

PROCEEDINGS OF THE PERFORMING SPACE 2023 CONFERENCE

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Hosting: Home Truths

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Hosting: Home Truths

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Abstract

Hosting: Home Truths, is a creative research project which considers contemporary spatial practices alongside archival materials, interrogating the legacies of labour and control that inform our domestic ecologies. In this work, hosting belies an entanglement of allegiances, and the research asks the question: *What is it to host?* Taking measure of the word’s entomology, that tracks from person to place, ephemeral presence to bread, guest to enemy, stranger to victim, a negotiation with the presence of an ever-evolving host emerges.

This project works with an archive relating to a women’s domestic college, and maps practices of hosting and housewifery in Australia from 1920s-70s, considering them as ongoing actors in the spatial manifestation of “home.” Positioned as legitimate spatial practices, which contribute to the architecture they inhabit, it looks to understand how they inform the way home-worlds, both built and “felt,” are maintained, held, and transformed through repeated action, habits and performances of labour and care.

The research methodology takes the archival artefact and performs a sequence of digestive “rituals” in its unpicking. It translates the past into a public event, creating a space to host an intermingling of gastronomic installations, video works and archival fragments.

Through discourse and display of these not-so-distant practices, women’s work and “housewifery” are understood as primary devices of construction for home environments, through care and control in Australia’s domestic interiors. These often-restrictive hierarchical practices, focussed on civility, are used as a counterpoint against which a contemporary culinary materialism and associated rituals might be developed. The aim is to transgress the strict boundaries in our inherited practices of eating, homing, and maintenance.

In the worlding of our domestic ecologies, this is one story of housing and homing in Australia, a story to start to tell other stories with (Haraway and Le Guin, 2019).

Keywords: Domesticity, Labour and Maintenance, Ritual, Architecture

Hosted Agendas

The research is performed at an event-based exhibition for Melbourne Design Week, 2024. This event translates the archival research alongside edible installations by Kate Foster. The work interrogates the role of the Host – those who act as the curator, conductor and translator of domestic and public interiors, confronting the lurking presence of a curious, sometimes sinister mix of ideologies and spectres that occupy these spaces. Throughout each element of this hosting, expressed in the mediums of bread, text, and video (Figure 1), we ask the question: *Whose agenda do we host in our contemporary domestic ecologies?*

Figure 1

Hosting: Home Truths MDW24 Event. Photograph by Temitope Adesina.



We understand the make-up of this domestic ecology in alignment with Busch (1999), who posits that the construction of the home is both a physical and psychological act reflecting not just how we live, but who we are and what we might become. The blurring of the physical and psychological aspects of “home” environments is furthered through the frameworks set out by Werner et al (2013) in *temporal homing theory*, where the house, inhabitants, and events are situated in a transactional and relational framework. The environment and people are understood to be inseparable and mutually defining, in a relationship that is played out through temporal forces “...a space conceived of as a dynamic confluence of people, places, and psychological processes” (Werner et al., 2013, p. 2).

Holding these theorists close, the project returns to the question of hosted agendas and seeks to unearth the spectral past of the Australian home environment. This past agenda is held in the archive and is crystallised in the Latin motto of the Emily McPherson College, UT DOMUM ITA PATRIAM, which translates: *As goes the home so goes the country*. In this assertion, the domestic becomes a generator of worlds and spaces beyond its container. To play out its significance within the ecology of “home,” we return to Werner et al’s (2013) assertion that the house, its inhabitants, objects and ritual events are situated in a relational framework, looping back and forward between the scales of *home-self-world*. Homemaking rituals, and specifically those of “hosting” are tasked as methods for holding this dynamic confluence in place, fixing it in the shape of “home.” The house becomes fluid and gooey, a container defined and influenced from the interior (Connor, 2004). This gooey interior, looping across scales, inevitably spills out across the threshold to determine our attitude and attendance to the suburb, city and landscape...and so goes the country.

Figure 2

Bread Installations. Photograph by Temitope Adesina.



Stories To Tell Other Stories

Returning to the event, the gallery becomes a home away from the house. The public is invited in to engage with the transformation, containment, and consumption of the body of research: leavened and otherwise, as loaves are held on plinths, and pinned amongst the archival fragments (Figure 1, 2). The performance is constructed in a nexus of mediums: bread, bodies, video, and text, a hosting negotiation that is traced in real time throughout the duration of the event, in the slow dismemberment and digestion of the installations, a collective story. (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Dismemberment and Digestion of Exhibition. Photograph by Temitope Adesina



In considering this story, attention is turned back to the container of all this activity: the house. Enlisting Le Guin's (1998) *Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, the house becomes the carrier bag for a story of hosting that dictates and enacts everyday worlding. This event and its accompanying research, positions itself as a story about the construction and design of this container, as both realised space and ideal. It argues that much of the making of domestic space has occurred, and continues to occur through the temporal actions, objects, rituals, rules, techniques and moral positioning set out by practices of housewifery and homemaking. In her introduction to Ursula Le Guin's parable, Haraway writes "It matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what concepts we think to think other

concepts with” (Haraway and Le Guin., 2019, p. 10). It is the story of bread that is chosen to embody the domestic narrative within this work. Bread, this airy, fermenting, swelling, crusty body in the scales of this event and research represents a dual category as food and as a lesser body. A container, a symbiote of self, another host.

The arrival of the bread in the gallery space creates nervous tension (Figure 1, 2), and the whispered phrase *are we allowed to eat the bread?* dances across the crowd. The assumption that the stand-in-host, warm to the touch, might invite guests to partake intuitively, proves naïve as protocols and permissions of the gallery override the homely rituals. It is not until lead by example (I tear off a fluffy piece of brioche) that the tension is broken. Soon bread is torn apart, shared and digested alongside essay, video work, and installations, ripped from walls by eager hands and mouths, transgressing taboos of both gallery and dining (Figure 3).

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