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A Lefebvrean perspective

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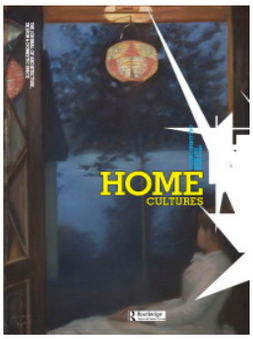

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METTE MECHLENBORG AND TOKE HAUNSTRUP CHRISTENSEN

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ABSTRACT The conceptual separation of home and work, central to the cultural history of housing in most modern westernized countries, has been blurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has introduced working from home to many households. Using Lefebvre's concept of spatiality, this paper contributes to the ethnographic investigation of how households negotiate the ambiguity of time and space at home in post-lockdown working-from-home practices. The paper shows that (1) the stronger the spatial ambiguity, the more important

METTE MECHLENBORG, SENIOR RESEARCHER AT BUILD, AALBORG UNIVERSITY: AS A RESEARCHER METTE MECHLENBORG HAS A PROFOUND KNOWLEDGE ON HOMEMAKING, HOMINESS AND HOUSING IN A CROSS INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH FIELD. SHE HAS A DEEP INTEREST IN THEORIES ON SPACE, PLACEMAKING, ESPECIALLY LEFEBVRE. SELECTED RESEARCH TOPICS ARE MICROLIVING, HOME IN DANISH HIGH RISES, SUSTAINABLE EVERYDAY LIFE PRACTICES, GENDER, DEPRIVED HOUSING AREAS ETC.

TOKE HAUNSTRUP CHRISTENSEN, SENIOR RESEARCHER AT BUILD, AALBORG UNIVERSITY: WITH A BACKGROUND WITHIN SOCIAL PRACTICE THEORY AND SOCIO-TECHNICAL STUDIES, THE RESEARCH OF TOKE HAUNSTRUP CHRISTENSEN COVERS A DIVERSE SET OF FIELDS, INCLUDING THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN EVERYDAY PRACTICES AND RESOURCE CONSUMPTION, THE INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGIES IN HOUSEHOLD PRACTICES, LEARNING, SUSTAINABLE EVERYDAY LIFE, SUFFICIENCY, AND EVERYDAY MOBILITY.

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temporal demarcation becomes, especially by the end of the workday; (2) household work is often included in work practices, and as such it bridges home and work while also keeping the homeworker "in place;" and yet (3) the domination of home also influences the way work is done, materialized, and understood. This suggests that working from home is not only a matter of flexibility and freedom, but an activity embedded in powerful spatial and temporal practices of home.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, working from home, time and space, spatial practice, Lefebvre

INTRODUCTION

Lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic forced employees around the world to work from home. By the summer of 2020, an estimated 37% of the workforce (dependent employees) in Europe who were able to work from home, did so (Sostero *et al.* 2020). In Denmark, 40% of employees worked from home regularly or from time to time during the first lockdown in the spring of 2020, a jump from 28% in 2019 (Statistics Denmark 2020). While the lockdowns and ensuing work-from-home arrangements were initially perceived as an emergent—and temporary—response to a global crisis, remote work has continued even after most countries have gone back to "normal." Firms around the world are currently adjusting their in-office work policies to favor either entirely or partially remote work—especially among white-collar, highly educated employees and knowledge producing companies—and employers in general have expressed their satisfaction with this new type of work practice (Shirmohammadi *et al.* 2022). This indicates that the lockdowns have softened the labor market's reluctance towards remote work (Neeley 2021).

Moreover, the global shift toward working from home is potentially affecting the very idea of home (Hollis 2021). This is especially the case in modern Western countries, where the separation of home and work is central to the cultural history of housing, ideally protecting private life from the hardness of the outer world (Weintraub and Kumar 1999). Though this historically idealized separation is never fully practiced, it provides insight into the major societal structures and spatial practices that frame most people's lives. According to urban historian Robert Fishman (1987), Victorian ideas on family and domesticity in late nineteenth century led to the radical separation of home and workplace. This separation turned the home into a space to which the "mental worker" of capitalism would withdraw when work and the city overwhelmed him. Home thus became a domestic world of its own

time and space, or as the German thinker Walter Benjamin (1999: 167–169) described it, a world "that was better."

In the Danish context, the separation between home and work was underscored by the Danish unions' 1919 adoption of the international motto (and movement): "Eight hours' work, eight hours' leisure, eight hours' rest" (Hendrickson 2015). The unions successfully used this pledge in their negotiations to settle a national collective work agreement, which has since divided everyday life in Danish industrial society into three temporal domains separated into two spatial domains. Within a few decades, social life became orchestrated around the collective temporal rhythm (Southerton 2003, 2020) of the industrial eight-hour working day, and with the entrainment of its temporality across social practices, a strong institutional rhythm was created (Blue 2019).

In practice, the opposition between work and home is a dichotomy (Weintraub and Kumar 1999) that masks the interaction between spatial and temporal practices—especially when it comes to working from home (hereafter WFH) and the roles, meanings, and spatial experiences this overlapping of domains (re)produces. In order to understand how home is affected when work moves in, this paper attends to the fact that spatiality is never neutral but a performative setting of meaning and embedded practices and roles. To unfold the spatial power of home (and work), the paper draws from the French thinker Henri Lefebvre's (1991) concept of space, in particular his definition of spatial practices and the embedded dichotomy between domination and appropriation. According to Wapshott and Mallet, Lefebvre's spatial thinking offers a way to grasp the ambiguity of space and time related to WFH and to reveal the ways in which practices, roles, and meanings become spatially embedded when work moves in (2011). Here, ambiguity is linked to studies of WFH and the uncertainties that arise when two different domains—work and home—overlap and result in different forms of *boundary work* (Cho and Voida 2022) or *boundary traffic* (Wethal *et al.* 2022). These are strategies that work de demarcate one domain from the other.

Our paper explores how the ambiguity of time and space is negotiated in Danish households that have been WFH at least one days a week since the end of the lockdowns. In this way, the paper contributes to the growing ethnographic research on WFH and how it might be part of an emerging, post-COVID-19 paradigmatic shift that could restructure long-established spatial practices of work and home.

The next section outlines the key elements of Lefebvre's conceptualization of spatial practices, which structures our empirical analysis, and presents the key findings of our literature review of existing studies of households' WFH experiences during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The following two sections describe our methods and then present and discuss the qualitative interviews. The paper concludes with a section summarizing our key findings.

THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

LEFEBVRE: SPATIAL PRACTICES OF DOMINATION AND APPROPRIATION—AND WFH

In his 1974 *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre (1991) describes spatial practices as the production and reproduction of spatiality. For Lefebvre, spatial practices are linked to his spatial trialectic: the empirical or perceived space; the conceived or mental space, which is where power takes its departure; and the lived space of everyday life, in which the perceived and conceived spaces merge and come to life. Spatial practices result from the ways in which a society thinks about space; that is, spatial thinking produces common practices and spatial experiences. Spatial practices are often "understood as practical perception and 'common sense'" (Shields 1998: 163). Thus, spatial practices are both a medium and the outcome of human behavior (Soja 1996). In Lefebvre's (1991: 61) own words: "From an analytical standpoint, the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its' space."

Lefebvre's concept of spatial power has to do with *domination*. Domination reveals how powerful ideas move from the mental or conceived space through the perceived space into space of everyday, lived life. That is, the conceived space will always "attempt to control, to dominate the spatial practices and therefore the lived (representational) space of users" (Wapshott and Mallet 2012: 69). However, inhabitants are not merely passive victims of this domination of space. Instead, they possess the agency to appropriate things and make them their own. *Appropriation*, therefore, represents Lefebvre's counter concept to domination. It takes place through the creative use of materiality, which is then given personal value. Thus, appropriation is a meaning-making process that "overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its object" (Lefebvre 1991: 39). As Wapshott and Mallet (2012) argue, the concepts of appropriation and domination in relation to WFH allow us to go beyond the perception of the home space as merely a passive context for the intrusion of work. By doing so, our paper wishes to explore the practices going on in relation to WFH as something that are performed in spaces of both appropriation and domination and define how WFH produces as well as reproduces certain aspects of home.

QUALITATIVE STUDIES OF THE TIME–SPACE NEGOTIATIONS OF WFH

While qualitative studies on WFH are firmly established, the number and range of inquiries accelerated during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Parsell and Pawson 2023), adding new and more nuanced layers to our understanding of WFH from an ethnographic point of view. A systematic literature review on ethnographic studies of WFH practices

and spatiality during the pandemic[1] serves to nuance the notion of remote work as a family-friendly arrangement that alters the work environment in response to employees' needs related to work–life balance (Shirmohammadi *et al.* 2022). Several studies on time–space negotiations look at families with children, and while studies on single-parent families and individuals who live alone are rare, some studies suggest that these households also struggle with the ambiguity of WFH (see Giles and Onescu 2021).

The digitalization of remote work and new technological work practices dominate many studies, and several explore the importance of digital technologies and practices in participants' transformations of their homes into workplaces (Maalsen and Dowling 2020; Cuerdo-Vilches *et al.* 2021b; Lark 2022; and more). Watson *et al.* (2021) show how the space and time of home and work constantly "tilt" into each other, often coexisting uncomfortably, and they introduce the concepts of re-domestication and "spectral modalities" (see also Maalsen and Dowling 2020; Lark 2022). The studies generally suggest that women find it most difficult to manage the relationship between work and family life (Cannito and Scavarda 2020; Beno 2021; Cockayne 2021; Craig and Churchill 2021). As women tend to do more informal housework, this results in "an unideal merger of their personal and professional spaces, disrupting any harmony that these mothers were working so tirelessly to achieve" (Burk *et al.* 2021: 229). Several studies (e.g., Dawes *et al.* 2021; Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta *et al.* 2021) conclude that power structures between partners "are reproduced through an unequal negotiation of space and time in the home, so that in practice, men's work was prioritized in spatio-temporal terms, whereas women's workspace and time was more fragmented and dispersed throughout the home and day" (Waismel-Manor *et al.* 2021: 636). For instance, in a study of how people in Vienna, Austria reordered their homes during lockdowns, Azevedo *et al.* (2022) find that men more often than women had their own working space, while women typically worked next to their children. This indicates that the pandemic in many ways reproduced, reinforced, or even clarified existing gender differences at home (see also Waismel-Manor *et al.* 2021; Reimann et al. 2021).

On a theoretical level, qualitative studies often define the negotiations of WFH as "boundaries of home" (Risi *et al.* 2021), "boundary work" (Cho and Voida 2022) or "boundary traffic" (Wethal *et al.* 2022), drawing on conceptualizations from Nippert-Eng's (2008, 2010) work signifying the ambiguity of space–time and the pressure it puts on household members. With some exceptions (e.g., Wapshott and Mallet 2012; Azevedo *et al.* 2022; Wethal *et al.* 2022), most studies tend to focus on temporal boundary work, perceiving the spatial context mainly as a background setting, in which virtuality and activities are displayed and lived out. By contrast, however, several studies show that the performance of and satisfaction with WFH practices are also a matter of material arrangements and the ability to withdraw to a place without

noise and interruptions (Sostero *et al.* 2020; Allen *et al.* 2021; Berniell and Fernandez 2021; Cuerdo-Vilches *et al.* 2021a; Azevedo *et al.* 2022; Mayer and Boston 2022). Shirmohammadi *et al.* (2022) find a paradox between expectations of WFH being space flexible (i.e., a mobile activity) and the actual experience of WFH as bound to material constraints and settings (see also Akuoko *et al.* 2021). Our paper takes a special interest in the spatial implications of WFH, understanding space not as just an empty container (see also Tietze 2002) but as a powerful context of meanings, embedded practices, and roles that works both productively and counterproductively with material work arrangements and boundary work.

METHODS

The main empirical data in this paper come from Danish homeworkers' stories about their everyday lives with WFH and the spatial and temporal implications and meanings that arise from these stories. To collect stories, we used qualitative, semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann and Kvale 2014) focusing on our informants' everyday lives. In the analysis, we relate these everyday descriptions and considerations to concepts and theories previously described within the field of WFH and time–space negotiations. In other words, we aimed to find the patterns and structures of homeworkers' experiences of material culture, boundaries, domesticity, roles, and negotiations concerning spatiality. Our thesis is that these patterns of spatial practices may reveal new insights into home as a spatial setting where the perceived, the conceived and lived life of domestic space are entangled according to Lefebvre.

As the interviews focused on home practices, we also include concepts from home and housing research, particularly in relation to the time and space of the home (Douglas 1991), everyday practices (Southerton 2020), and the material culture of home (Després 1991; Mallett 2004). These concepts underscore that home is not a neutral container of practices but a space where the power of appropriation is already embedded in the very notion of home. As Lefebvre defines the lived space, it is characterized as "an affective kernal (noyau) or centre: Ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling, house; or; square, church, graveyard" (1991: 43).

The interview guide followed a semi-structured design, allowing us to adapt the questions continuously depending on the interview context and the informant's specific situation and practices. The interview guide was divided into three sections, all focusing on households' negotiations of time and space related to WFH: (1) WFH during lockdowns and after the pandemic; (2) the household's reflection on how WFH has influenced their everyday lives and time–space perceptions; and (3) a detailed walk through of an average workday at home, similar to Spradley's (1979) "grand tour" method. The last part of the interview included taking photos to document the rooms and places in the home

that were particularly relevant to the organization of WFH and its effect on everyday life. The picture exercise had two purposes: First, it was part of the spatial analysis of WFH, documenting where these practices actually take place, and exploring how domestic space both enables and are effected by WFH practices. Second, the intention with the photo exercise was to spur more embedded information and specific spatial or practical experiences of everyday practices that more conventional interviews may not reveal. Within visual anthropology photo elicitation is used dig into more bodily experiences and by focusing on something other than the interview between the researcher and the information it can help "bridging gaps between the worlds of the researcher and the researched" (Harper 2002: 15).

Informants were recruited based on basis of the following criteria: (1) little or no experience with WFH before the pandemic; (2) working from home at least one day a week on average after the pandemic; (3) variety in urban context (city, suburb, and countryside); (4) more than one gender; and (5) household variation (families, couples, singles). The informants all have knowledge jobs that made it possible from them to work from home, but for various reasons they had not been practicing WFH regularly before the lockdowns during 2020 to 2022. It is a central observation in our study that the length and repetition of the lockdowns have been a turning point for several informants concerning attitudes and experiences with WFH. Another contributing factor has been the digitalization of work practices by companies and workplaces that also made it possible for people to work from home (Table 1).

A few comments should be made on limitations. First, with the exception of two homeworkers, Kenny and John, we recruited mostly privileged, academic informants. This resulted from our snowball recruitment technique and the fact that this group is overrepresented in the segment of workforce that is able and given the possibility to work from home. Second, while we included two single households, including one single homosexual cis-man, the remaining households comprised cis-gendered binary couples. We acknowledge that gender is a strong aspect of WFH studies; however, due to the small number of informants and the limited gender variance of the sample, it is not a primary focus of this analysis.

All in all, we conducted, recorded, and transcribed eight 1.5-h interviews. We then subjected the transcriptions to "thick description" (Ponterotto 2006). In this process, we selected central quotes and observations and then categorized them into themes and sub-themes. In this process we also used the photos that were taken as part of the collected data. Thus, the quotes presented in this paper are representatives of a larger data set. The photos are selected to underscore the spatial implications of WFH. All informants in this paper have been anonymized, and they all signed a declaration of consent prior to the interview.

Table 1. Informants in our study.

Name	Context	Household	WFH practice	WFH arrangements
Sarah	House in suburb	Couple with two teenagers	Normally has two home days, but currently her husband is unemployed, so she sometimes prefers her work office over home.	Sarah normally sits in an open home office/living room next to a larger living room and the kitchen. She prefers to sit here even if she has a basement remote from the social life of her family.
Runa	House in suburb	Couple with children	Works at home at least one day a week, maximum two.	Runa normally sits in her kitchen. Sometimes she withdraws to a corner of her bedroom to be away from noise and interruptions.
Sunny	Apartment in urban setting	Lives alone and not in a relationship	Works from home at least one day a week.	Prefers to sit in the kitchen, even though he could sit permanently in the bedroom where there is room for a workstation.
Morten	Apartment in urban center	Couple with 1-year-old baby	Works from home 1–2 days a week.	Has a home office, which he only uses for work.
Kenny	House in suburb	Couple with two young children	Works at home 2–3 days a week.	Kenny uses a home office next to the backdoor for work. He leaves his home office for breaks.
Agnes	House in rural area	Couple with two teenagers	Works from home 1–2 days a week.	Agnes has a home office with a glass door so the family can see if she is home or not. But they respect her privacy when the door is closed.

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Name	Context	Household	WFH practice	WFH arrangements
Thomas	House in rural area	Couples with two minor children	Works from home 2–3 days a week. Would love to work more from home.	Normally, Thomas works in his bed in the bedroom with the door closed (which the children generally respect). His wife is a stay-at-home mother, and the children are home-schooled.
John	Apartment in urban setting	Lives alone and not in a relationship	Works from home 1–2 days a week.	When working, John always sits at a small table in the bedroom of his grownup daughter (who visits him only on weekends).

FINDINGS: THE SPATIAL PRACTICES AND APPROPRIATION OF TIME AND SPACE IN WFH

Lefebvre considers spatial practice to be people's perceived space, that is, the repetitive routines of empirical spaces and the interconnected networks of movements and flows. All homeworkers in our study described how, during the three lockdowns, they had developed routines that simulated "an average day" with recognizable work sessions, arrangements, breaks, activities, and repetitions that made one WFH day resemble the next. As such, they had moved from an emergency form of practice during the first lockdowns (see also Cho and Voida 2022) to slowly establishing WFH spatial practices. This meant that they had stopped perceiving WFH as a sort of day off where the appreciated qualities of home life dominated work practices. One informant, Morten, explained: "Earlier WFH was a 'little treat to myself.' [I was] lying on the couch in at-home clothes and had my computer on my belly. Today, it resembles a regular workday." The deciphering of these regular workdays and their spatial practices is central to our findings. We also analyzed the common conflicts, insecurities, and mixed feelings that existed beneath the domination of the homeworkers' spatial practices. This means that the homeworkers in our study also mobilized criticism towards the same spatial practices that they themselves administered, produced, and found comfort in.

THE NORMATIVE TEMPORALITY OF WFH

A common feature in the stories of our homeworkers was the introduction of worktime. Despite individual interpretations, pointing to factors such as personal lifestyle, gender, family type, and age, the homeworkers had all integrated work into their homes through a normative temporal demarcation. This meant that they kept work in its place by keeping almost the same work hours as when going to the office, firm, or workshop. First, this allowed homeworkers to be (digitally) present with colleagues or available for online meetings (Maalsen and Dowling 2020; Lark 2022). In addition, it corresponded to the spatial rhythms of the home, especially in households with spouses or children who left home in the morning and returned in the afternoon. In both ways, we found that the socio-temporal rhythms of institutionalized work time (Blue 2019; Southerton 2020) provided a way for homeworkers to gain control over the ambiguity of WFH. As Sunny, a single man, told us, he became stressed and mentally ill during the lockdown due to the lack of spatial and temporal structures: "Under the pandemic everything blurred. And I worked way too much. That made me realize that I needed to separate work time and my private life."

Often, integrating the rhythms of the working day into the home domain dominated homeworkers' entire day, even if it means less flexibility. Kenny, for instance, ate his lunch at 11 am as he normally did at work, even though it did not correspond well with the lunch hours of his children, who were homeschooled during the lockdowns. For others, like Agnes, work time completely took over her day, and she often forgot to make herself a sandwich or take a break. Also, in many cases, breaks were mainly used to carry out domestic duties and obligations, traditionally defined as informal household work: doing the laundry, tidying the home, mowing the lawn, or emptying the washing machine, for example. Alternatively, breaks were used for essential activities that would normally be done on a day off or after work, such as picking up packages from the post office, going to the doctor, driving kids to the dentist, or doing tax registration. Paradoxically, homeworkers perceived their informal tasks during breaks as personal choices and personally fulfilling. They used words like "flexibility," "freedom," and the ability to balance work and life more equally (Morten, Sarah, Runa). As Kenny stated: "When you have a break, you can tidy up the kitchen or something else. That's freedom […] this is what you do, working from home: You also do practical stuff." However, the appropriation of WFH—which, according to Lefebvre's concepts, is surely at stake here—was not only a creative interpretation of tasks, in which empowered homeworkers used their freedom to conduct their everyday lives as they wished. To Sarah, a mother to two teenagers, WFH also meant the ability to compensate for long work hours: "Normally, my husband walks the dog, but when I'm working at home, I do it. Then I get some fresh air, and I also take some responsibility for things at home."

Even recreational activities—such as going for a run or reading the newspaper during lunch—were explained as purpose-driven activities that in the end contributed to a better and more effective workday. Maintaining discipline in one's daytime activities, including during breaks, differs from the former perception of WFH as a lazy day at home. As such, it shows how homeworkers developed practices that, on the one hand, structured their work day by keeping them "in place," and, on the other hand, contributed to their idea of a better home life.

SOFT BEGINNINGS AND HARD ENDINGS

All homeworkers had developed rituals to mark the transition from home life to work life and vice versa. While mornings were often perceived as temporal "soft spots" for flexible appropriation, the endings were crucial "hard spots" in which the ambiguity of time and space related to WFH was most evident.

In the morning, the transition rituals—or "ordering practices" (Azevedo *et al.*, 2022)—were spatially bound to home offices, workstations, or preferred places in the home and involved tasks such as plugging in the mobile computer, checking work emails, and reviewing the day's tasks. However, the transition from work to homelife in the afternoon was often subject to conflict and anxiety. Workers without children especially—but not exclusively—expressed the need for a more clear and consistent demarcation in time and space of the end of the workday. For households with children, endings were a collective and often gendered negotiation.[2] To Sarah, her workday was a conflict between the spatial and temporal nearness of her family and her work, both of which demanded her presence: "When the clock strikes 4 or 5 pm, there is an atmosphere [in the house] that the working day is now over. Then you can no longer demand silence in the house. It is such a culture that we have agreed on—then family life begins." Time was an important element in Sarah's negotiation of the work transition, and it switched from pro-work to pro-family late in the afternoon. Some of the homeworkers, namely those who were more or less alone at home during the afternoon (living alone or with older children), had developed rituals involving a gradual transition from work to home life. John stopped working slightly before the end of his workday and moved from his home office to the living room to "watch a little TV" and relax or prepare dinner, but he kept the computer turned on so that he could hear calls coming in (on the computer): "I need to be available…," he said, while transitioning the work domain into a home domain through the re-introduction of homely practices.

These transition stories tell us that home is anchored not only spatially but also temporally. The cultural and historical expectations embedded in the home as a space of leisure, intimacy, and relaxation (Mallet 2004; Silverstone 2012) collide spatially and temporally with

work late in the afternoon, when the common workday is over. The temporal rhythms of work and home put pressure on the spatial ambiguity of homework. Some homeworkers would leave their homes to demonstrate to themselves the crossing of one spatiality to the other (e.g., walk the dog, go to the gym, buy groceries, pick up the children), while others had introduced rituals to mark the transition. Morten, who had a home office, would symbolically register his hours at the end of the workday, something he only did while working at home. Kenny had difficulty ending his workday, and it often took him an hour to finish. To compensate for the temporal ambiguity, Kenny practiced a strictly spatial demarcation in which he stopped using his home office for home activities. In fact, after the pandemic, he never entered his home office after work hours. His office had entirely transformed into a space he associated with work. A third example was Agnes, who claimed she did not need a strong demarcation. However, she also recognized that this had made her more ambivalent about her work practices. On the one hand, she enjoyed the ability to work at home in the evenings and on weekends; on the other hand, she acknowledged that work also sneaked in *via* her work phone while she was watching TV and relaxing with her family. The ambivalence of demarcation, personal interpretations, and home expectations shows that the contest between work and home constantly leaves home space in a transformation that by no means is simple or final, but always potential present (Lefebvre 1991: 165–166; see also Wapshott and Mallet 2012).

MATERIALITY AND THE APPROPRIATION OF SPACE

A fundamental aspect of the nature of (social) space is that "[n]o space ever vanishes utterly, leaving no trace" because "each new addition inherits and reorganizes what has gone before" (Lefebvre 1991: 164). Working from home leaves traces of materiality and practices that change the production of home and therefore also the spatial practices inherited in the reproduction of this spatiality.

Technical equipment had been installed in home offices (Kenny, Agnes, Morten, Sarah), or it was left daily in the corner of the kitchen floor (Runa; see Figure 1), behind the couch in the living room (Sunny), or randomly in computer bags on tables or floors. As another example of material arrangements, Runa normally worked in the kitchen. Every morning, she took out her printer, laptop, wires, and stacks of board games which she used to lift her laptop from the table for ergonomic purposes (see Figure 1). Runa's husband had made her an interim table in her meditation corner in their bedroom, where she would go if there was too much noise or too many interruptions in the kitchen and she needed to concentrate (Figure 2).

While these two different workstations offered Runa different kinds of privacy while working at home, the work equipment in the kitchen and in their bedroom/meditation corner also turned her private home into a

Figure 1. Every morning working-from-home Runa stacks board games on the kitchen table. Respond/ BUILD, AAU with the courtesy of informant.

permanent visual reminder that work was always close, always accessible. A reminder that not only Runa lived with, but also her family, who also had to accept that their home suddenly included a workspace.

For Thomas, who normally spent his entire workday in his bed (Figure 3), the bed had a double meaning—as both a workspace and a private space—strongly dependent on expectations and time. He used the bed even though there were more suited spots in his home, like dinner table or children's room, for working with the computer, but Thomas felt that it was cozier in his bed.

Thus, practices constantly add new layers to spaces, and these alterations are never neutral but come with the performative power of change. For homes with dedicated home office spaces, the symbolic boundary between work and home may seem impenetrable, as in the

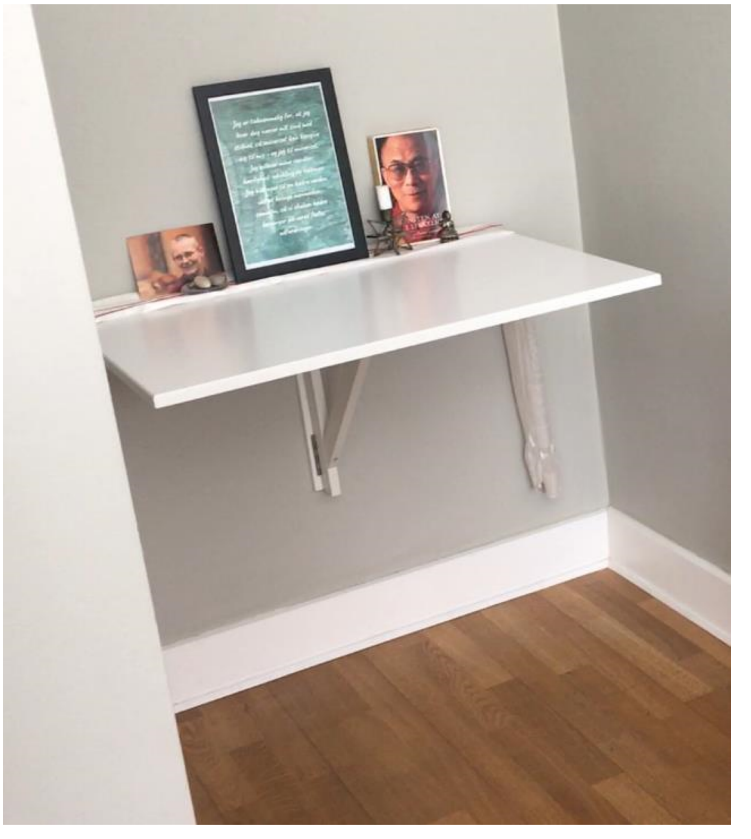

Figure 2. Runa's meditation corner in her bedroom is also used for work that demands concentration. @ Respond/ BUILD, AAU with the courtesy of informant.

case of Kenny, but it could also be more permeable or even collapse at the end of the workday or on weekends, showing how spatiality dynamically changes over time and with different bodily, mental, and symbolic negotiations of domination (Lefebvre 1991).

Homeworkers also appropriated the spatial blurring of space while working from home through their material negotiation that "overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its object," as described by Lefebvre (1991: 39). To our surprise, several homeworkers in our study worked from central locations in the home, where, according to them, it was best to sit—that is, it had a nice view of the garden, access to daylight, or was a well-designed room (see also Morales-Bravo and Navarrete-Hernandez 2022 on daylight during WFH). They preferred these places over otherwise more functional places, such as the bedroom (Sune, Runa) or the basement, where one could close the door and be alone. Sarah explained: "In fact, I could move down to the basement, where it is completely quiet, and I am physically away from the family. But it's nice to sit in the living room, and nice to hear the

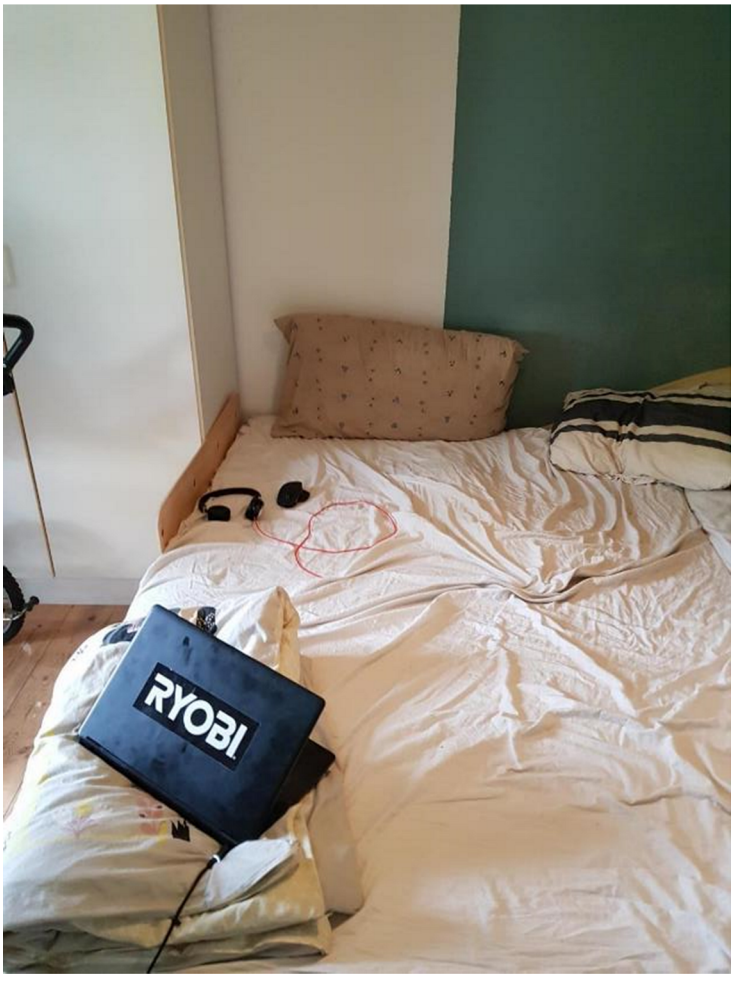

Figure 3. Thomas spends his entire workday at home in his bed. @ Respond/ BUILD, AAU with the courtesy of informant.

others." She added: "There is an ambivalence in shutting out family life when you work at home." By deliberately choosing to be in proximity to her family while WFH, Sarah accepted a certain ambiguity of space. The closeness of her family also brought home life closer to her work. Her appropriation of this ambivalence is a form of resistance to the domination of work, that is, a way of appropriating a non-homey domain (work) within the home (Figure 4).

In addition, we noticed that a negotiation over "office equipment" took place in several homes. This negotiation started during the first and second lockdowns, during which many Danish workplaces provided office equipment to their workers: computers, keyboards, printers, cables, computer screens, mouse pads, headphones, mobile phones, as well as height-adjustable tables and office chairs. While the digital

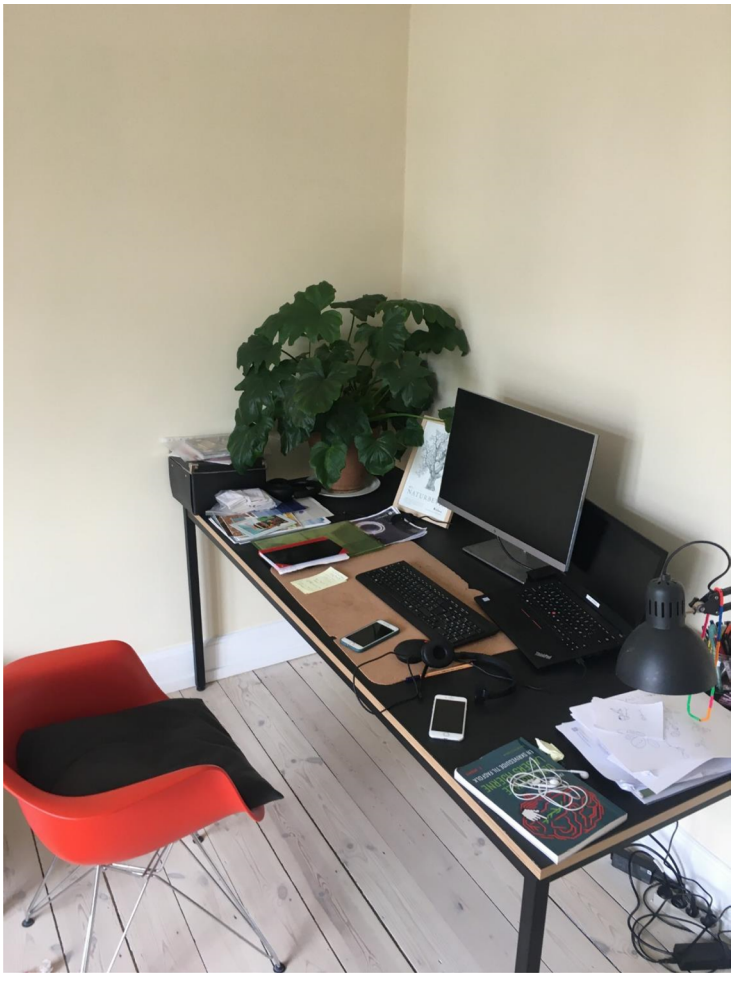

Figure 4. In most cases homeworkers did not allow office furniture into their homes even though it was offered or more ergonomic. Respond/BUILD, AAU with the courtesy of informant.

technologies were easily incorporated into the home, very few homeworkers in our study accepted the full package of office furniture, even if it would have been ergonomically much better than the equipment homeworkers had access to in their homes. For some, like Runa, the argument had to do with size; for others, like Agnes (as well as Sunny, Morten, Sarah, and John), the office furniture aesthetic did not align with her personal aesthetic: "I would never use a height-adjustable table, it's so ugly. Even if it is ergonomic. My eyes hurt, as I normally would say." Morten also thought that height-adjustable tables were "monstrous," and he mentioned that the office chair he had brought home during the first lockdown had "disappeared" after the last lockdown due to its unfit design. While work purposes can potentially dominate the home and everyday life through powerful spatial

practices, the spatial perceptions, cultural meanings, and practices of home allow homeworkers to appropriate core objects, such as tables, chairs, and material arrangements. The material negotiation of objects, aesthetics, and the interior—as revealed by the stories of "monstrous chairs"—shows that the home is also "a container for material possessions that are meaningful to each household member" and that "these objects [are] concrete embodiments of different aspects of their personalities" (quoted in Després 1991). From a more critical perspective, however, these negotiations also open up the possibility of another interpretation of the appropriation of work through the spatial setting of home, namely that the home itself is also dominated by powerful perceptions of individuality and personal freedom that force users to act in a certain way.

CONCLUSION

This paper has aimed to contribute to ethnographic studies on the implications of WFH post-COVID-19 by investigating negotiations of spatial practices in home. In particular, we have examined the transformative aspects of work–home separation and the underlying powerful structure of space, roles, and practices when inviting work into domestic spaces.

According to Lefebvre (1991), societal spaces like work and home are historically produced and reproduced through ideas, normative spatial practices, and user appropriation. The pandemic lockdowns changed global work practices and could be seen as disruptions that opened cracks in the trialectic of space (Lefebvre 1991; Soja 1996). While studies have shown that digitalization (Watson *et al.* 2021), boundary work and practice ordering (Azevedo *et al.* 2022; Cho and Voida 2022; Wethal *et al.* 2022), social life (Beno 2021; Craig and Churchill 2021), gender (Waismel-Manor *et al.* 2021), and the size and spatial organization of the dwelling (Akuoko *et al.* 2021) are all relevant for the normalization of WFH, our study reveals that the power of home and the introduction of spatial practices in which work and home overlap are important components. At least for the homeworkers in our study, who voluntarily had adapted at least one workday a week to WFH post-Covid-19. The limited number of informants and their homogenous socio-demographic and work profile must be noted.

Our study revealed that post-COVID-19 homeworkers had developed practices of WFH during the three lockdowns in which they individually resided and used as a structure into which they could lean in, but also a structure that the from time to time resisted, compromised, and appropriated. Therefore, the informants in our study were able to give an account of what they perceived as an average day of WFH, in which essential negotiations of time and space between work and home were generally smooth, rehearsed, and embedded in the everyday practices of home. Thus, a summary of the norms and activities that cut across our interviews—including differences in age, gender, household,

housing form, and work—draws a picture of WFH as a normalized spatial practice. While these practices had been learned over a long period (of lockdowns), the same informants would also object to their own spatial practices or reveal various tactics that undermined their own stories of spatial practices. Four features were deciphered:

First, all homeworkers negotiated the space–time ambiguity of WFH. Temporality in general seemed to be the easiest way to demarcate the work domain from the home domain. In fact, all homeworkers had introduced workday norms that resembled those of a regular workday at the workplace. Domestic tasks and informal household work were often included as a way to bridge the domains of home and work, while also keeping the homeworker "in place." Informants described these purpose-driven activities during breaks as acts of personal freedom and flexibility. Thus, they perceived them as examples of the appropriation of work life. Yet, these spatial practices also reflected the more common socio-temporal rhythm of everyday life at the societal level, which points to work as an entity that is produced and reproduced through institutionalized rhythms: Work is worktime, even in a home setting, through the discipline of home workers.

Second, the transition from one domain to another, especially from work to home, involved a strict negotiation of the time–space ambiguity, often involving rituals (e.g., registering work hours) or symbolic actions (e.g., walking the dog, leaving the house, moving to another room in the home). In general, temporal demarcations compensated for a strong spatial ambiguity. However, the opposite was also practiced. Kenny, for example, had stopped using his home office for activities other than work after he started working from home on a more permanent basis. In both cases, our study shows that the societal rhythms of everyday life put pressure on individuals when there is little to no time and space transition between work and home. Thus, individual negotiations bring freedom to WFH practitioners, but they also threaten to destroy the structure of everyday life and potentially the home itself.

Third, when work moves in, it leaves material traces in the home and reorganizes the spatiality of perception, use, and performativity, including after work hours: Laptops, printers, keyboards, and office chairs are left, stored, and integrated as the "misplaced" material culture of home, adding to the practical and constant blurring of work/life, outside/inside, and public/private boundaries, while at the same time challenging the ideal of the home as remote/detached from work and public life. Our study found that homey spaces had been reorganized, temporarily or permanently, opening up an ongoing negotiation of use and activities, not only by homeworkers but also their household members. Thus, the physical intrusion of work is not only material but also brings with it the associated mental, emotional, and social aspects of negotiation to the households that must learn to live with work (Lefebvre 1991; Nippert-Eng 1996; Wapshott and Mallet 2012).

Finally, using Lefebvre's spatial trialectic, we are able to see that the home is not an empty container but a powerful space that also tries to dominate the material facilities, temporal and spatial coordination, and boundary work. Thus, work is not only an intrusion that inserts and adds meanings and associations to the spatiality of home. Home also intrudes upon work and its associated meanings, practices, and roles. Homeworkers in our study resisted the institutionalized work equipment and being at home left the impression that homeworkers were less "on," as Sarah puts it. Several homeworkers also benefitted from the private corners of meditation (Runa) or beds, while approaching work with concentration and devotion. Thus, both work and home are altered when materiality overlaps and spatial practices collide.

The idea of domination and appropriation in connection with WFH raises the question of whether socio-temporal rhythms (Blue 2019; Southerton 2020) can be transformed merely by changing the spatial scene and adding spatial ambiguity to its core. To Lefebvre, domination in twentieth century Western societies is mostly driven by capitalism (see also Soja 1996), which tries to eliminate and flatten differences, conflicts, and peculiarities in relation to the monetary economy, consumer goods, and material value proposition of what he defined as "[t]he spectacular primacy of the conceived" (1991: 33–34). From this perspective, the perceived freedom that the interviewed homeworkers described as flexibility and personal pleasure—and which altered the material culture of work through the spatiality of home—may turn out to be illusory, that is, just another example of the domination of capitalism through spatial work practices in home environments. This perspective adds to already established arguments of manual and technological surveillance and control by the workspace by Wapshott and Mallet (2012) and others (see also Halford 2005). However, the performative nature and re-installation of home as the opposite of work after the workday ends or in spatially demarcated corners and rooms also show how powerful home is.

NOTES

1. The search was executed in Scopus in November 2022 using the following search string: (COVID OR pandemic) AND ("working from home" OR "work from home" OR "remote work" OR "home office") AND (architecture OR "interior design" OR space OR "interior design" OR spatial). To supplement this search, we also conducted a qualitative desk study to find studies not covered by the systematic review.
2. Studies suggest that female homeworkers with children tend to think about family life more than work life, while male homeworkers do the opposite (see also Craig 2020, Graig et al., 2021, Waismel-Manor *et al*. 2021). Our study, however, was less conclusive.

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