

Part 2

Unpacking Meanings

I love this garage. I'm in here all the time. It's my space, well sometimes anyway. I can mess around, make things, play some music, fix the bicycle. It's so full of stuff there's no way we could get a car in here, even if we had one. It has sort of become another room, a bit inside and a bit outside, especially in the summer when I can open up the creaky old door. Bloody cold in the winter though. It's hard to find much peace in the rest of the house, hard to make room for doing things. Everything seems to go on everywhere, all mad rush and no relaxing. In the garage time stands still a bit, feels like the hours take longer to go past, feels more like it used to. You know if you asked me what I like most about my house I would say the garage – doesn't make much sense does it!

In being interested in the dynamics of space, time and energy and their social transformations, we have to remember that ordinary (and extraordinary) lives are caught up in these dynamics. People do their best to make sense of change while they are immersed in it, caught up in the ongoing flow, sometimes embracing it and sometimes resisting. Quite a few of the chapters in this book draw on people talking about their experiences and particular aspects of their lives—sometimes the everyday routine, sometimes the more exceptional—in order to develop insights into how the demand for energy underpins and runs through the ever moving social world. People evidently can reflect upon even the most routine, habituated and mundane activities and practices that they undertake,

providing an important route for researching what people do, and how and why they do what they do. Such reflection can also centre on the meanings that people find in how they live, the spaces and places they inhabit and move through and how they understand the slow, the fast, the near and the distant and other relational senses of time and space, including as they shift and evolve over time.

While the two chapters in this part of the book are not alone in being interested in how people make sense of their situated life-worlds, we have put them together because of their common concern for drawing out aspects of meaning and experience in close detail. Both chapters have the ambition of developing better analytical understandings of the shifting complexities of contemporary lives, unpacking established frameworks and assumptions in order to better capture the empirical realities they find in their data. Both are also interested in what accounts of the shifting everyday can tell us about bigger processes of social change and their differentiation, extolling those concerned with processes of intervention—to reduce the use of energy in the home, or promote more sustainable forms of transport—to better recognise the complexities and dynamics of what they are attempting to intervene into. Hanging on to well-worn, simplifying views—for example of cars as fast and bikes as slow, or homes as divided up into neat functional spaces—might have the comfort that comes with putting familiar phenomenon into familiar boxes, but isn't going to get very far when actual social experience jars and fails to fit.

For Katerina Psarikidou the challenge is to immerse a fuller set of meanings into how we understand the temporalities of contemporary mobility practices, taking on both atemporal views of car systems and their alternatives, as well as frames that work with apparently clear cut dichotomies based on simple clock-time measures. Even in ancient Greek thinking, she observes, a distinction was made between 'chronos' that sees time as measurable and quantifiable, giving centrality to the clock, and 'kairos' which sees time as experienced and qualitative in character. She argues that a kairological, polychronic approach, open to the multiplicity of temporal dimensions through which people experience mobility and give it meaning, is needed. Sitting on the bus is not simply wasted time, frustratingly long in its duration, but rather a time during which people do things—reading, listening to music, texting friends. Walking is

not just about getting from A to B, but can be full of many other positive and negative meanings variously differentiated between places, day and night, and the seasons. Mobility emerges then as a shifting set of intersecting practices, materialities and temporalities, with the consequence that the meanings that people associate with moving around are more complex, relational and situated than dominant typologies suggest. Ambitions to promote modal shifts, refashion mobility infrastructures and electrify mobility technologies will always encounter the ‘kairos’ of mobility practitioners in some form. So being open to seeing time beyond clock time is pragmatically necessary, in addition to its appealing analytical sophistication.

Véronique Beillan and Sylvie Douzou have a more overtly spatial as well as temporal focus, concentrating on the home-space rather than moving beyond it. Their challenge is no less involved though, being concerned with the meanings that ‘being at home’ now carries and how these are increasingly disruptive of traditional formulations and narratives. Inhabitation of the home, they argue, is a social act and a way of seeing how broad societal changes—such as changing working practices and family structures—are refracted into people’s everyday lives and their use of the socio-technical and cultural materialities of the domestic home-space. The central axis of their analysis, drawing on intensive empirical work in France, is again to take on simple dichotomies. The home is classically seen as inside rather than outside, private rather than public and clearly demarcated in these terms. Such distinctions, however, obscure the ways in which there are ‘interpenetrations’ at work and reflected, for example, in how people talk about the connectivity between inside and outside. This exists both physically, in terms of the uses made of doors, windows, shutters and balconies, as well as through forms of communication and digital exchange. The chapter also takes on expectations of mono-functionality in which domestic space is conceived and designed as a set of boundaries and thresholds to separate rooms with different functions and meanings. The shifting contemporary experience can be quite different with the kitchen opening up to the living room, the bedroom a place for eating, the garage a space for storage, laundry, DIY, sport and/or music, rather than merely for housing the car, and so on. Blurring boundaries in these ways and seeing the home in dynamic terms has a raft

of implications for patterns of domestic energy demand—their aggregate scale, dynamics over time and profiles of access to key energy services—meaning that the units of analysis used to better capture ongoing and future change need some potentially radical re-renewing.

Both chapters therefore encourage us to see the interweaving of space, time and change through the accounts of those that experience (and indeed produce) them, with a view then to recognising the implications that follow for energy demand and its governance. Neither distils these in precise or pragmatic terms, establishing starting rather than finishing points in order to unpack dichotomous thinking and established categories of analysis. That in itself is an important contribution to how the ongoing making of energy demand should be approached in the future.