

# Approaching Home: New Perspectives on the Domestic Interior

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As we write this introduction, we find ourselves in a very different context than when we first sent our call for papers. The home is on everyone's mind these days and the domestic experience is suddenly taking on new meanings for many people. The threat of COVID-19 has led to world-wide stay-at-home orders. Yet, the global pandemic has dramatically underscored that home is not a haven for all. Staying home, it seems, is contributing to increased depression, domestic violence, alcohol consumption, firearms purchases, and homelessness, and groups already at risk and often marginalized by governments and institutions see their sufferings heightened when forced to confine in a home.<sup>1</sup> The claim that the home is unstable, precarious, and fragile, argued frequently in the literature focusing on themes of gender, race, age, poverty, violence and migration, seems especially pertinent.<sup>2</sup>

Noting that for women in particular the home is a dangerous place, and not because of strangers but because of family members, James Tyner cites the following alarming statistics: "Women in the United States are nine times more likely to be *deliberately* injured in their homes than on the streets; indeed, violence in the home accounts for more injuries than car accidents and muggings, combined. Furthermore, domestic homicides account for approximately one-third of all female homicides per year. By comparison, only 3 percent of men in the United States are murdered by their female spouses."<sup>3</sup> Tyner's research is a sobering reminder of how the home is constituted by power relations which are at times unequal.

Yet, while the articles in this issue do cast the home as a vulnerable, fraught, and contested space, they also reveal that it is central to forms of social

association that would be impossible without the organizing forces of the domestic. As a spatial imaginary capable of being imbued with feelings of belonging, intimacy, and safety, and a site where the physical realities of space and materials, power relations, and economics hold sway,<sup>4</sup> home can be defined in terms of the *living* that takes place there. In the *Anarchist Guide to Historic House Museums*, Franklin Vagnone recounts a story of how over time his family lovingly restored their character house in Philadelphia, only to see it reduced to a small pile of rubble by new owners. As he concludes, a house is "mostly empty space." What makes a home, he tell us, is the "living that takes place within it, not the structure or its contents."<sup>5</sup> At the same time, living is always mediated by materiality, so that, as feminist geographers Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling argue, the home is both "material and imaginative."<sup>6</sup> While underscoring that "home is a process," Blunt and Dowling emphasize the role of materiality, asserting that: "Home is a process of creating and understanding forms of dwelling and belonging. This process has both material and imaginative elements. Thus people create home through social and emotional relationships. Home is also materially created—new structures formed, objects used and placed."<sup>7</sup>

The importance of both materiality and imagination in understandings of the home, as well as the universal experience of a relation or lack of relation with a home—has also meant that the domestic is a rich background for artists to explore, from folk art to full-scale installations and digital media work.<sup>8</sup> | **fig. 1** | There is not enough space here to cover the diversity of practices that have approached the domestic, but