# Queering Home Podcast

## **Transcript**

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Welcome to That Feels Like Home, a podcast by the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, reaching you from Middlesex University London. I’m Ana Baeza Ruiz, and I’m hosting this third series to look afresh at what ‘home’ is, and what it means.

We’ve previously looked at home from a wide range of perspectives, including in series 2 some of our shared experiences of home during the pandemic. This season, we’ll be in conversation with academics and activists who have moved beyond traditional ideas of home as a place ‘of safety, privacy, and care’.

Each episode will propose alternative readings of home, from its engagements with histories of empire, the politics of micro-living under neoliberalism, home as a queer space, or the changing meanings of home for people who cross borders.

As always, we draw inspiration from our collections, and the stories missing in them, to rethink the past through the lens of the present.

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**The importance of ‘home’ in queer studies**

**Ana:** In this episode we’ll be looking at the ways in which homes might be queer, and why it’s important to look at practices of queering the domestic. Browsing through MoDA's collections of magazines, posters and catalogues from the 1930s to the 1960s home is represented as a typically heteronormative space white straight couples, often with a child, bask in the sun against the backdrop of a beautiful suburban home. The home has been a site for managing social behaviour, gender and sexual identities. In this episode, we're going to open up questions about this relationship between home, gender and sexuality to consider the project of queering home. What do we mean by home as a queer space? How have Queer Homes contested or conformed to traditional imaginaries of home? We’ll also ask how home, suburban, urban or otherwise, might not just be spaces for conventional domesticity and sexuality, but also sites of resistance and transformation.

And I'm so, so happy to be joined by two wonderful guests who are also collaborators, Matt Cook, who's joining us from London, and Andrew Gorman-Murray, who's joining us all the way from Australia. So welcome both. It's great to have you here.

**Matt:** Thank you, Ana.

**Andrew:** Thank you. Thanks for having me.

**Ana:** And I'm really thrilled to be here with you and we'll build on some of the conversations that you've been having already and collaborations like that edited collection from a couple of years ago *Queering the Interior*. But before we go into detail, just going to introduce both of you.

Andrew Gorman-Murray is a professor of geography at Western Sydney University in Australia. He's a social, cultural and political geographer. And his research encompasses gender, sexuality and space, geographies of home, belonging and mobility and visual arts and geography.

And Matt Cook is professor of modern history at Birkbeck University of London. He's a social and cultural historian of sexuality and of London in the 19th and 20th century. His books include *London and the Culture of Homosexuality* from 2003, again, *History of Britain* from 2007 and *Queer Domesticity* from 2014. In 2017, he coedited *Queering the Interior* with Andrew. And Matt is currently working on two further books, *Writing Queer History* and *Queer Beyond London* with Alison Oram, and both should appear on in 2022. So keep an eye out for those. And we'll certainly be including links in the show notes to all your work and publications.

But now we'd like to start by discussing this growing importance of home and LGBTQ studies. There's a special issue in the journal *Home Cultures* back in 2015 called Alternative Domesticities where, Andrew, you and other colleagues explore the ways in which until recently, there has been a tendency to examine how sexual minority identity has unfolded outside the home, but that more recently scholars have shifted their attention to LGBTQ domestic quotidian spaces and the way in which these spaces might destabilise more traditional narratives of home. So I wanted to ask you both about this. What are those traditional narratives of home and how do you see home as an important side of investigation within queer studies? Andrew, would you like to go first?

**Andrew:** Yeah. Thank you. This is a good question. So I was thinking about this... And, yeah and in terms of geography and other similar disciplines that had been previously rather focused on public spaces like gay villages or gay and lesbian bars, the use of streets for protests or pride parades and even public cruising grounds. And I think the earlier work followed the politics and the political imperatives at the time, which were about rights activism in the public sphere. But I think that in the last 20 years, maybe there's been a turn towards considering LGBTIQ issues in terms of the domestic sphere as well.

And I think that's followed a political imperative as well, looking at issues like marriage, partnership, adoption, family formation, succession. And I think that that points to some of those traditional narratives of home. That home is closely associated with the idea of the family, and in terms of gender, it's associated with the idea of femininity. So in patriarchal ideologies, home is imagined as a woman's place, and women are imagined as homemakers. And of course, I'm not saying that's an ideal, but that just happens to be a traditional value and it probably should be contested because it creates gender inequity. But I think that LGBT re-workings of home help contest these gendered narratives of the home as well.

And because also home is associated with the nuclear family and family values, I think LGBT re-workings at home can contest that as well, as well as other issues like privacy, identity, intimacy, overall reimagined. If we look at home through a queer lens, home is a site for queer identification or same-sex intimacy and relationships. Yeah, and I think it's very important because home is a critical site of identity formation and performance, a site for the security of self and being. So I think that it's also important to understand home and the way it helps affirm people's identities. But in that sense, it's also a very political site: it's connected to the public sphere as well. And if we think of home as a private space, it's not an automatic thing, it’s something that's made, it's constructed.

**Matt:** Andrew, you've really summarised, I think, the issues around normativity and LGBT relations to home really brilliantly. And I’d echo everything you've said. I mean, I suppose talking from or thinking from a historical perspective, I was considering the way in which home has been a place where you can fit in, you can demonstrate your respectability, your belonging to a sense of nation or local community. But it's also been a place where you distinguish yourself and you stand out by choosing a different wallpaper or pillars at the front or a different kind of garden or whatever it is. So there's this kind of paradox in a way that the home represents a place to demonstrate your um belonging to a culture, but it can also be a place where either in a minor or major key people have used it to articulate a difference in coded and much more explicit ways.

But I think those analyses of home have been much more recent amongst historians. And I think that's for a number of reasons. I think historians of sexuality have tended to look outside the home, because home, especially since the 1950s, has been established as such a kind of, as you said, Andrew, kind of a normative space. So the assumption was that you look for queer lives, for queer identities, for queer communities outside of that space. And in part, of course, because there was the idea that queer people were alienated from the home and alienated from the family. And so, of course, we wouldn't look there for evidence of those lives. And as a result, the kind of historical evidence that, for example, I was looking at in my first book on London was much more to do with legal records than it was to do with kind of letters and diaries, although there was some of that.

And I think over the 10 years that followed that work, I started to think, hang on a minute, there's a need to take queer history inside. That is actually our preoccupation with protest, with outdoor sex, with gay scenes, with use of public space is absolutely key in terms of the coordinates of queer identities and communities. But there's a big gap there, because most people have a home or aspire to have a home and spend a considerable amount of time there. And that's part the way in which identities get formed and stabilised and contested. And so I think, you know, in this kind of 10 year interval between my first book on London and essentially public spaces and my second where I looked again at London from the inside, I realised that there was a kind of missing link, if you like, in the way we've considered especially male queer identifications. And I say that because I think for historians of women's sexuality, home has been a more obvious place to go precisely because, as Andrew said, home has been has been culturally signified and used as a kind of feminized and women's space. And so whilst we might go to the home to explore aspects of women's history and lesbian history, the home hasn't until recently been the obvious place to go, or seemed the obvious place to go, for queer male history.

**Andrew:** Yeah, I like your point about fitting in and standing out and the significance of home for that reason. One of my earlier projects I was looking at home as a site of identity work for gay and lesbian people. And it was interesting how people reflected on the way home was a site - I should create a caveat here, for those people who had access to a home, that they had some form of autonomy over, of course not everybody does - but for those people who do, home was an important site where they could pull together those different elements of the sense of self, some which might be more normative if you like, like connections to family or connections to cultural or ethnic heritage and others that might make them stand out more like their sexual identity or their gender difference. Some people were even coalescing their sexual identity and their religious affiliation in the space of the home, which they felt that they couldn't do elsewhere, for instance, in a religious institution or the public sphere. So, yeah, it was very interesting in terms of it allowed them to both bring those elements of themselves that conformed and those elements of themselves that stood out and bring them together in the domestic sphere to create this sort of sense of holistic self, and also to provide a foundation for a sense of well-being and a sense of ontological security, a sense of who they were in the world.

**Matt:** That’s so interesting because there's a sense that of the home as a place if going to a gay bar in a way elevates the gay part of yourself, that's the most apparent maybe aspect of your identity or identification when you're in that space. At home, you know, there's arguably more scope to kind of unpick the primacy of that identification and to think about the way of the intersecting identities and identifications kind of play out. And so I think I really like your idea of holism, Andrew. And it also maybe relates to your initial caveats as well about access to the home and the ability to determine home space. Because I suppose one of the most, one of the key things that it's very easy to forget, but very important to remember, is that very few people historically had control over their home space. In the UK context, in the London context, for example, even until the 60s or 70s, most people didn't even have their own room. You know, they would be sharing with family, with other flat-mates and so on. And the idea of having your own room as a private space is really a very recent one. And so it's really worth thinking, I think, about the changing cultures of home and the way that has allowed new cultures of privacy and self-determination and decoration and so on to emerge for individuals.

**Andrew:** Yeah, I think that those are really interesting and really important points Matt. It's making me think, of course, you know, we imagine the home as the private sphere, but that privacy is imagined in terms of its distinction from the public sphere and in terms of a space for the family. It's not about individual privacy, per se. And that's something that has come more recently, I guess, in an Australian context, as houses have gotten larger in size and families have gotten smaller in number. So it has more capacity for individuals to have privacy within the so-called private sphere.

**Matt:** Yes.

**Andrew:** Historically, that hasn't been the case. Home has actually not been private for individuals, per se.

**Matt:** I mean, it is very interesting because I did some work on some back to back houses in Birmingham. So the very old traditional working class and dwellings, which was literally two rooms, and there would be neighboring houses on all three sides. So the back and then to the sides. And just standing in those houses really made me think about the nature of privacy, and what was overheard and what that proximity might have done in terms of desire. So there's one room which, you know, the census showed that there'd been both the family and a lodging married couple all living in the same room, separated by a curtain. And it made me reflect on the kind of dynamics of desire and sex in that context. You know, what were those individuals thinking or experiencing, you know, as they as they lived in that shared space? How possible was it to function as a space of desire or sex? Or were those things conceived and thought about in very different ways as a result of the space? And I suppose similar arguments or similar discussions have been made in relation to the difference between upstairs and downstairs in the upper middle class and upper class home and the dynamics of desire that play across those domestic divisions.

[music]

**Ana**: *You’re listening to That Feels Like Home. In this episode I’m talking to Matt Cook and Andrew Gorman-Murray about what it means to queer domestic spaces, and how this has challenged some of the ways in which homes have been imagined as a private refuge*.

**Queering home: definitions**

**Ana:** Everything that you're saying is really demonstrating the historical complexity of how we need to think not just about domestic spaces, but also about the queering practices of those spaces. So I wanted to ask about the word queer itself and how that has changed over time. Again, how this is historically, location specific, how there are multiple ways of being queer in the home. And I know Matt something you've remarked on by I think you said this is this way of thinking about the controlled plurality of queer formations which might overlap or oppose each other. Can you expand on this, in terms of queering the home and the multiple ways in which we can think about that?

**Matt:** Hmm. I suppose the problem with queer and the advantage of queer is that it's very slippery. So for some people it does designate a quite specific identity and it's used in that way. But I think the way in which I and I think Andrew too use queer is in a way trying to hold its looseness, if you like, and its expansiveness. And also to think about it as distinct from gay or lesbian, which operate in oppositional ways. So when you think gay, you think straight, for example, and heterosexual-homosexual. I think queer isn't exactly the opposite of normal. And I quite like that sense that that normal things can also be a little queer around the edges. So it's less of a kind of binary. And I think that way of thinking about queer can be very helpful when we think about the home, because there's usually quite a dance in most homes between queerness and-normativity in various ways.

And it's interesting the way queer in it's kind of sexual overtones is relatively recent, because it is only 20th century, but before that it very much had this idea of eccentricity. So, for example, a queer in the in the mid to late 19th century was a man without any furniture in his home, which like was such an odd definition that the Oxford English Dictionary threw up.

So I suppose when we think about it, when I think about queer in relation to the home, I suppose I think of two things. One is queers in the home. That is people that I might have identified, or other historians, geographers or other scholars and people have identified as queer in some way, and thinking about their domestic environment around them. So that's one way of doing this, which is in a way, a little kind of identitarian in that we're following a person and what we perceive to be their identity. But the other way of thinking about queer in relation to the home is the way in which the home might be a kind of queer or queering space. That is somewhat in the way that I just talked about home, that very dynamics of domestic life, of domestic architecture and design might in some way, shape or produce a kind of queerness-in the way people behave and interact and think about themselves there. So I suppose I try and hold queer quite loosely and as a kind of umbrella which might accommodate both thinking about a queerness produced and a queerness lived out, I don't know, does that resonate with the way you think about these terms, Andrew?

**Andrew:** Yes, it does Matt. And I agree with what you say. And I tend to hold the definition of queer quite loosely as well. I tend to think of it processually. So I tend to think of queer as a transgressive process and a process that works against binary distinction. So that's kind of where we get: is queer normative or anti-normative? It's not really, it's actually blurring that distinction altogether. So it's the backslash in between normative and anti-normative, so to speak. And I think that that's helpful for a number of things.. It's interesting because it can be used as more of an identity or a noun as well, but an identity that's inherently unstable and that's working against a sort of fixity at the same time. So that's when it gets a bit, I guess, slippery as well. But, yeah, I tend to think of it as a process, as a transgressive process of working against those binaries and therefore as a verb as well as an action.

**Matt:** Yeah, I think I think that's really helpful. In a way, when we think of it as a verb, it works very well with normal because I think it reminds us if we queer the normal, then it's a reminder to us that normal is no static thing. That actually if we look at what norms have been in the 18th and 19th, 20th century, the 21st century, they are constantly shifting. What is normal at any particular time, you know, will be very different, you know, normal behavior for a woman or a man or a child. You know, all these things are shifting.

And so we tend to think about norms and normativity; it’s one of my problems with the idea of heteronormativity, is that it get it tends to get seen as a trans-historical fixed thing. And actually, one of the things a queer project I think can usefully do is trouble norms and show how they will always be equivocal and always be in some sort of dance with dissidence and queerness. You know, rarely do you get this kind of clarity, around the idea of a normal home, or domestic life. You know, even if even if there's a kind of projected ideal, the lived realities will invariably be very different and much more complicated. So I think bringing queer into proximity to normal, not as an opposite, but as a kind of active interrogation, I think can be enormously helpful, and historically enriching because it encourages to-us to think, I think in less binary terms, you know, about the normative and the non-normative home, because actually I couldn't, in the end, when I worked on that *Queer Domesticities* book, find that division, I couldn't find that clarity of distinction between those two kinds of domesticity.

**Andrew:**  So I was thinking about the normative values that we associate with home themselves, like privacy, intimacy, shelter, nurture, that kind of thing. Even those normative values themselves shift in relation to who's imagining them or experiencing them, or acting them out. That privacy to one person is different to privacy to another person. So, you know, obviously, as we were just talking about before, privacy of the family is different to privacy of individual members of the family. The nature of intimacy in domestic space shifts depending on who's acting that intimacy as well. So I think yeah queer helps us to understand how those values, I'm thinking of Sommerville’s universal values of home like abode, shelter, hearth, hearth paradise, roots – how they are universal in that everyone might aspire to them (1992). But what they mean to specific people in specific times and places is different. And I think that's where a queer perspective can help and how we can see the plurality of those values

**Matt:** Yeah, absolutely. So, in a way that this is where a kind of queer approach is so helpful. I was thinking when we - just looping back to what you said Andrew about queer pluralities - and this connects, I think with your question Ana as well, is one of the things that really struck me, you know, I when I worked on that *Queer Domesticities* book and various articles surrounding it and indeed on *Queer Interiors* with Andrew, it really struck me that we couldn't really find the typical queer home. And so I suppose in that sense there's a real plurality. But I suppose, the controlled plurality idea is important because I think there is also in different cultural contexts, some parameters or boundaries to that. So whilst the case studies I drew on and looked at in queer domesticity were immensely different, they were very different men I was looking at, but they did have something in common. And what they had in common, I think, and this relates closely to cultures of home, is an acute self-consciousness. So they all knew that by aligning themselves with queer identity, however they were naming it, they were also putting themselves somewhat at odds, or in a kind of eccentric relationship to home. And in that sense, the way they made home, the way they decorated it, the way they lived in their home, what they did there, who they had to visit, all of these different things were done with more of a self-consciousness, I'd argue, than with um with those who weren't living out self-consciously queer lives.

**Homonormativity and domesticity**

[music interval]

**Ana:** *In this episode I’m talking to Matt Cook and Andrew Gorman Murray about the ways in which queer homes are multiple and plural, and challenge easy distinctions between the normative and non-normative. In the next part of our discussion we talk about homonormativity and the assumptions that home is by definition conservative and apolitical.*

**Ana:** So I think in the way that you're framing the queer approach to the home is precisely complicating many of these distinctions between what's normative and non-normative, the public and the private. I wonder if you could speak about how this bears on some of the queer radical critiques of lesbian and gay homes that discredits still domesticity as homonormative, as internalising heteronormative ideals, and therefore see the home as more conservative, privatised, depoliticised. What would you say to these critiques?

**Andrew:** Yes, this is a really good question, it troubles me a lot, this idea of homonormativity. Partly as a geographer because it arose in the American context and very specific context, and then it's kind of been applied in an all-encompassing way to different locations and different times without understanding of the nuance. So I wrote a chapter a few years ago looking at homonormativity in relation to radical queer critiques. My take on on it is that the notion of homonormativity, it's drawn from Lisa Duggan's book, but when the term is used, it's rarely placed in her specific definition and rarely placed in the full context of her discussion, which is actually about right-wing gay rights movements in the US, not specifically about domesticity as privatized, demobilized and depoliticised. It's in the broader context of right wing gay rights movements in the US. And these movements want gay men and lesbians to appear normal, to appear like heterosexual normative couples, and therefore are ensconced in the liberal middle-class suburban coupling and consumption patterns. But my problem is that that is only one mode of domesticity that's available.

**Andrew:** And it's not the only mode of domesticity that LGBTIQ people or queer people broadly have enacted. And my other concern with it is that it overlooks a lot of very significant work by feminist scholars who have examined the home as a site of resistance, transformation, community and identity politics, thinking most obviously the work of bell hooks, but other people as well, like Iris Marion Young, on the importance of recuperating the positive values of home for a sense of self and democratising them, rather than throwing the baby out with the bathwater, so to speak. So I guess part of my critique is as a geographer, I don't like this idea of picking one concept and then applying it in um an all-encompassing way everywhere, rather than looking at the nuances of specific practices in particular locations. And too I thought that a very particular idea around homormativity was being picked up and used and one that ignored the true plurality of queer domesticity. And we can look to the feminist work to see all the ways that home can be recuperated in positive ways.

**Matt:** And, once again Andrew and I find myself completely agree. So I mean, I suppose the things I'd add to that, you know, it's no surprise that that home has been something that the Gay Liberation Front and others located as central to the battle for rights, because it's also true that home has in many ways been a center of power and control and a way of as men and women in the 70s were saying, as a way of reproducing family in particular formations. So in a way, it seems explicable to me that the home has taken on this position on the battle lines. But as Andrew said, it also underplays the way home has functioned in people's lives. And I mean that, in the context of the kind of commune and squatting movements where there was a kind of active reinvention of home and the capacity, the capaciousness of home to accommodate different ways of doing domesticity and doing family. So that we could say that on the one side.

The other the other thing I'd say is that home is a place where you can make small gestures of resistance in your every day, you can do things a little bit differently, you can find safety where safety may not have been possible for you in other spaces or in the public sphere and that places of survival. And to me, those things are very radical because it's about human existence, human possibility, and some sense, however limited, however curtailed of self-determination and shaping your relationship with yourself and your place in the world.

So there's those two aspects that I find troubling about the sweeping use of homonormativity. But even the critique, the kind of most sensible critiques, I suppose, of of the homonormative are around gay marriage, for example, gay and lesbian marriage, and also adoption and child rearing. And the idea that the gay couple who are married and have two kids, you know, are the model of homonormativity, I also find troubling. Because in a way, the very fact that these men are doing this, however conventional they are, troubles, tugs at the whole institution of marriage. It says that marriage can be something different and it can be more capacious and it can accommodate all sorts of relationship dynamics and ways of being, and moreover, it insists that two gay men or two lesbians are perfectly capable and able of raising children. And so I think, you know, the critique is too flippant I think, because it ignores what some of these moves can do conceptually and culturally in terms of forging a place for difference in contemporary culture.

And I think the key thing here as well is and this is, again, maybe where queer lens is useful, is to allow for the multiplicity of meanings around this. If I just share an anecdote, when I decided to become a father in the late 1990s, and I was gonna, well I did co-parent with a lesbian couple and had two children, but when I first approached my mom rather nervously and said, you know, we were expecting our first child, her response was, well, of course, the nuclear family has always been ridiculous. It's always been, you know, unworkable. She said, you know, when I was brought up, you know, there was, grandparents down the street. There were neighbors, there was all sorts of adults involved in the rearing of me as a child and my aunts and uncles. And she said, what you're doing is creating a family with four engaged adults. So interestingly, she kind of erased our sexuality and said we were returning to a former communal norm. And of course, my decision to have children was partly because, you know, in a way it was part of a family tradition where, you know, all my siblings, aunts and uncles all have and want children. So in a way, it was very conventional.

And it can be kind of analysed in a very normative way. But at the same time, in the context of a rather feverish homophobia in Britain, post clause 28, it was also rather a radical thing to do; to insist that we could make family in this distinctive way. And, you know, our inspiration from my mom's perspective, our inspiration was coming through my biological family and the way that had functioned. But for the mums that the mothers of our children, they harked back to feminists from the seventies and the experiments in parenting in the 1980s and that radical tradition. And so I suppose the point is of the anecdote is, is that I think we need to be really cautious about analyses that insists that something is definitively radical or definitively reactionary or traditional or non-traditional, homo-normative or hetero-normative whatever, that actually almost invariably it’s complex. And we can think about things in layered ways and in conversation rather than in opposition. And I think certainly as a historian, I feel like we get further with that, because this isn't I mean, working historically is not about taking up kind of very deterministic political positions. It's about, is more for me about the development of discourse and ideas and the way in which those were lived out and accommodated in people's everyday lives.

When I grew up in the 1980s, the idea of being gay and being a father seemed absolutely antithetical, like one identity could not accommodate the other, even though there were plentiful historical examples, I've now discovered, of men who were precisely those two things. But it seemed impossible to me growing up that that could be the case. And so when 10 years later, I did become a parent, there was a kind of odd shift for me and thinking, OK, hang on a minute, these two identities can kind of come alongside and can relate to each other. And so I think these social and cultural shifts are really worth tracking because it's also about shifts in conceptions and experiences of identity over time and queer identity over time.

**Queer homes in the media**

[music interval]

**Ana:** *We’ve been talking about queer families, but how have these been represented in the media? Stay with us to hear more on this, representations of suburban homes, the nuclear family and queerness, and some final reflections on the impact of the pandemic on our domestic lives …*

**Ana:** I wonder in that sense how you value or consider the growth in, well, popular media and interest in queer home lives, I mean, think of you know Queer Eye or the American sitcom Modern Family or the series Transparent, there seems to have been a shift in the last couple of decades or at least 10 years. How do you see this kind of phenomenon in terms of articulating these possibilities, as something that you can actually see?

**Matt:** Yeah, I mean you've named some kind of key examples, but those, you know, that they were also kind of path-breaking examples in a sense. I mean, the first representation in the British media was *Queer as Folk*, which was 1999, where there was a gay guy who has a baby with a lesbian couple. So these representations are-fairly recent. And I think what's really striking about them is, for all sorts of explicable and understandable reasons they’re quite simplistic portrayals and we're talking very much about white and middle class men and their families, which in a way, it's quite interesting kind of squeezes ideas about queer families into another box um.

So, you know, how do you do that in a kind of popular sitcom? But I think it's striking that across the across the different representations, there's a distinct resonance and narrowness between those representations of how you might do the queer home, and do the queer family. I don't know what you what you think Andrew, I know you've thought more about these representations than I think I have.

**Andrew:** I did early on in my PhD work do some analysis of representations of gay couples on reality home renovation programs in Australia in around 2003-2004. Home is always a big business in Australia, renovation is a big business and then there were all these reality competition programs and they specifically included some gay couples, which was quite interesting in itself. And the producers were saying, well, we thought we should because gay men are gentrifiers, so we should have them in the program. So we have the gentrifier trope going on. But the way the couples – and the shows I'm talking about are The Block in The HotHouse – but the way the couples were portrayed in the shows, and the editing, was quite interesting. One of the couples in The HotHouse was portrayed as very family-oriented and wanting to create a family house for their future children, which I thought was, and this was 2004, was fairly forward for Australia. Um, and the other tropes um in The Block were more about the nature of gay men's inherent design skills, which of course goes into the whole idea of uh you know the home being a feminine site, gay men being at the bottom of the hierarchy of masculinity and therefore more feminine. So there's a natural affinity between gay men and domestic design.

**Andrew:** So in one season, OK, that was played out and everybody liked the design. But in the following season, the gay couple created a design that was perceived as very masculine, very much like a bachelor party pad, not family oriented at all, and therefore not suitable for the home they can market or home owner market and was therefore not desirable. So there are also limits on the tropes around gay men and the domestic sphere. An interesting trope is when you bring gender into it and the way if it shifts and becomes too masculine, too much in in the mold of the bachelor pad, then it's not a good thing, and problematic.

**Suburban geographies and queerness**

**Ana:** And that links to something I want to ask especially because there's a lot of collections of suburbia from London in the collections and they very much present that normative image of the white, heterosexual, happy family home. And, and in a lot of English speaking countries, there has been that portrayal of suburbia as that safe haven that's kind of a very white, heterosexual and middle class, I am aware that's been contested also is actually being much more demographically diverse, particularly where the U.S. increasingly in the U.K. So I wonder if you want to say something more to that in the way that suburbia is still the popular imaginary remains that very straight place. How does that fit with the reality, maybe the Australian context and Matt maybe you want to comment as well?

**Andrew:** Yeah, the Australian context is very interesting. The historian Graeme Davison said Australia is the suburban nation par excellence and the first suburban nation in the world (1995). Obviously, the idea of the suburbs was developed in England, but we kind of perfected it here. And our cities are very, sort of, 80 per cent of Australians live in the suburbs. But I find I actually use this in my lectures because I find Davison's discussions very interesting and very helpful, because he shows how certain values and certain identities are embedded in not just the ideology of the suburbs, but their very creation. So he talks about such values as evangelicalism; that they're attached to this idea of some kind of religious revival, but also an elevation of the idea of the nuclear family form. And this idea that if you created a detached house for a single nuclear family, then that's the type of family form that you would create and proliferate in the suburbs. And that's kind of what happened initially anyway. The idea that houses are an asset that are immensely profitable to own and to sell. So we have class values embedded in the suburbs as well. The idea of romanticism that a house with its own garden is closer to nature and the place of moral and physical regeneration. So it's good for mind, body and soul. And ideas like sanitarianism as well, that the suburban home is open and clean, spacious, therefore healthier, better than the city. So I guess these kind of values held true for a fair while in Australia because suburban expansion was supported by state and federal governments for a long time with very explicit legislative parameters around who could access home financing. This is including up until the World War II to the post-World War II period, it varied from state and federal, but basically you had to be a couple from between the ages of 30 to 36 with children or intending to have children to be able to access government home financing.

So the suburbs were quite explicitly for middle class heterosexual families. In recent decades in Australia, from the 1970s onwards, that's changed. And again, that's in response to government policies. In the 70s, we had a shift in federal government policy from what had been called the White Australia policy and the exclusion of um people from non-white ethnic back-backgrounds immigrating to Australia to an official policy of multiculturalism and encouraging and allowing immigration from diverse source countries. And so in particular, Sydney and Melbourne have become immensely diverse culturally. And of course, different migrant groups have brought their own domestic forms, their own family forms, their own forms of familial relationship, including extended families and community networks into those cities. And so this has reshaped the nature of the types of families and the types of households in the suburbs. There are now more multigenerational households, more extended families. Which means the suburbs are demonstrably moving away from the white middle-class nuclear family being the dominant form. Yet that still seems to be the dominant form ideologically, even though the reality is much more diverse.

**Matt:** It's very resonant and just thinking about, you know, the classic kind of 70s, 80s novel/memoir in the U.K. was about the escape from suburbia into the center of the metropolis. So the queer flight from the suburbs, if you like, which were kind of, I think, cast as the epitome of these kind of normative values and so on. But I think you're- you're absolutely right that I think what has happened is a kind of diversification or a re-inflection of suburban life, partly as a city center living has become so expensive. So, you know, it's almost reversed. It used to be pretty cheap to live in central London. I mean, now it's virtually impossible. And so as a result, the suburbs have become a slightly more complex phenomena, I think, than they had been previously.

So, you know, you could say that there's been a kind of queering of suburbia, I think. And also I think as queer visibility has grown, I think people have become more aware of having queer neighbors, you know? And, for that reason alone, there's kind of been a kind of sense of suburbia. Suburbia's meanings, you know, expanding you know and diversifying somewhat. And that's before we get onto the whole topic of gentrification, which some have argued has been spearheaded historically by gay men, which I would dispute. But you know again, there's this idea that, you know, gay men go in, “zhuzh up” an area and it becomes more expensive and desirable to live there because it's got that slight edge. It's become trendy. You know, it's where the gays live. So there's a whole range of kind of debates and ideas circulating in in in terms of what's the suburbia now means as opposed to what it might have meant 20, 30, 40 years ago. And so it's another example, I suppose, of the way in which these apparently quite clear terms like normal or suburban, shift in their meanings and shift in their complexions over time, but always with some trace of former meanings going with them.

**Andrew:** Yeah, entirely. (laugh) It's interesting, though, the way some of those tropes persist.

**Matt:** I was just thinking how narrow perceptions are of the class band of gay men. So what people are talking about often when people envisage a gay man, that man is white and middle class. And so then that becomes the kind of gentrifier figure. But completely forgetting, as you said, you know, that the numbers of homelessness, the homelessness figures in the UK, you know, gay men, a way overrepresented in those numbers really tragically. And, you know, in all sorts of ways, men and especially women are priced out of those trendy, supposedly gay areas of the city.

**Futures for making homes**

**Ana:** There's a final question that I'd like to ask you, which is more reflective on the present moment and the way in which during the pandemic there have been reconfigurations of home. And so I wonder how you judge the current situation and how you see this might bring also new directions for the kinds of interdisciplinary research around home and gender and sexuality, Matt.

**Matt:** Gosh, that's such an interesting question. I was thinking very much about the significance of home in the context of pandemics, you know, the way in which it's for many people exacerbated experiences of loneliness and isolation, which, of course, has to do also with relationships, desire, sexuality and so on. I was thinking about the kind of pressure cooker of home and the rise of domestic violence in all domestic, in many domestic contexts. And the need, I suppose, to think again about home and what it means in-in the pandemic context, you know. Yes. As a place where you're safe from the virus, but maybe you're not safe in other ways. And I think that's something that goes across, genders and sexualities. So I think we do need to, you know, it needs to be folded into the way we think about changes in home culture because it's cast a new light I think, the pandemic year and a half has cast a new light on what home can do and can mean.

**Andrew:** Yeah, absolutely Matt. It's interesting, I've actually written a couple of papers about this recently um with a colleague from the University of Tasmania, Ruby Grant, who actually did some empirical work with LGBT Tasmanians on their experience of covid spatial restrictions in Tasmania. And so we looked at the work in terms of their experience of public spaces, private spaces and online spaces. So people who were being forced to stay home; for some home is quite a dangerous place, particularly for some young people who weren’t out or even some young people who were out but whose family was not supportive of them. They said they experienced violence in the home. And even for couples who were stuck at home together, spending too much time together led to kind of relationship tensions. But even the idea that online spaces were a kind of solution were not really. There are a poor substitute for friendship networks or for other social spaces. People thought the online spaces were very forced, didn’t allow for free socialisation um and also didn't feel they were very therapeutic spaces that were enhancing their wellbeing. So altogether, the domestic sphere was quite compromised for this group of LGBT Tasmanians. I know it's compromised space for a lot of people at the moment, particularly in terms of people experiencing violence at home. That's quite difficult. And for people who can't access other social networks and were forced to do so through online means, which were not satisfying and not therapeutic, that had an impact on their mental health and wellbeing as well. Yeah.

**Matt:** I mean, it's been part of a debate here as well Andrew. So it's so important what you're saying. And I think part of that, the other the additional layer of that is around intimacy and touch and sex. And I think one of the debates here and it has been around, you know, the way in which those things are seen far down the pecking order, or are easy to do without. But actually, I think for many people in general, that's not the case, that sex can be an incredibly important part of weekly and daily, daily, monthly life. And in fact, it's been Queer Network's, Queer in the Queer Press that there's been discussion of, you know, when we were allowed in the UK to buddy with another household. And there's been talk about sexual buddying. So, you know, buddying up with a with a sexual partner and that that hasn't been a frivolous thing to do. It's actually been a very important thing to do in terms of a feeling of intimacy, but also a feeling of sexual community. So I think, I think there's some really interesting debate to be had and in some ways, I think queer commentators are leading the way on that because I don't see those debates about sex and intimacy happening in relation to heterosexuality and straight individuals or couples. And yet, we need, I think, to start thinking about to consider more the importance of those of those aspects of our lives in our daily lives.

**Closing**

**Ana:** So thank thank you, Matt and Andrew. Thank you so, so much. That was so rich and so much more that we could cover. But we will add publications from you on the show notes so that listeners could then follow up on it. So, so much more of, you know, based on what we were we were discussing. And it's been great. So thank you.

**Andrew:** Thank you. Ana thanks for inviting me. Thank you.

**Matt:** Ana thanks so much. It's been a real pleasure and it's so great, Andrew, to have the opportunity to chat again.

**Andrew:** Yeah, I really enjoyed that. (laugh)

**Matt:** Once again, we find ourselves in complete agreement.

[music clip]

**Ana**: *Thank you for listening, and especially a huge thanks to my guests for this episode, Matt Cook and Andrew Gorman-Murray, for joining us to talk about their intellectual project of queering home, which complicates assumptions of the household as normal and conservative, and which has pointed at how critical home spaces can be for developing other kinds of family life and kinship.*

*In the rest of the series we’ll continue to reassess traditional ideas of home and venture into other, more critical readings of this space.*

*Don’t miss our next episode with Deborah Sugg-Ryan and Sarah Cheang, in which we will expand histories of home to discuss how the British empire shaped everyday life at home.*

*For more information about this episode, show notes and reading list please visit our website www.moda.mdx.ac.uk/. You can also find a You can also find a link to a survey in our show notes. We’d love to hear from you, please tell us what you think. And, if you enjoyed the podcast, leave us a review wherever you listen to your podcasts.*

*We’re also keen to expand the museum collections around home, so if you’d like to know more, please get in touch with us via email at moda@mdx.ac.uk.*

*I’m Ana Baeza and this podcast is brought to you by the Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, Middlesex University. We’ll be back again soon, stay tuned.*

## **Show Notes**

If you enjoyed our podcast 'That Feels Like Home' (or even if you didn't!) please let us know by completing this short survey: <http://ow.ly/bzxM50EAwff>

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### **Objects from MoDA Collection**

* BADDA960: 'Flats, Urban Houses and Cottage Homes: A companion volume to 'The British home of today'', edited by Walter Shaw Sparrow, 1906.
* SD13461 - Design for linoleum or carpet featuring a mosaic and tile pattern with marble effect wavy squares, in light pink, dark pink and grey, outlined in black, 1920s to 1930s.
* SD13459 - Design for linoleum or carpet of an intricate geometric tile pattern with diamond shapes, in red, green, grey and yellow, 1920s to 1930s.

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*Links:*

Thinking Allowed (Matt Cook and Rachael Scicluna) https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b04cffpj