Book Review

Jenny Kennedy, Michael Arnold, Martin Gibbs, Bjorn Nansen, and Rowan Wilken, *Digital Domesticity: Media, Materiality, and Home Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020; 329 pp. ISBN: 9780190905798, £25.99.

When MSN Messenger first emerged in the late 1990s some Australian parents were concerned by this strange way of socialising. However, as the years passed parents' perceptions of this technology and what it enabled had radically shifted: children were encouraged to use the technology so that they would 'fit in' with their peers. It is these sorts of domestic transformations that the authors explore in this fascinating and empirically rich volume. Different periods of digital domesticities are described here based on three projects undertaken by the authors beginning in the early 2000s: 'wired homes', followed by 'connected homes' and finally that of 'high speed broadband' some fifteen years later. These eras correspond to such things as home offices and desktop computing, proceeded by mobile devices and Wi-Fi and then streaming services and ubiquitous connection. The studies were conducted in a variety of domestic contexts around the Melbourne area deploying various ethnographic methods. The result is a story of domestic change that foregrounds the growing digitisation of home life. The story told in this antipodean setting is comparable to other similar domestic contexts across the globe.

But this is not just a narrative about technological change. Simultaneously revealed are the effects that social relations and personhood in the home had in how the analysts understood the devices that people engaged with or refused to engage with.

The book's argument draws on two bodies of theory in order to interpret its detailed finding. One is the 'domestication approach' that first emerged in the early 1990s when information and communication technologies (ICT) became a single object of study. This is a model used to examine how the social dynamics and spatial arrangements of the household 'domesticate' ICTs as well as how ICTs reconfigure the dynamics and arrangements of domestic spaces. The second approach is that of media ecology. In this case the focus is on the interconnectedness of ICTs that configures and stabilises a cultural environment, a kind of domestic ecology.

Each chapter explores aspects of this domesticating process but is always attentive to the particular ecology in which this occurs. Importantly, though, how technologies are spatially positioned and temporally contained discloses the centrality of social relations. In the chapter on 'Appropriations', for example, parents place the TV in a particular room so as not to 'lose' the kids and consciously designate weekend time as one for cutting off from technologies. What is known as 'digital housekeeping' – the work involved in setting up and maintaining home networks – mobilises social relations and forms of expertise to particular effects. The same holds true regarding access to digital devices such as mobile phones and iPads: one's age and status as a person is marked through these kind of acquisitions. At the same time, previous forms of communication technology, such as letter writing is still valued in contrast to email which lacks the intimacy and personality of this 'older' technique of conversing.

Fundamentally, *Digital Domesticity* demonstrates that what is current – whether it is kinds of ICTs or manners of social relating – are inextricably framed by such past forms and possible futures. What the authors evocatively capture are particular moments of domestic dwelling that for a time appear and feel as new but are continually on the cusp of something newer.Eric HirschBrunel University London

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