

INTERNATIONAL
journal of
CULTURAL studies

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Los Angeles, London, New Delhi and Singapore
www.sagepublications.com
Volume 11(4): 477-497
DOI: 10.1177/1367877908096055



'There is one in every home' Finding the place of television in new homes among a low-income population in Santiago, Chile

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ABSTRACT ● This article studies the symbolic and practical meaning of the placement of television sets in different home spaces. Based on fieldwork conducted among a low-income population in Santiago, Chile, it shows how their move to a social housing estate constitutes for these families an opportunity to start organizing their domestic space in a different way, particularly in accordance with modernist distinctions between public and private spaces. In this context television sets appear as a central element of the material culture of the home, symbolizing for family members their access to the normal stock of material culture in urban homes. But at the same time the practice of watching television both in public and private places is commonly resisted, showing that the device still occupies an ambiguous place within the ideas of domesticity of the members of the families under study. ●

KEYWORDS ● home spaces ● housing estates ● location ● material culture ● television set

When thinking about the place of television at home it is clear that the relationship between television-related practices and the rest of the practices that we identify as forming what we call 'home' is very complex. Unlike any other media technology, television occupies a central place in home practices to the extent that it is difficult to imagine or think about home without recalling its presence and its effect on the home environment. From the distribution and use of home spaces to the scheduling of individual actors in time, television practices constitute one of the central nodes around which, and in connection with, domestic life is lived.

To acknowledge this fact we have to understand television practices as a complex set of activities, sequences and operations that involve a diversity of actors at different moments of time and in different scenarios. They involve much more than just the practice of watching television. From the very first notions that we develop about television when children, to conversations about celebrities at work, the place of television in our everyday lives involves more than the mere fact that we spend a couple of hours per day in front of the 'box'. In practice television is directly or indirectly involved with all major areas of practices developed in our everyday lives, especially at home.

In this article we look at one particular practice related to television: its location in the home. More specifically we are going to analyse the placement of television sets in the homes of a group of low-income inhabitants of the city of Santiago, Chile, who have recently moved to live on the housing estate. In order to do this we first review the literature on television sets as material culture. Then we characterize the context under study, especially in terms of the spatial characteristics of the new homes. In third and fourth place we study the location of television sets in the main areas of these homes, public and private spaces. Finally, the article concludes with some remarks about the place of television both as material culture and practice in the new living spaces of these families.

Television sets as material culture

Despite its relative obscurity for many years, material culture has gained a central place in contemporary social theory. Especially within the field of anthropology (Appadurai, 1987; Miller, 1987; Olsen 2003; the *Journal of Material Culture*), but increasingly within sociology (Dant, 1999, 2005; Komter, 2001; Preda, 1999) and psychology (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981) objects are seen as central to the existence of human societies. From most of these perspectives, 'artefacts ... are actively used in social and individual self-creation in which they are directly constitutive of our understanding of ourselves and others' (Olsen, 2003: 91). It has even been said that no human society can exist without the creation and manipulation of objects to give consistency to action over time and space (Latour, 1996). Objects 'bind human actors and participate in developing specific forms of social order – because they allow for common practices to develop, stabilize, and structure time' (Preda, 1999: 355).

In this context the home appears as a key area in which the interaction between people and things takes place because: 'as well as being a material entity in itself, a house is a locus for material culture, a meeting point for people and things' (Dant, 1999: 60). Our homes are first and foremost lived-in spaces filled with material objects. We do not inhabit our houses as the empty receptacle of our routines, but as meaningful places that express who we are, not only to ourselves and our families but also in the way that they 'function as a social act that transmits non-verbal messages and meanings' to

our environment (Malkawi and Al-Qudah, 2003: 25). This is especially true in contemporary society, where many activities and expressions associated with a more 'public' being are declining (Putnam, 2000) or are increasingly under the control of different kinds of 'expert systems' (Giddens, 1990). In this context all activities related to the private sphere become core to the construction of personal and social identity.

For many of us our home is the key area in which we manage and relate to the growing amounts of material culture characteristic of contemporary society. But this process is not automatic. As concepts like domestication (Lie and Sorensen, 1996; Silverstone et al., 1992) or appropriation (Carrier, 1990; Miller, 1987, 1988) remind us, when we take commodities into domestic settings there is always 'a process through which artefacts are defined and placed in a way which may imply redefinitions of one's own routines and practices' (Lie and Sorensen, 1996: 9). Along with this, the new additions always interact with the rest of the commodities already available in the home in ways that cannot be predicted from the onset. Both the home and the commodity, even the consumer, are reconfigured, changing in a relative degree the characteristics, use and meaning of this space that we know as 'home'.

One current limitation of this perspective is that, 'despite the popularity of concepts like appropriation, much less has been said about the properties and dynamics of the environments into which products and technologies are (or are not) adopted' (Hand and Shove, 2004). In order to contribute to this task the aim of this article is to study how television sets as material culture interact with home spaces in the homes of 20 low-income families living on a social housing estate in the city of Santiago, Chile.

Why study television as material culture? Despite the diversity and variety of ethnographies on television use (to name just a few examples Gauntlett and Hill, 1999; Gillespie, 1995; Lull, 1990; Mankekar, 1999; Moores, 1993; Tufte, 2000) most of the research has concentrated on the practice of viewing and its relationship with the audience's everyday life and perceptions. But this focus ignores the fact that television sets are not only an empty receptacle of transmissions generated elsewhere, but also a material object, physically located in the temporal and spatial structure of the home. While the double nature of the medium has been acknowledged in theory (see Silverstone, 2001) the empirical study of television as practice has been focused heavily on viewing and its effects on the audience, implicitly seeing this practice as the only relevant activity related to media technologies consumption at home. The study of television as a central part of the material culture of homes, of the meanings and identities related to its physical presence in the home environment has been in most cases forgotten.

Among the exceptions to this trend (Fachel Leal, 1990; Hartley, 1992) we can highlight the work of Anna McCarthy (2000, 2001a, 2001b) on the location of television sets in public areas. Her starting point is the idea that until now television theory and research had a strong focus on viewing the device as creating a situation of 'no sense of place' (Meyrowitz, 1985), especially due

to its capability to connect home spaces to what is happening in other places in the world. But this focus 'makes us forget that television is an object and, like all objects, it shapes its immediate space through its material form' (McCarthy, 2001b: 96). In order to take into account this material aspect of television sets:

... rather than focusing solely on the immateriality of the television image, as terms like 'placelessness' and 'derealization' encourage, a television theory must also take into account the very material thingness of television technology. This involves looking not only at the medium's very spectacular reorganizations of space and time – the live broadcast of the media 'event,' for example – but also the rather more banal and quotidian materiality of the TV set itself, the *unremarkable* functions it performs, as a piece of furniture. It means bothering to think about the very basic and barely noticeable physical form of television. (McCarthy, 2001b: 96–7)

This change necessarily implies the broadening of the research agenda beyond the sphere of viewing to material practices like the location of the set and its relations to the rest of the material culture in the home. The materiality and positioning of the television set is not innocuous or meaningless. As we shall see, the location of the device in the home and the arguments that lie behind it show in an alternative way how people use material culture to appropriate and give meaning to their living areas.

The new home spaces of the housing estate

The research on which this article is based was conducted during 10 months in 2004 in an urban location in the city of Santiago, Chile.¹ More specifically, the study was focused on 20 low-income families, inhabitants of a social housing estate called 'Tucapel Jimenez II'. This estate is an interesting site for research because it is a representative example of the virtues and defects of Chile's revolutionary social housing policy of the last decades. Between 1980 and 2000, around 173,000 social housing units were built in Santiago alone (Tironi, 2003: 35). Therefore most of the population in critical need, who used to live in shantytowns on the outskirts of the city, now live in one of these housing units, having access to decent housing and basic services such as drains and tap water for the first time.

Beyond this, the mere fact of being a home-owner has some positive effects on the way this population perceive their lives. As happens in many other societies around the world (Kellet and Moore, 2003; Moran, 2004), in contemporary Chile to be a home owner, especially for the first time, represents a key moment in a family story. This is especially true in the case under study, because 'for most of these families, the movement to the housing estate transforms them for the first time in legal owners of a proper and private home' (Ureta, 2007: 318). These families usually understood the change not only in

terms of an improvement in their material conditions of living, but also as some sort of integration into the kind of urban life that they perceived as normal for working-class families. What they were looking for was not to start living their lives as Santiago's middle classes but as any other working-class population lives; to be '*pobre pero honrado*' ('poor but honest'), as a widely used popular phrase recognizes. By moving to a flat on a housing estate most of them perceived that they were still members of the working class, but in a different way, in the way a 'normal' working-class population lives in the city.

In terms of material configuration, this new living environment is characterized by one central aspect: its modernist ethos (Rowe, 1993). From their beginning at the end of 19th century in Europe, housing policies for low-income populations have been guided by the – explicit or implicit – belief that functional and rational planning is absolutely necessary in order to improve the living conditions of these populations. As a result of this perception, planning in housing estates was 'understood as a convergence of aspects: the normalization of residential environments, standardization and the regulation of minimum standards, techniques of architectural mass production' (Mar, 2003: 2). With the global spread of housing policies, these ideas also became the standard ideology behind them in countries as diverse as South Africa (Robins, 2002; Ross, 2005), Brazil (Amorim and Loureiro, 2001), Israel (Kallus and Law Yone, 2002) and Australia (Mar, 2003).

In terms of the internal space of the home, a materialization of this modernist ethos was the clear division between different kinds of home spaces. Here the central objective, as identified by John Hartley, was to 'normalize' family practices through the establishment of specialized spaces:

The internal topography 'produced' family functions, with special emphasis on separating sex, hygiene and living – heterosexually conjugal parents in one bedroom, out of sight of their asexual children, who were ideally in single room each, or at least sorted into pink and blue areas. Cleaning (surfaces, clothes and bodies) was separated from social living, wet areas from dry, as was cooking and food preparation. (Hartley, 1999: 105)

The main division was between front and back regions of the home (Ozaki, 2003). The reason for this division was the idea of imposing different uses and meanings of home spaces by low-income populations in accordance with the accepted idea that:

The front is always the public or entry side, and it is decorative and respectable. By contrast, the back is the private side where domestic services and chores are performed, drying clothes, growing vegetables, and doing repairs. Whereas the front is displayed, the back is hidden from public view. (Lawrence, 1982: 122)

This division between front and back regions was also present in our case study. As can be seen in Figure 1, the homes in Tucapel Jimenez II were designed clearly distinguishing between public and private areas through



Figure 1 Plan of the flats, Tucapel Jimenez II housing estate

Source: Research department, Ministerio de Vivienda y Urbanismo (Housing and Urbanism Office), Government of Chile

the use of walls, doors and other partitions. *Public areas* (the darker shaded areas in the plan) are formed mainly by the living/dining room, the entrance hall and the central passageway connecting all the spaces of the home. These are more visible and easy to access for anyone coming from the outside, commonly the more decorated spaces and the spaces where visitors are received. *Private areas* (the paler areas in the plan) are formed by kitchen, toilet and the two bedrooms. These were the spaces of reproduction, hygiene and intimacy; spaces that are, at least in theory, reserved only for the inhabitants of the home and few intimate others.

It is important to remember, however, that although 'this house design embodies assumptions about family life ... it is worth noting that there is nothing inevitable about the use of space outlined above' (Munro and Madigan, 1993: 31). In practice both areas were not immutable over time. In practice, both spaces were commonly mixed and their location and extension vary considerably over time, sometimes temporarily, sometimes permanently.

One key point regarding our case under study is that this modernist division between different home spaces was a complete novelty for most of the inhabitants of the estate. For example, Jonathan, a married 34-year-old father of two, who used to live in a situation of backyard accommodation with his partners' parents in the borough of Recoleta before coming to the housing estate, said in one interview:

Nowadays we live in a more organized way. You can be more relaxed. We used to have just one room. The living room, the kitchen and the bedrooms were all together without separation of spaces or surroundings. Not here though. Here there is the kitchen, the living [room], you have one bedroom and the other bedroom. Everything is partitioned. It is more comfortable and there is privacy for the children and the couple who have their own bedroom and not before. Before, as I told you, it was all together, all mixed up and I think that things should be in their right place; you cannot mix oil with water, everything has to be in its place, everything well organized and in harmony.

This need for space and home partitions was even more acute in the case of families who came from a shantytown, as can be seen in this extract from one interview with Paloma (24 years old):

My situation has changed by 100 percent. We are much more comfortable now because there [shantytown] we had everything on top of each other, we had a big bed and the cradle of the baby, then everything was mixed up. We couldn't put anything more, not even a kitchen, nothing, we had to eat at my mother's place because nothing fitted in. It was a little shack of 3 by 3 meters. Here at least we have somewhere to sit, somewhere to eat, a bedroom for ourselves, a bedroom for my daughter. This is what I always wanted, more space.

As Jonathan and Paloma recognized, many of these families used to live in single-space homes where it was almost impossible to make any distinction between different areas. Both for people who came from shantytowns or from a situation of backyard accommodation, their former living spaces used to consist of only one undivided space that changed its nature in accordance with its use. The entire home was a kitchen when cooking, a dormitory when sleeping, or a TV room when television was being watched.

In their new houses, for the first time they were able to clearly distinguish between different home spaces. Commonly this change was identified as one of the major improvements in their living conditions since the move to the estate. To live in a divided home space was usually interpreted by them as living in a 'normal way' or the way any other working-class urban family lives. Home partitions were associated with the development of a new kind of domesticity characterized by several concepts and aesthetic ideas like 'comfort', 'privacy', 'harmony', etc.

But also many of them recognize this segmentation of home space as still incomplete, especially in relation to one key space: the lack of another bedroom to separate boys from girls. For example Patricia (30 years), a mother of three girls and two boys ranging from 12 years to 4 months, acknowledged that:

The problem is going to be when my daughter starts her teen years, the other [daughter] too. Then it is going to be boys and girls and it's going to be complicated because I only have one bedroom for the boys and I cannot

put the girl in my bedroom either; then it is going to be a problem. Ultimately, the entire house could be smaller, it could have a smaller kitchen, a smaller living room, you can always manage with that, but the thing with the bedroom is a problem. I have started seeing it right now; my older daughter doesn't want to be with the boys, so the drama has started.

Their new home spaces appear to them as both an opportunity to start living in a more 'organized' way, but also as an expression of the still incomplete adaptation of their new flats to the way home spaces should be arranged in contemporary homes.

In the process of adaptation to these new spaces, the location of the television set was one of the central issues to be clarified. Without exception, all the families under study had television sets in their homes well before their move to the housing estate. Its presence has already been deeply internalized and for most people the television set forms a central part of the 'normal' stock of available home technologies. We examine therefore not the presence of television sets as such, but how its presence as material culture and its placement in the home serves to materialize the way these families adapt and give meaning to their new living spaces.

The symbolic character of television sets in public areas

In the places where they lived before, mostly shantytowns located on the outskirts of Santiago, these families used to 'establish identities, perpetuate social norms and mediate community through architecture' (Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1994: 860), through the external aspect of their homes. In these houses 'the exterior is the representation of the current state of affairs in the household and the plans for the future' (Klaufus, 2000: 353). How the house looks on the outside is central to the image that the family project for others, the material representation of the extended self of the family (Holston, 1991).

This situation changes on the housing estate due to the external homogeneity of the buildings and flats there. Now the interior is the main space where they can develop their own aesthetic concepts, especially in the public areas. For these families 'the front region of the house is a place where a performance is given. The front is relatively well decorated in order to show social status and claim prestige. It is a place for display, maintaining and embodying certain standards' (Ozaki, 2003: 105). The living/dining room represents the ideal place to show their own tastes and initiatives to neighbours and members of their social networks.

The problem in the case under study for this use of home space is the ambiguous status of the living/dining room as a public and private space. Given their shortage of space (each flat of 38 square meters has to accommodate a family of 4.9 members in average) families simply cannot afford to have spaces whose only use is for public occasions – they must be also functional spaces for everyday use. This tension between the public and the private character is always



Figures 2 and 3 Television sets in living rooms

present in the placement and use of television set. In terms of location, Figures 2 and 3 show no ambiguity about the centrality of the television set in the living rooms of these families. In most of the cases, television sets constitute one of the central commodities for families and individuals, something to be displayed to visitors and other residents. Although all the television sets pictured were turned off when the photographs were taken, their visibility is evident. Without exception they occupy a central place in the living rooms of the families.

Along with the visibility of the television sets, in all the images presented here we can see how the location of television sets is always established in relation to other objects or, even better, forming an 'ecology of objects'

(Pantzar, 1997), with different roles and relations among its members. Television sets are never alone, and the distribution of the surrounding objects is never casual or innocuous. They are often the focal point to which the different pieces of furniture, especially sofas and chairs, are directed. This can be clearly seen in this extract of one interview with Ruth.

We always try to put the television in one corner, where you can see it, because we tried to put it on the centre [of the living room] and doesn't seem to fit, because the sofas are big, so they make it so the television has to be in relation with the sofas, it must be visible from the sofas, and also from the dining room. (Ruth, 30 years)

As Ruth recognized, television sets always establish connections with their surrounding environment. Things are not located in a random fashion in relation to them. They are arranged in accordance with certain ideas, values and aesthetic judgements. From the picture of the children in the living room of Ramon and Alejandra (Figure 2) to the piece of embroidery under the set in Alan and Edith's home (Figure 3), television sets and their environment form an ecology whose ultimate end is to show, to locals and visitors alike, the individuality and aesthetic dispositions of the home owners. These arrangements closely resemble those found by Fachel Leal in her research on Brazil, where 'the repertoire of objects in a house in a working-class neighbourhood is strategically located in the most evident corner, next to the television, as a point of magical contagion' (1990: 186).

This last point is nicely exemplified through analysis of the living room of Catalina and Diego (Figure 4). Both members of the couple were highly committed Catholics. In accordance with their beliefs they have arranged a little altar in their living room where they put the Bible, candles, a picture of Christ and other religious objects. One interesting thing was that the television set was located in the same corner of the room, just beside the altar, even overshadowing it.

By highlighting this example we don't intend to imply that television sets have any sacred value for these families. These families have had television sets for a long time before moving to the housing estate and the device just forms part of what they understand as the normal material stock of their homes. What is remarkable from the picture is the fact that the proximity between the device and the altar, the place of the sacred, does not seem to bother the couple, who see it as a logical way to order their home space. Both the altar and the TV set share, in their minds, that same degree of visibility: they are things to be openly displayed to locals and visitors alike.

What does the presence of television sets in public areas of the home say? Beyond the diversity of meanings found in each particular home, the presence of the device is a symbol of normality and social participation in a context in which symbols of social inclusion are quite scarce. By having a television set in their public areas the members of the household make a material statement about their participation in a social order in which having a television set is



Figure 4 Television set in Catalina and Diego's living room

seen as a normal, or even compulsory – part of the material culture of the 'modern' working-class home.

Even in the case of families that didn't have a television set in their living room at the time of the fieldwork, this space appeared as the right place to locate it, as with Cristina:

We still can't buy another one [television set], we have just one and as my husband arrives very tired at night from work, he likes to watch it in bed and between moving it from here to there I prefer to leave it there, in the bedroom.... I would like to have one here, because *there is one in every home*, but I still haven't been able to buy it, it would be more comfortable, definitely. (Cristina, 30 years, emphasis added)

From her words we can see how the location of the TV set in the public areas has been naturalized to the point that it appears as a part of what it means to live in a normal home. For these families the possession and display of a television set is primarily related to status or 'distinction' in its most basic form: the status of having what 'every home has', the minimal set of commodities that serve to identify a working-class urban home as such.

But this 'normalization' meaning does not mean that a secondary, and more traditional, form of distinction cannot be attained through the placement of the television set in the living room. While most of the families have television, the kind of television that they have on display still matters. As can be seen in the Figures, commonly the biggest and newest set occupies the public space, even though the set that was more often used was the smaller and older one located in the bedrooms.

Television sets as *material objects* have a central position in terms of their public location in the ceremonial spaces of the home. But this positioning

does not mean that the *practice of watching television* in these places is so easily accepted or welcomed.

For some families, the practice of watching television in public space is central to family life, echoing the classical image of television as a 'gathering place' (Adams, 1992), or just taking a more pragmatic approach in terms of comfort. But for others the practices related to television use can also conflict with the practices identified by the interviewees as characteristics of a 'good' family life.

At the table, while we are eating, it [the television] is turned off, because these are the only times when we can be like a family and if the telly [is on] nobody speaks and they don't even know what they're eating because they are watching telly. (Rosa, 34 years)

In addition to these criticisms, there is another type of critique regarding the use of television in the public areas of the home that is connected to the ceremonial use of these spaces.

I don't like television in the bedrooms, but if I have to choose between the living room and the bedrooms, I prefer the bedrooms, because I don't like when people arrive and there's a telly on in the living room. It is as if everything that we have to talk about is gone, because everyone is watching the telly. I think that it is better to leave it in the bedroom and then if people come we really can talk and not be just watching television. This is why I don't like it that much. In the bedrooms I don't like it either because sometimes instead of talking or doing other things you're watching telly. If it's one thing it is not the other, this is why I don't like it that much, but well ... you have to put it somewhere. (Carlos, 32 years)

Television as practice is also regarded as having a negative influence over the use of space not only in terms of family life, but also in terms of the ceremonial use of home spaces. For Carlos to watch television in the living room while strangers are visiting seems like a disruption of the place, the introduction of an practice that reduces the quality of the performance that is being developed on the 'front stage' of the home.

Television in ceremonial space is clearly valued not as media technology, a source of entertainment or information but, above all, as a material symbol. Its symbolic qualities overcome its functional ones, transforming the object into a receptacle of images and meanings, not a medium of external communication but an end in itself. The negation of the practice, or even the counter-practice of turning off the television when someone suddenly steps in (as frequently happened during the interviews), does not negate the effect of the apparatus, because its strength is based in its presence as a material object, as a piece of technology, and not in its use. Television sets embody values; they represent ideas and concepts to their owners and others through their sheer physical presence in ceremonial spaces. Their use can only add unwanted complexity and confusion to the factual quality of their material existence.

The intimacy of television sets in private areas

In relation to private areas, the analysis of the material collected during fieldwork shows that bedrooms appear as the only possible location of the sets in the more intimate spaces of these homes. In fact none of the homes under study had a television set in the kitchen or in any other functional space. Even in the case of families where the television set was moved frequently between different home spaces this movement was only between the living room and the bedrooms; it never involved the temporary location of the set in the kitchen. The kitchen, and in general, functional areas, were not a 'place' for television for two reasons. On the one hand, as kitchens and other functional spaces were quite small and usually overcrowded, to locate a television set in them seemed to be practically impossible for most of these families. On the other hand, most of the interviewees, especially housewives, acknowledge that they didn't usually watch television while doing house chores replacing it by the use of radio, as Carla recognizes:

[I like to see television] but when I have everything done. When I start doing chores I prefer the radio, because with the telly you have to be there, sitting and you cannot move, but with radio I can be doing everything and it doesn't take up space. (Carla, 31 years)

In relation to bedrooms, Figures 5 and 6 show how pervasive and quotidian the presence of television sets is in them. What is characteristic here, in contrast to the television sets located in public places, is the relative lack of any formality or ceremonial character of the device. In Figure 5 we can see the television set found in the bedroom of Isabel (29) and Victor (32). In contrast with the almost sacred status of the television sets they had in their living room, the extreme simplicity of the one located in their bedroom is notable. There is no decoration and the set is partially covered by what looks like a racket for a children's game, facing an unmade bed with clothes scattered over it. Here it is the visibility of the screen from the bed that appears as important, not the television set as material object.

This is clear when we analyse the place of the television set in Mariela's bedroom. Mariela (aged 45) works as a housekeeper and shares her flat with her partner Ricardo and her two grown-up children, Rosa and Luis Manuel. Given the lack of available space in the flats they have developed different strategies to accommodate their huge amount of commodities and other material things. One of these strategies is to locate the television set in Mariela's bedroom on a shelf in the closet next to the bedroom as shown in Figure 6. This location is quite helpful in terms of space saving, but at the cost of reducing the device merely to a screen inside the closet that can be watched comfortably from the bed.

Both images clearly show that the presence of television sets in bedrooms is much more functional than symbolic in these homes. Decorations and



Figures 5 and 6 Television sets in bedrooms

centrality are replaced with informality and improvisation, with the overall consequence that the symbolic status of the device seems smaller, at least in terms of its status as part of the material culture of homes.

But this is not the case for all the bedrooms and television sets studied here. In Figure 7 we can see the bedroom of Jeanette (aged 19), who lives with her mother Lucia and brother Francisco. One of few children with a private bedroom, her case was remarkable because it shows how television sets in bedrooms can also be used to represent the personal space of the owner, especially in the case of teenagers.



Figure 7 Television set in Jeanette's bedroom

Figure 7 shows how the television set is located right next to the bed, in a highly visible place in the bedroom. More interestingly, the set is decorated with the same stickers that are on the wall, establishing a connection between the device and the rest of the material culture used to demarcate Jeanette's personal space. By doing this she appropriates the set into its own space, transforming it from a mass-produced technology into something personal and unique, with a particular identity and meaning for her. The television set becomes a central part of a very particular 'bedroom culture' (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001) helping her to materially reflect her individuality to herself and other members of the household. In this sense we can see how in contemporary societies 'the bedroom ... is an important haven for most teenagers, a private, personal space often decorated to reflect teens' emerging sense of themselves and where they fit in the larger culture' (Steele and Brown, 1995: 551).

Thus, depending on who is using the bedroom, the meanings attached to the device are quite different. From its relative invisibility in Mariela's bedroom to its centrality and personalization in Jeanette's bedroom, the status of the television set as material culture of bedroom is much more diverse than in the case of public areas.

In terms of the relation between the location and the practice of watching television we again found mixed reactions, usually ordered in relation with gender and age. For males and youngsters bedrooms seem to be the ideal setting for the television, offering privacy and comfort.

I like to have it there [bedroom], because I'm more relaxed in bed. I take off my shoes and I lie all over the bed and that's all. Here [living room] I cannot be bare-foot because there are people coming.... The bedroom is more

relaxed. You can take off your shirt, and lie on the bed. Anyway there's nobody looking at you, so you have more privacy inside your square metre. (Alan, 48 years)

For woman, especially housewives, placing a television in the bedroom interferes with 'normal' usage of this space, particularly in the case of children. Most see bedrooms as spaces for rest and the television only introduces unwanted changes in the sleep patterns of their children.

In the other house we had [a television] in the children's bedroom, but they stayed up late watching cartoons so never slept. Now when they go to bed, they go to my bed for a while and then I send them to their bedroom and they fall asleep fast. If they have the telly here they don't sleep. It can be midnight. (Alejandra, 36 years)

This is not the only problem related to the placing of television in bedrooms. There were also common complaints about the effects of television's presence on the couple's communication in their bedrooms. In some cases this perception leads the couples to take action to delineate a space for intimacy by moving the television set outside the bedroom, as described by Ruben.

We used to have it here, in the bedroom and then one day we went to my sister's wedding and during the mass the priest said 'The worst thing for marriage is to have a television in the bedroom. It is not recommended and is not good for marriage.' Since then there's no television in the bedroom.... It is good for marriage because it gives you more time to talk, or for your marital life also, 'nooo, I'm watching telly' [laughs], it's good. My wife said to me after we heard that 'From now on, nevermore,' and little by little we moved it out.... Communication is good now, you can talk. We talk about things, not that 'I'm watching telly, talk to you later.' (Ruben, 36 years)

Ruben and Patricia, his wife, established a clear distinction between space for intimacy and the space of television. For them intimacy is a place constructed by certain practices related to the patterns of communication of the couple where watching television brings negative influences.

As in the case of public spaces within the home, the location of television sets in private spaces at home is not without controversy or resistance. On the one hand, television sets constitute one of the most common material objects to be found in a bedroom. Even in the case of the low-income groups it is not unusual to find a television set in the bedroom, commonly in the master bedroom. On the other hand, among the members of the families under study, especially women, there is still an important degree of criticism about the perceived effects of this location, and its related practices, on family life. Here again television sets seem to be more accepted as an object (because, after all, as Carlos recognized it 'you have to put it somewhere') rather than as a practice, especially from a normative point of view.

Conclusions: new spaces and television place

Today it is easy to assume that television occupies a 'natural' place in the home. For many of us, some of our very first memories are associated with the practice of watching television, and since then it is very difficult to imagine a home without a television in it, from its public display in the living room to the intimacy of a bedroom. This 'natural' image of television does not mean that it is not subject to conflict. Television, like any other technology, is in a continual process of adaptation, or domestication, to home dynamics. As with any other technology, television has to permanently fight to retain its place at home and its location constitutes one of the main fields over which these fights take place.

The adaptation to a new home appears as a particularly interesting moment to study the meanings attached to this location. In the case under study, the homes in the housing estate, with their new segmentation of home spaces, gave these families the opportunity to redefine the way they inhabit their living spaces in accordance with what they think it means to live in a proper working-class urban home. In this process television sets as material culture have a central place, both in the public and private areas of their homes. In terms of public areas, television sets are one of the main objects to be publicly displayed in living rooms. Here the devices are important because they embody particular meanings; above all a sense of normality, of perceived participation in the way the material culture of domesticity is arranged in contemporary Chilean urban society. As one of our interviewees recognized, they have the television sets in living rooms because *'there is one in every home'*.

In relation to private areas, although the meanings attached to the device as material culture were far fewer, its presence was deeply normalized for most members of the family. Especially in the case of members who cannot express themselves in other areas of the home, such as teenagers, television sets, along with other material objects, regain a symbolic character as markers of the personal spaces of the owner, as happened in the case of Jeanette. Both in public and private spaces television sets are intimately linked to the ideas of 'home' and 'domesticity' that these families try to orchestrate in their new living environment.

But this centrality of the television set as material culture does not imply that the practices related to its use are easily accepted by family members. As seen here, watching television still generates resistance and criticism, especially when it comes into conflict with the 'correct' or 'normal' ways of using the different home spaces identified here. Even private spaces that theoretically appear as ideal for television practices are disrupted in a way by the introduction of a television set. Although 'it is difficult to decide to what extent this defensiveness concerning television is genuine and to what extent it is a reflection of what the respondents construe that social expectations should be' (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981: 75), the negative reactions show how ambiguous is the place that television occupies in the

ideas about home and domesticity of the members of these families. On the one hand its material form is welcomed, even dreamed about, as a necessary part of their 'ideal homes'. On the other hand, watching television in these locations is rejected as something that disrupts what they consider to be 'normal' practices according to their ideas about their new domesticity in the housing estate, both in public and private spaces.

Note

1. In terms of methods, the families were selected using a snowball sampling, starting with the family of Patricia, our gatekeeper in the housing estate. The research was based primarily on three series of in-depth interviews in their homes with all the adult members of the 20 families selected.

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