



Labor, violence and the unfamiliar: Animals' geographies of the more-than-human home

Progress in Environmental Geography

1–20

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DOI: 10.1177/27539687241278367

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Abstract

Bringing insights from feminist geographies of the home to the animals' geographies literature, this review posits the more-than-human home as a site of unevenly distributed violence and labor, for both humans and nonhumans alike. It expounds a holistic ecology of the more-than-human home that transcends a focus on companion animals, thereby raising questions of interspecies co-existence, autonomy, and control. Within this, it explores the work that pests do, understanding the domestic space as a site of multiple contradictory processes of social reproduction, recognizing how one being's homemaking is another's unmaking.

Keywords

feminist geography, queer geography, pets, pests, domestic

Introduction

The last twenty-five years have witnessed an abundance of animals' geographies scholarship (Buller 2014), particularly encompassing the domains of urban ecologies (Barua and Sinha 2019), wildlife conservation (Lorimer 2015), and laboratory environments (Greenhough and Roe 2011). Within this abundance, there are three distinct empirical and conceptual gaps that this review seeks to address. Firstly, it concentrates on the domestic as an interspecies “contact zone” (Haraway 2008, 216), situating its importance within a wider historic neglect of the home by human geography. Secondly, the extant literature on the more-than-human home has privileged accounts of companion animals¹ but largely overlooks unwanted cohabitants such as pests² (Hodgetts and Fair 2024), as well as commensals that are neither generative

nor detrimental to projects of human homemaking. Moreover, with some notable exceptions (Power 2009b), these categories have largely been considered in isolation from one another. A holistic ecology of the more-than-human home needs to embrace all these divergent human-nonhuman relations, not concentrating solely on the actively desired, nor relegating pests to a passing reference or footnote, as seen in Kaika (2004, 281) or Franklin (2006, 154). Thus, a comprehensive understanding of animals' geographies of “domestic” space must extend beyond a focus on “domesticated”

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animals, thereby raising questions of interspecies co-existence, autonomy, and control. Thirdly, advances in our understanding of the more-than-human home need to not only empirically expand to encompass a greater diversity of taxa but also stand to gain from the theoretical contributions of multiple waves of feminist geographies, to avoid romanticizing, naturalizing, or essentializing the home. Such an intellectual dialogue would also extend the latter literature beyond its conventionally anthropocentric framing. Consequently, there is a need for more attention on the home as a site of unevenly distributed violence and labor, for both humans and nonhumans alike, as part of a broader project of defamiliarizing the family and the home.

To that end, Part One articulates the significance of further research into the more-than-human home. Part Two identifies three key analytics from feminist geographies that could inform the analysis of the more-than-human home: the home as a site of labor, the home as a space of power and violence, and the project of defamiliarizing the home. Consequently, Part Three surveys the existing animals' geographies of the more-than-human home through these key analytics. Finally, Part Four concludes with further directions for research, including expanding beyond a focus on animals and the Global North, and exploring the possibilities for queering domestic political ecologies as well as paying greater attention to nonhuman labor.

This article focuses on the domestic as a material and imaginative space (Blunt and Dowling 2006), rather than on domestication as a process, but critical geographical scholarship on the latter (Anderson 1997; Cassidy and Mullin 2007; Swanson, Lien, and Ween 2018) still has a bearing on the analysis, given both the prevalence of domesticated animals in domestic spaces, and how historic and contemporary acts of domestication are entwined with labor and violence, the determining thematics of this piece. Moreover, understanding "domesticated" as "becoming accustomed to the

household" (Cassidy 2007, 5) or the capacity "to live familiarly or at home (with)" (Alaimo 2016, 19) suggests some of the fertile intersections between these concepts.

Part one: Entering the more-than-human home

The "great indoors" (Biehler and Simon 2011) is a critical area of inquiry, especially given the growth of indoor spaces and the increasing proportion of time humans (Wakefield-Rann 2021) or "Homo indoorus" (Dunn 2018, 1) spend within them. Yet there has been a general exclusion of domestic space from political ecology (Biehler and Simon 2011; Kaika 2004) due to a treatment of indoor spaces as fixed and unnatural, or as sites of trivial, feminized or inauthentic natures compared with masculine wild natures (Anderson 1997; Cassidy 2007, 9), thereby mirroring the academic marginalization of the home as a private and gendered space³. Feminist geographers have worked to legitimize the home as a site of geographical inquiry (Blunt and Varley 2004). Homes were previously ignored by geographers due to their association with the feminine and with "reactionary, stasis-bound, nostalgic notions of security and belonging" (Gregson and Lowe 1995, 226). They were considered trivial compared to the public worlds of business and politics (Duncan and Lambert 2004).

Yet the more-than-human home is a crucial and timely site to analyze, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Without homogenizing the diversity of pandemic experiences, I contend that the enforcement of lockdowns produced a global and largely unprecedented time of interiority, one that was necessarily unevenly felt. This intramural confinement, occasioned by uncertainty, death, and suffering, and partially enabled by the rapid digitalization of everyday life and the mass expansion of home working, transformed the meaning, use, and spatial requirements of the home, although the long-term impacts of this remain to be seen. Some

scholars suggest that this recent period of interiorization has also (perhaps temporarily) reshaped human-nonhuman relations. For instance, the “anthropause” (Searle, Turnbull and Lorimer 2021) altered rat rhythms and topologies, with rodents found to be more active in the day, engaging in novel nesting and feeding behaviors and pursuing wider territorial ranges. Occurring simultaneously with a lockdown expansion of pet-keeping, the pandemic can be seen as a time of both pet and pest abundance. Moreover, the domestic compression of everyday life, amid heightened anxieties over hygiene and contamination, may well have exacerbated the impacts of unwanted more-than-human entanglement and the willingness to convivially accommodate other species in our homes. These recent developments speak to the necessity of grappling with the contemporary more-than-human home, in its full multispecies complexity.

Finally, the more-than-human home brings into stark relief many of the major concerns of animals’ geographies and therefore has the potential to generate significant knowledge for this subdiscipline. The home is a critical site for understanding how animals exceed the literal and metaphorical places they are allocated by humans, their sanctioned “animal spaces” (Philo and Wilbert 2000). Animals can thus be seen as matter out of place through their entry into the home and the expression of their own lived geographies or “bestly places” (Philo and Wilbert 2000) that may be in contravention of human design. This raises the questions of for whom or for what domestic space constitutes a home, and how can potentially contrary practices of more-than-human homemaking be brought into alignment? Allied to this is a concern for the co-constitution of space by non-human actors: analysis of how animals both shape and are shaped by processes of urbanization (Barua and Sinha 2019; Hovorka 2008) can be scaled down to the more-than-human

co-production of domesticities, and how humans and nonhumans are themselves transformed by those processes.

Part two: Learning from feminist geographies of the home

Insights from existing feminist scholarship on the geographies of the home are critical for interrogating this underexamined field of animals’ geographies. In this, I recognize the intellectual and political heterogeneity of geographic feminisms. This work, largely from the 1990s onwards, encompasses both socialist feminist perspectives that emphasize reproductive labor within the private space of the home (in contrast with often masculinized public productive labor) and work inspired by the cultural turn that recognizes the home as both material and symbolic. Consequently, I am teasing out two key threads from these different perspectives: a focus on reproductive labor and violence from the first, and a concern with meaning from the latter.

These insights can also be contextualized as critical responses to the work of humanist geographers of the 1970s and 1980s. Epitomized by the work of Yi-Fu Tuan, the home was understood as a place of “security, familiarity, and nurture” (2004, 164), as a “shelter or a haven” (2004, 164), and as “a bounded space” (2004, 165). Such an analysis gave some recognition to the gendered division of labor, and to the danger of boredom emerging from familiarity, but it also fundamentally denied the more-than-human nature of the home, defining the home as a “thoroughly humanized, socially constructed world” (2004, 165). Feminist geographers critiqued Tuan for adopting a mode of aesthetic masculinity in opposition to the feminist other of place itself (Rose 1993), his lack of an analysis of power, and his universalizing claims that utilize man as a baseline (Sibley 1995). They have refuted humanist geography’s idealization of the home as a

masculinist space of refuge and leisure on three grounds. Firstly, they have highlighted that the home is also a space of exploitation and work, particularly social reproductive labor (Dalla Costa and James 2017), performed predominately by women and is thus integral to the functioning of capitalism. Even if socially reproductive labor is externalized beyond the family to a paid employee (i.e., a nanny), it is often still preferentially home-based due to a culture of domesticity that prescribes the home as the primary site for childcare (Gregson and Lowe 1995).

Secondly, feminist geographers have shattered the image of the home as a refuge through revealing the home as a potential place of violence and danger, as well as a site for the reproduction of uneven gendered power relations (Gregson and Lowe 1995, 226) that perpetuate the oppression of women (Bowlby, Gregory, and McKie 1997). Understandings of the home as a space of privacy where one has the capacity to be oneself (Somerville 1992) have been contested by scholars who recognize how families can engage in their own practices of discipline and surveillance (Johnston and Valentine 1995; Madigan, Munro, and Smith 1990), particularly exacted upon women, children, and queer members of the home.

Building upon this, feminist geographers have highlighted the heterogeneity of experiences of the home, further disaggregating the power relations that striate domestic space and transcending critiques of masculine refuge to also challenge the presumed universalism of white middle-class womanhood. Black feminist writers such as hooks (1990) have countered existing excoriations of domestic life by arguing that the home can be a space of renewal, subversion, liberation, and resistance to the brutality of racism (although such calls have been tempered by calls that this should not place oppressions that occur within Black families beyond reproach; Lewis 2022).

Queer scholars have also addressed the marginalization and exclusion of LGBT+ individuals from the heteronormative family home and their inability to experience the home as a

source of identity or as an ideal space, due to the need to conceal non-heterosexual identities (Johnston and Valentine 1995), occasioning an increased focus on public spaces of queer encounter. However, this framing of the home as inherently heterosexist, oppressive, and exclusionary has also been nuanced, both by scholars detailing heterosexual family acceptance and affirmation of LGBT identities (Gorman-Murray 2008) and exploring the home itself as a site for the conscious production of queer life. Moreover, heterosexuality itself must not be taken as a naturalized given within domestic space. Instead, scholars argue that it is actively co-constituted through embodied, sensual, and sexual interactions within the space of the home (Morrison 2012).

Recent scholarship on the home has encompassed a greater diversity of modes of domestic life. There has been a push to conceptualize the home beyond a suburban middle-class ideal and instead explore homemaking in the context of disaster, including forms of home-unmaking and domicile (Nowicki 2014), as well as thinking about the production of home transnationally and its role in reproducing colonial relations (Blunt 1999). Attention has turned to those on the margins of home, thinking about extreme geographies of the loss of home and the emotional and sensory dimensions of them (Brickell 2012). This move to reckon with a greater diversity of experiences of home is critical to the project of defamiliarizing the home, in the sense of challenging the taken-for-granted nature of the home as an institution and normative ideal, and instead recognizing it as geographically, socially, and historically contingent and mutable. By rendering the home “unfamiliar,” its ambivalent, uncanny, and discomfiting qualities are brought into view.

Humanist constructions of home as a “bounded place” have also been thoroughly refuted by scholarship that highlights how domestic spaces are always connected to public spaces and institutions (Rose 2003) and that home is constituted by social relations that

extend well beyond the immediate locale (Massey 2018). The home is understood as traversing multiple scales, from the individual to the local to the national and transnational (Blunt and Dowling 2006). Homes are no more emotionally and discursively fixed and static than the identities of those who inhabit and co-produce them (Bowlby, Gregory, and McKie 1997), and can engender complex and contradictory emotions (Blunt and Varley 2004). Moreover, one can distinguish between home as a “material and symbolic” place (Blunt and Varley 2004, 3) and the house as a physical structure, as one can be physically unhoused but retain a conception of home, and vice versa (Somerville 1992). I argue that the domestic is the muddying of the two and that the family as a malleable affective and ideological structure is forever at arm’s length from the domestic.

In bringing these different literatures together, from feminist geographies of the home, I am embracing the domestic as a legitimate field of inquiry and critically reckoning with the uneven power relations at play. Simultaneously, through drawing from the animals’ geographies literature, I am contesting the anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism found within some of the feminist geography literature, by bringing the animals back indoors. In light of this scholarship, I contend there are three key feminist thematics through which to understand animals’ geographies of the more-than-human home: the home as a site of (reproductive) labor, the home as a space of power and violence, and the project of defamiliarizing the home, both in terms of contesting the home and the family as natural and given, and in terms of rendering the home unhomey or uncanny.

Part three: Critically interrogating the more-than-human home

Labor

A focus on labor brings a fresh analytical perspective to debates regarding the novelty of

current human-companion animal relations. Many scholars contend that there has been a recent shift in the status of pets in the West, in terms of the intensity of human affection bestowed upon them, and a spatial shift in their everyday geographies, bringing them into the intimacy of the home, including spaces such as the bedroom (Franklin 2006). This highlights pet-keeping as a historically and geographically contingent phenomenon, rather than a natural or inevitable process (Irvine 2004). However, this novelty is counterpointed by the recognition of longer histories of multi-species co-habitation (Charles 2016; Howell 2002; Irvine and Cilia 2017) bolstering arguments that the home has always been a site of multispecies relations (Cudworth 2019). Using the insights of feminist geography, the specificity of this shift towards a new era of pet love (Nast 2006a) can be grasped via the changes in reproductive labor it has engendered. Nast (2006b) interprets the rise of new elite pet-centred consumption patterns as a reflection of rampant consumerism and post-industrial alienation that displaces concern for human suffering. But I argue that this can also be understood as an expansion of the reproductive labor required to maintain companion animals, and a consequent displacement of some of that labor to professionalized services beyond the home: an expanded mode of reproduction that begets capital accumulation, from dog yoga (Nast 2006a) to expensive canine food trucks in affluent areas (Hubbard and Brooks 2021). The care work required keenly parallels the reproductive labor of childcare, in terms of time demands, balancing multiple responsibilities, and the feminization of much of this labor (Cudworth 2022). This is exemplified by contemporary Chinese “pet slaves” (Tan et al. 2021), a self-identification utilized by professional women whose personal lives and housing decisions are centred on meeting the needs of their companion animals. Moreover, the rise in post-lockdown animal abandonment

(Wollaston 2021) as well as increasing demands for dog walkers and trainers suggests a crisis of care and reproductive labor oriented towards the nonhuman.

Yet thinking critically about the role of labor in the more-than-human household requires a recognition of animal agency and the work that nonhumans do (Barua 2019; Besky and Blanchette 2019; Welden 2023). Pets cannot be reduced to simple recipients of care. Instead, the value of pets can be understood in terms of encounter value (Haraway 2008) and nonhuman emotional labor (Collard 2020): companion animals are shifting from being enrolled in productive labor to both receiving and enacting forms of reproductive labor. Dogs can be understood as interspecies care workers, due to their provision of comforting tactile encounters, and their corresponding yet costly emotional regulation (Coulter 2016; Cudworth 2022).

This further highlights the question of what work nonhumans do to construct and maintain the more-than-human home. Working on the fringes of Khulna city, Bangladesh, Alam et al. argue that an array of nonhuman agencies is integral to securing home via “spontaneous multi-species exchanges” (2020, 1132), from the feeding of stray birds and dogs who then guard the home, to the collection of cow dung to create fuel sticks. Alam et al.’s work extends beyond companion animals, embracing a holistic ecology of the more-than-human home, and encompasses the economic, aesthetic, and spiritual dimensions of making home. It also addresses a broader shortcoming of the more-than-human home literature: a lack of engagement with sites in the Global South (with notable exceptions such as Shillington (2008)), and consequently a failure to provincialize the Western more-than-human home, as well as a need to challenge imaginaries of domestic fixity through engaging with homes in more informal settings that may engender different human-nature relations.

Meanwhile, the labor of managing, removing, and preventing unwanted nonhuman cohabitants can be seen as an integral mode of social reproduction. Drawing on Gregson and Lowe’s (1995) typology, the structural upkeep of the household (including pest removal) is the only form of social reproduction that must by necessity be performed within domestic space (although not necessarily by its inhabitants). And increases in the prevalence of specific domestic infestations can be linked to changes in social reproductive habits, particularly hygienic and sartorial practices. In the UK, rising clothes moth populations can be traced back to shifts in cleaning practices and an increase in the quantity of clothing owned by individuals, reducing the labor expended on maintaining garments and protecting them from infestation (Brimblecombe and Lankester 2013). Similarly, Hollin and Giraud (2021) highlight how the resurgence of bedbugs in Europe and North America, following their near extirpation, can be attributed to increased geographical mobility, a reduction in the use of certain cleaning chemicals (due to changing attitudes towards individual ecological impacts), and an increase in the acquisition of second-hand furniture. This speaks to ideas of feral proliferations in the Anthropocene (Tsing, Mathews, and Bubandt 2019) and Giraud et al.’s (2019) work on reckoning with the Anthropocene not only as a time of loss and extinction but unwelcome and uneven abundance.

Infestations are often shamefully concealed by those who experience them, as they convey the stigma of dirty homes and by association dirty people, that can be attached to ideas of race, class, and migration status (Kraus 2009; Lynch 2019; Raffles 2011). Thus, there is a need for an intersectional analysis that disaggregates this dimension of the more-than-human home. Moreover, the multi-billion-dollar pest control industry is integral to public health and is mired in everyday animal death and suffering, yet it is disconcertingly absent from social

science literature. This externalized and professionalized management of the more-than-human home can also be understood as a significant form of productive labor and “dirty work.” Dirty work, as identified by psychologist Everett Hughes (1962) refers to devalued forms of labor that can provoke disgust and lead to the stigmatizing of those who perform it. Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) identify three axes of dirty work: social, physical, and moral. Pest control is situated at the intersection of the latter two points, as its unglamorous labor carries the stigma of engaging with squalid environments as well as the moral taint of animal execution. This leaves pest controllers as an underexamined category of “dirty workers,” a neglect that may be emerging from methodological squeamishness. There is a need to grapple with the international economics and technics of professional pest management and address the embodied expertise and epistemologies of professional pest controllers as an overlooked mode of natural history knowledge. Moreover, how responsibility for undertaking this dirty work is delegated is a critical matter of socio-ecological justice. Biehler (2009) charts the changing relationships with bedbugs and cockroaches in public housing in New York, as these infestations shift from being considered a public and collective concern to being a privatized affair, consequently shaping the management solutions applied. Biehler contends that effective pest management needs to challenge the presumed boundedness of domestic space, speaking directly to the insights of geographies of the home.

While some theorists comprehend animal labor as an intersubjective relation oriented towards human ends (Porcher 2017), others contend that we need to recognize animals’ own social reproduction: their production of use values in their species interest (Collard 2020; Fair and McMullen 2023) and the intra-species care work animals undertake, which is often met with repression (Coulter

2016). Consequently, thinking holistically about the more-than-human home also raises questions about the work that pests do and how we can understand the domestic as a site of multiple conflicting projects of homemaking, or how one’s homemaking is another’s unmaking. The reproductive labor of pests can materially and symbolically undermine human domestic infrastructures, just as humans seek to undermine those of their unwanted cohabitants. Understanding these acts of labor and worldmaking is congruent with animal geographies’ wider project of grappling with animals’ own topologies (Barua and Sinha 2019; Hinchliffe et al. 2005)—their “beastly places”—defined on their own terms, rather than in relation to the human. This poses methodological challenges, given the ongoing and incongruous reliance on humanist approaches in more-than-human geography (Hodgetts and Lorimer 2015), but also ethical ones. How can these competing claims to space be adjudicated and by whom, whether they be animal rights to the city (Hubbard and Brooks 2021; Shingne 2021) or claims to home within our own (Alaimo 2016, 22)? This highlights issues of power within the home, another key analytic drawn from feminist geography, and a central concern of the latest wave of animal geography scholarship (Hovorka, McCubbin, and Van Patter 2021).

Power and violence

Another key question suffusing animals’ geographies is the extent to which everyday domestic relations across species differences either de-stabilize or reinforce human exceptionalism. Is the loving of pets a temporary extension of the privileged categories of humanism, or is animal alterity embraced? And consequently, to what extent is the figure of the human decentered or transformed by its relation to companion animals? Considering this literature in light of feminist contributions on power, violence and heterogeneous experiences of the home brings new insights, which can be explored via

three main themes: domestication, status and permanence within the household, and control over domestic space.

Domestication: Questions of power, autonomy and control in domestic space form a palpable intersection between domestic animal geographies and critical feminist geographies of the home, and curiously, the work of humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan is centrally derided in both, yet for contrary reasons. Within the literature on pets, there is a clear retaliation against Tuan's (2003) formulation of domestication as a relationship between dominance and affection, with affection understood as only possible in relations of inequality. Couched within Tuan's humanism is an abhorrence of the denigration of people to the level of pets, and there is also a concern for animal suffering that may be inflicted through these practices of domination, for instance, centred on the denial of animal sexual autonomy through regular acts of castration or the malformation of bodies through acts of selective breeding. While Tuan explicitly refuses to reach a clear analytical standpoint — advocating instead for a richly descriptive mode of geography — he seemingly concedes that the domination of the nonhuman world is of a qualitatively different nature to the domination of other humans, and to some extent, is unavoidable. Many ensuing animal geographers take umbrage with Tuan's conception of domestication, both in terms of his normative anthropocentrism, but also to the extent to which he understands the imposition of power and production of pets as a unilateral and solely human endeavor (Cassidy 2007; Smith 2003), rather than as a process of mutual interspecies co-constitution. Thus, while Tuan's romanticization of home was critiqued due to his failure to recognize the operations of power and domination, the critique of his work on pets largely decries his over-emphasis on these forces. The dissonance in these parallel critiques suggests the extent to which these two bodies of literature have henceforth failed to engage with each other.

Haraway's (2007) work acts as a critical counterpoint to Tuan's, as she theorizes domestication as a relational process of co-constitution, co-habitation, and co-evolution of humans and dogs, a messy encounter with the other, albeit one that is always riven with uneven power relations. Similarly, Swanson et al. (2018) argue for domestication as a mutualistic, gradual, and far from unidirectional multispecies affair. A key site for interrogating these different understandings of domestication is the everyday lived practices of multispecies households.

Status and permanence: A significant geographical literature has highlighted how companion animals are incorporated into the intimacy of domestic life (Charles 2016; Fox 2006). Pets have been identified as “minded individuals” (Sanders 1993, 215) who are actively included in domestic rituals and shape household routines (Irvine and Cilia 2017). Companion animals may be viewed as integral members of the family particularly by young children, suggesting there are also age variations in the meanings and practices of pet-keeping (Tipper 2011). Franklin (2006) argues that relations with companion animals are working to hybridize the family, evident in shared residence, joint activities, and emotional interdependence. The very presence of animals previously excluded from domestic space being included in the home can unsettle human-nonhuman boundaries. Yet feminist geographies of the home highlight how inclusion within domestic space is not antithetical to relations of power, violence, and loss of freedom. The inclusion of pets within the family unit can even provide a rationale for harm, as they commonly act as proxies for abused partners in the context of domestic violence (Flynn 2000).

Moreover, the position of animals within the more-than-human home can be seen as precarious and malleable due to the fungibility, disposability, and replaceability of pets, what Shir-Vertesh (2012, 420) refers to as “flexible

personhood,” explicitly inspired by Ong’s (1999) concept of “flexible citizenship.” Boundaries of the family and of the home are often symbolically and spatially redrawn with the arrival of a human child, excluding animals from spaces such as the bedroom, redesignating the pet as property rather than person, and sometimes terminating all relations with the previously loved pet. Shir-Vertesh contends that ultimately “the presence of pets actually strengthens and preserves conceptions of humanity by demarcating those boundaries that we are not ready or willing to cross” (2012, 429). Even the privileged treatment of pets as practice “prechildren” for imminently reproductive families denies the animals their alterity and is directly at odds with Haraway’s critique of treating dogs as “surrogacy and substitutes” for human children (2007, 96). Due to a moral skittishness (Horowitz 2019) about the potential for our “fur babies” (Greenebaum 2004) to exhibit sexual urges, the childlike status of pets often goes in tandem with the denial of their reproductive autonomy (Fraser 2024). The discarding of pets due to the demands of international labor mobility also highlights the ambiguous status of pets as belongings and the pragmatic limits to their membership of the household (Fox and Walsh 2011).

The capacity to expel pets from the household and consequently devalue their status speaks to a broader potential shortcoming of the existing more-than-human home literature. In the refutation of Tuan’s focus on domination, there has at points been perhaps an overly celebratory emphasis on co-becoming. Here again Nast’s (2005) work is instructive, with her critique of Haraway’s (2007) work for not recognizing the elitist and eugenic relations that underlie dog agility training. This troubles the ethics that pervade these relations, reminding us of the histories of violence that existing relations of animal obedience are premised upon (Giraud and Hollin 2016). This critical stance has been furthered by work that recognizes

relationships between elite geographies of pet-keeping and gentrification as well as the role of pets in processes of social and racial stratification (Hubbard and Brooks 2021). In contrast, Power’s (2017) research highlights the impediments to making home produced by rental precarity and landlords’ refusals to accommodate companion animals. Such rental restrictions and limited access to canine-friendly facilities (e.g., dog parks, veterinary services) were found to be more prevalent in predominantly African-American areas (Rose, McMillian, and Carter 2023), suggesting a racialization of such inequalities. This occasions other forms of violence, including the often traumatic forced separation from pets in order to access safe and appropriate accommodation, or pet owners — including economically vulnerable older adults (Toohey and Rock 2019), unhoused pet owners (Irvine 2013b), and survivors of domestic violence (Flynn 2000; Labrecque and Walsh 2011) — sacrificing their own well-being in favor of their ongoing multispecies cohabitation. Altogether, this challenges a simple equation of pet-keeping with elite consumerism but still further highlights the power dynamics that striate the more-than-human home as well as aligning with feminist claims that the domestic cannot be isolated from wider sociopolitical dynamics (Rose 2003).

As Cudworth (2019) highlights, the posthuman possibilities of pet-keeping do not eliminate its inherent power asymmetries. Drawing upon the work of hooks, Cudworth contends that homes can act as a space of “anthroparchal resistance” (2019, 428). Pets themselves can provide a sense of home, in terms of comfort and security, even in contexts of domestic violence (Flynn 2000) or displacement in temporary shelters (Labrecque and Walsh 2011) or even act as “lifesavers” for homeless people (Irvine 2013a). Yet homes simultaneously continue to be sites of interspecies violence, in light of wider debates regarding the moral justifiability of pet-keeping (Irvine 2004) and the

reduction of animals to property, or what Collard (2020, 6) conceptualizes as “object life.”

The exercise of power and the violence of expulsion are more acute in the case of unchosen and unwanted cohabitants. Power (2007) discusses representations of pests in twentieth century Australian home-maker magazines as nonhumans that disrupt the security and contained nature of the home, rupturing its material and conceptual borders. Through a focus on domestic infestation, the home becomes a locale for the biopolitical governance of unruly nonhuman life. This raises questions of how different technologies and knowledges promote and maintain particular hierarchies of nonhuman life, and render some beings killable, and how these acts are shaped by their occurrence within domestic spaces. What I have framed as reproductive labor in the previous section can also be seen as routinized acts of extermination, or what Reis-Castro understands as the deliberate production of “nonencounter value” (2021, 323), or the generation of “hoped-for-absence” (Ginn 2014, 538). Yet what could nonhuman resistance to these exercises of power and violence entail, given extant research into modes of animal refusal (Dave 2019; Hribal 2003; Wadiwel 2018)?

Spatial control: Consequently, a third dimension to the power relations of the more-than-human home is the extent to which animals can enact their own agency and exert their own meanings upon the space, extending the previous discussion of nonhuman homemaking. Can the home be a “beastly place”? And what does it mean for the house’s human inhabitants when we start to recognize home as a multispecies accomplishment? The latter question is exemplified by Smith’s (2003) work with members of the House Rabbit Society, who permit their homes and furniture to be physically restructured by adopted bunnies in order to be more amenable to leporidae topologies, as, for instance, the rabbits concentrate all items in the center of the room (allowing clear runs at the side) or

transform mattresses into sites of excavation. The actions of the House Rabbit Society can be understood as open and experimental attempts to facilitate animal agency and meet the needs of both co-existing species while recognizing the inevitability of power imbalances in human-animal relationships. It can be seen as a form of “muddied living” (Cudworth 2019), a nonhuman breaching of domestic order and consequent acceptance of greater levels of dirt. Even with the House Rabbit Society, there are still limits to animal autonomy within the space, with the rabbits always neutered. This re-ordering of domestic space through animal agency is often socially condemned, as observed in Holmberg’s (2014) work on the policing of animal hoarders, with the presence of large numbers of cats deemed to undermine the homeliness of home. The housing decisions of Tan et al.’s (2021) previously discussed “pet slaves”—such as moving to more expensive apartments with garden access to benefit their dogs—also indicate the ways in which nonhumans as actors shape the spatialities of the home, with the language indicating relations of power and affection that exceed and complicate a unilateral pattern of domination.

Yet an acceptance of animal placemaking doesn’t necessarily trouble broader power relations. Indeed, an insistence on animal alterity can reinforce human-animal dualisms. Charles (2016) concludes that the more-than-human home is messy but not truly posthuman due to the efforts made to assert human superiority and resist anthropomorphism. This tension is captured by pet owners’ attempts to accept “dogs-as-dogs,” for instance, through framing the household as a “pack” (Power 2008). Such an approach is biologically essentializing and fails to comprehend animals as individuals but also does not make them simply conform to human family form. Yet dog owners’ everyday practices did attempt to contain and mold their companions’ caninity where it created excessive disorder, in terms of hair and smells. Again, as

with Shir-Vertesh's (2012) work, a failure to manage animal alterity can lead to the pet being let go. Similarly, Fox (2006) concurs that while pet-keeping has posthuman elements, with pets as liminal figures who disrupt the categories of human and nonhuman, there is an underlying retention of humanity as a reference point.

Consequently, a focus on power highlights the violence of domestication and of securing the home from unwanted nonhuman others, but also recognizes that nonhumans exert their own agency within the home, shaping the spatial configurations of the domestic and attaining positions of status within the household (albeit ones that are precarious and contingent). The containment of animal alterity also suggests resistance to challenging the anthropocentrism of the home. But as a final lens, I consider whether the more-than-human home could be otherwise: how can a multispecies approach further the feminist geographic project of defamiliarizing the home?

Defamiliarizing the home

Here I draw on feminist scholarship that contests the home as a uniform, homogenously experienced, and naturalized given, as well as a long history of utopian imaginaries of how domestic life could be otherwise. I consider the defamiliarizing of the home through two key strands: the potential for domestic animals to transform the family and the welcoming in of the other and the uncanny. Beginning with the first concern, and drawing on a new wave of critical transfeminism that is reimagining the family as free from capitalist heteropatriarchal norms (Lewis 2022), I ask: rather than being essential appendages to the maintenance of bourgeois life, what role can pets play in queering and refiguring the family? Can the active presence of companion animals within the home constitute new kin relations that challenge heteronormative practices, ideals, and

definitions of the family, or does the easy assimilation of pets within a nuclear family form entrench such ideals? These questions are pertinent in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the lockdowns resulting in a pause on family-making for some and a doubling down on the family as the world for others, leaving many isolated, with no recourse beyond the familial unit.

The rise of pet-keeping has been linked to smaller family sizes and an increase in individuals living alone (Franklin 2006), suggesting pets may pose a challenge to conventional family forms. Nast (2006a) argues that pets are superseding children because they are more convenient, mobile, and amenable to human narcissism: we can project what we like onto a pet. However, there is a need for geographic and cultural specificities regarding these phenomena. For instance, Franklin's (2006) Australian-based work notes a whiteness to certain pet-keeping practices that deserves greater interrogation, as well as class inflections. Meanwhile, Irvine and Cilia (2017) have identified the highest degree of pet ownership among households with children, and Shir-Vertesh's (2012) identification of pets as practice "prechildren" suggests that pets are securing rather than transforming the family. In their role as child proxies, pets may also be fortifying heteronormative divisions of reproductive labor, with men seen as "playmates" or as "leaders of the pack," while women were expected to bear the brunt of everyday care work and the enforcement of household rules (Greenebaum 2004).

However, we can see glimpses of multispecies "family abolition" (Lewis 2022) in McKeithen's (2017) reading of the cultural trope of the "crazy cat lady" as a figure of queer excess, in light of her refusal to prioritize her romantic and procreative relationships in favor of her affective connections with non-human life. The "crazy cat lady" stands not just for the failures of heteronormativity, but as a total loss of human governance over

domestic space, due to the ascension of feline topologies, as well as disorder and dirt and the significance of access to the bed. This is further contextualized by Wilkinson's (2014, 2020) work on the happily non-reproductive female singleton of childbearing age as herself a figure of queerness, in her refusal of compulsory coupledness, with single individuals at odds with heteronormative nuclear family forms (Oswin 2010). Again there are resonances with Tan et al.'s (2021) "pet slaves," as women actively prioritize their relationships with animals as opposed to romantic love as the former does not compromise their autonomy and identity as workers.

The debate, as discussed within the previous section, of whether the incorporation of other species into the household challenges or re-entrenches anthropocentrism needs to expand to consider more discomfiting organisms. While it may be possible to assimilate companion animals within the category of "furry children" (Power 2008), the alterity of many pests poses a far more radical challenge to more-than-human homemaking. There is a need to turn to the "unloved" (Rose and Van Dooren 2011) and "unloving others" (Chao 2018) of the home: nonhumans that we are unwillingly entangled with that can also cause us significant harm. In this context, Kaika's (2004, 273) work on the "selective porosity" of the home is instructive. She describes how the production of "good nature" (e.g., the piping in of potable water) and metabolism of "bad nature" (the flushing away of sewage) are integral to the discursive construction of the home as secure, hygienic, and self-contained. Within this framework, nature is produced as the other of the bourgeois home. Thus, the domestic functions through an alienation from the social and natural relations that materially sustain it and spatially connect it but are ideologically othered and visually concealed. Yet such functions can break down, revealing these material interconnections as a manifestation of

the "domestic uncanny" (2004, 266), transforming the house into an unpredictable space. Pests can be seen as a key manifestation of the domestic uncanny, rendering the house unhomey, and thus, the management of pests can be seen as integral (rather than incidental) to the material and discursive production of the home. As Power notes, "Border practices separating home from "outside," wildness, nature, and dirt are central to the material and conceptual construction of Western homes as safe, secure, autonomous, human spaces" (2009a, 29), mirrored by Alaimo's analysis that "the home, both literally and figuratively, has been erected as the spatial definition of the human" (2016, 20). Pests challenge ideas of containment, fixity, improvement, and familiarity, and reveal an unruly wildness within our own homes, one that exceeds human governance. They highlight matters of dirt, purification, and material and psychological boundary maintenance as central to the production of home (Gurney 2000; Ozaki and Lewis 2006; Sibley 1995). They disrupt the idealization of home as a moral and civil space where "uncivil" nature is excluded (Hinchliffe 1997, 201). Looking to Somerville's (1992) typology of the signifiers of home, domestic infestations can be seen as a transgression of territorial security (unwanted others are not successfully excluded) and ontological security (impacting one's sense of identity as modern and hygienic), as well as emotional security (distress) and physiological security (infection and disease), thereby troubling the idealization of home. Pests can be read through a lens of "queer ambivalence" (Crysler et al. 2024, 259), both in the sense that their presence in the home reflects a non-binary ecological understanding (one that rejects a nature/culture spatial dualism) and because they chafe against a narrative of heroic human mastery, instead demanding a mode of uncertainty and contingency germane to a queer ecological approach.

Yet Kaika (2004) also proposes that the domestic uncanny is liberating, in that it

reveals everyday individualized alienation from social and natural processes. Consequently, in embracing the discomfiting and queer presence of unwanted nonhuman others and the loss of human control, is there a route to liberation? Power's work on brushtail possums in Australia suggests such a possibility. Contrary to Kaika, Power (2009a) argues that the ruptures in the borders of the home (and the conceptual borders between nature and culture) can engender rather than unsettle feelings of homeliness. She highlights how the porosity of the home is negotiated through everyday practices of homemaking in the case of brushtail possums in Sydney. Through their nocturnal sounds, nauseating smells, and inhabiting of liminal wall voids, the possums unmake the borders of the home, yet they also forge a connection to Australian nationhood. The presence of native marsupials helps settler colonial subjects feel at home at the scale of the nation. But even with this case, there are hierarchies of non-human life at play. Power notes that there is no redemption for the parallel presence of the common rat. Meanwhile, Lynch's (2019, 364) research into experiences of living with bedbugs in a low-income neighborhood in Glasgow highlights the possibility for multispecies co-existence despite the discomfort this can engender, as participants shifted from an attempt at immunization (itself carrying risks from toxicity) to one of "shared vulnerability," and therefore loosening the boundaries of the home and aligning with a cosmopolitical approach to sharing urban space (McKiernan and Instone 2016). However, Lynch's work is constrained by its very limited empirical basis (interviews with three individuals) and does not fully reconcile the ambivalent relationships between structural inequality and bedbug exposure, raising questions about which bodies and homes bear the weight of unwanted entanglements. Domestic infestations raise challenging questions of multispecies ethics. With itching skin, gnawed wires, disturbed sleep, and soiled

food, they put to the test the extent to which we can and want to stay with the trouble (Haraway 2016). These conundrums are even more striking when we consider the intersection between domestic infestations, rental precarity, and housing inequality, and recognize that these infestations are not evenly felt. In response, Kane (2023) conceives of the "violent uncanny" as encapsulating the discomfiting proximity of outdoor earthly matter within domestic space. While explicitly focused on mold, Kane also makes passing reference to rats and understands both as the material manifestations of the everyday violence of austerity in privately rented and social housing. Meanwhile, Biehler and Simon highlight how "indoor pest control exemplifies the inequitable embodiment of indoor ecologies, as low-income children are disproportionately exposed to opposing risks from roaches and roach-killers" (2011, 185), consequently rendering pest control a matter of socio-environmental (in)justice. As enticing as Kaika's vision of uncanny liberation may be, the ethical dilemmas posed by pest exterminations and removals suggest a potential limit to how welcoming, lively, and flourishing people desire their homes to be. Thus, while both pets and pests via different avenues work to reconfigure, queer, and defamiliarize the family and the home, such transformations should not necessarily be celebrated nor romanticized.

Part four: Towards future geographies of the more-than-human home

As indicated and modelled by the approach of this review, geographies of the more-than-human home need to attend to a greater diversity of life forms, expanding beyond a companion animal focus. Looking at the existing literature, we can still note a bias within animal geography — albeit one that is being slowly rectified —

towards species that are “big like us” (Hird 2010, 36), reflecting a wider prioritization of mammalian and bird species over invertebrates (Owens and Wolch 2014). Moreover, a singular focus on animals’ geographies does not embrace the full complexity of the more-than-human home, as domestic space is also a key interface for vegetal geographies (Seymour 2022) and microbial life (Lorimer et al. 2019; Wakefield-Rann 2021). There are further dimensions of the more-than-human home to be reckoned with — particularly changing relationships with water use (Waite and Nowroozipour 2020) or energy use (Hinchliffe 1997), from fuel poverty (Angel 2017) to embodied experiences of thermal comfort (Hitchings 2011). Understandings of the more-than-human home — in tandem with the wider project of globalizing, politicizing, and decolonizing animals’ geographies (Hovorka 2017) — also need to expand beyond a focus on the Global North, and consequently reckon with a greater diversity of ecologies and domesticities, understanding how the cultural, architectural, and bio-geographical specificities of different dwellings shape varied configurations of the more-than-human home.

Secondly, resisting the potentially depoliticized nature of animal geographies (Giraud 2019), this review has married existing literature with insights from feminist geographies of the home. As a further avenue, only briefly touched on here, there is a need to queer the more-than-human home. We see this in McKeithen’s (2017) work on the “crazy cat lady” and the potential to radically rethink the form and boundaries of the family through companion animals. But the queering of the home is not exclusively a concern with chosen more-than-human kin. There needs also to be an engagement with all forms of oddkin (Haraway 2016), including the dis-comforting, ambivalent, and awkward (Ginn, Beisel, and Barua 2014), and insights from queer ecology as an emergent discipline here could be critical.

Thirdly, if we are to take seriously questions of flourishing and the role of nonhuman labor in producing value for capital (Besky and Blanchette 2019), we must grapple with non-human social reproduction and the multiplicity of homes found within domestic space. Thinking with pests alongside pets does not just expand the categories of creatures under consideration. To borrow Cudworth’s (2019) phrase, it makes “muddied” living even muddier, as it demonstrates that the multispecies co-constitution of domestic space can simultaneously be a process of interspecies antagonism and mutual harm. It defamiliarizes the home through decentering the human, illuminating processes of homemaking that are indifferent to or in opposition to anthropocentric design. More attention must be given to the distribution of the labor of making home, within and beyond the household, and across human and non-human residents, and how that work becomes enrolled in systems of power, violence, and exclusion. What social reproductive labor is necessitated by the more-than-human home, in terms of embracing or excluding nonhuman others, and who is performing it? And what labor do nonhumans undertake to produce multispecies homes, both in accordance with and at odds with human intentions? Through these questions, future research can interrogate the limits of conviviality and of human control, critical tensions at the heart of the more-than-human home.

Acknowledgements

Versions of this paper were presented at the 2022 Royal Geographical Society Annual Conference, in the session on “Hidden Animals,” and the 2023 American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting, in the session “Dirt, Labour, Death and the More-than-Human.” It received substantial generous feedback via the Rice University Centre for Environment Studies “Planet Now: Conversations in Environmental Studies” seminar series and the University of Oxford School of Geography and the

Environment Technological Life work-in-progress series and it benefitted greatly from the Summer 2023 Technological Life writing retreat. My particular thanks to Gillian Rose, Tim Hodgetts, Jamie Lorimer, George Cusworth, and Theo Stanley for their insights and reflections on the piece, and to the editors and anonymous reviewers for their generous, constructive, and enriching feedback.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the Oxford University Press John Fell Fund [grant number 0011779] and the University of Oxford School of Geography and the Environment Travel and Research Fund.

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Notes

1. Following Labrecque and Walsh (2011, 80) and Irvine (2013b, 15–16), I use the terms 'pet' and 'companion animal' interchangeably, reflecting the prevalence of both terms within the literature.
2. 'Pest' is employed as a relational and historically contingent term that defines a nonhuman animal as unwanted from an anthropocentric perspective, rather than reflecting an inherent quality of the lifeform.
3. Due to this neglect of the indoors, this article explicitly focuses on intramural domestic space, while acknowledging that there has been substantive geographical work on gardens, exploring them as spaces for human-nature boundary making (Head and Muir 2006), the embodiment of paradoxical subjectivities (Longhurst 2006) and the production of disciplined subjects (Robbins 2012), as well as the violent displacement of awkward nonhuman others (Ginn 2014).

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