

Tactical Acts from Lockdown Homes

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ABSTRACT

The Covid19 lockdown brought work home. As design researchers our interest has been in the socio-material changes which the pandemic lockdown, as a top down strategy has brought to the domestic realm. Using an online response gathering tool we undertook an inquiry with thirty-one different households from around the world. Analyzing this data, we present seven inter-connected activity categories performed by people as they merged and separated their professional work and domestic living within their homes. From within these categories we note particular activities let people overcome the pressures of merging professional work and domestic living. We see these activities to be tactically emerging from specific characteristics of the domestic realm. Targeting innovation specialists, product designers, architects and service designers we seek the potential for amplifying such tactical characteristics when designing for working from home futures.

Keywords: Constructive Design, Design for Social Innovation, Homes Studies, Practices Theory.

INTRODUCTION

As a design research inquiry, our point of departure is the home under the Covid19 pandemic lockdown, and the socio-material changes occurring in the domestic realm. Approaching 'home' as one of the fundamental units of our contemporary society, we view the pandemic as a force that situated professional work to be carried out with domestic living for varying periods of time. It is within this context, of work getting displaced and situated within the confines of the domestic realm we began our inquiry by asking what socio-material changes could be occurring to the domestic environment? Schools, colleges, offices, factories and much of our contemporary workplaces hollowed out human presence during the lockdown and families were mandated into their homes by diktat. As the pandemic began spreading in the first quarter of 2020, home was where everyone was. Large numbers continue to be, carrying out their school lessons, giving exams, organizing online meetings, workshops while at the same time cooking, doing yoga, teaching and playing with children. The actions and performances within the domestic realm under a lockdown were in itself teleological.

Over past decades as organizations have introduced more flexwork and telecommuting programs (Siha & Monroe, 2006) and with home based businesses becoming popular(Vorley & Rodgers, 2014), the boundaries between home and work have blurred. But with the Covid19 pandemic and the force of its ensuing lockdown, families have needed to work from home globally. This historic large scale push where the home suddenly became a site for work and professional labour (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Cieraad, 1999) in the 21st century provisioned intrigue for a design research inquiry for discerning changes occurring to the

domestic realm. Methodically, we view the pandemic as a form of crisis, accident and breakdown (Latour, 2005). Using the crisis as an exposure, our aim was to inquire constructively and interpret facets and aspects of the changes within the domestic realm. Nations employed forceful measures leading to widely varying situations, like enforcing social distancing, restricted movement of people and closure of business and services. Such forceful measures we see as a 'strategy' being employed from top down (De Certeau & Rendall, 2011). While entities such as governments and work organizations deployed this strategy, it can also be seen as emerging from roles of responsibilities of professional, citizenry and familial identities, to protect themselves and their communities from the onslaught of the pandemic. The strategic push as a lockdown meant that conventional space and time that were earlier neatly categorized as work, entertainment and family life were all suddenly amalgamated into a single place - the home. Thus as a conceptual construct for an inquiry on the domestic realm, we treat the lockdown strategy as a force from atop exerting pressure on the home (Figure 1). With this framing, our primary lens views the coming together of professional work and domestic life and the ensuing socio-material changes within the home. In coming up with procedures to formulate our inquiry we build on and contribute to practices theory (Schatzki, 2012), and ask what does it mean to design for social innovation (Manzini, 2019) in the domestic realm when billions work from their homes? With such a process we present seven interconnected categories with supportive rich details, for innovation specialists, service designers and architects to consider and leverage for designing transitional futures that could enrich the potential of bringing together professional work and domestic living within the home.

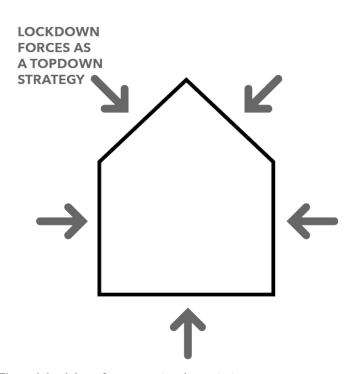


Figure 1. Lockdown forces as a top down strategy

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1. GATHERING SOCIO-MATERIAL CHANGES WITHIN HOMES UNDER LOCKDOWN

To begin our inquiry into the situation that forced professional work and domestic living, we customized an online survey platform Typeform into a more open-ended response gathering tool. The decision to take an online inquiry was straightforward, as venturing into the field with physical presence became restrictive, remote inquiry presented a viable option.

Considering the nature of our inquiry and with potential respondents working within their homes, we deliberated that this mode would result in rich reflective slices of experiences as research input. We designed the response tool with twenty-six queries. These were built in such a way that it allowed people to reflect and detail out where possible, of how their everyday practices, materially and spatially were changing while they undertook their professional duties from their homes. Of these, three queries had five, four and four subquestions within them. Of the total number of queries, thirteen were set as mandatory and rest optional. There were four questions that had the option of sending in photographs with textual responses.

With this data-gathering tool we selectively reached out to people from within our networks and personally requested participation. We got a total of thirty-five responses of which we consider thirty-one in our dataset (see Table 1). A majority of the people (24/31) who contributed with their responses included architects, designers, design researchers and innovation specialists. Targeting the query onto a selective disciplinary domain was purposeful; but it is not to allude that design professionals cope with the lockdown differently than people with other backgrounds. Our reason was methodical. Firstly, our larger interest as design research, which goes beyond this article is in building collaborative potential domestic futures, that could be, rather than, 'what is' or a 'before and after' socioscientific comparative analysis. Then as mentioned, the target audience of our research findings is the design community who could leverage from it and apply it to the design of domestic futures. Our tool was designed to gather responses in the form of succinct textual details through multiple open-ended questions and visual details from photographs from within homes. Considering the responses would be delivered through online means we aimed for rich and granular data that could be interpreted in design-based terms. For this we felt it would be useful for respondents to interpret design terminology and the emphasis on capturing and communicating design related details of the changes around their homes. With such a framing we wished to access an interpretive and emic-able (Rowsell, 2011) perspective on the micro-changes occurring within homes from and for design expert backgrounds than as diffused design (Manzini, 2015). With such a framing, our contribution for design is a thematized exposition of seven categories of activities, that have emerged from homes under the forces of the lockdown strategy. Then from a Practices Theory position, we interpret these categories to hold activities, which we discuss in the following section. By framing these categories, that hold domestic activities from the Covid19 lockdown period, our aim is to present 'Working from Home' as a 'Social Practice' for Practices Theory, coming as a contribution from a Design Research inquiry.

2. CATEGORIZING ACTIVITIES OF THE LOCKDOWN HOME

We began by analyzing the gathered textual and photographic data with a grounded theoretical approach using the Nvivo tool and through free form colour coding on textual responses and photographs. Our analysis generated fourteen categories. After distillation we settled on seven main categories. As results we present these categories, with granular details and supportive photographs. These categories are not exclusive to each other as separate entities but like every day domestic activities and materiality, are inherently and deeply interconnected.

Table 1. List of respondents, their locations, professions, number of members in their home, the area of their homes and number of rooms.

Number of Respondents	Country	Profession	No. of members at home ('+' pets)	Area of home in sq. Mtrs	No. of rooms
R01	Finland	Teacher/Design Researcher	2	60	3
R02	Finland	Teacher	3	63	3
R03	Finland	Photographer	1	33	2
R04	United Kingdom	Designer, Community Artist, Educator	4	92	5
R05	India	Consultant	1	150	2
R06	Denmark	Pedagogue Assistant	2	100	4
R07	Denmark	Technical writer	3	141	4
R08	Denmark	Academic Researcher-Innovation	4	450	20
R09	India	Architect Freelance writer	2	140	3
R10	Finland/China	Designer	1	35	2
R11	Australia	Senior Project Manager	2	50	2
R12	Kenya	Architect	4	200	9
R13	Finland	Architect, writer, film curator	1+1	90	3
R14	Finland	Academic administration	2	66	3
R15	Australia	Design, Research	40 (Co-housing)	9	3
R16	Poland	Architect	2	62	3
R17	Denmark	Teacher	3	91	4
R18	India	Architect	3	170	7
R19	Germany	Architect	2	62	2
R20	Finland	Retired woodworker	2	95	5
R21	Netherlands	Student	1	12	2
R22	India	Industrial designer	3	90	6
R23	Finland/China	Curator, artist and graphic designer	4	180	3
R24	Singapore	Design Strategist	4	110	5
R25	India	Software	4	200	6
R26	Italy	Design Researcher	2	70	4
R27	Finland	Senior Recruiter	2	53	2
R28	Finland	Project Manager	1+1	31	2
R29	United Kingdom	Service designer and lecturer	2	80	3
R30	United States	PhD student	2+2	90	6
R31	Russia	Design Researcher	3	50	2

analysing human life (Schatzki, 2012:16-17). A bundle being temporal in character forms when everyday practices are performed upon material arrangements. He writes that 'activities' are one of the components that compose everyday social practices, and activities are essentially bound with material entities. He qualifies activities to be events, which means, that they happen, and activity events can be distinguished from mere occurrences by virtue of being intentional and voluntary (Schatzki, 2012:18). With such a framing from Schatzki, (2012:16-17), we have considered the home under the lockdown as a 'material arrangement' within which intentional activities are undertaken to merge and separate professional work and domestic life (Figure 2). Considering such a position on activities from Practices Theory,

the seven categories that will be discussed, have been interpreted from a grounded analysis of reported events and happenings (from respondents) from within homes during the

Schatzki, (2012) discussing ways to conduct research on everyday practices says that to consider the notion of a 'bundle' of 'practices' and 'material arrangements' is fundamental to

lockdown. We approach the event descriptions as comprising of materially supported intentions undertaken to carry out professional work duties from peoples' homes under the lockdown. Thus, from a Practices Theory position we qualify the categories as comprising of 'activities' performed within the 'material arrangement' of homes during the pandemic.

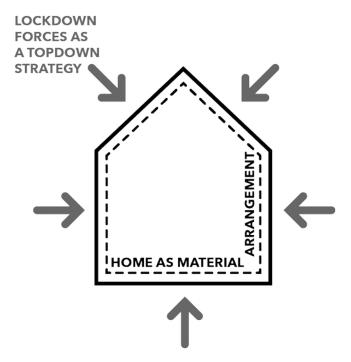


Figure 2. Home under Lockdown as a Material Arrangement

Before proceeding, we would also like the reader to note below, the ordering of the 'activities' categories. As a matter of presentation, the thematized categories are conceptualized in a sequence to generate an imaginative pattern (Figure 3). With that we present seven interconnected activities categories within the material arrangement of homes under a lockdown.

The Moving Body ->- Displacing Things and Spaces ->- Managing Roles, Responsibilities and Relations ->- Demanding IT and the Screen ->- Dealing with Mixed Soundscapes ->- Being with Flexible Patterns ->- Experimenting Anew at Home

Figure 3. Seven interconnected categories of 'activities' within homes under a lockdown

2.1. The Moving Body:

With the closure of swimming pools, gyms and sports clubs on one side to ways of dealing with everyday ergonomics to cooking and eating, people cite multiple ways in which the pandemic lockdowns have had an impact on their corporeal bodies. But what we highlight here is how people use their bodies to make a distinction between their 'working' selves and their 'domestic living' selves. We find evidence of people creating a separation by actively using and moving their body to separate professional work and domestic living. For example, R3, a photographer from Finland describes her work space:

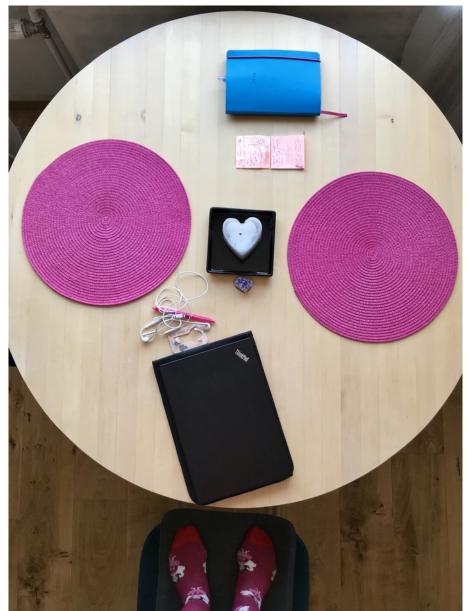


Figure 4. R3's Table

"This is my main table and working desk (...) during the day I can switch from one chair to another depending if I work or eat. I like to work on the left side and eat on the right side, but sometimes I switch sides or work and eat on the same side..." (R3)

People experience a sense separation by moving the body from one place to another and therefore actively creating a boundary between work and non-work. For e.g. R2 from Finland, mentions "I don't like it, how work invades my home and the only thing I can do is to take a long walk to get away from it." Then, the movement of the body is also be used as a way of creating separation between the work practices of other family members, R30 mentions "sharing the same workspace is problematic when both of us have virtual meetings simultaneously. In this case, I move to the dining room and take meetings on my laptop." As seen the moving body is actively used to distinguish both, professional work and the domestic living and also between co-dwellers professional space and time.

2.2. Displacing Things and Spaces

From the moving body we proceed to displacing things and spaces next. With more family members spending time at home, there are more displacement of things. Our respondents mention of moving objects, reusing existing furniture to changing rooms to get by their

everyday professional selves. 14 out of the 31 participants wrote that that they had made spatial/furniture/things (non-IT) changes because of working and spending more time at home due to the lockdown. For example, R1 notes the changes that she has done to make do as her working space:

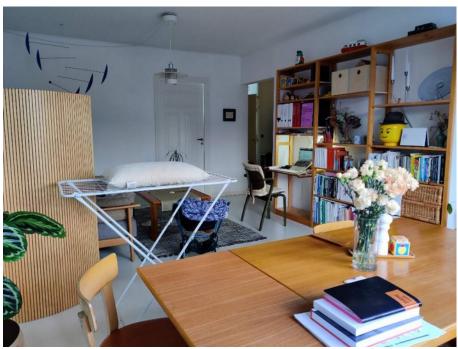


Figure 5. R1's Work Space in the Living Room

"I don't have the table/chair I need, I am using an extended shelf layer as a desk and a wooden armchair as a chair. I added some cushions on it to make it more comfortable, but it is still a bit far from an office setup." (R1)

R1 has put together and recreated an "office setup" within a large book shelf and showcase in her living room. It demarcates her work space from the living room space with the sofa behind her and her spouse's seat on the dining table. On the other hand, new spaces demarcating work and domestic living have been made by adding dividers to separate, setting up material boundaries between the spaces. For example, R29 describes the boundaries that she has created in their main room.

"It is a picture of our living room, office space, and dining room. It has become pretty much a flexible place where we (my husband and I) do yoga, and Insanity (exercise). Also, the dining table has become a workshop zone. We do pottery, jewelry, plasticine figures, paint, etc. (...) I divided the office with a screen that creates a sense of office space different from the living room." (R29)

R29 creates boundaries between the different work spaces by putting up dividing objects such as a screen and a small cupboard that differentiates the different domestic activities. Due to the increase in the density of activities within a home, R29 responds by developing tactical space making, using objects and creating physical boundaries within her living room to limit the spillovers between the work and domestic living practices.

Another noticeable aspect within this category is the displacing of domestic objects and spaces between family members. The pressures of multiple working bodies within the home throughout the day results in things and spaces changing usership between members and even between generations. For example, when asked what piece/s of furniture she uses most when spending time at home, R31 responds with this, "my daughter's small table and a pile of pillows." In the case of R2 as another example, says "I normally share the bedroom with

my daughter, but in this situation, I feel it is better to have separate rooms, so I've moved my bed into the living room as well."

With Displacing Objects and Spaces, the forces of the lockdown are creating not only new dynamic flexible spaces but also new attachments and detachments with domestic objects and spaces for family members. If objects hold and mediate relations then the lockdown is forging new relations and dislodging old ones within the home.

2.3. Managing Roles, Responsibilities and Relations

The force of the lockdown also indicates traces of new domestic living-related responsibilities emerging for household members. For instance, R22 from India when asked if there any completely new activities he has discovered or come up, responds with: "Help in the kitchen, cooking and cleaning utensils, which I never did before." Then R17, notes a reflection about the pre-Covid period regarding which member of the family is responsible for certain domestic tasks by saying "Establishing routines that were taken for granted pre-Covid. Who plumps up cushions, who folds clothes, who keeps water jug filled?" As the forcing of domestic and work-related activities occurs, the home provisions meeting domestic responsibilities while undertaking work responsibilities. For example, R30 says, "I also prefer the flexibility of doing personal chores while still finishing a day's work." At the same time, as the lockdown strategy transforms the home as a place of work and domesticity, people note the constraint of missing their connections with the outside world, including work, friends and close and extended family and long to perform their past roles and relationships. For example: "I miss going out and meeting my friends or even other people at work." And R27 mentions "I feel that I'm little bit less stressed when I'm working from home and can focus better but at the same time I'm missing my colleagues." And "...Not being able to visit my mother - that is the worst of all." The loss of connection is not felt only as a feeling of connecting with friends, but has also consequences on people's ability to work. As noted by R23: "tough, stress and difficult to concentrate when the place you stay at doesn't have any connection with the work you must be doing." Without having colocation as an option, understanding the norms and practices of co-workers became more difficult for people. As noted by R29,



Figure 6. R23 sent this photo when asked to express the 'mood' of her home

"As a new member of a team and company, have to meet my new colleagues online. Not been able to engage with them face to face, is been hard. Also, since I am learning how they work, it is very difficult to see what and how they do things."

In such a context, there is an emphasis and reliance on technology to mediate and maintain work and personal relations, which brings us to the next category of the use of ICT within the homes during the lockdown.

2.4. Demanding IT and the Home Screen

The role of the all-pervasive communication technologies and the supportive screen inside the home under a lockdown functions as a bridging and pivot-point, connecting the work realm while maintaining and aiding domestic-living in parallel. While peoples' homes were already technology ready for catering to the needs of remote work, during the lockdown almost a third (9/31) of our respondents had purchased or brought new IT related hardware. The Wifi extender, router, monitor screens and headphones were popular new entrants into homes. More than half (19/31) of them had installed new video or connectivity application software on their devices. But the domination of communication technology in the contained domestic realm and the all-demanding screen seems to straddle between the requisite and the resentful. Reflecting on his mode of working from home, while his two daughters took up classes online, R12 says, "Internet has becoming the new oxygen for working from home."



Figure 7. R12's Make-shift Work Space in the Bedroom

While R21, a student who lives by herself in a single bedroom apartment away from her family in a foreign country, when asked about new activities discovered during the lockdown period, mentions, "Playing...Online games with family members and staying connected." As an example of a child being introduced to the relationship of the screen to work, R17 mentions that she's been letting her son listen in during her online meetings, "Playing out 'workspeak' on speakers for child to hear what work sounds like. Proving that computer time is not idle time to child therefore screentime has different purposes." Then there are expressions of concern with regards to technology as well. A common complaint relates to problems with connectivity and network speeds when working from home. As noted by R12 and R19 here, "It's the overload on the internet speeds at times." and "At times the slow server connection has annoyed and affected my temper." Then there are issues expressed about the uneasy relationship of the use of the screen as a medium in itself. For example, as R22 and R1 express their concern and frustration with the screen time and the screen as a mediator, "TV or movie watching stopped completely as we have to restrict screen time for our toddler." "It's just SO MUCH SCREEN TIME! I don't want to see friends and family mediated by the same apparatuses that exclusively mediate my work-life."

As evident, ICT and the screen actively mediate work, familial relations, new learning and entertainment, and is deeply lodged within the home under the lockdown. Despite frustrations and concerns the provisioning of work from home in its current context cannot be imagined without these technologies.

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2.5. Dealing with Mixed Soundscapes

As work entered home through the remote technological route during the lockdown, we see evidence from our respondents that it encounters a particular unrestraint voice of openness associated with domestic life (Blunt & Dowling, 2006), the sounds of the home. As the pressure of the lockdown forced the increasing of work practices within the home, we find our respondents mentioning of a 'disturbance' to work.

For R2 one of the difficulties of carrying out her professional work from home was, "Keeping the noise and voices from kids quiet during online meetings/classes." And R12, mentioning about how their home has changed says, "learning to have more patience with the kids and their noise levels." Then for R25, sounds from domestic appliances make it difficult to carry out work, "Mixer sound from kitchen is disturbing during calls. Also, TV sound". It is not only the sounds of the domestic realm that are an issue, but also when different work voices mix there is a problem, as R30 mentions, "Sharing the same workspace is problematic when both of us have virtual meetings simultaneously. In this case, I move to the dining room and take meetings on my laptop."



Figure 8. R25's New headphone purchase

The above instances provide insights regarding the issues people face from noise and sounds when working from homes during the lockdown. We see it as being indicative that domestic soundscapes are different from the sounds of the office and there is a contest and clash of two different aural natures, each with their own decorum and background. With that we move to the next bundle, relating to the flexibility of working from home.

2.6. Being with Flexible Patterns

What was mentioned earlier about domestic life being associated with an 'unrestraint character of openness' features and provisions as a positive trait of the domestic realm. To the question of what has been most ideal about working from home, 12 respondents mention flexibility or an aspect relating to it as being the most ideal about carrying out their work from home. As seen in the case of R05, "If there are no scheduled events then I have the flexibility to use my day to my benefit for other things I want to do." Describing her work station at home, R28 mentions this, "I work in three places: 1) my dinner table 2) on the sofa & footstool with small pillow behind my back, 3) on the bed..."



Figure 9. R7's View from her dining room work space

When asked if working from home is changing her, R7 mentions, "The only difference that I have been experiencing is that as I moved my working hours to the afternoon & evening and night (I take care of kids in the morning) I am much more productive." And then when asked what has been ideal about working from home, R19 mentions, "Taking a 10 min break every 2-3 hours and doing stretching exercises." While R21 says "Now that I have some time extra (which otherwise would go in cycling) I try out new recipes."

As evident from the instances above the aspect of being flexible cuts across multiple categories that we have presented so far. There is flexibility in the use and care of the body, in the use of whatever space and object the home provisions or mixing the role and responsibility of caregiving. The mention of gaining time because of not commuting due to the lockdown and attributing that time for flexibility is a recurring mention in our data set. And with such a flexibility of separating work and home mindsets, the home begins to afford what we present in the final category, as Experimenting Anew.

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2.7. Experimenting Anew at Home



Figure 10. R31's home work station

With the imposition of the lockdown and being restricted within the confines of their homes, the response from our participants indicates that the restrictions results in them trying out new activities. This is not to colour the overall responses in an overtly positive way, but to say that at the time of gathering responses with the selected members, based on the nature of our query, there is an indication that the pressure of the lockdown home also brings inventiveness and experimentality. We do not discuss the nature, cause or result of such an experimentality here, but we indicate that the home under a lockdown becomes a nucleus of new trials and experiments embedding into everyday activities. Experimenting with new practices took the form of, for example, new workouts and physical exercises for R1, "I started doing youtube ballet classes" while she was also trialing with gardening and cooking, "I also started growing a levain and some greens" and R31 mentions "Homemade chocolate". Then R2 and R22 mention of artistic and other projects— "taken on playing bass as a new hobby"; "we picked up watercolor where we all enjoy painting and sketching, fun way to indulge ourselves and be more creative instead of addictive screen time."

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In this way, not only was the home able to take on the multiple practices that the lockdown strategy imposed on it, but it was also able to accommodate additional new practices that the people took on. With this we culminate the presentation of the seven categories holding multiple activities undertaken by our respondents.

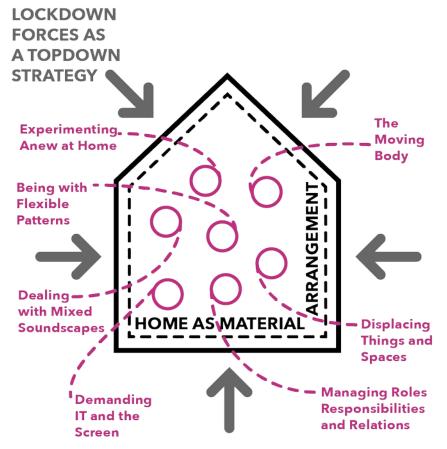


Figure 11. The emergence of activities from the home under lockdown

Having approached the home under lockdown as a 'material arrangement' within which activities were undertaken, we have now presented seven interconnected categories, holding varied activities from thirty-one homes from around the world under the Covid19 lockdown. Prior to that in the introduction we discussed how we saw the lockdown as a top-down strategy exerting a force on the home. To further the conceptual construct of our inquiry, we propose to view the two theoretical constructs in a combination as a conceptual gestalt of our contribution. This means, as the forces of the top down strategy of the lockdown were subject onto the material arrangement of the home, it resulted in the output of varied activities which we presented within seven interconnected practice activities. The top down forces of the lockdown onto the domestic realm results in household members to undertake activities related to both, their professional work responsibilities and ones related to domestic living causing a 'densification' of activities (Figure 11). To overcome such a push, particular activities can be seen to hold 'tactical' characteristics in varying measures.

3. TACTICAL ACTS WITHIN THE LOCKDOWN HOME

We note above how the lockdown as a top down strategy necessitates a 'densification' of activities at home. We also mention the presented categories to hold a 'tactical' characteristic. De Certeau (De Certeau & Rendall, 2011) writes tactics are performed by less powerful actors. It can be understood as an adaptation to the environment, which has been created by the strategies of the powerful. For him, a tactic depends on time — it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized "on the wing." Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into "opportunities."

Thus, if the lockdown as force is a strategy imposed from top down, then particular activities can be seen as being performed tactically to overcome the forcing of professional work and

domestic living in the pandemic home. Faced with the increased densification within the home, people feel the need to create separation between professional work and domestic living. Each of the seven activities discussed provision different potentials and concerns for separating professional work and domestic living. As the descriptions indicate the categories of, 'Moving Body', 'Displacing of Things and Spaces', 'Being with Flexible Patterns' and 'Demanding IT and Screen' provision tactical opportunities to separate, while 'Managing Roles, Responsibilities and Relations' and 'Dealing with Mixed Soundscapes' can be seen as a deterrence for separation. 'Experimenting Anew' we consider as a category of its own, emerging as agency between the dwellers adapting to the domestic realm subject to the lockdown. We see each of these categories holding potential and opportunity when considering 'Working from Home' as a 'Social Practice'.

4. CONCLUSION

We have now presented our analysis of data gathered from homes during the Covid19 pandemic. We interpret the lockdown as a top down strategy whose forces result in various activities within the home. Using a Practices Theory framework, we framed these activities within the home as a material arrangement. We then presented the activities within seven different categories using textual description and photographs. Then following De Certeau, we indicated that some activities work tactically better for separating professional work and domestic living. We see all activities emerging from specific characteristics of the domestic realm that are closely interconnected with categories we presented. With such a presentation of the categories we call on innovation specialists, product designers, architects and service designers to amplify potential tactical emergence or address its concerns when designing for working from home futures.

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