

‘Out of sight, out of mind’ –
The place of self-storage in
securing pasts, ordering the
present and enabling futures

Presented for the degree of PhD 2018

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In memory of Clare, Norma and Peter

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Abstract

Thirty years ago the self-storage industry in the UK was non-existent; now it is the biggest in Europe. Renting a self-storage unit is advertised as the solution to controlling clutter, a secure space for valuable objects and way to enable mobility. Its growth in size and popularity is thought to be symptomatic of wider material afflictions and shifts in Western society including overconsumption, an increase in divorce rates, an ageing population, increased mobility and 'generation rent'. Self-storage plays a significant role in routine domestic practices as well as distinct periods of transition (i.e. moving house), trajectories (i.e. growing up, growing older) and events (i.e. bereavement, divorce) that occur over the life course.

The overall aim of this thesis has been to form an understanding of what self-storage units signify including, and besides, their storage function. Based on interviews and object elicitation at self-storage units with users in the UK, this thesis argues that our possessions, as they are sorted, packed, moved and stored, are integral aspects of our dwelling and mobility in the contemporary world. By bringing to light the narratives surrounding hidden objects stored in self-storage units, this thesis has shown that 'unpacking' this kind of materiality provides rich possibilities to understand and grasp the world beyond and displaced from people's immediacies.

This thesis firmly situates self-storage use within a range of contextual forces: the categorisation, ordering and hierarchical place(ment) of matter in response to ideas of clutter, mess and excess; the containment of contingency and potential futures in the face of uncertainty; and the connection and consolidation of identities in light of mobility and changes across the life course. It adds new sets of ideas to engage with theories of consumption, home and identity, and demonstrates the importance of acknowledging stored materiality as a distinct, necessary and complex phase in biographies and geographies of objects, which has previously been underplayed in the material culture literature.

Declarations

This work has not been submitted in substance for any other degree or award at this or any other university or place of learning, nor is being submitted concurrently in candidature for any degree or other award.

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This thesis is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated, and the thesis has not been edited by a third party beyond what is permitted by Cardiff University's Policy on the Use of Third Party Editors by Research Degree Students. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references. The views expressed are my own.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Prologue: Mind over matter

It was a cold winter's evening in late December when I found myself sat on the sofa in my parent's living room in rural Somerset. The fire was roaring, occasionally spitting embers onto the hearth. Our family dog was snoring contentedly by the doors that looked onto the garden. I had only lived in this family home for one full year before moving out for university but had returned each summer to work in the village pub. The memorabilia from my childhood and teenage years were packed away into a big cardboard box that lived on top of the wardrobe in what had been my bedroom but was now reimagined as the guest room. As I sat nursing a cup of tea my thoughts turned to that box and what was inside. There were definitely various children's books (The Queen's Knickers a particular favourite), my brownie sash adorned with hard-earned badges, Spice Girls CDs, my broken Baby-G watch, the notes I had passed to a crush in lessons, souvenirs from school trips and family holidays... but what else? My memory failed me and I could not list all the things I had decided to keep and treasure. Nevertheless, the box and all in it would stay.

Whilst I was back in Somerset my mum had asked that I go through the last of my things which had not made it up to Cardiff. These were the things that neither belonged in my day-to-day life, nor in the box on top of the wardrobe. We had arrived at the topic of sorting out following a conversation about a radio programme my mum had recently listened to, in which Dr Rachel Hurdley discussed her research on mantelpieces. I looked up from my cup of tea at the mantelpiece above the fireplace. Our mantelpiece fitted the general trend she had described: we had a clock in the centre and a few other decorative ornaments, as well as matches for the fire and old cards pushed behind a large paperweight. The objects on the mantelpiece and the historical map print framed above summed up a lot about our family identity. I glanced over to the display cabinet to the right of the mantelpiece, and then looked again more closely. The top section had glass panelled doors, behind which were crystal glassware and other smaller, more delicate ornaments and knick-knacks. The bottom section had opaque wooden doors, but I knew that behind these were a collection of board games, craft materials and books. These things, which were hidden from sight encapsulated our identity just as much as those on the mantelpiece or in the cabinet – so why was it necessary to store them hidden away?

My mind wandered. I thought about the kitchen cupboards, chests of drawers, wardrobes, under-bed storage, the attic ...self-storage. We had driven past a self-storage facility earlier that day just outside the neighbouring town. I would see other facilities on the train back to Cardiff on the outskirts of towns, in industrial areas and along arterial roads. Brightly lit and glaringly obvious, at the same time mysterious and mundane. Who uses self-storage? Why do they need it? What is being stored? Whose homes and lives do these stored things not fit into right now? What secrets lie behind those unit doors? What forgotten things might be unearthed if they were opened?

1.2 What is self-storage?

Self-storage – shorthand for self-service storage – is an industry in which storage space (room, lockers, containers, lock-ups etc.) known as ‘storage units’ are rented to customers, often on rolling monthly contracts. The service offered by self-storage companies is fundamentally very simple. Self-storage users choose a dedicated unit to rent based upon its size and type, tending to overestimate how much space is required and underestimating how much it will cost (SSA UK 2018, p. 62). Once settled on a unit they can move in as soon as they want and when moving out need to give notice of as little as seven days. Only users have the keys to their own units and whilst most stores sell locks many prefer to use their own. Access to the sites themselves varies but is often via key-coded gates and doors, so when a customer inputs their personal key code it not only unlocks these but also turns the alarm for their unit off. Most stores allow their customers to enter during daytime hours throughout the week when staff are present, but others offer 24-hour access, some of which charge extra for the option. Cohen (2018) describes that stepping inside a self-storage facility “feels like entering a vacuum: cool, sterile [and] sealed off from the world”. It is easy to walk around without seeing other self-storage users, which gives the space an eerie quality. This is probably because only 23% of self-storage users visit their unit once or more a week (SSA UK 2018, p. 43).

Just thirty years ago the UK did not have a self-storage industry; now it’s the biggest in Europe with a 48% share of the market (SSA UK 2018, p. 2). One of the first in the UK to see the potential of renting out empty space was Rodger Dudding, known to many of clients as Mr Lock Up. Having amassed more than 12,000 garages, he is one of the largest private owners in the country. As Dudding built his empire he expected people to use the garages to store their cars overnight, but ultimately found that 80% were used for domestic storage (Yearsley 2014). The UK’s first self-storage chain, Abbey Self-Storage, was founded in 1979 by Doug Hampson who had come across the business when he happened to drive past a self-storage facility in Los Angeles in 1977. Scores of other companies have since opened, yet even up to Lok’n’Store opening its first site in 1995 Andrew Jacobs, the company’s CEO, says the industry was “almost non-existent”

(Yearsley 2014). The UK's two biggest self-storage firms, Big Yellow and Safestore, were founded in 1998 and the following year a US self-storage giant, Shurgard, opened its first store in the UK.

The amount of self-storage space in the UK has almost doubled in a decade and growth of the industry shows no sign of slowing down, because whilst “it may not be sexy [... the] industry has bucked successive recessions” (Yearsley 2014). The Self Storage Association UK estimates that the industry added around 2.4 million square feet of space in 2017, and over 70 new stores were opened (SSA UK 2018, p. 6). It is expected that 48 more sites will have opened by the end of 2018, and 47 will open in 2019 (SSA UK 2018, p. 29). Across the UK there are now about 1,160 indoor self-storage sites, plus 345 sites offering outdoor containers, which serve a total of approximately 450,000 customers (see Table 1 below). Self-storage, in the UK, covers 46.6 million square feet which is the equivalent of 0.67 square feet for every person in the country.¹ Whilst less than 2% of the population are using self-storage, of these over 40% are repeat customers of the service (SSA UK 2018, p. 35).

Table 1 - Self-storage industry UK overview (SSA UK 2018, p. 6)

Supply	46.6m sq. ft.
Annual turnover for self-storage	£750m
Number of self-storage stores (incl. container-based sites)	1,505
Number of self-storage businesses	723
Storage per head of population	0.67 sq. ft.
Average size of store	29,600 sq. ft.

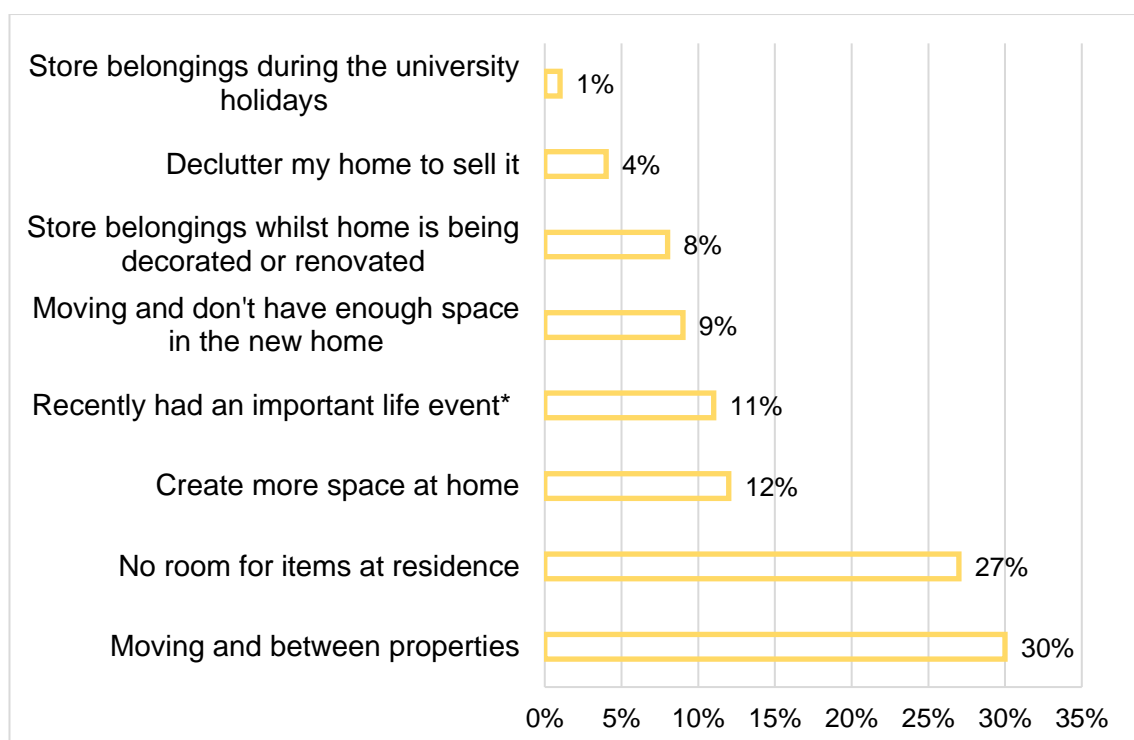
Early self-storage facilities tended to be converted buildings away from main roads but increasingly, following Big Yellow's pioneering strategy, the industry has come to be recognisable as new, brightly-coloured, purpose-built warehouses. These are often located in prominent sites along main roads, which essentially act as free marketing. The majority of units (69%) are less than 100 square foot (SSA UK 2018, p. 42), which is typically the size that would easily store the contents of a two-bedroom house or flat. Rental prices vary by size and location. A 45 square foot unit, roughly half the size of a garage, would typically cost between £80 and £140 a month, with rates highest in London. The average net rental rate is £23.08 per square foot per annum (SSA UK 2018, p. 2). On top of that customers must pay to insure their goods, which is sometimes not

¹ There is more self-storage space available per person in the UK than anywhere else in Europe, but it is still far behind the US where the figure is an astonishing 7 square feet per person.

included in home insurance policies. Self-storage is therefore not cheap; the SSA UK (2018, p. 22) have calculated that renting a 60 square foot unit equates to 6.1% of the UK average household disposable income.²

From the Self Storage Association UK annual report (2018, p. 39) a fictional, typical customer can be imagined. He is a 50-54 year old man, separated, but living with a new partner in a home that they own outright. He earns above the average wage.

Figure 1 - Reasons for using self-storage by personal users (SSA UK 2018, p. 44)



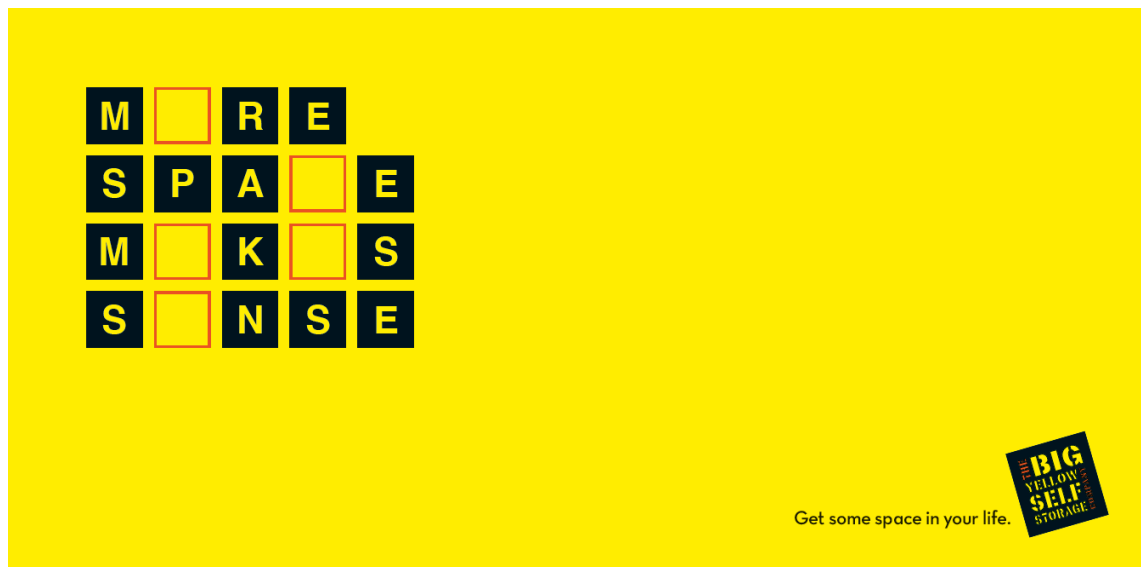
*e.g. birth of a child, marriage, death, inheritance, separation, divorce etc.

There are plenty of triggers for putting things in storage, and many of these are related to the stressful life-changing moments in the users' life, which the industry refers to as the 'Four Ds': death, divorce, dislocation and downsizing. Of those four it's moving that is at the heart of self-storage, which accounts for at least 40% of personal (as opposed to business) users (SSA UK 2018, p. 44). This can be as straightforward as a student locking up their possessions for the summer but can also be a painful experience. A rise in divorce rates, an increase in the number of people living alone and lower incomes

² Of those surveyed for the Self-Storage Association UK 2018 annual report the majority were homeowners and 73% of respondents had a household income at or above the national average (SSA UK 2018, pp. 36, 39). This data further supports the theory that self-storage is more commonly used by the wealthier segments of the community.

have driven more people to downsize or live in flats, thereby requiring self-storage for items that don't fit at home. Indeed divorced or separated people are twice as likely to use self-storage than other people (SSA UK 2018, p. 2). The staff at self-storage facilities – usually a team of just a few people – are accustomed to working with customers experiencing upheaval or distress (Cohen 2018), some seeing their role as akin to a counsellor (Weston 2018).

Figure 2 - Print ad for Big Yellow Self Storage



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Recently a fifth 'D' has become more relevant: density. Self-storage users also put things in storage because they lack the space at home, in fact almost half say they have no room for the items at home (see Figure 1), whether that was because they didn't have room for them or they wanted to create more (liveable) space at home. The rising proportion of the population renting privately – which increased from 14% in 2009 to 20% in 2017 – has contributed to a lack of storage space, particularly for those in house shares who may only have a bedroom to keep their stuff (Cohen 2018). City-centre living is also experiencing renewed popularity but because housing space is smaller it often doesn't have the amount of storage space that is needed (Cohen 2018).³ Space to accommodate the storage needs of homeowners is also lacking in new-build homes which have been getting steadily smaller over the last 30 years, despite repeated calls to adhere to Housing Space Standards (HATC Limited 2006).⁴ A report by the

³ Apartments in the UK, unlike many of those in Europe and America, do not often have storage lockers in the common areas of apartment buildings.

⁴ Housing Space Standards state that homes should provide adequate space for storage of 'clean and dry' items on shelves (linen, boxed up possessions, mops, Hoover etc.) and space for 'dirty' storage such as bicycles (HATC Limited 2006, p. 56).

Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) found that 47% of the new-build residents surveyed could not house all of their furniture in their homes (CABE 2009, p. 4), and another report by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) found that 57% of residents did not have enough storage for their possessions (Roberts-Hughes 2011, p. 9). Big Yellow have played into this with a series of adverts which highlight how self-storage can help to 'get some space in your life' (see Figure 2 above).

As well as an inbuilt lack of space, homeowners are increasingly converting spaces in their homes that were formerly used for storage, so that it is comfortable to continue living in the same house for longer without moving. For example, spare rooms have become offices and lofts have become bedrooms. In their research, Halifax (2017, p. 1) found that since 2012 planning applications for single storey extensions are up by 49% and loft conversions have grown by 43%. However, opportunities to extend are very unevenly distributed, denied to those who lack the space or the means to build (Hand et al. 2007, p. 670). Small-scale spatial reorganisation and DIY is also increasing, and the functionality of storage is a big driver for the market that goes "way beyond the simple erection of a shelf" (Mintel 2003 in Hand et al. 2007, p. 670). Ultimately it appears that the UK is going the same way as the US where there is a 'salient home-storage crisis', necessitating the use of gardens, garages and outdoor spaces for storage (Arnold and Lang 2007). So as Lamont (2009, para. 33) expresses, "If home is no longer a castle, then at least a storage unit allows some room for manoeuvre outside the ramparts".

The popularity of self-storage can't simply be explained by a lack of space though because if that were the case the industry wouldn't be so successful in the US, where annual growth has been 7% between 2012-2017 even though the average home is bigger than anywhere else in the world (Cohen 2018). It's also about how many possessions we have (something the '4 D's' don't account for). According to Danny Dorling, we have got, by weight, six times as much 'stuff' than the generation before us (BBC Two 2014). In the book, *Empire of Things*, Trentmann (2016) suggests that much of this is from the accumulation of clothing and electrical items over the past few decades. However, the rise also reflects wider social changes. For example, because partnerships are changing more often or starting later and because there are more flexible family arrangements, people end up having multiple versions of the same items. In a recent interview with the Financial Times Frederic de Ryckman de Betz, who owns Attic Storage in London, suggested that self-storage reveals a lot about human nature, describing that no matter how much space you have, it will never be enough (Cohen 2018).

Whilst the majority (61%) of self-storage customers are domestic users, the remaining 39% are business users (SSA UK 2018, p. 20) who tend to take larger spaces for longer periods of time. Some self-storage companies rent out of both office and storage space,

which has proven to be particularly popular with start-ups. According to the Self Storage Association Annual Report, 51% of businesses using self-storage have between 1 and 3 employees, and 72% have 10 or less (2018, p. 51). Big Yellow say that 60% of its business customers are now start-ups, reflecting the general trend in the UK (Cohen 2018).⁵ For many firms, and start-ups in particular, the appeal of self-storage is its “flexibility, cheap rents and the convenience of a no-ties agreement” (Harding 2011). Whilst renting an office might require a 12-month lease, in self-storage it is easy to downsize, upsize or move out altogether with only one- or two-weeks’ notice. As well as entrepreneurs selling their goods online, self-storage homes anything from mini-gyms to music academies and wheelchair restoration. As Harding (2011) describes, self-storage units are “the blank canvasses on to which new business are painted”. And it doesn’t stop at start-ups, self-storage has caught the public imagination for the weird and wacky things kept and done behind closed doors (see Lamont 2009; Harding 2011).

Figure 3 - Storage Hunters UK cast.



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The public imagination around self-storage has in many ways been fuelled by the growth in references to it in popular culture. “You must watch a lot of *Storage Wars*” has been a recurring refrain during the course of this research project. The premise of this television show (which has been replicated in spin-offs and international versions, including *Storage Hunters UK* – see Figure 3 above) is that when rent is not paid on a storage unit it is opened and the contents are sold off by an auctioneer. Inevitably there is something valuable in the unit, or the contents are particularly intriguing (i.e. full of spy equipment).

⁵ According to parliamentary statistics, the number of British companies has increased from 3.5 million in 2000 to 5.7 million in 2017 (Rhodes 2017, p. 4).

Whilst some stores do auction off the contents of abandoned units this show is entirely staged and gives a false idea of what people actually store in self-storage.⁶ Self-storage facilities have also been popular settings for thrillers and horror, playing-up the image of their stark uniformity, poorly lit corridors and eerily empty premises. Good examples of this are the 1991 movie *Silence of the Lambs* and comic series *Self Storage* (see Figure 4 below). The other main characteristic of self-storage which is utilised in popular culture is that no one knows what is stored inside except the user. A particularly memorable scene towards the end of the television series *Breaking Bad* shows a huge pile of money that has been hidden away in a self-storage unit, safe from adversaries and the authorities (see Figure 5 below).

Figure 4 - Pages from *Self Storage* comic, Issue 1



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Illicit activities are a problem that has troubled the self-storage industry – by providing people with a private space, they can get to stuff without staff or other users being any the wiser. HM Revenue and Customs regularly seize illegal tobacco and alcohol from self-storage units (see Jones 2018). The murdered bodies of Kathryn Chappell (in Manchester in 1993) and Jane Longhurst (in Brighton in 2003) were both found in self-

⁶ Most stores simply hire skips to dispose of the contents of abandoned units because there is rarely anything of monetary unit inside and they need to make the unit available to rent again as quickly as possible.

storage units (Lamont 2009). And between 2003 and 2004, a terrorist cell stored a bag of ammonium nitrate, which can be used to make explosives, at a London branch of Access Self-Storage. This led to the conviction of five men with links to al-Qaeda following a police operation that involved replacing the warehouse receptionist with an undercover agent but also highlighted concerns that self-storage is vulnerable to terrorists (Summers 2007). Most self-storage companies require their customers to provide photo ID, full contact details and copies of utility bills before they can rent a unit. They must also sign a disclaimer in which they waive their rights if they have stored anything illegal or flammable. The security of possessions is therefore as much dependent on the users following the rules as it is the wire fences, key-coded doors and alarms. The safety of possessions in self-storage was very recently brought to question when a fire at a self-storage unit in Tottenham, North London, claimed everything inside leaving some of its customers with only minimal insurance to replace entire households, lifetimes and livelihoods (Smithers 2018).

Figure 5 - Still from 'Gliding Over All' S05E08 of Breaking Bad aired 02/09/12.

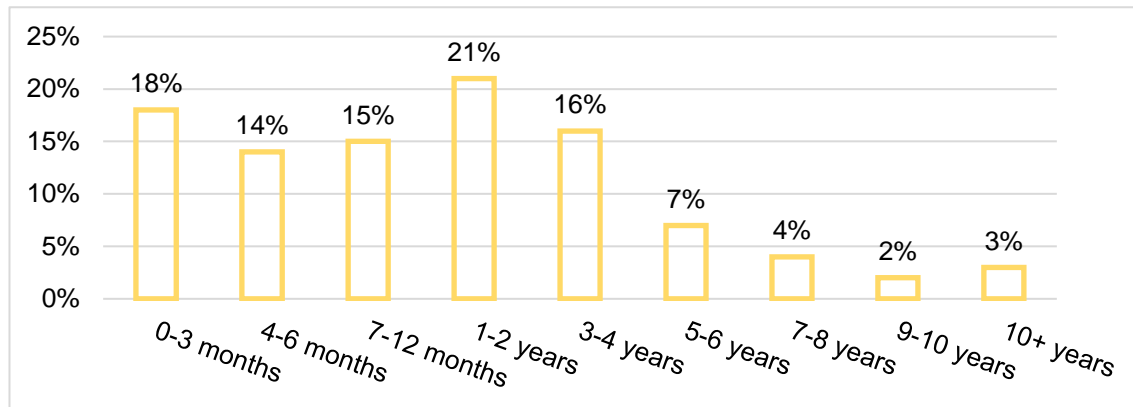


"Breaking Bad" Courtesy of and © 2019 Sony Pictures Television, Inc. All Rights Reserved

The perception of self-storage as secure, reliable and (increasingly) necessary seems to be intact despite devastating fires, criminal activity and thrillers because demand is continuing to grow, and with it our relationship to self-storage is changing. For many people self-storage is a short-term, temporary solution to a pressing need. Others, however, use the space as more of a permanent satellite and integrate it into their everyday lives. More than half of the users interviewed for the Self Storage Association Annual Survey (2018) said that they have been renting their current storage unit for at

least a year and almost a third have kept their unit for three years or more (see Figure 6 below). There have been instances of users who routinely visit their units to drop-off, pick-up and use their things, such as a woman who keeps her clothes in a west London storage unit and goes there every morning to get dressed for the day, as if it was her own walk-in wardrobe (Cohen 2018).

Figure 6 - Length of stay in current unit (SSA UK 2018, p. 40)



It is the everyday, routine uses in response to events throughout the life course that the industry believes will bring customers back time and time again. In an interview with the Financial Times, Tom Hayward, at the Big Yellow in Nottingham, describes how the self-storage industry likes to think long-term (Cohen 2018). He sees students – a key source of summer business – as potential customers for life, “They’ll need storage again and again” he said. “Boy meets girl, boy’s stuff ends up in storage. Buying their first property, then perhaps first child. Later on, perhaps going into an old people’s home”. A young person could end up renting a self-storage unit five occasions over their lifetime. To think that we could chart the progression of over lives in this way, moving possessions in and out of self-storage with each transition or event, as they fall in and out of relevance or significance, is an interesting way to frame materiality over the life course.

From the context presented in this section we can see that self-storage is a social and cultural phenomenon with far-reaching motivations and consequences, so it is surprising that academic inquiry into its use is currently non-existent. The industry typology of the ‘4D’s’ of self-storage is very simple and unlikely to account for the diverse and nuanced motivations for and experiences of using self-storage. It is important to explore the new geographies of self-storage at this moment in time because its growth looks to have come about as a symptom of larger material afflictions in Western society. Over-accumulation is incompatible with the amount of space we have in our homes and how we choose to order them. So much so, that in the words of Arnold and Lang (2007, p. 33), “today, the home goods storage crisis has reached almost epic proportions”. Self-storage is advertised as the antidote and a way of control our burgeoning material

convoy, as well as to enable flexibility, uncertainty and mobility, but is it in fact exacerbating the problem? What does the rise in self-storage tell us about how we acquire, cherish and dispose of things? Are we becoming a nation of self-storers?

1.3 Unpacking geographies of storage

Over the last two decades there has been a growing body of literature that builds upon and complements established understandings of consumption as relating to consumer choice, acquisition and utility. This has led to a more holistic conceptualisation that encompasses ordinary spaces and practices of material culture (Gronow and Warde 2001; Gregson 2007; Holloway and Hones 2007; Jacobs and Smith 2008; Crewe 2011; Hurdley 2015). Research on everyday practices in the home, reframed as ‘ordinary consumption’ by Gronow and Warde (2001), have previously been championed by feminist scholarship. These studies focused upon the activities that women carry out in the home which are devalued and hidden from view (see DeVault 1991). These accounts paved the way for a renewed focus upon consumption in the home as part of the enactment of everyday life. This thesis contributes to this work by extending the idea of consumption to encompass the period of an object’s life when it is in storage.

A significant strand of this research has gone on to study how family, and relational identities more broadly, are a collection of everyday practices (such as display and home-making). The implications of this is that identity practices are displayed and that display is an identity practice. This can clearly be seen in Hurdley’s work on mantelpieces (2013) and Rose’s study of family photography (2010), both of which bring material practices in the doing of relationships to the foreground. Rose (2010) found that the practices surrounding family photographs range from taking, printing, dating, storing and displaying to looking at and circulating. Putting particular photos in frames and on walls is an act of display, but so is showing and talking through a family album. The latter happens in relation to storage, where photos and albums are put away out of view for the majority of the time. Similarly, whilst Hurdley (2013) focuses upon the items placed on the mantelpiece, these are understood by her participants as in relation to things that are not there, those in storage. So, as Woodward (2015, p. 219) states, “things that are made visible and are able to be put on display are always in relationship with that which is stored away – either as a deliberate act of concealment or through reasons of space”. Finch (2007) argues the choice of what to display is an act of conveying to others which relationships matter. However, as has been shown in work with wardrobes this over-emphasises the public presentation of self (see Woodward 2007), and the process of putting and keeping stuff in storage is an equally important relational practice.

There has also been a general trend towards giving more value to the downstream practices of consumption including repair (Gregson et al. 2009), inheritance (Finch and Mason 2000), second-hand cultures (Gregson and Crewe 2003) and divestment (Hetherington 2004; Gregson et al. 2007b). Crewe (2011, p. 27) argues that value and significance can emerge through practices of discarding just as much as through production and purchase. Throwing away, giving away, passing-on and selling are attempts to work out what to do with particular things by drawing on frameworks of meaning (Gregson et al. 2007b). Hetherington (2004) identifies that removal is only one form of disposal that sits alongside storage as well as abeyance, return and haunting. He recognises that a third space is sometimes mobilised in disposal, the threshold itself which is “liminal, betwixt and between, itself uncertain and anomalous” (2004, p. 162). As Hetherington (2004, p. 170) goes on to argue, the conduits of disposal are effectively (storage) spaces in which we can manage absence through practices of ordering and placing. Issues of disposal, then, are not just physical but representational and leads us to question how society deals with the “haunting presence of exclusion” (Munro 1998, p. 148 in Hetherington 2004, p. 163) that is an inevitable part of routine and ordinary consumer activities.

Storage, therefore, emerges as a space and stage in practices of ‘living with things’ (Gregson 2007) which can be viewed in opposition to display and a part of processes of divestment but also significant in its own right. Tilley (2001, p. 264) describes how “a new shirt may at first be reserved for special occasions, then used for painting or gardening and finally become a series of cleaning cloths” and from a processual perspective we can appreciate that things can have radically different meanings according to the stages that they have reached in their lifecycles. Likewise, where objects are used, displayed or stored can tell us a lot about their ‘place’ in an individual’s life (see Gregson and Beale 2004). However, scholarship in this area is not particularly well developed. Cwerner and Metcalfe (2003, p. 230) called for theories of consumption to take note of “the part of many objects’ lives when they are hidden away or stored”. More recently Woodward (2015) has argued that the definition of consumption should recognise items that are dormant in addition to those that are currently being used. She argues that by acknowledging accumulations of objects that have slipped out of use or been pushed aside we can better “explore the ways in which things allow us to enact, construct or even dismantle our everyday relationships” (Woodward 2015, p. 218).

Through engagement with the empirical data this thesis approaches self-storage in four different ways. First, it conceives self-storage as illustrative of the categorisation of objects, space and (in)actions. Categorisation, on the one hand, is dependent upon how the object is valued in terms of potential use, monetary value or as a vehicle of memory.

On the other hand, categorisation is perceived spatially. For example, clutter and mess are considered to be 'matter out of place'. In order to put 'everything in its place' the storage space must also be considered as appropriate, matching the object with the space. However, the use of storage to hide and control excess materiality is also subject to categorisation in relation, and opposition, to more extreme forms of consumption such as hoarding. As a consequence of these spatial, temporal and moral classifications self-storage can be constructed as the 'antidote' to inappropriate, excessive and unruly forms of materiality.

Secondly, this thesis explores the dormant but contingent status of stored objects in self-storage. Doing so brings to light the significance of gaps, pauses and interruptions in the lifecycle of objects and attests equally to the period of stasis and its processual nature. Objects in self-storage are experienced as contingency for potential use and possible versions of self or imagined social futures, which are uncertain or under negotiation. Placing objects into self-storage keeps them out of sight and out of the way 'in the meantime' whilst the circumstances necessitating their storage unfold, thereby delaying decisions until their fate is clearer. Stored objects are simultaneously dormant and suspended between states and also transforming from one status to another. Therefore the space of self-storage can be mobilised in the disposal of ambiguous items.

Thirdly, self-storage is conceived as a means to bridge between circumstances and identities, particularly those where futures are uncertain, or where the place of things is under negotiation. What people take with them and what they leave behind are important choices in experiences of mobility. Self-storage enables a way to detach and be free from the weight of possessions but also provides comfort in knowing that 'home' is situated in what has been stored. Immobilising objects in the face of mobility and instability keeps options over them open whilst creating a temporal bridge and connection between past and potential versions of self.

Finally, this thesis demonstrates that the use of self-storage can be understood as way to consolidate biographical objects. These items materialise personal and social pasts and through their placement can anchor and stabilise identity in space. Stored objects are utilised to remember and curate past identities which have value in memory-work and the ongoing project of self, thereby acting as lines of connection from which transformation can be mapped and consolidated. The movement of items in self-storage brings these acts of preservation and mooring to the forefront, supporting the curation of material biographies and reproducing intergenerational bonds of care.

The overall aim of this research project was to form an understanding of what self-storage units signify including and besides their storage function. In order to do this a

couple of research questions that are sensitive to the possibilities of the project were formulated and are listed below:

1. What is the place of self-storage within life transitions, trajectories and events?
 - a. How does self-storage enable possible futures and mobilities, and also secure personal and social pasts?
 - b. What is the role of uncertainty in decisions on what to keep, store and dispose of?
2. In what ways does the use of self-storage indicate a changing relationship with possessions?
 - a. How does self-storage reinforce dominant discourses of tidiness and materialism, and is conceived as an appropriate way to manage the household?
 - b. To what extent is self-storage a necessary space in the lifecycle of things?

This project adds to existing literature that unpacks the place of storage in everyday life, relating both to routine practices and distinct periods of transition (i.e. moving house), trajectories (i.e. growing up, growing older) and events (i.e. bereavement, divorce) that occur over the life course. However, it also extends research beyond the domestic sphere to the new geographies of storage found in self-storage units. By foregrounding materiality this thesis examines how experiences of uncertainty, which necessitate self-storage use, can be seen to inflect upon past, present and future identities and relationships that are materialised in stored possessions. Additionally, following Cwerner and Metcalfe (2003, p. 229) who argue that “storage is the key to understanding how people create order in the home and in the world” it explores how self-storage works with and against attempts to categorise, order and anchor possessions.

1.4 Thesis outline

In Chapter Two I present a review of literature relevant to this project. After a brief discussion of the re-materialisation of social and cultural geography, I outline how objects can be understood as ‘biographical things’. Then, homing in on storage, I provide a brief overview of pertinent literature on the home in order to situate self-storage as a site related to domestic practice. This is followed by a discussion of some of the key theorisations in/around/of storage practices and spaces. My aim here is to show how storage cannot be viewed in isolation but also how it is a distinct and complex material practice. Given the location of self-storage beyond domestic spaces, the latter is particularly important as self-storage is a separate but connected space to the home.

Next, I synthesise conceptualisations of self in relation to material objects and storage and finish the chapter with a discussion of how stored objects are instrumental in stor(e)ying the self.

Chapter Three outlines my methodology. First, I introduce ethnography as the methodological underpinning of my data collection. Then I move on to detail the process of negotiating access to potential participants, the recruitment materials and the practicalities of organising and conducting interviews. In the next section I reflect on interview methods and combining object-elicitation into interviews at self-storage units, as well as how the data was recorded, analysed and written up. I conclude by considering the ethical decisions taken in the design of this research, and pay particular attention to the place of emotion in interviews and the research project more broadly.

I present the findings of my analysis in Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven. I begin by considering the ways that research participants were observed to be engaging in practices of categorisation of their possessions, storage spaces and (in)actions. I argue that self-storage emerges as a way to create order in their homes and in the world by displacing and systematically ordering 'matter out of place' through the hierarchical placement of possessions. As well as clutter and mess, the 'excesses' of collecting and hoarding, which are also perceived to be 'out of place' in the domestic sphere, find an appropriate home in self-storage. However, as well as controlling possessions, participants highlight the danger of having too much storage space as self-storage is seen to also enable the acquisition of more things without consequence.

In Chapter Five I discuss how objects stored in self-storage act as contingency during periods of transition and change in participants' lives. Here I suggest that participants were highly sensitive to the potential value and use of their (currently) dormant things, and in response to this delayed decisions until circumstances altered in a way that made their fate clearer. This chapter extends our theorisation of consumption to recognise the significance of gaps, pauses and interruptions in the lifecycle of objects and argues that self-storage is a necessary space in the keeping and divestment of things.

Chapter Six is concerned with how self-storage stores those things which are required to bridge individuals and families between different circumstances, particularly those where futures are uncertain or under negotiation. From experiences of participants moving abroad and moving homes I argue that self-storage both enables mobility and creates stability. This chapter exposes the importance of the curation, preservation and storage of material things that root our growing and evolving conceptions of self as they change over the course of life transitions and events.

Following on, Chapter Seven is concerned with how the storage of 'biographical objects' in self-storage consolidates and secures identity through periods of change. The chapter makes visible the complex ways that people use possessions in the remembrance and curation of past identities, which have value in ongoing identity practices. I argue that whilst acts of preservation and mooring of mementoes of 'life-so-far' occur throughout the life course, it is when they are sorted, stored and re-engaged with in the space of self-storage that these practices are brought to the forefront.

In Chapter Eight I draw together the conclusions from my empirical chapters and discuss these in the context of the questions that prompted this research. I comment on what my study has revealed about the spatial, emotional and temporal relations between objects, identity and the domestic sphere. I suggest that by unpacking the experiences surrounding self-storage use it is possible to understand the role of stored materiality in securing pasts, ordering the present and enabling futures. I also offer some reflections on where research on this topic might usefully go next in order to develop the ideas presented here.

2 Literature review

Stationed along motorways, retro-fitted into former factories and squeezed into inner city plots, self-storage is a brightly-coloured reminder of the excess materiality of life. In some ways, like hotels for things, people unload their belongings from the backs of vehicles, stack them on trolleys and push them to their allocated room along dazzling, sterile, windowless corridors. By warehousing our things, we can move or stay, risk or secure, grow or shrink. This thesis sheds light on these curious spaces, the containment of contemporary society, which have been hidden in plain sight.

The emphasis on display, framing, presentation, performance and movement has created a bias in social and cultural geography, and material culture studies more broadly, that fails to account for that which is hidden, invisible, forgotten and liminal (with the notable exception of Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003). There has been an over-emphasis on the public presentation of self but the significance of storage should be acknowledged as an equally important relational practice contingent on complex frameworks of meaning. This has been already proven to be the case in studies of discard and second-hand consumption (see Gregson and Crewe 2003; Crewe 2011), that emerged following calls to attest to 'ordinary consumption' (Gronow and Warde 2001). In any case, the visible is always in relation to that which is stored away and this relationality should be better understood so to better grasp how materiality - whether used, displayed *or* stored - is capable of narrating a person's life. Therefore stored materialities, and the practices which surround its placement, should be included in definitions of consumption.

In this chapter I provide an overview of the literatures which have informed my research questions and shaped the way in which I have sought to address them. First, section 2.1 positions this research within the growing body of work that attempts to 're-materialise' social and cultural geography and outlines the approach to material culture which this thesis takes. The next section, 2.2, 'homes in' on storage by summarising the relevance and application of home studies to this research. Then section 2.3 brings together existing scholarship that addresses the practices in/of/around storage, producing an image of storage as implicated in practices of hiding, forgetting, placing, caring and sorting, attempts to combat clutter and lingering. This overview brings to the foreground the place of storage within the life of things and living with things. Following on, section 2.4 synthesises existing scholarship which considers the value of stored possessions in

ongoing projects of the self and social relations, taking forward and building upon the argument that ‘we are what we own’. Examining research which has researched materiality of ‘life so far’ and ‘life to come’ the section works through personal records, role transition, possible selves, family home-(un)making and social pasts, presents and futures. Finally, section 2.5 explores how storage has been storied in previous research, before the research methodology for this project is outlined in chapter 3.

2.1 Things that matter

2.1.1 Re-materialising social and cultural geography

This research follows efforts to re-materialise social and cultural geography (Jackson 2000; Lees 2002; Kearnes 2003; Anderson and Tolia-Kelly 2004). The ‘return to matter’ as a reaction to the dematerialising trends of the ‘cultural turn’ was a call for a return to material ‘things’ as opposed to discourse, narrative, semiotics and the visual. These ideas had dominated the academic imagination since the early 1970s when the cultural turn had shifted emphasis away from a positivist epistemology and towards a focus on meaning. What followed, was a revitalisation of geography by the development of a succession of critical perspectives over the 1980s and 1990s, including feminist and post-colonial geographies. Though these trends were welcomed, and are now well integrated into the discipline, they did not escape criticism. Nicky Gregson warned that the over-emphasis on meaning, identity, representation and ideology was in danger of side-lining studies grounded more firmly in material culture (1995, p. 139). Studies of material culture had long been part of traditional readings of cultural geography, and had received their own criticism as ‘object fetishism’ (Duncan 1990, p. 11) and in Gregory and Ley’s words “a celebration of the parochial [and] a contemplation of the bizarre” (Gregory and Ley 1988, p. 116). However, as Jackson outlines, “there are good reasons for taking material culture seriously” (2000, pp. 10, 13), including the analysis of processes of commodification, social differentiation and the attribution of symbolic value.

Following its revalorisation, materiality has been important in investigations of the everyday, the past and the geographies of ‘becoming’ because it is both “tangible and intangible, visible and absent, decayed and in the process of becoming, evoking sentimentality and mundaneness” (Tolia-Kelly 2009, p. 500). Material cultures represent a focus on the ‘thingyness’ of the ‘bump-into-able’ world (Kearnes 2003), which are central to various forms of human experience and action. Scholarship responding to the material (re)turn has spread to such an extent “that its edges can already barely be glimpsed” (Anderson and Wiley 2009, p. 318). Most recently this work has explored: **spaces** such as workplaces (Hurdley 2015), pet cemeteries (Schuurman and Redmalm 2019) and virtual worlds (Kinsely 2013); **practices** including knitting (Price 2015), yellow-

sticker shopping (Kelsey et al. 2019) and the care of things (Denis and Pontille 2015); specific types of **material culture** such as mess (Löfgren 2017) and fashion (Crewe 2017); **politics** regarding sustainable consumption (Evans 2018) and conservation (DeSilvey 2017); the role of materiality in reflecting and constituting **identities** including childhood (Horton 2018), families (Holmes 2019), old age (Ranada and Hagberg 2014), and sexuality (Gorman-Murray 2017); the **mobilities** of motherhood (Boyer and Spinney 2016) and parcels (Burrell 2016); and **emotions** relating to inherited mementoes (Muzaini 2015), souvenirs (Haldrup 2017) and love objects (Moran and O'Brien 2014).

A particular clustering of consequence for this project has formed around a focus on meaningful practices of use and encounters with domestic objects and spaces. For instance a great deal of work has explored the significance of material culture in the home, from its placement and visibility in identity practices (Rose 2003; Gorman-Murray 2008; Peters 2011) to everyday experiences of 'living with things' (Gregson 2007). Similar concerns are also being addressed in mobilities studies which attempt to understand how the (im)mobility of possessions impact upon experiences of home and belonging (Parrott 2012; Burrell 2016). Material culture has also become a sustained focus within studies of the life course, including research upon childhood and parenthood (Hecht 2001; Boyer and Spinney 2016; Waight and Boyer 2018), marriage and divorce (Löfgren 1997; Goode 2007), and ageing and bereavement (Hallam and Hockey 2001; Smith and Ekerdt 2011). What this diverse scholarship has in common is a focus on how the biographies, histories and geographies of things and their (inter)connections with people and places really do matter (Miller 2010). This project seeks to locate stored materialities within the webs of meaning which place them as mattering (or not) in the lives of self-storage users.

Assemblage theory, actor-network theory (ANT) and affect theory have been at the forefront of geographers' revalorisation of the material (or indeed the socio-material). Given their foregrounding of the material, and the focus on this research on stored materiality it is worth pausing to understand and consider the application of each theory in turn.

Assemblage is a concept which goes back to French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and most notably their refined work *A Thousand Plateaus* (2013 [1980]). They define assemblage as a mode of ordering and linking multiple heterogeneous entities so that they form a whole. Assemblage theory draws our attention to how the relations between parts are reformulated by components internal to the assemblage but also by parts exterior to them (Anderson 2017). There are no pre-determined hierarchies and no single organising principle behind assemblages, so all entities – whether humans, animals, things or matters – have the same ontological status to start with (Müller 2015,

p. 28). However, Elizabeth Grosz (1994, p. 167) clarifies that “is it not that world is without strata, totally flattened; rather, the hierarchies are not the result of substances and their nature and value but of modes of organisation of disparate substances”. Scholarship utilising assemblage theory allows for ‘problems’ to be decentred from the ontologically discrete individual or object of study to the agency that emerges between these parts in relation. For example, Allen’s work (2015) which implicates mobile phones as a part of a more-than-human assemblage that creates sexuality, and Renold’s paper (2014) which focusses on how the ‘horse-girl’ assemblage as a means through which young people can experience their power and desire.

There are considerable parallels between assemblage and actor-network theory (ANT). ANT also conceives all entities as being on equal ontological footing from the outset and focusses on how the associations and relations established between them produce new actors and ways of acting. It is then the relations established between these entities that make the difference whether one becomes more powerful than the other (Müller 2015, 2017). Again, like assemblage, ANT foregrounds the processual nature of the socio-material, with Law specifying that “There is no social order. Rather, there are endless attempts at ordering” (1994, p. 101). Latour calls ANT a ‘sociology of associations’ (2005, p. 9) and it is these attempts to trace associations which underpins the approach. Geographers have appropriated ideas from ANT to understand how material things (instead of being passive objects) coproduce socio-material realities and have agency (see Sayes 2014). Of particular relevance to this thesis, Epp and Price (2010) take an ANT approach to investigate the biography of a dining table over time as it interacts and transforms a network also comprised of family practices, spaces and other objects.⁷

ANT has provoked a series of critical assessments, some of which also apply to assemblage thinking. Whilst on the same page with Latour (2005) about the co-construction between humans and non-humans, Haraway (1992) critiques him for failing to acknowledge the importance of a priori power inequalities – gender, race, class, ethnicity – in the shaping of actor-networks. In a similar vein, ANT ignores social context unless it can be traced within networks. Routledge (2008) also argues that ANT neglects how different actants have different capacities to shape networks. Coming down in favour of recognising the importance of a priori power asymmetries and intentionality leads Routledge to give humans greater importance than things. This common critique of ANT and assemblage theory – that they ignore that humans are capable of intentions and pursue interests whereas things are not – is a pertinent criticism for this research. Another methodological critique of ANT is its focus on “endless[ly describing] chains of

⁷ Epp and Price question why some cherished objects end up in storage whilst others retain an active role in our lives and found that the family table was still granted agency even while displaced.

associations without ever arriving at an explanation for the reasons and differences in network formation processes” (Müller 2015, p. 30 see also Collins and Yearley 1992). Following traces wherever they lead was simply not possible in this research which was bound by the infrequency of self-storage users’ visits to their units (see section 3.1). Furthermore, ANT fails to account for the how the researcher is implicated in fashioning ANT accounts of certain phenomena. As will be discussed in more detail, conducting research interviews imbued with emotion presents problems about researcher positionality, and discounting such an importance methodological issue does not work within this research project (section 3.4.4).

ANT and assemblage thinking have allowed researchers to articulate a sensitivity to the material interventions of matter in how agency and politics are constituted (Whatmore 2006), allowing a place for the ‘force of things’. This latter sentiment is the basis on which another materially-focussed theory – affect theory – is aligned. Affect is a set of dynamic processes which human and non-human bodies undergo as they encounter, experience and perform among other bodies. In this way affect theory prioritises the body as a means for making sense of the world. It seeks to address and examine evoked states which combine when our bodies sense and perceive, and in doing so render affects intelligible. Essentially affect is temporally prior to its representational translation into a knowable emotion or feeling, “index[ing] a realm beyond talk, words and texts, beyond epistemic regimes, and beyond conscious representations and cognition” (Wetherell 2012, p. 19). Counter to more anthropocentric, human-focused, accounts, affect theory has been used to address the relations between different material things more generally. For example, Anderson and Tolia-Kelly (2004) explore how material objects are related to and thought through, and Anderson and Wiley (2009) have examined the broader dynamics which underpin engagement and encounters between different material things.

Affectual geography’s drive to conceptualise the world beyond its representation has unsurprisingly been judged as “too abstract, too little touched by how people make sense of their lives, and therefore too ‘inhuman’, ungrounded, distancing, detached and, ironically, disembodied” for feminist and emotional geographers (Bondi 2005, p. 438 see also Nash 2000). I share this criticism as well as Pile’s problematisation of the approaches’ fundamental ‘hypocrisy’. Pile (2010, p. 9) identifies that because affects cannot be grasped, made known or represented this means that affectual geography is flawed, since “its archetypal ‘object of study’ – affect – cannot, by its own account be shown or understood”. Yet affectual geographers, drawing on non-representational theory, constantly evoke moments when affect is evident – be these smiles, laughter, anger, hope etc. – continually doing what they say cannot be done, thereby “re-present[ing] and represent[ing] *affect* – and *in language*” (Pile 2010, p. 17 original

emphasis). Giving an example, Pile points to Latham and McCormack (2009) who make use of photographs in their study of Berlin but do not recognise doing so as a fundamentally representational practice. By choosing not to apply affect theory to this research I am not discounting the affective capacities of objects, or indeed that affect can be felt and shared. However, since research participants would only be able to describe any affects they perceived by representing them to me verbally, there was no means for me to personally grasp or understand them without some intermediate translation. I was affected by the combined forces and vitality of the participants, stored objects and self-storage unit but for the purposes of this research my experiences were side-lined in favour of the participants who had first-hand experience and emotional connections to the object of study.

Each of the above approaches (assemblage, ANT and affect) could have been usefully applied to this research project but this thesis argues instead for a return to 'first generation materialism'. I suggest that the preoccupation of social and cultural geographers with forming new theoretical approaches and turns, has meant we rushed ahead from a crucial disciplinary junction where there is still much to be done and learnt. So, counter to 'popular trends', this thesis will return to the recent past, bringing in older sets of conceptual ideas around the capacities of material things to be affected by and impact upon the social and emotional lives of people, whilst also acknowledging the impact more recent paradigms have had. I emulate the earlier work of Rose (2003), Tolia-Kelly (2004) and Cook (2004) in particular, as well as those geographers (such as Crewe (2011); Peters (2011); Horton and Kraftl (2012)) who have continued to do important research in the style established during the first wave of scholarship following the material turn. In this way, and following Whatmore's argument (2006, p. 604), I argue that social and cultural geography should not only be influenced and generated by a succession of 'new' turns "but by the gathering force of constant re-turns to enduring preoccupations".

2.1.2 Biographical things

Appadurai's seminal book *The Social Life of Things* (1986) reasserted the prominence of the object in social enquiry. Along with other contributions in the volume (notably Kopytoff), Appadurai explores the conditions under which objects circulate in different regimes of value in space and time. He concedes that things have no meaning "apart from those that human transactions, attributions and motivations endow them with" but goes on to argue that in order to understand processes of inscription (in their forms, uses and trajectories) it is necessary to follow the objects themselves (Appadurai 1986, p. 5). Hence, inspired by Appadurai, this project takes the view that biographical objects have the capacity to act upon and inform transactions with human interpreters. Commodities,

as Igor Kopytoff (1986) points out, can be usefully regarded as having biographies, lives or life paths that can be followed and (partially) accounted for through their narration. In this processual view, the commodity phase of the life history of an object is only a fraction of its biography and objects may move in and out of the commodity state (just as they may move in and out of storage). 'Biographical objects' – enlivened by the memories and emotions endowed upon them – transgress the perceivable physical boundaries between persons and their things and show that possessions can go a long way in becoming surrogate selves (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986; Hoskins 1998). Things, therefore, stand in for the self thereby making it solid and knowable. For example, in *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives* six women and men narrate their own lives by talking about their possessions, using these objects as "pivots for reflexivity and introspection [that allow for] auto-biography, self-discovery, [and] a way of knowing oneself through things" (Hoskins 1998, p. 198). What are very ordinary domestic objects have the capacity to illustrate intimate connections between people and things (see also Brown 2001; Turkle 2007).

As well as holding on to and portraying identity for knowledge of the self, possessions also act as vessels for memories including, but also beyond, personal histories. Forty (2004, p. 182) states that objects can become analogues of memory, which though "formed in the mind, can be transferred to solid material objects, which can come to stand for memories and, by virtue of their durability, either prolong or preserve them indefinitely beyond their mental existence". The objects, then, become "the closest thing to the memory of the moment", their physicality acting as protection but also as "memory joggers to an emotional state or moment that their owners want to recapture" (Crewe 2011, p. 44). Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's book, *The Meaning of Things* (1981), derived from a realisation that questions relating to how people use material objects to define themselves had largely been neglected. As part of this, they discuss how psychic energy, or attention, is finite and therefore objects go some way in freeing up a person's mind whilst still allowing them to excavate and revisit the memory at a later date. However, it is only when engaging with the object that the memory it 'stands in' for is 'sparked' (Dant 1999). Hallam and Hockey (2001, p. 50) suggest that objects often build up layers of meaning over time and in doing so "form histories of social events, relations and emotions that can be reanimated, denied or otherwise manipulated, depending upon the context of the object's use". These ideas come together in Turkle's edited book, *Evocative Objects* (2007), in which essays reveal everyday objects as coming to matter through our intimate relations, as emotional and intellectual companions that anchor memory, sustain relations and provoke new ideas.

When an object takes on personal significance or value beyond its use value it can be said to have deviated from its expected trajectory (Hoskins 1998, p. 195). Singularisation, sometimes known as appropriation or decommodification, refers to how consumers personalise and integrate objects into their lives (Wallendorf and Arnould 1988; Douglas and Isherwood 1996; Epp and Price 2010). These things are deemed to be representative of their identity – can be viewed as being ‘me’ (Miller 1987). The transformation of an object in becoming a personal effect “superimposes one layer of experience over another so that the original public shared meaning becomes obscured by the personal meaning [a possession] takes on in objectifying individuality” (Attfield 2000, p. 143). The post-commodity object then can mediate social transactions related to identity formation, so, as Komter describes, “things are a way to define who we are to ourselves and to others” (2001, p. 60). Objects are gathered for their ability to portray the identity traits the person wants to display and this development of self, extended through things, “can serve as means of individual *differentiation*... that make him or her stand out from others” (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981, p. 33, original emphasis). Objects also relate an individual to a group at a larger scale, for example Tolia-Kelly (2004, p. 315) found that whilst objects relate to individual biographies, they “are simultaneously significant in stories of identity on national scales”. When objects are no longer portraying the identity a person wishes to display they may be disposed of, but many are hidden in storage spaces (perhaps including self-storage) where they are kept as personal records of who the person once was (see 2.4.1).

Objects are also decommodified when they are representative of significant relationships. Kopytoff (1986) contends that objects can be defined as non-human active social entities whose accumulated histories come about from the social interactions they are caught up in. Even when a person is removed from a situation his/her identity can be projected by the objects that, to a degree, contain his/her essence. Goffman (1971, p. 194) describes how some things are ‘tie-signs’, signifying social bonds even when neither end of the relationship is present (such as family photographs in the attic) or where only one end is present (like a tattooed name on an arm). Dant, extending Goffman’s work, conceptualises these objects as ‘mediators’, which carry “information, emotions, ideas and impressions that could have been communicated by speech, gesture, touch or expression” without relying on people being present (Dant 1999, p. 153). These material mediators, then, do not just contain evidence of relationships but also communicate them. Their communicative potential can be controlled by putting the objects out of sight, which may be desired following the loss of the person or relationship they materialise.

Since it is the non-physical elements of objects, the meanings “stored, layered and deposited within them” (Crewe 2011, p. 29), that makes them truly valuable and ‘biographical’ (Hoskins 1998), it follows then that their value as significant possessions can be seen as irrational to all but the possessor (what Benjamin (1999, p. 19) calls ‘connoisseur’s value’). Value can be seen to reside in unlikely places and is shaped by routine interactions with our objects (Gregson and Crewe 2003; Gregson 2007; Gregson et al. 2007b). The value of a thing “is irreducible to monetary worth, but rather rests in its social history and geography, in the traces of wear and use embedded within it, and in the particular category of good” (Crewe 2011, p. 29). The social, cultural, temporal and spatial specificity of an object is important because what something means depends on when, where, why and how we see it. By centralising those objects which have been pushed to the margins this research hopes to bring light to the everyday politics and practices of self-storage. Much of the work that has developed from Appadurai (1986) has considered the movement of things and what people do with them. However, as Woodward (2015, p. 225) highlights, dormant things challenge this perspective, “as their continued life cannot be reduced to movement as they rest in drawers and cupboards”. Indeed it is the storage of things, amongst other practices of placing, arranging, maintaining, cleaning, curating etc., which animates possessions and, in a sense, attributes to them an inner life (Ekerdt 2009, p. 65). Whilst things are stored they remain significant, retaining their ability to provoke and evoke emotions and memories and whilst not visible or in use they may continue to change state and status. Domestic storage is out of sight but often not far from hand, so the added distance created by storing objects in self-storage may have an impact upon relationships with possessions and require a different perspective on the ‘inner lives of things’.

2.2 Homing in on storage

This section brings together and examines the dominant, recurring and emerging ideas about the meaning of home. Leading from Saunders and Williams’s claim (1988) that the meaning of home reflects society around it, this thesis attempts to situate the growing phenomenon of self-storage within understandings and contemporary experiences of home. It does so in order to ascertain how self-storage may or may not be considered a home space, in terms of its space, contents, practices and meanings.

In the 1970s and 1980s mass home ownership and the ‘right to buy’ scheme led to questions around the influence of tenure in shaping the understandings and expectations of home and home life to the forefront (Allan and Crow 1989). At the same time, other influences were shaping questions about the meaning of home. These included the feminist critique of home as an androcentric conceptualisation (see Watson and Austerberry 1986; Madigan et al. 1990) and the growing influence of post-modernism

drawing attention to the centrality of home in the politics of identity (see Madigan and Munro 1996). Critiquing Saunders and Williams (1988) and building on the work of Watson and Austerberry (1986), Somerville (1989) set out a provisional conceptual construction of the meaning of home. He identifies the key signifiers of home as: shelter, hearth, privacy, roots, abode, and (possibly) paradise. Later, in the early 2000s, critical geographies of home began to challenge and develop upon traditional essentialist and humanistic visions of home (Blunt and Varley 2004; Blunt 2005; Blunt and Dowling 2006). In her review of the expansive literature on home, Mallett (2004, p. 62) questions “whether or not home is place(s), (a) space(s), feelings(s), practices, and/or an active state of being in the world”. This section will focus particularly on the idea of home as both material and imaginative, and how this conception moves us beyond the dwelling to other home spaces.

Blunt and Dowling (2006, p. 22) insist that home “is a material dwelling and it is also an affective space, shaped by emotions and feelings of belonging”. Likewise, Easthope (2004, p. 136) describes that “while homes may be located, it is not the location that is ‘home’”. The material and imaginative realms and practices of home are relational and intertwined. Relational geographies of home highlight home-making practices, in which home does not simply exist but is made through social and emotional relationships, and is materially created through the use and placement of objects. As Daniels (2001, p. 205) states “the material culture of the home is expressive of the changing relationships of its inhabitants [and reveal] the complexities, conflicts and compromises involved in creating home”. Daniel Miller’s work (1998b, 2001), along with Wood and Beck (1994) and others, conceive that the social world of the home is materially manifested and continually (re)created through everyday practices. This focus allows for the diverse ways people ‘do’ or feel home to be foregrounded, rather than attempting to define its essence (see Jackson 1995; Gurney 1997).

The key ideas of the security and privacy of home, in particular, have been nuanced through a focus on practice. Earlier scholarship, which conceived home as a haven (see Moore 1984), based its understanding on the distinction between public and private, inside and outside. According to this dichotomy, the home represents a secure and safe space, a private and intimate regenerative realm removed from public scrutiny and surveillance (Korosec-Serfaty 1984; Dovey 1985; Bachelard 1994; Dupuis and Thorns 1998). However, historically homes were never exclusively private or restricted spaces (see Hepworth 1999) and contemporary house design (such as open plan living) has further blurred the simplistic distinction. More recently work has critiqued the characterisation of home as a haven, arguing that it is an idealised view at odds with the reality of people’s lived experiences, particularly ignoring those who experience home

as a site of fear, abuse or alienation (see Sibley 1995b; Goldsack 1999; Manzo 2003; Valentine et al. 2003). In this vein, Burrell (2014, p. 156) identifies the role of material culture in attempts to guard against threats to the privacy and comfort of home from its porosity with the street. Even with this change in focus, Goffman's (1990 [1959]) theorisation of front and back stage continues to be used to understand how private spaces of the home are the location for particular behaviours. As is discussed later in section 2.3.1, parallels can be drawn between private and hidden spaces, which allow storage to be conceived as back stage.

Increasingly, understandings of home stress that whilst home is accommodated in a house or dwelling it is not necessarily confined to this place, and the boundaries of home can extend beyond its walls to the neighbourhood or beyond. For those who write on travel and home, such as Ahmed (1999), home and away are not oppositional experiences or concepts. In making this argument, she argues that home is not a fixed or bounded singular space of belonging and identity, but may be other places of relationships (see also hooks 1990; Massey 1992). Home then, for Ahmed (along with Gurney, Somerville and others), is a matter of the presence of affect or particular feelings. More recent literature concerning home *un*making also considers the temporal, material and spatial fluidity of the home (Brickell 2013; Baxter and Brickell 2014). Nowicki (2014, p. 788) describes how "home is made, unmade and remade across the life course, subject to a seemingly unending variety of factors: financial, conjugal, socio-political and so on". Therefore, as Baxter and Brickell note, fluid meanings of home are unavoidable since they are "part of the life course and [...] experienced by all home dwellers at some point in their housing biographies" (2014, p. 135). Due to the fluidity of the idea of home, it is possible to consider self-storage as a temporary home or an extension to the home. As outlined above, home can be considered to be a set of spatialised practices, therefore the next section of this literature review 'homes in' on the literature concerning different domestic storage practices.

2.3 Theorising spatial practices in/around/of storage

From research on the consumption of material goods (see Miller 1987) has emerged an orientation in material geographies towards practices of doing and having. Geographers and others have argued that to consume is to do far more than simply purchase things – it is to use them. Increasingly such work has gone beyond a preoccupation with how commercial goods are 'domesticated' through their consumption, opening up a wider range of questions about how we 'live with things' (Gregson 2007). For example, Gregson (2007) examines how domestic spaces are made through the maintenance and cleaning, provisioning, display, storage and 'ridding' of all kinds of stuff. Here, as is always the case, storage cannot be viewed in isolation but in combination and relation

to other material practices. Cwerner (2001, p. 83) highlights how “storage practices reveal that the use value of commodities is more complex than their actual use might suggest”. This is something also stated in Gregson and Beale’s conceptualisation of wardrobes as practice (2004). They suggest that we need to go beyond the understanding of the wardrobe as a form of museum which maps life through accumulated clothing, to think about how it is positioned within all clothing consumption practices enacted in households (wearing, tidying, storing, cleaning etc.). The wardrobe, they argue, is “rather more complex, fluid and entangled than the bounded, singular containers of materialised meaning which currently pervade our thinking” (Gregson and Beale 2004, p. 699).

Examining the current research into and around storage practices, the following section of the literature review notes the depth and breadth of this complexity. It offers suggestions for how we might learn from this existing scholarship to understand what people might be doing in self-storage and points out any limitations on how they are approaching their conceptualisations of the space. The first sub-section explores how storage spaces have been theorised as hidden and in a dialectical relationship with the visible spaces of the home. It draws particularly from the work of Bachelard (1994) and Goffman (1990). Following this the discussion turns to how material practices, including storage, are implicated in forgetting (Muzaini 2015). Attention then turns to both the deliberate and conscious placement of items to create order and follow categorisations, and the flow and dispersal of objects into spaces demarcated as storage. Discussion of the flow of things through periods of storage is continued in the following sub-section where attention is turned to caring and sorting, drawing from the important body of work on ‘living with things’ (see Gregson 2007). The focus is then centred on theories and discourses surrounding clutter and the idea of storage as ‘antidote’. Finally, this section brings together work that considers how to conceptualise lingering, dormant matter and the conceptualisation of storage as a liminal passageway (following van Gennep (1960)) and a ‘conduit for disposal’ (Hetherington 2004).

2.3.1 Hiding

In dialectical terms the hidden spaces of dwelling – cupboards, wardrobes, garages, attics and cellars – are said to draw their qualities, status and meaning from their relationships with visible spaces (Korosec-Serfaty 1984, p. 304). In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard (1994, p. 17) describes how the verticality of home assigns the attic and cellar with imagined meaning: the light and lofty attic is equated with clear, rational thought, whilst the cellar as a dark space in the depths of the home is feared and therefore associated with irrational, unconscious thought. These polarised spaces sit at the margins of the home, only accessible from unfamiliar and rarely used staircases

(Bachelard 1994, pp. 25-26). Korosec-Serfaty (1984, p. 310) further describes the marginalised spatiality of attics and cellars, suggesting that going into either “means being a little apart, a little outside the house, in a space traditionally considered secondary” but also being outside of the ‘lived spaces’ that are used in daily family life. Self-storage units are undeniably beyond and separate from the domestic sphere so it is reasonably likely that they could be thought of as spatially marginalising the objects stored inside. Roster (2001, p. 426) proposes that possessions which have found themselves in storage have “migrated further and further away from the innermost walls of the sanctuary of the home [and its] embodied self, to extremities that while still encompassing self, [are] more centrifugal”. Migration suggests a slow creep outward, but the circumstances leading to self-storage use are often abrupt so this conceptualisation of the place of stored possessions may not be applicable in all cases. The ‘displacement’ of possessions into storage, as will be discussed later in this section, is not necessarily a negatively-coded process. Indeed Bachelard (1994, p. 8) hints at the importance of these spaces, stating that if a house has “a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors [then] our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated”.

Goffman’s theory of ‘front stage’ and ‘back stage’, from *The Presentation of Self* (1990 [1959]), has been usefully employed to understand how storage is situated in the back regions of the home and therefore can be identified by its ‘marginality’ (Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003, p. 235), likewise self-storage units can be understood in this way. Using the metaphor of the theatre to frame the ‘performance’ of face-to-face social interaction, Goffman describes the interaction between actor and audience in an intentionally created ‘setting’ located front of stage, and the tools of impression (needed to prepare for the performance) located backstage, to discuss the interplay between public and private spaces. Due to their identity displaying properties framing the homeowner’s identity to visitors, there is a strict order to objects made visible in the home (Hecht 2001; Makovicky 2007). For example objects in living rooms (front stage) “regulate the amount of intimacy desired with guests” (Rechavi 2009, p. 133). Since the performer can “reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude” back stage (Goffman 1990, p. 116), it is here that we can keep those possessions which “can betray us and reveal things we would rather have remained hidden” (Crewe 2011, p. 28). Putting possessions into “the invisibility of storage” (Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003, p. 230) can be thought of as masking and situating aspects of the ‘self’ which we desire to keep from public gaze (see also Korosec-Serfaty 1984, pp. 314-315). In essence, storage allows for the keeping of objects that might be intrinsic to our sense of self but do not necessarily portray the image we wish to project in the present. The placement of objects into self-storage, which is further distanced from the lived spaces of the home, could extend our conceptualisations of the ‘back stage’ and its role in performing identity, family and the home.

The closet or wardrobe is an example of the modern rational organisation of space that “moderate[s] display without diminishing actual possession” and in doing so invests homes with signs of ‘moral propriety’ (Urbach 1996, p. 65). As will be discussed in the later section on clutter, the closet (as with other storage spaces) stores the ‘dirty’ and ‘profane’ which threaten to pollute the rest of the room (Douglas 2000 [1967]). Closet doors shut to conceal the interior and open to allow access, and are usually designed in a way that minimises their own visibility as much as possible presenting themselves as an absence. Yet, as Urbach (1996, p. 66) states, the closet “can only be so inconspicuous. The door cannot help but hint at the space beyond”. Self-storage unit doors are very conspicuous, brightly painted in ‘company colours’ which are in stark contrast to the plain corridors, so they stick out rather than blend into their surroundings. Whilst opaque and impenetrable these self-storage unit doors are overtly visible and therefore indicate the presence rather than hide the objects stored within. However, as self-storage is located outside of the domestic realm, possessions stored there are further removed from the lived ‘front’ spaces of the home. Further, self-storage, arguably unlike storage spaces in the home, can neither be defined as ‘back stage’ because of its location and function.

Woodward (2007) challenges previous scholarship’s over-emphasis on the public presentation of self at the expense of understanding those things that never leave where they are stored in the wardrobe (see also Banim and Guy 2001). Whilst the wardrobe is deemed to be a method for organisation that keeps things to hand, its “actual use also turns it into a space of darkness and forgetfulness” (Cwerner 2001, p. 86). As identified in numerous wardrobe studies (including Banim and Guy 2001; Cwerner 2001), guilt towards unworn clothes is not unusual and internal dialogues to this end are frequently expressed. The role of so-called storage experts (such as ‘clutter consultants’), who condemn unruly wardrobe practices and poor space management, will be explored in a later section of this chapter. Self-storage companies make use of this discourse, positioning the service as a tool bring materiality under control in their advertising campaigns.

2.3.2 Forgetting

Everybody forgets, as things fade away from everyday concern. This may occur unintentionally with old age, the passing of time, or simply being unable to remember everything, or consciously when triggering memories can have unwanted outcomes. When we study *how* rather than *why* individuals choose to forget it can be observed that material and embodied practices are used to obscure or even obliterate memories. The material world can be implicated in forgetting since as discussed earlier memories, whilst formed mentally, can be transferred to objects which then act as their triggers (Forty

2004; Tolia-Kelly 2004). Therefore “the removal, obliteration or evasion of these objects (at home or in one’s surroundings) represents efforts to relegate disturbing materials of the past to oblivion” (Muzaini 2015, p. 104). Muzaini describes efforts by his participants to deliberately forget upsetting memories of war, and conceptualised their activities as conspiring silences, enacting absences and embodying avoidance. *Embodying avoidance* pertains to strategies that involve avoiding certain places, so to avoid unwanted recollections associated with it. Maddrell (2016) discusses this in some depth in her paper attempting to ‘map’ the spatial dimensions of bereavement, mourning and remembrance. She describes how individuals and communities navigate places as emotionally ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’, developing a “highly refined sense of where it is (im)possible to go and what one might expect to confront emotionally in particular time-spaces” (Maddrell 2016, p. 177). The *enactment of absences* refers to the hiding, throwing away or rearranging of objects in space so that they are not lying around in visible spaces where they could spark memories of the past. In this way “the material world is thus manipulated to ‘exorcise’ or ‘manage’ troubling memories” (Muzaini 2015, p. 104). By storing ‘biographical objects’ out of sight one reduces the chance of ‘memoire involontaire’: “the sudden flash of recognition or correspondence between the present and past experiences produced through a sensuous impulse” (Makovicky 2007, p. 299)

Practices of discarding and hiding act to make objects *invisible* and their attached memories *absenced*. So “if objects are ‘prosthetic companions’, generating memory through haptic, visual or other forms of contact (Anderson and Tolia-Kelly 2004), their disappearance thus serves to eclipse that memory” (Muzaini 2015, p. 106). Muzaini (2015, p. 106) found that many of his participants who aimed to forget the war did so by either discarding their material triggers of memory entirely or keeping them out of sight. Both methods serve to render the war years forgotten by eradicating traces of the war from the materiality of the home. One participant shared how he had put away photographs of his family that were taken before the war which reminded him of a time when they were ‘so happy’, in order to forget how his father had died in the war. Whilst hidden to forget his loss, the photographs are too valuable to be discarded as they were a means for his children to know their grandfather. An appropriate space must be found to render these objects invisible but secure, and when this space can’t be found in the home self-storage may be the only option.

Forgetting can also routinely happen through the storage of objects in different ways. In *Clearing out a Cupboard: Memory, Materiality and Transitions*, Martin Kraftl describes how during the process of moving to a new house with his wife, sorting and packing became more and more fraught and they “became to care-less – to care less – about the material things we were throwing into boxes” (Horton and Kraftl 2012, p. 38). This

stuff mattered, but they could not remember why or how. As a result, these things could “be characterised by both ambivalence and by a very specific kind of forgetting. That is, we consider that they might have some kind of meaning (or use), but the memories concerning those material things have short-circuited” (Horton and Kraftl 2012, p. 38). Forgetting, but sensing a significant memory or previously imagined use is then just as vital as remembering when it comes to objects left in marginal storage spaces.

2.3.3 Placing

The keeping of things requires finding appropriate places to put them in the home or elsewhere. However, as Dion et al. (2014, p. 565) state, “putting things in their place is more than placing them in a specific location” since it also refers to the ‘place’ of things in our lives. The use or sentimental value of objects impacts upon their placement. The rationale for placement can alter as things fall out of use and/or favour. Mary Douglas (1993, p. 270) describes how the kitchen cupboard can contain a great variety of things which may be needed throughout the year, which are “mentally ticketed for different kinds of expected events”. She goes on to describe the organisation within the cupboard with the most precious items, only used on the grandest but infrequent occasions, stored safely out of reach on the highest shelves and the most everyday stuff, which is hardier and cheaper to replace, kept close to hand. Peters (2011, p. 249) found that whilst tourists may put some souvenirs on display in their homes, storage is also employed in attempts to retain the object’s ‘extraordinariness’. Some souvenirs are valued for their ability to perform the identity of a well-travelled identity and are generally put on prominent display in the front stage spaces of the home, whilst those which can transport the tourist to ‘another place’ or retain personal idiosyncratic memories are often placed backstage or are stored out of sight. The practice of display is further caught up with taste, negotiation and simply ‘living with things’. Hurdley (2013, pp. 135-136) describes how one of her participants felt her mantelpiece displays were undervalued by her husband, who had expressed that he would prefer his ‘horrible grey sports trophies’ to be brought out of storage and displayed rather than her collection of valuable and delicate Moorcroft pottery. This “war over space and matter” shows that there is contestation between “what is revealed, and what is concealed in boxes in the loft” (Hurdley 2013, p. 136). Whether as a deliberate act of concealment or because of reasons of space, things that are made visible and displayed are always in a relationship with those that are stored away (Woodward 2015, p. 219). However, Hurdley and Woodward don’t account for how this relationship could vary dependent on the type of storage space and how it is conceived. For example, the space of a self-storage unit may produce different relationalities with a mantelpiece than a display cabinet.

Beyond the storage spaces inside the home, Hirschman et al. (2012, p. 382) observed that their respondents had a clear set of rules placing certain things inside the home whilst other things were stored in the garage. The rules appeared to be that those things that collect or accumulate dirt (e.g. vacuum cleaners), or are placed in the dirt (e.g. gardening tools, outside furniture), or are used on dirt (e.g. bikes) are not to be stored in the house. Items that could be potentially dangerous (e.g. power tools, gas canisters), and therefore associated with another kind of dirt, i.e. poison, are also often kept out of the household. Marginal, extremities of the home – such as the garage – occupy a liminal space “between the *inside* cleanliness and purity of the home and the *outside* dirtiness, disorder and chaos of the yard and larger world” (Hirschman et al. 2012, p. 381). As such the garage can be understood to be serving as a liminal ‘way-station’ between clean and dirty, storing things to maintain the sanctity of the lived spaces of the home (Lefebvre 1991; Douglas 2000). Whilst often connected to or adjacent to the house there is a definite boundary between the home and garage – often a sturdy lockable door. In this way, the garage “serves as a physical ‘buffer zone’ between danger and safety, between tame and wild, between inside and outside” (Hirschman et al. 2012, p. 385). This distinction between storage spaces – attics and cellars as well as garages – and the inner rooms of the home is further identifiable by their functional, durable and undecorated interior. The self-storage unit is distinctly separate from the home spatially, but if conceived as an extension to the home may share characteristics of domestic storage spaces like the garage.

Not all storage is the deliberate and conscious placement of things. Cwerner and Metcalfe (2003, p. 235) describe how various spaces of the home go through different phases of use and then disuse and as this happens things are moved into these spaces and are often left or kept there. They give the example of table tops which can often become spaces for the momentary placing of things when they are not being used to dine or study on, but on the occasion they are reclaimed – say for entertaining visitors for a dinner party – the debris is rounded up and put somewhere ‘out back’. Similarly, Hurdley (2006) demonstrated that the mantelpiece can become a repository for everyday items such as appointment cards, keys and invitations. As Cwerner and Metcalfe (2003, p. 235) identify, “spaces of casual storage or ‘cluttering’ are found in places such as corners, on chairs or under tables, although there are also more permanent ‘out backs’, such as garages and sheds, attics and cellars, under-stair cupboards and back or spare bedrooms”. Referring back to Goffman (1990 [1959]), ‘out back’ is a phrase which is as much metaphorical as it is literal, but viewing the spatialisation of the home in this way problematises his notion of ‘back stage’. It is not simply a space for intimacy, privacy and self-reflection, but also a lesser used space where objects that are no longer central to the lives and identities of the inhabitants are stored. Things do not accumulate in self-

storage in the same way as they can in the home; removed from domestic space, the things placed there are deliberately stored, even if not packed with full certainty about their placement.

The placement of things also acts to mark them out as special. In *Negotiating the 'Place' and 'Placement' of Banal Tourist Souvenirs in the Home*, Peters (2011, p. 247) describes how a participant kept their collection of souvenir bookmarks stored away securely. If they “were placed in a way that did not demarcate them, the bookmarks would lose their special social place”, so by keeping them separate they maintained their position as different – as souvenirs rather than just bookmarks (Peters 2011, p. 247). The wooden box that contains the collection is part of the participant’s home, sitting permanently on a shelf in her bedroom. When closed it is ‘part of the furniture’, yet when sporadically opened the bookmarks specificity as objects from ‘other places’ is made apparent (Peters 2011, p. 249). Placing objects out of everyday sight in the home is arguably a method used to retain the ‘extraordinariness’ of their souvenirs but also acts to demonstrate (over time) that the objects are doing “nothing more than taking up space” (Peters 2011, p. 250). Conversely, using banal souvenirs such as tea towels for their everyday function means they can take on use aside from being a ‘reminder’. However, through their usage their ‘otherness’ can be eroded over time as they become part of the normal fabric of the home. What were once ‘out of place’ moves to being ‘in place’ when they are no longer ‘strange and lively’. Peters (2011) follows the trajectory of a souvenir as it is integrated into the lived spaces of the home but does not consider what might happen should it be placed back into storage. The (re)placement of something, which had taken on a ‘normal’ function and place in the fabric of home, into an unfamiliar space or context (such as boxed-up in self-storage) could (re)construct the item as extraordinary.

2.3.4 Caring and sorting

Cleaning, sorting and storing are among those routine activities in the home associated with the care of possessions, and are among those meaningful practices associated with ‘home-making’ (see section 2.2). Ekerdt (2009) calls the ongoing commitments to store, clean and animate things as the ‘labour of possession’. Caring for a possession is an investment of time and effort which is justified by the notion that it is being ‘saved’ “from decay and ‘extinction’” (Hecht 2001, p. 136). Cwerner (2001, p. 88) states that the wardrobe can be seen as “the *art of caring* for one’s clothes and adornments”. He goes on to conceive clothes “almost as ‘living things’ that need to be nourished and protected from various environmental factors. Light, shade, humidity and temperature are among those factors that affect the ‘lives’ of clothes” (Cwerner 2001, p. 88), something which differs between domestic spaces which are inside the home and on the margins, as well

as between domestic storage spaces and self-storage units. Alternatively, McCracken (1988a) theorises that the cleaning, display, and discussion of objects are 'possession rituals', overtly functional practices which have the additional effect of reinstating the consumer's claim to their possession. 'Grooming rituals', involving similar activities of maintenance, are then the means by which "individuals effect a transfer of symbolic properties" onto the object rather than simply being subject to the effect of the object upon them (McCracken 1988a, p. 87). Through this 'grooming' McCracken (1988a) suggests that a singularised and personal bond is created between an owner and their possession through embedding of meaning onto the material object. These practices of care for objects are, in many ways what Finch and Mason (2000) describe as 'treasuring' in relation to keepsakes. Through their research it was found that "people make objects they have inherited into keepsakes by 'treasuring' or 'cherishing' them, which involves a great deal more than 'just keeping' them" (Finch and Mason 2000, p. 146). These practices of treasuring include keeping objects close, using or wearing them, 'never parting' with them or having them on display in a central part of their home. The practice of storing, unlike treasuring, cherishing or saving, is not encircled by established ideas of morality. Although there are no great distinguishing characteristics between the types of objects people 'treasure' and those that they 'just keep', Finch and Mason (2000, p. 149) suggest that "the difference is in the way they are kept and thought and talked about". As Gregson et al. (2009) point out, the success or failure of object maintenance has profound consequences for the life of possessions, affecting their continued place in their owner's life or placement within the home.

Sorting, in combination with tidying, cleaning, washing etc., is a routine storage practice that constitutes home-making. The outcome of these mundane household practices can often lead to items being cast out and divested (Gregson and Crewe 2003; Gregson and Beale 2004). In their research Gregson and Beale (2004, p. 692) encountered households who routinely tidy and sort their clothes whilst attempting to place them in storage spaces, in ways which always produced a cast-outs pile. This was made up of unwanted and no longer used clothing, which would be kept ready for charity neighbourhood bag-drops. Other households in the study could be seen to be using the same charity bag-drops as prompts to go through and sort their things. Similarly, Hirschman et al. (2012, p. 381) found that the garage serves as a 'halfway house' for items waiting to be donated to charity. With this continual pattern of storing, wearing, laundering, tidying, sorting and divesting, Gregson and Beale (2004, p. 699) suggest that it is reductionist to think of wardrobes as only functioning as bounded sites of storage acting as repositories of meaning and memory. Rather, we should be open to an additional conceptualisation of the wardrobe as "more temporary, transitory, spatial junctures, holding-places in the lives of things" (Gregson and Beale 2004, p. 699). It is

productive to be open to the functioning and meaning of self-storage being similarly complex.

Our homes, according to Löfgren are “veritable jungles of objects” and thus through keeping, caring, rearranging, storing and sorting our possessions we must “devote a large amount of energy and resources to handling this abundance” (1997, p. 32). Regarding the day-to-day life of matter in family homes, Dowling (2008) identifies everyday contradictions between clutter and containment in open-plan homes in Australia. As she notes, relations with children’s toys during play and at rest are a part of broader ongoing negotiations between inhabitants and objects that are central to everyday processes of home-making. It often falls to mothers to continuously monitor and evaluate the place of children’s things within the household and routinely get rid of things which have amassed out of control or are no longer needed. Therefore, decisions based on the use, and monetary or sentimental value of objects are taking place on a regular basis. As Phillips and Segó (2011) note, a mother’s ability to be self-disciplined and discard their children’s things is in direct contradiction to the intimate connection she has with her children and, by extension, the possessions those children use. It could be seen, then, that these routine material practices are indicators of relations of care as much as they are strategies to manage the household.

In addition to the analysis of day-to-day forms of living with things, Marcoux (2001b) describes how moving house constitutes a key moment to sort through things which may have multiplied during an extended period of residency in one place. Moving, amongst other things, becomes a means to re-evaluate relationships and memories by bringing them back into consciousness when needing to make decisions about what is worth packing and what should be discarded (Horton and Kraftl 2012). Clearing out and packing an entire home and thereby sorting through a ‘lifetime’s worth of stuff’, is “a process of literally laying out, laying bare and laying *to bear* a lifetime past” (Horton and Kraftl 2012, p. 41). Moving and handling things brings them into a ‘heightened zone of scrutiny’, positioning them “to be looked at, felt, smelt, considered and thought out” (Gregson 2007, p. 164). In (re)encountering accumulations of household objects during “a moment of profound instability in the[ir] ordering and placement” (Gregson 2007, p. 34) our past and imagined future identities are exposed and reviewed. Gregson (2007) conceptualises this as the ‘gap in accommodation’, and it results in decisions that take into account the capacity of things to be re-contextualised in new circumstances. When moving to a new house requires the use of self-storage, feelings of instability may linger as objects remain out of the home context for longer. Prolonging the review-period may impact upon the eventual (re)placement of items in the home or move them towards the waste-stream.

Things come to matter more once they have survived episodes of sorting (Marcoux 2001b, p. 84), as the material and/or symbolic essence of a person or relationship is condensed into fewer objects. Miller (2010) identifies this phenomenon as the 'resume effect', in which sorting significant relationships (to people, places, events etc.) must be condensed to make way for mementoes of other relationships (see also Roster 2001; Gregson et al. 2007b; Miller and Parrot 2009). Plainly if more relationships have been lived through then each "has to be pruned back to one or two totalising mementoes in this thrift of memory" (Miller 2010, p. 149). Deciding what to keep and what to discard can be an emotional task often infused with care, concern and love (Gregson et al. 2007a). The relationships with objects can be felt even more keenly during the break down of a relationship, such as a divorce (see Löfgren 1997; Goode 2007), because sorting (Marcoux 2001b) is a forced activity. In this instance, memories and meaning can change from a happy imagining of a future to bitter resentment, and subsequently comes a process of 'ejecting and wasting the other' (Gregson et al. 2007a, p. 689). More generally, Horton and Kraftl (2012, p. 35) suggest that sorting through things that materialise memories, identities and relationships actually supports people through the significant life course event. Likewise, keeping items in self-storage may have a similar effect.

Marcoux (2001b, p. 80) identifies that, when moving house, the difficulty in sorting not only comes from evaluating and (potentially) separating from an object considered to have sentimental value, but also from determining how to go about the process: "what to begin with, where to start or which priorities to put forth". In a similar vein, Horton and Kraftl (2012) observe, that whilst the process of sorting and packing may begin with good intentions (to pass on, dispose and slim down possessions) there comes a time in many moves when having to deal with stuff (the quantity of which was previously hidden) grows tiresome or time runs out. As a result stuff is thrown in boxes containing an assortment of bits and pieces, deferring decisions on its fate until a later date, when the move is over and done. In reality these boxes of 'random stuff' linger, this haunting presence of incompleteness constituting an absent-presence that can be felt as an unacknowledged debt or sense of guilt (Hetherington 2004). The "hopelessness, stress and frustration that comes with knowing that the cupboard is *still* full of stuff" can then unsurprisingly mean we choose to avoid opening those cupboard doors (Horton and Kraftl 2012, p. 40). The integration of self-storage into the process of moving may have impacts upon the extent to which sorting is prioritised or handled.

2.3.5 Combatting clutter

Non-descript piles, heaps, stacks, accumulations of clutter, can be seen as ‘domestic driftwood’ (Löfgren 2017, p. 6) overflowing and blocking up the spaces, channels and flows into, within and out of households who are struggling to cope with the immensity of objects bestowed upon them by contemporary consumption practices (Cwerner 2001). Clutter has been conceptualised as ‘matter out of place’ because it defies and transgresses cultural categorisation and ordering (Gregson et al. 2007b; Dion et al. 2014). This scholarship follows the theory set out by Mary Douglas (2000 [1967]) in *Purity and Danger* (2000 [1967]), whereby any anomalous or ambiguous objects that threaten or, indeed, cross the boundaries of the socially produced system of classification are defined as ‘dirt’. Through a process of ordering the symbolic boundaries between categories of objects and “rejecting inappropriate elements” to a place that is deemed to be either ‘correct’ or ‘out’ socially desired norms of cleanliness and tidiness can be upheld (Douglas 2000, p. 35). Whilst Douglas’ analysis is critiqued for relying on a binary distinction between dirty/not dirty and in place/out of place (Hetherington 2004; Gregson et al. 2007b), it is a useful tool to understand clutter and mess. Tidiness, therefore, depends on two conditions: a set of classifications and transgressions of these.

Rybczynski (1986, p. 17) argues that ‘hominess’ does not equate to neatness, and calls for an acceptance of untidiness to counter replication “of the kind of sterile and impersonal homes that appear in interior design and architectural magazines”. However, there is a proliferation of messages – reinforcing that mess is bad and tidiness is good – by media including self-storage adverts, self-help guides, TV programs, and in-store and online displays of the ideal home. These, according to Dion et al. (2014, p. 566), “diffuse the normative vision of tidiness, showing the appropriate way to use, present and order household possessions” (see also Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003; Cheung and Ma 2005). By accepting this notion “that living in a tidy house is desirable in itself” (Dion et al. 2014, p. 567), we strive to recreate the ordering of objects in space we have seen, which in turn becomes ritualistic and habitual activity (Arsel and Bean 2013). If the vision of a tidy home is not conformed to and upheld this negative image is seen to transfer directly onto the homeowners who themselves are seen to be bad, non-loving partners and parents (Dion et al. 2014, p. 573). This propensity to view clutter (and overaccumulation) as almost sinful comes from the idea that “the underlying ontology of this clutter problem is that we *are* what we *own*, and if our belongings are a mess, then, by extension, so are we” (Smith and Ekerdt 2011, p. 380). When clutter is perceived symbolically as dirt it “provokes disgust and precipitates guilt, shame and embarrassment” (Douglas 2000; Belk et al. 2007, p. 134). Consequently being organised and in control over one’s possessions, is conflated with having a ‘better quality of life’ (Belk et al. 2007), a tidy house and a tidy mind.

Decluttering, sorting and organising those things which “threaten to engulf our home[s] and disrupt our lives” (Belk et al. 2007, p. 138) goes some way towards regulating clutter and mess. Domestic storage spaces have been noted in their utility for managing clutter, since it is another socially acceptable method to control the visibility of things, distancing them physically and mentally from everyday life (Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003; Cherrier and Ponnor 2010). Whilst storing possessions is “a major means of ordering things in space and time” (Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003, p. 229) they are not necessarily organised within the storage space itself. However, the contained “intimacy of ‘ordered disorder’” (Makovicky 2007, p. 302) is largely safe from prying eyes and as such storage enables moral and social norms both of tidiness and the ‘right amount’ of materialism to be upheld. Storage may be the ‘antidote’ to clutter and mess but there is a growing mismatch between the number of things and available storage space in the home. This has led to ‘non-traditional’ storage spaces (balconies, garages etc.) being turned over to storage, their functional slippage having a knock-on effect around the home as these spaces then fall out of ‘use’ (Arnold and Lang 2007; Hirschman et al. 2012). Arnold and Lang (2007, p. 23) state that this highlights the significant problem of inadequate storage space in contemporary western homes, which we can assume is likely to be connected to the growing prevalence and use of self-storage.

2.3.6 Lingering

A large proportion of the things in a household are used or engaged with infrequently (or sometimes never) which is indicated and perpetuated by their location in the marginal spaces of the home. Some objects pass out of routine interaction with their owners’ seasonally – such as winter coats and Christmas decorations – and others fall out of favour, style, time etc. with much more permanence. These objects may be placed in (or end up in) storage spaces during such lulls of engagement, only to be re-introduced at a later time, or may linger there indefinitely. In *Why Women Wear What they Wear* (2007), Woodward developed an understanding of clothing in the wardrobe as being temporally dynamic. Through wardrobe ethnographies she found that women kept items that ranged from those that had never been worn (see also Banim and Guy 2001), items that had been tried on but never worn, items that were worn rarely, to items that were worn all the time. From this, she constructed a typology of ‘active’, ‘inactive’ and ‘dormant’ clothing; conceptualising dormant as items that are not currently worn but are kept with the potential to be worn again. However, when Woodward went on to pilot a study on other domestic storage spaces (2015) she realised that it was reductive to think of dormant things as being kept only for their potential future uses. She expanded her definition of dormant to incorporate things “where future possible uses may not have been considered – items that have accidentally ended up in a cupboard, or been deliberately kept as they are replete with memories or associations with others” (Woodward 2015, p. 222).

Stored objects may be dormant for a long period of time before their use is dictated by new circumstances (Cwerner 2001, p. 83). In one example from her pilot study, Woodward (2015, p. 228) describes how a spare mattress, used only when visitors came to stay, had to be stored under the bed because not only was there enough space there, but it also had the effect of concealing it. Propping the mattress against the wall would have been unsightly and have made the house “look like a temporary dwelling or student digs rather than a ‘home’” (Woodward 2015, p. 228). The contradiction between being able to temporarily ‘home’ visiting friends and family, and yet produce the image of ‘home’ meant for the majority of the time the mattress had to be “unseen and hidden” (Woodward 2015, p. 228). Home-making, in this instance, required the capacity to store and conceal the mattress, as much as to have it available to use. In this example, dormancy is of a cyclical nature, “a phase that weaves in and out of the thing being used” as the mattress moves in and out of being stored under the bed (Woodward 2015, p. 229). This is a shifting and temporary phase in the life of things, different from those things which are stored as they near the end of their lives and, perhaps, disposal.

The majority of things in storage can be described as mixed-state: between use and divestment, inside and outside, dirty and clean, generations, displayed and private, currently not useful but potentially useful in the future, or sacred and desacralised (McCracken 1986). Whilst holding dislocated multi-state items in abeyance, storage becomes a space in which objects “become suspended in both space and time as they move from one category of meaning to another” for an indefinite period of time (Hirschman et al. 2012, p. 385). Re-engagement and reincorporation can occur, but there is an over-riding sense that storage is where objects belong for the last phase of their lives in the home (Woodward 2015). As Hetherington (2004, pp. 166-167) describes, it is not “just the bin that is the conduit for disposal [but also] the attic, the basement, the garage, fridge, wardrobe, make-up drawer, or cupboard under the stairs, even the public rooms of the house itself”. It stands to argue that self-storage could also be the final stop for objects on their way to disposal. In many cases storage is a transition point to divestment, and by objects being assigned there it signifies their future absence. Gregson and Beale (2004, p. 699) observed that wardrobes “facilitate exitings and are therefore as much about passages, flows and divestment as they are about accumulated memorials and mementoes”. Similarly, Hirschman et al. (2012, p. 381) describe the garage as liminal space serving as a ‘hospice’ that enables the rites of passage for both people *and* their possessions. Following Van Gennep’s work *Rites of Passage* (1960), Hirschman et al. (2012, p. 371) suggest that mixed-state objects “pass through an ambiguous phase [...] and then re-emerge or re-integrate into another role or status”. This multi-stage phase, far from a movement from A to B, includes a diverse set of processes which impact upon the transitions’ direction and permanence. As Hirschman

et al. (2012, p. 371) explain, “states of liminality and the transformations which occur within them may be either permanent and unidirectional or temporary and cyclical”. For stored objects this can mean a number of things: (1) a possession’s time in storage can be temporary and it will return to ‘the world of the living’ to be ‘used’ again in the home; (2) this reintegrated possession may return to storage for another period or periods; (3) a stored object can undergo a ‘cooling off’ period (Roster 2001, p. 429) with ‘divestment rituals’ taking place so it can become capable of being divested or disposed (McCracken 1986; Gregson and Crewe 2003; Gregson 2007); or (4) the object could remain in storage permanently.

As time passes, bonds may unravel between person and possession. Hirschman et al. (2012, p. 375) describe that whilst objects in storage are “kept out of sight [they are] not out of reach or thought”. However, because they are hidden away, it is very easy to forget about stored possessions, and as Hetherington (2004, p. 167) expresses “the locations of something made absent may change its character”. By relegating something to storage it allows “oneself time to grow indifferent to it” (Korosec-Serfaty 1984, p. 313). When an object is (re)found in a storage space it is likely that distance, both mentally and psychically, may have altered the attachment felt towards it as a result of the bond between a person and object ‘cooling’ off (Roster 2001; Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005). As a result “remembrance is often matched with astonishment” at the apparent irrationality of choosing to store the object in the first place (Korosec-Serfaty 1984, p. 313). According to Hallam and Hockey (2001, p. 3) “memory practices and experiences shift over time as perceptions of the past are reworked in the context of the present and in anticipation of the future”, and we can imagine this happening to stored objects as they ‘cool’, and shift status and form. Since we are tied to our possessions and the memories and relations they materialise, it is not a surprise that “emotional ties to highly cathectic objects may [linger and] take years to dissipate” (Roster 2001, p. 425).

As well as enabling divestment, storage also hinders and delays it. Roster found that so long as belongings do not present problems or costs associated with their storage her informants “seemed content to ignore unwanted, infrequently used, or forgotten possessions” (2001, p. 427). Armed with inertia, whilst the benefits of possession continue to outweigh the costs – space, time, money, effort and inconvenience – stored and hidden objects are safe from becoming ‘candidates for disposal’ (Roster 2001). By utilising or making space in the home, or renting self-storage units one of these ‘costs’ of storage is allayed, and the probability of disposal decreases (Jacoby et al. 1977). Challenging the common argument that we live in a ‘throwaway society’ Gregson et al. (2007a, p. 683) suggest the term is used “all too glibly”, since their participants could be seen to be going out of their way not to dispose things via the ‘waste stream’, preferring

instead to hold onto and store goods until a better divestment route could be found (or holding onto them indefinitely). As we will now move on to see in the next section, to 'redeem' items from the 'unacceptable' category of waste is to let them linger for reasons that are not always functional but dependent on their meaning and memories (Attfield 2000, p. 145).

2.4 Putting 'the self' in self-storage

Identity, we are often told, is related to what one *appears* to be. Everything from our home decoration to our clothing is chosen to display and express our identity (Gullestad 1995; Hockey et al. 2015). Following on from his theoretical metaphors from the 'front', 'back' and 'setting', Goffman (1965, p. 246) later spoke of 'identity kits' which consist of both clothes and make-up and also the "accessible, secure place to store these supplies and tools". In doing so he highlights that identity is not simply what one carries around and appears to be, but that many of the indicators used to express social meaning and identities must be stored away when not in use. Indeed in contemporary society where identity is multiple and dynamic, "people need a safely stored *pool* of identity tokens to choose from" (Cwerner 2001, p. 80). The closet serves to ensure that only those garments worn at any particular moment are visible (Urbach 1996) and are a vast repository for self-representation, which enable individuals to try out different 'looks' to find the one that feels 'me' on that day. Items stored in the wardrobe do not just clothe the body but have complex and interweaving personal biographies associated with them (Cwerner 2001). The biographies of stored objects more broadly illustrate that "we are not just 'what we buy' but also 'what we do not throw out'" and therefore 'what we value' (Hetherington 2004, p. 170).

This section of the literature review synthesises existing scholarship which considers the value of stored possessions in ongoing projects of the self and social relations. The first sub-section explores how memories are preserved as personal records of life-so-far, kept as 'place-makers' for personal life trajectories and life narratives. Discussion then turns to the place of possessions in role transition, focussing in particular on 'lines of connection' between childhood and adulthood (Philo 2003), the 'empty nest' stage of parenthood (Hogg et al. 2004; Curasi et al. 2014), and managing the 'material convoy' in later life (Miller and Parrot 2009; Smith and Ekerdt 2011). Discussion of the significance of objects that signify the self is continued with attention being turned to material applications of the concept of 'possible selves' (Markus and Nurius 1986). The focus then moves to how stored objects play a role in the construction of home and the project of family (Hurdley 2006; Rose 2010; Woodward 2015). It includes discussion of research that has explored the materiality of both home-making (Miller 1998a) and home-(un)making (Baxter and Brickell 2014). Finally this section brings together work that

examines the containment of social pasts, presents and futures in stored objects, particularly in relation to gifts (Dant 1999; Mauss 2002), bereavement (Hallam and Hockey 2001; Hockey et al. 2003), keepsakes (Finch and Mason 2000) and 'imagined social futures' (Gregson 2007).

2.4.1 Personal records

Memories are culturally positioned as sources of identity and self-understanding, and metaphors of memory often highlight the notion of containment. As a result "the ability to remember is frequently expressed as the act of storing something in a vessel or structure" (Hallam and Hockey 2001, p. 27). This is two-fold, in that memories are 'stored' within material objects, and then these objects are 'stored' in a way that protects their materiality and memorialisation. Hallam and Hockey (2001, p. 3) describe how in contemporary Western society "'memories' are often conceived as possessions; we 'keep' and 'preserve' our memories almost as though they are objects in a personal museum". This is important because memories are also ephemeral and fleeting in nature, and we recognise that they can 'fade' over time. Since everyday objects are often the props of personal narrative and our personal identity is constituted by memory, any type of amnesia resulting from the loss or destruction of things is avoided at all costs (Chapman 1999; Hallam and Hockey 2001). A good example can be found in *Mementoes as Transitional Objects in Human Displacement*, in which Parkin (1999, p. 13) describes how situations in Africa reveal that when people are under pressure to leave their homes they gather items which are "reminders of who they are and where they came from", as well as those required for basic survival. These mementoes – including sentimental items like photographs, letters, beads and keys – then 'encapsulate' personhood "to the extent that to take away these few remaining markers of identity could lead to social death for their owners" (Hallam and Hockey 2001, p. 26).

Our material 'convoy' – those things we take with us, keep and curate – is stored because its contents play a role in identity production and maintaining a link with the past. An individual does not require these objects on a daily basis but is reassured in knowing they are able to call upon them at will. According to Hirschman et al. (2012, pp. 374-375) storage spaces, such as the garage, are necessary to hold these objects, which are "still tied to the homeowner through contagious magic, but no longer playing a role in his-her life". We still *need* these transitional objects to link us to our personal or shared past but "because it would be unseemly to display such items in the Goffman-esque front stage of a home's public spaces, we keep them tucked away in the more private backstage places of the home" (Hirschman et al. 2012, p. 375). As such the physical space in which these symbolic possessions are stored can be seen to act as a 'time capsule' of personal past history, the items dispersed to spaces where they can be kept out of sight but not

out of reach or thought (Hirschman et al. 2012, p. 375). Giving a different name to a similar type of collection, Cwerner and Metcalfe (2003, p. 237) describe how a participant's 'memory box' – containing things such as winkle pickers and swimming certificates from when he was 11 – had been recovered and remembered after he had moved house, and it symbolised a past he had curated and wished to remember. They were also metaphorical 'ghosts' that placed his memories within British youth subcultures at that time. Hirschman et al. (2012, p. 377) give examples of how these 'self-I-used-to-be' items which have been stored away can both be positive recollections of happier times – such as a participant's bowling trophies which led to her to reminisce about how she would match her shoes to her outfits for competitions – and negative memories which nevertheless symbolise triumph over adversity – such as a military uniform which was buried under unworn clothing, and brought back painful memories of the time a participant spent in military jail, but he would still never throw away.

Hirschman et al. (2012) describe these types of mementoes, the materialised personal records, which are stored in the garage as 'place-makers' for personal life trajectories and life narratives. They state that "for the time being they remain as tangible memorials of lives well lived. [...] Here in the garage they serve as the 'read' pages of their owner's lives, while the rest of the book remains unwritten" (Hirschman et al. 2012, p. 377). Following the metaphor of the book further, these objects "can be read as petrified remnants of vanishing eras" (Glenn 2007, pp. 13-14) which signify chapters, or episodes, in their owner's life. These episodes tend to be emotionally significant, and Hirschman et al. (2012, p. 377) describe how a participant constructed the narrative of her earlier life – 'giving up' the freedom and spontaneity of her young adulthood to become a wife and mother – around a collection of mementoes from that time. Keeping these items in the semi-private area of her family home seems to show that she does not want to give up that part of herself completely. As Attfield (2000, p. 265) states in her book *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* the material world "interrupts the flow of time to restore a sense of continuity as well as to reflect change and contain complex and apparently irreconcilable differences". Taking findings from a long-running oral history project, Attfield (2000, p. 145) describes that many garments were found to be kept long after they went out of fashion or no longer fitted, not out of a moral sense of thrift but because their owners could not bear to part with them. These clothes were imbued with memories of youth, significant persons, occasions and rites of passage. Attfield (2000, p. 146) terms these kinds of mementoes as "a form of transitional object helping people to come to terms with the passing of time", from the separation from their own youth to loss and bereavement.

2.4.2 Role transition

Storage can hold treasured objects which relate to distinct periods of people's lives, from which transition and trajectories can be mapped across the life course. In their sociological paper, *Confronting the Material Convoy in Later Life*, Smith and Ekerdt (2011) suggest that individuals literally bear a 'material convoy' from cradle to grave, and from place to place. As time passes the convoy grows, retaining items that support everyday life and the ongoing project of the self (Belk 1988). Within children's geographies, Philo (2003, p. 15) considers the continuity of objects kept from childhood through into adult life as being 'lines of connection'. These, and the complex way in which they affect, shape or haunt us, are crucial in the development of identities across the life course (Jones 2003; Valentine 2003; Jones 2008). Objects can be ejected from the convoy when they are (1) no longer useful, (2) no longer represent one's interests or identity, or (3) there is no longer the need or desire to maintain certain goods after a bodily or life course change (see Roster 2001; Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005; Ekerdt 2009). However, Hirschman et al. (2012, p. 373) found that role transition "often led not to the discarding of possessions used in their former roles, but rather to consigning them to the limbo of the garage". Here, as perhaps in self-storage units, they could be left to linger, hidden and generally forgotten about.

One such example of holding onto things after a role transition, which is given in the literature, is the 'empty nest' stage of a parent's life (Hogg et al. 2004; Curasi et al. 2014). Marcoux (2001b, p. 80) briefly mentioned that young people's things may have been "consigned to their parents' care" in the eventuality that circumstances (relating to the impact of jobs, relationships, education etc. on housing) might change and they are needed at a later time. For the parents, he intimates, providing their storage space in this fashion serves as a way to cope with the child's departure, an alternative to preserving the child's bedroom as it was when they lived at home. In addition to this, parents can also keep and index treasured objects that act as mementoes of their child's identity, some of which are kept without plans for future transfer and others with the intention of passing them on as heirlooms in the future (Sego 2010). Hirschman et al. (2012) interpret these collections of things as shrines to their children's (now grown) former selves. They found that an emotional connection was felt most deeply for objects that related to when their children were young and in their 'formative years'. As Phillips and Sego (2011) remark from a marketing theory perspective, discarding a child's things contradicts other intimate practices of care for that child. Decisions regarding the (continuing) place of these objects, whilst regular occurrences, are an emotional task laden with care and love, as well as concern for making the 'right' choices (Gregson et al. 2007a). Indeed, those objects which are thrown away before they should have been, or linger when they

should be disposed of, can haunt parents and children, constituting an absent-presence that can be felt as an unacknowledged debt or a sense of guilt (Hetherington 2004).

The material convoy we accumulate over the course of our lives is inextricably tied to us and the spaces we inhabit. As we grow older, unless the 'resume effect' has been strictly enforced it is likely that we will have more biographical objects (Miller and Parrot 2009; Miller 2010). These objects enable the soliciting of forgotten memories, thereby materially supporting the recall of memories. However, with advancing age – as time horizons shrink and the risk of vulnerability rises – the manageability and future disposition of the convoy comes into question (Smith and Ekerdt 2011, p. 378). From their review of self-help books on the process of down-sizing Smith and Ekerdt (2011) found that, like the de-cluttering self-help literature referred to in 2.3.5, the reoccurring suggestion was to reduce the number of things in the pursuit of a happy identity. However, the complex relationship that older people have with their belongings extends from their ability to remember and the safety of their living arrangement, to ongoing relations with family members who may be simultaneously grateful and burdened by the convoy being passed on (Hallam and Hockey 2001; Smith and Ekerdt 2011; Horton and Kraftl 2012). In this way, "an assembly of personal belongings, tended for years and conveyed to later life, becomes at this life stage a collective and trans-generational matter" (Smith and Ekerdt 2011, p. 389). Moreover, downsizing can be negatively viewed as a narrowing of the life-world, and therefore be put off if the elderly person is unable to come to term with the fact (Krasner 2005).

McCracken (1988a, p. 110) further explains how objects allow individuals to contemplate their emotional condition, social circumstances, or even entire lifestyle, "by somehow concretising these things in themselves". The material convoy enables a temporal 'bridge' between an individual's past and "an idealised version of life as it should be lived" (McCracken 1988a, p. 100); it is the lens through which to view retrospective (Hecht 2001) or possible selves (Markus and Nurius 1986). Keeping is, therefore, thought to be characteristic of a larger tendency and experience of instability and uncertainty. According to Tolia-Kelly (2004, p. 315) "material cultures secrete an essence of security and stability" by their presence in our lives. However, in her book chapter *Materiality, Memories and Emotions: A View on Migration from a Street in South London* Parrott (2012) argues that it is not enough to theorise objects as stabilising identity in the face of movement and change, without understanding that they have been both controlled and uncontrolled effects on identification. Instability and uncertainty in future life events are both instrumental in forming the meaningfulness of an object (Komter 2001; Smart 2007) and trigger more focused consideration of possessions.

2.4.3 Possible selves

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981, p. 53) suggest that objects affect what a person can do by expanding or restricting the scope of their actions and thoughts, and because “what a person does is largely what he or she is, objects have a determining effect on the development of the self”. The future is hazy and unknowable, so we are motivated to retain possessions that “conjure the future” (Ekerdt 2009, pp. 67-69), promising possible futures and possible selves (Markus and Nurius 1986). According to Bardhi et al. (2012, p. 511), we “use possessions to manage temporality”, to carry the past into the present, maintain and manage present selves, and anticipate ourselves. Whether stored or visible, possessions enable preparation for possible future iterations of self and all manner of eventualities that may occur. Hirschman et al. (2012, p. 379) found that garages serve simultaneously as ‘hedge funds’ and ‘investment stores’ for all the scenarios their participants could imagine taking place in the future. They argue that in these spaces the objects are resting in a kind of suspended animation, “they are ‘sleeping’ until an opportunity arises and there is the will or need to use them” (Hirschman et al. 2012, p. 379). Should that need or opportunity never arise the items can become candidates for disposal.

Hirschman et al. (2012, p. 378) found there were a variety of anticipated futures that necessitated the storage of things kept for ‘possible’ or ‘potential’ use in the future these included: the expectation of future hospitality, contingencies for future home repairs, ‘ingredients’ for creating future selves, and postponed or ‘stalled’ projects awaiting another chance at completion. Hirschman et al. (2012, p. 378) discovered that their participants commonly stored objects that were part of postponed projects – such as one who had plans to fix a broken push mower but did not have the time at the moment to do it. A recurrent theme that emerged with dormant projects was the availability of time; the materiality of their non-completion serving as a guilty reminder that these tasks *should* be completed. As Cwerner and Metcalfe (2003, p. 236) put it, “Rather than any absolute decision being made, the objects become increasingly marginalised, [...] out of sight and into the metaphorical recesses of the mind”. So for the time being, these objects are marginal to the lives of their owners, “stored on the edge of consciousness” (Hirschman et al. 2012, p. 379) but hinting at the idealised home environment and ‘can-do’ person that could be.

Applying Markus and Nurius’ (1986) concept of ‘possible selves’ to material objects we can understand how our possessions can represent our ideas of who we might become, standing in for our hopes, fears and goals. These objects are incentives for future behaviour and enable the evaluation of the current view of self. In their study of the wardrobe, Bye and McKinney (2007, pp. 490-491) found that women often kept clothes

that did not fit to incentivise their weight loss, and that throwing them away would be giving up hope for achieving that desired version of self (see also Banim and Guy 2001). Only in few circumstances were the ingredients for future selves given up easily. Indeed Hirschman et al. (2012, p. 378) describe how the objects meant for some intended future selves had since become unattainable but kept their position in storage. For example, one of their participants had set up a training room for herself in her garage to pursue a career as a soccer player, but after a bad car accident the imagined future use of the training equipment is towards a hoped-for career coaching football instead. In this instance, “both the consumer and the objects have been retasked, yet this re-tasking remains a future potentiality, not currently in action” (Hirschman et al. 2012, p. 379).

As part of their research on kitchen renewal, Shove et al. (2007, p. 31) found that situations where having and doing are out of synch are very familiar, and the objects stored in sheds, garages and kitchen cupboards reflect this. People intend “to become campers, cyclists or home bread-makers but [...do not put] these ambitions into practice”. Sullivan and Gershuny (2004) suggest that ownership of these kinds of objects can be symbolically important even if they remain in storage or are rarely used. However, in the work of Shove et al. (2007, p. 35) respondents expressed that they were keen to ‘make things work’, contemplating quite specific practices rather than being content with owning things which symbolised an ‘imaginary future’ (Sullivan and Gershuny 2004, p. 88). Could self-storage use be in response to a failure to manage the effective combination of having and doing required to realise these ambitions?

2.4.4 Family and home-(un)making

Tolia-Kelly (2004, p. 316) describes the home as “a place where memories traverse, are stored, exchanged, encountered and materialised”. The home comprises of a great array of material objects which collectively create “a dwelling experience that is greater than the sum of its parts” (Hecht 2001, p. 123). Household objects, as Hecht (2001, p. 123) succinctly describes:

“...are more than mere ‘things’, they are a collection of appropriated materials, invested with meaning and memory, a material testament of who we are, where we have been, and perhaps even where we are heading. They are what transforms our house into our home, a private cosmos that houses our memories of bygone times, as well as our hopes for what is yet to come. They bind our past with our present and our possible futures, thereby framing and reflecting our sense of self”.

Hence the home is “not only a material shelter but also a shelter for those things that make life meaningful” (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981, p. 139).

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) argue that the home contains a person's most special objects, where they can be close at hand and a permanent feature in identity production, or be freely discarded if they produce too much conflict with the self.

Home-making is an ongoing 'project of the self', a way for people to actively engage with creating and recreating the meaning of their homes, and means to narrate identity through home consumption (Miller 1998a). It consists of "the activities of endowing things with living meaning, arranging them in space in order to facilitate the life of those to whom they belong, and preserving them, along with their meaning" (Young 1997, p. 151). By appropriating mass-produced objects to create 'meaningful décor' people can move from being supposedly alienated or passive consumers to active producers of meaning (see Miller 1998a; Clarke 2001; Miller 2001; Makovicky 2007). Hollows (2008, p. 76) states that it is the ways we relate to our possessions and how we chose to arrange them that creates the foundations for our everyday practices and ways of relating to the home. This follows on from Seeley et al. (1956, p. 58), who suggest that "it is really the moveables which create the air of homeliness [...] rather than the physically rooted home". Likewise Reimer and Leslie (2004, p. 193) describe furniture as not just a commodity consumed in the home, but as the home itself. So materiality constitutes and is part of the creation of home, but it is important to remember that the negotiation involved in home-making is not "simply inward facing and privatised [...] but] 'stretched' to incorporate people or ideas that extend beyond the place of residence" (Hollows 2008, p. 75), and it is the dominant adults in the household who generally have the deciding say.

Domestic material culture is also used in the narration of family through the display of matter in the home. The 'project' of constructing identity through, and in, household objects is a fluid and ongoing process in which all members of the household are able to "actively try out different sides of the self" (Löfgren 1994, p. 66). Scholarship on this matter includes Rose's (2010) work on the way familial relations are consolidated and represented through photographs (through the sometimes copious work of taking, curating, disseminating and displaying photographic images), as well as research done by Tolia-Kelly (2004) on the role of décor in calling forth familial relations, including through the display of items intended to materially and symbolically connect a given family to relatives and ancestors in other places and cultural contexts. Along similar lines Hurdley (2006) has explored how mantle-piece display can function as a means to emotionally constitute family and memory through the display and arrangement of photographs and cards, in addition to being where everyday items are deposited. Woodward (2015) builds on this, highlighting how dormant matter that accumulates in the hidden spaces of the home can also play a role in working out familial relationships just as much as that which is collected and displayed. Furthermore, according to Horton

and Kraftl (2012, p. 33) routine practices of sorting, keeping and storing, can play “a significant, almost ritual, role in the (re)constitution of relationships and formations such as ‘family’/‘home’, perhaps especially in dealing with changes therein”.

In burgeoning social and cultural geography scholarship, the home is being repositioned from a positive metaphor of happiness and protection to a more ambiguous site of potential turbulence (Brickell 2012). Previous research in this area focusses on obstacles to home-making, such as the impact sexuality has on discourses of home which are tied to the idea of the heterosexual nuclear family (Valentine 1993; Gorman-Murray 2008, 2012). More recently, attention has turned to the politics and practices of home ‘unmaking’. Brickell (2013) explores the experiences of marital dissolution in Cambodia through the material and symbolic dimensions of domestic space, which she extends further in a special issue and editorial in *Home Cultures* (Baxter and Brickell 2014). According to Baxter and Brickell’s definition, home *unmaking* “is the precarious process by which material and/or imaginary components of the home are unintentionally or deliberately, temporarily or permanently, divested, damaged or even destroyed” (2014, p. 134). As well as marital breakdown, they suggest home *unmaking* is implicated through life events including moving/leaving home (Parkin 1999), burglary (Chapman 1999) and death (Marcoux 2001a). However as identified in her paper, *Spilling Over from the Street: Contextualising Domestic Space in an Inner-City Neighbourhood*, Burrell (2014, p. 161) highlights that home unmaking (in the face of a lack of agency to control the permeability of home) is not always a straightforward rejection of home. One of the participants’ in this study experience of divesting sentimentally valuable things from their home, exiled to a self-storage unit, demonstrates the hope for a better home in the future.

2.4.5 Social pasts, presents and futures

Hetherington (2004, p. 172) argues that how we negotiate the settlement of social relations involves tacit acknowledgement of the ways in which we make things absent in order to establish that settlement. Material practices are a means “to come to a settlement with how we manage our relations with others in terms of our memories, a sense of tradition, and through our relations not only with our contemporaries but also with our ancestors and future generations” (Clarke 2001, p. 172). Taking a slightly different focus, Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga (1999, p. 8) state that “the materiality of domestic life is a central factor in forming and reproducing the family biologically, socially, economically and morally”. Materiality and material practices have a significant role in the (re)production of social relations but, as Woodward (2015, p. 230) suggests, the enactment of relationships “is as much a question of what is displayed as that which accumulates in the hidden spaces of the home”. Indeed the placing of things so to absent them has consequences for how we think about social relations since they

“are performed not only around what is there but sometimes also around the presence of what is not” (Hetherington 2004, p. 159). Carsten’s (2000) study of adults who had been adopted as children, for example, reinforces this idea of objects’ importance in identity construction in conjunction with familial relationships. Despite maybe never having met their biological family, the connecting objects were vital in their understandings of kinship and relatedness.

Gifts can signify particularly durable bonds because “keeping things is keeping ties” (Ekerdt 2009, pp. 67-69), a feature of the social order for which Marcel Mauss (2002 [1954]) provides the most accepted theory. He claims that more-than-metaphorical ties between social bodies are produced corporeally through the practice of gift giving, and this meaningful exchange requires reciprocation. Taking this forward Frow (1997, p. 124) states that “gifts are precisely not objects at all, but transactions and social relations”. Gifted objects, both given directly – as gifts – and indirectly – as heirlooms (Finch and Mason 2000) – enable mediation between the ‘gift-er’ and the ‘gift-ee’, even when they aren’t present (Dant 1999). The properties of a gift are often chosen by the gift-giver for the meaningful or symbolic properties that they wish to be transferred to the recipient of the gift (McCracken 1988a, p. 84). Gifts effectively externalise a relationship between the gift-er and gift-ee, which can lead them to be cherished items but sometimes also a burden. The gift-ee feels a responsibility towards the gift, to both keep and display it where it may be seen if the gift-er should visit. This can make “the household display of items more obligatory than aesthetic or sentimental” (Ekerdt 2009, pp. 67-69). One such example of this comes from *Home, Materiality, Memory and Belonging*, in which Hurdley (2013, p. 109) describes the experiences of a participant whose ex-boyfriend had made her keep a candlestick, gifted by her sister, stored away in a cupboard rather than have it out on the mantelpiece. The need to negotiate and produce a shared space took precedence over the feelings of obligation she had towards displaying the gift. This was later rectified, “her past identity as an unhappy part of a couple is ‘in the cupboard’ now that the candlestick is out on her mantelpiece” (Hurdley 2013, p. 113). Woodward (2015, p. 226) provides us with another example of the marginalisation of a gift within the home. She describes the placement of a large rice cooker which had been a Christmas present from a participant’s sister in a spare room. At the time of receiving the rice cooker he had lived with a group of housemates, so it was used when they ate together, but now that he was living with a partner they found it wasteful, preferring to cook rice in a saucepan which was less of a hassle and multi-functional. When Woodward asked why he had not got rid of it, he described how because it is a present from his family he is unable to offer it to other family members, and because he knew his sister had gone to the effort of buying it he needed to let a suitable amount of time pass.

Within the context of time passing, material objects also have a performative role in bereavement, grief and memorialisation by mediating an ongoing relationship between the deceased and those who knew them (Hockey et al. 2003, p. 138). Things that were once very mundane objects of everyday usage – perfume, wallets, old shopping lists, worn shoes – are “rendered use-less with the loss of their previous owner [but] their persistent materiality can obtrude into a present where they cannot easily be incorporated into a new scheme of things, nor can they be thrown away” (Hockey et al. 2003, p. 141). As such the entire contents of a house, once so ordinary they commanded no special attention, can be shaken by a recent death and may speak to years of accumulated memories (Hallam and Hockey 2001, p. 12). Attfield (2000, p. 146) talks about the particular poignancy of clothing in memorialisation. In the account of a woman discovering her father’s suit long after this death, Attfield describes how coming across this item was not a melancholy experience but put her in touch with a neglected part of her life. The actual “sensory encounter with the cloth of suit awakened memories of her relationship to her father and helped her to reassess her values at a time in her life when she felt there were decisions to be made” (Attfield 2000, p. 146). Horton and Kraftl (2012, p. 40) suggest that following the passing of a close family relative it can feel like we are drowning in the stuff left behind and that sorting through cupboards full of objects is an overwhelming experience we don’t want to engage with. They question whether the practice of patiently sorting through these objects can help or hinder the grieving process and whether it might begin or undermine the processes of memorialisation. In a similar vein, Miller (2010) suggests that divestment may be a repair mechanism in dealing with trauma. The temporal and spatial positioning of objects changes and inflects upon meaning during mourning, since they may suffer a ‘social death’ as they are discarded, cast aside, or moved into storage in archives or attics, where they will lie dormant until reactivated (Hallam and Hockey 2001, p. 8). As Hallam and Hockey (2001, p. 20) state “death can initiate deeply felt desires to remember, just as it might generate the need to forget”.

There are some durable objects which outlive people and inalienable things whose disposal is unthinkable and cast a feeling of responsibility to forbears (Thompson 1979; Curasi et al. 2004). Keepsakes have a quasi-sacred status, not in any religious sense but due to their special status in not only symbolising the person that has died but also representing them. They are therefore acting as “the embodiment of a person who no longer has a physical body” (Finch and Mason 2000, p. 142), and in fact as ‘one-ended tie signs’ they “may last long after the relationship they signify has passed into a ‘past stage’” (Goffman 1971, p. 195). Keepsakes are quite close to what Weiner (1992) has described as ‘inalienable possessions’ whose prerogative is representing a kin group over time and between generations. McCracken (1988a, p. 44) describes an instance of

'curatorial consumption' whereby one woman in his study went about memorialising her family and thus granting herself 'belonging' by filling her house with inherited items. However, Hurdley (2013, p. 121) identifies that this "once taken-for-granted passage of goods through time has become incommensurable (in some respects) with expressions of taste" in terms of dressing oneself and home decoration (Gullestad 1995; Banim and Guy 2001). Instead, she highlights a reoccurring theme from her research that found a divergence between traditional inheritance rituals and ideas of taste and self-identity. As Ekerdt (2009, pp. 67-69, own emphasis) suggests "family and ancestry are layered *onto* whatever utility, monetary value, or delight might already adhere to thing". Hurdley (2013, pp. 122-123) provides an example of this when she recounts the experiences of a participant from her study who had kept and displayed all her family's good but is aware that her daughters (adults themselves) do not have the same attitude towards them as she does (see also McCracken 1988a). As such, the participant was undergoing a pre-mortem sort through⁸, "to save her daughters from the bother of getting rid of unwanted, antiquated (as opposed to antique) objects" (Hurdley 2013, pp. 122-123). However, in their research Hirschman et al. (2012) discovered that garages were the de facto museums of family histories which weren't desired in the home but could not be thrown away.

Another example of objects which are representative of obligatory social ties can be found in the storage of 'imagined social futures', whereby things are kept for their hoped-for transfer between generations (Gregson 2007). In storage spaces things – such as children's toys, books and clothes – can be literally suspended between two generations of family use – one generation too 'old' to use it and the next being too 'young' (Hirschman et al. 2012, p. 376). Whilst in some cases the hope of intergenerational passage comes to fruition, in many it is not realistic but still provides a certain level of satisfaction from the *belief* that certain possessions will stay in the family and continue to accumulate layers of emotional meaning (see McCracken 1988a; Curasi et al. 2004). By storing these things, it is hoped that their passing of them on will enact care towards loved ones, and "in the process [will] also transfer some associations, love and meanings attached to the original owner" (Hirschman et al. 2012, p. 376). So intergenerational legacies not only exist in actual transfers but also in the imagined potential transfers that keeping, curating and storage enables (Marcoux 2001b; Curasi et al. 2004). In these kinds of cases Hirschman et al. (2012, p. 376) found that the garage serves as a space for influencing or even creating a future desired by the possessing generation. For

⁸ A discourse has arisen in recent years that encourages older people and their family members to reduce the volume of possessions (Smith and Ekerdt 2011). This is largely framed as moralising disorderly, excessive households and a responsibility to control one's legacy so to spare the next generation. *Döstädning*, or the art of 'death cleaning', is a recent Swedish phenomenon by which the elderly and their families set their affairs in order (Magnusson 2017).

example, they describe a research participant's 'magical thinking' that by saving a dress that had belonged to her last and only child, a grand-daughter will then be born to wear it. Keeping, therefore, is an act of faith and a sign of hope and storing the dress (with or without the potential for transfer) is an act of love and caring.

2.5 Stor(e)ying

The majority of the examples used throughout this literature review have provided *stories* of stored things based around the discourses, memories and futures they stand in for. Objects possess an evocative narrative capacity which animates reminiscences and contemplation, and their storage acts to produce particular spatialised (re)encounters when (un)packed. Horton and Kraftl (2012, p. 32) talk of the compelling desire to recall and tell the story of each object in turn, so to give them potted biographies (Appadurai 1986) as they are excavated from a cupboard. However, they warn that to do so would "valorise a particular conceptualisation of memory as linear, neat 'unearthing' or 'accessing' or 'retrieval' of the past" (Horton and Kraftl 2012, pp. 32-33). Instead, they turn to the description Kuhn provides of the capacity of domestic material objects to spark "radiating web[s] of associations, reflections and interpretations" through messy, sentimental encounters (Kuhn 1995, p.4 in Horton and Kraftl 2012, p.33). This, they argue, allows for an articulation of the cupboard which accounts for the "muddled, juxtaposed [and] interrelated ways" that its contents are piled and stored together (Horton and Kraftl 2012, p. 33). Inverting Goffman's conceptualisation of the stage (1990 [1959]), researching storage allows us to view and scrutinise the background hum, silence and emotion that makes our home, family and self as much as that which speaks of life more overtly.

Since the early 2000s human geographers have foregrounded attempts to understand emotions in order to "appreciat[e] how lives are lived, histories experienced, geographies made and futures shaped" (Wood and Smith 2004, p. 533). This 'emotional turn' in geography was a positive recognition of emotion, rather than a new shiny object of study (Anderson and Smith 2001; Davidson and Bondi 2004; Davidson and Milligan 2004; Thrift 2004; Davidson et al. 2005; Parr 2005). Anderson and Smith – who are credited with initiating geography's appreciation of emotion and affects – make a plea for thinking seriously about how "the human world is constructed and lived through emotion" such as "pain, bereavement, elation, anger, love and so on" (2001, p. 7). An engagement with emotion has been more than a passing fad, as signified by the success of the journal *Emotion, Space and Society*, and inclusion in countless studies of home (see for example (Varley 2008; Longhurst et al. 2010; Jachimiak 2014). Of particular relevance to this research is Rose's work (2004) which examines women's 'feelings about photographs' of their young children. By attending to articulations of emotions very

closely, Rose exposes shifting senses of intensity and ambivalence, and also contributes to our understanding of the complexities and depth of emotional engagement with everyday (even banal) domestic objects. Emotional geography, then, is attuned to the affective elements at play beneath the topographies of everyday life. By stepping beyond 'representational geographies' it attempts to understand emotion – experientially and conceptually – in terms of its socio-*spatial* mediation and articulation rather than as entirely interiorised subjective mental states" (Bondi et al. 2005, pp. 1-2). An appreciation of emotion is useful in this thesis, in order to better understand the space, contents, practices and meanings associated with self-storage units. However the organisation of self-storage units and timing of interviews were not always conducive of deep articulations of emotions (as discussed in 3.3.4 and 8.4).

It is difficult to articulate the mundane taken-for-granted 'stuffness' of storage and stored objects. In *Reassembling the Social* Latour (2005) argues that to understand the most normal of objects from an estranged vantage point is to see how it matters, again or differently to before. As he goes on to reason, "even the most routine, traditional and silent implements stop being taken for granted when they are approached by users rendered ignorant and clumsy by *distance*" (Latour, 2005, p. 80). Storage, by its very nature, can generate distance, which then in turn upon opening produces feelings of distance and estrangement from what was once familiar. To view things anew, long after they have been put away or fallen out of use, places the individual as an archaeologist of their own life, digging backwards and attempting to the join the dots between seemingly disparate memories, feelings and things. When we forget we "re-arrange the psychic closets and push certain items to memory's far reaches" (Singer and Conway 2008, p. 283), but it is only when we are faced with sensual cues that 'available' memory is made 'accessible' (Muzaini 2015, p. 110).

Coming across spatialised memories through stored material things can reignite intimate connections that bring us closer to what had been forgotten, but can also make obvious the distance that has grown between the objects and ourselves or the people and events they evoke (Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003, p. 237). Stored memories may contradict "commonly held histories and accepted biographies, rather than prop up either the smooth flow of everyday life or the continuous narratives that implicitly undergird our senses of identity" (Horton and Kraftl 2012, p. 41). Breaking silences can also get to what Hurdley (2013, p. 103) calls the 'other' stories of divorce, grief, hesitation, failure, arguments, negotiation and dust. Horton and Kraftl (2012, p. 38) describe this process of reflection as an "uncanny, unsettling and defamiliarising experience" based as much on the object biographies as the circumstances around their retrieval. This, in turn, produces new emotion-laden memories of the intensity of moving away or moving on,

and the ongoing need to deal with actual and emotional baggage. In this way encountering stored objects is a moment of exposure and vulnerability, “when our assumed identities are exposed, vulnerable and up for review” (Horton and Kraftl 2012, p. 41).

Stor(e)ying then is a means for introspection and reflexive autobiography (Hoskins 1998), which is experienced as a thought-provoking, unsettling, joyful and enchanting encounter. Object biographies, however, are enmeshed in dialogue in a way that rarely results in the story being told from beginning, to middle, to end (Kopytoff 1986). And even more salient for this research is that re-enacting the placing of an object is rarely communicated but is also what gives them their implicit significance. Hurdley (2013, p. 114) describes the story from one participant of how a pebble ended up on a mantelpiece by happenstance because it would not fit in her pot of pebbles. She imagines that to the visitor it is ‘just a pebble’, but through talking about it all the other pebbles and the reason they are collected are made present. Asking participants to narrate storage requires them to see into the corners of their lives that have previously not been consciously acknowledged (Hirschman et al. 2012, p. 379). The next chapter will outline in detail the methods which were undertaken to achieve these kinds of storage stories.

2.6 Chapter conclusions

This chapter has outlined and critically engaged with the key literatures and theories which informed the research questions and focus of this project. Self-storage is a spatial phenomenon which has not yet been the study of research, and storage is also noticeably missing or side-lined in many accounts of ‘living with things’ (Gregson 2007). Those few scholars who have studied practices or spaces of storage have done so in ways that foreground material possessions and their place(ment) in understandings of identity, home and the life course. This thesis takes a similar approach, but attempts to extend understandings beyond the domestic dwelling to a space which is tied to these same themes but also set distinctly apart from them.

The limited work which focuses entirely on storage has taken one of two approaches. First, Goffman’s dramaturgical notions of ‘front and back stage’ has been employed to attest to the position and character of storage as out of sight, hidden and private (Urbach 1996; Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003). However, its application is simplistic (and necessarily dualistic), lacking nuance of how storage spaces can or cannot be conceived as ‘back stage’. This thesis attempts to conceptualise storage through Goffman’s metaphors, as being about more than marginality, but temporality and potential.

Secondly, work on storage has highlighted the discourse which places it as the ‘antidote’ to clutter, mess and excess (Cwerner 2001; Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003; Makovicky

2007; Hirschman et al. 2012). In order to understand storage is ‘the correct place’ for certain things these scholars have turned in particular to Douglas’ (2000 [1967]) conceptualisation of matter as ‘in’ or ‘out of place’, as well as van Gennap’s (1960) notion of liminality. Combining these two ideas has merit for understanding storage spaces at the margins of the home (garages, attics etc.), and this thesis examines if they are equally applicable to self-storage units.

Building upon these two areas, other research has illustrated that storage is considered to be the ‘correct’ place for certain objects which, following societal influences, should be hidden away and kept in abeyance (Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003; Crewe 2011; Hirschman et al. 2012; Woodward 2015). Storage has also been understood as impacting upon materiality by causing forgetting and the ‘cooling off’ of bonds between person and object, and then the eventual divestment of things (McCracken 1986; Hetherington 2004; Horton and Kraftl 2012). Exploring the role and suitability of self-storage in, what are generally considered, *domestic* material practices – of hiding, keeping, curating and disposal – this thesis considers in what ways self-storage units can be conceived as home spaces in terms of space, contents, practices and meanings.

Overall the scholarship summarised in this literature review demonstrates that storage cannot simply be understood as a collection of object biographies but is positioned within a host of domestic material practices (see Gregson and Beale 2004; Gregson 2007). This thesis argues that self-storage units, then, cannot be understood merely as bounded containers, but entangled in complex and fluid relations between material possessions and people, which operate in the context of life course events, trajectories and transitions. Engaging with narratives of the motivations and use of self-storage by users in the UK, this thesis provides an insight into the new geographies of storage.

3 Methodology

This chapter explains the ethnographic research process adopted in this thesis to explore the motivations and experiences of self-storage use in the UK. The first section, 3.1, presents how the theoretical concerns prioritised in this thesis inform the methodological approach. Within this there is a discussion of the value of ethnographic research to consider people's intimate relationships with domestic material culture and its relation to the space and context it is kept in (Kopytoff 1986). Following on, in section 3.2, the discussion turns to suitability of the two methods chosen for this research. The next section, 3.3, provides specific details of how, when and where this research was undertaken, outlining the practicalities of engaging with gatekeepers, participant recruitment, the organisation of the research interviews, issues of safety in the field, and the reality of methods in practice. It also outlines how the interview data were recorded, analysed and developed into the four thematic chapters. Finally, section 3.4 explains the ethical considerations of this research project, paying particular attention to the role of emotion. Overall, this chapter outlines how research methods can be employed to explore how stored materiality has the capacity to narrate changes across a lifetime. Object-orientated interviews are well positioned to explore the complex relations between people, things and their spatiality. It attests to how our relations to our things "are sensory, bodily, evocative and profound", but also "enduring, potent, powerful, inarticulate and at times unbearably evocative" (Crewe 2011, p. 27). In this context stored objects offer a renewed encounter with theories of material culture, home and identity.

3.1 Locating the research

This first section of this chapter is concerned with locating the epistemological and methodological approaches of the research, before moving onto a discussion of the chosen research methods.

3.1.1 Epistemology

Epistemological issues are concerned with *knowing*; in other words what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge. As discussed in this sub-section, the focus and approach taken by this research project fits within a postmodernist epistemology. In use of postmodernism in the social sciences started in the late 1970s, with particularly influential figures (Lyotard (1984), Jameson (1983) and Harvey (1989) forming ideas about a new period in societal development. Whilst Lyotard didn't invent the term

'postmodern' – which had been used by art critics since the 1870s – his 1979 book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* is credited as marking the very beginning of postmodern thought, broadening the range of the term and its popularity. Lyotard clearly defines postmodernism as a matter of "incredulity towards meta-narratives" (1984, p. xxiv), the overarching stories which attempt to sum up human history or put all knowledge into a single framework (e.g. Marxism). The philosophical movement, then, is characterised by broad scepticism and a general suspicion of reason.

Since Lyotard, "no unified postmodern theory or even a coherent set of positions" have been established (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 2), but this suits postmodernism because to define it would be to violate the postmodernist's premise that no definite terms, boundaries or absolute truths exist. However, the label in social science is often summarised as following five assumptions and foci (Smart 2000) which are: 1) the centrality of discourse – an emphasis on the power of language and the discursive production of objects; 2) an understanding of identities as fluid, multiple and temporally produced; 3) an acceptance of the impossibility of representing objective reality; 4) favouring multiple, local voices and politics over theoretical frameworks and universalising tendencies (grand narratives); 5) an acknowledgement that power and knowledge are intertwined and co-dependent. Taking these five ideas seriously drastically reconceptualised the meaning of social studies towards a hope that "the social construction of social reality, fluid as opposite to fixed identities of the self, and the partiality of truth will simply overtake the modernist assumptions of an objective reality" (Lincoln and Guba 2000, p. 178). Exploring subjective realities and small stories are fundamental to the aim of this research, as well as an allowance for the fluidity of identities in the study of changing objects relation over the life course.

Clarke (2006, p. 107) describes how the "reckless, dizzying antics of postmodernists seemed to throw reason itself into doubt". It follows that the postmodern sensibility is a distinct way of looking at the world and researching it, which rejects the distinction between structures, facts and data on the one hand and meanings, belief and interactions on the other. Postmodernism can be located within what May calls 'reflexive' ontologies (1999) or as 'bridge building' between objective and subjective ontologies (2011). On this continuum postmodernists tend to be more 'sceptical' – believing in the impossibility of truth and death of the subject in subject/object distinctions – or 'affirmative' – less sceptical about reality and with a less dogmatic ontology (Rosenau 1992). In fact, an affirmative postmodernist's view of the world is very similar to that of constructionism or interpretivism, which this research leans towards. Taking an affirmative postmodernist epistemology this research questions the ideas of truth and validity, rejects abstract and universal truths, and seeks situated, local knowledge.

There are a number of implications of a postmodernist stance on research design. First, objects which were previously under-researched can be taken seriously in their own right, since there is more freedom in what can be studied. This form of sensitivity fits with the overarching aim of this research project – to question the taken-for-granted objects, spaces and practices of self-storage. Secondly, whilst postmodernism didn't lead to any specific innovations in methods it does lend itself to those which allow for 'explanation from within', such as ethnography. This research uses an ethnographically-informed method of 'go-along'-style, object-orientated interviews. Finally, research is always a partial view of reality and is actively constituted by the researcher, who can never be an objective observer. This requires reflexivity and an awareness of researcher positionality during the research process and in its write up.

3.1.2 Understanding materiality

In the wake of the 'material turn', a proliferation of research emerged which attested to the centrality of material objects and materiality in the constitution of personal biographies and social relations (Appadurai 1986; Miller 1987). Taking diverse theoretical perspectives this body of research acknowledged both the vitality of materials (Ingold 2007; Bennett 2010) and the importance of things in framing everyday experience (Miller 1987). These approaches raise important epistemological and methodological questions about how human geographers (and other social scientists) can go about researching the biographical, emotional, tacit, and material properties of things. Whilst I neither theorise objects as 'actants' within the framework of actor network theory nor 'parts' of assembled 'wholes' as understand through assemblage theory, this thesis does argue that we need to take the properties of things seriously (see section 2.1.1). This research works from the understanding that things are not simply passive and inert but have the capacity to bring about affects (see Gell 1998).

As Sophie Woodward outlines in her paper on interdisciplinary approaches for understanding materials and material culture, despite acknowledgement of the entanglements of people, objects and space theoretically and epistemologically "less consideration has been given to how effectively social science methods are equipped for exploring these issues" (2016, p. 3). In part, she argues, this has arisen from historical disciplinary divisions which designated materials and their properties as the domain of the natural sciences and the stories that people tell about them as the domain of the social sciences (Hodder 1998; Law 2004). Within the social sciences, methods for the study of material culture have tended to either engage with the sensory, visual and material qualities of objects (Hurdley 2006; Rowsell 2011), or non-representational relations with things (Knudsen and Stage 2015). There is a brief discussion of these methods at the beginning of section 3.2.2.

3.1.3 Ethnography

Ethnography was established by the Chicago School of Sociology in the early 20th century and re-emerged as a method in human geography during the cultural turn (although it had a longer history of use by humanist geographers as noted by Cook and Crang (1995)). Ethnography's renewed vitality "was part of disciplinary appetite for methods that could help researchers understand the values, practices and knowledges of particular people in particular places" (Laurier et al. 2017), and it is a useful way for human geographers to combine theoretical concerns into empirical research (Law 2004; Crang and Cook 2007). Primarily, this is because ethnography provides insights of the world and ways of life from the inside more or less as it is experienced and understood in the everyday lives of people who 'live them out' (Crang and Cook 2007, p. 1). It is never possible to fully know events or grasp the full complexity of life (Law 2004), particularly because so much of what people do and know is unconscious (Latham 2003). However, ethnography – as a detailed, immersive and inductive methodology – gets to tacit and explicit knowledge (Herbert 2000, p. 552) by allowing access to the embodied and 'lay geographies' through which objects, places and people are encountered (Smith 2001; Cloke 2004).

While ethnography was historically associated (in anthropology in particular) with studies of 'remote' or 'exotic' cultures, it is now more commonly used to investigate 'home' or 'familiar' cultures. According to Silverman (2007) ethnography is about finding the remarkable in the mundane and searching for meaning in everyday life. It has been widely adopted to research the potential significance of material culture within the home and social relations, especially bringing to light those objects that appear banal or inconsequential (Miller 2001; Blunt and Varley 2004; Gregson 2007). Such an approach places the everyday – "the blindingly obvious" – at the centre of analysis (Miller and Woodward 2007, pp. 337-339). When studying people's lives their possessions can be brought in "as testimony to how people see, shape and are embedded in the world around them" (Crang and Cook 2007, p. 10). Ethnography enables us to acknowledge the centrality of objects in material practice and to see how phenomena – such as the growth in the use of self-storage – are situated within people's lives, as well as in the context of society more widely.

Central to ethnography is participant observation, but it also draws upon interviews, photographs, video and sound recordings and drawing, as well as other forms of data which facilitate the immersion of researchers into the setting they are seeking to study. The traditional form of ethnography, promoted by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), involves the researcher participating or observing in people's daily activities for an extended period of time, noting actions and conversations, and asking questions in order

to check emerging interpretations. Whilst producing extremely in-depth and detailed accounts of people's lives this style of ethnography is often not viable in contemporary contexts. For a study into self-storage units which are often visited infrequently and spontaneously this approach was not possible. The research involved accompanying participants from the first interviews held in cafes to their self-storage units, where a second interview took place in-situ in an attempt to elicit narratives of change and uncertainty. Therefore, this research is not strictly an ethnography but ethnographically influenced, employing interview and object elicitation methods *in situ* during the course of self-storage unit visits in order to overcome the limitations of just undertaking sit-down interviews (Kusenbach 2003, p. 462). Doing so means that talking is not the centre of attention, instead refocusing the participant on their experiences and practices in the space. Through an ethnographic approach it is possible to engage with this 'real world' messiness but, as Crang and Cook (2007, p. 14) rightly point out, "ethnographies cannot take a naïve stance that what they are told is the absolute 'truth'". Instead it must be acknowledged that the ways that people make sense of the events around them and render these 'true' in their own terms reveals how their lives are constructed, understood and acted out within larger societal processes.

3.2 Methods

It has been suggested that talking about the biographies of things is a way of understanding the discourses, memories and futures that are caught up in and surround them (see section 2.5). My aim, therefore, in talking with participants about their stored possessions was to develop an understanding of the nature of their relationship with them, but also the significance of their placement in storage, and the role they had in their lives more broadly. Object-elicitation is a natural addition to interviews since it simply involves inserting objects into the research interview, yet it can prompt the expression of ideas and experiences which interviews alone may not be able to uncover. In this section I provide an overview of the two qualitative research methods employed in the fieldwork for this project.

3.2.1 Interviews

Interviews offer focused ways in which to gain verbal accounts, narratives and reflexive understandings of participants' everyday lives and worlds. As such they are one of the key qualitative methods used in ethnographic research of material culture and the home (Marcoux 2001b; Hurdley 2006; Gregson et al. 2007b; Woodward 2007; Gregson et al. 2009). Interviews, as a kind of 'conversation' that can reveal what cannot otherwise be perceived (emotions, meaning etc.), have the potential to unpack the subjectivities implicated in human interaction with material things. The reflective space of the interview encounter can be particularly conducive to exploring the taken-for-granted and not-

readily-articulated (Johnson 2002), such as the meaning associated with routine material practices (i.e. caring, sorting, placing, ridding and storing).

The aim of the interviews was to understand how people experience and make sense of their own lives (Valentine 1997, p. 111) through self-storage. Following Eyles and Smith (1988) the interviews were designed as 'conversation with a purpose'. A semi-structured interview format was chosen because it is discursive "letting respondents develop their answers in their own terms and at their own length and depth" (Fielding and Thomas 2008, p. 255). I had an interview guide with me which I referred to occasionally to make sure specific themes I was interested in were covered (Miller and Glass 2004), but otherwise allowed the participant to guide the interview. Encouraging informal dialogue in this way allowed participants to raise issues that may not have been anticipated. As a result, the material generated from the interviews is rich, detailed and multi-layered.

Fielding and Thomas (2008, p. 249) identify that whilst the objective is that discussion should be as frank as possible, it can be impeded in several ways. Respondents may attempt to rationalise their actions, withholding evaluative or emotional reasons for them that would give a truer insight. They may also steer away from revealing anything that might embarrass them, avoiding describing aspects of behaviour or attitudes that do not maintain the self-image they prefer to portray. However, most of the participants seemed to be unconcerned with labelling their stuff as junk or themselves as hoarders (see section 4.2). Thus interviews reveal how the narration and making sense of everyday events perpetuate the practices and ideas that constitute them. Inevitably though, there were topics that I anticipated would be difficult to explore using only verbal means, predominantly those which had been forgotten or deemed to be unimportant. It was for these topics in particular that the incorporation of additional stimuli – the stored objects themselves – presented a means of eliciting closer reflection from the participants.

3.2.2 Object-elicitation

Research from theoretical perspectives acknowledges the importance of things in framing everyday experiences (see Chapter 2) and these approaches raise methodological questions about how the non-verbal, tacit and material properties of things can be researched. Matter can act as 'evidence', "enriched by contingencies, absences, imaginings and re-awakenings of geographies of the past, present and future" (Tolia-Kelly 2009, p. 504). Participant-observation has traditionally been one of the main approaches in anthropological studies of material culture (see Miller 1987). The exploration of material practices as 'interactive and embodied' has been developed through visual methods such as photography (Daniels 2010) and video (Dant 2010; Hockey et al. 2013), as well as sensory methodologies (Pink 2009). However visual methods, as well as capturing material practices, can also *provoke* responses. Notably,

photo-elicitation has been utilised to explore the material culture of family photographs (Rowell 2011) and mantelpieces (Hurdley 2006). Object-elicitation methods have been adopted across the social sciences as a route into people's narratives and memories (see Hoskins 1998), which are not always accessible in other ways (Hurdley 2006).

Object-elicitation methods have taken a number of different forms but generally involve the integration of material culture with a word-based approach. Ian Woodward (2001) has noted the utility of 'talking with' objects when attempting to express complex ideas about the human relationship with the material world, particularly the ways in which objects are valued (or not). His research highlights the need to interrogate the relationship between what participants' say and what they do with things. The place of objects in the interview scenario is something Sophie Woodward has investigated during her study of old denim jeans, trying out life history interviews *about* jeans and objects interviews *with* jeans to explore "how people 'speak' the material" (2016, p. 359). She found that material memories were relatively sparse in the life history interviews, and were more often about clothing disasters than routine material relationships, which were harder to verbalise (Woodward 2016, p. 7). Respondents also found their inability to articulate the attributes of their jeans frustrating and would fetch them to show her. Alternatively, in the object interviews where jeans were looked at and touched, Woodward (2016, p. 8) found that respondents' were more forthcoming and detailed in their articulation of memories particularly in ways that evoked their materiality (see also Mason and Davies 2009).

As seen in the work of Hurdley (2006) and Miller (2008), the situation of objects in place can also be important in the analysis of their materiality. Some object-elicitation methods place the participant in settings where they are surrounded by their objects. Pink et al. (2017, pp. 125-126) describe how a tour of home "puts the materiality and sensoriality of home at the centre of the encounter", producing interactions between the researcher, participant and whatever other things are brought into that context by the participant. In this way objects do not need to be preselected by the researcher but, if required, the researcher can play an active role in engaging the participant with their possessions. For example, Harris and Guillemin (2012, p. 695) suggest that the researcher can motion towards objects in a participant's living room, inviting them to "hold them, speak about them, reflect on how they feel, [thereby] opening up points of memory". A number of studies employ this approach, combining the 'go-along' with 'talking through objects'. In their study, Hirschman et al. (2012, pp. 373-374) asked homeowners to simply 'take the interviewer through' the garage and 'tell about' the items in it. Similarly, Muzaini (2015, p. 103) found that the most powerful stories emerged when he asked respondents to

'talk about' objects around their homes or those they kept hidden away which they selected and brought out themselves.

Object-based interviews allow access to “unspeakable geographies” and are particularly useful in attempts to capture “the ephemeral, the fleeting [and] the immanence of place” (Davies and Dwyer 2007, pp. 259, 261). Remembering plays an important part in these encounters whereby the object “laden with perceptual recall” becomes “a temporal conduit” of memories, emotions and experiences (Seremetakis 1994, p. 11). Muzaini (2015, p. 11) describes how if it had not been for the moment where memories were triggered for his respondents they would not have revealed those things they had rendered forgotten. In this way it was possible to extend beyond “meanings and values that apparently *await* our discovery, interpretation, judgement and ultimate representation” (Lorimer 2005, p. 84, own emphasis) to that which is liminal, marginal and unremarkable. Undertaking object-elicitation interviews at participants' self-storage units would allow for a greater depth of insight, furthering narratives provided in the first interviews.

3.3 Data collection

This study took a pragmatic approach to data collection (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2013), accepting that the nature of the circumstances leading to self-storage use – moving house, bereavement, the breakdown of a relationship etc. – could make data collection challenging. Therefore, it was accepted that multi-staged participant recruitment and a high degree of flexibility would be required. A convenience sampling approach was taken in this study, contacting self-storage company managers and executives in the hope that they would be able to circulate or display the research recruitment materials to their customers (discussed in more detail in 3.3.2). This presented the most feasible way of recruiting participants but, as is explained in 3.3.1, was far from infallible. As a result the data collection for this thesis took place in four main episodes over a one-year period from January 2016 to January 2017.

It was decided that *current* self-storage users were the desired participants of this study since it gave the researcher the opportunity to go with the user to 'visit' their unit. This meant that those interviewed had not experienced the entire process of renting a self-storage unit from beginning (motivation and moving in) to end (moving out), although a number had used self-storage previously and bought up those experiences in their accounts. All users were deemed of interest – regardless of the type of use, motivation, duration, size etc. - and as such there was no discrimination in selecting potential

research participants.⁹ Crang and Cook (2007, p. 14) describe this approach as such ‘theoretical sampling’, whereby selective access is gained to appropriate groups of people who are living through the research problem and are able to teach the researcher about it from their various perspectives. It is therefore not the number, ‘typicality’ or ‘representativeness’ of people approached which matters most but the quality and positionality of the information they can offer (McCracken 1988b).

3.3.1 Participant recruitment

There are 1,505 self-storage stores in the UK (SSA UK 2018), which granted considerable liberty in deciding where to locate the study. The deciding factors thus became ones of straight-forward practicalities, the density of self-storage stores (see Appendix A) and success in recruiting participants. Having already had experience of trying to entuse households from my parent’s village to partake in my MSc research into attics (Owen 2014), it was sensed that ‘tell me about why and how you use your self-storage unit’ would be a hard sell, particularly because in this instance it was not possible to rely on social capital. Instead I wanted to find volunteers who would self-select based upon their subjective, introspective or therapeutic interest, or perception that engaging in the research would satisfy their curiosity and be an enjoyable experience (Clark 2010). On this basis I opted to recruit volunteers through self-storage companies since, out of hundreds of customers per store, I felt confident that there would be some that were sufficiently interested as to offer their time. Participants could volunteer to be interviewed by indicating so at the end of a questionnaire I asked self-storage companies to distribute to their customers on my behalf (see 3.4 for ethical considerations of this). The nature and use of the recruitment materials are covered in more detail in sub-section 3.3.2.

Having decided that self-storage companies would be my route to recruiting participants it was then necessary to choose which companies to approach. It was my view that those in my current home city (Cardiff) would be a good place to start because it has 50% more self-storage space available per person than the UK average (SSA UK 2014, pp. 3, 5). The city of Cardiff is also ranked as 5th for storage space per person behind London, Edinburgh, Greater Manchester and Bristol (SSA UK 2014, p. 5). Of the five largest companies that manage 29.5% of the UK’s self-storage (SSA UK 2014, p. 5), the two largest – Safestore and Big Yellow – have stores in Cardiff. It was thought that these larger companies might be more receptive to research because they routinely undertake their own small studies, the results of which are posted on their blogs (see for example

⁹ The final group comprised of seven business users, twenty-three domestic users and one other user. Given the quantity and quality of data gained from domestic users the empirical chapters focus upon ‘domestic’ practices.

Safestore 2014).¹⁰ On a pragmatic level Cardiff would be easiest to coordinate and manage logistically, allowing for a greater degree of flexibility in arranging interviews in (often) out of town, industrial locations.

By a happy coincidence I was put in contact with the Managing Director of EasyStore through a colleague who had met them at a charity 'sleep out'. This connection led to us meeting at the end of November 2015 in advance of when interviews were planned to start in January 2016. I received a warm response and enthusiasm for my research project with a promise for participants to be handpicked on my behalf. EasyStore is a smaller company with two stores in South Wales and since very few staff were employed to run the stores the Managing Director had a hands-on role in the day-to-day running of the sites and knew a number of his customers personally. Attempts were made to make contact with other store managers and directors in Cardiff and South Wales which were largely met with silence. In March 2016, the store manager of Big Yellow agreed to hand-out my recruitment materials to customers but did not share the EasyStore Managing Director's enthusiasm or personal connections to customers, so this was less successful.

At this point it was becoming apparent that the mere existence of so many self-storage stores in Cardiff was no guarantee of gaining access to their customers since it was difficult to predict uptake by store managers even after gatekeepers (company managers and CEOs) had granted access. With a meeting with one of the Directors of Safestore lined up, I made the decision to ask for access to a large number of stores and in doing so extended my geographical scope to the South West and North West of England. These areas encompassed Bristol and Greater Manchester, two of the other cities ranked in the top five for the amount of storage space available per person (SSA UK 2014, p. 5). The meeting, which took place at Safestore's Reading branch, was a success and the Managing Director agreed to pass on my recruitment materials to the agreed-upon seven store managers.

Knowing that I would need to travel there and stay for a number of days should I receive responses back from participants in the North West, it was prudent to contact more companies in the area. Smart Storage, Apex Self Storage and FLEXiSPACE who have 15 stores between them across Greater Manchester, Liverpool and surrounding areas were particularly responsive. I conducted three days of interviews in the Greater Manchester area in May 2016 and two days of interviews in Liverpool and surrounding areas in June 2016. A further attempt to gain more participants required the research to be further expanded to the North East of England. Despite commitment by 1st Storage Centres and U Hold the Key to pass on my recruitment materials their attempts at

¹⁰ A problem that is recognised in the industry is a lack of understanding of what self-storage is and how to use it. Company blogs are one way they try to educate potential customers.

recruitment was not fruitful enough and it was decided that it was not feasible to travel to Newcastle and Gateshead for the sake of two interviews.

Table 2 - Response rate by company

Company	Participating stores*	Number of customers contacted	Returned questionnaires	Willing to be interviewed	Completed interviews
1 st Storage Centres	2	25	5	2	0
Access Self Storage	0	n/a	1	1	0
Apex Self Storage	8	550 (approx.)	23	11	9
Big Padlock	2	unknown	3	2	2
Big Yellow	1	2	3**	3	1
EasyStore	2	25	13	8	8
FLEXiSPACE	1	34	7	1	0
MyStorage***	0	n/a	1	1	1
Ready, Steady, Store	0	n/a	1	1	1
Safestore	25	unknown	9	4	4
Shurguard	0	n/a	2	1	1
Smart Storage	6	1009	19	4	2
Space-Maker	0	n/a	1	0	0
Storage Giant	0	n/a	1	1	1
Store-it Wales	0	n/a	1	1	0
Treforest Self Storage	1	5	3	2	1
U Hold the Key	8	600 (approx.)	0	0	0
		2250+	93	43	31

* Where participating store is '0' the returned questionnaires came from advertising research via social media or through friends/ colleagues' connections.

** One of the three returned questionnaires was via social media.

*** In Berlin.

Whilst transcribing and analysing the collated interview data I turned my recruitment efforts back to Cardiff and surrounding areas gaining a few more participants who I had failed to interview previously. In addition to this I put a final call out to friends, colleagues and on social media (Twitter, Facebook, Cardiff University Yammer). I also relaxed the

need to visit the storage unit as part of the interview, asking participants to supply photographs instead.¹¹ I planned to try this method and discount those interviews if they did work out, but the data from them was so rich that it was decided that they should be included (further discussed in 3.3.4).¹² Table 2 above, gives an overview of the participating self-storage companies/stores and success in recruiting and interviewing customers. In total 187 companies from across the UK were contacted over the course of 2016.

3.3.2 Recruitment materials

The recruitment materials provided to the self-storage companies to distribute (either in physical or electronic form) to their customers were a covering invitation letter, information sheet and a two-page questionnaire (see Appendix B, C and D respectively). The covering invitation letter and information sheet (both on Cardiff University headed paper) stated the purpose and importance of the research, its ESRC sponsorship and assured respondents of anonymity and confidentiality. The questionnaire was intended as both a means to recruit and purposively sift and choose participants in order to gain insights from a variety of users. However, as outlined in the previous sub-section despite a considerable number of self-storage companies collaborating in the distribution of the recruitment materials very few users returned the questionnaire and a third of those were willing to be interviewed. The questionnaire did, however, provide useful information with which to tailor individual interview questions, as well as a “broad-brush sketch of the unexplored field” (Hurdley (2006, p. 80) which helped to gain an initial understanding of ‘what causes the phenomenon’ of self-storage use (de Vaus 1996). This was particularly useful since there is no data on self-storage use in the UK except for the Self-Storage Association UK Annual Report and small-scale company surveys.

Since the questionnaire was part of the recruitment strategy it was especially important that it was well designed and presented so to give a good impression and entice potential interview participants (Bryman 2008, pp. 221-222). Designing questionnaires can often work effectively back to front, with the researcher deciding on what they need to find out and writing the questions which will help to provide answers (Fink 2009). I did not want to ask more questions than necessary as this ran the risk of participants becoming bored, or finding it too time-consuming and therefore not completing the questionnaire. Salma (2003) identifies that self-completion questionnaires can present difficulties to

¹¹ Two interviews were conducted over Skype and one in a coffee shop using this method. The latter was with Claudia whose self-storage unit was in Berlin. This gave an alternative perspective to others using self-storage whilst working/studying abroad who were returning to their unit around the time of the interview.

¹² This method had already been trialled once with Frank who had to rush off after our first interview, so we were unable to go to his unit. Fortunately, he had some images on his mobile phone from a recent visit and had a good recollection of what was in his unit.

respondents so due care was taken to produce what Burton (2000, pp. 335-336) calls 'good questions' that mean the same to each respondent. The questionnaire was made up of a mix of questions, some with a limited set of response categories and other open questions requiring written answers. Where possible and relevant, the questionnaire made use of questions already used by the Self-Storage Association UK in their annual customer survey (2014). However, doing so was not without its shortfalls, and when I was conducting the interviews I realised that the age question was flawed. Many of participants were of retirement age and the upper age bracket of '55+' did not capture the vast differences in, not just age, but life stage (such as working/retired, family home/downsizing etc.).¹³ The majority of questions permit comparability between responses and would allow the data to be aggregated and analysed (if desired) in a positivist fashion. A two-week time frame was set for the return of the questionnaire followed by an additional call for returns to non-respondents giving a week's extra response time.

3.3.3 Organising and undertaking interviews

Data collection took place between January 2016 and January 2017. From the returned recruitment questionnaire 43 self-storage users indicated that they were willing to be contacted for an interview and 31 participants were interviewed. A participant summary is provided in Table 3 (below) and extended biographies can be found in Appendix F. It is important to note the largely homogenous nature of those interviewed who were predominantly white, heterosexual, UK-born, middle-class Britons¹⁴. The majority had earned tertiary qualifications and (had) worked in middle-class occupations (including pharmacy technician, games developer and doctor), thereby having the disposable income needed to afford monthly payments on self-storage units of various sizes¹⁵. The only notable exception was Vicky, who lived with her family in a council house and by working at a self-storage store was able to get discounted storage there. As such the participants in this study represent quite privileged experiences of dealing with the materiality of life course transitions and events, which may not be extendable to other social and cultural contexts.

The participants were contacted via email or phone (dependent on the contact details they had given) and we arranged to meet at a place of their choice for the first interview

¹³ More recent versions of the SSA UK annual survey have since amended the question.

¹⁴ Relatedly my own position as a white, heterosexual, Anglophone middle-class women shaped the kinds of questions I asked and the kinds of data I was able to gather.

¹⁵ The average participant had a self-storage unit 110 square feet in size. Using SSA UK estimations (see page 3) means that, on average, a participant spent £2500 on renting their self-storage unit per annum. The median household disposable income (after income tax, national insurance and council tax deducted) in the UK in 2018 was £28,400 (ONS 2019). Therefore renting a self-storage unit would equate to nearly 9%. This percentage is likely to be considerably lower for the participants in this study.

and planned how to access their unit for the second interview. If the arrangement was to do the two interviews back-to-back this was generally chosen to be a café within walking distance or a short drive from their self-storage facility (see Table 3 below). When considering where to carry out the interview in a study of self-storage which often originated from domestic needs, the participants' homes might seem like the ideal location. The home is also an intimate context where private conversations and activities are played out (Miller 2001; Pink 2004). This can be beneficial in that the "atmosphere of home can help to generate a sense of intimacy, confidentiality and trust" in the research which is a powerful way of engaging with otherwise hidden aspects of life (Pink et al. 2017, p. 95). However, conducting research in the home can also be seen as too great an invasion of privacy (see Woodward 2007). Conducting the first interview in the public space of a café and then moving to the unit for the second interview worked well in providing a place to initially build rapport, and then delve into things more deeply within the (relative) privacy of the self-storage unit.

Table 3 – Participant summaries and interview locations, chronological order

Participant (pseudonym)	Type of user	Motivation	Rental duration	Unit size (sq. ft.)	Location - interview 1	Location - interview 2
Oliver	Business	Store kitchen units and appliances prior to fitting	17 years	125 x 2	- Unit -	
Myles	Domestic/ Business	Store contents of house and sporting equipment required for business during home renovation	3 months	165	M&S café	Unit
Bethan	Business	Store pedal-powered equipment between events. Workshop space	1 year 10 months	35	Coffee #1	Unit
Dawn and Ian	Domestic	Storing household items following downsizing brought about by divorce	2 years	125	Home	Unit
Restless World	Other (band)	Twice weekly band rehearsals	1 year 7 months	125	- Unit -	
Emma	Domestic	Storing household contents for duration of move abroad	3 years	75	Tesco café	Unit
Lee	Domestic	Storage of household items whilst temporarily living in rental property following house sale	1 year	150	Self-storage facility reception	Unit
Kathryn	Domestic	Storing household items to declutter house whilst up for sale.	2 months	35	M&S café	Unit
Harriet	Business	Secure storage of equipment, files and log books	2 years	50	Self-storage facility boardroom	Unit
Vicky	Domestic	Not enough storage space at home. Attic leaks and shed is insecure	4 years 3 months	160	Self-storage facility reception	Unit
Chris	Domestic	Secret storage of feminine clothing which can't be kept at home. (Cross-)dressing and trying on outfits	9 years	50	Self-storage facility staff room	Unit
Ed	Domestic	Storing bulky items which don't fit in apartment	9 months	16	Café Nero	Unit
Frank	Business/ Domestic	Temporary storage of furniture not needed in rental properties. Storing deceased mother's effects	2 years	100	- Costa -	
Steve	Domestic	Empty parents' effects after death and store until family is ready to sort through them	4 months	160 x 2	Self-storage facility reception	Unit
Martin	Domestic	Store 'share' of household items following divorce and whilst working/living abroad	1 year 7 months	25	Costa	Unit

John	Business	Office space for three magazine business employees	8 years	-	- Rented self-storage office -	
Warren	Domestic	Store items from parents' house which can't fit in home	1 month	75	Garden centre café	Unit
Stuart	Domestic	Storing possessions during construction of home extension	2 months	35	Waterstones' café	Unit
Leanne	Domestic	During move into smaller house and renovations to attic	1 month	50	Climbing centre café	Unit
Tony and Jan	Domestic/ Business	Storing collectables/antiques which don't fit in home and haven't yet been restored/sold	11 years	160 x 2	Self-storage facility reception	Unit
Alex	Domestic	Storing possessions before moving back in with parents after university	1 month	25	Home	Unit
Dominic	Business	Store tools and stock for solar panel fitting business	2 years 10 months	150	Self-storage facility boardroom	Unit
Caitlin	Domestic	Storing items which were removed to declutter for house sale	2 years	50	Pub	Unit
Anya	Domestic	Moving in with fiancé	1 month	35	University café	Unit
Lily	Domestic	To make moving to a new house easier	2 months	100	- Skype -	
Kieran	Business	Storage of catering equipment	1 year 11 months	150	M&S café	Unit
Claudia	Domestic	Storing household items whilst working and studying abroad	5 years 4 months	20	- Costa -	
Fiona	Business	Archive of records, storing extra furniture	3 years	250	- Company office -	
Gill	Domestic	Moving to a new house that needed renovation	6 months	150	Tesco café	Unit
Graham	Domestic	Storing partner's mother's effects, letting time pass before sorting	1 year 4 months	75	Costa	Unit
Craig	Domestic	Helping partner to downsize home	6 months	100	- Skype -	

The go-along technique allows ethnographers to observe their informants' spatial practices *in situ* while accessing their experiences and interpretations at the same time. Kusenbach (2003, p. 463) describes the go-along as a hybrid between participant observations and interviews, and a more systemic and outcome-orientated version of 'hanging out'. In some ways visiting self-storage units with participants can be seen as a go-along, since I was observing the process of entering facilities and unlocking units whilst asking questions about experiences and practices as we moved through and interacted with the space (for example getting lost, forgetting lock combinations, alarms going off). However, in other ways visiting self-storage units is not strictly a go-along because it is an 'inauthentic' and 'unnaturally-produced' outing that it is not a routine, familiar trip but one undertaken for the purpose of the interview.¹⁶ What made the interview visits even more 'contrived' was that most participants rarely visited their self-storage units, often only visiting once or twice between dropping off and picking up their stuff.

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with the aim of assisting participants to 'unpack' their self-storage use and experiences. This maintained some focus on the topics central to my study but also granted the participants' considerable scope to direct the conversation and in the second interview to be influenced by the contents and space of their storage unit. I was also sensitive to the fact that discussing personal material possessions or significant changes in their lives may involve private and sometimes emotional stories which could require extended explanations before the 'point' became clear. The semi-structured nature of the interviews also allowed me a degree of flexibility to adapt my responses to what had been said and probe for further insights where appropriate.

Building rapport within and between the two interviews is not only fundamental in adhering to ethical research practice but was important in addressing the problem of participant perceptions of the interview process. It is likely that the majority of the participants had limited experiences in research interview encounters, particularly regarding their personal experiences. The 'performative' nature of interviews can result in narratives which are necessarily storied according to the interview context (Holestein and Gubrium 2004). In an attempt to allay these concerns, the encounter was framed more like a 'chat' than an interview through the coupling of an informal, conversational tone with the informal setting.

¹⁶ A few participants did use the opportunity of visiting the unit for the interview to collect or drop off things and measure up furniture. This was generally more opportunistic than premeditated. Only on one occasion, with Alex, did I accompany a participant moving into their self-storage unit.

Each interview was, with the permission of the participants, digitally recorded for later transcription. This allowed me to more fully direct my attention to the participants so not to miss any conversational cues and fail to follow leads. Crang and Cook (2007, p. 83) point out that the “ideal social environment to encourage an interview may not be the same as the ideal acoustic environment to record one”. Indeed, the interview recordings taken in cafés were often punctuated by the sound of the coffee grinder working and background hubbub. Early on in the interviews I also found that strong wind interrupted recordings of interviews taking place at outside units (containers, garage-style units), therefore a second recording device (using the app on my mobile phone¹⁷) was used in conjunction with the voice recorder from that point onward.

Photographs were taken, with permission from the participants, of the unit as a whole and any objects we had specifically talked about. These were taken on my mobile phone, which on some occasions also doubled as a torch to better see into the depths of the self-storage units. As Hurdley (2006, p. 134) argues, photographs can be used as both aide-memoires when analysing interview accounts and to add ‘multi-vocality’ to the final text. In total I took 228 photographs which are included in this thesis where they help to evoke the aesthetic qualities and positioning of the objects in the self-storage units. More than mere illustrations, the photographs are incorporated where they help create meanings and understandings in relation to the narratives (Banks 2001; Pink 2004). However, as discussed in the next section many of these objects were packed away and hidden from view.

Directly after interviews I recorded notes in my field diary about what had happened, and anything that had arisen which struck me as particularly significant or interesting. It was also an opportunity for me to reflect on my feelings about how the interviews had gone. In conjunction with the recruitment questionnaire, the field diary entries then put the interviews into context – spatially, verbally and emotionally – contributing to the ethnographies ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973). Inevitably my field diary was both a record of the research and the beginning of the analysis. Whilst hidden between the lines of this thesis the field diary played a significant role in informing my analysis of the interview data, the development of chapter themes and the text throughout.

3.3.4 ‘A wall of boxes’ – methods in practice

Whilst I had gone into the fieldwork hoping to undertake object-based interviews at participants’ self-storage units, in reality it was difficult to engage with the objects stored in the self-storage units for a number of reasons and I had to adjust both my expectations

¹⁷ For a discussion of practicalities, perception and ethics of using mobile phones in research settings (see Gorman 2017).

and the research method. First, some units were so full that participants couldn't see their items in order to recall them. Stacked on top of each other and reaching far into the depths of the units we could only observe what was 'on the surface'. Some of the units were poorly lit, the only light coming from the corridor outside, so by standing in front of the units we blocked what little light there was. I used the light on my mobile phone and a few participants, like Emma, tried very hard to 'look around' their unit.

Emma: I'm just going to use my torch on my phone to remind myself what's behind here so that I can see it. [...] I can't actually see where... [Quiet whilst we both peer into the relative darkness and towering piles of things]

Emma: I'm going to climb up there.

[She climbs onto the top of the backrest of an armchair at the front of her unit to get a better look]

Secondly, the majority of the participants expressed a reluctance to move items around and unpack boxes unless they were easily accessible. Issues around remembering were compounded because the vast majority had not been to their self-storage unit for some time, had not labelled boxes, and many had packed up in a hurry. I tried to encourage participants to 'get stuck in' by telling them I had packing materials on hand (scissors, packing tape etc.) in case the thought of opening boxes was not appealing because they could not be sealed again. To my surprise none of the participants took this up in direct contrast to my experiences in research interviews I had undertaken previously in attics (Owen 2014). However, just because participants could not see or engage with many of their objects did not mean they were any less evocative, but it did change the framing of the interviews. Much of the interview data ended up being *orientated* towards objects but not strictly *based* on any particular items. As a result, the narratives from the interviews were often focused around the stored objects as a whole and what their moving and storage meant in terms of the circumstances within the participants' lives more broadly. This was particularly the case for Gill, who had a strong emotional response to the 'wall of boxes' in her self-storage unit despite their opaque uniformity (see 6.2.1).

Gill: Yeh, you know, you're getting me going see! [Gill is teary-eyed]

Researcher: I didn't mean to, sorry! [We laugh] I'm surprised that you can get that reaction from...

Gill: A pile of boxes.

Researcher: From a pile of boxes isn't it!

Gill: [she laughs] Yeh.

Gill, like many participants, also provided contradictory accounts which differed between the first interview in which responses were pragmatic and logical, and the second which

tended to be more emotionally-charged. Simply being 'in situ' at the self-storage unit and with their possessions led participants to provide narratives with considerably more depth of insight.

For the later interviews where visiting the self-storage unit was not possible photo-elicitation took the place of interviewing in situ. According to Harper (2002, p. 23) "remembering is enlarged by photographs" and by going through the images taken by the participant in a manner similar to looking around a storage unit the interview progressed in much the same way as the object-orientated interviews. This is not to say that the "peculiar 'magic' of the image" (Bell 2012, p. 155) is equal to the sensory experience of being with/amongst/touching distance of things, but as described in the next section the opportunities and engagement with object-elicitation at self-storage units was not typical of other studies.

3.3.5 Safety in the field

Whilst there is rigorous literature pertaining to researcher safety, much of this has focused on obviously risk-prone setting or research topics, such as war zones or criminality (Sharp and Kremer 2006). However less attention has been devoted to safety issues in areas not associated with such evident dangers, and risky encounters are under-reported by researchers (Bloor et al. 2007). Miller (2014) suggests that safety issues relating to gender have further been neglected. Although I did not feel threatened over the course of my fieldwork, reports of sexual harassment towards female researchers are not unheard of (Sampson and Thomas 2003), and I was putting myself into a vulnerable position by entering self-storage units with relative strangers (participants). Generic suggestions for gender-based safety do exist but they are often not applicable to researching out of the way places like self-storage units, which were often deserted and presented unique concerns and risks.

Throughout my fieldwork I was careful to ensure that someone always had the details of when, where and who I was interviewing, and that I checked back in with them upon leaving the interview location. Since this precaution involves sharing interviewee details it does raise ethical issues relating to participant confidentiality but was accommodated by the Cardiff University Ethics Committee as a necessary part of my safety. I also downloaded a location-sharing app onto my mobile phone from which my partner would be able to identify my GPS location, should I fail to get in touch within the agreed timeframe. However, like Chiswell and Wheeler (2016, p. 231) comment regarding the (in)capability of using mobile phones in rural locations, sometimes my mobile signal was poor or non-existent due to my out of town location or blocked by the self-storage structure. I carried a rape alarm with me, which again may have limited range to alert

passers-by or self-storage staff in the research setting, but at least would act to discourage harm if used.

Parker and O'Reilly (2013, pp. 345-346) describe the impossibility they faced of terminating a research interview in which they felt threatened by a participant when alone with him in his home, identifying that they were several rooms away from the front door and the participant was physically positioned between them and their 'escape'. This was something I was aware of and wherever possible I met with participants in a public place before going to their unit with them (as suggested by Faulkner 2004) and relied on instinct as to continue or not (Chiswell and Wheeler 2016, p. 231). In order to avoid being in a potentially vulnerable position when I was at a participant's unit with them, I made sure to consciously position myself closest to the door to avoid any possibility of being 'locked in' and tried to remember the route back to the reception or street. However, it must be noted that the participant had the upper-hand in this setting and risk could not be completely mitigated.

3.3.6 Transcribing, analysing and writing data

All of the interviews undertaken with self-storage users were recorded and then transcribed. Since transcription can inevitably result in reliability problems if the person transcribing is different from the one who conducted the interview, I undertook both to minimise mistakes and misrepresentations as much as possible. Generally I attempted to follow 'best practice' by transcribing as soon as possible after the interview. This meant I was able to better remember, with assistance from the photographs taken at the self-storage units, what objects the participants were referring to and could identify sounds, such as plastic bags being opened, which I also included in the transcription. I was also able to note when things had been said with irony or sarcasm, and the tone of voice or expressions that had accompanied the narration. Apart from sections which were absolute digressions from the topic, the interviews were transcribed verbatim 'warts and all' (Crang and Cook 2007, p. 88). By transcribing the interviews myself I had continuous engagement with the data which was useful in familiarising myself with it before coding. Names of people and places were altered during the transcription process, and later given pseudonyms, to maintain participant confidentiality (see 3.4.1).

Once the interviews had been transcribed they were uploaded to NVivo, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), in order to manage the data and streamline the coding process. Analysis is a continual process in ethnographic research as ideas evolve from familiarity with the data. Using NVivo gave me a systematic way to sort through and analyse the data, creating codes of emergent and reoccurring themes. These themes in part came directly from the data but were also generated from knowledge and appreciation of canonical and current debates in the greater research

topic (discussed in Chapter 2). Crang and Cook (2007, p. 132) describe how analysis must strike a balance between being a creative and structured process as well as checking interpretations yet also allowing room for ideas to develop. The process of coding and analysing research data has been criticised because it results in “only telling parts of stories rather than their wholeness” (Miller and Glass 2004, p. 127). However, I found coding and then grouping codes into themes particularly helpful to develop both a detailed understanding of the narratives and the complexity of how these related to one another and to wider concerns.

Writing up the research is a case of translating a messy process into a neat product, done so by chopping up, (re)ordering, (re)contextualising and (re)assembling the data (Crang and Cook 2007, p. 133). Initially, I decided to write about those issues which were most prominent in the research, searching for repetition within the data in an attempt to represent my main findings (Bennett and Shurmer-Smith 2002). I also paid particular attention to research material which could develop my theoretical imagination. Throughout this thesis, I include quotations from the interviews where they illustrate key themes or their complexities and ambiguities. Following Hurdley (2006), I recognise talk in the format of an interview as active, relational and performative thereby being attentive to *how* things were spoken about. More significantly for this thesis I explore the role objects play in directing conversations and narratives (Hurdley 2006; Woodward 2016). Whilst the interview quotations used are not ideal for evoking the various felt and emotional presences objects had, traces are still apparent through the participants’ articulation.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations involve both empathy for moral and ethical rights and wrongs as well as adherence to institutional codes of conduct. For this doctoral research, the institutional codes were two-fold with Cardiff University and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) each publishing their own ethical guidelines and/or holding research ethics committees. As an ESRC funded project there was full adherence to the ESRC Research Ethics Framework (2015) which outlines six key principles of ethical research which must be addressed:

- 1) Research participants should take part voluntarily, free from any coercion or undue influence, and their rights, dignity and (when possible) autonomy should be respected and appropriately protected.
- 2) Research should be worthwhile and provide value that outweighs any risk or harm. Researchers should aim to maximise the benefit of the research and

minimise the potential risk of harm to participants and researchers. All potential risk and harm should be mitigated by robust precautions.

- 3) Research staff and participants should be given appropriate information about the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks and benefits, if any, are involved.
- 4) Individual research participant and group preferences regarding anonymity should be respected and participant requirements concerning the confidential nature of information and personal data should be respected.
- 5) Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure recognised standards of integrity are met, and quality and transparency are assured.
- 6) The independence of research should be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality should be explicit.

The ethical decisions taken in the design of this research, then, were not made in isolation but in the context of a thorough and considered framework that accommodates both the expected moral outlook of a researcher and professional guidelines (Wiles et al. 2008, p. 34). Prior to the fieldwork I secured ethical approval from Cardiff University by outlining how I would prepare for and address potential issues. However, this capital 'E' ethics – which is also described as 'procedural ethics' by Guillemin and Gillam (2004) – fails to address the “messier, ongoing, impure, continually updated set of ethics that develop over time and through experiences” which emerge from the everyday encounters that occur throughout the research process (Crang and Cook 2007, p. 32). Lowercase 'e' ethics, as defined by Crang and Cook (2007, p. 32), requires more than doing 'the right thing' or knowing what the right thing is in the first place, but are shaped from situated decisions and ongoing debates about how we should act in the world which are not always straightforward or predictable (Lofland and Lofland 1995, p. 30). Following the suggestion of Guillemin and Gillam (2004, pp. 277-278), then, reflexivity was incorporated into the research practice by acknowledging and being sensitive to the 'ethics in practice' which might emerge in situ, and being alert and prepared for ways of dealing with the ethical tensions that might arise.

3.4.1 Privacy and confidentiality

According to Bulmer (2008, p. 150), ethical research requires striking a balance between exposing the hidden processes at work in modern society and protecting the privacy of participants. As Reiss (1979, p. 79 cited in Christians 2000, p. 139) states “the single most likely source of harm in social science inquiry is the disclosure of private knowledge considered damaging by experimental subjects”. As such confidentiality was guaranteed

to research participants in this study as the primary safeguard against unwanted exposure.

Self-storage company employees and managers acted as gatekeepers in allowing and facilitating access through which to recruit research participants. Once they had vetted my recruitment materials (Appendix B, C and D) many chose to distribute them via email complying with the confidentiality agreements they held with their customers. Those self-storage users who returned the questionnaire to me and indicated their agreement to take part in interviews did so voluntarily. All participants were told at the outset that any and all data collected would be treated as confidential (see next sub-section on informed consent). In order to maintain the participants' privacy pseudonyms were used instead of real names in order to ensure anonymity. All other features that could identify participants, including the location of their self-storage unit, were removed from transcripts at the transcription stage and some photographs have been doctored accordingly.

Completed questionnaires, scanned in copies of consent forms, audio recordings of the interviews, photographs and transcripts were held securely on an office computer and personal laptop (both password-protected) and backed-up on a hard-drive disk kept in a locked drawer. Data files at no point were shared with other parties.

3.4.2 Informed consent

Before commencing interviews with participants it was essential to acquire their informed consent to participate: what Bulmer (2008, p. 150) describes as the linchpin of ethical behaviour in research. Informed consent refers to the provision of sufficient information about a research project so that potential participants are aware of its nature and consequences before they decide whether or not to participate (Christians 2000, p. 138). Prior to beginning our first interview the participants were provided with a copy of the information sheet if they had not received or retained one from the recruitment materials (Appendix C) and a consent form (Appendix E). This gave them the fullest information concerning the nature and purpose of the research in order to decide upon their participation. I talked through the form with participants to further ensure they did not feel uninformed or deceived (Tracey and Carmichael 2010).

3.4.3 Hoarding disorder

Over recent years hoarding has been the subject of a tremendous amount of media interest, particularly day-time TV programs like *The Hoarder Next Door* (Twenty Twenty 2012). This attention is remarkable because hoarding was virtually absent in research and healthcare until the early 1990s. Frost and Steketee (2014, p. 3) describe how, following the first paper on hoarding in 1993 and then subsequent definition in 1996, they

have “felt like passengers on a runaway train”, inundated with requests for help from health departments, elderly services, housing official and fire departments. Understanding of hoarding has developed considerably over the last two decades and in 2017 the World Health Organisation added hoarding disorder as a new category under OCD, although this categorisation is contested with some suggesting it is a condition in its own right (OCD UK 2019). The condition is generally now understood as “where someone acquires an excessive number of items and stores them in a chaotic manner, usually resulting in unmanageable amounts of clutter. The items can be of little or no monetary value” (NHS 2018). Those with hoarding disorder can find the idea of discarding items distressing, and their personal, social, and domestic lives impaired by the quantity of things in their possession.

With hoarding disorder categorised as a mental illness these individuals could be defined as ‘vulnerable’ people under the broad understanding of the term in social research (see von Benzon and van Blerk 2017). So to avoid the possibility of distress to research participants it was decided that those clinically diagnosed with hoarding disorder would not be invited to participate or, if identified at interview stage, be removed from the study immediately. Since the question of hoarding was not directly addressed on the recruitment materials, to avoid putting off potential participants, it was necessary to be vigilant for signs of the condition in questionnaire responses and introductory conversations with participants. I further familiarised myself with the ‘clutter rating scale’ (Frost et al. 2008) but this had limited applicability to self-storage units which, by their nature, contain more than the average living room or bedroom. In the end, I had to take a common-sense approach, particularly because participants often described themselves as hoarders in a non-clinical sense.

3.4.4 ‘Emotional baggage’

As noted on the Ethical Approval Form for this project, it is possible that some individuals rent self-storage at stressful or emotional points in their lives (e.g. relationship break-up, bereavement) and this may result in upsetting narratives to being divulged during the interviews. These were not explicitly sought in the interviews but often emerged when discussing the events leading up to renting self-storage units or in relation to specific objects in the units. As the interviews were in-depth and largely non-directive, conversation was led by the participants who were able to dictate the content and form of the research (Brannen 1988). Talking about sensory methods Harris and Guillemin (2012, p. 696) suggest that research which explores participants’ experiences can lead into areas that would otherwise remain concealed and tapping into this may unleash emotions for which participants’ are unprepared. I made it clear at the outset that participants could withhold responding to questions if they wanted, and the interview

could be paused or ended at any point. Whilst I had not experienced many of the significant life events participants described during the course of their interviews, I empathised with the participants as best I could, acknowledging the emotions and tensions brought to the fore in discussing intimate personal and family practices. When similar life experiences had happened to me I found that sharing this established intimacy (Ng 2017). In many ways sharing personal stories created a sense of affirmation and social support (McKay 2002), which facilitated the research process but also affected the ways in which the participants related to me as a researcher (see Hubbard et al. 2001, pp. 129-130). Materials were taken to the interviews with which I could direct participants to appropriate bodies or services (such as the Citizen Advice Bureau) if the difficult subjects emerged. However, perhaps due to the age difference between myself and participants (many commented that they had children or grandchildren about my age) my advice was never sought in this way.

Ng (2017, p. 413) identifies that the research process “is active and morphing, evolving while the researcher experiences changes in his/her own life”, and that coping with emotional personal events can change the way the researcher relates to the research. As a research project punctuated three times by the loss of loved ones the issue of emotion was reflected upon more often than expected. From its inception it had been clear that emotion would be a key topic of the research and it threatened and was tangible during a number of the interviews. Harris and Guillemin (2012, p. 696) state that it is not unusual to experience a strong resonance with some interview narratives. This may lead the researcher to reflect on their own life and personal situation (Hochschild 1983). In this research the narratives brought up by participants around experiences of bereavement were particularly difficult. One participant asked, mid-flow while recounting his self-storage story following the death of his mother, if I had ever experienced loss. He proceeded without me responding, but from that point I was lost in thought about the funeral that I would be attending the next day. With great difficulty I had to drag myself out of that reverie to be fully present in the interview. Various strategies have been suggested for ‘emotion management’ during fieldwork including pacing interviews, keeping a personal diary and informal de-briefing sessions with peers (see for example Hubbard et al. 2001). My field diary became a particularly key tool to debrief and acknowledge how my own experiences and feelings of grief might be impacting upon the interviews. Research is an emotional and personal journey whereby researchers simultaneously draw upon theoretical ideas, experiences of conducting research and their own personal biographies in the pursuit of new understandings, thereby recreating themselves as researchers and individuals in the process.

An emotional response to a participant's narrative – felt as sympathy, empathy and a resonance with the researcher's own experiences – can also be productive because it has the ability to alert a researcher to the meanings and behaviours of those he/she is interviewing (Wilkins 1993). Emotion has an interpretative function because it enables the researcher to gain intuitive insight and subsequently allows inchoate knowledge to develop. Brannen (1988) suggests that awareness of the role of emotion in research should be extended beyond the interview process. When interpreting data we should acknowledge that the respondent's narrative is 'shrouded in emotionality' and because of this will be ambiguous and contradictory at times. Emotion is both data in its own right and a method of understanding. It is necessary to acknowledge that my own emotional responses to participants' experiences were present in the interpretation of the interview transcripts.

3.5 Chapter conclusions

This chapter has examined the particular research process adopted in this thesis from the recruitment of research participants, choice and implementation of research methods, and ethical considerations. It does so to explore the experiences of using self-storage in the UK. In line with good research practice I have attempted to be mindful throughout this project of my own views, values and assumptions and how my own identity, experiences and relationships with objects may affect data collection, analysis and written work. I have attempted to be reflexive about my interpretations of participants' narratives (Butler 2001), without falling into "self-indulgent navel-gazing" (Ley and Mountz 2001, p. 245). In reality, it is not possible to be completely reflexive as our identities and subjectivities are constantly shifting in response to events in our lives and experiences as researchers (see Dwyer and Limb 2001). Therefore, the incompleteness of my accounts and self-awareness are acknowledged.

The accounts of self-storage users' experiences in this thesis are also inevitably partial. They present only a selection of perspectives of the place of self-storage in experiences of life transitions, trajectories and events as well as showing broader ways and practices of 'living with things'. The analytical frames are based upon my personal interpretations of, and responses to, extant research (Chapter 2). Nevertheless, the situated-ness of the research does not negate its utility in speaking back to the issues which informed it. Indeed, as I demonstrate in subsequent chapters, the specificities of the experiences unpacked here can illuminate much broader issues from which new theorisations can develop. The following four empirical chapters provide different insights into the overlapping relations between objects, people and space. They address how self-storage fits into everyday lives and offers insight into the ways that it acts as a contingency and categorises, connects and consolidates.

4 Categorisation – Putting 'everything in its place'

The first of four empirical chapters examines the ways that research participants were observed to be engaging in practices of categorisation of their possessions, storage spaces and (in)actions. Popular discourses around storage and clutter have developed over recent years, signified by the growth of storage furniture and interior design solutions from companies like IKEA, self-help literature such as Marie Kondo's best-selling book *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* (2014), and an increased number of programs related to hoarding, decluttering and self-storage. What these have in common is first drawing attention, albeit through more 'spectacular' examples, to mundane material practices, and secondly reinforcing social and moral norms around how these routines should take place. These ideals are in opposition to modern 'consumer society' (as well as ideas of moral propriety), in which we are conditioned to desire and buy more, better, up-to-date things (Belk et al. 2007, p. 133).¹⁸ As a result, there is a seemingly constant stream of 'things' coming into our homes, which requires regular care, attention and time to be invested so that we do not drown in 'things' and our living spaces are not engulfed. The discourse, as noted by Cwerner and Metcalfe, in contemporary texts about clutter and storage, constructs "clutter as a social and personal problem and storage as providing the key to overcoming it" (2003, p. 230). Indeed, this is something self-storage companies are quick to highlight in their advertising campaigns.

Following the well-known idiom 'A place for everything, and everything in its place', this chapter highlights the experiences of self-storage users in attempting to combat clutter, mess and excess in their everyday lives and tie down 'nomadic objects' (Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003, p. 234) which are disobediently avoiding attempts to tidy and categorise. It contributes to literature on the home by considering the place of domestic objects and practices beyond the space of the home. The first section of this chapter, 4.1, explores the main ways that participants used self-storage to create order in their homes and in the world by displacing and systematically ordering 'matter out of place' through the hierarchical placement of possessions in a way that moderated their display at home.

¹⁸ However, we must also note the recent turn to thrift in response to having reached 'peak stuff', as exemplified by IKEA starting up a second-hand store.

Then, in section 4.2, the discussion moves on to how self-storage acts as a home for 'alternative' forms of consumption – collecting and hoarding – which are perceived to be 'out of place' in the domestic sphere. The final section, 4.3, briefly explores the other side to having more space namely, enabling the acquisition of more things and a lack of incentive to keep consumption under control.

4.1 'Matter out of place'

By studying the everyday and ordinary material practices of sorting, keeping and storing we can examine how systems of classification are deployed, that is, the social assignment of things to their place or designation as 'matter out of place' (Douglas 2000 [1967]). The 'place' for things is designated by cultural conventions which become materialised through their placement, creating a tangible and visible record of cultural meaning that is otherwise intangible. However, the *placement* of things is more than *plac(e)*ing them in a specific location (Dion et al. 2014, p. 565) since it also refers to the 'place' of things in our lives, an important element of the processes leading up to and during the stored life of a thing, something which will be expanded upon in a later section. Whilst there has been some avoidance in talking about objects as having 'place' or being 'placed' due to the trend of seeing objects as having 'agency' (see Bennett 2001), my interviews with participants reinforced that putting things into self-storage was a controlled action that necessitated, at least some, thought. In view of that, following Miller (2001) and Hurdley (2006), human involvement cannot be denied and is crucial in the placing of objects. As Peters (2011, p. 237) reasons, "clearly objects can be 'affective' and this can impact placement" but ultimately "it is a human who *places* items as significant or not and decides on their whereabouts in the domestic setting", or indeed decides to put them in self-storage. The 'correct' place for things was something which was often bought up by participants when discussing where their stored things had come from and where they would ideally end up. Vicky was aware of the ways in which the organisation of her domestic sphere differed from, what she perceived, as normative ways of keeping things:

Vicky: Normal people, if you want to say it like that, normal people would put things on top of wardrobes or in corners in bedrooms and things like that but I don't like that. Which is why the unit is absolutely fantastic for... things like holiday suitcases.

At her unit, Vicky suggested that the correct place for her Christmas decorations was actually in her loft, rather than in her self-storage unit because that is where it is a social convention to keep them, thereby conceiving self-storage as a non-domestic storage space:

Vicky: There are a lot of... Christmas, Christmas, Christmas, Christmas [She touches box or bag every time she says it] and there is a couple of boxes down there that are Christmas as well. ... which if I didn't have this [storage unit] would be in the loft at home. Because I think that's where most people [feel they] should put Christmas decorations.

Peters (2011, p. 249) found that placing objects out of everyday sight in the home is arguably a method that tourists use to retain the 'extraordinariness' of their souvenirs, placing them as special or significant. Whilst storing Christmas decorations out of sight for the majority of the year is done in part to preserve the enchantment of their display during the Christmas period, it is also in relation to seasonal cultural rituals in the social calendar – performing belonging (or un-belonging) through the display (and then subsequent removal) of festive artefacts. The self-storage unit, for Vicky as well as a number of other participants, acted in the same way as a loft at home, displacing festive decorations from everyday spaces when out of season. These households used self-storage in place of a loft because they either did not have one to use, they did not entrust their possessions to the loft they had, or the space had been renovated into additional rooms (spare bedrooms or studies) and therefore could no longer be used for storage in the same way. However, whilst their self-storage units are functioning much like attics, and acting as attic replacements, this doesn't mean that they can necessarily be considered a 'home' space. As will be seen later on, there is more to a 'domestic' space than how it is used.

4.1.1 Displacing excess and overflow

Storage is prescribed as the antidote for domestic overflow and excess deemed to be 'matter out of place' in the lived 'front' spaces of the home (Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003). When storage spaces were lacking in their homes the participants interviewed turned to self-storage. They identified their need as coming out, in part, from the mismatch between the number of things they possessed and the space they had available to store them. These experiences corroborate findings from America, which point to a crisis in home storage which has necessitated the displaced of stored objects into more peripheral or extended domestic spaces (Arnold and Lang 2007). In British homes, this is compounded by the lowering of housing space standards, which has a particular consequence for storage as the spaces are turned over to 'living' (Roberts-Hughes 2011; Finlay et al. 2012). It could be seen then, that if room for storage is being removed in favour of living space, self-storage units are being reimagined as domestic storage space (along with associated contents, practices and meanings). This was identified by Lee, the assistant manager of a storage site in South Wales, who was himself temporarily occupying a large storage unit during a house move.

Lee: Quite often the case with people generally, you know, they don't have quite enough room. Particularly these days with modern houses you don't get a lot of storage space like you do in an old... you know with the cupboards everywhere and all that sort of thing.

Not having enough storage space at home causes placeless things – what Löfgren (2017, p. 6) calls 'domestic driftwood' – to be defined as overflow or excess, regardless of their emotional, monetary or use value. Therefore, things which are overflowing and blocking channels within and through households and are not needed on an everyday basis are placed out of the way in self-storage units where they can be accommodated and then collected when needed.

Researcher: So if you don't really need it why are you holding onto these things?

Lee: Well when I say I don't need it, I don't actually need it on a day to day basis but because I've got nowhere to store it. I mean in the winter I don't need a lawnmower and things like that and bikes and what have you I don't need them in the winter, so it's in there.

By storing his lawnmower and other outdoor leisure objects in self-storage, Lee can retain possession of them for when he does want to use them. In the times in-between they lie dormant in a liminal space that is 'appropriate' to their status as outside, 'dirty' items (Hirschman et al. 2012). In this way self-storage can be seen to share many of the characteristics of the garage: it is durable – serving to contain dirty, dangerous and polluting objects, and marginal – removed from the lived spaces of the home and thereby maintaining their sanctity (Lefebvre 1991; Douglas 2000). Again, self-storage can be likened to a domestic space, but has more in common with the garage than storage spaces in the lived areas of the home (like a cupboard). This is because they share similar characteristics as the garage, relating to location (marginal) and contents ('dirty', out of place objects). However, unlike the garage self-storage units are not somewhere to maintain or fix items, only store them.

Since downsizing into a smaller property Ed and his wife, who are both retired, have experienced a changing relationship with their possessions. Having considerably less domestic space has led to some negotiation and comprises around what can fit into their flat, what can remain there and what needs to be stored elsewhere. This has meant that some things (like the chairs Ed describes below) need to be kept in their self-storage unit for the majority of the time when they are not needed but still need to be kept hold-of for the odd occasion when they are required.

Figure 7 - Ed's two extra dining room chairs



Ed: My wife wanted to get rid of two dining room chairs. And it was as simple as that. And I said well we've got nowhere to store them, um, because it's a 6 table setting and she says 'It just looks cluttered, I want to get rid of two chairs'. But you can't get rid of them permanently because you don't know when you might need them, Christmas, if ever we're having a dinner party and we've got more than a couple of people who need them. So I said 'Right find an alternative, I'll find somewhere to store them'. Um, there's not loft space because we're ground floor so [...] we've got what we've got in terms of space, so I had to find an alternative.

Researcher: Okay so it started with two dining room chairs, has it expanded on from there?

Ed: Well yes, it has I mean a couple of dining rooms chairs and then we said we've got other things like suitcases for holiday clothes. [...] We come down, take stuff out as we need it. So we'll come down and visit for 20 minutes maximum, sometimes its only 10 minutes and we'll just sort out our, um, and we sort it out there and then. And we have stuff in

the vacuum bags so we can take them off as they are and then bring back a new bag when we need [to]. So it's a fairly organised way of doing it, um, but it's not like we visit all the time. I mean in the last couple of months I've probably been once, I guess, to pick up a bag I needed because I'd just come back from Edinburgh, we'd been away for a week in Edinburgh and needed a large holdall that was there, so we brought that.

For Ed and his wife their overflow (made all the more pronounced having downsized into a smaller property) is both a blessing – signifying lives well lived – and a burden – requiring them to take stock and slimline their things so that they can be condensed into their smaller home (Miller 2010). Ed approached his self-storage need very practically and skirted around describing anything more emotional. Yet Smith and Ekerdt point out that “the stock and store of one’s belongings can be a resource, achievement, delight and comfort, but they may also by turn be a burden” (2011, p. 378). Having been used to the space for certain things which signified and enabled a particular lifestyle, downsizing spatially and materially represents “a narrowing of the life world” (Smith and Ekerdt 2011, p. 377), a uncomfortable reality to contemplate let alone narrate.

4.1.2 The fight against clutter

Overflowing and excessive things are intrinsically linked with clutter and mess. As new objects enter the home and move around it is difficult to maintain systematic organisation and ordering since things do not comply perfectly with the classification system in place, or at least the effort would be too great to continuously reorder and reclassify things (Dion et al. 2014, p. 578). Lorimer (2005, p. 87) states that “In the western household, effective home-making is most often an exercise in [...] keeping ‘everything in its place’”. Many of the participants, including Lily and Gill, described how their homes and lives had filled up with things, and expressed feelings of exasperation and it being beyond their control.

Lily: We have a three-bedroom house in London. Um, that surprisingly has filled up with stuff [Being ironic]. There is just the two of us but it has filled up.

Gill: I thought well, let me declutter... should we call it declutter? Get rid of all my rubbish because obviously in a three bedroom house there was myself and my husband and our two children, boy and girl. So obviously with those comes a lot of rubbish.

The transgressions – the clutter and mess - that happen as a result of excessive things therefore have to be tolerated, but when they get out of hand can be disruptive to the

liveability and comfort experienced in the home. Clutter is impromptu, casual and unintentional, as well as “an almost inevitable outcome of living with things” (Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003, p. 236). Following Douglas’s conceptualisations (Douglas 2000 [1967]), clutter is symbolically defined as ‘dirt’ or ‘matter out of place’, and is the by-product or transgressing elements of a systematic ordering and classification of matter (Gregson et al. 2007b). Gill equates her clutter with rubbish, suggesting it is stuff of little or no value or consequence. She also points out that the mess is relative to the make-up of her family; the endless influx of cheap plastic toys is an unavoidable part of having children and whilst these things are played with and enjoyed they fall out of use relatively quickly as the child grows up and develops.

Participants also alluded to the ‘nomadic’ nature of their things, explaining how what is regarded as ‘in-place’ at one moment in time is clutter the next, even without having moved. They diagnosed that the biggest problem was that most things did not have a ‘proper’ place of their own (Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003, p. 235). Domestic storage solutions attempt to reinforce boundary work in order to manage symbolic pollution. Furthermore, they alluded to their disappointment at being unable to rein in their consumption with more things entering their homes than leaving, and storage – putting mess and disorder out of sight beyond the boundaries of the home – as being a way to deal with it. Self-storage, then, is reinforcing domestic boundaries from beyond the space of the home.

4.1.3 Moderating display

Storage, both in the home and beyond in self-storage, serves the purpose of putting things away without actually diminishing possession, thus moderating their display in more visible spaces (Urbach 1996, p. 65). By concealing objects storage can act to invest homes with signs of moral propriety, serving “to address a widespread ambivalence about material acquisition and the accumulation of excess wealth” (Urbach 1996, p. 65). This concern about being seen as materialistic is particularly pronounced when visitors come to the home and these middle-class sensibilities around accumulations of things seemed to be even more prominent in the performance of home to potential buyers. For participants, putting their house on the market lead them to re-evaluate their things and consider how they might be perceived by the potential buyers, even before they went on to sort through things prior to the move. Even back-stage spaces, usually safe from the gaze of visitors (Goffman 1990 [1959]), had to be dealt with. This involved stripping-back personal touches, emptying cluttered surfaces and generally making the home ‘more presentable’ to potential buyers. Kathryn was particularly thorough in ‘decluttering’ her home, both on the surface and into cupboards, and even altered the landscape of her garden to make it more appealing.

Kathryn: From having a family of four living in a house, and the children have lots of mess and clutter or treasures as they like to call them, and extra clothing. So most houses where you open the wardrobe [...] they're jam-packed, I didn't want to show anyone around a house, open a cupboard and show things spilling out. So I just went through the house and went and did a first de-clutter. Things either went to the tip or the charity shop or to anybody who wanted anything, like armchairs or the odd bit of furniture we had. Plants from the garden, because I've got a very busy cottage garden. Most people actually don't like gardening, so again I dug up all my plants and turfed over the borders so it looks like a larger area.

When probed about why she had gone to such depths to 'depersonalise' and slim-line her household Kathryn explained that she found other people's belongings a distraction when looking around a potential new house, which would be problematic when trying to envisage making a home there. In order to keep potential buyers' focus on the positive attributes of her house – spacious rooms and period features – Kathryn took down items that displayed familial relations (like family photographs and souvenirs), thereby removing objects that could narrate their family home to allow the buyers to imagine their own family home in the 'blank slate' spaces.

Kathryn: I've even taken family portraits off the walls and replaced them with just paintings, you've got to de-personalise your house and it obviously worked! ... with having the offer. [...] I've always known this is how you sell a house, so I would always be horrified if I went to someone's house, who wasn't old, and their house was full. So you walked in and all you were looking at was a busy carpet and busy curtains, and magazines piled everywhere, and odd tables and ornaments everywhere, and family photographs... I personally wouldn't be able to... even though my father's a property developer and I know how to view properties, I would just be going 'Oh my goodness, look at all this'. I would just be transfixed like 'Oh look at that picture, that's horrible' or 'That's nice', or I'd be going 'That dog's really cute in that photo'. I would be distracted, so I think most people are. Hence why we decluttered the house; used the self-storage unit.

What is particularly striking about this quote from Kathryn is how she described that she would be 'horrified' by a 'busy' and cluttered house, but almost accepted this was inevitable for older people. Her negative feelings towards mess, clutter and excess echo the societal norms that position them as 'matter out of place' (Douglas 2000 [1967]).

When clutter or mess is perceived as such provokes intense feelings of disgust, guilt and embarrassment (Belk et al. 2007, p. 134). Kathryn had a very strong reaction of disgust towards clutter, both in that instance and in her own home. However, there is more to this narrative as Kathryn places herself as an 'expert' through her father's occupation, judging the seller's taste in artefacts and how their display distracted from the house itself. Clutter is a cultural practice (Hurdley 2013).

4.1.4 Hierarchical storage space

Whilst abundant 'stuff', the non-descript piles, heaps, stacks, assemblages of overflow, can be seen as 'domestic driftwood' (Löfgren 2017, p. 6) this is not found to be the case for all household things. In fact, the emotions or values attributed to some items play a part in creating a hierarchy of storage spaces. By adding self-storage to their repertoire of available storage space, participants described how their rationale for object placement was impacted by the value of the objects, as well as their physical proximity and security. This is something noted by Douglas (1993, p. 270) in relation to the 'best china', which she identified was stored hierarchically dependent on both its value and related frequency of usage. Whilst the time and place of things when they are bought out of storage is important to how they are put away, there is more to be said about cultural conventions of 'the correct place' for things within and beyond the home, as well as the impact of sentimental value. This could be seen from what self-storage users did and did not store in their units and their rationale for doing so. Several participants, such as Warren below, highlighted how their self-storage unit was home to certain objects but not others, because they did not deem it be the 'correct place' for things that were valuable to them.

Figure 8 - Warren's 'less valuable' possessions



Warren: I've got myself a fairly minimal storage because basically anything valuable I still keep at home. I keep my eye on it. And this is the non-valuable by and large.

Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) reported that physical closeness to an object, touching or embracing it, was related to the memories or relationships it embodied, whereas attachments based upon the characteristics of the objects itself led respondents to be more physically distant. In a similar vein, sentimental value was found to be a key deciding factor in the placement of things in self-storage or the home. Self-storage was deemed not to be the right place for irreplaceable things which, due to their nature, people preferred to keep close by near to them at home. Kathryn identifies this distinction between photographs which have not been backed-up and documents that can be replaced with relative ease.

Kathryn: I've only put things in the storage unit that I wouldn't mind if they burnt down to the ground. [...] I wouldn't store photographs because they would have been difficult to put in a storage unit in case anything would happen. But anything else even passports and birth certificates, they're all replaceable. But the photographs I've got aren't, because they're not in a cloud and they are on paper and on film, so they are stored in the house.

Frank described how they had tried to store as much of his deceased mother's valuable things in their family garage as possible because he felt they were more secure at home as it was an environment he had control over. It is interesting that autonomy and power over the space held greater purchase than an abundance of security features that most likely go beyond what is found at a typical British house. Security, privacy and autonomy are all key ideas in definitions of the meaning of home (see section 2.2), and here self-storage is seen to be lacking those features (at least in a conventionally domestic sense).

Researcher: Why is it those things are here and other things you've got are in your garage?

Frank: Because we thought we'd be able to fit the table and chairs in the garage.

Researcher: Okay so you tried to get as much in as you could?

Frank: Well the garage was cleaned out okay. And then, unfortunately, mum passed away and then the really personal secure items I wanted to keep are in our garage, the stuff that's not as valuable is in the lock-up.

Researcher: Right okay. So some kind of hierarchy there?

Frank: There is. Which is why, and perhaps it's my own experience of the security thing. Whereas I know I have control over my own environment, I don't have control of that.

Vicky actually expressed the opposite of Frank. She described how, because of the neighbourhood she lived in, she did not like to store things in her garden shed as they were at risk of being stolen. For Vicky, the lack of power she held over her domestic storage spaces (which also extended to the leaky roof of her poorly maintained council house), led her to place her faith in self-storage instead. Having a different perception of self-storage from all other participants Vicky's experience shows how self-storage use is a very classed practice (see section 3.3.3), which impacts on motivations for/ feelings about the space as well as the ability to afford it.

Vicky: I have got a shed that is very empty at home. But because of the area I live in, I'm not happy about having certain things in there. I mean obviously, there are things like your Christmas decorations and stuff that you would put in there because if they were to go missing it wouldn't be the end of the world. But if somebody was to break into my shed and personal effects, [...] there are things that were my grandmother's, you know just knick-knacks that were my granny's and like I say, family photos and you find when people do break into places like that they find it funny to... um... ruin things that are personal, no good to them but are personal to you.

Existing literature describes how those things that are visible and displayed are always in a relationship with that which is stored (Woodward 2015, p. 219), but these quotations show that the idea of value (particularly in relation to sentimentality) and placement goes far beyond this. When self-storage is included in the repertoire of storage available to a household, decisions have to be made about the suitability of the space based upon its perceived qualities (dirty/clean, safe/unsafe), in relation to known domestic equivalents, that may impact upon the things placed in its care. Hirschman et al. (2012) found that the garage, as a liminal space, is thought to be the right place for certain kinds of mixed-state objects, and for some of the participants this same distinction was drawn. However, others (Vicky for example) reported greater trust in self-storage and therefore placed it higher in their hierarchy of storage spaces.

4.2 Locating collecting and hoarding

According to Belk (2014, p. 33), both hoarding and collecting are extreme consumption activities and whilst they both involve acquiring, owning and curating objects “collecting is generally revered [and] hoarding is generally reviled”. He attests that collecting is

socially judged to be 'good' because collectors exert ownership and have power over things. Acquiring, maintaining and displaying collections is an exercise in controlling otherness, rule-governed and meaningful activities (Belk 2014, p. 33). These material practices are notably different from other collections of things like clothes in wardrobes, or the accidental accumulations of stuff described earlier. Storage plays a key part in this, making things visible or not as the collector wishes and reining in excess into an, at least partially, ordered system of artefacts structured by measures of relatedness (such as date, manufacturer etc.). As King (2008, p. 107) states, "Collected objects alone make a mess, and containers unfilled seem unfulfilled, but they marry one another's needs". However, as the situation below reveals, the excesses of collecting can reach a point where they no longer appear meaningful and virtuous but receive the same moral misgivings as other forms of clutter and profligacies.

The collectors, Tony and Jan (a married couple in their early 50s with no children), have both shared and individual collections including: Babycham collectables, ornaments, Garfield toys, prams, books, Cindy dolls, furniture, Monty Python DVDs and figurines, wooden children's toys, over 40 grandfather clocks in various states of repair, as well as other oddities that had caught their attention over the years. They keep this 'Aladdin's cave' of mismatched items in two big shipping container units on a yard less than 15 minutes' drive from their home, which they visit twice a week. The spatial tension between abundance and available space in Tony and Jan's home, bought about by their collecting hobby, is resolved by their self-storage unit; allowing them to derive satisfaction from their abundance of things (Riggins 1994), rather than them be a source of stress (McKenzie et al. 2015).

Tony: Generally the living room I think is less cluttered than it would be if we didn't have this. Um, and... [the] front bedroom is getting to a point now where I think it's reasonable, we are making efforts to have less in the house. [...] Um, certainly for me if we've got stuff all over the house it becomes a... [He laughs] don't want to say mental problem, but it becomes uh...

Jan: It upsets you a lot.

Tony: You can't see the wood from the trees.

The immensity of Tony and Jan's things blocked up the spaces, channels and flows into, within and out of their home. Tony's anxiety about their cluttered home chimes with Belk et al.'s suggestion that excessive things can create chaos, frustration and panic over how to manage time and space (2007, p. 133). Following Mary Douglas their collections, as 'matter out of place', transgress the boundaries of the socially produced system of classification and can be defined

as 'dirt' (2000 [1966], p.36). Furthermore, the couple is also bound by moral and social norms around the correct amount of possessions. Collecting goes beyond the norms of consumption with collectors procuring objects with the intent to create and eventually complete a collection of things (McIntosh and Schmeichel 2004) that are desirable for reasons unconnected to any utilitarian function (Belk 1995). This makes the management, of what could be deemed by dominant culture as fetishistic materialism, even more difficult (Hetherington 2004, p. 157), something they are acutely aware of because Jan's parents are hoarders. Therefore relocating Tony and Jan's collections to create a 'normal' clutter-free home is important both for their enjoyment of their domestic space and how they are viewed by those that visit.

Figure 9 - Part of Tony and Jan's collection of Garfield toys



In opposition to the virtues of collecting, hoarding is diagnosed to be 'bad' because of a lack of power over things which chaotically inhabit space and, seemingly to an outsider, are without order (Belk 2014). In these instances people with the disorder are helpless to the power their possessions hold over them (NHS 2018). Those clinically diagnosed as hoarders were not invited to participate in this research (see section 3.4.3) but a number of participants candidly described themselves as being 'a bit of a hoarder'. Describing herself as a hoarder Bethan positioned her material excess as unusual and contrary to, what she deemed, an acceptable number of possessions.

Bethan: I think I've always had, like, a massive thing with... I've been trying to broach it recently with just getting rid of things. I think I was

turning into a bit of hoarder, especially when I had the flat. I think that was the turning point when I moved out of the flat, it was like wow.

Researcher: How long had you lived there?

Bethan: I'd lived there for three years and it was a really cheap flat, but he was a kind of private landlord. I know why it was cheap because it was like really mouldy, but it was actually big like the front room was huge. And I think that didn't help. Suddenly there's like 'Yeh I can fit just one more in', 'Yeh maybe another two', 'Just push this sofa'. Yeh and then when I moved out I remember my dad coming up, and he was just like 'Where has all this stuff...' it was just coming out of all the cupboards and... it looked full but then all of a sudden when you bring everything out of all the cupboards... it's like what is all this stuff here?! So yeh, I think I felt a bit, I dunno, a bit embarrassed, a bit ashamed because I had got so much stuff!

Bethan expressed the emergent feelings of embarrassment and shame she had felt upon re-engaging with an excessive amount of stored objects in her home. Martin compared himself to hoarders he has seen on television programmes but was also quick to assert that his actions were more rational and less extreme.

Martin: I think there was a few things that got thrown away but I don't usually throw very much away. I'm a hoarder [He laughs] Not as bad as some of these people you see on television [I] must say.

Researcher: We're all guilty of it to some degree.

Martin: Yeh I think so. But uh... It might come in useful so it doesn't get thrown away. [...] You see these things on television where they have a house full and they can't even move in the rooms! And I don't know what the hell they've got in their head but I'm not that mad.

Caitlin similarly described her actions as both 'hoarding' and not-hoarding due to the circumstances she was experiencing being too busy to deal with her things. Both Martin and Caitlin are portraying their identity in relation to the mad 'other', associating their (in)actions with what they perceive 'lazy' hoarders doing. Indeed many of the participants, not only Bethan, Martin and Caitlin, appeared to be conscious of how I might perceive the number of their things and attempted to justify their possessions, either by rationalisation as 'not-hoarding' or by way of the proliferation of stuff in Western consumer society more broadly. Either way, self-storage effectively removes and conceals their things from any judgemental gaze, and dislodges feelings of 'stuffocation'

from where they can be felt every day to a space located out of sight and out of mind (Wallman 2015).

This section has outlined participants' experiences of ordering and placing objects which are deemed to be 'out of place' in the visible spaces of the home, and as discussed earlier self-storage is considered to be the correct place for such things because it is a well-matched marginal (and liminal) space (see Hirschman et al. 2012). The (in)visibility of objects, such as collections, which are capable of portraying identity could also be understood through the lens of Goffman's theory of front and back stage. Indeed Cwerner and Metcalfe (2003) have done so, equating the marginality of storage spaces with their situation in the back regions of the home. However, this thesis will attempt, in its conclusion (section 8.3), to extend this conceptualisation beyond the home to the (perceivably) domestic spaces of self-storage.

4.3 Enabling consumption

Having extra space is not without its downsides, and for some of the participants knowing they had room still available at their self-storage unit made them feel they could buy more things without there being any adverse consequences. Lily described having too much space as 'dangerous' since it enabled more things to be purchased and acquired without the physical constraints of maintaining a liveable, clutter-free home.

Lily: Because if you've got the space you just fill it up! And if you don't have the space you avoid filling it up and getting more things.

This phenomenon in relation to 'surplus space' is something Gellen (2012, p. 74) has previously observed occurring when household size declines and rooms subsequently are 'underutilised' in day-to-day activities; he found that as the amount of space per person increases so does per capita consumption. Ed outlined the same problem as Lily, stating that he felt "you expand to fill the space you've got". He then went on to describe how having things in two locations (home and self-storage) could be problematic, in that you would misplace and forget where things were, and this would lead to wasting time and effort trying to locate them.

Ed: So I guess at the end of the day limiting the amount of space is quite good because you're not going to get yourself into a situation where you've got everything in the wrong place, which you could do I think. That's the downside of having lots of space.

Only one participant, Oliver - a business owner with two storage units and a shop, said he had a physical list of where his things were stored. When asked, all others said they simply relied on being able to recall from memory where their things were located. This

recall was challenging, particularly when things had been stored for longer periods of time. Many participants explained that they had forgotten what they owned, let alone where these things were located. This extended from whether they had stored them at home or in self-storage to where and how they had been packed away. For example, even recalling which box an item had been packed in was impossible.

As well as enabling further purchases to be made, the availability of space in self-storage also had implications for how participants approached disposal (for which there is a more thorough exploration in 5.2). Jacoby et al. (1977, p. 27) found that “As the amount of available storage space increases, the probability that an item will be kept will increase, and the probability that it will be thrown away will decrease”. This, as Dawn and Stuart described, had a knock-on effect on the way abundant possessions were dealt with and the organisation of their homes.

Dawn: It can make you quite lazy. Because you have what you have in the house, and really we'd be even tidier I think, you know, you would be tidier if we didn't have self-storage because we'd have to organise it even more. Whereas you sort of put everything you want to in the house and then you kind of forget that you've got all that stuff in self-storage that you are paying for.

Stuart: If I didn't have storage I would have been much more severe with that I've gotten rid of.

In a number of ways, it seems that having too much space makes the ‘sins’ of materialism and laziness easier but also less evident. Having things stored in self-storage, removed from the everyday lived spaces of the home, invests homes with signs of moral propriety as clutter and excess are put out of sight. Minimising the visibility of one’s material convoy, however, risks forgetting the extent and nature of what is owned.

4.4 Chapter conclusions

In the first instance this chapter explored the ways participants used self-storage to cope with clutter, excess and overflow. They described two main circumstances for which the storage ‘antidote’ was administered: a mismatch between the number of things in their possession and available storage space; and the ensuing overspill of domestic ‘driftwood’, as ‘placeless’ objects cluttered up surfaces and corners of their homes (Löfgren 2017). It is likely that these experiences are repeated across the UK, as the design of modern British houses has been critiqued for falling short of recommended housing space standards (Roberts-Hughes 2011). For example, it is less common in new-build houses to have in-built wardrobes, under-stair/ airing cupboards and utility

rooms as these spaces are turned over to extra rooms. The loss of these spaces is significant because they are not as marginal as attics and garages (although also lost to conversions and surplus things), and are therefore used more routinely in everyday practices of sorting, keeping and storing things (Gregson 2007).

Using self-storage in place of or in addition to storage spaces in the home required participants to evaluate the characteristics of the spaces in relation to their possessions. A hierarchy emerged dependent on their value (monetary and sentimental) and frequency of use (Douglas 1993). This was individualised depending on how participants placed value on their things, but those things that were deemed to be 'irreplaceable' like family photographs and keepsakes generally were kept in the home, where participants could 'keep an eye on them'. The notable exception to this was Vicky, whose home situation – a poorly maintained council house with a leaky attic in a neighbourhood blighted with anti-social and small-time criminal activity – did not provide the level of security she wanted for some of her most important things. Vicky differs from the majority of participants because she works in the same storage site where she has a unit (she receives a significant discount), whereas the others tended to have middle-class occupations that meant they had the income needed, not only to afford monthly payments on self-storage units, but rent or own houses in areas where burglary was less prevalent.

Insights then further suggested that self-storage can locate collections and 'hoarded' things, and even enable the acquisition of more things. Moral propriety was upheld in the home by (dis)placing things into self-storage which could be thought of as excessive and without virtue. More generally, the narratives in this chapter identify the importance of self-storage as a space to manage what could be seen as, 'disobedient objects' which cross boundaries, categorisations and cultural norms. Participants could be seen to be engaging in practices of categorisation of their possessions (regarding use and sentimental value), storage spaces (suitability dependent on the things requiring storage) and (in)actions (perceiving themselves as/ in relation to 'lazy' hoarders). They purposively categorise self-storage as the right place for the things which are 'out of place' in the home (Douglas 2000), affirmatively choosing to put stuff at the margins because that is where – according to social conventions – it 'should' be. It is tempting to conceptualise self-storage as the place for overflow but, as is further explored in the following chapter, it is the *only* correct space for some things.

The narrative in this chapter have described instances of objects, which are perceived as 'out of place', being placed into the marginality and liminality of storage spaces, including self-storage units. The apparent differences and similarities between self-

storage units and storage spaces in the home continue to factor in the following chapters and this is explored further in the conclusion (section 8.3).

5 Contingency – Containment of uncertain futures

In the last chapter several ideas about the categorisation of goods have emerged through the context of self-storage. In modern Western society “we strive to build up a radiant ‘heaven-like’ home instead of a devilishly chaotic one” (Belk et al. 2007, p. 138), and storage helps in the fight against clutter and overflow by putting ‘everything in its place’. Self-storage, in particular, removes ‘polluting’ traces from the home entirely and can be used to store the more chaotic forms of consumption such as collecting and hoarding which are deemed to be ‘out of place’ in the domestic setting. However, having extra space also comes with its pitfalls and for some of the participants knowing that they had room available in their self-storage unit led them to acquire even more things. Following on from this idea, chapter five explores what storage practices surrounding dormant things in self-storage can reveal about the complexity of the value of possessions.

Following Hetherington’s (2004) conceptualisation of storage spaces – from attics and garages, to drawers and cupboards – as being ‘conduits for disposal’ this chapter examines how self-storage could be seen to act as a necessary space in the lifecycle of objects. Dormant, mixed-state objects which, as Hirschman et al. (2012, pp. 374-375) describe are tied to the homeowner through ‘contagious magic’ but not playing an active role in their life, occupy a status betwixt and between, neither used but nor thrown-away, not insignificant but not significant enough, not associated with merely past, present or future. The corresponding liminality of storage spaces allows objects to pass through an ambiguous phase between one status, role or condition to another (following van Gennep 1960; Hirschman et al. 2012). As a consequence marginal spaces such as attics, basements and storage rooms have a notable role in the lifecycle of things (Korosec-Serfaty 1984), ‘cooling’ objects which are ‘hot’ with meaning (Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005) and “facilitat[ing] rites of passage for both consumers and their possessions” (Hirschman et al. 2012, p. 371).

It is the indeterminate, liminal, in-between status of self-storage and the objects stored within and kept as contingency that is the topic of this chapter. Section 5.1 argues that things in self-storage are dormant, waiting for a decision which determines their ‘fate’. The section is broken down into three explanations that came up regularly in the research: putting decisions ‘on hold’ following bereavement or during emotionally

demanding circumstances; things stored 'in the meantime' until some point in the future when their fate is more obvious; and excuses for why they hadn't 'got around to it'. Moving on, 5.2, examines how the distance created by storing things in self-storage impacts upon their divestment. Finally, section 5.3 suggests that storage can be the final resting place for 'deserving' mementoes which are kept for their memories and associations with emotionally significant people, places and events.

5.1 Dormant things

According to Woodward (2015), dormant objects have either been held onto for future use, accidentally ended up there, or been kept for memories and/or associations, that resonate with personal and/or relational meaning. However, these categories do not fully attest to the uncertainty and indecision which led a large proportion of the participants to store things. These objects did not accidentally end up there but were involved in conscious decisions to decide their fate at a later date, despite this date is not being known. In the meantime these things can be seen as being 'inactive' (Epp and Price 2010), 'dormant' (Cwerner 2001) or 'in limbo' (Hirschman et al. 2012). This section explores those things which are kept by participants 'on hold', 'in the meantime' or 'until they get round to it'.

5.1.1 'On hold' – Emotionally charged storage

A large number of the participants described their experiences of significant life events, including bereavement, which had necessitated the sorting through and disposal of things but was made difficult by the circumstances they were under. The rationality of their decisions was interrupted both by the emotionally charged events and the sentimental value of the objects. They had problems with both deciding what to keep and how to get rid of the things they didn't want. Therefore storage allowed them to leave those decisions for another day, putting them 'on hold' to when they envisaged emotions would be less raw and more rational choices could be made. This, according to Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981, p. 21), frees sensations from the immediate environment so they can be dealt with in the abstract.

As Hockey et al. note material objects frequently have a performative and agentic role in memory and memorialisation, the 'inanimate' capable of 'mediating' the ongoing relationship between the deceased and those who knew them (2003, p. 138). After death mundane objects – such as old shopping lists, or worn shoes – are useless and cannot easily be incorporated into life moving forward but neither can be thrown away (Hockey et al. 2003, p. 141). Storage then becomes the only solution; and spaces such as cupboards, attics and self-storage hold the ongoing traces of people and relationships within their stored materialities. Emma tried to make light of the somewhat macabre

embodiment of her deceased relatives in the furniture stored within her self-storage unit, by laughing at the quantity of things she possessed which had belonged to loved ones.

Emma: Everybody died and it's all in here! [She laughs]

Frank's need for self-storage, like many, came about after his parents had passed away. His father had died a few years before and whilst he had known that his mother was getting frail her death had still been unexpected. As Miller (2010, p. 146) states, whilst biological death is unplanned, "you certainly can control the way you separate from or divest yourself from the objects that were once associated with that living body". In this way stuff plays a significant role in how we deal with the practicalities and emotions relating to a death. Making the arrangements for her funeral fell to Frank, as did dealing with her estate in accordance with the terms of the will. This meant clearing everything out of her house within the space of a few weeks so it could be sold and assets distributed to family members. However, whilst these processes needed to take place relatively quickly, divestment of possessions is, in fact, a gradual process that takes place over many years and can be mapped onto the process of grieving (Miller 2010, p. 147). Frank described the importance of having sufficient time to undertake the emotional task of going through his late parent's things in enough detail to ascertain what needed to be kept and what could be thrown away. Sifting through their household effects required him to continually reengage with his loss and make rational decisions about emotionally-charged items.

Frank: With my mum passing away, what you find is that you think 'I need to get rid of [this and that]', and you're going through stuff and you can't really 'I need to look at that a bit more detail'. So it's this procrastination, time element, availability of time.

Time is important, as Frank points out, not only in terms of having the time to do things properly but also what he calls 'procrastination'. Describing it in this way Frank is underplaying the necessity for time and space to grieve before re-engaging with things, equating his deliberate inaction with a character fault rather than his emotional need to temporarily withdraw. This is something Steve, who had recently retrained as a psychotherapist, was happy to discuss in detail, self-analysing his emotional response and actions following the death of his elderly mother.

Steve: It's really been waiting to reach this lull when, you know, when the sadness has become slightly less desperate.

Steve: So we're starting to get to the stage now where most people have stopped hurting and the grieving process has eased, largely. There are no anniversaries or anything like that coming up in a window now until November, so that's kind of the ideal time now to come in and start sorting through it, decide whether to dispose of it, or decide whether we want to keep it you know, or sell things.

Figure 10 - One of two shipping containers containing Steve's mother's effects



Steve identified that a suitable time had passed and the family's loss was being felt less intensely, which allowed them to start sorting through his mother's household belongings. Later in the interview, further justifying his decision (and the cost) to rent large self-storage containers for an extended time period, Steve referred to how emotions had run high immediately after the bereavement. Rash decisions made by relatives had led to some items being sold or 'picked' without the consent of the rest of

the family, and ultimately resulted in 'bad blood'. Putting his mother's belonging behind lock and key meant this did not happen again, and was unlikely to happen upon reengagement because feelings of grief no longer had such a strong impact upon decisions.

Self-storage emerges as a helpful space to reconcile with loss and work out what should be done with things. The things that were initially kept and stored, for their capacity to do memory work and narrate life that has been lived, are deemed significantly cooled to be released and divested (McCracken 1988a). Sorting through things creates what Miller and Parrot (2009) call an 'economy of relationships'. In this way "each significant relationship, whether to persons or periods and events [...] ultimately becomes reduced [...] as other mementoes make way for other relationships" (Miller and Parrot 2009, p. 513). This pruning back of a relationship to its material essence can be painful and difficult (Gregson et al. 2007b) and self-storage allows for the performance of economy to be delayed or not happen at all. For Steve and his family the pain of their loss is starting to ease and he suggested that within a couple of weeks the process of sorting through and distributing or selling his mother's items could be completed. However, for Graham's partner, the prospect of sorting through her mother's effects with the view to slimming it down is still too difficult as the emotions around her loss and the memories attached to her possessions are too raw to handle.

Graham: We've discussed getting rid of some of the stuff. It isn't the right time for my partner to do that because although her mother has now passed away, um about... a year and a half ago now, there is still some fairly strong memories and a certain sentimental value to some of the stuff in there.

Graham: She'll get there but it's just not right for her at the moment. I mean she was very close to her mum and um... although at the end it was all pretty predictable it was going to happen, it wasn't a shock, but it was still obviously very upsetting and um... You know the wounds are still slightly open I think on that one, so yeh.

By virtue of being a liminal temporary space self-storage can also provide relief when the sorting is too difficult to do at that particular moment. Things are maintained physically, kept in stasis until the right time comes to re-engage with them and make divestment decisions. The participants described how as well as making decisions on what to keep and what to dispose of the difficulty they came up against was finding an appropriate owner. In Graham's partner's unit, there were four large plastic boxes containing piano and vocal music. Her mother had been a music teacher and this was a

passion they had shared, both performing in choirs whenever possible. This meant that she was equally concerned with finding the sheet music a good home where it would be appreciated (Belk 1995) and conscious of losing tangible signifiers of her mother's life (Korosec-Serfaty 1984, p. 313).

Graham: We think there is an Oxfam music shop which we can leave that [sheet music], and think that we would hope they would find good homes. And I think that is part of it really, just some of the stuff isn't the money it's making sure that the heritage, if you like, around it isn't lost.

This sentiment of finding the 'right' disposal channel was also why Graham's partner was reticent to dispose of her mother's hat collection without appropriate care and thought.

Figure 11 - Four plastic boxes of sheet music which had belonged to Graham's partner's mother



Graham: I think there are certain things in there that are... things like some of the wonderful hats her mother used to wear and that sort of thing you know. But they are too good to chuck away, and putting them into charity isn't the right thing either.

Gregson et al. (2007a, p. 685) describe this feeling of anxiety “as a sense that someone, somewhere else could be a more appropriate keeper or custodian of such things”. During his study in South London (2009), Miller found that his participants described the process of disposing of objects “as a kind of repair mechanism that made them feel whole again in dealing with rupture and trauma” (2010, p. 147). The sometimes traumatic and often stressful events that motivate the use of self-storage create opportunities to sort through and re-evaluate things and the relationships they embody. As Marcoux (2001b, p. 83) attests in relation to moving house, sorting, whilst it potentially can be stressful, is also “a means to reshuffle relationships and memories by bringing them back into consciousness”. Sorting through effects belonging to deceased loved ones, whether with the luxury of storage to create distance or not, requires that each memory and feeling be resurfaced in turn and judged for its place in future memorialisation practices.

Myles remarked that after leaving his mother’s things in self-storage, he and his siblings were able to make considered judgements un-clouded by grief and time pressure, and ultimately they ended up keeping very little.

Myles: We didn't want to just quickly go through all her items so we stored her items to enable us to give us time to go through, rather than have to make a quick decision about do we keep this or dispose of it. [...] We just put everything into the unit basically and left it there for a while until it was, like, less painful to go through the whole experience. And then we just kind of did it over a couple of weekends, went through everything when we felt we could do that. Uh, you know, make a sensible decision about what to keep and what not to keep, rather than being, you know, being really raw and it being harder not to keep everything, you know what I mean. So that's how we did it.

Researcher: Yeh and slimming it down, what did you end up doing with the things you kept?

Myles: Well, funnily enough, we um, we got rid of almost everything. And it just goes to show that there are some very specific items then that we wanted to keep. Um, but we realised that you know, the majority of the bits and pieces we didn't really need, and we were just doubling up on a lot of other things like all the utensils and stuff like that, didn't really need that. And, um, some of the items of furniture that we thought were in better condition than they were, sort of, [we] just decided it was better to let them go. So as it happens we didn't really keep much of the stuff at all, but we just felt better about having taken a longer time to decide that I guess.

These examples show that many cope with negatively emotion-laden consumer decisions by avoiding a decision (Luce 1998), by storing them out of sight and out of mind. The practice of storing objects belonging to a deceased loved one, and putting decisions regarding their fate 'on hold', emerges as a strategy for coping with memories and associations that are still too raw (Muzaini 2015). Through their explicit efforts to distance the objects, participants could be seen to be making everyday lived spaces more 'safe'. Choosing to spatialise at least some material triggers of their bereavement and mourning into a space which can be locked away and re-engaged with when they decide they are more ready to deal with it (Maddrell 2016). Therefore, self-storage acts as a solution at a time of trauma (such as the death of a loved one); provides distance from things, enabling potentially easier sorting later down the line; and alters or delays the severity of the residue effect or economy of relationships (Miller and Parrot 2009).

5.1.2 'In the meantime' – Uncertainty, negotiation and potential

Self-storage, a marginal space away from everyday life, acts as a temporary home to objects that are under negotiation whilst their usefulness and place is determined (Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003, p. 236). Decisions are deferred to some point in the future or to another person or until circumstances have changed significantly enough to make the route forward clear. As such the practices of dispersal, divestment and displacement overlap in messy and sometimes irresolvable ways. Epp and Price (2010, p. 832) found that when objects are displaced it is done with some foresight as to how they might be reincorporated into lived spaces in the future. However, reincorporation attempts are constrained by a number of contextual factors including present and former identity practices, the object biographies and other complex relationalities. In this research this was most noticeable for those who had rented self-storage during a period of transition and considerable change in their life. Emma was interviewed shortly after she had returned to the UK after living and working in Africa for two years. At the time of packing up her things, Emma had not known what the future would hold on her return particularly in terms of housing so had stored the entirety of her household possessions in a self-storage unit.

Emma: I didn't know if I was going to move back into that house or what the situation was going to be. I hadn't really decided, answered any of those questions I had in my mind, I just thought when I come back I'll deal with it then. I think if I had been losing money every month having it in self-storage I maybe would have [Sighs] made more of an effort to get it into my dad's garage, which wouldn't be fair on him. [Laughs] But I think that it was more of a time thing and not really knowing when I came back

what I would was actually going to do or where I was going to live or any of that stuff.

Emma's uncertainty and unanswered questions about what the future might bring led to her storing things 'in the meantime' until she could make decisions based on the opportunities and choices available to her on her return to the UK. Self-storage, occupying a liminal status, matched her possessions which were caught between past and future living arrangements and enabled Emma's transition through ambiguity towards a stable future concept of herself. In Anya's case, the temporality of her self-storage use was linked to moving in with her partner, which she was excited about but also had apprehensions. By holding onto her stuff which had yet to be found a 'home' in her newly shared home self-storage allowed Anya to perform her household transition over a period of time.

Anya: There were some pieces of furniture I wanted to keep, there are still some clothes and things I wanted to keep. None of the stuff in storage is really of any financial value, but it's important to me. If it wasn't I would just get rid of it. That's why we are keeping it for now. And maybe I do get rid of some more of it when I can really look at it, but for the time being, I thought I can't make a decision on this now. [She inhales]

Anya: Knickknacks, lamps... uh... stuff that you just don't want to throw away because they might come in useful. You know I am guilty of that.

Tensions between Anya and her partner over what and where to put her possessions needed to be overcome before future pathways could be determined. Anya explained that this required time, both to see what worked and was needed, as well as negotiating the objects 'place' in their home. The second quote from Anya brings to light the idea of potential in things that hasn't yet been decided upon or realised. This idea of 'potential' came up again and again in interviews and we can think about why these items are held onto using the concept developed by Markus and Nurius (1986) of 'possible selves'. They describe how possible selves "represent specific, individually significant hopes, fears and fantasies" (1986, p. 954). It is difficult to get rid of things which have potential because it means giving up on idealised visions of the future that have been emotionally invested in. Stuart, for example, has been holding onto an unused camping grill for several years with the view to taking it on a camping holiday.

Stuart: That at the top, the slightly tatty box, that's got, like, a camping grill, which I've never used. It's brand new and my ex's dad was going 'Oh I don't need it, I'm emigrating to Greece, I'll just chuck it in the bin'. I

was like 'I'll have that' and I kept on thinking 'I'll use that' but then I've not gone camping since and that was like 6, 8 years ago.

Stuart also had a huge collection of books which he held onto not only in the hope of reading them again but with the long-term view of creating a reading room in his renovated house to cater for his passion. Divesting of his camping gear or collection of books would feel like 'giving up' on his visions for a perfect family life and home. Kathryn had large bags of fabric stored alongside her sewing machine. She explained that she often has sewing projects on-the-go but they don't always come to fruition; the latest one was on hold whilst they moved to a new house.

[The sound of a thick plastic bag being crumpled]

Kathryn: This is fabric I have for my sewing machine.

Researcher: Yeh, what do you make?

Kathryn: Um, what do I make? Hmm... I have projects. Now the projects never come to a full... I buy the material for them, I was going to make, um a quilt runner for the base of the bed but then when I decided to put the house on the market, I decided that would be too personal. [...] I didn't want to start doing that cos I don't know the colour the next house is going to be. Cos I haven't yet decided how I am going to...

A large part of our idealised future identity can be viewed through dormant stored objects. These things signify that we will reach our whole potential, returning to things on hold or pursuing new directions. Most of those interviewed described plans to come back to hobbies, interests or self-improvement that were on hold. Another, different project, that Warren held onto due its family heritage but also future hobby appeal was photos and other materials to trace his family history.

Warren: But these are the sorts of things you do when you retire you know. You know updating your family's history and so on.

He explained this activity wasn't something for his life right now, but would be a task that a future version of himself could be motivated to undertake. These glimpses, of an individual's idealised view of how their life could be cropped up in conversation around a whole host of stored objects. Tony and Jan had acquired a drum kit but it was lingering in their self-storage unit un-played.

Researcher: So whose drum kit is that?

Tony: Ours! [He laughs] Okay it's mine.

Researcher: Do you play the drums?

Tony: No, I've never played the drums, no.

Jan: It was given to us for free.

Tony: It was free to a good home, yep.

Jan: And I kind of went 'Oo drum kit! I'll have that' and then he got all excited.

Tony: I used to play in brass bands when I was younger, at the time I was playing that I did want to play the drums but they didn't allow me to play the drums. I don't know why but they just wouldn't. So, um, this was an opportunity to have a go! For free essentially. So had them stacked up in there. It is a full kit with cymbals and everything.

Researcher: Have you used it since you got it?

Tony: No. No, it was basically, it wasn't long before I went working away, was it? So all I've done is buy a set of sticks, cos all it came without no stool or no sticks with it. But I bought a pair of drumsticks and had a go at trying to get the technique. So at some point we will have a go with this; if we manage to clear some of the stuff out maybe I can set it up in there. Which would be ideal playing that in the middle of nowhere.

Tony's childhood desire to learn the drums has stood the test of time, but even now that he has (nearly) all the equipment needed to start playing his hobby hasn't really taken off. There is a degree of un-alignment between the imagined version of himself and reality. With a lot of these potential future selves held in stored objects the timing and circumstances were often blamed for them not being executed. However, duration, invisibility and dormancy, as well as the disparity between the ideal location of the things and their current situation, suggests that self-storage does not play a positive role in facilitating the fulfilment of potential selves. Many of the things that participants stored 'in the meantime' and had thus far failed to reincorporate into their lives were not applicable to their current identity or lifestyle. These had the capacity to either narrate their previous life or were seen to represent a future idealised self. Nonetheless, whilst mastery over circumstances such as material possessions can be motivating (Markus and Nurius 1986), it was observed that all this seems to achieve for objects which are deemed as having potential or under negotiation is to compel people to hold onto them for longer.

5.1.3 'When I get round to it' – time and inclination

Ferrari and Roster (2017) describe two types of procrastination which interrupt disposal – indecision and behavioural. Most of what was conveyed in 5.1.1 relates to the former: delaying decisions because of uncertainty, ongoing negotiation and perceived potential. This sub-section deals more so with the latter: behaviour which could be described as laziness, a failure to make the time needed, or a lack of motivation to see things through. Gill was apologetic but also stubbornly avoiding having to deal with her 'rubbish'.

Gill: It's convenient, it's locked away and I don't have to look at it. And so if I don't have to look at it I don't have to deal with it. That's... it's, it's... I'm sorry I'm coming off really lazy here. I'm not a lazy person it's just that I don't want to deal with rubbish and its rubbish.

In *Rubbish Theory*, Thompson (1979) defines rubbish as objects with zero value. Since Gill sees her stored things as rubbish she can't find the motivation to sort through and dispose of them because they lack value and the process will not bring her any joy. According to Thompson (1979), rubbish occupies a border category rather than being simply disordered. Many items end up in storage because of a lack of time to make decisions during the sometimes stressful and already time-consuming process of moving house (Horton and Kraftl 2012), something both Lily and Anya expressed.

Lily: Obviously ideally you'd get rid of things but that requires time and thought and that was the one thing we didn't have. Just did not have time.

Anya: You know, duvets... and probably they'll go but it was a bit of a rush and [we] just kind of, because we could, chucked it all in here.

The random assortment of stuff Lily and Anya had thrown into boxes when under time pressure now lingered, a haunting presence of what they had not managed to finish at the time and still needs to be gone through (Hetherington 2004). However, during the chaos and stress of moving, self-storage reliably picks up the pieces and controls disorder. Therefore, as Hirschman et al. (2012, p. 384) suggest, if the quantity of possessions stored in a liminal space is out of control then divestment is postponed further because the possessions are "effectively buried there". Many of the participants were simply overwhelmed by the task ahead of them, with each item in turn requiring their attention so as to ascertain their value and place in their lives and homes.

Myles: You've just got to weigh it up haven't you? It's that cost, is it worth the cost of keeping it somewhere or do you want to get rid of it? I haven't quite worked that out.

Myles describes his unresolved feelings and the tension between being motivated to sort through and get rid of things or pay to keep them. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981, pp. 232-233) advise that “although consumption approaches a point of diminishing returns in terms of physical and psychic comfort, its costs keep mounting” and it is the cost of renting a self-storage unit that eventually curtails the duration of renting for most self-storage users (Roster 2001) even for those with the disposable income to afford it.

5.2 Disposal: Absence, forgetting and letting go

The ‘separating out’ of storage is closely linked with sorting and divestment, of which participants recounted unsuccessful rounds prior to renting self-storage. Hetherington (2004) conceptualises storage as a conduit for disposal. He argues that disposal “is not primarily about waste but about placing” and “it is as much a spatial as a temporal category” (Hetherington 2004, p. 159). The presumption of the ‘throwaway society’ is that things are thrown away without a second thought once they are no longer wanted (Gregson et al. 2007a). However, this overlooks how goods are entwined with, and materialise, identity, memory and relationships and “assume[s] that such entanglements can be unravelled at a stroke and without a care” (Gregson et al. 2007a, p. 685). As we have seen in this chapter, emotional objects (such as the effects of loved ones) require considerable time and attention, and even when objects are known to have very little value they cannot be thrown away without a thought. Therefore self-storage, like Hirschman et al. (2012, p. 381) says of the garage, acts as a temporary resting area for things which have so far failed to be divested but are still intended to be moved along. As such a period in liminal storage space provides a ‘cooling off’ period and transformation which ultimately leads to being able to ‘let go’ (McCracken 1988a; Roster 2001; Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005).

Self-storage houses physically marginalised things that are decreasingly needed or of decreasing interest or concern, and as such are also marginalised from memory. As Cwerner and Metcalfe (2003, p. 236) state, stored objects are “taken out of the way as they move out of use and out of daily routines of life, out of sight and into the metaphorical recesses of the mind”. With self-storage this distancing is even more pronounced with most of the participants only able to reach their unit by car. Being out of sight and out of mind or absent from everyday lived spaces has a profound impact upon how the owner’s felt about their stored things. Gill described how being physically detached from her things had led towards emotional detachment and sparked a re-evaluation of their place in her new home.

Gill: Maybe we'll look at things, like, 'Do we need that? Is that something that is going to have a place in the way we live now?' And I think things like furniture will do but it might be that our more personal things don't. And we might also think that because we've been without everything for, you know, a year or whatever it is that it might be an opportunity to think 'Oh do we need this. Are we going to want it?' you know. Because perhaps you will get a little bit more detached from it because you've been detached from it for all that time.

It is the combined forces of space and time that pull apart these bonds between person and objects, loosening the threads of memory and sentimentality which had previously tied them together. As Gill describes, life will have continued in the absence of her things so their reincorporation does not seem to bring a lot of value. In fact Gill's description of her emotional detachment came across as being almost apathetic towards her dormant things. This mirrors Hetherington's finding that the location of something which has been made absent can change attachment felt towards it (2004, p. 167). The invisibility and distance provide space for reflection upon re-engaging with things, but equally cause people to forget about them.

Anya: Do you know what? I haven't really missed it and that's partly because I'm not... because it was all a bit of a blur packing it all. I haven't missed it because I'm not entirely sure what's there.

My interview with Anya, like many, was the first time she had set eyes on her possessions since storing them in a hurry as she moved into her partner's house. Anya describes how she hasn't missed her things because she has forgotten about them. Gregson et al. (2007a, pp. 688-689) found that getting rid of things enables relations between self and possessions to be harmonised. For Anya, losing strong feelings of attachment towards many of her personal things in self-storage after forgetting about them was beneficial in helping her to negotiate and develop a shared home environment with her partner. In a similar way, but under entirely different circumstances, events were unfolding for Dawn and Ian, who had divorced their respective partners and were in the process of setting up a home together.

Dawn: We're both divorced and we both had houses to sell and we needed to move two houses into one house. So we had a lot of excess furniture, things from family. So that's the main motivating factor [for using self-storage], and a lot of it we hadn't got the time to go through and clear out. We just needed to keep it and, you know, go through it at a later time.

In much the same way as those participants who recounted the nature of their self-storage unit following a bereavement, having the time and space to go through their previous marital homes facilitated the creation of their new home made up of the material things relating to previous lives, relationships and memories. However, undertaking this process together also made space for new feelings and associations to be created through and with their possessions as partnership. Absence, forgetting and remembering are routine and important elements in ordering homes (Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003, p. 230), and align past, present and future identities through practices of keeping and disposal. Self-storage as a kind of marginalised extension to the home is also a part of this process. It is recognisable that absence and forgetting bought about by storing objects for extended periods undoubtedly play a significant role in the process of divestment, as has been noted in relation to emotional items that are 'on hold' awaiting divestment decisions. The owner requires a period of separation from their objects in order for them to pass through a transformative state and ultimately be able to let them go. During, or rather either end of, this separation period the life of the object can be reviewed, its services appreciated and pending loss mourned, along with the pasts or relationships they signified (Hirschman et al. 2012, p. 381). Thus the object becomes desacralized and emptied of meaning (McCracken 1986). Fitting with Hetherington's (2004) conceptualisation of the liminality of disposal as a 'doorway', self-storage acts as a suitable place in which objects can pass through multiple states between use and disposal. Following some time in limbo, these things realise their fate by having passed through a necessary stage in their lifecycle located in self-storage.

5.3 Final resting place (perhaps)

Whilst some stored possessions occupy a liminal state in limbo until decisions are made about their fate and others enter storage on their way to disposal there remain some objects for which storage is their final resting place. As Vicky states: "*There are things that are there and will always be there*". Epp and Price (2010, p. 833) describe this as a puzzling phenomenon as often these displaced possessions are deemed by their owners to be central to their identities and yet do not reside in visible spaces of the home. However, following Goffman we can understand their storage as important in more regenerative, than performative, identity practices. These things are kept for their memories and associations and resonate with personal and relational meaning, such as love for a family member (Woodward 2015). They may be brought out and re-engaged with periodically during a move or when an external trigger brings them to the forefront of the person's mind, but they will always go back. The kept and stored things narrate memories of people, places and events that have shaped their owner's biography, and as Cwerner and Metcalfe (2003, p. 236) affirm their dispersal is not from apathy towards

the objects but because they are particular things that people want to keep. Indeed Bye and McKinney (2007, p. 495) argue that sentimental items which are held onto as important pieces of personal history 'deserve' storage space.

Vicky described how a collection of small ornaments sparked very vivid memories of caring for her grandma, performing household cleaning tasks for her. So, despite having a personal dislike for ornaments and not having any on display in her home, she had kept these in storage as a reminder of the love felt for and by her grandma and the embodiment of their relationship, as well as a distinct time in her life.

Vicky: Down at the side in that box, down there, the plastic box is erm, things of sentiment from my grandma, crappy little ornaments that you would have had in the 70s and things like that. [...] Erm, my sister wasn't interested in anything like that, having anything like that. Neither were either of my brothers. And erm, it was just a case of I didn't want them throwing away. Just because... I think, I think because they represented my childhood so much cos I spent a lot of time with my gran. And they sort of represented, it was her house and I used to go help her because she had very bad legs, she had ulcerated legs. So I would go and I would dust for her and things like that, see.

The ornaments carry the memory of the person who had owned them but has now passed away. Their monetary worth is unimportant as, having functionally evolved into keepsakes, their value does not rest so much with the physical objects but rather in their origin and associations (Finch and Mason 2000, p. 142). The keepsakes' special status means they not only symbolise Vicky's grandmother but also represent her, standing in as a means of embodiment where a physical body and person are no longer existing. As 'one-ended tie signs' these things are capable of lasting longer than the relationship they signify (Goffman 1971, p. 195). Vicky's quote highlights, the power and importance of the keepsakes go further than embodying her grandma and their relationship to standing in as part of her own life, specifically her memories and experiences of childhood.

Caitlin: Photographs, you know, I've got to keep them. I can't... I mean there are photos there even my first boyfriend, people I'd go out with along the way. And I'm not one of those people to go 'rip rip', because it's a part of your life you know.

Caitlin's photographs, as with Vicky's grandmother's ornaments, act as 'mediators' of memories and impressions of an absent person (Dant 1999); and they are again physical reminders of an earlier part of her life. Despite no longer having feelings of love for her first boyfriend (in fact she feels quite to the contrary), Caitlin doesn't want to remove the

traces of her previous relationship because they act to narrate the life she has lived and those she has loved along the way, which are biographically important for her. As well as signifying personal associations and memories, Miller and Parrot (2009, p. 514) found that memorialising objects also form idealised conceptualisations of a person of that generation, almost forming caricatures of the deceased. I also found this to be true with participants keeping items such as handbags or sewing machines belonging to female relatives and tools or machinery belonging to male relatives. These chosen things create a curated essence of the person that was.

Martin: I think actually I've got my mother's Singer sewing machine in there and I didn't want to throw it away. I remember it from when I was a little boy so I don't want to throw things like that away you know. I mean, it's of no real value, it's just always been there or around you know.

Researcher: Did she use it a lot then?

Martin: Uh in her younger days yes. I mean she made lots of things, pairs of trousers for me or whatever. Uh... she... well it was her job as well. She was, made samples for the likes of Marks and Spencer's or whoever at the time. Um, so yeh sure she made me a lot of different things, maybe some often hideous... But the machine was around so that's why.

For Martin, his mother's sewing machine was very present in his childhood home and represented his mother's career as well as her care of him. The sewing machine locks in and materialises his and her memories, emotion and identities. Transcending time, it unites and maintains the link between past and present selves; so by keeping the sewing machine Martin is acting in a way to reinforce and remind himself of the person he was and still is. To lose this link to the past is also a fear of losing his idea of self. However, his curation of the personal also has motivations that extend beyond personal attachment to protecting the ancestry of a loved one with pride and a perceived obligation to care for a piece of history.

Warren: This is one of my grandmother's; they are one of two things I kept that my grandmother did.

Researcher: Why did you keep it?

Warren: Well it shows something you don't see many women doing these days. Doing needlework or wearing the clothes they made themselves, let alone the ones they made for their husbands.

For example, Warren revelled in the opportunity to tell me about the everyday history behind some of his things, explaining how they were representative of the period and lifestyles at the time. Martin and Warren, by holding onto these cherished items, are

acting as guardians of 'inalienable' family wealth for future generations (Curasi et al. 2004). So what are keepsakes now, may become heirlooms in the future.

As discussed previously, when referring to things kept as memories of their own life events participants often seemed embarrassed that they might be perceived as materialistic. However, when talking about the objects that they had kept because they signified relationships with loved ones this was not the case. In fact a number of participants, including Vicky, openly stated the importance and irreplaceable nature of their memorialising things.

Figure 12 - The teddy Vicky's dad gave her son



Vicky: Everything else can be replaced. The sentimental goods can't because there's things that you obviously can't get back. [...] I've got a couple of things from, erm, when my dad was alive, gifts that... There is a teddy in there in one of the bags that he bought my daughter when she was a baby. And this one he bought my son and it's got Beni on it and my son's called Ben and he bought my son that when he was born. Erm, my dad died, god, 18 years ago this year. Once again there's things you can't replace so you wouldn't throw them away.

In the same way as keepsakes, gifted objects either given directly or indirectly as heirlooms (Finch and Mason 2000) enable mediation between the 'gifter' and the 'giftee' even when they aren't present (Dant 1999). The teddy bear gifted to Vicky's son by her father is very important in a number of ways: the embodiment of their relationships, memorialising her deceased father and also the event of her son's birth. For these reasons, and probably more, Vicky will never throw the teddy away, choosing to store it as protection from physical and perhaps emotional decay. By placing objects in self-storage their affective qualities lie dormant. So it is only when they are brought back out that they come into consciousness and prompt reflection, temporarily bringing together the 'there and then' with the 'here and now' in productive new ways (Peters 2014).

5.4 Chapter conclusions

Paying heed to the complex motivations, practices and outcomes of using self-storage this chapter extends our theorisation of consumption to include gaps, pauses and interruptions in the lifecycle of the object. As observed in 5.1, placing objects into self-storage allows for them to fall dormant, and keeps them out of sight and out of the way whilst the circumstances necessitating their storage unfolds. Thinking of things in self-storage as dormant yet contingent, can help us better understand the role of uncertainty in many storage decisions. When circumstances requiring self-storage were of a particularly emotional or stressful nature (i.e. following a bereavement) it was deemed to be an appropriate space to put decisions 'on hold' until the immediate effects of loss were less raw and impeding. Displacing things in this way could be seen to not only allow breathing space in terms of decisions around items' 'fate' but also meant that other spaces were significantly less emotionally triggering. A significant proportion of what is kept in self-storage is under negotiation, caught 'in the meantime' between past value and future potential. In these cases, self-storage can be seen to enable imagined versions of possible selves but also, unhelpfully, means their actualisation can be delayed indefinitely. Participants also described their procrastination holding up the sorting of items prior to storage, as well as impacting upon their continued storage, effectively postponing divestment until they 'get round to it'.

Self-storage, then, is a necessary space where possessions await their fate and also has some influence on the divestment process (see section 5.2). Self-storage houses objects which have been marginalised away from routine use, into a space which is out of sight and often out of mind. The period of separation in self-storage can unravel the threads between person and object, allowing them to pass through multiple states towards ultimately being let go. Observing both the processual distancing of objects from their owner and the contentious magic which reinforces these 'inalienable' bonds (the latter explored in 5.3) it is possible to see how social relations are negotiated and reach

settlement through practices of divestment and keeping. The narratives in this chapter bring to light both the continued emotional resonance of objects which have fallen dormant, and presence of emotion in articulations of significant life events (such as bereavement) and feelings towards experiences of uncertainty and hesitation.

6 Connection – Bridging between countries and homes

The majority of the participants interviewed for this research project were motivated to rent self-storage in response to the movement brought about by transitions and trajectories, periods of change in their lives. It is therefore productive to bring in ideas from the ‘mobilities turn’ since, as Cresswell (2012, p. 647) states, the discipline is not simply “based on boundedness and rootedness but rather to an alertness to how stillness is thoroughly incorporated into the practices of moving”. Fitting, since the safe-keeping of possessions in self-storage is an act of deliberate immobilisation. Hoskins (1998, p. 8) proposes that: “At a spatial level, the biographical object limits the concrete space of its owner and sinks its roots deeply into the soil. It anchors the owner to a particular time and place”. This chapter in many ways too will argue this. It is also important to situate the narratives in this chapter within geographies of the home scholarship, which has conceived roots, belonging and fluidity as key understandings and experiences of making and unmaking home (Somerville 1989; Ahmed 1999; Blunt and Dowling 2006; Baxter and Brickell 2014).

This chapter is concerned with how self-storage stores objects which are required to bridge individuals between different circumstances, particularly those where futures are uncertain and/or the place of things must be negotiated. Narratives are brought in from individuals and families who are using self-storage to bridge between countries and homes, and on the return to their stored possessions may have a different idea of their place in their lives. Turning first to experiences moving abroad, section 6.1 explores how self-storage enables both detachment and freedom from the weight of possessions, but also provides comfort in knowing that stability exists within a mobile lifestyle. The second section, 6.2, examines experiences of using self-storage to bridge between homes. It looks more in-depth at changes in living arrangements including moving home to pursue a new career/lifestyle, negotiating shared space when moving in with a partner, storing displaced things following divorce and holding on to things in the absence of an affordable permanent home.

6.1 Bridging countries

Urry (2002, p. 256) highlights that “being on the move” has become a “way of life” for many. Many of the self-storage users interviewed who had been storing items during sustained periods abroad whilst pursuing careers and education were using a self-storage unit as a ‘base’ within which they could store the material convoy that they couldn’t take with them. Cohen et al. (2015, p. 159) delineate ‘lifestyle mobility’ as a process not dependent on returning to ‘a’ home, which “pre-supposes the intention to move on, rather than move back”. Their movement is experienced through both roots and routes (see Hannam et al. 2006), and for individuals whose mobilities have moored them in multiple places for extended periods of time one place may no longer take primacy as ‘home’ over another (Cohen et al. 2015, p. 163). Self-storage, at this time, can stand in as another ‘home’ (for things). The challenge that has been identified within mobilities scholarship is how to “conceptualise the simultaneity of home as sedentarist and as mobile” (Ralph and Staeheli 2011, p. 518). From a different perspective, Ahmed (1999) argues that home can be understood as more than a singular, fixed and bounded space. This chapter then contributes to home literature which conceives home as temporarily, materially and spatially fluid, and an affective idea that goes beyond dwelling.

Marcoux (2001b, p. 82) describes how mobility can be related to lightness and detachment from things can be valorised as enabling freedom. The narratives below from Claudia and Emma show that one can be detached and mobile but still enjoy the feeling of stability and comfort that keeping and storing personal domestic possessions in self-storage provides.

6.1.1 Global Nomad

Claudia was interviewed towards the end of what she characterised as an unstable time in her life. Originally from Berlin, Claudia left in 2006 to take up a job in Afghanistan. What was meant to be a 6-month contract was extended a number of times and she ended up staying for 5 years. For the first year Claudia was in Afghanistan she kept her flat and piled up anything she hadn’t taken with her in boxes in the corner of one room so that the flat could be rented out. When it became clear that the job was going to be a longer-term engagement she gave the flat up, sold most of her stuff and stored the remainder in her sister’s cellar. In 2011 Claudia decided to make a change and study for a Master’s degree in London. Around the same time her sister split up with her husband, so their cellar was no longer available for storage. At this point Claudia had to quickly find somewhere else to store her things, so her possessions went into self-storage with the view of returning to them after the Master’s year. However, instead of returning to Berlin permanently Claudia then got a short-term job in South Sudan, spent a couple of

months in Berlin working on and submitting her PhD application, and went back to South Sudan for a second time, before finally moving to Cardiff to begin her PhD. Over this period each time she was in Berlin she packed and repacked her things, taking the things she needed and depositing those she didn't. Fast forward 4 years and Claudia is finishing off her thesis, looking forward to settling somewhere more permanently.

Claudia: I'm now at a point where I say I'm a bit exhausted with it. Um... It's not that I need to be at [sic] one place constantly. I don't think I would be happy with being in one place constantly, but having a base somewhere. The storage is a perfect base for when you are really doing this kind of thing back and forth and not knowing where to or what to [do next].

By packing and repacking her life and deciding what she can live with and what she can live without Claudia was constantly re-evaluating the place of her things in her life. Marcoux (2001b, p. 84) suggests that moving frequently "becomes a means for defining oneself as a subject among the material world". However, what Claudia could take with her was limited by the time she would be in one place and the ease of getting things shipped over.

Claudia: It doesn't make a lot of sense to me to kind of gave [sic] the storage up and put the stuff in a huge container and ship it over to Cardiff for considerable cost only to have it here in a room which was too small for all of the stuff and for the good chance that in 6 to 9 months I would pack it up again and ship it somewhere else.

Claudia: It is bound to practicalities. [...] Can I take something with me or is it, you know, seriously too much to bother with? Um... and what kind of space [does that have] in my head or in my mind? There are definitely things I can leave behind much easier.

Re-placing home is a difficult process involving feelings of being 'lost' that necessitates recreating familiarity and comfort through material things. Claudia talked about a favourite stuffed animal that she took everywhere because it was instrumental in making 'every bed home'. Having her stuff animal with her was a matter of producing affective feelings of home in different spaces (see Gurney 1997).

Claudia: There are definitely objects in my life where I would be devastated if something happens [to them] because I've lived with them for so long. To give an example, that's embarrassing, I have a stuffed animal, a stuffed pig. [...] I really love it, and I got it when I was [I] think 6

or 7. So the thing is now close to 40 years old, which is a long lifespan for a stuffed animal. [...] It was with me in Afghanistan, it was with me in South Sudan because it really makes every bed home.

Researcher: Is it with you here?

Claudia: Yes. I'd never leave that somewhere. That's coming with me.

Butcher (2010, p. 25) describes how there is a need to ensure the home is firmly embedded in a place – “a stabilising weight when all around is in flux” – so as to manage unsettled feelings that have been generated by moving abroad. Claudia identified that her feelings towards her self-storage unit and its contents depended to a large extent to how happy she was in her current circumstances; when unhappy she yearned for her things and the past parts of her life and settled homes they symbolised. Ahmed (1999, p. 341) suggests that the boundaries between self, home and away are permeable, so movement away also has bearing upon the constitution of home. In this way, Claudia's affective experience of being away (i.e. being unhappy with her living situation in Cardiff) also affects how 'homely' she is capable of feeling (i.e. her yearning for stability or previous homes).

Claudia: I really think it's bound in a way to the living circumstances I am in. [...] When I had that horrible flat which was seriously overpriced, it was more..., it was more that I thought about where I wanted to live eventually and then I also thought about getting the stuff in a container, in a van, bringing it somewhere. And you kind of play that through your head. It was more important then.

Experiencing disjuncture in her new surroundings, Claudia sometimes yearned to be surrounded by comforting possessions; her lack of things provoking acute feelings concerning the difference between her ideal and actual situation (Parrott 2012, p. 46). Home-making strategies are the affective and embodied response to an assessment of a place as being 'not like home', which engenders differing levels of discomfort (Butcher 2010). However, in many ways, 'home' for Claudia is tied up in the objects in her unit more than her current flat. The things in her self-storage unit materially constitute social and emotional relationships more than the essential items she has bought with her, and therefore have greater capacity for successful 'home-making' (see Miller 1998b).

Claudia: My flat here is at the moment very much my place because I eat there, I sleep there, I keep my stuff there. Um... the storage is a... probably more deeper [sic] way my place. Because it contains really parts of my life, of my personality probably um... which are not connected to the Cardiff life.

When Claudia first moved away it was seen only as a practical solution to her needs, but over time “*It kind of became an anchor for stuff I really want to keep*”. The unit contains possessions she can’t move to her temporary accommodation (and doesn’t want to) but are still important to her for various reasons (Burrell 2008; Brickell and Datta 2011). These items are valued for their longer-term place in her life, but until then moving them to the UK would “cast an uncomfortably premature permanence on the whole migration project” (Burrell 2014, p. 160), which Claudia is not set on long-term.

Claudia: It's basically really, kind of a ground to root in, or a kind of background kind of stuff. And that..., it sounds kind of strange because it still is kind of just storage, but that's probably the point, it's not just storage. If you are having such a fragmentalised life then it is not just a storage. It is very much really about... um... the physical security to know where you are coming from.

Self-storage enables Claudia to enjoy her mobile lifestyle certain in the knowledge that the parts of her identity from before this stage in her life are secure; its value as stability has increased with her mobility. Her material roots remain behind in her self-storage unit as she travels the world, uprooted without a permanent place to call home. It is not just a storage space but representative of who she was and how far she has come (Parrott 2012).

Claudia: I need a confirmation to know where I'm coming from because at one point life took a U-turn and brought me into kind of an incredibly different direction.

Claudia: It's really just a place where I have parts of my life and which connects - and that probably sounds more dramatic than I really mean it - it kind of connects this first part of my life with the hopefully coming part of my life. And it builds this transition, this transitional bridge in there.

As a point of stability in a period of transition Claudia’s self-storage creates a temporal bridge between past and future. In the future she plans to reunite with her extra stored possessions when she has a permanent job and home. The meaning of her self-storage unit as a ‘home’ will then cease to be as important, and the individual significance of various dormant objects will take precedence as she moves into and attempts to make a new home.

Claudia: When I'm going to have [sic] a more stable life it might not be that important anymore and then it will probably be reduced to just objects, but at the moment it's a lot more.

When asked about the desired permanency of this next stage of her life she explained that it wasn't only its duration that mattered but its stability too, i.e. the permanency of a job. So until that stability is perceived to have been reached self-storage remains the best place for her things. Seamon (2015 [1979], p. 80) states "rootedness is established through physical action and requires time to develop. [...] the person who changes places must re-establish rootedness each time [s]he moves". Self-storage is an additional 'root' representation of 'home' between and across the establishment of home dwellings.

6.1.2 Return, or not

Emma's unit, much like Claudia's, has been storing her things during a transitional part of her life. Emma moved to Africa for research fieldwork thinking it would be for just six months but ended up being there for nearly three years. Before moving she emptied her house of belongings and put them into self-storage so she could rent out the property unfurnished. This was at the advice of the rental company who pointed out that if a tenant broke the furnishings or something like an appliance needed repairing she'd need to do it – obviously less easy and stressful to arrange from Africa. Now back in the UK she still isn't ready to settle and will be keeping much of her stuff in self-storage whilst she lives in a house-share.

Before leaving for Africa Emma visited the self-storage site to speak to the staff there and have a look around to see if she was comfortable moving her stuff in. The safety and security of her things were important because it would not be easy to resolve problems from the other side of the world. Burrell (2014, p. 163) suggests that "this desire to... stabilise and shut places down emanates from a far wider context of precarity, change [and] uncertainty", and indeed as Emma was moving for an uncertain duration to an unfamiliar country with no concrete plans for her return this desire was particularly strong.

Emma: I wanted to see just how secure it was. So you know, can someone renting the self-storage unit next to me climb over the top and take what they want? [...] I wanted to make sure it was safe from the elements as well. The last things I want is to put all my stuff somewhere and for a leaky roof or something, you know. It's silly [...] and] highly unlikely but you think 'If, if...'. Because I was going to Africa it's not easy for me to, like, resolve problems from across the [other] side of the world.

Emma: I was comfortable just sticking it all in there and flying off, and yeh, kind of, problem solved for me. That's the way I saw it. So it's in there, I can forget about it now. And I did really. Other than emails to pay the bill I didn't have to worry.

From the outset self-storage allowed for Emma's uncertainty to not hold her back. She could return to her things and be assured that they would be just as she had left them. However, on her return, visiting her unit for the first time in three years Emma discovered her relationship to her things had altered considerably and she found herself questioning why she had kept so many things that she no longer felt any emotional attachment to. More than simply a question of time apart from her possessions (see section 5.2), living in Africa had been life-changing for Emma and led to a reevaluation of what she considered to be valuable in life.

Emma: I tell you, it's changed me going over there though, changed me as a person.

Marcoux (2001b, p. 83), building on Giddens (1991), recognises that moving can be a means for reflecting on one's self-narrative and is "an occasion for people to ask themselves, as he says, 'what do I want for myself?'" For Emma, viewing her things after living and working in Africa was an uncanny experience mingled with a strange sense of familiarity at having once lived with, and among, these objects. Time, distance and a changing sense of self meant that Emma could no longer identify a need for some of her things.

Emma: I kept this stuff but I could have just gotten rid of it, do you know what I mean? Like why have I got this? [She brandishes an old roll of wrapping paper]. It's wrapping paper!

Having packed in a hurry Emma's self-storage was full of odd bits and pieces which had been thrown into boxes as the need to finish packing created a rushed atmosphere fraught with indecision. So, upon re-engagement these things are a reminder of an "inability to effectively process and manage stuff at key, life-changing moments of transition" (Horton and Kraftl 2012, p. 40).

Emma: I guess I thought when I come back if I am moving back into that house then I'll need all this stuff again to continue living. [She laughs] But now that I've kind of moved on I'm thinking that, well, it'll probably go to another house that I'll live in, but because of my situation what's the likelihood of that happening now? This is why I'm re-evaluating what to do. [...] Like do I really need that sofa if I'm living in Africa for another three years? No. Do I need the garden furniture? No. [She laughs].

Now back in the UK it is time for Emma to work out which of her things are worth holding on to. Her life choices in some ways are connected to her stored things, there to bridge her over her period away. But since she is still uncertain about what to do and where to live next, re-evaluating her things almost seems futile. As such, self-storage can keep her things in stasis until she is ready to make the decisions on their fate and the next chapter of her life.

Figure 13 - The contents of Emma's home she didn't take to Africa



Self-storage holds things in abeyance for a short or a more long-term period. For most users it is a temporary solution between previous and planned situations, such as moving from one house to another. However, in other instances the move (abroad) is considerably bigger and home possessions are inflected within wider tensions and worries around disruption and mobility (Attfield 2000, p. 154). Therefore self-storage acts as a bridge between aspects of self during a period of transition and uncertainty; it allows for (im)mobility. Most of the participants described a degree of uncertainty that

surrounded the things they had in self-storage or events leading up to or after storing their possessions. Claudia and Emma in particular narrated stories of great upheaval and transition in their lives during which they negotiated physical and mental notions of borders, home and belonging. Self-storage didn't just store their possessions but also took on meaning as a home space where identity was rooted and secure. Just as life has been impacted by work opportunities that require moving across the world, so too the biographies of their things are disrupted through being (dis)placed in self-storage (see Kopytoff 1986; Hoskins 1998). What individuals take with them, and what is left behind, are important choices in experiences of mobility. Through the little they had with them Claudia and Emma attempted to engage in home-making strategies, deployed in an attempt to re-establish points of comfort, that is, to replace home. However, their 'home' was also situated in what was left behind in self-storage.

6.2 Bridging homes

Generally ideas of self and possessions have been bound up with the home since it is there that things are both displayed and stored depending on their role in a person's life at that moment. Bachelard (1994) for example, views the house as a womb and in a similar way Sibley (1995a, p. 130) has an "appreciation of the home as a restorative, anchoring, productive and insulating shell". The home is, more often than not, a constant upon which individuals and families can depend, retreating to and recuperating in amongst a sea of change in other aspects of their life. However, when the transitions and trajectories of life interrupt home spaces it may need to be broken down into its constituent parts and reassembled elsewhere. Since we take things with us when we move (Buchli and Lucas 2000), "to discard and throw away by turning things to waste becomes a means to enable geographical mobility" (Gregson et al. 2007a, p. 697). Alternatively, things may be relocated elsewhere and self-storage provides space until it is possible to settle again. As Bissell (2007) highlights relative stillness is important in worlds of mobility. Immobility of possessions and the memories, emotions and relationships they stand in for can be viewed as rootedness or anchoring in place. In addition to this, these domestic items bridge between circumstances and identities. The narratives here fit within more recent work on the geographies of home which has considered home-making and unmaking over the life course (see Brickell 2013; Baxter and Brickell 2014).

6.2.1 Moving home

Gill and her family are using self-storage at a time of a significant shift in their lives: moving from their family home in the London commuter belt to a run-down farm in rural Wales. Whilst they slowly renovate the farm buildings they are storing much of their furniture and extra things in a self-storage unit in a nearby town. As well as moving their

family home across the UK the move also came with a significant change in lifestyle from a career as a teacher (and her husband an accountant) to starting out as new farmers learning to care for livestock and how to run the farm. In this time of upheaval Gill identified their self-storage unit as being a safer place for their things than the barns and outbuildings, which were damp and unkempt. This meant that she didn't have to worry about that side of things at the moment, and could compartmentalise the various emotions and stresses in her life thereby making them more manageable.

Gill: Well just the fact it gives you peace of mind. Your stuff is safe and secure. Um... yeh I think that's it really, it's the peace of mind. Because that's the difference between having it here and having it at home. [It] is just knowing it's dry and secure and... um yeh, you haven't got to worry about it. [...] Too much change, too much going on. Yeh, this is security you know.

Despite being pragmatic about the enormous changes that brought about the need for self-storage, once confronted with her things at her unit despite them being boxed up and therefore not entirely visible, Gill revealed a strong emotional reaction to the point of getting visibly teary-eyed and upset.

Gill: Now I'm here actually I'm thinking 'All my stuff here!' Yeh, I'm feeling a bit 'Aw it's all my things.'

Researcher: Even though you can't see them you still feel that?

Gill: I know they are here. You know this is all it was, you know. There is a lot of stuff but every now and then you get a glimmer of something that looks familiar. And um so, like, I'll give you... Like this wardrobe is usually in the guest room, and it's always got Malcolm's suits in it. You know you can just suddenly see it in context. But it's out of context now so it gives you those feelings, those emotional connections with it and the old house, see that I've been able to compartmentalise. See, when I can shut the door to this I can forget that part of life at the moment. Because it's almost too hard to... Not too hard because it's not... But, like I say, my head is so full of what we are doing and the change and everything that's new. Um... I just haven't got the headspace to go to this really. So we're here and away from home, I suppose it just gives me a chance to go 'Oh yeh' and talk about it and think about it. I am feeling... quite a few emotions have come in... But it's alright.

Researcher: Yeh. What like missing your old place and...?

Gill: Yeh. It's all of that. It's all the emotions about... yeh... leaving it. This represents the past. This represents um... all of this bit is sort of on hold as well you know. So but it is... leaving that house was really emotional. Um... because it's the... that's the thing it's the boys' childhood and Grace's childhood all wrapped up in that house.

As Marcoux (2001b, p. 77) highlights, our things can appear to be 'cumbersome companions' on the occasion of moving, as we must make difficult decisions based upon the 'weight' or value of their memory, as well as their future potential use. Gill recognised that her children had grown up in their previous home and their identities were tied up with it, as was hers. She had a lot of fond memories of her children growing up in that house, which emerged from her affective reengagement with their household belongings. For example, upon spotting a box labelled 'DVDs' Gill proceeded to recount intimate family practices of recording and re-watching home videos (see Rose 2010). Seeing her things out of context reminded her that this connection was yet to be formed with their new home and that she hadn't yet had the time to process what the move had meant for her family.

Figure 14 - Contents of Gill's former family home



Gill: I've compartmentalised all of this and it's, you know, actually in a very physical sense it has been, it's been boxed away. And it's a real metaphor for what it is. Um, it's just enabled me to know that's okay and I can deal with it another time. And actually coming here has meant that I've had to deal with it a little bit [...] but that's alright because I'll have to at some point you know! Um but as I say it's just that at the moment I

don't have the head space for it. And you know, this is no doubt what you come across, people have a different story and a different relationship with their store and everything else. And mine has been, it's out of sight, out of mind and I don't have to go there. But when I come here you suddenly think 'Oh yeh that little bit, that life did exist. It is still there'.

When her things were out of sight and she was concentrating on the jobs around the house move, renovation and new lifestyle Gill had had little time to think about the magnitude of the change. As soon as she was confronted with the unit containing what she deemed to be her old life it brought up a lot of emotions (such as nostalgia and longing). Her self-storage unit was acting to physically and emotionally compartmentalise the old part of her life from the new.

Gill: All of this is associated as I say with that family home... so everything in its way, funnily enough, has that sentiment attached to it because it's from our family home. Um, and this place will be a different place. It will be a different experience. I mean it will be a family home but you know it's another chapter and that was, this all represents a different chapter for the minute. When it becomes absorbed into the new chapter then it will feel different, but you know for the time being yeh, it represents the past. [...] No doubt it'll be exciting and wonderful and emotional and everything when we get it all home. Um yeh, it'll be that chance to again reconnect with the past, deal with that I suppose.

Since “things are at the heart of the creation of a sense of place and of its recreation”, when they finally move their things into the renovated farmhouse their possessions will take on new meaning in their new home and the symbolic centre of their home will be recreated and rebuilt (Marcoux 2001b, pp. 74-75). For now though their self-storage continues to hold their belongings safe from the chaos of change, bridging the old and the new, the familiar and the unknown, the past and the future.

6.2.2 Negotiating home

Anya rented self-storage as an interim solution during the process of moving in with her partner and jointly renovating parts of his property. Sorting through her things was necessary to avoid repetition of their possessions, as well as choosing things that would define the shared identity of their home and storing those that would be incompatible with it (Marcoux 2001b, p. 79). She described that she had started moving clothes, knick-knacks and day-to-day stuff from her old house little by little, and by doing so she was succeeding at “*slowly putting my mark on his house*”. Anya suggested that this was

important so that she could feel 'at home' there (see Jackson 1995). However, moving two individual households of things into one home had meant some compromises, particularly with furniture and larger items. Reimer and Leslie (2004) contend that furniture, particularly items such as sofas and beds, can be explicitly tied to the notion of shared intimacy in the home and therefore embody a shared and negotiated identity.

Anya: I have already got rid of quite a few of my things which would have been important to me, that I would have liked to have kept but I thought 'I just can't hold onto this, it's ridiculous when we are living together'.

Anya explained that she had decided to divest of an art deco mirror and china tea set she had inherited from her gran but did not have a particularly strong emotional attachment to. Nonetheless she stated that whilst she had decided to getting rid of them, "I expect Rhys to get rid of some of his things too". Working towards a shared home identity can require considerable sacrifices and trade-offs (Wong et al. 2017). Anya weighed up what was truly important to her – the mirror, tea set and other items she had inherited from her gran – against her partner's sacrifices. Of the remaining things in her self-storage unit Anya had a clear idea of where she would like them to be in their home.

Figure 15 - The bureau Anya hopes to fit in the house she now owns with her partner



Anya: This is just a cheap-y bureau that I bought on Gumtree but I really, really like it. So I was very reluctant to let it go for that reason. So I am going to try and squeeze it into the house but I will admit that it might not fit, but again I'm not letting it go without a fight, [She laughs] without trying to fit it in anyway. [...] So I have said 'I'd like this to go here, and I'd like this to go here. Therefore I am keeping them. Is that okay?' and the general agreement was 'Yeh that's fine'. [She laughs] Whether it actually happens or not is further down the line of discussion, but you know I have talked about it. In my mind, I have a view of how things could be.

Anya acknowledges that to get her and partner's now shared home how she would like it, there will be a need for negotiation as they combine their identities to form one coherent space. Miller (1998a, p. 119) states that partners must “demand not only considerable compromise but also [...] to a degree the elimination of that same individuality”, thereby foregoing some loss of self in the course of merging with a beloved other. Whilst Anya understands there may need to be a compromise on her behalf, she is resolute and unwilling for it to be an unfair one-sided negotiation.

Anya: I would like to keep it [the bureau] but equally if we couldn't come..., like, I would know when I think Rhys is not being fair. You know if he said 'No we're not keeping any of this' I would recognise that and say 'Hang on a minute'. If we came to an amicable agreement where I genuinely thought 'This is being silly Anya' I could let it all go, that's okay. But what I would like is for us to have, like, a fair, 'Well I did get rid of my gran's tea service, what are you going to get rid of?' You know that kind of conversation. So to be honest... [Pause. She exhales] It could go and I could be okay with that [...] as long as I think the situation is fair. It's a bit tricky co-habiting when you haven't bought a house together but you're moving in with somebody and it's already their house, and then it becomes 'our house' [...] It does still take a bit of mentally adjusting I think. For both of us, you know.

Self-storage is giving Anya and her partner the time and space to come to these decisions about what to have in their shared space which best creates the home they wish to have together. It emerges as both a necessary temporary step towards the personalisation of domestic space, allows for decisions to be made without the pressures of time and space clouding judgement, and avoids adding additional stress to a situation already requiring sensitive negotiation and compromise (Marcoux 2001b). In line with the findings of Wong et al. (2017, p. 78), for Anya and her partner there was “a temporal

movement which shifted the prioritisation away from personal self-concepts (past), towards shared-self concepts (present and future). Anya's narrative highlights how self-storage can act to bridge between identities – as a single person living alone and a couple co-habiting – in the course of moving into and negotiating a shared home identity.

6.2.3 Divorce and separation

Stuart described a situation in which he had left a lot of his stuff at the house he owned with his ex-girlfriend when he moved out, deliberately avoiding what would have been an uncomfortable exchange. Years later when the house was put on the market (Stuart was now married) and a buyer came forward who wanted to move in quickly, his ex moved his things from the garage to the shed whilst she packed up her own things.

Stuart: I said 'I'll come round and see how much stuff I've got' and she'd basically moved all my stuff from the garage, which was like integral to the house, into the shed which was leaking and wet. And there was a lot of books and stuff that had gone out there as well. So I was like, 'Got to get this sorted', it was partly my own fault for not sorting it years before.

As Marcoux (2001b, p. 80) describes, in these types of circumstances “what matters is not so much *what* is divided, but *how* it is divided; how the sorting is performed and conducted”. Unfortunately, since the shed was leaking, much of Stuart's stuff was ruined, but what could be salvaged was moved into a self-storage unit. The majority of the stuff Stuart had left at his ex-girlfriend's and had now been put in self-storage was excess things from his first marriage which he had not subsequently needed. His divorce papers were missing though.

Stuart: So I had divorce paperwork in there. It's because I needed my 'degree absolute'. You have to have that to get remarried, to show you are divorced. And Anabelle's [current wife] going 'Have you got it?' and I'm going 'I don't know where it is!' I said 'It's in...' I went through all the stuff I'd taken with me and it's not here so it must be in the filing cabinet in my old house. And if my ex had gone through it she could have just binned it out of nastiness. But she didn't... Luckily.

Home 'un-making' has been defined by Baxter and Brickell (2014, p. 134) as a destructive process involving material components – which had previously been equated with domesticity – being divested, damaged or destroyed. Whilst some of Stuart's books and an old computer monitor had been ruined by damp as a result of, what he believed was, his ex-girlfriend maliciously storing them in the leaking shed, his important things (such as divorce papers) had survived intact. Fortunately for Stuart the only 'drama' around “uncertainties of valuation and identity” (Kopytoff 1986, pp. 64 cited in Goode

2007, p. 366) had been who should dispose of the things neither he nor his ex-girlfriend had wanted.

Martin, who had moved abroad for work following a divorce, explained that he was using self-storage to store additional things he did not need in his temporary accommodation. He plans to make a new home with his stored possessions upon his retirement back in the UK. Home-making in the UK would require quite a bit of work because he had left bulky items and furniture with his ex-wife and son in their ex-marital home. Not only this, he had little idea of what he did have in self-storage and had become quite detached from it over time.

Martin: I've got [...] very little, to be honest, as I explained. So yeh when I do find a house I'll need to buy everything, because she kept all the furniture and so on, which was okay by me because I've not really needed to pay to store furniture. Because uh... it's better to buy it when needed in my view.

Martin: I haven't spent an awful lot of time with some of my things! Uh, but I'm hoping when I retire to renew my relationship with them. [He laughs]

Goode (2007, p. 379) in a postscript at the end of her auto-ethnographic account of 'dividing the spoils' upon divorce described how she has "to some extent re-created the home I lost, in my new house, by using my collections as 'transitional objects', positioning pictures and ceramics in equivalent locations and 'layouts' to their former places". Martin may indeed find the same happens when he recreates a permanent home in the UK. Divorce, often necessitates the 'forced' sorting of things (Marcoux 2001b), bringing to light objects which had previously materialised happy imaginings of the future but now symbolise bitter resentment (Gregson et al. 2007a). Disposing or destroying objects is thought to be a productive act of catharsis that signifies moving on, whilst storing these same items could be viewed as an act of 'self-harm'.

6.2.4 Generation rent

The 'generation rent' phenomenon has brought with it a rise in parents storing their children's stuff for them until they have adequate or permanent enough domestic space of their own to house it. As Marcoux (2001b, p. 80) explains, young people often consign things to their parents' care where they will be secure until they feel 'more settled'. They entrust things that they may need in the future if there is a "potential change in status, relation or residence [or] in case it does not work out with the new partner or with the new place. In other words, people want to keep these objects as an option for the future and keep their options over them" (Marcoux 2001b, p. 80). This arrangement between children and parents acts to prolong dependence and care between the generations. In some instances the link is produced and maintained by the parent because they curated the items and believe they will be valued by their child in the future, and are therefore waiting for the right time to pass the treasures on. For example, Leanne kept a collection of artwork and things her two boys made when they were younger as well as bereavement cards for their father, and whilst her sons are aware of these collections they have not taken them off her hands. Therefore she feels that she is still obliged to hold onto them until they do.

Figure 16 - A box containing some of Leanne's grown-up son's artwork



Leanne: ... some little things done by little people. You know handprints, pictures from nursery, cards that they gave to me, you know, that they made in nursery... yeah they were in a box of little mementoes I've kept. Some birthday candles... yeah I've kept all of them. I've kept some mementoes. They are theirs really, they were given to them when they were about 12. So... I dunno, maybe if Harry lived in this country and had

his own home they would be the sort of thing you'd pass onto him so he can make his own decision on... but because he's in Sweden that hasn't happened, I'll just have to keep them.

Leanne: I was widowed when my boys were little, and I had the sympathy cards for their dad. A lot. But we sort of... I've kept them because they are for the boys if ever they want to read them. I didn't get rid of them. Yeh, did sort of... contemplate it a bit but I couldn't quite do it with them. [...] So... if they ever, sort of, want to read what people said... but they probably won't but they are there aren't they then. [...]... I dunno, there is no reason not to keep them really.

When the collections (and emotional connections) 'belong' more to the child than parent this relationship is slightly altered. In cases like this there can be a feeling of obligation to store things, whether in the family home or in self-storage, until the child chooses to part with them or the parent makes a push for them to go. Valentine (2003, p. 38) has argued that even as young people leave home they retain the identity of 'children' in their parents' eyes, and are treated as such continuing to receive parental care, albeit in a different way. A number of parents described what functioned as unspoken contracts regarding things that children had simply left behind. For example Leanne described how despite her eldest son having moved to Sweden, settling down there and being about to have a child of his own she had remained a custodian for some of his things.

Leanne: He's an artist so a lot of his paintings and stuff like that are there as well. And, well, I can't get rid of them, I wouldn't be allowed to.

Similarly Vicky explained that despite trying to persuade her grown-up daughter to part with her cuddly toys (which took up a lot of space and were never taken out) they remained in her self-storage unit.

Vicky: You will see in there, there are probably five bin liners in there full of cuddly toys which are my daughters. Right from when she was a baby, right up to her being whatever age and she will not let me get rid of any of them.

Researcher: And she's...

Vicky: ...22 yep.

Researcher: When was the last time you tried to push the teddies out?

Vicky: Not that long ago because we had a lady [at work] doing a cuddly toy thing... she's a scout leader and one of their other scout leaders had just been told she'd got cancer and they were doing a fundraiser thing

with cuddly toys. So I said to Ellie 'Can I please give...', 'No they're all my favourites, you're not giving any away'. Okay.

After trying and failing to motivate her daughter to sort through her cuddly toys Vicky resigned herself to storing them for a while longer. She felt that since she had the space for them (for now at least) it would be unfair to give her daughter an ultimatum and evict them. As well as the large bag of cuddly toys Vicky was storing a horse blanket for her daughter:

Vicky: My daughter's horse, Bracken, had to be put to sleep and that were [sic] Bracken's blanket. That will never be thrown, she will never allow..., she won't even allow..., I asked her could I wash it... cos it's a horse blanket and she said no. Cos it's still got Bracken's hair on it and things like that. So you know, they're her sentiment...

The reason Vicky concedes to her daughter's wishes, both with the cuddly toys and horse blanket, is that it's not her decision to make since the emotional connection to the items is her daughter's, and she does not have ownership over that. Curating objects on their child's behalf parents risk them not being appreciated and never being collected. However, the thought of disposing of potentially important identity objects can seem to parents as a far bigger risk. Therefore if sufficient space can be found at home or in self-storage to hold on to and store things then this will be done, with no ultimatums or timeframes implemented to motivate otherwise. The unspoken contract between parents and their children allows young people greater flexibility and mobility, as well as bridging the gap between the parental home and a dwelling of their own.

Many motivations to use self-storage are connected with changes to living arrangements, whether that is moving home to pursue a new career or lifestyle, negotiating shared home spaces with a significant other, storing displaced things after the break down of a relationship or holding on to things while an affordable permanent home is still out of reach. Previous research has largely focused upon the material practices of sorting and disposal in moving homes (see Marcoux 2001b; Gregson et al. 2007a), but the narratives from this research highlight the (additional/subsequent) role of storage in securing items and bridging between both identities and dwellings. The personalised home is an important component of identity and vice versa, and self-storage through the safekeeping of both mundane and significant things plays a significant part in their eventual (re)placing and the (re)construction of home.

6.3 Chapter conclusions

A sense of home is traditionally associated with grounding people in a particular place. Seamon (2015 [1979], p. 79) categorises 'rootedness' as one of the five underlying themes which mark out the experiential character of at-homeness (see also Somerville 1989). Yet slightly more recently, scholars have problematised this traditional, sedentarist bias that sees home as fixed, bounded and enclosed (see Massey 1992; Ahmed 1999). Resultantly the conception of home has moved beyond the dwelling to other spaces that materially and imaginatively connect people and places across time and space, leading to Ralph and Staeheli (2011, p. 519) stating that "mobility *and* stasis, displacement *and* placement as well as roots *and* routes go into the making of home". The home is also comprised of a great array of material objects which collectively create an experience of dwelling which is "greater than the sum of its parts" (Hecht 2001, p. 123). Domestic objects are, as Hecht goes on to describe, "...more than mere 'things', they are [...] a material testament of who we are, where we have been and perhaps even where we are heading". Having an intrinsic value in the construction and maintenance of self-identity, as well as notions of home spaces, our possessions move with us when we move. Marcoux (2001b, p. 84) suggests that "people take with them what matters" and whilst this might be true in the long run, the previous narratives show that when there is uncertainty and/or disruption self-storage can usefully store those things that aren't wanted or needed *right now*. Whilst "moving does not permit *status quo*" (Marcoux 2001b, p. 78) and a stable home-concept, self-storage can act to bridge across changes in status and circumstances and allows for potential aspects of self to be kept in stasis until they can be realised.

This chapter contributes empirically and theoretically to the 'new mobilities' paradigm that came out of sociology and is now permeating geographical research. It does so by building on scholarship that suggests that stillness is not a "wasted moment or a kind of emptiness and inactivity" (Cresswell 2012, p. 648; see also Bissell and Fuller 2011) but necessary moments that enable mobilities (Cresswell 2014, p. 109). This chapter also has an overlapping contribution to scholarship on the meaning of home, particularly work from feminist/emotional geographers which understands home as not simply a dwelling but any space in which affective feelings of belonging or rootedness are felt (hooks 1990; Gurney 1997; Ahmed 1999). The interviews analysed in this chapter expose the importance of the curation, preservation and storage of material things that root our growing and evolving conceptions of self. Immobilising material possessions in self-storage during life transitions and events emerges as being necessary for the stabilisation of identity and the (re)making of home.

7 Consolidation – Mooring personal and family identities

Bardhi et al. (2012, p. 511) states that “possessions anchor and stabilise identity in space”. Following on from, this chapter explores how self-storage plays a part in mooring and bridging ideas of identity and home during life course trajectories, transitions and events (e.g. moving house, divorce, parenthood), which are experienced by everyone at some point in their housing biographies (Baxter and Brickell 2014, p. 135). I will bring together scholarship concerned with life course and the meaning of home to consider the importance of ‘biographical objects’ in securing identity through periods of change (Hoskins 1998). Generally, life course research has focused upon the disposition of possessions during role transitions and in the adaption to new home environments (Young 1991; Gentry et al. 1995; Price et al. 2000). Whilst this is significant, the argument will be made that dispossession is only part of the story and material practices of storage in self-storage units also play a significant role in the re-evaluation and mooring of identities; thereby not only giving an insight into periods of transition but also into life course trajectories such as growing up and growing old. Further, it will be explored how self-storage units can be conceived as ‘home’.

This chapter explores the ways acts of preservation, curation and storage moor past identities, keeping them safe, secure and rooted in self-storage during life transitions and trajectories. The first section, 7.1, considers the material biography of stored objects relating to personal-life histories – items kept for their ability to signify achievements (and failures), memorialise experiences and map the development of personal tastes. In the second section, 7.2, the discussion turns to the significance of stored materiality in the development, evolution and curation of family identities, specifically childhood, parenthood and intra-generational relations.

7.1 Personal life-history

The act of clearing out a loft, garage, or entire home and moving it into self-storage and thereby sorting through a ‘lifetime’s worth of stuff’ is “a process of literally laying out, laying bare and laying *to* bear a lifetime past” (Horton and Kraftl 2012, p. 41). Moving and handling things brings them into a ‘heightened zone of scrutiny’, positioning them “to be looked at, felt, smelt, considered and thought out” (Gregson 2007, p. 164). In

(re)encountering these accumulations of material objects our past identities are exposed, vulnerable and up for review. In the intervening period between encounters our 'biographical objects' (along with people) gather time, movement and change (Kopytoff 1986; Belk 1988; Gosden and Marshall 1999). Stored memories both "interrupt the flow of time to restore a sense of continuity, as well as to reflect change and contain complex and apparently irreconcilable differences" (Attfield 2000, p. 265). As such the process of sifting through things relating to memories of people, places and events can become a way of supporting people experiencing a significant life course event (Horton and Kraftl 2012, p. 35), mooring ideas of self within the sea of change.

Deciding what to keep and what to discard can be an emotional task often infused with care, concern and love (Gregson et al. 2007a). However, as Horton and Kraftl (2012) observe, whilst the process of sorting and packing may begin with good intentions (to pass on, throw away and curate possessions) there comes a time in many house moves when having to deal with more and more possessions grows tiring or time is running out. As a result, things are thrown in boxes and into self-storage to defer decisions until later. Those objects which linger when they should be disposed of can haunt us, constituting an absent-presence that can be felt as an unacknowledged debt or sense of guilt (Hetherington 2004). One might interpret any objects that could not be ascertained as mattering, or that survive the initial sort through when they should have been disposed of, as a material reminder of the emotional difficulties and frustrations present in making a life course transition. Whilst many of the participants spoke of cherished objects, many more preferred to discuss those ambiguous items that had been packed and stored as 'stuff' to be decided upon once they were 'sorted' in their new situation or home.

7.1.1 Achievements and failures

It is not uncommon to hold onto books, essays and projects from our school or university days. A number of those interviewed admitted they had kept those things boxed up just as they were when they finished their course. They stayed boxed up like that for a number of reasons: 1) they signified achievements in their life and therefore were materially part of their identity, 2) despite their importance it was easy to put them to one side and forget about them, 3) there was a lot of uncertainty about the best way to divest of things, particularly textbooks, which might have value to others. Graham has kept his university trunk which is stored for the foreseeable future in self-storage along with other objects he and his wife cannot find space for in their home. Whilst not important enough to have 'on hand' or in storage spaces at home, the trunk signifies a significant part of his life and is yet to be disposed of.

Graham: Um, at the bottom there is my university trunk which is full of university textbooks from my uni days which again I have never thrown

away, I've never had them to hand. When they were in the old house they sat in the loft for 20 years but somehow I can't get rid of them! [He laughs] You are getting the idea I'm a bit of a hoarder now aren't you!

When we think about achievements and our possessions it raises some interesting points about how we construct the self. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981, p. 53) suggest that objects affect a person's abilities by expanding or restricting the scope of their thoughts or actions and have "a determining effect on the development of self". The items in Graham's university trunk are material signifiers of his student identity, as well as his subsequent identities. Holding on to and storing items relating to his earlier identity as a university student acts to moor those things which Graham can use to narrate his past self and his life. Unlike some material indicators of achievements which may be displayed proudly in our homes in the form of framed certificates, graduation photos, or trophies and medals, those objects that were part of the ongoing process behind the scenes tend to remain spatially out of sight. This fits loosely with Goffman's idea of front and back stage (1990 [1959]): with achievements performed through the placement and organisation of material signifiers front-stage, and the tools used in the labour of these achievements kept back-stage. These books, scribbled-upon notepads and drafts of work remind us of the effort that went into the final outcome, to the point of being just as treasured as certificates, for example. It may be for this reason as well as lack of time/will and knowledge of divestment routes that keeps us holding on.

Graham: I suspect when I open that trunk up I'll just say goodbye to them. Um but I don't know why I..., I'm not desperately sentimental about them. I suppose I've just kept them and I haven't had a chance to go through them. And, uh, but again if I got rid of them I'd like them to go to say a specialist second-hand book dealer or something like that. Because some of the books, I mean when I casually browse through some of these nice old bookshops they seem to have some of the volumes there that I've got in that box. [He laughs] So it would be quite nice for them to bring some value to..., to other people at some point.

Graham, now in his 60s, has his university days well behind him but is yet to open himself up to the possibility of actually seeing through the disposal or donation of his books. As they had such value to him as a student (and perhaps still do in narrating that part of his life, despite saying he is not sentimental about them), he would like them to be appreciated again by somebody else (Belk 1995). Graham is trying to hold onto a bit of his youth and this trunk moors his feelings of nostalgia for a past time and identity.

For Lily, the art projects she had completed at college serve as a reminder of her ability to be creative and how she has developed as an artist over the years. Her artwork, along

with other 'surplus' stuff is currently in storage whilst the house she has recently bought with her partner is being renovated. She is storing a mixture of sentimental items that need to be kept away from potential damage and valuable things (like a large Mac computer) she doesn't trust around the builders.

Lily: There is [sic.] some files along the side there. That contains my old work. I can't remember actually, it might have been school or college. So big, you know, A1 pieces of artwork, and bits of paper and art supplies.

Researcher: Why have you kept those?

Lily: I sometimes like to look back at it and, and remind myself 'Actually I was quite creative!' when I'm not feeling quite so creative, which is most [of] the time now! So that's the main reason. And yeh, I can see how I've developed over the years in terms of art style and things.

Figure 17 - Lily's boxed up artwork and Royal College of Art portfolio (on the chair at the back)



Having the material reminder of her capabilities is important to Lily since it acts as a support system when she doubts herself. The folders of work symbolise a wistful hope for the creative side of herself which she could regain. Belk (1991) claims that the main underlying motive for acquiring and holding on to objects that provide a sense of past is that they are instrumental in knowing who we are. If we do not possess some tangible proof of our history and the ability to remember where we've been, then we don't know

who we are and cannot forecast or plan where we are going. Lily's plan after college was to attend the Royal College of Art in London; she was unsuccessful and her stored possessions reflect this.

Lily: [The] file that is sitting on top of a chair, which is sort of black with a sort-of patterned lid, that has work [in that] I submitted to the Royal College of Art to try applying. Obviously, I didn't get in but it's sort of stayed like that and [I] just kept the work in there.

Whilst the portfolio reminds her of her failed application and resulting reluctant decision to find a job in an art gallery, she put a lot of work (and herself) into it so cannot consider throwing it out. The portfolio has, however, been relegated over time to other storage spaces and now her self-storage unit. Having it in visible places at home might be an unwelcome reminder of her ambition and skills being put on hold as she goes about her day-to-day life working in the art gallery. So storage here is unrealised ambition, possible selves that are 'still (to be) born', a memento of what could have been and what could potentially be again. Lily will have a lot of her artwork on display in front-stage spaces such the living and dining room of her new home, and her portfolio has a back-stage place in the performance of her identity as an artist. Storage safeguards those identity-affirming objects which may be potentially required in preparations back-stage for the future performance as an art student, but are neither currently needed back-stage or front-stage as this is not her current identity.

7.1.2 Collections and souvenirs

The gathering and collecting of souvenirs "makes an experience tangible, either for consumption by others or as a means of prolonging the experience for one's own consumption" at a later date (Wilkins 2011, p. 239). Generally, geographical research on souvenirs has focussed within tourism studies and therefore only considers the act of buying, displaying or storing and then re-engaging with mementoes bought whilst on holiday. However, if we consider the role of a souvenir in the 'strategic memory protection' of important life events (Zauberman et al. 2009) then they can't be narrowly defined as only outcomes of tourist consumption, but the definition should be broadened to include acquisition of objects that signify any type of distinct experience or life event (Belk 1991). Whilst it is almost certain that everyone has souvenirs in their possession, whether they memorialise a holiday or another experience, there were few mentions of these types of items (discounting personal photographs) in the self-storage interviews. This is most likely due to the value placed upon them and the subsequent implication that this has on their placement within the domestic space (see Peters 2011).

Martin had collected souvenirs from many parts of his life and during the interviews he produced a number of shoeboxes containing wide-ranging and seemingly unrelated objects which he pored over with noticeable enjoyment.

Martin: Lapis lazuli [type of precious blue stone] elephant. There's some little elephants.

Researcher: They're sweet, where are they from?

Martin: Well lapis lazuli only comes from Afghanistan, so when I was in Saudi Arabia one of the Pakistani's got it out of Pakistan. But at one time it was more expensive than gold.

Researcher: Really!

Martin: Weight for weight. One of these uh... Scarab beetles.

Researcher: This looks like a box of memories.

Martin: Riel's [currency].

Researcher: How much would they be worth in Sterling then?

Martin: I think there's about 6 to a pound. So £15 for that one? [He flicks through the other currency notes] Pakistan. Don't know where the hell that's from.

Researcher: Why would you say you're keeping that money?

Martin: It's just there. As I said I worked there so...

Figure 18 - Martin's box of souvenirs collected when working abroad



The things Martin had collected were chiefly connected to the period of his life that he had spent working abroad. He had bought these things at the time because they were exotic and interesting, but they now had the added power of reminding him of his previous job and what it was like to live and work in the Middle East. Collecting was not a new activity for Martin, who also pointed out his childhood stamp and coin collections.

Martin: Some things like the stamp collections and the coins go back to when I was a boy so they're, let's say they're 50 plus years old. Um, and I don't see that they'll ever be thrown away.

Glenn (2007, pp. 13-14) suggests that many objects can be seen as “petrified remnants” of unforgotten childhoods, but in Martin’s case his collections are less ‘petrified remnants’ and more ‘lines of connection’ between his childhood and adult identities (Philo 2003). Martin couldn’t consider parting with his collections because they provided him with a sense of continuity, as well as mapping out different phases in his life. Claudia similarly described how, on deciding to leave her job in Afghanistan and return home to Berlin, she had deliberately purchased decorative household items to act as a memorial to her time there, forging her own lines of connections between places, people and lifestyles, as well as her past and future homes.

Claudia: Um, before I left [after 5 years in Afghanistan] because I thought it's a fascinating country and I will probably not come back there again ... I bought a bit of, kind of, souvenirs so to speak. I think I bought three or four rugs, really - so far as I remember - really nice rugs, and they are doing this very nice, um, craftsmanship, this kind of carved smaller furniture, lamp stand stuff like that. And I bought a bit of that because it's really, well, cheap and absolutely lovely, and I wanted to have some memories.

Claudia: They are an anchor. They are kind of my flying carpets. My memory flying carpets. My vehicle for memories. For a period which was a long period of my life and a very important period of my life.

Both Martin and Claudia had strategically bought souvenirs to protect memories of experiences from distinct stages in their lives. They were both in periods of change in their lives when interviewed, and their self-storage allowed for safe-keeping before they settled and decided where to put their things long-term. Claudia described how when she finally got the opportunity to open the boxes and re-engage with these things it would be a “huge emotional moment” for her.

Claudia: I have lived in that country for a very long time, I have friends there. I have people there that claim to be my Afghan family, which is lovely and nice and stuff. And [I've] been [away for a] very, very long time from a country which has gone from relatively stable to a really bad situation.

Whilst the memories she had invested in her souvenirs at the moment she bought them were largely positive, Claudia accepted that time and circumstances might have had an impact on them that would make revisiting the memories of her past relationships and vastly different life a bittersweet encounter. The souvenir, as Stewart (1993, p. xii) suggests, “seeks distance (the exotic in time and space), but it does so in order to transform and collapse distance into proximity to, or approximation with, the self”. As both Claudia and Martin allude to, through their souvenirs the exotic of their experiences abroad are juxtaposed with the everyday bringing together different times, places and relationships in a way that productively influences the future.

7.1.3 Developing personal tastes

Across social sciences and geography, clothes and music are commonly used to discuss the bodily and sensory outward display of personal taste and identity. Only recently has this research moved beyond the ‘presentation of self’ to ‘ordinary’ modes and spaces of consumption such as, so-called, ‘wardrobe studies’ (see Banim and Guy 2001; Cwerner 2001; Woodward and Greasley 2015). However, unlike these studies which are based within the home the objects kept in self-storage are largely ‘at rest’ rather than a mix of the dormant and habitually used.

Most of Gill’s household things were very well packaged by a removal company into large cardboard boxes, but there was a small suitcase at the front of her unit which contained the very last items that were taken from her wardrobe before being packed up to move house. These clothes, previously relegated to the back of her wardrobe, had been left until last because they weren’t immediately needed in her new house. Now spatially inverted in her storage space these objects caused Gill to take stock and reminisce.

Gill: [Un-zipping the suitcase] What the hell is this? ...Now see, this is surplus stuff that I never wear. Oh, it's a bridesmaid dress. Denim jackets. See this must be stuff out of my wardrobe that I never wear which is why it was still there. And really I probably should chuck it out. Um... [...], I probably will throw most of that out. The only thing is I will keep the bridesmaid dress because it was... it's handmade. Because my best mate got married what – god, her daughter is 16 - so 17 years ago. And there were three of us bridesmaids and her mum made us dresses. And

they are quite nice. I probably won't ever wear it again but it's just the fact she made it and it's so lovely. And because it's sentimental I wouldn't throw it out. But the others, I never wear those denim jackets.

It is clear that whilst unworn since her best friend's wedding the bridesmaid dress is very important to Gill reminding her how it was made, the nature of her friendships then and now, and her enjoyment of the day itself. Whilst Gill does focus on the bridesmaid dress it is also interesting to note the dismissal of her denim jackets. The self is externalised through consumer goods and then in turn 're-appropriated' (Miller 1987, p. 28), as seen for example when people refer to an item of clothing as 'me'. However, these jackets, once bought and worn, now do not fit Gill's style and circumstances, and are therefore candidates for disposal since they bear no emotional connection either to others or her previous self. Gill expresses that one aspect of her past identity (materialised by the bridesmaid dress) is genuine, heartfelt, sincere and deep, whilst the other (the denim jackets) is frivolous and disposable. Fashion for Gill is relatively disposable culture but the bridesmaid dress is not of that ilk. She might have worn both only once but one is intensely disposable and the other is not, bringing to light the disposability of some past selves but not others.

Like the embodiment of identity through style and clothing, personal music collections straddle identity politics across the public and private. We use music for our enjoyment and, like books or DVDs, music collections are often visibly displayed in prominent places in our homes. This acts to put our identity into space (front-stage) through home-making and allow for conversations to emerge when we have visitors (performance to audience) (Goffman 1990 [1959]). However, we also store music out of sight choosing to deliberately mask these qualities and potential engagements. This is not to say that music is no longer important to us but maybe, like clothing style, it has developed over time and as we age, some of it is not the identity we wish to portray front stage. Graham had a vast collection of over 1000 CDs and hundreds of vinyl records, some of which were he kept at home but the majority were stored in his self-storage unit. He described how in the future he ideally would like to have a music room where he could display and listen to his music. But in the meantime the placement and visibility of his collection relates to different stages of his life and memories.

Graham: I mean at the moment I've obviously retained the cabinets [...] and that stores most of what's here. But I like my music so I've probably got another couple hundred CDs at the house now which are lying around in boxes because I filled up shelves, and [...] these I left behind. So there was a sort of cut-off in my mind. Whereas the ones back at the house I think I've actually bought those in the time I've been with Ivy so

they have a different significance. Quite interesting that, psychologically I suppose.

Researcher: That's a different stage of your life then?

Graham: Yeh, that's sort of in a box over there. Um, if I open that box again psychologically-speaking I don't think I'm that bothered. But part of me feels that I'm probably more emotionally attached to the records actually than I am to the CDs. Because, um..., because I bought the CD collection over I don't know, 20 years. So um..., and it interestingly reflects my taste which changed a bit over time.

When we talked further about how his music collection had grown, Graham referred more to the feelings and memories attached to when he purchased the records and also what he had been doing when he first listened to them.

Graham: I have records here which date back to my university days and... [...] it's a different kind of sentimental thing because it reminds me of a point in my life where I have very, very fond memories of and people [of] from that time I'm still friends with. [...] And there are certain things about some of those records. I can remember exactly what I was doing at the time I listened to it, or first heard it...

This connection through a music collection to memories and past identities was also brought up by Anya. She recognised, like Graham, that music is now easily available in digital formats whether on programmes like iTunes (which Graham admitted his entire collection was copied onto), or streaming services like Spotify. However, digital virtual goods lack what Watkins et al. (2016, p. 60) call 'positive contamination', that is they do not have the 'aura' that comes with physical proximity, touch and inalienable value. Correspondingly participants suggested that their music collections had remained valuable to them in their physical format, its tactility playing a significant part in their ability to access to memories and meaning.

Anya: You know I've got hundreds of CDs. Do I listen to them? Not often, you know, but I don't want to get rid of them... but why am I keeping them? Probably because, like..., they have some kind of memory... uh... to... my youth, golden days were in the 90s probably, that's when I went to university - in the late 90s. And, um..., yeh do I need them? There is Spotify now, I could just have everything digital but I still want to have them. [...]

Researcher: Yeh, do you think it wouldn't..., you wouldn't have the same memories evoked if you put it up on Spotify? Even if you could see the album cover on a screen.

Anya: I don't know. Maybe. I think it's wrong to say they wouldn't have the same memories because you'd hear a song on the radio and think, for example, Catatonia, I used to really like Catatonia you know. So that would evoke the same memory, but there is something about..., there is something tactile about holding it and [...] going 'Oh, I used to listen to this CD when I was in university' or something similar to that, or you know 'I remember wearing this knackered pair of Doctor Martens at such and such a place when I went to see Pearl Jam' or something like that.

We hold onto our music like clothes, books, souvenirs and all other manner of items, to remind us who we once were and to map out the journey of how we have changed. By viewing personalising objects outside of the domestic sphere participants felt the need to articulate the 'place' the thing used to have with them both in terms of physical placement and previous incarnations of self. Discussions around keeping and storing their material biographies show that the temporal dynamics of attachment, memory and taste are not linear or single-faceted, and whilst tastes may develop and change over a lifetime, they stand alongside more ephemeral preferences that will pass much more quickly (Woodward and Greasley 2015, p. 13).

Returning to the things we have kept in storage allows us to contemplate the emotional, social and personal biographies which have been concretised within (McCracken 1988a). Objects which have been collected along the life course – whether university books, souvenirs from working abroad, or music collections – stand in for the self, making it solid and knowable. These 'biographical objects' provide "a pivot for reflexivity and introspection, a tool for auto-biographical self-discovery, a way of knowing oneself through things" (Hoskins 1998, p. 198). Upon re-engagement, these objects spark both a linear and neat retrieval of the past and a complex, radiating web of associations, reflections and interpretations of the broader social and cultural context. Moreover, objects enable a temporal 'bridge' between an individual's past and an idealised version of life as it should or could be lived (McCracken 1988a, p. 110). Possessions are the lens through which to view retrospective (Hecht 2001) or possible selves (Markus and Nurius 1986), as well as the transitions and trajectories life has taken. The personal life-histories brought forth by the treasured and ambiguous objects in self-storage demonstrate the importance of storage in the preservation and mooring of material things which we use to narrate a self and life lived so far. Applying Goffman's theory of front

and back stage allows us to understand how stored objects are spatially marginalised but retain potential for future performances and their preparation.

7.2 Family identities

Scholarship on materiality and family-work has followed a number of veins. One such vein focusses on matter in the work of parenting and care-work. As Miller (1997) and Clarke (2004) have argued, the work of family provisioning – including the researching, deciding and purchasing of items – can be viewed as an expression of care or love. A further vein of scholarship considers the role of materiality in the home in the narration of family identity. Generally this work has focused on more visible objects and spaces such as photographs (Rose 2010), décor (Tolia-Kelly 2004) and mantelpieces (Hurdley 2006), which have the ability to consolidate, represent and connect family members. However Woodward (2015) has argued that dormant and hidden matter also plays a significant role in working out familial relationships.

The management of the flows of matter in and out of the family home is inextricably bound up practices of parenting, whereby the place of children's things within the household – which may be out of control or no longer needed – are continuously monitored and evaluated. Gregson (2007) has shown that decisions and practices of ridding and holding-on occur in the midst of, and as part of, a whole range of mundane activities such as tidying-up, doing the laundry as well as in the course of more exceptional events such as moving house and home improvements. The following narratives emerge from the context of using self-storage during the course of moving house, renovations and attempts to make more space at home. These are key moments to sort through things which may have multiplied during an extended period of residency in one place. Sorting through things to make decisions about what is worth packing for the self-storage unit involves re-evaluating relationships and memories that have been brought back into consciousness (Horton and Kraftl 2012). Deciding what to keep and what to discard can be an emotional task often infused care, concern and love (Gregson et al. 2007a), as well as ideas of how we value family identities and where that value comes from.

7.2.1 Curating childhood

Parent-child curation emerges as children (and parents) make things and experience the world in ways that result in durable matter including significant 'firsts' – things made, school work done, mementoes of achievements etc. – as well as collections of 'souvenirs' to remember significant events, experiences and life-stages. These items can become treasured and survive multiple rounds of decluttering despite mounting pressure on space. For example, Dawn kept both of her boys' first shoes, in spite of feeling the

material pressures of moving into a smaller house after divorce and her new partner Ian's wishes to slim down their things to make more space at home.

Ian: I've had a big debate with Dawn about throwing in the bin all her boys' first shoes.

Dawn: Yeh something I didn't tell you, I've got all my boys' first shoes and they're...

Ian: All the little Clarks sandals...

Dawn: Yeh from when they were 1 and 2 [years old] and all that sort of stuff.

Ian: And anyway, so Dawn refuses to get rid of them, even though they are growing mould at the moment.

Dawn: Yeah. Guilty, guilty.

Dawn's admission of guilt at holding on her boys' baby shoes but steadfast refusal to dispose of them is an interesting contradiction. As Rose (2010) notes in relation to family photos these shoes do not show signs of domestic labour or care (in fact they are actually deteriorating) but for Dawn they are an important part of past and ongoing integrative practices with (and a sign of love for) her children, and therefore cannot be disposed of.

Contemporary parenting is inextricably bound up with the everyday management of flows of matter in and out of the family home, and as such divestment plays a part in the curation of children's identities. Some objects are deemed to be less valuable than others and are routinely divested (Gregson 2007), or as part of the sorting process prior to, and after, being placed in self-storage (regardless of what may have motivated its use). Parents play a large role in the divestment of their children's things, suggesting that broken toys need to go or that clothes have been grown out of, but still acknowledging attachment as a reason to keep and store things. Parents also draw from their own experiences of knowing what they appreciated having later in life and as a result sometimes feel they can make judgments about their children's things on their behalf.

Leanne: Harry is in Sweden so he didn't have any involvement but I did call him with 'Do you need this?', 'I think I might, so just keep it until I'm next home'. But I was ruthless, some of the things I didn't even ask. I was just..., school textbooks, school exercise books... he's never going to look at them.

Researcher: How did you choose what was worth keeping?

Leanne: It got to the point where I just... could tell. [She laughs]

This statement from Leanne brings up issues of power in the curation and disposal of children's things. Ultimately, who gets to choose what to keep and what to throw away? Whether decluttering or packing for a move, parents often persuaded their children to get involved in sorting through their own things and in doing so slim down their material convoy to more manageable dimensions. Dawn described how she plans to reduce the number of large black plastic bags full of soft toys she has in storage belonging to her two 'grown-up' boys' with their help:

Dawn: ...some of them were quite expensive soft toys originally, they were Hamleys and all sorts of things, and we're going to line them up in the lounge and it'll be [...] who's going to be in our team and who's not, you know. [She laughs] And they are going to base that decision on, you know, who was favourite bear when they were little. Or one of my sons had these quite expensive furry animals: whales and giraffes and all sorts of things. I mean he might say 'Oh bin the whole lot' and I'll be going 'But, but we've got to keep some of them!' [We laugh] But yes we've got to get five bags perhaps down to one bag, so there is going to be pecking order of which furry bear stays.

This quote also highlights the conflict and difficulty parents face between getting rid of excess and saving things, which is further compounded by the feelings and practices of care they have for their children (Phillips and Sego 2011). Kathryn, who often stressed her 'if in doubt, chuck it out' mentality during the interviews admitted that wasn't always the case when it came to her boy's stuff and she had also stepped in to stop things being thrown away during the sorting process:

Kathryn: Lewis is ruthless like me; he's thrown most of his childhood memorabilia out. You know, things like clay masks he made in primary school, he went through and was just chucking too much out. So I went [and] picked out a few and made a small box, like that, of the oddments he made when he was at primary school: like knitting and embroidery aged seven. I stored those for him because I don't really think you want to be without those when you're much older, and they are quite cute.

Stuart, like Kathryn, could see the value in some of his daughter's discarded things since he had not got items from his own childhood to look back at. His own material biography, or rather lack of, thereby influencing hers.

Stuart: Meg just soldiered through it and was quite severe; she got rid of tons of stuff. [...] She got rid of all her school stuff and I was just, like,

'Oh I'll just hang onto this report.' [He laughs] *'I'll just hang onto this thing you made.'*

Researcher: Did you do that for quite a few things then?

Stuart: I did [keep] quite a few things, not a huge amount, but then most of it was actual rubbish. But some of it was what you would think was sentimental stuff that you'd think she'd keep, or that her mum would keep. [...So] I kept a small pile; I just thought 'I'll keep those because she might want them in the future'. [...] It's mostly for her benefit but some of the things... like reports, reports are interesting to read. I've not got any of my school reports but it's something that I've thought in the past 'Oh it'd be quite nice to see what I was actually like' because I don't really remember!

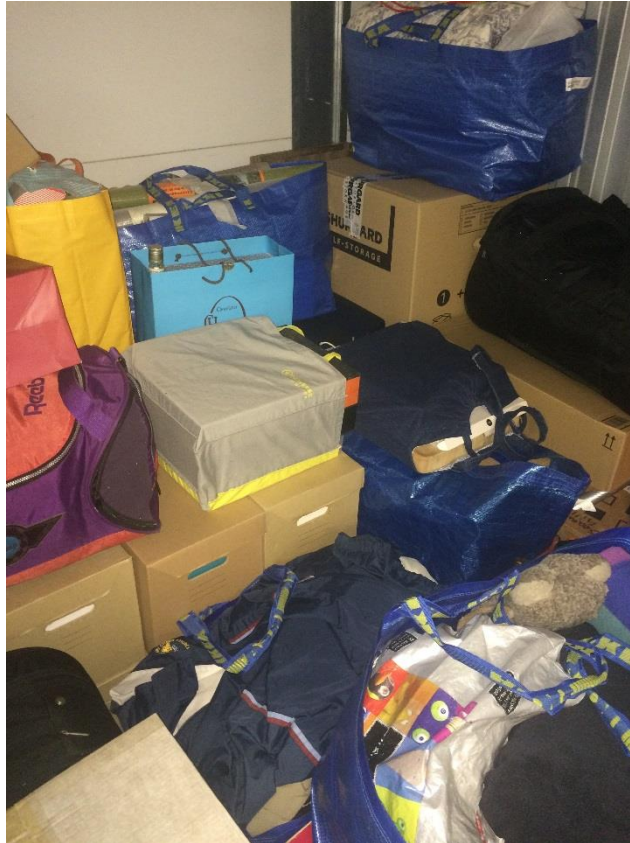
When probed about the value of the items she had saved from being thrown away Dawn referred to the simplicity and happiness of childhood in comparison to adulthood (and the role of matter in this transition) thus: *'It's a reminder of your childhood and a reminder of nice times and pleasant times. And even things from your teenage years that remind you of events and things that happened, you don't want to get rid of those either.'* McCracken (1988a) advises that objects kept from when we are children act to evoke and perpetuate the myth of a golden age of childhood or youth. Indeed the parents interviewed suggested that having childhood things – from significant firsts to life-stage souvenirs – to look back upon is important. By curating their children's things through material practices of sorting, saving and storing, parents are protecting and curating particular fragments of their child's material biography, so that it can be a part of the identity work of nostalgia and remembering in the future.

Storage, including self-storage, preserves things which are not relevant in day-to-day identity practices but allows them to be retrieved occasionally, or be rediscovered at key moments such as moving house. Acts to preserve and care for childhood identities continue into adulthood. Lily described how when sorting through their things, prior to moving them into self-storage and then eventually across into their new property, her partner had prevaricated about disposing of his childhood teddy bears. Lily succeeded in persuading her partner to keep the teddies even though they were both attempting to slim down their things. She felt it was worthwhile 'saving' his childhood memories that could be sparked by the toys.

Lily: And at the very, very bottom you can see a pair of ears sticking up from a soft toy. That's actually my husband's that I encouraged him to keep because he was about to chuck him away! It's a childhood toy and he has two sort-of very old ones, and he goes, 'I'm thinking of throwing it

away' and I go 'Nooooo!' And he did mumble at one point saying thank you for, you know, yeh sort of encouraging him not to throw them, because it's sort of two things that relate from when he was very small so...

Figure 19 - Lily's partner's childhood teddy



Both as adults viewing our own childhood things, and as adults caring and curating their children's things, we are aware of the "lines of connection residing in the continuity of psychic materials from childhood through into adult life" (Philo 2003, p. 15). These 'lines of connection', which are in some part manifest in the objects we have held onto, and the complex ways they affect, shape or haunt us are crucial in the development of identities across a life course (Valentine 2003, p. 39). Thus the preservation and storage of 'connecting objects' is vital in ongoing ideas of kinship and relatedness (Carsten 2000).

7.2.2 Curating parenthood

Children's things also bear value as mementoes of parenthood. Items that were bought for, used and now discarded by their children don't just relate to childhood. These objects hold memories that have as much to do with parenthood as they do childhood and letting go of them could feel like letting go of that identity and part of life, and perhaps even the children themselves. As Dawn admitted, her boys did not feel particularly attached to

their things in storage but they were extremely valuable to her and she could not consider throwing them away.

Dawn: All of the things they need are out of there, [...] we've been through the whole lot and they are not at all interested. Memorabilia is just for me. [...] The things they had from when they were younger they, being boys, aren't particularly bothered, you know. It's mainly me that can't consider getting rid of them.

Likewise Kathryn encountered a similar reaction from her son when she told him she was keeping some of his old things: *'[He] wasn't interested, 'fair enough, if you want to'. Disinterest'*. Despite their children not expressing any emotional attachment towards these objects or having any intention to 'collect' them in the future, they survived rounds of sorting and had found a home in self-storage. The tension between the divestment of childhood items to make room for other kinds of matter and the decision to keep things which capture and preserve elements of the child's and parent's past identities and character is problematic in terms of space. Self-storage provides a solution to this problem.

Caitlin: Old rocking horse, I wondered where he went. My daughter had that, she's 22 now, but when she was very little I used to drag her all-round the streets on it.

Martin: That's from my son. [Shows me some old postcards]

Researcher: Aww! [Reading from the postcard] We had a ride through the...

Martin: And that's from the other one.

Researcher: Oh they're lovely, really sweet. [Reading from the postcard] 'We had a good time at school'. Good to hear.

Martin: It's nice to keep things like that. They don't call me Daddy anymore

These two quotes from Caitlin and Martin show that the items they held onto (a rocking horse and postcards) remind them of a time before when their identity as a parent meant different things to what it does now. Putting objects into self-storage, as part of practices of sorting and keeping beyond the routine, can play a role in the (re)constitution of relationships, family and home, as changes are felt and dealt with (Horton and Kraftl 2012, p. 33).

7.2.3 Generations

Another reason to hold onto children's toys and books are for their potential future use by children who become parents themselves (and parents who, in their turn, become grandparents). Stuart explained how his second wife had kept a lot of her daughter's toys and books from when she was younger because she believed they would have value in the future if her daughter was to have children of her own. In this way some children's items are (re)imagined as possibly coming back into use even after a potentially long period of dormancy in storage.

Stuart: In the loft, we've got this..., a wicker basket and it's about that size and it's got like a hundred books all stacked in it. All types of books, but kiddy books from when she was a little baby. So she says Erin will want them when she has a kid. So she'll get those books, and they will be the books that she remembers from when she was little, she's now reading to her kids.

The couple had similarly kept toys in the hope that they might be played with again by their potential grandchildren. Since these toys and books had been treasured by their children they believed that passing them on would allow that joy to be sparked again and therefore even more value would be gained from them.

Figure 20 - Bionicles Stuart's son has grown out of but a grandchild might play with



Stuart: That is my son's from when he was [...] 10 to 15 sort of age. He loved Bionicles [...] so that's all his Lego stuff just put in there and I'm thinking he might want that. Cos he's..., he's probably grown out of it, but at some point he might get married. [...] He might or his sister might... His sister is pregnant at the moment so she might have a little boy, who might then grow into that. He did get a lot of entertainment from it when he was little.

This evidence of multiple uses and value through the generations shows that the lifecycle of things, if they stand the test of time, can be significant in the construction of familial relationships. As Gregson (2007, p. 126) suggests, efforts to pass on children's toys and clothing that are no longer wanted can be viewed as an attempt to avoid wasting things by "projecting them into imagined social futures". Building on this it can be suggested that holding onto children's things after they have served their initial purpose can act to prolong a certain phase of parental identity, as well as serving as a material manifestation of hoped-for future events, relations and identities (such as by holding on to treasured books or toys in anticipation of those items giving joy to future generations of children).

Participants also described their experiences of inheriting possessions and the value these had in 'continuing bonds' with deceased relatives (Maddrell 2013). Emma's inherited furniture, and her narrations of how objects had been passed on and moved around the family, "weave stories of intergenerational family inheritance and gifting" (Gregson 2007, p. 39).

Emma: There is a nice dressing table in this somewhere and it's a pretty good piece of furniture and it's pretty. I could be quite sad if that went. Um, that belonged to my granny, so that's really nice.

Emma: [The most valuable things] I would say are actually things that matter to my father. They matter to me because they matter to him. It's like, so this table. That came from his family, and the table behind. The one that's upside down, that big round table on its end. That belonged to his great-grandfather I think. Um going back to like the early 1900s, like it's over 100 years old. So because they belonged to his family and he has, I guess he has some kind of attachment to them. And because he's got a bit of attachment to them it means something to him, and therefore it means something to me. It's kind of rubbed off on me a little bit. I wouldn't throw them away.

Emma feels a duty to hold onto the things that matter to her father, but by keeping them in self-storage for a long period of time Finch and Mason (2000, p. 146) would suggest that she has not actively been ‘treasuring’ them (keeping them close, using them, having them on display). However, this does not signify a lack of care, and time and distance away does not impact upon the place of these things in her life but is purely symptomatic of her circumstances. Whilst unable to invest time and effort directly (Hecht 2001), by putting these cherished pieces of furniture into self-storage Emma is ‘saving’, protecting and preserving ‘inalienable possessions’ that represent a kin group over time and between generations (Weiner 1992).

Matter can serve as a means of memory-work (for parents and children) through which earlier times and previous versions of themselves are embodied and recalled (such as by preserving ‘little things made by little people’). In turn it is often these very same (life-affirming) items which go on to be passed between generations, and are used by subsequent generations to constitute the inalienability of the family (Weiner 1992). These objects, valued for their ability to tell stories about shared lives as a family (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Hoskins 1998), have survived rounds of sorting and disposal. According to participants, under ‘normal’ circumstances these types of items would be stored in the home because they are deemed to be invaluable and irreplaceable. However, during the course of moving house, particularly into a house that requires renovation, self-storage is viewed as the safer place for such treasured things. Through clearing, sorting and packing prior to using self-storage, revisiting and re-considering in the interim and then unpacking and finding a home for objects once the move or renovation is complete there are many opportunities for objects to evoke memories and prompt narratives. As Horton and Kraftl (2012, pp. 31-32) point out, sentimental or playful contemplation of particular material objects in this manner can be seen to be central in the doing of socio-cultural processes around life course transitions and familial bonds (Rose 2010). As such matter – even its dormant phase – can be seen as playing a productive role in home-making and the ‘family project’ (Löfgren 1997).

7.3 Chapter conclusions

Our possessions are biographical, showing who we were and what we have done, and yet memory is fallible so things are kept and stored to act as curated vessels of self (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Hoskins 1998). By focusing on the biography of things, this section makes visible the complex ways people use possessions in the remembrance and curation of past identities which then go on to have value in ongoing identity practices. As Hoskins (1998, p. 2) contends “the stories told [which are] generated around objects provide a distanced form of introspection [...] a form of reflection on the meaning of one’s own life”. Acts of preservation, or mooring, occur

throughout the life course and are brought to the forefront when items are sorted, stored and re-engaged with (Marcoux 2001b) in the space of self-storage. The 'project' of constructing identity through, and in, domestic objects is a fluid and ongoing process in which all members of the household are able to "actively try out different sides of the self" (Löfgren 1994, p. 66). Human and object histories inform each other, so as people and their possessions "gather time, movement and change, they are constantly transformed, and these transformations of person and object are tied up with each other" (Gosden and Marshall 1999, p. 169). Objects that are valued for their ability to memorialise people, places and events provide individuals with "the luxury of trying on alternative selves from the risk-free vantage of a stable self-concept" (Schouten 1991, p. 422). These mementoes of 'life-so-far' can be seen to be supportive in mooring people both during significant life course events and the trajectories of everyday life. It can be conceived, utilising Goffman's conceptualisation, that these mementoes are placed in a space beyond the 'back-stage', because they are not currently needed in performances of identity or in practices for the preparation of these performances. Following Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor, their storage acts to archive past and potential identities (like a storage room of costumes) which can be brought into the 'dressing room' when required and then performed 'on-stage'.

8 Conclusion

The starting point of this thesis was a real lack of sustained focus upon the place of self-storage units in the lives of those who rent them. Given that self-storage is a growing phenomenon, not only in the UK but worldwide, it was surprising to me that academic research was yet to put it to the forefront of enquiry. So this thesis did just that, developing an understanding of the significance of self-storage units including, and going beyond, their storage function. Collectively the chapters in this thesis firmly situate self-storage use within a range of contextual forces: the categorisation, ordering and hierarchical place(ment) of matter in response to ideas of clutter, mess and excess; the containment of contingency and potential futures in the face of uncertainty; and the connection and consolidation of identities in light of mobility and changes across the life course. This thesis has used self-storage as a focal point in order to develop more nuanced understandings of the spatial, emotional and temporal relations between 'ordinary consumption' and identity. In doing so, it extends existing literature on the place of storage spaces and practices in routine experiences of living with things, as well as transitions, trajectories and events that occur over the life course. It demonstrates the importance of acknowledging storage as a distinct, necessary and complex phase in biographies and geographies of objects, which has previously been underplayed within the material culture literature. Further, it situates self-storage in relation to, and set apart from the space, contents, practices and meaning of home.

As outlined in Chapter 2, from a critical engagement with the notion of object biographies, the theories and discourses around material practices, and concepts of identity and home, this thesis prioritised gaining an understanding of the role of self-storage units in routine (in)actions. These related to the ordering and control of matter and the significance of stored materiality for changes across a life course. So as a consequence, this thesis answers these two fundamental questions:

1. What is the place of self-storage within life transitions, trajectories and events?
 - a. How does self-storage enable possible futures and mobilities, and also secure personal and social pasts?
 - b. What is the role of uncertainty in decisions on what to keep, store and dispose of?

2. In what ways does the use of self-storage indicate a changing relationship with possessions?
 - a. How does self-storage reinforce dominant discourses of tidiness and materialism, and is conceived as an appropriate way to manage the household?
 - b. To what extent is self-storage a necessary space in the lifecycle of things?

In this concluding chapter I begin by drawing on the key findings of this thesis in order to address the two research questions, namely the role of self-storage in life transitions, trajectories and events, and how the use of self-storage could indicate a changing relationship with possessions. From this I argue how storage matters and what a focus on storage spaces and practices can reveal. Next, I reflect on the methodological contributions of this research. In the following section I offer some suggestions for possible avenues for future research, before concluding with some personal reflections on the key messages of this study.

8.1 Life transitions, trajectories and events

This thesis has identified that self-storage is used by people whilst changes unfold in their lives which have significant consequences for the use, need and value of their possessions. Whilst possessions occupy this altered, liminal state or are out of place in the current context, self-storage acts as a necessary solution storing things out of the way on a temporary or longer-term basis. The place of material culture in role transitions and adaptation to new environments has largely focused on the purchase or divestment of objects (Young 1991; Gentry et al. 1995; Price et al. 2000). This scholarship fails to acknowledge the role of storing possessions which this thesis finds to also be fundamental in processes of dealing with life junctures. The rich and detailed narratives in this study help to unveil the previously under-acknowledged role that (self-)storage plays in these situations. Responding to the first question of the research project, this section provides an understanding of the place of self-storage within life transitions, trajectories and events by exploring how it acts to both secure personal and social pasts, and enable possible futures and mobilities. It also analyses the role of uncertainty in decisions of what to keep, store and dispose of.

8.1.1 Securing personal and social pasts

A key finding in this thesis was the role of self-storage in securing objects which resonate with memories of past identities, experiences and relationships. Stored objects which are valued for the longer-term place in participants' lives were put into self-storage to preserve them out of the way from where they might sustain damage. These objects

included inherited furniture (e.g. the dressing table that had belonged to Emma's grandma), photographs (e.g. photographs of Caitlin with her first boyfriend), artwork (e.g. the portfolio from Lily's unsuccessful application to the Royal College of Art) and souvenirs (e.g. rugs Claudia had bought when living in Afghanistan). Each of these hidden, dormant items simultaneously interrupts the flow of time needed to maintain a sense of continuity and reflects change and apparently irreconcilable differences in their owners' life and identity. Self-storage acted as a mooring point for the possessions of participants whose moving or mobility meant that their homes were unstable, uncertain or under-negotiation. For example, Claudia described the rugs she had strategically purchased when living and working in Afghanistan as her 'memory flying carpets'. The safe-keeping of these rugs was important because they are a reminder of a long and influential period of her life. Since her identity, relationships and the country has transformed considerably in the time since she was in Afghanistan, Claudia (whose interview wasn't undertaken in the presence of her boxes) imagines that when she is reunited with her rugs it will be a bittersweet moment. By preserving objects in stasis self-storage plays a significant role in the eventual (re)construction of the home, perhaps especially in dealing with the changes therein and related conceptualisations of self, family and belonging. Stored objects act as 'lines of connection' helping people to come to terms with the passing of time and support the ongoing project of self.

This thesis also brings to light the importance of hidden and concealed materiality as a part of memory-work. As will be discussed in more detail later, when a suite of storage spaces is available there is a hierarchy to the placement of objects in self-storage units or different storage spaces in the home. Generally, self-storage is not thought to be the 'right place' for certain sentimental objects, particularly things which are irreplaceable. This was surprising because self-storage units have considerably more levels of security (locks, key codes, sprinkler systems, security cameras) in place than the average home, and is a controlled environment away from the disruptive forces which had necessitated its use. These perhaps counter-intuitive choices could, then, arguably be related to how self-storage is conceived as different or lacking as a 'home' space. The appropriateness of self-storage for some things but not others also extends to their designation as items of display or not. It was perceived that certain certificates, photographs and artwork should be displayed in 'front stage' spaces (Goffman 1990), or at the very least be stored close-at-hand where they could be easily produced and presented. In contrast, self-storage was deemed to be an appropriate space for the storage of objects such as art portfolios and university textbooks. These items which had been integral, but behind the scenes, to achievements which were celebrated front stage remained as such, out of sight in self-storage. Participants expressed difficulties in deciding whether to keep hold of these types of objects. Whilst they were valued as 'lines of connection' mapping the

development of identities across the life course (Philo 2003), their placement in self-storage brought this value into question in a way that it wouldn't if they were the kind of things to be displayed.

Beyond personal memory and identity practices, the narratives produced in this research point towards the role of stored objects in the working out of familial relationships. This verifies Woodward's suggestion (2015) that dormant matter could be just as important as that which is displayed and used. This thesis found that the safe storage of certain items signifies relationships of care and love towards the person the object represents and mediates. These practices were particularly apparent for 'inalienable possessions' which needed to be protected and preserved, 'saved' to represent a kin group over time and between generations. Perhaps due to the suitability of self-storage for particular items, the majority of the narratives were associated with things that (had) belonged to relatives that were still living. However, this thesis gives a particularly strong account of the duty and obligation parents' have towards their children's possessions, which goes beyond the 'consumer' focus of existing scholarship (Miller 1997; Hogg et al. 2004; Curasi et al. 2014). For parents self-storage resolves tensions between the divestment of childhood items as they fall out of use to make room for newer items and the decision to keep things which capture and preserve past identities. By curating children's things through sorting, saving and storing parents are protecting and curating fragments of a child's material biography so it can be part of their identity work of nostalgia and remembering in the future. However, by curating objects on a child's behalf parents risk these items being under- or un- appreciated and the right time not presenting itself to pass the treasures on. These curated objects, along with those left behind in the care of parents by children who have left home, are stored under an unspoken contract. If sufficient space can be found at home or rented in self-storage parents will try to hold onto the things indefinitely. The act of storing, then, can be seen as a part of ongoing integrative practices with, and signs of care between parents and children.

This thesis, therefore, argues that the storage of objects can be a meaningful practice. When viewed in isolation, storage is relatively devoid of inherent meaning until it is imbued with meaning by the self-storage user. This meaning is dependent on the object biographies, as well as radiating webs of associations and the circumstances under which the storage is occurring. In contrast, practices of 'making do' and 'treasuring' have inherent social and cultural meanings attached to them, upon which more specific meaning is placed which again are dependent on the individual circumstances. This thesis argues, then, that storing is therefore not only a means to protect and preserve identity, but also a way in which it can be created. By choosing to curate and keep certain items and dispose of others, a person is choosing a particular portrayal of their personal

and social pasts. Self-storage, beyond and outside of contested and shifting domestic worlds, is then a means to anchor 'deserving' items which are held onto as important pieces of personal and social history but aren't needed in day-to-day life.

8.1.2 Enabling possible futures and mobilities

Another key finding of this research is the role of self-storage in enabling possible futures and mobilities. The objects stored in self-storage were seen to be a manifestation of hope for an imagined or ideal vision of self. Similarly to the findings of wardrobe studies research (Banim and Guy 2001; Bye and McKinney 2007; Woodward 2007), participants in this research suggested that it was difficult to get rid of things which, in their eyes, have potential because to do so would mean giving up on an idealised version of the future. The stored objects signified several different desires including realising ambitions (i.e. Lily's folders of artwork), returning to or beginning hobbies (i.e. Kathryn's sewing projects and Tony's drum kit), visions of perfect family life (i.e. Stuart's camping equipment), and imagined social futures (i.e. Stuart's wife keeping children's books for potential grandchildren). All of these things were (re)imagined as coming back into use after a period of dormancy in storage, kept in stasis in the self-storage units until an opportunity arises which produces the will or need to bring them out (Hirschman et al. 2012, p. 379). However, to avoid the feelings of guilt these objects produced, from not seeing their potential through, they had been pushed away from lived spaces of the home and marginalised to the self-storage unit. It follows that this thesis found that whilst their continued storage could enable possible futures, the placement of certain objects in self-storage wasn't necessarily productive in facilitating the fulfilment of potential selves – something not considered by the wardrobe studies literature. According to Shove et al. (2007, p. 31), this would suggest that using self-storage for these types of objects showed a failure to effectively manage having and doing so to realise ambitions, which to some extent was true. However, the findings of this research are more aligned towards the argument Sullivan and Gershuny (2004) make, that it is symbolically important to retain possession of these objects and self-storage provides the space to do this.

Previous scholarship has argued that discarding and throwing possessions away is a way to *enable* geographical mobility (Gregson et al. 2007a, p. 697). However, the findings of this thesis were that the use of self-storage is also an important means to secure domestic materiality in a manner that *facilitates* mobilities, both geographical (i.e. moving to a new house or moving abroad) and personal (i.e. change of career or lifestyle). The materiality left behind may hold an uncertain place (see next sub-section) in people's lives going forward but can also play an important role in connecting and consolidating identities across time and place, thereby bridging the old and the new, the familiar and the unknown, and the past and the future. What people take with them and

what they leave behind is an important choice in experiences of mobility. Counter to Muzaini's (2015) findings, narratives in this research show that leaving possessions behind is not necessarily a choice to forget them but to hold onto them. Therefore, self-storage places objects which are not needed 'right now' into stasis and until there is felt to be enough stability or progress made towards the project of home it can be the best place for things. The storage of day-to-day household items in self-storage is an act of deliberate immobilisation, a stabilising weight when all else is in flux. For participants like Claudia, who had moved abroad and broken down her home into its constituent parts and was yet to settle and reassemble it elsewhere, her self-storage unit stood in for a home (for things). Self-storage enables the detachment and freedom required for a mobile lifestyle but also provides the comfort of knowing that stability does continue to exist. This thesis, therefore, provides empirical confirmation of theoretical accounts that have suggested the importance of stillness in experiences of mobility (see Bissell 2008; Cresswell 2012).

8.1.3 The role of uncertainty in decisions on what to keep, store and dispose

The findings in this thesis illustrate that uncertainty plays a significant role throughout the practices surrounding self-storage use, with the ability and ease of making decisions of whether to keep or divestment of objects contingent upon the circumstances at the time. Under various circumstances, including bereavement, divorce and simply moving to a new house, participants chose to store objects in self-storage when the rationality of their decisions was clouded with emotions. This extended to mundane 'junk' as much as it did to sentimental items. Participants described the importance of having sufficient time to sort through the effects of deceased loved ones and that self-storage allowed these decisions to be put 'on hold' until the immediate feelings surrounding their loss were less raw. In effect putting material triggers out of way meant that other spaces were considered to be less emotionally laden. This thesis, then, builds on Maddrell's work (2016), by highlighting how the displacement of material effects of the deceased can result in the creation of 'safe' spaces. Leaving things in self-storage, where they were out of sight but secure, meant it was easier to make considered judgement less clouded by grief and the pressures of time. Myles described how this distance had meant his family had ultimately kept very little. Unlike some of the other motivations to store objects, using self-storage following a bereavement was not imagined as a way to avoid decisions but to cope with them better further down the line.

Findings from this thesis also point towards the role of self-storage in not letting uncertainty constrain other parts of participants' lives. For example, Emma was uncertain of where she would be living after two and half years of conducting research in Africa so had kept all her possessions. On her return to the UK she had a slightly better idea of

their place in her life. In some ways, these possessions indicate an inability to effectively process and manage stuff at possessions during life transitions. Objects with uncertain value can haunt us, constituting an absent presence which can be felt as guilt and knowledge that they still need to be sorted at a point in the future. Self-storage use shows that indecision is common-place but can be accommodated through new geographies of storage solutions.

8.2 Changing relationship with possessions

The findings of this thesis indicate that self-storage is employed amongst other practices (i.e. sorting, disposal) and spaces (i.e. garages, attics) in the management of matter which is deemed to be 'out of place'. The practice of storing is loosely determined by the concepts of 'time' and 'order'. Managing the household through storing – temporarily displacing but retaining objects 'for the time being' to reclaim space from unruly or excessive matter – points towards specific articulations of meaning that direct how the practice of storing is carried out in a given moment. Therefore, positioning storage as the 'antidote' follows contemporary discourses which consider having 'too much' visible stuff or clutter in the home as amoral behaviour. Using Mary Douglas' conceptualisation (2000) of 'matter out of place' which defines how objects can cross boundaries, categorisations and cultural norms, this thesis provides a critical examination of how self-storage is described and used as a space to manage household materiality. Addressing the second question of the research project, this section provides an understanding of how self-storage reinforces dominant discourses of tidiness and materialism, and the degree to which it is conceived to be an appropriate way to manage the household. It also explores to what extent self-storage is a necessary space in the lifecycle of things. These findings point towards the growth and use of self-storage as an indication of a changing relationship with possessions.

8.2.1 Reinforcing dominant discourses of tidiness and materialism

One of the findings of this research was the impact of dominant contemporary discourses on practices of sorting, divestment and storing in situations that necessitated the use of self-storage. The utilisation of storage spaces has been designated by these same discourses as the key to overcoming the social and personal problems which originate from unruly materiality (Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003, p. 230), and this research finds that some self-storage used is rationalised in a similar manner. Participants in this study were found to be categorising mess, clutter and excess in their homes as 'matter out of place' and they described how these types of materiality provoked strong feelings of guilt and embarrassment. This thesis shows that concerns over portraying an image of tidiness and an 'appropriate' wealth of possessions were particularly apparent for participants who had rented a self-storage unit to assist in the decluttering of their home whilst it was

up for sale. The event of performing home to potential buyers put their home under a critical gaze, beyond what is usually expected with visitors or guests to the home. Under normal circumstances visitors are restricted to the 'front' spaces of the home and the household identity is carefully displayed in these spaces. On the other hand, when potential buyers visit a home, sellers are encouraged by their estate agents to remove excess items and personal touches so that they can imagine their own families' materiality in the space and are able to better appreciate the house's attributes. This requires that objects which normally give it a 'lived in feeling' – from lesser used items, general clutter and decorative items – are taken out of the home and put into self-storage so that it is possible to create this desired but unrealistic 'blank canvas' image of an ordered and blissful home environment. This phenomenon of de-personalising the home for its sale is conspicuously lacking from existing literature on the home, but has been made visible through research of an, arguably, alternative, extended home space.

Self-storage was considered to be an appropriate space to store and conceal polluting traces from the home so to invest it with signs of moral propriety. It is also a necessary space for those possessions which are not uncurrently needed or are under negotiation. As the next section will go on to describe, this is as a result of how the space of the self-storage unit is characterised in relation to what is stored there. However, processes of categorisation were also evident in the ways that self-storage users expressed their (in)actions – attempts to sort through and dispose of possessions – both in relation and opposition to popular media representations of hoarders. Moving beyond research on those who are clinically diagnosed as hoarders (Cherrier and Ponnor 2010; Frost and Steketee 2014), this research found that participants (notably Bethan, Martin and Caitlin) described themselves as 'a bit of hoarder', suggesting that their identities could be understood by the number of objects in their possession rather than their representative qualities. However, participants went on to express contradictory and conflicting conceptualisations of their consumption; they simultaneously positioned the excess displaced from their homes into self-storage as unusual and contrary to, what they thought to be, an acceptable number of possessions, in doing so portraying their identities in relation to the mad, lazy, hoarding 'other'. Participants felt compelled to justify the number of things they kept in their self-storage units, suggesting that their circumstances were to blame or that their (in)actions were not unusual but a contemporary cultural affliction. This had the effect of distancing themselves from the irrational and extreme actions they had seen depicted in the media whilst also highlighting feelings of discontent.

8.2.2 An appropriate way to manage the household

Self-storage units have created additional storage possibilities outside the home, and are promoted as a way to reclaim one's domestic space from objects so to free it up for use. The findings of this thesis illustrate that the use of self-storage has implications for how the domestic sphere is framed, as well as how self-storage units may be considered home spaces. The house is a contested space caught between the materiality of everyday life and the owners whose movements are restricted from certain spaces in their own homes where objects have 'taken over'. By containing possessions away from the home in self-storage units people are framed as now being able to utilise the space that had previously been taken away by their things. This could point towards instances of having acquired too much stuff but also shows how the categorisation of objects (i.e. as clutter) and associated practices (i.e. decluttering) appear to threaten the notion that households are in control of their materiality. Things that are diagnosed as not having a proper place of their own – what Löfgren (2017) calls 'domestic driftwood' – are often defined as excess, clutter or overflow regardless of their emotional, monetary or use value. Storage is deemed to maintain the sanctity of lived space of the home, separating away and symbolically ordering what has been categorised as out of place (Lefebvre 1991; Douglas 2000). When there is a mismatch between available storage space in the home and possessions it can be problematic because it can precipitate feelings of chaos, frustration and panic. This thesis highlights how self-storage is thought to provide an effective way to keep everything in place, offering an 'antidote' to the "home storage crisis" (Arnold and Lang 2007). Things could be placed out of the way and accommodated in self-storage units until they were needed and therefore collected.

Participants were seen to be using self-storage as a means to create order in their homes and in the world by displacing and systematically ordering 'matter out of place'. In those instances where self-storage was integrated as a permanent addition within a greater repertoire of storage spaces the rationale that governed the placement of objects followed a hierarchy constructed by the self-storage users. Participants explained that this was based upon the value of the objects (monetary and sentimental), the frequency of use, desired proximity and how secure they felt the self-storage unit and facility to be as a space. Feelings of autonomy over how and when the unit could be accessed were also very important as they linked to feelings of 'being in control' of the situation, and have previously been conceived as key characteristics of the home (see Somerville 1989; Mallett 2004). In this way, self-storage was categorised as the 'correct' place for some things but not others, the majority preferring to keep irreplaceable things close-by where they could 'keep an eye on them'. Instead, self-storage was more commonly designated to be the appropriate space for mixed-state objects (McCracken 1986). However, the rationale described by participants' in this study do not strictly map onto

the 'rules' Hirschman et al. (2012) found to influence the placement of mixed-state objects in the garage. Self-storage units were likened to garages by participants because in appearance they were very similar, sparsely decorated in line with their functionality and durability. However, they also remarked at the 'clinically' clean and bright interior, which seemed particularly stark in comparison to the items they were storing (for example Stuart commented that there were no cobwebs in the facility but his chairs were covered in them). Therefore, whilst the self-storage is conceived and designed to function and appear like domestic storage spaces, this thesis argues that it has qualities which mark it out as distinctive and different from the home.

This thesis found that despite being marketed and socially designated to be an appropriate way to manage the household when self-storage was integrated into everyday routines and spaces it was, in some ways, an ineffective method of ordering and controlling domestic materiality. This was because whilst self-storage did have the desired effect of storing mixed-state objects in a suitable liminal space, it also enabled the 'sins' of materialism, laziness and untidiness to be relocated to a space where they were out of sight and could be 'got away with' away from potential judgement. First, participants described how having the extra space enabled the acquisition of more things because there was a lack of incentive to keep consumption under control when it would not have a net impact on lived spaces. Effectively self-storage users identified that they expanded to fill the space available to them. This supports the findings of Gellen's study (2012) on 'surplus space' which found that as the amount of space available per person increases so does per capita consumption. Second, having the self-storage unit slowed and hindered the likelihood that divestment decisions were enforced. The extra space afforded by self-storage meant that the probability of an item being kept increased and the probability it would be divested of decreased. Third, there was a knock-on effect on the organisation of home by enabling the deferral of decisions without consequence and reducing the severity of attempts to slim down possessions. Fourth, having a self-storage unit led participants to misplace their things and forgot what they possessed and where it was. This had the effect of wasting time and effort when trying to locate things or the unnecessary purchase objects that were already owned. Essentially, once self-storage is established as a permanent addition to a household's storage spaces, new norms about the amount of 'necessary' storage space can be produced along with the available space. This is consistent with existing research which shows that smaller dwellings are often perceived by their owners to have less clutter than larger homes, despite there being less space for storage (Fear 2008).

8.2.3 Necessary space in the lifecycle of things

The findings presented in this thesis have revealed that self-storage can be seen to act as a necessary space in the lifecycle of objects as they move out of use and towards disposal. This builds upon Hetherington's conceptualisation (2004) of storage spaces as being 'conduits of disposal', in which he argues that disposal is not about simply a matter of *wasting* but should be considered in terms of *placing*. Self-storage was seen to function as a waypoint and temporary resting area for objects 'in limbo' which do not have a certain or defined place in terms of their ownership and use in everyday life. These stored objects are dormant and suspended between states for the duration of their stay. Their ultimate destination is undecided and contingent on the personal circumstances of the owner. The liminality of self-storage in terms of time and space impacts on the stored objects as they await the eventual decisions which secure their 'fate'. The period of separation allows for the remaining threads of memory and sentimentality that had tied the owner to the object to be loosened sufficiently to be let go. This echoes the way that dispossession is theorised as taking place from a consumer research perspective (Roster 2001) in which transformation and movement towards disposal require the 'cooling' of objects which are 'hot' with meaning. Participants in this research expressed that this process was underway, and those who had used self-storage previously confirmed that once objects had been assigned to self-storage this had generally signified their eventual future divestment.

Forgetting was seen to play a key role in the transformation of objects towards disposal as self-storage made objects invisible and their memories absent. This came about because objects in self-storage were spatially marginalised by their placement away from everyday lived spaces and pushed to the metaphorical recesses of the mind by infrequent engagement. Muzaini (2015) discovered that the removal or evasion of objects in one's home which represent upsetting memories (of war in this case) is a deliberate effort to relegate them to the past. Similarly, the findings in this thesis point towards the deliberate storage of objects in order to enact a distance which would have an impact upon their disposal. However, the packing up, moving and storing of items beyond the bounds of the home spatially inverts objects from where they had been previously stored, kept or displayed. Participants described how it felt uncanny to see and recognise what had once been familiar with in the stark space of their self-storage unit. Taking stock and reflecting on the distance now felt towards objects facilitated the rites of passage for the self-storage user and their possessions, as they asked themselves 'Do I really need it if I haven't missed it this whole time?' Self-storage can be seen to be a necessary space for this process to unfold, further distanced from the home and rarely visited, it allows for forgetting to render possessions less significant, less relevant and more disposable. However, unlike existing studies on processes of

divestment, this research also found that the space made available by self-storage can also have the opposite effect of making disposal less likely to happen because there are not the spatial consequences for not seeing the process of divestment through to completion. What compels self-storage users to enact divestment is the monetary constraints of renting a unit long-term, a constraint which has not been considered because research has focused solely on the domestic sphere.

Extending Hetherington's conceptualisation (2004), this thesis argues that it is too simplistic to think of self-storage as only a conduit of disposal. This is due to the fact that it is also the *only* space for some items which are not designated as dormant because they are caught between use and divestment but because they are thought to be something worth keeping. Dispersal to self-storage is, therefore, not always based on apathy towards objects but depends on whether the space is considered to be appropriate for the storage of treasured items which people want to keep for a point when they are needed in the future. It was evident from the design of self-storage units, and the ways that participants spoke of and engaged with them that the spaces are generally considered to be secure, safe and trusted. Self-storage, then, was a solution to the spatial conflict in homes between moving items along and saving them.

8.3 Storage matters

This thesis has contributed to an area in social and cultural geographies, and material culture studies more widely, which fail to give enough attention to the role of storage in how we live out our lives. It has done so by directing focus to self-storage units and their role in the management of material culture in everyday and life-changing circumstances. Objects, as they are sorted, packed, moved and stored, are integral aspects of our dwelling and mobility in the contemporary world. By bringing to light the narratives surrounding hidden objects stored in self-storage units, this thesis has shown that 'unpacking' this kind of materiality provides rich possibilities to understand and grasp the world beyond and displaced from people's immediacies. This section pulls together the two sets of arguments in this thesis to show how they address bigger issues around the categorisation of matter, experiences of uncertainty, change and mobility, and the curation of personal and social biographies. It demonstrates how the findings from this research add new sets of ideas to engage with theories of consumption, home and identity.

Self-storage is a rich geographical site full of things which can say so much about the place of objects in shifting understandings of self and relations to others, but so often are hidden away from doing so. Storage is a central aspect of domestic life and the home and the identities created therein, and whilst self-storage can also become integral to

these same processes it also stands separate from them. Self-storage facilities offer a 'pay as you go', temporary addition to a household's storage capacity, which even when integrated as permanent fixture can be released at short-notice. As such, this research shows how self-storage represents alternative ways of 'living with things', where objects are understood as having shifting value and place in the contingent flows of domestic life. This thesis opens up discussion of the appropriateness of spaces for being occupied by particular domestic material objects, when they themselves are perceived as domestic or not. How these self-storage units are conceived – as dormant, temporary, stasis, forgettable, care, anchoring – plays a crucial role in constituting storing as a practice. The many storage facilities available at home – wardrobes, attics, drawers – embody these differences, but it is only the innovation of self-storage which can encompass an entire household or lifestyle. The place(ment) of certain objects into self-storage and not others also says something about the complex and interweaving ways that matter is categorised as 'in' or 'out' of place and the perception of security in relation to an object's past or future value. Through distancing these types of matter self-storage upholds morals and standards in the home, and also can facilitate the disposal of objects which have fallen out of use or relevance. However by hiding, concealing and distancing unruly things from the lived spaces of the home self-storage also enables consumption, particularly when it becomes a permanent, additional satellite space. The use of self-storage indicates that we struggle to decide on the place of things in our lives, preferring to store items for their potential use or wanting extract all value possible from them rather than dispose of them prematurely. In the face of a neoliberal paradigm, that reinforces the importance of individual identity, curated through consumption, we are consuming more things, own more things, and find it difficult to let go of these things.

This thesis, in many ways, has argued that self-storage is a site of contradictions which are entirely dependent on individualised situations and relations with things. Self-storage is a uniting and separating force in time and space, and the practices surrounding its use are sense-making activities based on object biographies, ongoing lived experiences and attempts to rationalise emotion. Together with being a 'haunting' burden of uncertainty and indecision, in the face of the inherent fluidity of the postmodern era, storage materialises a complex universe of social relations, past, present and future which we don't wish to be without. The contents of self-storage units can both be seen as matter that no longer matters so much, and the constituent parts of life-so-far and life-to-be. Self-storage plays an important role in mooring and bridging people during experiences of uncertainty, change and mobility by storing objects which act as lines of connection between past, present and future identities. This speaks to the idea of postmodernism as inherently fluid and unstable (Bauman 2000). In the context of housing instability, in terms of a lack of stability in living situations, the growing rental market and the broader

housing crisis, self-storage use indicates that there are broad-reaching implications of structural issues in the UK.

Evaluating self-storage in terms of its space, contents, practices and meanings, we can consider how it can be conceived as a home space or not (Mallett 2004). The space and contents of self-storage, as discussed earlier (in chapter 4) was likened to attics or garages by participants. These home storage spaces are characterised by their practical décor, marginal position on the edge of the domestic sphere, and liminality (see Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003; Hirschman et al. 2012). Mixed state objects (dirty-clean, broken-functional, past-future etc.) which are 'out of place' in the spaces of the home are matched with a space which can cope with these transgressions (Douglas 2000 [1967]). Self-storage similarly houses things which occupy an ambiguous, unwelcome or uncertain place in people's homes and lives, and its contents occupy a marginal location in relation to the lived spaces of the home. Whilst the contents of self-storage do not differ greatly from other storage spaces (except when temporarily storing an entire household), the space has considerable differences. Its marginality and liminality are manifest both physically and mentally, as spaces disjointed from the home, with its location (requiring transit to get there, rather than passing through a domestic threshold) and appearance (clinical, clean) marking self-storage out as different from attics or garages.

Turning to Goffman's idea (1990 [1959]) of 'front' and 'back stage', this thesis has identified that previous applications of this theory to storage spaces are limited and simplistic (Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003). Storage spaces have been conceived as 'back stage' because they *aren't* 'front stage', not because they *are* 'back stage', overlooked for engagement in their own right. The back-stage is conceived by Goffman as where preparations take place for the performance front stage. This thesis suggests that objects in storage spaces (whether in the home or self-storage) are dormant and not currently a part of these preparatory practices. Storage spaces act to moor and consolidate identity confirming objects, but these identities are either past, future or parts which are not readily made visible (i.e. indicating the labour behind achievements). Storage spaces, then, occupy a state 'beyond' the back-stage which maintain the potential for performance. To use a dramaturgical metaphor, storage spaces are like the costume store at a theatre. These costumes (identities) have been used in past productions (performances front stage), which may be reprised in the future. The costumes are kept for that eventuality, and will be bought into the back-stage for fittings (remembering and revaluation) before the performance, if they are found to be fit for purpose. Applying Goffman to an understanding of self-storage use, highlights the potentiality of the stored objects and the meaning of the space as caught up in this potential.

As a practice, storage can only be understood in relation to and connection with other material practices. The use of self-storage involves many of the same practices associated with dealing with mundane and meaningful materiality in the home – sorting, packing, curating, keeping, hiding, divesting (see Gregson and Beale 2004; Hetherington 2004; Muzaini 2015). However, these practices generally happen in the time and space before and after self-storage rather than within it. Only a few participants described engaging with their stored things in their units, most choosing to take them home before undertaking those practices. Therefore self-storage is not the location for these domestic material practices, and cannot be understood as a home space.

The contemporary growth in mobile and precious home lives, is resulting in a new-wave of studies on the meaning and experiences of home (see for example Worth 2017; Jayne and Hall 2019). An interest in new configurations and definitions of home, must acknowledge self-storage as a key component of this phenomena and a way of understanding it. Essentially self-storage is representative of order on the one hand and uncertainty on the other, because of its capacity to manage materiality. This thesis shows that storage spaces and practices of storage are significant for understandings of consumption, home and identity. Consumption is far more than just the acquisition of things, and whilst research has begun to attest to ways of ‘living with things’ storage *could* and *should* be foregrounded. Storage is also important for understandings of home as rooted but also fragmented, just as identities are mobile. Self-storage illustrates that the project of self is always ongoing as we curate and divest of biographical objects along the way. This growing emphasis on projects of self is situated within the neoliberal paradigm, which highlights the importance of individuality through consumption.

8.4 Methodological reflections

The research for this project took a two-fold approach. The first interview took place using a semi-structured format outside of the self-storage units, and the second used object-elicitation techniques at the units. In the latter I accompanied participants to their self-storage units, thereby placing them in the setting where they were surrounded by their stored possessions. It was hoped that object-elicitation techniques could be employed and participants would be compelled and encouraged to bring their possessions into the interview context as they were provoked by them. In some cases, this did occur and participants were tactile with their things, unpacking them, showing them and talking about them, referring directly to their materiality as they did so. However, as things were stacked on top of each other and arranged to fit into as small a space as possible, only the objects on or relatively close to the surface were accessible. Participants were reluctant to unpack bags and boxes but did motion to other visible items where possible. However, even when their opacity obscured objects from view, the ‘wall of boxes’ still

provided a very rich research setting, providing a collective context for the changes going on in their lives. Simply knowing (vaguely) what was packed away out of sight led to narratives that covered broad-reaching experiences of grief, hope, exasperation and nostalgia.

Evidently, material culture that is not visible is still capable of provoking responses and is a route to narratives, emotions and memories which are not accessible in other ways. Most existing research on domestic material practices makes use of methods which engage with the sensory and visual qualities of objects (Hoskins 1998; Hurdley 2006; Rowsell 2011). Others acknowledge non-representational relations with things and how this is performed in non-narrative and unspoken interactions with these material objects (Thrift 2007; Knudsen and Stage 2015). This research attempted to do the former but the physical and emotional labour of unpacking and repacking boxes was too great for participants to undertake during the context of the interview. However, participants could still make use of the 'wall of boxes' as a collective and collected entity, reminiscent of the circumstances that placed them in self-storage. Many participants recounted the process of moving their things into self-storage and more still identified the complex and layered meaning of their stored things. These boxes are imbued with memories and emotions from the decision-making process of what and whether to 'store', which draw on the 'value' of objects as mementoes of personal and social pasts as well as items that are capable of facilitating possible futures and mobilities. These narratives are once again evoked in relation with the boxes through the research method.

Attending to the out of sight, which have been deliberately or routinely placed out of mind is a productive and interesting research method which emerged organically from the specific context of this research. Because of its specificity I am not advocating a new method but suggesting that this facet of research with materiality, which actively acknowledges the importance of invisibility, should be encouraged. Particularly researchers should take advantage of accumulations of closed and concealed 'boxed up' materiality when they come to light during research interviews, before or in-place-of direct object-elicitation. These 'walls of boxes' provoke conversations that go beyond the individual biographies of objects, to the enduring, fragmentary and wide-reaching experiences of living with things during life course events, trajectories and transitions.

There is, however, more to be said about the ethics of asking participants to reveal what they had concealed. Opening storage units filled with items which had been put away (actually and metaphorically) during stressful or emotional circumstances has the potential of (re)producing those same feelings. Unpacking the unit and boxes in it to discuss objects which had been made deliberately dormant is a volatile event which could open old wounds for which the participant is not expecting and unprepared to deal

with, perhaps having forgotten what the contents of the box were. Doing ethically appropriate research with objects requires balancing data collection with a duty to protect participants from possible harm, but the potential for harm cannot always be predicted. As participants had filled in the questionnaire as part of my recruitment strategy I was aware of the situation which had led to their self-storage need (including bereavement, divorce etc.). However, the stored objects could be, and were, representative of emotions and events beyond that. Therefore, practicing object-orientated interviews in a 'safe' manner required firstly being aware that the emotional resonance of objects may present themselves unexpectedly, and secondly being prepared (as much as possible) for ways of dealing with the ethical tensions that could arise.

Despite the emotional resonance of their dormant objects and, often, emotional events which had led to their placement in self-storage, participants generally tended to produce reasoned description of practicalities, over articulation of former or emergent feelings. However, their lack of deeply emotional narratives is not a lack of emotion. Interviews with most participants took place a considerable time after their self-storage need had occurred. Therefore the act of processing events resulted in different emotions of reconciliation, acceptance and hope, to take over from their initial grief, shock or denial. This research, through the self-selection of participants who felt 'able' to take part, did not access the moments when emotions were their most raw, but when feelings became more transactionary and practical. The narratives in this thesis, then, offer a different type of engagement with emotion to other emotional geographies research.

The homogenous and classed nature of the research participants should also be acknowledged. Having come across difficulties accessing research participants through self-storage companies, this project was not selective about participants – interviewing any and all who offered to take part. Referring back to the Self Storage Association annual report (2018, pp. 39, 44), the participants in this study fit reasonably well with their characterisation of a 'typical' customer and the key motivators for using self-storage. Self-storage use is a classed practice, largely contingent on the availability of disposable income (see section 1.2), and as a result the narratives in this research provide a predominantly classed perspective of dealing with the materiality of life course transitions and events.

8.5 Future research agenda

This thesis has taken a particular focus and been led by the empirical data in a way that has foregrounded the materiality of self-storage and as a consequence of this self/identity and storage have been emphasised. As a result, the space of self-storage, which one might imagine to be fundamental, has been eclipsed by these two other

aspects. Another, or further study might be more interested in bringing the role of space to the foreground to build upon what has been presented here. The fact is that self-storage stands apart from, but is intrinsically connected to, the domestic sphere is implicit in the findings of this thesis. By using self-storage people are extending the self across urban space. Self-storage units are more-than domestic spaces and they are more-than industrial spaces. The fact that the industrial is becoming domestic is a notable trend deserving of further study and asking a series of spatial questions would further develop an understanding of what the growth of self-storage means in contemporary domestic life. This thesis is the primary and necessary step towards big questions about the nature of domestic space in the 21st century. What is home? We used to think that home was simply a space which roots and nurtures our identities, but this thesis has shown that home is fragmented. Domestic space is fragmented across the city because our identities are fragmented across the city, different spaces – the home, office, gym and self-storage – allow for the production and performance of different identities. There is a whole set of questions about how the urban is constituted and how the availability of these huge facilities and little units within them allow domestic space to be reconfigured.

Broader implications, still, could be better understood with further study of the growth of the self-storage industry. The self-storage phenomenon indicates that contemporary life is inherently surplus; consumption is beyond and more-than our needs and control. Studies with this focus could contribute to larger debates around the validity of the concept of the 'throwaway society' – the critical view of society in which consumers favour the short-lived and disposable items over durable goods. This thesis goes some way towards doing so, providing empirical data that points towards the simplicity of the concept of the throwaway society and thereby adding to the critique put forward by Gregson et al. (2007a). According to Gregson et al. (2007a, p. 683) the throwaway society concept does not hold up because “discarding goods is as infused with love and care as the process of acquisition”. Likewise this thesis has shown that the storage of objects is inflected with webs of meanings and relations of care that go beyond that which is accounted for in ideas of disposability. Whilst people do certainly get rid of things, the use of self-storage – as a symptom of and solution to clutter (Chapter 4) and in light of the uncertainty and emotional attachment to possessions (Chapter 5) – indicates how people quietly forget about things, let them linger and actively hold them in abeyance so to value and treasure the memories, identities and relationships they materialise. Woodward (2015) argues that at the root of the throwaway society concept is an arguably flawed understanding of excess as a sign of materialism. The interview narratives in this thesis illustrate the emotional labour of deciding what to keep as a contingency, which contradicts this idea of things being thrown away without a second thought. By acknowledging the simultaneously productive and destructive forces of time, space and

emotion on and of stored objects we can understand how contemporary identities are produced, materialised and situated. For that reason, this thesis bolsters arguments that the concept of the throwaway society is used all too glibly (Gregson et al. 2007a; Woodward 2015) and suggests that further research should be conducted which accounts for the considerable role of storage in the lifecycle of consumer goods. Could it be that we live now live in a storage society? Or is it that we consume so much that we can't keep up with our materiality enough to throw it away?

8.6 Final reflections

This research project emerged from a curiosity as to why and what was being kept out of sight in self-storage units. It was based on a sense that, whatever the complex nature of self-storage turned out to be, understanding the nuances and contradictions of its use would contribute to understandings of storage, material culture, identity and home beyond what existed to date. As suggested in this conclusion, there is considerable scope to think about how self-storage indicates changing relations and practices of consumption and the subsequent impact this is having on the nature of domestic space in contemporary society.

I want to conclude by reflecting on a quotation from one of my participants, which has stayed with me since my conversation with her in September 2016. Anya had been attempting to rationalise her consumption in light of what she had rediscovered in her self-storage unit. She felt that her (in)actions were symptomatic of wider changes that had been happening over several decades, and that self-storage was responding to this change in consumption patterns and attitude.

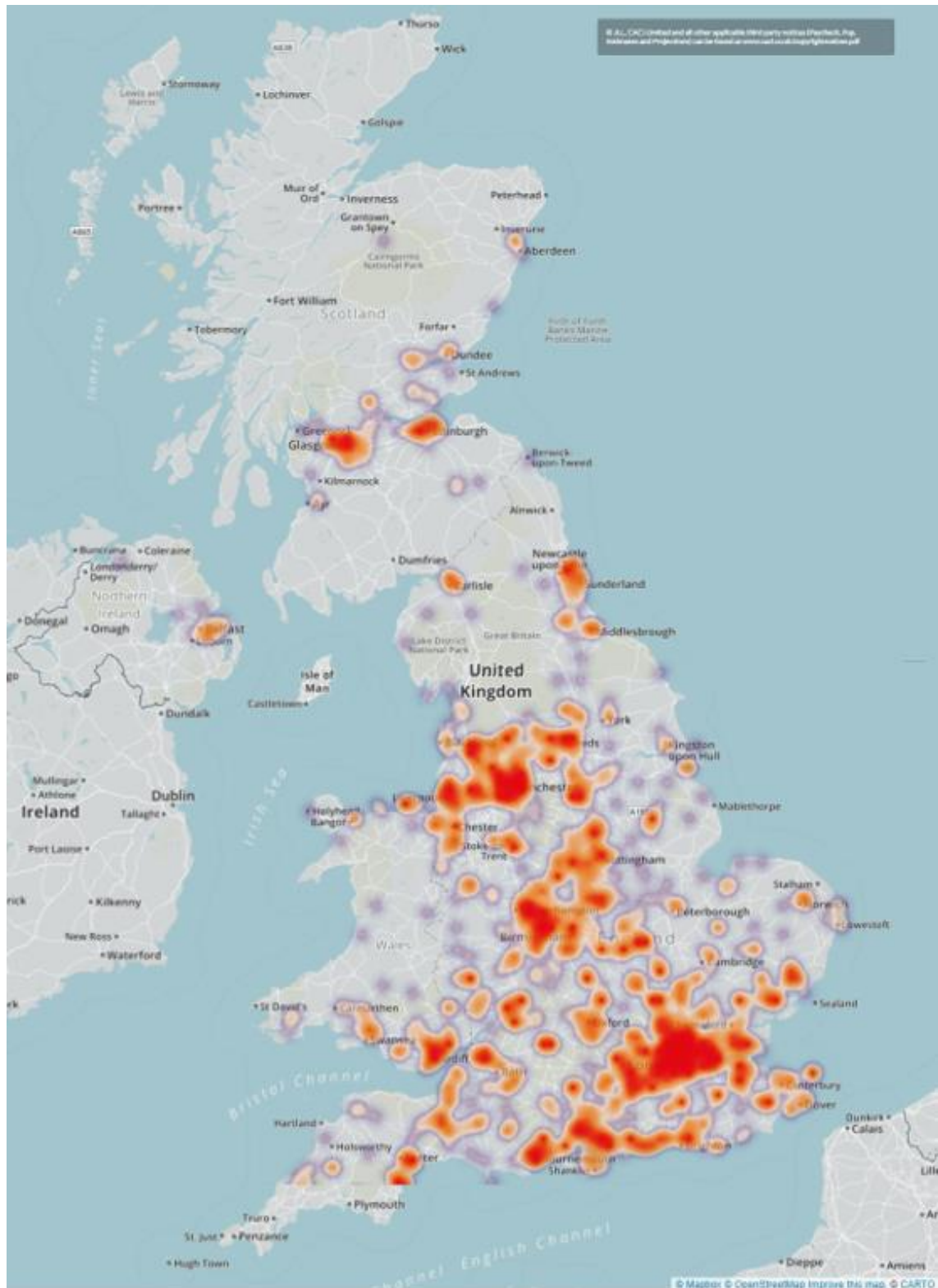
Anya: I think people have got so much more stuff than maybe my parent's generation did. We are becoming a bit of a slave to our possessions aren't we? I certainly am and I recognise it, but I don't want to get rid of them. [She laughs]

Concluding this study, Anya's comment seems an interesting point to end on and contemplate further. Storage has always been fundamental to the way we run, narrate and live our material lives. The growth of self-storage use provides choice as to how to we secure pasts, order the present and enable futures. Self-storage essentially stores the self: the memories we don't want to forget, the people we care for, the tastes we have grown out of, our successes and failures, clutter we want to hide. Responses and attitudes to structural uncertainty have necessitated the use of self-storage as we attempt to anchor our materiality and place in an increasingly fragmented, unstable and mobile world.

Appendices

Appendix A

Heat map of the density of self-storage facilities in the UK (JLL 2018)



Appendix B

Covering letter



Jennifer Owen
Room -1.02 Glamorgan Building
School of Geography and Planning
Cardiff University
King Edward VII Avenue
Cardiff
CF10 3WT

Email: OwenJ4@cardiff.ac.uk

22/09/16

Dear Sir/Madam,

On behalf of the School of Geography & Planning at Cardiff University, I would like to cordially invite you to participate in research designed to further our understanding of 'self-storage'. With the enormous economic and social changes of the last half century, the nature of 'storage' and how we use it has come to reflect the changing needs of individuals, families and businesses. Your contribution will help move our shifting understanding of consumer goods, life events, and entrepreneurialism into the new spaces of self-storage.

It is my understanding that you are currently renting a self-storage unit - as such I am inviting you to participate in this pioneering research. Participation from storage users like you is vital for the success of the research so I would be extremely grateful for your help. The main areas I would like to discuss with you are:

- what motivated you to rent self-storage,
- how using self-storage works in practice,
- and how you have integrated its use into your everyday life.

I am asking people to complete a short questionnaire (this should take only 5 minutes) before the **6th November**. You can either fill out the document, scan and return it to me by email or go to <http://www.cplan.cf.ac.uk/surveys/916274/lang-en> to fill it in online. At the end of the questionnaire you are asked if you would be willing to take part in a two part interview (taking up to an hour in total). If you can take part I will be in touch shortly after you return the questionnaire to arrange the interview at a time that suits you.

For more details about this research project, your participation, and specifics regarding anonymity, confidentiality and your right to withdraw please see the enclosed information sheet. Many thanks in advance for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Jennifer Owen'.

Jennifer Owen

(Postgraduate Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society)

Are you currently renting a self-storage unit?

CARDIFF
UNIVERSITY

PRIFYSGOL
CAERDYDD

What have been your experiences? Between January and December 2016 I will be undertaking research with renters of self-storage to understand their motivations for renting, how using self-storage works in practice, and the integration its use in everyday life. This research aims to understand self-storage renters' own experiences to better understand the nature of this growing phenomenon.

Who is eligible to take part?

I am interested in speaking to individuals who are currently renting self-storage for any reason. These may include using the space for domestic storage, as an office, gym or studio, for the storage of collectables, or a place from which to run a small business.

What would your role be as a participant?

Participation in this research is made up of two stages: a questionnaire and a two-part interview. Completion and return of the questionnaire allows me to prepare and structure the interview to minimise the amount of time required. Please indicate your willingness to take part in the interview by ticking Yes on the final question and filling out your contact details.

The first part of the interview will take place in a convenient location, such as a coffee shop, and will ask about your motivations for using self-storage and the way in which it fits into your life. The second part will take place at your self-storage unit and will discuss how you organise the space and why you keep items there and not elsewhere. The interview will be scheduled for a time that suits you and each part will last approx. 30 minutes each. Ideally they will be done one after the other but can be split if necessary.

your rights as a participant?

This research is subject to Research Ethics Committee of the School of Planning and Geography at Cardiff University. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you retain the right to withdraw at any point without the need to provide justification. You also retain the right to withhold from answering a question should you choose to.

How will your data be protected?

The information participants provide during the course of this study will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Any information you provide will be anonymised accordingly to ensure participants cannot be identified from the research results or any published research papers. A précis of my results will be available to anyone that wants them.

What is this research for?

This research forms part of a three-year doctoral programme at Cardiff University funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Should you wish to take part in this research please complete the attached questionnaire and return it by email. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to get in contact.

Self-Storage Questionnaire

Jennifer Owen
School of Geography and Planning, Cardiff University
Email: owenj4@cardiff.ac.uk



It would be greatly appreciated if you would complete and return the following questionnaire. You will be asked for details about your self-storage unit, your motivation for renting it, its purpose and use, what you store, as well as information about you and your household. Should you have any queries or concerns, please get in touch using the contact details above.

About your self-storage unit:

1) How long have you rented your self-storage unit for?

___ years ___ months

2) What size is your unit(s)?

___ square feet

3) Where is your self-storage unit? (company and branch)

4) How do you refer to your self-storage unit when talking about it to other people? (please tick all that apply)

Self-storage unit Room By the company name
Lock-up Other (please specify) _____

5) How often do you visit your unit?

6) Once at your self-storage unit, what is the average duration you spend there?

___ hours ___ minutes

7) What was your initial motivation for renting a self-storage unit?

8) If you use your self-storage unit for storage purposes, what sort of things do you keep in it? (If you do not use it for storage please move onto question 12)

9) Whom do the items mostly belong to? (e.g. me, my relative, family, business)

10) How much longer do you anticipate them being there?

11) How are items organised in your self-storage unit, if they are?

12) If you use your unit for other purposes than storing household items or storing business stock/equipment please describe here: *(If not applicable please move onto question 14)*

13) How much longer do you anticipate using your unit for this purpose?

About you and your household:

14) What is your age? *(please tick one)*

18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55+

15) What is your sex? *(please tick one)*

Male Female

16) What is your ethnicity?

17) What is your occupation?

18) Which of the following best describes your relationship status? *(please tick all that apply)*

Married or co-habiting
In a relationship but not co-habiting
Divorced/ Separated
Widowed
Single

19a) Do you have children? *(please tick one)*

Yes *(proceed to question 19b)* No *(proceed to question 20)*

19b) Have your children left home?

Yes, all No, none No, not all

Participation in further research:

If you are willing to participate in this research further please tick below. I would like to speak to people for two 30 minute sessions: one at your home or somewhere convenient for you regarding your motivation for using self-storage and how it fits into your life; and the other interview at your self-storage unit discussing the biographies of your things and how you feel about the space.

20) Would you be willing to participate in this research by taking part in two interviews?

Yes

No

If you ticked Yes please fill out the below, or email Jennifer Owen directly at owenJ4@cardiff.ac.uk.

Name: _____ Tel.: _____

Email address: _____

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire!

Consent form

<h2>Self-Storage Research Consent Form</h2> <p>Jennifer Owen School of Geography and Planning, Cardiff University Email: owenj4@cardiff.ac.uk</p>	 <p>CARDIFF UNIVERSITY PRIFYSGOL CAERDYDD</p>
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I understand that

... my participation in this research will involve taking part in two interviews to discuss my use of self-storage, as outlined in the information sheet entitled 'Are you currently renting a self-storage unit?'

... my participation in this research is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw at any point without the need to provide justification.

... the information provided by me will be held anonymously so that it cannot be traced back to me individually, unless I specify otherwise.

... in accordance with the Data Protection Act this information may be retained indefinitely.

... the information that I provide may be used in subsequent publications.

... I am free to ask any questions I may have at any time.

I, _____ (NAME), consent to participate in this study conducted by Jennifer Owen and supervised by Dr Jon Anderson at the School of Geography and Planning, Cardiff University.

Signed (Participant): _____ Date: _____

Signed (Researcher): _____ Date: _____

Appendix F

Interview participant biographies

Oliver

Oliver is in his late 50s and runs a local kitchen-fitting business. He rents two large, outside, garage-style self-storage units to store kitchen units and appliances until his customers are ready to have them fitted in their homes. He takes delivery of the kitchen units at the self-storage facility from an articulated lorry which has driven over from Europe. Oliver has been renting these particular units for 17 years, and self-storage has always been a part of his business. 'The containers' are integral to how he runs things between the shop and clients' homes.

Myles

Myles is tennis coach in his late 40s. The majority of his family's household possessions have been in storage for three months whilst renovations are underway at their family home. He admits that there is a hierarchy between the things he has put in the unit and those he keeps at home although he says that he is not a sentimental person. The 'lock-up' is particularly convenient for Myles because it is very close to the fitness centre he works at as a tennis coach. He keeps his tennis equipment at the front of the smaller of his two units and moves it between there and his car as needed for work four or five times a week.

Bethan

Bethan, who is in her early 30s, is self-employed. She runs a business where she constructs pedal-powered machines which she takes to festivals and other events. Examples include 'Tracy the Tricycle', a bicycle that turns a paint-spinner and another that inflates a light bulb shaped balloon. Before renting her self-storage unit Bethan stored everything in her front room but when she moved into a slightly smaller house this was not possible. In the year and 10 months since she started renting the 'lock-up', Bethan has grown to like the divide it creates between her home-life and work-life. However, whilst the distance between home and the self-storage facility is relatively short, she finds it hard to motivate herself to go there. She believes this is because the self-storage facility is lacking in home comforts and can be quite lonely.

Dawn and Ian

Dawn (a GP) and Ian (recently retired) have been together for a few years. Both are divorced and in their 50s. Dawn has two boys from her marriage, the elder of which is at university. Dawn, Ian and her younger son live in a maisonette in an affluent area of the city. The property is far too small to accommodate the contents of their previous properties (four-bed and three-bed houses respectively) so both have been renting a

number of self-storage units since. Ian has been slowly working through their excess stuff trying to work out what to keep and how to dispose of the rest, he tries to sort through a box a week. In the last two years they have gone from three self-storage units to two but there is a long way to go yet.

Restless World

Restless World is an alternative rock band made up of five young men in their early 20s who live and work in the same city. They split the rent of a self-storage unit (known as 'the bin') between them and have been using the space to meet and rehearse twice a week for the last year and a half. The decision to do this came about after they found renting a regular rehearsal too expensive and a frustrating experience. Instead of using the sub-standard amps, speakers and drum kit made available in the rehearsal space they can use their own which are stored in the self-storage unit. Guitars are brought along to each rehearsal because they think that storing them in the unit, which fluctuates in temperature, would cause them damage. As well as the instruments there are two old sofas in the unit, and the band have attempted to sound-proof the metal walls with carpet off-cuts. They have also brought in decorative items like wall hangings and lava lamps, and useful items like a make-shift bin and space-heaters. Whilst the storage facility manager fitted electricity for them at no extra cost there are no amenities like heating or a bathroom.

Emma

Emma is a PhD student in her late 30s who has just returned from two and half years in Africa, where she was undertaking fieldwork. She owns a house and moved all of her possessions out of the property, following the advice of the letting agent, so that it could be rented un-furnished. The rent Emma receives from her house covers the mortgage and the rental cost of her self-storage unit. When we met, Emma was about to move some of her things into a room she would be renting in a shared property. She hadn't yet decided what she would do with her house or other possessions because there was a chance she would move out to Africa for an extended period again. Whilst professing to be unattached to her possessions Emma did point out several pieces of furniture which she was fond of because they had belonged to deceased relatives. She found her inability to remember what the majority of her unit contained laughable.

Lee

Lee has a part-time position working at a self-storage facility and has access to a large unit rent-free. He and his wife are in the process of downsizing and have sold their previous house. They have ended up renting a place whilst they look for a property they really like. Their rental property is not very big so Lee so has been using the unit for the

last year to store excess items which don't fit in the house. Most of the things in Lee's self-storage unit are not used very often such as suitcases and garden furniture.

Kathryn

Kathryn is financial director in her late 40s. She is a self-professed neat-freak and aspires for everything in her life to be logical and ordered. She and her family have put their house on the market and plan to move nearer to her elderly parents. To facilitate the sale, she has tried to make their home more appealing to potential buyers by emptying a lot of their possessions into a storage unit, which they have been renting for the last two months. On the whole Kathryn is very ruthless about what she allows to be kept and what must be thrown away. However, when it comes to the things belonging to two boys' she is a lot less harsh. She even ended up saving some of their things from being thrown away and packed them up for posterity.

Harriet

Harriet, who is in her late 40s, is the office manager for a firm that conducts medical research. The company has been renting a self-storage unit 'lock up' for the last two years to store unused scientific equipment and laptops as well as logbooks which record all the experiments. Even though there are digitised versions of the logbooks for insurance reasons the firm are required to keep the physical copies off-site.

Vicky

Vicky, who is in her late 40s, is one of a small team of staff working at a self-storage facility on the outskirts of a large city. Having seen the benefits of having a self-storage unit from customers Vicky decided to rent a unit in order to help make her home less cluttered, which she has now kept for just over four years. She gets a small discount off the price of the rent. Vicky lives with her husband and children in a council house which she feels is overcrowded. Her home is located in an area which is notorious for crime so, whilst there is a shed in the garden, she doesn't feel comfortable storing anything in it. She also does not trust that their things will be safe from damage in the attic because she had problems with a leaky roof at their last council house. At least half of the objects in her storage unit belong to non-immediate family members who also take advantage of the extra space.

Chris

Chris is in his late 60s, retired, and rents a self-storage unit to secretly try on women's clothes and cross-dress. He told his wife about his interest in cross-dressing before they got married so to avoid secrets between them. She was initially quite accepting but over time she has found it increasingly difficult to cope with. For a while Chris stopped cross-dressing but when he began travelling away for work he found opportunities to try on clothes and made some purchases. He had to find places around

the home to hide these things, making use of out of the way spaces his wife didn't look or was unable to reach. However, as his collection grew larger and he and his wife began to decorate the house Chris decided to move his feminine clothing to a self-storage unit. He has now had the unit for nine years. Chris is able to sneak away to the unit without his wife knowing and enjoys being able to try on outfits and sometimes get dressed to go out to places where nobody knows him. Chris has configured his self-storage unit to be very much like a walk-in wardrobe, storing clothing and apparel in cloth-wardrobes, boxes and bags, and a space in the middle that has a long mirror and carpet on the floor.

Ed

Ed and his wife are in their 70s and retired. A few years ago they moved into an apartment which does not have much storage space or an attic. Downsizing from a larger property to the apartment required slimming down their things but there were some bulky items that they wanted to keep but didn't have the space for. Ed's wife felt that they did not have room for all their dining room chairs when they were not being used, so they have rented a self-storage unit for the last nine months to store those and some very large 'cruise' suitcases and hat boxes. The unit they rent is very small but is exactly the amount of space they feel they are missing in their home.

Frank

Frank is an ex-banker turned consultant in his late 50s, who manages a portfolio of offices and domestic properties which he lets out to tenants. For two years he has been using his unit to store items of furniture when they are not needed at the properties. However, more recently Frank has started to use his self-storage unit for personal storage purposes as well. Three months prior to our interview Frank's mother passed away quiet suddenly. A lot of the stuff from her house is stored in the unit, yet to be sorted through properly.

Steve

Steve, who is in his early 60s, used to be a plumber and gas fitter but has recently retrained as a psychotherapist. Steve's mother passed away about a year ago and in an attempt to remove some of the emotional triggers for his brother, who now lives in her home, he moved all of her effects into two huge storage containers. Over the four months they have been renting the container, his brother has been better able to make the home his own. It has also allowed for all of the family to take some time in choosing which items they want to have. Steve has found that the time and distance away from her effects resulted in all the relatives wanting much less than they had originally said. This has resolved disputes between those who had wanted the same things. Steve's mother had a habit of buying a lot of furniture and gadgets from TV shopping channels

and many of these objects have either not been used or barely used. He thinks that selling them will cover the cost of renting the unit.

Martin

Martin is a product manager in his late 50s. Martin's need for self-storage arose when he and his wife divorced and he subsequently took a temporary job in Europe. Whilst some of his things have been moved to his apartment abroad, the majority are in a self-storage in the UK ready to furnish his home when he moves back. He has been renting the unit for just over a year and a half. Martin admitted that what happened to his possessions was very low on his agenda during the divorce process and as such he did not take much time to sort through his possessions. Martin has a number of small collections, some of which he has had since he was a child and others he collected during previous job placements abroad. In addition to his own things, Martin is storing some items that belong to his mother who has recently moved from a care home to a nursing home and therefore needed to reduce the number of possessions she had with her.

John

John, who is in his late 40s, runs a local property magazine along with one other full-time employee. John previously rented a purpose-built office but for the last eight years, since the economic downturn, has rented self-storage offices instead. The self-storage office is next to a main road and is quite basic but fits their needs well enough but John had to install a make-shift air-conditioning unit to make it a more comfortable place to work. The distributor of their magazine (who also works for other companies) rents a self-storage unit downstairs to store the copies in the period between them being printed and distributed.

Warren

Warren is in his late 60s and self-employed. He is a canny self-storage user only renting a unit for as long as the introductory rates apply, which for his current rental period is 8 weeks. Warren is currently renting a unit to store the contents of his garage while he waits for good enough weather to fit a new door and repair the floor. Warren's possessions are eclectic and a number have been passed down to him from family members. He currently has a lot more items, particularly furniture, than he can comfortably fit in his house but keeps them because he plans to move into a larger property sometime in the future.

Stuart

Stuart is in his early 50s and works as a computer games programmer. When Stuart split with his, now, ex-wife he left a lot of his possessions at the property because he did not have the space and she did not mind. Recently his ex-wife has put the house

on the market and needed him to remove his items. This coincided with the renovation of the house he shares with his new partner, so they have rented a self-storage unit for the last two months to store his possessions and the objects that they want to put out of the way whilst the building work is underway. Once the renovation is complete there will be dedicated space for Stuart's items, including lots of shelving for his large collection of science-fiction novels. Stuart plans to sort through his possessions when they are moved across because a lot is water-damaged from being kept in a damp shed. This doesn't feel like too much of a loss to him because he didn't miss them for the whole time they were stored at his ex-wife's house.

Leanne

Leanne is a pharmacy technician in her late 40s. She has recently got divorced from her husband and part of the settlement required the sale of their family home. Self-storage was used to facilitate the move to a new property which was not immediately available to move into. Leanne's new property has a problem with the attic so whilst that is being fixed a number of their things remain in the 'lock-up'. One of Leanne's boys still lives at home and the other has grown up and moved abroad but a lot of the 'attic stuff' stored in the unit is his artwork which she is holding onto for him.

Tony and Jan

Tony and his wife Jan, who are around their 50s, store collections of all kinds including grandfather clocks, old-fashioned prams, Garfield stuffed toys and Babycham collectables, which together fill two large storage containers. They have had 'lock-ups' on and off for the last 11 years but had these ones continuously for the last 5 years. They have had some of these collections for a long time and fallen out of love with them so are selling them at their stall in an antiques market. Recently, the couple have been attending evening courses at a college learning to restore grandfather clocks and return the clocks to a more authentic and working state. As a result, they now have over 40 grandfather clocks, only a couple of which they have in their home. Tony and Jan enjoy being able to trace the history of the grandfather clocks' manufacture and owners.

Alex

Alex is in his early 20s and has just completed his undergraduate degree. With no job immediately lined-up he is moving back home with his parents. He is renting a self-storage 'locker' for three weeks between the lease of his student property ending and his graduation, after which his parents will help him transport his possessions in their cars, because it was too much for him to take in one carload. This is the second time he has used self-storage during the summer and on this occasion he went with a budget company. He feels like he has not received the same level of service, but it was adequate given the short time he needed it.

Dominic

Dominic, who is in his early 40s, runs a business fitting solar panels for homeowners and businesses. His unit is mainly used to temporarily store equipment and solar panels once they have been shipped from China until they can be fitted. Dominic's 'lock-up' is set up like a garage, opening out directly onto the tarmac so he can drive his van right up to the door. Before he had the unit he was storing a lot of the equipment at home so Dominic really likes the divide self-storage helps to creates between his work-life and home-life.

Caitlin

Caitlin, who is in her mid/late 50s, is a foster mother who spends most of her time caring for her large family. To accommodate such a big family she and her husband own an eight-bedroom house which, despite its size, is always full to bursting with things. Since many of their children and foster children have now left home, it was decided to downsize into a smaller property. Upon putting their house on the market Caitlin thought that the best way to make the house presentable for viewing was to tidy away items that weren't being used, so she rented a self-storage unit to put them out of the way and out of sight. When Caitlin's father passed away the house sale was put on hold but they never moved their possessions back home. Two years on and neither the house has been sold nor the self-storage unit cleared. Caitlin and her husband have been far too busy to sort it out and it is easier to leave their possessions in the unit.

Anya

Anya is a research manager in her mid-30s. She has recently sold her very small house to move in with her fiancé whose house is a bit bigger. Since Anya's partner wanted to sort through his possessions before the addition of her items created more chaos, she is storing the majority of her household possessions in a self-storage 'room' temporarily. Anya has slimmed down her things quite a lot in this process and expects her partner to do the same, so that she can have the objects she wants the most in their home. She has had the unit for one month and hopes to only have it for two more.

Lily

Lily is in her early 30s and works as a gallery assistant. She and her husband have recently sold their house and moved into a new house which required some renovation. Until the work on the house is done, they are storing anything they don't need day-to-day in a self-storage unit where it is safe out of harm's way. In particular, Lily didn't trust how secure their house would be with builders around so has stored their apple mac computer and many pieces of artwork she has collected or produced herself in the unit. Lily had originally wanted to be an artist and the items in her unit reflect her desire to come back to that in the future.

Kieran

Kieran, who is in his late 30s, works full time as a data analyst but in his spare time runs a mobile event catering company. He has been renting the 'lock-up' for just under two years to store the bulk of his catering equipment and non-perishable stock. When he first started his catering business Kieran kept most of this equipment in the spare room of the flat he shares with his partner, but as the company grew he was running out of space at home and his partner was running out of patience. Kieran still has to prepare and store much of the foodstuff in his flat because the rules of the self-storage facility forbid the storage of perishable products.

Claudia

Claudia is in her mid-40s and reaching the end of her doctoral studies in the UK. Claudia has been working and studying abroad for many years. Originally, she stored her household possessions in the corner of her flat so that she could rent it out, but when she realised that she wouldn't be settling back in Berlin for a number of years she sold the flat and stored them in her sister's basement. When her sister divorced her husband their basement was no longer available, so Claudia moved her stuff into a self-storage unit where it has remained for the last five years. Claudia misses some of the things in her unit, particularly souvenirs she bought from her time living in Afghanistan. She thinks that opening her boxes will be a bittersweet moment, but it won't happen until she is properly settled somewhere where she can see herself living for three years or more.

Fiona

Fiona is the office manager for a regional charity and is in her mid-50s. Three years ago the charity combined two offices into one, and to make more desk space rented a self-storage 'lock-up' to store archived documents (minutes, financial information, personnel files) and extra furniture. They plan to have the unit for at least another two years, until the lease of the office building finishes and they can move to a bigger premise.

Gill

Gill is a former teacher in her mid-50s. She and her family (husband and three children) are using self-storage at a significant shift in their lives – moving from their family home in the London commuter belt to a run-down farm in rural Wales. Their new house requires considerable modernisation and renovation, so until that is complete they are storing the majority of their possessions in a self-storage unit in a nearby town. The 'store' is a much safer place for their things than the farm's outbuildings which are damp and unkempt. As well as moving across the country, she and her husband (formerly an accountant) have had a change in career and lifestyle and are starting out as new

farmers, and her daughter has started at a new school. Gill hasn't had time to think about the immensity of this change since moving six months ago.

Graham

Graham is a civil servant in his late 50s. Just over a year ago his partner's elderly mother was downsizing from a detached house to a flat and then shortly after that she passed away. These two events provided opportunities to give a lot of her stuff away to charity or be disposed of, but a fair amount was too valuable to let go of like that or had sentimental value. These items were boxed up and stored in a self-storage unit near Craig and his partner's home. The objects have been lying dormant for over a year whilst Craig's partner and her sister process their loss, but more recently they have started to sort through the unit. They want to make the right decisions so aren't rushing the process and are happy to pay for the self-storage unit to be able to do this.

Craig

Craig is a senior manager in his late 50s. He has been renting a self-storage unit for the last six months to help his partner downsize her home. She has decided to take a career break and retrain in a new profession, which means her income has dropped dramatically and she had to move into a much smaller flat with cheaper rent. This meant there wasn't enough space for many of possessions, so they have been put in storage while she works out their place in her new life.

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