

## **Chapter Two:**

### ***Renovations and Extensions***

‘Sly as a fox and twice as quick: there are countless ways of “making do”.’

—*The Practice of Everyday Life* (de Certeau 1988, 29)

## The Home as a Tactical Site of Power

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau introduces the terms ‘strategies’ and ‘tactics’ in order to discuss how, in daily life, different members of society make do with the outcomes of their personal situations. He engages first in the occurrence of *la perruque*—instances of workers using their employer’s time to complete personal projects and endeavours. These terms, while beginning specifically in the workplace, can extend to wider subject areas and circumstances; to equivalent ‘artistic tricks’ (de Certeau 1988, 29) that, de Certeau suggests, seem to infiltrate everywhere. For the purposes of this thesis, I argue that by analysing the domestic space as a by-product of these strategies and tactics, readers can determine how the space has been repurposed to reflect the preoccupations and intentions of the author—how, as a tactical space, the house and the home enable female writers to execute power over their practice. In the following chapter, I will use these concepts as a base and demonstrate how the domestic space can be transformed from a site which only reflects experience, to one which stands for innovation and choice.

The house is a universally recognised motif that transcends individual experiences dependant on cultural and social status. As Smyth and Croft state, in *Our House: The Representation of the Domestic Space in Modern Culture*, ‘everyone in [the Western] reading constituency will have had experience of ‘the house’, [it being a broad term] for any constructed place of dwelling in which people conduct a multitude of activities encompassed by the verb ‘to live’ (2006, 269). The concept of home is another concept entirely. Although, for a lot of Western readers, ‘the house’ connotes similar images to ‘the home’—that is, images of family; of security and warmth, there are readers for whom these two terms are mutually exclusive. Unlike the house, the home is experienced uniquely by all members and groups of society. It is a concept that, at the core of its definition, divides us socially and culturally.

The concept of home also divides us historically, linking back to pre-second wave feminist connotations of it being a site of tension and conflict between the desires and expectations placed on females. I refer here, specifically, to Victorian notions of women

being ‘angels in the house’ (Archibald quoted in Golden 2004, 373-374)—coupled entities to the four walls which seemed to be built to confine them. Nancy Jesser states that ‘because domestic spaces have worked out for many women as places to be domesticated and/or be domestic, it is not surprising that most have mixed feelings about a structure that contains often the unfulfilled dream of possession and her lived experience of servitude’ (1999, 325). Contrary to this, I argue that contemporary writers, such as Helen Garner, do not seem to dwell on such notions of servitude, nor the feelings of tension that arise as the result of a historical reading of ‘the home’. Instead these writers ‘[show] homes and communities...as places to gather strength’ (Jesser 1999, 325)—as empowered spaces in which the tactical responses, outlined in concepts and practices of Bourdieu and de Certeau, are at play.

As I’ve mentioned, social structures and power relationships exist at the core of de Certeau’s concept of making do. This is not dissimilar to Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) where, as Michael Grenfell states, ‘[Bourdieu presents] his methodology as a way of “liberating” individuals – and society – from the imposing social forces that dominated them’ (2008, 5). By insisting that his theory be imbedded in field based projects and practical studies, instead of remaining as purely academic concepts, Bourdieu enabled his theories of practice to be applied to ‘any study in the social sciences’ (Grenfell 2008, 5)—of particular interest to this project are his theories on the strategies involved in structure, and the concept of the habitus.

Defined as ‘the mediating principle between individual practice and objective structures’ (Robbins 2000), Bourdieu intended the habitus ‘to transcend the structure-agency dichotomy’ (Maton 2008, 54). Maton states that ‘[it] is a concept that orients our ways of constructing objects of study, highlighting issues of significance and providing a means of thinking relationally about these issues’ (2008, 50). In this way then, the habitus acts as a kind of framework through which Bourdieu’s and, for the sake of this thesis, de Certeau’s strategies and tactics can be seen at work. In researching the ways in which the domestic space is, and has been, repurposed to become a powerful device of choice and innovation, the concept of the habitus has acted as a platform from which I have based my textual analysis—the methodology through which I’ve conducted my research.

Bourdieu states that ‘all of [his] thinking started from this point: how can behaviour be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules?’ (Maton 2008, 50). In Chapter One, *Exposed Beams*, I addressed my own similar concerns—the question of how female writers can transform the house and the home, from sites to which they have traditionally been confined and isolated, to spaces that exude power and represent choice; motifs which

they gladly use, despite past negative connotations. By viewing the domestic space as a kind of habitus, I have been able to analyse how this transition has been done. Furthermore, in the same way that the habitus describes the realisation that users can reassign spatial power allocations, de Certeau's strategies and tactics speak to the social power structures which '[become] possible as soon as a subject with will and power...can be isolated' (1988, 35-36). As both de Certeau and Bourdieu use, or at least refer to, the terms strategy and tactics<sup>1</sup>, I have been able to apply their theories and concepts to my textual analysis of Helen Garner's and my own work. This will be addressed in detail in Chapter Three, *Moving House*.

Although, for the purposes of this project, I am drawing on the similarities between de Certeau and Bourdieu's theories, I also acknowledge their moments of differentiation. In Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, a strategy is used to emphasise 'the active, creative nature of practices' (Maton 2008, 54); that is, to draw attention to the everyday acts of people within a society. If I were to apply only this definition to this project, I would be able to identify a strategy that highlights how the practices carried out in the home (that is, the way the space is used by characters and the author) act as a way to overcome perceived notions of structural power. However, while this is an interesting stance to take, and one that is arguably plausible, I am concerned here only with the author—instead of viewing the home, or the domestic space, as a device through which characters can move, I am placing control in the author's hand; examining *her* intentions and how *she* manipulates the domestic space. Exploring the application of these theories from a character's point of view is one I have struggled to avoid while conducting my research however it is unavoidably a stance that requires its own exegesis entirely<sup>2</sup>.

Bourdieu '[emphasises] the social construction of culture and the strategies individuals adopt to advance themselves and their families...' (Grenfell 2008, 23). This is not dissimilar to the concept outlined by de Certeau who addresses the notion of imposed power and suggests that, with tactics, there are many ways to overcome it. De Certeau defines a strategy as '...the calculus of fore-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power...can be isolated from and [*sic*] "environment"'. A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* and thus [can] serve as the basis in generating relations

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<sup>1</sup> de Certeau himself noted the similarities between his and Bourdieu's theories as being both '...analyzable [*sic*] indirectly, through another society' (1988, 50).

<sup>2</sup> This being said, Chapter Three will briefly investigate how and where my selected texts allow characters to present and dictate the power balances within the narratives.

with an exterior distinct from it...' (1988, xix). This definition applies to the way in which I view the domestic space in creative works and therefore, by using Bourdieu's habitus as a base, but changing to a de Certeau's lens through which to view this project, the isolation of women and the inference that female experience is limited only to the home as discussed in the previous chapters, becomes a strategic opinion implied by more dominant forces (in this case societal norms as dictated by our nation's Victorian and colonial backgrounds).

A tactic, to de Certeau, is '...a calculus which cannot count on a "proper" (a spatial or institutional localization) [*sic*], nor thus on a border-line distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other' (1988, xix). Ultimately, this definition suggests that a tactic is the means by which an individual can reclaim power over strategic places. In areas that have been used to encourage a certain control or belief, individuals can shift the power dynamics, enabling themselves to move among, between, and through the place. In this way, a 'place' becomes a 'space'—a practiced place, defined by how people use it, rather than where it is positioned in relation to other elements.

For the purposes of this thesis, I argue that if the home, in contemporary realist texts, is analysed in accordance with the concepts outlined by de Certeau, it can be viewed as a tactical space—a site that only the author can control, whether by reflecting on their own experiences, or by drawing on prior knowledge and research of homes similar to those they are constructing. If this is done, the society restricting the female author cannot access or dictate how she (the author) uses the space, that is, how she chooses to interpret the symbolic device and move her characters within it. A real-life example of this is in Grenville and Woolfe's account of Helen Garner in their text *Making Stories: How ten Australian novels were written* (1993).

In *Making Stories* Garner talks of writing *Monkey Grip* and how, in the process, she did not intend to comment on gendered power structures or, in the case of this project, the role that the house played in developing her protagonist, Nora. Instead, she declares that she never has a theoretical idea for any of her books. Despite this, as I will analyse further in Chapter Three, threads of gender-politics can be detected in the novel and in the wider body of her work. Gordon Graham suggests that this is a direct consequence of Garner's genre and style.

Contemporary realism—a genre independent of any formal description but full of unimaginable elasticity (Grant 1970, i), is bound only by the author's perspective of the human condition. Graham suggests that 'any adequate account of realism in literature, [contemporary or otherwise], must lend it at some point to a referential character [or

movement]’ whether that be literary, political or cultural (1998, 202). The contemporary realist novel ‘is in turn set within the context of a larger external perspective, that of experience’ (Graham 1998, 203). In a recent interview with Ramona Koval, Garner admits to this—that her work is, in many ways, a reflection of her experience<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, although she is not always aware of it, I propose that the home in Garner’s work, and similar contemporary realist texts, can be viewed as both a strategy and a tactic. The domestic space, as defined by Bourdieu, is a definite site to which all readers can relate on some level, yet it is also a one which authors can manipulate however they choose—it does not restrict them, as was originally intended by its strategic state. How the space is used, or rebelled against, reflects the author’s preoccupations—their own experiences become evident in the way that they repurpose a domain with such a strict tradition of gender dynamics and, without conforming to societal ideals of femininity, these authors demonstrate power.

At this point, I should explain the application of my selected theories, given their individual specificities to the times in which they were written. De Certeau, for the most part, refers to stereotypical places of social interaction and hierarchy—the office, the workshop or the movies—when discussing where strategies and tactics have and can be implemented. Despite this, his theorising can be similarly applied to the domestic domain as he states that strategies and tactics, or moreover, the wider ways of making do ‘traverse the frontiers dividing time, place, and type of action...’ (de Certeau 1988, 29). This, again, reflects his beliefs that space and place are two very separate entities—an idea supported also by theorist Homi Bhabha. Bhabha refers to the third space—‘a place of invention and transformational encounters’ (1994). For the third space to exist, ‘...we must believe that we can inhabit [different sites and make] each space of relative comfort’ (1994). This voices the concept of de Certeau’s tactics and reinforces my own argument for the use and potential empowerment that the domestic domain can provide. The creative components in this project specifically respond to these ideas.

Employing the concept of the habitus, Bourdieu states that the power of an individual is dependent on ‘their position within a particular field, and the amount of cultural capital they possess’ (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002, 21). This mediating principle which combines ‘...both objective social structure and subjective personal experiences’ (Maton 2008, 53), presents a more structured approach to the fluidity of de Certeau’s theories for, as previously stated, it is grounded strongly in practical fields and real-life societal observations.

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<sup>3</sup> Garner ‘agrees that is her practice to take stories from life’ (Koval 2012, 39).

Therefore if, as Derek Robbins states, tactics are 'the non-institutionalised resources of the weak' (2000) and as such are infinite, my proposal that the varying manifestations of the home within Garner's and my own work, represents such resources. My textual analysis, in Chapter Three, will continue to detail that when writers embrace tactical approaches to repurposing the domestic space, the site is transformed into a powerful thematic device which represents choice and innovation.