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# **Negotiating Noise in the Home**

A thesis

submitted in fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

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at

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by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Tē Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

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## ABSTRACT

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Thinking about how to visually observe space and place has long been central to the theory and practice of geographic enquiry. This preoccupation with vision is by no means isolated to geography, and is embedded in the Western privileging of sight as the primary source of knowledge acquisition. Researchers who have sensed the effect that the 'myopic' Western sensorium has had on geographic knowledges are engaging more nuanced approaches which acknowledge that the production of places and spaces is multi-sensory. Such perspectives open up new ways to explore the embodied, emotional, and sensuous production of space. With home at the nexus, this thesis contributes to critical geographic thought by exploring the ways in which the senses mediate socio-spatial power relations. In particular, the analysis centres on how experiences of abject and taboo noises affect the production and maintenance of bodies, identities, and spaces. Within a qualitative, poststructuralist approach, I move beyond Foucault's panoptic surveillant gaze to instead listen to the disciplinary effects of listening and hearing. Feminist discourses of embodiment and gender, Kristeva's conceptualisation of abjection, and Eliasian notions of manners and etiquette are drawn on to help flesh out the disciplining effects of aurality.

Twenty individual and four couple semi-structured in-depth interviews with people living in and around Hamilton, New Zealand, are drawn on to explore the means employed to negotiate abject noises. Attention is paid to how these strategies shape, and are shaped by, expectations of self-discipline and bodily comportment. Dominant narratives that emerged relating to the transgressive experience of noises from sexual activity, toileting, and domestic violence problematise the tendency of the (privileged) Western gaze to fix identity and meaning to boundaries and scales. Revulsion, fascination, imagery, 'dirt', and other non-aural phenomena, which abject noises readily communicate across partitioned spaces, suggest that listening and hearing do not happen in isolation. The sensory cross-talk invoked by abjection serves to expose the partiality of the Western five discrete senses model, and affects an ontological and epistemological rethink of how geographers engage with the world.

Moving beyond the traditional Western geographic paradigm, I employ sensuous and emotions scholarship from multiple disciplines to offer new ways to understand constructions of corporeal and domicile privacy, discourses which dominate the politics of abject noises in the home. Acknowledging that exposure to abject noises is not uniform across social strata, gender, class, ethnicity, and age are incorporated into the analysis of the flow of power within the socio-spatial experience of abjection. Various cultural sensoria are drawn on to sound out how, through the transgression of bodily and domicile boundaries, abject noises cause the subject and space to leak into each other, and into other bodies. In doing so, I contribute to critical geographies that position the relationship between bodies and place as mutually constitutive.



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

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Sound is intrinsically and unignorably relational: it emanates, propagates, communicates, vibrates, and agitates; it leaves a body and enters others; it binds and unhinges, harmonises and traumatises; it sends the body moving, the mind dreaming, the air oscillating. It seemingly eludes definition, while having profound effect (Labelle 2006 ix).

I'm only playing my music, but you say I'm making a noise, I'm not being anti-social no, I'm only trying to get some vibes, eah (*Our music*, Macka B, Rasta Soldier 2012).

When I was growing up in Hamilton, New Zealand, there was a large Māori<sup>1</sup> family living behind us on a neighbouring property. During long weekends and other public holidays, they would have parties and invite their extended family and friends. The festivities would go almost non-stop from Friday night until lunchtime the following Monday, and guitar sing-a-longs were the staple. When it became apparent that such an event was imminent, my father would quip, "The natives are getting restless." Whilst the racialised and colonialist overtones in his statement are patently clear, there was never any malice in my father's tone, and he never moved to have the parties shut down. He was happy to accept the noise as a part of urban living. A number of our neighbours were not as tolerant or accepting, and the authorities were called on a number of occasions to serve noise abatement notices.

For me, from the age of seven onwards, the party noise was not annoying at all. I would lie awake, fascinated by the singing, and I would tune in to the guitars

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<sup>1</sup> Māori are the indigenous/first nation peoples (tangata whenua) of Aotearoa New Zealand.

that accompanied the songs. To this day, because of these parties, I have an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of Bob Marley lyrics, such was the level of attention commanded by the enticing sounds from over the fence. A whole range of images and narratives would run through my mind in an attempt to piece together what was going on. I remember wondering why it was that some people complained and my father did not. This, I suppose, was my first experience of the subjective nature of (welcomed/desirable) sound and (unwanted/nuisance) noise.

Fast-forward to 2006, and I am researching for a Masters thesis exploring the discursive constructions of youth car culture in Hamilton, New Zealand (Beere 2007). Noise from modified exhausts featured prominently in news media reports relating to the problems associated with youth car culture. I found this interesting because the site where my research was based - Te Rapa Straight - is an industrial zone fed by a major arterial route. Truck, and other traffic noise, dominated the soundscape of that area and yet it is the youth car culture enthusiasts, or 'boy racers', who were often singled out as being problematic. Again, I was fascinated as to why certain noises are annoying to some people, while other noises appear to go unnoticed.

It was this fascination that led to the topic of this research: how people experience, understand, and negotiate noise in the home. Noise, commonly defined as unwanted sound, is a pervasive, and yet highly subjective feature of urban living. It is a transgressive presence, and one that, in the case of home, represents a trespass that is often difficult to avoid. Following my interest in scholarship relating to the sensuous, emotional, and embodied connection to

place, I wanted to explore the role that noise plays in the production (and disruption) of home spaces, and to understand how sound becomes noise. Home struck me as a salient location upon which to base my enquiry, as most of the narratives that I had heard and read about, or formed myself, were centred on the site of the home. Negotiation, within the context of this thesis, represents how noise affects behaviours and actions within the home. While the experiential narratives are discussed at length throughout, it is how sensuous experiences influence behaviours within the home that is of primary interest. Negotiation, as I discuss in Chapter Two, is theorised as being contingent on the spaces in which abject noises are produced and experienced.

### **Listening to Noisy Homes**

Geography as a discipline is well-positioned to explore the politics of noise, for places and spaces such as bodies, the home, and cities, all play a significant role in people's experiences of sound and noise. In the case of the built environment, housing design, and proximity to other homes, shapes and is shaped by, experiences of sound and noise. Moreover, being in-place is a sensuous and emotive process, and places and spaces are made and maintained through the senses. Paul Rodaway (1994) and Steven Feld (2005) argue it is through the senses that we are located in-place, and sensory experiences and awareness produce places. Sensing, and relevant to this research, *listening* and *hearing*, are inherently spatial processes.

Even though geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) have advocated since the 1970s for approaches that acknowledge the role that *all* of the senses play in

the production of space, sensuous research has remained but a murmur within geographic discourse. Or more precisely, non-visual approaches to engaging with sensuous experience have struggled, as Derek McCormack (2009) argues, to gain traction within human geography. For the most part, this is due to the historical origins of geography that, as Felix Driver (2003) attests, have positioned geographic enquiry as a visual pursuit.

Geographers such as Rowland Atkinson (2006; 2007), and Michelle Duffy and Gordon Waitt (2013), Feld (2005), Shaun Moores (1993), Rodaway (1994), and Susan Smith (1997) have moved beyond the dominance of vision in the production of geographical knowledge. This work has come after what David Howes (2003 xii) refers to as:

a long dry period in which the senses and sensuality were bypassed by most academics as antithetical to intellectual investigation. According to the latter perspective, sensory data was just the gaudy clothing that had to be removed to arrive at the naked, abstract truth.

In various ways, the geographers mentioned above demonstrate the importance of multi-sensory approaches to human geography research and in doing so, provide new ways to understand the interactive relationships that occur between people and place. Building on prior sensuous geographies scholarship, this research represents an attempt to enrich understandings of the role that the senses play in socio-spatial relations. To do this, I focus on experiences of noise, and how noise is negotiated, within homes in the urban New Zealand landscape. Utilising a poststructuralist framework, I critically engage with the

politics and power that resonate through noise in the home. Although multiple voices of sensuous experience exist, Western colonialist attitudes and the associated visual bias dominate social and academic discourses in New Zealand. As a result, non-visual senses are rarely explicitly acknowledged. Deconstructing the underlying discourses of sensuous experience through a poststructural approach can help bring to the 'foreground' the often taken-for-granted aspect of aurality.

Deconstructing the experience and negotiation of noise necessarily requires attention be paid to the power that flows through and within the 'politics' of sensuous experience. For, as the sentiments in Macka B's (2012) lyrics that introduce this chapter illustrate, the experience of noise is subjective, contingent on the personal sensitivities and attitudes of those that hear, and therefore subject to interpretation. The way that noise is interpreted is not only a personal judgement, but it is also influenced by various discourses. Within every cultural group, there are rules, laws, and protocols that govern membership within that group. Some of these rules are enshrined in formal channels of governance, while others are maintained through informal structures, routines, and rituals. In New Zealand, noise is policed both through formal legislation, and through informal and often implicit contracts between people and communities. The focus of this thesis is the latter.

Although at the beginning of this research I intended to explore a broad range of sound experiences, overwhelmingly it was *noise* that dominated discussions during the interviews. Noise then became the focus as it is my intention to allow the narratives of the participants who took part to guide this research as much

as possible. When participants spoke about noise in the interviews, they expressed feelings of frustration, anxiety, annoyance, tolerance, expectations, and abjection. Power, or perhaps more precisely, powerlessness is a common thread underpinning these expressed feelings. Participants often spoke of a sense of powerlessness to avoid or mitigate against noise, how this affected them mentally and physically, and how this affected their enjoyment of their home space. Therefore, literature that helps tease out the power relations that shape and shaped by the experience of noise in the home provide the foundations for this thesis.

## **Managing Noise**

The policing of noise by local authorities from things such as loud stereos, cars, parties, industry, and aircraft, is important for the effective management of cities. Wolfgang Babisch (2002), Guus de Hollander (2004), Hartmut Ising and Barbara Kruppa (2004), Geoff Leventhall (2003), and the World Health Organisation (WHO 2007) have demonstrated that exposure to noise can have significant impacts on physical and mental health and wellbeing. Weighing the rights of citizens to be 'noise free' against the issues posed by increasing population density is a challenge for modern societies. Policy relating to the management of noise in New Zealand is governed by the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), which states that:

Every occupier of land (including any premises and any coastal marine area), and every person carrying out an activity in, on, or under a water body or the coastal marine area, shall adopt the best practicable option to ensure that the emission of noise from that land or water does not

exceed a reasonable level (RMA 1991 No. 69 Part 3 Section 16).

Within the Act (1991), the point at which noise exceeds a reasonable level is defined as excessive noise, which means:

any noise that is under human control and of such a nature as to unreasonably interfere with the peace, comfort, and convenience of any person (other than a person in or at the place from which the noise is being emitted) (RMA 1991 No. 69 Part 12 Section 326).

As sounds are experienced differently within and across cultures, tensions often arise between those involved in noise abatement events - the complainants, those making noise, and officials responsible for enforcing noise abatement policy such as noise control officers. What one person deems excessive may not align with the values of those living in their neighbourhood. Often complainants are constructed as 'too sensitive', which can be reinforced if a noise control officer assesses the noise to be reasonable. 'Unreasonable' noise then is a highly contentious marker within a moral ordering of sensuous experience.

The enforcement of urban noise policy is the responsibility of local government (Territorial Authorities). Due to the highly subjective nature of aurality, enforcement of such a policy relies on subjective assessment. As Craig Gurney (2000a 41) states, "any rights to aural privacy would be very difficult to establish in law" due to problems associated with the subjectivity of noise. I draw on this statement by Gurney (2000a) strategically, as privacy is a recurring theme

throughout this thesis. Specifically, it is not only issues of subjective experience that makes aural privacy legislation problematic, but also the difficulty involved in defining the term 'privacy'. Authors such as Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling (2006), Tony Chapman and Jenny Hockey (1999), Stacy Gillis and Joanne Hollows (2008), and Hollows (2008) argue that domicile spaces are far from the private and discrete enclaves that hegemonic discourses position home as. Instead, critical engagement has positioned home as being subject to broader socio-spatial influences, which has served to render the very notion of the 'private' home as untenable. The problematic nature of 'privacy' is key to almost every facet of this thesis, and I contribute to this aforementioned work by examining the role that noise plays in problematising the sense of feeling 'private' at home.

Concern for the effects of noisy environments is not a modern phenomenon, and historical accounts show that the environmental management of noise has been an issue for over 5,000 years. According to Stephanie Dalley (1991), the myths of the Sumerians (3500-1750 B.C.) mention how the god Enlil is angered by the noise made by the people of an overpopulated city. As a solution for his noise problem, Enlil sends a big flood that sweeps over the city. Fear of another flood event was enough motivation for the Sumerians to be mindful of the level of noise that they made.

Several thousands of years later, according to Birgitta Berglund and Thomas Lindvall (1995), Roman rulers made an effort to reduce noise annoyance by passing a law that prohibits chariot driving on the cobblestone streets after dark.

City life in medieval Europe, as David Nicholas (2003 160) argues, is just as noisy:

Since the guilds insisted that work be done in the open, noise from industrial operations, including the death throes of animals being slaughtered and their cries while driving alive through the cities to the meat hall, were ever-present. Bells tolled the hours. Peddlers hawked their wares, and shopkeepers announced their goods.

### **Thesis Questions: Outlaw Noise - Beyond the Long Ear of the Law**

While the formal management of noise has a long history, there are noises in contemporary New Zealand society that for the most part fall outside of regulation by enforcement agencies. There are a range of noises experienced by people that can have comparable, and in some cases more profound physical and mental health effects than those formally legislated for. What is more, even though these noises that I am alluding to have been demonstrated to negatively impact on wellbeing, in many cultures a great deal of effort is often invested in avoiding discussing such noises. I am referring to noises that are constructed as abject and taboo.

And so we arrive at the crux of this thesis, where I now turn my attention to addressing questions relating to the corporeal and social politics of abject noises. How has it come to pass that certain noises are understood as abject? Why is it that the often disruptive effects of abject and taboo noises, such as those resulting from pooing, farting, sex, burping, fighting, urinating, and spitting, remain largely absent from discourses of noisiness? How has this 'silent presence' of abject noise shaped the construction of homes, bodies, and

connections to domicile spaces? Where does geography fit into all of this? These are the questions that I address in this thesis, for I find it immensely fascinating that the noises of abjection, which emanate from acts so intrinsic to human existence, are all but absent from 'everyday' experience in New Zealand. Abject noise is almost exclusively expected to remain suppressed and hidden. Like the colloquial 'elephant in the room', it appears that apart from in comedic contexts, concerted efforts are made to erase all traces of abject noise from the 'public' domain. In the case of academic discourse, the silence is deafening.

### **Dominant Themes: Literature and Participant Narratives**

The dominant imagining of home in New Zealand is a space shielded and separate from the public domain. Home is, as Gurney (2000b 55) puts it, a "social and physical space in which we most easily be our (embodied) selves." It is a space where abject and taboo noise ought to be able to roam free, and be expressed, away from the scrutiny of others. The physical structure of domicile spaces may offer a shield from cultural norms that expect certain noises to be contained and suppressed, but noise has some interesting and often annoying physical properties. By example, the material structure of the home often provides little or no aural privacy. This can make the negotiation of abject and taboo noises a challenge. For while subject to noise control legislation when they are deemed 'extreme', abject and taboo noises, for the most part, are policed not through force, but through internalised self-discipline. Noises resulting from bodily functions, sexual activity, and domestic violence, to varying degrees are abject, often taboo, and are rarely explicitly dealt with directly.

Tensions arise where abject noises are present, but are unable to be addressed due to the embarrassment and shame associated with such noises. Within the tacit politics that shape the negotiation of abjection, the success or failure of negotiating abject noise in the home is often an act of faith - faith that others will not transgress the boundaries of politeness by confronting us about the noises we make, and faith that the physical structure of the home will mask how we express the taboo aspects of lived experience.

A central aspect of this thesis is where the abject and taboo 'fit' within the binary of public and the private idyll. This is because sound and noise readily ignore the physical boundaries that demarcate the lines between that which is discursively constructed as private (discrete) from that which is public. Gurney (2000a) explores this issue in his work on coital noise, and highlights how the taboo nature of sex complicates the blurring of domicile and other physical boundaries. In the case of domestic violence, authors such as Elizabeth Schneider (1994) argue that discourses of privacy, defined through systems of patriarchal oppression, have facilitated abuse in home spaces. This 'right' to privacy, amongst other influences, often silences those who would otherwise speak out if they overheard acts of violence in the home.

### **'Sounding Out' Hamilton**

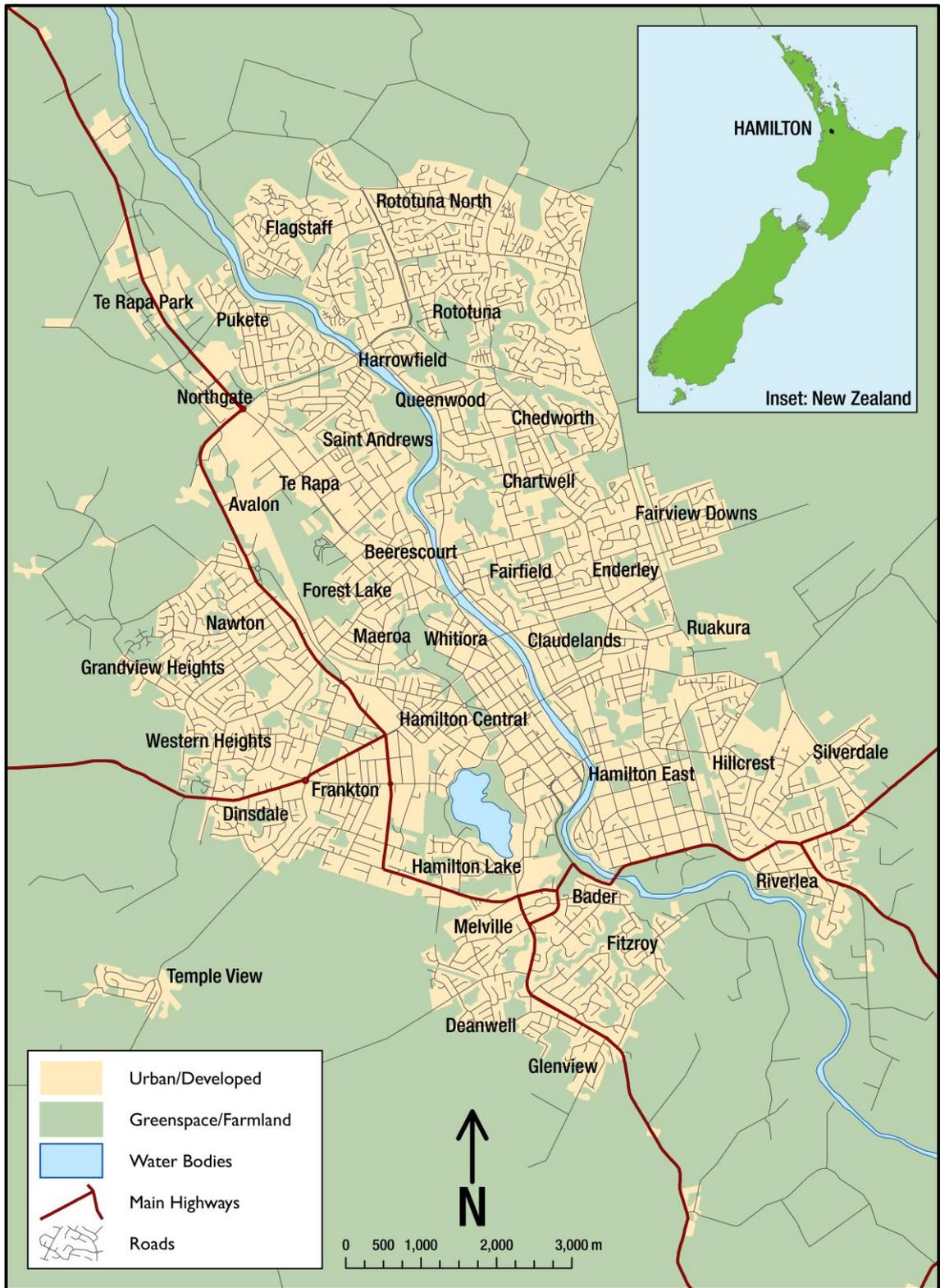
This research is based primarily within the city of Hamilton, New Zealand, and the surrounding area (see Figure 1.1). As of the 2013 census, Hamilton has a population of 141,612 (Statistics New Zealand 2014a), making it the fourth most-populous city in New Zealand. Hamilton City covers an area of 98 square

kilometres. With a population density of approximately 1,455 people per square kilometre, Hamilton is not particularly densely populated by world standards.

It is New Zealand's only major city that is inland, and the main economic activity revolves around dairy farming. Hamilton is the main urban centre of the Waikato Region, which hosts the world's largest dairy company, Fonterra. Being an urban centre surrounded by agricultural farming has contributed to national discourses that position Hamilton as a 'Cow Town' or 'backward'. But with a diverse mix of cultures (83 ethnicities from 65 countries (Hamilton Multicultural Services Trust 2014)), a large transient tertiary student population (15.23 per cent of the population),<sup>2</sup> and thriving hospitality and information technology industries, the 'Cow Town' moniker is something of a misnomer.

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<sup>2</sup> From the Statistics New Zealand Census 2006, which is the most recently available data at this level of detail.



**Figure 1.1: Hamilton, New Zealand (Source: Author)**

The average house size in Hamilton is 158 square metres, compared with the national average of 149 square metres (Quotable Value 2011), and the average

number of occupants per household is 2.7, which coincides with the national average.<sup>2</sup> Houses in New Zealand are usually stand-alone dwellings, and have between three to five bedrooms. With a relatively mild climate, houses in Hamilton (and in New Zealand more generally) are understood to be ‘under-insulated’. Visitors from Northern Hemisphere countries with whom I have spoken on the subject, almost without exception express disbelief at the low level of housing insulation in New Zealand. Recent changes to the Building Act (2004) have meant that insulation requirements (including double-glazing) for new homes in certain regions has become compulsory.<sup>3</sup> The legacy of previous building regulations, however, means that Hamilton’s older housing stock has both poor sound and thermal insulation.

While these data are generalised, they are useful for contextualising some of the issues that this research is addressing. Population density, and housing design and layout, contribute to how noise is experienced in urban spaces. By example, population density is not uniform across social strata such as socio-economic status. Houses in poorer neighbourhoods also tend to be built of materials that have low sound-insulating properties, and this is exacerbated by higher population density (Marsh *et al.* 1999; Meszaros 2005; Truax 2001[1984]; see also Appendix 1, Table 5.1). Gendered power relations are also ‘built’ into houses that reflect heteronormative (and heterosexual) constructions of ‘family’ (Gorman-Murray 2008; Longhurst 2012). Feminists from a range of spatial disciplines such as geography, architecture, and planning have exposed “the gendered assumptions that inform much housing design, as well as the gendered practices of design professions such as

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<sup>3</sup> Other factors such as the combined window area, and the direction the windows face, also affect whether certain insulation obligations are required (Building Act 2004).

architecture” (Blunt and Dowling 2006 7). Within these gendered readings of home lies an understanding that masculinist privilege informs, and is perpetuated by, housing design. This is important to consider, particularly in the case of domestic violence, where masculinist discourses of privacy often ‘silence’ reactions to violence noises (see Chapter Seven).

### **Some Notes on Language**

Throughout this thesis I am attentive to the concerns of poststructuralism, concerns that highlight how language, text, metaphor, and space are imbued with, and reinforce, the flow of power. For instance, deconstructing the Western bathroom/toilet offers some insight into the politics of the privacy idyll and the home. Arguably, no other space in Western discourse has so many euphemisms attached to it. From its early origins as a night chamber or garderobe (literally ‘cloakroom’), with the introduction of internal plumbing the ‘water closet’, through to the modern day lavatory, labelling of the bathroom/toilet has steered away from explicitly outlining what it is used for. Conversely, dysphemistic terms such as ‘thunder box’ and ‘crapper’<sup>4</sup> also speak to counter-normative social constructions of toilets and toilet use. Identifying the sites of power through deconstruction is not always a straightforward affair, and often meaning can be buried deep within social processes, especially if these processes are part of the ‘taken-for-granted’ aspects of existence.

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<sup>4</sup> The origin of the terms ‘crapper’ and ‘crap’ is often associated with Thomas Crapper, who is mistakenly credited with inventing the flushing toilet. As Bill Bryson (2010 383-384) argues, the term “crap in the lavatorial sense is very ancient” and was in use prior to Crapper patenting the elevated cistern.

Given the pronounced (albeit suppressed) nature of abjection and the taboo, however, the power relations that govern such things as sexual activity, using the toilet, and domestic violence, although socially taboo, are readily identifiable. Although inscriptions of abjection are relatively easy to 'sense' within the cultural landscape, this does not mean that the power is obvious and clear cut. By example, sex and toileting are often considered to be natural acts. This is not the case for domestic violence. Each is influenced by, and influences, differing power relations. In grouping these three activities/behaviours, I do not wish to imply that the power relations within each is similar.

Settling upon a 'voice' to negotiate the complexities of abjection proved as equally complex as abjection itself. Within the realms of an academic text, certain conventions are followed to ensure ideas are effectively (and affectively) communicated. Conventions consistent with my chosen theoretical and methodological approach valorise the importance of giving voice to the participants who share their stories to researchers. Earlier drafts tended towards what felt to be disembodied academic prose. While usefully descriptive and encompassing, heavily weighting my writing towards terms such as corporeal excreta, bodily function noises, and processes of expulsion and elimination tended to erase the embodied agency of not only the respondents who contributed to this thesis, but it also washed over the messiness and viscosity of the 'matter' being discussed. Poos, wees, piss, taking a dump, shit, farting, fucking, wanking, getting it on: this is the language of embodied experiences of the abject and the taboo. With this in mind, I express the abject with the euphemisms, dysphemisms, and common vernacular to better echo

embodied experience. When talking in more general terms, language such as corporeal excreta is used for the sake of brevity, and to perhaps also highlight just how much effort goes into 'dancing' around topics that are for the most part silenced in Western discourse.

### **Thesis Outline**

The following represents an attempt to better understand the relationships between sound, bodies, and the home. More specifically, I am interested in how abject and taboo noises can disrupt feelings of being at home, and how awareness of being heard, or hearing others, shapes the experience of home. Such matters fascinate me as rarely is the topic of noises understood as abject broached directly. Euphemism and concealment dominate the politics of the noises produced during sexual activity, bodily evacuation, and domestic violence. A secret world exists in our homes (and other spaces) that is for the most part left to chance, hoping that the rules governing etiquette, manners, and bodily comportment will suffice as a safeguard against disclosure. Negotiating sound and noise is an exercise in navigating individual expectations within the physical and social environment in which the home is situated.

In Chapter Two, I draw on literature that speaks to the 'situating' effects of sound, and critically engage with Western understandings of the body, the home, and subjective constructions of sensory experience. Historically, audition has not featured significantly within Western discourses of what Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) refers to as being-in-the-world. With a 'focus' on vision, scarce attention has been paid in the West to the role that hearing plays in

encounters of place. Addressing the processes that have privileged vision is particularly important for this research as geography has played a pivotal role in skewing Western perception towards vision. Further, due to its colonial past, this bias dominates socio-spatial understandings in New Zealand.

To better understand why there has been increasing acknowledgement of the senses in geography, it is useful to first engage with the foundations of why non-visual experience has up until relatively recently, been largely ignored in Western discourse. This has affected what Walter Ong (1982 42) refers to as a disembodied understanding of place predicated on “denatured abstractions.” An examination of the history of the Western sensorium demonstrates that perception is far from objective and is subject to political, religious, commercial, and gendered influences. The subjective nature of sensuous experience features prominently throughout this thesis and therefore the underlying politics of the senses requires attention.

After unpacking the power that has shaped the Western sensorium, and how this power has shaped the production of knowledge in New Zealand, I review literature that actively moves towards more diverse and inclusive approaches to understanding the ways that the senses inform socio-spatial relations. Since the emergence of humanism, greater emphasis has been placed on what Rodaway (1994 4-5) refers to as the multisensual nature of “everyday experience.” McCormack (2009), however, attests that non-visual understandings of place have struggled to find legitimacy within the discipline of geography. This is in spite of interest being shown in the mid-1970s by geographers such as Tuan (1974). I therefore draw on work from the fields of anthropology and sociology in

order to both problematise geography's 'short-sightedness', and as a source of inspiration for how geography might move towards multi-sensory research.

One of major effects of visual bias has been to reinforce distance from place and space. That which is visually perceived is marked as away from the body, and produces a disembodied relationship to place and space. In the case of home, geographers such as Blunt and Dowling (2006) and Andrew Gorman-Murray (2012) refute this and argue for an embodied reading of bodies and home. To explore embodied homes from a sensuous perspective, I turn attention towards how the experience of noise reinforces the liminality of socially constructed boundaries at the scales of the body and the home. In doing so, I argue that hearing and listening significantly connect bodies to homes, homes to bodies, and that sound actively embeds bodies within homes.

Chapter Three details the contributions that Julia Kristeva's work on abjection, Foucauldian understandings of power and surveillance, and Eliasian notions of manners and etiquette make to contextualising bodies and homes as site where abject noise is negotiated. All three offer useful insights into the historical processes informing contemporary attitudes to abject matter in New Zealand, the influence of abjection on scales and spaces such as bodies and homes, and the power relations that flow through sensuous homes.

Kristeva's (1982) *Powers of Horror* lends weight to understanding the ways in which abject noises destabilise corporeal and domicile boundaries. The fascination and disgust invoked by abjection simultaneously draws in and repels the auditor, and communicates a myriad of associations with 'dirt'. I make use of

Kristeva (1982) here to argue that visceral reactions invoked through association represent a transgression of bodily boundaries where the self 'overlaps' with, and is contaminated by, the other. The work of Norbert Elias (1978[1939]) is drawn on to help deconstruct the socio-spatial politics of embarrassment, shame, and modesty - three key factors in the negotiation of abject noises in the home. Elias' (1978[1939]) analysis of the history of bodily comportment is particularly useful to this research as his analysis demonstrates how changing attitudes in Western society map out in parallel to changes in the spatial configuration of homes, neighbourhoods, and cities. Further, tracking the history of discourses informing moral order, and the social construction of home that Elias (1978[1939]) discusses, is also employed in order to help disrupt notions that reactions and attitudes to abject matter are 'natural'. Michel Foucault's (1977; 1978; 1980) theorising of power as a cyclic flow exerted from all directions at once is drawn on to tease out the complexities of self-disciplining behaviour associated with abject noises. I expand on Foucault's metaphor of the Panopticon in relation to the flow of power to help explain the potential disciplinary effects of aurality.

Building on the theoretical foundations that have guided this thesis, in Chapter Four I plot the methodological concerns and approaches that were employed to gain access to how abjection and taboo noises are negotiated in the home. Consistent with feminist poststructural methodology, I locate myself in the research and explain how I used my own body as a research tool. Inspired by Gill Valentine (2005), the development of my own viewpoint allowed ideas to be teased out, and in some cases challenged, in order to avoid bland or superficial

responses. I also discuss how weaving positionality into the research process guided the use of disclosure, and how this affected the interviews.

I then discuss the motives informing the demographic and geographic scope, the recruitment process, and the types of interview methods that were used for this thesis. Largely shaped by the type of information that I wanted to access, such as attitudes and experiences of sex, toileting, and violence noises, I outline the ethical concerns relating to broaching such topics and how this influenced the recruitment of participants. I elaborate on how the combination of a relatively open demographic scope, together with the broad range of aural experiences that were sought, influenced the geographic parameters of the recruitment process. As is often the case with social science research, my initial vision for enlisting participants was not achievable, and I outline the measures taken to address this.

The processes followed during the testing of the semi-structured interview methods, the interviews themselves, and the approaches used to analyse the narratives of participants are then mapped out, highlighting the challenges and successes faced throughout. Attention is directed towards the efficacy of the warm-up exercises employed, how this was tested in a pilot interview, and how this influenced the subsequent approach that I took. I discuss the use of participant observation during the interviews, and critically reflect on the flow of power between the researcher and the researched. Here, I address how I was attentive to minimising my influence over the interviews, drawing attention again to positionality and self-disclosure. I make links back to the theoretical foundations informing this thesis in relation to how this manifested within the

choice of themes, questions, and how interview responses were coded. I reflect on the iterative steps of the coding and analysis process, and how the data affected a shift in the direction of this thesis. I also outline the six main themes that resonated throughout discussions on abject noise in the home, such as how the experience of abject and taboo noise aligns with certain spaces

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven provide an in-depth analysis of the experiences of abject and taboo noises within the interviews conducted for this thesis. Although each of the empirical chapters in turn address sex noises, bathroom and toilet noises, and domestic violence noises, these groupings are far from discrete. Issues relating to sovereignty (corporeal sovereignty and sovereignty of the home); controllable/uncontrollable (voluntary/involuntary sounds); public/private (within the home/the home in context with its surrounds); and discipline (self-discipline and the disciplining of others) resonate throughout all three chapters.

Chapter Five begins with a general introduction to set the scene for all three empirical chapters. I briefly cover the transgressive properties of abjection, and the ways in which abject noises can disrupt the production of bodies and homes, and reiterate the role that emotions and the senses play in geographies of home. The remainder of Chapter Five teases out the various ways in which the experience of sex noise contributes to, or disrupts, the production of domicile spaces. Issues relating to socio-economic status, the ability of noise to transmit meaning and multi-sensory cues across boundaries, and the visceral responses that often result from hearing others having sex are examined within the context of the moral ordering of home. Notions of etiquette, and how

understandings of home as 'private' shape the negotiation of sexual activity, are also drawn on to explore how expectations that sex be contained within 'intimate' spaces shapes the physical and discursive construction of domicile spaces.

Chapter Six shifts the focus from the bedroom to bathroom and toilet spaces. Building on the themes of abjection, etiquette, and power introduced in Chapter Five, I begin by outlining historical and contemporary attitudes to the management of 'dirt' in Western discourse. I argue that understanding the underlying discourses informing the management of bodily fluids is important, as such discourses have played an important part in shaping contemporary New Zealand homes, embodied connection to place, and broader socio-spatial relations. Critically for this thesis, the politics of sensuous perception are evident throughout. Expectations of corporeal containment, as detailed in the works of Sheila Cavanagh (2010), Elias (1978[1939]), Foucault (1978), and Kristeva (1982), are woven through participant narratives to explore how taboos surrounding noises associated with bodily functions are conformed to and contested within the home. Discussion falls within the context of dominant constructions of gender, both in terms of how certain noises communicate and mark bodies as gendered, and how different geographies influence the negotiation of bodily noises.

While sharing many similarities with the noises discussed in Chapters Five and Six, the social taboos that shape the geographies of domestic violence noises covered in Chapter Seven carry markedly different expectations relating to self-discipline. Unlike the expectations influencing the negotiation of sex and toilet

noises, I argue the 'silencing' of domestic violence for the most part occurs not at the source, but at the site of those that hear. This is affected through the privileging of masculinist power, where patriarchal domination is enshrined within discourses of home, and through the threat of potential harm that is transmitted to the auditor. This oppression is embedded within a false public/private binary, and manifests within the built environment of homes and neighbourhoods. Through examining the affectual politics of domestic violence noises, I contribute to literature that acknowledges the ways in which space and place are gendered.

In Chapter Eight, I reiterate the value of engaging geography from a sensuous and embodied perspective, and summarise how doing so can offer new ways of understanding discourses of scales such as bodies and homes. I recap the research objectives that guided this research, and reflect on the efficacy of the approach that was used. The potential for future work is discussed in terms of how researching the sensuous politics of abjection can contribute to understandings of the embedded, embodied, and mutually constitutive relationship between bodies and place.



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## 2 GEOGRAPHIES OF HOME, BODIES, SENSES, AND EMOTIONS: FOUNDATIONS

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In affluent societies (as in most others) much more than half of all waking time is spent at home or near it. More than a third of capital is invested there. More than one third of all work is done there. Depending on what you choose to count as goods, some high proportion of all goods are produced there and even more are enjoyed there. More than three quarters of all sustenance, social life, leisure and recreation happen there. Above all, people are produced there and endowed with the values and capacities which will determine most of the quality of their social life and government away from home (Stretton 1976 183 cited in Valentine 2001 71).

While the ratios and values that Hugh Stretton (1976) quotes are highly generalised and have changed over time, there is little doubt that the home occupies a significant role in Western cultures. In spite of this significance, prior to the 1970s limited critical academic attention was paid to exploring the social aspects of home in Western societies. As Blunt and Dowling (2006 6-7) argue, the study of home was almost exclusively discussed in terms of housing policy, the economics of housing provision, and housing design. This, in part, was due to the dominance of Marxism and housing studies - each heavily underpinned by economic imperatives - in understandings of place. Emerging attention from the humanist movement in the 1970s can be credited with moving interest in the home beyond partial economic discourses toward a more embodied and nuanced reading of domicile spaces (Blunt and Dowling 2006).

Rather than being a passive, neutral space residing outside the economic, public (read privileged) sphere, humanists perceived home as being a space with significant importance to identity production and maintenance. Humanist

readings of home, however, tended to romanticise the home as a private sanctuary constantly under threat from bureaucratic systems and commodification, threats which served to negatively affect the ability “to make home, to create a place that is sacred, separate from society and full of significance” (Dovey 1985 cited in Blunt and Dowling 2006 14). Conceptualising home in this way tended to produce homes as static, discrete spaces, and ignored the agency of home makers to resist and contest the influences of societal power structures. It also perpetuated binary distinctions where the ‘private’ home was set up in opposition to the ‘public’ domain.

It was not until feminist researchers began critiquing the absence of women’s lived experience within spatial discourses that sites such as the home began to be politicised within broader geographic and social systems. Researchers such as Gerda Wekerle *et al.* (1980), and the members of the feminist architectural collective Matrix (1984), recognised that as a product of human endeavour, home is as much a social construction as it is a physical space. This new approach to understanding home was advocated by feminist geographers such as Kim England (1991 135), who asserts that gender permeates through all aspect of social activity, and therefore geography must treat:

gender relations and gender roles as fundamental to a thorough understanding of the causal relationship between women’s and men’s actions and socio-spatial structures such as cities.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See also Linda McDowell (1983).

Doing so repositioned home as a cultural production that was more than just a neutral container in which social relations unfold. Instead, home began being read as a space imbued with all of the societal values and power structures that informed its construction (Valentine 2001).

Moving beyond discourses that have tended to essentialise socio-spatial relations has served to unearth the power that is 'built' into the home. For instance, feminist readings of home recognise the ways in which patriarchal modes of oppression are reflected both in the physical structure of the home and in the ways home is mobilised within hegemonic discourses at various spatial scales such as neighbourhoods, cities, and the nation (see Hanson and Pratt 1995; Mackenzie and Rose 1983; Rose 1993). Much of the early work on gender and the home has been critiqued for oversimplifying the "complex interrelationship between people and the spatial structure of the city" (England 1991 143), and for casting women as passive agents at the mercy of the built environment. This early work that first politicised home as gendered inspired a plethora of approaches that have moved beyond oversimplified binary categorisations and instead have positioned home as a complex matrix of socio-spatial power relations.

Two ideas that emerged from this feminist politicisation of place and space are particularly useful for exploring the experience of noise in the home from a geographic standpoint: first, the disruption of the public/private binary (and binary distinctions in general); and second, an emphasis on embodied, sensuous experiences of place. The following critical review will revolve around literature that speaks to these two themes as a means to draw out the power

relations evident in the negotiation of noise in the home. To do this it is first necessary to acknowledge the position that sensuous experience has traditionally occupied within geography, where hierarchical ordering of the senses privileges visual discourses and methods. I tease out the implications of visually biased approaches by drawing on broader discursive debates that highlight the political processes which influence the ways in which the senses and power interact. Addressing such issues is essential as visual bias in geography has marginalised other sensuous ways of knowing, which I argue has impoverished understandings of socio-spatial relations in spaces such as the home.

Second, I draw attention to geography scholarship that has moved beyond the dominance of the visual, and argues for a fuller understanding of sensuous experience. From the broader epistemological and ontological issues raised in the previous section, I refine the focus of discussion to the site of the sensuous home. Attention is paid to where the senses reside in the production, maintenance, and contestation of home. Human geographers such as Mark Paterson (2007) position the senses and emotions as mutually constitutive and this was particularly evident in the accounts of participants interviewed for this research. As such, literature that speaks to how emotions affect and are affected by space will be drawn on to help flesh out sensuous understandings of home. I use the term 'flesh out' intentionally to acknowledge that senses and emotions emanate within and from bodies, and therefore the production of sensuous homes is inextricably linked to embodiment. I will also augment geographical discourses with sensuous literature arising from disciplines such

as anthropology and psychology as a means to suggest how geography can be enriched by incorporating a fuller sensory approach.

Third, I attune my focus towards the spatial and corporeal politics of negotiating noise in the home. The transgressive and destabilising effects of noise at the site where bodies, homes, the senses, and emotions manifest is unpacked in order to disrupt the dominant imagining of home as a private, contained, and discrete space. In doing so, I add to the body of work that positions the home as a porous and fluid social construction, rather than merely an architectural space. Within critical contemporary home literature there is an almost 'deafening silence' in relation to noises that are positioned or experienced as abject. Sensuous home literature tends to focus on sounds that positively contribute to the making of home. When noise is discussed, rarely are abject and taboo noises engaged with.

Strategies to avoid being seen and heard engaging in abject/taboo activities predominantly revolve around the site of the home, and as Gurney (2000b 55) puts it, the home provides a unique space where 'dirt' can be managed "in ways which we cannot do elsewhere". It therefore seems errant that more work hasn't focused on understanding the role negotiating such matters plays in the production of domestic spaces. The very social norms that position certain things as 'off-limits' are so entrenched in Western discourse that discussing the politics of abject/taboo noises has largely been ignored by academia.

In the case of sexual taboos, Liz Bondi (1997 5) argues that feminists advocate that the personal is political, and despite feminist critiques of the public/private

binary, “matters regarded as personal or private” have for the most part been avoided. Although Phil Hubbard (2000) suggests that a resurgence of work on non-normative sexualities represents a shift away from the ‘squeamishness’ that has dominated geography in relation to topics constructed as taboo, many silences remain. Following Hubbard (2000), recent edited books compiled by Ben Campkin and Rosie Cox (2007) examining domestic ‘dirt’, and William Cohen and Ryan Johnson (2004), on the historical processes of the sociality of ‘filth’, have moved on from the reticence with engaging the abject. While these works offer useful insights into the narratives informing attitudes relating to abject and taboo matter, there is a distinct lack of direct engagement with embodied and visceral narratives. Personal ‘everyday’ experiences of how people feel about matter that invokes disgust remains sparse. By interviewing people about their relationships to abject and taboo noises in their homes, it is my intention to address these concerns.

My focus is orientated towards the three main categories of abject noises that recur in the accounts of the research participants - coital noises, bodily function noises, domestic violence noises<sup>6</sup> - in order to contribute to understandings of how abject noise affects the production and maintenance of home. In particular, I examine the disciplining effects of abjection in the home, the historical processes that have shaped abjection in the home, and how dominant understandings of abjection are conformed to and contested within home spaces. Through teasing out these issues, I also offer a critique of existing literature that has marginalised the important role of sensuous experience in the production of home.

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<sup>6</sup> Although my focus is on these three main groupings of abject noises, I do not mean to infer that this list (or categorisation) is exhaustive.

## Geography's Sensuous Legacy

Human geography remains a discipline in which vision is dominant, and it remains remarkably difficult for knowledge produced through other sensory registers to be taken seriously (McCormack 2009 105).

Examining the historical processes that shape hegemonic expectations and tolerances relating to the experience and production of noise is key to understanding how noise is negotiated in contemporary New Zealand homes. This is because a number of ideological shifts, whose origins can be traced back to the Enlightenment Era, continue to influence understandings of both sensory perception, and the social and cultural expectations associated with the negotiation of sensuous experience.<sup>7</sup> These ideological shifts have significantly influenced understandings of place and space, and also account for why non-visual senses remain understudied in contemporary human geography.

To unpack the role that the senses occupy in geography, it is useful to first examine the processes that have informed and shaped dominant hegemonic understandings of the senses in New Zealand. Such an approach is essential as the production of knowledge is embedded within a hierarchical ordering of the senses that serves to narrow the “discursive practices and limits of what

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<sup>7</sup> There is little consensus as to when the Age of Enlightenment began. Descartes' (1637) *Discourse on Method* is often quoted as an early marker of the Enlightenment. Charles Withers (2008 3) suggests many authors believe the Enlightenment Era began with German philosopher-scientist Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646-1716) and ended with Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Withers (2008 2), however, argues that it is perhaps better to consider the Enlightenment Era as something that “began not as a definite ‘thing’, or even as a chronological period, but as processes concerned with the central place of reason and of experience and experiment in understanding and improving human society.” Jonathan Israel (2001 3) concurs with Withers (2008) and acknowledges the temporal fluidity of the social processes that informed the Enlightenment movement, but asserts that “after 1650, everything, no matter how fundamental or deeply rooted, was questioned in the light of philosophic reason”. In light of the lack of consensus, the chronology of the Enlightenment Era and when contemporary attitudes relating to negotiating senses emerged is treated as problematic for the purposes of this thesis.

knowledge and geographies matter” (McCormack 2009 102). In a very real ‘sense’, what is known, and how the world is perceived, is affected by culturally specific ordering of the senses. Acknowledging the hierarchies of sensuous experience thus disrupts claims of objective ‘truth’, and reinforces the situatedness of all knowledges (Haraway 1991).

The socially constructed aspects of sensory perception, and the power relations that inform such constructions, can be plotted through Western discourses that have privileged certain senses over time. The first recorded Western hierarchical ordering of the senses was made by Aristotle (384BC - 322BC), who ranked them in descending order according to their perceived value: “visus (sight), auditus (hearing), odoratus (smell), gustus (taste), tactus (touch)” (Jütte 2005 61). The ‘external’ senses of sight and hearing were considered to be of higher value, as they were perceived to give access to the world. This distinction was gendered in that the ‘external’ world was understood as the realm of men.

According to Naomi Segal (2009), Aristotle positioned the lower ‘intimate’ senses of smell, taste, and touch to be furthest from thought, imagination, and memory, and therefore of lesser value. These so-called ‘lower’ senses were attributed to domestic spaces that were considered to be the realm of women. This categorisation of the senses for the most part remained unchallenged in pre-Enlightenment discourse. In the fifteenth century, sight’s position as ‘highest’ of the senses was further reinforced through the invention of the movable type printing press (c. 1436), and strengthened through Leonardo Da

Vinci's proclamation that "The sense of sight is Lord and commander of the others" (Jütte 2005 66).<sup>8</sup>

Changes to epistemological and ontological perspectives heralded by the Enlightenment Era required, and explicitly called for, new ways of perceiving the world. As theological dogma ceded to humanistic reasoning as the site of knowledge production, intellectual and social reformists required new tools to articulate this new engagement with 'reality'. It was the senses, and sensory perception, that reformists 'looked' to as a means to explore and conceptualise the world during the Enlightenment Era. Although vision has dominated Western discourse prior to, and since the latter stages of the Enlightenment Era, some of the first excursions into empiricism were far from the objective, occularcentric, and positivist approaches that dominate contemporary scientific endeavour.

Jessica Riskin (2002) draws attention to the ideological backdrop governing early French empiricist thought where the senses, sensation, and emotion were considered as inseparable. Constance Classen (1998 104) argues that in doing so, the belief of the "eye-minded fools" [scientists], "who imagine that all mysteries can be comprehended through extending the power of sight" was rendered problematic. Positioning knowledge as emerging equally from physical sensation and emotion became framed within the concept of 'sensibility', which at the time served to transform scientific empiricism (Riskin 2002 2). The

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<sup>8</sup> Original quote is from the *Codex Atlanticus* (89a; 258a), a compilation of Da Vinci's work c.1478-1519. No exact date is attributed to Da Vinci's comment. Robert Jütte's (2005) translation differs from that of Thereza Wells *et al.* (2008 103) where Da Vinci is quoted as saying that the sense of sight is "the chief and leader of all others."

acquisition of knowledge in this context was formed through all of the senses at once, which produced a “common currency of sensibility” (Riskin 2002 25).

What is particularly interesting in this construction of sensibility is that sensory experience was intrinsically linked to the formation of moral order, civic responsibility, and understandings of the natural world. Science, in this case, was embedded in the foundations of a moral and just way of being in the world, rather than being a neutral pursuit of ‘pure’ facts and data. David Howes (2006a 118) paraphrases: “Knowledge, sentiments and virtues were all assumed to enter the soul through the same portals - the senses.” Like Aristotle’s sense hierarchy, the sentimental empiricists (as Riskin 2002 refers to them) assigned values to the senses that reflected the hegemonic norms and power that dominated society at the time. Although all of the senses were considered as contributing to the production of knowledge, hierarchical ordering and privileging of certain senses over others was certainly evident.

For early empiricists such as John Locke (1632-1704) and William Molyneux (1656-1698) touch was positioned as “more ‘authentic’ than sight in giving the mind access to external objects” (Howes 2006b 119; see also Riskin 2002). Moreover, touch often served as a model for visual perception. Imperialist pursuits, however, and the increasingly capitalist tendencies of nation states during the Enlightenment Era, led to a breakdown of sensibility discourses. For those involved in imperialist expansion, knowledge did not occur exclusively under the umbrella of organised science alone, but “was often arrived at as a result of commerce ... Encountering the world empirically in an age of European empires meant that trade and learning went hand in hand, but they did not do

so equally” (Withers 2008 87). The inequality of which Withers (2008) refers speaks to the influence that commercial interests had over the production of geographic knowledge - the exploration of areas deemed to have potential economic benefits were prioritised and therefore the gathering of geographic knowledge was unequal and partial.

The emotional and sentimental narratives that featured so prominently in early sensibility methodologies had little or no place in the colonial project. The primary goal for Enlightenment explorers was to gather an inventory in order to gauge whether it was viable to exploit the resources of a given area. Visual methods such as mapping, diagrams, sketches, and written accounts were all that were required to record and quantify the economic potential of any given place. Through the colonialist project, vision began to become detached from touch and the other senses, and the site of ‘authentic’ knowledge production became more narrowly associated with the visual. As Ong (1982 42) states, direct situational associations related to touch were replaced with representations, denatured abstractions “entirely devoid of a human action context”. Awareness through lived experience was replaced with representations and abstractions, where the world was neutralised, secularised and denatured. Western understandings of ‘reality’ became comprised of disembodied, visual representations (Davidson 2002).

This shift was influential in the theoretical reconfiguration of knowledge production espoused by Immanuel Kant. Knowledge became *phenomena*, meaning “a thing which appears”, “something which is observed”, or to “expose to sight” (Ong 1967 74). As the subject became a spectator over an

externalised, disembodied world, the observer was distanced from any effects that their actions may have on the natural world. This paved the way for 'man' to become "masters and possessors of nature" (Descartes 1637 cited in Berman 1981 25), a key tenet within imperial expansion discourses. Geography in the Enlightenment Era, which was underscored by imperial motives and emphasised the use of visual methods, was perhaps more than any other discipline complicit in this shift towards a "more rigid separation of the senses" (McCormack 2009 102). As the separation of the senses became more defined, "vision became detached from touch, and assumed an abstract status divorced from the sensuous embodiment of the observer" (McCormack 2009 102).

Driver (2003) argues that the practice of geography has long been an exercise in the development of languages and techniques to capture what the eye could, or should, see in a landscape. As early as the late seventeenth century, a concerted effort to standardise visual geographical discourse and methods had begun. The intention was to develop a consistent approach to ensure results could be scrutinised and interpreted by researchers from other locations and institutions. The standardising of geographical discourse, however, effectively regulated and limited geographical diversity. It became the express task of geographers to:

observe, collect, classify, and systematize: in these ways, the world will be revealed, and revealed, moreover, by persons following a method whose use together with their own reliable status made them credible witnesses (Bourguet et al. 2002 cited in Withers 2008 94).

That which could be observed and witnessed was of primary concern. Even though geography's emphasis on the visual plays a significant role in positioning vision as the dominant sense in Western sensory discourse, this preoccupation with the visual is by no means isolated to geography. Privileging of the visual as the primary sense of knowledge acquisition occurred across many facets of Western discourse.

As geographic discourse became increasingly refined, and the visual became more dominant in scientific endeavour, a more nuanced hierarchical ordering of the senses emerged. Although the rank and value ascribed to each sense remained for the most part unchallenged, new discourses that aligned the senses with the prevailing societal norms of the nineteenth century began to emerge. Aristotelian sense ordering continued to endure, but with a greater emphasis on gender. The 'higher senses' of sight and hearing became more strongly associated with masculinities, and the 'rational' mind. The intimate 'corporeal' senses of smell, taste and touch were linked to femininity, and the 'irrational' body (Classen 1998 66). This coding of the senses was employed to reinforce the social and geographical subordination of women. For instance:

The gender-coding of the senses served to explain and legitimate the assignation of different social spheres to men and women. Men's star-set mastery of the distance senses of sight and hearing empowered them to travel, to read and write, to conquer and govern. As the guardians of the proximity senses of smell, taste, and touch, women's place was in the home, cooking, sewing, and taking care of their families (Classen 1998 6-7).

Sensory metaphor was employed across ethnic and class divisions as well. Dominant groups were most often associated with the discursive 'higher' senses of sight and hearing, while subordinate groups - working class citizens, 'non-Westerners' - were generally associated with the so-called lower senses of smell, taste and touch (Classen 1998). Smell, taste and touch, as Aristotle asserted, are distanced from intellectual pursuits and were associated with the manual labour undertaken by the working class. Further, 'non-Westerners' were constructed as being more interested in the 'animal' and 'libidinous' pleasures afforded by smell, taste and touch, rather than the 'spiritual' pleasure achieved through the sight and hearing (Classen 1998).

So why does this matter for a research project exploring the ways in which noise is negotiated in the home? Valentine (2001 7) argues that it is important to acknowledge the dualistic and visually biased foundations of geography as such biases "have shaped geographers' understandings of society and space and the way geographical knowledge is produced". The privileging of the visual has not only narrowed what knowledges are sought, but also it has defined which knowledges are considered valid. This is not merely a matter of the ignoring, or absence, of non-visual senses in geographic knowledge, but the active subjugation of the senses to the visual. In the case of music, Smith (1997 504) argues that geographers have most often treated sound "as something else *to be seen* diffusing in space, trickling down hierarchies, attached to the landscape and so on" (emphasis in original). Of particular concern for this research is the way that the historical Western ordering of sensuous experience has marginalised aurality, and has led to an impoverished understanding of the

role that sound and hearing plays in being-in-place (Classen 1998; Howes 1991; Stewart 2005).

Critical engagement with the senses, which began with the humanistic geography movement in the 1960s, has demonstrated that the legacy resulting from an emphasis on the visual and visual methodologies has defined which geographies matter. What could, or should, be seen in the cultural landscape, counted as legitimate geographic knowledge. That which could not be looked upon has up until very recently been all but disregarded from geographical enquiry. Moving beyond geography's sensuous bias is essential in order to better understand the complexities of socio-spatial relations, such as those that manifest in the production of home. As I argue throughout this thesis, the home is one of the most significant spaces through which identities are made and maintained. By taking a more sensuous, and therefore more embodied approach to exploring the role that the senses play in homemaking, I hope to offer new perspectives and richer understandings of the role homes play in identity formation, health and wellbeing, and embodied experience of place.

### **Beyond Occularcentric Geographies**

Recent work on the senses in disciplines such as geography, psychology, and anthropology, has required attention be paid to the dominance of the visual and the impacts that Cartesian dualistic thinking has had on the perception and experience of place. Geographers such as Atkinson (2006; 2007), Feld (2005), Moores (1993), Rodaway (1994), Gillian Rose (1993), and Smith (1997) have acknowledged the limitations that visually biased approaches place on what is

known about spatial interactions and have moved beyond the preoccupation of the visual to explore richer narratives of embodied sensuous experiences of place. As Ong (1982 77) states, however, freeing ourselves from the 'visualisation' of knowing "is probably more difficult than any of us can imagine", (ironically demonstrated by the use of the term 'imagine'). One only has to attempt to avoid the use of visual metaphor to experience just how visually skewed the construction of knowledge is in Western discourses (and the irony of using written language to discuss such issues is hence acknowledged). Nevertheless, it is necessary to explore ways to engage with sensuous geographies, particularly for research with an emphasis on how noise is negotiated in the home.

Tuan's (1974) *Topophilia* marked a watershed in human geography, as he explicitly situated all of the senses within the processes whereby space and place are produced. Echoing some of the concerns of the sensibility empiricists during the Enlightenment Era, Tuan (1974 224) reminds us: "We get to know the world through the possibilities and limitations of our senses", and not just through what can be seen. Humanist perspectives such as those adopted by Tuan (1974) reject the disembodied association with people and places and reintroduce new possibilities for understanding the ways in which geographies are produced through the senses. Doing so problematises abstracted visual representations of space that dominate Western geographical discourses and re-embeds the subject into the world. No longer distanced from what could be seen, the subject becomes enmeshed in all of the sights, sounds, smells, textures and tastes that make up socio-spatial spaces.

Building on the early works of humanistic geographers such as Tuan (1974), J. Douglas Porteous (1986), and Douglas Pocock (1983), Rodaway's (1994) *Sensuous Geographies* extends discussion on the relationship between the senses and spatialities by arguing that the experience of place is mediated through the senses. Moving beyond the primacy of the visual, Rodaway (1994 4-5) addresses human geography's sensuous absences by arguing: that "everyday experience is multisensual"; that the senses define relationships to the world; and that the senses in themselves work together to produce places and spaces. Rodaway (1994) is careful to acknowledge that the sensuous production of space is culturally specific, as is Howes (1991 167-168), who states that although "it is through a combination of the five senses that human beings perceive the world", the senses are variously combined by individuals or groups, affecting differing ways to approach understanding the world.

Feld (2005 182) puts the case strongly for a move beyond the dominance of the visual, arguing that "the multi-sensory character of perceptual experience should lead to some expectation for a multi-sensory conceptualisation of place". Karen Blu's (1996 222) lament that she "would have paid much closer attention to sound and to the smells and tastes of home" in her research had she been more attuned to the work Feld (1982) is a poignant example of acknowledging multi-sensory relationships to place. Feld (1982; 2005), an ethnomusicologist, puts forward what is perhaps the strongest case for understanding the production and maintenance of places and spaces as an inherently sensuous process. For Feld (2005 179) it not just that we come to know the world through the senses, but that the world and the senses are mutually constituted: "... as place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make

place.” It seems extraordinary then, as McCormack (2009) reminds us, that non-visual or multi-sensory explorations into the experience of place still struggle for legitimacy in the field of human geography.

Acknowledging that all of the senses contribute to how place is made and remade becomes particularly salient when the power relations informing sensuous experience are considered. Feld (2005), Rodaway (1994), and Tuan (1974) and all draw attention to the importance of acknowledging that perception is not value-free, and therefore the construction of reality through the senses is culturally specific. As Rodaway (1994 4) argues “the senses are not merely passive receptors of particular kinds of environmental stimuli”, but are instead embedded within cultural norms that actively influence the interpretation of sensory information. The ways that values ascribed to the senses can in some cases shift and evolve over time is one example. Phrases such as ‘rose-tinted lenses’ or ‘selective hearing’ are two idioms that resonate with how sensory experience is more than just objective reception. Thus, the possibilities and limitations that Tuan (1974) highlights must be considered as culturally produced.

By drawing attention to the cultural specificities of sensory perception I acknowledge, as Howes (2006b 114) puts it, that “the sensorium is a social construction ... showing that the senses are lived and understood differently in different cultures and historical periods.” Sensorium, in this instance, refers to both the full spectrum of sensuous experience (hearing, sight, touch, taste, and smell), and the historical, spatial, and culturally specific values ascribed to sensory experience (McCormack 2009). The use of the term sensorium is also

an acknowledgement that the experience and perception of sound does not occur in isolation from other senses. Instead, hearing is understood here as embedded within a broader sensorium that recognises the complex and dynamic ways in which the senses can work together to shape how the world is perceived (Howes 2006b; Pink 2004; Rodaway 1994).

### **Sensuous Experience as Culturally Produced**

While non-visual sensuous discourses have struggled for legitimacy within geography, anthropologists have been particularly active in highlighting the subjective nature of sensuous perception, and how this influences the experience of places and spaces. Central to critical anthropological engagements with the senses is the acknowledgement that constructions of what the senses are can vary greatly. In particular, this work moves beyond the dominant Western view that sensory phenomena are experienced through five discrete channels of seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and tasting. As Sarah Pink (2004 33) notes, anthropologists of the senses have focused on the ways that the senses are combined to produce realities and understandings of space through a sociality of a “multi-sensory context”. Kathryn Geurts’ (2002) research into the sensorium of the Anlo-speaking people of Ghana is a useful example of how sensory channels and perception vary between and across cultures. For the Anlo Ewe, a sub-tribe of the Ewe people, perception is not something that occurs through separate channels of sound, sight, touch, smell and taste, but instead manifests within a way of perceiving where the senses are integrated and contingent on each other:

Anlo-speaking people with whom I spoke did not seem to experience or conceptualise perceptual processes as restricted to five discrete channels. Phenomena such as “hearing in the skin” or “hearing odour” were not merely problems of language and translation but suggested a difference in embodied experience or aspects of different *being-in-the-world* (to use Merleau-Ponty’s phrase), which was fundamentally aural (Geurts 2002 49 emphasis in original).

By positioning perception as a complex multi-sensory experience, rather than examining the senses as five discrete channels, the five sense model as ‘scientific fact’ becomes untenable (Geurts 2002). Anthropologists such as Geurts (2002) and Pink (2004) offer ways to rethink understandings of the sensory production of space. It is important to note here also that even the notion that only five senses exist is far from a universal concept. So while Rodaway (1994) and Howes (1991 167-168) acknowledge that the interplay between the senses is complex, they both write from the standpoint that “it is through a combination of the five senses that human beings perceive the world”. Even within Western thought the dominant five sense model has not remained uncontested.<sup>9</sup>

Anthony Synnott (1993) suggests that the reduction of the sensorium to five senses first put forward by Aristotle was perhaps more an adherence to numerological beliefs held at the time, rather than for psychological or physiological reasons. John Gold (1980) contests the five senses model and suggests that there may be as many as ten sense channels. As well as sight, hearing, taste, and smell, Gold (1980) advocates for the inclusion of the skin

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<sup>9</sup> Synnott (1993 155) draws attention to three philosophers who argued for a different Western sensorium: Galen of Pergamon (129-217) argued that there are six senses; Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802) believed there were 12 senses; and for Maximilian von Frey (1852-1932) there were eight senses.

senses of pressure, pain, cold, and warmth, together with the two body senses of balance (the vestibular or spatial orientation sense) and kinesthesia (the sense of awareness of movement in the body) in the dominant Western sensorium. While Gold's (1980) reading of the senses is compelling, Paterson (2007) suggests that due to the ambiguities and affectual aspects of sensory perception, together with the complex ways that the senses interact, it is erroneous to consider the senses as discrete channels:

After all, the uncertainty we have concerning our own perceptual ability means we cannot even recognise whether we have five, eight or even twenty-one senses. Indeed, the taxonomy of the senses might literally be a senseless enterprise, since it is clear that the whole body is implicated in perceiving what Merleau-Ponty terms "the thickness of the world" (Paterson 2007 21).

Through comparing and contrasting the sensoria from multiple cultures, and tracking how the ordering of the senses has changed over time, it becomes clear that sensory perception is far from neutral reception of the world. Moreover, by acknowledging that the senses are embedded in social processes, it is possible to draw out the partiality of perception and how this partiality shapes understandings of spaces like the home.

To this end, I draw on Pandya's (1990; 1993) ethnographic work on the cosmology of the Ongee people of Little Andaman Island as a means to expand approaches to exploring sensuous spaces such as the home. Pandya's (1990; 1993) research is particularly relevant to this thesis as Ongee constructions of spatial relationships align seamlessly to contemporary geography scholarship

that problematises hegemonic constructions of home and of bodies (see Blunt and Dowling 2006; Longhurst 2001; Paterson 2007). More precisely, Pandya (1990; 1993) offers a means to both critique and rework configurations of spatial boundaries as produced and maintained through the senses. By drawing on this example, I also hope to demonstrate the importance of critically engaging with difference within sensuous research, and also to contribute to a growing body of literature that spans multiple disciplines in order to enrich spatial understandings of sensuous experience.

As part of his ethnographic research conducted in 1983 and 1984, Pandya (1990; 1993) explored the sensorium of the Ongee, and how understandings of the senses contribute to Ongee constructions of place and space. The Ongee people are a nomadic society that shift to various sites on Little Andaman Island according to the seasonal availability of food sources.<sup>10</sup> For the Ongee, space is not perceived as static, but as dynamic. This, in part, is due to the primacy that smell has in Ongee cosmology, which is reinforced by Ongee perceptions of environmental changes such as tides and weather patterns.

In the case of the communal lived space, corporeal odours and the odours resulting from physical endeavour converge with environmental conditions to produce the area of the village. Bodies for the Ongee are not distanced from places, but are integral to the production of place (Howes 2006a). Unlike dominant understandings of space in New Zealand, largely influenced by visually abstracted Cartesian representations, for the Ongee it is different forms

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<sup>10</sup> Due to development initiatives from mainland India, much of the land traditionally utilised by the Ongee is now inaccessible. The Ongee now have exclusive access only within two tribal reserves. <http://www.andaman.org/BOOK/originals/Pandya/pandya.htm>

of movement attributed to smells that define space. Ongee cartographies are not derived from remembering the images of places in space, but from remembering patterns of movement. As smells shift and change, so too does the extent of Ongee spaces. Pandya's (1990) experience of using visual maps during his fieldwork, and how this became a source of amusement, is a clear example of the fluidity of Ongee space. Frustrated at difficulties in mapping the areas occupied by the Ongee, Pandya (1990 792-793) asks why his guides always take him on different routes, to which his guide responds:

Why do you hope to see the same space while moving? ...  
All the places are constantly changing ... You cannot  
remember a place by what it looks like. Your map tells lies.  
Places change. Does your map say that? Does your map say  
when the stream is dry and gone or when it comes and  
overflows? We remember how to go and come back, not the  
places which are on the way of going and coming.

Previous research conducted on the Andaman Islands had entirely 'overlooked' the complexities of the Ongee sensorium. In 1922, anthropologist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1964[1922] cited in Pandya 1990) concluded that Ongee spatial configurations were inconsistent and lacking in precision. Radcliffe-Brown, however, had approached the Ongee from a visually biased, rigid Cartesian understanding of space. Human geographers such as Denis Cosgrove (1989), Stephen Daniels (1989), and David Demeritt (1994) have critiqued the notion that space is fixed, arguing that it ignores the complexities of human interaction with places and spaces. This visual bias establishes a binary that disembodies the active subject from the 'passive' landscape. Rose (1993) argues that this representation of space is a result of geography's

preoccupation with visual, and with masculinist imperatives to distance the self from the other. The 'inconsistencies' interpreted in the accounts provided by the Ongee perhaps speaks more to the cultural framework that Radcliffe-Brown (1964[1922]) observed from rather than "the dynamic Andamanese cultural view of space" (Pandya 1990 781).

Pandya's (1990) research is a salient example of how the hierarchical ordering of the senses mediates experience of places and spaces, and how this varies from culture to culture. This example also speaks to the importance of acknowledging the different ways individuals and groups sensually experience the world when conducting research. Discarding his own sensuous bias, Pandya (1990) was able to access more nuanced Ongee cartographies than previous research conventions had allowed. While these two reasons offer sound critical footing for this research, there is a third reason why I draw on this example. It is the notions of movement, and the resultant fluidity of corporeal and domicile boundaries expressed by the Ongee that offers a useful way forward in sensuous geographies research.

For the Ongee, multiple cartographies with the subject at the centre move and overlap to create a highly fluid and embodied conception of space: "space and cosmology are constructed through the process of movement ... each individual Andaman Islander divides space on the basis of his or her own movements" (Pandya 1990 781). Relevant to this thesis, these divisions are permeable and can overlap with the spaces of others. Corporeal boundaries do not begin and end with the epidermis of the body, but are defined by olfactory reach. Home spaces are defined by the collective overlapping sensed space of those that live

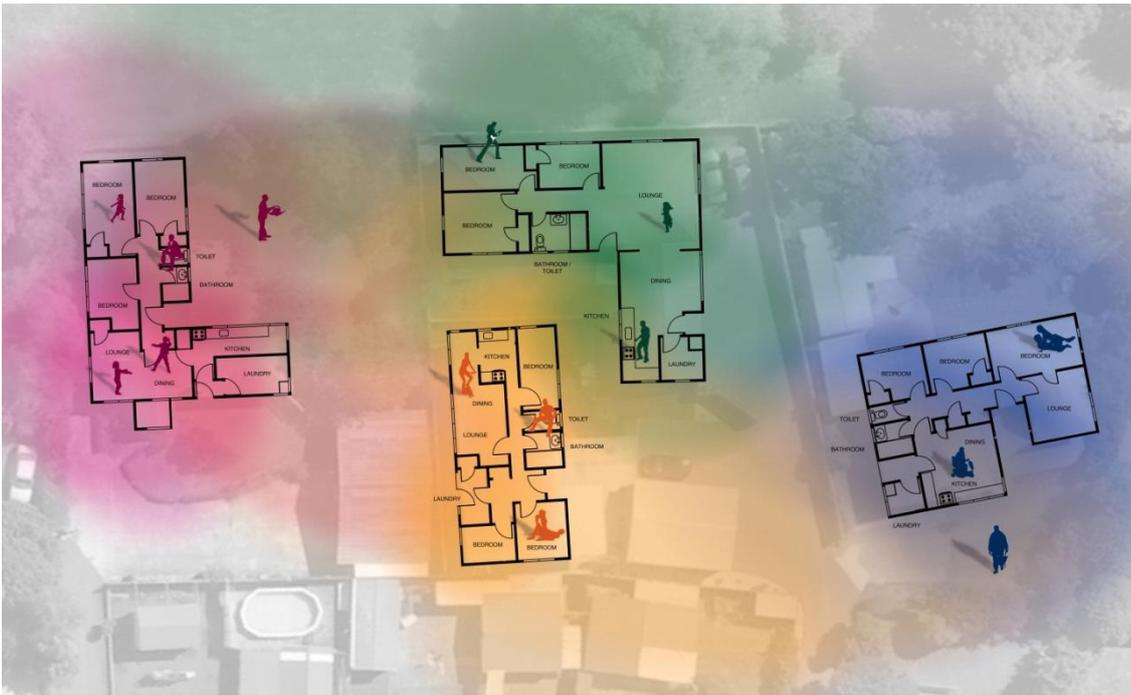
there. Physical structures, landmarks, and visual cues have little or no bearing on what is understood as the geographical extent of home. This lies in stark contrast to dominant perceptions of home (and bodies) in New Zealand as bounded and fixed, whose origins are largely a result of a visually biased 'view' of place.

The dominant sensorium in New Zealand may reify boundaries and borders, but acknowledging that all of the senses combine to produce space in essence challenges this Western propensity to fix boundaries on surfaces (Butler 1993). Drawing on accounts of sensuous experience from various cultures like that of the Ongee is useful to help break down the notion that space is fixed. Doing so offers new ways of understanding the experience of home. I do not mean to suggest that specific parallels exist between Ongee and Western sensoria. As Feld and Basso (1996 96) warn, such comparisons run the risk of setting up binary distinctions that, among other things, essentialise visual bias as a characteristic of Western cultures. Further, Classen (1998) asserts the importance of acknowledging difference in social science research by drawing attention to how vision may not be subservient in non-ocularcentric cultures, and that difference occurs within and not just across cultures. Within the boundaries of the dominant Western sensory paradigm (and indeed for me conducting this research), the difficulty of 'imagining' a world not dominated by vision dialogue requires examples from elsewhere.

Western space is so bound to visual cues that, as Ong (1982) suggests, moving beyond visual ways of knowing remains a very difficult exercise, or perhaps not even possible. But move on researchers must, for a view of space being mostly

compromised through seeing cannot account for the complexities of aural experience in spaces such as the home. Noise does not adhere to fence lines or shared internal walls. Instead, the sensuous experience of home involves overlapping social trajectories both from within, and from the immediate environs around the home. Bodies that sense, and make sense, are central to this process, and as geographer Gorman-Murray (2012) suggests, in this way homes and bodies can be understood as mutually constituted.

As sounds and noises break boundaries, external and internal trajectories are brought together to produce unbounded selves where the separation of the subject from the world dissolves. I suggest that sound (within a complete sensorium) is something that puts us in-place, that produces place, and that by transgressing physical boundaries, embeds bodies in space. Thus, in a sonorous (and generally in a more complete sensuous) reading of place, it is somewhat erroneous to discuss homes and bodies as separate entities. Instead, as Gorman-Murray (2012 2) argues, it is perhaps better to represent the leaky assemblage of sensuous, emotional bodies and homes as “homebodies”.



**Figure 2.1: Representation of the sonorous verses architectural extent of home (Source: Author)**

Gorman-Murray's (2012) work suggests that the borders of domicile space are defined not by land titles, architecture, or survey pegs, but by the full extent of sensory experience/awareness, and the agencies of those that reside in them. In Figure 2.1, each home is assigned a different colour to represent the difference between architectural and the aural extents. Home becomes through the intersections of sensuous bodies and space. Like the experience of the Ongee, home comes into being through the sensory intersections of bodies with other bodies, or what Paterson (2007 162) calls intercorporeity. This has significant implications for dominant imaginings of home as a 'private' and contained space. Indeed, through embedding home in a sensuous discourse, the embodied aspects of home become more pronounced, and the illusion of contained homes and bodies becomes untenable. With this in mind, and together with spatial theorisations of home by authors such as Sara Ahmed (2000), Ahmed *et al.* (2003), Blunt and Dowling (2009), Gorman-Murray (2012),

and Pink (2004), I now turn my attention to the sensuous home. My approach necessarily problematises scales of the body and the home, and as alluded to earlier, requires attention be paid to binary distinctions such as public/private, and how spaces are embodied.

### **Locating the Sensuous 'Homebody'**

Feld (1996; 2005), Howes (2005), Lisa Law (2001), Pink (2004), Rodaway (1994), and Tuan (1995) argue that relationships to place and space are mediated and defined through the senses, and spaces are made, maintained, and contested through sensuous experience. In his introduction to the collection of essays in *Empire of the Senses*, Howes (2005) suggests that one of the most notable recurring themes in contemporary sensuous literature is that of emplacement, or the sensuous interrelationship between bodies and the environment. Geographers such as Rose (1993), philosophers such as Donna Haraway (1991; 1997), and anthropologists such as Steven Feld and Keith Basso (1996), have long advocated for an understanding of bodies as being embedded within spaces and places. Critical academic interest in the senses has necessarily located such discussion within spatial contexts of what could loosely be described as cartographies of significance. Drawing attention to the significant role that the senses play in socio-spatial relations has reinforced that whether from an historical, anthropological, sociological, geographical, or philosophical standpoint, it is ill-advised to discuss sensuous experience without first locating the senses in-place.

In order to understand what spaces such as the home are or can be, the discipline of human geography must acknowledge that things such as cooking smells, the comfort brought by soft furnishings, the sounds of households members talking, the tastes of familiar food, and the sight of pictures on walls play a significant role in the production of home spaces. Equally too, unpleasant odours and tastes, unwanted sounds, undesirable views of the surrounding neighbourhood, and the tactility of surfaces within the home that do not align with the wants and needs of those who live there can also disrupt what it feels like to be at home. This does not mean that all of the senses always work simultaneously to make home. In certain situations, one sense channel, or a combination of senses may dominate over all of the others (Howes 2005). Subjective preferences such as sensitivity to noise or a desire to achieve a particular visual aesthetic may relegate other senses to not register in the immediate focus of the home maker. Therefore, explorations into the sensuous experience of home must acknowledge that relationships to places and spaces are subjective, multi-sensory, and dynamic. Although the intention of this research is to listen for the experience of negotiating abject and taboo noises in the home, I acknowledge that hearing and listening do not occur in isolation from the other senses (see Howes 2006a).

Locating the senses necessarily involves an acknowledgement of the role that emotions play in the production and maintenance of places and spaces. In matters of body/space relations, the senses and emotions are inseparable. Linguistically, expressions such as 'I was touched by the sentiments in that movie' indicate towards how the senses and emotions overlap. In *The Senses of Touch*, however, Paterson (2007) argues that this overlapping relationship

between senses and the emotions is more than just metaphoric. Using the example of nursing care practices, Paterson (2007 152) argues that empathetic touch communicates emotion: “touching is *feeling-with*, involving another tactile body, wherein the tactile and the emotional arise within each other. Feelings get communicated through the act of touching” (emphasis in original). Ann Game and Andrew Metcalfe (1996 58) state that in the case of performative social rituals, meaning is felt rather than intellectualised, a situation that “indicates [towards] the intimate association between bodily senses and emotion.”

As embodied experiences, sensing and emotion are subject to other corporeal politics, and Lynda Johnston’s (2012) work on the haptic geographies of drag queens argues for an acknowledgement that touch can be understood as gendered. By example, being touched by strangers while they are in public settings is a common occurrence for the drag queens Johnston (2012) interviewed. Eroticised bodily zones such as breasts are often the target for unsolicited ‘gropes’. In the case of women touching the breasts of drag queens, this is often understood as a means to determine ‘authenticity’, and Johnston (2012 6) argues that women “may do so in order to reflect on their own embodied subjectivity. In other words, touching may be gendered and confirm both normative and non-normative embodied ‘realities’.” As such, acknowledging “the gendered and sexed component of touch” (Johnston 2012 8) offers rich opportunities to extend sensuous geographies research. While the work of Game and Metcalfe (1996), Johnston (2012), and Paterson (2007) are examples of tactile engagement with place and space, the power relations shaping the experience of touch resonates within aural experience also.

In the case of emotions and hearing/listening to noise, sensing is invariably linked with an emotional response. In many cases, this emotional response can be extreme to the point that people can be driven to acts of physical violence.<sup>11</sup> Emotional responses invoked by the experience of noises are not the only reason why emotions are important to this research. Like the senses, emotions have a spatial component. They have reciprocal connections to places and spaces, and are inextricably linked to the production of home. Joyce Davidson and Christine Milligan (2004) argue that the articulation of emotions has an explicitly spatial element, where being-in-the-world is shaped by emotional responses to our surroundings. Gorman-Murray (2012 3) evocatively frames the emotions as the “connective tissue between bodies and spaces”. Not only is Gorman-Murray (2012) arguing for understanding the mutually constitutive interplay between emotions and spaces, but by using the term ‘tissue’, he strategically positions the emotions and spatial relations as embodied. Emotional (and sensuous) geographies in other words, are a very fleshy business.

This is useful for this research as emotional responses to noise can have a profound effect on how we feel about home, and these responses feed into how identities are created within homes (Davidson and Milligan 2004). The role of emotions in the production of space then parallels that of Feld’s (1996; 2005) discussion on the senses. In the same way that senses make place and places make senses, emotions shape places and places shape emotions (Davidson

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<sup>11</sup> No participants interviewed for this research engaged in acts of violence in retaliation against noise from neighbours or other sources. There are, however, many international examples of homicides and suicides attributed to conflicts resulting from noisy neighbours (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/jan/13/italy.mainsection> 26 June 2012; <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/neighbourhood-noise-17-people-have-died-from-it-1389990.html> 26 June 2012).

and Milligan 2004). Tuan (2007 158) states the case strongly for understanding socio-spatial relations as mediated through both the senses and through emotions:

Geography is an intimate bond with place, knowing it at the most basic level through one's *senses* and movements, knowing it practically in the course of carrying out the daily necessities of life, and knowing it *emotionally* through the use of charged words and deferential gestures (emphasis added).

Positioning the senses and emotions as “a way of knowing” within discourses of sound in the home also helps to move geography beyond the dominance of visual, linguistic, and textual domains (Anderson and Smith 2001 8).

The main reason for critically engaging with the senses and emotions in the study of home is that doing so destabilises home as bounded and architecturally fixed. For as Anne-Marie Fortier (2003 131) argues, home is as much an imagined space as it is a physical one, and home is produced through “physical and emotional work”. The work that goes into making home, in part, draws on past attachments to places, relationships and bodies. Conceptualising home as “much more than a house or household” represents an acknowledgement that broader socio-spatial influences are involved in making home (Blunt and Dowling 2006 3). Davidson and Milligan (2004), Gorman-Murray (2012), and Elizabeth Grosz (1997) all draw attention to the multi-scalar aspects relating to the emotional production of space, and how the (sensing and emotional) body is subject to influences across bodies, neighbourhoods, cities, and nation states. Locating discussion relating to home within wider spatial

discourses provides for, among other things, the subjective experience and power relations affecting those that dwell within to be contextualised and teased out. This is particularly important for understanding the experience of noise in the home, as cultural, personal, and spatial influences all converge to shape how noise is interpreted and experienced.

Therefore, in order to understand the ways in which home is produced, and where noise fits within the production of home, it is essential to acknowledge the central role that the senses and emotions play in the production of space. Bodies sense and feel, hence it is clear that an analysis of bodies as a discursive and material space (Longhurst 2001) must be incorporated into research on the (sensuous) home. Such an approach is central to Blunt and Dowling's (2006) *Home*, and the distinction that they make between house and home, in particular. In this case, a physical dwelling only becomes a home through the feelings and attachments of those bodies that live there. Crucially for this research, this relationship is not one-way, and homes also affect and produce the bodies that live there. As Susan Stewart (2005 61) argues, although "we may apprehend the world by means of our senses ... the senses themselves are shaped and modified by experience and the body bears a somatic memory of its encounters with what is outside of it."

This way of conceptualising the reciprocal relationship between bodies and place is articulated by Ahmed (2000) in relation to home spaces. Rather than being a fixed space that remains constant, Ahmed (2000 89) argues that home leaks into bodies through the senses, influencing how we interpret smells, sounds, touch, taste: "the lived experience of being-at-home hence involves the

enveloping of subjects in a space which is not simply outside them: being-at-home suggests that the subject and space leak into each other, inhabit each other". Influential architecture theorist Karsten Harries (1997 cited in Paterson 2007 97) argues that "our experience of buildings is inseparably tied to the experience we have of ourselves, of our bodies, just as our experience of our bodies is affected by the spaces we inhabit." As buildings and spaces are tactilely experienced, through their use, apprehension and appropriation, buildings also "touch us" (Paterson 2007 97).

The leaking between bodies and space speaks to the permeability of corporeal and domicile boundaries. This also occurs between the bodies within and surrounding the home. Like the sensory orientation of the Ongee, sense horizons of bodies overlap, ignoring both corporeal and architectural boundaries. Indeed, the very notion of boundaries in this context is a very Western construct. Paterson (2007) usefully turns to the work of Merleau-Ponty (2000) to articulate the fluidity of bodies in space, and how visual bias has reinforced the 'discrete body'. Of sensuous experience, Merleau-Ponty (2000 cited in Paterson 2007) advocates for disrupting visual ways of knowing the world, as visibility reinforces the body as distanced and discrete from other bodies. Rather, Merleau-Ponty (2000 cited in Paterson 2007 162) suggests that by exploring social interactions through focusing on senses and feelings, an "intercorporeal being ... which extends further than the things I touch and see at present". Instead of a "single body having experiences of a single world", Paterson (2007 142) suggests that through the senses and emotions, embodied experience can be understood as an assemblage of many bodies. Although Paterson (2007) is primarily concerned with the role that tactility plays in

breaking the boundaries affirmed by visual bias, his discussion compliments how sound disrupts the fetishisation of space as visual and distant.

Audition is particularly influential in how bodies and homes leak into, and inhabit each other. This is due to the way that sound is perceived from all directions simultaneously: “sound situates man [sic] in the middle of actuality ... in the midst of the world” (Ong 1967 128-129). Due to the omniscience and pervasiveness of sound, aural perception serves to embody objects and people, and connects that which is visually distant to the self. The spatial linkages produced through sound speak of an affectual in-between (Pile 2009), where boundaries dissolve and individual subjectivities overlap. Unlike the dominant Western ‘view’ that distances the observer, Dian Hosking (2007 680) argues that knowing places and spaces through sound is a “live event rather than a dead possession; a relational process and not an individual act”. In this case, sound processes are where interiors and exteriors come together, which disrupts the notion of contained bodies and emphasises “embodied participation in local/cultural, local/historical processes” (Hosking 2007 681).

Pink (2004) offers an excellent example that helps to conceptualise the production of ‘homebodies’, and where the senses fit within the process. From a multi-sensory perspective, Pink’s (2004) *Home Truths: Gender, Domestic Objects and Everyday Life* explores the ways in which individuals make embodied homes through the senses. Drawing attention to the dearth of engagement with the relationship between embodiment, sensory perception, and the spaces of home in anthropology, Pink (2004) discusses the affectual relationship between homes and bodies with particular emphasis on gendered

identity. Pink (2004) does this by embedding the sensuous elements of the homemaking practices of her research participants within the discourse of the 'housewife'.

Within Pink's (2004) analysis of homemaking, two main processes combine to produce home - housework and home creativity. On the one hand, housework refers to the cleaning and removing unwanted matter from the home. Home creativity, on the other hand, refers to the material ordering of objects in the home. Pink (2004) argues that both housework and home creativity are multi-sensory, and therefore the making of home is a sensuous process. By example, Pink's (2004) participants refer to olfactory, tactile, and visual cues as markers as to whether their home is clean. If one or all of the sensuous realms fall outside the expectations of the homemaker, the sense of being at home is disrupted. For Malcolm, one of Pink's (2004) participants, the unwanted tactile experience of tacky dirt underfoot broke the sense of comfort that he expects. Being at home, or not at home as in the case of Malcolm, is mediated through sensuous experience.

In the case of home creativity, the accounts of Pink's (2004) research participants reflect the same sensuous, embodied connection to place. Actions "such as hanging a painting, burning oils or candles, or choosing wooden over carpeted floors", or playing music, are all employed to make home spaces embody that which is important and desirable to the homemaker (Pink 2004 10; 109). Arranging objects that carry meaning, such as the placement of photographs, serves to make home an embodied space that reflects and

reinforces identities (Gorman-Murray 2007; Rose 2004). As Carey-Ann Morrison (2010 37) puts it: "...as people make home, they make the self."

Pink (2004) discusses the importance of the senses to the 'homebody' identity, where the use of things such as sounds produce home ambience that is expressive of both mood and self-identity, and this can result in domestic surfaces and objects being produced as embodied. Sensory embodiment within the home becomes more than merely arranging objects within the home, but a mutually constitutive process of becoming. Sensuous research helps to strengthen understandings of how bodies and identities intersect in space, rather than merely acting out in space. Due to the way homes come to embody that which is important to the self (Gorman-Murray 2006; Morrison 2010) the scale of the home is a particularly useful site to discuss how bodies are much more spatially fluid than occularcentrism allows.

### **Gendered 'Homebodies'**

The sensuous aspects of housework and home creativity can thus be understood to interconnect bodies to homes. Again, this sensuous ordering of home is not one-way. Using Judith Butler's (1990) theorisation of gender performativity, Pink (2004) echoes the sentiments of Ahmed (2000) and argues that the everyday experience of home is a reciprocal sensory process. The configuration of the 'homebody' in this context maps out the ways that gendered bodies spill out into domicile spaces through sensuous housework and home creativity rituals, and how those spaces become gendered, and how gender in turn spills back into the bodies that produced that space.

Pink (2004 43) argues that as a performative assemblage, gender requires repetitive interactions with other individuals, objects and spaces in order to be produced and maintained. In order to achieve a 'successful' gender identity, the sensuous environment of the home must align to the embodied identity of the homemaker. Employing the smells, sounds, textures, and sights of domestic surfaces and objects in the process of making 'homebodies' helps to establish a space that aligns with the self. As the 'homebody' arranges and orders the sensory, material, and social aspects of home, those arrangements feed back and leak into the embodied, gendered, and sensuous embodied identity of those engaged in homemaking. In the case of familial relations, kinship ties are marked by arranging photos and heirlooms within the home, and then these ties feed back into the homemaker, affirming their position as a member of a family.

As a social production, the sensory experience of a home space can be deconstructed in order to tease out the discursive influences that the self ascribes to. For instance, hegemonic narratives of housework and "housewifely practice" (Pink 2004 9) impose different expectations on women compared to men. As Pink (2004 5) notes, the belief that one of her male research participants "could not 'see' cleanliness in the same way as housewives do" is indicative of the gendering of the 'homebody'-making process. Women, discursively bestowed with the responsibility of keeping the heteronormative home clean and ordered, reproduce "their own 'proper' (normative) femininity" (Pink 2004 44) through housework practices. A number of Morrison's (2010) women participants reinforce this when they discuss the unequal burden of housework within the context heterosexual homemaking. For instance, housework for men is often viewed as an expression of love rather than

something that they are equally responsible for. While the gendered divisions of domestic labour is contestable and mutable, a visually disordered, 'smelly' home space in general disrupts expectations of femininity, and aligns bodies to dominant readings of masculine productions of home. The success of gender performance in this instance is measured through the sensuous environment of home spaces. These sensory cues can both align to, and disrupt, hegemonic gender distinctions.

With many parallels to Pink's (2004) work, Law's (2001) research into the sensuous experiences of home for migrant Filipino women in Hong Kong argues for an approach that centres on embodiment and considers the interrelationships between bodies, senses, and home. Like Pink (2004), Law (2001) acknowledges that making homes is a multi-sensory experience embedded in multiple spatial scales. Law's (2001) attention, however, leans more towards the politics of how home is sensuously reproduced by diasporic communities at the scale of the city. It is the inability of Filipino domestic workers to make 'homebodies' within Hong Kong Chinese homes that I draw on here to demonstrate that the mutually constitutive assemblage of bodies and homes is imbued with power.

For Filipino women, domestic work in Hong Kong is often seen as a lucrative option compared to employment possibilities in the Philippines. Their employment environment, however, is dominated by discourses that position Filipino people as lazy and criminally inclined. This 'othering' is reinforced further through the influence of the tradition of bonded servitude, which continues to resonate through contemporary Chinese society in Hong Kong.

The result is that Filipino women are often subjected to “slave-like conditions” (Law 2001 268). Expected to suppress their cultural identities and adhere to the cultural practices of their employers, Filipino domestic workers must perform identities that are disciplined towards Chinese ways of being. Familiar music, smells, and food are all absent or expressly forbidden in the employer’s home. As they live and work in Hong Kong Chinese homes, with only one day off a week,<sup>12</sup> Filipino domestic workers spend most of their time in their working *and* living space performing identities as dictated by their employers.

In the absence of the sights, smells, tastes, sounds, and textures of home, combined with a situation where their home space is essentially their worksite, Filipino domestic workers have no scope to make a ‘homebody’ in the space where they eat and sleep. In every aspect of domestic life, they are cut off from forging sensuous connections to their living spaces.<sup>13</sup> Since the 1980s, however, a phenomena called ‘Little Manila’ has been a constant fixture of the cultural landscape of Central Hong Kong:

every Sunday, 100,000 Filipino women cast off the cultural conventions of their Chinese employers for one day a week, and eat Filipino food, read Filipino newspapers/magazines and consume products from an abundant number of Filipino speciality shops (Law 2001 265-266).

For one day a week, the Central Hong Kong landscape is reconfigured through the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures of Filipino culture. This example

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<sup>12</sup> In cases that Law (2001) encountered during her research, some workers were not permitted a day off.

<sup>13</sup> It is not anticipated that any deep connections to the domestic spaces where they work will be forged as they are work spaces. The traits of the Filipino sensorium are actively forbidden by Chinese employers.

suggests, as Blunt and Dowling (2006) and Fortier (2003) assert, that home is not bound to a physical space, but is also a social and imagined space that can manifest at multiple scales. For the Filipino women working in Hong Kong, home is sensuously produced at the scale of the city through the consumption of products from the Philippines. The experiences of, and the strategies they employ to 'be Filipino' within the hegemonic space of Central Hong Kong, is an excellent example of the pivotal role that the senses play in making home. It also demonstrates that the sensuous environment of bodies and homes must be aligned in order to produce affective and embodied 'homebody' spaces.<sup>14</sup>

### **Historical Changes to the 'Private' Home**

Hearing, listening, sound, and noise literally and figuratively resonate throughout virtually every aspect of the homemaking process - from the acoustic properties of the built structure, to the expression of identities within and around the home. As Pink (2004 69) puts it, "Sound, whether intentionally created or not, is inescapably part of the home." Yet, sound's role in the relationship between bodies and homes has been largely neglected (Gurney 2000a). In the case of noise, Gurney (2000a) argues that it is crucial to acknowledge the aural aspects of home, as aurality is intrinsically bound to one of the more dominant understandings of home - privacy. Here, privacy denotes a socially constructed and highly problematic ideal (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Elias (1978[1939] 59), which has evolved over time. To contextualise how the relationship between the privacy idyll and aurality relates to this research, I

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<sup>14</sup> See also Geraldine Pratt's (2001) work on Filipino domestic workers in Canada.

begin with a brief discussion of some key historical processes that have influenced contemporary homes.

Western households in pre-industrial times were often characterised as sites “of production (work) and reproduction (family life)” (Hollows 2008 16). For pre-industrial era families, labour and economic endeavour were situated most often in the domestic sphere. The capacity to generate income and to provide for the necessities of life happened at home, and while women were seen as inferior to men and undertook different types of labour, men, women, and children all contributed to household income production (Hollows 2008). Tamara Hareven (2002 34) argues the family’s private affairs and public lives were inseparable. Little distinction was made between the family and any other people such as servants or lodgers who worked there, and household composition was based on sociability rather than on a partitioned space with separate social trajectories. Further, as Damian Collins (2009 437) puts it, “Under feudalism, royal and ecclesiastical authority, the apparatus of the state, the economic world of production and consumption, and domestic life of the family were all part of a unitary hierarchy.” In essence, there was no distinct notion of public and private.

The growth of religious liberalism (liberal political doctrine based on religious beliefs), together with the emergent bourgeois that emerged hand in hand with the development of industrialisation and modernisation, the power of the state and religious entities in matters of home was eroded. At the same time, around the end of the eighteenth century, industrialisation ushered in a massive shift where the means and methods of production moved from the sphere of the

home to centralised production sites such as large scale factories. Separation from religious, state, and production promoted by the bourgeois was underscored by demands for autonomy within the domestic sphere. The “tired old adage, ‘an Englishman’s home is his castle’” as Chapman and Hockey (1999 5) put it, emerged at this time, and reflected the change in values attributed to home.

Hareven (2002 35) sums up the nature of the shift succinctly when she states: “Following the removal of the workplace from the home as a result of industrialisation and urbanisation, the household was recast as the family’s private retreat.” Since the Industrial Revolution, dominant Western discourses have positioned the ideal home as being a private space, a sanctuary from the public domain where one can be most at-ease to be their “(embodied) selves” (Gurney 2000b 55; see also Blunt and Dowling 2006; England 1991; Gorman-Murray 2006; Hollows 2008;). Hegemonic imaginings of home that Mike Hepworth (1999 17) sums as a “retreat within which a personal life can be enjoyed in peace and security” are embedded within one of the most pervasive and equally problematic discourses in Western thought - the binary that divides private from public space (Collins 2009). Like all binary distinctions, public and private have historical and political origins, are unequal and often contested, and are far from discrete.

### **Problematizing Privacy**

The construction of home as a private enclave serves to reinforce separation from that which is not home - the public domain. The castle adage highlighted

by Chapman and Hockey (1999) speaks to a walled space to be defended from the influences of the outside world. Up until the 1970s, this hegemonic imagining of home for the most part remained unchallenged. Gillis and Hollows (2008) argue that as second wave feminists began turning their attention towards the previously taken-for-granted site of the home, the solidity of these walls began to crumble. The main focus of this early work on the home was primarily concerned with issues relating to how discursive and physical spaces and places reinforced and maintained gender inequality. One of the important themes that emerged from feminist critiques of how the built environment produces gender inequality (McDowell 1983), is the destabilisation of the public/private binary. Rather than being a sphere of experience isolated from the public domain, the notion of the home as discrete and private (and the notion of privacy itself) became problematised as unstable.

Blunt and Dowling (2006), Gillis and Hollows (2008), and Hollows (2008) draw attention to the way that home, rather than being a distinct entity separate from its surroundings, is embedded within multi-scalar relations. While domestic spaces have most often been imagined as removed from the public sphere, an amalgam of tangible and intangible interconnections between ideas, things, and people all come together at the site of the home. As a result, the production of home involves negotiating relationships within and across that which is considered to be the public sphere (Hollows 2008). Blunt and Dowling (2006 27) go one step further and argue that the production of home and the public domain inform and shape each other: "Home is not separated from public, political worlds but is constituted through them: the domestic is created through the extra-domestic and vice versa." One of the results of these interactions

crossing multiple scales, as Rob Imrie (2004) argues, is that the privacy idyll can only be partial and incomplete.

Such theorisations that disrupt the public/private, public/home binaries usefully mesh with sensuous understandings of the home. I have argued earlier that sensuous domestic experience is far from contained and discrete, and in many cases influences from inside and outside of the home effortlessly overlap. More specifically, noise from outside the home transgresses one of the central pillars to achieving a sense of privacy - that of the desire for solitude and seclusion. The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2012 n.p.) defines privacy as the “state or condition of being alone, undisturbed, or free from public attention, as a matter of choice or right; seclusion; freedom from interference or intrusion.”

Peter Somerville (1992 532), in his essay on homelessness, suggests that privacy involves and in some cases requires “the possession of a certain territory with the power to exclude persons from the territory and prohibit surveillance by others.” Exclusion in this case can be understood as sensuously defined, for it is the ability to avoid the sights, sounds, smells, touch, and taste of the other that underscores whether a space feels ‘private’. In the case of noise, being able to hear the actions of others when seeking seclusion pervasively disturbs the ‘privacy’ project. A telling remark from one of Blunt *et al.*’s (2007 316) participants regarding a performance staged in a domestic space speaks aptly to how noise can disrupt privacy:

But the Bow flats influenced the performance in different ways, particularly in terms of how sound travelled between rooms: “a conversation could be taking place in one room

and you can hear it very clearly in the other, and that really impacted on ... the atmosphere and the mood and the sense of the piece, and a real sense of people living on top of each other, something being active all the time, that you're never alone ... that you're always a hair's breadth away from somebody else."

Shirley Ardener (1993 12), in her book *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps*, recalls a comment made by Aida Hawile at a conference presentation that also speaks strongly to the relationship between the senses and privacy: "the boundary between the 'private' and 'public' may, in some contexts and under some conditions, be measured primarily by earshot." Ardener (1993) draws on this remark to assert that a space identified by the gaze may not necessarily coincide with a map identified by aural privacy. The separation afforded by the walls and other features of the home do not always coincide with the ability for that home space to provide aural privacy (see Figure 2.1 on page 52). Valentine (2001) concurs, suggesting that although partitioned spaces in homes and between homes can provide some visual privacy, achieving aural privacy within and between households is much more difficult.

Such sensuous readings of home inspires Pink (2004 19) to suggest that a home feeling private can be understood "as a sensory experience." Kathryn Mee's (2007 209) discussion on privacy in the home directly addresses the problematic role that visual bias has played in producing spaces as 'private': "Thus people may have the capacity to control a territory spatially and visually, by shutting the door or closing the curtain, but they may still have to smell their neighbour's dinner or listen to the noises they make." These examples make it quite clear that the senses play a significant role in maintaining and breaking

the tenuous and ever-shifting discursive constructions of feeling private and excluding unwanted influences.

An explicit primary concern for Ardener (1993), Mee (2007), and Somerville (1992) is that the ability to achieve a sense of privacy varies greatly between different social groups. Acknowledging the experiences of sound are socially, culturally, temporally, and spatially contingent, it stands then that as it is with all social phenomena, the power relations that emerge through aurality are not experienced equally. For instance, Meszaros (2005) uses the example of urban design to highlight how sound is experienced differently according socio-economic status. In urban areas populated by the poor, the cheaper building materials used for housing tend to provide poorer sound absorption qualities.

The resulting effect for urban poor becomes what Barry Truax (2001[1984] 70) refers to as “a kind of aural claustrophobia”. The analysis of noise complaints conducted for this research corroborates Truax’s (2001[1984]) statement, as there were almost five times more complaints per person in the three most-deprived decile areas compared to the three least-deprived deciles (see Appendix 1 for a graph, and description of how these data were derived). Nonetheless, it is important to note that increased exposure to noise in areas of high deprivation does not occur in isolation, and is only one of the many social influences that may contribute to ‘noisiness’ in poorer urban spaces. As such, Alex Marsh *et al.* (1999 5) suggest the effects of poor housing must be considered “alongside other indicators of social disadvantage”.

The socio-economic nature of aural ecologies is also evident in the example of those at the other end of the financial scale. A greater range of residential choices are available to those with financial wealth, providing the ability to avoid 'noisy' areas such as industrial zones. In the Hamilton context, the peri-urban fringe is littered with 'lifestyle' blocks, small rural holdings that among other things afford their owners with a greater sense of visual privacy than can be achieved in urban spaces. Such lifestyle blocks are beyond the financial means of most citizens in New Zealand, and are accessible only to affluent people. In this way, wealth allows for greater sovereignty over personal auralities through the ability to avoid noisy areas (Atkinson 2007). Tensions often arise, however, when urban values are asserted in these ostensibly rural spaces, and the anticipated 'rural idyll' of peace and quiet is disrupted by the noise of farming practices. While the desire to resist the colonising effects of aurality demonstrates the power of sound to reorganise the users' relations to places and spaces, and to reconfigure the spaces themselves, the ability to thwart this aural invasions is not experienced equally.

It can be very difficult to implement noise reduction strategies for those with limited socio-economic means. Unlike the olfactory strategies employed by Pink's (2004) research participants, such as using scented candles and perfumes to maintain control over home spaces, the volume required to block out external sounds with methods such as turning on a home stereo can often result in neighbours being exposed to the very thing that is trying to be blocked. This escalation can affect fractured social relations with neighbours, and produce an undesirably noisy place to live. Thus, even though music, either played through a home stereo or a personal listening device (PLD) is often used

as a sensory anaesthetic to drown out unwanted external sounds (Atkinson 2006; Rice 2003), such strategies are far from straightforward.

The invasion of noises made from others outside the home is not the only source of aural intrusion that has to be negotiated in making a home feel private. Within the home, family members, friends, domestic staff, and other sources of noise, can all impinge on the ability to make spaces in the home private. Daniel Miller (2001) argues that the household, and the house itself, make the production of a sense of privacy a constantly shifting target under negotiation by multiple subjectivities. Feeling privacy does not occur as a singular experience, but as a combined set of often conflicting agencies expressed by individuals in the home. Marshall McLuhan's (1961) essay *Inside the Five Sense Sensorium*, is one of the earliest to acknowledge the connections between individuals and shared sensory media, and speaks acutely to how difficult it can be to maintain a sense of privacy in the home. McLuhan (1961 cited in Howes 2005 48), argues that experience in the world is a series of intersections, unbound to the extent of the individual body:

As we move in a world of multiple centres without margins, every facet of space awareness is altered both in private and public existence. The very concept of privacy ... can no longer be sustained by the traditional means of partitioning space. The teenager has solved the problem as best he [sic] can by using radio to create an auditory private space for his [sic] homework.

Veit Erlmann (2004 186) uses the example of a research participant who relied on having a radio playing beside her bed in order to be able to sleep to

demonstrate how sound can be used to 'privatise' the self from unwanted sound. Michael Bull (2001) argues that whether it is not being able to sleep at night without the radio playing, or erasing disturbance of external aural stimuli through the use of a PLD, the aforementioned examples point to a specific Western mode of appropriation and transformation of places and spaces through the manipulation of sound. In this instance, Bull's (2001) argument alludes to the fact that particular aural methods employed to produce a sense of privacy are culturally specific. Lidia Sciama (1993) concurs, arguing that it is important to consider that differences exist both historically and between cultures as to which spaces are discursively understood as private.

While parallels may exist across cultures relating to the binary oppositions that produce the 'separation' of private from public, Ardener (1993) and Sciama (1993 90) suggest that "as well as being subject to great cultural variation", privacy is a slippery term, and therefore, social spaces defined as private need to be considered in terms of their particular contexts. Differences exist between and within cultures in relation to the ways that sensoria and sensuous experience is understood (Howes 1991; Rodaway 1994). As such, it is essential to avoid generalised definitions of what it means to 'feel private'. Instead, Sciama (1993) argues that it is necessary to first explore the moral and idyllic values attached to constructions of private and public, as well as the material structures to which privacy is ascribed. Like sensuous experience, the sense of feeling private is relative and must not only be considered in terms of the socio-economic factors mentioned earlier, but within the variances of cultural perspectives as well.



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### **3 GEOGRAPHIES OF ABJECTION AND TABOO: KEY THEORISTS**

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#### **Abjection and the Corporeal Politics of Noise**

In Chapter Two, the geographic, cultural, and temporal scope of discussion was broad in order to position this research within the wider discourses that have significantly affected dominant hegemonic approaches to understanding sensuous experience. This was necessary in order to contextualise the emergent body of work from the late 1960s onwards that informs much of my research, work that began advocating for a more situated, embodied, and political understanding of socio-spatial relations.

From here, I narrow the scope towards the site of the home and bodies, and discuss how contemporary critical engagement with the senses and emotions produces richer understandings of home than was articulated in modern and pre-modern discourses. In particular, I highlight the instability and permeability of the boundaries that are constructed around bodies and homes. Through examining the fluidity of noise (and sensuous experience more broadly) across corporeal/domicile boundaries, I contribute to a growing body of literature that treats bodies and homes as permeable and mutually constitutive. This notion of permeability is fundamental to understanding the experience of noise, which in part, is due to the fluidity of sound across places and spaces in the home. More precisely, I refer to how dominant imaginings of home as 'private' and contained are destabilised in the presence of noise.

For those seeking it, issues surrounding the ability or inability to produce a sense of privacy led me towards theories that articulate the ways in which unwanted presences can transgress and contaminate bodies and homes. Highly subjective and contestable, the construction of noise (as unwanted sound) is by its very definition makes it transgressive. Noise is considered a trespass, and in built-up urban areas, it is a trespass that is often very difficult to avoid. As I began engaging with the literature to help explore how sounds become transgressive, it became apparent that there is a distinct lack, or in some cases, a resounding silence in the home in relation to narratives of embodied sonorous experiences of activities that are positioned as abject and/or taboo. In the cases when it is addressed, the tendency is to discuss abjection in general terms. For instance, the section on home and domestic dirt in Campkin and Cox (2007) provides an excellent discussion on the social processes that contribute to the production of actions and matter as 'dirty'. Yet, the focus is very much on the cleaning and removal of traces of 'dirt'. Empirical accounts of negotiating expected social mores relating to sexual activity and using toilets remain absent. Rarely do researchers directly ask about the emotional and sensuous experience of taboo acts and matter.

### **Kristeva and Abject Noise in the Home**

While there are a myriad of influences that shape sensuous experience, the corporeal and social sounds of the taboo, of abjection, and of contamination, remain but a murmur in discourses of home. So far, contemporary literature on the senses has tended to focus on the sounds that have positive associations, and therefore, positively contribute to making home. Playing music to produce a

desired ambience (Hardie 2012), hearing children playing, the sounds made by domestic chores (Morrison 2010), and rain hitting the roof, are but a few examples of sounds that participants in this research, and in the literature on home (see Law 2001; Pink 2004) have attributed to positively contributing to feeling 'at home'.

Due to the fluidity and omniscience of sound across boundaries, the acoustic environment of the home does not always echo the aspirations of those who live within. Sound ignores walls and doors within the home, and this is not a problem when those sounds are in harmony with the expectations of the household. But as sounds can contribute positively to the production of home, so too can noises break and complicate the homemaking process. Although the impacts of noise have been the subject of numerous studies from various fields such as physical medicine (Babisch 2002), economics (Riethmüller et al. 2008), psychology (Spreng 2000), and epidemiology (WHO 2007), the intrusion of abject/taboo noises has for the most part been skirted over, or completely sidestepped (Gurney 2000a; 2000b being notable exceptions).

In the broadest terms, abjection refers to all things that disrupt and disrespect borders, boundaries, and rules (Kristeva 1982). The abject represents a presence that is liminal and elusive: it is neither subject nor object, and is therefore highly mobile across place and space. Moreover, that which is abject breaks boundaries and dissolves distance between bodies and things: the self collapses into the other; "inseparable, contaminated, condemned at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject" (Kristeva 1982 18). Here, the other is defined as that which is socially, ethnically, and geographically different,

and represents all that the self is not (Staszak 2009). Abjection is contamination from an unwanted other, and therefore, represents a threat to the self through the disruption of borders, and through the resulting contamination of sites such as the body and the home. It is perhaps no accident that exposure to unwanted sounds is referred to as 'noise pollution'.

The abject, through the dissolution of the boundary between the self and the other, serves as a reminder of just how liminal and porous 'bounded' spaces such as the body and home are. This is why the abject terrifies and torments, precisely because it unhinges the possibility that there is a boundary to defend. The abject invokes emotions of horror in response to disruptive sensations. When emotional responses are 'ordinary', the emotions help to construct and maintain boundaries. As Liz Bondi, Joyce Davidson, and Mick Smith (2005 7) argue, however, 'disordered' emotional experiences can "disrupt the very distinction between bodily interiors and exteriors." Abjection, in this instance, is intrinsically linked to the senses and emotions as responses to sensuous stimuli can order and/or disrupt spaces such as home. Through the disruption of boundaries, abjection highlights "the permeability and fluidity of bodily boundaries" (Bondi, Davidson and Smith 2005 7).

It is important to note, as Longhurst (2001) argues, that there is nothing inherently polluting about abject matter such as bodily excreta.<sup>15</sup> Rather, abjection, and abject matter fall within socially produced notions of cleanliness and hygiene that position excreta as dirty and unclean. Bodily excretions -

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<sup>15</sup> Zena Kamash (2010) draws attention to the 'general consensus' that evolutionary processes have affected certain matter to be abject, due to the threat to health that they often pose. While this belief has merit, Kamash (2010) is quick to note that these processes occur within specific cultural setting, and are therefore social constructs.

faeces, urine, sputum, menstrual blood, sweat - are abject as they break bodily borders and disrupt the illusion of the contained self. The perception that boundaries have been transgressed often manifests as a visceral response and is therefore often framed as 'natural'. In many cases, such as the experience of noises positioned as abject, reactions are shaped by normative social constructions of what those noises mean. The feelings of abjection, such as "anxiety, loathing and disgust" (Longhurst 2001 28), that relate to the experience of noises understood as abject, are deeply rooted in socially constructed obsessions with the avoidance of dirt. Like the source from which they emanate, abject noises are not inherently dirty, but instead are perceived and interpreted through a social lens that constructs them as abject.

Geography is a useful medium to explore the abject, as the experience of abjection is an inherently spatial process. While not a geographer, Kristeva (1982) is clear that negotiating abjection involves strategies of spatial demarcation in order to distance the self from the other. The fluidity and mobility of the abject, however, together with the porosity of boundaries and borders, means that this differentiation can only be partially achieved. This is due to the processes involved in defining the self:

Identity itself is constituted in the 'more than one' of the encounter: the designation of an 'I' or 'we' requires an encounter with others. These others cannot be simply relegated to the outside: given that the subject comes into existence as an entity only through encounters with others, then the subject's existence cannot be separated from the others who are encountered (Ahmed 2000 7).

In this way, separation from the abject (other) can only ever be partial. Distancing the self from the abject can never be fully achieved. The cyclic process of avoiding or erasing the other, whilst simultaneously being dependant on the other, becomes a source of anxiety (Sibley 1995 8). This anxiety is compounded by the importance given to expelling the abject, where separating 'us' from 'them', the clean from the unclean, and the ordered from chaos, is of utmost importance.

Kristeva's (1982) and David Sibley's (1995) reading of abjection emphasises bodily boundaries within self/other, private/public binaries that are borne from a puritanical obsession with 'dirt'. The experience of abject noises thus represents more than just an offense to the ears, but a corporeal, embodied contamination of bodily and domicile boundaries. The inescapable 'collapse' of the self into the other that the abject ushers affectively represents an overlap of bodies. Just as bodies and spaces leak into each other (Ahmed 2000; Stewart 2005), bodies and other bodies also leak into each other. For the Ongee, this is an integral and accepted part of existence. Within dominant Western understandings of bodies, however, the thought of overlapping bodies represents both horror *and* fascination, which makes the presence of the abject difficult to ignore.

To guard against contamination, multiple strategies are employed. In the case of encountering the ethnic other, Ahmed (2000) argues that discourses of racialised hate serve to separate the other from the self. It does this by producing other bodies as 'dirt' and a polluting presence (Sibley 1995). Emotions such as hatred "substantiate the threat of invasion and contamination [from] the dirty bodies of strangers" (Ahmed 2000 39). The emotions produced

through hatred act as a shield that assists the self to defend the self's body against being infected by the other. This process is what Kristeva (1982) refers to as the demarcation of space in order to insulate against the other. Producing the other through hatred or fear narratives differentiates the familiar from the strange, marks "out the inside and outside of bodily space (to establish the skin as a boundary line)" (Ahmed 2000 42).

The role that sound can play in producing overlapping bodies is significant. The intercorporeity that Paterson (2007) discusses is more than social, as intersecting sensuous horizons also connect us to the physicality of other bodies. Sound, with its ability to leave bodies and enter others, is particularly adept at reinforcing the blurred boundaries of the body. Sound encounters that are harmonious with the self reinforce the identity and boundedness of the auditor. Such sounds (and perhaps even noises in some cases) often go unnoticed, resonating in harmony with the self, slipping into the background.<sup>16</sup> In a visual culture that reinforces distance between things and people, aurality is, for the most part, taken-for-granted or actively ignored. Abject noises by contrast, are often difficult to ignore as they have a tendency to destabilise the bounded self. Experiencing disgust and loathing invoked by abject noise, therefore, is more than just an aversion to a distant source from elsewhere. Instead, I suggest transgressive invasions of unwanted sound represent an overlapping of sound-fluid bodies.

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<sup>16</sup> As mentioned in Chapter One, every participant interviewed for this research spoke about the ways in which sounds with positive associations often went unnoticed.

## **Elias and the Disciplining Effects of Abjection and Taboo**

Elias (1978[1939] 59) argues that “we must go back in time to that from which it emerged” in order to understand why certain activities have become abject and taboo. Elias’ (1978[1939]; 1982[1939]) two-volume canonical work *The Civilising Process* represents a painstakingly detailed exploration into the historical processes that have shaped contemporary attitudes relating to expectations around behaviour, manners, morality, etiquette, and self-discipline in New Zealand. In regards to the sonorous ordering of home, these were key themes that emerged across the literature that I reviewed during the preliminary groundwork phase of this research, and these themes also recurred throughout the accounts of the people who I interviewed in relation to negotiating noise. Therefore, Elias’ (1978[1939]; 1982[1939]) work provides a very useful means to discuss the politics of negotiating the abjection and the taboo in the home.

The year is 1530, and Desiderius Erasmus (Erasmus of Rotterdam) has written *De Civilitate morum puerilium* (*On Civility in Children* cited in Elias 1978[1939]). Intended as a guide on etiquette and morality addressed to the ten year old son of Adolph of Burgundy (1489-1540), Erasmus’ (1530) treatise is acknowledged as a watershed in what Elias (1978[1939]) refers to as the civilising process - the historical evolution of the collective social rules governing etiquette, morals, and values - that inform dominant behavioural expectations. Erasmus did not attribute any particular importance to *De Civilitate*, instead positioning it as merely one part of a broader set of guidelines required for instructing children on appropriate ways of being. Regardless of Erasmus’ opinion of his short treatise, *De Civilitate* struck a chord with sixteenth century European court society and by 1536 (the year of Erasmus’ death), it had been reprinted more

than thirty times. The first English translation appeared in 1532, and by 1534 *De Civilitate* had already been introduced as a textbook for the education of boys. More than 130 editions were printed (Elias 1978[1939] 54).

Why Erasmus' work is useful for research into the disciplining of behaviours associated with abject noises in the home is that *De Civilitate*, as Elias (1978[1939] 58) puts it, speaks to a definitive point in time where changes in expectations surrounding "outward bodily propriety" set in motion the silencing of the noises that I am addressing in this research - bodily function/visceral noises, coital noises, and domestic violence noises. This grouping of abject/taboo noises, while far from exhaustive, represents the dominant themes that I encountered within academic and mass media discourses, as well as in the narratives of the participants interviewed for this research.

In the case of bodily function noises, it would appear that the sensuous Western home is a space free of noises associated with the body. Baz Chalabi (2008 19) suggests that such absences are not isolated to academic and media discourses, instead he argues that in Western cultures "[t]he whole reality of poohing [sic], farting and peeing has been for the most part airbrushed out of films, books, radio, nearly everything". The taboo nature of coital noise too is silenced, albeit to a lesser degree than visceral noises. In contrast to visceral noises, coital noise holds an often positive position in mass media representations. This is due to the way that Western discourse positions noisy sex as "undoubtedly integral to a good performance and is both pleasurable sex and accomplished sex" (Gurney 2000a 40). Within the home, however, Gurney (2000a) argues that the dominant moral order dictates an expectation to silence

coital noise. Further, as it was in the now infamous Caroline Cartwright case (see Chapter Five), noisy sex is not always read as a positive thing by those who overhear it. Therefore, negotiating the ability to have noisy sex at home, while at the same time being expected to contain coital noise, makes intimate home spaces contradictory, and a challenge to manage.

The silence of domestic violence is different. While abject, the perpetrators in the examples that emerged during this research did not seem to feel any pressure to contain noise resulting from acts of violence. The silencing of domestic violence noise came in the auditor's (neighbours, and those who have been subjected to violence) reactions, where incidents went unreported through fear of what may happen as a result of intervention. While commonalities exist across all taboo/abject noises, because of these differences that exist in the ways that coital noise, bodily function noise, and violence noise are read and negotiated, each will be addressed in separate, but interrelated empirical chapters.

In the time of Erasmus, it was commonplace to encounter people farting, spitting, urinating, defecating, and even walking naked in the street. Although expectations relating to performing ablutions had begun to be more spatially disciplined than those in the previous epoch, mid-sixteenth century elimination processes were far from the contained, segregated activities that are expected in contemporary New Zealand. This is evident in Erasmus' (1530 cited in Elias 1978[1939] 130) instruction that "it is impolite to greet someone who is urinating or defecating. . . ." As Bryson (2010 379) notes, the "English for a long time were particularly noted for their unconcern about lavatorial privacy".

While not accepted in all social classes, dialogue regarding such behaviour was not censored, precisely because such practices were the norm and dominated premodern Europe. For instance, Erasmus freely and frankly discusses issues of bodily comportment in a way “that have in the meantime become unspeakable” within contemporary thresholds of appropriateness (Elias 1978[1939] 55). After Erasmus’ consolidation of the sentiments of courtly society, which sought to distinguish those of nobility from the lower classes in matters of “socially acceptable behaviour” (Elias 1978[1939] 60),<sup>17</sup> the ability to freely discuss certain behaviours changed significantly. Shame and modesty resonated through the expectation to restrain and conceal visceral bodily functions, and sexual desire, which resulted in such matters being reframed as unspeakable and taboo.

This formalisation of taboo, based on Erasmus’ (1530) work, and reinforced through the courts of Europe, defined the terms of self-discipline and control. It also marked the beginning of restrictions and the eventual ‘silencing’ of discussing the taboo, a key marker of the civilising process (Elias 1978[1939]). The way that the discussing of certain topics became socially restricted was a gradual process, as was its spread throughout European culture:

Not abruptly but very gradually the code of behaviour becomes stricter and the degree of consideration expected of others becomes greater. The sense of what to do and what not to do in order not to offend or shock others becomes subtler, and in conjunction with the new power relationships the social imperative not to offend others becomes more

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<sup>17</sup> Religious texts on manners predate the lay texts of the thirteenth century, but classism became more prominent as the court of the warrior nobility began writing their own codes of conduct (Elias 1978[1939] 60).

binding, as compared to the preceding phase (Elias 1978[1939] 80).

While it was the royal courts of Europe that originally drove what is considered to be taboo in contemporary New Zealand, the upper classes who aspired to court society soon began emulating courtly codes of conduct. By the eighteenth century, changes to the dominant social hierarchy heralded the emergence of the bourgeois class, and a weakening of the influence of the aristocracy in relation to social behaviour and taboos. New social structures brought with them new spatial configurations and new ways of interacting. For instance, the widespread and dominant (but not universal) construction of taboo heavily influenced the increasing privatisation of home, as this solved the “problem of eliminating these [natural] functions from social life and displacing them behind the scenes” (Elias 1978[1939] 139). Sexuality, and sexual identities fell into this socio-spatial regulatory regime also. Victorian Era (c. 1837-1901) values confined sexuality to the home, which was “increasingly removed behind the scenes of social life and enclosed in a particular enclave, the nuclear family” (Elias 1978[1939] 180).

Expectations of sexual modesty shifted the physical layout of homes. Departing from the single-room dwellings that dominated premodern living, separate sleeping areas were required to accommodate the containment of sexual desire. Yet, the same problems associated with sensuous containment that were discussed in the previous section prevailed. Even though by the nineteenth and twentieth century “the ‘conspiracy of silence’ observed on such matters in social discourse, are as good as complete” (Elias 1978[1939] 180),

immodest noises still transgressed throughout the home. The 'conspiracy of silence' was spatially and socially dependant on the home becoming a private enclave. As well as impacting on the expression sexual desire, and the expectation to contain bodily functions, the private home also had repercussions for the experience of domestic violence. Although Elias (1978[1939]) does not specifically address it, through the increased isolation of home from society, together with increasingly prevalent discourses of shame and embarrassment, the perfect conditions were set out for the perpetration of domestic abuse. Patriarchal subordination of women and children, the shame associated with not adhering to societal norms, embarrassment associated with discussing domestic violence, and the partitioning of family within a private home, all conspired to provide the 'ideal' conditions required for silencing domestic violence.

Thus, the separation of domestic life from the public domain played a significant part in the 'civilising' process, which for women turned out to be far from civil. When reading the evolution of the influences that have dominant constructions of civility in New Zealand, the separation of home from public life was certainly necessary in order to adhere to social expectations of shame and embarrassment. Controls made possible through the spatial reconfiguration of home are only part of the process. Key to the civilising process, as Elias (1978[1939]) argues, is the way that social expectations became internalised, exerted on the self. As moral codes of conduct filtered throughout Western society and became taboo to discuss, the power influencing behaviour shifted from external forces such as the state and other institutions, towards the self. Once the notions of shame and embarrassment became widely entrenched in

public discourse, prohibitions supported by social sanctions began to manifest in individuals as internalised self-discipline (Elias 1978[1939]).<sup>18</sup> Again, the 'privatised' home, and the family within, were integral to the internalisation of appropriate modes of behaviour:

And this restraint, like all others, is enforced less and less by direct physical force. It is cultivated in the individual from an early age as habitual self-restraint by the structure of social life, by the pressure of social institutions in general, and by certain executive organs of society (above all, the family) in particular (Elias 1978[1939] 188).

The shift from external influences to self-discipline was so complete that, according to Elias 1978[1939]), even in the absence of others the effects of the civilising process affected behaviour. In the case of nudity within the home, Victorian Era compulsions to conceal the body from the gaze of other members of the household "were so advanced and internalised that bodily forms had to be entirely covered even when alone or in the closest family circle" (Elias 1978[1939] 166).

This level of self-surveillance appears aligned with Foucault's (1977; 1980) theorisation of how power manifests, where the direction of power is asserted both as external and internal processes that are cyclic, fluid, and not fixed. Indeed, as Dennis Smith (1999) argues, there is a great deal of overlap in the theories of Elias and Foucault. In particular, Smith (1999 81) indicates that both authors were concerned with how the power relations that have informed perceptions of selfhood and society in relation to bodily functions have evolved

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<sup>18</sup> It is important to note that expectations of shame and embarrassment were not universally accepted, and were often contested by the 'lower' working class (Elias 1978[1939]).

throughout history. Further, Smith (1999 84) also draws attention to the fact that Elias and Foucault were both deeply interested in the connection between how matters of the body shape and are shaped by understandings of selfhood, “its substance, capacities, and obligations.”

Why I raise the concept of Foucauldian power here is that Foucault (1977; 1980) expressed the regulatory structures governing self-discipline with a greater emphasis on the senses than did Elias (1978[1939]). While Elias (1978[1939]) does draw on examples that refer to sensuously defined disciplining structures, he does so for the most part implicitly. Moreover, Foucault’s politicisation of the relationship between bodies and spaces, and how power manifests within this relationship, is discussed more explicitly than by Elias. For instance, Foucault’s (1977) *Discipline and Punish* explores the production of power through the sense of vision, and how particular spaces such as hospitals and prisons facilitate the maintenance of self-disciplining behaviour. Hence, I employ Foucauldian theory to extend discussion on the origins of abjection, taboo, and self-disciplining behaviour, in order to examine how power articulated through the senses is conformed to and contested in the home. Foucault (1977), however, did not ‘look’ further beyond vision in his thesis on the flow of power, an ‘oversight’ that I address in the following section.

### **Foucault and the Disciplinary Effects of Abjection and Taboo**

Abjection and taboo both discursively and spatially silence certain matter and sensuous experiences. The rules governing abject noise in Western society require the subject to discipline bodily functions, and activities such as sexual

intercourse, in order to avoid feelings of shame and embarrassment. The enclave of the home, and the family within, are key to the way that the civilising process unfolds, and are integral to learning how to be 'civilised'. As Elias (1978[1939] 137) states, from the eighteenth century onwards, the home and the family had become the primary institutions where young people learned the "socially required regulation and moulding of impulses and emotions". Through direct and indirect instruction, and repetitive habit, disciplining of bodily functions and sexual urges is "imprinted ... on the child" until such expectations become internalised to the point where they become automatic (Elias 1978[1939] 139).<sup>19</sup>

Avoiding the abject and the taboo is, for the most part, an internalised process based on expectations of civility, learned from parental instruction. The power of abjection and the taboo operates through the subject's fear of disclosure, and disclosure in this case is mediated through the senses. In the case of audition, it is the fear that others may hear (and pass judgement on) the self engaging in 'shameful' acts, which serves as the enforcer of socially required behaviours. The disciplining effects of abjection and the taboo exact power at the site of the body, operating a form of aural surveillance that circulates via implicit channels between the auditor and audited. Foucault's (1977) use of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon to discuss how power circulates sensuously through and between bodies and space offers a useful theoretical basis to understand how the power of the abject and the taboo are exercised through the senses.

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<sup>19</sup> Achieving this level of discipline is often regarded as marking the transition from 'childhood' to 'adulthood'. See Valentine *et al.* (1998) and Holloway and Valentine (2000).

The Panopticon represents Bentham's vision for a perfect disciplinary institution, a building constructed in such a way that a sense of constant observation is imposed upon all inmates at once. Bentham argued that the threat posed by the existence of an all-seeing but unseen observer in a central watchtower would cause inmates to exercise self-discipline, as all indiscretions would be exposed to a persistent disciplinary gaze. Compliance to authority in the Panopticon is not enforcement directly from an external source, but becomes incorporated into bodies coercively through awareness of being watched:

There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself [sic] (Foucault 1980 155).

The efficacy of the Panopticon, according to Foucault (1977 201), comes from how the disciplinary gaze induces "in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power." The true power of the panopticon is not situated in the central watchtower, but in the relationships formed in the configuration of bodies and space: power "is not an institution, and not a structure" that exerts influence from 'above', but a matrix of relationships where individuals internalise social rules and self-disciplining conventions (Foucault 1978 93). As Johanna Oksala (2010) states, individual bodies incorporate the normative expectations that resonate within disciplinary power through repetitive habitual performance and training.

David Wood (2007 247), following Foucault, states it is not just bodies that requires ordering for self-surveillance to function, “but the spatial and temporal distribution and regulation of the body: time was divided into smaller units to allow for total control of activity, likewise space was constructed so as to enclose but also to partition.” In terms of broader socio-spatial power relations, the partitioning of spatial scales such as the body and the home have great political significance: scale is crucial to the demarcation of the sites where power is negotiated, and defines “the boundaries and bounds the identities around which control is exerted *and* contested” (Smith 1992 66 emphasis in original). The spatial configuration of the home, and the home’s position within neighbourhoods, communities, and cities, is pivotal in the expression of power.

Geography (Driver 1985; Wood 2007), anthropology (Armstead 2008), political science (Siisiäinen 2008), philosophy (Oksala 2010), and cross-disciplinary research (Vaz and Bruno 2003), have all employed Foucault’s circulatory model to help explain how power manifests in the politics of corporeality and spatiality. While indebted to his insights relating to the flow of power, Foucault was primarily interested in the visual and paid little attention to the other senses. In effect, Foucault reduced the assertion of power to the visual (masculine/privileged) dimension of experience alone. The influences of the other senses, when broached, were discussed as contingent on sight (see Smith 1997).

Importantly for research into the disciplinary politics of abject and taboo sound, Foucault’s (1977) reading of the senses ignores the ubiquitous nature of sound and aural experience. Considering that virtually the entire body is engaged in

the experience and perception of sound (Feld 2005), and as Rodaway (1994) argues, hearing is arguably the most persistent of sensuous experiences, this is somewhat remiss. Individual and collective auralities have the potential to spill into places and spaces well beyond the immediate visual horizon, and to also disrupt the ways visual spaces are demarcated and controlled. Indeed, due to its ability to permeate areas the gaze cannot, sound carries with it a greater omniscience. The shortcomings of articulating power through the visual are evident in Mee's (2007) discussion on feeling privacy in the home, where she reflects on how easy it is to shut out the visual gaze of neighbours, and yet still be subject to noise. Foucault's surveillant gaze cannot account for the multiple strategies employed to reduce the noises we make "...in order not to be traced, embarrassed, identified or surveilled by others" (Atkinson 2006 4).

For this project and for human geography in general, Foucauldian (and Eliasian) notions of self-surveillance and discipline offer a useful way to understand the corporeal power relations of abjection and the taboo. The 'tunnel-vision' caused by the marginalisation of the non-visual senses, however, has impoverished what is known about socio-spatial power relations. Foucault's positioning of power within the metaphor of the Panopticon ignores the potential reach of the other senses to affect self-disciplinary behaviours. Indeed, in later work Foucault (2005 cited in Siisiäinen 2008 22) states that "it is the gaze, not audition, which exercises 'in the entire space, all the time, a mobile and differentiated *surveillance*'" (emphasis in original).

This 'oversight' of the role that the non-visual senses play in the articulation of power is made all the more perplexing given that Foucault would have been

aware that Bentham's first version of the Panopticon intended to incorporate acoustic surveillance. Bentham only abandoned the inclusion of acoustic surveillance because technology available at the time could not prevent prisoners hearing what occurred in the central tower (Leach 1997 cited in Cavanagh 2010). And while Foucault's (1977; 1980) theorisation of power is not isolated to within the panoptic gaze (Wood 2007 247), the lack of attention paid to the non-visual senses does have important implications.

The panoptic gaze cannot reach into every space and place and as such, its influence is not complete. As Matt Hannah (1997 350) argues, "[s]ome portions of our life-paths are kept invisible for the moment by tradition of law: the privacy of the home, the privacy of the bedroom or bathroom within the home, etc." Further, as all power is open to contestation, the Panopticon is not complete, or as omniscient as Foucault would have us believe. Rather, it is perhaps better to frame the surveillant gaze as 'imperfect', where contestation and resistance (within partitioned spaces such as the bedroom) results in the "imperfect success" of the Panopticon (Hannah 1997 352).

So where Foucault (1977) suggested that auditory perception extended the 'reach' of the panoptic gaze, I suggest a review that moves beyond the dominance of the visual as the primary disciplinary sense. Instead, it is necessary to focus on the ways in which a panaudic ear - free of visual contingency - influences behaviours and identities within an explicitly geographic context. My intention here is not to set aurality up as a binary opposite to the visual, nor to usurp the dominance of the visual with the aural. Instead, I strategically focus on the hearing sense both to highlight the 'short-

sightedness' of the dominance of the gaze, and to demonstrate the profound nature of the often taken-for-granted experience of aurality.

## **Summary**

In this chapter I have outlined the historical processes that have shaped dominant attitudes to the senses in Western countries such as New Zealand, and how the senses have been regarded by geography as a discipline. I have also drawn attention to the importance of acknowledging that research into the senses must be embedded in approaches that understand sensory perception as culturally specific. These contextual issues are central to this research in that the interrelated moral and sensuous orderings harking from the Enlightenment Era continue to influence the perception and construction of place and space. Further, by offering a discussion on a broad range of sensuous experience, I also allow for the complex interplay that occurs between and across the senses. By drawing attention to the temporal, spatial, and culture specificities of the senses, I answer the call of Tim Ingold (2000 285) who argues that research into the senses must be attentive to the “creative interweaving of experience and discourses, and to the ways in which the resulting discursive constructions in turn affect people’s perceptions of the world around them.”

Abjection (or abject noise more precisely) is a particularly useful concept to address this concern. This is because of the ways in which abject phenomena disrupt geographic scales such as the body and the home. In the case of the narratives of people who were interviewed for this research, abjection and the taboo featured significantly in their understandings of the transgressive potential

of noise. Whilst I acknowledge that abjection occurs across all geographic scales, I am primarily interested in the way that abject noises ignore the physically and socially constructed boundaries of bodies and homes.

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## 4 METHODOLOGY

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The experience of sound is highly subjective, and the threshold for when sounds become noise is contingent upon multiple social, cultural, temporal, and spatial influences. While these influences are varied, power (or powerlessness) is common to all. Therefore, when developing a methodology to access the role that noise plays in the production and maintenance of home, approaches that can accommodate the exploration of power within discourses of noise are necessary for engaging with the embodied, emotional, visceral, often-elusive, fluid, and sensuous aspects of negotiating noise.

Feminist geographers such as England (1994), Pamela Moss (2001), and Rose (1997) have long advocated for the accommodation of participants 'voices' within social science research, one that valorises the narratives of participants and that is attentive to the ways that place, space, and identities become embodied. These authors argue that traditional methods of scientific empiricism are unable to capture the richness of how people make sense of their lives. Rejecting detached approaches that seek objective 'truth', feminist poststructural theorists instead direct attention towards the lived, embodied social narratives, and to where power lies within the ways in which people describe their own worlds.

Due to the highly subjective nature of noise, remaining attentive to how people personally construct and understand the experience of noise is vital. Feminist poststructuralism provides the necessary foundations through which the embodied, sensuous, and fluid sphere of aural experience can be explored. It

also provides the means to tease out the flow of power that resonates through the negotiation of noise. To set the scene in terms of how I prepared for engaging with the interview and analysis phase of this thesis, first I reflect on positionality when conducting qualitative research, and outline why methodological reflexivity and disclosure were important to the interview process. Second, I provide a brief overview of the rationale that informed the demographic scope of this research. Third, I discuss the recruitment of participants, and why they were sought. Fourth, I detail the interview process, structure, and techniques that were employed. Attention is paid to the piloting of my intended approach, and how this affected subsequent interviews. Fifth, I unpack the themes that informed my lines of inquiry that were established prior to conducting the interviews, and how these themes evolved in response to dominant discourses that emerged within the narratives of participants. Following, and on a related front, I discuss the adoption of a post-interview questionnaire, and why this method was employed. Sixth, I detail the data analysis phase, and the methods used to both manage, and make sense of, the data. I track the process from raw data, through the coding phases, and draw attention to the benefits of being flexible and reflexive when analysing qualitative data. Finally, summarise the methodological approaches employed in this research as a means to link the theoretical framework to the following empirical chapters.

### **Positionality and Disclosure**

Prior to starting this research, I had been a DJ and an event coordinator. Both roles required the mitigation of noise in a professional capacity. I have also

been responsible for the music component of a number of domestic parties that have required prior planning as far as the management of noise pollution is concerned. In all instances, the impetus was to maximise sound system output, whilst at the same time avoiding the risk of being shut down by noise control. Conversely, in my own home I have been on the receiving end of unwanted party noise from neighbours. I have lived in both urban and rural environments and value the aural ecologies of both. I tend to privilege the sounds of the beach and bush, and whilst not overly sensitive to urban background noise, I prefer the aural experience of non-urban spaces. For these aforementioned reasons, my subjective position is quite fluid when it comes to understanding environmental urban noise.

Following England (1994), McDowell (1992), and Valentine (2005), it was important for me to understand my own attitudes, and how these may affect the research conversations. All three authors argue that the fostering of trust between researchers and participants is essential to the research process, and one way to establish trust is to incorporate reciprocity into the interview process. Reflecting on my own position was necessary in order to help negotiate the exchange of experiences in a reciprocal manner. As England (1994) argues, the research relationship is inherently hierarchical, and therefore the notion of interviews as a reciprocal exchange between the researcher and research participants is not equal. The researcher tends to remain in a position of power, and unless this is addressed, it can affect the information that is obtained. England (1994: 86) suggests “exposing the partiality of our [researcher] perspective” as a means to reduce (or at the very least admit to) the presence of the researcher’s voice while conducting research.

Prior to conducting interviews for this research, I spent some time reflecting on my own attitudes towards noise, particularly those that may diverge from dominant readings within the New Zealand context. For example, hearing loud music emanating from a party in the early hours of the morning does not automatically invoke negative feelings for me. As mentioned in Chapter One, the attitude my father took to dealing with party noise in our neighbourhood has largely shaped my own personal utilitarian beliefs when it comes to managing noise in the urban landscape. Party noises are one of the things I accept as part of the urban environment, and my reactions are informed by my position that I am one person compared to the 'many' who are enjoying themselves. Further, party noise is temporary and eventually will abate. Added to this is my belief that it is possible to transcend annoyance, to some degree, through reconceptualising what one considers annoying. Basically, how much do I want to let things like this wind me up? My position is mutable though, for if the music is not to my taste, or more importantly, the quality of the audio system is below par and the volume exceeds the comfortable capacity of the sound system, I do tend to become irritated on a professional/technical level.

I also considered how various spatial and temporal factors can influence the experience of noise, in part, to acknowledge that attitudes are not fixed and can be highly fluid. For instance, during my first week of a five week visit to Berlin, the sound of clinking beer bottles outside the apartment where I was staying at first felt like threatening noise. This reaction was informed by my experiences of the dominant drinking culture in New Zealand, where excessive alcohol consumption is commonplace, and often results in violent public confrontations. Alcohol related problems in New Zealand have resulted in local government

policy that bans drinking in many public places to avoid the associated violence (see Webb *et al.* 2004). Public drinking in Berlin carries with it a completely different set of attitudes, and in the absence of all my expected alcohol-related behaviours and outcomes, the sound of public drinking quickly lost its threat.

These examples both speak to spatial and temporal elements of urban sound. More importantly, they offer an insight into the attitudinal platform that informs this research. I believe my experiences across the 'annoyance' spectrum place me in a useful position to explore issues relating to noise as it is experienced and negotiated in the home. My positionality also assisted me in appearing as someone who was sympathetic and genuinely interested in the interviewees' experiences "rather than merely someone who just happened to be 'doing a project' ... as his [sic] 'job'" (Malbon 1999 32). Being reflexive in this manner also helped me to hone my attention towards the narratives of participants.

Although I was careful to express the full spectrum of my attitudes towards sound and noise, this did not entirely remove my perspectives from the interviews. Where appropriate, I remained attentive and sympathetic to participants when they expressed concerns or opinions about events that had annoyed them. Inspired by Valentine (2005), I also intentionally played the role of 'devil's advocate' by sometimes challenging the subject positions of interviewees when it felt strategic to do so. For instance, the participants who perceived the shrill noises that often accompany children playing as annoying were not automatically 'sympathised' with. In most cases, I offered an alternative reading that positioned children's play noise as 'normal'. Valentine (2005) advises that this approach can avoid bland, superficial descriptions of

experiences. Whenever negative associations were attached to things that I perceived in a positive light (such as loud car stereos), I would disclose my position as a DJ and an owner of a loud car stereo. This approach in many cases provoked and extended dialogue into the nuances of the perception and construction of noise.

By drawing on my own experiences, and explicitly weaving them through the interview process, I draw on what Sarah Wall (2006 155) refers to as the “sensibility of the use of the self in research ... for its usefulness in explicating tacit knowledge.” This was particularly relevant when engaging with abject and taboo noises, which are rarely discussed, especially with an unfamiliar researcher. By revealing parts of my own experiences, I hoped that this would make participants more comfortable about expressing ‘silenced’ aspects of their everyday aural lives. For instance, during a number of interviews I found myself sharing outright embarrassing and otherwise uncomfortable experiences relating to being heard, and overhearing others, having sex. Whenever the topic came up, I also admitted that I am uncomfortable with the thought that others may hear me having a poo. Further, I shared my experiences of hearing domestic violence and the difficulties I experienced in knowing what to do about it. Self-disclosure in this manner also served to add transparency to the interview process, ensuring participants understood that I was not necessarily ‘on their side’.

Many participants expressed that me divulging my own experiences helped them to feel more comfortable about sharing information about noises relating to topics such as sexual activity, toileting, and domestic violence. Interestingly,

the process of self-disclosure was not one-way traffic, as during this project I discovered that I have been living with tinnitus for some years. Through my discussions with the six participants who disclosed that they have tinnitus, I became aware of the effects this can have on socio-spatial relations on a very personal level. As England (1994 86, emphasis in original) notes: “the research, researched *and* researcher might be transformed by the fieldwork experience.” With this in mind, I began to consider the impacts of engaging with interviewees on matters relating to abjection, topics they may not have previously considered. As I stated previously, for the most part the Western ear is not particularly tuned to aural experience. Being reflexive required me to think about the impacts of broaching topics that may be of a ‘sensitive’ nature, and that may have previously been taken-for-granted by participants.

Raymond Lee and Claire Renzetti (1990) draw on Joan Sieber and Barbara Stanley (1988) as a starting point to examine both what constitutes sensitive topics, and why understanding ‘sensitivity’ is important for social research. The definition offered by Sieber and Stanley (1988 49 cited in Lee and Renzetti 1990) encompasses research “...in which there are potential consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in the research or for the class of individuals represented by the research.” Whilst this definition is useful for including topics that may not ordinarily be considered sensitive, this definition positions any research that has some sort of consequence for the subject group being researched as potentially sensitive. In this instance, sensitive becomes synonymous with controversial. Instead, Lee and Renzetti (1990 511) define a sensitive topic as:

one which potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or the researched the collection, holding, and/or dissemination of research data.

Key to this definition is the term substantial threat, which elevates the level of potential harm above the inherent risks associated with participating in research. Regardless of how carefully a researcher's ethical framework is adhered to, participating in research carries with it an element of risk. Anonymity cannot be totally guaranteed, especially if participants request that their real names be used. It is the substantial threat of that risk that determines whether a topic is sensitive or not. This definition is useful when conducting research, as it offers a suitable caution to guide the research process. Yet, the point at which a threat becomes substantial is far from clear cut.

At the same time that the term 'sensitive' is often taken-for-granted as being a common-sense concept (Lee and Renzetti 1990 511), Christina Foss (2007) cautions against treating the term threat in the same way. Karen Kavanagh *et al.* (2006 245 cited in Foss 2007 3), suggest that topics can be considered threatening if they are of:

a deeply personal nature; they impinge on the interest of the person being studied; they involve deviance or social control; or they enter the world of that which is personally sacred.

For example, Joe (39, male) said he felt uncomfortable being overheard going to the toilet and yet, within the context of the interview, he was comfortable discussing such matters with a virtual stranger. Here, while a threat existed

through crossing the boundaries of what Joe identified as personally sacred, the topic was not particularly sensitive.

For this research, rather than focusing on the notion of 'sensitive' topics, it has been more appropriate to frame this research in terms of "sensitive interviews" (Foss 2007 3). This issue is more than semantic, as it speaks to the need to balance the need for rich data with the safety of participants. I argue that over-managing the risk posed by 'topics' may render the research objectives untenable, and avoiding potentially threatening topics excludes avenues of enquiry that may positively contribute to society as a whole. Shifting the focus towards managing, rather than avoiding, threat also serves to add richer possibilities for exploring absences and silences - things that are left unsaid (Ho 2008).

### **Demographic Scope**

As my intention is to explore as broad a spectrum of aural experience as possible, I reviewed a diverse range of research possibilities that encompassed how all sounds and noises contribute to the experience of home. This ranged from banal, everyday sounds (Pink 2004) to potentially 'sensitive' noises from sexual activity (Gurney 2000a), toileting (Cavanagh 2010), and domestic violence (Dobash and Dobash 1980; Mugford 1989). Engaging with such a broad spectrum was a key objective, as I wanted to examine how both taken-for-granted and abject noises may influence social relations, and the production of home space, in ways that perhaps have not been considered.

Due to the ubiquitous nature of aurality, I did not feel it appropriate to limit this research to a particular social cohort. Therefore, the demographic scope was open to non-Deaf<sup>20</sup> individuals over the age of 18. Consistent with a qualitative approach, the intention here was not to produce a representative sample, but to examine as wide a range of auralities in the home as possible. As Valentine (2005) argues, achieving a demographic balance is not necessarily a central concern when conducting in-depth qualitative research. Instead, the focus is on understanding how people “experience and make sense of their own lives”, rather than seeking representative narratives of a population as a whole (valentine 2001 111).

Setting the age limit of participants to 18 years old or over was dictated by two main issues: the types of experiences that I wanted to ask about; and how the identity project within the home space is reinforced and/or disrupted by sound and noise. First, while I’m sure children could offer some valuable insights into the experience of abject and taboo noises, conducting interviews that covered topics such as sexual activity and domestic violence with children presented ethical issues that would have been difficult to address. For instance, broaching the topic of domestic violence with children in their home may make them feel quite uncomfortable, particularly if they are experiencing domestic violence. The risk of harm to participants in this instance was felt to be too great.

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<sup>20</sup> I use the term non-Deaf here to disrupt the binary that sets disabled people up as different and ‘lacking’ compared to ‘able-bodied’. The capital ‘D’ emerged from the self-determination movement of the Deaf community as a marker to assert their distinct culture. Deaf people were not sought for this research as the intention was to examine the effects of hearing and listening to abject noise on the ‘homebody’. While having a relationship to noise, including members of the Deaf community would affect an entirely different set of research concerns. Further, authors such as Rodaway (1994) use examples of disabled experience to highlight the role of the senses in the production of space and place, and I feel that in doing so, this tends to reinforce difference regarding disabled/non-disabled binaries.

Second, children and young people tend to have very little autonomy in the home, and it is often the adults within the domestic sphere who attempt to determine how sound and noise is 'supposed' to be managed. Yet to master (and internalise) the self-disciplining behaviours expected of adults (Elias 1978[1939]; Holloway and Valentine 2000), children's production and experience of sound and noise is most-often controlled by adults. As such, exploring the ways that children negotiate noise in the home would perhaps provide little as far as understanding the ways awareness of being heard, or hearing other people, influences how people behave. I do not mean to suggest that the power governing children's negotiations of aurality in the home is linear and straightforward. Nor do I suggest that children do not contribute to the production of home, or that children arbitrarily have no self-discipline in matters of aurality. Rather, I merely wish to make the point that children are subject to a different set of sensuous and spatial relations than adults.

Even though I set out to interview only those over the age of 18, the two children of one of the couples that participated were present during the interview. At the beginning of the interview, I reiterated that questions relating to 'taboo' subjects would be addressed, and asked whether this was going to be a problem with the children (aged seven and four) present. Both parents were comfortable with discussing intimate questions with their children in the room. Initially, this placed me in a position where I was forced to rethink my approach to this particular interview. I was quite uncomfortable about broaching some of the topics I wished to discuss in the presence of children. On the one hand, I worried that having to avoid asking certain questions would result in an interview that was absent of 'deep' insights. On the other hand, it felt

presumptuous for me to say what was appropriate or not in someone else's home. My concerns proved unfounded and the presence of the children actually contributed to, rather than reduced, the amount and quality of information that was shared. Having the children present also provided an insight into the moral economy of their home. Within the context of the interview, topics such as sexual activity were no more affected than discussing the disciplining of the children when they were 'noisy'. The same level of caution that adults tend to use when discussing intimate issues in the presence of children was exercised (such as the use of euphemisms), but this did not unduly affect the interview.

### **Recruiting Individuals, Couples, and a Key Informant**

Due to the relatively open demographic scope, I chose to focus on the experience of auralty within domicile spaces to help keep the project manageable. I felt there was a risk that no meaningful inferences would be able to be drawn from the resulting data in the absence of some form of spatial 'boundary'. In a related sense, I had also intended to draw on participants from within Hamilton City only, but soon after I started conducting interviews it became apparent that such a limitation was inconsistent with the theoretical and methodological foundations that inform this thesis.

Social relations do not happen in isolation and interactions in the home are embedded in broader multi-scalar networks (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Davidson and Milligan 2004; Gorman-Murray 2012; Grosz 1997). Even though my questions expressly focused on domicile spaces, participants often contextualised their experiences of noise in their current home by drawing on

examples from work spaces, shopping spaces, and also homes that they had previously lived in outside the Hamilton City boundary. For these reasons, the four participants who contacted me who lived exclusively outside of Hamilton City at the time that they were interviewed (three of whom lived within a 45 minute drive of Hamilton and one lived in Wellington) were included in this research. One further participant shared time between Hamilton and Auckland.

Print news articles, posters put up around the University of Waikato campus, and snowballing were used to recruit participants. In total, 20 individuals, four couples, and one key informant were interviewed. Snowballing utilised my direct and extended social networks and was responsible for the recruitment of 13 participants. Of these participants, 12 were people who I was previously acquainted with, and one I had never met. Nine people got involved as a result of newspaper articles (Appendix 2), eight of whom I had never met and one who was an acquaintance. The remaining six participants responded as a result of posters (Appendix 3), three of which I had never met and three of which I had been previously acquainted. Recruitment of the key informant from the Hamilton City Council involved direct contact via telephone and email.

The effects of interviewing 12 people who I knew prior to conducting this research was considered carefully. While I had not intentionally set out to do so, the majority of participants are Pākehā<sup>21</sup> by decent. This must be considered when reviewing the conclusion reached throughout this thesis. This approach to recruiting, however, did not necessarily result in a 'homogenous' cohort. As alluded to earlier, I have a very fluid identity and this has me encountering

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<sup>21</sup> Pākehā is the Māori term for anyone of European descent.

people from all walks of life. This was reflected in the people that I knew previously that participated in the research. Vegans, vegetarians, staunch meat eaters, keen drinkers, teetotallers, right and left leaning voters, unemployed electrical engineers, journalists, thespians, counsellors, students, and an army cadet are but some of the identities that were represented within the people that I knew prior.

Regardless of whether I knew participants or not, care was taken to not be overly sympathetic to anyone, and as mentioned earlier, I often played 'devil's advocate' to help tease out issues and to temper the effect of participants knowing me. My positionality was drawn and sometimes this aligned with those that I knew in equal measure with those that I didn't. This was also true for having my position challenged/disagreed with. Knowing some of the participants prior to writing this thesis also served to focus more deeply with the questions at hand absent of issues that may have arisen from having to account for perspectives from multiple cultures. Indeed, having to account for differences in world views between Māori and Pākehā for instance would have represented a very different project. Such a project I believe would be valuable for enriching understandings of the politics of sensing and emotions and is worthy of attention.

A major benefit of knowing participants is that I felt more comfortable broaching sensitive topics with those that I knew and this helped to 'dig deeper' in more meaningful ways. This was particularly true for the pilot interview, where previous knowledge of each other made it easier to broach 'sensitive' topics. For instance, broaching topics such as masturbation felt easier with people I

knew and this allowed me focus on the interview more intently than with those that I had not met before. In the case of the pilot interview, it also meant the participants felt less inhibited to interject if something didn't work properly and this helped to refine my questions and approach for subsequent interviews.

The initial goal was to conduct 25 interviews in total, although I remained open to recruiting more participants if needed. This figure was informed by my prior experience of transcribing audio recordings, where one hour of interview time represented four hours of transcribing. In the case of couple and focus group interviews, colleagues warned that this can be even more time consuming. As I expected each interview to run for at least 60 minutes, I felt 100 hours of transcribing time was a manageable amount, while still providing enough data upon which to base my research. The motivation to employ individual, couple, and focus group interviews was informed by the desire to explore not only the personal accounts of sensuous and emotional experiences of home, but also the dynamics between people in relation to how they negotiate issues relating to sound and noise in the home.

The preferred outcome was to conduct between three and six couple interviews, and up to three focus group interviews, each comprised of all the members of a household. Focus groups struck me as an appropriate in-road to access the potential differences between self-reported behaviour and how we are perceived by others. As David Conradson (2005 131-132) states, focus groups offer rich possibilities for exploring the "gap between what people say and what they do". This approach is particularly relevant to this research due to the often tacit and the 'taboo' elements of aural experience.

Attempts to recruit focus groups were not successful. This may speak to the fact that discussing the challenges posed by noisy flatmates/friends while they are present proved to be too daunting a prospect. The reason for this belief emerged during the interview process and was based on the reflections of a number of interviewees. When I asked Josh (21, male) about whether he was able to broach the subject with the perpetrators of a series of particularly noisy incidents he experienced while living in a University Halls of Residence, he said:

Josh: *No, well we didn't. Well, I mean that's interesting isn't it? Cos sex is a touchy topic. You wouldn't bring it up over the dinner would you really? "Oooh, I heard you and \_\_\_\_\_ um" [laughs]. "So how's life? Life's good. I meant the sex life" [laughs]. Um, yeah, no, we never really brought [it up], we tolerated the noise.*<sup>22</sup>

While I was not able to explore the tensions between self-disclosure and the perceptions of others in a larger group, these tensions did emerge within the three couples interviews that I conducted. Valentine's (1999: 68) work on conducting household research advocates for the utility of engaging couples as a means to garner insights into the power relations within the household that would otherwise "be difficult to identify in a one-to-one interview." Engaging a couple in an interview setting offers the opportunity to not only generate material on research topics, but also to explore the dynamics of household relations through observing how couples corroborate, or undermine, each other's statements. Being able to listen to how participants "challenge or modify

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<sup>22</sup> Interview notation: / interrupted, // overlapping speech, [ ] interviewer notation, \_\_\_\_\_ name omitted for confidentiality, ... speech trails off, bold text denotes participant emphasis.

each other's accounts" (Valentine 1999 69) is key to researching abject and taboo noises due to the influences that discourses of shame and embarrassment can have.

Valentine (1999) also argues that interviewing household members separately is a useful strategy for accessing how power dynamics are negotiated within the home. Unlike joint couple interviews, separate interviews offer more 'privacy' and therefore, the opportunity for participants to feel more at-ease to divulge secrets that other members of the household may not be aware of (Valentine 1999). I problematise 'privacy' here as while other parties might be absent during the interview, this does not guarantee that their comments would remain secret. Valentine (1999) usefully cautions researchers of the power-laden and ethical issues that can arise through conducting couple interviews. For two of the interviews that Morrison (2010) conducted in her research on heterosexual couples, the male partner was absent. In both cases, Morrison (2010 83) suggests that she:

heard a great deal more about the personal lives of these two men than I did from the men who participated. This is not to imply that the men who participated were unable to effectively articulate their own lives, experiences and emotions. Rather, it suggests that the men who decided not to be involved and their subsequent absence at the interview seemed to give their partners the space and freedom to talk more openly about them and their lives together.

Their absence did not mean the men were absent from discussion, which raises ethical issues that must be considered, particularly when it comes to reporting information that the other partner may not be aware of. Such concerns guided

my approach in the case of the individual interviews with a mother (Pippa, 39, female), and son (Mitchell, 18, male), who lived in the same house. Pippa and Mitchell were informed that their comments may be included in my thesis, and they were reminded of their right to withdraw any statement that they made. Neither felt the need to 'censor' their interviews, and both Pippa and Mitchell expressed curiosity as to what the other would say about them. The three couple interviews, combined with Pippa and Mitchell's individual interviews, provided a number of opportunities to compare and contrast the differences in perceptions and experiences within a household. For these reasons, I was satisfied that the absence of a larger focus group did not unduly affect the intended research outcomes of this project. Table 4.1 on the following page lists the details of the participants who were interviewed.

During the recruiting phase of the research, a number of participants relayed experiences of calling noise control to deal with noisy neighbours. To help inform questions around such matters, the participation of the environmental services manager, who oversees noise control at the Hamilton City Council (HCC), was sought.<sup>23</sup> My primary motivation for wanting to interview the environmental services manager was to gain a better understanding of central issues relating to the HCC's management of urban noise so that I could compare and contrast official policy concerns with those of the research

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<sup>23</sup> This avenue proved fruitful in an unexpected way, even before contact was made with the environmental services manager. During a conversation with the general manager of city planning and environmental services, mention was made of anecdotal evidence that suggested noise complaints were more prevalent around the time of the full moon. This was not the first time I had encountered such an opinion during a research project. In an interview conducted during my Masters research (Beere 2007), Inspector Leo Tooman, head of the Waikato region's highway patrol for the New Zealand Police, mentioned that officers generally anticipated more problems around the full moon. It struck me that these accounts spoke to an embodied affect, whereby the moon can potentially influence our behaviour on an affectual, pre-cognitive level. While this at first may seem far-fetched, the conviction by which anecdotal accounts were expressed suggested that this is worthy of further investigation.

participants, thereby enriching findings. As with the individual and couple interviews, it was deemed that a semi-structured approach was the most appropriate as I wanted to provide scope for as broad a range of issues to be discussed as possible.

NAME	AGE	SEX	OCCUPATION	INDIVIDUAL INCOME	TYPE OF HOME	BEDROOMS	BATHROOMS	RESIDENTS	LIVING ARRANGEMENTS	TIME AT RESIDENCE
Echo	36	Female	Lecturer/Storyteller/ Teacher/Student	\$25,000-\$35,000	Unattached House	3	1	2	Couple	7.5 years
Frank	36	Male	Musician/Sound Engineer	<\$25,000	Unattached House	3	1	2	Couple	14 Months
Pippa	39	Female	Mother/Student/Project Manager/Arts Volunteer	Not Supplied	Unattached House	3 + Rumpus / Bedroom	1	6	Single parent family with one boarder	1 year
Patricia	74	Female	Retired	<\$25,000	Unattached Unit	3	1	2	Couple	28 years
Rob	77	Male	Retired	<\$25,000	Unattached Unit	3	1	2	Couple	28 years
Sheryl	46	Female	Travel Administrator	\$35,001-\$45,000	Unattached Unit	2	1	1	Lives alone	2 years 4 months
Carol	56	Female	Teacher	\$25,000-\$35,000	Attached Unit (6)	2	1	2	Single parent with one 14 year old	2 years 4 months
Ron	78	Male	Retired	\$25,000-\$35,000	Unattached Unit	4	2	2	Couple	12 years
Richard	63	Male	Editor	<\$25,000	Attached Unit (5)	2	1	1	Lives alone	3 years
Jane	50	Female	Unemployed/Musician	<\$25,000	Attached Unit (10)	1	1	1	Lives alone	20 years
Dave	36	Male	Unemployed	<\$25,000	Unattached House	7	2	8	One couple, one brother and sister from Bombay, rest single. Aged between 20-39	1 year 6 months
Joe	39	Male	Tutor	Not Supplied	Unattached House	2	1	2	Flatmates	Not Supplied
Sue	66	Female	Customer Service/NZ Post/KiwiBank	\$25,000-\$35,000	Unattached House	3	1	2	Couple	2 years
Mitchell	18	Male	Not Answered	<\$25,000	Unattached House	3 + Rumpus / Bedroom	1	6	Family home and boarder	1 year
Karen	19	Female	Student	<\$25,000	Attached Unit (6)	3	3	4	Flatting (one couple + two singles)	4 months
Toni	32	Female	University Tutor	<\$25,000	Unattached House	4	1	4	Flat	3 years
Barbara	40	Female	Student	<\$25,000	Unattached House	5	2	6	Family with three boarders	8 months
Hannah	25	Female	Student/Counsellor	\$25,000-\$35,000	Unattached House (Ham), Semi-attached unit (AK 3)	4 (Ham), 2 (AK)	2 (Ham), 1 (AK)	5 (Ham), 2 (AK)	Flatting (with family two days a week Ham), couple (AK)	10 months (Ham, AK)
Judy	22	Female	Student	<\$25,000	Attached Unit (6)	2	1	2	Couple	4 months
Art	26	Male	Student	<\$25,000	Attached Unit (6)	2	1	2	Couple	4 months
Matt	29	Male	Beneficiary	<\$25,000	Attached Unit (4)	1	1	1	Lives alone	1 year
Peter	33	Male	Marketing	\$35,001-\$45,000	Unattached House	3	1	1	Flat	3 years
Denise	41	Female	Tertiary Academic	>\$65,000	Unattached House	3	1	3	Couple with one child (de facto heterosexual)	3 years
Susie	19	Female	Student	<\$25,000	Semi-attached House	5	4	4	Flat with three other girls	4 months
Josh	21	Male	Student/Tutor	<\$25,000	Attached Unit (8)	3	1	3	Flat	4 months
Sandra	46	Female	Teacher	>\$65,000	Unattached House	2	1	2	Couple	1 year
Sarah	36	Female	Mother	<\$25,000	Unattached House	3	1	4	Family home	2 years 10 months
Jeff	36	Male	Journalist	\$45,000-\$55,000	Unattached House	3	1	4	It's my missus, me and the kids in our whare (mortgage)	2 years 10 months

**Table 4.1: List of interviewees. Pseudonym used for some participants**

Employing a key informant approach is deemed appropriate for this research as key informant interviews can help to access a particular understanding or interpretation of a given cultural situation that would otherwise be unavailable to the researcher (Gilchrist and Williams 1999). A list of themes was drawn on to guide the interview (Appendix 4). The environmental services manager was also the person responsible for keeping records of noise complaints made in Hamilton, a dataset that I hoped to access for this project (see Appendix 1 and Chapter Five).

### **The Interview Process: Testing the Approach**

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, one of the main challenges I faced was how to get people to reflect on the often taken-for-granted and/or taboo aspects of aural experience. To test the efficacy of my approach, and to determine where improvements needed to be made, I arranged to conduct one pilot interview with Echo (36, female) and her partner Frank (36, male). Both agreed to allow the scope of the interview be 'open' so that any methodological issues that arose for either myself, or Echo and Frank, could be addressed if and when they arose. I approached Echo in the first instance as I have known her for approximately 15 years and knew she would feel comfortable giving critical feedback if she was unsure, or had questions about the interview process. Another important advantage for me as a researcher to enlist a familiar person's help relates to the abject and taboo themes that I wanted to address. Attentive to the concerns raised by Lee and Renzetti (1990) and Foss (2007) surrounding sensitive topics/interviews, I felt this was a good way to sound out how to approach discussion on sex, bathroom/toilet, and violence noises.

A week before, and immediately prior to the interview, I reiterated to Echo and Frank that if they had any doubts about the tasks that they were undertaking, or the questions that were asked, they could interrupt at any stage. Once Echo and Frank had confirmed that they had read the information sheet (Appendix 5), we organised a time to conduct an interview in their home. Drawing on the work of Nicola Wood *et al.* (2007), I hoped to be able to interview people in their homes in order to gain access to the often ineffable and tacit aspects of aurality and how this relates to the construction of identity.

In their critical engagement with approaches to understanding geographies of music, Wood *et al.* (2007 698) focus on the “being and doing” to understand how sonorous experience locates identities in places and spaces. The value of ‘being there’, as Wood *et al.* (2007) and Smith (2001) argue, is that interviewing people within the socio-spatial context which is being discussed helps to avoid descriptive ‘representations’. This approach offers potentially better access to the nonrepresentational aspects of sensuous experience. Nonrepresentational in this context refers to the destabilising of the epistemological priority given to representations and instead refocuses attention on practices and performances; the “corporeal, affective, and unwritable dimensions of existence” (Kwan 2007 23).

This process involves not only ‘deep listening’ and participating in the spaces where meaning is made, but also the observation of visual aspects of place and space as well. Therefore, the term participant observation becomes limited and inaccurate. Engaging space in this manner is best understood as a process of *participant sensing* (Wood *et al.* 2007; Wood and Smith 2004). Further, in the

case of participant observation, Eric Laurier (2003 135) argues, “the best participant observation is generally done by those who have been involved in and tried to do and/or be a part of the things that they are observing.” By positioning the production of knowledge as a process of “knowing through doing” (Smith 2001 32), I hoped that the taken-for-granted aspects of aural experience (see Schafer 1994) would come to the fore in ways that self-reporting may not access.

For these reasons, every attempt was made to interview people in their homes. Participants were given the choice as to where they preferred to be interviewed. At their discretion, I asked participants to give me a tour of their home, so that I could better understand the contexts in which they were discussing their experiences. During the tour, I paid attention to internal and external ambient sounds, the physical structure, building materials, where the home was in relation to its surroundings, where the rooms were in relation to each other, and the ways in which participants reflected on their relationship to each room. During the interviews, I remained attentive to sounds and noises as they occurred. I also prompted interviewees to be aware of environmental sounds during the interview. Respondent evaluations of those sounds were noted, and I also made a note of my own value judgements. When I transcribed the interviews, environmental sounds were annotated. Often, rich discussion was prompted by remaining attuned to environmental sounds and noises. In some cases, like during the couple interview with Patricia (74, female) and Rob (77), the presence of noises interrupted particular lines of enquiry. This distraction led on to a fruitful discussion of personal tolerances and sensitivities to noise:

Rob                    *Where's that coming from?*

Patricia:            *Can you hear it?*

Paul:                 *Yeah, I can hear it.*

Patricia:            *That's the yellow house. I think.*

Paul:                 *See, that's right on the threshold, depending on what I'm doing, that's right on the threshold of what I would, if I was trying to do something/*

Patricia:            */No, I couldn't. If I'm trying to concentrate, that, it's alright for a little while, and then eventually it sort of eats into you.*

Compared to the interviews that took place in an office at the University of Waikato, the degree of context that came with engaging participants in their homes made the interview process much richer. Sensing reactions to environmental sounds as they happened gave useful insights into the performative experiences of participants.

One issue that arose in taking this approach was that the mental gymnastics required to focus on aural stimuli as it occurred, whilst also listening to the responses to questions, proved difficult at times. As Wood and Smith (2004) attest, it is difficult to be simultaneously the researcher and to 'be in' the emotional economy of the environment being researched. The intention, however, is not to engage in futile and disingenuous attempts to achieve a 'god's eye view'. Rather, the aim here is to "acknowledge (and use) our position(s) as sensing, participant observers in order to gain a *partial* insight into what is 'becoming'" (Wood *et al.* 2007 878 emphasis in original).

Echo and Frank chose the lounge room floor as the space that they wished to be interviewed in. Once we had settled into the interview space, I got Echo and

Frank to read and sign a consent form that outlined their rights (Appendix 6), and to fill out a respondent information sheet (Appendix 7). Prior to asking questions, I chose to use a warm-up exercise to assist in stimulating discussion on aspects of aurality, and as a means to bridge discussion relating to intimate sounds and noises. An A3 sized worksheet was developed, comprising two parts: a checklist of sounds and noises to evaluate; and a space for participants to sketch a map of their home (Appendix 8). The checklist exercise was designed to prompt Echo and Frank to assess their perceptions of sounds and noises on the list, and to record these on a matrix with the level of annoyance/enjoyment on one axis, and the degree of awareness on the other. Following the assessment of the list, I asked Echo and Frank to sketch the floor plan of their home in order to 'locate' sound and noise in the home, and to get them to think spatially about their experiences.

In relation to the first part of the warm-up exercise, running through a list of sounds and noises was a useful way to both broach sensitive topics, and to stimulate debate. Broaching sensitive topics in this way allowed me to gauge reactions to particular sounds/noises, which helped guide my approach to discussing certain topics later in the interviews. As Elaine Ho (2008) indicates, although researchers gain access to lived experiences through *expressed* narratives, silences and absences also provide information and often indicate tacit resistances to the research agenda. Further, listening for absences is a useful way to assess a participant's boundaries of comfort and safety. Being attentive to verbal quips, laughter, and body language, all served as cues that assisted me to gauge how to approach the abject and taboo aspects of the

interview, and to assess the self-censorship practices of participants during my fieldwork process.

Observing non-verbal cues such as fidgeting, laughter, verbal qualifiers, and hesitation and reticence when inquiring into topics that are deemed to be potentially 'threatening' is essential if a researcher wishes to avoid 'self-censored' omissions by study participants (Ho 2008). Attending to such non-verbal cues, as Ho (2008 493) states, provides richer opportunities to explore the tacit elements of experience, and to "understand the broader societal processes and structures producing self-censorship." Such concerns are relevant to this research in that abjection is governed by complex rules and regulations, which for the most part affect a silencing of matters such as sex noises, toileting noises, and domestic violence noises.

Therefore, being attentive to the possibilities of self-censorship is of utmost importance when engaging with the abject. As stated in Chapter Three, power is cyclic and flows through externalised discourses and internalised self-disciplining behaviour. Kristeva's (1982) thesis demonstrates that the ability of the abject to affect behaviour is formidable, and I draw on Ho's (2008) example to help gain access to taboo and often deeply personal matters. Ho (2008 491) follows feminist poststructural critiques of positivist, objective 'truths', and argues that attention must be paid "to the way power dynamics operate in diffuse ways and at different scales". Remaining attuned to the potential for self-censorship, as Ho (2008) urges, was valuable in that it helped me as a researcher to listen for what may be silenced, and to be ready to 'dig deeper' if and when it was appropriate to do so.

Working through the list of sounds and noises, starting with banal sounds and moving towards more 'sensitive' noises proved to be an extremely useful means to access a full spectrum of aural experiences. This approach was as much about minimising risk to participants as it was about helping me to feel comfortable about accessing such intimate details. The safety net that the warm-up exercise provided allowed me to feel more at-ease, thus improving my ability to focus during the interviews. When abject and taboo topics came up, I took the opportunity to remind participants they were under no obligation to answer questions or to continue the interview. In many instances, rich discussion about taboo subjects or topics that had not previously occurred to Echo and Frank (and to participants in subsequent interviews) was stimulated directly from the process of working through the list.

After completing the first part of the warm-up exercise sheet with Echo and Frank, their feedback made me aware that the matrix grid (Appendix 8) proved too complex and difficult to interpret. Both Echo and Frank mentioned that they would have preferred a much more simple assessment recording method. As a result, a second version of the worksheet was developed (Appendix 9), which only required participants to record whether they experienced sounds on the list as "positive", "both positive and negative", or "negative".

At first, I was concerned that this type of forced response would be overly simplistic. Assessing and 'fitting' sounds and noise into just three categories did not allow for temporal or spatial variance, and there was no differentiation regarding where the sound was coming from. To achieve that level of detail would have required a relatively complex array of options that would have been

too complicated for a warm-up exercise. The forced response nature was explicitly mentioned by Joe as being problematic, but for every interview, the process of negotiating around the three fixed categories provided opportunities for teasing out issues, which often inspired further discussion.

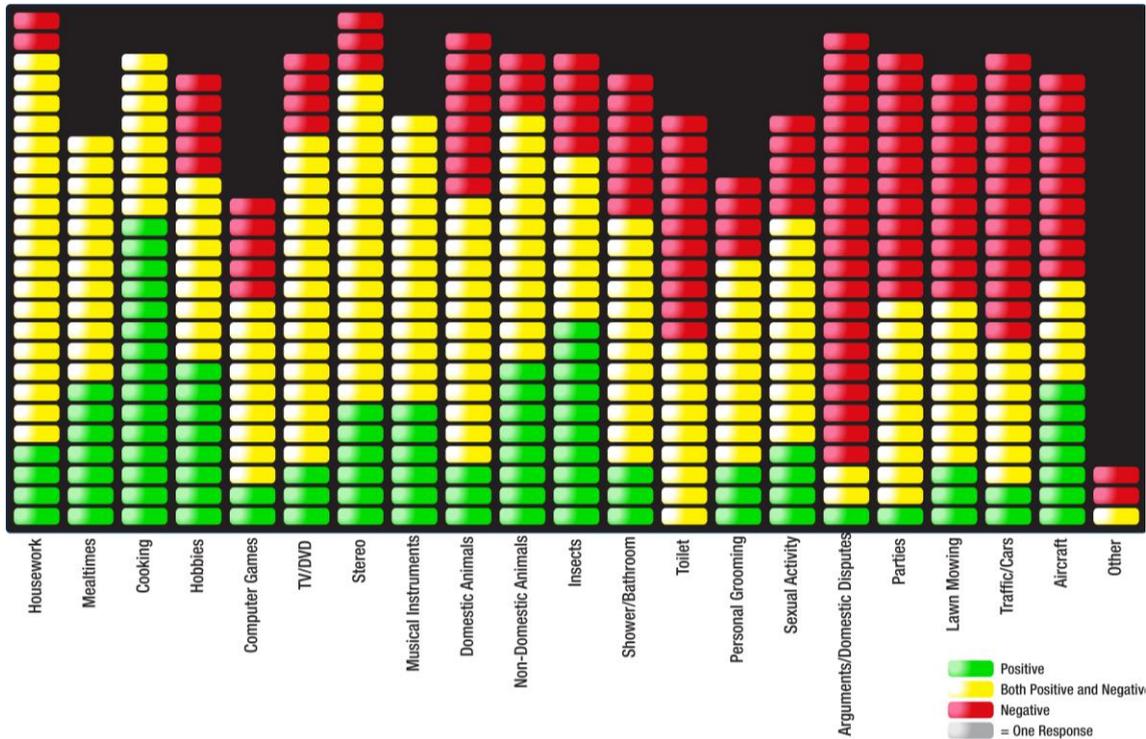


Figure 4.1: Responses to interview warm-up exercise

By example, when Richard (63, male) was assessing sounds relating to non-domestic animals (both positive and negative), it initiated a discussion about the different ways his dog barking was received by his neighbours, and the broader context of him in relation to his neighbourhood. In some cases, the noise of Richard’s dog was annoying (negative). At the same time, Richard’s dog gave an ‘early warning’ that someone was coming down the driveway and in such cases, the barking was heard as positive by his neighbours. The challenge of trying to ‘fit’ responses into one of three options directly stimulated discussion. When Denise (41, female) was working through the list, she commented that

her response was not fixed and varied depending on her emotional state. This led to me introducing, and teasing out a comment from a prior interview, where Pippa had mentioned that her sensitivity to noise varied during her menstrual cycle.

Feedback on the warm-up exercise was almost exclusively positive, and the benefits of using fixed/forced response categories to bridge the discussion of intimate sounds proved to be a worthwhile asset to data collection. I was aware that providing a list of prompts in this manner may have forced responses that may not have already existed. The potential for the list that I provided to define the entire scope of discussion was also a concern that I felt needed attention. To help avoid the warm-up exercise limiting what was talked about, I made a point of telling participants that the list was far from exhaustive, and they were welcome to add or subtract from the list as they saw fit. During the pilot and subsequent interviews, it was clear that my concerns were unfounded, and participants engaged with the list in a manner that suited them. The benefits of this approach outweighed the potentially negative impacts, and almost all participants mentioned that they found this part of the warm-up exercise useful.

Once the list exercise had been completed, I gave Echo and Frank the option to draw a sketch of their home (Figure 4.2 and Figure 6.2 respectively), which they could annotate with sounds and noises in the places where they were experienced. It was hoped that by conducting the list exercise first, participants would then have more to reflect on in relation to their spatial experiences of aurality in their homes. This was also included as part of the methodology as I expected that some interviews would not be conducted in the homes of

participants. Having a visual cue to work from was intended to provide more context for me as the researcher, and as a point of focus for participants as well. All participants who were not interviewed in their homes provided sketches, two of which had been prepared prior the interview.

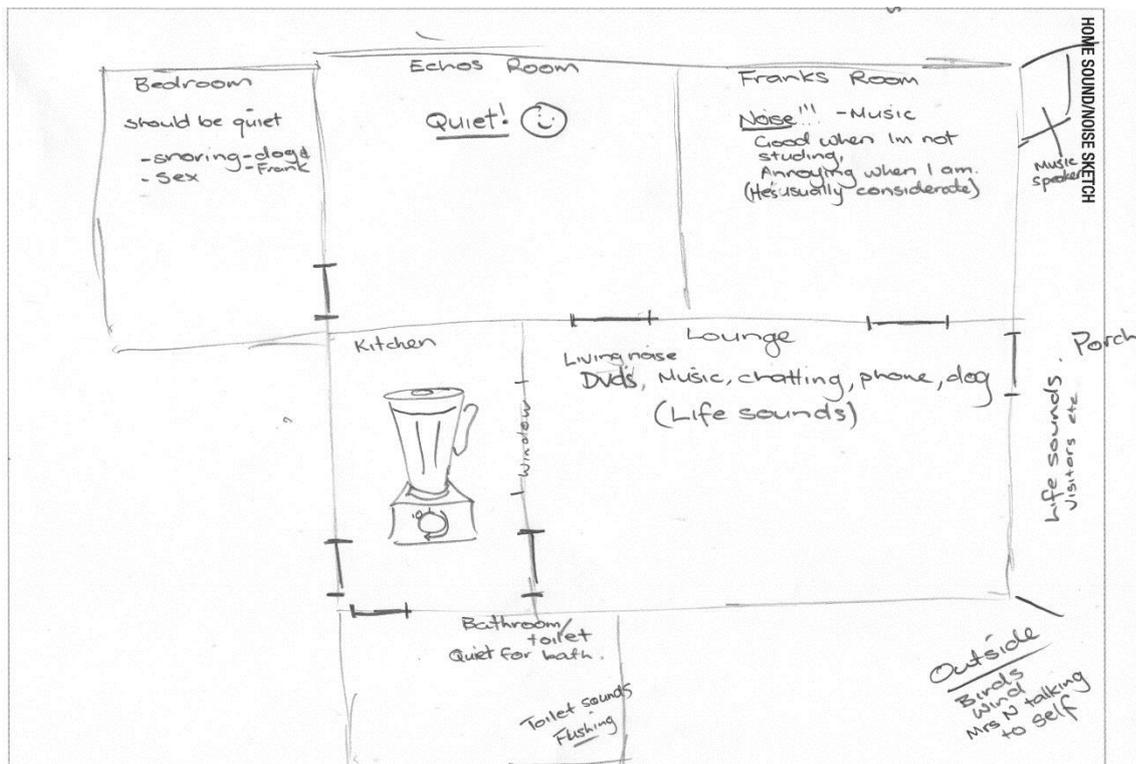


Figure 4.2: Echo's floor plan sketch

### The Interview Process: Themes and Questions

Twenty two participants were interviewed in their homes and the remaining five were interviewed in a study room in the Geography Programme building at the University of Waikato. For the interviews that took place in participant's homes, 11 were conducted in the lounge, and the rest were at the kitchen table. Participants were given the choice as to where they felt most comfortable doing the interview as I wanted participants to 'own' the interview as much as possible. At the table, I was able to watch them fill in the form and make

comments along the way. If we sat in the lounge, the floor plan sketch tended to be completed in silence due to the spatial separation of the seating arrangement. Either way, a sketch was an asset to the interview as, in every case, participants referred to their drawing during the interview. Twelve participants did not complete a sketch of their home, either because they were not comfortable with their drawing skills, or time constraints meant that this step was skipped.

To ensure that participants were fully aware of the types of subjects that were likely to be discussed, an information sheet was sent out to participants to read prior to the interview (Appendix 5). At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked to confirm that they had received and understood the details in the information sheet prior to starting the interview. When any issues that may have arisen from the information sheet had been addressed, I took the opportunity to reiterate that they had the right to ask questions at any stage during the research, and that they had the right to withdraw from the research.

I had intended on sending the warm-up exercise worksheets out prior to the interviews so that participants would have a chance to reflect on topics raised before being asked questions. The rationale for this approach was to avoid a situation that Tracey Bedford and Jacquie Burgess (2001) highlight, where respondents may feel disempowered if they do not have an answer. Given the level of explanation involved, and the opportunity to sense participant reactions that 'being there' would afford, I decided it would be more constructive to conduct the worksheet exercises at the beginning of the interview. During the pilot interview that I conducted, it became clear that doing the worksheet

exercise immediately prior to the interviews was the most prudent approach. In almost every case, rich discussion was stimulated from working through the worksheet with participants.

A list of questions was developed to serve as prompts or “hangers” (Valentine 2005 119). The central themes of sovereignty (corporeal sovereignty and sovereignty of the home), controllable/uncontrollable (voluntary/involuntary sounds), public/private (within the home/the home in context with its surrounds), and discipline (self-discipline and the disciplining of others) that emerged from the literature that I reviewed for this thesis served as the basis for what I was listening for during interviews (Appendix 10). Consistent with a semi-structured, in-depth interview approach, questions were not followed in a strict order to allow the interview to be as conversational as possible. Often, topics relating to specific prompt questions were raised during the worksheet exercise and were addressed at the time.

Following any initial discussion prompted by the worksheet exercise, participants were first asked about which sounds they like and which sounds they dislike in their homes. These factual, descriptive questions were chosen to ease participants into the interview. This approach makes it much easier to establish a rapport with interviewees, compared to leading with potentially threatening questions (Valentine 2005). As well as helping to warm participants into the interview, these two questions served to indicate which issues were key for participants, and therefore, what topics would be useful to follow up on later.

To help establish a rapport, and to minimise the unequal researcher/researched power dynamic, at this point in the interviews I made a point of explicitly stating that participants were the experts on their own lives. This approach is consistent with qualitative methodologies, where “the relevance and importance of ‘lay’ or ‘folk’ perspectives on the practices of everyday life” is valorised (Smith 2001 25). Reinforcing the notion of ‘participant as expert’ was particularly important to this research as I was aware that my intention to use self-disclosure may sway responses to mirror my own opinions. Even though my self-disclosed positionality would contribute to the interview, I took care to remind participants that my part in the conversation was to listen, and that there were no wrong or right answers.

As I wanted to explore potentially threatening topics in a non-threatening interview environment, questions focused on the spatial aspects of experience, rather than specific sounds and noises. For instance, participants were asked about the places in which they were most aware of being heard. This way, if they were comfortable discussing intimate subjects, the scope was there for them to do so. This seemed more appropriate than asking whether people were concerned about being overheard having sex for instance. As well as being attentive to what was being said, awareness of body language and utterances was critical at this stage. When one participant mentioned she was conscious of being overheard in her bedroom, the whimsical laugh that she uttered suggested the issue was not particularly threatening to her:

Paul: *Um, so what places, when you're in your home, what places are you most aware of being heard?*

Toni: *Bed. In my bed.*

Paul: *When you're in your bed?*

Toni: *And in, on the toilet. That would be it.*

Paul: *So that's what, snoring, when you're sleeping?*

Toni: *Um, [laughs], no. No, I don't think I snore particularly loud. But that's the time that I would be embarrassed if I was heard. So generally, being around making noise doesn't bother me but if I'm in bed making noise then I'd prefer not to be heard.*

Paul: *And those noises would be associated with?*

Toni: *[Laughs] Um, either someone else being there, or only me being there [laughs].*

By bringing up snoring, I had provided a space for Toni to back out of what may have been a threatening topic. Together with the laugh that she uttered at the mention of snoring, her body language indicated that she was referring to sounds that were more than just banal. This led directly to an insightful discussion on negotiating masturbation in the context of a flatting environment.

During three interviews, participants asked for the recording device to be stopped periodically. In all three cases, participants wished to share information, but did not wish to have this information on record. As a result, I am satisfied that the ethical guidelines followed during this research ensured that participants did not feel pressured to answer questions if they did not wish to.

An ethical issue did arise during the interview with Sarah and Jeff, and this involved the direct contribution from both of the children who were present. The eldest child drew a picture that represented an interpretation of what we were discussing, and both children spoke in response to what their parents were

saying. Although I did not directly ask them questions, I wanted to access the children's contributions as they raised interesting issues relevant to the research. My ethics application submitted for this project did not contain provision for interviewing children, so my supervisor and a representative of the University of Waikato Ethics Committee were consulted to discuss the use of the children's contribution. Informed consent from the children and their parents was sought in order to be able to use their contributions, which was given in both cases.

Following Valentine (2005), I made sure to ask lighter, more relaxed questions towards the end of the interview. This worked well for the pilot interview and the benefit in doing so was immediately apparent. Echo and Frank both expressed during the 'easing out' part of the interview that they had learned things about each other that they were previously unaware of. Further, they both expressed that aspects of the interview had been like a 'counselling' session. For some participants, the interview was an emotionally intense experience, and in some cases, epiphanic:

Jane: *So, um, I think possibly her lauding it all over me with her voice came from her father [reminisces about emigrating to NZ]. So anyway, yes, Mum and her stand over, this is another case where I think, don't bring the subject up. It is not worth it. But thank you very much for, that's just an epiphany, I must write it down for \_\_\_\_\_. Oh, good God. And she has a heart of gold, but my mum, God bless her...*

## Follow-up Questionnaire

Due to the level of attention required during the interviews, I was aware that there were likely to be opportunities for elaboration that I had missed. Participants were told that they were free to contact me if they had anything further to contribute after the initial interview, either via telephone, email, or face to face interview. I also asked if it was okay for me to email any further questions if they arose, and all participants consented. One participant followed up with an email that contained information that had occurred to them after the interview. I sent three emails out to participants to seek clarification about points they had made.

During both the initial contact phase and interviews, to varying degrees, all interviewees made comments relating to their personal sensitivity levels. All participants who responded via the newspaper articles had a particular issue or issues that inspired them to participate. In this instance, there was a distinct response bias. Newspaper article respondents all appeared to have something they wanted to get off their chest. Three participants who had existing issues with noisy neighbours all expressed a sense of powerlessness and found that an unintended outcome of the interview process was a sense of relief:

Sheryl: *Oh, that was really good. I enjoyed that. It was cool.*

Paul: *I'm glad you did.*

Sheryl: *It was like good therapy [laughs]. It was great!*

Because of this apparent response bias, I felt it necessary to provide some context to the judgements and perspectives that participants were expressing. Comparing expressions of annoyance and sensitivity against an interviewee's overall noise sensitivity would help to assess the wider contexts in which noises are experienced, and the moral economy informing their perspectives. For instance, if someone identified as not sensitive in general, but was very sensitive to a particular noise such as traffic noise, this tells a different story than someone discussing traffic noise who is highly sensitive in general. To assist in providing this context, I drew on Neil Weinstein (1978) and Martin Schütte *et al.* (2007) to develop a survey questionnaire.

Using the online survey host [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), I created an internet-based questionnaire using the Weinstein Noise Sensitivity Survey (WNS) and Noise Sensitivity Questionnaire (NoiSeQ) survey. In some cases, statements from these surveys were adapted to suit my research. Questions were grouped into the themes of home, communication, sleep, leisure, and work/tasks (Appendix 11). Using a Likert's Scale, participants were asked to respond to 35 statements to reflect their understandings of their own sensitivities to noise. Participants were sent a personal email that followed up on particular issues which may have required attention from the interview, and to invite them to complete the survey. Participants were reminded that they were under no obligation to complete the survey if they did not wish to. Two open questions were included at the end of the survey to elicit feedback on participant experiences of the research process, and whether participating in the research had affected their experiences or awareness of sound and noise in their homes.

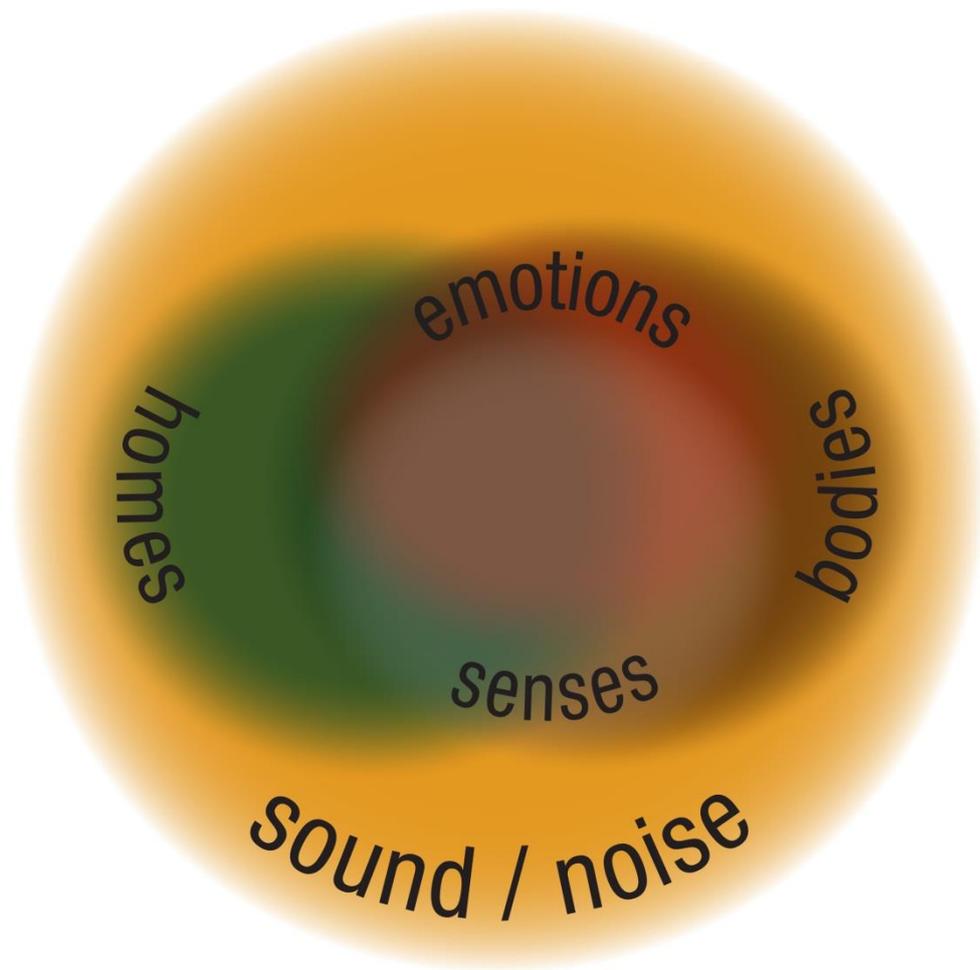
Employing a survey questionnaire proved useful as a means to enrich some of the gaps that were not addressed in during the interviews.

### **Interview Analysis: Making ‘Sense’ of the Data**

Reconfiguring understandings of space as sensuously defined is necessary when exploring the experience and negotiation of noise in the home. This is because of the way noise ignores physical and emotional boundaries. Fluid across spaces and places, noise can often be difficult to mitigate against. In addition, the concept of a bounded home cannot possibly accommodate how noise is actually experienced. In order to understand the experience of noise sensuous, engagement with the ‘homebody’ must acknowledge that the resulting overlapping trajectories across homes, bodies, senses, and emotions are fluid and unstable. The importance of weighting attention to sensuous and emotional experience cannot be overstated, as it is our senses and our emotions that put us in-place. As a researcher, however, it has been a challenge to keep track of the complexities of embodied constructions of home. I found myself, somewhat ironically, needing to visualise this complex matrix in order to better locate my ‘focus’ while locating the senses in the home. Figure 4.3 on the following page is a representation of how some of the influences being explored in this thesis come together.

Various iterations of Figure 4.3 have been a permanent fixture on my office wall throughout this research project. I include it here in order to introduce two underlying issues that came up for me while conducting this research. First, to ‘show’ how my own experience of being-in-the-world is visually biased. Visual

aids have proved extremely useful in orientating myself as a 'producer' of geographic knowledge and I continue to struggle, as Ong (1982 77) attests, to break free of visual ways of knowing.



**Figure 4.3: Conceptual framework**

Second, and perhaps more importantly, I believe such a representation draws attention to the ways in which a visual bias produces 'dead' ways of knowing. While great effort has gone into trying to represent the blurriness and leakiness of sensuous experience, any visual representation like this is fixed and stagnant. The relational connections between each shape remain constant on the page, but this does not echo the lived experience of sound. In some cases a feeling of joy or disgust invoked by sounds or noises may overshadow all other

aspects, and therefore, the space devoted to emotions would need to appear larger in such a diagram.

For this reason, shapes and text on a page can only partially accommodate the live, embedded action of sonorous experience. Although problematic, this does not completely negate the effectiveness of visual/textual representations of the sonorous world. Instead, let this serve as a reminder to researchers, and to readers of this text, that representing sensuous experience resonates with power and this in turn affects how knowledge is produced. Further, as Hosking (2008 679) reminds us, we must be attentive to the ways in which “research practices typically turn live talk into visualised and frozen words, into dead interview transcripts that can be analysed.” My intention here is not to position aurality in binary opposition to the visual, nor to usurp the dominance of the visual with the aural. Instead, I strategically focus on the ‘short-sightedness’ of visual ways of knowing in order to voice how such ‘views’ can distort the production of knowledge.

As stated previously, four main discourses emerged in the literature, and from the interviews, that related to how people negotiate noise in the home: sovereignty (corporeal sovereignty and sovereignty of the home); controllable/uncontrollable (voluntary/involuntary sounds); public/private (within the home/the home in context with its surrounds); and discipline (self-discipline and the disciplining of others). Far from distinct, these categories have a large degree of overlap and in some cases appear to be indistinguishable from each other. By example, aural sovereignty of the home is most often framed within

notions of public and private, where the ability to control noise challenges sovereignty, which in turn can raise issues relating to behavioural discipline.

In spite of the degrees of overlap, there is merit in pursuing them as individual threads, as a means to explore the ways in which they interact, to amplify specificities within each discourse, and to explore potential tensions and power relations therein. Although the four aforementioned umbrella discourses aided in how I teased out information from the interview transcripts, consistent with the theoretical and methodological framework underpinning this research I remained open to incorporating themes that I had not initially considered. I also was open to dropping themes if they did not manifest strongly through the narratives of participants.

Inspired by Vincent Peters and Fred Wester's (2006) discussion on coding qualitative data, I decided to employ Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) to manage and keep track of the coding and analysis process. CAQDAS are relatively expensive<sup>24</sup> and I chose Nvivo as I had free access through the University of Waikato. Like most CASDAQ, Nvivo provides multiple options for recording and retrieving data from text documents - from automated word search and retrieval functions to manual selection. Interview transcripts are loaded into an Nvivo project as text files, and by highlighting text it is possible to assign codes (nodes) to single words, sentences, or passages of text.

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<sup>24</sup> As of 3 April 2013, a full single license for Nvivo 10 costs NZD\$797. Cheaper options are available for students (NZD\$255), but this license expires after 12 months.

Automated functions for retrieving themes based on word or phrase searches are also possible. In choosing to use a software package such as Nvivo, I hoped that it would be a time-efficient method to assist the analysis phase of this thesis, particularly for cataloguing interrelations between codes and themes for the purposes of discourse analysis. For instance, the relative ease with which CAQDAS can manage axial coding - the comparing and contrasting of relationships between codes (Strauss and Corbin 1990) - made Nvivo appear to be a worthwhile avenue to pursue.

I chose to code blocks of text (paragraphs and passages) as I wanted to maintain a balance between keeping references to particular themes embedded within the context they were discussed, while still ensuring that passages of text were small enough to be manageable. Coding each event as discrete seemed too disembodied, impersonal, reductionist, and ultimately would have created more work by adding an extra step in the analysis process without providing any substantive/interpretive advantages.

The first phase of analysing the interview transcripts was guided by Mike Crang's (2005 222) discussion on open coding, where researchers work methodically through each line or sentence in an interview transcript, all the while "trying to think what each one meant or what was being done and why." An initial read-through of the transcripts was conducted to familiarise myself with any dominant and recurring themes, and to identify any general categories that were evident in the narratives of participants. During this open coding process, I remained alert for themes that had emerged during the literature review phase. Following Crang (2005), I also recorded *theoretical memos*

(Peters and Wester 2007) using the Memo function of Nvivo to help establish where emerging threads ‘fitted’ into the conceptual framework that was guiding my research. More specifically, I focused on what does sounds and noises ‘do’ within the bodies/homes/senses/emotions juncture (see Figure 4.3).

	WHAT CAN BE CODED	EXAMPLE
1	Behaviours, specific acts	Avoiding using the toilet
2	Events - short once in a lifetime events or things people have done that are often told as a story.	Travelling by train to the ‘big city’ as a young person
3	Activities - these are of a longer duration, involve other people within a particular setting	Organising a party and strategising how to avoid upsetting the neighbours
4	Strategies, practice or tactics	Calling noise control
5	States - general conditions experienced by people or found in organisations	Experience of noise in neighbourhoods of high deprivation
6	Meanings - A wide range of phenomena at the core of much qualitative analysis. Meanings and interpretations are important parts of what directs participant’s actions.	Hopelessness: calling the police did not help the situation with violent neighbours
	a. What concepts do participants use to understand their world? What norms, values, and rules guide their actions	It is often considered inappropriate to fart or burp in public
	b. What meaning or significance it has for participants, how do they construe events what are the feelings	Terror: I feared that my neighbour would hit me
	c. What symbols do people use to understand their situation? What names do they use for objects, events, persons, roles, setting and equipment?	The noisy neighbour is an inconsiderate asshole
7	Participation - adaptation to a new setting or involvement	Shifting into the city from a rural area was difficult to adjust to
8	Relationships or interaction	We don’t have anything to do with our neighbours, we don’t know them at all
9	Conditions or constraints	Want to live in the country, but I cannot afford to move
10	Consequences	Fear of reprisals if I complain or mention the noise
11	Settings - the entire context of the events under study	Home, work, the street, other countries
12	Reflexive - researcher’s role in the process, how intervention generated the data	Probing question: “How did you feel when he said that?”

**Table 4.2: Code types. \*Not coded for specifically in initial coding phase**

To attune myself to what to listen for when coding interview transcripts, I drew on Graham Gibbs' (2008) outline for helping to frame what types of data can be coded. Table 4.2 lists what Gibbs (2008) suggests a researcher can listen for and where possible, I have paraphrased examples from interviews in this research. Due to the broad range of disciplines that I was drawing on, thematic coding seemed to be the most appropriate way to organise narrative threads together. As Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006) argue, thematic analysis allows researchers to be theoretically flexible and it also provides the scope to apply epistemologies from multiple fields and methods. Grouping threads and streams into broader themes, rather than descriptive codes, seemed to be a better approach as I was most interested in the discourses that informed and shaped people's experiences, rather than the descriptive elements of what was being discussed.

The rationale for choosing themes was, for the most part, guided by how participants reflected on their experiences, but I also drew inspiration from the work of Gurney (2000a) and Rainer Guski (1999). Guski's (1999) four main personal traits used to examine how noise annoyance is moderated - sensitivity to noise, fear of harm connected with the source, evaluation of the source, and capacity to cope with noise - have informed the coding process. Guski's (1999) approach offers a framework that is particularly useful to this research, as a distinction is made between the factors that contribute to personal annoyance and broader collective attitudes. In this context, variables associated with personal annoyance are tightly linked to the individual, are relatively stable over time and space, and can vary considerably between individuals. Social factors relating to annoyance are linked to given situations and are shared to a

considerable degree between individuals of a society. Comparing individual experiences with more general hegemonic discourses of annoyance may offer potential inroads into the tacit aspects of negotiating noise in the home.

The distinction between the personal and the social aspects of annoyance are not clear cut, as personal annoyance is embedded in wider social discourses of annoyance (Guski 1999 48). On the one hand, the overlap may be so great that discussing them independently could be considered as redundant. On the other hand, Guski (1999) argues that there is merit in discussing them separately and his justification lies in the politicisation of annoyance. For example, collective social factors offer opportunities for discussing and influencing noise abatement policy that individual narratives may not.

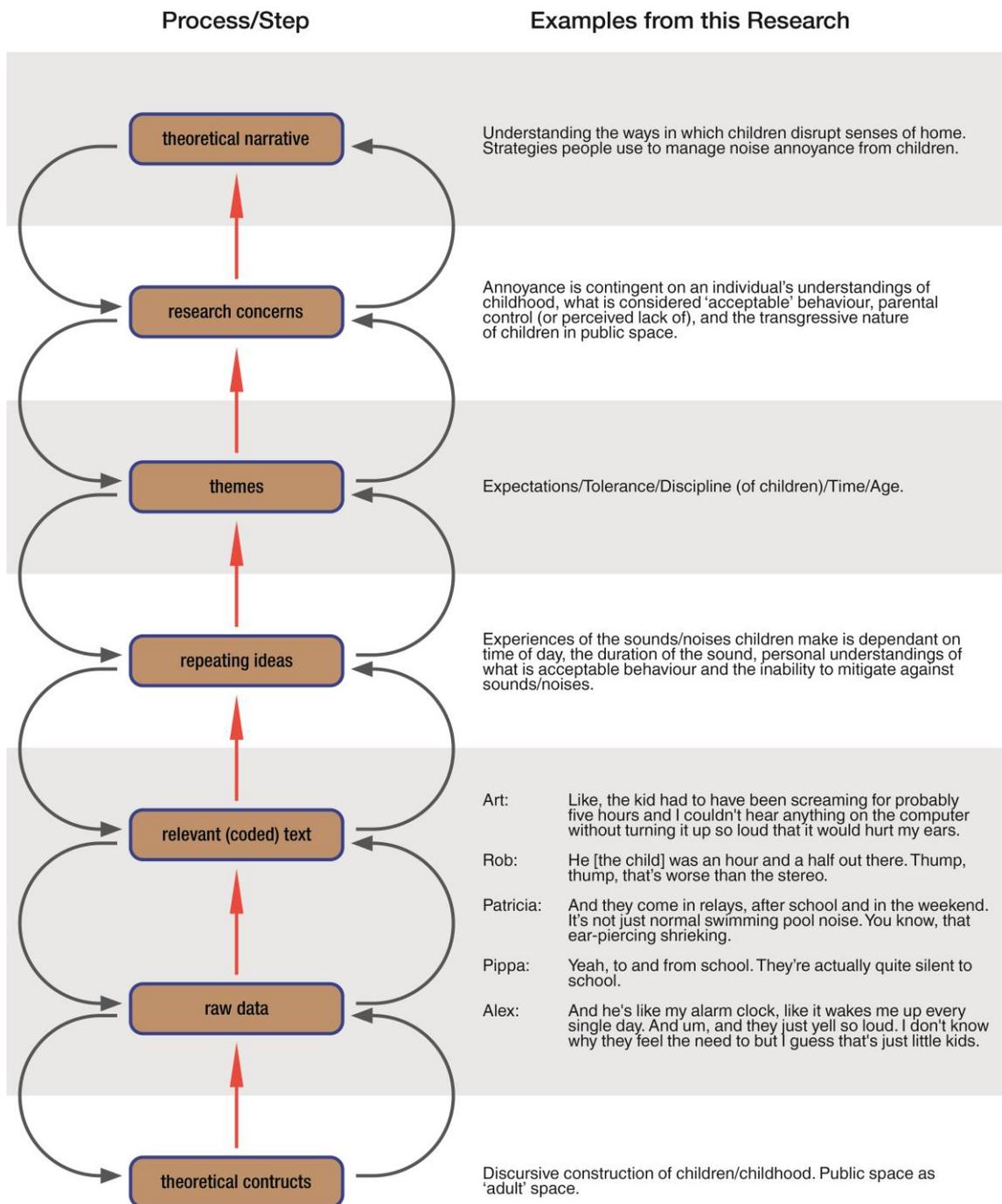
In total, 28 thematic codes were established: 21 of these were *a priori* codes that had emerged during the literature review and whose relevance was confirmed through the initial reading process, and seven *inductive* (grounded) codes emerged to capture certain references that were not adequately covered by the *a priori* codes that I had developed. Table 4.3 below lists the codes used in the initial read through of the interviews.

CODE/THEME	CODE TYPE	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS	NUMBER. OF REFERENCES
Abject/Contamination	A Priori	17	52
Age	A Priori	22	126
Class	A Priori	11	32
Discipline	A Priori	24	153
Emotions	A Priori	24	237
Ethnicity	A Priori	12	34
Expectations/Values	A Priori	25	650
Family	Inductive	16	86
Friends/Friendships	Inductive	16	62
Gender	A Priori	20	61
Housing Design	A Priori	24	258
Impacts of Participation	Inductive	9	13
Nature	Inductive	15	40
Negative sounds	A Priori	25	424
Neighbourhood	A Priori	25	420
Panaudicon	A Priori	21	101
Positive sounds	A Priori	24	120
Self/Other	A Priori	21	112
Sensitivities/Considerations	A Priori	25	701
Sleep	Inductive	22	117
Sovereignty	A Priori	25	235
Strategies	A Priori	25	470
Tacit	A Priori	23	75
Technology	A Priori	24	211
Time	A Priori	25	250
Tolerance	A Priori	25	396
Unknown/Indeterminable	Inductive	10	18
Work	Inductive	19	51

**Table 4.3: Interview codes**

### **Coding Relationships - Bringing the Themes Together**

For the second phase of coding, where the focus was on the dominant narratives apparent throughout each code category, and the relationships between the codes, I drew inspiration from Carl Auerbach and Louise Silverstein's (2003) discussion on the application of grounded theory. While I did not employ grounded theory, Auerbach and Silverstein's (2003) explanation of how to move from raw data to addressing my research concerns was extremely useful (see Figure 4.4). First, raw data were grouped according



**Figure 4.4: Research model (adapted from Auerbach and Silverstein 2003)**

to which of the four dominant theoretical constructs that emerged within the literature that they aligned to (such as sovereignty and public/private). Repeating ideas and themes were then used to 'test' the appropriateness of the *a priori* codes, and to determine whether any new inductive codes were needed.

The final step involved bridging the subjective experiences of the participants with the research concerns and goals. This step involves combining the narratives of participants with the theoretical constructs guiding the research, effectively weaving subjective experiences with theory to help make sense of the data.

While Auerbach and Silverstein's (2003) explanation tends to be linear (represented by the red arrows), I draw on their non-linear approach to coding process, which emphasises iterative reflection (represented by the grey arrows in Figure 4.4). Here, the possibilities for revisiting earlier steps provided opportunities to further tease out threads of enquiry. A balance must be struck, however, between the seemingly endless array of possibilities for revisiting data and making a project manageable. Going back over previous steps in the process was anchored in the four central themes of sovereignty, controllable/uncontrollable, public/private, and discipline, and memos were recorded to help identify dominant threads.

Through the condensing and refining of the narratives that ran through the themes that I was listening for, while at the same revisiting the literature, I began to get a sense that noise was the dominant theme that ran across all of the interviews. Of all the experiences that were coded for, sounds perceived as having a negative effect on being-at-home featured 424 times, compared to 120 times for sounds that had a positive association. Moreover, when discussing positive sounds, participants tended to 'list' each sound without delving further into how they felt about that sound. In contrast, participants went into great detail when retelling their experiences of noises. While this may speak to the

ways in which occularcentric cultures tend to disregard much of the aural environment (Schafer 1994), it also meant that noise rather than (positive) sound was providing a greater source of information for examining the role that aural experience plays in the production of home. Within the discussions on the effects of noises, abjection and the taboo was speaking loudest as far as offering an original contribution to human geography was concerned.

Without discounting the range of topics that were shared during the interviews, the rich data that emerged from the coding process relating to abject and taboo noises provided enough material upon which to base my thesis on. In particular, the location of noises from sexual activity, toileting, and domestic violence throughout the coding phase provided a large volume of data to work with. Narrowing the scope in this manner required a more concise refocusing towards the embodied and visceral experience of home.

It was at this stage that I also decided to discontinue the use of Nvivo. With only 24 interviews to analyse, and a smaller range of noises to listen for than I had initially intended, I was able to manage the references to abjection and the taboo by using the search option in Windows Explorer. References to sex, toilets, and domestic violence were searched for in each transcript using keywords such as sex, bedroom, fuck, fucking, poo, toilet, bathroom, fart, violence, fight, arguing, and shouting. Corresponding passages of text were copied and pasted into three word documents, with their original Nvivo codes intact. Findings were then drawn out based on where each passage fitted into the themes outlined in Table 4.3.

## **Summary**

The methods and approaches outlined in this chapter were chosen as a 'best fit' for the contextual and theoretical considerations that guided this research. I sought techniques that, as much as possible, provided a platform for the embodied and sensuous experiences of participants to guide the findings of this thesis. Doing so assisted the exploration of what abject noise means, from the perspectives of participants, to the production and maintenance of home. As I have argued previously, abjection is a visceral, and therefore, corporeal phenomenon, and methods to access such experiences must acknowledge the personal and subjective nature of hearing abject noises.

Employing semi-structured one-to-one and couple interviews, privileging the voices of participants, and incorporating reciprocity, appears to offer the best inroad towards potentially 'deep insights' into discourses of home. Further, this approach is well-suited to accommodate issues relating to embodiment, power, and the wide-ranging opinions that converge at the site of abject noises. Feminist geographers who utilise poststructural theory have provided useful 'maps' through which to navigate such an endeavour. This extends not only to the acknowledgement of how the cyclic flow of power affects socio-spatial relations, but also the power that manifests within research relationships.

In the following three chapters, I explore notions of power, embodiment, sensuous experience, and abjection, placing the narratives of participants at the fore. While each deals with a particular group of abject noises - sex noises, toileting noises, and violence noises - power and powerlessness are threads that are common to each chapter. Within the power relations affecting

'homebodies', six main themes relating to taboo and abject noises emerged. First, the experience of abject noises is very much shaped by the spaces and places in which they occur. Second, socio-economic status, ethnicity, and gender often influence the experience of abject noises. Third, there is a strong association between abject noises and the source of the noises. Fourth, when experiencing abject noises, the effects often extend beyond mere transgressions of socio-spatial etiquette, and are often 'felt' as a transgression of corporeal boundaries. Fifth, the negotiation of abject noises is rarely an explicit, externalised process, and is almost always negotiated through implicit means. Sixth, while not all abject noises are experienced as taboo, taboo sounds are almost exclusively understood as abject.

In almost all of the examples that spoke to notions of abjection and taboo during this research, more than one of the aforementioned six themes is present. Combined with the highly fluid and mobile nature of sound, dominant discourses and influences shaping the experience of abject and taboo noises are difficult to discuss in isolation. As such, the following three chapters are instead structured around various abject noises, through which the dominant themes that arose from the interviews that I conducted are unpacked.



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## 5 SEX NOISE AND THE HOME

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One of the main indicators of when sound becomes noise is that social and physical boundaries are transgressed. When boundaries are transgressed, a sense of contamination can ensue. Due to its highly fluid properties, (unwanted) sound is adept at transgressing borders such as the physical structure of the home, at ignoring subjective positions such as personal tolerances, and is irreverent towards the rules of social etiquette. As such, Kristeva's (1982) theorisation of abjection – central to which is the disruption of boundaries - provides interesting possibilities to help tease out issues relating to the contaminating effects of noise. Indeed, when Kristeva (1982 4) refers to the abject as that which “does not respect borders, positions, rules” she could just as easily be referring solely to noise.

A major aim of this research is to explore the influences unwanted sound has in relation to the ways in which bodies and homes overlap and constitute each other. Such an approach provides novel opportunities to extend often neglected understandings of both the relationship between bodies and homes, and wider societal attitudes towards sexuality and the sense of feeling privacy as a whole (Gurney 2000a 40). The concept of abjection in relation to noise is particularly useful to this research because it helps to reinforce how geographic scales such as bodies and homes are not discrete. Rather, as Doreen Massey (1991) argues, bodies and homes are constituted through relations with other places and spaces. While this occurs across all geographic scales, I am primarily interested in the way that abject and taboo noises ignore the physically and socially constructed boundaries of bodies and homes. When these boundaries

are broken, the self collapses into the other; “inseparable, contaminated, condemned at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject” (Kristeva 1982 18). Here, the other is defined as that which is socially, ethnically and geographically different and represents all that the self is not (Staszak 2008). The dissolution of the boundary between the self and the other becomes a threat to the self, and to the ‘privacy’ of the home.

When the abject disrupts and transgresses boundaries, emotional reactions are invoked. For this research, it is therefore necessary to acknowledge the role that emotions play in the demarcation of bounded spaces and places in the home. As Bondi, Davidson and Smith (2005 7) put it, “‘disordered’ and more ordinary emotional experiences” are embedded in an embodied politics that serves to reinforce the “permeability and fluidity of bodily boundaries”. Just like the abject, emotions are inextricably linked to boundary formation and maintenance and of reinforcing the distinction between internal embodied selves and to the exterior other (Bondi, Davidson and Smith 2005).

While not exhaustive, or isolated to abject and taboo noises, the notion of noise contamination was most pronounced when interviewees discussed such matters. As such, the following discussion draws on Kristeva (1982) and Gurney (2000a; 2000b) to help tease out how abject and taboo noises are experienced in the home. Elias’ (1978[1939]; 1994) work on manners, etiquette and the civilising process and Foucault’s (1977; 1980) readings of power and discipline will also be drawn on as a means to understand the politics of the taboo at the intersection of the home and the body.

## **Coital Noise and the Abject**

Judy (22, female) and Art (26, male) live together in a two-bedroom, attached unit. As a couple, Judy and Art rate themselves as being relatively noise tolerant and both value the ability to have their own place. In the past, they lived together in a rented home with others, but being able to have autonomy within the home outweighed the financial benefits of living in a shared accommodation situation. Both acknowledge that with the limits of their financial situation comes limited options as far as the type of dwelling that they are able to afford. Both Judy and Art acknowledge that their home, an uninsulated hollow brick unit in a block of six units, has poor sound and thermal insulation properties.

As Meszaros (2005) points out, construction materials used for housing in areas populated or accessible to those with low socio-economic status tend to provide poor sound absorption qualities. This is certainly true for many low-decile areas in Hamilton. Prior to 1973, hollow-brick masonry (well-known for having poor acoustic insulation properties) was often used by property developers to build apartments in low-decile areas (see Figure 5.1 on the following page). In 1973, changes to the New Zealand Standard 4204P<sup>25</sup> which governed the use of masonry in construction no longer permitted such structures to be built.

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<sup>25</sup> Superseded by New Zealand Standard 4229.



**Figure 5.1: A typical hollow brick used in the construction of apartment blocks in New Zealand, and an example of a ten-unit apartment block<sup>26</sup> (Source: Author)**

The legacy of these buildings, however, continues to shape the aural experiences of many people in Hamilton. The resulting effect for urban poor living in such places and spaces becomes a kind of ‘aural claustrophobia’, an oppressive aural ecology (Truax 2001[1984]). This is exacerbated by relatively higher population density in areas of high deprivation compared to areas of low deprivation (Sophar Report 2006; see also Table 5.1 on the following page).

Such conditions have been linked to negative psychological and physical health outcomes (see Evans *et al.* 2001; Galea *et al.* 2005; Pollard 1999). While highly generalised, it is important to consider these aforementioned data when exploring the subjective experience of noise as these statistics echo a pattern that is consistent with the experiences of urban poor in other Western urban populations. Although this thesis primarily seeks to explore the subjective experience of noise in the home, drawing on quantitative data in this way represents an acknowledgement of the broader socio-spatial influences that can shape embodied experiences of urban living.

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<sup>26</sup> There are approximately 23 apartment blocks of a similar construction type within 300 metres of the property in this photograph. This area is less than 0.28 per cent of Hamilton’s total area but accounts for just over two per cent of all noise complaints made in Hamilton City between July 1998 and June 2009.

DECILE	AVERAGE POPULATION DENSITY (PER HECTARE) JULY 1998 - JUNE 2009	TOTAL NOISE COMPLAINTS JULY 1998 - JUNE 2009 <sup>27</sup>	PERCENTAGE OF ALL NOISE COMPLAINTS	AVERAGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE PER COMPLAINT
1	86	1633	2.05	0.16
2	78	1840	2.37	0.23
3	68	2091	3.19	0.28
4	67	2393	3.65	0.26
5	128	3367	5.15	0.37
6	194	6867	10.50	0.52
7	128	9318	14.22	0.63
8	245	10552	16.04	0.78
9	143	16194	24.60	0.83
10	288	11906	18.21	0.89

**Table 5.1: Noise complaints by decile for Hamilton, July 1998 - June 2009. Decile 1 represents areas that are least-deprived and Decile 10 represents areas that are most-deprived**

The area that Judy and Art live in is ranked as Decile 8, an area of relatively high deprivation. Proximity to their neighbours, the layout of their home, and the construction materials that their home is made from all converge to offer little aural privacy from others who live in the rest of the apartment block:

Paul: *So the space between the flats is not well insulated or is it/*

Art: *//No, it's blocks//*

Judy: *//It's that//* [indicates to wall].

Paul: *Oh, this up here?*

Judy: *Yep.*

Paul: *And so you could pretty much hear everything that's going on in their [the neighbour's] world?*

Art/Judy: [Laughs].

Paul: *Would you like to elaborate on that giggle?*

Art: *We have heard them rooting,<sup>28</sup> like, on a number of occasions.*

<sup>27</sup> These figures exclude the 12,254 noise complaints that had no associated street address and the 2,114 complaints that would have required manual verification. See Appendix 1 for an explanation of how these data were derived.

Paul: *From both sides or...?*

Art: *Just from that side. Because that side there, through that wall is the lounge. And those people moved out a while ago.*

A result of both the layout of their home, and the materials that their home is made from, they are privy to a range of sounds from their neighbours, including intimate, 'private', taboo noises. For Judy and Art, overhearing sexual activity is not the most annoying type of noises that they have heard from their neighbours, but it has featured often in the four months that they have been living at their current address:

Paul: *So what happened when you heard the sound, or what were the sounds that you heard?*

Judy: *Bed creaky.*

Art: *Yeah, bed creakiness. Like, rhythmic creakiness.*

Paul: *And, any vocal sounds at all as well or?*

Judy: *I haven't heard vocal sounds.*

Art: *I was trying to/*

Judy: */I think I just had a giggle.*

Art: *I was trying to block it out [he vocal sounds]. So there could have been some "come on babies", you know, but they were just you know, out of my vocal [attention] range at that point.*

Paul: *So you made, you took steps to like um, mentally blocked out what you were hearing and just try and ignore it?*

Art: *Yeah, because we were trying to be [pause] intimate at that stage.*

Judy: *And it just/*

Art: */It was just like, "Oh no!" [laughs], because we know what the neighbours look like and it's not that hot.*

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<sup>28</sup> 'Rooting' is a colloquial term for sexual intercourse/sexual activity.

- Judy: *Oh my God.*
- Paul: *So there was an association with the sound that was being made and you connected that with the actual physical presence of the people?*
- Judy: *I don't think you could not if you saw them, aye?*
- Art: *Laurel and Hardy from Tokoroa. Very fat man and very skinny woman.*

A number of discourses central to this research converge in this example. Prominent is housing design, and how it facilitates the transmission of coital noise between the units in the block that Judy and Art live in. This in itself does not necessarily shape the experience of coital noise as abject, as in this case, overhearing sexual activity was at least partially experienced as a somewhat humorous event. Indeed, taboo sounds such as coital noise are not universally received as negative, and in some cases can be heard as humorous or as a source of sexual arousal or enjoyment (Gurney 2000a). When I asked Peter (33, male) who is currently renting a three-bedroom unattached house with two others, about the effects of overhearing sex noises he explains:

- Peter: *Again, it's a sliding scale. If you really want to get to sleep and it's just the noise and it's bugging you, it could be a hammer being banged. Um, if it's a woman that you find quite attractive then it's kind of an enjoyable sound. But if it's someone that you don't find attractive then it's a yeah, that's pretty kind of wiggly [abject], you find yourself kind of trudging [to try and ignore it].*
- Paul: *Yeah. So there is an association with not only the sound, maybe the sex sounds being 'wiggly', but/*
- Peter: */the visual.*

Where these particular examples invoke the 'wiggly' feelings of abjection is at the level of the corporeal, and in Judy and Art's case, also from the socio-economic and cultural status of those people who are being overheard. It is not the noises per se, but who is making them. A strong connection to the source of the noise exists, which in both Peter's, and Judy and Art's cases serves to invoke visual imagery. As Cavanagh (2010) argues, the process where objects are visualised from auditory cues not only places sounds, but also produces and attaches meaning to those placed sounds.

For Judy and Art, physical unattractiveness combines with how they read their neighbour's class status to position their neighbours as abject others. Art does this by positioning his neighbours within dominant corporeal and spatial imaginings of social 'backwardness' - "Laurel and Hardy from Tokoroa". The hapless comedic characters of Laurel and Hardy are drawn on here to reinforce Art's perceptions of his neighbours' cultural 'backwardness' and also their corporeal appearance - "Very fat man, very skinny woman." This association goes beyond the comedic affect represented by the Laurel and Hardy characters. Tina Chanter (2006) suggests that the objectification and juxtaposition of bodies in this manner is embedded in discursive mythologies of self and other - discourses that gain legitimacy by making some bodies 'complete', and that distance other bodies as abject.

The use of comic association to distance others along lines of ethnicity and social class is detailed by Imogen Tyler (2008 17) in her analysis of the emergence of the category "chav", a term that in Britain has become a

ubiquitous derogatory term for “white working-class subjects.”<sup>29</sup> More specifically, the chav figure is articulated through class (lower-class), ethnicity (almost exclusively white), and gender (very skinny men and overweight women) (Tyler 2008). Mobilising the various aspects of the chav discourse, as Tyler (2008 26) argues, is how the middle-class distance their “respectable whiteness from the contaminated, dirty whiteness from that of the lower class ... and abject the white poor from spheres of white privilege.” Art further articulates his experience of the abject “Laurel and Hardy” neighbours by embedding (read distancing) them within the spatial context of Tokoroa, a small town in New Zealand that has a relatively high level of social deprivation.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, as of the 2006 census,<sup>31</sup> the population of Tokoroa was 40.5 per cent European (Raukawa Charitable Trust 2011). Nationally, in 2006, 67.6 per cent of New Zealand’s population were of European descent (Statistics New Zealand 2014b). Hegemonic discourses position Tokoroa as a ‘Māori town’, and yet Art places his neighbours there. It appears socio-economic status, rather than ethnicity, takes precedent in Art’s reading of his neighbours’ corporeality.

Employing such a strategy helps to reinforce Art’s difference from his neighbours and serves to establish distance between himself and the abject. As Kristeva (1982) states, however, this separation can only be partially achieved as the very essence of abjection causes the self/other binary to fail. While “the urge to make separations between clean and dirty, ordered and disordered, that is, to expel the abject” (Sibley 1995 8) is an important part of identity politics in

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<sup>29</sup> Terms such as ‘bogan’ and ‘white trash’ are perhaps the closest equivalents to chav in the New Zealand context.

<sup>30</sup> Tokoroa is a Decile 10 (most deprived) town and is ranked as the 36<sup>th</sup> most deprived area out of a total of 1,927 census area units (CAUs) according to the New Zealand Deprivation Index 2006 (Source: <http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/dataandstatistics-subjects-socio-economicdep>).

<sup>31</sup> These are the most recent data available for Tokoroa.

Western cultures such as New Zealand, the self can never fully distance itself as it depends on the other in order to define itself. Within this process, abjection does more than blur the boundary between self and other; it causes the self to collapse into the other. The feeling of disgust that Judy and Art expressed during the interview in relation to overhearing sexual activity from their neighbours represents the disruption of physical and sensuous boundaries. As such, “the integrity of one’s ‘own clean self’” is no longer guaranteed (Kristeva 1982 53), and the illusion of the discrete body dissolves.

When bodies make noises that disrupt and break corporeal boundaries, the sanctity of the self is compromised and that which is internal is exposed. At the same time, the boundaries of the noisy bodies being heard are also broken. As Cavanagh (2010 106) argues, we are not only reminded of (intact or broken) exterior surfaces when sounds from human agency are perceived, but also the interiors of those making the sounds. Auditors become privy to internal thoughts, feelings and intent, as well as visceral biological processes. Kaja Silverman’s (1988 43) analysis of classic cinema draws attention to how the ‘voice’ is positioned as part of the subject and inferred with the power to project the “inner essence”. I argue that this extends to non-vocal sounds, and abject noises in particular. The trespass of coital noise becomes an amalgam of that which normally remains hidden from public view - highly charged sexual emotions, genitals, bodily fluids. The transgressive affect can be amplified by the absence of a visual reference, where the ear is free to build a picture of what is being heard. In some cases, the absence of the visual can make the effects of hearing abject noises more profound (Rice 2003).

## **Who's Listening? Who's Being Heard?**

Whilst the physical structure of their home provides 'weak' boundaries for the abject to disrupt, it is Judy and Art's relationship with their neighbours that has the most significant impact on how they feel about overhearing coital noise. The relationship between those making, and those who are overhearing, is key to how coital noise is perceived in a number of other accounts that participants shared with me. Peter, who identifies as being very noise tolerant, reflects on his own personal sensitivities to being heard during sex:

Peter: *I guess it doesn't really bother me. Obviously it depends on who's listening [to us]. But if it's her father, then probably. That would make me kind of blush, maybe. Maybe run [laughs].*

For Peter, the threat of being overheard by his partner's father is the only time that he is personally conscious of his own sex sounds. Dominant imaginings of the 'shotgun-wielding' patriarch combine with generational differences to disrupt Peter's ability to disconnect from the possibility that his partner's father may potentially be within earshot. Matt (29, male), who lives alone in a one-bedroom attached unit in a block of four, discusses an experience where he overheard a friend having sex. Due to the nature of his relationship with his friend, Matt frames his experience primarily as a lack of consideration, rather than an experience of repulsion:

Matt: *I remember, what was the occasion? I think it must have been at some party and then um, to this person I said, "Oh, can I*

*crash at your house on the couch or something?” because I couldn’t be bothered walking all the way home. I’m quite pissed [inebriated]. And she was like “yep, no worries.” And so I crashed on the couch and then her and her boyfriend were in her bedroom but she managed to leave the door open and the hallway door open and they were going at it. And they took ages, like ten or fifteen minutes of full-on sex noises. And um, they seemed to, I just got the impression they didn’t know, or forgot, or didn’t care that I happened to be in the house. And that, yeah, and I was sort of you know, eventually they stopped and I went, I managed to fall asleep afterwards. But it was a little bit, well, a little bit annoying because they, not cos of the sounds themselves cos it’s just people shagging but it was the fact that they didn’t seem to give a shit.*

Paul: *Inconsiderate?*

Matt: *Yeah, inconsiderate. I mean, okay, it was her house but it was um, she knew I was there in the lounge and [pause] I don’t know. I just would have thought they would have shut the doors or something, yeah.*

In this instance, overhearing or being overheard by friends is not talked about in terms of abject disgust, rather as a transgression of etiquette. Although the noises were “just people shagging”, Matt’s surprise at the lack of effort to contain their coital noise suggests a sensitivity that puts coital noise beyond merely an issue of being considerate. This appears to be consistent with Gurney’s (2000a 43) findings, where participants indicated that “coital noise was considered more intrusive” and harder to ignore than any other noises experienced in the home. While Matt says that a sense of repulsion was not invoked, the “instantly recognisable ... ululations of satiation” (Gurney 2000a 39) appear to be very difficult to set aside.

## **Coital Noise, Subjectivities, and the Social Construction of Home**

There is an indication in Matt's example of the inseparable connection between bodies, homes, and subjectivities, and in the way the social construction of 'home', and being 'at-home', produces such a degree of comfort and ease that one forgets about the presence of others. This also appears to resonate within an account that Echo and Frank relay, when they inadvertently exposed a friend to the sounds of their sexual activity:

Echo:            *We had a friend staying the other night and we forgot to shut the doors all the way through [to where our guest was sleeping] [laughs] and afterwards I went, "Fuck! All the doors are open." We hadn't even really thought about it. Yeah.*

Echo and Frank share a three-bedroom home and have lived together as a couple for 14 months. Both Echo and Frank told me the sense of privacy that living together as a couple provides is important to their relationship. Being able to achieve this, to feel privacy in this way, speaks to the ways home becomes a space where subjectivities, the social home, and the physical house intersect (Blunt and Dowling 2006; Gorman-Murray 2012; Morrison 2010; Pink 2004). In other words, the home and the relationships of those who reside there are mutually constituted. For Echo and Frank (and Judy and Art), their relationship requires the configuration of the social home to have a sense of autonomy. The ability to make their home feel like a private space is integral to achieving the type of relationship that they want. Both Echo and Frank feel that the degree of comfort that they have established for themselves within their home results in

the closing of doors prior to engaging in sex not registering as important. This appears to resonate within Ahmed's (2000 87) assertion that "[h]ome is implicitly constructed as a purified space of belonging in which the subject is too comfortable to question the limits or borders of her or his experience, indeed, where the subject is so at-ease that she or he does not think."

The imagining of home as autonomously private is so entrenched for Echo and Frank that they did not think to "shut the door". The same is also perhaps true for the couple in Matt's account of being exposed to coital noise. These two examples recall Gurney's (2000) argument that home is both a social and physical space, and one where individuals are free (or aspire) to express their embodied selves as they choose. In the case of sexual subjectivities, the home becomes a space that is 'separate' from the outside world. It is a place of comfort where one is free "to represent or practise your sexuality without fear of embarrassment, sanction or ridicule" (Gurney 2000a 40). To be at home, then, is to be at-ease and moreover, to not have to consciously work at or think about being at-ease. The home, being-at-home, is thus embodied and mutually constituted by the bodies and identities that reside within. It is clear that the ability to be at-ease and to be free to be one's self is valorised in constructions of home, and Judy and Art in particular expressed that they have gone to great lengths to achieve this.

Where there are 'selves', however, there are others, and the exercising of freedom "to be yourself can have deleterious consequences for the (embodied) selves of others" (Gurney 2000b 59). In Matt's case, his friends' sense of being at-ease to be themselves resulted in unpleasant consequences. It is worth

noting that in this case, the presence of another person represents a disruption of the 'normal' composition of the home. Most of the time, the couple in Matt's example are home alone. The same is also true for Echo and Frank. That said, even in the cases where coital noise is overheard from 'behind closed doors', the construction of home as 'private', and a place where identities can be expressed freely, are disrupted by noise and hearing. Again, I recall Ardener (1993), who states that the sense of what is public and private in many circumstances is defined by 'earshot'. Producing spaces within the home as a safe space to practice intimate relations, then, is embedded in an inherently sensuous politics. Intimate spaces in the home are not defined by four walls necessarily, but by the sensuous horizon that can be perceived outside of those four walls. Within the home, the mapping of sexual intimacies, and social trajectories within the home in general, does not follow a physical floor plan. Instead, 'rooms' map out along sensuous boundaries that shift, overlap and therefore are difficult to define and defend (see Figure 2.1).

Morrison (2010) discussion on the tensions that arise from sexual intimacy spilling out through homes, is indicative of how the 'spilling out' of sexual intimacy affects the composition of home. One participant that Morrison (2010 144) interviewed was particularly affected by the physical and social aspects of her home to the point where she felt uncomfortable having sex in her own bedroom: "Even though Marie and Paul's bedroom walls provide some spatial and visual privacy they do little to mask the intimate sounds of sex" from the people that they share their home with. In contrast, couples who Morrison (2010) interviewed that lived alone, and who lived in house of comparable design to Marie and Paul, reflected on a number of non-bedroom spaces where

they enjoyed being sexually intimate. Being out of 'earshot' afforded more opportunities, and spaces, for some of Morrison's (2010) other participants to express their sexual identities.

### **Coital Noise, Intimate Spaces, and the Moral Order of the Home**

Being accustomed to having an autonomous home potentially contributes to why the couples in these two examples forgot to enclose their intimate space from others in the home. Yet, even in homes where the norm is sharing the same dwelling with the social trajectories of other people, the sense of freedom to exercise the self can result in 'absentmindedness' when it comes to the subjective needs of others. Given the fluid nature of sound across boundaries, 'appropriately' containing intimacy within certain spaces can be highly problematic:

Paul: *Did you ever kind of, have to deal with issues around sexual activity in the Halls [of Residence]?*

Karen: *Yep [laughs]. Um, the guy who lived next to me, like he had a different girl in there every night. And um, you couldn't hear it through the walls. But like, when I get up at night to go to the toilet or whatever, you hear them through the door. Yeah, but I remember like back when I was little kid, and you hear your parents or whatever. It was a different feeling hearing my parents to hearing him. Like, with him, cos he's just my mate, I was like just whatever, you know. But with my parents that was just kind of like eeeww [laughs]. So it's a different sort of feeling that triggered, depending on who it was that I could hear ... like I didn't mind hearing them [friends] with other people sort of thing, as much as I did with my parents.*

For Karen (19, female), who currently renting with three others in a three-bedroom unit in a block of six, clear lines of distinction emerge along kinship and friendships as to how coital noise is perceived. The “eeeww” factor, a recurring discourse for how the experience of parental coital noise is often felt, features here for Karen. In both of the cases that Karen draws on, the physical layout and structure of her living space does not allow for the containment of coital noise. The “eeeww” seeps easily through walls, and in turn disrupts her personal space. Coital noise, like all noise, can be considered to be abject as it turns “aside, misleads, corrupts” prohibitions, rules and [moral] laws (Kristeva 1982 15) such as those that govern spaces constructed as private within the home. This in itself does not necessarily invoke the feelings of abjection that Karen recalls. Again, simply overhearing the sounds of sex does not universally invoke a sense of revulsion, as is the case when Karen describes overhearing her friend in the Halls of Residence. So why does overhearing her parents having sex invoke a sense of abjection for Karen?

Elias (1978[1939]) offers a potential explanation for why parental coital noise can cause unease for children and young people. Elias (1978[1939] 155) argues that parents play a central role in “instilling socially required habits” relating to embarrassment, modesty, shame, guilt, and self-control. While morality and the *civilising process* (Elias 1978[1939]) occur at broader social scales such as the state and nation, it is parents, at the scale of the home who are at the coalface of upholding ‘appropriate’ ways of being: “Parental responses to infant masturbation, displays of physical affection between parents and the instruction children receive about appropriate physical contact with others influence children’s understanding of their own sexuality” (Shtarkshall *et*

*al.* 2007 116). This parental moral training is embedded within an increasing privatisation of the home, where there is an expectation to contain “the most ‘private,’ ‘intimate,’ irrepressibly ‘animal’ aspects of human existence from the sight of others [within the] visible and invisible walls” (Elias 1978[1939] 163) of intimate [bedroom] spaces.

Failure to contain coital noise not only represents a failure in the “transmission of [appropriate] standards of manners and behaviour from parents to children” (Gurney 2000a 41), but also a failure in the architecture of the home. What is so useful about the way in which Elias’ (1978[1939]) frames this is that he positions coital noise within an explicitly spatial context that accommodates the sensuous, ‘invisible’ horizon of the bedroom. The notion that intimate acts are arbitrarily contained by four walls becomes untenable. So while the bedroom as an intimate space carries with it the expectations of being a private enclave, it is often woefully inadequate for the purpose. This is significant as “the real and symbolic boundaries which determine private space are fragile and if transgressed can have profound consequences for the listener’s sense of self and identity” (Gurney 2000a 40).

It is here that the physical and sensuous home, and the formation of a child’s sexual identity, are intrinsically intertwined. The home is a key site through which the civilising process is produced and maintained, and where “regulation, monitoring and management of the body [and] sensitivity to the nuances of our own and others’ behaviour” is learned (Gurney 2000a 41). This moral training is complicated, and often compromised by, the fluidity of noise. Parental expectations that their child’s sexual self incorporate appropriate degrees of

embarrassment, modesty, shame, and guilt become problematic through the inability of the physical structure of the home to contain coital noises. According to Gurney (2000a), this is significant as it serves to disrupt the role that parents play as the 'gatekeepers of decency' in relation to feelings of embarrassment that are 'supposed' to govern sexual intimacy.

It is important to note that this example speaks to a culturally specific set of parent/child relations where the child is developmentally dependant on their parent/s. Further, these relations are not fixed or universal, and they can differ for the individual over time. While there is the potential for the moral order of the home to be disrupted by parental coital noise, this does not necessarily lead to negative outcomes for children and young people. For instance, Danielle Knafo and Kenneth Feiner (1996), and Paul Omaki (1995), actively move away from Sigmund Freud's (1925) reading of the *primal scene* (witnessing the act of sex) as an entirely traumatic experience, and instead argue that the impact of accidental exposure to parental sexual activity is contingent on other social relations within the home.

Knafo and Feiner (1996) argue that in the cases where primal scene exposure is interpreted as traumatic, it usually represents a reaffirmation or symbolises pre-existing fears or anxieties. By example, in homes where there is audible fighting between parents, certain aspects of coital noise can be interpreted through association as an argument. Conversely, coital noise can also serve to reinforce positive associations and can contribute in a positive way to a child's or young person's development ideas around love, intimacy and relationships (Knafo and Feiner 1996 554-555). In such cases, coital noises can be read by

children as “an ordinary occurrence”, a source of amusement, or as a source of curiosity (Omaki 1995 56-57).

Narratives such as those drawn on by Knafo and Feiner (1996) and Omaki (1995) demonstrate that the construction of parental coital noise as negative is mutable. Due to “the essentially subjective responses to all forms of noise ... feelings of repulsion, guilt or embarrassment will not necessarily be precipitated by overhearing coital noise” (Gurney 2000a 42). Therefore, the dominant discourse that positions the ‘moral’ home as a space free of the sounds of parents having sex is highly problematic. Even in situations where parental coital noise is perceived negatively, this is not fixed over the lifespan of the individual.

One reason for this can be attributed to an increased awareness of what is being heard. The research Omaki (1995) draws on suggests younger children are more likely to have a neutral response to sex noises than adolescents due to an increased awareness of the source of the noises. This is not always the case, and feelings invoked by exposure to parental coital noise can be varied. For example, Karen’s reading of coital noise shifted as she got older, her family makeup changed, and she became more independent from her parents. Feelings of revulsion invoked by parental coital noise that Karen referred to earlier in the interview give way to feelings of protection and ownership:

Karen: *Like, especially because my parents have been separated since I was four. Um, I felt kind of quite protective over them. And so like, sort of hearing my mum with somebody else, or*

*hearing my dad with another woman, it was kind of like “Hey, they’re mine”, you know ... Yeah, but then, like with my friends I’d kind of yeah, I felt like I’ve got less ownership over them...*

So while Karen’s parent’s separation certainly impacted on her feelings associated with parental coital noise, the responses invoked by overhearing her parents having sex also changed over time. This may also account for why Karen was not affected to the same degree by her neighbour in the Halls of Residence. Again, the impact that overhearing coital noise can have is largely contingent on associations between who is making the noise and the auditor. Mitchell’s experience of parental coital noise also shifted over time. Now 18 years old and still living with his mother, he no longer feels embarrassment at the thought of overhearing, or actually hearing his mother having sex. Mitchell instead considers parental coital noise as merely an annoyance:

- Paul: *So, when you overhear, like, overhear those sounds, how does it make you feel?*
- Mitchell: *Pretty annoyed, because I can’t go to sleep.*
- Paul: *It stops you from going to sleep?*
- Mitchell: *That’s it really. I mean I don’t know, I don’t mind her getting some it’s just, “Keep it down!”*

Elaborating on the annoyance experienced from overhearing his mother having sex, Mitchell said it was the presence of *any* noise that affected his ability to sleep. It was not any associations relating to the awareness of sexual activity, but personal sensitivities to noise prior to and during sleep that frustrated

Mitchell. Although dominantly constructed as taboo, Mitchell's perspective again speaks to how experiencing coital noise is highly subjective (Gurney 2000a).

### **Coital Noise, Power, and Housing Design**

It is essential to locate the perspectives relayed by Karen and Mitchell as culturally specific and occurring within a sphere of spatial relations that are far from universal. Karen's and Mitchell's accounts, and Freud's (1925) analysis of the primal scene, occur within Western homes with multiple rooms. This design format has been largely shaped through historical expectations of modesty originating in the Victorian Era (Driver 1988; Elias 1978[1939]). During the Victorian Era, moral expectations relating to sexual practices positioned sex as something that was not to be enjoyed. Instead, and particularly for women, sex was seen purely as a precursor to reproduction and a patriotic duty. The enjoyment of sex, as Robert Roberts (1971) argues, was associated with the unwashed, abject lower working classes. To cope with the 'unwanted' sexual demands of their husbands, women were encouraged to "close your eyes and think of England".<sup>32</sup> In this sphere of social and moral order, it mattered little what domestic partitions were constructed from. In the case of sexual activity, visual partitioning was sufficient to maintain the moral order of the home.

As attitudes towards sex became increasingly more liberal during the twentieth century, sex inevitably became noisier. Victorian attitudes, however, continued to inform notions of modesty, and yet, domestic partitions did not keep pace with liberalised attitudes towards sex. As Alex Comfort (1993 54 cited in Gurney

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<sup>32</sup> The origin of the phrase is not clear, but is thought to have been inspired by a diary entry made by Lady Alice Hillingdon c.1912 (Keyes 2007).

2000a) states in relation to contemporary housing designers, they “all seem to be married to noiseless, childless partners or they’d avoid plasterboard.” While this quote speaks to the expectation that intimate spaces be partitioned in homes, this expectation is culturally specific. In cultures where housing size is relatively smaller than in countries such as New Zealand, and housing layout is less partitioned, exposure to and readings of parental coital noise can be very different. In such situations, “primal scene exposure is quite common”, is not necessarily considered to cause harm to children, and is not always considered to be immoral or immodest (Knafo and Feiner 1996 555).

Although their situations differ, there is a common feature within the narratives of Karen and Mitchell that is useful to tease out, and that is the role that housing plays in the disciplining potential of the panaudicon.<sup>33</sup> The common feature in Karen’s and Mitchell’s experiences is that the spatial configuration of the home means that overhearing sexual activity is unavoidable. In these cases, bedroom proximity factors heavily in how sound is transmitted between people in the home. For the parents involved, any strategies that may have been employed to avoid being overheard fail, not only because of bedroom proximity, but also because of the materials that separate each room. Housing design, however, is not the only determinant influencing the experience of coital noise. Subjective positions and the making of home intersect in complex ways, and therefore, the experience and negotiation of coital noise is contingent, to varying degrees, on both.

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<sup>33</sup> Rice (2003) and Siisiäinen (2008) use the term panaudicon, subverting Foucault’s Panopticon to strategically locate hearing and listening within the notion of self-surveillance and power.

For Mitchell's mother Pippa, who was interviewed separately during this research, the spatial configuration of her home had a pronounced impact on her sexual practices. Pippa lives with her four children and a teenage boarder. Pippa is currently single, her rented home has four bedrooms, and contrary to Mitchell's account, her children are very unlikely to overhear coital noise:

Pippa: *One of the reasons that no sexual activity goes on in this house now [laughs] is, I'm actually really conscious of the noise that is involved and so, therefore, I just won't even contemplate having sex in the house because my bedroom's right next to my son's bedroom ... I wouldn't do it here, unless my son was going to be out and that never occurs really [laughs].*

Pippa goes to great lengths to ensure her children do not hear her sexual activity and says that she feels comfortable having sex in her room only if she knows that she will not disturb her son or her other children in the adjacent rooms. In this way, the spatial configuration of the home plays a pivotal role in Pippa's sexual activity. This is confirmed when Pippa says that she would feel comfortable to have sex if her children are home, but only if her room was sound-proofed enough to ensure no one could hear her. It is clear, then, that the moral order of Pippa's home is aligned to the dominant discourse where exposing children to coital noise is something that must be avoided.

As the head of her household, decisions, discipline, and order falls to Pippa to establish and uphold. There is no one to tell Pippa to be quiet, it is an internalised belief that protecting her children from coital noise is the 'right' thing

to do. In this case, the 'right' thing is embedded in what Elias (1978[1939]) argues are historical processes where parents are expected to contain sex noises to within intimate spaces in order to avoid shame and embarrassment, both for ourselves and others. This appears to resonate with Gurney's (2000a) argument that the expectation to discipline one's sexual noises is key to how coital noise has become taboo in many cultures.

Foucauldian notions of power offer a useful means to understand the processes influencing Pippa's self-disciplining behaviours. For Foucault (1980 98), power is not unidirectional and exerted solely via institutions from 'above', but "something that circulates ... never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or a piece of wealth." Rather, power operates through complex networks which are both internalised and externalised. The policing of appropriate behaviours relating to coital noise is thus a process that is internalised, exerted on the self, and that is maintained by an awareness that someone may be in earshot. I say this because self-disciplining behaviours are embedded in a complex network of internal and external influences that are socially and spatially located, and require the regimenting, ordering, and partitioning of places and spaces (Foucault 1977) in order to be effective. For instance, while the site of power in Pippa's example is predominantly internal, the source of why such behaviour is constructed as appropriate originates from historical socio-spatial processes (Elias 1978[1939]; Driver 1988). These processes are maintained at various scales such as community (Holloway 1998), state, and nation (Philo 1991). The ways in which homes and intimate spaces within homes are partitioned is an example of how disciplining power is spatially maintained.

As such, wider belief systems come to bear on the individual and shape the moral geography of Pippa's home through discourses of 'appropriate' ways of being. Intimate bodies are expected to be partitioned from the rest of the home and enclosed within the walls of intimate spaces. Likewise, intimate spaces such as the bedroom are expected to be discrete and contained. Such processes speak to key theoretical constructs informing this research. In the case of self-surveillance, Wood (2007 247), following Foucault, states that it is not just the site of the body that requires ordering for self-surveillance to function, "but the spatial and temporal distribution and regulation of the body: time was divided into smaller units to allow for total control of activity, likewise space was constructed so as to enclose but also to partition."

This spatial aspect of discipline resonates with Elias' (1978[1939]) discussions relating to the expectation to contain that which is most 'private' to within the walls of the bedroom. In terms of broader socio-spatial power relations, the partitioning of spatial scales such as the body and the home have great political significance as scales define "the boundaries and bounds the identities around which control is exerted *and* contested" (Smith 1992 66 emphasis in original). The spatial configuration of the home, and home's position within neighbourhoods, communities, and cities, is pivotal in the expression of power, be it conformity or contestation.

For this research, and for human geography in general, Foucauldian and Eliasian notions self-surveillance and discipline offer a useful way to understand the corporeal power relations surrounding coital noise. There remains, however, an underlying privileging of the visual within these discourses. As I have argued

previously, the 'tunnel-vision' caused by the marginalisation of the non-visual senses has impoverished what is known about socio-spatial relations. Foucault (1980 155) positions the articulation of disciplining power within the metaphor of the Panopticon, an all-seeing "gaze. An inspecting gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he [sic] is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself [sic]." In later work, Foucault (2005 cited in Siisiäinen 2008) affirms that sight, and not audition, facilitates the flow of self-disciplinary behaviours. Siisiäinen (2008) argues that in prioritising the gaze, Foucault expressly ignores the roles all of the senses can play in the production of power, and the potential of the Panaudicon in particular.

In Pippa's case, her choices speak to a set of power relations which adhere to a discourse that positions sexual activity as something that must remain totally hidden, and not just from sight. For Karen, the visual played only a minimal role in her expectations that her parents discipline their sexual practices. In Matt's example, it was an aural and not a visual trespass that caused a sense of transgression. Deconstructing such issues necessarily requires a shift from 'short-sighted' understandings of the sensory politics influencing self-surveillance and self-discipline.

While it is possible to interpret the transmission of coital noises beyond the walls of the bedroom as transgressing the moral order of the home, it is important to note that the negotiation of embodied and sensuous power relations is far from straightforward. Comparing Pippa's and Karen's accounts is but one example of how the sensuous politics of the home are not fixed and are

open to contestation. Adherence to the power of a hegemonic moral ordering such as the expectation to avoid being overheard having sex is not guaranteed, even under the spectre of surveillance. Indeed, Foucault (1980) argues that although bodies can be rendered docile through exerted processes of power and domination, it remains that wherever there is power there is resistance. The now infamous Caroline Cartwright Case (*The Independent* 2010; *The Sun* 2009) is perhaps an extreme but nonetheless pertinent example of this. On the 17<sup>th</sup> April, Caroline Cartwright was fined £515 and was served with an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (Asbo) due to her excessively “noisy love-making” (*The Independent* 2010). Within 10 days of being fined, she had breached the terms of the Asbo three times, and each breach was attributed to noisy sex. In reviewing the evidence, Judge Beatrice Bolton’s view was that the defendant had “made no attempt to silence” herself (*The Independent* 2010). In her defence, Caroline Cartwright said she was unable to control the noises that she made and that she “did not understand why people asked me to be quiet because to me it is normal. I didn’t understand where they [the complainants] were coming from” (*The Independent* 2010).

It took the threat of an eight-week prison term, suspended for 12 months, to convince Caroline Cartwright to stem her resistance to expectations around noisy sexual practices. Clearly then, adherence to dominant values regarding coital noise is not guaranteed, even if someone is aware that they are being surveilled. In the case of Karen’s parents, however, there is no particular reference to an explicit contestation of the dominant moral ordering of the home. Perhaps then a sense of what Ahmed (2000) refers to as being ‘too comfortable’ erases the presence of others in the home. While this may offer an

insight into Karen's experience, I believe normalising and naturalising discourses surrounding sex may also contribute to how coital noise can sometimes be positioned beyond the reach of surveillant discipline. In particular, I refer to competing discourses that position taboo noises as being 'normal', 'natural' and ubiquitous, while at the same time being abject, contaminating and out-of-place. These discourses merge to affect a specific and often contradictory set of Foucauldian disciplining behaviours.

### **Nature/Nurture Imaginings and Coital Noise**

During the interview with Peter, we discussed his feelings regarding being overheard having sex. Although in some cases Peter does have concerns over actually being heard, he remains mostly unfazed by the thought of being overheard as sex "is what humans do." Such a belief constructs sex as 'natural', and therefore, a 'normal' aspect of lived experience. For Peter, to be upset by evidence of sexual activity, such as exposure to coital noises, is positioned to be irrational. Caroline Cartwright did not comprehend why people were offended by the noises that she made during sex as for her, the quality and volume of the noises were 'normal'. In certain situations then, subjective understandings of sex and sexual activity as 'natural' and 'normal' can inform attitudes that place coital noise outside the potentially disciplining effects of panoptic surveillance. Within these discourses is a belief that noisy sex is inevitable.

While it is a misnomer to suggest that all sex is noisy, the belief that noisy sex is synonymous with good sex is a pervasive theme in the West. Accounts drawn on by Roberts (1971) suggest that this belief was held even in Edwardian

England (c. 1901-1910), an era still heavily influenced by the moral traditions of the sexually muted Victorian Era. Much to the frustration of many men in the lower working class at the beginning of the twentieth century, sex had become so prudish and 'virtuous' that "copulation had lost much of its attraction" (Roberts 1971 37). One of the men in the account that Roberts' (1971) draws on, however, spoke of sex as enjoyable. Interestingly, it is the vocal cries made by the man's wife that were expressly related to his satisfaction. Little has changed since those accounts, both in moral expectation to contain coital noise, and that the aural aspects of sex are often considered to positively contribute to sexual experience:

Josh: *Yeah, well I definitely agree. I mean, in terms of when you're actively engaging in sex um, the noise of the female is actually pleasurable within your brain. Um, and that's almost one of those things that helps you get off. Um, it adds to the mood. It adds to everything.*

For Josh, the enjoyment of sex is accentuated by hearing the sounds his partner makes. Such a perspective - that good sex has an aural component - tends to complicate, and in some cases, contradict expectations to spatially contain coital noise. What is interesting is that Josh frames this within a biological context, locating the notion of pleasurable sounds within the brain. Later in the interview, Josh elaborates:

Josh: *When it comes to sexual noises, I think that the human brain actually has this innate ability to hear it no matter what [laughs].*

Paul: *So that's a biological response?*

Josh: *I think it is. I think there's almost like a um, I guess the brain almost anticipates and expects that if a boy and a girl<sup>34</sup> go into that room, then there is going to be a noise that is going to follow. Um, especially if they close the door, then you know that there's...*

Not only is the notion of pleasure located as an embodied experience, but also that the impacts of coital noises are virtually impossible to ignore due to an innate biological capacity to hear it. This tends to align with the experience of the participants in Gurney's (2000a) research, who indicated that coital noise is more intrusive than any other noise that is experienced in the home. In the case of noises from sexual activity, bodies intersect and overlap within and across the spatial configuration of the home. The sensuous body spills out, and disrupts the sense of feeling private by making noises during sex. Further, the home fails to provide spatial seclusion by allowing bodies to leak out through walls and doors. Aurality does not operate in isolation, as Josh was cued to anticipate coital noise through seeing "a boy and a girl" disappear together into a bedroom. In some cases, then, a sense of privacy is not necessarily defined by the sensorium per se, but through the anticipation that something is about to occur.

Understandings of sexual activity as natural, normal, "what humans do", and "innate", reflect dominant discourses that position sexual activity as a pre-social or supra-social condition. Coital noises for the pre-social body emanates out as an "inherent property of the human organism ... an expression of our animal

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<sup>34</sup> Josh seems to assume heterosexuality here.

natures” (Jackson and Scott 2002 103). In this context, coital noises become abject through their potential to invoke the “threatening world of animals and animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder” (Kristeva 1982 13). As such, Kristeva (1982 12 emphasis in original) argues that the abject confronts “us ... with those fragile states where man [sic] strays on the territories of *animal*.” Wild, animalistic bodies invade the civilised home, breaking the nature/culture binary that the social home requires in order to remain intact. Evidence of sexual activity for the pre-social body disrupts the cultured, civilised body, and this perhaps goes some way to explaining why coital noises are so difficult to ignore.

These naturalised constructions of sexual activity also appear to inform the belief that sex is inevitably noisy. Dave reflects on his own strategies to minimise the noises generated during sex:

Dave: *Um, and vocal sounds? Um, yeah, generally, um, it gets to a certain level of volume and so one stops sexual um, activity. And then that, then one starts again naturally, and the volume goes up, and stops and starts and stops. And um, and [pause] muffling doesn't seem to work for anyone.*

Paul: *Muffling with?*

Dave: *Ah, pillows, bits of material.*

Paul: *Whatever is lying around [laughs]?*

Dave: *[Laughs] Whatever is lying around, yeah, yeah, yeah. And um, that's a sort of, that frequency [volume, pitch, timbre] thing, there either comes a point when, with the muffling, it makes the time last a bit longer but it, it [the noise] still happens.*

No matter what techniques were employed, for Dave the volume that emanates during sex is unavoidable. The threat of aural surveillance is present, and being heard shapes the way Dave expresses his sexual identity. Having control over how long a sexual act lasts is interrupted by the awareness of people who may be in earshot. Under the threat of the panaudic ear, compromises are made to extend the length of time that Dave can have sex for, but any masking attempts ultimately fail as coital noise is understood as “naturally” inevitable.

Accompanying the pre-social construction of sexual activity is the supra-social, where sexual experiences are invested with romanticised, magical properties that allow bodies to transcend “the mundane realities of quotidian existence” (Jackson and Scott 2002 103). *La petit mort* or ‘little death’, a term used to explain the state of being at the point of sexual climax, is one example that indicates towards the supra-social aspects of sex. Through the highly charged physical and emotional conditions that are often associated with sex, a transcendent state is reached and the everyday dissolves. This becomes more than a transcendental meeting with one’s true self, but it can also represent a loss of self where “the boundaries of selfhood yield to the touch of the other” (Cornell 1993 103 cited in Potts 2000). When this happens, I suggest sexual activity transcends the potential influence of panaudic surveillance, a situation compounded by the state of being-at-home that Ahmed (2000) argues makes the subject forget to question limits or borders.

While such explanations offer compelling options to frame why sex is sometimes noisy, and why coital noises in some cases defies panaudic surveillance, such debates tend to be deterministic and ignore the social

meanings that bodies produce, receive, and maintain. As Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott (2002) argue, the pre-social and supra-social aspects of sexuality cannot be abstracted from the social (and I would add spatial) contexts in which they occur. Using orgasm as a basis, Jackson and Scott (2002) explore the ways in which sexuality, heterosexual desire, and pleasure are gendered and therefore socially mediated. This is particularly evident when considering the orgasm:

the dominant understanding at the turn of the millennium is that the ability to orgasm is natural; an inability to orgasm is an effect of social learning or conditioning. If we could just dispel our cultural inhibitions, or paradoxically (re-)learn our natural instincts, then nature would prevail. Nature/positive would overcome culture/negative (Potts 2000 56).

Dominant discourses that locate orgasm within a nature/culture binary resound with gendered expectations and understandings. For instance, the performance of successful (orgasmic) sexual activity for men is most commonly predicated on the presence of visual evidence (ejaculatory fluid). “Given the supposed invisibility of women’s orgasm” (Jackson and Scott 2002 107), an audible cue is expected as a means to mark out the climactic event.

This is reinforced through media representations, such as those found in pornography, and in women’s popular magazines. Validation through vocal expression is embedded in a belief that accomplished sex ultimately results in orgasm. The absence of orgasm signifies a failed or incomplete sexual event. For men, the ways in which heterosexual pleasure is represented in the media places a great deal of pressure to ‘give’ an orgasm to a woman. Failure to do so

for the man represents an affront to their masculinity. Conversely, women are under a certain amount of pressure to “reassure him, to provide evidence of her orgasm” (Jackson and Scott 2000 107-108) through vocalisation in order to affirm that a successful sexual performance has occurred.<sup>35</sup>

The subjective position of one couple in Dave’s home offers a useful insight into the expectations that accompany the good sex/noisy sex narrative:

Dave: *The one couple in bedroom two say that they make lots of noise but me and bedroom five, quite a distance away, have never heard them.<sup>36</sup> So, um, and so it’s a general, that’s a general joke. I don’t know whether it’s a general joke with the person in bedroom three, they would definitely hear. Um, but it is sort of like, “Ah, you should scream louder cos I can’t hear” [laughs].*

Declaring that they have loud sex appears to be an important part of the couple’s sexual identities. Simply having noisy sex is not enough on its own, and asserting the aural qualities of their sexual practices to others is necessary to produce successful sex. Indeed, Gurney (2000a; 2000b) draws attention to a kind of reverse voyeurism, where for some people the potential of being overheard contributes to the enjoyment of sex. Due to the lack of acoustic evidence, however, the ‘success’ of the couple’s sexual acts is contested, albeit indirectly. When discussing an event in a previous flat where he had overheard his flatmates having sex, I asked Dave to elaborate on which noises he found

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<sup>35</sup> While such discourses dominate Western representations of heterosexual desire and sexuality, they are not necessarily limited by them. Not all vocal expressions by women during heterosexual sex can be reduced to merely being a reassurance, as I believe this erases the agency of women.

<sup>36</sup> See page 243 (Figure 6.5) for a sketch of the location of the bedrooms in Dave’s house.

most annoying. Again, in a joking manner, Dave reinforces the notion that good sex is noisy:

Paul: *Was it the panting sounds, or...?*

Dave: *The panting sounds. No, no screaming, which is really weird. Um, I actually get a lot of my past friends to go to sex classes cos they just obviously weren't doing something right [laughs]. Only joking.*

Although Dave expressed that he would not seriously refer friends to sex classes, the absence of loud vocal sounds during sexual activity deviated from what he considered to be normal. It is clear, then, that coital noise is embedded in a multifaceted web of social meaning, reinforced and often contradicted by notions of pre-social and supra-social experience. As a result, the containment of coital noises cannot be reduced to merely a failure to conform to moral expectations of modesty and courtesy. In the words of Gurney (2000a 42), “coital noise itself is the outcome of a complex process of social construction rather than a simple failure to curb the urge to yell out”. Why Gurney’s (2000a) analysis is so useful is that he weaves the social processes that shape coital noise within a situated and embodied spatial context, particularly in regard to discursive constructions of home and privacy. Doing so offers interesting opportunities to examine why desire and sexuality can, in some cases, operate outside notions of panoptic surveillance.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See Morrison (2010) as an example of how heterosexual desire and the expression of intimacy is often difficult to contain.

## **Privacy, Performance, and the Implicit Politics of Coital Noise**

Coital noise manifests at the convergence of bodies, homes, emotions, and sensuous experience. At this nexus, the paradox that sexual acts are simultaneously expected to be silent *and* noisy manifests. The contradictory set of expectations that inform sexual desire and pleasure map out in spaces that, due to the fluidity of noises across physical boundaries, are unstable and ambiguously defined. The experience of coital noise must then be considered within a socio-spatial context that acknowledges that the production of intimate spaces in the home is problematic. Accounts of coital noise that emerged during this research certainly reflected this. Dominant understandings of privacy, and performance, dominated the ways coital noise is understood:

Josh: *Um, and she, she was the loudest girl I have ever heard in my entire life. I swear the entire [student] village would've heard. That would not have just been my room. Because I know that um, one time during the day the housekeeper, because they were doing it one time during the day, and the housekeeper was down the other corridor cos it was a Y-shape. It was block five; it was a Y-shape. And um, she had the vacuum cleaner on and she could hear this noise and she came down to investigate what the noise was. And cos [omitted text] and I had our doors open, she came down and she asked us what was going on. Because she said, her description of it is that sounded like a porn movie, that he'd had the volume turned all the way up. You know, on the TV. That the TV had just gone really, really loud and it was a porn going. And we were like "Oh no no no, it's just you know, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ at it again" [laughs].*

Josh's example relates back to his first year at university, when he lived in the University of Waikato Halls of Residence. Like the couple that Dave shares a house with, Josh felt it was the intention of the people concerned to be heard. Josh was left in no doubt that the couple were fully aware that their sexual practices were heard by people outside the walls of their room. The potential threat of panaudic surveillance, in this case, had no bearing on the performance aspect of sexual activity.

Josh never discussed the event with the couple, and could therefore only speculate as to what motivated them to be so audible. It does seem that the performance of sexual identities, in this way, is informed by the belief that good sex/noisy sex perhaps represents an attempt to validate how successful their sex is with those that are in earshot. This is done indirectly, and while the couple know they would have been heard, the matter was never addressed expressly. Toni (32, female), who currently shares a four-bedroom unattached rented home with four others, had a similar experience in a previous flat:

- Toni: *I can only really think of one time and that was, they were extraordinarily loud. Like, imagine turning the telly on and turning it up full. They were about, well they were probably louder than that. And I, to me, it was like they were trying to be loud so it wasn't, it was a bit like you know, get over it. Shut up. You know, it wasn't that it was actually, it didn't bother me. And I was like, you know, good on them kind of thing [laughs]. But...*
- Paul: *Good on them? Like, did you talk to them about it or?*
- Toni: *Oh, everyone [in earshot] was joking about it kind of. I mean they, they obviously knew they could be heard because when*

*you're all yelling at the top of your lungs, generally you expect to be heard I think.*

Paul: *So it was a yelling...?*

Toni: *Um, yep. And screaming and yep. Rather than just slapping or ah, squidging or um, other...*

Paul: *General moaning?*

Toni: *General moaning stuff, no. This was like, yelling and screaming. Yeah.*

Paul: *Was there an element, the thing that was annoying was [omitted text] that there was an element of performance?*

Toni: *Yeah, like they wanted us to hear.*

Again, the belief is that performing loud sex denotes an intent to be heard. Yet, this is not explicitly discussed with those who are making the sounds. In the case of coital noise, issues are rarely addressed explicitly. During this research project, 13 participants discussed the issue of coital noise, and in only one of these cases did a participant address the issue with the people making the noises. In the one case where it was discussed, the person was in the same room as the people making the noises. While the situations, sensitivities, and tolerances of the people involved varied, each situation was underscored by the way sexual activity and coital noises are constructed as taboo.

As I listened to the 'lack' of self-discipline in these examples, it occurred to me that the taboo nature of coital noise can serve paradoxically as a means to produce a sense of privacy. The personal sensitivities of those who may be in earshot can combine with dominant constructions of sex noises as taboo to assist in contesting the Panaudicon. When discussion of taboo noises is avoided, the noises and the actions causing those them become enshrined

behind a socially constructed barrier. This barrier produces a 'wall of silence'. So while the unspeakable nature of taboo subjects has the potential to oppress the expression of the aural self, it can also act as a boundary behind which identities can remain hidden, protected, and intact. For example, knowing that household members are unable or unwilling to raise issues relating to taboo noises can serve to allow an 'uneasy truce' to prevail:

Josh: *No, well we didn't. Well I mean that's interesting isn't it? Cos sex is a touchy topic. You wouldn't bring it up over the dinner would you really? "Oooh, I heard you and [partner's name] um [laughs]. So how's life?" "Life's good." "I meant the sex life [laughs]." Um, yeah, we never really brought it up. We tolerated the noise.*

The spatial configuration of the Halls of Residence meant that noise from multiple sources was a constant and arguably unavoidable part of life. Coital noises in the dormitory living situation occurred within a broader politics of background noise that was accepted as part of everyday living. An "informal rule that ... went around the Halls" reflected a 'live and let live' approach to shared accommodation, where "it [coital noise] was expected, and if that happened to us then we wouldn't expect them to complain about us" (Josh). For the couple that Josh mentioned earlier, the informal rule provided liberty, rather than limits, for sexual expression.

Knowing that it was highly unlikely anyone would reprimand them, or even mention their loud sex, allowed the couple to be noisy. If the couple had

produced an equivalent level of noise from a device such as a television, the Residential Assistant (who among other things is responsible for policing noise in the Halls) would have intervened. Coital noise occurs within an implicit and taboo sphere of relations, and as such, often exists beyond enforcement. For those predisposed towards noisy sex, the implicit rules governing taboo noises can produce a form of privacy. It must be noted that this sense of privacy is entirely contingent on the compliance of those within earshot, as demonstrated by the Caroline Cartwright case (*The Independent* 2010; *The Sun* 2009).

Even in less extreme cases, the implicit politics of the taboo can provide a sense of privacy. For example, Toni was very cautious to avoid disclosing who she was having sex with. Knowing that her flatmates would not discuss matters of coital noise meant that measures to avoid detection involved avoiding sightings rather than noises. While Toni felt that she was not compelled to “make that much of an effort to be quiet”, avoiding being seen was much more important. Here, the ‘wall of silence’ surrounding the taboo offers no protection from discovery, although it does appear to drive the taboo far enough underground to provide a feeling of privacy. For Toni, this can extend beyond the taboo nature of coital noise:

Toni: *It was more the effect of people being aware of that I’m doing anything, rather than whether I’m making noise or not if that makes sense. It wasn’t about the noise. It was about the fact that mmm [pause]. God, I don’t know how to explain that one.*

Paul: *The fact that there was something going on?*

Toni: *Well, if I was to bring someone home now, I’d probably be quiet as a mouse if I could because I wouldn’t want anyone to know*

*that I have someone there. It wouldn't just be about minimising noise, it would be about covering up the whole entire incident.*

Paul: *You wouldn't want the people that you're living with to know that you had brought someone home?*

Toni: *Probably not. Oh, depends. Depends who it is.*

Paul: *Oh okay. That's an issue of privacy/?*

Toni: */Yeah, rather than sound, per se.*

In this case, the motivation to minimise noise is driven by issues of keeping her 'private' life contained. It is the potential exposure to the judgement values of those whom Toni shares her home with that predominantly drives her desire to feel private, rather than a fear of just being overheard. In the case of sexual activity, paraudic listening is ever-present for Toni in her home, and fear of disclosure affects her ability to express herself in ways that she would prefer:

Toni: *I know that when I can't be heard that [pause] there's, I'm considerably louder.*

Spatiality is key to Toni's subjective position when it comes to dealing with noises from sexual activity in her current home, and in previous shared accommodation situations, reflects the ways in which intimate spaces are not necessarily confined within bedroom walls. Due to the taboo nature of coital noise, Toni's strategies to negotiate her sex life occurred outside any explicit means. As Toni explains, she had no direct engagement with her flatmates in regards to being heard during sexual activity:

Paul: *If there is somebody else home are you still able to um, engage in sexual activity, and you can stop the noise from going outside the room?*

Toni: *Yeah, to an extent. I mean I don't really know because I've never really tested it. I just assumed that it's not.*

The assumed, untested aspect of dealing with taboo noises involves a certain amount of 'faith' that no one is able to hear, as the process of determining whether others can hear taboo sounds requires a disclosure that personal activities are taking place. The efficacy of containment strategies are immediately obvious when it comes to visual privacy. In the research that Omaki (1995) draws on, parents were only aware that their intimate space had been compromised when a child was seen in the bedroom. In these cases, assessing how the child or children were affected by the event was instant. The same could not be said for auditory privacy. The primarily neutral effects from visual exposure to parents having sex mentioned earlier is in stark contrast to the negative affective responses of children who reported overhearing parental coital noise - experiences that "may have been more unpleasant, more memorable, and yet *hidden* from the parents" (Omaki 1995 75 my emphasis).

Significantly, parents are often unaware that their children have overheard parental coital noise, and therefore, the interpretation of such events is left to the child to interpret. Primal scene exposure is only explicitly recognised almost exclusively in the presence of visual disclosure. In most cases, there is no equivalent active intervention present in the negotiation of sex noises. Given that the rules that govern the negotiation of parental coital noise are dominated by notions of modesty, shame, guilt, and embarrassment, this is perhaps no

surprise. In their research on negotiating taboo topics, Michael Roloff and Danette Ifert (1998) suggest that avoiding a particular topic can be related to a perceived relational danger.

In the case of coital noise, the danger that disclosure represents emanates from the fear that embarrassment poses to the self. Perhaps narratives that position children of a particular age as too young to comprehend, or to be taught about, sex (Omaki 1995) also contribute to why proactively discussing primal scene exposure is avoided. Regardless of where any motives may originate from, in the partitioned home, the idiom *out of sight, out of mind* aptly describes the politics of parental coital noise. As a result, the efficacy of strategies to contain coital noises, and the impact that overhearing coital noises might have, can only be assumed:

Dave: *So, yes those, those noises were quite unexpectedly loud. Um, so, um...*

Paul: *Squeaking bed?*

Dave: *Squeaking bed, yeah, yeah, was quite loud. Especially banging up against the wall there. But I haven't had any feedback from my other flatmates. There doesn't seem to be any, or it hasn't been politely mentioned.*

Denise lives with her partner and their two year old daughter in an unattached three-bedroom home. Four metres from her bedroom is a caravan occupied by a neighbouring tenant:

Denise: *Whether we make noise and disturb other people? One of the things I've wondered about, since we can hear quite a lot from here from that house, is whether they can hear us. You know, can they hear us having sex in our bedroom? I don't know. In the caravan, can they hear that? I don't know.*

Although Denise did not know whether she could be heard, her personal sensitivity to coital noise meant that being overheard did not pose a threat. Instead, the prospect of the neighbour overhearing her would be amusing. Regardless, the actual extent of the sensuous horizon of her bedroom remains untested.

The power relations within these examples demonstrate how expectations, tolerances, and sensitivities can be conformed to and contested. Power manifests differently based on the subjectivities of those making sex noises and those who are hearing it. Sensitivities can also differ between those involved in sexual acts:

Paul: *If you are aware that you could be overheard, I guess it is a sliding scale like you said um, but you'd modify...?*

Peter: *I guess for me I'm, I guess I'm comfortable with it but obviously my experience is that women are generally more sensitive about being overheard. So I wouldn't generally be too fussed but then obviously you're sensitive to them so you might...*

Paul: *Tone it down for their sake?*

Peter: *Yeah.*

Peter's account frames the noises that result from sexual activity within an uneven politics of gender. The women that Peter has been sexually involved with have expressed a greater need to feel that their sexual activity is 'private' than he required. While they are discursively expected to be noisy, according to Peter's experiences, women are also somewhat ironically more sensitive to the implications of being heard. Dave too felt that "women are more private" when it comes to sex sounds. While these views are far from representative, they do perhaps speak to a gendered coding of the taboo, where sexual 'disclosure' poses a greater threat to women than to men. Or perhaps this may suggest a hegemonic reading of gender relations where women become positioned as being more sensitive to the threat of being overheard during sex. Either way, the sexual practices of both Peter and David were shaped by a sensitivity to the needs of their partners:

David: *Yeah. And the same with physical [non-vocal] sounds as well. They can get quite loud.*

Paul: *So, if there was nobody home, would that be different?*

David: *Yes.*

Paul: *And you wouldn't worry about it? You wouldn't worry about being overheard by the neighbours or...?*

David: *No, no. Ah, I wouldn't. Sometimes my, the person I was having sex with was, yeah. So yes.*

Gender merges here with other dominant themes that have featured in the experiences of the people who were interviewed for this project - connections and relationships to those who may be able to hear, housing design, proximity, privacy and performance - and these are all pivotal to the ways Dave manages

his sexual practices. Given the layout of his home and the proximity of his bedroom to the neighbour's house, in some cases it was just as likely that flatmates would be able to hear him during sex as it was for the neighbours. David, however, feels a greater sense of responsibility when it comes to his flatmates, which is informed by notions of courtesy.

This desire to avoid disrupting his flatmates with coital noise is embedded within an understanding that such noises can upset the enjoyment of home. By contrast, it is sensitivity to the needs of his partner, and not an issue of extending courtesy to the neighbours, that affects David's noise awareness. This is not to say that David is intentionally discourteous towards his neighbours. Rather, avoiding disturbing his flatmates is embedded in a broader politics of courtesy and consideration within the home, one that necessarily requires active and implicit negotiation on a daily basis to ensure a harmonious home. Conversely, the emotional, social, and spatial distance between David and his neighbours is much less immediate, and therefore, is less pending.

## **Summary**

Listening for the politics involved in negotiating coital noise has offered interesting insights into the mutually constitutive, embedded, and embodied relationships between bodies and space. Focusing attention on coital noise to tease out how spaces such as the home are embodied is useful precisely because it is taboo. Coital noise does not dwell in the background like most sounds and noises. Instead, as a taboo phenomenon, coital noise abjectly draws attention to itself.

Commanding attention, whether heard as annoying, immoral, humorous, or even arousing, the taboo of sex noises serves as a reminder to just how porous and unstable domicile and corporeal boundaries are. Through its demanding expectation that we listen, awareness of coital noises erodes distance and disrupts the 'comfortable' notion that bodies are distinct from other bodies, and from the spaces that they occupy. Visual bias may reinforce boundaries and produce distance between the self and space, but an aural (and multi-sensory) reading of socio-spatial relations tends to erode this separation. In doing so, that which is taboo brings into stark relief the taken-for-granted role that sounds and noises play in locating individuals, and often overlapping sensuous identities, in-place.

The politics of how coital noise maps onto and through bodies and homes are rarely dealt with in an explicit sense. Rather, the experience of hearing sexual activity, and being overheard having sex, is negotiated through internalised power relations informed by discourses of morality, modesty, embarrassment, and shame. The expectations resonating through these discourses affectively 'silence' how issues that may arise from coital noises are addressed. As a result, awareness of how far sex noises travel throughout the home, and the effects that the noises may have on others, is almost exclusively assumed and untested. Somewhat ironically, although the bedroom walls may not provide aural seclusion from others in the home, the 'wall of silence' produced by the coital noise taboo provides a sense of privacy, as those wanting to engage in noisy sex know that it is highly unlikely anyone will confront them about their potentially transgressive behaviour. How readily the transgression occurs is dependent on a number of interrelated influences such as housing design,

socio-economic status, personal sensitivity, the social composition of the home, and kinship ties.



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## 6 HOMEMAKING: A PROCESS OF ELIMINATION

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The act of going to the toilet is one that is intimately tied up with our bodies, our senses, and also our emotions (Kamash 2010 50).

Put bluntly, peeing is political, and so is taking a shit and washing up (Molotch 2010 2).

The process of making home is complex and occurs within a myriad of sensuous and emotional processes at various spatial scales. The notion of home carries with it a multitude of meanings. Producing a space that feels insulated from the public domain, according to Blunt and Dowling (2006), and Pink (2004), is a ubiquitous part of homemaking endeavours. Achieving a sense of privacy is far from straightforward. In many cases, constructing a space free from the influences of the outside world requires vast amounts of energy and numerous strategies. The inclusion of various objects such as curtains, and carefully managed sensory environments such as the use of scented candles/incense, and playing music, all help to reinforce homeliness and 'privacy'.

At the same time, homemakers must often go to great lengths to exclude elements that do not adhere to the ideal (private) home narrative. Yet, due to the permeability of physical and discursive boundaries, achieving the privacy 'ideal' is rarely attained, if at all. The ability to exclude undesirable influences is often contingent on issues such as socio-economic status (Meszaros 2005),

cultural preferences (Sciama 1993), gender (McDowell 1983; Pink 2004), and corporeal/mental disability (Imrie 2004).

At the heart of the difficulties in achieving a sense privacy is the problematic nature of hegemonic constructions such as private/public and self/other. While such distinctions may offer a goal to aspire to for those trying to produce a home as 'private', these binaries are illusions and, according to Kristeva (1982) and Sibley (1985), the containment and sealing off of corporeal and domicile boundaries is unachievable. Boundaries are just far too porous and unstable to defend, and therefore, the concept of the home "as a haven, or a place of privacy, security, independence and control" is neither stable nor guaranteed (Imrie 2004 746). Even if influences from the public domain are satisfactorily filtered, the problem of managing and eliminating unwanted influences from *within* the home can persist. For example, noise from other members of the household, or the potential for being overheard, can compromise a sense of privacy.

In much of the Western world, to varying degrees, there is a general aversion to hearing and being heard making many types of bodily function noises. Noises associated with corporeal eliminations such as faeces, urine, farts, burps, and sputum, are deemed to be undesirable in home spaces. This is not isolated to just Western cultures, as Miwako Ueda and Shin-ichiro Iwamiya's (2006) work on sound-masking devices in toilets in Japan attests. As Zena Kamash (2010 51) argues, the sensory cues that elicit "disgust, especially the damp, the slimy, and the stinky ... come out of our evolutionary past and are designed to protect us from potential threats to health and safety". While Kamash (2010) suggests

that this explains why certain elicitors of emotion of disgust are found cross-culturally, her work also lists, and is most focused on, the violation of social norms:

The violation of morality or social norms, is particularly interesting in this context, as the implication is that disgust has social functions and is then to a certain extent also a cultural construct, as well as being part of our evolutionary makeup (Kamash 2010 51).

Building on the themes of abjection, transgression, and contamination as a cultural construct outlined in the previous chapter, the following discussion moves from the bedroom to the bathroom and toilet. First, I offer a brief account of European toilets from prehistory through to the Victorian era to contextualise how historical processes have influenced contemporary spaces of, and attitudes to, the toilet. Second, I draw on accounts from the people who participated in this research to discuss how dominant discourses around toileting are conformed to, and in many cases, contested in contemporary New Zealand homes. Attention is paid to how bodily function noises disrupt the physical boundaries of bodies and domicile spaces, and how subjective expectations of home spaces shape, and are shaped by, the corporeal politics of toileting.

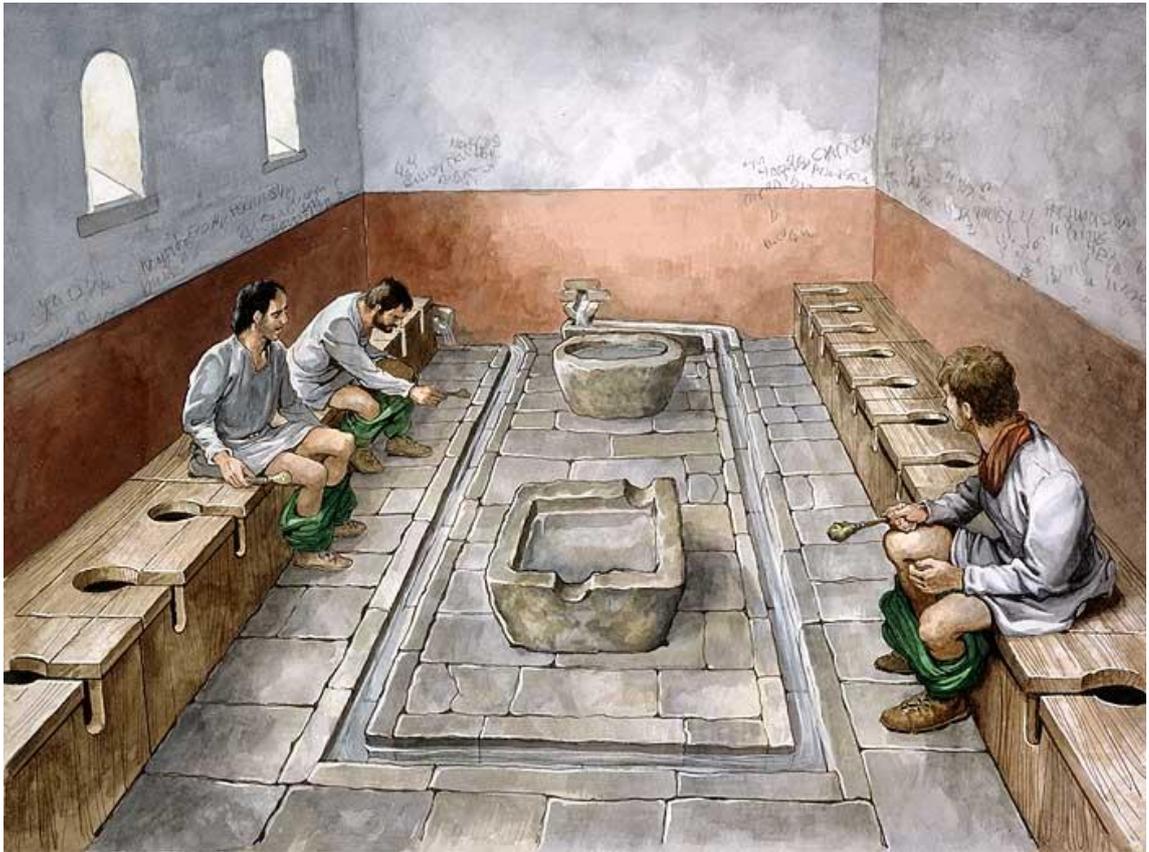
### **A Brief History of Toileting: From Antiquity to the Victorian Era**

The evolution of the toilet to its current manifestation in New Zealand homes is a useful starting point to begin unpacking attitudes to, and the effects of, abject and taboo bodily noises. For as Elias (1978[1939]) argues, attitudes and expectations relating to bodily comportment and the spatial scale of home are

inextricably enmeshed. The gradual changes to expectations surrounding the containment of bodily noises, which occurred within broader civilising process discourses, also appear to map out along similar trajectories as the changes that occurred to home spaces, and to what constitutes the 'public' domain. Further, the role that the senses play in the exercising of power governing toilet etiquette is evident in the following historical accounts, and as such, demonstrates that contemporary toileting behaviour and expectations have a long and interesting past.

The earliest known evidence of toilets that were incorporated into domicile space was found in the Neolithic village of Skara Brae, estimated to have been occupied between 3180-2500 BCE. Each dwelling included a primitive toilet which was linked to a communal drainage system. Water was used to flush excrement and other household waste to a central midden away from the home (Bryson 2010 368-369). Similarly, the Indus Valley civilisation (c. 2,600-1,900 BCE), and the Minoan civilisation of Crete (c. 2,000-1,600 BCE) used water to move toilet waste through a sewer network. In these examples, the toilet was not a partitioned, distinct space within the home. Those using the toilet would have been in full view of others who were in the home.

Roman latrines (c. 800 BCE) were also an open affair. Benches with holes at regular intervals went around a room, and urinating and defecating were done within full view of others using the facility. Moreover, written accounts at the time indicate that it was commonplace for conversations and business deals to take place with others in the latrine (Bryson 2010).



**Figure 6.1: Artist's impression of the latrine at the Housesteads Roman fort, Northumberland, UK (Source: Reproduced with permission from Heritage Explorer 2013)**

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century AD, sophisticated plumbing systems disappeared from the European landscape and did not re-emerge again until the nineteenth century (Bryson 2010). For the most part, so too did the incorporation of toilets within the extent of houses. Whether through a desire to create distance from the tyranny that many people experienced under Roman rule, access to the necessary financial resources to produce them, or some other influence, the discontinuation of sewer systems suggests a change in values that radically departs from the previous era.

During the Middle Ages, toilets in the Anglo-Saxon world consisted of trenches or cesspits with wooden seats over them, and were used as a public facility.

Through a desire to distance themselves from the lower classes, upper class aspirations resonated with notions of hygiene and etiquette that imposed the label of abject onto those outside court society. To elevate themselves above the 'unwashed' lower classes, facilities designed to be used inside the home, such as garderobes and chamber pots, became the preferred toileting option for the ruling elite. Unlike the period just prior to and following Erasmus' (1530) *De Civilitate morum puerilium*, it is unlikely that notions of modesty, shame, and embarrassment had gained much traction in relation to universally 'privatising' the process of going to the toilet.

The communal facilities that existed during this period tend to indicate that the toilet was yet to become the 'privy'. Even after Erasmus (1530), toileting activities were not universally privatised. What is evident, however, is that expectations of modesty had gradually gained more prominence, and it was the ruling elite who were pushing the 'privacy' agenda (Elias 1978[1939]). By the eighteenth century, changes to the dominant social hierarchy heralded by the Industrial Revolution, and the related emergent bourgeois class, meant the influence of the aristocracy in relation to social behaviour and taboos had waned significantly. New social structures brought with them new spatial configurations and new ways of interacting. For instance, the widespread and dominant (but not universal) construction of toileting as taboo heavily influenced the increasing privatisation of home as it solved the "problem of eliminating these [natural] functions from social life and displacing them behind the scenes" (Elias 1978[1939] 139). For the poor though, 'natural functions' continued to be a public part of social life. As Cavanagh (2010 80) states, from the "Middle Ages

through to the early modern period, elimination was less organized and more communal than it came to be in the late-Victorian era.”

The architecture, urban design, and waste management technologies that emerged at this time were all changing to accommodate the increased pressure to conceal the expulsion of corporeal ‘dirt’. While Elias (1978[1939]) is cautious about marking any particular event or period as being more influential than others during the civilising process, the silencing of elimination noises to a large degree has its origins in Victorian England. As Cavanagh (2010 28) states:

The ordinances governing the management of excretion in [the Victorian era], along with the technologies of the water closet developed by a host of sanitary engineers, plumbers, and inventors of the eighteenth century, led to a historically unparalleled privatisation and gendering of the eliminatory function.

Forcing the toilet indoors, as Gurney (2000b 63) argues, presented a tension for those that lived together within a home: “by bringing faeces, urine or menses indoors, the civilising process has created an entirely new set of problems for the accommodation of leaky and odoriferous bodies.” On the one hand, the home was positioned as the place where bodily eliminations were to be undertaken. Similarly, sexual desire and identities were also expected to be contained *within* the home. On the other hand, affecting a sufficient degree of modesty and shame by disguising the act of toileting or sex was (and still is in some cases) rarely possible. This is because sound, smell, and visual evidence all betray the deed. In the case of noise, as Cavanagh (2010 106) attests, the

“shift in auditory sensibilities leading up to the present day” that began in pre-modern England made the management of the taboo problematic.

In order to avoid exposure of the taboo, the physical structure of homes had to change to accommodate societal expectations. Initially, chamber pots in bedrooms served to help manage bodily eliminations, but increasing bourgeois obsessions with dirt and hygiene in Victorian England led to a separate room, the toilet, emerging within (and often outside) domestic spaces. Notions of shame and modesty required a partitioned, ‘private’ space where ablutions could be performed, and hence the civilising process reshaped the home. This is the origin of the term privy (from privacy).<sup>38</sup> Yet, the noises from the ‘thunder room’ were not as easy to contain, and sensuously speaking, the privy was far from private.

### **Toilets and Toileting: Comportment and Surveillance**

Although the partitioning of ‘private’ bodily functions from the public domain played a significant part in reinforcing notions of shame and embarrassment, it is the ways in which the power resonating through the civilising process became internalised that is central to this thesis. As moral codes of conduct filtered throughout society, and it became taboo to discuss toileting, the power influencing behaviour shifted from external forces such as the state and other institutions towards the self. Once the notions of shame and embarrassment became widely entrenched in public discourse, prohibitions supported by social sanctions began to manifest in individuals as internalised self-discipline (Elias

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<sup>38</sup> For a more comprehensive discussion of the evolution of toileting practices within domestic Western spaces, see Lawrence Wright’s (1960) *Clean and Decent: The Fascinating History of the Bathroom and the Water Closet*.

1978[1939]). Again, the privatised home and the family within were integral to the internalisation of appropriate modes of behaviour:

And this restraint, like all others, is enforced less and less by direct physical force. It is cultivated in the individual from an early age as habitual self-restraint by the structure of social life, by the pressure of social institutions in general, and by certain executive organs of society (above all, the family) in particular (Elias 1978[1939] 188).

According to Elias (1978[1939]), the shift from external influences to self-discipline was so complete that even in the absence of others, the effects of the civilising process affected behaviour. In the case of nudity within the home, Victorian Era compulsions to conceal the body from the gaze of other members of the household “were so advanced and internalised that bodily forms had to be entirely covered even when alone or in the closest family circle” (Elias 1978[1939] 166). This ingrained and automatic degree of self-discipline is reflected in a comment made by Matt in relation to farting:

Matt: *Yeah, if I'm by myself I don't care [laughs], I'll cut one. I wouldn't do it and you know, in town or generally even if I was visiting friends. Even if I knew them real well. Like, [friend's name] or something. I still probably wouldn't just let rip. Or if I do it even, you know, I'll usually go “Oh, pardon me.” But I've even done it while being by myself I've gone, “Oh, pardon me.”*

Matt's reaction to farting, even when no one else is likely to hear, is a clear example of just how ingrained expectations of bodily comportment are. The

discourses of privacy that inform the production of home, and the physical structure of the house are no match for the pervasiveness of the civilising process. Even when alone within his own home, a space that Gurney (2000b) argues is the site where individuals are most free to be their embodied selves, Matt is subject to auditory self-surveillance.

Such behaviour appears to confirm that the “the automatic functioning of power”, as Foucault (1977 201) suggests, is so complete that individuals exact discipline on the body. Significantly for research, Foucault (1977) positions discipline and power as a spatial and sensuous process. Elias (1978[1939]) argues that social sanctions and prohibitions synonymous with the civilising process hold their power at the site of the body, where they are reproduced in the individual as self-controls. These controls are turned so completely into habits that we find it hard to resist them even when alone in intimate domicile space:

Paul: *And, what about your own toileting noises? Are you/*  
Josh: */I'm perfect [laughs]. I never make a noise [laughs boisterously].*  
*[Omitted text] No actually that's, that's kind of funny, um,*  
*because I don't like the noises of even myself, in all honesty.*

Josh's dislike of his own bodily function noises, I believe, speaks to how power resonates within the site of the body. Through expectations taught from parental guidance, the power to produce noises as abject resides in Josh, to the point that hearing his own bodily function noises becomes transgressive. It is important to note that in Josh's case, the body is not the only site of disciplinary

power, as the flow of power is far from linear. For instance, Foucault (1978) argues that adherence to the expectations of the civilising process (within which lies the disciplinary effects of the panaudic ear), is highly contingent on the subjective expectations of those who live within a home. Josh's aversion certainly extends to being heard, and this shapes when and how he uses the toilet.

In the previous chapter, noises resulting from sexual activity were discussed in relation to how they shape experiences of home, and the design of domicile spaces. In a similar fashion, corporeal elimination processes have been, and continue to be, subject to the same disciplinary rules as sexual activity. It is not surprising, then, that there is a resounding silence in geographical and other disciplinary texts in relation to bodily functions. As Chalabi (2008 19) reminds us, it is not only academics who have sidestepped such biological actions, but unless it is being represented under the guise of comedy, nearly all mass-media representations of the body and home are void of shitting and peeing. Although my research is attuned to the noises that result from bodily functions, Chalabi's (2008) broad observation is useful because there is no separating abject noises from the other sensuous and discursive aspects of being-at-home.

### **The 'Homebody' and the Toilet**

While dominant discourses position bodily function noises as abject and taboo, this does not automatically cause them to be silenced in domestic spaces. As with most sensory phenomena, the experience of abject noises is highly subjective and rarely maps out along partitions designed to contain it. The ways

that bodily elimination noises contribute to the home and relationships within also depend on the personal sensitivities of those who live there. This is certainly the case for Echo and Frank in their small (by New Zealand standards) three-bedroom home. When I asked them about their attitudes towards, and awareness of, toilet noises it was clear that such noises were not considered disruptive or out of place in Echo and Frank's home.

Frank stated that he did not consider bodily function noises to be annoying, and this is fortunate in the context of his relationship with Echo given that in the case of farting, Echo identifies as someone who is "loud and proud!" From the beginning of their relationship, Echo took a "no holds barred" approach, and she said if Frank had not been accepting of her farting, "it would be an issue" as far as them living/being together is concerned. Fart noises are not transgressive in this case, as the boundaries between familiar bodies are not so rigidly enforced as they are with non-familial bodies.

With no other people living in their house, Echo and Frank's 'homebodies' remain, for the most part, uninterrupted by influences that do not align with their ideal sense of privacy. Echo's farts do not disrupt their home or identities because everyone within their domestic space has a common viewpoint, and this is reinforced through the intimate ties that Echo and Frank share. Apart from not owning their home, and being subject to rules stipulated by their landowner, Echo and Frank's home is embodied with everything that they are, and with little direct influence from anyone outside of their relationship.

This is also evident in relation to the toilet in Echo and Frank's home. For Echo, her subjective position does not require a high degree of partitioning as far as using the toilet is concerned. For instance, Echo usually leaves the door open when she goes to the toilet. Unlike Echo, Frank prefers to 'go' with the door closed, and expresses to Echo that he prefers that the toilet door is closed when she is in there. Frank points out that it is not overhearing toilet noise that informs his preference, instead suggesting that he thinks "it's just kind of, I don't know, it offends me on some level [Echo laughs]. It just seems weird." Frank believes toilet activities should be contained spatially, even though he identifies as not sensitive to the awareness of toilet activity. Although Frank finds it difficult to pinpoint exactly why he feels this way, it appears that discourses positioning toileting as abject, and a transgression of the moral order of the home, informs his position. This appears to be confirmed by Echo when she reflects on her visit to the toilet during the interview. Even though Echo does not close the door to cater to Frank's preference, my presence as a man within their home disrupted her sense of ease:

Echo: *That was actually, I was interested in that, in that I will usually leave the toilet door open if my girlfriends are around, or if it's just Frank and I here and I'll go to the toilet with the door open. But having a different man in the house, even though I know you, I shut the door. Out of, I dunno, out of courtesy I guess. But generally, Frank will go [laughs] "Oh, shut the door!"*

Echo has known me for approximately 15 years, but my male embodiment affected her sense of privacy and identity in her home. The transgressive

potential of toileting, borne out of concern for what she thought my sensitivities may be, causes Echo to feel the need to close the toilet door. In being considerate of me, Echo closing the door signifies her own sensitivities and also how the experience and negotiation of abjection and the taboo is contingent on bodies and places.

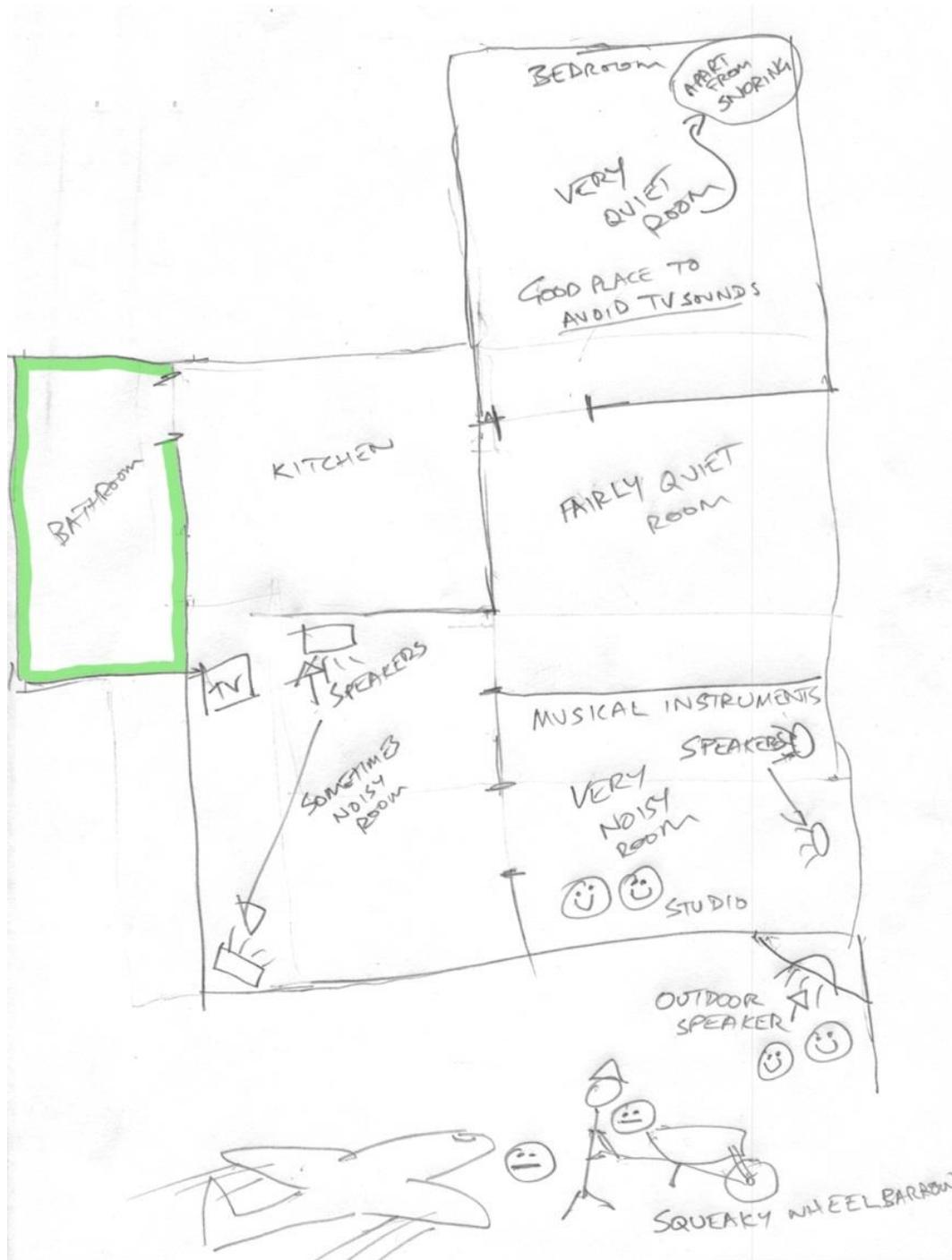


Figure 6.2: Frank's home floor plan sketch (bathroom highlighted in green by author)

The layout of Echo and Frank's home (Figure 6.2) means that both the kitchen and lounge space are both 'open' to the toilet if the bathroom door is open and anyone in the main living area of their house would be likely hear a great deal more with the door open. It was my *gender*, rather than modesty per se, which prompted her decision. In the presence of a man (other than Frank), broader gender and modesty discourses reinsert the public into the home. As Ardener (1993 3) states, "the entry of a stranger may change a private area into a public one ... Thus: *people define space*" (emphasis in original). Although I was not a complete stranger, the lack of familiarity that I represented within their home was enough for my gender to affect Echo's toilet door use. In this way, as the themes addressed in Ardener's (1993) edited collection attest, it is possible to consider hegemonic understandings of privacy as gendered.

### **Gender and Bodily Function Noises**

Gender came up in other interviews as something that shapes the experience and negotiation of abjection and taboo in domestic spaces. In line with the works of Ahmed (2000), Massey (1998), and Pink (2004), participant accounts regarding the sensuous experience of abjection confirm that the construction and maintenance of home is gendered, and that gender is spatially contingent. In particular, the way gendered expectations of bodily functions, containment, and discipline vary between the 'public' domain and the 'private' home indicates towards the interconnection between gender, space, the senses, and abjection.

While dominant cultural norms in New Zealand position farts as taboo in public, gender norms expressed in the following participant accounts tend to position

man-farts as *more* acceptable than woman-farts. This is because, as Iris Young (2005) argues, greater disciplinary pressure is experienced by women than men. From a young age, girls are socialised to actively restrict their bodily comportment in order to adhere to patriarchally imposed constructions of femininity. Girls are taught, and internalise, that they are fragile, are objects rather than subjects, and that to be 'feminine' they must "mask or subordinate the raw facts of embodiment, to make the body 'pretty' by constraining fluid flesh, masking its organic smells with perfumes, painting skin, lips, eyes, and hair that have lost their nubile luster [sic]" (Young 2005 4-5). In the case of subordinating bodily function noises, Mitchell's perception of toilet noises falls within a gendered framework. Indeed, Mitchell reads his mother's corporeal identity as transgressive of gender binaries evident in his reactions to the noises that she makes when on the toilet:

Mitchell: *I mean, mum sounds like a man on the toilet [laughs].*

Paul: *Like a man? So, you would expect men to be more noisy on the toilet than women or...?*

Mitchell: *I wouldn't expect them to but [pause] it's more stereotypical for them to.*

During the individual interviews with Matt, Joe, and Dave, differences between women and men in relation to corporeal discipline were also apparent:

Matt: *Yeah. Oh, maybe. Girls don't burp and fart generally. Or if they do it is like fffff, whereas guys are like rrrrrrr. Yeah, so I guess there'll be a difference there.*

...

Joe: *I think, I mean broad strokes again, a lot of women do not like to be heard to be, sound as if they're farting.*

...

Dave: *Ah, women are more private. Ah, yeah, yeah, women are more private.*

Peter situates his understanding of being sensitive to bodily function noises within a gendered framework:

Paul: *And you mentioned that women are perhaps more sensitive than men to those [toilet] sounds. Is that like, where have those observations come from?*

Peter: *Generally, I guess probably formed first from my mother and then just flatting with women.*

Paul: *Have you had those conversations with women you flatted with?*

Peter: *Yeah.*

Paul: *And they have said like...?*

Peter: *They have gone yeah, they've done the "Oh, that's so gross." And you're like "Oh yeah, whatever." But then after about the fifteenth time you realise that it actually does kind of bug them.*

Paul: *Oh okay. And your mum as well? Like, you were saying...*

Peter: *Yeah, she actually taught me to aim at the back of the toilet bowl to avoid the splashing sound.*

Noises, or more specifically, bodily function noises, are gendered. Disciplining of toileting noises is asymmetrical as women's bodies are expected to be more silent than men's bodies. As Cavanagh (2010 25) poignantly argues,

“panopticism works in harmony with acoustic registers.” We hear, and more generally *sense* gender. In the absence of visual stimuli, the panaudic ear inscribes gender through self-discipline and through the subjective position of the auditor. By example, women friends of mine have told me how they are able to ‘read’ aspects of a woman’s body from the noises that they make on the toilet. For instance, one person that I spoke to said she could tell by the duration and sound of a woman’s urine stream as to whether she had had children. Also, urinating is a good time to develop awareness of pelvic floor muscles, and almost all of the women that I held casual conversation with on the subject had either done this, or had heard a woman in the next cubicle doing them.

Toileting, as Cavanagh (2010 25) argues, meshes toileting spaces together with the sensuous and emotional aspects of bodily functions, inscribing gender onto bodies and identities:

Cissexual laws of symmetry require masculine and feminine subjects to assume divergent urinary positions. How one stands or sits, hovers or squats, indicates gender. The urinary echo orchestrates a truth about the body and its genital composition.

This not only happens through the spatial segregation of public toilets. Josh currently rents a three-bedroom home in a block of six single-storey units with two women who are also in their 20s. Josh’s bedroom has a door that leads to the toilet, an access way that only he uses. Josh knows that he is “instantly going to hear a noise” because “he is the only guy in the house.” Through awareness and his perception of the differences in the physiology of women’s

bodies, Josh hears the gender of his flatmate's bodies through the toileting noises that they make. Not only that, but Josh is able to tell which of his flatmates is using the toilet, by the degree to which they minimise their noises:

Josh: *Well, you see, this is probably the thing. I mean, I notice it more with [flatmate one] than I do with [flatmate two]. So whether [flatmate two] does the same as what I do [to minimise noise] and [flatmate one] doesn't, I don't know.*

Yet, the dominant and gendered expectations surrounding bodily comportment are highly mutable, and these expectations are perhaps no more unstable than at the site of the home. This is due to the dominant imagining of home as a private space where “you can - or would, at least, like to be able to - *be yourself*” (Gurney 2000b 57 emphasis in original). Being yourself in this instance includes the ability to “flout conventional etiquette by belching or breaking the ‘fart taboo’ which usually restricts flatulence outside the home (Gurney 2000b 58). Accounts from Pippa, Mitchell, and Echo suggest that home, as arguably the key site through which bodies are made civil (Elias 1978[1939]), is also the key site where the civilising process is most freely contested in contemporary New Zealand society. I asked Pippa:

Paul: *What about burping and farting? Those, kind of, bodily function sounds.*

Pippa: *See, I'd associate that with both [genders], because that's just, a quality in this home, through and through [laughs] when it comes to stuff like that.*

While Pippa's son Mitchell (interviewed separately) believes that audible fart noises stereotypically associated with men's bodies, within the home his comments confirm his mother's experience:

Mitchell: *No difference in bodily functions.*

Paul: *Not in this house?*

Mitchell: *Nah. Well I can tell you that [laughs].*

It is important to note that these gendered performances and norms are tagged to places and spaces. For Pippa, the 'homebody' is different to the public body:

Pippa: *So if I was to hear a fart in public, I will actually immediately think more of a male than a female.*

Paul: *But in the home it's different?*

Pippa: *But in the home it's different. It's all, all, everyone's equal.*

Pippa's comments reflect the insights of Ahmed (2000) and Pink (2004), who derive their theories through sensuous readings of space, and through understandings of gender as spatially contingent. To be a 'woman' in a public space is to contain bodily function noises. Away from panoptic surveillance, however, gender performance is less-constrained. These sensuous politics confirm the dialogue started by McDowell (1983) in relation to gender and the production of (home) space as mutually constitutive. Although Elias (1978[1939]) demonstrates that the home is arguably the key site in the

civilising process, it is also the key site where the civilising process is, or can be, contested.

Pippa's gendered identity is fluid between her 'private' home and 'public' space. Her home affords the ability to produce a gendered identity that is "equal". Gender becomes embodied into the home, because the home allows a version of gender to be performed that is more in line with Pippa's subjective position relating to farting. This is perhaps what Ahmed (2000) is referring to when she states that homes and bodies leak into and shape each other. Important for this research, Ahmed (2000) and Paterson (2007) argue that the reciprocal assemblage of bodies and space is primarily negotiated and defined as a sensuous process.

### **Farling, Home, and the Civilising Process**

Noise is often associated with matter and it is the imagination of matter that can invoke feelings of abjection. Farts, while often carrying an accompanying smell, have a less tangible connection with abject matter than faeces and urine. Further, farting is often represented as, or is deemed to be, funny. Faeces and urine are usually not:

Echo: *Like, very early in our relationship it was just like no holds barred in front of Frank. I'd just fart and, we'd actually giggle. You know, it's like that child toilet humour. You know, just have a bit of a giggle about it and stuff like that. So, you have to really aye?*

Echo relates fart noises with childhood, and for me this raises an interesting point about abjection, taboo, and the sensuous politics of homemaking. Dominant expectations position farting in earshot of others as not acceptable for adults, but the disciplining of fart noises is generally much less rigid for children. This variance in expectations between adult and child bodies, as Valentine (2004) argues, falls within a dichotomous Apollonian/Dionysian understanding of 'childhood'. Western discourse positions children as less-than-adults who are yet to 'master' appropriate (adult) ways of being. Children, on the one hand, are expected to transgress normative expectations relating to bodily comportment (as Apollonian 'innocent angels'). This is evident in the way that Jeff reads the bodily function noises that his daughters make:

Jeff:            *Oh, you hear the tinkle from the kids. But that's kind of you know, nothing.*

For Jeff, familial ties and his perception of 'childhood' make hearing his daughters using the toilet, and farting, an expected and accepted noise within the context of their home life. On the other hand, the civilising process places expectations on parents to train their children to discipline their bodily functions, and children are likely to be reprimanded for such transgressions (as Dionysian 'devils').<sup>39</sup> For Pippa, this can be problematic to negotiate:

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<sup>39</sup> Significantly, like many of the other influences that I discuss in relation to the negotiation of abject noise, such definitions and expectations emerged during the Victorian era (Valentine 1996).

- Pippa: *Yeah, there's competitions, so, so unfortunately I didn't stop it when it was young yeah. So now there are competitions [pause] on farts. And [laughs] burps and things, within the house and in the toilet [pause] between all younger members of the family.*
- Paul: *The three younger ones?*
- Pippa: *And the teenagers.*
- Paul: *And, you find that annoying?*
- Pippa: *I think it's hilarious [laughs]. I find it humorous. So that's why it's still goes, if it was annoying I would stop it because it's not socially acceptable. And you don't actually realise that, the extent of which you've allowed that noise, or sound to occur until you're at another person's house, and your three children think it's perfectly ok to not only [pause] let it out as freely and as calmly as they can, but then also to announce the fact that that was a damn good one [ecstatic laughter]. And then you're thinking to yourself hmmm [laughs].*

Within Pippa's own home, disciplinary expectations to contain the sound of farting do not hold traction. In fact, such expectations are actively contested and normalised through the 'competitive' environment in which farting, burping, and toileting occurs. As Foucault (1978 95) argues, "where there is power, there is contestation", but the challenging of social norms in Pippa's house is partial. Like Echo, Pippa's negotiation of farting tends to follow dichotomous lines of public versus private. Pippa wishes she had 'contained' such behaviour because she does not want her children to fart - and brag about it - in public. The potential for panoptic surveillance does not feature as a 'threat' for Pippa's children in relation to farting in public spaces.

Sarah and Jeff's two daughters, aged seven and four, also appear to disrupt public (adult) space through their toileting practices in a way that resonates with the Apollonian/Dionysian construction of childhood. When the topic of sensitivity to being heard going to the toilet was discussed, Sarah said that in her home there was no partitioning off from her children:

- Sarah: *Oh, there's other people I share my bathroom with [laughs]. Sometimes they are in the bathroom with me [laughs].*
- Jeff: *They certainly never go in there with me. But they'll happily barge in on Sarah when she's...*
- Sarah: *Doing whatever.*
- Jeff: *Doing whatever [laughs].*
- Sarah: *Really.*
- Jeff: *"Mama, where's my blah blah?" [children laugh].*

Valentine's (1996; 1996a; see also Holloway and Valentine 2000) work on children, space, and place suggests that a different degree of surveillance operates over the bodies (and bodily functions) of children. Through experience, adult bodies are able to read the implicit rules that, as Denis Wood and Robert Beck (1990; 1994) argue, are embodied into the objects and spaces of the home. The structure of houses in New Zealand, as Elias (1978[1939]) and Cavanagh (2010) demonstrate, has been shaped by prevailing attitudes surrounding modesty, embarrassment, and shame, and through dominant assumptions of gender norms (Ahmed 2000; Pink 2004). For adults, the codified rules that are reflected through the architecture of domestic spaces are responded to intuitively, almost without conscious thought. In the case of bodily

functions, bodies must not leak, and any abject or taboo matter must be contained within appropriate domicile spaces.

Pippa, as an adult, is well aware of “the rules embodied in the built environment” (Aitken 2001 18). An adult is an adult because they are able to contain and discipline ‘unacceptable’ actions such as loud farting (and then announcing pride in their achievement). When children are present within “another person’s house” (Pippa, 38), Stuart Aitken (2001 16-17) argues that these implicit rules are made explicit, and Pippa’s transgressive children bring these implicit ‘rules’ into stark relief. If an adult guest to a home was to act in the same manner as Pippa’s children, the impacts of such behaviour would arguably be much more transgressive. As Echo’s comments suggest, farting is “child toilet humour”, and therefore, outside the realm of what it means to be an adult. Yet, adults being amused by farting suggests that the adult/child binary is not fixed.

What this suggests is that home, and houses, are adult spaces that fall within the same politics of control that shape other spatial scales. Aitken (2001), Holloway and Valentine (2000), Valentine (1996), and Valentine *et al.* (1998) have all drawn attention to how the scale of public space is analogous to ‘adult space’. I argue that the same can be said for home spaces that are constructed as private. The rules and spatial politics within the home, although made problematic by constructions of childhood, remain for the most part defined and policed by adults. This is important to consider, as the defining of scales such as the home plays a significant part within wider strategies employed by social

groups to dominate, control, and even define others (Aitken 2010; Massey 1998).

The partitioning of home as a scale is pivotal to the maintenance of adult power as it assists the process by which the “natural, wild, depraved [farting body of the child is scaled] broken, tortured and abused in a myriad of ways” (Aitken 2001 23). This is done primarily to bring the child into line with “adult sensibilities and psychoses” (Aitken 2001 23). As Elias (1978[1939] 137) states, from the eighteenth century onwards the home and the family had become the primary institutions where young people learned the “socially required regulation and moulding of impulses and emotions”. Through direct and indirect instruction, and repetitive habit, disciplining of bodily functions and sexual urges is “imprinted ... on the child” (Elias 1978[1939] 139) until such expectations become internalised to the point where they become automatic. In the case of abject and taboo noises, the containment of scales is sensually produced. The scale of the home is made through sounds that are in-place, and disrupted by noises that are out-of-place.

Achieving this level of discipline is often regarded as marking the transition from ‘childhood’ to ‘adulthood’ (Holloway and Valentine 2000; Valentine *et al.* 1998). The enclave of the home and the family within are key to how the civilising process unfolds and are integral to learning how to be ‘civilised’. That is not to say that the agency of children does not affect the expectations of bodily containment within the home. For Denise, having a child subverted the way that she felt about farting:

Denise: *You know, we all do it. I used to be a lot more sort of precious about that sort of stuff. When I was younger, I couldn't stand, I mean when I was a kid I used to be too afraid to fart in front of anybody, you know. All that sort of thing. But now I just think oh, that's just part of life. And I think having a child is really good because they have to do it in front of you and they think it's funny. You know, and that's really nice. It is just really freeing.*

Denise's experiences as a child follow more dominant discourses of panoptic surveillance. Becoming a mother and having a baby who is oblivious to social conventions changed how she felt about farting. It was her child that gave her a sense of freedom and shifted farting from the confines of social taboo, reframing it more towards discourses of 'natural' and biological. The codification of the civilising process into domestic spaces and bodies is vulnerable in the presence of children's bodies, because children are understood to be 'pre-social' and subject to their Dionysian 'nature'. The social construction of abjection, on the surface, appears to cede to a narrative that normalises farts as something that everyone does, and therefore, being afraid to be heard does not make sense:

Pippa: *Well it's just a natural thing really isn't it? You don't purposely, you know, create a fart, do you know what I mean? It's just one of those things.*

A deeper reading of 'pre-social' and 'natural' discourses relating to farting exposes such constructions as contingent on the spatial context in which farts

occur. For instance, a fart can be purposely withheld, as Pippa's example illustrates:

Paul: *And with, I mean, the kids, they'll, they're happy to let rip whenever. What about yourself? Like, do you [pause]?*

Pippa: *Oh, hell, I don't fart [laughs]. You definitely, at home I don't care, but in public I will [not fart].*

Further, any resistance to dominant expectations to contain bodily function noises for Pippa remains firmly bound to the socially constructed realm of home space. It is not only space, but also the relationships between the people who share a home, which shapes how farting manifests and how it is negotiated in domicile spaces:

Denise: *I mean we've [Denise and her husband] been together 10 years and I'm still probably not going to just fart in front of him if I can help it. Um, and yeah, whenever he farts he apologises [laughs]. .... No, it's all right now but I think 10 years, still you know, yeah. I don't know, depends on your relationship doesn't it? But I think that's interesting.*

Contrary to her earlier comments about how having a child has been "freeing" in relation to bodily function noises, in the presence of her husband, Denise continues to adhere to the way she felt as a teenager. Acknowledging that the ways farting is negotiated is dependent on the nature of the relationship speaks

to the complex and often contradictory politics of abject and taboo noises in the home.

### **Toilet Strategies**

Josh describes his home environment as one that is “civilised”. Bodily elimination sounds, such as burping and farting, are completely absent from their shared home space. Josh has never heard any burping or farting in the four months that he has lived in his current flat. When I asked Josh about whether the same self-discipline applied when he was home alone, he stated that although “you are more relaxed when it comes to those things”, he still did not like the noise. In part, this was due to the smell that often accompanies farts.

Josh explained that if the same sound was heard from an audio source, such as a radio, he would find the noise amusing. He connects the noise with the smell and this disrupts his sense of home. It’s not that Josh’s home is absent of farts or fart noises, but that the presence of fart noises do not fit into his idea of being-at-home. To be-at-home, Josh and his flatmates must discipline their bodies to not fart. Avoiding making audible farts is policed at the site of the self. Although there was less pressure to discipline the output of bodily noises when no one else was home, Josh still had an aversion to how the noises made him feel. The difference between how panaudic disciplinary power is exercised on women compared to men was not a major influence on the aural economy of Josh’s home.

Josh's example is consistent with other comments made from respondents who are living in flatting situations. Peter currently has only one flatmate, but his home normally has up to three people in total living there. Gender and culture differences inform Peter's negotiation of abjection in the home:

Paul: *What places in your home are you most aware of being heard?*

Peter: *I guess the bathroom. Toileting.*

...

Paul: *So, the toileting? Not keen on being overheard?*

Peter: *Nah, not really.*

Peter will often avoid using the toilet if he thinks someone will hear, especially if the background noise in and around the home is minimal. This is contingent on how urgent the need is. If he needs to go but the sensation "wasn't too tense", then he would bide his time and wait for an opportunity where it was less likely that he would be heard. If the need to go is "tense" as Peter puts it, "well, I'm not going to [laughs] burst a bladder to avoid an uncomfortable..."

Peter's technique involving placing toilet paper into the toilet bowl prior to 'going' in order to avoid feeling uncomfortable was also used by Josh and Paula:

Josh: *What I tend to do is I take a roll, if I'm defecating, I take a roll of, not a full roll but I take a bit and I put it in the toilet already. And that way then that's sort of you know, gets rid of a lot of the sound.*

...

Paula: *I'm very conscious of any noise that I personally make. So I tend to put toilet paper down, even for urination because I just don't like the idea of sort of people knowing what I'm doing. You know what I mean? So yeah, I'm sensitive about, about that too. I like, I don't like the idea of people hearing my private personal activities.*

Josh's aversion to hearing even his own toilet noises seems to parallel that of Matt's aversion (as mentioned earlier), where the internalising of toileting as abject affects a degree of discipline that is exerted on the self. And although Peter and Josh mention that their aversion to being heard going to the toilet does not extend to causing themselves to "burst a bladder" as Peter puts it, this is conditional on the spaces that Peter and Josh are in. For instance, later in the interview Peter relays an experience where he was visiting a friend:

Paul: *So, you've got the strategy of using toilet paper. Would you avoid going to the toilet, maybe not so much in this house, because of the location of the bathroom, but in other places...?*

Peter: *Got caught short actually um. Went to a mate's place in Dinsdale [suburb] and I really needed to go to the toilet. He had a lot of family staying and I thought oh, I don't want to go for a whole lot of reasons and so I thought I'd go to the gas station which was like a block away. Started walking and ah, really getting to the point of busting, and the gas station was ah, closed. So luckily I managed to just scrape through, walking past the hospital and the A and E<sup>40</sup> had some fine facilities. And it was an accident but there was no emergency. Other way around [laughs].*

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<sup>40</sup> Abbreviation of Accident and Emergency Department, or Emergency Department.

Similarly, the sensuous politics of going to the toilet for Joe is demarcated along “ideas upon privacy and public domain and um, about having consideration to others” (Joe). Joe elaborates on what he means when reflecting on spaces that he is most aware of the noises that he makes. For Joe, toileting is a very private act, and he notes that the presence of others affects his sense of privacy when using the toilet:

Joe: *Well I will, sometimes when I go to somebody else’s home, I’ll flush the toilet and then go to the toilet. Yeah.*

Paul: *But in your home here, you find that um, will you avoid going to the toilet if, or you pick your times?*

Joe: *Um, if there was a stranger in the home, then I might choose when I go to the toilet. But um, generally I would just go when I felt like it ... But that said, I’d rather go outside for a pee. And then it is, just um, I find it far more comfortable. Yeah. I think toilets are rather odd places, there’s something not quite right about it.*

Privacy for Joe is not guaranteed merely through the architecture of the home, but is also dependent on who is in earshot. Joe’s comment aligns with Ardener (1993), where the presence of others (familiar or otherwise) can reconfigure a private space into a public one. It is through hearing and sound that the sense of privacy is disrupted. The distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’ in relation to the presence of others also shapes how Jeff negotiates the use of toilets. In his home space, he does not experience any anxiety at being heard making noises, but in the public domain, Jeff will bide his time to ensure he is ‘safe’ from panaudic surveillance:

Paul: *And so, what about issues around the toilet and bathroom noises?*

Jeff: *I'm not sure whether it was on your recording, but at [Jeff's work] it's obviously large. Not large, it's communal bathrooms, both genders. And um, you can rock in to take a wizz and hear the familiar splash off from a [laughs] another employee of [Jeff's work]. And that's just you know, that's a little bit cringe-worthy but you just deal with it, you know. Everyone's got to go so you know, it also links. It all makes the same noise, doesn't it [laughs]?*

Paul: *So do you, are you worried about being overheard?*

Jeff: *Oh, most definitely. If there's someone else in there I'll just wait and go back later [Sarah laughs].*

Feminist philosophers such as Grosz (1992) and McDowell (1983) have long advocated that the constitution of bodies and places is mutually constitutive. Positioning the composition of space as produced reciprocally with bodies offers a useful means to unpack the problematic nature of peeing 'publicly'. It is the presence of other bodies that has the potential to change a private space into a public one (Ardener 1993), and in the case of toileting, it is aurality that mediates that breach of corporeal boundaries. The abject threatens the boundaries between the self and other (Kristeva 1982), hence bodies in some cases go to extraordinary lengths to avoid being heard doing things such as urinating and defecating (Atkinson 2006). The potential to be overheard while using public toilets can be a source of anxiety. In some cases, the threat posed by being overheard causes some people to avoid public toilets altogether. This is not isolated to public toilets, and even in the home the potential to be

overheard can affect the ability to 'go'. For Mitchell, it was necessary to time his toilet visits carefully:

Mitchell: *If I go "dadoouk", don't like that.*

Paul: *So will you avoid going to the toilet if you think that there's other people that are going to overhear you or...?*

Mitchell: *Nah, it's just harder to go.*

Paul: *Harder to go? Is that 'stage fright'?*

Mitchell: *It's just like, if someone was standing next to the door I wouldn't be able to go.*

Due to the shame and embarrassment that are invoked through abjection, those with an aversion to overhearing others going to the toilet must deal with it in secret. It is not a matter dealt with by simply asking someone to turn their stereo down. Stress or anxiety caused by being sensitive to bodily function noises, and the effect of enduring annoyance on one's sense of home, in most cases must be suffered in silence. The implicit rules governing toileting noises, however, do not offer protection from embarrassment for everyone.

In extreme cases, the threat of being overheard by others while toileting can lead to health problems that sometimes require medical intervention. Parcopresis, or 'shy bowel syndrome' as Chalabi (2008) terms it, affects some people to such a degree that they are unable to defecate in the perceived presence of others. The negative effects of withholding faeces, either voluntarily or otherwise, have been known since at least the time of Erasmus (1466-1536). Similarly, paruresis, more commonly referred to as 'stage fright' or 'bashful bladder', is a psychological condition defined by academics such as Régis

Barros (2011), Bavanisha Vythilingum *et al.* (2002), and Philipp Hammelstein and Steven Soifer (2006), as a social phobia where sufferers are unable to urinate in public toilet facilities. Those living with paruresis can also be affected when using non-public toilets. Mark Boschen's (2008 904-905) broader definition is not limited to a sense of private or public, and instead suggests that paruresis occurs when sufferers "perceive scrutiny of their actions (e.g. being seen or heard to urinate)" whether at home or in a public toilet. In the most severe cases, catheterisation is necessary in order to allow sufferers to urinate.

It has been over fifty years since the first systematic description of paruresis, and yet little is known about the origins and specific features of this disorder (Hammelstein and Soifer 2006). Since Griffith Williams and Elizabeth Degenhardt (1954) first coined the term, physicians and psychologists charged with treating paruresis have not ascertained how and when shy bladder emerged. With no physiological differences between sufferers and non-sufferers, medical researchers have not been able to trace the origin of paruresis. In the absence of historical accounts, psychologists have nothing to 'go on' either. Authorship on parcopresis has only emerged this decade and even less is known about its origins or causes. What Barros (2011), Vythilingum *et al.* (2002), and Hammelstein and Soifer (2006), and Boschen (2008) do illustrate though, is that paruresis and parcopresis are phobias that are socially and spatially contingent.

The spatiality of toilet phobias is most often, but not exclusively, a public phenomenon. The presence of others within a public toilet facility, and the risk of disclosure, is much more immediate than within the home. Moreover, as

indicated by Boschen (2008), there is a sensuous component to the fear associated with having a 'bashful bladder' or 'shy bowel'. As most toilets in New Zealand are visually partitioned, I argue that it is the fear of being heard that presents the greater source of anxiety for toileting phobia sufferers. This is confirmed in Chalabi (2008), as the accounts that he draws on are dominated by the fear of aural detection (although smell, and in rare cases sight, were also evident).

I raise these medical and psychology discourses as it occurs to me that geography can offer insights into the production of social phobias such as 'bashful bladder' or 'shy bowel'. By taking a sensuous and spatial approach to examining contemporary attitudes and spatialities of toileting, and the historical processes that have informed them, I argue that it possible to unpack how and why dominant discourses in New Zealand have silenced defecating and urinating in the home. By example, one of the effects of living with paruresis and parcopresis is that it engenders an acute awareness of how far noises may extend beyond spaces set aside for urinating and defecating. Whether others are in earshot or not, the threat that others may be made aware of toileting activity serves to extend the range of the sensuous body much more readily than for those able to suppress such anxieties.

The successful adoption of the civilising process, a myriad of internalised rules and disciplining behaviours that map out variously in spaces, helps to reinforce distance and containment from others. Social phobias that disrupt the internalisation of embarrassment make bodies more readily leak and spill into spaces, and other bodies. Unable to internalise the civilising process, those

living with shy bladders and shy bowels in effect externalise the expectation of containment, mapping themselves out beyond the epidermal boundary of the body and of toilet spaces. Although paruresis and parcopresis are the extreme manifestation of concerns about being heard going to the toilet, examining the spatiality of these social phobias may offer valuable insights into how bladders and bowels for some people have become 'shy'.

### **Cultural Understandings and Negotiating the Abject**

As discussed earlier, aversion to being heard making bodily function noises is not isolated to the New Zealand context. While difference occurs within cultures, both Peter's and Dave's experiences speak to how cross-cultural encounters with the abject stand out as markers of embodied difference. As Bryson (2010 380) notes, in historical and contemporary discourses, "the most notable feature about anecdotes involving toilet practices is that they always - really, always - involve people from one country being appalled by the habits of those from another." Cultural difference was mentioned by both Peter and Dave (interviewed separately):

Dave: *Um, yes, yeah, cos we've got quite a few, well, we've got a bit of culture. We have got, like, an Italian girl, a Taiwanese girl, a brother and sister from India, and um, and three, sort of, New Zealanders. We are all, we seem to handle all our particular sounds in around the bathroom quite differently.*

...

Peter: *Cos I have, I realise that it, particularly culturally too. Like, lots of cultures get a bit icky-ed by it. And women seem to get a bit*

*more icky-ed by it as well. And so, I discovered the technique off throwing toilet paper down the bowl.*

While not directly referring to abjection per se, living in the same home with people from four cultural backgrounds made Dave aware of the different expectations surrounding the use of the toilet. Peter feels acutely aware of cultural difference as well, and actively minimises his toileting noises by using toilet paper.

As Dave and Peter reflected on their perceptions of differences between cultures, I was reminded of the work conducted by Ueda and Iwamiya (2006) in relation to sound-masking devices in Japan, work that ironically highlights both the differences and similarities between cultures. Oto-hime, which literally translates as 'sound princess', are electronic sound-masking devices that are a fixture in many women's public (and increasingly in private) toilets (see Figure 6.3). Oto-hime were devised by authorities to curb the water wastage that occurred as a result of the practice of flushing before toileting in order to mask any noises.



**Figure 6.3: Oto-hime controls (Source: Kathryn Duggan, 2009)**

Ueda and Iwamiya's (2006) research suggests that there is a high degree of aversion to being heard going the toilet in Japan, and this aversion is not new to Japanese culture. Like the royal courts of Europe, accounts of the codes of behaviour expected of Japanese noble women suggest that toilet noises have been taboo since at least the Edo period (1603-1868). Ueda and Iwamiya (2006) state that to avoid the shame and embarrassment surrounding toileting, Japanese women in the noble class employed a device known as Otokeshi-no Tsubo or "urn that covers sound". The Otokeshi-no Tsubo is an urn filled with water with an opening at the bottom that allowed water to flow out and mask toileting sounds. Interestingly, the manifestation of sound-masking devices in the noble courts of Japan coincided with increasingly disciplined regimes of bodily comportment in Victorian England.

Reactions to Oto-hime, as expressed in numerous blog posts on the internet (for example, see [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1\\_KMOQ8S6rl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_KMOQ8S6rl) and

<http://greeneyedgeisha.blogspot.co.nz/2010/07/sound-princess-headache.html>), suggest that Western sensibilities find such devices odd and intriguing, and a marker of cultural difference. Karen, however, finds it equally bemusing that some people in New Zealand employ the use of running water to mask the act of urinating and defecating:

Karen: *I noticed it when I was at school, a lot. Um, like girls would walk into the toilet together and because they would be so embarrassed about hearing each other they'd say to their friend "Oh, can you put the tap on?" And it would really get to me because they'd have all this, just wasting all this water. Like, they'd have the taps on like full blast so you couldn't hear them on the toilet. And the whole time like, you would walk out and the sink would be like up here with water and that really gets to me that they were wasting all that water just so they wouldn't be heard on the toilet. Um, so as much as I feel like I'm uncomfortable with it, I don't think I'd go to those sorts of measures. Like wasting all that water just to not be heard [laughs]. I think that is a bit extreme. I guess that's just different people's values though.*

So while the dominant hegemonic ear in Western discourse may find the Oto-hime to be a somewhat 'over-the-top', employing 'splash pads', 'courtesy flushes', or outright avoiding public toilets can also be understood as "a bit extreme". Both of these examples speak to the effects that abjection and noises constructed as taboo can have on how bodies interact in space. The difference is, that in the Japan context, the disciplining of corporeal noises has been formalised through technology.

## **Socio-Economic and Housing Design**

Modern housing design and the legislation guiding construction of new houses ensures a greater feeling of sensuous privacy than the older houses that some interviewees live in. Shifting emphasis has placed greater import on houses with multiple toilets and bathrooms. The property developers of the apartment that Karen lives in appear to have acknowledged this shift towards multiple toilets. The New Zealand Building Code (NZBC) Clause G1 (2006) states that a domestic house requires only one toilet and bathroom. Assumedly, to attract renters, and therefore, achieve a maximum return on their investment, the developers who built Karen's home installed two toilets and one ensuite (Figure 6.4). This is a welcome benefit for Karen:

Paul: *You don't like hearing the toilet?*

Karen: *Nah, it's kind of gross.*

Paul: *Yeah, it is kind of gross. [Omitted text] and, with four people I imagine that's...?*

Karen: *Yeah, but there's actually three bathrooms in our house which is quite interesting. [Flatmate 1] and [Flatmate 2] have an ensuite so they use their toilet which I don't really hear ... You don't hear but most of the time if there's people here I'll go upstairs to go to the toilet. Just so [laughs] you know, it doesn't feel as weird [laughs].*



Dave: No, but um, I suppose sometimes one, one is a bit louder with farting and stuff and that sort of, um, [pause] no one mentions that when you hear it.

Paul: It's not talked about?

Dave: Yeah, it is just one of those things. It is a bit embarrassing but, luckily the flat is not a, not [pause], it has a soft memory or a rubber membrane to those sort of things. They sort of bounce off and there's nothing there.



Figure 6.5: Dave's home floor plan sketch (toilets highlighted and numbered in red by author)

The “soft memory” for embarrassing noises in Dave’s flat reminded me of Elias’ (1978[1939]) comments about how the civilising process is dependent on implicit and internalised conditioning to operate effectively. In order to be able to ignore or ‘forget’ embarrassing noises, to not be in a constant state of anxiety, people in civil society must be able to relax “within the framework of a particular ‘civilised’ standard of behaviour involving a very high degree of automatic constraint and affect transformation, conditioned to become a habit” (Elias 1978[1939] 187). Civilised bodies must internalise reactions of embarrassment in order to function, otherwise the weight of expectation relating to the abject and taboo would be a heavy burden indeed.

Similar to the rules of conduct around coital noise, embarrassment surrounding toilet noises produces a discursive wall of silence that extends beyond the aural horizon of the toilet. In the face of embarrassing noises, one is not only expected to discipline the noises we make, but also to discipline our reactions to the noises that we hear. Unlike coital noise, where loud sex is often synonymous with good sex (Gurney 2000a), contemporary dominant discourses in New Zealand do not position loud defecating and urinating as a good thing, particularly in a shared living situation such as it is in Dave’s home. Fortunately, fear of embarrassment of being heard can be put aside because we know that no one will discuss it. A false sense of security works because of the ability to contain reactions, if not the noises.

Toni shares a four-bedroom rented home with three other people. Like Dave, having limited financial means that renting is an attractive option. In a sensuous reading of home life, renting for Toni comes with its own cost. One of the first

things that Toni noticed when she moved into her current home was the location of the toilet. Sharing a wall with the main socialising area, which is an open-plan space incorporating the lounge and kitchen, the location of the toilet in Toni's home is often an issue for her as it is within earshot of nearly every room in the house. Toni does not identify as being particularly sensitive to being heard going to the toilet, but when she first moved in, the configuration of her home did heighten her awareness that others may hear her. The effect that the sense of someone potentially being able to hear is difficult for Toni to describe: "it can be a bit sort of ... what's the word? You can just be very aware that other people might hear your noises."

Just like Frank, Toni finds the affectual experience of negotiating toilet noises difficult to explain. While not posing a particularly big threat, being "very aware" of being heard whilst using the toilet indicates towards the often intense transgressive power of abject and taboo noises. For instance, someone making noises doing the dishes or cooking a meal in Toni's home does not worry her, even though the kitchen noises may be deemed annoying. It is the association of a given noise with the corresponding abject matter, coupled with the politics of civil bodies that affects a heightened awareness of bodily boundaries being disrupted.

Being "very aware", as Toni states, confirms the special position that abjection has in problematising corporeal and domicile boundaries. The inclination towards fixing the definition of spaced onto surfaces (Butler 1993) does not withstand the onslaught of toilet noises, even if someone is not sensitive to being heard. This is due to the ways in which dominant discourses in New

Zealand position toilet noises as embarrassing and shameful. Because of the way that the sensuous extent of bodies bleeds out through the home, it is virtually impossible to avoid encounters with the abject, especially in shared renting situations. The abject disrupts and breaks, and is it also silenced through discourses of shame. In the case of domestic work noise, this for the most part goes unnoticed. Noises from taboo activities, however, brings to the fore the liminality of sensuous experience and bodily boundaries, and the layout of Toni's home exacerbates this.

Abjection is not the only issue relating to the toilet in Toni's home. The New Zealand Building Code (NZBC) 2011 Clause G4, stipulates that a toilet must have an external window, or when this is not possible, a passive stack ventilator; an active fan ventilator; and a permanent opening allowing adequate airflow (Department of Building and Housing 2011 14). The house that Toni lives in was built in the 1960s, and as such, was not subject to contemporary regulations:

Paul: *So you, the toilet at your house, when you turn the light on a fan goes as well?*

Toni: *Yeah, and it's loud and that's, the toilet's right smack bang in the centre of the house. So everyone can hear it.*

Paul: *They can hear the fan?*

Toni: *They can hear the fan. I don't want to wake them up.*

Paul: *So you'll/*

Toni: */I will flick the light on for a split second so I get just enough um, idea of where I am. And an, image of the toilet will burn into my brain [laughs]. It actually does. And then um, I sit down. And I tend not to flush either.*

Poor housing design makes shared living conditions less than ideal for Toni, who lives in a decile nine (decile ten being most deprived and decile one least deprived) area of Hamilton. Typical of housing in areas of high deprivation, poor insulation makes for noisy living. Knowing that there is a high likelihood that she will disturb someone with the fan, Toni tries to be as considerate as possible, but this can often result in injury:

Toni: *I actually, it is to the detriment of myself though in some ways because I do sometimes walk in to the door or you know, something.*

Paul: *On your way to the toilet?*

Toni: *There's, on the way out, is a door that I sometimes have closed inadvertently and I don't realise I've closed it.*

Paul: *Sorry, that's not the toilet door? So you opened the toilet door and there's/*

Toni: */and there is another door. And I smacked into it the other night. It doesn't happen that often though.*

Time of day, and the spatial layout of Dave's house, also shapes how his flatmates negotiate toilet use. At night, Dave avoids the toilet labelled "2" in Figure 6.5 so that he does not disturb the 'privacy' of the flatmates in the adjacent bedroom with "the loudness of the flush" and "the biological sounds as well". Interestingly, NZBC 2011 Clause G4 states that the "permanent openings for airflow between the surrounding habitable spaces" must not compromise "the privacy of the toilet or bathroom" (Department of Building and Housing 2011 14). Privacy, in this sense, is determined visually and the only consideration given to sound is that any ventilation devices must "have acoustic

attenuation, if required by NZBC Clause G6” (Department of Building and Housing 2011 16). No mention is made of aural privacy.

Ironically, the noisiness of the fan does not provide, or guarantee, a sense of privacy when it comes to making bodily functions noises in the toilet:

Toni: *If I was exceptionally noisy for some strange reason then I might be aware of it. Yep, that has happened.*

Paul: *And you're not aware of how noisy you're going to be until...?*

Toni: *Sometimes, sometimes you know [laughs]. Let's not go into too many details.*

Whether through illness or other factors, sometimes bodies can betray us as far as noise output is concerned. No matter how quiet we try to be, the process of defecating and urinating can be unpredictably and/or uncontrollably noisy. In such circumstances, the prospect of going to the toilet can invoke varying degrees of anxiety, which is made worse by housing design.

Carol (56, female) lives on the ground floor of a two-story block of six one-bedroom attached units. The block is constructed from the same hollow bricks as Judy and Art's unit described in the previous chapter. Unlike Judy and Art, however, Carol owns her unit and she is the only person in her block who is an owner/occupier. Carol shares one wall with her ground floor neighbour, and has one neighbour above. Being in such close proximity to other people in a building with low sound insulation properties, problems with noise have been constant for Carol since she moved in two and half years ago. Music from young tenants,

yelling and profanity, and loud cars entering and exiting the building's car park are all noises that Carol has taken action against, either through Hamilton City Council's Noise Control service, the police, or through direct contact with the owner and manager of the rest of the units in the block.

These experiences that Carol shared during our interview are legislated for and are enforced by public officials. There are noises that Carol had to negotiate that had an equal degree of annoyance, and in some cases, a greater negative impact on her sense of home. These noises, however, fall outside legislative intervention:

Carol: *I can hear their toilet next door, but you hear, you can hear [the neighbour above] plopping in the toilet in the morning. So I hear him go to the toilet every morning. He's got a, he must have a um, urinary problem because he's always weeing. And he just, you know, during the night time, before he goes to sleep, while I'm trying to go to sleep he goes in the toilet. It's like next door to my, my head. It's very, very close. It was the first thing I noticed when I bought it [Carol's unit]. Cos I thought, oh no. You can hear him go to the toilet and I said that to my Aunty and she said, "Well, that's just nature calling. You can't change that." Well God, I know that. You know, I'm not saying you can change that. I'm just saying you know, like, the, there's no sound control between the flats. It's too personal. I find it's too personal. I hate it. I don't wanna hear him going to the toilet all the time.*

Carol's account is perhaps the clearest reflection that I encountered during this research of how the perceived boundaries of bodies are transgressed and

rupted by the abject. The invasive potential of toilet noises are “very close” and “too personal”, suggesting that Carol’s bounded self is compromised by the noise that her neighbour makes. A sense of pollution and contamination arises that is different from her experiences of non-abject noises. Carol’s financial situation is a significant contributor to her experience of abjection, and how this disrupts her sense of home. For instance, Carol had this to say about her current living situation:

Carol: *Well, I mean there’s nothing between. There’s a concrete floor between him and me upstairs. Um, you know, like I lived in other wall-to-wall common wall flats in \_\_\_\_\_ Street, I never, I very rarely heard, I never heard anything actually. It was amazing. You know, I really liked that. You know he was right next door, he’s probably sleeping next, head to head, but I could never hear him. It was [neighbour’s name] and on the other side it was a family. Sometimes I used to hear slight noises from them but hardly anything. You know, there was a whole family living there. Um, yeah, it was, they were well built. That was the difference, they were well built. You know, like there was um, features in that flat indicated they were well thought out and well built. These are cheap, you know, they’re not facing the sun, you know, they’re awful.*

Carol’s example also indicates that noise annoyance does not occur in isolation, but is often connected to other influences, such as in the way that Carol’s limited financial means have led to feelings of being trapped. Carol has struggled to cope with the noise associated with living in close proximity with other people. She has been trying to sell her unit but the current real estate

market in Hamilton would mean Carol would have to settle for many thousands of dollars less than what she paid for her home. Settling for less would also limit the options as far as buying a new home is concerned. Carol aspires to owning a cottage in the country but is financially and spatially bound to her unit.

All of these aforementioned issues speak to the powerlessness experienced by those of limited financial means in relation to the sensuous environment of the home. Affecting a 'homebody' that is in line with personal aspirations and goals is much more problematic for those of relatively lower socio-economic status compared to those who can afford to own their own home. It is clear, therefore, that it is important to contextualise the experience of abjection as not just a matter of personal sensitivities and expectations. The highly subjective nature of aural experience makes a nuanced approach vital, even when researching the virtually axiomatic sphere of abject and taboo matter. For instance, Matt lives in a very similar block of units, but does not find toilet noises to be as abject as Carol:

Matt: *I used to hear sounds which I thought might be someone using the loo upstairs. All flushing sort of noises, but I couldn't really hear it that well and I sort of can yeah, I didn't really dwell on it.*

Paul: *It wouldn't be something that, if you could hear it wouldn't be a problem?*

Matt: *It wouldn't be a problem, but just slightly annoying. But it wouldn't be enough for me, for me to sort of be upset about it. Yeah, I'm not particularly worried about those noises.*

Even in homes with high quality insulation and building materials, the layout of a house may result in disturbing others, especially at night. As stated earlier in this chapter, Josh's bedroom has a door that leads to the toilet. This 'convenient' route to the shared bathroom means that noises travel more readily into Josh's room than if a wall was in its place. While built around the same time as Karen's house, the design and layout of Josh's home does not provide the same degree of feeling private when using the toilet that Karen enjoys. Josh finds overhearing toilet noises unpleasant, and this is made worse in the evening when background sounds and noises are at a minimum. But even more significantly, it is the power of abjection, and abject noises, to draw attention that Josh finds most unsettling. It is bad enough for Josh to hear toilet noises, but his aversion to it gives rise to an anticipatory state of abhorrence:

Josh: *So I can't **not** hear it [Josh's emphasis]. Like my, it's like my senses, my ears and everything, it's like they are almost waiting to hear the noise. And I don't want to hear the noise [laughs]. I really can't...*

Paul: *So what you are describing is it's a sound that you just can't ignore?*

Josh: *Exactly, yeah. And you are dead right. I mean, my ears, my brain, it just tells me "Oooh, there's going to be this noise. Wonder when the noise is going to be?" [laughs].*

Paul: *And that's cued by the rolling door?*

Josh: *That's cued by the rolling door, yeah. But if I'm asleep that's fine, because I can sleep through noise. Um, but if I'm not, then I do hear it.*

While Josh may have an aversion to overhearing toilet noise, and having a bedroom adjacent to the toilet in his home amplifies the disruption of his sense of home, he is not without power. The cue of the toilet door opening gives him warning so he can block out the noises. With one of his bedroom walls shared with the neighbouring unit, out of consideration for his neighbours he is not able to turn his stereo up loud enough to drown out any potential toilet noises. Instead, Josh has developed a method where he rubs his face and ears on his pillow, and the rustling caused by his facial hair is enough to completely mask any toilet noises. In this way, Josh defends the sovereignty of his corporeal space and asserts a barrier against the abject.

### **Abjection and Sensory Cross-Talk**

The contamination resulting from overhearing ‘plopping’ or ‘tinkling’ noises from a toilet represents more than just aural pollution, for there is an association transmitted by sound that connects the auditor to the abject. The objects - faeces, urine, sputum - are transmitted with the noises. Josh frames his understanding of the issue that he has with overhearing toilet noises “because I know what they relate to...” Karen positions her experience of toilet noises within a Western cultural paradigm:

Karen: *Western society, it is like a very personal sort of thing. And like, especially in, it's sort of that thing about like kind of opening yourself up to other people and stuff, kind of thing. Like, and it is just gross [laughs] [omitted text] but, like it's gross because we've got this perception of it being gross, I guess. But, because that's what I'm used to and that's how I see it. Yeah,*

*and so if you hear it then I guess sounds trigger kind of images and you don't really want to imagine like [laughs], your flatmate on the toilet.*

It is not just that abject noises are heard, but they are sensed. Through hearing, Karen also 'sees' the abject taking place, making the experience more intense. Without even consciously doing it, a lot of what is perceived relies on the subject 'filling in the blanks', or what Cavanagh (2010) refers to as the Western ear's illusionary power to insert meaning between hearing, and the source of the noises. Howes (1991), Paterson (2007), and Rodaway (1994) all advocate for understanding sensuous geographies as multi-sensual, and Karen's experience indicates that the 'five senses as discrete channels' paradigm is untenable. This is particularly evident when perceiving the abject. When that which is being sensed fits in with the values and expectations of the subject, the process of 'filling in the blanks' goes unnoticed. In the case of experiencing abject noises in the absence of other sensory feedback, completing the whole from incomplete parts takes on another dimension.

The threat that the abject poses to the self, together with the sense of disgust that is invoked therein, often makes overhearing abject noises from other rooms in the house an unsettling experience. The 'blanks' that are filled in are of the subject's own doing, and are based on past experience of that which is overheard. The fuller 'images' that are produced from overhearing noises from activities such as going to the toilet, having sex, and domestic violence are virtually inevitable due to the compelling draw of the abject, and can invoke an

even greater sense of abjection and contamination in the absence of other sensory information.

Tom Rice's (2003) example of the sensorium of medical hospitals is a pertinent example of this. Rice (2003 5) relays that the horror experienced by one of his research participants, Gordon, while listening to the sounds of a man dying in the bed next to him was heightened by the absence of other sensory information: "Indeed, the sound took on a more affective quality *because* of the dearth of other sensory modalities" (emphasis in original). The parts available to Gordon came together to produce an horrific imagining as the abject noises from the dying man invaded his corporeal space, and broke the barriers between him and death itself. Gordon's experience of the dying man in the hospital was obscured by a curtain, and yet the horror of the experience was amplified by the absence of the visual.

## **Summary**

Kristeva (1982 2-5) argues that the central theme within the feelings of anxiety produced through abjection is that while we are repulsed by the abject, we are also inextricably drawn to its presence: "as tempting as it is condemned ... a vortex of summons and repulsion". The abject demands attention, while the subject strives to ignore its presence. An example of how this manifests in the home is clear in Josh's comments, where the noises of elimination in the toilet are impossible to ignore. Moreover, he anticipated their presence, even though he found the noise offensive.

These corporeal expulsions pollute bodies via sensory perception. Bodily eliminations from the other are commuted to the body of the auditor, collapsing the self into the other (Kristeva 1982). The 'dirt' and 'filth' of the other overlaps with, and into, the self. This is more than an intellectualised response to something that is understood as disgusting and abject. The response is often visceral:

I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire. Along with sight-clouding dizziness, nausea makes me balk... (Kristeva 1982 2-3).

In this way, noises can be understood as powerful ambassadors of the abject. Noise and abject matter are akin; they both have tangible and intangible aspects, and both are highly fluid across spaces and places. Further, abjection and abject noises are inherently geographical, and therefore, are useful to assist in unpacking the maintenance and disruption of spatial constructs such as the scales of the body and the home. Thinking spatially and sensuously about abjection offers useful insights relating to the strategies employed to avoid the abject, and how efforts to avoid abjection in homes are often rendered impotent by the ability of noise to transgress partitioned spaces.

Home may be demarcated so that certain matter may be contained, but the partitioning of spaces rarely offers protection from abject noises. Perhaps it is also the unstable nature of the bodily eliminations themselves that compounds the sense of contamination. By way of comparison, noise from a stereo system

can be polluting but a stereo has a fixed physical extent that, for the most part, is free of associations with disgust and 'dirt'. The presence of a stereo in home spaces is matter-in-place. Stereos have knobs, dials, buttons, all designed to be touched and interacted with. Abject matter is unstable and this instability invokes horror. Overhearing abject noises leak from bodies and into other bodies and rooms in the home serves as an often violent reminder of the permeability of the auditor's body. The abject tears asunder the bounded defences of the body, and it often does so with the auditor's compliance.



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## 7 CONFLICT IN THE HOME: LISTENING TO THE SOUNDS OF VIOLENCE

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Since the 1970s, feminist researchers have problematised the construction of home as a sanctuary, as a 'private' and 'safe' space secure from the 'outside' world (Goldsack 1999). While the discursive construction of the ideal home certainly resonates with notions of security and privacy, the lived experience of domicile spaces for many people is one of violence, conflict, abuse, and alienation (Ahmed 2000). Blunt and Dowling (2006 10) argue that a "house environment may be oppressive and alienating as easily as it may be supportive and comfortable". The experience of domestic violence is one of the ways that the notion of home as a sanctuary is disrupted.

An undesirable consequence of the separation of home from the public domain is that acts of family violence can remain hidden from detection. Elias' (1978[1939]) thesis on the civilising process provides an insight into how the privatisation of home facilitates abuse. In *The Civilising Process*, Elias (1978[1939]) does not directly address domestic violence, yet he does note that the discourses of privacy, shame, embarrassment, and bodily comportment that have informed the modern New Zealand 'home' have had diverse consequences beyond the management of 'dirt'. It appears "the tendency of the civilising process to make all bodily functions more intimate, to enclose them in particular enclaves, to put them 'behind closed doors'" (Elias 1978[1939] 189) applies also to the 'containment' of domestic violence. Feminist academics have pulled aside the veil of privacy surrounding the home to expose how 'privacy' was created to maintain masculinist, patriarchal privilege - privilege that lies at

the heart of what Martha Fineman (1994 xiv) refers to as “the hierarchical nature of the family and its conceptual core of common-law inequality”.

Historically, the privacy idyll (of the home and family) has been the precept upon which ‘common-law’ has been selectively applied in “order to protect male domination”, and this has allowed violence against women and children to be shielded from prosecution and scrutiny (Schneider 1994 38). This is evident in the works of authors such as Ahmed (2000), and Ahmed *et al.* (2003), Blunt and Dowling (2006), and Laura Goldsack (1999), who have all ‘outed’ the ways in which the physical space of houses, in combination with discursive understandings of home, marital status, family life, and privacy, enable domestic violence.

While the feminist academics have exposed how discursive and physical constructions of home serve to maintain masculinist, patriarchal privilege, it is also “the isolation of the nuclear family into single family homes”, as Catherine Kirkwood (1993 16) argues, continues to allow “violence to occur in secrecy.” This has not occurred merely through happenstance, as historical evidence suggests that the male ‘right’ to abuse women and children was explicitly and implicitly written into law. In the case of domestic violence noises, the patriarchal privilege to be violent is reflected in legislation implemented during the Elizabethan Era (1533-1603). In order to ‘keep the peace’, Queen Elizabeth I passed a law that ensured quiet prevailed at night, as men were expressly prohibited to “beat their wives after ten o’clock at night, because the victims’ screaming may keep the neighbours awake” (Myncke and Cops 1985 cited in

Maris 2008 7).<sup>41</sup> While such legislation is perhaps a (not too) distant echo, there continues to be other influences compounding the risk that 'private' domicile spaces can pose, such as the way that institutionalised masculinism reinforces economic dependence on men by often excluding women from home ownership (Longhurst 2012). Through reviewing this literature, and analysing the stories that my research participants shared, I began to consider where the senses fit into gendered, classist, and ethnicised discourses of domestic violence and the making of home and identity.

Given that the sensuous environment of home is so important to the production of identity (Young 2005), and that a sensuous environment misaligned to individual expectations can disrupt the notion of being-at-home (Law 2001; Pink 2004), I believe that examining domestic violence and noises generated by conflict has the potential to offer new understandings of the political and moral economies that serve to oppress and alienate those who are subjected to domestic violence. Understanding the sensuous politics of violence in the home may also help to provide new insights into what Rebecca Dobash and Russell Dobash (1980) highlight as the role that home space and 'privacy' plays in silencing domestic violence through discourses of shame and fear.

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<sup>41</sup> Feminist researchers such as Lee Bowker (1993), Lee Hoff (1990), Kirkwood (1993), Martha Mahoney (1994), Schneider (1994) and have criticised the term *victim* in regards to domestic violence. Mahoney (1994) argues that *victim* suggests passivity and obscures or erases how agency is exercised in abusive situations. Authors such as Hoff (1990) have instead argued that the term *survivor*, which carries active connotations, is more appropriate as *survivor* makes visible the complex strategies that women employ to minimise or avoid domestic violence. Kirkwood (1993 136) employs both *victim* and *survivor* - or *victimisation* and *survival* to be precise - as *survivor* tends to trivialise the oppression within abusive situations and does not adequately account for the loss of control that women experience "as abusers increased their control within the relationship." Due to debate surrounding the discourses of domestic violence, I have chosen to use phrases such as "those living in abusive homes" for example, unless quoting an article or a research participant.

To address the ways in which violence noises affect bodies and identities in homes, I first provide contextual information relating to how discourses of home, and housing design have shaped the experience of domestic and family violence. Through a sensuous framework, I explore how noises generated by and associated with conflict affect the sense of home, not only for those subjected to violence, but also for those who overhear. Second, I draw on the narratives of some of the participants who relayed their experiences of conflict and domestic violence to help understand how fear and noise work together to disrupt the ideal home. Attention is paid to the ways in which domestic violence is constructed and 'silenced' as abject and taboo, and how fear is transmitted across spaces and scales through noise. I also tease out where violence noises 'fit' within discourses of femininity, masculinity, patriarchal power, and the sensuous and emotional placement of identities.

### **Domestic Silence: Negotiating Violent Noises**

Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing (Mill 1867)

Approximately five years ago I lived in an affluent neighbourhood in Hamilton, and one year after I moved in, during a particular hot summer, a family moved in next door who argued almost every evening. Very few New Zealand houses have air conditioning and opening windows is the most common way that houses are kept cool. The house that I lived in was designed to trap heat in winter, but this resulted in summer temperatures that were unbearable. To keep

my house cool in summer, I had to open almost all of the windows.<sup>42</sup> My arguing neighbours also kept their windows open, so their conflict noises were easily transmitted to my home. I could make out everything that was said. Most of the yelling was directed at the children from both parents in equal measure.

Every time the arguing started, I listened attentively to make sure things did not escalate. In the six month period that the arguing occurred, I heard no evidence of physical violence. I felt torn over what to do. On the one hand, I knew that the environment the children were living in would have been unpleasant. I felt that I was letting them down by not calling the authorities. On the other hand, I did not want to needlessly cause friction between my neighbours and myself by getting the police involved. Perhaps they were just going through a rough patch and I was over-assessing the issue. Further, one of the participants interviewed for this research reported, and I have heard from others, about situations where authorities have taken a 'heavy hand' to certain family situations that created more problems than were solved.

All through this I lived with a sense of guilt and retrospectively, I believe that I should have intervened earlier. Although I did not fear for the safety of the children, hearing the arguing almost every night for six months affected the peace within my home. Added to this was the fact that I was not able to 'tune out' from the noise as I felt obliged to monitor the situation. I mention this experience as a means to be explicit about my position when listening to the experiences that participants shared with me in relation to overhearing violence. My own experiences have made me aware that dealing with hearing domestic

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<sup>42</sup> See Appendix 12 for a graph that maps noise complaints in Hamilton against time of year, sunshine hours, and temperature.

violence is far from straightforward, and I made my position clear when such topics came up during interviews.

An incident that Denise overheard is indicative of the complexities of assessing and dealing with violent noises, particularly when only one source of sensory information is available:

Denise: *One time recently, I must have been home by myself during the day and I was in the bedroom doing something or other and I overheard from either the caravan or in the house, and they're very close to each other over there, um, something I thought sounded like a rape, basically. Putting it quite bluntly. And I just don't know, and how do I know because of the sounds? I mean I was attributing meaning to certain kinds of grunts and noises that I was hearing and um, a punch that I thought was an assault. And the man saying, mimicking the victim, saying "Oh, stop, it hurts, it hurts errr errrr, you little black cunt." And I know that I have overheard that phrase before and I mean sorry, I'm probably using your interview as a debrief here because I didn't even tell anyone else this. So, it feels to me like that's what was going on, but I don't know. You know, some kind of sexual assault. Maybe of a child? I don't know. Maybe I'm imagining it? Maybe it was just a guy fooling around? Maybe he was doing something else that was physically harmful? You know, twisting someone's arm, I don't know. But that just made me worry and I thought at that point I thought okay, I've got to do something here. I've got to talk to somebody. Maybe I should ring someone, you know. And I haven't. Um, because as you say I haven't seen anything at all. It sort of sounds mad. I mean, if I go to the police with that they'll say "What are you talking about?" Um, got no evidence. I don't even have a date. So, it's*

*a fraught issue because as I said, I actively listen sometimes. Because this is the noise that concerns me the most. Where it might be abuse noise.*

In the absence of other sensory information, Denise was reluctant to intervene. Her experience was less about reluctance to transgress the 'family/home as private' discourse, and perhaps more to do with the inability to confirm just what had transpired. There was no way for her to tell if any abuse was taking place, and as a one-off event there was little in the way of supporting 'evidence' for Denise to be compelled to act. She had heard a phrase that was used during the event at least once before, but could not attribute this to an abuse incident. Lack of other sensory confirmation left her feeling that there was no point in calling the police. What if Denise did intervene and no abuse had occurred? Would this have drawn undue attention to her own family, as the only Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent) living in her cul-de-sac?

### **Shame and the Silencing of Domestic Violence**

According to New Zealand Police estimates, only 18 per cent of all violence that occurs within the home is reported (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse 2009).<sup>43</sup> In New Zealand law, and throughout this thesis, domestic violence is defined as any act of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse between those who are in a 'domestic relationship', which includes spouses/partners, family members, people who ordinarily share a household,

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<sup>43</sup> There are a number of issues related to interpreting the number of crimes that are reported. The New Zealand Police believe reporting is skewed towards more serious violence. Further, ethnicity, migrant status, and age also skew the underreporting and reported data (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse 2009).

and/or people who are in a close personal relationship (Domestic Violence Act 1995).

Behaviours like punching, kicking, unwanted sexual touching, stalking, damaging property, verbal threats, harassment, intimidation, and asserting power over someone's life through humiliation or controlling access to family, friends, or money, are all considered to be domestic violence. If an abuser "causes or allows the child to see or hear the physical, sexual, or psychological abuse of a person with whom the child has a domestic relationship" or "puts the child, or allows the child to be put, at real risk of seeing or hearing that abuse occurring" (Domestic Violence Act 1995 Section 4 (3)(a)(b)), then this is also considered to be domestic violence against the child. This definition is important to keep in mind, as although my research focus is on home, and the police statistics quoted refer specifically to the space of the home, domestic violence is not necessarily bound to domicile spaces.

One of the most disturbing trends in the underreported statistics, according to the Crime and Safety Survey 2006, is that "offences committed by a partner were less likely to be reported because victims felt it was a *private matter* or that police would be unable to help" (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse 2009 1 (emphasis added)). Dowling (2012) argues that it is legal and cultural discourses of home and family life as a private sanctuary that underpin and drive the underreporting of family violence crimes. A report conducted by the Police Domestic Violence Unit in South Tyneside in the United Kingdom between 1990 and 1993 clearly demonstrated that not only did the separation of home life from the public domain facilitate the ability for offenders to conduct

acts of family violence, but also “that the private nature of the home seriously worsened the likelihood and severity of domestic violence” (Goldsack 1999 124).

The discursive construction of home is clearly implicated in domestic violence events at multiple scales. As Pink (2004 23) states, the “home is not always a site for the production of happy empowered identities, but might also be a place of violence, uncomfortable secrets and suffering.” Secrets in this case refer to the ways in which discourses of home and family as ‘private’ serve to produce domestic violence as shameful, embarrassing, and taboo (Goldsack 1999). Women who have experienced acts of domestic abuse often internalise their experience of violence, evidenced by New Zealand Police estimations that over 80 per cent of domestic violence goes unreported. Together with the discourses that position homes and families in New Zealand ‘private’, the internalising of shame and embarrassment further silences the likelihood that crimes will be reported.

### **Privacy, Sensory Surveillance, and Underreporting**

The silencing of violence in the home occurs not only through the sense of shame that accompanies domestic violence, but also through the way that those who may overhear such crimes avoid reporting to the police. Often the reasons given for not reporting revolve around discourses similar to those that position homes as ‘private’. The Australian Public Policy Research Centre’s (PPRC) Domestic Violence Attitude Survey (1988 cited in Mugford 1989) found that over one-third of respondents felt that domestic violence is a ‘private’

matter and should be dealt with within the family, and 28 per cent said that they would not report to authorities if they found out their neighbour was committing acts of domestic violence.

Of the same PPRC report, Jane Mugford (1989 n.p.) notes that while 28 per cent of respondents were prepared to say that they would not report on a violent neighbour, this figure is likely to be much higher due to the way that “Australians hold firm ideas about the privacy of family life and the importance of not ‘dobbing in’ others.” According to 2006 figures reported by Sydney Water, however, 14,981 people were prepared to ‘dob’ in their neighbours for breaching water restrictions (ABC News Online 2007). Any inference to the reluctance to report on wrongdoers, therefore, does not cover all aspects of Australian society. Perhaps this further indicates towards the patriarchal power that has such a significant role in the domestic sphere: keeping silent in effect preserves a man’s home as his castle, and the right to batter his partner and/or children.

There are other influences that contribute to the underreporting of domestic violence, such as the fear of violent repercussions from the perpetrator (which I discuss in the following section), and I do not wish to oversimplify such a complex and profound issue. My reason for focusing on the silencing of people who are exposed to acts of violence, including those who may overhear it, is that both speak to the sensuous politics of domestic violence and the way it is underreported therein. For instance, knowing that they are more likely to be reported if they are seen to be violent in public, domestic abusers in most cases defer their violence until they are in the ‘privacy’ of their home (Goldsack 1999).

The visual screen that a house provides rarely affords aural privacy from the surrounding environment for perpetrators of domestic violence to hide behind. Thus, at least in part, the 'policing' of domestic violence can be understood as embedded within the notion of the dominant sensorium in New Zealand, and is weighted towards visual surveillance. Implied here is that it is easier to ignore the horror of overhearing screams and distress than it is to ignore visual evidence of abuse.<sup>44</sup> This appears to be further confirmed in the cases that I draw on in the next section, where unlike the politics of coital and toileting noise, those who commit acts of domestic violence often do *not* discipline the noises that they make in order to conceal their actions.

Fourteen of the 24 participants interviewed as part of this thesis mentioned that they had overheard neighbours arguing or engaging in acts of domestic violence. One participant identified herself as a domestic violence survivor. In all but three cases, the domestic violence that was described was either a one-off event or was sporadic and happened rarely. Two respondents relayed stories of living next to a household where abuse had been on-going over a period of months. In every case, it was the noise from arguing, doors slamming, and other banging noises that first alerted participants that acts of domestic violence were occurring. Although there was a range of responses, including direct intervention, calling authorities, and doing nothing, in all but two cases the experience of violence noises had a significant impact on how participants felt within their homes. When reading the accounts that I draw on, it is important to

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<sup>44</sup> This distinction is not entirely clear cut. It is certainly more difficult to determine the severity of an act of violence when the noise is the only evidence of abuse. There are many examples on internet 'question and answer forums' where concerned people question whether to report or not because they are unsure if the noises that they hear constitute violence. In such cases, the reluctance to report stems from a fear that 'interference' may be an overreaction or that calling authorities will result in adverse neighbourly relations or violent confrontation.

note that my interview agenda was orientated towards the aural aspects of domestic violence. This tended to shift focus to violence noises overheard outside the home.

### **Domestic Violence Noise and Home Identities**

Sue (66, female) has been living in her unattached, three-bedroom home with her husband, four dogs, and two cats for the past two years. Sue has lived with depression for a number of years and is currently on medication to help her manage her mental health. She has also been living with chronic pain caused by osteoarthritis. Noise is something that can affect Sue's wellbeing considerably, and she has a number of strategies, including taking sleeping pills and positive thinking, to help reduce the impact that unwanted sound can have on her health and her experience of home. Up until two years ago, Sue had been living on a quiet rural farm (for 11 years), and before that in a coastal area of Auckland that she describes as a "pretty quiet area". Moving back into the city after living in quieter areas has been a real struggle for Sue, and she has not yet acclimatised to the noise of the city.

When she first moved into the city, Sue had a neighbouring family who engaged in verbal and physical domestic abuse. This made the transition to city living particularly difficult. At least once a week, and in some cases for an entire week, Sue's neighbours would argue for hours on end. The arguments often resulted in physical violence between family members. Proximity to her neighbour's home, and the building materials each house was made of, compounded the problem. Sue's home is clad with concrete fibre board and the windows are not

double-glazed. Her neighbour's home, which is within 11 metres of Sue's home, is a 1960s style weatherboard state house<sup>45</sup> that is also not double-glazed. With a clear line-of-sight to her neighbours, visual as well as aural privacy are limited. For Sue, there were no spaces in her home where she could avoid the noises of conflict generated by her neighbours.

Thankfully for Sue, those neighbours have since moved on, but she still vividly remembers the impacts that their almost constant arguing and fighting had on her sense of well-being. Noise was a prominent marker as far as the anxiety that her neighbours invoked, even to the point that non-violent noises such as the cars associated with her neighbour made Sue anxious:

Sue: *They had a lot of visitors with old rundown cars and they usually had most of their mufflers gone and they would be loud, or they would come up on like a motorbike or something. And that would, it would just be an irritant. It wouldn't affect me emotionally but I would just think, "Oh, when are they going to leave?" You know, stuff like that.*

Paul: *So the hearing of the cars arriving, you were saying "Oh, when are they going to leave?" Was there an association with hearing a noisy car pull up and an expectation that things were going to get out of hand again or...?*

Sue: *Yeah, I think so. I think so. Along with the fact that when cars would pull up or come down this end of the cul-de-sac, the dogs would bark and although we can stop them quickly they would bark every time it happened so that was an irritant because they hadn't done that before.*

Paul: *The dogs hadn't barked like that?*

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<sup>45</sup> Since the 1930s central government in New Zealand has provided subsidised housing, or 'state houses' for the urban poor.

Sue: *No. On the farm they would bark if somebody came up our long driveway until they saw the car. But then they would stop and that was fine because we were set back from the road on the farm. It was kind of an early warning system and I didn't mind them doing that. It didn't irritate me or affect me. But here, because we are in quite a small house, that is echoey [it makes the dog's barking irritating]. Um, so I could feel, during that whole time I could literally feel my heart rate come up. It would just be like an instant, like, "Oh no, not again." And I would get to the point where from about noon on I would start dreading the rest of the day if I saw the cars over there because I knew what it was going to get to be like.*

A number of key points that I have raised in this thesis are evident in Sue's account. First, abjection can be communicated through noise indirectly by association. The cars en route to her neighbour's house could be heard hundreds of metres away. The car noises invoked a sense of abjection even though no fighting, or other types of violence, was happening at that time. Second, and in a related sense, the fear and anxiety that hearing the cars produced affected a visceral response that elevated Sue's heart rate, which she later describes in terms of feeling physically sick. As Kristeva (1982 2-3) indicates, the abject provokes fears that among other things "increase heartbeat" and can create a sense of nausea. As the car noises transgressed the boundaries of her home, and her body, the abject polluted Sue's being through association. It did not matter whether violence was occurring at the time, for the association broke Sue's sense of home. It also ruptured her sense of corporeal being, prompting a sense that the borders of embodied experience were being compromised: "Yeah, it was tearing me apart." Attending to the

visceral responses such as those invoked by Sue's neighbours is crucial to understanding the relationship between bodies and homes. According to Duffy and Waitt (2013 467), paying "attention to the everyday visceral experiences of sound offers new insights into geographies of home."

Third, the transgressive potential of abject noise is aided by housing design and proximity of Sue's home to her neighbour. According to the New Zealand Deprivation Index 2006 (NZDep06), Sue's neighbourhood is highly deprived, and is one of the most deprived areas in New Zealand. The area around her home is rated in the lowest NZDep06 quintile and the materials that the houses in her neighbourhood are made of offer little sound insulation. Sue moved to the city for financial reasons and she much preferred to live in a rural/semi-rural setting. Her sense of her own identity does not align with the environment in which she currently lives, and a sense of powerlessness is invoked by the inability to mitigate against the noise of urban living. Again, I recall Truax's (2001[1984] 70) observation that one of the by-products of poor housing and poor urban planning on people of low socio-economic status is that the environment that they can afford to live in produces what he refers to as "a kind of aural claustrophobia." In Sue's case, she was unable to avoid the noise and often thought about going away for the weekend so that she "could get some sleep and calm down", but her financial situation meant that she could not afford to do so and this left her feeling even more despondent.

A fourth key point evident in Sue's experiences of having to endure the noises from her neighbours is that it affected not only Sue's mental health and sense of home, but this also had a flow-on effect in her relationship with her husband:

Sue: *Oh, yeah, I just got very very tense. Um, angry, which erupted over into just household life. I would snap at [my husband] for no reason, which I don't do. Um, I am pretty stable with that. Even when I've had bouts of deep depression I don't [pause]. Like, I'm not a person who, I don't nag, I don't tell a person they have to do something this way um, or tell them they are wrong. Or, I don't actually get angry easily at all but it would, I would just start to fill with rage and feel like I would kill myself or kill them. And that of course really bothered me emotionally [laughs] that I would feel that way.*

Being-at-home is shaped, in part, through the maintenance of harmonious familial relations (Blunt and Dowling 2006), and hearing the violent noises from her neighbours disrupted her emotional connection to her husband and to her own home. Emotions connect bodies and spaces (Gorman-Murray 2012), and as the senses are inextricably aligned to emotions (Davidson and Milligan 2004), any sensuous breakages also affect emotional connections. The home (and place and space in general) is known through the senses and emotions (Tuan 2007). The emotional and physical work that Sue undertakes to maintain her “intimate bond with [home] place” (Tuan 2007 158) was continually under attack and undone from abject violence noises. Sue was not at-home when violence noises invaded her domicile space.

### **Domestic Silence: Sensory Surveillance and Speaking Out**

Sue did not feel constricted by discourses that position violence noises as taboo, and she often rang the police when she got a sense that an aggressive

situation was escalating. This rarely brought relief, as the police response fell short of her, and her other neighbours' expectations:

Sue: *Even though we and the other neighbours would call the police every night it would just never change.*

Paul: *Every night?*

Sue: *Every night. It just didn't change the situation.*

Paul: *So that didn't feel like it was effective or...?*

Sue: *Well they, they weren't playing music so there was nothing the police could do. They can't confiscate human bodies and take their voices away. That's how they explained it to me.*

For the police to intervene, Sue said that charges would have to be laid, which only happened on two occasions that Sue could recall. Even then, this did not improve the situation for Sue. On one occasion, after the police arrested the offending neighbour, the person who was arrested had returned to their home by the next morning. While I have discussed a number of reasons why partners do not report abusers, there was perhaps another motive influencing lack of police reporting. In the case of Sue's neighbours, it was the woman who was the perpetrator of the physical violence. There is a stigma that a man is weak if he is battered by his (female) partner, and this can result in abused men not reporting the abuse that they suffer. Research by Dobash and Dobash (2004) suggests that men are just as likely (or unlikely, more accurately) as women to report their partners to the authorities. Sue said the apparent lack of action caused her to become "very, very suicidal. I was just crying and crying and I couldn't think straight." Fortunately for Sue, she was not entirely powerless. As her neighbours were renting their house, they were subject to the New Zealand

Residential Tenancy Act (1986). Section 40 (2)(c) of the Act (1986) states that a tenant shall not:

cause or permit any interference with the reasonable peace, comfort, or privacy of any of the landlord's other tenants in the use of the premises occupied by those other tenants, or with the reasonable peace, comfort, or privacy of any other person residing in the neighbourhood.

Although limited as to when they could intervene, the police told Sue that they were happy to field her calls as the more complaints that were made, the easier it would be to evict the problematic tenants. This is not a quick process, and it took approximately eight months before the neighbours who were causing Sue so much stress were forced to move out. I asked Sue about how it has been for her since the problem neighbours were evicted. The impact on her home life and wellbeing has been dramatic:

Sue: *I'm the picture of health [laughs]. Yeah, I am, I'm fine. I'm happy. I haven't had many bouts of depression um, and yeah, I've been feeling really good and haven't had any um, physical problems. Not any real physical problems [omitted text] whereas during that period, it [the pain from Sue's osteoarthritis] was constant and I just think that it was the noise that, the noise was triggering my emotions which just made me feel the pain. When you have like, what would be considered chronic pain, you can actually use the mind to actually not feel it. It's probably still there but you don't feel it. And, you can do it [positive thinking] where you just kind of forget that it's there, you can do it that well. But during that really intense time of fighting I couldn't do that. So I was hurting all the time also which, and I*

*don't know if you've known people with chronic pain, you can be pretty miserable if you let yourself be. But I had never let myself be, but I had no control at that time, which I attributed to the noise because it just not only kept me awake but I think I was afraid. Not of anything happening to us but I was afraid for the children, and CYFs [Child, Youth and Family - New Zealand Ministry of Social Development] weren't doing anything about it.*

The link between Sue's house, its location within her neighbourhood, her mental and physical health, the sensuous and emotional environment of her home, and the experience of domestic violence noises from her neighbours demonstrates the ways in which bodies and homes are mutually constituted. Gorman-Murray (2012) suggests that the emotional relationship to domicile space produces the home as embodied, affecting a 'homebody' assemblage. But as the senses and emotions are often fluid and contingent on wider socio-spatial relations, the 'homebody' is far from a guaranteed state, and requires constant maintenance. The poor sound insulating properties of her house made it impossible to escape the violence noises from her neighbour, and this severely impacted on Sue's ability to be at-home. The sense of powerlessness to control the sensuous environment of her home impacted on her embodied identity to the point where she became suicidal.

The inability to block out the noise affected Sue's sleep, and the emotional impacts of the violence noises aggravated her osteoarthritis and negatively impacted on her relationship with her husband. The contaminating effect from feeling the overlap of the sensuous bodily horizons between her neighbours and Sue tore apart her sense of a bounded corporeal identity. If both of the houses

involved were well-insulated, the distress of knowing violence was taking place would have continued for Sue, but the effects of the ongoing noise would have been greatly reduced. Sue's experience recalls Harries (1997 cited in Paterson 2007 97) belief that bodies do not merely dwell in buildings such as the home, but that the "experience of buildings is inseparably tied to the experience we have of ourselves, of our bodies, just as our experience of our bodies is affected by the spaces we inhabit." Unpacking this unmistakably visceral relationship, and where noise is located in this relationship, is key to understanding how the meaning of home is produced (Duffy and Waitt 2013).

As the senses and emotions are inseparable, I extend Gorman-Murray's (2012) reading of the 'homebody' relationship and add that 'homebodies' are also mediated through the senses. Ahmed's (2000 89) assertion that through the senses, "the subject and space leak into each other, inhabit each other" highlights the interconnectedness of bodies and homes, and destabilises understandings of the boundaries of the body and domicile space. By realigning corporeal and home borders as porous and unstable, I offer new ways of understanding the effects that noise has on Sue's sense of home, and the integral role that the senses play in the production of place and space. For in the same way that positive sounds such as music, "happy people talking", and "the sounds of cooking" all contribute to placing Sue at-home, the violence noises from her neighbours disrupted her sense of being-at-home. Now that the transgressions of domestic violence noises have abated, the sensuous environment of Sue's home allows her to be at-ease. She still endures other noises from her neighbours, such as loud stereos and lawnmowers, and these

can be upsetting at times, but in the absence of domestic violence noises Sue's 'homebody' assemblage is much easier to maintain.

Carol, like Sue, did not hesitate to call the police when she heard domestic violence, for the sake of the person that violence was being directed towards, and for her own peace of mind. Living in a six-unit, hollow-brick apartment block means that noises that violent in nature is readily transmitted from unit to unit. Carol's embodied home environment was challenged right from the moment that she moved into her unit, and being a domestic violence survivor<sup>46</sup> herself, she felt an acute understanding of what particular noises communicated:

Carol: *So certainly that was a factor for me, the noise. Um, you know, like if the noise, if it was loud I'd probably really tune into it you know. "Oh dear, 'alarm'. This is the 'alarm' time." This is when probably there's gonna be an incident. Yeah, so I think that, and there was domestic violence here next door, with a couple when I first moved and, you'd hear them arguing through the walls and I just used to get really panicked. You, know, cos you could hear it escalating. And then suddenly they'd be, you know, like things, really loud noises. And he broke, he smashed in the um, the door. He did other things but that was like, oh, you know, it's, it's true, you know, like it, my feelings are true you know, that yeah [the violence was escalating].*

As discussed in the Chapter Six, Carol has struggled with the aural environment of her home since moving in just over two years ago. The violence noises that

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<sup>46</sup> As mentioned in Footnote 41, terms such as victim and survivor have been problematised in relation to domestic violence. In this instance, survivor is a term that Carol uses to describe herself in regards to her experiences of domestic violence.

transgressed into her home space were impossible to avoid, or ignore, and this unsettled her sense of home safety, and her sense of privacy. As Blunt and Dowling (2006 10) argue, “one can live in a house and yet not feel ‘at home’. A house environment may be oppressive and alienating as easily as it may be supportive and comfortable, as shown by domestic violence” for instance. Although the violence was from next door, and hearing the noise of violence from her neighbour disrupted Carol’s sense of being-at-home, the absence of visual information made it difficult to know what was happening or whether it was appropriate to intervene.

Often, the level of noise unsettled Carol both physically and mentally. The noises were endured, however, as the arguing and angry voices alone did not offer enough information to prompt her to call the police. It was only when the noises got to a certain volume threshold that Carol was prepared to intervene, and this was based on her own experiences that made her aware that a violent incident was about to occur. The different noises communicated different degrees of abjection, but when the ‘alarm’ message came, she did not hesitate to act. During our discussion on domestic violence noises, Carol and I talked about how perplexing it is that a threshold even exists, and that people are prepared to accept violence noises that transgress into their homes:

Carol: *You know, it’s a wonder people don’t ring up or, I think I said to my Aunty, you know “Why aren’t people ringing up?” You know, well, none of them have got phones, you know, landlines so they’ve only got cell phones. That’s a factor. Um, but no one seemed, no one did anything. No one said, you know, came out and said “Hey! Cut it out!” So I was, I was the Mickey Mouse*

*and I had to ring up [the police], a lot. I said to her [the neighbour] at the mailbox one time, you know, you can, why are you, you know, I confronted her about it, and queried her as to why she was in that situation.*

In part, Carol believes access to a landline telephone affects people's ability to respond to the noises of domestic violence. While making a local call from a mobile phone to the police incurs a cost, the emergency 111 number is a free-call service and can even be called on a phone that is blocked due to credit default. It is feasible that many people are not aware that the 111 service is free, so this may factor into the reluctance to intervene. But like the respondents in the Australian Domestic Violence Attitude Survey (1988 cited in Mugford 1989), it appears that the reluctance to inform on neighbours is fed, to a significant degree, by the construction of domestic violence as a 'private' matter. Discourses of fear relating to the repercussions of informing on an abuser also silences the reporting of violence, and contribute to making domestic violence taboo. The power of these discourses is so strong that many people are prepared to accept disruption to the sensuous environment of their own home in order to avoid the transgression of informing on violent offenders.

At this point it is perhaps useful to draw attention to the power relations bound up in the ways in which violence noises disrupt the production of home. Crucially, I am reminded of McDowell's (1983) essay and the work that has followed in relation to how places and spaces are embodied with gender. In the case of home, Susan Hirsch (1994 5) states that "notions of public and private are 'deeply gendered' in ways that support patriarchy." The disruption of home

through violence noises is a salient example of how gender maps out through spaces, as in almost every case, it is men who are the cause of violence noises. Institutions that reproduce and maintain patriarchal dominance feed this process, further silencing the ways that violent men are 'permitted' to assert their masculinist agenda throughout the spaces that they occupy. In the time of Queen Elizabeth I, this was enshrined in English law (Myncke and Cops 1985 cited in Maris 2008), and remained so well into the twentieth century, where "male battering of women was untouched by law, protected as part of the private sphere of family life" (Schneider 1994 36).

### **Domestic Silence: A Cross-Cultural Example**

The positioning of domestic violence as a 'private' family matter in New Zealand was reflected in the experiences of Barbara (40, female). Barbara lives in a 108 square metre apartment in a large city in mainland China with her husband and son, but she is currently studying and boarding in Hamilton. She explained to me that with neighbours above, below, and on either side, her apartment in China, where she has lived for approximately eight years, is "surrounded by noise". Barbara often feels that she is unwittingly privy to the 'private' lives of her neighbours. Cooking noises, "intimacy sounds", sneezing, phone conversations, crying and "quarrelling" all transgress into her home. The physical structure of her apartment building in China does little to insulate against unwanted noise.

Each particular type of noise transmits an incomplete part of the 'private' lives of her neighbours, and different noises command different levels of attention. For

instance, the frequent sneezing from one her neighbours is hard to ignore because it is what Barbara refers to as “quite a special kind of sneeze [laughs]”. Most of the noises that she hears from her neighbours are perceived within the realm of what Truax (2001 [1984] 24) refers to as “background listening because the sound usually remains in the background of [her] attention.” Noises that are usual and commonplace are not usually noticed because they are expected and predictable. The sneezing captures her attention because it is beyond what Barbara perceives as ‘normal’. Like the sneezing, the quarrelling from one of her other neighbours is also a ‘foreground’ noise that cannot be ignored, albeit for different reasons:

Paul: *And the quarrelling, does that happen quite often? Is it quite frequent?*

Barbara: *Yeah, maybe once a week or something. So, and they have family problems and so the grandson just ah, throws things from different places and you can hear the very loud noises and you, you didn't know whether you could help or not because that was something private in that family. But ah, that private thing just ah, came into your ears and so you didn't know whether you should, should help or not.*

Concern for her neighbours, the abject quality of the noises, and the ready transmission of noise through her apartment's walls makes it impossible to ignore the quarrelling from her neighbours. Such noises are a disruptive presence in Barbara's own home space and affect her sense of being-at-home. Yet, in a similar way to the New Zealand context, assessing if and/or when to intervene is highly problematic due to the family and home life being

constructed as private. The 'civilising process' required the sectioning off of families from broader spatial and social networks in order to improve the containment of the abject and the taboo (Elias 1978[1939]). One by-product of this compartmentalising of social relations into spheres of 'public' and 'private' is the nuclear family, a unit largely isolated from everything outside the walls of the family home. Barbara suggests that part of the difficulty in addressing domestic violence noise is related to families being isolated from broader socio-spatial relations:

Barbara: *I do not know what is wrong with them because we do not talk with each other, even when we live in the same building. We talk with some of them, but we are more like strangers. In China, people just move in and move out. In big cities sometimes you had some, some very close neighbours but for most of the time people don't talk with each other.*

Societal structures dominated by heteronormative nuclear family units are imbued with patriarchal power. This power resonates through the discursive and built sensuous home and underlies the compartmentalising of neighbours from each other. Since the Industrial Revolution, family life has become increasingly isolated and hidden from broader societal surveillance and scrutiny. Richard Gelles' (1974) influential work *Into battered women* notes that the erosion of cohesive social structures, and the rise of nuclear families living in single family homes, has allowed domestic violence to take place in almost total secrecy. Feminists have argued that the compartmentalised nuclear family is part of broader patriarchal structures designed to keep women subordinate to men. By

example, the privatisation of family life not only helps to keep abuse hidden, but through keeping women economically dependent on their partner, also makes it difficult for women to leave an abusive man (Kirkwood 1993).

### **Violent Noise and Scale**

Joe lives in a two-bedroom unattached house in a central Hamilton suburb of relatively high deprivation. During his interview, we talked about the ways that his flatmate and Joe negotiate around the noises that they make in the home. Joe contextualised these noises within a discourse of “give-and-take”. For instance, although certain noises that his flatmate makes annoy Joe, like when she is watching television, he is aware that he enjoys “the sound of music quite high, sometimes, compared to her liking.” For Joe, this is just a part of everyday life in a shared living space and is normal and expected. Annoying noises made by his flatmate do not disrupt his sense of being-at-home. It is noise that enters his home from outside that upsets his sense of home.

Noise from one of Joe’s neighbours has been particularly troublesome, not only to Joe’s relationship to his home, but also to the way he feels about the neighbourhood where he lives. Just over 37 metres away from Joe’s house lives a family, the ‘patriarch’ of which acts and yells in a loud and abusive manner “every day, or every second day.” The volume of the yelling noise makes it impossible for Joe to avoid hearing:

Paul: *And when the abuse happens, is there nowhere inside your home that you/*

- Joe: */This house has got concrete walls and we still can hear him on the other side of the house. And he is across the road.*
- Paul: *And so, when you're hearing that [noise], from what I'm hearing, it disrupts your sense of peace?*
- Joe: *Very much so! Very much so. Not only does it disturb my sense of peace, my sense of neighbourhood peace if you like, my larger environmental peace, but also my own mental peace and my own sense of calm and my own sense of safety.*
- Paul: *Safety?*
- Joe: *Yeah. He is an aggressive angry man. We had gone across, um, there is one point that my friend that I live with has lost the plot, gone out across the road, said "Oi! You can't talk to your children like that!" And he yelled at her and said "You fucking stupid bitch!", and jumped out the window at her and approached on her across the road. Yeah, there is a sense of um, being unsafe. He's a very aggressive man.*

Unable to escape the abusive noises from his neighbour, Joe is forced to endure the disruption of his experience of home. Not only that, the quality of the noises communicates fear concerning his own safety, and for the safety of the man's family. Unable to endure the way that the man was treating his family, an attempt to intervene further reinforced this fear when his flatmate became the focus of the man's aggression. What struck me about Joe's comments is the way that he places his sense of home and peace within the wider spatial scale of the neighbourhood: his "larger environmental peace." For Joe, his sense of peace does not stop at the boundary of the home where he lives, but extends to his aural horizon within the neighbourhood that he lives. Reading Joe's experience of place and space sensually suggests that identity is not bound to domicile space, but is embedded within wider sensory and emotional spatial

scales. Like the sensorium of the Ongee, Joe's sensuous being extends beyond the epidermis, and overlaps with the other people in his neighbourhood:

Joe: *And this is an interesting neighbourhood at times too. I mean, we have another family down the bottom of the road who occasionally has, you know, every third or so weekend they'll have a **big** party and that big party can go all night 'til around about four o'clock in the morning [Joe's emphasis]. They'll have all the whānau [family] over, they'll all get pissed and then all of a sudden you have, "You fucking bitch! You never loved me! You fucking cunt!" And also next door on this side. I mean, the other night that we had um, our neighbour sort of lose the plot and play dreadful commercial radio at the top end of the volume that her stereo could do, and then it went to an advert she'd go over to another commercial station and then when the people across the road to went over to complain there was kind of a um, slanging match between the two of them and we thought there was going to be sort of, street battles fought outside our window. I mean, and we've got somebody across the park there who I mean, who have quite loud parties sometimes. Um, and maybe because there's a bit of space [between us and them] you can cope with that. They take the motorbike out and go round and round it circles in the middle of the park. And some of those things you just accept because that's the nature of the neighbourhood you live in. So, what I guess I'm getting at in terms of the person, the guy across the road, it is that he's over, above and beyond that normal level of background neighbourhood insanity.*

From Joe's account, it is clear that his neighbourhood is far from 'tranquil', and he accepts that urban living/sensing blurs the physical boundaries of his

domicile space and his body. The peace and safety, that Joe deems to be an important part of being-at-home, is contingent on a number of overlapping sensing bodies. Sometimes these bodies are annoying but they do not disrupt Joe's sense of his own corporeal being. The noises from the violent man across the road are on another level of transgression, impossible to ignore, and impossible to escape from. Violent masculinities permeate across and through the neighbourhood, through homes, and through bodies. Fear, a pillar of patriarchal oppression that is so intrinsically part of cultures of domestic violence, genders the spaces around Joe's violent neighbour. Through violence noises, the neighbourhood becomes subject to masculinist oppressive power.

Even though the man lives over 37 metres away, it is almost as if the violent man is in Joe's home. This manifests because Joe situates his understanding of home beyond the property boundary of the section that his house is on: the "abuse sort of floats over the neighbourhood", enveloping everything and everyone who is within earshot. The violent man is being violent within Joe's home, and the abject is projected into Joe's house like an unwanted guest. Such a feeling is suggestive of Paterson's (2007 142) assertion that embodied experience is an assemblage of many bodies overlapping through the senses and emotions, rather than just a "single body having experiences of a single world." This perspective necessarily accommodates a spatially diffuse notion of 'homebodies', one that acknowledges how bodies and domicile spaces are embedded in broader spatial networks and scales.

## **Violent Noise and Class**

Pippa's experience of hearing domestic violence noises and being-at-home is also embedded within a neighbourhood discourse that reinforces the permeability and fluidity of bodies, identities, and home across various spatial scales. In contrast to the "normal level of background neighbourhood insanity" in Joe's neighbourhood, Pippa lives in an area of relatively low deprivation. The 'background' sounds and noises fits well with her middle class expectations of what constitutes a 'good' neighbourhood to live in. For Pippa, what differentiates a 'good' neighbourhood from an 'undesirable' neighbourhood is largely shaped by sensuous experience:

Paul: *And this house, as it is, what about outside noises coming in? Do you find those a distraction?*

Pippa: *Not any, too much anymore. I use to find the next door neighbour's dog horrendously annoying. [Pause] And, the occasional domestic argument that comes from across the road. I, you know, it's not annoying. Other than it lowers the value of the suburb [laughs].*

Paul: *The property value?*

Pippa: *No, just even the value of living here. So the value of living in Hillcrest. If you have a domestic argument, or arguers, which may occur, you know, relatively frequently over there, the value of living here in Hillcrest, in this suburb, is lowered.*

Paul: *You have, so, when you say value, there's a prestige or it has a certain/*

Pippa: */It's, you know, if you say to people I live in Hillcrest, [pause] "that's a good suburb."*

In comparing Joe's and Pippa's experiences, there appears to be a dominant imagining that position domestic violence noises as synonymous with low socio-economic status. Both Joe and Pippa come from middle class Pākehā backgrounds, and yet their respective neighbourhoods vary greatly in terms of deprivation.<sup>47</sup> The 'acceptable' level of what is normal, as far as arguing/violence noises are concerned, has a much higher threshold in Joe's neighbourhood than the relatively low threshold in Pippa's neighbourhood. Further, the houses in Pippa's neighbourhood are, in general, of a higher structural standard than those in Joe's neighbourhood, and as such, noise is more likely to be overheard. Somehow, domestic violence is 'in-place' within poorer neighbourhoods and 'out-of-place' in wealthier neighbourhoods.<sup>48</sup> I raised this topic with Denise, and some of her comments resonated with Pippa's class-focused reading of neighbourhood noises. I do not mean to suggest that the middle class is free of domestic violence, and the *It's Not Ok* advertising campaign launched in New Zealand in 2007 draws attention to the fact that abuse occurs across all social strata (see <http://www.areyouok.org.nz/> for more information).

As Julie Cupples and Jane Harrison's (2001) analysis of the media representations regarding the case of Dr Morgan Fahey demonstrates, it can be

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<sup>47</sup> Analysis of the noise complaints in Hamilton tends to suggest that socio-economically deprived areas are noisier. As quoted earlier, there were over five times more noise complaints made in the most deprived quintile areas than there were in the least deprived quintile areas (see Appendix 1). While complaints do not necessarily translate as 'noisiness', Atkinson (2007) suggests that middle-class residents are more likely to be proactive when it comes to complaining about excessive noise. As such, the difference in complaints per person in between high and low decile areas ought to be larger in areas of low deprivation if wealthy neighbourhoods were equally as noisy as areas of high deprivation.

<sup>48</sup> Statistics New Zealand (2010) *Crime Victimization Patterns in New Zealand* data shows that people living in the most deprived quintile are nearly twice as likely to have been subjected to an act of domestic violence as those in the least deprived quintile. This tends to back up this assertion. The Statistics New Zealand (2010) report, however, does not detail the nature or the location (e.g. home, street or commercial premises) of the violent crime.

much more difficult to detect, and to report on, white middle/upper class men who act violently towards family members. Further, 'well-connected' men in privileged positions have a much "greater chance of a favourable outcome in the law courts than the less privileged" (Cupples and Harrison 2001 198). The recent high profile case of police not pursuing a case against the wealthy, white, and 'respected' businessman Charles Saatchi when he assaulted his wife Nigella Lawson in public, is testimony to how institutions work to maintain male privilege. While Dr Morgan Fahey eventually received a six year custodial sentence for multiple sexual abuse offences, the dominant discourse throughout the media at the time almost unanimously represented him as a respectable family man who could not possibly have committed 13 counts of abuse against 11 women, including sexual violation, unlawful sexual connection, and the rape of a patient who was heavily pregnant.

Denise, like Joe and Pippa, is from a Pākehā and middle class background. She is currently living in one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Hamilton. In the past, discussing the violent noises in her neighbourhood with friends has been problematic, as Denise's middle class friends feel she is out-of-place where she lives:

Denise: *Because occasionally I've thought it'd be nice to move away from the neighbours. Um, partly because there was a time when they were really, it was really hard. And partly, people, because sometimes people have said to us, our friends, you should probably not live next door to those people. That you know, that neighbourhood is bad and da da da. And Fairfield itself gets tagged with this reputation. Although, not necessarily*

*this part. And I go through a lot of angst about it. Every now and then it comes up in conversation [with friends] and um, my partner is adamant that he really likes this area and so do I in fact ... We don't like the idea of living in a place which we think expressly is not as diverse or not as interesting. Um, because we've got a very interesting, I think, multicultural community where we live. And so, I've had a, I've had a kind of, I've grappled with this, with friends who have said "Oh, but..." And I'll take your example of Hillcrest. Someone I work directly with in my own workplace um, she prefers Hillcrest because it is very 'nice'. And I kind of find it really hard, you know. I find it that issue problematic because we sort of found [Hillcrest] very boring.*

Having a preference for living in a diverse area places Denise at odds with her middle class friends, who live in 'nice' suburbs that are relatively free of the violence noises that Denise is exposed to. One of the major markers of a 'nice' suburb, then, is based on the sounds and noises that neighbours can expect to hear (or not hear). In this way, neighbourhoods can be understood as sensually defined. While she prefers to live in Fairfield, the soundscape in the cul-de-sac where Denise lives does present some issues when it comes to having friends over to her house:

Denise: *But I think one of the issues that I find is that back to the theme of embarrassment. Um, I find it harder to have people over here for dinner or lunch or something and if the noise starts then I feel embarrassed, you know. Ah, so I can't, I haven't bought silence, you know. I haven't, and which is what some people*

*might have been able to do. But you know, I never, I might in future, who knows [laughs].*

Denise acknowledges that in choosing to live in a lower socio-economic neighbourhood, she has to accept that it is noisy. The acceptance is somewhat partial, however, as while she prefers living in a culturally diverse area, there is the potential for embarrassment if 'non-middle class' noises arise while Denise is entertaining. This threat to the sensuous order of Denise's home is compounded, as Atkinson (2007), Guy Evans (2004), and Meszaros (2004) note, by the fact that homes in economically deprived neighbourhoods are exposed to more noise than homes in wealthy neighbourhoods. Indeed, production of middle class neighbourhoods "is partially determined by proximity to noise" (Atkinson 2007 1910). Atkinson (2007 1910) argues that this is because people with greater economic means have the "ability to manifest control over potential auditory disturbance in one's home" (Atkinson 2007 1910) in comparison to those of low socio-economic status.

Denise has not bought the silence that her middle class peers hold to be so important. As such, Denise's sensing body living in Fairfield represents a transgressive presence to some of her friends, and this is not the only way in which her place in her neighbourhood disrupts the dominant order:

Denise: *Yeah, I mean the other thing about class, and that's kind of how I'd prefer to talk about this. Although there are ethnicity issues embedded in this as well. But um, about two days after we moved in here, three years ago, there was a terrible, terrible*

*domestic argument in that house [two doors down, approximately 15 metres away]. And we were very upset and disturbed and then it never kind of happened again for ages after that, and it's very rare to have such a domestic dispute. We didn't call the police because we knew, we were the only um, at that time, we were the only Pākehā in the cul-de-sac. We were the only Europeans living here. And in our minds, and this is going to sound really, I don't know how it's going to sound, in our minds we were worried that it would really stand out because we had just moved in. That we were ringing the police straight away and we worried that it might mean that we would be treated differently.*

Not wanting to draw attention to her difference complicated how Denise felt she could respond to the violence noises that she heard. This example speaks to the ways that identities and 'homebodies' are multi-scalar, spill out beyond property boundaries, and are embedded within broader spatial politics. Denise is quick to position domestic violence as a class issue, and the ethnicity aspect of her experience relates to where she fits into the neighbourhood, rather than her constructing domestic violence as an ethnic issue. Thus, it is important to consider that the construction of the home and family as 'private' is only part of the reason for how domestic violence noises are simultaneously loud and silent in urban spaces.

Class, socio-economic status, gender, and broader spatial and sensuous identity politics were also evident in Sandra's experience of her new home. Sandra owns a home in an upmarket street close to the centre of town that she was living in up until one year ago. She is now living with her partner in an area

of relatively high deprivation, and the contrast between her current home and where she used to live is marked by very different 'noisescapes'. During a discussion about the effects that noise can have on her wellbeing, Sandra identified as someone whose sense of peace and home is profoundly affected by noise. Shifting to an area of low socio-economic status has come with exposure to a greater degree of noise than she experienced in her previous home:

Sandra: *Yeah. Because [Sandra's old address] was you know, it is quite upmarket. Well, relatively. That's not, it is not like sort of posh but it's definitely you know, most of the places were not rentals. They were all pretty much, bar one house round me, we are all you know um, owner/occupied. Quite nice area, but coming here, this is a state house area. Um, lots of state houses and there is you know, I really have noticed it. And the guy that was across the road ... there was a lot of, a lot of activity and a lot of sort of, a lot of coming and going and noise and then fights over there. Drunken fights ... Yeah, low socio-economic areas tend to be noisier and because people who are renting have probably less investment in the local environ, d'you know what I mean? Like, they don't, they don't own it so they don't have as much there. You know, about other neighbours because they can, are going to move, they are transient. Whereas people generally who are living in a place that they own, or are owner/occupied, they know they've got to live there. They've got to get on with their neighbours. It is optimal to, so it probably behoves them to sort of be a bit more considerate.*

Sandra said the stress and broken sleep from the fighting noise across the road impacted on her mental health. She says: “just for my sanity I’ve got to keep things quiet and peaceful around me.” The aggression transmitted by Sandra’s neighbour was only part of the increased level of noise that she encountered when she moved into her current home, but it was the thing that Sandra found to be the most upsetting. For Sandra to feel at home, she needs much more quiet than her neighbourhood provides. Thus, being-at-home is not restricted to her domicile space, but extends to the aural horizon around her home. Comparing Sandra’s experience of two different neighbourhoods also points towards the way, as Feld (2005) argues, that senses makes place. For Sandra, upmarket places are made through the absence of noise, and deprived areas are made by noise.

This sentiment seems to be reflected in the accounts of Matt, and Sarah and Jeff. Matt has lived in his one-bedroom ‘hollow brick’ unit for the last year, and noise easily filters through all of the units in his block. The socialising habits of one set of his neighbours left him feeling on-edge and upset his sense of home:

Matt: *I had some dodgy neighbours at one stage, living up diagonally from us. And it was, yeah, they have these parties and stuff. It would just drive me [crazy]. Aggressive, sort of late teenaged/early twenties kind of people. And they, yeah, so I turn the TV on quite loud and listen to that and that would block out the kind of drunken yelling and their shit music.*

Paul: *So there was some music and, and the yelling as well?*

Matt: *Yeah, yeah. Just...*

Paul: *Was it, either one of those more annoying than the other?*

- Matt: *Ah [pause], nah, come to think of it they are all pretty annoying. Like, maybe the yelling actually, the drunken sort of talking and yelling was a bit more annoying. Because it's kind of aggressive sounds. It's kind of, people are kind of stupid when they're drunk anyway and if you're not like, joining in [omitted text]. They were a bit rough.*
- Paul: *Rough?*
- Matt: *Not gangsters or anything but just um, kind of sullen kiwi young people.*
- Paul: *And you found that turning up the TV was effective? Like...*
- Matt: *It was better, it wasn't perfect but. It reduced my anxiety a bit. Um, distracted me.*

Feeling threatened, and with a sense of powerlessness to stop the source of the noise, Matt resorted to blocking out the noises from the other tenants in his block by turning up his television. Matt, like Sue, and Carol, is constrained by his financial situation and is limited as far as the type of accommodation he can afford is concerned. The result is that he is exposed to noises that are more common in low socio-economic areas, and more difficult to block out. A number of years ago, Sarah and Jeff were in a similar situation:

- Sarah: *In that situation, that control issue was probably, because we had no control over what happened. But, and again, we were attached to it.*
- Jeff: *The TV could have come through the wall if he had thrown it hard enough. Um yeah, he threw the TV/*
- Sarah: */And we, we couldn't get rid of them. They weren't our tenants so...*
- Jeff: *No, no. We just were, they were our neighbours, we couldn't get them out.*

Paul: *And living there, I guess, was it, as an attached unit or half house [omitted text], was that a financial consideration at that stage?*

Jeff: *It was the cheapest place we could find. So, we took it.*

Socio-economic status has a significant effect on health outcomes, and poor quality housing and the associated increased exposure to noise is but one of the ways that economically deprived city dwellers are disadvantaged (Evans 2004; Marsh *et al.* 1999). Again, examining the variations in experiences of noise and the associated health outcomes between deprived and wealthy urban dwellers is indicative of the way that bodies and homes are not discrete: they leak into each other, make each other, and constitute each other (Ahmed 2000; Santiago *et al.* 2011; Stewart 2005).

The examples of hearing domestic violence that Carol, Denise, Joe, Pippa, Matt, Sandra, Sarah and Jeff, and Sue share all speak to how home identities are not bound to the physical structure of a house, but are also embedded within the broader spatial scale of the neighbourhood. Senses embed the subject in-place, and when the sensuous environment aligns with their embodied identities, a sense of being-in-place ensues. Abject and taboo noises disrupt the placing of the subject in-place, and breaks the sense of being-at-home. Home, in this sense, extends to the acoustic horizon of the bodies that dwell there (Truax 2001[1984]).

A sensuous reading of place and space reinforces Massey's (1998) assertion that geographic scales are far from discrete. Instead, Massey (1998 124-125)

argues that scales are best thought of as a complex net of interrelations where social relations occur as “constellations of temporary coherence”. The fleeting and ever-changing temporary sonic environments where bodies, homes, and the neighbourhood overlap and blur into each other represent a multi-scalar constellation of sensuous and emotional experience. These accounts also suggest that class has a major influence over how violence noises are interpreted and dealt with across scales.

### **The Disciplinary (in)Effect of Panaudic Surveillance**

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed the role that the senses, and hearing in particular, play in the articulation of power, surveillance, and self-discipline. Foucault’s (1977) work that draws on Bentham’s Panopticon as a metaphor to discuss the cyclical movement of power through society was instrumental in not only reconfiguring how the flow of power is understood, but also in highlighting the role that vision plays in how power is expressed and propagated. Through internalised rules and expectations, power is not necessarily exacted onto the individual, but flows in a cyclic motion between external and internal influences. Awareness that others may be able to perceive actions is often enough to affect behaviour and intent. As the experiences of the people who participated in this research attest, this happens through multiple sense channels and is not limited to sight as Foucault (1977) professed.

Extending the sensory aspects of Foucauldian power, and the notion of self-disciplinary sensuous surveillance, has informed how I have interpreted the participant accounts that I have reviewed. When I began examining the

disciplinary effects of the potential of being heard engaging in acts of domestic violence, it struck me that violent perpetrators seem to care little whether they are going to be heard or not. As Joe observes:

Joe: *I certainly think that the guy across the road, who gets angry at his family, is completely unaware that his actions are impacting on other people's sense of consciousness. Yet, at the same time if he was aware, I doubt it very much whether he would care a great deal.*

Unlike the dominant discourses that shape the negotiation of sex and toileting noises, the threat of being overheard appears to have little bearing on the noises that a person makes if they are being violent in their home. It seems, then, that a different type of disciplinary politics governs abject and taboo violence noises.

While Foucault's (1977) positioning of vision as the channel of disciplinary power is somewhat 'short-sighted', his theorisation of the circulatory flow of power does offer insights into why reactions to domestic violence are often silenced. For instance, the disciplining effect of violence noises are transmitted via abjection and are situated within an implicit 'contract' between the violent perpetrator and those who are within earshot. The construction of domestic violence as a 'private' family matter, and therefore taboo, produces a 'veil of secrecy' that assists violent offenders to remain anonymous (Dobash and Dobash 1980).

Whether through discourses that make and maintain family as a 'private' entity, or fear of retaliation, when a violent event is heard but not reported, the person who has overheard it is exercising an internalised disciplinary restraint. The effect of a "unified, infallible, omniscient, and anonymous authoritative" presence over the individual continues through visual surveillance (Hannah 1997 348). For example, domestic violence perpetrators tend to exact abuse in 'private' spaces such as the home, and on sites of the body that are rarely exposed (Goldsack 1999). As domestic violence is heard much more than it is seen, however, audition rather than vision is arguably the means through which the power within the sensory politics of domestic violence most often flows.

Feminist deconstructions of the gendered power that resonates through places and spaces has offered a way to better understand the politics of violence noises in the home. Societal structures, such as the nuclear family, have been shown to support and maintain patriarchal power, and to work together with the discursive privacy of home spaces to afford men who perpetrate domestic abuse a space in which to do so. While significant in-roads have been made since the introduction of the Domestic Violence Act 1995, over 80 per cent of domestic violence still goes unreported. In the case of women who are abused, some of this under-reporting is due to gender-based privilege that favours men, and makes it difficult for women to leave an abusive situation. Reporting often results in economic hardship and combined with fear, forces women to suffer in silence. This 'silence', however, extends to the neighbours of abused women, who often hear but do not intervene or report. Masculinist oppression continues to succeed through the implicit compliance of those who hear violent acts but do nothing.

An Eliasian reading of how violent noises have become abject and taboo would suggest that those who overhear a violent incident but do not report it are merely adhering to the rules of being a 'civilised' citizen in a 'civilised' society. Matter and actions constructed as abject, taboo, or private, are resigned to the realm of the home and the enclave of the nuclear family. Managing abjection rarely involves direct action, but is negotiated through the cultivation of habitual self-restraint (Elias 1978[1939]). Intervening would represent a transgression of the sanctity and sovereignty of the home and of the family. This is in spite of the fact that the violent offenders fail to uphold their responsibilities to contain the 'private' matter of domestic violence. The profound impact that overhearing domestic violence can have on being at home, and the accompanying unease invoked through concern for those who are living in violent homes, makes the aural politics of domestic violence highly complex and perplexing.

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## 8 CONCLUSION

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Engaging with abject noise, and how it is negotiated in the home, has provided a useful platform through which to explore how the relationships between bodies, identities, and space are formed and remade. While representing only a small part of the complex role that the senses play in the construction and maintenance of bodies and homes, deconstructing the narratives of abjection and abject noise within the semi-structured interviews that were conducted for this research - 20 with individuals, and four with couples - has offered novel ways to explore geographies of home. Through addressing issues such as: how the 'silent presence' of abject noises shape, and are shaped by the construction of homes, bodies, and connections to domicile spaces; how the often disruptive effects of such noises can influence 'homebodies'; and where geography as a discipline fits into sensuous homemaking, I add to the 'body' of work that acknowledges how senses make places and places make senses (Feld 2005). More specifically, I have examined how noise can 'unmake' processes of homemaking. Deconstructing the contaminating effects of noises from a spatial perspective is not only useful for research on abjection, but it provides a 'sound' argument that other aspects of socio-spatial relations can, and should be, engaged as multi-sensory.

### **Re-sensing Geography**

Historically, the privileging of the visual has steered geography knowledges in the direction of what can be *seen*. Only since the early humanists began engaging more holistically with the senses, followed by feminist work that

advocates for embodied and gendered readings of spaces such as the home, has geography gained the tools necessary for tackling the complexities of negotiating noise in the home. Yet, non-visual knowledges, as McCormack (2009) argues, still struggle to gain traction in geography research.

The politics of abject noise in the home cannot be fully articulated through traditional means of geographic enquiry, where a bias towards vision has impoverished understandings of socio-spatial relations. Deconstructing and critiquing the power relations that flow through discourses of abjection has highlighted the 'short-sightedness' of geography. Taking a critical approach to knowledge production has demonstrated that geographers can no longer ignore the senses when engaging with embodiment and the production of space. In the case of transgressive experiences, sensuous approaches to reading space and place that acknowledge the role *all* of the senses play in locating the self in-place, are essential for understanding abject noises in the home.

With a dearth of non-visual literature, geography can benefit from drawing on work from other disciplines in order to 'flesh' out sensuous geographies. The potential that Elias' (1978[1939]) *The Civilising Process* offers for critical geographies of sensuous embodiment cannot be overstated. Although, as Michael Landzelius (2004 280) argues, "body theorists such as ... Norbert Elias ... are rarely cited" in geographies of the body scholarship, Elias' (1978[1939]) examination of the social processes that have informed bodily comportment and domestic spaces provides geographers with opportunities to better understand the power relations affecting spatial scales.

Examining matters that were once freely and openly discussed, such as the management of bodily fluids, demonstrates that the senses and sensing are not value-free. Disciplining the output of noises from sexual activity, toilet use, and domestic violence, is informed by attitudes passed down primarily through parental guidance, and occur within specific cultural paradigms that are far from universal. So not only does locating my analysis within an Eliasian approach provide a useful backdrop through which the spatiality of abjection can be explored, but it also serves to problematise the belief that aversion to abject noises is solely a 'natural' response.

Feeding into, and complimenting Elias' (1978[1939]) historical account of civility, Foucault's (1977; 1978; 1980) work provides a more explicitly sensuous politics of the articulation and flows of self-discipline and power. With a focus on the relationship between bodies and spaces, and how space is partitioned to maintain power, this potentially explains why Foucault is more prevalent in geography scholarship compared to Elias. It is Foucault's (1977) employment of the Panopticon metaphor and surveillance that is particularly useful for exploring the disciplining effects of abject noise, and sensuous geographies more generally speaking.

A major shortcoming of Foucauldian understandings of power, largely 'overlooked' by academia, is that vision is *the* sense through which self-discipline is maintained. This myopic 'view' ignores the complexities of the ways power manifests within sensuous experience of place, a result of the occularcentric paradigm that Foucault wrote from. Nonetheless, the dialogue begun by Foucault (1977) relating to the role that the senses play in the exertion

and internalisation of power has been extended by authors such as Hannah (1997) and Siisiäinen (2008). I contribute to this work, drawing attention to the omniscient properties of sound and noise, and the implications that this has for the affectual potential of panaudic surveillance. The leakiness of noise across partitioned spaces such as bedrooms and toilets - spaces that would otherwise protect from the surveillant gaze of others - can affect self-disciplining behaviours. Research into the effects of space on the flow of power can profit from awareness of how all sensory modalities can affect self-discipline.

Geography can also draw on the work of anthropologists such as Geurts (2002), Howes (2003), and Pandya (1990; 1993) when reconsidering approaches to sensuous geographies. Caution is required to avoid essentialising difference and otherness when employing examples of sensuous experience across various cultures (Feld and Basso 1996). Ruth Finnegan (2003) argues that terms like 'oral tradition' are often burdened with colonialist discourses of 'primitive' and lacking. Further, sensory anthropologists have tended to 'fit' analysis within "familiar disciplinary divisions of Western culture" (Howes 2003 7) which map out through the Western five-sense paradigm. Doing so denies the overlapping, and dynamic understandings of how cultures configure sensuous experience differently, such as the way that the Anlo-Ewe hear in the skin (Geurts 2002).

### **Geographies of Abjection and Housing Design: Insulation or Attitudes?**

By approaching the study of abjection from a geographical and multi-sensory perspective, it is clear that negotiating abject noise often affects a highly

complex range of social interactions in modern homes and neighbourhoods. Locating noise at the fore, this thesis contributes to the scholarship seeking richer and critical approaches to researching the relationships between people and place. For instance, the physical structure of the home evolved to accommodate the expectation that sex and excreta be contained. While the visual markers of abjection may remain behind closed doors, the architecture and materials used in modern houses are often woefully inadequate for containing abject noises. In the case of those who enjoy noisy or loud sex, perhaps this signals towards homes with better sound insulation qualities. Domicile spaces with soundproofing materials may provide a more suitable space to express intimacy. The urban poor, who endure much noisier neighbourhoods, could also benefit from insulated houses. People like Sandra, whose health is strongly connected to noise, would certainly prefer a quieter home:

Sandra: *If we ever buy, build a house together like, we've talked about this [with her partner], that's something that I would definitely investigate, you know, insulation in terms of insulating against noise. Not just heat or you know, cooling. But that's to do with controlling the level of noise.*

Advocating for houses to be built with better acoustic insulation to minimise exposure to abject noises, however, is highly problematic. In the case of domestic violence, detection of acts of abuse is arguably most often signalled by the resulting noises. Better noise insulation, in this case, may further conceal abuse and reinforce patriarchal power that is exercised through, and reinforced

by, the spatial scale of home. Given that discourses of domestic violence 'silence' most people who overhear it, and also those who are subjected to it, it is unclear whether soundproofing will have a major impact on the prevalence of abuse (and reporting) in New Zealand. It is perhaps more appropriate to challenge the underlying 'Victorian' attitudes that inform discourses of shame and embarrassment. Shifting the bar as far as what is embarrassing and appropriate is concerned, may help to diminish the prevalence of phobias such as parcopresis and paruresis.

For those living in abusive relationships, the politics of embarrassment differ, where discourses of shame (and fear) cause abuse to be underreported. The self-disciplining politics differ from sex and toileting in that perpetrators are rarely compelled to contain the noises associated with their violence. It is those who are abused who self-discipline their behaviour, which to a large degree is influenced by threats from their abusers if they fail to 'silence' themselves. Again, it is the discursive and physical construction of home that facilitates abuse. The sense of privacy that home affords in many cases increases the likelihood and severity of violent acts (Goldsack 1999). Critical debates relating to geographies of home, bodies, gender, and sensuous and emotional constructions of space can contribute to understanding these processes, as each can offer novel ways to interpret the power relations associated with violence in the home.

## **Privacy is Sensuous**

I have argued that plotting the history of contemporary attitudes towards abject noises is essential for understanding the politics of abjection, and how this affects embodied experiences, domicile spaces, and neighbourhoods and cities. The expectation, protocols, and management of abject noise (and matter) have at their nexus a long history predicated on gendered, classist, and ethnicised discourses. In parallel to the history of the senses, housing design has been influenced by political forces that serve elite, masculinist, and heteronormative agendas (Longhurst 2012). In the case of the physical structure of houses, these expectations to contain and suppress abject and taboo actions and matter are literally built into the very architecture of the home. Notions such as gendered expectations of embarrassment, modesty, and shame have resulted in contemporary houses being partitioned to allow abject matter to be contained. It is clear, given the experiences of many research participants that partitioned home spaces deemed 'appropriate' for the containment of abjection rarely manage to do so. Feeling privacy, as Ardener (1993) contends, is very much defined by earshot. As geographers such as Blunt and Dowling (2006) and Imrie (2004) argue, privacy (of the home) is no more than an ideological principle, and is embedded within gendered, classist, and ethnicised power relations. The discursive and physical boundaries of home are just too permeable and fluid to maintain a distinct space separate from the public domain. What I contribute here is that a sensuous reading of home, and the ease through which noise moves across space in particular, further demonstrates just how unstable the borders of domicile space are.

The concept of defining scales as a means for social groups to dominate others is a recurring theme in the accounts of domestic violence that participants shared. Feminists since the 1970s have identified that the scale of the home is imbued with inequalities that privilege masculinist power (Ahmed 2000; Blunt and Dowling 2006; Goldsack 1999). Among other outcomes, Kirkwood (1993) argues that this has allowed domestic violence to happen in secrecy. A sensuous reading of domestic space indicates that the “isolation of the nuclear family into single family homes” (Kirkwood 1993 16) does not always result in abuse remaining secret. The noises of violence are often heard by neighbours, and throughout neighbourhoods. Drawing on Young (2005), I have argued for the acknowledgement of the role that the sensuous environment of the home plays in the formation and maintenance of identities. Unwanted sensuous phenomena, as a polluting source, can disrupt identities and affect the ‘sense’ of being-at-home. This is not isolated to the homes in which violence occurs, but often impacts on the homes that are within earshot.

Fear is communicated via violence noises and, like other abject matter, it is difficult or impossible to ignore. As Kristeva (1982) notes, the abject commands attention, while at the same time dissolving borders between the self and the other. The threat posed by violence noises destabilises the ‘safety’ that the home is supposed to afford, and in the process, ‘homebodies’ become misaligned. While the presence and/or awareness of violence noises may disrupt dominant constructions of home, action is rarely taken to stop the source. Often the fear of repercussions ‘silences’ interventions. The account of one participant confirms that intervening when abuse is occurring can result in being threatened with violent repercussions. The lack of other sensory

information also complicates the decision of whether to intervene, or to call authorities.

Fear of transgressing the 'privacy' of another's home supersedes the disruptive effect of abject violence noises. Although often impossible to ignore, overhearing domestic violence is silenced through discourses of fear and masculinist privilege that valorise the notion of 'privacy'. The politics of the senses runs through these discourses, and hearing in particular, as it is arguably the most common way that domestic violence is detected. Perpetrators use the home to hide their actions, in many cases deferring their violence until they are in their homes, knowing that intervention is much more likely if someone witnesses abuse. Taking a sensuous approach to the geographies of fear and abjection can help to foster a better understanding of why such an abhorrent act such as domestic abuse can be 'swept under the carpet' in contemporary urban spaces.

In the case of the discursive home, the partitioning of houses from other houses, and families from other families, has wide-reaching implications for the experience of abject noises. The 'right to privacy' underwrites discourses of home, as evidenced in the dictum that "an Englishman's home is his castle" (Chapman and Hockey 1999 5), and reflects a belief that the home should be exempt from outside influences, such as the state, and neighbours. Relevant to this research, this has provided an unchecked space for domestic violence to occur, in spite of the violence noises that often spill out from homes and are heard by neighbours. In this instance, taking action against women and children being battered in the home undermines a man's 'right' to 'privacy' in his home

This effectively silences the ability to intervene, as the privileging of the 'privacy' discourse takes precedence over the rights of those subjected to abuse. The implications of this discursive construction of home continue to resonate through contemporary politics of domestic violence and the sensuous production of space. A sonorous (and multi-sensual) approach to researching geographies of domestic violence can thus add to understanding the experience of abuse in homes and neighbourhoods.

### **Re-sensing 'Homebodies'**

Throughout the three empirical chapters, I weaved dominant themes that flow through and inform abjection - revulsion, fascination, shame, embarrassment - through the sensuous and emotional geographies of bodies and homes. While commonalities exist across all three chapters, each makes a unique contribution to geography scholarship. Exploring the politics of sex noises in the home gives insights into how class affects how noise is experienced (houses affordable to the urban poor have limited sound insulating properties), and also how class can be communicated via noise. Judy and Art's experience of their neighbours' sex noises invoked various responses, including amusement. One of the key features carried into their domestic space, however, was the social and corporeal presentation of their neighbours. Previous encounters had shaped Judy and Art's reading of their neighbours as abject, 'dirty', and other. The sex noises from next door carried the physical appearance and social status of their neighbours - one that Judy and Art distanced themselves from - but the ease with which the noises entered their home resulted in a contamination that disrupted the boundaries of their "own clean self" (Kristeva 1982 53). The ability

of noise to communicate non-aural phenomena impacted on Judy and Art's sense of home, which speaks to the ways that the senses can affect being-in-place at home.

Sex noise, although taboo and affected by socio-spatial relations that expect it to remain hidden, are not always read as abject. In dominant Western discourse, noisy sex is often equated with accomplished sex. Therefore, self-discipline in some cases is superseded by the intense emotional and sensuous responses associated with sexual intimacy. The very protocols that silence any disclosure of overhearing sex noises, also paradoxically provide a sense of 'privacy'. Those who engage in noisy sex can do so knowing that, for the most part, it is unlikely that anyone will reprimand them for it. This results in a lack of awareness as to how far sex noises may travel, and therefore sexual activity remains a tacitly negotiated act.

While many examples exist that highlight the porosity of geographical scales, abject noises have an immediacy that makes the 'blurriness' between bodies and other bodies, and bodies and homes, readily apparent. That is because of the strong sensuous and emotional reactions that abjection can invoke. Emotions are reciprocally affected by sensuous stimuli, which can order and/or disrupt spaces such as home. This tends to "highlight the permeability and fluidity of bodily boundaries" (Bondi, Davidson and Smith 2005 7). Noise, whether taboo or not, can be understood as transgressive and therefore abject. Engaging with noise through Kristeva's (1982 4) thesis on abjection - that which "does not respect borders, positions, rules" - has proved fruitful in the case of examining how places and spaces are defined. Sensing, feeling, and abjection,

are all spatial processes that define spaces, bodies, and identities. Bringing these three concepts to the fore in geography research has the potential to contribute to work that provides more nuanced understandings of the porosity of the social and physical boundaries that dominate Western geographies.

Ahmed (2000) argues that this spilling out of bodies into homes, and vice versa, is mediated through the senses. Abjection is visceral, and in most cases affects a multi-sensory response. Hearing someone having sex, pooing/peeing, or fighting, can invoke images and associations that contaminate, often in the absence of visual stimuli. Yet, due to the overemphasis of the visual in the West, the interconnectedness of bodies with other bodies, and bodies and place, is most often 'overlooked' by the Western gaze. It is the transmission of noises that is perhaps the most common way that disclosure is announced. This suggests that bodies, through the noises they make, extend beyond the epidermis and spill out into and across the spaces they occupy. As Ardener (1993 3) argues, "*people define space*" (emphasis in original). Bodies and spaces are mutually constitutive. Fear of being heard, or even the threat of being heard using the toilet are strongly contingent on space. Often home provides the only safe space in which to relieve oneself, but home does not always provide the sense of privacy required to feel at-ease.

One of the strongest examples of how negotiating bodily function noises can affect understanding of space and identities is the example of phobias such as paruresis and parcopresis. With no physiological differences between those living with paruresis/parcopresis, and those who do not, bodily function 'shyness' falls into the rubric of social phobias. As such, I have argued that the

shame and embarrassment expected by the civilising process has played a significant part in the production of 'shyness'. My examination of abject noises from an explicitly geographical perspective has argued that shy bladder and shy bowel syndrome can also be thought of as spatial phobias. Those living with shy bladders and shy bowels are made acutely aware of the permeability and blurriness of boundaries, borders, and partitions. Awareness of proximity to others, and how their subjective experience spills out beyond their sensing bodies and the extent of domicile spaces, disrupts the rigidity of boundaries.

As my research suggests, abject noise is one phenomenon that brings the overlapping trajectories of bodies and place into stark relief. Boundaries reified by constructions of bodies, homes, and place/space as discrete have no traction within the world of the abject, and are readily swept aside by the transgressive power of the taboo. By engaging with abject noises, I challenge the propensity for geography to 'focus' on the visual, and argue for multi-sensory approaches to understanding space. This has significant implications for the production of spatial knowledges, and I argue that geographers can no longer ignore non-visual experience when engaging with embodied and emotional experiences of space.

### **Home as a Site of Resistance: The Contradictory Politics of Abjection**

As Foucault (1977) argues, the flow of power is omni-directional. Sex noise may be taboo, but it is often resistant to the presence of panoptic surveillance. Therefore, the management of sex noises within the home does not always follow the dominant moral order expected in domicile spaces. Home, as Gurney

(2000b) puts it, is considered to be the primary space where the self is most at-ease, free from the judgement of the public domain. Critical analysis of the affectual geographies of abject noises has exposed how 'homebody' leakiness can disrupt the production of home idyll as a 'private' space. Narratives of participants who reflected on the experience of overhearing their parents having sex indicate contradictory discourses. Being at-ease often results in sex noises spilling out through partitioned spaces, which disrupts constructions of home as a site where expectations of decency and modesty are learned and reinforced. Transgressing the 'rules' of sex noises can have "profound consequences for the listener's sense of self and identify" (Gurney 2000a 40) and their sense of home. The unspoken negotiation of sex noises is a feature of homes that requires further consideration. Domicile space is a key site where toilet/bodily function noises are also contested. Unlike sex noises, which are often valorised in popular media discourses, expectations to contain bodily function noises are rarely challenged outside domicile spaces. Exploring the ways in which these noises are negotiated has the potential to enrich existing scholarship on the geographies of home, and geographies of the senses in particular.

Gender is communicated through abject noises such as toileting (Cavanagh 2010), and this is evident in the ways toilet noises are negotiated in the home. Greater disciplinary pressure is placed on women to be 'contained' (Young 2005), however, the responses of participants suggests that this is often a highly contested discourse within the context of home. While a number of men interviewed perceived that women were perhaps more sensitive to being heard using the toilet or farting, there were an equal number of accounts by women that contradicted this belief.

Conflicting accounts generally revolved around the public/private binary. Noises such as burping and farting in the public domain are arguably most often expected as male actions, but within the context of the home the distinction is not so clear cut. The dominant construction of home as a private space where “you can - or would, at least be able to - be yourself” (Gurney 2000b 58) offers a space to disregard conventional expectations and break taboos around bodily function noises. In this way, the gendering of space becomes evident. It also demonstrates a paradox in the civilising process: the home is the primary site where rules of bodily comportment are learned, but it is also the site where expectations to contain abject noises can be openly contested.

The disruption of bodily boundaries, and the politics relating to the ways that abject noises affect bodies to leak out into spaces and places, varies according to life stage. The politics of self-discipline differ between children and adults, and exploring these differences provides an insight into the moral economy of sensuous and ‘private’ domicile spaces. Rarely are the rules surrounding the management of abject matter directly addressed by adults, as the taboo nature of abjection is governed by tacit means. Through instruction, mostly by parents in the home, expectations of self-discipline are learned. The spatiality of this learning is apparent in the ways that different actions are consigned to defined spaces in the home. Bodily function noises are expected to occur in toilets and bathrooms, or at least away from communally shared spaces. Children regularly transgress these rules of bodily comportment, rules that are implicitly codified into domicile space. Contrasting this transgressive behaviour against adult self-disciplining practices has shed light on unspoken geographies of the politics of home, and contributes to understanding how power is exercised through

various spatial scales as a means to control and define others (Aitken 2010; Massey 1998).

### **Researching Abjection: A Space for Discussing Taboo Topics**

By explicitly locating noise at the fore, this research contributes to scholarship seeking richer approaches to researching the relationships between people and place. Consistent with feminist theory relating to bodies, senses, and emotions, I used my own experiences and made my position explicit within the research process. Disclosing my own attitudes and anecdotes during the interviews served this thesis well, as doing so helped to gain access to intimate details of people's lives that may not have otherwise been forthcoming. For instance, relaying my own sensitivities to being heard using the toilet provided a space for an empathetic and rich exchange of opinions, rather than just superficial one-way responses. Disclosure also helped to minimise the uneven power dynamic that can occur within the researcher/researched relationship.

This approach did not mean that I agreed, or sympathised, with every response or belief. Where appropriate, reverse discourses were presented as a means to tease out the underlying power relations that shaped, and are shaped by, abject noises. Playing the 'devil's advocate' role prompted participants to reflect on how they had come to form their attitudes. This was particularly important for this thesis, as attitudes that dominate sensuous understandings of place and space in New Zealand tend to ignore or marginalise aural experience. Spending time formally identifying my own attitudes prior to conducting the interviews assisted this research immensely, as having a response ready when an issue

arose helped to keep the research conversation 'organic'. This is not to say that I had a response in every case. Further, establishing a 'sound' understanding of my own position did not mean that I remained fixed to a particular viewpoint. During a number of exchanges, my attitudes were challenged by participants and again, this proved to be a fruitful way of digging deep within the often taken-for-granted aspects of aurality.

When I began this research, my intention was to examine the ways in which a broad spectrum of sound experience shapes the construction of home. Had I focused primarily on abject noises from the outset, interviews and the resulting data would have most likely have drawn out a deeper range of experiences upon which to base my examination. Future work with a stronger focus on the disruptive potential of abject noises would be improved by focusing more intently on the self-disciplinary practices involved in negotiating sexual identities, and also how expectations are contested by those who engage in 'noisy' sex. I would also like to explore the geographies of 'shy bladders' and 'shy bowels', and where the notion of the sensuous/sensing body fits within the negotiation of social phobias.

Due to the implicit politics of abject noises, driven by expectations to contain abjection, a stronger focus on accessing what Conradson (2005 131-132) refers to as the "gap between what people say and what they do" would have benefited this research. Balancing self-disclosure against potentially contrasting views from other household members has the potential to offer richer insights into the strategies used to negotiate abject noises than individual interviews can provide. The inability to secure focus group participants perhaps speaks to just

how entrenched discourses of embarrassment, shame, and modesty are. The couple interviews that were conducted did give some opportunities to explore how behaviour observed by others can differ from self-reported accounts, but not to the degree possible within larger focus groups. If future research faces the same challenges in enlisting focus groups, employing sound diary methodologies is one possible option. Having participants record their own perceptions, as well as their perceptions of how other household members negotiate abject noises, may offer a 'safer' space where contradictions can be explored (see Duffy and Waitt 2011).

The senses, and sensing, play a significant part in the construction and maintenance of home spaces. Most often, the literature relating to home and the senses has been attuned to the sounds that positively contribute to the homemaking process. This literature has provided interesting insights into the ways in which socio-political influences have shaped discourses of home. Not all sounds experienced in the home, however, are perceived as positive. The taboo has all but remained absent from the geographies of home, as well as from other disciplines. By engaging with noises associated with sexual activity, bodily functions, and domestic violence, I add to work relating to how bodies are located in-place, and how places influence embodied and sensuous relations. Destabilising visual bias necessarily calls for a re-imagining of human geography in a broader 'sense'. The implications of multi-sensory geographies call into question existing approaches, and also pose questions of future directions, and not just for geographies of embodiment and home. For instance, what would geographies of smell and hearing mean for spatial technologies such as Geographical Information Systems (GIS)? The process of capturing

data via satellite, referred to as remote sensing, collects data that is visual in nature. What if remote sensing could actually live up to the potential that its name suggests? How would cartography sound and feel if the primary source of data was aural, or olfactory?

~~Watch~~ Harken this space...

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## APPENDICES

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### **Appendix 1: Noise Complaints: Hamilton City, July 1998-June 2009**

While representing an aside to the main focus of this research, the opportunity to explore socio-spatial asymmetries of urban noise exposure highlighted by authors such as Truax (2001[1984]) inspired me to conduct an analysis of the distribution of noise complaints in Hamilton. Socio-economic status is a recurrent theme, both in the literature, and in the accounts of participants, and I felt it would be useful to examine how social disadvantage shapes the experience of noise at the scale of the city.

Using noise complaint data as a proxy for noisiness, I employed the GIS software ArcGIS to plot noise in Hamilton. Noise complaint records held by the Hamilton City Council (HCC) were applied for in June 2009, and records were available as far back as July 1998. The dataset was supplied as a Microsoft Excel spread sheet, which contained the date and time of the complaint, the street address of the source of the noise complaint, and what action was taken by the noise control officer who attended the complaint. As the data contained street addresses, this made spatial analysis possible through the geocoding functions ArcGIS.

Complaint data was spatially referenced, or geocoded, using a combination of address point and road network matching. Of the 80,529 complaints that were made between July 1998 and June 2009, 12,254 did not have the street

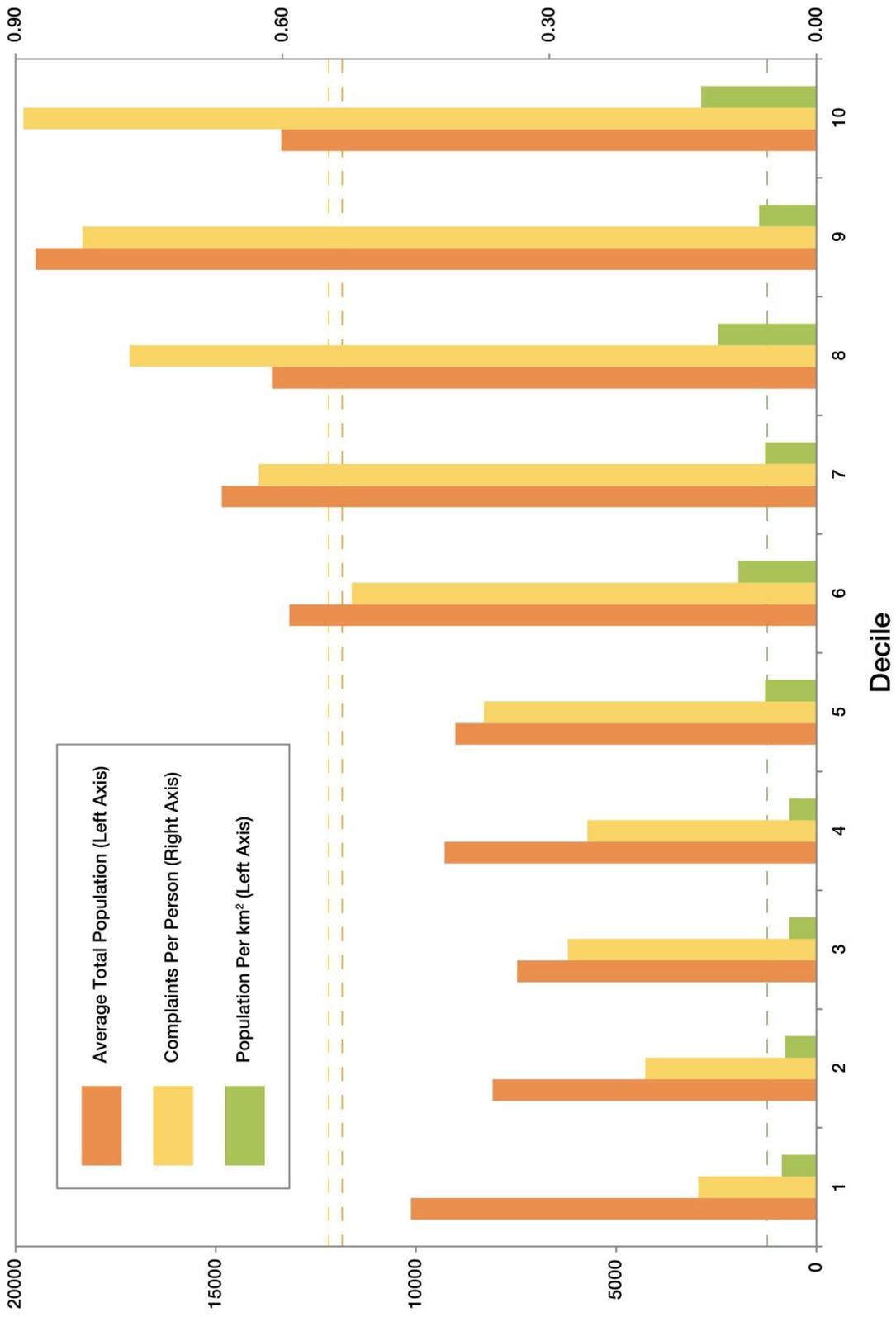
number recorded, which made accurate geocoding impossible.<sup>49</sup> In total, 96.9 per cent of the 68,275 remaining complaints were successfully geocoded. The remaining 2,114 unmatched records had either been recorded incorrectly or referred to streets that had been built after the road network data had been compiled. The complaints point layer was then overlaid with the New Zealand Deprivation Index 2001 and 2006 in order to examine any socio-economic trends that may be apparent in the distribution of noise complaints (see Table 5.1).

Although an auxiliary part of this research, quantitative analysis of the socio-spatial distribution of noise complaints offers possibilities for better understandings of how the built environment and socio-economic status contribute to 'noisier' living conditions. The eight-fold difference in the number of complaints between deciles of least compared to most deprived warrants further investigation. Ministry of Health datasets, such as the New Zealand Health Survey, would be integrated into this approach as a means to explore whether differences exist in the health outcomes between 'noisy' versus 'quiet' census areas. This work would need to control for variables such as population density, socio-economic status, the nature of complaints, and spatial trends over time to name a few.

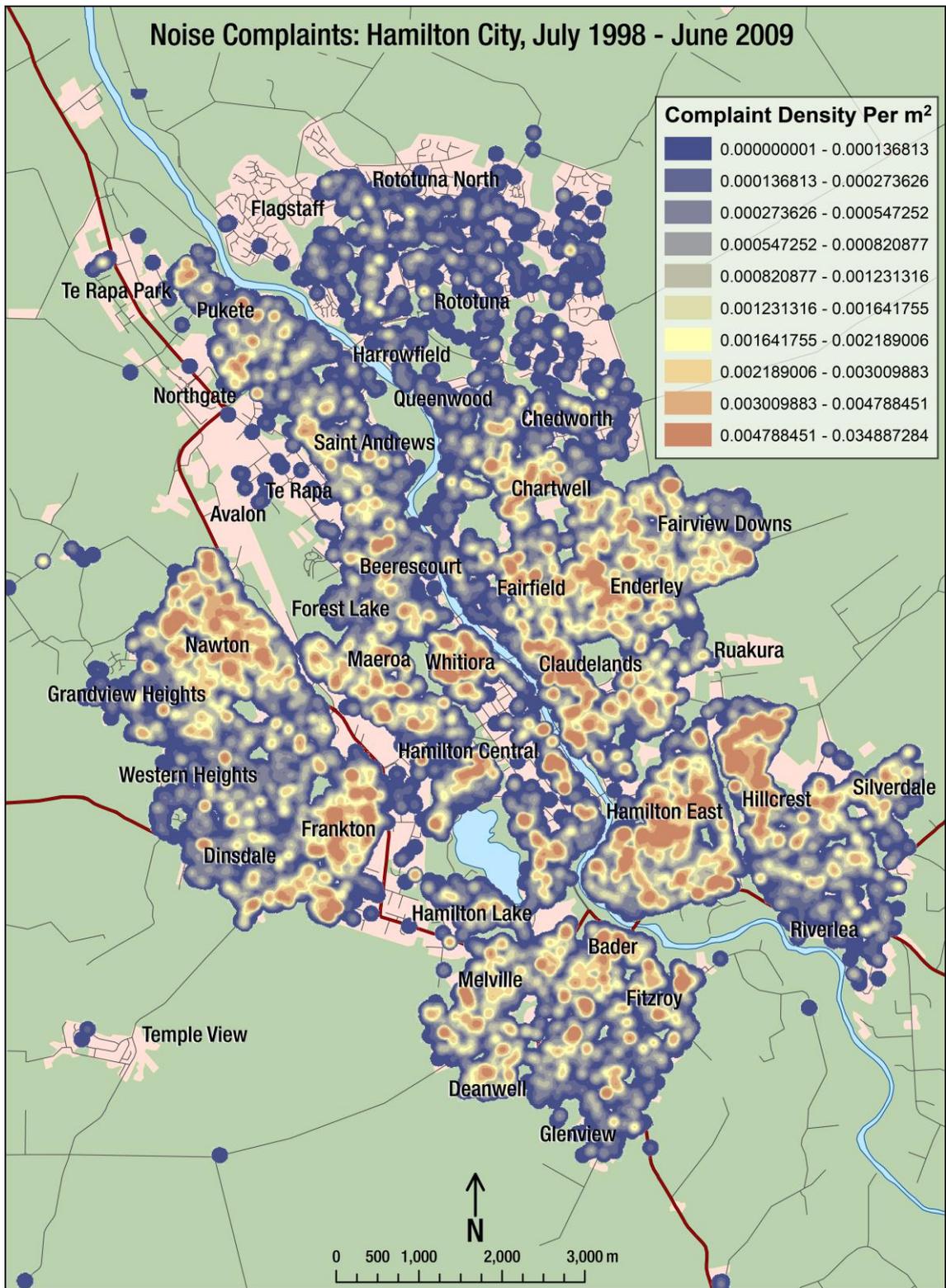
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<sup>49</sup> The environmental services manager at HCC mentioned that it was not always possible to identify the street number of the site where the noise was coming from, hence the incomplete data.

# Noise Complaints by Decile: Hamilton, July 1998 - June 2009



# Noise Complaints: Hamilton City, July 1998 - June 2009



# Listening in to who hates noise the most

Noise affects people in different ways and a Waikato University researcher is looking at how they cope with it. Jeff Neems reports.

If noisy neighbours, boy racers, or even the sound of intimate antics drive you up the wall, Paul Beere wants to hear all about it.

Mr Beere is a PhD candidate in the Geography, Tourism and Environmental Studies Department at Waikato University, and is working on a thesis on how people develop "coping strategies" for dealing with unwanted noise.

Mr Beere is familiar with noise issues, as he DJs part time and has also studied the boy racer culture in Hamilton.

His study into boy racers focused on the Te Rapa Rd situation, and looked in depth at what motivated and stimulated those involved.

With this new study, he hopes to look at the "cross-contamination of sound" in living environments, such as shared flats, families, or university halls of residence. He believed there would be parallels between how parents dealt with rowdy children, and how flatmates coped with the noise made by people they lived with.

But Mr Beere said he also wanted

to hear from people who enjoyed "the quiet life" in rural areas or small settlements.

"I'm trying to get as broad a cross-section as possible, because that will allow for comparisons and contrasts to be made," he said.

While there was a general assumption noise was "unwanted sound", Mr Beere said a developing school of thought was "changing the way noise is framed".

"Street sounds and outdoor noises shape where those noises occur – and that can have a positive influence on how people feel about that space," he said.

For his research, he hoped to talk to people for whom noise was either a major concern or something they were positive about.

For instance, some inner-city dwellers thrived on the hustle and bustle of living in the CBD, and "felt alive" when they heard music from clubs and bars or people talking on the street.

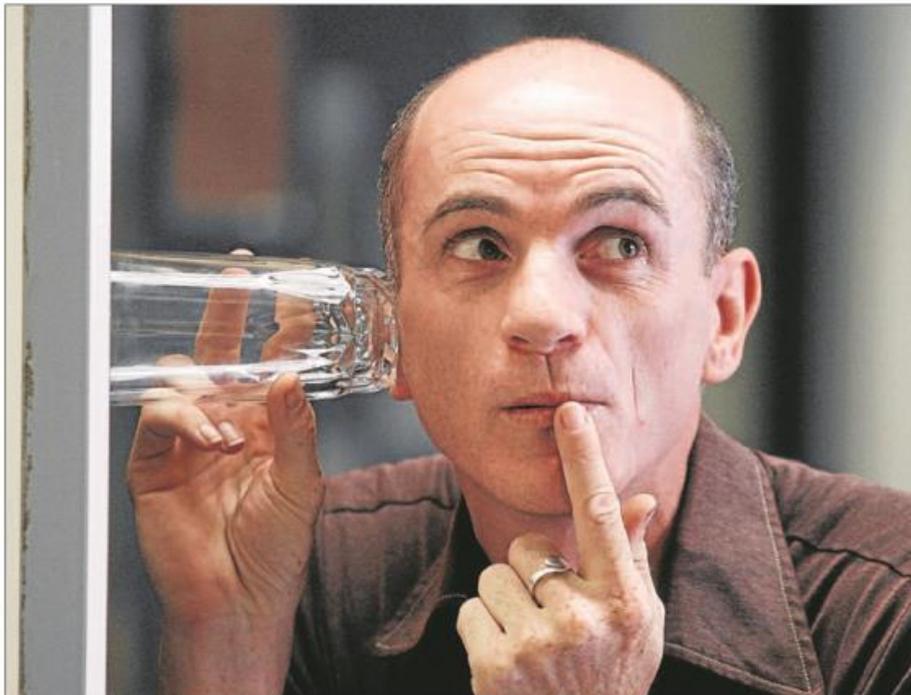
He expected certain kinds of noise would be particularly annoying for

some people – from loud music and lawnmowers, to the neighbours engaging in loud love-making ("coital noise"), to loud stereos or domestic disputes. The study would also cover the effects of noise on people's health and well-being.

"One of the major focuses is on how we modify our behaviour, based on whether we think people can hear us or not," Mr Beere said.

Mr Beere said in some cultures, toilet sounds and the noise of bodily functions were either hidden or celebrated. The Japanese were particularly wary of the sound of their own bodily functions, and would flush the toilet before doing their business to mask their noise. But in other cultures, people were "loud and proud" when it came to noises such as burping and flatulence. Some people preferred to use the toilet when their flatmates were out so they could not be heard.

Mr Beere said interviews with respondents would take about two hours. He can be contacted via email, pbeere@waikato.ac.nz.



**Noise study:** Waikato University PhD candidate Paul Beere is investigating what sort of unwanted noise annoys people, and how they modify their behaviour to cope. Photo: MARK TAYLOR



**NOISY STUDY:** Paul Beere has received a Top Achievers Doctoral Scholarship to study how noise affects people in different ways and how they cope with it.

Photo: SUPPLIED

## Noise all in ear of the beholder

By NICK SILVESTER

WHAT'S noise to some is sweet music to others but perceptions of noise also have a lot to do with where it happens.

It's a topic that's won Waikato University geography researcher Paul Beere a government-funded Top Achievers Doctoral Scholarship. He's been awarded \$96,000 over three years to research how people negotiate issues relating to sound and noise in the home.

Mr Beere, 36, is working towards his PhD in the Department of Geography, Tourism and Environmental Planning. However, he didn't always see himself as a scholar and certainly the thought that he might one day be receiving a scholarship aimed at the top 10 percent of post-graduate students wouldn't have seemed possible.

"I didn't have a very good time at school . . . my school leaving testimonial said 'Paul is not an academic'. When I consider how far I have come from high school to now, it has been a big jump."

Noise might be an unusual subject for a geographer but Mr Beere, who spent 10 years performing and organising street theatre in Hamilton before heading to university, says his focus is on what he calls sensuous and emotional geographies.

"Human geographers see social phenomena in spatial terms, he says. It might be the home, it might be the body. There's been lots of work done on the psychology of how people respond to noise; my research aims to put that work in a spatial context; it's all about the location."

Mr Beere says that sound is interesting because, more so than

the other senses, it crosses the boundaries between public and private spaces.

"It's very easy for us to pull the curtains if we don't want to see what the neighbours are doing but sound invades our homes in ways other senses can't, so being a geographer that's interesting because noise blurs the boundaries between the public and the private."

He became interested in noise after researching boy racers in Te Rapa for his Masters thesis. In that study, people complained about the noise from boy racers – but these were people living on State Highway 1. They seemed to be sensitive to some noises but could block out other noises just as loud as the boy racers' vehicles.

"The same thing happens in the home. People can be totally okay with the sound of kids playing next door but, when the same volume of noise comes from teenagers, it's a different issue."

Mr Beere says that although we might not always be listening to sounds, we can always hear them even if we are not aware of it. He says a study was done in a sleep lab that found people released the stress hormone cortisol when they were exposed to noise while they were asleep.

"What makes noise so interesting is that we may not always be listening but we are always hearing," he says.

Mr Beere has begun interviewing individuals and groups in the Waikato region for his research and is particularly interested to hear from people who are flatting together. He can be contacted at [pbeere@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:pbeere@waikato.ac.nz)

## Rock 'n' Roll ain't noise pollution

*But your mouth is*

By Walt Whitman



*“Paul is particularly interested in talking with people who are flating with other people or who are living in the halls”*

Noisy flatmates driving you crazy? Got neighbours from hell messing with your peace and tranquillity? Then Waikato PhD student Paul Beere wants to hear from you. Paul, a Top Achievers Doctoral Scholarship recipient, is studying the ways in which people negotiate issues relating to sound and noise in the home. A major focus of his research is on the impacts that unwanted sound has on wellbeing, and our relationship to the places that we live.

“I’ve chosen to focus on the home as it is a space that is considered to be private, a haven in which to relax. Unwanted sound has the ability to disrupt that privacy, whether it’s from the neighbour’s stereo or a noisy flatmate,” said Paul. The term ‘home’ refers to not only houses, but residential buildings such as apartments and the Halls of Residence. The inability to control sound in one’s living environment has been shown to elevate stress levels and reduce life expectancy. Mental health can also be affected and people have been driven to commit murder due to

excessive noise. “Between 1996 and 2000, there were 18 homicides in Britain that were due to disputes with neighbours over noise,” said Paul.

Although based in the Geography, Tourism and Environmental Planning department, his research incorporates theories and methods from a number of disciplines. “There are broad implications for my research, from urban planning to health and wellbeing. The National Foundation for the Deaf has also taken an interest in this project,” he says.

Paul is particularly interested in talking with people who are flating with other people or who are living in the halls. He would also like to talk to people who are new to New Zealand. Interviews can either be individual, or as a household, and will take around 60 minutes (a bit longer for group interviews). All interviews will be kept in the strictest confidence and participants can remain anonymous if they wish. If you’re keen to help out, or just want to find out more about the research, email Paul at [pbeere@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:pbeere@waikato.ac.nz)

# Sound and Noise Research

## Flattening? Boarding?

Research participants are being sought to help with a PhD project that explores how people negotiate sound and noise in the home.

Interviews will take no longer than 70 minutes and can be either individual or with everyone in your flat. All data will be kept confidential and you can remain anonymous if requested.

021 [QR code] pbeere@waikato.ac.nz  
021 [QR code] pbeere@waikato.ac.nz

## **Appendix 4: Key Informant Interview Themes/Questions**

### **Key Informant Interview/ Participant Observation with Noise Control Officer Themes**

#### **Main Themes**

- issues relating to personal sensitivity to noise and the nature of complaints;
- the subjective assessment of excessive noise; and
- how your organisation balances the needs of private citizens to make/be free from noise in an expanding urban landscape

#### **Sub-Themes**

- Sovereignty
- Controllable/uncontrollable (voluntary/involuntary sounds)
- Public/Private (within the home/the home in context with its surrounds)
- Discipline

## Appendix 5 : Interview Information Sheet

Department of Geography, Tourism  
and Environmental Planning  
School of Arts & Social Sciences  
*Te Kura Kete Aronui*  
The University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton, New Zealand  
Phone +64 7 838 4046  
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email: pbeere@waikato.ac.nz  
www.waikato.ac.nz/wfass/subjects/geography



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**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

### INTERVIEW INFORMATION SHEET

for the doctoral research project

#### ***Thinking About Sound and Noise in the Home***

##### **Background**

Thank you for taking the time to find out more about my doctoral research project, *Thinking About Sound and Noise in the Home*. The main reason for the project is to look at how people behave in relation to sound and noise, and the ways in which people may change their behaviour in their homes based on the awareness of being heard and/or hearing others. Much has been written on the effects of sound/noise on health and wellbeing and geographers have demonstrated the role our senses play in shaping the ways we perceive the places and spaces we interact in. However, there has been a lack of attention paid to the affects sound/noise have on how people act. This project aims to address this absence.

I have chosen to focus on the home as it is a place that is most often considered to be a private space. However, sound has the ability to invade our privacy from outside our homes and the sounds we make inside our homes can disturb the privacy of our neighbours. Sounds created by the people we live with also have the ability to compromise feelings of privacy within the home. The ability (or inability) to keep public sounds out or to make noise can have a significant impact on wellbeing and how we perceive the home environment. It can also affect the ways in which identities/personalities are expressed in the home. Examining the strategies used to negotiate issues relating to sound is the focus of this research.

##### **Participating in this project**

There are a number of ways you may be involved if you are interested in participating in this research. I will be using both group interviews (where I will interview most/all of your household or a group of people you have something in common with such as workmates), and individual interviews. Individual interviews will take 60-80 minutes and focus group interviews will run for 120-140 minutes. Light refreshments will be supplied during the interview. At the beginning of the interviews you will be asked to fill out a brief questionnaire and to draw a 'sound map' of your home (don't worry, it doesn't have to be a masterpiece) to help get you thinking about sounds in your home. I will then ask a series of questions that:

- seek to determine personal attitudes and experiences of sound and noise;
- examine how noise (and sound) affect identity and wellbeing; and that
- explore how issues relating to noise are negotiated.

All interviews will be audio-recorded to assist the research process. If requested, you will be sent a copy of your interview notes to give you the opportunity to make

corrections or request the erasure of information that you do not wish to be included in this research. Some of the questions refer to potentially sensitive issues relating to sexual activity, bathroom noises and domestic disputes. You have the right to decline to answer any questions that you are not comfortable answering.

### **Confidentiality and your rights as a participant**

All the information you provide will be kept secure either in a locked facility or as a password protected encrypted file on a password protected computer. The data will be used in my doctoral research at the University of Waikato. This data may also be used in articles, book chapters, published and unpublished work and presentations. The resulting PhD thesis will also be made freely available to the public on the internet. Unless otherwise stated, personal names or any other information which would serve to identify you, or the group you represent, ***will not be included in this research or in any future publications or reports resulting from this project.***

All participants have the right to:

- decline to participate;
- decline to answer any particular question;
- ask for the audio-recording device to be turned off at any time;
- withdraw from the project up to three weeks after the interview;
- ask questions about the research at any time during participation; and
- ask for the erasure of any information you have supplied.

You will be reminded of these rights at the beginning of the interview.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this project. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact either myself, or my supervisor at the addresses below.

Yours Sincerely

Paul Beere  
PhD Candidate  
Department of Geography, Tourism  
and Environmental Planning  
University of Waikato  
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+6478384466 ext. 6028  
Fax: +6478384633  
Email: pbeere@waikato.ac.nz

Professor Robyn Longhurst  
Department of Geography, Tourism  
and Environmental Planning  
University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton, New Zealand  
+6478384466 ext. 8306  
Fax: +6478384633  
Email: robyn1@waikato.ac.nz

This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research can be directed to the Secretary of the Committee - fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz or to the postal address -  
Secretary of the Committee  
Human Research Ethics Committee  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton, New Zealand

## Appendix 6 : Agreement to Participate

Department of Geography, Tourism  
and Environmental Planning  
School of Arts & Social Sciences  
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*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

### AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

for the doctoral research project

#### ***Thinking About Sound and Noise in the Home***

#### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The main reason for the project is to look at how people behave in relation to sound and noise, and the ways in which people may change their behaviour in their homes based on the awareness of being heard and/or hearing others. Much has been written on the effects of sound/noise on health and wellbeing and geographers have demonstrated the role our senses play in shaping the ways we perceive the places and spaces we interact in. However, there has been a lack of attention paid to the affects sound/noise have on how people act. This project aims to address this absence.

#### **STATEMENT**

I have read and I understand the information sheet that explains the research project *Thinking About Sound and Noise in the Home*, which is being undertaken by Paul Beere. I have been given the opportunity to discuss this research and am satisfied with the answers I have been given.

I understand that participation in this project is voluntary and that I can decline to answer individual questions or withdraw from the project for any reason within three weeks of the interview. At my request, any information that I do not wish to be included will be deleted. I understand that without my prior consent, no information that could identify me will be used in any reports resulting from this project. I understand that the information collected by Paul Beere will be used in his doctoral research at the University of Waikato, and that this PhD will be made freely available to the public on the internet. This data may also be used in articles, book chapters, published and unpublished work and presentations. I understand that all information I provide will be kept secure either in a locked facility or as a password protected encrypted file on a password protected computer.

#### **Please circle YES or NO for each of the following:**

- |  |               |
|--|---------------|
| I consent to having my interview audio-recorded        | .....YES / NO |
| My first name can be used in research reports          | .....YES / NO |
| A pseudonym of my choosing can be used in this project | .....YES / NO |
| I wish to remain anonymous for this project            | .....YES / NO |
|  |               |
| I consent to giving a tour of part or all of my home   | .....YES / NO |
| I wish to receive a summary of the research findings   | .....YES / NO |

**“I agree to participate in this research project and acknowledge receipt of a copy of this consent form and the research project information sheet.”**

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Email or street address for  
receiving your interview notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**“I agree to abide by the conditions set out in the information sheet and I ensure no harm will be done to any participant during this research.”**

Signature of researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research can be directed to the Secretary of the Committee - [fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz) or to the postal address -

Secretary of the Committee  
Human Research Ethics Committee  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton, New Zealand

#### Contact Details

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Fax: +6478384633  
Email: [robyn1@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:robyn1@waikato.ac.nz)



**Appendix 8: Pilot Interview Warm-up Exercise**

**INTERVIEW EXERCISE**

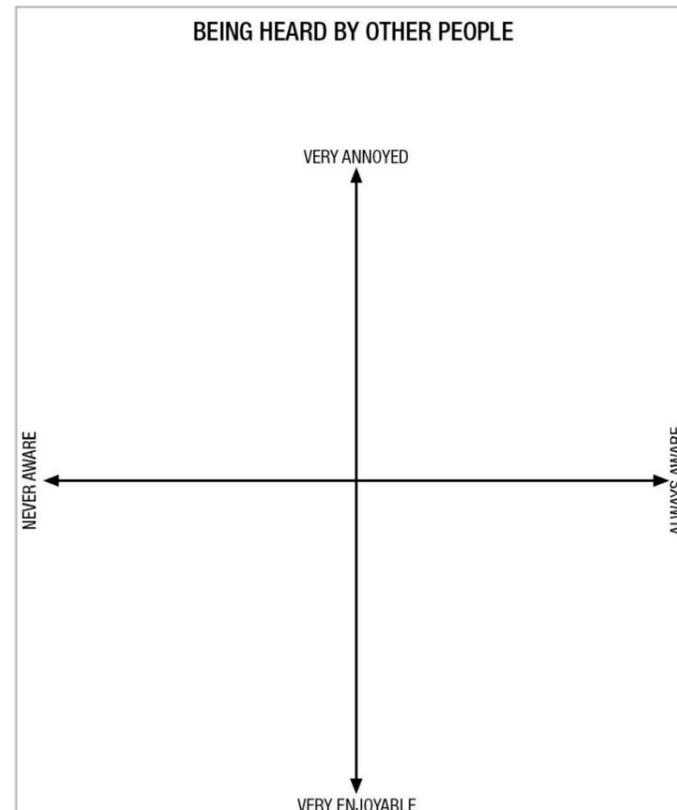
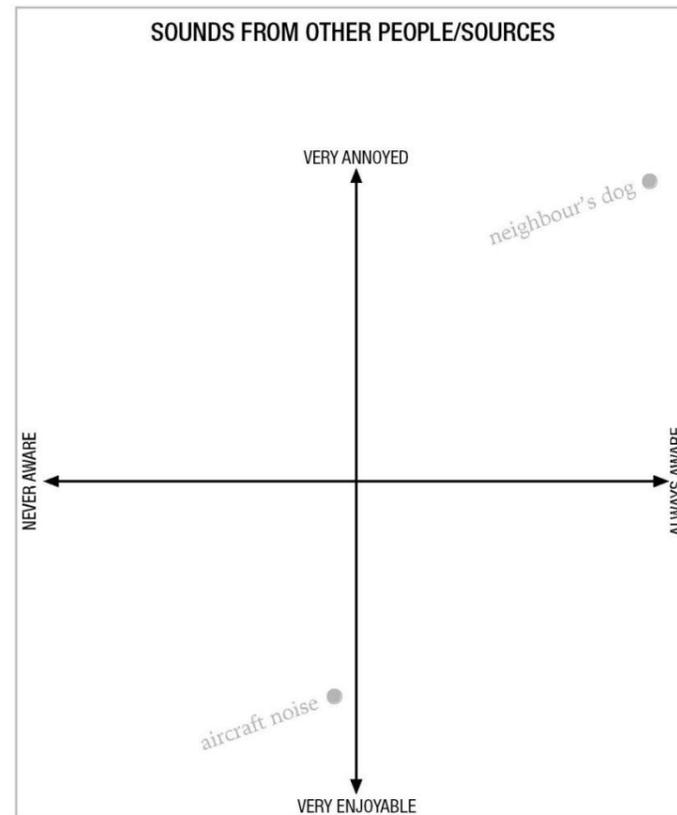
for the doctoral research project

***Negotiating Sound and Noise in the Home***

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

The purpose of this worksheet is to get you thinking about the role sound plays in your home. The list below is just to help get you going. You may refer to these things on both the floor plan you sketch and on the matrices on the right. It is not necessary to refer to everything on the list if you do not wish to do so. You may also add to this list if necessary. I have added examples on the the matrix on the left - aircraft noise and 'neighbour's dog'. In this case, the person is sometimes aware of aircraft noise and that it has very little influence on their behaviour, but they are always aware of the neighbour's dog and it significantly influences their behaviour.

1. Housework sounds
2. Lawnmowing
3. Computer games (including PS3 etc.)
4. TV/DVD
5. Stereo
6. Musical instruments
7. Parties
8. Hobbies (that make noise)
9. Eating/drinking/meal time
10. Toilet
11. Shower/bathroom
12. Personal grooming
13. Sexual activity
14. Arguments/domestic disputes
15. Traffic/Cars



**HOME SOUND/NOISE SKETCH**

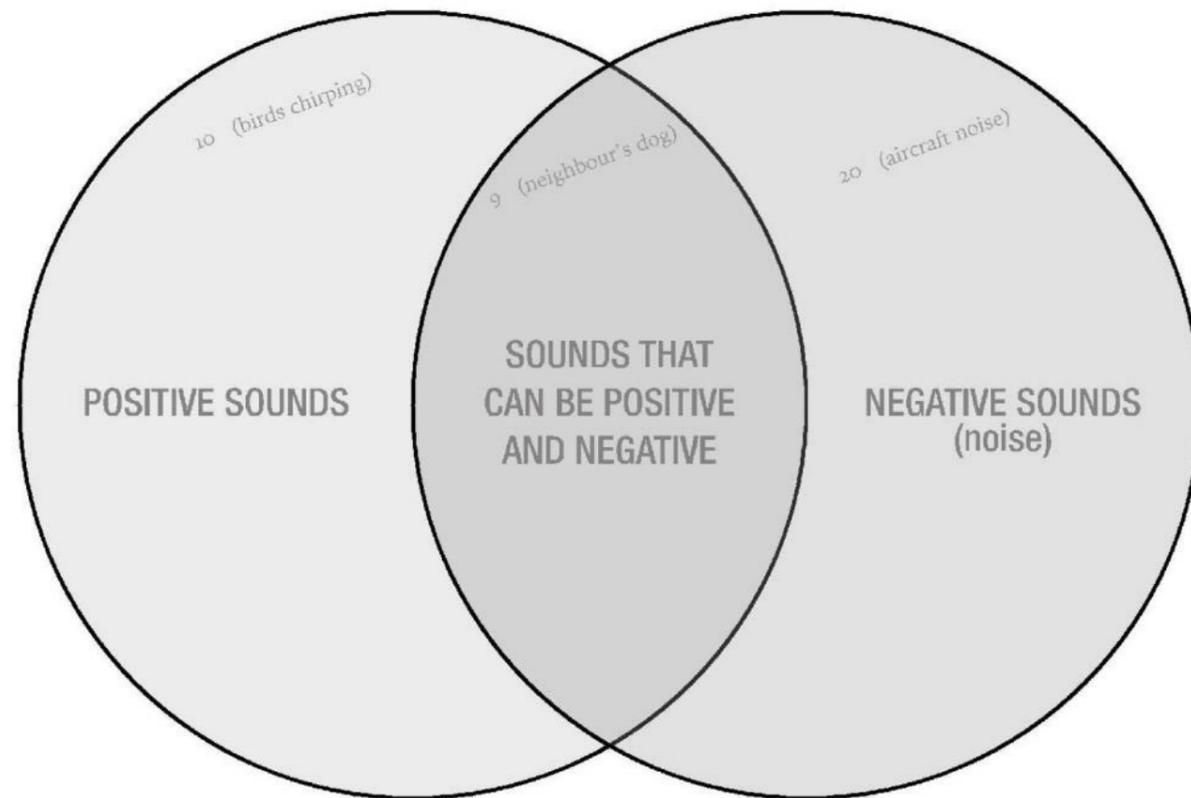
**Appendix 9: Revised Interview Warm-up Exercise**

## INTERVIEW EXERCISE

for the doctoral research project

*Thinking About Sound and Noise in the Home*

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_



- |  |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. Housework   | 11. Insects                     |
| 2. Mealtimes   | 12. Shower/Bathroom             |
| 3. Cooking   | 13. Toilet                      |
| 4. Hobbies   | 14. Personal grooming           |
| 5. Computer games (including PS3 etc.)                 | 15. Sexual activity             |
| 6. TV/DVD  | 16. Arguments/domestic disputes |
| 7. Stereo  | 17. Parties                     |
| 8. Musical instruments                                 | 18. Lawnmowing                  |
| 9. Domestic animals (dogs, cats etc.)                  | 19. Traffic/Cars                |
| 10. Non-domestic animals (wild rats, mice, birds etc.) | 20. Aircraft                    |

A Sketch of some of the Sounds and Noises in your Home

A large empty rectangular box intended for the participant to sketch some of the sounds and noises in their home.

## **Appendix 10: Interview Themes/Prompt Questions**

### **Themes**

- Sovereignty
- Controllable/uncontrollable (voluntary/involuntary sounds)
- Public/Private (within the home/the home in context with its surrounds)
- Discipline

### **Questions**

- What are the places in your home that you are most aware of being heard?
  - Do you modify your behaviour to avoid being heard? How?
  - Do you modify your behaviour to ensure being heard? How?
- What are the places in your home that you are most aware of the sounds others are making?
  - Do you modify your behaviour to avoid hearing others? How?
  - Do you modify your behaviour to ensure others hear you? How?
- What about different times of the day? [PROMPT] Do you avoid doing things at certain times of the day?
  - If someone else is home? Do you feel more free/the same/less free to make noise?
- What kinds of sounds/noises would you attribute to men? What kinds of sounds/noises would you attribute to women?
  - Do you think there is a difference between men and women in the ways they change or modify their behaviour?

- What differences have you noticed? What are the differences in your opinion?
- What about certain acts? How do you negotiate these activities based on the resulting sounds? How does it make you feel to be heard (address each in turn)? How does it make you feel to hear others (address each in turn where appropriate)?
  - entertainment options
  - computer games, TV/DVD, stereo, playing instruments
  - personal listening devices
  - housework, lawn mowing
  - domestic work
  - domestic disputes
  - sexual activity
  - toilet/bathroom
- Do you have a different opinion of sounds originating from inside the house and those from outside the house? Do you feel differently about sounds from outside the home (prompt for the type of sounds e.g. lawn mowing, domestic disputes)?
- Have you ever laid a noise control complaint? Have you ever had a noise control complaint laid against you?
- What about indeterminable sounds/ sounds that you cannot identify what they are and/or where they originate from?

# Appendix 11: Follow-up Survey Questionnaire



**Edit Survey**

To change the look of your survey, select a theme below.

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New Theme

Preview Survey

Add Page Before

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#3, SECTION ONE: HOME
>>

Add Page After

**Page #3** Edit Page Move Copy Delete Add Logic

SECTION ONE: HOME

Add Question Here

**\* PLEASE RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS**

I am very sensitive to sounds in my neighbourhood	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Neither Agree or Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Agree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree	<input type="radio"/>	N/A
I would not mind living on a noisy street if the home I had was nice	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Neither Agree or Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Agree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree	<input type="radio"/>	N/A
I can easily adjust to noises when they occur in my home environment/neighbourhood	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Neither Agree or Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Agree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree	<input type="radio"/>	N/A
I would accept other disadvantages to be able to live in a quiet residential area	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Neither Agree or Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Agree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree	<input type="radio"/>	N/A
When other peoples' children are noisy, I prefer that they do not play close to my home	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Neither Agree or Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Agree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree	<input type="radio"/>	N/A
I get annoyed when there are noisy leisure activities or events in my residential area	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Neither Agree or Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Agree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree	<input type="radio"/>	N/A
I do not like to hear the everyday sounds from my neighbours, such as footsteps, quiet talking, running water etc.	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Neither Agree or Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Agree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree	<input type="radio"/>	N/A

Add Question Here



### Edit Survey

To change the look of your survey, select a theme below.

See Green

New Theme

Preview Survey

Add Page Before

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<< #4. SECTION TWO: COMMUNICATION >>

Page #4 Edit Page Move Copy Delete Add Logic

### SECTION TWO: COMMUNICATION

Add Question Here

Edit Question Move Copy Delete

#### \* PLEASE RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS

If I am engrossed in a conversation, I do not notice whether it is noisy around me

I find it difficult to hold a conversation if it is noisy

In a restaurant or cafe, I cannot concentrate on a conversation if other patrons are talking loudly

I believe that music interferes with conversation, even if it is music that I like

I find it very difficult to hold a conversation if the radio or television is on

If it is loud around me, I quickly lose the thread of a conversation

Loud music at a party or bar makes me stop my conversation

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree or Disagree Agree Strongly Agree N/A

Add Question Here

Add Page After



### Edit Survey

To change the look of your survey, select a theme below.

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Preview Survey

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Page #5 Edit Page Move Copy Delete Add Logic

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#5, SECTION THREE: SLEEP



### SECTION THREE: SLEEP

Add Question Here

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#### \* PLEASE RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS

- I get very agitated if I can hear someone talking while I'm trying get to sleep
- I can fall asleep even when it is noisy
- I can only get a good night's sleep if I am in a very quiet environment
- Even the slightest noise can prevent me from falling asleep
- I do not feel well rested if it has been noisy during the night
- I wake up at the slightest noise
- Loud thunder does not usually wake me up

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
I get very agitated if I can hear someone talking while I'm trying get to sleep	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can fall asleep even when it is noisy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can only get a good night's sleep if I am in a very quiet environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Even the slightest noise can prevent me from falling asleep	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not feel well rested if it has been noisy during the night	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wake up at the slightest noise	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Loud thunder does not usually wake me up	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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### Edit Survey

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New Theme

Preview Survey

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#6. SECTION FOUR: LEISURE



### SECTION FOUR: LEISURE

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Edit Question

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#### \* PLEASE RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS

I find it hard to relax in a noisy environment

I get annoyed when people whisper or rustle paper when I'm at the movies

Listening to loud music after work helps me to relax

When dancing, I don't mind how loud the music is

I prefer quiet surroundings during the weekend

I find it annoying when the television and/or radio is left on as a "background" sound

I avoid leisure activities that are loud

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neither Agree or Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

N/A

Add Question Here

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### Edit Survey

To change the look of your survey, select a theme below.

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#7 SECTION FIVE: WORK/TASKS



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### SECTION FIVE: WORK/TASKS

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#### \* PLEASE RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS

- If I am working on a difficult or challenging task, I need absolute silence  Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neither Agree or Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree  N/A
- I can perform routine tasks in a noisy environment without difficulty  Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neither Agree or Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree  N/A
- My ability to work productively is greatly reduced in a noisy environment  Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neither Agree or Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree  N/A
- I need a quiet environment if I am performing a task for the first time  Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neither Agree or Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree  N/A
- If the people around me are being noisy, I find it difficult to get on with my work  Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neither Agree or Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree  N/A
- If the place that I am working in is noisy, I always try to find a way to change this  Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neither Agree or Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree  N/A
- Background music does not affect my ability to perform even the most complicated task  Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neither Agree or Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree  N/A

Add Question Here

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### Edit Survey

To change the look of your survey, select a theme below.

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#8 SECTION SIX INTERVIEW RE...



### SECTION SIX: INTERVIEW REFLECTIONS (OPTIONAL)

Add Question Here

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I am interested in hearing about your experiences since the interview. For instance, whether the interview has changed the way you think about/react to the sounds and noises that you experience in your home. If you have anything to reflect on, please write it in the box below.

The box will resize if necessary.

### Edit Survey

To change the look of your survey, select a theme below.

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Select a page to view below or [view all pages:](#)  
 #3 SECTION SEVEN: SOUND/NOIS...

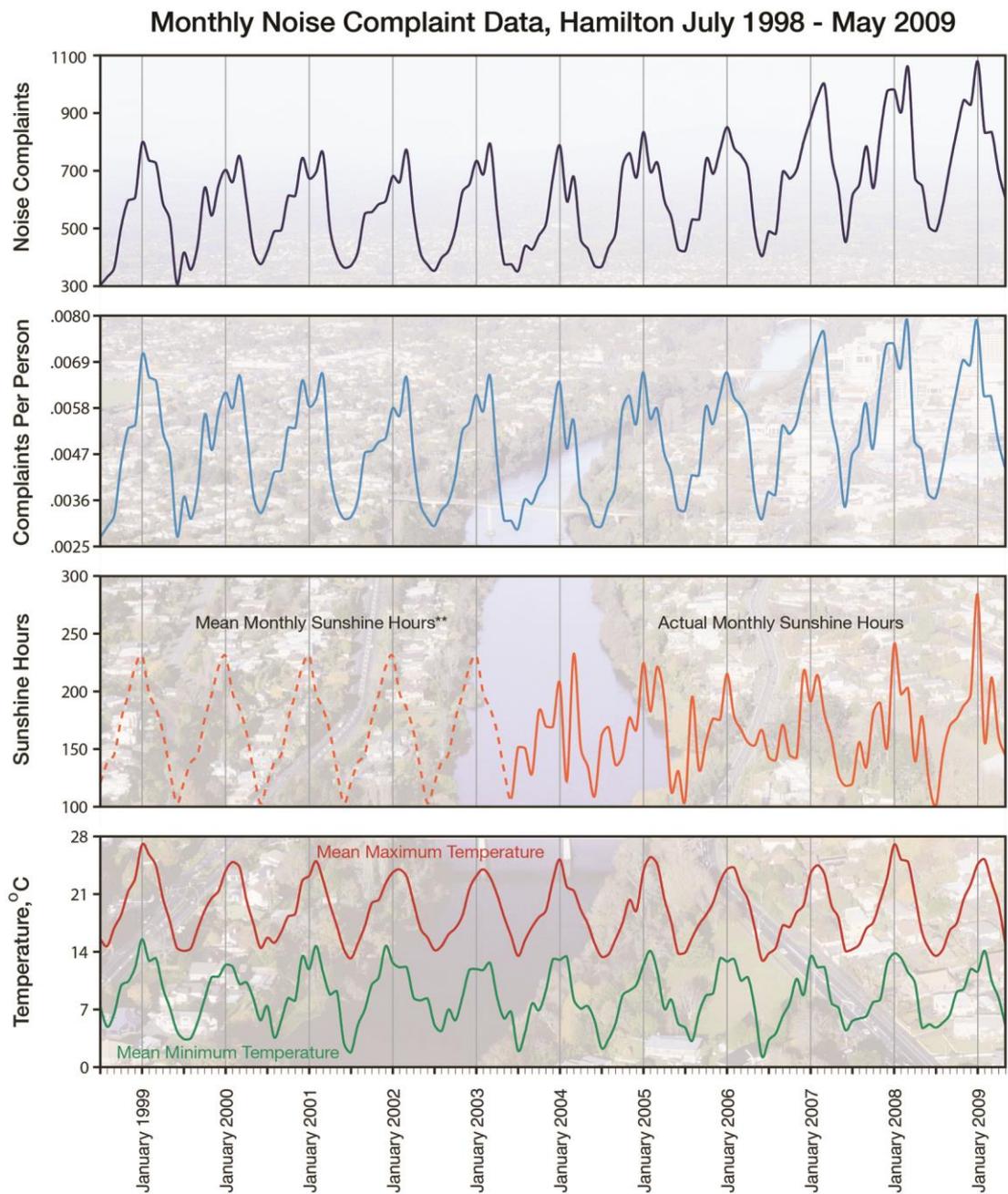
**Page #9**

#### SECTION SEVEN: SOUND/NOISE REFLECTIONS (OPTIONAL)

Since the interview, have there been any new instances of sound and/or noise that you would like to share? How have these changed the way you feel about the place you live? If you have anything to reflect on, please write it in the box below.

The box will resize if necessary.

## Appendix 12: Noise Complaints and the Weather: Hamilton City



\*Actual monthly sunshine hours not available between July 1998 and May 2003.

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