

# 5

## Methods for researching homes

In the previous chapters we have discussed a series of frames through which we might research, understand and design for homes. Our understandings have been based on in-depth research with participants in their homes, developed through research methods developed across a range of projects, which are always fine-tuned, honed and redesigned for new projects. Methods, as emphasized elsewhere (Pink and Leder Mackley 2012), are not made to be taken 'off the peg', and employed as they are. Therefore, in this chapter, we do not describe set templates for methods that can be used over again. Rather we present a series of design and ethnography research methods that have been engaged to research the home both in our own projects and in those of other researchers, describing the ways that they are effective and the types of knowledge and ways of knowing they can generate. These range between conventional interviewing methods, researcher and participant collaborations, video ethnography methods, self-reporting methods such as diaries, cultural probe methods and self-video recording. The discussion of methods will reflect back on the themes developed in the earlier chapters to discuss the use of these methods in the context of research and intervention related to the *temporalities, environments and activities and movement* of home.

### Researching everyday life

One of the core issues related to researching and designing for homes and for the people who inhabit them is that the home is a site of everyday life.

This means that it shares all of the challenges and opportunities that are associated with everyday life research, as well as those that are specific to how life plays out in homes. In this section we briefly provide context for the methods discussed below through a discussion of the nature of everyday life as a research site and then in the next section focus in more closely on the home.

Everyday life is not difficult to encounter, it happens ongoingly around us, in an unstoppable flow of events and processes and things of different affordances and properties, which continually configure and reconfigure along the way. This is one of the aspects of everyday life that make it most fascinating, while also being one of its characteristics that has most confounded researchers in seeking to define, 'capture' or document it. This has in the past proved a perennial problem for cultural studies researchers who have grappled with the problematic of disrupting the flow of everyday life in order to document or research it (see Pink 2012 for a discussion of this), for sociologists who have tended to divide everyday life into practices as a manageable research unit (e.g. Shove et al. 2007) or for non-representational scholars who have sought a number of ways in which to co-immerse scholarship and the everyday beyond conventional academic formats such as narrative first-person experience writing. These questions are also relevant for ethnographic and design disciplines; however, in the case of the approach we have advocated in this book, the bringing together of ethnographic and design approaches with a future orientation towards change and intervention, a new perspective comes to the fore. This agenda is already at the core of this book in the three themes that we have pursued – that is temporality, environment and activity. Each of these themes has at its core a concept of movement, in the form of movement through time, **the idea that environments are constituted through the continual movement of the things and processes that constitute and reconstitute their ongoingly changing configurations, and the notion of human activity encompassing the ongoing movement of people, and the things that assemble with them, through temporalities and places.**

The implication of this understanding that the everyday is part of a world in movement is that we need to engage research and design methods that equally account for this. That is, **methods that account for how our participants move, and that move with our participants and the things and processes that they become co-implicated with.** The methods outlined below account for this point as they engage with the idea that this process of moving forward in the world is both something that we need to appreciate when researching what people do and how they feel in their homes, and when accounting for how they will move on into their futures *with* design interventions or processes.

## Researching in homes

Researchers working in the home have long since recognized that this is a rather special research site. It is a site of incredible interest for several reasons: because it is precisely where people live out the mundane, unremarkable (Tolmie et al. 2002), usually hidden and fundamentally important element of their everyday lives – a site that is ongoingly changing, in the form of the home as ‘project’ (Pink 2004) as humans modify it and make it as they go along, and also as a site of material change, decay or growth over time; the home is also a site where the ubiquity of media in everyday life has long since been studied. All of these and other research and design interests and areas that intersect with the home make research encounters in the home frequent. As a research site, however, other people’s homes are often uncertain places. This indeed is the case not only for researchers but for others who need to go to work in other people’s homes – like social workers (Ferguson 2009, 2010), domestic workers (Law 2001; Pratt 1999; Smith 2011), community nurses and other health workers and logistics delivery workers (Pink et al. 2015). This means that doing design ethnographies in homes carries with it a series of issues and possibilities that are particular to the type of research site it presents us with.

The home is an intimate context, it is private and it is where private conversations and activities are played out (Miller 2001; Pink 2004). Being in someone’s home with them in a research relationship or conversation can take on something of this intimacy – that is, the atmosphere of home can help to generate a sense of intimacy, confidentiality and trust. In this sense it provides a powerful way in which to engage with otherwise hidden aspects of life in a place which continues to be private. Indeed as researchers, when we work with people in their homes, we need to build strong and genuine networks of trust with them. As researchers we are also responsible for creating a connection between the private worlds we encounter and the lives participants in research experience in them, and public domains of academic and more accessible or popular publications (like the websites and videos associated with this book). This raises ethical issues, and also issues around collaboration and participation, whereby we argue that it is beneficial to go beyond a research relationship with participants that is simply transactional. That is, good design ethnography research involves more than simply going into someone’s home, doing research with them there, taking away video or audio recordings, notes or photos and then using these for an analysis and publication. Instead we call for a more deeply moral and ongoing relationship with research participants, whereby when possible, they are given the choice of seeing images or text about themselves if they wish before it is made public and to have a power of veto over the images of them that are ultimately

released into a public domain. This ethical process was developed in the LEEDR project and also used by Pink and Astari in the making of the *Laundry Lives* film. LEEDR participants approved all of the video clips of them that were put online in the Energy and Digital Living website, and the *Laundry Lives* key participants viewed the film and approved it before its first public screening. We do not develop an extensive specific discussion of visual research ethics in relation to the home in this book, since there are many adequate discussions of visual ethics elsewhere (see Pink 2013 for a summary, and see <http://vrc.org.au/guidelines-for-ethical-visual-research-methods> for a useful guide to visual research ethics). However, we do note that using visual research methods in the home is a good example of how research often crosses the boundaries that people usually construct and respect between the public and private in everyday life. Therefore it becomes essential that researchers should seek to acknowledge and navigate this throughout the whole process of research, insight generation, any sharing and publication of visual materials.

Another factor to keep in mind when doing research in other people's homes refers to researcher safety. Again these considerations apply to anyone who works in homes. We may know little about the social, material or technological environments of homes before we enter into them as researchers. While formal researcher safety protocols have not tended to be part of traditional anthropological ethnography in the past, for a number of practical reasons, as well as because the trust through which the ethical relationships discussed above tend to be forged has often also been associated with the well-being of the researcher. However, such systems have developed in other research contexts, and for a good number of institutional as well as practical and sensible reasons safety protocols can play an important and useful role in ethnographic research process, often in the form of formalized processes of checking up on researcher whereabouts and checking in before and after research encounters. Across our projects we have developed various protocols to deal with this. For instance in Sarah Pink's collaborative research with Jennie Morgan and Andrew Dainty, Jennie spent some time accompanying community health workers and logistics workers on home visits and deliveries. While this research mainly showed up the ways in which these workers dealt with their own safety in such situations, as described elsewhere, it was also illustrative relating to the ways that Jennie needed to navigate the fact that she was doing (field)work in those same homes (Pink et al. 2015). In that example the researcher was already accompanied because she was doing research with the workers rather than the householders. In earlier work, in ways typical of anthropological ethnographic fieldwork it simply did not occur to the researcher that she needed to take any particular precautions, other than ensuring that someone usually knew she had gone to do such fieldwork (see for example Pink 2004). However, now that researcher safety issues are increasingly recognized, it is correspondingly more

common for ethnographers to visit homes in pairs or to have a safety procedure in place. For instance during the video ethnography research that led to *Laundry Lives* (Pink and Astari 2015), an anthropologist and filmmaker visited homes in Indonesia together. For the LEEDR project home visits, researchers always visited in pairs during the first stage of visits (the Getting to Know You visits discussed below) and for the subsequent video ethnography visits either made in pairs or used a structured safety protocol. In this project a researcher safety protocol was useful as a safety feature at the beginning of the project when the participants and researchers were unknown to each other. However as we learned, such protocols should also be flexible so that they can be reshaped over time in relation to changing fieldwork relationships, and as collaborative arrangements and friendships between participants and ethnographers emerge.

When doing interdisciplinary research we also need to consider how the home might be considered and experienced as a different kind of research site for researchers from different disciplines. We have found, that in our own experiences of collaboration, social scientists and design researchers have had similar sensitivities in relating to the home as a lived environment. In contrast, designers working in our team have found that researchers working in more technical disciplines are more likely to view it as a lab. For example, design researchers have found themselves in situations of needing to champion the aesthetic dimensions of items of research equipment that researchers from technical disciplines need to install in homes. However there are also different approaches to researching in homes within design research. For example in some fields of design (and in anthropology) there are concerns about giving participants things to do that disrupt normal everyday life, such as the use of extensive diary studies alongside technical studies. In some design traditions, which stand outside the co-design approach that we advocate in this book, researchers seek to study people in the home as discretely as possible (e.g. the HCI researchers Crabtree and Rodden (2004b) describe the discrete installation of video cameras within sixteen family homes in order to understand the routines of home but not disrupt the 'business of everyday life'). In contrast, forms of participation and reflection are core to the methods we outline here. This is a key common ground between third paradigm approaches within HCI research (Harrison et al. 2007; Pink et al. 2013) and the sensory ethnography approach developed by Pink (2015), both of which take a broadly phenomenological perspective.

During our discussions of methods in the following sections, wherever relevant, we highlight these overlaps as well as contrasts between design and ethnographic methods. Indeed when undertaking interdisciplinary work, it is important to create correspondences between different approaches but not to assume that superficial similarities necessarily mean similar conceptualizations or commitments. We do not generalize about differences here, since they often

emerge in the *doing* of research and analysis, given that as we have noted methods evolve and emerge on a project-by-project basis. However, a recent research experiment highlights how and where superficial similarities and possible differences between ethnographic anthropology and design research processes can emerge. Sarah Pink, Yoko Akama and participants found through a two-day co-exploration of ideas of and experiences of uncertainty between ethnographers, designers and artists in Melbourne, Australia, in 2014, that it was possible to define the different ways that uncertainty is located in the practice of ethnographers and designers and how different ways of approaching and knowing about the world can both come up against each other, and conversely sometimes be felt to be coherent. In such messy research and intervention contexts, it was argued that a core methodological aim might be to seek to embrace uncertainty in ways that encompass the needs and interests of both ethnographers and designers, as a mode through which to work together (Pink et al. 2015). Disciplinary differences will always emerge in new forms in ways that are project specific. In Chapter 1 we have discussed some of the more systematic analyses of this, which compare disciplines. The *Un/Certainty* iBook (Pink, Akama and participants 2015) discusses this in relation to the commentaries of researchers and designers, through statements, video clips and analysis, and offers readers a means through which to reflect on how such issues might arise and be treated in specific projects.

## Using short-term and intensive ethnographic and design research methods

The research methods that we discuss here have in common that they are all based on **relatively short-term encounters with research participants**, which might happen only once or twice. In some cases these have been part of a longer-term research process in which participants have been involved in a series of different activities over a period of four years. In other cases they have been developed within considerably shorter-term projects, but in which researchers have still stayed in contact with participants over a period of time after the initial research encounter itself. However, there are other reasons why short-term ethnographic methods are needed, for instance in order to fit with the timescales of applied research agendas and the deadlines of the organizations and other stakeholders that we might collaborate or partner with.

**Research undertaken in other people's homes tends to be short term for various reasons:** it is difficult to spend extended periods of time in homes – unless living there as a house guest, which constitutes a rather different research relationship that is quite typical of long-term anthropological research.

However even if one was to live as a house guest for a period of several months, while doing research about or in homes, it would be impossible to undertake research in more than very few homes during even a long period of fieldwork of 12 months. Where project timescales are much shorter, this would be impossible.

The methods we discuss were also played out in different types of relationship with households. Sometimes they have involved working with the same set of households, using several different methods over a four-year period, or a smaller set of methods during this period. In other cases only one or two of the methods have been used, and the amount of contact we have been able to have with participants during the whole research process has been limited to one or two meetings. The methods discussed are generically speaking participatory methods, but some include researcher-led videos, researcher-led creative activities and then more participant-led activities, such as a range of self-reporting methods.

## Using interview methods in homes

Conventional interviewing methods have long since been the mainstay of qualitative research in the social sciences and humanities. There is a wide literature on this topic, which provides a good source of advice and reflection on the types of interviews that might be undertaken, their theoretical underpinnings and practical methods (Seale 1998; Skinner 2012; Oakley 2000; Rapley 2004; Sherman Heyl 2001; O'Reilly 2005; Pink 2015). Although interviews are limited in terms of the types of embodied, sensory and atmospheric experiences, memories, imaginaries and aspirations that they might reveal or imply when compared with other more embodied and performative methods (see below), they do offer focused ways in which to gain verbal accounts, narratives and reflexive understandings of participants' everyday lives and worlds. Much of everyday communication is verbal and thus many of the ways in which such aspects of life might be communicated in a research encounter are likewise verbal.

However, we situate a design ethnography approach to interviewing differently to these more conventional renderings of the interview. In the approach developed here, the interview has some of the characteristics associated with conventional interviews, such as its intimacy and its development as a kind of 'conversation' (Oakley 2000), potentially a source of practical information as well as of representation, or as a (specific) way of participating in other people's worlds (Pink 2015). In contrast, in many existing discussions of the interview it is seen as a method to be used in isolation (with

the exception of **the ethnographic interview** (Sherman Heyl 2001; O'Reilly 2005)), whereby interviewing becomes the method used, rather than part of a suite of methods or an element of a more complex method. As is evident in the context of the methods discussed below, some of which involved physical activities, making things or video recording, in our own work, verbal interviews have become either more than just interviews, or they have been strands that are interwoven through embodied and performative methods and research encounters.

Whether or not situated within these more complex activities, there is, however, a certain specificity associated with doing interviews in homes, which can impact on the interview and on the research encounter and what we learn from it in a number of ways. As we have noted, the home is a private place, and it is a site where participants tend to have all their 'things' around them. It is also a place where they consume and produce, food, drinks, possibly other things, and that they ongoingly renew through everyday processes like cleaning and laundry. When entering someone else's home, it is important to keep in mind that this is the very world that we are entering and starting to share with a participant. Even if simply undertaking an interview in a home, we are already, once through the door, experiencing the same floor surfaces underfoot and breathing the same air as the research participant – that is, we are *in their* environment, and inhaling and feeling it as we move through it. This means that we enter into sensory environments, the significance of which is important to attend to. Elsewhere, Pink has outlined how these considerations can help us reflect on the home as a site for learning through one-to-one interviews:

By sitting with another person in their living room, in *their* chair, drinking *their* coffee from one of *their* mugs, or when drinking together in a café, one begins in some small way to occupy the world in a way that is similar to them. As the interview progresses, images, sounds, artefacts and emotions might be shared and other people may come and go. The interview and its environment create a place-event, where researcher and interviewee are mutually emplaced as they move along its narrative. They are in a situation where they interact in ways often more intense than in everyday life, producing heightened reflections and new ways of knowing. Interviews are not only places where researchers learn about other people's experiences, but where interviewees might arrive at new levels of awareness about their own lives and experiences. (Pink 2015: 80)

Interviewing in the home indeed involves entering into the mundane, intimate and private sphere of participants' lives. It can be a research encounter that goes beyond being verbal. Indeed this is one of the reasons why it becomes

useful to connect such more formal verbal interviewing methods with other ways of knowing and learning about people's lives. For instance, when researching uses of mobile digital technologies in homes through interviews, the technologies might become part of the interviews, used, to show the activities that are being spoken about. This, in some cases, has included participants demonstrating how they might use their tablets or other devices as part of the interview as a way of showing what they do at home (see Pink Sinanan et al. 2016). For instance as part of the interviews that she undertook within the Locating the Mobile research project in Australia in 2015, Pink asked participants about their mobile phone use biographies. The biographies of mundane things, including those of technologies, are often bound up with those of people. This means that when interviewing people in their homes, they often bring material objects into the interview and/or draw from those things that are encountered. Mobile phone biographies, Pink found, in some cases, were kept materially in the home, in the form of the mobile phones themselves. Participants went and sought out their old phones and told the story of their use through them, while being video recorded. For instance, one participant, Ben recalled his prior phone history, before talking about the several current phones he laid out in front of us on the table:

So this has been a great phone except for one thing, the GPS is absolutely rubbish. But this other one works so I use that when I need accurate measurements when I go for a run. This I'm sending for recycling. These other two are dead, I'm just slow to throw things away. But I used two phones when I was away. I kept an Irish sim and a UK sim. I think I kept them all because you needed an extra one when you went to another country. Phones are really annoying to unlock here. They are locked to networks and I don't think they do that in other countries now. I went to Malaysia and Indonesia and I tried to get one unlocked and they were like what do mean locked?

Indeed, in this way sometimes interviews can become blurred with the home tour as in the following example from the LEEDR project, shown in Figure 5.1.

Some everyday life biographies, experiences and activities that are stored or enacted in homes are often best encountered in this way, by extending the interview to include things and activities, rather than just words.

Not all interviews are with single participants, and in the context of doing research in households, it is important to seek to engage some participation of the wider household as a group, even if not all household members are able to continue to engage in the research process throughout the whole project. An example of this was developed in the LEEDR project by the design team, in the form of the 'Getting to Know You' (known as GTKY interviews) stage of the



**FIGURE 5.1** The encounter with this participant started as more of an interview over coffee, then the participant began to show Kerstin around the house, taking the coffee with her. Here she was showing Kerstin her kitchen book shelf, which we learned was part of what makes the home feel right for her, and she explained she couldn't find anywhere else for her books than this space in the kitchen. © LEEDR.



**FIGURE 5.2** *The GTKY shared meal interviews. © LEEDR.*

research. This was the first research encounter that the ethnographic and design teams had with each household, and served not simply as an interview but also as an introduction, and created a context where a series of other collective research activities was also undertaken. This enabled the research team to build a detailed picture of participant lifestyles, energy awareness, future aspirations, and habitual occupation patterns in a very limited timeframe while making the process a pleasant one for the participants. Although it was a design-led research activity, whenever possible a member of the ethnography team also attended and participated, meaning that she was also able to secure an introduction to the household in preparation for the more one-to-one research activities that she would undertake. The GTKY interview took place over a take-away meal paid for by the project but chosen by the family. A shared meal around the dining room or kitchen table provides a familiar context for inviting others into the home and for the participants to engage with the researchers. Kanstrup (2006) similarly describes how early visits to participants' homes were confined to the dining table as trust was established between researchers and participants. The LEEDR team was particularly keen to establish this trust before the video tours where participants would be asked to introduce more private areas of their homes such as bedrooms and bathrooms to the visiting researchers. The shared meal also provided the context for involving all family members in the interview with creative activities after the food used to engage and involve children as young as five (see Mitchell et al. 2014). The time together, with the families permission, was voice-recorded using a small Dictaphone. This allowed conversation to flow naturally among family members and researchers, providing an opportunity to begin to understand the interplay between family members.

## Touring the home with participants

Video tours, or audio tours sometimes incorporating photography, are increasingly used for researching everyday life in the home, and have figured considerably in the projects we have discussed in the preceding chapters of this book. There are various ways to conceptualize recorded tours. For instance, often they are considered as 'mobile recorded interviews', which allow researchers and participants to utilize 'domestic spaces and materials as prompts to frame conversations about what happens, where and why' (Hinton et al. 2012: 4). Especially in the context of HCI research and the exploration of technologies in the home, video tours have served to explore the situated contexts of devices and interactions, and to more generally document the research context and environment. Observation and documentation are also at the heart of recent uses of CCTV cameras in the home, where the idea is to record everyday activities as and when they happen (Martens and Scott 2004; Martens 2012).

In our own research (see for instance Pink 2013, 2015), we have departed from this emphasis on observation and documentation in order to advance these methods through a particular approach that involves using the video tour as a collaborative research tool, and a form of place-making (Pink 2007). Following this approach, video is used to help us to engage with participants as they show us around the home and explore together how everyday life plays out in moments when we are not there to observe. This involves going beyond research practices that use video as a tool to 'record' or 'document' everyday life, as if such activity and experience could be actually caught on camera in its entirety or was transparent in meaning (cf. Sunderland and Denny 2007). Instead, following our approach, we consider video to be a route through people's homes that can allow us to imagine everyday life as it had already happened, and how it could unfold for our participant households or individuals in different situations and contexts. In participatory design research, likewise, the idea of taking video beyond 'hard' data has been important. For instance, Buur et al. (2000: 21) consider the designer's working cycle through video as one of 'recording-editing-viewing'. As such they suggest that 'video recordings from e.g. a contextual inquiry are no longer hard data but rather the first attempts to create stories that frame the design problem and impose order on the complexity of everyday life' (2000: 21).

In our own experience we have found that video tours gave participants the chance to tell us about, demonstrate performatively for us, or show us evidence of examples of things that had or could happen in the home, and of how things 'usually' were. It also enabled us to use the home itself as a material and sensory probe through which to ask questions, invite participants to evoke experiences and to learn about how it was to live in that particular environment. The use of the video tour is also congruent with the emphasis on temporality, movement and environment that we advance in this book, since it enables researchers to explore each of these dimensions of everyday life with participants in their homes.

Simultaneously video recordings can provide a lasting slice of research experience for researchers, of being with participants in their homes, following them around and, in doing so, sensing our way through their homes. Consumer anthropologists have advocated video as allowing viewers to experience some of the 'sociocultural texture' (Sunderland and Denny 2007: 270) of people's everyday lives, thus enabling learning through a 'form of "acquaintance"' (MacDougall, 1997: 286). As we have written elsewhere (Leder Mackley and Pink 2013), this experiential dimension of video was important to our work and, combined with our individual experiences of conducting video tours with participants, it meant that – to some degree – we could also delve into each other's video work as though we had been there when the video was being generated. This is both a combination of having fulfilled the role of video ethnographer and, thus, a familiarity with the experience of the tour

as research encounter, as it is about developing forms of empathy for the positioning of fellow researchers as they undertake video ethnography.

The home video tour like other methods does not involve pre-established series of stages, but is rather adapted according to the research question, the particular participant(s), and their home. It should always be undertaken with respect for the privacy of the participant and as a collaborative exercise, whereby the participant is invited to show their home to the extent that they feel comfortable and necessary to undertake the shared exploration they are sharing with the researcher. In past projects different themes have featured. Therefore whereas in her earlier projects on the home Pink invited participants to tell her how they cared for each room and how they had adapted it over time (Pink 2004), or about the laundry items in their rooms (Pink 2012), in the LEEDR project participants were asked to tell us what they did in each room to make the room 'feel right'. Here the intention was to learn with them about how this process created demand for energy. Such activities enable us to learn with participants. They do not show us the everyday reality of domestic tasks as they are played out, but instead they enable participants to reflect on and create abstractions or aggregates of their experiences of undertaking these tasks over longer periods of time than those we would be able to actually observe as researchers. These rich and collaboratively produced understandings offer different types of knowledge to those presented from



**FIGURE 5.3** In this daytime video tour the woman participant who led it focused our attention towards how the family would come together in the different rooms she showed us, as well as the domestic technologies that were part of the home. She took the tour through the children's shared bedroom (where there was a seemingly passed down TV), moving through the living/dining room, to show the computer desk in the dining room and point out the washing machine socket. © LEEDR.

outside observation studies, and we argue that they enable significant insights into participant perspectives and experience.

As with all video materials produced during LEEDR, our ethics procedure determined that participants were able to review videos before we shared them with the rest of the team and edit any content they did not feel comfortable with. A follow-up visit allowed participants to further comment and, in cases where only one family member had shown us around the house (often one of the adults), it also invited reflections from other family members. These visits were further revealing in that they demonstrated any changes that had happened in the home in the weeks and sometimes months between our visits;



**FIGURE 5.4** Different family members led this tour and also participated as their everyday life activities continued as we went through the home. The tour happened close to Christmas 2011, so the mother of the family contributed while decorating the Christmas cake, and the father described how furniture would be moved according to times of year and special occasions. One of the children showed Kerstin around the top of the house, including their parents' bedroom and the bathroom, the colours of which he had chosen (although the bathroom was completely redecorated towards the end of our research). One of the moveable objects in the home was the 'family computer', which was at the time on the kitchen table, making the kitchen into a workspace, and laundry was a key part of the materiality of the home (see Chapter 3). © LEEDR.

these could include the acquisition, disposal or changed ownership of domestic technologies, the use of rooms according to season or the arrival/departure of guests and relatives, changes in family pets and so on. Reviewing the video tours brought into focus changes that would have otherwise gone almost unnoticed in the general busyness and 'ongoingness' of everyday family life.

While we have advocated for the virtues of video in understanding people in their homes, and expounded in particular their value and use for understanding the embodied, and unspoken ways of knowing that participants have about their everyday environments, video is not the only, and not always the most appropriate, method for use when exploring homes with people. Methods should be designed to suit research questions and contexts, and the use of video may not always be suitable for particular groups of participant or for the research question being explored (Pink 2013). In some cases moreover in projects that generally use video, and where the particular sample of participants supersedes the need to follow exactly the same method with each participant, photography and audio can be substituted with those participants who do not wish to be video recorded. While some research approaches would insist that the same research procedure is followed identically with each participant, in ethnographic work this is not necessarily considered important. This is because we know that each research counter is created through the development of a specific relationship between the researcher and the participant. Often it is reflexivity about this relationship and the specific circumstances through which knowledge was produced that matters more than the meticulous repetition of exactly the same procedure with each participant.

## Video re-enactments

As the examples we have discussed throughout this book have shown, the home is a site of, among other things, the everyday unspoken and embodied ways of knowing, which are part of how people do those 'background' tasks like laundry and switching off and on appliances at bedtime. However such 'invisible' aspects of the everyday are often not even immediately apparent to the ethnographer, but rather they need to be collaboratively unravelled and revealed through the encounters that we create between researchers and participants. Traditional anthropological ethnographers might have investigated such things through repeated observation, however, as we have noted, doing this in homes is often not viable, and interviews do not tell the full story of the embodied, sensory *in situ* experience of undertaking everyday tasks and routines.

The kinds of things that we are often interested in asking participants to share with us when we do research about homes and lives that are part of them are frequently surprising to participants. Across our various projects

participants have looked at us with curiosity, often we have wondered if they think we must be crazy to be interested in, for instance, what they do on the way to bed at night, or how they wash their dishes, load their washing machines or hang out their laundry to dry. A memorable example of this is shown in video 23 on the Energy and Digital Living website (see Figure 5.5). In this video, Alan, one of our participants, was showing Sarah and Kerstin his bedtime routine, which Sarah filmed while Kerstin accompanied. The re-enactment involved Alan taking us on what would be his usual route to bed at night. Because he worked nights and all his family would already be asleep when he arrived home, he started the tour at the moment he stepped



**FIGURE 5.5** Alan's video re-enactment of his bedtime routine in Energy and Digital Living: video 23 at [www.energyanddigitalliving.com](http://www.energyanddigitalliving.com). © LEEDR.

through the door. This was in fact his garage door as he would park his car outside his garage and then open the electrical garage door to walk through the garage where things were stored, into his backyard and then through to the conservatory. The routine he showed us was a unique example of the previously invisible, unwitnessed nightly route through his home, the kind of thing he would not usually be asked to describe, and something his sleeping family would not witness either. For instance when we were halfway through, Alan stopped at the bottom of the stairs unsure if we wanted him to continue until Sarah reassured him that we did. Later at the end of the video clip, Sarah asked Alan if there was a reason why he went through the house as he did – she imagined it might be so that he would not wake up his family, or perhaps to save electricity given that he did not switch the lights on in every room that he went through. However, as Alan made clear, these were not really things he thought about since it was ‘about putting on the lights I need’. Such everyday activities are not necessarily strategically planned in order to achieve particular domestic goals, but rather they are contingent – doing what you need to do, in order to be able to then do what comes next; that is, they are part of the ongoingness of everyday life as it is lived out.

While video re-enactments are sometimes unusual, novel, fun or interesting for participants, they are also a serious and theoretically informed research method which seeks to engage researchers and participants together in exploring ways of knowing about their activities in and experiences of the environments they live in. The re-enactment approach seeks to focus on two ways of knowing about homes. First, on what participants can easily articulate verbally about particular activities and environments, which they might be prompted to discuss or reminded of when they are actually in those environments, examining them and reflecting on what they do there with the researcher. Second, on those ways of knowing that are embodied and sensory, not necessarily ever articulated in spoken words, and not the kinds of things that participants would even think of discussing. This includes, for instance, bedtime routines and routes through the home, such as that of Alan mentioned above (and see Pink and Leder Mackley 2014), as well as washing up (Pink 2012), bathroom cleaning (Pink 2011), doing the laundry (Pink 2005; Pink, Leder Mackley and Moroşanu 2015) and mobile and social media use in the home (Pink, Sinanan et al. 2016). The theory and practice of re-enactment methods are discussed at length elsewhere (Pink and Leder Mackley 2014), and we recommend readers who are interested in a deeper and longer analytical discussion to that article. Here we take a more home-focused and practical approach to introduce the key ways in which re-enactments may be beneficially conceptualized, planned, carried out, and what they might mean analytically in terms of the types of knowing that they are able to generate and/or make accessible.

A re-enactment is conceptualized, in the context of research methodology, as a collaborative and reflexive activity developed between researcher and participant. It is important not to confuse this with an observation of actual everyday events as they are ‘always’ played out. Placing this in the context of our discussion of the home, several of the points that we have already made in earlier chapters frame this: first, we have emphasized that the home is a continually shifting site, and people, things and technologies move through it; second, we have shown how people ongoingly improvise in their everyday lives in their homes, therefore we would not expect the same routine to be enacted in exactly the same way every time.

Connecting with the three thematic chapters of this book – which have focused on temporalities, environments and activity and movement – re-enactments also have specific relevance to research that engages with each of these three elements, and indeed attends to the relationships between them. For instance, in relation to temporalities of home, re-enactments can focus on transition moments or processes of renewal in the home. These are frequently mundane moments related to cleaning or refreshing objects or environments, or shifts between daytime and night-time, coming home or going out. There are indeed many of these in everyday life, and we suggest that this approach is particularly useful for understanding how they play out. Because these re-enactments focus on the routines of everyday life, they attend to the way in which everyday life is ongoing, marked by particular regular events. However re-enactments also connect to the theme of the temporalities of home in the ways in which they enable participants to bring together abstract and cumulative versions of their everyday routines. As noted above, a re-enactment is not a single observed authentic instance of the routine taking place, but rather it is a pulling together of biographically or historically accrued ways of knowing about that routine or task, to produce a performance of it that is both particular and abstract at the same time. By this we mean that the performance of the re-enactment is of course specific – a one-off event – but that it is abstract in that it draws on and seeks to stand for the many times this has been performed before.

With reference to the environments of home, the re-enactment methodology engages with the physical material, sensory and digital elements of the environment of home in a number of ways. First, it helps us to understand, as researchers and in collaboration with participants, how the environments of home are made and remade as people move through them. They provide a narrative through which to explore how participants engage with these environments of home, how they experience them and which elements come to the fore for them. The very environments in which we ask participants to undertake the re-enactments, however, are also important as probes and

prompts in the research process. Here we suggest that it is because we ask participants to undertake re-enactments *in situ* – that is, in the very places where they usually enact the same processes or routines – the material and sensory elements of their homes help them to recall, and to perform their embodied ways of knowing, and to verbally articulate their reflections.

In relation to movement and activity, re-enactments are usually of an activity, and such activities tend to involve moving through the home, moving on in time and moving from one state towards another. The re-enactment method has been used, as noted above, across different types of activity. Some such activities involve moving *through the home*, such as bedtime routines, going out routines and arriving home routines. Laundry routines and other actual domestic tasks also involve moving through the home although in slightly different ways, since they engage movement as part of the accomplishment of a task where the focus is on material and sensory transformation of actual objects, rather than on the process of arriving in one part of the home from another.

Finally, it is important to understand re-enactments in relation to the types of knowledge or ways of knowing that they make available to researchers. As argued elsewhere (Pink and Leder Mackley 2014), the re-enactment brings to the fore tacit, normally unspoken, knowledge, which can be understood in a number of ways, and which might work at different levels of consciousness and intentionality. First, as embodied memory, a kind of ‘muscle memory’ which comes to the fore as the body is engaged in physical activity. This could be seen for instance in the ways in which people move around in their homes in ways that are known, but not spoken of, when someone reaches for a light switch on the wall without needing to look, knows that the door has been locked because they have felt it click, and when to adjust her or his step when arriving at the top or bottom of the staircase. Second, re-enactments can demonstrate performative ways of showing not only what is done, but also some of the affective elements of what is done, such as performing tasks in ways that intentionally resist conventions. This might include ways of cleaning the home that purposefully evade perceived standards or conventions of housewifely practice, as in examples given in Pink’s earlier work about gendered ways of looking after homes (Pink 2004), whereby for some participants there were certain areas of the bathroom they would not clean, or differentiating frequencies with which they would clean their homes. Third, re-enactments, as played out in our work, also invite participants to develop new levels of self-reflection about these activities, in that as they perform and comment on them, there are certain aspects of the activity that they are able to articulate verbally, in the form of explanations, rationales or other sometimes surprising revelations.

Examples of re-enactments can be seen in videos 23, 28, 29, 31 and 32 at [www.energyanddigitalliving.com](http://www.energyanddigitalliving.com).

## In-practice studies of everyday human activity

In-practice studies of everyday human activity bear some similarities to the re-enactment methods we have discussed above, in that they do involve participants performing normal everyday routines with researchers video recording or documenting in other ways. Therefore they are re-enactments but of a different kind (see Pink and Leder Mackley 2014). The key difference is that while there may be some shifts and changes in everyday routines in order to accommodate the researcher's presence, the activities being performed are played out within the context of an actual instance of a functional everyday life routine occurring. For instance, while they would be doing so specifically in the context of participating in a research encounter, and might for example have saved their laundry (Pink and Leder Mackley 2014; Pink and Astari 2015; Pink 2005), bathroom cleaning (Pink 2011) or washing up (e.g. Pink 2012) for that event, they are using the actual materials, technologies and processes to achieve something within an everyday life context. Therefore the showing of the activity at an abstract level as in the re-enactment method is still part of this task; however, the specificity of how it is performed on that particular occasion and the ways that this is navigated are also present in the encounter.

In the context of the LEEDR project, our 'everyday activity' visits (as we introduced them to participants) attended to specific areas of everyday life, first, because they were related to energy consumption and, second, because we considered them as relevant to possible design interventions. We arranged to visit families when we knew they were cooking a regular family meal or when they were due to deal with their laundry, and we usually combined these visits with engaging family members in re-enactments and conversations about their bathroom uses as well as their domestic encounters with digital media. Digital media made energy consumption necessary in their own right but were also integral to our attempts at designing solutions for energy demand reduction. As with other ethnographic methods employed on the project, we allowed our approach to adapt to participants' availability and preferences. We aimed to engage with events as and when they were due to occur naturally within the flow of everyday life. However, some families invited us to spend longer stretches of time with them, enabling us to attend to some of the other details of everyday family life in which these practices were embedded and entangled. Other families arranged for shorter, more activity-focused visits.

Inevitably, there were differences in the researcher's depth and variety of experiences; our video materials, on the other hand, were relatively comparable across energy-related practices, as we generally chose not to



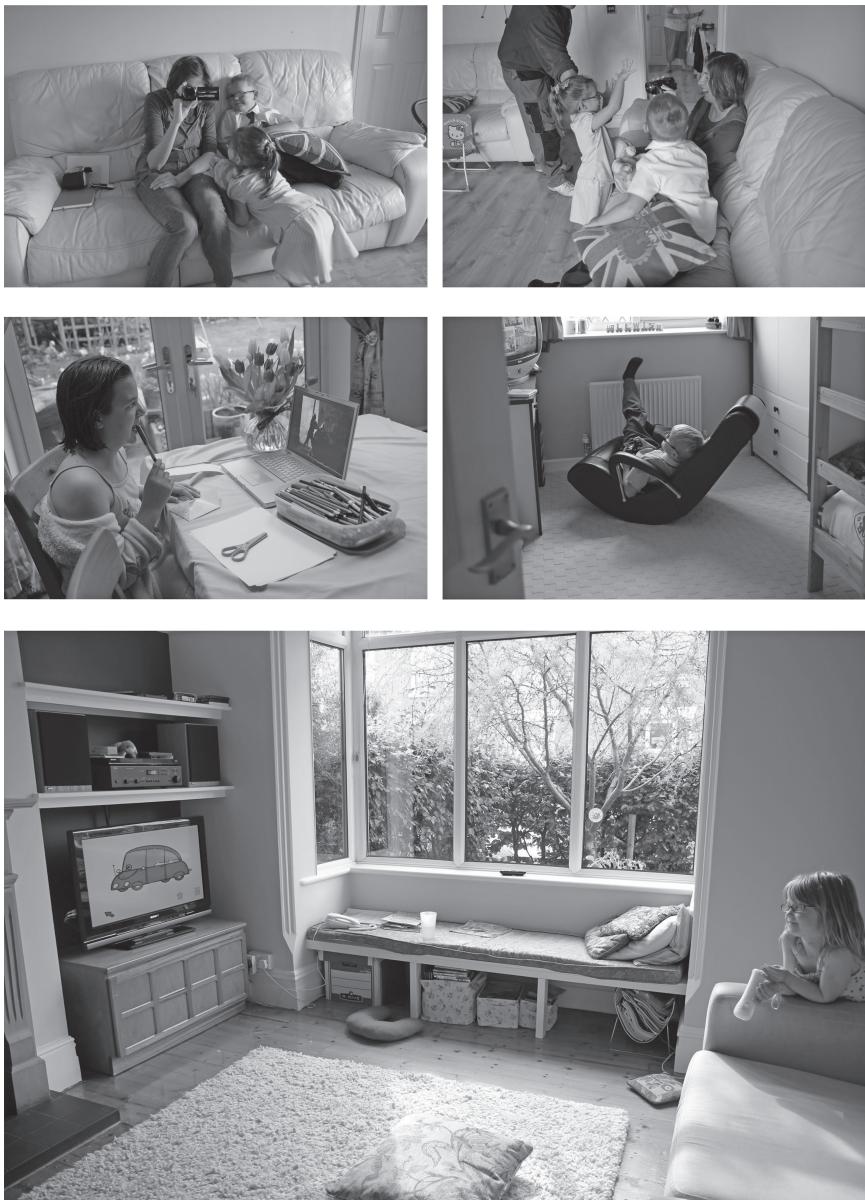
**FIGURE 5.6** Roxana and Kerstin spent time with this participant family over the course of three days. Among other things, they attended a regular Friday evening family meal and some Saturday morning breakfast and laundry chores. Media uses were explored as they formed part of family members' everyday activities, including working from home. © LEEDR.

record every minute of our visits but those moments that were most closely related to cooking/cleaning, personal hygiene, laundry and digital media activities. This could sometimes be a challenge, bringing to the fore how what are commonly defined as particular everyday practices cannot always be easily delineated and, instead, often overlap with or 'spill' into other areas of life and work at home. One example of this is Vicki's bathroom routine which we also discuss elsewhere (Pink and Leder Mackley 2015, see video 36 at [www.energyanddigitalliving.com](http://www.energyanddigitalliving.com)). Vicki told us that she usually takes a daily bath, in the mornings, although this might vary on the weekend. Rather than getting straight into the bathtub, her routine starts with cleaning the tub, sink and toilet, and hanging up towels that had been left on the floor by others. Once in the bath, Vicki often listens to Radio 4 and reads materials for work. As with other doors in the house, Vicki told us that she preferred for the bathroom door to be open during baths. Hence, depending on the time of the day, she might get interrupted by other members of the family going in and out of the bathroom, as part of their routine of 'getting ready' or just for a chat. Vicki's bathroom routine thus incorporates a range of activities which could be extracted from the research encounter and analysed in isolation; for us it made sense to consider the overall processes and sequences of activity in order to study their interrelations.

Whereas the LEEDR video tours were at times too long and involved for younger participants, the everyday activity work lent itself well to working with families, including younger children. This is because children could actively choose their level of engagement during our visits and, likewise, we could partake in and learn more about their activities as and when they happened. This was especially the case in relation to their already dispersed uses of media technologies around the home.

Again, a challenge was to choose the depth of engagement with media technologies, whether for instance we sought to learn details of how participants navigated websites or video games, or instead needed to know at a higher level how these forms of media engagement were relevant within the context of wider routines and activities in the home. These choices were not always straightforward; in some cases, the way a media device was used was also directly linked to its energy consumption (e.g. mobile devices).

The *Laundry Lives* documentary includes a series of edited video recordings of participants demonstrating how they did their laundry. These recordings were made using a similar methodology, which was employed both in Pink and Postill's research with Indonesians in Melbourne (Pink and Postill 2016) and in the video ethnography undertaken by Astari in Indonesia. This is also an interesting example of how the methodology can be adapted across projects of different lengths, sizes and foci. The documentation of laundry processes



**FIGURE 5.7** Children's media engagements during LEEDR's 'everyday activity' visits. © LEEDR.

here, and in Pink's earlier work (e.g. Pink 2012), was developed through a technique that involved elements of the re-enactment methods discussed above, and elements of the in-practice studies discussed here. Similar methods were used by Pink in the research in homes discussed in her *Home Truths* (2004) and *Situating Everyday Life* (2012), and they tend to be more suited to studies that are focused on particular sets of activities. In contrast, because the LEEDR research was of a longer term and explored a range of entangled everyday life activities, the approach taken to spending time with people in the homes was extended.

## **Participatory floor plan activity and timeline methods**

While the in-practice studies are designed to follow participants as they engage in activity, the floor plan activity focused on participants from a different direction. It can be used in conjunction with in-practice studies, and other methods discussed above, to consider, with participants, how they move around in and engage with activities in their homes. The method, as we used it, was developed with the aim to interactively generate an occupancy flow map of a whole family's routines throughout the home during the hypothetical 'average' weekday and weekend day. Floor plans of the family home were prepared in advance, and the family members were asked to talk through their behaviours on a given day while putting down numbered stickers in sequence. Three sheets were prepared for each day, covering the morning, afternoon and evening periods. Mapping techniques have been used in the past by a number of researchers studying behaviour, and have ranged from technology-based trackers (Aipperspach and Hooker 2005) to 'lo-fi' felt board representations of home (Mateas et al. 1996).

In the context of the example discussed here, this mapping activity was primarily an empathic design tool. Empathic design is a 'research approach that is directed towards building creative understanding of users and their everyday lives for new product development' (Postma et al. 2012). In empathic design, mapping activities are viewed as 'cognitive toolkits' (Sanders and Dandavate 1999) which generate 'stories' which tell us how people understand and misunderstand things, places and events. Of specific interest to this research into technologically mediated behaviour is their ability to reveal 'the intuitive relationships between system components' (*ibid.*). Our research showed that one of the key advantages of this mapping activity was that it allowed the researchers to delve into the busy lives of the participants and understand the rhythms and constraints that shape them



**FIGURE 5.8** *The floor plan activity.* © LEEDR.

in a very short timeframe. Beyond the empathic qualities of the method, the mapping activity was considered important for several other reasons; first, it provided triangulation of the verbal responses from the interview; second, it provided a spatial record of occupancy and energy use 'hotspots' which could be used to inform both energy monitoring research carried out by engineers, and possible subsequent design interventions; third, it generated unforeseen responses and dynamics from the family members providing greater insight into the group; and lastly, it highlighted the nature of habitual behaviours.

The final design of the activity consisted of a set of floor plan drawings of the home (one for morning, afternoon and night) for both weekdays and weekends. Each family member was given a set of numbered colour-specific stickers which they could lay down in sequential order as they talked through their 'typical' day. The activity produced a set of 'flow plans' which provided an excellent graphical record of a self-reported weekday and weekend day.

Such participatory methods offer researchers and participant ways to explore and document everyday life together to create shared research and design resources. They often involve the use of materials designed for these documentation purposes and specifically developed and tailored for use in homes, as were the floor plans, which were developed individually for each household. For instance, as part of another project (CALEBRE),

the timeline participatory method, a co-design tool was developed to help participants reflect on the home improvements they had made since they moved into their home (Mallaband et al. 2013). Here, a set of magnetic cards were designed to act as prompts depicting life events and possible home improvements. Working together the design researcher and the family used a magnetic whiteboard to create a timeline of their home using the cards as prompts. The result was a rich narrative of the householders' relationship to their home over time around which the researchers were able to explore why they had made the changes they had undertaken and how they went about each project.

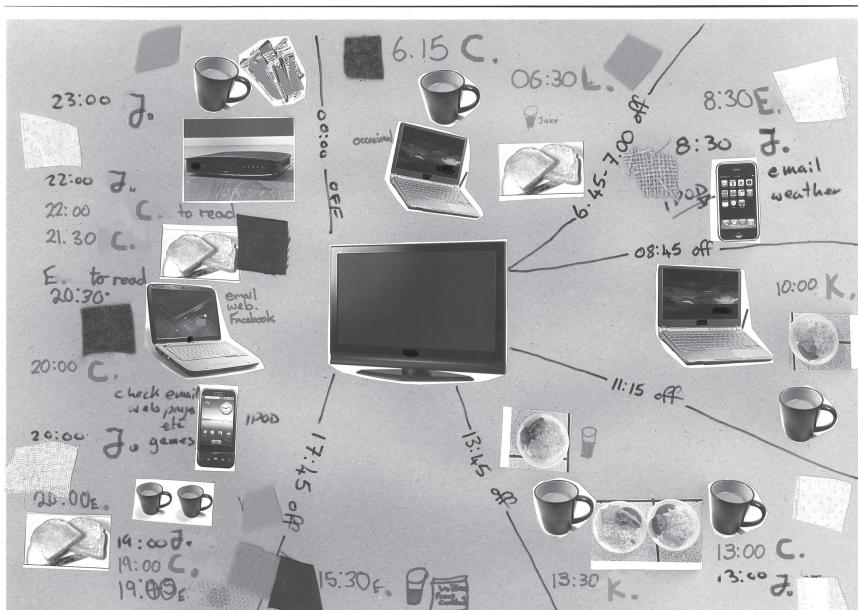
## Arts-based methods: The Tactile Time collage

While it has been argued that Arts-Based Research (ABR) has its own paradigm (Leavy 2015) different from both qualitative and quantitative paradigms, methodological tools inspired by visual and performing arts are sometimes used as part of qualitative research alongside interviews and other standard methods. For example, methods inspired by the visual arts, such as drawings, can be employed as part of interviews both as an elicitation technique and as a way of accessing and representing different levels of experience related to non-linguistic dimensions (Bagnoli 2009). The use of visual arts-based methods is most often participatory: the people taking part in research create drawings, collages or graphic novels in order to engage with the topic and questions addressed by the research. For example, in her work with young adults on migration and identity, Bagnoli (2009) asked participants to draw a self-portrait adding the people and things they considered important at that moment in life. Through the process of drawing the self-portrait, people were able to engage with, and to represent, in a direct and evocative way, their dilemmas and emotions related to being a migrant.

Collage is a visual arts technique that consists in mixing and juxtaposing pictures and materials, very often making use of newspaper and magazine cuttings. In her work on everyday temporalities and digital media usage, Roxana proposed the Tactile Time collage method as a way of mapping home time and of triggering a discussion over the qualities of time in domestic settings. The method was employed with families during a research encounter taking place in their homes. The participants were provided with a collage kit consisting in: pictures of ordinary digital devices, such as mobile phones, laptops and TV sets, and of food and beverage items; cardboard and coloured felt pens; and a variety of textile fabrics. The family members that wanted to take part in the task – usually between three and four people – were then asked to work

collaboratively in creating a collage that showed the way in which they spent time, together and individually, around specific technologies, such as the living room TV set. They wrote down the time when they normally switched the device on and off all around the day, adding pictures of other items they used or consumed on those occasions, such as food and beverage items, books and newspapers, mobile phones and laptops. This part of the encounter was audio-recorded in order to capture the rich discussion that went on between family members while doing the task. During the next stage, they were asked to individually choose a textile material that represented the way time felt for them in each of those moments and to explain their choice. The participants felt the fabrics in pursuit of one, or a combination of, textile materials that would express their subjective and non-linguistic experience of how time felt in a specific situation. In order to capture this process of touching, feeling and thinking, this stage was video recorded.

The Tactile Time collage method was designed specifically for this research and it was one of several participatory methods that were employed, alongside semi-structured interviews and participant observation, as part of long-term ethnographic fieldwork. Therefore, the set of collages was not analysed in isolation, but in relation to the other materials that resulted from the research. The insights that emerged from this research encounter were further explored, particularly, in writing about family time, and in looking at the forms of sociality that people and technologies engendered in domestic settings (Moroşanu



**FIGURE 5.9** Example of Tactile Time collage. © Roxana Moroşanu.

2016). However, elements of these methods could be explored and adapted so as to suit other research topics related to the experience of time, or the use of technology, within the home.

## Self-reporting methods

Other creative methods have been developed to enable exploration of participant's home life without the presence of the researcher. 'Probe' kits can be sent to or left with participants to be completed in their own time. The cultural probe method was first introduced by Bill Gaver and colleagues as part of the Presence Project (Gaver, Hooker and Dunne 2001). The concept was inspired by space probes that were sent off from earth to gather data from distant planets. Deliberately intriguing activities involving drawing, collaging and photo taking were used to gain insight into the lives of the older adults at the heart of the project. Gaver never meant for probes to be formally analysed – they were ways to provoke and inspire. The technique has been adapted by others to provide a way to collect more structured data from participants (see for example Haines et al. 2007). It's interesting to note that participants do not always engage fully with probe activities. The design teams within two projects through which we undertook design research in homes – CALEBRE (Vadodaria et al. 2010) and CCC (Lilley et al. 2010) – left self-report materials in the home containing creative activities designed to help understand how participants made themselves comfortable at home. However many packs were only partially completed by participants with some guiltily retrieved from drawers when the researcher returned to collect them. This has led us to reflect on the use of self-reflect methods in the home. Asking participants to remember to fill in diary entries repeatedly (however visually engaging the materials are), for example, is unlikely to succeed. In contrast a 'mission pack' containing a limited number of short tasks used by Haines et al. (2007) worked very well. Like Moroşanu's collaging activity described above, it only required one focused period of time from participants. Interestingly the older adults in the CCC project found the activities in the self-report pack rather daunting, reflecting similar findings from Burrows et al. (2015) who found some older adults hesitant to complete self-report tasks with a disposable camera. Creative self-report activities should therefore be used with care within studies of the home; although potentially able to provide rich insight into home life, the time commitment and demands on participants need to be carefully considered.

In a number of studies of the home, we have asked participants to capture their experiences of home at times when we were not present. This allowed us to explore family life without the disturbance of our presence in the home

as researchers or guests. A different approach to self-capture is seen in Kevin Mercer's study of media use in the home (Mercer et al. 2014). Participants were asked to wear a small camera and to begin recording whenever they watched video-based content on any device. After careful coaching and practice sessions, the participants successfully captured short video clips of their media use, which were later discussed and reflected upon within focus groups outside of the home. Andrea Burris (Burris, 2014) took this approach further by asking participants to wear a Sensecam lifelogging camera to capture how participants wind down after work in the home. The camera is designed to take a still image every ten seconds with no intervention needed from the participant once they had activated the camera. This method successfully captured the mundane comfort-making activities and routines of participants, many of which they would normally struggle to recall. Again the method is most powerful when participants are given the opportunity to reflect on the camera footage together with the researcher. Since Burris's study was completed, smaller- and higher-resolution lifelogging cameras have become available (e.g. the Narrative Clip [<http://getnarrative.com>]), which the authors, among others, have begun to experiment with to provide new ways to study the home.

## **Self-interviewing methods: The Five Cups of Tea video method**

Self-interviewing methods can be regarded as a specific type of self-reporting method, as they involve the participants engaging with the research questions in their own time and space. One of the first developments and conceptualizations of the self-interview was in the field of memory studies (Keightley, Pickering and Allett 2012). In a research project looking at the use of digital media to foster acts of remembering, the self-interview method was introduced in order to give research participants more time for self-reflection than a standard interview would normally do (Keightley, Pickering and Allett 2012: 509). When voice recording oneself at home, one is able to stop, pause and continue whenever they wish, and to play, delete and restart their recording. This gives research participants more control over their involvement in the research, as well as the opportunity to take their time to explore their thoughts on a specific topic with no pressure to respond immediately.

In Roxana's research, the development of the Five Cups of Tea method was inspired by this approach to the self-interview as a way to foster and facilitate self-reflection. As the name of the method suggests, the everyday practice of having a cup of tea – that was culturally situated in the British middle-class settings where the research was conducted – provided a particular temporal and



**FIGURE 5.10** Still image from a video recording of the Five Cups of Tea series.  
© Roxana Moroşanu.

spatial framework for addressing questions. In order to employ this method, the research participants were given a small video camera (a Sony Bloggie), together with an information pack that included five sets of questions, and they were asked to video record themselves preparing and having a cup of tea, and responding to the associated questions, for five times during the course of a week. This timeline provided enough flexibility, while giving a focus to the week and keeping interest for the task. Some participants chose the same cup of tea occasion, such as the first morning cup, every day, while others chose to do some of their recordings in a row during a Saturday – or over the whole weekend – showing the changes in their activities from cup to cup.

As Roxana's research looked at the qualities of time in domestic settings, this method was designed so as to provide a different entry point into this topic. The Five Cups of Tea provided a means of looking at moments of solitude while not intruding or interrupting them. The questions to be responded to while having a cup of tea were chosen and formulated so as to enhance the mindfulness of these moments, and to foster self-reflection: from asking participants to describe the taste and the feeling of having a cup of tea to someone who never tried it, to questions about personal hopes and dreams and about experiences of parenting. The cup of tea breaks were also situated within the flow of the day's activities. For each cup, the research participants were asked to share what they were doing before the break and what they were planning to do afterwards. While revealing the affordances of a cup of tea break to reorganize one's thoughts and prepare them for the next set of tasks, these questions also brought up interesting insights about the

different temporal qualities of various modes of activity, such as the situation of intermixing tasks.

The visual content of the recordings was left to the choice of the participants. Some employed the video camera as a witness to their experience of having a cup of tea, filming the setting and objects around them that were part of having that experience: the cup of tea, a busy table top, their phone or other devices and objects they would use during the break. Other participants turned the recording device towards themselves when answering the questions and talked directly to the camera. In each and every case, though, the video camera kept them company in their cup of tea breaks, capturing the corporeal image (MacDougall 2006) of the person filming, together with a few non-propositional insights about how different people experience their moments of solitude.

Apart from the context of this specific research on everyday temporalities and energy demand, the Five Cups of Tea video method could be adapted and employed in many other qualitative research scenarios, addressing questions related to embodied ways of knowing and to modes of inner expression.

## **Video diaries: The Evening Times video recording method**

Similar to self-interviewing methods, video diaries can be employed in situations when the presence of a researcher would be intrusive and when giving participants a longer period of time to engage with the research questions can trigger a different type of insights. Unlike self-interviews, video diaries do not normally employ a pack of specific questions to be responded to in each and every recording, but there is more flexibility regarding what can be filmed and shared. For example, in their work on family traditions, Muir and Mason (2012) handed out camcorders and asked the people taking part in the research to record their Christmas Day. The participants were able to decide what moments and situations to film, with no other specific requirements regarding the length of filming either. This meant that, in the end, all participants filmed other events alongside Christmas Day but that were nonetheless part of what Christmas holidays meant for them.

In Roxana's research, the Evening Times video recording method was developed as a way of exploring situations when family members spent time together, or what is called 'family time'. The participants were given a small video camera (a Sony Bloggie) for a week, and they were asked to record their family for a few evenings by passing the camera on, so that by the end of the week each family member would have filmed the others for at least one

evening. In this way we made sure that all the viewpoints over 'family time' were represented and that we did not give disproportionate control to one family member over filming the others. We wanted to know, specifically, about the ways in which digital devices, such as laptops, tablets and smartphones, were employed as part of 'family time', and we asked the participants to video record such moments when the other family members used their individual devices.

The resulting materials could not have been more heterogeneous. With one family member in charge of each evening, the recordings not only differed, in content and filming style, between the family participants, but also between family members. Some people filmed a series of several clips, showing the evolution and the changes in the evening, while others preferred recording one long continuous video. Some moved with the camera, going from room to room, in order to follow the other family members and their digital devices, while others placed the camera still in one spot and continued their evening activities.

However, in all these situations, the camcorder became part of the digital technologies that the participants normally used in their evenings at home. The content of the video recordings, as well as the way in which the camera was used in relation to the other family members, brought new insights about forms of sociality that involve the use of technology. As it was one of the digital devices employed in these situations, the camcorder became not just a way of representing what can be called 'family time with digital media', but an actual part of the enactment of these moments.

We did not predict that this method would fit so well in our participants' domestic activities, and in relation to the research questions that it was designed to address. This insight invites new considerations over the potential and the roles of digital methods when employed as part of research that addresses the ways in which people use digital technologies.

## Summing up

In this chapter we have reviewed and discussed a series of design ethnography research methods for understanding the home. Often the methods described are used in relation to each other, or as in the case of interviews and video tours and re-enactments, can blur into each other as the research encounter progresses. To maintain a distinction between the different activities, it is useful to consider what, in each case, forms the main narrative or probe guiding the encounter. For example, the use of the tour of the home puts the materiality and sensoriality of home at the centre of the encounter,

the activity-based encounters focus on the activity itself as the main probe through which researcher and participant seek to learn together, and the interview put the interaction between researcher, participant, and whatever other things are brought into that context by the participant at the core of the site of investigation.

These methods have been tested across a series of projects and, as we have noted, have informed some of the ideas that we have discussed in Chapters 2–4. Research methods for researching homes are most effective when tailored towards different projects. That is, the methods discussed above are not presented to be used as they are, but are ready for readers to adapt or to use as inspiration for future projects. Above we have also given a good number of references to other works where these methods and their specific *in situ* applications are discussed in more detail.