

Domestic Atmospheres Conference 24th & 25th March 2025

A British Academy conference with funding from Wellcome

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Day 1: 24th March 2025

Session 1: Air, Light & Humidity 10:00am -11:30am

Emma Garnett – University of Exeter

Experimental atmospheric interventions in the home

This paper will explore and open-up the home as a site for treating diseases and managing public health in the Anthropocene. It will discuss growing science and policy concerns around indoor air quality and interventions led by clinicians and housing associations to remedy these through filtration and ventilation technologies. To conclude the paper will consider how these interventions modify domestic atmospheres by bringing together different actors and things to collaborate and craft new kinds of health and care practices.

Marianna Janowicz – University for the Creative Arts

Where do you dry your laundry?

Drawing on ethnographic and historical research, this paper explores the relationship between architecture, domestic practices and internal air quality through the case study of drying laundry. Taking washing line bans as the starting point, the paper develops a critique of contemporary housing and its space (or lack thereof) for reproductive labour.

Sam Johnson-Schlee – London South Bank University

Poison gas

On the toxicity of household fossil fuel usage. Whilst the history of pollution in the outside atmosphere is well understood there is less popular awareness of the risks of the domestic atmosphere. In recent years successive reports have documented the dangers of fossil fuel combustion within the home with little resulting change in behaviour and much backlash. This paper introduces a historical overview of toxicity from manufactured and natural gas and offers some speculative arguments as to why there appears to be a significant cultural and social blind spot with regards to the toxicity of interior atmospheres.

Adam Walls – University College LondonBecoming Lights: On Gaslighting and Appearance

The Late Victorian period saw the introduction of gaslight into London's domestic interiors. This transformed the atmosphere of homes both physically and aesthetically, whether by vitiating the air or rendering surfaces and bodies in new and unexpected ways. This paper will focus on the subtle destabilisations which ensued – whereby a misplaced or ill-chosen lamp might threaten a subject's whiteness, sanity or propriety, rendering them “empurpled”, “dusky” or “fiery”. These phenomena formed the material precursors to today's psychological term “gaslighting”.

Session 2: Labour & Care 11:45am -13:15pm

Adjoa Armah – Oxford UniversityObjects of Connection: Maternal Bodies and the Immaterial Spaces of Home in Diaspora'

This paper explores the entanglement between household articles, grief, and diasporic intimacy thought with Black Atlantic Scholarship. Through the lens of a maternal body longing for return, to and of, the paper examines how everyday objects become markers of loss and memory, embodying both the material and immaterial atmosphere of home in diaspora. Adjoa takes an auto-ethnographic approach, drawing on both autofiction and critical fabulation, after Saidiyah Hartman, to explore home at multiple scales and sites.

Adam Drazin – University College London"You Should Hear My Cousin Scream in the Shower"

This paper examines the materiality of home among people moving from Romania to Ireland. It describes at the highly sensory experience of living spaces as 'membranous', and the ways these homes are interpreted and judged in meritocratic terms.

Ben Highmore – University of SussexTeenage Wasteland: Bedrooms, Adventure Playgrounds, and Youth Atmospherics in and out of the Home

Working historically, this paper will investigate two spaces that for various reasons were consolidated in the 1960s: the teenage bedroom and the adventure playground. These were spaces for a new, more autonomous forms of self-fashioning for young people, and atmospheres - as both metaphor and materiality - were crucial to their development.

Jessica Perera – Institute for Race RelationsTitle TBC

The paper will look at young BAME surplus populations living in temporary, overcrowded and unsuitable accommodation and their over-representation and containment in Pupil Referral Units and Alternative Provision in London.

Session 3: Domesticity at the Museum of Home: 14:00pm – 15:30pm

A chance to engage with the Museum of the Home staff sharing some of their work, and projects through a series of museum tours, workshops, talks and object handling.

Dr Michael McMillan will give a special tour & talk of his curated room, **A Front Room in 1978**.

**(Drop-in sessions, visitors have a choice to attend the session they like)*

Session 4: Other Domesticities 15:45pm – 17:30pm

Melissa Fernandez Arrigoitia – University of Bristol

Interdependence and Collective Domesticity

Collaborative Housing (CH) models are increasingly known for the intentional material, social and economic alternatives they propose to coinciding crises (e.g., housing, environmental, social care....). In this article, Melissa examines some of the everyday mutual aid and informal community care practices within three UK domestic-collective environments and explore their management of ageing processes, later life transitions and dying. Planning collectively for the often-unknowable finality of individual life makes this a unique domestic space with a complex, evolving atmosphere of relational interdependence that enables certain groups to develop a shared and negotiated ethic of quotidian care. She argues that this atmosphere of interdependence can not only bring an irruptive, transformative and open-ended tonality to the question of death and dying 'at home', but that it can open up new avenues for thinking about anticipation, sustainability and social futures in housing.

Edwina Attlee – University College London

Home Time: The Nightcleaners and the Night Nursery

This paper will explore the strayed home of the night nursery, drawing together activism from 1970s UK to think about reproductive labour beyond the space of the home and the time of

day(light). The campaigns of the Cleaners Action Group, the Women's Liberation Movement and the National Union of Students made radical claims on space, time and money in the name of equal rights. How does their work change conceptions of the domestic; how can it be called into practical use in the context of privatised childcare today?

Alex Vasudevan – University of Oxford

'This is Our House': Radical Care Work and the Making of Autonomous Spaces in West Berlin, 1965-1977

This paper re-traces the early history of housing struggles in West Berlin as a history of radical care work. It focuses, in particular, on the relationship between care work, alternative forms of domesticity and political self-organisation. In so doing, the paper proposes a new reading of the communal spaces and autonomous youth projects that first flourished in West Berlin in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Drawing on extensive archival research, the paper connects the everyday spatial practices of squatters and other housing activists in the city to matters of care that politicized health and were intimately intertwined with a wider struggle over the meaning of collective living, political action, and community organization.

Day 2: 25th March 2025

Session 1: Emergency and Climate 10:00am – 11:30am

Alistair Cartwright – University of Liverpool

Domestic ruination: populist, radical and literary modes in modern Mauritius

Prior to a critique of domesticity's recruitment to a neoliberal mode of "rightless relief", this paper argues that we need to consider other ways in which domestic atmospheres have been mobilised to political as well as affective ends in the context of disasters. Using the example of post-cyclone relief/reconstruction in Mauritius during the 1960s to '80s, the paper identifies three such alternatives. Modern Mauritian literature is juxtaposed with party-political newspaper reporting and colonial archives in order to generate an analysis of how domestic atmospheres have done service in the name of the rights of the displaced, as well as problematically subsuming the latter into the landscape.

Sapna Halai – University College London

Lessons from history and their relevance to heatwave adaptation

As climate change causes heatwaves to become more common in the UK it is likely residents will begin to adapt their lifestyles and homes to protect their health. Solutions may include shutters, fans, lifestyle changes and cooling. Understanding and exploring the factors that influence these choices is critical to ensuring a future just and more sustainable transition. This paper will explore historical changes in the built environment and the relationships people have with their homes to examine these factors.

Ruth Lang – London School of Architecture.

Towards a transient architecture of the home

In the context of the climate emergency, the cost of living crisis, and in response to resource scarcity, the adaptation and maintenance of our homes becomes an imperative consideration for architectural design. For cities in particular, preconceptions of how and where we live will need to be radically usurped. Whilst we might ordinarily think of our homes as permanent and our inhabitation fleeting, their very material structure will now also take on a sense of transience and transformation. This raises key questions for how we will design and care for our homes, and

forces us to reconsider the role of ownership and custodianship, construction and preservation, and of forming a sense of place in the architecture of our homes.

Anna Parker – Institute for Historical Research

Flooding and precarity in early modern central Europe

The Little Ice Age (c.1560-1630) caused a fundamental shift in how people interacted with nature in early modern Europe. In this period, Prague, a thriving, cosmopolitan Renaissance city, flooded regularly; homes, workshops, and vineyards were destroyed by rising waters. Combining the histories of the environment and emotion, this paper looks at how Prague's inhabitants understood and coped with ecological precarity.

Session 2: Crisis & Precarity 11:45am – 13:15pm

Sophie Elsmore

Infrastructures of housing delivery: rental housing and the rise of institutional landlords

Corporate private rental housing is on the rise in the UK, mobilized through institutional landlordism. Build-to-rent housing, premised in part on the idea of improving the quality of rental housing, continues to reaffirm the privatization of housing. This paper interrogates how the facilitation of this kind of housing creates intertwining complexities about the permanence of housing and precarity of the home.

Mara Ferreri - Politecnico di Torino

Politicising domestic crises on the threshold of housing collectivisation

This presentation is concerned with the intersections that inform domestic crises, and the ways in which individuals and collectives organise in response. It weaves together a concern with the politics of transformative housing alternatives with an attention to the immaterial dimensions of such politicisation. Its starting point is an important dimension of the housing crisis in Europe: an ageing population dwelling at the intersection of failing care and housing provisions. In the context of few but potentially significant examples, it asks how such collective alternatives emerge and what it means to think atmospherically about them.

Mel Nowicki - Oxford Brookes University

Dwelling in the Debt Trap: Experiences of Family Homelessness in a Failing State

This project explores England's family homelessness crisis, where hundreds of thousands of households are trapped in 'prison-like' hotel rooms and temporary accommodation unfit for habitation for weeks, months, and in some cases years. The decimation of social housing, an out-of-control private rented sector, austerity and welfare cuts, and a cost-of-living crisis has resulted in deepening poverty and a debt trap consuming families and taking local authorities to the brink of bankruptcy. Through the stories of mothers and their children living in temporary accommodation, this paper reveals the impact of dwelling in debt, and the consequences of state-cultivated stigma which associates being in debt and being homeless with personal failure.

Holly Pester - University of Essex

The Houseguest

Speaking on the subject of housing from the site of creative practice, this paper will take an isolated scene from Holly's novel *The Lodgers* - the moment a child invites a new lodger into the home - and discuss the practical, literary and political issues of *hospitality* that radiate from that fictional event. (Berlant 2022) Relating this to the ethics of hospitality (Attridge 2015; Derrida 2005) to contemporary debates on landlordism, the rent crisis and varied instigations of the public and private realms via various forms of lodgings, lettings and temporary stays, Holly offers ideas on what atmospheres a lodger brings into the home and what literary forms and stories of 'the strange guest', (Koch and Pelham 2024) represent tensions around privacy, precarity, and home.

Session 3: Plenary Discussion & Close 14.15pm – 16.00pm

Programme Outline: Day 1

TIME		
10:00 – 11:30	Panel 1	Air, Light & Humidity Emma Garnett Marianna Janowicz Sam Johnson-Schlee Adam Walls
11:30 – 11:45	Break	
11:45 – 13:15	Panel 2	Labour & Care Adjoa Armah Adam Drazin Ben Highmore Jessica Perera
13:15 – 14:00	Lunch	
14:00 – 15:30	Domesticity Within the Museum of the Home	Tours/Talks/Workshops with Museum of the Home Staff + a Special Talk and Tour with Dr Michael McMillan.
15:45 – 17:30	Panel 3	Other Domesticities Edwina Attlee Melissa Fernandez Arrigoitia, Alex Vasudevan

Programme Outline: Day 2

TIME		
10:00 – 11:30	Panel 4	Emergency & Climate Alistair Cartwright Sapna Halai Ruth Lang Anna Parker
11:30 – 11:45	Break	
11:45 – 13:15	Panel 5	Crisis & Precarity Sophie Elsmore Mara Ferreri Mel Nowicki Holly Pester
13:15 – 14:15	Lunch	
14.15 – 16.00	Plenary Discussion & Close	