

INTRODUCTION

EXPLORING AFFECTIVE MATERIALITY AND ATMOSPHERES OF HOME



*Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto, Kristiina Korjonen-Kuusipuro,
Viktorija L.A. Čeginskas, Anna Kajander and Helmut De Nardi*

Home as an Affective Assemblage

Homes accrue things. In well-to-do Western households there are numerous practical items from furniture to clothes, kitchenware and tools, quotidian objects that serve functional purposes in daily routines, but also objects that have a special meaning in constructing identity, building status or expressing affection. Many of these objects are essential parts of everyday embodied practices that we do not actively reflect on. We do not necessarily notice them or think about them unless they call for our attention. This often happens when there is a rupture in everyday life, for instance, when moving and resettling due to personal crises, natural disasters, conflicts or other unexpected catastrophes and thus needing to reconstruct a sense of home.

In this volume we want to understand the relationship between materiality and affects in the context of home. Thus, we argue that we need to take a closer look at the specific context of relocation and renegotiation. We understand home as an affective assemblage, a personal and intimate realm that constitutes the practices of homemaking and feeling at home (Ratnam 2018). We also connect home to location, but acknowledge that ‘home’ can be in more than one place (Lloyd and Vasta 2017). The memories of bygone and absent homes may stay in our bodies and minds after we leave them. Returning to or remembering earlier homes may also illustrate processes of alienation, conflicts or contradiction. Conflicting ideas of home may surface in conflicts between family members, when partners are breaking

up, or in dealing with the death of family member. Homes are affective assemblages that are constantly evolving. People move through different life stages, facing varying circumstances and relations, needs and desires, which are reflected in their relationships with materiality and objects. Hence, this volume seeks to explore how different layers of time are present in our homes through objects and materiality: we consider, in turn, objects from different phases of life, from different origins, made, owned or gifted by people who were dear to us.

Recent anthropological and ethnological research on materiality and affects interrogates the capability of material engagements to offer sources of comfort, joy and pleasure, for example, by allowing us to create cosy atmospheres of home (Bille 2015; Sumartojo and Pink 2019). What we mean by ‘cosy’ here comes close to a sense of homeliness, a culturally constructed expectation of how home should be and feel. This notion can convey different meanings to different people because sensing and feeling the materiality of our surroundings is subjective and shaped by previous experiences and memories that affect our bodily reactions, and the values and meanings given to them (Pink 2009: 37–38; Seremetakis 1994). A good example of this in practice is the Danish concept of *hygge*, which denotes a relaxed and informal mode of being where sensory elements such as lighting and colours play important roles (see e.g. Bille 2015).

While scrutinizing affective materiality and atmospheres of home, it is important to note that not everybody is able to choose where and how to live. Home is a gendered, socialized, classed and racialized concept that we do not have the time to fully unpack in all its complexity and nuanced experiences (Pink 2004). We duly recognize that each person experiences home differently according to that person’s socialization, positionality, affordances and autobiographical details. While we acknowledge the myriad ways of conceptualizing home, the focus of this volume is on perspectives that frame home through the lens of situated memory, comfort, wellbeing and emotion. Home can be a metaphor for feelings of security and stability, a harmonic state of mind and personal integrity (Blunt and Varley 2004; Lloyd and Vasta 2017). For some people, memories related to home can entail contradictory, troublesome and even traumatic elements, which they might not want to remember. At the same time, homes constitute physical entities consisting of different material elements and the presence of everyday objects. When choosing and combining sensory elements such as temperature, light, textures, sounds and smells, and by organizing, placing and safeguarding items, we create affective atmospheres, multisensory experiences of space, people and things, which bring together the material, the intangible, the social and the affective (Pink et al. 2015: 353; see also Bille 2015; Linnet 2011).

This volume scrutinizes the affective materiality and atmospheres of home in different contexts of situatedness and relocation, both voluntary and involuntary. In so doing, it considers the nuanced experiences of

how people make or reconstruct a sense of home and establish continuity through engagements with materiality.

Material Culture and Affects

The theoretical background of this volume stems from material culture studies and the affective turn. The so-called new materialism and the material turn emphasize that objects have affective power (Bennett 2010) and are emotionally charged (Löfgren 2016; Miller 2005). These ideas resonate with the theorizations of anthropological and archaeological explorations of the embeddedness of material objects in social life and relational materiality (e.g. Ingold 2007), ontology of objects (e.g. Henare et al. 2007) and material agency (Robb 2010; Saunders 2009). The agential power of things and materiality lies in different ways of knowing and being in the world. Matter and objects are connected to ways of knowing that exceed language: the sensual and embodied – in other words, the affective (De Nardi 2016, Povrzanović Frykman 2016b).

The affective and material turn in the social sciences has called for an understanding of bodily and often unconscious aspects of experience instead of the socioconstructivist focus on language, meaning and representation (see, for example, Barad 2003; MacLure 2013). Material objects and sensory dispositions are also relevant to the broader paradigm of posthumanism seeking to overcome dichotomies of body/mind, human/nonhuman and digital/physical (e.g. Jansen 2016). The new materialism paradigm emphasizes the ways in which humans and objects as well as sets of things are co-dependent (Barad 2003).

The major challenge for researchers in applying affect theory is that affects are difficult to define and ‘capture’. Even among affect theorists, there is no unified definition for what affective experiences are and how they could be perceived. According to human geographer Nigel Thrift (2004: 60), ‘affect is a different kind of intelligence about the world’ that shapes our attitudes and everyday practices, but cannot be necessarily translated into the cognitive (see also Thrift 2009). Some scholars separate affects from emotions in that affects are understood as nonconscious or preconscious perceptions and embodied reactions, whereas emotions are mostly seen as conscious, can be named and thus are culturally constructed (Jansen 2016: 59). This separation has been criticized because it draws an unnecessary distinction between body and culture. If affect is understood as something that we experience, that moves us and our bodies, and that makes us feel and react in certain ways, which we can notice and interpret, we should acknowledge that affective embodied experiences are also culturally and socially constructed and filtered (Ahmed 2014; Wetherell 2012: 4). Anthropologist Mikkel Bille and geographer Kirsten Simonsen (2021) have scrutinized the concept of affect in relation to practice theories. They note that affect is not necessarily an autonomous ‘thing’, a noun, but

also a verb or adjective, which can be scrutinized in bodily actions and affective practices. These ‘affective practices are spatially embedded and felt phenomena’ (Bille and Simonsen 2021: 296). Bille and Simonsen argue, referring to Ben Anderson (2009, 2016), that affect can refer to an adjective qualifying atmosphere. Affect is connected to emotions and atmospheres, and therefore also to something people do. A ‘lived body’ should therefore be an essential part of understanding affect (Bille and Simonsen 2021: 305).

The affective is often hard to describe and verbalize (Löfgren 2016: 126–27, 148–50; see also Nylund Skog 2013: 106). Even if we recognize moments and encounters loaded with emotions and sensory elements, we might not find or have the words to describe them (see e.g. Koskinen-Koivisto and Lehtovaara 2020). To scrutinize affects in the intimate realm of home, we need to employ alternative methodologies such as autoethnography that allow us to reflect on the nuances of subjective embodied experience. Many texts in this volume make use of autoethnographic inquiry as they engage with sensory experiences and memories. As anthropologist Sarah Pink (2009: 23, 40–43, 64–65) has noted, knowledge about the embodied and sensory realms can only be gained through reflecting on the researcher’s own sensory engagements and memories. Furthermore, homes are often extremely intimate spaces. When receiving visitors, the owners organize and clean their homes, *staging* them according to normative ideas of cleanliness and order (see e.g. Löfgren 2017; on staged atmospheres, see Pink et al. 2015: 353; Kajander 2021: 115). The authors in this volume reflect on their own memories and experiences of bygone and present homes, scrutinizing the temporal and embodied layers of affective materiality through autobiographical lenses.

In addition to autobiographical reflections, the authors of this volume utilize visual methods, such as photography and visual mapping, which allow us to engage with material elements and spatial dimensions from a different angle. Visual methods help the researcher to grasp certain moments of fluid, mundane everyday life and to analyse them in retrospect (Lehmuskallio and Gómez Cruz 2016). However, from the perspective of sensory experience, visual images do not allow us to engage with multisensory aspects of materiality. Sensory studies that have addressed the culturally constructed sensory regimes acknowledge that when studying affective experiences and sensory memories, some dimensions remain hidden and unspoken (Connerton 1989; Bendix 2000; Pink 2009; Sparkes 2009). In this volume, we focus on the sensory domain of the *haptic* – often a neglected theme in the explorations of the senses (see e.g. Paterson 2009), but one that is central in terms of understanding engagements with materiality. Haptic knowledge is embodied and related to touch and movement. To analyse this, researchers often need to apply autoethnography – in other words, to reflect on their own experiences, memories and sensory participation.

To meet the challenge of understanding and expressing the entanglement of material and multisensory elements, and of narrating the material assemblages, scholars may use other genres than academic articles interpreting

research material. Essays can use unconventional material, introduce new topics through open questions and offer reflections that are not aimed at producing a clear result. With this volume, we seek to offer a balance between the detailed and rich ethnography of everyday life, theoretical discussions and creative forms of writing. We have divided the chapters into four parts: on (1) autobiographical materiality, (2) continuity through materiality, and (3) engagements with affective materiality, and (4) essays on material traces and future visions, ending with concluding thoughts. Below we introduce some conceptual tools and approaches that are used in these parts to theorize about the sensory and material entanglements of home.

Autobiographical Materiality

Among the numerous objects found in a home, certain objects are dear to us and have followed us through the course of our lives. Many of these remind us of people we are close to and therefore are imbued with affective experiences and social bonds (Alonso Rey 2016; Kuusisto-Arponen and Savolainen 2016; Koskinen-Koivisto 2022). Some objects can be characterized as *biographical objects*, which function as tools for autobiographic elaboration, a way of knowing oneself through things (see Hoskins 1998). Such objects maintain memories of self, home and family, which are important means of cultural maintenance and identity work.

Stories and meanings connected to personal objects can be analysed using the concept of *autobiographical materiality* that relates to biographical thing-body assemblages (see De Nardi 2016: 33–35, 119). We see autobiographical materiality as a wider concept than the biographical object (Hoskins 1998; Huhn 2018). It can entail sensory elements other than objects and can relate to spaces and atmospheres. Autobiographical materiality often refers to a disappeared materiality of bygone worlds and experiences. Especially in the context of displacement and diaspora, autobiographical materiality can manifest itself through absence. Objects and places that no longer have a physical existence have been theorized as sites of memory that have an agential role in narrated memories (Kuusisto-Arponen and Savolainen 2016). Even when absent, they can continue to embody personal and collective experiences related to home and interconnect the material with personal biographies (see also Alonso Rey 2016; Koskinen-Koivisto 2022; Lems 2016; Čeginskas, Chapter 2 in this volume). Autobiographical materiality connects with temporal complexities. It ties together past and present experiences, and makes one think about the future: objects that perhaps would still be needed and should be saved.

The chapters in Part I analyse the role of autobiographical materiality in past and present homes. In Chapter 1, Maja Povržanović Frykman explores the affective materiality of her parents' home in her birth country of Croatia. The text offers a journey to affective experiences with sensory and material details that come alive when the author steps into the house, opens

drawers and touches items imbued with memories. Povrzanović Frykman demonstrates how the affective presence of objects enables a feeling of continuity and connection to previous generations and to a migrant's country of origin. In Chapter 2, Viktorija L.A. Čeginskas scrutinizes how the memory of absent objects enables her to contextualize her life story in relation to personal experiences of transnational mobility and family memory of displacement that emphasize breaks, changes and continuation in family history. She shows that absent objects possess a social, imaginative dimension and can act as connecting objects of memory to evoke and co-create memories that connect a person's life story with their family history, thereby strengthening affective bonds across generations.

Past homes continue to be present not only in our minds but also in our bodies. The process of settling into a new home means a process of embodied and sensory adjustment. In Chapter 3, Tomás Errázuriz engages in autoethnographic and analytical inquiry into feeling and being in his new home; he offers an alternative view on sensing the atmosphere of home. He suggests that a key experience of being at home is not to feel anything special, but being able to relax and orientate oneself through engaging with the materiality of home and personal things that are familiar and set in the right place. This definition brings us back to the starting point of this volume, the idea that we tend not to pay attention to the materiality of home unless there is a rupture in our everyday life that calls for our attention. Ruptures, whether due to personal life or large-scale global events, shape our living with and relationship to materiality.

Continuity through Materiality

In recent years, anthropological and ethnological research on migration and materiality has expanded. Materiality is approached as an analytical framework that does not reduce objects to mere symbols, but addresses the corporeality of experiences of mobility and place making through materiality (Basu and Coleman 2008; Povrzanović Frykman and Humbracht 2013; Kurki 2020). Migration researchers have paid attention to everyday materiality by arguing that material objects enable the continuation of habitual daily practices, routines and skills such as cooking and craft making in times of crisis and in new diasporic and transnational environments (see e.g. Dudley 2010; Pechurina 2015; Povrzanović Frykman 2016a; Kurki 2020; Lauser et al. 2022). Materiality may play a crucial role in maintaining memories of difficult and even traumatic experiences, which are often silenced and forgotten (e.g. Kidron 2009, 2012; De Nardi 2016). It has been noted, for example, that mementos are often present in oral history and life-history interviews. As physical testimonies of what happened, objects of memory can make difficult and complex issues concrete and thus *tellable* (De Nardi 2016; Savolainen 2017; Koskinen-Koivisto 2022).

Everyday objects can have a stabilizing effect on people by actively supporting their processes of cultural identity and their emotional journeys of recreating a sense of home and belonging in their new environment (e.g. Tolia-Kelly 2004; Basu and Coleman 2008: 316–317; Povrzanović Frykman and Humbracht 2013). At the same time, engagements with objects can increase individual feelings of disempowerment and non-belonging that highlight breaks and shifts in social practices and thereby reveal complex processes of place making among migrants and refugees (e.g. Parrott 2012; Grønseth 2012; Boccagni 2014; Grubiša 2022). Some contributions in this volume deal with images and memories of lost homes, drawing on the special genre of nostalgia and sentimentalization (see Povrzanović Frykman; Čeginskas; Sireni and Seitsonen). Many objects of memory reproduce iconic and nostalgic images, and displaying them is thus a way of keeping the memories alive, emotionally and spiritually close to oneself (see also Kuusisto-Arponen 2009; Alonso Rey 2016). However, it must be remembered that nostalgia can be a means of contesting dominant narratives and criticizing the present: objects safeguarded from the past can underline what is missing or ignored in the present (e.g. Korjonen-Kuusipuro and Meriläinen-Hyvärinen 2016).

The chapters in Part II on continuity through materiality focus on Second World War refugees' histories of forced displacement and resettling, and the ways in which the past is embodied in a new home environment through material heritage. Oula Seitsonen and Maarit Sireni write about the Karelian refugees who were evacuated from their home in the Russian borderlands and resettled in different parts of Finland. Up until today, these Karelians have cherished and engaged with their heritage in many ways, both in public and in private. In Chapter 4, Oula Seitsonen introduces objects related to his own family heritage, arguing that they act as agents of memory materializing transgenerational memories, nostalgia and longing for lost homes. In Chapter 5, Maarit Sireni, who has studied the present-day homes of the descendants of Karelian evacuees, describes how small affective objects such as utility items and personal mementos imported from Karelia, as well as pictures and objects portraying the place of departure, play a significant role across generations of Karelian people in restoring a symbolic bond with their lost homeland. She argues that the place of origin is reproduced through the material and visual cultures of their homes. In Chapter 6, Anna Kurpiel and Katarzyna Maniak scrutinize the homes of new inhabitants who settled in the border region between Poland and Germany in the aftermath of the Second World War. These settlers took possession of houses that used to belong to other people who had perished, fled or were deported during and after the war. Kurpiel and Maniak employ the concept of adopted heritage to explore the meanings attached to the presence of materiality reminding people of the past and to consider homemaking practices in the context of difficult heritage. All three chapters in this part show how lost, missed or adopted material items

from the past can carry meanings and affects in the present, and thus be active parts in the material assemblages of current homes.

Engagements with Affective Materiality

According to Sara Ahmed (2010), objects can make us happy, not due to the quality of the objects themselves, but to our intentional actions towards them. Making home is a concrete example of this: engaging with the materiality of home, (re)organizing and placing objects, and daily embodied practices make people feel at home. We are in intimate contact with things and by giving value to things, we shape what is near us (Ahmed 2010). Home is not only where one's things are, but where one can be and engage with them. Through these engagements, it is possible to act and create atmospheres which make our interests, values and identities visible for ourselves and for others.

In their research on kink-identified individuals, in Chapter 7, Johanna Pohtinen has used the method of collaborative photography and asked respondents to share with them photos and stories of kink-related objects in their homes. They analyse how kink-related objects are used in negotiating the boundaries between private and public, and in creating affective atmospheres, the right kind of 'attunement' and potential (Stewart 2011) for kinky activities. In addition to having and placing objects, people can feel cosy at home by doing things with materiality such as practising crafts. In Chapter 8, Anna Rauhala explores the sensory and emotional experiences related to knitting and crafting during the COVID-19 pandemic. She analyses how craft hobbyists had experienced the pandemic and how the pandemic is reflected in their artwork. For many of the hobbyists with whom Rauhala engages, craft making has been a way to process emotions and reduce the anxiety caused by lockdowns.

In Chapter 9, Giovanna Bachiddu shares her findings that in the narratives of transnationally adopted people, materiality is a crucial component of kinship belonging. Objects associated with the birth country become evocative and keep acquiring layered meaning and relevance. These objects can help the adopted person to accept the controversy of belonging, being simultaneously part of two places and two different kin groups. Indeed, objects and materiality can give continuity to personal and collective identities by bridging existential boundaries between here and there, and serve as tangible points of connection with places, landscapes, events and people over time and geographical distance (see Basu and Coleman 2008: 316–17; Naum 2015: 79).

Material Traces and Future Visions

In Western countries, notions of home and the practices of dwelling often have their roots in ideals related to the patriarchal nuclear families of the postwar years, and to middle-class ideals of material welfare (e.g. Lloyd

and Vasta 2017). These ideals and practices related to home are deeply rooted in a consumer culture characterized by abundance (e.g. Löfgren 2017). This worldview needs to change, as the Western way of life based on a capitalist market economy and ownership is challenged by the demands for sustainability and degrowth of resources and energy, which force us to rethink our daily lives and necessities, including our practices relating to dwelling and household, materiality and objects.

Most things that we own continue their lives after we leave them behind (Errázuriz 2019). Our homes become other people's homes. Some objects that we hold dear to us will become mementos for our loved ones and still be associated with us, but most of our personal belongings will no longer be needed and will thus become material for recycling or waste. Part IV features essays that ponder on the accumulation of things in our lives and the materiality of home in the future. These chapters do not seek to offer definitive answers, but rather raise questions that seem paramount when we think about autobiographical materiality and living with affective materiality. These chapters aim to feed our imagination and elaborate our ways of knowing in a form that is different from the preceding articles. In Chapter 10, Gabriel Moshenska engages with the question of what we leave behind when we are gone, while in Chapter 11, Robert Willim reflects upon the co-becoming of people, things and technology: Can things transform people? How do smart, hypermodern and automated homes affect our lives and ourselves? The book ends with an epilogue by Helmut De Nardi in which they reflect on the approaches to affective materiality in the world of movement.

This analysis of affective materiality and atmospheres of home offers insights into processes of continuity and change, and into situations that forced individuals and families to relocate and/or negotiate their place in the world. Engagements with objects and materiality are essential parts of creating the sense of home and belonging, a condition that should not be taken for granted.

Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto is Senior Researcher in Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Jyväskylä and Principal Investigator of the SENSOMEMO project (Research Council of Finland). She has published on war heritage, sensory memory and material culture as well as ethnographic methods. Her publications include *Her Own Worth* (Finnish Literature Society, 2014) and the co-edited volumes *Challenges and Solutions in Ethnographic Research: Ethnography with a Twist* (Routledge, 2020), *Routledge Handbook of Memory and Place* (Routledge, 2019) and *Transnational Death* (Finnish Literature Society, 2019).

Kristiina Korjonen-Kuusipuro is a researcher at the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (XAMK). She is also a Docent in Cultural Anthropology at the University of Jyväskylä. Her research interests include human place relations, memory and affects. She is an editor-in-chief of *Human Technology*. Her main publications include articles in international

journals such as *Emotion, Place and Society*, the *Journal of Intercultural Studies* and the *Journal of Youth Studies*.

Viktorija L.A. Čeginskas is a Research Fellow at the Department of History and Ethnology, University of Jyväskylä. She has worked in the research projects EUROHERIT (2015–20, European research Council), HERIDI (2020–24, Research Council of Finland) and SENSOMEMO (2020–24, Research Council of Finland). Her research interests revolve around the construction of belonging and the past, memories and identity politics. She is co-author of *Creating and Governing Cultural Heritage in the European Union* (Routledge, 2020) and *Europe from Below* (Brill, 2021).

Anna Kajander is a Postdoctoral Researcher of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Jyväskylä. Her doctoral dissertation (2020, University of Helsinki) focused on experiences of different book formats and digitalization of reading habits. Her current research interests include emotional and sensory memories connected with material objects, and the affective and digital materiality of everyday life.

Helmut De Nardi is a Senior Research Fellow at Kings College London. Their research touches upon the issues of material culture and memory, including *The Poetics of Conflict Experience* (Routledge, 2016) and *Visualising Place, Memory and the Imagined* (Routledge, 2019). They have also served as editor-in-chief for the *Routledge Handbook of Place and Memory* (Routledge, 2020).

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