**Home-Being: Creating Dwelling in the Digital Age**

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https://doi.org/10.34737/x04q0

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# Home-Being:
# *Creating Dwelling* in the Digital Age

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A thesis submitted to the Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI) at the
University of Westminster in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, London, September 2024

# Abstract

This thesis explores the interrelation between the experience of *creation* and *inhabitation* in the context of dwellers' experience of home renovation with social media. Contributing to the contemporary discussion about media–life entanglement in our digitally saturated world, I draw on Heidegger's (1951/1971b) notions of *building* and *dwelling,* and his assertion that "to build is in itself already to dwell" (p. 144) by considering it from a participatory perspective. Through a phenomenological ethnography of *renovation diaries* and *home accounts* of dwellers – who create both their palpable house as well as a place on Instagram – I explore the meanings of this *entanglement* between experiences of *creation* and *inhabitation* for enabling a sense of *nearness and dwelling* in the digital age. Thus, I consider how the modern separation between the role of the user and the producer is challenged in the experience of the *dweller-creator,* which brings together objectivity and subjectivity, work and home, professionalism and amateurism and experiences of creation and inhabitation into correspondence through a caring active engagement. Exploring the practice of home creation with digital media as something that goes beyond the creation of content *on* and *for* social media platforms, I suggest the concept of *creation-in-the-world* to consider the role of media in functioning as a gathering force that can bring people nearer to others, to the material world and to themselves. Thus, in an era that is often perceived as a deterministic drifting in an open and undifferentiated flow of digital information, this thesis posits that media, when used as part of practices of *creation-in-the-world*, can contribute to people's sense of *dwelling* and the constitution of responsive places by enhancing the relation between experiences of creation and inhabitation. This approach holds that building and dwelling are never finished but are rather ever-evolving experiences that are inherently part of our existence, and our relatedness to the world and others in a specific place and time.

# Acknowledgements

Doing this PhD for the past seven years while also bringing my two little boys into the world during a global pandemic has been a slow and often unsettling process. I am deeply grateful to those who supported me in this creation process and allowed it to happen.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my wonderful supervisors, Tarik Sabry and Claire McAndrew, whose care, wisdom and support have been invaluable. To Tarik, my director of studies, who assumed this role in the middle of my PhD journey and by that reinforced my belief that the serendipitous ways in which life unfolds can bring with it the most marvellous surprises, thank you. I am grateful for your generous and inspiring guidance and reassurance as I walked my first steps in the world of Heidegger's philosophy. Your scholarly mentorship, insights and encouragement have been vital for the development of my ideas and my experience as a researcher. My thanks also go to Claire, for your unwavering commitment from the early days of my application until the end of this project, for not giving up on me during this long haul, and for the kind and rigorous comments, insightful advice, immaculate attention to detail and for showing me the craftsmanship of academic work.

I am also sincerely grateful to my examiners, Mark Deuze and Anastasia Denisova, for their time, thoughtful feedback and engaging discussion during my viva.

To Anthony McNicholas and Alessandro D'Arma, the previous and current directors of the CAMRI PhD programme at the University of Westminster, thank you for supporting me during the changing circumstances of this PhD project. And to David Gauntlett, Neal White and Anastasia Kavada, who were also part of this ride, I give my thanks. A special thanks goes to Paddy Scannell for kindly agreeing to read an early draft of part of my work and sharing his thoughts with me. My PhD was funded by the Quintin Hogg Trust University of Westminster Research Studentship Award, and I am grateful for this generous support. I would also like to thank Simon Watmough for proofreading and copy editing this manuscript.

Completing this thesis would not have been possible without the love, care and support of my friends and family. To my mum and dad, Smadar and Amazia Yeger, I am forever grateful for your unconditional love and faith in me since the day I was born and for your encouragement and

reassurance throughout my creation experiences over the years, however unconventional they might have seemed at times. I hope that you could come back home soon. To my grandparents, who have not been here for decades but continue to be with me in my thoughts and in my heart: Thank you for showing me in your actions, your caring dedication to the home and garden, and for believing in me. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my friend Adi Goldiner, who suggested I pursue this PhD and reminded me along the way that this goal is achievable, even while being a mum. And my thanks go as well to Yael and Tal Marian for giving me a place to think and write in their home.

My deepest gratitude and debt go to my partner and my co-creator in life – Roni. Words cannot describe the love and dedication you showed in reading every word I wrote, taking our boys to endless playgrounds and parks so that I could write, and believing in me even when I had doubts. I love you. And to my sons, Dori and Alex, the locus of my care, my home, my world – thank you for waiting patiently for mummy to finish this mammoth task and to come back to spend more time with you. Thank you as well for showing me the world through the curious, sensitive and inquisitive eyes and hearts of those who were born into life in the digital age.

Finally, my enduring thanks go to Ali, Claire, Leanne, Bianca, Martina and Kate, the *dwellers-creators* who shared their experiences with me and allowed me to tell their stories of building and dwelling.

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*Chapter One*

# Introduction: Building and Dwelling with Social Media

In recent years, the rise of social media has transformed many areas, including the ways in which people are participating in the design and building of their physical homes. Platforms such as Pinterest, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube are increasingly a part of home renovation processes. This thesis explores the enhanced engagement of dwellers in shaping their domestic environment through social media as an existential experience of home creation, which is viewed as part of the way in which human beings dwell in the world.

Drawing on Heidegger's existential phenomenology (1927/2019) and specifically on his later essays *Building Dwelling Thinking* (1951/1971b) and *The Thing* (1950/1971c), the *home* is viewed in this thesis as an ever-evolving living place/thing that *dwellers-creators* care-for, and not as a static object. By focusing on the experiences of *dwellers-creators* who share their home creation process on Instagram *home accounts* and *renovation diaries,* I explore how the entanglements between media and material things affect the way people experience meaningful connections and a sense of *nearness* to themselves, to others, to and to the world around them.

At the heart of Heidegger's concept of *dwelling* is the notion that "[w]hen we inhabit something, it is no longer an object for us but becomes part of us and pervades our relation to other objects in the world" (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 45). Employing Heidegger's existential idea of *dwelling* as a way of *being-in-the-world* within the specific context of the experience of home creation with social media raises the questions: how do *homes* become something that people *inhabit* or *dwell in,* in a deep Heideggerian sense? That is, how do people come to experience their homes not merely as objects but rather as something that is part of them and pervades their relation to other objects, people and places in the world? Or, in other words, part of their fundamental human experience of *being-in-the-world*? To consider these questions we also need to consider the issue of what exactly the homes and places we inhabit in an all-encompassing world in the digital age are.

Before delving into the theoretical backdrop (chapters 2–3) and the phenomenological ethnography (chapters 4–7) – this introduction sets the stage for the exploration of dwellers' experience of home creation with social media by telling my personal story of *building and dwelling with social media* as a precursor to this research. This first-person exploration[1] is inspired by similar approaches both within phenomenological research (e.g., Seamon, 2000a) and ethnographic enquiry such as autoethnography (e.g., Adams, Holman Jones and Ellis, 2015). These reflexive approaches suggest that research, and specifically social science research, is never impersonal and neutral, but rather influenced and shaped by the researcher's personal experience. As Seamon (2000a) suggests: "Provided the phenomenologist has access in her own experience to the phenomenon she plans to study, first-person research can offer clarity and insight grounded in one's own lifeworld" (p. 165).

## 1.1 The place it all begins

The first place I built on the internet was a fashion blog[2] and online cupcake shop, which I operated from my flat in Tel Aviv in 2009 using the WordPress blogging platform. After years of working in traditional media outlets in Israel (i.e., radio, newspapers and television) as a news producer and editor, I was excited about the new possibilities that the internet had brought. Or as journalist Marie Le Conte (2022) describes the experience of our generation with the internet, "it was new and shiny and so were we; bright-eyed little humans, walking hand in hand with technology that was about to change everything" (p. 4). Wanting to be able to gain more control over my work and my life, and to find a way to connect work, personal interests and social life, I decided to leave my day job. The idea behind creating a website was to take three passions (fashion, baking, and content creation) and explore how the internet could help integrate them all into one place. This, I hoped, would enable me to make a living while also doing the things that I love and to meet like-minded people.

When I started my blog in 2009, Facebook and Twitter had been around for three years or so, and my blogging identity as 'Fashion Cupcakes' immediately became part of my identity in the

[1] For an overview of first-person methods to study experiences see Lumma and Weger (2023).

[2] For a critical discussion on the experiences of Fashion Bloggers see Duffy and Hund (2015).

"real world" as well as across social media (i.e., Facebook and Twitter). This experience was overwhelming. Almost instantly my personal life, social life, professional life – and now also public life – all became one. On the face of it, this integration of life, work and social relations was what I was aiming for. And for some time, it was a good feeling. Through the blog and social media, I met people who became close friends and felt part of a community. I was on a journey of constant learning and my experience as an active participant on the internet enabled me to benefit from this new world.

But at a certain point, I started feeling a detachment between the person I was and my online persona. And the desire to have all elements of my life mixed together evolved into the need for something more nuanced. I realized that while I enjoyed baking as a hobby, I was not enjoying doing it as a profession. And more than that, I was not enjoying being labelled as a baker or as a fashionista, for that matter. I was someone who enjoyed *doing* certain things, but I did not want to *become* these things. This online identity started to overshadow my life. While I was still very much interested in politics and news, I found myself "cornered" again and again into having conversations about recipes and style advice (even with former colleagues from the news desk). The internet seemed to favour a catchy narrative over complex nuances, and I wanted to return to a fuller sense of self. I realized that to feel comfortable on the internet, some degree of separation between the different parts of my life was needed, alongside more privacy. In the Fall of 2010, I closed my personal blog. But my desire to build and dwell in and with the internet did not fade. In fact, I was just starting to build something new.

### *1.1.1 Connecting the physical and digital worlds*

Returning to my roots in more traditional media, I embarked on my next adventure on the internet to create an online fashion magazine called *Fashion Forward* with my friend and fellow fashion blogger Shelly Peleg. Dreaming of combining the benefits of digital content (e.g., video, animation, links to other websites) and the experience of reading a glossy print magazine, we were inspired by e-commerce websites like net-a-porter.com and the rumours about Apple's upcoming launch of a new tablet (later known as the iPad). In February 2010, we launched the first Hebrew online fashion magazine as a weekly flipbook newsletter, writing to our readers that:

> *Fashion Forward* is the fashion magazine we would want to read. We believe that fashion is not just shopping. It is also art and a culture, and at the end of the day, it is mainly our way of telling who we are, or who we would like to be. Once a week we will bring you a little parcel of inspiration right to your email doorstep – an online magazine that gives you an experience of browsing through a glossy journal.

I remember vividly how we felt we were on the cusp of a big moment with the ways in which new technologies enable people to create and connect through the internet. As small and insignificant as our Israeli fashion magazine was, we wanted to be part of this new world. No doubt, this was an exciting period full of promise. Shortly after we launched *Fashion Forward* in February 2010, the beta version of Pinterest was up and running in March 2010. A month later, Apple launched its first iPad, and in October 2010, Instagram was released to the public.

In the next few years, instead of blogs and websites, the new wave of social media platforms and, specifically, the rise of algorithmic feeds changed the ways in which we communicate, consume content and create. And after a few years of optimism, for many today (e.g., Bogost, 2022; Lindsay, 2022), "what was once a great bar is now a sweaty, claustrophobic mess" (Le Conte, 2022, p. 6). But the question is: does it have to be? And what can be done to make our experience *in* and *with* social media more inhabitable once again?

### 1.2 My experience of building and dwelling with social media

During the early years of the social media era, before the experience on these platforms soured, I moved between countries and continents and the ability to interact with others far away became especially important to me. I started using Instagram in October 2011, a year after its launch. I was living in London then and didn't have a smartphone. So, I would take photographs with a DSLR camera, go back home to download them to my laptop, and then upload them to Instagram. I went to all this effort just to share things like two chairs on the lawn at St James's Park (my first photo), some pumpkins for Halloween at the local pub, or the cover of the latest issue of *Vogue* magazine. But why go to so much trouble in the first place, one might ask? In those early days of Instagram,

it was mainly about communication and being visible to others who were part of my social circle. And since I was living in London but was rooted in Tel Aviv, using social media helped me to connect these two worlds.


*Figure 1 Some of the first photos on my Instagram account, October–November 2011*

### *1.2.1 The poetics of making a home: a double play of re-creation*

While I used Instagram to communicate with others, my purpose for using Pinterest was different. Moving back to Tel Aviv in Spring 2012 after living in London, I was about to live for the first time on my own. When I found a charming but crumbling old flat, I turned to Pinterest for inspiration in *imagining* how to *create* my new home. From the first moment I stepped into the flat, I felt an elusive quality, which I later learned is described by Alexander (1979) as "the quality without a name" (p. ix). With its exquisitely painted tiled floors, beautiful, rounded corner windows and two small balconies, I *imagined* how I could *live* there, drinking a cup of coffee in the morning or meeting with friends on the balcony under the stars on the warm summer nights. At this point, Pinterest had already been around for over two years, but this was the first time I used it. I created my first board and called it "Balcony".

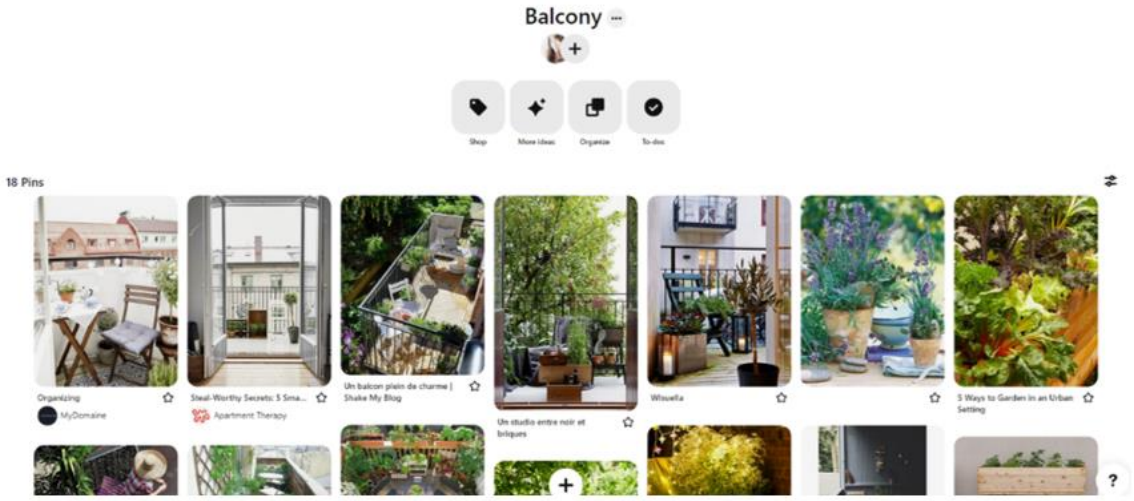



*Figure 2 My first board on Pinterest, 2012*

It felt therapeutic creating my little *corner of the world* as Bachelard (1957/2014, p. 26) calls it. I was sitting there in the flat, looking at the *potential* of the space around me and then back again on my Pinterest boards, *dreaming* how my home *could be*, how I wanted it to be, and eventually trying to *connect* the world around me and the world on the screen into *one*.

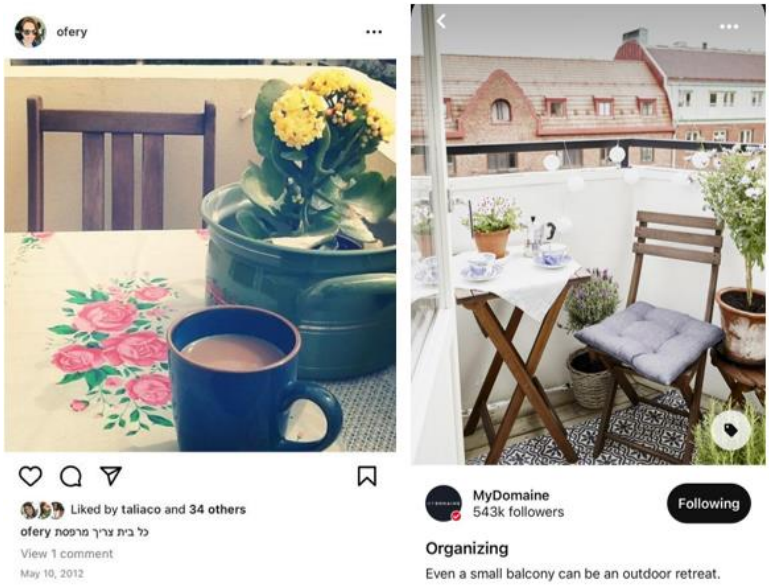



*Figure 3 My balcony on Instagram, 2012; and an inspiration photo for my balcony from Pinterest*

This process of imagination and creation of my home by using images from Pinterest in relation to the physical space around me carries echoes of Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*. Fascinated by how people imagine their homes, Bachelard (1957/2014) opposes the traditional dichotomy between the roles of the image as either an imitation or an invention. In the introduction to *The Poetics of Space*, Kearney (2014) suggests that for Bachelard, "imagination was at once receptive and creative – an acoustic of listening *and* an art of participation. The two functions, passive and active, were inseparable" (p. xx). Kearney (2014) explains that Bachelard's use of the word *poetics* comes from the Greek word "*poiesis*", which means "to make", and that the philosopher's understanding of this process of making is twofold:

> We are inhabited by deep imaginings – visual and verbal, auditory and tactile – that we reinhabit in our own unique way. Poetics is about hearing and feeling as well as crafting and shaping. It is the double play of re-creation. And this oscillating tension flies in the face of traditional dichotomies between subject and object, mind and matter, active and passive, which inform the history of Western thought. (pp. xix–xx)

Considering Bachelard's idea of *poetics* as a double play of *re-creation* in the context of dwellers' experiences of creating their homes with social media suggests that care and attentiveness (i.e., hearing, feeling, seeing) to one's environment and everyday life – that is, to what already *exists* in the world in which people are immersed in – is essential for the creation of something new.

Making the flat in Tel Aviv into a home required furniture, plants, mirrors and curtains. I slowly sourced these objects by walking throughout the city, searching for things that would help me feel more at home, adding those to the armchair that once belonged to my grandparents and the books I had collected. And as I carried pots and mugs, chairs and vases, fairy lights and shelving units all the way back to my new place, it became more and more of a home with every little piece I added.

But I was not doing it alone. My mum joined me, helping me paint a wall, put down some vinyl flooring in the kitchen, or reupholster a small stool I had bought at the Jaffa flea market. My dad came to visit to hang a rounded mirror, and my brother installed the shelves. At this point, as

my flat became more and more of a home, I stopped using Pinterest that much. I found that I was only going there when I needed an "idea", a visualization of how to create something or alter the space around me. Other than using it as a place to find visual ideas, there just wasn't any point being there because there wasn't anyone else there, or if they were, I was unable to interact with them. Where was everyone? They were all on Instagram. So, having used Pinterest for inspiration for my home and wanting to communicate with others, I turned to Instagram to share pictures of my home and my experience of living there (e.g., baking a cake, buying some flowers for the weekend or reading my favourite newspaper).

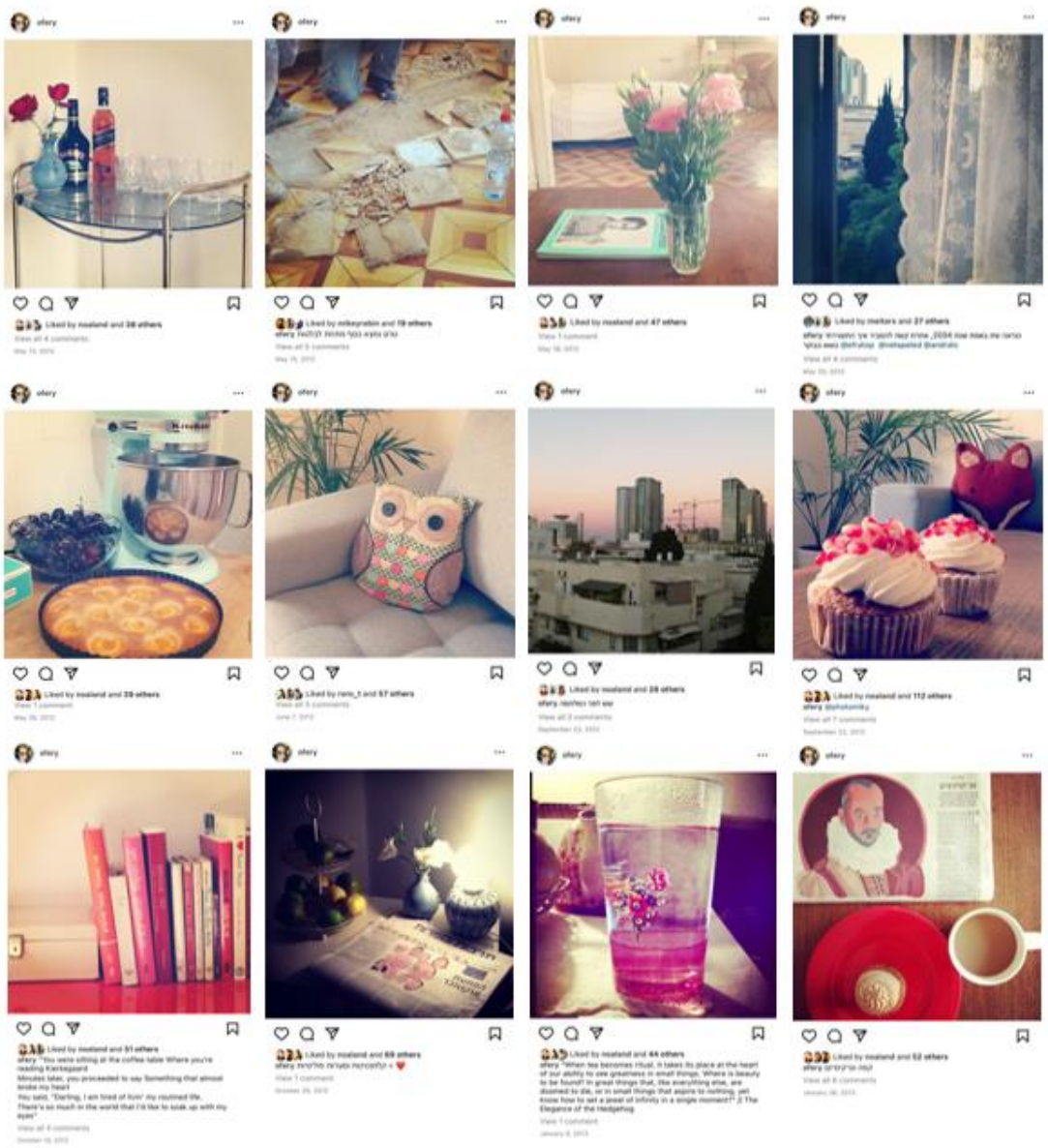


*Figure 4 Photos of my home in Tel Aviv that I shared on Instagram, May 2012– January 2013*

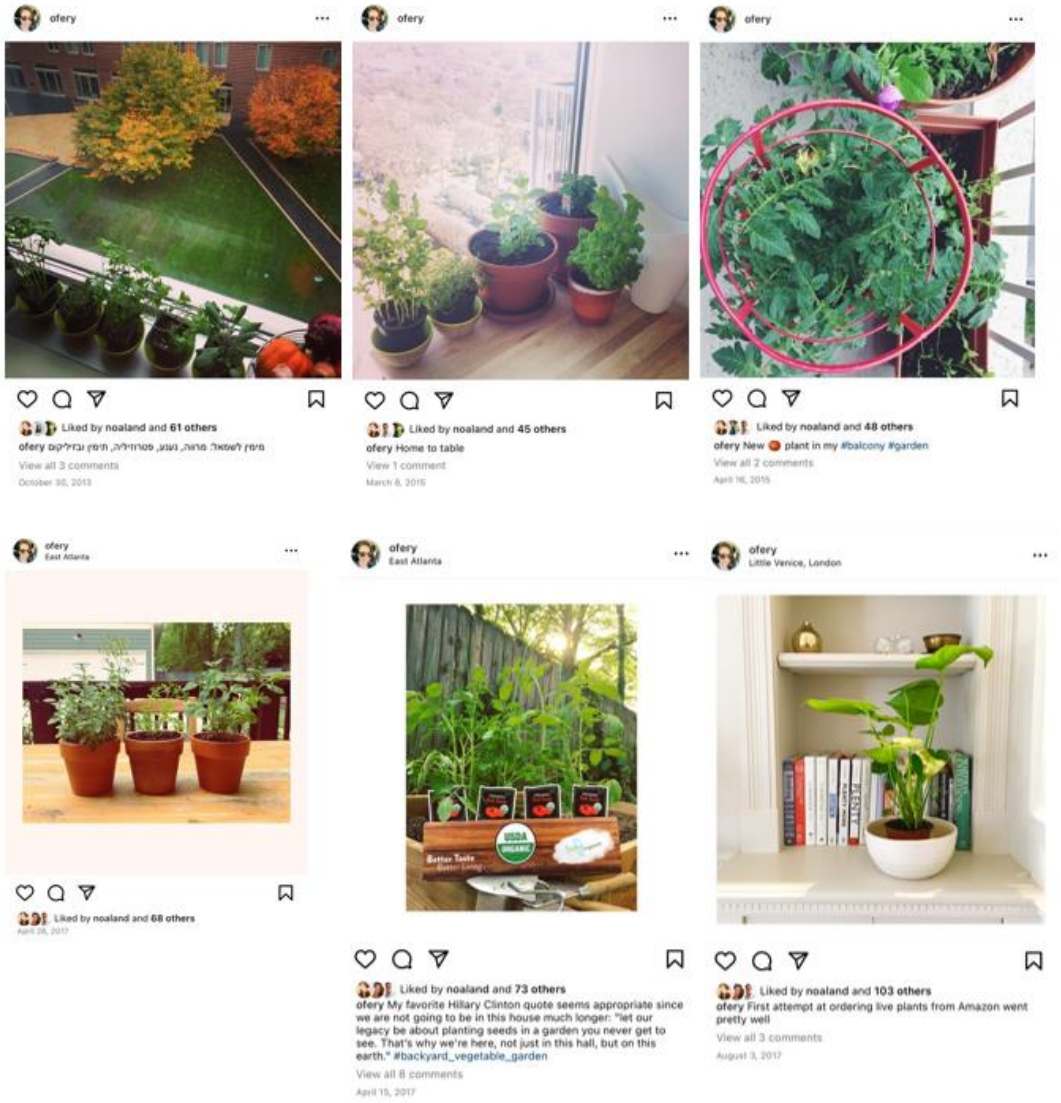



*Figure 5 Photos of my homes in Boston, Atlanta and London on Instagram, 2013 –2017*

Between 2012 and 2022, as I moved between three countries and ten different homes, I developed a deep interest in the relationships between people and their homes. Since leaving my flat in Tel Aviv, I have had one home in Boston, three in Atlanta and five in London. Throughout these frequent moves, I constantly tried to make myself feel at home in every new place, and this always started by planting something. Over the years, as my family started to have more furniture and possessions, the physical things we gathered also functioned as a linkage that provided a sense

of belonging and continuity to our dwelling experience in our different homes.[3] As Marcoux (2001) unearthed through his research, "the things that people move with them are at the heart of the constitution of a memory which often resists displacements" (ibid. p. 70). In every new house I was engaging in the double play of *re-creation* that Kearney (2014) finds in Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* (1957/2014), where, on the one hand, I was focusing on *seeing*, *hearing* and *feeling* the house and considering it in the context of our everyday life, and on the other, I was *imagining* the *potential* of how we *could* live there by searching design ideas on social media platforms and finally, making the *house* into the *home* I imagined.

### 1.3 Experiencing home and the quality without a name

Stepping back to 2015, I was living in Atlanta, and after years of working in media, I decided to start studying for a master's degree in interior design, deepening my understanding of why the *home* matters. Unlike my classmates and Professors, I didn't bring a background in design or architecture. Nor did I have plans to work as a designer. I was just deeply interested in what it was that made me want to live in certain homes and not in others: was it a personal preference, or were there homes that would be preferable for most people? And if so, why?

That year, while taking a course in environmental psychology for interior design, I focused on the "human response to residential design" and suddenly, I could put words into the experiences I have had about the relation between people and their homes. Especially compelling for me was Christopher Alexander's (1977; 1979) idea of *pattern language*, according to which there is a *timeless way* of creating buildings and places that have a quality of *aliveness*. And the way to do it requires the participation of people in the creation of 'their own houses, streets and communities' (Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein, 1977, book cover).

Alexander's idea struck a specific chord as I was searching for a house to buy at that time. As I was viewing dozens of houses, I couldn't help but think how these places were not reflecting what we were discussing in class: how they were not built around human needs (Gifford, 2002)

[3] See Marcoux's (2001) discussion on the role of mobile possessions in "securing memory in action" (p. 69) and in the context of research about migration and diaspora.

(or at least not my needs), how they could not enable the everyday life that I wanted to live in them, and lacked a fundamental sense of place (Relph, 1976).

I started wondering if it was just me or whether these houses really lacked something. There was one house I remember very well. It was a 1920s bungalow with a cherry tree and a swing in front of the house, and everything about it seemed so thoughtful, full of love, care and attention to detail. From the moment I walked into that house I again felt the 'quality without a name' (Alexander, 1979), that elusive feeling of a sense of place that is responsive to the world around it and to the people living in it. Nonetheless, unlike me, other family members were less enchanted by this elusive quality and were more focused on the fact that the house was quite old and would probably require additional investment in maintaining it. We ended up buying another house, a new build that seemed better in the value-for-money matrix of price per square footage. But I couldn't stop thinking about that other house, its *liveliness* and its potential to *enable life in it*.

### *1.3.1 Becoming a dweller-creator*

The bright side for me in the new house we ended up buying was that the builder agreed that we participate in the final decisions. However, in many ways, my humble experience as a *dweller-creator* in my East Atlanta home in 2015 differed from the experiences of the dwellers I interviewed for this research. Firstly, my house was created by a developer (without an architect) from an off-the-shelf generic plan and was at the final stages of its building when we bought it with very limited scope for changes, while the *dwellers-creators* in this research all went through a significant refurbishment of an old house. Secondly, the digital environment in 2015, where I took my first steps as a *dweller-creator*, was very different from the digital environment of 2022. At that time, Pinterest was the main arena for home design inspiration on the internet, and the phenomenon of *home renovation accounts* on Instagram by dwellers sharing their home creation process was very nascent, and I did not share my creation experience there.

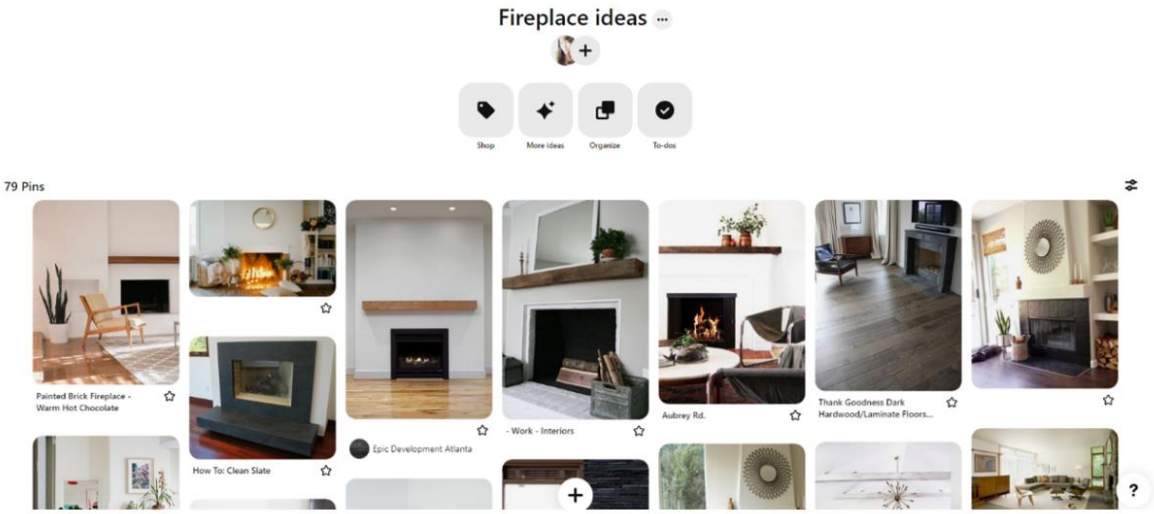



*Figure 6 Pinterest board that I used for inspiration for the fireplace, 2015*

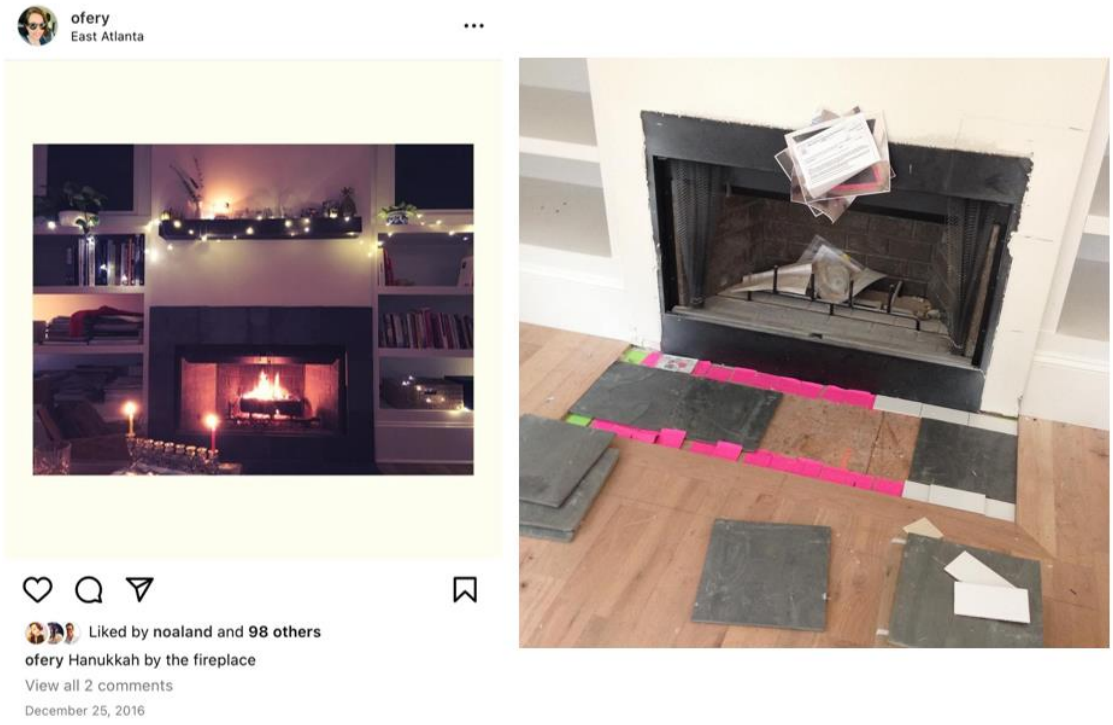



*Figure 7 Building process (2015) and the fireplace on my Instagram (2016)*

One of the main things I was able to effect before the building works ended was the fireplace. After browsing for ideas on Pinterest I had a clear sense of what I wanted: a modern, simple and rustic hearth. Armed with my Pinterest ideas, and after receiving the green light from our builder,

I began sourcing the materials. To translate my vision into a more concrete plan, I drew a very unprofessional sketch of the hearth and used Post-it notes on the floor to mark how I wanted the stones to be laid. As I had experienced in my flat in Tel Aviv in 2012, I once again saw how my Pinterest dreams were shaping my physical environment.

From my limited experience as a *dweller-creator* in 2015 I learned two important things: first, the current system of how houses are being built or refurbished (at least in many places in the US) makes it hard for dwellers to participate in the design and building processes of their homes; second, that social media holds potential to be part of the way in which dwellers participate in the design and building process of their homes. This possibility fascinated me and became the topic of my master's thesis in 2016, and ultimately led me to pursue this PhD.

### *1.3.2 Pinterest patterns*

Inspired by Alexander's call for dwellers' participation in the creation of their built environment, my master's thesis from 2016, "Pinterest Patterns: Towards Democratization of Home Design in the Digital Age", had an optimistic view of how digital platforms could be part of such participation. My focus then was on how Pinterest could be considered a source of big data that draws on the collective intelligence of millions of people and the algorithm. The idea of having intuitive digital tools that allow people to create their own homes without the technical difficulties of using professional design programs was intriguing. But of course, a primary challenge has always been how to connect different design ideas into a concrete and operated built form and how to connect these plans and design ideas into a specific existing context (natural and built) and people's everyday lives. This observation raised the question of the qualities of places and homes that will be created by using some form of design intelligence (collective or artificial) and the significance of the human aspect in creating places and homes. One potential risk was that relying too heavily on images from social media in creating dwellers' homes would result in a dystopic reality, where homes are created as a duplication of visual trends, neglecting dwellers' lived experiences and ignoring the specific context of existing environments.

Nevertheless, the ways in which people are increasingly using social media as part of a home creation process entails more than just its use as a utility for sourcing inspiration but rather as part

of a social practice of creation that includes interaction with others and an ever-evolving contextualization that vary from time to time and place to place. And moreover, as I suggest in this thesis, this practice could be considered part of the existential situation in which people are continuously trying to create a place and home for themselves to dwell in the world.

## 1.4 Aims and justification

The consideration of home creation with social media as an existential experience that is part of the ways people inhabit the world sits within an intersection between a few contemporary scholarly discussions about *home, dwelling, place* and our *being-in-the-world* in the digital age. Recently, after a notable absence from the architectural discourse in the digital age (van den Heuvel and Mota, 2023), the home – and, with it, the notion of dwelling – has re-emerged. Discussing the issue of dwelling in the digital age in the context of architecture, Antoine Picon (2023) noted that this "proves an especially complex question, not only because of the specific issues raised by the digital. For the home, even more than the digital, tends to blur the distinction between the imaginary and the real"[4] (pp. 11–12). A notable example of this renewed interest can be seen in the book *Rethinking Dwelling: Heidegger, Place and Architecture*, in which the philosopher Jeff Malpas (2021) explores the close relation invoked in the subtitle.

At the same time, whereas the notion of dwelling has returned to the scholarly discourse in philosophy and architecture, in the field of media, scholars have been increasingly exploring phenomenological and existential issues as part of an approach that views media as an inseparable aspect of our all-encompassing life in the digital age (e.g., Deuze, 2012; Moores, 2012; Pink, 2012a; Lagerkvist, 2017; Markham, 2020). Yet, while many of these discussions are deeply influenced by Heidegger's philosophy, his notions of *building* and *dwelling* remain undeveloped in this context. To contribute to this discussion, this thesis returns to Heidegger's essay *Building Dwelling Thinking* (1951/1971b), in which he challenges the common understanding of building and dwelling as means and ends and instead argues that the two notions must be considered together in relation to one another and in relation to our human existence in the world.

[4] Picon also refers here to Bachelard's (1957/2014) discussion on imagination and home that was mentioned in chapter 1. See more on this issue in chapters 3, 7 and 8.

Against this backdrop, this thesis aims to explore the relation between *building* and *dwelling* through a phenomenological existential perspective and in relation to ideas of participation in media and in architecture. By focusing on the experiences of home creation with social media in the specific context of *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* on Instagram, I explore the meanings of the commingling between experiences of creation (i.e., building) and inhabitation (i.e., dwelling) *in*, *with* and *through* media in the lives of *dwellers-creators*.

In so doing, I aim to enrich the discussion about our *being-in-the-world* in the digital age by exploring how places and homes are being created as part of a physical–digital relational world and how the active participation of people in the creation of their homes and the places where they live affects their sense of place and their broader experience of life in the digital age.

## 1.5 Structure of this thesis

To explore these issues, this thesis unfolds over eight chapters starting with the first-person introduction (chapter 1), then moving to the theoretical foundation for this project (chapters 2–3), followed by a discussion about the methodology and research approach (chapter 4), continuing with the three chapters (chapters 5–7) of the phenomenological ethnography of dwellers' experiences of home creation *in*, *with* and *through* Instagram *home accounts* and *renovation diaries*, and ending with the concluding discussion in chapter 8.

In chapter 2, *The Entanglement: Being-in-the-World in the Digital Age,* I start with the philosophical underpinning of this research in the phenomenological existential approach of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). This outline is followed by an examination of the influence of these ideas on the scholarly discussion in media about our existence in the digital age. This treatment also includes an account of the development of the notions of *place* and *placemaking* in the fields of philosophy, human geography, social anthropology, material culture and architecture and their consideration regarding life in the digital age. The chapter also delves into the issue of participation *with* and *through* social media platforms by considering the concepts of amateurism, craftsmanship, and creation, as well as discussing the literature about home renovation with media. It concludes by focusing on the ways in which Pinterest and Instagram are being used as part of the home creation process with social media and the differences between the two platforms.

Continuing with the theoretical backdrop of this thesis, chapter 3, *The Experience of Home – Building and Dwelling,* delves into the discussion about the interrelation between the experiences of creation and inhabitation. Beginning with Heidegger's discussion about the connection between the experience of *building* and the experience of *dwelling* and my suggestion to view it from a participatory lens, I then turn to discuss dwellers' participation in architecture, focusing on Christopher Alexander's idea of *A Pattern Language* and the relation between phenomenology and participation. Considering Heidegger and Alexander's ideas in relation to one another and in the context of the anthropological discussion about the relation between home and its dwellers, the chapter continues with a discussion about Bachelard's phenomenological poetics of the home as the place where past memories, present experiences and future imagination co-exist and ends with a consideration of *home renovation diaries* as a new form of a reflective biography of home by its dwellers.

Building on this theoretical footing, chapter 4, *Methodological Framework: Phenomenological Ethnography,* includes a positioning of this research within the field of media studies as part of the non-media-centric approach, followed by a discussion about the philosophical underpinning of this project and its phenomenological approach. This outline is followed by a detailed discussion of the methodology and the research questions and an overview of the ethnographic fieldwork in the context of Instagram *home accounts* and *renovation diaries,* including issues of access, sampling with algorithms, and the data collection methods of in-depth interviews that are combined with long-term ethnographic observations. Lastly, I reflexively consider the methodological process and the ethical considerations that guided me throughout this process before turning to the ethnographic findings and discussion in the following three chapters.

Commencing this ethnography with chapter 5, *More-than-Content: Experiences of Creation-in-the-World,* I start the discussion about dweller's experiences of home creation with social media with an overview of the evolution of the use of digital media as part of a home creation process from utility (*the Pinterest era*) to social practice (*Instagram renovation diaries*). Critically considering this development, I suggest viewing the contemporary engagement with social media in home renovation as an experience of *creation-in-the-world*. With this concept, I aim to focus on experiences of creation that go beyond the discussion about social media creators as influencers to consider how such creations are entangled with people's lived experiences and material environments. This chapter also includes an exposition of the participants in this ethnography,

their place/home account on Instagram and their decision to participate in the creation of their palpable home.

Chapter 6, *Grounded Media: Place and Relations in the Digital Flow,* focuses on the social aspect in the experience of the participants in this ethnography as being part of what they describe as a home renovation community, and I conceptualize as the *relational environment* that they inhabit. Thus, by using the concept of *place* in relation to dweller's home accounts, I consider the possibilities for orientation, grounding and a sense of place in a hybrid digital-material world and the existential meanings of life in such places instead of in an undifferentiated digital flow. This discussion includes issues of how the self is being-with others and the questions of visibility, vulnerability and authenticity.

Concluding the phenomenological ethnography, chapter 7, *We Are What We Care-For: People, Things and Meaning,* draws on Heidegger's notion of *care* and his concept of *things* as opposed to merely physical objects. Thus, it explores how *homes,* through their ever-evolving creation and inhabitation that encompasses different temporalities, are being experienced as *things* that *dwellers-creators* care-for and the meaning attached to them.

Finally, in the concluding chapter 8, *First, We Dwell. Then, We Build,* I discuss the findings in relation to the guiding research questions and the contributions of this thesis, the limitations of this project and directions for future research. The chapter ends with an epilogue on the state of dwelling in the digital age in relation to care and participation.

*Chapter Two*

# The Entanglement: Being-in-the-world in the Digital Age

The assertion that people's everyday lives and existence in the world today are entangled with technological devices and digital media may initially seem quite intuitive. However, a deeper consideration of the existential human situation of *being-in-the-world in the digital age* raises a myriad of issues as to the ways in which people are living their lives in an increasingly digital world, including the issue that is the focus of this thesis, of how the use of social media as part of the experience of home creation, affect the experience of *dwelling* in the home and in the world.

Drawing on scholarly writings both within the phenomenological and existential approaches in the field of media studies, as well as on the ongoing discourse about *place*, *home* and *placemaking* in the fields of human geography, anthropology, material culture, architecture and philosophy – this thesis follows the thread that connects many of these ideas: the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976).

As part of his lifelong exploration into the issue of the human life situation, Heidegger presents in his seminal book, *Being and Time* (1927/2019), an alternative to the prevailing philosophical and psychological models that view people and world as separate entities. In his existential–phenomenological approach, Heidegger (1927/2019) views people and world as immersed and entangled in a constant situation that he refers to as *being-in-the-world* or *Dasein.* Thus, the philosopher argues, people are essentially *thrown* into the world in which they are *coping* as they are experiencing it in their everyday lives. Heidegger posits that the human life situation always includes a *unity* of three aspects: people, place, and time. As Scannell (2014) explains, this *relational totality of involvements* means that "Being in the world is always being in a world with others [..] in some particular place at some particular time" (p. 22). Thus, Malpas (2021) argues that:

> Human existence is first of all relational, which means that is constituted through the multiple ways in which it is connected,

> causally, affectively and rationally, with respect to the internality of the self, the commonality of others and the externality of things. Such relationality does not ramify in some unbounded and homogenous space but arises only within the bounded but open heterogeneity of place. (p. 146)

In his worldly perspective, Heidegger pays special attention to the everyday things people care about and pursue, arguing that through the active engagement of people with the world, with other people, with material things and with the environment – we can learn about our human existence. As Heidegger (1927/1988) suggests: "[*Dasein*] finds *itself* primarily and constantly *in things* because, tending them, distressed by them, it always in some way or other rests in things" (p. 159, *italics in the original*). In that regard, Sharr (2007) explains that "[t]he philosopher's exploration of dwelling and place can be considered as one of many routes that he tried to follow in trying to make sense of the question of being; exploring the situation of being in the physical world of things" (p. 26).

Reviewing the development in Heidegger's thinking over the years, Malpas (2021) argues that in *Building Dwelling Thinking* (1951/1971b), the discussion about *being-in-the-world* has somewhat "re-articulated":

> It remains the case that human being first finds itself *in* the world through its activities, but those activities are explicitly understood in very broad terms, and, most importantly, as contributing to or playing a role in the structure of the world, but not as producing it. The world is now understood as both arising from and consisting in the interplay between the multiplicity that also appears in and through the world. (Malpas, 2021, p. 21)

This multiplicity that Malpas (2021) mentions includes "persons, animals, plants, artefacts, processes" (p. 21)[5] and also "larger assemblages that take form, for instance, of bridge and house" (ibid.). In this context, and by drawing on Malpas' (2021) understanding of Heidegger's notion of

[5] This also includes Heidegger's (1951/1971b) concept of the fourfold; that is, the unity of earth, sky, divinities and mortals, which, as Malpas (2021, p. 21) argues (drawing on Bartning) could be understood in relation to spatiality and temporalty.

*building* "as an active engagement in the world" (p. 86) that also includes design and planning (see the discussion of this issue in chapter 3), the experience of home creation with social media is viewed in this thesis as an active attention and creation that is situated and responsive to the specific context of one's life, place and time.

## 2.1 The existential–phenomenological turn

In the field of media studies, as digital technologies and social media have become ubiquitous, researchers have started to view digital media as part of an all-encompassing everyday experience of people and the way in which they are *being-in-the-world* (e.g., Markham, 2003; Deuze, 2011, 2012, 2023; Pink, 2012b; Kember and Zylinska, 2012; Peters, 2015; Couldry and Hepp, 2017; Markham and Rodgers, 2017a; Lagerkvist, 2017, 2019; Frosh, 2019; Markham and Tiidenberg, 2020; Markham, 2020). This focus on life *with* and *in* digital media is related to a broader turn towards a non-media-centric approach to media studies (e.g., Morley, 2007, 2009; Couldry, 2012; Moores, 2012, 2017) and the use of phenomenology to understand people's experiences with media in the context of everyday life (e.g., Scannell, 1996, 2014; Markham and Rodgers, 2017a). These phenomenological and existential approaches offer an alternative to the prevailing critical approach in media studies in the past couple of decades, opening the way for a hermeneutics of trust (e.g., Scannell, 2014) that focuses on how media is interwoven in people's experiences and their engagement with things in the world (digital and non-digital alike).

Researching the beginning of internet use in the 1990s, Annette Markham (2003) was early to suggest viewing the internet not merely as a tool but also as a *place* and a *way of being*:

> If contemporary communication technologies such as the Internet facilitate a closer and closer connection between human and technologies, or a collapse of meaningful distinctions in how self and social structure are constituted and lived, the container begins to disappear and the category called "way of being" becomes, simply, everyday life. (p. 12)

Almost two decades later, Markham (Markham and Tiidenberg, 2020) argues that the process she envisioned has happened and the internet has become part of life, like electricity, "taken for

granted as a global way of being" (p. 11). Therefore, she argues that the internet should not be considered the focus of research but rather "something we all see through, live through" (ibid.).

Nonetheless, as some researchers embraced the stance that the digital is an integral part of people's way of *being-in-the-world*, others have argued that there is a significant difference between life before and after the digital age, since in the new reality "data come to find people" (Lash, 2007), and that "the things we encounter, and consequently our experiences and views of the world, will be shaped by the sorting and filtering of algorithms" (Beer, 2009, p. 998). In this context, there were also questions regarding the issue of human agency in the face of algorithmic power (e.g., Van Dijck, 2009).

Over the past two decades, as the pendulum kept moving between utopian and dystopian visions of how digital media is, and potentially could, alter people's lives in the digital age, scholars have increasingly been arguing for a different approach that sees the digital as part of life. This stance considers the digital age as a continuation of the pre-digital era by viewing new technologies, algorithms and digital media as part of the social, material and cultural environment we inhabit (e.g., Deuze, 2012; 2023; Pink, 2012b; Baym, 2015; Peters, 2015; Couldry, Fotopoulou and Dickens, 2016; Lagerkvist, 2017; Seaver, 2017; Bucher, 2018; Frosh, 2019; Markham, 2020). Thus, Deuze (2012) argues that we do not live *with* media but rather "live *in* media" (p. x) and that "media are to us as water is to fish" (ibid.) since "the key categories of human aliveness and activity converged in a concurrent and continuous exposure to, use of, and immersion in media" (ibid.). Around the same time, Pink (2012b) also suggests that the digital and physical aspects of life are essentially part of *one* world:

> When understanding the use of the Internet we need to consider how such an activity is rooted both in the everyday materiality that we inhabit in our physical environments and what have come to be called virtual worlds. Of course these are in fact both part of one and the same world. (p. 6)

Rejecting a dualism between a virtual and a real world we inhabit, Baym (2015) explains that the deterministic approach to digital media "is built on juxtaposing the online with the offline, comparing, contrasting, and looking for clear lines of influence" (pp. 175–176). However, in contrast to this approach, she argues that digital media both stem from the social and cultural

contexts in which they are created but also constantly shape and change these social and cultural contexts. Therefore, instead of viewing new technologies and their influence on people's lives as either positive or negative, Baym (2015) argues that "people are adaptive, innovative, and influential in determining what technology is and will become" (p. 175). Thus, for example, she explains that although originally computers were not supposed to enable interpersonal communication, people's "drive to be social and find means of connecting with one another has been a guiding force in the internet's transformation from military and scientific network to staple of everyday life" (ibid.).

Sharing the view that people still have the power to act even in a reality intensely mediated by technology and influenced by algorithms, Couldry, Fotopoulou, and Dickens (2016) argue that agency and reflexivity do not disappear. Instead, "new forms of agency and reflexivity" (p. 118) emerge "as social actors continue to pursue their social ends but mediated through digital interfaces" (ibid). Coming from a social phenomenological perspective and building on Alfred Schutz's [1932/1972] ideas, Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp (2017) argue in their book, *The Mediated Construction of Reality*, that to account for these forms of agency and reflexivity in the deeply mediated reality of the digital age, there is a need to develop a new kind of phenomenology, a materialist phenomenology. Viewing mediatization as a meta-process of change "in how social processes *go on through media* and are articulated together in ever more complex organizational patterns" (ibid., p. 36, *italics in the original*), Couldry and Hepp suggest that the rapid increase in digitalization and datafication has led to a stage of deep mediatization. As a result, they argue, "the ways in which we make sense of the world phenomenologically become necessarily entangled with constraints, affordances and power-relations that are features of media as infrastructures for communication" (ibid., p. 7).

Nonetheless, critics have argued that the scholarly fascination with concepts like mediatization risks "reasserting monolithic accounts of power that tend to downplay or exclude audiences and the significance of the lifeworld" (Livingstone, 2019, p. 171). Urging scholars not to overlook people's lived experiences with media, Livingston (2019) explains that:

> […] when I said, a few years ago, that everything was mediated (Livingstone 2009), I meant to position "the media" historically among other societal mediations—money, language, goods, or

> urban planning (Silverstone 1994). It was not a claim about the growing concentration of power in the hands of a few global conglomerates, though such institutions must remain in view, or about the exploitation of audiences, although this is clearly a concern. Rather, it was an invitation to attend to the conditions of meaning-making, to amplify audiences' voices in the interests of social justice, and to imagine with them alternative futures. (Livingstone, 2019, p. 175)

To engage with profound existential questions of life in and with media in the digital age—while also attending to people's lived experiences and how they make meaning out of those experiences—scholars often turn to ideas from philosophy, phenomenology, and anthropology. Drawing on anthropological inspiration, Seaver (2017) suggests considering algorithms as culture, arguing that "algorithms are not singular technical objects that enter into many different cultural interactions but are rather unstable objects, culturally enacted by the practices people use to engage with them" (p. 5). In a similar vein, Bucher (2018) considers phenomenologically "how life takes shape and gains expression through encounters with algorithms" (p. 62). In this approach, inspired by Ingold's (2000/2022; 2011) work, "people learn what they need to know in order to engage meaningfully with and find their way around an algorithmically mediated world" (Bucher, 2018, p. 98).

Returning to the traditional ontological and existential discussion of what it means to exist as a human being, now with contemporary technology and media, Paddy Scannell (1996, 2014) was a pioneer in applying a Heideggerian phenomenological approach to media studies. Focusing on the concept of "care structure" of things, Scannell (2014) argues that "[i]t is *all* the hidden concern that produced [something] as what it is" (p. 26, *italics in the original*), such as how it was made, its "usage, impact and effect" (ibid). Continuing this discussion in the context of our digital life, Peters (2015) argues that media "are our condition, our fate, and our challenge" (p. 52), and therefore "Media theory has something both ecological and existential to say" (p. 52). Similarly, for Frosh (2019), the relations between people and media are also existential since, as he puts it, "media are poetic forces; they bring forth worlds into presence, producing and revealing them" (p. 3).

Building on the existential and ontological projects inspired by Heidegger's philosophy (e.g., Scannell, 2014; Peters, 2015), Lagerkvist (2017) suggests an existential media analysis to view life in the digital age *in*, *through* and *with* digital media. Referring to the inhabitants of this "digital ecology" as "existers" – and building on Heidegger's concept of *thrownness* – Lagerkvist (2017) argues that "we seem to be […] thrown into our digital human existence" (p. 97). Thus, "classic existential issues have become more and more entwined with our digital lives" (ibid. p. 97), and this situation calls for media studies "to attune to the big and basic questions in life" (ibid). In so doing, Lagerkvist (2017) argues that existential analysis allows us to move forward from "conceiving of the Internet as either liberatory or controlling, deeply meaningful or trivial" (p. 103) and instead seeing it as "an existential and ambivalent terrain" (ibid.).

Adding to this existential perspective (e.g., Scannell, 2014; Peters, 2015; Lagerkvist, 2017; 2019), while also drawing on Heidegger's philosophy, Tim Markham (2020) suggests that "there is no point in trying to regain any kind of lost innocence associated with the pre-digital world, or in trying to attain a purer kind of being-in-the-world less contaminated by data" (p. 6). Instead, he argues that:

> [F]eeling our way through digitally saturated worlds is productive: it is not a means of reaching a point where we no longer have to keep moving and adapting; rather, it is exactly how we come to know the world and feel at home in it. (p. 14)

Following Lagerkvist (2017), Markham (2020) also views *digital life* as a situation of *thrownness* that "can only be met ethically in the thick of it, by endlessly sizing up, trying out and habituating ourselves to practices while asking what else is possible given where we are" (p. 144). Yet, although these ideas have been circulating in recent years amongst prominent media scholars, they are still somewhat marginalized compared to the critical media discourse, resulting in contemporary research outputs that continue to portray a "dichotomy between a completely mediated or nonmediated existence" (Deuze, 2023, p. 223), contrasting media and life against each other "as an 'either/or' rather than a 'not only, but also' relation" (ibid.). To account for the relationality in the entanglement of media and life in the digital age, Deuze (2023) argues that media studies should offer a "grounded, embodies, real-world approach to the way we are in the

world, suffused by media – but neither determined by media nor completely in charge of their programming" (p. 250).

In response to this call for grounded, non-deterministic research focused on real-world experiences – how people engage with, pursue objectives, and care-for things *in*, *with* and *through* digital media – this thesis adopts an existential phenomenological approach to explore experiences of home creation with social media. Thus, while many of the existential–phenomenological writings in the field of media focus on issues of temporality and liveness, this thesis aims to contribute to this discussion by focusing on the issue of *home*, *building* and *dwelling* and viewing them as part of an active engagement of people with the world. And while there are prominent examples of explorations of the issues of *place* and *home* in the context of media–life entanglement (e.g., Moores, 2012; Pink, 2012a), these researches mainly focus on the routine, unspoken and habitual aspects of media uses as part of everyday life (e.g., Pink and Mackley, 2013). Yet, as Lagerkvist (2017) suggests, existential media analysis would benefit from broadening its focus from everyday routine activities to include also a consideration of how the "mundane and the extraordinary co-found […] the existential terrains of connectivity" (p. 97).

## 2.2 Place in the digital age

While the main focus for Heidegger in *Being and Time* (1927/2019) was on temporality, this focus has evolved over the years into a greater emphasis on the concept of place as essential to understanding human existence in the world, and he is now considered as one of the most influential philosophers of place (Cresswell, 2015). The concept of place in Heidegger's philosophy – and its development in the writings of the philosophers Edward Casey (1993, 1997) and Jeff Malpas (2006, 2012, 2018, 2021) – suggests that:

> Being (existence) is not simply being in a place as a container […] but is instead marked by a stronger connection between a thing and its place […]. The relation between people and place is affirmed as a relationship of dwelling – of inhabitation – in which there is a continuity between person and place. (Cresswell, 2015, p. 27)

According to these philosophers, place has a central ontological meaning since, as Casey (1997) explains, "[t]o be at all – to exist in any way – is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place" (p. ix). Seamon (2023) argues that the ontological new interpretation of place by Casey and Malpas "was revolutionary conceptually because it presupposes that people and place are one lived whole; to break this wholeness changes both places and the individuals associated with those places" (p. 5). Discussing the relation between space and place, Heidegger (1951/1971b) argues that in contrast to the common assumption that places are created in space, he believes that "the act of place-creation produces space" (Cresswell, 2015, p. 28). A similar view can be found in the writings of scholars such as the architect Christopher Alexander (1977; 1979) and the geographer Edward Relph (1976, 1993) (see a detailed discussion in chapter 3 on these ideas in the context of architecture and the built environment).

Thus, Alexander (1979) suggests that "we must begin by understanding that every place is given its character by certain patterns of events that keep on happening there" (p. 55) and that "these patterns of events which repeat themselves are always anchored in space" (ibid. p. 69). Moreover, "[t]he life which happens in a building or a town is not merely anchored in the space but made up from the space itself" (ibid, p. 74). Echoing Heidegger's ideas (but without explicitly referring to them), Alexander (1979) argues that when one thinks of a particular activity or a situation, it is impossible to think about it without imagining it happening somewhere, a specific place where it occurs, since "the action and the space are indivisible. The action is supported by this kind of space. The space supports this kind of action. The two form a unit, a pattern of events in space" (ibid. p. 70). Thus, Malpas (2021) explains that it is in this relation between people, things and place that *dwelling* can be found:

> The way dwelling is understood is not in terms of a mode of existence that is primarily shaped by the subject or, more specifically, by human beings. It is not that an otherwise objective space is given meaning through the addition of human activity, experience, thought or feeling. Instead, 'meaning', […], is, in one sense, already 'in' the world. What comes first, then, is not the human being standing against a world of objects, but a single dynamic structure of interactivity in which the human is already

> involved and by which human life and experience are shaped. (p. 29)

While Alexander, Relph and Heidegger all developed their concepts of space and place in relation to the physical world, an acceptance of the ontological meaning of place means that place cannot disappear in our digitally saturated world (Malpas, 2018) but rather needs to be reconsidered, including a consideration of the relationality and the relatedness of the digital and the non-digital[6] (see the discussion in chapter 6). As Malpas (2019) argues, "[A]lthough there can be no doubt that technology changes the way places appear, the fundamental role played by place in the very possibility of appearance, including the appearance even of technology, remains unchanged" (pp. viii-ix).

Realizing the importance of place for considering life in the digital age, Shaun Moores (2012) and Sarah Pink (2012a, 2012b) have suggested that a theory of place can be used to understand the entanglement between digital media, practices, experiences, and other material, social and sensory aspects in people's lives. As Pink (2012b) explains:

> Theorists of place tend to be interested in the question of how sets of diverse things come together, become entangled and interwoven with each other, and in doing so become part of the creation of new (but always changing) configurations of things or ecologies. (p. 7)

Contesting the assertion of some scholars that forms of transportation and media in the modern era have increased placelessness and undermine the experiences of home and place (e.g., Relph, 1976; Meyrowitz, 1985; Augé, 1995),[7] Moores (2012) argues that "place, far from being marginalised, is instantaneously 'pluralised' in electronic media use" (p. 13). And as Cresswell (2015) asserts, "if place is the very bedrock of our humanity, as some have argued, then it cannot have vanished because it is a necessary part of the human condition" (p. 85). To understand the

[6] While these questions are increasingly being considered from a phenomenological standpoint, these discussions still often fall into the dichotomy between virtual and real places and worlds (e.g., Champion, 2019).

[7] In recent years Relph (2021a) has continue to argue that technology undermine the experience of place positing that digital media "affect experiences of place in ways that are disorienting because they overwhelm us with information and images, bring into question what is real and what is fake, confuse real and virtual reality, and exacerbate extreme views about who belongs where" (p. 573). He claims this while continuing to distinguish between virtual and augmented realty, arguing that the latter "by providing digital information about landscapes as we are experiencing them, […] can make familiar landscapes conspicuous and perhaps enhance critical understanding of our relationship to the everyday world" (Relph, 2019, p. 23).

*places* in our digitally saturated environment and their creation process, Moores (2012) and Pink (2012a) both (separately) draw on the geographer Doreen Massey's (2005) concept of place as open and global and on Ingold's (2007; 2008) ideas of movement along lines, as well as on phenomenologically inspired writings about place.

Massey (2005) sees places as a spatio-temporal "event of a place" and "not as points or areas on maps, but as integrations of space and time" (p. 130), "a constellation of processes rather than a thing" (p. 141). According to her position, a place is more of an open, ever-changing concept than a physical locality, something that is "woven together out of ongoing stories, […] a moment within power-geometries, […] a particular constellation within the wider topographies of space" (ibid. p. 131). For Massey,

> What is special about place is precisely that throwntogetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now (itself drawing on a history and a geography of thens and theres); and the negotiation which must take place within and between both human and nonhuman" (p. 140).

Building on this idea that places are created by the entanglement between space, time, people, processes and other things, Moores (2012) calls for "an appreciation of media uses as place-constituting activities, among a range of other such activities in everyday living" (p. 46). Considering the connection between places and everyday life, Pink (2012a) also argues that "practices, material agencies, skills and ways of knowing don't happen *in* places that their practitioners go to in order to perform them. Rather they are constituents of places" (p. 28). Pink (2012b) explains that approaches to place such as Massey's (2005) and Ingold's (2008), are focused on relatedness:

> [and are] developed in such a way that enables us to think of how things are interwoven or entangled with each other and the continuities this involves, rather than in thinking of how they are separate but connected. (Pink, 2012b, p. 7)

Nevertheless, in considering Massey's (2005) ideas of place as open and global, Moores (2012) argues that "what is missing from her approach to place is precisely a detailed attention to environmental experience, and to matters of dwelling and habitation" (p. 82). Such attention he

finds in the writings of phenomenological geographers[8] like Tuan (1977) and Seamon (1979a) and in the phenomenological philosophy of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. This, although Massey (2005) herself explicitly rejects Heidegger's notion of place, arguing that it "remains too rooted, too little open to the externally relational" (p. 183). Massey's critique is part of a broader discussion[9] that views place as a politically contested issue, where the challenge is how to settle between the boundness of a place and the values of openness and inclusivity. Thus, as Cresswell (2015) explains:

> While the geographical engagement with phenomenological enquiry rescued the notion of place from oblivion it simultaneously constructed a notion of place which some see as essentialist and exclusionary, based on notions of rooted authenticity that are increasingly unsustainable in the (post) modern world. (p. 41)

Nonetheless, Moores (2012) argues that there is "no reason, in principle, why a concern with habitation and embodied practices should be at odds with an interest in the openness of places" (p. 82). Pink (2012a) also agrees that Massey's work "begs further thought on the question of how the detail of local activities, sensory perception and human embodied experience are implicated in the constitution of place" (p. 25). Trying to reconcile between the *boundedness* and the *openness* of place, Malpas' (2018, 2021) understanding of place focuses on its relationality:

> Place is that bounded open region of possibility in which even space and time, as well as subjectivity and objectivity, first emerge. As such region, it is fundamentally relational, and that relationality permeates everything that pertains to place, everything that belongs with it, everything that appears in its embrace. (Malpas, 2018, p. 40)

[8] The question of how places and practices are interconnected and influence one another was central to researchers within the "experiential perspective" of human geography, who were strongly influenced by phenomenology (e.g., Buttimer, 1976; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977; Seamon, 1979a; Buttimer and Seamon, 1980; Seamon and Mugerauer, 1985). For further discussion, see chapter 3.

[9] A similar critique was also raised against Heidegger's concept of dwelling and its use in the context of architectural theory. Thus, in his article "The dark side of the domus" Leach (1998) argus that "architecture must look to a more flexible theoretical model, more in tune with the fluidity, flux and complexity of our contemporary modes of existence" (p. 31) For more on this critique and a response to it, see chapter 1 in Malpas, 2021.

Both Malpas' (2018, 2021) interpretation of place, as well as Massey's and Ingold's understanding of place, all share a sense of gathering alongside openness. Nevertheless, thinking about how places are created and how they can allow a sense of inhabitation remains an enduring challenge. Thinking on these issues, I diverge from Moores' (2012) focus on movement and mobility[10] as place constituted through "issues of habit, affect and attachment to environment in everyday living" (p. 69), in mundane habitual activities such as walking, driving, typing, scrolling and clicking.[11] Instead, I suggest focusing on the more deliberate act of place creation *in*, *with* and *through* media in the context of dwellers' Instagram *home accounts* and *renovation diaries*.

### *2.2.1 Placemaking with media*

In the decade following the calls to consider the concept of place in relation to life *with* and *in* media (from, e.g., Moores, 2012; Pink, 2012a), researchers have explored different ways in which technology and digital media are being used as part of placemaking (e.g., Evans, 2015a; Krajina, 2017; Lavi, 2017; McKim, 2017; Halegoua, 2019; Halegoua and Polson, 2021; Wilken and Humphreys, 2021; Maciej, 2024).

For example, Evans (2015a, 2015b) examines the use of locative social media to suggest a digital post-phenomenology of place that focuses on the situatedness, that is, the physical environment of people when they engage with technology. Building on Malpas' (2006) interpretation of Heidegger's ideas and on Jacobson's (2006) suggestion that *mood* affects people's spatial understanding, Evans' (2015a, 2015b) ethnography explores how users of the location-based social network Foursquare experience space, and suggests that people's attunement,

[10] An earlier discussion on the tension between mobility and locality can be found in David Morley's (2000) book "Home territories – media, mobility and identity". Morley argues that "if we take mobility to be a defining characteristic of the contemporary world, we must […] ask how, in a world of flux, forms of […] dwelling are sustained and reinvented" (pp.12–13). Following Tomlinson (1999) and Peters (1997), Morley concurs that despite the availability of different forms of travel and movement from place to place, most people are still very much rooted in their local life and their homes. "However, while many people remain local and many are 'kept in place' by structures of oppression of various forms, the experience which is most truly global is perhaps that of the experience of locality being undercut by the penetration of global forces and networks" (p. 14).

[11] In another, more recent consideration of the possibilities for inhabitation of digital environments through media, Markham (2020) builds on Moores' (2015) idea, (following Ingold), that a sense of at-homeness and the constitution of places can be achieved through practices of movement and mobility in digital environments.

orientation and *towards-which* are crucial to their "experience of using location-based social media and the revealing of place that emerges from that usage" (Evans, 2015a, p. 845). Referring to Heidegger's concepts of *dwelling* as *nearness* to *things*, Evans (2015a) distinguishes between two ways that people use location-based social networks to "reveal places" (ibid., p. 857) that are "dependent upon their orientation towards and intention for using the device" (ibid., p. 858). Evans concludes that only one mode of engagement results in a sense of *nearness* with the world (that he refers to as computational or poetic manner) and that this mode "is dependent upon the user bringing the device into care as part of their average everyday behaviours and is contingent upon the extent to which computation is a part of their everyday life" (Evans, 2015a, p. 857).

Other examples of phenomenologically inspired research into place and placemaking with media are explored in Markham and Rodgers' (2017) book *Conditions of Mediation: Phenomenological Perspectives on Media*. These include Krajina's (2017) account of how encounters with screens in the urban environment could contribute to the creation of a sense of place and Lavi's (2017) discussion on diasporic space as a contextualized experience of habitation – both inspired by Moores' engagement with phenomenology. Turning to the field of architecture for inspiration as to how media could be used as part of a process of placemaking, McKim (2017) focuses on the approach of architectural phenomenology, as developed mainly through Norberg-Schulz's interpretation of Heidegger's ideas (see a discussion on this issue in chapter 3). Drawing on this, he suggests that media could "provide a layer of historical depth to an existing physical geography, rather than simply a superficial aesthetic overlay" (p. 155) and that this should be achieved by "media-based interventions within architectural space" (ibid., p. 158).

Continuing the discussion about digital placemaking, Halegoua (2019), in her book *The Digital City*, suggests the concept of *re-placing* as "the use of digital media in cultivating a sense of place for oneself and others" (p. 16) by focusing on "the production of urban spaces within networked societies" (p. 19). For this discussion, Halegoua (2019) builds on Morley's (2000) call to consider new "forms of collective dwelling" (p. 12) in a "world of flux" (ibid.). Using social constructionist and phenomenological lenses, she argues that in cities, "actors use digital media to negotiate to create stable places of belonging while being in flux" (Halegoua, 2019, p. 5). In an issue of *Convergence* magazine on digital placemaking, Halegoua and Polson (2021) explain that "a drive to create and control a sense of place is understood as primary to how social actors identify with

each other and express their identities and how communities organize to build more meaningful and connected spaces" (p. 573).

Lastly, taking a media-centric approach to consider "placemaking through mobile social media platform Snapchat", Wilken and Humphreys (2021) focus on the platform's design and business model to discuss how "place and placemaking is configured in and through mobile device use and the precise modes of engagement associated with the mobile social media application" (p. 580), such as "(1) Filters and Lenses, (2) Snap Map and (3) venues and Context Cards" (ibid., p. 588).

Sharing with these scholars the notion that media could have an important role in placemaking in the digital age, the focus of this thesis is somewhat different from most of the existing literature about digital placemaking in three main ways: firstly, by considering the experience of placemaking not in the realm of habitual everyday routine use of media, but rather as part of an active engagement of an ongoing situated experience of home creation as building and dwelling (Heidegger, 1951/1971b); secondly, by focusing on the experience of the creation the specific place that is the home, with its unique and existential meaning in people's life; and thirdly, by considering the concept of place both in terms of the physical home as well as in terms of the place that is the *home account* or *renovation diary* – and how the two places are related to one another in dwellers' experience.

## 2.3 Amateurism and participation in the digital age

The active engagement of dwellers in the creation of their homes *in*, *with*, and *through* social media is linked to the broader discussions about amateurism and participation in the digital age[12]. Over the last two decades, these issues have been discussed and debated, both in academia as well as in mainstream media and public discourse. In these discussions, participation in the digital age is referred to either as an emerging culture (Jenkins et al., 2006; Jenkins, Ito and boyd, 2016) or as the result of a deliberate effort by tech companies to harness people's activities as part of their business model (Meikle, 2016). And while some scholars have suggested an optimistic view regarding the potential of new forms of participation in the Web 2.0 era (e.g., Jenkins, 2006;

[12] The discussion about participation based on digital platforms is sometimes referred to as *democratization* or *democratic practices* (e.g., Poell, Nieborg and Duffy, 2021, p. 158).

Shirky, 2008; Gauntlett, 2011; Ratto and Boler, 2014), others raised concerns that these participatory activities are part of how digital platforms affect and transform institutions and social practices in society (e.g., Van Dijck, Poell and De Waal, 2018). Whatever the case may be, it is currently widely acknowledged that social media platforms have changed how people participate in different activities that were previously mainly done by professionals and experts.

Continuing with the approach that refuses to see technologies and digital platforms as deterministic forces (e.g., Deuze, 2012, 2023; Baym, 2015; Jenkins, Ito and boyd, 2016), the view of participatory activities of people in the digital age that is taken in this thesis, recognizes it as a multifaceted phenomenon that is at once, reflecting-of, enabled-by and shaping both the social practices and experiences of people in the world as well as the technologies and platforms themselves. As Jenkins, Ito and boyd (2016) argue:

> Technologies do mirror and magnify many aspects of society – good, bad, and ugly. The technologies do not themselves make culture participatory. People do. And they do so by imagining – and working to achieve – new ways of connecting, coordinating, collaborating, and creating. (p. 184)

Thus, a phenomenological exploration of experiences of creation and participation *in*, *with* and *through* digital media should also account for the broader context of people's lives and pay attention to how this creation is part of the social, cultural, environmental, geographical, material and professional aspects that emerge in people's experiences. Nonetheless, in contrast to the more holistic phenomenological approach taken here, much of the critical writings in media studies in recent years on participation on and with social media have been focused on specific aspects of participation, such as participation as labour or participation as cultural production. These studies include work from scholars who have raised concerns regarding new forms of labour in the platform society (e.g., Nieborg and Poell, 2018; Van Dijck, Poell and De Waal, 2018; Poell, Nieborg and Duffy, 2021) and critically considered the aspirational and creative labour and passionate work of social media production (e.g., Duffy and Hund, 2015; Duffy, 2017; Duffy et al., 2021). Nonetheless, significantly less research attention is given to considering the ways in which social media and digital tools are being used as part of the creation of other things *beyond*

*media* and how this creation corresponds with people's everyday life and their physical and social environments.

Referring to this form of creation as *creation-in-the-world* (see the discussion in chapter 5*)*, I suggest that it is distinguished from other forms of labour and cultural production of media content, by the motivation behind it (which does not solely focus on gaining an audience or commercial aspirations, although it can still be a part of it), the outcome of what is being created (which includes something beyond media content for social platforms), and the entangled nature of such creation that brings together digital, social, material, professional and other aspects in people's life. This understating of creation of more-than-content, *in*, *with* and *through* social media and digital tools, draws on the concepts of amateurism (e.g., Said, 1994; Shirky, 2010; Gilbert et al., 2020; Ingold, 2021b) and craftsmanship (e.g., Sennett, 2008; McRobbie, 2016; Gershon and Deuze, 2019) as a basic human activity.

The concept of amateurism has been discussed over the years by scholars who find value in activities driven by passion, interest and commitment and not by monetary, economic or professional incentives. Thus, when discussing professionals and amateurs, Said (1994) argues that work and life are connected in the most meaningful way in the concept of amateurism as: "the desire to be moved not by profit or reward but by love for and unquenchable interest in the larger picture, in making connections across lines and barriers" (p. 76). In his article "In Praise of Amateurs", Ingold (2021b) also suggests that amateurism is not about a lesser degree of commitment to high standards but rather an approach that addresses any task or subject "for the love of it, motivated by a sense of care and affection, personal involvement and responsibility […] it is a way that cannot be dissociated from his or her whole way of living in the world" (p. 155).[13] This view suggests that amateurism is about people's *caring stance* towards the world, a deep connection between humans and other things, one that is being forged through a dedicated engagement (see the discussion in chapter 7 on the concept of *care*).

Considering participatory activities in the digital age as amateurism, Shirky (2010) explains that "the term itself derives from the Latin *amare* – 'to love'". The essence of amateurism is

[13] In the same vein, Ingold's (2013) discussions about making activities in the context of architecture, and his view on participation in architecture (2021a) provides anthropological–phenomenological insights on how the roles of users and producers commingle in the lived experiences of people, as discussed in chapter 3.

intrinsic motivation: to be an amateur is to do something for the love of it" (p. 82). Similarly, Sennett (2008) uses the concept of craftmanship to describe the same human desire "to do a job well for its own sake" (p. 9), and his concept of craftsmanship has been suggested as a way to think about new forms of creative work (e.g., McRobbie, 2016) as well as an alternative view on how to consider activities of media makers or creators (e.g., Gershon and Deuze, 2019). In his discussion about craftmanship, Sennett (2008) calls to move from focusing on the exceptionality of creativity into focusing on the worldly-oriented process of making things:

> An eagle-eyed reader will have noticed that the word *creativity* appears in this book as little as possible. This is because the word carries too much Romantic baggage – the mystery of inspiration, the claims of genius. (p. 290)

Thus, McRobbie (2016) argues that "[b]y lifting creative work from its pedestal and focusing on the mundane dimensions of the process of making, Sennett brings creative work closer to the more ordinary jobs and occupations" (p. 147). Drawing on the concept of craftsmanship (e.g., Lave and Wenger, 1991; Sennett, 2008), Gershon and Deuze (2019) suggest an alternative to thinking about media makers or creators as "a business of one", arguing that "[d]oing a task well for its own sake, for the satisfaction of showing mastery, is a very different goal than doing a task solely for profit, and often someone else's profit" (Gershon and Deuze, 2019, p. 304).

Building on this theoretical discussion about participation, amateurism and creation *in*, *with* and *through* digital media, the following section explores the literature about the specific issue of how media is used as part of a home renovation process by dwellers, including a focus on Pinterest and Instagram, the two leading platforms that are being used in this context.

### *2.3.1 Home renovation with media*

Over the years, various forms of media—books, magazines, trade shows, exhibitions, television and digital platforms—have been used by dwellers during the building, renovation and decoration of their homes. One of the most influential categories to gain traction in late nineteenth-century Europe and the US was home and interior magazines (Aynsley and Berry, 2005). Design historian Jeremy Aynsley (2006) notes that "[w]hile the editorial blend of each title was individual,

sufficient common characteristics suggest that by 1900 they had become a defined genre of magazine publishing that in many respects continues on similar lines today" (p. 199). Focused on consumers, monthly magazines such as *House Beautiful*, featured inspirational "profiles of individual houses with detailed descriptions of their room arrangements, furnishings, and gardens" (Aynsley, 2006, p. 199) that were often impractical for most readers, alongside more accessible decoration ideas. Design magazines also involved dwellers through competitions that invited amateurs and professionals alike to contribute, such as "Ideas for artistic and original designs for a House for an Art Lover" (Aynsley, 2006, p. 201).

However, Aynsely (2006) notes that historians remain uncertain about how the inspiration and advice from these magazines were actually implemented by different dwellers at the end of nineteenth century. He does, however, identify a possible clue in the satirical novel, *The Diary of a Nobody* (1892), by George and Weedon Grossmith, which follows a couple's experiences in their London home. In the novel –originally published as a magazine column—the character, Henry Pooter, "takes note of current commercial strategies of the advertisers, paying attention to brand names and adopting the advice of magazines, which he exchanges with neighbours, in a wish to introduce his desired effect of homeliness" (Aynsley, 2006, p. 201).

While *The Diary of a Nobody* is a literacy satire featuring a fictional character, the practice of diary writing has been used for centuries—especially by women—not only to document every day life but, perhaps more surprisingly, to share it with others (Culley, 1985). In her book *The Qualified Self,* Lee Humphreys (2018) suggests that sharing aspects of one's life on social media continues this longstanding tradition. She argues that "[i]n many ways people are using new media in similar ways to how people used old media" (p. 3). Her theory of "media accounting" explores "the media practices that allow us to document our lives and the world around us, which can then be presented back to ourselves or others" (p. 9). As she explains, "media accounting tells a story, conveys information, and reveals explanation… [and] is an important way through which we come to understand processes and change – changes about ourselves and others" (p. 13). Still, a key shift in the digital age is "the visibility and circulation patterns of media accounting" (Humphreys, 2018, p. 118).

Before the digital age, in the twentieth century, sources of home inspiration for dwellers expanded beyond magazines and books to include television—particularly home makeover shows

that "participate in a now well-established historical lineage of multi-media design advice, mediating design ideas and representing an ideal dwelling space" (Narotzy, 2006, p. 260). Narotzy (2006) distinguishes between the early DIY programmes in Britain and the US, which were more informative, and later home makeover shows, which were more entertainment-driven:

> While the former's educational vocation focused on the clear, step by step presentation of a process and on skill acquisition, makeovers prioritize narrative, appearance, outcome and drama. They lay bare a shift from function to representation in terms of the media's contribution to the self-made domestic interior. (p. 267)

Thus, even as the home makeover TV genre "emphasize[s] the agency of the designers, while paying lip service to homeowners' requests or suggestions" (Narotzy, 2006, p. 271), and is geared towards being interesting, the books that supplement these TV shows took the role of providing more practical knowledge to people on how to renovate their homes.

In recent years, while the proliferation of home renovation content on social media and the increasing use of social media as part of a home renovation process by dwellers have been discussed in mainstream media (e.g., Denyer, 2015; Vincent, 2023; Hess, 2024), the academic research on this issue is still very limited. A notable exception to that is the work of Aneta Podkalicka and her colleagues, who have engaged in recent years with the issue in a series of publications that discuss the role of media (both traditional and social media) as part of home renovation practices in Australia,[14] mainly in the context of Low Carbon Living[15] (e.g., Hulse et al., 2015; Podkalicka et al., 2016; Podkalicka and Milne, 2017; Hunter, 2019; Podkalicka, 2019; Podkalicka and Anderson, 2020; Aggeli, 2021; Aggeli and Mechlenborg, 2022). Pointing to the dearth of research about the use of media as part of a home renovation process, Podkalicka and Milne (2017) argue that although:

> [P]eople use media to learn, share and document their renovations […], [f]rom how-to videos on YouTube and the curated […] pages

[14] These researchers are all focused on the Australian renovation market. For more about Australia's infatuation with home renovation see Fiona Allon's book "Renovation nation: Our obsession with home" (2008).

[15] This work forms part of a research study project with Australian Cooperative Research Centre for Low Carbon Living (CRC LCL).

> of Pinterest to the mainstream impact of The Block […], few studies actually examine the specificity of media use. (p. 694)

In a two parts report about "media and home renovation practices in Australia" (Hulse et al., 2015; Podkalicka et al., 2016), the researchers explore "renovators' motivations, influences and the ways in which they sought information and expertise" (Podkalicka et al., 2016, p. 7), as well as "the roles of media in home renovation processes" (ibid.) by using a "media ecology" perspective (ibid., p. 12) to explore "media world" of home renovators. In their study, they have found:

> [A] high level of commitment, research and entrepreneurial work by renovators – both in terms of planning, decision-making and implementation – that goes into each renovation. This is particularly the case for homeowners who renovate to live in a home (the main focus of this report) rather than for investment. (Podkalicka et al., 2016, p. 42)

Following these reports, Podkalicka and her colleagues continue exploring home renovation practices with media in Australia by inquiring into questions of home renovators' "budgeting, self-education and documentation" (Podkalicka and Milne, 2017) by employing the concept of "double articulation" (Silverstone, 1994; Livingstone, 2007) "about the ways in which media always function at both the material and symbolic levels" (Podkalicka and Milne, 2017, p. 695). Thus, they conclude that:

> Not only do media have a significant material presence within this fabric of the social life but they construct and re-construct the everyday material, social and cultural reality of renovation practice. The omission of media from the studies of home renovation is thus so much more surprising. (Podkalicka and Milne, 2017, p. 702)

Trying to explain this oversight in the scholarly literature on the role of media in home renovation practices and experiences, Podkalicka (2019) suggests that:

> The challenge can perhaps be explained by theoretical and empirical tools not keeping up with the fast pace and dynamic shifts in digital

> media, which includes blurring boundaries between the roles of content makers, audiences and consumers, and increasingly complex infrastructures. (p. 211)

In the context of *dwellers-creators* who are sharing their home renovation process and experience on social media, there are two kinds of practices of creation where the boundaries between producers and users intermingle: the practice of creating their physical home and the practice of creating content to share online. At the same time, many others create their homes (or other things in the world) with social media but do not create content to share publicly as part of their experience of *creation-in-the-world*. As a result, these creation experiences with media are often less represented in media research (c.f., Podkalicka and Milne, 2017; Podkalicka, 2019) that mainly focus on creators of content, influencers or microcelebrities (e.g., Marwick, 2015; Abidin, 2016, 2017, 2020; Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Erz, Marder and Osadchaya, 2018; O'Meara, 2019; Leaver, Highfield and Abidin, 2020; Miguel *et al.*, 2022; Duffy, Miltner and Wahlstedt, 2022; Duffy, Ononye and Sawey, 2023; Kozinets, Gretzel and Gambetti, 2023).

By bringing together the discussion about creation *in*, *with* and *through* media and the discussion about the creation *of* media in the context of home renovation and social media, this research explores what can be seen as instances of resistance to the neoliberal market approach that views people as *either* producers or consumers in both the field of architecture, as well as in the field of media.[16] By considering people's experiences of creating their homes with social media from a phenomenological perspective, this research suggests seeing dwellers' participation as an active engagement where the modern boundaries between production and consumption are being blurred, and the experiences of creation and dwelling are reimagined as a holistic entanglement. This does not mean that *dwellers-creators* operate outside of the modern capitalistic system. It simply means that in the context of creating their *own* home (and their home account), they are acting as both *creators* and *dwellers*, producers and users, designers and inhabitants and that this *convergence* is affecting their experience of home and their sense of dwelling.

[16] A similar discussion can be seen in Ingold's (2000/2022) suggestion of a dwelling perspective vs. a commodity perspective in the modern post-industrial world.

## 2.4 A platform for every practice

As part of the practice of home creation with social media, *dwellers-creators* have been using different digital platforms in different ways for more than a decade. While different platforms are being used in different ways by different people, they each have particular affordances[17] that enable or constrain specific uses. Thus, Pinterest (launched in 2010) is primarily used for searching visual inspiration and design ideas; YouTube (launched in 2005) is mainly used for watching "how-to" and tutorial videos; Facebook[18] groups (launched in 2010) are mainly used for asking specific questions; and Instagram's (launched in 2010) primary use in recent years in this context the practice of *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* (see chapter 5 for a timeline of the development of the practice of home creation with social media). Amongst these different platforms, it seems that two platforms in specific – Pinterest and Instagram – represent the evolution that happened in the way in which social media is being used as part of a home creation process.

### *2.4.1 Finding ideas on Pinterest*

Starting with the early years of Pinterest, researchers have found that Pinterest users consider Pins (image clippings) as practical ideas (Gilbert et al., 2013) and that there is a direct and strong connection between users' activities on Pinterest and projects that they plan to pursue in the physical world (Linder, Snodgrass and Kerne, 2014). Linder, Snodgrass and Kerne (2014) argue that by collecting Pins and sorting them into thematic boards, users on Pinterest are performing a process of digital design curation that includes visual cognition (Baddeley, 2000) and provokes ideation. Early studies suggested that users see other users as 1) sources of good ideas (Linder, Snodgrass and Kerne, 2014); 2) social proof that non-professionals can achieve new ideas (ibid); and 3) sources for identification with like-minded people (Chang et al., 2014). Nonetheless, Pinterest's social affordances, especially as other platforms have developed, seem very limited (as

[17] Drawing on a review of how the concept of affordances has been used in social media research (e.g., Bucher and Helmond, 2018), Ronzhyn, Cardenal, and Batlle Rubio (2023) define social media affordances as "the perceived actual or imagined properties of social media, emerging through the relation of technological, social, and contextual, that enable and constrain specific uses of the platforms" (p. 3178).

[18] Facebook was available to the public from 2006 and the feature of groups that is mainly used as part of the home creation process was added in 2010.

supported by the ethnographic findings in this thesis). Thus, the primary uses of the platform are as a visual search engine and as a digital pin board for curation (e.g., Kerne et al., 2017) and collection of "ideas" either by professionals (e.g., Scolere and Humphreys, 2016) or as part of people's everyday activities. The curation activity on Pinterest is described by Linder, Snodgrass and Kerne (2014) as everyday ideation and draws on Wakkary and Maestri's (2007) concept of everyday design – a concept that considers design as a form of use and dwellers as everyday designers, who change and alter artefacts and how they can be used:

> By everyday ideation, we mean ongoing processes in which curators look for, find, organize, and return to meaningful information as a means of provoking and forming ideas that address practical and emotional needs. These curators are informal designers [who] work with digital representations of information as design objects. (Linder, Snodgrass and Kerne, 2014, p. 1)

The notion that Pinterest users consider pins as practical design ideas that they can use in their everyday lives is echoed by Pinterest's co-founder Evan Sharp, who explains that the company sees itself as a visual search engine for ideas:

> Early information technology used words to connect ideas, like hyperlinks […]. Search engines we built today have drafted on that [;] they rely on words to get you answers to your questions. But when it comes to searching for ideas, words aren't the right way. Sometimes you don't really know what you're looking for until you see it. (Sharp in Lynley, 2017)

In the context of the experience of home creation by dwellers, the use of Pinterest has been discussed by the actress Diane Keaton (2017) in her book *The House that Pinterest Built*. Keaton (2017) shares her experience of creating her home by using Pinterest and explains how she was able to "pin the world's most eminent architects from the past through the present and revisit them anytime" (ibid., p. 8). Keaton adds that what is especially compelling to her about Pinterest is the idea of "seeing through other people's eyes" (ibid.):

> Pinterest is a place where wordless juxtapositions are the perfect format for collecting and editing those dreams. Pinterest is

> experienced in the moment. Once-upon-a-time scrap bookers, collage artists, image-driven addicts, and appropriators like me were lonely hunters. Now dare I say billions of people discover, seize, and enlarge their reference pool with the variety of beauty allocated from others. (Keaton, 2017, p. 8)

Keaton describes her experience of finding visual inspiration for her home on Pinterest as being part of "an eternal digital community" (ibid.). However, as researchers have noted, "community" is limited in its use as "an academic concept" (Pink et al., 2016, p. 103) due to its ambiguity, its widespread use and the different definitions and meanings people attached to it (Amit, 2010).

Yet, despite the academic unease with the term community, Amit (2010) suggests that the persistent use of the term to describe different things calls for researchers to consider "the possibility of developing a mode of investigation that recognized this ambiguity as a useful analytical resource rather than as a handicap" (ibid., p. 358) (see the discussion in chapter 4 on the methodology and in chapter 6 on the concept of relational environment). Thus, for example, Keaton's use of the term community to describe a sense of connection she feels to others who have created and/or shared visual home design inspiration she found on Pinterest fits within Amit's (2020) discussion on how people often experience a sense of belonging that they perceive as community, even without having a direct correspondence or communal engagement with a group of people.

Nonetheless, the little possibility for direct engagement with others on Pinterest, as well as the difficulty to follow other people's home creation experiences as they unfold, have increasingly shifted the focus of *dwellers-creators* who were using social media as part of their home creation process from Pinterest to Instagram that provides a fertile soil for social engagement as part of a home creation process (see the discussion in chapters 5 and 6 on this issue).

### *2.4.2 Connecting and communicating through Instagram*

While Pinterest is mainly used as a visual search engine and digital curation board, the increasing use of Instagram as part of a home renovation process by dwellers should be understood in the context of the platform's social affordances and its functioning as "a conduit for *communication*"

(Leaver, Highfield and Abidin, 2020, p. 1, *italics in the original*). In their book *Instagram*, Leaver, Highfield and Abidin (2020) argue that "the visual image, video and other combinations of these elements in Stories are first and formats about communicating with one another" (p. 1). However, unlike in the early years of social networks, where communication was mainly with friends, family and colleagues that people already knew, Instagram also operates as an *environment* that allows for the formation of different groups of like-minded people who are gathered around shared interests. As Baym (2015) explains: "[D]ifferent technological platforms do lend themselves to different sorts of group formations, and differences in digital affordances lead to differences in group behaviour" (p. 83). In these *communities of interest*, the content and the photographs being shared are "easily recognised as eliciting social interactions" (Serafinelli, 2018, p. 87).

Thus, it seems that the human desire for interaction and its coupling with the way in which media are being used by dwellers for documentation of a renovation for different purposes (Podkalicka et al., 2016) could explain the widespread of *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* on Instagram. In a recent article in the *Financial Times* titled "Rise of the Insta-Renovators: Revamping their Homes for an Online Audience" (Vincent, 2023), British *dwellers-creators* describe how their Instagram *community of interest* grew from an intimate group in 2018 where everyone knew each other to the widespread practice it is today. The article describes how Instagram has become the main arena where dwellers share their home renovation process by opening "dedicated Instagram accounts for their homes".

Importantly, a platform like Instagram is not *one holistic* place or community. Instead, as Baym (2015) notes, the different groups (or the relational environments as I refer to them) that are developed in and in relation to a social platform represent diverse groups which have different "practices and purposes, which are sometimes at odds with the other groups" (p. 83). Moreover, even the broader home design and renovation *community of interest* on Instagram is in fact many different subgroups that are defined by different markers such as taste, geographical location, socio-economic background, etc. Thus, while these groups share some characteristics with one another – most notably, the interest of their members in home design and renovation – they are differentiated in other respects.

Another important issue when considering the social engagement and communication between *dwellers-creators* in the *relational environment* of home renovation communities on Instagram

(see the discussion in chapter 6) is how knowledge is being transferred around the shared interests of home and home renovation. A useful framework for this discussion is Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of *communities of practice*. Emerging in the field of education as a model of how members of a community can learn from one another and transfer knowledge in non-formal ways, the concept was extended to include remote collaborative work with digital technologies (e.g., Kimble, Hildreth and Wright, 2001) and in online communities (e.g., Jenkins, Ford and Green, 2013), and has also been considered in the context of home renovation with digital media (e.g., Aggeli and Mechlenborg, 2022). Thus, drawing on this concept, Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) suggest that in online communities, "people initially learn through 'lurking' or observing from the margins, that certain basic activities may represent stepping-stones toward greater engagement, and that key individuals help to motivate others' advancement" (p. 158). By watching how more experienced members of a *community of practice* do things, socialize, solve problems, and – no less importantly – tell their stories about their practices and experiences (Kimble, Hildreth and Wright, 2001), new members learn how to shape their practices.

This discussion about periphery vs. centre and newcomers vs. veterans of participants in a group relates to the discussion about different degrees of engagement of users in digital environments. Thus, some researchers have suggested that there are two forms of online users: active and passive users (e.g., Escobar-Viera et al., 2018), and that passive participants are considered the majority of users on social platforms (Van Dijck and Nieborg, 2009). Nonetheless, Jenkins Ford and Green (2013) argue that the distinction between passive and active participation is more fluid and that passive participants contribute in many subtle ways to their online communities. As an alternative to the unfavoured view of passive participants as "lurkers" who "drew on the community without contributing back" (ibid, p. 157), Jenkins Ford and Green (2013) suggest considering participation as a process where all participants are working together in different ways, including sharing content, asking questions, commenting, criticizing, encouraging and supporting in different ways.

By placing the participatory and the phenomenological existential scholarly discussions in media into a conversation with each other in this chapter while considering issues of place, placemaking and amateurism in the context of *dwellers-creators'* experience of home renovation with social media, the next chapter moves to the field of architecture where I consider Heidegger's

(1951/1971b) idea of *building and dwelling* in relation to people's participation in the creation of the built environment, and in particular, dwellers' active engagement in the creation of their homes.

*Chapter Three*

# The Experience of Home – Building and Dwelling

Among the different places where people's lives are lived, the *home* has a unique significance for understanding our human existence in the world. As Cresswell (2015) explains, in a phenomenological approach to place, home is considered "a centre of meaning and a field of care" (p. 39) and "acts as a kind of metaphor for place in general" (ibid.). This focus on the home as part of "humanistic approaches to place" (ibid.) is attributed mainly to the ideas developed in the work of two philosophers: Heidegger's (1951/1971b) concept of *dwelling* and Gaston Bachelard's (1957/2014) discussion on the *poetics of space*, and their development in the field of human geography. Thus, while home certainly has multi-dimensional meanings and interpretations across the academic literature[19] (Mallett, 2004), in the context of this thesis, the home is explored through an existential–phenomenological perspective as part of the exploration of the experience of *home creation* (building) and *inhabitation* (dwelling) with social media and as a *thing* that *dwellers-creatures* care-for.

Drawing on Heidegger's essays *Building Dwelling Thinking (Bauen Wohnen Denken)*[20] (1951/1971b) and *The Thing (Das Ding)* (1950/1971c), this chapter discusses the concepts of *building and dwelling* as a holistic experience of creation and habitation from a participatory standpoint. These philosophical ideas are explored here by engaging with scholarly discussions

[19] The centrality and the ubiquity of the term "home" give way to a variety of interpretations that vary across different times, geographies and research disciplines, spanning from historical (e.g., Rybczynski, 1987), anthropological (e.g., Miller, 2001, 2010), and philosophical writings (e.g., Bachelard, 1957/2014), through research in the fields of human geography (e.g., Tuan, 1991), architecture (e.g., Dovey, 1985), and design (e.g., Pink et al., 2017), expanding also into discussions of the psychological aspects of the home (e.g., Moore, 2000; Israel, 2003). In a review of the concept of home in multidisciplinary academic literature, Mallett (2004) found that home is often understood as a place, a space, a feeling, a practice or was a way of being-in-the-world.

[20] Malpas (2021, p. 39) explains that the detailed discussion in *Building Dwelling Thinking* (1951/1971b) is one of the only places where Heidegger discuss the concept of *dwelling* (*Wohnen*). Besides this main discussion, Malpas (2021, p. 198) notes that the term is also mentioned briefly a few times including in *Being and Time* (1927/2019); *The Thing* (1950/1971c); and in *… Poetically, Man Dwells …* (1951/1971a).

about the interrelation between dwellers and their homes, as well as the connection between creation and inhabitation in the fields of architecture (e.g., Alexander, 1977; 1979), anthropology (e.g., Miller, 2010; Ingold, 2013; Pink et al., 2017), human geography (e.g., Relph, 1976, 1993; Seamon, 2018) and philosophy (e.g., Bachelard, 1957/2014; Malpas, 2021). Thus, by using a phenomenological existential perspective to consider the experience of home as building and dwelling *in*, *with* and *through* media, this thesis touches on issues that are part of the broader discussion about the human situation of *being-in-the-world* in the digital age. Since, as Malpas (2021) argues:

> Although the question of the home may arise through an initial concern with the home as residence, it does not end there, but instead leads on to a more encompassing concern with the ways in which human living is given form across the entire range of human activities. (p. 78)

## 3.1 The relations between building and dwelling

As part of his broader exploration into "the situation of being in the physical world of things" (Sharr, 2007, p. 26), Heidegger discusses his ideas of *building and dwelling* in relation to the built environment in a series of three lectures at the beginning of the 1950s: *Building Dwelling Thinking* (1951/1971b), *The Thing* (1950/1971c), *and "…Poetically, Man Dwells…*' (1951/1971a). To consider the nature of the "things that we call buildings" (Heidegger, 1951/1971b, p. 152), Heidegger explores two questions: "What is it to dwell?" and "How does building belong to dwelling?" (p. 143). Malpas (2021) explains that the "position set out in 'Building Dwelling Thinking' includes three main interconnecting relations: between building and dwelling, between space and place, and between the human and the world. In each case, Heidegger reverses the usually assumed ordering of those relations" (p. 20). Thus, Heidegger starts by saying, "We attain to dwelling, so it seems, only by means of building. The latter, building, has the former, dwelling, as its goal. Still, not every building is a dwelling" (Heidegger, 1951/1971b, p. 143). Sharr (2007) explains that Heidegger "considered building and dwelling to be bound up intimately with one another. For him, these activities were related through people's involvement with the things of 'place'; and their attempts to make sense of place" (p. 36). As Heidegger (1951/1971b) writes:

> Dwelling and building are related as end and means. However, as long as this is all we have in mind, we take dwelling and building as two separate activities, an idea that has something correct in it. Yet at the same time by the means-end schema we block our view of the essential relations. For building is not merely a means and a way toward dwelling – to build is in itself already to dwell. (p. 144)

The essential relations that Heidegger (1951/1971b) sees between the experience of *building* and the experience of *dwelling* and his call to "build out of dwelling" (p. 159) is considered in this thesis as a conceptual foundation for exploring the participation of dwellers in the creation of their homes in the digital age. Thus, I argue that dwellers' experiences of home creation *in, through* and *with* social media provide a unique opportunity to explore what happens when experiences of building and dwelling are bound up together. As Heidegger (1951/1971b) suggests:

> As soon as we try to think of the nature of constructive building in terms of a letting-dwell, we come to know more clearly what that process of making consists in by which building is accomplished. Usually we take production to be an activity whose performance has a result, the finished structure, as its consequence. It is possible to conceive of making in that way; we thereby grasp something that is correct, and yet never touch its nature, which is a producing that brings something forth. (pp. 156–157)

As Sharr (2007) explains, for Heidegger, *building* a home and *dwelling* in a home are both continuous aspects of daily life and dwellers' engagement with their homes. It is not merely an architectural project that starts and finishes, but rather an ongoing situation of changing and modifying the living environment in different scales in response to dwellers' lives:

> In Heidegger's scheme, using the table constitutes dwelling. And people's engagement with it constitutes building and dwelling. Moving the table around the room is building, of a sort, done in response to the needs of its users. (Sharr, 2007, p. 41)

The different practical possibilities of use that a home offers to its dwellers for their daily life experiences can be seen as what Heidegger (1951/1971b) refers to as the building's capacity for "letting dwell":

> [T]he nature of the erecting of buildings cannot be understood adequately in terms either of architecture or of engineering construction, nor in terms of a mere combination of the two. [...] The nature of building is letting dwell. Building accomplishes its nature in the raising of locations by the joining of their spaces. *Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build*. (p. 157, *italics in the original*)

Sharr (2007) explains that Heidegger believes that places, things and buildings should be understood through use and experience. Nonetheless, use and experience do not guarantee a sense of *dwelling* or *nearness*. Since, as Sharr (2007) notes, the philosopher argues that "one can occupy buildings daily but not feel at home in them or near to them" (p. 39). How then *nearness* and *dwelling* can be achieved? As Cresswell (2015) explains: "Building as dwelling involves an ethics of care and preservation in relation to the world that, if properly heeded, results in authentic being-in-the-world – a kind of being based on humility and nurture" (p. 29). Arguably, similar to the way people *care* about their own existence (see the discussion in chapter 7), understanding *building as dwelling* suggests that a caring engagement with the home and its creation process requires the involvement of its dwellers. As Sharr (2007) writes:

> Heidegger's building and dwelling took place together over time. The activity described by these words wasn't so much the preserve of professionals as the way of life of regular people. It described individuals' ongoing relationship with the world around them at a variety of scales; taking place over months, years and lives. It wasn't the short-term outcome of a mercantile production process managed by experts. (p. 42)

However, this understating of Heidegger's ideas regarding the creation process of homes, buildings and places as inherently participatory is not the way in which the philosopher's ideas are usually interpreted in the field of architecture. The introduction of Heidegger's ideas within

architectural discourse was mainly through the writings of the architect Christian Norberg-Schulz (1971, 1980, 1988). And as Sharr (2007) argues, while Heidegger's call was "to reintegrate building with dwelling – to reintegrate the making of somewhere with the activities and qualities of its inhabitation" (p. 3), and was not focused on "any sort of finished product" (ibid.), under Norberg-Schulz's Heideggerian-professional framework for architecture, any participatory engagement of dwellers was confined only to the final stages after the building was already built:

> Unlike Heidegger's Black Forest farmhouse residents, who designed and built for themselves according to their own needs and cultural expectations, in this scenario the architect designs, contractors build, and only then do inhabitants build and dwell. (Sharr, 2007, p. 99)

This emphasis on the moment in time in which a design plan materializes into a concrete physical building, but before it starts to evolve as part of its true nature of "letting dwell", is the epicentre in the means and ends scheme of modern architectural production. This is also the point at which physical houses usually turn into visual media,[21] photographed when they are "ready" and "finished", before they start to be affected by the messiness of people's lives and the natural changes, including deterioration. Yet, as Ingold (2013) suggests in his discussion on *making*, even if "[t]he architect would like to think that the complete building stands as the crystallisation of an original design concept, with all its components finally fixed in their proper places" (p. 47), in reality:

> [B]uildings are part of the world, and the world will not stop still but ceaselessly unfolds along its innumerable paths of growth, decay and regeneration, regardless of the most concerted of human attempts to nail it down, or to cast it in fixed and final forms. (ibid., p. 48)

In contrast to the way in which Heidegger's idea of *dwelling* was interpreted in the field of architecture as connected to the human experience *after* the completion of the physical artefact, Jacobs and Malpas (2013) suggest that the concept of *dwelling* could help in thinking through a

[21] Visualizations prior to this materialization include drawing, floor plans, renderings, models, etc.

new research agenda for housing that acknowledges the *incompleteness* of a home as part of an ever-evolving life of building and dwelling:

> That humans dwell means, in part, that humans are always in the world in a way such that their own being is bound to the beings around them, and so also to the world – dwelling thus implies relationality, as it also implies indeterminacy and incompleteness, and yet it also requires identity […]. The challenge is to incorporate such thinking into contemporary housing studies, and especially into a field that is so often driven by utilitarian, prudential and even commercial considerations. (p. 290)

Rethinking Heidegger's concept of *dwelling* and the different interpretations it has had over the years regarding the issues of place and architecture, Malpas (2021) writes that "to talk of dwelling inevitably involves some notion of place" (p. 35). And that the understanding of dwelling should be focused on how "place is tied to the human, […] and to that which goes beyond the human, which is to say, to the world" (p. 35). Thus, Malpas (2021) suggests that:

> As it is a relation in and to place, dwelling necessarily involves the human, and yet is not grounded in the human. The human finds its ground, its place, in and through dwelling. It does this through attending and responding to (making allowance for) the larger ordering of things that together constitute the world. (Malpas, 2021. p. 51)

Malpas (2021) argues that this deep relation between place and the human – that is, *dwelling* – should lead to the creation of buildings that offer more *responsiveness* "since the place to which all 'building' and 'dwelling' respond is always multiple and differentiated, so the responsiveness at issue here can never be determined or prescribed in advance" (p. 188). Thus, Malpas (2021) argues:

> On the basis of Heidegger's account, one can view design as operating within a domain opened for it out of the active engagement in the world that is building, and as standing in a close relation to the mode of living in the world. (ibid. p. 86)

Yet, while this approach resists the idea of a house as a final fixed form created as part of a design project, this is not to suggest that what we are talking about here is merely a spontaneous habitual everyday activity that goes on in the background of life. Instead, when thinking about the issues of planning and design in Heidegger's (1971b) scheme of *building and dwelling*, Malpas (2021) argues that "the space of design, of plan and of project is opened up in the original responsiveness that is involved in dwelling and in letting-dwell" (p. 77), and that this requires "a different attitude to design – one that sees design as responding to the task of building and of living as that takes on a singular and concrete form" (ibid., p. 87).

Acknowledging that *Building Dwelling Thinking* does not provide any specific architectural theory, Malpas (2021) does not clarify whether when talking about an "active engagement in the world that is building" (p. 86), he means the active engagement of professional architects or dwellers. However, his later comments suggest that he thinks there is a problem with the current system of how buildings are being created:

> The danger for architecture is that it becomes dysfunctional through a refusal of that releasement – through the holding on to place, to the bounded and the open, as if place were indeed that which remains in the possession of architecture, as if it were the 'gift' of architecture, as if it were "made" by architecture. But architecture does not possess, does not have in its gift, does not make, that to which it already belongs. (ibid., p. 188)

Moreover, Malpas (2021) argues that a close reading of Heidegger's (1951/1971b) essay reveals that in contrast to supporting the notion of a heroic individual creative architect, such as Ayn Rand's Howard Roark,[22] Heidegger presents an opposite approach, with an emphasis "on an attentive responsiveness to place and to the world" (Malpas, 2021, p. 57).

Drawing on this understanding of Heidegger's (1951/1971b) idea of *building and dwelling* as an ongoing, attentive, responsive relation between people and the world through the concept of place, I now turn to briefly discuss the historical context of people's participation in the creation of homes, following by a more detailed exploration of Christopher Alexander's (1977; 1979)

[22] This is part of Malpas' discussion on the two forms of authenticity in Heidegger's account that I discuss in chapter 6.

suggestion for the participation of people in the creation of their built environments and their homes.

## 3.2 Dwellers' participation in architecture

The participation of people in the creation process of their homes is not a novel idea and, in fact, has existed for centuries in the form of vernacular architecture (Rapoport, 1969). Vernacular architecture has been a common tradition throughout history in which ordinary people, and not experts, play the central role in creating the built environment:

> The physical environment of man, especially the built environment, has not been, and still is not, controlled by the designer. This environment is the result of vernacular (or folk, or popular) architecture, and it has been largely ignored in architectural history and theory. (Rapoport, 1969, p. 1)

Rapoport (1969) argues that this tradition of buildings that are shaped through time by members of the community "is the direct and unself-conscious translation into physical form of a culture, its needs and values as well as the desires, dreams, and passions of a people" (p. 2). Rapoport identifies in vernacular architecture what later became one of the main arguments in favour of participatory process in the modern era: "[s]ince the average member of the group builds his own house, he understands his needs and requirements perfectly; any problems that arise will affect him personally and be dealt with" (ibid. p. 4).

However, in the modern era, with the move towards professionalization and specialization in the field of architecture, the mechanisms of the market approach result in a growing distance between the people who create a house and the people who live in it. In their book *Architecture and Participation*, Blundell Jones, Petrescu and Till (2005) argue that this exclusion of people from influencing one of the most important aspects of their life "leads to a sense of alienation of the users from their environment" (p. xiv) and creates a gap "between the world as built and the world as needed and desired" (ibid.). Wishing to narrow this gap, different scholars have argued

over the years for the importance of the participation[23] of people in the creation of their homes and their built environments (e.g., Alexander, 1977, 1979; Dovey, 1985, 1993; Relph, 1993; Till, 2005; Ingold, 2013). However, as it turned out, in many cases, this participation "is token, bringing a degree of worthiness to the architectural process without really transforming it" (Blundell Jones, Petrescu and Till, 2005, p. xiii).

Considering the effect media might have on people's participation in architecture in the context of home design television shows, Blundell Jones, Petrescu and Till (2005) caution that an emphasis on superficial imagery "can lead to false participation, turning us into passive consumers and not active doers and makers" (p. xv). This argument is based on the prevailing way in which architecture has been presented over the years in media, with an emphasis on one moment in time when the building is "finished", leaving aside the process of its creation and the daily life, uses and changes that are inevitably in its future:

> There is hardly a magazine or newspaper column that illustrates architecture taking the user into account […]. It is as if architecture were merely a potential space and not an actual place, concrete, made of real materials, and inhabited by people in a permanent and continually changing relationship. (Blundell Jones, Petrescu and Till, 2005, pp. 12–13)

Then, with the emergence of social media platforms and the new participatory discussion, the role of media as part of the participation in the creation of architecture has also been reassessed. Thus, McKim (2014) argues that while the field of architecture has generally been unfavourable to participatory ideas and the DIY design movements, he sees an opportunity in how digital tools and new platforms could be used to increase participation in the creation of the built environment. Nonetheless, McKim (2014) insists that this potential participation needs to remain a professional-led process:

[23] This discussion is also connected to an earlier wave of thinkers in the 1960s and 1970s, who promoted an agenda for the return of people and communities as active participants in the creation processes of their cities, neighbourhoods and homes. Thus, Jane Jacobs (1961) suggested a bottom-up approach to urban planning, Bernard Rudofsky (1964) explored the history of "architecture without architects" in traditional societies, and Sherry Arnstein (1969) developed "a ladder of citizen participation".

> In the context of architecture and urban planning, it seems clear that the desirable goal is not the promotion of a "do it yourself" public working independently from or in opposition to the design professions, but rather the development of effective forms of collaboration between two spheres that have too often been disconnected. (p. 291)

Indeed, the architectural discourse on the potential of digital media and social platforms to play a part in the creation of houses and buildings repeatedly remains within the framework of professional architecture. Thus, in his discussion about "the second digital turn in architecture", Carpo (2017) argues that the idea that new technologies and digital platforms will be used as collaborative digital design tools[24] ended up in "the participatory turn that never was" (p. 131), whereas "[t]he ensuing meteoric rise of social media, from Facebook to Wikipedia, was not matched by any comparable development in digital design" (ibid., p. 5).

Considering the idea of *dwelling in the digital age* in the context of architecture in a recent issue of *Footprint*, the editors, van den Heuvel and Mota (2023), noted that "after the digital turn, the house seemed to have gone missing from architecture debates" (p. 3). Asking, "What had happened to the notion of dwelling?" (ibid.), van den Heuvel and Mota (2023) write that:

> When perusing the digital discourse in architecture, it is striking how its main foci almost exclusively concern new production methods, especially the 'non-standard' fabrication of building elements and different understandings of the material dimensions of architecture that are being hypothesised under the impact of the new abstracted ways of 'drawing' as an outcome of data-processing. (p. 3)

Nonetheless, the new interpretation of *dwelling* in architectural theory that van den Heuvel and Mota (2023) find in "the reconceptualisation of architecture as ecological and relational" (p. 5) seems to be taking *dwelling and building* away from the worldly emphasis in Heidegger's

[24] Different initiatives in the earlier days of the Web 2.0 era that envisioned greater participation of dwellers in the creation of their homes, included ideas such as MIT's Open Source Architecture (Larson et al., 2004), and the WikiHouse project (Parvin, 2013).

discussion on the human engagement with the physical world of things and place. Instead, van den Heuvel and Mota (2023) suggest that "[e]ven when ecology takes us back to the oikos or house, it must be an 'objectless' house" (ibid.). However, as Picon (2023) argues, "[t]he first thing to note is that digital has not taken architecture away from the physical world, far from it" (p. 14).

Notably, these discussions on *dwelling* and architecture are once again not focused on dwellers as builders and creators of their material environment and separate building and dwelling into two different discussions, and in so doing, "block our view of the essential relations" (Heidegger, 1951/1971b, p. 144) between them. To bring building and dwelling together into one discussion, I suggest considering Heidegger's notion from a participatory lens by focusing on dwellers' experience of home creation *in*, *through* and *with* social media. By focusing on the practice of home creation through *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* on Instagram, I explore how the role of media has shifted from the more passive forms of media consumption that Blundell Jones, Petrescu and Till (2005) were worried about towards a more active engagement of dwellers in the creation of their physical homes. And in contrast to most of the discourse regarding participation in architecture as part of a professional-led design project (Luck, 2018), the form of participation of dwellers explored in this thesis is seen as part of an ongoing existential experience of *building and dwelling*.

### *3.2.1 Alexander's call for a paradigm shift in architecture*

One of the most revolutionary proposals for participation in architecture was Christopher Alexander's pattern language (1977; 1979), which advocated for restoring a meaningful role for people in the creation of their built environment and called for a new paradigm in architecture (Grabow, 1983).

During the 1970s the architect and his colleagues published a series of books[25] with the ambitious intention to "lay the basis for an entirely new approach to architecture, building and planning" (Alexander, 1977, book cover). As Alexander (1977) explained: "[A]t the core of these books, is the idea that people should design for themselves their own houses, streets, and

[25] The trilogy includes *The Oregon Experiment* (Alexander et al., 1975); *A Pattern Language* (Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein, 1977); and *The Timeless Way of Building* (Alexander, 1979).

communities" (book cover). As a way to enable a new participatory process, Alexander searched for an adaptive problem-solving method focused on human experience in order to restore "ordinary people's" ability to design their own environments and homes (Alexander, 1979). In *A Pattern Language*, Alexander (1977) suggested 253 patterns: a connected network of design problems and solutions grounded in everyday experiences with architecture that can potentially be combined in different ways to create an infinite variety of design wholes (i.e., buildings, places, neighbourhoods) with a "living quality" that fosters a sense of place. The main goal was to find a way to create buildings that would have a unique quality of "aliveness" that is hard to describe but easy to detect, which Alexander (1979) referred to as the "quality without a name". This quality, Alexander posited, "cannot be made, but only generated, indirectly, by the ordinary actions of the people" (ibid, p. xi) and is based on people's feelings and human needs.

While Alexander's idea (1977) has been celebrated in some architecture circles and with communities of DIY dwellers, many scholars in the field of architecture were less convinced about the new direction that he suggested (Dovey, 1990; Saunders, 2002; Dawes and Ostwald, 2017). Discussing the critique of Alexander's idea for participation, Dovey (1990) argued that "[a]s a paradigm shift in the practice of environmental design, the pattern language approach also requires a marked shift in environmental epistemology" (p. 4). He continued:

> I would argue that the epistemological base of the pattern language is implicitly phenomenological. The patterns are derived from the lived-world (lebenswelt) of everyday experience and they gain their power, if at all, not by being proven empirically correct, but by showing us a direct connection between the pattern and our experience of the built environment. (ibid.)

In the same vein, Bhatt (2010) suggests that Alexander's main argument is that there are "broader holistic modes of knowing" (p. 719) that pattern language aims to unveil:

> This call for a shift in epistemology across disciplines, when understood in the context of the arguments proposed in A Pattern Language and The Timeless Way, provides a rich, cohesive theory that extends beyond emphasising day-to-day experiences of living,

> developing into a nuanced exploration of how and when physical, spatial settings become cognitive. (ibid. p. 721)

Bhatt (2010) suggests that Alexander's focus on deep human feelings and needs in his quest to find "the quality without a name" (Alexander, 1979) is part of his efforts to offer an alternative to the Cartesian rationalism binary framework of knowledge that considers objectivity and subjectivity as opposites. Thus, "The idea that objectivity is not dispassionate and can evolve from deeply embodied subjective feelings is an argument that pervades much of Alexander's work" (Bhatt, 2010, p. 722). Since, for Alexander, "physical spaces affect qualitative aspects of life, and to understand how and when that happens, we need to shift our perception of knowledge from Cartesian rationalism to an holistic understanding of spaces" (Bhatt, 2010, p. 724).

This rejection of the dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity is shared of course by Heidegger. And indeed, it seems that there are many similarities between the ideas of the architect and the philosopher, as seen in the significant influence they both have had on phenomenological writings concerning place and place creation in architecture and the built environment (e.g., Relph, 1976, 1993; Dovey, 1985, 1993; Mugerauer, 1993; Seamon, 1993, 2000b, 2018). Interestingly, Seamon (2018) states that Alexander never explicitly defined himself as a phenomenologist, and he also never suggested that he was influenced by Heidegger's ideas (Gare, 2003). Nevertheless, even without a direct influence, it has been argued that Alexanders' work can be seen as inherently phenomenological (Seamon, 2007), and it has also been noticed that there is a strong connection between the ideas of the two scholars (e.g., Seamon, 2000b; Gare, 2003; Mitcham, 2005; Sharr, 2007), including concerning the issue of "non-expert building" (Sharr, 2007, p. 3). Nonetheless, while it is usually Heidegger and Alexander's phenomenological attention to *place* experience that connects the two, I suggest considering their ideas through a participatory perspective by focusing on the relation between *building and dwelling* in the experiences of *dwellers-creators* with social media.

### *3.2.2 Phenomenology and participation*

Since the 1970s phenomenology has played an important part in exploring the concepts of place and home in academic research in the areas of humanistic geography and architectural

phenomenology (Seamon, 2018). More recently, this interest has expended through the philosophical writings of Casey (1993, 1997) and Malpas (2006, 2012, 2018, 2021) on place, and also include discussions of the phenomenology of both "real and virtual places" (Champion, 2019) and the combinations between the two. In a review of the phenomenological literature on environmental and architectural issues, Seamon (2000b) explains that researchers in this field usually assume that "people and environment compose an indivisible whole" (p. 1), drawing on the tradition of existential phenomenology and on Heidegger's (1927/2019) and Merleau-Ponty's (1945/2012) ideas. Discussing the work of phenomenological human geographers Edward Relph (1976), Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), Anne Buttimer and David Seamon (1980), Cresswell (2015) explains that for these scholars, place "was a concept that expressed an attitude to the world that emphasized subjectivity and experience rather than the cool, hard logic of spatial science" (p. 35).

Influenced by both Heidegger and Alexander, Relph (1976, 1993) argues that place is a complex phenomenon that includes spatial elements, social activities and personal and shared meanings and that "[t]he realization and the fusion of these elements are simply too difficult to achieve except by allowing the people who live and work in places to participate in making them as they would wish them to be" (Relph, 1993, pp. 34–35). Calling for places "to be made from the inside out" (ibid., p. 34), Relph (1993) argues that:

> The role of professionals and outsiders is to provide direction and advice based on their special skills and breadth of experience that allow them to resolve specific technical matters, overcome parochialism, and see the broader effects and implications of local actions. (p. 34)

Returning to Alexander's (1979) assertion that the unique quality of places cannot be controlled or pre-determined, Relph (1993) shares this notion that: "*Genius loci* cannot be designed to order. It has to evolve, to be allowed to happen, to grow and change from the direct efforts of those who live and work in places and care about them" (ibid. p. 38).

Trying to reimagine a new vernacular architecture, and by drawing on his own experience of building a house in the Rocky Mountains in Colorado, the philosopher Carl Mitcham (2005) draws on Heidegger's (1951/1971b) and Alexander's (1979) ideas and argues that "[t]he unscientifically thought but deeply lived act of building must to be rediscovered, perhaps in a new kind of thinking"

(Mitcham, 2005, p. 32). Similarly, the philosopher Arran Gare (2003) also points to the connection between Heidegger and Alexander's ideas, considering the two as part of the same post-mechanistic "tradition of thought going back to Goethe and Schelling" (p. 5). Gare (2003) suggests that:

> While Heidegger has had a major impact on architectural theory through the influence of his notion of lived space, it is Christopher Alexander, an architectural theorist who has not been influenced by Heidegger, who has made the most vigorous effort to overcome the form of architecture and town planning that discloses the world and people only as standing reserve. (p. 5)

Gare (2003) argues that Alexander's efforts to envision a new paradigm for environmental design "could fulfil Heidegger's intimation that architecture could change the way people dwell within the world and change what they aspire to, a change that could be central to overcoming the destructive forces of modernity and to creating environmentally sustainable forms of life" (p. 5).

The aspiration to find a way to create places and homes that are responsive to people's lives, and not least to the world and the environment, has a robust theoretical foundation in phenomenological notions in the writings of both Heidegger and Alexander. But perhaps it is not a coincidence that many scholars mentioned here are philosophers. Translating these ideas into the context of the contemporary built environment is indeed a challenge. Thus, Seamon (2018) describes how Alexander himself realized that his revolutionary suggestion that people will design their own places might also need to include professional help:

> Alexander became dissatisfied with pattern language as a design approach. He realized that the pattern language process alone was not sufficient for producing life-sustaining buildings or places. He recognized that his theory of wholeness needed to incorporate a design-and-construction process whereby wholeness is not just envisioned but made to happen. (p. 163)

Considering this realization, Seamon (2018) concurs that "the help of perceptive, creative persons who 'see' the central needs of place and envision changes" (p. 166) is essential and that:

> Place making cannot simply happen, but must be grounded in an empathetic understanding of place and a knowledge of how qualities of the environmental ensemble can strengthen or weaken place. Citizens aiming to make their place better is crucial, but this commitment must be complemented with thoughtful understandings as to how that place improvement can be facilitated practically via the environmental ensemble. (ibid., p. 185)

### 3.3 Making, changing, accommodating

The discussion in this chapter about *building and dwelling* as a participatory ongoing caring engagement of dwellers with their homes is connected to ideas that were raised in the field of anthropology, such as Daniel Miller's (2010) concept of *accommodating*, Tim Ingold's discussion on *making* (2013) and *participation* (2021a); and Sarah Pink's (Pink et al., 2017) view of the house as a site for *change.*

Coming from a material culture perspective, Miller (2010) suggests that "houses are the elephants of stuff" (p. 81) – large, expensive and difficult to control. Moreover, since houses involve many stakeholders such as the state, landlords, local councils and building professionals, "against these forces, any desire by us, the mere people who dwell in houses, to engage in a certain relationship to them can find us way down any pecking order of power" (ibid.). Thus, Miller (2010) argues that while "people are constructed by their material world, […] often they are not themselves the agents behind that material world through which they must live" (p. 84).

As part of his ongoing discussion about the relationships between people and their homes, Miller (1988, 2001, 2002, 2008, 2010) also draws on his personal experience of living in a North London house built in 1906. Using the term *accommodating* to understand the relation between dwellers and their homes, Miller (2010) suggests that among the range of things that should be considered when changing the house to accommodate its dwellers – is "the agency of stuff itself" (p. 96). For Miller, the meaning of the term *accommodating* includes the "need we all have, to find accommodation in the sense of a place to live" (ibid.) and also "a process of accommodating in the sense of an appropriation of the home by its inhabitants" (ibid.). But unlike thinking about the

house as a commodity, as part of the material world of things that exist to serve the needs of people, Miller suggests that *accommodating* needs to be reciprocal: "It may imply our changing of a home to suit ourselves, but it can also imply the need to change ourselves in order to suit our accommodation" (ibid.).

Lastly, Miller suggests that *accommodating* something is about a willingness to compromise:

> By considering our relationship to the home through the term accommodating we face the home not as a thing but as a process. Being accommodating and being accommodated is something with which we are constantly engaged. (Miller, 2010, p. 96)

Miller (2010) then asks how *accommodation* becomes *accommodating*, and "How do we, in practice, achieve this balance between our agency and that of the home?" (ibid.). However, viewing this question from a Heideggerian perspective requires seeing dwellers and homes not as opposite forces but rather as an entanglement that, through mutual responsiveness, continuously constitute, affect and shape one another.

Drawing on research projects conducted by a few of his PhD students, Miller (2010) discusses some of the ways in which homes accommodate their dwellers: first, by allowing people to rewrite their autobiography inscribed in things when moving houses (Marcoux, 2001); second, by functioning as a mirror of aspiration for dwellers who are renovating their homes as to who they might be (Clarke, 2001); and third, by allowing dwellers the feeling that they have agency and the possibility for change by making small-scale adaptations of the home, like moving a chair around (Garvey, 2001). Based on these studies, Miller (2010) concludes that:

> In each research project it is the dynamics of the home that is paramount, whether moving house, refurbishing a home, creating mess or merely moving stuff around. In each case the persons are once again creating themselves through the medium of stuff. (p. 99)

Nevertheless, the changes Miller discusses all evolve around relatively small engagements of people with objects and furniture in their homes. However, the possibility for dwellers to truly influence the creation or the renovation of "the elephants of stuff" (Miller, 2010, p. 81) – that is, their house – remains the elephant in the room.

Trying to address this issue, Ingold (2013), in his exploration of *making* in the context of architecture, contests the notion that "[r]esidence begins when building ends" (p. 47). Exploring more broadly how physical artefacts are materialized in a process of *making*, Ingold (2013) suggests that through practices, experiences and stories, knowledge can be transformed from more experienced people to novices through a process of "guided rediscovery"[26] (p. 110):

> To tell, in short, is not to explicate the world, to provide the information that would amount to a complete specification, obviating the need for would-be practitioners to inquire for themselves. It is rather to trace a path that others can follow. (ibid.)

Drawing on Ingold's (2013) notion of "guided rediscovery" in exploring dwellers' engagement with others on social media as part of their home creation process invites consideration of how *home renovation diaries* are used as stories of creation that transfer knowledge not necessarily through articulation and specification but rather as a "practice of correspondence" (p. 111). This understanding resonates with the phenomenological epistemology of Alexander's pattern language (e.g., Dovey, 1990; Bhatt, 2010) as knowledge that is rooted in people's lived experiences and, as such, can be readily recognized and used by others (Erickson, 2000). As Bhatt (2010) suggests:

> [B]y delving into the seemingly mundane aspects of everyday life that the disciplinary knowledge in architecture in general tends to overlook, pattern language creates a rich dialogue that has the potential to encourage a user to reconfigure his or her most intimate spaces. (ibid. pp. 716, 718)

Lastly, another discussion regarding home creation in the digital age is Pink et al. (2017) book *Making Homes: Ethnography and Design*,[27] which views the home "as a *material*, *digital* and sensory and affective *atmospheric* environment, which human activity is both a part of and constitutive of" (p. 46, *italics in the original*). Thus, in this discussion the home is viewed as a place where things constantly "change, decay and become repaired or renewed in different

[26] This is similar to the discussion in chapter 2 about the use of stories to transfer knowledge in communities of practice and to Sennett's (2008) notion of craftsmanship.

[27] This book is part of an ongoing series by Routledge (edited by Rosie Cox and Victor Buchli) that is focused on the issue of *home* from interdisciplinary perspectives.

velocities and in different ways" (ibid.). In considering the home as a process of *change*, Pink et al. (2017) draw on ideas from the field of design anthropology (e.g., Gunn and Donovan, 2012; Gunn, Otto and Smith, 2013) – that are inspired by Ingold's (2012, 2013) writing on the issues of design and making from a phenomenological perspective. However, while the focus of this thesis is on the experience of home creation by dwellers with social media as an entanglement between creation and inhabitation, the focus of Pink and her colleagues (2017) is on researching people's everyday experiences of the home as "a site for change" (p.1) that will come about through intervention of professionals based on ethnographic findings, and often beyond the context of the specific home.

This relates to what Ingold (2021a) describes as ethnography for architects. In ethnography for architects, like in the user-centred design approach, "the resident is posited as a consumer, whose needs or desires are to be prioritized. Thus, ethnography for architects conforms to a market-based logic of service provision and does nothing to challenge it" (ibid. p. xiv). In contrast, Ingold (2021a) suggests that the approach of architectural anthropology (Stender, Bech-Danielson and Landsverk Hagen, 2021) "could promote the idea of participation as a genuine co-creation that is mutually transformative" (Ingold, 2021a, p. xvi), by recognizing "both design and making as ongoing, collaborative processes in which people and materials are caught up in a complex web of ecological relations" (ibid.). Ingold (2021a) suggests that such an approach calls for "locating the creativity of the design process not in the exceptional faculties of 'creatives', such as architects and designers, but in the generative potential of the social relationships in which all participants are involved" (ibid. p. xvi).

## 3.4 Imagining a home

The experience of home, both in its creation as well as in its habitation, constantly involves *past* memories, *present* situations and *future* imaginations,[28] which are all part of what Heidegger views as the ontological holistic temporal structure of *care* (*Sorge*) (Dreyfus, 1991: 244) (see the discussion in chapter 7). Aiming to "show that the house is one of the greatest powers of integration

[28] See the discussion in chapter 1 about my experience of using Pinterest to create my home in 2012.

for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind", Bachelard argues that "[t]he binding principle in this integration is the daydream" (Bachelard, 1957/2014, p. 28).

In this process of *imagination*, Bachelard (1957/2014) sees the house as a unique and important place in the world by viewing it as "our corner of the world […] our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word" (p. 26). Bachelard argues that without a house, "man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is a body and soul. It is the human being's first world" (ibid., p. 29). Therefore, Bachelard suggests that:

> For a phenomenologist, […], it is not a question of describing houses, or enumerating their picturesque features and analyzing for which reasons they are comfortable. On the contrary, we must go beyond the problems of description […] in order to attain to the primary virtues, those that reveal an attachment that is native in some way to the primary function of inhabiting. (ibid. p. 26)

By focusing on *memory* and *imagination*, Bachelard (1957/2014) suggests that memory is about space as much as it is about time since "it is quite hard to remember without remembering something, or some event, in a place" (Cresswell, 2015, p. 30). Thus, in Bachelard's (1957/2014) *poetics* as a double play of *re-creation* (Kearney, 2014) that includes both "hearing and feeling as well as crafting and shaping" (p. xix), dwellers' experience of home creation also includes memories of all their previous homes:

> Through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasures of former days. And after we are in the new house, [the] memories of other places we have lived in come back to us. (Bachelard, 1957/2014, p. 27–28)

Thiboutot and Martinez (1999) explain that Bachelard sees *imagination*:

> as a unique passageway by means of which we reach an inhabitable, intersubjective, and fully human world. Within that perspective, our lives are constantly renewed by the appearance of a revealing image

> or a telling metaphor. Each time that we are awakened by this appeal we commemorate the birth and rebirth of a human world. (p. 1)

Emphasizing the importance of the imaginary in the experience of *dwelling*, Picon (2023) argues that it is not merely people's personal memories of the homes that they have had but that the experience of inhabiting is "an experience informed by all the images of dwelling that circulate and propose alternatives to current inhabiting" (p. 20). And in the context of the digital age, this includes all the images of homes that people currently see on social media, as well as in *renovation diaries*, but also in new forms of imaginary places created by artificial intelligence (as I discuss in chapter 6). Thus, Picon (2023) argues that:

> [D]welling engages the definition of the human and its historical evolution through a mix of concrete experience and imagination. Its transformation in the digital age is determined by many factors other than just the familiarity with computers, tablets, and smartphones. This familiarity is in fact only one of the expressions of a much more general transformation of the way human beings understand themselves in relation to their environment. (p. 20)

In recent years, the focus on imagination and future-making as part of a renovation process has started to be discussed in different studies that explore media use in a renovation (see discussion in chapter 2) in relation to "notions of consumption and everyday life" (Hunter, 2019, p. 36); and the ways in which dwellers dream with media about future renovation where "content, such as social media boards or postings, helps them to build a more concrete image or an embodied version of their imagined narratives" (Aggeli and Mechlenborg, 2022, p. 163). But beyond these more practical ways in which social media is being used as part of home creation, this thesis explores what happens to the home's integration of thoughts, memories and dreams, which Bachelard is interested in, where social media is added to the mix as part of an experience of creation and inhabitation. We must bear in mind that these memories and dreams are always being experienced by dwellers as they are in the palpable world of things and in a specific environmental context.

## 3.5 Thinking of home

While most of the discussion in this chapter revolved around the relation between *building and dwelling*, I would also like to briefly consider the third term in Heidegger's (1951/1971b) *Building Dwelling Thinking*. At the end of his essay Heidegger (1951/1971b) writes that:

> Perhaps this attempt to think about dwelling and building will bring out somewhat more clearly that building belongs to dwelling and how it receives its nature from dwelling. Enough will have been gained if dwelling and building have become *worthy of questioning* and thus have remained *worthy of thought*. (p. 158, *italics in the original*)

While Instagram *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* reflect how experiences of home creation and inhabitation are socially constituted, they also function as spaces for reflection and meaning-making. In that sense they can be seen as contemporary digital hybrids of the personal diaries, letters, journals, and books that have been written by dwellers over time. Drawing on Humphreys' (2018) call to "identify the ordinary within new media practices by comparing them with historical media practices" (p. 7), it appears that dwellers' home renovation and building experiences have also been documented in pre-digital diaries. In a collection of American women's diaries spanning the eighteenth to the twentieth-century (Culley, 1985), a woman named Edith Clark recounts in a journal entry from 2 September 1933 the experience of building her homestead in the Big Horn Mountains of Wyoming, with help from her neighbours:

> So, came the lumber that would mean a roof for my domicile, and window frames, and door and floor. It looked very grand and interesting. I realized more thoroughly than before that I was building a house! It is the first one I have ever built, you know, so I deserve a thrill, I think! (Culley, 1985, p. 214).

Like today's *dwellers-creatures* who share their experience on Instagram *home renovation diaries*, Edith Clark also created both her physical house and a form of media (her journal) to document and share her experiences with others.

Whereas Clark shared her experience with someone she knew, there is also a tradition of more public "reflective or biographical accounts of designers and other thinkers who use a building project as a vehicle for contemplation" (Littlefield, 2020, p. 233), such as Michael Pollan's *A Place of My Own* (1997/2008) and Ben Jacks' *A House and its Atmosphere* (2017).

In his book about the creation of his writer's hut, which he built with his "own two unhandy hands" (p. ix) behind his house in New England, Michael Pollan (1997/2008) writes that his book is "not so much a how-to-do-it than a how-to-think-about-it" (xi) and:

> a narrative of the universal process of design and construction – which is to say, the age-old story of how dreams get turned into drawings that then get turned into wood and stone and glass, finally to take their place in the palpable world. (ibid., p. ix)

Pollan's (1997/2008) book ends after the completion of the house construction on his "move-in day" (p. xiv). But as he writes in the preface for his new edition, "[m]any readers have written to ask what happened after that: did the writing house work out as I'd hoped? Do I still work in it? (They also write to ask where they might see photographs of the finished building)" (ibid., pp. xiv–xv). In contrast, Jacks' (2017) book encompasses both his design and inhabitation experiences as a "designer-inhabiter-narrator" (Littlefield, 2020, p. 237), and as Littlefield (2020) suggests, this view of house as a process is connected to both Heidegger notion of dwelling as well as to phenomenological writing on place experience:

> What Jacks usefully does is describe what it's like to be in a place and both respond to, and change, it. Much of the atmosphere of Jacks' home is implied through his description of his personal investment in it, in a non-financial sense. (Littlefield, 2020, p. 236)

Thus, while there are notable examples of thinking, questioning, and telling stories about dwellers' experiences of building and inhabiting, these accounts have often been confined to more static forms such as books or journals. By contrast, in *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* on Instagram—as in other new forms of "media accounting" (Humphreys, 2018) —document and reflect on the home creation process comes with far greater visibility and immediacy, as I explore in the phenomenological ethnography (chapter 5–7). First, however, the next chapter outlines the methodological framework of this research.

*Chapter Four*

# Methodological Framework: Phenomenological Ethnography

This chapter focuses on the methodological framework of this research. It starts with a brief positioning of this thesis amongst the broader non-media-centric approach to media studies, followed by a discussion of the philosophical underpinning of this research and its roots in Heidegger's existential phenomenology. This is followed by a discussion about the methodological framework of phenomenological ethnography and the understanding of the ethnographic field site where the experiences of dwellers' home creation with social media are explored. The chapter then continues with a detailed discussion of the ethnographic fieldwork in the relational environment of Instagram's *home accounts* and *renovation diaries*, including the sampling and recruitment of participants, the consideration of the affiliations between different participants and the phenomenological focus on the experiences of six participants, that include in-depth interviews as well as ongoing observations and ethnographic foraging. Lastly, the chapter ends with a reflection on the ethical choices taken in this research.

## 4.1 Introduction and contextualization

Researching people's experiences of creating their homes with social media brings with it all the known traits of studying phenomena that are ever-evolving, and in particular the intensity and challenges in the chase after the shifting sands of social media, the changing social practices that arise around it, and the experiences of the people who are using it as part of their everyday lives (e.g., Baym and Markham, 2009; Abidin and de Seta, 2020). As Abidin and de Seta describe it: "doing ethnographic research about, on, and through contemporary digital media is most often a messy, personal, highly contextual enterprise fraught with anxieties and discomforts" (ibid. p. 4). To tap into people's experiences of creating their homes with social media, I have chosen an existential–phenomenological lens that invites consideration of this issue as *one worldly*

*entanglement,* where people, homes and digital environments are all viewed as inseparable aspects that constitute the human situation of *being-in-the-world* in the digital age.

The use of phenomenology by media scholars (e.g., Scannell, 1996, 2014; Couldry, 2012; Moores, 2012; Couldry and Hepp, 2017; Lagerkvist, 2017; Markham and Rodgers, 2017; Markham, 2020) is part of a broader movement in recent years that calls for a non-media-centric approach to media studies. This approach originated in the works of British media scholars David Morley (2007; 2009), Shaun Moores (2012; 2017) and Nick Couldry (2012) and aims "to 'de-centre' the media" (Morley, 2007, p. 200) so we can "understand better the ways in which media processes and everyday life are interwoven with each other" (ibid.). Suggesting that media research should look further than just focusing on media technologies (Krajina, Moores and Morley, 2014), Morley (2009) argues for an emphasis on "the changing relations between the material and the virtual realms of communications" (p. 115). Similarly, Couldry (2012) explains that his research approach "is grounded in the analysis of everyday action and habit" (p. x), and Moores asserts that "media studies are at their strongest when they're outward looking, when we're in dialogue with work that's going on in other disciplines, in geography, philosophy, sociology, anthropology and so on" (in Krajina, Moores and Morley, 2014, p. 691). Inspired by these scholars, Pink et al. (2016) argue that "such approaches de-centre media as the focus of media research in order to acknowledge the ways in which media are inseparable from the other activities, technologies, materialities and feelings through which they are used, experienced and operate" (p. 9).

Nonetheless, scholars have acknowledged that the non-media-centric approach contains an inherent paradox or challenge (Hepp, 2010; Skey and Waliaula, 2021): how to conduct media research that de-centres media while recognizing that digital media have become so pervasive so they can no longer be meaningfully separated from other aspects of human life. This dilemma relates to ongoing discussion about the "mediation of everything" (Livingstone, 2009) and the debate about the usefulness of the concept of mediatization (e.g., Deacon and Stanyer, 2014; Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby, 2015; Lunt and Livingstone, 2016). For some scholars, the earlier "cautious enthusiasm" (Lunt and Livingstone, 2016, p. 468) regarding mediatization has shifted toward a concern that the emphasis on the power of media in mediatization means that "interest in audiences is eclipsed" (Livingstone, 2019, p. 174). Addressing this omission of lived experience in the research, Sonia Livingstone (2019) argues that:

> In accounts of the mediatization of societal domains or fields […], the lived experience of audiences is largely invisible, partly because audience research favors "voices from below," while mediatization theory examines the workings of power "from above" (Lundby 2016). (Livingstone, 2019, p. 175)

Insisting on the importance of accounting for human voices "from below" in media research, Livingstone (2019) contends that, "including the people in a mediated, perhaps mediatized, increasingly datafied age—that's the task in front of us" (p. 180).

More recently, Hepp and Couldry (2023) have acknowledge that while it is almost impossible to "grasp the dynamics and developments of contemporary societies without focusing on the role of digital media and their infrastructures" (p. 147), media scholars should be cautious "in centring everything on communication" (ibid.). Emphasizing the importance of the non-media-centric approach, they argue that this approach "has repeatedly taught us not to generally assume media-mediated communication as decisive for all social changes, but to question more openly when this has which relevance for what kind of changes" (ibid.).

Recognizing the value of non-media-centric approach to study "mediatization from below", Andersson (2017) suggests that this can be used as "a bottom-up approach with ethnographical thick descriptions of clearly delineated contexts or phenomena, guided by contextualization and a focus on social aspects beyond media representations and media technologies" (pp. 49-50).

In a similar vein, Annette Markham and Katrin Tiidenberg (2020) highlight the importance of ethnographic sensitivity in telling the stories of people's lived experience with the internet—stories often overlooked in the "more complicated imaginaries of inextricable entanglements of computation, networked communication technology, environment, capitalism and human experience" (Tiidenberg, 2020, p. 13). While Tiidenberg (2020) recognizes the value in these broad conceptual narratives, she also insists that:

> [W]ithin the specific contexts of pervasiveness, the internet continues to be experienced, utilized, built, hacked, resisted, felt, imagined and articulated in a myriad of ways by different people, in different settings, for different purposes. And these small stories of the everyday internet matter. (p. 13)

Indeed, it is precisely these small stories of people's lives as they create their homes with social media and share it on their *renovation diaries* that this thesis seeks to explore. However, these are not merely "stories of the everyday internet" as Tiidenberg (2020) puts it. When online and offline life in the digital age are understood as part of *a single, integrated* world, such stories— and the lived experiences they reflect—extend beyond digital platforms (or the internet) into various different domains of dwellers' lives: their physical homes, social relations, professional contexts, and geographical environments. The non-media-centric phenomenological approach taken in this thesis holds that while media are an inseparable aspect of the entanglement of *being-in-the-world* in the digital age, they must be understood in the context of people's everyday experiences, practices, places, and environments—and the way they use media *beyond the internet*.

## 4.2 A Phenomenological approach

The phenomenological approach taken in this research relates to one strand of the broad and rich philosophical tradition and research approach that originated from the work of the philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) and that has grown to be an influential "heterogeneous movement with many branches" (Zahavi, 2018, p. 2). This specific branch draws on the existentialist–interpretative phenomenological approach of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). Heidegger's philosophy marks a shift from Husserl's transcendental phenomenology towards an existential and interpretative phenomenology that is focused on human experience in the context of everyday life. As Moran (2000) explains, Heidegger "claimed Husserl remained too Cartesian and intellectualist in his account of human engagement with the world" (p. 13) and instead called for a new understating of the human existence in the world.

The main concern of Heidegger's phenomenological approach is ontological, in his focus on human existence through the concept of *being*. For Heidegger (1927/2019), people are always in a situation in which they are *thrown* into "a world which is already-there: full, seamless, and present to us as encounters demanding responses" (Markham and Rodgers, 2017, p. 5). To describe the connection between people and the world, Heidegger uses the term *Dasein* or *being-in-the-world*. In making sense of this relationship, Heidegger's phenomenological approach calls for an "attention to the things themselves" (Moran, 2000, p. 21), starting "with the understanding in the shared everyday activities in which we dwell" (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 8). Moran (2000) explains that

phenomenology offers an alternative to the traditional subject–object dichotomy by offering "a *holistic* approach to the relation between objectivity and consciousness" (p. 13, *italics in the original)*.

As a research approach, Phenomenology is often considered part of the range of methodologies that lay under the definition of qualitative research alongside other methods like ethnography, narrative analysis and grounded theory (Patton, 2014; Creswell and Poth, 2016). Seamon (2000a), in his literature review of phenomenological research as it relates to the built environment, emphasizes that the aim of phenomenological research is not the idiosyncratic descriptions of people's experiences per se but rather an analysis of these descriptions from which certain patterns and underlying commonalities can emerge as the core invariants of the phenomenon. Hillier (2005) adds that the invariants emerging from such phenomenological research "must be seen to be common to the world itself and human experience of the world, and so unite the study of subjects and objects, people and things, into a single framework" (p. 11). Hillier (2005) suggests that "[t]he driving idea of phenomenology is that there exist connections between minds, bodies and worlds which are independent of the conceptual frameworks imposed by society and by science, and which are in fact likely to be obscured by these frameworks" (p. 5). These connections are especially significant for researching the experience of the creation of tangible and physical things like dwellers' homes. Thus, the experience of creating a home with social media is explored in this research as a holistic phenomenon that includes dwellers and their homes as part of *one* relational physical, digital and social world.

Crucial to this phenomenological approach (as discussed in chapter 2) is that human existence and experience are always anchored somewhere, in a place. Yet, as Malpas (2019) argues, the issue of phenomenology as "explicitly situated in relation to place" (p. ix) lacks "sufficient attention in the literature so far" (ibid.). Moreover, the importance of the phenomenology of place increases in the context of the digital age, raising new questions about different forms of real, virtual or hybrid places (e.g., Champion, 2019). Thus, to explore the experience of home creation with social media and the places where it occurs as part of one relational, all-encompassing environment, I have coupled a phenomenological approach with an ethnographic methodology. I have done so while bearing in mind that:

> [P]henomenology will always remain irreducible to any set of methods or principles of the sort that can then be "applied" in any straightforward fashion. There is no "method" or no set of "principles" that completely determines the proper manner in which place (or appearance either for that matter) is to be inquired into. (Malpas, 2019, p. x)

## 4.3 Methodology and research questions

The combination of phenomenology and ethnographic research has been employed by researchers in exploring the lived experiences of people on a variety of topics (Desjarlais and Throop, 2011). Desjarlais and Throop (2011) explain that "in general, this work, while attending to particular situations faced by people in specific sociopolitical settings, often inquiries into ostensibly universal dimensions of human experience" (pp. 93–94).

Considering Lagerkvist's (2017) call to "align technology-oriented perspectives that probe our digital existence ontologically with ethnographically and textually situated approaches that interrogate cultural practices and lived experiences of the digital world" (p. 107), the objective of coupling a phenomenological approach with an ethnographic methodology in this thesis is twofold. Firstly, it aims to enrich the ethnography with philosophical ideas and base its ontological foundation on Heidegger's existential phenomenology. As Pink et al. (2016) explain: "[E]thnography […] is only useful in relation to other practices and ideas within a research process" (p. 2), and "[t]o engage in a particular approach to ethnography, we need to have a theory of the world that we live in" (ibid. p. 3). Secondly, a phenomenological ethnographic exploration of the different practices, relations and experiences of people who are creating their homes with social media enables an understanding of this experience as happening in a place or a locality that spreads across digital and physical terrains that together function as the ethnographic field site.

A main inspiration for this thesis as to how to use phenomenology as part of ethnographic research is Sarah Pink's corpus of ethnographic methodology, including *Digital Ethnography* (Pink et al., 2016) *Ethnography and Design* (Pink et al., 2017); *Digital Materialities* (Pink, Ardèvol and Lanzeni, 2016)*;* and *Visual Ethnography* (Pink, 2021a). In *Digital Ethnography:*

*Principles and Practice*, Pink et al. (2016) explain that phenomenological approaches have a vital role in academic research that focuses on the study of experience and helps us "in expanding our understanding of the human condition" (p. 20). In Pink's approach the focus is on "how the digital has become part of the material, sensory, and social worlds we inhabit" (Pink et al., 2016, p. 7). Drawing on the concept of media as practice (Couldry, 2004), the digital ethnography approach (Pink et al., 2016) eschews directing its research on media texts, institutions, platforms or audiences and instead focuses on the social practices and experiences that are related to the use of digital media. But again, phenomenology speaking, these practices also must be understood in the context of the place where they happen, as well as how they are part of the constitution of these places. As Seamon (2023) asserts: "To speak of human beings apart from their worlds is inaccurate conceptually and destructive practically. Rather, human beings are always already bound up with and subsumed by the worlds in which they find themselves" (p. 1).

Based on the conceptual and theoretical discussion in chapters 2 and 3 and by employing a phenomenological ethnographic approach to explore dwellers' experience of home creation with social media, the ethnographic inquiry in chapters 5–7 is guided by these two main questions:

1. *What are the relations between the experience of creating one's home and the experience of dwelling in that home when using social media as part of this process?*

2. *How does people's experience of creating a home with social media relate to their experience of being-in-the-world in the digital age*?

### *4.3.1 The ethnographic field site*

Using a Heideggerian phenomenological lens that views the digital and the material as one worldly entanglement of *being-in-the-world* in the digital age raises the issue of what exactly the ethnographic field site of this exploration is. In recent decades, the famous ethnographic hallmark of "being there" has been challenged as the concept of the field site itself has become more open and unbounded. Reviewing this transformation from the early proposals of a *multi-sited ethnography* (e.g., Marcus, 1995), through suggestions to view *the field site as a network* (Burrell, 2009), de Seta (2020) argues that:

> Weaving networks into an ethnographic field can bring the most disparate things together, and particularly when one's research topic is not extremely narrow, each node of the network can result in dizzying vertigos over a wealth of potential interlocutors, unexplored communities, or entirely new categories of data. (p. 83)

As part of these revisited considerations of the concept of the field site, it has become widely accepted in recent years that the connection between the ethnographer and participants can be entirely mediated through technology (Abidin and de Seta, 2020). This way of doing digital ethnography includes new ways of engaging in conversation, such as "watching what people do by digitally tracking them, or asking them to invite us into their social media practices" (Pink et al., 2016, p. 3). As a result, Pink et al. (2016) suggest we "abandon the received anthropological notion that unmediated physical co-presence is inherently superior to, or more legitimate than, other forms of being there" (p. 134) and argue that in some cases, we can learn more by lurking on digital practices than by "being there" physically (e.g., Postill, 2017).

Thus, the ethnographic field site can be understood through the concept of place, which has been suggested by Moores (2012) and Pink (2012a) to describe the formation of new entanglements in our digitally saturated environment, drawing on Massey's (2005) and Ingold's (2007, 2008) ideas (see discussion in chapter 2). As Pink et al. (2016) explain:

> If we take the argument seriously that we now live in a world in which the digital and material domains of our lives are not separate from each other but part of the same lives and world, this has consequences for how we think about localities beyond the idea of them being material and physically apparent elements of places that are knowable and that can be known, referred to and identified. (p. 127)

This is what Massey (2005) describes as "a constellation of processes rather than a thing" (p. 141) and what Ingold (2008) calls "a zone of entanglements" (p. 1796) "in which earthly substances and aerial media are brought together in the constitution of beings which, in their activity, participate in weaving the textures of the land" (ibid.). These entanglements often leave digital "traces" that are valuable for ethnographic work (Beaulieu, 2004, 2010).

Notably, many of the traces formed as part of *dwellers-creators*' experience of home creation with social media are visual images. Rose (2014) explains that images can be used by researchers to tap into the "ineffable" and sensorial and to "uncover the implicit knowledges in everyday practices" (p. 28). In *Visual Ethnographic Research* (Pink, 2021a), the focus is on:

> how people experience, learn and know with the visual, rather than on collecting visual content or data. These phenomenologically inspired understandings of the image offer visual ethnographers fruitful ways of understanding how images participate in our everyday lives, beyond being representational devices. (p. 31)

This approach draws on non-representational (e.g., Thrift, 2008) and more-than-representational (e.g., Lorimer, 2005) theories that offer us "ways to engage with the visual, and with images themselves, beyond representation to focus on the tacit, sensory, habitual and sometimes seemingly mundane elements of everyday life" (Pink, 2021a, p. 30). As Rose (2016) explains:

> [T]here are a number of approaches to visual images now which emphasise the importance of the sensory – or affective – experiencing of images. Scholars such as Laura Marks and Mark Hansen emphasise the embodied and the experiential as what lies in excess of representation; hence their insistence on the power of the image itself and for the need to intensify the experiencing of images. (p. 34)

In such a phenomenological-inspired approach to visual images, the effort is to "search the image for a trace of the originary, physical event. The image is connective tissue" (Marks, 2002, p. x). Inspired by the works of Ingold (2000) and Gibson (1979), Fors (2015) suggests that there is a "reason to argue for research methods that acknowledge digital visual material as more-than-visual and theory that moves toward the unspoken, tacit and sensory elements of learning in everyday practices" (p. 1). Similarly, Boden and Eatough (2014) also acknowledge that "visual imagery offers a 'way in' to the phenomenon that is nonlinear, nonlinguistic, and directly intertwined with the felt-sense experience" (p. 163). Therefore, the exploration of photographs form dwellers' Instagram *home accounts* as part of this phenomenological ethnography, focuses

on the "relationship between photography and participants' experiences, activities and environments" (Pink, 2021a, p. 114). This means that although Instagram *home renovation diaries* offer rich visual material, they are not subject in this thesis to detailed visual analysis of issues such as style, aesthetics, composition, filters, or design choices. Such representational focus could divert phenomenological attention away from people's lived experiences. Instead, Instagram posts and stories are used as sources for understanding *dwellers-creators*' experiences and practices of building and dwelling within both material and their digital environments—and as a way of exploring their own interpretations of those experiences.

Moreover, using visual ethnography is particularly suitable for exploring experiences of change, such as the experience of home creation with social media, since it is "a mode of engaging with the past, present and future of everyday life and involves the materialities and technologies of these different temporalities" (Pink, 2021a, p. 43). As Pink et al. (2017) suggest, this movement between past, present and future[29] is important in understanding people's experience of home as an ever-evolving process:

> The sometimes dramatic and imaginative ways in which people imagine, anticipate, plan to alter, or fantasize about, changing or making their homes simultaneously form part of how people live in their homes. (pp. 28–29)

After discussing the phenomenological approach and the ethnographic methodologies of this research, the next part of this chapter provides a detailed discussion of the phenomenological ethnographic fieldwork conducted in this project.

## 4.4 Ethnographic fieldwork

Undertaking phenomenological ethnography to explore the experience of home creation with social media means focusing on the lived experiences of *dwellers-creators* as part of *a worldly*

[29] An example of such relatedness between images on social media, the immediate physical environment, past memories and future possibilities can be seen in chapter 1 in the first-person phenomenological exploration of my experience of using Pinterest to create my home in Tel Aviv in 2012.

*entanglement* that includes material, digital and social aspects. The term *dweller-creator*[30] suggested in this thesis refers to people who are actively engaged in the process of shaping their dwelling place, whether it is by designing, building, renovating, decorating or cultivating their residence, in diverse ways and various levels of engagement, with or without professional help. This form of participatory engagement is not new, but in recent years it has taken on a new form with the growing use of social media by homeowners for various aspects of home renovation. Platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, TikTok, and others have become vital tools in this process.

The use of social media and other digital tools in the process of home creation by dwellers is multifaceted (Hulse et al., 2015; Podkalicka et al., 2016; Podkalicka and Milne, 2017), continuously evolving, and varies from place to place, between different groups and depending on the platform. Amongst the diverse ways in which dwellers create their homes with social media, this phenomenological ethnography focuses on exploring Instagram's *home accounts* or *renovation diaries* and the lived experiences of the *dwellers-creators* behind these accounts. And although this ethnography mainly focuses on the experiences of *dwellers-creators* who are publicly sharing their home creation process, it acknowledges that there are countless other *dwellers-creators* who are creating their physical homes with social media but are not sharing it online.

The fieldwork for this phenomenological ethnography was conducted at different periods and intensities in 2022–2024 during months of following, observing, lurking and engaging with *dwellers-creators* using social media platforms, specifically Instagram, as part of their home renovation process. Approaching this digital ethnography as an open process and not as a "research 'method' that is bounded" (Pink et al., 2016, p. 11), I immersed myself in the world of *dwellers-creators*, considering the hybrid position of the researcher as both a lurker and a participant (e.g., Beaulieu, 2004; de Seta, 2020). To accompany the broader ethnographic observations, I focused on the experiences of six *dwellers-creators* I followed closely, analysing their digital activities and

[30] I have decided to use the term *dweller-creator* to replace the term dweller-designer that I used for a while during the work on this research. This term reflects an understanding of "home creation with social media" as an ongoing process of making a home, which stretches before, during and after any renovation project, in contrast to a premediated design plan that is then being built and comes to an end. Ingold (2013) mentions a similar term to *dweller-creator* in his discussion about resident-builder (p. 48).

the things and places they have created (on Instagram and in their homes) and conducting in-depth interviews with them.

### *4.4.1 Access, sampling and recruitment*

Using a non-media-centric perspective, my point of departure for exploring home creation with social media was not any specific platform but rather the social practice of dwellers engaged in renovating their physical homes and using social media as part of this process, though not necessarily to share their experiences. As Hepp (2020) suggests, the non-media-centric approach becomes even more relevant in the digital age, since:

> [I]n a moment in which digital media are 'everywhere', a focus on *one* of them prevents us from understanding how they influence different social domains as well as individual human beings. Only by taking particular social domains and the individuals' involvement in them as a starting point can we grasp what media 'do'. (pp. 101-102, *italics in the original*)

Thus, beginning with the broader social practice of dwellers' participation in the design, renovation and building of their physical homes – using different platforms for different purposes – I did not initially focus solely on Instagram *renovation diaries*. Nonetheless, while I explored different pathways to locate *dwellers-creators* – both online (e.g., Pinterest, and Reddit) and through personal networks (e.g., on WhatsApp groups and in person) – Instagram and Facebook groups emerged as the most feasible sites for this, where abundant digital traces point to dwellers' active participation in home renovation.

The recruitment of participants for this research started in the Spring of 2022 by employing a purposive sampling strategy based on opportunities. The sampling aimed to identify participants who met these two criteria:

- Dwellers who are currently planning/undertaking/recently finished a home renovation/building project.
- Dwellers who are/were using social platforms for their home renovation/building project.

The advantage of a purposive sampling strategy is its focus on participants who have a relevant lived experience that could contribute to the researcher's understanding of a phenomenon or a social practice. Therefore, "participants are selected on the basis that they can grant us access to a particular perspective on the phenomena under study" (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2022, p. 43).

The recruitment process included both direct messaging to relevant participants on social media (see appendix 1) and posting invitations on social platforms (e.g., Facebook home design groups) (see appendix 2). This process required mapping some of the places where *dwellers-creators* could be found. This mapping exercise included searching for Facebook home design groups (see the list in appendix 3) and Instagram accounts of *dwellers-creators*. While the sampling was not restricted by any geographical exclusion criterion, the recruitment was focused on two geographical contexts – the UK and Israel – where I had significant access to participants and knowledge about the local cultures, including indications about the existing use of social platforms as part of home creation process by dwellers.

Of course, like any non-probability sample, this sample is susceptive to various factors and biases related to the researcher's identity and socio-geographical background. Considering such trade-offs, Baym (2009) explains that the way to assure the quality of qualitative research "is a matter of finding practical and defensible balancing points between opposing tensions" (p. 173). Drawing on Baym's experience and others, Abidin and de Seta (2020) remind us that "[t]he most widely recommended remedy to assuage epistemological anxieties, participatory doubts and ethical dilemmas is self-reflexivity" (p. 10). In the case of this research, my experience of living in the UK and being originally from Israel, with a few years in between in the US, has shaped my social connections as well as my social media alignments, and as a result affected my ability to access participants in these geographical locations.

During the efforts to recruit participants on Facebook groups and on Instagram, I noticed some significant differences in the practices of home creation with social media between the UK and Israel. This is not surprising, since as Poell et al. (2021) explain: "Platform ecosystems […] evolve unevenly, as do the practices of their inhabitants" (p. 13). Moreover, "[w]hile the relations between platforms, complementors, and end-users can be analyzed in broad terms, the particular ways that platformization unfolds […] within specific geographic regions, are markedly diverse" (ibid.). Thus, while in both countries social media appears to play a role in the home creation process, its

uses differed markedly. In Britain, the practice is currently expressed significantly through *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* on Instagram (Vincent, 2023), whereas in Israel, at least for now, such *renovation diaries* are almost non-existent. Instead, the primary use of social media as part of a home design or renovation process[31] is through closed Facebook groups.[32]

The reasons why the practice of home creation with social media has developed so differently in the UK and Israel could be various and extend beyond the issue of how social media is being used in these countries. For example, it could be related to the significant difference in the built environment and in the ways in which homes are being built or renovated in each country. Also, there are of course other sociological and cultural differences between the two places and societies. This distinction between the ways in which the social practice of home creation with social media unfolds in different places invites further research while considering the particularities of each locality and each society.[33] However, it is beyond the scope of this research.

Considering the clear contrast between the Israeli practice of Facebook home design groups and the growing prevalence of Instagram *home renovation diaries* in the UK, I chose to focus on *dwellers-creators* who share their experience on Instagram. While the primary geographical context of this ethnography is the UK (with five of the six main participants there), I also consider overlaps with other countries—primarily Australia and the US—where notable examples of Instagram *home renovation diaries* were found. As I discuss in chapter 6, users' geographical location is not readily available on Instagram. Nonetheless, geography remains crucial in shaping environments, communities and places as part of a hybrid digital–physical world, as I discuss in this ethnography.

The decision to focus on Instagram *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* raised two challenges. First, how to explore the experience of creating something in the world *beyond* media (i.e., dwellers' physical homes) *with* and *on* a social platform—as part of *one holistic* lived

[31] I conducted two pilot interviews with Israeli women who were using social media (mainly Facebook closed groups) as part of their renovation process but did not share it on social media. These are not included in the thesis after a decision to refocus the sampling on dwellers who share their experience on Instagram *renovation diaries.*

[32] At the time of this study a variety of closed home design Facebook groups were active in Israel. Recruiting participants from these groups turned out to be challenging after the invitation to participate in the research was deleted by some of the group monitors. For a list of home design groups see appendix 3.

[33] For example, this could be the focus for future comparative anthropological research into the cultural relativism of the use of social platforms in different regions, as suggested by Miller (2020).

experience, and not merely as content creation by influencers (see chapters 2 and 6). Second, how to maintain a phenomenological sensitivity and openness to the many dimensions of *dwellers-creators* experience of home creation, without narrowing the focus to Instagram alone—while also accounting for other platforms and aspects of life "outside Instagram". These considerations had guided me throughout the phenomenological ethnography, serving as a reminder to de-centre media and attend instead to the entanglement between media and life and the lived experiences of *dwellers-creators*.

Importantly, while the experiences of *dwellers-creators* are considered in this thesis through the lens of Instagram *renovation diaries*—the more visible aspect of home creation with social media—I also aim to explore less apparent dimensions of the practice, such as the use of other platforms and digital tools, and prior experiences of renovation and social media use before opening the *home account*.

### *4.4.2 Being in the field and the snowball algorithmic method of sampling*

To locate participants on Instagram, I started to follow more and more potential *dwellers-creators* and approached them personally through a private direct message. The decision to use my personal profile (cf Bucher, 2017) was driven by my objective to immerse myself[34] in the field site of this ethnography to enhance my understanding of the experiences, the environment and the world of *dwellers-creators.* Nevertheless, in hindsight, it turned out that having visibility and digital traces (i.e., a real personal profile with my photos and my history) was also beneficial to my ability to build trust with the participants[35] (e.g., Abidin, 2020).

[34] Before using my personal profile to follow and approach participants, I opened a designated Instagram account to follow home design and renovation content and *dwellers-creators.* This separation of having to switch between my personal and research accounts felt artificial and as an impediment to my ability to immerse myself in the world of home renovation on Instagram.

[35] I realized this after I started approaching participants from my account while it was private (i.e., locked to anyone who does not follow me), and noticed that I was not getting any responses. Therefore, I decided to open it, hoping that if participants were able to see more personal information about me, it would make them feel more comfortable responding to my messages, and it did.

Thus, this process of immersing myself in the world of *dwellers-creators* on Instagram and using the platform to find potential participants became an important part of the ethnographic research itself. As Pink et al. (2016) explain:

> [E]xperiences of the types of immersion of being with ethnographic participants – beyond interviews and elicitation methods that has been called "being in fieldwork" (Marcus, 2008) – have now been discussed in relation to digital contexts [Marcus et al., 2012; Horst, 2016] (p. 23)

In doing so, I was able to assimilate the experience of a person who starts to follow home renovation accounts on Instagram, including viewing their content and liking their posts. Based on these activities, I also started receiving suggestions from the algorithm on other accounts to follow since "[p]latforms algorithmically determine the interests, desires, and needs of each user on the basis of a wide variety of datafied user signals, personalizing the user's stream of content, advertising, and contact suggestions" (Van Dijck, Poell and De Waal, 2018, p. 41).

Viewing this situation not as an impediment but rather as a way-in into the phenomenon, I suggest that snowball algorithmic sampling, in which the recommendation for following potential participants comes from an algorithm, can be considered what Bucher (2017) describes as an algorithmic imaginary, a situation where people and algorithms meet. Using it in triangulation with more traditional snowball techniques (e.g., Baltar and Brunet, 2012; Leighton et al., 2021), such as direct referrals from the participants whom I interviewed and other content-related leads (e.g., mentions of other *dwellers-creators* in posts, stories and comments on Instagram, lists of following and followers), enabled me to find relevant participants, while at the same time provided me with a certain level of in-situ experience of the world of *dwellers-creators* on Instagram. As Seaver (2017) notes: "[t]hrough paying attention to the texture of access, the ethnographer learns about how knowledge circulates, information that is practically useful but also a research outcome in its own right" (p. 7). In this approach, Seaver (2017) views *algorithms as culture* by drawing on ideas from ethnographic research and considers "algorithms as 'multiples' – unstable objects that are enacted through the varied practices that people use to engage with them, including the practices of 'outsider' researchers" (ibid., p.1). By embracing such an approach to ethnographic research

with social platforms, "[w]e are not remote observers, but rather active enactors, producing algorithms as particular kinds of objects through our research" (ibid., p. 5).

### *4.4.3 Arriving at a place*

Through my encounters and interactions with the Instagram algorithms and with people and accounts on the platform, and more vividly as I started to interview *dwellers-creators* and dived deep into the dozens or hundreds of posts on the accounts of the people I interviewed, an array of different affiliations, relations and influences between *dwellers-creators* started to become evident. These affiliations include interpersonal relations, inspirational influences, technical and practical knowledge sharing, and an emotional support system. As this web of connections and interrelations between *dwellers-creators* began to emerge, I sensed that I was not researching separate individual experiences, but rather that I had arrived *somewhere* — to the site in which this social practice occurs. This pivotal moment aligns with what Pink (2021b) describes as the "ethnographic hunch", a moment that "sparks an ethnographic-theoretical dialogue, turns around my thinking, and creates a strand of investigation through my research, analysis, or both" (p. 30). In this study, this "hunch" or "aha moment" was the realization that *dwellers-creators'* experience of home creation with social media as seen in Instagram *home renovation diaries*, happen in and actively constitute *places* and *environments*. This moment also prompted a deeper theoretical engagement with the concept of place and its existential significance (e.g., Casey, 1993, 1997; Malpas, 2006, 2012, 2018, 2019, 2021; Seamon, 2018, 2023) for understanding experience across both tangible and digital realms (see chapter 2). Through this interaction between theory and ethnographic findings, I came to see that *dwellers-creators* are in fact making two interconnected places: their physical home and their Instagram *home account*—part of one unified worldly experience.

Repeatedly, on Instagram posts and in the interviews alike, *dwellers-creators* describe their experience as "feeling part of a community on Instagram" (see theoretical discussion in chapter 2 and the ethnographic findings in chapter 6). However, while the concept of community is often used both by people to describe their lived experience (Amit, 2010), as well as in corporate languages of tech companies (Van Dijck, 2009), in academic discourse, the use of the concept "is limited in its empirical application to describing social formations" (Pink et al., 2016, p. 104).

While acknowledging the "distinction between emic (vernacular) and etic (scholarly) terms" (ibid., p. 121), Pink and colleagues argue that an ethnographic work should aim to bridge this gap between the different ways in which the concept of online social groups is understood.

Thus, instead of simply referring to what *dwellers-creators* describe as community, I suggest considering it as a *relational environment* (see findings and analysis in chapter 6). Importantly, a *relational environment* includes the places within it and is shaped and constituted by the ongoing activities of its inhabitants in physical and digital spheres alike. Moreover, a *relational environment* that is being weaved by *dwellers-creators*' activities on Instagram and beyond does not have a clear perimeter in contrast to closed Facebook groups or WhatsApp group chats where a social group is bounded by a clear place with borders, where one is either in or out. The fluid boundaries of *relational environments* of communities of interest on Instagram make it a challenge for ethnographic work since one cannot apply to enter the imagined community described by participants, follow it, or become a member. Instead, these *relational environments* are multiple and do not exist as a coherent and stable entity but rather a plurality of many *relational environments*, unbounded and entangled in different ways and experienced by each specific *dweller-creator* somewhat differently. In thinking about how to approach such fieldwork, Seaver (2017) suggests the concept of scavenging ethnography:

> Rather than thinking of access as a perimeter around legitimate fieldwork, the scavenging ethnographer can attend to access as a kind of texture, a resistance to knowledge that is omnipresent and not always the same. These challenges are data themselves—about the cultural life of algorithmic systems. (p. 7)

Building on the ethnographic tradition of gathering relevant information from diverse sources—from informal chats to newspaper articles, advertisements and conference hallway conversations—Seaver (2017) argues that "[t]here is much to be scavenged if we do not let ourselves be distracted by conspicuous barriers to access" (p. 7). In the present research, beyond ongoing following and observation of *dwellers-creators* on Instagram (including saving posts, sending links and images to myself and writing notes in my research journal), my scavenging ethnography also included collecting fragments of how the practice of Instagram *renovation diaries* manifests outside the platform, in my everyday life. For instance: a friend mentioning a

long-followed blogger now documenting her renovation; a marketing email featuring home items curated by renovating Instagram influencers; a conversation with a mum at my son's football practice who shared her renovation journey online; and a newspaper article titled "Rise of the Insta-Renovators" (Vincent, 2023). As I gathered these anecdotes from the blurred boundary between physical and digital realms, I returned home to share my scavenging spoils with the algorithm—following the accounts I discovered offline. These fragments not only shaped the evolving *relational environment* of my Instagram feed but also became a valuable source of insight for this ethnography.

### *4.4.4 Interviews and analysis*

Between April and August 2022, I contacted 82 *dwellers-creators* through a direct message on Instagram, offering them to participate in this research (i.e., conducting an online video interview and giving their consent to use data from their social media accounts in this ethnography). While the majority of the people I contacted did not reply or decline to participate, I eventually conducted in-depth interviews with eight *dwellers-creators* (six of which are included in this ethnography after two have withdrawn from the research). Five of the participants are currently living in the UK (and are originally from Canada, the US, South Africa, Italy and the UK) and one is from Australia. The socioeconomic profile of the six participants (educated white women, aged between 27 and 55), represent a relative homogeneous sample. This is up to par with both the tendency of taste communities on social platforms to reflect similar social identities of their members (Poell, Nieborg and Duffy, 2021, p. 135), as well as with the recognized approach to sample size and consistency in phenomenological research. Thus, while there are no specific guidelines as to the number of participants for phenomenological research, it is common for a phenomenological sample to include a small number of participants (Bartholomew *et al.*, 2021), and it has been suggested that larger and non-homogeneous sample could negatively impact the quality of phenomenological research (ibid.). In their systematic review of sample size in phenomenological research, Bartholomew et al. (2021) suggest that: "a focused sample may encourage a more harmonious expression of participants' interpreted lived experiences in which individual voices are honored and can contribute to a coherent whole" (p. 3).

Considering the non-media-centric phenomenological approach of this research, the interviews aimed to go beyond the use of media as a tool and to understand the context of how social media is *intertwined* with the participants' lived experience of home creation. As Pink et al. (2016) suggest:

> In order to understand how digital media are part of people's everyday worlds, we also need to understand other aspects of their worlds and lives. In doing so, we might focus specifically on those domains of activity in which digital media are used rather than on the characteristics or use of media. (p. 10)

In preparing for each interview, I familiarized myself with the participant's Instagram account, as well as other available public sources (e.g., Pinterest accounts). This allowed me to notice, for example, some shift in use patterns from Pinterest to Instagram—later reflected on by participants in the interviews. The semi structured in-depth interviews were conducted via Zoom and took between an hour and an hour and a half. The interviews were recorded and were automatically transcribed. The analysis of the interviews was inspired by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin's (2022) interpretative phenomenological analysis, an approach that is rooted in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography. This approach focuses on a detailed exploration of the experience of each individual and their understanding of that experience. Such analysis usually begin with one case and includes a careful reading and rereading of each interview, using exploratory noting, finding personal experiential statements and themes and developing group experiential themes (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2022). After the analysis of the first interview, the researcher continues with the other participants based on the same steps while trying to find convergences and divergences between the participants who share a similar experience.

After conducting the first two interviews (with Bianca from the UK and Ali from Australia), I began analysing Bianca's interview—reading and re-reading the transcript while carefully listening to the recording, writing exploratory notes, and extracting experiential statements, which I copied into a separate document. Meanwhile, I continued recruiting participants by browsing and exploring the accounts of dozens of dwellers-creators, reaching out to invite them, scheduling interviews, and delving into the renovation diaries and home accounts of upcoming participants.

After analysing Bianca's interview, I repeated the same process with each participant, gradually compiling a document of personal experiential statements for all interviews.

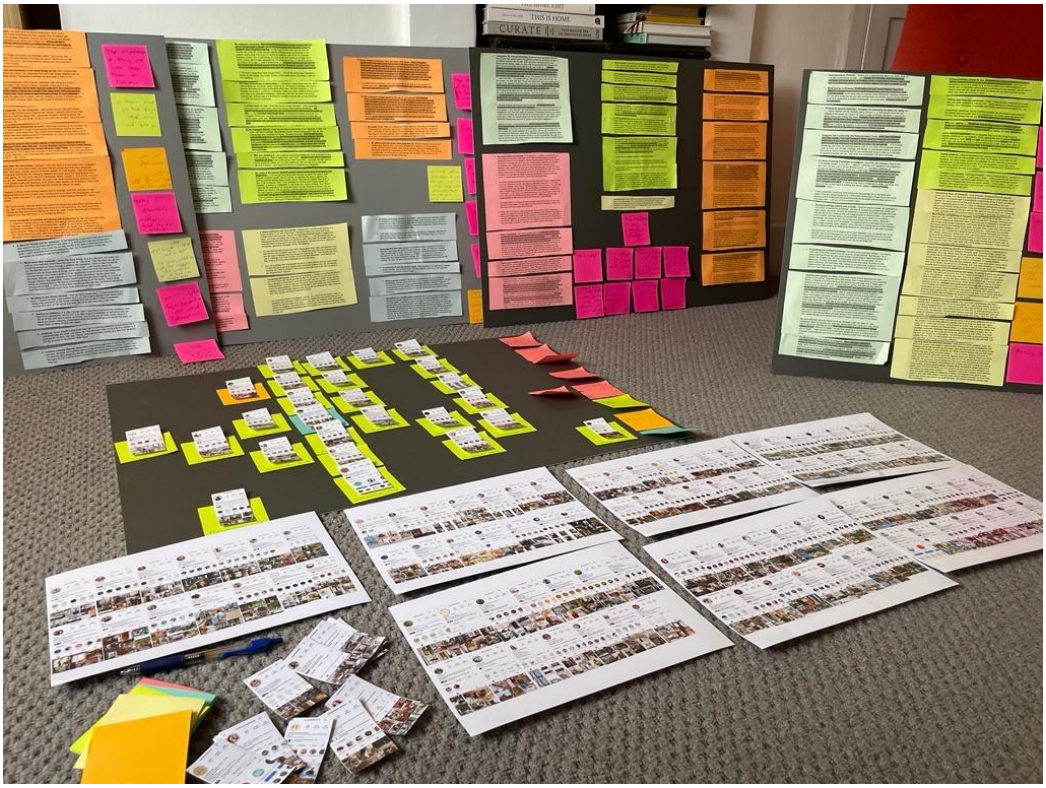


*Figure 8 Thematic boards of a cross analysis between participants, October 2022*

To develop group experiential themes, I printed each participant's experiential statements (3,000–4,500 words) on different coloured paper to visually distinguish them. I then cut the statements and began organising them on thematic boards. This process resulted in five boards, each focused on a different aspect of participants' experiences of home creation with social media (see Figure 8). The emerging themes were: (1) the experience of designing one's own home; (2) sharing home design on Instagram; (3) being part of the Instagram home design community; (4) being a creator/influencer; and (5) knowledge sharing online—through both teaching and learning.

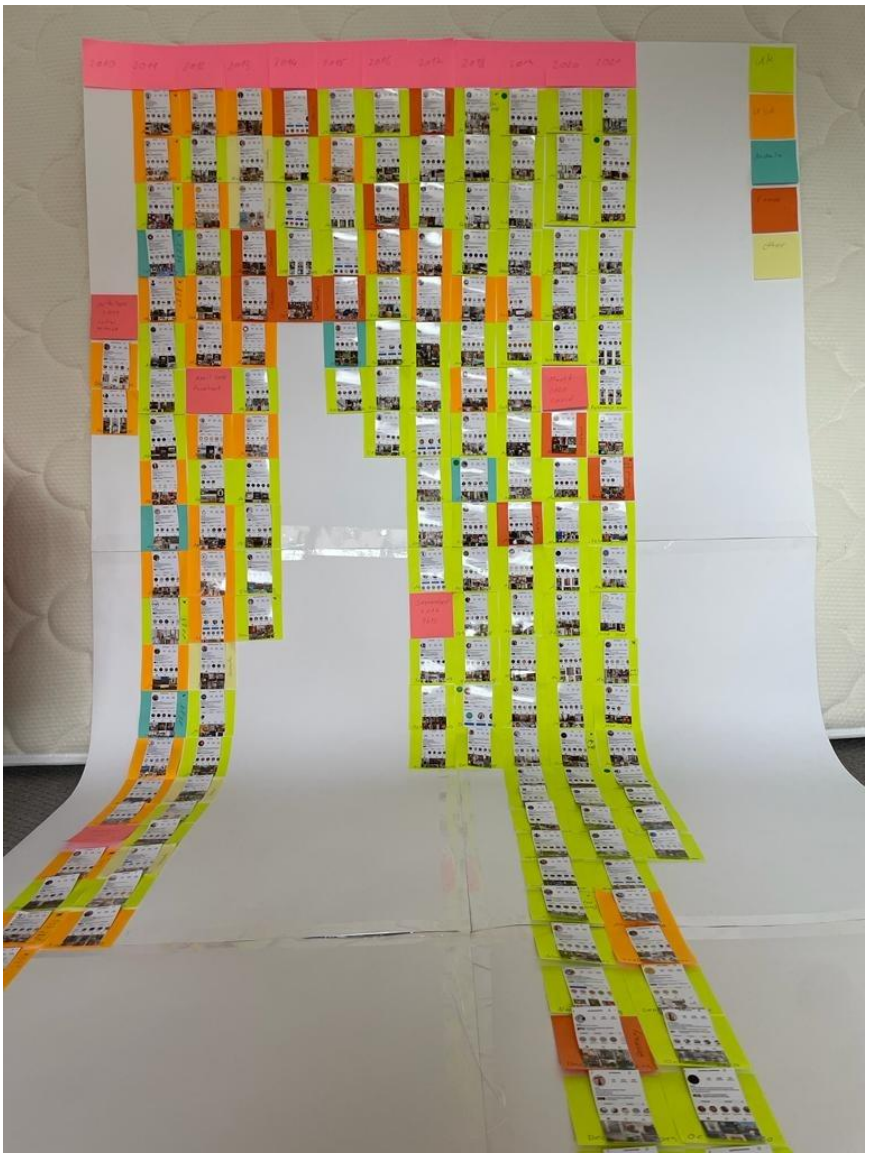


*Figure 9 Timeline and geographical analysis of the home renovation community from my Instagram*

Trying to better understand the different affiliations between *dwellers-creators* and what they describe as their community—and in conjunction with the analysis of the interviews in September-October 2022—I began to map and organized the data from the home renovation *relational environment* as I experienced it on my Instagram account (which was continuously affected by the ongoing interactions I had with *dwellers-creators*). In this process, I collected over 100 home renovation and home design Instagram accounts (not only those of *dwellers-creators* but also brands' accounts, famous designers, etc.). I then took a screenshot of each account to capture a

specific moment in time (i.e., number of followers, name of the account, etc.), printed them and started to organize and reorganize (figure 9)[36] the accounts in my *home renovation relational environment* based on timeline from 2010 to 2021 (when the account was set up or when it changed into a home renovation account) and geographical location.

This analysis involved collecting data from the "About This Account" section of each Instagram profile, including the date the account was created, former usernames, and, where available, geographical location (the latter is only visible for certain high-follower accounts). I then compared this information with the content and timestamps of posts to determine when the renovation process was first shared. This was crucial, as relying solely on the account creation date would have been misleading: users who joined Instagram in its early years often did not share renovation content at the time. For accounts currently focused on renovation but opened in the early 2010s, I traced back through their posts to identify when renovation-related sharing began. This allowed me to distinguish between accounts originally created for home renovation and those that evolved into *renovation diaries*—whether or not the account name changed, or previous content was deleted. Through this analysis, I gained insight into how the practice of Instagram *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* developed over time, identifying early examples around 2016–2017 and noting a significant increase in activity during the COVID-19 pandemic (2019–2020) (see Chapter 5). These findings from the *relational environment* of my Instagram account were complemented by data gathered through scavenging ethnography and integrated with the more in-depth phenomenological analysis of the six core participants, based on interviews and sustained observation on Instagram.

Importantly, each *relational environment,* with its sprawling affiliations, cannot be fully traced. Instead, this ethnographic research merely aims to provide a glimpse into a specific area of the practice and experience of home creation with social media. This limitation is an embedded challenge in academic writing, namely:

> [I]n order to decide what does or doesn't belong in one's research project and to produce a viable written report, the ethnographer

[36] Timeline (2010–2021) and geographical analysis (UK bright yellow; USA orange; Australia blue; Europe Red; other light yellow) of the home renovation relational environment from my Instagram account (photo from October 2022). Organized by the date the account was opened.

> continuously prunes down networks as they proliferate, constructing a skeletal 'field as network' that eventually feels more like a crooked bonsai tree than an expanse of thick experiential wilderness. (de Seta, 2020, p. 84)

With my "ethnographic hunch" (Pink, 2021b) in mind I continued to engage in an ethnographic-theoretical dialogue, continuously moving back and forth between the conceptual development of my ideas, the analysis of information and observations from the field site, and the writing of the ethnography. Thus, the scholarly process of making this thesis itself became an experience of ongoing creation. This experience resonates with this thesis's broader existential–phenomenological view of the human situation as ever-changing relational involvement instead of a more restrictive separation of research into phases of study design, analysis and writing. As Seaver (2017) explains:

> The scavenger replicates the partiality of ordinary conditions of knowing – everyone is figuring out their world by piecing together heterogeneous clues – but expands on them by tracing cultural practices across multiple locations (Marcus, 1995) and through loosely connected networks (Burrell, 2009). (Seaver, 2017, pp. 6–7)

## 4.5 Ethics and reflexivity

Concluding this methodological chapter before moving to the ethnography itself in chapters 5–7, I shall now turn to reflect on the ethical considerations that have guided me in this research. One of my main objectives in choosing the methodology of phenomenological ethnography is not only to explore the experience of home creation with social media in a holistic way but also to be able to *present* this experience with its richness and complexity without deducting it into anonymized "data", and especially without losing the ability to present images and verbatims from participant's Instagram accounts. Of course, this requires some specific ethical consideration of issues such as confidentiality, anonymity and copyright issues.

In methodological literature there has been a growing discussion in recent years about the ethical considerations of visual research, including the need for "accounting for the ethics of image

making, showing, and sharing, how plural moralities might be at play, and how these are constituted, navigated and expressed" (Pink, 2021a, p. 67). Usually, when it comes to the use of images from social media in research outputs, "[s]trategies applied to minimize the risk of privacy erosion included not showing image examples, anonymizing users' accounts, hiding IDs and profile images, and paraphrasing text" (Chen et al., 2023, p. 865). However, this prevailing approach to anonymizing participants' data (Chen et al., 2023) is not without its repercussions. Thus:

> Even when grounded on extensive datasets, hundreds of fieldnotes and collections of traces, the accounts produced by digital ethnographers end up including an extremely narrow selection of inscriptions, often thoroughly edited, translated, scrambled, rephrased, anonymised, cropped, selectively blurred and collated according to a constellation of ethical, argumentative and aesthetic authorial decisions. (de Seta, 2020, p. 90)

Considering the ethics of accountability, Baym (2009) draws on Gonzalez's (2003) suggestion to think about the ethnographic work as "Account-ability. The ability to account. To tell a story" (Gonzalez, 2003, p. 83). This story includes both participants' stories in the content of the ethnography as well as the story of the making of this research. As Baym (2009) observes:

> It is an accounting of choices among various alternatives, as well as a story of missteps, shortcuts, shifts, revelations, and battles. It is only possible if we are able to articulate the beliefs underlying each choice. Since choice necessarily involves competing options, the accountability part comes into play when we are able to explain why we chose this method instead of another equally acceptable method. (p. 196)

A significant methodological choice in this thesis is telling the story of home creation with social media without anonymizing participants' identities. And while some have argued that public data from sources such as blogs could be used without consent (e.g., von Benzon, 2019), it is largely accepted among researchers that informed consent is an ethical requirement (Samuel and

Buchanan, 2020) for using participants photos and content from social media while allowing their identity to be known.

Embracing the ethical stance of informed consent without anonymization as a methodological choice results, on the one hand, in added complexity to the research process and makes recruitment more challenging. On the other hand, it enables the creation of a vivid and rich depiction of *dwellers-creators*' experience of home creation with social media. While the value of a methodological approach that preserves participants' identities—allowing their experiences and the rich visuals from their home accounts to be shared without anonymisation—is clear, it also comes with trade-offs. These include the potential to deter participants unwilling to be publicly identified, and the possibility of self-censorship in what they choose to disclose.

Supported and approved by the Design, Creative and Digital Industries Research Ethics Committee at the University of Westminster, the following steps were taken to mitigate any potential harm or discomfort to participants: participants received an information sheet with a full explanation about the research (see appendix 4); and were asked for their consent (see appendix 5) to participate in the research including being interviewed, using materials from their social media accounts and presenting their verbatims and images under their names or by using pseudonyms (but in any case without being anonymized). In addition, participants who wished to review their data were given the opportunity to ask not to include certain parts from their interviews or to choose to withdraw from the research if they so wished. And indeed, two of the participants decided to withdraw from the research, and their data is not being used. In contrast, others decided to alter some parts of their accounts.

Another issue to consider beyond consent is the issue of the research context, including who the participants are and the sensitivity of the research topic (Samuel and Buchanan, 2020). In that regard, the fact that participants had already shared their experiences on Instagram under their names could potentially made the decision to allow their identities to be known easier.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Abidin and de Seta (2020) reassure us that "[n]early any researcher who chooses to adopt an ethnographic approach to digital media ends up dedicating some thought to the anxieties, challenges, concerns, dilemmas, doubts, problems, tensions and troubles that result from practicing it" (p. 11). By laying bare my methodological challenges, dilemmas and concerns, as well as by reflecting on my personal experience of creating

a home with social media (chapter 1), I am embracing this research stance on the importance of the *processual*, of the experience of *making* in understanding the things that are being created, whether it is a home or a PhD thesis. Thus, while continuing to the following chapters that portray the experiences of six *dwellers-creators* and discussing their experiences of home creation with social media, one should bear in mind that although "[r]esearch reports are carefully edited retrospectives, selected among different story lines and options, depending on one's audience and goals" (Baym and Markham, 2009, p. ix), they are also only the product of a *process* that led to their creation, and this process is full of imperfections and constrains as well as care and dedication.

*Chapter Five*

# More-than-Content: Experiences of *Creation-in-the-World*

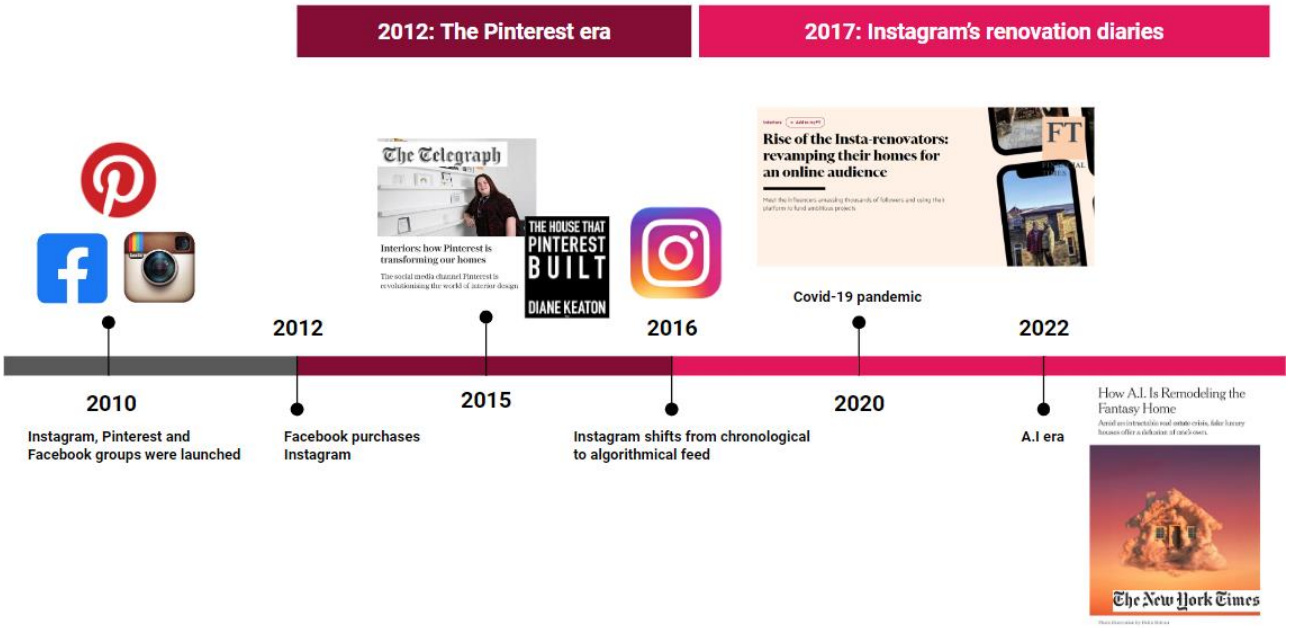



*Figure 10 Timeline of home renovation and social media. Compiled by the author*

In the digital age, the new manifestation of the practice of home creation by dwellers brings together three discussions that evolve around the concept of creation: first, the discussion about the creation process of the physical home (now *with* social media) in the context of material culture, making activities and participation of dwellers in the creation of the built environment; second, the discussion about the creation of content *in*, *with* and *for* social media platforms[37] in the context of cultural production and aspirational labour; and third, the existential and

[37] As discussed in previous chapters these two discussions – in the field of architecture and in the field of digital media culture – have often been framed as part of a discourse about participation.

phenomenological discussion about the role of media in creating worlds, environments and places as entanglements between the digital, the material and the social.

In the next three chapters, through a phenomenological ethnography, I explore the experiences of *dwellers-creators* who participate in the creation process of their physical homes with social media and who also create content about this experience and share it on their Instagram *home accounts* and *renovation diaries*. In this exploration I pay attention to the *relations* and *entanglements* between different aspects and elements in a home creation process with social media. Based on this ethnography I suggest the new concept of *creation-in-the-world* to think about the process of the creation of more-than-content in the context of social media.

This chapter starts with a brief overview of the evolution of the use of social media as part of a home creation process, from utility (*the Pinterest era*) to social practice (*Instagram renovation diaries*). Focusing on Instagram *renovation diaries*, I explore *dwellers-creators*' experiences of creation where media content draws on and is part of the creation process of something else in the world, in this case, a dweller's physical house. This *creation-in-the-world* is distinguished from other forms of content creation by creators and influencers on social media platforms that focus solely on creating content for distribution and often for monetization. Shifting the focus from the production of media content per se into thinking of how experiences of creation *with* media are entangled-with and related-to the broader lived experience of people allows for a new understanding of creation in the context of social media use. Through this phenomenological prism, creation is considered a holistic experience of active engagement that includes digital-material-social entanglements that are part of people's everyday lives.

## 5.1 From utility to social practice

At the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, the rise of digital media and social platforms such as YouTube, Pinterest, Facebook and Instagram offered a new utilization[38] of services and tools for a home renovation process that were previously harder, more expensive

[38] In the *New York Times* podcast "Hard Fork" (Roose and Newton, 2023), Instagram's co-founder Kevin Systrom suggested that "the best networks are first to utility, and then they piggyback on that utility, and they become a network".

or in some cases impossible to obtain prior to that (Hulse et al., 2015; Podkalicka et al., 2016). Thus, instead of flipping through the pages of a monthly architecture or design magazine, one could find an abundance of home design ideas and inspiration on Pinterest. And instead of searching in a book about how to fix, install or build something or calling a professional to do so, one could watch a tutorial video on YouTube. This period, in which social media platforms were used mainly as a tool in a home design and renovation process (e.g., for inspiration, the discovery of design ideas, how-to guides, sourcing professionals, materials and supplies, and creation of sketches, renderings and floor plans), is referred to in this thesis as the *Pinterest era*[39] (2012–2017).

Nonetheless, while Pinterest turned out to be a very useful search engine for visual "ideas" (pins) by providing a flow of visual inspiration and enabling to group and collect these ideas in thematic boards (see chapter 2 for an overview of the research about the use of Pinterest in the early years), it lacked social affordances allowing meaningful communication between different users and did not provide a wider context for each pin (see the discussion on the social affordances of Instagram vs Pinterest in chapters 2 and 6).

Then, starting around 2016–2017 and increasingly since 2019–2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic, there seems to be a new way in which social media platforms are being used as part of a home design and renovation process, with the rise of *renovation diaries* and *home accounts* on Instagram. This change represents a shift in the practice and the experience of home creation with social media from a more private involvement of dwellers, who were using social media as a tool to gather inspiration and information, into an ongoing social practice in which *dwellers-creators* are interacting with other stakeholders in the creation process of their homes by sharing the design and building process with others; asking questions; supporting each other; and teaching and learning (see chapter 6 about home creation as a social practice as part of a relational environment). In these *renovation diaries*, a home renovation is often portrayed as an ongoing process with its relatedness to a *dweller-creator*'s life and as a story that unfolds over months and years, and not as fragmented bits and bobs of design nuggets like in the case of Pinterest.

[39] This period includes the use of other platforms besides Pinterest by *dwellers-creators* but is characterized by the rise of Pinterest as an online inspiration board and a visual discovery tool.

## 5.2 Reclaiming the concept of *creation*

In recent years, the term creator has become the most pervasive iteration describing content producers on and for social media platforms. Media journalist Taylor Lorenz (2019) traces the origination of the term back to YouTube and explains how it was actively pushed by different platforms to describe prominent content producers, or "power users". Although sometimes used synonymously with the term influencer, the term creator is considered to have more positive connotations with an emphasis on the quality of the content (Kozinets, Gretzel and Gambetti, 2023) and its connection to self-expression (Lorenz, 2019). This positive association of the term creator seems to be a leading source of attraction to platforms such as Instagram that encourage its users to "go create" and "bring your ideas to life and share them with the world" (figure 10). Nonetheless, behind this veil of self-expression, the underlying neoliberal propositions to be successful, to make money and to become famous are very clear on Instagram's "creator lab" webpage, where users are lured to share content with the world in order to "build a brand", "get paid for the work you do" and "get discovered".

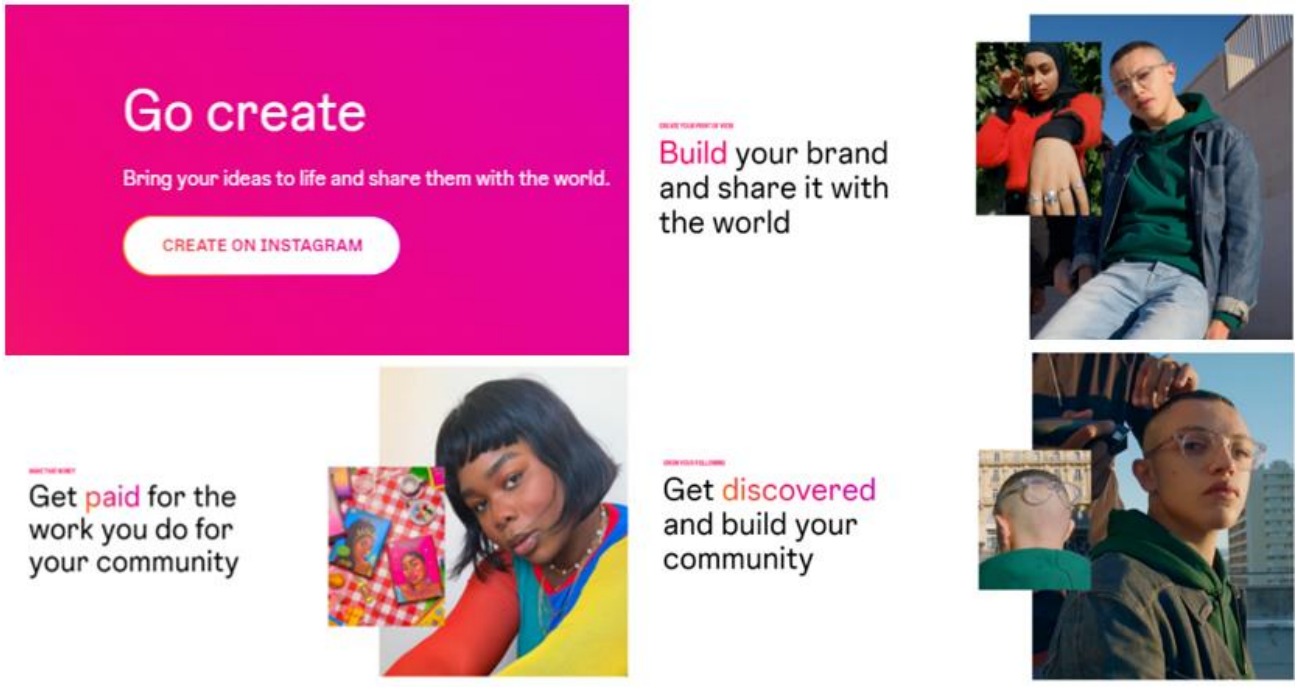



*Figure 11 Instagram guide for creators, March 2024*

This washed terminology of "sharing ideas", "creating", and "building a community" has been identified by researchers as a practice in which big tech corporations encourage users to produce content that will increase engagement, "hailing users in ways that foreground the potential for artistic practice while glossing over how the value of such user-creativity feeds back into their business models" (Poell, Nieborg and Duffy, 2021, p. 133).

Nonetheless, while the economic interests of tech companies certainly drive *their* actions, this thesis aims to expand the discussion about creation with social media *beyond* the cultural production or aspirational labour (e.g., Duffy and Hund, 2015; Duffy, 2017; Duffy et al., 2021), to explore how media is part of a creation process of something that people *care* about in the broader context of their lived experience. This does not ignore the fact that as *dwellers-creators* share their home renovation experience, and with the increase in the number of followers, they are often drawn to leverage their audience in one way or another through paid content, PR marketing posts, or self-promotion of new business ventures. Moreover, as the practice of *home renovation diaries* spreads, the hope to gain an audience or to monetize a home renovation account sometimes becomes one of the reasons for people to start such an account in the first place.

On the other hand, as Scannell (2014) advises us, employing a hermeneutics of trust[40] alongside necessary critical thinking, results in an understanding that these aspects are just one piece of the puzzle. In fact, people's experiences of creation are multifaceted, and this phenomenological ethnography hopes to reveal the richness and complexity of different aspects of people's lived experiences. Thus, by focusing on the experience of home creation with social media as *creation-in-the-world*, this ethnography touches on issues such as why people are creating things in the first place, how they are doing it, and how the process of *creation-in-the-world* affects one's life. Or, as Sennett (2008) puts it: "what the process of making concrete things reveals to us about ourselves" (p. 8) and, more existentially, about our *being-in-the-world*.

[40] Scannell (2014) argues that the widespread *hermeneutics of suspicion* in critical approaches, largely inspired by Marxists approaches of how the mystery of commodity hides exploitation of labour, "regards what is hidden in things as the deceptions of power which is its critical duty to unmask" (p. 17). In contrast, Scannell, drawing on Heidegger's phenomenology, suggests incorporating a *hermeneutics of trust* in research to better account for the complexity of how people experience different aspects of their everyday lives. Scannell argues that the two hermeneutics "must both be acknowledged and recognized if we are to confront with clarity the moral choices and ethical dilemmas with which we are endlessly confronted" (ibid., p. 26).

## 5.3 Instagram home renovation diaries

The practice of dwellers' *renovation diaries* and *home accounts*[41] was not prevalent in the early days of Instagram (launched in October 2010 and acquired by Facebook in 2012). Early examples of *home renovation diaries* can be seen from around 2013 on Instagram accounts of bloggers who shared their home renovation process as part of a broader lifestyle-related content, serial DIYers who started to document their home renovations, and interior designers who shared their professional projects as well as the renovation process of their private homes. Then, around 2016, after Instagram's major shift from a chronological to an algorithmically sorted feed (Bucher, 2020), more and more *home accounts*[42] focusing on dwellers' home renovation process emerged.

Yet, viewed historically, Instagram home renovation diaries can be situated within a broader tradition of using media to seek home design inspiration and practical knowledge (e.g., magazines, books, digital media), and to document and share renovation or building processes (e.g., diaries, letters, blogs). As Humphreys (2018) argues:

> When we look across media over time, we see patterns of how people are incorporating media into their everyday lives. By focusing on what people *do* with media, rather than on the technology, we can see similarities otherwise obscured by the newness of the platform. (p. 7)

Drawing on Couldry and Hepp's (2017) historical analysis of mediatization through waves of mechanization, electrification and digitalization, Humphreys (2018) suggests that "[c]hanges in media accounting over time can be understood through changes in mediatization" (p. 117). Nonetheless, there are also some notable differences in new practices of "media accounting" on social platforms such as *home renovation diaries*, since "the degree of publicness is potentially greater in the networked environment" (Humphreys, 2018, p. 115). In essence, while people have

[41] In many cases there is not a strict distinction between *renovation diaries* and *home accounts* since the experiences of renovation projects and ongoing life in the home often comingle, including content of other aspects in *dwellers-creators'* lives (i.e., travelling, the homes of other family members, other design or renovation projects).

[42] The names of home accounts on Instagram where dwellers share their renovation, home experiences and interiors often include different variations of the house number, the year the house was built, the architectural era, the geographical area, or some reference of the connection between the house and its dwellers.

been media creators long before the digital age, "[c]heaper, more integrated mobile technologies further enabled the creation, distribution, and consumption of media accounting" (ibid., p. 119).

The six *dwellers-creators* I interviewed for this ethnography in the Spring-Summer of 2022 opened their Instagram *home accounts* between July 2018 and September 2021. These *home accounts* and their *dwellers-creators* include Ali, "*Our Secondhand House*" (Queensland, Australia); Claire, "*What Have We Dunoon*" (Dunoon, Scotland); Leanne, "*Good Bones*" (London, UK); Bianca, "*The Home Reform*" (London, UK); Martina "*The Venetian Pantry*" (London, UK); and Kate "*My Old Pub*" (Hertfordshire, UK).

For some of the *dwellers-creators* who participated in this ethnography, this was their first place on Instagram and the first time they had used the platform. Others had a personal, often private account before their home account but decided to open a new account focused on their home renovation(s). For some, opening their home account was simultaneous with their renovation process, while others started sharing their experience and telling their renovation story in retrospect. The scale of their renovation and the degree of their participation in the design and building of their homes also vary among the different participants, and so does the initial motivation to create the home account. And while different points of departure could have been chosen to start this ethnographic tale (for example, the decision to participate in the creation of their home), I begin with the initiation of the knowable place that is the *home account*, and with each participant's decision to start telling their renovation story on Instagram. The second half of this chapter returns to how each dweller came to take an active role in the creation process of their palpable house, tracing the different entanglements between the two experiences of creation (i.e., of the home account and the physical house) as part of one holistic experience of *creation-in-the-world*.

### *5.3.1 Ali, "Our Secondhand House"*

*Queensland, Australia, opened her account in July 2018 (11.8k followers/February 2023)*

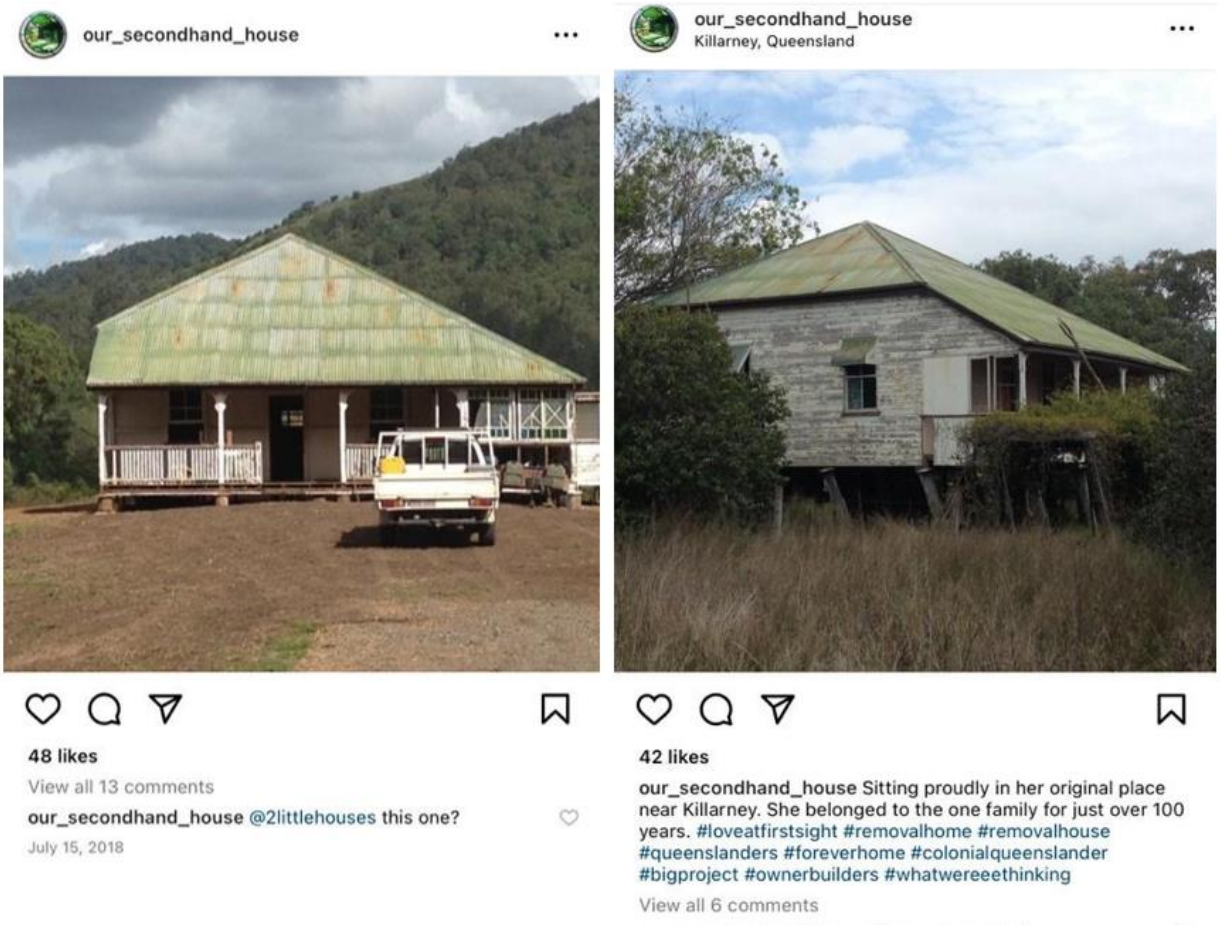



*Figure 12 The first posts from Ali's account. Our Secondhand House, July 2018*

When Ali opened her Instagram account "*Our Secondhand House*" in July 2018 to share her experience of renovating an old Queenslander house in Australia together with her partner Clay, she did not expect this experience would evolve the way it did for her:

> I guess, like many things, how you set out is not where you end up. And definitely that's been the case for us. […] I feel like when we set out to just document our story through a platform like Instagram, I had no idea [that] the benefits would be so multifaceted.

> I never would have thought about it giving us a voice to share our philosophies on life and to encourage others to do the same. […] So, it came from something that was very practical to something that […] is much more multi-dimensional, much more. (Ali in an interview, May 2022)

Unlike many of the bloggers who were early to share their home renovation online, Ali was not an early adopter of Instagram and opening her *home renovation account* in 2018 was her first attempt at using the platform. Thus, as an "exister" who was *thrown* into this digital ecology (Lagerkvist, 2017), she was "feeling her way" (Markham, 2020) and learning as she went. In fact, as she remembers: "I was really surprised when we decided to document things on Instagram, that there are other people doing it. Silly me, but I didn't. I was new to Instagram, also. So, I had very little knowledge that I was coming in with" (Ali in an interview, May 2022). Ali and Clay decided to share their home renovation on Instagram because they wished to update loved ones about their renovation experience and to document the renovation process for themselves:

> In the beginning, it was very much about sharing with people that we knew who didn't live close to us and couldn't see how things were progressing through. And it was also for our own benefit to be able to look back and say, "Oh, gosh, I don't remember the house looking like that". So, to document it in that way, personally for ourselves, was the first intention. (Ali in an interview, May 2022)


*Figure 13 Window makeover. Ali's account, Our Secondhand House, August 2018, Instagram*

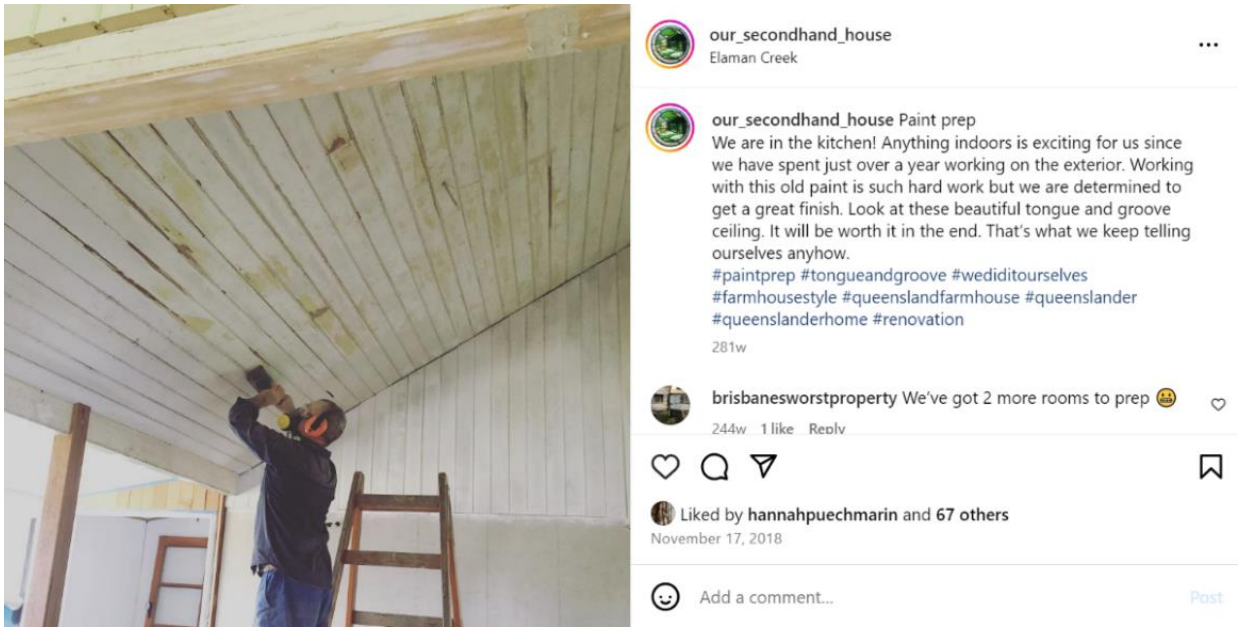



*Figure 14 Paint prep. Ali's account, Our Secondhand House, November 2018, Instagram*

### *5.3.2 Claire, "What Have We Dunoon"*

*Scotland, UK, opened her account in January 2019 (304k followers/February 2023)*


*Figure 15 Claire's first post. What Have We Dunoon, January 2019, Instagram*

A few months after Ali had started sharing her experience from Australia, Claire decided to open her Instagram account, "*What Have We Dunoon*", together with her partner Cal, to share their experience of renovating Jameswood villa, "a derelict Victorian in Dunoon, Scotland". And similar to Ali, Claire's initial motivation was to share her renovation experience with her family and friends back in Canada, where she grew up:

> After we bought the house and realized we were taking on a much bigger project than we ever expected to be doing, we thought it would be nice to share the experience with our friends and family. […] I had lots of different friends asking me how things were going and what was happening. And I just thought, actually, Instagram was a really easy central way of just showing all our friends and family what was going on and letting them keep up with our

> progress. So, it genuinely started just as a way of keeping close [...] people to us up to date with what we were doing on the house. And that's kind of all it was for the first six months. (Claire in an interview, July 2022)

And although Claire and Cal are both Millennials, unlike many of their generation who grew up using social media, the couple was barely using social platforms before opening their *home renovation account*.

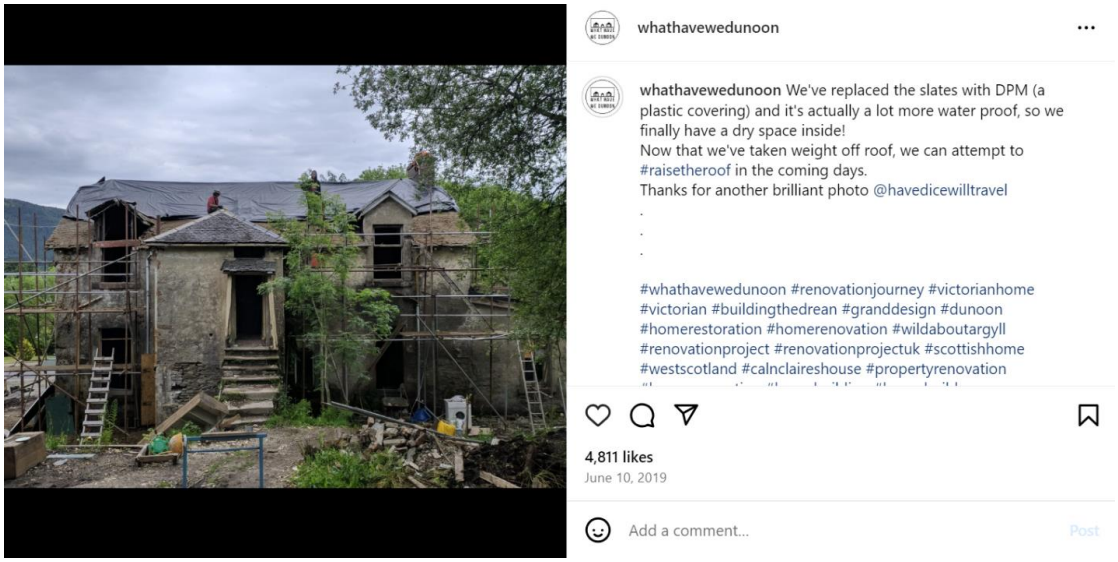



*Figure 16 Renovating a derelict villa. Claire's account, What Have We Dunoon, June 2019, Instagram*

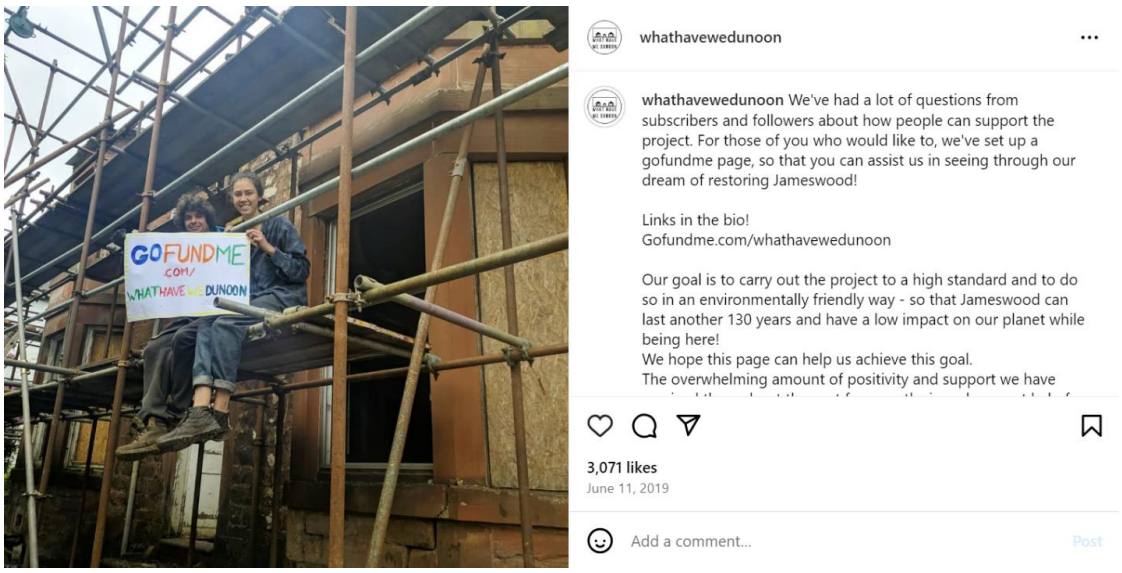



*Figure 17 Material and digital worlds commingled. Claire's account, What Have We Dunoon, June 2019, Instagram*

### *5.3.3 Leanne, "Good Bones"*

*London, UK, opened her account in November 2020 (37.9k followers/February 2023)*


*Figure 18 "We bought a house!". Leanne's first posts, Good Bones, November 2020, Instagram*

Leanne, an American expat living in London, opened her Instagram account, "*Good Bones*", at the same time she was moving into her new house:

> We bought a house! Number 69 😎 After nearly a year of trying to get her, she's finally ours. Today we moved in (while celebrating Biden's win) to the house our kids will grow up in, the house we'll make our home. Old, wrinkled and full of quirks (see: holes in walls), we're determined to love her and fix her up. Glad you're here for the ride. 📈 (*Good Bones*, 7 November 2020, Instagram)

Thinking about the reasons why she decided to open her account and share her home renovation experience on Instagram, Leanne says that it was her au pair who suggested it to her, joking that it was a way to "get free stuff". However, a more profound reason for her decision to do it, she explains, was that she needed someone to talk to during her renovation process, and her immediate family was just not interested:

> They could not have cared less about the things that were going on in my head. […] my husband still thinks that every room in this house is painted white. […] So, I had no audience, and I needed to talk about it. So, I just put it out there. (Leanne in an interview, June 2022)


*Figure 19 Day 16 of the building. Leanne's account, Good Bones, May 2021, Instagram*

Unlike Ali and Claire, Leanne did have another personal Instagram account prior to "*Good Bones*", which she subsequently made private and stopped using. She explains that on her personal account, she didn't have any sort of external community "that wasn't in my real world" and that she merely used the platform as "a photo album". In the beginning, most of the followers of her home renovation diary were people that she already knew, until it started to change: "It took ages; it took like a year to get to 1,000 followers or something. And then from there, [it] just kind of went crazy. So, it was slow, but I still had people to talk to".

### *5.3.4 Bianca, "The Home Reform"*

*London, UK, opened her account in January 2019*[43] *(3.9k followers/February 2023)*

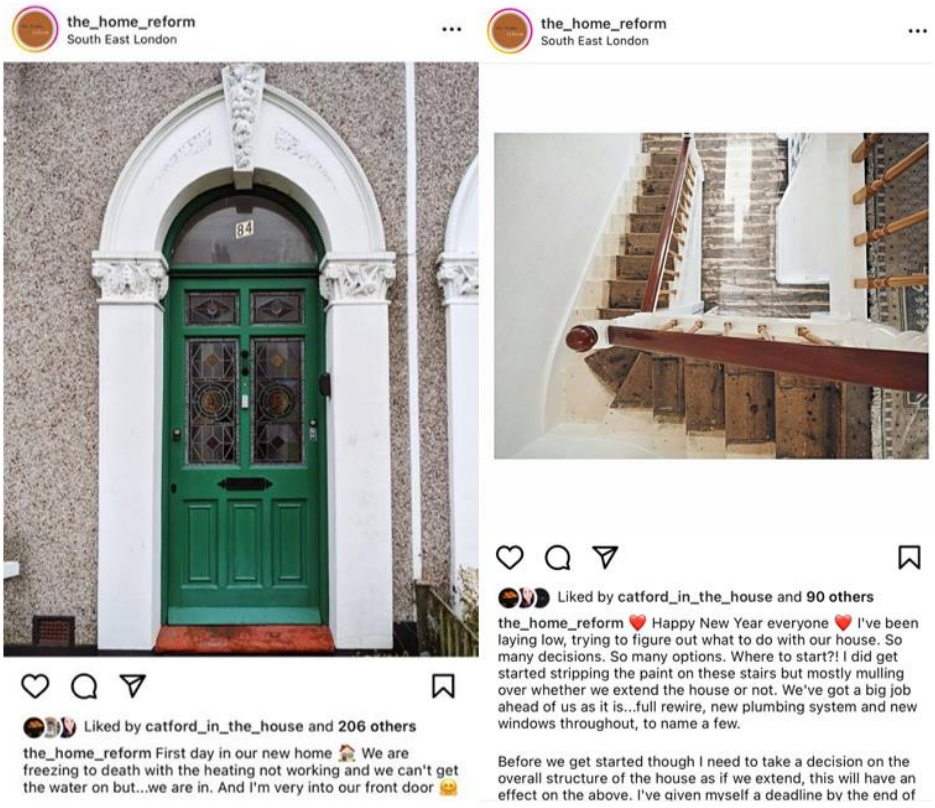



*Figure 20 Bianca's first posts from her new house. The Home Reform, December 2020, Instagram*

For Bianca, originally from South Africa, who now lives in London, the decision to open her Instagram *home account*, "*The Home Reform*", was more of a deliberate step to enter the world of home design. Studying accounting and working for large corporates as a recruiter, she says that she always loved interior design and houses. Feeling frustrated by the disconnection between what she was doing all day and what she was passionate about, she decided to devote more attention to her longtime interest in home design and took a part-time interior design course.

However, studying it theoretically was not enough for her, and she wanted some practical experience. On her Instagram account, she shares experiences from different renovations she undertook in recent years, including the redecoration of her flat, the flipping of a flat in Yorkshire

[43] Bianca opened the account in January 2019. However she only started sharing her renovation experience of her current house in December 2020.

as an investment, and mainly her renovation experience of her South East London home. During the design and renovation of all three houses, Bianca maintains: “Instagram has probably been my go-to in terms of connecting with people and inspiration”.

Bianca says that there are four reasons behind her decision to open her account: first, it was a way to advance her plan to become an interior designer by showing people her style and her work; second, she enjoys showing people what she is doing and passionate about; third, she wanted to be able to share with her friends and family back in South Africa what she was doing and; last, she used it as a personal diary for her to “look back on […] how far I have come and what I’ve been doing”.

Since she started sharing her home renovation experience, she has found out just how much people are interested in other people’s houses:

> If I go to a party, it’s really weird. The first thing people ask me is, “Oh my god, how’s your house?” And “Oh, I see what you’ve done on your house. I love seeing your posts” […]. It seems like ordinary people are very interested in what people do with their houses. […] It’s the first thing they say to me before they even ask, “How are you?” (Bianca in an interview, May 2022)


*Figure 21 Imagining the future. Bianca’s account, The Home Reform, April 2022, Instagram*

### *5.3.5 Martina, "The Venetian Pantry"*

*London, UK, opened her account in January 2021 (37.1k followers/February 2023)*

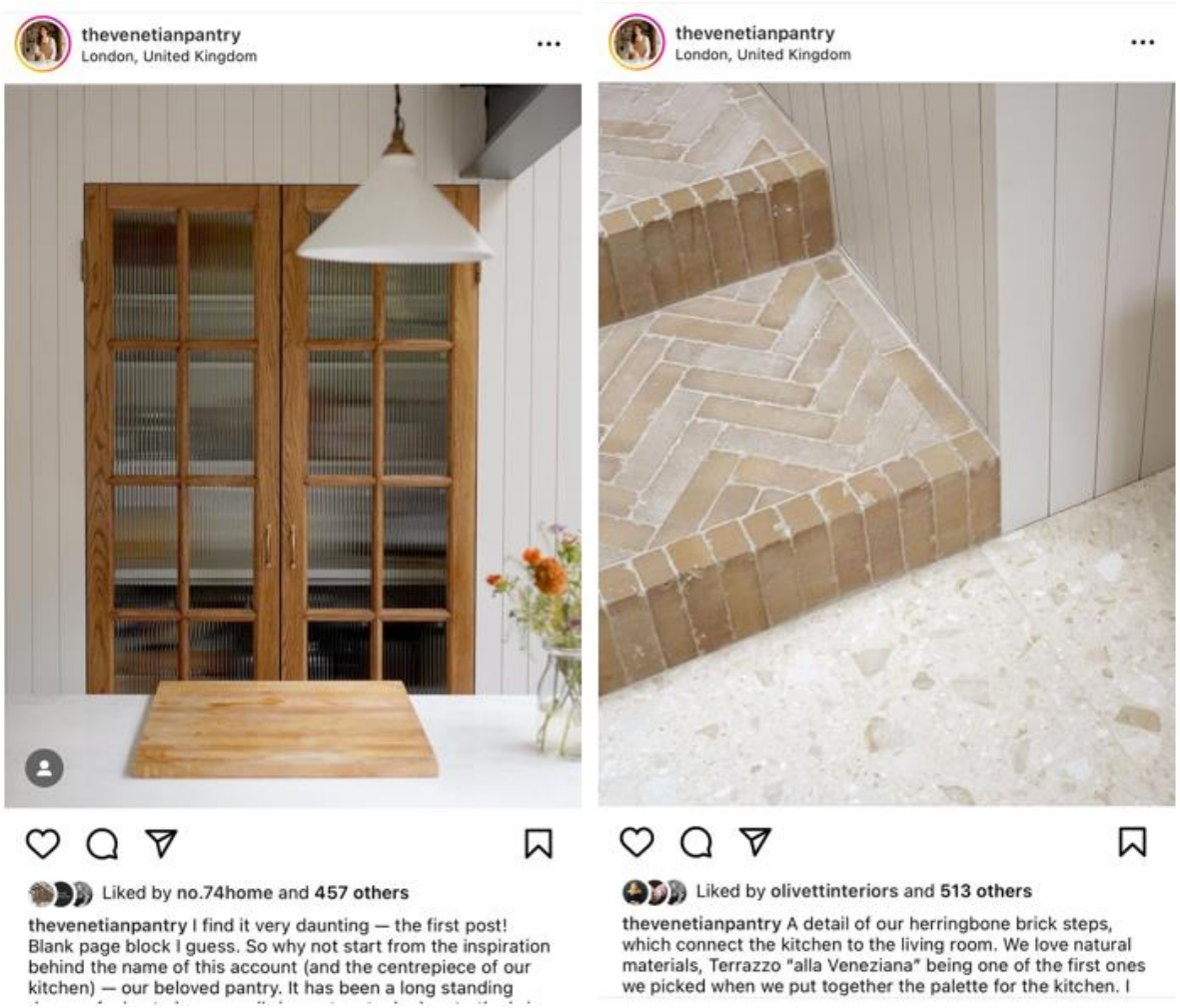



*Figure 22 Martina's first posts. The Venetian Pantry, January 2021, Instagram*

For Martina, who is originally from Italy and now lives in London, her experience as a *dweller-creator* is spread across two Instagram accounts. After buying her North East London house in 2019, she started documenting her renovation process, sharing her experience on her private Instagram account with family and friends, many of whom live in Italy and "couldn't see it in person". Like Leanne, Martina says that while she still has her old personal account, she "barely use[s] it anymore". Then, in January 2021, after finishing most of the renovation, she decided to open her public *home account*, "*The Venetian Pantry*":

> I've been sort of dabbling with this idea of opening a public account for a while. I actually tried back in 2017 […] to open a travel photography account, and that didn't go far at all. So […] I have always wanted to have a place to converge my different passions with photography, design and food. And my partner really pushed me to open this account. So, I did, and then it sort of took off much faster than I thought it would. (Martina in an interview, August 2022)

Martina explains that "*The Venetian Pantry*" "was never a renovation account because it started after the renovation". However, she decided to tell large parts of her renovation story, which she documented meticulously on her private Instagram account, by editing it into a "renovation series" of stories. She then combined this retrospective of the main renovation that had already been completed with the ongoing projects she was doing in the house and with other content that was a "mixture of content from interior, food and a bit of travel and lifestyle".


*Figure 23 After the renovation. Martina's account, The Venetian Pantry, March 2021, Instagram*

### *5.3.6 Kate, "My Old Pub"*

*Hertfordshire, UK, opened her account in September 2021 (71k followers/February 2023)*


*Figure 24 The first posts from Kate's account. My Old Pub, September 2021, Instagram*

The last *dweller-creator* in this ethnography is Kate, who opened her home account, "*My Old Pub*", in September 2021, two and a half years after she moved to her house in April 2019. Like other participants in this ethnography, Kate also had a private Instagram account before starting her *home account*, where she mainly shared family photos with friends and family. However, as she remembers, when she occasionally started posting photos of her home, she realized that her "friends and family really weren't interested in whether I'd decorated a room or not. […] As my sister said, 'who wants to see important pictures of your bookshelf'" (Kate in an interview, August 2022). So, being interested in both photography and home design, Kate decided to use Instagram as a place to share her passions with others who might have similar interests.

However, finding like-minded people interested in seeing her home photos was not Kate's only objective when she opened her public *home account*. She was mainly interested in *interacting* with people about these issues:

> It was frustrating to me that I couldn't sort of interact with people. […Like] asking questions such as "Has anybody used this paint?" Or "Has anybody used this shop before?" "Are they any good?" "Where did you get this from?" […and] just being able to interact and ask questions […] and learn from other people. […] And I felt that when you have a private account, you can't really do that. Because you will ask people a question, and they are probably less likely to respond to you. (Kate in an interview, August 2022)

So, she set up her account and started sharing photos of her home, seeing whether there were people out there who would be more interested in her home than her family and friends:

> [I thought] I'll give it a go. It would be nice to interact with people; I certainly never thought that it would grow to more than about 100. I genuinely thought it would be about 100 people following me and that, […] it would be a nice open way of […] learning a bit more about interiors, etc. (Kate in an interview, August 2022)

### *5.3.7 Creating a place to connect*

The stories of how Ali, Claire, Leanne, Bianca, Martina and Kate each came to open their *home account* on Instagram and share photos of their homes and their renovation experiences are distinguished from one another in several ways. However, they also share a few commonalities, including:

1. Their use of social media to share their renovation with loved ones;
2. Their wish to share their passion for home and design with like-minded people;
3. Their desire to be able to connect and interact with others about their home renovation while also maintaining some degree of privacy, and;
4. Their use of social media as a diary to document their creation process.

As I discuss in chapter 4 while reflecting on my experience of recruiting participants for this ethnography, being able to interact with others on social media often requires some degree of visibility to build trust and to find a common ground, and this often goes through an open account where people can learn something about who you are. Thus, while Leanne, Martina and Kate all wanted to keep their personal lives private behind a locked Instagram account prior to opening their home account when they wished to *connect* and *communicate* with others interested in similar things (e.g., home renovation), it motivated them to open a *home account* and create a place where they could share their *renovation story*, including their taste, their choices, and their experience. For this, the place/account's openness to the world – and in particular to people whom they did not personally know yet – was crucial.

However, at the same time, its boundness was also crucial since, as Malpas (2018) suggests, it is this interplay between its boundness and openness that makes a place a relational "region of possibility" (p. 40). In the next chapter (6), I discuss how this interplay between openness and boundness manifests in *dwellers-creators* experiences of place as part of a *relational environment* of a home renovation community on Instagram. However, before that, the next section of this chapter continues with the second aspect of creation in dwellers' experience of home creation with social media – the decision to take an active part in renovating their homes.

## 5.4 The experience of creating your own home

The decision to use the term home creation came after much deliberation, where I considered other possible terms such as home design (which I started with) or home renovation. I eventually landed on this term since it seems to be more receptive to account for the multifaceted ways in which *dwellers-creators* engage with their homes over time, including aspects of planning, design and construction as part of a structural renovation, but also the continuous attentiveness and responsiveness to the home and to all the things that constitute it. Thus, the home creation experiences shared by dwellers on their Instagram *home accounts* vary significantly between different *dwellers-creators* and between different stages of the home renovation process and can broadly be divided into three forms of participation: *extreme renovation*, *co-creation* and *slow*

*creation*.[44] *Extreme renovation* is the highest form of involvement of dwellers who go through a long-term, large-scale structural project that often includes a wide range of DIY activities and minimal use of professionals (e.g., Ali and Claire). Then, the more common form of participation is a process of *co-creation* where *dwellers-creators* work alongside architects, builders, and other professionals (e.g., Leanne, Bianca, Martina and Kate). In both these forms of participation, the structural renovation stage is often followed by a long-term, ongoing, *slow creation* process that includes interior design, gardening, alterations, additions, and maintenance of the home. These activities are done by the dwellers themselves, with the help of family and friends or with professionals.

Moreover, while these slow ongoing engagements of dwellers with their homes are certainly not new, how these experiences are documented continuously and shared with others on Instagram *renovation diaries* and *home accounts* as a narrative of home creation story – and is done so simultaneously by many *dwellers-creators* around the world – reflects a new way in which the usually more intimate process of home creation becomes a public, shared social practice through digital media (see the discussion on the social aspect of home creation with social media in chapter 6).

### *5.4.1 You see what your work is creating*

Claire and Cal's endeavour to restore a neglected Victorian villa in Scotland that was abandoned for 20 years is perhaps one of the most extreme renovation processes shared on Instagram (and also on their blog, their Facebook page and a BBC TV show). Their adventure started when Cal accidentally bought the wrong house in an auction in October 2018, bidding on a unit that was part of a divided ruined villa in Sandbank, Dunoon, instead of the two-bedroom flat he intended to buy in Glasgow. However, even after this mistake, choosing to get into this extreme renovation as *dwellers-creators* was not the obvious decision:

> When we started this project, we had a structural engineer come in, and he said, you guys should knock down the building. And I think, from a professional standpoint, he was absolutely right, in that for

[44] The slow creation of a home in many cases follow the first two forms of participation, but it can also be the only form of dwellers' engagement in creating their homes.

> most people, economically, […] most developers, or most people investing in property, it would make absolutely no sense to restore it, rather than just knock down and rebuild. (Claire in an interview, July 2022)

Thinking about it differently from how most people probably would, Cal and Claire decided that while they did not have the money to do a comprehensive restoration like the one Jameswood villa needed, they had something else they could use:

> We had all the time in the world. And so, for us, because we had tons of time to invest into a place instead of money, it meant that doing a slow build, like a restoration, kind of worked for our life situation. (Claire in an interview, July 2022)

Besides time, they also had Cal's experience working as a carpenter before their renovation. Claire, on the other hand, says that she did not have any relevant previous experience and that her skills were not "really matched up with this project" (ibid.).

I've been trying my hand at dot and dabbing, and man do I love it!
It is so satisfying seeing a room transform from a building site, to (almost) a home in a few hours!
It was a bit of a slow start, with a learning curve - but now that myself and a helper have had a few goes, we are starting to speed up!
The excitement is hard to describe - I've really caught wind of a great deal of motivation, and I'm running with it!

*What have we Dunoon, August 24, 2021, Instagram*

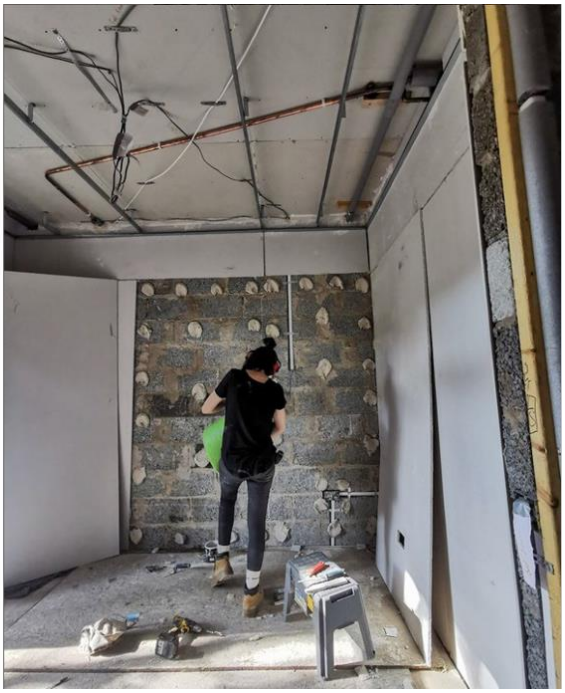


*Figure 25 A Room transform. An edited post from Claire's account. 24 August 2021, Instagram*

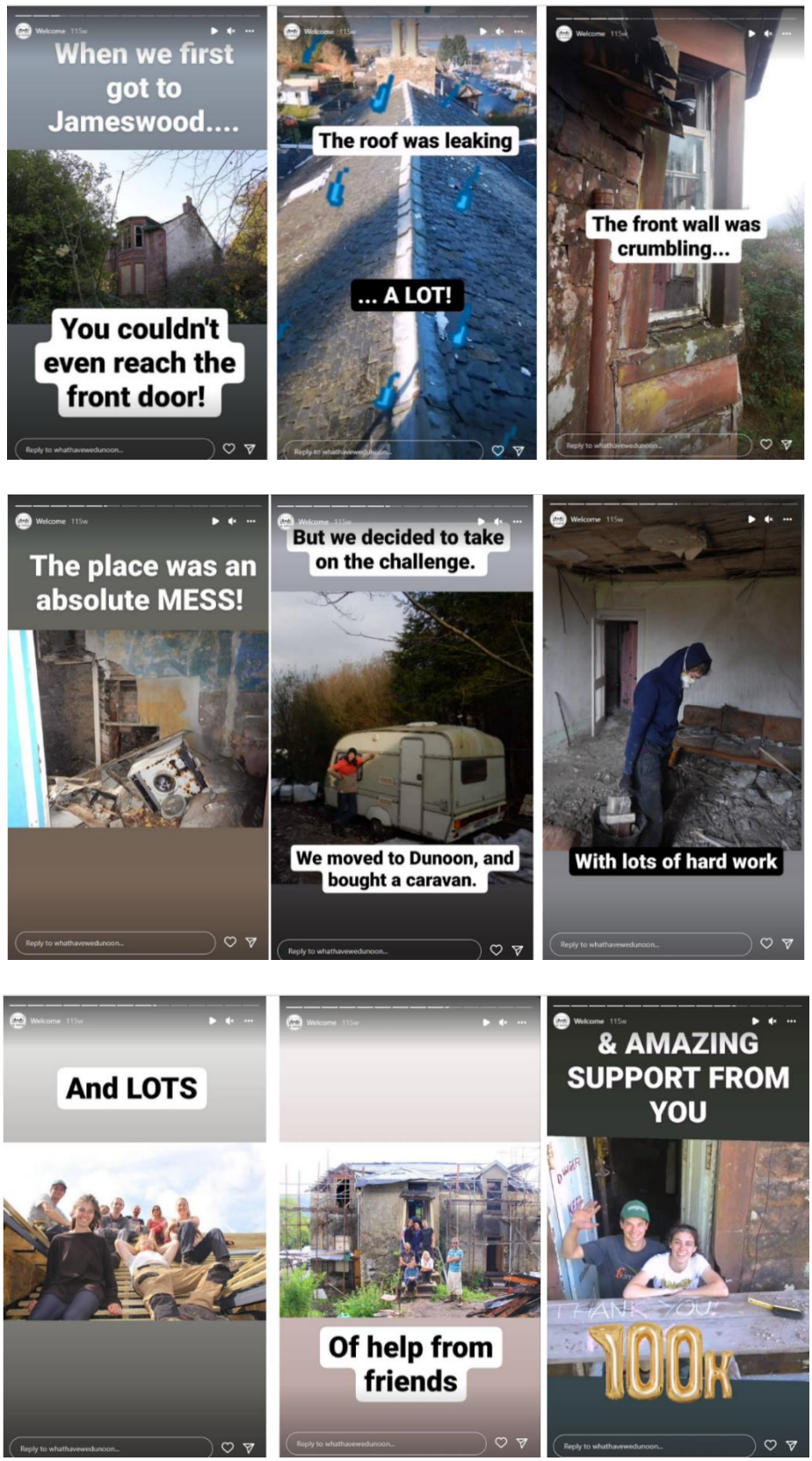



*Figure 26 Claire and Cal's story on Instagram. What Have We Dunoon, July 2019*

Claire and Cal's decision to invest time instead of money to renovate and restore their home can be seen as contesting the conventional modern thinking about how one can achieve things (i.e., buying vs. making or creating) and how one can learn things (i.e., formal education or professional training vs. apprenticeship and learning through doing). Explaining her way of thinking, Claire noted that taking the time to do the renovation by themselves (with the help of friends and volunteers) was, for her, similar to investing 3 to 4 years in getting a university degree:

> We are learning every single day, […] we've learned so, so much. So, if you think about it, if people spend and put themselves into a lot of debt learning, then this was an incredible opportunity. (Claire in an interview, July 2022)

Despite the scope of the immense task that they had taken on when they started the renovation, Claire kept her original plan to study medicine. And during the first year of the renovation, she studied to take her pre-med exams. Nonetheless, even though she excelled in these exams, after a year of renovation and the experience of sharing it online, Claire realized that she did not want to study to become a physician anymore:

> I got like a sinking feeling. And I realized, actually, maybe this wasn't what I wanted to do anymore. But I think that only happened because I had become so empowered and learned so much from the project that I was doing, and I felt so comfortable and excited and happy to be working for myself. And I think once I had taken this risk of taking on this project, the idea of going and doing a career, and a really high stress, high responsibility career, that was really a structured way of living, it didn't feel right for me anymore. (Claire in an interview, July 2022)

For Claire, this experience of building her own house was truly transformative, and she couldn't see herself going back to a more conventional way of life:

> Once I had lived a bit more fluidly, and my responsibility was for myself, I don't think I wanted to go back to living a stable career life […]. It [this project] just opened up new opportunities for me and a

> new way of thinking and a new way of life. (Claire in an interview, July 2022)

Moreover, while it is impossible to draw a distinct line between Claire's experience of creating her physical house and her experience of creating content about this renovation on social media, it seems as though the more transformative aspect that made her rethink her life and her professional path, was related to the tangible renovation and building experience.

Thus, while Claire's intentions in going into this extreme home renovation process with social media were not to develop a new professional path or to find a lucrative income, her story of leaving the traditional workforce (at least for the time being) echoes issues that were raised as part of the discussion about the aspirational promise of social media for self-employment and the possibility, or the illusion, for a holistic harmony between life and work (e.g., Taylor, 2015; Duffy, 2017; O'Neill, 2024).

In the context of creative economies, the expectations of having a "passionate attachment" to work, or "passionate work", has been discussed as linked to an entrepreneurial attitude, in which work and life are deeply entangled in one another (McRobbie, 2016). Worried about the larger implications of an entrepreneurial life in an aspirational economy, McRobbie (2016) sees Sennett's ideas as offering an "intellectual bridge between old and new ways of working" (p. 146) with his arguments about the "dignity of labour" (p. 147). And indeed, Claire's renovation experience as *creation-in-the-world* seems to fit more closely within this discussion since even while she was gaining a huge followership on Instagram – most likely because of the extraordinary nature of her renovation – her everyday experience of the creation of her physical house, remain continuously rooted in the gruelling work of building a derelict house with one's own hands.

Furthermore, as a result, the content that she shares as part of her experience of *creation-in-the-world* looms large on the dignity of labour that McRobbie (2016) is interested in. And it is in this everyday physical labour of building her own house that Claire found a rewarding new perspective on the direct connection between her work and the tangible effect that this work has in the palpable world of material things:

> Our work and everything that we are doing is being put directly into our home. […] Every penny, all our work and effort, is going straight into this. And […] you see what your work is creating, you

> see the progress and the effort that's going into it, and the evolution and at the end of the day, we can say we did this, and it's a really nice feeling. […] When you go out to work every day, you are often […] doing it to pay off a mortgage, and it is to build your home and your family. But it's a bit more disconnected. (Claire in an interview, July 2022)

While the years of engaging in extreme renovation were very intensive and all-consuming for Claire, it is still unclear how her future, including her work path, will evolve after the renovation (for now, they have started to operate holiday rentals in one part of Jameswood villa while living on another part). By taking the process of *creating their home* into their own hands instead of outsourcing it to others, the obvious, tangible end result – that is, the house – becomes just one of the outcomes of this process, alongside other experiences, knowledge, skills, relations and meanings that unfold from Claire's experience of creating her own home. Moreover, while this renovation experience is undoubtedly extraordinary, it can be used to provoke thinking about the possibilities of using readily available things such as time and human resourcefulness to constantly learn new things as we go for achieving meaningful engagements of creation that could potentially affect people's life experience, as it did for Claire.

### *5.4.2 Connecting through the doing*

Another example of taking the extreme renovation route is the story of Ali, a social worker, who together with her partner Clay, who has his own business collecting and selling Australian native seeds, decided to restore an old house by themselves in Queensland, Australia, and make it into their home. Explaining this decision, Ali says: "We wanted to be involved in the experience of creating our own home. […]. Neither of us has come from a building background. But [we] felt that we were resourceful enough and could acquire the knowledge" (Ali in an interview, May 2022).

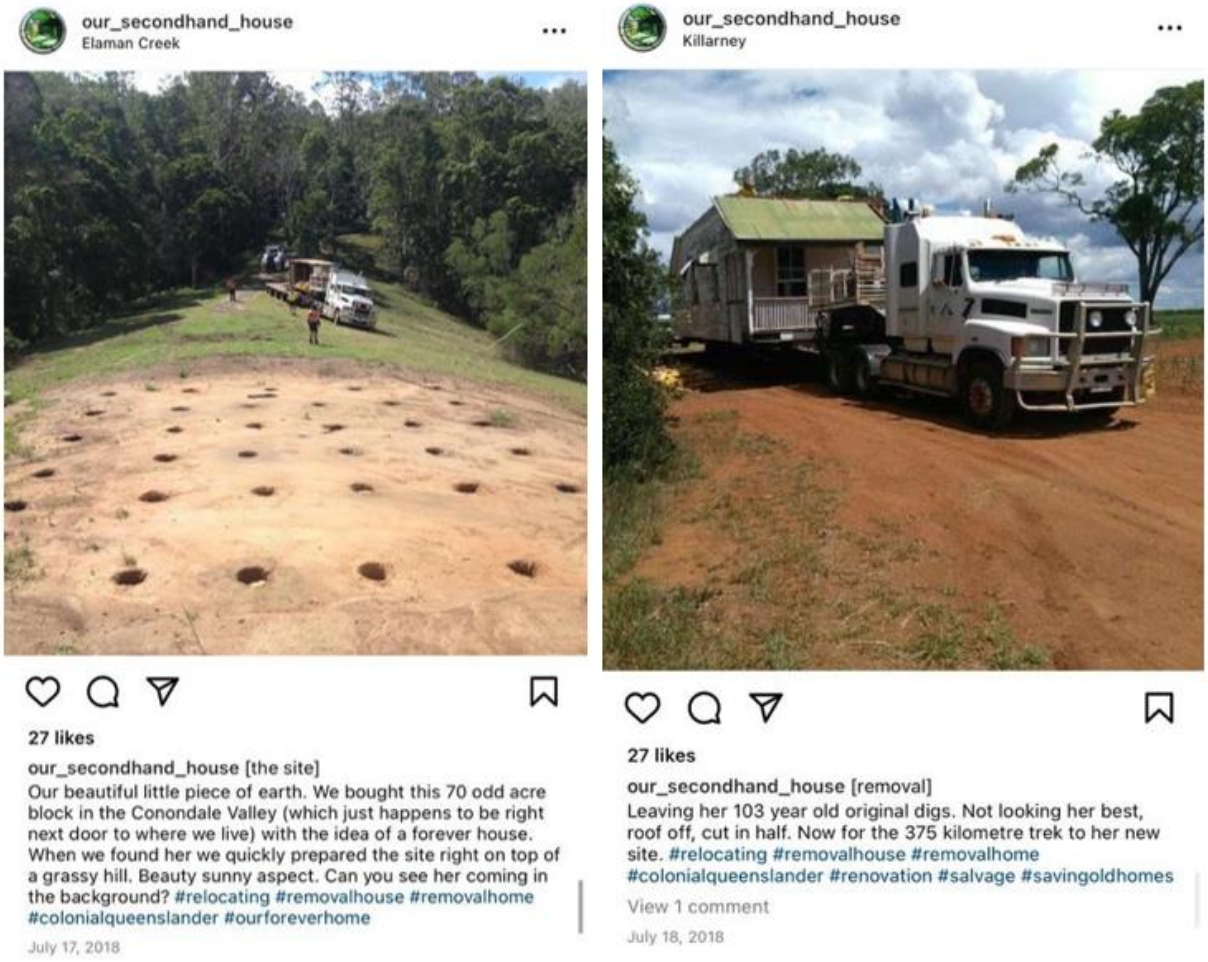



*Figure 27 Some of the first posts in Ali's account, Our Secondhand House, July 2018, Instagram*

They chose a 103-year-old Queenslander farmhouse that had belonged to the same family for over a century and had been vacant for over a decade. Located on a farm a few hours from where they lived in Conondale Valley in Queensland, Australia, they relocated the house in three pieces, carried by trucks over 375 kilometres. Wanting to devote themselves to creating their new home, Ali decided to leave her job as a social worker and work full time on the house. On their Instagram account, Ali and Clay declare: “We did it ourselves * saving an old house”. Ali explains that this sentence demonstrates what sets them apart from many others who renovate their houses and share it on Instagram:

> Many people are purchasing the services of professionals to do lots of the work and maybe doing a little bit of painting or a little bit of styling in their homes. But we […] only had a few things that a professional came and did […] One of them was electrical work, and the other was plumbing. (Ali in an interview, May 2022)

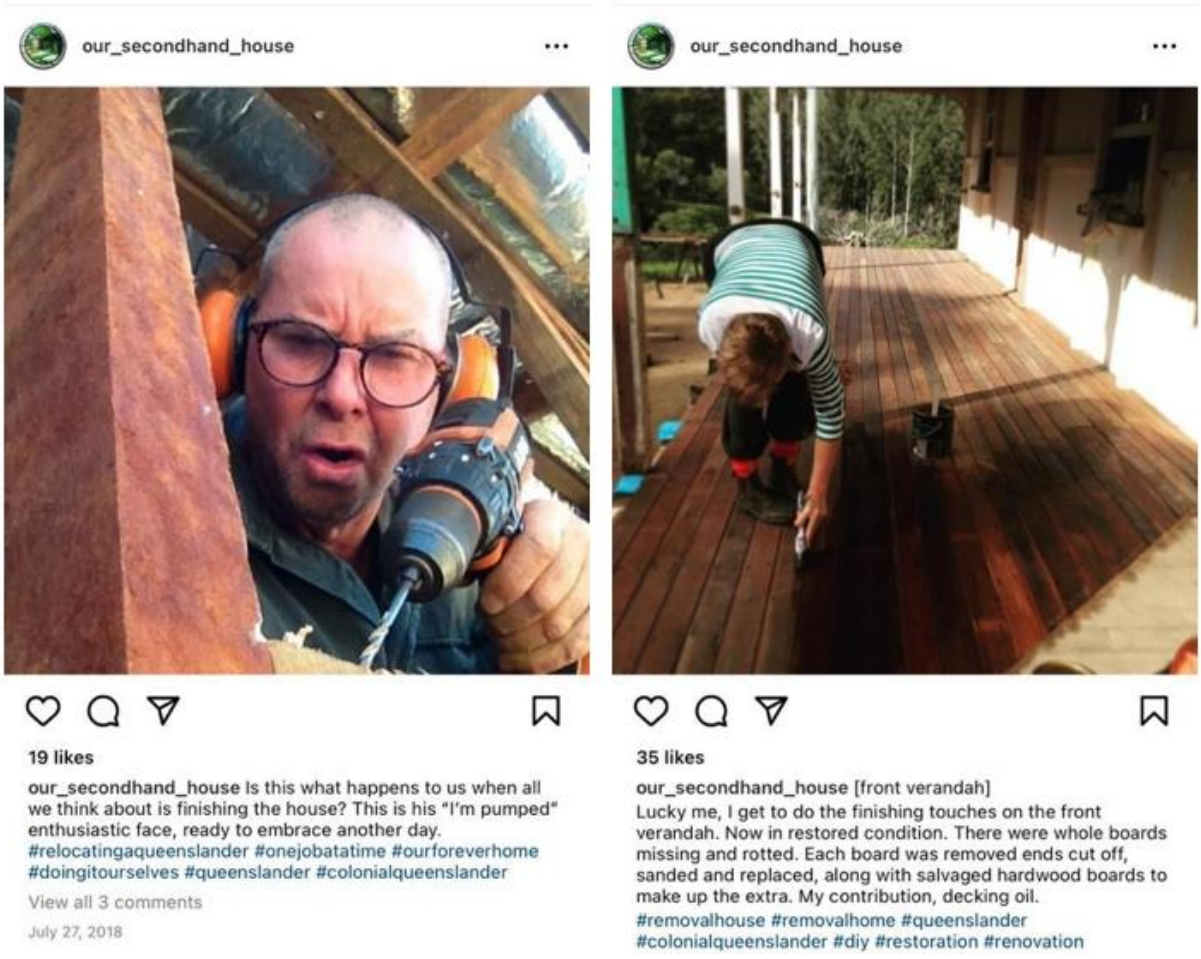



*Figure 28 Ali and Clay doing some DIY work in their home, Our Secondhand House July 2018, Instagram*

Having done everything themselves and challenging themselves, Ali feels that they are able to connect to the house in a much deeper way:

> I think the real difference in us is in how we feel about living here because we did it. […] It's the connection that's been established through the whole process of sanding, scraping, and painting; it's

> hard work. It was really hard work. And then you reap the rewards. […] There's a lot of pride associated with that for us. And so I think all of those things are very significant in your sense of place and your wellbeing that's attached to that. (Ali in an interview, May 2022)

Ali's experience echoes Sennett's (2008) argument that "[p]ride in one's work lies at the heart of craftsmanship as the reward for skill and commitment" (p. 294) and Relph's (1993) view that through active participation of people in creating the places in which they live in, a deep connection is being established between a person and the place it has created. This approach suggests that time, care and work one puts into something are directly connected to the satisfaction, attachment and meaning that results from that engagement. These issues of care, creation and meaning, are further discussed in chapter 7.

How does one feel connected to home? […]For both of us the deep connection is in the act of immersion. Immersing ourselves in the construction, the restoration, the styling, the gardens, the everything really. We wanted to do everything ourselves. But we also had a deep desire to learn to grow our skills, to be independent and be able to accomplish things ourselves. And, I'm here to tell you, we have! […] We've learnt as we've gone along. I truly believe that our involvement in every step has grown our sense of connection to this place. […] Go us!

*Our Secondhand house, August 27, 2023, Instagram*

*Figure 29 Involvement and connection. An edited post from Ali's account, 27 August 2023*

### *5.4.3 Trust your gut – it's your home*

While Claire and Ali each had a transformative life experience renovating their homes by themselves (with their partners and some help from others), the more common form of participation of dwellers in creating their homes is by working alongside professionals in different ways and intensities. Taking a leading role in her home renovation, Leanne came up with many design ideas for the extension and renovation of her home, improvising sketching and ways to communicate her thoughts and desires. For example, she invited her followers on Instagram to peek "inside of her brain" to see her thinking process in developing her ideas for her kitchen.

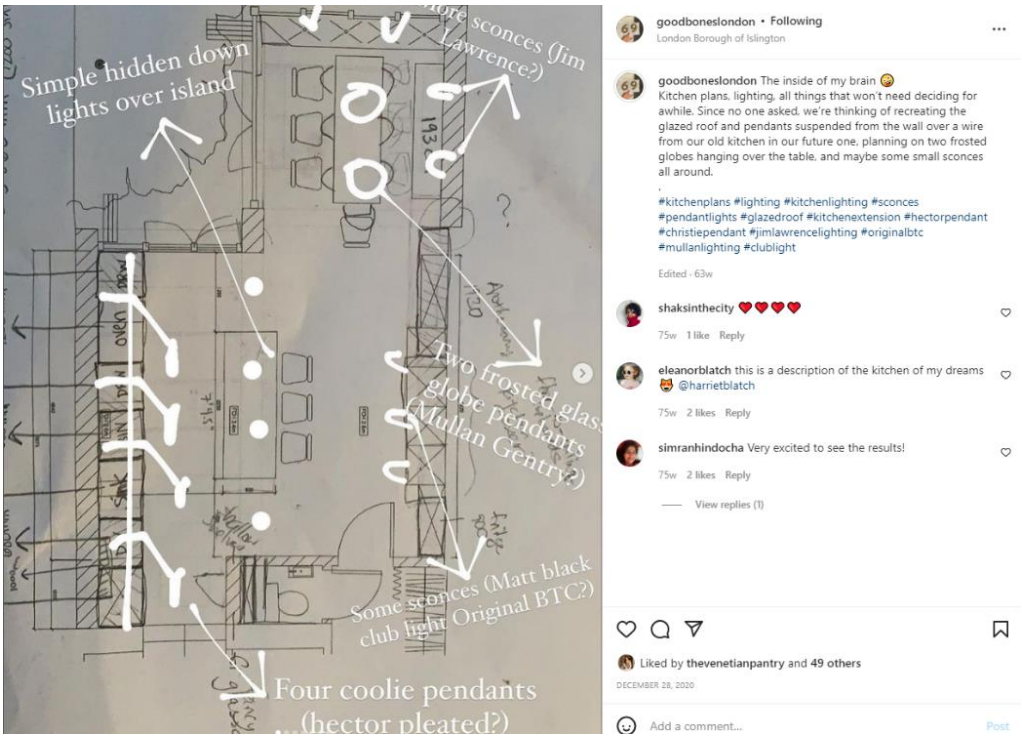
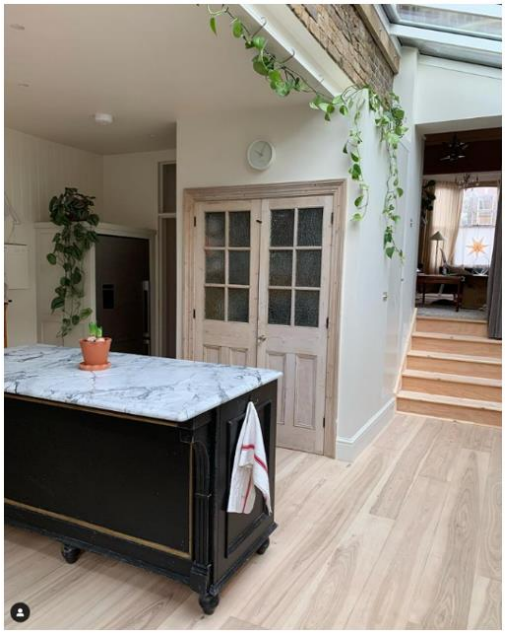



*Figure 30 Communicating her ideas. Leanne's account, Good Bones, 28 December 2020, Instagram*

This decision to take an active part in the creation of her home was very natural for Leanne, as she explains: "I guess I never considered not designing my own home […]. I just really liked to do it. And I had been just waiting for the opportunity to do it. Because we didn't own our own home before" (Leanne in an interview, June 2022). When she introduced herself on her Instagram account, Leanne said that her passion for home renovation was inspired by her parents, who "modelled DIY as an extreme sport" (*Good Bones*, September 20, 2021). For Leanne, the ability

to decide how her home would be was crucial, but making her vision a reality in a *co-creation* process alongside professionals wasn't always a smooth ride. Thus, while trusting her instincts was vital for her, she was able to find inspiration and reassurance that her desires could be implemented in the specific context of her home by interacting with other *dwellers-creators* in her area who tackled similar issues.



After countless tweaks and up-all-night design conundrums we have a functional, beautiful kitchen and a healthy dose of forgetfulness. If you're in the beginning or middle of a project, remember those feelings of uncertainty plague everyone. […] Ask for advice but trust your gut if it's talking to you. After all, it's your home ❤️‍🩹

*Good Bones, December 20, 2021, Instagram*

*Figure 31 Some forgetfulness. An edited post from Leanne's account, 20 December 2021, Instagram*

[…]It was important to me to hide away the morning machines […] but many tried to convince me there wasn't enough space in our traditional #londonterrace for a proper pantry.

Once I saw Martina's @thevenetianpantry now-famous pantry […] I knew we could pull it off and I refused to back down. 😈 Our wonderful builders have built it exactly to my drawings, accommodating my vintage eBay doors, and lots and lots of changes 🥹

*Good Bones, July 20, 2021, Instagram*

*Figure 32 Learning from others. An edited post from Leanne's account, 20 July 2021, Instagram*

Having been told that her wish to create a walk-in pantry was not viable for a house, Leanne was inspired by Martina's story on Instagram, which proved to her that this was indeed possible. Another notable example for her determination to create the house as she wanted it to be, can be seen in how she decided to design her own kitchen island when she couldn't find one that met all her requirements. She needed to find a craftsperson who would help her create bespoke furniture that would fit her specific needs and tastes.

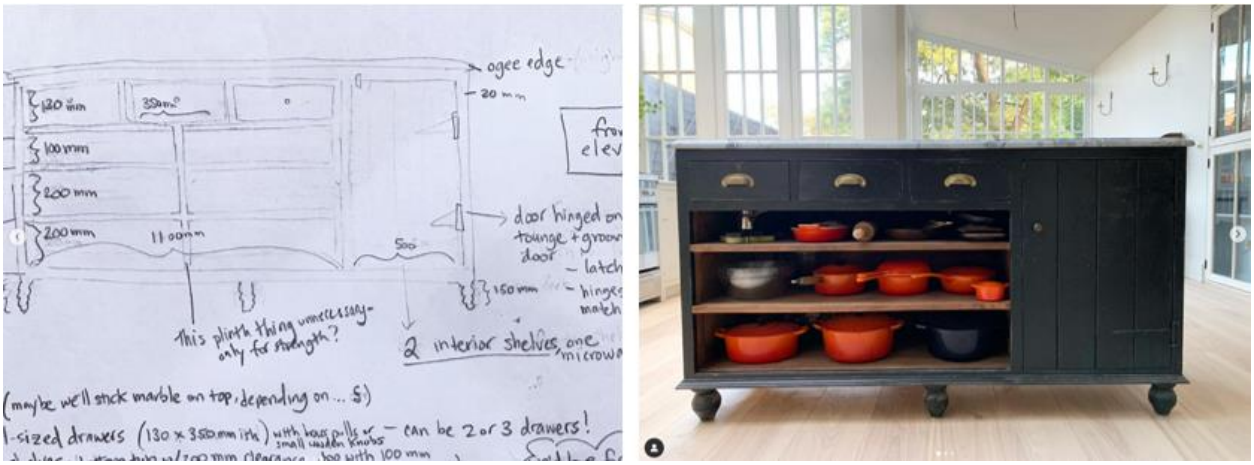



*Figure 33 The kitchen island Leanne designed. Good Bones, November 2021, Instagram*

Leanne's home creation experience is an example of the meaningful involvement of a dweller in the renovation process of her home, a form of participation that, as Ingold (2021a) suggests, locates the "creativity of the design process not in the exceptional faculties of 'creatives', such as architects and designers, but in the generative potential of the social relationships in which all participants are involved" (p. xvi). Naturally, as Ingold (2021a) acknowledges, such back and forth between different stakeholders could result in "a degree of friction and even resistance in the design process itself" (ibid.). Nonetheless, Ingold views such resistance as a positive aspect of participation where the "boundaries of inclusivity and exclusivity in the design process are shifting and permeable" (p. xvii). And as can be seen in Leanne's case, her involvement has allowed her to "stuck to her guns", as she puts it, and gain control over the creation of her home. Interestingly, following her experience of creating her own home and sharing it on Instagram, she had also moved to the other side of this equation, designing homes for others who were impressed by her designing ability as a *dweller-creator* (see more on this in chapter 6).

### *5.4.4 Design for everyday life in the home*

Another example of a *co-creation* experience of a *dweller-creator* is Bianca's renovation of her South-East London house. Moving to her new house in December 2020, Bianca and her partner decided to live there for a year before starting the renovation, planning exactly how they would want their long-term home to be (see a detailed discussion of slow renovation in chapter 7). They hoped this home would enable them to get all the things they longed for and didn't have in their previous homes. For Bianca, home and home design have always been things she was drawn to: "Since I was little, I was just always passionate about making the spaces I lived in as beautiful as I could" (Bianca in an interview, May 2022). Long before her renovation started, Bianca used Pinterest and Instagram to collect home design ideas and inspiration. However, while she was living in her new house before the renovation, she discovered that "what I had planned to do before we moved in completely changed after we started living there" (ibid.). Considering the specific context of the house, its potential and constraints, Bianca decided to make a list of the things that were most important to her, her "non-negotiables", such as a separate utility room, a downstairs WC and an open kitchen.

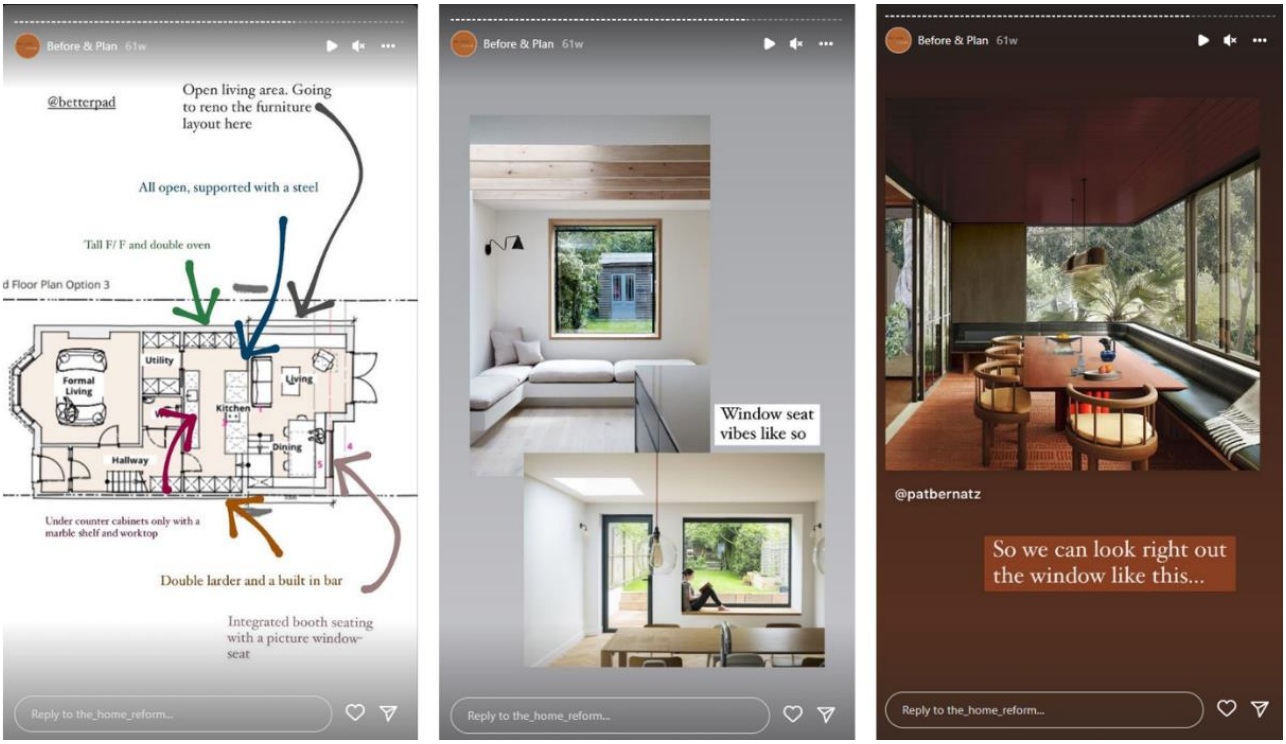
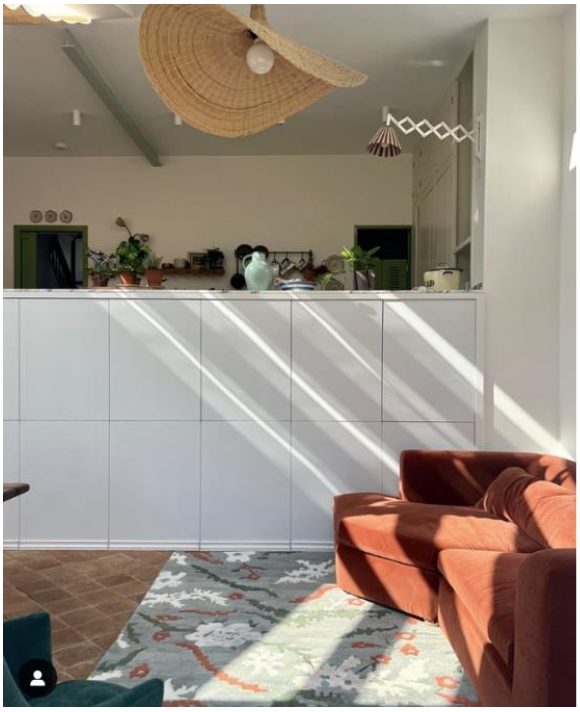



*Figure 34 Bianca's stories on the planning of the renovation, The Home Reform, Instagram*

Directed by her wish to be able to live in the house in the context of her everyday life, social habits, and preferences, Bianca's renovation and design ideas were targeted at ways how the house will let her dwell, to use Heidegger's (1951/1971b) terms:

> I knew I wanted to be able to cook and talk to my husband or my friends if they were watching TV. Or if they are eating, I would want that flow. […] I wanted the kitchen, dining, and living rooms to be able to interact with each other but definitely feel separate and have their own space. […]. So it just came down to […] how I use the space socially and every day. (Bianca in an interview, May 2022)

After she had lived in the house and got a good understanding of what she wanted concerning her life patterns, Bianca used Pinterest and Instagram to create mood boards that helped her architect understand what she wanted: "I definitely think social media has a huge part in conveying ideas. […] It can really help a designer quickly understand what is important to that person" (Bianca in an interview, May 2022).



[…] We controversially created an open plan style middle room to house our kitchen as this layout gave us the kitchen layout and size we wanted, a separate utility, WC that wasn't under the stairs, storage in the extension and an open plan feel with some element of distinctive zones and separation between areas. And mega high ceilings in the extension which was a big bonus! Point is - do what works for you functionally and aesthetically, even if it may initially be hard for some to wrap their heads around 😅

*The Home Reform, January 9, 2024, Instagram*

*Figure 35 Design fit for life. An edited post from Bianca's account, 9 January 2024 Instagram*

### *5.4.5 To be inspired and to inspire*

For Martina, like Bianca, her experience of using social media to plan a future home renovation started long before she bought her house in 2019 by collecting references and design ideas on Pinterest:

> I started sort of daydreaming about what our [future] house [would be like]... And I started from Pinterest, really just gathering inspiration and mood boards, on Pinterest, which, if I look back at the early references I had on my Pinterest board, it's like completely different from what we ended up with. (Martina in an interview, August 2022)

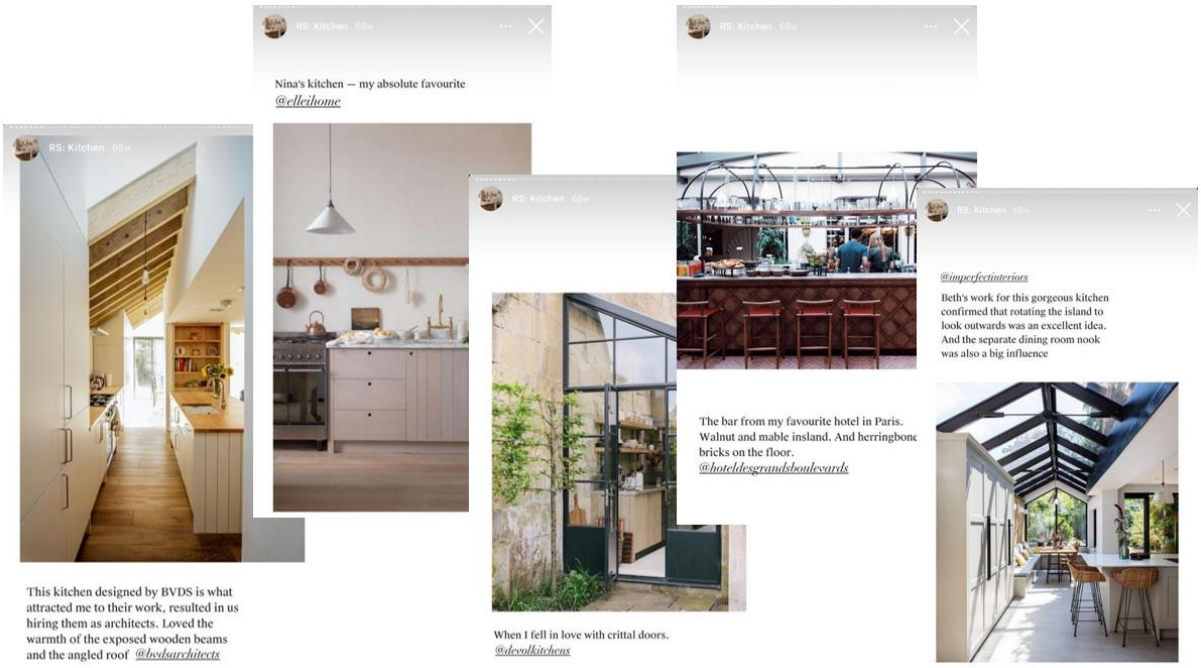



*Figure 36 Inspirations from Martina's renovation series story, The Venetian Pantry, Instagram*

After collecting inspiration, Martina also used social media to find professionals to work with, and she collaborated in a *co-creation* process with her architect and builder to execute her vision for her home. This included working on the design plans, sourcing materials and working on-site. At the same time, Martina was also trying to simulate how the proposed design would look and

feel by using improvizations like standing with parts of the old fence to try and get a feeling of the size of the extension and more high-tech methods of using free online tools such as “Home By Me” to create 3D drawings and renders.

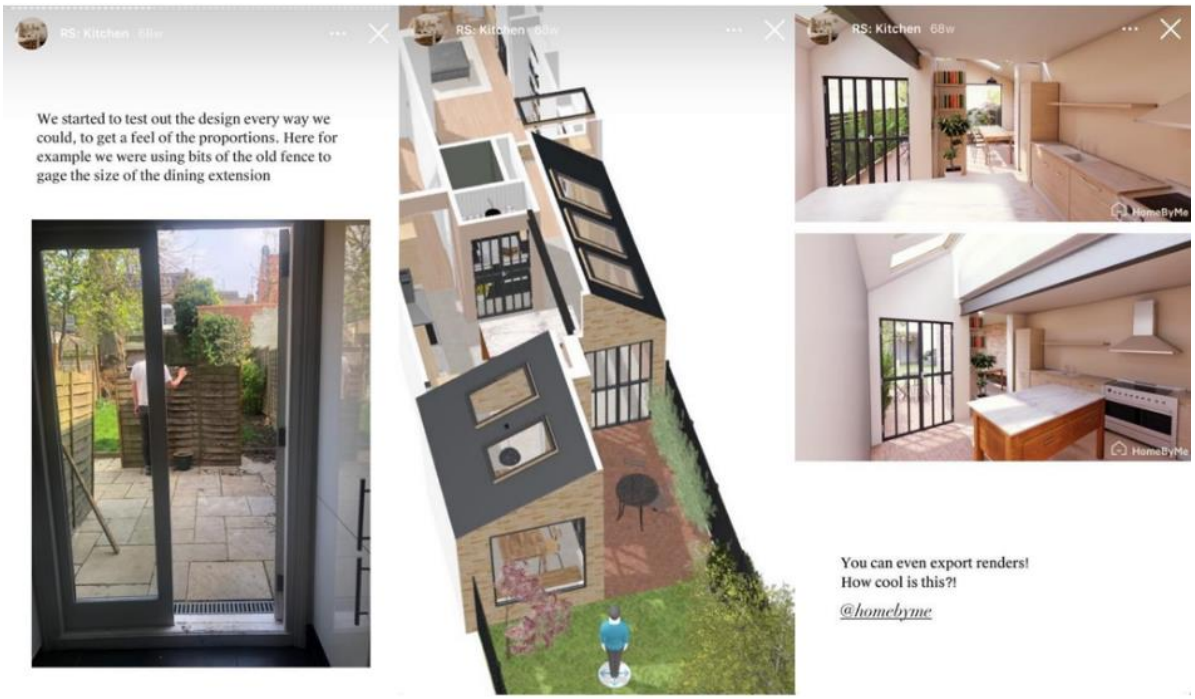



*Figure 37 Martina's simulations from her renovation series story, The Venetian Pantry, Instagram*

One main thing that was important for Martina to have in her home was her walk-in pantry, which became the inspiration for her account name, “*The Venetian Pantry*”, and later inspired other *dwellers-creators* like Leanne:

> When we were working with our architects to help us with the layout of the kitchen, I kind of ended up doing the layout myself […], but one of the requirements was to have a pantry in there […]. So, I made the decision to sacrifice the fridge space. […] And the design of the whole kitchen kind of stemmed from the position of the pantry (Martina in an interview, August 2022)

Tracing the evolution of the pantry idea, Martina says that she was inspired to have a perpendicular island by an idea she saw on the Instagram of an interior designer she follows and that from there, the way to get her precious pantry was open:

> To me it makes total sense, […] that way you look out onto the garden when you're preparing food instead of facing a wall. And […] because we have the dining area in front of the island, then you can talk to your guests […]. Then I saw that it's something a lot of people adopted in their design […] having a pantry and then having […] the island being perpendicular to the kitchen runner. (Martina in an interview, August 2022)


*Figure 38 "The best decision". An edited post from Martina's account, 11 April 2021, Instagram*

Nevertheless, the inspiration for her did not come solely from social media. Thus, in Martina's home, "thoughts, memories and dreams" (Bachelard, 1957/2014, p. 28) are constantly brought together as "[p]ast, present, and future give the house different dynamisms" (ibid. p. 28). Daydreaming about an old Italian grandma's kitchen, together with inspiration from local East

London restaurants and fond memories of a hotel she once visited in Paris – and then reappropriating them all together in the context of her home.

[…] The original plan was actually to have a pocket door here (would you believe it!), until our builder Edi pointed out that it would create some constant micro-movements, that in the long run might have compromised the stability of the tiles in the shower. My mind went to this fabulous hotel I stayed at in Paris: the doors to the ensuite were chunky, rectangular wooden french doors, with an arched decoration carved in them. […]
Now every day officially starts with that simple gesture, the grand opening of those arched doors. It's in these little details, I believe, that the joys of home-making lie.

*The Venetian Pantry, September 6, 2021, Instagram*

*Figure 39 Inspiration from Paris. An edited post from Martina's account, 6 September 2021, Instagram*

### *5.4.6 Working with the house*

Kate, the last *dweller-creator* in this ethnography to open her home account "*My Old Pub*" in September 2021, had another significant home renovating experience prior that she did not share on Instagram. In this experience, she slowly renovated her small, terraced house in Cambridge, almost by herself, in a DIY process that took place between 2014 and 2019. In her Cambridge renovation, Kate says that she "tried absolutely everything" and was doing most of the work by herself, except for some structural work, electrical work and plumbing:

> I have taken down ceilings, I've taken up floors, I've laid floors, I've done the tiling, I've built stud walls, I've built the cupboards, I've done skirting boards, I've taken out a fireplace, […] I've had a go at lime plaster […], I've put plasterboard up and curtain rails [etc.]. (Kate in an interview, August 2022)


*Figure 40 "Fell in love". An edited post from Kate's account, 3 April 2022, Instagram*

In fact, Kate's first DIY experience as a *dweller-creator* was not her only connection to the field of home renovation, architecture and design. Her academic and professional background includes studying architecture, working for large architectural firms focusing on urban design, and specializing in historic buildings. This background has led her to run her own business that brings historic buildings on the "at-risk register" back to life by finding new uses for them. Nonetheless, having all this professional experience, Kate says that her hands-on, DIY experience as a *dweller-creator,* renovating her first house in Cambridge, was invaluable: "I'm a firm believer that the more you try, the more you understand it, and probably the less mistakes you make".

Returning to Kate's current renovation experience in her "*Old Pub*" in Hertfordshire, she says that as rewarding as her DIY experience in her previous home was, it was also a very exhausting experience. So, when she was planning to move again, she did not want to have another big DIY project. However, when she entered the house that would later become hers, she was overcome by its elusive "quality without a name" (Alexander, 1979), and despite all its very non-obscure problems – she was hooked. Specifically enchanted by the fireplace, Kate was drawn into another home renovation. Trying to make the 16th-century pub which was converted to a home in 1965 and was badly damaged and neglected – into her new home, Kate knew that she needed some help:

> Here, because of the nature of the building that is listed, and because of the extent of the repairs that were needed externally, […] my skill level wasn't going to be good enough. So, when I first moved in, I had about six months of work done by a building firm […]. (Kate in an interview, August 2022)

These works included exterior works, as well as plumbing and electric works. And at the same time, Kate was also rolling up her sleeves again, "doing as much as I possibly can". Before moving into the house, Kate started planning what she would like to do there. Like Bianca and Martina, she used Pinterest to find ideas on how to design and decorate the house. However, when she moved into the house, she discovered that her visual ideas from Pinterest were not actually compatible with the house that she had:

> Before coming here, I'd save loads and loads and loads of images to Pinterest because I wasn't really doing Instagram then. And now, when I look back at them, they're pictures of Victorian and Georgian houses or more recent houses; they're not pictures of houses with lots of beams everywhere and very wonky walls. (Kate in an interview, August 2022)

Thus, after trying to replicate the things she liked in her previous house and the design ideas she collected on Pinterest, Kate realized just how much each specific house demands contextual consideration:

> I went through this process of painting all the rooms, really dark colours, and bright colours. […], and eventually, I had to say, "Just stop!" […] I realized it wasn't for this sort of house. […]. So I have had to teach myself […] to work with the house and the room in front of me and not what I've seen in a magazine and try and retrofit something that just doesn't work at all, in my opinion. (Kate in an interview, August 2022)

Therefore, without intending to, Kate was essentially undergoing what Mitcham (2005) saw as the comparison between vernacular architecture and action painting, namely:

> One has to try out many alternatives before getting a good fit. If that trying out is projected on, and limited to, the drafting table – even more to the computer screen – I lose the hand-with-its-hammer, my body, in the building. […] In the vernacular world, directions are inherently unclear. Technoscience and engineering aspire to make it all clear—which also clears out the vernacular. (p. 40)

Refocusing on the house that was in front of her and its characteristics, Kate was now at the stage of an *ongoing slow renovation*, including DIY projects like building a built-in bookcase with her father, renovating her utility room and decorating the kitchen and the fireplace by putting up dried hops around the house. But the changes to the house were not only those that she was planning, and the house has some changes of its own going on (as I discuss in chapter 7).

[…] Two years ago today Dad and I started our first real bit of DIY together, which was this Billy Bookcase hack.
I had always wanted some built in bookcases, but the price of them was just totally unaffordable. So, I decided the only way I was going to get some was to have a go at doing them myself! […]

*My Old Pub, February 22, 2023, Instagram*

*Figure 41 Having a go at something new. An edited post from Kate's account, 22 February 2023, Instagram*

## 5.5 Conclusions: entanglements of creation

Through the phenomenological exploration of the experiences of Ali, Claire, Leanne, Bianca, Martina and Kate, I discuss in this chapter the interrelation between the experience of creating a *home account* on Instagram and the experience of creating one's *physical home*. By suggesting the concept of *creation-in-the-world*, I use a phenomenological lens to trace how this *holistic* experience of home creation *in*, *with*, and *through* digital media is entangled, shaped by and affecting of different aspects in *dwellers-creators*' broader lived experience in the world.

Importantly, in both aspects of creation in *dwellers-creators*' experiences, there is a convergence between their roles as users and producers, as they are functioning at once both as the creators and the dwellers of their homes, as well as the creators and the inhabitants of their Instagram *home account/place* and its broader *relational environment* (as I discuss in chapter 6). This entanglement allows the process of home creation to gradually and slowly unfold as well as to be spoken of not as a confined design project but rather as a process of constant change and modification, as dwellers' ideas and wants are leading the way vis-à-vis how their home is being created.

From the ethnographic findings and the experiences that were discussed here, it appears that this double entanglement (between the different roles of *dwellers-creators* and between the two experiences of creation) traverses many aspects of the participants' lives and has a significant impact on dwellers' experience in their homes and in the world.

Thus, for example, for Claire, it was evident how the extreme renovation of her home diverted her from the traditional path of academic degree and a demanding career (in her case, as a physician) and made her think differently about her way of living. Similarly, for Ali, while being at a different stage in her professional life, the decision to renovate her home by herself (with her partner) also lead her to withdraw from her work as a social worker and to immerse herself in the experience of building and dwelling. The entanglement between work (although for the most part this refers to the unpaid work of building their homes) and everyday life was not the only entanglement that emerged in their experiences. Both Claire and Ali (although with some different emphasis) discuss how the entanglement between the actual hands-on daily process of building and the visible things created by their work results for them in a deep sense of meaning and connection to their house (see more on this in the discussion in chapter 7).

In the *co-creation* experiences of Leanne, Bianca, Martina and Kate, which include more design aspects alongside other stakeholders, other entanglements resurface. These include the strong connection between *dwellers-creators'* understanding and knowledge about their daily lives, needs and wants and their desire to shape their house accordingly to allow them to dwell as they wish. Another issue that came out in this analysis was the relation between visual inspiration and the specific material and spatial context of the house. Thus, for both Bianca, Martina and Kate, the early visual inspiration that they gathered on social platforms outside of the context of the specific renovation turned out to be, in many cases, unsuitable and was disregarded (Bianca and Martina) or required additional changes after it was already implemented (Kate). Thus, the importance of working with the house and considering its spatiality and materiality – including its constraints, quirkiness, and uniqueness – is essential and needs to be accounted for when one considers the implementation of inspiration or design ideas found on social media.

Finally, another interrelation that emerged in the first part of this ethnography is the inspirational cross-pollination between *dwellers-creators* like in the case of the pantry, where inspiration and design ideas move and rematerialized in different homes and home accounts (Martina and Leanne). While this chapter only briefly touched on the social aspect of dwellers' home creation experiences in the context of Instagram *home accounts* and *renovation diaries*, the next chapter delves into this issue through questions of place and relations in the digital flow and provides an exploration of dwellers' experience of a being part of *relational environments* on Instagram and beyond.

*Chapter Six*

# Grounded Media: Place and Relations in the Digital Flow

*Places are the contexts of human life and in some manner are themselves alive, for they grow, change and decline with the individuals and groups who maintain or ignore them.*

*Relph, 1993, p. 38*

*Dwelling is relational. It is […] founded […] in the mutual constitution or composition of elements within a bounded yet open regionality.*

*Malpas, 2021, p. 51*

Continuing with the existential–phenomenological notion that views human existence in the world as an entanglement of *place*, *people* and *time*, Scannell (2014) advises us that "the order in which these three integrally connected components of the human situation are raised is crucial" (p. 56). Adding to the existential perspective that focuses primarily on how we are *thrown* into our digital ecology (Lagerkvist, 2017) or our digital life (Markham, 2020), this chapter takes a different focus by exploring the first component in our human situation; that is, the notion of *place* as part of a relational, processual and contextual environment of Instagram *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* in their entanglements with the world. By considering each *home account* or *renovation diary* on Instagram as a known place (Pink et al., 2016) and the relational field between different places and their inhabitants as part of an environment,[45] I explore the different connections, entanglements and reciprocities in this all-encompassing environment that is digital and beyond-digital at once. To think about these issues in the context of an ethnographic work, I draw on the concept of localities (Appadurai, 1995; Massey, 2005; Pink et al., 2016) as relational and contextual knowable places that can be identified both by their inhabitants as well as by

[45] In their book *The Digital Environment*, Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2021) argue that we live in three interconnected environments: natural, urban and digital. Their analysis is focused mainly on the digital environment, while the other two environments remain in the background. In contrast, the phenomenological approach taken in this thesis focuses on the relatedness and the entanglements between the digital, the material, the social and the experiential aspects of life as a one all-encompassing environment.

ethnographers who "seek to understand definitions, and the meaning, of localities for the people who inhabit them" (Pink et al., 2016, p. 126). Thus, using the concept of place in relation to people's experiences in the digital flow can help in considering the ways in which media *is* and *could be* used in grounding human existence in our current age, allowing a sense of orientation and increasing people's sense of *dwelling* in the world.

## 6.1 Finding our way: between digital and physical terrains

Navigating their way through the world,[46] including in digital terrains, people are constantly searching for gripping points of ontological and existential security. This includes questions such as: Where am I? Is it real? Where is it coming from? What is it connected to? Can I trust it? What will happen if I do something? Where can I go? And what can I do?

To explore such questions, Lagerkvist (2017) suggests an existential approach to consider "how fundamental existential issues are pursued when people's lives and memories are increasingly shaped in, by, and through digital media forms" (p. 98). Starting with Giddens' (1990) definition of ontological security is based on the notion of predictability and the assumption that we are able to trust "that people, things, places, and our sense of self are more or less consistent" (Lagerkvist, 2017, p. 102), Lagerkvist emphasizes that our human existence is full of uncertainties. Therefore, she suggests that phenomenology and the philosophy of existence can help in considering "how or if—living with uncertainty—we may secure any sense of cohesion, meaning, direction, purpose, ethics, grounding, continuity and community, that is, existential security in the digital age" (ibid.). Importantly, this search for existential security is never an isolated individualistic experience but rather always relates to other people and the world through the holistic relations of *being-in-the-world*.

Moreover, as Markham (2020) suggests, as people navigate their ways in the digital tangle, they "are endlessly inventive when it comes to generating new contextual habits of practical knowledge and embodied techniques of disclosure that allow for perpetual motion if not ontological security" (p. 14). As part of this quest, traditional questions of *realness*, *trust*, and

[46] See also related discussions about how "we find our way about" in everyday media use (Scannell, 1996; Moores, 2015) and wayfaring (Ingold, 2007).

*authenticity* are becoming increasingly acute when thinking about social interaction, visual images, and information that people encounter in digital environments. As discussed later in this chapter, in the context of home creation with social media it provokes issues such as the *authenticity* of *dwellers-creators'* identity as professionals or amateurs and as dwellers or creators of the house; the *sincerity* of dwellers' choices and recommendations as genuine or influenced by commercial incentives; and the *realness* of the house that is presented in different forms of media, including possible manipulation of photos, up to the question whether the place even exists in the palpable world.

### *6.1.1 A place on Instagram and in the world*

As discussed in previous chapters, while dwellers' participation in home creation has long involved both media consumption and production, Instagram *renovation diaries* stand out in key ways—differing from earlier forms of traditional media, such as design magazines and home renovation TV shows, as well as more recent digital platforms like Pinterest, YouTube and Facebook. Thus, *dwellers-creators* who share their home renovation experience on Instagram function *at once* as both the creators and the dwellers of their physical home, as well as the creators of content and as the audience for the content created by others. These *entanglements* and *convergences* between the different roles and perspectives that are all *combined* in the experiences of *dwellers-creators* make this experience particularly suitable for exploring the blurring of boundaries between different aspects of life in the digital age.

Starting with the popular TV genre of home renovation shows, where a home renovation story is usually depicted as a moment in time, a project whose creation process is either condensed into one episode or less often spread across multiple episodes. Another way a home renovation is portrayed in traditional media is in design and architecture publications. In this case, a home is usually presented as a final architectural product in carefully edited photos, usually promoting the architect or the designer who created it. In these media representations of a home design or renovation, the content is produced by professionals and not by the dwellers or the creators of the house (who are usually different people). The audience in these cases is completely separated from both the creation process of the content as well as from the creation process of the house and, as a result, is not participating in these creation processes.

Compared with these more passive ways in which people can witness the interiors of a home or a renovation process on traditional media, digital platforms such as YouTube and Pinterest allow people to both easily share content (including with others they do not know), as well as to search and organize different multimedia of visual inspiration or design ideas to use as part of their home renovation process. Nonetheless, in many cases home renovation content on these platforms is presented and consumed as scattered pieces of media and not as a holistic story of a process that stretches over time and include interaction between creators and audiences. And while other digital platforms—such as home renovation forums and Facebook home design groups do offer more interaction—they are usually focus on questions and tips and do not function as a *place* where a home creation experience is presented holistically over time.

It seems that the closest example that precedes Instagram's *renovation diaries* is home renovation blogs, where people share their home renovations as well as life experiences in the home over time and interact with readers through comments or via email. Nonetheless, these blogs operate more as separate places and less as an environment with different interactions and a sense of shared locality between its members.

Thus, while each of these examples shares certain attributes with Instagram *renovation diaries* and *home accounts*, the holistic combination of instant documentation, sharing of textual and visual content, and ongoing discussion of the home creation process with others beyond close circles represents a new development in how media is used in home-making. Beyond being a creative practice, this "throwntogetherness" (Massey, 2005) of space, time, practices, visuals, texts, and materialities transforms it into a phenomenon of *place*.

Drawing on the ontological meaning of place (e.g., Casey, 1997; Malpas, 2006, 2018, 2021), I argue that a home creation experience in the context of Instagram *renovation diaries* and *home accounts* does not happen in one continuous space or flow, but rather needs to be understood as happening in and as constituting of *places*. As Malpas (2021) explains, space and place should be distinguished from one another: "The difference […] is that place consists in a bounded and differentiated openness (encompassing forms of both time and space), while space, taken alone, is typically associated with a mode of unbounded and largely undifferentiated extension" (p. 5). Thus, thinking of the experience of home creation in the context of Instagram *renovation diaries* and *home accounts* as a *place-constitute practice* and as an experience that is anchored in a place,

I suggest three aspects of the locality (*environment* and *places*) that emerge through my phenomenological ethnographic work:

1. ***A relational environment*** – each *home account* on Instagram is part of a relational field of affiliations to other accounts that is also affected by the geographical and/or immediate social environment of the *dweller-creator*. This *relational environment* is often perceived and referred to by its inhabitants as a community.

2. ***The self, others and being-with*** – the relations between the inhabitants of this *relational environment* depend upon the exitance of the sociable self – that is, the *dweller-creator* – that communicates both through broadcasting and ongoing correspondence with others.

3. ***A knowable place or locality*** – The *place/account* that is the *home account* is perceived as a bounded and coherent yet interconnected *known location* that can be visited to witness an unfolding and ongoing renovation process and/or life in the home. It is also often intimately connected to an identifiable physical place/home.

## 6.2 A relational environment

Starting with the first out of the three aspects of the ethnographic field explored in this research, I suggest that *dwellers-creators* are operating in and constantly creating and shaping the relational environment they inhabit. Drawing on Gibson's (1979) concept of affordances, Bucher and Helmond (2018) consider platforms as environments that are different from one another whose affordances are constituted through an ongoing generative relation between users and environment (the platform). The use of social networks and digital media platforms to enable the basic human need for connection and social interaction has been discussed extensively by media scholars over the years (Baym, 2015;  c.f. Turkle, 2011). And indeed, the desire to connect with others is one of the salient issues that repeat in *dwellers-creators*' experiences, and as seen in the first part of chapter 5, has been a primary motivation for opening a *home account*.

Reinforcing the approach that concurs that people's use of digital media is not deterministic (e.g., Markham, 2020; Deuze, 2023) and that human actions and objectives shape the ways in which technology is being (or stop being) used (Baym, 2015; 175), the *dwellers-creators* that I

interviewed explain how they use different platforms based on their affordances[47]. Specifically, Pinterest is being used to search concrete ideas and organize them in thematic boards, but it does not support (and as a result is not used for) any form of interpersonal connection: "Pinterest […] doesn't feel very interactive at all. It's just […] a nice calm way of viewing images. I think it's very good for very high-end design. […] but there's absolutely no interaction there at all" (Kate in an interview, August 2022).

In contrast to Pinterest, Instagram enables a high degree of interaction between its users, including between *dwellers-creators* who are creating their homes and exchanging information, knowledge, support and advice:

> What I found on Instagram that Pinterest doesn't have is the community side of it. And I found that the interior community is so generous with their references and sharing […] a lot of times people tag the products they've used or the companies they've used. Or if not, you can ask, message, and people are surprisingly willing to share that kind of stuff. And it's something that I'm very consciously trying to keep up on my side. (Martina in an interview, August 2022)

[47] This relates to the discussion in chapter 2 about the concept of relational totality of involvements in Heidegger's writing, where "the immediate environment pre-assigns the possibility of whatever I am doing (or not doing)" (Scannell, 2014, p. 61)


*Figure 42 Home creation with others. An edited post from Martina's account, 11 April 2021, Instagram*

As demonstrated in Martina's quote, the use of the word community is prevalent both in *dwellers-creators* posts on Instagram as well as in their interviews for this research. This sense of belonging to an online group was discussed by Baym (2015), who argues that "[m]any online groups develop a strong sense of group membership" (p. 81), and "members of these groups often describe them as 'communities'" (ibid.).

Nonetheless, as discussed in previous chapters, the widespread use of the word community by people to describe their experiences is often at odds with scholarly concerns regarding the ambivalent meaning of the term (Pink et al., 2016) and its use as a strategic mechanism to control users' behaviours (Gillespie, 2018). Nonetheless, as it has been suggested (Amit, 2010, 2020), while it is essential to make an effort to ground and unpack the meaning of the term community in a specific context, it is important not to ignore it since the prevailing use of the term could indicate the deep meaning it has in people's lives. Of course, there are many different definitions of

community,[48] and it has been noted that in the context of the digital world, "one platform can host many different groups" (Baym, 2015, p. 83).

Thus, a useful way to start this discussion is to go back to the five qualities that were identified by Baym (2015) in online groups and in many definitions of community, which are: "sense of space, shared practice, shared resources and support, shared identities and interpersonal relationships" (p. 84), and to explore how these traits relate to the *relational environment* of Instagram *home renovation communities* as they are experienced by the participants in this ethnography.

### *6.2.1 A typology of a home renovation community on Instagram*

As mentioned, Instagram is by no means a singular community and different users see themselves as part of different groups or communities. This segmentation also continues within what can be described as Instagram's *home renovation community,* which is in fact many different groups or affiliations with some crossover between them. Discussing this plurality, Leanne explains that what she considers her community is not simply "people who like pretty houses on Instagram; it's much smaller than that". One main factor that seems to affect who is part of her community is the geographical location. Thus, most of her followers are from the UK and even more specifically, from North London, where she lives. And although she is originally an American, only about 15% of her followers are based in the US. Other demographic markers of her followers also echo her own identity: "It's just people who look and talk like me and have the same amount of money as I do. It's like this weird self-selecting thing where we all kind of speak the same language" (Leanne in an interview, June 2022). Kate also says she was surprised by the conjunction between her online community and her geographical location and how most of her followers are "bizarrely in the UK, and actually quite close as well". Kate thinks that the reason for that might be the unique type of her house (a timber frame house), which is "relatively unusual on Instagram" but is typical for the area where she lives. Living across the globe in Australia, Ali says she is following people

[48] To consider social relations between people on and through digital platforms and social networks, researchers have suggested different concepts such as: networked individualism (Wellman, 2002; Wellman, Boase and Chen, 2002), localizing the internet (Postill, 2008), and networked collectivism (Baym, 2015).

from around the world, but the connections she made are mainly with people from Australia, "and most of them are either interested in old homes or interior design" (Ali in an interview, May 2022).

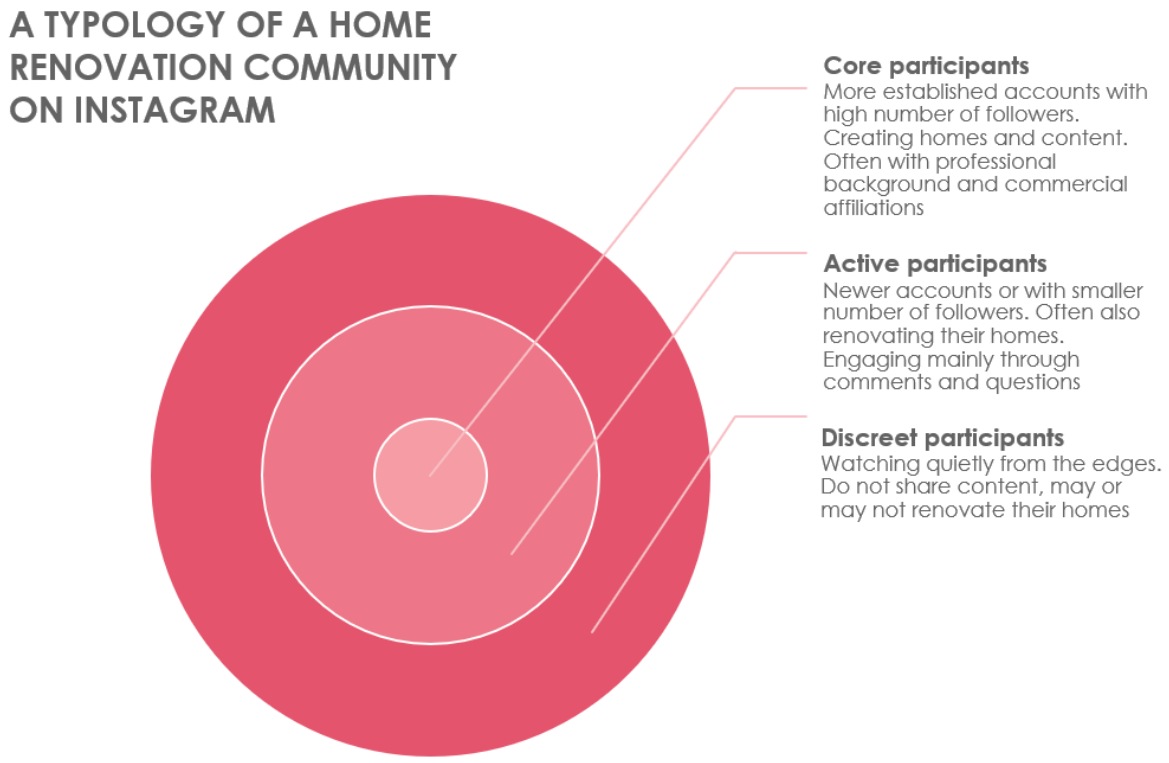



*Figure 43 A typology of a home renovation community on Instagram. Compiled by the author*

The geographical proximity, the specific type of house, the kind of renovation one does, and the demographic similarities are all drawn together and comingle through the gathering force of the *place/account* constituted by *dwellers-creators*' actions and social interactions with social media algorithms. Thus, Claire says sharing her renovation experience on social media has been "a nice way to connect with people closer to us in Scotland doing restorations or having been through the same sort of experience". This includes people who "aren't actively sharing a restoration at the moment" but decided to reach out after they saw Claire and Cal's home renovation account. "You naturally make really good connections and really great friendships just from those shared experiences" (Claire in an interview, July 2022). Bianca also says that she "made great friends on Instagram", most of whom she hasn't met in person, and the ones she did meet "are usually the ones that live local to me".

Beyond geographical location, the number of followers that a *dweller-creator* has also influences which group they are part of. Describing this dynamic, Kate says that:

> The community changes based on the size of your account. […] When I joined, I felt like I was sort of taken under the wing of sort of smallish accounts. And then, as you grow, the bigger accounts kind of take you under their wing. […] and you find you kind of work your way up until you […] have a kind of community of people that are similar size accounts that you communicate with and ask the same silly questions. […] And so, you seem to be passed from one group of accounts to the next one as you […] grow in size; it's really weird. (Kate in an interview, August 2022)

The experience Kate describes fits within the discussion about *communities of practice* (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and its application in the context of the digital world (e.g., Jenkins, Ford and Green, 2013). As Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) have noted, people can move over time from the periphery of a group towards its centre as they learn from, connect with and relate to others in similar positions.

Thus, the process of telling the *creation story* of a home through *renovation diaries* and *home accounts* on Instagram, usually while it unfolds and as part of a *relational environment*, can be considered as a form of "war stories" that were identified as characteristics of *communities of practice* and "serve to legitimate a newcomer as they move from peripheral to fuller participation. The stories they tell and the stories in which they feature are used to assess members' competencies" (Kimble, Hildreth and Wright, 2001, p. 223). In *renovation home accounts* on Instagram, dwellers can follow what Ingold (2013) refers to as a "guided rediscovery", watching closely how a renovation unfolds over time and drawing on knowledge and inspiration that they can appropriate and use in their specific context (as seen in the story of the pantry in chapter 5). This focus on guidance instead of on specification is contrary to the traditional design and renovation process where architects and designers provide a complete specification to follow. Thus, Ingold (2013) suggests that:

> *In place of specification without guidance, the story offers guidance without specification*. […] the former might yield a plan, but it is the

> latter that allows the practitioner to carry on, or as Polanyi put it (1958: 62), to 'feel our way forward' in the accomplishment of a task. (Ingold, 2013, p. 110, *italics in the original*)

Moreover, while each of the *dwellers-creators* who were interviewed for this ethnography has thousands of followers, their close ties and the number of people that they consider as a source of inspiration, ideas and support is significantly smaller. Describing her community or *relational environment* on Instagram, Martina says:

> The majority are just people who are looking in from the outside but not engaging. And then there are, I would say, 20, 30, maybe 40 creators that I actively engage with, and they are […] creating content as well. And we all seem to know each other weirdly; it's a very small community, which is surprising because it's global. But for some reason, we all talk to the same people. And these are the people who are very active and very engaged and also produce content, not just consume content. And out of those, […] three or four, I consider close friends, about 10 I've met in real life, and I have […] some sort of personal relationship with and then maybe another ten that I speak with quite regularly on Instagram. (Martina in an interview, August 2022)

Ali describes a similar experience of having different relations and different levels of engagement with her followers:

> There's probably […] 50 or 60 people that will comment on almost everything I do or put on there […]. So, there's a real essence of sharing experiences as well, which is really lovely. And a couple of times, we've posted questions and said, "Has anyone else embarked on this?" and [if so] "What did you do?" That's been really helpful. (Ali in an interview, May 2022)

### *6.2.2 The nice corner of the internet*

Discussing their experiences of sharing their home renovation and their life in their homes on Instagram, *dwellers-creators* repeatedly describe their experience as extremely positive and supportive, contrary to the contemporary critical discourse that emphasizes the risks and the ways in which social media harms its users:

> I always thought that an online presence or an online community would bring a certain amount of negativity […] or trolls that could be involved in being online. But that's just not been the case with our community at all. We've had the most positive experience [...] you could have online. I don't know if we're really just lucky or if the online world is a better place than I thought it was before. (Claire in an interview, July 2022)

Similar to Claire, Martina was also bracing herself "for haters and trolls, and just like nasty comments". But instead, she said that she was surprised to find "a very nice community of kind people":

> I've never had a bad experience with anyone, which I think is quite amazing. I mean, you hear all the time about social media being this dark and scary place where people just will tear you down. And so far, touch wood, it's been just like, the most amazing supportive, […] nice community. (Martina in an interview, August 2022)

… thank you as always for the advice, enthusiasm, kindness and encouragement. I don't know if it's possible to find a more pleasant corner of the internet, but I do know this whole reno business wouldn't be nearly this fun without you 😊

*Good Bones, July 2, 2021, Instagram*

*Figure 44 The nice corner of the internet. An edited post from Leanne's account, July 2021, Instagram*

Leanne also agrees that "it is a very, very positive place. […] It's never like some places where you put yourself out there, you're vulnerable and people just cut you down or make you feel small. It's not like that at all" (Leanne in an interview, June 2022):

> Most people who I consider my friends – I've never met them. And it's odd, but they gave me a ton of assurance as I was going forward with big decisions. And they gave me so much advice and just a sounding board. And I think that that kind of community in the society we live in is almost non-existent. So, it was so nice to have this self-selected community where we deeply cared about certain stuff. And also, those people had more experience than I did in lots of respects. So, I was able to use their knowledge. (Leanne in an interview, June 2022)


*Figure 45 Kindness, wisdom and support. An edited post from Leanne's account, 20 September 2021, Instagram*

Although she is not part of the same UK home renovation community as the other *dwellers-creators* in this ethnography, Ali shares the same positive experience from her place in Australia:

> I realized that there were lots of people on Instagram doing the same thing, which was really lovely [...]. It's like a little community of people who are doing something similar to you, even if they're not doing exactly what you're doing. They're encouraging you. They're giving you that kind of drive to keep going. (Ali in an interview, May 2022)

These testimonies raise a question about what makes *dwellers-creators*' experiences positive, amongst many other troubling experiences people have on social media. Of course, different factors could be at play here including *dwellers-creators*' age, gender, socio-economic background or other characteristics of members of this group. And indeed, it has been suggested that "some of these taste communities map onto markers of social identities, including gender, race, ethnicity, class, and ability" (Poell, Nieborg and Duffy, 2021, p. 135). Nevertheless, based on the ethnographic work in this research, I suggest that beyond these social markers, another explanation for the positivity of *dwellers-creators*' experience could be the focus on the creation of something

(i.e., a home) instead of on a person's identity. This connects to Gauntlett's (2011) observation that "making *is* connecting", not only by combining materials and ideas to create something new but also by considering the social aspect that is usually part of a process of creation and the increased attachment to "social and physical environments" (p. 2) as a result of an act of making or creating.

Although not explicitly connecting it to the process of creation, some of the explanations that *dwellers-creators* suggest for the positive nature of their experience revolve around related issues. For example, Martina suggests this positivity is unique to the interior design niche because "it seems like the sort of influencers that unfortunately attract nasty people and nasty comments are people who share a lot about their body". While Leanne believes that "the good creators in this corner of the internet create value", in contrast to content by some celebrities that "has no inherent value at all. In fact, it has a negative value, because it's not real, and it makes people feel resentful, or jealous or inadequate". Acknowledging that *home accounts* can also trigger negative reactions due to the inherently privileged position of having a property and the means for renovation, Leanne says she is surprised by how few, if any, negative comments she has received. Viewing this *relational environment* as a reciprocity of value, Leanne says that she is giving her followers something for free and, in return, getting many other things:

> I'm getting community, I'm getting business opportunities, I'm getting recognition, I'm getting so much advice and help, and […] some free gifts that came in […]. But what I hope I'm giving people is value, a lot of value, in terms of ideas, in terms of practical things, in terms of just making them laugh. (Leanne in an interview, June 2022)

Being in a similar situation to others who are renovating their homes, Bianca says that "they all face some kind of big problem when they renovate". Trying to overcome these problems, people are very generous "with their ideas and helping you", including people with thousands of followers who "still take the time to respond to comments, respond to messages, which I find amazing" (Bianca in an interview, May 2022). In this close interaction, Kate says, "you feel like you end up knowing people quite well", and that the intensity of the connection includes sometimes daily messages from people she has never met in person.

My baby pantry is turning 3 today. Three years of posting, three years of connecting with wonderful people from around the world (you) and three years of indulging in the things I love to do the most — designing, cooking and capturing it all on camera. It feels like instagram has changed a lot in this past three years […] but the one thing that has stayed constant so far (and I pray it'll always be) is the kindness and support of this community […]

*The Venetian Pantry, January 17, 2024, Instagram*

*Figure 46 Stability in a changing terrain. An edited post from Martina's account, 7 January 2024, Instagram*

### 6.3 The self, others and being-with

As explored in this ethnography, the second aspect of the relational environment of Instagram's home renovation community relates to the different forms of communication and social engagement between the self and others. This communication can be divided into two main categories: interpersonal correspondence (public or private) and broadcasting or publishing. This issue of the self in the context of the social relates to one of the most criticized aspects of Heidegger's phenomenology, both in the field of architecture (Sharr, 2007: pp. 111–112) and in the field of media (Scannell, 2014: pp. 27–28). Such a critique[49] suggests that Heidegger's effort to defend the authenticity of oneself leads to an exclusionary approach toward the other. Moreover, Malpas (2021) explains that as part of this critique, "the exclusionary nature of Heidegger's thinking is seen as tied to the ideas of place and 'dwelling' as well as to Heidegger's emphasis on the 'essential' and the 'authentic' in the thinking of these ideas" (p. 52). Nonetheless, Malpas (2021) argues that these concepts have been widely misinterpreted[50] and that some of the

[49] Sharr (2007) explains that "by the 1990s […] the philosopher's thinking had increasingly come under attack" (p. 111) with the rise of an array of critical theory approaches that have "roots in Marxism, the writings of Adorno and the Frankfurt School, and the French post-structuralism" (ibid., p. 112).

[50] Malpas (2021) argues that this critique of Heidegger's ideas in different disciplines is largely affected by the philosopher's ties to the Nazi movement in Germany from the 1930s and his anti-Semitic remarks in his notebooks from these years. Yet, Malpas believes that while there are some problematic aspects in Heidegger's thinking and,

"misunderstanding and misreading" (p. 59) of Heidegger's concepts of the self's authenticity is associated with the translation of Heidegger's writings from German into English.[51]

Thus, while Heidegger is often interpreted and associated with an approach that sees *authenticity* in the "strong" individualistic sense or "focused around a 'heroic' individual self and the importance of self-determination and creative self-expression" (Malpas, 2021, p. 57), Malpas argues that Heidegger's writing on this issue in *Being in Time* is "strongly opposed to any narrow individualism, since *Dasein* always articulates itself in and through the world – including the world as it is given collectively and historically" (ibid., pp. 56–57). This approach resonates with Scannell's (2014) effort to rethink the "nature of the social"[52] in Heidegger's phenomenology by suggesting "a more adequate formulation of the phenomenology of the self in everyday life, taking as [a] starting point the 'who' of everyday broadcast media" (p. 28). Focusing on the interaction between the self and others, Scannell (2014) argues that:

> The communicative, communicable self in everyday life is the *available* self – available as its self to other similar selves. Heidegger's analysis of the everyday world was in terms of its availability: the ways in which everyday things that make up the immediate environment "give" or make themselves available as things-for-use. So likewise with the everyday self. A more than instrumental social world requires that its members be sociable. (p. 37)

undoubtedly in his affiliation with the Nazi party, "his thought as a whole" (p. 52) and specifically in *Building Dwelling Thinking* (Heidegger, 1951/1971b), "runs directly counter to it" (Malpas, 2021, p. 52).

[51] To correct this confusion, Malpas (2021) distinguishes between two ways in which the term authenticity is being used: the first (weak) widespread basic sense that "refer[s] to the quality of something as being 'true to' the way it appears or presents itself […]. In this sense, 'authentic' functions almost interchangeably with 'genuine' or 'real' and can also be used to mean 'sincere', 'honest' or 'having integrity'" (pp. 53–54). Then, in the second (strong) more problematic sense of the term, authenticity "is connected with a certain sort of 'expressivist' view of the self that emphasizes the importance (even the imperatival necessity) of one's actions and appearance being a direct manifestation or expression of one's inner feelings and commitments" (ibid. p. 55).

[52] Scannell (2014) argues that: "Heidegger missed the foundational significance of the 'They' as the basis of the phenomenology of the 'self'. […]. He sets up a false opposition between two integral aspects of the structure of the being that each of us has; namely that each and all are, at one and the same time, just like everyone else (and necessarily so) and uniquely particular person – the one and only, genuine 'me'". (p. 33)

If taking *dwellers-creators* as the available communicative selves that Scannell (2014) describes, then the way in which they make themselves available to others is by inviting them to join the ride or the journey of their home renovation experience. This includes the more passive option of following the "broadcasting" of the narrative of the home renovation, as well as information and inspiration. However, as described by the participants, it is also important to make themselves available to others to engage in active and ongoing responsive correspondence through comments, questions and direct messages.

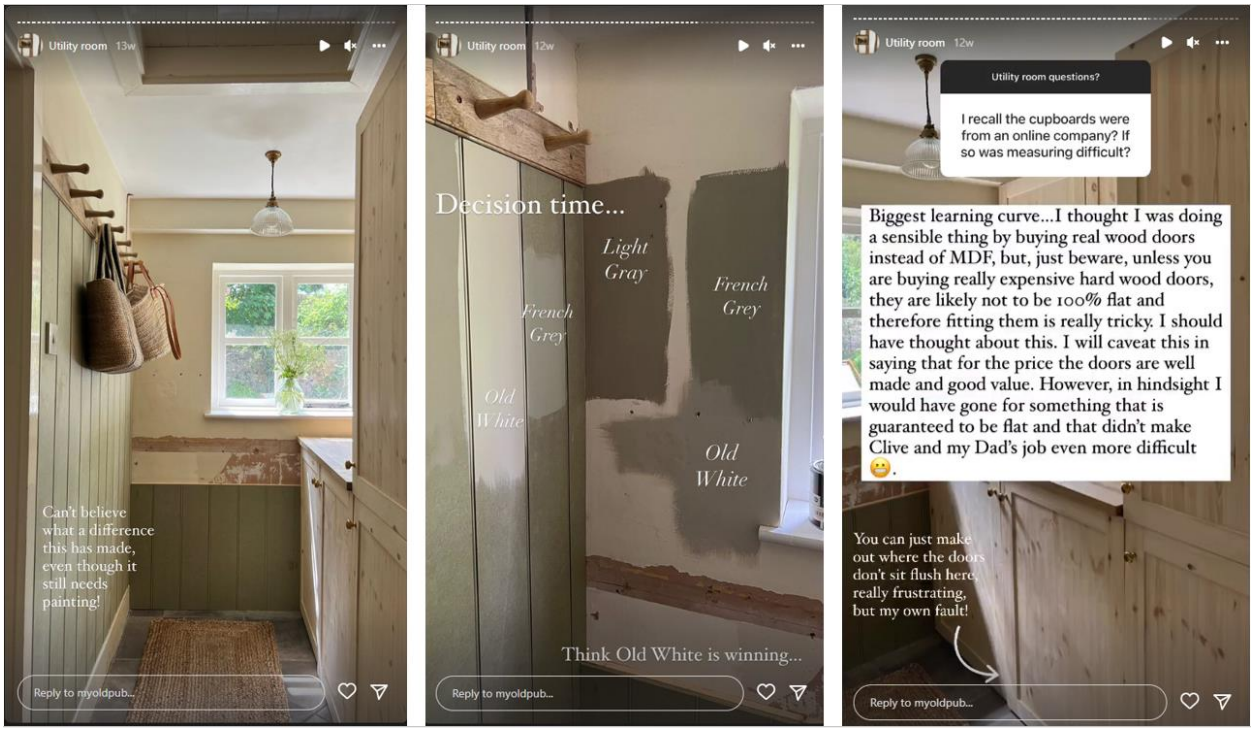



*Figure 47 Kate's story on the ongoing creation of her utility room. My Old Pub, Instagram*

Comparing her home renovation experiences before she had her *home account* and after, Kate says that she made a lot of mistakes that could have been prevented had she been able to ask more questions and get more feedback:

> I wish I'd done this earlier in the process of this house because I think there's a lot of support there. So, when you're in the middle of a renovation and something floods, or you break something, actually

knowing that other people are going through exactly the same thing, and they've dealt with it by doing X, Y and Z is really helpful. So, I think the biggest difference is just feeling like you've got the support and a wider pool of knowledge from other people. Whereas previously, it was very much like feeling in the dark and trying to Google something or […] learning from friends and colleagues. But you've got a much bigger pool of information available to you on Instagram. (Kate in an interview, August 2022)

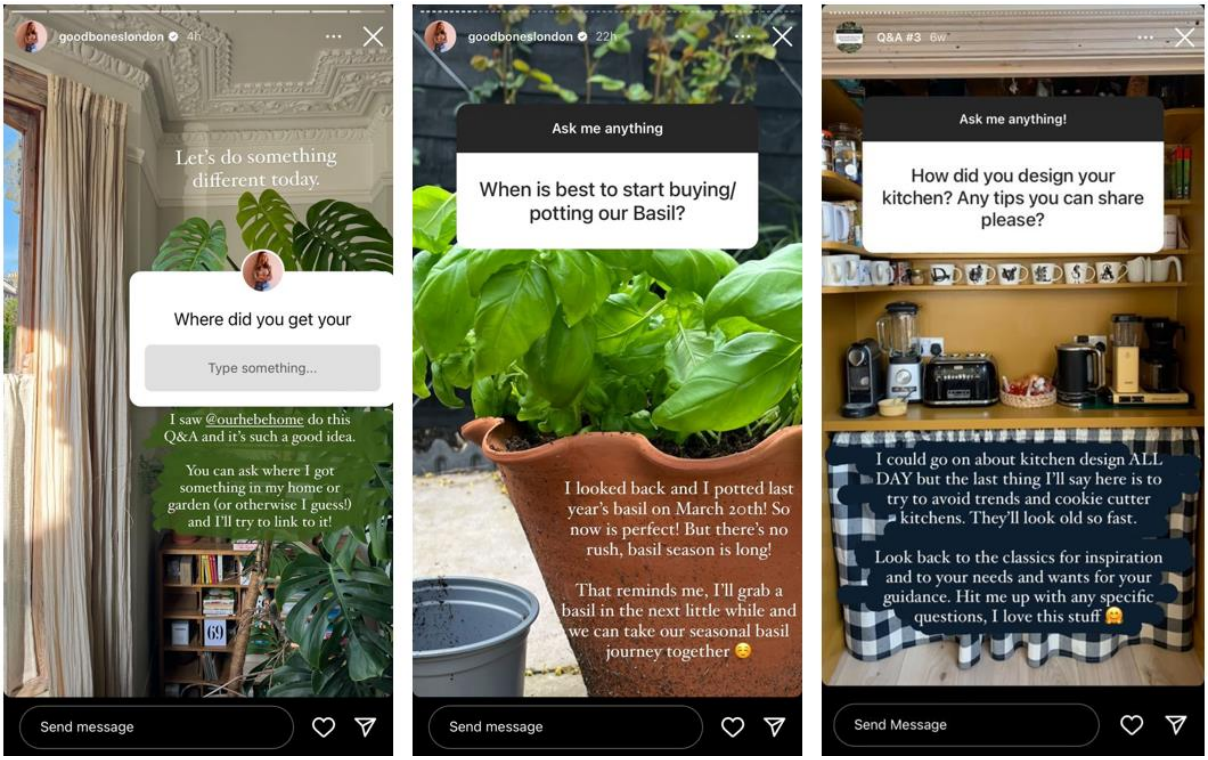



*Figure 48 Leanne's Q&A sessions with her followers. Good Bones, Instagram*

In this ongoing process of inspiration, learning and support, *dwellers-creators* are never solely the experts or the amateurs but are rather constantly moving between the two roles, sharing their experience and knowledge and teaching others, and at the same time consulting others in their *relational environment*, and thus making this process of creation into a social practice. Moreover, as Gershon and Deuze (2019) suggest in their discussion about media creators:

> [A]s a craftsperson, you are always helping other people become better as well – you are enmeshed in relationships of apprenticeship, co-working, mutual support, and mentoring that make the challenges of working together more valued than the efforts of individually marketing oneself. (p. 304).

In this environment of knowledge sharing, *dwellers-creators* are constantly engaged with both timeless or universal questions, as well as questions that are more specific to a certain area, a type of house, or the time of the year. Importantly, while the answers to many factual questions could be found on the internet or elsewhere, and even quite easily – as seen in the earlier research on the use of media in home renovation (e.g., Hulse et al., 2015) – this contemporary readily available option to have a large pool of relevant *dwellers-creators* that can be approached to *directly* to consult with regarding one's own renovation – is novel.

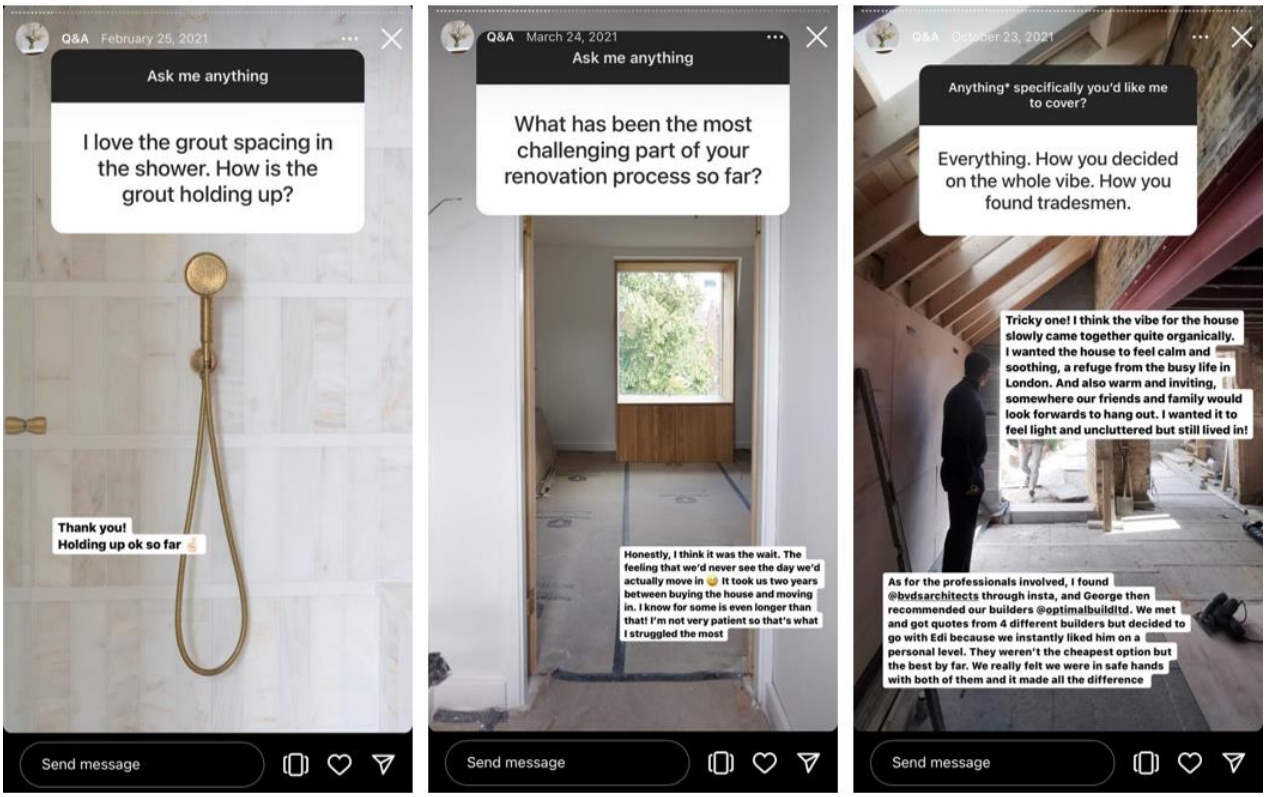



*Figure 49 Martina's Q&A session with her followers. The Venetian Pantry, Instagram*

Nevertheless, as mentioned, while *dwellers-creators* are potentially available to anyone, in practice, the *relational environments* are usually drawn on some commonalties in taste, location, type of house, etc. The interpretation of this process as a positive gathering of things that people are interested in or as a confined echo chamber or filter bubble depends on whether one sees platforms as powerful deterministic forces or as just another part of our world in the digital age where "encounters with algorithms" (Bucher, 2018, p. 62), are added to the many other things people meet in their everyday environment (Seaver, 2017).

### *6.3.1 Visibility, vulnerability and authenticity*

When *dwellers-creators* make themselves available in different ways to others on social media and create content based on their lives and their homes for others to consume and draw on, they are inherently becoming more visible and potentially more vulnerable. Indeed, visibility is a double-edged sword. It opens people to the world, an openness that inherently provides both the opportunities for sharing one's talent, ideas, taste and creation, as well as opportunities for connection, while at the same time, such openness and exposer can also increase certain risks (i.e., privacy issues, surveillance, bullying, etc.). Criticizing the pressure to *put yourself out there* on social media, Duffy, Ononye and Sawey (2023) focus on the vulnerability that is associated with the exposure of influencers to others. Yet, from a phenomenological existential standpoint, *visibility* and *vulnerability* are two embedded aspects of our human experience in the world. Therefore, we cannot, and should not, eliminate the risks associated with openness to others and the world by withdrawing from the world, but rather need to acknowledge and find ways to mitigate the inherent tension between the two in life, including the digital. As Markham (2020) suggests, "any serious consideration of what a digital ethics might look like should start from the ubiquitous distractions of our cluttered lives rather than seeking to take an abstracted position outside of this endless noise and light" (p. 23).

Thus, being visible, available and communicable with others on social media and digital environments provokes questions regarding the *authenticity* of the *available self*. Discussing the authenticity of content creators and influencers on social media platforms, Poell, Nieborg and Duffy (2021) argue that "there is considerable cross-pollination between 'amateurs' and 'professionals' […]. Yet platform companies are keen to play up these distinctions by hyping

creator communities as 'ordinary' and 'authentic'" (p. 134). In this context it has been argued that influencers on social media often present a form of fake authenticity, or *calibrated amateurism* (Abidin, 2017), "whether or not they really are amateurs by status or practice" (p. 1). And that this pressure to be authentic, results in "authenticity policing" (Duffy and Hund, 2019) where "social media creators and influencers routinely assure audiences of their sincerity" (Poell, Nieborg and Duffy, 2021, p. 151).

Indeed, this cross-pollination between what is considered amateurs and professionals is also evident amongst Instagram's home design and renovation communities, where many *dwellers-creators* have some sort of professional background in design or architecture. As Martina explains:

> I think the community is definitely made up of industry experts. There are these superstars of interior design like Athena Calderon […] and others that are like this huge household name. […] And then […] there are a lot of just normal people who are making up their house. […] It's a spectrum of DIYers, interior designers and other types of designers like me. (Martina in an interview, August 2022)

Kate agrees that most of the *home renovation accounts* that have many followers are of people who come from art or design backgrounds and those who do not usually want to enter the field of home design and renovation more professionally after their success on Instagram:

> There are a few people that haven't got any backgrounds in it at all and […] have amazing accounts and amazing houses, and you do see them after a while tending to actually set up their own interior companies on the back of it (Kate in an interview, August 2022).

Nonetheless, I suggest the deeper question is not about whether *dwellers-creators* have a related academic or professional experience but more about whether such a strict separation between professionalism and amateurism is important or even possible. Of course, it is reasonable to assume that people who are passionate and care deeply about home and home design will direct their attention to these issues throughout their lives in one way or another, and this caring attention seems more relevant than other restrictive definitions. Moreover, based on Malpas' (2021) interpretation of Heidegger in *Being and Time*, "'inauthenticity' is a structural element in Dasein's

being that Dasein can never escape – 'authenticity' is thus not an achievement for Dasein, but one of the two modes between which its being constantly moves" (p. 59). Also considering people's *authenticity* in the digital age, Markham (2020) argues that:

> There are real choices with real implications associated with how we respond to the world so revealed, but it is not a question of fidelity to a true or authentic self; integrity can only derive from an ethics inherent in a present into which we are thrown and that is ontologically prior to any purported sense of origin. (p. 18)

Markham's (2020) suggestion (drawing on Heidegger's *Being and Time*) that we are *thrown* into our digital existence without elaborating on how this situation is interrelated to our simultaneously *being* within the corporal world of things and environmental and social contexts, including one's sense of self[53], implies a dualism between our physical and digital life. Alternatively, I suggest that following Heidegger's *Building Dwelling Thinking* (1951/1971b), we cannot lose sight of our embodied existence in the world and in the physical and social contexts of our being, since as Heidegger argues: "[e]ven when we relate ourselves to those things that are not in our immediate reach, we are staying with the things themselves" (ibid. p. 154). Picking up on this difficulty in Markham's argument, Lupinacci (2022) finds that for the participants in her research, "[t]he authentic experience is the embodied experience, and what is actually felt by the body is fundamentally untransferable" (p. 208). Yet, as I suggest in this thesis, a phenomenological understanding of our existence in the digital age requires a constant effort to hold our *being-in-the-world* as a *holistic* experience that traverses all aspects of life as part of *one* worldly existence (although I acknowledge that it is often challenging to do so).

Another salient issue in the discussion about the sincerity of creators on social media in the context of home renovation diaries is the question of whether *dwellers-creators* are genuine in their choices and recommendations for their homes or ulterior motives drive them. Sharing their experiences, *dwellers-creators* explain in their interviews that as their Instagram accounts reached a high number of followers, they started to be approached by PR and marketing professionals.

[53] See also Markham's (2020) positive reflection on people being thrown into the digital world as a way to restart worldly existence: "The notion that there is no discrete self prior to the corruption of the digital culture into which one finds oneself thrown is in its own way liberating" (p. 92).

Describing how this process works, Kate says that when she got to about 8,000 followers, "you suddenly get this influx of people asking you if you want stuff. And I was sort of a rabbit in headlights. […] I didn't think this was a thing". The commercial route usually progresses from branded gifts (without an additional payment beyond the "gift") to paid collaborations, including monetary compensation from brands to creators. Kate says that she "had to learn quite quickly" how to adjust to this new reality:

> I feel it's really […] a massive responsibility. If you're saying that something's good, or you've enjoyed using something, or it looks good, you kind of have to be genuine about that. Otherwise, […] you're just telling lies, and that doesn't really sit very comfortably. (Kate in an interview, August 2022)

Claire also explains that as their audience grew, they decided to take "the role of […] being creators a little bit more seriously and kind of […] treated it more as a business":

> There was a huge shift in our mindset about Instagram, […] and it was something that we didn't take lightly. […] And we had never really intended or wanted to be "influencers". […] So, it was a very intentional change for us. And we talked about […] what sort of businesses we would be okay with collaborating with and what responsibilities we were going to take as somebody with a large following. (Claire in an interview, July 2022)

Martina says that she always tries to be as transparent as she can, "even from a legal point of view. […] before posting my first ever collaboration, I researched the ASA [Advertising Standards Authority] guidelines, which are […] the official guidelines of what you have to declare as an influencer". She noticed that people engaged differently with content marked as an advertisement or collaboration with a brand: "They're less inclined to put a 'like' or a comment if they see that it's an ad".

Discussing how it feels from the audience's side, Leanne says she has no patience when accounts become "corporatized" and constantly advertise things: "I often put them on mute; I just don't like it". Kate also says that before she started to share photos of her home on Instagram, she "used to get quite frustrated with some accounts because you found that every single day, they

were pushing something else. And some of them just appeared to be doing it for the money rather than things they would actually choose to have in their houses and become a lot less genuine". But now that she sees it also from the perspective of someone who creates content, she says that when people are investing hours in operating their accounts, "it's basically a full-time job" and it makes sense that they need some form of payment to do it.

Considering the delicate dilemma facing creators who have thousands of followers on social media, Leanne says that while the draw to do an ad is obvious "it is money, […] and that's what we all need more of", she also identifies a risk in it: "the moment that someone like me on Instagram, sells my brand, I guess it sounds silly to say that, but the moment I put my name on something [...] that I don't truly believe in, it cheapens the value that I'm giving". Leanne says that she would accept and recommend things that she loves and needs: "But when people do it just for any old thing, […] I don't trust that person anymore […] the whole point is that we trust what we're hearing. And the moment it becomes an advertisement, there's no more trust, I think". She says that, unlike many people who just go onto Instagram "to be inspired, and just to look at pretty stuff", she can spot the difference between authentic creators and the ones who are not:

> I care a lot, but I don't know if everybody does, and I think if everybody cared, then a lot of these people wouldn't be "successful". But also, what does it mean to be successful on Instagram when you're not getting paid? And it's literally just the number of followers? What does that even mean? I don't know. (Leanne in an interview, June 2022)

These experiences are often interpreted as what Duffy (2016) refers to as "narratives of authenticity and realness" in the context of aspirational labour, where mostly women are "(not) getting paid to do what they love" (Duffy, 2017). However, through a hermeneutics of trust (Scannell, 2014), the issue of *care* looms large in *dwellers-creators* thoughtful reflections about the ethical implications of their acts and the effect of a *caring* or *careless* attitude of inhabitants on the character of a place and an environment. Thus, as Leanne says:

> The whole point of Instagram and social media is that we are not supposed to be fake. The whole point is that it's real, right? Obviously, people disagree with that. And a lot of social media is

> fake, but I have no appetite for it. I have no appetite for pretending […]. This is why I talk about budgets and how difficult some of this stuff is […] It's not just that I snapped my fingers and this kitchen plan came up. It was really hard, and all of this stuff is hard. And that's why you need a community around you to do it. (Leanne in an interview, June 2022)

Similarly, Claire also says she was actively trying to reflect a realistic view of her home renovation experience. And the fact that many others choose a different and perhaps less genuine depiction of their life or home renovation does not affect her ethics:

> I think there are quite a few Instagram accounts in the interiors or restoration community that are very curated and are all about making beautiful photos and maybe glamorizing the restoration of a building. And that's really never been our intention. […] even when we got a better camera, it has always just been real photos of what we're actually doing that day. And we want to kind of give a pretty realistic view of what it takes to do a restoration of this scale. (Claire in an interview, July 2022)

These reflective accounts of *dwellers-creators* who describe their doubts and concerns as to how to navigate and inhabit their *relational environment*, together with their descriptions of the positive nature of their experiences in a *home renovation community*, suggest that a caring and responsive attentiveness is pivotal for the creation of inhabitable and flourishing environments. Moreover, people could use the same technological infrastructures and platforms differently. These activities have a crucial influence on the qualities and characteristics of the places and the environments that are being created. As Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2021) suggest:

> We are not powerless cogs in the digital machine. Although the vast majority of individuals have not directly built the digital environment, they sustain it and reproduce it through their daily practices – in the same way in which even though the vast majority of city dwellers have never placed a single brick in any of the

> building they inhabit, their actions and routines contribute to both maintain and transform the urban environment. (p. 171)

Or as Deuze (2023) puts it: “neither media nor life are given. Both are always in a process of becoming, influencing, and reinforcing each other and, through their entanglement over time, produce an endless variety of experiences, feelings, and ways of being in the world” (p. 223).

### 6.4 A knowable place or locality

After discussing the *relational environment* in which *dwellers-creators* operate and the social context of the communicative available self in relation to others, this section focuses on the known *places,* that is, the *home accounts* that constitute *dwellers-creators’* environment. As Pink et al. (2016) suggest, “localities can be constituted through the technologies themselves, and the online-offline are part of the same processes through which localities are produced, experienced and defined” (p. 127). Considering a *home account* as a locality means seeing it as a known destination that one can intentionally visit or as a potentially knowable place that one can stumble upon. Whatever the case may be, once you are *there,* it becomes *known* and *identifiable* and can allow the inhabitant and others an orientation and some context by focusing on the *relationality* of what belongs to that place (the home account) and between the place and its environment (digital and physical alike).

When arriving at a *home account* on Instagram, the readily available information includes the account handle (user name or the name of the account), a profile photo (with a colourful outline in case new stories were added in the past 24 hours), number of posts, followers and following; a written short description of the account, the person behind it and in some cases a link to another website; a list of followers who are also followed by the visitor as well as suggestions of related accounts to follow; and ways to connect with the account owner by following, receiving notifications, sending messages or emails. The account’s content is beneath this facade of information: the grid with photos (each lead to a post with text, comments, tags, location, etc.) and the highlights (saved collections of stories).

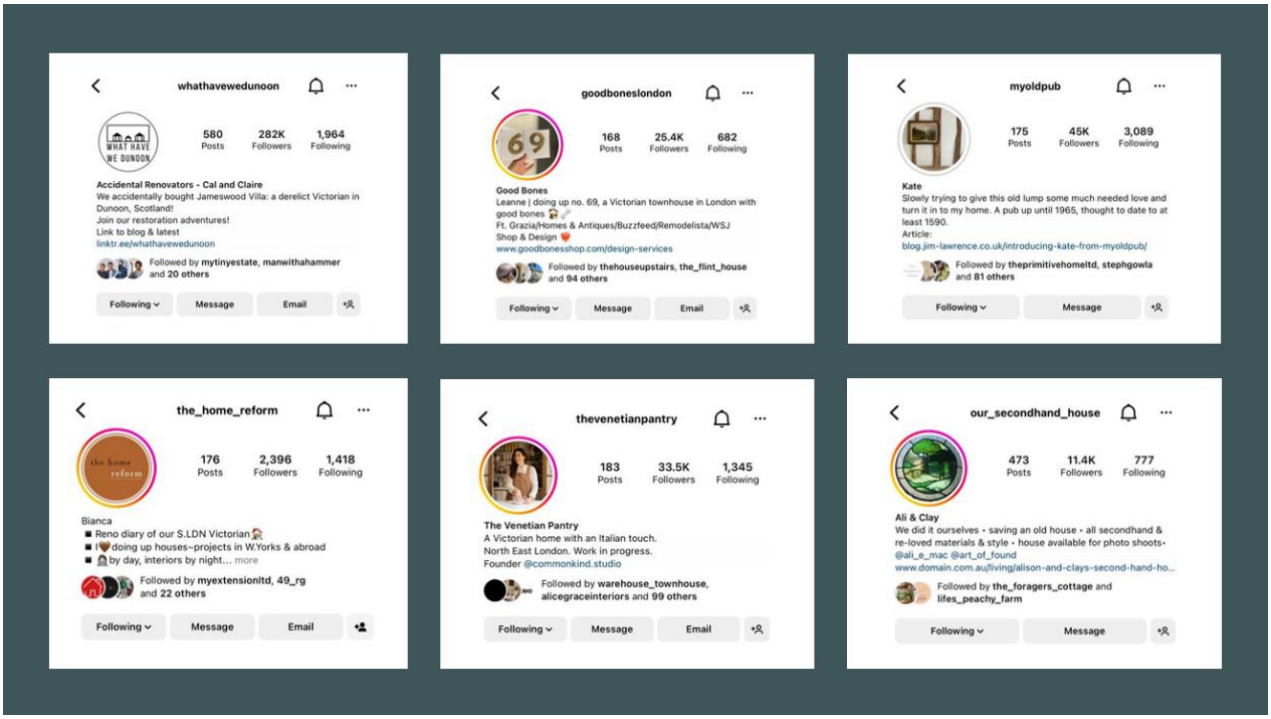



*Figure 50 The facades of the place/home account. Participants' home accounts on 7 October 2022*

Interestingly, what is *less* readily available at first sight is information that appears under a page named "about this account". To get there, one has to press on the three little dots at the top right corner of the account to find this explanation: "to help keep our community authentic, we're showing information about accounts on Instagram". This includes the date they joined, previous account names and the country from which the account operates. Then, hiding further away is a link to Instagram's help centre with an explanation of "why this information is important". Nevertheless, if this information is so important, then the question is why it is hidden in the background instead of being presented at the front of the account next to information such as the number of followers. Moreover, presenting this information could help orient the account geographically (where the account is based) and chronologically (the date the account was created) and, in so doing, help in its authentication, contextualization and grounding of the place that is the account. Thus, it seems that although *dwellers-creators* are resourceful in getting familiar with and navigating in their *relational environment*, they are doing so even though information that corresponds with "real-time and place" is kept in the background or not available at all.

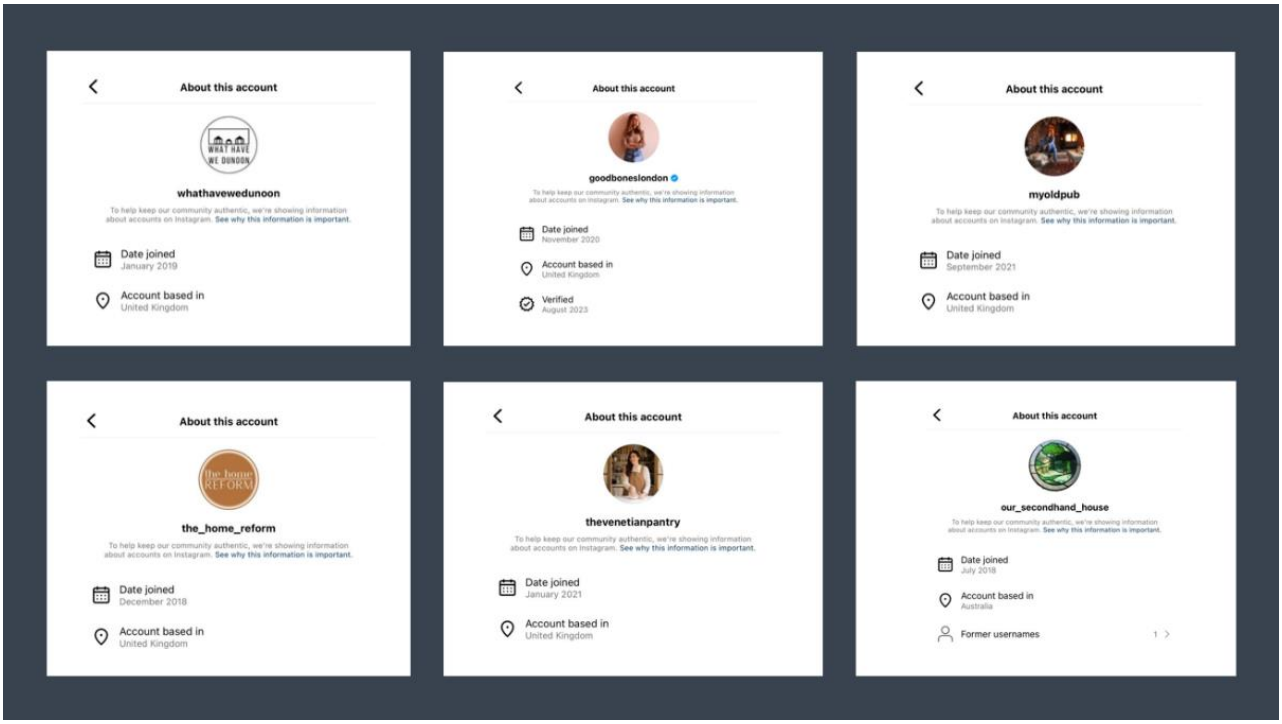



*Figure 51 Hidden in the background. Participants' "about this account" pages, Instagram, June 2024*

Nonetheless, the absence of a clear map and useful navigation tools and the often feeling of a lack of orientation (e.g., Relph, 2021) does not suggest that these *places* do not exist or are not being experienced as known localities. This understanding stems from the approach taken in this thesis that place is an essential aspect of the world and the human *being-in-the-world* and therefore cannot disappear in the digital age. This line of thought draws on the ontological understanding of place by philosophers such as Heidegger, Casey and Malpas (see discussion in chapter 2). As Casey (1997) suggests, when we engage with technology, our locus is "*not nowhere*" (p. xiv, *italics in the original*), and therefore a new and genuine phenomenon of place emerges. Malpas (2018) also argues that place does not disappear in a digitally saturated world in favour of "the space of unbounded extensionality in which everything is related to everything else across a seemingly unbroken field of transfer and flow" (p. 201). Instead, he suggests that "place must persist, even in the face of the apparent loss of place" (p. 203). In the end, place is "that within and out of which experience arises. Any experience of the world, along with the appearing of things within the world, will thus always be from within the embrace of place" (ibid.).

Beyond the philosophical understanding of the ontological meaning of place, early ethnographic explorations of social networks have found that people often consider their place/profile online as a home they tidy and decorate (Miller, 2012). Moreover, Miller (2012) argues that beyond the use of social networks for communication and maintaining a connection with people far away (especially in the context of diaspora and immigration), it is possible to consider social networks "as places in which people in some sense actually live" (p. 156) and create "a new form of domesticity" (ibid.). Bearing in mind the *relatedness* between the immediate physical environment and media environment, Scannell (2014) suggests that media (radio and television in his case) allow us to be in "two worlds at one and the same time"(p. 63). Thus, he argues, "rather than signifying the end of 'homeliness', television signals the beginning of our being at home in the world" (ibid.). Scannell describes this process of engagement with media as entering "a doubled spatiality and a doubled temporality" (ibid.), where the immediate environment and media environment commingle.

In the case of Instagram's *home accounts*, the physical home of a *dweller-creator* commingles with the *home account* and in some cases with the physical homes or the *home accounts* of others. This blurriness is seen in Kate's experience of how she started to find her house, which she shared on Instagram, reemerging in the world in other people's houses:

> I've only just started to realize that people will post something, and they'll say, "Oh, I've been following Kate". Or they will send you a picture. And they have copied your room. Absolutely everything in it. And that I find a little bit scary, to be honest, because […] I don't know. You just feel like, "Oh, my goodness, that's such a responsibility that someone has just gone out and bought all this stuff, […] down to the sofa". People will literally go out and buy exactly the same sofa with exactly the same fabric on it. […] Until that happened, I actually [did not] realize what an impact you do have by posting stuff online. Just naively, it didn't occur to me that people would do that. (Kate in an interview, August 2022)

This way in which *dwellers-creators'* physical homes move through their home accounts and feeds back into the immediate physical homes of others, reinforces Pink et al. (2016) discussion

about how digital media play “a key role in shaping the nature of the immediate environment in which we live, making our local contexts and our local knowledge shift towards being something that refers, not only to the material physical environment, but also to the digital” (p. 129). Thus, while Martina’s pantry influenced the design of Leanne’s kitchen (as discussed in chapter 5), Leanne’s laundry room with its “gorgeous old sink” that she “accidentally but luckily won while bidding on eBay late one night after one too many🍷” (Leanne, *Good Bones*, 8 June 2023, Instagram), have influenced Bianca’s house where she was looking for the exact same old sink for her laundry room.

*Figure 52 Leanne's laundry room, December 2021; May 2022; February 2023; June 2024, Good Bones, Instagram*

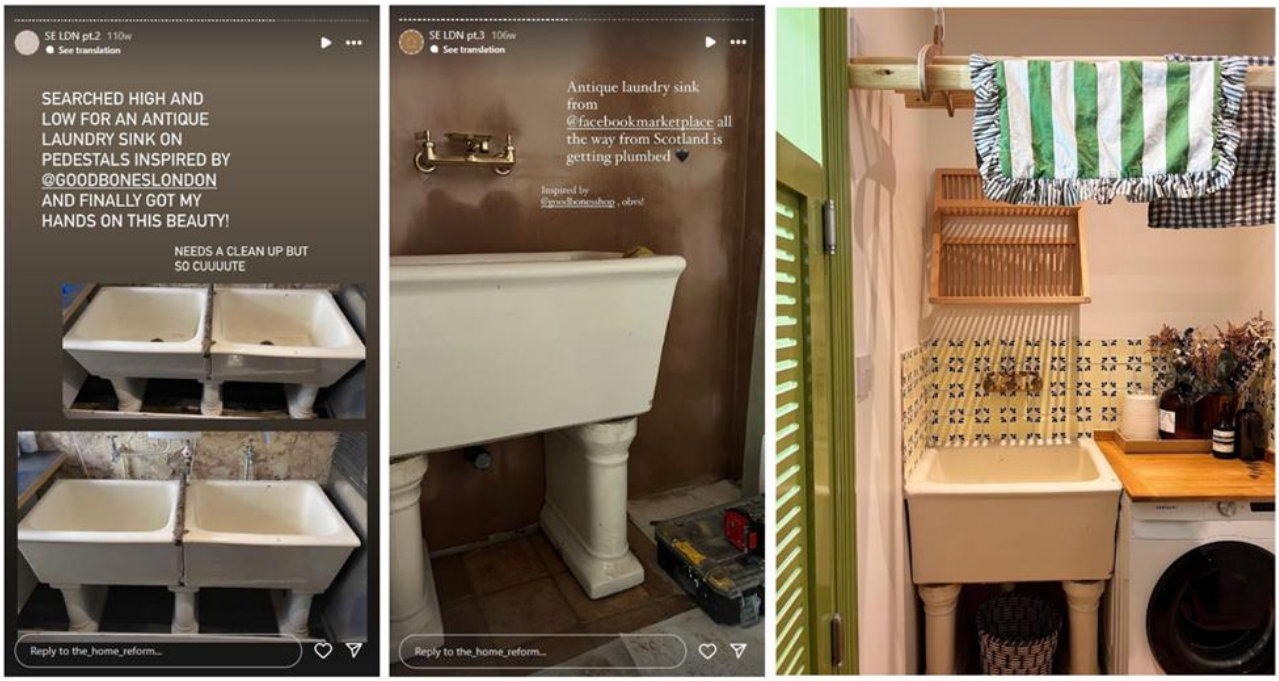



*Figure 53 Bianca's laundry room that was inspired by Leanne, The Home Reform, Instagram*

Beyond the appropriation or the duplication of a specific house, as it has been experienced through its context in the *home account/place*, there is a question as to what happens when such a *place/account* is experienced as fragmented elements in the digital flow. I also ask how the material appropriation of design ideas from a contextual place/account differs from those found online without their relational place and context.

These questions touch on issues such as origination,[54] authentication and the belonging of elements to a structure of a knowable place. As Malpas (2018) emphasizes, "place cannot be reduced to any one of the elements situated within its compass, but must instead be understood as a structure comprising spatiality *and* temporality, subjectivity *and* objectivity, self *and* other" (p. 166, *italics in the original*). A well-known discussion about the possible diminishing of place in the modern digital age is Castells's (1996/2010) suggestion in his book *The Rise of the Network*

[54] The questions of *origination* and *authentication* in digital environments also relate to the idea behind blockchain technology (Haber and Stornetta, 1991) and the possibility of using cryptographic stamps to mark the history and the authenticity of digital information and media. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the possibilities of using blockchain technology for authentication of places in the digital environment, but it is certainly an interesting route that should be explored in future research while thinking about the possibilities for a more grounded media in digital flows.

*Society* that in the new technological era, "space of flows" will replace "space of places". While Castells (1999) himself later acknowledged that "the geography of the new history will not be made, after all, of the separation between places and flows, but out of the interface between places and flows and between cultures and social interests" (p. 302),[55] the issue of flows vs. places in the digital environment returns to the fore with the rise of social media and specifically algorithmic feeds. This is because in many ways, the *feed is a flow* where places are experienced as fragmented and out of context. And this raises the question of how a digital environment can provide a sense of orientation, grounding, cohesion and contextual relations within *places* and in a *relational environment*. Thus, considering the changes to places and place experience in the digital age, Malpas (2018) keeps insisting that "even though places may seem to change, place as such remains and so too does the essential relation of place and the human. The world begins in place, but so too do we" (p. 209).

Describing her experience wondering about in the digital environment, Bianca says that although she follows many people, she deliberately avoids scrolling her Instagram feed because "I'm really annoyed about the fact that I see so many adverts". Thus, to find inspiration she prefers going "into the explore page, or just the search button" (Bianca in an interview, May 2022). Once something has grabbed her attention on Pinterest or Instagram, Bianca starts looking for its *origin* by looking at the designer's website or the hotel where the picture was taken. This process allows her to better understand a specific image's context, origin and relational environment. Bianca says, "There's a very small handful of people that I just love, […and] sometimes I will search for them in the search bar and go to their page and just look at their stuff", and as a result, the algorithm also adjusts itself and puts their stories up first for her. Kate describes a similar experience: a handful of accounts amongst the many she follows that she finds herself returning to again and again, knowing that she will probably find something that she likes "and get an idea from them".

[55] In the preface of the 2010 second edition of his book Castells (2010) writes: "Although there are places in the space of flows and flows in the space of places, cultural and social meaning is defined in place terms, while functionality, wealth, and power are defined in terms of flows" (p. xxxix).

### *6.4.1 Is this place real?*

When thinking about *places* in a digitally saturated environment in the context of *home accounts* and *renovation diaries*, there is a question regarding the authenticity and the realness of the *place/house* presented on social media. This issue of the compatibility between what is shown in a photo and what is out *there* in the palpable world ranges from questions about whether the house has been tidied up just for the photos to whether the photo is a synthetic creation of artificial intelligence. Similar to the distortion of time in the move from a chronological to an algorithmic feed, where platforms present "a sense of time that is not about liveness but timing, not freshness but relevance, not real-time but right-time" (Bucher, 2020, p. 1703), the concept of place also often lose its potential to provide orientation and context as social media platforms favour "right-place" over "real-place", to borrow from Bucher. Thus, for example, one can use a geotag to attach a certain image to an alleged physical location, but in fact it can be an image of a completely different place that could never be found in that geographical location. However, is it even important that the houses presented on home accounts really exist and let someone dwell in them?

In a recent article in *The New York Times*, journalist Amanda Hess (2024) discusses how she found herself dreaming of fictional houses created by AI software that were suggested to her by the algorithmic recommendation system of Instagram:

> I have not hidden my obsession with homeownership and renovation from the internet's all-seeing eye. At night I wander between Zillow and D.I.Y. Instagram accounts, stalking the hallways of homes I will never visit, assessing the work of contractor-influencers I will never employ, weighing aesthetic choices I will never make. Now artificial intelligence has breached my domestic fantasy, reshaping my desires to fit inside its phantom walls. (Hess, 2024)

Hess emphasizes that with the proliferation of AI-generated photos, it is becoming increasingly harder to know which photo is of an actual place that exists in reality and which is an artificial meshwork:

> Search Pinterest for décor inspiration, and you'll find it clogged with artificial bedrooms that lead off to websites hawking cheap home accessories. "House porn" accounts on TikTok and X churn out

> antiseptic loft renderings and impossible views from nonexistent Parisian apartments (Hess, 2024).

The places Hess describes are examples of ungrounded pieces of media floating in the digital flow without a possibility of connecting them to a concrete physical place or the everyday lives of real people, and not to a contextual digital place such as the *home account*.

Compared with this influx of images of artificial homes, *dweller-creators*' *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* could be seen as an alternative that exposes the processual, relational and contextual aspects of the actual experience of home, including its building and dwelling as they relate to the material and the human. Thus, while both AI homes and physical homes are increasingly affected by a flow of visual images from Pinterest and Instagram, brick-and-mortar homes are also always staying within the contextual material possibilities of how these inspirations can be implemented in the physical world and the possibilities or constrains it offers for dwellers' everyday lives. Describing the AI house she has been daydreaming about, Hess (2024) writes that "it had come from nowhere, or everywhere. It was crowded with design touches perfectly synced to the ones cresting on my Instagram and Pinterest feeds. The 'personal taste' that drew me in was actually a highly impersonal taste". When interviewing the designer who created the artificial image of the house Hess desired, he told her that one of the prompts he uses on the AI software to create it was "no people, no animals". This irony that to make a house look more *real*, there is a need to eliminate living creatures was not lost on Hess. She suggests that it is just the latest step in the disconnection between houses and their true role in supporting the lives of human beings.

In contrast to the haunted houses of generative AI, *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* – while mostly also focusing on photos of interiors without dwellers – allow the reality of life in the house to slip in (purposely or unintentionally). For example, in these photos from Ali's home/account, her dogs are seen coming and going (in and out of the frame in the original posts) in the same dining room that is seen from different angles, at different times, each time with different chairs and other additions and alterations. For the regular visitor at Ali's *home account/place*, this becomes a familiar place, recognized and probably loved (or else why bother and return there). Thus, the realness of Ali's place on Instagram is continuously enhanced by the gradual changes in her material environment, as well as through a contextualization of time and place by mentioning issues such as weather and through its saturation in the human context of

daily lives through the stories of the house creation and of experience of dwelling, including mundane aspects like cleaning and engaging with the ongoing tasks that still need to be completed (as seen in the post below).

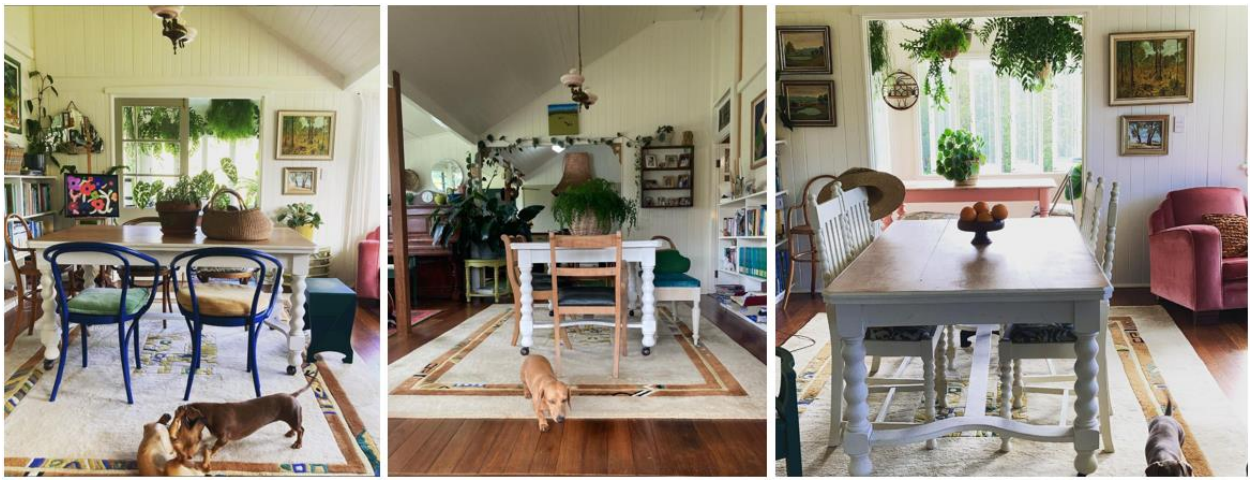


*Figure 54 With living creatures. Our Secondhand House, December 2022; May 2023; December 2021, Instagram*

C L E A N H O U S E. After days and days and days of rain, humidity and extreme heat, a slightly cooler breeze has blown in bring some much needed energy! Gave the place a really good vacuum, mop and all round spruce up. As usual I shifted a few things around. Soon I'll have to do a big clean of wall and ceiling. This whole space still needs a final paint coat so that might be the motivation to get it done.

*Our Secondhand house, January 31, 2024, Instagram*

*Figure 55 Context of time and place. An edited post from Ali's account, 31 January 2024, Instagram*

Certainly, it can still be argued that the strong sense of aesthetics and the meticulous presentation of the house in many Instagram *renovation diaries* and *home accounts* continue the traditional way homes are presented in architectural journals instead of challenging this norm. And as Leanne says, some *home accounts* represent an unrealistic image of the house, showing "the same corner over and over, that someone has spent two hours styling and two hours tidying and then the rest of the house is a dump".

However, other *dwellers-creators* use their *renovation diaries* to provide a glimpse (although often still very carefully presented) into what is not working out so well for them, and this seems to be appreciated by others. Thus, Kate says, "If I say something about, 'You know what, this has gone badly wrong, and I've messed this up', I get a lot more comments on that kind of thing". Nonetheless, Kate admits that it is difficult for her to put unpleasant photos on her grid, so she will usually save the stories of what went wrong to the text below the picture or to the stories on her account: "And I will sort of take the mickey out of myself and say, 'Yeah, I've got this wrong or this is a real mess. This is what my house genuinely looks like'. […]. It's difficult because no one wants to follow an account that's just full of messy rooms" (Kate in an interview, August 2022).

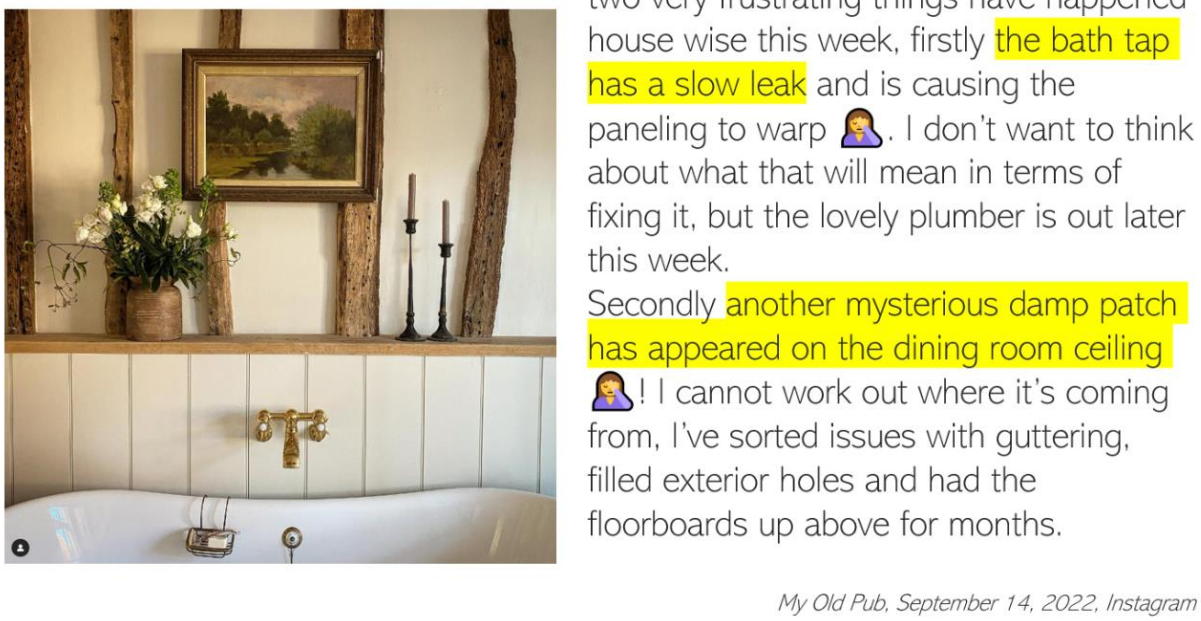



*Figure 56 When things go wrong. An edited post from Kate's account, 14 September 2022, Instagram*

As with the discussion about the *authenticity* of oneself, here again, how dwellers' homes are presented on social media does not necessarily need to be divided into the authentic/fake dichotomy. Perhaps a better way to think about it is as a continuation of the human situation, including in the home, with the continuous interplay between visibility and vulnerability, the wish to be authentic and also to have a sense of privacy. Thus, as Markham (2020) suggests, ethics and meaning of our life in the digital age will not come about by standing on the side lines and criticizing people's engagements as being not authentic enough but rather through embracing a more nuanced and emphatic view that sees the digital inhabitant, as a "human being who sometimes stumbles, falls, misunderstands, struggles, is vulnerable, hurting, speechless, and finds no solution; but who may also experience moments of ultimate meaning, community, support, and fullness, as she navigates through the torrents of our digital existence" (Lagerkvist, 2017, p. 107).

While people never share everything with everyone (online or in life), *renovation diaries* and *home accounts* seem to be telling the story of a home creation closer than ever to how it is experienced firsthand by people in the world. Or as Leanne puts it: "Sometimes renovations are about gorgeous light fixtures and marble fireplaces. But most of the time? They're about waiting for a roof" (*Good Bones*, 22 September 2021). This notion sounds very familiar to everyone who has ever renovated their home.

Just another day in paradise. The glazed roof - the raison d'être of our kitchen extension - was meant to be installed a few days ago. And yet...here we are. Open to the elements and, well, waiting. The glazed roof company hasn't rescheduled so we're just…here. I'm cracking away at the small DIY jobs I can do but the builders have left - they can't do much more until we're watertight. Sometimes renovations are about gorgeous light fixtures and marble fireplaces. But most of the time? They're about waiting for a roof.

*Good Bones, September 22, 2021, Instagram*

*Figure 57 Open to the elements. An edited post from Leanne's account, 22 September 2021, Instagram*

## 6.5 Conclusions: the rise and fall of places

While places can thrive through the activities and the attention given to them by their inhabitants, they also decline, as Relph (1993) mentions, when they are being ignored. A sign that the place that is the *home account* changes and perhaps starts to decline is when the regular pace and pattern of updates change or stop altogether. Other signs of lack of responsiveness include people disappearing from their environment, stopping commenting, answering messages or liking other people's content. In the built environment, the experience of encountering places and buildings that have passed their heydays or have been abandoned is a familiar sight. Although the digital environment has a much shorter history, this notion of how places and environments (accounts, platforms, websites) are declining is also very familiar. Thus, people who used Instagram regularly in its earlier years before the 2016 move to an algorithmic timeline recall how the platform has changed, and many of their friends have stopped sharing photos there as a result.

Indeed, Instagram is full of these haunted houses of accounts that were once lively places and are now standing still without any change. Considering what would happen to her *home account*, Kate said in her interview in August 2022:

> I suspect I won't be doing it in five years' time. […] Because quite frankly […] I'm not going to start redoing a room just to make content. […]. I tend to do things quite full-on and then kind of go, "Right, I've had enough of that", and move on to the next thing. So, I think everybody knows me well, just waiting for me to go, "Yeah, you've had enough of Instagram now, haven't you?" and move on to something different. (Kate in an interview, August 2022)

In fact, as she expected it would happen, Kate's *Old Pub* on Instagram has not been updated regularly since January 2024. And Kate is not alone. In November 2022, a headline in *The Atlantic* announced that: "Instagram is over" (Lindsay, 2022) and that "the app's original purpose has been lost in the era of 'performance' media":

> To scroll through Instagram today is to parse a series of sponsored posts from brands, recommended Reels from people you don't follow, and the occasional picture from a friend that's finally

> surfaced after being posted several days ago. It's not what it used to be. (Lindsay, 2022)

Regarding algorithm changes, Kate said in 2022 that many people were considering leaving Instagram because of these changes.[56] One such change to the Instagram environment was prioritizing video content, or Reels. As Kate describes it: "If you don't put Reels up, your stuff does not get seen. […] What's really frustrating is when people say I haven't seen your posts for weeks, and you just think '[…] I'm posting them, and no one can see them'". Such changes to the algorithm alter the everyday experience people have come to rely on, and therefore essentially rattle their *existential security* in their environment. "I think the beauty of Instagram was that you could sit steadily, and it's rather quiet. It's like reading a magazine" (Kate in an interview, August 2022). However, following the changes in July 2022, Kate says: "Instagram is not quiet anymore, and it is frustrating". She explains that when it comes to using Instagram for interiors and design inspiration, still photos are much more useful than videos, since "you want to be able to study an image, understand it, take something from it".

Changes to the way algorithms work, and as a result of the way people are experiencing their digital environments, cause people to alter their behaviours in different ways of *coping*, such as resisting, adjusting or leaving the platform/environment altogether. As Deuze (2023) suggests, different strategies and tactics can be used to approach the entanglement of life in the digital age. This includes *fighting media* through disconnection or by "arming ourselves" with media literacy skills; *surrendering media* by "utilizing the various affordances of our digital environment to get the most out of the media experience" (p. 222) or *becoming media* "either by adapting carefully (if not critically) to what media want from us or by learning how to reprogram and hack the system, making it participatory rather than imposed reality" (ibid.). Kate's tactic to address this environmental change was trying to adapt by doing an occasional Reel "and make them really basic and not to sort of in your face". Another response to this change was not following what

[56] The pivotal moment in this change was in Summer 2022, when a protest against Instagram demanded: "Make Instagram Instagram Again" (Bruening, 2022). This backlash came after Instagram's effort to assimilate Tik Tok by shifting towards an "algorithmic curation" that "prioritize[s] creators and video over friends and photos" (James and Ellis, 2022). As a results of this protest the company decided to scale back some of the changes that had been implemented to the platform a short time earlier (Huang and Isaac, 2022). However, although some changes were tuned down, the negative sentiment regarding how much the platform has changed persisted.

Instagram was trying to make its users do but rather trying to resist it. Kate shares how some *dwellers-creators* initiated the use of the hashtag "still Sunday" to publish still photos and not videos, with "the idea that we're desperately trying just to bring some peace and quiet back" (Kate in an interview, August 2022).

In a bleak charge of what went wrong with social media, Ian Bogost (2022) writes that not only is "the age of social media […] ending", but "it never should have begun". Bogost distinguishes between social networks and social media and argues that the shift from connecting to publishing is the root problem:

> Social networks, once latent routes for possible contact, became superhighways of constant content. In their latest phase, their social-networking aspects have been pushed deep into the background. Although you can connect the app to your contacts and follow specific users, on TikTok, you are more likely to simply plug into a continuous flow of video content that has oozed to the surface via algorithm. […] Think of the change like this: In the social-networking era, the connections were essential, driving both content creation and consumption. But the social-media era seeks the thinnest, most soluble connections possible, just enough to allow the content to flow. (Bogost, 2022)

Essentially, what Bogost's critique is getting at is the problem of why much of our digital environment is not really inhabitable, being rooted in the *flow* of ungrounded pieces of media that are not really connected to anyone or any place instead of allowing *places* that can enable human connection. Hoping that the original idea behind social networks – "to use computers to connect to one another on occasion, for justified reasons, and in moderation" (Bogost, 2022) – could be restored, Bogost suggests that we need to slow down, and do *less*:

> To win the soul of social life, we must learn to muzzle it again, across the globe, among billions of people. To speak less, to fewer people and less often—and for them to do the same to you, and everyone else as well. (Bogost, 2022)

As I argue in this chapter, this process also requires creating an environment with places of different scales and characteristics to be used for different purposes, including more intimate places for connecting with others and possible homes to dwell in. Early signs indicate that it is perhaps the direction in which we are heading. In an article in Business Insider, Bradley and Perelli (2023) suggest that "the fatigue average people feel when it comes to posting on Instagram has pushed more users toward private posting and closed groups", where they wish to return to "the days of tighter connections and communities" (ibid.).

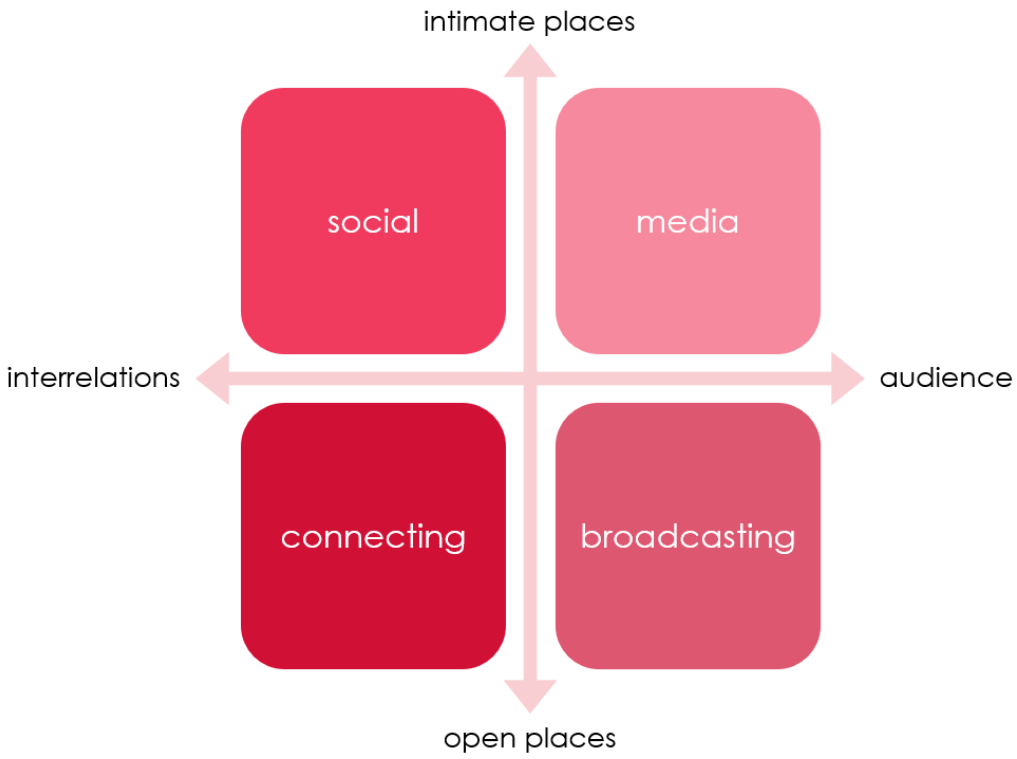



*Figure 58 Rethinking place and relation in digital social media. Compiled by the author*

Returning to the delicate balance that the *available communicative self* has to walk between *visibility* and *vulnerability* that was discussed earlier in this chapter, the question here is how privacy, intimacy and reciprocity could co-exist with the social objective of openness to the world to get to know new people that you want to know and make your taste, ideas and creations available for others. A possible direction to create our digital environment in a way that would accommodate people's different needs and objectives could come by looking for inspiration from our built

environment. There, we can see that people do not live out in the open or in the flow. Instead, they are gathered in places and dwell in homes that are existential structures of human life. However, these places and homes are also open and connected to the world and to one another. Since, as Malpas (2021) suggests:

> The interplay of the bounded and the open […] has a significance for human being that goes beyond the architectural alone. The very possibility of human knowledge and experience, which is to say, the very possibility of human openness to the world, arises only out of the singular finitude of human being, that is to say, out of its concrete situatedness, its placed-ness, its 'being here/there'. (Malpas, 2021, pp. 184–185)

To think about our possibilities of dwelling in the world in the digital age, we need to start and think about places where people could connect and create and be open and visible to others as they wish while also keeping in mind how the questions of boundaries and frequency affect people's necessity for intimacy and for being protected.

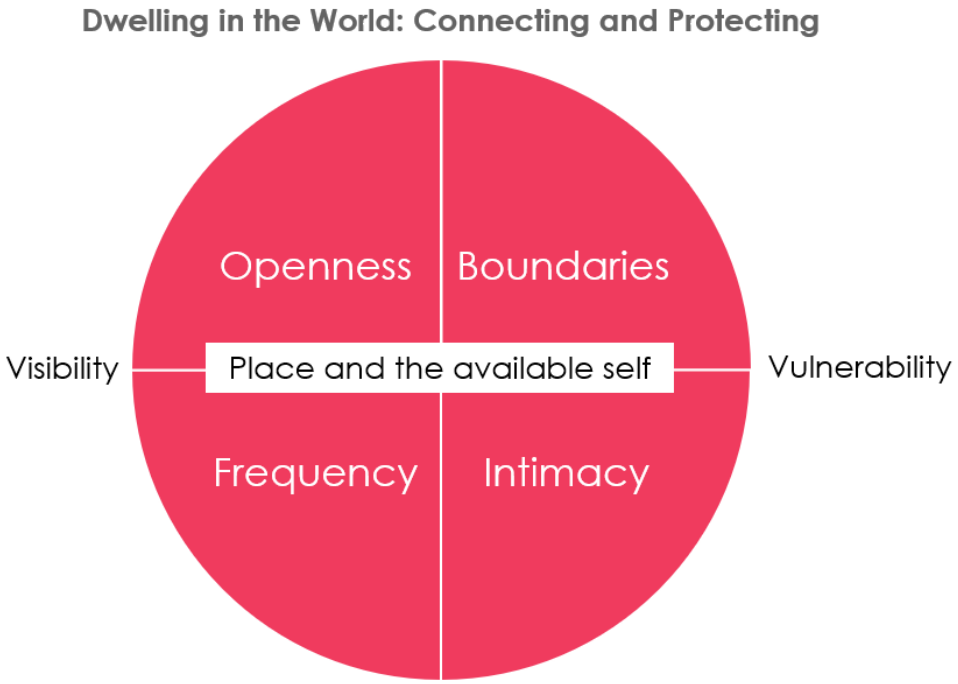



*Figure 59 Dwelling in the world. Place and the available self in the digital age. Compiled by the author*

*Chapter Seven*

# We Are What We Care-For: People, *Things* and Meaning

*[e]ach one of us is what he pursues and cares for. In everyday terms, we understand ourselves and our existence by way of the activities we pursue and the things we take care of.*

*Heidegger, 1927/1988, p. 159*

The concluding chapter of this phenomenological ethnography continues the exploration of home creation with social media in the context of Instagram *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* as an existential experience by focusing on the *home* as a *thing* that *dwellers-creators* care-for. By drawing on Heidegger's notion of *care* and his concept of *things* (1950/1971c) as opposed to merely physical objects, I consider in what ways homes are being experienced as *things* that *dwellers-creators* care-for and the meaning that is attached to them. Discussing dwellers' choice to actively participate in the renovation of their physical homes, I explore the issue of care in both of its senses – as *attentiveness* and as *nurture* – by focusing on the entanglements, the relations and the *nearness* between dwellers and the place they create and live in, and the possibilities it brings for an enhanced sense of *nearness* to themselves, to others and to the world.

## 7.1 Always we care

As we have seen with the concepts of creation and community, the usefulness of the term care as an analytic unit in research could also be questionable due to its prevalent use and ambiguous positive connotations in everyday life. Yet, it is precisely the role of phenomenology to try and unpack such notions that are so embedded in human lived experience until they become almost transparent. Considering the notion that for human beings, their own existence is an *issue* (Heidegger, 1927/2019: 32), Heidegger argues that *care* (*Sorge*) is an ontological holistic temporal structure that involves *past, present* and *future* orientations, where people are always *already-in-something, amidst-of-something,* or *ahead-of-something* as they are being in and engaging with the world (Dreyfus, 1991: 244). As Scannell (2014) explains:

> Being human is being in concern always and unavoidably in whatever waking situation we are in. We are always in a situation that calls upon us to cope with it, to manage it, to deal with it somehow or other. […] Being alive and living in the world is being in concern. Care is the foundational ontological condition and structure of the being of human beings. (p. 24).

This notion of *care* as an ontological structure that directs humans towards the world in different temporalities is often understood in the sense of *care* as *attentiveness*. Nonetheless, when asked about this issue by Dreyfus, the philosopher indicates that for him the two meanings of *care* as *attentiveness* and as *nurture* – are closely connected:

> In a conversation with Heidegger I pointed out that "care" in English has connotations of love and caring. He responded that that was fortunate since with the term "care" he wanted to name the very general fact that "*Sein geht mich an*", roughly, that being gets to me. (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 239)

Thus, considering *care* as *attentiveness* as well as *care* as *nurture*, this chapter draws on Scannell's (2014) discussion on "*care* structure" and continues the growing discussion[57] about the importance of *care* in works such as Mol, Moser and Pols' book *Care in Practice* (2010) that considers how *care* and technology belong together, de la Bellacasa's book *Matters of Care* (2017) about the "significance of care for thinking and living in more than human worlds" and Seaver's (2021) discussion about *care* and *scale* in the context of "current debates about the ethics of algorithmic systems" (p. 512). As Mol, Moser and Pols (2010) suggest:

> Care practices move us away from rationalist versions of the human being. For rather than insisting on cognitive operations, they involve embodied practices. […] Crucially, in care practices what it is to be human has more to do with being fragile than with mastering the

[57] In an earlier discussion about care, Joan Tronto (1993) argued that the concept is absent from "central questions of philosophers" (p. 3). Nonetheless, she acknowledges that "[t]he major exception, perhaps, is found in the work of Martin Heidegger, for whom Zorg [care] is a central philosophical concept" (p. 23). For a recent discussion about a "Heideggerian ethic of care" see (Elley-Brown and Pringle, 2021).

> world. This does not imply a docile acceptance of fate: care is active, it seeks to improve life. (p. 15)

Importantly, *care* is not an inner feeling, but rather it exists in the *relations* between humans and the world, in an environment that is always full of other people and all sorts of entities, creatures, materials, media, atmospheres and things. As Scannell (2014) suggests, the "*care* structure" of things "is nothing more or less than the human thought, effort and intention that has gone into producing the thing *as* which it is" (p. 14).

## 7.2 Between objects and things

Before delving into the discussion about the *thing* that is the home[58] and how dwellers' engagement with their homes affects their understating of themselves and the experience of *being-in-the-world*, we need to start with Heidegger's concept of *things* (1950/1971c) (see also the discussion in chapter 3). In a Heideggerian sense, a *thing* depends first and foremost on the relationality of something with people and the world. Heidegger refers to this *relationality* in terms of *nearness*. Worried by the rapid pace of transportation, communication and media (radio and television) in the modern era and what he calls the "frantic abolition of all distances" (Heidegger, 1950/1971c, p. 163), Heidegger sees modernity as a threat to the possibility of objects to be *things*, and for people to experience *nearness,* saying that "nearness does not consist in shortness of distance" (p. 163). Instead, he suggests that: "Nearness, it seems, cannot be encountered directly. We succeed in reaching it rather by attending to what is near. Near to us are what we usually call things" (ibid., p. 164).

At first, it seems as though Heidegger infers *nearness* from what is in people's immediate physical environment. However, as Sharr (2007) explains:

> One is near to what one finds immediate, however far away it may be; and one is also far from that which one doesn't find immediate, however close it may be. For Heidegger, the definitive characteristic

[58] Heidegger (1951/1971b) in his discussion in *Building Dwelling Thinking*, writes about "the nature of these things that we call buildings" (p. 152). See also Sharr (2007,p. 23, 46)

> of a thing is its possibility to bring people nearer to themselves, to help them engage with their existence and the fourfold.[59] (p. 35)

To demonstrate the distinction between mere objects and *things*, Heidegger uses the example of a jug. He explains that when we fill up the jug, we become aware of its functioning as a vessel that *holds* something. The philosopher's point is that what is doing the *holding* here is the *void* inside the jug. Thus, Heidegger (1950/1971c) argues that "[t]he vessel's thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds" (p. 167). Wishing to move beyond the scientific understanding that the jug holds air and is never truly empty, Heidegger argues that "the void holds a twofold manner: taking and keeping" (ibid. p. 169.). The essence of this philosophical argument is about the possibility of how humans, the world and every*thing* in it – can potentially be *related* to each other. This possibility for *nearness* in life's tangle is through the experience of *dwelling* in a world full of *things* (of all sorts). After all, for Heidegger, "Thinging is the nearing of world" (ibid., p. 179).

Applying these philosophical ideas in the context of media studies, Scannell (2014) argues that it is the *significance* of an entity or an object to *someone* that makes it a *thing:*

> Everyday things are everywhere imbued with the presence of particular some ones. Anything can be transformed to appear as some thing: a transformation brought about by some one impressing upon the thing the mark of their being. (ibid. p. 20)

Thus, if we follow Scannell's interpretation of Heidegger, it seems that any contemporary or ready-made object could potentially be considered as a *thing*. Nevertheless, other scholars who focus on Heidegger's specific artisanal examples (i.e., a jug, a table and a hut in the Black Forest) conclude that his philosophical ideas are less equipped to make sense of our current day and age (e.g., Latour, 2004). Thus, Latour argues that for Heidegger, a can of coke could never be considered as a *thing.*[60] Yet Scannell (2014), on the other hand, explains that "Everyday things have a 'they' structure (they are for anyone) but upon such structures we impress our selves and

[59] The fourfold for Heidegger (1950/1971c, p. 171) is the unity of earth, sky, divinities and mortals and how they belong together as a holistic onefold.

[60] Peters (2015) suggests that the tactic of Latour and other pragmatist in regards to Heidegger "is to rely on him heavily and mock him relentlessly" (p. 39). Peters himself suggests that his philosophical approach to media fits within both Heidegger and Latour's orbits.

in so doing transform them and make them part of our lives" (p. 22). In this way, any impersonal object, if approached with *care* and *concern*, could be considered as a *thing*.

### *7.2.1 The thing that is the home*

Considering the home as a *thing* calls for focusing on its *gathering* as a place that brings together things that belong to accomplish its nature of "letting dwell" (Heidegger, 1951/1971b, p. 157). This is the home's *potential* for *holding* people's everyday life, as well as supporting a meaningful existence by bringing dwellers nearer to themselves. The quest to explore how people and building *belong together* is described in the opening paragraph of Heidegger's (1951/1971b) *Building Dwelling Thinking*:

> *In what follows we shall try to think about dwelling and building.* This thinking about building does not presume to discover architectural ideas, let alone to give rules for building. This venture in thought does not view building as an art or as a technique of construction; rather it traces building back into that domain to which everything that *is* belongs. (p. 143, *italics in the original*)

Discussing Heidegger's (1951/1971b) reference to buildings as "built things"[61] (p. 152), Sharr (2007) explains that for the philosopher, "a built thing – like any thing – should be understood through tactile and imaginative experience; not as a detached object" (p. 46). This notion of a *thing* as a combination of tactile *and* imaginative[62] encompasses the different temporalities (past-present-future) of the *care* structure (what it was, what it is and what it could/will be). Thus, the physical proximity between a person and a *thing* does not determine the sense of *nearness* between the two: "In this way, imaginary places, lost places or places not yet visited might be as immediate as actual tangible locations" (Sharr, 2007, p. 64). Such lost places can be seen in Scannell's (2014) memories of how he was standing in his empty childhood home after his mother had moved out of it:

[61] Heidegger (1951/ 1971b) uses an example of a bridge to discuss the gathering nature of built things (pp. 150–151). Sharr (2007) explains that the bridge example suggests that the philosopher means by building "not just to houses or schools or offices but to any variety of human interactions of building and dwelling, from furniture to cities" (p. 46).

[62] See also chapters 1 and 3 for a discussion about Bachelard's (2014) idea of poetics as a double play of re-creation.

> Stripped of all its familiar things – these photographs of the family on the mantelpiece, that set of china in the corner cupboard (a wedding present), the three piece suite of furniture chosen after much deliberation – the room (the house itself) no longer bore the marks of her presence. The house, which *was* her life, *upon which* she had impressed her being there, was no more so. (p. 20, *italics in the original*)

Here, we can see how a physical place can turn into a *meaningful thing/place* for someone and also how it changes as the *significance* that was attached to it starts to fade with the removal of physical objects that had been absorbed with meaning for someone. Heidegger (1950/1971c) argues that for *things* to appear as *things*, we need to "step back from the thinking that merely represents – that is, explains – to the thinking that responds and recalls" (p. 179). Only when a responsive reciprocity between things and human is formed, then a thingness quality is present.

While Scannell's emphasis is on the relation between a *person* and some*thing* that holds significance or meaning for *that* person, Alexander (1979), in his discussion about the *quality without a name* that particular places or buildings possess, suggests something different. For Alexander, when certain elements *belong together*, they create a *holistic whole* (e.g., a city, a street, a house, a room) in our built environment, which has a certain "objective" quality of *aliveness.* Thus, this *quality without a name* is not about a subjective personal attachment to a place or a thing but rather the way in which things fit together in a way that brings this quality to the fore.

But how can we know which things belong together and how they can be *gathered* in a way that *corresponds* and creates this quality, let's say, in a home? Ingold (2013) argues that "[t]he task of the maker is to bring the pieces into a sympathetic engagement with one another, so that they can begin […] to correspond" (p. 69). But who is the creator or the maker of a home? Here, it is important to remember that for Heidegger (1951/1971b), *building* is something everyone does in their everyday activities in and with their homes. However, it is not merely a mundane engagement but also a contextual engagement of planning and design that is done as "a responsiveness and attentiveness to that placed-ness" (Malpas, 2021, p. 85 ). In that regard:

> The question of home, of living, of dwelling and so of building is […] always and only a question that arises within a singular horizon,

> with respect to a concrete situatedness, in and through the unitary multiplicity of what is given here, within these bounds, in this place. (Malpas, 2021, p. 86)

Therefore, dwellers are always, in some way or another, the makers and creators of their homes, even when they are not participating in the design or building of the architectural structure. Of course, the more remote dwellers are from influencing how their houses are – the harder it gets to achieve this correspondence between the house and its ability to fulfil its nature of "letting dwell" (Heidegger, 1951/1971b, p. 157).

### 7.3 Gathering a home, holding life

The notion of *care*, as a defining characteristic of her *being*, emerges constantly in Leanne's interview in different contexts. For Leanne, the position of her house at the locus of her attention and *care* stems from her parents, who "care very, very deeply about the home". Growing up with floor plans and discussions about paint colours around the dinner table, Leanne says that:

> My parents just have such a deep respect for beautiful things. And their home is really beautiful. […] It's a really, really special house. It's not especially big or especially fancy. […] And it's not because it's breathtaking […] it's this deep appreciation for beautiful objects, I think, and beautiful functional objects and caring a lot […] my parents just care so much. They have never had much money, they were both self-employed, […] but everything they did have, they put into the house. […] So, they have this unbelievably beautiful space. And that's what they value. And that's what I value. And I think this is how they raised us. (Leanne in an interview, June 2022)

In Leanne's experience, caring deeply about something leads to her wish to improve it and nurture it, investing time and effort in this *thing.* In her case, it is her house, but similarly, it is also her approach to *Good Bones*, her *home/place* on Instagram (as discussed in chapter 6):

> I've lived in a bunch of other houses [...]. I always had critiques about how I would have changed them if they were mine. And […]

> I don't have any critiques about this one. Because I really like it now […]. I think it's probably mostly because it is how I want it to be. […] It is a significant amount of effort to bring it to where you want it to be. […] So, I think for a lot of people who don't care very much, that's why it makes sense for someone else to do it, or to buy a house that's done. […] Most people, at least my demographic and my friends in America, just want a house that's done. They don't want to have to think about it. (Leanne in an interview, June 2022)


*Figure 60 Cares like her parents. An edited post from Leanne's account, 19 June 2022, Instagram*

For Leanne, her contentment with her house evolves mainly around the compatibility between the house and her life, this corresponding nature of *things* that *belong together* and *hold together* in a harmonious way. Contrasting her experience in rental houses and her experience in the house she created for her family indicates that ownership (actual or a feeling of ownership), when understood as the ability to influence one's home, is directly attached to *care*. When the people responsible for the way the house *is* (i.e., owners, architects, dwellers) truly *care* about the life of the people living in a house (and are less driven by other considerations such as profits or artistical expression), then the higher the chances that a physical house and dweller's lives will correspond.

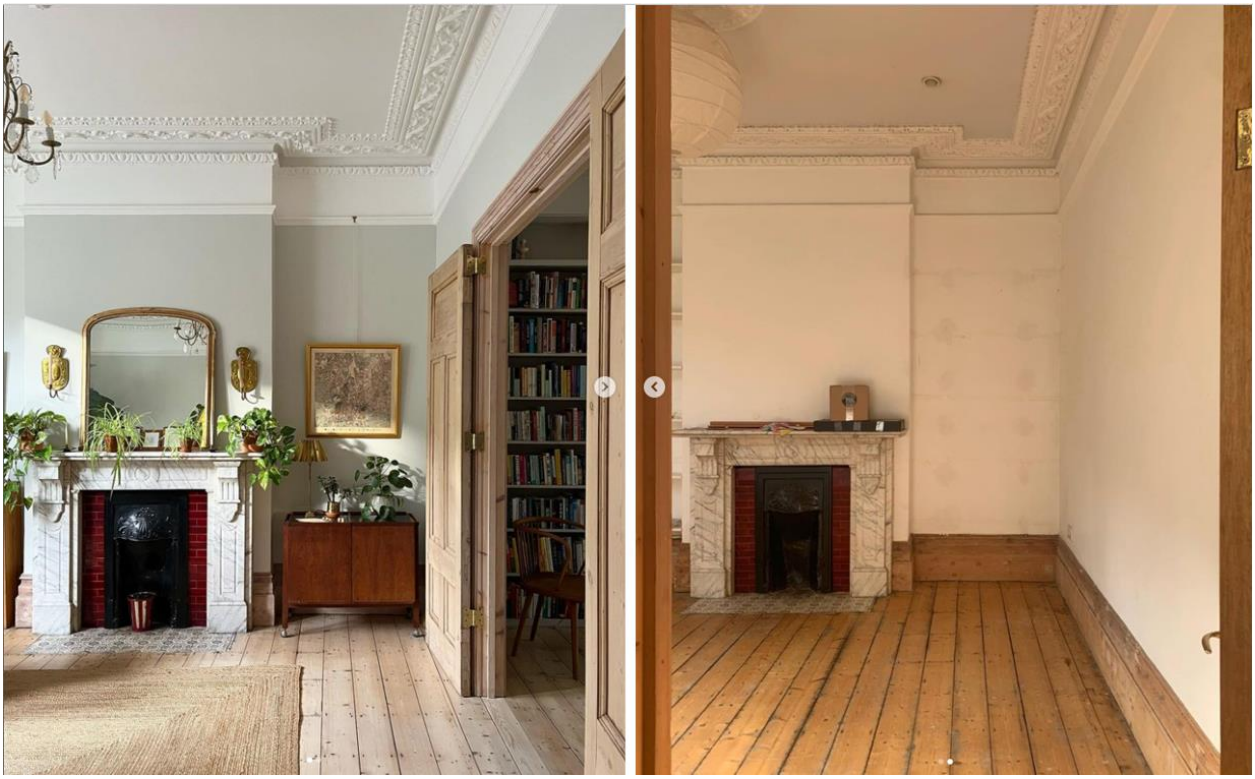


*Figure 61 Leanne's living room before and after the renovation (two years apart). Good Bones, 29 November 2022, Instagram*

Lighting is so important, especially in a kitchen where you need serious task lighting and ambiance. And it's easy to get wrong, as we learned from many years of living in rentals with either not enough light or too much harsh light and too much shadow.

When designing our kitchen, [...]I planned to run a floating shelf the length of the kitchen [...]. I did a lot (a lot a lot) of research, stalked @eyeswoon for tips and finally landed on (what I think is) the perfect solution for us.

*Good Bones, October 6, 2022, Instagram*

*Figure 62 Who cares about this place? An edited post from Leanne's account, 6 October 2022, Instagram*

Similarly, Martina also says that living in a house that she has participated in its creation according to her taste and liking feels like "such a privilege". She adds that the quality of her life has skyrocketed in her new house – "like nothing I've ever experienced before" (Martina in an interview, August 2022).

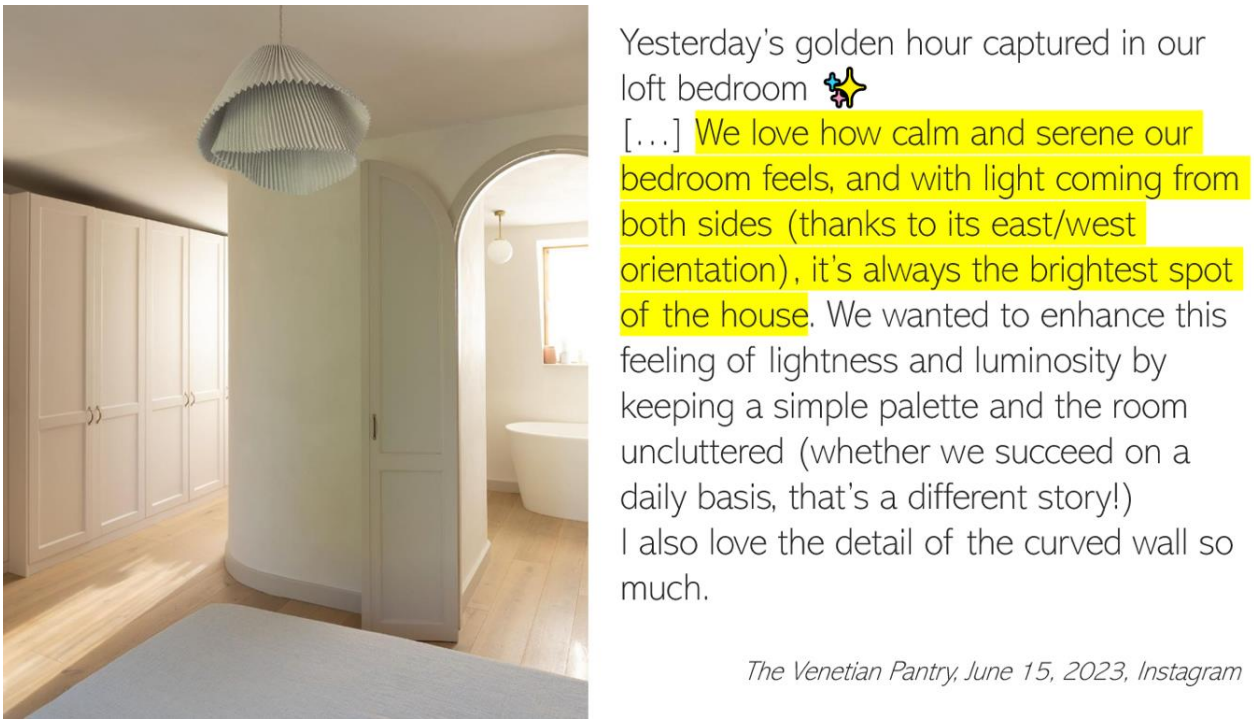



*Figure 63 Feeling the house. An edited post from Martina's account, 15 June 2023, Instagram*

Exemplifying the phenomenological perspective that suggests a convergence of subjective and objective ways of *being* and *knowing*[63], Ali describes how, on the one hand, the *care* that was imbued in the creation process of her house has filled it with meaning for her, and on the other hand how the *thing* that is the *house itself* is now projecting this *quality without a name* (Alexander, 1979) that is *knowable* by others. Comparing her experiences in the different homes she lived in, Ali says that the home she and Clay have built for themselves feels more like home than anything she has ever experienced, and in a deeper way. Ali describes this feeling as being "a part of this house":

[63] See the discussion of Bhatt's (2010) interpretation of Alexander's ideas in chapter 3.

People talk about “Oh, your house has soul” […], or “It’s so warm and inviting”, even if they haven’t been here and they’ve just seen a photo on Instagram. And I do put that down to the fact that maybe there’s an emotional kind of energetic connection there somewhere with those things. […] Clay and I talk a lot about plants and growing things and the idea that you can invest in them with love and all those things that most people […] don’t consider. It’s just a plant, and you can give it some water. So, I think there is a deeper level of energetic transfer and connection with things. […] It’s in the hands-on touch you might have had with that; it’s around the connection or the actual process involved in polishing it, painting it or repairing it. (Ali in an interview, May 2022)


*Figure 64 A house that grows. An edited post from Ali’s account, 1 September 2022, Instagram*

For Ali, the process of creating her own home starts with the environment, or more specifically, the plot of land where she and Clay have decided to build their house:

We didn't want to disturb the land very much […]. We wanted it to sit lightly on the ground. And we owned this property, and Clay had done lots and lots of work, conservation work clearing bush land and regenerating the bush land that we already had a sense of place here. So, I think bringing the house here was just an addition to that. (Ali in an interview, May 2022)

*Figure 65 Bringing it together. Ali's house, Our Secondhand House, 15 July 2021, Instagram*

Interestingly, the Australian practice of purchasing a complete old house and then transferring it to a different site, as Ali and Clay did, seems counterintuitive to the possibility of creating a grounded *place* attached to an *environment*. Nevertheless, judging from the house Ali and Clay have created and from their experience, it looks as though their *caring* stance towards making a true connection between the house, the land and themselves – echoing Heidegger's (1951/1971b) discussion of the character of dwelling as "sparing and preserving: (p. 147) – has enabled them to bring a sense of *nearness* even to what started as two separate things. Choosing which specific house to buy, Ali explains that "the aesthetic of the house was a big draw card". But perhaps more than that, a leading consideration was "the fact that all the materials that it was made with were old materials that have already lasted 100 years" (Ali in an interview, May 2022). With the old materials also comes the history of the house and its dwellers: "When we bought the house […], we loved that we could find out who had built it and who had lived in it before. And really kind of acknowledge all the different chapters and lives that something like a house has". Viewing material things as something that has a *life* and a *story* of how it had been created, cared for and used by people is the way in which objects bring meaning for Ali:

> It's not just a house; it's been so many different things to so many people. I guess it's the feelings that you can attach to an object in a way that creates the meaning. And that's what the story does. It creates the meaningful kind of feelings attached to an object. […] I'm looking at a lamp at the moment that was Clay's friend who passed away a few years ago. […] We painted it and fixed it up, and it is a lovely thing that we have something of his in our lounge room. (Ali in an interview, May 2022)

And while Ali got a glimpse into the story of the first 100 years of her house, in most cases, these stories are being lost as houses move between owners and dwellers, leaving only some traces of their creation and inhabitation stories in the materiality of the house. Moreover, as I discuss later in this chapter, it is through *renovation diaries* and *home accounts* that many stories of homes' creation and dwelling experiences are now being told, and these stories could potentially affect the relation and attachment of future dwellers to these houses as well.

Rarely have we ever had this front verandah this clean and tidy, it usually has tools and such all over it. It's hard to believe now that this old beauty came to this spot in three pieces on the back of a truck! This front verandah has pretty much been entirely rebuilt using most of the original timber from the house and other salvaged wood to replace where we couldn't save. […].
Now it seems those big hard jobs are behind us! Maybe a little more sitting on this verandah and relaxing.

*Our Secondhand house, October 1, 2022, Instagram*

*Figure 66 An old beauty. An edited post from Ali's account, 1 October 2022, Instagram*

[…]I love finding something, a beautiful treasure, something that someone else has discarded, something that may not be perfect, may not be the 'current trend', may just be moving through the circular economy living a new chapter of its life.
For those who have followed us for a little while, you will know that almost everything in our home has been found, preloved, recycled or salvaged. […]
Everything in this pic has had a previous life or existence elsewhere, a story. I love that.

*Our Secondhand house, May 22, 2023, Instagram*

*Figure 67 Stories of material things. An edited post from Ali's account, 22 May 2023, Instagram*

The *caring* process of *gathering* things – land, house, objects, materials, people and stories – into *one holistic whole* – requires time. As Ali remembers: "when the house first came to the property, it didn't feel like a home at all; it was just a shell really, a shell with lots of potential".

> But as you put your mark on it in so many different ways, […] it then offers you something else. […]. Like anyone who builds a house, we have made it suit ourselves. We love looking at the bushland outside the bedroom window. So, we made sure there were French doors that you could open to see the bushland in the morning. […] I feel like they're all the rewards for being so intimately involved in our house; we get all these lovely rewards from that. (Ali in an interview, May 2022)


*Figure 68 Made it suit ourselves. An edited post from Ali's account, 16 April 2022, Instagram*

[…] Do you have a favourite spot in your home? This is mine. So many elements are perfect for me. Our sense of achievement is big […] this sunning spot is on the northeast side of our house lapping up the early morning sun in summer and getting ever drop of sun available in winter. […] The plants love this aspect and it has evolved into a little green/sun room.

*Our Secondhand house, March 23, 2023, Instagram*

*Figure 69 Lovely rewards from the house. An edited post from Ali's account, 23 March 2023, Instagram*

### *7.3.1 Slow renovation*

The gradual process Ali describes fits within Ingold's (2013) discussion of *making*, where he suggests that instead of thinking in terms of projects, we should think about the creation of things "as a process of *growth*" (p. 21) and "place the maker from the outset as a participant in amongst a world of active materials" (ibid.). Ingold (2013) argues that there is an inherent mismatch "between the perceptions of the architect-designer and those of the resident-builder" (p. 48). Thus, while a professional renovation project necessarily starts and ends, *making* "is a matter not of predetermining the final forms of things and all the steps needed to get there, but of opening up a path and improvising a passage" (ibid., p. 69). Nonetheless, as Malpas (2021) argues, the role that design and planning still have in the context of Heidegger's (1951/1971b) discussion of building and dwelling, as mentioned in chapter 3, is to open "the original responsiveness that is involved in dwelling and in letting-dwell" (Malpas, 2021, p. 77). Taking a deliberative, slow approach, Ali explains that when she talks about *slow renovation*:

> It's the idea that you can just […] sit with it and take a longer time to make considered decisions that perhaps, down the line, there'll be

> better decisions because you didn't rush it. You waited, and you thought about it, and you lived here for a little bit and thought about how you use the house and how you use the rooms. And you take it kind of one step at a time. So, you kind of feel your way almost. (Ali in an interview, May 2022)

The value of slowing down also appears in Kate's experience, who describes herself as "an incredibly impatient person" who wants "everything to be done now". Nonetheless, when it comes to her renovation, Kate says that she learned here that she must "do it slowly. Financially, I couldn't possibly do everything at once". Reading about slow design and slow interiors, she has learned that it is crucial not to rush into decisions to really understand what she wants:

> When friends and family started to come over, at first, they were like, "Well, you know how long is this going to take? It's going to take you forever". And I was like, "But it's not a rushed process. This is a slow process so that I get to know the house, understand it". And I went in, knowing with my eyes open that this was going to take a long time. (Kate in an interview, August 2022)

[…] It took about 8 months to freshen up this bathroom, it was a slow process, but in hindsight definitely was the right way to do it in the instance. Oli the plumber suggested we attack it like this, that we remove the old fittings, see what that left us with and only then order the new ones. This was a stroke of genius, it meant each element (bath, shower, sink) was ordered separately once we knew what would fit and work with the existing pipework. […]

*My Old Pub, February 5, 2023, Instagram*

*Figure 70 Taking things slowly. An edited post from Kate's account, 5 February 2023*

Taking things slowly also means allowing oneself to do things at different intensities at different times (see also the discussion in chapter 6 about frequency, visibility and vulnerability on social media). Like the changes throughout life in people's personal and professional desires to socialize, to create things or to start a new project, the desire to change or improve things around the house also varies from time to time and is not a consistent state of being. We all have our seasons when we spurt forward, wanting to be more open, engaged and active. And other times when we would rather recharge in our comfort place.

I've returned to a garden which has just exploded into life, […] love it when it gets to that time of year! The first thing I did this morning was pick this floppy bunch, it smells incredible because it's full of apple mint (which grows so fast and is great in vases!).

I'm sorry for being a bit absent on here lately, I feel much refreshed after a good break and looking forward to getting a bit of creativity back! Anyone else find they lose all creativity at times?

*My Old Pub, May 7, 2023, Instagram*

*Figure 71 The life of the garden. An edited post from Kate's account, 7 May 2023*

Thus, after nine years of renovating two houses, Kate realized that she needed some rest: "I think I've got to a point where I just want to have some time without chaos, e.g., rooms being pulled to bits and piles of DIY stuff everywhere" (Kate, *My Old Pub*, 12 January 2023, Instagram). Nonetheless, her house had its own plans. Shortly after Kate announced she wanted some quiet time, she noticed a damp problem in her dining room wall:

> I discovered some more issues on the dining room side of the house last night […], which very frustratingly means, […] that having said

> project dining room was off the cards, I think it is now back on and bigger than originally anticipated! Excellent 🤦‍♀️! (Kate, M*y Old Pub*, 17 January 2023, Instagram)


*Figure 72 The house testing Kate's patience. An edited post from Kate's account, 6 March 2023*

Thinking about whether social media contributes to a slow or fast approach to home renovation, Kate says that she sees examples of both approaches on Instagram. And while she herself and the accounts she likes to follow focus on "the evolution of the space and a home and slowing that down", there is also "a tendency for social media to try and make people feel like they can do things really quickly, [when they] […] want to get something finished and move on to the next thing because they're trying to get a photograph of it" (Kate in an interview, August 2022).

Moreover, this is perhaps the issue: what exactly is the thing that people are creating? Is it merely a visual representation, a veneer of something that does not really correspond with one's lived experience? Or is it a *creation-in-the-world*, where every day experiences, material things, social practices and media are all *intermingled* and *related* to each other as part of the all-encompassing way people are *being-in-the-world*? Creation processes of the latter necessarily involve *care* and require *time*. Thus, if Heidegger (1951/1971b) is right that we can build "[*o*]*nly*

*if we are capable of dwelling*" (p. 157, *italics in the original*), then this suggests that *building* (or creation) in the Heideggerian sense is something that is inherently human. And therefore, we should make sure not to lose sight of the importance of *time* and *care* in our creation processes, including the creation of our homes. As Sennett (2008) suggests: "Slow craft time also enables the work of reflection and imagination – which the push for quick results cannot" (p. 294). This is not to say that digital technology and social media are inherently destructive to the possibilities of *nearness* and *dwelling*. Instead, as repeatedly argued in this thesis, they are part of life and as such should be shaped and used with *care* and in *relation* and *responsiveness* to human scale, pace and experience in an environment and place.

When it comes to renovation, one of the most straightforward ways to get a sense of how to change and shape a house to accommodate its dwellers[64] is by experiencing the existing place and trying to imagine how it can be in the future. From Bianca's perspective, slowing down meant getting to know the house by living in it for over a year before starting a renovation process and committing to any major changes. Describing her experience, Bianca says that she has "always been someone that likes to move really fast and to kind of get things done. But I knew when we moved into this house, I needed to take a step back, make sure we lived in it for some time to figure out how we use the space" (Bianca in an interview, May 2022). Moreover, the experience of living in the house prior to the renovation helped Bianca more than just understand how she would like to use it functionally. It also helped her to appreciate the house and the *care* that was put into it by its previous dwellers:

> It is an amazing house. We realized that the people before us really took a lot of care in retaining a lot of the period features. And I discovered little things, little notes that they had written […] that if I hadn't lived in there, I wouldn't have possibly noticed. (Bianca in an interview, May 2022)

[64] See chapter 3 for a discussion of Miller's (2010) concept of accommodation.

*Figure 73 Bianca's kitchen and entryway at the beginning of the renovation, Instagram, March 2022*

The experience of familiarizing herself with the house changed Bianca's plans for the renovation, "even though it frustrated me because I didn't like living in a house that was not finished" (Bianca in an interview, May 2022). In addition to living in the house before changing it, Bianca also emphasizes the importance of physically being in the house every day during the renovation. Realizing that "there will always be things that go wrong", Bianca says that "if you're there every day, you can catch those things quickly", and builders are "able to ask you about little details". This experience corresponds with Dovey's (1993) phenomenological approach of "the cycle of lived space", which considers the "geometric space" of architectural design and drawings simply as a tool which helps to connect the actual "lived space" that exists before and after the renovation. In his suggestions for a participatory home creation process, Dovey (1985) recognizes that such participation is important "not only because dwellers all too often have their desires ignored, but also because the opportunity for environmental change is an opportunity for an enhanced sense of home. Participation can be as important for the opportunities it opens up as it is for the mistakes it avoids" (p. 60).

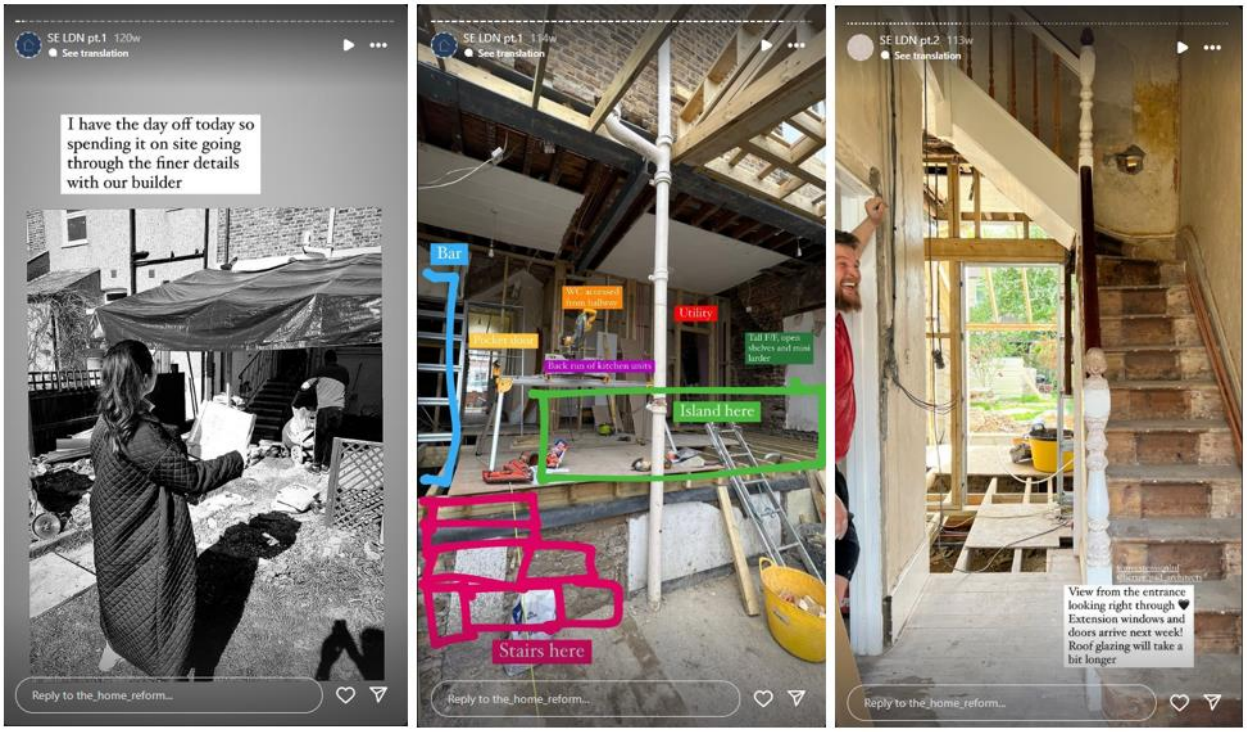



*Figure 74 Bianca on-site during the renovation. Stories from The Home Reform, Instagram*

Thus, since dwellers usually *care* the most about how their house will be, being on-site might help ensure that their wants are not lost in translation in the changes between the old lived space and the new one. Nevertheless, mistakes and unforeseen things are bound to happen. Since as Ingold (2013) puts it:

> Human endeavours, it seems, are forever poised between catching dreams and coaxing materials. In this tension, between the pull of hopes and dreams and the drag of material constraint, and not in any opposition between cognitive intellection and mechanical execution, lies the relation between design and making. (p. 73)

Beyond mistakes, it seems a slower approach might also help prevent some regrets. Discussing her regrets of focusing too much on form over function and not leaving a place for her everyday products in her bathroom, Martina asked her followers about their renovation regrets. Besides the issue of lightning (specifically spotlights) that seemed to bother people, some shared that the rushed nature of many renovation processes, where dwellers had to make so many decisions in a short time frame, resulted in design decisions they now regret.

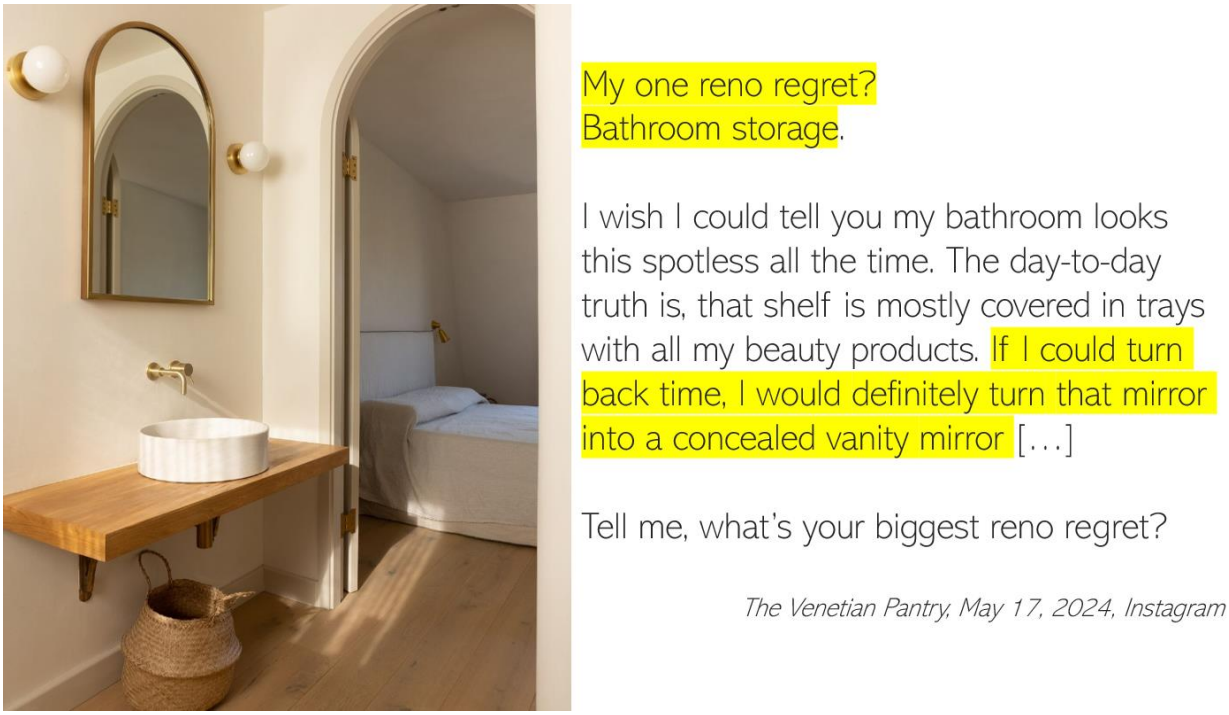



*Figure 75 Renovation regrets. An edited post from Martina's account, 17 May 2024, Instagram*

### 7.4 Forging relationships with and through the house

Continuing the discussion about the issue of *care* and the *relationality* between a house and its dwellers, it is interesting how some *dwellers-creators* refer to their home almost like a person whom not only they support and care-for but also forging a relationship with. It starts with the simple fact that the house usually had its own life and history before meeting its current dwellers. For Ali and Clay, this means that they "wanted so much […] to respect the past of the house, […] almost like it is a person" (Ali in an interview, May 2022). Thus, building this intimacy with their house has been through real daily tactile experiences, "the fact that your hands have touched so much of it [...] in that slow renovation journey that you go on with the house".

Claire describes a similar experience in her and Cal's long-term extreme renovation, where they were "building a relationship [with] and a respect" for the house. "We've truly built and taken care of and put a huge amount of love into this building, and now we'll be able to enjoy it as our home for the rest of our lives. And it's a really special thing" (Claire in an interview, July 2022). For Claire, imbuing any physical object with *care* makes it part of a person's life as a *thing* that holds significance: "You can take that same experience and fix or patch your favourite sweater,

and it's […] going to be a part of your life for longer, you are building a relationship with it. And it's better for the environment […] It's so nice [and] brings you joy".

One example of the caring relationship Claire has built with material things is the story of how they saved their 1890s house's doors:

> These doors really have been on a journey. In the 1890s, they were introduced to their new home, Jameswood. They've been through two world wars, and they've seen our little village, Sandbank, located on the edge of Dunoon, transition from being the home of Robertson's boat yard, where beautiful racing Yachts were built, to the home of a US Navy submarine base, and now, to a quiet marina.
>
> They spent nearly 30 years in a lonely, leaking, abandoned building. Sheltered by layers of paint, they were some of the only pieces of Jameswood that could be salvaged and brought back into this home. Saving these doors hasn't been easy. […] We owe many thanks to our friends, who helped us scrape and melt layers of paint off these doors in their restoration process. It was a long, messy ordeal, but it was all worth it – they look gorgeous, almost like new. But better! Link to our Homemade Paint Stripper recipe in our bio. We've chosen not to hide away every imperfection. I haven't filled every knick and knock these doors have sustained. If you look closely, under the fresh paint, there are some bruises left by a lifetime of use.
>
> (*What have we Dunoon*, 24 January 2023, Instagram)

Emphasizing the importance of connecting to the home's material histories, Historian David Olusoga (2020) suggests that "the lifeless things that estate agents love to call 'original features' enable us to commune with past residents […]. Innately we care about flesh and blood more than bricks and mortar, and material history only matters because it mattered to them" (p. 3).

*Figure 76 A lifetime of Use. Claire and the salvaged doors. What have we Dunoon, 24 January 2023, Instagram*

*Figure 77 Before (2019) and after (2023): Cal, Claire and Claire's parents, What have we Dunoon, Instagram*

While the story of the restoration of the doors indicates Claire's caring stance towards the past, the attention and *care* towards the *present* and the *future* are not less potent in her experience of home creation and continuously emerge in her posts and her interview. Thus, alongside the connection and relationship that Claire and Cal have formed with the house, their renovation process, with the daily physical work alongside volunteers, friends and family, contributed to very meaningful and close relationships, as already noticed by Gauntlett (2011) in the context of making.

Moreover, Claire's caring also stretches into the *future*. Imagines how she will share the house with loved ones, Claire says: "I think that has always been a huge part of what has driven me past the hard days is thinking of those human aspects of a home and the connections and experiences and friendships we're making as we do it, and that we will be able to make and share with other people once the building is done" (Claire in an interview, July 2022). Reaching even further into her imagination of the future, Claire says:

> I think […] you're building a relationship with your building or your home. And also, building a relationship with […] it sounds weird, but with the future […]. I often think of the next generation that's

> going to be using, experiencing and enjoying this space in this building. And that's quite a nice thing to think about. Even if I'm not there to experience it. It's nice to think of what you're giving to somebody in the future. […] It's a really nice relationship that you're building with some future entity. (Claire in an interview, July 2022)

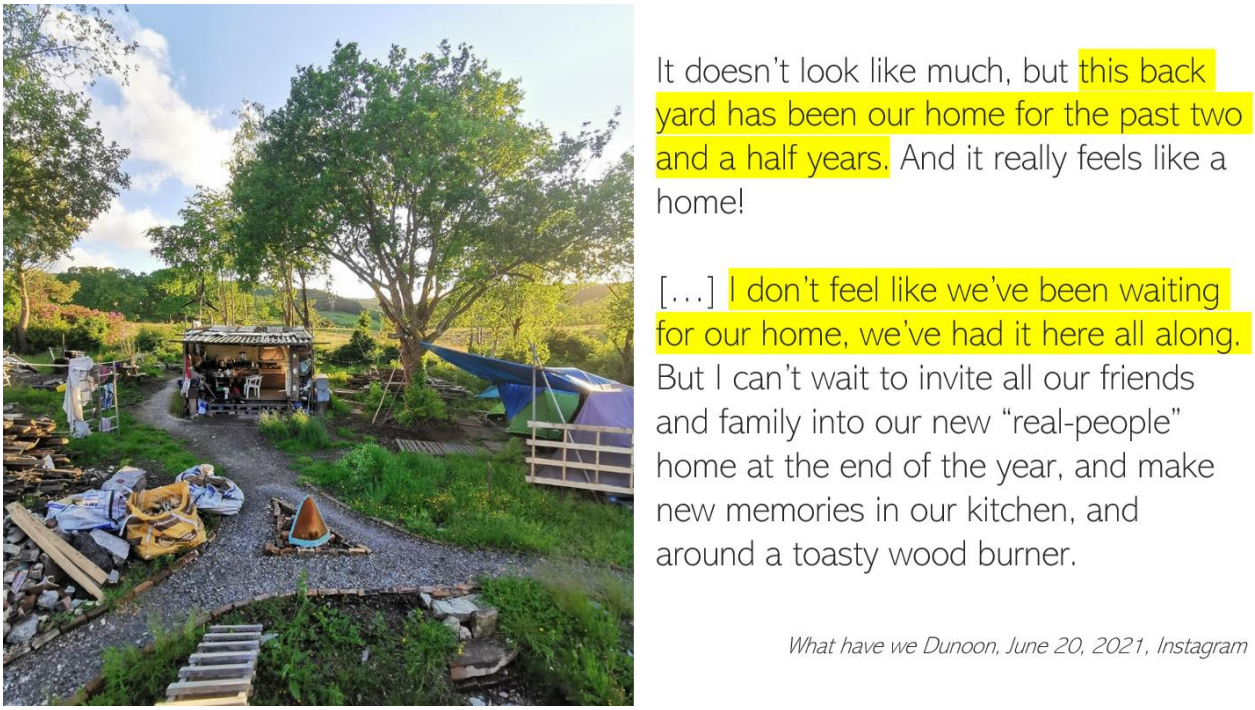



*Figure 78 A home in the back yard. An edited post from Claire's account, 20 June 2021, Instagram*

These experiences of saving an old, neglected house and breathing new life into it suggest a humanistic approach of *care and repair* towards things and environments. Ali says: "I like the idea that something that lots of people think is nearing the end of its useful life can be with care and repair, fixed and have another life". This stance contrasts an instrumental attitude to objects and buildings that views them as disposable commodities that only exist to serve people and be thrown away. Ali's and Claire's caring experiences with material objects echo Miller's (2001, 2008, 2010) anthropological work in the field of material culture about "how people express themselves through their possessions, and what these tell us about their lives" (Miller, 2008, p. 1).


*Figure 79 Relationship with the future. An edited post from Claire's account, November 2020, Instagram*

Moreover, it is especially interesting to think about Ali's and Claire's caring and nurturing approach to their houses and other objects in relation to their professional backgrounds as a former social worker (Ali) and a potential medical student (Claire), as discussed in chapter 5. This caring approach that views people, the world and objects as *things* that need to be respected, nurtured and preserved also supports Miller's (2008) suggestion that "usually the closer our relationships are with objects, the closer our relationships are with people" (p. 1). Telling in her interview about how she is fixing furniture, Ali says compassionately that she is trying to "save the things that are in the worst state":

> Because I can't bear that they might just get thrown in at the rubbish tip. […] I love the idea of thinking about who made this. Where did it come from? […] I think all of those questions I asked myself around the stories or my querying or questioning of those things, is because it gives that piece of furniture or that object some meaning. And I really like that. (Ali in an interview, May 2022)

This notion of focusing on mending what needs to be nurtured also appears in Alexander's (1977) pattern "Site Repair", where he suggests that "Buildings must always be built on those parts of the land which are in the worst condition, not the best" (p. 509). Calling to "consider the site and its buildings as a single living eco-system" (ibid., p. 511), Alexander argues that: "[w]e must treat every new act of building as an opportunity to mend some rent in the existing cloth; each act of building gives us a chance to make one of the ugliest and least healthy parts of the environment more healthy" (ibid., p. 510). As can be seen in Ali's queries, it appears as though the path to meaningful engagement with the world of *things*, including the *thing* that is the home, goes through *care*, interest, questioning and engagement.

### *7.4.1 Memories, imaginations and stories*

As discussed in chapter 3, Bachelard (1957/2014) notes that remembering past experiences of what happened in a house and imagining what could happen there in the future – makes the home an epicentre of meaning and "a privileged entity for a phenomenological study" (ibid. p. 25). This is driven by a somewhat obvious and yet still powerful realization that buildings, as a place and the context where human life is *gathered* and *lived*, have a different *life span* than people. Thus, while people usually live for a few decades, the buildings where they live usually predate them and will most likely succeed them after they perish. This makes homes a unique place in which the *horizontal temporal care structure* that Heidegger describes (Dreyfus, 1991: 244) becomes concretized in the material world of *things*.

Yet, while this is the way in which many people are experiencing their homes, making what is known to a person to be knowable by others is a phenomenological challenge. One way to pass on and communicate past memories or future imaginations is through stories, as seen in Ali's case. These stories could be told by various forms of media and communication (verbal, written, visual) or through the things that material objects tell us about human lives. In *home renovation diaries* on Instagram, these two ways of telling stories about human life in a specific house converge. Thus, for example, the name of Kate's account, "*My Old Pub*", refers directly to the house's history, dating to the 16th century and its original use as a public house. Wanting to get to know her house more intimately, Kate started to research its history and was able to discover it was at least 100 years older than she thought:

> I quite like the fact that it's an old pub because, to me, it just feels like people have been here and enjoyed their time here and had a relaxing time, and it's kind of very chilled out and laid back. And I love the idea that it's got so much history. (Kate in an interview, August 2022)

Knowing that her house was a pub for centuries until the 1970s, the one question that preoccupied Kate was: where was the bar? Yet, with the dearth of available documents and photos that would give her more details about that, Kate searched for traces of evidence in the materiality of her house:

> You're going to think I'm mad, but […] there's a beam which I think was where the bar was, […] there's one side that's really smooth and it feels like that's where people used to rest their hand and have a pint […], and I love that idea that different things have gone on here. (Kate in an interview, August 2022)

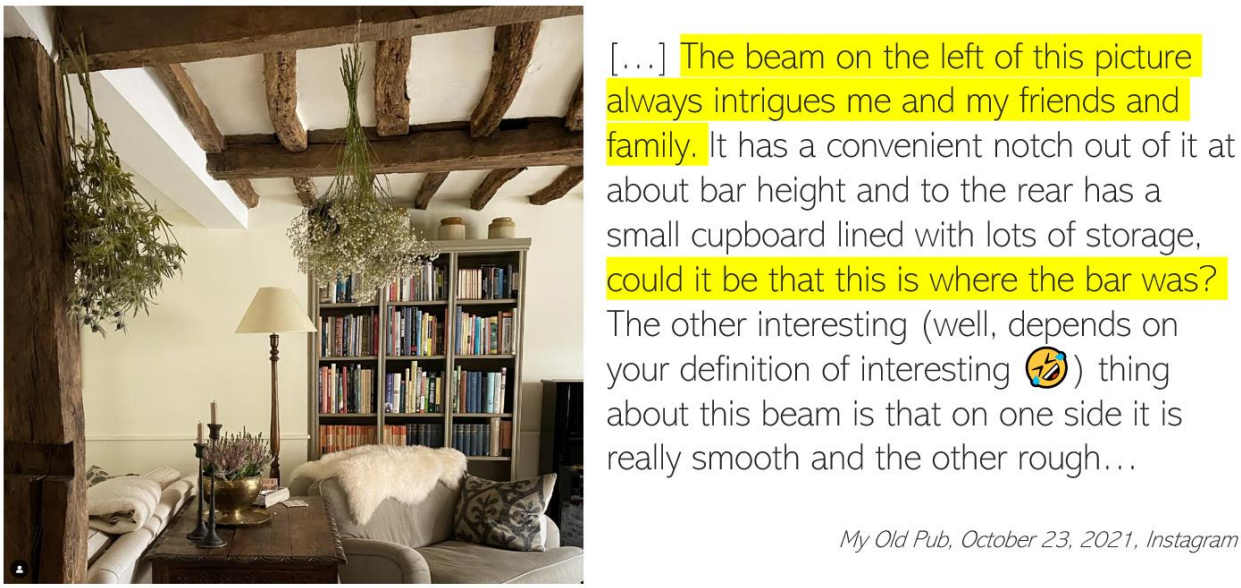



*Figure 80 Where was the bar? An edited post from Kate's account, 23 October 2021, Instagram*

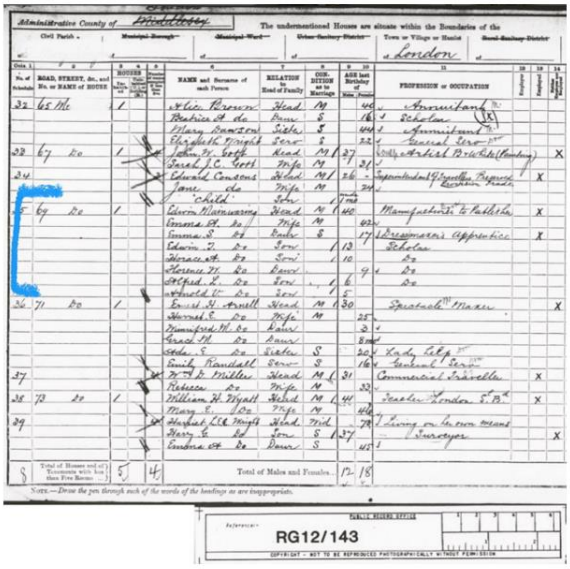
Like Kate, Leanne was also intrigued by the history of her house and the previous lives that were lived there. Thus, one of the first posts she shared on her *home renovation diary* on Instagram

was a page from the 1891 census describing the Mainwaring family, the first family that lived in the house after it had been built. However, as mentioned earlier, as houses move from owner to owner and dwellers change over the years, many parts of the stories of the life they held disappear. Hidden amongst bureaucratic documents and private information, it seems people are missing a significant part of the meaning that could be attached to *place* where one lives. But perhaps it is precisely the way in which media could be used as part of place creation activities that include the stories of a place/home, its creation process and its relationality and belonging to an environment, a time and a context of human life.

Indeed, the sleuth-like investigations by Kate and Leanne appear to reflect a broader trend among thousands of dwellers and homeowners in recent years seeking to uncover their house's history or the lives of previous occupants—making house histories "the new frontier of popular, participatory history" (Olusoga, 2020, p. 2). Explaining this fascination, Olusoga (2020) argues that:

> Those who set out to discover the histories of their homes report experiencing profound feelings of empathy for the people who came before them. But their encounters in the archives with people who long ago left this world are enormously amplified upon returning home with the thought that their hands gripped the same wooden banisters and pushed open the same doors. (pp. 3-4)

In her efforts to restore and mend her house and bring together its pieces into a harmonic whole, Leanne, like other *dwellers-creators* in this ethnography, was keen to restore original parts of the house as much as possible and at the same time to also alter it to become part of her family's life and to suit their needs. Deciding to restore two of the original fireplaces that had been ripped from their place by a previous owner, she put them back where they belonged. Doing this herself in a DIY renovation, she was immersing herself in the experience of re-creating her home with care for its past days, present uses and future plans.




A little history 😳 This is a page from the 1891 census. No. 69 first belonged to the Mainwaring family. Edwin, a book maker turned book seller, and Emma would eventually have 8 children: Emma, Edwin, Horace, Florence, Alfred, Arnold, Hilda and Edith (the last two born after this census). They lived here from when it was built somewhere between 1886 and 1890 until at least 1911. Later censuses haven't been released yet so we don't know much else except for who the last owners were

*Good Bones, November 20, 2020, Instagram*

*Figure 81 Who lived here in 1891? An edited post from Leanne's account, 20 November 2020, Instagram*

These rusty old fireplaces are original to the house. The previous owner had removed them and stored them in the basement, where we could just about see them behind piles of rubbish. They charged us an exorbitant amount of money to leave them behind (I don't want to talk about it), so now we have no choice but to try to fix them up and put them back into the bedrooms they came out of, right? 😬

*Good Bones, January 18, 2021, Instagram*

*Figure 82 Care and repair of the fireplaces. An edited post from Leanne's account, 18 January 2021, Instagram*


My mum is coming to visit 🥹 so I came up to put fresh sheets on the bed in the guest room that was, until a few months ago, our living room and will one day be Domino's room when the room she's currently in will become our en-suite bathroom (or so we say). The ever-evolving house.
It'll be my mum's first time in our house so I thought it'd be a nice touch to put that portrait of my teenaged dad she had stuck in a closet for years in here for her 😆

*Good Bones, February 10, 2022, Instagram*

*Figure 83 The ever-evolving house. An edited post from Leanne's account, 10 February 2022, Instagram*

In the renowned room with the restored fireplace, which is now infused with Leanne's *care* and *hands-on-touch* of her DIY works, the *building* (i.e., constant small changes driven by dwellers' needs and life circumstances) never stops. Documenting these changes on her *Instagram home renovation diary*, Leanne, like other *dwellers-creators*, provides a glimpse (figure 83) into how *personal relations* (mum is coming to visit), *memories* (a portrait of teenage dad), *future plans* (it will become Domino's room), and *daily life* (I put up fresh sheets on the bed) are continuously entangled with material objects that are in fact *things* that hold *meaning* in her *ever-evolving house*.

## 7.5 Conclusions: The story of caring for the home

In this last chapter of the ethnography, I suggest that *dwellers-creators*' active participation in the creation process of their homes should be understood as a mark of *something deeper*, which is the fact that they *care* about the *thing* that is their home. Drawing on Heidegger's concept of *care* as a *holistic temporal structure* and his notion of *things*, I focus on how memories and history, labour, touch, experiences, imaginations, hopes, and plans all intermingle in dwellers' experience together with the house's materiality and spatiality and in relation to others.

Considering the *care* structure of the home, two main observations emerge throughout *dwellers-creators*' experiences: firstly, the active caring engagement with the home over time results in close relations between the home and its dwellers and in a feeling of *nearness*. Secondly, the role of stories is important for an enhanced meaningful relation with the home and that *renovation diaries* and *home accounts* allow for the home story of both creation and inhabitation (*building and dwelling*) to be told over time, including different forms of media (e.g., photographs, floor plans, historical documents, texts, videos, etc.) and as part of an ongoing conversation with others. Thus, as the story of how a home fulfils its nature of "letting dwell" unfolds, dwellers' experience and perhaps also the experience of future dwellers become imbued with meaning.

*Chapter Eight*

# Conclusions: First, We Dwell. Then, We Build

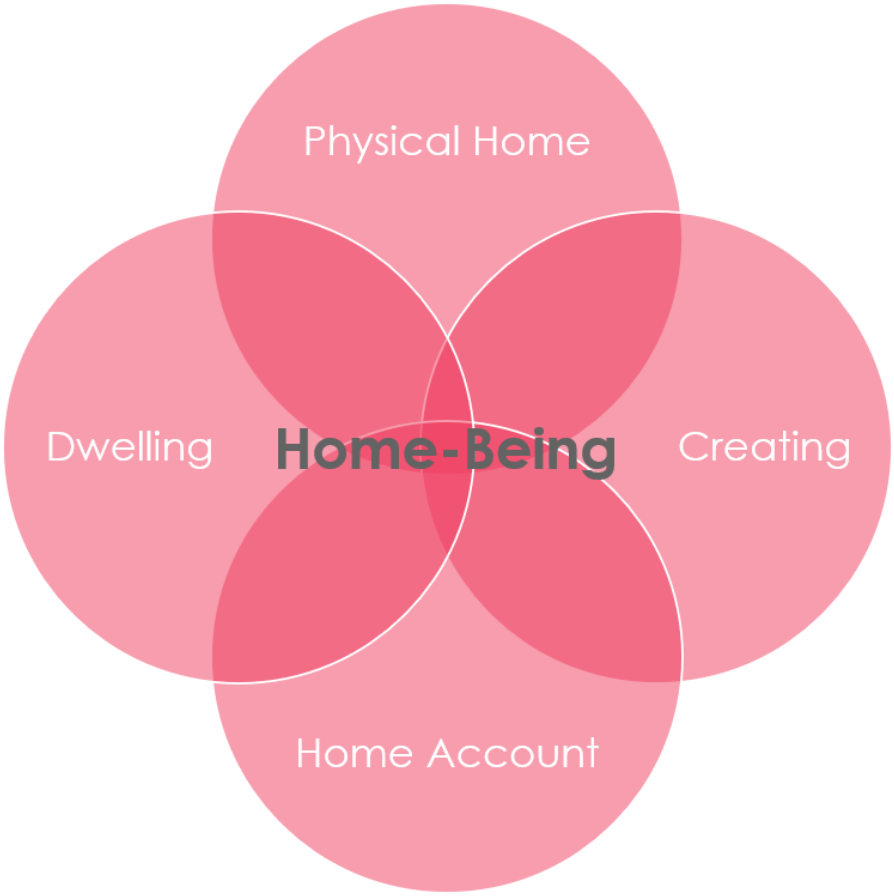



*Figure 84 Home-being as a double entanglement. Compiled by the author*

This thesis has explored the experience of home creation with social media as a double entanglement: both between dwellers' experiences of creating their *physical homes* and their experience of creating a *home account* on Instagram, as well as between their roles as the *creators* and the *dwellers* of these two places. By exploring these entanglements as *one* holistic experience of place creation *in*, *through* and *with* digital media, my aim was to trace, untangle and weave together conceptually the different relations in the experience of home creation in the context of Instagram *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* as part of the way in which people are *being-in-*

*the-world* in the digital age. Considering this holistic experience from an existential–phenomenological perspective, the guiding questions I set to explore were: what are the relations between the experience of *creating* one's home and the experience of *dwelling* in that home when using social media as part of this process? And how does the experience of home creation with social media relate to *dwellers-creators'* experience of *being-in-the-world* in the digital age?

In this concluding chapter, I explore the key findings from the phenomenological ethnography in relation to these questions and discuss how these findings contribute to the scholarship both within the discussion in media studies about the existential and phenomenological understanding of media–life entanglement in the digital age and the discussion about practices of creation with social media, as well as to the discussion about home, dwelling and participation in the context of architecture and the built environment. This is followed by a brief consideration of the limitations of this project and possible directions for future research and ends with some final thoughts on building and dwelling as an active engagement of caring *creation-in-the-world*.

## 8.1 Findings and contributions

At the onset, when starting this research, I intended to explore dwellers' participation in the *creation* process (home design and renovation) of their physical homes *with* and *through* different social media platforms. However, as this research began, I realized that rather than social media being used merely as a tool, the new practice of *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* on Instagram emerged (around the time when I started this PhD in 2017). This understanding shaped the focus of this thesis on the experience of home creation with social media in the context of *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* that have not yet been explored in academic research.

Through an exploration of the experiences of dwellers who participate in their home renovation and share it on Instagram, I found that this experience does not happen in a digital flow but is rather constitute of and happening in designated places that dwellers create on Instagram as part of this experience. As I discussed in chapter 5, *dwellers-creators* have opened a specific account to be the place where their experience of home creation in the physical world is being shared and discussed online. Another related finding that was the focus of my discussion in chapter 6 is that these *places* (*home accounts* and *renovation diaries*) are not isolated entities but are rather being

experienced as part of a *home renovation community* on Instagram that I conceptualized as a *relational environment*.

Building on the notion that dwellers are, in fact, creating two intimately related *places* as part of *one* lived experience, I focused on how this holistic experience of the creation of the home account and the physical house are *intermingled* and affect different aspects in dwellers' lives by considering this *relational* experience as *creation-in-the-world* of more-than-content, *in*, *with* and *through* media. By reclaiming the term creator from its prevalent use in recent years as a marketing fad and using a non-media-centric phenomenological approach, I explore how digital tools and social media are being used as part of the creation of something tangible in the world. In this focus, I aimed to broaden the discussion about influencers and creators on social media beyond the understanding of it as either a form of labour or as cultural production and to think of how creation with media is also entangled with other parts of people's lived experiences.

Considering dwellers' functioning as both the producers and the users (creators and inhabitants) of the *home* and the *home account*, this thesis found that in the context of the production of architecture, this creation is distinguished from conventional design projects that are confined to a specific time frame and result in a final artefact. Thus, dwellers' participation in the creation of their homes through *home renovation diaries* is characterized by a slow process of creation that unfolds over months and years, in different intensities, ranging from extreme DIY renovation through co-creation with professionals and up to gradual, ongoing small modification of the home. While these renovations often include a more intense phase of structural building, they are characterized by dwellers' meaningful involvement before and after that phase in dreaming and planning with media and in continuous, slow, evolving modification of the home after the renovation in relation to dwellers' lives. As appeared in the experience of *dwellers-creators* in this ethnography, this ongoing *creation-in-the-world* has a transformative potential to affect other areas in *dwellers-creators*' lives, such as their professional path.

While these experiences of creation may or may not cause dwellers to change their careers, they seem to all result in a sense of self-pride and a feeling of satisfaction of dwellers from the ability to shape their homes as they wish as well as their content from the house itself due to its compatibility with their daily lives and responsiveness to their needs. This ability to have a voice in the design and building process is enhanced and reinforced by seeing other *dwellers-creators*

doing similar things in similar contexts. This finding was important for an understanding that home creation with social media through *home renovation diaries* is indeed a *social practice* that is deeply affected by the activities of others in a home renovation community of practice and not a personal, individualistic experience.

Another issue that emerged in my analysis is the importance of considering the material and spatial context of the house that is being renovated. From the experiences of *dwellers-creators*, it appears as though inspiration and design ideas from social media were only beneficial when used with attention and consideration to a specific place and house. Thus, ideas that were suitable for one house become obsolete in another context, and the use of social media requires constant contextualization in relation to the specific time and place of each renovation.

My analysis in chapter 6 focused on considering how the experience of home creation with social media in the context of *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* does not happen in an undifferentiated *flow* but rather in *places* that are part of a *relational environment* and how these places and environment correspond and are in fact part of people's lives beyond the screen. Contributing to the discussion about the existential situation (e.g., Lagerkvist, 2017; Markham, 2020) of life *in* and *with* media and drawing on the ontological meaning of place (e.g., Casey, 1997; Malpas, 2006, 2018, 2021) and on the importance of the concept of place (e.g., Moores, 2012; Pink, 2012a) for understanding practices with digital media, I found that the *home account/place* and the *relational environment* on Instagram are far from being "virtual". In fact, the *home renovation community* of each *dweller-creator* reflects many social, economic and geographical markers in people's lives, physical environment and identities. Thus, the *home account* (through people's choices and actions together with algorithms) functions as a place that gathers people whom *dwellers-creators* would like to meet and who have shared interests and tastes.

This "gathering force" of the Instagram *home account/place* illustrates the role of the platform—and its algorithm—in shaping places and digital-physical environments. Instagram affords users the ability to share visual content in a space (i.e., the account) that is both *bounded* and *open*, familiar yet accessible, *known* and *knowable*, and available for others to follow and engage with *the dweller-creator* through comments, tags, and direct messages. In contrast, while Pinterest also hosts accounts where visual content is collected in boards, it does not foster a similar

sense of place. *Dwellers-creators* describe Pinterest as lacking accessible channels for social interaction. Moreover, Instagram encourages users to create original content displayed in chronological grids—akin to diary entries—alongside visual stories, whereas Pinterest is primarily used for curating content created by others. Through a platform-sensitive approach to social media affordances (Bucher and Helmond, 2018), it becomes clear how different platforms enable or constrain particular practices within the broader process of home creation.

Thus, while dwellers' participation in home creation has a long history predating the digital age, Instagram's specific affordances have enabled a new manifestation of this participatory practice through *home accounts* and *renovation diaries*. A key affordance for *dwellers-creators* is the ability to connect, learn, share inspiration and support, and exchange ideas, material objects, and practical information—instantaneously and visually—with a wide community of others undergoing similar experiences. In the past, such exchanges typically occurred among existing social contacts or with professionals, whether in person or through letters and diaries. By contrast, "the visibility and circulation patterns" (Humphreys, 2018, p. 118) enabled by Instagram mark a shift in both the practice of "media accounting" of home creation and the ways in which dwellers participate in home creation as part of a broader, networked community.

One surprising finding that stood out early in the interviews was that in contrast to prevailing scholarly discourse, *dwellers-creators* have described their experience of being part of an Instagram *home renovation community* as extremely positive. This finding should not be understood as contradicting or undermining research about the harm and danger that are inflicted in many cases as part of people's experience of using social media platforms, in particular among vulnerable groups such as children. Nonetheless, it does suggest that the widespread use of hermeneutics of suspicion in critical approaches would benefit by complementing a hermeneutics of trust that is open to hearing the variety of experiences people have with social media, including the more favourable views. Moreover, there is perhaps what to learn from these experiences on how to create more inhabitable environments in the digital age. Thus, possible explanations for the positivity of *dwellers-creators*' experiences in their home renovation communities included what participants view as a "value" that is being created and shared, as well as the focus on the creation process of something instead of on people's identities.

Of course, these creations of homes and the places that are the *home accounts* as part of a social practice and an environment, include relations and communication with others. Thus, to understand the activities and practices of *dwellers-creators*, I draw on Scannell's (2014) discussion on the *available communicative self*, including a consideration of how *dwellers-creators* mitigate between a desire to be open and authentic and the need for privacy and intimacy. In trying to navigate between these issues, one tactic that was used by *dwellers-creators* is to discuss the less photogenic aspects of life in a home through "stories" that can be seen as a more intimate space on Instagram than posts on the grid. Another way is in texts that are used to accompany photographs that continue to present the more representative state of the home. Moreover, as connections were formed through the openness of being an *available communicative self* in the known place – that is, the *home account* – more private and intimate routes of communication emerged through private messages and even face-to-face meetings in some cases. These findings could be used in thinking of how a digitally saturated world, similar to our built environment, can include places that allow people different levels of intimacy and visibility as a way that supports people's different desires at different times of life to connect, create, and protect.

Another interesting issue that emerged in the ethnography is the proactiveness in how *dwellers-creators* react to what they experienced as a constraint or something that they did not like in a platform, echoing the non-deterministic approach to people's engagement with media (e.g., Deuze, 2012, 2023; Baym, 2015; Jenkins, Ito and boyd, 2016). Thus, the feeling that Pinterest would not allow communication and personal interaction resulted in a move to Instagram, which would allow that. In the same way, having a private locked account on Instagram has also been experienced as restricting the ability to communicate and share a home renovation, and this has led to the opening of a public *home account.* Instagram's push towards video content also resulted in the adjustment of practices that include both resistance and adaptation. All these ways of coping and living in and with platforms and algorithms suggests that *dwellers-creators* do not feel powerless but are rather actively trying on their part to shape their experience, place and environment. These findings support the notion that platforms as environments (Bucher and Helmond, 2018) are connected and extend beyond the platform itself to other parts of the digital world, as well as to the broader context of people's *being-in-the-world*. Thus, while there seem to be a potential correlation between the timing of major occurrences both in Instagram (i.e., the change to an algorithmic feed

in 2016) and in the world (i.e., COVID-19 in 2019-2020) and the spreading of *home renovation diaries*, further empirical research is needed to establish a connection between these events.

An important focus of this thesis was on exploring the different ways the material and the digital are entangled with one another. Thus, my analysis showed specific examples of how the physical homes and the photographs from *home accounts* continuously shape each other and move between the palpable and the virtual spheres and between being content and materialization and vice versa. Examples of that can be seen in Kate's experience of how she realized that people are copying her house and in the direct influence between Martina's pantry to Leanne's pantry and from Leanne's laundry room to Bianca's laundry room. This strong influence of images of homes from social media of the shaping and the creation of physical homes, interiors and architecture raises questions as to what happens when the inspiration does not come from an inhabitable house but rather from images of houses which no one really dwells-in such as AI-generated images. Nonetheless, in contrast to ghost houses of AI as well as to photographs of real material houses that are floating in the digital flow without their contextualization in relation to the lives of the dwellers' who live in them – this research showed how *dwellers-creators*' *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* can be seen as an alternative that reveals the relation between home creation and inhabitation by focusing on the *processual*, *relational* and *contextual* aspects of dwellers' experience of *building and dwelling*.

In chapter 7, by considering the *home* as a *thing* in the Heideggerian (1950/1971c) sense that *dwellers-creators* care-for, the attentiveness of dwellers towards the home through its creation appeared as having a significant influence on their sense of *nearness* to their homes, as well as on the meaning that was attached to it. Thus, the actual participation, the hands-on touch and the ongoing involvement all contributed to this feeling of dwelling and *nearness* to the house and others. The *care* imbued into the house (as well as to other material objects) through active involvement and labour was seen as part of the care structure that made objects or places into things that hold meaning for people. Thus, the idea that previous dwellers cared for a house contributes to dwellers' current sense of dwelling, as well as the desire to pass on this *care* through involvement with the material world as part of dreaming of how the house could be used by its dwellers in the near and far future.

In my analysis, I found that the way in which the care structure of a house is revealed relates to stories that can be passed through the materiality of the house as well as thought verbal, written or visual narratives. My conclusion from this is that, while previous forms of media such as books, diaries, letters and blogs were used to document and share stories of home creation and inhabitation, Instagram *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* expand this tradition by building on digital affordances such as fast distribution, real time communication and multimedia forms of content to create, document and share the story of the *care* that went into the creation and the inhabitation (building and dwelling) of a house and its ability to fulfil its nature of "letting dwell". Through these stories, both the experience of current dwellers and perhaps the experience of future dwellers become more meaningful by making people and homes closer to one another.

To conclude, in exploring the experience of home creation with social media in the context of *home accounts* and *renovation diaries*, I have found that an active caring engagement of dwellers in the creation process of their homes increases their sense of dwelling in the home both in terms of meaning that is achieved through their participation in the creation of the house and the house's story, as well as in terms of the satisfaction that they have from the responsiveness and the compatibility between the home, their desires, needs and daily life. This experience of the double creation of the home and the *home account* as the experience of *creation-in-the-world* also seems connected and affecting *dwellers-creators* broader existential lived experience in the world, including their "sense of cohesion, meaning, direction, purpose, ethics, grounding, continuity, and community", that Lagerkvist (2017, p. 102) view as part of existential security in the digital age. By suggesting in this thesis a reading of Heidegger's essay *Building Dwelling Thinking* (1951/1971b) from a participatory lens in relation to the experience of home creation with social media, I found that the practice of *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* suggest how practices of creation with media, and in particular place creation, can contribute to people's sense of dwelling and *nearness* to their homes and to others.

## 8.2 Limitations and further research

This research explored the practice of home creation with social media in relation to people's broader lived experience and as part of the existential situation of life in the digital age. While I hope that I could shed light on the richness and complexity of these experiences of *creation* and

*inhabitation*, I acknowledge that these experiences are also part of broader power structures, forces and constrains that affect and shape people's lives. And it is only a small part of people's lived experience, if any, that can be captured in such a project.

Moreover, since *home accounts* and *renovation diaries* are relatively new practices, it is hard to know how these places will unfold over a longer period. If learning anything from how places in our digital environment have changed in the past decade, as seem in my discussion about the rise and fall of places, it is reasonable to assume that this specific manifestation of the practice of home creation with social media will also morph and change its shape, perhaps by a development of more intimate places where the ongoing slow evolution of the home could be documented and shared with specific people.

Nonetheless, while this thesis includes only a glimpse into the vast and multifaceted experience of home creation with social media, it also relates to an even broader issue of creation in the digital age. In this context, Heidegger's (1950/1971c) concern that the shrinking of distance in the modern age (with flights, cars, radio and television) will result in a dearth of *nearness* and *dwelling* raises the question of what will happen in the coming years as many *processes of creation* of all sorts are changed, expedited and replaced by artificial intelligence technologies. It is still too early to know how this will affect the creation process of complicated material things like buildings and houses. Nonetheless, the question of the meaning of people's participation in practices of creation is expected to become even more potent. At the heart of this discussion is the question – why are people creating things in the first place? Is it because they want to have the end result, the artefact? (in this case, would it not be easier to buy it or ask an AI to make it for you?). Or do people create things because this is part of who we are as humans and how we dwell in the world?

I believe these questions will be the focus of research in the coming years regarding the changing ways things are being created in our digital age. And perhaps this discussion on the relation between *building and dwelling* and the experience of *creation-in-the-world* could contribute to thinking of these issues both regarding the creation and inhabitation of our homes, as well as in the broader context of creation and participation.

## 8.3 Epilogue: *Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build*

For the concluding discussion of this thesis, I would like to return to the end of *Building Dwelling Thinking*, where Heidegger (1951/1971b) asks, "What is the state of dwelling in our precarious age?" (p. 158) and to ask how *building and dwelling* with social media could affect the state of dwelling in our digital age. Heidegger (1951/1971b) answers that the "plight of dwelling does not lie merely in a lack of houses" (ibid. p. 159), but it is rather a continuous everlasting situation that predates modernity and will accede it. Thus, Heidegger argues that:

> The real dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they *must ever learn to dwell*. […] Yet as soon as man *gives thought* to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer. Rightly considered and kept well in mind, it is the sole summons that *calls* mortals into their dwelling.
>
> But how else can mortals answer this summons than by trying on *their* part, on their own, to bring dwelling to the fullness of its nature? This they accomplish when they build out of dwelling, and think for the sake of dwelling. (Heidegger, 1951/1971b, p. 159, *italics in the original*)

What Heidegger is telling us here is that as humans, our own existence is an *issue* for us. The search for *home* and *dwelling* is inherent to our *being-in-the-world*, and therefore, it is something that we *care*[65] about and constantly pursue, including in our current digital age. According to Heidegger (1951/1971b): "Dwelling […] is *the basic character* of Being in keeping with which mortals exist" (ibid. p. 158, *italics in the original*), and "we do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell, that is, because we are *dwellers*" (p. 146, *italics in the original*). Malpas (2021) argues that the ambiguity of whether dwelling is inevitable or a possibility is because "dwelling, *Wohnen*, does not name *one* mode of being as opposed to *another*, but instead refers to the way human being, in an unqualified sense, is 'in' the world" (p. 42, *italics in the original*).

[65] Malpas (2006) explains that care is "the name Heidegger gives to the structure of being-in-the-world understood as unified through the idea of being-there as that very being whose being matters to it – about which it cares" (p. 99).

Moreover, these different modes include an ongoing effort of people to inhabit and feel at home, but also instances in which humans "fail to dwell" (ibid.). Returning to Heidegger's (1951/1971b) initial question, "What is it to dwell?" (p. 143), Malpas (2021) argues that dwelling for Heidegger is "that everyday mode of living in the world in which one also finds a 'home' in the world, in which one attends to the world and to one's place in it" (p. 183). But what is this attendance to the world? As I discuss in chapter 7, this relates to *care*[66] since one attends to what one *cares* about. Understood in this way, *dwelling* is in fact a *caring stance* towards the world, and only when we truly care can we dwell. For Heidegger (1951/1971b): "*The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving*" (p. 147, *italics in the original)*, and as he explains: "[t]o spare and preserve means: to take under our care" (ibid., p. 149), but not in a limiting or authoritative manner, but rather "[r]eal sparing is something *positive* and takes place when we leave something beforehand in its own nature" (ibid., p. 147, *italics in the original*). Or as Malpas (2006) explains "[t]o spare and to preserve is to 'let be', but not through a withdrawal so much as a certain mode of engagement" (p. 271), that is *building*. Furthermore, he contends: "Building is the activity that produces, that brings things forth, either through cultivation or through construction" (ibid., p. 271).

Thus, as I suggest in this thesis, this *active, caring attendance* and *engagement* or *building* can also be understood as *participation*, and that means being present, taking an active part, dealing with things, engaging with the world, having a moral stance, to make and to create while respecting the world, and others by letting them be. Thus, *dwelling* as *care* precedes building because *first*, we *dwell* (care), and only *after* that we *build* (create). But as we built out of care, we already dwell since "to build is in itself already to dwell" (Heidegger, 1951/1971b, p. 144). Thus, for people to answer the existential summon to find a sense of *dwelling* in Heidegger's precarious era or our digital age – people should care and be engaged in the creation and the shaping of their world: "*Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build*" (Heidegger, 1951/1971b, p. 157). Repeating this same sentence twice (also in p. 158), Heidegger indicates that it is central to his

[66] Notably the notion of care (*Sorge*) is absent from recent discussions about dwelling in the context of architecture (e.g., Malpas, 2021; Picon, 2023). While care is being a central issue in *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1927/2019. See also Dreyfus (1991) and Malpas (2006)), it is often less discussed in relation to Heidegger's *Building Dwelling Thinking* (Heidegger, 1951/1971b). A brief mention of the relation between care and dwelling can be seen in Seamon's (1979b) earlier work where he writes: "According to Heidegger, dwelling involves care and concern for the environment, the people, and the community in which one chooses to live" (p. 47).

argument. Nevertheless, what is important is that although we are dwellers, there is still a question of "if we are capable of dwelling" and, as a result, if we are capable of building. And as discussed throughout this thesis, this question depends on what we care about and value and how we then participate in creating our world and our homes accordingly.

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# Appendix 1: Templates of recruitment messages

Recruitment message n.1 – direct message to a specific user and a more general message asking potential participants to contact me

*Hello,*

*I am a PhD student at the University of Westminster, London, currently researching the experience of dwellers who are using visual social platforms (i.e., Pinterest, Instagram) as part of their home design process.*

*If you are in the process of home renovation (about to start one soon; in the middle of a renovation or just finished renovating lately) and you are using / were using visual social platforms to help you in this process, I would be grateful to hear about your experience. If you are interested in participating in my research, please send me a message and I will be in touch with more details.*

*My email is: o.yeger@my.westminster.ac.uk*

*All best wishes,*

*Ofer Yeger*

Follow-up message n. 2

*Dear …*

*Thank you so much for your message and your interest in participating in my research. As mentioned in the message I posted on Facebook, I would be grateful to learn more about your home design experience.*

*I am attaching a short explanation about my PhD research that is conducted at the Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI), University of Westminster, London. Please read it carefully before you decide whether you would like to participate.*

*If you decide to join the research, you will be asked to share images of your home and images that you found on social platforms, to fill out a short questionnaire, and to participate in one or two online video interview/s that will take 1–2 hours each.*

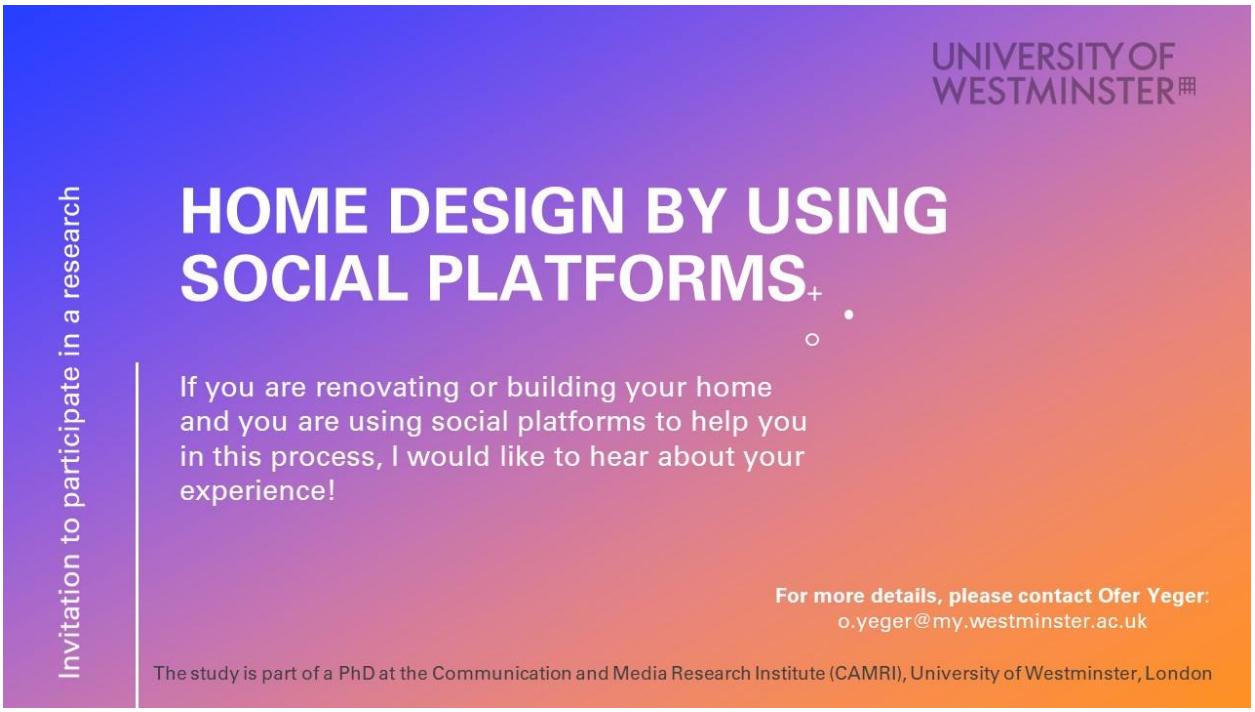
*I would be very happy to answer any question you might have. If you decide to participate in my research, please fill out and sign the consent form (also attached to this email).*

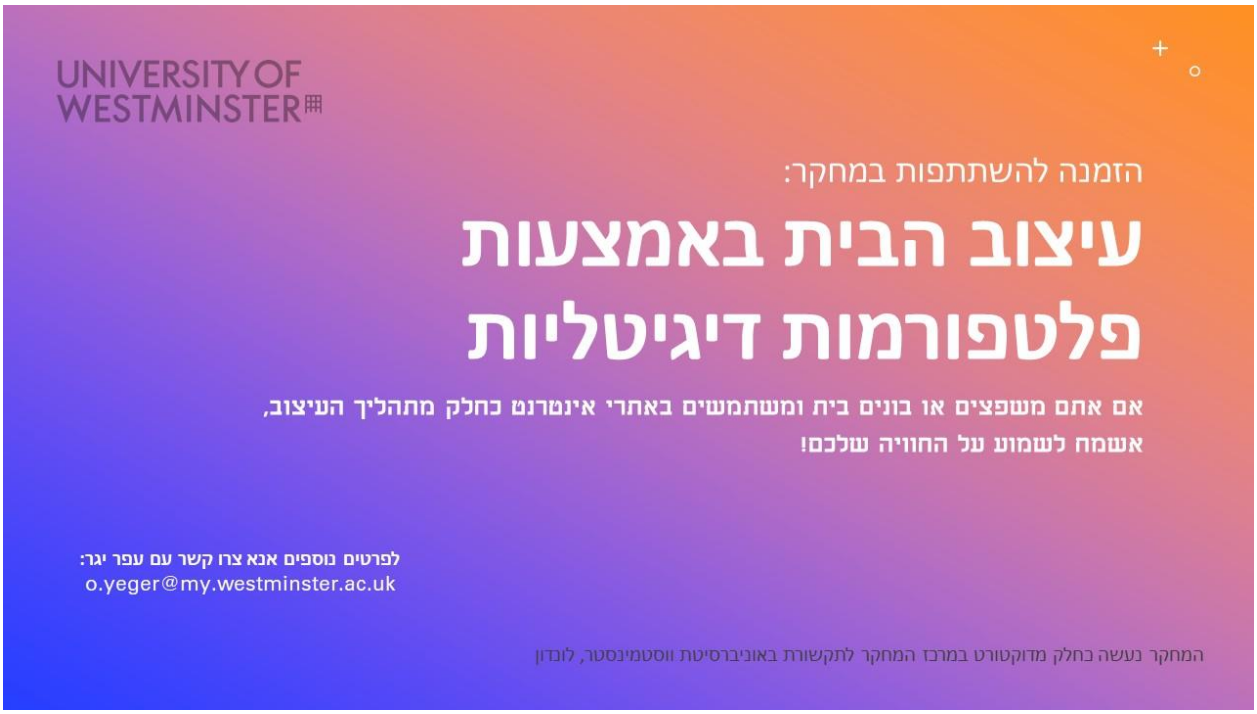
*I will be in touch after you return the signed consent form to discuss the next steps.*

*All best wishes,*

*Ofer*

Appendix 2: Invitation to participate in the research English/Hebrew



# Appendix 3: Facebook home design groups for participant recruitment

Facebook open group: Home Decor & Interior Design Ideas (348k members March 2022)
https://www.facebook.com/groups/238789684291852/

UK//English
Facebook closed group: Organise my UK home (122k members November 2021)
https://www.facebook.com/groups/250602448718002/

Facebook closed group: Home Sweet Home North and Central London, Middx, Hertfordshire (15.1k members November 2021)
https://www.facebook.com/groups/362257347119560/

Facebook closed group: Decorate your home on a budget (134.5k members November 2021)
https://www.facebook.com/groups/584166461682715

Facebook closed group: Little Black Book of Interiors (7.7k members November 2021)
https://www.facebook.com/groups/littleblackbookofinteriors/

Israel/Hebrew
Facebook closed group: Beautiful homes for inspiration - בתים יפים להשראה (140.7k members November 2021)
https://www.facebook.com/groups/1056207131212008/

Facebook closed group: Home design, ideas, tips, and consultation - עיצוב הבית, רעיונות, טיפים וייעוץ (106.7k members November 2021)
https://www.facebook.com/groups/1318902364786686/

Facebook closed group: Crazy about interior design - משוגעים על עיצוב פנים (165.9k members November 2021)
https://www.facebook.com/groups/901176079939484/

Facebook closed group: Crazy about Nordic design - משוגעים על עיצוב נורדי (57.2k members November 2021)
https://www.facebook.com/groups/590692554472250/

# Appendix 4: Research participant information sheet

UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

**June 2022**

Research Participants Information Sheet:

## Bring it home: an exploration of dwellers' home design experience while using social platforms

**Ofer Yeger, School of Media and Communication**
**University of Westminster, London**

Thank you for taking the time to learn about my research and considering participating in it. My name is Ofer Yeger and I am a PhD student at the University of Westminster, London. The following document outlines the aims of my research, and a description of what it means for you to take part in this study, so you can decide whether you want to participate.

**What is this research about?**
This study is part of my PhD research at the University of Westminster, London. The purpose of my research is to explore the experiences of people who are using social platforms (i.e., Pinterest, Instagram etc.) as part of their home design process.

**Who can participate in this study?**
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you are over 18 and are planning/undergoing/or recently finished a renovation project in your home, and you are/were using social platforms as part of your design process – you are welcome to participate.

**What does participate in this research mean for you?**
Participating in this research means sharing with me your experience of living in your home and designing your home with the help of social platforms. All the correspondence between us will be via email or digital messages and online video interviews (no face-to-face meetings).
If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. Then, I will ask to schedule a video interview that will take approximately 45-90 minutes. If necessary, I may also ask to schedule a follow up interview.

**How will your information be used?**
The verbal and visual information you will provide for this study will be used only for the purpose of my research. It will be included in my thesis and published as part of my PhD dissertation and in any other publication of my study's findings.

**Will the information in this study be anonymised?**

**OFER YEGER // UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER // EMAIL: O.YEGER@MY.WESTMINSTER.AC.UK**

UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

**June 2022**

No. As a participant in this study you agree that your experiences are discussed under your real name or by using a pseudonym. In both cases, the information you provide will not be anonymised and your identity might be revealed based on your images.

**Can I ask to view the information I have provided for the study?**
Yes. This study allows participants to access their data at different stages of the project to comment and contribute their views.

**What are the benefits of participation in this study?**
Your participation in this study will contribute to a better understanding of people's experiences in their homes and the process of designing their homes by using social platforms. For you, as someone who is undergoing such design process, it might be helpful to reflect on this process and perhaps discover new insights that will help you in your own design process.

**What might be the disadvantages of participation in this study?**
Participating in this research means having some elements of your private life (I.e., photos of your home and your home design experience) shared publicly. It is important that you and other members of your household feel comfortable with that. To ensure that you feel confident to participate, you can decide which questions you want to answer, and you will also have the option to access the information about you that is included in the research.

**Withdrawing from the study**
You can choose to opt out of the study at any point (up until the final stages before publication), for any reason or without providing a reason. Upon withdrawing from the research, you can also request to remove from the research any information you have provided for the study up to that point.

**Contact details for further questions**
Ofer Yeger
PhD student at University of Westminster, London
Email: O.YEGER@MY.WESTMINSTER.AC.UK
Phone: [redacted]

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research study.

# Appendix 5: Research participant consent form

UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

Research Participants Consent Form:

## Bring it home: an exploration of dwellers' home design experience while using social platforms

**Ofer Yeger, School of Media and Communication**
**University of Westminster, London**

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and asked the researcher any question you may have regarding this study.

**PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY IS VOLUNTARY**

| | |
|---|---|
| I have read and understood the study information sheet dated 06/2022. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. | YES / NO |
| I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and that I can withdraw from the study at any time up until one month before the submission of this study (or parts of it) for publication, without having to give a reason. Withdrawing from the study should be done by sending the researcher a written message and receiving a confirmation. | YES / NO |
| I agree to the interview/s being video recorded. | YES / NO |
| I understand that the information I provide will be used for Ofer Yeger's PhD dissertation and any other research publication and that **the information will NOT be anonymised, and my identity could be recognized.** | YES / NO |
| I agree that my real name can be used for quotes and throughout research outputs. | YES / NO |
| I agree to use pseudonym for my quotes and in all research outputs. | YES / NO |
| I agree to the use and the publication of any visuals, photographs, or other materials that I have provided directly to the researcher. | YES / NO |
| I agree that relevant information and photos from my social media accounts will be used and published as part of this research. | YES / NO |
| I give permission for the (non-anonymised) information I provide to be deposited in a data archive so that it may be used for future research. | YES / NO |

**OFER YEGER // UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER // EMAIL:** O.YEGER@MY.WESTMINSTER.AC.UK

UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

**Signatures**

| Name of participant [IN CAPITALS] | Signature | Date |
|---|---|---|
| Name of researcher [IN CAPITALS] | Signature | Date |

Please retain a copy of this consent form.

**Contact details for further information**

Ofer Yeger
PhD student at University of Westminster, London
Email: O.YEGER@MY.WESTMINSTER.AC.UK
Phone: [redacted]