UNDERSTANDING CLUTTER: GEOGRAPHIES OF EVERYDAY HOMES AND OBJECTS

Alexander James Miller

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School of Geography

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Abstract

Clutter is an everyday form of material culture in the home. It is increasingly prominent in popular culture and yet is under-researched by social scientists. This thesis fills this gap, working to understand clutter as a discourse, as part of everyday practices, and as something which co-constructs identities. It contributes to literatures on material culture, home life and temporal experience, drawing on research conducted with people who hoard and people who do not hoard, and a discourse analysis of decluttering texts. This is reported over three chapters of analysis. The first defines clutter. I argue all clutter is defined extrinsically, subjectively and as a problem. Clutter can also be internally differentiated into two forms: rooted clutter and flowing clutter. Rooted clutter is 'stuck', framed by memory and the past. Flowing clutter is mobile, orientated towards the present and the future. The second chapter explores clutter's relationship to time using ideas of rhythm, life transitions and memory. Rooted clutter and flowing clutter and made and managed through different rhythms. The meaning of clutter changes through the process of life transitions, and is engaged with to materially enact them. Rooted clutter as a memory object communicates gaps, absences and forgettings. The third and final analysis chapter considers clutter and home. Clutter norms and practices vary by room; this develops into a conceptual argument that home is a *multiple* assemblage of dwelling. Clutter's agency, in discourse and practice, is explored. Material agencies of home are shown to structure and mediate clutter practices. Finally, clutter is explored as an identity object; keeping as a material practice is discussed. Keeping clutter embodies selfhood and is an act of dwelling(-as-cultivation). Overall, this thesis shows clutter to be an important part of everyday life at home, making and mediating domestic experiences with objects and through time.

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Chapter 1   Introduction

1.1   Clutter in Contemporary Culture

Clutter and decluttering seem to be having a bit of a cultural moment. You can join over eight million others and buy a copy of *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying* by celebrity declutterer Marie Kondo, which promises to lead you into a tidy life (KonMari, 2018). If you live in Japan you can watch a TV series based on the book too (KonMari, 2018). You might prefer instead to download the *Unfilth Your Habitat* app (UfYH LLC, 2012), to help you manage your stuff at home. Or why not get in a professional? The Association of Professional Declutterers and Organisers lists 222 professional organisers in the UK ready to help you clear your clutter (APDO, 2018). Interest in (and perhaps we could say too anxiety around) clutter and decluttering seems to be growing in contemporary Western culture. Cherrier and Belk (2015) note that this trend has been in progress since around the late 1990s, although today we see an intensification of interest in and reporting on clutter and its management.

In addition to this, reporting around hoarding, as an 'extreme' version of our relationship with clutter, has also been on the rise. Historically, hoarding has been in the public eye since the 1940s with the lives and deaths of Homer and Langley Collyer, two hoarding brothers in a Harlem brownstone, causing intrigue and a flurry of reportage (Herring, 2014). Interest in hoarding has been more of a slow burn, but, again, contemporary representations of this 'extreme' relationship to clutter are on the up. *Hoarders* (2009-Present) has been going strong for eight years, depicting on TV the decluttering of hoarded homes. The definition of Hoarding Disorder as a specific mental health problem by the World Health Organisation very recently made the news (as UK examples see Armstrong, 2018; Bagot, 2018; Hymas, 2018)

This interest in clutter seems to represent a confluence of two different (interlinked) social changes in how people relate to objects in everyday life. First, we have a shift towards a desire for more 'authentic' things set within, paradoxically, an overall turn away from objects. The experience economy is growing, with more and more people choosing to spend their money not on stuff but on events. These events

are documented digitally, through proliferating social media which capture images and record experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 2011). This turn away from objects, however, is accompanied by a re-evaluation of (some) other material things. For example, vinyl is making a comeback; its purchase in preference to streaming music can be seen as evidence of a changing way of thinking about commodities within this overall context of the declining sales of stuff (Woodward, 2014). We can also see this in an overall aesthetic of retro, a boom in the hand-made and in a growing adoption of craft practices, as ways to make meaningful things (Gauntlett, 2011; Price and Hawkins, 2018). In the world of interior design, the head of sustainability at Ikea tells us we may have reached 'peak stuff' (reported in *The Guardian* by Farrell, 2016). Today's fashionable homes are defined by aesthetics of bricoleur, for example mismatched framed pictures spread unevenly across a wall (doing this on a mantlepiece, artfully layering the frames, is particularly chic). They include houseplants (things we nurture and care for), and their furniture is upcycled or mid-century modern. From this, we can see that rather than rejecting stuff in general, the trend is instead for thoughtful (we could say mindful) practices of consumption and curation as alternative ways of relating to things.

The second trend I see working to influencing a growing interest in clutter and decluttering is a general cultural suspicion of objects. A turn away from consuming objects thoughtlessly, and a more mindful approach to things which considers their material longevity, is on the rise. This is a response to the massive planetary ecological challenges we face around resource overuse and pollution. However, it is also (co-opted as) an aesthetic and life/style choice. Sustainability, as an aesthetic and practice, are increasingly both connected and commoditised. Kilner jars bedeck mindful kitchens, 'zero waste' blogs and books tell the story of a year lived making only enough waste to fill one of these jars (for example *Zero Waste Home*: Johnson, 2016). Finally, practices of upcycling manifest this connection between waste avoidance and a particular contemporary aesthetics. A part of this reconsideration of object values, upcycling is both practiced by individuals and represented on TV (for example *Salvage Hunters* (2011-Present) and *The Repair Shop* (2017-Present) both find, save and remake things).

Together, these two different ways of thinking about things today represent a shift in consumption patterns and a changing sense of how we both ought to acquire objects, and relate to the objects which we already have. Clutter can be seen as caught between these. On the one hand, clutter is stuff which we do not need or want, and stuff in general is losing its cultural cachet. On the other hand, waste is to be avoided, and objects saved and revalued where appropriate. How we should relate to clutter, and practice decluttering, is therefore unclear given that each of these trends seems to offer its own solution. Consequentially, clutter becomes a greater cause for concern and anxiety, something which people feel they increasingly need guidance on. Therefore, interest in clutter rises on the tide of these two changing ways of relating to objects in everyday homes and lives.

1.2   Why a Geography of Clutter?

Academics are already working on the issues I see as influencing clutter's increasing cultural relevance (see, as examples, Brown, 2018; Ocejo, 2017; Sung *et al*., 2018). There is also a literature on media constructions and representations of hoarding (Eddy, 2014; Herring, 2014; Kaplan, 2014; Lepselter, 2011). However, there is a real lack of scholarship which takes as its main aim clutter's discursive production, its enrolment into everyday practices, or its cultural meanings. In fact, I only found two articles, both written some time ago, which take clutter as their main focus (Baker, 1995; Cwerner and Metcalfe, 2003). Other work on experiences with clutter is out there, but clutter's specific meanings are un(der)conceptualised in work which takes as its aim, more generally, how home life is lived (Dowling, 2008; Luzia, 2011; Stevenson and Prout, 2013; I give a thorough review of the literature on clutter in section 4.3.3).

This lack of attention to clutter, especially in this broader context of clutter's growing salience as a cultural idea, is reason enough to spend time studying it and reflecting on it. Contemporary shifts in how we relate to the world around us and the objects within it, how identities are constructed through shifting ways of relating to things, and what the (social, cultural and political) implications of these changes are, are all topics worthy of investigation and debate. Geographers seek to understand

how people relate to the world; our relationships with/in the world are ones lived through our relationships with other bodies (including humans and non-humans), with spaces and places, with discourses and ideas, and with objects, including clutter. Therefore, to study contemporary social life geographers need to attend to how our lives lived with things are changing, including our relationship with clutter.

Beyond this, clutter is an interesting issue for geographers to research because of how it relates to different geographical literatures. Clutter is something we keep at home, and home is a key research theme for geographers of many stripes. Material culture is also something contemporary geographical scholarship thinks about and thinks through, again in different ways. Home is understood to be made through practices with, and through the meanings of, material culture; material culture's meanings, and how it works within practices, is understood to be mediated by its context, including the home. Overall then, home and material culture exist within a mutually constitutive relationship, one which works in terms of the making of home and the making of meanings, both of which are seen as deliberate practices shot through with issues of identity creation and display.

But clutter does not fit neatly into this. Clutter is forgotten about. Clutter is left over. Clutter sits at the back of a cupboard, away from much of the action in everyday life. It lingers on shelves and it creeps across desks. Clutter therefore speaks to a different sense of what home means, and in this way challenges the rather purposive framings of domestic material culture geographers familiarly produce (I review these literatures in section 6.3). Therefore, by looking at clutter we are able to take a different perspective on socio-material life at home. Rather than overlook clutter we need to peer behind cupboard doors and into the home's forgotten spaces, thinking about the whole range of different things which people possess. Doing this creates geographical knowledge from a particular, situated, viewpoint, within which different senses of truth, space and time can emerge (Haraway, 1988). By doing this we can get a fuller sense of life at home, and find things coming into focus which, from another angle, we might otherwise not see at all.

My research on clutter (and more broadly on home, material culture and on time) is in this way similar to work being pursued in a couple of different

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contemporary research trends. First, there is work which looks at forgotten objects and object accumulations (Grossman, 2015; Horton and Kraftl, 2012; Woodward, 2015). By being forgotten about, found, remembered and (one day but not yet) removed, clutter speaks to a different (temporal) sense of life at home lived with things. These studies highlight uncertainty and provisionality. They highlight changes and absences in meaning. They point to lives lived with things, in place and through time, that are not wholly articulated, or perhaps articulable. They decentre the intentional as a maker of meanings and selves, they highlight fallibility and failures, but also the productive nature of these uncertain ways of being. Second, contemporary research more broadly is attentive to ideas of things coming apart, of things breaking, unmaking, overflowing and working in non-constructive or deconstructive ways (from a human standpoint) (as examples Baxter and Brickell, 2014; Czarniawska and Löfgren, 2012; 2013; DeSilvey and Edensor, 2013). Again in this we see alternative ways of looking at the world around us and how things work within it. We see a lack of certainty again, and a real sense of social and material provisionality in terms of what it means to make ourselves and our lives using objects in place. Clutter's challenge to the normative orderings of home space, as something out of place in the home and a 'proper' life, makes it especially amenable to a geographical analysis. Geography's understandings of place, how it is constructed and the ways in which things can be defined as out of place, as well as the implications of this, make it particularly suited to understand this kind of material culture in the home.

Finally, clutter is also interesting as an overlooked part of 'everyday' life. The everyday for geographers is a key research theme, which aims to explore mundane material practices in and of the world; how people get on with the business of living life in an open and unfolding context of worldly comings and goings. My work looks at 'everyday' homes and the role of 'everyday' objects (clutter) within them. Studying clutter seems particularly appropriate here, given that it is often framed and understood as something trivial, as a petty annoyance or a 'first-world problem'. However, as scholarship on the everyday attests to, things which are commonplace and overlooked are not necessarily unimportant. As I argue in this thesis, clutter can and does work to make homes, to produce and frame practices within them, to

construct identities. Clutter has particular temporal qualities, it works within the unfolding context of a life lived at a range of temporal scales, from everyday routines of decluttering to relationships with things cultivated over decades.

Taking this all together, clutter is a topic worthy of the detailed treatment which I give it. It is a particularly relevant topic to be studying today, one which allows me to explore key geographical research themes of home, material culture and time from an interesting and underused angle. Other studies show the value of this kind of perspective. By looking at marginal things and analysing them in ways which challenge overarching narratives of how places, meanings, identities and experiences are co-constructed, by thinking through the unintentional, the overlooked, the forgotten, we can learn about material culture, about the home and about time. As I show in this thesis, taking this standpoint generates new ways of knowing the world.

1.3 Understanding Clutter: Project Outline

My project seeks to understand clutter in three (interrelated) ways: as an idea and a discourse, as it works within practices, and as something which holds together and constructs social selves and experiences. To explore this, my research includes a range of different perspectives; I have spoken to both people who hoard and people who do not hoard, to see how they understand, relate to, practice and speak about clutter. I have also analysed self-help texts on decluttering to understand clutter's wider discursive context and find yet more ways of understanding clutter. Given that there is a real absence of research focused on clutter out there already, including these diverse perspectives is necessary to give a good overview of the matter at hand. My work has been guided by the following four research questions, questions which have structured my data collection, analysis and my writing:

1. What is clutter?
    - o How is clutter defined?
    - o How does clutter work as a discourse?
    - o How is clutter different from other kinds of objects / object categories?

2. <u>How does clutter work within everyday practices in and of home?</u>
   - Where does clutter come from?
   - How is clutter managed at home?
   - (How) does clutter express agency in the home?

3. <u>How does clutter relate to identity and selfhood?</u>
   - (How) do clutter objects work within constructions of identity?
   - How do relationships with clutter change over time?
   - What are the social meanings of clutter and having a cluttered home?

4. <u>What does studying clutter tell us about life at home with objects and through time more broadly?</u>
   - How does clutter contribute to debates on material culture?
   - How does clutter contribute to debates on time?
   - How does clutter contribute to debates on home?
   - How does clutter contribute to work at the intersection of these?

To begin answering these questions in **chapter two** I review geographical work on issues of material culture, home, time and mental health. This review frames my analysis; I outline at a broad level how these ideas are currently understood in geography. This more general review contextualises my analysis, situating my specific research interests within the wider literature. It also shows how I think about home, time, material culture and mental health at an abstract level, examining the meanings of these which carry through into my analysis. Finally, this chapter also identifies some gaps in these literatures to which my research contributes.

Chapter three outlines the process by which I collected and analysed data for this project. I explain how I did this and reflect on the implications of my choices. I highlight where I think the decisions I made were good ones, but also discuss some instances where my research choices could have been better. This candid (and I hope balanced) account demonstrates the range of ways in which I have tried to understand clutter in my thesis.

Having introduced conceptually the ideas I work with and talked about my methods for collecting and analysing my data, the next three chapters report on my findings. Each of these is similarly structured. They begin with detailed literature reviews on the specific topics my work engages with. These frame my research and introduce the ideas which it draws upon and develops. After this I give my analysis of clutter, in relation to the frame I have established, looking in each chapter at different issues which are united conceptually by the overall chapter theme.

The primary purpose of **chapter four** is to introduce clutter as a concept and an object category, and to define it. I review the (limited) academic literature on clutter and show how to date this topic has been researched. I also introduce work on other kinds of material culture, on dirt, mess and on excess, to show the ways these have been understood. I move on from these surveys and begin the task of defining clutter and exploring how it is discursively constructed. Defining clutter here is important not only because this is a key part of how we can understand clutter, but also as I need a working definition of clutter to make sense of the rest of the work I do. This chapter argues that clutter is defined extrinsically (as things which are out of place), subjectively and as some kind of problem. I draw on these elements of a definition to show how, on this basis, clutter is different from other kinds of matter out of place. Doing this also helps me to develop clutter's definition and to more clearly delimit it. I highlight how clutter's definition is normative, and how it is made sense of within discourses which draw on tropes of mental health and illness. Finally, the chapter concludes by introducing my original argument that clutter, in fact, comes in two forms: rooted clutter and flowing clutter.

Chapter five makes use of the definition of clutter developed in chapter four, working through some different ways in which clutter relates to and emerges in time. Its literature review covers, in turn, rhythms and routines, lifecourse and life transitions, and memory. I then draw on and add weight to my argument that clutter can be rooted or flowing by analysing how these forms of clutter are related to differently in terms of rhythmic and routine actions. I next consider clutter in relation to lifecourse and life transitions. I show how different forms of clutter are associated with different life stages. I then outline how clutter is made and managed within and

as a part of life transitions. Finally, my analysis turns to how rooted clutter works as a memory object. I show here rooted clutter relates to memory in a complicated and quite ambiguous way, one which is about absences and forgettings.

Chapter six, my final chapter of analysis, thinks about how clutter works within the home. I first review literature on practices of homemaking with and through material culture, and second discuss work on the creation and communication of identity at home via (practices with) material culture. I use this literature to analyse how clutter's meanings and experiences differ between different rooms in a house. I synthesise this to show how, overall, the home works within and between experiences of and practices with clutter. After this I analyse clutter's agency in homemaking practices, and then the agency of home space in making clutter and mediating our relationships with it. Finally, I show how clutter works within constructions of identity and experiences of home, arguing that clutter works to make present and embody identities in home space in ways otherwise overlooked in research on the material cultures of home.

Finally, I conclude my thesis by summarising and recapping the arguments which I have made throughout it in **chapter seven**. I show here how this research on clutter not only illuminates its (until now) un(der)researched roles and meanings, but show how this in turn works to develop geographical thought on home, time and material culture. I demonstrate here the value of seeking to understand clutter not only as an end in itself, but also as a way in to understandings of lives lived at home, with objects and through time. Finally, in this chapter I reflect on the broader significance which studies of clutter might have for understanding what it is to live with and alongside objects in place.

Chapter 2   Literature Review

2.1   Introduction

In this chapter I place my research in its wider academic context. I situate my study of clutter within geographical thought, exploring the bodies of literature which have served as its inspiration and to which it in turn contributes. The review in this chapter is a broad and fairly general survey of the field, looking in turn across work on material culture, time, the home and mental health. This overview is complemented by detailed literature reviews within each chapter of analysis (chapters four to six). These subject-specific reviews work to contextualise my work and set up the specific theories and arguments which I draw on, add to and develop in my three analysis chapters.

Material culture work is like my own in that it takes objects, and people's practices with and relationships to them, as its central focus. In the first section of this review chapter I show the general contours of contemporary scholarship in this area. Having quickly noted how work on material culture has developed over time, I introduce work which focuses on how material culture is used by individuals to construct and represent their relationships and their identities. I then consider work which thinks about how practices with material culture are situated within and formed in response to our (normative) socio-cultural context. After this I turn to literature on practices of divestment, showing how the connection between the individual and the social in practices of material culture. I subsequently turn my attention towards accounts which focus in on the material nature of material culture, introducing actor-network theory and vital materialism. I conclude here by arguing for the importance of connecting these approaches to capture the diversity of ways in which human and material lives intersect and interconnect.

I next review literature on the geographies of time, showing four different ways geographers think about time. I focus on the most pertinent to my research, work on time as a personal experience. I briefly introduce the themes of rhythm and routine, lifecourse and life transitions, and memory, which I draw on in my analysis (chapter five). I end by reflecting on time in the abstract, showing how and why my analysis of

time across these three different themes makes sense, and how time coheres as a single phenomenon composed of different, emergent, relational and emplaced dimensions.

Following this I look to literature on the geographies of home. This review introduces scholarship which I draw on mainly in chapter six. My aim here is to give a definition of home, one which I later use. I begin by noting the different scales at which home is used conceptually, before focusing in on the home as the place someone lives. I introduce humanistic geographies of home and feminist scholarship on home. Based on my reading of these I argue for a sense of home as a 'spatial imaginary' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006) and an 'assemblage of dwelling' (Jacobs and Smith, 2008). The review concludes here by showing how this works in action, discussing, first, queer and, second, migrant homes and homemaking practices.

The final body of literature I introduce is work on the geographies of mental health. I introduce this topic last here to mirror the way I see mental health as relating to my research. My work is a study of clutter, in which people who hoard are but one group who are involved. The voices of people who hoard add depth and complexity to my work, complicating the literatures discussed beforehand. My first step in this review is to position how I understand hoarding, explaining I am politically motivated to refuse to state whether hoarding is a socially constructed pathologisation of difference or if instead it is a 'really real' medical condition. I then outline how research on mental health in geography has progressed, noting here how my work diverges significantly from the mainstream.

Having introduced the key debates which I engage with in my work, I conclude this chapter by first summarising the arguments I have made. I then reflect on my treatment of these literature as separate, and highlight their multiple points of connection, which of course now includes this research.

2.2   Geographies of Material Culture

Material culture has a long tradition of scholarship behind it; historically this work has been associated with anthropology and archaeology, with the former serving as a key

reference point for geographical research. In anthropology material culture has, at different times, been seen as evidence of racial differences (and inequalities) (see Buchli, 2002; Clifford, 1988), as a way of symbolically constructing and reproducing social relations (for example Douglas, 1966; Malinowski, 1922; Mauss, 1954), and as objects which are themselves symbolic of underlying cultural structures and beliefs (Bourdieu, 1979; Lévi-Strauss, 1972). Later work inspired by postmodernism, in anthropology and beyond, took the consumption of material culture seriously, framing it as a key way in which individuals construct their identities through the signification of goods (Baudrillard, 1998; Bauman, 2007; Ritzer, 1999). This development of work on material culture directly fed into how contemporary research is framed. Through a dissatisfaction with this way of working and its restrictive focus on the (symbolic) purchase and acquisition of objects, scholars began to open the meaning of 'consumption' to take into account a range of other spaces, practices and experiences, framing it as:

> [c]onjoining purchase, use, production and distribution, the global and the local, the relations between subject and object worlds, not to mention questions of need, choice and citizenship, consumption encompasses the conditions and the constitution of social life.
> (Gregson and Crewe, 2003: p.9)

This reframing had wide-ranging impacts on studies of material culture. Contemporary work see consumption as distributed throughout networks of practices and relationships, working to make and mediate multiple points of connection between people and places.

Research on material culture today understands it as something which permeates and (co-)constructs our everyday lives. Work often focuses on the individual level, noting how people use objects in performances of selfhood and in the creation and sustenance of relationships. The work on Daniel Miller is particularly important in this regard. He argues our identities and practices are lived through and alongside objects. This is work which he has developed over many years (see Miller, 1988; 1998; 2001a; 2008; 2010), and which now forms a rich canon which scholars of material culture often draw upon. Based on detailed ethnographies Miller's work sets out how objects work to constitute our shared social worlds. The overall impact of

Miller's agenda-setting anthropological research has been to sensitise students of material culture, from a whole range of disciplines, to not only the symbolic meanings of objects but also to how they are enrolled in practices and how they work to constitute ideas, identities, experiences and relationships.

To take an example, above I highlighted literature on purchases of new goods as identity-forming acts. Miller's (2001a) research on shopping extends and builds upon this to take our understandings of material culture in a new direction. He looks beyond the individual acquisitions of objects to communicate identity and cultural meanings. Miller introduces the idea of 'the treat', something, he tells us, mothers tend to buy for other family members. This is not only an act of identity for the mother, but is also a materialisation of love and care, an objectification of feelings and sentiments. Treats are selected to communicate not public identity but personal affection and are chosen based on another's tastes and the intimate knowledge of them which provisioning parents pick up. Miller takes us beyond the act of purchase and thinks about subsequent acts of giving and receiving, and the sentiments and experiences which constitute and make these meaningful.

Inspired by this turn, work on 'consumption' today looks far beyond the act of purchase. Woodward (2007) studies women's 'backstage' consumption choices, focusing in on clothing and how women select what to wear. She shows that women's choices consider more than questions of fashion and identity, that they think of how clothing works to make and mediate their social relations, and how their (possible) social selves might be constituted and interacted with differently in the context of varying spaces and practices. In addition to this, Woodward's (2007: p.51) work also argues that 'much as choosing what to wear can be seen as an act of self-construction, so too, the act of sorting out former selves through clothing is also part of this process of engaging with self-identity'. We see here broader engagements with objects impacting upon identities and practices. Other examples of this include the way in family photographs work within practices of looking, both as things which enable performances of identity as well as material things which serve to constitute, contextualise and sometimes challenge these identities and constructs (Rose, 2003; 2004). Finally, material culture is also something which is malleable, and which can be

actively constructed by individuals within acts of identity creation, as leisure practices, or as political interventions (Campbell, 2005; Christensen, 2011; Gauntlett, 2011; Greer, 2014; Stalp and Winge, 2008). Overall, we see in this that the meanings of objects work to create identities and socialities, but this works within practices that are not fixed and so can be reinterpreted and recontextualised. This is a very much alive sense of what it means to consume objects, in which things are more than their cultural meanings and are framed instead as active and changeable agents within situated socio-material practices.

These personal ways of using objects are themselves situated within wider normative and value-laden ways of relating to material culture. For example, the treats which Miller (2001a) reports on are situated within contemporary Western modes of household provisioning, as gender- and culture-specific ways of using objects to achieve social effects. I want to look a little now at some literature which explores more directly the ways in which our personal consumption choices and practices are situated within and structured by the norms and values of the society within which we live.

How people choose which objects to put into their homes, why they like what they like, is a question that concerns many writers on material culture. Bourdieu's (1984) Distinction is a key work which explores the social level at which such choices are made. Bourdieu describes taste as something that reflects one's social position within a culture. Class and gender rule, strongly influencing aesthetic judgements. We can find many examples of this, from poor Romanian city dwellers' shared desire for wooden furniture (Drazin, 2001) to the emphasis Norwegian housewives place on functionality and comfort in how their kitchens should look (Gullestad, 1984). Özlem Savaş (2010) researched how Turkish migrants living in Vienna decorated their homes, and found very similar preferences, with many respondents buying identical ornaments and household objects as their compatriots. The sameness and cheapness of these furnishings émigrés felt represented their membership of the Viennese Turkish community. These practices affirm Bourdieu's (1984) thesis that one's structural position determines one's aesthetic preferences. However, Savaş found these aesthetic values were not, in fact, shared by *every* Turkish migrant in Vienna, but

rather only by those who identified strongly with the local Turkish community. Others saw themselves and their homes are more in line with those of 'modern people in Turkey', favouring contemporary furniture closer to the native Viennese norm. This suggests therefore that membership of a cultural group is an important factor in how people relate to material culture, but one which does not function deterministically.

In addition to working to determine what people put into their homes, the situatedness of individuals within particular geographies, cultures and points in history also works to produce their practices of divestment. Mary Douglas (1966) argues that concepts of cleanliness and dirtiness, and the practices with material culture which they occasion, are culturally specific. This thesis is one supported by a wealth of evidence that demonstrates the geographical and cultural variability of such values and practices (as examples see Douney, 2007; Gregson, 2011; Pink, 2004; Seo, 2012). To take a single example to develop this point, Gypsy-Travellers' conceptions of dirt, and what counts as matter out of place (see Douglas, 1966), revolve around a distinction between the inner body and the outer body (Griffin, 2002; Okley, 1983). The inner body is kept scrupulously clean and pure, the home of the authentic cultural and spiritual self. The outer body, however, is understood to be a public and changeable face, the 'dirtiness' of which is less threatening to selfhood and an individual's purity. This fundamental distinction is mirrored in how Gypsy-Travellers engage in cleaning practices and in their relationships with home and non-home space:

> Travellers placed great emphasis on domestic cleanliness. The normative rule was that the *inside* of trailers be kept as clean as possible, and in practice most families lived up to this. [...] *Outside* the trailer the norm of cleanliness was more relaxed. Here floor sweepings, dismantled toys, litter, and bits of metal from scrap sorting were not considered 'out of place'
> (Griffin, 2002: p.116, original emphasis)

The different ways in which inside and outside space are interacted with here rests on the fundamental distinction made between the inner and outer body (Griffin, 2002; see also Okley, 1983). However, while Gypsy-Travellers as a cultural group generally share a belief in these values, the responsibility for maintaining these symbolic and

actual distinctions are not equally shared. Cleaning practices are highly gendered for Gypsy-Travellers, as are many other forms of everyday practice (Casey, 2014; Griffin, 2002; Okley, 1983). This means that even as norms are shared within a group, when we start to look at the actual practices of individuals we see that they are formed through a complex of intersectional identities, as well as personal preferences and individual choices. While often othered and homogenised in public discourse, in part because of their cultural beliefs around dirt and cleanliness and the practices which these work to produce (Hyman, 1989; Tyler, 2013), Gypsy-Travellers like all cultural groups are internally heterogeneous in terms of their beliefs and practices (Casey, 2014; Griffin, 2002; Okley, 1983).

The personal and sometimes idiosyncratic ways in which people practice divestment is a key focus of much contemporary research on material culture. Scholars study divestment both to understand its symbolic and communicative aspects, the ways in which stuff works to constitute and reflect identities through the getting rid of things which are 'not me' (Gregson *et al.*, 2007a; Gregson, 2011; Marcoux, 2001), as well as how divestment is practiced materially and its wider social implications (Hetherington, 2004). Decisions around how to divest of something work to create social identities and express norms and values; for example, Gregson and Beale (2004) demonstrate how passing on maternity clothes to friends for new mothers works to construct a social identity as a 'good', 'thrifty' and 'caring' mum. This exceeds the meanings of *what* we give away, and shows that *how* we get rid of things serves to create (social) selves. To divest of something requires skills and knowledge about how to manage materialities (Strasser, 2000), as well as resources through which these can be put into practice, for example social networks through which objects can be found new homes (Gregson *et al.*, 2007b). Hence, acts of divestment are constituted within wider social and material frames, as well as constitutive of them. This demonstrates the recursive and situated nature of material practices, the way in which they cross domains and the thoroughness with which material culture penetrates our lives.

From the work I have so far reviewed it can be seen that there are then two interacting levels at which people relate to material culture, the social and the

individual. At the social level the specific culture, geography, social group and point in history at which people live work to shape how they relate to objects. This includes norms for proper object use, socially valued forms of display and shared understandings about the symbolic meanings of things (Bourdieu, 1984; Douglas, 1966). At the individual level people draw on these shared ideas and use them to frame their personal practices and ways of being (Miller, 2001a; Savaş, 2010). Here norms can be subverted, and objects used to constitute and express personal relationships and ways of being with others.

To understand material culture we need to think about both of these together. My work on clutter considers both the individual and the social level at which we relate to objects, as it explores both the socio-cultural 'meaning' of clutter, as well as how it is enrolled within and works to constitute practices, identities and social relationships. One way in which my work differs from that reviewed above is that I do not look at one specific kind of object (like photographs), specific practice (like divestment), specific space (like the wardrobe) or specific group (like new mums). Instead my research is about an what I describe as an object category. Clutter is a label which we apply to objects at particular times; it is a description of our relationship with, and is judgement of, an object, not a name for a particular type of object. Clutter has not been considered in much detail up to now (see review in section 4.3), although other (problematic) object categories, like mess, excess and dirt (reviewed in section 4.4) have been interrogated. My way of working builds on the literature reviewed in this chapter. It is a development which has emerged from the diversification of what studies of material culture include; I look at a range of spaces, practices, discourses and objects which together work to (in)form clutter.

The studies of material culture presented so far frame it within the context of social action and everyday practice. However, what this way of working can fail to consider is 'how different matters matter differently' (Gregson and Crang, 2010: p.1027), and overlook how the material properties of things, and their agencies, can work to construct and contest their social meanings and effects. Bill Brown (2001) introduces a distinction between objects, which are social and involved in the construction of identities and meanings, and things, which are material, physical and

agentic. This is useful way to point out material culture works not only within human lives, and that it also operates on its own material terms. Whether things and objects can be so sharply separated is something I question in other work (Miller, In preparation). As such this is not a linguistic distinction I deploy here, preferring to read this work as an encouragement to think about the multiple meanings of matter, rather than as evidence that objects and things are very different beasts.

Actor-network theory (ANT) describes bodies and objects as 'actants', a term used to both make clear the fundamental equality between all things in the world as well as to highlight the equal and distributed capacities for action shared by every thing (Latour, 2005; Law, 2002; Law and Mol, 1995). From this standpoint, practices, ideas and relationships are understood as negotiated and emergent outcomes. ANT takes a perspective of flatness, where relationships between actants are framed as non-hierarchical, and inequalities understood to be emergent rather than given (Latour, 2005). Studies therefore look at the ways in which actants work to enable and resist certain ways of being in and doing the world. Door closers (Latour, 1988) and scallops (Callon, 1986) resist human wants; plants (Hitchings, 2003) and buildings (Gieryn, 2002; Guggenheim, 2009) serve to produce human actions and ways of living alongside them. Overall, sociality is framed as derivative of physical, agentic relationships between actants (Latour, 2005). This way of thinking works to sensitise us to non-human agencies which otherwise may be overlooked. However, this approach to the social and to experience is, I would argue, problematic. These equalizing tendencies work as a race to the bottom; emotions and subjectivities are hard to theorise and understand in an approach which sees a human's life as the ontological mirror of a building's (Lees and Baxter, 2011). Therefore, while this sense of agency is helpful, and a presumed equality a useful optic for allowing us to see non-human agencies more clearly, ANT does not give the kind of account which I am looking for in my work, which seeks to explore how people experience and understand clutter, in addition to how they physically relate to it.

An alternative way in to theoretically recognising the agencies of things is through vital materialism. This treats the social and the material differently to ANT; they are separate but equal and interlinked domains. This separation allows us to

think about questions of experience and to address issues of subjectivity and emotion, without reducing these to epiphenomena of the agency of actants. However, this does not mean that we need to overlook the actions of materials within this, or to reduce their capacities and agencies which work to co-construct human lives. Vital materialism seeks to understand how materials operate in their own terms, both within and beyond human lives. Jane Bennett's (2010) approach is central to such efforts. She describes her work as 'thinking beyond the life-matter binary […] [aiming to] theorise a materiality that is as much force as entity, as much energy as matter, as much intensity as extension' (2010: p.20). Loud echoes of the work of Spinoza (1989; also Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) can be heard, especially in her arguments for the vibrant connative drive towards association which matter has, its movements and agencies, as well as its affects which are distributed between and connect humans and non-humans. This Bennett (2010) describes as 'thing-power', the ability of matter to move and make experiences and (inhuman) meanings within a subject. Within this work there is a careful attention to *matter* as opposed to materiality (see also Ingold, 2007). Bennett (2010: pp.52-61) makes this clear in her work, spending a whole chapter, for example, describing 'a life of metal'.

Thinking more broadly, the specific qualities of matter have been shown to matter in a wide range of studies looking across a range of different contexts. There is a tendency in this work to look at material deconstruction and decomposition. Processes of weathering and ruination, in which non-human agencies of water, wind and sun, combine with the specific material natures of plants, metals and stones (and others) work to create novel material arrangements (Edensor, 2005; 2011; DeSilvey, 2007). These processes work without necessarily referencing human acts and agencies; they operate unseen and therefore this demonstrates the non-hierarchical relationship between subjects and things, that material lives matter on their own terms (Bennett, 2010). This way of working can also be attentive to how specific materials and their agencies work to shape human practices (Gregson *et al.*, 2010; Liboiron, 2015). How and whether humans can manage the vibrant action of materials is determined by the specific nature of the biological and chemical processes at work. Finally, the specific qualities of matter can also be brought to mind when thinking

about processes of construction, for example in craft practices (Miller, 2017; Paton, 2013). Here again human capacities and actions are framed as emergent in relation to the material qualities of interacting (human and non-human) bodies. We can see from these ways of working that experiences and emotions are formed not simply by abstract actant agency but as part of a conversation between different kinds of material bodies and what their coming together and coming apart works to enable and constrain.

Contemporary studies of material culture can be seen from even this limited review to form a wide-ranging area of research. I want to conclude by arguing for the importance of paying heed to material agencies and affects within work on how people use objects to express and construct their identities and relationships. As can be seen from this review, connecting these two interlinked domains allows for attention to both the material and the cultural elements of 'material culture'. Only by being as open as possible to the ways in which both of these conjoined spheres operate, working together and against one another, can we hope to frame human (inter)action with things in and of the world in such a way as to reduce neither material agencies and affects nor human emotions and experiences. In my work I take up this ambition by attending to the diverse ways in which practices with clutter are formed within a material context, and how this works to create, enable and constrain human lives and experiences.

2.3   Geographies of Time

Time as a concept is something which scholars in (almost) every discipline have to think about in one way or another. Physicists calculate the speed of light, chemists the half-life of radioactive materials, geologists think about deep time measured in aeons, historians try and learn about what happened in the human past while philosophers wonder whether this is ever even possible. It is, of course, beyond the scope of my work here to try and review all, even any, of these issues. My intentions are more modest. First, I give a very broad outline of different ways in which geographers think about what time is. These are: time as something abstract and concrete; time as a

political force; time as a social construct; time as a personal experience. This last sense of time is the one I develop in my research. I introduce the three ways in which I conceptualise this very briefly here: time thought about in terms of rhythm and routine, lifecourse and life transitions, and memory. This introduction informs the conceptual argument I go on to make, where I present time as a multidimensional construct (Adam, 1998; 2004; 2008) which emerges alongside space through practices (May and Thrift, 2001). This argument contextualises my work in chapter five, where I analyse these different temporal elements separately, as they emerged in practices and through my research.

The first way of thinking about time I discuss here is time as something abstract and concrete. Torsten Hägestrand's time-geography is emblematic of such a perspective. His pioneering work mapped, recorded and analysed not only the frozen points between which people move, but the journeys people take in time between them. Here time was often represented as an axis on a graph, something stable, repetitive and abstract. This sense of time can be referred to as 'clock time', the measured and consistent marking of seconds, hours, days and years which developed in modernity to facilitate capitalist production and exchange (Glennie and Thrift, 2009; Thompson, 1967; Zerubavel, 1981). Hägestrand's (1982; 1985) work sought to illuminate the barriers and constraints people encounter to their practices of mobility, and was underpinned by a social justice agenda. Generally, time-geography is presented as firmly in human geography's disciplinary past, but it is worth noting similar, albeit differently articulated, ways of studying and recording temporality in this abstract way persist in the work of contemporary GIScientists, among others (Gatrell and LaFary, 2009). Today time-geography is looked back on often as a too abstract, too mechanistic mapping of movement, which elides the actual experience of a body travelling through and between places over time (Davies, 2001; Gren, 2001). This assessment is one I am inclined to agree with; however, this work was important in tuning geographers' attention in to the study of time and pushing geographers to develop their account of time beyond this, in ways I turn to next.

The second way of thinking about time in human geography is as a chronopolitics (see Klinke, 2012), a political and politicised force which mediates and

constructs uneven global relations. This developed with work on globalisation in the 1990s and 2000s, and there are two issues characteristic of this work I discuss here. First is the idea of space-time compression (Harvey, 1989; Virillo, 1986). In broad terms, time-space compression is an understanding that the world is speeding up and getting smaller, it is becoming compressed. Distance is eroded due to innovations in transportation, computation and communication technologies; these forces therefore make interactions quicker. The second issue relates to this; only developed states are positioned to enjoy the benefits of speed. The *relative* speed of different places therefore impacts upon the degree to which they can participate in contemporary (global) economic and cultural life. Some places plod on slowly, others race ahead (Klinke, 2012). Time here is relative, not abstract clock time; time is socially and politically constructed and has variable effects.

The third way geographers think about time is as a shared social construct. This work draws on social theory in which contemporary lives are understood to have become disembedded from their traditional structures; socio-political change has led to a detraditionalisation of lives and lifestyles and an associated increase in individualisation, with people now possessing more agency to construct their identities through practices of consumption and conscious reflection (Bauman, 2001; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991). These changes have impacted upon time at a social level. The future is now an individualised space of shared risk, rather than certainty; we collectively face global problems created in modernity (Beck, 1992) while we are forced to constantly revise our selves and reconstruct them through consumption (Bauman, 2007). Our pasts no longer determine our futures, and instead need to be agentically reframed and reimagined to form autobiographically constructed, rather than socially prescribed, identities (Giddens, 1991). This shift can be usefully described as a change from a traditional and predetermined lifecycle, to an agentically chosen lifecourse (Elchardus and Smits, 2006). I explore geographical work on the lifecourse, and on life transitions, in my literature review in section 5.3.2, and draw on these theories in my analysis in section 5.5.

The final sense of time to discuss is geographical work on time as a personal experience. Geographers think about space and place in a whole range of different

ways, as individually experienced, textured and constructed. Doreen Massey (1992: p.262) argues that geographers need to add in to work on complex, three-dimensional, relational space an account of time as an additional fourth dimension; she suggests our task is to 'rethink space as integrally space-time and to conceptualise space-time as relative, relational, and integral to the constitution of the entities themselves'. This way of working and thinking about time is echoed across a whole range of different perspectives on temporality, which see it as constitutive of, and emergent within, practices and relations in and of the world. There are a diverse range of ways in which this can be theorised, from perspectives including practice theory (Southerton, 2012; Shove, 2009), non-representational theory (Lorimer, 2005; Thrift, 2008; drawing on, among others, Bergson, 1911; Deleuze, 1994) and post-phenomenology (Cloke and Jones, 2001; Ingold, 2000; 2011). Indeed, with such alacrity have geographers answered the call to include time within geography made by Massey (1992; also 2005) and others (contemporaneously including Harvey, 1996; May and Thrift, 2001; Thrift, 1996) that some are now challenging the pre-eminence that time has been accorded within human geography (see Merriman, 2012).

Time emerged as a strong research theme in my work. Specifically, I analyse clutter in terms of personal temporal experiences as it relates to rhythm and routine (section 5.4), lifecourse and life transitions (section 5.5), and memory and forgetting (section 5.6). What I want to do now is show how these are connected, and also how they can be separated out for the purposes of analysis. To do that I want to first introduce each of these senses of time, reviewing them very briefly (see section 5.3 for detailed reviews). Having set the scene I reflect on how and why it makes sense to talk about time in these different ways, as split up into different temporal elements. To do this I outline the work on time of Barbara Adam (1998; 2004; 2008), and then the timespace approach of May and Thrift (2001), which informs how I conceptualise time (and space) in my work.

First, work on rhythm sees it as both a product of interactions (with)in the world, as well as something which structures them (Edensor, 2010a; Lefebvre, 2004). Rhythm is often drawn on to analyse and record the relationship between mobile practices, bodies and ideas which constitute the world and one another (Edensor,

2010a). Rhythms work to make places, and places serve to structure rhythms (Crang, 2001; Vannini, 2012). Here the spatial and the temporal are intimately linked and framed in four dimensional terms. Rhythms are presented as general, continuous and distributed: to study rhythm is to study 'the patterning of a range of multiscalar temporalities […] whose rhythms provide an important constituent of the experience and organisation of social time' (Edensor, 2010b: p.1).

Second, lifecourse and life transitions research in geography seeks to understand both how individuals at particular points in their lives experience and inhabit places differently, as well as how lifecourse positions are socially and culturally constructed (Bailey, 2009; Hopkins and Pain, 2007). Life transitions research theorises time as something non-linear and its experience in terms of discontinuities and breaks (Hörschelmann, 2011); researchers study past, present and future in terms of how these interact in an emergent way and work to constitute one another and their meanings (Hockey, 2008; Worth, 2009). This work concerns itself less with the physical and mobile practices in and of space which accounts of rhythm work with, and looks more towards (temporal) narratives, reflections and questions of identity.

Finally, work on memory frames time and its experience differently again. Memory is studied both as a personal experience and as a socially shared construct (Drozdzewski *et al.*, 2016a; Legg, 2007; Ratnam, 2018). For individuals, memory can work in different ways, including bodily memories (Paton, 2013; Sudnow, 1993), recalled memories (Jones, 2005; Meah and Jackson, 2016) or as unconsciously brought-to-mind recollections (B. Anderson, 2004; Jones, 2011). Within all of these, memory is presented as something which links between times and serves as a thread of connection; memory is an orientating construct which works to sew together experiences and identities lived in different times and places (Jones and Garde-Hansen, 2012a). The temporality informing work on memories is one which looks backwards and through which experiences and practices in the present, and in the future too, are constructed and shaped (Jones and Garde-Hansen, 2012a).

These three different senses of time can all be seen to operate quite differently from one another. What I want to do now is show how these diverse ways of thinking about time hold together, the way that despite these clear differences it does still

make sense to talk about 'time' in general. The work of Barbara Adam (1998; 2004; 2008) is especially useful here. She talks about time as a singular phenomenon which is internally differentiated and multiply constructed and experienced. She refers to time as something itself multidimensional. What this means is that in addition to being a fourth dimension to add to geography (Massey, 1992), time is itself made up of multiple temporal dimensions. Adam (2008) gives a summary of these. Time involves: timeframes, which are bounded periods of time; temporality, the direction in which time flows; timings of events, their synchronisation and coordination or not; tempo, the (felt) speed or intensity of action; duration, the length of time; sequence, the order in which things happen; temporal modalities, which include the past, present and future, but also experiential modalities of memory and anticipation. The way in which these different features emerge and relate to one another depends on our perspective. Adam (1998: p.11) describes this as the 'timescape' we study, with timescapes being:

> a way of seeing and a conceptual approach [...]. Where other scapes such as landscapes, cityscapes and seascapes mark the spatial features of past and present activities and interactions of organisms and matter, timescapes emphasise their rhythmicities, their timings and tempos, their changes and contingencies. A timescape perspective stresses the temporal features of living. Through timescapes, contextual temporal practices become tangible. Timescapes are thus the embodiment of practiced approaches to time.

This reconciles the differences found between the ways of thinking about time I reviewed above. Since 'the temporal framework we impose determines what we can and do see' (Adam, 2008: p.8) it makes sense that depending on what and how we study, different senses of time appear. Therefore, while time in general is constituted from all these different dimensions, their relative importance shifts depending on the context of action and of research. This helps us to make sense of time as a whole; a whole which we can only ever see and know a part of, based on our particular, situated viewpoint.

I want to conclude here by connecting time and space back together. In the longer quote from Adam (1998) above she seems to draw them apart. This is not

something she argues for conceptually (Adam, 2008), however, I want to be explicit here on how I see them as connected, and to do this I want to turn to the timespace approach of May and Thrift (2001). They argue that time and space are inherently connected, and represent that in their writing by collapsing them to form their terminology of 'TimeSpace'[1]. This connection works as social life is something constructed in and through practices and engagements with/in the world, meaning that time and space can never be held apart, framed as a binary or a dualism, and instead need to be seen as formed together in emergent practices. Adam (1998) talks of this at quite an abstract level in her work on timescapes, taking the position of a theorist rather than an actor. May and Thrift (2001) draw on and develop her account, to suggest that in the doing of life, as well as in reflections on it, timescapes emerge as part of our wider experiential landscape, structuring how time feels and is experienced, which dimensions of it matter more or matter most. Here 'the picture that emerges is less that of a singular or uniform social time stretching over a uniform space, than of various (and uneven) networks of time stretching in different and divergent directions across an uneven social field' (May and Thrift, 2001: p.5). This means each of the different ways of thinking about time which we started with can and do make sense, since time, its perception and its experience, emerges through lived and emplaced relationships in and of the world; time is judged and lived contextually and relatively, rather than is a single way, across multiple fields and spaces. The implication of this is that while later I talk about clutter as it relates to rhythm and routine, lifecourse and life transitions, and memory, these temporalities emerge in context and in interactions between clutter, bodies, other objects, knowledges, discourses and temporal regimes (and more). As such, the temporal stories which I tell are ones emergent within the spaces which I visited, and are by no means the only ones which clutter can co-produce.

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[1] I choose not to use their capitals in my work as they seem to wrongly imply that 'Time' and 'Space' are names for concrete and fully knowable phenomena, rather than relationally drawn and constituted terms and experiences.

2.4 Geographies of Home

Home, like time, is another fairly sprawling concept which geographers (and others) have considered from a range of angles. It is an idea which can be applied across a range of spaces and scales, taking on different meanings in each of them. Home can be framed as homeland, the nation or state where we feel that we belong. This sense of home has both personal and political effects, meaning home is a term open to critical geopolitical analyses (Brickell, 2012). We can also feel at home at a much smaller scale; Bachelard (1994: p.4) tells us that 'our house is our corner of the world', anywhere that we feel comfortable and in which we imagine we belong (Bachelard gives as an example a favourite chair). Finally, home can also mean the place where we (normally) live, again where we feel belong and have some ownership over.

All these different senses of home interconnect, and each of them is drawn on across the diverse geographical scholarship on 'home'. My research took place in people's homes (the place where they live) and seeks to understand how clutter works within these homes and how it helps to constitute them. Therefore, in this review I concentrate on this latter meaning of home as the place where we live and feel at home. In chapter six I explore how clutter works to make (us feel at) home, and to do this I review literature on practices of homemaking (section 6.3.1) and on the connection between constructions of home and identity (section 6.3.2). Here I want to step back and explore the meaning of home in more general terms. To do this I look across three different analytical ways of talking about home. The first of these comes from humanistic geography, which sees home as an essential and privileged value. The next is feminist approaches to the home, which contest this rosy reading. Finally, I talk about the home as a spatial imaginary (Blunt and Dowling, 2006) and an assemblage of dwelling (Jacobs and Smith, 2008), two terms which I argue we can connect to give us an open sense of home which is able to account for its positive and negative aspects and experiences. I conclude by setting this understanding of home within the context of scholarship first on queer homemaking and then on migrant homemaking, to demonstrate how this reading of home works to make visible alternative ways of doing and being at home.

Humanistic geography is rightly recognised, even by its critics (Rose, 1993), as having put home on the map in geography. Humanistic geography emerged as a reaction to quantitative spatial science and sought to interrogate lives as they are lived and experienced in the world. This meant that scholars were interested in how people interact with and make place as a site and as a feeling, bound up in personal and cultural meanings. Place was framed as key to humanity, with a sense of belonging and insideness thought to structure our connections with/in the world (Buttimer and Seamon, 1980; Ley and Samuels, 1978; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1974). In its concern with meaningful and authentic places, humanistic geography often celebrated the home as indexical of the kinds of relationships it was interested in exploring, and how human-place interactions were best lived. For Relph (1976: p.39) 'home is not just the place you happen to live in, but an irreplaceable centre of significance', and for Seamon (1979: p.69) 'the dwelling-place is generally the spatial centre of at-homeness' in the world. Homes were presented in such work as spaces of rest and retreat, private, meaningful places to which we can return to nourish our selves and from which we can set forth into the world again. But, as Gillian Rose (1993: p.56) notes, humanistic geography's 'home/place is not one that many feminists would recognise, though: it is conflict free, caring, nurturing and almost mystically venerated'. Feminist geographies of home challenged this kind of presentation, and the broader absence of women's experiences of home and of place in humanistic geography. Despite its drawbacks, humanistic geography is an important forebearer of the kind of work I do in my research, focusing on the small, the personal and the experiential. Contemporary writers have the luxury of a much wider range of scholarship to draw on to allow them to avoid theorising the home in such gendered and exclusionary terms.

Feminist writings on the home often take issue with the idea that it is a private space of rest and retreat set apart from the world, a place where we can be our authentic selves as subjects, noting that such framings neglect to mention the role and experiences of women at home who (are expected to) labour there in order to produce such comforts (Rose, 1993). Masculinist accounts of what home means and how it functions are broadly criticised in second wave feminist thought, which often presents home instead as a site of oppression and repression for women. Beauvoir

(1952) argues that women's confinement to the home denies them the chance to engage in public acts of identity construction and display, and forces them into immanent labour where their (domestic) actions are dictated to them by the needs of others (men and children), rather than based on their own wants and desires. Irigaray (1992) sees women's place in the home as a sacrifice made in the constitution of male subjectivity, which emerges through contradistinction, first, and originally, from the mother. Later, male nostalgia for lost maternal oneness (*chora*; from Kristeva, 1984a) leads to its recreation as a concatenated home-wife complex, from which men may selectively leave but within which women are entrapped. However, these arguments are criticised within other feminisms as excluding the perspectives of non-white and working-class women. The assumption that women do not and cannot work outside of the home misses the historical (and continuing) engagement of working-class women in paid labour (McDowell, 1999). bell hooks (1990) draws on her experiences as a black woman growing up in a deeply unjust and racist climate, to frame her home as a space of freedom from racial oppression, not one of gendered repression. Home for hooks (1990) is a positive political arena, as a counterpoint to racism and violence but also as somewhere in which political action can happen to make change.

Within and between feminist scholarship, and the lived experiences of women, 'house and home are deeply ambivalent values' (Young, 2005a: p.123). Situated experiences give rise to different meanings and readings of home. Essentialist arguments are doomed to fail. Home is defined contextually and intersectionally, based not only upon the overarching power relations of a society, which subordinate women, but also within individual relationships, families and in concert with spaces and objects. Gender and sexuality are performed (Butler, 1990) and identities are experienced intersectionally with no one marker of selfhood able to account for all of our home lives (Valentine, 2007). Homes are sites in which intersectional selves are made manifest relationally, based on who is there and the norms and values which suffuse that space. Home is not and cannot be only or exclusively a site of oppression or of freedom.

A working theory of home therefore needs to articulate it as a lived, emergent and contested site, to make room for diverse meanings, experiences and values. Blunt

and Dowling (2006: p.2) argue that home is 'a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and which construct places, extend across spaces and scales, and connect places'. To them, home is complex, a situated construct, a coming together of experiences and meanings, bodies and objects, norms and values.   To capture this malleability of home Blunt and Dowling (2006) describe it as a 'spatial imaginary', a necessarily broad term which names the home as a particular place to which feelings and ideas are attached. These are experienced at a personal level, and constructed in reference to wider norms and power geometries. This idea of the home makes room for the multiple and sometimes contradictory senses and arrangements of home which we find in the world. As a spatial imaginary, the home is not something which is pre-given and essential. Instead it is something which is actively (re)made through practices of homemaking, a temporal achievement of feeling at home, imbuing it with a sense of structure that serves to orientate us towards the world (Baxter and Brickell, 2014; Douglas, 1991; Schillmeier and Heinlein, 2009). Homemaking is the drawing together of material practices, things and ideas in the (enactment of) home.

To capture this socio-spatial construction of home I find Jacobs and Smith's (2008) term 'assemblage of dwelling' helpful, and develop it in section 6.4. They argue we can best understand the home as a spatial imaginary, a material place and the feelings about it, as a site of co-emergence within which feelings, spaces, practices and norms are woven together, interacting and mutually constituting. This leads us to attend to the physical, material properties of housing as well as the emotional and symbolic elements of feeling at home together, as elements enfolded into one another through ongoing material practices in the home and their meanings. Home in this sense is an achievement, one which can be made and unmade (Baxter and Brickell, 2014), rather than something essential and given. This also makes room for the meaning of home to change over time through a variety of different experiences. Altogether, taking this perspective allows us to think about home in all the ways it is lived; we start here from practices and feelings, rather than an essentialist envisioning of home space as being of a singular or fixed type.

To explore this sense of home a little more I want to turn to two bodies of literature on homes and homemaking practices. These are, first, queer geographies of the home and, second, geographies of home within the context of migration. I use literature on queer domesticities to show how home as a site and an experience can both reproduce exclusionary social norms as well as offering a site of resistance to and respite from them. Here then I look at the 'imaginary' part of home as a spatial imaginary. Work on migration is used to explore home as a place or a site, and show how it can be stretched, moved and constituted in an open and mobile way (Massey, 2005), rather than simply or only relating to a single and/or fixed place.

Andrew Gorman-Murray (2006: p.54, emphasis removed) argues that many approaches to home conceptualise it 'within an implicitly heteronormative framework', imagining home's occupants to be heterosexual couples living with or without children. This is true both of the humanistic and the feminist geographies I reviewed above (although of course not of all of them). Home is a strongly heteronormative site; the 'discursive naturalisation of the heterosexual family within home prescribes appropriate uses for that space' (Gorman-Murray, 2006: p.55) which can make it an oppressive place for the non-conforming (Valentine, 1993; Valentine *et al.*, 2003). At other times though, queer home experiences can be more positive; home can be a site to integrate sexual and other identities which might normally seem incompatible and kept separate, through practices with material culture (Gorman-Murray, 2008a). In addition to material culture and the symbolic representation of the sexual self, gay subjects 'queer' home space in other ways, subverting its traditional assumptions to support their lives and lifestyles. For a group of older lesbians living in London, the kitchen was found to be an important site for semi-public togetherness, sociality and political action (Scicluna, 2015). In the autobiographies of gay men in Australia, non-domestic spaces served as 'homes', with home experienced as stretching beyond the walls of the house (Gorman-Murray, 2006). Together these two different ways of engaging with home space challenge the normative division between public and private, giving different senses of how we can live in and be at home. Overall, experiences of home are worked out intersectionally and in practices. Home as a heteronormative imaginary can make it a place of exclusion, but home can also

function as a site of (queer) togetherness and belonging. An understanding of the home as a spatial imaginary allows us to account for this variety, rather than forcing us to choose to see it as essentially liberating or repressive.

As a *spatial* imaginary home is always tied up with a particular place. However, this place can be more than just a static point to which feelings are attached. As Ahmed (1999) argues, this means that rather than ideas like migration and movement being antithetical to the idea of home, we need to see home space as a coming together, as somewhere of openness and change, constituted through relations between people who stay and people who go. This is a sense of home as something both sedentary and mobile, as a process created through objects and practices on the move, meaning the 'home is like an accordion, in that it both stretches to expand outwards to distant and remote places, while also squeezing to embed people in their proximate and immediate locales and social relations' (Ralph and Staeheli, 2011: p.525). For migrants, home is a moveable concept (Arnold, 2016). As identities are hybrid and translocal, for some who move, so too are experiences and meanings of home, found not necessarily within a singular space to the exclusion of others but in the idea of connections between spaces and translocal, intercultural exchange (Arnold, 2016; Ley-Cervantes and Duyvendak 2017). Framings of home space which ignore its mobility can lead to the social exclusion of mobile populations, who are cast as homeless when, in reality, they take their homes with them through meanings and practices (Kabachnik, 2010). Where migrants settle, specific imaginings of home emerge that transcend the borders of a house or a state. This can be achieved through material culture, objects which connect to homes and homelands symbolically and materially while also themselves being transformed in the act of movement (Pahl, 2012; Tolia-Kelly, 2004). Taken collectively, this work reminds us to be attentive to how homes, as spaces, are constituted relationally and through practice, and draws us towards (to paraphrase) an open sense of home (Massey, 2005). Homes as spaces are not closed, but rather are emergent borderings within which feelings of belonging are constructed and projected. Within all of this multiple bodies and objects matter, working to construct place as an emergent site (Massey, 2005) and the home as an assemblage of dwelling (Jacobs and Smith, 2008).

In this review I have introduced the idea of home, first in humanistic geography and second in feminist thought. I then turned to Blunt and Dowling's (2006) theorisation of home as a spatial imaginary to describe it as an open engagement with place that is at once both material and representational. By thinking of home in these terms we can conceptualise it in its spatial and experiential variety. I added to this Jacobs and Smith's (2008) term 'assemblage of dwelling' to highlight the role which spaces, objects and bodies play in co-constructing the home as an emergent site and feeling. Finally, I demonstrated the value of this approach by reviewing literature on queer and migrant home(making)s, showing its ability to speak of a diversity of homes and ways of living in them.

2.5 Geographies of Mental Health

The final body of literature to discuss here is work on 'mental health' in geography. Hoarding Disorder is listed in the DSM-5 (APA, 2013) as a specific mental health problem, and has also very recently been similarly recognised by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2018). I introduce clinical and critical academic literature on hoarding in section 4.3.2, and explore its definition as a normative construct further in section 6.4.1. Speaking more broadly here, social science studies of mental health take different approaches to the idea of 'mental health problems'. Sometimes these are used as unproblematic labels or descriptions, but more often they are troubled and seen as a pathologisation of difference (see Foucault, 1971; 1973). In the next paragraph I explain how I approach hoarding in terms of mental health. This serves to position my reading of literature on the geographies of mental health which I subsequently review. I identify three main ways of working, which I name 'spaces of mental health', 'places of mental health' and 'experiences of madness'. This last approach looks at the everyday experiences of people with a 'mental health problem', and thinks about wider conceptual issues (for example meanings and experiences of home). Most often though these texts involve only people with a 'mental health problem' and seek to study how this impacts on their relationship with these everyday concepts and experiences. My work here, which studies clutter and includes people who hoard alongside people who do not hoard, is therefore significantly different from

most work on mental health in geography. I conclude by arguing for the value of my way of working; it allows us to both understand the specific experiences of people with a 'mental health problem', but also to build better theories in general by including a more diverse range of voices.

Scott Herring (2014: p.3) sees hoarding as a social construct, arguing through a deconstruction and genealogical reconstruction of the image of the hoarder in contemporary US culture that 'we cannot comprehend hoarding without appreciating the unlikely confluence of psychiatrists, newspaper reporters, sociologists, social workers, professional organisers, online journalists, and novelists who foster representations of this supposed mental disease'. Herring (2014: p.7) understands hoarding and its representations as a kind of 'moral panic over stuff' in which socially deviant behaviours are identified, labelled and represented as problematic and worthy of scrutiny and intervention. Understanding hoarding in this way is useful as it deprivileges medical authority to speak for and speak about people labelled 'mad'. It opens us up both to considerations of the perspectives of people who hoard and to the cultural work of hoarding's media representations (see section 4.3.2).

However, framing hoarding in this way also precludes the genuine desire that many who hoard have for a 'cure' and their hopes that psychotherapeutic interventions could deliver this. Life in a hoarded home is difficult in all kinds of ways, and every person who hoards involved in this project wished they lived otherwise. Additionally, the label 'Hoarding Disorder' helps explain and legitimise behaviour, and can be experienced as useful and comforting. Motivated by this, in my work I consciously refuse to say whether Hoarding Disorder is 'really real' or a cultural invention. Instead I prefer a position informed by the idea of strategic essentialism (Spivak, 1988), which for me means effectively endorsing both and neither position. It is productive and legitimate to question the pathologisation of difference. Academic work should not assume Hoarding Disorder to be a singular phenomenon or type of experience. However, to generate positive political and personal impacts, judged by people who hoard to include a labelling of their behaviours and efforts to 'cure' them, we can at times strategically essentialise their differences and draw them together as a whole group for the sake of political claim-making. Both perspectives have merits for people who hoard, and both come with drawbacks. How we choose to use

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language here has productive effects, and I do not want to foreclose any ways of speaking which can make people's lives better. The way we talk about hoarding needs to be determined by how best, in each situation, we can maximise the positive impacts upon people's lives. Therefore, I will not endorse one position to the exclusion of the other. I think this is the most ethical position to take. I talk about specific practices and experiences, I discuss similarities and differences. I do not make a judgement about whether these differences are unhelpfully pathologised, or if they are a product of pathology.

I read scholarship on mental health in geography as developing over three distinct phases: first, work on the spaces of mental health, second, the places of mental health and, finally, experiences of 'madness'. Literature on the spaces of mental health often takes a quantitative approach. Originated by the Chicago School, and continuing today, this includes work on the spatial epidemiology of mental illness (Dean and James, 1980; Faris and Dunham, 1939; Giggs, 1973; Ngamini Ngui *et al*., 2013), location analyses of deinstitutionalised service provision (Dear and Taylor, 1982; Sixsmith, 1988; Wolch, 1980) and work on the (spatial) integration of people with a 'mental health problem' into the community (Aubry and Myner, 1996; Bond *et al*., 2004). In all of these mental illness is deployed as an unproblematic label, and work proceeds by conceptualising space in abstract terms based on the distribution of bodies and resources within it.

The next phase of development, on the places of mental health, seeks to explore how people with a 'mental health problem' live in and experience the places around them. These geographies understand place as both the context of social action and an actor in itself, shaping choices, thoughts, feelings and actions. The different places studied are all seen to have their own histories, cultures and modes of sociality which must be understood to make sense of the lives which are lived within them. This work focuses on how individuals navigate place as somewhere both socially shared and politically structured. Often studies take an ethnographic or interview-based research approach to document and understand how people with a 'mental health problem' live in and interact with places. These places include cities (Knowles, 2000; Pinfold, 2000), rural places (Parr *et al*., 2004; Parr and Philo, 2003; Philo *et al*,

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2003), institutional (Curtis *et al*., 2009; Quirk *et al*., 2004; Quirk *et* al., 2006) and semi-institutional sites of care provision (Bryant *et al*., 2011; Parr, 2000; Smith and Tucker, 2015), as well as shared community places (Brewster, 2014; McGrath and Reavey, 2013; Parr, 2008).

The final development to this literature is work on the experiences of 'madness'. This work studies the *personal* experience and production of space, rather than its social characteristics and performance. These micro-geographies look at how self and place emerge together, informing one another, in the constitution of lived experience. The emphasis is on the particular; individuals are focused on rather than the spaces or places they are to be found in. Mental illness is conceptualised not as a social category like gender, class or 'race', defined through medical discourse. Rather, it is seen to be a category of experience, a way of living in the world. I use the term 'madness' here to highlight the conceptual distance marked between normative, medicalised accounts of subjectivity and the ones these offer where 'mad' experiences are not dismissed as irrational but valued in their own right (Parr and Davidson, 2010). Also, some of these texts explicitly seek to research incidences and experiences of 'madness', the slippery and undefinable mental states of people living through delusions, panic attacks and episode of mania (Andrews, 2007; 2011; Chouinard, 2012; Davidson, 2003; Parr, 1999; Segrott and Doel, 2004; Smith *et al*., 2012; Tucker and Smith, 2013). These different ways of being in the world are productive of sensations and spatialities very different to those of 'non-mad' lives.

It is within this last tradition of work that I see my study as situated. I work with people who hoard to understand their lives and experiences as individuals, taking seriously their thoughts, feelings and practices as ways of doing and being in the world. Taking this kind of experience seriously means opening up geographical research to a greater range of perspectives, and doing this can help to avoid the production of normative geographies. I talked in my review of the geographies of home about the problematic and exclusionary way home can be framed if we do not account for the perspectives of diverse groups of people. I think that this argument can be productively extended to include, here, people who hoard. Davidson's (2003) work on agoraphobic experiences and meanings of home explores it as a site of

identity, a place where fluid ontological boundaries are stabilised in the predictable nature of home space. This leads into specific homemaking practices of a preoccupation with tidiness and cleanliness which aim to perpetuate the stable nature of the home. For arachnophobic people the home can also be instead a site of anxiety and panic, somewhere they could be confronted with a spider at any time (Smith *et al.*, 2012). This leads to specific practices designed to keep home space secure, practices such as (repeatedly) checking for spiders. It also leads to a constriction of where in one's house one can go, with cellars and attics often off-limits (Smith *et al.*, 2012). Here we find distinctive texturings and constructions of home space, ones which add to existing work on the home as an emergent spatial site. I argue that it is important to include these varied perspectives in order to learn not only about what home is like for people with phobias (or people who hoard), but to guard against creating normative or exclusionary definitions of home. I have made this argument here in terms of the meaning of home, but I think that it holds too for work on time and material culture. For example, how people who hoard relate to 'meaningful objects' differs in important ways from how meaningful possessions are framed in existing literature (Miller, 2018).

Overall, this section has argued for the importance of including the voices of people who hoard within geography, that their perspectives and their differences matter, and that we ought to make room for them. I want to conclude by noting that this should not been seen as an attempt to further ghettoise mental health, and that I am not arguing that people with a range of 'mental health problems' should be wheeled out in every study to add colour or depth. Indeed, there are likely already a wide range of perspectives of people with a 'mental health problem' in geographical research; given that around one in four people each year experience some kind of 'mental health problem' (McManus *et al.*, 2009) it is almost certain some of these people will have participated in academic geographical research. Rather, what I want to suggest is that we actively make room for these voices where it is applicable. Just as we might commonly seek a sample of people with of varying genders, classes, ethnicities and ages, we might also think about including people with a 'mental health problem', where this is pertinent to the research topic. People who hoard have a

distinct perspective on home, and therefore we should seek to include this in order that we may research and write inclusive geographies.

2.6   Conclusions

This review has introduced the key bodies of literature that I draw on in my analysis to understand clutter. I discussed, in turn, work on material culture, time, home and mental health. These reviews have been pitched at a relatively abstract and general level, in order to set the scene for what is to come and to contextualise my later discussions. In my analysis I draw together work from the different bodies of literature I review here. In this chapter I have chosen to keep them separate. This was a decision taken to help me give a focused discussion of each topic, without having to shift my attention and keep demonstrating how these ideas are mutually implicated in one another.

In this review I argued for an approach to material culture which looks at its actions, effects and affects within the context of practices, and which frames it as constitutive of identities, experiences and relationships, as well as something that works on its own material terms. Of time I argued we think of it as similarly emergent and contextual, and that we best frame its contextual emergence as working to determine which of the (multiple) dimensions of time characterise our practices and experiences. Home, I suggested, is a spatial imaginary constructed as an assemblage of dwelling, again somewhere emergent, mobile, material and mutable. As can be seen from this summary, each of these different ways of thinking about these topics shares a focus on relationality, contextuality and emergence as key theoretical priorities. What this means is that, overall, home, time and material culture are all complexly co-emergent and entangled within practices, forming life as something progressive and unfolding. How clutter works within this, as something constitutive of and constituted by its relations, is explored through empirical examples later on. While I took an easy route and heuristically pulled apart these literatures for the sake of this review, this should not be taken to characterise my understandings of them, or indeed my later analysis.

Chapter 3   Research Methods

3.1   Introduction

This chapter tells the rather chequered history of how I collected the data I draw on in this thesis. My PhD began as a study of the (home) lives and experiences of people who hoard but, due to the trouble I had finding people who wanted to take part in the project, it ended up as the study of clutter presented here. Overall, my research was spread into three distinct research strands, which I explore in turn here. These use a diverse range of methods, and so for clarity I have summarised these as table 3.1.

The first strand is discussed in section 3.2, where I outline how I conducted research with people who hoard. Section 3.2.1 covers my research methods and intentions, and is split up into five subsections. The first of these gives a summary of my project aims. The second outlines my recruitment strategy and the third how I dealt with research ethics. The fourth subsection explains how I collected data using an online qualitative survey, while the final subsection discusses the interview components of this research. I reflect on this work in section 3.2.2, discussing why I think this research did not work and what lessons I have learned from this.

The next part of the chapter (section 3.3) introduces my revised (and now current) research project on everyday homes and lives with clutter. I begin here by outlining how I designed the project to make the best of the data I did manage to collect with people who hoard while expanding on this to make room for other accounts (section 3.3.1). In section 3.3.2 I outline my strand two methods, splitting this over three subsections. The first covers how I managed recruitment, the second the arrangements I made for research ethics, as the third how I collected data in this strand of the research.

Section 3.4 looks at my strand three method, a discourse analysis of decluttering texts. Finally, section 3.5 explains my process of analysis and how I integrated all of these diverse strands of research and the data collected in them. The chapter concludes with a final note of reflection on the research overall.

	Research Conducted With:	Research Methods:	Participants:
Research Strand One	People who hoard	Stage 1: Online qualitative interview	38
		Stage 2: - Illness narrative interview - Video-voice interview - Object-elicitation interview	5 total; of which 2 completed every interview
Research Strand Two	People who do not hoard	- Photo-elicitation - Interview - House tour and photography	21 participants (18 research encounters)
Research Strand Three	Decluttering self-help texts	Discourse analysis	13 texts

Table 3.1 – Summary of Research Methods

3.2   Strand One: Research With People Who Hoard

3.2.1   Research With People Who Hoard: Methods

3.2.1.1   *Researching the Lives of People Who Hoard*

When I started my PhD I planned to explore the home lives and experiences of people who hoard. This was intended to contribute to the small but growing literature on experiences of madness (see section 2.5). I wanted to do more than this though, and speak not only about how people who hoard lead their everyday lives but also expand and challenge existing framings of how people relate to objects and how lives at home are lived. My research questions were as follows:

- To investigate how people who hoard think about themselves and (their relationship to) hoarding:
  - Consider what narratives and practices people who hoard use to understand themselves individually and collectively.
  - Consider what narratives and practices people who hoard use to understand hoarding.
  - Investigate how people who hoard's understandings of themselves are mediated by their homes and their (relationships to) objects.

- To investigate the home and homemaking practices of people who hoard:
  - To investigate how people who hoard think about their homes.
  - To investigate how and why the homes of people who hoard are important to them.
  - To find out how people who hoard create a sense of home through objects.

- To investigate what objects mean to people who hoard:
  - To discover how people who hoard use objects to construct/mediate their identities.
  - To investigate the processes of accumulation and divestment of objects of people who hoard.
  - To investigate the emotions which hoarded objects provoke for people who hoard.

To answer these I designed a project in which the data collection was spread over two stages. The first was an online qualitative survey, the second was three rounds of interviews. The first of these was an illness narrative style interview. Ahead of the second interview, participants were asked to film a tour around their homes, and were asked to watch this back before we discussed it and their feelings about their homes in general, during our second (video-voice) interview. Third came an object-elicitation interview. Before discussing these methods in more detail, I outline next how I planned and managed recruitment and then how I dealt with research ethics.

3.2.1.2   Recruiting Participants Who Hoard

When I started this research I planned to recruit my participants online. I hoped to interview 15-20 people in the second stage of this research, and to gather as many responses as possible to my survey. I began by posting advertisements about the research on internet support forums for people who hoard (with permission from group moderators), hoping this would allow me to reach a large number of people. I approached twelve forums, and received agreement to post from five. My advert invited participation in my online survey. I stated this was the first stage of my research project and that at the end of survey participants would be given a chance to contact me to be involved in the second interview stage. 38 people completed the online survey, generally giving quite detailed answers to its questions. The self-reported characteristics of these respondents are:

Gender	**Female**	**Male**
Number	35	3

Table 3.2 – Gender of Online Survey Participants

Country of Residence	**US**	**UK**	**Australia**	**Canada**
Number	29	4	4	1

Table 3.3 – Country of Residence of Online Survey Participants

Age Range	**18-25**	**26-35**	**36-45**	**46-55**	**56-65**	**Over 66**
Number	1	4	5	12	10	6

Table 3.4 – Age Range of Online Survey Participants

As these tables show, the majority of survey respondents were middle-aged women living in the US. Respondents did not therefore represent a very diverse group. Part of this can be attributed to hoarding tending to 'worsen' with age (BPS, 2015), meaning people taking part are likely already to be older. In addition to this, the majority of people using the forums where the research was advertised are women in the US. This is evident from posts to the forum, and is something some participants also noted in survey responses. Therefore, while this sample is not representative of the population as a whole, it is fairly representative of those who saw the advert.

Whether participants who hoard have different perspectives based on their gender or country of residence cannot be detected in my work, due to a lack of sample diversity. Differences of this type are not reported in other literature on hoarding.

Only two people (Barbara and Pearl[2]) who completed the survey also took part in stage two of strand one. I therefore needed to change my recruitment strategy. I looked beyond online communities and attempted to find gatekeepers who could make potential participants aware of my research and pass on my contact details to them. I contacted all professional declutterers in the north of England and in London (37 in total, found through web-searching); a small proportion agreed to inform their clients about the research, but this generated no participants. I searched online and contacted thirteen housing associations in Leeds, Kirklees, Bradford and Manchester; none responded to help me find participants. I contacted all professional counsellors in a fifteen-mile radius of Leeds (83 in total) who advertised as being able to treat people who hoard (searching on www.counselling-directory.org.uk); a small number responded and agreed to inform their clients about the research, but this did not generate any new participants. I contacted 25 face-to-face support groups which welcome people who hoard in the north of England and in London; some agreed to help with the project. I attended one support group in person to talk about the research, generating one participant (Linda). A participant from a different support group who was made aware of the research also contacted me to take part (Simon).

One final participant was found by chance (Sally). She responded to my strand two advertisement and informed me she saw herself as someone who hoards. I gave Sally the option of taking part in either strand one or strand two research and she chose strand one. Table 3.5 summarises my sample and data collection for my interviews with people who hoard:

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[2] Pseudonyms have been used here, and throughout my thesis, to replace participants' names. This is discussed in section 3.2.1.3.

Name	Age (Approx.)	Location	House Type	House Size	Interviews Completed
Barbara	65	USA	Detached house	4 bedrooms (2 spare), 2 reception	All
Pearl	65	Australia	Detached house	5 bedrooms (4 spare), 2 reception, garage	First
Simon	50	UK	Semi-detached	3 bedrooms (2 spare), 2 reception, garage	All (no filming)
Linda	50	UK	Detached house	4 bedrooms (3 spare), 2 reception, garage	First
Sally	50	Dunfield	Detached house	6 bedrooms (3 spare), 2 reception, garage	First

Table 3.5 – Sample of Interviewed Participants Who Hoard

This sample comprises four women and one man. All participants were home owners, and all lived in large properties. This sample is therefore not representative of people who hoard or the population as a whole. However, given that the number of people who have taken part is so small to begin with it would be very difficult to attribute any differences between their responses to structural factors rather than personal ones anyway. The problem here is the sample size, much more so than its skew.

3.2.1.3   Research Ethics

I designed my methods in response to the ESRC's (2015) framework for research ethics. It gives six key principles which guide ethical research, and which they expect ESRC funded research to use. For brevity I have condensed these down to three: the need to avoid harm and maximise benefits to participants; the need for consent to participate to be free and informed; the need to respect participants' desires for anonymity and ensure confidentiality of information they give. I explain how I dealt with each of these in turn.

Hoarding is a sensitive topic, defined by Lee and Renzetti (1993: p.5, original emphasis) as '*one that potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or the researched the collection, holding and/or dissemination of research data*'. Conducting research into 'mental health problems' threatens to distress participants, while holding and

disseminating data on this subject without proper safeguards risks identifying respondents who may then be stigmatised. However, in a review of several studies assessing the harm caused by taking part in research on sensitive topics, Jorm *et al*. (2007) found few respondents actually reported any long-term ill effects. However, it is argued that even if participants are negatively affected this does not necessarily mean that they should be prevented from telling their stories (Draucker *et al*., 2009). Additionally, as Jorm *et al*. (2007) note, negative feelings following interviews do not preclude positive ones; one can find an interview stressful and still feel that participation was beneficial. The benefits of taking part in difficult research include catharsis, empowerment, self-acknowledgement, healing and a sense of purpose (Hutchins *et al*., 1994).

To minimise any potential harm arising through the process of research I took steps before, during and after research contact to safeguard participants' welfare. Before contact I familiarised myself with key topics and terminology used by people who hoard through reading self-help information and looking through support websites; this helped ensure research encounters were conducted in a culturally safe way (Goodrum and Keys, 2007; Sieber, 1993). During interviews I was flexible, allowing participants leeway in guiding the conversation in order to stay away from difficult topics while still covering the preselected areas in my interview guide. I provided participants with generic helpline information after completing the online survey they could use to seek support should they find participation distressing. I ended all interviews on a more positive note, reflecting on progress with decluttering or on the support participants told me they had available to them.

Participants were given information about the research at the start of the online survey. Those who took part in stage two of this first strand of my research were given a further information sheet about this part of the project. These are available in appendix I. For both stages of the project participants were informed of: the aims, risks and benefits of the research; that I had no conflicts of interest; the process of the research; how their data would be stored, used and disseminated; that interviews would be recorded using a digital audio recorder; how to ask further questions about the project; that they are under no obligation to participate and can

withdraw at any time. Before being able to complete the survey participants had to click to confirm they agree to take part, that they have read and understood the project information, and to confirm their eligibility (being over 18 years old and self-identifying as someone who hoards). Participants who took part in stage two of this strand of research were given either a paper or an online consent form to complete (depending on whether their interview was face-to-face or via Skype) before data collection began.

Part of the consent process is understanding that information given will be kept confidential, as well as the limits of this. I transcribed all interview data and then pseudonymised it by replacing direct and indirect identifiers, recognising this as a necessary evil which involves a loss of important contextual information (Tilley and Woodthorpe, 2011). Pseudonymised data, and original research recordings, were held encrypted on the University of Leeds server. On the consent forms participants were given the option to allow their data to be placed on an online data repository, accessible only to other researchers. (Placement of data in such a repository is a requirement placed upon me by the funder of my research, the ESRC.) Agreeing for data to be placed in a repository was optional for participants. Only three respondents to my online survey and one interviewee who hoards did not agree to this. Data has now been submitted to the UK Data Service ReShare programme.

Video data was kept confidential and only used for analysis; I did not give the option to make this available because it is too difficult to pseudonymise without unacceptable data distortion. Participants were not offered the choice whether to have their data pseudonymised or not. Some participants can be unhappy with this (Wiles *et al.*, 2008) and enforcing pseudonymity can be construed as a paternalistic suppression of participants' voices (Giordano *et al.*, 2007). I made this difficult decision to mitigate harm. While I accept people who hoard should be allowed to be identifiable if they wish to be, there may be consequences for others who are affected by this disclosure, for example family members (Shulman, 1990). Being identified as living in what may be seen as squalid conditions could be stigmatising, and I would suggest that people who hoard do not have the right to impose this on others, whose privacy I am also obligated to maintain.

This research was granted ethical approval following a full ethical review by the University of Leeds Faculty Ethics Committee. When I changed my recruitment strategy I applied for and was granted an amendment to this ethical approval. Research began only once approval was granted.

3.2.1.4   Online Survey of People Who Hoard

Once participants had consented to take part in the online survey they were presented with a series of questions. The first page asked three background questions, with participants asked to type their gender and what country they live in and to select an age range from a series of options. Following this were nine open-ended questions, posed one per page. Participants were provided with a text box to type their responses into. None of these questions were mandatory, meaning that participants were able to avoid giving answers which could distress them. The questions asked in the survey are in appendix II. Before the data was submitted participants were reminded that they had the option at that stage not to submit their responses, and that once submitted their data could not be removed from the study. The online survey was hosted securely on Bristol Online Survey (now known as Online Surveys – see www.onlinesurveys.ac.uk).

I chose to use an online survey for two reasons. First, I wanted to gather a breadth of responses from a range of participants. I wanted this breadth to complement the in-depth nature of my planned second stage of research. The questions I asked were designed to address all of my research aims and objectives. They progressed over four thematic areas. The first asked about hoarding, its onset, management and effects. I then asked about how participants relate to objects, before asking about how they relate to their homes. I asked about how participants manage their hoarding before ending the survey by enquiring about the role of their hoarding support forum in their life. The survey concluded by giving participants the opportunity to write about anything else they felt was important to them, and to give feedback on the survey. The second reason I conducted this survey was to gain familiarity with the lives and experiences of people who hoard ahead of my interviews.

This had a double benefit of allowing me to craft interview questions to cover topics pertinent to them I may not have considered, as well as to help identify particularly sensitive areas in which I would know to tread carefully.

My survey responses were a very useful source of information for me, which I draw on over the course of my analysis. The mean average response was 720 words, with participants writing as many as 2292 words and as few as 73 words. No questions seemed to generate particularly long or short answers, and no questions were often left unanswered (excepting the two concluding questions). I did not find any sensitivities that I did not expect, although reading through this data did confirm that (the experience of) hoarding is a sensitive subject. Participants' responses were candid; they explained their thoughts and feelings, often noting where these were opaque to themselves, and they gave facts and told stories about their lives and lifestyles. Responses were sometimes performative of the feelings they expressed, sometimes conversational and directly addressed to me, and often very descriptive and clearly written. This means my data is high quality. I imagine the familiarity participants had with writing on these issues, gained through their membership of online support forums, was the driver of this. As I asked participants about the full range of topics I was interested in discussing, I have been able to draw on this data to support my arguments in numerous areas. Overall this was a useful exercise which paid dividends, especially in retrospect since without this source of data my insight into the lives of people who hoard would be much more limited.

3.2.1.5   Interviews with People Who Hoard

Five participants completed the first interview of stage two of my data collection. This explored their lives, life histories, perceptions of themselves, how they think about hoarding and its impact on themselves and others. This interview was intended as the first of three, meant to 'set the scene' and allow me to get to know participants and how they understand and experience hoarding. This information was intended to contextualise our later discussions about their homes and their relationships to their possessions. An interview guide for this interview, and all other interviews in this

strand of the research, is available in appendix III. I intended to draw on this interview to answer my first research aim. I describe this first interview as a semi-structured illness narrative style interview. I chose a semi-structured approach to allow participants to guide our conversation and avoid me pressing them on sensitive topics, while also maintaining enough consistency between interviews to ensure they covered the same key themes (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Illness narrative interviews are widely used in qualitative research exploring life with a (mental) health problem (for example, Atkinson, 2009; Harden, 2005; Hydén, 1997; Roe and Davidson, 2005). They can be used in a structured way (Groleau *et al.*, 2006) or implemented less strictly, as I chose to do. My interview sought to learn both facts about hoarding in participants' lives, for example its onset and its effects, as well as the cultural frames within which these experiences are situated and understood (Bury, 2001). Understanding how participants think about hoarding was important for me, as researchers often find narratives and understandings articulated by participants which would not be endorsed by medical professionals (Hydén, 1997; Lillrank, 2003).

At time of research there were no studies of the narratives which people who hoard use to understand hoarding. I therefore needed to find this out for myself, as I could not use medical accounts to learn about participants' beliefs. I found a variety of ways of understanding and presenting hoarding, though these are not reported on here as my work shifted away from interrogating this. Discrepancies between medical narratives and those of people who hoard have recently been reported in work by David Orr and colleagues (2017); they explore the varied ways people who hoard interpret and frame their behaviours.

Only one participant, Barbara, fully participated in my next interview method, which I describe as video-voice (after the photovoice method pioneered by Wang and Burris, 1997). Another, Simon, completed the interview without the associated filming. This stage of the research looked at how people who hoard think about, live in and relate to their homes. Photovoice is a technique often deployed in work with people living with a 'mental health problem', drawn on for its potential to facilitate the inclusion of people with varying linguistic capabilities and for the accessible way it allows participants agency in their self-presentations (Cabassa *et al.*, 2012; Fullana *et*

al., 2014; Han and Oliffe, 2016). It is also used among other marginalised groups to give them agency in their self-presentations, and to make the research process interesting and therefore something (more) participants want to take part it (Bolton *et al*., 2001; Johnsen *et al*., 2008; Packard, 2008).

Photovoice involves participants taking photographs as a research method, and then reflecting on these in an interview; my video-voice method involved participants making films and then talking about them. I hoped that by asking participants to film 'home tours' I would allow them to choose without pressure where in their homes to show, and where to conceal, making this an ethical way to access data on this particularly sensitive issue. I chose video for this method, in preference to photography, for three main reasons. First, video is useful as its ability to be re-watched means it is akin to ethnographic note-taking, something which can be revisited and reconsidered in the light of new findings (Pink, 2011). Second, video records more 'background' than photographs; I wanted to avoid participants showing me only (particularly) cluttered areas and not recording the more 'mundane' spaces I was also interested in exploring. Third, video captures experiences as they emerge and records movements through and engagements with/in place (Lorimer, 2010; Pink, 2007); I wanted to study everyday interactions with/in the home, thus making video a better choice for generating insights into the lived and experiential qualities of the domestic.

Participants were given limited instructions (in appendix III), making room for them to respond creatively if they wished to (Holliday, 2004). I asked that tours cover the activities that take place in different rooms, what objects are located in them and how participants feel about them. I stated participants were free to approach this task as they chose, but I also gave four varied ideas on how this could be done. These were provided in case participants did not want to come up with an original presentational strategy. These offered a range of possibilities and signalled the diversity of responses I would be pleased to receive. Participants were asked to send me the videos after filming. These were to be a source of data in their own right, as well as the basis of our subsequent interviews.

I created a generic interview guide to be tailored to explore each film, as well as wider questions I wanted to answer. I asked participants watch their films before our interview so that their contents were fresh in their minds, meaning they would not struggle to answer specific questions about things shown. Interviews were designed to find out about the presentational choices made in the filmmaking process, their feelings about the process, how participants lived in and experienced their homes, as well as more generally their understandings of and feelings in the home. Interviewing here worked to add back in information about what happened around the filming, information which can sometimes be lost in the process of recording (Simpson, 2011).

In the end only Barbara made a video. Simon just took part in the interview, answering questions about his home in general and some specific questions on the rooms within his house and his thoughts about them. Overall it is hard to judge the success of this method, given the sample size of one. It was though created thoughtfully to balance my interests and those of participants. I reflect in section 3.2.2 that this filming may have hindered my recruitment. Therefore, while I would suggest this works as a way to gather data on lives at home, for participants who hoard this approach does not seem to have been the right one to take.

The final portion of the research was an object-elicitation interview, which only Barbara and Simon completed. This was designed to explore what objects mean to people who hoard (research aim three). This approach was suggested to me by Zemirah Moffatt, a visual anthropologist and professional declutterer. She has used this way of asking questions about and around specific objects in her work as a declutterer (Moffatt, no date), as well as in academic work conducted with Jennie Morgan (see Morgan, 2016). My object-elicitation method involved providing participants with a list of different kinds of objects to find before we met, and then asking them a series of questions about them in an interview. The objects to find were: an object you were given as a present; an object that says something about you; something that means a lot to you; a piece of clutter; a piece of rubbish; something that you're saving to use in the future.

Object-elicitation as a specific research method is not widely reported on (although see examples published after I developed my approach, both researching

clothing: Iltanen and Topo, 2015; Woodward, 2016). I referred to this method as 'object stories research' to my participants. This was to avoid unnecessary jargon, but this term is also more suggestive of what I wanted to achieve here. There are four elements to this. First, work on material culture frames it as a central actor or constituent in everyday lives and relationships (see review in section 6.3). Narratives are important in this, as ways of telling stories about the self through objects which work as mediators or representations (section 6.3.2). By asking participants to tell me about objects, especially objects which mean a lot to them, I was therefore also asking them to tell me about themselves. Second, object stories as a term equally seems to refer to the stories or histories of objects themselves, rather than our personal tales told through objects. I wanted to get a sense of the social life of the things which people who hoard own (Appadurai, 1986), and trace the ways in which they move in and out of homes and lives. Third, I wanted to make room for the affective relations participants have with objects, and to recognise their material capacities to act and affect (see section 2.2). To do this I asked participants to hold objects while we talked, to allow them to engage with their physical materiality, in addition to reflecting on them as representations (see Brown, 2001; Miller, In preparation). Finally, I wanted our conversations about specific objects to form a way in to talking about more abstract and conceptual issues. Interviews which reflect on photographs are understood to offer this (Warren, 2005); I hoped that interviews with objects would do the same, allowing me to talk about things like the meaning of clutter and how objects can represent identity by looking at specific case studies.

Each object story began with a description. We then talked about where the object had come from, how it is used and related to currently and concluded by looking to its future. I did generate some interesting data from this, but on reflection I think my method was too broad and shallow. Were I to repeat it I would ask fewer questions about fewer objects, but try and talk about them at greater length. Taking an innovative and relatively novel approach did mean that I had less to draw on when designing my method, and so more room to err. I do though want to temper this reflection by again noting my small sample size, which means any conclusion about the quality of this method can only be tentative.

3.2.2   Research With People Who Hoard: Reflections

Overall my ways of gathering data with people who hoard represent an innovative suite of methods, and in this they stand in contrast to wider work on the geographies of mental health which tends generally to be quite conservative in how it works with participants to gather data, focusing overwhelmingly (although by no means exclusively) on interviews and participant observation (see Andrews *et al.*, 2014). While I did not manage to get as many participants to take part in my methods as I would have liked, I think this is good work which I stand behind. It is hard to judge the value of these approaches individually given my small sample size, however the data which I generated was, I believe, of high quality. Also, a total of 38 fairly detailed survey responses and nine interviews of around one hour each is not an inconsiderable about of data. I have analysed and reported on it in two conference presentations exploring hoarding in different ways (Miller, 2016; 2018) and prepared a journal article manuscript, currently In preparation for *cultural geographies* after revisions have been requested (Miller, In preparation). I also integrate this data into the research reported here on clutter (see section 3.5).

I want to conclude my account of the research I did with people who hoard by reflecting on why I think this project did not work. There are three reasons. First, hoarding is a sensitive subject on which people are reluctant to speak. This makes recruitment more difficult. Second, people who hoard are a relatively hard to access population. I had to use gatekeepers in every recruitment method I tried, relying on their cooperation and support. Some were very helpful and supportive, but most of them ignored my requests. If I could have communicated directly with more people who hoard the situation may have been different. Finally, I think that my research design also made recruitment more difficult, specifically my plan to use house tour videos. It is notable that while five participants completed the first interview, three dropped out before completing the filming. In email conversations Barbara expressed uncertainty about this, but did eventually complete this aspect of the research. Simon took part in all interviews, but chose not to complete the filming. We talked about why this was in his (revised) second interview:

> **Simon**: Like if a load of your students or, yeah, said "We want to come in" I'd say "Of course you can", and if somebody said "Do you mind if I just", [mimes taking a photograph] I'd say "Well I'd rather you not really" and, I wouldn't mind you taking a picture of me but not of all everywhere because then it's your house somewhere else, you see. [...] I don't mind [answering questions] about past, present, future, you know what my intentions are, don't mind, but I don't really want filming. [...]
>
> **Alex**: So does it feel kind of more permanent or, kind of more final to make a film, rather than talking about it, once you've recorded it…
>
> **Simon**: … yeah, yeah because at the moment it's transient, it's a work in progress. [...] You see if, it's just like, I wouldn't mind going on the television if nobody I knew was going to watch, but you see there's bound to be somebody that knows, either knows me or knows somebody "I think your neighbour or your friend was on the television, I've recorded it, do you want to have a look, eugh".

In this quote we can see that for Simon the issue is not me seeing his home, in fact he offered to take me on a tour before we conducted our first interview, which I accepted. There seem to be three other problems here. First, filming creates a permanent record of what Simon says is a temporary state, so by taking these images he is fixed at this point. Second, Simon seems to worry that these images might be published, where he says 'it's your house somewhere else', despite my assurances this would not happen. Finally, and I think perhaps fatally for this research, Simon connects the filming with TV programmes on hoarding, where he segues from talking about filming for this project to filming for television. Like almost all other participants who hoard, Simon feels that programmes about hoarding are exploitative and that they create and perpetuate negative stereotypes about people who hoard. Potential participants who made this connection are likely to have been put off from taking part. I might here have shown more sensitivity in how I designed my research to prevent this fear from arising. Filming was an interesting method, which I put thought into designing and had imagined to be an ethically sensitive approach. It was not though integral to the success of the project, and if I had the chance to do this again it is not something which I would use. I do however feel it is unlikely that this change alone would have led to me getting enough of a response to make this viable as a topic for my thesis, but it would likely have improved my response rate.

3.3 Strand Two: Understanding Clutter

3.3.1   Understanding Clutter: A New Research Direction

I found myself a year into my PhD and without a viable project; I saw that I had two choices, either to quit or to think of a new research topic. I chose not to quit. As should already be clear, I shifted my research focus to think about clutter in everyday homes and lives. I have already introduced the project and its aims and objectives (section 1.3). In chapter two I situated it within geographical scholarship and showed to what bodies of literature it speaks. In this section my aim is to explain how and why I decided to do this project in the first place.

I found myself with rich, interesting data gathered from people who hoard, just not enough of it. What I wanted to do was to make the most of what I had, and find a way to use it in a revised research project. I felt that throwing away this data would have wronged the people who hoard that shared their stories with me. I felt a responsibility to try and tell their stories in a respectful and true way. One option I had was to keep the same research focus, the lives of people who hoard, and change my research method. Having already exhausted my attempts to find participants who hoard I would have needed to look for other data sources. There is an abundance of media outputs which depict hoarding, but these are already well mined by other academics (Eddy, 2014; Kaplan, 2014; Lepselter, 2011). Talking to therapists and declutterers was another option, but I was concerned about setting up a contrast between these 'expert' voices and those of people who hoard. Rather than cement a framing of people who hoard as 'ill' and in need of expert intervention, I wanted instead to stay true to my original intentions to study the everyday and to take people who hoard seriously as knowledgeable and meaning-making agents in their own lives.

To do this I knew that I had to change my research topic. I thought about what the central issue in hoarding was, what made it distinct, and saw that it was the presence of clutter in people's home. Clutter was something I was already therefore investigating, and invested in, and I knew already there was an absence of research on this topic (see review in section 4.3.3). This seemed to me to be a gap which I could fill. I decided that I could use the data I already had on how people who hoard think about objects and their homes as part of my wider study of clutter in everyday homes

and lives. I saw that some of these everyday lives could be those of people who hoard, and that I could add in data collected with people who do not hoard. The next section (3.3.2) outlines how I recruited people who do not hoard to talk about clutter, and the methods by which I generated data with them. These research encounters sought to explore life at home for these participants, and to learn about the role and meanings of clutter in their lives. This approach is similar to the work I did with people who hoard, although with them I did not focus so strongly on clutter as a concept. To contextualise the data gathered from participants, and to understand clutter as a cultural discourse, I also completed a discourse analysis on self-help texts about decluttering. Together these methods added to and extended the work already conducted with people who hoard, allowing me to talk about clutter in general.

I believe that reframing my project has, perhaps counterintuitively, better enabled me to meet some of the goals I set myself for this project. One of the reasons I originally wanted to explore the practices and experiences of people who hoard was to challenge the under-representation of the actual day-to-day experiences of people with a 'mental health problem' in geographical research (see section 2.5). I also wanted my work to develop framings of home and objects, which are conceptually founded upon the exclusion of non-normative practices to make 'general' arguments (section 2.5). By changing my research approach, and including the voices of people who hoard within what counts as 'everyday' perspectives on the home, I am directly addressing this marginalisation in how I practice and write about my research. Rather than championing marginal voices from the outside, and arguing that they should be let it, I now instead include them myself and demonstrate, not just argue for, the value of their inclusion. This means that I see my research as a project about clutter, which includes people who hoard as one (potential) form of difference. In my work, as I explore in more detail in section 3.5, I am not trying to compare and contrast the experiences of people who hoard with people who do not. Instead I look across my data for patterns and trends, and then see whether (and which) structural factors explain this. These include whether the respondent is someone who hoards, but also their age, gender, lifestyle, the size of their home and so on.

With the luxury of hindsight I am glad my initial research plans failed. At the time this was, frankly, terrifying, as I watched my chances of completion drift further away with each week that passed without any participants coming forward. Today I feel that my work is all the better for this. Clutter itself is an interesting and, I believe, an important topic in its own right. It is one where people who hoard have something to contribute to add to an array of voices, which come from a range of backgrounds and perspectives, to talk about clutter at home.

3.3.2   Understanding Clutter: Research Methods

3.3.2.1   Recruiting People to Talk About Clutter

To recruit participants into my research on clutter I decided to advertise to them directly. First in this section I talk about how I designed my advert, then how I distributed it and finally what sample this method of recruitment achieved for me.

I created an advert which took the form of an A5 postcard that I put through people's letterboxes (reproduced as images 3.1 and 3.2). The postcard addressed readers directly, to draw them in to the text and to make it feel accessible. I was aware that for some participating in academic research might seem intimidating, so chose a conversational style, for example using the slang term 'neat freak'. The text on the front of the advert was also intended to convey the range of different people I was interested in finding for the project, to make sure that everyone who read it felt that they would be welcome to take part. The back of the postcard contained key information about the research, and directed potential participants to either contact me directly or to look online at my University of Leeds webpage where further information was available. The website text available to participants is reproduced in appendix IV. This answered more key questions about the research, and had links to the full project information sheet and consent form.

To maximise participation rates I referred to my research as being about 'home storage, organisation and clutter'. Participation rates in research are highest when people feel they have something worth contributing (Kristensen and Ravn, 2015), so by highlighting the range of different things I was interested in (and indeed have

Bit of a hoarder?
A neat freak?
Something in-between?
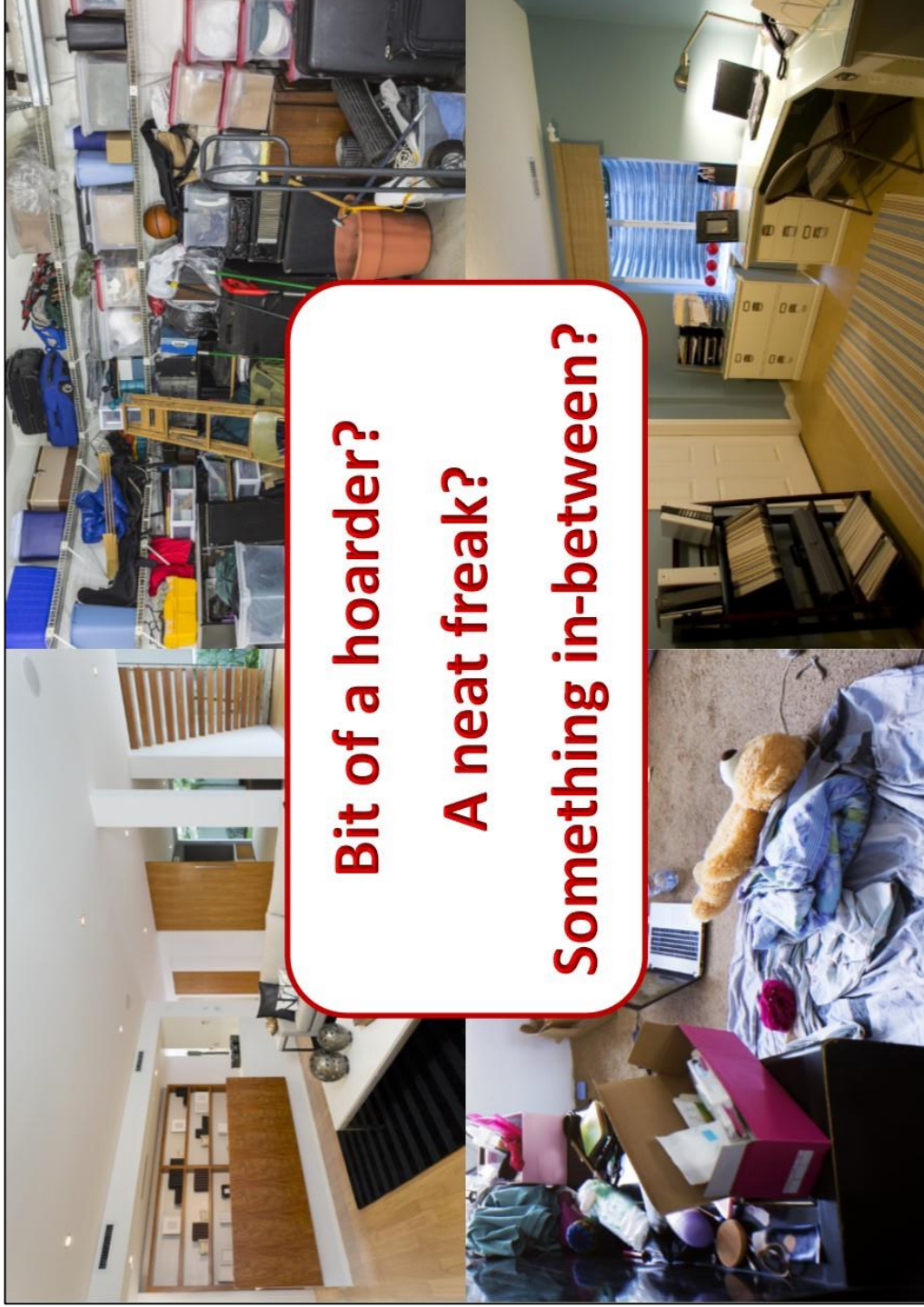
Image 3.1 – Postcard Advertisement for Clutter Research (Front)

Participants Needed For Research on Home Storage, Organisation and Clutter.

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Hello,

My name is Alex Miller, and I'm conducting academic research on home storage, organisation and clutter in your local area.

I'm inviting you to take part in the research, which explores the different things that people do with their belongings in their homes. The research looks at what people decide to keep, store and throw away, and the reasons why. It also looks at how people go about storing the things they own, exploring people's practices and their thoughts about them.

Your participation would involve an interview, which would be conducted in your home. This would explore your thoughts about home storage and organisation, and the different ways in which you think about your belongings. You would be asked to give a guided tour of your home, focussing on areas where you store things and areas which you think are organised and/or disorganised. In total this will take only around two hours. Everyone is welcome to take part in the research project, so long as they are older than 18.

If you are interested in finding out more, please visit the project website. Alternatively, please get in touch to request the same information by phone, email or post, or if you have any questions about the research.

Many thanks,

Alex Miller

WEB: www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/people/person/a.miller **POST:** FAO Alex Miller,

EMAIL: gy10ajm@leeds.ac.uk

School of Geography, University of Leeds

PHONE: 07429824408

Leeds, LS2 9JT

Image 3.2 – Postcard Advertisement for Clutter Research (Back)

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reported on in my thesis) I sought to maximise recruitment. Drawing out related themes aimed to generate responses from people with a range of different relationships to clutter. I also tried to achieve a varied sample by carefully selecting the images I chose to go on the front. Home life and the management of objects within it are normatively female concerns. I worried that this would lead to an under-representation of men in the research, so I chose images of two more stereotypically masculine spaces, a garage and a study, to try and prevent this and to show the breadth of the areas within and experiences of home I looked to explore. Permission to use these images was purchased from Shutterstock from their range of stock photography. My use of images was also designed to be eye-catching. I worried my advert could be overlooked as junk mail and discarded unread. For this reason I chose to have them printed on A5 postcards, using a relatively thick (recycled and recyclable) cardstock. This is an unusual format for an advert, helping it to stand out. The postcard form was also a good choice because it feels quite approachable and friendly, as postcards connote holidays and messages exchanged between friends.

Once I had designed these adverts the next step was to get them out to potential participants. I literally did the legwork here, putting them through letter boxes myself by hand. I aimed to achieve a varied sample of around 20 people. I initially chose to conduct research in a single location. 'Dunfield'[3] is a small town in the north of England. It has a mixed residential population with areas of council/ex-council housing, traditional terraced housing and larger detached homes in more rural/peripheral areas. It has easy access to two cities meaning many residents commute to their work. The variety of housing types in Dunfield, and its accessibility, led me to choose this as my (primary) fieldwork location. At the start of the research I generated a relatively complex sampling frame to include a cross-section of housing types and tenure types, analysing data from the ONS 2011 Census to do this. I refined this to seeking small, medium and large houses, and flats. In Dunfield the presence of large and medium properties in an area correlates positively with home-ownership, and negatively with all forms of renting. The presence of flats and small properties

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[3] Place names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

correlates equally positively overall with both private and social renting, while correlating negatively with levels of home ownership. A sample of large and medium properties therefore is likely to yield a large proportion of home owners; a sample of small properties and flats will include large numbers of social and private renters. Houses make up over 90% of Dunfield's housing stock so flats needed to be specifically targeted. I initially visited the three Census Output Areas with the greatest concentrations of each housing type in Dunfield to advertise my research, identified by from ONS 2011 Census data.

This strategy was less successful than I hoped it would be. My responses rates for 'large houses' was high, but I received few responses from participants in other housing types. I supplemented this by expanding my study site to two further locations, each with a large quantity of small housing. These were 'Foxclough', a town slightly larger than Dunfield, set in the countryside and further away from neighbouring cities, and 'Werley', a desirable village with good amenities and strong transport links to nearby urban areas. I found three participants by doing this, and I also used my personal networks to generate two more participants with interesting takes on the issue of clutter: Laura is a friend of mine who I asked to take part because she was moving to a new home, in her late 30s, after having returned to live with her father for a few years and finding their shared clutter an annoyance. Mary is a recently widowed friend of my mother's, whose husband was someone who hoards, currently engaged in decluttering their shared home after her husband's death. Neither lived in advertised-to areas.

My final sample for this part of the research was 18 interviews involving a total of 21 people (three interviews conducted on a joint basis). Pseudonymised information about my participants is collated in table 3.6. This sample is not balanced. There are fifteen women in this part of the research and six men. This over-representation of women is likely to be related to the topic which I chose to study, the home and the objects kept within it. This could be considered problematic; however, I did not notice any significant gender differences in participants' practices or in their accounts of them. In interviews conducted with couples on a joint basis, where such differences might be more visible since I had the opportunity to compare accounts

Name	Age (Approx.)	Location	House Type	Tenure	House Size
Ann	70	Dunfield	Flat	Owner-occupied	2 bedrooms (1 spare), 1 reception, study, garage
Catherine	70	Dunfield	Detached house	Owner-occupied	2 bedrooms (1 spare), 2 reception, study, garage, loft
Charlotte	35	Dunfield	Detached house	Owner-occupied	3 bedrooms (1 spare), 2 reception
Diana	35	Foxclough	Terraced house	Owner-occupied	3 bedrooms (2 spare), 1 reception, cellar, loft
Ed and Sarah	35; 35	Dunfield	Detached house	Owner-occupied	4 bedrooms (3 spare), 2 reception, garage
Emma	30	Werley	Terraced house	Private rented	1 bedroom (none spare), 1 reception, study, cellar
Francesca	45	Werley	Terraced house	Owner-occupied	3 bedrooms (2 spare), 1 reception, cellar
George	70	Dunfield	Detached house	Owner-occupied	4 bedrooms (3 spare), 2 reception, study, attic, garage
Ian and Claire	70; 65	Dunfield	Detached house	Owner-occupied	3 bedrooms (2 spare), 2 reception, study, garage, loft
John	65	Dunfield	Detached house	Owner-occupied	2 bedrooms (none spare), 1 reception, garage
Laura	35	Other	Terraced house	Owner-occupied	2 bedrooms (none spare), 1 reception
Liz	55	Dunfield	Detached house	Owner-occupied	4 bedrooms (3 spare), 3 reception, study, garage
Mary	65	Other	Detached house	Owner-occupied	5 bedrooms (4 spare), 2 reception, garage, loft
Sadie	40	Dunfield	Terraced house	Owner-occupied	4 bedrooms (none spare), 2 reception, garage, cellar
Sandra	50	Dunfield	Detached house	Owner-occupied	3 bedrooms (1 spare), 2 reception, study, loft, garage, cellar
Sue	65	Dunfield	Detached house	Owner-occupied	3 bedrooms (none spare), 2 reception, garage
Tim	65	Dunfield	Flat	Private rented	Studio flat
Viv and Will	75; 75	Dunfield	Detached house	Owner-occupied	3 bedroom (2 spare), attic, garage

Table 3.6 – Sample of Participants Recruited to Talk About Clutter

directly, I did not notice particularly gendered ways of relating to home or objects. For example, Viv expressed a greater degree of sentimentality and reported keeping more memory objects than her husband Will, whereas Ed was the sentimental one in his relationship with Sarah. A larger sample might have made broad gender differences more noticeable, but my research design emphasises depth instead and so offers detailed accounts of understandings and practices.

Another noticeable skew in this sample include an under-representation of people living in flats and people renting their homes (only two participants for each of these). In research on the home and on material culture, tenure type (Easthorpe, 2014; Miller, 1988) and house size (Fairhurst, 1999; Nethercote and Horne, 2016) have both been reported on as impacting upon practices and understandings of home. Nobody I spoke with lived with housemates rather than a partner or a family member. The impact of living with housemates has not been explored much in work on home and its material culture (although see Cieraad, 2010). My research cannot be said necessarily to represent the experiences of people living in these kinds of housing situations. This being said, scholars on these topics do not report radically different lifestyles for their participants. Differences are generally quite minor, and very different ways of understandings ideas like home and the role of objects within it have not been reported. So, while my research cannot say with certainty it speaks to all forms of experience, it does not seem very likely that repeating this work with people in different kinds of homes would yield especially different results.

All participants in this part of the research were born and raised in the UK, and all were from a white British background. This means that the norms and values which participants expressed to me reflect, to a greater or lesser extent, their membership of this cultural group. I showed in section 2.2 the role which one's cultural, social and historical context plays in working to produce how people live with and alongside material culture. Therefore, I cannot and do not suggest that the findings reported here will necessarily hold true for people who are not part of the same cultural group from which my participants are drawn.

Overall, the skews within my sample, which mean it does not represent all people living in the UK, and certainly not all people across the globe, could be framed

as a drawback. I would, however, suggest a different interpretation. Given the importance of socio-cultural and historical context to understandings of and practices with material culture (see section 2.2) having this shared foundation allows me to see more clearly both the role individual choices play and to identify shared structural factors which work to produce ideas and behaviours. Whether and to what extent the ways of being with clutter reported here are common to people living in different times and places remains an open question, one to be solved through either explicitly comparative research, or another research project the findings of which could be compared to the ones given here.

3.3.2.2   Research Ethics

When I designed my research methods for this part of my project I again took ethics seriously. Clutter in everyday homes is not necessarily a sensitive subject, and so I was less concerned about instituting distress protocols than I had been for my work with people who hoard. However, I still tried to take a thoughtful approach and recognise that I was asking people to welcome me into their homes and show me places within it which might be kept off limits to other visitors.

I tried to maintain consistency between this part of the project and my work involving people who hoard in terms of the ethics arrangements. Arrangements for the collection, storage and dissemination of data remained unchanged. This was, first, because I believed that my approach was already well considered. Second, because to be allowed to conduct this project I needed to apply for a second amendment to my ethical approval. I therefore tried to avoid rocking the boat here and to keep as much the same as I could. Generally this was unproblematic. However, this drive for consistency did lead me to not offer participants the opportunity to waive their right to anonymity in publications. As I discussed above (section 3.2.1.3), this can be understood as problematic, and given the less sensitive nature of this research I did not feel that enforcing pseudonymity was an ethical necessity here. In the end though no participants questioned this. Indeed, many were keen to know how I would keep their data safe, and asked me to explain the process of pseudonymisation to them.

This does not seem to have been experienced as a problem for the people who took part in this research.

My advertisement indicated that participants could go to my webpage (appendix IV), or contact me, for more information. Copies of the information sheet and consent form for the project were made available to them at this time (reproduced in the appendix IV). I brought paper copies of these when I met with participants, and gave them another opportunity to read them and to ask me questions before they signed to confirm they were happy to take part in the research. The consent form again offered participants the opportunity to have their data placed in an online research bank, viewable to other researchers, following the same procedures described above (section 3.2.1.3). Twenty participants agreed to this, and their data have been submitted to the UK Data Service ReShare project. Participants were also given the option whether to allow photographs taken during the house tour to be used in publications associated with the research. I was concerned that photographs might be potentially identifiable, if viewers were familiar with the home or possessions of my participants. All participants agreed to the publications of photographs.

3.3.2.3   Research Methods to Understand Clutter

The methods I used to collect data in this strand of the research were photo-elicitation, a semi-structed interview and a house tour during which I took photographs. Interview materials for this part of the research are held in appendix V. I had also planned return visits to my participants to engage in participant observation, but as I describe below this method was not pursued. Before my first research visit I piloted these methods, giving them a dry run by roping in a friend to take part. I made some changes to my initial plans on the basis of this pilot, which I describe.

The first method I used during my research visits with participants was photo-elicitation. This involves asking participants to respond to preselected images, unlike photovoice where participants talk about images which they have created themselves. (The photographs I used are reproduced as images 3.3, 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6; they are

reproduced in to a larger scale in appendix VI, accompanied by the image sources.)
Talking about photographs helps participants to discuss taken-for-granted topics more
easily than they otherwise might, since participants are asked to respond to specific
scenes and images they might otherwise overlook (Harper, 2002; Rose, 2012). Using
photographs as prompts can also help make discussions more detail-orientated, and
also works to ground abstract discussions within concrete examples, making them
easier to talk about (Harper, 2002; Rose, 2012). It is for these reasons I chose to use
photo-elicitation. I also wanted this method to be a way in to talking about other
people's practices and to gauge how participants thought about clutter in general.
The questions which I asked reflected this. I asked participants about what they could
see in the pictures and how they would describe them. I inquired about their opinions
on the pictures, and who they might think lived in the room shown. I also asked
participants how it would feel to spend time in the room.

The images which I selected reflected my intention to understand clutter in
broad terms. Before beginning this project I was aware that 'clutter' has different
meanings. Clutter can be used as an aesthetic judgement of how 'busy' a room is, but
can also describe objects as out of place (this distinction I go on to describe analytically
as a difference between rooted and flowing clutter, starting in section 4.8). Images
were sourced online, using an image search engine. Image A shows what I now
describe as rooted clutter, while images C and D show flowing clutter. I chose image B
to get a sense of the importance of objects in a home, and to serve as a contrast to the
images I selected which include clutter. Images C and D show similar scenes in terms
of the amount of stuff in the room and the overall level of (dis)order. Image D though
clearly is home to a child, whereas image C does not necessarily suggest this. I wanted
to use these conflicting connotations to understand the degree to which lifecourse
stage influences how participants think about clutter. All of the images show living
rooms. Living rooms are the most public rooms in a house, and so participants are
likely to have seen more of them than they have, for example, bedrooms. They might
have a greater sense therefore of what is 'normal' here. I was also keen that clutter
levels be the main variable between the pictures, another reason for consistently

Image 3.3 – Photo-Elicitation Image A

Image 3.4 – Photo-Elitication Image B

Image 3.5 – Photo-Elicitation Image C
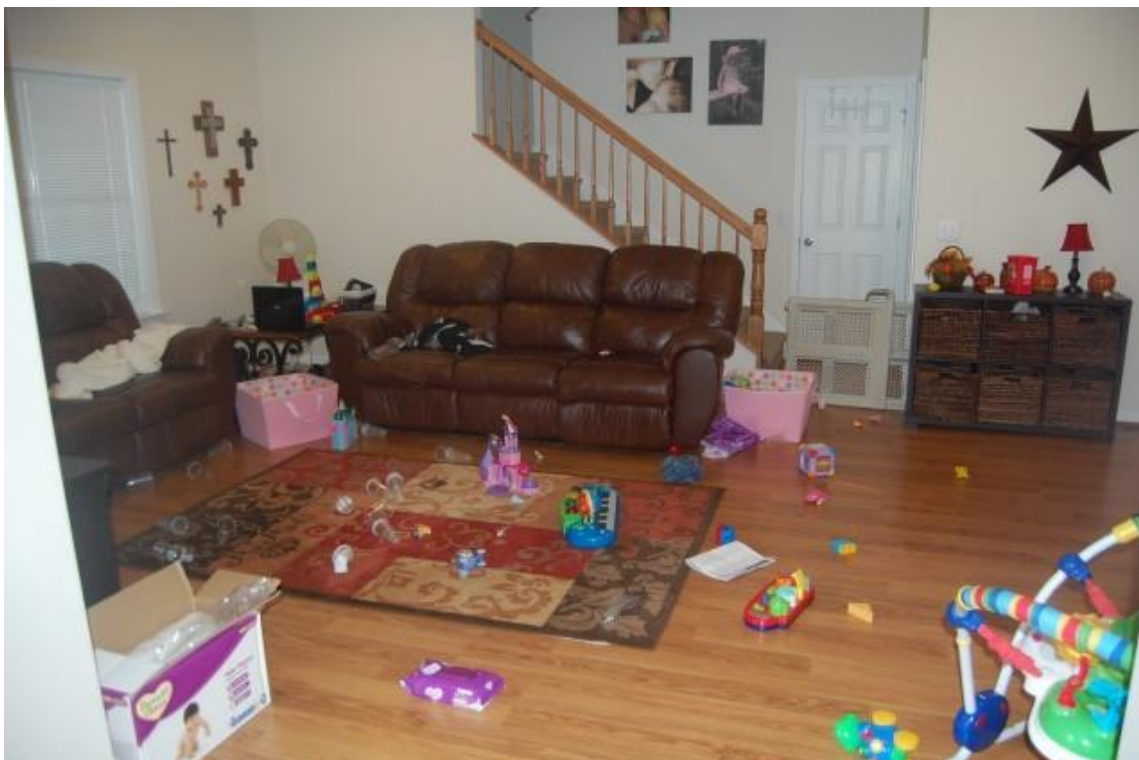
Image 3.6 – Photo-Elicitation Image D

showing living rooms.   I also tried to select images which display similar taste levels and class connotations. Maintaining these similarities allowed me to better attribute responses to the presence and type of clutter shown, rather than other confounding variables.

Initially I had planned for photo-elicitation to come after our interviews. However, on piloting the project (the data from which is not included here) I found responses to my interview questions were relatively shallow, and my participant here seemed unsure of how to answer them. In contrast, responses to my photo-election were much more detailed. I revised my approach, and chose to do photo-elicitation first. This proved to be a good strategy, and had three major benefits. First, it helped to guide our subsequent conversations towards concrete discussions around specific spaces, objects and practices. Asking participants to focus on a specific room shown helped me to structure later responses in similar terms, giving me the kind of data I was looking for. Second, these images provided me and participants with a shared language on which to draw in our subsequent discussions. Participants were able to express themselves relative to the images; for example saying things like 'sometimes my house gets like the third picture'. This gave us a direct way to talk about different levels and types of clutter, which otherwise would have been more difficult to discuss in the abstract. I argue in section 4.5.2 that clutter's definition is essentially subjective. Offering these visualisations of clutter meant we shared a reference point for talking about practices and experiences. Third, talking about these pictures helped me and participants to build rapport. Answering questions about a picture which is in front of you is easier than talking about your life and practices in general, helping participants to 'warm up' and feel more comfortable talking to me. To maximise rapport I chose to ask about image A first. This is a more unusual photograph and shows a less typical domestic scene. We were able to share a joke here; participants commented on the image's strangeness, and I told them that this was taken from uglyhousephotos.com.

The next part of my research was a semi-structured interview. This method provided a balance of flexibility during interviews with consistency between interviews (Mason, 2002; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). I wanted to find out in this part of the research about people's thoughts and feelings about their home, and about clutter specifically

within it. I wanted to get a sense of what participants were like and what was important to them in how participants arranged their home lives. I also wanted to find out about specific practices and how they interacted with and thought about their possessions. I began by asking participants to tell me about their home life in general, how they came to live where they do and who they live with. This was a way to get to know participants and to find out about any particular life events which might have a bearing on their practices and understandings of clutter. It was also a question I anticipated that participants would be able to answer easily and at some length. This was to give confidence in responding to my questions, and also to guide participants towards giving longer and more detailed answers (Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

I then moved on to ask about home decoration. This achieved two things. First, it concentrated participants' talk on their homes and objects specifically; I asked them to describe the room we were in first to make sure they gave this kind of response. Second, I wanted to know about how interested in design participants were, thinking that this might relate to the degree to which clutter was a concern for them. We then moved on to talking about cleaning and tidying. This was to gauge the extent to which participants interacted with their homes, and to learn about their material practices of homemaking. I also wanted to introduce the idea of tidiness into our conversations, as a topic related to, although distinct from, clutter. We moved next to the heart of our interviews as I guided conversations towards a direct discussion of clutter. I asked about storage in the home, the places participants had for keeping their possessions and whether they had any problems here. I asked too about organisation and practices of sorting and managing objects at home. We next talked about clutter. I waited to introduce this topic, and made sure to engage participants in detailed talk about objects and about their practices at home before we came to this most important question.

Participants found it hard to give a definition of clutter when I asked them. By this stage the rapport we had built meant this did not faze participants too much, and they were comfortable with their lack of an easy answer. Having prepared participants to talk about specific examples meant they readily turned to this way of communicating to answer this question, which was useful for me as these provided a

way to think about clutter's meaning in the absence of participant definitions. We ended the interview by talking about decluttering and times when participants had engaged with their objects and decided to get rid of them. This provided further data about what objects count as clutter, and also gave me insight into how often participants interacted with their possessions in this way. Overall, the data I collected by this method was useful to me in a number of ways. The general information about participants' lives contextualised their relationships with objects and what their home life was like. Information collected about clutter and decluttering directly informs much of my analysis, while I only occasionally use information about participants' decoration practices or the spaces they have to store things. These questions did play their intended part though, improving responses to my more direct questions about clutter.

Having found out about participants' home lives already in our interview, and having been introduced to their homes and the spaces within them through my questioning, the house tour I conducted with participants could concentrate on objects and practices, without the need to fill in contextual details. This was helpful as it allowed me to get the maximum benefit from this part of the research. The house tour I conducted follows in a (recent) tradition of mobile and emplaced geographical research methods. My approach was similar to the 'Show Us Your Home' method of Jacobs *et al*. (2012), who used a home tour alongside a semi-structured interview to research domestic life. Taking a walking tour of someone's home shares in the same benefits enjoyed by other mobile methods. By moving through a place alongside participants, researchers are able to see and understand the embodied and affective nature of their engagements with place, as well as being on the spot to ask questions about their practices and relationships (Hall, 2009; Hein *et al*., 2008). In addition to this, by asking questions about place *in place* richer data can be generated as knowledge is constructed, reflected on and transmitted within the context of the (mobile) interview, rather than simply reported (J. Anderson, 2004).

In my house tour research I began with a preamble which highlighted some different kinds of objects and spaces which I was interested in seeing, to show I was interested in 'everything', even if it might seem to participants mundane or boring.

Beyond this I allowed participants to guide the tours. This was for two reasons. First, I felt that my walking around and asking questions would have felt awkward given the normally private nature of the home. Second, I wanted to understand what places and objects in the home were important to participants, and where they felt they ought to show me. This was in itself a form of data, in addition to participants' reflections on the meanings and importance of these locations. Another benefit of taking house tours was that it allowed me to see clutter objects for myself 'in the wild'. As I have already noted, the meaning of clutter is subjective. I needed to gauge for myself the degree of clutter in different locations since making comparisons between participants' accounts would have been difficult. By asking participants to show me their home and the clutter within it I gave them the opportunity to revisit spaces of the home they access less often. This meant I was able to find out about objects which they might otherwise have forgotten; this forgetting about and finding objects turned out to be an important research theme in my work (section 5.6.3).

As a relatively 'constructed' research method, something which participants would not do unbidden, this way of working had drawbacks as well as benefits. The data I collected was less natural(istic); participants' engagements with objects were at my behest and not reflective of their normal patterns of interaction with things. This meant objects which participants rarely or never engage with were brought to the fore and were given meanings and stories which they might not otherwise hold in day-to-day life. It is important to note though that while this criticism is a fair one, it is in practice very difficult to ever capture 'normal' behaviour (Laurier and Philo, 2006).

Some participants chose to tidy up before I arrived. I am not sure how many people did this; only Sarah mentioned she did, while three others (George, Mary and Tim) told me explicitly that they had decided not to tidy up. I had considered asking participants not to tidy, but decided against it because I felt that it was not up to me to tell them how to act in their own homes and because I worried this might be seen as presumptuous, that I would have otherwise expected them to clean up and treat like some honoured guest. The degree to which this has affected the data gathered is an open question. I do know that not every participant tidied, and that therefore at least some of my data is 'uncorrupted'. This idea of data corruption only holds if we

imagine homes to be normally untidy and then cleaned for guests. However, it makes as much sense to say homes are normally tidy, but that sometimes this slips. Those who deliberately resisted tidying up could equally be understood to have 'distorted' the data. Whichever way we cut it, I have some distorted and some undistorted data in the research. This seems to be a fair compromise given the difficulty of saying with certainty what distortion actually means in this context.

During house tours I took photographs (with permission). These were either of whole rooms, spaces within rooms, like cupboards and drawers, or individual objects which I spoke with participants about at length. I made sure not to include written identifying information in the images, for example turning over letters on a desk to conceal the address. Participants were made aware that photographs of their homes or the objects within it are potentially a means by which they could be identified. All were happy with this though and so I photographed quite freely, including personal objects about which participants told me stories. Before the house tour began I reconfirmed that participants were happy with my taking pictures, and all gave their consent again. I chose to take photographs during our tour for four reasons. First because, as I have said, clutter is subjective. I wanted to be able to use photographs to make comparisons between participants' understandings of clutter. I was conscious that I might be told by two different participants that a cupboard is 'very cluttered', but that without a visual record I could not compare them and see whether clutter was being judged consistently. Second, I took photographs as a way of reminding myself about research visits. Revisiting visual data helps to recall embodied and affective experiences (Lorimer, 2010). Third, taking photographs served as a form of notetaking (Pink, 2011). During tours participants would point to objects and refer to them as 'this' or 'that'. By taking a photograph, which I can hear myself doing on the audio recording, I could later index these mentions to specific objects and ensure data about them was not lost. Finally, I took photographs because I wanted to use them as illustrations in my thesis. I reflect on how and why I did this in section 3.5.

The final method to talk about here is one which I did not use. I gave participants the option of taking part in subsequent participant observation sessions at times when they were decluttering their homes. Nicky Gregson (2011) used this

technique of visiting participants to view and assist in divestment practices. I was inspired to try the same, hoping to learn more about the process of decluttering and see decision-making in action. However, in the initial stages of the research no participants expressed an interest in this. After ten research encounters and no take-up, I dropped this method and did not pursue it any further. There are two reasons I think that this did not work. First, because participants might have felt that they contributed enough already. Research encounters were around two hours long; beyond this participants might feel there was not much left for them to say. The second reason is that, as I have now discovered through my analysis, decluttering is not often a practice amenable to this kind of research (section 5.4). Small-scale decluttering happens in the onflow of life and in the context of other practices, while larger-scale decluttering happens irregularly and is often fairly unplanned. Remembering (and wanting) to stop the task at hand, call me and see if I am available, and then wait for my visit before resuming, is not practical. Therefore, this kind of research method does not, as I have now found, suit studying decluttering. I have already quite detailed information about how participants engage in decluttering. While it would have been interesting to see this in action, I do not feel that it has hampered the project. Indeed, my understanding of why this method was not appropriate demonstrates I have in fact generated insights into decluttering practices.

3.4   Strand Three: Clutter Discourse Analysis

The third strand of my research was a discourse analysis of self-help books designed to assist people with decluttering their homes. This part of the research explored how clutter is constructed as a discourse. This data was intended to show how clutter and decluttering are framed in these texts as an end in itself, and also to allow me to explore the degree to which texts' representations of clutter matched the experiences and practices of my participants.

I analysed thirteen self-help texts, hoping to capture a variety of different approaches to clutter and decluttering. Advice on this topic is available from a range of sources including television, blogs, magazines and websites. I focused my research

solely on texts circulated in printed book form. The reasons for this were several: books are easy to find and purchase online; it is relatively easy to find out which books are most popular; self-help books offer a complete treatment of the subject, unlike magazines which present advice in a serialised or ongoing form; they deal with 'the problem' in general, unlike many self-help TV programmes which target the specific problems of different individuals each episode; restricting my analysis to a single medium meant I did not need to engage in multi-media analyses or consider how the medium affects the discursive message, which would have complicated my research.

Having made the decision to draw solely on printed books, my next choice was which books to analyse. The approach I took to this was mixed. I first selected the bestsellers. To find these I looked at how books on clutter/decluttering were generally categorised on Amazon.co.uk. This allowed me to list the available titles in the category (household management tips) in ranked order of number of sales, which is recognised as the best proxy for overall book sales figures available (Kelley-Milburn, 2017). From this list I selected all relevant titles from the top 50 books in the category (nine in total). To achieve greater breadth I then selected a number of titles outside of the top 50 which appeared to offer a different perspective, for example a book on decluttering specifically targeting creative people (*New Order*), and one relating decluttering to the principles of Feng Shui (*Clear Your Clutter With Feng Shui*). The full list of texts analysed appears in appendix VII. They are referred to here and throughout by their titles, rather than cited by their authors, to avoid confusion between academic literature and self-help texts. Together, these texts represent how clutter/decluttering is dominantly framed in the self-help literature, along with some less influential perspectives to give a wide range of approaches.

In order to understand the different ways in which clutter and decluttering were framed in the texts, I approached them with a methodology of socially-orientated discourse analysis. This works at the level of society, thinking through the inspiration, precursors and connections of the discourses studied; this is as opposed to linguistically-orientated analysis which works at the level of the sentence (Paltridge, 2012). While these two approaches are interconnected, and each needed to make sense of the other (Fairclough, 2012), they can be seen as archetypes for different

schools of thought on how to approach textual analysis (Paltridge, 2012). A socially-orientated perspective is attentive to the context as well as the content of discourses, recognising that meaning is not isolated within the text and instead arguing that we 'cannot understand the significance of any word unless we attend closely to its relationship to other words and to the discourse (indeed, the competing discourses) in which words are always embedded' (Cameron and Kulich, 2003: p.29). Such an approach to discourse is useful when seeking to study the social and cultural formations with which it deals. As a relatively less labour-intensive process than linguistically-orientated analysis' word by word deconstruction of texts, a socially-orientated approach allows a greater range of accounts to be studied (Paltridge, 2012). Lillis (2008: p353) argues for the importance of 'closing the gap between text and context' by supporting such analyses of discourses with real-world, ethnographic research as a means to extend, challenge and add theoretical depth to studies of texts. This is something my research does by connecting these discourses with the practices and experiences reported by participants, which Lillis (2008) describes as 'ethnography as method', showing how talk, text and practices mutually constitute, challenge and contextualise one another.

To orientate my engagement with the texts I generated a series of questions I was interested in answering. These were constructed with reference to my research questions to ensure that the discourses I recorded and analysed all helped to support my analysis. The questions I used were as follows:

- What is clutter? What does the word clutter mean? What kind of objects are clutter? What is clutter associated with? What other social/cultural formations or ideas does it relate to?

- (How) Does clutter act? How is agency framed in the text?

- What impact does clutter have on our selves / minds / bodies / homes / lives / lifestyles? How does this effect happen? How are objects, identities and the home related to one another? Representationally, practically…?

- Why do people get/become clutter(ed)? Individual problem or societal trend? Where does clutter come from?

- What is decluttering? What is the effect of decluttering? How does this effect work?

- How should we declutter? What kind of technique is decluttering? Is decluttering orientated towards the self, the home, both?

- Who manages clutter? Whose responsibility is it to manage clutter?

- How are homes (normatively) organised? What does organisation mean?

- What should homes be like? What role do people play in the construction of home? What role do objects play in the construction of home?

While I used these questions as a way to frame my engagement with the texts, I did not seek to produce a series of answers to them. To do this would have been to force the discourses I found into my preconceived ideas, and would also have left no room for contradictions and ambiguities, turning an open text into a closed, definitive answer. In addition to picking out discourses relating to these questions, I also recorded anything else I felt to be of note or interest more broadly. For example, I was aware from my wider reading on self-help texts that (neoliberal) ideas of the self as a blank-slate and an ethos of self-transformation were common to self-help and lifestyle media (see Jones, 2008; Raisborough, 2011). Consequentially I decided to also record anything relevant to these topics.

To conduct my analysis I read each book in turn, underlining and adding marginalia to the books to highlight important passages and quotations, while simultaneously recording what discourses I found, alongside my emergent analysis and interpretation of them, on a notepad. I repeated this process for each book, before cross-comparing my results and looking to identify points of similarity and difference between texts and how different issues were framed in them. After this I created a master list of all the different discourses found in the texts. I compared all the examples of each different discourse I found to ensure my categorisations were internally valid. I then used these categorisations to analyse the structure of the discursive field as a whole, looking at how different discourses fitted together, whether they often appeared alongside one another or always remained separate. From this I returned to the texts and my notes to determine whether these structures

were matters of coincidence, thinking through the reasons behind the different discursive formations I had identified.

Overall, this method allowed me to interrogate the discourses in individual texts, how these discourses were deployed across different texts and why, as well as how the discursive field works as a whole and how different (elements of) discourses relate to one another. Once I had completed this work I wrote it up as an interim report of my findings. This summarised the key arguments, with examples, and worked as a standalone document exploring the discourses within decluttering texts. I completed this discourse analysis while I was in the process of collecting strand two research data, and was concerned that a list of discourses would not suffice as a way to sum up the contents of the texts. This document was then used in my overall analysis of clutter, the process of which I describe next.

3.5   Analysis: Drawing Together My Research Strands

I have now outlined all of the (many) methods by which I collected data for this project. There were three strands to this which I have woven together to form my analysis. To sum up: first, I collected data with people who hoard. These took the form of responses to an online survey, and data from three different styles of interview. Second, I gathered data from people who do not hoard. These were collected during research encounters which included photo-elicitation, a semi-structured interview, and a house tour during which I took photographs. Finally, my third strand of data collection was a discourse analysis of decluttering texts. Here I explain how I brought these three strands together to form my analysis. I first outline the general principles guiding how I have analysed my data. I next outline the process by which I coded my interview and survey data. I then discuss how I worked to integrate my three data strands together and come up with the arguments I present here. I end this section by explaining how I approached the use of quotes and photographs in my work.

The key principle by which I have analysed my data is that this is a study of clutter. When I say that what I mean is I am interested in how clutter, as a concept, a

practice and an idea, works. I am not interested in comparing and contrasting data sources for the sake of it. I have aimed to synthesise as much as possible the three research strands for my project. Rather than looking at how people who hoard, people who do not hoard and decluttering texts each frame and understand clutter individually, and then compare and contrast these, I have instead tried to work holistically. What this means is that I have aimed to find key trends, similarities, differences and points of contact between individual responses (interviewees/texts). Where differences are reported this is because there are divergences in how different responses frame an issue; difference has not been assumed *a priori*. Overall, my process of analysis has aimed to be inclusive, to try and minimise the distance between participants who hoard and those who do not. Sometimes which strand data comes from is found to be explanatory of difference, more often than not though this is not the case, and discourses, experiences and practices are distributed more freely between different data strands.

To achieve integration between data sources I analysed data gathered with participants who hoard and those who do not hoard together. I placed transcripts of all the interviews I had conducted, and responses to my online survey, together in NVivo 11 (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2010) data coding software. I worked through the transcripts alphabetically by pseudonym and coded them. My coding process was conducted over two stages. First, I used an emergent method where I labelled the texts quite freely, applying both descriptive and analytical codes to my data. By engaging in this process I was able to begin the task of identifying key areas to explore further, and made room for novel or unexpected findings to emerge. Once I had completed my first pass of coding I took some time to reflect on the work I had completed. I noted which themes had come out of my data and thought about how I could explore these further. To give an example, one code I generated was 'decluttering – when'. Reading the responses to this I noted that the idea of routine cropped up repeatedly, in a number of different ways. From my wider engagement with the literature I was familiar with on work domestic routines around object management, as well as work on the geographies of rhythm. To help me to explore the temporality of decluttering, a theme discovered through during my first pass

coding, I decided to include rhythm and routine in the coding frame which I used to conduct my second pass coding.

I also used three other methods to generate content for this coding frame. First, I thought about themes in the wider literature on homes and material culture which had not emerged from my first pass coding. I decided to include these as prompts, in case I had overlooked these ideas previously. Second, I took codes directly from my first pass coding and reproduced them. For example, my first pass coding generated 'subjective' as a code, one which held a lot of data from a variety of participants. The subjective nature of clutter has not been explored in the literature, but I knew from my first pass coding it could be an important element of my analysis. The third way I generated new codes was by creating a lists of object types and space types. For example, my revised coding frame included 'gift', 'inheritance', 'cupboard' and 'attic'. I considered that these might be important distinctions in my final analysis, and so wanted to be able to easily access data on these and identify clearly the spaces and objects to which participants were referring. This proved to be a good move, as it facilitated my analysis of how clutter works in different spaces of the home (section 6.4). Having compiled this coding frame I returned to my data and began the process of coding again. This worked to reorganise my data and clarified the structure of the discourses and practices with which I was working. By following this two-stage process I have maximised the benefits of my coding. Emergent coding can be better at generating novel findings, but risks a lack of structure to the coding overall and a lesser degree of engagement with the literature (Saldaña, 2015). Starting with a coding frame maintains consistency, and a strong analytic focus, but can supress novel research findings (Saldaña, 2015). My overall process of coding was time consuming since I had to do everything twice. It was also invaluable and has allowed me to find novel insights and to address concerns already present in the literature on life at home and material culture. It also allowed me ready access to quotes on the topics which I was interested in, facilitating their inclusion in my work.

When I came to integrate this coded data with my discourse analysis to create the arguments in my thesis, I had to navigate between two quite different ways of working. I had my written summary of my discourse analysis of decluttering texts on

the one hand, and coded interview and survey data, which I already had analysis ideas for, on the other. These did not wholly match up; my discourse analysis found themes which were not present in my data collected with participants and my interview data was coded to themes I did not identify in my discourse analysis. I had to decide which findings to take forward and write up in my analysis. I chose to prioritise novel findings not reported on elsewhere in the literature; I felt these were the most important to include as they add something genuinely new to the research literature. In some cases this meant I had to look again at my data. For example, I returned to my decluttering texts to see their perspective on rhythm and routine. I added these research data to my findings.

My next priority was data which represented an analysis point which spoke to the wider literature. I want this work to be relevant to geographers interested in home, material culture, time and mental health, rather than only those interested in clutter. Finally, I chose to include findings where there was the greatest degree of overlap in terms of the themes studied. For example, memory came up often across all data sources, but was considered in different ways between them (section 5.6). The degree of overlap here suggested that this was an important topic to include.

Having decided what themes to include, my final methodological choice was what examples to use to support my arguments. I chose quotes which best captured the sense of the argument which I was making. I have tried where possible to allow participants to explain things in their own terms, and to guide the reader to the most important points within the quotes given. Beyond this I have tried to show the breadth and range of perspectives on offer. Sometimes I achieve this by giving multiple examples to support my argument, at other times by moving between many participants to develop a single point. One section (5.5.2) where I work differently is my discussion of life transitions and clutter. Here I explore only Catherine's life and life transitions. This was a conscious choice made to demonstrate clutter's changing role across a single lifecourse. In general though I have tried to include as much variety as possible in terms of whose voices are included. Some participants do get more airtime than others, either because their experiences chime particularly strongly with the different arguments which I make, or because they have a particularly

evocative or interesting turn of phrase. Overall though I have aimed to include everyone as much as possible, not only to demonstrate variety but also because I believe that everyone should be heard if possible, and that all of my participants have something valuable to contribute. I have used images with a similar guiding principle in mind. I have aimed to show what participants' houses are like, and to exemplify the spaces and objects they talk about with photographs. Using photographs is particularly important in this research since clutter's subjective nature means that my participants' descriptions might not be enough on its own to bring to mind what their home is like.

3.6   Conclusion

I have used a wider range of research methods when collecting my data for this project. I have heard from lots of people, and we worked together in a variety of ways to understand clutter. The process of completing the data collection for this project has been challenging. However, I have navigated this process in a considered and care-full way, working with and alongside people to find out about their homes, lives, practices, experiences, and their clutter. The thoughtfulness of the people I spoke to, and the time which they gave to me, bears out in the analysis which follows. In the next chapter I begin the task of understanding clutter. I bring participants' voices and insights into focus and start to unravel how people think about, practice and live with clutter.

Chapter 4 Framing Clutter: Definitions and Discourses

4.1 What is Clutter?

> **Will**: I suppose it's like how would you define what a weed is, clutter, I mean, it wasn't a clutter [in our old house] was it?
> **Viv**: No because there was so many places.
> **Will**: Places you could put it.
> **Viv**: Yeah, didn't look, it didn't look like clutter there did it because there was room for it and…
> **Alex**: How would you define what clutter is then?
> **Will**: Err, well something that isn't hidden away, wouldn't you, something you haven't got room for.
> **Viv**: Yes.
> **Will**: I don't know really what clutter is, no.

What is clutter? Viv and Will are not sure. Like my other interviewees, they struggled to produce a definition on demand. Clutter is something we know in our everyday lives, through experience and tacit knowledge, not in the abstract through rules and definitions. Anything, it seems, can be clutter, just as Will implies that anything can be a weed. In the course of my research I encountered many objects which participants either called clutter, or thought could be called clutter by someone else. These included: a collection of dogs' whiskers (image 4.1), a knight made of scrap metal picked up on childhood trip to France, an Elvis teapot (image 4.2), a paper medal with 'Charlotte is a cow' scrawled on the back by an outraged little sister, a cardboard cut-out of Gollum (image 4.3), several dozen empty egg boxes. What ties together all these disparate pieces of material culture as clutter, when they seem so disconnected?

In this chapter I argue that it is not anything about them as objects per se. I develop an account of clutter as things dislocated from their relational context. By this I mean things understood to physically be out of place from where they belong as well as things which do not fit within the relationally drawn context of a life as it is lived. Clutter is, I argue, matter out of place defined on a relational, personal and experiential basis. This means rather than try to come up with a single definition of clutter which works in every relational and emergent context, I look instead at how clutter is experienced, understood and lived alongside in everyday life.

Image 4.1 – A Collection of Dogs' Whiskers (Sue)

Image 4.2 – An Elvis Teapot (Catherine)

Image 4.3 – A Cardboard Cut-out of Gollum (Emma)

4.2   Chapter Aims and Outline

4.2.1   Aims

This chapter has three aims. First, to show that clutter is a cultural term which does cultural work, and to give an account of how this operates. Clutter is a concept which individuals relate to differently. Clutter is, I argue, a way of talking about and making sense of particular kinds of experiences and relationships which we have with objects, ones where objects seem dislocated from the home and the self. Second, this chapter aims to explore the range of ways in which clutter can be defined, drawing on academic literature, as well as participants' accounts and those of the decluttering texts I have analysed. Finally, this chapter introduces my argument that clutter comes in two forms, rooted clutter and flowing clutter. In this it aims to give an account of clutter which makes sense of multiple and contradictory clutter definitions. This is the key contribution this chapter makes to the overall argument of my thesis, and represents an original argument and novel research finding.

4.2.2 Outline

To achieve these aims I first give a review of academic literature which explores clutter's meanings and actions. This is in three parts. First, I show how clutter has emerged as a cultural idea, demonstrating its development alongside and as a consequence of wider social and cultural change. Next, I look at how clutter is framed in the lives of people who hoard. I look at different bodies of academic literature to show how each of them presents clutter differently; clinical medical accounts, critical analyses of hoarding's media representations, and academic research involving participants who hoard. This review shows how clutter and hoarding relate to each other as cultural ideas, and how hoarding is framed. Finally, I review research on clutter in the lives of people who do not hoard. I show the multiple ways in which clutter is defined, demonstrating that these do not add up to an account which is internally coherent. This lack of coherence underpins the double definition of clutter I develop later.

I then look to literature which explores three related ways of labelling problematic material culture; these are dirt, mess and excess. This review shows how these other concepts have been framed, to both see where their definitions end (and therefore where the definition of clutter might begin) and also to get some inspiration on how to approach the task of understanding clutter.

Following these literature reviews I look to my data and begin exploring the definition of clutter. I give some general elements of clutter's definition: that it is something defined extrinsically, subjectively and as some kind of problem (section 4.5). The first two of these have not been reported in academic literature. Together this section shows clutter to be some kind of matter which is out of place or which fails to fit in with the relational context of a life as it is lived; that clutter is dislocated.

Section 4.6 develops this account of clutter by thinking about how it is linked to and differentiated from ideas of dirt, mess and excess. This section develops my analysis of clutter as a cultural idea by exploring further its discursive construction and associations. It also adds to the meaning of clutter by giving a deeper account of how clutter is experienced and defined in a relational context through its (double) dislocation.

After this, I show how clutter is constructed as a discourse through ideas of hoarding and OCD. These serve as discursive limit points at which our relations to objects are deemed excessive and transgressive. This section develops my account of how clutter is framed as a cultural idea which does cultural work. It shows how this definition of clutter works within wider biopolitical discursive structures for understanding the self through ideas of mental health.

The final part of this chapter draws together all of the foregoing sections. It revisits the definitions of clutter found in the literature and shows some contradictions between them. On the basis of this I argue that clutter comes in two forms, rooted clutter and flowing clutter. I explore the specific meanings of these terms as I conceptualise them, showing how they work differently as matter out of (its relationally framed) place.

4.3   Clutter: Literature Review

4.3.1   Clutter as a Discourse and Norm

Clutter is a cultural idea which has developed over time. The contemporary home is normatively a place of order and rationality, which is kept clean and tidy and free from clutter (Dion *et al.*, 2014; Löfgren, 2017). If we feel that we are not meeting this expected standard there are, as I showed earlier (section 1.1), a variety of places we can turn to for help if it feels needed. This framing of the home as a space to be managed has developed and emerged alongside other ideas, including germ theory and modernist approaches to the rational(ist) use of (home) space (Herring, 2014; Strasser, 2000). These ideas took hold in the twentieth century, and worked to cast the sphere of the domestic as a space not only of love, care and labour, but one which required scientific and managerial oversight (Johnson, 2006). This was achieved in large part through the popular media, prominently women's magazines (Hand and Shove, 2004; Martens and Scott, 2006).

Social practices also work to reframe who and what belongs in the spaces of the home, with for example children's objects gradually moving into the middle classes' formerly child-free drawing rooms from around the mid-twentieth century

(Cieraad, 2013). Aesthetic changes in home decoration have also led to the broad cultural rejection of clutter.   In Victorian houses objects were deliberately left out as if they had just been used, an improving literary work lying open on the Davenport; today we (ought to) put them away where they belong (Cwerner and Metcalfe, 2003). Finally, clutter today can be seen as having entered a distinct phase in its conceptual development. Decluttering, as a practice and as a cultural idea, has only recently gained popular currency and legitimacy. Decluttering emerged as a concept in the public imagination of the Global North in the 1990s, alongside the role of the professional organiser and the genre of decluttering self-help texts (Cherrier and Belk, 2015). Clutter is a cultural concept which is particular to this socio-historical juncture. It is, though, also one which is informed by older (though themselves still changing) cultural norms around home life.

The development of the tidiness norm described here, it should be noted, is socio-culturally and historically specific. As I outlined in section 2.2, the cultural group, geography and point in history within which an individual lives works to partially determine how they relate to objects. Shared ways of understanding the meanings and roles of objects work to create a structure in which people act as individuals, drawing on these norms in order to construct their everyday practices and ways of being. Therefore, it is important to note that the work reviewed here and labelled as 'the tidiness norm' needs to be thought of more properly as the way in which people in the contemporary West think about tidiness, rather than as a universal way of relating to objects.

Alongside these changing (Western) ideas around the definition of clutter and how home space ought to be used, we have also witnessed the emergence of 'the hoarder' in the (Western) cultural imagination. Scott Herring (2014) shows in his work of cultural history *The Hoarders* the long roots of this figure, who dates back (at least) to the 1940s. The cultural construction of hoarding has developed over time, like the development of the tidiness norm, disseminated by the media and constructed through a confluence of medical researchers, a growing band of clutter professionals and, circularly, media representations of hoarding. Today TV programmes such as *Hoarders* (2009-Present) continue this work, with interest in hoarding said to point 'to

anxieties ascending on the narrative arc here at the beginning of the 21st century[;] hoarding speaks to and about our moment' (Lepselter, 2011: p.920). The hoarder is understood to be a limit figure, one who marks out where the domestic norms which construct clutter as a problem have been transgressed. The idea of hoarding then informs contemporary constructions and understandings of clutter.

In both of these cases, the development of contemporary ideas of hoarding and of clutter, we can see they are closely tied to the wider socio-cultural contexts in which they are used. Clutter is a cultural term which does cultural work, describing not only a category of object but, by implication, how we normatively ought to relate to the world around us. This therefore means that the definition of clutter is not fixed, but is mutable and contestable. This means that clutter's definition cannot be said to be a settled matter. So, rather than seeking a final definition I instead look at how, broadly speaking, clutter is imagined and dealt with across different spheres, and think about how we can make sense of this.

4.3.2   Hoarding Clutter

I want to look more now at the figure of the hoarder and at how clutter is framed in the lives of people who hoard. There are three different bodies of literature to draw on here; clinical medical accounts of hoarding, critical accounts of how hoarding is presented and constructed as a discourse, and studies which look at the lives and experiences of people who hoard. In clinical accounts there is surprisingly little reference to clutter. Texts focus on the ways in which people who hoard think (in general and about objects), rather than looking at what clutter means (both as a concept and to them). Since clutter is understood to be a symptom of hoarding, the clutter itself is of less interest than the behaviours which cause it and the consequences of having it. Hoarding is diagnosed by the presence of clutter in the home (APA, 2013), often assessed using the Clutter Image Rating Scale (designed by Frost *et al.*, 2008) which is recommended for use as part of best practice (BPS, 2015). Beyond this, clinical accounts focus on challenging thoughts and behaviours to mitigate clutter's physical impacts and to assist in the task of decluttering, rather than

thinking about clutter's meanings or how clutter in hoarding is constructed culturally (Steketee and Frost, 2014).

Analyses of media representations of hoarding suggest their function is didactic, to demonstrate how we ought to normatively make decisions about what objects we should keep (Eddy, 2014; Lepselter, 2011). TV programmes frame clutter as a consequence of mental illness and inappropriate choices (Eddy, 2014; Kaplan, 2014; Lepselter, 2011) and as evidence of the 'sick' minds of their subjects (Potts, 2015). In all of these, clutter in hoarding is presented as a bad thing, both in how it gets in the way of everyday life as well as in how it represents a problem in the minds of people who hoard. Here hoarding clutter is presented as a warning, and is used as a discourse to frame normative object relations (Eddy, 2014; Lepselter, 2011).

Research which includes people who hoard's perspectives directly shows how they understand and relate to clutter on an everyday basis (Cherrier and Ponnor, 2010; Miller, In preparation; Orr *et al.*, 2017). People who hoard give accounts of clutter which revolve around a number of different factors. These include keeping things to use in the future (Cherrier and Ponnor, 2010; Miller, In preparation), keeping things to connect them to the past or to other people (Cherrier and Ponnor, 2010; Orr *et al.*, 2017), and keeping things because this is how they were raised (Orr *et al.*, 2017). In all of these whether the clutter is a 'bad thing' is contested and challenged, with people who hoard seeing value where clinical accounts see evidence of madness and critical accounts see representations of deviance. Media constructions of the hoarder are performative, cultural acts which do cultural work. They do not necessarily reflect individuals' ideas and practices, but instead represent the normative limits of how objects ought to be related to. I am therefore attentive in my research to how the discourse of hoarding works to frame the issue of clutter while not expecting this cultural discourse to necessarily match up with the lives and experiences of people who hoard.

4.3.3 'Normal' Clutter

The clutter of people who do not hoard is the subject of only a handful of academic analyses, and in most of these clutter tends to be conceptualised rather obliquely. The studies I review here all involve only participants who do not hoard. I argued in sections 2.5 and 3.3.1 that such a separation is potentially both unproductive and less ethical than including the voices of people who hoard alongside those of people who do not hoard, resisting a framing of them as 'other'. However, in the literature this strategy has to date not been pursued. Instead studies take an either/or approach and discuss either people who hoard or people who do not hoard, the latter of which I now turn my attention to. How clutter is conceptualised and defined varies both between and even within these texts. I discuss the different dimensions of these definitions of clutter in turn, showing the breadth of associations and definitions which clutter bears even within this small area of scholarship. These are: clutter as a problem; clutter as something which is stuck; clutter as something defined by mobility; clutter as challenging memory object; clutter as productive of life's ongoingness. In section 4.8 I return to these multiple definitions and account for their contradictory nature through my double framing of clutter as rooted and as flowing.

All of the texts I discuss here view clutter as some kind of problem. Clutter can cause problems in people's lives, can be the caused by wider problems in one's life, or clutter can be a problematic and ambiguous object category. In Cwerner and Metcalfe's (2003: p.229) research, participants experienced clutter as 'blocking the flows of everyday life' (p.229). Baker (1995) reflects on clutter as something which creates unpleasant feeling in the home, and gets in the way of thought and action. In Arnold *et al.*'s (2012: p.24) visual ethnography they:

> see families' daily struggles with clutter and disarray. Many households grapple with a clutter crisis resulting from the sheer number of artefacts they own and try to manage. Clothes, dolls and boxes overflow closets; food is stockpiled in garages and pantries; toys and media gadgets are everywhere.

Analysis of popular texts show how they construct 'clutter as a social and personal problem and storage as providing the key to overcoming it' (Cwerner and Metcalfe, 2003: p.230), with clutter emerging as a consequence of a life too full of competing

demands (Dowling, 2008; Luzia, 2011; Stevenson and Prout, 2013). Clutter is a problematic object category, matter which symbolically taints home space (Belk *et al.*, 2007) and which shifts in its meanings through in its storage (Hirschman *et al.*, 2012), potentially challenging our identity (Baker, 1995; Horton and Kraftl, 2012).

Clutter is, in some texts, presented as objects which are and feel stuck, which do no move and cause us to feel unable to move forward: '[c]lutter resists, clutter is stubborn, is always there, still there, still in the way' (Baker, 1995: p.15). More than this, clutter to Baker (p.17) is something which sticks to us, it:

> clings to the self by association, and which is regarded as "evidence"
> of the self's state of mind. This is to see cluttering objects as burs,
> which are not easily shaken off.

In his framing clutter sticks around not only materially in the home, but also mentally in one's thoughts, lingering, remaining and blocking them. Clutter here is something articulated in terms of persistence, enduringness and stubbornness, as things which do not move and which we struggle to get rid of. Belk *et al.* (2007) give a sense of clutter objects as things which build up and accumulate, being moved into storage and kept apart, only engaged with irregularly and often as a consequence of external life events which produce either a need to declutter (like a house move) or a felt need to redefine our selves using material culture (like when changing career).

However, clutter is also at times defined by its mobility, rather than its stuckness. Cwerner and Metcalfe (2003) found people engaged with their (stored) objects in a much more dynamic way. Items which might be labelled as clutter, things put down in the course of life, are in Cwerner and Metcalfe's (2003: p.236) analysis a functional response to the contingency of life:

> [Clutter] constitutes alternative modes of ordering the home based on
> practices, habits and routines that are complex, contingent,
> sometimes unconscious and often unexpected.

This sense of clutter as an emergent ordering of the world, particularly in the course of a life lived in the home alongside multiple others, is found across a number of different studies (Dowling, 2008; Löfgren, 2012; Luzia, 2011; Stevenson and Prout,

2013). Löfgren (2012) sees the making of clutter as a side-effect of routine practices of functional storage, quick fixes of shoving things to one side where they become clutter as matter out of its (proper) storage place. Decluttering occurs when routine clutter creation stops being a workable strategy once quantities of clutter have grown too large and its presence hampers rather than helps the flow of life. Alternatively, Dowling (2008) and Stevenson and Prout (2013) explain that clutter emerges when home space is used in an everyday way by children and adults together. Clutter is what emerges through these spaces being used differently, with toys being for children a source of fun and for adults of irritation.

In some texts clutter is talked about in terms of memory and the past. Some mention this only in passing (Cwerner and Metcalfe, 2003), whereas in others this sense of clutter is foregrounded (Baker, 1995; Horton and Kraftl, 2012). Horton and Kraftl (2012) reflect on their own experiences of sorting through clutter. These things were left over, forgotten or put aside, not intentionally kept for a purposive reason. This means that when returning to them their meaning was not in any sense already given or predetermined. The memories formed and recalled through their engagements with objects could be challenging. This sense of the ambiguous and challenging nature of clutter objects is one Baker (1995: p.17) also reflects on:

> Despite clutter being my own, I want to disown it, to excise this part of the self. Clutter might even be provisionally defined as "my *dis*own," keeping the emphasis on the dis to mark the passage from verb to noun. The *dis*own: that which is marked off, though only provisionally, from the self.

Here we have a sense of clutter objects not just as simple memory objects and ways to remember, but as things which are distanced from the self and related to in problematic ways.

Clutter can also be seen not to cause problems and challenge identities, but instead to support them and offer positive resources for getting on with life. Here clutter is seen to be productive and forward-looking, rather than something which drags us backwards. Luzia (2011: p.298) argues that 'not only can "clutter", "mess", unused objects, and an overall lack of space be useful for homemaking, but that at

certain times in the life of a home, such states of disorder and the accompanying processes of reordering can be crucial for "growing" home and family'. Here clutter, as an emergent ordering of homes and lives, allows for positive experiences of change and growth. In this sense clutter is not related to the past but to a life lived in the present tense, and is framed as something which is constitutive of life's ongoingness.

Finally, I want to note that in discussions of clutter its material agency tends not to be accounted for. Löfgren (2012: p.114) makes what seems like something of a throw-away comment that 'through a magic force, new objects are attracted' to clutter, causing it to grow. Beyond this though there is an absence of attention to clutter's agency, even while in studies of living in a cluttered home the agency of home space is accounted for and explored (Dowling, 2008; Luzia, 2011; Stevenson and Prout, 2013). Where we see clutter acting at all it is always passively, through inaction and intractability, of being and remaining there (Baker, 1995; Horton and Kraftl, 2012). I explore clutter's agency in section 6.5.1.

Overall, we see from this review that clutter is talked about between (and even within) studies in many different ways. There is no consensus definition of what exactly clutter is, or how it might be defined. This means the analysis in this chapter represents a useful and original contribution to the scholarship in this area. In section 4.8 I give an account of the different forms which clutter comes in: rooted and flowing. Developing this vocabulary for clutter from my research data allows me to use it to account for the variety of conflicting ways clutter has been written about, arguing that these contradictions emerge because clutter comes in these two different forms.

4.4   Other Matters Out of Place: Literature Review

I want to turn my attention away from clutter for a while and look instead at dirt, mess and excess. These terms are similar to clutter in that they are ways of categorising objects as out of place and framing this in negative terms. Here I give a partial review to introduce these object categories, and to highlight some relevant literature on them which informs my analysis of clutter. This review is constructed with two aims in mind. First, to show how these concepts have been explored in order to get some

ideas about how to proceed towards a definition of clutter. Second, to look at where definitions of dirt, mess and excess end to see where the concept of clutter might begin.

4.4.1   Dirt

Dirt is a cultural category we use to label particular types of objects about which we think in particular ways. As with clutter, what counts as dirt is socio-culturally constructed, variable, and open to interpretation and contestation (Douny, 2007; Reno, 2009; Strasser, 2000). The classic take on how this works comes from Mary Douglas' (1966) social constructionist argument that ideas of cleanliness and dirtiness, the sacred and the profane, are all worked out relationally. Dirt is a necessary element within a 'clean' society, which is ordered around its removal as 'matter out of place'. In her account the meaning of dirt is something which comes from its context. This is in a double sense; first, understandings of purity and danger are culturally situated. Then, specific things, practices, and even people are labelled dirty on the basis of their spatial location, and the coding of that space within culture (Douglas, 1966). This reminds us that spatial definitions of clutter as out of place are formed in the context of wider socio-cultural norms and values.

A second way we can frame dirt and rubbish is in relation to time. Viney (2014: p.4) argues that waste is not just, pace Douglas, matter out of place, but also matter out of time:

> [U]se and disuse organizes, divides and distributes time. […] [T]he process of using and discarding objects generates and maintains certain temporal relations, relations that help us organize our experience of the world.

What Viney (2014) implies by this is that understandings of the meaning of rubbish are formed not only through abstract cultural and social structures but also within the context of lives and experiences. He describes such objects as temporally complex. They exist because of a temporal disruption, the end of their materially and socially useful lives (their 'use-time'), while also being temporally continuous in the sense that

nevertheless they endure and remain. Rubbish is caught between two times, the future-oriented use-time it once had, and the disoriented waste-time of its material future. It is this condition of betweenness which constitutes waste as a phenomenon for Viney (2014); it speaks of the past and future together, but is anchored in neither of them definitively.

4.4.2 Mess

Mess is another term we use to describe things which seem to be out of place. There is little research which deals with mess directly. Studies often explore its historical and cultural specificity, relating it to the development of the domestic tidiness norm (see section 4.3.1.) which works to define the parameters of what counts as a mess (Dion *et al.*, 2014; Löfgren, 2017). Mess, and its inverse tidiness, are different from dirt and cleanliness. Both relate to matter out of place (Douglas, 1966) and society's norms, but mess is not considered to be polluting in the same way dirt is (Dion *et al.*, 2014). This means that, unlike dirt, mess can be tolerated and does not always require immediate intervention because it does not pose a threat (Dion *et al.*, 2014). As matter out of place, mess is of a particular sort. It is a state in which objects of different categories are combined and put together in ways that do not seem to follow particular logics. This means that its identification is subjective; it is a matter of perspective whether things belong together (Dion *et al.*, 2014). This mixing, while messy, can at times be both positive and productive. A non-domestic example is the way mess in an artists' studio can be drawn on as a resource for creativity, framed as the novel coming together of different elements which provokes minds and aesthetic sensibilities (Sjöholm, 2014). This is something Denegri-Knott and Parsons (2014) suggest can also be found in the home, through offering new ways of living through alternative arrangements of, and concomitant relationships with, mess.

4.4.3 Excess

Excess and its sister concept overflow have been the subject of increasing academic interest in recent years, as the subjects of edited books (Czarniawska and Löfgren,

2012; 2013), journal articles (Luzia, 2011; Waight and Boyer, 2018) and conference sessions (Miller and Owen, 2018; Morgan and Moffat, 2016). Löfgren and Czarniawska (2012; 2013) note that excess and overflow are morally and ideologically loaded terms. As an idea, excess speaks of its normative management. It is something to be contained and controlled, something which has slipped its rope to roam beyond its bounds. A more positive framing is also possible, with overflow meaning a sense of abundance and opportunity. Like clutter, overflow is somewhat ambiguous in its meanings and value. Indeed, as Löfgren and Czarniawska (2013) show, the morality of excess varies historically and geopolitically, and is tied up with notions of class and gender within social groups. Norms and values around excess and overflow are linked up closely with othering; in drawing distinctions about what is too much we often simultaneously mark out groups who, unlike ourselves, are excessive (Löfgren and Czarniawska, 2013).

Excess calls for a solution, some way to deal with it, but we can answer that call in numerous ways through strategies including containment, reducing its flow, or instead by changing strategies and practices to accommodate it (Löfgren and Czarniawska, 2012). In studying excess we need to be attentive to its productive, constructed and performative material nature, and avoid a binary of good and bad when thinking through its complex (moral) economies and actions (Löfgren and Czarniawska, 2012; 2013). Clutter can be said to be a form of excess then as matter out of place, something which exceeds the space it ought to be in.

4.5   Elements of a Definition

Having reviewed literature on clutter, and selected works dealing with dirt, mess and excess, I now turn to my data to explore the definition of clutter. I argue clutter is defined extrinsically, subjectively and as some kind of problem. In the literature reviewed above the first two of these were not present. I argue these three elements of clutter's definition are among its prime coordinates. These elements hold whether clutter is rooted or flowing, working to hold together clutter as an object category. I now work through each of these elements in turn.

4.5.1 Clutter is Defined Extrinsically

When I asked participants how they would define clutter I was often instead provided with examples of clutter:

> **Alex**: So how would you define clutter, could you put…?
> **Sandra**: Well, I suppose I'd call that little pile of [my daughter's stuff for her new house] there a bit of clutter, even though I know they've just got this house [so] that will be going, it's just in transit that, but it annoys me.

This seemingly sideways approach to a definition is, I argue, a meaningful way of giving an account of clutter. This is because clutter is drawn in negative space, known not through its internal properties or capacities but through its lack of fit with the world around it. You cannot make a list of things which are always clutter, because the nature of clutter is not determined by objects' natures but by their relational context:

> **Diana**: I don't think clutter's having, I don't think clutter's the type of stuff I think that clutter is things not put away, or, too much stuff in one area rather than unorganised stuff or… erm, like those two little shelves there under the bookcase […] it's just got cluttered with other stuff, so cards and then the top one has got cluttered with an empty lightbulb box, my perfume, that's sort of a dampness thing, some other bits and bobs.

Here Diana explains clutter as things out of place, and explicitly tells us that it is this 'out of place-ness' which defines clutter. She then goes on to give an example, reinforcing the idea that clutter is to be known from its context and by experience, rather than in the abstract. Even in texts on decluttering, which one might expect to be able to give a general definition to suit all their readers, clutter is defined again extrinsically through its spatial location and not its internal properties. For example, *Lose the Clutter, Lose the Weight* (p.4) tells us that '[c]lutter is too much stuff scattered in the wrong place'.

Clutter is also defined extrinsically in a second way: as things which are not helpful or useful in your life, things which are unnecessary. Decluttering texts say these can be identified either through some general rules around object use, for example that if an object has not been used in over a year it is unlikely to be needed. Or, more indirectly, clutter is 'any thing that you don't feel good about or that stops

you using your space in a way that either empowers or nurtures you' (*Banish Clutter Forever*: p.25, emphasis removed), or things which do not 'do the work of being beautiful, or bringing us joy, or helping us out in our daily lives' (*Simple Matters*: p.17). Again then, clutter is not a kind of object, but is in this instance a lack of fit between objects and a personal (rather than a spatial) context. Hence, clutter is defined from the outside in. We start with a space or a life and then name as clutter things which do not fit within them.

4.5.2   Clutter is Defined Subjectively

To define clutter then is not to identify a specific kind of object, it is instead to identify where an object does not fit in a relational context. This relational context works on two levels, the context of the space an object is in and the more broadly drawn context of an individual's life. Deciding that objects do not fit and are clutter in both these cases is something determined subjectively:

> **John**: Yeah, well it's subjective isn't it, so between me and my son, he doesn't see any clutter at all, this is what I'm saying. The camera's out of place, that normally wouldn't be there, so if that wasn't there and I was sat here and he came back with something he would think nothing of throwing it on there and leaving it there forever.

> **Pearl**: Yes, [my Dad] always saved and he would, even if something broke, he would pull it apart and save all the pieces that were still viable, so anything that broke he would pull it apart and he would save the handles and he would save the nuts and bolts and save the nails, so I guess I sort of thought that was sort of normal behaviour.

> **Liz**: I've trained myself over the years because I've had to, and when I was working over the years I was at quite senior level so I had to be organised, couldn't be farting about, doesn't look good.

The definition of clutter is a subjective decision. As John makes, clear different people see clutter differently. This means that people have different expectations about what should go where, and make different decisions about what counts as spatially out of place. Pearl understands her relationship to clutter, as someone who hoards, to have been influenced by her childhood, while Liz sees her personal way of relating to

objects as something which has developed over the course of her life through her work history. The subjective nature of clutter can be seen here to be about more than just personal preference. How we relate to and understand clutter involves the individual as a perceiving and relating subject, linking us back up to our pasts and involving our identities in how we understand and relate to objects. The relational context in which definitions of clutter are formed incorporates the subject as a key actor. These definitions are more than purely spatial, about whether we should leave our keys on the coffee table or not. They are more broadly about how we as subjects, bearing our identities and histories, see objects as relating to our selves.

4.5.3   Clutter as 'Problem'

Finally, clutter is defined as some kind of problem. Clutter can be a representation or consequence of a problem in people's lives, it can cause problems for people, or it can be understood as a problematic, ambiguous category of object:

> [Clutter] is only the physical aspect of the problem. There are always deeper underlying reasons why clutter has accumulated.
> (*Clear Your Clutter With Feng Shui*: p.47)

> It affects everything. No friends come over, I cannot let visitors in. It is impossible to clean properly. I can never find anything. […] I live in a five bedroom home and two of those rooms are completely filled to a height of five feet and I literally cannot get into them. My garage is full to the ceiling, my carport has stacks of boxes, my sunroom is completely full to over four feet.
> Hoarding Survey Respondent: Female, 56-65, Australia

> **Francesca**: Clutter is things that you don't know where else to put them, you don't know what else to do with them, they're just there because you've ran out of imagination of what to do.

None of my participants embraced having clutter in their homes. All of my participants reported regularly managing clutter in a variety of different ways. Clutter as a problem is one which is defined subjectively, spatially and relationally, as something which does not fit in with our world, or with the world as we would like it to be. Why clutter is seen as a problem relates to its being matter which does not fit

with its relational context. In addition to this, clutter is also broadly presented as a problematic cultural category through its close association with decluttering, that it is something to get rid of (Cherrier and Belk, 2015), and its discursive framings through ideas of hoarding and OCD (see section 4.7).

Clutter is not, as we can see, a kind of object. Clutter is instead a term used to describe things based on their lack of fit within the relational context of our homes and lives. Clutter as an idea works contextually, it names a quality of experience we find in our lives lived with objects. To define clutter is to draw on our personal, subjective preferences, as well as to relate objects to the self, a self which carries its history and which has developed and changed over time through its gathering experiences. To say clutter is about a way of relating to the world helps us to make sense of the idea that it can exist in more than just the home, the site which I study. Many of my interviewees talked about mental clutter and the idea of headspace, while one of the decluttering texts I analysed included chapters on 'time clutter', 'emotional clutter', 'spiritual clutter' and even 'clutter clearing your body' (*Clear Your Clutter With Feng Shui*). In this analysis of domestic clutter, what I pay attention to is, therefore, not a kind of object but a mode of experience. This means that to understand clutter we need to look to the spaces, places and times in which it is experienced and defined. As this broader framing of clutter reminds us, clutter is a cultural term which names a quality of experience, it is one which does cultural work through its discursive associations and in its construction through wider socio-cultural norms and values.

4.6   Clutter Discourses

I turn now to how clutter relates to other ways of speaking and thinking about, and relating to, objects. I look at dirt, mess and excess, other matters out of place I reviewed literature on in section 4.4. Here I show what discourses clutter is associated with, and what this means for clutter as a cultural idea. I also develop the definition of clutter through contradistinction, looking at how clutter is different from all of these.

4.6.1 Clutter and Dirt

In decluttering texts we often find a discursive connection between clutter and dirt. This framing is drawn out in different ways. A decluttered home 'feels clean and fresh' (*Simple Matters*: p.17), and is said to be easier to keep clean, making it more healthy (*Minimalist Living*). By contrast, *Start With Your Sock Drawer* tells us that not only are clutter objects 'dust magnets' (p.145), they themselves 'fester at the back of cupboards' (p.172), extending this idea of dirt to the objects themselves, not just their surroundings. Most forcefully, in *Clear Your Clutter With Feng Shui* (p.8) the feeling of the Feng Shui energy of clutter is described as 'unpleasant, sticky, unclean' and as having 'a distinctive musty, pervasive odour'. This connection we see between dirt and clutter was also reported on by Belk *et al*. (2007: p.134) in their research on individuals' experiences with decluttering:

> Clutter is symbolic dirt or feces […]. It is part of the pollution which Douglas ([1966]) defines as "matter out of place". When perceived as such it provokes disgust and precipitates guilt, shame, and embarrassment. A consumer with a cluttered home is like a child or adult who has soiled himself or herself. Thus, a disorganized home is not only as issue of space utilization in the home, but is also strongly linked to the emotional life of the individual.

However, turning to how my participants spoke about clutter and dirt, I found instead not a connection but a differentiation between clutter and dirt:

> **Francesca**: People can do what they want to do in their houses, so long as it's clean, you know if someone's house is like dirty and smelly and you can see the dirt on the sofa, that's not nice, but no, it doesn't bother me but, no, I've got friends who've got cluttered, messy houses.

Here we can see that Francesca makes a direct distinction between clutter and dirt. We can look to two quotes from Ann to explore this further:

> **Ann**: …that settee, that with the food plates on [in photo-elicitation image C], that is disgusting, because if there's anything, if there's food spilled on it or anything it looks like, erm, you know the sort of fabric that would be stained and go nasty.

> **Ann**: I'm a bit of a control freak actually, I don't like that because I think everybody else should be the same and they shouldn't because that's how they are, and I've got to accept […] not everybody's the same, and they function, and they've brought up families and they're perfectly happy.

In the first extract there is no room for manoeuvre. Subjective opinions do not come into questions of dirt. The idea of dirt is, as Mary Douglas (1966) tells us, socially defined and agreed upon. Clutter though, as I have shown, is something which is defined subjectively. Knowing this, in the second quote Ann feels that she is not really positioned to pass judgement over the clutter in other people's homes and lives, whereas she finds dirt in the home unproblematically 'disgusting'. I suggest that references to dirt in decluttering texts, and in the declutterers' discourses reported by Belk *et al*. (2007), are performative renderings of clutter objects intended to shift their meanings away from being a matter of subjective opinion and to define them more straightforwardly as a 'bad thing'. This then allows these texts to make general claims about the importance of getting rid of clutter, rather than having to present themselves as subjective and therefore less authoritative. Further evidence which supports this argument can be found in how texts advise people to get rid of clutter. They give tips on, for example, where and how to donate decluttered objects or how to sell them effectively. Dirty objects should not be passed around in this way, if it is dirty in one house it will be as dirty in the next since the definition of dirt is social. Clutter here must then have returned to being a matter of subjective opinion. By calling clutter dirt texts are calling attention to it as a problem, and making a rhetorical point about its inappropriateness in one's home. This is not the same as trying to convince readers that clutter is the same kind of thing as dirt. Both concepts relate to the idea of matter out of place, but for clutter 'out of place' is defined subjectively rather than socially.

4.6.2 Clutter and Mess

Mess is not the same as dirt; the latter is polluting and socially defined while the former is subjectively defined and does not pollute (Dion *et al*., 2014). Interestingly though this definition mirrors how I explained the difference between clutter and dirt.

It would appear that clutter and mess are closer cousins that clutter and dirt. This makes teasing them apart as concepts both more important and more challenging. Rather than aim to give a full definition of mess here I restrict myself to exploring how we can understand clutter better through looking at the ways it is different from mess.

I want to think about some instances of messiness in order to explore this. First, I want to think about messy beds. Tracy Emin's iconic *My Bed* (1998) is really, really messy. Emin produced a riot of things out of place, with condom wrappers, fag butts and empty bottles tucked in and around her crumpled white sheets. But a bed can also be messy with nothing on it but its sheet and covers, if they are screwed up and skewwhiff. This shows that messiness is not defined as things out of place from where they normally belong. Sheets are supposed to go on a bed. Rather, messiness can be seen in this example to be an aesthetic sense of things being not as they ought to be, or them being arranged in a (for want of another word) messy way. Things are messy when they are mixed up together and not ordered neatly (Dion *et al.*, 2014). Things can be messy and cluttered (Emin's bed), messy and uncluttered (a bed with screwed up sheets) and, drawing now on my data, cluttered and neat:

> **Laura**: [Photo-elicitation image A] looks tidy and clean, and it's not completely cluttered, things haven't just been thrown around […] it's just been collected, it's got its place and that's where it stays.

Therefore, we can now say that clutter cannot be synonymous with mess, we find them both together and apart. We can also say that mess is an aesthetic judgement about how things are arranged, while clutter is judgement about whether things are out of place in their relational context.

I turn now to two images from my photo-elicitation which were both described by some participants as messy and as cluttered. These are images C and D (see appendix VI). What I want to draw out is how the use of these terms differs between the images, and what this tells us about the meaning of clutter. Both images have an aesthetic sense of things being disordered and mixed up together. Both images also have things which are out of place from their normal storage location. Despite these similarities I found some quite subtle distinctions being made between the images.

Image C was generally understood to be both messy and cluttered. Image D though generated much more uncertain responses:

> **Sandra**: I suppose it's, that's not quite the right word, cluttered for that one it's just a bit untidy with small children's toys.

Sandra at first described the room as cluttered, but went on to correct herself. Emma was the only other participant to call image D cluttered, but qualified this by saying 'all the clutter entirely comes from toys, and even then they look like they've got a toy box that they're all going to go back into at the end of the day'. We can see then that people are taking more than the spatial location of objects into account here. Determinations of clutter as matter out of place can be seen to be working in a relational context, which is attentive to not only what object is where, but more broadly to the ways in which these objects are being used. The absent presence of a child in image D meant that most participants did not see it as cluttered with objects out of place, but instead as missing an infant. This missing child also led some participants to contest whether this was even a messy space:

> **Ann**: Yeah but that other one [photo-elicitation image C] looked as if it had been abandoned, this one [photo-elicitation image D] has got toys that a child is probably playing with *now*, […] it's not untidy it's a child's playroom that at the moment.

Here, Ann suggests the room is not messy. Rather, she sees a child currently playing, one who follows different aesthetic logics to that of an adult. Therefore, whether we can make an aesthetic judgement as to whether things are inappropriately arranged is questionable when we seek to make such a judgement over a space ordered not through a rationalist gaze of object management but of childhood play. In contrast to this, image C was much more readily labelled as both cluttered and messy. The potential occupants of this room were not agreed upon by all respondents. Some pictured students, some families with teenagers or older children, while others thought of adults living alone. In all of these cases the potential occupiers were imagined to be of an age where they might be expected to engage with objects on terms other than play, and instead conform to more general rules around object use

and storage. I explore lifecourse norms around clutter (left implicit here) later, in section 5.5.1.

What I want to take from this is that clutter is, as I have already argued, defined subjectively and in a relational context. Here though I show that the relational context in which definitions of clutter are formed are figured as more than frozen spatial locations within which objects are situated. Clutter in this sense relates to not just a space, but a lived place in which things and bodies are in motion and in relation to one another. This adds complexity and depth to the way in which we can understand the definition of clutter. The relational way in which this definition is deployed is also shared by how mess is defined. This is done through a relational aesthetics of order, rather than deciding if an object is in its proper spatial context, as is the case for clutter.

4.6.3 Clutter and Excess

Clutter and excess are closely allied concepts. I show in section 4.7 how clutter as an idea is bordered by discourses which mark out where relationships to it have become excessive, in terms of OCD and hoarding. These are examples of defining excess through othering (Löfgren and Czarniawska, 2013). However, we can find clutter defined through excess in ways beyond this. Clutter can be excess matter out of place when it is defined as things which are placed beyond the spatial limits of where they should be stored. We can also define clutter as excessive matter out of place when we define place in a more relational and lived way, thinking not just about storage but about human lives and wants. This is something I explored above in the relationship between clutter and mess. Finally, clutter can also feel excessive, and be defined in terms of an experience of excess as things out of place which crowd in on us. In all these different ways the definition of clutter is related to the concept of excess. Thinking again of Löfgren and Czarniawska's (2013) argument that excess is a morally loaded concept, we can another reason clutter is defined as a problem: because is framed as excessive.

The intertwining of clutter and excess is also evident in understandings of where clutter comes from. In decluttering texts, clutter is understood to come from the excessive nature of contemporary lifestyles. This works on two fronts. First, contemporary lifestyles are said to be oriented around excessive consumption, which leads to an overaccumulation of possessions in people's homes; we have a 'skewed relationship' with objects where people 'equate stuff with happiness and happiness with stuff' (*Simple Matters*: p.16). Second, contemporary lifestyles are understood to be excessively busy, leaving little room for home management and decluttering, meaning clutter accumulates; factors including 'the daily commute, staying on top of everyday chores, [and] fulfilling all our professional commitments' (*Organisation*: p.11) together mean that '[a] fulfilled life will always generate a level of excess, inconsistency and clutter' (*Organisation*: p.12) and will get in the way of decluttering. These causes of clutter through excess relate back to the strategies of reducing flow and containment Löfgren and Czarniawska (2012) describe. Texts do not present changing strategies to accommodate excess as an option, since this would not involve decluttering, which is the texts' central premise.

In my research consumerism was not referred to by participants as a cause of clutter in their lives. They did though understand clutter to result from being busy:

> **Charlotte**: We'd had a whole weekend of it, friends had been over, all the toys had been out, you know it still had the, the basis that it has but it was absolutely chaotic, and there's points sort of in, during the week if I'm at work or when we've got stuff going on or I'm tired or we can't be bothered, when there's piles of clothes lying around there's, you know, dirty dishes waiting to go in the dishwasher.

Accounts like Charlotte's were typical of understandings of clutter as something which emerges when life overtakes us and we cannot manage the home and the objects within it because of excessive demands on your time.

Drawing this together we can see that clutter and excess relate to one another in three different ways. First, clutter can be understood to be 'normal' in general, with border clutter practices marking out where our relationships to it are excessive. Second, all clutter can be understood to be 'excess' when we define it at matter out of place, remembering that this idea of out of place is one which works relationally and

contextually, accounting not just for space but also lived relations and actions. Third, clutter can in general be understood to result from excess, both as an excessive attachment to objects and through excessive demands on our time. One way in which we can understand clutter to be different from excess in general, and make sense of it as a discourse in its own right, is that clutter is *multiply* excessive in nature. This differentiates it from other accounts of excess in the literature (see Czarniawska and Löfgren 2012; 2013). Excess is a general term which speaks of a variety of contexts and objects, clutter is a form of excess which has a specific, multiply excessive, character. Beyond this, clutter is experienced and related to in particular ways, in terms of how it relates to temporality (chapter five), identity and the home (chapter six). The specific nature of how we live with clutter (as excess) is different from how we live with other excesses and marks clutter as distinctive and different. To develop my account of clutter the next section explores where clutter is constructed as 'normal' in relation OCD and hoarding, two excessive ways of relating to it.

4.7   Normative Limits of Clutter: Clutter and Mental Health

Texts on decluttering often frame themselves in terms of mental health and wellbeing. At times this remains implicit, through references to healing and self-care. Sometimes though this framing is explicit, with texts exploring the idea that our relationships to objects can express mental health problems, specifically Hoarding Disorder and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. *Lose the Clutter, Lose the Weight* and *Stuffocation* include self-complete questionnaires, in the latter to analyse if we are 'suffering from *Stuffocation*' (p.9) and the former to measure our anxiety levels on the GAD-7 scale and mood using the PHQ-9. This framing of object-relations through tools associated with mental health assessment works to present the possibility of pathology. Participants who do not hoard also drew on discourses of hoarding and OCD to make sense of their own and others' relationships to objects. I did not introduce these terms into our discussions, instead these references were spontaneous and formed part of wider conversations about their experiences with and relationships to objects. Looking at hoarding first, few people referred to hoarders as a discrete group of

people suffering from Hoarding Disorder. More often hoarding was referred to as a way of describing participants' own actions, or labelling the actions of others:

> **Diana**: Maybe this is a bit hoarder-y, I don't know, it's something I don't use so I don't know why I've got it.

> **Sadie**: You'd say [of the owner of the home in photo-elicitation image A], you'd say a bit of a hoarder, slightly eccentric.

Here the term hoarding seems to be a relative one, expressing something of a sliding scale rather than a discrete and sharply bordered 'mental health problem'. Hence, I draw a textual distinction between 'Hoarding Disorder' as it is defined and treated medically, and 'hoarding' as it is represented and understood culturally. I use the terms 'Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder' and 'OCD' to make the same point. References to hoarding were made in passing and without any further explanation of what hoarding might be. This then suggests that hoarding was assumed to be part of everyday, common-sense discourse around object relations, with an easily discernible and readily available meaning. This is mirrored in how participants talked about OCD. No participants spoke in terms of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, and instead references were restricted to the cultural concept of OCD. As with talk of hoarding, most referred to OCD in more relative terms:

> **Catherine**: Yeah I would say, I may be a tidgy tidgy tidgy little bit OCD, but not, not greatly, you can see because if I was OCD there still wouldn't be things lying about, you know, I like to be able to live comfortable but I like things in their place.

> **Emma**: But I would be totally OCD about like, well shouldn't use that phrase, but very meticulous about how that stuff got arranged.

As can be seen from Emma's quote, this discourse was so pervasive that even where participants thought that referring to OCD in this way was problematic, they at times still fell into using it as a way of talking about how people relate to objects.

Overall we can see that ideas of hoarding and of OCD serve as borders in discourse, acting as normative limits to signal where our relationships to clutter are excessive. In terms of hoarding this excess works as too strong an attachment to

clutter, or as having too much of it, whereas for OCD this works the other way, marking a too strong rejection of clutter and its problematic absence. Thinking back to Löfgren and Czarniawska's (2013) work we can see hoarders and people with OCD as groups constructed as 'other' through the definition of excess. However, this othering does not work in a straightforward way. First, we see a construction of 'others' who have transgressive relationships with objects, but these are others are who participants simultaneously (partially) identify with. Therefore, while we have some sense of who and what defines excess we also have a sense that this definition is not necessarily a clear one. Second, it is important to note that this discourse takes a particular form in its references to mental health. In decluttering texts I found there was also a discursive limit figure of 'the show home' which represented a too perfect, and seemingly inauthentic, way of relating to objects which texts claimed not to be aiming towards. Show homes were rarely talked about by my participants in these terms. We need to account for why it is mental health that is playing this specific role in discourse. Indeed, it might make more sense to talk about being 'a bit of a slob' or like a 'perfect housewife' in terms of how we relate to clutter objects, rather than talking in terms of mental health and wellbeing.

To explain this we need to account for two facts. First, the prevalence of ideas of hoarding and of OCD in the media. Herring (2014) tells us that contemporary representations of the lives and experiences of people who hoard are both increasingly common and also generally framed around psychotherapeutic discourses of illness, rather than discourses of difference. This framing of hoarding in the media is one also found by scholars who analyse television programmes which focus on hoarding (Kaplan, 2014; Lepselter, 2011). In terms of OCD, this too is fairly regularly depicted on television, often in restricted terms which present it as revolving around attention to detail and a preoccupation with orderliness and cleanliness, rather than as something involving intrusive thoughts and compulsions which can have a variety of focuses (Johnson, 2008). Thinking more broadly, mental health is commonly depicted in the media in a variety of formats which has led to a growing level of awareness of multiple mental health conditions, which in turn has facilitated their incorporation into discourse in everyday life (Harper, 2010; Johnson, 2008; Peck, 2008). So, ideas of

mental health are already out there as framing devices for explaining how people relate to objects. The second thing to account for is the way therapy speak is now commonly employed by people to understand and interpret their behaviours in all kinds of different ways (Rose, 2007). To know the self is to know it in these psy-discursive ways (Rose, 2007), meaning that talk of OCD and hoarding takes on an added cultural salience and meaningfulness which ideas like 'the show home' do not possess. Where people are talking about themselves as being a 'tidgy little bit OCD' (Catherine) this is for them a meaningful and culturally shared way to interpret and understand their behaviours; it does not mean they think they might be medically diagnosable with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.

This reminds us that ideas around clutter are formed within a wider socio-cultural context. This includes media representations of how people relate to objects, and where they do so 'abnormally', as well as more broadly the contours of contemporary self-understanding, which we see here to be framed (at times) through ideas around mental health. Paying attention to clutter not only as a discourse in its own right but also in concert with other norms and values is important. I showed above how norms around home space and its management also work to define the meaning of clutter. Clutter as a lived and relational concept needs to be understood within the normative structures and social values which make meanings out of the ongoingness of life.

Marking out where relationships to clutter are 'abnormal', through ideas of OCD and hoarding, means that, by implication, having some clutter is 'normal'. 'Normal' lives are lived in the middle ground between OCD and hoarding, and so 'normal' lives are lived with (the right amount) of clutter. I explore in section 5.5 how what counts as 'normal' for clutter differs by lifecourse stage. In section 6.4 I show where clutter normatively belongs in the home and how participants understand and relate to this. These two sections together flesh out this middle ground of 'normal' clutter, bordered by ideas of OCD (too little clutter) and hoarding (too much clutter).

4.8   Forms of Clutter

In this final section I want to now introduce my twofold conceptualisation of clutter.
Clutter is, I argue, something which can be internally differentiated into two forms,
rooted clutter and flowing clutter. These are experienced differently, defined
differently and have different discursive associations. However, I argue that clutter is
still a meaningful whole which has core qualities that hold it together as a conceptual
category. The shared elements I report on here are clutter's extrinsic definition, its
subjective definition and its status as some kind of problem. I add to this list of
general qualities through my analysis of clutter in chapters five and six. Here I reflect
back over the literature on clutter I reviewed earlier, as well as the analysis I have
made of clutter so far. In doing this I highlight two contradictions and differences
within how clutter is talked about, and show how these different ways of thinking
about clutter are found also across my data. These are, first, how clutter can be
framed as things which are stuck but also as things which are mobile. Second, how
clutter is presented as relating to the past and to memory, but also to the ongoingness
of life in the present tense. These differences and contradictions together
demonstrate the value of my approach to clutter which conceptualises it as rooted
and flowing. I then outline what each of these forms of clutter are like in turn.

4.8.1   Contradictory Clutter

In my review in section 4.3 I found clutter to be presented as both something which is
stuck and something which is mobile. My participants also gave these different senses
of clutter in our interviews:

> **Tim**: I mean I'd say just stuck, I don't know, things just stuck places
> and they never really move and you never use them, they're just sat
> there for no reason […], yeah, but I think mainly that you're never
> using it, it's just stuck there for some reason or other.

> **Emma**: I'm definitely a little bit more clutter-y than my partner is, so
> things like […] I have a pile of Christmas cards there that I'm going to
> go post shortly, to me it's almost like an in-tray out-tray kind of place
> the kitchen table, well the living room table, like I'll put something
> there to remind me that I need to do something.

In these two quotes we can see quite different senses of what clutter means. In the first quote from Tim we see clutter as something which is stuck. This kind of clutter is similar to that which Baker (1995) and Belk *et al*. (2007) talked about. In the second quote we get a sense of clutter as a more mobile concept, as something defined not by its qualities of stasis but as something which flows and changes. This sense of clutter is similar to that reported by authors including Cwerner and Metcalfe (2003) and Löfgren (2012). In both of these we can see a sense of clutter as something which is out of place. The difference is in how clutter as an object category is framed through its temporality, a way of thinking about object categories we saw Viney (2014) using to define the meaning of rubbish above (section 4.4.1).

The next contradiction is in how clutter can be framed both in relation to memory and the past while also being understood as something which supports the ongoingness of life in the present. Things which are imagined as stuck are also often understood to be ones which relate back to memory. Clutter objects that are presented as things which facilitate life's ongoingness are framed in more mobile terms instead:

> **Ian**: Our wedding photograph, err, somebody made us that didn't they, and the globe, some Wedgwood, this is, somebody bought us this […]. My father was into hedgehogs and these are my father's, so two of my father's, that's a coal hedgehog as well, that was my, one of my mother's favourite ornaments, this is from Ireland a piece of the Blarney stone it's supposed to be, this is a Gaudi lizard from Barcelona, and we go on really. Bits and pieces.
> **Claire**: This is our room with the bits of clutter, they're mementoes of different things.
> **Ian**: It just goes on the bookcase doesn't it.
>
> **Alex**: Oh let me get a photo of it in all its glory! It's like you've staged it for me!
> **Laura**: <Laughs>
> **Alex**: Clutter!
> **Laura**: So this started off as my pile of charity things, but you end up dumping things, running in running out.

Image 4.4 – Ian and Claire's Cluttered Bookcase
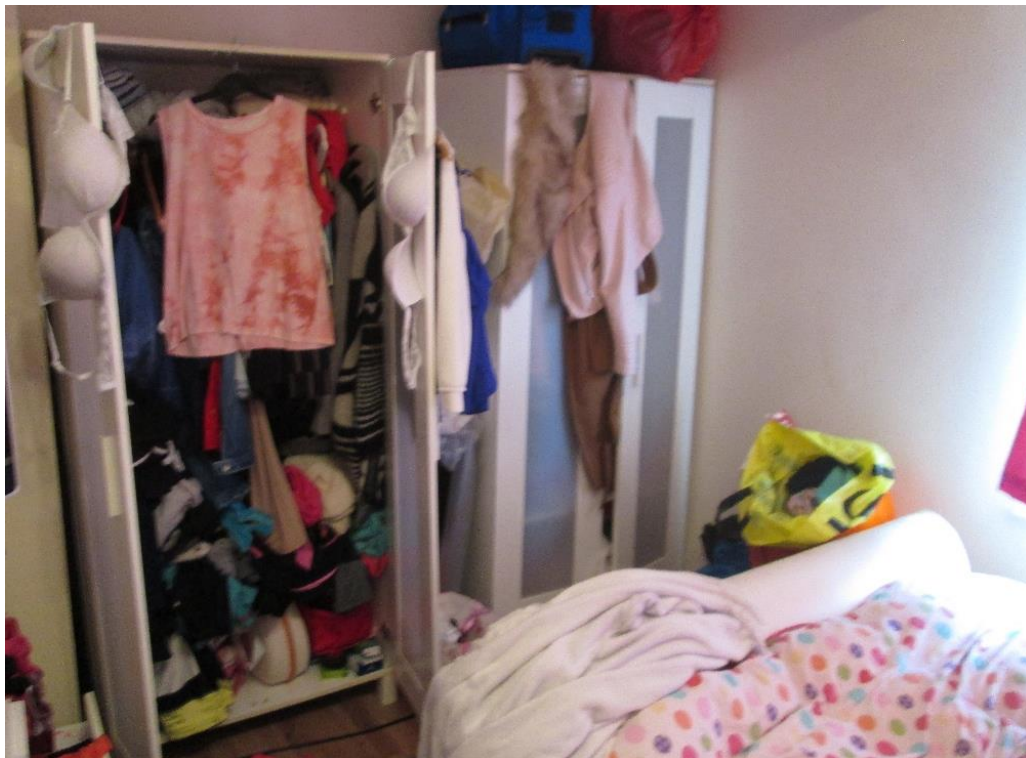
Image 4.5 – Laura's Cluttered Bedroom

In the first quote Ian and Claire assemble objects, which they describe as clutter, on their bookshelves in order to remind them of people, places and times past (image 4.4). These things do not move around, and instead form a backdrop to life which is only added to. This is quite different from the way in which clutter emerges in Laura's bedroom (image 4.5). For Laura, clutter works as an active strategy of home management and organisation. Clutter is created both as a way of keeping together things which need to be moved on as well as produced to keep life moving and to allow Laura to run in and run out in the course of other activities. These are quite different framings of clutter in terms of what it accomplishes and where it comes from.

We can see from the above we have two dimensions of clutter where its definition is constructed differently. This implies that rather than being one kind of thing, clutter has meaningful internal differences. These differences are found not only my research data but also in the wider literature, suggesting that they are not caused by how I have addressed clutter in my research, or because of any specific quirks my sample might have. As I have shown, participants across a range of other studies can be seen to articulate the meanings of clutter in these different ways too. This suggests my account of clutter as coming in different forms is a useful distinction to draw, one applicable to the work of other researchers. Finally, in a couple of instances participants themselves drew a distinction between different kinds of clutter:

> **Ian**: That's an untidy clutter [in photo-elicitation image C], it was cluttered [in photo-elicitation image A] but it had a purpose and a place it hadn't been left there as in "I'm finished with the newspaper it'll go on the floor until we have a big tidy up at the end of the month".

> **Francesca**: In the Marie Kondo book she distinguishes between active clutter and passive clutter and to me this is active clutter, they could use any of these items [in photo-elicitation image C] at any point or perhaps they've only just used them and they haven't had a chance to put them away but in that first [photo-elicitation image, A], the clutter was permanently there, it wasn't moving.

Ian makes a distinction between static forms of clutter (which have a place) and more mobile ones (which will be moved at the end of the month). Francesca also talks in these terms. She references Marie Kondo's *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying*, which I read as part of the discourse analysis I conducted for this research. I did not find this distinction she talks about in this text, and it appears that this is a misattribution; an internet search for 'active clutter passive clutter' led me to a different self-help decluttering author instead (www.lenabentsen.com/two-types-clutter-active-passive/). Wherever Francesca came across this idea, we can see that for her this dual typology of clutter, defined through mobility and stasis, is a meaningful differentiation, one which she drew on at a couple of different points in our conversation. This means then that my understanding of clutter, as rooted and as flowing, which I turn to now, is one which is not just something we can see from an academic vantage point, but one which makes sense of experiences and informs participants' framings of clutter.

4.8.2 Rooted Clutter

Rooted clutter fills attics, garages and shelves, it is generally engaged with infrequently in the course of day-to-day living due to its sequestration away from the parts of the home we live in the most. Rooted clutter is defined by its qualities of stuckness and its association with the past and with memory. In addition to this, rooted clutter is also identified by its stickiness and its agency. Rooted clutter fills the room in photo-elicitation image A.

Rooted clutter is understood as things which are stuck and sticky. This can work in different ways. Rooted clutter can be things which are stuck in one place, things which don't move and are rooted to the spot. Rooted clutter can instead be stuck in the sense of being stuck in our lives, things we have attachments to and which we struggle to move on (from). Here the object has taken root in our lives, even as we may not wish it to. These things tie us to the past, speaking of who, what and where we have been, but do not necessarily have much of a job to do in the present. In this way rooted clutter is associated with memory. At times this can be experienced in a

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positive way but can also be experienced negatively, as something which ties and bind, something which does not let us move forward.

Rooted clutter is a problematic object category. Its problematic nature comes, first, from its relationship to time and its association with the past and with memory. Rooted clutter has its own temporal logic of stasis, memory and enduringness, it bears a sense of the past which is ambiguous:

> **Charlotte**: A load of stuff of mine from university that I'd entirely forgotten about and it was stuff that was obviously quite precious to me at the time. [...] I had this thing at university that was like plastic pockets and it hung on the back of my door, erm, and every time I did anything or there was something I would sort of save the ticket or a box of matches or whatever it was [...] I can't bear to go through this because I wouldn't want to get rid of anything.

Here Charlotte talks about 'a load of stuff' which speaks about her past and ties her up in her memories. We can see in this quote the ambiguous nature of this tie to the past. Some of these things Charlotte cannot remember where they came from, others transport her back to times and places of her past. She does not want to part with these things, but she also feels she obliged to, and so resists sorting through them. Hence, this rooted clutter is ambiguous, speaking of the past but not in a singular, clear way. I explore in more detail how this rooted clutter works in terms of memory in the next chapter (section 5.6); here I just want to demonstrate the ambiguous and somewhat problematic relationship to the past which rooted clutter holds.

A second way in which we can see rooted clutter as problematic is as something which sticks to us, rather than is stuck, and makes claims of us (see also Baker, 1995).

> **George**: This is a chest of drawers which I can't bring myself to throw out, and I'm ashamed of myself for having it [in the garage]. [...] I inherited [it] when my parents died and I err, it's been in the house for a long time, it's large, it's a bit grubby, it needs sorting out, it needs restoring but I have never worked up the enthusiasm to do it [...], it's something that genuinely troubles my conscience.

At lots of points people talked about things which they could not part with. This chest of drawers for George is something which sticks around in his garage, which has stuck

with him and his family through the years, which he does not really know what to do with. It stays and it endures, although it is not really loved. Here the object seems to make some claims on him. Unloved and uncared for, used only for storing old pictures and spare frames, it sticks to him, like 'burs' in Baker's (1995: p.17) terms, and pricks his conscience. This claim-making of objects represents part of rooted clutter's agency. Clutter's agency is an undeveloped theme in the literature, as I noted in my review in section 4.3.3, and is something I explore more in section 6.5.1.

Rooted clutter is defined subjectively and extrinsically. It feels as if it is out of place within the context of a life. This extrinsic definition is one which therefore works on a fully relational basis that takes into account not only the space in which the object is, but more broadly the lived place of home as a site of identity and meaning (reviewed in sections 2.4 and 6.3). By working in this more relational way, rooted clutter can therefore be seen to relate back to subjectivity, and to questions here not (just) of personal preference but of who we are as subjects.

Finally, rooted clutter is often associated with hoarding. Many people who hoard in my research kept clutter from their pasts which they felt was an ambiguous presence in their lives today:

> **Barbara**: I feel like I can't just throw it out because it has, I'm not sure why that is, if it's because [this fabric] reminds me of my sister because I made the dresses from her wedding from it […;] it brings up those feelings of sadness but somehow I'm still not willing to throw it out, does that make sense to you?

This association works also at the level of discourse. Kaplan (2014) shows how hoarding programmes frame their subjects as inappropriately nostalgic (I return to the theme of memory in section 5.6). Non-hoarding participants drew on the idea of hoarding when noting ambiguity around objects' values and meanings.

Rooted clutter is one of the two forms of clutter I introduce here. It is defined by its stuckness in homes and lives, a sense that it is rooted in place. It relates to memory, and a sense of the past which is ambiguous and distanced, one less readily meaningful than that communicated by memory objects and other meaningful possessions (see section 5.6) In this, rooted clutter is a problematic object category

and is related discursively to hoarding. Rooted clutter's problematic nature can also
be understood with reference to its agency and the claims it seems to make of us, its
nature as something which sticks around. Rooted clutter is defined extrinsically and
subjectively, in ways which construct it as out of place in lived and relational terms.

4.8.3   Flowing Clutter

Flowing clutter sits on table tops, sofas and floors, and tends to be interacted with and
moved around relatively frequently in the course of day-to-day living. Flowing clutter
is defined by its mobility and its connection to the ongoingness of life. It is defined too
by its problematic nature, and is identified subjectively and extrinsically. Flowing
clutter connects discursively to the idea of OCD. Flowing clutter is shown in photo-
elicitation image C.

Flowing clutter is defined through mobility in two ways. First, flowing clutter is
produced through everyday lives on the move:

> **Sandra**: Perhaps [the owners of the room shown in photo-elicitation
> image C have] just come back from holidays, I don't know,
> everything's just dumped, some boots there, yeah, I think it's perhaps
> somebody with a youngish family that have just got in from
> somewhere or got back from somewhere and it's just everyday clutter
> really.

Here Sandra talks about 'everyday clutter', the stuff which arises through people living
in a home with one another and with things. Stuff gets put down and picked up again;
this stuff is flowing clutter. It takes up room and is out of place, not kept in its storage
location. Generally it is not expected to hang around for long, and is moved on
relatively quickly. This is the second way flowing clutter is mobile. Rather than
something which is stuck, flowing clutter moves about and moves on relatively freely.

This movement of things around the home, produced in the course of life,
means that flowing clutter tends to be associated not with a backwards looking
temporality inflected by memory, but instead one which speaks on life's ongoing and
progressive nature. In academic literature this is sometimes referred to as functional
storage, as ways of keeping life going by putting things down and moving on to the

Image 4.6 – Books Going to the Charity Shop (Mary)

next task at hand (Löfgren, 2012; Luzia, 2011). Flowing clutter can also be more forward looking though, and produced with reference to its future use. Image 4.6 is a pile of books left out on Mary's stairs. This flowing clutter looks forward to her next trip to the charity shop, and like the example of Laura's pile of things for charity above, is a way of productively organising objects in the home to facilitate their movement. In this way flowing clutter can be seen to be productive of home life as progressive and changing; it is a strategy of object management which allows the home to be remade through the movement of objects around it.

The problematic nature of flowing clutter rests not in its ambiguity in terms of how it relates to the self, as we found was the case for rooted clutter. Flowing clutter can instead be seen to be the result of wider problems in life, for example being too busy and not having time to put things away. I explored how clutter is framed in terms of excessive busyness above (section 4.6.3). I suggest this busyness is related to flowing clutter because it is this form of clutter which relates to life on the move. Busyness can, in turn, create problems when flowing clutter builds up to a point where it makes life hard to live:

> **Emma**: I think the noisiness is about, so say if the table's really cluttered then when I want to sit down to eat I have to make space and I would hate just pushing stuff out of the way to eat, so I think it's when it begins to just encroach on everyday living in ways that aren't great.

Here we can see that too much flowing clutter can make the home an unpleasant place to live in. It can turn from facilitating life and allowing it to move forward and can shift instead to something which holds us back and gets in the way. Emma talks here about the 'noisiness' of clutter, that it not only blocks us but also creates an unpleasant affect in the home. Here the problematic nature of flowing clutter is about how it makes a space feel, and about its being out of its proper place.

Flowing clutter is defined extrinsically; its out of place is a spatial designation which works on the basis of activities and tasks. Here, as I talked about in section 4.6.2 on clutter and mess, the extrinsic definition of clutter is based around the context in which life is lived. In this way flowing clutter can be understood as subjective, as it is the subject who engages with tasks and frames their engagement with space on the basis of these activities, deciding what does not fit. Emma makes flowing clutter, placing cards on her table (section 4.8.1), as a positive strategy of space management; she leaves them deliberately out of place to remind her to post them. When she wants to eat a meal the cards can be jarring and feel noisy, as they no longer fit within this reconfigured space of dining.

Finally, flowing clutter is framed as a discourse by ideas of OCD, rather than hoarding, which is associated with rooted clutter. OCD was invoked by participants to communicate an excessive preoccupation with order, or to say it another way, as an excessive rejection of flowing clutter:

> **Sandra**: Yeah [clutter left out] does [bother me] and I'm thinking 'that should be put away and that's not right there' so, I try, I hope I'm not OCD but I do like things to be quite neat and organised.

While not associated with hoarding at the level of discourse in the same way rooted clutter is, flowing clutter is still a presence in the lives of people who hoard. We can

see this below in how Sally differentiates between the generally stuck clutter she owns and the things her son leaves out when he has finished using them:

> **Sally**: I mean to a certain extent [my kids] can be just as guilty as me, sometimes it's not necessarily the hoarding that causes stuff, like I'll put all the cushions back on the settee, [my son and his girlfriend] go in they'll lay down they'll get the blankets out and then they'll just leave them.

So, flowing clutter and rooted clutter are both present in the lives of people who hoard and people who do not hoard. This means then that the alignment of hoarding with rooted clutter and OCD with flowing clutter is one which works at level of discourse and not experience. This shows that these forms of clutter are framed differently in cultural terms.

The definition of flowing clutter rests in its mobility. This mobility is twofold; flowing clutter is created by mobile bodies and lives, and flowing clutter itself is something which tends to move on and move around the home quite freely. Flowing clutter in both these senses relates to life's ongoingness and can be understood as productive and positive. Too much flowing clutter can cause problems and can make the home an unpleasant place to be. We can also see flowing clutter as the result of problems if it comes about because we do not have the time to deal with things properly. The definition of flowing clutter is formed subjectively and extrinsically, but in different ways to how rooted clutter is defined. Flowing clutter is generally associated in discourse with OCD, which represents an excessive rejection of it.

Flowing clutter and rooted clutter are conceptually separate, and are, as I demonstrate, related to differently and enrolled into practices in different ways (see, as an example, section 5.4). However, this does not mean that they are irreconcilable, and that there is no switching between them. Rather, as these categories of clutter are ones which emerge in our interactions with/in the home and alongside objects, the things which enter them have the capacity to be related to in many ways (as different forms of clutter, or as something else entirely). I do not explore in my thesis the way objects can shift between being rooted clutter and flowing clutter. As these forms of clutter have not been identified before it is necessary as a first step to

articulate them clearly, so that we can understand them. However, this means that more work is needed to understand better the relationship between rooted clutter and flowing clutter, since my work considers them in isolation from one another. I identify this as a future avenue for research in my conclusion chapter (section 7.3). For now then this is a point which I leave here, and continue on with my account of how we relate to flowing clutter and how we relate to rooted clutter.

4.9   Conclusions

In this chapter I had three aims: to show clutter is a cultural term which does cultural work; to explore the range of ways clutter can be defined; to introduce my argument clutter comes in two forms, rooted clutter and flowing clutter. I have shown clutter is a cultural term which labels particular experiences with objects, ones where they are experienced as out of place in a relationally drawn context. Clutter is defined subjectively, meaning that it speaks of a quality of experience, rather than as a term of strict definition. The experiences which clutter represents are ones which are made sense of within a shared social and cultural context, our lives constructed through wider socio-historical norms around proper object use and space use. As such, clutter as a concept is both meaningful and normative.

In this chapter I have shown a range of ways in which clutter is defined. I first looked at academic literature on clutter which defined clutter through stasis, mobility, its connection to the past, its supporting life's ongoingness and as some kind of problem. I then turned to my data, arguing that at a general level clutter is determined extrinsically, subjectively and, again, as some kind of problem. I developed the definition of clutter through an account of its connection to and differentiation from ideas of dirt, mess and excess. I showed too how clutter is defined in terms of mental health, exploring its framings through OCD and hoarding.

I drew these together definitions of clutter to present my argument that clutter comes in two forms, rooted and flowing. Drawing these definitions from my data worked to make sense of the contradictions between different definitions of clutter

identified throughout this chapter. I then introduced my understanding of clutter as rooted and as flowing and explored what both of these forms of clutter are like.

Overall this is the key take-away point from this chapter. Clutter is an umbrella term for describing experiences with objects, and can be differentiated into two distinct forms, rooted and flowing. Clutter is a general name for experiences where objects do not seem to fit within a subjectively and relationally drawn understanding of their proper place in the home. This is informed by individuals' identities, the tasks they are engaged in and also wider norms around home and object use and relations. This general sense of clutter can be differentiated into two forms. These share clutter's extrinsic, subjective and problematic definition, but relate to it in different ways. They also differ in their relationship to temporality and identity. This argument, that clutter is both a meaningful whole and also something differentiated into two forms based on how it is lived alongside and framed, is a novel intervention within the literature on clutter. This contribution resolves the contradictions I identified in how clutter has to date been articulated. This double framing of clutter is a key research finding which allows allowing greater precision when talking about clutter, as well as resolving the contradictions in existing clutter research. It is something which I develop further in the next chapter, where I explore how these different forms of clutter relate to rhythm and routine, lifecourse and life transitions, and memory in different ways.

Chapter 5   Clutter and Time: Rhythm, Life Transitions and Memory

5.1   Introduction

This chapter explores clutter as a temporal phenomenon. It does this by looking at how participants experience clutter and relate to it in time, by thinking about how clutter is constructed as a (temporal) discourse, and by exploring how participants think and talk about clutter and time. I develop the account of clutter which I gave in my last chapter here, drawing on clutter's definition to understand how it is lived with and alongside. The chapter draws on a range of different ways of thinking about time and temporal experience, looking first at how clutter works rhythmically, then in the context of life transitions, and finally as a memory object. These each have a bearing both on how clutter is constructed discursively and how it is experienced. These different ways of conceptualising time all work together to make sense of clutter as something which emerges in relational spatial and lived personal contexts. After stating my aims for this chapter, I outline its structure, showing the path I take through my data and the literature to achieve these aims.

5.2   Chapter Aims and Outline

5.2.1 Aims

This chapter has two aims. First, to develop my account of clutter as a cultural term, here as something which relates to time. I add more depth and detail to the account I developed in the last chapter. I show flowing and rooted clutter to be constructed with reference to time in different ways. My second aim is to show how the emergent relational context in which clutter is made, managed and related to, works temporally. I argued in the last chapter that clutter is something which is defined as out of place in a spatial context or in the context of an individual's life. Here I add to this by showing how both of these contexts change over time. This means that clutter is something which emerges, is managed and experienced in and through time.

5.2.2 Outline

To achieve these aims I begin this chapter with a literature review (section 5.3). I first frame this by returning to the argument I made in section 2.3, that time is best understood as emergent timespace, where temporal experiences are constituted contextually and relationally. This situates my treatment of the relationship between clutter and time in this chapter; I analyse and write about clutter as it relates to different senses of time which emerge through practices, while recognising that this separation is only ever partial. I then begin my literature review and introduce academic work on: rhythm and routine; lifecourse and life transitions; memory.

Section 5.3.1 of this review looks first at routine domestic practices, reporting on how these are conceptualised, as well as how they are formed and experienced. I argue that accounts of routine provide strong insights into practices, but do so in a restrictive way which does not account for issues of material agency, affect, identity and cultural meaning. I show how the idea of rhythm can be used to frame routines so as to make room for these. This wider framing informs my analysis of rhythmic and routine practice with clutter.

I next review literature on the lifecourse and on life transitions, introducing these concepts. I show how material culture research studies the lifecourse, noting it replicates an overemphasis on the beginning and the end of the lifecourse, and a lack of focus on adults' experiences, in common with other lifecourse and life transitions research. This gap in the literature is one my analysis helps to fill.

The final body of literature I look at is work on memory. I show how memory has been broadly conceptualised and studied in geography, paying attention to how it is connected to issues of identity and place. I argue for an understanding of memory, place and identity as emergent and relational. I show material culture studies of ambiguous, uncertain and challenging memories to be an emergent research theme in this area, one which my analysis contributes to.

Following this literature review I turn to my data to show how clutter is made, managed and experienced in (relation to) time. I give an account in section 5.4 of routine and rhythmic practices of clutter making and clutter management. I explore

flowing clutter first, then rooted clutter. Together these two sections show how these kinds of clutter work differently in rhythmic and routine ways. I draw these together to argue that rhythm is a key element to the meaning and experience of clutter in general.

I then explore how clutter works in relation to the lifecourse and life transitions. First, I show how clutter is framed as a cultural idea through ideas of the lifecourse. Flowing clutter is related to children and families, while rooted clutter is related to older people. After this I give an account of how clutter emerges and is managed through life transitions. I focus on three experiences in the adult life of one of my participants (Catherine) to show how each of these produced (practices around) clutter.

Finally, my analysis in section 5.6 explores rooted clutter's relationship to memory. I show how rooted clutter is constructed discursively as ambiguous or problematic memory objects. I then look at experiences of memory and ambiguity in action. I show how memory objects can be(come) clutter, defined through their spatial or lived personal context. I then investigate what kinds of experiences participants have when engaging with clutter as a memory object.

I conclude this chapter by recapping the key arguments made throughout, drawing out where this analysis makes an original contribution to the literature, and demonstrating how I have achieved my aims for this chapter.

5.3   Literature Review: Lives Lived in Time and With Objects

This section reviews literature on the key analytic themes for this chapter: rhythm and routine, lifecourse and life transitions, and memory. I introduced these very briefly in section 2.3; here I give them a much fuller treatment. As I noted in my review, this separation of these temporal elements is somewhat artificial; while different senses of time emerge as the most prominent within timespaces (Adam, 1998; 2008; May and Thrift, 2001), this does not mean that other temporalities disappear. For the sake of clarity, and to better reflect the emergent senses of time my research captured, I hold these temporalities apart here. Our experiences of clutter, and lives in general, are of

course, more complicated than this. Timespace is made and experienced relationally, through the interaction of bodies and objects in place. Clutter is an actor within relationally constituted timespace. This means that it is implicated across and between a range of domestic temporal experiences and practices. How these relate to one another is beyond the more modest scope of this research, which instead lays the groundwork for such an integrative perspective by identifying and analysing the different ways in which clutter relates to (elements of) time. Here I show the multiple ways in which clutter serves to constitute the timespace of home, and in turn how the timespace of home serves to constitute meanings and experiences of clutter.

5.3.1   Routines and Rhythms

To help me interpret everyday, often taken-for-granted practices with objects, which characterise many of our dealings with clutter, I turn first to studies of (domestic) habits and routines. These pay very close attention to how stuff gets done at home, but, as I go on to argue, their focus only on practices can be restrictive. After looking over works on routine I suggest that they can be usefully supplemented with accounts of rhythm. Rhythm is about life in general in its unfolding, whereas studies of routine are about specific practices within a life. So, to understand clutter and decluttering within its wider context, in the home, in the life of a person and in culture, I turn to accounts of rhythm.

Habitual and routine actions are key to the practice of everyday life, but their definition is somewhat contentious and disputed in the literature. We can understand them as ways of carrying on that are sedimented into bodily dispositions, as ways of acting in a less than fully conscious manner (Bourdieu, 1990; Ilmonen, 2001; Seamon, 1980). Alternatively, routines can be enacted in obviously conscious ways. For example, many people in the UK routinely put up Christmas decorations sometime in December. This is not an unthinking bodily reflex but instead a shared cultural practice which involves consideration of aesthetics and affects (see Miller, 2008: pp.18-31). By some scholars habits and routines are framed as positive and productive; David Seamon (1980) argues that habits are valuable as points of

familiarity and stability for the habitually acting individual. They also create familiar everyday spaces of habitual interaction, which he describes as place-ballets. However, as Ilmonen (2001: p.14) notes, '[r]outines are also impeding structures that narrow down our alternatives for action'. This is the other side of bodily habits, which can be presented as passive performances in accordance with normative expectations, different from conscious practices which can resist spatial norms (Certeau, 1984). Given these competing ways of understanding habits and routines it can be hard to define them in a singular, satisfactory way (Ehn and Löfgren, 2009). They can seem constraining, but also enabling in their familiarity. They can be both personal and shared, be reflex or socially orientated actions. For Ehn and Löfgren (2009) this means we need to pay ethnographic attention to habits in practice, rather than try and map out their constituents ahead of time (see also Southerton, 2012).

Empirical studies of routines and habits demonstrate their complexity. Much recent research is framed through practice theory, which focuses on social life through the optic of the practices from which it is made. This approach means that accounts of routine focus on how practices work and are socially organised, rather than considering their wider cultural meanings or their personal meaningfulness (Shove *et al.*, 2012, Warde, 2005). There are four elements of routine practice I want to draw out. First, routines need to happen regularly. Shove (2012) argues that to be routine a practice needs to colonise a particular time-slot in the day/week/year. Southerton (2006) suggests the regular practices most likely to become routine are those which require a high degree of synchronisation between individuals; to facilitate synchronicity, regularity and predictability are required. However, we can also think of time-slot colonisation not just as set points in a diary, but also in terms of time-slot ordering. Routines are practices enacted in sequence, with the order of actions pre-determined (Southerton, 2012). Therefore, time-slot colonisation can be understood within the context of practice itself, and its emergent social time, not just in relation to the clock time a routine happens at.

Second, routines can be formed through the 'socio-technical structuring of time', as Jalas and Rinkinen (2013: p.55) discuss in their study of routines around domestic heating using wood as a fuel in Finland. They describe the ways in which the

capacities of heating systems, such as the ability to store heat, work to structure the lives of the households they provide warmth for by determining the periodicity and ordering of routine practices. Third, routines can be enacted on the basis of material markers. Mylan and Southerton (2017) describe how the routine of doing the laundry is socially ordered. While between different individuals there is much variety in this routine practice, at a social level laundering is ordered through a number of shared elements. One of these is the use of objects as material markers that signal when laundry needs to be done, such as a full washing basket. In both these accounts the agency of objects is not explored, with the role of objects framed anthropocentrically.

Finally, the fourth element of routine I draw out is their constitution in relation to wider temporalities and rhythms. This can come from a range of sources. Mylan and Southerton (2017) describe institutional temporal rhythms which dictate a clean shirt is needed for work on Monday. The example I gave of decorating at Christmas is a cultural temporality. Routine practices also work in relation to the cyclical nature of the Earth's seasons (Wahlen, 2011).

Studies of routines in the home are useful ways of thinking about how practices happen, and I draw on some of their insights later in this chapter (section 5.4.1). However, a focus purely on practice feels unsatisfactory. There is a world beyond routines, which the restrictive framing of practice theory tends to efface. This world includes affect, object agency, questions of identity and selfhood, and framings of practices and their experiences in terms of their cultural meanings. As I show in my analysis of practices with clutter, all of these have their part to play. Therefore, another way of thinking about regular and routine practices is called for. We need one which retains a focus on the intersection, and mutual constitution, of the temporal and the material in and through practices, and one which can hold on to the valuable ethnographic insights research on routine offers, but without framing them in such a restrictive way.

To resolve this, I suggest we can best think about routines through the idea of rhythm. Accounts of rhythm look beyond routines, but do not overlook them. Rhythm is a key coordinate of temporal experience (Adam, 2008; May and Thrift, 2001), and is an area of time in which geographers have engaged their attention quite

deeply. Most accounts of rhythm start from Lefebvre's (2004) *Rhythmanalysis*. In this text Lefebvre argues rhythms are everywhere and in everything. They are part of the open and progressive nature of life in the world; he tells us that '[e]verywhere where there is interaction between place, a time and an expenditure of energy there is **rhythm**' (2004: p.15, original emphasis). Rhythms emerge and change, they can remain stable over time but always hold within them the possibility for difference since they are iterative, not repetitive (see also Wunderlich, 2008). Lefebvre argues that places, bodies, non-humans, objects and practices are all constituted through rhythms and possess their own rhythms. He also shows how human bodies are trained in rhythmic, normative performances, which he describes as dressage. This includes practices such as walking (Edensor, 2010c), which, as a rhythmic practice, is simultaneously open to contestation and difference (Edensor, 2008).

Bodies themselves are multiply rhythmic. As Adam (1998) notes, as well as performing rhythms the body is constituted of multiple rhythms. These work at different scales, from the heart beat, to the circadian rhythm, the menstrual cycle, up to the life cycle as a whole. These bodily rhythms intersect with and are constituted through the rhythms of the Earth. Rhythms are both created through action and are the context for action. Rhythms can be imposed, meaning we can address questions of power relations, but they can also be changed and resisted, leaving room for critical politics and subversions. The construction of routine practices through and alongside wider temporalities therefore makes sense in this account of rhythm, which sees all life to be woven as a tapestry made of ever unspooling thread. By placing routines in the context of rhythm we see life stitched up together through and within time, not cut up into patches of isolated practices.

Rhythms make place in an open sense in that they are about multiple trajectories coming together and moving apart, which includes not only people and objects but also ideas, cultures and discourses (Edensor, 2010b; see also Massey, 2005). As Crang (2001) argues, since rhythmic practices make timespace we can understand the city as not a singular place but as a site of interconnection and overlap between multiple timespaces, constructed through rhythmic practices which are themselves (partially) founded upon multiple rhythms and beats. Vannini (2012) gives

an example of this in action. He reflects on the ways in which socio-technical ferry rhythms work to make the places of island communities. Experiences of place are mediated by ferries' comings and goings; they structure movements around and within islands, as well as serving as key marker points in the passage of time. These ferry crossings are themselves though constructed in relation to other rhythms, such as the passing of the seasons or the regular enactment of local cultural events.

The home too can be understood as a place made through the intersection of rhythms. Nansen *et al.* (2009) show again technology's role in forming the rhythms of place, looking at domestic media. They also explore the rhythmic expectations we have of domestic spaces, that rhythms come together and synchronise in family practices. This sense of rhythm is not so much about dressage and training, but a deliberate falling into line with one another. This shows that not marching wholly to the beat of one's own drum is not necessarily a bad thing, and indeed to submit to the rhythms of others, for example when caring for them, can be an expression of kinship and of love (Davies, 2001). What these accounts therefore offers us is a way to relate practices of and with clutter to a wider sense of the home as a lived and relational place. This fits better the understanding of clutter which I developed in the last chapter, as something which is understood and experienced in lived and relational terms. Rhythm can help to conceptually define what clutter is, it can be used to understand where clutter comes from and helps us to frame and conceptualise practices of clutter management.

Overall, in this section I have made a case for understanding routine practices through the idea of rhythm. While existing studies of routine provide us with excellent and detailed accounts of practices, they do not connect these up with a wider sense of life as something which is lived and unfolding. To find this I have argued we can turn to accounts of rhythm, which place routines in their wider temporal and relational context, and in doing so enlivens them.

5.3.2 Lifecourse, Life Transitions and Material Culture

People move through time via the lifecourse. Lifecourse positions are understood in two separate but related ways. The lifecourse first relates to our chronological age. In addition to this, the lifecourse gains its social meaning through an understanding of it as having different stages which we move through – from childhood to adulthood to old age. Age and life stage together serve to position us within the lifecourse (Elchardus and Smits, 2006). Geographical studies of the lifecourse emphasise the second of these, looking beyond age as biology and chronology, and framing it in terms of its social effects and cultural meanings (Hopkins and Pain, 2007). Doing this allows questions of place, power and politics to be addressed, with research able to explore how experiences and practices are constituted on the basis of lifecourse stages (Bailey, 2009). This means that age is understood in relational terms; lifecourse stages are constructed in contradistinction to one another, on the basis of intersectional differences, and in specific, lived (inter-)generational relationships and practices (Hopkins and Pain, 2007; Vanderbeck and Worth, 2015a).

Research into the lifecourse starts from an understanding of it as a path through a life charted over time. Historically, our trajectories were broadly mapped out in front of us, and understood as a life*cycle* formed of a series of immoveable stages through which all people were thought to progress (Elchardus and Smits, 2006). Contemporary paths through the life*course* instead are more freely chosen, with this choice understood as a result of a broader social detraditionalisation and increasing individualisation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991; see section 2.3). Giddens (1991) describes this process as colonising the future, an agentic and reflexive process of imagining the self in time and deciding where and who one wants to be. This happens often around 'fateful moments' where people (feel they) stand at a crossroads and make a choice about where to head. These choices are contextualised within a wider sense of the individual's autobiography, that is who they are and where they have already been in their lifecourse. This autobiography is constructed in an unfolding and progressive sense in which elements can be foregrounded or forgotten to form a unified and meaningful whole which makes sense of the present and allows for a projection of self into the future (Giddens, 1991). The (autobiographical) self,

constructed through and within the lifecourse, involves not only understandings of who we are, but also who we are not; this sense of disconnect from our pasts makes lifecourse something which is experienced progressively, through which we feel that we have travelled (Hockey, 2008).

An alternative way of thinking about the passage of lives through time emphasises life *transitions*, rather than life*course*. These accounts similarly see contemporary (Western) lives as being detraditionalized. However, they encourage greater attention to the messiness which comes along with this detraditionalisation, which can be overlooked in work on the lifecourse framed often in linear and developmental terms (Hörschelmann, 2011; Worth, 2009). Scholars 'focus on biographical *ruptures* and *discontinuities* […] [and] ask how non-linearity in individual life courses can be understood, how discontinuities are produced, experienced and negotiated and how they can be researched' (Hörschelmann, 2011: p.378, original emphasis). There is in this research a greater emphasis on the structural factors which shape a life, as well as more room for thinking about how personal and social changes together work to form life transitions (Hörschelmann, 2011; Worth, 2009). Therefore, accounts of life transitions do not work in such fully agentic terms as work on lifecourse does. For example, much more attention is paid to how our journeys through life are lived with others, the ways in which 'linked lives' work to structure our practices and experiences (Hörschelmann, 2011). In this then there is a greater sense that we live in ways which synchronise with those around us (Bailey, 2009), plotting our courses in relational terms (Hopkins and Pain, 2007). People wish to go through shared life transitions with their friends and their peers (Flaherty, 2012); to go through such transitions early or late can be distressing and challenge the (colonisation of the) future we had imagined (Shirani and Henwood, 2011). There is room here too to consider how transitions are constructed at a bodily level, in discourse and through politics (DeLyser and Shaw, 2013). This work also makes more room for spaces and places to be important actors within life transitions (Hörschelmann, 2011), as well as, I argue, objects, including clutter. Finally, a focus on non-linearity, and the multiple influences upon constructions and enactments of life transitions, feeds back into how scholars conceptualise and research time and our lives lived through it. Nancy Worth's

research explores how messy life transitions are enacted temporally, as complex and emergent intersections between past, present and future together (Worth, 2009; drawing on Grosz, 1999), leading her towards similarly messy and emergent research methods to capture this complex temporality (Worth, 2011).

Theories of and approaches to the lifecourse and life transitions are fairly well developed overall in geography (Bailey, 2009; Vanderbeck and Worth, 2015b). However, rather than paying attention to the overall flow and shape of the lifecourse, research in geography is instead said to be guilty of 'fetishising the margins and ignoring the centre' (Hopkins and Pain, 2007: p.287; see also Vanderbeck and Worth, 2015a). This bookending of research means that the experiences of adults are rarely interrogated. This contrasts with the degree of interest in the geographies of children's lives (see, for example, the entire journal of *Children's Geographies*) and a smaller, but still substantial, interest in those of older adults/the elderly (recently reviewed by Skinner *et al.*, 2014). Adulthood as a lifecourse category forms a curious absent presence in much scholarship: the majority of respondents to a whole range of geographical studies are adults, but rarely are their experiences or discourses conceptualised as being specifically related to their holding this lifecourse position and not others (Vanderbeck and Worth, 2015a). Studies across the lifecourse are developing though, evidenced by, for example, a growing attention to the idea of intergenerationality (Vanderbeck and Worth, 2015b).

This tendency of bookending, with its concomitant lack of attention to the interrelations between (people of) different lifecourse stages, is also evident in literature which pays attention to practices of and with domestic material culture. There is a great deal of work which looks at the material culture of old age, from a variety of perspectives. We have accounts of the 'special things' which older people own (Chapman, 2006) as well as studies which look instead to the totality of possessions older people have in their homes (Ranada and Hagberg, 2014). Some authors think about divestment, both in relation to moving to a residential care home (Fairhurst, 1999), and also as a way to care for others by not leaving too many possessions behind as unwanted inheritances (Smith and Ekerdt, 2011). We have takes on the specific meanings of objects in later life, with research showing both how

the ownership of objects and their 'tasteful' display becomes less important as we age (Ewart and Luck, 2013), as well as the ways in which aged and gendered subjectivities continue to be constituted through displayed objects (Tarrant, 2016). A final way in which the possessions of older people are considered is as objects which family members have to deal with once the older person is deceased, with studies thinking both about the social concept of inheritance (Finch and Hayes, 1994) as well the experience of dealing with these remains and reminders (Guillard, 2017). As Vanderbeck and Worth (2015a: p.6) argue, '[t]he construction of individual generational subjectivities […] is intimately linked to discursive practices that construct particular individuals and groups as 'in place' and 'out of place' in particular contexts'. The logic of these normative geographies then can be seen to be at work in the segregation of older people in research, the way that their material lives only tend to be studied in connection with places they are seen to belong, that is the home, the care home or the grave.

Such segregation matches studies of material culture at the beginning of the lifecourse. Here, authors consider subjects such as young people's bedrooms (Lincoln, 2015) and toys (Woodyer, 2017). In a reverse to the picture in geography more broadly, there is less research on children's material culture than there is on that of older people. An edited collection of viewpoints published in *Children's Geographies* (Skelton, 2018) reflects on this lack of attention to kids' stuff, with Woodyer (2018) suggesting it relates to a pressure to do 'serious' geographies of fun. Where the material culture of children is researched it is often in relation to practices of childcare and adult responsibilities (for example Gregson, 2011; Waight and Boyer, 2018).

Studies of clutter are often pitched in these terms, with authors specifically researching families with children (Arnold *et al.*, 2012; Dowling, 2008; Luzia, 2011; Stevenson and Prout, 2013). These studies emphasise what Luzia (2011) describes as the 'throwntogetherness' of intergenerational domestic life. This is the intersection of differently aged bodies, and the objects which they need, in the home. In this work home is an intergenerational space, a site of accommodation, negotiation and sometimes tension where the needs of multiple people intersect, overlap and conflict (see Arnold *et al.*, 2012; Cieraad, 2013; Dowling, 2008; Luzia, 2011; Stevenson and

Prout, 2013). While these studies are interesting in their accounts of parenting, we might say that they tell us comparatively little about children's experiences. Indeed, in many cases it feels as if children are something to be managed in the context of an adult's life, rather than equivalent actors with their own material cultures and practices. This then returns us to Vanderbeck and Worth's (2015a) argument that we need to pay greater attention to the coming together of different generations in space, with their own trajectories, agencies and agendas.

5.3.3   Memory and Memory Objects

In geography much work on memory concentrates on the level of the nation or the state, thinking through memory as it is experienced collectively (Jones and Garde-Hansen, 2012b; Legg, 2007). In these accounts memory is a social act, working to bind groups together and to express their identities (Drozdzewski *et al*., 2016a; Hoelscher and Alderman, 2004). This work emphasises the objects, spaces and practices of memorialisation, and pays attention to the power dynamics of memory through asking questions about who is remembered, who is forgotten, and to what ends (Drozdzewski *et al*., 2016a; Hoelscher and Alderman, 2004). Studies of domestic and personal memories more rarely engage with these issues of power, but they do share an attentiveness to questions of identity and how memory is enacted and embodied. Meah and Jackson (2016: p.515), for example, argue that the kitchen is like a 'private living museum'. Kitchens are both full of things which prompt memories, as well as being spaces which are curated by individuals and families in order to express and embody their selfhoods. Kitchens are also spaces where, for example through practices of cooking, memories are experienced and created sensorially (Longhurst *et al*., 2009; Meah and Jackson, 2016).

There is room to think more broadly about this kind of sensory memory practice, both in studies of collective memory (Drozdzewski *et al*., 2016a) and in memories of home (Ratnam, 2018). There are other features which collective and personal memory share; individual memories are always formed in a social context, and 'social memory' itself works as an aggregate of individuals' memories (Legg, 2007).

We can think about collective memory as being marked in public spaces through monuments (Drozdzewski *et al.*, 2016b), but private loss is also recorded through, for example, memorial benches and the interring of ashes (Kellaher *et al.*, 2010; Maddrell, 2013). The thread connecting these types of memory and forms of practice is place. Remembered experience is an experience of something which happened in place, when we remember we do so in place, while the act of remembering colours our perceptions and experiences of place (Jones, 2005; Nora 1989).

Memory is often linked up with identity, whether this be the collective memory and identity of nations (Smith, 2009) or personal remembrances which inform the identity of individuals. I explore clutter and identity more in the next chapter (section 6.6), so only give an overview of these connections here. Thinking on a personal scale, there are different ways memory and identity can be related. First, memory can be seen as an orienting narrative which tells us who we have been in order to make sense of who we are today. Such biographical accounts do not frame memory only as recalled facts, but rather see memories as something woven in autobiographies by remembering individuals in order to make sense of themselves in shifting personal and social contexts (Giddens, 1991). Memory can also be understood as embodied and immanent in our engagements with the world, both in terms of how we are trained in the conduct of everyday life (Bourdieu, 1984), including in rhythmic practices of 'dressage' (Edensor, 2010c; Lefebvre, 2004) as well as evident in the skills and competencies our bodies learn over time (Paton, 2013; Sudnow, 1993). Finally, memory can be framed in more complexly emergent terms. Identities are becomings, and memory is an active ingredient in this (Jones, 2011; Jones and Garde-Hansen, 2012b). This means that memory is not about a static calling to mind of things which have happened, but rather is processual, contextual and relational:

> Memories are living landscapes seen obliquely from an always-moving viewpoint of ongoing life. […] [M]emories are always in parallax, sliding over each other: distant memories can seem to stand still, like a far-off hill seen from moving train, making a backdrop to whatever the closer foreground has to show as it rushes by. Yet, of course, it is the perceiver who is moving through the moment as the near past and more distant past make us into an animated 'selfscape'.
> (Jones and Garde-Hansen, 2012b: p.13)

This framing presents memory as something which is both immanent and remade in the present, rather than as something which is confined to the past. Memory works here actively and dynamically to form identities as they emerge in interactions, rather than only through personal reflections. This understanding of memory, I argue, is the one which can best help us explain our experiences with clutter. This is because such an approach helps us to make sense of failures of memory, and how clutter often seems to communicate a gap between the past and the present, rather than continuity between them. I explore how this has been reported in the literature below, and then in my analysis in section 5.6.

In my research, it is memories in and of home which form the context in which a mobile self understands their identity and relates to the world, and I am interested in how clutter works in this configuration. Bachelard (1994) argues that the home of our childhood is a central site of memory which both informs how we understand the affective spaces of the home today as well as being embedded within our bodily memories and working to inform how we organise and relate to lived space. This account relates very much to the home as a series of places, thinking about how and why, for example, cellars and attics have particular eerie qualities based on childhood apprehensions and cultural representations of them, not the meanings of the things we keep there. However, in thinking about our homes and our childhoods, the objects within them (which themselves make up the spaces Bachelard is concerned with) can be as powerful ways to remember (Hecht, 2001). Indeed, objects in and of our homes are central to our memories not only of childhood spaces and experiences, but also of the selves, people and places we have known throughout our lives.

Recognising this, Greg Noble (2004) suggests that the home matters as the gathering point of our many material things which bear memories and traces of the past. As a gathering point, the home is important as somewhere which draws together disparate memories and allows them to be narrativised into a singular sense of selfhood, working to counter experiences of memory and self as fragmentary and distributed (Noble, 2004; for a similar argument see Gorman-Murray, 2008a). However, as I have argued, place is not simply a neutral container for integrating and

making sense of temporal experiences and identity. Instead the home, like other sites, is an intersection of rhythms, a product of relational and interactions between multiple bodies, selves and things (Edensor, 2010b; Nansen *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, we cannot expect the home to be simply a neutral site in which a pre-given subject acts as a conductor of material meanings. We need to be attentive to the ways in which places, things and bodies are all themselves meaning-making. In recognising the agency of material things, spaces and places we must also recognise their capacity to affect memories and practices of remembering. This then introduces the potential for memories to fail, to fade, to be confronting and challenging, as well as to be comforting and integrated into our identities.

Some of the objects people keep at home are meaningful ones, ones enrolled into practices of identity which work to construct and communicate feelings and relationships between people in place, as I discussed in my review in section 2.2. These objects help us tell stories about ourselves, they become woven into individual biographies and narratives of identity (Hoskins, 1998). Wedding presents can represent our relationships, and remind us of the trajectory they have taken (Purbrick, 2007); objects can remind us of migration journeys and connect us to a larger sense of diaspora (Pahl, 2012; Tolia-Kelly, 2004); they can bring to mind the experiences we have had as a family (Roberts, 2012) while also embodying a wider sense of social embeddedness within an intergenerational family structure (Makovicky, 2007). The stories objects tell are not fixed, and their meanings and memories are reworked and reinterpreted. Such a changeability can be seen through accounts of people moving house, times at which identities and memories are challenged (Fairhurst, 1999; Hockey, 1999; Marcoux, 2001). When we move we need to sort through the things that we own, and often make decisions about what to keep and what to dispose of. This process is the active editing of a biography. Deciding what to keep is partly about deciding what to remember, and deciding what to remember about our lives informs our identities and our sense of continuous selfhood (Marcoux, 2001). This is a reconstruction of identity, as our past projects into our present and our future, telling us about who we are now, and who we might become.

These accounts of memories of times, places and people past, which work and are reworked in place and in the changing context of a self through time, are only one story we can tell about objects. As Rachel Hurdley (2015) notes, much of the time our practices of and with material culture do not happen at the level of reflective engagement, they do not add up and they do not wholly make sense. Thinking about some of these ways of engaging with things adds complexity and depth to how we can conceptualise the relationship(s) between memory, place and identity. The home is full of things we have chosen to keep, but it also houses things which we have simply not thrown away. These can trigger involuntary memories which rather than working to confirm our selfhood and sense of our history can trouble or challenge some of the narratives we have built up around times and places past (Grossman, 2015). Objects can accumulate and in this process gather and lose meanings through their storage, in ways which are non-intentional and unexpected (Hirschman *et al.*, 2012; Woodward, 2015). Horton and Kraftl (2012) reflect on their own experiences of sorting through such domestic accumulations. These things were left over, forgotten or put aside, not intentionally kept for a purposive reason. This means that when returning to them, their meaning was not in any sense already given or predetermined, so the memories formed and recalled through their engagements with objects could be challenging:

> [T]he performativity of material things in this context can be unsettling, revelatory, shocking and distressing […]. As such, clearing out a cupboard can be constitutive of new, sometimes troubling, memories.
>
> (Horton and Kraftl, 2012: p.35)

Memories are not simply the property of individuals but are formed within, and as a product of, the wider rhythmic and emergent coming together of people and objects in the home. This means that memories and identities here are not necessarily (only) positive and integrative (Noble, 2004) but can take different and shifting forms. Memories are not just willed and self-reflexive performances by a subject, but emerge instead through the complex interactions between people and objects in place. Such an approach to these provisional and uncertain domestic memories, and the objects which create them, is an emerging research theme in the literature, one which speaks directly to my research that frames rooted clutter as ambiguous memory objects.

Having now exploring existing research on rhythms and routines, lifecourse and life transitions, and on memory, highlighting key conceptual arguments and identifying some gaps in the literature, I now turn to my data. I discuss how clutter relates to time, working with the ideas outlined in these reviews.

5.4 Rhythms and Routines of Clutter and Decluttering

5.4.1 Flowing Clutter

5.4.1.1 Making Flowing Clutter

Flowing clutter is framed and experienced in mobile terms, as something regularly produced through and within life lived in the home (section 4.8.3). Its production is understood in the literature through the idea of routine practices. Löfgren (2012) argues that clutter emerges through routine practices of coping with the onflow of life, of getting into (bad) habits of shoving things out of sight. For Luzia (2011) clutter emerges where routines break down or fail to form, leading to an excess of objects which take up space. In my data I found examples of both routine and non-routine practices creating clutter:

> **Emma**: I read a book at bedtime or you have a bedtime cup of tea, […] you take your makeup off or whatever, […] so I just kept putting stuff [down] there [by the side of the bed], and because that was a space that I didn't see, and didn't interfere with my everyday life, and it kind of didn't bother me that I was doing that until [my partner] started referring to it as the "lady's nest of filth"! <Laughs>

> **Catherine**: Now at the moment my garage is ram packed but that's because the extension at the back, until it's been decorated, stuff that normally lives in there is all over the place.

Emma made clutter in her 'nest of filth' every single night through her bedtime routine, before she got a bedside table. Catherine's clutter has been created through the non-routine; stuff that normally lives in her extension is placed in her garage (and throughout the rest of the house) while renovations are underway. Between these examples, and the arguments in the literature, there are different approaches to routine. However, these can be reconciled if we shift our focus and think instead in terms of rhythm. As I argued in my literature review (section 5.3.1), this works as a

wider theoretical frame within which we can understand routine practices. In both these cases it makes sense to say that clutter emerges as a by-product of keeping the rhythm of life going. Whether making clutter is routine or non-routine (and my data shows it can be either) the aim here is to give an ordered sense of flow to our existence by not stopping and starting, putting things away where they belong, but instead carrying on and getting by.

To further support this argument we can look to another example of how people relate to flowing clutter:

> **Sandra**: This is the drawer we use the most, it's like a drawer that has keys, car keys, calculators, notebooks, takeaway menus for takeaways on a Saturday night, receipts from if we buy something […], address book, day to day finances and when insurance and car things are due on there, erm pens, different, Tesco, so this is clutter but in a way it works because we know where everything is.

Many of my participants had clutter drawers or cupboards where they kept a variety of largely unrelated but useful objects (see images 5.1 and 5.2). Clutter drawers exemplify the idea of flowing clutter's relationship to the rhythm of life. Unlike arguments about whether clutter is a routine or non-routine by-product of practices (Löfgren, 2012; Luzia, 2011), here clutter is deliberately created as a strategy for managing the home. This shift reframes clutter away from questions of routine and demonstrates directly how it keeps the rhythm of life going. Active strategies of producing clutter in clutter drawers work on two fronts. First, clutter drawers make putting things away easier. Rather than having to file receipts and take the calculator back upstairs to the study, or even think about where they might 'really' belong, clutter drawers are quick fixes for storage. This means that they do not interrupt so much the tasks we are engaged in. Second, the things in a clutter drawer tend to be used regularly; their access is facilitated by their being shoved in a drawer in a central area of the home (generally in the kitchen), rather than stored away from their site of use. This allows them to be accessed quickly, and doing so causes less disruption.

Overall we can see that flowing clutter is made through mobile practices of people living in the home. Sometimes these practices can be routine, with clutter made regularly, or sometimes they can be non-routine. In both of these senses

Image 5.1 – Sue's Clutter Drawer

Image 5.2 – Ed and Sarah's Clutter (and Book) Cupboard

flowing clutter relates to the ongoingness of life, it works to produce and facilitate practices in the home that serve to keep the rhythm of life going. This framing of clutter in terms of rhythm, rather than routine, is a useful contribution to the literature because it resolves the question of whether clutter is routine or not by showing it to be both, and showing both ways of making clutter to be connected through rhythm.

5.4.1.2   Decluttering Flowing Clutter

Getting rid of flowing clutter is an activity which happens regularly in the home; it can be understood through the idea of routine in five different ways. First, following Löfgren (2012), decluttering happens when routines break down, when clutter builds up to such an extent it hinders rather than helps. A clutter drawer only works as long as we can open it.

Second, decluttering can be seen as a routine action in itself. No participants reported decluttering in a set time-slot each day or week (Shove, 2012), perhaps because it is generally performed alone, without the need for synchronisation (Southerton, 2006). Instead, decluttering often happens as part of a wider routine of making the house ready for visitors, with people getting rid of clutter before guests arrive:

> **Laura**: If it means me having friends round and doing a bit of a once over or not having them round because it is messy and I haven't got time to do it I'd rather give it a quick once over, for them and for me.
> **Alex**: Yeah. So do you think, what do you think they would think if they came round and you hadn't had chance to clean it, or…?
> **Laura**: I think it would depend on who. […] [I]f it was someone that didn't know me and it was a first judgement they'd probably think "Hmm".

Laura would always want to make her home ready for visitors by giving it a once over, putting things away where they belong and having a clean around. Here, decluttering works as a routine practice which sequentially colonises the time-slot before people come, as part of a wider routine of home entertaining (Southerton, 2012). This practice relates back up to the tidiness norm, which Laura implies influences her

behaviour here. She wants to avoid being judged negatively against this standard by her guests and so makes the time to put things away and clean up. This reinforces my argument that we need to look beyond practices and to wider culture to make sense of routines, which we see here as constructed with reference to the tidiness norm.

The third way decluttering works as a routine is as a regular response to material markers in the home, like Mylan and Southerton's (2017) laundry practices:

> **Diana**: The only time I move DVDs from by the TV [back] to [the bookcase] is if the pile by the TV gets too many and it's blocking the receptor of the remote.

Material markers were though rarely cited as prompts for decluttering. Participants reported instead decluttering as a response to affective prompts. This fourth way that decluttering relates to routine has not been reported on in the literature either on how people live with clutter or in analyses of routine practices:

> **George**: When I say I periodically tidy [my study] up basically I'm talking about [my desk], if I'm working on my university work, which I tolerate for two or three days before I get fed up with it and have to clear it up, but you know this is kind of getting, this is the early stage of the process, it has to get about two or three times worse than this until I get completely sick of it, have to clear it out.

Here George is prompted to routinely declutter his desk not when the papers on it build up to a set material point, but rather when he is 'completely sick of it'. This tells us that clutter is an affective element within the home. This gives it a sense of agency, and works to present it as being an actor in its own right within routine home practices and experiences (on clutter agency see section 6.5). As I noted in my review above, practice theory-framed studies of routine do not make room for the more-than-human in their understandings of the conduct of life. These affective markers therefore challenge this framing and expand the scope of what might be said to be at work within everyday routine domestic practices. Their existence also reinforces my argument that we need to think about routines through the idea of rhythm, as this perspective makes room for the rhythms of things to play a part.

Decluttering flowing clutter relates to routine in a final, fifth way. This is in how practices of decluttering are enacted on a routine basis within the context of wider rhythms:

> **Charlotte**: I've got another kid at school, got my other girl at school so, so right, remembering all the things that you've got to take back for her and all that sort of stuff, and trying to get two small children out the door in the morning when you've got to get to work, sort of knowing where my keys are, knowing where I'll find a pen, like if you've got a party knowing where my scissors are and my Sellotape, because otherwise they just get put somewhere and I can't find them.

Here Charlotte makes reference to a range of rhythms which produce her routine practices of decluttering (Mylan and Southerton, 2017; Wahlen, 2011). These include the institutional rhythms of school, work, lifecourse stage (childhood and child-rearing) and lifecourse events (like parties). Decluttering for Charlotte makes sense within the context of these rhythms and emerges through them. It is not a practice which she engages with in a way cut off from the rest of her life, but is something constituted and made meaningful through and within it. Therefore, it is important to see clutter through the optic of rhythm which makes room for the messy realities of life in the home, rather than looking only at segments of practices and routines.

5.4.2 Rooted Clutter

5.4.2.1 Making Rooted Clutter

Rooted clutter, as I argued in the last chapter (section 4.8.2), is defined by its qualities of stuckness. This works on two fronts, with rooted clutter understood to be both something which sticks around physically, as well as something which acts as a kind of block to thought and action (Baker, 1995). In both of these ways we can see rooted clutter as related to rhythm, but here rather than representing (attempts to manage) the rhythmic onflow of life, rooted clutter is a blockage to this flow.

Rooted clutter objects are experienced in terms of these qualities of stuckness, as blockages in the flow of life. For people who hoard often they are felt to be deeply problematic in terms of their effects in halting home life's flow and forward movement:

Full of clothes, cat fur, dirt, shame. It makes me sad and tired. It looms over me. Overshadowing all the good of my life. It makes me feel stalled. Unable to barely move. To barely function though I do. It is like a silent monument of stress standing there with a pointed finger showing I'm a horrible person, a failure. A failure at the very basest thing in life... making a home.

<div align="center">Hoarding Survey Respondent: Female, 56-65, USA</div>

Here rooted clutter blocks not only practices of homemaking, but also a positive sense of life and self as something which progresses and unfolds. Rooted clutter sticks around and holds us back, makes us 'feel stalled[,] [u]nable to barely move'. This sense of stuckness is not confined to people who hoard, although it was only in the accounts of people who hoard that stuckness was talked about in such devastating terms. Below Viv recounts an experience of haunting by the rooted clutter in her home. Rather than being incorporated into her life now, the clutter remains frozen in its former state as the possession of her aunt. Here, the rooted clutter is still stuck in Viv's life, and is meaningful with reference to the past rather than the present:

Viv: I found it really hard to throw [the] bits and pieces [I inherited] away, I'd scale it down every now and then, and I used to have this recurrent dream where my Auntie Gertrude came out of hospital and said to me "What have you done with my", you know things that I'd thrown away, and in my dream she was there, better, wanting this stuff back and I'd binned it. So yeah, that's probably why I don't dare.

Here we see the mutual constitution of the rhythms of objects and the rhythms of life as it is lived. These stuck objects create home spaces which we feel stuck in, and lives which feel unable to move forward. Here we can see the rhythm of clutter objects working in relation to these wider rhythms and problematically defining them.

These frozen objects of rooted clutter come to us from different sources, all of which relate to life's rhythm. These include lifecourse events, such as family deaths, which lead us to inherit objects which we do not know how to manage or what to do with (Baker, 1995). Another source of rooted clutter is the build-up of things over time (Belk *et al.*, 2007). These can be objects which are gathered up over the course of a life, which add up together as clutter and materially stick around:

> **Catherine**: What you've got to remember is at my age, a lot of stuff that I have is stuff that, a lot of these Pyrex dishes were actually wedding presents, […] I just think "Well there's nothing wrong with it so you know", and I could probably manage with a lot less than I've got now, but I've always had them.

Or, less purposively, they can be things have been put to one side, out of sight in spaces like garages and attics, which end up stuck there and not engaged with:

> **Will**: All that stuff we had up in the loft, if we'd have lived in a smaller place I'd say "Take it down the tip" but "Stick it up in there, it might come in", you know, "Stick it up in the loft it might come in".

In both quotes we have a sense of objects building up in the course of the flow of life. These are put aside in order to avoid making difficult decisions, or simply put away and forgotten about as life flows on. Here we can understand rooted clutter as something which is produced through the flow of life, but also as something which represents a blockage in it when we come to engage with it again. If we live a long life, like Will and Catherine, eventually we can run out of room to put things away and aside. These things put away can come to cause us problems and we can end up questioning why we kept them in the first place, without feeling quite confident enough to be sure that we should throw them out. This means they stick around.

5.4.2.2 Decluttering Rooted Clutter

Getting rid of rooted clutter happens less regularly and routinely that decluttering flowing clutter. Participants engage in this type of decluttering in relation to other rhythms in their lives. For example, people might have a yearly clear out before Christmas in order to get rid of things which they no longer want, need or have room for, and to make space for new objects to come into the home:

> **Sadie**: Once a year I do a full clear out of toys, stuff that they've grown out of, stuff that they haven't even opened, and other children can use it. So once a year I do do that and it's usually November and it's just in time for Christmas.

Other participants I spoke to declutter instead in relation to wider climatic and seasonal rhythms:

> **John**: I can't expand so I'm constantly, that cupboard has got stuff in, and it was on the list as a winter job to clear it out, which I haven't done yet, so there's room to be made in there […]. I've got a filing cabinet in the little cupboard in there, and there's loads of stuff in there that really needs sorting out but that'd take ages, paperwork, but I'll get to that one day when it's chucking it down, I try to do things based on the weather.

Decluttering on the basis of these natural rhythms has not been reported in the literature on clutter to date, although enacting practices in this way is something which has been explored in the wider literature on rhythms and routines (Adam, 1998; Wahlen, 2011).

Most often, decluttering is not considered as an end in itself, but rather as a way to achieve something else:

> **George**: It's prompted by the need to do something else or the desire to do something else, so to redecorate or to get some new furniture at some point, rather than a sort of "Well let's do a bit of decluttering now", […] yeah, it's prompted by something else rather than "Let's declutter" as an exercise in itself.

In this way we can understand decluttering rooted clutter again as a kind of routine action which works as a response to the relational context in which a subject finds themselves. What differentiates decluttering rooted clutter though is how this relational context is drawn. Rather than something which aims towards making life within the home flow better, this kind of decluttering aims to move the self forwards and make room for new practices and identities to emerge once the objects holding us back have been cleared out. Moving house, redecorating, retirement and the death of a spouse were all cited as reasons why people in my research chose to declutter. All of these can be understood as fateful moments (Giddens, 1991) at which people make decisions about their identities and selves, who they are now and will be in the future. Engaging with objects is one way in which people can manage these transitions and changes, and reflect them materially in the spaces of the home (Belk *et al.*, 2007; Horton and Kraftl, 2012). In this we can see that the decluttering of rooted clutter is about keeping the flow of life going, conceived of at the level of identity and selfhood. This shows that routines of decluttering are about more than the (inter)actions of

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bodies and object, and are conducted in relation to broader social and cultural concerns. Here then we see again the value of thinking in terms of rhythm, which gathers together the material, the social and the cultural and shows how they intersect and interconnect in productive, unfolding ways.

5.4.3   Clutter Rhythms and Routines

I have presented across section 5.4 an account of the various ways in which both rooted and flowing clutter are constructed and interacted with temporally, drawing on ideas of routine and rhythm. Clutter as a general concept relates to routine, while its different forms relate to routine differently. I showed how flowing clutter is managed on the basis of affective prompts, and how rooted clutter is managed in terms of identity. These two findings both expand the terrain on which we can think about routine as operating, challenging both framings of routines as merely 'automatic' practices (Bourdieu, 1990; Ilmonen, 2001; Seamon, 1980), and the rejection of questions of identity and object agency in practice theory inspired analyses (Shove *et al.*, 2012, Warde, 2005). To understand clutter routines we need to think about them as working in the meaningful relational context of home, where routines are enacted and framed in cultural and personal terms, and engaged in by individuals alongside agentic objects which contribute to how the space of the home is constructed and lived.

To capture a sense of home life as something lived in these terms, I have argued we look to accounts of rhythm to provide an overarching theoretical context within which to couch the specificities of routine practices. I argue that clutter in general is something constituted and interacted with through wider rhythms. Again, different forms of clutter work differently. Flowing clutter's rhythms are regular and frequent; rooted clutter's rhythms have a less frequent and more irregular periodicity. So, clutter is a meaningful whole in its rhythmic constitution while also being able to be meaningfully differentiated into two forms on the basis of their rhythms. I spent time in chapter four arguing that clutter is something which is related to and defined within a relational context, a context which is drawn in spatial terms and also in

relation to identity and selfhood. We can now add to this that the relational context within which clutter works is one which is rhythmic. The context of a home and a life where clutter is named is one that is engaged with in temporal terms. Clutter, as a rhythmic element of home space, works to construct how lives are lived there, while also being but one beat in the polyrhythm of home life which is relationally and materially drawn (Edensor, 2010b; Nansen *et al.*, 2009). By paying attention to clutter we can see how other (rhythmic) elements within homes and lives work, as well as understand how these are themselves constructed (in part) through experiences and practices with clutter.

Finally, I argued that clutter is something which is produced within and relates to the flow of life. Overall, clutter is a blockage in the flow of life, it is something which in different ways stops life's rhythm and holds it back. For flowing clutter, everyday practices of life in the home were blocked, while for rooted clutter this blockage was located at the level of identity and selfhood. This idea of a (rhythmic) blockage in life is what makes clutter different from other objects in terms of rhythm. One exception to this is the use of clutter drawers, where blockages are strategically managed and maintained to free up movement through and around the rest of the home. Other scholars have noted clutter seems stuck or works as a blockage (Baker, 1995; Cwerner and Metcalfe, 2003); here I relate this to the idea of rhythm. By framing clutter through the idea of rhythm I show how it can be both routine and non-routine, shifting attention from the routine to the wider context of the rhythmic. Finally, presenting clutter in rhythmic terms serves to connect it up more clearly with a sense of the home as a lived, rhythmic intersection of bodies, objects and practices.

My work also develops accounts of rhythm. Rhythm has been studied as something mobile and progressive in a range of ways and across varying contexts (see section 5.3.1). Clutter, presented as a particular kind of rhythmic blockage, adds something novel to the literature. It works to develop a more hesitant perspective on rhythm, one where a rhythm's blockage is shown to be as important as a sense of rhythm as something mobile and progressive. Clutter has a specific rhythmic temporality of the blockage; this works to define its meaning and its experience, and to differentiate it from other forms of (practice with) material culture.

5.5 Clutter, Lifecourse and Life Transitions

5.5.1 Clutter, Decluttering and Lifecourse Stages

Having the right amount of clutter is 'normal', as I explored in section 4.7. Here I discuss how what counts as 'normal' varies with lifecourse stage. This shows further how clutter is culturally constructed with reference to wider norms and social values, and how its relational definition as something out of place takes account of the lifecourse position of its owner/creator. This section also adds detail to how flowing and rooted clutter are discursively constructed, showing them to be associated with different lifecourse stages.

5.5.1.1 Flowing Clutter: Children and Families

Flowing clutter, children and families tend to go together in discourse. Generally, participants thought that it was 'normal' for homes with children to be cluttered:

> **Alex**: So you said you're kind of au fait with that kind of clutter and things…?
> **George**: …yeah yeah, it's just, that's life when children are that age.

> **Sadie**: Oh yeah, that's quite normal for us! <Laughs> That looks like a normal house with kids. […] Erm, at the end of the day if you've had kids in the house, not even at the end of the day that can happen in minutes, that's quite, yeah, that's quite a normal house with children.

Parents who responded to photo-elicitation image D thought that it pictured a typical and recognisable scene of life at home with children. George recalled similar experiences when his now adult children were small; Sadie's playroom where we conducted our interview looked like image D there and then (image 5.3). It was understood as normal for young children to leave objects out of place in the course of their play; as I discussed in section 4.6.2 while play is ongoing participants contest whether these objects constitute clutter.

Having a home shared with children that is cluttered with toys is seen as 'normal' by participants in another way. Participants understood clutter's presence to indicate normative practices of 'good' parenting:

>**Liz**: I'm a great believer in the stimulating aspects of play so that wouldn't worry me in any way whatsoever, on the contrary if a house had children of that age and they didn't have things out I'd worry, I'd be very worried you know, poor souls, so you always have that stimulation.

>**Charlotte**: It's not that I don't want to accommodate for my kids, but it's, and I do worry sometimes that because all of their toys are in a cupboard that they don't always go and play with them, so if you notice I've left the doors open for her to go and get, and I'll purposely go and get stuff out, and my older daughter knows that that's where all her stuff is, because I found, and one of the things as well I want them to have dedicated space that is, that is theirs, you know in the same way that it allows me to sort of organise.

In the first quote Liz explains that normative 'good' parenting means that clutter is made and managed in a child's best interests. Children are seen to naturally make clutter in the course of their play, and the role of the parent is constructed as one which allows children to play freely. Therefore, we have an interesting shift here, where the overall tidiness norm is superseded by normative parenting practices, a stronger cultural value. This shift means that for my participants homes with young children ought to be 'normally' cluttered. Charlotte worries that her practices of clutter management mean her home is not cluttered enough. She keeps her children's toys well-ordered in a cupboard in her open-plan kitchen diner (image 5.4). While this works for Charlotte as a way to efficiently manage clutter and put it away, she has concerns this might work too well and supress her children's spontaneous play practices. This then leads her to leave cupboard doors open and to bring out toys herself for her children to make sure they have access to them and are given the opportunity to play and to make clutter. What this tells us is that clutter is something which can change in its discursive construction. I earlier argued clutter is 'bad' in reference to the tidiness norm. Here we see the tidiness norm accorded less weight, and clutter presented as a good and 'normal' part of parenting practice.

As children grow up this arrangement of norms shifts. The meaning of 'good' parenting for older children is not simply about allowing and managing clutter, but moves towards teaching children how to manage clutter themselves and inducting them into the tidiness norm:
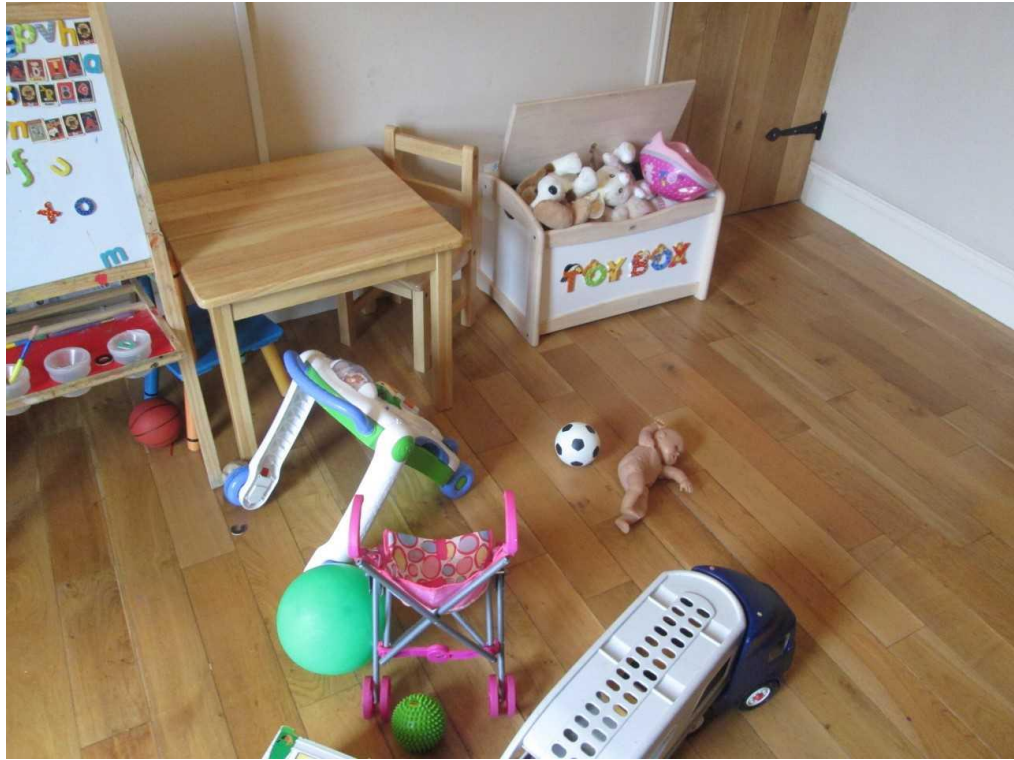
Image 5.3 – Sadie's Playroom Floor

Image 5.4 – Charlotte's Toy Storage

> **Sandra**: I think that one [photo-elicitation image D] I can understand, […] very young children are playing with the toys […], but that one [photo-elicitation image C] looks perhaps as if old children, perhaps even teenagers have just come and dumped their stuff everywhere and, yeah, half eaten sandwiches so, yeah. I think [photo-elicitation image C] probably is far more unacceptable than [photo-elicitation image D] in terms of, you know, that's what you'd expect from a small child but actually for a teenager that's probably not acceptable in a communal room.

In this quote Sandra shows that there are different expectations placed upon children of different ages. Very young children, who are learning through play, are allowed to make clutter. Older children are not given as much leeway to create clutter, and so rather than something normal and good, clutter here is a problematic object. Children are expected to learn about clutter as they grow up:

> **Emma**: My cousin […], him and his wife, literally, kids don't have to tidy up one thing before they move onto the next thing and it's just like, I have spent time in their house, it's much messier than this house [in photo-elicitation image D], so playtime is just this, one toy after another after another, constant clutter, erm, to the point where I'm like "Your child isn't going to learn focus" […]. [Y]eah, I just imagine a really precocious child that's been allowed to do whatever the hell they like and get everything out.

Emma articulates this idea of training in the tidiness norm, and implies here that not teaching older children about clutter is not good parenting.

Overall, we can see that flowing clutter is generally framed in relation to childhood and family life. The age of the children here matters, showing clutter to be something which figures differently across different lifecourse stages in relation to the degree to which children can be expected to participate in normative practices around tidying and proper object use. This association of children with flowing clutter is, interestingly, reproduced in academic analyses of clutter. Many studies which think about clutter do so specifically in the context of family life (Arnold *et al.*, 2012; Dowling, 2008; Luzia, 2011; Stevenson and Prout, 2013). All of these studies focus on flowing clutter, not rooted clutter. This reproduces my finding that lifecourse is an important part of how clutter is understood and interacted with, and demonstrates

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that, in discourse, flowing clutter is associated with family life, and that ideas of family and parenting work to constitute experiences and practices with clutter.

5.5.1.2 Rooted Clutter: Older People

Rooted clutter is associated with older people. Every participant imagined photo-elicitation image A to be occupied by an older person, and as I showed in section 4.8.2 this image shows rooted clutter. Participants gave different reasons for this:

> **Alex**: You've got an older person, why older person?
> **Sarah**: It just feels like there's a lot of, pictures, just a lot of I don't know…
> **Ed**: If you were, if you were our age I'd have to have inherited a lot of that or done like, a lot of travelling and brought a lot of that stuff back, and I don't really have time to do that.
>
> **Emma**: I think, I associate this much stuff […] with kind of sentimentality, so someone who likes to have things around them, you know there's an old painting up on the wall as well, someone who likes to have things around them that reminds them of certain people or certain situations or certain times, so you know like maybe that hideous green ornament was like a wedding present or that cake stand maybe it belonged to some old aunt.

In the first quote we see the rooted clutter is thought to be that of an older person because of the time it would take to amass this quantity of objects. Section 4.8.2 talked about rooted clutter as something understood to build up over the course of a life; here we see the logical conclusion of this, that homes which are the most cluttered are those where the residents have lived the longest. In the second quote Emma talks in terms of memory and sentimentality; memory is an important part of the definition of rooted clutter (section 4.8.2). People who have lived longer might be expected to have the most memories. However, that does not necessarily mean that they will always have the most memory objects. This connection between old age and clutter keys into constructions of older people are being tied to the past, as having little future and only their memories (Chapman, 2006).

Research conducted with older people depicts their relationship to material culture differently and presents a variety of ways in which older people relate to their

possessions (see section 5.3.2). Ed, Sarah and Emma are all under 40 years old; we might imagine a lack of much direct experience could be leading them astray. However, even older participants imagined the occupier of photo-elicitation image A to be elderly:

> **Alex**: And you said it might be an older person, […] is it the objects in the room that are old or is it having that much stuff?
> **Ian**: It's having that much stuff.
> **Alex**: So do you think a lot of older people have got rooms like that?
> **Ian**: You might think we're old, I don't know!
> **Claire**: We're older people! Most of our friends don't, I could think of one of my friends.

> **Alex:** So what's making you think over 75?
> **John:** Because I'm 63 <Laughs>, so I just, I just, I've immediately looked at that and said older person, just the way it is, the stuff that's there the furniture, the layout.

Ian and Claire are both retired, and imagine that from my perspective as a young person they might seem old. But, while they and their contemporaries (bar one) might all be described as old, their homes are unlike that in photo-elicitation image A. John again might fairly be described as an older person, but he too disidentifies with the image while still suggesting it is home to an older person. Why then do participants imagine an older person when they look at this picture, regardless of their age or their experiences? The answer to this lies not at the level of experiences; it is because in discourse rooted clutter is associated with older people.

There are some different reasons why this might be so. In general older people are, as I have already said, associated with memory, time having passed and being stuck in the home (Chapman, 2006). These associations are shared with those of rooted clutter, as well as how rooted clutter is experienced; these shared features make the comparison a meaningful one. Another explanation might be that older people here are working as a discursive 'other' group, marking out where relations to objects are excessive (Löfgren and Czarniawska, 2013). Therefore, this othering in discourse is part of how participants relate to photo-elicitation image A as something which has an 'excessive' amount of clutter in it, something every participant agreed on. Finally, Herring's (2014) work on hoarding explores how clutter and old age came

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to be associated with one another through specific media representations of hoarding, and also its conflation with Diogenes syndrome (a 'mental health problem' specific to the elderly where they live in squalid conditions). All of these three dimensions together, or apart, might be why rooted clutter is consistently discursively associated with older people. For my purposes, exploring how clutter is understood and experienced, deciding which (mix of) factors are at work here is not necessary. It is enough to conclude that there is an association between older people and clutter in discourse, even as this linking is not found in older people's practices.

5.5.2   Clutter, Decluttering and Adult Life Transitions

I want to now look at how people relate to clutter in the process of life transitions, switching from an analysis of discourse to one of practices. Here I draw on data collected during my interview and house tour with Catherine, and talk about three life transitions she went through. I show how in all of these clutter emerged, changed and was related to differently.

> **Catherine**: We didn't have children, my husband lost his sight in his mid-to-late 20s so from then on he's always been a house husband. […] [W]e had a big detached house with a half-acre garden and we had two, two border collie dogs so, Mike kept himself busy, because he'd had sight and then he lost sight so, he wasn't totally blind he could see, he only saw in shades of grey and he saw shapes and shadows, but he sort of was, he used to tell people he was a domestic engineer, so he did sort of all the things at home and I worked in the public sector I've been a civil servant and been a public sector consultant […]. We knew because of where we were we would never be able to stay there and so we moved here, I was still working, we moved here to sort of get to somewhere where it would work for us when I eventually retired. […] My husband and I moved here, I've just got to start thinking, he died in 2009 so I think it was 2007, erm, when we moved here, and we moved here, we downsized to move here, and this was gonna be our forever retirement home for the two of us, but like I say we hadn't been here the two of us too long and, unfortunately, sadly, he died so I'm here on my own now.

There are three life transitions which Catherine talks about here I reflect on. These are: her husband Mike losing his sight early in their marriage; Catherine's retirement and their downsizing to a new home; Mike's death shortly after they moved.

Mike's sight loss was a big life transition for them both to get used to. Catherine implies above that it meant they never had children, and it meant that Mike took on the non-traditional role of being a 'domestic engineer' while Catherine pursued her career to a high level in the civil service. This shows the way in which lives are linked together (Bailey, 2009; Hopkins and Pain, 2007; Hörschelmann, 2011). Mike's sight loss was not only for him a 'fateful moment' at which he had to reframe his autobiography and adjust his sense of self (Giddens, 1991); it also had a direct impact on Catherine's life too. Her life linked up with his was one in which children did not happen; remaining childless here then is not something which happens solely at Catherine's agentic discretion, but as a consequence of Catherine's linking her life with the husband she loved (Bailey, 2009; Hopkins and Pain, 2007; Hörschelmann, 2011). As something which profoundly shifted both of their lives, creating a new lived context for the couple, Mike's sight loss created clutter:

> **Catherine**: Mike had lots of stuff in [the shed at our old house], drills, men stuff, and he used to keep himself busy but a lot of that we got rid of [when we moved], because his eyesight had got to the point where he was never going to use a lot of that stuff again so we got rid of that, so that was his stuff.

Clutter is created in the process of a life transition. As Mike's sight deteriorated he was no longer able to use his 'men stuff', the tools and machinery which he kept in the shed. The stuff endured longer than his ability to use it. Mike's 'men stuff' became rooted clutter. It remained and endured in the out-buildings of their previous home together; it spoke of the past and what had been without having much of a role in the present. The relational context of Mike's life changed; this therefore meant that the statuses of objects within it shifted. Things once useful in the context of Mike's sighted engagements with the world became unusable. They were judged, on the basis of this new relational context formed through life transition, to be out of place as things which he could no longer use. When Mike and Catherine moved they eventually decluttered these things.

The next life transition I look at here is the couple's downsizing and Catherine's retirement. These two elements together formed a single life transition in Catherine's mind. As she says above, they were conceived of together to lead to a new life in a

'forever retirement home'. In this process both the spatial and personal context of Catherine's life changed; she changed from a working person to a retired person, and moving to a new home shifted her spatial context. As I have shown, it is in both of these kinds of contexts in which clutter is named and related to (see sections 4.5; 4.6). Changing both of these meant that clutter was created in the process:

> **Catherine**: We had a big shed at the bottom of the garden [at our old house] [...] there were, there were ornaments and things [in there], because when my husband's parents died we inherited lots of stuff that had been his mum's and because I had far more space there so I kept things, [...] and it was nice but it was only when we came to move from there, we had space for it so we kept it but when we came to move from there, you know you've got to think about it and say "How often do I use this, am I likely ever to use it?"

> **Catherine**: A lot of this stuff, trouser suits and stuff, it's what I wore when I was working because I had to be smart, [...] and again a lot of these trousers to go with the jackets in there, my smart trouser suits for work. But I suppose I need to make a decision where I might keep one or two, but which one?

Catherine moved house before she retired. Downsizing a large home in the country to a more modest suburban one meant her storage space reduced. This led Catherine to declutter in order to enact this life transition effectively. We can see here how she engaged in a process of questioning the use of these objects in a new spatial context, thinking about her new lifestyle and whether they would be used. After Catherine moved she retired. Retirement means for Catherine that she does not need to dress smartly for work every day, and so her clothes become out of place in the context of her non-working life. She questions keeping them, and recognises that she does not need to hold on to them all, but as yet has not engaged in decluttering to get rid of this now out of place workwear.

Finally, I want to talk about Catherine's life transition into widowhood. Sadly, Mike died shortly after they moved into their new home together. This transition was the most profound for Catherine; her marriage to Mike lasted decades and was a key part of how she understood herself. The home which she moved into was intended to be one she shared with him, one they chose together to meet both of their needs.

Finding herself recently retired, widowed and in a (relatively) new home meant that Catherine's spatial and personal context was deeply altered. In this process clutter emerged, and she engaged in practices of decluttering:

> **Catherine**: Again that's Michael's, so there's just odd things [in the wardrobe], just because it was his I kept it.
> **Alex**: Did you go through most of his clothes?
> **Catherine**: Erm, yeah [...], I just dealt with it, but when you're bereaved you deal with these things, some people want them all gone and all out straight away and others, you just do it in your own time as and when you're ready.

In this quote we can see Catherine's engagement with decluttering as a way of managing her life transition (see also Horton and Kraftl, 2012). Her practices of passing on her husband's clothes were, as she implies, part of her bereavement and materially connected to it. However, this life transition was marked not only by getting rid of objects; I want to talk now about one more 'clutter' object which has emerged in Catherine's life transition into widowhood:

> **Catherine**: I will tell you about this because I think it's relevant to what you're doing…
> **Alex**: …right…
> **Catherine**: …I hope I don't spook you with it. And this is just me. That's my husband. [...] Yeah, those are his ashes [on the bedside table]. Because I just can't decide, it's letting go. And I actually get comfort from him being there, I know it spooks some people.
> **Alex**: I think it's nice, I think it's…
> **Catherine**: …yeah, that's my husband.
> **Alex**: So are you going to kind of try and work something out or do you think that you just want them with you?
> **Catherine**: Yeah I think, see I, cos, he wasn't a [local] man, he was from Worcestershire so he has no real connections round here, erm, and I couldn't really, I didn't want to just do anything with his ashes, and then it got to the point where I hadn't done anything with them and I just thought "Oh I'll just keep them".

Here Catherine talks about the urn in which her husband's ashes are kept, 'sleeping' with her at her bedside. Ashes are a problematic object category in their own right; they embody a deceased loved one and are felt to make claims on their custodian, they need to be cared for in an appropriate way and for some this can be paralysing (Kellaher *et al.*, 2010). I want to argue that these ashes have shifted in their status

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over time, moving out of the category of 'clutter'[4]. As Hirschman *et al*. (2012) argue, stored objects can transform in their meanings as they 'cool off' from their original associations. Initially, Catherine wanted to find a final resting place for the ashes outside of her home. This therefore meant that the ashes were spatially out of place in her home. They were a problematic object to manage, and Catherine struggled with what to do with them. They were materially stuck in the home, and infused with memory and the past. Drawing these facts together we can call the ashes rooted clutter. Over time though Catherine has grown accustomed to their presence, and finds comfort in keeping them with her. Through her grief, Catherine's sense of self has shifted, and she has had to come to see herself now as bereaved and living alone. This shift in self has meant that her husband's ashes do now fit within the context of her new, post-life transition identity. They are no longer out of place, but instead are meaningful, emotional objects which speak of love and care and loss. She has incorporated the ashes into the relational context of her self as widow. In this process of transition the relational context of Catherine's home and life has changed. This then meant that what counts as clutter changed too.

Cathine's life transitions show us more of how clutter works: clutter can emerge through a life transition; a life transition can lead to decluttering; clutter can, through transition, lose its status and become a meaningful object in new life context. Overall, this analysis adds to how we can understand clutter (practices) as emergent from the relational context of a life, by exploring the role life transitions play. It contributes to literature on life transitions by showing how they are enacted through and alongside the material culture of clutter. Additionally, this analysis works to fill in some of the absent presence of the adult in current scholarship on the lifecourse and life transitions by giving an account of a series of shifts in Catherine's adult life (Hopkins and Pain, 2007; Vanderbeck and Worth, 2015a). Finally, it also works to

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[4] I recognise the term clutter here might feel inappropriate or disrespectful, as clutter is often seen as something trivial and unwanted. This is not my intention. I argue that clutter is not a trivial matter, here and throughout my thesis. I respectfully call these ashes clutter on the basis of my analysis, understanding how this term might be read but wishing to argue against such an understanding.

show the value of a life transitions approach which focuses on '*ruptures* and *discontinuities*' (Hörschelmann, 2011: p.378, original emphasis), rather than a smooth ordered flow, by demonstrating how for Catherine her 'adulthood' has in fact been defined into different stages, rather than lived in only one way as a single stage between youth and old age.

5.6   Rooted Clutter: Memory and Remembering

5.6.1   Rooted Clutter as Problematic Memory Object

Rooted clutter is associated with memory, as I showed in the last chapter (sections 4.3.3; 4.8.2). Here I want to explore how this works in more detail. In this first section I will show how in decluttering texts rooted clutter is framed as something which relates to memory in a problematic way. The two sections following this one draw on participants' accounts, showing how they experience and articulate the connection between clutter and memory differently.

Decluttering texts work to construct clutter as something which relates to memory in a problematic way. Generally, texts have no issue with people keeping meaningful memory objects:

> Don't get me wrong, I'm not suggesting that you have a ruthless cull of everything that you inherit. Many of us have a few treasured items […] that we love having on display or wearing; they bring back happy memories, suit our style and are a positive presence in our lives. These belongings are not the problem – what I'm talking about is the cupboard-hogging, space-stealing 'stuff' that is crowding corners and dragging us down.
>
> (*Start With Your Sock Drawer*: p.26)

Above we can see a distinction drawn between memory objects as clutter, which ought to be got rid of, and memory objects as treasured items. Clutter can relate to memory, but is constructed as doing so problematically. Clutter as a memory object is stuff which does not work to make us feel good in the now. Memory objects only have value if they support life today and in the future, not as a record of what has been.

Texts help readers distinguish between bad (clutter) memory objects and positive memory objects by taking them through a process of guided introspection (on this see section 6.6.1). In almost every text readers are asked to think about who they 'really' are, what their values are, and what 'really' matters to them. This recovered, 'buried self' forms a barometer against which decisions about what objects are important are made. It is the framing of the self in these texts which leads them to frame memory objects in these terms, as only valuable insofar as they relate clearly and directly to our recovered, authentic selves:

> Truly precious memories will never vanish even if you discard the objects associated with them. When you think about the future, is it worth keeping keepsakes of things that you would otherwise forget? We live in the present. No matter how wonderful things used to be, we cannot live in the past. The joy and excitement we feel here and now is more important.
>
> (*The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying*: p.134)

> Dealing with family heirlooms is complicated in part because of the emotional life wrapped into our things. Again, we should look to the museum curator. The curator understands that an object's value has less to do with precious materials than it does with story.
>
> (*Simple Matters*: p.33)

In the first quote we can see how central the present and the future are in decluttering texts, how they are suffused with a progressive, forward-looking temporality. The past is not valued in and of itself, it is something secondary and subservient to ourselves in the now. In the second quote we can see how memory objects ought to relate to the self, in clear and direct terms. Our memory objects should be like pieces in a museum, clearly labelled and identified, representations of the past arranged in a way to make them meaningful to the present. In this there is no room for ambiguity or uncertainty; memory objects must speak of a knowable, meaningful and positive past, in a voice which makes sense to our selves in the present.

What this means by implication, therefore, is that clutter objects have unclear or ambiguous relationships with the past, ones which are not curated and predefined. It is uncertainty and ambiguity which define how clutter objects relate to memory. The way in which decluttering texts present how memory objects should work is quite

similar to the account developed by Greg Noble (2004) which I talked about above (section 5.3.3). He argued that the home works as a context for drawing together disparate bits and pieces which cumulatively connect up to form the self. Decluttering texts present a similar strategy, imagining the home museologically, as a space which overall tells the story of our lives, in a way meaningful to the viewer/owner in the present, through representative examples of material culture. However, as I argued above and as decluttering texts gesture towards, memory does not only work in this way; memories can fail, they can be ambiguous, uncertain and challenging (Grossman, 2015; Horton and Kraftl, 2012). It is to this kind of memory (experience) I now turn.

5.6.2   Memory Objects as Rooted Clutter

Some things people keep to remember the past. This is widely recognised in the literature on memory and material culture, and can be interpreted in different ways (section 5.3.3). I want to talk here about two instances where such memory objects can be(come) clutter. These participant perspectives differ from the 'expert' discourse used in decluttering texts. I want to show how, first, and contrary to decluttering discourses, important memory objects can be clutter, based on their spatial context:

> **Sally**: I would have said [my problem with hoarding] started probably more, probably as people close to me started dying, erm I certainly don't remember […] as a teenager storing or hoarding things at all. […] I suppose the first person to die was my dad sixteen years ago and suddenly so many things that meant nothing to me when he was here meant a lot, his flat cap, his gloves, his driving gloves, you know sixteen years later I've still got those, can't bear to throw them, I'll never wear them but they're him […]. Then I think my auntie was the next one to die, […] we used to go and stay over there as children, so little ornaments, so little rabbits and things that we used to always play with, a little musical box that again takes me right back to childhood I can still hear it, I close my eyes and I'm in that back bedroom[.] […] Then of course my mum died which was the final, final one, I kind of feel like I'm an orphan now, and almost everything from her, bottles of perfume I've kept, furniture, I've got her bedroom suite at home, […] my house is just like an Aladdin's cave, I've got things like vases, oh all sorts, Babycham glasses, [...] just all sorts and it, added up all together it is clutter.

Here Sally talks about whole range of deeply personal and important objects which she owns. All of these things she keeps to remember her family, and they all evoke for her powerfully and directly times and places of her past. These kinds of memory objects, which help to remind Sally of her past and work to situate her in relation to the people she has loved, are not in themselves unusual; most people keep important mementoes and reminders like this. What marks a difference here is the quantity of objects Sally has, and how she stores them. She owns more objects than she has room to keep. This means these objects are out of place in her home, they exceed the locations where they ought to be kept and, as Sally says, 'all together it is clutter'. This shows us that the category of clutter does not exclude memory objects.

Another route memory objects can take to become clutter is by being defined as out of place in the relational context of their owner's life, not their spatial context:

> I think, in the beginning, I saved the things I cherished, so I wouldn't forget them. Then I saved those things for years because hey, I'd already saved them this long. Plus, there was a time that feather pen and the little plastic hamburger sword and the Britney Spears key chain meant something to you. How dare you throw away that stuff out. It's almost like I can't (for lack of a better word) dishonor my younger self by getting rid of old possessions.
> Hoarding Survey Respondent: Female, 18-25, USA

The objects this participant talks about are all things understood as clutter here, things which do not fit into the context of her life, since she does not know which memories or experiences these objects are supposed to represent. Through the process of forgetting object stories things become clutter, changing their status over time as they are stored (Hirschman *et al*., 2012). Interestingly though, this does not mean that she wants to get rid of them; even as she cannot remember why the objects which she holds onto are important, she does still feel that they are important. What this seems to imply, therefore, is that keeping rooted clutter which relates to memory matters, even when it has become disconnected from the memories which it represented.

I return to this theme in the next section. For now I want to quickly draw out a couple of important points which these forgotten object stories tell us. First is that memories fail and meanings fade (Grossman, 2015; Horton and Kraftl, 2012). This

reminds us that remembering is an active and relational process which happens in the present; memories are not read off from objects but are created through engagements with them by an emplaced self (Jones, 2011; Jones and Garde-Hansen, 2012b). Second, the presence of forgotten things in the home reminds us that domestic experience works as an intersection of people, things and place. We can forget about objects, but that does not mean that they disappear. We can find objects, and they can have lost their meanings. This challenges anthropocentric framings of the home as a space (which is full of objects that are) representative of identity and selfhood (Noble, 2004); this means we need to therefore make room for material agencies in how we think about the home (a theme I return to in section 6.5).

5.6.3 Rooted Clutter as Memory Objects

Rooted clutter was often kept by participants because it was associated with memories. In this section I look at how rooted clutter is experienced as a memory object, rather than how it comes to be understood as clutter. I found an association between memory and rooted clutter across all of my data. However, participants related to this differently. Some had lots of rooted clutter and placed great emphasis on the memories attached, others avoided clutter and spoke of memory differently:

> **Ed**: In the living room we want to replace the coffee table and, at first, it's a really nice coffee table but it doesn't go with the other furniture in the room and it was something from my grandma which was, had like a lot of nostalgia but then it's like, well, what's more important, the way it looks with all the room or the nostalgia feeling, and I can access the feeling if I want to, I don't need to have a piece of furniture right in front of me.

> **Ann**: My [old] house actually wasn't as cluttered as this, I call this cluttered. […]
> **Alex:** So why don't you put more of it away or in a cupboard…?
> **Ann:** I don't want to because I like it, everything I've got tells a story, I don't, you know I've got things like that picture over there was in my son's bin and he painted it, he was a drug addict my youngest son and I had four years of hell with him, I got him through it by struggling, I don't know how but I did and he's become the person I hoped he would be, but I got that out of the bin because I saw in that hell, I saw in that something so that will never go and he can't understand why

I've put it there, he says "It's just an abstract picture, nothing was in my head when I painted it" but I've interpreted it as that, so that means something to me so that's stopping there.

In the first quote Ed shows that it is not that he does not engage in practices of memory with objects; his grandma's coffee table makes him feel nostalgic. Rather, he prioritises aesthetics over these memories which he feels he can access in different ways. For Ann the reverse is true, she sacrifices aesthetics and allows her home to be cluttered as she values more the memories which objects evoke. Overall it seems that one of the factors determining how much rooted clutter participants had was the degree to which they thought memory to be important and worth sacrificing space and aesthetics for, as well as the extent to which their memories are rooted in objects.

Participants do not then form a homogeneous group. The degree to which participants had rooted clutter as memory objects varied, as did the emotional impact of these objects. However, all participants (including Ed) related to rooted clutter as memory objects; there are two common themes here which I want to explore. First is that participants engage with rooted clutter as memory objects in ways which do not see them incorporated fully into (autobiographical) accounts of the past (Giddens, 1991). Rather than objects which tell a coherent and continuous story of the past, rooted clutter objects are more ambiguous and distanced from the self:

Charlotte: [All this stuff] was obviously quite precious to me at the time, really quite like, there was a candle holder in there that somebody had given me, can't remember who it was but one of my friends had given me […]. I can't bear to go through this because I wouldn't want to get rid of anything plus I have to hide it from [my husband]. […] That was some sweets that [my husband] brought me back from Hong Kong, he went to Hong Kong with work when we were first together, […] lots of love letters, what else, […] old address book. Christ yeah, people in there I can't even remember who they are <Laughs> I have, erm, oh God there you go, old uni card, I haven't been through it recently. […] See there's obviously quite a lot of junk in here, like I probably wouldn't keep that, see it's like an old, it's a pretend watch and it's got sweets inside and I can't remember why I've got it, but I had, like I find lots of things like that like a random pebble, I obviously picked that up and kept that. I probably, see, I would really struggle to get rid of, and I don't really, I don't really want it and I don't mind keeping it as long as it's organised.

Image 5.5 – Charlotte's Box of Memory Clutter

In this quote Charlotte talks about a box of objects from her university days, tucked away and left in storage (image 5.5). Charlotte opened this box for the first time since leaving university during our house tour. Some stuff she clearly identified as having precious memories attached them, like her love letters. Other things she did not know what they were or remember where they came from, making them clutter as I suggested above. These things do not then construct a narrative of self; this is impossible when she has forgotten what they are. Rather, what these objects do instead is call attention to the gap in time between when they were acquired and now. In doing this they communicate a sense of a self through time, but this self is someone who is strange to us, who has had experiences which we cannot remember. We can also see rooted clutter as something which calls attention to a gap in time at work in how Liz talked about objects she inherited from her father:

> **Liz**: I couldn't bear to go into [the annex my now deceased father lived in] for months, couldn't bear it because he was still there, in my head he was still there, […] it took until the following summer after he died for me to go in, […] all these possessions, the things that I still have, are the things that when I open the box I'm in a right state, it's silly things, it's his flat cap, for God's sake, […] when I see his box of things that I've kept I still can't look at it without knowing, it will get me.

The gap in time Liz's clutter communicates is framed quite differently to Charlotte's. Here, rather than a gap between the self today and the self of the past, Liz's rooted clutter spoke of a gap between the past when her father was still alive and the present in which she misses him. Rooted clutter here painfully draws attention to her father's absence. In this way rooted clutter works as nostalgia; it is about a connection to the past and yearning to return there, one which simultaneously recognises the impossibility of going backwards. The temporality of rooted clutter is one of puncture and absence, a gap in time experienced sometimes painfully and problematically.

The creation of this gap works through the space of the home which creates this kind of memory. Charlotte's objects are ones she keeps in the loft, Liz keeps hers in the annex. The ability of objects to communicate a gap between then and now works in relation to their placement within space. Being put away means objects are revisited rather than always there. Liz particularly made use of the space of her home to enact this, by hiding (from) objects in the annex which caused her pain. For Charlotte the spatial sequestration of her things meant that she was able to forget them, and this forgetting is what then meant these objects could embody the temporality of the gap. Therefore, we can see that the home is not a neutral site for memories but is part of how they are engaged with, structuring how they are produced and experienced (Jones, 2011; Jones and Garde-Hansen, 2012b).

The second way in which rooted clutter relates to memory is as something which records the past as a memorial. Often participants talked about keeping memory objects as rooted clutter because they did not want to get rid of things, not because they actively wanted to keep them:

> **Viv**: I don't collect ornaments and pictures, but I sort of hang on, like to things like this that was my grandma's and it's not really of any value or…
> **Alex**: …is it your taste, particularly…?
> **Viv**: …no, no and it's cracked as well so why have I got it, I don't know.
> **Alex**: When you look at it do you think of your grandma?
> **Viv**: Yeah, I think of her house, she had quite a nice ambience in her house, it was just a back to back in Beeston but somehow it had a nice feel to it, which this [vase] hasn't got here, but it does very much evoke her house, or it did before I chipped it.

Here Viv talks about a vase which, as above, does not actively work to construct a sense of her narrative identity as something continuous into the past. When Viv mentions the vase it is as clutter; she does not really know why she keeps it and it does not make sense in the context of her life today. Only on my asking her does she situate the vase within the context of her memories. This rooted clutter is not something which is pre-packaged with meanings, but instead it is something made meaningful in the context of remembrance. On one level the vase is out of place, something Viv does not really like or have a reason to keep, but on the other hand it is something she has remembrances through in the process of reflecting upon it. It is this quality which characterises rooted clutter objects; they relate to the self and work to define identity through memory in an emergent and relational way, as things which need to be contextually made sense of rather than as things which already have pre-determined meanings inscribed into them.

> **Viv**: I noticed yesterday I hadn't thrown away, a kind of candle that was given to [my son] when he was baptised, a sort of commemorative candle, 40-odd years ago that my son got when he was baptised, […] I don't know [why I've kept it]. I don't know, I don't understand my own motives. […] I suppose there's a reason at one stage, but once you've let it stay there a while you just don't ask yourself the question anymore about it, it's there for a reason you just can't quite remember what the reason was maybe, it's part of your life isn't it, it's part of your being as it were.

We can see this sense of how rooted clutter memory objects work in this second quote from Viv. Rooted clutter is 'a part of your life', it is something which offers us a way to remember, rather than something which communicates a memory (I talk about the importance of clutter being 'a part of your life' in section 6.6.2.1, and return to this quote again there). Rooted clutter then does not relate to a sense of a narrative self, one already distributed into objects in the home (Noble, 2004). It speaks instead of a more active sense of memory and meaning-making. This lack of a predetermined meaning is why these objects can be seen as clutter, because they do not fit into the relational context of a life. Instead they need to be (re)interpreted to be made sense of in the present. Rooted clutter communicates a gap in time, it reminds us of our past and needs to be related to our present.

In this way rooted clutter works in visibly emergent and relational terms, with memories constructed here 'obliquely from an always-moving viewpoint of ongoing life' (Jones and Garde-Hansen, 2012b: p.13). As I argued in my literature review, memories are made actively in an emergent context of a life and a home in motion. Clutter objects work in this way, as things caught up in a complex temporality in which past and present are connected but held apart, with the self shown to be something which emerges as an intersection of objects, places and a body rather than as something stable and enduring. Rooted clutter is a resource for remembrances which works actively in the present and which calls attention to the past, it marks out a gap in time and communicates the complex temporality of selfhood and memory.

5.7   Conclusions

In looking at how clutter is experienced and talked about in terms of time, this chapter has covered a lot of ground. I looked at three different aspects (rhythm, life transitions and memory) of time and analysed how clutter works in relation to them. Overall, this chapter has worked to develop my argument that clutter comes in two forms, rooted and flowing. I have shown in more detail here how each of these are framed and interacted with. This chapter has also developed my account of clutter as something which is out of place in the context of a home or in the context of a life. I have demonstrated how ideas of 'out of place' are framed through temporality, and how clutter emerges in and through time.

Many studies of clutter conceptualise it in terms of routine (Löfgren, 2012; Luzia, 2011). In this chapter I too analysed clutter in terms of routine action. I applied insights from literature on routine practices to explore how flowing and rooted clutter are created and managed. I showed them to relate to routine in the following ways: clutter is produced and managed routinely in relation to wider rhythms; decluttering routinely colonises time-slots within wider practices of hospitality; clutter is dealt with on a routine basis in relation to material markers. In addition to this I have also shown routine practices to be ones which work on the basis of affective markers; this has not been reported on in scholarship of clutter or of routine practices. This research finding

tells us not only about clutter, but also has wider implications for how routines can be conceptualised. I argued in my literature review (section 5.3.1) that we can best frame routine practices through the idea of rhythm, suggesting that by doing this we are better able to situate routine within the broader onflow of life. I applied this insight to my study of clutter, and demonstrated its value in my argument that we can think about clutter in general as something which relates to a stalling in the rhythmic flow of life (section 5.4.3). Understanding clutter through the idea of rhythm is a useful perspective, one which allows me to show how different forms of clutter work differently in terms of rhythm while also being able to draw out what they share. In doing this I add weight to the argument developed in my last chapter that clutter comes in two forms, while also holding together as a single conceptual category (section 4.8), by demonstrating how this works in practice.

My analysis of clutter through ideas of the lifecourse and life transitions worked to show how in discourse the different forms of clutter are associated with different lifecourse stages (section 5.5.1). I showed how the 'normal' middle ground of clutter (introduced in section 4.3.3) is textured on this basis. In developing this argument I showed not only how clutter is constructed as a cultural idea in terms of the lifecourse, but also how it interacts with parenting norms to take on different characteristics (section 5.5.1.1). This supports my argument that rather than being a matter of fixed definition, the meaning of clutter is relational and contextual. In this section I also looked beyond discourse, and explored in detail how three life transitions of Catherine's all led to practices with clutter (section 5.5.2). This developed my account of the way in which clutter works in relational contexts, here showing how life transitions create (practices with) clutter by altering the context of a subject's home, life and relationship to objects. In focusing in on Catherine's experiences, this section also adds to work on life transitions more broadly. As I noted in my literature review (section 5.3.2), rarely are adult life transitions researched; by looking at Catherine's experiences my analysis goes some way to address that gap.

Finally, I looked in this chapter at how rooted clutter works as a memory object. This is an underdeveloped research theme in scholarship on clutter (section 5.3.3). It is though an interesting element to explore. This is because, as I showed,

clutter as a memory object works not in terms of narratives of identity, but instead communicates absences, gaps and challenges to memory (practices) (section 5.6.3). Work on these kinds of memory experiences is a developing research theme I identified in my literature review on memory (section 5.3.3), to which my research contributes. In my analysis I showed first how clutter is constructed in discourse as a problematic memory object, by looking at how decluttering texts talk about memory objects (section 5.6.1). After this I looked at participants' experiences. First I showed how memory objects can be judged as clutter, based on their lack of fit within a spatial or personal context (section 5.6.2). I noted here how forgetting is one route by which things become clutter. After this I argued that memory experiences with clutter objects are ones which do not create neat narratives of identity but instead express a ruptured temporality, in which the gap between the past and the present is highlighted rather than closed (section 5.6.3). I suggested that how clutter is stored helps to make this rupturing possible. My analysis showed clutter objects relate to memory in an ambiguous way, one in which meanings need to be (re)constructed through lived engagements with objects, rather than simply read off from them.

Overall, the analysis in this chapter has developed my account of how clutter works as a cultural term, in accordance with the first of my aims for this chapter. I showed how it names rhythmic experiences of blockage (section 5.4.3), how it is constructed in discourse in relation to the lifecourse (section 5.5.1) and how clutter is framed as problematic memory objects (section 5.6.1). By looking in detail at practices with clutter I have also shown how it emerges, is related to and is managed through time (my second aim). I have shown clutter to be managed and emerge through rhythm (section 5.4), life transitions (section 5.5.2) and on the basis of memory (section 5.6.2; 5.6.3). This chapter adds depth to the claims which I made in the chapter four about what clutter is and how it works. Clutter is a cultural term which describes experiences with objects where they do not (or no longer) fit within the context of a home or a life. These home contexts, and the personal contexts of a life, are ones which emerge as intersections of people and objects. I have shown here how these contexts work in relation to rhythm, life transitions and memory, with each of

these producing (practices and experiences with) clutter. All of these practices happen within the timespace of home.

In the next chapter it is the spatial, rather than the temporal, which takes my attention. I develop my account of life lived with and alongside clutter by looking at where clutter is kept, and to what ends, the agencies of clutter and of home space, and consider how practices of keeping objects work to construct a sense of home as a meaningful dwelling.

Chapter 6   Clutter and Home: Storage Places, Agency and Selfhood

6.1   Introduction

In this chapter I think about how clutter works in the home. Here I look further at how people practice and understand their relationships with clutter. This chapter explores how home works to constitute practices and meanings of clutter, as well as how clutter works to act back and construct meanings and practices in the home. I look at how clutter works within specific rooms of the home, and argue that the relationship between individual rooms works to form practices and experiences of home as a totality. I demonstrate that both clutter and home space express agency in this relationship, alongside and sometimes against that of the people who live alongside them. Clutter is shown to be something which creates meanings of home, and which is used by people to enable and create their identities. Far from something of little value, which can easily be dismissed, clutter in this chapter is shown to be an important element in life at home in a number of ways.

6.2   Chapter Aims and Outline

6.2.1   Aims

This chapter has three aims. First, I aim to account for how the home works to construct and interact with meanings and practices of clutter. I look at how different parts of the home work to produce meanings and practices of clutter, based on how they are normatively used and culturally constructed. I also attend to the ways in which clutter makes meanings and practices in the home. Second, I aim to demonstrate the productive role clutter plays in constructing homes and lives. I look at how clutter makes meanings in the home, how clutter is used to construct identities and feelings of homeliness. Third, I want to explore in yet more detail how clutter works as a cultural term. Clutter works to construct meanings of home, and is framed in discourse as having particular forms of agency.

6.2.2 Outline

The next section of this chapter is a literature review, spread over two parts. In the first (section 6.3.1) I show how homemaking as a practice has been researched, and how material culture works within these practices. This review highlights the recursive and mutually constitutive relationship between home(making) and (practices with) material culture. I show home and objects to be active and agentic players in experiences and understandings of home and of clutter. The second section of this review (section 6.3.2) looks at how identities are made in the home with objects. I look first at how material culture is understood to display and represent selfhood. After this I show how the home works as a meaningful origin point from which identities are constructed, turning to the idea of dwelling.

After this review I move on to exploring my data. In section 6.4 I look at how clutter relates normatively to different parts of the home, and how participants articulate their practices with clutter. I show clutter to be framed and experienced differently in front-stage spaces like living rooms (section 6.4.1), in more back-stage spaces like bedrooms (section 6.4.2) and in storage spaces (section 6.4.3). Overall, I show both that how clutter is understood and experienced relates to its placement within the home, and that meanings and experiences of home are influenced by the presence of clutter. I conclude by arguing that home works as an assemblage of different rooms, each with their own part to play in constructing the home and our experiences in and of it overall. Different rooms and spaces in the home work as assemblages in their own right, with their own norms, logics and relationships. These spaces interact and work together to construct overall meanings and experiences of home.

I then turn my analysis to an exploration of material agency. I look at how clutter's agency is framed in discourse: that clutter is something which seems to grow of its own accord (section 6.5.1.1) and that it is often presented as some kind of threatening, impersonal force (section 6.5.1.2). I suggest that these discourses represent instances of forgetting about and later finding clutter and experiences of 'thing-power' (Bennett, 2010) respectively. I then look at the agencies of home space in producing practices and experiences with clutter. I look first (section 6.5.2.1) at the

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material nature of home, focusing in on the way water, by its impacts on spaces and objects, makes and mediates (relations with) clutter. I then look at how the physical arrangement of home space can make it more or less accommodating for people and their clutter, and show how home works to produce and constrain (practices with) clutter (section 6.5.2.2). Cumulatively, this section demonstrates that experiences and practices with clutter work relationally and contextually, in interaction with agentic spaces and objects, rather than solely at the prerogative of people.

The final analysis section of this chapter explores how clutter relates to identity in the home. I first show instances where clutter is framed and experienced as something which does not relate to or represent selfhood (section 6.6.1). I then complicate this by showing that at other times clutter does relate to identity and its construction in the home (section 6.6.2). This works, I argue, through practices of *keeping* objects. Keeping serves to materially embody identities and relationships (section 6.6.2.1) as well as working to produce the home as a secure and familiar environment which enables practices of identity (section 6.6.2.2).

Finally, I conclude the chapter by recapping the key arguments which I have made throughout. I show how my analysis has met my chapter aims, and where it makes an original contribution to the research literature.

6.3   Literature Review

6.3.1   Homemaking and Material Culture

Homemaking is how people make houses into homes. As I argued in section 2.4, home is a spatial imaginary constructed materially, through objects and practices, as well as mentally, through norms, values and representations (Blunt and Dowling, 2006). Home works as an 'assemblage of dwelling', where the physical and the representational co-emerge and interact with one another (Jacobs and Smith, 2008: p.518). In this review I show how discourses, practices and materials of home work both individually and together in homemaking. This develops the introductory account I gave in my literature review chapter, and focuses in on specific everyday practices of homemaking. First, I explore some of the norms which frame meanings

and practices of home. I demonstrate that these are constructed both discursively and in (material) practices, showing how the borders of home 'are not only materially given but also culturally defined' (Steiner and Veel, 2017: p.2).   After this I look at how homes are made (materially and socially) through material culture as an assemblage of dwelling. First, I show how homes are formed materially through (practices with) objects. Second, I demonstrate how the meanings of objects work to create and communicate the meanings of home. I then turn this around, showing the meanings of home to work to construct the meanings of material culture, focusing on the context of objects at home. Lastly, I show how the home works to materially enable and constrain practices of and with material culture. Overall, material culture and home(making) are shown to exist in a mutually constituting and recursive relationship.

The norms which (partially) construct the home as a spatial imaginary influence ideas and understandings of home, and are materially reflected in the arrangement of home space. Meanings and practices of home are culturally specific, with architecture (Datta, 2008; Seo, 2012), decoration (Drazin, 2001; Makovicky, 2007) and living arrangements (Bille, 2017; Rasson *et al*., 1999) all representing specific cultural idea(l)s of what home means and how it should be lived (in). Contemporary Western homes are framed as private places (Chapman, 1999a; Young 2005b). They are constructed in discourse as sites which exclude nature and are the domain of culture (Kaika, 2004), and are built to maintain this exclusion (Power, 2009). Homes are constructed normatively as sites of health which exclude illness (Hockey, 1999). Experiences of needing care at home can undermine homemaking; for example, when incorporating practices of personal care (Twigg, 2000) or materially incorporating technologies to assist with daily living (Schillmeier and Heinlein, 2009). Homes are also constructed heteronormatively (Gorman-Murray, 2006; Valentine, 1993), and are coded as feminine spaces where women care for children and for men (Gorman-Murray, 2008b; Pink, 2004). Materially, the heteronormativity of the home is not something seen as encoded into objects which express heterosexuality, but instead communicated by the absence of things which connote queer identities and subjects (Morrison, 2013; on queer domestic material culture see, as examples, Gorman-Murray, 2008a; Scicluna, 2015). The assumption of female labour in the home is architecturally built into its

fabric (Datta, 2006; Johnson, 2006) as well as expressed in everyday objects and their branding, like cleaning products (Martens and Scott, 2006; Pink, 2004). The home is also normatively a site of identity (Miller, 2008); I review literature on this in the next section. Finally, the tidiness norm, which I introduced in section 4.3.1, also frames home as a spatial imaginary. Homes are normatively spaces of tidiness and order (Cwerner and Metcalfe, 2003; Dion *et al.*, 2014; Löfgren, 2017; Strasser, 2000); homes that are untidy are framed as transgressive (Herring, 2014). The tidiness norm is something which is materially expressed in domestic practices of tidying (Dion *et al.*, 2014; Löfgren, 2017) as well as materially embodied in how home spaces and furnishings are constructed to facilitate the orderly keeping of things (Edwards, 2013). Tidiness is but one of the normative dimensions which construct the spatial imaginary of home as a representational and material space. Unlike the other norms I discussed above, it is one which has received much less research attention to date, meaning my work makes a substantial contribution to developing scholarship here.

As well as being made through norms and their enactment, homes are also made through material culture. Houses are not only material things in their own right, they are also assemblages of objects which come together to form the space of home (Guggenheim, 2009; Jacobs, 2006). In this way, not only can homes be seen as (quasi-)objects which possess agency, they can also be understood as assemblages of agentic objects, which work individually, as well as together, to construct the home and our experiences of it (Blunt, 2008; Bouzarovski, 2009). Houses are made into liveable places through the incorporation of domestic technologies (Shove, 2003; Shove and Southerton, 2000; Watkins, 2006). Cox (2016) talks about the ways in which the specific materials a house is built from, and the degree to which they can be altered, both work to determine how homely a house feels. Brown (2007) shows us how the material construction of a home becomes incorporated into narratives of selfhood and homeliness by self-builders. DIY practices are meaningful ways of engaging in practices of homemaking and identity (Gelber, 1997; Gorman-Murray, 2011). These practices of home construction and maintenance currently operate within a neoliberal context, which emphasises the exchange value of housing (Clifford Rosenberg, 2011). This reminds us that experiences and practices in and of the home remain situated and

contextualised within social norms and values. Overall, the home is constructed from objects; it is experienced both in its totality, as an entire home, as well as interacted with on an object-by-object basis. This returns us to the concept of the home as an assemblage of dwelling (Jacobs and Smith, 2008). Homes are material assemblages which work to construct experiences in and of them. Here we can see that this works at a macro-level, with the materiality of the home in general being an agent in this (Jacobs and Smith, 2008), but we can also interpret this at a more micro-level, with individual objects and materials also working to create experiences of home.

Home as an imaginary, as well as a physical place (Blunt and Dowling, 2006), is created through objects. The idea of home is expressed in particular objects or arrangements of them, for example wedding china (Purbrick, 2007), cabinets of ornaments (Makovicky, 2007), or wooden furniture (Drazin, 2001). Objects are also important in how a space is made into a home, how it is domesticated. Taking objects with us from one home to the next helps maintain a sense of continuity in our homemaking, and works to connect us up with our pasts (Marcoux, 2001). The extent to which we decorate the place we live can work to express the degree to which it feels like home, showing that the making of home space is an achievement that operates between ideas and material things (Búroková, 2006). However, having a space of our own, and keeping our possessions there, does not necessarily mean that we feel it is our home (Cieraad, 2010). The relationship between objects and the home as an imaginary is not deterministic but is worked out relationally. For example, Daniel Miller (1988) explores the ways in which a house may feel unhomely based on tenure. He explores the strategies by which residents in council houses work to appropriate them and use objects to project themselves into the home, using things to cover up or hide the space which has been designed, and is ultimately controlled, by others. Material culture is an important strategy for how we can feel at home, whether we own a space or not (Easthorpe, 2014).

Material culture therefore works to construct meanings and experiences of home. However, this relationship is a reciprocal one; the home also works to construct meanings and experiences of material culture. Rachel Hurdley (2013) explores cultural meanings of and practices with mantelpieces, showing the objects

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placed on them have their meanings elevated by their context. This is something Louise Purbrick (2007: p.109) also discusses in her work on wedding presents:

> Context is not always the straightforward equivalent of actual location. Being put into a particular place, unseen at the back of a kitchen cupboard or in the eye-level central spot of a dining room glass cabinet, classifies the object as cherished or unwanted, clearly contributing to its value. Cupboard and cabinet are frames that hold the objects in their place, culturally as well as physically. They position objects within a domestic hierarchy; they categorize them. […] The type of household to which the cupboard, the cabinet or other space belongs affects their contents as representations. For example, surviving marriage gifts displayed in a glass fronted cabinet in a long-established home of a still married couple may be cast as timeless signs of continuity whereas similar things similarly located in a house occupied by a widow or widower become memorials. […] Context, then, refers to the objects' place in a system and the system itself. It is the enclosing frame (cupboard or cabinet) within the larger framework (the new or long-established household). It is also the house and the home, the material and symbolic environment. Context is, therefore, a temporal and spatial location.

Home is not simply a neutral container for our stuff, it gives specific meanings to the objects which we keep in it. Storage spaces in the home are therefore important places which give meaning to the objects which they hold as well as holding objects which themselves work to construct meanings and experiences of home. The liminality of garages (Hirschman *et al.*, 2012) and cupboards (Horton and Kraftl, 2012), as (storage) spaces-in-between, allows for the meanings of objects to transform and be reworked over time (on liminality and transformations see, as classic examples, Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969). Cabinets hold special objects apart from the rest of daily life (Makovicky, 2007) whereas drawers are spaces where objects accumulate and can be forgotten about (Grossman, 2015; Woodward, 2015).

In general, the home can be understood as internally differentiated into public and private areas (Bille, 2017; Chapman, 1999a; Young, 2005b). In more public, front-stage areas like living rooms, where guests are received, people tend to try and present themselves in their best light, often through the (tasteful) arrangement of objects (Chapman, 1999b; Clarke, 2001; 2002). These presentations are supported by back-stage work, in places like bedrooms, by practices including storage and

organisation, which facilitate, as well as offering a space of respite from, public performances (Cwerner and Metcalfe, 2003; Goffman, 1990). In addition to this, the home can be imaginatively segmented into more and less central spaces (Bachelard, 1994; Power, 2009). More central spaces are those front-stage and public, less central spaces are found backstage in the periphery of the home which we visit less, places like attics and garages. These kinds of places, by dint of their separateness from the rest of the house, are framed by some as having ghostly or dreamlike qualities, and also as spaces of transformation and change (Bachelard, 1994; Hirschman *et al.*, 2012; Power, 2009). Here again we can return to an idea of the home as an assemblage of dwelling (Jacobs and Smith, 2008). In this iteration, we can understand the home as an assemblage of *rooms*; we can understand rooms as assemblages of objects. Rooms work within the assemblage of dwelling at a meso-level. They are situated within the macro-context of an entire house, and objects are situated at the micro-level within rooms. When thinking about how objects work to materially construct the home and its meanings, it is important to pay attention to how they are interacted with and understood individually (at the micro-level), as well as thinking about how they work within their wider meso- and macro-level contexts. My argument here that we should think about how the assemblage of home works at different (interconnected) scales is a conceptual development to Jacobs and Smith's (2008) idea of the assemblage of dwelling, one I develop through my analysis in section 6.4.4.

Finally, I show here how home itself influences practices with material culture. Daniel Miller (2001b) uses the term 'estate agency' to describe how homes act on, against and for their inhabitants. For Miller, this estate agency is less about the abstract idea that homes can and do have agency, and more about experiences of living in a home which acts back in sometimes troublesome ways, of living with the ghost of 'the longer history of the house and of housing relative to its present inhabitants' (2001b: p.109). This ghost haunts the process which Miller (2002) calls accommodating, the process of homemaking and making the self at home. Gregson (2011) takes up Miller's (2001b; 2002) ideas of estate agency and accommodating to explore how people make domestic divestment decisions. For Gregson the process of divestment is an important part of the ongoing accommodation of self to home and

home to self through material and social changes. Examples of home space influencing practices with material culture include what Leach (2002) describes as the 'tyranny of character', how the style of one's home (seems as if it) calls for the acceptance only of 'in-keeping' objects. This is similar to the Diderot effect, where the style of new objects works to reconfigure the meanings of older, existing possessions, leading to practices of divestment (see Gregson, 2011). The amount of space we have also matters, and works to produce practices with material culture; moving to a smaller home necessitates we get rid of objects (Marcoux, 2001), new home contexts can create new meanings for our once cherished possessions (Fairhurst, 1999), while living in a small space can make everyday practices of material culture more difficult to manage (Nethercote and Horne, 2016). In these ways we can see how homes cause and create practices with material culture, ones which are accommodations between human desires and the agency of home space.

Overall, life at home is a series of reciprocal entanglements. Homes are constructed from objects and materials, but they also work to construct practices with material culture. Home contexts give meanings to material culture, while material culture constructs the meanings of home. The spatial imaginary of home (Blunt and Dowling, 2006), its nature as somewhere both representational and real, works as an assemblage of dwelling (Jacobs and Smith, 2008), in which the material and the social co-emerge and interact with one another (see section 2.4). In this review I have been pushing at this idea of an assemblage of dwelling, and I have developed it to work at a finer grain of analysis by thinking about how the home as an assemblage can be broken up into different parts and studied at different scales. I have shown how meanings and materialities of home emerge at a micro-scale through (practices with) objects. I also talked about the importance of the meso-scale when thinking about objects in different rooms in a house, the way in which their context within an assemblage work to construct practices and meanings. Overall, these add up and interact to form the home, the macro-scale of the assemblage of dwelling. This analysis is a useful one, which draws on existing studies of material culture and frames them in more precise terms. I also demonstrate its value in the way it frames my analysis of clutter at home in section 6.4.

6.3.2   Making the Self at Home

Home is an important site for individual and shared identity, working to construct and represent it in a range of ways across different scales (Blunt and Dowling, 2006). Here I want to talk about two senses in which we make the self at home. First, I look at how identity is constructed and communicated at home using material culture. Second, I think about how material culture and our practices with it make the home meaningful space, one which works as an orientating point for selfhood.

Identity at home is something which is both practiced and represented. Practices at home work to create identity at a range of scales, from individual, to family, to national identities (Blunt and Dowling, 2006). A whole host of different practices can be enrolled in this, for example individual leisure practices (Christensen, 2011; Stalp and Winge, 2008), looking at family photographs (Roberts, 2012; Rose, 2004), and practices of cooking and eating national cuisines (Bell and Valentine, 1997; Longhurst *et al*. 2009). These practices involve the use of objects. Objects also work to represent identities in the home. They encode (parts of) our identities; they help to make the self knowable, by acting as representations on which we can reflect (Miller, 1987; drawing on Hegel, 1977), and are, because of their representational qualities, experienced as parts of the (extended) self (Belk, 1988). This means that their display, which sees objects enrolled into identity narratives and then held up as representations of these narratives, is crucial to the expression of selfhood at home using objects (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Miller, 1998; Pahl, 2012).

Display works to make manifest domestic relationships, constructing the home as a site which is shared with others and in which (particular) people live (Finch, 2007; Reimer and Leslie, 2004). It also works to construct personal identities. Often, studies of material culture at home think about how different parts of identity are represented in objects. For example, studies report on the ways in which objects embody migrant identities, working to constitute mobile and situated senses of home, identity and belonging through the enduring and polysemic nature of objects (see Basu and Coleman, 2008; Pahl, 2012; Savaş, 2010; Tolia-Kelly, 2004). Within all of this, narratives of selfhood are important; objects encode narratives within them and are made meaningful through the process of narration. Objects therefore matter in the

home because of the stories attached to them. And the context of the object matters. As I showed in my review above, where objects are positioned within the home works to partially determine how they are understood and reflects the narratives within which they are framed. Home space also works to make practices of identity and display more or less possible, with people projecting themselves into the home as a relational site through accommodating (Miller, 2002). Finally, Gregson (2011) suggests that accommodating involves divestment to maintain a sense of identity at home. Here then we can see that while display is an important practice when it comes to identity at home, it is not the only one which matters (I review other such practices with material culture in section 2.2). This is something I demonstrate in my analysis in section 6.6.2.1 where I show the importance of *keeping* material culture at home.

Of course, practices of display, and narratives of identity, are not only enacted at home. However, the home is an especially important site for this kind of identity work. The home is the main place where people keep this kind of identity object; home space therefore matters as the context in which identities are represented (Búroková, 2006; Lincoln, 2015; Easthorpe, 2014). Beyond this, the home also matters as the point at which different parts of our identities come together and can be integrated. Andrew Gorman-Murray (2008a) explores how home functions as a space where gay identities and other identities can be symbolically reconciled, parts of the self which must be kept apart in other places. Greg Noble (2004) also explores this integrative function of home. While objects matter individually, because they reflect different aspects of selfhood (or memories), the home matters as the place in which selves and memories (represented as objects) meet and relate to one another. This draws out the importance of home space as the site of and context for performances of identity. By thinking about home space, Noble (2004: p.233) argues, we can 'do justice to the breadth and continuity of lived intersubjective experience'. The home works to bring together selves from different times and places, selves which are connected to multiple others and which are split up and objectified into individual objects. Overall, for Noble (2004), the home works to integrate and stitch together identity into an experiential whole, while individual objects work to represent different parts of the self.

These approaches to domestic identity objects frame them as full of meaning, as things which already are incorporated into narratives which constitute and communicate identity and selfhood. However, to imply that every object already tells a story neglects the fact that we can just as easily forget about things (Grossman, 2015; Woodward, 2015), and that the meanings of objects can change over time, for example through the process of storage (Hirschman *et al*., 2012; Horton and Kraftl, 2012). This is something I explored in section 5.6.3, discussing how clutter objects do not get incorporated into our being, and instead represent a gap between the past and the present, not a continuity of selfhood. While objects can be (and often are) meaningful, I suggest that they are not necessarily always already full of meanings. Recognising this lets us think about how we *construct* the meanings of objects, and our identities alongside them, rather than simply read them off from things around us.

The second way in which home and identity connect is through home's function as an orientating point from which identities can be built. Humanistic geography frames home as a (private) starting point, where people can feel in control and safe, and from which they go out into the public world with a sense of self-assurance and stability (Relph, 1976; Seamon, 1979; Tuan, 1974). In this way homes can offer a sense of what Giddens (1991) describes as ontological security, by providing a reliable and enduring base to leave from and return to, a space of ownership and control in and from which social and individual identities can be constructed (Bate, 2018; Dupuis and Thorns, 1998; Lutherová, 2014). However, as I discussed in my literature review (section 2.4), these understandings of home have been criticised by feminist scholars. Rose (1993), for example, points out that for women who labour in the home it is not a site of rest and relaxation from which to sail forth into the world, but can be a claustrophobic space of drudgery (see also Beauvoir, 1952; Irigaray, 1992).

Noting home's ambivalent value, Iris Marion Young (2005a) seeks a middle ground between home's positive and negative qualities. She agrees with feminist arguments that the home can represent a space of drudgery, but still sees political potential within it (informed by the work of, among others, hooks, 1990). Young argues that homes can function as originary points for identities, drawing on

Heidegger's (1993) notion of dwelling. For Heidegger the creation and maintenance of a home is a fundamental need which people have for security and comfort, so fundamental that he describes it not simply as something which people need to be happy, but for them to *be* at all. Homemaking is how people form these places Heidegger names as dwelling. Dwelling offers an originary point which the world is experienced and measured against, making things like identities and relationships possible. Dwelling as a practice takes two forms for Heidegger, dwelling-as-building and dwelling-as-cultivating. Dwelling-as-building means a gathering together, a creation of space through the intersection and conjunction of what Heidegger describes as the fourfold: the earth, the sky, the divinities and fellow humans. Heidegger's romantic language here captures the radical relationality and co-constitutedness of the ontology of dwelling. This bringing together constitutes subjects, objects and their spatiality. In this we can see echoes of our framing of the home as an assemblage of dwelling (Jacobs and Smith, 2008), in a shared sense of the co-constitution and co-emergence of subjectivities and materialities. Heidegger's dwelling-as cultivation involves not the act of bringing things together but of guarding and keeping them, their preservation, and the care of and for them in their own terms.

Young (2005a) argues that building is a task which tends to be engaged in by men, from which women are excluded. Cultivation, on the other hand, offers more potential to celebrate women's role in homemaking and the constitution of dwelling. She recognises women's structural inequality, and their enrolment into practices of care, cleaning and housework generally. While accepting this kind of work can be oppressive, Young also argues that we can frame practices of care, cleaning and maintenance as acts of dwelling-as-cultivation. These practices with material culture personalise the home, by projecting the self into space through display, and make it fit an individual. These practices can also be ones felt to be deeply constitutive of both personal and gender identities (Hollows, 2006; Pink, 2004). This work of cultivating makes the home a storehouse of the past. Our pasts and our memories are important ways in which we construct identity (section 5.3.3). Therefore, acts of preservation, of keeping and caring for things, are important and meaningful in the home. They do not merely reproduce home as a place but make it a meaningful point of origin,

somewhere to look back from and upon. Acts of preservation are personal and individual, like putting photographs into an album. These are acts of identity and identification, not (just) labour. While they are often undervalued and somewhat ambiguous when compared to acts of building, the tasks of cultivation do matter (Young, 2005a).

We can add to this account of caring for objects and maintaining the home further insights from the work of Nicky Gregson (2011). She concludes her research on divestment by arguing that we can understand it through the idea of dwelling:

> [C]ontemporary dwelling is best thought about in terms of inhabitation, cohabitation and the practices of habitation, and that it is fundamentally and simultaneously about accommodation and accommodating. Dwelling is orientated around the dwelling structure as home and, as critically, around the things, the people and the non-human animate presences that move through it and stay within it, or not, over temporalities which range from the everyday through to decades. In this sense, dwelling is achieved through an ongoing flow of appropriation and divestment; through acquisition, holding, keeping, storing and indeed ridding.
>
> (Gregson, 2011: p.21)

Here again we see how practices with material culture make the home into a dwelling place, and in this process make it into somewhere which can both represent and provide an originary point for our identities. Gregson here ties this process of dwelling up with the material agency of objects and home space, using Miller's (2002) idea of accommodating to capture this. Here we can see how everyday domestic practices work to construct the home as a meaningful site. This work differs from ideas of display and identity, in that it is less about creating the home as a site which represents selfhood and instead is about creating home as a site which embodies and supports selfhood. Both perspectives together show how interwoven (practices of) identity and home are, demonstrating their interconnected and co-emergent nature.

The rest of this chapter draws on the reviews given in this section. In what follows I make use of the literature reported on here and to show how clutter works to make the (meanings and practices of) home, and how, in turn, home works to make the (meanings and practices of) clutter.

6.4   Keeping Clutter at Home

6.4.1   Cluttered Public Rooms

In general, homes are normatively supposed to be tidy and uncluttered (Dion *et al*., 2014; Löfgren, 2017; section 4.3.1). In the most public rooms in a house, like living rooms, people generally do their best to meet normative expectations and display themselves in the best light possible. This means public rooms are the spaces in the home least associated with the presence of clutter. This normative practice is such that not living up to this standard is part of how diagnoses of Hoarding Disorder are made. Criterion C (one of six) used to identify Hoarding Disorder in the DSM-5 (APA, 2013: p.247) handbook for psychiatrists states:

> The difficulty [patients have] discarding possessions results in the accumulation of possessions that congest and clutter active living areas and substantially compromises their intended use. If living areas are uncluttered, it is only because of the interventions of third parties (e.g. family members, cleaners, authorities).

Later in the text the meaning of 'active living areas' is developed:

> Criterion C emphasizes the "active" living areas of the home, rather than more peripheral areas, such as garages, attics, or basements, that are sometimes cluttered in homes of individuals without hoarding disorder.
>
> (APA, 2013: p.248)

We can see two things from this. First, the definition of Hoarding Disorder is (at least in part) a culturally situated normative judgement. The tidiness norm is not something which is universally shared; for example, for the Dogon of Mali having rubbish strewn around public areas connotes prosperity and fruitfulness (Douny, 2007). Second, having some clutter is 'normal', while having it in the living room is 'abnormal' (see section 4.7). This demonstrates that the spatial context of an object works to give it meaning, as I showed above (section 6.3.1). Throughout my thesis I have argued that the spatial context of an object works to define whether it is clutter or not. Here we can see that the spatial context of an object also works to define the degree to which clutter is a problem, rather than something less remarkable. Clutter in public rooms is potentially evidence of pathology, clutter in garages and attics is less of a cause for

concern. This is the case whether the clutter is rooted or flowing, so rather than try and pull these forms of clutter apart in this section I analyse them together.

I want to focus now on how participants relate to and experience clutter in their public rooms. First, we can see that the context of the living room works to define meanings and experiences of clutter:

> **Charlotte**: I suppose I want to make sure that it sort of looks its best, do you know what I mean? […] We had family over on Saturday, and that, that, erm tray of rubbish, so that's my sort of [tray of] sorting out stuff that I need to sort out from the week, that got shoved in a cupboard upstairs just because it looks a bit messy, do you know what I mean, and they were sort of coming for a visit, you know like a day-long visit, we went out for dinner, the kids played together and all the rest of it, and they particularly have a very pristine house as well so when they were coming I was like "Pete [husband], shove the tray in the cupboard!" you know, "Put the bag of dirty washing into the wherever it is".

> **Charlotte**: So this is the airing cupboard that I was telling you about that needs sorting out.
> **Alex**: So sort of from perfection to…
> **Charlotte**: ….to chaos yeah. So I think all that needs is some kind of shelving unit to lift everything, to give me like two layers, and also a sort out as well, but it's really difficult to do that because actually I want to put a shelf across here so that I can put towels up here or just have storage of stuff, but it's really difficult to do because of all the pipes. So that you just sort of reach down, pull and just hope that everything sort of survives.

In the first quote Charlotte explains that keeping her living room clutter free and looking good is important to her. Ahead of her husband's family coming to visit Charlotte hides clutter and tries to put on a presentable front, moving objects off-stage so she can present her best public self. In second quote Charlotte talks about clutter in her airing cupboard. This was not tidied up for visitors coming. Charlotte moved into her home five years ago. She built an extension and tastefully decorated her living room (and the rest of the house) in that time. She still though has not got around to putting up some shelves in the airing cupboard (image 6.1). The presence of clutter in Charlotte's airing cupboard shows that it is not clutter per se which bothers her. Rather, by comparing the two extracts above we can see that clutter bothers

Image 6.1 – Charlotte's Cluttered Airing Cupboard

Charlotte when it is visible in public spaces. This therefore shows us that the spatial context of clutter determines how it is experienced, and that while clutter in public rooms is problematic, clutter in an airing cupboard is not, even if it is in chaos.

I want now to turn this analysis around and show how the meanings of clutter work to construct experiences and meanings of public rooms. Participants who hoard often expressed that the clutter in their homes influenced how they felt about them:

> **How does hoarding affect your life? Is there anything it makes it difficult for you to do?**
> It is embarrassing to have people in even for short periods of time because I am very aware of the clutter when people are here, more so than I am when no one is here but me. It probably bothers me more than the visitors. It makes it difficult to have workers in to repair things because it is difficult to get to areas that need work and again there is the embarrassment.
> Hoarding Survey Respondent: Female, Over 66, USA

How would you describe your home? How does it make you feel?
Horrible horrible horrible! It's a mess. We have so many leaks but we are too embarrassed to have the plumber in. He couldn't get to the pipes even if he wanted to [because there's] so much junk. When one in the household hoards, everyone does. Four under one roof. The floor is soft in some spots upstairs, not safe. The leaks create mold, my mother has COPD [a chronic lung condition] from the mold.

Hoarding Survey Respondent: Female, 26-35, USA

These participants reported having clutter spread throughout their entire homes, and here its visibility in public areas creates unpleasant effects. In the first extract this participant's home is not somewhere which feels welcoming and homely. She feels unable to invite guests to socialise with her at home. Clutter has exceeded its normative, back-stage location and prevents them from inviting anybody round, even a workman to make repairs. In the second extract we can see how strong this embarrassment can be, and the end results it can cause. Again, for fear of stigma workmen are not brought to the property. This has led to serious, long-term health problems and the potential for further damage and for accidents. The clutter in this participant's house means she is simply too embarrassed to seek help.

Finally, I want to show here how clutter's presence in a living room, normatively a space for presenting our best selves (Clarke, 2001; 2002), relates to questions of identity.

> **Ed**: If I'm sat watching TV, erm, I sometimes look around on the sofa and it's like, I've got my phone there, there's the remote then there's an iPad and then there's maybe like a mug at the side and that kind of annoys me, like if someone came in and saw me with all these things on the sofa I'd just feel, erm, not kind of like how I'd want to be perceived so then I'll end up thinking "Well I'm not going to watch this programme for a while so I will put that TV remote away".

Here Ed talks about practices of decluttering in his living room. He does this as a self-presentational strategy, to avoid being (seen as) someone who lives in clutter (even by an imagined visitor). Image 5.2 (in the last chapter) is of Ed's clutter cupboard, which shows that he is not averse to clutter in itself. It is the spatial context of the living room, as a public area of identity display, which leads him to practice decluttering in this way. However, while participants agreed that not having clutter in the living room

was generally best, some challenged the idea that clutter's presence ought to lead to negative judgements. This is a sentiment which Diana expressed:

> **Alex**: So would you describe [your home] as messy or cluttered or…?
> **Diana**: Both! <Laughs> Messy and cluttered! Erm…
> **Alex**: Does it bother you, is it something you wish you were a bit better about or is it just, you just don't put stuff back because you're happy as you are?
> **Diana**: I don't think it makes me a bad person. […] [T]o some extent I think, well, people who judge you for that kind of thing, like I said I don't think it makes me a bad person so, if that's important to you then that's what's important to you but it doesn't, it doesn't make me a bad person, so, kind of, I don't care, I suppose if they judge me for that then that's their own business.

Here Diana (who does not identify as someone who hoards) contests the value of the tidiness norm. She recognises its existence but challenges whether it is appropriate to make judgements about people based on the clutter in their homes. As she states, her home is cluttered, and she had the most cluttered living room I visited during this research (image 6.2). Ed's quote shows us cluttered living rooms can affect participants' senses of self and are decluttered on this basis. This is not though always the case; values can be articulated differently and the tidiness norm challenged.

Image 6.2 – Diana's Living Room

6.4.2 Other Cluttered Rooms

In the last section I showed participants generally avoid clutter in public spaces like living rooms because of their role in communicating and constructing identity. Here, I look at more back-stage rooms, ones which do not have the same role to play in the home. These are places like spare rooms and studies, more private and the location for back-stage performances. This means that clutter in them is less problematic, and so participants can make use of clutter within them to support their lives.

Several participants kept clutter at home to help their adult children who had moved out of the house but not settled into somewhere permanent yet.

> **George**: This is a room [image 6.3] in a sort of suspended animation, almost neither one thing or the other. […] [T]his again, most of this stuff here is my son's, is our son's, and again an expectation that when he goes, when he gets settled somewhere, most of it will go.

George has a lot of this kind of rooted clutter, stuck in place and yet out of place in the context of his life. Three of the four bedrooms in his house have clutter belonging to his children, and so does half his garage. This annoys George. He would like to run a model railway in one of the rooms, but it is currently filled up with his son's belongings instead (image 6.3). We can see here another example (in addition to that reported in section 5.5.1.1) of how parenting interacts with clutter. The relative degree of ownership which children have over their bedrooms (Lincoln, 2015) extends beyond the time they have left the family home. Parental acts of love and support for children trump the annoyance of living with clutter. Together, this means parents keep children's belongings, sometimes for years, often in their old bedrooms. These rooms work to facilitate parental practices of love and care, and make space in the home for children even after they have left. In these less public rooms we do not have practices of 'displaying' family (Finch, 2007) but rather practices of keeping which embody family relationships materially in space. I explore this idea in more detail in section 6.6.2. Here, I want just to note that this clutter has a particular meaning, as an expression of love and care. By being kept in relative spatial seclusion, and not used in visible performances of family, the place this clutter resides allows it to fulfil a particular role in embodying, rather than displaying, family love.

Image 6.3 – George's Son's Clutter

Image 6.4 – 'Days of the Week' Plastic Bags in Sue's Bedroom

Less public rooms are sometimes cluttered instead as a strategy of order and organisation:

> **Sue**: At the beginning, or the end of the week, Fridays normally, I go through the diary for the following week and I have a carrier bag for each day for the week. […] [T]hat really does work. And carrier bags are a lot easier than having in-trays, out-trays, day-trays or whatever because you, so long as you've got somewhere to put the bags it's more flexible.

> **Tim**: This is a box of stuff, of work stuff and stuff I want to get rid of, yeah, I need, I need to get rid of that stuff, I don't like that stuff. […] I mean it's interesting, if you'd come at a different stage, before I put the table there, this area tended to become just a dumping ground […] [for] stuff where there's nowhere else to put it, so you stick it there because it's not an area that you really use.

Flowing clutter is associated with this kind of practice. In the first quote Sue talks about how she uses space to order her life. She keeps her 'days of the week plastic bags' in her bedroom, out of sight rather than front-stage (image 6.4). However, their presence back-stage facilitates her performing competently at work, when she is front-stage (Goffman, 1990). Tim has less room to enact this kind of practice. He lives in a small, open-plan apartment which has a sleeping area on a mezzanine floor. Beneath the mezzanine is Tim's dining table, and the pile of clutter he refers to in the extract above. Like Sue, Tim uses clutter as an organising strategy. As he makes clear, it is the (relatively) less central nature of this space which means this is where clutter accumulates. As somewhere less frequently used, and less useable given the low ceiling height, this is the least public part of Tim's home. Therefore, this is the location most amenable to becoming a 'dumping ground' and is the space in which clutter accumulates. This then shows that it is the degree of publicness of a space that works to influence clutter practices, ones which work to order and organise life.

One final room which demonstrates how clutter practices relate to whether a space is imagined as public or private is Ann's spare bedroom:

> **Ann**: Now this is the guest suite and it's fitted out for anyone to just come and arrive and if they don't want to go home they can stay 'cos there's spare pyjamas and slippers and what have you in there, and everything that's in the drawer, I'm just charging that [electric

toothbrush] because I've had visitors, there's everything anyone could want in the drawers there, I don't use any of this stuff so I forget it's there.

Alex: Do you keep anything overflow in here like in the bottom of the wardrobe or is it all just…?

Ann: No, no this is just all stuff for people to use in here, this is theirs, their stuff, I'll show you where I keep my stuff.

Alex: You've got it set up nicely with the hairdryer [attached to the wall] and everything, it's like a hotel isn't it?

Ann: Yeah well it is, what I'm, what, yeah, because what I've got in mind, when I get to where I can't look after myself I absolutely will not go into a home, I've been into too many, I've been to some nice ones but I've been to so many awful ones, so I am not going there, it's part of my understanding that I'm being looked after at home so I could have somebody to live with me and look after me and they can have their own space.

Unlike other participants, Ann does not imagine her spare bedroom as a (more) private part of her home. In fact, she imagines it as a more public space than the rest of her house. Rather than somewhere to accommodate overnight *guests*, this room will accommodate overnight *employees*. To stay in her home and avoid residential care Ann reverses the general arrangement of space in the home other participants effect. This is achieved not only by making sure the room has the proper facilities, but also by stripping it of Ann's personal possessions and keeping it clutter free. Receiving care from workers at home can challenge constructions and experiences of it as a private place (Schillmeier and Heinlein, 2009; Twigg, 2000). Ann forestalls this by creating somewhere which is not her own, which is set up to accommodate the possessions of others. Here we have an absence of clutter as an organising strategy to facilitate Ann's wished-for future self, rather the presence of clutter achieving this. This again demonstrates the meanings of a space, and the degree to which it is public, help shape practices with clutter.

6.4.3   Clutter(ed) Storage Spaces

The final kind of space I look at in this section is storage spaces in the home. These are places like cupboards and attics, spaces which are (to different degrees) least central within the home and the least public. I talked about clutter drawers in section 5.4.1.1,

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showing them to be a particular way of ordering flowing clutter. The non-public nature of clutter drawers means that clutter's presence in them is not a problem. These drawers work to facilitate life in the home by making it easier to store and retrieve items, and work to circumvent the need to think about where things 'ought' to go by putting them all together in one place. Clutter drawers work to keep the home tidy and to keep life in it flowing smoothly. This is achieved by them containing clutter and keeping it out of sight.

Rooted clutter kept in storage spaces works in a similar way. For example, many participants stuck things in the loft they might want to use later, or instead things they felt they could not part with (yet), often emotional objects like heirlooms. This is a similar strategy to that used with clutter drawers: keeping things out of sight and out of the way. However, some participants had more problematic relationships with clutter kept in storage spaces. I use my interview with Mary to exemplify this:

> **Mary**: I've lived with someone who was a hoarder for so long [her husband who has died], the hoarding was basically confined to the loft and I just didn't go near it because it would mean a row, and ostensibly he used to go up and spend best part of a week sorting the loft. I don't know what he was doing, he wasn't getting rid of stuff, you know, erm, so you wouldn't necessarily see too much evidence of it. […] [Keeping stuff in the loft] evolved because if I wanted to get rid of anything he'd say "Well I'll put it up in the loft" […] but there came a point definitely you're right "I can't, I'm not willing, it's wearing me out, just you get on with the loft and I'll pretend it's not there". […] [I only go into the loft] very rarely, I only go up when someone's here and it's, it's really hard, my sister was here before last Christmas and we managed to get some of the Christmas decorations down, some not all of them, certainly the Christmas before I didn't bother, I was too hurting to do that but, erm, you know there's things missing that I would like. […] I don't know whether it looks as bad as I've described, it certainly doesn't look good. […] Of course it's not very easy to get up anyway, so that gave him, that gave him… […] I used to talk about getting, like we had in our last house some steps that folded into the, and just kind of retracted and he claimed that we couldn't do that, and he may well have been right, but I do wonder…
> **Alex**: Do you think maybe it was so you didn't have…?
> **Mary**: …so that I couldn't get up. […] I don't know, that's me putting negative spin on things and things were negative enough without me.

Mary's husband, who died a couple of years ago, was someone who hoards[5]. As she explains in this quote, most of his (hoarded) possessions were contained in their loft. There are two points which I want to draw out of this. First, that as a rarely accessed space the loft was somewhere able to contain most (but not all) of his clutter without it being visible to Mary in her day-to-day life. The strategy of keeping things in the loft made life more liveable and helped avoid arguments over clutter, which were more frequent before this arrangement evolved. This storage of things out of sight allowed for the rest of their home to be less cluttered as a result, meaning this storage space worked as part of a wider logic of home organisation which kept clutter contained to specific areas. At the end of the extract above Mary indicates a belief her husband tried to prevent her from accessing the loft, by falsely claiming the ladder could not be replaced with ones easier for Mary to use. Here, Mary reflects that her husband may have actively used the materiality of the space of the loft, its rickety steps Mary finds hard to navigate, to exclude her from it and to conceal its contents from her.

Second, we can see that the presence of clutter in the loft has led it to take on particular representational qualities. The loft represents Mary's husband and her loss of him. It was too painful for Mary to go into the loft after his death, and she only recently has felt able to begin the task of decluttering it. Beyond this, the loft also represents her husband's hoarding. The loft was the space which Mary spoke about most during our interview, and she implies that this was where almost all of his hoarded possessions were kept. However, in more passing references Mary talks about a range of other spaces which were also cluttered:

> **Mary**: He couldn't throw food out the fridge, out of date food, didn't mind me doing it. […] He collected so much stuff that he would never use and was piled into sheds, I got rid of his shed, that was quite an achievement. […] He had this big tub of nuts and bolts [in his bedroom] and his hand function had gone and I couldn't stop him having to sort through [them].

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[5] Mary made it clear in our interview that she loved her husband dearly and wanted me to know this. In many respects he was a wonderful partner for her. Their relationship did though have its challenges, which I reflect on here. The data here should not be taken to characterise the many happy years they spent together.

When Mary looked into her loft during our house tour she found there was not as much stuff in it as she thought there was. Drawing these insights together suggests that the space of the loft has taken a symbolic resonance as the site of her husband's hoarding. Work on lofts frame them as spaces of dreaming, in which shadows loom large, where space and time take on somewhat unworldly qualities (Bachelard, 1994; Power, 2009). This was the experience which Mary had; her loft has grown bigger and fuller in her construction of it as the site of her husband's hoarding. This particular texturing of home space is possible because of the physical inaccessibility of the loft within the home. Here, the clutter within the loft, the cultural quality of loft spaces as sites of dreaming, and the loft's inaccessibility, together work to create it as a particular kind of space with its own symbolic and emotional resonances.

6.4.4   Clutter and Home Space(s)

I now want to draw together the foregoing analysis and draw out its implications for how we can understand the home. Jacobs and Smith (2008) describe the home as an assemblage of dwelling, somewhere which exists through the co-emergence of social feelings and practices alongside non-human materialities and agencies (see section 2.4). This framing fits within the general way in which assemblages are conceptualised in geography and beyond (see, for example, De Landa, 2006; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988; Dovey, 2010; McFarlane, 2011). Jacobs and Smith (2008) suggestively make use of the term assemblage, but they do not connect this up with wider thinking on how assemblages work. Assemblages are networks of practices, bodies, objects and spaces that function as a unit. The constituents of an assemblage can work together as a whole, but can also ally themselves together into other (smaller, differently constituted) assemblages. These can themselves form alliances and work together with yet other assemblages in novel relationships (see De Landa, 2006; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). Buildings, as assemblages of bodies, objects, materials and practices are readily theorised in these complex material and interactional terms (Bouzarovski, 2009; Edensor, 2011; Jacobs, 2006). However, what I want to do is connect this up more with a sense of home, rather than housing, and think about how this relates to particular human experiences, to issues like emotion and identity. This sense of

assemblage is not one that Jacobs and Smith (2008) explore when they talk about the material co-production of feelings of homeliness and the meanings of the domestic, but it is one, I argue, we can see at work in my analysis above.

The home works at a macro-level as a single assemblage of dwelling. Within the home living rooms, as the most public room in a house, have their own logics and associations. They are sites of identity and the front-stage performance of the self. They relate to the tidiness norm in a particular way. They are not supposed to be cluttered, and clutter within them can be framed as especially problematic. Within the assemblage of the home, spare rooms are different. They are often back-stage, and clutter within them is less problematic. Clutter is used here to support front-stage performances, and to embody, rather than display, family. Storage spaces within the home are less central than other parts of the house. They are places where clutter is normatively supposed to reside. They are spaces we engage with less regularly, which have specific meanings and give meanings to objects.

Each of the different (cluttered) spaces I describe in my analysis can be seen to work on their own social and material terms; I have shown how in each of these social ideas and norms lead to material practices, and how the material arrangement of space can create meanings and practices around objects. Each of these spaces is, therefore, its own meso-level assemblage within the wider assemblage of dwelling. How we relate to individual clutter objects, and how they relate to our identities and our experiences at a micro-level, is informed by their relationship with this wider context of the room. Each of these rooms-as-assemblages work together with other rooms/assemblages, collectively constructing domestic experiences and practices. When back-stage areas use clutter as a strategy of organisation it is to facilitate competent front-stage performances; storage spaces hold the clutter we do not want left out and visible in the rest of the home. Each of these assemblages is therefore constituted alongside other domestic assemblages, not in isolation. Here we can see how meso-level assemblages of rooms work together to construct the macro-level of the home. Cumulatively, the home is an assemblage of dwelling (Jacobs and Smith, 2008); one, I argue, that is itself made up of a series of other assemblages. This is an original argument developed from my analysis of clutter. Here I have taken forward

Jacobs and Smith's (2008) idea of the assemblage of dwelling, showing how this works at a conceptually finer scale and how different assemblages in and of the home work to construct home overall. This conceptualisation of the home helps me to understand how clutter works at home; I introduced this idea in my literature review and used it to show how it can also help make sense of other domestic experiences and practices (section 6.3.1). This understanding of the home as a multiple assemblage of dwelling is something applicable to the work of other researchers who may productively use it to develop their accounts of domestic life.

6.5   Clutter Agency and Home Agency

The concepts of material and object agencies are a key ways of thinking about how people relate to their possessions in the less-than strictly hierarchical relationship between the subject and the object. Thinking about the agency of things, including clutter, means taking into account how they work to influence, determine or produce our relationships to them and to the world at large. In sections 6.5.1 and 6.5.2 I draw out the key ways in which my participants spoke about and relate to clutter in terms of its situated agency within their homes and lives. I want to spend just a little time first reflecting on other ways in which clutter might be thought of as expressing agency. To do this I look to work which thinks about the qualities that objects possess and how these work to inform how people (inter)act with them. I first outline some of the contours of the scholarship in this area. I then reflect on the application of such ideas to experiences and practices with clutter.

Examples of the qualities objects possess which influence how people think about and relate to them include age, utility, aesthetics and condition. Walter Benjamin (1969a) reflects on the 'patina' an object has as something which informs how, at both an individual and a cultural level, it is conceived of and engaged with. By patina Benjamin means the qualities and visible markers of age that objects accrue over their lifetimes. A sense of patina connotes authenticity and meaningfulness, and therefore objects possessing these hallmarks of the authentic and markers of time are given respect and accorded status. However, where patina builds up to the point at

which the surface of an object is corroded its cultural value can slip; in processes of ruination such significations of the past tend to reduce an object's cultural value as its utility and aesthetics change, while also working to open up its interpretations beyond those which it originally held (DeSilvey, 2007). Perceptual engagements with a confusion and profusion of things, where their physical and cultural boundaries slip and shift, form alternative modes of being (with things), opening up the body and the self to different forms of material awareness (Hawkins, 2010; Edensor, 2008). Damaged things can also be said to call out to bodies and to draw them into practices of care, agentically enrolling humans into relationships with them on the basis of their physical condition (Patchett, 2008a; 2008b; see also Hitchings, 2003). Finally, how objects are valued and related to, whether repaired or intact, is based in part of the 'type' of object they are, which is to say the particular function which their design opens out to (Attfield, 2000). Woodward and Greasley's (2017) comparative work on collections of objects, which thinks of them as agentic material assemblages, shows how an object's use can matter in our relations with them. The uses to which things can be put, and the ways in which they have been used in the past, work to create forms of practice with them that reflect both their current utility and their history. This combines both the objects' patina and its potential future in terms of use (see also Benjamin, 1969b). Finally, we can also think about the future of objects and how we value and understand them as being based on their material affordances. An object's material form allows or prevents certain forms of practice, this in turn affects how we understand and relate to material things in the world (see Miller, In preparation; Miller, 2002; Paton, 2013; Sennett; 2009).

The agency of damaged or degraded things, and how this relates to their material affordances and their utility, is something I have reflected on in work elsewhere on hoarded objects and the ways in which they are assigned values based upon their potential ability to be used (Miller, In preparation). I therefore see these factors as important ones to consider when thinking about how people relate to their possessions and to the world around them. Indeed, given my understanding of clutter as something defined subjectively and in the context of the lived interrelationships within which an individual finds themselves (section 4.5), taking these factors into

account is a necessary part of how clutter comes to be known. Factors including the utility, condition, age and aesthetics of things all matter when making emplaced and embodied decisions about what counts as clutter. However, my participants did not reflect in much depth on these issues when we talked about their belongings. This is perhaps because my work took place at a single point in time, with these factors always already included in how people spoke about and related to their clutter. The nature of how clutter is defined and how this decision is taken makes it more difficult to detect the hand of material agency at work; to resolve this, subsequent research might consider more of the 'social life' of things, and how identifications of objects as (not) clutter vary through time on the basis of the age, usefulness and meaningfulness of objects (Appadurai, 1986). Such work would be especially apposite given geography's current preoccupation with the material, and the way such an account would connect to key debates on creativity and making (for example Carr and Gibson, 2016; Edensor *et al*., 2009; Miller, 2017), material agencies (for example Gregson and Crang, 2010; Tolia-Kelly, 2011) and practices of repair and maintenance (for example Gregson *et al*., 2009; Graham and Thrift, 2007). The rest of this section focuses on what my participants did articulate to me clearly about the agency of clutter (section 6.5.1), and how this interacts with the agency of home space (6.5.2).

6.5.1   Clutter Agency

6.5.1.1   Clutter That Grows

Across my data I found a consistent discourse of clutter as something which gathers on its own, grows and calls to other objects to join it. This sense of clutter's agency was articulated by my participants:

> **Sandra**: So clutter I think is just like random bits of paper or things that nobody knows what to do with, that they just plonk down and then they're there for ages and another bit joins that bit and then they multiply and then you've got a little family of clutter.

> **Alex**: So is [your study] always cluttered or does it kind of ebb and flow?
> **George**: Ebb and flow. I get tired of it and tidy it all up and then it grows again.

> **Pearl**: Over time I just end up with stuff and too much stuff and more stuff, and then it becomes piles of stuff but then I have to sort it and put it in containers and label it and, I don't know, it's really hard to explain but just gradually over time there's too much.

In the first quote Sandra is explicit about how clutter grows and multiplies on its own. In the second quote George states 'it grows', decentring himself and framing clutter as the agent of change. In the third quote Pearl finds herself unable to explain or account for how, gradually over time, objects seem to accumulate and how clutter grows without her being aware of it. Many decluttering texts use the same discourse:

> You're walking down the street and you see that someone has thoughtlessly thrown an empty cigarette packet in a corner near the roadside. […] Before long it becomes a full-blown rubbish dump. Clutter accumulates in the same way in your home. It starts with a bit and then slowly, insidiously, it grows and grows.
> (*Clear Your Clutter With Feng Shui*: p.16)

> [Clutter] seems to gather on its own without any involvement from you.
> (*Lose the Clutter, Lose the Weight*: p.129)

In the first quote clutter is said to grow, but in the second clutter's agency is more equivocal, with clutter only *seeming* to act in this way. Finally, as I noted in section 4.3.3, the only reference to clutter's agency I could find in academic literature was Löfgren (2012: p.114) commenting that 'through a magic force, new objects are attracted' to clutter. This is not an analysis he pursues. Again, clutter is presented here as having an ability to call to other objects and to grow and accumulate. This builds up to a consistent discourse which presents clutter as having a specific form of material agency.

Despite the prevalence of discursive references to this sense of clutter's agency, I did not get a glimpse of it in action. I question whether this discourse is one that is meant to be taken literally. I do not think there is a general animist belief that clutter objects literally call other objects to join them, and that these objects then grow legs, wander through the house and join their object friends as clutter. I think instead that clutter is made, forgotten about and then found: it only feels like clutter has appeared from nowhere. I argued in section 5.4 that clutter is commonly created

to keep the rhythm of life going. Our attention is sometimes elsewhere when we make clutter. I talked about Emma's 'nest of filth' (section 5.4.1.1) as clutter created through routine action, clutter she did not herself notice, engaged as she was in the task of going to bed. Only when her partner pointed it out did she get a bedside table to prevent this clutter accumulation. This sense of not seeing clutter, due to our engagement in everyday living, was expressed by Barbara:

> **Barbara**: To be honest with you in my day to day life I don't notice a lot of the clutter […] a lot of times I just don't see it but when I was doing that video I was noticing things that I don't normally notice.

In the process of looking at her house with a more objective gaze, when she filmed her video house tour, Barbara noticed clutter which during her task-orientated daily life she did not see. It is not that clutter creates itself through its material agency, but rather that clutter is made and forgotten about, and when later we notice it there is a sense it has appeared from nowhere. Another example of this is putting things away, forgetting about them and then finding them again:

> **Sue**: I was just looking round in anticipation of you coming and I thought "I'd forgotten about that sleeping bag. Out."

Sue forgot she had a sleeping bag in her garage. Above we saw Mary forget how much clutter there was in her loft. In section 5.6.3 we saw Charlotte had forgotten about things she saved from her days at university. Accumulations happen unseen in the home, objects are stored and forgotten, accumulations happen without our noticing them (Grossman, 2015; Woodward, 2015). This discourse of material agency represents what it *feels like* to live with clutter, to be surprised by its presence, not what clutter actually does when our backs are turned (at least, as far as we know).

6.5.1.2   Clutter as Impersonal Force

I want now to introduce a second sense of clutter's agency found across my data. This is that clutter is something which can take over a home, which has an agency that needs to be resisted and managed. Decluttering texts often frame clutter in this way:

> [You have a relationship with your possessions,] [a]nd just like all your other relationships, this relationship will also have its ups and downs. Its periods of ease and difficultly, dominance and submission.
>
> (*Organisation*: p.36)

> For many of us, paper is taking up so much space in our homes and offices that it should be paying rent. […] Contrary to what it might feel like, those 8.5 x 11 suckers do not own you. And inch by inch, your reign over *them* is about to begin.
>
> (*New Order*: p.31, original emphasis)

> [Decluttering means] turning the tide on chaos and taking back control.
>
> (*Start With Your Sock Drawer*: p.67)

In all these extracts there is a sense of clutter as something which can take over a life and a home. There is also a sense of threat in all these quotes. Clutter is not something which acts meekly; it dominates, it reigns over us and it creates chaos. The agency of clutter is presented as some kind of impersonal, non-human force of nature which needs to be kept in check. It is perhaps understandable that decluttering texts would talk in these doom-laden terms, since for them clutter is necessarily the enemy. However, I also found participants talking about their relationship with clutter in similar ways, showing that this sense of clutter agency is experienced in practices as well as articulated in discourse:

> **Sadie**: So again you see it encroaches everywhere, there's stuff everywhere.

> I'm hoping that if I can get that room completely cleaned out it will give me the courage to start on another room and clear it out, and go on from there until I can get the whole house under control again.
>
> Hoarding Survey Respondent: Female, Over 66, USA

> **Simon**: And all these books have just spiralled out of control, can hardly move for books, there's books in boxes all 'round the house, in nearly every room of the house.

In the first quote Sadie talks about how objects encroach into the rest of her home, taking it over. In the next two quotes participants who hoard talk about a feeling of being out of control of their possessions. This sense of lacking control over their

homes, and clutter having 'won' the battle, was quite commonly expressed by people who hoard. Participants who hoard, who generally have the most clutter, were more likely to (strongly) express this sense of clutter's agency. We can read into this that the level of clutter in a home is related to (experiences and perceptions of) clutter's agency. This is not to argue hoarding only relates to, or is caused by, clutter's agency; rather, practices with clutter in general involve it as an agentic party, and where we find more clutter we find a greater sense of its agency.

We can understand this sense of being out of control, I suggest, by thinking about clutter objects as exerting a pull over people through their 'thing-power' (Bennett, 2010; see section 2.2). This is a sense that objects have material capacities to call out to other bodies and produce affects/effects within them. Bennett (2011) suggests we can see this at work in how people who hoard relate to their possessions, something which I agree with as a partial explanation of why people who hoard keep objects (Miller, In preparation).

> The criterion for deciding what to keep and what to discard is whether or not something sparks joy. When deciding, it's important to touch it, and by that, I mean holding it firmly in both hands as if communing with it. Pay close attention to how your body responds when you do this. When something sparks joy, you should feel a little thrill, as if the cells in your body are slowly rising. When you hold something that doesn't bring you joy, however, you will notice that your body feels heavier.
>
> (*Spark Joy*: p.8)

> Letting go of even broken things is painful. Like a broken knick-knack... I feel I SHOULD have fixed it, saved it. Lots of shame too. Like I'm not enough. I'm too dumb to even take care of things, to fix them when they break. I feel dumb for not taking care of my life and belongings.
>
> Hoarding Survey Respondent: Female, 56-65, USA

The first of these quotes come from internationally bestselling decluttering author Marie Kondo. Here Kondo explains how to make decluttering decisions based on her 'spark of joy' philosophy, a process of opening ourselves up to the affective potential of objects and allowing their thing-power to guide our decision-making. The next quote shows thing-power in action. The hoarding survey respondent communicates a

sense that she is enrolled into relations of care by objects through their thing-power, that she has an obligation to care for and safeguard them.

These experiences of material agency can feel threatening, where the perceived normal and normative dominance of subjects over objects is challenged (Bennett, 2010; 2011). This can at its extremes lead to the problematic matter being framed as something deviant, disgusting or dangerous (see, for example, Sartre, 1969: pp.600-15; Shildrick, 1997; 2002). It is not then that clutter has staged a material coup and taken over the home completely here, but rather that experiences of being out of control of the object world can feel problematic, and can produce threatening experiences and talk. Here we can see how clutter's agency is experienced, as something problematic, unwished for and in need of a resolution.

6.5.2 Home Agency and Clutter

6.5.2.1 *Material Agencies and Clutter Practices: Keeping Things Dry*

I want to turn my attention now to think about the agencies of home space. In this section I think about how the agency of home works through its material nature, and focus in on participants' attempts, and failures, to keep their belongings dry. I argued in section 2.2 that accounts of material life need to incorporate both human experiences and material agencies. Things and spaces change, degrade, and interact. Chemical (re)actions cause objects to fall apart and come together in novel alliances (Edensor, 2005). Objects which become ruined in this process lose their cultural meanings and open themselves up to new uses and interpretations (DeSilvey, 2007). In my research I found instances of objects coming apart through material agency:

> **Sadie**: That's insulation that again we've not got around to doing, […]
> it'll have to be thrown out because it's gone all manky on the floor.

Here we can see insulation kept in a cellar has been changed through the process of its storage. The damp agency of the space of the cellar has acted upon the insulation, making it 'manky' and unusable. Its status as an object has been challenged in this process (DeSilvey, 2007), although here this is only incomplete with the matter still identifiable, but not useable for its intended purpose. This creates new, unwanted

practices; Sadie must throw the insulation away rather than use it to keep her home warm. We see the work of water and mould in section 6.4.1 too, with a participant who hoards reporting on how her home has become unsafe due to an unaddressed water leak. Her mother contracted COPD as a result of this. Here bodies, as well as objects, are transformed in the process of material decay and remade into new and unwished-for forms. Together in both of these processes we see the interaction of material elements creating and changing life at home, impacting upon domestic experiences and practices through the expression of material agency.

This kind of occurrence was relatively rare in my research. This is because participants were generally conscious of the material agencies of home space and were obliged to fashion their practices around them:

> **Emma**: The beanbag is something we keep saying we're going to get rid of, but I feel like if we had a third bedroom it's a really useful thing to have in more of a chill-out space, so it's more, I can't put it in the basement because it will go damp, I daren't touch the attic and I've got no more storage, so […] it's useful and I don't want to throw it out, I don't particularly want it in this room but I've got nowhere else to put it.

> **Sandra**: I know, it's really nice I like it here [in the cellar – image 6.5], we go to France most years and when we come back always bring about 100 bottles of wine and then stock up again. […] I suppose it's just a bit quirky, the fire actually works and the guy that lived here before I think he used to have a smoke and a drink down here out of his wife's way, put the fire on, so it's sort of continued.

In the first quote Emma explains how the materiality of her cellar, its dampness, prevents her keeping a beanbag there. This contrasts with Sandra's experience; her dry cellar enables her to use it in an unconventional way. Sandra's cellar has a chair you could sit and smoke in (image 6.5), Emma cannot keep a beanbag in hers. Taking these together we can see that decisions around domestic space use, and practices with clutter, are taken with nonhuman agencies in mind. Emma's beanbag is made of fabric and therefore vulnerable to the forces of decay, to the action of mould which grows readily in dark and dank environments, and to the water held in the damp cellar walls which would penetrate and seep into the porous material. In recognition of this

Image 6.5 – Sandra's Dry Cellar

inhuman vitality she is pressed into keeping the beanbag in her living room, even as she would rather it was elsewhere. Kept in the cellar the beanbag would transform and change, and in this process no longer be able to function as somewhere to sit; its cultural meaning would slip from seat to spoiled. Overall, clutter practices are not just enacted at home, but in negotiation with the multiple material agencies which act on, within and through home space as an agentic and evolving home assemblage (see Edensor, 2011). Participants think not just about materiality, the cultural meanings and uses of objects, but also about their material nature as things, their capacities, agencies and vulnerabilities (Ingold, 2007). Material agency, and thinking about possessions as 'things' rather than 'objects' (see Brown, 2001) is underreported in work on material culture and home (see Miller, In preparation). Here I have shown how clutter practices work with the material capacities of things in mind.

The materiality of home space also works to intercede in practices which are already ongoing. Here, rather than participants making storage decisions based on their knowledge of the material agencies of their home, participants are caught out by them, forced into new ways of keeping objects and relating to their possessions:

> **Barbara**: I got all the open surfaces cleared, the floor was cleared […] [but] I ran into a little backsliding thing, erm, underneath my kitchen sink there had been a leak, I didn't actually realise, it had been a slow leak and it had actually rotted out the base of the kitchen cabinet […], that created a little bit of a backstep for me.

> **George**: A connector exploded [on the boiler] in the loft and there was water everywhere […] until it did there was about four times as much [stuff in the loft] […], so that has been much reduced. […] I learned the hard way because I think part of the problem with, as I say with the plumbing problem we had, was we had so much stuff here and we tended to shove it around and it shoved, it knocked up against something and it knocked the pump to the connector.

Barbara explains here how the material agency of her home worked to prevent her practices of decluttering. She was making good progress towards clearing out her kitchen until she found damage caused by a leak under her sink. Here we see the action of materials working without human knowledge or intervention, destabilising the borders of objects through chemical interactions and creating new arrangements of matter not designed to serve human needs (Edensor, 2005; 2011). This produced a kitchen which Barbara could not live with, causing her to switch from decluttering and instead make repairs to return her kitchen to its 'proper' state. The reverse is true for George. Here, a connector breaking caused a flood. This then led him into decluttering, getting rid of objects from his loft to prevent the problem recurring. In both instances we see how the material nature of objects works to intercede in human lives, and how the material agency of home space, in concert with the material nature of the objects within it, work to form life at home and our practices with clutter.

This section has developed my account of life within the assemblage of home, here drawing out the role which material agencies play within an assemblage supposed to keep out water (Edensor, 2011). This section shows how practices with clutter are produced with material agencies in mind, how the action of water and of mould serves to shape what is possible in the home. Participants were aware of these material agencies in their everyday practices of storage, and actively managed and negotiated these in how they stored their possessions. At times though the actions of materials cannot be easily predicted; things break, rot and flood. Here human practices needed to accommodate themselves to the action of materials. This

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demonstrates further that life at home is a material negotiation of multiple conflicting agencies, over which people only have partial control.

6.5.2.2   Accommodating Clutter

Instead of looking at how home agency works through the interaction of materials we can also think about it in terms of estate agency (Miller, 2001b), as something which produces practices with and experiences of clutter and that works in terms of accommodating (Miller, 2002). Across my data I found instances where participants worked to make their homes accommodate them and their possessions:

> **Charlotte**: So this is an extension on our house, so we only had it a year ago and erm, when we had it built, erm we err, we pretty much designed it ourselves […] but sort of everything in it's thought about, so where the cupboards are are thought about, […] it was designed with storage in mind, or the opportunities to put storage in place, […] I've tried to make it so that sorting out is dead easy to do, sort of "This goes here, that goes there" you know just whizz round do it quite quickly and then it's done. […] [My husband is] a really good cook so he does all the cooking, I know what he needs to be that good cook, but I also know that when he's finished cooking I need to be able to efficiently tidy up and sometimes I need to be able to do it at the same time […] so the kitchen's sort of in two halves […] so it basically means that while he's cooking and creating I can still empty the dishwasher and I can still set the table, and that's basically how we sort of, I sort of worked it out.

Charlotte designed her extension with decluttering in mind, thinking about how it could support her management of flowing clutter. She had large cupboards built in to allow her to easily put away stray objects and make tidying up efficient, especially important for her with two children under seven. She also thought about the practicalities of home management when designing the layout of her new kitchen. This space works to enable her husband's practices of cookery, within a context that allows for easy cleaning. This space doubly supports their lives, allowing her husband to express himself in cookery, while also allowing them to live in a relatively uncluttered and easy-to-clean home.

Other processes of accommodating work in reverse, with participants fashioning their practices within the constraints of home space, rather than shaping home space around their practices.

> **Sadie**: This we call the shupboard, the shit cupboard <Laughs>, so in there is vacuums, mops, brushes, brooms, erm birthday, you know, bags, carrier bags, also that is a bit of a pantry as well, so I've got some shelves in there that I put extra of food on, so cereals all stuff like that, because our kitchen is actually, it looks like there's a lot of cupboard space but it's actually very poorly designed and there is not a lot of space to keep everything, so that is just crammed, it's got cool boxes, all things like that. […] It's really disorganised and it can get really messy, I'd like [the shupboard] to be bigger, […] if you had a pantry and a utility a lot of the stuff that's in the shupboard would have a purpose and would have a place but at the moment they're just makeshift, so it looks very disorganised, very cluttered, and you can't really see anything so you end up buying more. […] If you look on like Pinterest and stuff people are really clever, they like take this wall out and then they'd have like built in, so they'll have like cut down into the staircase and drawers and doors all the way down, so there is stuff you could do but that's a disproportionate cost, to do all the joinery work just to have a broom cupboard.

Sadie's shupboard (images 6.5 and 6.6) is a case in point, a space which resists her attempts to organise it. She lives with the choices of unknown architects and builders, who designed her house unhelpfully. Her kitchen does not have the room to keep all her family's food; Sadie did not choose its design but inherited it when she bought the house. These two pre-existing (and expensive to alter) spaces in her home work in concert to produce clutter. The shupboard is hard to organise, but Sadie has to use it because she needs to keep food and other objects somewhere. The spaces of her home produce clutter, and produce annoyances for Sadie who must try and navigate them. Here, Sadie accommodates herself to her home (Miller, 2002), and must live with(in) clutter as a consequence of her home's estate agency (Miller, 2001b).

Overall, we can see that home space can work to enable and constrain practices with clutter. By making home space more accommodating Charlotte worked to eliminate and contain clutter in her new extension. Sadie was not able to do this, and instead had to accommodate herself within a home (poorly) designed by others, one which produces clutter through the arrangement of storage spaces. In both cases
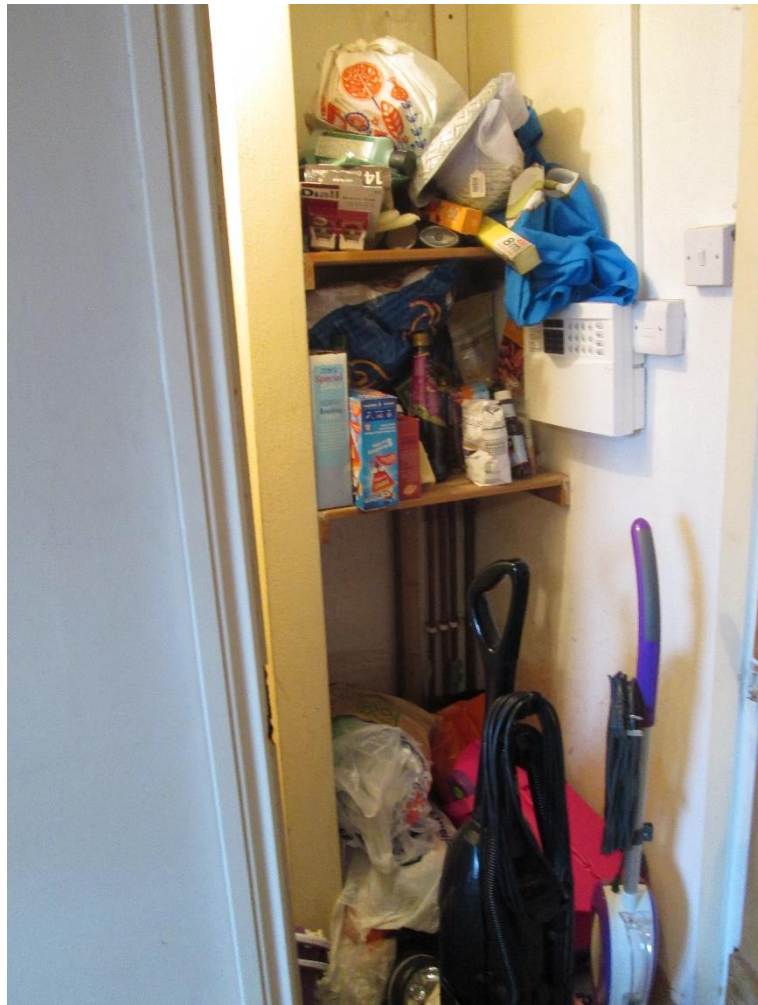
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Image 6.6 – Sadie's 'Shupboard' (Front View)

Image 6.7 – Sadie's 'Shupboard' (Internal)

we can see how the home acts upon clutter. We can add this to my demonstration of the ways in which the material properties of home space, the dampness of cellars for example, also work to enable and constrain practices with clutter. The home is a key agent within the assemblage of dwelling, one which makes room for some practices (with objects) and not for others, and one which materially affects the objects kept within it. Social labels of home spaces as cluttered or not, and our experiences of them as individuals, are emergent within a shared material context. This demonstrates how clutter works not only in discourse, but also as an actor in the home in its own right. By developing this analysis I show clutter to be like other objects in the home, and beyond; clutter has agency, its material nature matters, it interacts with(in) the spaces of the home and it acts upon its owner.

6.6   Clutter, Identity and Home

6.6.1   Clutter as Non-Identity Object

Clutter has a complex relationship to identity (practices) in the home. It can be (framed as) both objects which do not relate to the self, but I also saw it at work in participants' constructions of identity. In this section I look at instances where clutter is presented as non-identity objects.

> Often, the things we choose to communicate to the outside world reflect our innermost sense of self. Yet many people remain undecided as to their personal tastes, unsure of what brings them true satisfactions. Creating an environment that matches our deepest aspirations enables us consciously to orchestrate the existing link between our inner and outer selves. Architects and ethno-sociologists agree that our living space makes us who we are, that a home shapes the mind and spirit of the people who live in it.
>
> (*L'art de la Simplicité*: p.19-20)

These texts do not aim to help readers get rid of as many possessions as possible. Instead they aim to help people come to an understanding of what possessions are the

right ones for them, and to help create home environments which include only these meaningful and important things. I talked in section 4.5.1 about how texts define clutter as objects which do not work to support an individual's life(style), and in section 5.6.1 about the importance they place on memory objects which relate to the self and identity in a clear way. Decluttering texts are not anti-object; rather, they value objects insofar as they relate to the self and reject clutter as things which do not relate to our authentic selves.

The task at hand then is not to find and eliminate all clutter. Instead it is to first understand our 'true' selves. Once we understand ourselves we can then see clearly which objects do the work of creating and communicating our identities. Finally, the last step is to get rid of clutter, the things which do not do this:

> Minimalist living is really just a starting point for authentic living. We need open spaces – blank canvases – upon which we can occupy ourselves more deeply with the art of living.
>
> (*Minimalist Living*: p.162)

> The key to maintaining a simplified life is to buy into the lifestyle holistically. We can't maintain a clutter-free home if we don't also change our approach to accumulation.
>
> (*Simple Matters*: p.28)

In these quotes we can see the ways texts pivot their focus away from clutter and towards the overarching life(style) of the reader. The first quote frames decluttering as setting up a context for living authentically, once we have discovered what this means to us. In the second, we see that this is a task we must continually engage in, and that 'decluttering', when framed as identity-work, feeds into other areas, including how we accumulate objects.

To get us to this end-point of maintaining our newly minimalised homes (which match our authentic lifestyles), texts take their readers on a journey of guided introspection (introduced in section 5.6.1). Texts frame selfhood as somehow split, with a gap between the everyday self, who lives in and creates clutter, and our true selves who are hidden by clutter. This true self needs to be excavated; I describe it for this reason as the 'buried self'. This works in two ways. First, because the buried self needs to be uncovered through a process of guided introspection, which works by

penetrating deeper and deeper into our thoughts and feelings. Second, because the

process of recovering the buried self involves getting rid of the clutter accumulated on

top of it, which works to supress it.

> When done correctly you carry out [decluttering] by connecting with
> your true self, your *intuitive personality*, finding your why […]. The
> resources to make it all happen were within you all along; you just
> needed to tap into them and find your best self. Once you empower
> yourself and personalise your surroundings, life becomes simpler and
> less complicated.
> (*Organisation*: p.43, original emphasis)

> Before you start throwing things away take time to […] [visualise] the
> ideal lifestyle you dream of. […] Your next step is to identify why you
> want to live like that. […] Ask yourself 'Why?' again for each answer.
> Repeat this process three to five times for each item.
> (*The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying*: pp.41-4)

> The last week [of this decluttering programme] will require you to dig
> deep into the spaces of your home where you have probably stashed
> a high density of objects because throwing them away was too
> painful. By then, you'll hopefully have the mindset to handle getting
> rid of these items with more confidence and less distress.
> (*Lose the Clutter, Lose the Weight*: p.78-9)

The first quote here makes it clear that these texts are aiming to help readers

(re)discover their authentic, buried selves. In the second quote we can see guided

introspection works archaeologically; layer by layer, question by question, it reveals

the hidden treasure of our authentic selfhood buried beneath the detritus of our

everyday lives and selves. Finally, in the last quote, we can see that decluttering

programmes are structured around this kind of process of self-(re)discovery, designed

to accommodate our growing awareness of and familiarity with our buried selves.

Overall in these texts clutter is framed as something which does not relate to our

identities. Instead, clutter hides our buried selves, which need to be excavated. This

buried self is as a singular, internal identity. It is one which already exists within us,

one which will endure into the future as we change and grow. We take this self

forward and make the home a place to suit it, somewhere which contains only

meaningful objects which we 'really' love, using this self to help us navigate the future.

This idea of decluttering to make our selves manifest in home space is something which I found my participants engaging in. I already reported on this when I discussed how Catherine used decluttering to enact life transitions, changing the material context of her home to suit her new identity (section 5.5.2). To give one further example, Mary describes decluttering as a process not just of getting rid of objects, but of rediscovering her identity through the process of decluttering. Here we can see that this involves for her not only divestment of objects which do not represent who she is now, but also includes buying new objects which represent her new self:

> **Alex**: It sounds almost like you're kind of striking out and maybe doing some quite different things now you've, like you said, you're on your own, thinking about how you want things in your way. Do you think that would be right?
> **Mary:** Yeah I suppose, yes I am and I'm finding that quite difficult because of the constraint I lived under […]. So yes it's a transition time for me in lots of respects, particularly sorting out what I need and a certain amount of decluttering going on you know, and I've even started collecting something, you'll see when we go into the dining room, I quite like the fact that "You can buy it, you can have those things if you want" so that's quite good. […] Really Alex, at the moment my main role in life is looking after myself but, as an ex-Catholic and 40 years married and carer, I cared for [my husband] a long time, there's the [professional care workers] that used to come [and help me], but, it's quite difficult to get your head in that direction so it's a bit of a statement you know, "I can indulge myself", a bit of a second childhood.

Mary uses the metaphor of a second childhood to talk about her recently started collection of tin model toys. This comparison works, I suggest, not just because this is a toy collection. The idea of a second childhood also communicates a sense that Mary has been born again into a new identity, as well as the idea that, like a child, she will learn, grow and over time understand herself better. In Mary's account we see clutter objects as things which do not match up with her new identity, things defined as out of place in the new relational context (or life stage) in which she finds herself.

Clutter is framed in decluttering texts as something which does not relate to selfhood. Participants in my research at times also presented clutter in this way and used decluttering to make home environments which match up with how they see

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themselves as individuals. The home is an important site of identity, where selfhood is represented and constructed through the (co)presence of meaningful objects, which individually display and construct aspects of identity and cumulatively express our identities as individuals (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Finch, 2007; Noble, 2004). This kind of process is akin to Gregson's (2011) account of divestment as a process of accommodating the self at home and getting rid of objects which do not work to create the home as a positive place which represents identity. As objects come to no longer represent who we are they are got rid of, and this works to create the home as a meaningful site of identity construction and communication. We can therefore understand decluttering as a practice of homemaking, one which creates the home as a material and meaningful space, one which represents the people who live in it.

6.6.2 Clutter Objects as Identity Objects

6.6.2.1 Keeping Clutter and Continuity

If homes are spaces where identities are normatively represented through objects, and clutter is understood as objects which do not relate to identity, we can understand why people engage in practices of decluttering. However, people do still have clutter in their homes. Sometimes this is simply because they have not got around to getting rid of it yet. At other times though I found participants labelling objects as clutter, but then choosing to hold onto them anyway. I explain this here by showing that clutter objects (at times) do work as identity objects. I argue that it is the practice of *keeping* which matters. This adds to existing literature which focuses on practices of display (reviewed in section 6.3.2), divestment and consumption (reviewed in section 2.2). Keeping clutter gives a sense of continuity to selfhood, and works to materially embody, rather than display or communicate, identity at home. Practices of keeping also enable clutter objects to be used as a resource to construct, rather than simply represent, identity. In both these ways we can understand clutter as something involved in dwelling-as-cultivation at home (Young, 2005a).

To make this argument I look to my data. In this first quote Sandra talks about some clutter which she and her husband, Richard, brought with them when they moved house two years ago:

> **Sandra**: We had to get rid of a lot of stuff [when we moved]. In the other house we had a big loft and we, now that was cluttered, it was, because all the kids when they were young they had toys, we had twins, so we decided to keep all the toys and the cots just in case, but then we didn't have another one but then we couldn't bear to part with them because, some sentimental… Richard's mum bought the cots, then just before [the twins] were born she sadly had breast cancer and died, and so she'd bought them cots and we couldn't bear to part with those cots, in fact we still have them because they meant so much, you know, to her, she wanted to see the twins, but it just wasn't meant to happen, so we couldn't part with them.

Moving house gives people an opportunity to review the objects which they own and make decisions about what to do with them (Marcoux, 2001); it is an occasion associated with decluttering. As Sandra says, when she moved she too decluttered and got rid of a lot of stuff. Here she talks about some clutter which she kept, two cots bought for her children, now aged 26. These cots are not something Sandra plans on using. They are not out on display but are stored in the loft. They do not fit within the context of Sandra's life(style) today and are materially stowed away from the rest of the house, put away in attic, rarely, if ever, engaged with. This does not mean that these cots are unimportant. We can see they function for Sandra as clutter memory objects, calling attention to a gap in time, the absence of her husband's mother from their lives (see section 5.6.3). Keeping clutter here, I argue, is something which relates to identity. The cots serve to materially embody Richard's mum's love. It is keeping, not displaying, which forms family identity here. Having these cots tucked away in the background makes the home a privately meaningful context (rather than publicly displaying shared identity). No visitor would see them. Sandra herself rarely sees them. Suitcases and Christmas decorations are the only things up in the loft which are ever used, and these are needed only infrequently. What matters here is not how the cots are engaged with, but rather the sheer fact of having them, of preserving and keeping them. Keeping these cots creates an enduring connectivity, expressed in the enduring nature of the clutter Sandra keeps. Practices of preserving and caring for

objects here make the meanings of home as dwelling (Young, 2005a). The emphasis is on stability and stasis, of creating the home as a material context which embodies relationships which construct (family) identities, rather than displays them.

Keeping clutter is an act of dwelling-as-cultivation in another sense too. I demonstrate now how keeping clutter constitutes a sense of self and of home as something continuous and enduring in and through time.

> **Viv**: I suppose there's a reason at one stage, but once you've let it stay there a while you just don't ask yourself the question anymore about it, it's there for a reason, you just can quite remember what the reason was maybe, it's part of your life isn't it, it's part of your being as it were.
>
> **Catherine:** What you've got to remember is at my age, a lot of stuff that I have is stuff that, a lot of these Pyrex dishes were actually wedding presents, because I haven't actually, well again like some people they want the best of absolutely everything but I just think "Well there's nothing wrong with it" so, you know, and I could probably manage with a lot less than I've got now, but I've always had them. Even a lot of stuff in here I haven't actually bought, it's just acquired you know […].
> **Alex:** I suppose all this stuff is just kind of, part of your life isn't it?
> **Catherine:** Yeah it's stuff that builds up and is just there, and if it works and I've got somewhere to put it, you know, so I keep it there, things have been there, you know the pressure cooker, that was a wedding present <Laughs> that's 1972, we won't go there!

Viv expresses a sense of dwelling here evocatively in the first quote, describing objects as 'part of [her] being'. In section 5.6.3 I used this quote to show how rooted clutter as memory objects work as a resource for remembering. Here I argue this, in turn, relates to dwelling. The importance of keeping objects, as Viv expresses, is that they materially embody the self. Clutter can be used to remember, but its role extends beyond this. Keeping things which are a part of the self at home makes the home into a space which embodies the self, which fits it and speaks of identity. Again, this is not about display and communication but about making selfhood present and immanent in the world around us (Young, 2005a). Catherine also expresses this when she talks about some pots and pans in her kitchen cupboards, which I noted in section 5.4.2.1 are rooted clutter, built up over her life. These objects *can* be used to remember, but

they also work as embodiments of selfhood. They matter as 'stuff that builds up and is just there'. These are things Catherine and Viv enter caring relationships with, things which serve to materially constitute their homes and provide a sense of continuity to them, things which are 'just there'. This non-reflexive, comfortable sense of home as familiar and stable is what allows it to work as somewhere from and within which we can actively construct identity; this process is about being-with objects, not using them and thinking about them. Here, even as something is clutter, spatially and relationally out of place, it is important because it is *my* clutter, it belongs to, relates to and embodies me. I am present in my home, it fits me and it suits me. Constancy in the material context of home creates the feeling home is somewhere safe and familiar, safety and familiarity are important to the meaning of home.

6.6.2.2 Keeping Clutter and Constructing Identity

Home as dwelling involves creating a familiar and stable social and material environment (Young, 2005a). Clutter participates in this, as I showed above. Dwelling is also though a point of orientation, somewhere from and within which we are able to construct our identities. I want to argue here that clutter works as a resource for constructions of identity. This is an argument parallel to the one I made in section 5.6.3 where I talked about clutter as something which is used in active practices of remembering. As we saw in section 6.6.1, clutter objects are things which do not relate clearly and directly to the self. However, they can be, and are, used in *constructions* of identity, working as a (material) resource which makes home space a point within which identities are formed.

The first example I want to give of this is Ann's collection of unloved tortoises (image 6.8), which she talks about in this extract:

> **Ann**: I made a mistake of getting that tortoise […] I used to have it down on the hearth […] and people then started buying them for me and so now they're there I can't get rid of them, my heart sinks when somebody gives me one again! […] That came from Belize and then my grandchildren bought me them, so they sort of mean something, I can remember where every one came from, that came from Turkey, it was made for me in Turkey, and so everything sort of tells a story in

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a way, and I think to myself "Well, when I get housebound I can look at these and think back and retell the story", if you know what I mean.

Here Ann talks about a collection of tortoises which she owns, mainly given to her as gifts. These are clutter; Ann does not like or even really want them. Nevertheless, they are stuck in her home, for fear of offending the people who gave her them. However, this clutter also works as something from which Ann can construct her identity and can be read as working to create her home as dwelling. First, these tortoises serve to materially embody enduring loving relationships which she has with their givers, working in a similar way to Sandra's cots (section 6.6.2.1). These tortoises are framed by Ann as having in them the potential to be used in future constructions of identity, that at some point Ann will use them as memory objects to allow her to remember her past. By cultivating and caring for these tortoises Ann therefore holds open this potential, and in the process of keeping constructs for herself a dwelling place which is a site of stability and constancy. Finally, I want to suggest that we can see an expression of material agency at work in this process. As Ann says, her 'mistake' was keeping a tortoise on her hearth, and that this act led to their unwanted accumulation. Hearths are focal points for rooms, they elevate the significance of objects kept on them (Hurdley, 2013). Unwittingly Ann placed her first tortoise somewhere that gave it undue status. Here then, we can say, the meanings of home space have served to create this unwanted effect for Ann. This then shows how dwelling at home is a relational process, something in which the agencies of home space matter.

I want to give one final example of keeping clutter as an act of dwelling. Here I turn to clutter Viv stores in her garage (image 6.9), which she explains as offering a resource from which she can construct a future identity:

> **Viv**: I mean a snooker table, well, my grandson's getting a bit old, he probably won't want to play, you see we used to have it in the house before and if we throw it away you're kind of saying "Well we're not going to play snooker anymore" […]. You're not opening up so many new opportunities when you're in your seventies, so when you say "Right I'm not going to do that anymore" you think "Well, I don't just want to sit and watch Cash in the Attic on the telly", you know, erm, I don't fancy watching daytime TV, I'd rather think I was going to do

wonders in the garden and create […]. [These bikes] are another thing, typical, are we going to go bicycling, are we? […] In my mind's eye, you see the Saga adverts, this couple gazing fondly at each other, riding along on their bikes, they've sorted out their pensions and everything's right with the world <Laughs> and they're looking at each other with, and we'll go [cycling locally], you know, sort of, but, I mean will we? But once you take them to the tip you never will, will you?

These objects which Viv describes are clutter, unused, out of place in the context of her current life and unlikely ever to be wanted again. But, as Viv makes clear, this does not mean that these things are unimportant, or that they do not relate to her identity. Instead, rather than working to construct Viv's sense of self in the present, they offer a resource from which Viv can construct an imagined and wished-for future identity as an active and happy older person. This is not achieved in practices of display but ones of keeping. By keeping things Viv forms dwelling, a structure which relate to Viv's identity, not in terms of her eternal buried self, but in terms of her potential future self. Clutter objects can be therefore a resource from which identities are constructed. They work within the home as an originary point from and within which selves are made relationally with and alongside objects. The space of the home matters here but not as a site of conjunction, of adding up different parts of selves who are already immanent in objects (Noble, 2004). Rather, it is because the home contains storage places which facilitate practices of keeping without displaying. The garage is somewhere Viv need not visit often. This therefore allows her to keep things there which she does not want and need in her day-to-day life. We can imagine the garage as a prop-room, full of things which wait to be used in Viv's front-stage constructions of identity (Goffman, 1990). Viv's home materially accommodates this kind of arrangement; home space is therefore an active part of how homes are dwelt within, through the keeping of material culture.

Image 6.8 – Ann's Unloved Tortoises

Image 6.9 – Viv's Garage

6.7   Conclusions

This final chapter of analysis has looked at how clutter works within the home. I set myself three aims here. I aimed to show how the meanings of home space work to give clutter different meanings based on where it is located. I did this by exploring how the degree to which a room is conceived of as public or not works to define whether clutter is seen as a problem (section 6.4). My second aim was to demonstrate clutter's productive nature at home. I did this by exploring its agency in section 6.5.1, and showed how home's agency interacts with clutter to produce practices in section 6.5.2. I also explored the ways in which clutter produces the home as a dwelling (place) in section 6.6.2, and the way it is used to construct future identities (section 6.6.2.2). My final aim was to develop my account of how clutter works as a cultural term. I met this by showing how discourses around clutter are mediated by the meanings of home space (section 6.4) and by reporting on how clutter is framed in discourse as having two particular forms of agency, as something which grows (section 6.5.1.1) and as an impersonal force (section 6.5.1.2).

To finish this chapter I want to recap the key arguments which I have made over its course, and draw out where these represent an original contribution to the literature. To begin, I explored in section 6.4 how clutter works differently in different parts of the home. In my literature review (section 6.3.1) I showed both how objects give meanings to the spaces they are in and that they also receive meanings from their context in a reciprocal relationship. This is so for clutter, which takes on different meanings and roles depending on where in a home it is (sections 6.4.1, 6.4.2 and 6.4.3). I showed how clutter relates across different spaces to homemaking. I drew my analysis together in section 6.4.4 and synthesised this to produce my argument that home space works as a multiple material 'assemblage of dwelling'. This term I developed from the work of Jacobs and Smith (2008) who use it to describe home space overall as a site where social and material elements are co-constitutive and co-emergent. I capitalised on their work by arguing that while we can usefully think about the home as working like this, we can also think about home as an assemblage which is itself made up of a series of other, smaller assemblages. These smaller assemblages follow their own logics, and possess their own (co-emergent and

relational) materialities and socialities. These smaller assemblages work together to enable domestic practices; for example, I showed how storage spaces which contained clutter worked, and that by their containing clutter they enabled life in living rooms to be practiced in particular, culturally valued ways. This extension to Jacobs and Smith's (2008) work is an original contribution to the research literature. In my literature review, where I started to develop this, I applied it to the work of other scholars, talking about a way of seeing the home as an assemblage which works at interacting micro- and meso-levels to form the home overall as a macro-level context (section 6.3.1). In itself this demonstrates the wider applicability of my argument, and my analysis shows the value of making such an application in the account it allows me to develop of life lived at home with clutter.

I then turned my attention towards material agencies; clutter's agency and the agency of home. Section 6.5.1.1 explored a discourse of clutter which frames it as something which grows of its own accord. I noted here that this discourse is not something meant to be taken literally, rather it represents occasions where clutter is forgotten about. I then looked at instances where clutter is framed as a threatening impersonal force, as something which takes over a home unless it is managed properly (section 6.5.1.2). Here, I related this to the idea of thing-power (Bennett, 2010), and explained that this was experienced as threatening because it reverses the usual ordering of subjects and objects. After this I looked at the agency of home space (section 6.5.2). First I showed how the material nature of home works to create practices with clutter, focusing on participants' attempts and failures to keep their belongings dry (section 6.5.2.1). Home's agency works here to determine what can be stored where, and can create new and unwished for practices with clutter when water transgresses into the home and seeps into possessions. Secondly, living with clutter can be understood as a process of accommodation, with home space's configuration working to enable and constrain clutter practices (section 6.5.2.2). How material agencies work within practices and experiences of clutter have not been reported on in the literature to date. This work serves to develop research on clutter to take account of multiple material agencies which work upon it and produce human

practices with it (something I argued was important to do in section 2.2), as well as contributing to broader work on home and material culture.

In the last section of analysis I considered how clutter relates to domestic identity (section 6.6). I began by showing that in decluttering texts clutter is framed as objects which do not relate to our 'buried' selfhood and that this means we need to get rid of them (section 6.6.1). This means that decluttering can be understood as an identity practice, like the divestment practices Gregson (2011) reports on. I shared examples from my data where participants declutter in this way. The next section complicated this relationship between clutter and identity, and demonstrated that at other times clutter is used in identity practices (section 6.6.2). I argued that it is the act of keeping which matters here, adding something new to the literature reported on in section 6.3.2 which focuses on acts of display, and to literature on divestment and consumption introduced in section 2.2. I showed here that keeping works as a way to materially embody and embed the self into home space, by maintaining a sense of constancy of the self and its enduring presence; this makes the home a site of stability and familiarity (section 6.6.2.1). I developed this in section 6.6.2.2 where I argued keeping clutter works to make the home a site of dwelling, somewhere which feels familiar and comforting, and which, because of this, can work as an originary point for the construction of identity. I showed clutter objects' part within this, as things kept aside for us to use in an imagined future. Overall, this section develops our understandings of material culture at home, and showed that more passive ways of relating to objects can mean as much as the active practices of consumption, divestment and display. This is a conceptual development which extends how we can think about the roles of material culture in the home, and recognises the importance of simply having thing (of our own), in addition to doing things with them.

Chapter 7   Conclusions

7.1   Introducing the Conclusion

At the start of this thesis I suggested that clutter is having a cultural moment. I linked our changing relationships with objects to clutter's emergence as a cultural phenomenon, framing my work as part of a broader project considering transformations in our everyday relationships with the material world. I also argued that by studying clutter, and looking at everyday homes and objects through the lens of clutter, we can generate novel insights into what it is to live at home, with things and through time. By starting from the overlooked, the forgotten, the marginal and the 'trivial' – by starting from clutter – I have been able to address everyday experiences in such a way as to uncover novel research findings, which not only have implications for our understandings of clutter, but also speak more broadly to the meanings of home, of time, and of material culture. In addition to this, my work serves as an example of inclusionary scholarship which takes seriously the lives and experiences of people with a 'mental health problem' (people who hoard). It has demonstrated the value of including them within our studies of everyday life, both as a more ethical form of research practice and also as a way to create inclusionary geographies.

To conclude my thesis in this chapter I begin by recapping its key arguments, in section 7.2. First I talk about how I have understood clutter, what it is, what it does and what it means (section 7.2.1). Then I draw out where my arguments have a broader significance for approaches to material culture, time, home and mental health (7.2.2). These have the potential to influence scholars working on a range of issue, and represent original contributions to the wider literature. In section 7.3 I talk about some clutter created during the course of my completing this PhD, a box full of the decluttering texts I analysed for this research, which I now keep under my bed (image 7.1). I reflect on these as a way in to considering questions left unanswered in this thesis, and also the wider conceptual significance of my research, situating it within geography's attempts to understand home life.

7.2 Understandings of Clutter

7.2.1 What Clutter Is (And Is Not)

One of the key contributions which this thesis has made to scholarship is its definition of clutter. I reviewed the (small body of) existing literature on clutter in section 4.3.3, and showed the variety of different ways in which clutter has to date been understood. I noted in section 4.8.1 that within this work there are contradictions in how clutter has been defined, for example that it has been understood both as something which is stuck (for example Baker, 1995; Belk *et al*., 2007) and something which is mobile (for example Cwerner and Metcalfe, 2003; Löfgren. 2012). To resolve this contradiction, based on my empirical material and analysis, I argued that clutter comes in two forms, rooted and flowing (sections 4.8.2 and 4.8.3). This (double) definition is a new and useful intervention into the literature on clutter. It has facilitated my analysis of clutter throughout the course of my thesis, and is something future clutter researchers can draw on. In the rest of this section I synthesise the arguments I have made about clutter's nature. I look here in turn at: how clutter in general is defined; the norms and values which contribute to clutter's definition; how clutter is constructed in discourse; how rooted clutter and flowing clutter are made and managed.

Clutter works as an umbrella term which describes (experiences with) objects where they (feel as if they) are out of place in the relational context of our home and/or our life. I have argued that there are three general elements to clutter's definition: clutter is defined (i) extrinsically, (ii) subjectively and (iii) as some kind of problem. To know something as clutter is to have a sense of how the world should be, or how we would wish it to be, and then to name as clutter the things which do not fit in it, that is to define it extrinsically, from the outside in (section 4.5.1). Since clutter is defined extrinsically, it is always defined by an individual. Therefore, clutter's definition is subjective, as it relates to how a subject understands themselves and the world around them (section 4.5.2). Clutter's lack of fit with the world makes it a problematic object category; clutter is either caused by problems in one's life, causes problems in daily living, or is something we feel to be problematic, about which we are not sure what to do (section 4.5.3). I reviewed literature in section 4.4 on other

problematic object categories: dirt, mess and excess. In section 4.6 I showed how clutter differs from these other matters out of place. Dirt is defined socially, while clutter is defined subjectively (section 4.6.1). Mess refers to an aesthetic sense of things being misplaced, clutter to objects which are physically out of place (section 4.6.2). Excess is a general term which is applied to a variety of objects and spaces; clutter is a (domestic) form of excess, which is characterised as being multiply excessive (section 4.6.3).

Overall, clutter works as a term which names relationships with objects where they are experienced as out of place. Definitions of what belongs where at home work through the tidiness norm, which is therefore central to how people think about and relate to clutter. I reviewed literature on this in section 4.3.1, noting how the tidiness norm has developed over time to inform how we normatively ought to relate to objects today, and that in contemporary times homes are not 'supposed' to be cluttered. However, I showed that rather working as a blanket ban on clutter, the tidiness norm instead works differently in different rooms of the house. Public rooms, like living rooms, are the ones which represent our 'best selves' and are therefore generally the least cluttered, falling in line with normative tidiness expectations (section 6.4.1). Other parts of the home, where the self is not usually on show (other than to oneself and to family members), tend to follow the tidiness norm less strictly (sections 6.4.2 and 6.4.3).

Generally, adults try to conform to, and do not challenge, the tidiness norm (although they might not always achieve this in practice). Failures to meet this norm, I argued, are pathologised as evidence Hoarding Disorder (section 6.4.1). Young children though are not expected to be tidy and to avoid clutter; instead, their making clutter is framed by participants as 'normal', and children's clutter is taken as evidence of 'good' parenting (section 5.5.1.1). Children are expected to learn (and to be taught about) the tidiness norm as they age (section 5.5.1.1). The tidiness norm does not then work in isolation, but in concert with other (domestic) norms, including norms around parenting. As another example of this interaction, parents allow their homes to be cluttered as an expression of their love for their (adult) children (see section 6.4.2). This tells us, overall, that the meanings of clutter, and how we relate to it, are

culturally constituted and worked out relationally between social norms and values. The tidiness norm is important in structuring how people relate to clutter, but it is not the only norm which matters. In my thesis I showed the role of parenting norms in our practices with clutter, but as I go on to suggest below (section 7.3) future research could help to further situated clutter in relation to other social and spatial norms.

Clutter is something people talk about, as well as relate to in practices. Sometimes I found discourses and practices around clutter to be at odds with one another. I showed that decluttering texts discursively frame clutter as something which does not relate (clearly or positively) to our memories or our identities, and contrasted this with how my participants related to clutter in these terms (sections 5.6 and 6.6 respectively). At other times I found decluttering texts and participants to articulate the same discourses. Both present clutter in general as having two specific forms of agency. First, they frame clutter as growing and gathering of its own accord, although I questioned whether this was the case in practice (section 6.5.1.1). Second, clutter is also talked about as a threatening impersonal force, whose agency needs to be resisted; this, I argued, is a way of articulating (experiences of) its thing-power (Bennett, 2010; see section 6.5.1.2). Another shared clutter discourse is its framing through ideas of OCD and hoarding, with these marking limit points at which 'normal' relationships to clutter become excessive and transgressive (section 4.7). I showed here how wider ways of speaking and knowing the self, in psy-discursive terms (Rose, 2007), inform how people think about and talk about clutter. Finally, I also showed how rooted clutter and flowing clutter are constructed differently in discourse, especially in relation to the lifecourse: flowing clutter is associated with children and families (section 5.5.1.1), rooted clutter with older people (section 5.5.1.2).

These different discursive associations are one of the ways in which flowing clutter and rooted clutter can be differentiated. I showed in my analysis of where different forms of clutter come from, and how they are managed, that participants practice their relationships with flowing clutter and rooted clutter differently. Flowing clutter is defined by its mobility and its forward-looking temporality. It emerges in attempts to keep the rhythm of life going (section 5.4.1.1). It is decluttered routinely, in order to manage home space and to make life at home run more smoothly (section

5.4.1.2). Rooted clutter is defined as things which are stuck, and which stick around in the home. Rooted clutter blocks the flow of life and gets in the way of everyday living; it is also something which builds up through the flow of life, materially sticking around (section 5.4.2.1). Decluttering rooted clutter happens infrequently and has an irregular periodicity, it is something often practiced in relationship to seasonal and cyclical rhythms, for example in anticipation of Christmas (section 5.4.2.2).

It might be apparent to the reader that overall I spent more time in my thesis thinking about rooted clutter than flowing clutter. Its connections to memory and identity, formed through its enduring and sticky nature, bore the greatest level of critical scrutiny. Rooted clutter seems to have the greater impact on meanings and experiences of home, while flowing clutter speaks more of an everyday sense of managing domestic materialities. I think about how rooted clutter speaks to the themes of memory and identity in the next section, as my analysis here has wider implications for how we can think about these topics. It is these more broadly applicable insights which I see as having the most value in my work. Understanding clutter in itself is interesting, but understanding what it means to live at home, to remember and to think about our identities, are topics of much wider concern and importance. By studying clutter I have been able to contribute to these projects. While the above insights are helpful to future researchers looking at completing their own clutter projects, the arguments I review next have the potential to be used in a much broader range of research projects.

7.2.2   Thesis Contributions to the Wider Literature

As the summary above has shown, my thesis has considered in detail clutter's definition, how it is related to in practices, its cultural meanings and how people live with and relate to it. In addition to all of these novel findings about the nature of clutter, I have also generated a range of insights on the nature of material culture, time and home. In this section I draw out findings which make a contribution to these broader literatures and debates. I also situate my work within the broader contours of current geographical scholarship, noting how my work can develop our

understandings of place through the way in which it frames the uses and meanings of that which is 'out of place'.

I see my work as informing debates on material culture in three main ways. First, my introduction of the idea of *keeping* as a particular way of relating to objects at home (in section 6.6.2). Second, my arguments about how identities and memories are actively (co-)constructed alongside material culture, rather than just read off from it (in sections 6.6 and 5.6). Third, as a demonstration of the value of attending to clutter, and other overlooked and forgotten objects, as a way to generate novel research findings. I discuss these in turn.

I introduced the idea of keeping material culture in section 6.6.2. Keeping is, I argue, an important way in which identities, relationships and sentiments are materially embodied (rather than displayed or represented) at home. Keeping as a practice does not involve display, for the sake of others or for the self. It works to both creates the home as a meaningful (dwelling) place which materially embodies our identity, and allows the home to work as a material context within and from which we construct our selves. This is a useful addition to the literature on material culture. As I showed in section 2.2, work on material culture has developed and diversified in terms of the practices it considers, moving beyond a focus on consumption to think about how people relate to objects in other ways. Adding my idea of keeping to this growing range of practices gives researchers greater conceptual specificity and a novel way to think about how people relate to their possessions. Keeping refers to more 'passive' ways of being with objects, unlike (deliberate and deliberative) acts of consumption, display or divestment. It highlights the importance of considering how things endure across their material lives, and the ways in which material capacities to endure can work to structure how we feel (at home, and about objects).

The second (related) way my thesis adds to studies of material culture is in how I conceptualised and discussed the way in which people use objects to (co-)*construct* their memories and identities. In sections 5.6 and 6.6 respectively I talked about how clutter is made meaningful in the context of active processes of remembering and identity-making. Work on material culture tends to present objects as representing past events and identities in a straightforward way; objects are seen as filled with pre-

packaged and easy-to-access meanings which we read off from them (see section 6.3.2). My work on clutter emphasised how remembering and identity-construction are active processes which take place with and alongside objects. Rather than reading off pre-packaged memories and identities from their possessions, I showed how participants actively (co-)construct the meanings of objects. Participants relate these meanings to their selves in a relational and emergent process. Theories of memory and identity frame them as performative, contextual, relational and emergent (section 5.3.3 and section 6.3.2); in my thesis I have shown this at work in our practices with (clutter) objects. Showing how people relate to objects in this way, with meanings made through and alongside objects rather than simply represented by them, develops how students of domestic material culture can think about processes and practices of identity and memory.

The third contribution my thesis makes to studies of material culture centres on the value of thinking about overlooked, forgotten or uncertain objects. I have already noted that studies of these objects form an emergent research theme (see Grossman, 2015; Horton and Kraftl, 2012; Hurdley, 2015; Woodward, 2015). Here, rather than offering a conceptual argument my thesis provides instead a (further) demonstration of the value of studying these topics. I go on to reflect in section 7.3 on what (else) pursuing these might offer us.

My analysis in chapter five, where I thought through the relationship between clutter and time, reported two arguments about the nature of (domestic) temporal experience I review here in turn. These were on the relationship between routines and rhythms, and the role of (clutter) objects in life transitions.

In my literature review in section 5.3.1 I argued that we can best understand routine domestic action through the idea of rhythm. This conceptual move forward was shown to be a useful one when I came to my analysis of the making and managing of flowing and rooted clutter (across section 5.4). This theoretical argument helped me to resolve a question of whether clutter-making is routine or non-routine. Beyond this, my work in this section also contributed to the literature on (rhythmic) routine actions by highlighting affectively prompted routines (section 5.4.1.2). These have not been reported on to date. This finding itself further supports my theoretical argument

that we need to think about routines in the context of rhythm, rather than focus only on practices; thinking of routines through the idea of rhythm becomes more important when routines are themselves prompted by material agencies and affects.

My work has contributed to scholarship on adult life transitions too, through my analysis of three transitions in Catherine's life (section 5.5.2). This is an underdeveloped research theme, so my analysis helps to fill this gap in the literature. Beyond this, I showed here how life transitions work to create new relationships with, and understandings of, objects. I showed too how engagements with objects can work to both enact and resolve life transitions. This suggests life transitions are not only effected socially, but are emplaced, relational and *material* passages through time in which identities and biographies are reworked and reimagined.

My research on clutter has shown that it is an important element in everyday homes and our experiences of them. In terms of the literature, my work has allowed me to develop how we can conceptualise home. I argued in my literature review (section 2.4) that to capture the emergent socio-material nature of home space and our feelings about it we can productively use Jacobs and Smith's (2008) idea of the home as an assemblage of dwelling. I developed this in my thesis, arguing that the home works as a *multiple* assemblage of dwelling. In my account, the home is a macro-level assemblage, rooms a meso-level, and human-object relations a micro-level. Meso-level assemblages interact to form the home overall. I showed how this works in terms of clutter practices, but this way of thinking about the home can be applied to a variety of contexts. This development gives greater precision when researching the home as an assemblage, and also highlights the roles different rooms play in homemaking, something generally absent from the literature on home.

My research can also contribute to our understandings of place. This is a key concept within geography and can be seen as one of its foundational ideas. My work on clutter as out of place material culture can develop how geographers think about the idea of (the out of) place, therefore speaking to a broad range of researchers interested in a variety of topics. Often scholars think about things which are out of place as socially, culturally and/or politically problematic. Clutter, as I demonstrated in section 4.5, is defined through its lack of fit within a subject's lived context. However,

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rather than something which is always and necessarily troubling to identities and cultural constructions of home life, clutter is instead at times an important part of how people construct their selves, their relationships and their sense of temporality.

In literature on the out of place Mary Douglas' (1966) work is very influential. Her understandings of the socio-spatial construction of culture and everyday practice through a binary framing of in place/out of place works to inform much contemporary scholarship on the meanings and effects of that which is out of place. This sense of the problematic nature of mixing together things which ought to be spatially and socially separate is reflected in the work of Kristeva (1984b), who describes abjection as an affective tension between the desire the be rid of and pull away from the out of place, and our necessary connection to such things forged in the very act of denying and denigrating out of place objects and concepts. This idea is taken up by Shildrick (2002) who applies it at a corporeal level to understand cultural constructions of monstrosity through the co-placement in a single form that which 'ought' to be kept separate. The idea of abjection and out of place these authors rely on is drawn upon to make more politicized arguments in the work of Tyler (2013) who considers the treatment of minority groups in the UK, such as Gypsy-Travellers, to be legitimated and normalised through discourses framed in these terms. Finally, Tim Cresswell's (1996) seminal *In Place/Out of Place* explores the socio-political processes through which certain bodies and practices are deemed out of place, and the effects which this exclusionary coding has upon them and, consequentially, on society as a whole. Overall, this very brief review shows my work on the productive and positive aspects of clutter to be at odds with how many researchers think about the concept of the out of place. The taken-for-granted and largely untroubling nature of clutter in the homes of my participants indicates that place *and* out of place are everyday geographies which people navigate in the co-construction and enactment of their lives, selves and relationships.

Contemporary work on place often frames it quite differently to how it is presented when considered alongside the concept of the out of place. Rather than seeing place as somewhere constructed in opposition to the out of place, geographers often instead prefer to think of place as constructed through movements,

relationships and practices. Doreen Massey (2005: p.140) describes place as somewhere which is throwntogether, 'a negotiation which must take place within and between both human and non-human'. Rather than a pre-defined location place is instead a process, an intersection of people, ideas, practices and material things which come together, from somewhere, to make place. This means that, rather than being a static site, place changes and grows, is multiple and open, constantly reinventing through inhabitations and interactions. This sense of place calls attention to that which is outwith it, to places distant but not remote, to people on their way and to things which have just left. Places are also structured by power relations and are sites which can exclude and dominate. Place is somewhere which is both individual and shared, somewhere which is policed, political and personal. Massey suggests an attention to the co-constitutedness of place can work against the violence of exclusions which happen in place's name, often framed through the (I argue here problematic) concept of the out of place (Cresswell, 1996; Sibley, 1995), while individuals work to make a place for themselves in the world where they feel safe and that they can belong. My thesis has focused particularly on home, a species of place to which we attach particular social and personal, inclusionary and exclusionary, sets of meanings and values (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; see sections 2.4 and 6.3). Conceptualisations of home can frame it as a place for only particular kinds of subjects; however, as scholars of home note, despite or even because of this people do still work to make homes for themselves in the world (Kabachnik, 2010; Speer, 2017). Home, like place, is an unfolding site which works as an affective, emotional and representational connection between people who leave and people who stay, worked out *through* mobile processes, not in spite of them (Ahmed, 1999). '[H]ome is like an accordion, in that it both stretches to expand outwards to distant and remote places, while also squeezing to embed people in their proximate and immediate locales and social relations' (Ralph and Staeheli, 2011: p.525); one important way in which this embedding and stretching of home works is through meanings of and practices with material culture, including clutter.

Based on this understanding of the nature of place, and my research which demonstrates the lived complexity of the inhabitation of home as a place which draws

together things which are temporally, affectively and spatially far away as well as near, I suggest that my research can contribute to debates on and geographical conceptualisations of the nature of (the out of) place. We should not think of the out of place as being opposed to place; clutter as out of place everyday objects shows how in terms of material culture people negotiate these senses of distance and difference in ways which are not exclusionary but work to construct ideas and practices of the self, of time and of relationships in ways which sew together things here and there, 'in place' and 'out of place'. My work can therefore push geographers towards a reconceptualization of the idea of the out of place by highlighting the lived reality of our existence caught and constructed within the space between the in place and the out of place. This approach includes socially, culturally and politically problematic things and bodies on the margins; it recognises their marginality while also remembering that margins are themselves part of the page on which we write the stories of our lives. This, I argue, is an important development which geographers interested in place and its lived nature can take forward and use to consider the complex and co-constructed nature of life in place lived through, with and alongside things which variously are framed as (not) belonging there. Here, place and out of place are presented in unfolding and material terms, with the politically and theoretically important idea of the out of place reconfigured to work in unfolding, dynamic material terms rather than through a static binary which is predicated upon normative exclusions.

This section of my conclusion has recapped the key contributions and arguments which my thesis adds to a range of literatures. There is one final contribution my thesis makes which I want to draw out here. This is the way I have worked to include the voices of people who hoard in my research, alongside those of people who do not hoard. Often, geography segregates people with a 'mental health problem', treating them as some kind of 'special case' for research purposes (see section 2.5). Work on specific experiences of living with a 'mental health problem' is important. But people with a 'mental health problem' are more than a diagnosis. They have something to contribute on a range of topics; people who hoard live in homes, with material culture and through time. This means that they too have

something to add to studies of clutter. I have sought to value their contributions in an inclusive way that makes room for their perspectives. I have not reified the idea of hoarding by assuming that people who hoard practice and experience their relationships to clutter differently from people who do not hoard, and in the same ways as one another. Instead I have looked across and between multiple different ways of knowing clutter, from people who hoard and people who do not hoard. This is, I argue, a more ethical way of constructing social research, which makes room for diversity and takes people with a 'mental health problem' seriously as knowledgeable and meaning-making equals of people without a 'mental health problem'. It also works to help ensure that the geographies recorded here are not (accidentally) normative and exclusionary. This inclusive way of working develops how we do geographical research, and other forms of social research, and will, I hope, push scholars to research and write in more inclusive ways.

7.3   Reflections on (My) Clutter

This research has helped us understand clutter, and has generated new insights into material culture, time and home. Something it has not done is help me decide what I should do with clutter in my own home. Completing this PhD created a lot of clutter. My study was piled with journal articles, notes and drafts, stacked on the bookcase and on my desk. The rest of my house 'slipped'; normally I like things just so, but while writing up I had neither the time nor the energy to keep up to everything. I want to think here about a box of books, the decluttering texts I analysed as part of this research, which I (now) consider clutter (image 7.1). I interrogate my feelings about them as a starting point for thinking about clutter in general, how my work here might connect up with wider conceptual arguments and what issues future research could address. I talk about three themes here: (i) whether clutter is only domestic, and what 'clutter' outside the home might be like; (ii) how changing patterns of home life in the context of the housing crisis might affect how people relate to clutter; (iii) the

Image 7.1 – My Clutter: Decluttering Books

relationship between flowing and rooted clutter, and more broadly how we can think about (practices with) objects as working in different categories.

Before I do that though, let me tell you about these decluttering books. I bought them a year and half ago, and used them to complete my discourse analysis. At first I kept them lined up on the desk in my study, taking them out in turn to read. After I had written my discourse analysis I decided to clear some space and put them away. At this point I imagined I would need them again, that I would want to return to the books when writing up. So I placed them into a cardboard box and put this under my bed, breaking the sides of the box a little so it would fit more easily. There they stayed, along with other bits and pieces of clutter (like board games, wrapping paper and ends of fabric) which might not survive being kept in my (damp) cellar. At this point these books were not clutter: I was keeping them to use them again; they were not *out of place* under my bed, but simply *out of the way* there. When it came time to for me to complete my analysis, these books made their return, coming out from under the bed and back into my study. This time the books were more mobile. I pulled them out from the box when I needed them, leafed through them, read them, and then piled them up on my desk. Periodically I would tidy up, when I got sick of

working in a mess, surrounded by flowing clutter. Then the books would go back into their box on the floor. In their box the books were still out of place, still clutter, as they were getting in my way, annoying me and cluttering up my study floor. Placing them together here worked like a clutter drawer, in that their being kept together out of place was easier than getting them out from under the bed every time I wanted them. Tidying my desk, therefore, was both a decluttering and a re-cluttering of my study. I put up with this while I was working on my analysis, but once it was complete it was time to put the books away again. The last stage in the journey these books have taken (so far) is to a self-storage unit now that I have moved house. I packed up the books wholesale in their box and transported to the unit. Here they sit as rooted clutter, and I do not know what I should do with them. This seems a particular irony given that this clutter has emerged just at the point when I am claiming to understand it (also ironic is that these are decluttering books designed to help you get rid of clutter, not to become clutter). To make the best of a bad job I want to reflect on my feelings about these books, and how I have related to them, to connect my work on clutter to broader questions about socio-material life, and to think about what other questions we might ask about clutter.

The reason why I call these books rooted clutter is because I do not know what to do with them, and so they feel stuck in the context of my life. On the one hand, I do not really anticipate that I will need them again. On the other hand though, there is still a chance that I could want them in the future, to write up a journal article or something. Another reason I feel that I should keep these books is because they are connected to my work. They materially embody my identity as an aspiring academic. My understandings of them are therefore influenced by the culture of academia. Academia values knowledge, which these books represent. Academics are 'supposed' to have a lot of books. This seems a facile point, but I do feel that having lots of books helps to admit me to the 'Academics' Club' somehow. Their connection to academia complicates these books, and brings in the norms and values of other spaces and places, which are generally excluded from the domestic. These books challenge the separation of 'work' and 'home', and of Alex as (aspiring) academic and Alex as friend or partner (and so on).

There are two points to draw out of this theme of identity(-making) and clutter. First, that work on clutter needs to expand to take account of a greater range of norms than I have discussed here. I have shown the importance of the (domestic) tidiness norm throughout this thesis. I have also shown how this intersects with parenting norms. However, there are a whole world of ways of doing and being which have not been considered. To give an example, we might often think (undergraduate) student houses are 'normally' messy and cluttered. How does a 'messiness norm' interact with the tidiness norm? What other ways of relating to things are there which might impact on how people practice and understand clutter? Does clutter exist (in the same way) outside of the Global North where the tidiness norm developed? This is an avenue to pursue.

The second thing these texts make me think about is the degree to which clutter is something which exists (in the same way) in non-domestic places. If these books were in my university office, would they have the same meaning? Would I feel as conflicted about them? Lots of researchers who I have talked to about my work have joked with me about the clutter in their offices. It feels as if academia has a specific culture of clutter, where clutter is the norm or even a badge of honour. This is, of course, not true of every office environment; some workplaces institute a 'clear desk' policy. What kinds of 'clutter' do academics have, then? Is this different from people in other workplaces? Do the distinctions between rooted clutter and flowing clutter, found in my discussion of the home, hold in other spaces? Can you even have 'clutter' in other spaces, or do you have something else entirely? Here, institutional norms might work to construct meanings and experiences of clutter in different ways. And, thinking about institutions, can they have clutter? Are the 'excess' objects in museums' storerooms clutter? Is clutter a domestic phenomenon, or is it something more broadly distributed?

I ask these questions because I think they are productive ones to think through. If we think about how clutter is practiced and related to in other spaces then we can think about how clutter might work as a general phenomenon. What we can then do is think about whether the idea of 'clutter' represents something more fundamental in how we live with things in the world. Do the experiences and practices with clutter

recorded here gesture towards a broader sense of what socio-material life is like, something provisional, emergent, ambiguous and relational? Is there a core essence which clutter represents in terms of how people and objects come together in place? There is of course a great deal of theory and philosophy which already considers what it means to live in the world alongside things. But, as I have shown, studying and reflecting on clutter can refine and develop such theories. Perhaps attention to clutter, and other overlooked, forgotten, marginal and 'trivial' things, might have far reaching implications for how we understand our lives and place in the world. Of course, I am not making such bold claims of my own analysis here. I am though suggesting that by taking a new perspective and thinking about clutter (and other such things), new ways understandings of the world, and our place within it, can and do emerge.

The placement of these books in a self-storage unit while I'm living between different friends and looking for a house to rent brings me to the second theme I want to draw out in my reflections on them. This how clutter might be experienced in different, challenging ways in the context of contemporary changes to ways of living at home, showing the relevance of my research to work on housing policy and practices, as well as experiences of home. Both within the UK and around the world there is a 'housing crisis', which while taking geographically specific forms is united in general by a prioritisation of profit maximisation at the expense of living space and standards (Hodkinson and Robbins, 2013; Madden and Marcuse, 2016). In the UK in 2017 fulltime workers can typically expect to pay 7.8 times their yearly earnings on purchasing a home, an increase from 3.6 times their annual earnings in 1997 (ONS, 2018). This boom in house prices, which has not been accompanied by a similar uplift in average wages (ONS, 2018), has led to both the creation of a precariously housed 'generation rent' (Hoolachan et al., 2017) and huge profits for investors in housing as a commodity (Hodkinson and Robbins, 2013). Overall levels of homeownership are declining, but not the degree to which people want to own their own homes, showing this is a question of affordability rather than changing social priorities (Saunders, 2016). Renting can be experienced as an insecure form of tenure, with people sometimes struggling to put down roots in the same way as those who own their own

home (Bate, 2018; Easthorpe, 2014; Miller, 1988). One 'solution' to this is the emergence of micro-homes (Kichanova, 2019). This is touted as a potentially environmentally friendly and socially sustainable form of housing (Ford and Gomez-Lanier, 2017), although living in a very small home is not suitable for everyone (for example, on the effects of this on children see Solari and Mare, 2012). The housing crisis in the UK is one which disproportionately, but not exclusively, affects younger people for whom the property ladder has been pulled up out of reach (Hoolachan and McKee, 2018), causing them to experience delayed life transitions and insecurity due to their tenure as renters (Hoolachan *et al*., 2017). In 1997 20% of people aged 20-34 lived with their parents, in 2017 this had increased by 6%, representing more than 588,000 young people (ONS, 2017). Some of these young people are 'boomerang children' who have returned to their family home, generally after university, while others have simply never been able to afford to leave (Hoolachan *et al*., 2017). Living together as adults can be challenging for both boomerang children and their parents (Newman, 2012). Young people who do leave home can often find themselves living with housemates, which means they share communal areas and have less autonomy in how these parts of their homes are run and organised (Bricocoli and Sabatinelli, 2016; Mackie, 2016).

Overall, the housing crisis is a multifaceted problem with many different causes and effects (Madden and Marcuse, 2016). One effect which has not been reported on is how the housing crisis interacts with people's experiences and practices with clutter, and how this in turn effects how people construct their identities and practice their relationships. Living in a micro-home and sharing your home with others, as a co-tenant or as a member of a boomerang family, means you may have less space to keep and accumulate rooted clutter. Living in rented accommodation with an insecure tenancy may make people reluctant to accumulate clutter in the same way as homeowners, and moving house more regularly as a renter may lead people to declutter objects which otherwise would have remained in situ gathering meanings. I argued in section 6.6.2 that keeping clutter is important for the construction of identity, and in section 5.6.3 that clutter is important as a memory object. However, if people do not have the space or the ability to accumulate this kind of clutter what will

the long-term implications of this be for how they understand themselves and their pasts? Will they turn to alternative, non-physical means of memory-making, or will they instead have a different sense of their trajectories through life when they lack objects through which they can remember their pasts? Living together with other people may also affect experiences with flowing clutter. Sharing communal areas may lead people to avoid making clutter there and could prevent them from making and clearing clutter in the context of their everyday rhythms (see section 5.4.1). Sharing space may also affect how people imaginatively segment their homes in terms of where clutter belongs, with the differentiation between public and private more sharply defined when living areas are shared (see section 6.4). These normative object geographies may not be shared by all members of a household, and negotiations and arguments over what belongs where may characterise home life for sharers which makes clutter into a running battle. In my research only two people rented their homes, and no participants lived with boomerang children or with housemates. This means that these interactions between the housing crisis and how people live with and alongside clutter are only potential. Further research would help to unpick some of these relationships. However, what can be said is that clutter is an important if overlooked part of life at home, and that therefore living arrangements which constrain how people can use clutter to construct their identities and everyday lives is likely to have effects on how people relate to themselves and to one another.

The third theme these books lead to me reflect on is the relationship between, and broader meanings of, rooted and flowing clutter. I have said that at the moment my decluttering books are rooted clutter. But how true is that? If I am using them, albeit as a rhetorical device, does that mean they are still clutter? Are they clutter when I write about them, or when you read about them? In addition to this, what is the difference between the books as 'clutter' under my bed now, and them 'in storage' when I first put them away? Storage is something which I have not really reflected on in my thesis, presenting clutter as implicitly different from 'stored' objects without specifying what storage means. This distinction between clutter and storage is something participants used when talking about their belongings, but the line between them is hazy. I talked about the importance of keeping clutter objects; does

keeping things in storage work in the same way? How and when do things move from being 'in storage' to being 'clutter'? Is it when we first put them away? Is clutter something which emerges when we re-engage with stored objects? Is clutter made the moment we forget about things, or when our lives move on and our stored objects no longer fit within them, whether we realise this or not?

To develop an account of clutter I think we need to pay attention to the meanings of storage[6]. We also need to pay attention to the relationship between rooted clutter and flowing clutter. I have held these apart in my analysis, although in practice their separation is more difficult. Do participants recognise such a differentiation in their practices? How, why and when do things move between being rooted clutter and flowing clutter? These questions are important because answering them would develop our understandings of clutter. If I repeated this project, aware of the different forms which clutter comes in, I might uncover new findings about the nature of and relationships between rooted and flowing clutter. My research has introduced this distinction to the literature, and so I was at pains to show that clutter can be held apart in this way. The next step is to problematise this, and look at where these forms of clutter are drawn together.

Expanding research on this might in turn feed into a wider sense of the nature of objects. Do things in general flow and take root? Might these modes of experiencing and relating to objects speak of a wider sense of what material life is like? Can this work on clutter be applied more generally to studies of other objects, or to spaces and

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[6] There are, to my knowledge, a number of scholars working on this already. This includes Jen Owen, who is writing up her PhD thesis on self-storage units. Jen and I co-convened a session at the RGS-IBG conference (Miller and Owen, 2018). In our session (on excessive and abundant material culture) all the papers we heard touched on storage, to different extents. These were from: Rebecca Collins and Elyse Stanes; Emma Waight; Heather Rosenfeld; Oliver Moss and Lionel Playford; Kezia Barker and Sonia Zafer-Smith. Finally, Sharon Macdonald and Jennie Morgan, working as part of the large AHRC project *Heritage Futures* (on the theme of 'Profusion'), are also thinking about storage in their work. This list is unlikely to be exhaustive, and I hope to discover the work of others on this topic who also contribute to our debates and understandings.

places? Do buildings 'flow' when they are used and become rooted when they are ruined? Do processes of restoring or 'rescuing' heritage sites allow them to 'flow' again? How do human senses of flowing and rooted buildings and places interact with their always unfolding and mobile materialities? And in what other ways might we say that objects (and perhaps spaces) flow and change and move? Can a perspective of the rooted replace or challenge the flowing geographies, practices of accumulation and processes of constant reinvention, which characterise contemporary neoliberal spatial norms and ways of valuing? Again, this is not something I claim that my thesis answers. But, again, I think it might be something we can claim that studies of overlooked objects like clutter have the potential to answer. Taking a minor perspective can produce major results.

7.4   Concluding the Conclusion

When I started my PhD I did not set out to study clutter. My work began as a more conventional (and probably less interesting) study of the experiences and practices of people who hoard. The failure of this project led me in to studying clutter, something few academics have written on, and never at such length. What I have found in this 'accidental' research project is that clutter is an interesting and important part of everyday life at home. It makes meanings and identities. It shows up hidden ways of living with and relating to things. As I have argued, by starting from clutter, as something overlooked and forgotten, new ways of understanding life at home, lived alongside objects and through time, become apparent. Clutter studies can add to and enliven geographies of home, of material culture and of time. They can add complexity and depth, and generate new ways of knowing. Clutter might be annoying, and it might get in the way, but it does matter and it is important (even when you do not know what to do with it).

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Appendices

Appendix I. Strand One Methods: Information and Consent Documents

Exploring the Experiences and Practices of People with Hoarding Disorder

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

The aim of the project is to explore what life is like for people with hoarding disorder. It will look at the everyday lives of hoarders. Specifically the research will focus on three topics: how hoarders think about and live in their homes, how hoarders think about and relate to objects and how hoarders think about hoarding disorder.

You have been invited to participate as someone who sees themselves as a hoarder. Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will need to tick the boxes below to confirm this. You can withdraw from the survey at any time but once your answers have been submitted they will no longer be able to be withdrawn. If you agree to take part you will complete an online questionnaire. This will take around 1 hour. You can save your answers and come back to them if you like. The questions you will be asked will be open-ended to allow you to explain your thoughts and write about your experiences.

Taking part in this research could cause you to become upset. The questionnaire will ask about your experiences of hoarding and you may find writing about this distressing. You do not have to write about anything that you do not want to though and you do not have to answer any question you do not want to. While there are no immediate benefits to participants from taking part in the project it is hoped that your responses will help raise awareness of what everyday life is like for hoarders through presentations and publications associated with this research. It is hoped that these will help other people who see themselves as hoarders

All information collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You should not be able to be identified in any reports or publications by people you do not know. Information that will be collected about you will include general information about your background as well as your experiences of hoarding and

how you live your life. If you have written about this on the internet before or told others about it then they may be able to identify you from the stories that may be included in publications. The results of this study will be included in my PhD thesis, as well as in academic journal publications. You have the option of allowing your responses to be placed in a secure online data bank, viewable only by other authorised researchers. You do not have to agree to this and it will not affect your participation if you do not agree.

This research is funded by an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) PhD studentship. Please contact Alex Miller if you have any questions or concerns about the research. You can also contact my supervisors Nichola Wood and David Bell if you would like to discuss the research with them.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Alex Miller

Researcher:
Alex Miller
School of Geography
University of Leeds
Leeds
LS2 9JT
Email: gy10ajm@leeds.ac.uk
Website: www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/people/a.miller

Supervisors:

Dr. Nichola Wood	Dr. David Bell
School of Geography	School of Geography
University of Leeds	University of Leeds
Leeds	Leeds
LS2 9JT	LS2 9JT
Email: n.x.wood@leeds.ac.uk	Email: d.j.bell@leeds.ac.uk
Website:	Website:
www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/people/n.wood	www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/people/d.bell

Please tick the box next to all the statements you agree with.

<u>Optional</u>
I agree for the anonymous data collected about me to be placed   □
in a secure online data bank, viewable to other researchers.

<u>Mandatory</u>
I see myself as a hoarder and am over 18 years old.   □

I confirm that I have read and understand the information   □
above explaining the research project.

I understand that once my answers have been submitted I will   □
not be able to change them or withdraw them from the study.

I understand that my name will not be linked with the research
materials, and I will not be identified in the report or reports   □
that result from the research.

I agree for the anonymous data collected from me to be used in   □
relevant future research.

I agree to take part in the above research project.   □

Exploring the Experiences and Practices of People with Hoarding Disorder

Thank you for taking part in this research project by completing an online questionnaire.

You are now being invited to take part in the next stage of the research. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

The aim of the project is to explore what life is like for people with hoarding disorder. It will look at the everyday lives of hoarders. Specifically the research will focus on three topics: how hoarders think about and live in their homes, how hoarders think about and relate to objects and how hoarders think about hoarding disorder.

You have been invited to participate as someone who sees themselves as a hoarder. Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. There are a limited number of places on this research project, these will be allocated on a 'first come first served' basis. If you do take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. You can still withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason. If you agree to take part you will participate in 3 rounds of research. The first will be an interview that will last approximately 1-2 hours. In the second you will be asked to make a film of your home and send this to me. If you do not have the means to do this then it can be provided for you. There will be another interview in which we discuss the video you have made. This will last approximately 1-2 hours. The third round of research will involve another interview and some work exploring your relationships to objects. All interviews will either be conducted via Skype internet video-calling, or if you live in mainland UK you can be interviewed in your home instead if you prefer. The questions you will be asked will be primarily open-ended to allow you to explain your thoughts and talk about your experiences.

Taking part in this research could cause you to become upset. The research will ask about your experiences of hoarding and you may find talking about this distressing. You do not have to talk about anything that you do not want to though, and the interviews can be stopped at any time. While there are no immediate benefits to participants from taking part in the project it is hoped that your responses will help raise awareness of what everyday life is like for hoarders through presentations and publications associated with this research. It is hoped that these will help other people who see themselves as hoarders

Information collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. However, if you tell me that you or another person is in danger of coming to harm I cannot guarantee that this will be kept confidential. You should not be able to be

identified in any reports or publications by people you do not know. Information that will be collected about you will include general information about your background as well as your experiences of hoarding and how you live your life. If you have written about this on the internet or told others about it then they may be able to identify you from the stories included in publications. You can let me know if there is anything you tell me about that you do not want me to write about and this will be kept confidential. The results of this study will be included in my PhD thesis, as well as in academic journal publications.

Interviews conducted on Skype will be recorded using computer software; interviews conducted in person will be recorded using a digital audio recorder. These recordings will only be used for analysis purposes. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside of the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. Interviews you give will be transcribed for analysis. You have the option of allowing these transcripts to be placed in a secure online data bank, viewable only by authorised researchers. You do not have to agree to this and it will not affect your participation if you do not agree. The video you make will only be used for analysis and no part of it will appear in any publication without your permission. Videos will not be placed in an online data bank.

This research is funded by an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) PhD studentship. Please contact Alex Miller if you have any questions or concerns about the research. You can also contact my supervisors Nichola Wood and David Bell if you would like to discuss the research with them.

If you would like to take part in this research please email Alex Miller at gy10ajm@leeds.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Alex Miller
School of Geography
University of Leeds
Leeds
LS2 9JT
Email: gy10ajm@leeds.ac.uk
Website: http://www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/people/a.miller

Supervisors:

Dr. Nichola Wood	Dr. David Bell
School of Geography	School of Geography
University of Leeds	University of Leeds
Leeds	Leeds
LS2 9JT	LS2 9JT
Email: n.x.wood@leeds.ac.uk	Email: d.j.bell@leeds.ac.uk

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Consent to take part in 'Exploring the Experiences and Practices of People with Hoarding Disorder'

Mandatory:	Add your initials next to the statements you agree with
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 05/08/2015 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions I understand that I am free to decline to.	
I understand that my responses will be kept anonymous. I give permission for members of the research team (the project supervisors) to have access to my responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified in the report or reports that result from the research.	
I agree for the data collected from me to be used in relevant future research.	
I agree for this interview to be recorded using a digital audio recorder. I understand that this recording will not be shown to anyone outside the project.	
I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change.	

Optional:

I agree for the anonymous data collected to be placed in a secure online data store, viewable to other researchers.	

Name of participant	
Participant's signature	
Date	
Name of researcher	
Researcher's Signature*	
Date	

*To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant.

Appendix II.   Strand One Methods: Online Survey Questions

Background Questions

- What is your gender? [Type response]

- What is your age? [Select answer options: 18-25; 26-35; 36-45; 46-55; 56-65; over 66]

- What country do you live in? [Type response]

Main Questions

- When did you start to have a problem with hoarding? When did you first start to see yourself as a hoarder?

- How does hoarding affect your life? Is there anything it makes it difficult for you to do?

- Why do you think you save things?

- What kinds of objects do you save? Why?

- How does it feel to throw things away?

- How would you describe your home? How does it make you feel?

- What would you like to change about your home? Why?

- What, if anything, are you doing to manage your hoarding at the moment? How did you decide to do this?

- How important is your hoarding support forum to you? Why?

Concluding Questions

- Please use this space to write about anything else that you feel is important which has not been covered in the survey.

- Please leave any feedback about the survey here.

Semi-Structured Illness Narrative Style Interview Guide:

Preamble

I'd like to talk about your life and your experiences with clutter today. I'm interested in hearing about how your clutter problems have developed over the course of your life and the way that they affect you today.

1) I wonder if you could tell me about the development of your clutter problems, starting from when you first had a problem with clutter?

- Then what happened? How did you feel?...

2) Can you think of any causes for your _____ [hoarding / clutter problem / messiness – mirror]

- Things that make it worse?
- What happened around the same time?

3a) What hoarding traits do you think you have?

[WRITE:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____]

3b) Can you tell me more about _____? / What do you mean by _____? How has _____ affected your life?

[Repeat for each trait mentioned – if not mentioned, ask about: acquisition problems / organisation problems / difficulty discarding / emotional attachments to objects]

4) I've seen that there are a few different words used to describe clutter problems on the internet, and I was hoping we could discuss what they mean to you. Could you tell me how you see the difference between a hoarder and a messie?

Have you heard the term clutterer? What does that mean?

What about squalorer?

5) Can you tell me about what you are doing to manage _____ at the moment?

- Why / why not used: self-help books / online self-help tools like Flylady / therapy / medication / declutterers?
- How did you decide to use _____?
- Experiences with _____?

6a) Who does/doesn't know about your _____?

- Friends? / Family? / Co-workers (if applicable)
- Why / why not?

6b) How has _____ impacted on your relationships with your friends and family?

7) What do you think about how hoarding and hoarders are depicted on TV?

8) Anything else you would like to talk about that hasn't been covered so far?

House Tour Film – Instructions

You are being asked to film a tour around your home, talking about it as you go. This video is intended to get a sense of how you live in and think about your home. It is up to you what you show and what you say. You do not have to film anything you do not want to.

When making the film please try to cover the following topics for all the areas you show in the film:

- The different things you do there
- How you feel when you spend time there
- What different objects are there

There are lots of different ways that you can communicate this information. It is up to you how you do this. To help you get started here are some different ideas for ways you could approach the filming:

- Pretend you're an estate agent showing someone around the property (such as on TV shows like Location, Location, Location or A Place in the Sun)
- Film a 'day in your life' covering the different activities you do during the day
- Pretend you are making a documentary about your life
- Start from your front door. Then move through the different rooms in your house one at a time, starting with the nearest.

If you have any questions about making the film then please let me know. You can get in touch either by email: gy10ajm@leeds.ac.uk or on the phone: 07429824408

Thank you for your participation in this project.

Alex Miller

House Tour – Generic Interview Guide

Before

Preparations – cleaning, tidying?

Feelings before making it?

During

Any parts of the house that you chose not to show? Why / why not?

How did you feel making the film?

Is there anything that you think you forgot to mention or want to clarify?

How do you feel looking at the film now? Does your house look how you imagined it would on film?

Facts / Use of Space

How easy is it to move around the house?

Do you struggle with using the rooms as you would like?

How easy do you find it to find things?

Can you tell me about any household routines you have for cleaning and stuff?

Feelings About the House

Do you like your house?

What would you change about it?

Do you think your house is homely? Why / why not?

Do you have a favourite place in your house?

Where do you spend most of your time?

Do you put up Christmas decorations?

How would it feel to invite someone to your house?

Object Stories Research

Thank you for taking part in this research project. For the final stage of the research you are being asked to find some objects from around your home which we will talk about together during an interview. This stage of the research is designed to find out about the way you think about and relate to objects.

The questions you will be asked will be broadly the same for each object we discuss. They will cover where the object came from, what you have done with it since you've had it, whether and how you use it now. We will also discuss what you think about the object, what it means to you and what you plan to do with the object in the future.

Please find at least one example of each kind of object. If possible this object will be on hand when we talk about it. If you would like to talk about an object which you cannot move or would not like to show then you are also free to do that.

Please find the following objects from around your home which you are happy to discuss:

- A piece of clutter
- A piece of rubbish/garbage/trash
- An object that says something about you
- Something that you're saving to use in the future
- An object you were given as a present
- Something that means a lot to you

If there are any additional objects that you would like to talk about in the interview then you are welcomed to do that.

If you have any questions about the list of objects to find, or about how the research will be carried out please let me know.

Thank you for your participation in the project.

Object Stories Research – Interview Guide

Preamble

- As you know we're talking about some different objects that I've asked you to collect from around your home.

- I'm going to ask you to show them and hold them while we talk if you can.

- This is to find out about what makes different objects important, and about how you think about different kinds of objects.

- Will ask similar questions for each object, and some more specific ones sometimes.

- Please try answer as fully as you can – I'm interested in what you have to say, even if you think it might sound boring or obvious.

Conclusion

Is there anything that we've not talked about today that you think we should have?

- This is our final interview – <u>thank you</u> for taking part, it's really helpful.

- Even though the interviews are finished I'd still value you input – so if you want to talk again or if there is anything you think it would be useful to tell me please get in touch.

- If you decide that there is anything that we have spoken about that you'd rather I didn't write about then please let me know; you are still able to withdraw your data from the study altogether if you choose.

- Questions?

Present / Says Something About You / Means A Lot /

Clutter* / Rubbish** / Future

1. **Can you describe it for me?**

2. **How did you come to get it?**
   - When?
   - Why?

3. **Is it something that you use?**
   - What for?
   - Used it in the past?

4. **Do you like it? [NOT Means A Lot]**
   - Why / why not?

* What makes this clutter?
- Would you always have called it clutter?
- How would you define clutter?

**What makes this rubbish?
- When did it become rubbish?
- How do you define rubbish?

**What is the difference between rubbish and clutter?

5. Why did you choose this object for us to talk about in particular?

6. What do you think you will do with it in the future?

- Use it? When?

7. Do you see yourself parting company with it in the future?

- When?
- Why / why not?
- How will it be disposed of?
- Why dispose of it like that?
- How would disposing of it make you feel?

Understanding Storage, Organisation and Clutter

Hello, and welcome to the project home page. Here you can find information about the research, as well as ways to contact me. If you have received an advertisement for taking part in the research please read on to find out more.

What is the project about?

'Understanding Storage, Organisation and Clutter' is my research project, which I am conducting into the ways in which people think about and relate to the objects that they own. It involves working with people who live in a range of different housing situations, looking for a variety of different perspectives.

The project aims to find out why people keep different kinds of objects, and how different ways of keeping things relates to what they mean to us. It will look at how people understand ideas like clutter, and the social meanings behind keeping objects. The research will investigate how current fashions for decluttering, on TV and in the wider media, interact with people's everyday processes of keeping, storing and thinking about their belongings.

How do I take part?

If you have received an advertisement to take part in the project, and decide you would like to go ahead as a participant, then the next step is taking part in the research.

Taking part involves an interview, which would be conducted in your home. We'd talk about the different objects that you own, how you think about them and what they mean to you. We'd talk about different times when you might sort through your possessions, for example when you clean and tidy up, or instead if you redecorate. You would be shown some photographs of the interiors of different homes and we would talk about what you think of them.

You would also be asked to give a tour of your home, paying attention to the different places where you store and organise your belongings. We'd talk about these places and the things you keep there as we go around, and I would like to take some pictures of them during the visit. This research would all be recorded using a digital audio recorder.

Once the interview and tour are finished, you will then be given the opportunity to take part in the research on an ongoing basis – this is entirely voluntary. It would involve inviting me to visit you again at a time when you are sorting through your belongings – maybe clearing out the garage or tidying up some drawers. During these visits I would talk to you about your thoughts and decisions, either watching what you are doing or helping you as a participant.

Where can I find more information?

Some more information can be found about the project, and what taking part means, by following the links below. These lead to an information sheet about the project, and a copy of the consent form you would be asked to sign.

[Information Sheet](#)   [Clickable hyperlink to pdf of information sheet]

[Consent Form](#)   [Clickable hyperlink to pdf of consent form]

If you're interested in the project, and would either like to take part or find out more, please contact me. You can do that by:

Email: gy10ajm@leeds.ac.uk

Phone: 07429824408

Post: School of Geography, University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT

INFORMATION SHEET FOR 'UNDERSTANDING STORAGE, ORGANISATION AND CLUTTER' PROJECT

You are invited to take part in a research project. This information sheet is designed allow you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please contact me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information, and take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

The aim of the research is to understand people's everyday experiences and practices with home storage, organisation and clutter. The research looks at the different ways in which people make decisions about what to keep and what to throw away, and tries to understand the reasons why people make the choices that they do. It looks at the meanings behind why people decide to keep things in their homes, and how they then store and organise those belongings.

You have been chosen to participate because you live within one of the areas in which the research is being carried out. Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. After taking part you will be able to withdraw the information you give for a period of two months, this period begins from the time at which the information was collected. There are no negative consequences if you choose to withdraw and you do not have to give a reason.

If you agree, you will take part in an interview in your home and provide a tour of your home for me. This will take in total approximately two hours. The interview questions you will be asked will be open-ended, allowing you to explain your thoughts and talk about your experiences. For the home tour you will be asked to show me around the different areas of your home where you store things, and show areas you think are organised and/or disorganised. During the tour you will be asked open-ended questions about the objects that you own and how you use the spaces you show me. After this has finished you will be given the opportunity to contribute further to the research. This would involve me visiting you again on a different occasion, when and if you decide to change what you store in your home or change the way in which you store it. For example, if you decide to clear out your garage or if you reorganise your wardrobe I would ask you let me know and I would visit you. During this visit I would either help you with what you are doing, or just watch depending on what you prefer. I would again ask questions and take photographs during this process. This part of the research is optional and taking part is voluntary.

There are no expected risks to taking part in the research. While there are no direct benefits to participants from participating in the project, it is hoped that your responses will contribute to our understandings of issues of home storage, organisation and clutter.

You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications associated with the research. The responses that you give will be anonymised before they are included in any publications associated with the research. Information that will be collected about you will include general information about your background, how you think objects should be stored and organised in the home and the reasons why. You will also be asked about the things which you keep and store in your home, and the different things that you do with them. The results of the research will form the basis for my PhD thesis, will be included in academic journal publications and reported at academic research conferences.

Interviews will be recorded using a digital audio recorder. These recordings will only be used for analysis purposes. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside of the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. During the home tour, I would like to take photographs of your home using a digital camera. These will only be reproduced in publications with your express permission, otherwise they will remain confidential.

This research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Please contact Alex Miller if you have any questions or concerns about the research. You can also contact my supervisors Dr Nichola Wood and Dr David Bell if you would like to discuss the research with them.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Alex Miller
School of Geography
University of Leeds
Leeds
LS2 9JT
Email: gy10ajm@leeds.ac.uk
Website: http://www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/people/a.miller

Supervisors:
Dr. Nichola Wood
School of Geography
University of Leeds
Leeds
LS2 9JT
Email: n.x.wood@leeds.ac.uk

Dr. David Bell
School of Geography
University of Leeds
Leeds
LS2 9JT
Email: d.j.bell@leeds.ac.uk

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Consent to take part in 'Understanding Storage, Organisation and Clutter'

Mandatory:	Add your initials next to the statements you agree with
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 09/05/2016 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary. I understand I am free to withdraw the information I give up to two months after the time it was collected without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question/questions I understand I am free to decline to.	
I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified in the report or reports that result from the research. I understand that the responses I give will be anonymised in any publications. I give permission for members of the research team (the project supervisors) to have access to my responses.	
I agree for the data collected from me to be used in relevant future research.	
I agree for my interview and home tour to be recorded using a digital audio recorder and for photographs to be taken of my home using a digital camera.	
I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change.	

Optional:

I agree for photographs of my home to be used in publications associated with this research.	
I agree for the anonymous data collected to be placed in a secure online data store, viewable to other researchers.	

Name of participant	
Participant's signature	
Date	
Name of researcher	
Researcher's Signature*	
Date	

*To be signed in the presence of the participant

I'd like to start today by talking to you about some photographs. I'm interested in what you think of them and what they might make you think.

Photo Elicitation

Can you describe the room shown in this picture?

- Visual – what is there in the room
- Aesthetic – what the look is

What do you think of this room?

- Do you like it? Why / why not?

What kind of person lives in this room?

- Biographical characteristics
- Personality traits

How would it feel to be in this room?

- Would you like to spend time here?
- Would you like this room in your house?

<u>**Interview Guide**</u>

Can you tell a bit about your home life, so who you live with, how long you've lived here…?

- Who do you live with?
- How long have you lived here?
- Where did you move from?
- Why did you decide to live here?

I want to talk first about the decoration of your home and the choices which you've made. Can you describe the room we're in and what it's like?

- What about the rest of your home?
- What have you done to your home to change its look? Do you have plans to make changes?
- What would your ideal home be like?
- What kind of style do you prefer – minimalist or plenty to look at?

I also want to talk about how you keep your home clean and tidy. Could you describe for me what you might do in a typical day or week?

- Spring cleaning?
- Decluttering?
- Is having a tidy home important to you?
- Does having a tidy home say anything about its occupants?

Can you tell me about the different parts of your home you have for storing things?

- Where do you store things? Do you have a cellar/attic/garage etc? What is where?
- Do you have any problems with storage at the moment? What are they? What would you change?

Would you describe your home as well organised?

- Is being organised important to you? Why / why not?
- What would a well organised home be like? Who might have a well organised home?
- Can you always find things at home?

How you would define clutter?

- Are any parts of your home cluttered? Where? Can you describe them?
- Do you plan on organising them? Can you describe how you would do that?
- Could you describe a cluttered home for me? What would it look like? How would it feel to be there?
- Who might have a cluttered home?

When was the last time you sorted out / reorganised your belongings?

- What did you do? What prompted you to do it?
- Did you get rid of anything? How did you get rid of it – tip / charity shop / bin? Why…?

(Can you tell me about redecorating?)

- Did you get new things for the property?
- Did you get rid of anything? What? How?

(Can you tell me about when your child was born?)

- Did you get new things for the property?
- Did you get rid of anything? What? How?

House Tour

I'd like for us to take a tour around your home, looking in particular at the places where you store / organise things. I'm thinking both about different rooms you might keep things, and places in rooms where you might keep things – e.g. storage furniture. Different places we could look are:

- Garage / Loft / Cellar / Shed
- Cupboard under stairs / Junk room / Utility room
- Wardrobe / Kitchen cupboards / Bookcase / Desk

I'd like to talk about and see where you keep the following different types of objects:

- Keepsakes (mementoes, souvenirs, heirlooms)
- Important things (passport, wills, financial paperwork…)
- Useful things (Sellotape, string, screwdriver, stamps…)
- Seasonal things (winter clothes, camping gear, Christmas decorations)

Photo-Elicitation Image A (Full Size)

Image Source: http://uglyhousephotos.com/ [Accessed 26 July 2016]

Photo-Elicitation Image B (Full Size)

Image Source: http://bossycolor.com/the-6-best-decorating-tricks-for-your-rental-if-you-cant-paint/ [Accessed 26 July 2016]
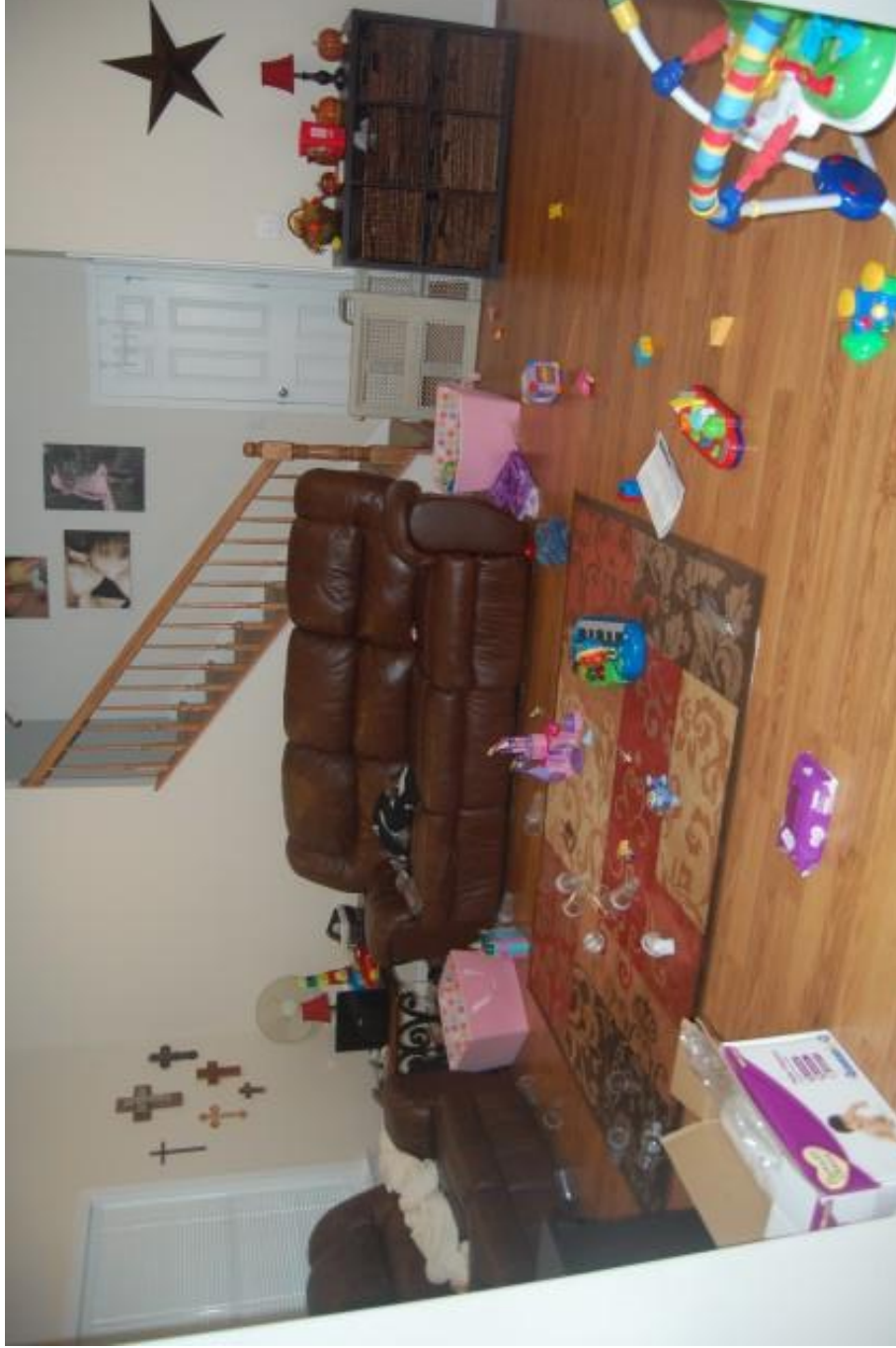
Photo-Elicitation Image C (Full Size)

Photo-Elicitation Image D (Full Size)

Image Source: http://thefrugalfreegal.com/a-peek-into-my-messy-living-room-before-and-after-photos/ [Accessed 26 July 2016]

Appendix VII.   Strand Three Methods: List of Texts Analysed

Boyle, E. 2016. *Simple Matters: Living With Less and Ending Up With More*. New York: Abrams

Chandra, S. 2010. *Banish Clutter Forever: How the Toothbrush Principle Will Change Your Life*. London: Vermillion

Hill, G. 2013. *Minimalist Living: Decluttering for Joy, Health and Creativity*. North Charleston: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform

Hoffman, R. 2016. *Unf*ck Your Habitat: You're Better than Your Mess*. London: Bluebird

Joyson, B. 2016. *Organisation: The Cognitive Truth Method: Organisation Strategies, Cleaning and Life Management*. North Charleston: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform

Kingston, K. 2008. *Clear Your Clutter With Feng Shui*. London: Piatkus

Kondo, M. 2014. *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying: A Simple, Effective Way to Banish Clutter Forever*. London: Vermillion

Kondo, M. 2017. *Spark Joy: An Illustrated Guide to the Japanese Art of Tidying*. London: Vermillion

Loreau, D. 2017. *L'art de la Simplicité: How to Live More with Less*. London: Trapeze

Silverthorn, V. 2016. *Start With Your Sock Drawer: The Simple Guide to Living a Less Cluttered Life*. London: Sphere

Wallman, J. 2015. *Stuffocation: Living More with Less*. London: Penguin

Walsh, P. 2016. *Lose the Clutter, Lose the Weight*. Emmaus: Rodale Books

Wolf, F. 2016. *New Order: A Decluttering Handbook for Creative Folks (And Everyone Else)*. New York: Ballantine Books