Dismantling Mantelpieces:

Consumption as Spectacle and Shaper of Self in the Home

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploratory study of contemporary British mantelpiece displays. Located within anthropological/sociological literatures of the meaning of home, identity and material culture, it opens up the 'focal point' of the domestic interior to scrutiny. This familiar 'homely' space is a strangely invisible presence within the house. Ethnographically-informed interviews reveal its role in the ordering and categorisation of domestic time, space and objects; also family and gender relations. By transforming this taken-for-granted space into *matter out of place*, ongoing practices of memory, family and home are interpreted as internalised cultural categorisations.

The perspective of gift theory reveals frictions between traditional practice and current conflations of self and taste, home and family, in a mass of proliferating materials. Focusing on the mythopoetic gendering of the gift and the house, I show how the mantelpiece is a *structuring structure* in an order of artefacts including the house and displayed objects. There is a 'gap' in-between the tangible, visual and audible properties of mantelpiece displays which can show *the immortal ordinary society* of premodern mythopoesis and ordering of power relations. The syncresis of home, memory, family and women is past-oriented and exclusionary, compressing and disguising 'being' - *domestication of the body* - as 'knowing'.

The study employs multi-modal collection methods, such as postal questionnaires, in-depth qualitative interviews, visual data including a longitudinal autophotographic project, Mass-Observation Archive material and architectural histories. Data are analysed from differing perspectives, including narrative/biographic accounts, emergent themes, innovative visual interpretation and historiography/archaeology. Presentation of findings addresses the 'crisis of representation' by using text, photographs and sketches in a bound thesis, a CD-Rom and a website. Using *sociological imagination* thus problematises everyday processes of 'doing' both social membership and social enquiry. In conclusion, I suggest future multi-dimensional enquiry into the 'gaps' in social/architectural fabric.

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N.B. Appendix VI also available on password-protected website:

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Chapter One - Introduction:

Searching the Living Room; Researching the Field

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Searching the Living Room; Researching the Field

'I am only including the little story of his death to explain how my sisters and I came to have such a large quantity of cement at our disposal.'
(McEwan 1978: 9)

1.1 Seeing the Point

There was one of those gaps in time, which are not really gaps at all, just a break in what I think should be happening. It was actually an advert break in a TV soap I was watching – or perhaps it was a fly-on-the-wall documentary, or a sitcom – and I did not know what to do with those long minutes. I did not want to look at adverts for shampoo and cars, chemists and soap. And so, for the first time, perhaps, I turned my eyes to the left of the television screen and looked at, or saw, or noticed, perceived – whatever the very definite verb for seeing might be – what had been the background of my living room for a very long time. Suddenly, in that moment –at least, that's how I tell it now – the mantelpiece became visible to me, the focus, the focal point of my gaze, stare, vision.

And then, probably, the programme started again, and I turned my eyes to the right of the mantelpiece, and carried on watching what a lot of other people were watching that Winter night in 2000 (I know that much). Or maybe I did not; it is possible that I leapt from my sofa in one of those epiphanic moments that a book character, or somebody telling me how they fell in love, relates. And I ran to my desk and wrote it all down in a great burst of creative enthusiasm. If the latter had happened, this is what I would have written (for the former, take it as given that I was thinking all these great thoughts, in some order or other).

I looked at the symmetrical display, and thought, 'Why have I done that?'. I stared at the vase of flowers in the very centre of the arrangement, and remembered how, upon moving back to the house after an absence, I had decided always to have fresh flowers in the middle of the mantelpiece (even if, more often than not, these were weedish type flowers from the garden or park – I could not buy *myself* flowers). And the

photographs – my grandparents' wartime wedding picture – placed there following my grandfather's death; one of my mother, laughing, that she did not like. And like her, in a way, I displayed tourist objects – a reproduction of the Nefertiti head from Egypt; she always insisted on keeping an ancient French fertility goddess on her mantelpiece – always disliked by my brother and me. Funny that it's *her* mantelpiece...

There was something slightly odd about that Nefertiti head – an object on sale at every marketplace and tourist shop I had visited on the (highly cultural, of course) trip I had taken with my father. He had bought one too, and I had bought two more, for my brother and mother. I knew where the heads were in those other three houses – I noted them when I visited – my mother's mantelpiece, the top of my father's gas fire (naughty old Mrs So and So had modernised in the seventies) and my brother's bookshelf – they were somewhat cramped, waiting for their first house to be renovated. And when I happened to glance at the head on my mantelpiece, I remembered all the others, scattered about the British Isles, and somehow, it joined up my absent, divorced, dispersed family. And I remembered the holiday, then the fact that I was not absolutely sure I liked the head, but really I had to have a souvenir, and it was too good to throw away. It was, moreover, so intimately bound up with some duty to keep my family together, on my mantelpiece, that to hand it to a charity shop or somesuch place seemed like a betrayal – even though I was sure that my family would not think that. They possessed the same object, yet owned different stories and memories.

Then there was that rather frightening face carved into a piece of wood up there, a present from my young brother-in-law. I knew it would be heresy to get rid of it, but had turned its face to the wall, leaving on show a nice, natural-looking piece of tree. It was turned back if he visited. Matching this reversed gift, on the other side of the vase, was the carved wooden head of a Fijian man, made by my paternal grandfather for my maternal great-grandfather following his visit to see us in Fiji some quarter-century before. Both were now dead, and I had inherited the ornament from my great-grandfather. It was my most precious object, which my mother had allowed me, grudgingly to take to Oxford, warning me to take care of it, and somewhat annoyed that I had removed it – *my* heirloom – from her living room. How complex were the

memories I had invested in that small carving. My husband hated it, and I resented him for not realising how important it was.

The twin to the Nefertiti head – as I recall – was a pottery model of a palm-reader hand, bought by me to give to my step-father. But somehow, it had ended up on my mantelpiece, because I liked it, and was not too sure he would like it. It made more sense for me to keep it, surely. But I was not sure it really belonged there – it made the display look a bit *bodily*, bodied, embodied, whatever the word might be that describes an assemblage of heads, a hand, and a conjunction of masks, animal ornaments and photographs of people about the rest of the room. But they were all there for a reason, at least, I had a reason for them all to be there, unlike anyone else in the house, although it did make the room look somewhat cluttered. I hung on to these objects, because people had given them to me, or because I liked them (sometimes I even liked the gifts). They had always to be kept out, on show, so I could remember these diaspora of friends and family. Even though, now I come to think about it, how often did I actually look at them? And my mother-in-law's clumsy question, 'Do you dust?' - born out of a concern for the problem of keeping them all nice and clean, rather than (she insisted), of my housekeeping abilities - had made me wonder whether their absence might be a relief, from the burden of memory, the very weightiness, the thinginess of things.

There was the other sort of stuff, as I saw it, on the mantelpiece too. There was the fluff of cards – I am remembering them as birthday cards, but they cannot have been, for it was winter, and too early for Christmas – perhaps postcards from family members, or pretty letter cards. I know some cards stayed rather longer than others: pictures I liked, or invitations to weddings, even though I was well aware when these would be. Then there were the reminders, the boring odds and ends of vet appointments, and the key for the friend who was coming later. And the dust, although I am being too honest now (why do you think I have never forgotten my ex-mother-in-law's comment?)

And then – it is surprising how many thoughts one can have in an advert break – I looked at the mantelpiece itself, above the nasty gas fire that I was too poor to replace, and which I kept, despite the new central heating – just in case, as my father said.

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This was a 1930s ex-council house, with fireplaces still in the living room and two of the bedrooms. Someone had, at some point, removed the kitchen fireplace and filled it in, but had left this quite inconvenient, high mantelpiece in the living room. The shape of the room and positioning of the aerial socket meant that the television had to go in the alcove made by the chimney breast, and the need for two sofas in the room meant that everyone always looked side-on at the television screen. The combination of two doors, a window and the left-over parts of the fireplace dictated the positioning of the furniture. It would have made sense, in terms of how the room was used, to put the television under the mantelpiece, and remove the obsolete gas fire, but that just seemed wrong. And I rather liked having a mantelpiece, anyway, don't ask me why.

Or rather, I did ask myself why – why did I want the mantelpiece there, in the centre of the room, but why did I barely look at it, because we watched television in there, or chatted? (And it was not as if there was a fire there anymore). Why did I always have the fresh flowers in the middle, and the candlesticks at the end, and the mirror above (I forgot to mention those)? What were those particular objects doing up there – the disliked gift, the gift I liked too much to hand over, the heads, the wedding photograph, my poor mother's picture, and the various cards behind all of this? Who had put those ideas in my head, and when, exactly, was I going to dust (my mother would be appalled, but then, she has a cleaner)? By what process had I selected those particular objects from those available to me, which filled the dresser, sat in front of the books, dodged the condensation on the windowsill, and even stood on the floor (a wooden pig from an ex-boyfriend, rather chewed by the dog, but I didn't like to throw it out, exactly).

The awful symmetry, the mirror, the candles - I knew them all from somewhere, but where precisely, I could not say. It was a shelf, above a redundant fire, out of place, really, inconvenient, but I had attached such importance and pride to what was on there, to some extent; yet still I used it as a storage space. Did I want others to look at the 'official', the permanent, the *real* display, but ignore the mundane ephemera, and the dust? It was the central point of the room –the house - the first thing people saw when coming in from the tiny hallway, but when we were in there, I barely saw it. Without it, what would the room be like? Where would we take those posed snapshots – in front of the television, or against the glare of the window?

I had, at that time, to find a topic for my Housing Masters dissertation, and feeling quite beaten in my original aim: to save Britain's homeless. A stint in a housing advice centre had convinced me of the need for change in the system, and I realised that I had to know more to be seen as qualified to do anything about it. But after a year in a class with social housing officers, studying and doing fieldwork about the sector, I felt that there was nothing to be done at grassroots level. My fellow students were kept busy at work chasing rent arrears, filling in forms about rental voids, or meeting benchmarks for repairs. A time working in a dry hostel for homeless people, followed by a series of interviews with employees of the housing association, had added to my feeling of hopelessness. No one working in the field of social housing seemed able to do very much. Getting into research work seemed the only way to be able to influence policy, but the thought of doing a study of tenancy problems, or traveller housing, or rooflessness, just made my head sink lower.

When I suddenly –and despite the tricks of memory, that suddenness is true – really looked at my mantelpiece on that dark night, I saw another way into the problem. I do not pretend that a dissertation on mantelpiece display will lead to a radical shift in central housing policy. But it made me want to look at housing, houses, homes, in a different way. I was doing certain things with, and putting certain things, in a particular order on the mantelpiece and in my living room, and I wanted that mantelpiece in my living room, but I could not explain the origin, or the purpose, of those practices and assumptions about objects and order. I knew that it had some thing to do with comfort and tradition, design and convention, what others thought of me, and what I thought about myself, my family, friends and the past. I did not know whether exploring this further would help me answer those questions, or help anyone in terms of the problems and meanings of home and family, self-identity and culture, the taken-for-granted and its alternatives. But something that had been invisible – in the very centre of the living room – had become visible, and more than that, loud. To ignore it would have been rude.

To cut a long story short, I did carry out a Masters project on the topic, discussed in the next section. I have also given lectures about the mantelpiece to housing officers studying the course I had done. The effect is curious. At first, some of them are

somewhat sceptical, as many people are, about the purpose of such a research topic. But after we have done some work about it, they seem to accept my suggestion that mantelpiece displays are not just domestic frippery (unless they are being very polite to the visitor). They start talking about going into tenants' living rooms, looking at what's on display, and making judgements about people. Or they recall how some tenants, stuck in temporary accommodation, do nothing with their houses, and what that might mean. Someone remembered how refugees packed, in their one suitcase, family photographs, and how one woman, housed with her daughter in a single room, had made space on the bookshelf, like a little mantelpiece, for the few photographs and ornaments she had taken with her from the family home, a place of abuse. Making space for photographs and ornaments, even in a suitcase or a little room is important even for people trapped. And these objects are not randomly scattered, but ordered, just as a room or a particular shelf might be ordered.

To the visitor, these are silent goods for visual consumption. An object does not speak for itself. And so, without going into more detail here, that is why each chapter, each accounted-for textual unit of the study in this thesis is interspersed with unlabelled 'picture' plates, constructed from visual data gathered during the doctoral project. Some are montages, others collections around a theme, and a few original photographs stand alone. I discuss this mode of presentation in detail in Chapter Six. For now, they could be treated as one of those apparent 'gaps in time' – or space – within which I suddenly saw the mantelpiece. I will say no more about this at present, since I have a world of data waiting. The next section explains how that first thought, and the Masters dissertation that followed, led to my current research questions. I will then put this sharply focused subject into its first frame: the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Mastering the Subject

> 'Today, he said, men had to learn to live without things. Things filled men with fear: the more things they had, the more they had to fear. Things had a way of riveting themselves on to the soul and then telling the soul what to do.'
> (Chatwin 1987: 64)

After my initial shock of noticing the mantelpiece, I then had the job of turning this momentary flash into a cogent research question for the Masters dissertation. At the

time, I was on a major anti-consumerism kick. I had read 'Culture Jam' (Lasn 1999), had a go at the zeitgeist work by Klein (2000) (a bit too earnest), and joined the 'Buy Nothing Day' movement. I'd done my best to do all my shopping (by bike) at various local shops, avoiding my most local shop, Tesco; was getting a weekly organic vegetable box, and using ecological cleaning products: the usual path of the East Oxford home-owning graduate. It was absolutely clear to me that mantelpiece displays were rampant exhibits of status and consumer idiocy, even if the people who owned them were unaware of this. They were all duped consumers, cultural dopes, or in denial of some sort. By that, I meant everyone but me.

Having undertaken a short research methods course that semester, I decided that the best approach to excavating the truth beneath other people's mantelpieces was to interview a selection of homeowners and tenants at different stages in their 'housing careers'. Consequently, I interviewed 12 people, ranging from semi-retired owners of a large house in prestigious North Oxford, to a student sharing a rented flat with three others, in East Oxford. Due to time constraints, I used a snowball sample of friends of friends or acquaintances, visited them in their homes and carried out taped interviews of an hour or more, also taking photographs at the time. When it got to the transcription stage, I catalogued only the parts that seemed relevant to the job at hand, highlighting particularly salient sections. It was at this point that I suffered a crisis of confidence: how was it possible for me to take control of other people's words? It seemed like an act of misappropriation. A stern word from my supervisor, to the effect that it was my dissertation and I had to take control of it, followed by my mother's 'Just get the bloody thing written', prompted the writing up.

The thesis was neatly structured and divided into three themes: authenticity, ownership and time, concluding with a discursive attack on the 'pathology of the age'. There were two reasons for this. First, I had pursued a personal political anti-consumerist agenda throughout the project - during my questioning in the interviews and at the cataloguing stage. Second, I had been deeply influenced by three books: Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's *The Meaning of Things* (1981), Rybczynski's *Home: a short history of an idea* (1986) and, Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-fashioning* (1980). Rybczynski's historically embedded argument showed how nostalgia indicated a discomfort with the present, whilst Csikszentmihalyi and

Rochberg-Halton's extensive longitudinal empirical study of people's relationships with their personal possessions concluded with a distinction between instrumental and terminal materialism, which was age-related. Older people had a 'transcendental' relationship with things, which were instruments in maintaining and constructing social relations. They argued that younger people conversely used their possessions solipsistically as extensions or reflections of self and self-interest, detached from wider social and global /ecological networks, and related this to a concern for the environmental implications of future global consumption patterns. The third (Greenblatt 1980) was a literary theory text that I had first encountered when reading Classics and English. It took a New Historicist perspective that had been deeply influential on me as an undergraduate, since it called into question traditional, taken-for-granted readings of Renaissance literary texts, such as the plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe.

There were two problems with utilising the theory for social research, the first of which is apparently obvious: the social is not just a text to be decoded and deconstructed. My intention was an exploratory study of what people were doing with their mantelpieces, and what mantelpieces were for. To approach interviews then as detached texts to be scrutinised as discourses of political economy was therefore to miss that aim entirely. In addition, I had not taken into account the political perspective of Greenblatt's (1980) text when using it as a tool for analysing interview texts. I had taken its Marxist perspective as a given, without engaging in a critique of such an approach. This is a gross generalisation of these three insightful and meticulously researched books, just as the thesis focused overly on the negative aspects of domestic consumption, at the expense of the meanings that interviewees had given to their material cultures of home. The loose ends, the ambiguities and complexities of the relationships that people had with their objects and families had been sacrificed for the desire for a neat structure and tidy ending. Like so many of the women (and men) who had spoken to me, I wanted an uncluttered, stylish finish to my production.

This is not absolutely to condemn the Masters dissertation: it was very good for a novice research project, in that it opened up a previously neglected area of sociological research to further exploration. And yet, in positioning myself as an

archaeologist – or rather, a treasure-seeker - fears that I might be chasing fool's gold had caused a blindness to trajectories and pathways that the interviewees' accounts had suggested. Material culture revealed by archaeology requires different analysis from present practice. The question of how to relate dug-up material with other available evidence, without the accounts of lived experience must by necessity omit that verbalised dimension of cultural analysis that has become so familiar to present-day ethnographers and any mode of interview-based or participant observer research. Observation is always accompanied by the spoken and/or written word of the 'researched' individuals – be they termed 'informants', 'participants' or 'interviewees'. I felt, on reviewing the Masters project, that I had, to some extent, performed an archaeological disembedding of the mantelpiece from its peopled contexts. Consequently, the uncertainties of meaning – the partial attachments, half-uttered comments and accounts that did not fit in with my initial research aim, to uncover the 'reality' of domestic display – had been smoothed over.

Therefore, when it came to developing these ideas further for the purposes of the doctoral project, I realised that some changes in methodology would be necessary to allow these tangents and whispers to emerge, and to allow the informants to be heard and seen in the final production. The fixedness, the rigidity of the personal political framework with which I had encircled the last dissertation had forced a neatness that had not been apparent in the interview or visual data. It had been a given, an assumption that had then constrained all the other givens - *data* - despite an appearance of critical reflexivity as I struggled with the question of power relations within the final product. For this reason, this thesis does not have the same coherent (and rather too cohesive) framework of research questions that directed the pilot study. Without wanting to labour the point, there is no extensive sociological research focusing on the mantelpiece: it is the assumed, the *given* focal point in so many British living rooms, and yet has remained curiously unseen as a focus for social research – or even for much attention in those very rooms.

Thus, this doctoral thesis is exploratory, in terms of looking at mantelpiece display as a 'way in' to the social and cultural practices and relations of the everyday within the home, and as a substantive focus for study in itself. It is discursive, and the data are not sliced up into three neat themes, as they were in the Masters dissertation. There

is, I hope, space for interpretations by the reader and viewer in this thesis, gaps into which they might place their counter-voices, just as I hope there will be room for differing accounts by informants, The aim is to shout, "ISN'T THIS STRANGE? Look at it, it's there, in your living room, or in your mother's or somewhere in your childhood." It's there, in the very centre of the British house, of cultural memory, of biographies, design histories, family albums. There are clocks in the middle, mirrors above, symmetry and NO FIRE. Once again: NO FIRE. Why are they there? Why do people want them? Why are housebuilders still putting them in? Why does the ever-bigger television jostle for space with it in the living room? Why do some people put coffee cups and bills and TV remotes on them, while others absolutely will not? And why do so many people who talk to me about it say, 'Oh it's a shrine, isn't it?', whereas not one informant did (and only five of the 145 questionnaire respondents)? There are a few, in seminars and presentations, who put up their hands to point out, quite proudly, that they have a 'real' fire in their house, as if this changed the extra-ordinariness of the mantelpiece in Britain, where 93% of homes have central heating installed (Online Neighbourhood Statistics [ONS] 2005). Why is it a point of pride to have a 'real' fire at home? What is its point? 99% of homes have at least one television and 99% of people have a telephone connection; nearly half of all homes have internet access, and yet, the gathering place of the hearth remains in its traditional form and place (ibid.).

However, this brings me to an important *caveat* for the thesis. As the 'Biographical Notes' show (see appended *Supplement*), the people whom I interviewed were principally self-defined as middle-class – by lifestyle if not by origin, as they put it. The study is historically specific, undertaken at a time when most houses are now centrally heated in Britain, even if some people cannot afford to use the utility. Having a 'real' coal or wood fire is a matter of choice for the majority – and certainly for those few who made the point in presentations. Even in 1979, fewer than 10% of mainland British homes were heated by open coal fire (Utley et al. 2003). As I discovered when delivering papers at conferences outside Britain, the mantelpiece is a specific cultural object, unique in many ways to British homes, and to the collective British memory (or heritage). The study does not seek to compare mantelpieces with, say, fridges in Norway (unknown fellow delegate, European Network of Housing Researchers Conference, 2002), coffee tables in Germany (mentioned by an

informant, Alison) or Far Eastern domestic shrines (Chris Webster, School seminar, 2002). The aim is not to comment on substantive cross-national differences in practice. I am looking at the mantelpiece in British (Welsh) homes. However, the concluding chapter will suggest how this close empirical scrutiny of a domestic microspace and daily practices relates to more universal cultural schemata.

1.3 Getting to the Point: Research Questions and Study Aims

'...*men* [sic] *whose mentalities have swept only a limited series of orbits often come to feel as if suddenly awakened in a house with which they had only supposed themselves to be familiar.*'
(Mills 1959:7)

It seems fitting to place the disarray of my original questions into a more ordered display. This is a list of questions that prompted further study following the Masters project. They are not designed to be comprehensive, answerable or sensible; their purpose is to show how the field of study first appeared to me:

- The first question: How do people account for mantelpieces in their houses today?

- The second questions: By what methods are objects selected and arranged on the mantelpiece? How does this placement relate to the ordering of objects within the geographies of home? What are the effects of the mantelpiece in the ordering of domestic space?

- The third questions: How might these practices of ordering artefacts – displayed objects, the mantelpiece and the house – be related to orders of time, such as history, memory, biography, social/ritual time, seasonality, futures and potentialities?

- The fourth questions: How do mundane timed, spatialised practices relate 'doing' self, family, gender and 'home' to cultural and social frames? What

are the effects of embedding practice within both specific and universal frames?

- The fifth questions: How can this interpretation of minute materialised, spatialised, timed and socially-embedded practice illuminate the order of institutions, practices and relations on a larger scale? What are possible research trajectories from this domestic study?

These are more in the order of foreshadowed ideas, rather than fixed questions, since there is no existing field of research into which the project can comfortably be placed, nor an existing hypothesis which it can seek to prove, contest or elaborate upon. Further, as the questions suggest, the study had three more general aims:

- Its first, substantive aim was to make the invisible 'focal point' of the living room and surrounding practices visible, vocalised and accounted for, if only through a glass, darkly.

- Its second, methodological aim was to practice and reflect upon a multi-modal approach to collecting, analysing and presenting data and findings.

- The third, theoretical aim was to consider how the empirical study of daily domestic practice, might relate to cosmological interpretations of practice, and thence inform future research trajectories.

These three aims were intended always to be interlinked, and to pursue Mills' (1959) vision for the sociological imagination, cited above. In the next section, I show how my background informed the framing of the research questions in this way.

1.4 Positioning the Researcher

In tandem with my intention to carry out a more fluid, less structured analysis of mantelpiece display emerging from informants' accounts, I was also approaching the field with nearly twenty years' learning that focused almost entirely on mythical,

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heroic and cosmological interpretations of individuals, artefacts, families and societies. Having learnt Latin, and then Greek, from the age of 11, I subsequently took joint Honours in English and Classics – focusing principally on poetry, drama, and literary theory. This involved close reading of individual texts, and also making cross-disciplinary conceptual links such as 'Epic', 'Tragedy' and rhetoric. I read nothing written after the Restoration, except for Coleridge and twentieth century literary theorists, taking particular interest in Mediaeval dream poetry and *Paradise Lost*. I had gone on to teach secondary school Latin, English and Classical Civilisation courses whilst undertaking the Masters. At Cardiff University, I took on the teaching of mediaeval and classical Latin courses in the School of History and Archaeology during my doctorate. Hence, my doctoral research in 'social reality' was interspersed with forays into ancient epic poetry, lurid Roman and Mediaeval chronicles, the Crusades, the Vulgate, Christian fathers and the complexities of Latin grammar. My times in the 'other place' of the School of History and Archaeology also brought me into conversation with scholars researching matters such as ancient Greek domestic cult (Morgan 2005), mediaeval social display (Coss and Keen 2002), and interdisciplinary studies linking archaeology and literature (Hines 2004).

Therefore, my conception of 'home and family' was informed not only by anthropological and sociological discourses, but also embedded in ancient myth and fixed grammatical structure. I had grown up breathing the dust of the cursed House of Atreus, the blood of internecine killing and cannibalism, and the smoke of altars, oracles and heroic feasts. The house, the family and the hearth were not mundane, everyday ongoing accomplishments, but dangerous places of pollution, deviant love, sudden slaughter and the wrath of gods. They were also places for love overcoming death, family devotion, ritual cleansing and divine blessing. Cosmogony, genealogy and the relations between the mundane profane and sacred divine spheres mattered in everyday practices. The grammars with which these were constructed had clear, fixed rules - the very rigidity of which meant that ambiguity, paradox and complex meanings could be manifested by sentence composition or even the inflection of a single word. In this context, 'postmodernism' seemed a trivial and clumsy parody of pre-modern complexity, intelligence and subtlety.

Consequently, the study is embedded in epistemologies of social institutions and persons that tend towards heroic, ritual and cosmological interpretations, framed by a twin impulse towards rigidity and ambiguity. The key device in most pre-modern textual and oral poetic traditions is that of divine interference in human affairs. The tropes of *deus ex machina*, Necessity, fate, fortune, and the will, malice or love of various divinities are used to explain the arbitrariness of human action and suffering. Rituals of cleansing, sacrifice and prayer must be performed exactly according to strict laws, as part of the bargain between humans and gods. However, even if humans keep their part of the bargain, the gods might not reciprocate. This is explained by invoking unseen human error, the unknown workings of the gods, or some impurity that might not be the fault of the individual, but genealogical. In obeying one divine imperative, another might be broken, so humans are frequently caught within labyrinths of unknowable complexity. However, these ambiguous, complex operations also offer resolution to human conflict, power struggles and debates, when it seems otherwise impossible.

This interaction between human and divine spheres might seem, to the modern eye, like a concealment of networks of power relations in human societies. And yet, the invocation of the divine at moments of crisis is often the device by which the apparent rigidity, solidity and coherence of the dominant power structure is opened up to questioning and scrutiny. Thus, my understanding of struggle for symbolic meaning, cultural practice, economic domination and social status was developed within a particular mythico-poetic frame of reference that might seem irrelevant and anachronistic, to the extent of being elitist. However, in linking such arcane learning with the findings of the Masters dissertation and social and anthropological theory, I shall show how this knowledge lent a suitable background for the doctoral study. While its empirical focus is everyday domestic practice, it is therefore framed by the universal, in the sociological tradition of making visible 'immortal ordinary society' (Garfinkel 1991: 10). It was this background that enabled a final theoretical leap from a seemingly trivial, minute domestic space to a theoretical consideration of the relations between persons, practices, places and institutions.

1.5 Nostalgia: taking turns and returns

'People turn to the past because they are looking for something they do not find in the present – comfort and well-being.'
(Rybczynski 1986: 215)

If we look back to the Masters, which became, effectively, a pilot for the doctoral study, it is possible to see how it positioned me at the outset of the doctoral research, and informed the selection of literatures framing the study (Didau 2001). As a conclusion to the dissertation, I tied up the triple thematic thread of authenticity, ownership and time with the notion of nostalgia. This is traditionally interpreted as longing for an earlier, better time. However, as I argued in the dissertation, its origins are the *nostoi* - the 'returns', usually 'homeward journeys' of the Greek heroes after the Trojan War related ancient Greek epic. The theme of Homer's *Odyssey* is the hero's *nostos*. Odysseus suffered 'nostalgia' – the 'pain' of the not-at-home, of the homecomer, in his ten-year journey back to Ithaca. In the meantime, his faithful wife Penelope stayed at home, threatened on every side by treacherous servants and murderous, money-grabbing suitors, who want her to marry her to gain Odysseus's property. In doing so, they transgress the laws of Zeus Xenos, the divine protector of 'the laws of host and stranger/guest' [*xenia*]. Her son, Telemachus, presuming his father dead, is anxious for her to select a husband, before the substance of the house is consumed by the numerous suitors. Odysseus returns disguised as a tramp, and as a 'stranger/guest' [*xenos*] is given hospitality, to the disgust of intruding guest-suitors and bad servants. After defeating the suitors and punishing the servants, he is reunited in his true identity as homecomer, ruler of the house and husband of Penelope. Nostalgia, therefore, is the property of the displaced, the unhomed or homeless. I concluded the Masters, then, with a discursion on the pathology of a society of duped consumers that had confused time and place, and in doing so exposed an impossible, endlessly deferred desire to 'return home'. In retrospect, this had overly suppressed the voices of the informants, instead putting the dissertation in its 'proper place', uncluttered and neat for display. The doctoral study therefore began from a position of foregrounding informants' narrative accounts in order to redress the balance.

However, a return to the Masters work after the doctoral fieldwork reminded me that, as Hodder pointed out, there is a discrepancy between what people say and what they do, and it is this very discrepancy where the gaps open up, to make visible 'multiple and conflicting voices, differing and interacting interpretations' (Hodder 1998: 120). He used this argument to highlight the importance of the seemingly 'trivial pursuit' of the analysis of material culture for opening up the lives of subordinated peoples. However, I realised that the same argument could motivate an approach to data collection, analysis and presentation that would valorise not only the articulate, articulated, familiar 'ways of knowing' and 'ways of seeing' the 'family' mantelpiece, but also unearth fragments of unspoken, unseen or untouched modes of knowledge. As a result of this reversal, I reviewed my attitude towards archaeology and the foregrounding of informants' accounts, and this informs the 'turn' in the last three chapters of the thesis. Having initially mistaken contrast for positive/negative opposition, I then realised that variations on the theme of the mantelpiece: spoken and visual, contemporary and historical, artefact *of* display and artefact *for* display would, in their turns, bring different aspects to light, casting others into shade.

Therefore, the research seeks out those paths betwixt and between situated, local knowledges and familiar practices and disembedded, disordering theory and method. It is for this reason, fully discussed in Chapter Six, that there are uncaptioned 'plates' of visual data in-between chapters and a 'turn' in the final chapters. The former are another way of showing and seeing mantelpieces, as a punctuated reminder throughout the words of the text that the mantelpiece display is, after all, principally a visual artefact. The latter is intended to capture, however fleetingly, that reflexive relation between informants' methods of sense-making through practices of showing and telling, and my research methods.

I conclude this chapter with a synopsis of the thesis, in order to clarify at the outset this liminal position: of being both a complicit member, in one sense, with informants and their views, yet making explicit, through multi-modality, other ways of viewing this comfortable domestic space. The summary is also intended to foretell the emergent character of the findings, which do not crystallise clearly around the research questions, but between which there were constant resonances and clashes. These refused at times to fall into my neat categories, and made me rethink the order,

orientation and structure of data types, analysis and thesis presentation as an ongoing project.

1.6 Organisation of the Thesis

'My dear, there is nothing so convenient or so good for human beings as order.'
Xenophon (1923: VIII.3)

Table 1: Thesis Design

Chapter 1: Introduction	Research justification; questions; positioning the researcher and the study
Chapter 2: Literature as context	Review of surrounding fields of theoretical/empirical texts
Chapter 3: Mass-Observation archive mantelpiece reports: 1937 and 1983: considering the past as lived experience	Interpretation of reports as reflection on history/memory and elite/mass methods of knowledge-production
Chapter 4: Multi-modal research methods of data collection, analysis and presentation	Explaining verbal/visual, narrative/thematic, timed/spaced approaches to design
Chapter 5: Interview data: storying objects and moral identities	Discussion and analysis of narrative as method of accounting by and for informants in social research
Chapter 6: Visual data and social display	Consideration of the visual as social research method and as social practice
Chapter 7: Relating memory: empirical reflections on time	Analysis based on memory as ordering device of the mantelpiece
Chapter 8: Relating home and family: empirical ordering of space	Interpretation of mantelpiece as object in domestic, gendered, family space
Chapter 9: Gift relations; empirical focus on displayed gifts; the turn to theory	Empirically-informed consideration of gift exchange as perspective on practice
Chapter 10: History of the mantelpiece; from ancient Rome to modern Cardiff	A telescope on present practice from archaeology/historiography viewpoint
Chapter 11: Conclusion: synopsis, reflection and looking forward	Summary of chapters, focus on salient themes, and future research

Chapter One: Introducing research justification, foreshadowed questions and aims. The researcher is positioned and the multi-modal research agenda briefly framed.

Chapter Two: The project is situated substantively within fields of literature around the meaning of home and material culture, discussed in this chapter. This literature review is intended to contextualise the research as I saw it during the time I was designing the project, carrying out fieldwork, analysing and writing up findings from interviews. Other literature is introduced later in the context of methodological, substantive or theoretical discussion and findings, rather than keeping it behind the glass doors of a book collection. In particular, Chapters Nine, Ten and Eleven introduce other groups of texts to reflect their 'timing' in the research process.

Chapter Three: Visits to the Mass-Observation Archive at Sussex University library were the frames for my Cardiff fieldwork, since I could find no other substantial source of knowledge about mantelpiece displays. At the very outset of Mass-Observation, in 1937-8, volunteers submitted reports about what was on their mantelpieces and those of family members, acquaintances and neighbours. In 1983, participants were asked record what was on their own mantelpiece or 'mantelpiece equivalent' once again, and so these offered an historical documentary collection about the mantelpiece. Since both these periods were in living memory, I present the archive material as another perspective on memories of the mantelpiece, discussed empirically in Chapter Seven. Moreover, this review had an effect on the design of the current research project, concerning strategies and perspectives for informant-participation.

Chapter Four: This focuses on the design and carrying out of the project. I discuss the methodological approach informing the design and multi-modality of data collection, analysis and presentation of findings. The postal questionnaire, in-depth qualitative interviews with informants in their homes and twin visual data collections are explained. Another 'cut' on methods follows, with a short reflexive piece about doing the research. A synopsis of findings from the initial postal questionnaire ends the

chapter and sketches a background for more detailed narrative and thematic analyses to follow.

Chapter Five: This is one of two chapters considering the data in the light of a specific social research method. Narrative/biographical accounts of objects displayed on mantelpieces and other 'focal points' are described here as a first method for making sense of the interview data. Narratives are conceptualised as co-constructions, and moral accounts, and the objects as 'social things' rather than commodities. I conclude with a consideration of the validity of narrative methods, and their use in conjuncture with other research methods. This chapter is also the 'twin' of Chapter Nine, in that it focuses principally on the objects displayed, rather than the mantelpiece.

Chapter Six: This is a second 'take' on methods of social research, entering the ongoing debate on the use of the visual in social research methods. I consider the photograph as a culturally embedded artefact and process. In reflecting upon the relations between text and picture, linearity and the 'snapshot', I debate the implications this has both for my research methods and presentation of findings and informants' practices of showing and telling, displaying artefacts and narrating accounts. In conclusion, I discuss how this analogy of display led to my decision to present uncaptioned, highly selective pictorial plates in between each chapter, the illustrated *Biographical Notes* supplement, and to include all unedited visual data in a CD-Rom and website.

Chapter Seven: This centres a discursive interpretation of empirical interview findings around the notion of memory. As such, resonances can be found with the 'living memory' Mass-Observation reports presented in Chapter Three. It also provides a contrastive view of the past as lived experience with the historiographical interpretation offered in Chapter Ten. It shows how memory, like the narrative method discussed in Chapter Five, is a principal ordering device both for accounting and for display practices. It is also the principal mode by which time is constructed on and around the mantelpiece, and how past practice becomes compressed in the re-membered mantelpiece. The mantelpiece is shown in its role as oriented and

orienting practice of 'pastness': personal and social memory, family history and childhood. It is in this chapter that the links between 'mother' and 'memory' emerge.

Chapter Eight: Having located the findings around the notion of memory in the last chapter, and thus the mantelpiece as orientation and orienting practice in time, I put the mantelpiece in its place within relations of home and family in this chapter. Thus, its physical position in the living room, its part in the ordering of domestic geographies and economies of space and objects is elaborated. The specific juxtaposition of the mantelpiece and the television, and the gendering of domestic space are principal modes of focusing the chapter finally on how practices become embedded and taken-for-granted.

Chapter Nine: This is the chapter which turns the focus of the thesis from informants' accounts and social research methods to a theoretical debate about the gift, thus bringing together notions of familial practices of domesticity and familiar methods of social research. A close empirical focus on interview accounts about presents and heirlooms is considered in relation to gift theory. This informs an interpretation of the relation between women, home and memory as one conclusion to the empirical findings.

Chapter Ten: In the penultimate chapter, I take the idea of the gift and relate it more clearly to notions of the *given* and *data*. Using Bourdieu's notion of 'genesis amnesia' (1977), I argue that keeping sociological enquiry within the time/place of lived experience limits interpretation, just as the safeguarding of cultural tradition without reflection on origins gives the illusion of coherence. A review of known mantelpiece genealogy shows how ambiguity becomes sedimented, and thus how the reverse process of unpacking the 'soundbites' of social memory and traditional practice can open up gaps and misalignments.

Chapter Eleven: After a summary of chapters and findings, I review the process of the research project. First, as a practice of doing social research, I reflect upon how this might inform future research methods. Second, I consider how this interpretation of minute materialised, spatialised, timed and socially-embedded practice might

illuminate the order of institutions, practices and relations, and a possible future research trajectory.

1.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has positioned the research within the context of its timeliness, in terms of scrutinising an unexplored space in the home, based upon a pilot Masters project. The areas of enquiry have been laid out as foreshadowed questions, I have located both myself as researcher and the epistemological background of the doctoral study. Finally, I have provided a brief overview of the thesis as structured table and discursive summary. It is now time to view this in the context of related fields of literature, which follows in the next chapter.

Chapter Two: Reviewing Fields of Literature
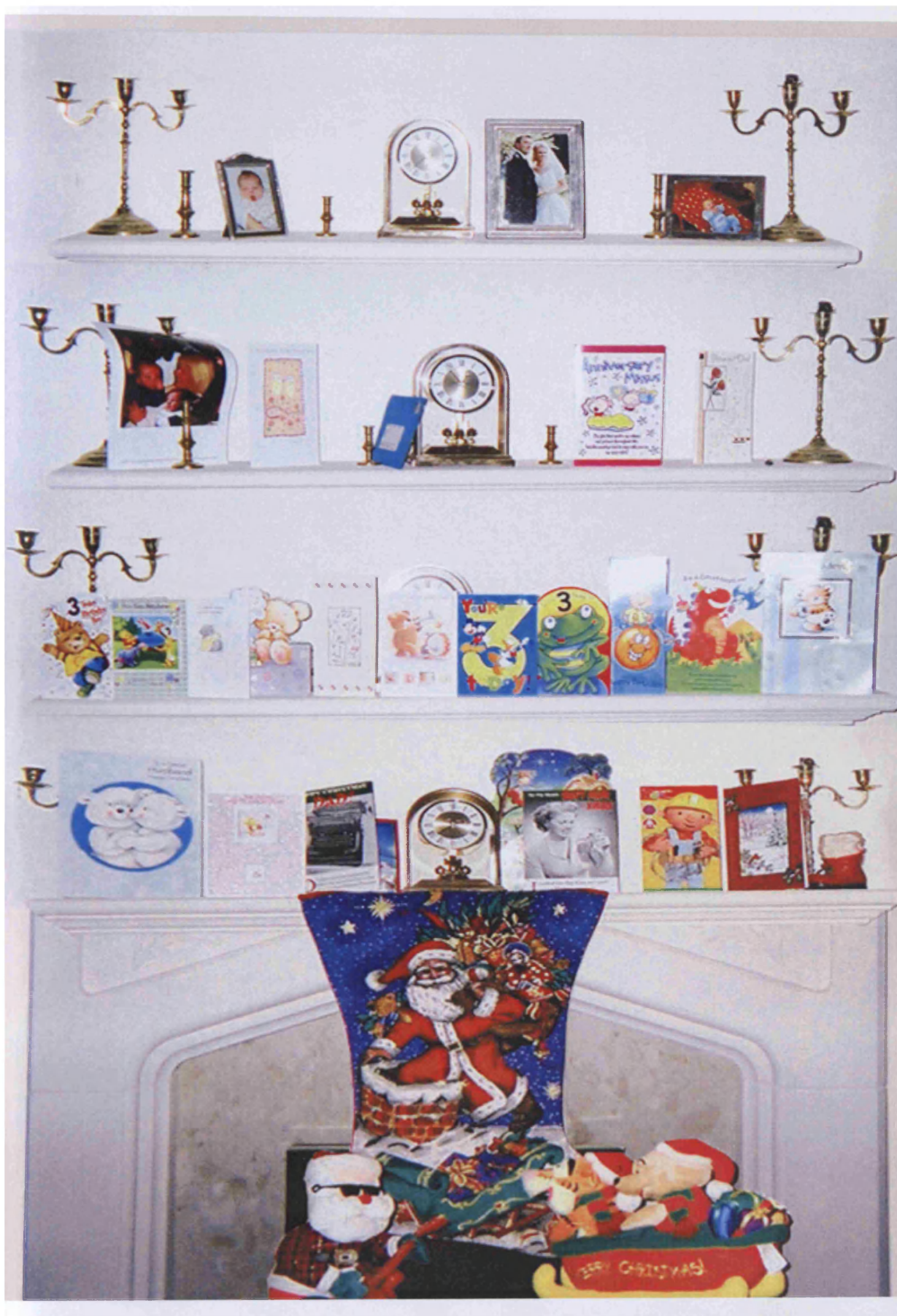
Chapter Two: Reviewing Fields of Literature

'Culture, in the sense of the public, standardised values of a community, mediates the experience of individuals.'
(Douglas 1966: 39)

2.1. Introduction: Timing and Positioning the Study

Mantelpieces are not necessary in Britain, since fireplaces for burning wood or coal are no longer necessary. Unlike most other cultures, the British did not make the transition to stoves in the nineteenth century, and so the question remains as to why Britain continued to hold onto the fireplace (Muthesius 1979). Mantelpieces could therefore be viewed as an archetypal 'positional good' (Hirsch 1977), just as the goods displayed on them might be valorised by this positioning (Bourdieu 1990 [1965]; Banks 2001). The research had a double aspect: why people still had mantelpieces in their homes, and the specific interaction between identity, time, space and material culture. The mantelpiece therefore takes on a particular saliency, since it stands at an intersection of these concepts. It is the peculiar intensity of this moment of meeting between traditional cultural practices and contemporary personal accounts constructed around ideas such as biography, taste and choice that makes this study timely, in illuminating the intersection of the biographical and historical, the focus of sociological study (Mills 1959).

The twentieth century has been popularly conceived as the rise of advertising, branding and the use of material cultures as signifiers of group and/or individual identity (Packard 1957; Debord 1995 [1967]; Baudrillard 1996 [1968]; Klein 2000). Following the Second World War, Britain underwent a transition to a society of 'new consumers' and homeowners (Morgan 1999). In tandem with what has been happening in society and the market has been an academic interest in the meaning of things, home and nostalgia as a socio-cultural characteristic (Rybczynski 1986; Dovey 1999: 149-150). Both consider the way in which the market has appropriated nostalgia and commodified it as 'lifestyle' to sell houses. In Rybczynski's unpacking of nostalgia as a method of dislocating from the present, he argued that domesticity is 'an idea in which technology was a distinctly secondary consideration' (1986: vii).

He uses an historical perspective to inform an exploration of the idea of home, rather than a definite 'answer', but concentrating on architectural, social and cultural influences on what are now seen as 'natural' ideas such as privacy, domesticity and comfort. Similarly, Davidoff and Hall (1995) and Forty (1986) scrutinise the construction of the middle-class home as private, feminised, aesthetic and moral sanctuary in nineteenth-century Britain as a response to industrialisation and urbanisation.

It was in this vein that I ended the Masters study (Didau 2001), with a focus on nostalgia as a social pathology governing the continued presence of the mantelpiece. I had framed my informants, as a group that was complicit in a deluded 'return' to the sanctuary of a carefully framed past, due to 'discomfort with the present' (Rybczynski 1986: 125). This reading was too absolute, and I wanted to move the doctoral study beyond this critique. The primary focus of the study was how informants 'did' family, home, identity, taste and culture, and to focus more on themes emerging from their accounts. I therefore centred much of my initial reading on empirical studies of the home, conceiving the mantelpiece as a microspace that was an ongoing and everyday site of cultural practices in the home.

Since it was an exploratory study, I located it within two very broad fields of literature:

- The meaning of home
- Material culture

Within these, I focused on the ways in which 'home' and 'things' related to:

- Identity
- Time
- Space/place

It is not appropriate to engage with these entire fields, and discussion is therefore limited to what seemed to touch most closely on the substantive topic. Therefore, the

aspect of time that seemed most relevant was that of 'memory', and similarly, the role of houses and objects in the construction of identity is discussed, rather than the vast fields of sociologies of identity. However, as I discovered during the course of the fieldwork, many informants had not deliberately chosen to have a mantelpiece: as an informant (Geoff) said, they were 'serendipitous'. Choice was not necessarily personal: those who had them liked them, and for some it was 'part and parcel' of a period house. For others, the mantelpiece had been put into their newly built home by the developer, and they were pleased about it (Leach 1996; see also Shove 1999; Chapman 1999a). A few who had grown up with the dirt of 'real' fires were glad to be rid of them, although others recalled the beauty of lost, ripped out fireplaces and mantels with regret (Leach 1996; Gregory 2003). Thus, the continuing popularity of mantelpieces and fireplaces at this particular moment – an actively useful space within living memory, but no longer necessary – places them in a curious position when considering the relations between identity and taste, consumption and display. Later on in the research process, I felt it necessary to 'turn' the thesis away from the empirical focus of the first research question: 'How do people account for mantelpieces in their houses today?' As I have explained in Chapter One, this involved a return to the literature to focus on two specific areas:

- 'The gift' as a particular way of conceiving material culture
- The written history of hearth, fireplace and mantelpiece

Therefore, this literature is 'attached' to these discussions and the conceptual turn in Chapters Nine and Ten, since it makes little sense to foreground it here. At this point, it is important to emphasise that it is the mantelpiece that I am concentrating on. Many of my informants conflated the mantelpiece and the hearth/fireplace, but part of the point of the thesis is to separate them. The mantelpiece is a decorative element, at first absent, then integral, and later a separating and separate part of the hearth, as I elaborate in Chapter Ten. In brief, it was a frame for the practical element that was originally to heat the home and/or cook food upon. It is therefore a different order of object from 'fire', in that it was a culturally categorising/categorised artefact (Douglas 1966). However, once the form of the mantelpiece was in place, it took on other

functions; it became accountable and accounted for, as we shall hear from informants' accounts.

2.2 Scaling the Map

An initial interest in the mantelpiece's distinction from the fire and its peculiar current status, described in the introductory chapter, prompted the organisation of this first review of literatures. With the advent of different living patterns within the home, and different technologies, such as women employed in the labour market, central heating, tumble dryers, and televisions, the mantelpiece, like the fire it framed, became problematic in terms of the ordering of domestic space and time. If the mantelpiece had once been the focal point for the display of precious family goods, what happens when the television enters the room? If 'mother' is working, who tends the fire, and what use is the mantelpiece for storing the insurance book if she is not at home to pay the insurance man? And if every electrical device in the house is equipped with a digital clock, what is so special about the clock on the mantelpiece?

Therefore, my literature review started to take shape around ideas of boundaries, ordering and selection. I realised that it made sense to look at literatures concerning meanings of house and home with specific regard to the idea that the house is a huge artefact, just as the mantelpiece is an artefact, as are the objects displayed upon it. As Gell commented, houses are extraordinary, since they are collective, 'complex artefacts consisting of many separate, standard, parts: they are thus organized, or "organic" entities, unlike, say, a bowl or a spear, however wonderfully wrought' (Gell 1998: 252; Hugh-Jones and Carstens 1995). And the house is also 'a body *for* the body' (Gell 1998: 252-3; see also Bourdieu 1977 for 'domestication of the body'). Another difference is that the house has two surfaces (Ingold 2000), interior and exterior: it is a thing and a space, a cultural artefact and a place. As I discovered, that physical difference perhaps does not make it so different from mantelpieces and small artefacts, since people's accounts gave these dimensions that stretched in time and space, oscillating between classically defined distinctions of past/present/future(s), inside/outside and public/private or social/personal. In this way, the distinction between the house, the mantelpiece and objects displayed upon it becomes a matter of

scale rather than utterly different categories of things, as they are normally viewed. I found that this perspective made the task of ordering the literature review much simpler, since relations between material culture, time and identity then became the focus.

Similarly, as we shall see in the empirical chapters, themes emerging from the fieldwork do not land in discrete forms, since home, identity, objects and various time perspectives are complexly entangled: that, in a way, is the point of doing this study. I pictured the literatures as interlinking rings in a Venn diagram, with my research project at the meeting of the four rings (Allan and Skinner 1991: 66). Yet, it was not a static diagram; it was forever shifting about, according to which particular text I was reading and pondering. For example, Miller's (2001) edited collection 'Home Possessions; Behind Closed Doors' could be placed within the literature of material culture, the meaning of home, identity or time – in the sense of biographies, family histories or national/cultural/social traditions in flux, or the effects of technology. Of course, it not comprehensive, and the ordering might seem eccentric, just as I might criticise an informant (privately) for not having a clock in the centre of their mantel, and for leaving their toe-nail clippers out. There are worlds, universes of literature out there which touch upon the data I gathered, but in filling a gap with an empirical study of the mantelpiece, I had to select locating literatures that might best inform an interpretation. The exploratory character of the project explains the repositioning of the findings in Chapters Nine and Ten, to enable a slight shift in interpretative frames.

2.3 Finding the Mantelpiece

One thing, however, is certain: there has been no in-depth, extensive empirical social enquiry into mantelpiece display, except for the pilot study that I conducted for a Masters dissertation (Didau 2001). Mantelpieces were, for many generations, conventionally thought of as the focal point of the living room (Lawrence and Chris 1996). There is documentary material available, in the shape of historical reports held in the Mass-Observation Archive at Sussex University library which I shall discuss in some detail in the next chapter (Mass-Observation 1937, 1983). This has been briefly considered from the aspect of the rise of modernity and related to contemporary

domestic aestheticism (Putnam 1995, 2002). In the same edited collection as Putnam's later piece (Breger and Scholz 2002), two German scholars have briefly considered the mantelpieces described in two texts: an H.G. Wells novel (Stange 2002) and a journalistic historical American piece (Scholz 2002). However, these are of little relevance to this project, except to note that all three scholars use descriptions of mantelpiece displays: archival, literary and journalistic as interpretative tools for analysing individual character and beliefs, and social class, movement and modernisation. In other sociological/anthropological texts, the mantelpiece has been mentioned in passing (Bourdieu 1984; 1990 [1965]; Banks 2001; Agnew 2003) or has been included in photographs, yet unnoticed in the text, in visual research into the aesthetics of home (Halle 1993; Painter 2002). Attfield (1999) comments that in the move to open-plan modernity in British homes in the mid-twentieth century, the parlour was lost, and the mantelpiece took on the role of parlour substitute. It is in this gap, where the academic eye has not rested, but glanced, or passed over, which is the focus of attention here, and thus it is around a lacuna that the literature is arranged.

In seeking a definition of cultural practice, I drew upon Douglas's work analysing the ritual and taboo (1966) which was later related to housewives and their attitude to dirt (1993). She argues that dirt is only 'matter out of place' and that boundaries are arbitrary, and therefore cultural. Further, since 'cultural categories are public matters... [and]...if uncleanness is matter out of place, we must approach it through order' (1966: 180) - by observing how patterns are maintained by exclusion or by explanation of ambiguity and anomaly within the pattern. There is no difference between primitive and modern societies, except that primitives have comprehensive patterning whereas moderns apply it to 'disjointed separate areas of existence' (ibid.). Private individuals can have private assumptions, but these are not cultural categories. Douglas also asserts that for binary rituals of categorising space to inside/outside, clean/dirty, familiar/strange, safe/dangerous 'the laws of nature are dragged in to sanction the moral code' (1966). This exegesis of practice seemed most useful for the study of mantelpiece displays, since, as I have argued, they are liminal spaces, and as such, the mantelpiece is a boundary place/artefact where these separations can be made visible (see Morley 2000). It is therefore partially located in the recent emerging empirical field of anthropologies of home, material culture and practice focusing on boundaries (Dolan 1999; Rosselin 1999).

2.4 The Meaning of Home

The literature concerning the meaning of home has been extensively and exhaustively reviewed in recent studies (Gurney 1996; Knight 2002; Gregory 2003). For a very recent overview of the literature on the meaning of home, see Mallett's discussion (2004). Rather than waste valuable space in this thesis to retread the entire field, I shall present sufficient contextual background to make sense of the work at hand. The home is a site for consumption practices and the establishment of social and economic relations (Jackson and Moores 1995; Wilk 1989). As the papers in edited collections by Cieraad (1999) and Miller (2001) all demonstrate, from a variety of perspectives, agencies of material culture, the house and the individual interact in an ongoing construction of meaning. Domestic settings can also be a domain of cultural anxiety, in that the 'private' space of the home may be implicitly felt to be the object of potential surveillance and judgment by visitors or a 'generalised other' (Darke and Gurney 2000; Allan and Crow 1989; Hunt 1995). Homes are also setting for the enactment of self, where the 'otherness' of previous owners and potential visitors must be managed – even exorcised (Gregory 2003; Hockey 1999; Miller 2001b). Thus, the management of domestic display has been conceptualised both as performance for others and a marking practice contributing to negotiations of identity within a network of relations.

Many disciplines have undertaken research on the home over the last three decades (Benjamin 1995; Moore 2000; Mallett 2004). Considering the importance of home in most people's lives, this is not surprising. It has been an obvious area of research in social anthropology (see, for example, edited collections by Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga 1999; Cieraad 1999; Miller 2001). Environmental psychology (Groat 1995; Case 1996) and architecture (Canter and Lee 1974; Canter 1977, 1981) have also focused some attention on home, and the disciplines of sociology, cultural studies and human geography have also turned their attention towards exploring the dimensions of home. This interest has resulted in the multidisciplinary subject area of housing studies opening up. Until recently, however, the study of housing in Britain has focused primarily on policy, economics and

architecture (see, for example, post-war studies such as Gale 1949; also Hall 1992; Malpass and Murie 1999). After all, the house in Britain had originally been nothing more than a moveable roof for the fire (Prizeman 1975). However, due in part to an article by Saunders and Williams (1988), which called for a move to perceiving the house as crucial space of interaction, drawing on Giddens' conception of *locale* (Giddens 1984) the 'meaning' of home became a focus for study. Home was not just bricks and mortar, but a *locale* which participated in the building and maintenance of social relations and meanings.

This interest in the meaning of home and its place in the constitution and maintenance of identity, social, family and gender relations, and as a locus of consumption opened the subject up to wider and more intensive academic scrutiny. Nevertheless, there have been tensions in the two approaches to house and home, which have been viewed as quite different by the academics involved, revolving either around large, policy-based quantitative studies (Kearns et al. 2000) or small-scale qualitative, ethnographically-influenced research into the meanings of home (Gurney 1996; Gregory and Gurney 1999; Gurney and Darke 2000; Knight 2002; Gregory 2003). The usefulness of the shift from policy and economics has been questioned (Kemeny 1992), and the review of the Housing Studies Association's Housing Imaginations conference 2001 questioned the very meaning of 'the meaning of home' (Coolen et al. 2002; see also Shove 1999). The accusation of normativity which had been the catalyst for opening up this area of study now could, the authors suggested, be laid at the door of this new study area. Nevertheless, an understanding of 'home' as more than four walls and a roof has broadened attitudes to tenure and property (Saunders 1991; King 1996; Gurney 1996; Knight 2002).

Some sociological and psychological research has attempted to separate the conflations of house, dwelling and home (see, for example, Carlestaam 1989; Benjamin 1995; Brink 1995; Rapaport 1995; Gurney 1996; Moore 2001). 'House' and 'dwelling' have been distinguished as the physical structure of a form built for habitation, although there might not actually be a built form (Oliver 2003). 'Home', on the other hand, is imbued with cultural, social and affective meanings that hold a special place in the individual and popular imagination, memory and everyday life. The definition of home in relation to the individual has been gradually refined from

Haywards' (1975) categorisation (see Moore 2001). Haywards (1975) listed five aspects of home: boundaried physical structure; territory, locus in space; self and self-identity and finally as a social and cultural unit. Sixsmith's psychological analysis (1986) found 20 different meanings of home that could be grouped into three 'experiential modes'; personal, social and physical structure. However, these focused on the relation between the individual and the home, and other contributions from transactionalism and phenomenology moved away from this emphasis on the role of home in the life of the individual to look at the effects of social and cultural factors on the experience of home (Case 1996).

Reviews of earlier British housing policies have demonstrated the often flawed social engineering and/or profit motives that directed housebuilding and planning policies such as 1930s suburbia and the move to small kitchens (Oliver et al. 1981; Gold and Ward 1994), the loss of the parlour (Attfield 1999), New Towns (Attfield 1995) and the move to domestic electricity (Ravetz and Turkington 1995). These reinterpretations suggest that nothing in the British house should be taken for granted, and are worth sociological/anthropological attention, just as non-Western houses have been scrutinised for decades (Bourdieu 1977; Oliver 1976, 2003). Amit (1999) called for a similar move to doing anthropology 'at home', and this closing down of the gap between 'us' and 'the other' (Said 1995 [1978]) can be seen in recent anthropological collections such as those by Cieraad (1999) and Miller (2001). Similarly, sociology has more lately joined the fray, with, for example, expositions collected by Chapman and Hockey (1999).

The extending field of enquiry into the domestic interior can be seen in the work of the Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior (CSDI), which 'integrates a range of disparate and often unconnected studies of the domestic interior from a variety of disciplines into a recognizable field of enquiry' (CSDI 2005). Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, this has brought together past and ongoing research from disciplines of social anthropology, art and the humanities, and furthermore aims to analyse the relationship between academic fields of research and more commercialised aspects such as design. Of particular interest to my research project is the CSDI interest in undertaking an analytical survey of the domestic interior from 1400 to the present, since this has until quite recently been examined only in terms of

architecture (for example, Brunskill 1978; Prizeman 1975; Wood 1965, discussed in Chapter Ten). Exceptions to this have included the edited collection by Kwint et al. (1999) and Johnson's (1993) analysis of the symbolic shift to the division of interior space, recently re-viewed by him with a more complex interpretation (1999; see also Hillier and Hanson 1984). Rybczynski (1986), beginning with a discussion of the chair, also posits the historical origins of the relations between domesticity, privacy and comfort characterised by the uses, technologies and positioning of furniture. Another anthropological study has also demonstrated that these taken-for-granted concepts are quite recent, using seventeenth-century painting of Dutch interiors as the materials of interpretation (Cieraad 1999b). Historical houses, and their mutually constitutive relationship with political economy, gender, family and social relations have also been a focus for new historical/archaeological readings (for example Forty 1986; Parissien 1995; Matthews 1999).

These are particularly salient to my work, since they use the historical materials of the culture, varying in scale from the walls of the house, its fireplaces, doorways, furniture, together with contemporary cultural materials, to open up areas of study that were traditionally the domain of historians, and that might have been discussed with a broad regard for the historical conditions of the time, but that were not constitutive parts of those conditions. However, while many are substantial critiques of the period, they leave implicit those affective dimensions of the past on the present. Related to such analyses are empirical research projects that seek to unpack commonly-held assumptions bound up with meanings of home, which will be discussed next.

2.5 Privacy: a Gendered Boundary

Much of research into the domestic interior has concentrated on notions of privacy, privatism and privatisation (Saunders and Williams 1988). Some writers have traced this assumption back to the creation of the private domestic sphere during the urbanisation and industrialisation of Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Hall 1979; Forty 1986; Davidoff and Hall 1995; Hepworth 1999), and argued that the construction of 'home sweet home' enabled the middle classes to

maintain moral distance from the degradation and exploitation of workers. For the first time in Britain, industrialisation meant that the worlds of work and home were geographically separate, and cottage industry ceased, placing the sphere of production firmly outside the dwelling (Forty 1986; Davidoff and Hall 1995). This literature relates privatism with gender relations and the 'cult of domesticity' in the nineteenth century (Hepworth 1999). Reiger (1985), for example, refers to a Weberian notion of 'disenchantment' with the invasion of home by experts, 'rationalisation' and technologies relating to household 'chores'. The culture of domesticity brought new pressures to bear on women regarding their regulating influence in terms of morality and aesthetics. Not only were they expected to regulate their own behaviour, but also that of their families and the private aesthetic of the domestic interior, in contrast to that of public art, which remained a masculine domain (Forty 1986; Davidoff and Hall, 1987; Sparke 1995). Some scholars have argued how this was consequently translated into a an anti-domestic modernist aesthetic in the early twentieth century which excluded and subordinated women from 'distinctly unhomey', future- and technology-oriented expert design, and the alienation of these houses' inhabitants (Rybczynski 1986: 187), but others criticise this as a simplification of the complex relations of self, household and home (Reed 1996; Morley 2000) and specifically of women's appropriation of the modernist aesthetic (Giles 2004; see also Attfield 1995). The dominant 'benign' discourse of home as private sanctuary, as clean, as feminine has come increasingly under scrutiny, not only as overly simplistic, but also as masculine and even misogynistic discourse (see Morley 2000: 56-85 for discussion; also Chapman and Hockey 1999a; Chapman).

In contemporary empirical studies, Darke has commented on the problem of 'impression management' at home, as particularly a cause of tension for women, noting the 'ritual apology' of women (and never men) regarding the 'mess' in their homes (Darke 1996: 63). However, other research showed a seemingly opposing gendered distinction drawn from fieldwork in Australia. This was between women wanting their homes to be 'a place to be lived in', relating it towards family relations, and men who, by contrast, related strongly to the display function of the house and 'its role in presenting an image of the self and of the family to the outside world' (Bennett et al. 1999: 44). The conflation of 'home' or 'household' and 'family' is a common mistake (Mackintosh 1979), but this masks tensions that are often pressing

upon the wife/mother (in traditional nuclear families in Britain) (Hunt 1995; Chapman 1999; Morley 2000; see also Berger and Kellner 1970). Similarly, the easy conflation of self and home has been the focus of critical attention by some, pointing out that this similarly ignores negotiations and conflict between members of the household (for example, Gullestad 1995; Chapman 1999b; Reed 2002), and class-based differences and other motivations (Dolan 1999).

Recent studies have therefore argued that home is not private, personal and detached from the public realm. Allan (1989) comments that the living room is 'interstitial', a perfected view of the 'real' home, although this still supports the notion that there is any 'private' space in the home. Darke and Gurney (2000) focus on the guest/host relationship, and the 'gaze' of the guest, which may be welcomed or spurned depending on the meaning of the house as symbol of economic success, embodied taste or site of family life. They relate this to Goffman's (1959) 'impression management' to avoid 'letting the side down' (Darke and Gurney 2000: 80). Relating Foucault's work on prisons (1977 [1975]) to the spatial organisation of the house, some writers have similarly scrutinised the constraints on privacy and choice inside the home (Gurney 1999). For example, the position of the kitchen alters the position of the cook as central, visible and also able to observe activities inside and /or outside the house (Hillier and Hanson 1984; Fiske 1992).

2.6 The Meanings of Space and Place

The architectural and design aspects of 'home' have been studied carefully for their significance in several debates that tend to coagulate around the notion of structure/agency (see Giddens 1984). In what is often seen as a key text in poststructuralist interpretations of the house, Bourdieu related the internal structure of Berber houses in Algeria to certain 'homologous oppositions' including 'Fire: water:: cooked:raw::high: low::light:shade::day: night::male: female' (1977: 90). He thence argued how these internal oppositions of domestic space related to divisions of external public space, although this reading has been contested (for example, de Certeau 1984: 52; see also Silverstein 2004). It is a primary 'structuring structure' in his elaboration of *habitus* and is thus the principal site for the interiorisation of

practices of distinction, which are so implicit that their origins are forgotten (Bourdieu 1977).

Importantly, Bourdieu highlighted the 'mythico-poetic' symbolism of domestic space and structures (1977:118), an aspect of the meaning of home that Bachelard (1994 [1958]) in particular brought to the sociological imagination (see also Barthes 2000 [1957]). However, Dovey's extensive critique of architectural practice argues that, for example, the fireplace is now an 'arbitrary fragment of discourse', conflating ideas such as heat, hearth and home and commodifying this deep-seated distinction between inside and outside to sell houses (Dovey 1999: 148). Such an argument relates the meaning of home to wider considerations of space and place, commonly separated according to differing conceptualisations of inside/outside. The character of the relationship between space and place, the local/global, inside and outside has been the focus for debate, around which the routines, habits and familiarity of home are crucial for the maintenance and construction of identity through ontological security, as are other familiar places (Giddens 1990).

Postmodern readings displace universal theory with local differences, metanarratives with proliferation of meaning and replacement of significance and 'use value' with signification and 'exchange value' of decidable signs. This has relevance for the study in its impact on conceptions of goods/commodities and space/place (see Baudrillard 1996 [1968]; Lyotard 1984; Featherstone 1991) However, the relationship between 'space' and 'place' has been conceptualised as a distinction between the general and the particular, global and local that are mutually constitutive (for example Harvey 1996). In terms of appropriation and ownership of meaning, 'place' can be wrought out of 'space' by the ongoing construction of everyday practices and lived experience (Lefebvre 1971, 1991; de Certeau 1984). Augé makes a distinction between 'place' and 'non-place', in that place is 'relational, historical and concerned with identity' (1995 [1992]: 77), and in his criticism of 'non-places' proliferating and intruding into most practices of daily life represents the pessimistic viewpoint that de Certeau (1984), for example, resists.

Empirical studies in the power relations of housing design have shown how people have subverted design imperatives, such as open-plan living rooms and flats without

entrance halls (Attfield 1995; Hanson 1998; Rosselin 1999). Recent work has opened up the 'leaky' home further (Felski 1999-2000: 26), by interpreting relations between architecture and the state (Buchli 1999; 2002). Buchli argues elsewhere that the seeming weightiness of 'spatial logics' of architecture, as laid out by Hillier and Hanson (1984), can be disrupted by the 'most ephemeral manipulations of material culture' (Buchli 1999: 6). The material culture of the home thus becomes potent in scrutinising the nexus between personal and social, public and private constructions of meaning with relation to time, space and identity. It makes sense, then, to move onto look at material culture and the display of artefacts in the home.

2.7 The Meaning of Things

The study of things was has frequently been contained within consumption studies (Miller 1988). An early American study argued that consumption was conspicuous and emulative, with the non-working wife playing a pivotal role in: 'evidences of wasted effort...under the guidance of traditions that have been shaped by the law of conspicuously wasteful expenditure of time and substance.'(Veblen 1953 [1899]: 68). Bourdieu's later study in France turned this argument slightly in positioning the argument in social space, with lines of distinction and difference drawn according to categories of cultural, symbolic, economic and social capitals (1984). His elaboration of *habitus* argued that 'the mode of appropriation of cultural goods' is one dimension of the way in which social relations objectified in things are 'insensibly internalised', calling such study a 'social psychoanalysis' (Bourdieu 1984: 77). Close study, therefore, of 'taste' can unpack embedded relations of power or class, and thus of 'symbolic violence' (for example, Bourdieu 1977: 192), which can be made invisible by popular discourses of personal taste or fashion (for example, Bayley 1991) and popular texts about the fireplace (for example, Wilhide 1994; J. Miller 1995). Later postmodern consumption theories, with no reference to empirical fieldwork, 'see through' things as if they were somehow transparent, or even make a point of their immateriality, to unpack implicit relations of power, or to celebrate the aestheticisation of daily life (see, for example, Baudrillard 1996 [1968], Featherstone 1991). Such readings are complemented by Bauman's critiques of the 'flawed' or

'duped' consumer (Bauman 1998) and his later readings of the individualisation of society, liquid love and modernity (2001; 2003).

Recent archaeological and design historical collections have argued cogently for the association of objects, class, status and wealth in Britain since the fourteenth/fifteenth century shift towards meritocracy, an urban middle class and the end of the feudal system (Johnson 1993; 1999; Kwint et al. 1999). Other texts note the rise of the idea of a consumer society at the end of the seventeenth century (Saumarez Smith 2000) or associate the rise of mass production factory methods in the nineteenth century with a mass consumer class, as opposed to an elite (Forty 1986). Such contributions blur the lines between pre-modern, modern and postmodern practices and theorisations of relations between consumption/production, goods and people.

Recent studies of material culture also reflect the cross-disciplinary character of the field and its complexity. Pocius's edited collection (1991) conceptualises material culture as a 'three-dimensional form' of the complex 'competing concerns' (cultural, historical, personal, social) of a society, although perspectives vary according to disciplinary and methodological approaches. It also highlights the notion of the 'scale' of artefacts, linking landscape, the built environment and smaller objects within wider theorizations of material culture. As Kopytoff (1986) emphasises, things have a 'cultural biography' and are embedded in frameworks of time and memory (Tilley 2001; see also Appadurai 1986). Their role as consumer goods is only momentary. Biographies of things are important in the construction of individual and family autobiographies (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Woodward 2001). By appropriating mass-produced objects to create 'meaningful décor' (Chevalier 1999: 94), people can move from being supposedly alienated or passive consumers to active producers of meaning (see also Miller 1988, 1995, 2001; Jackson and Moores 1995; Cieraad 1999; Drazin 2001; Clarke 2002).

Thus, we can see that the idea that things have biographies (Kopytoff 1986) means that they are temporal curios, for they stay the same, whilst their meanings can change over time and in different spatial and cultural contexts (Rybczynski 1986; Hodder 1998; Knappett 2002), which has led to a view of objects as 'promiscuous' in their ability to accept new meanings (Saunders 2002). However, the things themselves are

culturally powerful, and are bound up with persons' ascriptions of identity, self-selected or denoted by others. Attfield (2000) argues that objects are not physical, but open up the ongoing negotiation between animate and inanimate spheres, cultural and individual experience and the varying social dimensions of use/consumption and original design intent. Hodder's comment on skeuomorphs highlights the constant reinterpretation of objects, and possibilities for different trajectories of use and meaning:

> 'An artifact may start as a focus but become simply a frame, part of an appropriate background. In the skeuomorphic process a functional component becomes decorative, as when a gas fire depicts burning wood or coal. In other cases the load of meaning invested in an artefact increases through time, as in the case of a talisman or holy relic.'
> (Hodder 1998: 120).

Therefore, objects can pass over temporal, spatial and cultural boundaries, carrying with them former connotations, like material metaphors (a paradox), yet picking up new ones in the new context. But what cannot be forgotten is their materiality, their heaviness, which play sometimes easily, sometimes uneasily with the many orders of accounting work that they do, and that are constituted around them (for example, Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Kopytoff 1986; Miller 2001). For others, the salience of things as a field of study is their very 'thingness' and their consequent role as mediators in varying individual, situated experience and practice and cultural symbolic relations (Buchli 1999; Clarke 2002; Miller 2002). They argue for the importance of not using 'rules of reinterpretation' and 'language-like syntax' (Hodder 1998: 114) when studying material culture, but through 'the evocation of sets of practices' to explore implicit meanings (Hodder 1998: 114; Gell 1998). While it is an ethnographic aim to learn about people's 'situated knowledges' (Taylor 2002), interpretation of informants' accounts of current meanings and uses of artefacts such as display items, mantelpieces and houses can illuminate temporal relations that otherwise remain implicit and taken-for-granted (Gell 1992).

Other artefacts have particular significance because of their symbolic position, for example, as gifts, caught up in the traditions of exchange and reciprocity (Hall 2006; Mauss 2001 [1950]; Bourdieu 1977). In contemporary research, gifts have also been seen as salient concerning gendered relations in the fields of consumption, family and

home (Cheal 1988, Hunt 1995). Like the house itself, gendered characteristics of artefacts are vital for symbolic meaning (De Grazia 1996; Andrews and Talbot 2000), particularly in relation to the home and display, as we have seen (Bennett et al. 1999). Of specific interest to this study is the association of the central artefact –the hearth – with women, and with women's work, as practical, as boundary-protecting and moral cleansing (Bourdieu 1977; Filbee 1980; Hepworth 1999). The mediaeval importance of 'hearth goods' or 'food goods', as vital for food-consumption, and of moral value, also had importance as resale items for women for economic protection (Pennell 1999). This blurring of boundaries between female moral/economic production and consumption spheres can be seen in the female spheres of 'feeding the family' and mundane shopping practices (Murcott 1995 [1983]; Miller 1998; Clarke 1999)

2.8 Time and Identity: 'memory work'

The way in which individuals construct meaning is often by memory-work (Douglas 1993). By personalising time as memory, individuals can link houses, spaces and things to self-identity and autobiography. If we look at artefacts as parts of a society's 'characteristic ways of history-making' (Mills 1959: 7), then we can see a link between the small objects on display at home and public monuments and museums as 'memory work' (Douglas 1993). Rowlands (2002) examines small objects and monuments in their role as props in processes of belonging, remembering, and – notably – forgetting, thus linking in effectively with work concerning public monuments (for example Loukaki 1997; Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003; Schwartz and Schumann 2005). Loukaki suggests that interference in state monuments (in this case, the Acropolis in Athens), disturbs national identity-work, and that it is important to acknowledge the 'poetics' of space, things and monumentality. Artefacts have scale (Saunders 2002) and Saunders' interpretation of war objects emphasises both the 'promiscuity' of material culture and also how the living and dead 'find proximity' via small objects from the battlefield. The transformation to 'memory objects' (ibid.: 177) and 'collectables' by changing their context to domestic space effectively alters the symbolic relations of the artefact The examination of such object biographies and transitions brings into sharp relief relationships between different constructions of time (for example Adam 1995).

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Attempts to change traditional elements of domestic design therefore can be conceived as attempts to displace identity, such as Khrushchev's modernist efforts to remove the nucleus of hearth of petit bourgeois by removing the stove (Buchli 2002; see also Hanson 1998; Attfield 1999). Studies such as Drazin's (2001) study of Romanians' relationship with wooden furniture have shown how seemingly private constructions of identity around traditional domestic artefacts also resonate with cultural, social and political categorisations and the struggle for meaning. The importance of objects doing memory work is conveyed in a wide-ranging survey, in which thirty-seven meaning categories were constructed (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981: 57). These included general memories or memories of a particular place, and the finding that one object was usually categorised in many places highlighted the nuanced complexities of relations between people and things. Notably, the stamping of identity by processes over time added 'value' to an object, such as an informant's mother painting and then her husband sanding a wooden chest (ibid.: 62)

Douglas makes an explicit connection between museums and houses as 'memory machines' (1993: 268); the former for public memories and the latter for private, by means of displaying artefacts. Maleuvre makes the connection between collecting and displaying objects in the home, and its transition from a building to a place that is constitutive of identity (Maleuvre 1999; see also Belk 1995). Similarly, de Certeau celebrates places of everyday practice as warehouses of memory (1984). Historical surveys of domestic art and culture emphasise the constructed character of practices of collection and display, and their historical, cultural specificity (for example, Camesasca 1971; Saumarez Smith 2000). This emphasis on the importance of close, local empirical work is iterated in Miller (2002), to uncover object relations and meanings that accumulate and change over time, again contesting the ability of grand narratives to engage with the complex mediations of cultural consumption within individual experience (see Miller 1988). The power of houses, rooms and objects to evoke memory is not always read as a benign effect (Bahloul 1999; Taylor 1999) and has been criticised as a masculine discourse of home (Morley 2000).

Edited collections by Cieraad (1999) and Miller (2001) likewise show how memory is an ongoing accomplishment by means of the material culture of home, in displayed goods and other practices such as cooking (Petridou 2001). One in particular is significant (Chevalier 1999), in that it shows how audience assumptions about a plate picturing the pope are confounded by the personal memory motivating display of the picture. It is not seeing the pope that was the memory on which the picture 'turned', but the visit of the informant's daughter. This suggests that local, contextualised fieldwork inhibits an easy structuralising or rule-making regarding habits of consumption and display of ornamental goods (see also Miller 2002). The relationship individuals have with their material goods is not necessarily comforting, and their materiality can be problematic (Miller 2001b).

Likewise, media images and the visual consumption of other people's homes, in which the informant was the 'other', or the spectator, had effects beyond mediation (Gregory 2003). These can be in the background of memory: reading mother's magazines influenced one informant's 'adult' mantelpiece, as a kind of double prism of practice. That nexus of personal and social memory, individual and cultural practice is not a simple construction of micro-macro, agency-structure relations, as can be seen in ongoing theoretical debates regarding structuralism, poststructuralism and modernity and postmodernism in relation to space, place, persons and objects (for example Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984, 1998; Buchli 1999; Dovey 1999; Morley 2000; Bauman 2001; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). I do not intend to engage with this debate here, except to say in relation to the study I found Strathern's concept of the partial relation (1991), as discussed elsewhere (Latimer 2001; Munro 2004), useful when considering how I might make sense of the small-scale empirical findings.

2.9 Conclusion

There is a current trend in sociology/anthropology for ethnographic studies of home and material culture (for example Parish 2005; Lincoln 2005; Leach and Money 2005; Parrott [in process]) which engage with Gullestad's argument that: 'the most seemingly trivial fields may turn out to hold the greatest potential for cultural

analysis' (1993: 159). I have located this doctoral study within this continuing field of empirical study, and related it to literatures concerning the meaning of home and things, which can be conceptualised as doing 'memory work' (Douglas 1993). In seeking to engage with the idea of a collective or 'social memory' (Bourdieu 1977), it makes sense to turn in the next chapter to a document of British culture of the twentieth century, the Mass-Observation Archive, and specifically at the Mantelpiece Reports of 1937 and 1983.

Chapter Three - The Massed Past Mantelpiece:

Mass-Observation and Method

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3.1 Introduction

Interpretation of historical materials is problematic, and particularly so in the case of mantelpieces, since there is only one documented source for what people put on their mantelpieces at two brief moments beyond the present day: the Mass-Observation Archive in Sussex. In 1937, 158 Mass-Observation participants were asked to make lists of the contents of their own and other mantelpieces, together with photographs (Mass-Observation 1937). Only one sent in a photograph, with a note on the back divulging a family secret, whilst others took the opportunity to comment on the over-zealous cleaning, poor taste and snobbery of friends and family. This was followed up in 1983 with a similar request, this time with a definition of the mantelpiece or mantelpiece 'equivalent' added, since it was no longer seen as a taken-for-granted space in the home. In addition to these responses, the philosophy and methods of Mass-Observation will be discussed, since, just as pre-war mantelpieces have their effects on present-day display, so the methodology informing the collection of these documents affected my approach. This is reflected in the positioning of this chapter here, prior to a discussion of the methods I used to collect and interpret empirical data.

I shall leave histories of hearths and mantelpieces prior to 1937 until Chapter Ten, since it was only after exploring the modern-day mantelpiece that I realised how they reflected this particular past: the past beyond living memory. The Mass-Observation Archive is particularly interesting, as not only a source unfiltered by academic interpretation, but also for the way in which it resonates with the memories of people who took part in the Cardiff study. Therefore, I have chosen to interpret the Archive in a way that reflects these current memories. Space does not permit a full discussion and interpretation of this resource. It is viewed here as a foreshadowing of memory and methods: methods of mantelpiece display (design and collection); methods of research (design and collection).

I shall begin with a brief history of the origins of Mass-Observation, followed by a focus on one aspect of their wartime examination of people's homes. This will be followed by an interpretive view of the Mantelpiece Archives of 1937 and 1983, and finally a discussion of the relationship between this collection and my data collection. Before embarking on this journey, I shall briefly contextualise the 1930s mantelpiece with reference to the literature.

3.2 Situating 1930s Mantelpieces

The inter-war period in Britain is particularly pertinent to a study of the mantelpiece for two reasons. First, it was a time of unprecedented mass speculative building programmes and the development of suburbia (Oliver et al. 1981; Stevenson 2000). Second, and entwined with this was a professional concern with bringing modernist architecture and design into the lives and houses of the 'public', who were seen as requiring education and enlightenment regarding their built environment and tastes (Putnam 2002). Advertisements of the time show this push to market modernism to the public, including domestic heating technologies such as replacing the coal grate with gas or electric fires (Oliver et al. 1981). However, other manufacturers of fire surrounds dwelt in the past, marketing 'True Old World' and 'Old English' fireplaces to the new suburbians at Ideal Home Exhibitions throughout the 1930s and in brochures (for example, Claygate 1934; see also Gold et al. 1994 for marketing of 'hearth and home' to families).

However, modernist designers were to be disappointed, not only by the failure of British suburbia to be 'modern', with its mock-historical styles and attachment to traditional building techniques (Stevenson 2000: 37), but also by the 'public's' attachment to traditional technologies. Putnam (2002), writing about the 1937 Mass-Observation mantelpiece Archive argues that, from a design historical point of view, the 1930s mantelpiece did reflect the Modern Movement. However, a sociological interpretation suggests that while in some newer houses, the huge Victorian overmantel might have been replaced by narrow, tiled fire surrounds (Oliver et al. 1981: 175), methods of everyday material cultural practice did not change as a result. In other words, although a modernist slant might have affected the physical size and

shape of some mantelpieces, they remained at the central point of British living rooms and display practice. This is also a lesson in the importance of historiography – the critical interpretation of 'history'. As Newton noted in his work as historian and curator of domestic interiors at the Victoria and Albert museum, there is little unstaged photographic evidence for the popular domestic interior prior to the 1950s (see also Weston 2002). Design books and magazines offer the professional take on the interior; Mass-Observation offers a glimpse, however affected by the mode of collection or edited, of what people really displayed on their mantelpieces.

It is in this interwar period, during which the professionals of taste and technology sneered at the new suburbia of an excluded public, that Madge, Jennings and Harrisson began Mass-Observation in response to the Abdication crisis and coronation of George VI in 1937 (Stanley 2001: 94). There has been extensive writing on Mass-Observation, well-summarised by Stanley (2001; and see Harrisson 1970 [1943]; Sorensson 1986; Sheridan 1993; Sheridan et al. 2000; Parkinson 2002 and also Plummer 2001). The paradox of the Mass-Observation programme was that it was deliberately non-elitist, using 'the observation of everyone by everyone, including ourselves', counter to notions of a social 'science', yet still held notions of hierarchy and expertise, in pressing for their 'better' type of science (Stanley 2001: 97). Stanley writes that 'these twin but... contradictory impulses were consciously and deliberately part of Mass-Observation from the outset' (Stanley 2001: 95). As a result of this oscillation, the Mass-Observation project has been accused of either 'intellectual arrogance or naivety' in 'shifting perspectives between individual experience and collective behaviour', but making an attempt, like ethnography, 'to make the 'familiar strange' (Sorensson 1986: 34).

This is strangely resonant with my original impulse to research what people display on their mantelpieces, and the accompanying discomfort with any such project, in making claims of universality based on individual experience. It is also notable that Mass-Observation, in some ways, set out to include the 'public', the Mass, in an expert 'science', unlike architects and designers. In Chapter Ten, I shall show how slow the British were to take up the wall fireplace in the Early Modern period, just as it is clear that they resisted the adoption of other heating technologies when they became available, despite pressures of marketing, professionals and common sense.

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Now, most British homes are centrally heated, and the mantelshelf, once the divider of the heating and decorative parts of the fireplace, is its last remaining part. I therefore intend, in the light of this 'nostalgic' perspective, to reflect on Mass-Observation Archive materials, not as stand-alone 'snapshots' of 1937 and 1983, but as seen through 21st century mimetic practice. Mass-Observation materials are qualitatively different research data from questionnaires, interviews, photographs undertaken in a present-day research project, and to use them as raw 'data' would indeed be arrogant or naïve. As will be seen, the diversity of respondents and responses makes the use of the Mass-Observation material complex, and it seems best to relate it only partially to the present.

3.3 Prelude: Mantelpieces and Homeownership

During the Second World War, Mass-Observation undertook a doorstep survey as an 'Enquiry into People's homes' (Mass-Observation 1943). It was a report on 1100 interviews, mainly visiting every eleventh house in eleven areas of England between August 1941 and April 1942. The aim was to contribute to 'the great task of rebuilding and rehabilitating Britain', according to the co-authors of the report, the Advertising Service Guild. The interviewers were female and carried out semi-structured doorstep questionnaires. Ninety percent of the interviewees were female, and lived in areas that were identified by Mass-Observation as working class. Interviewers noted differences in response according to age and sex. What is pertinent to the earlier collection of mantelpiece reports (Mass-Observation 1937) are two details of the findings. First, the report summary notes that there was a low desire for homeownership (Mass-Observation 1943: xix). The strongest desire for homeownership was in areas where it was possible to own one's home, and extremely low (7%) where it was impossible, such as in flats and housing estates. Desire for homeownership was strongest in the Garden Cities, where the houses and districts were generally liked. The report also commented that 'Length of residence affects people's desire to own; the longer they live in a house, the more they desire to own it'. Second, the summary notes that most houses were still heated by coal fires in grates, 'and what is more, coal fires are still very definitely preferred to any other means of heating living rooms, even though it is realised that gas or electric fires and

central heating have many utilitarian advantages, especially in bedrooms' (Mass-Observation 1943: xiv).

Thus, according to Mass-Observation's criteria, 'homeownership' was not a natural, a given. The effect of time on the desire to own one's own home was noted, as well as its feasibility and the aesthetic effects of house design and location. Moving onto domestic heating technology, it can be seen that respondents were not responsive to newer, more efficient technologies - and central heating had been available since 1800 (Aslet and Powers 1985). The people they interviewed still desired a coal fire, despite its practical disadvantages. They were used to it, and time gave coal fires a legitimacy that superseded considerations of efficiency or commonsense (see Ravetz and Turkington 1995).

3.4 Mantelpiece Reports 1937

3.4.1 Introduction

Mass-Observation Directives were sent out twice-yearly. The Directives had just begun in 1937 and many of the reports submitted about mantelpieces were from people who took part in the initial Day Surveys, in which they recorded the events of a day in their lives. Fifty two men and thirty nine women participated in these in 1937. These were all named individuals. Besides these, there were twenty two other named volunteers, and nine schoolboys who wrote short essays about their mantelpieces for homework. Another twelve (unnamed) schoolboys wrote lists of what was on their home mantelpieces, and there were twenty four other reports by unidentified volunteers. Therefore, there were 158 individual reports about volunteers' own mantelpieces, and in many cases, mantelpieces in other people's houses. The Directive asked them to:

> 'Write down in order from left to right, all the objects on your mantelpiece, mentioning what is in the middle. Then make further lists for mantelpieces in other people's houses, giving in each case a few details about the people concerned, whether they are old, middle aged or young, whether they are well-off or otherwise, what class (roughly) they belong to. Send these lists in. If possible, also take photographs of mantelpieces.'

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Respondents were requested to 'report on yourself... sticking to the facts as far as possible'. Their anonymity was assured, and so they were told:

> 'You therefore need not hesitate to write down your reports truthfully. Their scientific value depends upon your acuracy [sic].'

A single photograph of a mantelpiece is sent in 1937, a very small indistinct image, with the following written on the back: 'Although a family secret, I think I should mention that the flowers [a very large bunch] are always arranged so as to hide a crack in the mirror.' This shows the performance of 'recording accurately' and also the secrets of houses and families that are not usually known, concealed behind vases and left unspoken. I was privy to some of this in the Cardiff interviews, as the 'confessor', and also to how the visual is not all it seems. Many objects are concealed, even while on display, such as less-liked images on cards being put behind others, and impermanent objects 'hiding' behind others. Of course, I always have the doctoral photographic data now, although these are no more 'acurate' than the handwritten or typed lists of the 1937 Mass-Observation Panel. A brief overview of the 1937 reports follows, and all quotations are taken from these reports. They are referenced as they are in the Archive folders, and hence there are some discrepancies, due to lost numbering slips on individual reports. The 'Schoolboy' reports can be read in the file named: 'Volunteers who did not submit day surveys'. The others are, as can be seen, divided into Men/Women alphabetical files. I have not named them, to retain their anonymity in print.

3.4.2 1937 Mantelpieces: A Synopsis

These 1937 mantelpieces are very conventional spaces; usually symmetrical, with a clock in the centre, flanked by pairs of vases and candlesticks, dishes containing useful 'oddments', letters and writing accoutrements. The 'oddments' are of their time; collar studs and stiffeners, pen nibs (often broken), inkwells and sewing equipment. Since class is mentioned in many of the reports, it is interesting to note that the mantelpieces seemed, in a way, to be classless, a rigorously conventional

space, a very active and mobile platform for people to use daily. In particular, the mirror above the mantelpiece means that it is useful for men fixing their collars.

Also, since the fire, at this point, is laid daily, the fireplace as a whole is not merely ornamental, and is a place of work in the morning and throughout the day. In winter, it is also a place where people will stand to get warm, and sit in front of, since coal fires were notorious for not spreading their heat around a room. Without televisions, the flames would be a focal point. Tension can be found in the reports between the permanent ornaments and the ephemeral intruders. It is seen as both a neglected space for dusty old objects and the broken or 'past it' ephemera of home life, but also a useful place to put things which need to be found easily. A few of the mantelpieces described are very grand, 'dead' places of a few decorative objects, usually in the dining room. However, this is not the norm. It is, of course, 'mother' who struggles with the rest of the family to maintain order on the mantelpiece. In the days of few telephones and several daily postal deliveries, letters build up even in one day.

This disorder can be symbolised in the central clocks, which respondents in most cases mention as being fast, slow, or broken. This seems to be an accepted state of affairs. During the 1930s, 'synchronous electric clocks' began to make an appearance (see *Homes and Gardens*, June 1932), as did electric and gas fires which could be fitted into existing hearths. A few electric clocks are listed by respondents, but no new fires (although they are not requested to do this). As I mentioned, the 1941-2 Mass-Observation report stated widespread resistance in Britain to new, more efficient forms of heating the home (Mass-Observation 1943). Perhaps an analogy could be drawn between this resistance to beneficial innovation and the lack of accurate time-keeping offered by electric clocks, synchronised centrally via the current.

The life, it seems, is in the oddments, not in the twinned vases, frequently cracked, or filled with old pen nibs, rarely flowers. The ornaments fall into several categories. A very few are regarded with affection, such as wedding gifts or heirlooms, or holiday souvenirs from close friends. Many are described dispassionately, and are frequently twinned vases or candlesticks, or mementoes, usually from holidays in Britain (inscribed with 'a gift from…'). There are a few oriental pieces, and their authenticity

(or Woolworth's price) is stated. Apart from an occasional difference in quality of material, these objects do not seem to vary according to income or class. The clocks were also 'displaced' in terms of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1984), and were as likely to be broken in upper middle class homes as in homes of the very poor working class. The mix of ornaments and oddments is classless; a drawing room mantelpiece might be tatty, whilst a kitchen mantelpiece might be very smart.

A few are used as bookshelves, perhaps due to lack of space, particularly in rented accommodation or student rooms. What comes across is the fact that mantelpieces and fireplaces are taken for granted, in contrast to today's period, or reproduction interiors. The mantelpiece can be used just as a storage shelf, and the objects on it are not often sentimental or positional goods. The main concern of the housewife is to keep it tidy, rather than decorated with special objects.

Occasionally, a witty schoolboy, or a young man living with his parents or in 'digs' will pour bile upon the poor taste of his unfortunate landlady or mother, but the descriptions of the permanent residents of the mantelpieces are tedious in their predictability. It must be noted that many of the single respondents were living in 'digs', and described either the communal living room mantelpieces, or their bedroom mantelpieces.

The writing is most interesting when the respondents are describing the 'intruders' of the mantelpiece, and the relations between the family members that these embody. It is these asides, or parentheses, to the scripted mundanity, the authorised biography of the family mantelpiece where 'real life' appears to happen. Nevertheless, despite the idiom in individual narratives, these too are surprisingly uniform; the harassed mother, the struggle for order, the mess of domestic activity, and the hint of wickedness with which the respondents reveal what is not meant to be seen by outsiders.

It is noticeable how the objects themselves are described with pathetic fallacy (I hesitate to claim they are held to have agency or effects at this point). For example, 'the clock sometimes arrives in the centre', whilst other objects very often find themselves 'stranded... with some other intruder' (1937 Schoolboy). Also, one

woman feels sympathy for objects on her brother-in-law and his daughter's mantelpiece:

> 'I don't like saying it, but to me the clock and everything on that shelf looks – lonely – still, it is *their* shelf.'
> (1937 Women H-Z: 153)

A secondary outcome of this report is criticism of her relatives, since the mantelshelf is so well-polished, that she feels 'tired' to think of the 'energy which might so much more usefully be employed.' Comments on a family member's mantelpiece rumble with otherwise concealed conflicts and resentments. How could this have been seen in a photograph? Also, the objects that do stay somehow get permanent status tautologously: for example, at the very top of one overmantel in a schoolboy's home 'stand those ornaments which no one has had the courage to throw away, because of their longstanding' (1937 Schoolboy).

There is a noticeable presence of local traditional objects on some 1937 mantelpieces. For example, the 'large glazed earthenware dogs' on a Lancashire mantelpiece were not 'thought beautiful' and 'the younger generation dislikes them', but used to comfort 'fractious children'. These were clearly going out of fashion in 1937, and I cannot recall there was anything so locally specific on twenty-first century Cardiff mantelpieces. One Scottish woman who had moved to Wales did collect and display sheep as a sign of identification with Wales, and showed Edinburgh crystal in her dining room, partly as a connection with her nation of birth (see Chapter Nine). In addition to this display of place-specific culture are material signs of the times. One woman mentions a relation's mantelpiece display of a Gandhi head: 'The Indian Leader of Revolt'. There is a bust of George Bernard Shaw on another student's mantelpiece, to show an allegiance to Christian socialist values (also on the mantelshelf were Christian Union pamphlets). Since Mass-Observation was instigated partly as a response to the Coronation crisis of 1937/38, it is notable that there were several Coronation mugs on mantelpieces – of the coronation of George V in 1912. Just as British people had a reputation for resisting modernisation of housing and technology, this too might demonstrate an adherence to the past stability of a monarchy prior to the disruption of Wallis Simpson: an American and a divorcee.

In contrast, this showing of political and religious allegiance was not a practice on the contemporary mantelpieces I saw in Cardiff – they were detached from these particular networks to become somehow more interiorised, or referential only to immediate social and family networks and temporality: weddings, birthdays and other ritual events. Others were shelves for collections of, say, Harriet's silver or Sian's china; personal assemblages that did have visual similarities with these 1937 mantelpiece displays of vases, ornaments and candlesticks. However, I shall argue later how these conventionalised displays relate to their forebears in a different mode of practice 'the mantelpiece'.

Furthermore, there were many 1937 mantelpieces upholding photographs of dead brothers, sweethearts and sons, soldiers who had died twenty years previously in the First World War. It was difficult not to feel that pointless tearfulness of hindsight reading the Mantelpiece Reports of the young men and schoolboys, knowing they might have soon been remembered as photographs on mantelpieces. This remembering of the dead was spoken of by an older informant (Nick's father-in-law) as a Victorian method of commemoration, which his mother's generation had stopped, due to this overwhelming loss, which was both personal and socio-cultural, in that it was a mass grieving which they considered to have ended with the end of the last World War. As I shall mention, one informant, Hannah had moved the photograph of her father from the wall to the mantelpiece following his death, and one questionnaire respondent had placed a commemoration of her still-born daughter on her living room mantelpiece, but these were unusual – perhaps because death is treated differently, unlike the high-risk times of the nineteenth century and the World Wars. Apart from these memorials, the only other 1937 photographs were of family groups, of grandchildren or parents, a practice which continues today, but without the rarity of photographs in 1937. Then, they were positional goods (Hirsch 1977) whereas on the Cardiff mantelpieces, it was as common to see a film awaiting development, or for photographs of living family members on a modern mantelpiece: the children, a happy event, a wedding (see Bourdieu 1990 [1965]; Banks 2001).

Signs of the times are not just materialised as display objects. Cleaning and tidying as a daily routine is evident in 1937 Reports, either by the mother/wife or a char, due to

coal dust. The aestheticised modern fireplace, free from the dirt of a 'real' fire, does not necessitate this quotidian practice. The centrality of the 1937 fire is also reflected in the constant battle for tidiness, which was similarly gendered in the Reports. This spatially gendered conflict is particularly apparent in the schoolboys' (often mischievously revealing) Reports, with, for example, 'father's end' and 'mother's side' by a boy who adds:

> 'Four of us at home are males; perhaps this explains why we are unable to keep the mantelpiece tidy, even after repeated pleadings from Mother, to, "take that off there,", or, "put it in its proper place" and so on.
> (1937 Schoolboy)

There is constant movement on the mantelpiece – letters, change, glasses, spectacles, playing cards, money for the milkman, insurance books, ashtrays full of pen nibs, studs, hairpins, ink bottles, stamps, and the storage of letters as a type of address book. Such movement was not apparent on the Cardiff mantelpieces: without the fire beneath, the mantelpiece becomes something else – a hangover from the past, certainly, but also liminal – will it survive another generation of central heating and television?

Changing pastimes and consumption are aspects of a comparative glance at 1937 and 2003 mantelpieces. The pipe, the sewing materials and the collar studs are no longer to be seen. Furthermore, as one woman commented, in 1937:

> 'Things vary on the mantelpiece according to the purse, fashion-urge, taste and whether they are in work (-insecurity here means mantelpieces among middle-aged are the last things to be changed). Then again as opposed to well-to-do people workers often have useful things on the mantelshelves.'
> (1937 Women A-G, no number)

No one I interviewed made that distinction; however, my perspective on 1937 mantelpieces was that, despite fine distinctions of class being made by the respondents, I could not perceive this in their written descriptions of the mantelpiece displays. Perhaps photographs would have shown more of this; perhaps it was because these particular distinctions are not visible to my twenty-first century, middle class eyes which see only 'the past' on 1937 mantelpieces.

As I have noted, after reading a few of the mantelpiece lists, I could almost predict what the next list would reveal. They were monotonous in their conformity. The interesting parts of the Archive were when volunteers broke away from the Directive and wrote judgments and comments. Just as the 'interview society' (Atkinson and Silverman 1997) favours the articulate individual with a story to tell, so I favoured those respondents to the Directive who chose to, or felt confident in writing accounts, rather than a list. Nevertheless, this valorisation does also show how a list of objects, though descriptive in one sense, is entirely meaningless in another. A shopping list might suggest some distinctions of socio-economic class, for example, but without accounts, they can be very similar and indistinct, just I suggest that a photograph is revelatory in one way, but concealing in another.

Some 1937 volunteers take the opportunity to make comments on 'the mantelpiece' as a universal phenomenon. All but one of them had a mantelpiece; one 'artist' did not, finding them 'bourgeois', and described the display on his sideboard. Another man, who was an author, describes a generality of other people's mantelpieces:

> Taking the living room mantelpieces, here is revealed what artistic taste prevails in the house. Generally a neglected portion, with a clock that often doesn't go; framed photographs, often opened letters stuck at the back. In season, sometimes a vase of flowers. Generally speaking, I find mantelpieces are either too empty or too overcrowded. Full of oddments, and seldom lacking some oddments or framed photos. Seems to be the shelf for a piece or so of gaudy, cheap china ware.'
> (1937 Men A-J, 240)

This can be viewed in connection with another comment, written by a schoolboy:

> 'If all impressions were taken from the state of mantelpieces, I am afraid that untidiness would be the first and most prominent feature to strike people on entering our living room at home.'
> (1937 Schoolboy)

These two seen together offer a synopsis of that curiously tangled role of the mantelpiece as presentation of people's taste – the individualised aspect of culture, as a presentation of self – as a shared cultural ideal typical 'mantelpiece', and as a distillation of home as a daily accomplishment where not only home as space, but also home - as family, as social and as cultural - is practised.

In sum, the 1937 mantelpiece is a place of domestic certainty, uniformity, and comforting homeliness, above the fire: a focal point that is a centre of domestic activity. It can also be seen as shifting, stressful, untimely; a temple to disorder, obstinacy and inadequacy above an outdated, laborious ritual space. And so, a lifetime later, had it become an over-the-top anachronism, or a now-perfected distillation of domestic, familial practice? I shall look briefly at the 1983 Mass-Observation Reports, to continue this line of thought.

3.5 Mass-Observation Autumn Directive 1983

3.5.1 Introduction

In 1983, another Directive was sent to Mass-Observation volunteers. In this Directive, the Mass-observation director of the time, David Pocock states that it was prompted by a visit from a museum curator who regretted the lack of Archive material about house interiors during the Second World War. He writes:

> 'If you have seen historical reconstructions of ordinary rooms in museums you will know how much they tell us about life in those times. I would like our written reconstructions to be as faithful an account for the 1980s as we can manage.
> In Section 4 the reference to mantel-shelves or mantelpieces will remind some of you how much the arrangement of our rooms has been affected by central heating.'

Note the change in tone from the 1937 Directive, which is when Mass-Observation began. There is an assumption of equivalence between museum reconstructions by curators and written accounts by volunteers for Mass-Observation. There is an assumed 'we'. As opposed to the distance between volunteer writers and Mass-Observation staff in 1937, there is no mention of 'science' or 'truth', but of giving a 'faithful account' for the decade. Later in the document, respondents are requested to detail every last cobweb and thrown down coat in their living rooms, not tidying up in their 'mind's eye'. I am not going to look at these responses in detail, due to lack of space and a wish to focus on 1937, at a point before central heating had make its mark in rooms and in lived experience.

In brief, responses to the 1983 Directive contrasted in terms of the number of volunteers who still had mantelpieces, and the number who sent in photographs to illustrate their written responses, or who wrote on the back of the photographs. In this later case, people were writing only about their own homes, rather than commenting on others'. The idea that these reports were to become a resource for future museum displays is thought-provoking, in the light of Charles Newton's comments, during our interview, about the problem of finding 'evidence' for domestic display practices (see Chapter Six for further discussion). It also shows how curatorship of the present, for the future, has become a conscious practice, unlike previous times. Curatorship of the mantelpiece, as a museum object, an heirloom of past methods of domestic life, was a theme arising from the fieldwork in Cardiff (McCracken 1991; also Douglas 1993).

I read the 1983 reports less attentively than those from 1937. Those were precious materials of the past, fraught with tragedy and made brilliant by my nostalgia for a time I could not possibly remember. My teenage years of the 1980s were known, given, remembered. Having read all of the 1983 mantelpiece reports, I noticed the same distinction and/or ambivalence of space as display and usefulness as I saw in the reports of 1937 and the empirical Cardiff findings. This was despite the fact that in 1983 and 2003, the 'mantelpiece' includes the tops of televisions, top of gas fire, sideboard, window sills and desks. Pen pots, letters, nail files, spectacle cases, and matches are still listed. In 1983, the proportion of women was 70%, and most were over fifty years old. Like the 1937 reports, and like the Cardiff project, this was not a 'generalisable' or 'universal' sample of the population.

3.5.2 1983 Mantelpieces: A Synopsis

There are many more photographs sent in response to the Directive, showing how cameras are no longer a rare good; photographs are no longer just positional display goods or material remembrances of people, but also easily produced records – easier than writing down lists of displays. My summary of the 1983 reports will be brief, as it is designed only to keep up the thread that conjoins these mantelpieces of a still-living memory. These are not referenced, as all quotations are so brief, but can be found in full in the cited folder at Sussex University library (Mass-Observation 1983).

In particular, I shall examine what people wrote who were alive in 1937, as carriers of this memory.

The display spaces illustrated or described are more diffuse than in 1937. No longer is there a lone sideboard, following the mass take-up of central heating in Britain. There are desks and bookshelves, as well as the tops of gas fires and televisions included in the reports. Those who have mantelpieces might distinguish between this place and other places in their houses. For example, a 64-year old married man lists several places including desk, mantelpiece, and top of the gas fire. He focuses on Do-It-Yourself (DIY) jobs, prefiguring a noticeable gender division in my Cardiff project, in which many men spoke of the fire surround in terms of its structure, as opposed to the mantelpiece as a display space. Another retired man of 70 has 'mantelpiece objects in bookcases', an example of a prevalent notion in the 1983 of what these are, distinct from other objects on display around the house. A single 68 year old retired man, who was a medical statistician, reports of his mantelpiece that, 'its symmetry pleases my mathematical mind', displaying a connection between his character, his profession and his mantelpiece display. Notably, even though he lives alone and it might be assumed that he has control over his domestic environment, the two vases are 'a gift, not my choice'. This gift imperative was a theme I saw emerging from the Cardiff study, discussed in detail later.

A retired married man keeps things in compartments of flap top desk, thus compartmentalised and concealed, and it is a 'job I take on once a month' to go through it. This echoes the timed stays and task-driven movement of 1937 and 2003 mantelpieces, with their complex relations of practicality and display. His desk is the first place to look for 'anything', as mantelpieces were in 1937. But he also has a mantelpiece which is purely decorative - except the clock, but he does not count this as a useful object. In a later discussion of mantelpiece history, I discuss how a nineteenth century design commentator bemoans the presence of the clock at the very 'central opportunity' of domestic display space (Cook 1871). Yet, as we shall see, the clock survives even now on the mantelpiece, perhaps an adherence to its position as a status good in the eighteenth century, as a marker of retirement in the mid-twentieth century, and a ritual gift even in the twenty first century). It is noticeable that the 1983 mantelpiece is no longer the place for insurance books and letters, which are

now no longer so prominently displayed or even obsolete. Not only have times changed, in that people do not commonly have daily written correspondences and weekly insurance contributions, but places have changed in the home.

Nevertheless, the practical aspect of the mantelpiece remains, as there is often a lamp for reading on it. Its physical position in the room and its height makes this an ideal place for a lamp, a modern equivalent for the candles that were necessary in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As I mention later, the candles remain on many modern mantelpieces as a past practice that is now transformed in the light of modern technologies (Ravetz and Turkington 1995). Also, just as the schoolboy of 1937 saw the mantelpiece as an encapsulation of his home and family as daily practice, one woman writes in 1983 that the mantelpiece is not as it should be, just as the house is not as it should be, following her recent divorce. As a result, DIY jobs have stopped, and her single parenthood can be seen in the daily comings and goings of her daughter's school- and play-things from the mantelpiece – rather than a 'father's side' of 1937 or Sian's husband dumping change and receipts on 'her' mantelpiece in 2003.

In sum, the mantelpiece reports of 1983 show aspects of constancy and change. The mantelpiece is no longer a space in every home as a given. People have other places for 'mantelpiece objects'. However, they know and distinguish what these are, as opposed to the other materials of home life. Nevertheless, some of these objects have moved category, to become concealed objects, or extinct. Many objects – ornaments, clocks, souvenirs - remain the same, whilst the reading lamp mingles with the traditional candlesticks, suggesting that the living room continues to be ordered (partly) around the fireplace, despite the new component of the television. The mantelpiece as material object or as symbolised by objects held in common cultural memory to be 'mantelpiece objects', or in spaces categorised by the Directive and its respondents as 'mantelpiece equivalents', remains an important place in the home. With reference to the Directive's description of the 'mantelpiece equivalent' I shall move onto the effects and resonances of Mass-Observation on the 2003 Cardiff project.

3.6 And so to Cardiff

Some of the Cardiff informants had been children in the 1930s and 1940s, prior to the take-up of domestic heating technologies, when Mass-Observation had undertaken the mantelpiece reports and survey into people's homes. I shall look at the aspect of memory in Chapter Seven. Other younger people, growing up in the later 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, had childhood memories of a 'modernised' fireplace or of its removal. The younger ones, in their twenties and thirties, remember a mantelpiece, and sometimes, an 'open' fire. By the 1980s, the tide had turned back, to a pre-centrally heated past, as the trend for refurbishment of older houses to their 'original' state and the building of neo-Georgian houses, complete with fireplace, began. Of course, the central heating remained, as the past was carried only partially into the present. Since a preliminary examination of the 1937 and 1983 Mass-Observation Archives had led me to believe that there was a continuous thread of practice, however knotted or twisted, between these two 'mantelpiece eras', it made sense to learn and borrow from the methods used. It was clear from the 1983 reports that there existed in the popular imagination (or at least, in the minds of Mass-Observation respondents) a metaphorical mantelpiece, which did what a metaphor should, literally, do. It 'carried with' it an assemblage of ideal mantelpiece display objects. The question of whether this shared cultural referent carries with it an analogous habit for displaying exemplary objects - the clock, the vase, the candlestick, was something I wanted to know. I therefore decided to carry over into my project the description of what a 'mantelpiece equivalent' might be and what it might display from the 1983 Directive:

> 'If you do not have a mantelpiece, you will be asked about its equivalent; the shelf, window sill or other surface where you might put ornaments, clocks, reminders, photographs, birthday cards and so on.'

This sentence was in the covering letter to the questionnaire I delivered to people's homes. Already, Mass-Observation was having an effect on the project, in that it was ordering how I and participants might conceive of the mantelpiece and its objects by means of a description of its replacement in the modern home. Yet its effects were deeper than mere words on a page. I was aware of various criticisms of Mass-

Observation methods, for example, as its director wrote concerning the new formation of Mass-Observation from 1981 onwards:

> 'Methodological questions about representativeness when working with small numbers of self-selected respondents rather than with randomly selected samples of the population. But also, as with oral history, it validates the lived experience of ordinary people and creates the conditions for the expression of that experience.'
> (Sheridan 1993: 29).

I knew that, although my project was not focusing on oral or life histories, I was similarly concerned for the validity of using a self-selected sample of informants, and of using their stories as grounding for analysis (see Plummer 2001 for full discussion). Moreover, I was using multi-modal collection methods and found that Mass-Observation had also been criticised by the mainstream for its use not only of 'heteroglossia of methods' but 'renegade data' and 'flawed methods'(Stanley 2001: 95). As I discussed at the beginning of the chapter, Stanley perceives that problem that the mainstream had with Mass-Observation was that its inherent contradictions of using 'subjective cameras' and a 'new science' with core trained researchers were 'twinned' (Stanley 2001: 95). Likewise, she argues that its methods were subject to criticism because there was no attempt to iron out methodological contradictions as irrelevant 'ends' (Stanley 2001: 95). As this chapter has shown, there was considerable variance between the first Mantelpiece Directive and the second, in that notions of 'acuracy' and science were left to the 1930s. However, the 1930s responses were just as varied as those in 1983, with lists, essays, drawings, rants and the one photograph. The Directive had only pointed the participants in a direction, rather than providing a map, and the material collected was not 'ironed out' into a neat word-processed document. Whatever else it achieved or failed to do, Mass-Observation's emphasis on making visible what had been invisible, and in allowing the 'Mass' a part in empirically-based social enquiry - partial and heterogeneous - suggested methods of enquiring into people's homes and mantelpieces, as I shall explore in the following chapters.

Chapter Four - Methods

Section Two:

Please complete this section if you **DO** have any mantelpieces in your home.

1. How many mantelpieces are there in your home? (Please state number) 2

2. Please draw a simple sketch of the mantelpiece in the living room/reception room. *THIS IS OUR STUDY — WHERE WE SPEND MOST TIME —*
There is an example sketch on the front page of this questionnaire.
NO MANTELPIECE IN LIVING ROOM
Please make your sketch in the box below, labelling the things on your mantelpiece (eg. Vase of flowers, scented candle etc.):

DRAWING BY DUNCAN GRANT (SELF-PORTRAIT)
DRAWING BY EDWARD WOLFE (CAT)
DRAWING BY DUNCAN GRANT (NUDE)
VENETIAN CARNIVAL MASKS
CERAMIC ORNAMENT (GIFT)
PILE OF CDS.
WHITE FRAMED PHOTO
POSTCARD ON EASEL
BLACK
ALABASTER VASE
CLOCK
WORK CHART
ART GALLERY INVIT
Egyptian Cat
SMALL REFERENCE BOOKS
This is a little self built into the mantelpiece.

Wooden Vase
2 Round Clay pots to carry clock
We spend most of our time in the study
There is NO mantelpiece in the living room
STUDY
CD Rack
Photograph
Film to frame
Clock
3 Venetian Carnival masks
British Museum replica statue of Egyptian Cat
Modern Gas fire
Books — phrase books + foreign dictionaries
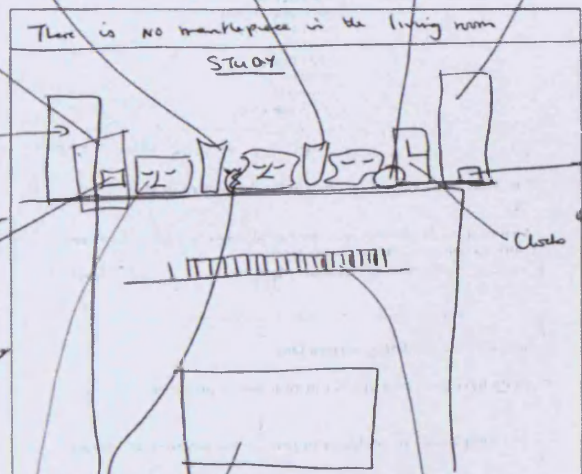
Chapter Four - Methods

'I should never be able to fulfil what is, I understand, the first duty of a lecturer – to hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantelpiece forever.'
(Woolf 1929: 5)

4.1 Introduction

Looking at the Mass-Observation archive and its 'twin but ... contradictory impulses' (Stanley 2001: 95), gave me food for thought when developing the design of my project. The different perspectives between 'list' responses, schoolboys' homework essays, discursive pieces, sketches and photographs, and the comparative aspect of seeing the two Reports also prompted a careful review of fitting method to research questions and aims. I had already decided that interviewing people in their homes was to be the principal method of data collection, since this had been successful in the Masters project. However, I wanted to explore the possibilities of collection, analysis, interpretation and presentation more fully than I had done previously. As I explained in the introductory chapter, the research design was to permit 'multiple and conflicting voices, differing and interacting interpretations' (Hodder 1998: 120). The purpose of this was to open up a research path that could find a way between different methods of knowing, showing and telling.

The research questions were not rigid hypotheses, and the research aims were broadly substantive, and theoretical, and with a specific intention of practising and reflecting upon multi-modal research methods. This was not an arbitrary 'experiment': since this was an exploratory study, it made sense to practise a methodological strategy that would open up, rather than close down avenues of knowledge. As a part of this aim, this chapter is divided into two principal parts. The first formally lays out the methodological approach and methods used in the carrying out of the research. The second is a reflexive, autobiographical account of what happened when I took the research design out of its plastic folder and into the 'field'. I do not intend to put these two methods of describing research strategy and conduct in a hierarchy or binary opposition. Both 'really' happened; both are now presented as genres of

approaches to describing research projects (Atkinson 1990). By offering these two constructions, I aim to show how different stories can be related of the same events and the same substantive productions. This prefigures a principal theme of the thesis concerning selection, framing and ordering of cultural artefacts.

The first method of description displays the project as a map with clearly delineated boundaries and pathways. In the latter part, the perspective changes to that of the researcher's tale of travelling in the field. Both descriptions are modelled on the 'researcher-explorer' and 'map' metaphors as discussed by Finlay (2002: 212). Therefore, the *a priori* positioning of the researcher was that of the voyager, rather than the 'miner' (Kvale, 1996: 3-4). This decision was informed by the experience of carrying out the Masters project (Didau 2001). I had begun that project with the assumption that there was a kernel of 'truth' that I could excavate from the field, conceptualised as an archaeological dig of domestic material culture. In doing so, I produced a neat dissertation, but on reflection considered that this had been at the expense of nuanced ambiguities and liminal spaces in which I had dallied prior to this reified account. In accounting for myself as a competent researcher, I had discounted the role of interviewees as fellow travellers and producers of complex knowledges. Therefore, both parts of this chapter are modelled on this approach to doing sociological research: that the people I interviewed were co-constructors of knowledge (Gubrium and Holstein 2002), within a project that was mapped out, and a journey that was carried out. As I explain in Chapter 10, however, I realised in the course of the study that the archaeological/historical account of mantelpieces, as a telescope on present, accounted-for practices, was a construction that also had its place in the research design. As a brief addendum to Chapter Four, I offer a synopsis of findings from the postal questionnaire. This is a pencil sketch, designed as a background to the empirical chapters, and is discussed more fully with reference to the history of the mantelpiece in Chapter Ten.

4.2 Part One: A Map of the Study

In this section, I will discuss the process of designing the research project. My questions were very simple: what was going on in the spaces chosen for displaying

artefacts in the home, and what made the mantelpiece different from other domestic display areas? As was discussed in the introduction, there are many more questions stretching out from these twin trajectories. The Appendices towards the back of the thesis provide extra information for this chapter.

4.2.1 Synopsis

Table 2: Timetable of Fieldwork

DATE	WORK
Jan –Feb 03	Selected sampling areas and mode of delivery. Prepared, tested and delivered 50 pilot questionnaires; visited Mass-Observation Archive
Mar/April 03	Surgery/convalescence
May 03	3 pilot interviews; interview transcription; primary analysis of questionnaires and transcripts
June-July 03	450 revised questionnaires to 3 sample areas; 27 interviews; disposable cameras given to 16 informants for year-long autophotographic project
August 03	Surgery/convalescence
Sept 03	Interviews completed
Oct 03	2nd Mass-Observation Archive visit
June-Sept 04	Follow-up interviews, collection of disposable cameras
June 2005	Interview with Victoria and Albert Museum curator C. Newton

This is a summary of the research project, and will be followed by a detailed discussion of each element in the research design and process. The research design was informed not only by the experience of doing the Masters project, but also by the Diploma in Social Science Research Methods that occupied much of the first year of the doctorate. This encouraged me to take a more formal approach to designing the

project than that which preceded fieldwork for the Masters. This had been a very small-scale project, in which the twelve people I interviewed were selected by the snowball method of sampling (Marcus 1995). This had been successful in leading me to articulate, middle-class people in Oxford who were well-educated, very keen to talk about their mantelpieces and who provided rich material for analysis. However, it had been informal and haphazard, resulting in findings that emphasised the importance of the mantelpiece as a concentrated distillation of meaning in the home.

Upon reflection, it seemed vital for the validity of this more extensive period of research to rethink my approach to the topic, to permit dissonant voices and counter-narratives to emerge (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). It was for this reason that three contrasting residential areas of Cardiff (details of which are given later in this chapter) were selected for the distribution of a postal questionnaire. It was originally intended that the questionnaire responses would be analysed in detail and form the 'extensive' context for the interview data, in order to justify findings posited from this 'intensive' in-depth method of data collection. However, after participation in courses on qualitative research methods and, in particular, ethnography, I realised that this strategy for validation of qualitative research was neither necessary nor congruent with techniques for validating qualitative findings (Mason 2006). The questionnaire responses did become part of the thesis, but without that bias of requiring them to verify the interview and visual findings.

Following a piloting of the questionnaire and three pilot interviews, the questionnaire was altered slightly and distributed to the three sample areas (see Appendices I-IV). If respondents were willing to be interviewed, they were invited to provide contact details at the end of the questionnaire. With some exceptions (discussed later in the chapter), I contacted all of them to arrange interviews. I eventually interviewed twenty five informants and other members of their households in their living rooms. These interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. I also took photographs of the mantelpiece or other display spaces they discussed, and these were stored digitally and on paper (see *Supplement*). I gave disposable cameras to the seventeen people who had mantelpieces (including one of the pilot participants), and they took

photographs at fortnightly intervals of the mantelpieces over a twelve-month period (see www.postmodernisnt.co.uk and Appendix VI). One year later, I contacted the photographers and visited them to pick up the cameras and hold a short interview with them, to discuss the experience of photographing their mantelpieces, and suggestions for improving the method. In addition to those selected from the sample areas, I also interviewed two senior academics as other pilot informants. This seemed appropriate, since I wished to visit the 'extremes' of the research boundaries, and interviewing two 'knowing' actors fitted the purpose. Finally, I visited the archive building of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, to interview Charles Newton. He curated and co-authored 'Household Choices' in 1990, a joint book/exhibition project which had many similarities with my study (Newton and Putman 1990). Since 'Household Choices' had focused on home décor, I was interested in hearing an 'expert' perspective on presenting the home interior as a museum exhibition

After an initial use of CAQDAS for analysing the interview transcripts, I found that narrative analysis was a useful way into the data. This was followed by a coding of the transcripts into principal themes, as suggested by the narrative analysis. I also carried out some analysis of visual data. These two principal aspects of methods for collecting, interpreting and presenting data are discussed fully in subsequent chapters. As we have already seen, in tandem with this work in Cardiff, I visited the Mass-Observation Archive at Sussex University Library (for a brief overview of the Archive visit www.massobs.co.uk), and also carried out further historical explorations, elaborated in Chapter Ten.

4.2.2 Research Design: First Principles

This project does not claim to be feminist. However, as Delamont discusses (2003: 42-55), Oakley's research on housework (1974) was the opening of a door into a new intellectual space focusing on families and households, which was subsequently to be explored by other feminist sociologists (for example, Murcott 1983; Finch 1984). Nevertheless, this new research interest in what might be considered domestic or private spaces and relations was not confined to researchers who identified

themselves as feminist, or who showed any interest in feminism. Furthermore, as Mass-Observation materials show, research into the domestic life of Britain had been conducted previously, using methods that could be considered very different from the qualitative approaches employed by these feminist researchers (Mass-Observation 1937; 1943; 1983). This raises the question of the ongoing debate regarding the question of so-called feminist methods. Delamont dismisses the assumption that, 'feminist research is by women, on women, for women' and that, all positivist and quantitative research methods (treated as synonymous) were 'hard' and 'masculine', so all feminist research must be interprevist and/or qualitative, and therefore 'soft and feminine' (2003: 70-71). Stanley (2000) covers the debate fully, but it is not one which is necessary to rehearse again here. Nevertheless, although the feminist approach has been more of a debate than a consensus (for example Stanley and Wise 1983; Harding 1987), there is one principle that seems core: that participants are not to be treated like objects (Lather 2003 [1988]; Kasper 2003 [1994]).

My approach to interviewing as constructivist also tied in with feminist approaches to conducting the interviews like a conversation (Oakley 1981; Finch 1984). While I did not see that the research would benefit the people who participated in any way, I did my best to avoid using them as data producers, and worked at listening to them. For example, Diane and Derek actually talked very little about display and the mantelpiece. Instead, there was a very long dialogue between them about the history of Llandaff North, intertwined with their family history. I realised quite early on in the interview that little of the account would be material for the thesis, but recognised that they wanted an 'expert' listener to record this oral history of the locale where they had spent all their lives. Whilst not strictly relevant to the job in hand, it was a biographical account of a place. This was a timely reminder that, whilst the mantelpiece was, for me, the focus of my project; for my informants, however, it was a partial element in their lives past and present. It would be a mistake to valorise the mantelpiece as 'the family shrine' (for example Bourdieu 1990 [1965]; Banks 2001) rather than to embed it within a network of relations of times, places and persons. Moreover, repeatedly to steer Diane and Derek back to the project's focus would have left them, an elderly couple in poor health, possibly feeling unhappy that I had ignored their memories. I also wrote cards of thanks to the photographers, and will be

sending all the participants a short report of the final thesis, so that they feel involved in the production and can see how their accounts fit in with others (VanEvery 1995). In addition, I also intend to contact them regarding the website of visual data (see Chapter Six for a full discussion).

I have included a biographical/photographic 'snapshot' of each informant and their mantelpiece in the *Supplement*. This will give another view on the findings in the main body of the thesis, in that it reproduces informants' questionnaire responses and photographs taken at the time of the interview.

4.2.3 Multi-modality

Although some social scientists espouse the natural science model of incommensurate paradigms (such as Burrell and Morgan 1979), as put forward by Kuhn (1996), others do not (Bryman 1989; Schmuttermaier and Schmitt 2001). This debate has been conducted for some decades now, and as Fielding and Fielding commented, 'Advocates of particular methodologies have been concerned more with asserting or defending their accustomed lines of inquiry than with indicating the possible points of convergence with other approaches' (1986: 23). Mason and Finch used both qualitative and quantitative methods for a large-scale family obligations project (Mason 1994). She argues that the potential for integration and commonality is limited, in that the methods are differently faceted, so the question must be whether they are operating on the same level. This was particularly pertinent in this project, since I found when I interviewed people using questionnaire responses as a starting point for a qualitative interview, that we had different understandings of questionnaire categories: the word 'reminder' was a case in point.

Further, Mason's recent contribution to the methods debate has somewhat opened up the argument (Mason 2006). She argues not only for reflexivity concerning qualitative methods *per se*, but suggests that a way forward would be to 'mesh' or 'link' data (Fielding and Fielding 1986) rather than follow an integrative strategy.

Therefore, 'dialogic' or 'multi-nodal' explanations would follow, rather than classic forms of triangulation (for example Bryman 1998; 2004). This would involve the mixing of qualitative and quantitative data and multi-dimensional forms of representation, including textual, audio-visual, photographic and 'real world' elements. Such an approach can enrich the empirical contribution to theoretically driven explanations, which can otherwise lack engagement with lived experience (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). The use of both types of method seemed to fit with the research questions I was asking. First, employing a postal questionnaire as a starting point would allow me to gauge rates of return from each of the three sample areas, which might yield interesting insights into who was interested in responding to this kind of project. Second, it would put the interviews into a geographical context, as the spread of responses, and 'mantelpiece houses' and 'non-mantelpiece houses' could be mapped out (see Appendices I and II).

Following up the questionnaire with qualitative in-depth interviews meant that short questionnaire responses could guide the interview, and be explored in more depth. Thus, although one might argue that the questionnaire put me in a privileged position, as 'dictator' of the questions; these could then be questioned and contested by interviewees. In addition, whilst not aiming to use the entire questionnaire 'bank' as a means of verifying interview accounts, it certainly broadened the scope of the project, enabling a way into using historical contexts for the project, as I shall show in Chapter Ten. Therefore, a combination of methods, which were ideally suited to fulfil the aims of my research, gave the project breadth of scope, and depth of exploration that adherence to the incommensurability of qualitative and quantitative paradigms would not have permitted.

Having decided that it was appropriate to collect several different types of data, I also wished to present them in such a way that they would reflect upon each other, expanding interpretative possibilities, rather than offering a neat, closed-down box of a project. The data I collected were:

1. Mass-Observation Archive Documents: Mantelpiece Reports from 1937 and 1983
2. Questionnaire responses: written answers and pencil sketches
3. Qualitative Interviews: narrative/biographical accounts and shorter comments
4. Photographs taken by me during the interview
5. A year-long photographic study of mantelpieces, undertaken by informants at fortnightly intervals
6. Interview with curator/author of 'Household Choices' project and book, Charles Newton (Newton and Putnam 1990)

These are all presented in the thesis in different, yet linked parts. I discuss the treatment of narrative/biographical interview accounts and the visual data in detail in Chapters Five and Six. The Mass-Observation discussion has been presented as a prelude to my project, but is intended also to resonate throughout the thesis, as are the 'choral interludes' of selected visual findings. The entire body of visual data is available at the margin of the thesis, in CD-rom format and on my website (password-protected): www.postmodernisnt.co.uk.

Following this explanation of how multi-modality fitted the exploratory character of the project, is an elaboration of the methods used.

4.3 Preparation, Pilot Questionnaire and Interviews

4.3.1 Finding Information

Since the project was exploring a place in the home that seemed to be relatively neglected in social enquiry, I had to make sure that I had thoroughly researched all areas of literature to see if there were any 'hidden' sources of information. Not only are there commonly used sources, such as academic texts, monographs and journals, electronic databases such as BIDS, Social Science Abstracts and the Web of Science. There are also audio/visual materials, ephemera such as marketing material and 'grey'

literature like unpublished Masters dissertations, doctoral theses and conference papers or papers under journal review. I used all these sources of information, together with conversations with other academics and reading non-academic literature (see Rumsey 2004 for discussion).

4.3.2 Why do a pilot?

It was a good idea to carry out a pilot (Arber 1993a) as a vital rehearsal in doing fieldwork, allowing me to work not only on the practicalities of doing fieldwork, but also on less tangible aspects such as self-presentation, confidence and attitude (Coffey 1999). I decided to use Whitchurch as a pilot area, focusing on a street of 1930s semi-detached houses and bungalows, and two small estates that were still being built. Specifically, these were Park Avenue, and developments at Forest Farm and Park Grove (see Appendices I and II). I had initially intended to use only the Park Grove estate, but decided against it when delivering the pilot questionnaires, since half the development consisted of townhouses. I knew this house-type did not have traditional fireplaces, from examining designs in house-builders' brochures. By that time, I was trying to match the pilot areas with the main sampling areas, and knew that Radyr Gardens did not contain town houses. Park Avenue consisted of 1930s houses that had chimneys, and I thought at the time that it was a salient house age to choose, since the 1930s suburbs were at the turning point of domestic technology in Britain (Oliver et al. 1981). As it turned out, I later decided to use earlier terraced housing as a sample type in Llandaff North, since pre-1919 housing is more common in Wales (ONS 2005).

After I had formulated the first version of the questionnaire, I tested it on three colleagues before piloting it. This 'pre-pilot' was useful for correcting initial mistakes. Despite my doubts regarding the time a pilot took, it was a vital part of the project, since I altered the questionnaire substantially as a result. It made me focus on why I was asking each question, what knowledge I was hoping to gain from the questionnaire, and what kind of interview I wanted to carry out. I carried out three pilot interviews and gave one informant a camera with which to participate in the

year-long photographic project (discussed later). The form of data analysis was also preliminarily piloted. I coded the questionnaire data and entered it into an Excel file – as I did the main sample of questionnaires – for a review. The pilot interviews were transcribed and each transcript was reviewed to ensure my method was satisfactory. I decided to use the pilot interview transcripts for analysis together with the main sample interviews, as it made sense to do so. I discuss the piloting stage in more detail in the later 'reflexive' section of the chapter.

4.4 Selecting Sample Areas

The selection of sample areas was partly based upon the wish to take a purposive sample. Purposive sampling has been used very successfully in projects exploring various aspects of the meaning of home (Gurney 1996; Knight 2002; Gregory 2003). However, the sample I wanted was 'the house', rather than the household or individual informants, as one of my research interests was the distinction between the mantelpiece and other places in the home as a locus of display. In order to explore whether and how informants might account for this, I wanted to interview those who had mantelpieces in their current homes, and others who did not. Different types of sampling methods result in quite different samples, and should be chosen to fit with the aims of the research (Henry 1990; Arber 1993; Burton 2000; Yates 2004). In this case, a quota sample, for instance, would have been inappropriate, since this depends upon selecting respondents according to pre-determined criteria, and hence relies upon an accurate knowledge of the population under investigation. The snowball sample I had used when collecting data for the Masters project had resulted in a white, middle-class British sample, all of whom had mantelpieces. That was appropriate at the time, since I knew of no existing research of the topic, and wanted an intense portrait of a particular slice of society which was very willing to talk about their mantelpieces, rather than any other display space in the home. Marcus has used snowball sampling as a research method when exploring the meaning of home (1995).

For the doctoral study, however, I wished to look at a broader range of people, and in particular, to interview those who did not have a mantelpiece and did not aspire to

have one. Therefore, purposive sampling in terms of area selection was the most appropriate method, as this should have led to responses from very different segments of the population of Cardiff. In addition, I could find no data concerning the existence of mantelpieces in British houses (or any houses), and since this was the criterion upon which area selection was based, quota sampling was impossible, as would any claims to generalisability of the findings to the general population. An investigation of neighbourhood statistics revealed that the 1991 census (ONS 2004) did not have relevant data concerning housing type, and there were no other relevant sources concerning Cardiff housing stock. The Cardiff House Condition survey had tables listing housing type and date of construction by ward, but this was not pertinent (Keltecs 1989). Neither the 1998 Welsh House Condition survey nor the 1997 Welsh household interview survey offered the information I required (ONS 2004). Although there were figures for pre-1919 housing, renovation and refurbishment work carried out since then meant that there was no correlation between house age and presence of mantelpieces.

In order to gain background knowledge of the areas I was considering, I attended a local history evening class at the Cardiff University Centre for Lifelong Learning, which examined the suburbs of Cardiff. Conversations with other students, who all wanted to study their own suburb, helped me select Llandaff North as an example of a 'settled' suburb, and also to use Whitchurch as the pilot area for the doctoral study. I confirmed this by travelling to these areas and looking at the houses; specifically at whether they had chimneys. Although this was no guarantee that there would still be traditional 'open' fires in the houses, it was at least an external confirmation of there having been open fires at one time.

Show Home viewing at Radyr Gardens and perusal of developers' brochures indicated that new houses were definitely being built either with 'traditional' fire surrounds or the option of having one. Unlike the traditional houses in Whitchurch and Llandaff North, new houses do not always outwardly display whether they have traditional-style fires, since technological advances mean that they no longer need chimneys. It was therefore necessary to assume, from looking at house developers'

brochures, that a proportion of the houses on these developments would have traditional style fires. Cheaper 'starter' homes did not offer this design feature and so it was necessary to select an area of recent housing development that included the more expensive style of houses. It also had to be quite big, as I was limited by not having a car, and wanted just one area of new housing as a sample. My supervisor suggested the development where he lived, Radyr Gardens, as an ideal site. Since it is a large development by several house-builders, it made sense to use this as the sampling area for the main research. The weekly 'Homes' section of the Western Mail, which covers the South Wales area, confirmed that this was the ideal site for sampling. Other developments were either too far away or too small. I confirmed this by cycling around Cardiff to investigate other possibilities.

As a third sampling area, I selected an area of Cardiff Bay, which is very mixed architecturally. It is the area on the East Bank of the River Taff, consisting of three distinct styles of housing. In the 1980s, many of the nineteenth-century terraced houses were demolished and new social housing, consisting of flats and terraced houses, was built, where many of the original residents were rehoused. Several streets of the earlier houses remain, spreading from Clarence Embankment as far as the newer development. The third type of housing I selected was a little further up the riverbank: Century Wharf. This is a gated complex of luxury apartments, locally known as 'Millionaires' Row'. Therefore, this third area was, in a sense, the 'exotic', selected precisely because it was not an area of one type of 'family homes', like Llandaff North or Radyr Gardens. Further, the juxtaposition of late twentieth-century social housing, original terraces and twenty-first century luxury apartments was interesting in its diversity of design. Apart from the streets of original terraced houses, I could not tell from the exterior whether either of the contrasting housing forms – the apartments and the social housing – would contain traditional-style fireplaces.

As it happened, when I was delivering the questionnaires to this area by bicycle, I discovered that I could not access Century Wharf. I had assumed that the envelopes could be handed over to a concierge for delivery to individual letterboxes, but this

was not the case. Only letters posted to named and addressed individuals would be delivered, to protect the residents from junk mail shots. I learned this from conversations with the weekend concierge and, at a second attempt, the full-time weekday concierge. On this second visit, I was aware that time was running out, as this was the last area I had to cover, and I did not want to lose more time by referring to the Postcode Address File (PAF). Additionally, this development was so new that I was not sure that any or all residents would be on the electoral register or PAF. It would also mean that this small sub-area of fifty questionnaires would have been delivered by a different method from the other four hundred. Although the sample was not intended to be representative in any way, I was interested to discover the rates of return for this particular delivery method and did not want to spoil the results. I therefore decided to cycle to the next area of new development, which runs parallel to Century Wharf, Schooner Way, and deliver the remaining questionnaires to two apartment blocks there - to which I could gain access. In all four hundred and fifty questionnaires were deployed (one hundred and fifty to each study area). I chose this number following discussions with both my supervisor and researchers in associated areas, who suggested that this figure would provide a satisfactory number of informants for interviewing.

4.5 Designing and Delivering the Questionnaire

Once the sample areas had been selected, the problem presented itself of selecting people to interview in these areas. Initially, I considered following Danny Miller's technique of knocking on doors and either interviewing immediately or establishing a more convenient time for a visit (Miller 1988). However, I was concerned about my potential vulnerability as a solo female researcher (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, Coffey 1999; Jamieson 2000; Leonard 2001). As Sampson and Thomas (2003) have pointed out, the vulnerability of female researchers is often under-reported and is a responsibility of both the institution and the individuals. I therefore decided Miller's approach would be foolhardy, and also felt that some kind of introduction to topic was necessary for potential informants, as it would otherwise require lengthy explanation. A fellow researcher of the home from the School of Social Sciences had initiated her

research by hand-delivering a letter in her selected areas, with a request that people telephoned her if they were willing to participate (Gregory 2003: 84). At the time of formulating a research design, however, I was interested in contextualising people's mantelpiece displays within a wider framework of social, cultural and economic capital, as the project seemed to 'fit in' theoretically with Bourdieu's work on taste (Bourdieu 1984). It therefore made sense to formulate a questionnaire designed to do this work. Another influence was the British Social Attitudes Survey (Jowell et al. 2000), which employed numerous classifying devices such as occupation category, newspapers and journals read and types of entertainment media used to categorise responses. The pilot, based on such thinking, was changed substantively for the main project, since I had realised by then that I wanted to focus closely on the mantelpiece, with some background information regarding household (see Appendices III and IV).

There is extensive literature about the epistemology of questionnaires (Punch 1986; Fowler 1993; De Vaus 1996), and I had to consider the use of such a research tool. De Vaus argues that, whilst they might be criticised as 'scientistic' or 'technistic', they are useful if they 'fit' the task at hand. Other tools should be used if they are more appropriate, and it is important to use questionnaires only after considering their suitability (De Vaus 1996: 8-9). Questionnaires have been used in research about the home, as a prelude to more detailed interviews (Knight 2002; Burns 2004). I did not want my research to be large-scale and principally quantitative, as this was inappropriate for the topic (See Scott 1997; Kearns et al. 2000 for surveys of this kind). However, I wished to use a survey as part of my quest for an '...understanding of what causes some phenomenon' (De Vaus 1996: 5). In this case, I felt it would be useful to have a contextualising background for the interviews concerning the visual aspect of the mantelpiece, and ideas and memories that were associated with it. As I have already discussed, I also felt it important to acknowledge that interview accounts are not the only way of gathering knowledge in social science projects, and that '...the idea and practice of qualitative research necessitates recognition of the contingency and uncertainty of the social world' (Gardner 2001: 199).

Both Bryman and Arber emphasise the importance of presentation when designing questionnaires (Arber 1993; Bryman 2001). I therefore put an address sticker on each envelope with the Cardiff University logo on it, included a covering letter on departmental writing paper stating the purpose of the research, its ESRC sponsorship and assured respondents of anonymity and confidentiality. I also included a stamped addressed envelope. Like many small scale qualitative research projects, I was not aiming for representativeness of population as a whole, but wanted as high a response rate as possible. I therefore included a Cardiff University pencil and bookmark which would encourage recipients to open the envelope and possibly fill in the questionnaire immediately. Informants all said that they liked getting the pencil, and many of them did fill in the questionnaire immediately. I was aware that I would probably have poor response rate from Cardiff Bay area due to 'area and cultural differences in willingness to respond' and this was indeed the case (Arber 1993: 84). I considered providing the questionnaire and letter in other languages to encourage response rate (this is a particular issue in Wales, which is bilingual), but lacked resources and time, and was concerned that it would confuse people.

Salma (2003) notes there are difficulties associated with using a self-completion questionnaire: the researcher cannot 'check' the identity of the person completing the questionnaire or whether they were answering the questionnaire in a frivolous manner. The question order cannot be regulated; nor is the researcher 'on hand' to explain the meaning of questions or aid those unable to fill-out the questionnaire due to illiteracy or mental/physical disabilities. However, despite these concerns, I decided it was the best option, and, as it turned out, this 'uncertainty' and 'misinterpetation' was an important path of the research. A face-to-face survey filled in by the researcher, such as the General Household Survey (ONS 2005), would have been wholly inappropriate, as I wanted them to draw and to write in their own time. Nevertheless, it was important to retain an awareness throughout the project that there were silent, invisible individuals and groups.

I put a picture of a mantelpiece on the front cover, entitled 'What's on your Mantelpiece?', to provide a guide for respondents' sketches and also seize their

attention. One unintended consequence that I considered later, was that this was an automatic deterrent to people who did not have mantelpieces and who might not have read the covering letter mentioning 'mantelpiece equivalents' as carefully as I hoped. After a few brief introductory questions, I asked respondents to sketch their mantelpiece, to get them interested in the topic as recommended by Bryman (2001). It would also make them sit down in front of their mantelpiece, I hoped, and engage with it in a way they might not have done before. Finally, they were asked to write down any memories they might have of childhood mantelpieces. Some people left this blank, possibly because it was in the wrong place (after a few questions about occupation, household formation and self-defined class). Nevertheless, many did write long answers to this, and then gave their contact details when invited to at the end of the questionnaire for follow-up interviews. As Burton points out, 'Good questionnaires maximise the relationship between the answers recorded and what the researcher is trying to measure', and 'good questions' should mean the same thing to each respondent (Burton 2000: 335-6; see also Fowler 2000). In developing a questionnaire, then, it made sense to standardise answers as far as possible by offering closed questions and categories. The questions had to be kept simple, jargon-free, relevant to the topic and clearly worded, avoiding vagueness, bearing in mind the time recipients might be willing to spend filling it in (Burton 2000: 336-7; Bryman 2001; Yates 2004: 32-4;). However, despite my clarity, there was some confusion, yet I found this to be fruitful in terms of conceptualising the complexities around concepts such as 'reminder', 'shrine' and 'story', as we shall see later on.

4.6 Interviews: Interaction and Analysis

4.6.1 Introduction

I decided to use qualitative interviews as the main method of data collection. The questionnaires had been intended primarily as a sifting device for finding interview participants, and to provide a broad-brush sketch of the unexplored field of British mantelpiece display. This made sense, since there are no known data on the topic,

save for Mass-Observation Archival Reports. I had undertaken interviews for the Masters project, and was certain that a list-making exercise, as most of the Mass-Observation volunteers had done, would not give me the depth of detail that I was looking for. I was particularly interested in the stories that people had to tell about the artefacts they displayed on their mantelpieces, and what had affected their selection practices. Therefore, open questions which invited narrative or biographical accounts seemed to be the best way into the topic.

Denzin offers a review of the interview 'as an interpretive practice' from 1900 onwards, highlighting the constructed nature of this research practice (Denzin 2001: 25). He goes on to comment that, 'Today we understand that we write culture, and that writing is not an innocent practice' (Denzin 2001: 23). Further, neither the 'interview society' nor the 'narrative turn' in the social sciences can be accepted unquestioningly (Atkinson and Silverman 1997; Gubrium and Holstein 2002). Atkinson and Silverman (1997) write about the 'interview society' and its assumptions, namely that the private self is the true, authentic self, to which the individual has access, and which can be publicised and spectacularised by means of the interview, which foregrounds the biographical and the interviewed subject as authentic productions and producers of knowledge for public consumption. Like Gubrium and Holstein (1998), Holstein and Gubrium (2000) and Denzin (2001), they argue that these interview interactions are performances, and that the narratives emerging from these events lend coherence and authority to lived experience. The interview, as a confessional, a method of excavating narratives from a subject, is not an avenue to direct experience. It is an interaction, in which knowledge is contingent and co-constructed (Holstein and Gubrium 1996; Kvale 1996). Similarly, narratives are not there as products contained within a passive subject, waiting to be found. Different versions of narratives are related as different aspects of identity are recalled in response to the demands of the present interaction and presence of others (Munro 2004).

4.6.2 Interaction

The interviews were carried out in people's homes, and tape-recorded. They were unstructured and I did not take a schedule with me, as I was listening for their categories as opposed to my imposed, theory-led classifications. However, I did take the questionnaire completed by the respondent, so that if I felt that the interview was faltering, I could use their words as a prompt, rather than using my ideas in this 'guided conversation' (Lofland 1971). I did all the data collection in a university where the tradition of qualitative research is strong, as is specifically ethnographic research. Lecturers who conduct ethnographic research taught many courses on the Diploma in Social Science Research Methods, and extensive reading within this area of qualitative research influenced me. Spradley called ethnographic interviewing 'a series of friendly conversations' (Spradley 1979: 58) and advises a specific array of methods, to which my practice of interviewing did not conform, such as a series of interviews interspersed with analysis, and the set of ethnographic questions he advises.

Recent writing on ethnographic interviewing continues to emphasise that, although there are no set 'rules', 'respectful, ongoing relationships' with interviewees, in a series of interviews continue to be crucial for full exploration of informants' knowledge and meanings (Heyl 2001: 369; see also Spradley 1979; Aull Davies 1999; Taylor 2002). However, some researchers term single in-depth qualitative interviews that establish 'rapport' with informants 'ethnographic' (for example Ortner 2002; Kusenbach 2003). I would similarly argue that in adopting a co-constructionist perspective on interviewing, I was picking up on the view of informant as the con-constructor of knowledge (Mishler 1986; Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Kvale 1996). This is an elaboration on Spradley's suggestion that the researcher views the interviewees as teachers, and to learn their knowledge in their language, and to learn their meanings (Spradley 1979). I accordingly call the people I interviewed 'informants', as I was interested in their meanings during our 'active' interview, although some ethnographers now prefer the term 'key actors', due to the perceived colonialism of the earlier term (for example Fetterman 1998). Moreover, I adopted

other elements of the ethnographic approach, in particular, researcher-reflexivity and the recent focus on writing ethnography, as I shall discuss later. I also made the decision to keep a field diary that could form a basis for the second part of this chapter. I followed Lovering's format for field notes, made as soon as possible after each interview (1995: 17):

1. How I felt
2. General emotional tone and reactions
3. Non-verbal behaviour
4. Content recalled
5. Implications and thoughts at this stage.

I therefore choose to call the interviews I undertook 'ethnographically-informed', since they were 'friendly conversations', which contributed towards a research process that was reflexive in its empirical and representational parts, and engages in methodological debate. However, I was not immersed in the field (for example, living with informants) and having informal conversations with them, nor did I undertake series of interviews, both of which still seem necessary to me to call these 'ethnographic interviews'.

As I was aware of the importance of context and interaction in ethnographic interviewing, the effects of my self-presentation were important to acknowledge (see Coffey 1999; also Goffman 1959; Delamont 1992; Hallowell et al. 2004). This seemed especially pertinent as I was a 'guest' in the house, as Finch describes (Finch 1984). In terms of the effect of gender (Benney et al. 2003 [1956]; Riessman 2003 [1987]; Padfield and Proctor 2003 [1996]), I did feel that it would be easier to establish a rapport (Burgess 1984; Beatty 2003 [1995]) with women informants. However, I found that, although in many cases the interviewee was a woman, this was not an automatic guarantee of establishing rapport. The men were not uncooperative, as Sigelman (2003 [1982]) describes, but often related more (apparently) factual accounts of, say, the mantelpiece structure. But sometimes, when I interviewed only the 'man of the house', as the only or main participant, he could be very articulate and almost poetic. As well as establishing some kind of rapport in the hour or two that I spent with them, I did not want to spoil this by taking explicit control of the interview

with a set of closed questions. In order to allow informants 'the scope to define the important issues' (VanEvery 1995: 3), I often used their sketches and memories drawn from the questionnaire as a starting point for the interview, although it was often easier to use something on mantelpiece we were sitting in front of to lead into the topic.

An ethnographically-informed approach meant that I wanted to work towards the 'understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that people (including the inquirer) initially hold, aiming towards consensus but still open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve' (Guba and Lincoln 1994: 113). This constructivist strategy meant that the interviews did not all follow the same pattern, as we took different trajectories, and occasionally wandered off the expected topic altogether. I had to be attentive to everything they said, and practise 'prompting and probing' (Fielding 1993: 140) without driving them away from a potentially fascinating pathway. Finding the balance could be difficult, as I have mentioned in the case of Diane and Derek. Further - in terms of context - as Michael (2004) describes in alarming detail, I had also to be aware of the impact of 'non-human' factors, such as my tape recorder and various animals. For instance, a cat decided to 'harass' my feet, which led to a conversational tangent, and Hannah's baby was so determined to play with the tape recorder that the machine had to be put on the mantelpiece - like other objects she wanted to keep safe from her offspring. It then became part of Hannah's display as well as an interview 'instrument', just as Jane's cat entered the interview transcript.

4.6.3 Narrative Analysis

My interpretative account of the interviews could not pretend to be the only analysis that the interview accounts had made available. For this reason, the interview tapes and transcripts have been kept for others to scrutinise, should they wish, and some lengthy extracts of interview transcripts provided within the thesis. First, I followed Mello's suggestion of using 'coherent narrative sections, or even stories in their entirety' (Mello 2002: 241) at the beginning of data analysis, rather than splitting the

data up immediately into themes. Shorter, non-narrative parts of the interviews were not ignored, but used in the later stages of thematic analysis.

With an awareness of the possible pitfalls of such methods, I selected narratives from the interviews, according to a few simple criteria for structure and content (for full discussion of various approaches, see Czarniawska 2004; Riessman 2002; Cortazzi 2001). As a commonly employed conversational device, narrative can be perceived as both a 'mode of knowing' and a 'mode of communication' (Czarniawska 2004: 6). This particular mode of translating 'knowing into telling' (Cortazzi 2001: 386) is also an important method in ethnography, in that it can be seen as reflecting the 'metanarrative' device of the ethnographic text (Cortazzi 2001; Atkinson 1990). This was important for my intent of mirroring informants' methods of display (on the mantelpiece, photographically and in interviews) with my methods in the final text. The chosen extracts were all characterised by emplotment and self-justification according to 'culturally salient values and beliefs' (Cortazzi 2001: 391). Since it was not my aim to write a critique of various narrative analytic methods, I selected a relatively simple form of structural analysis introduced by Labov (1972), which has been elaborated on, modified and opposed (discussed by Riessman 2002; Cortazzi 2001). I selected short, discrete narratives from several interview accounts, in order to open up several themes for further exploration. My initial criterion for selecting these was that they were linear narratives with a beginning, middle and end, whose characters were organized around a central crisis (Plummer 2001: 400). As I demonstrate later on, these narratives were all doing 'moral work' (Plummer 2001: 404) around themes of self- and family-identity. This suggested that practices of and around mantelpiece displays were bound up with socially conditioned ideas of what might be knowable and known, showable and shown in the domestic sphere.

It would have been possible to pursue a series of episodes from a single interview account in order to look at the cumulative effect of narratives in terms of character and action (Czarniawska 2004). However, the aim of this thesis was to know more about a relatively unknown place in the home, not a close study of one or two informants' autobiographical/housing stories. However, the other interpretations,

focusing on time and the notion of the gift, combined with questionnaire, Mass-Observation documents and visual materials, mean that there are several different 'takes' on the mantelpiece. It was important to acknowledge the 'limits of narrativity' and of the ethnographic interview (Kusenbach 2003: 462), to reflect other knowledge-making processes in the dissertation.

4.6.4 Thematic Interpretation

Following an initial coding using MAXQDA, described in the next section, I developed analytical categories to index the interview transcripts using descriptive categories, since people do not use precise analytic categorical terms (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Miles and Huberman 1984). I then gathered similar parts together within transcripts, before linking them with other transcripts, using cut and paste in a Word programme. I then printed these out and made handwritten notes, highlighted passages and recollected them in Word, before editing them down to something that I could control for the purposes of writing up. Having sketched out a map of what had been narrativised in interview accounts, I concentrated on linked notions of time and the gift, since these ideas emerged from the narrative analysis as potentially fruitful metathemes. These can be seen as coming together in particular at the nexus of inter-generational transmission of culture as material inheritance and as handed-down ideas and practices. I focus on the presence of the mantelpiece in the contemporary living room as an architecturally-embedded form of social and family memory or 'structural nostalgia' (Silverstein 2004: 553; also Plummer 2001). Having searched through the transcripts and replayed the tapes listening for ideas around past and present, I began to detect an omission from these dominant accounts. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) press the importance of interrogating silences, and in this case, the 'gap' was a vital element in the analysis of my findings, as I shall reveal later.

<u>4.6.5 Using Computers in Data Analysis</u>

I attended an introductory ESRC training seminar run by the CAQDAS (Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software) team from Institute of Social Research at Surrey University to decide whether to use computer software, and which package I might use for the coding of interview data (see Fielding and Fielding 1986; Holloway and Jefferson 2000; Bryman 2001 for discussion). The technological society of the twenty-first century seemed to demand I used a software package (Dey 1993). I decided to use MAXQDA, and found myself hating the flatness of the computer screen with its quartered display, as opposed to the piles of paper, post-it notes and fluorescent pens to which I was accustomed (see Brown et al. 1990; Coffey et al 1996 for discussion). A mere scientific 'gloss' does not benefit any research project, and I also realised that this was a mechanical device for coding, and that the 'CAQDAS' acronym was a misnomer, as I had been warned in the Social Science Research Methods diploma sessions (Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Bryman 2001). Nevertheless, Holbrook and Atkinson point out that new techniques of presentation, such as hypermedia, might in future make the written prose text 'dreadful anachronism', warning the researcher not to view data collection and analysis as 'discrete and linear'(Coffey et al. 1996). By convention, my doctoral dissertation would be a linear prose text, but I discuss later how I allow some representation of disruptions and marginalities in the interplay of written and visual materials.

There were conceptual similarities between the materiality of my former method of coding, and the technologised coding offered by MAXQDA, in that members' accounts can be fragmented and decontextualised (Atkinson 1992a). It disrupts narrative flow, since it adopts a 'code and retrieve method' that computers like (Richards and Richards 1994; Weaver and Atkinson 1995). Nevertheless, the initial breaking down into themes was useful to return to, following narrative analysis, as 'canvassing different approaches' gives the analysis offered in the thesis an 'internal validity' (Atkinson 1992a: 471). Prior to an analysis of narrative, I used the software programme to locate and bring together what I considered to be narrative, as I discuss in more detail later. In a purely practical sense, using MAXQDA was a useful tool,

since narratives were quicker and easier to collate than the use of paper transcripts. However, on returning to the package when analysing empirical material for the three chapters focusing on the concept of times past, future and present, I found it to be deeply unhelpful, since it sliced individual interview transcripts up, detaching parts from the whole in a way that I found disruptive in the dual task of collating material into the chapters, whilst keeping a grip on the original wholes. I returned to the technique of highlighter pens on paper transcripts, followed by cutting and pasting sections from each transcript into a new computer file.

4.7 Mass-Observation Archival Sources

At a very early stage of the project, my supervisor suggested looking at the Mass-Observation Archive website. I was amazed and delighted to find that volunteers had submitted 'Mantelpiece Reports' in the first year of Mass-Observation (1937) and in its renewed form, in 1983. I immediately contacted the librarian and arranged a visit. Neither Report was on microfiche, so the librarian had brought the files from the store for me. Due to the fragility of the paper, it is necessary to handle and read the Reports in a room sealed by double doors, and to use only a pencil to record any information. The librarian kindly photocopied one long letter that was written in 1937, but otherwise, I had to write down anything I wanted to reread. I spent three days at the library on my first visit, and another three on a subsequent visit. The fact that I had to record all I wanted from handwritten lists, typed letters and occasional photographs or sketches while I was there, in the sealed room, made it an intimate encounter, since it could not be imitated by a review of photocopies or hypermedia. It was a different experience from reading 'real life' interview extracts in books or even interviewing informants in their homes. I did not doubt that these guarded documents were 'authentic', but did not intend them to constitute any kind of generalisable sample, being an 'idiosyncratic' assemblage of various approaches to a Mass-Observation Directive (Platt 1999: 208-9).

As we have seen, I primarily analyse their content, although Prior (2003) argues that documents are not 'containers of content' for human agents, but are agents. They are

productions situated in fields of action, and, using a Schutzian term, the 'multiple realities' of their creators. It is therefore important to look at the original purpose and networks of action (Finnegan 1996). Also, they are for consumption: there is an audience in mind, as can be seen in some of the letters to the Director that accompany them. Whilst Prior agrees with Barthes (1977), that the reader is all that matters, but he also comments that, 'the researcher should... be able to follow the document in use' (Prior 2003: 68). Whilst recognising that the documents had an intended audience and were historically and culturally specific artefacts, I saw my role was to interpret them, with an awareness of my motives and assumptions (Finnegan 1996). However, as I have already discussed, the Mass-Observation documents also had their effects upon the design and interpretative approach to the current study, and it seemed particularly important to assess the processes and motives of their production, as we have seen. Their place in the thesis therefore fits in with the aim of linking, rather than neatly integrating data, through resonance and reflexivity rather than rigidity and completeness.

4.8 Writing Up and Presentation

When the time came to start writing up more than initial thoughts and notes, I found myself drowning in data – the complete opposite of my original fear that I would not have enough. It felt almost like a betrayal to exclude any data analysis from the final thesis, but, 'Out of the melange of stories, incidents, and beliefs, one or more threads have to be located and pulled together' (Blauner 2003 [1987]: 267). I soon realised that the questionnaire data would have to take a background position in the thesis, and so these findings are briefly presented in tables. I do not offer the coded segments I initially produced when using CAQDAS for primary thematising of the interview transcripts, as these were overwhelming. Having undertaken to use a CAQDAS programme to code the interview data, I then realised that that I needed a way into presenting the data in a readable and comprehensible form. Another route in, by means of narrative analysis and a discussion of the visual data, seemed more fitting, since:

'The data we accumulate day by day, week by week and month by month do not automatically yield an understanding that is organised in terms of themes and chapters.'

(Atkinson 1992: 5).

Therefore, the chapters are arranged as 'slices' or 'cuts' of the data: first, there is a methodological perspective, followed by chapters organised around the broad theme of time, and finally by a focused look at inheritance and the gift as organising concepts. This presentation is designed to emphasis the interprevist character of the thesis, rather than arguing that there is only one way into the data. I wanted the 'entirely unexpected issues' that my ethnographically-informed fieldwork had yielded to find a place in the final product (Bryman 1988: 67). Without wanting to get lost in the ongoing debate, I have included visual data in the 'gaps' and margins of the text to make visible 'the tensions between members' meaning and the ethnographer's interpretative responsibility' (Lather 2001).

The website and CD-rom of all the unedited visual data: questionnaire sketches, interview photographs and the year-long photographic study, are designed to open up interpretive pathways, as I discuss in Chapter Six. There is also the *Supplement* which gives another version of the visual data and provides the informants' questionnaire responses as a counterpoint to interpretation of their interview accounts. The thesis therefore engages with the 'rhetorical', 'postmodern' or 'linguistic turn', problematising the writing of ethnographic texts and in particular, the recognition of these as 'a genre of textual product' (Atkinson and Hammersley 1995: 255; see also Alasuutari 1995; Van Maanen 1995; Denzin 1997; Van Loon 2001). In removing the conventional break between 'methods' and 'findings', the visual and narrative 'cuts' enter ongoing debates concerning ethnographic and qualitative methods (Taylor 2002). This multi-modal representation specifically seeks to engage with the temporal/spatial character of discursive practice in a way that will encourage an 'ethnographic imagination' (Atkinson 1990), following the 'turn' in writing ethnography.

It was also important that researcher reflexivity was not nodded at in a sentence and then ignored, but acknowledged as an integral part of the research, in the tradition of the monograph or confessional (Atkinson 1992; Reed-Danahay 2001). However, the '"swamp" of interminable self analysis and self-disclosure' had to be avoided, as this could obscure the main focus of the presentation, rather than contributing to the project (Finlay 2002: 212; see also Atkinson 1992; Van Maanen 1995; Devault 1997). Members' accounts were not to be used as mirrors for reflecting researcher glory, and it was also important to acknowledge the linguistic turn in social research (Atkinson 1990). In order, therefore, to highlight the constructedness of the thesis text, I decided upon including the dual methods chapter, offering two versions of the research 'reality', rather than showing an aestheticised final product cleansed of the problems doing research in people's homes (see Hallowell et al. 2004 for biographical accounts of the research process). I felt ethically bound to make myself and my methods visible in the text (Murphy and Dingwall 2001), but had also to realise that reflexivity is another presentation of reality, and not to be used as a pretext for countering accusations of bias (Potter and Wetherell 1995).

4.9 Ethics

The professional conduct guidelines of the British Sociological Association (BSA) include a statement on ethical standards (BSA 2002). This advises researchers to follow the principles of informed consent and confidentiality of the research subject and to respect their privacy. The BSA emphasises that these are guidelines rather than rigid rules, and there has been debate concerning the guidelines to researchers. While May (1993) and Punch (1998) write about their concern that rigid rules would lead to 'innocuous' research (Punch 1998: 17), Kimmel (1998) expresses an opposing view that guidelines that are not rigidly imposed are too easy to overcome ethically. As the BSA states, it does not provide 'a set of recipes for resolving ethical choices or dilemmas, but recognises that it will be necessary to make such choices on the basis of principles and values, and the (often conflicting) interests of those involved' (BSA 2002: Statement of Ethics 2). It is the researcher's responsibility seriously to

deliberate ethical issues when they arise, since social research is a process and subject to change.

This consideration became real when I was interviewing Harriet. She spoke about the downstairs mantelpieces, which were her domain, and mentioned that her husband had one in his study upstairs, which was a very different display. I asked if I might see it and take a photograph, to which she readily agreed, and showed me both the study mantelpiece and the mantelpiece in their bedroom. I took photographs, and asked whether she would get in touch with me to let me know whether her husband was willing to be interviewed about the mantelpiece in his study. The following day, I received a message on my mobile phone from Harriet, saying that her husband was extremely upset about the fact that we had been in his study and that he did not want to be interviewed. Although Harriet had agreed to me photographing her husband's mantelpiece, and I was therefore not responsible for the intrusion, I knew that it would be ethically unsound to retain the photograph, or to write about what was on the mantelpiece. This did upset my 'researcher' mind, as the contrast was salient between 'upstairs' and 'downstairs', masculine and feminine spaces. Yet I had to recognise that 'researchers have a duty to avoid treating participants as a means to an end, rather than as an end in themselves' (Murphy and Dingwall 2001: 339). I emailed Harriet immediately to let her know I would destroy the photograph and not use those data relating to her husband's mantelpiece. This crisis of ethics and valuable data is discussed by Twigg (2004), when a respondent cries upon hearing what she has just said on the tape, so Twigg destroys the recording. Anonymity of all participants was maintained by use of pseudonyms in all texts and presentations relating to the project (Plummer 2001). In addition, any visual data that might reveal their identities, such as visible faces in photographs and reflections in mirrors, were blanked out. The website of visual data is password-protected and not accessible by general web-users.

4.10 Part Two: Journey into the Field

I had decided that the best way to access people for interviews was by carrying out a questionnaire. Anyone who wanted to participate further could give their contact details, whilst an additional benefit was that data from the returned questionnaires might set the scene in some way for the in-depth interviews. I wanted to avoid looking at the glossy period-feature glamour of Pontcanna, which I had seen through the trendy uncurtained windows on my way home. I also did not want to interview people in areas where there were no mantelpieces at all. I guessed that houses built without chimneys would not have fireplaces, unless they were in very modern developments that were putting in electric 'flame' fires in traditional fire surrounds. This cut out large chimneyless housing estates built in the 1970s and 80s in the Cardiff suburbs, and I had therefore selected three areas that offered a range of periods and designs. The first practical step of the research project was to send out a pilot questionnaire, to an area that included older and newer housing in Whitchurch. As an impatient novice researcher, I balked at this seeming delay to the 'proper' research, but it was an essential rehearsal in designing an instrument for the job at hand.

First, appearance was important; after all, I was trying to sell something to people who had no rational impetus to buy. My only experience of being a questionnaire recipient was when market surveys came through the letterbox, usually accompanied by a pen. These might be filled out during a bored breakfast, although the size and apparent complexity of the document, thick with text and tick boxes, was often a deterrent. However, the idea of including a Cardiff University pencil and bookmark sprang from this, and proved to be popular with the people who responded. I also realised that the questionnaire had to have a catchy title and cover, like a novel, rather than the dense print of a market survey. However, since the questionnaire was about an odd subject, it seemed important to preface it with an official-looking covering letter, to offset the slight lunacy of the question, 'What's on your mantelpiece?' Thus, a combination of an authoritative letterhead, on official departmental writing paper and a questionnaire frontispiece picturing a 'typical' mantelpiece display (more of that later) seemed ideal. The rubber-topped University pencil might tempt recipients

to fill in the questionnaire there and then, whilst the bookmarks suggested a certain seriousness to the enterprise (and were free). The pencil would also make a tantalising lump in the envelope, at least guaranteeing some people would open the envelope in the first place. Even at a time of easy credit and near-instant disposability, a free pencil is still a free pencil. The envelope then became the focus of attention. What size and colour would be the most persuasive? Since a brown envelope looked dangerously like a bill, and any other colour would seem silly, I decided on white. A4-sized envelopes were unwieldy and might also seem overly official, so I ordered A5 envelopes from the departmental stationery, with windows in for the addresses. How I was to curse this decision later on, as I folded five hundred questionnaires, letters and stamped addressed envelopes, then struggled to fit address stickers tidily over those windows.

Second, the problem of delivery occurred to me. Colleagues told me they had done doorstep interviews or stuck questionnaires through the door with a letter explaining they would be collected at a certain time. However, I was limited by having no car, and since this method depended on calling at different times of day to ensure a good response from a particular geographically defined area, it was not practical. In addition, it was wintertime, and I did not feel safe calling on strange houses at night, when most people would be at home. I also knew how annoying suppertime callers were. Another successful method was to post out personally addressed questionnaires, with names taken from the electoral register. But not all people chose to advertise themselves on the electoral register; others forget to remove themselves once they have left the area and so the records are not up-to-date (Arber 1993; Salma 2003). Therefore, it made sense to hand-deliver the questionnaires.

The question of collection remained. Picking up the completed questionnaires at a defined time would be difficult, due to lack of a car, and another scheme of asking people to leave them in the letter box, sticking out, could be upset by postal deliverers pushing them in with the daily post. However, I did not want to call back on a dark evening, when most people would be in, just in case an axe murderer dragged me into his lair. Such are the fears of the lone PhD student. Although including stamped addressed envelopes would be costly, and involved trusting people both to remember

to post them, and not use my precious stamped envelopes to write to their mothers, it seemed to be the best option.

So, I had the envelopes, the stickers, the stamps, the pencils and the bookmarks. All I needed now were the covering letter and the questionnaire. It was at this point that I wondered what it was I wanted to know. Talking about 'The Questionnaire' and getting all its attendant paraphernalia gathered together had somehow made it present, but its purpose was still a misty ideal, clothed in suddenly insubstantial 'Research Questions'. What did I want to know from whom? Why did I want to know it and how was I going to find it out? The reconstruction of mantelpiece displays in traditional houses at the Museum of Welsh Life in St Fagans, near Cardiff, assumed a knowledge consensus, but reading about the ways in which archaeologists, cultural historians and Mass-Observation researchers had made their claims to knowledge had shown that there are many ways to skin a cat. In order to step away from the epistemological abyss, I asked for help from a researcher in a neighbouring department who had experience in constructing questionnaires and gave the questionnaires to three PhD students in the department, my supervisor's partner and another lecturer. All came back with good reports – that it was interesting to fill in and in particular to draw one's own mantelpiece or equivalent space. I decided that it might be time to send out the pilot questionnaire. These, together with the stamped addressed envelopes, the pencils, the bookmarks and the authoritative covering letter, were folded carefully into the envelopes, after each questionnaire and envelope was numbered. I could then know which households responded, and check response rate for specific house types in each street. Only a very few people scrubbed out the numbers.

It was now time to get on my bike in a suitably industrious manner and deliver the questionnaires. I delivered half the questionnaires to the first, older area and set out to deliver the rest in the development of new houses. However, many of the family-type houses were still empty, and I balked at delivering the remaining thirteen to the town house terrace at the bottom of the cul-de-sac, since I knew that they did not have mantelpieces, according to the company's brochure. Several of the older houses in the sample were bound to have had fireplaces ripped out, and the lack of chimneys on very modern houses made it difficult to know how many of the new family homes had

fire surrounds. I wanted some mantelpieces in the sample! Serendipitously, I came across a small development in nearby Forest Farm, where I could ask the builders on-site about the housing design. Once they told me there were fireplaces in the houses, I took a pragmatic decision to deliver the last questionnaires in this estate.

I had selected the areas as a car passenger, which had felt safer, not least because of that physical shield a car gives, but also because I was legitimated, in a sense, by being in a car, and being accompanied by someone. Yet as a lone cyclist laden with plastic bags and so on, I felt that, certainly to the householders of the new developments, I looked like a freak. This feeling of not belonging was to continue throughout the delivery and interview process. When delivering, I waited to be challenged as an unwelcome busybody; when cycling to interviews, I felt exposed and without the refuge of a car between interview visits. Of course, this never happened, but feelings like these emphasised how the merry words of the Methodology textbook do not translate smoothly to the mess and bother of actually doing it.

Twenty-five of the fifty pilot questionnaires were returned, and of those, seven people initially agreed to be interviewed. This seemed to be a very good result, and I prepared to analyse the questionnaires and carry out the interviews in people's homes. However, a simple surgical procedure went wrong and it was another two months before I returned to work, by which point, four potential interview participants were unavailable. It was another month before I felt physically and mentally confident enough to catch the bus to the house of the first person I was to interview. Luckily, she was an extremely friendly woman, who gave me a cup of tea and talked about things that seemed relevant to the subject at hand. I was to discover that this was not a given in qualitative, semi-structured interviews: some people just liked having someone to talk to for a couple of hours about anything that came to mind, despite my best efforts to be in charge of the procedure.

I had two hours to spare before the next interview, and nothing but a park bench to sit on. Why is so much research about waiting for buses and sitting on park benches? The first interview had been so exciting, in that it had shown that people would talk about their mantelpiece displays, histories and attitudes to home, family and taste, that I needed to switch off completely. Reading a magazine helped somewhat, as did the

barking dogs and crying children in the park, but I realised as I walked into the next interview, that the break had not been long enough. My attitude towards the second interview was coloured by the first, and I found that I wanted the same answers and stories, which, of course, did not happen. Nevertheless, the family were astoundingly good-willed about my stilted questions and insistence that they must, in some way, find their mantelpiece terribly important, and offered me supper. In this type of situation, as in others where the interview ended, but the talking did not, it was difficult to know when to switch the tape recorder off. Too often, I was to pack it away, only to find Great Truths about mantelpieces tumbling out of people's mouths into oblivious air. In the end, I learnt to let go, and accept that I had more than enough talk recorded for a PhD thesis.

After a review of the questionnaire, I removed extraneous matter about newspaper choices and home improvements - this was not a British Social Attitudes survey in miniature – and delivered the questionnaires to the three main sample areas. Forty five respondents gave their contact details for interview, but I eventually visited only twenty five of them. This was partly because I did not contact men who left only a mobile phone number; irrationally, perhaps, I thought that this was suspicious. Others did not respond to my messages by phone and email, and one man changed his mind when he found out the interview was in his home, since he too was wary of strangers, particularly with a new baby in the house. This reminded me that the home is different place from the public spaces of work, despite the recent awareness of an ambiguity around these boundaries. Another interview was arranged in the informant's office, since his wife felt home was too busy, with three young daughters and her full-time job. This highlighted the gendering of management of household boundaries, and the curiosity of my role as interviewer/guest, stranger/listener. We had an entertaining interview in his office, which was based around a biro drawing he had made of the mantelpiece on the back of a letter from SKY TV.

When booking interviews, I felt, curiously, like a man, arranging dates with respondents to my Lonely Hearts advertisement. How guilty I felt when one of them asked for next Tuesday evening, only to be told I was seeing someone else, and how fine the balance between making them feel special, and letting them know I was in demand. How could I explain why I felt like a man in these spoken, absent

encounters, yet felt all too conscious of my femaleness as I stood at the door, flicking my fringe and hoping to God that my mascara had not smudged? As I usually cycled to interviews, and it was the hottest summer on record, this performance anxiety was exacerbated by more bodily concerns: did I look nice, was my T-shirt dirty, and were shorts acceptable?

The interviews, which had been designed to be semi-structured, could open up into an unstructured form that at times destructed into a free-for-all. However, some participants did expect and want questions, effectively verbal tick boxes. This was particularly difficult to deal with when they did not have a mantelpiece, like a quiz show without any questions. The mantelpiece, I realised, provided a ready-made prompt for both of us, and without them, I wondered what the point of the interviews were, save to defend myself from those triumphant hecklers at conferences and seminars shouting, 'What about people who *don't* have mantelpieces?' Therefore, after the experiences of the first few interviews, in which the questionnaires were used as structuring instruments, a format that focused on the mantelpiece as idea, memory and/or presence in the living room where we sat as an informal framing device often seemed a better strategy. Some wanted to talk about mantelpieces of their childhood, others about the notion of art, or the family relationships embodied in displayed objects. Others had several mantelpieces, and spoke about the purposes of these in relation to the use or 'mood' of different rooms. Those without mantelpieces sometimes mentioned mantelpieces from their pasts or putative futures. Thus, pulling the questionnaire out at the beginning of an interview had meant that this sheaf of paper became the vocal point of the interview.

Perhaps the 'mantelpiece as frame' approach did not always work, but then, what does? One participant spent the first twenty minutes in taciturn puzzlement at my increasingly desperate questions, as there were only three things on his mantelpiece. Yet, before my very eyes, he underwent a process of recognition concerning the peculiarity of the mantelpiece as a structure and as an idea. He entirely reversed his attitude, and we had a fascinating discussion, which would never have happened had I brandished my security blanket at the outset. I thought I knew what types of people, and what types of mantelpiece displays I would find in the areas I selected, judging as people do from house frontages, post codes, and handwriting. Yet at every turn, these

expectations, these judgments of taste were confounded; the convenient typologies I had so confidently inferred from Veblen (1953 [1899]) and Bourdieu (1984) blurred, just as the neat frames offered by the questionnaire shifted and I learnt, for the first time, that research was about practice and progression, rather than perfection.

4.11 Addendum: A Brief Analysis of Questionnaire Data

The main sample questionnaires were not analysed in detail until after the interviews had taken place and initial findings noted. This was because I was not aiming to test hypotheses generated by questionnaire data by means of qualitative interviews. As I have mentioned, there was no expectation of universalisability or generalisability. The questionnaire respondents were self-selected from the sample areas (for example Burns 2004), and the interview participants were selected through a combination of self-selection and circumstance. The interview sample was therefore not representative of the questionnaire sample, which in turn was not representative of the population.

It is not an aim of the thesis to use the questionnaire data in detail, but some analysis was carried out in for two reasons. First, in interpretations of interview accounts, I hoped to use a salient case that resonated with what other participants in the project had written in their questionnaires, although I emphasise that resonance, not verification, is my intent. Therefore, I undertook to put questionnaire data into reasonably simple Excel files in order to be able to refer to them (Appendix V). The linking of interview accounts, questionnaire data and photographs is not to pretend to universal mantelpiece truths, but to ensure that within the 'hermeneutic spiral' (Hines 2004: 12), I was not spinning a wildly out-of-control yarn. Most of the questionnaire findings, therefore, await another time for full scrutiny, but here are presented some tables and comments as a brief background, for reference later on in the thesis. Apart from the data in Table Three, which refers only to the main questionnaire sample areas, all other tables and figures include the five pilot informants' questionnaire responses. These figures are therefore from a sample of 145. Of the five pilot

informants, two lived in the same household, hence there are 29 households, but 30 informants for Table Five.

Table 3: Summary of Postal Questionnaire Returns

Area: 150 questionnaires to each	Questionnaire Returns	Initial interview contact given	Interview carried out
Cardiff Bay	28 (19%)	10	5
Llandaff North	45 (30%)	20	12
Radyr Gardens	67 (45%)	16	8
Total for all areas	140 (31% of 450)	46 (33% of 140)	25 (18% of 140)

(Percentages rounded up)

Table 4: Number of Mantelpieces for All Returned Questionnaires

Area	Mantelpiece	No mantelpiece
Cardiff Bay	9 (32%)	19 (68%)
Llandaff North	31 (69%)	14 (31%)
Radyr Gardens	60 (90%)	7 (10%)
Other	4 (80%)	1 (20%)
Total: all areas	104	41

Table 5: Spread of Households Interviewed

Area	Households	Mantelpiece	No Mantelpiece
Cardiff Bay	5	3	2
Llandaff North	12	8	4
Radyr Gardens	8	5	3
Pilot	4	3	1
Total: all areas	29	19	10

Summary of Questionnaire Responses for household type/formation:

Owned with a mortgage or outright: 129

Private rented: 9

Rented from a family member: 3

Registered Social Landlord: 4

Women respondents: 101

Number of respondents with mantelpieces: 105

Number of all who had display spaces in the house other than the mantelpiece or 'equivalent': 116

Number who saw a distinction between the mantelpiece or their chosen mantelpiece equivalent and other display spaces in the home: 109

The following tables summarise data gathered principally from questionnaire responses, with some additional information taken at the time of the interviews and from visual data. They present class and ethnicity as questionnaire respondents defined them. Of the 101 female respondents and 39 male respondents, 60 defined themselves as 'middle class' and 36 as 'working class' without any ambiguity or uncertainty. The others chose a variety of responses, reflecting the complexities of class categorisations. Similarly, the request to self-define ethnicity met with a variety of responses (Table xx). Whilst nearly a third (44) called themselves 'White', the next highest reponse (23) was a blank space or '-'. Following these two categories, 'British' and 'Welsh' both had eighteen responses, followed by 'White British' with thirteen. There were seventeen respondents who were unique in their self-ascribed ethnic identities, again highlighting the multi-dimensioned aspects of ethnicity that can be limited by closed categories. These are reflected in Table xx, concerning the attributes of the 30 interview informants. The tables will not be discussed further, due to limitations of space.

Tables 6 and 7: Self-defined Attributes of all Questionnaire Respondents, including Interview Informants (101 female/39 male)

Self-defined class	Number
Middle	60
Working	36
Objection:'no idea'/ 'not matter'	11
Transitional: working to middle	8
Left blank	8
Uncertain: 'middle?'	3
Uncertain: upper middle/middle	3
Lower middle	2
Upper middle	1
Transitional: middle to upper	1
'RG1'	1
'I'	1
'B'	1
Uncertain: 'lower middle?'	1
Upper working/lower middle	1
Lower	1
Transitional: '4 to 1'	1

Self-defined Ethnicity	Number
White	44
Left blank	23
Welsh	18
British	18
White British	13
Caucasian	5
White Welsh	1
Welsh/Arab	1
White UK	1
White European	1
European	1
White C of E	1
Black	1
Scouse	1
Greek	1
Chinese	1
Middle Eastern	1
Asian	1
Indian	1
Anglo	1
White English	1
Arab	1
African	1
Illegible	1

Table 8: Self-defined Attributes of Interview Informants (only those who completed the questionnaire)
(Female 21/Male 10)

Class	Ethnicity	Female	Male
Various Middle (transitional/uncertain)	Various White (British/Welsh/English/Caucasian/Anglo/UK)	13	6
Working	Various White (British/Welsh/English/Caucasian/Anglo/UK)	4	2
Undefined	Various White	3 [pilot]	0
Middle	Welsh/Arab	1	0
'Not important' (objection)	Left blank	0	1
Left blank	White UK	0	1

Table 9 contextualises the 'mantelpiece objects' that are listed in Figure xx: the mirror, the candles and the clock, within a wider array of displayed artefacts. Whereas many of them are intended for display, the 'stored objects' include such items as films awaiting development, toe nail clippers, remote controls, dirty mugs, bowls of screws, which are put there for safe-keeping or on the way to other places within and outside the home. These different types of artefacts are discussed in later chapters, but a full 'typology' of the mantelpiece will be the subject of a future interrogation of questionnaire and visual data.

Table 9 : Objects displayed on all surveyed mantelpieces and mantelpiece-equivalents

Ornaments	**91**
Photos	77
Candles/tealights/candlesticks	**70**
Clock	58
Mirror hung above	**53**
Stored objects	47
Plant/flowers	**41**
Cards/invitations	30
Vases (empty)	**27**

How many respondents had the 'ideal typical' mantelpiece?

96 had some sort of combination of mirror, mantelpiece and clock.

All three: 25

Mantelpiece and mirror or picture or other decorative object: 15

Mantelpiece and clock but not drawn above the shelf: 10

Mantelpiece and mirror: 27

Mantelpiece and picture or other decorative objects above: 19

Symmetry according to hand-drawn sketch: 76

Table10: Words Circled in Questionnaire (145 Respondents)

Most popular	Popular	Quite popular	Unpopular	Very unpopular
Focal Point: 96	Gifts: 36	Expressive: 27	Passage of Time: 14	Story: 8
Display: 75	Souvenirs: 35	Precious: 26	Design: 12	Housework: 8
Family: 57	Celebrations: 34	Traditional: 25	Storage: 11	Boring: 5
Home: 54	Clean: 34	Friends: 24		Shrine: 5
Memory: 52	Reminders: 31	Seasonal: 23		Religious Belief: 5
Aesthetic: 50		Holidays: 21		Formal: 5
Functional: 41		Dusty: 21		Autobiography: 2
Shelf: 41		Beautiful: 21		Empty: 2
Symmetry: 41		Invitations: 20		Home made: 1
		Cluttered: 19		

I realised some omissions that I might usefully have put in. In the list of words that I asked the respondents to circle, it would have helped to put in 'Christmas' and a word such as 'future' or 'looking forward', also a word relating to 'jobs to do' or 'tasks'. The word 'reminders', I thought, clearly meant 'prompts' for future tasks. However, interview participants did not always agree, seeing it rather as another definition for 'memory' of events, places or people.

4.12 Sketching out the Mantelpiece

A notable variation in responses was the way in which people chose to label objects on the mantelpiece. Some wrote 'vase'; others, 'vase with flowers'; others still wrote 'vase of silk flowers' or just 'dried flowers'. Similarly, some wrote 'family photo'; others 'photo of my nephew' or just 'picture'. Some labelled the object 'photo frame', leaving me wondering whether these had pictures in or not, as this seemed to be an important distinction (see Chapter Five for a discussion of Karen's empty frame). Another distinction that some people made, and others did not, was between 'candle', 'scented candle', 'candlestick', 'tea light' and 'tea light holder'. Some had clearly drawn candles in the objects labelled 'candlestick', and some had not. The fact that these distinctions were made even in the drawing and labelling was immediately visible in the questionnaires returned, and raised my awareness of different methods of ordering space prior to the interviews.

Even though I had provided an example sketch on the front cover of the questionnaire, showing a full fire surround with example objects drawn and labelled on the mantelpiece, with a mirror drawn above it, this did not entirely influence all respondents. Some did draw the whole surround and the space above. With these responses, it was possible to see whether they did have the traditional mirror above, or whether they used the hearth space as an additional area for display. However, some did just draw the 'line' of the display.

What also came across was the difference between what was drawn, and which words were circled. This brought across the timed aspect of the mantelpiece, and the transitoriness of some objects. Also, it emerged that my 'judgement'' of the mantelpiece that I saw drawn was quite different from how they felt about it, according to the words circled. For example, a bare mantelpiece (or what I thought of as bare) was associated with 'home', 'family' 'precious' and so on.

Reflecting on later interview discussions regarding the curious invisibility of the focal point, I noted the number of people who did not fill in gaps, who did not seem to see the questionnaire, or who got confused by simple instructions. Another aspect of not 'seeing' was what people chose to put in their sketches. Some sketches were of great artistic merit and clearly labelled with each item. Others were barely visible: a few vague, unnamed lines. I was tempted to valorise artistically fine, labelled drawings, as 'proof' of a good mantelpiece and potential informant (so difficult not to conflate them). However, the first pilot interview taught me not to take the drawings at face value. Rosalind had drawn a bare windowsill for her 'mantelpiece' equivalent and, moreover, had written that they owned the house. Upon visiting her, I was told that the house was rented, and that she was waiting to move to a similar house down the road. The windowsill was indeed bare, but she did have a small mantelshelf, and we discussed that, together with richly drawn memories.

Another example of 'selection' in the sketching process was uncovered when I interviewed Norah and Geoff. Norah's mantelpiece sketch showed it to be completely 'decorative' as opposed to serving any storage function, yet it was a prop for two large stereo speakers, which stood at either end of the mantelpiece, and upon which ornaments were placed. Geoff had also 'cleansed' his sketch of the detritus that was on his mantelpiece: a film awaiting development and a guitar slide. Of course, it is highly likely that these were not on the mantelpiece when he drew it, as these types of objects were impermanent residents. Nevertheless, both these occurrences made me realise that not only are objects selected for mantelpiece display, but the very presentation of the mantelpiece as a sketch in a questionnaire is selective. I also realised, following my third interview –with Ruth – that my question about whether people had display spaces in the home other than their mantelpiece (in Ruth's case, the piano top), had not been not answered 'correctly'. Ruth wrote there was none, but her house was noticeable for its plethora of display spaces throughout the living room, kitchen and up the stairs. I shall open up the theme of 'The Gift' in Chapter Nine with Ruth's account of a crowded display shelf. However, for now, the notion of 'selection' has become a focus, and I shall begin the empirical discussion in the next chapter by selecting narrative accounts as a way in to the interview data.

Chapter Five - Narrative Methods:
Narrating Identities and Materialising Culture in the Home
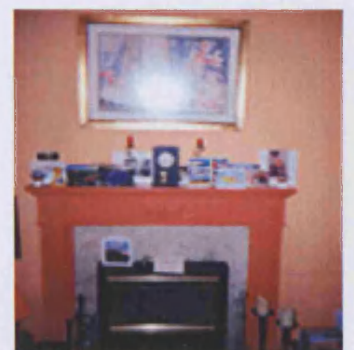
Chapter Five - Narrative Methods:
Narrating Identities and Materialising Culture in the Home

5.1 Introduction: Narrating Materials and Reading Rooms

The construction of narratives around objects displayed in the home is the primary focus of the chapter, and is an introduction to the empirical findings, which are also discussed over the following four chapters. It engages with the first research question, 'How do people account for mantelpieces in their houses today?' focusing on 'storying' specific artefacts on mantelpieces and mantelpiece equivalents. However, its secondary focus is on narrative, and as such it engages with the aim of practising and reflecting upon multi-modality in social research methods. It can be seen therefore in relation with Chapter Six, and discussions in the previous two chapters regarding how different modes of 'showing and telling' produce different modes of knowledge.

Initial theoretical discussions briefly locate this perspective on the topic within existing studies of home, material culture and narrative methodology, which have been introduced in previous chapters. Questions concerning the dominance of the unstructured, in-depth qualitative interview as a social scientific method, and in particular of the 'narrative turn' are raised briefly in the introductory discussion. Following an analysis of four narratives related by two informants, a final reflection returns to the question of method. In conclusion, an approach recognising both the visual and storied aspects of material cultures is suggested for the study of domestic display. This therefore leads on to a discussion of the visual as another aspect of practice, and as a method of accounting in social enquiry in the next chapter.

This process of constructing meaning is examined through a detailed analysis of informants' accounts. As such, it looks at the mantelpiece from a particular angle, taking meaning to be contingent and co-constructed by informant, researcher and objects within their domestic setting. Interview accounts are just one method of exploring the situational, interactive production of meaning. Analysis of these

accounts demonstrates how individuals who are often conceptualised only as consumers become producers of meaning through their domestic stories. By constructing narratives around visual productions in the apparently private space of the home, people participate in the ongoing accomplishment of social, moral identities. Thus, the practice of producing narratives around objects contributes to the personal work of autobiography and renders objects as meaningful participants in the social work of identity-building.

5.2 Contexts: Meaning of Home, Consumption and Material Culture

The home is a site for consumption practices and the establishment of social and economic relations (Wilk 1989; Jackson and Moores 1995). As the papers in edited collections by Cieraad (1999) and Miller (2001) all demonstrate, from a variety of perspectives, agencies of material culture, the house and the individual interact in an ongoing construction of meaning. Domestic settings can also be a domain of cultural anxiety, in that the 'private' space of the home may be implicitly felt to be the object of potential surveillance and judgment by visitors or a 'generalised other' (Allan and Crow 1989; Hunt 1989; Darke and Gurney 2000). Homes are also settings for the enactment of self, where the 'otherness' of previous owners and potential visitors must be managed – even exorcised (Hockey 1999; Gregory 2003). Thus, the management of domestic display has been conceptualised both as performance for others and a marking practice contributing to negotiations of identity within a network of relations.

While the accounts engage with Featherstone's discussion of the 'aestheticisation' of everyday life (1991), I do not agree that the findings posited here represent a distinctively postmodern consumer. Miller (2002) and Clarke (2002) both emphasise the materiality of home and things as constitutive of social processes, rather than an abstracted notion of home as symbol. As Kopytoff (1986) emphasises, things have a 'cultural biography' and are embedded in frameworks of time and memory (Tilley 2001). Biographies of things are important in the construction of individual and family autobiographies (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Woodward 2001). By appropriating mass-produced objects to create 'meaningful décor'

(Chevalier 1999: 94), people can move from being supposedly alienated or passive consumers to active producers of meaning (see also Miller 1988, 1995, 2001; Jackson and Moores 1995; Cieraad 1999; Didau 2001). Therefore, this interpretation of informants' narratives is substantively located within empirical studies of interactions between people, their homes and material culture which suggest that there is an active meaning-making process in which all three play a role (Dittmar 1992). Riggins' useful insights into ethnographic study of the domestic living room complement the analysis provided here (1990, 1994). His approach to analysis, 'mapping' and 'referencing' to render objects meaningful both in personal autobiography and within the realm of public cultural values, is one way of making sense of domestic space and material culture (see also Douglas 1966; Bourdieu 1984). The analysis presented in this chapter focuses on how identity-work through narrative can inform this intersection.

5.3 Interviewing and Narrative Approaches

The 'narrative turn' in social science research has been evident for the last twenty years. As Mishler (1986), Riessman (1993, 2002), and Cortazzi (2001) – among many others – have established, the analysis of personal, narrative accounts is a powerful means to understand the construction and performance of selves. The analysis of biographical and autobiographical materials – spoken and written – provides a valuable resource in the exploration of moral careers and transformations in identity (Evans 1993; Stanley and Morgan 1993; Plummer 1993, 2001). Narrative is one way of illuminating the intersection of biography and history, the focus of sociological study (Mills 1959).

In some cases, however, people do not tell long stories about the objects they were displaying in their homes, and the interview structure remains stichomythic. This broken rhythm of talk consists of short questions being met with equally brief responses. This problematises the concept of the 'narrative turn' in social science research, which gives primacy to one particular social practice and form of interview talk. There is a danger in ignoring the fact that not all respondents participate in the

popularised social scientific practice of the unstructured or in-depth qualitative interview. In taking the interviewer's role to be one of providing opportunities to the interviewee to relate their 'own' story (Mishler 1986), this approach places the interviewee in the role of a container of stories that can be mined, rather than as a co-constructor of knowledge (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). The social character of these stories must be recognised, since in the 'interview society', it is recognised that interview narratives are not transparent reflections of lived experience or the self, but are interactive performances (Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Kvale 1996; Atkinson and Silverman 1997; Gubrium and Holstein 2002). As Atkinson and Silverman point out, the emphasis on narrative in interview interactions results not from an essential superiority to this type of subject, but from a 'preferred subjectivity' (ibid.: 19) that is currently popular not only in the social sciences but more widely in society. With reference to the topic of this chapter, Coolen et al. (2002) express concern about empirical studies of the meaning of home in particular, which have tended to use small-scale, qualitative interview samples for data collection to the exclusion of other approaches. Therefore, although the narratives that are interpreted in this chapter are engaging and entertaining - as stories are – their 'socialness' does not give them automatic rights to be a central focus of sociological enquiry.

5.4 Mantelpieces: Vocal Points

Exploring the narratives about things emphasises what mantelpiece displays (or other domestic display areas) are accomplishing in the home. Their materiality is not bound by temporal and spatial limits, since they are the material with which people build stories of absent presences, a horizon beyond which the past and future, the otherworld and ideal self dwell (Didau 2001). The mantelshelf provides a formal structure for this display, a highly traditionalised and normalised form of revelation, which, like the 'once upon a time' narrative motif, can be conceptualised as a formal structuring device. These devices are not necessary for narrative or aesthetic accomplishment. In reading the poetics of living rooms, however, mantelpieces do predicate and delineate display space at the room's central point, in a way that

perhaps no other architectural convention has done. It therefore seemed appropriate to apply narrative methods of data collection and analysis to the topic.

Informants' mantelpieces and 'mantelpiece equivalents' were not just display spaces, but also sites where family and individual stories were constructed around individual objects and assemblages of photographs and collections of artefacts. The four narratives, told by two informants (Belinda and Karen) were carefully selected for their salience in illuminating themes that emerged from an extensive analysis of narrative sections of all the interview transcripts. The analysis was conducted according to guidelines discussed by Riessman (1993, 2002), Coffey and Atkinson (1996), Kvale (1996) and Czarniawska (2004).

The focus of the interview seemed ideal for inviting informants to tell stories, and this was usually successful. In order to put their room displays into wider autobiographical context, I often asked them to tell me about their housing histories. Each object could also be made the subject of a narrative, as I asked individuals to tell me about the origins of the vase, or clock, or ornament. At other times, the information they had written in the questionnaires concerning childhood memories, or why they did not want a mantelpiece, suggested a narrative pathway. Objects were not only props to life histories but essential players; we were host and guest, yet also presenter and listener, judge and defender. The narrative was doing work, often in allowing the teller to display other worlds in an otherwise limited environment. She could show, by means of the narrative, that she had other identities, societies and values. Also, future narratives or narratives of intent were also constructed around domestic material cultural displays, as is discussed in the last case of the empty photograph frame.

Although the artefact on display remains materially the same, different stories, or different versions of the same story, can be related to it according to the specific identity its owner wishes to invoke in an interaction. One informant, Alison, whose 'gift accounts' are discussed in Chapter Nine, ended a story about a decorative plate with an illustration of this point:

Alison: If it was somebody who I knew better, or wanted to know better or whatever, then I might actually tell them a bit of the story, you know and it could be the longwinded version which you got or it could be something much, much more abbreviated which is just about, you know, 'I got that to remember my godmother'...You know, there are any number of permutations... of how I could wrap it up.

This account raises methodological questions concerning the use of interview narratives as a preferred resource for social enquiry. This will be discussed in the conclusion to the chapter, with reference to the narrative turn in the social sciences and the concept of the interview society. Yet, when reading the following storied accounts of material domestic culture, it is helpful to be mindful of their situated, material domestic context.

5.5 The Stories

5.5.1 Not Just a Wife and Mother

Belinda told the following narratives about two objects she had on display to make present other identities. She lives in a modern house with her husband, and has two adult daughters who both have children. She and her husband chose not to have a mantelpiece in their home. The first object was a large bronze of a male and female figure embracing, displayed on a shelf unit in the front bay window area. She tells the story of how she acquired the object. Its acquisition is given a place and time, based upon her knowledge of where they were living. In a sense, 'home' embodies not only place, but also time. This idea of the confluence of time and place as 'home' will be discussed elsewhere.

RH: Is the statue on the, in the window alcove particularly special?
Belinda: Our daughters bought it for us some years ago, would be less than fourteen years ago cos I know where we were living at the time, and it cost them a lot of money and a great deal of effort to get it. They wanted this specific one and it's very very heavy, and one daughter pushed it home from town in a pushchair (balancing it on the pushchair). And I was very touched that our daughters thought of my husband and myself as being you know, like that. You don't usually think of your mother and father I don't think – and I

thought it was lovely. And it's got a little pamphlet you know about the person who made it and all that.

Belinda concentrates on the moral values constructed around the object. It was a gift from her daughters to her and her husband. It cost her daughters money, time and effort. It was specially selected, and has a leaflet about its maker. An ordinary-looking domestic ornament is made abnormal by the story she reads into it, and which she chooses to tell to me. It is unusual *per se*, in that it is not mass-produced, and is personalised by the pamphlet detailing its producer. It is also unusual in the amount of time and effort invested into it by the givers. This element of the story is emphasised in this particular production of it, as she details her children bringing it home in a pushchair. This personalising detail of the effort that went into the object adds value, just as the pamphlet does.

The third element that makes this object no ordinary production (in her eyes and telling) is the revelation it gives her of her daughters' perception of her and her husband. However, rather than tell me directly what that perception is, she points at the statue of the lovers: 'You know, like that'. This emphasises the dramatic nature of story telling in these interviews; the objects are demonstrative of the themes of the stories. In a hermeneutic circle of narrative and material content, each augments and benefits from the other's meaning. In this case, the statue is ordinary, temporally and spatially static, yet in the telling it becomes unique, and even vivified. Simultaneously, the statue is the material present of the themes in the story. It is 'very very heavy' proving her daughters' effort; it has a pamphlet, evidencing its uniqueness, and this uniqueness is extended symbolically into the realm of filial perception.

The role of the listener is important, since to whom the narrative is told influences what is said and what is omitted. Belinda might have felt able to tell someone else how they were 'like that', or omitted that element of the narrative altogether. Her daughters' perception of their parents as sensual is iterated: 'You don't usually think of your mother and father, I don't think'. The shift to the second person is conventional, yet brings into play our relative ages and gender. We are of an age to be mother and daughter, and this highlights the interactive nature of narrative. The

moral is not to make assumptions about one's parents, a lesson which I am perhaps intended to take personally, since it is repeated. The realisation of her identity as a sexualised human being (together with her husband), rather than just 'Mother', is a further accomplishment of the object narrative. Her comment, 'I thought it was lovely,' is ambiguous. It could refer to her daughters' investments in it, their filial perception, and/or her identity. These are all highly moral identities, which are presented as unusual, yet not deviant, since they inhabit an institutional structure of marriage and family life ('my husband', 'our daughters', and 'the push chair'). Similarly, the statue is described as unique and special, yet in its domestic setting provides a safe structure within which to construct meanings. Her concluding sentence brings us back into the present and the material, a fitting end to the tale.

The domestic establishment allows for certain exhibitions of the unordinary, since it is assumed to fit into certain conventional bounds of home, family, safety and so on. The context is important; had the same statue been in an art gallery or shop, its symbolic meaning could have been very different; acceptable sensuality could have been viewed as eroticism or even pornography; the heaviness as ugly or of only monetary value. Its specific cultural context, the domestic - like a stage set - imbues meaning, just as the tale told by its owner does, and this is a reciprocal action. The meaning of things in the home is what gives home its meaning.

Another convention that is considered to permit, or even invite the unique (in this society), is that of the gift (discussed in detail in Chapter Nine). This value, which is loaded with moral imperatives for the giver and recipient, is related in this story. Investment of time, effort and money are moral actions for the giver, whilst appreciation, and, it could be argued, the production and telling of the gift narrative are prescribed for the recipient. Emotional investment on both sides ('I was very touched that our daughters thought...') also adds value. Even if the object itself might be mass-produced, stories about it make it a personal production. It could be said, then, that prescribed public cultural values are rewritten by individuals at home, where they transform artefacts by telling stories about them, and thus themselves.

It is interesting to consider the direct correlation Belinda draws between the object's appearance and what this conveys about her identity, together with her daughters'

perception of that identity. She perceives it as representative of her character and how that is seen by those closest to her. This valuation of art as representative differs from some other participants' views, but suggests a perception of art as representation that is highly traditional.

5.5.2 The Good Grandmother

I will now consider another narrative told by Belinda, about a small hard dough ball on the display shelf, which she has selected as her 'mantelpiece' for the purposes of the research project. Again, the narrative starts with a statement establishing it as a gift from a family member, her young grandson. This story occurs earlier in the interview process than the tale of the statue, and I am still adopting a 'questioner' role. Nevertheless, the tale has a clear structure, beginning with object descriptor (gift), how it was 'produced' for her, when she received it and why it is on display.

> *Belinda*: It's a little thing that my grandson made – I'm not sure out of what – dough or something, and if you look ever so carefully it's got a G for Grandma but I can't see it. It's like a kit that he had, and you know, I had to enthuse over it and so on, cos he gave it to me for a birthday or Christmas or something. And I sort of had to waffle and say 'Oh, how lovely,' and try and find out what it was supposed to be without telling him I couldn't recognise it. It's a 'G' for grandma.
> *RH: And how long's that been there if it was a birthday?*
> *Belinda*: Probably about two years. Cos he's five now and he was very tiny – you know he made it with the help of his mother, so yes. And as I say you just don't see it anymore.
> *RH: So it's not that you haven't moved it because you know you thought consciously – it's just kind of been put there and stayed there?*
> *Belinda*: Well, it was put there so that he would feel it was very important – which of course it is – but the fact that it's still there (I'd forgotten about it).
> *RH: And does he see it still?*
> *Belinda*: Well he does visit but whether he notices it or not I don't know.

What is told in this narrative is her moral identity of as a good grandmother, as shown in the iterative 'it's a G for grandma'. Encircled by this repeated comment is a periphrasis supporting and supported by this emblematic device, comically describing how she tried to find out what the thing was without upsetting her grandson. I attempt to return to what I consider to be the 'plot' of the interview, being interested in decision-making processes underpinning display. However, Belinda continues to

hold the moral thread of her narrative, of a small boy being helped by his mother and then by his grandmother, to become a proud producer of cultural objects. In doing this work (using a 'kit', putting the object on display), she and her daughter have successfully contributed to the transition a small child makes from indiscriminate dauber on walls to acculturated social being. The fact that he or she no longer sees this little ball of dough is irrelevant to her; the work has been done.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that she tells the tale from this moral perspective, of being a good grandmother and the associated task of acculturating her grandson. Although the dough ball was clearly an aesthetic monstrosity, the cultural norm is to display things in the home for moral reasons. It is also normal to leave things out on display months or years after their original moral role has ended. Yet the morality tales of British domestic culture – home and family, comfort rather than beauty – reside in these forgotten, often invisible things.

This is an important theme that has emerged from close analysis of this narrative: that the culture of the family and the home can be somewhat different from public culture. The moral economy of gift giving, of family values and identity-building within the domestic context could be seen as based on anti-aesthetic values. This is not to simplify domestic cultures, since, as many of the interview narratives suggested, the relationship between the moral and the aesthetic is complex and ambiguous. Each object on display contains many interwoven narratives, which are under constant revision, and are dependent on the teller and listener for particular momentary orientations. Yet these displays, whilst informed by public mores about what home is for, what is to be revealed or concealed, are also vital players in ongoing processes of individuation. The notion of home and self-identity as mutually constitutive is public, yet the work that goes on behind closed doors is seen as one's own business. The people who took interviews as occasions for relating narratives established this: my role was that of listener. Others who cast me as an interviewer, with a list of normal questions to which there were normal answers, were not, in a sense, 'at home' during the interview. As an interviewer, it was difficult to invite narrative; they had invited me into their homes, and I did not know then how to negotiate the etiquette of courting narrative. It seemed to happen spontaneously, or not at all.

5.5.3 Framing Material

The last two interview extracts concern, paradoxically, resolution and deferment of a problem that is both aesthetic and moral. Karen is a young woman who has recently bought a Victorian terraced house, where she lives with a lodger. The former owners had fitted a modern pine mantelpiece to one hearth space, yet the back fireplace remained a gaping hole, which Karen liked as being 'modern'. This narrative concerns an immediate and seemingly unproblematic filling of the wall space above the mantelpiece. Since her budget would not permit the purchase of a large painting, Karen simply bought a length of material from Ikea and had it framed. The narrative is one of resolution, a problem solved. This contrasts with the future conditional narrative that follows, yet is concerned with the same issue: filling emptiness.

> Karen: Yes. Well the painting, I wanted something quite large to go above it [the mantelpiece], you know something to fill the space, and I looked into pictures and my budget, and it was sort of getting a picture the size that I wanted was quite expensive. So I just got the material from Ikea, and I just got it framed.
> RH: *Oh I see, now I understand what you put in the frame over there.*
> Karen: Yes.
> RH: *It's brilliant.*
> Karen: Well, it is quite dramatic I guess, and it's quite a cheap thing you know, cos you didn't have to pay for someone's work of art or something. But you know, if you were buying a frame or a sort of print in that sort of style, it would be quite pricey. But I thought, that's a little bit different, and you know, it was quite cheap.

In this case, the 'larger frame' is the wall above the mantelpiece, which is customarily filled by a mirror or picture of some sort. The convention of putting a mirror up is not mentioned and Karen wants 'something to fill the space', something 'large'. Cost is emphasised as being the problem in this narrative. This is equated with 'a picture the size I wanted', 'someone's work of art' and 'print in that sort of style'. She solves the problem by going to Ikea, buying a length of patterned material and having it framed. This is 'quite cheap', 'quite dramatic' and 'a little bit different'. The iteration of 'quite cheap' encircles the second section of the narrative, so that the phrase rounding off the whole story of the object brings to the fore the theme of cost.

It seems like a simple tale, yet Karen is accomplishing several tasks in her recounting of it. Principally, she is accounting for herself. In this sense, each retelling of the tale constructed around the object affirms her identity. Her performance is an investment not only in the narrative, which in a sense is a memory of past action, but also in her present self. Past and present are thus literally materialised in the frame. However, it is not until the narrative is told that this interaction can detach from this common grounding. This ongoing identity work can be seen in the way in which the provenance of the object becomes a moral narrative. Confronted with the problem of cost, the protagonist overcomes this through resourceful action, and furthermore, she displays not just thrift, but also an aesthetic sensibility, since the framed material is 'dramatic' and 'different'. I, the listener, have no choice but to show admiration for this accomplishment, since to question it would be to deny the values of thrift and aesthetic sense and, moreover, Karen's originality: this is no Monet print. The mass-produced material has been individualised by her work on it, which has reproduced it as her work of art. That is accomplished by putting a frame around it, thus separating and distinguishing it from the kilometres of the same material 'out there'. This act of separation has a simultaneous effect on its producer, individuating her from the common run of people. However, the values affirmed in recounting the narrative place her firmly within the frame of social normality: it is legitimated deviance, licensed carnival.

5.5.4 The Empty Frame

Can displayed objects embody narratives of the future, of intent or directionality? Another narrative from the same interview, about an empty photograph frame, imparts a different perspective on the poetics of things in the home. In contrast, however, this is one of a possibly endlessly deferred future fulfilment of the aesthetic self and the photograph frame.

> Karen: So I picked a frame up in TKMaxx, and it was just, cos it sort of blended in and it was nice colours. But I haven't actually got a picture to go in it – cos I think I want a really nice picture. And I can't decide what it's going to be at the moment, you know, cos yes, it is the focal point and I want something quite nice to go there, and I haven't sort of - I'm quite fussy. I wouldn't put anything in. I'm a bit like that with things like, I wouldn't put

anything in just for it to go, obviously a picture in. Oh, I won't have a picture in until I find the perfect one, and then I'll put that in – I think.

Several respondents had empty photograph frames on display. The provenance of this particular frame is mentioned first, followed by an aesthetic reason for the purchase. This is followed by a 'but', a common word in the narratives, and one that is used, it seems, as a preface to an apologia. In this case, it pre-empts criticism by pointing out the obvious absence; the frame is empty. Since photograph frames are produced with the intent that the consumer will put a photograph in it, this seems like deviant behaviour. However, Karen defends this omission by transforming it into a deliberate act. Moreover, this is not due to stupid indecisiveness, but a deliberate withholding of the decision. She backs up this argument by calling on two witnesses; the mantelpiece itself ('cos yes it is the focal point') and her own moral identity as a person of taste and discrimination (I'm quite fussy. I wouldn't put anything in'). In this case, her identity and the mantelpiece display are mutually constructive and contingent; if the mantelpiece is the focal point, then she has taste, and *vice versa*. The repetition of, 'I wouldn't put anything in' emphasises her intentional omission as confirmative of her aesthetic judgement. That conditional is mixed up with the present and the future, suggesting that the empty frame contains three time zones; the present, the future, and a curious contingent universal. In other words, her act of not putting 'anything' in is contingent upon the supposition, 'if I were fussy'.

It is interesting to note that dual meaning of 'anything', as 'just any old tat' and, 'anything at all'. As I noted in the discussion of the dough ball, that object's very invisibility denoted a kind of anti-aesthetic morality within domestic culture. In this narrative, the emptiness of the frame symbolises an aesthetic moral identity by the very absence of a 'normal' aesthetic – a photo in the frame. The ambiguity of 'anything' highlights this paradox: that in order to maintain this identity, it might be imperative to maintain this emptiness – an ascetic aesthetic!

The particular behaviour embodied by the frame is then extrapolated to a general comment on her identity in the narrative, as 'I'm a bit like that with things'. The 'like that', as heard in Belinda's narrative of the bronze statue, endows the object with a demonstrative quality, showing that object, narrative and narrator are involved in

interaction. Yet, whereas Belinda's narrative was of a past action and present identity, this is a narrative of an intended future action, and a current stasis that is nevertheless highly active. The object is not only performative of an element narrator's universal 'timeless' identity, but also offering potential and intended action, a narrative of the future.

That there will be no picture, 'until I find the perfect one,' conveys the direction of the narrative, a purposive quest. However, as discussed earlier, it is possible that her aesthetic morality will not permit fulfilment of the task and the frame. The repeated 'I think' at the beginning and end of the narrative suggests Karen's uncertainty concerning her intention. However, this is portrayed as a considered ambiguity, rather than inability to make decisions. The final act of putting in the 'perfect picture' will also confirm her perfection or completion of this identity. This is a narrative of the future, yet the emptiness of the photograph frame symbolises the uncertainty of identity-building and the risks of completing such work: failure.

Karen has deferred the filling of a photo frame because she wants to find the 'perfect picture', justified by it being on the 'focal point' of the mantelpiece (where she has placed it). Paradoxically, she has filled a much larger empty space above the mantelpiece with a piece of framed material. Her telling of its provenance is almost casual: 'So I just got the material from Ikea, and I just got it framed.' Like the naming of TKMaxx in the previous account, the mention of Ikea assumes a common frame of cultural reference. I suggest that they are both known for cheapness and appeal to a certain type of consumer, relatively young and poor, yet possessing a sense of fashionable taste that is not cheap (although this is debatable). The point is that it is a certain type of shopper who knows what these places are, rather than a certain type of art lover or connoisseur of antiques. 'Someone's work of art or something' is too expensive; aesthetics are then forced into the market place. Yet individual taste can be distinguished within the frame of shopping. Agreement with this principle is crucial within the frame of consumption; otherwise we stare into the abyss of anonymity, an emptiness in place of identity. When the choice of consuming 'someone's work of art' is closed, the thwarted consumer must become producer.

How is it that this empty space was filled so freely, yet the photograph frame remains empty? There is no simple answer, yet I suggest at this stage that it is to do with accomplishing identity. Karen has individuated herself by means of the framed material and narrative, but a photograph is perceived differently by framer and viewer. This perhaps has to do with the filtering function of most objects; they are something in themselves. A personal photograph lacks that, being an apparently immediate representation of self or the places and people close to the self. This deserves further debate, and there is sadly no room to engage in it in this chapter.

Another account mobilising a moral identity through the trope of absence was that of a mother who no longer had a fireplace or mantelpiece to protect her children from potential fire risk (Nick's wife). The explanation was similarly offered as a self-apologia, implying that not wanting a domestic hearth and mantelpiece, like having an empty photograph frame, is deviant or resistant. In order to conform to social rules, the participant offered a narrative that upheld the moral imperative to protect children, and which I could not therefore contest. Thus, the absent mantelpiece, and a future conditional narrative of risk performed the same work as a present mantelpiece in that it interacts with the participant's identity as a mutually constitutive agent. By maintaining the mantelpiece as an absent presence, the narrator maintains her identity as a careful mother. This analogy with Karen's narrative about the empty photograph frame, in which the mantelpiece in its role as 'focal point' was called upon to support her decision (which was indeed endlessly deferred) suggests a homology between both as artefacts, distinguished by scale, rather than order. At a second interview, Karen explained that she had stored the frame in a bedroom drawer, since she was yet to find 'the perfect picture'. It could be argued that Karen, like the 'careful mother', maintains her careful aesthetic identity by not presenting a photograph in the frame: its emptiness guarantees purity.

5. 6 Conclusion: Focal and Vocal Points

I have shown how people telling stories about objects they have in their homes are also telling stories about themselves, as moral beings with histories and beliefs, who are both socialised and individuated. By narrating stories about and around the

objects they display in their homes, individuals can account for identities that otherwise might not be immediately present or presentable. Narrative analysis of sections of interview transcripts has shown how informants accomplished the negotiation and construction of identities within interview interactions, invoking absent times, places and people.

Methodologically, the chapter contributes to narrative approaches of social enquiry. It has briefly outlined how the research questions can be connected through the 'socialness' of displayed artefacts, the mantelpiece and narrative accounts. The importance of biography, related as memories of the provenance of objects, and the moral work of familiar 'ways of knowing and telling' is clear. Therefore, mantelpieces (or equivalent spaces) are accounted for as 'vocal points' in this chapter, upon which 'doing' memory, and hence relations of self, family and home can be accomplished through narrative. We have seen how the moral dimension of display can be elaborated by narrative, but also how distinctions between domestic artefacts and public art can be made in ways that categorise the informant as aesthetically proficient.

Moreover, negotiations between family-centred or familiar domestic practice and estranging or individuating aesthetic display practices are problematic. These informants are not just 'doing' home and family: they inhabit opposite ends of the assumed linear progression from single, to married-with-children, to retired-couple-with-grandchildren. The accomplishment of identity by familiar objects such as gifts from family, photographs and pictures above the mantelpiece cannot be elided with 'home' and 'family'. Conversely, since emotionally important 'vocal' objects might not be the same as aesthetically important, individuating 'focal' goods, such complex accounts do not permit sharp binary delineation between cultural categories such as inside/outside, and hence blur the relations between mundane familiar practice and a 'public' aesthetic (Bachelard 1994 [1958]; Douglas 1966; Bourdieu 1977; see also Reed 1996; Clarke 2002).

However, as discussed in the introduction, neither the 'interview society' nor the 'narrative turn' in the social sciences can be accepted unquestioningly (Atkinson and Silverman 1997; Gubrium and Holstein 2002). The interview, as a confessional, a

method of excavating narratives from a subject, is not an avenue to direct experience. It is an interaction, in which knowledge is contingent and co-constructed (Holstein and Gubrium 1996; Kvale 1996). Similarly, narratives are not there as products contained within a passive subject, waiting to be found. Different versions of narratives are related as different aspects of identity are recalled in response to the demands of the present interaction and presence of others (Munro 2004). Different objects are given prominence according to the stories that can be constructed around them. In an interview situation, the interviewer can ask about objects that might not be noticed by the casual visitor, family member or house guest. For example, Belinda would not normally have told the story of the dough ball to any visitor. They offer a preferred perspective, of articulate speakers in in-depth qualitative interviews. The exclusive use of this method valorises a particular form of social enquiry and practice. This does not invalidate the insights that this research strategy provides; narratives and their shared schemes of reference inform theory in emphasising the narrative/biographic, familiar practices of taste, consumption and material culture

Nevertheless, I suggest that, in order to engage both with the substantive topic and its relations with theory, the methodology of inquiry into domestic practice could step beyond the interview narrative that Coolen et al. (2002) criticised. For example, a combination of visual and verbal methods has been used in some studies of the domestic interior (Hunt 1989; Riggins 1994; Cieraad 1999; Miller 2001; 2002; Clarke 2002). These position both the verbal/unseen and visual/visible aspects of material culture in the home within the frame of enquiry, highlighting private/personal and public/social modes of domestic space. Pink (2004) has recently called for methods of enquiry that engage with the 'pluri-sensory' character of the home: the smells, sounds and tastes of home, as well as its seen, tangible and storied properties. In the following chapter, I therefore take up the call for the use of visual data collection and interpretation, to consider how this might link in with the conventional methods of qualitative interviewing, and narrative as a method for both social research and 'doing' social life, to illuminate the mantelpiece and surrounding practices.

Chapter Six - Visualising Practice:

Framing Material Culture and Visual Data

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6.1 Introduction

> *'It is another thing to try and make over our existence into an unchanging lapidary form. Purity is the enemy of change, of ambiguity and compromise. Most of us indeed would feel safer if our experience could be hard-set and fixed in form.'*
> (Douglas 1966: 163)

This chapter focuses on photographic data that I collected, following the consideration of interview accounts in the last chapter. First, I discuss methodological contexts for my decision to use visual data collection and analysis methods, using the interview I had with museum curator and author of 'Household Choices', Charles Newton as a starting point (Newton and Putnam 1990). Second, I reflect on the many selection processes that were involved in presenting them as part of a research text, using informants' comments during the interview as themes around which to consider 'the visual'. Its primary aim is to consider how these processes are partially analogous to ongoing, contingent practices of positioning, selecting and editing of material culture in the home. As such, its purpose in explaining the multi-modal frames of visual presentation in the thesis (and beyond) is to reflect on how the visual frames familiar practices of memory, accomplishing identity within the domestic sphere, and the ordering of objects within the home.

One central interest, raised by the last chapter, is how methods of social life and methods of social enquiry might be categorised and separated. One issue that the Mass-Observation Archive brought up, was how in 1937, photographs were positional goods (Hirsch 1977), commemorating the dead or the family on the mantelpiece, but not submitted as illustrative of the written report or as self-explanatory visual reports (with one exception). Some volunteers drew labelled sketches, suggesting that 'writing' the mantelpiece display was not sufficient. By 1983, photographs were more common, supporting this notion that visual, rather than written media, were preferred for describing the domestic interior. Yet the two Mass-Observation Reports

accentuate the novelty of using photographs to augment or replace text – due to technological innovation, rather than as a 'better' type of knowledge.

Hence, the suggested mirroring of the management and ordering of visual data problematises the seemingly static, finished aesthetic products of home. The mantelpiece is not 'only a picture', as Michael called it, although it might seem so during an hour-long interview visit. It is an element of 'domestic process art' (Hunt 1995): a gradual accretion or accumulation which might change daily, seasonally or with relation to specific events (see Adam 1995; Gregory 2003 for different orders of time). Similarly, photographic data in a text or at a presentation are not just snapshots; they are materials that have been through a process of framing, developing, editing and selection. I address this by presenting different categories of visual data:

- Uncaptioned, digitally-edited 'plates' in-between chapters.

- Informants' questionnaire sketches and my snapshots of mantelpieces/equivalent spaces taken at interview, as part of their 'Biographical Notes' in the *Supplement*.

- A website and an appended CD-Rom, presented as virtual 'photo-galleries', displaying all visual data: sketches, interview snapshots and unedited linear 'slideshows' of informants' year-long photo-studies.

In conclusion, I suggest that the 'social life of things' (Appadurai 1986a; 1986), such as display items and photographs, must be incorporated with narrative accounts to enlarge the scope of social research. However, since the photograph is also an aesthetic production that is distancing and can be displaced from the site of photography, unpacking photography as process and product can disturb the familiarity of everyday processes of meaning-making, such as stories and homely assemblages of things.

As I have already shown, interview accounts of the provenance, acquisition and selection of objects for display give these objects a biography (Kopytoff 1986), just as

photographs are socially produced material objects with histories, rather than abstracted, decontextualised images (Edwards 2002). Therefore, this account of producing photographs for presentation as part of a text demonstrates the necessary inter-relatedness of the visual and the spoken, the material and the narrative, for interpretive research in the home. Whereas a narrative can account for an artefact as both having a biography and being constitutive of a person's biographical account, a photograph is - unless captioned - only visual, although its own 'social life' (Appadurai 1986) will endow it with biographical and narrative properties.

6.2 Part One: Visual Theory and Methodology

6.2.1 Seeing Double: words and visions

The 'writing' of the visual has increasingly been problematised. Benjamin noted the displacement of the cult value of photographs with exhibition value, when, 'For the first time, captions have become obligatory' (Benjamin 1999 [1955]: 220). As part of the project, I interviewed museum curator and design historian Charles Newton, in the archive cellars of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. This visit highlighted the 'crisis of representation' (Atkinson 1990), since 'exhibiting authenticity' has been a longstanding problematic in museum curatorship (Phillips 1997). Newton had curated the 1990 'Household Choices' exhibition, part of a project that also produced a book (Newton and Putnam 1990). A variety of methods were used in the production of both book and exhibition, including photo-elicitation, autophotography by children and adults of their own and others' homes, and what is conventionally understood as 'expert' photography of domestic interiors. In the book, some of these photographs illustrate the text; in contrast, Newton deliberately kept text to a minimum in the exhibition, since his experience suggested that the business of keeping up with the captions exhausted visitors. The photographs were relatively unframed, simply mounted on cardboard in groups, with a short printed caption.

As Berger (1972) comments, a caption will dictate how a picture is interpreted, whilst Gell (1998) went further by resisting the notion of a grammar or linguistics of visual culture. If we allow that cultural materials can be matter in and out of place (Douglas

1966), we can interpret any textual caption or more complex verbal/written accounting for the visual as displacing it to another realm or order, to which it does not belong. As Newton stated in our interview, however, photographs of private, contemporary domestic interiors are not conventional 'museum exhibits'. First, photographs by ordinary people are not the sort of thing to be raised above the *milieu* (compared with artefacts literally raised up in the home and onto the mantelpiece). Second, the subject matter – the ordinary, private British home interior – is not normally considered extraordinary unless *made* extraordinary (Parr and Barker 1992). For these reasons, the cardboard mounts for the 'Household Choices' exhibition were stored differently from other more conventional exhibits. They were stored flat, uncovered, in document drawers on top of one another, and Newton handled them to lift them out and show them to me. I was permitted to take two photographs of them. He contrasted these 'rules' with those for a large fragment of William Morris wallpaper, which was framed and covered in glass on a wall in the archive room. It was literally intangible, since no one was permitted to touch it, nor even photograph it. It was possible only to look at the 'real thing', *in situ*. This artefact really was suspended above the busy-ness of the everyday, invested with uniqueness by age, and with rarity by, paradoxically, the fragile ephemerality which once had made it the height of fashionable taste. A postcard, perhaps, from the Museum shop would allow some facsimile to be displayed and remembered in the visitor's home, yet it was 'unphotographable'.

This attitude to the materials of 'Household Choices' was particularly apposite for a consideration of methods in my research design, since it resonated with Mass-Observation methodology. As I have already discussed, the aim of Mass-Observation was the practice of observation by and of the 'masses', to counter (with a certain ambivalence) elitist social enquiry (Stanley 2001). In 1937, only two photographs were submitted for the Mantelpiece Report, since photographs were positional goods (Hirsch 1977), displayed on a very few mantelpieces, and most participants had submitted handwritten lists on paper. Similarly, 'Household Choices' photographs were cultural materials gathered by the 'mass', using what is now no longer a positional instrument or technique, of their everyday domestic settings. Yet it is because of their ordinariness that they occupy a curious space of meaning and value. They are neither museum exhibit, in the conventional understanding of the term –

whereas an old fragment of wallpaper is – nor are they disposable. They were used to illustrate verbal accounts and written 'expert' analyses, but also 'spoke for themselves' in a museum - albeit with a short text caption (unlike other exhibits, which might have an expository audio-guide or brochure). They are mounted, but unframed. It is at this point that the 'mirror' of my methods of data collection and presentation becomes the focal point of the paper.

As Bourdieu has argued, photography performs social functions, for in valorising what is 'photographable', it is never independent of social class, norms, hierarchy and prestige, its function is the: 'recording and compilation of "souvenirs" of objects, people or events socially designated as important.' (Bourdieu 1990 [1965]: 7). He also comments that, as a product, it occupies a middle ground between nobility and the masses, distinguishing it from paintings and mass-produced prints. Writing about family photographs, he notes that, in the houses of the *petits bourgeois* in the village of Lesquire, 'they even invade that shrine of family values, the drawing-room mantelpiece,' relegating medals and trophies to a dark corner. He views the production of family photographs for display as the 'domestic manufacture of domestic emblems' (ibid.: 25). Certainly, this observation concerns a specific time and place, yet we might note his observation that people photograph what is 'photographable' and that in a particular French village, family photographs had displaced the material markers of past family achievements in the public realm. Similarly, Banks (2001) notes the cultural specificity of domestic photographic displays: no distinction is made by British middle-classes between displaying photographs of living and dead family members, compared with Hindu practice in India. He also notes that the top of the television is a 'shrine' in his mother's house to his dead father, and that in middle-class homes, the mantelpiece may serve a 'similar shrine-like function'(Banks 2001: 119). (I find his reversal odd: the mantelpiece's role as upholder of family memory precedes its upstart neighbour in the living room.)

Unlike medals and rare fragments of old wallpaper, photographs are reproducible, yet, who would want to, outside the family circle? The strange thing is, these reproducible, yet unique markers and products of social convention do, from a distance, all look the same. Selected to be raised above the business of domestic practices onto the drawing room mantelpiece, these photographs occupy an

ambiguous place. Like the photographic exhibition from the Household Choices project, they valorise the domestic, the familial as 'photographable', and are therefore in circulation as social/cultural goods. In contrast to the 'unphotographable', yet desirable (to those 'in the know') Morris wallpaper, their content is of interest only to those who already know all those babies, brides and birthday boys.

Bourdieu goes on to remark that at a time when the 'capital of precious goods' is in decline, the family album is its 'accessible substitute', photographs of children make their parents their historiographers, the makers of their heirlooms (Bourdieu 1990 [1965]: 30-31). Following the decline of the group, photographs now bear the responsibility of 'compiling the family heritage' (ibid.: 28). Changes in family inheritance practices are pertinent to the findings of this contemporary Cardiff project (see Chapter Nine), but the point also emphasises the importance of taking nothing for granted.

Incidentally, it is worth noting at this point how both Bourdieu (1990 [1965]) and Banks (2001) label the mantelpiece a 'shrine'. In contrast, the fieldwork I did in Cardiff found an ambiguity in mantelpiece displays that mirrored, from some angles, the liminal position of the 'domestic emblem', the family photograph. It did raise some precious artefacts above the common circulation of domestic goods, but also acted as a storage facility, temporary 'home' for displaced objects and dumping ground.

Likewise, I cannot pretend, in this laborious consideration of the 'problem of images' (MacDougall 1997), that the photographs I took were not to be used as *aide-memoires* when listening to interview tapes and convenient illustrations for accounts about the displays. Like informants' mantelpieces, the photographs performed many parts, and deserve similar attentiveness. Ball and Smith (1992) justify the exploration of signs with reference to Garfinkel's ethnomethodological approach to society as members' ongoing work, 'with no possibility of evasion, hiding out, passing, postponement or buy-outs' (Garfinkel 1988: 103). This was my first motivation for scrutinising the unseen mantelpiece, and it therefore makes sense to show how my work in selecting, editing, and framing, was then produced.

6.2.2 The Landscape of Visual Methods in Social Enquiry

A mantelpiece is only a picture. It's a piece of art that you look at.
(Michael)

The practice of photoelicitation has been used extensively by sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists to enrich informants' responses (Banks 2001; Loisoz 2000; Ball and Smith 1992), to distance them from their everyday life (Banish 1976) or in a cumulative manner, combined with replayed recordings of an initial interview (Heisley and Levi 1991). Also, photographs can provide a check on findings (Becker 1991), allowing informants to interpret and adapt their verbal accounts. As Pink (2003) and Ruby (2005) point out, collaborating with informants was already being done by Bateson and Mead (1942), and Pink emphasises the need for an awareness of the historical context of current visual anthropology by other disciplines: it is not a new method, and has a long history both of practice and debate. Photographs are not just simple tools for eliciting interviewees' responses, although, as I found with the questionnaire sketches, a picture can be a practical starting point for discussion.

Hunt (1995) gave informants cameras to photograph significant objects and spaces in the home, and the photographs then took the role as prompts for an interview (see also Woodward 2001). A more radical example of using auto-visual material to elicit interview responses is that of Marcus (1995), who asked participants in her research into the home as a reflection of the self to draw their houses and talk to the pictures. In another novel use of visual methods, Duneier (1991) writes how his work as a participant-observer street vendor in New York was affected by Ovie Carter, a professional photojournalist. What had started as an intent 'to illustrate the things I was writing about' changed because 'Ovie's photographs helped me to see things I had not noticed, so that my work has now been influenced by his' (Duneier 1991: 12). This comment highlights the way in which a snapshot is not a simple freezing of time, since it enables a re-view, and consequently a re-interpretation of the photographed thing. The photograph thence becomes a material of research in its own right. Harrison argued for a more central role for visual imagery and methods in both research training and practice, attributing its liminal position to Mead's interpretation

of the visual as problematic in 'disciplines of words' and also by the positivist slant that saw photographic data as value-laden and subject to selectivity and subjective 'fallibility' (1996: 76). For example, work by Riis (1971 [1890]) was clearly to disseminate the 'truth' about poverty, but this type of photo-sociology was inevitably linked with sensationalist photo-journalism and government propaganda techniques.

A century away from Riis' study, which did its work in shocking the American public and assisting in housing law reform, the photograph cannot be viewed only as a representative transparent medium, but as an artful object that contributes to the aesthetics and meanings of a sociological text. As I mentioned in the last chapter, Pink (2004) argues cogently for the combination of interview accounts and visual data when exploring the home, as this can help to convey the 'pluri-sensory' aspects of home. I knew that photographs were essential to my data collection, since I wanted them not only as *aide-memoires* when analysing interview accounts, but also to add their 'multivocality' to the final text, rather than being 'mere illustration' (Banks 2001: 144; also Pink 2004). Any photograph that I chose to take, like the mantelpieces themselves, would be 'multiply embedded', as are the 'many visual forms that sociologists and anthropologists deal with' (Banks 2001: 79). They would be open to multiple interpretations, since 'internal narrative' could be constructed within their frames, as well as advancing the argument of the text (Banks 2001: 114).

Visual data have been collected in social research of domestic space and material culture of the home (see edited collections by Miller 2001; Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuniga 1999; Cieraad 1999; also Woodward 2001). Of particular relevance to this project were two recent research projects into art and the home (Halle 1993; Painter 2002). Halle's study of art and class in the American home invites photographs as illustration to the text, as does Painter's edited collection on the 'At Home with Art Project' (2002). This turns not only art into photographic subjects, but also other elements of the project - the purchasers, the developers of the project, the places in the home where the art was placed, and also other objects of art or design, such as the Krupps coffee pot, Gormley's statues, elements of the 'Household Choices' project and so on, to pull together into a coherent topic, 'Contemporary Art in the Home'. Although an edited collection, this overall topic seems to lend a resonance and coherence that 'makes sense of' the photographic

plates. Nevertheless, this is a reminder that final productions flatten out the processes and conditions of their making, just as the static, neat tableau of the mantelpiece can, in a moment, fool the visitor into viewing this condition as permanent and unproblematic.

A recent review of visual anthropology argues that viewing the 'visible and pictorial worlds as social processes [...] provides a perspective lacking in other theories' (Ruby 2005: 165). Audiovisual technologies can record visual culture, based on epistemology that 'culture is manifested through visual symbols embedded in gestures, ceremonies, rituals and artefacts situated in constructed and natural environments' (Ruby 2005: 165). Like Pink (2003), Ruby therefore criticises naïve approaches to the production of ethnographic film. Pink also argues that, 'reflexivity should be integrated fully into processes of fieldwork and visual or written representation in ways that do not simply explain the researcher's approach but reveal the very processes by which the positionality of researcher and informant were constituted and through which knowledge was produced during the fieldwork'(Pink 2002: 189).

In addition, data collection involves the use of instruments which similarly affect processes of knowledge production (Michael 2004), as well as considerations of self-presentation (Goffman 1959; Coffey 1999). I did not use a video camera in the interviews, precisely because, at the time, I considered the presence of the camera would disrupt the interview talk, and that my lack of technical knowledge might indeed result in no data collection at all. I also wanted to see how my photographs and the informants' photographs might differ, in terms of framing and the literal position from which the snapshots were taken. Despite this difference in technique, it seemed important to practise a similar reflexivity and awareness, particularly because of the seductive ordinariness of taking domestic snapshots.

The use of photographs as illustration of the domestic interior in academic texts seems almost too natural, precisely because photographs are 'domestic emblems'. Yet Chalfen (2002) makes a useful distinction between the problematic of home media such as photographs, where the focus is on product rather than process, choosing to view photographs as a type of 'data base', thus distinguishing it from the problematic

of visual anthropology, which is about process, and the problems of viewing visual anthropological products as 'evidence'. I found that informants did problematise the display of the product, such as Karen's 'empty frame', discussed in the last chapter. However, my current intent is to focus on the 'crisis of representation' (Atkinson 1990), and the problem of integrating, conjoining - 'marrying' (in some awkward pastiche of the wedding photo on the mantelpiece) - verbal accounts and written analyses with visual materials. It seems ridiculous to elucidate visual meaning with words: consider the tale of the pianist who, when asked what a piece of music 'meant', played it again.

In this chapter, I shall discuss principally the photographs I took at the time of the interview and the photographs informants took in the following year. Their questionnaire sketches also deserve fuller consideration, since these were, in a way, the most personal of all the data I collected, carefully drawn or hastily scribbled, inside or transgressing the limits of the box provided. Due to limitation of the thesis, these are not discussed in detail here, but deserve close scrutiny in the future. Despite my argument that they are of a different visual 'order', they are, of course, presented in the thesis just like the photographs: on plates in the text and in a CD-Rom and website for the reader to view!

6.3 Part Two: Visual Practice

6.3.1 A Snapshot on Method

As a brief reminder of Chapter Four's discussion: I took photographs of the mantelpiece or other display spaces informants discussed using a simple camera. These were stored digitally and on paper, as were the sketches that informants had drawn in their questionnaires. Half the interviewees had mantelpieces, and half did not, but chose other display spaces in their homes. I gave disposable cameras to the people who had mantelpieces, and they took photographs at fortnightly intervals of the mantelpieces over a twelve-month period. One year later, I contacted the photographers and visited them to pick up the cameras and hold a short interview with

them, to find out the effects of photographing their mantelpieces, and whether the methods might have been improved.

The decision to give informants cameras for a twelve-month period following the initial interview and photographs was motivated by a desire to avoid 'swooping god-like into other people's lives and gathering data (including visual 'data') according to a pre-determined theoretical agenda...[which]...strikes me not simply as morally dubious but intellectually flawed' (Banks 2001: 179). Of course, a study of people's mantelpieces is not fraught with the same moral and ethical dilemmas as ethnographic studies of child prostitutes or bull-fighting (Pink 2001), but the research is about people's homes and lived experience in their homes, a space which is still considered a private, emotionally charged place of negotiation and conflict (see, for example, Chapman and Hockey's edited collection 1999). Also, Loizos, suggests that, for example, regular photos of room contents can be 'revelatory' as an historical document (2000: 96), and that it is important to note absence and presence in the visual record (ibid.: 101). Thus, in the belief that autophotography would be more appropriate to the research agenda, which concerns material culture produced, performed and consumed on the mantelpiece, I literally handed over the mechanics of the research process to the participants, by giving all of them disposable cameras to take fortnightly photographs of their mantelpiece displays. This was intended to illuminate the timed aspect of domestic cultural displays, their rhythms and tempos (Adam 1995) and also, in a spirit of curiosity, to see what would happen when informants were given cameras.

I visited the photographers a year later and conducted a brief interview, which has not been used in this thesis. Of the 16 who had originally taken part in the photographic study, two had dropped out and did not reply to phone, email and letter messages. But 'leaving the field' was difficult (for discussion see Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Coffey 1999). After one year, I wanted to know more, how the mantelpieces changed over a decade, and how the families changed. One family had got a new puppy, which had changed the make-up of the living room. Another had updated photographs of his young daughter on the mantelpiece: when she would be a teenager, would the 'baby' photos still be there?

The short interviews I held with the photographers were useful, as I found out the effects of taking the photographs on their perceptions of their own and other people's mantelpieces. I also wanted to know what time of day they took the photographs, from what angle in the living room, who took the photographs and whether they changed the mantelpiece at all prior to photographing it. For future research projects, I also discovered what they thought about my method of reminding them fortnightly by e-mail or telephone message. All of them found this an effective reminder mechanism. Some had found the cameras difficult to use, resulting in unlit shadow pictures; others had been meticulous in taking the shots at a particular time of day and always from the same angle. Several had a designated place for the camera to keep it safe from daily household activities, and one male informant had rejected the disposable camera in favour of using his new digital camera; this meant that his photographs are in digital, not material form. The disposable cameras were developed and the photographs stored both materially and digitally, as were my photographs taken during the interview, as recommended by Loizos (2000). I shall now discuss in detail the processes of producing photographs, for final display in the thesis. The principal focus will be on the photographs I took at the time of the interview, due, as ever, to the constraints of time and space.

6.3.2 Process

I guess we don't sit around chatting about it, or looking at it, or looking at things on it – it's just there. But in terms of design, in the sense of how this little bit of the room is organised, I guess it is a focal point. Well, it competes with the TV. But, I'm not sure.
(Karen)

The initial quality of the photographs I took in the interviews was contingent upon the quality of the camera and the photographer; there were no masterpieces in the original productions. Also, crucially, many of the photographs had to be taken at an angle to the fireplace, since the size of the rooms and positioning of furniture often did not allow direct shots. This oblique perspective affected interpretation, as did the decision of how much context should surround the mantelpiece in the finished product. In addition, there were no original close ups of individual objects. This was

because the initial intention was to consider the mantelpiece display as a single entity, rather than pulling objects out of context.

The mantelpiece, according to all informants, was the focal point when entering the room. However, everyday functions of the living room (when not being used as an interview room!) meant that sofas, televisions and coffee tables tended to get in the way of straightforward camera angles. Paradoxically, not arranging the room for a photo-shoot, as a magazine photographer might do for public consumption, lest the ordinary domestic aspect be lost, resulted in many oblique images. These hinted at artistic preciousness, or attempts to elicit plodding 'Meaning' from the inane. Informants might not deliberately have placed the clock in the centre of the mantelpiece, or left dead flowers on it, yet interpretations of such presentations are inevitable. Similarly, these incidental, contingent perspectives became the subject of interpretative speculation once they were translated into material objects as photographs.

The mundane practices of domestic life had, paradoxically, resulted in an obliqueness that estranged the everyday. This highlighted the interactive character of the relationship between everyday routine activities and the domestic aesthetic, and specifically how this was manifested in material culture of the home, the physical geography of the house and the ordering of space. This forced a reconsideration of the normal and normative practices of ordering domestic space, in the same way, perhaps, that the formal structure of the mantelpiece can lend apparently unintended prominence to certain objects. Thus, everyday practice, and its attendant props (the sofa, the coffee table and the television), can be seen as agents in the aesthetics of home: the focal point of the mantelpiece display, and my photographic productions. Meanwhile, my initial judgments of the meaning of these displays as manifestations of taste, cultural and social capital, lifecourse and social relations within the household were challenged by the accounts given by the producers of these displays. People told different stories about the same things (such as clocks), and the same stories about different things (such as collections of model hedgehogs and cuddly sheep!). Initial categorisations of individuals by means of their domestic material cultures opened up to different interpretations when amplified by their accounts of objects and displays.

6.3.3 Selection

If I dismantled something and was meaning to reassemble it, I might chuck the pieces up on the mantelpiece while I left it in pieces... I would use it at least with the intention that it should be a temporary storage place...Even though in the nature of things... temporary might slide into the long term.
(Adrian)

The photographs were not intended to be works of art; taken in a hurry, they were a prelude to the 'real work' of the interview. Thus, it was not until they were mounted on corkboards and stored as computer images that I began to consider them as aesthetic objects detached from the oral narratives given during the interview, and as a distinct collection. The process of arranging them on the boards for viewing was striking in its similarity to the action of arranging a mantelpiece. For many of the people I interviewed, the arrangement had been cumulative, or had been done so long ago that it was forgotten. However, two of the female informants had made it a priority following recent house moves, considering the practice of ornamenting the mantelpiece with their objects as a vital constituent of making their 'mark', of personalising space. By arranging the photographs on corkboards, specially purchased for the purpose, I was performing a similar act of appropriation. The practice also demonstrated what many informants had spoken of: the problem of things, in that they necessarily demand space. This ordering of domestic space, and the imperative to supply appropriate display areas for aesthetic objects shows how objects can be actively constitutive of identity production in the home (see Knappett 2002 for a recent discussion of this debate).

There was no room for all the photographs on the boards, but no room for putting up another board in the house. This seemingly simple act of sticking the photographs to the two boards became heavy with meaning, and I could not view it as a random selection process. Those selected to go back in the box took with them 'trajectories of knowledge' (Strathern 1999), which might be lost permanently. Those that remained had to be categorised and ordered, yet chance juxtaposition or central placing would alter any interpretation. Eventually, common sense prevailed, and they were arranged for the best fit in the limited space. It occurred to me that the chance groupings on

informants' mantelpieces could be transformed, like this arrangement, into highly symbolic arrangements, and subsequently into typologies that were entirely detached from original intent or function. Furthermore, the interviews were, like these photographs, only a snapshot of the process of domestic life. An entirely contrasting interview interaction, another mantelpiece display of fresh flowers, unposted letters or new birthday cards and a different photograph might be the materials of social enquiry on another day. The effects of time in interpretive practice then came to prominence.

The question of authenticity, which came up repeatedly in the interviews, applied as much to the corkboard museum of people's domestic displays, as to those displays themselves, and the narratives which contribute to the construction of meaning. The occasion of the interview could become an event at which individuals chronicle their histories by means of these props on their mantelpieces. The occasion encouraged embellishment, raising ordinary things, to the status of museum objects commemorating the rituals of the everyday. As many informants said, they had not thought much about this focal point, as they called it, until I brought it to mind. Its presence was important for many only as an absence of absence; it formed a comforting background to their domestic lives. Thus, the narratives were framed by the interview and the displays by the photographs, now sliced from their domestic framework to be reconstructed as a photographic gallery.

6.3.4 Editing

> It's certainly not a display area, it's just another shelf... You can always make another display area if you really had to... It's just that this is so unattractive, it hasn't been developed.
> (Gina)

As the photographs became productions in their own right, they invited speculative editing. The ease of computer editing permitted repeated changes. Complicating this technological process however, were the meanings attached by participants to certain possessions, which at first appeared to compete with my interpretations, including aesthetic considerations, for centre ground. The participants are omitted from the photographs, yet their presence is felt, as is mine, by chance reflections in the mirror

or television screen. Both the editing process and eventual appearance in print raise questions about framing. Judicious editing and a good frame can conjure masterpieces from dross, yet meanings can be lost if a picture is edited and framed carelessly. The final product can be seen as an album; like the mantelpiece itself, it is questionable whether it is truly as representative or symbolic as this neat collection pretends.

The photographs displaced what they displayed from the social, domestic context in which once they dwelt. They become 'matter out of place', and thus subject to interpretative reordering (Douglas 1966). Despite the embodied character of the interviewing process, in which my bodily presence was such a concern (Coffey, 1999), and in which both protagonists performed a number of roles (Holstein and Gubrium 1995), little of the human remained in these stills from the interview. There are no people in the photograph, even though one knows they are there. The participant, once the focus of the interview (the objects on the mantelpiece our props), has disappeared. Occasionally, a foot appears in the corner of the picture. This disturbs the aesthetic integrity of these perfect display shelves, and so in the editing process, the limbs are sliced out. It is an easy procedure, since they are in the lower corners of the photograph.

Rather more difficult to discard are the reflections of the flash in the mirrors above the mantelpiece. I cannot forget that I was there, that an interview took place between one or two people and me, that the photograph captures a moment in my life, and theirs. And yet, time has passed since that moment, and the photographs now inhabit elsewhere, plucked from their original homes. Edited and framed intelligently, the depictions are transformed into museum pieces commemorating 'Domestic Material Culture' and 'Past Lives'.

Again, an analogy can be seen between the photographic collection and the domestic mantelpieces. However, in order to present a coherent display, any interpretation that proffers the photographs as perfect pieces of modern history is superficial. The people remain in the picture, possessors still of these silent images. In the reflection of a mirror, or a television screen, darkly, the shadows remain, daring me to ignore their presences. It remains a negotiation between them and me, for space and voice,

for authenticating ownership of these images. And yet, these ghosts, like the obliqueness and odd diagonals of some photographs remind me of something else, a duty to commit them to memory, just as informants have memorialised so many in the things on the mantelpiece. The ones some commemorate are already dead; others are mindful of their children, speaking of the need to clear the clutter to avoid *post mortem* problems for their offspring.

The photographs now, rather than the material mantelpieces, have become the focal point of the final explanation, fixed in these straight lines of text far removed from the wandering, elusive processes that constitute the mantelpiece display and the interview. Several layers are sedimented upon these two original actions, which once were separate, but are now conjoined in this textual 'marriage'. In an ideal world, the explanation offered for why and how people put these miniature displays on show on their mantelpieces would be a production whose writers would have equal billing – them and me.

But they will always be 'the others', whose ideas are given credit, but whose voices sink to the whispers of ghosts as the material sinks down into the past. The evidence that remains has removed their autonomy, as it seems that their mantelpiece displays did not exist prior to the interviews, which brought them into being by putting them on show to the outside. As time goes on, the fleshly bodies that produced the interviews are fossilised into flat black text, their productions crushed into the perfect frame of the edited photograph.

Thus, at a remove of only a few months, it is my turn to reconstruct narratives and images of the people and places that, in their turn, committed to memory places and people from the past – sometimes a very recent past. The question is how to produce a thesis which frames all these times, places and people; neither a grotesque chimera, which shows all too literally the creatures from which it is made, nor a smoothly rendered piece of art that conceals the processes and relations of its production.

6.3.5 Presentation

*You go to other people's houses, don't you, and you just get an impression,
"That's what goes on a mantelpiece". That's just the kind of stuff people keep
there.... You wouldn't put a saucepan up there, would you? It would be
inappropriate. And it's kind of half storage, half display.*
(Bronwen)

Mantelpieces are joint efforts, even though the final displays might be the act of one person, usually (in this project) a woman. Indeed, the negotiation and contestation of space resonated through many of the narratives, as women spoke of the desire to preserve the mantelpiece as a tidy place, undisturbed by the ephemeral clutter of the husbands and children. Nevertheless, many mantelpieces are about families, human relations and human histories. The material objects are often gifts, remembrances of other people and past times, or souvenirs of other places and different lives. The seemingly simple act of taking a photograph at the interview exerted a curious change over these creations, which are very much present in the here and now for the people who took part in this project. Yet, that in a way is irrelevant to me; each photograph is now transformed to a remembrance of times past, an hour or two in another house, a reproduction of something that is not present in my life. The pictures are more than straight representations, for the slant of memory now twists these photographs into nostalgic visions (see Rybczynski 1986). The mundane, manipulated by the passage of time, and the aesthetic dignity lent by a photograph, is newly framed by memory.

The danger with mantelpiece displays themselves, is the temptation this structure offers to aestheticise the past; that proscenium arch of the fire surround writes a narrative which might be lost in the random scattering of objects. As one informant said, 'I talk, and you can create a narrative out of it'. Not only he and I, but also the apparent coherence of the mantelpiece, are participants in the co-construction of meaning. An awful symmetry is already imposed by the cultural inheritance of the mantelpiece display. As my earlier discussion of mantelpiece displays in 1937 shows (Mass-Observation 1937), this cultural memory was once a lived experience of hearth and home. Some informants consciously reject this convention, deliberately leaving a blank space in the centre or choosing not to have a mantelpiece. Many remember the dirt and work that a coal fire involved – the fire which was once the domestic

necessity that the mantelpiece framed. Others celebrate the traditional frame, establishing a clock, twinned candlesticks and so on – but without the fire. The authenticity of the mantelpiece itself is in question, as its function transforms from a frame for the fire, to a decorative monument. It is, in a sense, an aestheticised and cleansed memory of domestic past.

And so, the material that remains is three-dimensional, in a way: their narratives, my narrative, and the photographs. The question is how to avoid flattening this to the framed black text. I am fraught by the nostalgia of these delicate pictures, informants by the opportunity an interview gives for a coherent, yet possibly false remembrance of these mantelpiece tableaux. Remembrance is an odd word, for it applies both to the things themselves, and the act of remembering. Whilst the things do not change, the act is modified by time and people passing, and events, such as interviews or the taking of photographs.

Mantelpiece displays are specifically visual productions: some look very nice, whilst others are a terrible mess of papers and photos and bowls of screws. Ongoing lives are present in the oddments, between the gaps of the permanent or ideal display: the wedding invitation, the confiscated toy, or the film awaiting development. Some informants viewed their very beautiful set pieces, perfect in symmetry, as representative of a life already lived. In the interviews, they constructed biographies around these permanent displays, which connected them with absent times, places and people. Yet these commemorations could be seen as idealised versions of the past, a neatened bricolage that occludes anything disruptive to the smooth stream of memory. The same can be said of the photographs, which begin as awkwardly angled conglomerates of the mantelpiece, the television perhaps and odd parts of feet, bookshelves and toys. These are then cut to size, to fit the frame of paper and text. The thesis somehow confers on this collection of pictures and writing an authenticity which unedited confusion of spoken words and photographs do not possess.

Similarly, as I mentioned in the last chapter, one informant spoke of the need for the 'perfect' photograph for an empty frame on the mantelpiece, and another of finding the right frame for a badly framed picture above it. A frame sets something apart, inviting another look and interpretation. The expensive frame one informant had put

around a mass-produced, cheap print set it apart from the millions like it. The frame and its place above the mantelpiece at the centre of the room, as selected by the informant, were participants in a reordering and recreation of an object from the common to the unique.

6.4 Framing

'Framelessness is itself a frame'
(Phillips 1997: 208)

Therefore, I was left with the question of how to present visual materials in the final thesis as a part of the whole: attached, having an effect, and affected by immediate textual context and wider networks of cultural assumptions. Just as the mantelpiece appears as neat linear display, hinting at the both temporal linearity of narrative accounts, and a 'hard-set' fixed form (see Douglas 1966: 163), the written part of the text took on the appearance of a tidy account, despite the fact that its production had been a process more akin to making a garden (Munro 2002): disrupted, affected by the weather, and involving pruning, planting and removal. Winstanley (2000) incorporated small pictorial and photographic parts of her doctoral thesis within the body of the text; this had an effect of integrating, at least in appearance, written and the pictured elements, and also highlights the often-ignored characteristic of text: it is a visual substance and cultural artefact. However, visual anthropology/sociology is moving more into digital and hypermediated realms; further problematising representation, presence and materiality (see Rothenbuhler and Coman 2005 for discussion; also Pink 2004; Dicks et al. 2006).

I therefore decided to reflect process and product, aesthetic displacement and social attachment by mediating the visual data in three ways:

- First, the immediate impact on the reader is made by the visual plates flanking and sitting in-between chapters. They are uncaptioned. In a similar way, as I shall discuss in Chapter Eight, the mantelpiece is important in the geography of home, in that it is often the first vision of the house interior a visitor (stepping beyond the porch/hall) will see. Guests do not expect a verbal

explanation of the mantelpiece display, but will make their own interpretations according to internalised cultural categories (Bourdieu 1977). Yet, they are also 'gaps' between the textual artefacts, in that they are not made visible in the verbal account. As such, they are like the 'gaps' I asked informants about during interviews in Cardiff and noted when reading the Mass-Observation Reports. Whereas the vases, candlesticks, photographs and mirrors had narratives - often biographical accounts constructed around them by informants - the things in the gaps were of a different order, 'intruders' (1937 Schoolboy), temporarily displaced from their proper homes, such as toe-nail clippers, letters for the post, or an undeveloped film. Yet, although they were matters 'out of place', they were still part of the display at the time I viewed them, but left unmentioned until I asked for an account. And so these 'plates' sit between, waiting, perhaps, for their proper place, but viewable; uncaptioned, but with the possibility of being called to account at another time. They are part of my display, selected, edited, framed, but not so surely placed as their more conventionally exhibited counterpart, the neat black academic robes of the text. They also disturb the textual account, throwing a different light upon how to order things: visual and verbal ways of knowing are not always complicit, but conflict or transgress boundaries that might be taken-for-granted in one mode, but strange in another.

- The second mode of visual framing is an embedding within the Supplement. As such, these photographs and interview sketches are attached to informants' questionnaire responses placing themselves geographically, in social space, and situating their 'mantelpieces' in their homes, childhood memories and in the frame of the questionnaire sketch. In placing the interview photographs with their 'informants', I must remove them from a specifically visual category of data.

- The third mode of presentation is that of digital photo-galleries, on a CD-Rom appendix to the thesis, and on the website www.postmodernisnt.co.uk. The photographs that I took and those taken by informants, together with their questionnaire sketches, are all presented, unedited, in a CD-Rom at the back of

the thesis. This allows me to do what a simple paper presentation would not have done: show readers all visual data in its imperfect, poorly-angled, badly-drawn, shadowy, unflashy form, in contrast to the montages, collections and singular, perfected displays in the 'gaps' of the thesis text. However, these galleries also have an aesthetic value, as dematerialised 'albums' to be viewed onscreen. The collection of year-long photo-studies emphasise the constancy and change of mantelpiece displays over a period of time, changing interpretations of interview accounts and photographs and embedding the informants' mantelpieces in a temporality that is not just memory or biography, but a 'mantelpiece year', a diary of *a* mantelpiece and of *the* mantelpiece.

6.5 Conclusion

'Life may not be an imitation of art, but ordinary conduct, in a sense, is an imitation of the properties, a gesture at the exemplary forms, and the primal realization of these ideals belongs more to make-believe than to reality.'
Goffman (1986 [1974]: 562)

The recent 'material turn' in social research recognises that 'objects, technologies and material environments are simultaneously material, cultural and social' (Haldrup and Larsen 2004). Rather than ascribe affectivity to objects as a theoretical postscript, a 'genealogical ethnographic approach' (Borgerson and Rehn 2003) can bridge the perceived gap between immaterial and material, theory and everyday practice. This reconnection of objects and subjects is evident, for example, in Miller's extensive studies and reviews of material culture and consumption (for example, 1998, 2001). Similarly, recent discussions in visual methods have recalled the photograph from abstract image to framed materials of social and cultural interaction (for example, Edwards 2002). This study of mantelpiece displays has brought into focus the relationship between material culture as everyday practices, contingencies, and interactions, and research into and of material culture. The process and materials of the fieldwork, analysis and presentation must engage with the similar processes and materials that were its focus, in a way that does not freeze-frame the relationship as a neat snapshot.

The presentation of text and photographs can also present the common materials of everyday domestic life as extraordinary. This research project seeks to question the taken-for granted space of home and the culture of home. However, by acknowledging that space, cultural display and personal accounts (material, spoken and visual) are negotiated and frequently contested, it has also opened up the complex relationship between permanent ideal and the poorly arranged, unpolluted mess of life, and the problem of presenting the findings of social research. Finely edited and framed photographs might show the bones of the story of home, a pure anatomy of domestic display that any museum might show us, but the same place can tell a different tale if seen darkly through an unlit, unfocused stream of fortnightly images or clothed in the flesh of story, memory and experience. '...Framelessness is itself a frame' and in museum curatorship, there has been a recent turn 'towards explicit contextualisation' (Phillips 1997: 208), directing the viewer just as Benjamin (1999 [1955]) had noted of photographic captions.

Also, as Berger (1972) shows, a caption can utterly change the way in which a picture is perceived. And so, my particular artfully disordered collection of 'family albums', or albums of families, are other prisms, just like the perfectly presented symmetry of ordered themes, tidy frames and neat conclusion of the dissertational text. They are other frames, presentational genres (Atkinson 1990), just as the mantelpieces I photographed were a particular rendering on a particular day of the 'focal point' of the living room. Yet this can be seen as a part in a wider comment on how people organize experience, mediated through various frames of materials displayed in their homes and the narrative accounts they construct around these displays, when prompted by an interviewer. It is clear that both material displays and narrative accounts are not direct experience, but mediated accounts - visual and verbal – and as such, cultural practices.

In summary, I discussed the relationship between accounts constructed around objects and the co-construction of moral identities during interviews in Chapter Five. I concluded that discussion by commenting on the added dimension to analysis that the collection and presentation of visual data would bring to the project. Yet I would argue that, just as visual and narrative versions of data analysis add richness to the interpretation, so visual/material artefacts and narrative/biographical accounts are all

materials with which informants build versions of mediated experience. These are all social materials, within which the material culture of the home is one category. The narrative accounts I used could all be seen as drawing on the '...moral traditions of the community...' (Goffman 1986 [1974]: 562), just as mantelpieces and their displays are iconic or mythic in British culture. Further than that, if we follow Goffman's view, 'everyday life, real enough in itself, often seems to be a laminated adumbration of a pattern or model that is itself a typification of quite uncertain realm status' (ibid.).

It is not my intent here to explore further the uncertainty of this (possibly) 'ideal' realm. I wish, rather, to emphasise the point that the problem of framing visual data within the conventions of a doctoral thesis can be perceived as one of authenticity, interpretation and authorial power. However, I argue that the problem is of a different order, relating to the framing of experience by individual members by means of various types of social materials and techniques. Thus, while photographs can be viewed as second-order representations of particular mantelpiece displays, they can also be taken as non-verbal, non-textual frames of experience. The photographs I took at the time of the interview are other materials which texture the interview interaction. The sketches made by questionnaire participants are another 'take' on the time spent filling in the written answers. The photographs they took over the twelve-month period of the longitudinal study are silent framings of the moment they spent holding up the cameras, getting the angle they wanted, hoping the light was right.

After a series of processes that these materials underwent, they have undergone a certain transubstantiation. They are now parts of something else: a bound thesis, a virtual gallery, and/or an appended *Supplement* and without going back and back (or so it is meant to seem), as Goffman does in his introduction to 'Frame Analysis' (1986 [1974]: 16-20), that is how they will stay, for now. As can be seen, I have chosen to organise some into certain orders on the page, to offer different interpretations. Others, however, are purposefully disordered splatterings across the page, or poorly cut and coloured, like a bad hairdresser. But the viewer will doubtless find meanings in them. Nevertheless, in showing the inter-relatedness of social interactions, of domestic space, objects and narratives, and of photographic and spoken accounts, I hope to present something of the complexity both of home lives

and of enquiry into the domestic interior. We have seen how a multi-modal approach to research design, data collection and interpretation can illuminate the substantive topic from different angles. The Mass-Observation Archive had its effects upon the design of the research, while narrative analysis offered a way in to the 'embarrassment of riches' (Spradley 1979) that the data offered. A look at visual data has shown how this aspect of methodology and of the mantelpiece can link in to a multi-modal method of presentation.

The mundane practices of domestic life had, paradoxically, resulted in an obliqueness that estranged the everyday: the furniture got in the way of 'straight-on' shots, and informants, busy with life, might not have time to take well-managed snapshots in good light. This highlighted the interactive character of the relationship between everyday routine activities and the domestic aesthetic, and specifically how this was manifested in material culture of the home, the physical geography of the house and the ordering of space. This forced a reconsideration of the normal and normative practices of ordering domestic space, in the same way, perhaps, that the formal structure of the mantelpiece can lend apparently unintended prominence to certain objects. The photographs displaced what they displayed from the social, domestic context in which once they dwelt. They became 'matter out of place', and thus subject to interpretative reordering (Douglas 1966). Initial categorisations of individuals produced by the *sight* of domestic display sites opened up to different interpretations when accounts of objects and displays, often based on memory, disturbed that visual judgment. A gap has opened up between the visual and the spoken. This gap relates to the way in which artefacts are ordered, accounted for and viewed.

In making the website, I have also enabled possible future participation by informants. This is currently password-protected, as it must remain attached to the doctoral research for ethical reasons. However, I intend to contact informants to request that the site is made available to all of them, enabling them to view their own mantelpiece 'year', sketches and interview photographs in the context, not of their own living rooms, but in a gallery of other mantelpiece images. This will extend the methodological and substantive contributions of the study and requires further consideration beyond the scope of this thesis.

Further, mantelpiece displays can be viewed from several different time perspectives. They can relate to the mantelpiece as cultural history, personal biographies, memories, memorials, family histories, the period of the house, or ongoing family lives. They have historicity, temporality. Some have become what they are now over a period of time, an accretion that can be excavated. Others were formed some time ago and remain static, whilst others change only when punctuated by ritual, social, and/or family events, such as birthdays, Christmases, births and death, or with the turn of the seasons (nature still has its place in the culture of home – as seen on TV, in magazine coverage, in vases and plant pots). On some displays, the 'usual' artefacts are removed for seasonal changes or event markers such as birthday cards and gifts. On others, the permanent display is augmented, rather than replaced by incoming or temporary objects. Narratives and photographs are good methods instruments, therefore, since they present us with a 'snapshot', as seen at the time of the interview, a year-long 'album' and the narrative, which gives a different view of the display and its extensions into various time perspectives. Having looked at the data 'up close' methodologically, I shall now consider findings from interview accounts constructed around the notion of memory, its effects on mantelpiece 'time' and as an ordering device for narrative and display.

Chapter Seven - Mantelpiece as Monument:

Memory as Practice

Chapter Seven - Mantelpiece as Monument: Memory as Practice

7.1 Introduction: from 'Method' to 'Themes'

We have seen how organising accounts and artefacts in different orders and modes of presentation can change the view we have of those. Since photographs and narrative/biographic accounts are artefactual, it is possible to view the methods of social life and of social enquiry as partially connected, although not entirely homologous (see Bourdieu 1977; Strathern 1991). Both methods of showing and telling are familiar, but placing them in juxtaposition, or viewing them as symmetrical or asymmetrical practices, in a 'hierarchy' of text and image, collecting similarities or highlighting difference or favouring articulacy and aesthetically-pleasing contents and frames for knowledge will alter interpretation. Practices of showing, telling and knowing in turn can be displaced, estranged, removed, augmented or diminished according to ordering and categorisation. None of these practices could be called unique or idiomatic, although the particular finished artefact can be appropriated and made singular. It is unlikely that this thesis or informants' mantelpieces are identical to any other cultural good, even if the process is culturally embedded. This embedding is dependent on remembering past practice, and as such, 'remembering' is not just personal but social and dependent upon a legacy of practice.

In this chapter, I shall explore how memory can be viewed both as substance and as practice. The theme of memory was dominant in interview accounts, and this fitted in with narrative methods, the idea that things have biographies and social lives, rather than being commodities or purely aesthetic signifiers, and that practice has genealogy (Bourdieu 1977; Appadurai 1986a; Kopytoff 1986). The first section discusses informants' childhood memories, distinguishing age-related differences, followed by a second section considering the effects that the 'substance' of memory has had on current practice on the present mantelpiece. In the next chapter, I pursue the theme of spatial, object and family relations, to bring together the temporal, spatialised, material and social networks in which the mantelpiece and its display are entangled.

The absence of a coal or wood fire in the home is very recent; the use of kitchen ranges and living room fires is still within the bounds of living people's memories, as this chapter shows. The children I spoke to, although they were not bothered about a mantelpiece, thought they would 'probably' have one. I shall argue how it has become a liminal and compressed space, dependent to some extent upon past practice and memory, rather than any current use-value. Note that many, although not all, of the memories recalled are of 'mother's' or 'grandmother's' mantelpiece. Men are mentioned, but do not dominate the space. This makes sense if we recall that women were traditionally in the home and did the work of cooking, washing and cleaning that would coalesce around the fire.

The oldest informant was 81 (Norah), and she had clear memories of her grandmother's cooking range in the 1920s. Likewise, other informants in their seventies and sixties remembered mantelpieces in their grandmothers' houses in the 1930s and 1940s. But these women, their grandmothers, were Victorians; their mantelpieces were the same, in their functions, as their mothers' and grandmothers' before them. As Michael comments, mantelpieces were different then, because they were useful. I will discuss his comments in more detail later, but it is important not to forget that, until the 1950s, very few houses were heated in any way other than coal fires. Although central heating and electric or gas fires had been available since the early 1800s (Aslet and Powers 1985), lack of money and an emotional attachment to open fires had maintained the primacy of the cooking range and coal fires after they were technologically obsolescent (Mass-Observation 1943; Ravetz and Turkington 1995). It is worth considering whether this emotional attachment is what has kept mantelpieces, hangovers from past practice, in existence. However, at this point, memory is the focus, and the way in which it contributes towards the interpretation of domestic space. For centuries – not just in the memories of older informants – mantelpieces were a constituent of the fire, necessary for cooking, heating and washing. I shall discuss the known history of the mantelpiece in Chapter Ten. For now, we shall concentrate on informants' memories.

7.2 Informants' Accounts

The use of rooms in the traditional British terraced house has changed, due to changing technology and practices. Professionals such as doctors and solicitors rarely make home visits now. The front room was extremely formal and used rarely, for visitors – it was the 'parlour' that was kept for best. There was the kitchen, in which the range provided heat for cooking, washing clothes and people. Due to the lack of central heating, this might be the only heated room in the house. Bedroom fires were lit only if someone was ill, and so it could be said that home life – centred around the heat source – was more communal due to a pragmatic desire to keep warm – in the colder months, at least. Children did not spend time in their bedrooms in the same way that children do now. No one I interviewed in these types of houses kept a room for 'best', although Norah, who lived alone, used her large front room only when she had several visitors. The 'kitchen', now that the ranges have gone, is another sitting room, and the very small back 'kitchenette' as it was known, was the kitchen with gas ovens, fridges and so on. People who live in terraced houses no longer keep a 'parlour', suggesting that the social convention of paying house visits is no longer a formal occasion. These types of houses are now ordered in many different ways, but that strict demarcation of domestic space, and the mantelpieces, is no longer practised. Many people who talked to me had only one living room and one mantelpiece, as they lived in modern houses, such as informants from Radyr Gardens.

The types of memories that I am going to discuss can be seen as belonging to three categories. First, there are those older informants whose memories can be heard echoing the Mass-Observation reports from 1937. Second, there are people in their forties and fifties who were children at the time when open coal and wood fires were being replaced by electric, gas or oil heating in the form of fires or radiators. Third, there are younger informants who might have grown up with a fireplace in the family home, as they became desirable (albeit usually unnecessary) once central heating had become an almost universal good. The memories also fall into another order of remembrance, in that some are materially reproduced in the homes I visited, or continue to be 'visited' in the parental home. Others might be constructed around particular ornaments, whereas some were memories recalled from childhood, or from

that 'social memory' (Bourdieu 1977) that is not attached to lived experience. Harriet, for example, had not grown up in a house with a mantelpiece, but had a pine shelf behind the sofa that was her mantelpiece. Her aunt had called it an 'altar', but Harriet saw it as: '...just a traditional thing and pictures and things that go over the mantelpiece'.

7.3 An Older Generation: Memories, Mothers and Father's Old Timepiece

Not all of the older informants had clear memories of what was on the mantelpiece. The fire was the focus of their memories and the activities that the fire demanded and enabled, such as building the fire and their mother's cooking. Some of them had half-assumed memories - assumed in the sense that they were shrugged on like the clothes that are always worn and rarely thought about. Several of them pointed out that it was not something they would ever have thought about, were it not for my questionnaire and interview. In this section, I shall principally discuss five informants' accounts. They are aged between 68 and 81, and therefore have childhood memories that range between the 1920s and 1940s.

7.3.1 Eric and His Father's Retirement Clock

Eric has memories of three mantelpieces, showing how the mass of terraced housing was designed and used from the time of its construction in the late nineteenth century, to mass modernisation following the Clean Air Acts in the mid-twentieth century. He recalls being 'boiled like a lobster' in the kitchen, as the range had been heating water all day for the weekly baths. The mantelpiece in the front room was very formal and symmetrical. Additionally, the piano was in there, which the children played. Then there was the middle room, or 'sitting room', that was used in everyday life. The mantelpiece here was also quite formal and used for ornamentation. This mantelpiece is the focus for Eric's narrative about his father's clock.

> We were discouraged from putting anything up there. There was a very nice torch and clock. I don't know where my father got that, but he was very fond of it and I wasn't allowed to touch that... One day, I broke the dome that went

with it. I was really worried about this and I remember telling my mother and she sort of told me off. I think she broke the news to the old man because he would probably have went spare. They managed to buy another one after the war and I got the clock, but it's in pieces. Somehow or other, some of it got lost. I don't think I lost it, but there again, I can't put it back together. Anyway, that was on, that was decorative and it worked until I got hold of it. That was in the lounge.

This story displays many aspects of daily life that have changed, and others that have remained constant. The ownership of things and the ownership of space in the home are constant themes (as in accounts by Sian, Rosalind, Harriet and Hannah). The relationship between fathers, mothers and children and how that is manifested in the negotiation of domestic space and objects are also recurrent themes. The relations within the household are narrated in a dramatic manner; he depicts an active scene of him breaking the clock, relaying it to his mother and envisioning her telling the tale on to his father. The memory is not a tableau; also, it is ongoing in that he still has the clock. As well as inheriting the object, he has inherited the memory of a childhood transgression: the children were discouraged from touching things on the mantelpiece or adding to the display with their own things. Despite being material, this domestic cultural display is intangible; it is purely visual. The end of the story is interesting in that it could be read as an analogy for memory; Eric has inherited a working, decorative timepiece, but at some point in the past something went missing. He does not know whether it is *his* fault, or whether he can fix it.

What I would like to focus on now is the socio-historical, rather than the biographical aspect of the narrative. His father was, Eric says later, 'obsessive' about winding up the 'typical family clock', the type people 'are often given when they retire - or *then*, when they retired *then*'. No other informants had retirement clocks on the mantelpiece, and none had clocks that required winding up: Eric's 'retirement' clock was an anachronism, as, in a sense, was his memory of breaking it. Geoff's wife had a cupboard full of old clocks, as display only. Time is no longer a 'family' matter, and the clock on the mantelpiece has stopped being the keeper/teller of family-time. Nor are clocks long-held, prized markers of ritual events. As I discuss in Chapter Nine, when clocks are given as ritual gifts, they can be problematic, rather than a singular, central family good on the mantelpiece. However, many people do still use the mantelpiece clock to tell the time, despite the plethora of domestic electrical goods

with time displays. Most people have a wristwatch now, a kind of private time-keeping, and do many activities separately, rather than being at home in the sitting room/kitchen as a unit. This was exemplified when I visited informants, to have brief words with other members of the household on their way out to swimming, yoga, shopping trips and social calls. There is no longer such a thing as a 'typical family clock', and a clock can be bought for the price of a cup of coffee in Starbucks.

Eric does not have a mantelpiece currently; he took them out of his house in the 1970s, when he installed central heating. The piano top is his mantelpiece. However, he makes an important distinction between the piano top and his remembered mantelpieces – the cards would not have been on a 1940s mantelpiece for long, due to the risk of fire. This also explains other people's memories of cards and letters being propped behind more permanent objects, to keep them from falling into the fire. It does run counter to many informants' current notion of the function of a mantelpiece – using it to display cards is now a common practice for many informants.

Eric recalls his parents' kitchen mantelshelf as a space for storing objects such as knitting needles. He remembers that older men of the time – the 1940s – carried purses and so there were no loose coins on the mantelshelf. No one I interviewed had change on their mantelpieces at the time, although some did mention that they (if they were male), or their husbands (if they were female) did empty their pockets on getting home, although not onto the living room mantelpiece. Very few men carry purses now; the fashion has changed. Eric's family had a mirror above the kitchen mantelpiece, not, as he points out, for narcissism, but for it being 'handy'. This contrasts with the account I relate later of Shyam's mirror – a matter for debate in the house.

7.3.3 Norah and Her Mother's Utopia

This tale of transgression can be compared with Norah's memory of her parents' mantelpiece above the range in the kitchen, in a similarly designed terraced house in Cardiff. Her childhood memories are of the range in use in the 1920s and 1930s. On the death of her grandmother, her mother used some of the money to replace the range with a modern grate, known as a Windsor. At the same time, she decided not to

replace the old mantelpiece; her justification is revealing of the battle, without compromise, for this particular space in the house:

> He [father] would insist on –there were six candlesticks on it, you know, going up in size. Say there was two, two, two. And yes, and father would want to put things behind, so she [mother] thought she'd have him and so she didn't have it. And he didn't have any mantelpiece at all.

Rather than have her decorative space, with its symmetrical display of candlesticks, sullied by her husband's letters, Norah's mother got rid of the mantelpiece altogether. This shows how different conceptions of the same domestic place can be. She saw it as a space for ornament, he as a convenient storage shelf. It also resonates with the etymological ambiguity of 'utopia', both a 'good place' and 'no place' ('Eu-topia' and 'A-topia'). The transformation of space by the removal of the mantelpiece was a means of punishment, yet also rebounded on Norah's mother, who then had no place for her candlesticks.

For many informants and respondents to the questionnaire, both functions were and are combined, but it is noticeable how many remembered or live now with a gendered distinction as to the ordering and appropriate use of visible spaces in the house – brought into focus by talking about the mantelpiece. This also recalls some of the Mass-Observation writings about mantelpieces, and how 'Mother' was very much the manager and protector of the mantelpiece. None of the younger informants mentioned such memories of conflict and transgression, although couples did talk about current negotiations for space. For Norah, the things on one of the mantelpieces in her current house – the first since leaving her childhood home (which she inherited after the death of her parents) – are also important because of 'the memories that they hold' (my phrase in the question). In fact, her reply is concise: 'Yes, mother, mother'. However, her conception and practice regarding mantelpieces is not purely in memory of her mother, as I shall argue in the last two chapters of the thesis.

7.3.4 Diane, Derek and the Kitchen Ritual

Diane, a woman in her seventies, also remembers the kitchen mantelpiece (in a similar Cardiff terraced house) in relation to family relations and gendered practices.

What also comes across in her narrated memory is the permanence of what was on there and what activities took place. This notion of permanent displays and repeated, unchanging practices, came across in all the older people's memories. She recalls the cooking in the oven and the drying of clothes. Her husband interrupts with a reminder that 'usually', there would be rods with clips attached to the mantelpiece for the purpose. This implies how very routine the practice was, and also how this practical usage of the mantelpiece meant that they also looked the same in all the houses he remembered. Diane recalls that there was a brass shoe in which letters and other things went, although she did not know what the latter were, because the mantelpiece was too high for the children to touch it. Again, the intangibility of this material memory is evident. It was an adult space 'up there', where her mother put 'everything she wanted to keep'. It was therefore a very important place for storage of important things, but fundamentally an adult space:

> Certain things would always go in there [in the brass shoe], certain things for my father was always put in there so that when he came home from work he would know where to look.

The space was therefore embedded in the practice of the time; her mother at home, cooking and washing, her father at work. The mantelpiece was used as a vital communication tool within the marriage, where important things could be kept safe and high up, away from the children and the less safe surfaces in the house. As Michael comments later, there were more people living in each house then (Diane was one of eight children in a three-bedroomed terrace), and they were much more cluttered, due to the bulkiness of copper baths, tools, coal scuttles and the paraphernalia of cooking and washing. Therefore, the high kitchen mantelpiece, in the activity centre of the house, was an essential highpoint above the hurly-burly. The material presence of the mantelpiece in domestic geography will be discussed in the next chapter. The fact that there were letters up there ('always letters', as Frank recalls) is a reminder of how different communication was in the 1930s and 1940s. Although some people had telephones, there were no answering machines or text messages or emails for the virtual storage of messages, and so it was all on paper, and often in the form of letters. As can be seen in the Mass-Observation Archive writings, there were other important documents stored on mantelpieces that children who could not see or touch the mantelpiece might not have known about. When there were few

bank accounts and no direct debit facilities, books had to be kept for weekly payment of insurance, rent and milk deliveries (almost non-existent now, due to supermarkets and fridges). No one mentioned kitchen drawers as part of their memories, although Norah's mother clearly did not allow the mantelpiece to be used for this storage of daily or weekly necessities. It is apparent that Diane's mother used her mantelpiece very differently from Norah's mother, although noticeably, it was mothers who were in charge of the space. It was definitely not a space for children.

As an end note to this account, it was interesting that Diane and Derek argued about what was the mantelpiece-equivalent in their current home, as I elaborate in the next chapter. For Derek, it was the breakfast bar; it was the top of the gas fire for his wife. Note how the largeness – the largesse, even – of the mantelpiece above the range, raised high above the *milieu* of everyday and childish things –has been compressed and separated into these two spaces – one ornamental, the other useful.

7.3.5. Michael's Victorian Values

Nick's father-in-law, Michael, has a lot to say on the subject of mantelpieces as a past necessity and a present 'piece of art'. He too remembers the cooking range, and also two black cat statues, thus bringing to mind the symmetry of 1930s mantelpieces and the fact that ornaments were made specifically in pairs or sixes (like candlesticks) *for* the mantelpiece. The relationship between individuals, space and things is then brought into question – when objects are made just to go on the mantelpiece, what is driving the display: is it the individual, or is it the space? It is also important to remember that mantelpieces, although viewed as necessary elements of the domestic fire, are cultural phenomena, like the British attachment to the open grate, as opposed to enclosed stoves, which became increasingly popular in Europe and America (Cook 1995 [1881]; Saumarez Smith 2000). His memory is that his parents did not have a clock, but that his mother eventually bought a 'mantel' clock, which was, paradoxically, too heavy and wide to go on the mantelpiece and was put on top of a cupboard. The physical size of the mantelpiece is brought to mind. However, his memory becomes less personal, and he expands his biography to the level of general social comment. As mentioned earlier, he comments that houses were small and cluttered and full of people:

> You had to find somewhere to store things you were using daily or weekly
> [...] they were much more of a utility purpose than a decorative purpose.

He therefore saw mantelpieces prior to central heating as utility goods, in contrast to the present decorative function of mantelpieces. It was a type of calendar of routine – a material rota, rather than a closed diary of reminders, or a diary of 'special' events. He considers mantelpieces now to be a 'piece of art' but relates the change not just to personal biography, but to British history and various advances. He sees a schism in time between the Victorians, of whom his mother was one of the last, and modern times. Mantelpieces played a role in commemorating the dead, from 'mining accidents', 'drowning', 'disease' and, of course, the two wars. So in addition to its function as a storage place for daily or weekly necessities:

> ...The idea of a mantelpiece was, as you said, to stand a clock on to know the time [...] It may be to have stood photographs on if you wanted to remember people so that when you were visited you could say, 'Well, that was my father,' or 'That was Uncle George or whoever [...] But that was- it had a useful purpose. Once it ceases to have a useful purpose, throw it out.

Thus, he also considered commemoration of the dead as a useful purpose, at a time when, he claims, people were more 'emotional' about death. Of the people I interviewed, only one had a photograph of her dead father on the mantelpiece (and one questionnaire respondent commemorated her stillborn daughter on the mantelpiece), so this could be true. However, what cannot be disputed is the change in medical advances, health and safety legislation, and the end of heavy industry in Britain, which has greatly increased chances of survival. Added to this were the losses of men in the two wars. The Mass-Observation Archive records many photographs of young men who died in the Great War; in 1937, they were to have no idea there was to be another one. Death, particularly of men, was not so unusual in the inter-war and post-war period, and the social display of the dead in photographs, perhaps to keep them in the social memory, was noticeable in the 1937 reports, in contrast to the Cardiff mantelpieces recorded for this study.

Although Michael's mother might not have had a clock that fitted on her mantelpiece, he still sees the mantelpiece as serving a useful function, in that it was a focal point

for displaying the time. The way in which mantelpiece 'time' has changed since Michael's remembrances resonated with current practices of distinction. It seems no longer to play that role of calendar of the everyday, but as a calendar of foregrounded social rituals - focal points of social life. As Wendy points out in her questionnaire, she keeps reminders in a diary or mobile phone (see *Supplement*). Similarly, Karen talked about displaying only aesthetically pleasing 'reminders', rather than prompts to pay the gas bill, which would be put in a diary. Hannah admits to displaying pretty wedding invitations partly for the attention of her National Childbirth Trust group, and Alison leaves aesthetically-pleasing birthday cards on show on her mantelpiece, concealing less artistic ones behind, or moving them to another place. Alison also displaces her 'normal' display for events such as Halloween and Christmas, which are marked by special decorations. Similarly, Christine was loath to participate in the auto-photography project, since she thought her mantelpiece display never changed. However, a look through her mantelpiece 'year' shows how the permanent display is augmented – rather than replaced or updated – by interposed event-markers such as birthday, birth, wedding anniversary and Christmas markers.

7.3.6 Bernie, Mike and Shyam: Making Sense of Mantelpieces

This raising up of the mantelpiece to a different order of memorialising artefact can be seen in Bernie's plans. A man of a similar age to Michael, he has clear memories of the mantelpieces in his childhood home, and his mother's display of china on the main living room mantelshelf. He has the same collection on display in his house, and wishes to purchase a mantelpiece at B&Q (like Diane and Derek) on which to recreate, commemorate, his mother's original display. This clearly demonstrates the relationship, for some older people, between the memory of 'mother's' mantelpiece and material recreation of this past. In this situation, the china collection is an ongoing fabricator of Bernie's memory, which has now extended into a desire to reproduce its former place on the mantelpiece. Norah, similarly, had her mother's things on her dining room mantelpiece.

Nevertheless, it is essential to recall that not all older people had these remembrances of practice and material displays. The focal point was the activity centre of the fire or kitchen range. Memories of the mantelpiece were contingent upon its relation to the

fire.   It could be argued that, with the removal of the fire and consequent disconnection of this relation, the mantelpiece has taken up a different position in the domestic time and space.   The oddness of the mantelpiece is brought into focus by one informant who had not grown up in Britain, Mike (Shyam's husband).   His mother had a sideboard in Jamaica, his childhood home and he comments:

> To be honest, I think the only reason why those mantelpieces is there it was because of the old coal fires in the old days and of course it would be naked without anything, so they built the mantelpiece and then people started putting bits and pieces there, like. Nowadays with the new houses, you don't find decent mantelpieces, do you?

This fits in with the thesis that mantelpieces are, historically, dependent on the domestic fire for their existence.   As discussed in the penultimate chapter, mantelpieces are not necessary to the fire, as can be seen in many vernacular British houses. It is interesting therefore that Mike, who considers the house to be a woman's domain, and in particular its ornamental aspects, has rationalised the mantelpiece as necessary 'of course', to dress the naked fireplace - a delicate image. The display on this is seen as an unintended consequence that has since become culturally embedded. The principally decorative aspect of contemporary mantelpieces is highlighted by his wife Shyam's memory of her grandmother's mantelpiece in the 1930s and 40s:

> Every damn thing seemed to be on this mantelpiece which on a Saturday, ugh, we had to go there every Saturday and it was our, my sister and I had to clean the brass and everything was brass. The candlesticks, the clock. She used to have a button box with the most intricate pattern on it. It wasn't very big, about the size of [inaudible] but you had a little brush to scrub the, you know, clean the Brasso in between, but everything used to sparkle. [...] you'd see the reflection of the blackness against the brass...

Although some informants commented on the dust, clutter or mug-rings on their current mantelpieces, there is no longer any reference to such hard labour – or such beauty. We have seen how older informants who recounted childhood memories recalled activities and labour on and around the mantelpiece. Although physically removed from lower orders of domestic space and practice, the mantelpiece was part of the daily fabric of life, whilst also upholding precious family goods.

7.4 Middle-aged Informants: separating spaces

I shall now discuss a group of informants' accounts which recall mantelpieces from the 1950s and early 1960s. This was a time of transition for the domestic fireplace, as the Clean Air Acts, house-building programmes and post-rationing consumerism led to modern and modernised domestic interiors (Ravetz and Turkington 1995; Attfield 1995, 1999; Morgan 1999). Phillip recalls his parents' mantelpiece being: 'full of stuff [which] was definitely used as a space in which my mum and dad put things'. He has no memory of the range, nor do any of the people in this age group, as the time has passed for most houses having ranges. It was still the place for 'putting stuff', for many, but not all people in their fifties remember the mantelpiece of their childhood as being an active space. Few have rose-tinted memories of it in this age group, unlike people in their late sixties, seventies or eighties, many of whom remembered the superior quality of cooking on the range, imbuing the whole space with nostalgic recall (despite the labour involved). Instead, they might remember only the dirt and mess of an open coal or wood fire, but without the 'reward' of good food, following the separation of the living room fire and the kitchen cooking stove.

7.4.1 Social, Sociable Memories

Belinda and her husband do not have a mantelpiece in their modern house by choice, as it is relief to them to have heat immediately available at the flick of a switch. She does not remember the mantelpieces from her childhood except that they did put cards on it (counter to Eric's memory of the fire risk). Nevertheless, her memory of the mirror and the fire and 'nothing in between' is associated with danger. She recalls how 'ludicrous' and dangerous it was, as the girls used the mirror whilst in their nightdresses, because the unheated bedrooms were freezing. The mirror, which in current houses is seen as a *trompe l'oeil* to increase room size and increase the light, was a convention that Belinda recalls as being dangerous but necessary. This again emphasises the main domestic fire as a focal point because it was essential; ornamentation on the mantelpiece was secondary to this function. Despite having no

clear memory of the mantelpiece, she thinks that there were 'probably' letters on it and that 'they' had dog ornaments on them, 'didn't they?' This emphasises the normative and highly conventionalised use of the mantelpiece prior to its change in function from the mid-twentieth century. For her, the personal memory does not really exist, but she has a social memory of 'the mantelpiece' in a very different era and lifestyle, when 'they' had dog ornaments. This separation of mantelpiece 'time' fits in with Michael's schismatic conception. As for other informants, the mantelpiece for Belinda was 'just always there' 'and it was the focal point because you sat around it, because it was the fire'. The permanence of the mantelpiece, and its relationship with the fire, is the most noticeable feature of the memories of older people.

Belinda's husband, Frank, on the other hand, talks at length about the mantelpieces in his grandmother's house, in a high-status road in Cardiff. The whole family lived there, including his aunt. No one I interviewed lives in multigenerational houses, and so his memories of the mantelpiece are representative of a pattern of household formation that informants no longer related. He recalls building the fire, and the display being 'usually photographs, mugs and a couple of statues [...] and brass candlesticks'. This is again a very conventional space, with no particular objects, just a symmetrical display. The mugs are suggestive of commemoration mugs, as recorded in the Mass-Observation Archive, of which there were none on current mantelpieces. In addition to the convention is the idea of permanence, that there were 'all the letters being, and postcards put, always on the mantelpiece behind the candlesticks so they didn't fall down', and the letters would be taken down when someone answered them 'and not go up again'. This shows how the mantelpiece, like those described in the Mass-Observation Archive, was used as a prompt, an in-tray for correspondence, and how the decorative permanent items were interposed by stores of impermanent, moveable goods.

This point is illustrated by Christine and Harry, who have a mantelpiece in their modern house, which they like. Christine just recalls her mother doing her hair in front of the fire. This leads her to conclude that there 'must' have been a mirror above the mantelpiece. The memory of watching her mother perform a routine task in the warmth of the fire enables her to recall the display. She also remembers that her

mother's mantelpiece was quite bare, like hers, but that she kept letters on it 'for convenience', and that her mother told the children to move things off it. This combination of display and convenience, managed by mother, accords with other older people's memories and the Mass-Observation Archive, even though Christine was young in the late 1940s and 1950s, a later period.

Similarly, David has a general memory of his parents' mantelpiece being 'conventional' and different from the mantelpiece in the study he shares with his partner. This demonstrates how concrete the social image is of what a 'conventional' mantelpiece looks like, formed both from biographic memory and other orders of recall, such as an unspecific cultural memory. In contrast to all the other informants in this age group, his partner, Kate, did not have a mantelpiece in her childhood home. This was because her mother, an architect, classed mantelpieces, together with lace curtains and other non-necessities as 'bourgeois'. Her professional affiliation, in the late 1940s and 1950s, was with Corbusier, who conceptualised the house as 'a machine for living'. As such, Kate's mother could be seen as one of the 'design experts' perceived as imposing modernism on a recalcitrant British public, as I discuss in the penultimate chapter. Kate's childhood memory therefore, relates to questions concerning the function of the house in terms of practicality and ornament, much like this debate about the role of the mantelpiece.

7.4.2 Divisible Space, Invisible Memory

Sheila's parents also did not have a mantelpiece, but she has a memory of her grandparents' mantelpiece in the 'back room' (not the parlour):

> Everything seemed to go on that mantelpiece. It seemed to be anything you couldn't find always seemed to be on their mantelpiece.

She does not recall it as a decorative space, but as a convenient (and fondly remembered) storage place for all the necessities of daily home life, as did so many older informants. This brings to mind the 'kitchen drawer' of modern life, although this is speculative and invites future research into this hidden, undisplayed space. When I mentioned the possibility of a future study into 'the kitchen drawer',

informants reacted with mock-horror, as if it were a shame. It is possible, then, to consider whether there has been a change in the lines dividing goods into displayable and non-displayable categories, shameful and sociable artefacts and spaces.

Conversely, Alison disliked her parents' display, seeing it as formal, but in a different way from hers, and 'modern'. It displayed 'a very select range of special ornaments', which might not be to her taste, but could be said to have given her a sense of selecting and distinguishing domestic artefacts and spaces. Her parents' mantelpiece was not at all traditional. Of course, the 'modern' of the 1960s is seen as very old-fashioned now, particularly the design of the mantelpieces themselves. Old-fashioned, in the style of 1930s and before, is now fashionable. This twisting about of time, in terms of 'period features', can be contextualised within Alison's childhood memory, which is not based on what she saw displayed in her childhood home. Rather, it was an image of a Christmas mantelpiece in her mother's copy of 'Woman and Home'. This media-mediated memory could be seen as another type of cultural memory, different from those I have already discussed (see Gregory 2003). That influenced her 'conscious wish' to recreate that image in her adult home. This suggests that childhood memories are not passively consumed but stored, to have accountable effects on later practices. Although Alison remembered her parents' mantelpiece, she rejected it as material with which to create meaning. In effect, she skipped over that unfitting 'modernised past' to the 'unmodernised past' before the changes post-war.

Adding to this bricolage of 'the past' and different methods and materials of remembering are two last members of this age group. Like Alison, Rosalind has a barren memory of her mother's mantelpiece, on which there were china ornaments and photographs. She does, however, defend her mother, who had an unhappy childhood and therefore would not have pleasant memories to keep up on the mantelpiece. The china she remembers as being untouchable. As for Eric, the mantelpiece for Rosalind was intangible, visible material. Like Alison, despite her dislike of her mother's mantelpiece, she did initially copy her style of display, as will be discussed in another chapter. Ruth on the other hand, does not have a mantelpiece, but wants one because she remembers her grandmother's so clearly and strongly associates it with home. She recalls each object, and has in fact inherited many of

them, displaying them around the living room. In her case, the repository of memory is not the mantelpiece, nor is the focus for recalled practices. Rather, artefacts once displayed on the mantelpiece have a constant call on her memory, making present her desire to bring the mantelpiece back into her modernised home, in a similar way to Bernie wanting a new mantelpiece in his modern house. This also relates to some informants' preference for older 'period' houses, to be considered in the next chapter.

7.5 Younger informants: A Synopsis of Accounts

Geoff has no childhood memory; nor does Gina. Adrian recalls it as a 'cluttered' place where letters were kept, above a coal fire. Dan, like Alison, recalls his parents' mantelpiece as a 'cheap plywood frame', and his wife remembers only the coal fire of her childhood. Annette remembers the mess of her grandparents' fire, and that her parents, like her, did not have a mantelpiece. On the other hand, Sian, who is a similar age to Annette, remembers her grandmother's open fire as being 'so comforting', whereas her childhood home, in the 1970s, had a non-traditional mantelpiece over a gas fire. She does not recall the displays, focusing more on the presence and absence of a 'real' fire. Harriet remembers that both her parents and grandparents had one, but generalises the personal memory to 'tradition', as we have seen.

Hannah, in her early thirties, has not really thought about her parents' mantelpiece until I asked her, and remembers the mantelpiece in the front room, which was always 'immaculate' and had china ornaments on it, none of which she remembers. The back room had a mirror propped up on it that no one ever 'got round' to hanging it. This has recently been replaced by a portrait of ballet dancers. Her childhood mantelpieces, therefore, could be seen as representing two aspects of the mantelpiece: one of permanent unchanging perfection in the front room, the other of an endlessly deferred minor DIY task that has now been supplanted by the new picture.

Bronwen, in her mid-twenties, also recalls her parents' mantelpiece – still the same – as a place of constancy in terms of display, and equates this with a settled stage of life. This memory is different from those of older people, since her childhood

memory is still 'visitable' and visible in her parent's home. Her parents have a wood fire and she remembers Christmas - a general 'Christmas' - as emblematic of home, and family, rather than one day. This memory of a recurring ritual is different from the one-off event-based memories of particular objects on the mantelpiece of which many informants spoke. This point concerning the multi-modal methods in which 'time' is practised on the mantelpiece is also suggested by Bronwen's memory of two photographs on her parents' mantelpiece. These have always, in her life, been there; one of her parents' wedding day, and the other of her grandfather, who died before she was born:

> It's a photograph from the past and it's relevant to you, even though you weren't there. So they're the kind of things that stick in the mind.

There is the idea of a mutually absent presence – an important ritual event and a person, absent from the informant's experience, but relevant to her biography and genealogy, and constantly present on the mantelpiece. She was absent from both the wedding and her grandfather's life, but is 'relevant' to them as an imagined, and now actualised inheritor. She can own the memory of the photographs, rather than the memory of the person or event: the photographs have taken the place of lived experience. It is perhaps time to think how the permanent place these had on Bronwen's parents' mantelpiece made them memory objects; how place has its effects on memory.

Karen, in her early twenties, does remember her parents' mantelpiece as a place where her mother's inherited antique objects were displayed, including a Boudicca figure and a Nefertiti statue. They too had a real fire, and the mantelpiece was a mixture of permanent display and changing ephemera such as birthday cards and postcards. It was also a safe place for the garden-door key. She considers the mantelpiece as 'just somewhere to display' her mother's heirlooms. It is interesting that there was a distinction between mobile and immobile things. This could be equated with the notion of alienable and inalienable goods; heirlooms are different property from keys and cards. This could be analogised with different types of memory; birthdays and Christmases are remembered, rather than Christmas and birthday cards, although they are the highlight of mantelpiece displays when they are

put up. As I discuss in Chapter Nine, gifts marking such events have different properties again. Although her mother effectively owned, chose and managed the display, no one was asked to move things off the mantelpiece. Wendy similarly remembers her parents' mantelpiece as being 'somewhere to put things' and it is the things she remembers; even though in her parents' new house, there is no mantelpiece, she 'knows where to find them'. For Victoria, like Bronwen, her childhood memories are still there in her parents' home, where the mantelpiece is an active and changing space for viewing by family members and visitors:

> People get up and they'll go and look at the photos. And I will when I go home, I'll straightaway go and look at the cards and the important things like that.

The mobile, changing display of new photographs and cards are what has salience for Victoria on her visits home, in contrast to Karen's view of the mantelpiece as a place where heirlooms are kept. In these different ways of remembering and commemorating, the constant theme is how the mantelpiece can have an effect in making prominent certain objects and certain practices of memory, marking time and commemorating.

Clearly, people of different ages have different memories of childhood mantelpieces. There is a division between those who grew up with kitchen ranges, the open fire as a given, those who were children when central heating became more prevalent, and younger people who might remember and still visit their parents' home and a 'real' fire, even though these are, in most houses, unnecessary to heat a room. An emerging theme is the complex relation between the mantelpiece and memory, which might not be so comforting as it might have seemed. The place of the mantelpiece in memory practices has become important, and it therefore makes sense now to turn to the place of the mantelpiece in the modern living room.

7.6 Placing Memory, Displacing the Mantelpiece

The next section, then, looks at how the present, and the physical presence of the mantelpiece in the living room, was accounted for during the Cardiff interviews. As

Harriet commented: 'It's not exactly a burning issue or anything'. And that is the point: without the fire, why is the mantelpiece still present?

Having offered an interpretative framework for informants' childhood memories of mantelpieces, I turn now to their views on the current mantelpiece. Like the memories, these are a combination of the 'general' notion of the mantelpiece and their own or other people's mantelpieces. However, the generalised mantelpiece is not quite an abstraction, for it is grounded materially in biography. Houses are fabricators of biography (see Douglas 1993; Maleuvre 1999) and they, like things in houses have biographies (Kopytoff 1986). These individual biographies are intertwined with more general histories – social, architectural and material, that are invoked by informants to support their accounts. Thus, the mantelpiece is symbolically 'placed' or ordered differently, affected by biographies of self, things and houses, historical notions of appropriateness and distinction, and current practice. The present mantelpiece does not stand alone; it extends temporally, spatially and socio-culturally in complex networks of relations.

Earlier in this chapter, I focused principally older informants' accounts, since this resonated both with the notion of memory and with previous material from the Mass-Observation Archive. In this section, the architecture of the house or flat is the ordering device, rather than the informant: the absence, removal or presence of a mantelpiece, or the selection of another domestic space is the pertinent 'hinge' for the discussion (see Munro forthcoming).

7.6.1 Norah's Restorations

Norah moved from her childhood home, inherited from her parents, into her husband's house when she married him, aged 60. He died seven years ago, and she has worked hard to restore the house to 'what is what like when it was built'. He had modernised and either removed fireplaces or replaced them with ones that were modern in the 1970s and 1980s. The two main reception rooms now have traditional looking surrounds; in the dining room is a spectacular oak overmantel.

None of the three mantelpieces downstairs changes very much; they are spaces for display. Many of the objects were inherited from her mother, or belonged to her husband. Occasionally, a letter or some tablets will be put on the 'den' mantelpiece, where Norah spends much of her time. Like many other informants, she does not notice the mantelpiece or things on it normally:

> I think they're part of the place and you know, you just – you just accept them. You come in, I don't give a damn what anybody says, the fireplace is still a focal point. You come in, the first thing you look at is the fireplace, but -

Although my effect as a researcher of mantelpieces is clear, the paradoxical statement that she does not notice them, but they are focal points is a recurrent motif during the interviews: the unseen focal point. It is also noticeable how many people spoke about coming into a room and looking at the mantelpiece, suggesting its role as a focus for visual consumption is not as a static tableau, but is relational and dynamic. Norah's main point about the mantelpieces in her house is that they are the result of her hard work in 'trying to put back everything what I can' in the house (a 1920s semi-detached villa). She will 'never, never, no, never' change them, and is pleased to have restored the house from her husband's modernising work (see Gregory 2003). Having lived in only two houses, she has never lived in a house without a mantelpiece, and has strong views about modern houses, saying they 'don't mean anything'. She equates the absence of a mantelpiece with the absence of 'meaning' in modern houses, although she goes on to back this up with a story about a friend who lives in a modern house which does have a mantelpiece. The point seems to be (as Mike said in the last section) that there is a disjunction or lack of sense in having a fireplace in a modern house:

> She's got a fireplace with a stone surround and there's a mantelpiece and there's little bits of china, but what about [...]. And I think there's a cocktail cabinet, a three-piece suite and two chairs. It's a huge dining room. It's nothing. The fireplace is nice there. I'll grant you that. But it, it's got nothing.

It is clear that the friend has all the material goods a house requires, that a person requires. All the conventional stuff of domesticity is there. Yet Norah negates this matter, absents it, because it is meaningless to her. She does not explain this, and I could not harass her for a reply. Yet in the context of the interview, it could be

inferred that meaning for her was something that had to be earned over time, in terms of the age of the house and the age of the object, and also for her, the provenance of the object, as an inheritance and with a known narrative attached that has also been passed down. Duration is important. It could be said that she did have a system of the meaning of houses and domestic objects, based on genealogy, duration and biography. There was a keystone to this, as when asked whether the things on her mantelpieces are important because of 'the memories that they hold', Norah's reply is: 'Yes. Mother, mother'. Architecturally, modern houses might have similar visual attributes (even though Norah thinks they are too small), but these do not inhabit the same relations of meaning and are therefore unrecognisable in her system. Even though she does not think of her mantelpieces on a daily basis, she states that the mantelpiece and fireplace still form a focal point as one enters a room. It is a paradoxical place.

7.6.2 Shyam's Modernities

Shyam's current house, in which she has lived for 45 years, is also a place of memory. She was a working mother, who left notes for her daughters on the mirror above the mantelpiece in the back room so they would have no excuse for missing them:

> Because it would be staring them in the face [...] especially if they were admiring themselves in the mirror.

Unlike the mothers cooking on the range, she worked, in the 1970s and 1980s, and the mantelpiece played the role of prompt for her daughters in her absence. As a focal point, in the back room that led into the kitchen, directly opposite the doorway, the mantelpiece could not be missed. Its location in the geography of the house made it an ideal tool of communication. The activities of the fireplace have shifted, from the fire to the mantelpiece and above. Her living room mantelpiece has changed since she filled in the questionnaire, due to the influence of one of her daughters. It had previously been a display space for her many photographs and sentimental objects, but:

> It seems uncanny you see, I've always had pictures, photographs on the mantelpiece. In the front room, it was no end, just one line of photographs and

Linda said, 'Oh, mum, you have to slim everything down, so take your pictures off the mantelpiece and just have your clock there'.

Her daughters have taken away the photographs of themselves of children, not to display as she did, but to keep as memories of themselves, 'when I've gone'. The photographs that once she displayed have now become the materials of different types of memory – of self, rather than of one's children; for private consumption rather than public display. Their passing on of the photographs is a pre-figuring of her own passing, a pre-mortem transition, just as she has passed on some of her ornaments to them. Shyam says that this is not a morbid action, just a 'clearing out', and associates it with the disposal of the china cabinet inherited from her father, who kept a boarding house in Tiger Bay and had been given many things from abroad by sailors. I shall discuss inheritance practice in detail in Chapter Nine.

The living room mantelpiece now displays only a clock – not a special one – which Shyam uses to tell the time when she has a nap in the afternoons:

> When I have a sleep in the afternoons, I go in there and sit supposedly reading, and I invariably fall asleep and I don't wear a watch. So I like a clock to know what time it is but not for any other reason I can think of.

The mantelpiece, having been a place for displaying biographical photographs, now performs a different role in Shyam's daily life. It is the focal point of the room, and therefore an ideal place for her to see the time when waking from a nap on the sofa opposite. Its role as a place where time can be seen passing continues, but its precise role has changed as Shyam's age affects her daily activities and how she perceives displayed goods.

Shyam is amused that her children have restored the fireplaces in their houses, since she remembers the work and the dirt of a 'real' fire. Both daughters have central heating, but one of them has a 'beautiful' fireplace, that Shyam says 'really is the focal point of her room'. Thus, the 'focal point' that in her childhood was 'the focal point of your whole being', where her uncle and grandmother would tell them stories, when there was television or central heating, has become a different 'focal point' – a 'beautiful' thing. Her mantelpieces have changed in function/role as a result of time

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passing, her children moving on and her retiring and ageing. It has also changed because mantelpieces have now become part of a 'new fashion' as Shyam sees it, but one in which she participates with the influence of her daughter.

Even though her mantelpieces have changed both in appearance and function, she still has clear ideas of what she wants on there. She does not like the letter her sister brought and forgot to post being on the back room mantelpiece: this is clutter. This is quite different from her husband's mantelpiece. Mike has the middle reception room as his space, for his reading and television watching. He sees himself as a 'lodger' in the rest of the house, and agrees with his wife that he would not notice if the mantelpiece disappeared from the room. He would replace it with a table or chair to store his daily necessities, such as the pens, tablets and change pot that are currently on the mantelpiece. These are interspersed with decorative objects that Shyam put there, relevant to his biography such as a photograph of his mother. This a complete reversal of her mantelpieces, in that his is primarily for storage and the implanted ornamental objects are, as far as he is concerned, unnecessary and not particularly wanted. His main concern is that it is clean, and he will check his mantelpiece and the others for dust. Shyam has bought him two yellow dusters, one he keeps upstairs and the other in his room. When she dusts, he will take his duster and do it again after her. Both make an assumption that their beliefs are universal, as Mike thinks that 'the decoration of the mantelpiece is more important to women than to men' and Shyam comments that men are not concerned about it 'as long as they know it's clean'.

For Mike, his room is a place for him to carry out his activities of reading and watching television, not a place to adorn. He has a dispassionate view of the mantelpiece, having grown up in Jamaica, thinking of it as incidental to the fire. Shyam does comment that mantelpieces without the fires are a 'waste of a wall', but says, 'Well, you put the sofa there and my husband's, "Well. Where's the TV going?"'. The ordering of space in the home is a problem, but part of this is caused by the shape of rooms and placing of electrical points in older houses. The protruding chimney-breast makes it difficult to use the wall differently. In a way, the mantelpiece justifies its existence by its very existence - which is nonsense, or a tautology at the very least. Mike would only fill the space with another storage place, and Shyam would want to see the time after her nap. The chimneybreast makes it

difficult to put other objects in the space. Yet, as Mike said when the china cabinet was removed, 'why is it there?' He also thought the hanging of a high mirror above the living room mantelpiece ridiculous, since it was too high to look at oneself and he thinks mirrors belong in bedrooms and bathrooms. He has a pragmatic approach to home as a place to do things in, but also clear ideas of appropriateness. Mirrors are for looking at oneself in, not as an aesthetic object, and this practice belongs to private regions of the house. Therefore, Mike is not detached from the decoration of the home interior: he has clear ideas of fitness and order, but has different ideas of these from those of his wife and daughters.

Shyam, like many of the older informants, remembers the dirt and work of the old fires and finds it amusing that young people want mantelpieces, even though they have not lived with 'real' fires. Also, she notes how the collection of old brass ornaments that she and her sister cleaned weekly (as mentioned earlier in this chapter) in the routine of domestic life in the 1940s, was 'grabbed by an American cousin; none of us wanted it'. These heirlooms were work to her and her sister; they were valuable objects to the cousin who saw them differently, attaching different meanings to them. She saw similar items in 'the Argos book' and now realises the monetary value of them, yet the investment of her time and effort as a girl has put brass ornaments into a different order of meaning from that of monetary value.

7.6.3 Diane, Derek and B&Q

Similarly, Diane and Derek, who do not have mantelpieces at the moment, are considering buying one from B&Q (like Bernie). They took out the fireplaces when modernising the house in the 1970s, but now see them as 'fashionable' (Gregory 2003). In fact, it is Diane and one of her daughters who are planning the new décor, including a mantelpiece, which she calls 'a step back'. She terms the display objects that are currently on top of the gas fire in the back living room, 'my ornaments'. Derek comments that 'if there is a shelf there, she'll put something on it' supporting, in a way, Mike's thesis that people put things on mantelpieces because they were – and are - there. Both comment on the profit to be had with foresight; anyone who recognised that mantelpieces would become fashionable when they were ripped out in previous decades would have profited. Each has a very different conception of the

mantelpiece, based on what it is used for, as I mentioned earlier in the chapter. They were also influenced by my description of the mantelpiece 'equivalent' in the covering letter for the postal questionnaire, which I had taken from the Mass-Observation 1983 directive: 'where you might put ornaments, clocks, reminders, photographs, birthday cards and so on'. He sees the breakfast bar in the kitchen as the mantelpiece, she considers it to be the top of the gas fire in the back living room.

> Diane: All that's on my breakfast bar is my mugs for my kitchen and the, oh, I got a little coffee pan
> Derek: It comes in handy for everything though, doesn't it?
> Diane: Oh, well, they stick things on it, but I don't. I mean if I got cards or anything, it goes on there [the gas fire].
> Derek: We use it more as a, like a mantelpiece than what we do as a breakfast bar.
> Diane: Well this isn't a mantelpiece.
> Derek: It's somewhere to put stuff. It's never used as a breakfast [bar].
> Diane: Yes, but for what you said you meant in your letter, I would have said I use the gas fire.

She sees the breakfast bar only as a place for 'my' objects, but the gas fire is her mantelpiece because of 'my' ornaments and also that (and the top of the television next to it) is where she puts cards. Derek justifies the definition of the breakfast bar as a mantelpiece because it is not used as a breakfast bar, and is where he and their daughters (who do not live there) put 'everything'. The possession and ordering of space is defined differently, a theme that the boundaried, yet blurred use of the mantelpiece as both display and storage has brought to light.

7.6.4 Bronwen's appropriate appropriation

Bronwen is a woman in her mid twenties, who shares a house with her sister and a friend. They moved in quite recently, and rent the house from a family member. The house therefore feels like 'more than' a rented property, but not quite owned. As was mentioned earlier in the chapter, her parents live in the same house and have much the same display on their mantelpiece as when she was a child. Bronwen describes her own mantelpiece display as: '...reasonably similar to what my mum would have had'. She has a clear conception of what should go on a mantelpiece from looking at other people's:

> You wouldn't put a saucepan or something up there would you? It would be inappropriate. And like, it's kind of half storage, half display, isn't it?

The ordering of space for her is normative and based on what her mother did, and what she has seen other people doing. Or rather, she does not see what other people *do*, but the outcome, the display. The actions that went into the display are, in a sense, embedded in it; the processes of concealing certain things in cupboards or keeping them in different rooms, of selecting certain items, perhaps without much thought, to go on the mantelpiece. 'The other' is not just an influence on her assumptions regarding appropriate display. I ask her whether: 'What's there on the mantelpiece reflects the way you've decorated the house in a way, or your preferences?' I am careful to avoid mention of self-expression or use of the word 'taste'. Her reply is notable. First, she frames her answer as an enactment of a universal 'other' coming into the room (as many other informants did, together with specific exemplars of other people to support their views). She then expresses slight concern about what the other residents might think of this. Bronwen continues with a four-stage description, in which she links the mantelpiece display with 'me', which equates with colours and plants, which then 'reflect the house':

> If someone walked in this room – I don't know how the others would feel about that – but it's very me, the kind of colours and shapes and that are all stuff that basically run through the house. There's plants in all the rooms and these kind of light blues and yellows and things are right through the house, and the lilac. So, yes, they do reflect the house.

Like many informants, Bronwen has a strong identification with certain colours as being 'me'. Alison's colour is orange, Christine's is pink. Others do not have a strong feeling of connection with colours (which could be construed as a question of ownership of or by colours), but are affected by house moves. For example, Rosalind chooses different colours and themes each time she (frequently) moves house. The type and age of house also influences her decision. It is clear from Bronwen's comments that she is the decision-maker in terms of house décor. She says that this is because she has lived in houses before, unlike the other two, and so has more things. There is therefore an equivalence drawn between having a house and having things. This comes across in interviews with younger people. Those who have moved into

their current home from the parental home or a shared house in which they might only have had a bedroom in which to keep personal items still think in these limited terms of ordering space. For example, Victoria has things from her bedroom on a shelf in the flat she now rents with her boyfriend. The other women in Bronwen's house keep their things on their bedroom mantelpieces.

7.7 Conclusion

The last point brings up the question of the effect of the house (Miller 2001), in terms of its age, structure and design, on practices of display and memory. In Bronwen's case, it seems that, as she progresses towards a 'home of one's own', she gradually acquires more things to fill the space. Informants who have just left home, or the compressed space of a room in a shared house, start off by transposing 'bedroom' objects to the living room. Things then proliferate in order to fill the space, and to fit in with it appropriately. This is not the only pattern of relations between informants, things and houses, but it once again highlights the relation as being complex and possibly problematic, as I shall discuss further in the last three chapters. The notion of tradition has a complex relationship with memory, since it amplifies 'the past' beyond the personal to the socio-cultural arena of practice and concepts. It has a force which somehow augments the personal – which might be authentic, or original, but is also idiomatic – with a massivity of past experience. This links up with questions as to what is 'authenticity'. Does the resonance between Mass-Observation reports and recollections by older informants lend weight to informants' memories, and do their remembrances authenticate the reports? What is the relationship between memory, or the architecture of memory, and the architecture of a house? How can 'taste' be resolved with other selective frames such as personal and social memory, housing design and current family or household relations? This conclusion does not seek to answer these questions. As perspectives on the research questions and aims in earlier chapters have suggested, frame, presentation, selection and order – in space and in time – can inverse the dominant position in a moment: suddenly the taken-for-granted becomes peculiar. In this conclusion, I shall highlight themes arising from the accounts discussed in the chapter, from a view of these as a collection of 'memory' as one mode of accounting for practice.

As we have seen, various accounts are invoked for informants' current practices. All these accounts resonate with John's expert interest (as a child psychiatrist) in the importance of 'what children see' as I discuss in the next chapter. The materials of remembrance are not just the house itself, but also other images or relations that are not immediately visible. The question is to what extent can these different orders of 'pastness' fit together in comfortable alignments, and how the changing position and role of the mantelpiece might foreground the partiality – or even discrepancy - of relations between past practice, social memory and normalised assumptions. Oddly, in its syncresis and/or compression of storage and display, the modern mantelpiece might bring to light the gaps in relations between past and present practices, and hence the misalignments in current practices of 'doing' self, home and family.

In terms of the relationship between past, present and future, the mantelpiece can display an aestheticised past, nostalgia without the pain, such as 'ideal' photographs of children, before the difficult teenage years. In addition, there are many objects of memory on the mantelpiece, and objectifications of ongoing life. As well as 'reminders' of the past and current concerns, there are 'reminders' of the future, such as invitations and less 'aesthetic' objects, such as letters to post and films to develop. Thus, some things have a genealogy, which allows them time up on the mantelpiece. These are looking back, and thus could be termed 'Epimethean', after one of two brothers of Greek mythology. Epimetheus means 'hindsight', and he is characterised as the stupid brother, who could not predict what was coming. Objects such as invitations, letters to post and undeveloped films, could be termed Promethean. Just as Prometheus personified 'foresight', the etymological genesis of his name, these are objectifications of the action of looking forward, they are objectified future practice. Strangely, however, they are also objectified past practice and relations. An invitation, as well as holding a future memory of a wedding or christening, also extends into the past, as social relations and past memories that must have resulted in the giving of the invitation. Certain cards on the mantelpiece are the fabric of the traditional practice of posting cards, rather than just phoning, emailing or sending webcards for certain ritual events. They are presented on the mantelpiece as display objects. Conversely, films are not 'meant' to be there, as they are in the gap of the permanent or ideal display (as on Geoff's mantelpiece); their time as a display object

is limited. But contained within that film are memories; the photographs were taken with the intention of producing materially a memory that might have survived in the mind or as a narrative – perhaps not. Thus, not only is the film awaiting development, the memory is awaiting development or transformation, from a memory held in mind to a materially-produced past. It is memory in waiting.

When thinking about the role of memory in ordering space and making distinctions between objects – some for display, others for concealment – the place of material/spatial presence in the interpretation of memory can be considered. The mantelpiece was the focal point of remembered rooms for younger informants. They therefore remembered very clearly the objects that were physically foregrounded by this positioning in the living room. Now, when visiting the parental home, these are the objects they look for, and thus consider material goods to be constituent of 'home', even though they might no longer be on a mantelpiece. The physical geography of childhood homes has placed certain objects at the forefront of memory, and of the ongoing construction of 'home' by the use of objects (as Wendy has done).

Similarly, Bronwen has a clear idea of what should go on a mantelpiece, and also how the mantelpiece display relates to biography. The memory of her parents' mantelpiece has influenced her conception of domestic space, and how the biography of space, in this case the mantelpiece, relates to autobiography. However, the ordering of space in her childhood home, and the prominent placing of family photographs and other permanent display objects on the mantelpiece, has, as for Wendy, constituted this memory, and hence her current and planned future use of domestic space. Mantelpieces, the ordering of space, and the material culture that was foregrounded by these traditional focal points, are the very fabric of memory.

Hindsight is talked about frequently (by Shyam, Eric and Frank), and also the 'fashion' system within which mantelpieces circulate (Miller 1995; Attfield 1999). It is worth noting that the fashion system of houses is relatively recent, for the majority (Saumarez Smith 2000). But mantelpieces themselves, although their appearance shifted, were a permanent feature of most British homes for centuries. Only changing technology, and the obsolescence of their previous function, related to the fire, has led to the mantelpiece itself entering the fashion circuit. It has become a skeuomorph

(Hodder 1998). Looking back at the mantelpiece, informants such as Shyam, Eric and Frank saw foresight as past wisdom in the context of fireplaces, since had all the 'original' features been kept, this past would have been a tremendous investment for future profit –today. However, the mantelpiece itself in contemporary houses can be seen as Epimethean; it looks only to the past, ignoring a future of plasma TV screens on the wall. Yet is this stupidity? Maybe that question cannot be answered just yet.

Drawing from informants' accounts, this chapter partially connected objects on display and the mantelpiece itself as objects of memory (Saunders 2002). Thus, when people talk about heirlooms and inheritance, these terms can be attached not only to objects on the mantelpiece, but extended to the physical appearance of mantelpiece displays, and the very desire still to have a mantelpiece as a 'focal point', even though the necessity has gone. It seemed at first as though as though the mantelpiece had become a metonym or synecdoche for a past practice, a social and cultural memory that transcends, or is interwoven with, individual biography (see Bourdieu 1977). However, this idea does not encompass that sense of compression, of a process of syncresis in which some element has been squeezed out. This is substantively true if we compare modern mantelpieces of the sort in Radyr Gardens with the great overmantel in Norah's house or Kate and David's 1920s double shelf. Modern houses have got the mantelpiece -albeit condensed, and used differently from its forebears, and this transition in substance echoes changing practices.

The findings suggest that childhood memories are not passively consumed but stored, to have accountable effects on later practices. When I mentioned the possibility of a future study into 'the kitchen drawer', informants reacted with mock-horror, as if it were a shame. It is possible, then, to consider whether there has been a change in the lines dividing goods into displayable and non-displayable categories, shameful and sociable artefacts and spaces. As the mantelpiece has lost its place above an active fireplace in the centre of family and home life, it could be argued that the display and practice of time-keeping has changed in the home. On the mantelpiece, the clock was a status-good at the centre of the mantelpiece and family life. Around it was a permanent display, interposed with a circulating world of goods related to everyday events and routines that nevertheless had to be kept 'safe' from the everyday *milieu*. Now, the clock might still be in the centre of many mantelpieces, but more as a

traditional display item than a positional good, or even a useful artefact for Cardiff informants. It is no longer flanked by this same combination of permanent and mobile goods. Certainly, informants continue to perceive it as part-display, part-storage, but the 'time' as now stored there is displayable – no longer necessary for 'time-keeping' in the family - in a syncresis of the two categories. As we shall see in the next chapter, there are other impermanent objects on current mantelpieces, but these are of a different order from 'calendar' objects, or timekeepers. The role of the mantelpiece itself as a timekeeper could be seen, in part, as having been raised from the 'everyday' to a repository of memory that is itself a memorial object.

The extra-ordinariness of time-keeping on the mantelpiece is highlighted in the prominence of its relation with Christmas, which came across in most accounts, highlighting the transition from the mantelpiece as daily 'calendar' to marker of special social events. Although it might be easy to call events such as Christmas 'seasonal', that would be a misnomer. A look at the auto-photographic snapshots of 'Christmas' suggests it is constituted of bought items, such as cards, holly, candles and tinsel. These are purchasable at any time of the year, and cannot be termed 'seasonal'. Similarly, as I point out in the penultimate chapter, the mantelpiece itself is no longer 'seasonal', in that it used to be more noticeable when a living room fire was lit in the cold months. It is now, in one sense, always seasonal, and yet lacks seasonality. It is more a marker of 'highlights', when its normal display is displaced, replaced, or augmented by transient, yet important social markers.

Another aspect of the selectivity of memory as accounting for current practice was Alison's rejection of her parents' 'modern' mantelpiece. In effect, she skipped over that unfitting 'modernised past' to the 'unmodernised past' in a twisting about of time, that relates to the seeming mobility of fixed 'period features'. Resonating with Kate's memory of a house without a mantelpiece, due to the expert modernism of her architect-mother, Attfield (1999) suggests that domestic divisions of space from the 1950s onwards, and the removal of the 'parlour', left only the mantelpiece as a miniaturised version of that formal, visitor-centred space in the house. This view highlights the role of architects and house-builders in constructing memory (Dovey 1999). This element of the design 'imperative' emerges in this chapter, and is

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discussed more fully with reference to new houses and technologies in the following chapter.

One could argue further that 'tradition' is 'fashion' viewed through the selective lenses of social memory or family history. 'Tradition' was a notion that Harriet, in her early 30s, invoked as the reason for her mantelpiece's appearance. This notion is particularly apposite in relation to informants in the 1960s-80s, since none of them had a memory of a time when domestic fires were necessary for heating and cooking. As the accounts accumulate, it seems appropriate to examine relations between biography, other ways and materials of remembering and the idea of tradition. I shall address the problem of 'tradition' in Chapter Ten, but it is worth pointing out here that 'tradition' has an interesting Latin origin, in that it stems from a verb *tradere*, meaning 'to hand over for posterity, to teach, to hand down an account of an event, or to betray' (see Lewis and Short 1879 for full reference). This complex, seemingly contradictory verb is relevant to this exploration of memory, since memory, tradition, and accounts are produced and consumed in many different ways, just as the mantelpiece has come to be produced and consumed in ways that are different from earlier household practices. In some cases, the end-result – the mantelpiece display – might look similar, but an examination of process and practice unravels these similarities.

In order to continue this exploration of the mantelpiece, I turn in the next chapter to the mantelpiece and its relations in the house: spatial, material and familial.

Chapter Eight - Piecing Together Relations:

Family, Space and Objects

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Family, Space and Objects

I was interested that people were taking notice of the rooms that children live in,
you know, and the things that children have to look at.
    (John)

8.1 Introduction

As I mentioned in the last chapter, John's comment made me think about people's childhood memories, how they use and perceive their current mantelpiece or other display space, and their attitude towards decorative objects in the home. It also led to a review of what informants said about their own children, and also the few comments by these children. The idea of someone 'taking notice' of the home as an object of visual production, as a subject for visual consumption, struck him as innovative. This accorded with the notion of double vision, in that the mantelpiece is a taken-for-granted focal point. Its absence would be noticed, as would the absence of display, since everyone who spoke to me, thought a bare mantelpiece would be 'odd', 'strange' and they would not like it. Yet it was not often seen as an actual presence, unless seen by 'the other'. The informant might be 'the other', in an account of visiting other people's houses, just as a visitor to their house might be 'the other'. This gaze was perceived as a prompt to keep the mantelpiece free of clutter and dirt. Therefore, not only did the mantelpiece shift in symbolic meaning according to its position within cosmologies of home, family, self and memory, but informants also underwent transformations, decentring and recentring according to their literal 'place' - as host or guest.

Thus, having looked at memory as an ordering device for analysis in the last chapter, I shall concentrate on relations within the house – the mantelpiece present, and its presence in the home. First, I shall look at accounts constructed around children, the often silent witnesses of the mantelpiece. This 'family-centred' discussion then turns to the gendering of spatial and material economies in the home, before focusing on

relations within the 'family of objects' that inhabit domestic space – centring on the television.

8.2 Children and the Mantelpiece

Children in this study had no choice about how mantelpiece displays were produced, but did affect them, since their presence - either in a house or in a family – was visible on the mantelpiece. I spoke to four children, and heard stories about others, who were absent presences during the interviews – on the mantelpiece, rather than in the room with the grown-ups. Young children, who still lived in the family home, were on the mantelpiece in different modes of presence. Sian had a photograph of her three children in the bath together, and school photographs on the living room mantelpiece. Nick and his wife had a photograph of all their children on their cupboard top, and their mother explained her choice not to have a mantelpiece as a child-safety issue related to the pilot light of a gas fire. Hannah had put photographs of her three children on the mantelpiece. A snap of Dan's twelve-year old daughter - aged five – was on the mantelpiece, but not one of their son. Geoff displayed a photograph of his toddler daughter on the mantelpiece; this changed frequently as they took a lot of snapshots of her and she was changing very fast. Harriet had photographs of two of her three sons on her mantelshelf. Whereas Sheila had displayed photographs of her own children in the marital home, she had replaced these with those of her baby grandson in her new house after her divorce. Gina displayed a swimming trophy won by one of her three sons on the gas fire top in the main living room, and school photographs on the bookshelf in the alcove beside the fire. Neither Sian's son, nor Harriet's children and Dan's daughter were enthusiastic about the photographs that their parents had put on display. Dan's daughter thought it was 'embarrassing'. But the parents liked them.

Many of the photos were of the children much younger than they presently are. Others were 'ideal' photographs. Sian controls what goes on the mantelpiece; if her children make something at school, she decides whether it goes on display. Thus, the representation of these children on the mantelpiece is a partial and edited version of their appearance and practices. This is not always deliberate: Harriet did not omit one

son's image from her mantelpiece on purpose, as she has photographs of him in the many other display areas around the house. Similarly, Julia (Dan's wife) just did not think to put a photograph of her son up there. They have an extensive arrangement of family photographs 'collage-style' on a board in the kitchen. But Sian had selected the photographs for her mantelpiece because the children were 'altogether' and looked neat in their school photograph, and all looked very 'sweet' in the bath.

8.2.1 The Early Learning Centre

It was only during the interview that Hannah realised that her mantelpiece was very 'child-focused'. She feels extremely proud of her children, since she was adopted, and so they are her only known blood relatives. This is a very strong connection for her. Nevertheless, as well as displaying this connection, the mantelpiece is also a place of punishment for her children. If the two boys have been naughty, or fought over a toy, the toy goes up on the mantelpiece for twenty-four hours. They can see it, but they cannot touch it. The mantelpiece is not only out of bounds because it is high up; the boys have been trained not to touch anything up there. Similarly, Harriet's sons had broken an ornament - the silver windmill - by playing with it. Whereas the windmill had doubled as ornament and a toy, the children's 'ownership' of it had been replaced by their mother's singular view of it as 'ornament'. They had overstepped the limit of its 'toyhood', and this transgression into the adult territory of 'ornament' had banished their boyhood practice.

Thus, we can develop a perspective on the 'focal point' as a place where an object is on view, not for aesthetic pleasure but as a constant reminder of misbehaviour. The toy is removed from the arena of play, childhood and tangibility, to a different order of object – for consumption by sight alone. Eric's consumption (and destruction) of the forbidden clock was raised in the last chapter. The memory of the time he broke his father's precious clock is the one he recalls, rather than any other of that particular mantelpiece: this one view has displaced all other retrospectives. As such it resonates with Rosalind's memory of her mother's untouchable mantelpiece display of china, which she reproduced when her children were young:

When the children were tiny, I did start off putting really lovely things [on it], but when they were broken, I was so gutted. So I had to be practical and take them away until I got past that stage and they were taught never, ever to touch the things that mattered to mummy on the mantelpiece, and they never did.

Thus, Rosalind learnt from her mother this particular treatment of the mantelpiece, as a place where children were dangerous intruders. The effect of viewing children as objects' risky relations is to displace the display, temporarily. Further, Rosalind's account suggests that her daughters have also learnt that the mantelpiece is an adult space. Objects on the mantelpiece have sanctuary from the low-lying, childish territories of home, either as ornament or as a part of pedagogic practice. In both cases, they are risky relations for children who dare to touch them or treat them as toys.

The inverse of this is the practice of keeping children safe by putting risky objects on the mantelpiece. Hannah keeps things like screws in bowls on the mantelpiece. The presence of children in Nick's household has entailed the absence of a mantelpiece: it brings with it the risky connection of an open gas fire. This is not reasonable, since Dan – living in the same development – chose to have an enclosed gas fire for child-safety reasons, but the account does remind us that a mantelpiece has until recently always been above an open fire.

The trend for 'living flame' gas fires, designed to imitate the open coal or wood fire suggests that accounting for the domestic fire place does not relate to what is 'reasonable'. The accounts discussed in this section cannot be read as overarching truths about the relationship between children and mantelpieces, but connections can be made with what older informants said about childhood memories, and with some schoolboys' reports in the Mass-Observation Archive (1937). Some older informants had childhood memories of it being an 'adult' space, such as Diane, whose mother kept unknown important things up there and Shyam, whose job it was to clean the brass for her grandmother. Similarly, we have already seen accounts of the danger of cards falling off the mantelpiece and nightdresses by the fire.

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8.2.2 Putting Away Childish Things

Responses from children and their parents point to an absence of active involvement by children in the constitution of the mantelpiece display. When I asked Harriet's son what his focal point was, he pointed at the television, which was opposite the mantelpiece, so that watching television in effect made the mantelpiece invisible. Dan's daughter said that the infant picture of her on the mantelpiece was embarrassing, to the surprise of her mother. The television was her focal point and her mother got annoyed when her children and husband left mug rings on the mantelpiece (as there were when I visited). Hannah's sons were in bed when I visited, so it was not possible to find out how they felt about the mantelpiece's role in their upbringing.

According to Sian, her children did not spend much time watching television, although her older son (aged twelve) enjoyed the History Channel. When I asked him about the mantelpiece in his room, he said that he used it as a shelf for his favourite books. However, this was because there was no adequate bookshelf in his room, and had he the choice, he would put sports trophies on the mantelpiece (as Gina had on top of the gas fire). Sian planned to turn the room into a guestroom, and move her son into a room without a mantelpiece. Not one of the mothers was happy about the television being the focal point for their children. Sian, as I mentioned, was careful to stress that her older son watched an educational channel. This corresponds with comments by other informants (not all) about the 'negative' effect of the television as focal point.

Thus, if the interaction between the child and the mantelpiece is considered in terms of what was said in the interviews, they do not participate actively in producing the display. Their parents select images of them (possibly without a great deal of conscious deliberation). Even though something might be made by them, or represent an achievement by them, they do not choose whether it is displayed, or where it is displayed. Sian's son did put his favourite books on his bedroom mantelpiece, but this was due to lack of storage space, and he was moving to another room. Adults do have a choice about what images of themselves (and others) are displayed in their homes. Phillip and Jo had chosen the photograph of themselves on holiday for their

mantelpiece. Norah had her wedding photograph on the mantelpiece in the living room and Karen had no photograph at all in her empty frame. Yet parents chose whether and how their offspring were to be seen and framed, despite the feelings of the children. This brings up the question of the control and negotiation of space, which will be discussed next from the perspective of gender relations in the home.

8.3 Possessing Space, Ordering Gender

The issue of the gendering of space in the home was not one that I intended to address in detail. It formed an element of my initial research questions, but was by no means a focus, just as I was not setting out to do 'feminist' research, as I explained in Chapter Four. It has been extensively explored and discussed in the literature and I did not want to retread a weary path for the sake of it. However, in the course of repeated visits to the data, I realised that not to mention it would be analogous with not seeing the mantelpiece as I walked into people's living rooms. They might register it now only as the background to the business of everyday home life, but it was my wish, my imperative (and how these two intertwined!), to foreground the space and its relations, however partial, with questions of historical cultural practices. The home is not a place of consensus and harmony all the time, and since most of the people I interviewed were in cohabiting heterosexual relationships, this was where the lines of negotiation were drawn.

It is important to note, however, that issues of sharing space came across in dialogues with Annette, who is in a same-sex relationship, and Bronwen, who shares a house with her sister and a friend. The interaction between gender roles in marriage/cohabitation and the political practices of space relations in the home was not a simple, combative dialogue. Any commentary or analysis is complicated by the fact that it was not always possible to talk to both partners, due to their commitments, and so I heard only parts of the story. Nevertheless, the mantelpiece display and the stories that informants told about it did show how relations within the home, within marriages and partnerships, between spouses and children, visitors and hosts are visible in the microspaces of home. Many of these did fall into classical narratives of

woman and home. Women tended to be 'in charge' of the mantelpiece, as they were in the Mass-Observation Reports of 1937.

8.3.1 Contextualising Sian's 'little space': Husbands and Wives

One angle on the gendered uses of space can be seen in Sian's house. She has mantelpieces in both living rooms and in the bedroom she shares with her husband. In the 'quiet' living room, she has placed her collection of Moorcroft pottery, because she likes to look at them as aesthetic objects. Her husband does not favour this, since they are expensive, and he views them as investment goods that should be kept safely stored away. By putting them in the quiet room, Sian has protected them, she says, from children kicking footballs, but will not put them away. Her husband has a completely different approach to mantelpieces, and she knows he would rather put out his 'horrible grey sports trophies', which are kept in storage. The mantelpiece is therefore a contested space in terms of what is revealed, and what is concealed in boxes in the loft. He wants expensive items kept hidden; she wants ugly things to be concealed. However, she is not completely in control of the space:

> He dumps his handkerchief and his change on the [bedroom] mantelpiece and it drives me mad, that does. I think he leaves receipts on the mantelpiece. I can't – I'm not sort of obsessively tidy – but I can't stand clutter on the mantelpiece [...] It's my little sort of space and he just dumps some money on it (laughs).

She does not, however, immediately remove this unwanted detritus from her 'little space':

> Well, I think, I'm not going to touch them now and how long he lets – I think he would be happy for it to be a mountain.

This raises two issues – time and space. In this short narrative, Sian displays the performativity and temporality of this apparently static tableau. It extends into the realm of marriage relations, and the timed aspect of display spaces. It also complicates the issue of the control of space in the home. I have discussed the way in which children do not possess the mantelpiece in terms of its production, but adults do not necessarily order it as they would wish. It is ongoing and contingent on the

practices of everyday life, of conceptions of the function of home and the negotiation of relations in the home. It is also, as I discussed in Chapter Five, constitutive of the construction of identity. This short passage also opens up another field of enquiry. Where in the home does a woman have a space to call her own? Sian certainly manages the house and what goes on it, but it is unclear as to what she can call her own. Her 'little space' is constrained by her husband's use of it as an in-tray or dumping ground for the contents of his pockets. Not having spoken to him, I cannot comment on what his space is. However, the important issue here is that Sian feels that her microspace in the shared bedroom is a battleground. Neither she nor her husband has a 'room of one's own' in which to do as they please, unlike the children, who, while they might be moved around bedrooms and have constricted space, do have rooms of their own (Dovey 1999). This inverts the assumption that it is children in family homes who are constrained.

Geoff considers the function of the mantelpiece to be a place where he can find things easily. He comments that there is a 'distinction' between this practice and conception and those of his wife, who uses it as a display space. She puts fresh flowers up there, in one of the many vases she has around the house (kept principally on the mantelpiece in the back room). He says that she permits his wallet to be left there for a limited time. At the time of my visit, there is also a guitar slide and a film awaiting development on the mantelpiece. These will not be left there for long. Having renovated the house entirely, Geoff sees mantelpieces as 'serendipitous' and a 'stock recurring thing'. He does not give them much attention, and left them in because it was less work than ripping them out. They bought the house cheaply as a wreck when the housing market slumped and they could not sell their flat – the retention of all period features (including bath and toilet) is a consequence, therefore, of poverty in Tiger Bay – now renamed Cardiff Bay. This is a world away from Sian's semi-detached Edwardian house in Whitchurch, in which the fireplace cannot be used, 'but at least it looks like it can be used'. She is much concerned with authenticity, and does not like mantelpieces in new houses since:

> I think you need a chimney breast. Maybe it's because I've always lived in an old house but I just think it looks as though it's trying to be something it's not.

She comments that:

> But there's an - I think that most people, you know, our friends, like most of the people we know, have got older houses and sort of similar to this really. It's funny, isn't it?

She, a teacher, and her husband, an accountant, were having extensive building work done on the house at the time of my visit. A new kitchen was being added, so that they could have a separate dining room. She was also planning to put the fireplace back into her daughter's bedroom, and replace the fitted wardrobes, as traditional freestanding furniture was better. This was not a priority, but it is interesting that she was concerned with authenticity of a period house, and found mantelpieces in new houses inappropriate, but did not find it inappropriate or inauthentic to add a new kitchen onto her house or put a fireplace back into a bedroom. It would be easy to ascribe a motive of middle class snobbery regarding the appearance of period houses. Yet this is a family home, and one of the reasons for the building work was not only to make a separate dining room, but also to make a large family kitchen, where they could continue to play games at the kitchen table and talk to each other while Sian did the cooking (her children enjoyed helping with this). Her husband was an absent presence during the interview, and it did seem like the house was divided in terms of concept of function and also household tasks, although I heard only Sian's version.

Conversely, I heard only Geoff's story of the mantelpiece. Sian's conception of her home contrasts with Geoff's attitude towards his house, which he worked hard on himself. He considers himself working class, because 'I get my hands dirty'. The original fireplaces in the house are the kind that Sian recommended to me from a vendor/renovator in a Cardiff antiques market. But Geoff had left them in place just to avoid unnecessary work. This could be seen as analogous with his attitude towards things – he leaves them in a convenient place to avoid the task of placing them somewhere in particular, and remembering where he has put them. This attitude towards the mantelpiece is the same as Adrian's, who would use a mantelpiece as an 'in-tray' if he lived alone, with some permanent decorative objects on display also. This is the type of mantelpiece that Harry, Christine's husband, recalls from his childhood, but says he 'wouldn't dare' put anything on their mantelpiece, or change the display. Jo, Phillip's wife, talks unfavourably of a male friend's habit of walking

into their house and putting his keys onto the mantelpiece. He has transferred this habit from his own house, where he puts them up there away from his small children.

Douglas's (1966) conceptualisation of matter in and out of place can clearly be seen in these practices on and perceptions of the mantelpiece. Geoff has left the mantelpieces in place and is not concerned by their presence or absence. They are 'serendipitous' as he calls it. He, Adrian and Sian's husband would use the mantelpiece as an in-tray if they were in sole control of it, but their practice on the mantelpiece differs according to the degree of compromise in the use of domestic space. Adrian does not put anything 'ongoing' or 'temporary' on the mantelpiece, which is entirely managed by his wife. His only input is that he knows that she would not put anything he did not like on the mantelpiece. Geoff, on the other hand, treads a middle ground. He does put things on the mantelpiece that he wants to find easily, like his wallet and guitar slide, but knows that his wife will ask him to move them within a limited time frame. This space, whose limited physical size and immobility make it precisely the ideal space on which to store and find things, is paradoxically limited in this function because of this boundaried and immobile characteristic. This also means that Adrian's use of it as an in-tray is limited by time. The mantelpiece is delimited in terms of time and space, and it is these very boundaries that make it liminal and contested as an elided display/storage space.

Sian's husband is at the far side of this ongoing negotiation as to the appropriate use of space. According to Sian, he does use their bedroom mantelpiece as a dumping ground, and it is a highly contested space. She sees it as her 'little space' which he makes his with his use of it. For her, as for Geoff's wife and Adrian's, objects such as cheques, receipts, letters, keys and money are 'matter out of place'. For the men, they are matter in place. Some of them compromise by permitting these things to be 'in place' for a limited period, but this is on sufferance. It could be argued that the compromise is one-sided since the men do, it seems, allow – or at least accept - the idea that women maintain it as a pure display space. Harriet's husband is fortunate in that he has his own room upstairs, where he puts what he likes on the mantelpiece. Downstairs, she allows him to put his spectacles on the dining room mantelpiece, as he would otherwise lose them. Using a focal point in this way makes sense.

Pertinent asides to these contestations are the accounts of Annette and Hannah. Annette lives with her female partner, and they have a large, mobile shelf unit in place of a mantelpiece. Annette deliberately decided not to have a mantelpiece, since she associates them with RAF houses in which she lived with her former husband. They had no control over where they lived, and she recalls the dank fireplaces with miserable bar fires. She orders most of the décor downstairs. Her partner is permitted to have a few ornaments on display, but most of the things are Annette's. If her partner cleans and moves the objects very slightly out of place, Annette will move them back (this is what Annette does following a visit by her cleaning lady). However, this dominance of the downstairs space is not, she says, problematic. This is partly because they live in a four-bedroomed house, and each has an upstairs room of her own, besides the shared bedroom.

Hannah's mantelpieces in the long, knocked-through living/dining room were not original to the traditional terrace. One was a brick fireplace with a gas fire in it, from the 1970s. The other was a wooden 1920s surround with an empty space beneath in which there were children's toys: a floor-level 'toyplace'. The word 'fireplace' seemed particularly inappropriate in this case, although very few of the informants did use the fires in their 'fireplaces'. Neither of the mantelpieces was tidy. They were a mixture of decorative objects, stored things, toys, cards and wedding invitations and objects of uncertain purpose and origin. Hannah felt that the kitchen window sill, where she kept her large collection of cookery books, was far more 'her space' than the mantelpieces. These simply reflected the ongoing life of the family, and looked like all the other surfaces in the room – cluttered with ephemera, gifts and a few heirlooms.

8.3.2 Crossing Place: A Transitional Home

A gendered distinction can be seen clearly in Victoria and Luke's flat. They are in their early twenties and this is their first home together, as opposed to childhood homes and shared student houses. It is a flat rented from Luke's father and does not have a mantelpiece. The focal point is a television/stereo unit, but there is a shelf unit in one corner that Victoria nominated as her mantelpiece. She wants a mantelpiece eventually, and has a clear idea what will be on it. However, she has made a display

on the shelves that is a combination of heirlooms, gifts and memorabilia of self, family and home (objects and photographs). Many of the things on display have been transferred from her bedside table at the family home and in shared houses.

At the centre of the middle shelf is a crucifix. I assume that this is a powerful representation of her Christian faith, but she tells me it was in her bedroom in the family house, and is central because it reminds her of 'home'. This shows how objects might have a taken-for-granted social and public symbolism, but individuals can disconnect, in some sense, the object from this enmeshed social role to constitute other autobiographical significances. It is notable that in the transition from private display in the bedroom to public display in the living room, objects are given different meanings. The crucifix, (a gift from her great aunt) could not have had the connection with 'home' while it was still there; it is a consequence of physical detachment from a place that objects are reconnected to place in a different order of relations. In a small way, this illustrates Hodder's conception of skeuomorphs (1998) and also Kopytoff's thesis of biographies of things (1986). Rather than the changing meaning and use of an object occurring through generations, the displaced crucifix telescopes this to the span of a single life. Not all the objects on Victoria's shelf have a great meaning for her; many of the things are presents: 'new stuff that I don't know where to put'; like Victoria herself, they are awaiting the move to an ideal home. This notion of things that are not meant to be there, or that create mild anxiety because they are not quite in place, relates to the problem of what to do with gifts, as I shall discuss in the next chapter.

Although the array of things on the shelf unit is not what will be on her future mantelpiece, Victoria has designated this space for display of decorative objects. The bottom shelf on the unit is Luke's place. This is a storage place for practical things like a screwdriver, penknife, glue and personal stereo. Victoria likes him to keep it tidy, although he points out that she has put her sewing kit there. They agree, however, that this is Luke's space; well below eye level and for the storage (and temporary dumping) of tools and practical items. Nothing on the display shelves is Luke's.

This might suggest that Luke is absent as a producer of the room. However, he is very much present, since the focal point of the room is the 'entertainment unit'. For people sitting on the sofa, the most visible items – apart from the television, DVD player and stereo – are the DVDs and CDs, which are mainly Luke's. This collection is significant for the recollection of his autobiography, just as Victoria's display is. The difference is that this is not one of the primary purposes of his 'showable' collection. When he plays a film or piece of music, Luke recalls who gave it to him and when. This brings up the importance of recognising that the home is not just a visual or static production. It is plurisensory (Pink 2004), and this can be missed when viewing it from a single sensory perspective.

It can also be easy to assume that the production of home is women's work, because men are not always active in the visual, static décor of home. Yet many of the informants in this project did say that the television was the active, the lived focal point of the room. It was Christine's husband who had chosen the big black television; Rosalind had an abiding dislike for the huge television in the room, and tried to ornament it with objects. The focal point can change according to time, presence or absence of certain people and the time of week or year. For example, Phillip talked about watching sport on television, and Eric said he tried only to put the television on in the evening, unless a Test Match was on in the afternoon. Luke's collection of CDs and DVDs was as meaningful to him as Victoria's display, but an easy assumption to make was that this was a passive consumer, rather than a careful selector of aural and visual products. This raises the question of the moral ordering of goods, and their multimodal functions. It also questions the notion of the mantelpiece display as an object only for visual consumption.

In considering Victoria and Luke's living room, I was tempted to see it, as I first suggested, as a gendered distinction in the use and ordering of domestic space. She made the visual, decorative display; he used an unseen area for tools and so on. The goods made for the purpose of entertainment were his and were placed around the visually dominating television. Yet this reading ignores the meanings that both partners had constructed around the objects. It also omits the memories that Victoria and Luke have of their childhood homes: whereas Victoria's parents' home has a mantelpiece and pictures on the walls, Luke's parents do not have many areas of

display in their home. She therefore has an inherited notion of the aesthetic function of home that is connected with more personal meanings (invitations and photographs on the mantelpiece). Luke, on the other hand, is not accustomed to these practices. Both displays extended into their owners' biographies; to give primacy to socially agreed meanings is to detach objects from these personal relations.

Therefore, I do not want to oversimplify the gendering of this ordering of space and time in the home, or the notion of matter out of place, in terms of old and modern houses, mantelpieces and other display spaces, permanent and impermanent objects, concealment and display, and backstage/frontstage rooms in the house (Goffman 1959; Osaki 2003). As is clear from the above discussion, these methods of negotiating space between partners, parents and children can interweave, intersect and clash in different patterns. We have seen that the presence of the mantelpiece had its effects in these orderings of rooms and practices. In the next part of the chapter, we turn to a more deliberated discussion of the mantelpiece's place – and loss of place - in the living room, and its relations with surrounding objects, in particular, the television.

8.4 The Dead Centre of the Living Room

Jane's mother died when she was sixteen, and she has lived in the same house ever since. On my first visit, many objects of her mother were still on the mantelpiece (a long, thin modern one in a knocked-through living/dining room). She spoke of her intent to decorate the room and replace the objects. On my second visit a year later, she had decorated and moved most of the old decorative items upstairs. She had bought, in one or two shopping visits, an entirely new set of things to complement the new décor. This demonstrates the way in which people do not like empty space (all but one of the people I spoke to did not like the idea of a bare mantelpiece). The house demands to be filled up, it is, in a sense, a consumer that is given this role/agency by its inhabitants (Miller 2001b). Are they householders, or does the house hold them?

However, this is not a passively obeyed imperative, or order given out by domestic space. Both Bronwen and Jane were actively engaged in what they displayed, and the intent with which they did this. For Bronwen, the house move followed a relationship break up from a disliked partner. He had not liked her putting certain things out in their shared flat, such as a vase from her older sister. This was now displayed on the mantelpiece, together with other objects that stated: 'Aha, this is my place!'

The display of her possessions was both an act and an objectified performance of her self-possession, her reclaiming of herself and her space. Similarly, although Jane was not haunted by the past in any way, she looked forward to refurbishing and updating the living room, including the purchase of new display objects and pictures for the mantelpiece. This was a precursor to her eventual plan of redoing the room completely, and removing the modernised mantelpiece (which ran the length of one wall) to place a traditional fireplace in the very centre of the knocked-through room. This is astonishing, since it entirely reorders the original space. It had been two rooms, each with a chimney breast and alcoves on each side. When it was knocked through by her mother, the discrete fireplaces were conjoined, by a single projecting shelf. Gas fires were put in the original fireplaces. This was one very common reordering in the 1970s and 1980s, as small reception rooms were opened up in the slow move towards open plan living, and the loss of the front parlour (Attfield 1995; Gregory 2003). Rather than return to the two-room plan, as the 'modernisation' of her parents' time becomes outdated, Jane intends to combine two modes of ordering the room.

At present, the television is in the centre of the room, and she turns it to face whichever way she has defined as the 'sitting room'. She swaps the room around periodically, moving the table and sofa. At the same time, she reorders the mantelpiece, since one side is kept purely decorative, the other as a practical space where she looks in the mirror to dry her hair every morning. Both sides are always kept very clean, since she dusts and polishes every day. There is no sense of the practical area, with the mirror, hairspray and hairdryer being concealed as messy. The top of the television is used as an addendum to the mantelpiece, like Diane's next to the gas fire top, but not for ornament, unlike Diane's. It is where she puts her sunglasses, for example, so she can find them. At some point in the future, she

intends to alter the arrangement altogether. She will remove the entire 'modernised' mantelpiece and the gas fires. She will put in a traditional-style mantelpiece – not necessarily with a fire -into the central double alcove, and make this a focal, decorative point for the room.

This is a curious hybrid, since she intends to revert to the traditional mantelpiece, but is not returning to the traditional division of room space. By putting the new reproduction mantelpiece into the central alcove, which is flanked by the two original chimney breadths, she is utterly negating the conventional notion of authenticity, in that there is no possibility this fireplace can function as a container for a wood or coal fire. Yet, unlike new houses, which have a flat wall on which a fireplace might be put, containing a gas or electric fire, this house does bear the imprint of its past, as a double roomed space with two coal fires. This change will transform the room, even though it remains the same shape and size. Rather than the diffuseness of the current mantelpiece, which also bends in and out with the line of the wall, and ends in two larger shelves in the two outer alcoves, there will be one physically central focal point. By removing the mantelpiece, Jane will also be able to move plug points around. she is currently hampered by a common problem in older houses, which is that there are plug points only on the 'fire wall', forcing a certain ordering of electrical equipment, and hence furniture.

Bronwen comments on the same limitation, as her television sits in the onetime fireplace (now televisionplace) itself. Even when houses were fitted with electricity, the easiest way of doing this was to fit one or two points only on one side of the room. The focality of the fireplace and mantelpiece directed these plug points to that side of the room, despite the inconvenience of fitting past habit to modern technology. The existence of and practices around the domestic fireplace did, in a way, force a room geography that has put the mantelpiece and television in juxtaposition (and, in Bronwen's living room, in combination). A contrast can be made between Jane's uses of her wall-length mantelpiece, which is divided clearly into two parts – practical and ornamental – with Bronwen's use of her traditional-style mantelpiece:

> You don't want things that don't look nice on there and you don't want it to be messy, whereas that shelf [a shelf unit next to the mantelpiece] seems a bit

stuck back in the alcove a bit and that's more functional. That's got an old radio on it that works, but I don't want people looking at it *per se*. And the phone's up there and the teddy that the dog keeps chewing to pieces. So that's more functional.

For her, the alcove is concealed space, whereas in Jane's double reception room, the alcove will become the focal point. In the present, however, the difference is also apparent in their conception of ordering a room. For Bronwen, the mantelpiece is a focal point, whereas the shelf, hidden in the shadow of the alcove is not, and therefore has a function for the storage of things that are used. This contrasts with her idea of the mantelpiece, which is 'half storage, half display', but is storage in a different way. It stores decorative correspondence, like the holiday postcard, whereas the vet reminder card is on the shelf unit. The mantelpiece stores a plant, because there is 'nowhere else' to put it in the room, but the dog's teddy is on the shelf. She also distinguishes the mantelpiece by its physical height. She does not have children, but the mantelpiece is too high for her dog to knock things off. It is also at eye level, and so always visible. This is, in a way, an imperative, an order *by* space, which obliges her to keep this place clean and tidy and aesthetically pleasing:

> [It] must be clean because if you've devised it as a focal point, you don't particularly want people looking at it and thinking, 'Oh God'.

Yet it is clear that Bronwen has not devised the mantelpiece as a focal point. Her childhood home, the positioning of plug points, and hence of the television and the sofa (opposite the mantelpiece/television), and the age of the house, with its nineteenth century room geography and fireplace, have all constituted the mantelpiece as the focal point. Bronwen has put on it: 'The kind of stuff you normally put on a mantelpiece'.

This contrasts with her view of new houses with flat walls, where she thinks it is more practical to have shelves and cabinets. The absence of the fire as an actor in this focalising of the mantelpiece is striking. Bronwen has grown up with an open fire in the living room, and is clear about her liking of fireplaces, not just mantelpieces. She misses having a fire, even a gas fire, in the room. Yet her comments suggest that, in her eyes, the absence of the fire emphasises the role of the mantelpiece in utilising space in a room. To lose the fire is unfortunate (the result, she says, of Health and

Safety legislation for rental houses); not to use a mantelpiece is careless and a waste of space. Yet she comments on the difficulty of the limited fixtures and the position of them mantelpiece in terms of the organisation of the room. She also comments on the practicality of shelves and cabinets in modern houses. It is the shape of older rooms, with the alcoves and chimney breast, that effectively leads to her conception of a room like this without a mantelpiece as 'weird', and a disused chimney breast shelf as a 'waste of space'.

Bronwen's childhood, of growing up with a mantelpiece which had a permanent display, with some seasonal alterations, has given her a normatively conceived idea of 'the kind of stuff' that goes on a mantelpiece. Therefore, when she lived in a flat without one, she had to reorder that 'kind of stuff' by putting shelves around the room. Now that she does have a mantelpiece, she has put things on it that are 'family things' that give her a 'feeling of home' and make her 'happy', as a space representing materially her transition from an unhappy relationship in a flat. Why does putting things on the mantelpiece make her happy and give her a 'feeling of home'? What has led to her thinking of this practice, of putting things on a mantelpiece as a way of making it 'my place'? Why did she have to put up shelves in her previous flat to display the 'kind of things you would normally put on a mantelpiece'?

Unlike Jane, Diane and John, Bronwen does not use the top of the television as an addendum to the mantelpiece display. This is partly because it is new, and so the top is too narrow, and also because, being directly underneath the mantelpiece, she feels it would be too much. This brings up a major theme in people's conceptions of mantelpieces in their current homes, and its place in the future of flat walls and flat screens, as Phillip discusses. For some, the juxtaposition of the television and mantelpiece was unproblematic. The top of the television was a continuation of the mantelpiece display, at the same generally termed 'eye level', for some informants such as Diane. For others, such as John, the top of the television was an element in a display that might go round the room at that eye level. For John's wife, Charlotte, the television itself was incidental; she was happy for it to be in another room. This luxury, however, of division of rooms according to uses (reading, watching television – often a timed usage - and entertaining guests), was not available to all. Many

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informants had only one reception room. Such a compression of space was particularly pressing in Sheila's case following her divorce and a subsequent reduction in financial and living circumstances. Her new house was not as accommodating to previous domestic practices. Her display took up the gas fire surround, the television and surrounding area and parts of the floor.

The television, however, was a problem for some informants, and this 'problem' was noticeably gendered (Morley 1995; 2000). It is important to note, however, that the views of people who did not live with partners and children had different views. Eric, for example, was troubled by the television, and tried to keep it tucked out of the way, watching it only from 7pm onwards (unless the cricket was showing in the afternoons). His relations with the television were unmediated by partner negotiations, yet still fraught with considerations of place and time. Belinda, Rosalind and Julia (Dan's wife) were not happy about the size and prominence of the television. Belinda would have had a small one to get out (of concealment) for occasional use. She did not have a mantelpiece by choice in her modern house, but was particularly concerned by the prospect:

> I wouldn't like two focal points, [...] it would just clutter. [Pointing at the shelf opposite back entrance to room, selected as her mantelpiece] I mean, I'm not going to sit around that, am I? But if I had a mantelpiece, I might try to arrange the furniture around that, and I would also be trying to arrange it around the television. And as I am quite a tidy person-

Belinda did have a mantelpiece in the room where the television was in their previous house. However, the room was used only for watching television, it was a smaller box, and the mantelpiece display was quite minimal. Even so, she was not altogether happy with this double vision, saying that if she had been 'as perfect as I'd like', she would have been very bothered by it. She does not want a mantelpiece in her current house: 'Because with central heating and so on, we now sit around the television'. Nevertheless, there is a difference between her current house and the previous one, in which there was a television and a mantelpiece in one room (which she distinguished from the 'activity room', where the shelf unit was - now her 'mantelpiece'). In the old house, there were the two rooms distinguished by the different activities that took place in them. The television was smaller, and:

The furniture we had was just one settee and one armchair. And you see, they seemed to encompass the mantelpiece and the television. They seemed to point at both, somehow.

This difference is pertinent, since it highlights the relationship between the television and the mantelpiece, and further, how certain individual choices and social practices have unintended consequences.

The most curious relational positioning of the mantelpiece and the television was that in Harriet's living room. She had wanted a mantelpiece, having 'always' lived in older houses. Nevertheless, it was her husband who had suggested putting some up a year before the interview. As she said: 'It's not exactly a burning issue or anything'. The strange appearance of her living room struck me as I entered – almost all the informants in this project talked about themselves walking into other people's houses, or others walking into their living rooms. They were the 'other', or saw the actions of another, as a part of what made the mantelpiece a focal point.

I entered this particular living room with an expectation: that I would see a mantelpiece, on a chimney breast, and sit down opposite it on a chair or sofa, for the interview. I walked in and saw the mantelshelf, with ornaments on it. Underneath the shelf, which was on the protruding chimney breast, was the sofa. As I sat down on the sofa, I found that I was looking directly at the television, which was against the 'door wall'. Harriet considered this shelf very definitely to be a mantelpiece, and the focal point of the room. It was in the place a mantelpiece should be, but the positioning of the rest of the furniture and the television, towards which the sofa and armchair pointed, was the focal point once one was sitting down. The 'mantelpiece' was the first thing I saw walking into the room, but it then became invisible, since my back, and anyone else's back, was against it. Harriet's young son considered the television to be the focal point, which Harriet said was 'terrible', yet in the ordering of furniture in the room, any other option was negated. This was very interesting, since it brought to the fore the symbolic resonance of the mantelpiece as something more than its parts. It was just a shelf behind the sofa, which no one looked at unless they were actually walking into the room. Yet, for Harriet, it was the focal point.

Nevertheless, this was not a 'burning issue' for her, and this is perhaps the point. Without the fire, it is possible to put a 'mantelpiece' anywhere. For Bronwen, the placing of her sofa against the fireplace was unacceptable, and this, combined with the limited plug points, meant that the television had to go under the mantelpiece. For her, the mantelpiece did order the room; it gave it 'colour and shape and form' and balanced it. Many of the informants spoke of this role of giving balance and symmetry to a room, of making sense of the space, such as Dan and Christine. However, this required 'balance', since the television was 'boring and black' (as Rosalind said) and could not be a focal point. This emphasises the timed character of television watching (as Phillip and Eric mentioned), which might also be class-based (Fiske 1992). I had to ask some informants, such as Diane, Derek and Jane to turn off the television in order for the tape recorder to pick up the dialogue.

Other objects that are in the home for consumption purposes do not demand the same attention as the television. After all, it is easy to do the washing up or cook or even read, with half an ear listening to the radio. The television is different from other consumption goods, in that it commands the focus of the eye and ear, and the positioning of seating around it. People who do not want to watch the television can do other things in the room, such as reading, knitting or chatting (if the television watchers do not mind the intrusion). Yet the room has been ordered for the purpose of watching television. When I revisited Dan's family to pick up the photographic collection, they had very recently upgraded the television and its impermanent brick, home-made stand (disliked by Julia) to a large, silver flatscreen with matching stand and DVD player. This was because they could now afford it, and had also bought new sofas. These new objects had led to the reordering of pictures around the room, including the removal of a Celtic knot above the mantelpiece and its replacement by a large, framed watercolour (see Miller 2001b for the way in which one purchase can lead to many changes in a room).

8.5 Positional Goods; Positioning Goods

The physical domination of the television, however, is not a simple victory of technology and practice 'winning out' over the old-fashioned mantelpiece.

Televisions are not only in living rooms for the visual consumption of what they contain, or transmit. They are in a fashion system, open not only to advances in technology, but also style, and it was a combination of their dual properties that were the focus for conflict in households; the time spent watching them, the content, and their size, colour and framing. Therefore, it could be argued that televisions are now positional goods (Hirsch 1977). The goods and photographs up on the mantelpiece are still positional in some senses, but the question is how their juxtapositions problematise the ordering of domestic space. The mantelpiece itself continues to have status as 'added value' in a house (as Victoria called it), or, as Sian said, 'a nice feature'. The mantelpiece is still considered a focal point – often because it is opposite the door to the living room, is in the centre of the room and is at eye level - and this continues to be the case in many new houses.

8.5.1 Period Mobility

No one I interviewed in the new housing development had bought their houses because there was a mantelpiece, just as people in older houses which had them saw them as 'serendipitous', to use Geoff's term. Yet those who did have them trod a fine line between positively wanting them and viewing them as something almost unseen, a comforting non-absence. Some appreciated them for the role they play in ordering a room. They balanced the room, gave it symmetry, 'made sense' of it and/or countered the influence of the television, which could be seen as exerting a 'pull' on the sight, according to informants such as Belinda. A few appreciated it as a space for display, such as Diane and Christine, but it was not something that they desperately desired, since things could be displayed in cabinets or on shelves. Adrian saw them as being right in the 'context' of the British house and climate, since, having lived in Singapore, he realised that a mantelpiece would just seem silly in a tropical climate. Similarly, he did not see the sense in having a mantelpiece in, say, an apartment in Cardiff Bay, since the context would not be correct. He recognised this distinction as stemming partly from his conception of 'home' as the British family house of his childhood, and partly from this practical sense of appropriateness.

However, many informants did not think it was appropriate to have a mantelpiece in a modern house. These were individuals such as Hannah, Bronwen, Norah and Sian

who lived in older houses with mantelpieces. In all these cases, not one of the houses contained all the original mantelpieces. As I described earlier, new houses horrified Norah because they were small and had no 'meaning'. I argued that this was because the structure, including the mantelpieces, and the contents lacked any relatedness to networks of history, biography and the social structure (Mills 1959). The mantelpieces were disconnected material objects, alienated and decontextualised. The other women were not so critical in the same way, but spoke of the 'silliness' (Hannah) and inappropriateness of these mantelpieces on the flat walls of new houses – particularly Edwardian/Victorian style large tiled affairs. Yet all of them had either replaced the mantelpieces in their homes with reproductions and ones that 'looked authentic' (like Sian), or knew that the mantelpieces were not original to the house before they moved in.

Norah's project was to make the house 'how it used to be', with a grand Victorian overmantel in the dining room and other restoration projects. Yet it is difficult to understand how such a project has more 'meaning' than her friend moving into a new house with features such as a mantelpiece does. Hannah visited her friends in new houses and thought it was funny when there was a mantelpiece, and Sian commented that it was 'funny' that all their friends lived in old houses like theirs. None of the informants criticised people who had mantelpieces in new houses, or those who put them back into 'modernised' Victorian houses. As Belinda said, it is a matter of 'personal taste', and Hannah attached the 'silliness' to the house not the person. This seems strange, since they invoked the relation between the individual and their home as a mode, a means or a co-constructor of self-expression when accounting for themselves.

Informants talked about the 'other' coming into the room and looking at the things displayed on the mantelpiece or other space, but were generally very clear that this did not matter. Some, such as Bronwen, were concerned that the 'focal point' of the mantelpiece was clean, uncluttered and had appropriate display objects on show. Many informants cast themselves as the other, invoking friends' and relatives' houses to support a point they might be making, such as the 'snob value' of wedding invitations (as Hannah said), the 'coldness' of rooms without mantelpieces (according to Charlotte), or the gorgeousness of restored fireplaces (as Shyam saw them). Many

of them talked about the conversations that went on with other family members and friends about mantelpiece displays, lack of mantelpieces and so on. There is a lot of talk about interior décor, and some of the judgments that were reported were blunt. Harriet's aunt commented that her new shelf mantelpiece cloth made it look like an altar (but her sister liked it). Charlotte had visited a friend in a new place with a big display cabinet, who 'did not understand' why none of her friends liked it, and Mike thought his wife Shyam and daughters were mad to put a mirror up above the mantelpiece.

Yet, when it came to talking about people in modern houses who had mantelpieces, and people who removed or restored mantelpieces in old houses, none of the informants criticised these 'others' who had done this. So, in this case, were they all implying that this was the houses' fault, or the builders, in the case of new developments? People put it down to personal taste, what people want. This does not make sense. None of it makes sense. This is a focal point, but a background. It gets in the way of room order, but makes sense of the room. It counterbalances the television, but results in awkward 'double vision'. It is at eye level, but people had not seen or thought about it unless I asked them to. It was 'silly' to have them in new houses, but people who lived in these houses were not silly. It was a matter of 'personal taste', but just a 'serendipitous' 'nice feature'.

What a strange and foreign place the comforting, traditional mantelpiece had become in the course of the fieldwork. Particularly apposite was Sian's comment on the 'funny' similarity of houses between her family and their friends, since this reflects Bourdieu's 'insensible internalisation' thesis of *habitus* (1977; 1984). When referring to 'other' people who live in modern or modernised houses, the same rules regarding taste do not apply; perhaps this is because their 'structuring structures' (the house, the mantelpiece, their *habitus)* separate them from the same categories of culture (Douglas 1966; see also Bourdieu 1977; Said 1995 [1978]).

8.5.2: Shifting Space

In a similar disordering of the taken-for-granted, the living room also seems less familiar, according to this interpretation of interview accounts. The television seems

to order the room and the individual in one way (Morley 2000). Informants spoke of it 'drawing the eye', of being an active focal point. Yet the television was viewed negatively by some people, such as Rosalind, who thought it was boring and black. This makes the point that it is only a focal point when it is switched on, whereas the mantelpiece display is always there. Or rather, the television is a different type of focal point when it is switched off: a negative, or perhaps a present absence. The mantelpiece sometimes orders a room and the placing of the television and furniture, but this too is questionable. It is convention that stops people putting the television in the fireplace (as Bronwen felt she had to do) or the sofa underneath the mantelpiece, as Harriet did, although it was actually the mantelpiece that came in after the sofa. Her mantelpiece was on the chimney breast, which as a permanent structure in older houses, usually orders the position of the mantelpiece. Jane, however, had plans to disrupt even this architectural structuring of space.

In John's phrase (given at the beginning of the chapter): 'the things that children have to look at', the complex imperative entwined with the possession of objects (visually) is apparent. First, they do not possess display goods in the same way that their parents do; they must look at them, because they form the background of the 'rooms that children live in'. Second, this idea of different positions could, in turn, be related to family and/or household formations: the views of and by, for example, male and female parent/partners and children, and also visitors to the house were positioned – and positioning – according to these relations. Finally, the position of the mantelpiece in the living room was enmeshed in a geography of objects. Particularly pertinent was its relationship to the television, and how this was viewed by family members. In one sense, it was the 'host' to this newcomer, yet its residency is not so certain. The 'double vision' that two focal points require, interweaved with the multiple viewpoints of household members place the mantelpiece within complex spatial and material economies.

For many, there was a constant battle, negotiation or compromise in the ordering of domestic space, and the preservation of the mantelpiece as an ideal space. 'Intruders' (as one Mass-Observation schoolboy called them), had only a limited stay of grace before 'mother' moved them off. The television was once the 'intruder' into the living room, the moveable, alienable object in contrast to the immoveable, inalienable

(or so generations thought) fireplace and its mantelpiece, a seemingly inherent construct of social, family and national values for centuries within western and British civilisation. It seemed integral, in metonym, metaphor, image and practice, to social relations and the notion of a civilised society. In order to be a member of society of a nation, an individual had to ascribe to these practices. This can be seen in, for example, eighteenth century paintings and nineteenth century photographs (see Wood 2001; Weston 2002). The mantelpiece display shows to the world their ordered domesticity.

A parallel might be drawn between 'permanent' and 'impermanent' objects on the mantelpiece. Many informants saw the mantelpiece as materialisation, in either its mobility or its constancy of display, of the settledness of one's life (as Bronwen called it), of home and family. This was not always the case, though. For some such as Wendy, the importance was in the meaning of things; the mantelpiece was somewhere to display them, and incidental. Nevertheless, I would question this account, since Wendy grew up with a mantelpiece in the family home, where she constantly saw a permanent display of certain objects. Now that the parents have moved, they no longer have a mantelpiece. However, she still 'knows where to find them [the objects]'. This implies that it was the daily visual consumption of the objects on the focal point of the mantelpiece that made them important, made the memory, and was constitutive, in part, of Wendy's attachment to things, and the desire to display them, however cramped her accommodation might be.

8.6 Conclusion

This reading of the mantelpiece has constructed it as evocation and invocation of absent presences: traditional practices and displays surrounding the fireplace; memories of places, times and people and also a 'social memory'. I would also like to foreground the way in which accounts showed how traditional practices of gender, family or household hierarchies were made visible on the mantelpiece. In addition, conventional orderings of domestic space were shown to be problematic and

enmeshed in ongoing negotiations. The place of the mantelpiece, as a liminal, almost
– but not quite – anachronistic artefact illuminated this point, particularly in relation
to its new neighbour in the living room, the television. We have seen how the
mantelpiece as a focus for study brought into sharp relief the frontiers of relations
between family, domestic space and materials. In the next chapter, I shall return to
focus closely on several narrative accounts of the gift, as another timely perspective
on these boundaries. The gift, as practised reciprocity and displayed object,
highlights the complex nexus between traditional practices of display and 'doing'
home, family, gender and social relations, and contemporary methods of
accomplishing identity in the domestic sphere.

This chapter has followed an exploratory path taking the notion of ordering as an
ongoing practice, within spatial, familial, gendered and material geographies of home.
This connects with the previous chapter, which scrutinised time as practised, ordered
and materialised on the mantelpiece. Taken together, these chapters offer another
perspective on accounting, selection, framing and presenting practices that were
discussed from the perspective of methods of telling and showing in the preceding
pair of chapters. What these twinned chapters have shown is that there is no neat way
of categorising or describing mantelpiece displays, since modes of showing, telling,
hearing and seeing all have their effects on modes of knowing, otherwise termed
'epistemologies'. What we have seen is that, if we look and listen carefully to
informants' accounts, their 'modes of knowing' are entwined with their 'modes of
being', or ontologies.

Yet this constant relating of knowing to being, of accounting for practice by
accounting the self – childhood memory, family membership, aesthetic competence –
has shown that there are discrepancies and gaps, misalignments in this process of
'being' and 'knowing' 'showing' and 'telling' time, space, home, family, self and
gender. This thesis has so far been discursive, free-ranging, in order to open up the
field of this 'little space' in the home. But in focusing on the gift, I wish now to
centre the discussion on this singular theme, that has been present throughout the
thesis, in terms of the familiar, the taken-for-granted, the known-through-memory, the
present as a gift from the past. Is it really possible to step back from the embedding
of knowing in being? I cannot answer that question, but in taking a step back from

informants' accounts, I have shown how very peculiar these mundane timed, spatialised, materialised practices are. The gift – as substance, theory and practice – will be the device enabling a contemplation of this compression, or syncresis of knowing and being, the insensible internalisation of cultural categories and the 'domestication of the body' (Bourdieu 1977; also 1984).

Chapter Nine - Objecting Relations:

The Problem of the Gift

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The Problem of the Gift

'Shelf life is by definition limited. Life on a mantel can last for ever.'
(Agnew 2003: 16)

9.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on informants' accounts of gifts to illuminate modern gift relations, and various modes of interpreting the notion of 'gift'. By focusing on the gift as practice and substance, I aim to unpack the compression and elision of past/present, accounting for objects/selves, knowing/being and thus construct a frame for making sense of the findings. We have seen that opening up the multi-dimensionality of viewing points, positioning accounts and ordering practices also exposes misalignments, conflict, paradox and difference. The last two chapters considered the mantelpiece in relations of time and space, objects and persons. As such it was shown to be enmeshed in memory, biography and family histories, as were the objects that it physically raised up above the common *milieu* of household things.

Reflections on the Mass-Observation Archive material have already shown how the memories of older informants interplayed with this collection of archive reports which documented mantelpieces displays at a time when the fireplace was still a centre of daily activity in the home. It was an architectural 'given', even though it was technologically obsolescent by 1937. It is now a liminal household object, in that it, like the objects it raises up, occupies a position that is at once foregrounded and foregrounding, and the background to everyday life in the home. As such, it is still a 'given', having almost automatic rights to a central position even in the living rooms of newly built houses, as the taken-for-granted traditional hearth. Similarly, its place in the memories of informants is taken-for-granted by many, and even those who did not remember or recall a specific memory of a mantelpiece from their childhoods still had a fixed notion of what is displayed on a mantelpiece and what might stand as a 'mantelpiece-equivalent'. It has its place, therefore, in personal memory and social

memory, in houses and in 'The Home', as a common and personal heirloom. As such, it could be seen as a place of and for the imagination.

Yet what enables it to reside in the popular imagination – a focal point, a display for precious/necessary goods - is the very flaw which threatens its territorial rights to the living room: its detachment from the place of the fire. Furthermore, we have seen that is not a sign circulating in a hyper-reality, as postmodernists might contest (Baudrillard 1996 [1968]; Dovey 1999), because it is its 'thingness' that is its salient property, and which problematises it as a focal point in the living room. It hesitates at an horizon of time - passing from living memory as the mantel over the fire - to stand now as an 'edge' on the flat walls of modern houses, protruding, or intruding into a space that is now also the territory of the newcomer, the television. Additionally, in being a raised platform for artefacts, the mantelpiece at once becomes demanding and demanded: the weight of remembered family practices and displays, of appropriateness, of taste and tradition all come to bear on a place that is not only problematised, but problematising.

I have shown how these negotiations and frictions regarding the position of the mantelpiece and its positioning properties for displaying goods have tended to become most visible when looking at gender relations, and particularly at the role of the mother and the female partner. The common conflation of woman and home (Forty 1986; Davidoff and Hall 1995), home and memory (Douglas 1993; Maleuvre 1999) has been demonstrated with regard to their role as managers of the mantelpiece in both family relations and spatial relations within the home, and this can be related to their management of the hearth and hearth goods (Filbee 1980; Pennell 1999). As mother/partner, women were both pivotal in memory and in present orderings of the domestic spatial economy. Since the gift economy has been shown to be a feminised practice (Cheal 1988), and many informants accounted for displayed objects as gifts, it seemed an apposite focus for exploring one particular line of interpretation. Most of the informants whose accounts form the empirical basis of this chapter were female. This was not due to my selection practice, but because it was principally women who received gifts for themselves that were also gifts for the home, and who chose to buy themselves domestic display objects if they received money as a present. This emphasises the conflation of woman and the domestic interior (Bourdieu 1977).

I shall first contextualise the empirical findings within gift theory, in order to highlight its importance in my final interpretative frame.

9.2 Literature

This chapter relates to several debates in sociological and anthropological theories of gift exchange. Assumptions regarding a definite schism between primitive and modern societies, encouraged by Mauss's work (1990 [1950]) have been substantially reworked following critical reflection of the 1960s (Douglas 1966; Nugent 1993; Myers 2001). Bourdieu provided a critique of gift society as 'collective deception', and the advancement of market capitalism as a disenchantment, a refusal to continue with the cost of this colluding delusion (1977; 1979). Gift exchange within modern commodity exchange societies is now seen as complex and research has centred on unpacking the rules, meanings and functions of the gift relation (see Agnew 2003). For example, the anonymity of money (Simmel 1978) has been contested by recent work on the gift relation (Zelizer 1994; Miller 2001c; Hall 2006). Whereas Hall anatomises the giving of money to street beggars to show how there is an exchange in this apparently one-sided ritual, Zelizer argues that impersonal, alienated/ing goods and meanings of the market are constantly appropriated by consumer practices. This accords with Appadurai (1986a) and Kopytoff (1986) arguing that the form of the good as 'commodity' is only a moment in its biography.

The feminization of gift exchange and of gift-events, such as Christmas has been a recent focus (Cheal 1988; Hunt 1995; Corrigan 1995; Godbout 1998). The unequal relations of gift-giving have been related to the maintenance of gendered emotional and domestic work and consequently to social and economic anxieties concerning inequality, divorce and the commodification of emotion (Cheal 1987; Hochschild 1989; Belk 1996). For example, the commodification of social relations invested in gifts, and the 'symbolic violence' of gift hierarchies, has been a concern for sociologists (Bourdieu 1977; Cheal 1988; Godbout 1998). In particular, Christmas has been a focus for the view of the gift as commodity (Belk 1993) and the domestication of previously socially explicit hierarchies of exchange (Nissenbaum

1997), with specific attention on the parent/child relation (Werbner 1996), as well as gendered tensions highlighted by the event.

Conversely, the embedding of gift exchange in the market has led to a review of commodification in general. For example, Miller (1998a) has argued that everyday shopping practices have replaced gift exchange, rather than the now commodified world of gift-giving. In a conflation of market and reciprocal circuits of exchange, the notion of 'gifts to self' question the validity of separating the two spheres, and similarly question the value of consumption theories that ignore the continuing hold of 'the gift' over the social imagination (see Mick 1996). Cash is not put on display in the home (Leal 1995: 316), but reconciling taste and the varying sentiments of household members with the gift relation is difficult (Chapman 1999). However, cash is often given as a gift between close family members (Douglas and Isherwood 1996 [1979]).

Thus, this chapter explores how, in an assumed culture of individualised choice, taste and identity (Featherstone 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001), gift theory might illuminate the ambiguous status of the gift-for-display. In this respect, it is located theoretically within the literature contesting the dominance of individualism and fluidity in sociological theory. This has recently been found in work based in Strathern's concept of partial relations (1991), focusing on mobility, ambiguity and the relation (Latimer 2001; Munro 2001; Mason 2004). Hence I aim to move the thesis into considering the relations between the mundane and the cosmological, routine and ritual, and how categorising the gift as 'structuring structure' or *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977; 1979; 1984) might contribute to a theory of the mantelpiece.

This apparent compression of theory: syncresis of *habitus* and the relation, is quite deliberate at this stage, since both are refusals to accept the freewheeling circulation of signs and identities. This aspect of postmodernist theory seems to posit a *complete* detachment of meaning from places, things and people that denies heaviness, volume, temporality, attachment and other properties of gift-artefacts that problematises their exchange, as my next point demonstrates. It was noticeable how many of the informants considered that most of their display objects were gifts, even though responses to my questions regarding provenance of objects revealed that they had

bought many objects themselves. Thus, 'the gift' - even the seemingly paradoxical 'gift to self' - is more 'visible', or accountable than 'the commodity', perhaps because of its continuing importance as a 'visible manifestation' of one's social relations (Dittmar 1992: 98). The 'gift to self' not only compresses exchange in social space – reducing it to a singularity, rather than the duality of exchange - but also social time, in contrast to Bourdieu's theory that a period of time must elapse between receiving and reciprocating a gift (1977).

This suggests that an analogy between gift exchange and my interpretation of the mantelpiece and mantelpiece display as syncresis and compression is a useful device for framing this chapter on 'the gift'. This collapse of traditional boundaries of difference and periodicity in gift exchange might not, however, be the same as the removal of gift exchange as a *'prestation totale'*, a total social fact (Mauss 1990 [1950]). As we have seen in the empirical findings, mantelpiece practices and artefacts interact in relations of displacement, replacement, restoration, renovation, refurbishment, adaptation, augmentation and diminishment, rather than 'removal'. The complexities of contemporary gift practice can be seen in the first account, which serves an introduction to the various aspects of domestic gift displays that are illuminated in the accounts that follow.

9.3 Burning Down the House: Peter Pan, Tenby and the Small China Dog

Ruth gave me this account when I asked what she would save in the event of a house fire. She has many display areas in her living room, filled with heirlooms, presents, things she has bought and photographs of her family. Yet amidst all of this stuff, she would take one object besides the photographs of her children and grandchildren: a small china dog. Some twenty years previously, Ruth gave her daughter four pounds to take on a school day trip to Tenby. Rather than spend it on sweets or things for herself, the child returned having spent all her mother's money on a gift – for her mother. This perfect gift exchange, in which money given was immediately translated and reciprocated in the form of a material object, is perhaps the most intense example of the process by which people embed or crystallise social relations

in inalienable goods. It does contend with Bourdieu's argument that a period of time should elapse between reciprocal gift exchange (1977), and raises interesting questions regarding hierarchies of exchange and symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1977; Werbner 1996):

> Alison came round with the teapots because she sent for them, and said, 'Oh, I don't like this one, you can have this one'. The Peter Pan one, she bought as a present to come home from Disneyland [...]. It's not that I don't like the teapots, but if you're thinking of just grabbing and running, I think it would have to be [the china dog] – it means quite a lot, because, as I say, she didn't have all that much money, and to give her four pounds, and she ends up coming home, and 'What did you buy - spend all your money?' I knew that she must have spent most of her money on that, and she was about eleven, I suppose, twelve, so I would try and grab that, and all the pictures, obviously, because you don't like the thought of pictures going up in flames.

Ruth does not mention all the heirlooms she has gathered about her, from her parents, grandmother and husband's family. Although most families no longer inherit large objects, many continue to receive small heirlooms such as ornaments. A discussion of 'curatorial consumption' examines one woman's role in memorialising her family and thus granting herself 'belonging' by filling her house with inherited goods (McCracken 1991: 44). However, this once taken-for-granted passage of goods through time has become incommensurable (in some respects) with expressions of taste in dressing oneself and dressing the home (Miller 1995, Banim and Guy 2001). This is a theme in many informants' accounts, highlighting the difficult interaction between traditional inheritance rituals and the conflation of taste and self-identity.

Ruth does, however, mention the huge collection of teapots that covers a broad display shelf in the living room and has spread to other areas of the house. This collection was not her choice; her daughter joined a teapot collectors' club, but gave her mother any she did not like. She then started to buy her mother teapots from holiday places. and then other family members began to give Ruth teapots too. They take up a lot of space, but are imbued with little meaning by their owner. Nor does she use them for their designed function. Other informants had 'suffered' aspects of

this fate: the designated collector, the recipient of souvenirs or the repository of unwanted objects still labelled as 'gifts' – reverse heirlooms, in a way.

The giving of money, particularly to one's children for the self-purchase of presents has also become prevalent (according to people I interviewed), thus transferring the responsibility and the power of selection from giver to recipient (see also Douglas and Isherwood 1996 [1979]; Corrigan 1995). In this account, Ruth's daughter turns this transferral on its head, just as she reverses the heirloom process by giving her mother unwanted objects as gifts. Many informants told me stories about choosing their own presents, of contributing to the cost of their own gifts, and one even bought her own heirloom. Many also spoke about the problems of storage and disposal of objects, in particular, things they had received as gifts. The 'throwaway society' is not so quick to destroy things which are still so powerfully invested with memory, emotion and relations with others. Yet, at a time when 'stuff' has never been so cheap, and the private space of home has been opened up to scrutiny as a place of and for consumption, ritualised gift exchange can no longer be taken for granted. Various aspects of the gift in transition will be explored, which Ruth's tale of teapots and china dogs has opened up for us.

9.4 Once Upon A Time: Renewing the Past

The comparisons that are available to this study can be found only in the Mass-Observation Archive material (1937, 1983). With reference to the display of gifts, souvenirs and heirlooms, there has clearly been a transition. In the 1930s, mantelpiece displays were highly conventionalised spaces (all but one of the 120 volunteers in 1937 had a mantelpiece). They were symmetrical and usually had a clock in the middle. People displayed inherited objects whether they liked them or not, and kept things on display even when they were broken. Souvenirs from relatives, from the Far East, the continent and British seaside resorts were put on the mantelpiece. Older people in the Cardiff study also recalled similar assemblages, and some had retained this custom of display on their current mantelpieces. However, there was a sense of a change in attitudes towards this customary form of home décor, as Shyam, aged 74, related it:

Until last week the cabinet was full of china that was about sixty/seventy years old. Foreign china there was because my dad kept a boarding house and the men used to bring mementoes home. They brought these two tea sets and a coffee set and when you held it up to the light there's a woman's face at the bottom of the cup and I actually seen a piece in the Echo [local paper] last night about it: 'For Sale', a china cup, it was a joke really, 'For Sale', a cup with a lady's face in the bottom. Well that was the two sets that I had and I thought well I know my girls; if anything happened to me they're just going to bundle everything up. That may sound morbid but you do, you don't always want all the old rubbish your family has collected but they both said they wanted the tea set. So I said well there's only a tea set and coffee set, you can choose between yourselves. As long as one of you takes the cabinet so now I am waiting for the cabinet to go. Linda [daughter] has on her mantelpiece, as you say probably from me, a candle, candlestick and a clock and a vase, I think.

Shyam's story is interesting, since I visited her just after her daughter Linda had prompted her to clear her living room mantelpiece and, as she relates here, clear the old china cabinet that her husband has always thought a waste of space. Although Shyam has retained and displayed all her family's goods, she knows that her daughters, both aged around forty, do not have the same attitudes towards heirlooms (see McCracken 1990). Their houses are carefully renovated period properties with, as she thinks, beautifully ornamented interiors. That old assumption, that one's inalienable family goods can be entrusted to the next generation is no longer valid (contrast Weiner 1985; Chevalier 1999), and Shyam is dealing with this transition with a pre-mortem clear out to save her daughters the bother of getting rid of unwanted, antiquated (as opposed to antique) objects.

Paradoxically, her daughter continues to decorate her period mantelpiece in the same way as her mother has done; she has, however, selected the items for display herself. Shyam's mantelpiece display includes a bird ornament that belonged to her dead sister, a perpetual calendar (so popular in the 1930s) from her aunt, and an ornament that her daughter gave her. Like Ruth's daughter, she was disposing of unwanted goods by giving them to her mother. Whereas Ruth had to keep the teapots because they were quite costly (and therefore could not be thrown away), Shyam's daughter was given the ornament as a leaving present from work; the

morals of gift exchange preclude throwing it away. By giving it to her mother as a 'gift', she avoids destroying the network of relations imbued in the object. Shyam, therefore, has a dual responsibility: to dispose of unwanted heirlooms, and to store unwanted gifts. She finds the current absorption with certain antiques – such as the china cups – amusing, thus highlighting the curious distinctions that are made between desirable antiques and junk shop bric-a-brac.

9.5 'Buy-It-Yourself': Representing Future Heirlooms

> The candlesticks my mother gave me, she had a burglary about two years ago and they cleaned the house out basically and she had lots of lovely antique stuff and like, with the insurance money, she said that I – my brother, sister and I to choose something so that's what I chose with the money she gave me.

Harriet tells me this story about a pair of silver candlesticks on her mantelpiece, which is covered with a lacy cloth and an entirely silver display. It was interesting that her mantelpiece was a pine shelf her husband had put up on the wall behind the sofa, since the original fireplace had been removed. This demonstrates how people construct their material environments; it was Harriet's house, Harriet's mantelpiece, and Harriet's heirloom. It was comforting, at a time when lifestyle magazines and supplements are promoting certain orders of taste and design, to discover idiomatic constructions of home interiors (Gregory 2003). What was most noticeable, however, was the way in which Harriet had translated a cheque from an insurance company into a gift from her mother (see Keane 2001 for money's 'vulnerability to slippage' – used by Harriet to advantage). In fact, this was more than a gift, it was a replacement for an object that had been currently her mother's possession, but also contained its potential role as heirloom. Such a transformation was conditional on her mother's death. This implied condition had been destroyed, however, when her mother's goods were stolen; whatever object had been assigned to Harriet would now be an object for purchase, for new meanings, in a shop or stall.

Since the intended transformation had been prevented, a new transformation took place. The original objects were converted to insured, stolen goods, which could then be turned into money. However, rather than Harriet's mother going out and buying

herself new display items, she bypassed this stage in the conversion process of money: to her object, thence daughter's heirloom. Instead, she allowed her children to buy things with the insurance money and ascribe to these objects the role of pre-mortem heirloom. Whereas Shyam had undertaken a pre-death clearout of objects, effectively ending their biographies as heirlooms, Harriet's mother had dealt with the problem of inheritance by giving her children the power of selection and ascription. This also offers a solution for the problematic gift relation when different family members contest ownership of a symbolically significant heirloom (see Finch 1997).

9.6 From Death to Marriage: The Euthanasia of Wedding Gifts

> The clock was a wedding present and I think we had about three carriage clocks! And one of them just ended up there. I have to say I never – well, infrequently use it to tell the time because there's clocks on the video and all kinds of things around the room that I use in preference.

Adrian spoke to me in his university office, using a sketch he had made of his mantelpiece display on the back of a letter from SKY. It was an ordered mantelpiece, however, and easy to understand in terms of conventionalised display. There was a mirror above it, and a clock in the middle. The clock is not used to tell the time; it is, as Adrian says later, the 'automatic' clock at the centre of the mantelpiece. It is, similarly, the automatic wedding gift. As markers of important ritual events, clocks also take a central role; changes in their function as gifts and time displays therefore suggest other transitions in social practices and relations. Older informants, such as Eric, spoke of the clock on the mantelpiece as a special object, only to be wound by father, an expensive object that might be given as a retirement present, and used to tell the time (even if it was wrong).

Adrian and his wife received three wedding clocks; two are stored away, and it is unlikely they will be displayed. It is also unlikely that something so ritually bound up and so costly will be thrown away at this point in their lives (mid-thirties). Both the stored clocks and the displayed clock are taking up space in the home. All of them were given automatically; Adrian cannot recall who gave them the clock on the mantelpiece, so that particular, personal relation is not present. It is associated with a happy event, but also connects with the unwanted clocks; all three are displayed in a

way, as a reminder of the problem of materialising ritual events in objects: what is to be done with them? The 'wedding list' is increasingly used to deal with this problem, and cash is now British couple's 'most wanted' gift (Guardian 2005; see also Cheal 1988: 122). This is seen as distasteful by some people, but makes sense at a time when many couples live together and assemble many necessities of home life before marriage. Also, without the guidance of a list, guests are stuck with the problem of choice, and resort to the conventional - resulting in a multitude of the same objects, none of which can be thrown away.

9.7 Collection, not Selection: 'being ourselves for you'

Storage of wedding gifts is not the only problem. There is a certain equivalence between the 'automated' ritual of wedding presents, and the way in which some people have collections imposed on them accidentally, but to the great convenience of gift-givers. As one can see in every city centre, there are shops that exist with the sole purpose of providing this particular species of gift that has no function or role besides those of solving the problem of ritual gift-giving at a time when many people have everything they need, of being 'the wedding gift' or 'collectible'. Such a shop sells a particular type of china ornament that I encountered only in this exploration of mantelpiece displays: figurines from Lladró pottery in Spain. There are many websites devoted to the selling, buying and telling stories about these figures (for example:www.Lladro.com; www.someonespecial.com; www.aretiredcollection.com). Each one has an official story and is usually part of a collection or 'family' of figurines. Some are made with specific events in mind, such as the birth of a child, Mothering Sunday, Valentine's Day and, of course, weddings. They could be viewed as representations of the absolute commodification of social ritual and gift relations, and were displayed on many mantelpieces, irrespective of any socio-economic categorisations. However, their recipients did not view them as commodified relations; many of them were much-loved objects and were connected closely with accounts of memorable occasions and family relations.

However, such 'collectibles' – unlike books or chocolates or kitchen utensils – could become problematic, should the recipient rebel or the occasion they commemorate

change from a happy memory to a different life. The following account, concerning a collection of Lladró ornaments and Scottish crystalware shows the problem that an individual contends with following a complete change in lifestyle and identity. The second, in which a woman tells of her burgeoning collection of hedgehog ornaments, contrasts with the former, in that the narrator is less troubled by the assignation of 'collector' identity (see Dittmar 1992: 98).

Annette has changed her lifestyle and, to some extent, her identity. Previously married and living in RAF houses, she is now divorced and lives with her female partner in a modern house that she owns. On her move to Wales, she started to collect sheep, which I shall discuss later. She also has a collection of Lladró china figures. These are expensive gifts from her parents:

> I think luckily my parents are in Scotland so they don't visit very often because their taste and my taste in somewhat removed, hence – though I do still keep the Lladró pieces through there because they tend to buy me them. They've stopped now I did say, "No, no more Lladró, no more ballerinas and stuff because that's not just me", so I have said no to that.

She has put the Lladró figures in a cabinet in her dining room, separate from the main display unit that is the focal point of her living room, and which contains a careful selection of ornaments that commemorate aspects of her biography she wants to recall. As well as the china, wedding gifts of china and Scottish crystal are kept in the cabinet:

> That's from my previous marriage so it's more – I look on that [in the dining room] as definitely as a storage area ...but this [in the living room] is more reflecting my personality. That's a different mood, but I do think it's a shame not to show the pieces off because some of it's quite expensive. [...] They are a different part of my life so they don't perhaps fit in with my lifestyle now as they did, but I still think the crystal stuff is beautiful, sort of Edinburgh crystal which of course because I'm Scottish I've got a sentimental attachment to that.[...] But it's functional as well because I have to store it somewhere. I suppose I could wrap it all up and put it in the garage but I do like it on display but I very – no, I use them very rarely. I have other crystal I prefer to use which is much less ornate than that stuff. [...] It's very much the old me I suppose but it still was a part of my life so I don't suppose I want to erase it altogether. [...] But it's not like a constant reminder of the past. [...] I just think it's quite nice stuff that doesn't deserve to be put away. [...] Not quite yet anyway.

In response to my question whether it is partly the expense of the items that stops her putting them away, Annette says that this is the case (although she had not thought of it in this way before):

> It does seem a shame to put it all away when obviously there's a lot of money spent acquiring it all for me so perhaps there is an element of that...

This story does emphasise the complications that have arisen from the habit of equating social relations and rituals with material goods. Divorce was not a commonplace until the 1970s, and the disposal of old wedding presents following divorce is a new concern. In addition, people married younger, before setting up home together, meaning that wedding presents performed a different purpose from today's routinised exchange.

Annette also has an extensive collection of sheep, begun when she moved to Wales, due to their common association. This decision foregrounds the way in which tourism has spectacularised culture (Urry 1990; Stanley 1998); this has progressed from the small 'Souvenirs of Whitby' on 1937 mantelpieces and highly prized mementoes of the Orient brought back by sailors for Shyam's family. These tourist objects have become an area of production and consumption in themselves, and furthermore, have become a field for constructions of meaning entirely detached from their countries of origin. The association of sheep with Wales is particularly salient, since although there are a lot of sheep in Wales, the connection is now a focus for jokes, political furore and media debate. However, this does not destroy the particularity of Annette's decision to collect sheep, and this could be viewed as an aspect of an interest in connecting material culture to place, and hence connecting herself (as can be seen in her account of the Scottish crystal).

The original motive of her decision to collect sheep has nevertheless been appropriated by other people and undergone a transformation. She now receives many sheep from various friends and relatives, but displays only her favourites. As new ones arrive, older ones are sidelined, and eventually are stored upstairs in a spare bedroom. She has not yet thrown any away, as she has plenty of space in the house.

It has four bedrooms and she has no children; the sheep, therefore, are not currently 'stealing' space from people. Logically, however, the collection will have either to be stopped, or older or unwanted sheep figures disposed of at some future point.

What began as a decision to make a link with her 'new country' has been transformed into an easy gift-making decision by her friends and family. This transformation of an individual decision to select specific goods to a collective decision, in a way, *not* to have to select gifts, resonated in many people's accounts. For example, the next account is given by a woman who has had to confront this problem, since she lives in a three-bedroom house with her husband and three sons. Gina likes hedgehogs, although she became a collector by 'accident'. They now take up a lot of space at home, and even in her office. She therefore has occasional 'culls', but continues to accept them from people in good humour:

> I started collecting them when my oldest son was a baby, and it was completely by accident. I saw a glass blower, and I've always been intrigued by little hedgehogs, and he made two glass hedgehogs, and my mother-in-law bought them for me, and it stemmed from there, because once people know that you collect something, the floodgates open! So, some are more special than others; we have several hundred [laughs]! A lot of the soft toy ones, I cull and give them to the school when they have fairs or whatever. [...] I let them carry on, because they know that it's something that gives me pleasure, the fact that I have them all around my workstation at work as well [smiles], because I have so many, and they're going up the stairs [laughs]. But I like them, people know that I like them, it gives them pleasure to give them to me, so I haven't got the heart to say, 'Look, I think I have enough'.

As is clear from Gina's account, she does not mind this ascription of 'hedgehog collector' identity, nor does she have a problem with disposal – although note that the creatures join that circus of school fairs, charity shops and jumble sales that deserves more research. It is a different world of goods and gifts from the sphere of objects bought in 'objects' shops. Gina lets people give her hedgehogs to give *them* pleasure; they, conversely, think they are giving her pleasure. Therefore, although the hedgehogs are taking up too much space in the house, and she has nowhere to store them, as Annette can, they do perform a role in the process of building and maintaining social relations. This does, however, break down when an individual no longer wants that ascribed collector identity, when there has been a significant change in lifestyle and self-identification, such as Annette attempting to remove herself from

the label 'Lladró collector' by putting the ballerinas in another, less prominent place (but could not hide them away).

Collections can also fulfil other connections of memory and friendship, perhaps because these particular sorts of objects, including tourist goods, have become curiously immaterial. Not everyone appreciates tourist objects for aesthetic form, such as Jesus figurines from Brazil, but these sorts of display gifts can become a form of communication between partners and friends. Kate and David have a habit of picking up iconic tourist trash for each other, such as Eiffel towers, and also specific cultural goods such as Venetian masks on their many travels. These are displayed on their mantelpiece, together and without fuss, as material memories of travels and this ongoing private joke. This fusion of aesthetically pleasing objects and memorabilia of various types that did not 'fit' with the order of things was a common feature of many mantelpiece displays and other decorative assemblages around the home. Some people were troubled by this disorder, or 'matter out of place' (Douglas 1966), but could not reconcile an aesthetic design with maintaining a display of gifts that might be beloved objects, or have associations with loved ones. One couple solved the problem by telling their adult children what they wanted as souvenirs from their far-flung travels, thus maintaining their control of their home décor. However, other individuals could not reconcile contesting demands on their space, as can be seen in the next story.

Sian lives in an Edwardian villa with her husband and three children. There are period fireplaces in both reception rooms, which she has decorated with collections of Wedgwood and Moorcroft pottery. She likes these features, as they look 'authentic'. There was a tiny carriage clock on one side of the mantelpiece, and this decentring seemed deliberately to contravene the 'rules and regulations' that govern mantelpiece displays, such as symmetry and a central clock (to which many people still adhere). Her explanation shows how she negotiates a path between her aesthetic designs and displaying a problematic gift (see Madigan and Munro 1999:70):

> I know I think it's because it's too tiny to be central. My mum bought me that; I think it was for my eighteenth or something. I saw it in a shop in town and I just love it as well, but I just think to have that in the middle would be rather – well it would look a bit odd so I tend never to put it in the middle.

She does recall that it was an eighteenth birthday present, an event that is viewed as the ritual passage from childhood to adulthood in Britain, and for which, appropriately, she bought a clock. Like many other informants, the fact that she chose the clock does not interfere with her perception of the clock as a present from her mother. She loves the clock and her mother and these considerations over-ride her desire to have a quite traditional display on the mantelpiece. This decision can be seen in reverse in a short story by Hannah, who displays three tiny mice on her mantelpiece, despite the fact that she detested her grandmother, from whom she received them:

> The mice are from my father's mother. That's the one thing of hers I have because I wouldn't have anything else of hers in the house. I hated her. She was frightfully snobby and was very sexist [...] She was a witch. From the age of 12 onwards I refused to see her after that. I didn't see her until she died. I allowed mice house space on the, I think it was William Morris, "nothing that isn't useful or you believe to be beautiful." I believe them to be beautiful. They have no sentimental value whatsoever other than they've been in all the flats George and I have lived in and I like them.'

In this case, Hannah has divested the mice of their socially related meaning and located them in a culturally specific frame of reference that allows her to see them as aesthetic objects. It emerges that they also perform a function as a music box to silence screaming children; the mice therefore fulfil Morris's joint remit. This divestment contrasts with the way in which she, along with other informants, can also invest objects with social relations and memories of absent times, places and people. It is important to note this ability to invoke narratives about objects from an array of accounts, dependent on their effectiveness as tools in the construction of objects as 'fitting', as aesthetic, memory and/or identity goods. This 'calling to account' finds an analogy with the way in which individuals are taking the responsibility for the selection of their own things with money gifts. It also connects with the removal of 'automatic' rights to house space for inherited goods (McCracken 1990).

The current political emphasis on choice, rights and responsibilities seems to have moved into the system of gift exchange, in moving choice from the giver to the receiver. However, this 'democratisation' of the gift is not all it seems to be, as I shall

discuss in the conclusion. In order to illuminate the key point concerning the gendering of the gift, I shall end this empirical section by focusing in close detail on two accounts given by the same informant. This is the last exposition of interview accounts, and this microscopic scrutiny is intended to allow a glimpse of all the themes raised so far in the empirical chapters. It also mirrors the distancing from the informants' views and the realm of lived experience that characterises the final two chapters.

9.8 Repairing Relations : The Shield of Achilles

9.8.1 Repairing Relations I: Remembering the Past

The following two narratives were told to me by Alison, a woman who lives alone in a modern house with a mantelshelf, which forms the centrepiece of what she calls her 'focal wall'. To the left of the mantelpiece is a plate from the Jersey Pottery, commemorating the Millennium. Her mother gave this to her on a visit to the pottery after they had viewed her godmother's body on the island, where Alison was born. However, her mother did not choose it or entirely pay for it. Her offer to get it for her daughter is prompted by Alison's exclamation that it is 'gorgeous', and she also contributes to the cost. If told in a sentence, 'I liked this plate, so my mother gave me some money towards it and I bought it', does not convey the complexity of the gift-giving process. The plate is introduced with an apologia: 'I've often thought, perhaps people will think, "That's a very odd thing to have on a wall," but this is very, very symbolic.' Alison has put herself in the position of the other, an absent presence which is referred to in many of the interviews, and considers that the act of putting the plate on the wall is 'odd'. It is her action that is deviant, rather than the plate, yet by recounting the narrative embedded in the object, she justifies this action. In a curious reflexive move, the presence of the plate on the wall at once questions her action and affirms it via the medium of her narrative. She thus accounts for herself in this account of the plate. The narrative is very long, interspersed by brief 'signs of listening' by me (indicated here by ellipses). The story loops and circles, but it is all connected with the plate and Alison, via place, family and memory. It is artfully told, involving shifts of tense and person, with asides and various periphrases. By showing

the whole story, I aim to demonstrate how the provenance of a gift is a process, and that the final static 'product', a plate on a wall in a house, belies the complex account of its ongoing role in identity, memory and family work:

And then this plate, which perhaps I've often thought perhaps people will think, 'That's a very odd thing to have on a wall,' but this is very, very symbolic. This plate is The Jersey Pottery Millennium bowl/plate or whatever. Now there's a whole load of associations here. I was born in Jersey and – [...] my parents used to have a guesthouse in Jersey and all three of us, me and my sisters, were born there and we lived there until I was about six. My godmother – in my adult life even when I was married and after that I had gone back a lot on holidays and the link was really my godmother who, my Auntie Mary as I call her, who died. When did she die? Ah, 1999. [...]

And my mother and my middle sister and I went over for the funeral and I wouldn't have contemplated not going and we went – we couldn't – the dates. That's right, we booked this trip for three or four days and when we got there we discovered that the funeral was the lunchtime after we were leaving on the morning. They'd changed the dates but we decided, oh well never mind, but we went to see her and – at the undertakers, you know laid out, you know we wanted to see her and I'd never done that before or since and it was a big traumatic experience for me. But it was a 'saying goodbye moment' and then the three of us were all very subdued but wanted to do something that day.
[...]

It would have been about lunchtime and we didn't want to just wander around St Helier and we'd hired a car and everything. And I said to Mum, 'Let's go to the Jersey Pottery,' which was a place that I had taken, my husband and I had taken Aunty Mary, for lunch on many occasions and it was one of my really favourite places. You know if somebody said to me, 'It's your birthday, I'll take you anywhere for lunch, where would you want to go?' The Jersey Pottery Restaurant would be up there for me as one of the places I love to just be whisked off to. So the place was very symbolic, a) because I love it, b) because it had associations of being there with Auntie Mary, and it seemed like a nice gentle place to go. [...]

We wanted somewhere that would take our minds off it but wasn't going to be crowded with horrible people, and we went there and we had a look round and every time you go no matter how many times you go, it's just such a lovely place and you know, the craftsmanship and everything and we actually had afternoon tea. I think we couldn't face a lunch or something, you know we just didn't feel up to it, but we had afternoon tea there and we actually all found it was fine. The three of us together, we got through it and it lifted us out of ourselves a bit. But it was still connected to memories and we went in the shop – sorry, it's taking ages to explain this story - we went in to the shop and this was there together with its matching different plate. And I just took one look at it and said, 'Oh, that is gorgeous, you know that is just fabulous,' and it was the Millennium Plate on sale. And my mum said, 'I want to buy

you each something to remember this you know. Would you like that?' and I said, 'Yes, I'd like that more than anything else.'[...]

And in fact it was a bit more expensive, so I think I put some money to it. But I brought it back and it just had to be it somewhere really, really prominent and for me even though it's asymmetrical that was the place to put it and that's why it's there and – [...] I suppose every time I look at it in a kind of – *shush* – all of that just goes *shush* through my brain or even through my subconscious brain probably. [...] It doesn't consciously always come out but just one look at that and all of that story is encapsulated in that.

The 'story' is introduced as an exegesis of the symbolism embodied by the plate: 'Now there's a whole load of associations here.' This is a complex tale, as it begins with Alison's birth in Jersey, and is, in a sense, autobiographical and a history of the family. It moves on to a memory of her godmother, who provided an ongoing link to the island once she moved away aged six, since the participant visited her frequently. Her death in 1999 prompted a visit by Alison, one of her sisters (the other's absence is unexplained) and her mother, in order to attend the funeral. However, the funeral is timed for after their flight departure, and so they go only to see her godmother 'laid out' at the undertakers'. She says, 'I'd never done that before or since but it was a big traumatic experience for me but it was a saying goodbye moment...'.

Since they miss the funeral, she suggests this visit to the pottery, which is a place of memory for her. Not only had she taken her godmother there, but also her husband. It is therefore an autobiographical marker for her, as well as a suitable place in which to commemorate the death of her godmother. The narrative at this point has become detached from the plate altogether, as Alison enters a periphrasis about the Jersey pottery. She uses the device of an imaginary conversation to introduce this, supporting her assertion that it is 'one of my really favourite places'.

Time is clearly an important idea that is being enacted in this narrative, embedded (as Alison sees it) in a plate that commemorates a number of times, places and people, an object that was produced, moreover, with the intent of commemorating the Millennium. It fixes on her wall her birthplace, a holiday place for her as a single, married and divorced woman, her godmother's home and deathplace. She moves between several time zones when telling the story, from the human universal (the Millennium, birth and death), autobiographical (her aged six, her passing from single

to married to divorced), to the every day, including flight times, funeral timing, lunchtime. The climax of the story is the 'saying goodbye moment', unique and ritualistic, which could not be followed by 'just wander[ing] around St Helier.' The Pottery therefore becomes highly significant, in being the only place to go to after such a moment. This explains why Alison takes such pains to justify the visit. This is summarised by the statement, 'So the place was very symbolic,' echoing her comment about the plate, which in turn, therefore, takes on greater symbolic significance, *genius loci*. Crucially, however, it is the spirit of another place, a place other than her current home. It is spirit of the other – place, home, family, death, childhood memory. It is therefore an objectification, an othering of place, time, self and family in Alison's rendering of it.

Her moral identity, as someone who 'wouldn't have contemplated not going' is affirmed by the visit to this symbolic place, where they have a cream tea. This is meal is usually viewed as 'naughty but nice'; however, they have it because 'we couldn't face a lunch'. Although they are 'lifted out of ourselves for a bit', the visit is complex, as 'it was still connected to memories'. It is her favourite place, where with a hint of the romantic, she says she would 'love to just be whisked off to', and where they had a cream tea, yet this is balanced by its role as a place of memory, where she took her godmother to lunch, and as a time for grieving following a 'moment' of 'saying goodbye'.

Just before Alison returns from the periphrasis about the Pottery, which after all is crucial to the symbolism of the plate, she exhibits reflexivity, '...sorry it's taking ages to explain this story', before repeating that they 'went into the shop'. The combination of the direct speech and the 'real time' description of the plate's provenance, which becomes more 'moment by moment' as the story progresses, bring the place and the getting of the plate into the present vividly. Her reflexivity, on the other hand, highlights the artfulness of everyday talk, which might not be planned discourse, yet is constructed with dramaturgical skill. Talk is performance; the actor playwright must persuade her audience of her subjective authenticity, yet this is achieved only by stepping back from or beyond the role. Thus, in constructing the plate by the medium of this narrative, Alison is also constructing herself in talk that simultaneously objectifies her as an artful performer and assures the listener of her

role as authentic subject. This demonstrates how the notions of subject/object duality simplify a complex, ongoing interaction, or almost invisible oscillation within a mutually constitutive relationship. Similarly, the plate, like Achilles shield, is at once an object representing external relations and intimately related with Alison's biography and character (Homer *Iliad* XVIII). And like the shield of Achilles, it is a gift from her mother.

The final part of the narrative is situated in the pottery shop, where Alison sees the plate and, in direct speech, replays the scene in which her mother offers to get her daughters something 'to remember this'. Since the plate was rather expensive, the participant 'put some money to it'. The plate therefore memorialises not just the Millennium, but also is a remembrance of Alison's godmother, the Pottery, and the visit with her family. It also encapsulates the 'moment' of going in to see the body, and the mistiming which led to this. Moreover, it is also seen as a gift from her mother. The idea of the gift is a recurrent one in the interviews, and complex. In this instance, the recipient contributes money to something she has chosen herself, because it is 'gorgeous'. It is her aesthetic choice, yet symbolises a multitude of memories and times.

This first account by Alison emphasises the connection between the 'othering' of objects as gifts, separated from the circulation of everyday objects, and the 'mothering' of the gift relation. We have seen in all the accounts so far the specifically feminised gift relation, not only in the giving and receiving of gifts, but also as repositories of the provenance of objects – as 'memory machines', perhaps – as Douglas termed houses (Douglas 1993; see also de Certeau 1984; Maleuvre 1999). This connects with previous findings regarding mothers/female partners as not just the keepers of memory, but the makers of memory, and their construction of the mantelpiece as an adult space, removed from the *milieu* of tangible, childish things in the low-level plains of home. I therefore suggest hat there is also a process of the 'mothering' of place: separating and distinguishing this from domestic space, 'othering' into memory and the imagination. Let us explore this thesis a little further, by considering Alison's second account of a 'gift', before a fuller discussion in the conclusion.

9.8.2 Repairing Relations II: Time as Present

The next narrative concerns a pair of candlesticks that Alison keeps at the fireside. She recounts how she bought them from a craft shop in Brussels, on a visit with her father. The introductory sentence situates the narrative in her autobiography, since the visit was intended to help her decision as to whether to take up a job there. Like the first narrative, it shows that she is well-travelled, and the visit to a craft shop is linked to her family history of catering at antiques and craft fairs. It is also situated within a network of family relations, just as the narrative about the plate was. However, this is put forward as a contrasting account, since: 'traditionally my dad and I didn't get on terribly well'. This is tempered with a claim that: 'as we've got older we've got – I have more tolerance of him'. The correction is interesting, since she moves away from the 'we' statements and positions the shift to tolerance as her move. Save for the silence about her other sister, there is no suggestion of conflict in the plate narrative, yet in this she is clearly accounting for herself as a 'good daughter' dealing with a 'difficult father'. This moral identity is one I, as the listener, could be expected to identify with, and a later aside by Alison implies that she assumes complicity in the role.

Those candlesticks my dad and I bought those on a trip to Brussels when I was actually going to weigh the place up to decide whether I wanted a job there or not. And it was unusual for my dad and I to be out together, because traditionally my dad and I didn't get on terribly well, although as we've got older we've got – I have more tolerance of him. And it was a bitterly cold day and there was a lovely craft shop there and we went in there and those two were rusty old horrible things kicking around in a bucket of sale items. It was just after Christmas and I pulled them out and said, 'Oh, they're really nice'. They're not exactly a matching pair; they are slightly different heights [...] Just slightly, but anyway, near as damn it a matching pair [...]

And I showed these to my dad and I said, 'Oh, these are really nice; is there anything we could do with them?', meaning, 'Is there anything you could do with these?' and he said straightaway, 'Oh, I can clean those up for you, no problem'. He said, 'I'll do them for you,' so I bought them and he did clean them up and painted them black. And so they – now where would I have been – they must have been for here actually, because the only – I must have been living in the rented place immediately before this house when I saw them and so even though this isn't a real fire that doesn't stop it having the - [RH: Accoutrements?] Yes, accoutrements on the real fire.

Not only is the narrative situated morally and geographically, she also places it in time, as it was 'just after Christmas'. Just as in the plate narrative, Alison brings it into the present with vivid description, as 'it was a bitterly cold day and there was a lovely craft shop there'. The candlesticks are presented as 'rusty old horrible things kicking around in a bucket of sale items', and since they are now before my eyes on show in her living room, it is clear that their transformation will be a cardinal element of the story. She also employs direct speech, suggesting the artfulness of narratives used by informants when using these forms of telling. This is also brought across by the balancing act of the earlier half of the narrative, in which first, the place and purpose of the visit is followed by the relationship between father and daughter. Second, details of the weather and the shop are followed by the description of the candlesticks in the bucket. Third, the time is followed by her action and speech, when she pulls the candlesticks out of the bucket. This cadencing of the story is an elaborate structure, balancing the informational with more complex elements of the story.

Her highlighting of imperfection, by pointing out the asymmetry of the candlesticks is something that people do in many of the interviews, and for different reasons. Since Alison is concerned with having a symmetrical display on her mantelpiece, it is possible that she must show an awareness of this discrepancy, and I too, as listener, must play my part by supporting the purchase of the non-matching candlesticks, initially described as 'rusty old horrible things', but subsequently called 'nice' when she points out the asymmetry. To be 'nice' and not match is all right; had they remained 'horrible' and asymmetrical, that would have disturbed the aesthetic ordering of the 'focal wall'.

The second half of the narrative continues with direct speech, but the tenor has changed. Whereas the first half set the scene and the event of finding the candlesticks, the second action concentrates on the moral aspect of the narrative, for which the listener has been prepared by the signalled roles of 'good daughter' and 'difficult father' in the first half. The implied identification I might find with the former role is brought to the fore, when she replays the scene in which she says, 'Is there anything we can do with them?" meaning, "Is there anything you could do with these?"' Alison encourages my complicity with this humorous aside concerning

father/daughter interactions, in which direct help is not requested, since the offer of help must appear to come from the father. It is not altogether a deceit, since it permits a difficult relationship to repair via offers of practical help, rather than emotional intimacy. Her father's eagerness to play his part is emphasised by her, when she states that, 'He said straightaway, "Oh, I can clean those up for you no problem." He said, "I'll do them for you," so I bought them, and he did clean them up and painted them black...'. The repetition of her father's words, and consequent action, suggests that. Like the asymmetry of the candlesticks, this is a 'goal' of the narrative, to tell the story of a father/daughter interaction.

The narrator makes three points about the relationship. First, it is her tolerance that has enabled them to get on better than in the past. Second, it was she who initiated the interaction in which practical repair work takes the place of emotional repair work. Third, her father immediately responded; this was a 'known' game. Although they might not have got on in the past, this type of work accomplishes a type of repair within the relationship. This also, then, is a peculiar type of gift exchange. She purchases the candlesticks, and he restores them. However, he is not the only one doing the giving of time and effort. In a way, it could be argued that she buys the candlesticks in order for him to repair them.

9.8.3 Gendering Genealogies

There is a contrast between the two gift exchanges between daughter and parent. In the first, she goes with her mother and sister on an emotional journey, and her mother gives them a gift for both of them to remember the day, the place, the death of a very close friend. It was complicated by the fact that it was Alison's immediate aesthetic liking for the plate that prompted her mother's offer. However, the lead up to this moment shows that it was not just her exclamation of its gorgeousness that prompted her mother's offer: it was one event in a long process. This process means that, even though Alison contributed to its price, it now hangs on her wall as a symbolically charged memorial. The positions of giver and receiver are intertwined: Alison's presence on this emotionally charged trip was vital; the account demonstrates the reciprocity of the gift as more than the thing on Alison's wall. The story of the provenance of the candlesticks is similarly complex. This exchange is not presented

directly as a gift-giving, but as an instance of repair work between father and daughter. The metamorphosis of the candlesticks from 'horrible' to cleaned up and painted could be seen to represent this accomplishment. Both parties participate in an interaction in which money and time are invested reciprocally as part of the process of repairing relations.

With reference to Alison's accounts, I argue that there is a temporal distinction between the two in terms of orientation. The plate is a multi-dimensional memorial, placed in a network of memory, childhood, family and feminine relations. Its purchase and its transition from commodity to gift/memorial was a journey in the company of women, centred around Alison's mother and godmother, and the place of her birth. In contrast, I argued that the candlesticks are purchased with a purpose of repair work in which father and daughter are complicit, but asymmetric non-companions: 'traditionally', they have not got on. The candlesticks are constitutive and symbolic of moving on, leaving behind traditional practice of relations by utilising a traditional father-role: DIY. To return to the mythic analogy I drew upon for the plate, Achilles' shield is given to him by his mother, but it the male god (in the absence of Achilles' mortal father) - Hephaestus, the lame metalsmith – who wrought it, Alison's parents inhabit the same places of 'Mother/creator ' and 'Father/maker'. In the poetics of things, I suggest that mothers fulfil the creative role of the imagination and memory, whereas fathers perform the manufacturing role of repair and maintenance. Alison's accounts were notable in that they highlighted the absence of fathers in so many accounts, and the liminal role of fathers/male partners in remembering the provenance of objects and stories, in managing and noticing the domestic interior as more than a clean storage space for things.

This close focus on informants' accounts has suggested two themes: the gift as practice and object in transition, and the gender of the gift relation.

9.9 'I fear the Greeks, even bearing gifts': The Walls Come Tumbling Down

As I have shown with reference to a number of accounts by a variety of informants, the problem of the gift is complex. For many individuals, gifts continue to play an important part in the building and maintenance of social relations, life histories and memory. They can recall absent times, places and people by merely glancing at an ornament on a shelf. This is possible even when they have chosen the gift for themselves, as they translate the money and the accompanying human connection into the object. A particularly nice object can, conversely, be divested of the connection and appropriated as an aesthetic object. Both these processes are important at a time when home and self are so closely bound up, and the symbolic/cultural capital of artefacts is interpreted in discourses of taste in conflation with identity (Bourdieu 1984). No one wants to display a horrible old vase from a little-known relative. It could, therefore, be said that there is no simple nexus of material culture and social relations, and this detachment allows individuals to select gifts as reflections of their taste.

Does this equate with a commodification of social relations? Is it ethically correct to dispose of unwanted objects, to turn the inalienable into alienable and therefore destructible goods? This is clearly not what is happening, since people continue to store unwanted gifts, or put them into another form of gift exchange, in charity fairs and shops. People also continue to follow the imperatives of giving gifts at ritual events, despite the fact that so many of these items are from a peculiar market of 'gift goods' that are highly commercialised (Caplow 1984; Werbner 1996). There is also the ongoing gendering of gifts, which was very clear in my fieldwork (Cheal 1988; Corrigan 1995; Godbout 1998). Women received ornaments for the home, and were often the 'managers' of the home interior (Hunt 1995). This analogy of woman and home means that they seemed to feel a responsibility to be repositories of all the stories of every object on display in the home, just as their homes could become repositories for unwanted things. Adrian, who had three clocks, thought his wife

might remember the provenance of the one on the mantelpiece, just as many other men could not recall the provenance of many things on display, but knew their wives would remember.

Douglas (1993) links history – the social past – and memory – the personal – with her idea of houses and museums being 'memory machines'. In his poeticisation of space, Bachelard (1994 [1958]) conceptualises the house as a space intimately connected with the body and mind as an ongoing reminder of the dream- and past-self. More recently, Marcus (1995) has interviewed informants about how their homes' relations to their biographies can be pathological.

This duty to retain memories, and to invest objects with meaning, means that, despite assumptions regarding 'throwaway society', many women (and men) continue to harbour unwanted goods in their homes. This begs the question: what is home for? It could be argued that, while there is certainly a spirit of entrepreneurship in gift exchange, just as there is in the home, there is also a steadfast adherence towards moralities of gift exchange and the role of home as repository of memory. However, if the culture of giving either money for transmutation to object - or of objects themselves - continues, the only possible conclusion is that the mass of stuff bursts homes apart: they are, after all, only walls and a roof. The material and symbolic heaviness of both 'gift' and 'home' in maintaining relations of attachment and belonging clearly emerges from this focus on the gift.

All the accounts suggested that women - like houses - are viewed as the repositories of memory, of unwanted objects: both safekeepers and dustbins. If we look back to Chapters Seven and Eight, we can recall that mothers were also pedagogues, punishers and peacemakers. Women were managers of the mantelpiece, preserving it from 'intruders', such as father's letters, or monitoring the visit of an unwanted guest. On the other hand, Adrian sees the mantelpiece as a storage place where 'temporary' slides into the 'long term' (See Chapter Six). If women/mothers, houses and mantelpieces – like gifts – are at once containers of treasure and holders of rubbish – that cannot be disposed of – how can this paradox be related to theories of the house? I shall turn now to Bourdieu's outline of *habitus* with respect to the Berber house in Algeria, in order to illuminate the question (1977; 1979).

Bourdieu's construction of oppositions conceptualises the female orientation as *centripetal* seeking the house and consumption, the male as *centrifugal*, belonging to the marketplace and production (1977: 92). He therefore explicitly connects 'the "book" from which children learn their vision of the world [that] is read by the body' (1977: 90) and that symbolic, practised orientation of the woman with the interior of the house. In this way, the processes of the 'domestication of the body' occurs, and the 'insensible internalisation of cultural categories'. This links up with feminist approaches to education and shows how 'recent work on mothering provides ample evidence of the significance of female child-rearing activities for social identities' (Arnot 2002: 9; see Walkerdine and Lucey 1989; Reay 1998). None of this work looks specifically at the work that mothers do as practitioners in inter-generational cultural transmission by means of domestic display practices, but focuses on the importance of pre-school informal/unintended pedagogy in the home by mothers. This relates to the feminist critique of the way in which the conflation of mother and home implicitly interplays with notions of public and private (for example, Pateman 1988; Ivinson et al. 2000), and hence with nineteenth century moralising discourses regarding women and home (Cieraad 1999a; Hepworth 1999). This conflation of woman and home, of the female body and the domestic interior became central to the construction of the middle-class home and the moral management of the family in contrast to the industrial, polluting sphere of men (for example, Forty 1986; Davidoff and Hall 1987). The problematisation of relating domestic space with 'mother' or 'wife' has been a focus for feminist critiques of the contemporary meaning of home in that it reproduces the boundary of public/private; male/female space (Matrix 1984; Darke and Gurney 2000).

Cheal argues that gifts are redundant; this is their value as 'used to construct certain kinds of voluntary social relationships.' (Cheal 1988: 14). However, these findings do not show that gifts are redundant: they have become almost more 'employed' in the constitution of identity, and used as a counterweight to the incursion of the market. This can be seen in the continuing transubstantiation of money-gift to artefact-gift, rather than the display of cash in the home (Leal 1995). Similarly, the trope of 'gift-to-self' is enmeshed with this: is there a boundary at which purchased goods can be separated into two distinct categories of commodity and gift? I argue

that these accounts show how the tradition and traditional accounting of 'gift exchange' remains necessary, and that this relation is not 'voluntary', but enmeshed in the powerful tropes of 'home' 'memory' and 'family'.

As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the 'gift' is a potent method of 'showing' and 'telling', and this close focus on empirical findings has shown how the 'gift relation' is so closely bound up with accounting-for-objects/accounting-for-self, that this way of 'knowing' is almost indistinguishable from modes of 'being'. In the next chapter, I turn to consider how these powerful notions of 'home', 'family' and 'memory' relate to the 'focal point' of the mantelpiece, and hence how these 'givens', these traditional cultural tropes – seen so often as a singularity – can be viewed as an archetypal 'gift'.

Chapter Ten - Reflecting the Past:
Mirroring the Present

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'At the beginning, perhaps we should confront one frequent objection to the use of historical materials by social scientists: It is held that such materials are not precise or even known fully enough to permit their use in comparisons with the better confirmed and more exact contemporary materials available... As I have argued, the requirements of one's problem, rather than the limitations of any one rigid method, should be and have been the classic social analyst's paramount consideration.'
(Mills 1959: 146)

10.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to use the mantelpiece not as a microscope on current practices as the last chapter did, but as a method to distance and disembed informants' accounts, and reflexively to displace the mantelpiece from its present position as a familiar, homely artefact. In its position as a skeuomorph (Hodder 1998), in period and modern houses, restored or reproduced, mimicked or mocked, displaced or replaced, it is an ideal place from which to view modern practices in the context of ancient functions. This penultimate chapter reflects on the relationship between past and present from a third perspective, and is, in a sense, a historiography of the 'past' of memory and documentary evidence (see de Mare 1999; also Tarlow and West 1999). I have offered Mass-Observation volunteers' Reports and informants' memory accounts as two perspectives on 'history'. In an 'interview society' (Atkinson and Silverman 1997), 'being there', and the ability to provide a personal account are the dominant modes for making sense of the world. But in this chapter, I draw upon another mode of history: that of the known past of the mantelpiece and its genealogy. As Carr pointed out, 'the facts speak only when the historian calls on them' (1964 [1961]: 11). The history I am about to call on is a stranger; the vast bulk of it has passed from 'living memory'.

Why introduce all this historical material so late on? Because it is, in a way, the unwanted guest, the 'other', that rips the familiar mantelpiece from its place in contemporary memory and the modern home, from those assumptions that call on the

sanctity of such notions as 'home' 'family', 'memory' as if these were 'knowledge', rather than embodied practice – or culture. In doing this, the chapter follows Mills' exhortation to fit my methods to the 'problem', and to address Bourdieu's criticism of 'genesis amnesia' of sociologist/anthropologists and social members (1977). In introducing this material in the penultimate chapter, I am also addressing Douglas' argument regarding the way in which anomalies to cultural categories are treated to maintain order: 'Uncomfortable facts which refuse to be fitted in, we find ourselves ignoring or distorting so that they do not disturb these established assumptions' (1996: 38).

It would have been very easy to finish the thesis with a comfortable return to informants' accounts, and to summarise the findings based on that fieldwork. However, 'the gift' emerged late in my interpretation as a category that discomforted the informant-based analysis, in that I realised that, as a 'social analyst', I had been too embedded in 'being' a social member, rather than taking that critical distance to reflect upon what had been given – *data* (Warde 1996; Monguilod 2001). Originally, houses were simply unwalled roofs for the fire (Prizeman 1975). As homes, they are a given for most people in this country. Nearly seventy per cent of adults in this country own their homes (ONS 2005). 'Home' is a daily accomplishment, and the display of material culture in the home is a part of that accomplishment. I have shown that exploring these practices shows how people 'do' home, family, motherhood, marriage and memory, as visual material culture and as stories they construct around the objects of display. Yet, as I have argued, much of this is accounted for within given frames of understanding that are treated as external facts, rather than embodied, internalised practices.

We have seen how many present methods of domestic display have some origins in past practices. The 1937 Mass-Observation Archive accounts had many resonances with the memories of older informants (Mass-Observation 1937), whilst many informants referred to the displays and routines of their mothers and grandmothers when accounting for their own practices around the mantelpiece. The Mass-Observation reports were a different mode of data from interview accounts, but in echoing informants' memories, they take their place in a particular ordering of data. Similarly, informants' modes of accounting for their methods and objects of display

on the mantelpiece were not only of the order of 'memory', as much that was on the mantelpiece was contingent on daily activities. However, we could remember that it is not *necessary* to put a film awaiting development on the mantelpiece, or keep things safe from children up there. Similarly, it is not necessary to appeal to mother's practices, or grandmother's mantelpiece, or the obligation of the gift exchange, to account for what and how displays are produced. It is not obligatory to have a 'story' to tell about the things on show, or even to put anything on display, or have a mantelpiece at all.

Nevertheless, the people who chose to be interviewed did tend to have stories to tell, and to give accounts founded on memories of mantelpieces from their childhoods. These were, almost without exception, expressed in terms of maternal relations. Even Eric's tale of breaking his father's clock involved him telling mother of the accident, as the mediator between him and his father. What I have demonstrated about another relationship between the Mass-Observation mantelpieces and current mantelpieces was how much had apparently stayed the same on the display, despite the fact that many original functions of the display (as of the mantelpiece itself) have been rendered obsolete by domestic/architectural innovations and changing modes in family and gender relations. If we can see the architecture of the house and practices within the house as homologous - at least partially – then a careful scrutiny of the known history of the mantelpiece – once an architectural *given* - might illuminate that dark corner where memory does not turn its gaze.

After a brief reminder of how findings from the Cardiff questionnaire sketched out the field, we shall step outside of informants' accounts and living rooms, to see what other genres of history-making have to offer, as a kind of counter-point to constructions founded on biography, memory and imagined tradition. In doing so, the chapter takes on another perspective than that of the usual sociological enquiry: that of archaeology or historiography. In changing the position of the social researcher, from the now traditional co-constructor of informants' accounts, the position of the mantelpiece changes from a snapshot of memory, biography and storied/storying objects to material culture, an historical artefact that might belong, not in the familiar surroundings of home, but in a museum. A revisiting of data collected from questionnaire responses will be the starting point, since the aim of the chapter is to

show how common conceptions of the mantelpiece are related to the known origins of such notions. I shall then trace an archaeological and historical 'genealogy' of the mantelpiece and its connotations, before reflecting on how such a perspective might affect interpretations of present practices.

10.2 Re-membering the Present: Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

As we saw at the end of Chapter Four, the questionnaire results showed that 105 of the 145 questionnaire respondents had mantelpieces. This was to be expected: who is more likely to respond to a questionnaire called 'What's On Your Mantelpiece?' This is not a thesis proving mass ownership of mantelpieces. However, it is important to remember that mantelpieces are absolutely inessential today, as are fireplaces in the central living room. As questionnaire respondents noted, the mantelpiece is different from other furniture in that it is permanent, it is part of the house or 'serendipitous', as Geoff called it. This suggests that it is beyond their control. Yet, if we turn to the residents of Radyr Gardens, the area of new housing that formed part of the questionnaire and interview sample, it is notable how many of them still have a central fireplace and mantelpiece in their living rooms. Sixty of the sixty seven Radyr respondents had a mantelpiece in their houses – none of which is more than ten years old. Of the forty respondents who did not have mantelpieces in their homes, 16 wanted one.

Therefore, in the total sample, 121 out of 145 people either had or wanted a mantelpiece. Perhaps these people are mad or really do have absolutely no control over what builders put in their houses. Certainly, as Hanson (1998) comments, builders cannot afford to go wild in their mass-building projects, and tend to adhere to the same patterns of design. But if people detested them, would they buy these neo-Georgian houses, with porches and fireplaces? Would people without mantelpieces yearn for them? Just as builders adhere to the same designs in order to avoid losing money, as a 'safe bet', I argue that people who live in houses tend to maintain the same patterns of practice, or at least, a partial semblance of those patterns.

The pictures which people drew in the questionnaires show that many still follow traditional display practices. Ninety-six had some combination of mantelpiece, clock and a mirror, picture or decorative object hung above the shelf. Forty of these had all three: mantelpiece, clock and mirror or picture/plate. Twenty-five of these had the classic mantelpiece display of mirror and clock. Seventy-six of the mantelpieces had symmetrical displays, as did a further eight of the 'mantelpiece equivalents'. Another feature of half of these displays was combinations of candles (sometimes labelled as 'scented'), candlesticks, candleholders and/or tea lights. In brief, the majority of respondents to the questionnaire had kept to the 'rules' of mantelpiece display to some extent.

In the questionnaire, I had given them a grid of thirty six words and asked them to circle any of the words they associated with their mantelpiece or equivalent. Ninety-six of the 145 respondents circled the word 'focal point'. Seventy-five associated 'display' with the mantelpiece or equivalent. More than one third of respondents had circled one or more of the terms, 'home', 'family' 'memory' and 'aesthetic'.

In contrast, only two circled 'autobiography' and eight 'story', even though the interviews suggested that mantelpiece displays were bound up with stories and autobiographies. This is apposite, considering the emphasis that social research now places on autobiography and narrative (see Atkinson and Silverman 1997; Cortazzi 2001; Plummer 2001; Riessman 2002).

Even though 34 people had circled 'clean' and 21 'dusty', only eight associated housework with the mantelpiece. In a similar seeming paradox, despite the seventy five who thought their mantelpiece was connected with 'display', only 5 thought it a 'formal' space. In terms of the presentation of self, perhaps it was likely that people would not want to associate themselves with housework or formality, but rather with display, aesthetics and cleanliness through the words they circled. Only five respondents circled the terms 'shrine' and 'religious belief'. Of all the respondents, four had literal religious elements to their displays, such as a Buddha figure or religious text.

Yet, despite the obvious unpopularity of either displaying religious beliefs on the mantelpiece, or of associating such terms with their displays among the respondents,

this was strikingly discordant with what people said in conversations with me about the project. 'Oh, it's a shrine, isn't it?' was the oft-repeated rhetorical question answering my statement that I was looking at what people did with their mantelpieces. According to the questionnaires, respondents had clean, symmetrical displays that were focal points, which were not formal or associated with housework. This contrasts with the memories of older informants and the 1937 Reports in their emphases on cleaning, and the permanent ornamental display. The displays were aesthetic and associated with home, family and memory, but had nothing to do with a story or an autobiography. Many of them were functional shelves. And despite the strong association with family, home and memory, very few respondents called their mantelpieces shrines or associated them with a religious belief. However, the words, 'It's a shrine, isn't it?' echoed throughout the project, as did the term 'focal point', even though, as I have suggested, the mantelpiece seems more like the background (although also contested and hierarchical) to the daily domestic practices of the people I interviewed.

The aim of this summary of questionnaire data is not to present a thorough analysis – the very point is that it is not. I have not trawled the questionnaires, cross-tabulating every circled term, and revisited each respondent to check that they really meant 'reminder', as opposed to 'memory', and did they distinguish 'memory' from 'autobiography' for a reason? The point is that so much to do with the home, with domestic practice and with the mantelpiece and the display of objects is taken-for-granted. Desire for home-ownership is taken for granted (Gurney 1999); mantelpieces are taken-for-granted, and it is a given that they are focal points where people display objects to do with memory, family and home. This is the presentation that is accepted. Housework, formality, the seeming showiness of one's 'autobiography' or religious beliefs is not. Yet mantelpieces are still popularly conceived as domestic shrines, even if the particular producer of a specific mantelpiece display might run a mile from such an association. Similarly, I assumed that people would naturally associate their mantelpieces with autobiographies; that was my 'given'. Yet the questionnaire data did not give me this. The interview accounts did, as the interaction produced autobiographical narratives constructed around objects and housing histories. This was not, therefore, an explicit given, but

an emergent property. I learnt not to take things – or people, or houses, or data – for granted.

An example of this is Sharon's mantelpiece, in Cardiff Bay. She claimed to have restored it authentically to the period of the house: 1900. I knew it was faux Regency, with plaster 'Roman' figurines on plaster mantelpieces, all covered in fleshy gold paint that still looked sticky and sat ill with the leatherette sofas and overflowing ashtrays. I despaired of the encounter, not worthy of the term 'interview' – rather a hand-to-hand combat of cultural capitals. Yet, just as I was packing up, she mentioned her collection of scent bottles on a shelf unit in the bedroom. I asked her a little more, and suddenly realised I had been missing the point, because I had been too busy assuming I knew what Sharon, her house and mantelpiece were 'all about', and thought I had the sum of her material culture. But that was because I had not looked beyond the immediate context of her educational, social and cultural capital, the spatial limits of the living room and the anachronism of the mantelpiece as focal point. Her focal point, apart from her family, was her collection of scent bottles from around the world, that she kept tucked away in her bedroom, far from the destructive hands of her grandson and the hurly burly of daily life. So up we went to the bedroom, and I photographed the shelf unit where Sharon kept her collected treasures. Yet Sharon, like many other questionnaire respondents, had circled 'focal point', 'home', 'family' and 'memory' as words she associated with her mantelpiece. It seems a timely moment, then, to pick up on these threads of assumptions, givens, taken-for-granted notions that I, informants in the project and the people who told me, 'It's a shrine,' and trace what is known about mantelpieces as historical objects, as material, cultural, practised heirlooms.

10.3 Recollecting Matters

As we have seen in Chapter Three, there is scant source material for historical recollection of mantelpiece displays in Britain. There is the Mass-Observation Archive, which offers principally written reports, with a few sketches and one photograph, of 1937 mantelpieces (Mass-Observation 1937). I noted how volunteers for the 1983 Report, which contained more photographs, were asked to respond in

order to allow future generations to reconstruct modern-day mantelpieces as museum objects. However, as the curator/author of 'Household Choices', Charles Newton stated during our interview, curating home interiors is not simple (see Chapter Six). For example, his view, as an expert curator, was that television costume dramas are frequently incorrect, since they draw on a very few sources from a brief period in the late 1880s and early 1890s and a small section of the upper middle class, resulting in all period dramas being full of overstuffed, over-classed houses that do not reflect how most people 'did' home in the nineteenth century. His expert view was that it was very difficult to have any idea how most people decorated their homes prior to the advent of mass-produced, cheap cameras after the Second World War, since any photographs earlier than this are staged and normally middle class (see also Weston 2002).

Consequently, the 'authentic' study and display of historical homes is problematic for museum curators (Phillips 1997, also see Chapter Six), and for design historians (Saumarez Smith 2000). I experienced this when visiting the last three back-to-back houses in Britain, which have been restored by the Birmingham Conservation Trust and National Trust at Court 15, Hurst Street Birmingham at a cost of several million pounds (Upton 2005). There are a few photographs extant of these back-to-backs between 1939 and 1941 (Bournville Village Trust 1941: Illustrations 1-7; Upton 2005). The mantelpiece over the range in the back-to-backs – although not all had them – lives still in the memory of some previous inhabitants. One account echoes what I had read in the 1937 Mass-Observation Archive:

> 'There are many ornaments on the high mantle [sic] shelves – flowery vases which are often used as repositories for letters, money or sweets. ... The art consists of family portraits, often hazy from enlargement, framed certificates and prints from Victorian times – Highland stags, the Infant Samuel and so on.'
> (Anon., cited in Upton 2005: 68-9).

Another recalls Friday was 'fish and brass day' when the ornaments were polished, just as Shyam mentioned and other questionnaire respondents (Upton 2005: 69). Yet, what a visit to the expensively-restored Court 15 highlights is that this is heritage, a history cleansed, literally, of soot, rats, filthy water and poverty. As tourists of the past, we were free to turn over the cigarette cards on the mantelpiece, inspect the

'hazy family portraits', and nose into the vases, but we could not sit there after dark with the candles lit, gather pennies for the milkman, or reply to letters stuck behind ornaments. And thus, any attempt to contextualise contemporaneous findings with historical mantelpieces and displays must be only partial, glimpsed through a glass darkly and without pretence of 'science' or 'acuracy' [sic] (Mass-Observation 1937). The aim of this look at a fragmentary background for the Cardiff study is to show how people pick up, twist and turn or drop threads of methods for building and maintaining houses and socio-cultural relations inside houses.

Prior to the twentieth century, extant old houses, photographic images, curated museum houses, staged displays of country houses, or Victorian stylebooks, paintings and literature offer opportunities for interpreting past uses of the hearth and mantelpiece (see Wood 1965; Phillips 1997; Arnold 1998; Long 2002; Scholz 2002; Stange 2002; Weston 2002). As for ancient Roman and Greek houses - places and times which are still invoked for continuing attachments to 'hearth, home and family', and the association of fireplace display with symbolically important goods - only literary references and much-debated scant material evidence are available (Lewis and Short 1879; Sears 1992; Perring 2002; Morgan 2005; Tsakirgis forthcoming). I have shown that more than two thirds of respondents to the Cardiff questionnaire associated their mantelpieces with the term 'focal point', and half with 'display', whilst 'home', 'family' and 'memory' were the next most popularly associated terms. I shall therefore turn now to these few Roman remnants to consider possible origins of these connections.

10.4 Roman Remains

According to the canonical Latin dictionary by Lewis and Short, *focus* has a number of subtly different meanings. It can signify the hearth or fireplace, but can also act as a metonym 'to signify one's dearest possessions', home and family (Lewis and Short 1879: 764). This was due to the placing of *Lares*, the gods of the household, in niches on the hearths, 'and for them a fire was kept up' (ibid.). The term *arae et foci* [the altars and hearths] is common in Roman literature as a collective term for country, gods, home and family (for example Sallust, *Catalina* 52.3 and 59.5 and Livy *Ab*

Urbe Condita 5.30). Virgil uses *focus* powerfully in the *Aeneid* to denote a funeral pile (11.212) and Propertius signifies an altar by the same word (*Carmina* 2.19). Somewhat bathetically, however, *focus* could also signify nothing more than a fire-pan or brazier (Lewis and Short 1879: 764).

This combination of the powerfully symbolic, genealogical metonym and material heating and cooking technology is interesting when the uses of the modern fireplace are considered. No longer necessary as a heating and cooking technology in any of the informants' houses in the Cardiff study, the fireplace now means other things. In particular, the mantelpiece, designed as the decorative part of the structure, has taken on an analogous combination of symbolic and material roles: aesthetic display, functional shelf and 'home', 'family', 'memory'.

Some modern writers claim that the hearth for the Roman household gods was in the hall or *atrium* (Lewis and Short 1879: 149; Sear 1992: 33). Seneca (Epistles 44.5) 'remarks that an atrium "crammed with smoke-blackened images" was a sign of the old nobility' (Sear 1992: 33). The dictionary takes for its authority on these matters the Roman authors, whilst Sear uses literary references and the ruins at Pompeii and Herculaneum. Morgan (2005) also refers to archaeological and written evidence for similar metaphorical associations of the hearth in Classical Greek houses with family. However, other modern writers claim that the altar of the household gods was associated with the cooking hearth, in the kitchen (Perring 2002: 192; Camesasca 1971:419). Moreover, Tsakirgis (forthcoming) argues that there were both fixed hearths and later moveable braziers in ancient Greek houses (see also Morgan 2005). She also comments that the idea of a constantly burning domestic flame, kept up for purposes of worship, is a misunderstanding due to confusing the domestic hearth with public hearths, thus countering Lewis and Short's statement (1879). There was no particular place for them in the house. Interestingly, Tsakirgis (forthcoming) supports the contested thesis that early hearths and other domestic forms gave rise to the forms of Greek temples – so often seen the other way round. Before presenting her argument, she does give the reader this *caveat*: that little material evidence remains of the ritual/symbolic significance of domestic hearths, and the only evidence really is literary: '...their sacred character is considered, this last matter seen largely through

the lens, albeit somewhat and sometimes distorted, of literary testimonia' (Tsakirgis forthcoming: 1).

The lack of clarity on the position, form and uses of ancient hearths, and their symbolic significance, throws an interesting light on statements made in literature about the 'period house', and hence the assumed importance, significance and desirability of having an immoveable, traditional fireplace and mantelshelf in the main room of the house, ideally with a 'real fire'. For example, in a reversal of Tsakirgis' informed argument, Wilhide writes, 'an altar, a temple, a shrine, a proscenium arch: the form of the fireplace has always suggested a gathering place of power' (Wilhide 1994: 8). Other design writers for the popular market employ similar taken-for-granted notions regarding the ancient hearth and hence its relations with the contemporary domestic fireplace, just as house-builders and home-owners can assume a place for the fire remains in the 'family' living room (for example J. Miller 1995; Innes 2000).

However, experts in the field continue to debate several key questions: first, whether it was considered necessary to keep home fires burning for cult purposes, second, whether there was a distinction between the cooking hearth and the sacred, status-making fireplace and third, what the difference was between a fixed hearth and moveable braziers in terms of meanings. Clearly, there are no social scientific data concerning domestic cults in ancient Roman and Greek cities, and thus the only evidence available is a few literary remains and the ruins of ancient houses and cities. These conflict, and there is much debate among ancient historians as to the form, location and use of hearths and braziers, as I have briefly illustrated (See Morgan 2005 for detailed discussion). Just as I found problems when making sense of questionnaire data, so classicists, archaeologists and ancient historians do not have a clear view of the past, but must look at it through the 'distorted lens' of ancient drama, poems and legal prosecutions, or interpret material fragments, often displaced and disfigured.

Morgan (2005: 197) argues that the Greek term *hestia* [hearth] was indeed a real feature of the house, as well as playing an important 'ideological role'. For example, she cites an ancient account of an adulterer getting protection from the gods by

touching the hearth, thus avoiding the automatic death penalty (Lysias 1.27). In her argument, therefore, *hestia* is of material and symbolic importance in constructing the house/home, and the place of human institutions within cosmological sense-making structures. Similarly, I argue that my findings illuminate how mundane cultural practices are the visible parts of symbolic schemata that, in turn, have effects in other mundane practices and sense-making processes. This is why exploring the ways in which people make sense of their 'trivial' cultural practices, in the background hum of every day life, and actually *looking at* little mantelpiece displays, that oscillate in and out of everyday vision, is important.

Participants in the Cardiff project have taken fragments of the past: the Senecan comment on the nobility of 'smoke-blackened images'; the focal point, the extension of hearth for home and family, altar and country, and interpreted it in the present. Some have memories of a combination of uses in their childhood homes, when the mantel above the kitchen range was used for drying clothes, storing letters, yet also had a permanent display of shining brass ornaments (for example, Diane, Derek and Shyam). Others consider the domestic fire as nothing more than a practical heating device, and have ridded themselves of it, to rejoice in central heating (such as Belinda), or see a time coming when it will be no more than a decoration underneath a plasma screen television (like Phillip). Nevertheless, even without a fireplace and mantelpiece, many continue to have a particular place or places in the house for significant objects, separated from the general *milieu* of everyday, mobile things. The mantelpiece is ideal for this, even without the fire to blacken heirlooms, since it is physically removed from the floor, the coffee table or kitchen-side, just as the (possible) hearthside niches (Lewis and Short 1879: 764), paintings (Perring 2002: 192) or *Lararium* [freestanding cupboard] (Camesasca 1971: 419) were in Roman houses.

10.5 Restoring History

I shall move now onto the early British hearth, from which mantelpieces were once entirely absent, even though, as some of my informants said, it is 'part and parcel' of the fireplace (such as Gina and Sian), and many have a mantelpiece without a

working fire, or a fire that they use, beneath it (for example, Harriet has only a designated mantelshelf, above her sofa).

The movement of the main fireplace from central hearth to wall is well documented in architectural literature (for example Wood 1965: 257-276; Drummond 1971: 99; Prizeman 1975: 106; Armstrong 1979: 51; Brunskill 1978: 99, 1981: 40-43; Barley 1986: 245; Johnson 1993). It is notable that, although some houses in some regions of the country had sidewall fireplaces in the twelfth century, people were very slow to take up this new and improved form of heating, and it was not until the mid-sixteenth century that the fireplace was a focal point. It depended partly on regional variation and poverty, but also on the symbolic division of rooms that this move to the wall involved and other reasons, one being an adherence to traditional beliefs (Aslet and Powers 1985: 39). It is worth noting at this point the following comment: 'The adoption of the fireplace in England was apparently attended with the same reluctance as its abandonment today' (Drummond 1971: 99; see also Camesasca 1971).

Having slept, ate and lived in the main hall with the servants, often on truckle beds, families began to divide space between public and private, front and back, sleeping and entertaining, cooking and eating (Armstrong 1979: 512; Brunskill 1981: 43; Johnson 1993: 106-109). Moving the fire to the wall enabled an extra storey to be added, and to have back-to-back fireplaces: one in the hall and one in the kitchen, where servants would cook. Extra heating was provided with moveable braziers (Wood 1965). With a fireplace against a wall, distinct from the kitchen cooking hearth, people could make a feature of its surrounds. Extant mediaeval houses have beautifully decorated chimneypieces and fireplaces, with friezes, heraldic emblems, quatrefoil motifs and shields adorning this point of warmth in the main living and entertaining room of the house (Gotch 1909; Wood 1965). The fireplace became liable for tax in the 1660s, which 'would not have been imposed if fireplaces had not been a matter of pride as well as easy for officials to assess' (Barley 1986: 245).

Thus, prior to the advent of a distinct mantel-shelf, the fireplace in the main room of British houses has become attached to certain meanings. It has become detached from the practicalities of cooking, and from the use of servants. It is not absolutely necessary for heating, since there are (although this is not absolutely certain)

moveable braziers. It has become a focal point for heraldic devices and ornamentation: it is now placed at the centre of social relations. Not only an ordering device of the room and the house interior, the wall fireplace also has a part in the exterior display of social stratification. The wall fireplace means that some can now have 'tall imposing facades' of two–storey houses, as opposed to the single storey, single 'public multiuse' hall that had been common to all social strata (Brunskill 1981: 43). It is time now for the separation of fireplace and decorative overmantel by the focus of my study: the mantelpiece.

10.6 Separation of Parts

The Elizabethan and Jacobean periods saw an intensification of this status-making, highly ornate fireplace, due to the rise of a mercantile middle-class, which was anxious to advertise its social credentials (Wilhide 1994: 23). The mantel-shelf, having been an indistinct part of the fireplace, became a discrete feature at the start of the eighteenth century in 'fine rooms' when:

> 'The slight simplification from the massive chimney-pieces of Elizabethan and Jacobean times made the definite division of the mantel or fireplace and the overmantel covering the area of wall above the fireplace. The mantel-shelf became a more prominent feature.'
> (Barfoot 1963: 62)

While there was now a separation of fire place and display place, there was 'a continuing harmony of style for the two parts' (Gotch 1909: 277). The mantel-shelf remained quite narrow, fitting with the plain style of interior design in the eighteenth century, but from the 1780s onwards, furniture moved away from the walls and towards the fire, 'given the vagaries of the British weather' (Parissien 1995: 157). A design book of the time claims that the 'heightened prominence of the fireplace in principal rooms was a peculiarly British solution ...[to the climate]... with the fireplace the "rallying point or conversational centre" of home' (cited in Parissien 1995: 157). The Georgian country house, it has been argued, had become a 'culture industry' for a 'newly emergent consumer class' (Arnold 1998: 18) and the staging of

houses for tourists was already a feature of eighteenth and nineteenth century social life.

In the nineteenth century, the size of the mantel-shelf grew, with the enlargement of chimneypieces, even though this was unnecessary, due to Rumford's innovative grate technology in the 1780s, which should have resulted in smaller chimneypieces (Parissien 1995: 156; Aslet and Powers 1985: 180). Quite why chimneypieces did not shrink might have relevance with today's puzzle concerning the persistence of this anachronistic shelf – even where there is no chimney. There are many paintings of families sitting around the fireplace, and photographs later on in the nineteenth century - although it is impossible to know to what extent the mantelpiece displays were staged for the artist's or photographer's frame (see Weston 2002 for discussion). It seems, according to interior décor 'professionals' of the time, that the clock, the candlestick pairs and/or vases and the overmantel mirror were reasonably constant parts of the display (Mrs Orrinsmith's *Drawing Room*, 1878, cited in Forty 1986: 110; Cook 1995 [1881]).

Late-twentieth-century writers continued to make that claim (Hills 1985: 118; Camesasca 1971: 377). Note, however, that Saumarez Smith is careful to give his sources as he problematises the use of paintings, books and pamphlets of the time (Saumarez Smith 2000: 234-240), just as Newton, Phillips (1997) and Weston (2002) raised the issue of authenticity when using sources such as nineteenth century photographs. Readers familiar with lifestyle magazines such as *House Beautiful*, weekly features in newspapers, such as *Guardian Weekend, Daily Mail* and advice books (for example Innes 2000) might feel that Victorian style books need bear little resemblance to everyday domestic practices (Gregory 2003). Now, as I noted earlier, many Cardiff informants and questionnaire respondents still have these traditional objects on their mantelpieces: the mirror, the candles and/or vases and the clock. The mirror was a luxury good in the eighteenth century, due to the high cost of mirrored glass (Saumarez Smith 2000), but the combination of mirror and candles shed precious light in an era of no artificial lighting.

By the late nineteenth century, writers of stylebooks were commenting on the 'pretentious uselessness' of the symmetry and pairing of mantelpiece ornaments in

'lower middle-class drawing rooms' (for example Mrs Orrinsmith's *Drawing Room*, 1878, cited in Forty 1986) or the 'pity' of giving up the 'central opportunity of the room' to the clock, 'that is not worth looking at for itself, apart from its merely utilitarian purposes' (Cook 1881: 119). Cook's explanation of the lack of interesting display on the parlour mantelpiece is that:

> '[I]t is such a trouble to most people to think what to put on it, [and] they end blindly accepting the dictation of friends and tradesmen, and making to Mammon the customary sacrifice of the clock-and-candelabra suite.'
> (Cook 1881: 119).

He urges his readers to take note, that:

> '[T]he mantel-piece ought to second the intention of the fire-place as the center of the family life – the spiritual and intellectual center, as the table is the material center ...[and which ought, therefore to have on it]...things to lift us up.'
> (ibid.: 121).

Cook was an American writer, who nevertheless used British exemplars in his advice book, perhaps because Britain has been viewed since the last century as the last bastion of the open fire (Muthesius 1979). It is noticeable that the British, unlike the Americans and continental Europeans, did not adopt other available forms of heating. Furnaces, central heating and stoves were all available (Cook 1881: 111; Aslet and Powers 1985: 183; Long 1993: 98), but the British resisted these innovations (Camesasca 1971: 378), just as they had resisted the innovation of the wall fireplace in the twelfth century (Drummond 1971:99).

Another nineteenth-century American commentator argues for the continuing tradition of the open fire, as opposed to the stoves of America, seeing them as 'Lares and Penates of Old England', whereas the American stoves are 'fatal to patriotism... for who would fight for an airtight?' (Beecher Stowe's *Sunny memories of England*, 1854, cited in Long 1993: 98). This association of the coal fire grate, and hence its mantelpiece, with patriotism, echoes a rallying cry of time, written by 'an Ulster Cleric: "We have a great Home, and its hearth is a royal woman!"' (Wilhide 1994: 75). As such, it accords with the increasing division of space in nineteenth-century industrial Britain, with the separation of work and home, and in particular the

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gendering of space (see Forty 1986: 94-119; Marshall and Willcox 1986: 69; Gregory 2003). It also marks a split between Britain and America and continental Europe, where other more efficient forms of heating were adopted. The German writer Muthesius excuses this British attachment on grounds of temperate climate allowing survival of the 'domestic altar' but finds it unusual due to its 80% inefficiency (Muthesius 1979: 52). However, it did mean that the mantelpiece persisted atop these fireplaces, unlike the situation in America, where, despite furnace heating, people even put in fake fireplaces and mantelpieces 'as if they couldn't bear to give up the memory of what had once been so pleasant' (Cook 1881: 111).

10.7 Re-membering the Past

Now, let us step back from the nineteenth century fireplace and mantelpiece for a moment to consider what writers of the time were saying about it. Histories of the domestic interior have said that this was a time when the fireplace and chimneypiece expanded, following some restraint in the eighteenth century. This was despite the introduction of Rumford's grate, and the fact that, as we have seen, fireplaces had previously existed without distinct mantel-shelves. Mantelpiece displays came under attack for their conventionality and awful symmetry. Central heating had been available since 1800 (Aslet and Powers 1985: 183), but the British resisted introduction of new heating technologies that were adopted in other countries. Writers of the time ascribe this to the association of home, family and country, with reference to *Lares* and *Penates* and the 'domestic altar'. The use of the display space on the mantelpiece without due thought to its position supporting (in a sense) the fire as spiritual and intellectual centre of family life is likened to a 'sacrifice' to Mammon, to consumerism (rather than the gods of home and family) and to a lack of thought about the meaning of the mantelpiece and its interrelation with the family table.

On returning to the nineteenth century, it is important to remember that the open fire in the grate was a seasonal, as well as a daily event. In the summer during this period, flowers, a fan or a *trompe l'oeil* of grate or flowers were put in the fireplace to replace 'the gaping hole left by the absence of a cheering blaze' (Parissien 1995: 162). This

is in contrast to the fireplaces of all most interview informants in the Cardiff study, for whom the 'gaping hole' is a continuous daily event. Only Geoff, according to his year of photographs, had a winter fire burning in the living room grate. A few other participants, such as Alison and Dan, used gas fires under the mantelpiece on cold days. Despite its almost complete absence from houses in 21st century Britain, the open fire was only reluctantly discarded by householders in the twentieth century. As I have mentioned, housewives surveyed by Mass-Observation in 1941 did not want central heating, despite its efficiency (Mass-Observation 1943).

Central heating in Britain did not really take hold until the Clean Air Acts of 1956 and, more so, with the act of 1968, since this introduced smokeless fuel zones (Ravetz and Turkington 1995: 125). National space was then divided up to such an extent that many people really had no choice but to turn to central heating, or at least replace the open coal/wood grate with a gas or electric fire, so that by 1979, fewer than 10% of mainland British houses were heated by an open fire (Utley et al. 2003). As Ravetz and Turkington comment in their historical survey of British housing:

> 'The ghost of the candle lingers on in decorative, coloured and scented candles which form a stock-in-trade of gift shops and have little value for lighting… typically displayed on mantelpieces, when these are available.'
> (Ravetz and Turkington 1995: 131)

They link this with Chapman's (1955) survey of bye-law houses when, despite the availability of cheap electricity, he found that candles were still the 'second or third most important ornament', whereas in the semis and detached houses of the middle classes, these had transmogrified into electric simulacra, with 'imitation "drips"' (Ravetz and Turkington 1995: 131).

10.8 Return to the Present

As I commented, there was no 'cheering blaze' in homes of most Cardiff interview informants. Dan's family did use their enclosed gas stove, and Charlotte had moved an electric fire into the fireplace – prompted only by my interview visit. The absent presence of the fire is now a constant in most of the informants' homes, whereas until the advent of central heating, it was a seasonal presence and absence. Times change,

and timed presence has changed to a constant blankness. It is interesting to note that, shortly before the move to new technologies or at least, the attempt by modernist designers and suppliers of new electric and gas fires to move the recalcitrant British public into the future (Homes and Gardens 1932, Oliver et al. 1981; Attfield 1999), the mantelpiece reached its apotheosis. The late Victorian overmantel reached from mantelshelf upwards, sometimes as far as the ceiling, often featuring a central mirror and surrounded by compartments for the display of many objects, no longer on one level, but several. Despite a trend towards simplified fire surrounds in new houses (Putnam 2002), the overmantel persisted in some homes even into the time of the 1937 Mass-Observation Report (Mass-Observation 1937). Moreover, not all late Victorians had had the money to introduce the overmantel, just as many still had the now unfashionable marble fire surround, that they disguised with tasselled drapes (Long 1993).

Most of the literature available shows photographs and paintings of middle-class mantelpieces (for example Wilhide 1984; Hills 1985), just as my findings are from those who responded to the questionnaire, who were principally middle- class home-owners. The Victorian overmantel could be perceived as the last flicker of the 'real' fire with the 'real' mantelpiece. In some ways, it was similar to the ornateness of the Elizabethan and Jacobean overmantel panelling (Parissien 1995). The noticeable departure is that, although the Victorian overmantel is also a materialisation of wealth and status, it had spaces in it for the display of moveable goods. Although these might have been prescribed by stylebooks, and convention (although this is not clear), the objects could be moved, unlike the 'pre-mantelshelf' time, when fire place and display place were almost a single entity, in immoveable stone or wood and paint. There was no opportunity for 'matter out of place' (Douglas 1966) when it could not be moved.

10.9 Approaching Now

The inter-war building of suburbia (4 million houses, according to Oliver et al. 1981) gave people mantelpieces, but frequently much narrower and tiled, often atop gas or electric fires, and reflecting in their designs, the prevalent modernist interests of the

time: the sun ray, the theatre and the cinema (Oliver et al. 1981: 184). Nevertheless, as well as Victorian overmantels keeping their place in many homes, speculative builders continued to build these old-fashioned styles (Claygate 1934; Waring 1947: 53), just as developers continue to implant neo-Georgian mantelpieces into neo-Georgian modern homes today (Hanson 1998: 146). This is the point at Madge, Jennings and Harrisson began the Mass-Observation programme. The paradox of the Mass-Observation programme was that their deliberately non-elitist method, using 'the observation of everyone by everyone, including ourselves', countering notions of a social 'science', seemed also to be caught in notions of hierarchy and expertise, pressing for their own 'better' type of science (Stanley 2001: 97).

This odd relationship between expert and novice, public and professional, teachers and learners, modernists and suburbians is clearly seen at a national level in the literature during and after the Second World War, when the rebuilding of Britain became a paramount concern (for example, the Penguin series, 'Things We See', including Brett 1947 and Jarvis 1947). One architect argues for central heating in the mass-building programme, with good ventilation:

> 'But if we are to retain our open fires it would be as well if we were to improve on the designs of our fireplaces; the surrounds which have been used in many speculative houses, generally being ugly and over-elaborated with innumerable recesses and ledges which are neither an asset nor a necessity in the modern house....Manufacturers must give more care to this than they have done in the past and concentrate on designs of both simple and unobtrusive appearance.'
> (Waring 1947: 53)

The battle for domestic space can be seen in the way in which architects, designers and town planners pushed one dominant reading of 'modernity' to the British public, through books such as the Penguin 'Things We See' series and the design of houses. However, another angle can be taken on this conflict, if we consider householders' reshaping of post-war open-plan designs and small kitchens:

> 'Modernity in this context was expressed through the adaptability with which families constructed and reconstructed their surroundings to fit in with their changing lifestyles rather than passively accepting the aesthetic styles the design experts tried to impose upon them.'

(Attfield 1999: 78; see also Attfield 1995 for the appropriation of New Town houses by working class tenants; Giles 2004).

This is worth remembering as I conclude with a comment on the appropriation and adaptation of past practices, and material and symbolic associations by modern-day Cardiff informants.

10.10 Conclusion

'In the intimate harmony of walls and furniture, it may be said that we become conscious of a house that is built by women, since men only know how to build a house from the outside...'
(Bachelard 1994 [1958]: 68)

Many earlier uses of the fireplace surround have been moved into the present. As I have shown, they might have become detached from their earlier meanings and uses, such as the candles on the mantelpiece (Ravetz and Turkington 1995). Other meanings have persisted, at least in writing, such as the attachment to household gods, although it might not have been the case that there was always a fire burning 'cheerily' in the hearth for them, or that, indeed, they were material figures by the ancient hearth. The mantelpiece has persisted into the 21st century, entirely detached from the central, essential hearth in the mediaeval hall, from the moveable heating braziers and the immoveable ornamentation of the earlier wall fireplaces. I have shown that the British were slow to take up the wall fireplace and slow to take up other heating technologies. Now, most British homes are centrally heated, and the mantelshelf, once the divider of the heating and decorative parts of the fireplace, is its last remaining fraction. In the Cardiff project, a new housing development formed part of the sample for questionnaires and interviews. The houses in the estate are built according to traditional designs. Most respondents to the questionnaire in this area had a mantelpiece. Many respondents associated terms such as 'focal point', 'home', family' and 'memory' with their mantelpiece or equivalent, and many had symmetrical displays with traditional features such as the mirror, clock and candles on show.

I have also shown how these implicit cultural practices have a complex relationship with past practices. Mantelpieces are hang-overs from the past. Much of what people do with mantelpieces, and the fact that so many people still want them, or at least permit them to remain, are accounted for as effects of tradition and memory. Many practices are taken for granted, such as displaying a mirror above the mantelpiece. These are traditional, and enacted without reflection or done with a different purpose from earlier meanings and uses, yet with those evocations as absent presences, just as the mantelpiece constantly invokes and makes present its missing part, its absent past – the fire. Others, such as the placing of photographs of dead relatives on the mantelpiece, have quite clear connections with ancient practice. Yet the majority of respondents to the questionnaire did not associate their mantelpieces with terms related to such practices, such as 'shrine' or 'religious belief'. In a seeming contradiction, people in conversation about the project immediately associated the mantelpiece with the concept of 'shrine'. This paradox of differing perspectives, of appropriation and detachment, can be seen throughout the partial genealogy provided here. Perhaps this looked like an interesting historical diversion, but it is one perspective from which I intend to illuminate my final point about mantelpieces.

Chapter Eleven - Conclusion
Mothers: the Invention of Necessity

MIRROR

PHOTO STATWORTS CLOCK STATWORK PHOTO

window

window sill
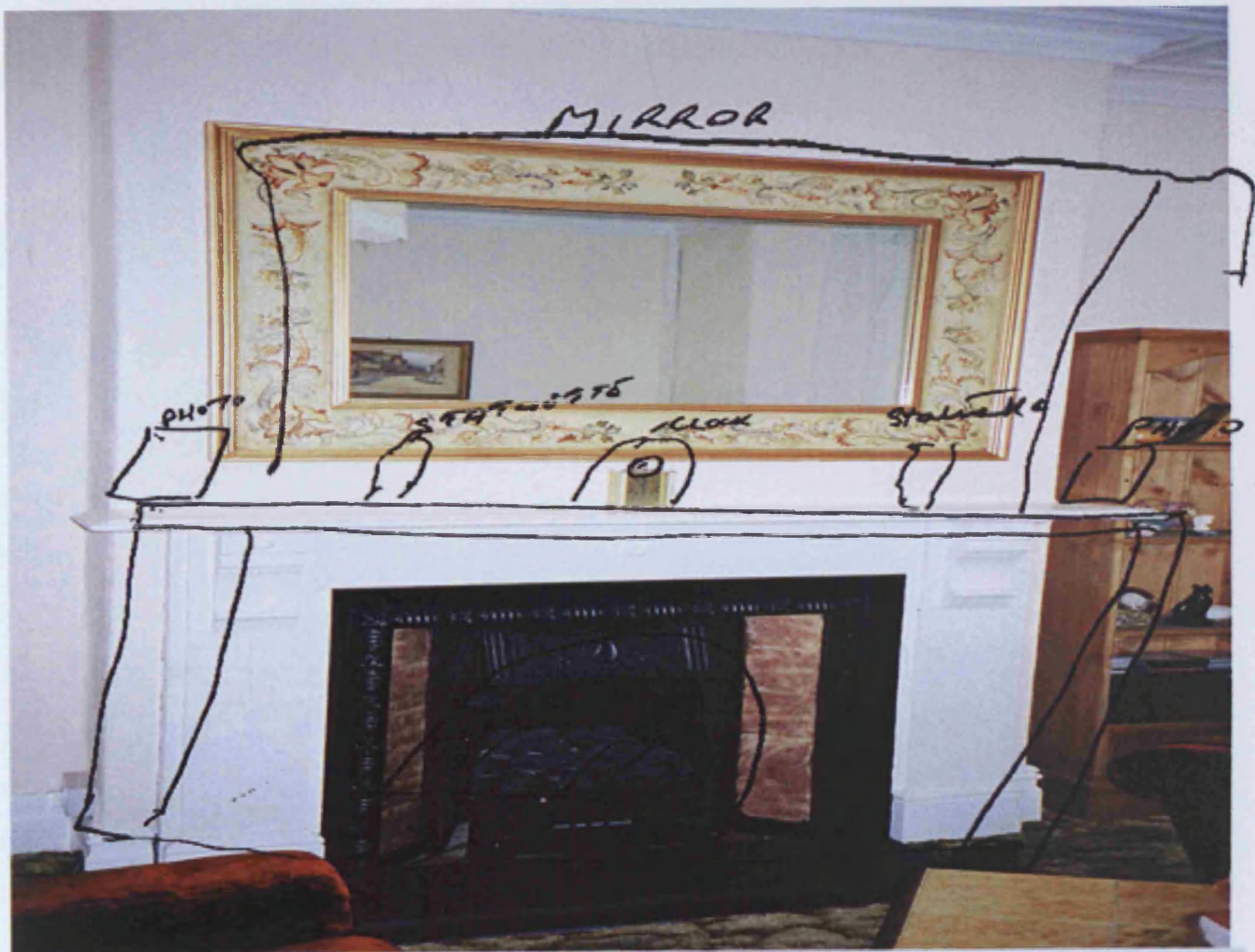
Chapter Eleven - Conclusion

Mothers: the Invention of Necessity

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.
(John 14: 2)

11.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I looked at the known history of the mantelpiece. This showed how current conceptions of the mantelpiece and its display are partially related to historical material and conceptual constructions of the fire surround and surrounding displays. The principal terms associated with the mantelpiece in the questionnaire were: focal point, family, home and memory. These words slip off the tongue so easily, they hardly bear thinking about. Yet when we do think about them, it becomes clear that there are gaps, silences, discrepancies. The conflation of home and family with *focus* is, as we have seen, an idea rooted in the Roman state. The idea of home as a locus of memory, or as a repository of memory emerged from my fieldwork, just as Romans displayed images of their ancestors, preferably 'smoke-blackened', in the centre of their houses.

As I demonstrated, the physical place of the fire in the home is not obvious, nor can it 'go without saying' that it should be at the wall opposite the door in the main living room, topped by a mantelpiece. That a mantel should be adorned by (often symmetrical) candles, clock, vases, photographs, ornaments, and topped by a mirror or a picture is not natural. The very existence of the mantelpiece, its place in the home above a wall fire, and the known origins of certain display practices have been shown to be cultural and often unrelated to use-value. What we have seen in this study is how this taken-for-granted 'focal point' bears scrutiny, foregrounding the background of daily domestic lives. Taking various approaches to the different orders of process contributing to its current central position in so many living rooms can open up this seemingly static, traditional domestic *tableau* to the sociological imagination. Let us now revisit these different modes of interpretation and consider how these threads might weave together.

11.2 Interweaving the Threads

11.2.1 Observing Mass

So many people who talked to me about this study stated, 'Well, it's a shrine, isn't it?' but only five of the 145 questionnaire respondents termed the mantelpiece thus, and no one at interview. Yet what emerged from a glimpse of the Mass-Observation archive was that the mantelpiece in 1937 was a shrine of sorts, or at least, a temple to constancy and common practice. I noted a commonality, seemingly regardless of carefully annotated class distinctions, of how the mantelpiece was ordered in terms of storage and aesthetics, use-value and display-value, moveable and immoveable goods. In between a permanent ornamental display were the ongoing materials of everyday life, that were therefore visible at the moment they were needed.

The presence of the mantelpiece itself was barely in question, since the kitchen and/or living room fires were almost universal in Britain – despite the availability of more practical heating technologies. It was also clear that there was a gendered distinction in domestic practice, as 'mother' often managed the mantelpiece – a matter of ongoing tidying, removing 'intruder' objects from the mantelpiece. Photographs of the dead (often from the Great War) and Coronation mugs placed the 1937 mantelpieces in history, and also suggested that it was part of the fabric of both social commemoration and private remembrance. Further, the materials 'in-between' connected the family mantelpiece with mundane public and social life: smoking paraphernalia for guests; letters; grooming goods for going outside; a central, unifying clock-time. In this sense, perhaps, it was constitutive of observances that, although not religious, were homologous in that sense of connecting the personal with the communal. Similarly, the Mass-Observation Reports were a curiosity in that they were at once a unified collection of social historical documents, by their very age and provenance, and individual accounts that were non-uniform and ungeneralisable.

11.2.3 Telling Tales: Narrative and Biographic Accounts

This first detailed analysis of the data showed how informants constructed narratives around objects on display that accomplished other work. These were not just 'the story of the frame' or 'how the dough ball got its colour'. The stories that people told were telling in that they did moral work of a particular type: they positioned the teller of the tale as 'hero' in some way or other – as a good mother, as a responsible grandmother; as a culturally expert individual. These were not the only tales to be told of these objects; other accounts would be given to other people at another time. We can only imagine those versions. But it is important to recall two aspects of these accounts; first, I asked for the provenance of these artefacts; second, all of these things were visible, either on the mantelpiece or on selected 'equivalent' display spaces that were termed 'focal points'. Not every thing on display had a 'moral' tale, and not everyone accounted for objects in that way.

However, it is notable that this focus on provenance and biography was an assumed pattern for interviews, which I and the informants found fitting to the topic. Like the narrative form itself, there was a common agreement that cultural display in the home had more than an aesthetic value; it could be placed in networks of memory, biography and family history – and thence account for these memories, biographical parts and family chronicles. These different narratives all centred on the notion that identity – self-identity, family membership and social 'belonging' – could be constructed around objects that were similarly identifiable.

These specific attributes nevertheless placed them within a circuit of goods that were universal: artefacts which had 'added value' that could be verbalised, when prompted. Yet only those things that were 'tellable' were told, and only those narratives that were accountable at the time, related to me. Informants told the same stories about different things, and different stories about the same things. Therefore, whilst it was their very 'thingness' that mattered, in the telling of tales, their materiality somehow disintegrated: they became invisible metaphors, or carriers of another type of 'good'. As goods involved in ethical tales, they are then social and political objects (Cortazzi 2001: 391) and are not one-off, *ad hoc* creations, but storied, stored cultural artefacts.

And as carriers of cultural meaning, the 'goods' that they carry could be alluded to as the poetics of things.

Mythopoesis is a cultural act of story-making that moves tales from the individual to the universal scale (see Sproul 1991 [1979]; Barthes 2000 [1957]). I argue, then, that these artefacts can transcend the market-place of individual status-making, taste-affirming, identity-building interactions, just as they have literally been raised up from the low-lying geographies of the home. Although individuals might say that these are happenstance, rather than deliberated positionings of goods, that 'happenstance' happened too often to be dismissed.

11.2.4 Making the Invisible Visible

An introduction to the interview fieldwork that focused on verbal accounts clarified a distinction between the verbal and visual aspects of mantelpieces and their displays. What were most 'tellable', such as the dough ball, the china dog or the brass mice, were not always the most visible. Objects could lose visibility, because the duration of their stay had made them disappear, become background. New or temporary things, or in particular, things that should not be there, might be visible – even spectacularly present - yet not verbally presented, since they were not of the particular order of 'tellable' goods. Yet these were often telling, in that objects such as the letter left forgotten and unposted on the mantelpiece, or the film awaiting development – or even the dust – brought assumed concepts to the surface. These things are not fixed, inalienable or even deliberately placed: they are the happenstance, alien, displaced goods that, strangely, always have their place, on mantelpieces, shelf units and cabinets. This 'pollution' is allowed, even if it might, in the normal run of things, be unmentioned.

Yet this study did account for these 'unmentionables', in showing how they have been present on 1937 mantelpieces, just as they are now. Observing these things shows two aspects of display. Individuals have different ways of ordering mundane objects in their homes. They might keep them on the dresser, as opposed to the mantelpiece, or store them on a lower shelf – at foot level, rather than eye level, or keep them in the

kitchen, rather than in the living room. But they are always there and often not actually concealed in a drawer, but concealed by common consent.

This seemingly accidental disorder, or matter out of place is therefore so prevalent, yet unmentioned, that it is cannot be seen as one person's mess, but as a cultural characteristic, a 'public secret', if you will (Taussig 1999). These 'accidental tourists' of the mantelpiece are the very things that can tell of social change over time. Whereas a mantelpiece in 1937 would be dusted every day – perhaps by a 'char lady', or by 'mother', the 2003 mantelpiece might be cleaned once a week, by a cleaner, or less frequently, perhaps, by a member of the household. While letters were on nearly every mantelpiece in 1937, this is a rarity, an annoyance, in 2003, and rolls of film, or a digital camera, have taken the place of the single positional photograph. The mantel clock is no longer a necessity for time-telling; it is one of many methods for keeping time, from wristwatches and mobile phones to LCD displays on household appliances. Its place on the mantelpiece is the same in many cases, yet its position has shifted from history to convention, fashion to tradition.

11.2.5 Do Not Touch

Another distinction that emerged was that among categories of the audible, the visible and the tangible, vision is frequently placed above the other domains - just as narratives might be classified as superior to abrupt responses. There is also a common assumption that what is present and visible at eye-level – as things are on the mantelpiece, is also tangible. Yet there are rules as to what is touchable, and how it is touchable. Only certain people might pick up postcards, turn them over and read them, but anyone can pick up a card and look at the picture on the front. Ornaments can be picked up to be cleaned, but must not be picked up and played with or broken. A jigsaw is a toy on the floor, but a reminder of transgression up high on the mantelpiece.

Although a mantelpiece might show the viewer transgressive objects – or rather, objects that tell of transgression, such as the forgotten letter – it also inhibits transgression. These are things raised above the hurly-burly mobility of everyday life, to a kind of stillness, to be noticed, but intangible for one reason or another. They are

physically centred in the living room, in a different order of objects from those below or around the mantelpiece. Therefore, they are strangely contextualised and decontextualised, carefully placed and yet displaced by that placing.

11.2.6 Memories, Past Times and Periodicity

Many of the practices and artefacts described in the Mass-Observation reports resonated with the memories of older informants. However, this alignment was misleading, since it gave the impression that the reports and contemporary memories were in the same categories of knowledge-production. I argue that they are not, since a contemporaneous account does not belong to the category as the recounting of memory. The list of objects and the description of activities looks the same and sounds the same, but they are separated by their place in orderings of time. In other words, just as artefacts are placed in the foreground or background, spoken of or ignored, historical documents, family history and memories can be categorised as being different methods of conceptualising the past.

The mantelpiece is particularly pertinent in these different aspects of 'pastness', since it occupies positions in all of these orders of time for many informants. Their particular appeal is their presence as period features in a house, even if they might not be of the period of the house itself. It is as though they have a time-zone of their very own – no longer belonging to specific houses of specific periods – but ex-temporal and detached from the normal periodicity of architecture. In this sense, in that they are no longer historically specific goods, they inhabit an eternal present, always present for the invocation of family, memory and home; history, tradition and 'the past'. They are therefore, strangely for an artefact that is always so intimately associated with memory and tradition, distinct from the normal run of historical artefacts, in that their actual place in history no longer matters. They are always available for being recalled as the fabric of memory, or as monuments to historical practices and tradition.

11.2.7 In the Family's Way

Similarly, whilst the mantelpiece might be accounted or discounted in terms of its relevance or visibility in everyday domestic lives, it is immoveable, unlike other 'mantelpiece equivalent' spaces selected by informants which can be moved, such as shelf units. Likewise, the living room mantelpiece is the only small mantelpiece in modern houses, and even informants in multi-mantelpieced period houses made the distinction from other display spaces in that they were 'serendipitous' *in*, a 'nice feature' *of* or 'added value' *to* the house. Unlike display spaces such as walls that are ubiquitous and necessary properties of each house and all houses, the mantelpiece is, in a sense, happenstance feature, augmentation and permanent architectural structure.

The odd feature of current mantelpieces is that, now that they need no longer sit astride the active fireplace on the chimney breast, informants in modern house are choosing whether or not to have them, whilst others have put them above the sofa, place the television under one or plan to reinstall one in the space in-between chimney breasts. The fact that other informants had chosen either not to have them in new homes – and that housebuilders indeed gave them that choice - or had removed them from older houses brings to the foreground this salient feature of the mantelpiece: that with the advent of central heating in over ninety percent of British homes (ONS 2005), its cultural role as part of the working fireplace has ended, and it has entered into a new relation with domestic space, artefacts and time and practice.

Whereas many informants spoke of the mantelpiece as an ideal focal point, many of them related conflicting ways of looking at it. For one person, it was a storage unit; for another, a special place for display. The goods that were displayed on it were also a focus for negotiated identities: an investment object for one was a display good for another, for example. These distinctions tended to be – although not unanimously – made along two lines: that of male/female and that of adult/child. These combined differently according to household formation. What was noticeable was that such a distinction could still be made in 2003 – a distinction that was quite clear in 1937. Not only were displays similar visually (in part) to those described in 1937, but also similar in terms of family negotiations of ordering domestic space. What was

different was the relation the mantelpiece was now involved in with the television as the 'focal point'.

However, this conflict could be seen from the same perspective: it was often the female mother/spouse who wanted the mantelpiece to remain as a 'focal point', whilst the father/spouse and children treated the television as the focal point. This was particularly noticeable in Harriet's case: her mantelshelf was above the sofa which faced the television – they were diametrically opposed. Yet, whilst the mantelpiece above the unnecessary fire was in some ways disruptive to common-sense ordering of a room around the television, it was also seen as 'making sense' of a room that otherwise lacked a centre point. Although usually ignored and unseen, it was perceived as important for the moment of entry by guests, others, upon whom it would make an immediate visual impact opposite the doorway. The television, whilst highly visible, was not an ideal focal point for outsiders. I argue that the mantelpiece has stopped being entirely a permanent structural property *of, to* and *in* the house, attached to the fire, and entered a new relation in-between negotiating time, space, artefacts - as *cultural* mediator – and the person. What the 'unmentionable' property of the modern mantelpiece was that it is no longer a total structural *given*, but to a certain extent, a choice. The question to reflect upon then was to what extent it remained in place as a piece of cultural heritage, and how that might relate to choice.

11.2.8 The Gift of Giving

Gifts for display and gifts that were displayed were especially salient in this type of practice, since they materialised the relation between giver and recipient, and the recipient within a traditional exchange relation. They therefore positioned informants as inhabiting a network of relations that were traditional and went without saying. Yet, when people told their individual tales of the particular process by which these objects 'became' gifts – parts of the gift relation – I argued that these accounts demonstrated a less certain, less categorisable system of reciprocity than might be assumed from that umbrella term, 'the gift'. Not only were people translating cash gifts into objects they had chosen for themselves, disposing of things that had been once automatic 'heirlooms' and entering into reversals of traditional inheritance practices, they were also becoming labelled as 'collectors' for the very sake of the gift

relation. The traditional process of transubstantiation, of turning ties of kinship, ritual events and social convention into substance, was problematised in this interpretation of individual gift accounts. The processes by which this relation was being made visible, displayable, entailed quite difficult practices of selection, placement and display that did not always align with practices of 'doing' other types of identity, family and social work.

Traditional and conventionalised practice cannot be taken for granted as a 'total social fact' (in Mauss's use of Durkheim's phrase 1990 [1950]), and this dissonance or discrepancy was highlighted when informants turned to objects on the mantelpiece, as in the case of Sian's clock and Harriet's candlesticks. Individual attempts to 'do' traditional displays on the mantelpiece can do so only partially, or by deviating from conventional pathways of inheritance. Yet these particular cases show us that these deviations from convention are conventional, or are becoming so. It is not possible to 'do' tradition, convention, history, biography and memory at the same time and in the same place. By making visible the gift relation, they displaced, or replaced, other relations such as, for example, the person who could 'do' tradition in the form of symmetry, or who displayed only those objects which they, as an aesthetically expert individual, had selected. In other words the 'order' of the gift might disorder other orderings and imperatives for display. If this trope of disorder can then be turned to reflect upon the mantelpiece, as another awkward in-between artefact, we can begin to see how it might be conceived as relating partially as a *place*, I argued in the previous section, but also in *time* betwixt past and present practice, with particular focus on the gendered property of this liminality.

11.2.9 History/Historiography

Most of the interpretations offered in the thesis were grounded in fieldwork in Cardiff. The Mass-Observation archive informed the practice of the fieldwork, just as it resonated with informants' memories. Yet as a look at the known history of mantelpieces showed, careful distinctions had to be made between terms that could so easily be elided, just as the mantelpiece was introduced to make distinct the separation of space between the fire place and the display place on the focal wall. It then took a role as a shelf for displaying moveable goods, as opposed to architecturally-embedded

displays. Once it had taken on this role, it too became embroiled in different methods of distinction. What I have pointed out is that, now that the fireplace is technologically obsolete, the mantelpiece occupies a liminal position in the ordering of domestic space, time and artefacts – and has thus highlighted some dissonances and disorderings in taken-for-granted notions. It oscillates as focal point and background, presenting absences and absenting the present – extinct, yet enjoying a renaissance as a timeless monument to 'the past'.

Hodder argued that skeuomorphs 'telescoped' time (1998), but the mantelpiece does not really do this. Telescopes view far-off places, whereas the mantelpiece views and makes present a far-away, compressed 'past': this defies reason. As such, its presence resonates with the visual tableaux that are presented to any visitor to a living room. What can be seen is a 'shrine' of sorts, to a created past that bears some visual (*made visible*) similarities with historical practices, even though these, like the mantelpiece, have been sliced out of their original network of practices, and their original domestic geographies. Individual narratives linking aspects of these visual displays with biographical pasts and remembered practices make sense of the mantelpiece and its display – in part. Yet if we remove the biography from the person to the artefact, we see that the presence of the mantelpiece and the display does not make sense according to the same rules of sense-making. What must be remembered is that the mantelpiece and its display is not available for visual consumption by accident; these have been made visible, not by individual persons, but by some act of common, or cultural consent. What I shall explore now is how to interpret that practice.

11.3 Communion

> *'[A] multitude of myopias limit the glimpse we get of our subject matter [...]
> all we can do, I believe is to keep faith with the spirit of natural science, and
> lurch along, seriously kidding ourselves that our rut has a forward direction.'*
> (Goffman 1983: 2)

What we have seen is that practices of knowledge production revolve around circuits of sense-making that are cultural, that meet on common ground. The connection, for example, of family, home, memory and the focal point of the mantelpiece is popularly understood to make sense. The display of mirror, candles and clock make sense as a

traditional unit of display. The telling of stories of the provenance of certain artefacts, centring on constructions of identity, is a convention, whilst ignoring materials that cannot be identified within this cultural category is quite normal. Similarly, positioning the furniture around the fireplace, and keeping certain items out immediate sight or in other rooms is a traditional method of ordering domestic space. 'Home' and 'family', the mantelpiece, narrative, photography, biography, memory, the gift and goods for display are all frames of mediating lived experience. These have their effects, in that they are cultural methods for ordering, selection, storage and display.

In fixing materials into certain cultural frames of reference, all these methods must discard what is not fitting. Even the blurred, unfocused photographs that form part of the year-long photo-study are another version of a polished communion of knowledge, an aesthetic apology that defends the thesis against selecting only beautiful and articulate data. These frames are all contributory in raising individual objects, narratives, sketches and photographs above the hurly-burly of everyday 'history', of particular cases and clumsy instances, to the level of the universal, of myth. Once an artefact –be it a photograph in a frame or an ornament on a mantelpiece, or a series of words that is termed 'narrative' – it can also be removed from its time-frame, just like the mantelpiece. Clearly, informants who took part in this study were experiencing daily life, mundane domestic practices, family relations and accomplishing 'social life' without stopping to reflect on how their particular meaning-making processes – their ongoing placements and displacements of artefacts, their constructions of self, home and family – might relate to a cultural or mythical understanding.

I have provided a close empirical study of mantelpiece displays, and related this throughout the study to theories of the gift, time, identity, space and material culture. It is not the aim of the thesis to offer a complete closed grammar or order of things or domestic space. I have already pointed out the curious discrepancies, partial connections and paradoxes that studying the mantelpiece can highlight. But I would like to end by taking the discussion 'out of place' to a different order of knowledge production – to that of mythopoesis. What we have seen is how people, on a daily basis, accomplish identity, family, and so on. I have shown that these are

problematic, and that innovations such as changing technologies, women's work outside the home, mass-production and availability of goods do not sit easily with these conventional methods. This problematisation is equally conventional – a cultural, rather than an individual problem.

We have seen how there are different ways of ordering, making visible, and making heard these conventions. But there is one 'gap' that does not seem to be framed or made available in any way. I did not see it at first, and still did not see it or hear it, or know it was not there, until I was nearing the end of the thesis. Whereas mothers, grandmothers, women and daughters were a constant reference point for the mantelpiece, as repositories of memory, as teachers of domestic practice, fathers, grandfathers, men and sons figured very little. They were there, to be sure – just enough so that I thought they really did figure as important elements in the processes of knowledge that went into mantelpieces and their displays. But the more I looked, the more I realised that they were there mainly as negatives, as those inversions or absent presences against which the brightness of memory, mothers, displays and practices could be measured. They were not actually framed, nor were they the frame, but formed that context from which the mother as cross-generational transmitters of culture could be plucked, and transposed, timelessly, in this mythical role. This makes sense, but that is the danger – it makes sense.

Why, at a time when so much has changed, should the female remain, as she did in the nineteenth century, forever conflated, elided and confused with the home, with the family, and with memory? And a similar question can be asked: why is it that cultural methods of framing and sense-making should be posited on the idea that it is the past – however that might be conceived – upon which and with which the present might be constructed? Save for the few oddments left in the gaps, little attention was paid to such intentional or purposed actions – there was no orientation to the future that was accounted for on the mantelpiece. Karen could never find the 'perfect picture' for her photo-frame, and on my second visit, I heard that the frame had been placed in a bedroom drawer, still empty.

This could be seen even at the beginning of the study, when informants assumed I meant 'memory' by 'reminder' in the questionnaire. I meant something quite

different, but even I was taking it for granted that the only term connected with the future had to be that of a reminder for a task – the future is only a list of jobs to be done, like Alison's now-repaired candlesticks. The only highly visible/verbalised manifestations of the future on mantelpieces were artefacts such as wedding invitations and theatre tickets – and these were uncommon. Yet, these are ritualised or social events, based on past practice. Of course, it makes complete sense to commemorate the past in various ways on the mantelpiece, and to have a fireplace in the living room, because it makes sense – it is based on past practice. But that is my contention – it does not really make sense.

11. 4 Architect-Mother

From one object in a room to another, housewifely care weaves the ties that unite a very ancient past to a new epoch. The housewife awakens furniture that was asleep.
(Bachelard 1994 [1958]: 68)

When domestic fires were ubiquitous, the practices of keeping them alight, of women maintaining them as part of housework duties, and of families gathering around them were not just figurative devices, since they were rooted in everyday practice (Filbee 1980). Such practice was linked to symbolic meanings, as a metonym for the family, the house, the nation and nationhood. Now, the fire, as a flame that has to be kept alight to heat the house, provide cooked food and hot water for cleaning clothes and bodies, hence, essential in performances of the civilised nation, household and body, has all but disappeared, and is certainly not necessary for these daily social reconstructions. Not to engage in these practices was to dismember oneself from the social. All that remains of it, in most cases, is the mantelpiece, which remains the centre point, as Adrian (among others) put it, of the main living room in some houses. Others might have a shelf unit, top of a gas fire or a breakfast bar, but all of the houses I visited did have one thing in the main living room: the television. What does, or can, perform the same socially cohesive role as the fire has in the past, in this society? What image can invoke the same ideas of nation, home and family, even if these might not be altogether accurate, or might be ideologically, politically or economically motivated? Some living rooms have mantelpieces, sometimes with

fires underneath them that are used (although only one of the informants in this project used a coal fire occasionally). All had televisions in them.

I have suggested that the traditional distinction on the mantelpiece as a place for storage and display has undergone a syncresis or elision that is not altogether comfortable, and that particular intersection is a space for negotiation and conflict. The mantelpiece has been transposed to the modern living room, yet with the loss of the open coal/wood fire, something has been lost in translation: its everyday role in domestic practices. This perspective is now augmented by the suggestion that the mantelpiece is also a place of telescoped practice, in that previous practices, increasingly framed by cultural memory, rather than lived experience, are viewed 'at a distance' on the mantelpiece. This compression is now under more pressure due to the introduction of the television (another type of viewing from afar). This new visitor places the mantelpiece in the contemporary living space further into the margins of daily practices. Is it reasonable to host a protruding, heavy, space-consuming 'piece of art', as Michael called it, in the centre of the reception room? Is it reasonable, then to view the mantelpiece in its turn as metonym for hearth, and thus for nation, gods, home and family? Has its detachment, transposition and compression (literally, in the case of small modern mantelpieces) actually turned it into something else?

11.5 Odyssey: A Return

'For it contains few elaborate decorations, Socrates; but the rooms are designed simply with the object of providing as convenient receptacles as possible for the things that are to fill them, and thus each room invited just what was suited to it.'
(Xenophon 1923: IX.2)

As we have seen, accounts constructed around the mantelpiece and its displayed objects are moral, reflecting social processes of meaning-making that are therefore political (Cortazzi 2001). Let us reflect upon the Ithacan hero Odysseus, that Greek bringer of gifts and the ethical heroes of the mantelpiece accounts – good mothers, home-makers, gift-bearers and memory-keepers. We have seen how there is a conflation of symbolic meaning between mantelpieces and women, of women and

home, and women and ornaments as the keepers or repositories of memory, of family accounts, and within gift relations. We have also seen how the mantelpiece is a place of discomfort – an adult space, a visible space, a tangible place, which at the same time commemorates children, acts as a background for family life, and which is, in some ways, untouchable. This fits in with Mauss's interpretation of the gift as a doubled entity – its German etymology is *poison* (1990 [1950]: 62). If we link this with the ancient notion of the poisoned chalice – a cup containing impure blood - then we can see why this normalised duality of woman as both container and as contained – in and of the home – should be contested.

In Homer's *Odyssey*, Penelope has been at home throughout, maintaining Odysseus as absent presence, keeping the house, its goods and his memory in mind. She is also kept in the house, unable to go on adventures like her husband. Penelope has kept it all safe for Odysseus, and kept him safe in deflecting the suitors with her tapestry, which she weaves by day, and unweaves by night, thus maintaining a semblance of a seamless, ongoing, unending fabrication. Materially, this is what the tapestry seems to be, but this is, indeed, mere fabrication, a tissue of lies to retain control and order of the house, and to keep intruders out. But he – the displaced, the nostalgic one, returns. Like the notion of woman, keeper of the domestic interior, and kept within the interior, the linked notion of nostalgia – often confused with memory, biography and/or history – is characterised by paradox and ambiguity.

The moment that nostalgia's 'place' is found – at home – it requires immediate displacement to keep its place as an ordering device for practices. It must remain always exterior to the home in order to survive. We have seen in this study, there is a confusion of storage and display, gifts and bought objects, televisions and mantelpieces, men and women, adults and children, that all these orders are an ongoing enmeshment of differing viewpoints, negotiated orders and conflicting priorities, or focal points. If we allow that nostalgia has, indeed, 'come home', how can this total collapse, or syncresis of inside and outside relate with the continuing conflation of woman and the domestic interior?

Penelope keeps the house on the edge of movement, disorder with her nightly and daily rituals of weaving and unweaving, creating and destroying. Odysseus enters, a

dirty stranger/tramp, 'no-man', remaining in the liminal space of the forecourt – literally 'before-the –house' [*prodomos*]. In a sudden heroic singular momentary action, he rescues the house and his 'man'-liness – his properties. But it is Penelope's daily mundane accomplishments that have maintained the house and his manliness from the brink of collapse. Her management, her ongoing practices of home and her *invention* protect the house from the exterior threat day by day, and night by night.

If we think back to the mass-observed mantelpieces of 1937, dust, decay and death were ever-present. 'House work', and the constant cleaning and maintenance of the active fire place were kept up by women: 'mother'; the 'char'. Photographs of the dead were displayed, as a common practice. Decay was implicit in the ongoingness of practices around the mantelpiece: the broken vase, the slow clock, the movement of letters, collar studs and broken pen nibs. Decay, seen another way, is vivifying, since it implies a future-orientation. What I have argued is that the Cardiff findings show a past-orientation, in the metaphors – and practices – of 'memory' and 'mother' – containers of and contained within the notion of 'home'. This conflation has been a constant way of 'knowing' since at least the pre-modern time of Homer, and we have seen it as a 'construction' of the nineteenth century, and a practice and memory of the twentieth century.

Similarly, the 'gift' as an ordering social relation has been a constant negotiator between hosts and guests, family and friends. In Mauss's interpretation of the Trobrianders, the house was part of 'préstation totale' that was the gift society (1990 [1950]). As I have shown, the often syncretised tropes of mother/memory/gift/home continue to be powerful invocations that are called upon when individuals are called to account. But in this syncresis, this compression, something has been squeezed out of place: fathers and futures. According to the questionnaire responses, the mantelpiece was principally a 'focal point', an aesthetic display, linked with home, family and memory. It was dusty and clean, but not a place of house work. It was to do with family and memory, but not story or autobiography.

In the interview accounts, there was clearly a problem in the economies of domestic space, connected with compressions of new and old practices, most potently evoked by the relation between the mantelpiece and the television, and the gendered character

of negotiation and conflict – in which children were silent witnesses. They too are internalising this traditional way of 'knowing', a way of being that seems not to take into account the changes in the twentieth century in institutions such as family, technological advances ad the changing uses of home, and the entry of women into the forum – the work place and market place. This elision of home/family/memory/mother/gift diminishes the cultural and social space of those who do not fit into this condensed meaning of home (see Cohen and Taylor 1992; Chapman et al. 1999): home-less and child-less people, single people, lesbian and gay couples, the ageing population, divorced people and other 'exotics' who do not fit into this compressed – enshrined - metaphor. Children are learning the same pattern of cultural categorisations, even though these do not 'fit' with 21st century practice. There is a need for House Work, rather than this continuing 'domestication' of the body.

Agnew stated that: 'Shelf life is by definition limited. Life on a mantel can last for ever' (2003: 16). But, the mantelpiece is a shelf, an edge protruding into houses ancient and modern, a cross-over of time periods that contests, challenges, comforts and constrains domestic practice and its relations with the work places and market places beyond its physical bounds. In conclusion, I cannot encompass all the themes, ideas and interpretations that I have suggested throughout the thesis. I would like to focus on a particular thread that seemed to interweave the diverse materials and modes of the study.

11.6 Summary

> 'Conditions may be overlooked because they are too small to be or are simply not recognised as initial conditions in the first place.'
> (Strathern 1999: 4)

If we return to the Mass-Observation reports, discussed in Chapter Three, one pertinent point emerges. In 1937, volunteers were asked what was on the mantelpiece. All but one described at least one mantelpiece in their own home and usually several of their relations' and neighbours' or friends'. By 1983, the aim was to record mantelpiece displays as a precursor to future museum displays, and as a

revisitation of the 1937 report. Yet it differed in one crucial respect: volunteers could describe a mantelpiece or 'mantelpiece equivalent'. I chose to reuse this phrase in the letter covering the Cardiff questionnaire, since some kind of option was necessary for respondents who did not have a mantelpiece.

The mantelpiece, having been a universal and inalienable good, has become exclusive, moveable and alienable. As an 'alien' good in the home, it has twin aspects. It is no longer 'host' to permanent and impermanent artefacts because of its relationship with the fire, but because of tradition. It is, in effect, a guest in the house, which puts it in a liminal position. It looks Janus-like to its authoritative position in the centre of the home, and to a future where it is permitted residence only by a cultural attachment to it – a social memory - as a property of the hearth, and by extension, as a property of the home and family.

If we take this further, it has ancient historical links with nation, ancestors and gods. This continues to give it some charismatic right to remain in the centre of the home, but as its position is changing as it slips from lived experience of the 'hearth' as centre of the home, biography and family history. The television is the centre of the living room as lived everyday practice; there are computers in every family house I visited, children have warm bedrooms and women go to work outside the home. Alienated from its position of host or container of cultural practice and lived experience to guest/stranger, the mantelpiece is no longer 'at home' in the modern living room. It is the object of curatorship, a museum artefact that has somehow slipped through the net.

The mantelpiece is now one of a proliferation of display spaces in the home, which is sometimes privileged, by the selection of objects upon it, but is often made special only because of its position in the living room opposite the doorway. It is at once still an 'altar', a sanctuary for raised-up objects, and profane – raised up *by* those very things, but also by its chance, momentary visibility on entering an unfamiliar room and finally, by custom. In Chapter One, I linked three cultural objects - the house, the mantelpiece and the displayed artefact - by the concept of scale. As we saw in the chapter about the gift relation, this link has become disordered by the proliferation and availability of artefacts in combination with continuing ritual social practices.

The gift relation is at once sacred and pure, yet also polluted by and polluting of current practices involving identity and taste in the home. The tension is between traditional cosmological cultures of reciprocity and current practice. The 'gift' is in a similarly liminal position as the mantelpiece. However, I argue that this is not as a result of postmodern fluidity, liquid modernity, individualisation or demoralised society. This practice of compression, of elision and syncresis, conflating memory with tradition, reciprocity with consumption and disposal practice, storage and display, focality with vocality, is a cultural, rather than an idiosyncratic phenomenon.

What is noticeable is that this type of practice is not modern: the conflation of woman and home, home and family, hearth, gods, nation is ancient, pre-modern - with one exception. Whereas the hearth has translated to the modern home – although its position is unstable, the idea of God has not. Miller argued that women's mundane shopping for the family was future-oriented and symbolised a 'vestigial search for a relationship with God' (1998: 150). This might be so: perhaps the ancient rituals of cleansing, sacrifice and prayer – the human side of the divine, future-oriented pact – have moved into the marketplace, the risky locus of bargaining on the future. The compression and syncresis of old domestic practices and goods, to make room for new practices and goods has, I argue, resulted in a (perhaps temporary) loss of visionary, future-oriented, progressive house work. If the 'woman's place' of the hearth, its gods and goods have been lost, where now, is the place of women?

Let us return – for the last time - to the mythical starting point of the study: the tale of Odysseus. I had overlooked something: the end of the poem. Scholars have debated endlessly the authenticity of the end of Homer's *Odyssey* (Toohey 1992). The debate has rested on the discomfiting discrepancies in style, and the appropriateness of this last 'comedic' book mirroring the heroic deeds of the preceding twenty three books of the epic. Yet, the text is the only material available of this oral poem, and I shall end my argument on this uncomfortable fact. Odysseus 'cures' his nostalgia by coming home, but he sets off after one night in the marital bed to visit his father's house, only to become embroiled in a battle with the dead suitor-guests' relations, who must avenge the deaths according to ritual obligation. Only the divine intervention of Athene prevents an endless repetition of irreconcilable patterns of ritual behaviours, to

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move 'time' onwards. Yet Penelope has been left again, alone in the house, the house keeper of her husband's honour and memory, properties and daily business.

I can give no Big Answers to the research questions with which I introduced this study. I am not going to plod through each one systematically, because this small study has shown how this miniature space of home can relate to questions above and beyond its 'shelf life'. Take in its place, in conclusion, a consideration of the original aims, which sought to relate this narrowly focused exploration with broader fields of enquiry.

11.7 Endings

'Thus the minuscule, a narrow gate, opens up an entire world. The details of a thing can be the sign of a new world which, like all worlds, contains the attributes of greatness.'
(Bachelard 1969: 155)

This is a brief revisiting of the research aims, to make explicit the multi-dimensional modes of addressing these throughout the thesis. I have been, perhaps, too ambitious in this first substantial practice of social enquiry. As *apologia* for this flaw, I invoke the mantelpiece, a narrow frame, a slender shelf, which I thought I 'knew' from the first glance of the Masters study. But, the more I looked, the more I saw. This was more than a lens, or a frame, or a viewing point: the details of this microcosm seemed as immense, as startling and candescent as the stellar illuminations of gigantic cosmological schemata. Therefore, I judged it better to show as much as I could of this humbling epiphany than to sit quiet and good in the sanctuary of fixed, answerable 'research questions'.

- Its first, substantive aim was to make the invisible 'focal point' of the living room and surrounding practices visible, vocalised and accounted for, if only through a glass, darkly.

I accomplished the aim to 'make visible' the 'focal point' of the mantelpiece. This had not been done before in any depth or range in empirical

sociological/anthropological studies of home. My interpretation shows that the mantelpiece is liminal, an edge of time and space which is therefore an ideal place for scrutinising conflict and negotiation in domestic practice. By taking multi-dimensioned views and approaches, I showed how there are discrepancies or gaps between what is spoken, or 'speakable', what is visible, and what is tangible in the material culture and practices of the mantelpiece. In unpacking conflated traditional cultures of home, family, memory and display, I showed how there is a constant friction in partially attaching, partly detaching practices. This tension in the negotiations of domestic geographies and economies of space, time and identity were minutely examined in the empirical findings, and related to other ways of 'knowing' space, time and identity by drawing in 'living' and 'dead' histories of the mantelpiece.

- Its second, methodological aim was to practice and reflect upon a multi-modal approach to collecting, analysing and presenting data and findings.

Using Mills's (1959) 'sociological imagination' as a guide, I have shown how a multi-modal methods approach to the 'problem', using techniques that are not comfortably fitted together, allow for discrepancies, partialities and ambiguities, Hence, I illuminated these gaps, or the 'sieve-order' (de Certeau 1984) in 21st century compressions of practices, relations and substances, old and new. In offering multi-dimensioned viewing-points, I showed how position of viewer and viewed is crucial for displacing, replacing, augmenting or diminishing certain relations of power, and highlighted the persuasive rhetoric of narrative and biography, the selectivity of visual displays, temporal and spatial disruptions that are characteristic of both social research methods and everyday domestic practices. In making this analogy, I contributed to ongoing methodological debates concerning ways of knowing and the 'crisis of representation' (Atkinson 1990; Warde 1996).

- The third, theoretical aim was to consider how the empirical study of daily domestic practice in might relate to cosmological interpretations of practice, and thence inform future research trajectories.

I have shown how 'culture' and 'knowledge', 'exterior' and 'interior' are not clearly boundaried in mundane practices of home. This ambiguity is problematic, since it is in illuminating 'gaps' between the spoken, visible and tangible ways of knowing, showing and telling that a path opens up for social enquiry. Sometimes, I have parted the tissues of the spoken, the visual and the tangible to reveal that powerful corpus of internalised, assumed practice termed 'culture'. In doing so, I engaged with the contested macro/micro debates that have been dominated recently by the rhetoric of postmodern/liquid/fluid/individualised society. I do not seek to deny the importance of these contributions, or to take on the gods of sociological theory. Bourdieu's theorisation of *habitus* (1977, 1979, 1984) and Douglas's analysis of cultural categorisation (1966) formed a frame for my interpretation of apparently idiosyncratic invocations of memory, taste and contingency. However, my reading of these could not entirely connect in a cohesive theorisation, and Strathern's concepts of partiality, ambiguity and the relation were useful in ending a needless quest to 'answer' the research questions. I opened up a space that is not ready to be closed down – yet – by neat conclusions.

What I emphasised was the curious position of the mantel above the hearth in the contemporary living room: this is not a postmodern, or even a modern place, but premodern, the stuff of myth. Practices around it might be partially detached from past practice, but it is the continuing attachments that cause the friction: in a liquid, fluid individualised realm, there is no friction. The mantelpiece is an in-between space, and a small, unnoticed, but needed presence. It is its property of non-absence that it is always seen - its negative, rather than its presence - its positive. In making its presence felt, I have contributed to the sociological task of reflecting on the taken-for-grantedness of everyday lived experience, to reveal processes of mythopoesis .

I intend to extend this scrutiny of 'betwixt and between' into the market place and work place, to explore how this will illuminate the 'gap' more brightly, between embodied, unspoken unseen, untouched, enshrined practice and 'knowledge' – or rather, a distanced reflection, which is all that separates the 'sociological enquirer' from 'social member'. My current interest is in the 'corridors of power' – literally. These too are liminal 'non-absent' spaces, where relations of power can fall between the gaps of the accounted-for, visible places of meetings, decisions, and negotiations.

By moving into the interstices of institutions beyond the four walls of home, I aim to engage further with debates concerning power relations, to view through tears in the social/architectural fabric *the immortal everyday.*

List of Appendices

Ia-Id: Photographs of sample area housing types

II: Map of Cardiff with sample area maps

       Cardiff map: Copyright Cardiff Council 2005
       ('Thematic Maps', 2001 Census, www.cardiff.gov.uk/censusdata/map.asp
       accessed 6/03/06)
       Sample area maps: Crown Copyright 2006
       (www.ordnancesurvey.org accessed 6/03/06)

III: Covering letter for the postal questionnaire

IV: Postal Questionnaire for all sample areas, including Section One versions
       for Radyr Gardens and for Llandaff North/Cardiff Bay

V: Excel files of questionnaire responses

VI: CD-Rom of visual data [in plastic folder on back cover]

       N.B. Appendix VI also available on password-protected website:

       www.postmodernisnt.co.uk

Appendix Ia: Pilot Area - Whitchurch

Appendix 1b: Cardiff Bay

Appendix 1c: Llandaff North

Appendix Id: Radyr Gardens

Radyr Gardens

Whitchurch Pilot

Llandaff North
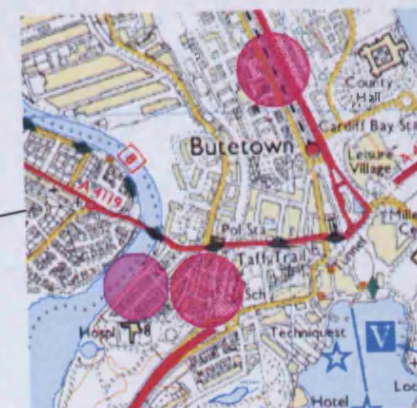
Cardiff Bay

Appendix II: Sample Areas in Cardiff

Appendix III: Covering Letter for the Questionnaire

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

PRIFYSGOL CAERDYDD

Dear Sir or Madam

I am a research student at Cardiff University, undertaking a project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The aim of the project is to find out what your home means to you. Since this is a complex area to study, I am focusing what is on the mantelpiece (or its equivalent) right now.
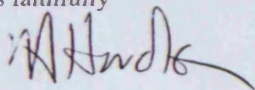
I would be very grateful if you would take a few minutes to look at the enclosed questionnaire. The answers you give are an essential part of this research. The first section asks you to complete a few general questions about your home and interests. Then, you will be asked some questions about what is on your mantelpiece (or its equivalent if you do not have one).

Nowadays, central heating has abolished the fireplace in many homes; but then again, many people have restored old fireplaces, or chosen new homes with traditional fire-surrounds. If you do not have a mantelpiece, you will be asked about its equivalent; the shelf, window sill or other surface where you might put ornaments, clocks, reminders, photographs, birthday cards and so on.

The last section of the questionnaire asks you some general questions about your household. If you are willing to be interviewed, please give your name and contact details at the end of the questionnaire. All the information you provide will remain entirely anonymous.

When you have completed the questionnaire, please post it back to me in the envelope provided. Your contribution to this project is important, and I look forward to receiving your completed questionnaire. Please do not hesitate to telephone or e-mail me if you have any queries regarding this project.

Yours faithfully

Rachel Hurdley
PhD student

E-mail: DidauR@cardiff.ac.uk
Tel: 2087 5735

Appendix IV: Postal Questionnaire
What's on your mantelpiece?

EXAMPLE SKETCH

Mirror

Wedding invitation

Plant

Candle

Photo of parents

Ticket Clock Postcard

Bowl for keys
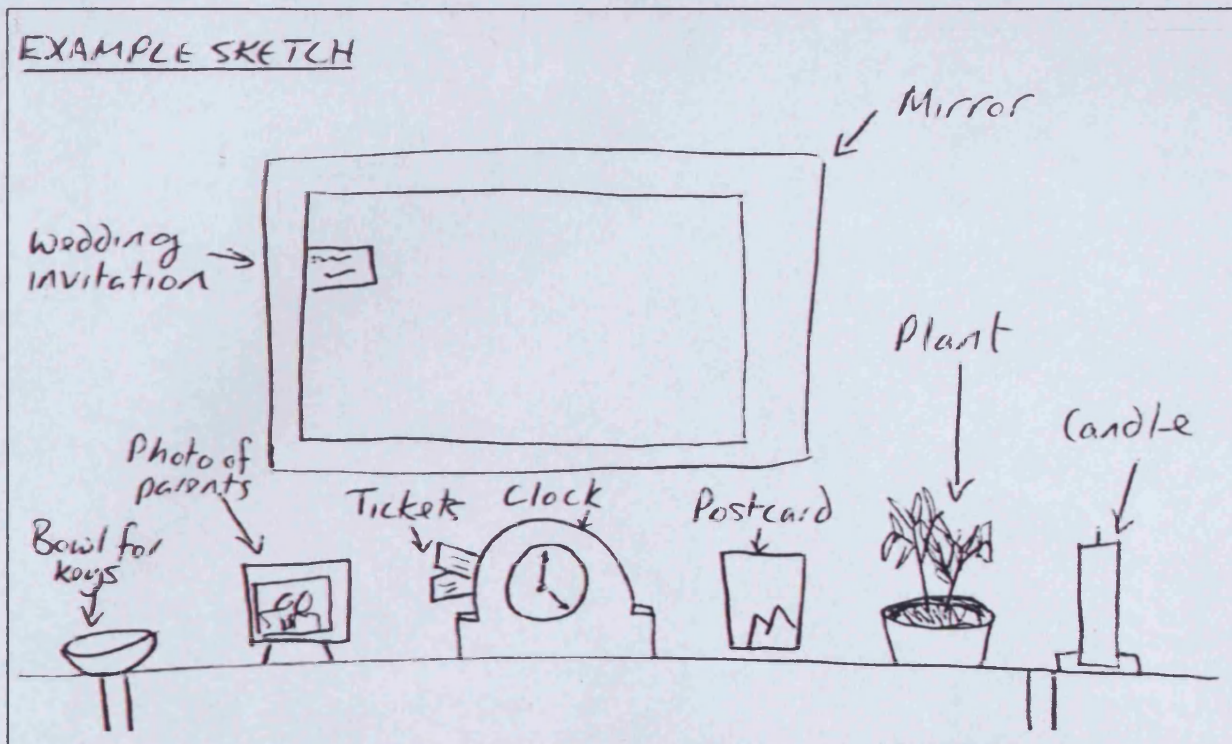
Questionnaire June 2003
PhD Research Project
Rachel Hurdley
Department of City and Regional Planning
Cardiff University

Section One:

EVERYONE please complete this section

1. How long have you lived in this house? ___ years ___ months

2. Since leaving the home you shared with your parent(s) or guardian(s), how many houses, flats or rooms have you lived in (including your current home)? Please state number: ____

3. Has the interior of your home been altered since you have lived there?
      Yes   No

4. If so, what has changed?   Kitchen Units
                                   Bathroom Fittings
                                   Floor Coverings
                                   Wall décor
                                   Light fittings
                                   Heating
                                   Fireplaces
                                   Other (please list)

5. Who made these changes (e.g. you/your family, landlord etc.)?

6. What influenced your decision to move to this area (e.g. Close to work/ city centre, like the area, offered a house here)?

===

Thank you for completing Section One.

If you **do** have any mantelpieces in your home, please go to Section Two.

If you do **not** have a mantelpiece in your home, please go to Section Three.

(An example of a typical mantelpiece is shown on the front cover of this questionnaire, in case you are unsure of the definition.)

Section One:

EVERYONE please complete this section

7. How long have you lived in this house? ___ years ___ months

8. Since leaving the home you shared with your parent(s) or guardian(s), how many houses, flats or rooms have you lived in (including your current home)? Please state number: ____

9. If you bought your house off plan, did you have input into elements of the interior design?   Yes   No   Not Applicable

       If you did, what elements did you choose?   Kitchen Units
                                                               Bathroom Fittings
                                                               Floor Coverings
   Wall décor
   Light fittings
   Heating
   Fireplaces
   Other (please list)

10. What influenced your decision to move to this area? (e.g. Close to work, like new houses, wanted to upgrade, good for children)

===

Thank you for completing Section One.

If you do have any mantelpieces in your home, please go to Section Two.

If you do not have a mantelpiece in your home, please go to Section Three.

Section Two:

Please complete this section if you **DO** have any mantelpieces in your home.

1. How many mantelpieces are there in your home? (Please state number) ___

2. Please draw a simple sketch of the mantelpiece in the living room/reception room.

There is an **example sketch** on the front page of this questionnaire.

Please make your sketch in the box below, **labelling the things on your mantelpiece** (eg. Vase of flowers, scented candle etc.):

3. Here are some categories listing words you might associate with the mantelpiece you have just sketched, now or in the past. Please circle any words you do associate with this mantelpiece:

Aesthetic	Functional	Passage of time	Celebrations
Focal point	Shelf	Tradition	Seasonal
Display	Storage	Memory	Holidays
Design	Clean	Autobiography	Gifts
Formal	Empty	Story	Souvenirs
Symmetry	Cluttered	Family	Invitations
Expressive	Dusty	Home	Home made
Beautiful	Housework	Shrine	Reminders
Precious	Boring	Religious belief	Friends

4. How important is it for you to have a mantelpiece? (Please circle your answer)

   Very important

   Quite important

   Not very important

   Not important at all

5. Are there any other 'focal points' in your home where you keep photographs, mementoes, reminders and so on?

   Yes   No

If so, where are they (windowsill in kitchen, dining room wall, dressing table etc)?

6. What, if anything, makes the mantelpiece different to other 'focal points' or display spaces?

Thank you for completing Section Two. Please go to Section Four on the back page.

Section Three:

Please complete this section if you do <u>NOT</u> have any mantelpieces in your home.

1. **Have you deliberately chosen not to have a mantelpiece in your home?**

    Yes   No

    If 'Yes', please state why:

    _____
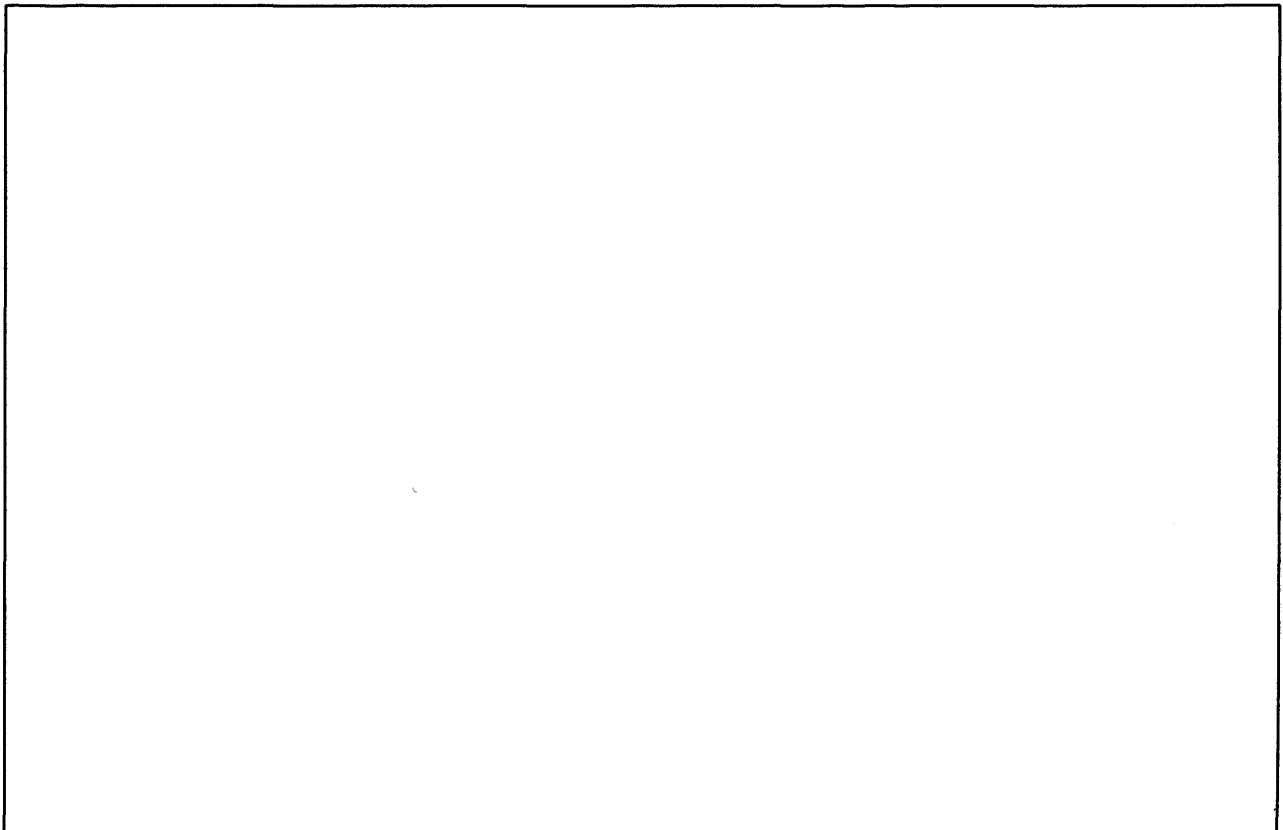
    If 'No', would you like a mantelpiece?   Yes   No

2. **Please think of a place in your home, which you might call the equivalent of a mantelpiece. In other words, a windowsill, bookshelf, desktop or similar place where ornaments, photographs, clocks, reminders and so on might be put.**
    Please state what this place is, and which room it is in:

    _____

3. **Please make a sketch of this place, <u>labelling the things on it</u>, in the box below (eg. Vase of flowers, scented candle etc.).**
    An <u>example sketch</u> can be found on the front page of this questionnaire.

4. Here are some categories listing words you might associate with the place you have just sketched, now or in the past. Please circle any words you do associate with this place:

Aesthetic	Functional	Passage of time	Celebrations
Focal point	Shelf	Tradition	Seasonal
Display	Storage	Memory	Holidays
Design	Clean	Autobiography	Gifts
Formal	Empty	Story	Souvenirs
Symmetry	Cluttered	Family	Invitations
Expressive	Dusty	Home	Home made
Beautiful	Housework	Shrine	Reminders
Precious	Boring	Religious belief	Friends

5. How important is it for you to have this space in your home? (Please circle your answer)

Very important

Quite important

Not very important

Not important at all

6. Are there any other 'focal points' in your home where you keep photographs, mementoes, reminders and so on?

Yes   No

If so, where are they (windowsill in kitchen, dining room wall, dressing table etc)?

7. What, if anything, makes the mantelpiece different to other 'focal points' or display spaces?

Thank you for completing Section Three. Please go to Section Four.

Section Four:

EVERYONE please complete this section

1. Please fill in the table below:

Members of Household	Sex M/F	Age	Ethnic Group	Relationship to you (e.g. child, spouse)	Occupation (if over 16)
Yourself				/////////////////////	
Person Two					
Person Three					
Person Four					
Person Five					
Person Six					
Person Seven					

2. Is your home: Owned outright   (Please circle answer)
   Owned with a mortgage
   Privately rented
   Rented from Social Landlord e.g Housing Association
   Provided by your employers

3. Some people think that a person's "social class" (working class, middle, upper etc.) is still important. Which social class would you say that you belong to?

4. Do you have any memories of a mantelpiece, or equivalent place when you were younger? It might have been in your childhood home, your grandparents' sideboard, or a piano top. If you do, please write a few words about it:

   If you are willing to be interviewed for this project, please fill in your details below.

   Name: _____ Best time to contact: _____

   Tel./E-mail _____

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please return it to me in the envelope provided. Your contribution is very important, and much appreciated.

Appendix V: Excel Files of Questionnaire Responses

Ou.	Area	Iv	Age	Sex	Spouse	Child	Class	Owner Ethnic	Mem	Sym dis	Mirror	Mp	Clock	1/2/3 mno	Candle	Photo	Ornam	Vase	Card/invit	Store	Plant/flo	Important	Distinct.	Others
413	1	0	41	0		1	3 Working	1 Welsh	1	0	1	1	1	123	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
348	1	0	32	1		1	3 Middle	1 British	0	1	0	1	1	23	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
380	1	0	46	0		1	2 Working	1 illeg.	0	0	1	1	1	-23	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
382	1	0	42	0		1	4 Working	1 European	1	1	1	0	1	12	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	1
335	1	0	37	1		1	2 middle	1 White	1	1	1	0	1	123	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
431	1	0	34	1		0	3 middle	1 British	0	1	1	0	1	123	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
418	1	0	53	1		1	1 middle?	1 white	0	1	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	1
324	1	0	40	1		1	2 working	1 -	0	1	1	0	1	12	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	3	0	1
375	1	0	32	1		1	2 middle	1 asian	0	1	1	1	1	12	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1
430	1	0	26	1		1	0 middle	1 white	1	1	0	0	0		1	1	1	0	0	1	1	2	1	1
362	1	0	35	1		1	1 -	white	1	1	1	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
307	1	0	35	1		1	2 not thght	1 (white) Br.	1	1	1	0	1	123	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
443	1	0	35	1		1	3 class 4	1 -	1	1	1	0	1	12	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	1
434 CG																								
329	1	0	48	1		0	2 working	1 British	1	0	0	1	0	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
430	1	0	39	0		1	0 m-wss wc	1 white	1	1	1	0	1	23	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
346	1	0	50	1		0	3 Middle	1 Wh Brit	1	0	1	0	1	12	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
341	1	0	42	0		1	2 working	1 -	1	1	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
330	1	0	36	1		1	3 middle	1 white	0	1	1	0	1	12	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
305	1	0	34	1		1	1 ?	1 w-brit	1	1	1	1	1	12	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
445	1	0	45	0		1	2 middle	1 Greek	1	1	0	1	1	23	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
319	1	0	36	1		1	3 wkg-mid	1 British	0	0	1	1	0	12	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	0
318	1	0	-				-	-		1	-	1	0	-2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
414	1	0	30	1		1	2 middle	1 British	1	1	1	1	0		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
422	1	0	31	1		1	1 middle	1 white	0	0	1	1	1	-23	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1

Ou.	Area	Iv	Age	Sex	Spouse	Child	Class	Owner Ethnic	Mem	Sym dis	Mirror	Mp	Clock	1/2/3 mno	Candle	Photo	Ornam	Vase	Card/invit	Store	Plant/flo	Important	Distinct.	Others
315	1	0	40	1		1	2 hardwkgl	1 Welsh	1	1	1	1	1	123	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
378	1	0	41	0		1	2 1	1 African	1	1	1	0	1	12	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	1
439	1	0	42	0		1	2 middle	1 Welsh	0	1	1	0	1	123	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
354	1	0	40	0		1	0 upwk/wm	1 English	1	1	0	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
312	1	0	40	1		1	3 middle	1 White	1	1	0	1	0	23	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
377	1	0	38	1	-	1	2 wkg mc	1 British	0	1	1	1	0	12	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
330	1	0	36	1		1	2 wk to m?	1 Wh. Coff	1	1	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
388	1	0	40	1		1	1 middle cl.	1 Welsh		1	1	1	1	123	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	1
425	1	0	36	1		1	3 middle	1 -	1	1	1	-		-23	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
366	1	0	51	0		1	0 middle cl	1 -	0	1	1	1	0	123	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
439	1	0	41	1		1	1 grudg mc	1 Welsh	1	1	1	1	1	123	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	1
365	1	0	36	1		0	0 middle	1 British	1	0	0	1	0	23	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
317	1	0	41	1		1	2 middle cl.	1 -	0	1	1	0	0	-2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
344	1	0	39	1		1	2 middle cl.	1 White	0	1	1	0	1	123	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	1
340	1	0	45	0	Welsh	1	2 wkg cl.	1 ISE	0	1	1	0	1	23	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1
400	1	0	32	1		1	2 middle	1 Indian	0	1	1	0	1	23	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	1
333/27																								
416	1	0	32	1		1	0 m to upper	1 -	1	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
336	1	0	39	0		1	1 middle	1 White	0	1	0	0	0		0	-						2	1	1
328	1	0	29	1		1	0 -	1 British	0	0	1	1	0	12	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	1
363	1	0	42	1		1	0 middle	1 Wh. Eur.	0	1	-	1	1	-2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0
404	1	0	51	1		1	0 middle cl.	1 Cauces.	1	1	1	1	1	12	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
398	1	0	37	1		1	2 wkg cl.	1 Chinese	0	1	1	1	1	12	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
446	1	0	-			1	1 middle cl.	1 White	0	1	1	1	0	123	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	1
434	1	0	39	1		1	2 middle	1 British	0	1	1	1	1	12	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	1

Ou.	Area	Iv	Age	Sex	Spouse	Child	Class	Owner Ethnic	Mem	Sym dis	Mirror	Mp	Clock		Candle	Photo	Ornam	Vase	Card/invit	Store	Plant/flo	Important	Distinct.	Others
300	1	0	31	1		1	2 middle cl.	1 Cauces.	0	0	0	-	0		0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	1
305	1	0	41	1		1	3 middle	1 Wh-Brit.	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
305	1	1*	39	1		1	0 wohns to	1 White	0	1	1	1	0	12	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	1
383	1	1*	47	1		1	0 middle?	1 White	0	1	1	1	0	12	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
440	1	1*	55	0	1 Arabic	1	1 middle	1 White	0	1	1	1	1	12	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
405	1	1*	36	1		1	2 wkg cl.	1 British	0	1	1	1	1	123	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
334	1	1*	39	0		1 2 + 2	not impt	1 Asian	0	0	-	1	1	-23	0	1	-		-	-	-	3	1	1
435	1	1*	25	1		1	0 middle	1 White	0	1	1	1	0	12	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
406	1	1*	34	0		1	1 not clas	1 White	0	1	1	0	0	123	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	1
	1	1*	42	1		1	2 middle	1 -		1	1	1	1	123	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	1
323/2																								
010	2	0	33	1		0	5	1 White	0	1	1	0	0	12	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	1
902	2	0	24	1		1	0 middle	2 British	1	0	0	1	0	-23	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	3	1	1
871	2	0	52	1		0	0 lower cl.	1 -	0	1	0	-	1		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	1
851	2	0	29	1		1	0 wkg cl.	1 White	0	1	-	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
957	2	0	40	0	Welsh	1	1 middle cl.	1 Seauce	0	1	0	1	1	12	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0
905	2	0	26	1		1	0 wkg cl.	1 Wh/Wel	0	1	0	1	1		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0
850	2	0	-			1	0 middle	1 -	0	1	1	0	1		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0
x	2	0	61	1		0	0 middle	1 -	1	-	-		1	-	not done	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	0	1
880	2	0	75	0		0	0 middle cl.	1 Wh. (Brit.)	0	1	-	1	0	-23	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	2	1	1
865	2	0	53	1		1	2 wkg cl.	1 other	0	0	1	1	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
979	2	0	57	0		1	2 middle	1 White	0	0	-	1	1		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
964	2	0	56	1		1	1 wkg cl.	1 Cauces.	1	1	1	1	1	123	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
423	2	0	62	0		1	0 working	1 native Wel.	0	1	1	0	0	123	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	4	1	1
905	2	0	-			1	0 wkg cl.	1 Welsh	0	0	1	0	1		0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	1

Ou.	Area	Iv	Age	Sex	Spouse	Child	Class	Owner Ethnic	Mem	Sym dis	Mirror	Mp	Clock		Candle	Photo	Ornam	Vase	Card/invit	Store	Plant/flo	Important	Distinct.	Others
879	2	0	43	1		1	3 wkg cl.	1 British	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
941	2	0	26	1		1	0 middle	1 White	1	0	-	1	0		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
934	2	0	62	0		1	4 to 1	1 White	0	1	1	1	0	123	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
885	2	0	60	1		0	0 wkg cl.	1 White	1	1	1	0	1	23	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
936	2	0	45	1		1	0 middle cl.	1 -	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
945	2	0	32	0		1	0 non luck	1 British	1	1	1	1	0	12	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
883	2	0	46	0	Welsh	1	1 lwr m c	1 Welsh	0	0	0	0	0		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1
977	2	0	29	1		1	1 middle cl.	1 White	0	0	-	1	0	-2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1
868	2	0	33	1		0	0 wkg cl.	1 Welsh	0	0	-	0	0		1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0
908	2	0	26	1		1	0 middle cl.	1 white	0	0	-	0	0		0	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	1	0
897	2	0	39	1		0	0 middle	0	0	1	-	1	1	-23	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	0
960	2	1*	82	1	Asian 1		0 u.m. (prof)	1 Cauces.	0	1	1	1	0	123	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
973	2	1*	43	1		1	3 middle cl.	1 Welsh	0	1	0	1	0	23	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
980	2	1*	54	1		1	2 ms but	1 Welsh	1	0	1	1	1	12	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
x	2	1*	43	0		0	0 working	- Brit wh.	1	1	1	1	1	123	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
677	2	1*	27	1		0 0 tenant	um to m?	1 White	0	1	0	1	1	12	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	1
995	2	1*	53	0		1	1 middle?	1 Welsh	0	0	-	1	-	not done	1	-	1	0	0	0	0	3	1	1
900	2	1*	47	0		1	2 wkg cl.	1 Welsh	1	0	1	1	0	12	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
856	2	1*	34	0		0	0 middle	1 Wh. Brit.	0	0	-	0	0		0	1	0	0	1	0	0	4	0	1
516	3	0	26	0		0	0 middle	- Arab	0	1	-	0	0		1	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	1
580	3	0	37	0		0	0 lwr mc	1 Brit. Wh.	0	-		0	-		-	-		-	-	-	-	0	0	0
x	3	0	51	1		0	2 wkg cl.	3 Black	1	1	1	1	0	2	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	2	1	1
583	3	0	31	1		0	0 middle	1 Welsh	0	-		0	-		-	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	0
579	3	0	26	0		0	0 wkg cl.	2 White	1	-		0	-		-							1	1	0

Ou.	Area	Iv	Age	Sex	Spouse	Child	Class	Owner Ethnic	Mem	Sym dis	Mirror	Mp	Clock		Candle	Photo	Ornam	Vase	Card/invit	Store	Plant/flo	Important	Distinct.	Others
576	3	0	50	1		0	0 wohnc	1 Eng. Wh.	1	0	0	0	0		0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
553	3	0	47	1		0	2 wkg cl.	3 White	1	0	0	0	0		0	1	1	0	0	1	1	2	1	1
527	3	0	57	0		1	0 wkg cl.	1 White	1	0	0	0	0		0	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	1	1
524	3	0	23	1		1	0 not impt	2 White	1	0	0	0	0		0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0
523	3	0	24	1		1	0 middle	1 White	1	0	0	0	0		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1
486	3	0	26	0		0	0 middle	1 Cauces.	1	0	0	0	0		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
452	3	0	22	1		1	0 Um??	2 White	1	0	-	0	1		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0
530	3	0	67	1		0	0 wkg cl.	1 -	1	1	1	1	0	123	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0
591	3	0	63	1		0	0 wkg cl.	1 -	1	0	1	0	1	23	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	2	1	0
589	3	0	74	0		1	0 wkg cl.	1 -	0	-		0	-		-									
526	3	0	61	0		1	0 no idea	1 White	0	0	1	1	-	123	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
571	3	0	43	1	1 Black	1	1 wkg	3 White	1	1	-	1	0	-23	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	3	1	0
562	3	0	80	1		0	0 not care	1 White	0	0	1	1	0	12	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
400	3	1*	23	1		0	0 w to mid	1 White	1	0	-	0	0		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
490	3	1*	22	0		0	0 wkg cl.	2 British	1	0	-	0	1		0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0
520	3	1*	29	1		0	0 middle	2 English	1	0	-	0	1		1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
472	3	1*	43	1		0	0 wkg cl.	2 Wh. Brit.	1	0	-	0	0		0	0	0	0	1	1	0	4	0	0
474	3	1*	42	0		1	0 wkg cl.	2 British	1	0	-	0	0		0	0	0	0	1	1	0	4	0	1
		21*																						

Ou.	Area	Iv	Age	Sex	Spouse	Child	Class	Owner Ethnic	Mem	Sym dis	Mirror	Mp	Clock		Candle	Photo	Ornam	Vase	Card/invit	Store	Plant/flo	Important	Distinct.	Others
887 Hannah	2	1	30	1		1	3 middle cl.	2 White UK	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
013 Sian	2	1	36	1		1	3 middle	1 White	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
978 John	2	1	70	0		1	0 middle cl.	1 Brit. Wh.	1	0	-	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
482 Victoria	3	1	26	1		1	0 middle cl.	2 Brit. Wh.	1	0	-	0	1		1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1
557 Bernie	2	1	59	0		1	0 wkg cl.	1 Welsh	0	0	-	0	0		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0
520 Geoff	3	1	47	0		1	1 wkg cl.	1 White	0	1	1	0	1	123	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
575 Sharon	1	1	40	1		1	1 wkg cl.	1 White	0	1	0	1	0	23	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0
108 Rosalind	0	1	52	1		1	2 -	1 -	1	-		1	-	not done	-							2	1	1
560 Shyam	3	1	74	1	Jam. 1		0 middle cl.	1 Wel/arab	1	1	1	0	1	123	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
947 Wendy	2	1	26	1		0	0 ??m/um	2 Wh. Brit.	1	0	0	0	0		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
129 Ruth	0	1	53	1		1	0 -	-	1	0	-	0	0		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	1
608 David	0	1	56	0		1	0 -	1 White UK	1	1	-	0	1	23	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	1
100 Kate	0	1	56	1		1	0 RG1(PrM)	1 Anglo	1	1	-	0	1	-23	-	1	0	0	0	1	0	3	1	0
139 Gina	0	1	41	1		1	3 -	1 -	1	0	-	1	-	not done	-	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	1
924 Sandra	2	1	56	1		0	0 Middle..	3 Welsh	0	0	0	1	0	23	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1
966 Jane	2	1	32	1		0	0 Wkg Cl.	1 Welsh	0	0	0	0	0		0	1	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	1
957 Eric	2	1	67	0		0 Slodger	"wr mid"	1 Welsh	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1
976 Derek Diane	2	1	63	1		0	0 middle	1 British	1	1	0	0	0		0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1
964 Harriet	2	1	36	1	Indian 1	Anglo/ind2 middle	1 White	1	0	-	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1
998 Bronwen	2	1	25	1		0	0 middle cl.	2 White	0	0	-	0	1	-2	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	1
983 Norah	2	1	80	1		0 0r/sis	0 middle	1 -	0	0	-	0	0	-23	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	1
907 Karen	2	1	29	1		0 Slodger	middle cl.	1 White	1	0	-	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	1
411 Nick	1	1	39	0		1	0 not impt	1 British	0	1	0	-	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
386 Belinda	1	1	55	1		1	0 working	1 British	0	0	0	0	0		0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	1

Ou.	Area	Iv	Age	Sex	Spouse	Child	Class	Owner Ethnic	Mem	Sym dis	Mirror	Mp	Clock		Candle	Photo	Ornam	Vase	Card/invit	Store	Plant/flo	Important	Distinct.	Others
362 Annette	1	1	40	1		1	0 wkgtomid	1 Cauces.	1	0	-	0	0		0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
373 Alison	1	1	40	1		0	0 middle cl.	1 White	1	0	-	0	1	23	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
331 Dan	1	1	43	0		1	2 Middle cl.	1 -	1	0	-	1	1	-2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
361 Nigel	1	1	40	0		1	3 mid/wkg	1 British	1	1	1	1	1	123	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
366 Phillip	1	1	55	0		1	0 wkg/mc	1 Welsh	1	1	0	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
394 Christine	1	1	60	1		1	0 Middle	1 Welsh	1	1	1	1	0	23	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
			30		**101**	**100**		**140**	**95**	**84**	**53**	**105**	**58**		**70**	**77**	**91**	**27**	**30**	**47**	**41**		**109**	**116**

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