchen table was always littered with broadsheet newspapers and well-thumbed copies of the major current affairs magazines.

Having only recently moved to Camberwell, Jenny and Will had few friends close by. Much of their socialising was done with Jenny's sister who lived close by with her partner and four children. Once a week Jenny would take the two kids out to

a local soft play group where they would meet up with Tilly's cousins for a morning of play before going for lunch at a local café. On weekends the two families would get together for meals, each taking it in turns to host, after which the youngest children would be carried off to bed for naps while the older kids fought over computer games. Will had moved to the UK from North America over a decade previously, leaving all of his family and friends behind. His relationship with his parents was, and remains, somewhat strained and family visits across the Atlantic had been few and far between. Will was resolved to spend the rest of his life in Britain and had devoted his energy to his young family and to developing his professional and friendly connections in the UK rather than in maintaining bonds with those he had left behind.

Jenny and Will were proud parents, endlessly fascinated and delighted by their children. Tilly, alarmingly articulate and boundlessly energetic, loved to read and sing. Though she had only turned two a few months before I met her, she could already read simple words, much to the delight of Jenny and Will. She had attended nursery before Jenny went on maternity leave with Archie, but soon she would be under the care of a live-in nanny, who Jenny and Will had spent months searching for, and who Jenny agonised over, unsure as to whether they had made the right choice, and nervous that plans would somehow fall through before she arrived. Jenny, an ardent and vocal supporter of the importance of women returning to the workforce after having children, worried how Tilly and Archie would cope with the upcoming change. Even had she wanted to extend her maternity leave beyond six months, however, she would not have been able to do so. The large mortgage she and Will had taken out to afford a house with

enough space for their growing family had meant that they couldn't afford for her to take the six months of unpaid leave that she legally had the option to take.

Alongside Jenny, Will, Tilly and Archie, the other resident of the Spencer household was Bob, a chubby tabby cat who, due to his suspicion of the fancy cat flap Jenny and Will had installed, was frequently left locked outside the house for days on end. Bob was constantly in trouble for climbing on the table during meal times, or scratching at the carpet on the stairs with his claws, or defecating in Archie's bed when he was accidentally shut in to Archie's bedroom one night. Tilly loved him however, and would pet him and stroke him, chasing him in circles from the kitchen to the living room, through the hallway and back in to the kitchen again attempting to grab hold of his tail. Jenny was concerned about Bob's health. He was an old cat, and his behaviour was becoming erratic, his movement often slow and laboured. Without pet insurance, however, Jenny was unsure as to what they would do when Bob's poor health became a pressing concern and there became a choice between expensive treatments and the sadness of putting down Tilly's beloved 'Mob'.

Jenny and Will live on an unprepossessing street of terraced houses, some of which are owned or rented by their occupiers and some of which were social housing. The house's previous occupiers had been in financial trouble, and occasionally bailiffs would come to the door demanding the repayment of debts the previous occupiers owed. All the houses on the street had back gardens, and the view from Jenny and Will's converted attic was across these back gardens, some of which were messy, some of which were neatly tended. As the weather

became warmer, the street was often noisy in the evenings and at weekends when kids played outside in the back gardens and families fired up their barbeques. Jenny and Will get on well with their neighbours to their left, but their neighbour to their right had problems with alcohol addiction and mental health. Sometimes he would be friendly, other times he would be abusive. Jenny and Will are relatively relaxed about the situation, confident that his abuse would remain purely verbal.

Jenny and I painted their front door a smart, glossy black – like that of 10 Downing Street, she joked. During my time with them their house underwent a number of cosmetic changes as Jenny and I did the small DIY jobs that were too minor to have been given to the builders. We painted the hallway from a pale yellow to a crisp bright white and Jenny planned to get a giant map of London printed to decorate the now blank walls. At the front of the house is a living room with a large bay window, which had been knocked through to the dining room behind to make a single room and painted in a chic dark green (see fig. 10). The living section of the room contains a scuffed white sofa – that Jenny was desperate to get rid of as soon as she could find one both she and Will liked enough – with a soft grey love seat sitting perpendicular to it, facing the window and the street outside. A TV sits on top of a wooden cupboard tucked into the corner of the room. On the floor is a rug printed with an image of a car racing track made for kids to race cars along it, and two wicker cases full of toys and dressing up clothes are stacked next to it. The section of the room that was originally a dining area is now a study, an entire wall of which is lined with books

from floor to ceiling. A running machine is pushed against the opposite wall next to a keyboard in the corner.

The renovations to their house created a 'side-return extension', whereby the room at the back of the house was extended backwards into the garden, and to the side so that it takes up the entire width of the house. Jenny and Will chose to have an archway rather than a door between the study and the new kitchen so that there is an uninterrupted line of sight from the front of the house to the back. The kitchen can be entered either from the hallway, past the small bathroom and utility room, or from the living room. It is sunny and bright, the back wall having been replaced by large folding glass doors that can be fully collapsed to leave no barrier between the kitchen and the back garden beyond. The newly-fitted kitchen units are a glossy white with a polished white stone work top. In the centre of the room is a large kitchen island and pushed up against this is a child-sized toy kitchen made of wood, complete with tiny pots and pans and stuffed toy vegetables. On the right hand side of the room and sitting under a skylight is a long, thin wooden dining table with wooden benches tucked underneath and Tilly's high chair positioned at the head of the table, where the family eat every meal gathered around the table.

Glossy brown bannisters lead the way up the stairs from the hallway to a mezzanine floor comprising Archie's bedroom and the family's main bathroom. Before the renovations, Archie's bedroom had been a kitchen, much to the bemusement of Jenny and Will who couldn't understand who on earth would want a kitchen so far from the living and dining rooms. The first task after the

builders left had been to get Archie's bedroom ready for him to move out of Jenny and Will's room and into his own. The walls in Archie's room are a cool navy blue. His cot is tucked into a corner and next to a nursing chair that Jenny used while she trying to get Archie to sleep for naps and for night time feeds. A large dark wood chest of drawers full of Archie's clothes rests against the same wall, the top of which doubles as a changing table. Opposite this is a single bed that Jenny sometimes sleeps in when Archie is sleeping poorly and there seems no point going back to her own bed only to have to return to Archie's room when he inevitably wakes again a little while later. The main bathroom is compact, the bath and surrounding areas full of the toys Tilly plays with while Will and Jenny give the two children a bath every night at six o clock on the dot. In the ceiling between the two rooms is a small, square hatch that leads to a storage space in the roof over Archie's room, where clothes that Archie and Tilly have grown out of or are yet to grow in to are stored.

Up a short flight of stairs from the bathroom are the two remaining family bedrooms. Tilly's is painted a pale pink accented by a 1970's Miffy print curtain made by Jenny's mother. The bed groans under the weight of numerous teddy bears and stuffed toys which remain undisturbed from day to day as Tilly sleeps in a cot on the other side of the room. A large wooden chest of drawers is packed full of Tilly's clothes, and the top is cluttered with a selection of ornaments, hair ties and greetings cards. In an alcove created by the chimney breast is a small book case full of books from which Will reads Tilly her bed time stories in an impressive array of comical accents and voices. Will and Jenny's room is decorated in muted grey tones. A large bed is flanked by matching bedside

tables, both of which feature a stack small of reading books. A large chest of drawers is covered with floral fabric the stool sitting in front of the mirrored dressing table nearby. Aside from some family photographs, the only decorative item is a print bearing the names of some of Jenny and Will's favourite places in London. At the top of the house is a large guest room and en-suite bathroom created by a loft conversion undertaken by the house's previous owners. The walls are a soft yellow, made brighter by the sunlight that streams in through the skylight in the pitched roof, and the French windows that overlook the garden below. A large built-in wardrobe with sliding mirrored doors takes up much of one wall but were kept entirely empty, ready to be filled with the possessions of their new nanny when she arrived.



Fig. 10: A floorplan of the Spencers' house (author's own 2014)

The West household

Anna, Ben and their daughter Lottie are the youngest household I lived with – Anna had just turned 30 and Ben was two years younger. When I went on a warm spring day to visit them at their home in Nunhead to introduce myself and tell them something about my research, I thought they must be two of the calmest, most relaxed people I had ever met. They agreed to take part on the spot, even though I urged them to take time to think about it. They liked having people around, they said. Since Lottie had come along, their previously busy social life had been reduced to occasional lunch time meet-ups and kids' birthday parties so it would be nice to have someone else around to talk to.

Anna and Ben had met at university and had moved to London together after they graduated. Ben had got a job working for an artisanal food maker while Anna had done a number of marketing jobs that she was good at but which she found ultimately unsatisfying. When, at a party thrown by Ben's employers, she met the owner of a well-known coffee roasting company based in London, she approached them and asked for a job on the spot. One day Ben returned home from work to tell Anna that he had quit his job, with almost immediate effect. Anna, after her initial anger at his unilateral and apparently unplanned decision to change careers when they had a small baby to feed, encouraged Ben to pursue his dream of owning his own shop rather than entering the world of office work she was sure he wouldn't enjoy. The next year was devoted to achieving this dream, as Ben and Anna worked toward the opening of the Wests' shop selling fine foods and drinks to the residents of south-east London.

Unsurprisingly, food was a big part of Anna and Ben's life. Both loved to cook, and shared the view that good quality produce and ingredients were worth paying for. Day to day, Anna and Ben shared the cooking, knocking something up from scratch without a plan. Sometimes – when there were guests for dinner or just when he'd spotted a recipe he thought looked interesting – Ben would decide to make something new and adventurous, and often time consuming. When two friends of theirs from university came for dinner, Anna and Ben spent the entire day preparing roast belly pork buns from their favourite cookbook. They loved to go out for meals, and when Lottie was sleeping well enough to be entrusted to the care of a baby sitter they'd take themselves out for dinner, gradually venturing farther and farther afield, always returning with comments on the menu and service.

The majority of Anna and Ben's friends were yet to have children, and Anna and Ben would occasionally dip back in to the social life they had before Lottie was born, albeit separately. Anna would stay in with Lottie while Ben went off to the pub, or Ben would put Lottie to bed while Anna went out for dinner with friends. If the gathering was during the day they would just take Lottie with them, loading her up into the buggy and taking her on the train into London. Being married, owning their own home and having a baby by the time they reached their late twenties put them ahead of their friends by a couple of major life milestones. They hadn't meant to have Lottie so soon after they were married, however, and while their friends might have been waiting until they had steady careers and incomes before they decided to have children, Anna and Ben were

trying to do both at the same time, figuring their own lives out as they got used to life with Lottie.

Anna and Ben hadn't planned for Lottie to be born so early after they were married, but they hadn't wanted to wait for long. Anna's parents had both died of cancer when she was young, leaving Anna and her brother with only their grandmother as their surviving family in the UK. Anna wanted to build a family of her own, and to waste no time in doing so. Anna and her brother were close, even if she was frequently frustrated by his inability to organise his life and entailing bureaucracy properly. He lived just down the road and would often pop round for a chat or to visit Lottie. Ben came from a big family from the North of England. He had two brothers who each had their own families. Ben was the only one of his brothers to move away from the area he had grown up in, and his parents would make intrepid trips to visit him in the city, arriving with cool boxes full of sandwiches and biscuits to avoid the expense of buying food en route. Ben's father would bring his tools with him, and Anna and Ben would usually have a list of DIY jobs that needed tackling with his tools and expertise. One visit it was removing a tree with poisonous berries from the garden, the next it was fitting child guards at the top and bottom of the stairs.

The Wests live in a neat little terraced house, positioned in the middle of a long row of terraced houses on a road that stretches through Nunhead all the way to the neighbouring area of Brockley. The house is slightly set back from the street, behind a tall hedge and gravelled area, through which runs a red tiled path. Their front gate and front door are painted the same shade of pale blue, a design touch

that they acquired with the house, along with most of the house's colour scheme. Inside the house a high ceilinged hall leads to the living, room, study and kitchen. The walls are white and studded with framed paintings and sketches of various sizes. The living room has a large bay window, the light that streams through it muted by net curtains (see fig. 11). A grey Ikea sofa and two matching armchairs are positioned around a giant multi-coloured foam jigsaw that takes up much of the wooden floor to create a soft surface for Lottie as she scrabbled around on the floor before she could walk and then to cushion her falls as she began to learn to walk. A TV is affixed to the wall above the fireplace, next to a bookshelf full of cookbooks and art books that had belonged to Anna's mother. A crate full of toys is tucked into the corner of the room surrounded by bright plastic balls and play benches too big to fit in the crate. Double wooden doors, usually left open, divide the living room and the study – which also doubles as a guest room thanks to the sofa bed that sits opposite the desk. Lottie's bright red buggy is usually kept next to the sofa, with the matching red change bag hung over the handle. French windows open from the study into the garden, although these usually remained closed, even in high summer, to prevent Lottie escaping into the garden unsupervised. The kitchen is painted in the same light blue as the front door and the garden gate, with a grey slate floor. The dining area is filled with mismatching furniture – a dark wooden round dining table sat in front of a pale wooden bench with a seat that opens to reveal a storage box underneath, a white dresser filled with crockery, glasses and ceramic baking dishes, a thin chest that holds cutlery and serving utensils. The kitchen cupboards are cream with a wooden work surface, accented by a pillar-box red Smeg branded fridge-freezer. A stable door leads to a large garden where an area of wooden decking

gives way to lawn. Along the side of the lawn runs paving stones that climb three steps to a raised area, part of which is given over to a small allotment where Ben grows beans, rhubarb and other fruit and vegetables. The rest of the raised area is taken up with a wooden shed and a brick barbecue.

Upstairs, a mezzanine floor comprises a guest room, crammed with mismatching furniture – a desk, a roll top bureau, a tall bookcase, a double bed and a metal hanging rail. Their bathroom is small but airy thanks to the large window that looks out on to the garden below. The walls are painted the same familiar blue, accented by white tiles. A shelf above the sink full of Anna's natural, organic toiletries, more of which fill a cabinet hung on the wall by the door. The area around the bath is covered in shampoo bottles, plastic bath toys and bottles of children's bubble-bath. Up a short flight of stairs is a landing that leads to the family's bedrooms. On the landing between the two rooms is a large built in cupboard chock full of clean, folded linens and towels. In the ceiling above is a hatch leading to the loft which Anna and Ben use for storage. Lottie's room is simple and relatively sparse, only her cot, a few stuffed toys and the tiny shoes sitting on top of the chest of drawers that contains her clothes tell you that this room belongs to a baby. A single bed is pushed to the edge of the room, opposite a bookshelf filled with a small selection of children's books. A baby monitor sits on top of the bookshelf, the camera pointed toward the cot. Next to Lottie's bedroom is Anna and Ben's, made bright and sunny by its two large windows that face out onto the road. A built in wardrobe runs the length of one of the walls, opposite a double bed flanked by matching bedside tables. In the corner of the room sits a plumply cushioned arm chair.



Fig. 11: A floorplan of the Wests' house (author's own 2014)

I had not intended to write a thesis that took the lives of middle class south-east London householders as its subject, nor did I set out to make a study of the wants and disappointments that are the stuff of everyday life. This thesis has been shaped by the method I chose to use – by my decision to make a study of household lives by living in my respondents' homes with them. My next chapter details this method.

Chapter 1.

"This is Mary, our resident anthropologist": methodology

> **Anthropologist looking for a home:**
> I am a social anthropologist. I'm looking for households who would like to be part of my study. It would entail taking me into your home for a few months – think of it like having a lodger or an exchange student who asks a few more questions! I would be happy to repay your kindness through contributions towards bills and household costs, and through household duties, part time childcare etc.

This was the message that rescued my research. I had set out to study households by living with them. I looked for households willing to take me into their home and extend me temporary membership. Unsurprisingly, finding households interested in acquiring a resident anthropologist proved difficult. I had envisaged using my network of friends and former colleagues in London to help me find potential participants, thinking that my friends' ability to vouch for me as a nice and trustworthy person would help to overcome some of the potential barriers to welcoming a stranger into their home. I was wrong. My friends' bemusement about the project – and, I suspect, about the work of anthropologists – rendered their 'pitch' on my behalf unconvincing.

In an effort to reach beyond my existing network, I decided to post a short advert on an online forum that served the residents of a part of London in which I used to live. The East Dulwich Forum was one I knew to be used well-used by local residents. This tactic had the added benefit of allowing me to reach potential respondents directly, rather than relying on intermediaries to describe the project and its entailments. After months of unsuccessful calls and emails to

attempt to track down potential respondents, the East Dulwich Forum provided almost instantaneous results. Within an hour my post had over a hundred 'views', and by the end of the day I had responses from two women, interested in hearing more about the project.[1]

Back in a south-east London I didn't know

While I had originally planned to find participant households in different areas of London, by proving to be such a powerful recruitment tool, the East Dulwich effectively defined the location of my fieldwork and the 'sample' from which my respondent households were drawn. The forum ostensibly serves a particular area of south-east London – East Dulwich – as a place for the advertisement of local events, a marketplace for second-hand clothes and objects, a noticeboard for help offered and wanted, and for local residents to discuss local issues and share recommendations or warnings about local businesses. In, reality the site's

[1] My first post in the forum had two replies, both from mothers who told me that they were looking for help with childcare. I responded by sending them the participant information sheets for adults and children I had prepared, and letting them know that if after reading the sheets they and their family were still interested in taking part in the study I would be happy to visit them so that they could ask me further questions in person, and make a better judgment as to whether they might want me living with them for a period of around three months. Both women then invited me to their home to meet their families. While the first family I visited chose not to go ahead, the second family I met were the Harpers, who became my first respondent household. I posted again in the East Dulwich Forum three months later when looking for my second respondent household and received only one reply. Again I followed this up with my information sheets and offered to go around to visit, where I met Jenny and Will Spencer for the first time. Jenny and Will asked me to return a second time to meet Tilly, before emailing me to let me know that they would like to go ahead. Again, when approaching the end of my time with the Spencers I posted again on the East Dulwich Forum and again received only one reply. After reading the respondent information sheet the Wests invited me to visit them, and after a remarkably brief chat Anna and Ben told me that they would be happy for me to come and stay with them for a while.

usership extends to the surrounding areas of Peckham, Camberwell, Nunhead, Forest Hill, Herne Hill, Tulse Hill and beyond.

Having previously lived in south-east London for three years, I considered myself familiar with many of these areas. I soon found, however, that my participants used the area in a very different way to the way I had. As a single woman in her mid-twenties, renting a room in a house share and commuting into central London every day to my office job, south-east London had been my 'base' from which to travel far and frequently across London. My knowledge of the area reflected the particularity of my engagement with it – the supermarket I went to for my grocery shopping, the pubs I drank in with my housemates, the cafes I visited for weekend brunch with friends. I didn't know which restaurants were the most child friendly. I had never paid attention to which streets had flat, even pavements which made them easiest for pushing a buggy along. I wasn't aware which were the few shops that sold bread made by the best local bakery. In learning to use East Dulwich as the Harpers did, Camberwell as the Spencers did, and Nunhead as the Wests did, I encountered parts of south-east London I had never been to before, and facets I had simply never noticed. Through this, I began to consider how the places my respondents lived-helped to shape their lives and lifestyles in ways that I wouldn't have otherwise considered, and how relatively small geographic differences – these houses were only a few miles apart at most, all were within walking distance of one another – make big differences to the life of the household.

The East Dulwich Forum's reputation for being an active and friendly online community taps into the area's identity as one of London's 'villages' (Alkayat 2013). The notion of East Dulwich as an idyllic village with a close community pervades the online forum in which users discuss at length the possible threats to the area's 'village-y feel'. I suspect it is no accident that a forum centred on the goings-on in East Dulwich has become so popular. I have given a description of the areas of south-east London that formed my fieldsite in the introductory chapter, but suffice it to say here that East Dulwich is a very well-to-do area populated predominantly by affluent white people, surrounded by some less well-to-do areas in which residents are more 'ethnically diverse' and generally less affluent. The East Dulwich Forum exists not simply as a community of residents of East Dulwich, but as a community of middle class residents across south-east London. The separation between on-line and off-line should not be overplayed (Hine 2000), and even early research on the impact of the internet on local communities demonstrated the ability of online interaction to increase the levels of offline socialising between members of these communities (Hampton and Wellman 2003). Yet the East Dulwich Forum is not simply an online reflection of the relationships of the residents of East Dulwich offline, it both creates and is created by the perception of East Dulwich as a London 'village' with a strong community. The users of the East Dulwich Forum are members of a sort of East Dulwich 'community-in-the-mind' (Pahl 2005), which cannot be separated from the East Dulwich they see on a map.

I had expected the households in my study to be entirely unconnected, and I assumed that the concept of 'community' would have no place in the framing of

my fieldsite. The reality was very different. My research is rooted in south-east London and the online-offline community of the East Dulwich Forum, and my ethnography is one of south-east London households and their lives as lived both in the home and in their communities. Consequently, my definition of a fieldsite is similar to that of Firth, Hubert and Forge in their early study of middle class kinship in London. Their 'sample areas' – Greenbanks and Highgate, both in North London – are termed 'quasi-communities': areas with which, although not 'precise social units', the residents hold 'a certain degree of identification' (1970).

On a practical note, the fact that my three participant households were located within walking distance of one another, and were all active contributors to the same online community, made it both more important and more difficult for me to preserve their anonymity. There was a real possibility that they might one day cross paths with each other – either physically or 'virtually'. While all three households asked me to keep their identities a secret, they were free to talk to anyone about my presence in the household, and my reason for being there. All seemed eager to discuss me and their participation in my research with their friends and family as an interesting and unusual occurrence in their lives, increasing the chance that their networks of friends – many of whom were also active on the East Dulwich Forum – may overlap and the identities or characteristics of my participant households might become known to one another. While all three households seemed eager to learn details about the other households in my study, either to 'compare themselves' or simply out of curiosity about how my lifestyle had changed since moving to a new household;

this potential crossover made me even more determined that each household should learn only the most general details about each other to ensure that there was no risk of any more personal information being passed through this community network and finding its way back to the household in question. I learnt to my alarm that even the most innocuous pieces of information had the power to fuel my participants' conceptions and misconceptions about each other. My thoughtless comment that I had missed listening to Radio 4 while living with the Harpers allowed the Spencers to form an opinion of them as un-intellectual. My mention that the Harpers lived in East Dulwich led the Wests to conclude that the Harpers were 'posher' and better off than they were. The relative proximity of my participant households to one another and the knowledge that they were all part of the extended network of virtual and physical relationships seemed to fuel their desire to form a picture of these others who were unknown but also connected to them in so many ways – not least through me.

All three of the households in my study were middle class. As discussed in the introductory chapter, there is no accepted definition of what constitutes the 'middle class'. Economists use complex definitions involving 'median adjusted household disposable income' (Pressman 2010: 244), but anthropologists are generally happy to refer to the middle classes in Britain loosely, and to assign respondents to this group based on what seems to be a combination of income, education level, consumption habits and the ethnographers own understanding of what it means to be middle class (or perhaps *not* working or upper class).[2]

[2] Anthropologists are not alone in this regard. Perhaps considering the seven classes Savage et al. identified in their recent analysis of the BBC's Great British Class Survey to be too complex (Savage et

Riches, in his discussion of the middle class family in Britain, paraphrases Butler and Savage's definition of the middle classes to describe their lifestyle as 'self-reliant, educationally aspirational and materialist…associated with incumbency in professional occupations' (2010), before going on to tell us that his chosen respondents are those he simply knows to be middle class. Similarly, I refer to the households in my study as 'middle class', partly because they describe themselves so, and partly because they fit my understanding of what it is to be a middle class resident of London. All but one of the adults in my study were 'professionals' with white collar jobs, all had attended university, all of the families lived in houses they owned and employed some kind of home help.

I refer to their middle class status not to indicate that my study can say something definitive about what it is to be middle class, but rather to emphasise that the lifestyles and experiences of my respondents are not common to all households in south-east London, where there exists a wide variety of income levels and socio-economic groups. The relative affluence of my participant households allowed them to have a set of concerns and stresses very different from many of their neighbouring households. The wider debate around the impact of gentrification on south-east London also highlights the fact that the households in my study wield a level of economic power not matched by many of their neighbours, an issue I address in chapter six. In many ways my study could be said to be one of an 'elite', defined by Salverda and Abbink as:

al. 2013), geographers Hennig and Dorling have refer to simply the 'poor', 'wealthy' and 'middle'. According to their analysis, in 2010 37% of Londoners fell into this middle ground between the 'poor' and the 'wealthy' (Hennig & Dorling 2015).

> '…a relatively small group within the societal hierarchy that claims and/or is accorded power, prestige, or command over others on the basis of a number of publically recognized criteria, and aims to preserve and entrench its status thus acquired' (2013: 1).

Certainly, some of my participants are members of 'elite groups' commonly recognised as such – half of the adults in my study attended Oxbridge universities, many of them work in professions that gives them the kind of power and influence that has been defined as connoting elite status (see Smith 2013). In the context of south-east London, however, where estates of council housing are being demolished and replaced with 'affordable housing' that many argue is in fact distinctly unaffordable for most local residents, and the sweep of gentrification is visible in the rapid proliferation of third-wave coffee shops and gastro-pubs, it is the middle class residents like my participants who hold the power, prestige and command over the local area. As my study became one of households in south-east London, the practices of gentrification – and the political significance of the lives of my participants – emerged as a theme I could not ignore. In relating the lives of my participant households to the more political debates around the intersection of class, property prices and legislation governing houses and the built environment my research follows in the footsteps of classic studies of London. Young and Willmott's *Family and Kinship in East London* includes a discussion of housing policy, its impact on the lives of their participants and their opinion as to how this policy could be changed to better suit the lives of the residents of East London (1957).

The East Dulwich Forum is organised so that conversational 'threads' are grouped according to topics. Suspecting that the most attractive thing I could offer to potential respondent households would be free childcare, I posted my first 'advert' for respondents in the thread entitled 'The Family Room', which is devoted to 'discussions of Family Life'. When I attempted to post my second and third posts in threads devoted to more general discussion – not related to the family specifically – the forum's moderators moved my post to 'The Family Room' or 'The Family Room Classifieds'. It was inevitable, then, that all three of my respondent households would be families with children. Anthropologists have long argued that the household and family cannot be conflated – the family being defined by kinship and the household by propinquity (see Bender 1967). Nevertheless, the family and the household remain difficult to separate, especially in relation to British households (Moore 1988). In the one sense my research would be appear to be a study of nuclear families living in south-east London. The Harpers, Spencers and Wests certainly referred to themselves as families. Carsten argues that '…all the different processes involved in living in houses, taken together, make kinship' (2004: 55), suggesting that in studying a family in their home I am studying the practice of kinship. Yet, the Harpers, Spencers and Wests were joined in their homes by nannies and cleaners, friends and pets, not to mention the things with which they shared their lives. The study of the life of the household cannot be reduced to the study of kinship. While the East Dulwich Forum put family life at the centre of my research, the family did not replace the household as the focus of my project.

Moving in: Residential ethnography

It was my desire to encounter the often hidden facets of household life – moments of tension, intimacy, imperfection and inelegance – that led me to choose to live with my participant households in their home. This was an unusual approach for a study made in Britain, where the home is considered intensely private space. Hitherto most anthropological or sociological studies of British homes have adopted interviews as their primary method (see Clarke 2001; Gregson 2007; Money 2007; Miller 2008 for just a few examples). That interviews are most often the method of research into the home is understandable – researchers are eager to ensure that that their presence in the home is not an intrusion and the interview allows for both the participant and researcher to call a halt to the process before the researcher's presence becomes onerous. An interview-based method also enables research in a number of homes concurrently, increasing the sample of the research and a greater breadth of study. The problem with an interview-based method is that, no matter how long or regular the interviews might be, and no matter how comfortable the participants might become with the presence of the researcher in their home, the separation between 'the interview' and normal life is marked by the appearance of the researcher. No matter how emphatically a researcher might stress her willingness for her participants to go about their daily business as though she were not there, I suspect that the really mundane, un-genteel and sometimes embarrassing activities of household life – cleaning the toilet, wearing pyjamas until mid-afternoon, complaining about an irritating text message from a thoughtless family member – are either 'edited' out by participants, or simply

delayed until the researcher has gone home. Living with my respondents removed, or at least minimised, this separation between 'research' and normal life and allowed me a more holistic perspective on household life.

By becoming, as much as possible, one of the household, I too became part of the relationships that extend the household beyond the home. I was often present for visits from friends and family, getting to know some of my respondents' network of family and friends. I was there for extended visits by my respondents' parents, giving me an insight into the family dynamics beyond the immediate household that nevertheless had a significant impact on the relationships within the household. I also met my respondents' friends who came around for planned dinner and tea parties or dropped by for cups of tea. I met Emma and Tilly's friends when they came around for play dates. I was present at parties thrown for birthdays and Christenings, and was introduced to bemused friends and neighbours as some variation on 'Mary, our resident anthropologist'. I went along with Jenny, Tilly and Archie to Sunday lunches at Jenny's sister's house and walked to local coffee shops run by Anna's friends to sample their coffee. Living with my respondents allowed me to be treated as part of the household by those outside of the household as well as those within it. This status afforded me a place at occasions and events that although significant in the life of the household and useful for my research, I would not otherwise have had access to.

Living in the home with my householders, taking part in the work that goes in to maintaining the objects of the home, learning how to attend to the specific requirements of each object to make it work, or fit, or stay in good repair kept

my research grounded in the materiality of the home, and gave me a much more detailed knowledge of the things that made up much of the household than I could ever have achieved through interviews or periodic visits. Getting to know the rules that surrounded the use and treatment of the objects in the home brought taken-for-granted practices to light and created the kind of 'novelty' that Latour argues is necessary for engaging with 'the most routine, traditional and silent implements' which many of the things that populated the homes of my participants were (2005: 80). Gradually my respondents asked me where things were, as my ability to navigate the organisation of their stuff began to rival theirs. Similarly, being present nearly all of the time, over an extended period of time, allowed me get to grips with the rhythms of the household – the periodic grocery deliveries, the weekly activities, the bedtimes, bath times and nap times that structured the life of the family and the movements of the things and people within the household. By understanding and living the routine of the household, I could feel even the smallest shifts and changes, I knew when things had gone wrong, when the atmosphere had gone sour, when householders were stressed or anxious. This sensitivity allowed me to consider the tenuous nature of the harmony of the household, and the ever present shadow of disappointment.

I found that constant presence required relinquishing the control and focus that can come with interviews, and that the result was a research project with an inherently holistic perspective. I realised early on that, in order to make the experience of living with an anthropologist as painless and stress-free as possible, I needed to do what I could to make the research process unobtrusive. Questioning participants about their feelings on particular subjects or their

motivations for doing a particular task in a particular way would have made the experience of being 'studied' uncomfortable and oppressive. I rarely attempted to steer conversations in a particular direction or to push the discussion on to a topic I was especially interested in because I didn't want my respondents to feel that they were being 'studied'. So choosing not to pre-decide what to discuss, what to see, what to be present for, meant that I saw nearly everything that went on in the household, and chatted to my respondents about everything that was going on in their lives. The result is a project that considers the entirety of household life, with a focus guided by the preoccupations and concerns of my participants.

In detailing the benefits of this kind of 'residential ethnography', I must acknowledge that it was easier for me to undertake this kind of research than it may have been for many other researchers. Ethnographers undertake research as 'persons of a particular age, sexual orientation, belief, education, educational background, ethnic identity and class' (Bell 1993: 2), and these particularities impact upon access and experiences in the field (Ardener 1984). I suspect that my participant households accepted me as a young woman more readily than if I had been male, or older, or both. As I discuss in chapter five, it is the relatively normal in Britain for young women to be called in to the home to provide assistance with household needs like housework and childcare. The Harpers had previously employed a young woman as an au pair who had occupied the same spare room that I did during my time with them, the Spencers hired a young woman as a nanny who moved in just after I left. My age at the time of research 27, made me young enough to occupy this 'au pair' like position, but close

enough to the ages of my adult respondents to allow them to see me as a potential friend – a self-sufficient adult rather than a young person for whom they would have felt a duty of care. This was an important distinction as my participants spoke of the burden of worry that came with the sense of responsibility they felt, or expected to feel, for the young au pairs and nannies in their home.

Although an adult, I was also single and childless, and therefore a life-stage behind my participants, ignorant of what it meant to be married and a parent. This was important for two reasons. First, it minimised my participants' worry that I might be standing in judgement of their parenting or relationships. I stressed my inexperience in these areas to them in order to emphasise the fact that I was not measuring their behaviour against any conception of the 'the right' way doing things that I might have. Second, it provided a source of 'othering'. Those conducting 'anthropology at home' warn of the necessity and difficulty of 'othering' those whose lifestyle and language is so similar to the researcher's own. I was wary, before entering the field, of becoming 'blindfolded by knowledge' – of my own knowledge and assumptions blinding me to the understanding of my respondents (Hastrup 1987). As anyone who has ever been a houseguest can attest, however, the homes of others can feel like very alien environments. For me – who grew up as an only child in a single parent household, who is unmarried and without children, who had never been part of a household that included a couple or another child – the experience of living amongst a nuclear family with small children was full of novelty and 'other'. I had expected to feel uncomfortable and uncertain about how to behave for my first

few weeks in each household but I was shocked at the extent of my discomfort and the length of time that I felt uncertain. I constantly made slip-ups and mistakes that highlighted my lack of understanding and lack of familiarity with the households and their way of life. That this lack of surety and my propensity to make faux pas returned afresh with my entry into each household underlines that not only were the lives of my respondent households very different to mine, they were very different from one another's. Each household had different rules, different habits, different attitudes about how the household should live and what household life should be like. It was the ostensible similarity of the three households I lived with – of class, location and family structure – that threw their differences into sharp relief and led me to consider how and why households that seemed so similar 'on paper' lived so differently, and why their lives felt so different to mine.

Over a period of just under a year I lived with my three participant households for continuous stints of between three and three-and-a-half months. Between these stints were periods of 'down time' while I waited for it to be convenient for my next household for me to move in. This 'down time' was spent writing up fieldnotes and preparing for the next few months in the field. I found these intervals essential in helping to manage my position as both 'insider' and 'outsider'. Kondo has written a very personal account of the difficulty of maintaining 'distance' in the field, especially when living with those one has set out to study. During her fieldwork in Japan, Kondo – a Japanese-American woman – spent a few months living with a family who were generous enough to take her in while the apartment she planned to live in was being made ready for

habitation. She describes how the expectations of this family, and her desire to behave in such a way as to please them, led to a 'collapse of identity', in which she was no longer able to distinguish herself from her object of study. Kondo frames this experience as unsettling and somewhat traumatic: '…participation to the point of identification led also to a disturbing disorientation, an uncertainty as to which role I was playing.' (1986: 79). In going home to her native United States for a month and then moving into her own apartment, upon her return to the field Kondo sought to reassert the degree of distance she argues is necessary for the ethnographer to 'recover meaning from the experience.' (1986: 84). Embedded in the households I was studying, maintaining any degree of distance was difficult. As my days were filled with housework and childcare, and the trajectory of my days came to be dictated by the quality of a child's night sleep, it became increasingly difficult for me to separate the interests and opinions of my participant households from those of my own. More importantly, these periods of 'down time' were necessary to remind myself of the specificity of life in each household. Allowing for a time of reflection after each period of fieldwork prevented the three households 'running in to one another' in my mind, ensuring they remained distinct and differentiated in my consideration of them.

I decided that in order to make a study of a household – to learn its habits and behaviours and how these habits and behaviours change or fluctuate – three months was the minimum time I would need to spend in each household. This restricted the number of households I would be able to include in my study to a very few. Certainly such a small sample size is unusual but not unheard of in ethnographic research. Bourgois' study of drugs and poverty in East Harlem is

based on the stories of just five people – Primo, Caesar, Luis, Tony and Candy – but the lives of these five people are used to illuminate much larger issues in the experience of poverty (2003). Another study of poverty, Lewis' classic ethnography of the Mexican poor, is told through the lives of five families (1975). One of the first studies that provided an insight into the British household, Wallman's *Eight London Households*, was conducted as part of a broader study into South London from which eight households were chosen to focus on in more depth as a counterpoint to the high-level, simplistic perspective on the household provided by large-scale surveys such as the census (1984). Wallman gives us eight detailed and nuanced portraits of family life, chosen to demonstrate the way that households and household life defy generalisation and categorisation. In choosing to study such a small number of households, I chose to prioritise depth over breadth. My research has no claims to generalizability – it cannot claim to speak for all households, or even all households of young families, or even all households of young families in south-east London. Rather, I use Candea's concept of the 'window into complexity' (2010 :34), a small insight into a world of endless variety that might help us to consider concepts and ideas that might be a preoccupation of all, but then again might not.

Of course, any claim to increased 'accuracy' or 'validity' would be entirely undermined by the fact that my presence in the household had an impact on almost everything that happened within it. In a physical sense, giving a bedroom over to me as my own space put an entire room largely out of service for the family. In all the households these were the 'spare room', but all were previously used for storage of some form and my moving in had required that these rooms

be cleared and some of the things within them moved to other parts of the house. So from the first day, my presence created a ripple effect of reorganisation that, certainly in the case of the Spencers, spread throughout the entire home, leading to large scale reorganisation. My eagerness to help out around the house meant that certain household tasks became mine by default, and my eagerness to ensure that these tasks were done well and regularly meant that the rhythms of household maintenance were changed by me, as were the division of responsibility for these tasks and any tension that might have surrounded this division.

My presence also impacted the way that relationships within the home were played out. While plenty of tension was noticeable in my presence, I witnessed few serious arguments. I suspect that, as comfortable as my respondents were with my presence, they would still have been too embarrassed to conduct a 'shouting match' in front of me, even if they had wanted to. My ability to be an extra carer or child-minder slightly reduced the burden of childcare on the parents, reducing the amount of time that parents spent playing with or tending to the children in the home. This probably had minimal impact on mothers caring for the small babies in my study, but was more significant with the toddlers who I could play with, feed or read to, freeing the other adults in the house up to do something else. Just as my respondents are likely to have done their best to present their relationship as harmonious, I suspect that they worked hard to seem like the best parents possible. While my ignorance of childrearing helped in this regard, my gaze as an outside observer still came to stand for a lot of the judgement – both real and imagined – that the mothers in

my study felt. They would often make comments like: 'I'm sure this makes me a terrible parent', or 'this must put you off having kids forever'. I suspect that a desire to better match their behaviour with their conception of what 'good parenting' looks like to someone outside the family may have affected their interaction with their children slightly, especially at the beginning of my time in each household.

My experience of the household was one of a woman in the household and my research has been shaped by that fact. As Hammersley and Atkinson advocate, in the knowledge that I am the research instrument in this project I must forefront my role in the process of interpretation 'as actively making sense of the world' (1995). Because the three women in my study were on maternity leave and therefore at home almost every day, it was with them that I spent most of my time. Time spent together, and the assumption that as women we shared common experiences and perspectives, meant that the women in my study shared far more confidences with me, and were far more willing to engage in discussions about their place in the family and their feelings about the family than the men. As a woman yet to marry and have children, Claire, Jenny and Anna were keen to share their knowledge on these subjects with me, to give me advice that they felt would help me in the future. Their advice was an illuminating insight into their own imagined futures and the disappointments they had encountered. It was considered natural that I would be 'closer' to the women in the household, and I suspect it would have problematic should I have aligned myself with the male members of the household. A comment made by Jenny that she wouldn't want to hire a nanny who was too attractive was a

demonstration of the suspicion around young women who enter the household. While my close bond with the women in my study gave me a detailed insight into the lives of women in the family and the household, it created an imbalance in my perspective. I can speak much more to the experiences of the women in the household than to those of the men. This effect was augmented by the fact that the period of maternity leaved seemed to throw gender roles into their sharp relief, temporarily halting Claire, Jenny and Anna's roles as breadwinning members of the household with an active and demanding life outside of the family and confining them to the home and their children. This period seemed to prompt a certain amount of reflection on these two roles and their relationship with one another, leading Claire to consider whether or not she wanted to return to work and reaffirming Anna and Jenny's commitment to their careers as, in part, a way to escape the confines of the home and the restrictions of life as a mother. This naturally guided my explorations of gender toward the playing out of women's roles within the home.

My time with the Harpers, Spencers and Wests were intense periods of fieldwork. While these stints were broken by the odd weekend away, and occasional holidays, I was generally with my participants from the moment they came downstairs in the morning to the moment they went upstairs to bed. This was a lot to ask of them, and my primary goal during these periods was to ensure that my presence in the household caused as little inconvenience as possible. I didn't pay my respondents rent, although I did give them a small amount of money to cover the increase in bills that resulted from having another adult in the house. Instead I attempted to off-set the disruption and inconvenience of

having an extra person in the home by helping out with housework, childcare, running errands, cooking and generally doing whatever each household needed me to do. As all of my households were families with young children, a lot of my time was spent 'helping out with the kids' – holding babies who refused to be put down, building Lego towers, reading stories, and wiping toddlers' sticky hands. Given that I had barely any experience of dealing with babies or very small children before beginning my fieldwork, the first few weeks were an especially steep learning curve, as the Harpers had welcomed their second child only three weeks earlier and Emma, their daughter, was an energetic two-year-old who they felt required constant attention.

Over the course of my fieldwork, however, I came to realise that the most valuable resource I was offering was not my labour but my sheer presence. Chatting to Claire on a return visit a few months after I moved out of the Harpers' home, she told me that when she spotted my advert on the East Dulwich Forum she almost didn't care if I came to stay without lifting a finger to help – she needed someone, anyone, around during the day to alleviate the loneliness that comes from being stuck at home day after day with two small children. When I first met the Spencers they seemed to have a clear and functional idea of how I could help them – while it would be nice to have someone to babysit once in a while, what they really wanted from me was DIY. Jenny told me that she had a list of DIY tasks that she was determined to complete before the end of her maternity leave, and seemed very pleased that I had some skills in this area already. Indeed, by the end of my stay I had helped her repaint their hallway, spruce up the garden and manicure the front of the house. Yet it was clear that

Jenny, like Claire, valued having another adult around to help her manage the stress of caring for two children. Returning home after a few hours on my own at a local café I would often find Jenny irritable, her dislike of being alone intensified by the added stress of caring for two small children. The Wests seemed to have the least need for my help, having only one baby who was already 9 months old, both of them at home for most days and a nanny coming to look after the baby for 2 days a week. While I contributed to the household by cooking, doing laundry, washing up and baby-sitting Lottie whenever they needed me to, once again their main reason for taking part seemed to be that they liked having another person around the house, someone to introduce other stories or topics of conversation to stop their world being too insular and isolated. On my last night with them, Anna told me that she liked living with people because she liked being able to have conversations with people who understood her life, who could understand the importance of certain events or appreciate the stressful nature of certain tasks without her having to explain these or put them in context. I took this to mean that she liked to feel understood. So while in theory my presence in the household was earned through chores and childcare, I believe that a good part of the incentive in all three households was the feeling of support or companionship that came from having another person around the house to share in the daily stresses of childcare and running a home. In this sense, then, my position in the home rested on my ability to make my respondent households feel less stressed and therefore better able to cope with these daily stresses than had I not been around.

Living with my respondents was an intense and often stressful process. There were many times that I was present for things that I felt uncomfortable witnessing – arguments, moments of intimacy, or moments of sadness – that, although useful for bringing issues and tensions within the household into stark relief, created a stressful environment to live in. There were many times when respondents would tell me things that felt so personal that knowing them made me feel uncomfortable, or that were clearly attempts to gain my support for their side in an argument or dispute. As a third adult in the household I would sometimes be called upon as an arbiter in disagreements – asked to give my opinion as to which course of action they should follow, or what would be an appropriate response in a certain situation. This role was one I did my upmost to avoid but which was often forced upon me. My opinions or preferences would be used to make a case for or against doing something – 'Mary thinks that we should do this', 'I've spoken to Mary about it and she agrees that we should do that' – or I would inadvertently lend weight to a particular view by mentioning a preference for something or disagreement with a particular issue. Over time I learnt to try to keep my opinions on issues – especially about political or social matters – to myself as far as I was able without removing myself from these conversations entirely.

The close familiarity, and the openness and honesty that this earned me from my respondents, gave me a fuller picture of the family, but also made me party to information, opinions or practices that I'm sure my respondents would not have shared had they been thinking of the conversation they were having with me as part of my process of research, rather than part of sharing confidences with a

friend. This lack of clear division between discussions 'on the record' and those 'off the record' puts me in the position of walking a fine ethical line – deciding which stories or opinions shared with me are too potentially embarrassing or incendiary to be recounted, even anonymously, in my work. Ellis discusses this same issue in relation to her fieldwork in isolated fishing communities, amongst whom her position as a 'researcher' was soon forgotten and she was instead treated as a friend. The anger and hurt of her participants when learning that she had written about their most intimate secrets demonstrated how the line between 'friend' and 'researcher' is easily lost in the field but too easily redrawn in writing up, so that confidences become yet another piece of data (Ellis 2007). I felt strongly that my participants' confidence in me should be reciprocal, and that I should share things from my own life and experiences with my respondents to in some way adjust the imbalance of power that is created by my maintaining my privacy while my respondents open their homes and reveal some of their most closely held secrets to me. Even so, the imbalance is inescapable; my respondents know almost nothing about my life, except what I choose to tell them, while I know almost too much about theirs.

While ethically complex, I was gratified by the friendships I developed with my respondents. I had hoped, before embarking on fieldwork, that my respondents and I would become friends, seeing this this a good test of how well the method had worked. If I had emerged from these households with strained relationships, I would have concluded that the method I chose – living with my respondents – was too unpleasant or uncomfortable to be a viable mode of research. Thankfully, all of my respondents seemed genuinely sad when I left their homes

and all have been eager to keep in touch ever since this has affirmed my belief in this style of deep ethnography as a way of studying the household – while the process isn't easy, it has the power to be a positive experience for both ethnographer and participants.

Drawing as research and analysis

Perhaps befittingly given my findings, the method I planned to use didn't work as I wanted it to. The result of this disappointment was an ethnography quite different to that I had originally envisaged. While living with my respondents had been my plan from the start, I intended to incorporate a secondary method – drawing. More specifically, drawing plans of spaces in the home, and detailed drawings of individual objects inspired by the drawing practices of archaeologists. My attempt to integrate these drawing practices into my ethnography was an experiment, and by and large a failed one. I had hoped that drawing would enable me to produce an ethnography that better balanced the perspectives of people and things, that would force me to engage with the material by reproducing it on paper. Instead I found myself unable to synthesize the two very different forms of data generated by my two methods. The drawings I had hoped would reveal processes too easily overlooked by observation, provide greater depth and greater detail to my understanding of household practice, instead served only to generate a great deal of redundant information that did little to illuminate everyday life in the household.

My high hopes for the benefit that drawing could have for my research were fed by the growing push for a renaissance of drawing as part of the ethnographic method. In his introduction to an edited volume on the subject of graphic anthropology, *Redrawing Anthropology: Materials, Movements, Lines* (2011), Ingold asserts that the process of drawing should be as integral to the ethnographers practice of understanding and discussion as writing. Ingold's faith in drawing lies in the power of the line as 'a certain way of knowing' (2007: 87) that brings together processes of observation and description. To trace a line is to embark on a journey, the path of which is made visible on the page. From Ingold's phenomenological perspective, the draughtsman, like the walker, is 'drawn *into* the world along paths of observation' (italics in original, 2011: 17). In the same volume, McFadyen discusses the process of drawing archaeological features, demonstrating that it is through the act of drawing that his knowledge of a trench is created as the many elusive aspects of the trench take form on the paper as he draws (2011). The theme of drawing as a useful tool of both recording and analysis is echoed in Taussig's essay on his practice of drawing in the field. Taussig takes a single drawing as his starting point, a rough drawing in one of his many notebooks amassed over 40 years of research. Underneath this drawing – depicting a scene he witnessed but did not understand and could not even be sure he *had* seen, of a woman sewing a man into a nylon bag at the side of a freeway – Taussig has scrawled only 'I SWEAR I SAW THIS' (2011: 1), a testament to the difficulty of articulating actions or events we do not fully understand. Taussig argues that drawing enables ethnographers to process and consider their experiences in the field without the restrictions that govern

language and grammar, by avoiding 'the realism of the field worker's notebook, that drive to get it all down in writing just as it was' (2011: 13).

My decision to draw was prompted also by the critique of many anthropological studies of material culture that, in seeing material culture only through the perspective of the social materiality is denied. Olsen, an archaeologist and one of the most vocal critics of 'material culture studies', has criticised the anthropological study of material culture for its 'dominant anti-material conception of culture' that he argues buries objects in layers of social significance and social relations that threaten to obscure their physical presence (2003: 87). Slating the apparent renaissance of material culture in the rise of consumptions studies for failing to question the 'socially derivative nature of things' (2010: 37), Olsen positions archaeological practice – the 'discipline of things *par excellence*' – as the path out of this apparent dead end (2003: 89). His critique fails to acknowledge many of the studies of material culture, and those of the home, that explore the impact of the physicality and physical presence of objects (see, for example, Cwerner & Metcalf 2003; Gregson 2007; Daniels 2010), and the ways in which practice emerges through the combined and often conflicting efforts of subjects and objects (see Shove 2007). Nevertheless, I was inspired to adopt a method that would allow me to consider objects outside of their interactions with subjects, to understand how they interact with one another and with the space that surrounds them – so I looked to archaeology and archaeological practice for guidance. In doing so, I was following a tradition of theoretical cross-fertilisation between archaeology and anthropology that has marked the history of the study of material culture (Hicks 2010).

While my aim was to explore the use of drawing as a technical practice of the ethnographer, without the connotations of art practice and 'artistic expression', before embarking on fieldwork I underwent a process of learning the basic skills of drawing to ensure that my drawings were able to demonstrate what I wanted them to demonstrate. I co-opted a neighbour of mine who is an artist and art teacher to give me a few drawing lessons. She taught me the basics of sketching – how to translate what I saw in front of me to the page. Given that I began with no drawing skills at all, even after these lessons I was far from accomplished when I entered the field, but I felt just about comfortable in putting pencil to paper to render an object's likeness.

I consulted archaeologists and manuals of archaeological method and practice to help me understand the fundamentals of archaeological drawing and learned that drawing happens at almost every stage of an archaeological excavation. At the beginning of the fieldwork process plans are drawn of the site as a whole in order to make a record of its position, size and other characteristics. The surveys undertaken in the making of these plans are one of the key ways that preliminary hypotheses about the site are formed, and decisions made about the best places to excavate. Sites are excavated by gradually removing layers of matter and drawings are made to record what is uncovered at each stage of this process, either as 'plans' of horizontal areas or 'sections' of vertical stratigraphic units (Roskams 2001). Plans – drawings of horizontal units – depict a single context (see fig. 12). Ideally, each context would represent a separate 'phase' in the life of the site. In reality, however, contexts are not clearly defined and overlap to such

an extent that it is impossible for the archaeologist to reveal a coherent context in its entirety. It falls to the fieldworker to decide where a context begins and ends, often somewhat 'arbitrarily' (Drewett 2011: 123).

The drawings originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The drawings were sourced from Drewett 2011: 58, 123.

Plans are drawn to scale, usually 1:20, and the location of finds and features within the plan are plotted using triangulation from fixed points, or by placing a drawing frame over the area (See figs. 13 & 14). Vertical sections depict a slice through multiple layers of context (see fig. 15). Both plans and sections are drawn to be considered in relation to others made of the same location. Drawings are numbered and indexed in order of depth. Finds are labelled according to the context they were a part of (Roskams 2011). The drawn record then becomes the means through which finds are dated and the process of interpretation is carried through from the field into post-excavation. This continuous process of interpretation can return to drawing, as re-interpretations are made and drawings altered to reflect the changing perception of the site's chronology (Hodder 1991).

The drawing originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The drawing was sourced from Drewett 2011: 129.

Archaeologists make field drawings in order to create a permanent record of a context before it is destroyed. Given the constant movement of objects around the home, my drawings were intended to fulfil a similar purpose – to make a permanent record of an assemblage of objects before this assemblage was dispersed. I therefore decided to replicate the archaeological process of field drawing as closely as possible. Archaeologists usually do not excavate huge areas, they identify the places where they think interesting things are most likely to be uncovered and dig trenches in those spots. In a similar manner, during my first few weeks in each household I attempted to identify small surface areas that I could observe more closely to elucidate household processes. I chose two spaces in each household, picking areas that were involved in different kinds of behaviours and activities. In the Harpers' home this was two spaces in the kitchen – the sitting area and a section of work top, in the Spencers' home the kitchen island and the coffee table in the living room, and in the Wests the mantelpiece in the kitchen and a small table that sat next to the sofa and an armchair in the living room. My choice of areas to record was a matter of guess work, I couldn't know whether the areas I chose would help me to understand the home any better than any other area I might have chosen. In many ways this mirrors the archaeologist's practice of identifying areas to dig trenches in the field – while surveys, technical data and experience might indicate where good places to dig trenches are, there is no way of knowing for sure if a trench has been put in the right place until the trench is dug, and even then there is always the risk that the truly important and enlightening finds might be buried in an area undug.

Once I had chosen an area to record, I set about measuring it and drawing its outline to scale. While archaeologists draw each 'layer' of a trench once, I would be drawing the same area repeatedly. This created both problems and opportunities that archaeologists in the field are unlikely to encounter. Archaeologists draw their plans to scale in order to ensure that these drawings can be used as a reliable indication of the position of the finds and features within the trench, to facilitate the analysis of these finds and features to form a hypothesis as to how these finds and features came to be there. While I hoped the use of scale would give me a more detailed insight into the movement and interaction of objects, I quickly recognised that the process of drawing to scale is very time consuming. The need to triangulate the position of multiple locating points in order to plot the outline of each object was both fiddly and logistically difficult. I decided, in the interests of pragmatism to aim for a 'roughly to scale' approach. I took exact measurements of the trench area, and the position of fixed objects within the area to use as guides. I drew these on drawing film that I treated as the 'master sheet' (see fig. 16).

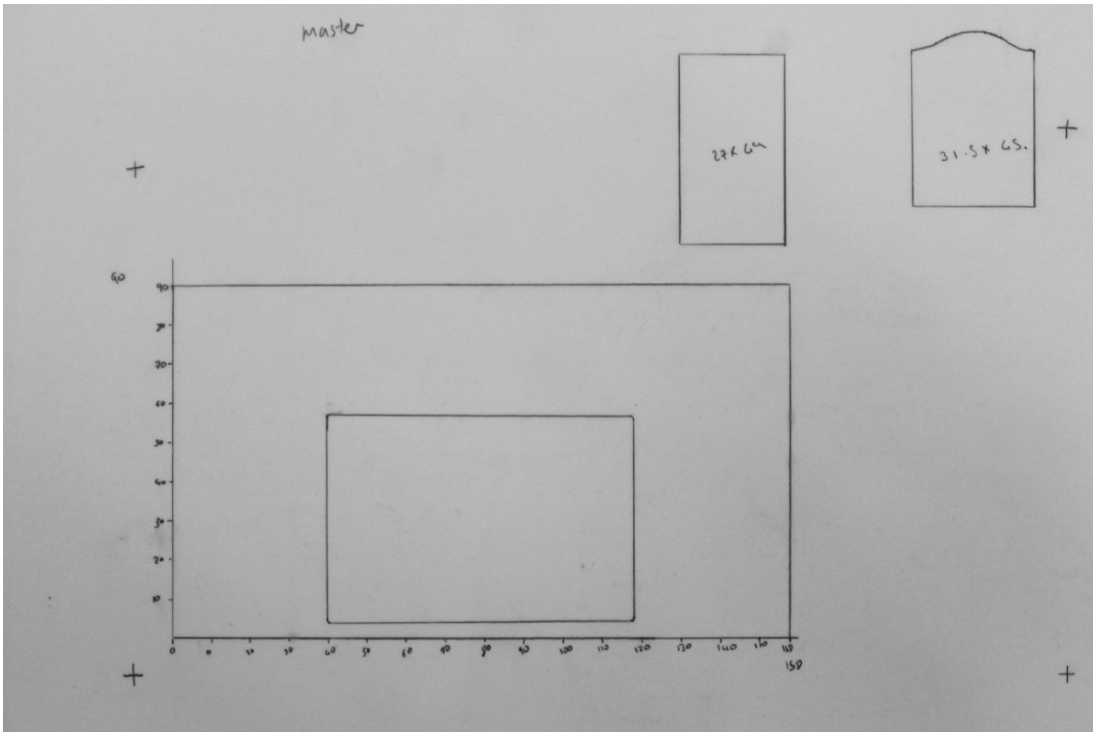

Fig. 16: 'Master sheet' used in drawing of plans of Spencers' kitchen island. Here I have drawn the outline of the island, with the outline of the hob area within. In the right hand corner are the outlines and measurements of a chopping board and trivet, which were often placed somewhere on the island. I included them on the master sheet for ease of regular reproduction. (author's own 2014)

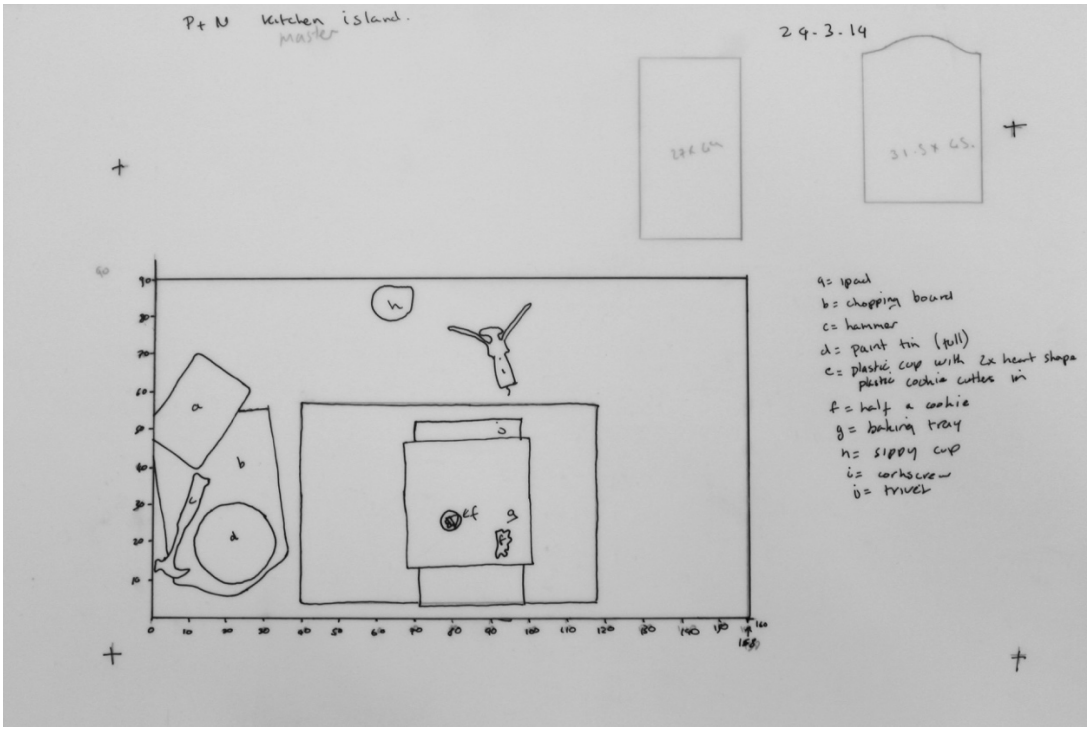

Fig. 17: Plan of Spencers' kitchen island. The plan was drawn on a piece of drawing film laid over the 'master sheet' as a guide. (author's own 2014)

Each time I came to make a plan I would lay the master sheet over a piece of gridded paper, then lay a new sheet of drawing film over the 'master sheet' and draw the objects within the space on this top sheet, using the fixed objects drawn on the master sheet as a guide for relative position (see fig. 17). This made the process much quicker while still making it evident when an object had moved. I tried to draw plans every other day, although in practice the frequency averaged to two or three times a week. While every household was aware of the fact that I regularly drew areas of the home, I tended to draw the plans when the family were out of the house, before they got up in the morning or after they had gone to bed in the evening. The process of plan drawing felt so technical – involving 'technical' equipment like measuring tapes, metre rules, mechanical pencils and a clip board – and so obviously a 'research process' that I felt doing it in the presence of householders would have made them feel ill at ease. I was also concerned that by demonstrating the level of detailed attention I was paying to the objects in the home, I would have made the householders self-conscious about their use and arrangement of their possessions.

In addition to archaeological style 'plans', I also drew sketches. I had envisaged that plans would help me consider the movement and arrangements of objects, but plans record the position and outline of objects only, with little accommodation of further detail. I wanted to incorporate an activity that would help me to consider the materiality and physical properties of objects. Even the most detailed notes are a poor means of recording and communicating an object's form and physical properties. Sketches offered a quick, less structured means of visual description that in theory allowed me to convey the physical

properties of an object, or a certain aspect of these physical properties quickly and easily. My sketches were often very simple. Although my drawing teacher had given me guidance about how to use shading and other techniques to add detail to my drawings I usually opted to keep these to a minimum, only adding elements of detail I wanted to highlight – patches of distress, staining or other visible results of life in the home on the object. Unlike the regular schedule of plan drawing I tried to keep to, sketching was done on an as-and-when basis, if I had a few hours to spare. At the beginning of my fieldwork period I usually sketched single items, things that were used a lot, or were involved in a household process that I found interesting or potentially illuminating. Often I wasn't sure what I was trying to communicate through these sketches, only that I felt that this object was significant or interesting in some way and that I wanted to make a record of it. As time went on, I began to do sketches of collections of items, or 'scenes' that showed how objects occupied the space together (see fig. 18). These sketches tended to be more purposeful, in that I set out with a clear question in mind – usually: 'why are these things together? How did they come to be here?'.

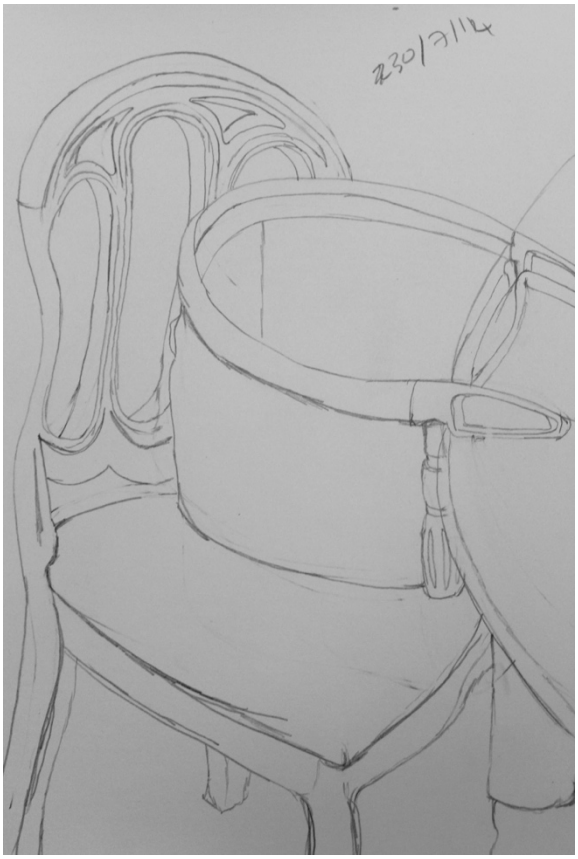

Fig. 18: Sketch of a chair positioned behind a highchair that is fixed to the dining table in the Wests' kitchen. I drew this scene because this demonstrated how children's possessions were incongruously bolted-on (here literally bolted) to the existing assemblages of adult life. (author's own 2014)

In preparing to use these kinds of plans and drawings in my research, I had read and heard archaeologists describe this form of drawing as a process of both recording and interpreting data. That the act of making the plan is a process by which the archaeologist in the field forms an understanding of the trench they are recording and begins to piece together the narrative that will be presented in the site report. As Hodder puts it, these drawings can only be made by 'simultaneously constructing a narrative of the unfolding of events through time' (1991: 55). I had hoped that drawing plans would be a similar process for me – that I would begin to notice patterns of object movement or arrangement that would inform my understanding of the household, its practices and relationships. This was not the case. Drawing a plan may have created a means for me to consider – in detail and with precision – the movement of objects

around the home, and frequently led me to consider how things ended up where they did, but it did not bring any moments of clarity about how and why movements or assemblages came to be. Making plans could show me what was happening, but it couldn't tell me why it was interesting or why it was useful to know about. I was aware that by making these drawings regularly over the course of my time in each household that I was creating a record that I could return to and interrogate after my period of fieldwork was over, but I wasn't sure at the time of drawing them – and I'm still not sure now – what kinds of questions these records might be used to answer.

The sketches I made proved to be more useful than the plans I meticulously drew, their simplicity making them easy to 'read' and to consider. Consulting the sketches felt like a similar process to consulting my notes, a process of looking at the sketches and considering what stood out to me about them and in this sense they were more easily integrated into my process of analysis than the plans. They still felt like an addition to my notes, however, rather than of equal significance. Perhaps it is impossible to escape the fact that, as Marcus argues 'Textualization is at the heart of the ethnographic enterprise' (1986: 264), but when in the field I found it impossible to move out of the mind-set that note taking was my primary means of recording data and that drawing was something to be done if time allowed. Note taking was how I recorded what happened on any given day. It was how I recorded my thoughts and theories. I would jot down half formed thoughts, or debate possible hypothesis with myself. The act of writing notes allowed me to crystallise ideas by forming them into sentences and writing them down, but also to explore caveats and flaws in ideas I had

previously accepted. Most importantly, note taking allowed me to ask questions. To record points of confusion and curiosity. My notes are littered with question marks and 'why???'s. Perhaps I was limited by my lack of experience and relatively rudimentary skills, but drawing felt restrictive in its requirement that one must decide what one is going to say about the object to be depicted before one puts pencil to paper. Note taking allowed me to figure out what I was trying to say as I wrote it down. Or to immediately change my mind and contradict myself. While drawings seemed to require coherence, my notes allowed me to be incoherent, in the assumption that coherence would come later.

In essence, then, I was hoping that drawing would help me think in the field by requiring that I pay attention to things, and the form and properties of things that I might otherwise have overlooked, and by helping me to make sense of what I saw around me. Contrary to Ingold, Taussig and other advocates of drawing practice and graphic anthropology, I felt that the benefits of drawing for my research were limited. While drawing forced me to engage with things that might ordinarily have gone unnoticed, and to consider the minutiae of the movements and behaviours of things on a regular basis, the static drawings felt detached from the hustle and bustle of household life. Their extremely close focus offered little insight into the complexities of day to day life in the home. My plans may have been able to tell me by how many centimetres the Harpers kettle moved between Tuesday and Thursday, or exactly how many of Tilly's toys appeared on the Spencers' kitchen island over the course of a weekend, but knowing these things didn't help me explore why the presence of these toys in the kitchen might have made Jenny irritated, or what this demonstrated about

everyday life in the home. For another project, one focussed on a single household process, a single area of the home or a particular thing, the level of detail provided by plans might prove to be a valuable means of deepening understanding. For my project, however, it did not.

In attempting to engage with material culture outside of the lens of the social – as Olsen advocated – I created data that held little insight into the workings of the household as a whole. In order to consider shifting positions of things observed in my drawings related to my broader questions about the household, I needed to 'slot them back' into the context of my participant observation, something which positioned them as, at best, a sometimes useful supplementary form of data. Had I been an archaeologist, using these drawings as my key method and without the daily goings on of the household around me, I would have been free to interpret household activity from these drawings, and to infer the behaviour of subjects from the material evidence depicted in these drawings. As an anthropologist, however, the life of the household continued all around me, defying, contradicting, or more often pre-empting any insight I might draw from my drawings.

Ethnographic orientations: Gullestad's *Kitchen-table Society*

Very few ethnographies have sought to provide a window into the mundane workings of the household. Even fewer have studied the household as a whole, considering the multiple aspects of household life both within and outside of the

home, and their interplay with one another. Gullestad's seminal study of working class Norwegian women, *Kitchen-table Society* (1984), is one of these few. A study that, as I have mentioned, has influenced mine. It is the fullness of the portrait she makes of her participants'' lives that makes *Kitchen-table Society* so engaging, and so powerful. I had read *Kitchen-table Society* before embarking on my fieldwork, and had been struck by the depth of Gullestad's ethnography. But it was not until I was in the field that I began to see how my work was similar to hers, and how influential it would be in the writing of my own ethnography. As it became clear to me that my ever-presence in the home made it impossible to limit my focus to particular aspects of household life, I turned to the holistic approach she adopts. Her monograph touches on nearly every aspect of her participants' lives – their home life, their paid work, where they socialise and who they socialise with, their roles as both wives and mothers, and the moral discourse that surrounds all of these things – and in doing so gives us a study of working class Norwegian women that allows us to understand what it meant to be a working class woman in Norway at that time. My thesis, like my research, seeks to take in the fullness of my participant households' lives, and use this as a basis to form a picture of what it means to be a middle class household living in London today.

Rereading Gullestad's account of her method after returning from the field, I was struck by our shared difficulty in managing the dual role of 'friend' and 'researcher'. She refers to an occasion in which she accidentally offended one of her respondents by inadvertently criticising her parenting skills.

> At this moment I broke their unwritten rules for how to handle these matters, by suggesting that because of the divorce and the troubles that went with it, she should give the boy a little more attention and care than usual.
>
> This was obviously interpreted as a criticism of her as mother. She became quiet; her head sank down between her shoulders. The others started frantically to talk about something else… (1984: 134)

I found myself in this same position many times, having unwittingly asked a question or made a comment that my respondents took to be a criticism. I found that the risk of these incidents increased over time as the boundary between my roles of researcher and friend became increasingly blurred. The closer my relationship became with my respondents, the more relaxed I became around them and the less considered my contributions to conversations became. At the same time, the further I was taken into the confidence of my respondents, the greater my ability to hurt their feelings. Close relationships are the great benefit and the great risk of becoming part of your respondents' domestic lives. Both Gullestad's method and mine were an exercise in balancing these two things.

If managing the roles of 'friend' and 'researcher' in the field was difficult, I found it equally difficult to manage these two roles when it came to writing up. Like mine, Gullestad's research asked a great deal from her respondents. They opened their most private lives to her and she was trusted with both their friendship and their secrets. *Kitchen-table Society* honours the generosity of her respondents through the coherence of their stories. Their stories are woven through the ethnography so that by the end the reader is familiar with each of their lives, their particularities, the specificities of their lifestyles and their experiences. Our

familiarity with the lives of her respondents makes them sympathetic characters even when we hear of them behaving in a less than sympathetic manner. In writing my own ethnography I wished to do as Gullestad had and ensure that my participant households were presented as coherent wholes, their specificities and individualities as clear to the reader as they had been to me. My decision to begin every chapter with a vignette from the life of each household was driven in part by this desire to ensure to do justice to my respondents' openness with the depth of my description of them.

Chapter 2.

Working, caring, and storing for imagined futures

Claire had a business idea that she sometimes mentioned. Both she and Emma had a liking for sweet foods, especially cakes, biscuits and muffins. When Jack had drifted off to sleep in Claire's arms in the middle of the afternoon and if Emma was out at nursery, Claire would switch on the TV very low so as not to wake the baby and open a packet of biscuits or bar of chocolate. For Emma, the greatest treat was making banana muffins to Claire's special recipe with her mother. Emma, too small to reach the kitchen counter, and too likely to cause a spillage of some form to be allowed to work in the carpeted living area of the kitchen, would sit on the tiled kitchen floor, a large mixing bowl between her knees, and stir the ingredients together as Claire added them. While Emma liked banana muffins, she adored the muffin batter, and her method of spooning the batter into the red silicone cases Claire laid out for her went according to a rhythm of 'one for the muffins, one for me!'. The sweet tooth Claire and Emma had in common was held in check by the difficulty they had in finding appealing treats that aligned with their dietary requirements. Both were unable to eat to the same set of ingredients, ingredients so ubiquitous that their diets were severely restricted. The difficulty of finding foods that didn't include one of the many ingredients they couldn't tolerate had led Claire to start making her own.

Claire's business idea was to develop a line of cakes and sweet foods that were suitable for those with the same dietary requirements she and Emma had. After all,

she mused, it was increasingly common for people to be allergic to certain ingredients, and those who couldn't eat the kind of delicious sugary, creamy and chocolatey snacks that filled supermarket shelves and that were displayed the windows of bakeries were pretty hard done by. Claire, for one, was sick of having to nibble on a block of joyless dark chocolate or a chocolate topped rice cake, which couldn't really be thought of as a treat at all. It made her sad to see Emma watch her friends munch on brightly-coloured cakes with sprinkles on and mini bags of chocolate buttons at birthday parties when Emma couldn't have any. The night before Emma attended a birthday party she and Claire would decorate a little fairy cake of Emma's own, just for her, that she would take along with her to the party and have when all the other children were given their piece of birthday cake.

In order to become a successful baker, however, she would have to become much better at baking. And in order to do that, she thought, she needed better tools. Claire only shared her grand baking business plan with me after she had gone to take her hand-held blender out of the back of the cupboard to blend up the ingredients for a soup she was making – an electric wand with a number of detachable fittings that allowed the motor to power either a blender or a whisk – only to find that its blades had gone rusty, covered in a brown residue that Claire saw as rendering it unfit to be used. Claire did the vast majority of her shopping on the internet, and she was an assiduous bargain hunter, comparing the prices of products across multiple online stores, weighing up their delivery costs and reputation before she made a decision. In the few days that followed the discovery of the rusted blender, her free moments were spent looking at electric blenders and whisks on the internet. She would sit on the sofa, immobilised by the presence of

Jack feeding or sleeping in her arms, and would scroll through pages and pages of appliances. It didn't take long for her to identify the one she wanted – top of the range, free standing, with a powerful motor and multiple attachments that would allow it to blend and whisk and do numerous other things besides.

Of course, these features came at a price, and the machine she wanted had a three figure price tag. With their income already dramatically reduced by Claire's being on maternity leave, this was a bad time to be splashing out on expensive kitchen appliances. And yet, Claire told me, it would save them money on the long run, as they wouldn't have to buy expensive chocolate for Claire, and more importantly it would mean that Claire could make yummy cakes for Emma, with Emma. They already loved baking together and a fancy machine that did the mixing and all the hard work meant that they could make things that were much more complicated. Maybe Claire could even make a few extra cakes and sell them to earn a bit of extra money while she wasn't working. Their bread machine had been expensive but it had been worth it to be able to make lovely soft white bread that Emma could take to nursery with her so that she could have toast at snack time with all the other kids.

Aside from money, there was the issue of space. Their kitchen counter was already full of appliances – their espresso machine, the bread maker, the toaster and the microwave. There wasn't enough space to store anything else on the counter top without taking something away. Claire wondered if maybe the new machine could live in the cupboard but it would be heavy and getting it in and out would be such a hassle that she probably wouldn't ever use it. As it was, their large free-standing

grilling machine lived in the cupboard, and the effort of taking it out and carrying it to the counter top on the other side of the room – it had to be situated near a plug – and then waiting for it to cool down, cleaning it and then carrying it back to the cupboard was irritating enough. Even if she did manage to squeeze it in to a space on the kitchen counter top, Peter wouldn't be happy. He wanted the kitchen to be clutter free, and the proliferation of gadgets and appliances annoyed him greatly.

The more Claire thought about it, the more she didn't think it was going to work. As much as she wanted to be able to make cakes and biscuits for Emma, and as much fun as she knew they would have baking together, it was simply too expensive, and there simply wasn't enough space. About a week after discovering the rusted blades of the old handheld blender she bought an almost exact replacement – another small hand held wand with a blender and whisk attachments. The new blender went back where old one had once been, to the back of the cupboard and, at least for the remaining time I spent with the Harpers, was not seen again. The next time Emma went off to a birthday party she carried a sandwich bag containing the same banana muffin she had every tea time.

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Jenny spent the few hours before the cleaner arrived racing around the house. It was like this every week, and that was part of the point. Before she hired the cleaner, Jenny had said that the aim was two-fold: the cleaner would clean, and the knowledge that the cleaner was coming would force the family to tidy up at least

once a week. The tidying up had to happen before the cleaner arrived because otherwise the cleaner would have to move things out of the way before she could clean, reducing the amount of cleaning she would be able to do in the two hours that she was paid to spend at the Spencers' house. Jenny was certain that, without the cleaner's arrival to spur them into action, they would simply never tidy up, so despite cursing her decision to hire a cleaner – and therefore the need to engage in a frantic high-speed tidy up every week – Jenny maintained that the arrangement was the only way to ensure their house was kept respectable looking.

Jenny and Will had no intention of making their house perfectly neat and rigidly ordered, they wanted their home to feel relaxed and lived in. A little bit of clutter was fine, and Jenny was rather scathing of people who had nothing better to do or to think about than to keep their home spick-and-span. But these relaxed attitudes were tested by the amount of time they spent searching for things that really weren't where they should have been, and which no one could remember where had last been seen. This problem was exacerbated by the open plan design of the ground floor of their house, which meant that things could easily slip from room to room without anyone noticing. A cup would be picked up in the kitchen and then wander into the living room and then be looked for in the kitchen. The glass doors between the kitchen and the garden that folded away entirely into the wall, leaving no barrier between the inside and the outside, allowed the activities of the kitchen to extend into the garden during the summer months and for the remnants of these activities to remain outside, forgotten, long after the household had moved back indoors and the boundary between the kitchen and the garden had been reinstated. One of Tilly's favourite activities was to pack up her little pink backpack with a

collection of things she found and that had caught her interest and to hoist the backpack onto her back, pretending she was departing on a long and exciting journey. She would carry the backpack for a few minutes, before she was called to the table for her dinner or decided she wanted to wear her beloved purple cape, and then the backpack and its contents would be dropped, remaining where it was until either Tilly came looking for her backpack again, or someone rifled through it looking for the thing they needed but couldn't find.

Jenny and Will were constantly looking for things that they needed but couldn't find. Jenny lost her phone for days, eventually finding it buried under some newspapers in the living room. Will spent half an hour looking for Tilly's favourite reading book that she wanted him to read to her at bedtime, and even longer searching for the Calpol to help her sleep when she had the flu. These searches would get increasingly frantic and frustrated as Jenny and Will cursed the wasted time spent running around the house. During these searches their tolerance for the charmingly chaotic nature of their house would evaporate and they would grumble about never being able to find what they needed. The hope was that, in creating the necessity for a weekly tidy up, the balance a good balance of order and chaos would be reached, the house would be tidy enough for things that were lost to be easily found.

Jenny and Will clearly hated the pre-cleaner tidy ups, and would put them off for as long as possible. Will would empty the dish washer and put away the story books Tilly would leave strewn over the kitchen table before heading out to work and leaving Jenny to carry on. Jenny's main goal was to clear surfaces to make way for

the cleaner to wipe them, so she would make piles of papers at the end of the kitchen table, and tuck them under the fruit bowl. All of Tilly's toys would be shoved into the cupboards of her tiny wooden play cupboard. Oversized items were balanced on top of the already precarious mounds of DIY materials and multiple buggies in the cupboard under the stairs. Jenny would attempt to make carrying things between floors more efficient by filling up bags of clothes and toys that belonged upstairs before lugging them all up and distributing them. Piles of Laundry were taken upstairs and dumped on the chair in hers and Will's bedroom, awaiting a time when Jenny would be able to convince Tilly to help her divide the clean clothes between their appropriate chests of drawers.

After all this, Jenny would sink down on a chair in the living room exhausted and out of breath from running up and down the stairs. She could only afford a few minutes' rest, however, as soon the cleaner would arrive and it would be necessary to take the kids out to the park or for a walk to make sure they didn't get under the cleaner's feet. They would return a couple of hours later to an expanse of clean, white marble kitchen counter top devoid of clutter, neatly made beds and sparkling bathroom tiles. It never lasted long.

*****

Anna and Ben were due to drive off to the airport in the morning for their annual holiday. It was the middle of August and almost unbearably hot. Their flight was early in the morning, and even though packing everything they needed for a week away with the baby – their first trip abroad with Lottie – was going to be an

onerous task, they had decided it would be a crime to waste such beautiful weather and had taken Lottie out for lunch with some friends, returning hours and a bottle of wine later. It was so hot that Anna hadn't been able to face packing until after it got dark and the temperature began to drop, so after dinner, Anna had dragged herself upstairs to start throwing things into the suitcase, while Ben went to clear space in the boot to accommodate their luggage. He returned half an hour later looking harried to tell us that the car key wasn't operating the lock so he couldn't get into the car.

The only explanation they could think of was that the battery in the car key had ceased to work and was therefore unable to operate the car's central locking. It had been a while since they'd used the car – it had been such lovely weather that they had simply walked to their favourite stores to pick up groceries, often stopping for a cup of coffee or something to eat on the way. Anna searched the internet to work out what kind of battery the key took and whether they could find one at a late opening supermarket nearby, but Ben vaguely remembered being told by someone who worked at Halfords that electric car keys were a notorious source of car problems, as the batteries were unreliable and when people attempted to change the batteries themselves, the car's immobiliser was automatically triggered and the process of getting it working again in fact became far more costly. In the end they had no choice but to call the AA, and hope that the problem could be sorted out in time for their trip to the airport early in the morning.

The AA dispatcher assured Ben that someone would be with them in an hour or so, but three hours later, at 11pm, by which point both Anna and Ben would usually be

in bed, there was still no sign of them. Another hour went past before finally someone arrived. Ben took the mechanic to the car while Anna and I waited for the verdict, discussing what they would do if the car couldn't be repaired. A taxi would be expensive, as they were flying from an airport that was located outside of London, and they had so much luggage to take that it would be difficult to fit it all into a car much smaller than their large four-wheeled drive and its enormous boot.

Not long later Ben returned with the diagnosis. It wasn't the key's battery that had run down, but the car's. The repairman informed Ben that they had misunderstood how to correctly turn off the car's lights, turning off the car's main headlights but leaving others still running, so that in the time since the car had last been used, the car's battery had been drained of power. The fix was a simple one, the mechanics would 'jump start' the car, it would have to be left running for an hour or so to charge the battery up again. It was around midnight by that point but Ben had no choice but to return to the car and sit in it while the engine ran to charge the battery until the small hours of the morning, ensuring that a few hours later when he, Anna and Lottie climbed into the car it would be able to carry them to the airport and on to their holiday.

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Objects are the means through which householders attempt to enact imagined futures, their potentiality offering future happenings. While Shove's work has demonstrated that consumption is a process whereby householders attempt to materialise imagined futures, I demonstrate how day-to-day practices of life in the home can be seen through the same lens: as the work of enacting imagined

futures. I detail the ways in which householders mobilise, organise and orchestrate things and their potentiality in their attempts to bring about imagined futures, working to ensure that things are in the right place, at the right time, and in working order, to make what they want to happen, happen. I argue that storage is a means through which householders attempt to manage the burden of this work. Often positioned as a means of separating objects that are no longer relevant to household life from those that are – of putting them 'out of the way', perhaps on their path out of the home for good – I show how storage is also a means through which householders sought to keep 'in hand' the potentiality of things and the imagined futures they enable, while putting the work of caring for these objects 'on hold'. Yet, even when apparently safely tucked away in storage, the materiality of things continues to change, and with it their potentiality. Objects emerge from storage bearing the marks of the passage of time – looking different and behaving differently. These unwanted changes serve to underline the inescapable nature of the burden of care that comes from a life with things, that the work of caring is an unavoidable part of the householders' efforts to make household life what they wanted it to be.

In their study of daydreams and fantasies, Jenkins et al. discuss how their respondents, when describing their fantasies of an idealised future, recounted tales of household harmony presented through scenes of everyday 'homeyness' (2011). They introduce us to their respondent, Emily, who imagines life in the new flat she has recently purchased but is yet to take possession of:

> I can see myself walking through the front door, chucking my keys down on our dresser that's going to be by the front door and walking in, probably with food bags and you know sorting out the kitchen and stuff like that, just normal and homely. (2011: 270).

Emily's daydreamed scene, like the imagined futures of householders in my study, is both strikingly mundane and full of things. Objects shape Emily's fantasies of her future, integral to the behaviours she regards as the stuff of 'normal and homely' life. As Shove has shown, householders look to objects to help them, or make them, do what they want to do. The householders in her study sought to induce behaviours by buying kitchen appliances that facilitated or encouraged these behaviours, supporting Shove's assertion that 'the physical architecture or fabric of the kitchen affords or encourages particular ways of doing, and restricts or discourages others' (2007: 23). Objects have potentiality, they put certain courses of action, certain occurrences, on the table, as it were, by virtue of the specificities of their materiality. Keane refers to this as 'futurity'. Things are, he argues, 'oriented toward unrealized futures', they instigate certain behaviours and ways of behaving because some, or multiple, aspects of their materiality or form are conducive to these behaviours (2005: 193). He gives the example of a chair, which through its form suggests that it be sat upon. I could give the example of Lottie's paddling pool that invited splashing around in, of Tilly's reading book that invited being read, or Claire and Peter's camera that invited the photographic documentation of family holidays. Potentiality opens up imagined futures, encourages the consideration of behaviours. Weszkalnys describes how samples of water, earth and rock that indicated the presence of oil buried under the land and water of the African island nation of São Tomé and Príncipe, allowed prospectors and the Santomean government to speculate on

the promise of oil and resultant riches through the negotiation of rights to the oil and the drilling of wells. The potentiality of oil opened up an imagined future that oriented the Santomean government and encouraged the investment of vast amounts of time and money in the search for oil (2015). At the time of the publication of Weszkalnys' paper, the promise of lakes of Santomean oil, and the riches that would accompany them, had not materialised, demonstrating another aspect of potentiality – its unreliability, the propensity of things to promise things that they can't deliver. Potentiality, then, is the reason why objects are the means through which householders attempt to construct imagined futures, their materiality both enables and suggests the imagined futures that orient householders' day to day lives. Potentiality is not an absolute promise, however. It shifts and it disappears, leaving disappointment in its wake.

While the potentialities of things promise to enable imagined futures, the satisfaction of householders wants often relies upon multiple objects being brought together in specific arrangements, both temporal and spatial: the right things at the right time in the right place. As Shove argues with reference to DIY, the tools and materials involved in such practice must come together in specific arrangements in order to create the result – or an approximation of the result – householders want. Individually, tools and DIY paraphernalia are useless, and in order to be useful, 'tools and materials have to be situated in proper relation to each other, to the future of the home and to the competencies and capacities of the DIY-er' (2007: 52). The householders in my study spent a lot of time moving stuff around, taking or shifting things from the place they were to the place they were needed. Even the smallest, most mundane tasks involved moving things to

bring them into configuration with other things in an attempt to make what they wanted to happen, happen. This work is tiring, relentless and fraught with the risk of failure. Jenny, worn out from a morning spent furiously tidying in anticipation of a visit from the cleaner, lamented the fact that tidying was a seemingly endless task, that there was always something else that needed to be taken somewhere else. 'It's just a constant battle against the inertia of things', she sighed, before telling me about the special baskets with staggered bases made to fit neatly on stairs she was planning to buy. She hoped that if the family could be trained to put things that belonged upstairs into a basket at the bottom of the stairs, it would be easy to take groups of things en masse to the places they were ordinarily kept and where they would likely be looked for next. Jenny hadn't gotten around to ordering the basket before I left the Spencers, so that the cleaner's visit was still preceded by stress, and every morning still included an irritated search for Tilly's hairbrush that was always set down wherever it had last been used, which never seemed to be the same place twice.

Objects are often resistant to easy movement, they are too big or heavy to easily grasp, too small to stay firmly grasped within the hand, too smooth to be held, or so rough as to be painful to touch. This resistance required physical effort on the part of householders to negotiate, effort that drained householders' energies. Making a puree of vegetables for Lottie's dinner required that Anna drag the state-of-the-art, but heavy, food processor along the kitchen counter to a place where it could be easily reached and operated. This was an uncomfortable process, as the food processor's rubber feet created friction against the work surface that made it difficult to move along the work top, and its original position

tucked away in the corner of the worktop, behind the chopping board piled high with fruits and vegetables, meant that Anna had to lean at an uncomfortable angle in order to take hold of it. The necessity of going to the effort of dragging the food processor out to use it, and the necessity of shoving it back into the corner of the work top in order to clear space for chopping and other food preparation tasks, were sources of irritation, albeit minor, that made the process of preparing a meal, something that Anna enjoyed doing, feel like hard work. The work that went into the organisation and orchestration of objects was a source of household stress, its prospect enough to bring the disappointment – or rather abandonment – of householders wants. Sometimes they just couldn't be bothered.

The orchestration of objects in the pursuit of imagined futures is complex and delicate. It necessitates an understanding of the workings and capacities of the objects involved and how they work together. Returning to Shove's discussion of DIY, she demonstrates that while competency might be distributed between householders and their tools in this practice, in order for the project to be completed with the result householders have envisioned, householders have to know what they're doing when it comes to DIY, so that they can bring the necessary tools and materials together in the way and order that will bring about the outcome they're looking for. In a similar way, the tasks of daily life in the home require both effort and skill on the part of householders, and even if householders can muster effort, they sometimes lack the requisite skills. Anna and Ben, ignorant of the correct way to turn off their car's lights, inadvertently ensured that their car's battery was drained of power, rendering it unusable.

Even when householders know what to do, their skills can fail them. During lapses of concentration, householders lost track of the order in which things need to be brought together, or forgot about necessary things or materials entirely so that washing machines were set going without the detergent necessary for properly cleaning the clothes within, or the washing was carried outside to the line but the clothes pegs vital for ensuring the clothes were not blown off the line by the wind were forgotten in the utility room. My aim is not to demonstrate the ineptitude of the householders I lived with, or to detail the many ways in which this ineptitude served to derail their attempts to make the dinner they wanted to make, to do laundry so that their clothes might become clean and presentable, or to do any number of other tasks in the pursuit of their imagined futures. Rather, my point is that household life is demanding, and that the pursuit of even the most mundane of householders' wants required not just their careful coordination of multiple objects in the right spatial and temporal location, but also that they had the necessary skills to make these things work as they wanted them to. This work entailed almost endless possibilities for slip-ups and errors, with the potential for disappointment – for things going awry and householders facing the unwanted consequences of these failures – a constant presence.

Householders' skills and efforts were required not only to operate their possessions, but also to keep them working as they wanted them too. As Gregson at al. have argued, the objects that occupy the home are in a 'constant state of becoming' (2009: 248), the physical change that accompanies their aging and deterioration impacting upon their ability to 'actualize practice' – they no longer

help householders do what they want to do (2009: 250). Things are in a constant state of flux, which if left unchecked will take them far from their original state. Laundry and the care for clothing to ensure that it is pleasant to wear and presentable has been discussed as a maintenance practice that occupies a great deal of householders' time and effort (see Gregson on Laundry 2007; Crăciun 2014 on the 'bobbling' of fabric). Amongst the three households I lived with, the Harpers spent by far the greatest amount of time doing laundry. Despite investing in a special heated clothes airer and a dehumidifier to speed the drying of clothes and thereby expedite laundry process, their two laundry baskets were seemingly always full. Claire's strict rules as to the proper way of folding clothes – baby clothes to be folded with the arms and legs into the body, and then folded in half so that the fastenings were on top – combined with Peter's frequent sporting activities and refusal to wear a single piece of clothing more than once before it should be washed again meant that laundry was the most time-consuming of their household tasks. Laundry is but one task of maintenance, however, and there were endless others required to keep the objects householders relied upon working as they wanted them to. Jenny's fancy – albeit temperamental – automatic coffee machine needed to be topped up with water and fitted with a new 'pod' every time it was used if it was to make them the cup of coffee they wanted. Anna and Ben's iPad had to be charged up if it was to play the TV show about dogs that Ben liked to show Lottie while she was eating her dinner to keep her entertained. As Graham and Thrift argue, the maintenance of objects is no minor task, it is unending, ongoing, and essential to everyday life (2007).

Yet, while some things receive constant attention and ongoing maintenance to ensure their continued serviceability, many others receive almost none. The outer reaches of the household – attics, cellars, the backs of cupboards, bottom drawers and spaces behind sofas, amongst many other areas – are populated by those items that are no longer, or have never been, in regular use by the household. Cwerner and Metcalfe describes these 'back stage' areas as '…places of surprises and unexpected memories, and where 'ghosts' of our past lives, indeed of past times more generally, dwell and return to haunt us' (2003: 235). From this perspective, the objects that fill the various tucked-away storage areas of my respondents' houses were the residue of the past, lacking in relevance for the present but imbued with memories of household days gone by. And indeed my respondents' attics were full of outgrown clothes, toys that had fallen out of favour, materials for abandoned craft projects and vast quantities of baby paraphernalia. As their babies and toddlers continued to grow, and to outgrow their things, the three households in my study were constantly identifying stuff that was no longer useful to be deposited in cupboards and drawers in order to make way for that required by this next developmental stage. As Gregson has pointed out, baby clothes are the prime example of this kind of swiftly outgrown item. Her respondents maintained an ongoing collection of clothes that had become too small, periodically removing them to storage or to be passed on to other homes (2007). Similarly, the stairs to Claire and Peter's attic usually had a small pile of baby grows and girl's leggings and tops positioned on one of the low stairs, where Claire had put them ready to be carried up to the attic on her next trip. For Gregson, 'back stage' areas of storage were steps along the way toward an object's eventual ridding. Children's toys, which she argues are less transient

than children's clothes, are kept 'for love in back-zone storage spaces' (2007: 125), until they can be eventually be removed from the home. Toys – bought by parents as a means through which to express their love – take time to relinquish, their period in storage allowing for other things to take over this role and to legitimise their eventual divestment. Here items kept in storage, especially those related to previous phases of a child's growth, are significant for their history in the household, the memories they evoke, and their place in household relationships.

And yet, the things householders had stored in their 'back-zone spaces', haunted them as much with the futures they offered as for their past involvements. While removing items from the busiest areas of the home was a reflection of their declining or currently non-existent use for daily life, it was also a means of 'holding-over' the potentiality of these objects, and for deferring the behaviours and processes in which they were implicated. When Emma received a shiny new red tricycle for her birthday that Peter had carried back for her – flat packed – in his suitcase on his return from a business trip to New York, the small wooden tricycle she had been given a year earlier suddenly became surplus to requirements (see fig. 19). The small wooden tricycle was taken upstairs to the attic and was tucked away in a cupboard, alongside a number of other toys that Emma no longer played with (see fig. 20). The tricycle was no longer involved in the household's daily life, relegated to a 'back-zone' where it was seldom seen, except when someone opened the cupboard to deposit another item.



Fig. 19 Emma's shiny, new red tricycle, given to her as a replacement for the old wooden one she had outgrown (author's own photograph 2014)

The tricycle was not confined to the household's memories, however, it also occupied a place in its imagined future. Claire looked forward to the time when Jack would be tall enough, and steady enough on his legs, to ride around on the wooden tricycle. She mentioned how nice it would be when both Jack and Emma could ride around together on their tricycles, Emma on her shiny red one and Jack on his small wooden one. The temporality of the small wooden tricycle calls to mind the findings of a very different ethnography to mine. Pine discusses the relationship between migration and hope through the lives of economic migrants from rural Poland. Here, migrants occupy a kind of dual temporality, living lives of loneliness, hard work and often poor material conditions in the present in their host country, while in their home community existing in a triumphant imagined future in the minds of their family members who look forward to their

return and to the plans that will be facilitated by the funds they bring home with them (2014). The small wooden tricycle, tucked away in the attic, accumulating dust in the present, exists in the futures Claire imagines for her children, its potentiality offering to allow Jack to have fun riding around the garden with his sister as she wants him to.



Fig. 20: Emma's old wooden tricycle in the storage cupboard in the Harpers' attic (author's own photograph 2014)

For my respondents, putting items in storage was a means of keeping their potentiality 'in hand', removing these items from the household's present and depositing them in the future. Storage areas become not only repositories of past

memories, but of imagined futures – with many objects occupying both of these temporal positions. Munn points to something similar, although in a very different context. She describes how the islanders of Gawa might regard sections of gardening land not currently in use as 'asleep', to be later awakened by planting. Here the future potentiality of the land, embodied in the heaviness of its soil and stones, is kept dormant, it's promise for future harvests kept on-hold (1986). Many of the items in the storage areas of my householder's homes were similarly 'on hold'. Propped up against a filing cabinet in Claire and Peter's loft was a white canvas featuring a detailed line drawing of the small hill top village from which Peter's ancestors hailed. The drawing had been meticulously made, and the care and effort that had gone into it was clear, but it was unfinished, with half of the canvas largely blank, the drawn lines trailing off in the middle of in the middle of a church's spire. Leaning against the filing cabinet was the easel that canvas was meant to rest upon, its legs folded for storage. Peter had begun the drawing when he had broken his leg in a sporting accident and sheer boredom had led him to consider ways of entertaining himself from his current sedentary position. He had decided that, being confined to the house, it would be a good opportunity for him to develop his artistic skills. The subject had been chosen because he wanted to be able to give the fruits of his labours to his mother as a gift. Over the weeks of his recuperation he had sat before his easel, his leg in a cast, occupied by his drawing. But the drawing took longer to make than his leg took to heal, and when he was able to walk and run again the attractions of sport and the outdoors were too great to be foregone. The canvas was stashed away in the loft, out of the way of the children, but above the desk Peter sat at to work on the days he worked from home. The drawing was, 'on hold', he said, until he had

time to finish it off, so the canvas and easel were similarly 'on hold', with an imagined future in which their potentiality would contribute to the completion of the drawing he wanted to draw, and to his mother's joy at receiving it.

Householders' attempts to put the potentiality of things 'on hold' were threatened by the changes these things underwent during their time of storage. While these things might have occupied an imagined future in the lives of my respondents, they were also occupying the present, a 'real time' life during which their materiality and their potentiality were being shaped by their interaction with the things, materials and substances that surrounded them. As Attfield states, '[t]he passage of time is made visible in the material world as a process of aging' (2000: 214). Decay wreaks havoc and reveals the mutability of things, as illustrated by ruined buildings and the disintegration of the fabric of buildings and the things that remain within them. Edensor argues that '…processes of decay and the obscure agencies of intrusive humans and non-humans transform the familiar material world, changing the form and texture of objects, eroding their assigned functions and meanings, and blurring the boundaries between things' (2005, 318). Edensor is referring to buildings open to the elements, without the protections afforded to the things my respondents had tucked away in their cupboards and drawers. And yet even in the most carefully tended homes objects are subject to the ravages of various forces, materials, substances. These effects might be relatively slight, a layer of dust or a musty smell. When Archie outgrew his new-born baby grows and Jenny unpacked the boxes of second hand baby clothes for boys she had been given by various friends and relations of hers who had little boys of their own, she found that many of them

were dotted with dried food and other suspicious stains, and even those that were clean "smelt of attic", their fibres giving off a musty scent that Jenny felt would be unpleasant for Archie to wear. While she had looked forward to going through the box, picking out adorable tiny outfits for Archie to wear, she was instead greeted by a pile of laundry, and spent days sifting thought the clothes and washing them so that they would be in a state ready for Archie to wear. Stains and smears that could have been easily removed when fresh were now encrusted and embedded, meaning that even after the work of sorting the clothes, treating them with stain remover and then washing them on a lengthy washing cycle, many of the marks remained. Things emerge from storage with more dramatic alterations, however. Alterations that render them useless, or at least of less use. When Claire set out to make cake pops – small spherical cakes on sticks – for Emma's birthday party she rootled around in the back of one of the kitchen cupboards and pulled out her electric cake pop maker, a small appliance that resembled a toasted sandwich maker but which had nine semi-circular indents in the plates which, when closed, allowed for cake batter to be cooked into small spheres. After wiping the plates down to remove dust, and filling the indents with batter, she found that the clasp that held the two heated plates together while cooking had become rusted and difficult to operate, meaning that instead of being able to fill the pan with batter, close the lid and set the machine to cook as she had been used to doing, the lid had to be held down for the duration of the cooking process. The cake pop maker's transformation into its now rusted form meant that the feel-good process of making pretty and fun-to-eat cakes that Claire had envisaged became a stressful and labour intensive chore that left her with burnt fingers, frazzled nerves and slightly burnt

cake pops. While the back-stage areas my respondents used for storage were out of the way of the hustle and bustle of family life, these areas were also most likely to play host to pests. As Power points out, those areas of the home that are deemed uninhabitable by humans are those most likely to be inhabited by insects and other pests (2007). Tucked away in a basket in the space underneath a chest of drawers, the clothes Claire was planning to repair in readiness for her return to work after her period of maternity leave were infested by moths that ate through their fibres. Undisturbed, these moths had free reign to work at Claire's trousers, so that when they were taken out of storage, these trousers that Claire had spent hundreds of pounds on because they were so smart and well-tailored, were now ridden with holes that rendered them entirely unwearable.

Storage was a means for householders to manage the work of imagined futures, to put the necessity to maintain things 'on hold' along with their potentiality. And yet, objects do not emerge from long periods of storage unaltered, and while householders may have imagined their stored things re-appearing to enable future behaviours that mirrored past ones, or the continuation of behaviours that had once run smoothly, these imaginings often ended in disappointment. Without the kind of ongoing maintenance discussed above, required to keep objects looking or working as householders want them to, they took on different forms and presented different potentialities, usually less suited to helping householders do what they wanted. Schwenkel's discussion of the water supply infrastructure of Vinh City, Vietnam, details how a network of pipes that had once promised to enable easy and efficient running water to all citizens and to herald a new age of both progress and equality had deteriorated, as a lack of

maintenance had allowed the pipes to become cracked and leaky, or blocked with detritus. Without this maintenance, the pipes could not enable the modern future they had promised, in which households conducted domestic practices of washing and cooking in the private sphere (2015). In Larsen and Christensen's study of bicycles and their treatment in Copenhagen, they argue that many of the unusable bicycles that litter the streets of Copenhagen become unusable because of a lack of ability and willingness on the part of bicycle owners to maintain and repair their bicycles. The bicycles are 'endangered' by their owners' lack of willingness to put effort into their maintenance (2015: 923). Larsen and Christensen note the striking lack of respect paid these past-their-best bicycles on the street, their baskets used as rubbish bins by passing pedestrians: 'Few seem to care much about their own or others' bikes' (2015: 927).

When objects emerged from storage altered – dusty or rusty or in other ways deteriorated – householders were reminded that objects demand care. Mol et al. have noted that 'care is central to daily life' (2010: 7), while Puig de la Bellacasa argues that the successfulness of life's project – its 'liveability' – is dependent upon the 'caring accomplished within it' (2012: 198). If we want something to work – our bodies, our cars, our electric mixers – we have to care for them, to engage in what Mol et al. refer to as 'persistent tinkering' (2010: 14). Denis and Pontille have made this point in their study of maintenance workers care of signage in the Parisian subway system. Their participants are constantly confronted by the 'vulnerability' of the signs under their care, and by the 'plurality of their fragility', as their colours fade, and their screws rust, and they are attacked by mould that belies the dampness of the atmosphere (2015: 348).

The work of the maintenance crew is aimed at stabilising the materiality of the signs, a 'bodily commitment' to keeping the things in their care in working order (2015: 356). The householders in my study spent time and effort caring for their possessions. Peter would take great pains over making coffee at the weekends, eschewing his usual instant powdered coffee and instead firing up his top of the range espresso machine, complete with steaming wand for frothing milk. After the coffee was made he would wash every removable component of the machine separately and thoroughly, drying them and replacing them, so that the machine was always immaculate and in perfect working order. Gregson et al. have demonstrated how householders might feel a 'duty of care' toward their things, detailing the efforts their participant went to in restoring their family's dining table. The dining table, occupying a central role in the household's day to day life, seems to have earned these efforts – '[w]hilst they enable the feeding of a family, as objects too they are seen to require feeding' (2009: 258).

Caring isn't easy, however. In her characterisation of care, Tronto is clear that care is a burden (1993). Puig de la Bellacasa warns against a rose-tinted view of what it means to care. The practice of caring is a necessity, but it is 'not necessarily rewarding and comforting' (2012: 199). Some things seem to resist care. Denis and Pontille's maintenance workers complained about the fact that the design and construction of the signage board panels made them difficult to remove for repair, ensuring they demanded a great deal of time and physical exertion in their routine maintenance (2015). Some things are difficult to know how best to care for. Graham and Thrift have pointed out that many commodities are impossible for the lay person to repair because it isn't clear how they work

or how to make them work again (2007). Ben and Anna's car broke down, not because of a lack of care but because of a lack of knowing how to care. Even if they had been able to diagnose the problem, they would still have needed a professional with the right tools and equipment to help them with the necessary maintenance to get the car back in working order. Tucking things away in storage was a way that my respondents attempted to manage the burden of care. To keep things 'safe', while also removing the necessity for bodily commitments of care. In Burrell's study of householders attempting to deal with external threats to the home – crime, noise, the vision of passers-by – she describes how Mary, her participant, moves her most prized possessions into off-site storage in order to lessen her worry that they might one day be stolen (2014: 161). Putting things away in cupboards and drawers was a means through which the households in my study attempted to put both 'potentiality' and the care necessary to maintain it, 'on hold'. But householders' attempts to take things for granted, to trust that an object would emerge from storage with their physical form and their potentiality unaltered, invariably resulted in disappointment – things not going the way householders wanted them to, with the need to clean or mend things before they would 'work', or to abandon plans all together.

Things, then, were both householders' greatest allies and greatest enemies in the effort to enact imagined futures. The work of attending to objects, caring for objects – making sure they were where they needed to be, keeping them clean and in working order, putting them away and unpacking them again – was the means through which householders worked to get what they wanted. While the potentiality of objects shaped imagined futures and enabled householders to live

as they wanted and to do what they wanted, the ever-changing nature of their materiality threatened to create gaps between what objects were or what things did, and what householders wanted them to be or to do. Seeking to put objects 'on hold', to count on their potentiality without attending to their materiality, was a risky strategy that could backfire. The next chapter looks at the disappointments that follow from when things don't go the way householders want them to, and how objects are so often at the centre of the tensions and frustrations that can erupt, seemingly out of nowhere, to derail household life.

Chapter 3.

Moments of tension and the frustrations of everyday life

Peter's mother was entitled to a week's leave after the birth of a grandchild to spend time with the new baby and had therefore come to stay with Claire and Peter for a few days. The timing of this visit had caused some consternation on Claire's part as she felt that Peter's parents had thought only of their own convenience, and not what was convenient for her and the kids. While Claire knew that Peter enjoyed having his parents around, Claire found it a strain to entertain her mother-in-law during the day while Peter was at work. Claire felt that her parents-in-law did not fully appreciate how difficult it was for her to care for two children on her own, and were not flexible or accommodating enough to ensure that their visits helped her. Instead, their presence created more work as Claire had to ensure that they were properly cared for and comfortable. Even when trying to be helpful, their lack of familiarity with the household and its rules meant that they often caused more problems than they solved.

One morning, a few days in to her week-long visit, Peter's mother was making herself some toast for breakfast, and after a few moments noticed that the toaster had begun to produce quite a considerable amount of smoke. She tried to open the kitchen window, but, not knowing where the key to unlock it was kept, was unable to. Meanwhile, smoke continued to drift through the kitchen door towards the smoke detector in the hall, and soon the alarm began to wail. Claire and Peter's house had an especially comprehensive security system. After a spate of burglaries

in the surrounding area, Claire had demanded that they have their normal wooden door replaced with special plastic door that, as well as being more difficult to break down, could not easily be taken off its hinges, thus making it more difficult for thieves to gain entry. Along with this extra-secure door, they also had a burglar alarm installed that was connected to a 24-hour control centre that would alert the police should the alarm be activated. This alarm incorporated the fire alarm, so that should the fire alarm be set off, the control centre would summon the fire brigade automatically.

Claire, carrying the baby, ran upstairs to find her mobile, thinking that the alarm control centre would call her in order to find out if this was a false alarm or if they should alert the fire brigade. Meanwhile, the landline phone began to ring and I picked it up. The lady in the control centre told me how to disable the alarm and after a few minutes the wailing stopped. Both Jack and Emma were distressed by the noise, especially Jack, who was crying loudly. Peter's mother-in-law was clearly embarrassed and felt guilty for having caused this havoc. Claire was visibly irritated and made a point of telling her mother-in-law how lucky it was that we had managed to speak to the control centre before they had alerted the fire brigade as, had they been called to a false alarm, Claire would have had to pay a large fine. The fire alarm was yet another example of Peter's parents making life more – not less – difficult for Claire and the kids. By not having the 'common sense' to close the kitchen door to prevent the smoke reaching the smoke detector, Peter's mother had underlined her role as a stranger in the house and demonstrated, in Claire's eyes, her lack of care for the family by failing to observe and consider how the household lived.

Later that day, after Emma had requested a bagel for her lunch, Claire set about cleaning the inside of the toaster in an attempt to stop it smoking. She shook it over the sink and a shower of black flakes and rocks flew out. Claire complained that the toaster should never have become so full of crumbs as the cleaner should have emptied it out regularly. The blame for the stress of the morning's fire alarm was thereby shifted from Peter's mother-in-law to the absent cleaner and her negligence in attending to the needs of the kitchen appliances.



Fig. 21: The Harpers' toaster, which much to Claire's consternation, occasionally smoked (author's own photograph 2014)

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Jenny tried to make sure that she took the kids out at least once a day. If she didn't, they would all go slightly stir crazy. Being only two years old, an age at which she was considered vulnerable and in need of constant attention, Tilly took up much of Jenny's energies despite the fact that she also needed to tend to Archie who, when not sleeping, was carried everywhere in Jenny's arms. Tending to those two was exhausting. Aside from anything, the necessity Jenny felt to pay attention to them, to maintain concentration at all times, was draining. If she zoned out for a minute or two and let her mind wander, or was distracted by talking to me or by a notification on her mobile phone, she would invariably have her attention dragged back to the children by Archie crying because he wanted feeding, or Tilly having fallen over or bumped into something. Then Jenny would scramble to placate or distract them with food or toys, anything to put them back in a good mood if she could. Taking the kids out to a soft play session at Peckham community centre or to the local park was a way of breaking up the day, and saved Jenny from having to think of endless activities to keep Tilly engaged and stimulated – something she considered to be very important.

Jenny preferred to walk to these activities. Although the walk wasn't an especially long one – around 20 minutes – a cargo of two small children made it an arduous journey. Tilly, happy to run around in the house or the park, would get tired over long distances and so could not walk alongside Jenny. Will and Jenny had decided against investing in a double-buggy with space for two children, as they thought they looked unwieldy and difficult to manoeuvre, and a third buggy – to add to the two they already owned – would have taken up more precious storage space in the

house. Their plan was to buy a 'buggy board' for Tilly – a small, wheeled platform designed to be affixed to the back of a buggy for toddlers to stand on. Although the buggy board would eliminate the need for Tilly to walk, it still required that she stand up for the entire journey, which she found difficult to do. They had decided to delay the purchase for a few more months to allow Tilly to grow into a stronger walker, and until the buggy board became a viable option for these journeys, taking both of the children out for a walk meant Jenny or Will having to place one child in the buggy and carrying the other in a harness.

Ordinarily, Tilly would go in the buggy and Jenny would place Archie in the harness and wear him against her chest so that he faced her. Archie was a large baby, however, and wearing him strapped to her front could get uncomfortable over the course of a long walk. One morning, when setting off for playgroup, Jenny decided to put Archie in the buggy, and put Tilly in the harness on her back. This would allow Archie to sleep, and be a slightly more comfortable arrangement for Jenny. The morning had started well and Tilly was in unusually high spirits. As often happened, though, breakfast had overrun – it had taken a while to find an outfit that Tilly would consent to wear – and Archie had begun crying so that Jenny felt it necessary to feed him, with the result that Jenny and the kids were running late for playgroup. After getting Archie settled in the buggy, Jenny set about manoeuvring Tilly into the harness on her back so that they could hurry down to Peckham. In order to be put into the harness, Tilly had to put her legs on either side of the harness and then wrap her arms around Jenny's neck so that Jenny could clip the harness into place around her. While a simple set of instructions for an adult, Tilly was not yet at an age where she could easily translate instruction into bodily

movement. I could hear, from where I was standing in the utility room, Jenny getting increasingly irritated with Tilly's inability to follow the simple instruction, 'Wrap your arms around Mummy's neck!'. Soon Tilly began to cry, admonishing Jenny for shouting at her. Archie soon joined in, having been left trussed up in his snowsuit in his buggy for ten minutes, becoming increasingly hot and uncomfortable. Jenny, in her exasperation, shouted: 'Tilly, just put your arms around Mummy's neck…what part of that don't you understand?!' in response to which Tilly only cried more loudly.

Jenny apologised to Tilly, telling her that she was sorry, that Mummy didn't mean to shout, and that Mummy was just worried that they were going to be late for playgroup. Eventually she managed to persuade Tilly to wind her arms around her neck so that Jenny could lift her up and clip the harness around her. Jenny was worried that Tilly was precariously positioned even though the harness was fastened, and so she came to find me so that I could tug the harness around Tilly to make sure she was securely positioned. Then, with Archie still crying loudly in the buggy, she and the two children set off on the long walk to playgroup, now running at least an hour late.

When they returned a few hours later, Jenny declared that the kids were exhausted, that she was exhausted too for that matter because Archie had been awake all night that night and Jenny had been awake too, trying to get him to go back to sleep again. Eventually he had drifted off, but only a few hours before – according to the strict timetable of naps and meals Jenny and Will tried to keep the children to in an effort to regulate their sleep patterns – it was time to wake Tilly up, so

Jenny had only been able to doze on the single bed they kept in Archie's room for those nights when Archie refused to sleep and Jenny wasn't able to leave the room to return to her own bed. While the kids napped, Jenny had a cup of coffee and a scoured the internet for more inspiration for their ongoing process of decorating their newly remodelled ground floor.

When Tilly woke up, Jenny asked her what she wanted to do, that they could do anything she wanted. Tilly decided that she wanted to paint, and as it was a nice day Jenny pushed the large glass doors that separated the kitchen and the garden to one side, and moved Tilly's plastic easel outside where she could paint in the sunshine. When Archie awoke Jenny took him outside too and the three of them sat in the garden together, with Jenny commissioning Tilly with subjects to paint, and Tilly periodically getting bored with her painting and running off into the garden to chase Rob the cat. When Will returned home that evening Jenny told him that they had missed him very much, and that she was going to order a buggy board over the internet that evening.

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You could tell whose turn it was to feed Lottie her breakfast before you even opened the kitchen door. While Ben's mornings were quiet – only the occasional baby giggle or whine of irritation at a spoon of porridge that was moving too slowly from the bowl could be heard – mornings under Anna's supervision were a racket. Anna would sing and make loud exclamations of mock surprise or issue comically absurd admonishments, much to Lottie's delight. In contrast to the rest of the household, for whom seven o'clock was considered very early in the morning, by the time breakfast rolled around Lottie was more than ready to start her day,

having been awake for at least an hour. Ben dealt with this surfeit of energy with distraction, giving Lottie toy cups to stack or engrossing her in episodes of documentaries about doggies, Lottie's favourite animal. Anna preferred to try to match it, using Lottie's infectious glee to kick-start her day with enthusiasm and propel her on to a morning of activity.

Even without the noise, though, the state of the kitchen would have left you in no doubt as to who had been in charge of the baby porridge that morning. Ben preferred to be in total control of the process, holding both the bowl and the spoon, measuring a small mouthful of porridge before bringing the spoon to Lottie's mouth, and then using the spoon to wipe of any excess. Of course there was the occasional drip on to Lottie's tummy, but these were swiftly wiped away with a damp cloth or baby muslin after the porridge was finished. Handing Lottie a toy, Ben would move to the sink to wash her small bowl and spoon before lifting her out of her high chair and carrying her into the living room to continue the morning. Anna, on the other hand, liked Lottie to get involved. Leaving the bowl on the tray of the highchair allowed Lottie to alternate spoons of porridge fed to her by Anna with handfuls of porridge taken directly from the bowl. The sloppy consistency of the porridge and Lottie's loose grip meant that the majority of the porridge was lost en route to her mouth, dripping down her front, over the tray of the highchair or on to the surrounding floor. This loss of porridge meant that even when the bowl was empty Lottie was not full, and Anna would need to give her a piece of bread or buttery toast, her favourite food, to fill her up. Lottie would be carried from the kitchen – covered in porridge, clutching a chunk of bread – leaving a porridge-strewn highchair and a trail of crumbs in her wake. Lottie's refusal to be left sitting

in the highchair to wait for Anna to clear the porridge dishes and wipe the surrounding area meant that the mess would be left until Lottie's nap time a few hours later, or until Ben came downstairs and cleaned it up.

The morning Anna decided Lottie could operate her own spoon, the breakfast mess reached a whole new level. The novelty of the bright pink spoon proved too much for Lottie to restrict its movement to the path from the bowl to her mouth. Instead she had delighted in waving it around, using it to point at things with, and occasionally letting it slip out of her hand and drop to the floor. She had delighted in doing these things whether the spoon was covered in porridge or not, and as a result there was porridge everywhere – on the floor, on the dining table, the highchair, the fridge, on Anna and of course, all over Lottie. The shrieks of joy that had accompanied this porridge flinging attested to Lottie's enjoyment, and Anna's accompanying laughter attested to her joy at Lottie's enjoyment.

When he came downstairs, however, Ben was less overjoyed at this new development. His exasperation was evident and he asked Anna how on earth they had managed to make this level of mess. When Anna responded that she decided to let Lottie use a spoon, he was less than impressed, seeing the porridge that covered almost every surface in the vicinity of the highchair as proof of the fact that she clearly was not ready to hold a spoon herself. The offending spoon lay on the floor by the high chair, covered in a small pile of grey slime and Ben picked it up to fling it in the sink, clearly not happy about the new shape of breakfast time. Over time, Lottie's spoon technique improved, and breakfast with Anna became progressively less and less messy, until nearly all of the porridge ended up in Lottie's mouth, or at

least somewhere on her person. The noise levels remained high however, so it was still never a surprise who you would find sitting with Lottie while she spooned her own porridge.

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As these three vignettes demonstrate, households do not exist in a state of perpetual harmony and joy. The stresses and strains of daily life take their toll, and inevitably even the happiest of homes experience times of discord and dissonance. These incidents are moments of tension, when frustrations, resentments and disappointments that usually lie dormant in household life rise to the surface to become only too evident. While in some cases such moments might be the result of a fundamental rupture or an irreconcilable difference that can prove fatal to the relationships that make up the household, in the three households I lived with these moments were common but short-lived, seemingly easily forgotten or put aside as householders are carried forward by the rhythms of daily life.

These moments, however common they might be, and however accustomed a household might become to them, are often distressing for those involved. In these moments the home, a space where householders consider themselves at their most secure, safe and comfortable, becomes 'unhomely'; a place of discomfort and upset. Interactions are strained, emotions are heightened, and tempers are frayed. Tense, and shot through with frustration, these were the times when householders' imagined futures seemed at their most precarious, their efforts to make household life what they wanted it to be at their most futile. The home is a space filled with objects householders both care for and rely upon.

These possessions facilitate and contribute to household practice while demanding time and effort from householders to keep them in place and in working order. The familiarity of these things is part of what makes the home 'homey' (McCracken 1989), but in moments of tension, these objects can seem to 'turn' on householders, making simple tasks difficult, exacerbating problems, and ensuring that things don't go the way householders want them to. Even when objects work as they are meant to, they are able to make plain the fact that householders themselves are often working at cross purposes, their wants conflicting. In these moments fellow householders cease to be allies and instead become if not enemies then opponents, working against each other rather than together.

Objects play a starring role in each of the tension-filled incidents recounted in the opening of this chapter, putting themselves centre stage and dragging the underlying tensions of the household into the spotlight. Objects are involved in every process of household life, and with this involvement comes the ever present possibility that they might hinder rather than help householders do what they want to. In so doing objects act as catalysts, transforming moments of relative harmony into moments of disharmony. Jenny might have been anxious about being late for playgroup, feeling trapped in her temporary homemaker role and worried about what would happen when it came time for her to return to work, but it was the baby harness, and the near impossibility of strapping a toddler into the harness without a second pair of hands to help, that had both Jenny and Tilly in such a state of misery. Claire's frustration with her parents-in-law's seeming refusal to learn the ways of the household so that they could be

more helpful to her in caring for the children was longstanding, but it was the toaster's dramatic smoking and the fire alarm's oversensitivity that put the household into a state of noisy chaos. Ben had always been bemused by Anna's inability to clean up after Lottie's meal times, having little difficulty doing so himself, but it was the spoon's ability to send the spread of porridge across the kitchen that turned his bemusement into irritation.

Moments of tension can feel all-pervasive, permeating the atmosphere – defined by Bille, Bjerregaard and Sørensen as '…the cultural, economic, or even political premises that lay the ground for the sensuous and emotional feel of a place' (2015: 31). These tension filled atmospheres become almost tangible, the shift from relative harmony to relative disharmony felt by householders as though a change in temperature – the rising heat of the moment. In her discussion of the resistance of householders in the Chinese city of Fuzhou to the demolition of their homes, Chu discusses the 'ruination of the atmosphere' that results from the state's acts of destruction (2014: 360). As the neighbourhood emptied of residents and the material infrastructure degraded, the 'heat and noise' of human inhabitancy dissipated, leaving the neighbourhood feeling 'cold, dank and sinister' (2014: 361). Chu juxtaposes this chilly atmosphere with that of the courtroom in which householders attempted to challenge the legality of these demolitions. The courtroom is a 'hothouse of tension', where tempers are frayed, strong words are exchanged and the air is full of righteous anger (2014: 362). Tension cannot be seen but it can be felt, its presence in the atmosphere altering household dynamics to reduce comfort and raise voices.

In the heat of the moment objects seem to reveal themselves as something different – to shift from friend to foe. Things set aside to be returned to later suddenly become oppressive 'clutter', items that householders are usually happy to step over or around are suddenly frustratingly 'in the way', appliances that needed some kind of 'knack' or a little patience to get them to work seem to be wilfully making life difficult, becoming the final straw that tips irritation into outright anger. Objects move fluidly between these opposite identities, from aid to obstacle, treasured to hated. Claire's toaster had served her well, allowing her to make Emma the bagels with butter and jam that she loved as a snack or to quickly warm some mini potato waffles when Emma claimed she was hungry during the night, without having to waste time heating the grill and finding a baking sheet. When the toaster began to smoke, however, it became a source of misery and stress. Pieces of technology like Claire's toaster are Latourian 'black boxes', complex machines whose workings users do not understand. Black boxes might claim 'universality', to work anywhere and everywhere but in reality they require conducive conditions reminiscent of the laboratory in which they were created (Latour 1987). Such conditions were often far removed from those of household life. It is in the failure of these black boxes – the point at which they no longer do the thing they are meant to do – that they shift from 'stable' to 'agitated'. They are revealed to be not single object entities but an assemblage of multiple parts, each composed of further parts, each the result of complex and mysterious processes. While for the most part these black boxes may remain silent, doing the bidding of subjects, it is in these crises that they demonstrate their mediation of action (1999: 184). In issuing smoke Claire's toaster – black

box and former silent ally – moved from 'stable' to 'agitated', and in doing so brought agitation to the household.

Yet, as I discussed in the previous chapter, the ever changing materiality of things requires ongoing work on the part of householders to contain and stabilise them. The smoking of Claire's toaster could likely have been prevented had Claire refrained from using it to toast potato waffles whose oily surface would have transferred to the toaster's elements, or if the crumbs that had collected at the bottom of the toaster over successive mornings of toast for breakfast had been emptied regularly. Care could have prevented the toaster's smoky outburst and kept it working as Claire wanted and expected it to. And yet, as also argued in the previous chapter, care is a burden. Even where householders were able to care for their things, the necessity to do so was a cause of frustration, and the expense or difficulty of acquiring a replacement – or a professional to fix the damage – created prolonged and increasing irritation. As Gregson demonstrates, household items fail before householders feel they legitimately should, succumbing to planned obsolescence. It's one thing if a white good breaks down after ten years of 'good service', when its demise is justified by its hard work, but this isn't always the case. When freezers with supposedly cutting edge anti-frost technology pack up after only a couple of years, as Gregson's participant's did, the result is anger and a sense of injustice (2007). The cracked tile on the floor of the Harpers' recently renovated wet room meant that shower water seeped through the crack and made a stain on the ceiling of Claire and Peter's bedroom directly below. Until they could afford to have a builder come and repair the tiles, the Harpers were forced to create what they

referred to as ‘a barrier of towels’ on the floor in front of the crack to keep it dry. Still, the risk of water soaking through the towel to the crack made the Harpers reluctant to run the shower for more than a few minutes, forcing them to shower hurriedly and with the constant fear of causing greater damage to the ceiling below. The crack in the tiles was a source of irritation not only because it necessitated hurried showers and the hassle of having to lay towels on the floor, but because the tiling was still relatively new. It didn’t seem legitimate that it should crack after such a short amount of time – it hadn’t worked hard enough to deserve the effort of care and maintenance it now demanded. This meant Claire and Peter resented the time and money they would have to invest in its care.

The shift from friend to foe is often not permanent, however, and objects might fit both of these categories at once, eliciting conflicting attitudes and emotions from householders. Jenny and Will adored their dining table. It was sleek and modern without being alienating and the dark veneer toned perfectly with the sage green walls in their living room. They had bought the table before their renovations had been completed, envisaging it in the soon-to-be-realized dining area of their newly-enlarged living room. However, after the renovations were complete they had decided that they would rather use the new space in the living room as a study, rather than a dining area. The dining table had therefore been placed in the kitchen, where the limited space meant that it had to be positioned against a wall, leaving only three sides of the table available to sit at. Even pushed against the wall, the table made moving around the kitchen difficult and often frustrating as it occupied so much floor space that it left only a narrow gap to move between it and the kitchen island. The dining table that had originally

been prized as a beautiful object that celebrated their new home and held the promise of relaxed dinner parties and family meals together now occupied a more complex position as something both loved, and resented for the inconvenience it caused.

This ability of objects to slip easily between the roles of friend and foe is part of their 'openness'. As discussed in the previous chapter, Keane has demonstrated the capacity of objects to facilitate certain behaviours by virtue of the specificities of their materiality. This demonstration forms part of his discussion of the semiotic 'meanings' of objects in which he argues that the physical properties of objects facilitate their iconicity. He goes on to state that the inherent multiplicity of the physical characteristics of objects creates what he calls 'bundling', in which the multiple properties of things allow them to index multiple ideas or concepts. Objects are therefore 'open', having multiple, ever-shifting 'meanings' that are impossible to limit and therefore inclined to bring unexpected consequences (Keane 2005). In moments of tension, the properties of objects that make them foes – their size, or complexity, or lack of stability – eclipse those properties that make them valued friends – their pleasing colour, sleek design or comfortable height. The sleek design and dark colour of Jenny and Will's dining table that had made it perfect for their newly renovated home with its chic sage green walls, were eventually eclipsed by its large size that forced some diners to spend mealtimes sitting facing a wall – or at an awkward angle to be able to face their dining companions – and squeezing awkwardly between dining chairs and the kitchen island when crossing the room. The multiple physical properties of Jenny and Will's table meant that its position as a

beloved object was not stable, allowing it to transition to becoming an object of irritation, in spite of its continued possession of the characteristics that once made it beloved.

Objects have the capacity to be the catalyst that transforms the mood of the house and bring tensions to the surface because they are often the point of resistance, where householders' imagined futures instead give way to the often disappointing lived reality of practice. If Keane shows us that the materiality of an object shapes its potentiality, this materiality must also limit it. Things enable behaviours, but they also place restrictions on the form this behaviour takes. A cup can only hold so much liquid. A table can only seat so many people. An oven can only cook something so quickly. Objects place limits on householders' actions and these limits can make life in the household feel more stressful or less successful than it *could* be, if only these objects were a bit bigger, more powerful, a different colour – if their materiality, and therefore their potentiality, were different. These restrictions might thwart an action entirely or might require that householders negotiate with the object, making do. Things happen, but the things that happen might not be what householders wanted. While these unexpected results were sometimes as good or better than householders had imagined, they were more likely to be disappointments that left householders with a sense of failure, and result in frustration on the part of the householder at the object's refusal or inability to facilitate the outcome they desire, and at their lack of skill in coaxing the object to do so.

The limited potentiality of objects necessitates decision-making – conscious and unconscious – and these decisions betray the differing, often conflicting nature of householders imagined futures. Making plain that sometimes householders want different things. The conflict that results from these differences has been demonstrated and discussed in relation to the aesthetic decisions of the home. In Clarke's study of home decorating, she shows how objects can be 'stuck in the middle' of householders' conflicting preferences for the look of the home (2002). Clarke gives the example of Miriam and Ivan, a couple whose tastes in art are so different that their collection of pictures and paintings lived propped up against the walls, unhung because they cannot decide which pictures should decorate their walls. In this scenario, objects are a demonstration and constant reminder of Miriam and Ivan's inability to reach a consensus. Their refusal to take a decision about the fate of the art, and their respective failures to compromise, are a demonstration of independence, that neither has sacrificed their aesthetic sensibilities to their relationship. In his contribution to the same volume, Miller shows that feelings of resentment are sown where householders feel that their preferences are being overridden. He gives the example of Georgina, a respondent whose husband is an artist and therefore has strong views about the design and decoration of their home. His preference for a 'minimalist' look has been instituted at the expense of Georgina's taste for more 'romantic' art, thwarting her desire to make their home 'a medium for expressing their relationship' (Miller 2001c: 116). Conflict and compromise, difference and negotiation are made manifest by the object's demand for action, and therefore a decision about what that course of action should be.

Amongst my respondent households, however, these conflicts arose more often around practice than design – where they should eat, when they should sleep, where each activity should take place and how it should take place. Ben's irritation at Anna's decision to let Lottie feed herself was not a reflection of differing aesthetic preferences – he didn't display such an aversion to mess in any other aspect of their lives – rather, it reflected their differing ideas as to the kind of breakfast time they wanted Lottie to have. The fun and energetic start to the day that Anna sought to create by giving Lottie her spoon was at odds with the calm, contented morning moments that Ben wanted her to have. In her discussion of the atmosphere of Japanese homes Daniels argues that householder's conflicting 'scripts' for the home must be balanced to prevent the home becoming a site of tension (2015). The households in my study were not always able to balance these conflicting scripts. They often wanted different things for the household, and wanted the household to do things differently. Objects were the point at which these multiple conflicting imagined futures met, and were forced to battle it out through the process of decision making. Jenny and Tilly argue almost daily about whether the television should be on or off. Jenny wants to turn the television off during the afternoon because she worries that by allowing Tilly to watch too much TV she is being a bad parent, relying on the TV to pacify her child rather than keeping her engaged with fun activities that will help her develop important skills and provide bonding moments in which she and Tilly enjoy each other's company. Tilly wants the TV to be on because she loves the animal's voices in *64 Zoo Lane* and because she gets bored when Jenny is feeding Archie and therefore cannot move from the sofa to have a

dance party or make playdough models with her. The television is the site at which these two conflicting wants meet, it is the television and whether it is off or on that Jenny and Tilly argue about. The fact that the television can either be on or off requires that a decision be made, and it is at the point of this decision that an otherwise calm afternoon suddenly becomes one of raised voices and toddler's tears.

While much of the material culture of the home has the potential to be the catalyst for a moment of tension, some have more potential than others. Money, unsurprisingly, was frequently bound up in moments of tension in the households I lived with. As middle class households with a relatively high disposable income, none of the households in my study managed their money very strictly. However, during my time with them, their budgets were tighter than usual because of maternity leave, career changes or the large expenditures of house renovations. The role that money played in moments of tension was different to that of much of the rest of the material culture in the home, its absence acting as an underlying issue that would be brought to the surface through some other catalytic object – a bank statement, a parking ticket, or a mobile phone bearing a text message asking for a contribution to the cost of a shared family gift. Interestingly, moments of tension involving money, or a lack of it, rarely involved any kind of dispute about spending money. Both couples seemed to take the attitude that, since they both worked and earned money for the household, they should be able to buy things for themselves as and when they wanted without having to 'ask permission'. Instead, these moments seemed most often to be related to the restrictions that a lack of money placed, not only

on what householders could purchase but also on what they could do, and how they could live their lives. When Anna and Ben ran out of money because the friends Ben had been doing sporadic work for were slow to pay him, Ben became upset by the fact that this effectively restricted him to the house, preventing him from even taking Lottie on a long walk to East Dulwich in the morning as this involved stopping for a coffee for him and lunch for Lottie which he could not afford. Losing his and Lottie's daily ritual was a blow because these trips allowed Ben to visit some of the shops that were sources of warning or inspiration for the shop he was soon to open, and provided opportunities for him to continue to build his network of contacts in the local food and coffee trade that he and Anna were excited to soon become a part of. Without these errands Ben was relegated to the home with Lottie, his place amongst the professional foodies of south-east London seeming far out of reach.

The power of moments of tension lies in the fact that they are the moments in which failure is recognised and disappointment follows. The three incidents described at the beginning of this chapter are examples of objects enacting their agency, seeming to wilfully act against the householders, derailing their attempts at action. These objects were acting as what Latour calls 'anti-programmes', 'devices that seek to annul, destroy, subvert, circumvent a programme of action…' (2000: 18). Objects working against the aims of the householders seem to compound the householders' stresses and frustrations. As if life weren't difficult enough, even their own home and the objects within it are trying to thwart them, ruining their plans and ensuring that things in the household are not as they should be. Yet, the object's misbehaviour is also a reflection of the

householders' inability to keep the home, and the objects within it, running smoothly. Claire knows that her toaster, a technological black box, should work because she's been told it should work. The toaster's sudden issuing of smoke and the ensuing disruption is an act of betrayal on the part of the toaster that would never have happened had the cleaner properly cleaned the toaster, had Claire not developed the habit of toasting Emma's mini waffles because she couldn't be bothered to grill them, had her mother-in-law had the foresight to close the door before making her morning toast. These moments of tension, brought to a head by objects, compound frustrations and anxieties, as they seem to highlight householder's own failures.

In Shove's study of households and their material culture, we encounter householders regarding the failure of their imagined futures as a reflection of their own inadequacies. Failure to create the clutter free and ordered aesthetic that householders believe defines the perfect kitchen becomes a constant reminder of their inability to live up to their own standards of housekeeping and to fulfil the aspirations for behaviour they had when choosing their kitchen (Shove 2007). The potential created by household appliances creates new expectations for household behaviour, and an inevitable risk of shortfall. Shove's respondent Sarah describes how, despite investing in a new large freezer that should – in theory and according to her mother – make her life easier and her diet better by enabling her to freeze food and take something out of the freezer to have for her dinner in the evening rather than having to go to the shops every day, she had failed to get into the routine of cooking and shopping that would allow her to take full advantage of the freezer and the potential it offered (Shove

2007: 33). Objects have the capacity to bring the issues and shortfalls that householders see in their household into sharp relief. An object's refusal to do what it should, be where it should or look as it should can easily become an indication that the household isn't working as it should. The sheer presence of some objects seems to taunt householders as a constant reminder of what their home could be like, if they were able to manage it better. Objects chosen with the aim of making householders feel better about their lives may in fact result in householders feeling less satisfied with their homes and with themselves.

It does the objects of the home a disservice, however, to discuss their role in contributing to tensions within the household and bringing forth the moments in which these tensions overwhelm the household, without also discussing the role they play in diffusing these tensions and smoothing household relations. Taking one's frustration out on the closest, or the most immediately irritating object, can be mildly therapeutic, and is far less problematic than taking one's frustration out on the nearest person, who is likely to either return your frustration, or to be hurt by your anger. Objects, as the members of the household who are unable to shout back and far less able to make clear their objection to unfair treatment, are often the target of anger. By carrying this burden of anger and annoyance, objects play a vital role in the relationships of the household, providing an outlet for frustration that otherwise might place an untenable level of pressure on these relationships. Objects are also able to take the blame for moments of tension, shifting the blame, and guilt, away from the subjects involved. After the fire alarm had been reset and the kids calmed from their anxiety over the loud alarm, Claire and her mother-in-law discussed the oversensitivity of the alarm,

and the added stress of every false alarm risking a fine from the fire brigade. Later that day, when Claire made a point of cleaning the toaster and made visible her shock at the amount of crumbs that had been sitting in the toaster, waiting to cause smoke and wreak havoc when some unsuspecting person came along and tried to make toast, she was shifting the blame away from her mother-in-law and on to the toaster, and the cleaner whom Claire believed should have been cleaning the toaster regularly in order to prevent these sorts of incidents occurring. By explicitly assigning the blame to the toaster, and through the toaster to the cleaner, Claire was able to ease her mother-in-law's guilt at causing so much disruption, and smooth over the cracks in her relationship with her mother-in-law that this incident had highlighted. Claire's irritation had been due, in part, to the negligence she saw in her mother-in-law's actions. Had her mother-in-law noticed that the rest of the household closed the door to the kitchen when toasting anything in order to prevent any smoke that might be generated reaching the fire alarm in the hallway, the crisis might have been averted. This was yet another example of visits from Peter's family making Claire's life more difficult rather than easier. In explicitly assigning the blame elsewhere, Claire disowned any implication that she might have been annoyed at her mother-in-law by making it clear that she didn't consider her mother-in-law to be at fault. Blaming objects allows householders to display their irritation, while exonerating themselves or others in the household.

As Shove has demonstrated, things can help householders make household life closer to what they want it to be – they provide the route out of tension by allowing for visible and tangible change. Frustrations are resolved through the

work of enacting imagined futures – moving objects around, throwing objects out, replacing objects or buying new objects so that the 'physical landscape of material possibilities' is conducive to householders doing what they want to do (Shove 2007: 37). When mess and clutter brings irritation at the state of the home, a session of tidying seems to bring order and reduces tension levels. When Anna could no longer cope with the irritation of the piles of stuff occupying the sofa in the study area, she spent hours sorting the piles, deciding what should be kept and what should be moved into the attic or the spare room, until the sofa was clear and she could happily work in the study without the constant distraction of piles of clutter. Where a certain object seems to be constantly causing frustration by making an action difficult, a replacement offers to solve the problem, removing both the source and catalyst of tension. Jenny and Will's new, thinner dining table removed the inconvenience of having to pull the dining table out into the centre of the room to seat more than 4 people, a source of irritation that threatened to ignite a moment of tension. Where tensions involve a lack of behaviour – a failure to do something householders wish they did or had done objects can facilitate this behaviour. Jenny dealt with her increasing frustration at the fact that the family rarely sat down and relaxed together by investing in a new love seat to make the living room space more cosy and inviting, in the hope that this would encourage them to move out of the kitchen and into the living room.

The fact that things don't always do what householders want them to is sometimes what allows them to help householders enact their imagined futures. Jenny invested in a running machine to help keep herself fit and healthy. The

running machine was positioned in the living room, pushed up against the wall next to Will's keyboard. The running machine is an investment that will impact upon the household's use of the study area of their living room for months and years to come. It takes up space and means that householders must walk around it when moving between the kitchen and the sitting area. Even when Jenny doesn't want to run, the running machine will continue taking up space, making its presence known, reminding Jenny that she really should go for a run. The running machine will not simply disappear when Jenny's desire to run does, and when she might wish that the running machine was not continuing to occupy much needed space in the living room, acting as a daily reminder of the exercise she 'should' be doing. It is the fact that the running machine won't do what Jenny wants and disappear, that it is large and cumbersome and necessitates walking around, that makes it such an effective ally in Jenny's eyes.

Moments of tension give us the objects of the home at their most powerful, able to ignite the household into disorder and discord. The complex and ever changing materiality of things makes them treacherous allies, shifting from friend to foe and back again. Householders want different things, and these differing wants are brought into conflict over the treatment, use and arrangement of objects that force these differing wants to go head-to-head in decision making. These day-to-day spats sparked by householders' frustrations at their partner's determination to leave the light on in the kitchen or their child's reckless scattering of toys all over the living room floor are just some of the many tensions and irritations that pepper household life, that make it stressful, and make it what it is. Many of the incidents I have recounted in this

chapter have been, on the face of it, trivial. The moments when I saw householders at their most visibly distressed, at their most frustrated or stressed were all centred around seemingly unimportant incidents. Yet, as the following chapter explores, the parents in my study saw the success of their child's future, their likelihood of their children living the futures they had imagined for them, as contingent on the success of their childhoods. Seemingly small failures – missed nap times or biscuits before dinner – threatened their children's futures in unknown ways. In this context, the significance of moments of tension lay not only in their disruption of the present, in their capacity to derail their children's futures.

Chapter 4.

Making tomorrow today: parenting for imagined futures

As Jack grew from a tiny baby into a slightly larger baby, Claire and Peter began to notice that his eyes never seemed to follow them the way that Emma's had at that age. For a while they comforted themselves with the medical advice that young babies' eyes develop at different rates, but over time Claire and Peter became increasingly worried. Their GP gave them a referral to an eye doctor and, eager to ensure that Jack had only the best care, Claire and Peter did considerable research to work out which were the most well-respected names in this area working in London, and through both the NHS and their private medical insurance managed to secure appointments with two specialists. After a series of appointments and examinations Claire and Peter were left with a number of options and some difficult decisions to make. While it was yet possible that Jack's eyes might begin working normally of their own accord, the best chance of correcting this condition was through surgery.

The prospect of deciding that their small baby should undergo surgery was a horrifying one for Claire and Peter, made more difficult by the fact that the doctors did not agree on the best approach. Both agreed that the best chance of correcting his vision was through surgery. The younger he was when the surgery was performed, the more easily his eyes would be able to adapt and heal so that his eyesight might become normal. One of the eye doctors advocated doing the surgery as early as possible, in only a few months' time. The chances were high, however,

that one operation would not be enough. The second eye doctor was more reluctant to operate so early, preferring to give Jack's eyes more chance to right themselves on their own, arguing that while operating earlier would give him a greater chance of developing perfect vision, this chance was still relatively low, and not worth the trauma of surgery so early in life. Whether they operated sooner or later, the results were unlikely to be perfect and Claire and Peter were faced with the prospect that Jack would never have perfect vision. Of course, Claire and Peter could also decide to do nothing, and hope for the small possibility that Jack's eyes would right themselves on their own.

The lack of clarity in the eye doctors' recommendations meant that there was no obvious best course of action for Claire and Peter to choose. The various uncertainties and unknowns meant that every option was a risk that involved weighing up the possibilities of both short- and long-term distress with potential long- and short-term benefits. Guaranteed positive results from surgery would have made the prospect of the distress it would cause easier to contemplate, but opting to put their baby through surgery that might do nothing to improve his eyesight seemed reckless. Claire and Peter struggled to know which Jack would thank them for less: distress now, or impaired vision in the future. Unable to know which Jack would come to see as the best option, Claire and Peter were left guessing, attempting to predict the outcome of every decision, and Jack's feelings about the matter. The weight of this decision was heavy, the outcome likely to have a considerable impact on Jack's life to come. The risk of making the wrong decision was great, while even the best outcome was hard to contemplate. In considering the benefits of early surgery Peter said that if they chose to do nothing, and Jack

never developed perfect vision, his chances of ever becoming a professional cricketer were over. Claire responded that given it was highly unlikely Jack would become a professional cricketer, or would even want to become a professional cricketer, this seemed like a poor reason for choosing surgery. Peter paused and agreed that yes, Jack probably never would become a cricketer even with perfect vision, but deciding that he never could before he had the chance to make that decision for himself seemed unfair.

In the end, Claire and Peter decided to choose the more cautious option, waiting to see how Jack's eyes changed of their own accord over the next few months and make their decision based on that. In the meantime, he was given spectacles to help guide his vision, small round plastic frames that magnified his little eyes and made him look like a tiny, very serious adult. To everyone's delight the glasses brought improvement, so much so that after a few months of wearing them the eye doctors began to think that surgery might not be necessary, and that the spectacles alone might train Jack's eyes to good vision.

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On the first full day I spent living with the Spencers, Tilly informed me that she wanted to do some painting. As I adjusted the roll of paper hanging over her child-size easel to give her a blank canvass to fill, she told me that she wanted to do a painting 'like Paul Klee' – a Swiss turn-of-the-century artist. This was by no means the last time Tilly, who had turned two a few months before I met her, surprised me by professing a liking for an artist, musician or other cultural figure not normally

considered a favourite of toddlers and small children. Jenny and Will loved it when Tilly made these types of statements, enjoying the incongruity of a child who couldn't yet tie her shoe laces reciting the name of the composer of her favourite ballet, her inclusion of an extra syllable in her pronunciation of Tchaikovsky adding to the charm of the scene.

Tilly had acquired her liking of Paul Klee on a trip to the Tate Modern – an art gallery in central London – with Jenny, and had been introduced to Tchaikovsky when taken to a ballet at the Royal Opera House – a grand old venue that featured performances by famous companies of ballet and opera – by Will. When Will's parents came to visit from their home in North America, Tilly was taken along on sight-seeing day trips to both Oxford and Cambridge to wander around these universities' colleges and galleries. These were the types of activities that Jenny, Will and their families liked to do in their spare time, and they were in no doubt that Tilly should be taken along to be introduced to the joys of art, music and culture at an early age. At the same time, the cartoons, sugary pop music and princess paraphernalia typically associated with small girls in England were notably absent from Jenny and Will's home.

Before he moved to the UK and became an accountant, Will had led a very different life, making movies and playing in bands. He took both film and music very seriously, and his tastes in both were varied and wide. Knowledgeable in these areas, he was keen to share this knowledge with his children, introducing them to 'the classics' of music and film, educating them in quality from as early an age as possible. Sometimes this worked and sometimes it didn't. Tilly was a fan of Sun Ra –

a famous if somewhat unorthodox Jazz musician of the mid 20th Century – although her liking of Sun Ra paled in comparison to the fierceness with which she adored the soundtrack to Disney's Frozen, an animated film about two princesses which, at the time of my fieldwork, had recently been released and was at its peak of popularity. Will had greater success with Star Wars, instilling a love of the franchise that he fuelled with storybooks and YouTube clips.

Will was passionate about film, but both he and Jenny seemed to be ambivalent towards television. The television was hardly ever on, and it was certainly never turned on without a plan to watch something specific, usually episodes of their favourite quiz show, during which they would compete to see which of them could get the most correct answers. For the entirety of the three months that I lived in her home, I saw Tilly watch the actual television set three, possibly four times, each time to watch a film on DVD, never to watch live television. TV programmes were shown through the iPad or on Jenny or Will's iPhones, streamed through YouTube or another online streaming service, with Jenny or Will in control of which shows would be streamed, when they would begin and when they would end. Only a couple of children's TV shows were considered worthwhile viewing because they had some quality that Jenny and Will considered especially clever or entertaining. Tilly was not allowed to choose videos or programmes to watch by herself, ensuring that Jenny and Will had full veto over her viewing. These TV programmes and YouTube clips were considered a 'treat', used to incentivise Tilly at meal times – bad behaviour at dinner time or a refusal to eat all of her food would ensure that the iPad or iPhone was confiscated and that she would not be allowed to watch anything.

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Anna's parents died within a few years of each other, leaving Anna and her brother orphans before she had finished university. These tragically early deaths affected Anna in many ways. She said that they had given her a different perspective on life, leaving her unfazed by what she considered to be inconsequential annoyances. When I went through a clumsy period of breaking and dropping things – smashing two glasses and a jug in quick succession – Anna was quick to deflect my apologies, telling me that after losing both her parents, she really didn't care that much about losing a few bits of crockery. In other ways, though, her parents' premature deaths had made her more aware of potential dangers. Anna attributed the fact that she was married, with a house and a baby before any of her friends were even thinking of these things, to the fact that she was painfully aware of the fragility of life, and was determined to make herself and her life as secure as possible. Anna was a relaxed mother in many ways, but was careful when it came to hazards, or anything that might threaten Lottie's health.

Anna and Ben had by far the most sophisticated baby monitoring system of any of the three households I lived with, opting for a system that included a sensor pad that was positioned under Lottie's mattress and would immediately sound an alert if it sensed that Lottie had stopped breathing – a product designed for premature babies and new-born babies but used in Lottie's bed until she was a year old – and a camera that allowed Anna and Ben to see that Lottie was sleeping soundly. Anna would absentmindedly glance at the baby monitor regularly throughout the

evening, even if we could hear Lottie breathing calmly and evenly through the speaker. When Lottie once picked up and chewed two or three berries from a tree in the garden – berries that had the potential to be poisonous when ingested – Anna and Ben chopped the tree down the next weekend, removing the source of the threat.

Growing up, Anna had been given a strictly healthy diet. Her mother had banned any sugary products or unhealthy foods from the house, and prioritised nutrition over flavour. Anna joked about the somewhat joyless meals she had been subjected to as a child and teenager. As an adult she had resolved to enjoy her food, and took great pleasure in cooking and eating delicious meals. Her fastidiousness manifested itself in quality however, as both she and Ben invested time and money in ensuring that their food was fresh and made from the best quality ingredients they could afford. When it came to the meals they cooked for themselves, this focus on quality was as much to do with flavour as health, as good quality ingredients meant better-tasting, more enjoyable food.

When it came to Lottie's meals, Anna's standards rose even higher. The majority of Lottie's meals were made from scratch by Anna or Ben. Weekly deliveries of organic vegetables formed the basis of these meals, alongside bread from a local bakery. While Anna and Ben would include supermarket quality produce in their own meals for the sake of ease, Lottie's food was only ever organic and the best quality available, a rule observed strictly. For Anna, feeding Lottie healthy, 'unadulterated' organic food was motivated by a fear of potential hazards. While she knew that the negative health effects of pesticides were probably negligible, she had no intention

of taking this chance, doing her very best to ensure that Lottie encountered nothing that could threaten her health now or later in life, the real possibility of illness and the fragility of health being something that Anna had experienced first-hand.

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This chapter is essentially an analysis of the clichéd truism that kids grow up fast. The inevitability, and seemingly alarming speed, of the process of a child growing up meant that, for the parents in my study, the passing of time was impossible to ignore. Of course, children age at the same rate as adults, but the change this ageing brings is far more dramatic. A child goes from crawling to walking in a matter of weeks, unintelligible sounds transition to words and sentences in a few months, baby grows that once drowned a baby's tiny form become snug in what seems like days. Parents in Britain are encouraged to track these progressions religiously in their baby's 'red book', the government issued *My personal child health record* that recommends parents document their child's progression and be alert for any signs of abnormality in this progression (Royal College of Paediatrics & Health 2009). Here they are told that their baby should be lifting its head at twelve weeks, holding objects by five months, and sitting without support by eight months. Cole and Durham argue that the similar tendency of North American parents to track their children's 'progress' 'constitute[s] a particular temporality of childhood and a particular way of conceiving of, and investing in, the future' (2008: 13). The parents in my study were always looking for the next sign of their child's development, the next era in the progression from childhood to adulthood, tracing the seemingly linear

progression from one to the next laid out in a structured form in the 'red book'. They saw their child's future as shaped directly by his or her childhood – by household life in the present.

But what will this future be? A second truism – that parents want the best for their children – was certainly borne out in my research, but this 'best' had a level of specificity. This is not to say that the parents in my study had carefully laid out life plans that they expected their children to follow. Rather, that parents had hopes for their children, visions of the people they would become and the lives they would live. They imagined their children's futures. The temporal collapse that accompanies the understanding that a child's future happiness is made or broken through today's parenting meant the household's present set the course for their child's future, for better or for worse. In his study of working mothers in North America, Thompson noted that his respondents traced a clear relationship between their own childhoods and their adult lifestyles, and expected the same to be true for their children. These mothers saw themselves as creating memories of childhood for their children and in doing so shaping their future (Thompson 1996). Similarly, the parents in my study worked to ensure that everyday life in the home was conducive to their children's successful future.

This envisioning of a child begins before birth. A child's parents and kin materialise the as-yet-unborn baby by buying goods and products for it to use (Cook 2008). While the parents in my study were adamant that they would love their children no matter what they became or how they decided to live their lives, it was clear that the futures they imagined for their children were written

into their parenting. These imagined futures were not coherent or complete – the parents I lived with did not have a checklist of traits or attributes they worked to help their children acquire – these were inchoate imaginings, formed as children grew and began to display their own preferences and inclinations. Some of these imaginings seemed to parents to be so inevitable as to be predictions. Claire's joking assertion that Jack flirted with women by flashing his adorable baby dimples belied an expectation that he would grow up to be both heterosexual and flirtatious – a stereotypical red-blooded man. Some of these imaginings were dearly held: that their child would grow up healthy, diligent, or confident. Parents worked hard to encourage their children to fulfil these deeply held imaginings and the fear that they might not was a source of anxiety. Some of the things parents wanted for their children's futures were almost idle wishes, the hope that a child might share their dad's love of jazz or their mother's talent for cooking.

With these thoughts of the future came fears for the future. Theodorou and Spyrou's study of pregnant women in Greece highlighted the anxiety that women feel when they think of their children's futures, anxieties deepened by her respondents' feelings of responsibility and a belief that by not following medical advice as to how to ensure the health of their foetus during their pregnancy, they would be risking the health and future happiness of their child (2013). The parents in my study saw their children and their children's futures as similarly malleable, shaped for the better or worse by their parenting as it played out in everyday life in the household. While they were buoyed by thoughts of their

children's bright futures, they were also beset with anxiety that by doing the wrong thing they might be damaging their children's futures.

In attempting to set their children on course toward the lives they wanted for them, parents worked to arm their children with the correct tools. Or rather, to help them develop their own tools. When, after the family day trip to Cambridge, Tilly played a game in which she packed her backpack ready 'to go to university', Jenny told Tilly to go and tell Will about her game, knowing that he would be delighted that their daughter was already planning to pursue a life of intellectualism. Indeed he was, and Will told Tilly that she had made him very happy and that he very much hoped she did go to university when she grew up. Jenny and Will made no secret of the fact that they wanted Tilly to be a precociously smart child, and an intellectual adult. When Tilly did something to demonstrate her intelligence – recognise a picture of Camus, name the composer of *The Nutcracker,* recite the technical names for the different types of clouds – Jenny and Will would respond with glee. Jenny joked that she was 'scared' by Tilly's intelligence but she took steps to encourage it, ordering a set of books aimed at helping children a few years older than Tilly begin to learn to read, buying craft materials and musical instruments that encouraged Tilly to develop her skills and creativity. Through these educational books and toys – part of the kind of 'intense mothering' I will discuss in the next chapter – Jenny was attempting to set Tilly on the path to becoming the kind of adult she wanted Tilly to be, with the kind of life she wanted Tilly to have. Jenny remarked that, in teaching Tilly to read, she was ensuring that Tilly would be 'ahead' of her peers when she went to school, a source of both pride at Tilly's intelligence and of

concern at the risk that these efforts would backfire and Tilly would be too 'bored' to pay attention at school. Jenny was attempting to 'speed-up' Tilly's development, bringing her vision of Tilly's ideal future of intellectualism incrementally closer and increasing her 'potential' to live this ideal future. In contemplating Tilly's successful future, however, she was also forced to contemplate a less successful one in which she became an unengaged student whose education suffered as a result.

As I mentioned in the introductory chapter of this thesis, Butler and Robson argue that gentrification is a 'coping mechanism' on the part of the middle classes to deal with the threat of globalised working structures on their domestic arrangements (2003). Attempts such as Jenny's reflect the anxiety of middle class families over raising their children to compete on a global stage, during a period of global recession, when certainty is in short supply and threats to the futures parents imagine for their children could come from any direction. In this atmosphere, a laissez-faire attitude to raising children comes to be seen as neglectful. Anagnost, in her discussion of the ways that Chinese parents seek to ensure the future success of their children, states that with the introduction of the market economy in China came the narrowing of the 'cusp' between success and failure (2008). Chinese children are now regarded by their parents as competing against children from across the world. In response to this intense competition, Chinese parents have sought to 'enhance' the 'quality' of their children from their early years through apparently nutritious foods and educational play. These methods are an attempt to speed up educational development in order to create 'surplus' value that gives greater chance of

success in the global market. This intense focus on developing the skills of the market, however, is accompanied by narratives of failure, as stories of children whose mental health has been made fragile by the pressure for scholastic achievement and of children lacking in social skills because they spend all their time with their school books have begun to emerge in Chinese discourse. Here, parents' attempts to give their children the skills they believe their children will need to compete on the global stage bring the associated fear that these efforts will backfire and their children will become qualified but unable to cope with the world around them.

The belief that their actions and behaviours in the parenting of their children would shape the adults their children would become, lent every decision and action a weight that the parents in my study felt as a burden. While attempting to raise their children into healthy and well-adjusted individuals, they knew the resentments and anger that could develop between parents and children, of the life-long scars and traumas that could result from bad parenting, and of the possibility that their bad decisions could harm their children for life in ways that they would not become aware of for years to come. While these parents were struggling with the pressures of today, these pressures were compounded by the unknown future consequences of their actions. Claire became worried about Emma's explosive reactions to seemingly minor issues – a spilt cup of water or a misplaced item – as she was concerned that this propensity to 'freak out' belied an anxiety acquired by watching Claire 'freak out'. She wanted Emma to be calm, able to encounter problems without becoming overly worried or agitated, and was concerned that by becoming visibly upset in front of Emma she was leading

by example, setting Emma up for a life of anxiety rather than showing her how to remain on an even keel. The burden of this responsibility brought stresses to the minutiae of daily life, leading parents to second-guess their behaviours and feel guilt for things that seemed to me to be the most minor of parental transgressions. In Chua's ethnography of striving for success and the tragic consequences of failure amongst inhabitants of the Indian state of Kerala, she discusses the toll that the effort to ensure their children achieve success takes on parents' lives. She gives us the example of Aleyamma, a woman distressed by her daughter's desire to marry a man from a lower caste and to, in her view, throw away the chance at the good life that she and her husband had sought to provide for their daughter at the cost of a great deal of time and money. Aleyamma's despair and the resulting depression – or, in the view of her daughter, Aleyamma's desperation to prevent her daughter from choosing to act against the will of her parents – led Aleyamma to attempt suicide (Chua 2014). The stress of parenting never brought the parents in my study close to this level of despair. Yet, Chua's example demonstrates the perils for parents of such a determined quest to give their children the lives they want for them. Investing everything in their child's imagined future means that parents have everything to lose when, for whatever reason, their children's futures deviate from those imagined.

These anxieties were compounded by the fact that often the 'correct' parenting choice was not immediately, or ever, obvious. Mizoguchi argues that parenting in late modernity has been characterised by a proliferation of life choices which have increased pressure on parents to choose how to parent their children

(2000). Warde, in his discussion of the anxiety felt by consumers when faced with a myriad of consumption choices, argues that this issue is mitigated by the fact that those invested in the outcome of this decision are likely to be most informed, so that their decision is guided by their acquired expertise (1994). The parents in my study were invested in the outcome of their decisions, regarding these as key to their child's future health and happiness. Yet, their attempts to become informed often did little to ease their anxiety. While the many online forums and social media hubs that exist to discuss parenting are invaluable sources of advice and guidance for parents – most often aimed at mothers – they are also sources of confusion and worry. Sites such as the famous – and infamous – website and message board, Mumsnet, were rarely used by my respondents, who felt that it was populated mostly by women with unrealistic, or extremely self-sacrificial approaches to mothering. Jenny would tell me about the ridiculous ideas of mothers who felt that forcing their children to wear nappies was cruel and who believed themselves to be so at one with their children as to be able to recognise when they were about to urinate. Claire would discuss the expectation amongst the 'Mumsnet type' of mother that one would make fresh batches of baby food for every meal, devoting hours a day to preparing your child's meals at the expense of almost everything else. Even Anna, who did indeed spend hours preparing fresh, organic meals for Lottie would jokingly reprimand herself for being 'lazy' when giving Lottie a pouch of ready-made organic baby food when she didn't have the energy or inclination to cook. Anna, Jenny and Claire laughed these expectations off, but in doing so acknowledged the awareness that others would consider their approach lacking. Cucchiara's study of middle class parents in North America, and their decisions to send their children to public school

rather than fee-paying private school, noted how some of her respondents mocked what they considered to be the overly risk-averse attitudes of some parents, and their view that their child was both fragile and warranting some kind of 'special' treatment (2013: 87). They regarded their ability to see this anxiety for what it was as a demonstration both of their more confident parenting, and of their more relaxed attitudes to their children's future – that they weren't the kind of parents who obsessed over getting their children into Harvard. And yet, even these seemingly confident, un-anxious parents questioned their refusal to what they saw other parents doing, asking themselves whether they were 'doing damage' to their kids by not paying for the private education they maintained wasn't necessary (2013). The knowledge that some parents were investing time and effort in acts of parenting that my respondents refused to do – even those that were considered over the top and unnecessary – made them feel that they weren't doing all they could, and brought a nagging anxiety as to what the possible effects of this might be.

While for some issues it was easy for Anna, Jenny and Claire to brush the opinions of others aside and feel comfortable doing things their own way, for others, the multiple views as to the right or wrong way of raising children or running a household, brought confusion and uncertainty. How were they to know what the right and wrong approaches were? This confusion was compounded when my respondents followed the advice of supposed experts, only for this advice to lead them to failure. Jenny had consulted books and forums in considering the best way to reconcile Tilly to the presence of her new baby brother. She alighted on the idea of buying Tilly a tiny doll-sized cot that

would live in Archie's room and that she would encourage Tilly to put one of her dolls 'to bed' in while she put Archie to bed, making Archie's bedtime something Tilly was involved in and not a time during which she saw Archie as competition for Jenny's attention. This plan had limited success and Tilly's inability to stay quiet and calm during bedtime meant that it was often difficult to get Archie to sleep with her present. Instead, Will or I would have to attempt to distract Tilly in Jenny's absence and Jenny worried that Tilly's newfound tendency toward tantrums was not simply a result of her recent entry into the 'terrible twos' – an age popularly regarded as being especially characterised by tantrums and volatile behaviour – but an expression of her resentment and envy of her baby brother that Jenny had failed to properly manage.

The choice between different courses of action often manifested itself as a choice between objects in attempting to find the right tool for the job. When Jack was teething Claire tried numerous types of 'teethers' to help minimise his distress. Taking advice from her sister, Claire cut up an old flannel and boiled it in hot water to sterilise it before letting it cool and giving it to Jack to chew on. Jack refused the flannels and Claire was forced to run to the supermarket to try and find alternative 'teethers', all of which were sterilised and presented to Jack and all of which were refused, much to Claire's exasperation. Claire remarked to me that their house was full of baby paraphernalia that had been bought in an attempt to properly attend to their baby's needs before they discovered that for some reason this object was ill-suited to their lives or their baby. When they were dealing with the uncertainties of raising a baby as novice parents, Claire said their approach when facing a potential problem was to 'throw money at the

situation', buying something that promised to solve the problem and ease their anxiety. When Emma was a baby, Claire and Peter had followed the advice of friends and invested in a Bumbo, a solid plastic seat designed to help babies learn to sit upright. These items were expensive, and Claire noted that they were changing hands for a lot of money on the East Dulwich forum, but their Bumbo had gone largely unused as Emma had been perfectly happy sitting propped up on some cushions, and it wasn't long before she was able to sit up of her own accord. Parents had almost no way of knowing which items would become essential to raising their child and which would become largely obsolete, to be fobbed off on other unsuspecting new parents at the earliest opportunity. The fear of the risk that might result from a failure to provide this item for their child, however, ensured that Claire and Peter had dutifully bought every gadget and specialised baby object recommended to them, for fear that a failure to do so might bring some kind of harm to their child.

If anxiety surrounds decision-making, so does an inability to effect decisions made. When I gave Tilly her dinner of fish fingers and mashed vegetables one day, I offered her ketchup to accompany her fish fingers and in doing so undid Jenny's determined refusal to introduce Tilly to the sugary, vinegary attractions of ketchup that Jenny knew would likely now be demanded as an accompaniment to many meals and would probably become a life-long addiction. When Emma's nursery could not provide suitable non-allergenic alternatives for Emma, and instead provided her with something unappetising, Claire was incensed at the nursery's inability to ensure that Emma was sufficiently well fed, as this hampered her attempts to get Emma to put on the weight she needed to

compensate for having been underweight for much of her childhood as a result of her food allergies. Anna noted with amusement the accent with which Lottie spoke the words she learned at nursery, picking up the south London accent of the women who cared for her during the day. These incidents demonstrated the edges of parental control, and the fact that no matter how hard these parents might work to shape the future of their children, their power could only extend so far and external forces had the power to derail their efforts. The appearance of problems with Jack's vision left Claire and Peter feeling powerless in the face of the probability that their child would experience the discomfort of necessary treatments and lasting difficulties with vision. This threat to the future they imagined for him had emerged seemingly from nowhere, the fault of no one and nothing, unpredictable and unpreventable.

The treatment of toys and other possessions was a means by which the parents in my study sought to guide the behaviours of their children, and instil the concepts of proper behaviour that they wanted their children to take into their adulthood. Rae-Espinoza discusses how, in her fieldsite – the Ecuadorian city of Guayaquil – mothers try where possible to consent to their children's demands, especially when in public, as the tantrum or other bad behaviour that might follow this refusal would be a transgression of their child's social responsibility for geniality, since setting a precedent of bad behaviour in public was far more dangerous and likely to cause behavioural problems in adulthood. Rae-Espinoza notes that in Guayaquil, children were given sweets and other treats as a regular part of everyday life, so that children learned requests were only denied for legitimate reasons and to accept these refusals when they came (2010). In

contrast, the parents in my study were willing to endure antagonism in an attempt to ensure their children 'learnt'. Claire was adamant that Emma learn to tidy up after herself, and care for her possessions. Although Emma usually tried to ignore these instructions – and sometimes got away with it – Claire would periodically insist that Emma tidy her toys away into their appropriate places before any more could be taken out to be played with, despite the ensuing tantrum. It was impressed upon Emma that her child-size table must be wiped down after an especially messy meal or activity. Playdough modelling and painting were done on a tray placed over her table so as to protect the carpet and furniture from staining. Emma adopted these rules over time and would ask for a cloth to wipe the table herself. Peter's transgressions involving household objects would be used as learning examples, with Claire telling Emma that Daddy had once again forgotten to close the kitchen door, and encouraging Emma to tell Peter off for his failure to do so. The majority of these rules related to cleanliness and tidiness but for Claire the actions they encouraged were about doing things the right way, the most sensible way, and the way that prevented the consequences of disorder. In their analysis of the numerous 'rules' that exist for governing behaviour in a North American living room, and the treatment of the things that it consists of, Wood and Beck argue that breaking these rules is a contravention of 'some (often implicit) sense of *the way things ought to be*' (italics in original, 1994: 17). Wood and Beck's analysis is based on a single living room, the list of rules detailed for them by Beck's two young sons, and by their parents. Here rules prescribe the ways in which objects are meant to be used and treated, the children's mistreatment of objects regarded as an indication of unwelcome behavioural traits by their parents to be sharply discouraged. The

slamming of a screen door suggesting a 'wantonness, that Denis…cannot accept in his children' (1994: 17). Claire jokingly said that she knew she was unreasonable for having such strict rules about how baby grows should be folded, how a shower should be cleaned and how potatoes should be peeled, but that it was clear that she also felt it was important to do these things 'the right way', and for Emma to learn to do things 'the right way'. This practicality, and the level of common sense to know the right way of doing something, was something that Claire often found lacking in others. She would regularly criticise others for having no common sense, her cleaner for not being 'switched on' enough to know not to scrub at the sealant on the edge of the shower, or her relations for not having the forethought to appreciate the difficulty of travelling a long way with two small children when they issued invitations for family gatherings. For Claire, this lack of common sense was not simply a lack of thought, but a lack of consideration and a lowering of standards. By impressing upon Emma the importance of tidying up after herself, of closing the door to the kitchen and of keeping her toys organised by type, she was instilling in Emma the importance of a practical approach, of common sense, of doing things the right way, of the right way of treating objects and the right way of treating people.

In chapter two I demonstrated that householders attempted to use objects to help them make household life what they wanted it to be – using the potentiality of things to help them do what they wanted to do – and in chapter three I demonstrated how these attempts often failed. The parents in my study attempted to use objects to craft, not only the future of the household and its behaviours, but also the future of their children. They drew on the potentiality of

objects to shape the potentiality of their children, encouraging certain behaviours and discouraging others. Jenny's purchase of a set of books designed to help children learn to read was an attempt to use the potentiality of the books to enable and encourage Tilly to develop her skills at reading. Her attempt succumbed to Shove's dynamics of having and doing (2007), as the potentiality of the books was not matched by Tilly's will to sit still and study the words on the page. When Anna realised that, according to the proper progression of development as detailed by her 'red book', Lottie should have already started to drink from a cup without a spout, she bought a cup with a specially designed easy sip lid that enabled a baby to drink from it without spilling liquid (see fig. 22). Anna's hope was that the specificities of the cup's materiality, which determined how the cup had to be held and used in order for Lottie to be able to drink from it, would guide Lottie's use of it, thereby forcing her to develop the skill of drinking from cup without a spout. Once again, however, the attempt failed. This was due to what Keane describes as 'bundling' – the idea that the indivisibility of a thing's material characteristics makes it impossible to draw on one aspect of this materiality without the others coming into play (Keane 2005: 188). While the cup's form indeed ensured that Lottie was forced to hold the cup carefully, with two hands – as she would have to hold countless cups throughout her life – in order to drink the liquid within, the cup's other characteristics brought other possibilities. Unlike Lottie's other cups with spouted lids, this one was made of clear plastic. Lottie found it entertaining to stuff the cup full of small toys – soft finger puppets, crayons, and anything else that could be crammed in. Soon the cup was repurposed as a toy, and Lottie went back to drinking from her usual brightly coloured cups with spouts. The failure of these attempts were met

with little surprise, attributed to the impossibility of making a child do what they didn't want to. Here the capacity of objects to derail plans paled into insignificance against the capacity of children to do the same. Parents often explained their capitulation in disputes with their small children with the assertion that it was necessary to 'pick your battles' – an acknowledgement that in the struggle to ensure their children had the future they wanted for them, it was their children who posed the greatest threat to its realisation.



Fig. 22: Lottie's cup without a spout (author's own photograph 2014)

In his essay on mothering, Miller discusses these disappointments at length, arguing that parenting is 'a series of inevitable defeats', in which the separation between parent and child is demonstrated over and over again by the division between the parent and the child's desires and preferences. In the early days of her child's life, a mother might see her baby as an extension of herself – an embodiment of the best parts of her personality, without the bad habits and personality defects that she sees in herself. Over time, however, as a baby's own personality begins to become evident and the child begins to assert itself, it becomes painfully clear that mother and child are not one and the same (Miller 2004: 48). Mismatches between the things parents wanted their children to like and be 'into', and their children's actual preferences, often became clear within the households I studied. Anna and Ben might have decided that Lottie's favourite animal was a giraffe, but when Lottie learned to speak it was 'doggy' that quickly became her favourite and most shouted word. Jenny, deciding that Tilly needed a dressing up box full of props for her games, lovingly crafted a feathered headpiece using her glue gun and a collection of sequins and feathers she had stashed away in her sewing kit. Tilly unceremoniously rejected the headpiece, tearing off the feathers and throwing the ribbon on to the floor and seemed to display little interest in the dressing up box. Claire went shopping during 'the January sales' when prices were reduced and bought Emma a collection of trousers, t-shirts and jumpers to take her through the winter months, but no matter how hard we tried to persuade Emma that her red trousers and jeans with multi-coloured stars embroidered on them were pretty and cool and exactly what all the other little girls were wearing, most days began with Emma demanding to wear a dress or the hugely oversized Mickey mouse

jumper that she had been given by her uncle and aunt. Wielding little actual power in the home and unable to undertake many activities under their own volition without the permission or acquiescence of their parents, children's treatment of their own possessions is one of the only ways that they can assert their independence. Wilkie describes how, amongst finds from the archaeological excavation of a garbage pit of a household living in Santa Monica between 1920-2 were two porcelain dolls, the heads found smashed to smithereens (2000). Wilkie points out that the tiny fragments into which the dolls' heads had broken did not indicate accidental damage, but a concerted effort to break the heads beyond repair. Wilkie suggests that the likely culprit for this damage was Irene Cordes, the young daughter of the family whose garbage pit had been excavated, and hypothesises that this violence had been prompted by her frustration at the arrival of a younger sister. Wilkie argues that Irene Cordes' behaviour is a demonstration of the fact that children use material culture to express 'their opinions and sense of individuality' (Wilkie 2000: 104), opinions that often run counter to those of their parents.

Children's tastes – in clothes, in music, in books, in TV programmes – are not in line with those of their parents, no matter how hard they might wish to pass on their love of jazz, or football, or particular story books. While these things might be rediscovered later in life, parents are often disappointed when hoping that their children will come to love the same things that they do. Miller frames these disappointments in terms of the corruption of children in the eyes of their parents (2004). Parents might resolve to give their children strictly organic diets and to allow non-gendered, non-violent toys and cartoons only, but the external

forces of advertising, older children and kids' parties quickly bring the temptation of sweeties, Barbie dolls and toy guns to their child's attention. In this article, Miller focusses on the preoccupations of middle class parents – a desire for children to eat 'pure' unprocessed food, and for children to play with toys that do not contradict their world view through gender stereotyping or the apparent promotion of violence – and demonstrates how these principles are eventually abandoned as parents become providers of these formerly demonised sweeties and Barbie dolls as they attempt to ease the rupture rendered by the development of their child's agency. Miller makes it clear that these preoccupations are not the preoccupations of the working class parents in his study, and it is easy to see these attempts to maintain strict control over their child's diet and toys as middle class affectations, the concerns of those with plenty of money and no real threats to worry about. But the parents in my study saw very real dangers in sugary foods and toy prams. The untimely death of Anna's parents made her determined to ensure that Lottie would be as healthy as possible. While she knew that pesticides and additives might present only the tiniest risk to health in later life, she also knew that health is a fragile thing, and took any risks to Lottie's health very seriously. Jenny was keen to encourage Tilly to play games that involved packing up her backpack to go off to university, rather than pushing a toy pram around pretending to be a mother with her own baby. Coming face to face with the impact of parenting on her own career, Jenny wanted her daughter to aim as high as possible, and not to suffer at the hands of gender-based career disparity. Parenting might be a 'series of inevitable defeats', but these defeats can be the source of real despair for parents who are trying

their hardest to set their children on a path to happiness and success, in the knowledge that their failures could do just the opposite.

In his studies of Mozambique and the way in which residents of the nation's capital, Maputo, seek to navigate uncertain futures, Nielsen demonstrates that by positioning themselves in the imagined future, at the point at which their hard work has paid off and they have the house or job or position that they want, his respondents were able to 'look back' from this point in the imagined future, and investigate the present from this new perspective. And yet while positioning oneself in this imagined future is to position oneself at a point of success, Nielsen's participants assumed that their imagined futures would fail. Nielsen describes this relationship between the present and the imagined future as though these failed imagined futures – 'collapsed futures' – are 'wedged into the present' (2014: 223). Here the distance between past and present is removed, so that the future '…instils within the present a series of futuristic properties by opening ongoing actions as being always *in potentia*' (2014: 215). By positioning themselves in the imagined future, Nielsen's participants are able to consider not only how this imagined future might be brought about, but also the forces that might bring about its demise. Collapsed futures represent a '…position from where the potentially capricious powers in the universe might be illuminated' (2014: 224). In an earlier work Pedersen and Nielsen demonstrate the capacity of things to act as 'hinges' that connect disparate temporal positions and happenings related to an imagined future (2013). They discuss the anger of workers at a stadium being built by Chinese investors on the edge of Maputo, at the fact that, when their Chinese employers paid their wages, they were

presented as bundles of cash, with no envelope to conceal the notes. Without envelopes the transaction between employer and employee has no specificity, it becomes anonymous. Without any meaningful interaction with their Chinese employers the workers were suspicious of their motives. When Nielsen enquired why the workers didn't teach their employers any Mozambican words to ease communications, his respondent told him that this would be foolish as their employer would only use these words to insult them in the future. The envelope is the 'hinge', the 'middle point' that brings together disparate events, so that the possibility of teaching their Chinese employers to speak their language is considered in relation to the envelope and its absence – with the distrust that stems from their employers' refusal to treat them with respect (Pedersen and Nielsen 2013: 129). In a similar way to Nielsen's participants, mine used the position of their children's imagined future and its potential collapse to consider the threats to its fruition. Similar to Nielsen and Pedersen's hinges, disparate happenings are brought together in consideration of their children and the many uncertain threats to their future health and happiness, so that a choice of what bread to buy, the level that the thermostat is set at, the decision whether to have the TV on or off, might all be seen in relation to their children and their children's future.

Parents work in the present to give their children the future they imagine for them. This makes the household with young children inherently future focussed, constantly anticipating the next stage, and the years to come. Objects are drafted into this attempt to bring hopes and aspirations for children's futures to pass as a means of guiding behaviour and attitudes, lending their potentiality and their

agency as facilitators and enforcers. If objects possess potentiality, children represent almost pure potentiality, the breadth of possible futures being the source of both optimism and fear as parents believe their child could do almost anything, but at the same time fear the innumerable threats that could lie in wait for them. Daily life in the household is about attempting to navigate this potentiality, using objects as one of the guiding tools to set their children on the right path.

While both the mothers and fathers I lived with had long-term hopes and expectations for their children, this long-term perspective appeared to create much more day-to-day anxiety for Claire, Anna and Jenny. The weight of everyday decisions – what to feed the kids for lunch, what to dress them in, what activities to do during the day, how to comfort the kids when they are distressed and how to punish them when they misbehave – fell primarily to the women in my study because they were the ones who cared for the children during the working day. Although Ben – who for a period was at home caring for Lottie during the day while Anna was at work – was anxious to ensure that Lottie was kept safe, happy and well fed, he did not feel the need to mull over the many future perils of choosing the wrong course of action. It was the women in my study who studied books on childcare and scoured the internet for articles and blog posts to understand the dangers that lay in seemingly innocuous decisions and how best to avoid them, and who felt the consequent inadequacy when they measured their decisions and actions against these standards of recommended behaviour. Walzer's study of parents of babies in North America found a marked distinction in the levels of worrying about the baby that mothers and fathers did.

The mothers she interviewed reported worrying almost constantly about their babies, and regarded worrying as an essential part of being a 'good mother'. Fathers, on the other hand, were able to set worries about their children aside when they were working or engaged in some other activity. Walzer argues that worrying, like most aspects of parenting, is divided along gender lines: 'The mother worries, the father doesn't; his job, in fact, might be to tell her not to worry' (1996: 223). Despite the intervening twenty years between Walzer's research and my own, I found a similar level of disparity between the amount of worrying about the children done by mothers and fathers. Without having to make the many minor decisions that make up the daily routine of parenting, Will and Peter were able to ignore the many considerations that went into making these decisions, freeing themselves from their cumulative weight. More than this, however, the women in my study – especially Jenny and Claire – seemed to feel the risk of being a 'bad mother' more keenly than the men in my study felt the risk of being a 'bad father'. This is not to say that the men in my study did not feel responsible for the wellbeing of their children, but that each parental action did not appear to be a test of the quality of their parenting in the way that Jenny and Claire felt theirs to be. The next chapter explores the disproportionate impact of having children on the mothers in my study. While both mothers and fathers worked to create the futures they imagined for the household and for their children, it was mothers who willingly sacrificed their visions of their own futures for those of their children.

Chapter 5.

'I'm not cut out to be a housewife': mothering on maternity leave

Claire often discussed the possibility that she would stop working if Peter was promoted. I suspect that, had she not found it so stressful to juggle her work and childcare, putting her career on hold would not have been an attractive proposition. At the company she worked for, working mothers were considered something of a liability. Claire mentioned that directors in the company had recently instituted rules that made working hours less flexible – demanding that employees be at their desks and available to respond to client requests until 5:30pm, making it difficult for women who needed to leave work in time to collect their children from nursery. These same directors had made comments indicating that they considered young women a risk to employ because they were likely to decide to have children within a few years and would therefore disappear on maternity leave and probably never return to work. Claire had also noticed a pattern whereby men, and women without children, were more likely to be given the most high profile projects while women with children – who it was assumed would work shorter hours and be less likely to be available to work late should the project require it – where given the less high profile projects that were less likely to lead to promotion. Claire felt the injustice of these attitudes, arguing that women with children, herself included, were simply more efficient during their working day – taking fewer breaks and stopping to talk less in order to ensure that they got their work done during the fewer number of hours they could be in the office – and worked in the evening and on weekends after their children had gone to bed,

sacrificing their own leisure time rather than reducing the number of hours they worked. This animosity toward mothers, and the lack of sympathy for the many logistical difficulties of juggling the strict nursery school and school schedules that govern the lives of parents with the erratic and sometimes unpredictable schedule of a busy work environment led Claire to expect that her return to work after her maternity period was up would be stressful and thankless – as it had been when she returned to work after having Emma. This stress seemed especially pointless when Claire and Peter took into account the fact that childcare for Emma and Jack – nursery, a nanny or an au pair – would be so expensive as to account for almost all of Claire's take home pay. She would effectively be working only to pay for childcare.

The possibility of giving up work to look after her children wasn't Claire's ideal solution, however. She suspected that after the children were at school during the day and therefore had no need of her at home to care for them, she would be forced back into the workplace – by boredom as much as anything else – and would likely find herself unable to return to her current career, having lost the vital years in her early 30s that are meant to be spent working tirelessly to cultivate a CV that would see her into the next few decades of her career. Claire talked about probably beginning a different kind of job when the children were older, but wasn't sure what that would be and she feared being left aimless when her children were grown up, filling her time with something rather than motivated to do something she really enjoyed. Claire was faced, then, with a decision to return to work in a stressful environment for little increase in the family's earnings, or to give up work in the knowledge that she might never again have the chance to cultivate a career

as successful and with the earning potential as the one she had. Her belief that time spent away from her children was missed quality time that could never be recovered, meant that stopping work seemed like the best thing to do for her children, even though Claire knew that this decision might be something she regretted in the long run.

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My time in Jenny and Will's house coincided with the pinnacle of the Frozen craze. The Disney film – centred on the relationship between two sisters – has been praised for its feminist credentials in contrast to the majority of similar Disney animations that portray women as weak and passive, requiring male protagonists to save them from disaster and distress. The strong female characters at the centre of Frozen's plot quickly became iconic and the English-speaking press were full of articles, commentary and think pieces hailing the film as the first in a new genre of feminism friendly fairy-tales – followed, of course, by the resulting backlash.

Will took Tilly to see Frozen at the local cinema, a run-down multiplex in the bottom of a car park in Peckham beloved by locals for its cheap ticket price and independent status. Tilly was instantly besotted, and the soundtrack to the film quickly overtook our lives, played at all times of the day. Tilly would demand that her favourite sections of the film be played during meal times and she would roam the house re-enacting scenes and singing her favourite songs from the film. When Will's mother came to stay she made Tilly a cape like the one Elsa – Tilly's favourite character from the movie – wore and Tilly would tear it off and throw it down with

a flourish in the style of Elsa at an especially dramatic moment in the plot, declaring: 'and I fling off my cape!' with gusto. When Tilly's grandmother sent her the DVD of Frozen as a surprise gift, it became the go-to remedy for Tilly's bad moods, a calming influence when she was hyper, or as something comforting when she was feeling run down or poorly.

Jenny and Will watched this obsession with amusement, entertained by her adorably tuneless renditions of the film's numerous power ballads. Singing was something Jenny and Will enjoyed and they would happily sing along with Tilly almost as tunelessly. While not fastidiously restrictive about Tilly's viewing habits, Jenny and Will tried to make sure that she didn't spend too much time in front of a screen. She wasn't allowed to watch just any TV show, Jenny and Will had sanctioned a couple of shows – 64 Zoo Lane, a cartoon about a young girl who visits her friends in a zoo at night time; and sometimes Peppa Pig, the hugely popular cartoon about a young pig named Peppa, her family and their friends – that Tilly was allowed to watch during meal times or when either Jenny or Will needed a break from childcare. These shows were considered acceptable partly because Jenny and Will found them clever or entertaining enough to be worthwhile viewing for Tilly, and because they didn't feature the level of gender stereotyping that Jenny and Will saw in many other shows aimed at small children. The discussion about Frozen's feminist credentials in the media had prompted Jenny and Will to have their own discussion on the subject, in which Jenny argued that while Frozen was far less unacceptably gender stereotypical than most other Disney films about fairytale princesses, it was by no means stridently feminist or without its fair share

of problematic gender clichés. Nevertheless, it was far enough from the Disney Princesses that Jenny and Will objected to for it to be deemed acceptable.

While Jenny and Will vetted TV, films, toys and books for problematic gender stereotyping, clothes didn't seem to receive the same level of scrutiny. Tilly's absolute favourite item of clothing, that she would ask to – and then demand to – wear every day, was her 'ballet'. A pink cotton dress with a multi-coloured netting tutu skirt, that Tilly adored for its similarity to the outfits worn by the ballerinas she had seen on her trip to the Royal Opera House with Will. She loved to don 'the ballet' and dance around so that surrounding adults would tell her how pretty she looked in it. When 'the ballet' was too dirty to wear – a regular occurrence given her refusal to take it off for meal times – she would substitute other 'party' dresses in for it, although none of these had sufficient twirling capability to match the attraction of 'the ballet'. Tilly had a collection of hair slides and clips that she would ask us to clip into her hair to make it look pretty, or she would ask Jenny or me to arrange her hair into a 'beautiful' ponytail or top-knot style. Jenny would often tell Tilly how pretty she looked, and yet also seemed to expect that Tilly would develop the kind of concerns over her appearance – especially her weight – that Jenny felt had plagued her adult life. When preparing a snack for Tilly to cheer her up when she was feeling upset or offering her a favourite meal to try to change her mood, Jenny would remark that she was probably creating poor food habits in her daughter, teaching her to turn to food in times of upset or unhappiness. After giving Tilly a second biscuit one afternoon, Jenny told me that it was alright because she would teach Tilly how to run too, giving her the tools she needed to manage her health and weight in the way that Jenny had learned to. Will never mentioned his

own weight, or gave any indication that he expected Tilly to be unhappy with hers in later life. Yet for Jenny, a concern over her eating habits and the risk of eating too much and thereby becoming fat, unhealthy and ultimately unattractive was something that seemed to haunt her life, and something that she fully expected to haunt the life of her daughter. Despite working to protect Tilly from sexist stereotypes that might limit her ambition and shape her perspective on what her place in the world should be, Jenny still fully expected Tilly to experience the same feelings of anxiety and inadequacy that she had felt in comparing herself to the stereotypical ideal of womanhood.

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A few months before I moved in with the West family Ben had quit his job. He had been working for his employer – a renowned maker of artisanal foods – for a number of years and although he enjoyed working there, he had begun to feel that the job was no longer the right thing for him. His role required him to keep a schedule that was often unsociable, working on weekends and early in the morning, giving him hardly any time with Lottie and Anna. There was also little room for job progression, as the business, although famous, was small. Ben's frustration finally came to a head one day, and after a discussion with his manager he decided that it was time to leave his job and make a change. When he came home from work that evening and told Anna that he had resigned – with immediate effect – he had only two vague plans in his head: get an office job with regular hours and clear career progression, or open his own shop.

By the time I moved in, the decision had been made that Ben would open his own shop, and plans were underway to seek out an appropriate location and make the appropriate preparations. In the meantime, Ben was at home most days, apart from the odd one spent doing bits and pieces of work for friends in the artisanal food business. This casual work provided a small boost to their income while they were surviving on one income but was sporadic. For the first month or so of my time with them, Anna was on maternity leave, working only a single day a week to maintain her connection to the work environment. After a while this increased to three days a week, and then to four. While initially Anna and Ben had paid for a nanny to come and care for Lottie on the days that Anna was at work, as the timeline for Ben's shop dragged on, their finances could no longer accommodate a nanny, so it became Ben's responsibility to care for Lottie during the day until she began nursery.

Lottie would wake up early in the morning – often around five in the morning – and Anna would retrieve Lottie from her cot and take her back to bed so that she and Ben could look after Lottie while dozing. Anna would give Lottie her morning feed and then hand her over to Ben to give her breakfast. While they still had a nanny, Lottie would only be in Ben's care for an hour or so, getting her dressed before the nanny came to take over. After the nanny was let go, this was the point at which Ben and Lottie would begin their day together, probably spending the morning in the living room, Ben keeping one eye on the TV and one eye on Lottie shuffling around on the floor, then going out for a walk and a spot of brunch before nap time. In the afternoon they might play in the garden or Lottie would sit in her playpen in the kitchen while Ben pottered around cooking or cleaning – the

cleaning lady had been given up not long after the nanny as a further cost-saving measure, meaning that the weekly clean of the kitchen and bathroom became Ben's responsibility. When Anna came home from work Lottie would immediately demand her attention, and to be fed. A few hours later Anna would put Lottie to bed and then their childcare responsibilities would be done for the day.

This arrangement was temporary. Shortly after her first birthday Lottie began nursery, and while there were a few months of 'settling in' where she only went to nursery for a couple of days in the week, soon she spent the whole working week at nursery, returning in the evenings grumpy and tired for an hour or two with Anna and Ben. Lottie's move to a full-time nursery schedule coincided with a breakthrough in the plans for Ben's shop. Soon the majority of his time was taken up with planning and preparations, overseeing renovations and talking to new suppliers. Anna had been promoted when she returned to work after maternity leave, so that she now had far greater responsibility and had been given a number of key projects to manage. Nevertheless, when the time approached for the opening of Ben's shop, Anna took a week off work to assist with the preparations, spending daytimes helping Ben organise stock and get everything looking perfect and then picking Lottie up from nursery and putting her to bed before preparing a meal for Ben when he returned from the shop late at night. When the shop finally opened, Ben, who ran the shop entirely on his own, was absent from the home for much of the time, working both weekdays and weekends, with only one day a week off. Once again, the majority of the childcare fell to Anna.

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I could have framed this study as an ethnography of maternity leave, given that all three of the women in my study were on maternity leave for all or most of the period that I lived with them.[3] Certainly, there have been few ethnographic studies of maternity leave or parental leave in the UK. Social scientific research into maternity leave tends to explore it in relation to issues of a woman's career and gender inequality, ignoring the lived experience of the time itself. As Stockey-Bridge argues in one such piece of research exploring women's decisions whether or not to return to work after their maternity leave ends, motherhood 'draws women away from their career and aspirations and into the domestic sphere' (2015: 94). In the UK, maternity leave tends to be the moment of dramatic shift from workplace into the domestic sphere, a period during which the women in my study were almost confined to the home attending to what they considered to be the near-constant needs of their babies at the expense of virtually everything else. For women like those in my study whose lives had previously been devoted in large part to the development of their careers, who had spent their working days in offices and meetings, governed by

[3] In the UK women are entitled to take up to 52 weeks of maternity leave. The first 26 weeks of this period is termed 'Ordinary Maternity Leave', while the remaining period is termed 'Additional Maternity Leave'. 'Statutory Maternity Pay' – 90% of average weekly earnings before tax – is paid for the first 6 weeks, after which point women are entitled to £139.58 or 90% of their average weekly earnings if this is lower for the following 33 weeks. Women are not entitled to any pay for the remaining 13 weeks (gov.uk 2016a). Some employers might pay more than the Statutory Maternity Pay, this is referred to as Occupational Maternity Pay, but this varies by employer and is subject to rules set by the employer (Department for Work and Pensions 2015), and women may be required to pay back the additional maternity pay they have received from their employer if they choose not to return to work (www.maternityaction.org.uk). The average length of maternity leave taken by women is increasing: according to government statistics it rose from 32 weeks in 2006 to 39 weeks in 2009, although this rise coincided with an increase in the period of entitlement of Statutory Maternity Pay from 26 weeks to 39 in 2007. As of 2008, 77% of women had returned to work by the time their child was aged 12-18 months (gov.uk 2011).

deadlines and management, this represented a radical – if temporary – change, a time when they seemed to be living another woman's life, albeit in in their own home and with their own family. This change was made willingly. Jenny, Claire and Anna were adamant that their period of maternity leave was an essential part of their mothering, allowing them to breastfeed their new baby, to be present for the precious early days before, too soon, their baby would grow up before their eyes. No matter how exhausted, lonely, or bored they might have felt, never once did I hear one of them indicate that it wasn't worth it, that they wouldn't willingly set aside what they wanted for the sake of their children. And yet it was also clear that this change was made with the understanding that there was no realistic alternative. That they had to put their careers on hold, to adopt the role of 'housewife' that hadn't featured in their imaginings of their future, whether they had wanted to or not.

That Jenny, Claire and Anna took leave and their husbands did not is not unusual in the UK. In 2011 the law was changed so that men were entitled to take up to 26 weeks of paternity leave if their partner returned to work, and this was the legal situation at the time of my fieldwork.[4] In 2012-13 only 1.4 per cent of

[4] Fathers are currently entitled by law to two weeks of paternity leave paid at £139.58 per week, or 90% of their average weekly income, whichever is lower. In 2011 they became entitled to up to 26 weeks Additional Paternity Pay if their partner returns to work (Chanfreau et al. 2011). This was changed in 2015 so that parents can now share the entirety of the 52 weeks of shared parental leave they are entitled to between them – apart from the two initial weeks which must be taken by the mother – and 39 weeks of Statutory Shared Parental Pay (gov.uk 2016b). According to government statistics, in 2008 91% of fathers took their allowance of two weeks of paternity leave after the birth of their baby. However, the take up of Additional Paternity Leave has been very low, with only 1.4% of fathers making use of the entitlement in 2012-13 (Mason, 2014).

fathers took advantage of this entitlement (Mason 2014). Yet all three women in my study are middle class, well-educated, well-versed in the various permutations of the gender discriminations they could face in their work environments and in day-to-day lives. All three had successful careers, and earned, or had the potential to earn, more than their husbands. In theory, these should be the women most able to demand gender equality in their married lives. Yet, for Jenny and Claire at least, life during the time I spent with them seemed to resemble the stereotype of married middle class life 50 years ago, before the great strides towards equality that are said to have been made in the intervening period. Both Jenny and Claire stayed at home caring for their children and looking after the home, while their husbands continued to work. Claire and Jenny did the vast majority of the housework and the coordination of the household, while their husbands did relatively little of this work, being absent during the working day and returning for the period of relaxation in the evening.

Sociologists have highlighted the place of housework in the continued devaluation of work done by women. Oakley's classic study of housework framed housework as work, highlighting the amount of time and effort women spend on housework, and the monotony of days filled with these tasks (1974). More recently, Pink has sought to counteract what she sees as the denial of women's agency implicit in these framings of housework as drudgery and housewives as the exploited victims of patriarchal oppression. In her sensory ethnography comparing the experiences of housewives in Spain and Britain, she argues that the stereotype of the housewife who spends her days following an endless

routine of onerous chores is largely a myth in modern British society, that housewives have much more freedom to organise their days as they desire and happily abandon tasks, cut corners or make use of time saving devices to perform their housework tasks in a way that fits their attitude to them. Furthermore, Pink's focus on the sensory experience of these tasks enables her to highlight the pleasure that many of her respondents found in the process of housework, the smells and sensations of cleaning and tidying that created a pleasurable experience and a pleasant environment in which to live (2004). While I do not doubt that there are many women in the UK for whom the role of housewife is a lifestyle they have happily chosen and embrace, this was not the case for my respondents. The temporary role of housewife had come part and parcel with the decision to have a child. While there may have been sensory pleasures to be found in the fresh scent of cleaning products and the order of a tidy kitchen, the women in my study had little time – or inclination – to find them. The independence that Pink sees in the ability of housewives to order their day as they desire was not available to the women I lived with, whose days were strictly ordered by nap times, and who were at the beck and call of their young baby's needs. These women who didn't want be housewives, who never saw themselves as housewives, had little choice but to take on the role for the duration of their maternity leave.

The period of maternity leave was one in which the life outside of the home was put on hold, and time away from the home and children was no longer justified. In Gullestad's *Kitchen-table Society,* we see women who make use of a number of routes to escape the home and the responsibilities of the home, if only

temporarily (1984). While work may offer little in the way of 'fulfilment and self-expression' (1984: 309), it is a way to 'get out', to engage with a world outside of the domestic. Getting 'out', also provided a means to mitigate the tensions of the household life. Gullestad contrasts the home, as a place of practicality and practical concerns, with the discotheques and nightclubs her respondents attend every week, where they are able to be the 'attractive women' they want to be, but which household life gives little opportunity to be. The home could not provide everything Gullestad's respondents felt was integral to their identity and personhood. It was clear that the women in my study felt similarly, that their careers were something they wanted rather than something they did out of necessity. They employed material strategies to maintain links to their careers which offered types of fulfilment the home could not. Jenny's mobile phone was often in her hand as she fed Archie or after the kids were in bed so that she could read the newspapers and Twitter, keeping up with the political chatter and goings-on in Westminster where she worked. Anna maintained her utter inability to drink sub-standard or sub-standardly made coffee, even when not at work at the coffee roasting company. The complex and multi-staged process by which Anna and Ben made their coffee, a method obeyed meticulously for every coffee, was a perfect replica of the method used at her place of work, this process reaffirming her connection to the world of coffee several times a day.

That it was Jenny, Claire and Anna, rather than their husbands, who should take time out of their careers to care for their babies in the early stages of their lives was repeatedly justified by the assumption that Will, Peter and Ben were somehow less capable of doing so. It was generally regarded that the solution to

any bout of the baby's crying would probably be to feed it, meaning that if anyone else was holding the baby when it needed comforting it would be handed to his or her mother. For small babies, then, it was considered essential that their mothers be there to care for them, the presence of their father preferable but not absolutely necessary. In her analysis of the moral discourse surrounding breast feeding in Canadian public health education material, Wall highlights the expectation that women should be willing to sacrifice their own requirements for those of their children, reduced to 'builders of better babies' and becoming invisible as subjects in their own right (2001: 604). Wall argues that women are often left to cope with the demands of breast feeding and the toll it takes on their bodies alone, often while caring for their other children as well as their baby. While Claire, Jenny and Anna were determined to breastfeed their babies, and passionately believed that this would give their children a better chance of a healthy future, they did so knowing the impact that this decision would have on their lives, not least the requirement to be present to feed their child repeatedly throughout the day which ensured that, until their baby was weaned, they had to be near the baby at all times. Their freedom was sacrificed for the sake of their child and their child's future, their isolation and bodily exhaustion considered by themselves and their husbands to be a price worth paying.

Hays's study of attitudes to mothering amongst North American mothers revealed a similar willingness to adopt a style of mothering that was both labour and time intensive, especially amongst middle class mothers. Hays points to the seemingly inexplicable nature of the rise of this kind of 'intensive mothering', asking why, when women are now likely to maintain a career after they have

children, has the definition of 'good mothering' become more rather than less demanding.

> Why do many professional-class employed women seem to find it necessary to take the kids to swimming and judo and dancing and tumbling lessons, not to mention orthodontists and psychiatrists and attention-deficit specialists?... Why are there aerobics courses for babies, training sessions in infant massage, sibling-preparedness workshops, and designer fashions for two-year-olds? Why must a "good" mother be careful to "negotiate" with her child, refraining from demands for obedience to an absolute set of rules? Why must she avoid spanking a disobedient child and instead feel the need to explain, in detail, the issues at hand? Why does she consider it important to be consciously and constantly attentive to the child's wishes? Why does she find it necessary to apologize to the child if she somehow deviates from the code of appropriate mothering? (Hays 1996: 6)

As Hays points out, such attitudes to mothering are not the natural order of things, they are culturally and historically contingent. Barlow has criticised the Western-centric conception of mothering that sees only the dyadic relationship between mother and child and ignores the variety of attitudes and practices of mothering that exist. She describes mothering practice amongst the Murik of Papua New Guinea, where as soon as babies are able to sit up they become 'public persons', with all female members of the community expected to adopt a mothering role toward them. For the Murik, the key task of mothering is to teach babies how to relate to those around them, shared mothering enables this relatedness and allows the baby to develop their network of relationships (Barlow 2004). Scheper-Hughes, in her study of life in a favela in North Eastern Brazil, tells the stories of women for whom the fragility and tenuous nature of their children's lives is an inescapable reality (1993). Sickly, weak children who appear to lack the will to live are neglected in favour of those that seem to cling

more tightly to life. For these women, living in grinding poverty, mothering is characterised by the pragmatism required to keep themselves and those children with a chance at life, alive.

The women in my study had ultimate responsibility for childcare, they had the final word over day-to-day parenting decisions, largely because it was they who had to make them. Hays gives us the example of Rachel, a middle class mother with a high pressure job who nevertheless devotes the majority of her waking hours not spent in the office to the care of her young child. Rachel works until midnight at least once a week in order to ensure that she can take Thursdays off work and devote the entire day to her daughter, doing activities that are centred around her daughter and what her daughter wants. Rachel states that her husband is as invested in their daughter's happiness and development as she is, yet she regards her salary as the fund that will pay for her daughter's care, as though the child were primarily her responsibility. Hays finds that this tendency for women to regard themselves as having the ultimate responsibility for their child's care is one that runs through the attitudes of all of her thirty-eight respondents. For most of these women this is not due to the fact that their partners can't be trusted to care for their children, but that they display either a lack of effort in doing so, or a lack of competence. My research echoes this finding; Will and Peter spent far less time with their children than their wives did, Peter sometimes going for whole weeks without seeing Emma and Jack because he was out of the country for work or working long hours that took him out of the house before Emma and Jack woke up and brought him back well after their bed time. This disparity in time spent with the children translated to a

disparity in the ease with which mothers and fathers interacted with their children. Claire thought that Peter was terrified to be left alone with Jack, unsure as to how to comfort or placate him should he begin to cry. Will, who was almost always present for bed times and breakfast times was happy to look after Tilly on his own for a while, but would look to Jenny for guidance about how best to care for baby Archie, much to Jenny's exasperation. The situation was different for Anna and Ben, with Ben at home caring for Lottie, but it was still often noted that Lottie preferred Anna's company. Even though Ben was perfectly happy to be home caring for the baby when Anna returned to work, there was still the overriding assumption that Lottie's closest bond was the bond she shared with Anna. As Hays argues, in seeing a high bar for the level of time and effort that must be expended to be a 'good mother', and in understanding that their partners are unwilling or unable to go to such lengths, women come to have responsibility for the delivery of intensive methods of care. Responsibility that they work to fulfil while also fulfilling the demands of their careers – mothers' lives become the battle ground between the demands of the market and the ideology of the domestic sphere as embodying opposition to the cold rationality of the market.

Jenny tried and failed to resolve this conflict. Jenny and Will's decision to move to a larger house shortly before she had Archie meant that they could not afford to live without her income, making it impossible for her to extend her leave beyond the six months of paid leave offered by her employer. Jenny asked Will to take the six months of paternity leave he was entitled to when she returned to work so they could delay hiring a nanny, but Will had refused. Will earned less than

Jenny; they would have been as able to survive on her salary alone as they would have been to pay a nanny if they were both working. Jenny was concerned about the difficulty of finding a nanny that they could afford, but who she would trust to care for her six-month-old baby, and beyond this she felt guilty at returning to work after only six months, a relatively short period amongst the middle class mothers she knew, who usually took the full year their employers allowed, relying on their partner's income alone for the last six months. Will's decision not to take an extended period of paternity leave was never explicitly discussed at length in my presence, and it was hardly ever referred to. I don't know Will's reasons for choosing not to take paternity leave, or the way in which the idea was broached. The few references Jenny made to his decision were made as asides, and it was clear that Jenny didn't wish his decision to become a source of resentment or anger between them. Will wasn't satisfied with his current role in his workplace and had put a lot of effort into lobbying his employers to allow him to change direction, efforts that were now paying off. Jenny was supportive of his desire to do something he found more fulfilling and did everything she could to help and encourage him in this regard. It must have been clear to her why Will would be reluctant to take paternity leave. But Jenny was also at a key moment in her career, taking six months out to care for her second baby was no more convenient for Jenny than it was for Will. While both Jenny and Will had decided that they wanted a second child, only Jenny saw the repercussions of this on her career, with no freedom to opt out so as not to risk losing momentum in the workplace. Jenny had little choice but to carry the majority of the burden for caring for her children, despite her attempts to share the burden more equally with her husband.

If Jenny and Claire's experiences of maternity leave imply that adopting the traditional role of the housewife is an inevitability, Anna's experience appears to be the counterpoint to this. Certainly, the fact that Anna returned to work while Ben was not working meant that Ben took on the bulk of the childcare and housework at that point. Both parties were happy with this arrangement, it was convenient, cheap, and Ben enjoyed spending time with Lottie. Even aside from care during the working day, Ben took on a large part of the childcare, feeding Lottie her breakfast in the morning while Anna slept, or putting Lottie to bed if Anna wanted to go out for the evening. This division of childcare had been largely accidental, however, as it had been assumed that Ben's shop would be up and running by the time Anna returned to work, allowing them to afford to employ a nanny until Lottie began at nursery. As the process of opening the shop took far longer than anyone had anticipated, and as Ben was at home most days, it seemed both practically and financially sensible for him to care for Lottie, and to let the nanny go. Ben and Anna entered into this arrangement with ease and willingness. It was, however, an arrangement borne of circumstance rather than the idea that they should share the care of Lottie, and the impact of this on their careers. Osnowitz's study of contract workers demonstrates how being in the home during the working day gives men the freedom to perform domestic roles without a concern that they will be seen as performing the role of a stay-at-home parent (2005). Ben acquiesced to caring for Lottie when Anna returned to work, safe in the knowledge that he would not be 'stuck' in the role for long, expected to put his career on hold to care for his child. When, after months of delay, Ben's plan for his shop began to get off the ground, Anna was once again in the position

of primary carer for Lottie, as Ben's schedule meant that he worked through the weekend and had little spare time. Anna opted to work only 4 days a week, taking her day off to coincide with Ben's so that they could spend at least one day a week together. In the end, then, Anna organised her working life around the schedules of both her child and her husband.

In comparison to the professional environment, in which it was clear Jenny, Claire and Anna felt competent and confident, the role of 'full-time mum' that they played for their period of maternity leave was one of uncertainty and anxiety. In Clarke's study of children's parties and the efforts that go in to their planning and preparation, she positions these events as ones in which mothers negotiate modes of mothering, contesting and reinforcing norms through the exchange and provision of gifts, clothes, and foods (2007). Clarke uses the example of kids parties and other social events like them to dispute the narrative of isolated mothers, confined to the home with little interaction with the outside world. In contrast to Clarke's mothers, Jenny, Claire and Anna were not members of a community of regularly socialising mums, and events such as children's parties only served to highlight the rarity of their socialising with other mothers. Mirroring Clarke's descriptions of anxiety and exasperation at the increasingly elaborate and expensive parties mothers are expected to organise for their children, Claire spent the weeks before Emma's birthday party agonising over details – which weekend would be the best to throw the party, what the entertainment should be, what the location should be, what kind of catering she should provide. In contrast to Clarke's mothers, however, the majority of Claire's anxiety seemed to stem from her lack of confidence in choosing the right course

of action for each of these many components rather than frustration at the level of effort, skill or financial investment required. In the end, Claire opted for a bouncy castle party at the local sports centre and to do the catering herself – buying fish fingers, mini sausages, chips and other safe children's foods from the supermarket and transporting them to the hall on the day. The night before the party she and I stayed up late making cake pops – small spherical cakes on a stick that we covered in bright coloured icing and toppings – and a butterfly shaped cake to be the centrepiece of the buffet. These options had been debated for days and days. Claire and I had discussed the many pros and cons of external catering, a party at home, a store-bought cake and the filling of the party bags. Claire, who usually prided herself on her knowledge of and expertise in the raising of children – acquired through her extended family and teenage years spent caring for her many younger siblings – was left unsteady and unsure in planning a party, the success of which would display her knowledge of mothering norms, a failure marking her out as ignorant of these norms and unskilled as a mother.

This fear of the judgement of other 'mums' crept up in other, less high-profile occasions. Jenny was irritated by her sister-in-law's surprise that she did not carry a change of clothes for Tilly in her handbag in case of spillages or other accidents, Claire felt the barbed nature of a comment from a mother of one of Emma's nursery-mates who mistook Emma's brightly coloured leggings for pyjamas and told her in a seemingly back-handed compliment how 'cute' it was that she wanted to wear them to nursery. The judgement of others was felt keenly by the women in my study, especially in relation to their children's possessions, clothes, or food, aware as they were of the assumption that it was

part of their role as a mother to ensure that the material culture of their children was correct and well cared for. Their ownership of these responsibilities was reinforced by their own attitudes. When telling Emma why she had to take a coat to school Claire asked her: 'What will the other mummies think of me if I let you turn up at nursery with no coat?"

Jenny and Claire both surprised me with their willingness to tackle household tasks that added further stress and exhaustion to their already taxing days during their maternity leave. All three families had employed a cleaner while both adults were working, or planned to when both were working again, but felt that this help was a needless extravagance during maternity leave. External domestic workers such as cleaners and nannies are one of the ways that dual-earning households are able to 'pick up the slack' of household chores and childcare needs. Employing these workers frees up those women who can afford to employ them to work full time outside of the home, but the fact that these workers are most often women does little to undo the gender imbalance of work in the household. Critics of the commoditization of domestic work who argue that women employing cleaners and maids to do their 'dirty work' are exploiting other women focus their condemnation on women, whose responsibility it is assumed these tasks ordinarily would be (Bowman & Cole 2009). Indeed, the responsibility for finding, hiring and firing cleaners and nannies fell to Claire, Jenny and Anna to organise, and sometimes agonise over. It was Claire who texted me weeks before her return to work, in a terrible panic because the au pair she had lined up turned out not to be suitable and she was frantically trying to find an alternative solution.

While cleaners and nannies were considered a justifiable expense when Jenny and Claire were working, during their maternity leave they became a luxury that could be done without. Claire reduced their cleaner's hours and then let her go entirely a few months into her maternity leave, arguing that she could do the cleaning herself now that Jack no longer needed to be held in her arms at all times. Her decision was also justified by her assertion that the cleaner's standards had slipped to an unacceptably low level since she was first employed, despite Claire's issuing of clear instructions. While Claire had previously been satisfied with the work of her cleaner, during her maternity leave her standards of cleanliness appeared to rise, and things that had ordinarily gone unnoticed became examples of cut corners and shoddy work. Pink makes a distinction between the almost mythical 'ideal' housewife who is tirelessly fastidious in her cleaning, and the reality of many housewives who were happy to cut corners and do substandard housework in the name of ease and speed (2004). In making known her unwillingness to accept anything other than excellent levels of cleanliness, Claire moved closer to the normative ideal of the housewife, demonstrating her skill in judging cleanliness, the high standards she demanded for her family and her commitment in ensuring that these standards were met. Unable to live as she wanted, Claire turned to the normative ideal of a woman in her position as the standard against which to judge her behaviour.

Claire did not limit herself to housework and cleaning. One afternoon she asked me to hold Jack for a few hours while she attempted to climb out of the bathroom window onto the flat roof of the kitchen extension to identify the source of a leak

that had caused a patch of discolouration in the corner of the ceiling. She reasoned that if she waited for Peter to do it she'd be waiting forever, and so wiggled out of the window and peered over the corner, identifying a gap in the bricks that was allowing water to seep through and proceeding to fill it in the hopes of stopping the leak. A few days previously I had come downstairs to find her and Emma sitting in the hallway while Claire unscrewed the handle on the kitchen door. The handle had been known to stick and Claire had become concerned that Emma might find herself trapped in the kitchen, unable to open the door from the inside. She had decided therefore to attempt to fix the handle, and if that didn't work, to remove the handle all together. Jenny's home improvement efforts were more extreme. On the first full day I spent living in Jenny and Will's home, as soon as the children had been put down for their afternoon nap, Jenny asked me to help her move the furniture that had been put in the living room for storage while their house renovations had been completed into Archie's newly painted bedroom. This was the beginning of three months of DIY and tasks, during which time Jenny, with my help, worked in hours snatched here and there during the day while the kids were sleeping and sometimes in the evening after they had gone to bed, to repaint their hallways, landings, doors and woodwork, paint their fences and sow grass in their garden, put up extra shelves in their living room, and sand and stain their new kitchen table and benches. While Will helped during weekends and the odd hour in the evenings, these tasks were driven by Jenny, who had, she said, accepted long ago that of her husband's many talents and interests, DIY was not one. Will clearly hated DIY and had little interest in developing his skills in that area – his efforts were distinctly half hearted, often abandoned half-done. Jenny, far more willing to get stuck in,

pragmatically prioritising 'getting it done' over finicky techniques or precision, seemed to have decided that getting the DIY done was her job, and that the only time she was likely to be able to complete these tasks and get the house 'done', was during her maternity leave. But these tasks were onerous, and the lengthy list of jobs-to-be-done that she had drawn up hung over her days, attaching guilt to the hours spent surfing the web or chatting with me which could have been used painting bannisters or planting the garden. I never ceased to be amazed by her energy, her willingness to use her few hours break from the constant demands of childcare for manual labour and often physically exhausting work. Her determination to complete her list of tasks before the end of her maternity leave drove her. Jenny wanted to return to work knowing that her house was 'ready', knowing that once her time was divided between her career and childcare she would have precious little to devote to fixing up her home, meaning that tasks left undone at the point of her return to work were likely to remain undone for a long while.

That Jenny and Claire regarded DIY as their job contrasts with Miller's findings in his study of residents of a North London Council Estate, where in the context of home improvement, gender roles were distinct but complementary – women are in charge of design, and their male partners or kin do the physical labour to bring this design to life. Miller argues that through these complementary roles women and men were brought together in a joint effort to 'appropriate' their state owned homes (1988). The contrast between Miller's findings and my own are, probably, in large part a reflection of changes in British society and the conception of gender roles in the intervening thirty years between his research

and mine. I suspect that they also reflect the intensification of motherhood, and the place of the home as the key site in the playing out of this commitment. Jenny and Claire's willingness to add further tasks to the already tiring and time-consuming work of caring for small children belied both a feeling that childcare was not enough of a task to fill your time – that 'just' caring for their children without expecting themselves to complete more tasks would be laziness – and the sense of being 'in the home' that characterised the period of maternity leave. Removed from their careers, their offices, their colleagues and the social spheres that accompany these parts of their lives, Jenny and Claire's focus was on the home, and their time and energy was invested in the home and its development. If maternity leave was a time during which Jenny and Claire expected to, and were expected to, prioritise their children and family above everything else, the home became the embodiment of these relationships, the work they put into improving their homes becoming the tangible manifestation of their commitment – a true labour of love.

All three of the mothers in my study had seemingly endless ideas for how they would like to arrange and decorate the home to make it more appealing or better suited to their children. These ideas often involved turning areas of 'adult space' into 'child friendly' space. Claire discussed the possibility of giving the spacious master bedroom that she and Peter currently shared to Emma so that she might have a bedroom-cum-nursery with plenty of room for a large dolls house and room for her to play. Jenny carved out spaces for the children in any space not currently occupied, creating a 'den' under the stairs on the upstairs hallway and devoting a whole section of the garden to a Wendy house, sand pit and 'art area'

for Tilly and Archie to use during the summer time. Stevenson & Prout have discussed the growth of the 'toy room' – a room devoted to children's toys – as a means of coping with the limits of space in the home and the proliferation of children's toys by allocating an area to which these things can be consigned (2013). On the contrary, Jenny and Claire appeared to be maximising the area of the home that the children could regard as their own, building the children into the home environment. These improvements and planned improvements were accompanied by imaginings of their child enjoying these spaces – Jenny described how Tilly would love to paint in the garden during the summer, and how the shade of the fence would protect her against the glare of the sun. Claire saw Emma holding sleepovers in her bedroom/nursery. Claire and Jenny worked during their maternity leave to make the home a place where their children could live as they wanted them to, aware that once their maternity leave was over they would no longer have the free time or energy to attend to these issues. The commonly held idea that women returning to work after maternity leave feel guilty for leaving their children in the care of others, however financially necessary that return might be and however much they might enjoy their work, was certainly borne out by my research. Pugh has hypothesised that toys are often marketed to that guilt, offering a means for mothers to assuage their guilt and feel better about the 'compromise' between work and childcare by suggesting that toys are able to be companions or aids, taking over the role traditionally played by parents to some extent (2005). I suspect that Jenny and Claire's eagerness to craft their home into a place of play and comfort for their children was an attempt to in some way minimise the guilt they told me they felt

in returning to work. While working was something they wanted to do, and something they enjoyed doing, it was something they felt guilty for wanting.

I was struck, during my analysis, by the fact that all three of my respondents had described themselves to me at some point as feminists. Yet at the time I was living with them, Jenny and Claire's lives fulfilled the stereotypes of a gendered division of labour in the household, and Anna had avoided this stereotype only through an accident of timing, and had indeed fulfilled this stereotype for the majority of her maternity leave until Ben had stopped working. As mothers of daughters, Jenny, Claire and Anna seemed keen to help their children avoid such contradictions in their own lives. Jenny, well-versed in the feminist critiques of much of the popular culture aimed at young girls, and only too aware – both through her own experiences and through her work in public policy – of the impact of becoming a mother on a woman's career prospects, steered Tilly away from Disney princesses (the more recent Disney movies *Frozen* and *Tangled* being the exceptions because of their 'strong female leads') and Barbie dolls toward story books about smart girls outwitting their opponents and creative past times that would develop her interest and skills in these areas. Anna's concern was Lottie's self-confidence and freedom, bemoaning the content of reading books, complaining that she'd banned certain books from Lottie's repertoire for their unhelpful messages about weight, family structure or gender roles for fear that Lottie would learn that it wasn't 'OK' to be whoever she wanted to be or do whatever she wanted to do. Claire defended Emma's right to feel equal to any man, while assuming that her interests and actions would likely follow those stereotypically associated with being a girl – more than happy to

buy Emma Disney Princess paraphernalia and paint her nails pretty colours as a treat, she was also keen to remind her that she was as good as any boy and could do anything just as well as any boy. Buchli and Lucas, in their archaeological study of an abandoned council house commented on the quality and clear expense of the children's clothes they 'excavated'. They argue that by buying such good quality clothes for her children, at an expense she likely would not have gone to for her own clothes, was an attempt by the mother of the children who lived in the council flat to help them transcend the poverty-driven limitations of their mother's life (2000). In a similar way, the mothers in my study were attempting to use material culture – toys, clothes, books – as a means to help their daughters transcend the disappointments and frustrations they were experiencing in their own lives at that moment. These attempts were made with an air of defeatism and a recognition of futility. Of course their daughters would want to wear 'princess dresses' every day, of course their daughters would be exposed to forms of media implying that they should be beautiful, feminine and acquiescent; of course their daughters would favour playing with dolls over playing with Lego. In the same way that, of course Jenny would put her career on hold to care for their children while her husband refused to do the same; of course Claire would demonstrate her willingness to ensure high standards of cleanliness of her family's home by dismissing their cleaner and doing the work herself, of course Ben would hand Lottie to Anna every evening as soon as she returned from work, assuming that Lottie would always be better cared for by her mother, their daughters would of course grow up to face similar expectations. Just as Claire, Jenny and Anna had willingly sacrificed what they wanted for the care of their children, and watched their husbands pursue their

own aspirations and imagined futures largely unencumbered, so they expected their own daughters to one day do the same.

Certainly, the picture I have painted of hard working mothers and largely absent fathers is shaped by the fact that my time was spent in the home with Claire, Jenny and Anna as they worked at motherhood. I have no doubt that Peter and Will worked hard at fatherhood, and were themselves struggling to reconcile the demands of their careers with their desire to give their children the futures they wanted for them. But it is clear to me that the women in my study – at least during their maternity leave – willingly sought to give their children the futures they imagined for them, at the expense of what they wanted for themselves. Of course, sometimes getting what one wants requires giving something up. After all, as I discussed in chapter two, the work of enacting imagined futures requires bodily sacrifice of time and energy. As does the work of caring. My point is not that women gave up what they wanted, or put what they wanted on hold to give their children the lives they wanted for them, but that their husbands did not do the same. That it is not the norm for fathers to take lengthy periods of paternity leave while their partners work is clearly a significant factor in this discrepancy, but there is more at play than that. Even in countries where the law has been constructed to enable men to take as much responsibility for childcare as women, the expectation that mothers have ultimate responsibility for their children continues. Perälä-Littunen's exploration of understandings of what it is to be a 'good' mother and a 'good' father in Finland, a country where policies of family leave are based on the ideology of gender equality, found that while the characteristics of a 'good mother' flowed easily from her respondents, those of a

'good father' were more difficult to identify. Even after asserting that the qualities of both a 'good mother' and 'good father' were essentially the same, these statements would be followed by an assertion that, of course, a bond between a mother and her children is the strongest (2007). This similar understanding amongst my respondents, that Claire, Jenny and Anna were somehow inherently more capable of parenting than their husbands, served to legitimise the reluctance of Will and Peter to share with any degree of equality in the care of their children. The burden fell on the mothers in my study to compromise the futures they imagined for themselves in order to give their children what they thought they should have.

Chapter 6.

A trip to the shops: middle class imagined futures and south-east London

One day, Claire, Jack, Emma and I went to the shops together. So far, winter had been mild and as a special treat Claire sometimes agreed to pick Emma up from nursery on foot rather than in the car. Emma hated being crammed into her car seat and put in the back seat alongside her little brother, away from her mother all the way at the front. Negotiating Jack in the buggy and Emma on foot was a difficult job, however, as the pavements between the Harpers' house and Emma's nursery weren't smooth, and Emma had a tendency to absentmindedly stray toward the road if she wasn't holding someone's hand at all times. And although the walk was a short one, Emma was often tired from a long day at nursery and before they reached home her enthusiasm for the walk often turned to proclamations that she couldn't walk any further and demands to be pushed in the buggy instead of Jack. After one too many of these fraught walks home, in which she ended up carrying Emma and pushing Jack in the buggy up the hill, she resolved to get a buggy board.

Buggy boards are small wheeled platforms that affix to the back of a buggy. They are designed to solve just the kind of problems Claire was having, by providing a means for a toddler and a baby to be pushed along at the same time – the baby in the buggy and the toddler standing on the board. Claire did as she usually did when planning a purchase, and shopped around on the internet. Horrified by the price of

the board made to fit the buggy she owned by its manufacturer, she considered buying a generic board made to fit any buggy but was too nervous that it would be poor quality or wouldn't fit properly. After deciding that it was worthwhile spending the extra money on a brand she trusted, she found a shop nearby on Peckham Rye that was selling it for the same price as she could find on the internet, but without the extra cost of postage. After calling to ensure that they had the model she wanted in stock, we decided to go the next day to buy it. This was to be the first shopping expedition beyond the supermarket that I had seen Claire mount, and until this point I had been somewhat surprised by her reluctance to venture more than a few minutes away by car.

The morning of the trip to Peckham did not start well. Emma refused to eat her breakfast, causing a delay to the morning's progression, and a subsequent tantrum over the outfit she would wear compounded the issue. Eventually, everything was assembled for our trip – the buggy was loaded with Claire's change bag containing nappies, wet wipes and various changes of clothes for Jack and one for Emma should there be some kind of incident, Jack was all bundled up in his snow suit ready to be settled in to his car seat for the journey, and the rest us had our coats and shoes on. All of us except Emma, who was so angry that Claire was holding Jack, and therefore unable to put Emma's shoes on for her that she collapsed into a wailing heap on the floor until Claire handed me Jack – who was also crying by this point – and saw to Emma's shoes.

We all piled into the car, the two small children in their car seats on the back seat, and Claire and I at the front. The journey was short and soon we were approaching

Peckham, searching for parking spaces in the side roads of Peckham Rye. As we searched fruitlessly Claire lamented the fact that she could have just taken the bus, as there was one that went close to her house and would have deposited us just near the shop we were destined for, but negotiating Jack, Emma, the buggy and the boxed-up buggy board would have been more stressful than the search for parking she said. This was why she never strayed too far from home. Eventually, a space was found, and we climbed out of the car. I freed Emma from her car seat while Claire took the buggy out of the boot and clicked it into readiness. After a few moments' struggle to slot Jack's car seat onto the buggy, we were off. Claire pushed the buggy along the potholed concrete pavement, swerving off slightly into the road to avoid puddles of brown oily water and litter. Once we stepped onto Rye Lane – the shopping street on which the shop was located – I held tight to Emma's hand to prevent her being trampled by the foot traffic around us, despite her loud protestations. Claire's progress with the buggy was slow, as space on the pavement was tight, and pedestrians would walk into her path, forcing her to guide the buggy around them or wait for them to move on. The sloping pavement made it difficult for Claire to maintain a straight course, and at one point the buggy threatened to topple over.

When we stepped into the store, the contrast was dramatic. Despite the bustle outside the store, inside all was calm – spacious and not overcrowded, there was plenty of space for Claire to push the buggy around to browse amongst the items on display. Soon though, Emma became agitated, and despite the shop assistant's sympathetic smile Claire hurriedly selected the buggy board she wanted and paid for it at the cash register before handing the buggy over to me and taking Emma's

hand to lead her out of the store. When we got home, a little over an hour after we had departed but all utterly exhausted, Claire declared that next time, she would happily pay the delivery charge.

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The renovations to Jenny and Will's home had taken longer than expected. When they were finally finished, Jenny and Will were delighted to see the workmen go and to be able to begin the process of getting their home back to a state of normalcy. The renovations had created a side-return extension that connected the living room and kitchen area, bringing more light into both of these spaces with a new skylight. The kitchen's external wall had been replaced with large, folding, glass windows that created an unimpeded view of the garden, and could be pushed aside in the summer time to remove the barrier between the outside and inside space. The entire kitchen was new, having been moved from a room on the first floor to its new position at the back of the ground floor. This strange former position of the kitchen had been a source of bemusement and irritation. The constant need to carry things up and down the stairs, to and from the kitchen, for meal times and snacks made the arrangement entirely impractical and made daily chores – carrying groceries in to the house from the car, taking the bins out – more hassle than they should be. By moving the kitchen downstairs, they created a large, light airy kitchen with plenty of space to cook and eat while also freeing up a room on the first floor to serve as Archie's bedroom.

No one quite understood why the previous owners had maintained such a strange arrangement, except that they had been unwilling to invest in the property to rectify the issue. The previous owners had owned a couple of houses on the same street as Jenny and Will's house, renting them out before they eventually went bankrupt and the houses were put up for sale. They had made few friends amongst the street's tenants, who objected to the fact that they had let their houses to a string of unsuitable tenants, and had failed to properly maintain the properties. This animosity seemed to have transferred itself onto Jenny and Will, who had become conflated with the previous owners in the minds of some of their neighbours, who mistakenly believed that Jenny and Will owned other houses on the street.

Jenny and Will's relationships with their neighbours were fraught at times. While they were on good terms with the family on their right, their relationship with the tenant in the house on their left was a different story. Like many houses on the street, the house to their left was owned by the local council, and the current tenant was an alcoholic with some mental health issues. This tenant would hang around outside his house from morning to night on dry days, drinking and shouting abuse at his neighbours. Although not the only targets of his abuse, Jenny and Will received more than most. When his behaviour was reported to the police and the council threatened to evict him, he became convinced that it was Jenny and Will who had reported him. Every time a member of the household left the house, there was a good chance that their exit would be greeted by a barrage of obscenities and verbal abuse. A lot of this abuse centred around the theme that Jenny and Will

considered themselves better than him, and therefore felt that they had the right to comment on his behaviour.

Jenny and Will occasionally experienced animosity from other members of the neighbourhood. One day Jenny and the kids were walking home with Will's parents and passed a woman complaining loudly about her neighbour's incorrect use of their wheelie bins. When Jenny walked past, the woman began to loudly castigate her for her lack of concern for the local community and for the ruining the area with her 'fucking gentrification'. Jenny, although shaken, dismissed this woman as being in some way mentally ill, her behaviour unreasonable enough to be written off as the rantings of a person not in their right mind.

Nevertheless, Jenny and Will seemed to like living in Camberwell. They regularly extolled the virtues of living in London and talked about their horror of being forced to move out of the city, or to one of its more remote boroughs. Friends who lived in suburban areas, or even worse, the Home Counties, were regarded as having isolated themselves, making it so difficult for others to reach them as to remove any duty one might have to visit by virtue of being their friend. Even though Jenny and Will spent little time in the cafes or shops of Camberwell and Peckham – aside from a weekly lunch date at a local cafe with Jenny's niece and sister-in-law, and occasional weekend trips to the café of a nearby modern art gallery – they liked knowing that these areas were on their doorstep, creating a bustling and dynamic environment around them.

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I came home one afternoon to find Ben and Anna in high spirits. On closer investigation I realised they were, in fact, drunk. This certainly wasn't usual. Anna and Ben enjoyed good wine and nice beer just as much as they enjoyed good foods, but this was usually restricted to a couple of drinks in the evening and not bottle of wine in the middle of the day on a Thursday. It transpired that they had just returned from lunch at an excellent restaurant not too far away, which quite accidentally had turned into a rather boozy affair. The meal came compliments of the restaurant's owner, a thank-you for Ben having been so helpful to the restaurant when he was working for his previous employer, who were one of the restaurants' suppliers. With the free food had come free wine, which had been simply too delicious not to drink.

Anna and Ben loved going out to eat at restaurants and cafes. Every few weeks they would organise a babysitter and then set about deciding which restaurant they should go to, debating the pros and cons of various establishments, the quality of their food considered in relation to the quality of their wine list and the excellence of their service. Given Lottie's propensity to wake in the middle of the night, they were reluctant to stray too far from home aware that they might have to rush back at short notice to relieve their babysitter of a screaming baby. This confined their discussion to those restaurants close to their home, of which there were four or five that Anna and Ben considered good enough to eat at. When they returned home in the evening they would usually still be discussing the meal they had, debating which had been the best dish or criticising some aspect of the flavours or the way

the dishes had been presented. A bad meal was a great disappointment, a frustrating waste of one of their few evenings out.

While going out for dinner was regarded as a special occasion, they put almost as much thought into going out for a coffee or popping to the shops to get some groceries for dinner, weighing up which shop stocked the best bread, or the nicest tomatoes in deciding which should be their destination. Often whole outings, or even days, would be constructed around visiting a certain shop for a certain required ingredient, or ensuring that they would be able to stop off on their walk with Lottie at a café that sold sufficiently good coffee. These trips would often take them far and wide, seeing them walk from Nunhead to Peckham and then to East Dulwich before returning with Lottie asleep in her buggy and numerous paper bags full of fresh vegetables, cheeses and meats. This was considered time well spent, not only because of the importance of securing good quality and fresh ingredients for their cooking, but also because they enjoyed visiting these shops and cafes and seeing all the delicious looking things they had on offer.

Anna and Ben's wine-fuelled lunch was the main topic of conversation for the rest of the afternoon. They wanted to know if I'd to that restaurant, or to its sister restaurant that had recently opened in Camberwell. I received a full run-down of each of their meals, and had the true highlight dishes explained to me in great detail. Anna declared that she was certainly going to have a go replicating her favourite dish which probably would be quite simple to make, although its success would rely upon her being able to source some perfectly ripe pears, which wasn't always the easiest thing. Soon it was nearly time to pick Lottie up from nursery,

and Anna set about peeling some vegetables to boil for Lottie's dinner. She couldn't wait, she said, for Lottie to be old enough to be taken to restaurants like the one they had been to for lunch that afternoon, so that she could experience how incredible food could be.

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Fig. 23: Property on Rye Lane that once housed a Gregg's bakery but was gutted by a fire during the riots in the summer of 2011 (photograph author's own 2016)

In February this year, *The Peckham Peculiar*, a self-described 'hyper-local' free newspaper that covers the various goings on in Peckham and the surrounding area – while being careful not to step on the toes of its sister publication, *The Dulwich Diverter* – reported on the redevelopment of a property on Peckham's main shopping street, Rye Lane (McGinlay, 2016). The property, which used to house a branch of the fast food bakery Gregg's, had been entirely destroyed by a

fire set by rioters during the summer of 2011 but was now being rebuilt to include, not only a new retail space, but three apartments (see fig. 23). The article noted that, although it was not yet clear what would occupy the retail space, the developers were in talks with the operators of a coffee shop. This kind of change is not isolated. Across the street from this burnt-out former Greggs is a salvage yard, which property developers are seeking permission to convert into twenty apartments and a restaurant large enough to seat 200. Discussion of these developments, and others in Peckham and the surrounding areas of south-east London, feed into the narrative of an area being rapidly re-written by gentrification (Robins 2006). Change makes for an uncertain future. Gupta, when discussing infrastructural development projects, argues that these projects are characterised by a temporality of 'suspension', that while they might suggest an impending outcome, this imagined future has yet to be realised and might very well fail to materialise as envisaged, or at all. Even if it materialises it may later be demolished or altered in some way. The future is, he states: 'always under erasure' (2015). Concomitant with the change gentrification brings is uncertainty. South-east London is changing but it isn't clear what it will become, or what it will become after that. For my respondents, these changes were a source of intrigue and interest; for many other residents of south-east London, these changes are less benign.

In making a study of everyday life for the middle classes in south-east London, it would be a glaring omission on my part not to consider the highly political context in which these lives are lived.

Many of the most visible changes happening in south-east London that are attributed to the forces of gentrification are being enacted by property developers and local government, the decision-making process far removed from the families in my study. Yet these changes are remaking south-east London in the image of my participants, courting the wealthy middle classes and their spending power in the name of regeneration. The way the Harpers, Spencers and Wests engage with their local environment – the shops they shop at, the cafes they take the kids to on a Sunday morning, the schools they will soon work to secure a place at – contributes to the flourishing of some places, businesses and institutions, and the decay of others. This engagement is guided by the pursuit of imagined futures; by the things they want to do. The shops they choose to shop at and the cafes they choose to visit are those that not only sell the products they want to buy and the food they want to eat, but which provide the kind of friendly atmosphere or easy to navigate space that keeps the threat of obstacles and stresses that threaten to derail excursions and errands to a minimum. This chapter contributes to the debates over the gentrification of London by looking, not only at the ways that the middle class residents of gentrifying areas contribute to the process of gentrification, but at the way middle class householders' imagined futures drives this contribution. In doing so I give a better understanding of how and why middle class households bring change to their local environments, connecting the dramatic changes brought by gentrification to the minutiae of everyday life in the household.

The most prolific researcher and writer on the gentrification of London is Tim Butler, who, along with various collaborators, has explored the processes and

motivations that drive the middle class gentrification of London. As mentioned in my introductory chapter, Butler sees the gentrification of London as springing from a desire on the part of the middle classes to live a life that is both more interesting than that of their parents' generation, yet to live in an area that is safe enough in which to raise their children (Butler and Robson 2003). He identifies a mismatch between the middle classes' claims to appreciate the 'diversity' of the areas they gentrify, and the extent to which the middle classes engage with the people that create this 'diversity'. Having coined the term 'social tectonics' in reference to the way that the middle class share the space of the city with these others but have virtually no real interaction with them (Butler and Robson 2001), Butler later suggested that the term, while still useful, should be qualified. In an article in which the responses from middle class residents of Peckham interviewed in 2011 were compared with those of middle class residents of nearby Brixton ten years previously, Jackson and Butler found that there was a greater level of middle class engagement with non-middle-class people and spaces amongst the Peckham residents (2015). This shift did not diminish the ability of middle class residents to use the presence of 'others' as part of an 'active formation' of their middle class identity, defining themselves in opposition and relation to other less or more gentrified areas in the vicinity (2015: 2361). Butler's research, while fascinating, has a tendency toward disdain that colours his research, in describing the residents of the south-east London area of Telegraph Hill, Butler and Robson state that: 'There is an element of smugness that is somewhat off-putting…' (2003: 175). This disdain is evident in his discussion of 'mass consumption', which he considers to be a key tenet of middle class behaviour. For Butler, mass consumption is a key driver of

gentrification, as the history of a place previously occupied by 'subordinate groups' is 'a commodity in the eternal search to find expression for individualism and distinction in a society based around mass production and consumption' (1997: 45).

This is not to deny the validity of many of Butler's arguments. The gentrifying middle classes do indeed occupy areas that historically have been populated by the less well-off – and often the more vulnerable – driving up property prices and making housing even less affordable. The property market is usually discussed as one of the drivers of gentrification, especially by the media who report on the rising house prices in London and the increasing gap between the average income in London and price of a home (Jones 2015). The practice of knocking down social and council housing to create new developments that contain only the bare minimum of 'affordable housing' dictated by law – and far less than had previously been present on the site – has been roundly criticised by local residents and the media for requiring the mass displacement of families, often to parts of London they have no connection to, or outside of London altogether. This is a particularly hot topic in South London, where the 'regeneration' of the Heygate Estate in Elephant and Castle, and the Aylesbury Estate in Camberwell — a minute or two from Jenny and Will's home – have become causes célèbres, used as examples of social cleansing in the name of 'regeneration' (Walker 2013). These large-scale developments radically alter the make-up of the local community in a relatively short space of time, replacing poorer and working class residents unable to afford 'market price' rent or property prices with wealthier, middle class renters and homeowners. This same process of

replacement is enacted, albeit over a longer period of time, as social and council housing is purchased by tenants as part of the right-to-buy scheme introduced by the Thatcher government in 1980. The current Conservative government's commitment to extending the right-to-buy scheme, allowing housing association tenants to buy their homes at a discount of up to £104,000 in London, promises to continue to reduce the volume of social housing available in London and therefore the social make-up of the city (Gallagher 2015).

Jenny and Will's home – a former council house that found its way on to the market after being purchased through right-to-buy – represented this phenomenon. Jenny and Will's decision to move to Camberwell had been driven by their feeling that, with the arrival of Archie, they needed more space. They wanted the children to have their own bedrooms so that they had a space they could call their own. While their previous flat had been located on the edge of a large park, they had no garden, and they wanted the children to be able to run around outside without a parent accompanying them to ensure they kept away from the road and didn't talk to strangers. While they loved the position of their old flat, the high house prices in that area had pushed their search further afield, until they had found their new house. The extensive renovations they conducted just after moving in to the home entirely remodelled the lower floor of the house, creating the spacious aesthetic fashionable amongst middle class households (Claire frequently lamented the previous owner of their house's failure to build a side return extension, like that of the Spencers', which she felt would have made her home much more spacious and pleasant to live in, rather than the simple one room extension they had), and ensuring that their home was different to most

others on the street. Jenny and Will's large, light kitchen was made for creative cookery, dinner parties and giving toddlers free roam between the house and the garden on sunny days – the types of behaviours Jenny and Will envisaged for their life when buying their new home and commissioning their architects to remodel its interior. Zukin discusses the fashion for this kind of open plan living in relation to converted lofts in New York City as an attempt to create an atmosphere of 'informality and equality', a removal of the boundaries between areas dedicated to work and leisure (Zukin 1988: 68). Jenny and Will, as home owners and professionals with disposable income, were in a position to remake their home to suit their life – or what they wanted their life to be – rather than forced to live within the structure their home set for them, like housing association tenants who inhabited much of the rest of the street. These changes increased the value of the house, placing it even further beyond the reach of the area's poorer residents, and ensuring that the next family to live in the home would be as well off as, if not more than, Jenny and Will.

Despite their move to Camberwell, Jenny, Will and the kids spent little time there. During the week Jenny would take the kids out to activities – singing lessons on a Monday, soft play on a Thursday. Both of these activities were held at the public gym in Peckham, subsidised by the council to make the fee for attendance only a couple of pounds. Jenny commented on the fact that, despite the fact that the council funded these activities so that those with limited resources could afford to take their children there, the majority of the mothers that she met at these occasions were distinctly middle class. Jenny and the kids would walk the short walk into Camberwell only once a week, to have lunch with

Jenny's sister in law and her children at a café where the staff were good with the kids, and where they weren't made to feel unwelcome if Archie was crying or Tilly was throwing a tantrum. It was not just Jenny whose day-to-day journeys around her local area were dictated by her children. During the time I lived with them, Claire spent most days in the house, leaving only to drop Emma off at nursery and pick her up again in the evening. These pick-ups and drop offs were sometimes accompanied by trips to the supermarket to pick up extra groceries that weren't foreseen when the supermarket order was made online at the beginning of the week. Periodically, when Emma had been eating even more fussily than usual and Claire wanted to ensure a pleasant dinner time and a well-fed Emma, she would drive Emma to their local supermarket to pick up a hot, cooked chicken from the rotisserie counter – Emma's favourite food. At the weekend, however, when Peter was at home and able to help negotiate journeys with two small children, the family would load up the buggy and walk to Dulwich Common so that Emma could have a go at riding her scooter, or drive the short distance to their favourite pizza restaurant, their favourite because the owner let them park in the staff car park, making it an easy journey. Claire did venture as far as Peckham a couple of times during the three-and-a-half months I was living with her; once on the occasion described at the opening of this chapter, and once to go to a mother-and-baby screening of a film at the cinema there.

In the early nineties Warde published an article arguing that gentrification was driven, not so much by class, as by the changes brought by the shifts in women's role in society. He attributed the increased presence of the middle classes in the inner cities to the fact that more women were in work, and were less willing to

make the long commutes from the suburbs into the city (1991). His argument was refuted by Butler and Hamnett who responded that, while more women were indeed working full time and less willing to commute long distances due to the demands of childcare, the working women Warde referred to were middle class. A propensity for women to remain in full time employment after marriage was, they argued, one of the characteristics of the middle class, along with a political leaning toward liberalism that made an urban life appealing so that gentrification is an issue of both gender and class (1994). The issues of class and gender come together in my respondents lives in the kind of 'intensive mothering' I discussed in the previous chapter, in which Claire, Anna and Jenny both took extended periods of maternity leave from their careers during which they worked to care for their children and the household, at a cost of great time and effort on their parts. In later work, Butler explored how school choice is one of the means by which gentrifiers limit their, and their children's, interaction with their non-middle-class neighbours, sending their children to better performing schools outside of their local area – 'playing the system' to bypass the norm that children attend schools near to their home – or sending their children to fee-paying schools, where they would be sure to associate only with other middle and upper class children (Butler 2003). Just as school choice works to deepen the divisions brought by gentrification, so my respondents' child-centric use of their local area contributed to the process by which the spaces of south-east London become geared toward its middle class residents to the detriment of its non-middle class residents.

Moving around the city with a small child in tow is not easy. Boyer and Spinney's study of East London mothers' journey making with their children demonstrates that the process of getting from A to B which would ordinarily be simple and straightforward becomes fraught with stress and difficulty when the journey is made with a child. Their respondents recounted experiences which demonstrate that buggies are cumbersome and unwieldy, unsuited to packed buses and flights of steps; cafes and coffee shops are populated by customers ready to display their judgement and irritation at a wailing child, and leaving the house is often so much effort as to largely confine some mothers to their homes with their children (2016). Similarly, Claire, Anna and Jenny's use of the surrounding area was shaped by the ease with which these spaces could be navigated, and how comfortable they would feel taking a noisy small child into these spaces. This meant that Anna avoided bustling Peckham Rye in favour of nearby but relatively tranquil Bellenden Road, and that Jenny and Will would take the kids to the café in a nearby art gallery for a piece of cake rather than battle through the busy streets of Camberwell. Beyond this, their movements were guided by the extent to which locations aligned with their imagined futures of days spent with their children. They went to parks, play-centres, and cafes that sold the kind of organic, wholesome food they wanted their kids to eat, and visited shops that sold things necessary for their kids to do what they wanted them to do. Thus Claire travelled to Peckham just to visit the one shop in Peckham selling baby paraphernalia from a brand she trusted, and Jenny took Tilly to the garden centre to choose some new plants for them to plant together in the garden. In choosing to visit, eat and shop at places they felt were likely to be least stressful, and which would pose the fewest obstacles to the successful enactment of their

imagined futures the parents in my study – mostly the mothers – were encouraging the retail gentrification of their local areas, ensuring that enterprises conducive to their lives and priorities flourished.

This process of retail gentrification was neatly illustrated by Ben's opening of an artisanal foods shop. Ben's shop, when it finally opened over a year after he left his job, was an exercise in understated chic. The front of the store has gleaming forest green tiles that reach to waist height, before giving way to bright white wall. Inside, products were displayed sparingly on bare wooden shelving that left plenty of the blank white wall behind visible. In the centre of the store wire racks piled with luscious red tomatoes, neon yellow lemons and an ever-changing array of seasonal, organic vegetables contrasted with the muted palette of their surroundings. The shop, which had formerly housed a laundrette, was unlike many of those surrounding it, although having been grocery shopping with Anna and Ben many times, the design and ambiance felt familiar to me. While the store sold cheese, cured meats, wine, bread and all the items one might expect to find in a deli, Ben was adamant that it not be referred to as such – associating these with the kind of faux 'continental' stores selling poor quality produce at vastly inflated prices that he saw lining the streets of East Dulwich. He preferred to refer to his shop as one specialising in 'fine foods and produce', echoing the unprepossessing terms used by stores in the surrounding area that he frequented and admired – purveyors of 'provisions' and 'goods'. These stores are conceived and market themselves as standing in direct contrast to anonymous chain stores and the 'big four' supermarkets whose numerous outposts are represented on virtually every shopping parade in London. They are always

small, emphasising through their compact size their difference to sprawling hypermarkets and the conglomerates that own them – their independence, the 'little guy' in the world of retail. Their simple, low key aesthetics suggest an 'old-fashioned' way of shopping, harking back to a slower-paced, more personal way of shopping when shop keepers were trusted experts whom shoppers relied upon to guide their purchasing decisions, however questionable this dichotomy between present and past shopping practices might be (Everts and Jackson: 2009).

The name Ben chose for his shop – that joins his surname with the name of the area in which the shop is located, Brockley – emphasises what he sees as one of the key distinctions between his shop and the Sainsbury's supermarket located close by: his shop is local. This emphasis on the local carries through to the store's produce – honey from bees kept up the road from his shop in Telegraph Hill, bread baked at a bakery in East Dulwich, wine produced by a guy who sells from a stall close by at Brockley market. In joining his own name with that of the surrounding area in the name of his shop, Ben – not a native Londoner, and who lives in a different part of south-east London a short drive or train ride away – positions himself as local too, writing himself into the surrounding area. In his study of the retail gentrification of Abbot Kinney Boulevard in Venice, California, Deener argues that by positioning themselves as 'an authentic version of community life in need of preservation by restricting the invasion of formula retail chains', the independent stores that drove this gentrification claimed 'symbolic ownership over the street's identity' (2007: 292). In defining Abbot Kinney as distinct from other areas in Los Angeles, the small independent stores

provided what Deener describes as 'storefront identity', giving the street a certain aesthetic, ensuring it sells a certain type of product, and determining the ways in which the street can be used. In creating this 'storefront identity', certain characteristics of the area and certain aspects of the area's history were emphasised while others were ignored (2007: 294). In positioning his shop as 'of South-East London', Ben is reflecting a version of the area as populated by small-scale producers of natural, organic, artisanal produce; and whose residents are wealthy enough to afford to pay a premium for such produce, with enough time and willingness to cook meals from scratch, and who want the kind of organic wines and nut butters he stocks. This is a version of Brockley that aligns with the kind of life Ben wants to live, and the kind of life he wants for his family. Both he and Anna are evangelical about the benefits of good quality, organic fruits and vegetables, both enjoy cooking and are happy and able to spend hours at a time doing so, both enjoy the experience of buying from local producers and shopkeepers from whom they can learn about the product they are buying and the efforts that went in to growing or making it. Zukin et al., in discussing retail gentrifiers in Harlem and Williamsburg, note that entrepreneurs who kick-start the process of retail gentrification in an area are often inspired by seeing a 'need' for a certain type of store, or by the difficulty they face in procuring a certain type of product. She quotes the owner of a store in now trendy Williamsburg saying that she '"knew the one thing we were lacking was a good wine store"' (2009: 58), so she decided to open one. Although owning his own shop was a sensible progression in Ben's career path, he was determined that his shop should provide the local community with the kind of produce, and the kind of

shopping experience that he considered beneficial to one's life, but which was not readily available nearby.

Yet the vision of South-East London reflected in Ben's shop is likely not to be shared by many in the surrounding area. Brockley, although better off than Peckham or Camberwell, has an average household income nearly £20,000 lower than that of East Dulwich (Greater London Authority 2015), home to the delis Ben dismissed as overpriced and inexpert. While some residents will doubtless have been delighted to see a store such as Ben's appear near their home, it is likely that for others the arrival of his shop would have been an indicator of the continuing march of change moving through areas of south-east London about which their feelings are ambivalent, or outright hostile. Mazer and Rankin point out that when retail gentrification changes the face of local environments, those excluded from enjoying the consumption opportunities offered by new stores bring feel unwelcome, as though the area is no longer 'for' them. Referring to their fieldsite of Parkdale, an area of Toronto, they describe how the rooming-house tenants – residents living in low cost, rented accommodation – had feelings of shame and alienation as they no longer saw themselves reflected in the community and its trendy shops and cafés. Mazer and Rankin argue that these feelings of alienation are generated by the fact that wealthier residents have 'claimed neighbourhood social space for themselves' (2011: 831). Interestingly, these feelings of alienation come side by side with a view that these changes are likely to be good for the overall community, that even though these new shops and cafes might leave them feeling uncomfortable in their own neighbourhood the fall in crime and the increasing prosperity that they are likely

to bring are positive developments (2011). Davidson's study of the effects of gentrification in the nearby London borough of Wandsworth found similarly mixed feelings. The arrival of the upmarket supermarket Waitrose was welcomed by wealthier residents for the improved quality of produce it brought but represented a problematic development for the less wealthy 'indigenous' population who, while recognising the promise of better quality produce, were dismayed by the high prices that rendered this better quality inaccessible and feared that this new arrival spelt the end for the cheaper local and 'discount' shops that had previously populated the area (Davidson 2008). Ben's motivation in opening his store may have been to bring better quality produce to the residents of Brockley, and to serve it to them in an environment that is chic and uncluttered while also reassuring of the quality of the produce they were buying. Yet in doing so, he formed part of a wave of change that brings benefits only available to certain sections of the residents of these areas. Many residents of Brockley and wider south-east London can't afford to buy what Ben wants them to have.

Ben never explicitly discussed the issue of gentrification in relation to his shop but he was aware of accusations of gentrification levelled at shops owned by people he knew, and at places he liked to go to eat and drink. While I was living with Anna and Ben, we talked about an article we had all read in the newspaper, discussing the public outcry at the decision by owners of a newly opened pub a few miles away in Deptford to name it the 'Job Centre', as the building the pub occupied had formerly been a jobcentre. Newspaper articles discussed the insensitivity of the decision, and framed it as a callous joke on the part of the

pub's owners, poking fun at the fact that a valuable service that helped those without employment get back into work had been replaced by a trendy pub catering to well off 'young professionals' (Elliot 2014). Ben, familiar with the pub's owners and their work taking over dying pubs or defunct buildings and remaking them as successful, albeit 'trendy', pubs, was quick to defend the owners, pointing out that the jobcentre had closed down long before the pub took over the building. Nevertheless, he thought they should have foreseen the backlash, and the possibility that some of Deptford's residents would not be excited at the arrival of such a venue. Brown-Saracino has argued that studies of gentrification are often quick to label gentrifiers as either uncaring or in denial about their role in the process, arguing that many are in fact keen to position themselves as different to the image of the callous 'pioneer', and work to prevent what they consider to be dramatic or damaging change to the character of the area (2013). She describes how gentrifiers attempt to rationalise the change they bring with their desire to maintain the 'diversity' of the areas they move to by seeing original residents as transformed along with the fabric of the area. In their vision of the community's future, original residents gain prosperity as the area becomes more salubrious, the residents refurbished along with the locale. Ben, similarly, seemed to consider his own shop outside of the debate of gentrification, an unproblematic addition to Brockley's retail offering that, rather than signalling the further shift of Brockley toward a place where less-well-off residents no longer felt comfortable, was in fact a friendlier, more approachable form of shop. Ben, kind and affable himself, wanted to make customers feel welcome, and when choosing stock, he was careful to ensure that there were products at different price points, including both high quality items at inevitably

high prices and equivalent items at a lower price point, to ensure that his prices weren't exclusionary. But the before and after pictures of the building Ben's shop occupies – its former incarnation as a down-at-heel laundrette to its current understated chic – makes plain the dramatic change that has been wrought. These two establishments cater to very different clienteles, with very different ways of life. Ben did not have the down-at-heel-laundrette-using residents of Brockley in mind when he created his shop, he had people like himself.

Before setting up his shop Ben had sought advice from his friends and acquaintances in the surrounding area who owned shops and coffee shops. His and Anna's expertise in food and coffee and the retail of both meant that visits to local shops to pick up groceries for dinner or to grab a cup of coffee often ended up being lengthy visits in which they gossiped and 'talked shop' with the owners of these businesses. Ben's fascination with the process of shop keeping and the technical requirements of sourcing good quality produce and storing and displaying it meant that he was knowledgeable about the workings of small businesses across south-east London, and he took inspiration from many of them in designing and organising his own shop. That Anna and Ben were employees, or former employees, of highly respected artisanal food producers, meant that they were readily accepted into the loose community of shopkeepers and entrepreneurs whose businesses represented the gentrifying force in south-east London's retail. Ley argues that 'food talk', like that which Anna, Ben and their shopkeeper friends engaged in at length, is a key facet of the 'new middle class's identity, a 'cosmopolitan habitus' that acts as a marker of class distinction (Ley 1996: 308). Here, carefully curated and beautifully displayed food is part of the

'aestheticization of everyday life', where even the most basic commodities – milk, bread, apples – become markers of taste (Ley 1996: 308). Ley argues that this same aesthetic literacy – the ability to take something mundane and work-a-day and make it into an object of desire – facilitates the success of the 'new middle class' in enacting gentrification. Cultural capital rich, economic capital poor, these gentrifiers put their 'aesthetic eye' to work in transforming the run-down into the anti-corporate upscale (1996: 310). The language of food was the lingua franca of the shopkeepers and café owners that Anna and Ben bought from and socialised with, the knowledge of which ensured they were welcomed into this community. But it also serves to exclude others, less knowledgeable, and less able to acquire this knowledge, or simply less interested. Surrounded by those as expert and interested in food as they were, Anna and Ben seemed to have forgotten that many did not wish to, or were not able to, spend so much time and money on their food. Anna would become irritated by friends' requests that they meet at a restaurant she considered poor quality because it was cheaper or more convenient, arguing that she knew these friends were willing to spend time and money on other things and couldn't imagine why good quality food was not one of their main priorities for expenditure. Indeed, even when money was tight for Anna and Ben they refused to compromise on the quality of their food, regarding such a sacrifice as simply too detrimental to their quality of life to be tolerated. Anna and Ben's passion and commitment, which was reflected in the attitudes of many of those they socialised with, left them blind to the possibility that others couldn't, or didn't want to spend the kind of money on groceries that they did.

Ley's somewhat cutting characterisation of the 'new middle class' in Canada includes a reference to their preoccupation with 'exotic' food, the cuisines of far-flung places satisfying their desire for 'exotic' experiences that are limited by lack of funds sufficient for constant travel (1996). May makes a similar point, aligning the middle class enjoyment of 'exotic' foods with the gentrification of London – seeing both as driven by a desire to appear 'worldly' and 'cultured', embracing of 'the other' through liberalism and open mindedness. May demonstrates, by quoting the troublingly racist statements made by his respondents, that this appreciation of the 'exotic' is based on retrograde views and a conception of 'the other' as being for one's entertainment (May 1996). Considering the fact that Ben's shop caters to exactly the kind of seemingly liberal-minded middle class shoppers May discusses as prodigious consumers of exotic foods, it stocks remarkably little food that could be referred to as 'exotic'. In fact, where possible, Ben has opted for produce grown or made in Britain or even more locally. Even those foodstuffs that are clearly grown abroad – coffee, chocolate – have been processed by local London companies, and branded with names and packaging that identify them as products of specific areas of London. This echoes, Bridge and Dowling's findings in their comparative study of retailing in various areas of Sydney, in which they noted a propensity for restaurants in gentrified areas to position their food as 'Modern Australian', even though the dishes it serves and ingredients they use are known by both the restaurant and their consumers to have been imported from the food cultures of other places. Bridge and Dowling interpret this as a process whereby 'ethnicity is to be mediated by a sense of sophisticated "Australianness"' (2001: 101).

Amongst independent food stores in south-east London, this focus on British food is striking. The main shopping street which runs through the centre of Peckham is studded with food shops, butchers, fish mongers and grocers. These stores are independent like Ben's, but unlike Ben's shop the majority of their food is imported. These imported foods supply the diverse community of Peckham, and the surrounding areas, providing ingredients not readily found in the small 'metro' supermarkets that are the alternative shopping venues for those without access to a car. Meat, fish, fruits and vegetables spill out onto the street, piled high on tables or in long refrigerated counters. Alongside fruits not grown in Britain, and rarely seen in British supermarkets, are packaged goods made by unfamiliar brands. Some of these shops are crammed with produce, others are relatively sparse, their half-empty shelves less populated than Ben's curated ones. The resolutely non-local nature of this produce is proudly declared by signs asserting that the owner receives twice weekly shipments of produce from Africa or the Caribbean. Similarly, but very differently, Lordship Lane – the main drag that runs through East Dulwich – is populated by French wine shops, Italian Delis and Spanish charcuteries, all making a virtue of their imported foods. Against this backdrop, the local-ness of Ben's shop, and the few others like it in south-east London, becomes not only a reaction against big-name supermarkets, but against the kind of desire for 'exotica' that May critiques. Where once food from the farthest reaches of the earth was in vogue, now the the voguish option is food that is local to your very doorstep. After buying a jar of honey made by local bees, Anna wondered aloud if she was owed back some of the £6 she had spent, given that some of the bee's pollen would likely have come from her own garden. For London's gentrifiers – both retail and residential – this

localism is a means of staking their claim to the area in which they live – demonstrating their commitment to and ownership of the locale by literally eating and drinking it. The markers of distinction have become reversed, it is cooking from close-to-home that is the marker of cultural capital, while 'exotic' produce has been relegated to the 'world food' aisle of the supermarket and Peckham's imported produce shops.

Yet for many this 'exotic' food is anything but – ingredients used regularly in meals considered familiar and unremarkable. The shops that specialise in providing these products allow residents of south-east London whose cooking traditions and habits are not served by the major supermarkets to cook the meals they want to eat. While Ben's shop is just one shop, the wave of retail gentrification of which it is a part threatens the existence of shops whose ethos is so utterly opposite to his. As south-east London continues to be gentrified and the retail landscape becomes reshaped in the image of Ben's shop and those like it, stores selling goods imported from Africa, Asia and elsewhere will be under threat. Those for whom these shops provide valued access to ingredients they cannot easily get elsewhere will be written out of the retail landscape, not just because they might not be able to afford the kind of produce on sale in shops like Ben's, but because they don't want it. The diverse cuisines so patronisingly praised by May's respondents become replaced by a cuisine of extreme localism.

This final chapter has considered the impact that my respondents' attempts to enact their imagined futures has on their local environment through contributing to the processes of gentrification that are changing the face of south-east London.

While the process exemplified by Jenny and Will – moving to a less well-off area in search of the space they felt was necessary to allow their kids to live the future they imagined for them – has been well discussed by both the popular media and in academic literature, the relationship between parenting and gentrification has been largely overlooked. The kind of 'intensive mothering' discussed in chapter 5 acts as a means of ensuring that those businesses that cater to the practices and attitudes of this kind of mothering are supported and their like encouraged, while those that do not are avoided and become more at risk of failure. Ben's shop, an example of the retail gentrification of south-east London, becomes a mean by which his wants – to cook and eat high quality food that also acts as a marker of one's belonging in south-east London – are written into the retail landscape of the area. As Ben's wants are written into the retail landscape, other wants are written out. Those who don't want to, or can't afford to attempt to live an imagined future similar to Ben's see their own wants no longer served by their local area. While none of my respondents were uncaring about the process of gentrification and what it meant for their fellow residents, they were, nonetheless, participants in its advancement. Herein lies the paradox that ensures the continuation of gentrification in the face of public discourse that underlines its negative effects – in attempting to live the way they wanted, the three households I lived with made it more difficult for others to live as they would want.

Conclusion

In trying to live the lives they wanted, the Harpers, Spencers and Wests encountered a host of obstacles – some of their own making, others far beyond their control – that derailed their efforts. In the face of illness and crime, pests and pets, cold weather and cracking leather, angry neighbours, leaking roofs, uncooperative partners and rebellious children, they worked to make the futures they imagined. They worked hard and they often failed. This is a point that has been made throughout this thesis, but it's an important one to emphasize because studies of the home often overlook or minimise it in their discussion. If we want to understand life in the home, we need to acknowledge that it's *hard*. It's hard because it matters, because household life might be mundane but it is deeply felt, because householders care about household life. In considering householders' imagined futures, I have demonstrated the power of the future in shaping the behaviours of the present, and the fact that things and their potentiality shape, enable or thwart these imagined futures.

My method was an unusual one for researching the home in an urban environment and helped to make my research distinctive. I envisaged that by living with my respondents I would gain a more intimate perspective on their lives, and that's exactly what I got. My respondents agreed to take me into their homes, to allow me to become part of their everyday lives, to allow me to become party to their private lives. In a country where the privacy offered by the home is sacrosanct, this was both brave and generous. This bravery and generosity has allowed me to make a study that explores not just one aspect of household life, or

the way the household deals with one particular issue, or the place of one particular item in household life, but the project of household life, the concerted efforts through which everyday life in the home comes into being. My approach has created a study with a holistic perspective, that, like Gullestad's study of Norwegian working class women, provides an insight into the lived experience of a section of society whose lives are thought to be well understood, but who few have set out to understand.

Being a part of the household, present day in and day out, allowed for little 'perspective'. I had little capacity to decide for myself whether I considered something to be important or not, an event to be a nightmare or a minor irritation. I understood something to be significant by the strength of my respondents' feelings, by their reactions. The scenes from household life that open each chapter are, more often than not, centred on the most mundane activities – trips to the shops, making breakfast – and yet these moments were often suffused with intense emotion. The intensity of such moments is rarely reflected in studies of the European and North American home because an interview-based method so easily makes them invisible. My research has demonstrated the importance of these moments, not only because they have the capacity to derail the imagined futures householders work toward – which they do – but because these moments are what make household life difficult. They colour the mood of the household for hours or days at a time, they instigate arguments and resentments, they create guilt and anxiety, they make it clear that external forces have a power of veto over everyday life. Living in my respondents' homes with them allowed me to understand what mattered to

them, to acknowledge the importance of the mundane in household life. My choice of method allowed for a deeper, more sensitive study of household life, one that I hope others might be inclined to adopt in future research.

In the introduction, I discussed the unsettled socio-political backdrop to the Harpers', Spencers' and Wests attempts to live their imagined futures, and the uncertainty that arose from the ever-present possibility of being blindsided by something outside of their control. And yet, littered throughout this thesis are sources of uncertainty quite separate to these political and social circumstances, sources of uncertainty that could, and did, derail householders' imagined futures, and the prospect of which fuelled their anxieties. It was the possibility that their train might be cancelled, or that the wind might be too strong to allow them to cycle to work safely; that moths might infest their home, or that their tree might become infected with some kind of disease; that they might lose their job, or that a prospective landlord might consider their business too unreliable to be granted a lease; that their child might become ill, or that their child might be bullied at nursery that made their lives feel uncertain. The householders I lived with were constantly negotiating uncertainty, threats to their imagined futures that emerged from all sides. These were not, for the most part, a result of the existential aimlessness of modernity, but what we might call 'acts of god', external forces that periodically appeared to derail household life, before retreating once again. Householders often seemed to operate under a 'what's next?' mentality, an expectation that at some point, at some time, something would intervene to ensure things didn't go the way they wanted them to.

Working to make life what they wanted it to be seemed to mean working against forces beyond their control.

The work of enacting imagined futures was material: getting the right things in the right place at the right time; maintaining objects to ensure that they carried on doing what householders wanted them to do. Storage was a means through which householders sought to keep the potentiality of things 'in hand', to be called upon at some point in the future. Here, in contrast to the framing of household objects as holders of memory we see how objects haunt householders with promised futures. In chapter two, I illustrated this through the example of Emma's small wooden tricycle, which, although stored in a cupboard in the corner of Claire and Peter's attic, allows Claire to imagine a time when Emma and Jack will ride around the garden together. Shove's idea that householders materialise the future in the present through their consumption choices has been an influential one in the formation of my analysis. Here I build upon it by demonstrating that, for the householders in my study, the future was materialised not only through practices of consumption, but also through those of arrangement, maintenance and storage.

Tucked away, out of sight, in the far reaches of the home, objects populate householders' imagined futures. Upon these objects' triumphant return to everyday life, however, it becomes clear that they have been living in the material present, their aging demonstrated by their changed physical form and the corresponding shift in their potentiality. These triumphant returns are often not triumphant at all; the ravages of dust, the elements, household pests and any

number of other forces may well have taken their toll. Objects are demonstrated to be as vulnerable to these forces as householders themselves, if not more so. Things require care if they are to work for us, and, as Puig de la Bellacasa argues, care cannot be premised on a longing for a 'smooth harmonious world' but requires 'everyday practical *doings* that engage with the inescapable troubles of interdependent existences' (italics in original, 2012: 199). Neglecting to care for objects while they were being stored left them vulnerable to the effects of external forces and allowed them to fall out of working order. I am not looking to make a moral argument here, but a practical one. Where householders failed to care for their possessions – when Claire's toaster was left full of crumbs, when Ben and Anna allowed their car's battery to run down to empty, when Jenny pulled bags of children's clothes out of the loft to find them irrevocably stained – their imagined futures were jeopardised.

I have discussed how the work of imagined futures – the effort they put into trying to make household life be what they wanted household life to be, into making their kids something nutritious for dinner, into keeping the house tidy, into making toast, into watching their favourite program on the TV – occupied householders' time and was the focus of their energies. These efforts were motivated as much by the fear of unwanted futures as by the promise of those they wanted. The parents in my study felt that the success of their children's futures lay in their hands. Their children, growing and changing before their eyes, physically marking the passing of time through their development, were a constant reminder of the imminence of the future. Told that poor parenting could permanently damage their child, and their child's future, these parents

interrogated every parenting decision they made for its consequences. In this context even minor disappointments were regarded as significant. Slip-ups and heat-of-the-moment incidents when parents' behaviour constituted what they considered to be 'bad parenting', were sources of guilt and anxiety. A bad-tempered telling off or end-of-tether shouting-at were agonised over as a threat to their child's emotional well-being in the present, and as potentially resulting in an anxious disposition as they got older. Capitulating and giving in to requests for another biscuit or a packet of crisps brought fears that they were teaching their children bad eating habits, planting the seed of unhealthy eating and the unhealthy body that went with it. While parents were aware that, probably, one slip-up, one irritated yell, would not have the lasting damage they so feared, they couldn't know for sure, and without knowing the outcome of their actions, they could only wait in worry.

Aside from crystallising the impact of the future on the household behaviours in the present, the fact that all three households in my research had children also served to demonstrate how the work of enacting imagined futures played out differently for the men and women in my research. Along with the belief that children's early years are crucial for their future health and happiness comes the idea that, if parents do it right, they can maximise their child's potential for a successful life. This attitude, and the style of mothering based upon it – so called 'intensive mothering' (Hays 1996) – demands that women invest huge amounts of time and effort in the care of their small children. Jenny, Claire and Anna all had successful careers they enjoyed, and as much if not more earning ability than their husbands, but put their careers on hold to take maternity leave. Only

Anna's husband, Ben, who was temporarily unemployed, was willing or able to take time out of his own career so that his wife could return to work. The period of maternity leave, during which these women spent working days at home looking after the children, secured their position not only as their children's primary caregivers, but as having primary responsibility for the care of the home. Jenny, Claire and Anna, despite having no desire to be housewives, took up this role for the sake of their children, and because they saw no alternative option. All three women spoke of the isolation of maternity leave, of the loneliness of days spent caring for a child that required all their efforts. It was clear, and sometimes stated, that they had hoped their husbands would have been more able and more willing to share this burden, but that they had been disappointed. Instead, they had devoted themselves to the care of their children, to the maintenance of their home, to inhabiting the role of 'housewife' that they had never wanted to play.

Of course, the fact that I conducted my research during times of maternity leave fails to reflect the possibility that, when both parents were working, the burden of childcare may have been shared more equally. And yet, it was clear in Claire and Anna's panic when the nannies they had found to look after the children when they returned to work pulled out or appeared not to be suitable that they regarded childcare to be their responsibility, that it was they who would have to deal with the issue. The key point here is not that the women in my study did more childcare than their partners did, because this would hardly be a revelation. It is that, despite being middle class women with successful and well-remunerated careers who considered themselves feminists and who wanted an

equitable division of childcare between themselves and their partners, the women in my study ended up being, at least temporarily, the housewives they had never wanted to be and still didn't want to be. In part, this was due to their husband's inability to take an extended period of paternity leave, although this was only contractually prohibited in Peter's case. In part, it was because their husbands didn't want to risk the damage it would do to their careers to take an extended leave of absence. As I mentioned in chapter five, in the period since I conducted my fieldwork, the law has changed so that parents are able to share parental leave, entitled to a period of 40 weeks that after the initial two weeks – which must be taken by the mother – they are entitled to divide between them. Only two percent of couples have taken advantage of this new law. A recent study has suggested that, the reason for this low uptake is the fact that many employers do not provide enhanced Shared Parental Pay, which means that they would only pay the statutory minimum of £139.58 per week to any fathers who took parental leave, representing a significant pay cut for many men (Allen 2016). And yet, the women in my study earned as much, and sometimes more, than their husbands. The financial rationale was not the main driver here. It might be that Will and Peter would have felt embarrassed to take an extended paternity leave, that they would be transgressing the norm in their work place. It might be that they felt that the long-term damage to their careers would be irreparable. And so their wives set aside their own imagined futures for those of their children, and dealt with their frustration at their husband's refusal or inability to do the same.

In a report published this year, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) stated that while women's wages were around 10 percent lower than men's before the birth of their first child, this pay gap widens after a woman has had her first child, so that by the time this child is twelve women's earnings are around a third lower than men's. The IFS suggested that one of the main contributing factors to this wage discrepancy was the fact that women with children have spent less time in work: 'By the time their first child is aged 20, women have on average been in paid work for four years less than men and have spent nine years less in paid work of more than 20 hours per week' (Dias et al. 2016). The everyday lives of the Harpers, Spencers and Wests provide an insight into the household dynamics that lie behind these statistics. Each of the women in my study had different attitudes towards maternity leave. Claire never considered any alternative to taking maternity leave to care for her children, but did not enjoy the isolation that came with it. Jenny wanted to share the responsibility of childcare, and the sacrifice of taking time off work, with her husband, but despite her repeatedly broaching the subject, Will refused. Anna had already taken a year of maternity leave by the time I went to live with the Wests, and while Ben took over care of Lottie during my stay, this was by accident of the fact that he wasn't working at that point. Anna, nevertheless, was pleased to be able to return to work. Whether they wanted to or not, these women ended up putting their careers on hold and taking maternity leave, a division that served the careers of Peter, Will and Ben but which came at the expense of their wives'. These findings are inescapably political – the fact that discussions over which partner should take time out of work to care for babies and children result, for the vast majority of households in Britain, in outcomes that resemble those of the Harpers and Spencers, and is one

of the main reasons that women with children in Britain continue to earn less than men.

The politics doesn't end there. The households in my study, middle class, home-owning residents of south-east London, are contributing to the much-discussed gentrification of this area. Their use of their local community – the shops they frequent, the cafes they stop at, the playgroups they take their kids to – contributes to the success of some businesses at the expense of others, and to the retail gentrification of these areas. Householders chose to visit and shop at businesses that facilitated their imagined futures – that sold the kind of food they wanted to cook with, and that they wanted their children to eat, or that presented fewest obstacles to being navigated with small children in tow. These preferences, guided by their imagined futures, contributed to the process by which their local areas are being rewritten in their image, the streets becoming populated by shops that are geared toward affluent, middle class customers. One of these shops is Ben's, which sells a carefully curated selection of high quality foods – the kind of ingredients he and Anna like to cook with, and will go to great effort to source – and is in stark contrast to many of the shops that surround it, and certainly to the laundrette that previously occupied the space. Ben's aim is to sell good quality ingredients, that he believes are more nutritious, better for the world, and make for better tasting meals. His criterion for deciding whether to stock an item is to decide whether or not he would want to buy it. And yet this criterion ignores the fact that many of the residents of the area in which Ben's shop is located, can't afford to buy the kind of things he does, or don't want to. Ben favours hyper-local products, those grown or produced in south-east

London, as he believes that stocking these kind of products is good for the community, supporting his fellow residents and demonstrating how 'of-the-area' his shop is. And yet the vast majority of Ben's customers are middle class and white, just as he is. The kind of 'localism' Ben is selling is exclusionary, it fails to acknowledge that many of his fellow residents of south-east London cook food that requires ingredients produced far away from London, foods sold in the many shops nearby that specialise in foods imported from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. Ben has not set out to make south-east London more welcoming to the middle classes and less welcoming to others, just as my other respondents did not set out to ensure that the chic cafes and organic butchers they shopped at flourished while other businesses floundered, and yet, guided by what they wanted for their lives, by their imagined futures, this was the process to which they contributed.

My research has demonstrated the benefits that derive from the method I used, the fuller understanding of household life that can be gained through living with our respondents, and becoming as far as possible a part of the household. Of course, such a method is both time and labour intensive, and limits the number of households that can be included in a study like mine. While my decision to live with my respondents brought depth of understanding, it allows for few points of comparison. A greater period of time in which to conduct my research and a larger sample size with more varied household forms would have ensured greater difference between households that could have proved illuminating. The parents in my study were constantly looking toward their children's futures, and interrogating their actions and parenting decisions made in the present for their

impact on their children's futures, meaning that the imagined future was a powerful orienting point in the lives of my respondent households. I don't believe that imagining the future, wanting everyday life to work a particular way, and the resulting disappointment and frustration when it doesn't, is unique to the households I lived with. I suspect that this same dynamic between the imagined future and its disappointment plays out in households of all forms across Britain, but that in households without children and their physical manifestation of the passing of time, the relationship between the present and the imagined future may be perceived differently. Research conducted in a similar way but directed at young households, at old households and at households without children, would all be interesting complements and counterpoints to my research.

While the fact that Claire, Jenny and Anna were all on maternity leave for the duration of the research provided an insight into an aspect of household life that has rarely been explored ethnographically, the gendered division of household and childcare labours would have changed dramatically when this period was over and both parents were working full time once again. Future research could include a household where both parents were working whilst juggling the demands of having very young children, or could be based on longer periods spent with households, beyond the end of the period of maternity leave, to explore the impact this had on the way in which parents managed the work of childcare and caring for the home, and how parents managed the conflict between the futures they imagined for themselves and those they imagined for their children. Further insight into the perspectives of men like the fathers in my

study would add richness to my portrait of household life. Because the women in my study had all taken maternity leave and were at home for much of the time I was staying with their families, it is their experiences and viewpoints that dominate my findings, whilst the men in my study – especially Peter and Will – are sometimes background presences. Away from the home and the household for large parts of the day, and sometimes for evenings too, working or travelling, Peter and Will were absent presences, and their opinions or behaviours were often described or referred to by their wives but unseen by me. Peter and Will did not confide in me as their wives did and so their wants and anxieties were less clear to me, and my discussion of the work they did in the pursuit of imagined futures is made less rich as a result. As I mentioned in my discussion of my method, this unbalanced perspective was driven by my place in the household as a woman, and a male researcher could, perhaps, be able to give a fuller exploration of the way in which middle class men balance their imagined futures with those of their children, and indeed, their wives.

Jackson argues that, in order to minimise disappointment, to maximise wellbeing, we might be wise to work harder at being satisfied, to understand as his Sierra Leonean respondents did, that '...happiness consists in knowing how to make the most of what one has rather than staking everything on the chance of something else' (2011: 197). The question that seems to arise from my discussion of householders' wants and their disappointment is: wouldn't life be less stressful, less disappointing, if they just wanted less? Household life might be less of an emotional rollercoaster perhaps, there might be fewer dejected lows, fewer moments of tension and frustration. And yet, wanting comes part and

parcel with caring. It is householders' emotional investment in household life that makes their imagined futures within it so potent. After all, as Mol et al. put it, '[c]are is active, it seeks to improve life' (2010: 15). Householders care that their kids are happy, and safe, and contented and well-fed. Householders care that their partner finds the colour of the living room walls pleasing, or gets a good night's rest, or is able to recover from the stress of a tough day at work. Householders want so much because they care so much, and that, surely, is something to be celebrated.

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