

## On Materiality: Home Spaces and Objects as Expanding Elements of Everyday Experiences

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**Abstract:** In this article, using a multidimensional methodology, we explored the role of materiality in the everyday lives of eight Italian families. Focusing on spaces and objects, we analyzed how people "use" material frames and boundaries in expanding their individual and collective experiences at home. We employed a composite design including different sources of data: audio and videotaped home tours, visual ethnographic notes and photos, observations of everyday family activities, home-mapping and observational tracking of actions at regular intervals. We used discourse and conversation analysis to investigate family members' talk-in-interaction concerning materiality. The findings show that spaces and objects are expansions of participants' everyday activities: they are presented as flexible in their use, multifunctional and affectively connoted. We also present implications for the methodological design and its potential for capturing how family doings create both a sense of life and the affordances of everyday experiences at home.

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## 1. Introduction

The role of materiality in the ethnographic analysis of everyday life has become a relevant topic of research in the past few decades (JOHNSON, 2015; OVERHOLTZER & ROBIN, 2015; PINK, 2001; SHANKAR & CAVANAUGH, 2017). Spaces and objects can be considered elements through which it is possible to explore how materiality plays a relevant role in everyday activities, especially within the family setting. In fact, in the specific context of their homes, people can "use" material objects and boundaries to expand<sup>1</sup> their experiences. [1]

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<sup>1</sup> Here, "expansion" refers to a reconsideration of the role of materiality, intended to function as a lever for more complex social and cognitive activities and to elicit new ways of thinking.

In this article, we aim to explore the role of materiality in everyday life at home through a composite methodological design. More specifically, we propose to observe different family activities by analyzing discourse, as well as with visual notes and tracking, as ways of understanding how private and collective objects and spaces are used for different home activities. In our view, the family home is constituted by a set of feelings, customs, meanings and experiences in which the material component can play a crucial role, because its nature is never neutral. As spaces and objects offer multiple representations of family members and of their collective and personal symbolizations (ARCIDIACONO, 2010), we set out to capture these elements with a methodological design implemented for the ethnographic observation of the everyday home lives of eight Italian families. We chose to qualitatively analyze how people use material frames and boundaries in expanding their individual and collective experiences at home with a view to understanding to what extent the methodology we have adopted can contribute to identifying family activities that create a sense of life and the affordances of everyday life. [2]

The article is organized as follows: In Section 2, we present some key terms related to the subject of the research and our epistemological approach. In Section 3, we introduce the context, the field, the methodological design and the methods used. Afterwards, we relate the results of the qualitative analysis on how spaces and objects are presented as elements that expand family members' experiences in their everyday lives at home (Section 4). In Section 5, we propose a discussion of some implications of the research design to open up the possibility of reflecting on social processes in family life and contributing to further qualitative research. [3]

## **2. A Qualitative View on Materiality, Home and Material Culture**

An interest in materiality pervades a wide range of disciplines, especially in the social sciences, in which the development of material culture has contributed to the debate about the notion of materiality's hybridity since the early 1970s. According to TILLEY, KEANE, KÜCHLER, ROWLANDS and SPYER (2006), in the structuralist view we can identify a conception of material culture as a form of text, as something to be decoded, while semiotics has contributed to a consideration of materiality as a resource for discovering the language of things. Within the phenomenological approach, the study of material forms has been considered as an investigation of socialized parts of human lives. [4]

The term "material" has sometimes been used as a synonym of "object" or "thing"; consequently, "materiality" refers to the physical or tangible aspects of entities (IHDE & SELINGER, 2005). Alternatively, material culture studies concern the social aspect of materiality and the dialectical relationship between people and things. The social and cultural dimensions play an important role in emphasizing that the study of the material dimension is fundamental to an understanding of cultures, discourses and social relations framed within a specific space and time, at the intersection of different disciplines. SØRENSEN (2007, §2) indicated that materiality can be understood as "the formed pattern in which a

particular entity takes part and which allows it to relate in particular ways to (an)other particular entity(ies)." In this sense, materiality is more a distributed effect, rather than an essential property of an entity. This view relies on the idea, put forward by JONES (2004), that the notion of materiality encompasses "the material or physical component of the environment [and] emphasizes how those material properties are enrolled in the life projects of humans" (p.330). Similarly, a central question could be centered on "how the very material character of the world around us is appropriated by humanity" (GRAVES-BROWN, 2000, p.1). [5]

In every case, we can take into account both sides of materiality: on the one hand, materiality as "hard physicality" (OLSEN, 2003, p.88) of the world's character; on the other, the socially and historically situated agency of human beings in designing and using materials as artifacts and in considering how material things can participate in and influence a variety of social processes (INGOLD, 2012). Especially in anthropology and ethnology, increased attention has recently been paid to ontological aspects of the relationship between humans and materiality. At the same time, other disciplines (such as linguistics and social psychology, among others) have devoted specific attention to the material aspects of language and cognitive processes. As indicated by INGOLD (2011, p.434), "to understand materials is to be able to tell their histories—of what they do and what happens to them when treated in particular ways—in the very practice of working with them." [6]

The rediscovery of the multiple ways of connecting social and material relationships in the analysis of human beings has taken a growing relevance, especially in consideration of how material entities exist, within the cultural frames in which they can acquire a social presence, as the result of discursive processes (BAURIEDL, 2007; PEALS, HETHERINGTON & VANDENBERGHE, 2002). This aspect is particularly crucial in our case, because our aim was to observe different family activities via our analysis of the family members' discourses. As PEALS et al. highlighted while referring to the work of HARRÉ (2002), "what turns a piece of stuff into a social object is its embedment in a narrative construction" (PEALS et al., 2002, p.9). In this sense, materials can be considered as actants and their agency can be understood as relational (BROWN & CAPDEVILA, 1999). [7]

In this article, we do not consider materiality merely as a form of adaptation to an existing reality. Indeed, we view it as an extension of social activities, a tool for eliciting (new) ways of thinking. Our aim was to focus on situations in which material spaces and objects can contribute to understanding forms of activities performed by people at their home. Therefore, we considered the everyday lives of families as complex settings in which materiality provides the conditions for social activities. In this framework, we decided to approach materiality from at least two social anthropological perspectives (MILLER, 2005): the first concerns the theory of mere things as artifacts; the second is the line that claims to entirely transcend the dualism of subjects and objects. It concerns the nature of agency, even beyond materiality, and the consideration of its relativity where some things and people are seen as more material than others, leading finally to an

exploration of the plurality of forms of materiality. As scientists in the human sciences, we look for signs indicating that people are aligning to and distancing themselves from the social roles they play. In this sense, understanding how and why family practices may create a sense of life and the affordances of everyday life is vital if we are to explore what we call "material culture." VANNINI (2009) has shown to what extent modern material culture studies attempt to rediscover the significance of objects, not only in terms of their role in economic exchange, but also—and more importantly—in terms of their cultural role (APPADURAI, 1986). This new function has historically been considered secondary in most social scientific disciplines, which have traditionally been more interested in values, beliefs, collective consciousness and social structures related to material objects (BUCHLI, 2002; GODELIER, 1988; KNAPPETT, 2005; MILLER, 1998, 2014 [2008]). Our concern here is how spaces and objects actively influence family members in their everyday lives at home. [8]

Although the above-mentioned aspects show the relevance of materiality in everyday life, determining how family members perceive spaces and objects in their home as they use them and talk about them seems to be less documented. This point recalls various considerations, especially those connected to methodological aspects. In fact, if we are to reach our goal, we need a research design for accessing the ways in which family members make sense of their world and, in turn, their ways of doing and acting. Previous studies (GROVES et al., 2016; HENWOOD, GROVES & SHIRANI, 2016; HENWOOD, PIDGEON, GROVES & SHIRANI, 2015; KANSTRUP, 2002) showed that using multiple sources (interviews, photos, videos) is valuable for promoting participatory approaches, discerning social representations (HEDENUS, 2016) and analyzing contexts of everyday life. The advantage of these studies is that they present methodological strengths and limitations of designs that provide ways of linking reflection on practices to the complexity of participants' everyday conduct. For instance, SHIRANI et al. (2016) highlighted the relevance of visual approach as a modality for capturing everyday practices over time. In this article, we intend to consider this evidence as a model for the construction of a methodological design, thus making the role of materiality more visible. We are aware that the use of video in social research is increasingly popular (JEWITT, 2012) and therefore focus on how the combination of images and activities gives participants something tangible to refer to and allows them to anchor discourses about everyday life and complex aspects of the mundane (PHOENIX & BRANNEN, 2014). [9]

For the above-mentioned reasons, we are specifically interested in proposing a methodological design for observing how people "use" material frames, boundaries, spaces and objects in expanding their everyday experiences at home. We also intend to contribute to the field of qualitative research considering the central role of materiality in regulating family cultures and dynamics. [10]

### 3. Methods

The existing qualitative research is a useful framework for creating a design based on a combination of methods. In our opinion, a multiple data approach is the best way to explore the variety of elements that constitute the family members' use of spaces and objects at home. Our study is therefore based on this type of approach. [11]

This study is part of an international project jointly developed by three Centers on Everyday Lives of Families based in the United States (University of California, Los Angeles), in Italy ("Sapienza," University of Rome) and in Sweden (University of Linköping). The primary goal of the project was to conduct extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the domestic spaces of families with a view to performing qualitative analyses on aspects of their everyday lives and examining their challenges. The three centers shared similar criteria for the selection of participants: the families were required to be homeowners paying a monthly mortgage and they had to have at least two children living at home, one of them between 8 and 12 years of age.<sup>2</sup> The families were recruited with fliers in schools and on occasion via teachers who were personally acquainted with the research team. After an initial meeting with the researchers, parents and the children over eight years of age signed consent forms for participation in the study and received instructions concerning the timing and procedures of the study in their homes. We employed a range of data collection methodologies (ARCIDIACONO & PONTECORVO, 2004; OCHS, GRAESCH, MITTMANN, BRADBURY & REPETTI, 2006), including conducting semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, mapping and photographing the families' homes and belongings, tracking family members' activities and uses of the home space, and making video-recordings of daily activities over the course of a week for a total of approximately 20-25 hours per family. Three researchers spent four days videotaping and tracking family members in their homes. All the interviews, recordings and field observations were transcribed according to the system reproduced below in the [Appendix](#). [12]

In this article, we draw on data collected exclusively at the Italian Center on Everyday Lives of Families, which documented a week in the life of eight middle-class dual-income families in Rome. We used a combination of methodological tools to analyze how parents<sup>3</sup> formulate their discourses in relation to objects and

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2 The selective participatory criteria were used for the larger project involving observation of the everyday lives of middle-class families. As highlighted by ARCIDIACONO and PONTECORVO (2010a), the middle class is "an unmarked reference group that is tacitly used as a model for research and policy decisions about family, welfare, and the participation of men and women in the workforce. Usually, middle class refers to the class or social stratum lying above the working class and below the upper class. Precisely because most families identify or hope to identify with the middle class, understanding tacit assumptions about middle-class working families moved to the center of the research interest" (pp.454-455).

3 In this article, the parents are the main focus of the family, in the sense that they were the starting point of every discourse, being constantly followed by the two cameras we used. However, in most cases, children were the main partners of the parents' action and discourse within the home. In the eight Italian families we observed, grandparents were not living with the participants or present at the homes during the data collection. As for the children's role, we observed different situations in which the parents' discourse about the home space was inspired

domestic spaces. To attain this goal, within the data (selected passages of verbal interactions, photos, visual notes), we were looking at the aspects that participants themselves suggested as resources for their discursive exchanges in their everyday activities at home by referring to them in explicit ways. In this sense, we considered discourses and practices as instances belonging to interpretative sets participants use to give meaning to their own activities. [13]

We used the following data collection methods: interviews (semi-structured individual dialogues with parents about personal details, professional status, family history, organization of daily life, descriptions of home spaces and activities, childrearing, school education), audio-tours (audiotaped tours of the house by one member of the family during which he/she described the home spaces to a researcher), video-tours of the participants' homes (videotaped tours of spaces in the home carried out by each family member without the presence of researchers so that the most meaningful objects and spaces in the house from the perspective of the inhabitants could be determined) and video-recordings of daily activities at home (observation of the participants—carried out by two separate researchers—in the everyday life at home in the morning and evening, with a focus on family members). To better understand the use of spaces and objects, we crosschecked the data obtained from the above-mentioned methods with other sources, such as photos, home-mapping (see Figure 1) and tracking of family activities at regular 10-minute intervals by the researchers.



Figure 1: Home-mapping for tracking activities, based on the home map (left side). The movements of the family members are indicated over time within the spaces they occupy (the red elements on the right side) [14]

We developed the above-mentioned design to ensure a qualitative procedure of triangulation of various sources of information (see Table 1). As members of an interdisciplinary research team, while collecting the data, we were interested in

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by the children's consideration of spaces or objects (for instance, Excerpt 7 on the use of large boxes to store different items). This aspect is in line with other studies focused on the interplay between children and parents in building social interactions based on shared topics of discourse (PONTECORVO & ARCIDIACONO, 2016) or the use of objects within a contingent activity (ARCIDIACONO & GONZÁLEZ-MARTÍNEZ, 2019; PONTECORVO, LIBERATI & MONACO, 2013).

applying diverse methods that had been validated in recent years by studies conducted in various fields (e.g., BRASSAC, FIXMER, MONDADA & VINCK, 2008; MONDADA, 2011; PINK, 2006).

Method	Participant	Collector
Semi-structured interview	Father/Mother	Researcher
Audio-tour	A family member and a researcher	Family member
Video-tour	Each family member	Family member
Set of photos	Family members and spaces, from the participant's perspective (during the audio-tour)	Researcher
	Family members and spaces, from the outsider's perspective (during the week)	Researcher
Home-mapping/tracking	Family members (during the weekday visits)	Researcher
Video-recording	Family members (two separate cameras, one per parent)	Researcher

Table 1: Data-collection strategy [15]

Our analysis is based on an idiographic, local approach (ARCIDIACONO, 2015; SALVATORE & VALSINER, 2009) and aimed to access participants' ways of constructing the meaning of their discourses. We chose to use discourse and conversation analysis (see, respectively, EDWARDS & STOKOE, 2004; SACKS, SCHEGLOFF & JEFFERSON, 1974) because both methodological approaches make it possible to study conversation and to understand social interaction in the context of production. On the one hand, conversation analysis is useful for examining people's own interpretation of on-going interactions, as revealed in the turn-by-turn unfolding of the conversation; on the other, discourse analysis allows us to use a representational view of language. Although we recognize the differences between discourse and conversation analysis in terms of methodological assumptions, both approaches are aligned in their focus on discourse use as a topic in its own right and share various similarities.<sup>4</sup> [16]

We are convinced that a combination of both analytical methods is an effective way to help capture the participants' activities during their spontaneous interactions at home. For this reason, we employed discourse and conversation analysis to select the accounts of the topic of investigation (home spaces and

4 We consider that some of the similarities between discourse and conversation analysis are pertinent enough to justify a methodological combination. According to WOOFFITT (2005), the two approaches share the following characteristics: both consider conversation as a topic for analysis, focusing explicitly on language as social action; both focus on properties of data (how language is actually used and how research questions can be derived from observations of features exhibited by the data); both were influenced by ethnomethodology and, accordingly, the sense of social action being accomplished via the participants' use of tacit, practical reasoning skills and competencies.

objects) offered by family members in the context of natural discourse production in their everyday lives. The data were considered as *capta* in the setting of the family home, which allowed for in-depth analyses of the discourses produced by the participants when they were "noticing, attending to, or orienting to" them in the course of their interaction (HERITAGE, 1995, p.396). [17]

The main part of the analyses was carried out on the transcripts: when a relevant passage was identified through a synoptic analysis (PONTECORVO & ARCIDIACONO, 2007), we further examined it by going back to the original audio and/or video data. The research group discussed it analytically until the members reached a high level of consent (Cohen's kappa=.80 for ten coding options taken into account for the categorization of data). [18]

We examined the audiovisual recordings of the participant families, along with the corresponding transcripts, photos and tracking, and identified a non-exhaustive set of passages having to do with home spaces and objects. The next steps were to describe the discursive activities taking place and identify the patterns of production. We deployed a triangulation of different sources of data, annotating the interplay of conversation and the display of material elements. Then we performed a case-by-case analysis of the excerpts accounting for the participants' doings *in situ*. We considered different elements at the same time: discursive exchanges, co-presence of family members and activities in specific locations, references to objects and spaces that were mapped, discourses about family and organization. These aspects were useful for understanding whether our methodological design (see Table 2) had played a role in identifying family activities related to materiality.

<b>Data collection</b>	<b>Data analysis</b>	<b>Typology of outcomes</b>	<b>Intended final product</b>
Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires; audio-tours; video-tours; video-recordings of daily activities	Transcription and synoptic analysis based on an idiographic approach; collective discursive analysis (by the research group); coding of topics	Excerpts of interactions	Feedback to participants (joint meeting) and personalized family album
Photos	Comparison of sets of home photos taken by participants and outsiders	Organized sets of home photos	(including photos, excerpts of interactions
Home-mapping; tracking of family members' movements at home	Identification of the use of spaces and objects; types of individual/collective activities and locations	Maps of family members' activities	and examples of family activities in their everyday lives)

Table 2: Implemented methodological design [19]

## 4. Results

We considered diverse features of everyday family life to document how people act in and across a spectrum of activities: with the selected excerpts<sup>5</sup> we provide, our aim is to offer discursive accounts of the participants' perspectives on materiality and orientation, in terms of the use of objects and spaces inside and outside the "scene," of transitions (e.g., movements from one space to another, from one activity to another) and of connections between the family culture and the outside world (for instance, represented by the researchers). [20]

In taking into account multiple sources of information, we were interested in looking at the process of making the home a place that confirms, denies and creates cultural realities within family relationships. In this sense, we used the different sets of collected data to show how parents present domestic spaces in various ways: 1. as boundaries and marked thresholds of the family; 2. as a selective personalization invoked during everyday activities at home; and 3. as resources for the linear or cumulative organization of objects and activities. [21]

In the following sections, we present these elements with examples from various sources of data to highlight the value of the implemented methodological design. [22]

### 4.1 Boundaries and thresholds

Boundaries should not be taken for granted, nor be understood as having some universal, independent causal power. Instead, they are social constructs established by human beings for specific purposes and manifestations of social relations (OCHS & KREMER-SADLIK, 2013). Space is typically divided into binary oppositions, such as inside and outside. Accordingly, people present internal, private spaces with respect to what is considered not part of the home. For example, in the interviews and questionnaires, family members could focus exclusively on what is inside their home to refer to family spaces. In our methodological design, in addition to questionnaires and interviews in which family members indicated the number, sizes and some everyday uses of the home spaces, we focused on elements of domestic demarcation that appeared in their everyday activities and were presented by the participants in the video-tours. These sources of data provide examples of how internal and external demarcations and thresholds were presented by family members. [23]

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5 For all the excerpts presented in this article, we use the terms *mother/father* to refer to adult participants and *child* to refer to young people, even though they could assume different roles during the interactions (not only as *mother/father* or *child* but also, respectively, as *wife/husband*, *woman/man* and *brother/sister*). To ensure anonymity, we have used pseudonyms in place of the participants' real names. Apart from the English version of the transcripts, the original Italian version is presented for each excerpt. The translation of utterances from Italian was performed not word-by-word, but in a way that represents what the respondents were saying in their mother tongue.

The first excerpt is related to Family A. During the father's video-tour, he decided to include external areas and their use to illustrate how family members moved the boundaries of the home.

<p>Father: so I'll start:: my tour, (1.0) from the: terrace ((opens the door leading to the condominium terrace)) (1.0) that- isn't ours= our apartment's, but is jointly owned. (2.0) let's say though that I acted arbitrarily I took possession of it asking for authorization to place some plants there, (0.8) which was granted to me, (2.0), so that:: [...] and let's go inside, this is: the entrance, (5.0) here we have used the common space ((a closet of two meters)) to be able=that is not used, to be able- to perform a separate collection of household waste, a minimal one, eh::</p>	<p>dunque io inizierei:: il mio tour, (1.0) dal: terrazzo ((apre la porta del terrazzo condominiale)) (1.0) che- non è nostro=, del nostro appartamento, ma è quello del condominio. (2.0) diciamo che ho fatto un'azione arbitraria me ne sono impossessato chiedendo l'autorizzazione per mettere delle piante, (0.8) che mi è stata concessa, (2.0) per cui:: [...] e andiamo a casa, questo è: l'ingresso, (5.0) qui abbiamo utilizzato uno spazio condominiale ((uno sportello con due contatori)) per poter=inutilizzato, per poter- fare una raccolta differenziata, minima, eh::</p>
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Excerpt 1: "I'll start from the terrace." Family A, father's video-tour. Participant: father (47 years old) [24]

In choosing to start his video-tour from the terrace, the father of Family A presented this space as an extension of the home. In this respect, we can observe the emphasis that the father applied to what he does not possess, the common terrace, designed as an opening towards the outside. In fact, the family members had appropriated this space to a certain extent, firstly by putting some plants there and then by transforming it from a space for collective use to private use. The two poles of what is "ours/not ours" were marked in the beginning of the discourse and reversed through a declaration of cleverness: the action of "taking possession of" (defined as arbitrary and therefore recognized as unfair, irregular and questionable) was justified by the arrangement he had come to with other families living in the same condominium ("I took possession of it, asking for authorization to place some plants there, which was granted to me") and was thus inserted into a personal normative frame. [25]

After his description of the terrace, the father moved towards the entrance of the home, but again presented a common space (the area just in front of the door) that the family had transformed into a place to store recyclable waste. It is another example of transformative use of a space, converted for a "private" use, although without any legitimate permission. In the father's argument, the civic value of collecting household waste for recycling made the space-appropriation reasonable. He highlighted the fact that the space was not being used for anything else, casting his action as appropriate and presenting the area as exploitable for civic goals. In this sense, Family A showed how the boundaries of home spaces can vary according to the reasons, ideas, creative uses and family members' ability to adapt them. It seems that being asked to present the home

spaces in a video-tour allowed the father to include an external area (the terrace) and, at the same time, to give personal justifications (for his successful attempt to sneakily conquer some spaces of the condominium) that were sufficient, in his view, to defend the family's space-appropriation as reasonable and acceptable. [26]

Within this view of internal/external spaces, other families showed the possibility of expanding the borders of their home, presenting the use of external areas for different collective activities during the recording of daily activities (although, in the interviews, no allusion was made to these spaces as areas for family activities). That was the case for Family B (see Fig. 2), which presented the terrace as a part of the home instead of an external space.



Figure 2: Family B, Wednesday evening; the mother and children (Leonardo, 12 years old; Dora, 10 years old) are opening coconuts on the terrace [27]

In the second excerpt, we refer to another family (C) and focus on symbolic actions that were oriented towards drawing boundaries between the self and the others. In the case of Family C, this was presented through the communicative instruments of a "decoded" symbol that explicitly defines a religious and cultural identity. The family is Jewish and their religion was often discussed by the members in relation to their everyday life (because they decided to be a Jewish family, even though the father comes from a Catholic background). Their house contains numerous objects that refer to this identity—the *hanukkiyah* in the library, the bagatelle table (a present for the *Hanukkah* holiday), a visible Jewish calendar—that were used as part of individual and family presentations with regard to others (for example, the researchers). In particular, on the main entrance door jamb, a *mezuzah*<sup>6</sup> indicates their belonging to a specific culture. The *mezuzah* identifies the family and stands, materially, at the threshold between the inside and the outside of the house: the door jamb immediately marks both their belonging to the real and the virtual community they are linked to and their otherness, with respect to the non-Jewish. Such demarcation defines the family's identity via the principle of cultural similarities or differences. In the parents' video-tours, this border constituted the starting point to present the home.

6 The *mezuzah* is a religious symbol, placed on the doorframe of Jewish spaces, that contains scrolls of prayers (verses of the *Torah*).

<p>Father: so, we are ready (.) eh:: I decided to start from:: from the outside. Specifically from the door eh: the first thing to show is the <u>mezuzah</u> that somebody else will present in detail, maybe Arianna ((the mother)) so it is:: is a: is a container and inside:: there are the scrolls of law ((the verses of the Torah)) and it is a symbol present on every door of Jewish families.</p>	<p>allora, eccoci pronti (.) eh:: ho deciso di cominciare da:: da fuori. Proprio dalla porta eh: la prima cosa che facciamo vedere è la <u>mezuzah</u> che qualcuno spiegherà meglio, magari Arianna ((la madre)) insomma è:: è un: è un contenitore e dentro:: ci sono i rotoli della legge ((i versi della Torah)) ed è un simbolo che sta su tutte le porte delle famiglie ebraiche.</p>
<p>Mother: so my visit of the house starts from the outside, from the <u>mezuzah</u>. the <u>mezuzah</u> is a: Jewish symbol that is placed on the doorframe, the doorframe of the house, and:: and we put it here recently because: before in this house, that was my father's office, there was a <u>mezuzah</u> but <u>inside</u>. it was a little <u>shy</u> matter, maybe a form of shy Jewish religion and this year, a few months ago, we put it outside, in its own place to indicate that this is a Jewish house and this is in fact one of the (.) main commandments, to put this scroll of prayers on the door: of the house</p>	<p>allora la mia visita della casa comincia dall'esterno, dalla <u>mezuzah</u>. la <u>mezuzah</u> è un: simbolo ebraico che si mette sulla porta, sulla porta di casa, e:: noi l'abbiamo messo da poco perché: prima in questa casa, che era l'ufficio di mio padre, c'era la <u>mezuzah</u> ma <u>dentro</u>. era una cosa un po' più <u>timida</u>, forse un ebraismo più timido e quest'anno, pochi mesi fa, l'abbiamo messa fuori, dove deve stare per indicare che questa è una casa ebraica e questo è proprio uno dei (.) precetti fondamentali, di mettere questo rotolo di preghiere sulla porta: di casa</p>

Excerpt 2: "This is a Jewish house." Family C, mother's and father's video-tours.  
 Participants: father (43 years old), mother (43 years old) [28]

While doing the video-tour, the father of Family C decided to start from the outside: in his presentation, he introduced the topic ("the first thing is to show the *mezuzah*"), although, at the same time, he delegated to his spouse the responsibility of describing the meaning of the *mezuzah* for their family and their culture in greater detail ("it is a symbol present on every door of Jewish families"). The illocutory act performed by the father was devoted to accomplishing a modification of the relationships among family members and external observers: he presented the home, indicated who would be in charge of explaining the meaning of the *mezuzah* and offered the researchers a unique insight about a marked cultural symbol. As a consequence of the referential frame introduced by the father's discourse, the mother was immediately invoked as a co-author of the presentation. In this sense, the mother's following reference to a *Jewishness*, for as long as the *mezuzah* was not exposed on the front door, was an alignment to the father's discourse. In her presentation, she marked her religious identity as different from the attitude of the family she grew up in ("before ... there was the *mezuzah* but inside. It was a little shy matter, maybe a form of shy Jewish religion"), but available for public recognition ("this year, exactly a few months ago, we put it outside, in its own place to publicly indicate that this is a Jewish house"). During the video-tour, the mother was speaking on behalf of the family,

establishing a connection to the Jewish culture and the rules of the religion ("this is in fact one of the main commandments, to put this scroll of prayers on the door"). Considering both the parents' video-tours, we classified the presentation of the family as a kind of inter-discourse that connects discursive units, combined in complementary and coherent ways. The family members pointed these elements out to the researchers in the video-tours they made and offered additional details about their religious culture to supplement what had already emerged from the parents' interviews. [29]

By using different data sources, we managed to observe how, for the participant families, demarcations did not concern only physical spaces within or outside the home. In fact, family members also used spaces as boundaries between routines, for example waiting for lunch or dinner. This implied using spaces as places with a specific value, often recognized as the special areas of certain family members (for instance, the kitchen as the mother's "realm"). However, spaces that were described in a "static" way during the initial interviews were continuously changed, modified and adapted for other uses, activities and needs. These elements can be captured only by systematically recording the family members' everyday lives. For example, in Family B we observed a situation in which the participants transformed a space that was apparently neutral (the kitchen wall) into a place where a playful activity could be performed while the family was waiting for dinner: on a weekday evening, the children were playing hangman there (see Fig. 3): with this action, they reframed a part of the home space to perform an activity created out of the contingency of the situation (waiting for dinner to be prepared by the mother).



Figure 3: Family B, the hangman game the children played on the kitchen wall while waiting for dinner [30]

This is an example of how, in the "interstices" between one situation (the meal preparation) and another (the dinner), family members can create occasions for new activities. By using the kitchen wall as a place to play a game, the family was able to reframe the space for another purpose. [31]

Other families offered further examples. In particular, Family D transformed the jamb of the kitchen door into a place for the children's swing (see Fig. 4), while Family E organized the bedroom as a multipurpose space, transforming the bed into a sofa and leaving an empty space in the middle of the room (see Fig. 5). These are examples of families' ways of redefining the internal boundaries of rooms, moving back and forth between private areas during the night (e.g., the parents' bedroom) and common family areas during the day.



Figure 4: Family D, the kitchen door as a place for a swing



Figure 5: Family E, the parents' bedroom; a foldaway bed becoming a sofa [32]

These examples show how families are constantly reframing the demarcation of external and internal spaces, especially within small flats in which a reorganization could be essential for using limited spaces for more than one activity. Referring to the methodological design we used, it seems to us that these aspects are related to a dynamic use of spaces and objects that was possible to capture by combining different sources of information. In our view, the design was settled in a useful way to detect the "lives" of objects and spaces, instead of representing a static picture of home areas, as it is case of data sets constituted exclusively by photos or answers to questionnaires or interviews. [33]

## 4.2 Spaces and objects as personalization

Family members often describe home spaces with a "personalization" of items connected to their own objects, tastes, preferences and human characteristics. For example, in Family F's video-tour, the mother "humanized" the bedroom curtains as a way to shift from a presentation of a space/object to a description of her personality.

<p>Mother: these wonderful curtains that you see, (2.0) chosen by me, (2.0) I had a dressmaker make them for me, (1.0) on the basis of:: of the color of my dining room because:: as you see I really like things:: that are <u>vivid</u> I mean (.) bright, because they reflect me a little:: also my character=I am a very cheerful person, full of life, (1.0) and:: what can I say?</p>	<p>queste bellissime tende che vedete, (2.0) scelte da me, (2.0) le ho fatte fare io dalla sarta, (1.0) in base al:: colore della mia camera da pranzo perché:: come vedete a me piacciono molto le cose:: <u>vitali</u> insomma (.) luminose, perché rispecchiano un po':: anche il mio carattere=io sono una persona molto allegra, molto vivace, (1.0) eh:: che dirvi?</p>
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Excerpt 3: "They reflect me a little." Family F, mother's video-tour. Participant: mother (38 years old) [34]

During her video-tour, the mother talked about the room's curtains as if she were talking about herself. She explained that she was the one who had chosen the colors, the furniture and most of the objects in the house. In her words, the curtains symbolized her character. The comparison was based on a logical assumption of analogy: as she is "a very cheerful person, full of life," the curtains too are "wonderful, vivid, bright." In her discourse, the objects were an extension of some personal qualities. [35]

Other families provided not only the expression of individual feelings associated with spaces and objects, but also a value connected to the sense of being together, of "doing family." In particular, Family A presented the kitchen as the space for communal living, as the area for memories and the planning of family activities.

<p>Mother: so this (1.0) is (1.0) the heart of the house (3.0) is: (2.0) the kitchen. I'll say that this is the room I like the best, not because we eat here but because it is in fact the heart of our home, and:: we spend a lot of time here, enjoy each other's company, planning:: our lives, our days, laughing and joking, our vacations.</p>	<p>comunque questo (1.0) é (1.0) il cuore della casa (3.0) è: (2.0) la cucina. direi che questa è la stanza che mi piace di più di tutte, non perché ci si mangia ma perché è il cuore della casa appunto, e:: qui passiamo molto tempo, in allegria insieme, organizzando:: la nostra vita, le nostre giornate, ridendo e scherzando, le nostre vacanze.</p>
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Father: we designed a larger kitchen, so we could spend time in it, like in the kitchens, in previous times, eh:: before (.) during::: the fifties. big kitchens, with an area for eating, for sitting, for doing homework, even for playing	abbiamo fatto una cucina molto grande, perché può essere vissuta, come erano le cucine, nei tempi, eh:: indietro (.) negli::: anni cinquanta. cucine grandi, dove c'era una zona per mangiare, per stare, per fare i compiti, per giocare anche
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Excerpt 4: "The kitchen as the heart of the home." Family A, mother's video-tour and father's interview. Participants: mother (55 years old), father (47 years old) [36]

The parents talked "affectively" about the kitchen, presenting it as the result of a joint intention to have a large, pleasant and functional space. In describing the kitchen, the mother and the father highlighted the central role of this space, its relevance in terms of the room in which the family spends most of its time, both for domestic purposes (e.g., eating) and for other activities (e.g., doing homework, spending time together, relaxing, playing). In particular, the father added a memory about the design, in times gone by, of large spaces, such as comfortable kitchens with multiple functions for all family members in the home. With this reference, he presented his idea of the actual meaning and relevance associated with the kitchen as a space for everyday life and activities. Similar findings were highlighted by a previous study (ARCIDIACONO & PONTECORVO, 2010b), in which the kitchen was identified as the domestic space in which Italian families spend most of their time in their everyday lives. [37]

Another element that seems crucial in accounting for the need to use a composite methodological design in investigating home spaces and activities has to do with the object as focus of the analysis *per se*. In addition to the references offered during the interviews about the parents' preference for spaces and furniture, we recorded different discourses in which, via references to objects, participants spoke of family memories, particular situations and special events (e.g., objects celebrating childhood, the couple, changes and developments within the family). Apart from each object's specificity in terms of what it represents (a photo of a person, a place, etc.) and why it is made visible (for example, displayed in the living room or at the entrance of the house), the levels of material wealth that families attain indicate to what extent spaces full of possessions can serve as sources of internal satisfaction for family members, constantly reaffirming, via the presence of objects in the house, the meaning that the family has created (ARNOLD, 2013). Since the home is a repository for family belongings, it is interesting to understand not just how many possessions households have (information that can be obtained with questionnaires and interviews), but also the kinds of objects, where the family members place them and how they use them. We noticed that the homes of participant families were strikingly crowded with objects that could be considered the biographers of the family members since they selected categories of objects that embodied their chosen identities. For this reason, images and symbols from the culture with

which family members feel an affinity were displayed as part of a family biography that was purchased or inherited<sup>7</sup> (see Fig. 6).

<p>Mother: this is a small display case, a display case in which I have all my somewhat unique small objects. they are some (.) small collections, well, I like very much [...] well, there are guitars, this is the passion (.) it is the passion of my husband who takes care of the music side and we like it, because then we can spend very very nice evenings!</p>	<p>questa è una vetrinetta, una vetrina dove io tengo tutti i miei oggettini un po' particolari. sono delle (.) piccole collezioni, ecco, mi piacciono tantissimo [...] ecco, ci sono delle chitarre, questa è la passione (.) è la passione di mio marito che cura molto l'aspetto musicale e a noi fa piacere, perché poi passiamo delle serate molto molto allegre!</p>
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Excerpt 5: "Displaying personal objects." Family G, mother's video-tour. Participant: mother (46 years old)



Figure 6: Family G, the display case holding the mother's collection of objects and the father's guitar [38]

On some occasions, the home was presented like a museum, with the exhibition of objects that "built" a specific representation of family identities. According to GIORGI, PADIGLIONE and PONTECORVO (2007), in this case it is possible to speak in favor of a kind of "naïf museography" that the family can display to represent its style, identity and cultural belongings. Displayed in domestic spaces, reserved for the private/public gazes, collections can reveal unique aspects of the family: in fact, the material side of the display can show the symbolic meanings the adults attribute to the objects and spaces in their homes.

<sup>7</sup> In our study, the display of artefacts can be connected to different values, such as feelings of attachment, admiration, entertainment, heritage, reflection of core interests and family histories that people highlight in their discourses. However, we did not analyze this aspect specifically and consider it a good candidate for further research. For example, a line of research could try to determine the status of objects and spaces that are not discussed or are missing.

Mother: I have my COLLECTION OF DOLLS:: (0.5) YES	Ho la mia COLLEZIONE DI BAMBOLE:: (0.5) SI
Researcher: ah!	ah!
Mother: my ethnic dolls, exclusively. Very difficult to find.	le mie bambole etniche, rigorosamente. Difficilissimo trovarle.
Researcher: and also this one is:: let's say, you've been collecting for a long time?	e anche questa è:: diciamo, è abbastanza tempo che la collezioni?
Child: this is a gift,	questa è un regalo,
Mother: no, not such a long time maybe, a couple of years	no non è moltissimo forse, un paio d'anni
Child: this I bought for you, Mom?	questa te l'ho comprata io, mamma?
Researcher: and how did this passion arise?	e com'è nata questa passione?
Mother: from this (doll), this is Big Mama ((picking up a doll))	da questa (bambola), questa è Big Mama ((prendendola in mano))
	
every time I travel I put it in my luggage, because it is my:: talisman,	ogni volta che viaggio la metto in valigia, perché è il mio:: portafortuna,
Child: Big Mama?	Big Mama?
Mother: Big Mama. I like her very much maybe because she reminds me of a very dear friend, a black friend living in Washington	Big Mama. Mi piace molto forse perché mi ricorda una carissima amica, un'amica di colore che vive a Washington

Excerpt 6: "I have my collection." Family A, audio-tour. Participants: mother (47 years old), child (10 years old), researcher [39]

Looking at objects as instruments of display and museums for preserving memories and histories can play a role in framing home spaces as places for

internal personalization of family members' everyday lives. The way in which people are socialized by the family traditions of their respective childhood homes or by friends can influence the choice of objects to display, the decision to use spaces to present family histories and so on. In Italian culture, in which material heritage is especially important, family members might inherit valued heirlooms and construct their household around them. Beyond the materialization used to express who the families are, parents may present their choices as attempts to reveal a sense of style and cultural refinement. [40]

### 4.3 Spaces presented in terms of linearity or cumulative places

Another aspect emerging from the composite design of our investigation concerns the participants' design and use of spaces as a way to present personal discourses regarding the family. More particularly, we observed different configurations of common rooms: for example, spaces were presented in terms of linearity *versus* cumulative places, according to the family history and development (see Fig. 8). This is especially clear in living rooms, in which a large number of objects (decorations, books, photos) are displayed by family members (see Fig. 9). These photos represent not only individual or family styles, but also functional ways to use the space, to show a sense of style and to account for the organization of activities connected to specific objects.



Linearity in common space's organization



Cumulative way to fill common spaces

Figure 8: Family C (left side) and Family E (right side): living rooms



Figure 9: Family F; the living room [41]

Let us refer, for example, to the audio-tour made by the father of family E: his discourse is about his feeling of appropriating a space (the living room) and the need to organize it.

<p>Father: let's say that what I feel is most mine in the house is the space's organization. I feel it is mine because I carefully studied and stated the way I wanted this house to be. then when I am walking it is the space that I feel is mine instead of this or that object (.) now in the living room what I like most the part I like most, the bookcase of course, which is something that (0.5) that brings things together in the sense that it creates a space like this, walls with bookcases, they always, how can I say this, somehow open up a small space</p>	<p>diciamo che la cosa che sento più mia in tutta casa è l'organizzazione degli spazi. la sento mia perché mi sono messo a tavolino e ho detto come voglio che diventi questa casa. così dove cammino è lo spazio che sento che mi appartiene piuttosto che questo o quell'oggetto (.) ora in soggiorno la cosa che amo di più la parte che amo di più, la libreria naturalmente che è una cosa che (0.5) che unisce nel senso che fa un ambiente così, le pareti attrezzate, sono sempre, come dire, ampliano in qualche modo l'ambiente un po' ristretto</p>
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Excerpt 7: "The space that I feel is mine." Family E, father's audio-tour. Participant: father (44 years old) [42]

In the father's discourse, he personalizes the living room in a way that denotes an identification between the space and the individual. His presentation has an affective connotation ("what I feel is most mine in the house is the space's organization"), but also technical and professional ones ("walls with bookcases, they always ... somehow open up a small space"), and these are related to his passion (he aspired to become an architect). Spaces and objects were thus intended as useful elements for the design of a functional organization of the home and, at the same time, a source of personal satisfaction: the father in fact saw the entire house as an extension of his individual characteristics, desires and tastes ("I carefully studied and stated the way I wanted this house to be"). With its furniture, spatial arrangement and aesthetic forms, the living room became a reflection of the father's choices, ideology and ways of being. [43]

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

This analysis of the everyday home lives of eight Italian families showed that spatial boundaries are socially constructed with a symbolic function (e.g., the *mezuzah* in Family C) or for a pragmatic reason (e.g., the father of Family A justifying his use of the common closet to set aside recyclables). Spaces can also be valued from an aesthetic point of view, as was the case in Family F, in which the mother highlighted her choice of the curtain's colors, drawing a parallel between it and her own character. [44]

If the space offers a framework for the study of objects, materiality could also be studied as a source of activities, discourses and social interactions displayed by family members. This is an aspect that needs to be investigated more thoroughly, so it could constitute a relevant topic for further studies. In this vein, the results of this article could inspire new questions and avenues for additional ways of exploring the project's data. [45]

In line with these considerations, our main aim here is to highlight the value of the implemented design in ensuring the collection and analysis of different types of evidence related to materiality and in contributing to identify aspects that create the conditions for a family's representations and activities. According to DAM and EYLES (2012, §4), a family's identity can be perceived in every dimension of their home and can play a critical role in its meaning. We are convinced that the composite design we used provides a space for investigating how the expansion of people's experience is connected to the ways in which home spaces and objects represent family cultures and dynamics. With respect to the topic of materiality, in a previous work we highlighted relevant aspects that are useful for understanding our findings from this research (PONTECORVO & ARCIDIACONO, 2007). In fact, among the domestic spaces, the kitchen, bedroom and living room appeared as the ones that particularly account for family representations of roles, gender, being a couple or being parents. More specifically, the kitchen is presented as the most "female" space, not only in terms of food preparation, but even regarding the "style" of the space, the organization of furniture and objects in the room and at its borders. As for the parents' bedroom, the observed Italian families presented it as a multifunctional space, ready to be adapted to different needs. For example, instead of appearing as the parents' private and inaccessible realm, this bedroom is presented as a space that can easily be transformed and used as a common family *lieu*, a workplace or a childcare area. In the living room, large pieces of furniture create environments surrounded by a more stable set of decorative objects that reveal a great deal about family identity. Family photos, art and decorative objects of many kinds often densely pack this space. By combining different sources of information, we detected a moderate density of more or less permanently on-display objects and determined which member of the family continuously assumes responsibility for the different activities performed in various family spaces. [46]

From the discourse that participants offered about their everyday lives, we observed how spaces and objects are intended to be expansions of family members' activities. In fact, materiality is used to present a family culture to external observers (for instance, the researchers), because spaces and objects can account for frames and borders in areas of intense activity that contribute significantly to the dynamics of culture. We observed that shifting and moving frames and borders are processes involving parents in creating a family culture, negotiating meaning at the individual and collective level and from different subjective viewpoints. In studying the everyday lives of families using a combination of data sources, we detected that spaces and objects in the home are presented as flexible in their use, multifunctional for the different family activities and affectively connoted by the participants. These elements emerged, in particular, from our direct observation of family members' discourses and interactions and seem connected to what ERNSTE (2005) highlighted: daily social interactions in space and time are like masks behind which human beings are always partly hidden and hiding. This mediatedness enables humans to objectify and generalize themselves and the environment. [47]

The findings of our investigation highlight the relevance of looking at objects as "choses en mouvement" ["agents"] (APPADURAI, 2013, p.19) according to the historical evolution of families. For example, when things can be difficult to classify in cultural and social terms because of their changing nature, considering objects as a projection of people's intentions can help to highlight the connection between the objects and the context. In fact, objects are rarely presented as isolated elements: on the contrary, they are associated with other objects and the whole space in which they fulfill their functions. These elements, often difficult to capture with a single instrument or method, can emerge more clearly when a combination of data sources is used. In our case, we considered the context itself as a natural object: this aspect is connected to the idea put forward by MILLER (2014 [2008]) about the possibility of building an aesthetic and figuring out an order (FOUCAULT, 1966) in establishing relationships between people, spaces and material objects. This step was possible with the adoption of a composite methodological design allowing us to identify types of family activities that create a sense of life and the affordances of everyday life. [48]

We also want to comment on ways of studying family culture through references to home experiences, practices and representations. We chose to focus on materiality to test the potential value of the implemented methodological design. As spaces and objects are often considered static elements that can simply be described (or indicated), we tried to show how an attachment to a material culture can be a general fixture of families' heritage. The display of objects and the arrangement of spaces are not exclusively ordered elements that family members make visible inside their homes: they can also be useful indicators for better understanding how people contribute to bringing the spaces to life (CONNOR, 2014) and taking into account the affordances (GIBSON, 1999). In fact, objects are not only invested and connoted from an external perspective (e.g., how they are used and in which circumstances: these are aspects that can be investigated with the usual surveys), but also imply a particular relationship with the user,

through the different possibilities of being employed in specific ways that are accessible using designs that look for a combination of data sources. For this reason, we consider our findings to be the natural extension in the field of qualitative investigations that attempt to better understand how people frame their lives and use spaces and objects as artifacts representing images of the family (AARSAND & FORSBERG, 2010). [49]

We are convinced that the direct observation of family practices (especially with video-recordings) and the possibility of comparing these particular "uses" to representations and discourses (also accessible through interviews) about spaces and objects, as well as to other sets of data (photos, maps, tracking of activities), constitute a promising way to account for a complete view of a family's everyday life. However, we want to underscore the relevance of looking at each family as a specific case: as ERTEL (2000, §22) put it, we recognize the sense of the idiographic strategy we adopted "in order to comprehend and appreciate the dynamics within a particular family with its individual features and originality." Based on the integrative view of the design we presented, we highlight how combining different data sources helped prepare the researchers to offer comprehensive feedback to the participants. In fact, the commitment of both communities (in our case, family members and researchers) in, respectively, revealing aspects of everyday life and accounting for the observed practices, can be evaluated via different forms of feedback and reflexivity, involving the participants in the analytical process and the researchers in the restitution of knowledge. With our methodological design, we attempted to create a shared space for both communities, involving both in the different steps of the qualitative research project. This process ensured mutual gain and helped strengthen the participants' access to the outputs of the investigation. [50]

We are aware that further studies are needed to determine to what extent integrating qualitative analysis of verbal exchanges, individual and collective contributions and a visual approach capturing activities over time constitutes a relevant method for investigating the everyday lives of families. [51]

To conclude this article, we underscore the need for a dissolution of the dualism in which objects and subjects are viewed as separate. The combination of multiple sets of data and qualitative analyses represents an added value in the examination of the relational side of materiality. This aspect opens up the possibility of also looking at people's activities through the discourses they offer on spaces and objects by moving through and around them. [52]

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## Appendix: Symbols of Transcription (adapted from JEFFERSON, 1985)

.	falling intonation	abc	stressed syllable
?	rising intonation	:	prolonging of sounds
!	exclaiming intonation	=	contiguous utterances
,	continuing intonation	(.)	pause (less than 0.5 seconds)
ABC	high tone	(2.0)	pause (seconds)
(abc)	talk not easily understandable	-	abrupt cut-off
(( ))	segments added by the transcriber to clarify contextual aspects	[...]	part that has been omitted

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