

DOMESTIC FLUX

- A threshold writing / visual arts workshop on domesticity and intimacy by Tamsyn Challenger and Colin Herd, rooted in Fluxus



- [Suzanne Duchamp \(instructions by Marcel Duchamp\), *Unhappy Readymade*, \(1919-20\)](#)

Fluxus artists frequently produced art of, from and in domestic space. Troubling the meaning of sustainable practice, their approaches uncover the opportunities of the domestic space as a site for art that is ephemeral, temporary and fleeting.

Work-from-home culture has often meant that our homes are transformed into extensions of our offices, and in the cases of artists, this further encroaches on the spaces where we might make work - as well as how we might live. It is often

impossible to separate out space and the contortions this balancing act demands are bodily, mental and creative, as we literally negotiate the objects, furniture, humans and more-than-humans with which we share our domestic environments. This workshop will unfold in two sessions on Wednesday 16th & Saturday 19th July to explore techniques and experiments to embrace domestic spaces as sites for creative initiative, experiment and discovery in amongst the demands of the everyday.

This workshop is in conversation with Fluxus Performance and Event Scores, such as the below:

[Yoko Ono, *Telephone Piece* \(1964\)](#)

Mieko Shiomi, *Air Event* (1964)

Inflate a a small rubber balloon in one deep breath and sign your name on the balloon. [This is your lung]. You can buy the lungs of other performers at auction.

Ben Vaultier, *Bathtub* (1962)

As many performers as possible jam themselves into a bathtub.

Emmett Williams, *The Gift of Tongues* (1962)

Sing meaningfully in a language made up on the spot.

George Brecht, *Three Telephone Events* (1961)

When the telephone rings, it is allowed to continue ringing until it stops.

When the telephone rings, the receiver is lifted, then replaced.

When the telephone rings, it is answered.

Albert M Fine, *Clothespin Piece*, (Date Unknown)

Performers inconspicuously attach spring-type clothespins to various objects in the street.

Nye Ffarabas, *Milk Festival*, (1966)

1st day: buy a quart of milk

2nd day: buy a quart of milk in Canada [Imperial quart]

3rd day: Make up a quart of milk with skimmed milk powder, water and one ice cube

4th day: Dilute enough evaporated milk to make one quart

5th day: Dilute sweetened condensed milk to make one quart

6th day: Express a quart of milk

7th day: Milk a cow; one quart

Alison Knowles, *Shoes of Your Choice* (1963)

A member of the audience is invited to come forward to a microphone if one is available and describe a pair of shoes, the ones they are wearing or another pair. They are encouraged to tell where they got them, the size, color, why they like them, etc.

Geoffrey Hendricks and Nye Ffarabas, *Fluxdivorce*, (1971)

In 1971 Ffarabas and Hendricks separated to pursue same-gender relationships after ten years of marriage. On their anniversary that year, they staged the all-day performance "Fluxdivorce" at their home, in which they cut in two all their material possessions.

Joanna Walsh: #theoryplushouseworktheory (2023)

A 12-hour online performance for the PHI Foundation based on Walsh's text recounting her personal practice of performing everyday tasks while listening to critical theory texts read aloud. Challenger was one of the invited performers.

Other Texts

[Tai Freedom Ford 'notes on domesticity' \(2024\)](#)

Peter Gizzi, 'Add this to the house' in *Some Values of Landscape and Weather*, 2003

Ntozake Shange, 'inquiry', from *Nappy Edges* (1972)

Alan Bernheimer, Personal Life, from *The Spoonlight Institute*, (2009)

Robert Creeley, 'This House' from *Collected Poems* (2005)

John Wieners, 'Sexual Despair', *Book of Prophecies* (2007)

Sawako Nakayasu, 'Couch', *The Ants* (2014)

[Warsan Shire House Poem](#)

[Andrew Marvell 'Upon Appleton House'](#)

Mary Douglas Domestic Space

Eula Biss To Have and To Be Had

Colin & Tamsyn Domestic Intimacy Experiments List

Arrive to your front door after work, an excursion, shopping or an errand. Locate your keys. Before you unlock your door, write a poem. Photograph or film the door and/or what you are carrying. Whatever you are carrying, physically or metaphorically, do not open the door until you have written a poem. Do this for a week every time you leave the house, on returning. Collect the poems after the week. Put the collected poems through your neighbours' doors, with this experiment attached and an invitation to them to do the same. Collect all the poems you receive in return. Hold a reading in your building or street for everyone's poems.



App-enings

Write for five minutes in Whatsapp

Write for five minutes in Messenger

Write for five minutes in Instagram DM



After a free writing exercise, the group share poems by calling each other and reading the poems to each other from outside the room.



Lie or slump on a sofa and write, for five minutes. Try to forget that the group are there. While you write, the rest of the group watch you and take notes or draw/depict your gestures and movements.



Fill a kettle with water and set it to boil. Write, standing up, in the time it takes for the kettle to boil. If you need more time after the kettle has boiled, put something in the microwave or put on a slice of toast. Please bring visual evidence with your writing.



Pierce the film lid

As above, but write for the duration of a ready meal in the microwave, while watching it go round and round and while listening to the sound of the microwave. Please bring visual evidence with your writing.



Write a poem while brushing your teeth. Feel free to bring back an audio recording.



inquiry

my questions concern the subject poetry
is whatever runs out/ whatever digs my guts
til there's no space in myself
cryin wont help/ callin mama wont help
lovers are detours/ no way to assuage this
poem/ but in the words & they are deceitful/
images beat me confuse me/ make me want all of you to share me/
& i hide under my bed/

poetry is unavoidable connection/
some people get married/ others join the Church
i carry notebooks/ so i can tell us what happened/
midnight snacks in bed with whoever/ are no compensation/ when
i'm listenin to multitudes of voices/ i consume yr every word &
move/

durin the day you are initiated into the' holy order
of prospective poems/ i dream in yr voice/ sometimes act
yr fantasies/ i've made them my own/
whatever is here/ is what you've given me/
if it's not enough for you/
give me some more

i'm not very com

i'm not very cor
gettin my poem

isn't easy for m

i dance most ti

when i'm lone

pull pearl bea

my window-s

the freeway/

climb trees/

i hear young

girls cursin

their moth

men cough

to rid ther

always m

i avoid fr

i dance

i make g

pre-mer

a despe

hurtin

not res

PERSONAL LIFE

A short fuse on a long afternoon
twinges for concentrate
as silent upholstery after illusion

the one worth fainting for

The other steps gingerly into day
distinguishing each likelihood
with a catalogue of glances

There is no bowling alley to the subconscious
as wake up fresh

made in Italy

designed by God

precipitates words into sight
or intention to dismay

Every panorama does good
that outlaws willies
and belief in maps

Outtakes load the self of stardom
Canals on Mars break into print

ADD THIS TO THE HOUSE

Not a still life into which artifice may enter
but a labor to describe the valves
and cordage that entwine this room;
the voltage is enough to kill.

Who in morning dish-gray light
can fathom the witless parable of waking,
the bed, the cask, the zoned spaces
we pass through. It would be lovely
to say floorboards pose in firelight,
coals are banking down, the room
comes up by degrees. Instead, the day
has begun, shadows dispelled by the clock,
by the promise of work, Clorox,
the phone. I can see you by that metaphor,
the house, the door, the car heading out
to meet the sun, then again hours
later returning, your back to it.

Couch

After countless days and nights of living together, a couple decides to get divorced. It takes a little over a few hours of negotiating over their material possessions before they give up and decide to call the ants. She gets on the phone and calls up her ants, likewise he gets up and calls his ants. The ants arrive at 8 a.m. the following Monday, and quickly set to work. Around 4 p.m., the couple returns and enters gingerly, wondering if any progress has been made. While questions still fly about the room as to what will happen to the refrigerator, the records, and the television, they find that the couch has been broken down into small chunks, neat little couch chunks, all thanks to the his and her ant set they had received for their wedding.

If You Said You Would Come With Me

BY [JOHN ASHBERY](#)

In town it was very urban but in the country cows were covering the hills. The clouds were near and very moist. I was walking along the pavement with Anna, enjoying the scattered scenery. Suddenly a sound like a deep bell came from behind us. We both turned to look. "It's the words you spoke in the past, coming back to haunt you," Anna explained. "They always do, you know."

Indeed I did. Many times this deep bell-like tone had intruded itself on my thoughts, scrambling them at first, then rearranging them in apple-pie order. "Two crows," the voice seemed to say, "were sitting on a sundial in the God-given sunlight. Then one flew away."

"Yes . . . and then?" I wanted to ask, but I kept silent. We turned into a courtyard and walked up several flights of stairs to the roof, where a party was in progress. "This is my friend Hans," Anna said by way of introduction. No one paid much attention and several guests moved away to the balustrade to admire the view of orchards and vineyards, approaching their autumn glory. One of the women however came to greet us in a friendly manner. I was wondering if this was a "harvest home," a phrase I had often heard but never understood.

"Welcome to my home . . . well, to our home," the woman said gaily. "As you can see, the grapes are being harvested." It seemed she could read my mind. "They say this year's vintage will be a mediocre one, but the sight is lovely, nonetheless. Don't you agree, Mr. . . ."

"Hans," I replied curtly. The prospect was indeed a lovely one, but I wanted to leave. Making some excuse I guided Anna by the elbow toward the stairs and we left.

"That wasn't polite of you," she said dryly.

"Honey, I've had enough of people who can read your mind. When I want it done I'll go to a mind reader."

"I happen to be one and I can tell you what you're thinking is false. Listen to what the big bell says: 'We are all strangers on our own turf, in our own time.' You should have paid attention. Now adjustments will have to be made."

[This Room](#)

The room I entered was a dream of this room.

Surely all those feet on the sofa were mine.

The oval portrait

of a dog was me at an early age.

Something shimmers, something is hushed up.

We had macaroni for lunch every day

except Sunday, when a small quail was induced

to be served to us. Why do I tell you these things?

You are not even here.

hates. One person's rooted dislike or medical prohibition results in certain foods being totally eliminated even if they are

everyone else's favorite food, so in the regular menu everyone gets what they are indifferent to, and no one ever gets their favorite dish.²⁰

The home also censors speech. It has slots for different tones of voice, conversational topics, and even language. In the name of the community, referred to as "we" or "everyone," neither shouting (because it dominates) nor whispering (because it is secret and exclusive) is allowed, and no private conversations at meals. The rank order which shows in the order of seating and the order of serving imposes restrictions on topics—"Not in front of the children"—or on language—"Not in front of your mother-in-law."²¹ "Don't sing at the table," says the mother in *The Little House on the Prairie*, and then, realizing they are sitting by the wagon with no table, she amends it to a rule against singing at mealtimes.²² Obscenities and talk about money problems at mealtimes are ruled out for different reasons. We have already said that though the family may depend on money coming in, in its internal dealings it is essentially a nonmonetary arrangement. A truce on money talk at table is a truce in the name of the home on all the private struggles that are going on to negotiate a share of the budget for particular projects. Finding the right time to talk about something can be quite a problem in a highly coordinated home.

The idea of the hotel is a perfect opposite of the home, not only because it uses market principles for its transactions, but

²⁰ G. Mars and V. Mars, unpublished manuscript on cultural theory applied to London families.

²¹ An American sociologist commented that this description of the home as a system of rules and rankings was distinctly elitist. Particularly the control on speech recalls the family in the American south in which children had to wash their mouths with soap if they used foul language. It is necessary to say that the details of the rules vary slightly, but the general concern to make an equitable, structured space for living is reported for many civilizations. The examples from English autobiographies and children's stories quoted here are not upper class. In Africa the control on speech takes the form of prescribing categories of kin who are allowed to joke with one another, thus defining others before whom obscenity is ruled out.

reproached for eating too fast or too slow. Synchrony guarantees fair distribution: no second helpings can be given until the last slow eater has cleared his plate. The home requires apology or explanation from one caught raiding the larder ahead of the mealtime or after it or between meals. Why was he hungry? Where was he last mealtime? The expectation of synchrony gives a right to a vast amount of information about members' doings.

Tyrannies of the Home

This is how the home works. Even its most altruistic and successful versions exert a tyrannous control over mind and body. We need hardly say more to explain why children want to leave it and do not mean to reproduce it when they set up house. When we add the possibilities of subversion, the case for rejecting the idea of the home is even stronger. The free-rider on the collectivity may be the authoritarian father, or it may be the youngest child, or the mother herself. There is no space here today to talk about the model subverted to an individual's private self-interest. Nor is it necessary to say much about the inadvertent interruptions of the proper flow of claims and counterclaims which block the perception of the collective good. For a thousand reasons, the home becomes inefficient in its own terms. It is rigid: mealtimes cannot be suddenly changed to accommodate a visitor lest cascading disorder overthrow its subsystems. Warmth and friendship may take second place in its priorities.

Apart from its tyranny over times, the home tyrannizes over tastes. In the name of friendly uniformity, the menus tend to be designed not to satisfy food preferences but to avoid food hates. One person's rooted dislike or medical prohibition results in certain foods being totally eliminated even if they are

Home certainly cannot be defined by any of its functions. Try the idea that home provides the primary care of bodies: if that is what it does best, it is not very efficient; a health farm or hotel could do as well. To say that it provides for the education of the infants hardly covers what it does, and raises the same question about whether specialized school or orphanages would not do it better. We will dismiss the cynical saying that the function of the home in modern industrial society is to produce the input into the labor market. As to those who claim that the home does something stabilizing or deepening or enriching for the personality, there are as many who will claim that it cripples and stifles. This essay makes a fresh start by approaching the home as an embryonic community. If it sounds platitudinous it is because many sociologists think of the embryonic community as modeled on the idea of a home. This relic of nineteenth-century romantic enthusiasm has been a stumbling block in sociology, where it is assumed too easily that the survival of a community over many vicissitudes does not need explaining. On this line of thought both home and community are supposed to be able to draw upon the same mysterious supply of loyal support, and further, their inner sources of strength are unanalyzable: thanks to a kind of mystic solidarity home and small local community are supposed to be able to overcome the forces of fission that tear larger groups apart.¹ This essay will approach solidarity from a more pragmatic point of view. It will try to answer the question, What makes solidarity possible? not by theorizing but by empirical observations on what strategies people adopt when they want to create solidarity



Alison Knowles, The Big Book, Something Else Gallery

Biogs:

Tamsyn Challenger

Challenger is a multi-disciplinary artist. Her work has explored wide-ranging sociopolitical themes, including gender violence and precursor work on selfie culture, and has been featured in the Top 5 Guardian Exhibitions list twice.

She's produced radio for the BBC, including 'My Male Muse', which became a BBC radio 4 Pick of the Year in 2007. In 2017, she was asked to deliver the David Vilaseca Memorial Lecture at Royal Holloway University. Subsequently, she joined the Advisory Committee for the Centre of Visual Cultures at RHUL.

Since 2024, her poetry has been published in Anthropocene Poetry Journal, Osmosis Press, The AI Literary Review, Skirting Around Magazine and Permeable Barrier. Her first poem

film, 'Fret' was a Women in Word Lit Fest official selection in 2024. 'Fret' was subsequently published by Ink, Sweat and Tears. Since then, films she's made from her poems 'Very Bye' and 'White Cube' have been officially selected for StAnza Poetry Festival, 2025, and for the exhibition 'Between a Frame and a Soft Place' at the Millennium Film Workshop, NYC. Her first poetry pamphlet is due to be published in October 2025.

Colin Herd

Colin Herd is a poet and lecturer in Creative Writing at University of Glasgow. His books include Too Ok, Glovebox, Swamp Kiss, You Name It, Click & Collect, Cocoa & Nothing - with Maria Sledmere and Oberwilding - with SJ Fowler. Aquafaba is forthcoming 2025 with Spite Press.