STRUGGLING FOR SPATIAL AUTHENTICITY:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE TINY HOUSE MOVEMENT

by

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Thesis directed by Professor Jordan Hill

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the Tiny House Movement using a theoretical perspective and concepts derived from Henri Lefebvre’s The Production of Space and ideas from others who have examined spatial phenomena, including Jurgen Habermas and Michel De Certeau. Though this movement is relatively new, the core principles that motivate and underly it are not. Some were articulated by Sarah Susanka in The Not So Big House, while others have stemmed from the tendency for large, nominally public areas within the average home, today, to be seldom utilized for their intended purposes, if at all. The failure of current dominant housing models to meet the evolving needs, both practical and financial, of contemporary users is evident in these conditions and in the growing popular interest in tiny houses. Many tiny house users report that their experience of their own homes is profoundly more fulfilling since downsizing. There are presently, however, major drawbacks and risks, including significant hidden costs as well as legal and practical complications, inherent in living in a tiny house full-time. Consequently, the movement is dependent on the online participation and outspoken display of current voluntary tiny house users, in order to propel its participatory momentum to the critical mass it will require in order to effect the legal change necessary to make tiny house living a viable choice for those most in need of affordable housing. For those who can afford this lifestyle at present, there are numerous potential benefits to “going tiny,” including decreased ongoing costs in time and money, increased
sustainability and mobility, and a realignment of the design of domestic space in accordance with the actual practical needs of the users thereof. The resulting increased spatial authenticity and usability for the users bolsters satisfaction with their domestic space and boosts the representational significance these homes carry. In this way, the Tiny House Movement represents an opportunity to revolutionize and revitalize domestic spatial models in accordance with the actual needs of contemporary users, but is currently a viable option only for those with the education and affluence to choose this lifestyle voluntarily, under current legal conditions.

The form and content of this abstract are approved. I recommend its publication.

Approved: Jordan Hill
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Today’s dominant housing model is no longer suited to the domestic practices of most users, largely due to the fact that many contemporary houses are still based around design elements that rose to prominence over a century ago. The average American house has continued to expand in size, often forcing prospective homeowners to confront the costs of rooms and spaces within the home that they do not need or use. As current housing costs continue to rise and many families in the United States are spending between one-third and one-half of their income on housing,¹ many have begun to look towards alternative models of housing for both financial and practical reasons. One recent expression of the search for new housing models is the Tiny House Movement. With a focus on “human-scale” housing,² these tiny houses are usually under five hundred square feet,³ often built on wheeled trailers, and are usually designed and built to be as sustainable and energy-efficient as possible. Interest in this movement is steadily growing and a plethora of events, television shows, and, in particular, blogs have come to the forefront to discuss and promote the increasingly popular fascination with “going tiny”. There is, however, critical work remaining to be done if the


Tiny House Movement is to achieve the legal recognition and popular implementation that it seeks, and which would allow the potential benefits of this lifestyle to be accessible and affordable for a broader market.

The Tiny House Movement offers a potential opportunity to reconnect the actual needs of the users of domestic space with the design of their homes. In a time when affordable and appropriately scaled housing is often difficult to find, many users are reporting that tiny house living meets their practical and financial needs in ways that more traditional models of housing have failed to satisfy. In order to understand the ways in which tiny houses can offer an increased sense of satisfaction for their users, it will be necessary to examine the role of the users’ actual needs and use of domestic space in informing and defining the design of that space. The interaction of these two elements is generally much more prominent within the tiny house movement than within the current dominant domestic arrangement. This is evident in the fact that many tiny house residents have expressed such an increased sense of satisfaction with their domestic space and with the new unity of design and practice in the way that their tiny houses are built and used, reflecting an increased sense of spatial authenticity for these users.

This thesis will define spatial authenticity as the unification of design with the needs and particular practices of the users of domestic space, and it is a development of concepts first posited by Henri Lefebvre. Because tiny houses represent a reclamation of the primacy of usability for individual user(s) within the design of the home, they provide an opportunity

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for this increased sense of spatial authenticity. Such a state is realized through the users’ ability to recognize their own individuality, in their unique spatial needs and uses, reflected back to them through the intentional practice-based-design of their domestic space. The recognition of one’s own individual identity as manifest in the design of their domestic space is as important to spatial authenticity as the ease with which such space facilitates that user’s activity. In this way, personalized usability and the incorporation of personal identity within the design of the home is critical. Communities designed to accommodate these kinds of houses could potentially result in more usable and vibrant public spaces, in addition to the transformation of private domestic arrangements such changes would yield. The Tiny House Movement, consequently, is an expression of the struggle for spatial authenticity in both private and public space.

While this heightened sense of spatial authenticity is useful in understanding the allure of “going tiny,” for many people the potential authenticity of a tiny house is simply not affordable. This lifestyle is presently only a feasible option for wealthier and better educated individuals, for whom living tiny is not an absolute financial necessity. There are currently a number of financial, as well as practical and legal obstacles to “going tiny” in most parts of the United States. Chief among these is the fact that tiny houses are generally not as
affordable as they might initially seem. Presently, they often cost more, per square foot, than traditional homes and carry numerous hidden costs, such as land on which to place them. As a result, tiny houses are not yet a viable option for most of those who cannot afford more traditional housing. The disproportionate and hidden costs of tiny house living are greatly exacerbated by the risks imposed by their legal status. Even if they were as affordable as they are often perceived to be, their price tag comes with risks not associated with more traditional forms of housing. Such risks stem from the fact that tiny houses are not legal in most areas of the U.S. because they fail to meet minimum space requirements, as well as other zoning and coding restrictions on legal primary residences. These conditions have stifled, and continue to mitigate and obscure, the potential and varied benefits of living in a tiny house. Tiny house living is simply not an option for any without the level of affluence and education required to navigate its complicated costs and legalities. Because of this, and despite widespread popular interest in the Tiny House Movement, relatively few people actually live in tiny houses full-time, today. Instead, many recent tiny house builders seem to be homeowners who are using

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them as second houses on their own land. Consequently, those who do live tiny full-time are, more often than not, those who are able to afford the cash price tag, as well as the financial and legal risks, that such a lifestyle decision entails under present legal conditions.

In order for this to change, the Tiny House Movement’s voluntary participation must continue to grow until its practices have become commonplace enough to force legal changes that accommodate these structures and remove the legal risks implicit in “going tiny”. The momentum of the movement will require a certain critical mass of subversive participation in order to effect the legal change required for more widespread implementation. Because of this, the Tiny House Movement is and will be dependent on more affluent individuals choosing voluntarily to “go tiny,” until the necessary legal changes have been effected. Despite the potential for tiny houses to usher in a new affordable, spatially authentic housing model, present legal conditions have restricted participation in the movement to those wealthy and educated enough to choose this lifestyle, with its inherent risks and complications.

Because many of those choosing to live tiny are also exposing themselves to very real legal and financial risks, their most viable method of presenting their success in “going tiny” is through online blogging. Such participation heightens the risk of legal or financial consequences for the tactical use of tiny houses, which furthers the effect that most who can afford to participate in this visible way are the voluntary tiny individuals of more affluent and educated populations. The satisfaction provided by this kind of visible participation, however, heightens the personal meaning that the space of tiny houses carries for their users,

7 Siebrase, “Tiny houses - Rebelling…”.
making it an important part of the meaning of such domestic space for those individuals. This online display is not only an expressive outlet, but also the primary mechanism through which the movement may hope to gain the additional participation it requires to make the benefits tiny house living attainable and affordable for the wider population. In this way, the visible online participation of current voluntary tiny users is doing the critical work of attempting to open up the possibility of “going tiny” and its benefits, including spatial authenticity, to a broader market in actual need of better and more affordable housing.

The Tiny House Movement exemplifies the fact that many people in America are searching for a sense of spatial authenticity that present domestic arrangements do not provide. Such spatial authenticity can only come from living in a domestic space that is designed to meet the user’s specific and unique needs without imposing disproportionate or undue financial burden. This thesis will argue that, by reconnecting design with practice, tiny house users are able to attain a spatial authenticity that reconnects the purposes these spaces are intended to serve with the design decisions incorporated to facilitate such practices. The recognition of this increased spatial authenticity also heightens the personal significance and meaning that such homes represent for their users. This movement certainly represents one possible opportunity to reimagine the domestic landscape in accordance with the needs of contemporary users in this way, and to reduce the environmental impacts of housing, in the process. It also presents an opportunity to leverage modern manufacturing, modular construction, and other technologies to drive down the costs of homeownership and, thereby,

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to increase the attainability of such for many who cannot currently afford to own their own home. Present legal conditions do, however, require a certain level of education and money, in order to successfully navigate the complex legal and financial requirements of “going tiny”. Tiny house living is simply not an option for any without the level of affluence and education required to navigate its complicated costs and legalities. Consequently, the success of this movement in attaining the widespread legal accommodation it requires is predicated on the voluntary participation of those who can afford the risks and costs of living this way before it is legal, and on the ability of those same volunteers to publicly demonstrate that living in such a small house can be done successfully and to great reward.

The feasibility of “going tiny” is greatly diminished for all but a fairly affluent segment of contemporary society, since the tactical use of tiny houses comes with caveats and risks. Only those who can afford the significant legal and financial gamble of this lifestyle are able to reap its potential benefits. This is only exacerbated by the fact that, despite their improved efficiency and sustainability, many tiny houses still carry a hefty price tag. While they may be only a fraction of the cost of many larger homes, tiny houses represent significant up-front and hidden costs, such as the cost of land on which to place them. Some obvious up-front costs could potentially be minimized by a widely expanded market for such homes, like the mass-produced modular components proposed by Kathryn Schenk, as well as potential new ways of dividing and selling or renting land for the placement of tiny houses. However, when coupled with the risks posed by their tactical nature, under current conditions, tiny houses are simply not a viable affordable alternative for those who truly need such new options. The fact remains that, until the movement has
attained significant legal accommodation, “going tiny” remains a viable option only for those wealthier individuals who can afford the hidden costs and risks implicit in the movement’s tactical nature.

Legal changes are already taking place, in certain areas, and increased participation in the Tiny House Movement can only expedite or encourage such adaptation within regulatory representations of space. The hope of the Tiny House Movement is that its diversionary spatial tactics can find success in creating new spaces for the legal placement of tiny houses, through legal accommodations demanded and won by these tactical practices. Such changes would open up the tiny house market to a wider prospective audience and has the potential to create new, more affordable opportunities to “go tiny.” Small victories of this kind have already been won, as cities like Walsenburg, Colorado and Fresno, California have responded to the increasing popularity of this movement by making legal changes to accommodate tiny houses. If tiny houses are to be allowed in more popular urban areas and major cities, these diversionary tactics will need to reach a level of participation that cannot be ignored, and which will thereby feed back into representations of space by forcing the legal changes that would accommodate their widespread use. Because they are still a potentially significant risk, the population that must shoulder the responsibility for growing the movement’s actual participation to this point must be, primarily, those for whom the risks are affordable and manageable. This requires a certain level of economic status or income, as well as a

necessary level of education and understanding of the legal complications involved and the
tactics that can be most useful in navigating them. This means that, under present conditions,
the only people who can realistically afford to “go tiny” are those who choose to based on
desire rather than economic necessity.

Its reliance on voluntary participation from more affluent individuals in search of a
sense of personal and spatial authenticity puts the Tiny House Movement in a strikingly
similar position to the “new left” described by Doug Rossinow. A significant portion of
current tiny house participants are the actual contemporary remnants of this original new left
movement, as many of those in attendance at the 2016 Tiny House Jamboree in Colorado
Springs were part of this baby boomer age group and demographic. According to Rossinow,
the new left of mid-twentieth century America consisted of “…young white radicals [who]
desired a breakthrough to solidarity with ‘others’ that has remained, from the acme of the
interracial civil rights movement until the present, an ineradicable aspect of the vision of
breakthrough to new, authentic life.”

Like the new left, the voluntarily tiny population is
not necessarily the population that stands to gain the most if the movement is successful in
achieving legal change. Furthermore, the progressive or radical nature of the Tiny House
Movement may, similarly, be less a product of altruistic efforts by the voluntarily tiny
community and more a by-product of these individuals’ struggles for their own personal and
spatial authenticity. “The new left was less an outgrowth of a continuous history of radical
politics in the United States than the evanescent leftist branch of a search for authenticity in

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industrial American life.”11 Supporting this possibility is the lack of radical or revolutionary rhetoric within the voluntarily tiny community online. Those who have successfully transitioned to tiny house living are more often found touting the benefits of this lifestyle for their own happiness than espousing its potential for other, less affluent populations. By participating in the Tiny House Movement, this wealthier, educated population has been able to attain a new authenticity for itself. The increased spatial authenticity these users have achieved by “going tiny” is not, however, limited to this population by anything other than the logistics of current legal circumstances. By subverting these legalities through the use of spatial tactics, the voluntarily tiny population, like the new left, is working, whether intentionally or not, to attain legal changes that would benefit a much wider segment of the population, for whom homeownership is not currently affordable. New manufacturing techniques and the potential for mass-production of modular components means, according to Kathryn Schenk, that tiny houses could potentially offer an affordable and viable new housing model. In order for this to happen, however, such legal accommodations must be made in order to make this lifestyle feasible for a wider market. Although this would open up homeownership to entirely new populations, most of those people cannot, without legal change, afford the hidden costs and risks implicit in “going tiny” today. In the process of seeking their own spatial authenticity, the contemporary remnants of Rossinow’s new left are also doing the tactical work that is required to attain this legal change. In so doing, they are increasing the likelihood that tiny houses, and this kind of spatial authenticity, will one day be attainable for the broader population.

Regardless of the risks and costs, there are definite benefits awaiting those who successfully manage to “go tiny”. Sarah Susanka alludes to the ways in which space that is more usable and personalized can result in greatly increased satisfaction, for the users of such space. This dynamic, too, is exaggerated by the extreme minimalist floorspace of tiny houses, and has a consequent effect on the significance and meaning, for the users, that is embodied by domestic space. Lefebvre refers to this kind of space, that which he describes as “…space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate,” as “representational space,” and goes on to posit that, “it overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects.”

Representational space is laden with meanings which have their origins in the history and memories of the user(s) thereof. Within the limited space of a tiny house, families and couples often spend more time together, making memories. Because tiny houses cannot accommodate as many possessions as larger homes, many users report that they find themselves being more thoughtful about their purchasing and consumption, as well.

Learning what is essential and what can be foregone in one’s life is often an integral and profound part of “going tiny”. The density of memory and corresponding significance within

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12 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 39.


14 Ibid.; Hulleman, "Top 5 Reasons Tiny House People Are Winning…".
the representational space of the tiny home is, simultaneously, often heightened by the increased free time and freedom to pursue one’s own goals and interests that can result from the reduced financial and time burden of a tiny house.\textsuperscript{15} “Having a tiny house is not the goal; the freedom it gives you is…you have to know yourself -- and your needs -- to design a home as personal as a thumbprint, as custom as a tattoo.”\textsuperscript{16} The experience of spatial authenticity that is a product of the direct interaction and close alignment of design with practice also effects the representational meaning that a user inscribes within their domestic space, and herein lies the unity of these three concepts within the Tiny House Movement.

The successful design of any space, whether domestic or public, in conforming to and facilitating the actual needs of its users, results in an experience of spatial authenticity that also contributes directly to that space’s representational significance, and is the fulfillment and actualization of its \textit{raison d’être}. In accordance with the aforementioned limitations inherent in representations of space, tiny houses also preclude the kinds of public interaction that may be possible in a larger home, and in so doing they relegate public life to more properly public spaces. By encouraging users to spend more time outside of the house, domestic representations of space that incorporate tiny houses would most likely increase public participation in those exterior public settings, rather than inside the home. This, in turn, requires more thoughtfully designed community settings that incorporate more


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.}
accessible, available, and usable public spaces, in order to accommodate such increased use.

“No problem feeding the private, nesting impulse with cottage living; but the smaller the
nest, the bigger the balancing need for community.” This also has the potential to invigorate
public, communal spaces through this increased use and consequent added representational
significance. Increased participation within public space raises the likelihood that public
spatial practice will encourage more practice-based-design in these areas.

Because of the current legalities surrounding their use, tiny houses are not, for a
number of reasons, generally visible to the public and, therefore, their successful use can
easily go largely unseen. Despite their diminished stature and often intentionally hidden or
low-visibility placement, however, the success of the Tiny House Movement in reaching new
audiences and encouraging new voluntary tiny users is predicated on its successful
presentation to the public. For this reason, it is no coincidence that the Tiny House
Movement has demonstrated a significant level of media and, most especially, online
participation; its future is dependent on precisely that. The effects of this virtual visibility are
not, however, limited to the furtherance of the movement, as a whole.

Online participation offers an outlet for tiny house users to communicate their
accomplishments in achieving an elevated sense of spatial authenticity. This is particularly
important because tiny houses are not directly expressive, in either their placement or scale,
of the users’ socio-economic status, as more traditionally sized homes are. In contrast to the
fairly one-dimensional expressive content formerly found in the visible scale of one's house,

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17 Ben Brown, ”Livin’ Large in Small Spaces: It Takes a Town,” PlaceShakers.com (blog),
tiny house users are not showing off their own success through the size of their house, but something much more personal. In online display, tiny house users are able to demonstrate their own ingenuity and creativity in design and incorporation of multifunctional and more straightforwardly expressive elements. Tiny houses, consequently, present an opportunity for users to showcase their own individuality and creativity, as well as their success in aligning domestic representations of space with their unique practices and vise-versa. Pride is what sustains the tiny house movement, in this way: pride in the practice-based-design of successful human-scale housing, and pride in the innovation and personalization, made spatially manifest, that makes possible this increased sense of spatial authenticity. The pride one feels in sharing these accomplishments with the online public is part of the representational space of the tiny house.

Current tiny house users’ achievement of spatial authenticity through the creativity and innovation in their personalized practice-based-design, combined with this proud online display, represents the successful unification of the three elements of Lefebvre’s conceptual triad of spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space. The potential success of the Tiny House Movement in attaining the legal change needed for more widespread implementation is, therefore, an opportunity for domestic users to produce a space of their own, designed with representations of space that reflect and facilitate those users’ actual spatial practices. Such spaces, in turn, bear the increased representational significance implicit in that unity. This movement is a reaction to the failure of dominant contemporary domestic designs to adapt to the changing practical and financial needs of the users of those spaces. Through practice-based-design, tiny houses reconnect design with
practice, maximizing usability. Although they are not currently an affordable and accessible alternative, the tactical use of tiny homes, combined with their vocal online display, could potentially change that. If voluntary participation in the Tiny House Movement by the remnants of the new left and educated, working young adults can increase to the point that it effects legal change, this movement has the potential to offer a newly authentic, accessible, and affordable model for homeownership and to revolutionize and revitalize the production of domestic space.

**Literature Review and Methodology**

In order to understand the effects and implications of the Tiny House Movement on domestic and public space, this thesis will utilize a theoretical framework put forth by Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*, as well as principles and ideas from Jurgen Habermas, Michel De Certeau, and Doug Rossinow. It will also make use of ideas posited by contemporary tiny and small house scholars like Sarah Susanka and Kathryn Schenk, both of whom have authored examinations of the design of smaller, more usable houses and of tiny houses, specifically.

Henri Lefebvre’s foundational work in developing spatial theory posits the idea of a dialectic triad consisting of three elements that interact and inform one another throughout a process he refers to as “the production of space.” Together, “spatial practice,” “representations of space,” and “representational spaces” make up this triad and interact in a dynamic that he describes as, “…the dialectical relationship which exists within the triad of the perceived, the conceived, and the lived.”18 According to Lefebvre, the production of

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18 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 39.
space is grounded in the interaction between these three elements, and this paper will argue that the successful interaction or unity of the three is the sense of spatial authenticity towards which many tiny house users strive, primarily through thoughtful design that is based in the unique individual practices of the particular users of domestic space.

The first of these three concepts, spatial practice, is the actual use made of space by the users. Lefebvre claims that, “the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of it’s space.” Upon the examination of most contemporary American homes, however, one may discover a significant amount of neglected or unused space, and the historical origins of some of the most neglected rooms in the common home date back to well over a century ago. The historical genesis of these rooms is the rise of the bourgeois public described by Jurgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.* Herein, Habermas discusses the ways in which newfound public participation of private individuals in bourgeois society found a spatial expression in rooms like the “salon,” in which, “…private people…assembled to constitute a public…” Despite a shift in public activity and participation towards virtual and online realms and otherwise out of the domestic space of the house, generally, most houses today feature rooms initially designed for the purpose of accommodating and facilitating these “public” practices. In the words of Sarah

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19 Ibid., 38.


Susanka, “one hundred years later, these formal areas still define the house,” but these spaces often go largely unused. Most tiny houses, by contrast, tend to exclude these formal settings and seldom used rooms, still present in so many houses today, in favor of more usable and specifically private space. This effort could be described by Susanka’s assertion that, “it’s time to rethink our houses and to let them become expressions of the way we really live.” This assertion rests on the observation that the design of contemporary homes is no longer suited to the actual spatial practices of domestic users. Susanka’s claim that the design of domestic spaces should be reoriented around these practices is echoed in the principles of the Tiny House Movement, and is central to the concept of spatial authenticity.

Tiny houses present an opportunity to reclaim the role of the users’ actual practices and needs in shaping the representations of space that define the design of those users’ homes. Lefebvre refers to representations of space as “conceptualized space,” and describes the concept as “the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, and…the dominant space in any society (or mode of production).” Though his formulation of this concept includes many different aspects, the most useful for this paper are the representations of space constituted by the design of the home, as well as those representations of space put forth by tiny house residents and enthusiasts in displaying the potential benefits and drawbacks of “going tiny”. With respect to the former category, representations of space play a pivotal role in restricting and defining the practices that a space can or does facilitate. “Space commands bodies,


prescribing or proscribing gestures...It is produced with this purpose in mind; this is its *raison d'être.*”

In order to get the most usability out of limited available space, tiny house users display an overwhelming focus on multi-functionality within the home and the creativity, ingenuity, and innovation required to design a house that can accommodate the breadth of their domestic practice within such a limited space. In Lefebvre’s formulation, the current disconnect between design and practice is articulated as a “silence of the users,” and it is the crisis of spatial authenticity that those same users experience, as a direct consequence of this silence, that practice-based-design seeks to remedy. Through the direct input of users and the customized designs of many tiny houses, practice-based-design is employed to reconnect practice with representations of space.

The idea of spatial authenticity is grounded in the concepts of spatial practice and representations of space posited by Lefebvre. The “silence of the users” that Lefebvre describes is the primary source of the crisis of domestic spatial authenticity that exists within current dominant domestic models. Tiny houses, especially those that are custom designed for their specific user(s), represent an opportunity to re-establish a direct dialectic between these two concepts, reinvigorating the usability and consequent satisfaction that tiny houses offer their users. Even ready-made tiny houses can offer some increase in spatial authenticity, however, by eliminating the disconnect between the practices of the users and the spatial remnants of outdated historical domestic practices that still predominate many contemporary homes, and thereby eliminating or reducing the undue financial and practical burden that

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25 Ibid., 143.

26 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 51.
such unnecessary spaces impose. This necessitates a de-emphasis on houses, as commodities, and a reinvigoration of the role of spatial practice within domestic representations of space, making the concept of spatial authenticity primarily oriented towards use-value for the actual and particular users of that space.

Because they serve primarily to prohibit or restrict certain practices, not only with respect to individual houses but also of larger districts and whole cities, representations of space also play an important role in determining and codifying the legal uses of space. They inform and specify both the design of individual homes and the layout and design of the communities in which they are located. This dynamic can be seen in the case of zoning laws and other legal restrictions that tiny houses confront and seek to subvert. Insofar as they are a central part of the restrictions on spatial practice that any space imposes, Lefebvre also says that, “representations of space must therefore have a substantial role and a specific influence in the production of space.”27 In this context, the specific representations of space that exercise such a profound influence over the designs of current dominant domestic arrangements have betrayed a failure to keep-pace with the changing practical needs of today’s users. They have also demonstrated a disproportionate focus on houses specifically as commodities for sale and resale, and these are two of the primary conditions, within the production of domestic space, that the Tiny House Movement is seeking to correct.

The principles behind the Tiny House Movement are not, themselves, new. Before the current movement came to the fore, Sarah Susanka put forth ideas about reconnecting design and practice in her book, The Not So Big House. Here, Susanka argues that the limited

27 Ibid., 42.
financial resources of any prospective home buyer would be better utilized in customized smaller homes. These “not so big houses” trade size for custom-designed spaces that facilitate domestic users’ actual practices and, consequently, will get used for their intended purposes with greater frequency and to greater satisfaction. “What makes the Not So Big concept work is that superfluous square footage is traded for less tangible but more meaningful aspects of design that are about beauty, self-expression, and the enhancement of life.”

While these principles are evident in the Tiny House Movement, the lifestyle of “living tiny” takes these ideas to their most extreme, asking not only how domestic space can better serve the particular practices of the specific users, but going one step further to ask just how many of these varying activities can be adequately served by the same space. In the process, by minimizing the resources required to build, power, and maintain a tiny house, the movement is also reacting against a current overemphasis on housing as a commodity. In this way, it is attempting to recenter domestic representations of space around practicality and versatility of use, as well as the creativity and innovation in achieving such. In the process, the Tiny House Movement is simultaneously advocating for, and developing, housing that is more affordable and sustainable.

In order to accomplish its goal of legal change, the voluntarily tiny community makes use of Lefebvre’s concept of “diversion,” through the use of what De Certeau calls “spatial tactics”. Aligning the design of public and private spaces with the users’ actual practices

28 Susanka and Obolensky, The Not So Big House, 24-25.

29 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 167.

can lead to denser and more vibrant representational space, through increased use and its consequent appreciation by users. If not done successfully, however, as would seem to be the case with dominant and outdated contemporary housing models, a space can be left empty, hollow, “vacant, and susceptible of being diverted, reappropriated and put to a use quite different from its initial one.” This dynamic, which Lefebvre calls “diversion,” is essential to the production of space, and is, in the case of the Tiny House Movement, performed quite intentionally. This is accomplished largely through the use of “spatial tactics,” including the practice of locating tiny houses in areas where they are not strictly legal, in direct defiance of legally established representations of space. A concept developed by De Certeau, spatial tactics are a category of subversive practice which he describes by saying, “although they are dependent upon the possibilities offered by circumstances, these transverse tactics do not obey the law of the place, for they are not defined or identified by it.” Although often not illegal outright, tiny houses fail to conform to a number of use-restrictions and zoning rules in most districts, and most members of the movement address these issues in similar ways, which almost always conform to this articulation of tactics. In many cases, tiny houses are built on wheeled trailers, which has the added benefit of increased mobility. Many tiny house users cite their ability to take their home with them if they have to move to another city or state as a primary perk of choosing this lifestyle in an increasingly mobile world and economy, but it also has its own drawbacks. While not necessarily a legal way to build a permanent legal residence, this tactic also effectively places wheeled tiny houses in a sort of

31 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 167.

little-defined legal grey area, negating the need to meet certain requirements while potentially replacing them with others. Similarly, tiny houses are often used in areas where their placement is not legal, but are intentionally located out of sight of authorities, or are co-located on another’s land with permission. Such spatial tactics exemplify the way in which diversion of existing spaces can be accomplished through clever navigation of the restrictions imposed by legal representations of space. Though their use is not a solution to the legal and practical barriers of “going tiny,” they demonstrate the way in which participation in tactical spatial practice can begin to insinuate new diversionary uses of space into the existing landscape, with the hope that such uses will eventually reach a critical mass of participation that allows them to gain legal recognition and accommodation.

Because they exclude many nominally public spaces included in more traditional homes, the separation of public and private is critical to the Tiny House Movement. In order to fully understand the spatial significance of the distinction between public and private, which is a critical component of tiny house living, it is first necessary to gain some insight into the historical origins of public life, more generally. Jurgen Habermas argues that the “public”, as commonly conceived-of today, originated in the bourgeois class as an educated and conversant community that arose in fundamental opposition to the governing body of the state:

…state authorities evoked a resonance leading the publicum, the abstract counterpart of public authority, into an awareness of itself as the latter’s opponent, that is, as the public of the now emerging public sphere of civil society. For the latter developed to the extent to which the public concern regarding the private sphere of civil society was no longer confined to the
authorities but was considered by the subjects as one that was properly theirs.\textsuperscript{33}

Harbermas’ characterization of this emerging “public” is significant not only in its framing as the abstract representation of the populace in opposition to governing forces but, as will become especially important later, in its focus on the locus of this “public” specifically as within the educated and monied “bourgeois” class of the day. This is evident when he says that, “the authorities addressed their promulgations to “the” public, that is, in principle to all subjects. Usually they did not reach the “common man” in this way, but at best the “educated classes.”\textsuperscript{34} Habermas goes on to say that, “this stratum of ‘Bourgeois’ was the real carrier of the public, which from the outset was a reading public.”\textsuperscript{35} The spatial significance of this idea lies chiefly in the fact that, through the force of their economic and political participation, this bourgeois “public” engaged productive and governing forces of the economy and state in a dialectic conversation: “…through the vehicle of public opinion it put the state in touch with the needs of society.”\textsuperscript{36}

Before long, according to Habermas, the emergence of this new public life began to make itself apparent in the production of domestic space, itself: Private homes quickly began to include interior spaces devoted to, and in turn reflective of, the public aspects of private individuals’ lives. Through this transformation, “…the family room became a reception room in which private people gather to form a public…. ‘The most imposing room in the

\textsuperscript{33} Habermas, \textit{The Structural Transformation}, 23.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 31.
distinguished bourgeois home…is reserved for a completely novel chamber: the salon …

[original ellipsis] yet this salon does not serve the ‘house’ — but ‘society’…”37 With the inclusion of such salon rooms and gathering spaces, bourgeois domestic space came to reflect the dichotomous public and private aspects of the users’ lives and, indeed, their very identities. In this way, the private home became an amalgamation of public and private spaces and, “the line between private and public sphere extended right through the home.”38

The increasingly prominent presence of public life in the domestic sphere, however, had consequences on both the identity of those designated public spaces within the home, as well as on the nature of privacy, itself. Participation in public life within the domestic sphere implied the, at least intermittent, presence of an outside audience in close proximity to the most private of spaces. This, in turn, led to increased visibility of formerly private space, a degeneration that Lefebvre warned is counter-productive to the users’ actual needs, and which he argued conflates the purposes and nature of public and private spaces, respectively.

…the visual space of transparency and readability has a content… It is at the same time a repressive space: nothing in it escapes the surveillance of power. Everything opaque, all kinds of partitions, even walls simplified to the point of mere drapery, are destined to disappear. This disposition of things is diametrically opposed to the real requirements of the present situation. The sphere of private life ought to be enclosed, and have a finite, or finished, aspect. Public space, by contrast, ought to be an opening outwards. What we see happening is just the opposite.39

37 W.H Riehl, Die Familie, 10th Ed. (Stuttgart, 1889), 185, quoted in Jurgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989), 45.

38 Habermas, The Structural Transformation, 45.

39 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 147.
The private home became a public representation of the individual user and, “the intimate sphere dissolved before the gaze of the ‘group’…” The “gaze of the ‘group’” is here reminiscent of a dynamic described by Lefebvre, in which visibility has led to a breakdown of the properly private domain. Of course, the complete separation of public and private would seem nearly impossible. As Habermas posits, “subjectivity, as the innermost core of the private, was always already oriented to an audience.” When viewed in this light, it is apparent that even the private spaces of the bourgeois home necessarily took on, within this spatial arrangement, an element of publicity, themselves. The result was and is a lack of properly “…private spaces, which are acoustically or visually separate from the open areas.” The intermingling of public and private in space is by no means unique to any one particular culture. Lefebvre cites Japanese housing models as an illustration of perhaps a more well-adapted harmony between public and private spaces and their overlap when he says of them that “The ‘public’ realm, the realm of temple or palace, has private and ‘mixed’ aspects, while the ‘private’ house or dwelling has public (e.g. reception rooms) and ‘mixed’ ones.”

While Habermas seems to assert that this dynamic of intermingling, itself, is unavoidable, the encroachment of public visibility into private space must maintain a certain balance in order to avoid distorting the inherent relationship between the two. Such over-

41 Habermas, The Structural Transformation, 49.
42 Susanka and Obolensky, The Not So Big House, 39.
43 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 153.
visibility and under-enclosure of private space is what Lefebvre took care to admonish against:

…the relationship between private and public is now fundamental: today the global picture includes both these aspects, along with their relationship… The East may have something to teach the West in this regard, for the ‘Asiatic mode of production’ was always more apt to take ‘private’ residence into consideration. At all events, the categories of private and public and the contrast between monuments and buildings must henceforth be integral to our paradigm.\[44\]

With any increasing presence of a public audience within the home, even those specifically private spaces within the domestic domain exhibit a uniquely, if only partially, public character. The consequences of this dynamic can be seen in the modern tendency to view the house as a status symbol and as the physical manifestation and demonstration of wealth and status. Such intentional and clear signification — what Lefebvre calls “readability” — takes on a uniquely inauthentic or even deceptive character, however. This is precisely because of the fact that such spaces are produced primarily to be read, rather than as an organic outgrowth of the practical needs of the users of such space: “It turns out on close examination that spaces made (produced) to be read are the most deceptive and tricked-up imaginable. The graphic impression of readability…concealing strategic intentions and actions.”\[45\] The blurring of the lines — literal and spatial as much as metaphorical — between public and private \textit{spaces} also had a deleterious effect on the distinction between public and private life, which Habermas characterizes as “…the disintegration of that specific portion of the private realm within which private people, assembled to constitute a public and to

\[44\] Ibid., 159.

\[45\] Lefebvre, \textit{The Production of Space}, 143.
regulate those aspects of their commerce with each other that were of general concern, 
namely, the public sphere in its liberal form.”⁴⁶ This disintegration of the once-new public 
reflected a corresponding degradation of private life, its counterpart, as “…the private sphere 
itself became deprivatized.”⁴⁷

Because this bourgeois public was necessarily private, the collapse of public and 
private identity into one another represented the loss of both these distinct categories. The 
bourgeois public of Habermas defined itself in opposition to governing forces, and was 
therefore dependent upon the privacy of the space in which it conducted its public activity for 
its protection and continued existence. Despite the loss of both distinct categories, the spatial 
legacy of this private public continues to this day. “If the element of distance that is 
constitutive of the public sphere is eliminated, if its members are in too close touch, the 
public sphere is transformed into a mass…The reciprocity of the public and the private 
spheres is disturbed.”⁴⁸ This disturbance has been, more recently, accelerated and 
exacerbated by the ever-increasing intrusion of mass-media, and with it economic and 
commodity consumption, into domestic space:

When the laws of the market governing the sphere of commodity exchange 
and of social labor also pervaded the sphere reserved for private people as a 
public, rational-critical debate had a tendency to be replaced by consumption, 
and the web of public communication unraveled into acts of individuated 
reception, however uniform in mode. Through this development the privacy 
that had its referent in the public as audience was turned into a travesty.⁴⁹

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⁴⁶ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, 142.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 152.


⁴⁹ Ibid., 161.
This “travesty”, as Habermas calls it, is the social origin of what may properly be called pseudo-public spaces within the domestic interior.

Such spaces no longer serve a truly public function, in the sense that Habermas’ bourgeois public was a thinking, debating public of transformative thought and collective action. Instead, they continue to bear the formal, physical, spatial hallmarks of public life despite the fact that the public activities that previously served as the genesis of such spaces have been largely replaced, within the home, by passive reception of mass-media and consumption behavior, more generally. “The deprivatized province of interiority was hollowed out by mass media; a pseudo-public sphere of a no longer literary public was patched together to create a sort of superfamilial zone of familiarity.”

This characterization of consumption behavior is strikingly similar to Lefebvre’s description in which, “the television viewer cannot write anything on the screen of his set. He has been dislodged from the product; he plays no role in its apparition. He loses his author’s rights and becomes, or so it seems, a pure receiver…” Given this, it should come as no surprise that television viewing is a common adaptive use of many of these residual pseudo-public domestic spaces, though even television viewing has come to demand its own specific space, while residual pseudo-public spaces — like the salon or formal living or dining room, often remain alongside them.

It is precisely these pseudo-public areas of the home that are the continuing spatial legacy of now the defunct bourgeois public of Habermas, the preponderance of which still

50 Ibid., 162.

dominate domestic space today. Despite the practices and social realities that were the impetus for the creation of such public spaces having, if not completed disintegrated, at least migrated to a new locus in contemporary American culture, “one hundred years later, these formal areas still define the house. It’s as if visitors are presented with a stage set, while the people who live there spend their time backstage.”\textsuperscript{52} The evidence of this disuse is abundant, and frequently referenced in articles like “Residential Behavioral Architecture 101,” which cites a UCLA study that tracked the movement of 32 families within their homes, the results of which were characterized by the statement, “We estimate that around 400 or so square feet of those 1000 [the total area of the first floor, which does not include bedrooms, of the house in this example] are actually used with any regularity.”\textsuperscript{53} What’s more, the rooms that showed the most use were the kitchen and family room, with nearly as many incidents of use being recorded on the stairs between the first and second floor as those recorded in the formal living room. In her article, “Formal living rooms, McMansions a thing of the past,” Wendy Koch cites a survey completed by the National Association of Home Builders, in which “four out of five, or 82\%, of those surveyed expect this room [the formal living room] will vanish or become merged with other spaces.”\textsuperscript{54}

Such disuse is characteristic of a domestic spatial arrangement that has outlived the practices that were its very origin. Even the function of entertaining guests in the home seems

\textsuperscript{52} Susanka and Obolensky, \textit{The Not So Big House}, 30.

\textsuperscript{53} Friedlander, “Residential Behavioral Architecture 101.”

to have migrated away from these formal sitting rooms, towards the kitchen area. Architect
and author of *The Not So Big House*, Sarah Susanka, illustrates this by describing a party she
attended where, “during the entire party, the living room remained vacant except for the
occasional guest who walked through to admire the art as if viewing pictures in a museum.
Even the dining room, which was filled with a splendid display of food, was empty. Where
was everybody? Crowded into the kitchen…”55 The historical origins and obsolete function
of these kinds of pseudo-public spaces are a central preoccupation with her characterization
of the changing needs of the users of domestic space, as she asserts that, “although life at the
end of the 20th century is quite informal, Emily Post still rules over the floorplans of our
houses, making sure that they mind their manners,” and then goes on to claim that, “at the
turn of the new century, most houses are designed for the turn of the last.”56

Adaptation of domestic spaces for new practical functions, without any real change in
the overall arrangement and design of the home to cater to these new functions, is a dynamic
that Lefebvre calls “diversion”.

An existing space may outlive its original purpose and the *raison d’être* which
determines its forms, functions, and structures; it may thus in a sense become
vacant, and susceptible of being diverted, reappropriated and put to a use quite
different from its initial one. …The diversion and reappropriation of space are
of great significance, for they teach us much about the production of new
spaces.57

Susanka’s articulation that “most of us tend to entertain our friends in the family room; a
formal dining room becomes a mail sorting place, and a formal living room is a museum for

57 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 167.
curios and uncomfortable furniture,” is pertinent to Lefebvre’s concept of diversion in two major ways. The first, and more obvious, is that it indicates a disruption in the production of domestic space, in that such home production has not yet properly adapted to new domestic practices and away from the old function that the salon served in Habermas’ bourgeois society. The second is that the primary functions of these residual pseudo-public spaces in the home have migrated outside of the domestic sphere entirely, or simply been combined into the functions of other existing rooms in the house, leaving rooms like the formal salon, parlor, or dining room — in the formulation of Lefebvre — vacant, with any ad-hoc diversion of such spaces — as in Susanka’s example, as a “mail sorting place” — being, at best, activities that could just as easily be done elsewhere within the home. Despite this, however, the inclusion, or even prominence, of pseudo-public rooms in the design of newly built homes persists, to this day.

Of course, there is always some latency period to be expected between the emergence of new uses of space, primarily through diversion, and the consequent production of new spaces intended to suit the particular needs of such new practices. “Like all social space, spatial practice is lived directly before it is conceptualized; but the speculative primacy of the conceived over the lived causes practice to disappear along with life, and so does very little justice to the ‘unconscious’ level of lived experience per se.” One may expect a delay between the emergence of new practices and the subsequent adaptation of spatial arrangements designed specifically to suit those new functions, since new uses cannot but

59 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 34.
emerge within already-existing arrangements. However, as Lefebvre articulates, the fact that such latency is entirely expected does little to alleviate the disconnect between design and practice for the users, in the meantime.

How much longer can diversionary uses or vacancy of such pseudo-public domestic spaces can be expected to satisfy the users of such spaces, before the chasm between practice and design becomes too wide and too long-standing to continue to suffice, as such? This disconnect between what Lefebvre calls the “spatial practice” of the users and “representations of space” that govern the design and formal arrangements of produced domestic space is what he refers to as “…the silence of the ‘users’ of this space.”

Lefebvre asks, “why do they [the users] allow themselves to be manipulated in ways so damaging to their spaces and their daily life without embarking on massive revolts?” It is this very “silence of the users” that is the primary source of the crisis of spatial authenticity that confronts the users of contemporary domestic space in America, today, and is a subject to which this paper will continually return. The socio-economic and political factors that have served to preserve the production of outdated models of domestic space will be examined in closer detail further on. For now, it shall suffice to have established how contemporary domestic arrangements, with particular respect to pseudo-public spaces within the home, came to be. Even more important is the fact that they have failed to adapt to the evolving needs of their users, for this is how it came to be the case that, in the words of Le Corbusier,

60 Ibid., 51.
61 Ibid.
“...men live in old houses and they have not yet thought of building houses adapted to themselves.”

The theoretical basis for this analysis is grounded in concepts first articulated by Lefebvre, and according to which the concept of specifically spatial authenticity is developed. While many conceptions of authenticity, generally, have been posited over time and have been largely unsatisfactory, this more general conception is outside of the scope of this analysis. Spatial authenticity, however, as the unification of the Lefebvre’s conceptual triad, is recognizable in the alignment and communication between spatial practice and design in a domestic space of which the end user can properly be said to be the author, as well as in the increased meaning that a user consequently assigns to such space.

The predominance of primary sources on tiny houses online and in blogs is significant, in its own right, as it indicates a partial migration of certain functional elements of domestic space towards the digital realm, and in turn highlights that the Tiny House Movement, as it currently stands, exists largely online. The research methodology for this paper has been primarily conducted online and in-person, with a focus on firsthand accounts of tiny house users. Though I attended the annual Tiny House Jamboree in Colorado Springs, and also visited a tiny house being used tactically in Suburban Denver, the majority of primary source material I found consisted of online, firsthand accounts of tiny house users in blogs and on tiny house themed websites. Newspaper and other online articles profiling and interviewing such subjects were also common, but the theme of tiny houses in online space pervaded even these common source types, making written accounts of tiny house living

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difficult to find anywhere other than the internet. Such intentional online participation is not only common within this movement, but seems to be the primary mechanism through which the Tiny House Movement is able to broadcast its successes and failures in ways that can encourage and inform prospective and current tiny house users. The abundance of pride many of these users feel is evident in their accounts, and this transference of the communicative aspects of domestic space is significant. Tiny houses lack the directly communicative visibility and scale that more traditionally sized homes display as representative of the users’ success or socioeconomic status. It seems, instead, that the online display of users’ ingenuity and creativity in design has supplanted such characteristics and resulted in a consequent migration of these communicative aspects into online space. It is fair to say, therefore, that, at least with respect to the public-as-audience, the Tiny House Movement exists primarily online.

The significance of the online existence of the Tiny House Movement, therefore, should not be overlooked. As the costly effects of the over-fixation with housing, as a commodity, continue to make themselves apparent in the contemporary housing market and its crisis of spatial authenticity, the migration of such communicative aspects of domestic space to the online realm is truly revolutionary. While eliminating arguably superfluous and pseudo-public spaces within the home, and along with them the readable scale and visibility of more traditional homes, tiny house users have found a suitable outlet for those communicative functions formerly performed by these elements, and one which comes free-of-charge. Instead of paying for scale and unnecessary rooms, tiny house users have highlighted the ways in which online space can be leveraged to minimize the functional and
felt absence of these formerly ubiquitous spaces and the large homes that include them. In keeping with the principles of practice-based-design, the Tiny House Movement represents the realization that certain functions formerly performed by domestic space can now be achieved entirely online, at great cost-savings to the user. This is how, quite impressively, the Tiny House Movement is able to make its presence felt by so many today, despite the fact that relatively few people have ever actually seen a tiny house, in person. Consequently, this movement constitutes a partial migration of the functions domestic space, particularly with regard to its readability towards the public, as an audience, into online space.
CHAPTER II

PERSONAL IDENTITY, DESIGN, AND SPATIAL AUTHENTICITY

“The primordial instinct of every human being is to assure himself of a shelter. The various classes of workers in society to-day no longer have dwellings adapted to their needs; neither the artisan nor the intellectual.”

— Le Corbusier

For decades, and until very recently, average home-sizes in America have grown significantly. This has occurred even as the average occupancy of those same homes, and homes worldwide, has decreased. Although the square footage of these large homes is impressive, the arrangement and consequent size of most domestic spaces is a remnant of historical use that is no longer well-suited to the practices of most individual users in their daily lives, today. While sitting rooms and formal dining rooms continue to dominate the floor plans of many Americans’ homes, there is very little call for such pseudo-public spaces in contemporary domestic practice. The very presence of these rooms and spaces brings practical and theoretical issues to the fore about the nature and purpose of domestic space and its relationship to the identity of the user(s). Simultaneously, it distorts the relationship between what Lefebvre calls “spatial practice” and “representations of space”. This chapter will attempt to illuminate the relationship between personal identity and domestic space which has contributed to a contemporary crisis of spatial authenticity, and will go on to posit


that this situation presents an opportunity to create and foster a new authenticity for the users, within the production of such domestic space.

**Domestic Space and Personal Identity**

Before delving into the details of a spatial analysis of domestic spaces, and tiny homes more specifically, it will be prudent to examine the relationship between domestic space and personal identity. In general social terms, the cityscape, as a whole, can be interpreted as the physical, spatial manifestation of the practices and functions served by that space, itself. “From the analytic standpoint, the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space.” While one must bear in mind that this practical expression is always mediated by cultural, political, and economic forces, the same approach may be taken with respect to the analysis of domestic space for the particular individual users. The spatial arrangement of an urban landscape may be analyzed, in part, as a necessary extension of that culture’s composition and activity. The same may be said, regarding private domestic space: that it reflects and represents, even as it simultaneously shapes, the compositional and practical identity of the individual user(s) of such a dwelling. “… Psychologists connect sense of place to personal identity and recollection…” and there is, consequently, an explicit connection between sense of place, specifically in the domestic realm, and personal identity.

Interestingly, there is little historical literature on the evolution of sense of place over time, and the processes through which past generations made the environments where they lived part of their individual and community

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65 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 58.

identities. Though historians at the turn of the century such as Frederick Jackson Turner pioneered the study of how Americans interacted with particular environments to produce distinctive, place-based local and regional identities, the historical profession in subsequent years by and large abandoned this study, assuming instead that the nation’s high degree of geographical mobility, the centralization of economic and political power under modern capitalism, and the spread of a standardized, interchangeable, instant architecture had left Americans with a sense of “placelessness” — a feeling of belonging in no particular place.67

In this context, such a sense of belonging may be related to the spatial instantiation of the user’s individual practices and, as such, their unique personal priorities and identity.

Furthermore, this “feeling of belonging” has significant ramifications, with respect to the individual user’s overall orientation towards the spaces of daily life, and is intimately connected to the idea of domestic space as a space of one’s own. Mircea Eliade articulates this orientational quality of what he calls “sacred space” in his claim that, “if the world is to be lived in, it must be founded — and no world can come to birth in the chaos of the homogeneity and relativity of profane space. The discovery or projection of a fixed point — the center — is equivalent to the creation of the world…”68 Le Corbusier articulates, in similar fashion, his position that “…the house has always been the indispensable and first tool that he [man] has forged for himself.”69

These two thinkers both posit ideas of domestic space as instrumental means, in both the immediate practical sense as well as in the deeper orientational sense described by Eliade. The idea of domestic space as an orientational “fixed point” alludes to the importance of such

67 Ibid., 18, footnote 17.


69 Le Corbusier, Towards a New Architecture, 17.
space as being integral to one’s experience and interpretation of “the homogeneity and relativity of profane space.” This belies the importance of the domestic dwelling as critical to one’s mode of relating to the world and, therefore, their very identity. In the same way that the sacred space of the home stands in confrontation and opposition to the exteriority of profane space, so too does the personal projection of one’s identity within and upon the domestic realm stand in direct confrontation with the exteriority of the city at large. The city is, compositionally, a product of collective social, political, and economic forces over which no individual user can be said to have direct control or dominion. “…A city does not present itself in the same way as a flower, ignorant of its own beauty. It has, after all, been ‘composed’ by people, by well-defined groups. All the same, it has none of the intentional character of an ‘art object’.”\(^{70}\) However, the “intentional character” that Lefebvre here associates with art is not necessarily absent, within particular domestic spaces, as it is in the city as a whole. In keeping with this, he also asserts that “the dwelling passes everywhere for a special, still sacred, quasi-religious and in fact almost absolute space,”\(^{71}\) and goes on to make the stronger claim that “the relationship between Home and Ego, meanwhile, borders on identity.”\(^{72}\)

Without yet considering the design, architecture, and construction of the home, itself, this relationship between domestic space and identity becomes apparent even at the level of interior decorating. The arrangement, maintenance, and potential constant rearrangement of

\(^{70}\) Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 74.

\(^{71}\) Ibid., 121.

\(^{72}\) Ibid.
the residential interior betrays the intimate correlation between the identity of the user and the composition and form of domestic space, even at this most basic level. By conscious inclusion and exclusion, as well as by physical organization or placement, the user chooses what features to incorporate not only into the living space, but also into this spatial manifestation of the identity of the occupant. “Any determinate and hence demarcated space necessarily embraces some things and excludes others; what it rejects may be relegated to nostalgia or it may be simple forbidden. Such a space asserts, negates, and denies.” It is worth noting that some such interior design decisions are within the reach of even those users who rent, and do not own, the domestic space they occupy.

Through the consumption of goods with which to construct a home, through choices regarding its decoration and through direct productive work resulting in ornamentation and display, women increasingly became the key progenitors of the meaning that came to be embedded within the domestic interior. In that process of elaboration women found a means not only of representing the dominant cultural themes of the day … but of externalising [sic] ‘themselves’. As a result, their homes became material manifestations of their personal identities.

Although Penny Sparke frames this dynamic with respect to women specifically, it is certainly more generally applicable in the contemporary domestic setting. The dynamic illustrated by Sparke is reminiscent of Le Corbusier’s statement that, “arrangement is the graduation of aims, the classification of intentions.” The arrangement of the domestic interior is a reflection of the priorities and values of the user. Through the inclusion, in this

73 Ibid., 99.


75 Le Corbusier, Towards a New Architecture, 11.
description, of “dominant cultural themes of the day,” it once again becomes evident that the private and public domains cannot attain full mutual exclusion and are always intermingled to varying extents. As such, “private space is distinct from, but always connected with, public space.”

It is also significant that the physical apparatus of the home environment is still necessarily shaped, in part, by the practical and biological needs of the human animal. In this way, many objects in the home still refer, quite directly, to the physical makeup and tangible identity of the occupant. Still others refer to the dominant cultural and political forces of their larger social setting which, too, are incorporated as aspects of any individual’s personal identity, again to varying extents. Domestic space is therefore, like personal identity itself, characterized by a tension created by the necessary (innate) and elective (learned) elements of the occupant’s constitution attempting to reconcile themselves against the external social forces that constantly exert their influence upon, and thereby mediate, the composition and expression of both of the former elements. “Cities arise out of man’s social needs and multiply both their modes and their methods of expression. In the city remote forces and influences intermingle with the local: their conflicts are no less significant than their harmonies.” With respect to this tension, the domestic spatial arrangement can be productively viewed as mirroring the dualistic Freudian model of the human psyche, as alluded to by Lefebvre’s comparison of the relationship between home and identity to the ego. Much like the Freudian interaction of id and super-ego, the home environment, as ego,

76 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 166.

represents a synthesis of private and public influence. The degree of success or failure, which includes Lefebvre’s “silence of the users”, in their reconciliation is the crux of the issue of spatial authenticity, a concept that will be more fully articulated in the next section of this chapter.

While the comparison to Freudian models of psychology is useful in understanding the productive tension at play within domestic space and the individual, it also illuminates the external social, economic, and political pressures that are constantly informing the way any individual may choose to express him- or her- self through the domestic spatial arrangement. External pressures such as these are undoubtedly the culprit in the growth of the average American home, since this general trend toward increased size does not seem to have manifested in response to contemporary or even historically recent spatial practices. The need to display one’s own status and wealth through the size of their home is born, instead, out of cultural influence, and is characterized by a specifically communicative instrumentality, which Lefebvre calls “readability,” rather than practical value. The need for such readable size, however, is inherently limiting in its own right, since size costs money and anyone with a limited budget will consequently have to choose, at some point, between size and personalization. Personalization, in this sense, refers to the specific instrumental utility of an individual’s dwelling and its various elements in that specific user’s unique practices, in addition to the more obvious sense of expressing users’ varying personal aesthetic preferences. Economic considerations in the means of construction and production have continually homogenized the latter as the means and methods of the physical construction of domestic space have become increasingly mechanical.
It is obvious, sad to say, that repetition has everywhere defeated uniqueness, that the artificial and contrived have driven all spontaneity and naturalness from the field, and, in short, that products have vanquished works. Repetitious spaces are the outcome of repetitive gestures (those of the workers) associated with instruments which are both duplicatable and designed to duplicate: machines, bull-dozers, concrete-mixers, cranes, pneumatic drills, and so on. …are… homogeneous so that they can be exchanged, bought and sold, with the only differences between them being those assessable in money…

It is this increasing mechanization and the efficiency-oriented economy of mass production that has taken customization and personalization as its primary victim. While this is surely true in both the properly public and the private domestic spheres, the latter is particularly susceptible, as the needs of individual users of domestic space vary much more greatly than the inherent plurality that public spaces and their corresponding users and practices necessarily demand.

The degree to which individuation of personal identity and the expression thereof is possible through the production of domestic space has been lessened by economic forces acting on the means of production. Loss of personalized use-value and, therefore, individuality in domestic space is not unexpected, in this sense, but neither is it unavoidable. Instead, it is a consequence of a growing conception of domestic space that is overly concerned with such space specifically as a commodity for exchange. This growing conception has increasingly failed to adequately cater to the qualitative variability required to meet the differing specific needs of many individual users who, themselves, collectively constitute the market to which such commodities are ostensibly supposed to appeal. “This is what happens when commodities acquire social meanings through advertising and marketing;

78 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 75.
they become cultural more than functional goods, with symbolic meanings that grow separated from and more important than the reality of the commodity’s production.”

Instead of catering to the instrumental requirements of the consumers and users of domestic space, contemporary housing models have increasingly been focused on the ability to be mass-produced as efficiently as possible, in order to increase profit margins, and to be as generic as possible, in order to facilitate or ease sale, resale, and further exchange of space as a commodity. Such houses are simultaneously being designed to exhibit readable scale and size, in order to be tangible and intelligible manifestations of personal wealth and status in space. Each of these functions is oriented more towards the market and the public as a whole than to any individual user and their unique needs, whether those needs be expressive or functionally practical, and “…appearances and illusion are located not in the use made of things or in the pleasure derived from them, but rather within things themselves, for things are the substrate of mendacious signs and meanings.”

Domestic spaces have devolved to mere commodities and expressive signs, and have therefore degraded, in kind, the instrumentality that was their most primary original purpose. Even as houses have become more readable, they have become less expressive, at least with respect to the unique individual identities of their users. Given this, it should not be surprising to see new models of housing begin to appear, which emphasize qualitative distinction as a primary focus of their arrangement and design. Multitudes of individual users have come to realize that their own domestic spaces have failed, thanks to the domination of

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80 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 81.
quantitative considerations like scale and size, to adequately express, embody, and reinforce their individuality and personal identities, in much the same way that such spaces have failed to meet their practical needs as users.

...There is the difficulty of giving one’s own personality a certain status within the framework of metropolitan life. Where quantitative increase of value and energy has reached its limits, one seizes on qualitative distinctions, so that, through taking advantage of the existing sensitivity to differences, some attention of the social world can, in some way, be won for oneself.⁸¹

Therefore, it should not be surprising to see more straightforwardly-reactionary movements arise, in which size is deemphasized. In the case of tiny houses, this deemphasis is exaggerated to the point that such small scale becomes intelligibly communicative in and of itself. The unusually small scale of tiny houses communicates something on its own: a rejection of the common use of large, visible scale to display wealth and status. Such communication hinges on the very same “sensitivity to differences” that is articulated by Simmel, above.

Within the context of the Tiny House Movement, functional or, most especially, multi-functional qualitative innovation and the intentional restriction of space, along with all that the latter necessarily entails, which arguably includes the former, take center stage. This is true, with respect to both practical suitability to the individual users’ needs and expressiveness through personalization in both formally expressive and functional elements. Within the Tiny House Movement, innovation takes primacy over size in both the physical

apparatus of the home, itself, and in what this creativity expresses and reflects about the personal identity of the user.

**Practice-Based-Design, Use-Value, and Spatial Authenticity for the User**

In order to best understand the ideals championed by those looking to “go tiny” (an expression used to describe those transitioning into tiny house living), this paper will repeatedly refer to the idea of spatial authenticity. This concept is grounded in ideas posited by Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*, and will refer primarily to the alignment of representations of space, specifically with respect to the design of individual homes, and the spatial practices of the particular users of those domestic spaces. While this paper has already discussed the current predominant disconnect between these two, it is important to bear in mind that contemporary American homes do, in fact, include elements that are practical and usable, albeit amidst many other inclusions that, as earlier addressed, have failed to keep pace with the changing needs of the users.

It might be helpful, given this, to conceive of spatial authenticity as primarily use-value oriented, and as individualized and customized to the *specific* user of any domicile. In this way, a conception of domestic space that is founded on attempts to address the “silence of the users” will necessarily be customized to the specific end-user, and will consequently necessitate a deemphasis of houses as commodities.

…instead of uncovering the social relationships (including class relationships) that are latent in spaces, instead of concentrating our attention on the production of space and the social relationships inherent to it… we fall into the trap of treating space as space ‘in itself’, as space as such. We come to think in terms of spatiality, and so to fetishize space in a way reminiscent of

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82 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 51.
the old fetishism of commodities, where the trap lay in exchange and the error was to consider ‘things’ in isolation, as ‘things in themselves’.  

The commodification of housing, having resulted in an increasingly market-oriented design that is based around mass-marketability and efficient and profitable reproducibility-through-repetition in the manufacturing process, has diminished the input of the individual user in the design of contemporary housing and led to the current crisis of spatial authenticity represented by the dominant model of housing production and the housing market, itself. Tiny houses may well be inherently less-suited to resale than more generic homes, as they represent a custom-fit style of housing that is catered to a specific individual’s spatial practice and therefore are not, by any means, one-size-fits-all (though the irony of using this colloquial expression in a discussion of tiny houses is not hard to see, so perhaps it would be better to say that they are not “one-design-fits-all”). Although the diminished resale appeal of tiny homes does impact the function of a house as an investment, such considerations will be discussed more later. These considerations aside, tiny houses exhibit a shift in focus from broad salability to focused and intentional usability, unique to the needs of the specific intended user.

By customizing houses that fit their own specific purposes and lifestyle, tiny house users are often able to find an authenticity that can only be achieved through the alignment of their domestic space with their own particular needs. This is achieved by allowing any expressive formal elements, as well as the functional elements, to reflect the individuality and practices of the users of such space. Such an approach can be described as practice-

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83 Ibid., 90.
based-design, an idea that Sarah Susanka posits has a lasting effect on the longevity of such spaces. “The reason… [some] houses have aged well is that they were designed for the human beings who live in them, not for the technology of the time.”84 In this sense, the phrase, “the technology of the time,” may be understood as the means and mode of the production of domestic spaces. The singular focus of this current process on the efficiency attained in the “repetitive gestures”85 of industrial and large-scale manufacturing, for economic reasons, has failed to adequately address the current spatial needs of the very users for whom housing is or was intended. When viewed as a reaction against this trend, tiny houses exemplify what Susanka calls “useful beauty,” when she claims that “when attention is paid to the usefulness of a house, there’s a place for everything and everything is in its place. In architectural lingo, such a house expresses a ‘useful beauty’.”86

In keeping with the idea that a useful house has a “place for everything and everything is in its place,” one common theme within the practice of tiny home living is, in fact, organization and the efficiency thereof.87 Organization is also important for tiny house residents as a primary means of mitigating the felt effect of the inherently limited space. “If you can keep it organized, your house will look and feel a lot bigger.”88 The concept of “useful beauty” that Susanka mentions combines the expressive content that is currently

84 Susanka and Obolensky, The Not So Big House, 179.
85 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 75.
86 Susanka and Obolensky, The Not So Big House, 62.
88 Levin, "Living in a Small House – Benefits & Challenges.”
found primarily in the size and scale of many contemporary homes with the emphasis on use-value that is so critical to the attainment of spatial authenticity. It therefore represents a mode of spatial production that reclaims the primacy of the users’ spatial practice in the representations of space of the design of the domestic realm.

The expressive content that is communicated primarily through the size of many contemporary homes is not completely erased by this reclamation; instead it seems that such communicative functions find a new means of spatial expression in the innovation incorporated into the design of tiny houses. Through the intentional practice-based-design of these smaller homes, “…superfluous square footage is traded for less tangible but more meaningful aspects of design that are about beauty, self-expression, and the enhancement of life.”89 Susanka claims that, “one reason houses have become too big is that they are planned with the idea that there needs to be a separate room for each activity.”90 She goes on to assert that “…it’s easy to see how often functions are duplicated in a typical floorplan.”91 The Tiny House Movement, however, represents a reaction to this idea, in the extreme. Instead of merely eliminating the redundant spaces, as well as pseudo-public areas that do not serve a properly private function, within the home, tiny houses go one step further and dare to consider just how many activities might be adequately served by the same space. As is not lost on Susanka, this is not a new concept, but instead is similar to what one may observe in the design of boats, in that “each space within the boat is carefully tailored to serve more than

89 Susanka and Obolensky, The Not So Big House, 25.
90 Ibid., 34.
91 Ibid., 41.
one function.”\(^{92}\) Multi-functionality is a core concept of the Tiny House Movement and the spatial conditions that necessitate this are analogous to Lefebvre’s articulation of space as functionally limiting, in which he claims that, “activity in space is restricted by that space; space ‘decides’ what activity may occur, but even this ‘decision’ has limits placed upon it.”\(^{93}\) However, while the limited room available in tiny homes certainly brings this dynamic to the fore, the nearly ubiquitous multi-functionality found in tiny homes in fact highlights the way in which the multiplicity and variation of domestic spatial practice limits or specifies the form that the house and its constituent elements may take. In so doing, tiny houses instantiate and illustrate spatial practice reflecting back onto, and thereby informing, design.

While it may be the case that representations of space, especially at the level of design, are inherently limiting, with respect to the spatial practices that they do or do not allow or facilitate, the very limited square-footage of tiny homes imparts a necessary, though partial, reversal of this dynamic. The significant limitations on the design of tiny houses are quite intentionally based on the practices of the users and the spatial requirements that are implicit to those uses. “The patterns of life are no longer constrained by the floorplan; they are expressed by it.”\(^{94}\) This claim, however, may be only partially true since the floor-plan, as a representation of space, is still constraining, albeit to a much lesser degree. Such a more-even dialogue between spatial practice and design is characteristic of the spatial authenticity enjoyed by the user in such a setting, as their own practice is reflected back to them through

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\(^{92}\) Ibid., 61.

\(^{93}\) Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 143.

\(^{94}\) Susanka and Obolensky, *The Not So Big House*, 39.
the elements of design visible in their home, thereby allowing the user “…to rediscover the unity of the productive process.”

Simultaneously, the spatial visibility of the unique user’s practice is communicative not only of his or her individual identity, but also of the user’s ingenuity and innovation in incorporating multiple practices into the design and function of any single element. This is exemplified by the fact that, “most tiny houses have… an impressive array of dual-purpose accoutrements: couches that turn into beds, seating that functions as storage, and tables and chairs that fold up into the walls.” One article profiling a tiny-house resident mentions that, “there's hidden storage everywhere. Each stair leading up to the bedroom is actually a pull-out drawer. The ottoman hides a collection of DVDs. Storage compartments line the side of the upstairs bed.” From cleverly hidden cabinets, including stairs that also serve as cabinets, or even simultaneously as shelves and bathroom door, to a couch that can fold flat and lay flush against the wall to increase available standing room, or a bed that slides into a

95 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 42.


hidden compartment in the floor for the same purpose, the innovation found in tiny homes is a central focus and a point of pride for the designers and users. This is precisely because the spatial authenticity for the user is elevated by the physical manifestation of the dialogue between unique practice and design, effectively creating an answer to the question posed by Lefebvre, who writes,

…the producers of space have always acted in accordance with a representation, while the ‘users’ passively experienced whatever was imposed upon them inasmuch as it was more or less thoroughly inserted into, or justified by, their representational space. …If architects (and urban planners) do indeed have a representation of space, whence does it derive?

In the case of tiny houses, the source of this representation of space from which design is derived is, in increased measure, generated by the actual and, in many cases the unique or particular, practices of the user. This effectively transforms the passive experience of space, on the part of the user, that Lefebvre describes into an increasingly active participation in the shaping of the representations of space that inform the design of the home. The result is that “…each space is defined by the activities that take place there.”

This participation, as much as the resultant use-value implicit in the domestic space that is its product, is essential to the experience of spatial authenticity. The Tiny House Movement therefore represents an opportunity to achieve an increased sense of spatial authenticity for the individual users of domestic space. That is not to say that tiny houses are

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100 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 44.

101 Susanka and Obolensky, The Not So Big House, 33.
the only means of achieving this, since custom-designed homes would also seem to allow for
the alignment of practice and design in much the same way. Larger custom-designed homes
are not, however, within the budgets of many people and tiny houses offer a more attainable
means of achieving this effect. Larger custom-designed homes also fail to demand the same
degree of careful selection, in both inclusion and exclusion, and prioritization that tiny homes
do, and similarly fail to demand the multi-functionality that serves to highlight and
communicate the user’s ingenuity and creativity in making the most of such limited space. In
keeping with this, one user described the effect of “going tiny” in the following way:

All in all, living small successfully means staying mindful of the physical
objects you choose to live with. This mindfulness is, I believe, sorely lacking
in today’s society… One of the biggest challenges – as well as one of the
greatest benefits – to living in a small home is that you constantly assess what
you own and what you’re bringing into your space… Living small takes
creativity, flexibility, and ingenuity… Living small really forces us to
carefully consider the things we own, and make choices about what we really
need, as well as what we don’t need. Although this might sound limiting, it’s
actually quite liberating.\footnote{Levin, "Living in a Small House – Benefits & Challenges."}

The experience of participating in the conception of a custom-designed tiny home, unique to
one’s own practices is, in this way, as much about uncovering the relationship between one’s
own spatial practice and its spatial setting as it is about building a house.

The spatial ramifications of tiny houses and their influence on the dominant housing
model are not limited to the private realm, either; public participation is also informed and
shaped in new and necessary ways, for those who live in tiny homes. “Community is very
appealing but… It also requires better private space. Not necessarily more, or larger, or
extravagantly pimped out. Just better.” This position exemplifies the way in which a proper separation of public and private spaces can, in fact, invigorate both of these respective realms. The expulsion of pseudo-public spaces from within the domestic interior relegates those properly public activities to actual public spaces that are shared by the larger populace. The harmony between the representations of space as public areas and their actual and increased use, as such, in the spatial practices of the users therein can only lead to an invigorated sense of spatial authenticity within the public realm, as well. As will be discussed in the final chapter, increased popularity and frequency of the use of public spaces can also have a densifying effect on the shared meaning embedded within such spaces. This densification of meaning, combined with the small scale of tiny homes and the physical, spatial density that they certainly allow within the greater urban landscape, seems much more likely than most recent housing trends to lead to what one author describes as great cities. “What makes them great? Public transportation. Density and diversity. A respect and passion for creativity and the arts. Walkable neighborhoods packed with characters, local stores and local venues. Personality.”

Personality, effectively inscribed in space, is a central component of the spatial authenticity of any domestic arrangement. In a fitting description of the potential benefits

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offered by “going tiny”, one tiny house resident summarized the simultaneous improvement of both his public and private life, through tiny house living by saying that,

A goal of mine is for our tiny house is to encourage more time outdoors, to connect more with neighbors, and to foster collaborative, supportive community. I hope it also acts as a reminder that any of us (even with no construction experience) can take the building of our own home back into our own two hands, if we so choose. Tiny living isn’t without its sacrifices, but maybe that’s a good thing? It’s about time we took a good look at what we really need to be happy, to rethink what it means to be a homeowner and to be successful in life.\textsuperscript{105}

The tiny house movement is a rejection of the primacy of historical use and the over fixation with housing, as a commodity and as a display of socio-economic status, within the representations of domestic space. Rather than using limited financial resources on rooms that no longer serve critical functions, tiny house users instead opt to design their homes around their own particular domestic spatial practices. The successful alignment of spatial practice and representations of space, through practice-based-design, requires a careful assessment of the user’s needs and wants and a thoughtful incorporation of those ends in the design of the home. The ability to recognize the facilitation and satisfaction of those needs, reflected back to the user through spatial manifestation, is at the heart of the experience of spatial authenticity. In order to accommodate the multifaceted usability needed within the limited space of a tiny house, multi-functionality and careful organization are critical. Because they are so central in the practice-based-design of representations of space within tiny houses, this multi-functionality and the innovation and creativity that its successful incorporation requires have become the central communicative element of tiny houses. This

\textsuperscript{105} Hulleman, “Modern Tiny House People > Alek Lisefski.”
allows tiny house users to display their own personality and individuality through the design of their home, even as it facilitates those specific practices that the unique users have deemed most important to them. Tiny houses, therefore, represent a new spatial authenticity for the users of domestic space, in that they are an opportunity for individual users to reclaim their voice within the process of the production of space.
CHAPTER III

ECONOMIC AND PRACTICAL REALITIES OF TINY HOUSES

Today we begin to see that the improvement of cities is no matter for small one-sided reforms: the task of city design involves the vaster task of rebuilding our civilization. We must alter the parasitic and predatory modes of life that now play so large a part, and we must create region by region, continent by continent, and effective symbiosis, or co-operative living together. The problem is to co-ordinate, on the basis of more essential human values than the will-to-power and the will-to-profits, a host of social functions and processes that we have hitherto misused in the building of cities and polities, or of which we have never rationally taken advantage.106

— Lewis Mumford

This chapter will offer an analysis of the Tiny House phenomenon in its practical spatial dimensions, and will attempt to illustrate the practical feasibility, and obstacles thereto, implicit in the Tiny House Movement. Even if this movement, as it presently stands, is not able to achieve widespread implementation, it does present real-world lessons that may prove useful towards developing more suitable models of housing, for the future. As climate change, economic development, and an increasingly connected and digital world come to bear on the way most Americans live their lives, this evolution must find expression, simultaneously, within the spatial realm. This paper has discussed the ways in which representations of space and design might be reconnected to the actuality of individual domestic users and their multitudinous spatial practices, but did not delve into the practical extensions of what such a transition might look like on the ground, literally and metaphorically. The environmental, legal, and economic considerations that come into play when trying to effect change on a widespread scale are by no means insignificant. While tiny

houses offer a very real potential to increase the affordability and accessibility of homeownership for many who cannot currently afford it, there are numerous hidden costs and complications that preclude “going tiny” from being a viable affordable option, under present legal conditions. Though the Tiny House Movement exemplifies a consciousness of such pressing issues and the desire to find new ways of dealing with such problems in space, it also raises important practical questions of its own. This chapter will attempt to enumerate and analyze the existing practical problems that confront dominant models of domestic space and to which the Tiny House Movement may present solutions. It will then examine the particular problems and obstacles unique and implicit to the Tiny House Movement, itself, and to efforts to implement this kind of domestic model on a more widespread scale. Such considerations come to bear on the question of who, under present conditions, can actually afford to live in a tiny house. These obstacles include, most notably, the many hidden costs and practical obstacles to “going tiny” in the current legal landscape. Although the Tiny House Movement has the potential to revolutionize domestic models in accordance with the financial and practical necessities of many users, its tactical practices entail many costs and challenges that are only currently surmountable for more affluent or financially established populations, for whom more traditional housing is also a potentially viable option.

Recent trends in housing have failed to meet the emerging demands of contemporary spatial practice, with respect to domestic life, as well as environmental and cultural sustainability. The tiny trend offers myriad practical opportunities for improved efficiency and sustainability in the material production and consumption of domestic space. Conceptually, the Tiny House Movement offers opportunities to reconnect representations of
space, at the level of design, with the spatial practices of the users. Despite this fact, the realities and legalities of tiny houses still present numerous obstacles to “going tiny,” particularly for those for whom more traditional models of homeownership may already be impractical or even unattainable or unaffordable. In this way, the tiny trend, as it presently stands, does not escape currently dominant modes of commodified production and consumption that are a now ubiquitous part of contemporary American capitalism. This fact is evident in the current price tags of move in ready tiny houses, as well as in the demographics of those who seem to be the current market for such homes, who are mostly college-educated, well-employed adults. These obstacles, whether legal, practical, or financial, prevent the Tiny House Movement from being an affordable or accessible option for those without the considerable education and financial resources needed to navigate the complicated process of “going tiny”. Given this, it is prudent to examine the potential for, and obstacles to, actualization of this trend and its core principles, on a more widespread scale.

**Current Practical Problems in Domestic Space and Potential Solutions Offered by Tiny Houses**

Before examining the problems and complicating factors that arise as a direct consequence of the Tiny House Movement and its struggle for widespread implementation, it is necessary to consider and analyze the problems and shortcomings of current predominant domestic arrangements. Such an analysis is crucial to understanding the spatial context in which the Tiny House Movement has arisen, and in and against which it continues to develop. Although it does bring numerous complications of its own, “going tiny” does
present potential solutions to many of the shortcomings of contemporary domestic spatial arrangements. Understanding these is critical to comprehending the significance of this movement as a reaction against these current trends.

One major problem facing today’s housing market is a general lack of affordability. In his TEDx Talk on tiny houses, Andrew Morrison puts forward a basic formula to find the amount of net income that one uses to pay for just their housing needs. That formula is, “(Housing Cost / Net Monthly Income) x 100 = % of net income”. He goes on to claim that, based on average housing costs quoted by the National Association of Home Builders, most Americans have to devote about twenty-seven percent of their net income to meeting their housing needs, which translates into almost eleven hours out of a typical forty hour work week being spent earning enough to cover housing costs. This figure may even be low, considering that an article on cbsnews.com cites a study by the Center for Housing Policy which found that, “more than 26 percent of working-class Americans who rent apartments spent over 50 percent of their income on housing in 2011, up from just 22.8 percent in 2008, according to a new report. And that number would likely have been even higher if so many households hadn't stopped earning enough to qualify as working-class.” Compounding this effect, traditional financing of an average home, including interest and other costs, often ends up meaning that the buyer will inevitably pay between triple and quadruple the actual price of their home by the time their mortgage has been paid-off and they own their home.

107 Morrison, “Tiny House Movement | Andrew Morrison | TEDxColoradoSprings.”
108 Von Hoffman, "More working-class families…"
outright.\textsuperscript{109} Morrison also uses figures from the NAHB to demonstrate how the average purchase price of a new home, almost $250,000, necessitates, through most traditional mortgages, a down payment of nearly $50,000. This sum, as highlighted by Morrison, is an amount that could easily be used to completely build a self-built tiny house. In some of the more affordable cases, this amount could even be used to purchase a move-in-ready tiny house. According to this same NAHB data, says Morrison, average house sizes have increased by more than half over the last forty years. Simultaneously, the average occupancy of those same homes has dropped, resulting in nearly 1000 square feet per person in the average American house. In an article about micro-apartments, Vanessa Wong says that, “single-person households made up 26.7 percent of the U.S. total in 2010, vs. 17.6 percent in 1970, according to Census Bureau data. In cities, the proportion is often higher: In New York, it’s about 33 percent.”\textsuperscript{110} In light of this kind of data, it is apparent why the option of a smaller, more affordable space that still meets all the essential needs of the user might be appealing to a certain segment of home buyers.

The distinct lack of such affordable spaces, due to recent housing trends emphasizing size, is likely at least partially-responsible for the declining incidence of young people buying homes in recent years.

At the end of last year, only 35.8 percent of adults under age 35 owned their own home, the smallest share in U.S. Census Bureau records dating back to 1982. A decade ago, 43.1 percent of adults in that age range owned a home,

\textsuperscript{109} “What Is The Tiny House Movement?”.; Morrison, “Tiny House Movement | Andrew Morrison | TEDxColoradoSprings.”

and much of the decline in U.S. homeownership rates falls squarely with young adults who are delaying purchases.\textsuperscript{111}

The same source claims that some of the blame for this trend is probably due to other factors, such as wide incidence of student loan debt,\textsuperscript{112} a trend toward marrying later, and increased demand for mobility. However, it also cites a Bloomberg survey that recently found that some of the biggest or fastest growing cities in America also demonstrate considerable gaps between average millennial earnings and the typical cost of purchasing a home.\textsuperscript{113}

This lack of affordable housing is not exclusive to those looking to own their own home either, but is one shared even by renters. In the case of some Colorado resort towns, the inadequate quantity of available and affordable rental housing is becoming a problem for the very workers who, in a sort of poetic tragedy, facilitate the industries which are driving the growth of those very towns.

The worst-ever rental market in Colorado’s mountain communities is fueled by a convergence of several factors, including a booming tourism economy drawing record numbers of visitors, prodding employers to grow and hire more workers. Add to that a lack of new affordable housing construction in the last half-decade as towns grappled with the economic downturn. And then there’s the surge in homeowners converting properties they once rented to

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\textsuperscript{112} Harris, ”Could tiny houses solve a big problem in Denver?”


In this example, once again, one may see the economic momentum of space, as a commodity, running roughshod over the needs of the users. As former employee housing is, with increasing incidence and motivated by higher profitability, marketed and sold to tourists in the form of short-term vacation rentals, so too are the former users of that space finding themselves without suitable, affordable spaces to meet their needs. This is illustrative of the “vacationland” dynamic articulated by William Philpott, who describes it as, “…the story of how places themselves became products: manufactured, packaged, branded, and marketed like so many consumer goods. It is the story of the profitable and prolific place-making industry that emerged, the new kinds of planning that accompanied it, and the new kinds of landscapes that resulted.”\footnote{William Philpott, \textit{Vacationland: Tourism and Environment in the Colorado High Country} (Seattle, WA and London, UK: University of Washington Press, 2013), 5.} Because desirable land is now being marketed and sold effectively, and at higher profits, to the short-term vacation rental market, the employee housing needs in many of these “vacationland” destinations have been left by the wayside.

With respect to both home rental and home ownership, tiny houses could potentially present an affordable option. If property owners are able to construct tiny homes affordably, they should be able to rent them affordably, and still quite profitably, as well. Although there are potential hidden costs, risks, and financial complications implicit in building or owning a tiny house that will be discussed at length in the next section, there are examples that show
that it certainly can be done affordably. One Texas couple built their own tiny house for only about $7,000. While this is certainly on the low end of the cost spectrum, even for tiny houses, other sources indicate that the typical cost of building one’s own tiny house should be expected to range from about $10,000 to about $50,000. Examples include the case of Morrison’s “hOMe” tiny house, which cost $33,000 to build and equip, as well as the “Brevard Tiny House,” which can be had for $46,000. One woman, living tiny in Washington, “…spent $36,000 on her house…’I have some debt from the house,’ she says, ‘but most people pay for 30 years. I’m going to be done in two.’”


Hartsel, Colorado, “…reckons they spent between $20,000 and $25,000 on the house, with the trailer/foundation accounting for $5,000 of that.”

Up-front purchase price is only a part of the cost-savings equation, as well, since tiny homes offer cost reduction and time savings in a number of other areas. Tiny houses, simply by virtue of their small size, cost less to heat and cool. In many cases, since tiny houses are often built on trailers, they also don’t require any property tax, although this legal grey-area that they often occupy certainly has its own major drawbacks that will be discussed further in the next section. Another significant area of savings that is less obvious, however, is what the limited space saves the user in time. Time spent cleaning and maintaining the home is greatly reduced in a tiny house, resulting in more time to pursue hobbies or to spend with family or friends: more time to live one’s life. This type of additional time-investment is not even included in Morrison’s calculation of the amount of time the average American spends covering the cost of their housing, and such time-savings are a point of emphasis within the Tiny House Movement, generally. The reduction of all of these cost-factors are part of what Morrison refers to as “human scale” housing. This concept is related to practice-based-design and centers around figuring out what needs a user’s house must meet and designing

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124 Morrison, “Tiny House Movement | Andrew Morrison | TEDxColoradoSprings.”
backwards from there, in order to create a house that suits those needs without creating undue costs in time or money. This same idea, and its intimate role in informing the Tiny House Movement, is articulated well by Claire Martin in an article profiling one Colorado resident who constructed her own tiny house. “Just big enough, and no bigger: That’s the mantra of tiny-house advocates, whose 100- to 500-square-foot homes would fit inside the great room of some suburban McMansions.”

In keeping with this idea of appropriate or human scale, other energy costs, as well as ongoing resource consumption, generally, are also fittingly minimized within tiny houses. This is made possible not just by the reduced volume of air that needs to be heated or cooled, but also because the limited space leaves less room for appliances, requires fewer lights, and because tiny houses are often constructed in ways designed to maximize natural light and air circulation in order to further reduce energy needs. Even those tiny homes that make use of the typical public utilities, including power grid and water and sewage systems, see dramatic cost-reduction. “Tiny houses cost little to maintain and utilities are a bargain. Typical monthly expenses are $6 for water, $25 for electricity and $20 for propane. These homes can use smaller heating systems and alternative energy. One solar panel charges a tiny house's lights, the owners' cell phones and appliances.” Additionally, as alluded-to in this excerpt, many tiny houses also demonstrate an emphasis on independent or even off-grid living. They are usually built to be as self-sufficient as possible, with respect to energy-use,

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125 Martin, "Colorado woman’s tiny house…”.


127 Eastman, “Tiny houses: As personal as a thumbprint…”.
and many tiny homes feature composting toilets, water-catchment and greywater systems,\footnote{Alek Lisefski, “What to do with greywater from your tiny house,” The Tiny Project (blog), August 12, 2014, http://tiny-project.com/what-to-do-with-greywater-from-your-tiny-house/.} as well as solar panels and other “green” innovations.\footnote{“A Tiny House Aims for Zero Energy,” Energy Design Update, 25.8 (August, 2005): 1-5, Business Source Premier; EBSCOhost, http://0-search.ebscohost.com.skyline.ucdenver.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=18471545.; Ozery, "Tiny Homes Are Big On Energy Efficiency."} Of course, at present, such technologies as solar power bring their own additional costs when building a tiny house. However, this is true for more traditionally sized homes as well, and tiny houses require less energy to be self-sufficient. In addition to the energy independence and ongoing cost savings that such setups can offer, they also minimize the environmental impact of tiny houses, which is a core ideal within the movement. As Jay Shafer, one of the seminal members of the Tiny House Movement, describes, “people's reasons for living small vary a lot, but there seems to be a common thread of sustainability… A lot of people don't want to use many more resources or put out more emissions than they have to.”\footnote{Terence Chea, "Tiny house movement thrives amid real estate bust,” Boston.com (Associated Press), November 29, 2010, http://archive.boston.com/business/articles/2010/11/29/tiny_house_movement_thrives_amid_real_estate_bust/.}

Reduced energy consumption does not have to be a consequence solely of the small stature of tiny homes, either; innovation in the materials used to construct new homes can also offer increased efficiency. Advancements in plastics and other technologies can be leveraged to create homes that are designed, as complete systems unto themselves,\footnote{“A Tiny House Aims for Zero Energy.”} to be

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more energy efficient. New synthetic materials, combined with the small size of tiny houses, make these homes easier to insulate effectively and, consequently, more energy-efficient:

This idea inspired Plastics Make it Possible to partner with Zack Giffin, the star of FYI TV's Tiny House Nation, and builder Paul Baumann to construct a tiny house in Boulder, Colorado, USA. The house highlights how advances in plastic building products can help homeowners become more energy efficient, while also creating a durable, low-maintenance house…What makes this tiny home particularly energy efficient is that individual products were combined to create a continuous sealed barrier between the exterior and interior of the home. The house's building envelope behaves as a system with all of the parts working together to create something much greater than what any building component would achieve by itself. Compared to traditional construction techniques, less of the home's climate-controlled air escapes, and outside air is less likely to penetrate the home's living spaces.132

Because tiny houses are, at this time, generally newly-built, they present a ready opportunity to redefine the way new houses are designed and built, in order for them to be more efficient and to reduce energy and resource consumption along with harmful emissions.133

The environmental impacts of housing, generally, do not end with energy use and carbon emissions. The domination of space, in Lefebvre’s terminology, also leaves indelible traces on the natural environment, and this is another area in which tiny houses may offer a potentially reduced impact. “There was once such a thing as appropriation without domination — witness the… hut, igloo or peasant house.”134 For a variety of reasons, including their reduced footprint as well as their current tendency to be placed on mobile trailers and therefore easily located in, or relocated to, a variety of places and without the need for significant permanent infrastructure, tiny houses are more like the hut, igloo, or

132 “A tiny house provides a big lesson…”

133 “A Tiny House Aims for Zero Energy.”

134 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 166.
peasant house that Lefebvre mentions. This offers myriad opportunities for improved urban density, since tiny houses can quite easily be placed in backyards or on the grounds around existing homes, though the legal complications of such placement will be discussed further in the next section.

The use of tiny houses as urban infill also presents new opportunities for alternate income streams, such as backyard tiny houses being offered as short-term rentals or even additional long-term rental-housing. Such use makes it possible for additional and more-affordable housing to be located in areas that are already served by existing infrastructure, such as public transportation. The potential for tiny houses to be used in the manner of urban infill aligns, as well, with the increasingly prominent focus, amongst younger generations of potential home-buyers, on location and proximity to amenities and transportation. Developer Monty Hoffman, in an article in the Washington Post, summed up this shift in priorities by saying, “it’s no longer about impressing your friends with your huge 1980s castle, it’s more about your lifestyle: What restaurants and fitness centers and community life can you walk to? It’s not about driving everywhere and staying inside and spending hours watching TV…”[135] The need for urban densification and additional affordable housing in close proximity to city centers should not be underemphasized, either, as, “some three-quarters [of millennials], in polls, say they plan to live in America’s urban cores. Many fewer say they’ll

be looking for drivable suburban homes.” Walkability and proximity to public transportation, amenities, and employment, though important, do not exhaust the list of increasingly prominent needs pertaining to new urban housing. The need for community and vibrant public spaces will be discussed at length in the next chapter. These considerations can, however, have powerful positive side effects, including increased public health and decreased obesity brought on by walkable neighborhoods, which also foster closer and more familiar communities, and consequent decreased reliance on automobile transit, which can reduce traffic and carbon emissions.

The potential new revenue streams offered by tiny houses do not end with backyards, either. The possibility of tiny house communities that rent lots for the placement of mobile tiny houses on short- or long-term bases presents an opportunity for property owners to generate income through the use of their land without necessitating the total domination of that space in significant and permanent ways.

More and more landowners are specifically renting out pieces of their property to multiple tiny homeowners, easily and quickly making a profit… renting out land to tiny homeowners is a simple way to earn a monthly paycheck… You can split the land into equal square footage, or offer different sizes for different costs. Electricity and water needs would be minimal, as tiny homes are eco-friendly and energy efficient.

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138 Rubel, “Is the Tiny House Market Worth Investing In?”. 
Such practice is also an opportunity for small, struggling, or recession-stricken communities to reinvigorate themselves and increase population through progressive zoning and spatial arrangements that are specifically intended to cater to the burgeoning demand for tiny houses. These kinds of changes in allowable use also illustrate direct feedback from the Tiny House Movement, itself, as a popular spatial practice, into representations of space at the legal and governmental level. This is what is being done in Walsenburg, Colorado, which recently amended its zoning and land-use rules to accommodate these minuscule structures and which already has multiple tiny house communities underway or in development and now, “allow[s] tiny homes on any residential lot. They just have to be on a foundation, not a trailer.”

Potential future communities of tiny houses also fit nicely with the increased mobility of the contemporary workforce. Mobile, or even just moveably-scaled, tiny homes placed on lots such as these would allow their users to move more freely around the country, whether at their own leisure or as demanded by their employment or other lifestyle decisions. “Those taking part in the budding movement often embrace the lifestyle because it allows them to leave a smaller environmental footprint, live mortgage free, and because the houses often are on wheels, to pick up and pursue a new career or passion without worrying about having to sell or find a new home.” The mobility of tiny houses built on trailers is a unique opportunity for those, such as military personnel, whose jobs require them to move often,

139 Colorado Public Radio, "Walsenburg has big hopes for tiny homes.”

140 Jones, “Recession-Scarred Millennials…”.

since mobile tiny houses allow them to bring their domestic space, their home, with them when they relocate. The relative affordability of many tiny houses could also offer the kind increased economic freedom that would allow some tiny house users to own tiny or smaller homes in multiple locations, or to extend the lessons learned from tiny house living to future home-making in less-tiny spaces. Even those tiny houses that are not constructed on wheels are inherently, due to their reduced size, easier to relocate: “…another beauty of the tiny house is you can put them almost anywhere. They are moveable at this scale. You can easily put them up on rollers and pull them around.”

This does not mean, however, that tiny houses are easy or convenient to move. Considerations such as durability, weatherproofing, width, height, stability while underway, and the difficulty of driving while hauling such a large trailer are all complicating factors, not to mention the cost of purchasing and owning a vehicle capable of towing such a load. Further complicating the matter is the fact that finding a suitable place to locate a tiny home, whether for the first time or upon subsequent relocating, can be quite a difficult task. Though they will, from a purely practical standpoint, fit just about anywhere because of their size,

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142 Laura LaVoie, "Is Home a Place or a Sense of Belonging? Can it Be Both?" Life in 120 Square Feet (blog), June 28, 2016, http://www.120squarefeet.com/2016/06/is-home-place-or-sense-of-belonging-can.html.

143 LaVoie, “5 Tips on Staying Organized in a Tiny House.”


tiny houses currently do not truly “fit in” (the irony of this pun should be apparent) legally, amidst the current spatial arrangement. This is a condition, however, that those championing the movement are determined to overcome, and “…affordable-housing advocates are researching the possibility that attractive micro homes could one day complement or replace stigmatized trailer parks and low-income housing, especially in places such as the District, where they could be built in unused vacant spaces such as alleys.”\textsuperscript{146} The biggest obstacle to this effort is that, in most areas, current laws and zoning and use regulations prohibit the use of tiny houses as urban-infill. While planned communities of mobile tiny houses are attempting to solve this issue,\textsuperscript{147} escaping the stigma of the trailer-park and re-ordering the dominant arrangements of domestic space in order to allow for the proliferation of tiny homes, whether clustered in communities or scattered between more traditionally-sized homes, will undoubtedly be no small task.

One primary and significant effect that the limited space of tiny houses imparts upon the user is imposed scarcity. This is only furthered by the fact that, in order for a house to be moveable at all, weight considerations must also come into play. The concept of imposed scarcity refers to the necessity of limiting one’s possessions when living in a tiny home, due primarily to dramatically decreased storage space. It is the most obvious way that the design of tiny houses, across the board, feeds back directly into, and thereby informs and restricts, the spatial practice of their users. “When you have a tiny home, filling it full of ‘stuff’ is not

\textsuperscript{146} Wax, “Home, squeezed home…”.

an option, at least not if you actually want space to move around in. When your home is small, you have to make some hard choices about what to keep, and what to get rid of. This means you can't go out and buy frivolous items whenever you're feeling bored or blue.”

While it may be possible to learn to live with this kind of imposed scarcity, the process of “going tiny” and paring-down one’s possessions to a quantity that will fit in a tiny house, and to just those objects that serve a critical enough function to remain there, can be a painstaking and difficult process. On the other hand, it can also be simultaneously rewarding and liberating; one user reports that, “one of the biggest challenges – as well as one of the greatest benefits – to living in a small home is that you constantly assess what you own and what you’re bringing into your space.” The spatial restriction of limited storage brings forth direct consequences on the consumption-behavior of their users. “Less space means less hoarding, or accumulating stuff that many later feel they didn’t need in the first place — which may also result in a sense of freedom and mental clarity few have been able to articulate without embracing a smaller living space.” It remains to be asked, however, whether the spatial limitations of tiny homes necessarily curb the consumerist tendencies of their users, as there are some surprising contradictions to be found in this regard, which will be discussed in the next section.

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148 Levin, "Living in a Tiny Home: Benefits & Drawbacks.”
149 Ibid.
150 Levin, "Living in a Small House – Benefits & Challenges.”
151 Hulleman, "Top 5 Reasons Tiny House People Are Winning…"
Legal Obstacles, Scarcity, Spatial Tactics, and the Present Cost of Simplicity

Though tiny houses may offer potential solutions to many of the problems caused or highlighted by current housing trends, the potential for their widespread implementation presents many obstacles and complications of its own. While the small space of tiny homes may force their occupants to live with less, it is not necessarily true that they inherently curb consumerist tendencies. Furthermore, it may surprise some to learn that tiny houses do not offer a particularly viable option for affordable housing, as things presently stand. This is true, in part, because, despite the relative affordability of constructing a tiny house, there are numerous legal complications to actually living in a tiny house full-time, which effectively makes the prospect of purchasing a tiny house a financial and legal risk, in its own right.

Consequently, despite the potential of the Tiny House Movement to offer a more authentic and appropriately scaled arrangement of domestic space, “going tiny” is, at present, simply not an option for many of those that it could benefit the most, given the right circumstances. This section will attempt to elucidate the numerous hidden costs, risks, obstacles, and drawbacks to prospective tiny house residents, and to offer some insights into potential areas where progress may be made more readily than others.

One of the first things noticed by anyone who steps into a tiny home is likely going to be the striking shortage of space and consequent quantitative limitation on material possessions this imposes. Tiny house residents simply do not have the space to own a lot of things. While this imposed scarcity may limit the amount of things one may possess at any given time, it does not follow, necessarily, that they consequently serve to curb consumption habits and mitigate frivolous waste. The fallacious assumption that quantitative limitations on
what one may own at any one time necessarily limits consumerist tendencies forgets to consider the temptation to constantly or frequently upgrade. This temptation may even have implications for the duration users remain in a tiny house, itself. With constant advancements in the materials and means of construction, what is to keep one, considering the relative affordability of construction, from building newer, more upgraded tiny houses with increasing frequency? Despite the increased consumption of resources this would entail, it may also present a new resale market of move-in-ready tiny houses would be more available and affordable for those in need. The trade-off between resource-use in construction and increased affordability would be difficult to quantify, at present. However, it definitely presents the potential to decrease the environmental benefits of tiny houses, to a certain extent, while simultaneously creating a new used-tiny-house market for those without the resources or time to construct their own. From a legal standpoint, such a used-tiny-house market is well within the realm of feasibility, as “…reselling a tiny house is akin to selling a standard home since the owners retain the title.”\(^\text{152}\) It should not be overlooked, however, that purchasing a tiny-house that is not designed specifically to suit one’s own particular needs also diminishes, perhaps to varying extents, the increased spatial authenticity for the users that was discussed previously.

With respect to the idea that tiny houses limit their users’ consumption habits, as is a popular claim,\(^\text{153}\) there are reasons to suspect that they may not do so to the extent one might imagine. The temptation to replace and upgrade one’s possessions does not disappear with

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\(^{152}\) Chang, "Tiny Homes Are Gaining in Popularity…", 2.

living in a tiny home. Limited storage space may also impose other lifestyle challenges, like limiting one’s ability to keep ingredients for cooking at the ready. One resident claims, “I don’t cook, really. I live at the Whole Foods coffee bar, or I heat things up.” This particular concern may be partially or wholly assuaged by the fact that eating is a necessary consumption, at least to a certain extent, and it is not clear that the additional financial cost of dining out can be equated to an increased degree of consumerism over cooking for one’s self. The potential issue remains, however, since “a small fridge and no pantry means you have to make extra trips to the store for things you can’t fit, here’s to saving the environment.” Additionally, it is entirely possible that the financial savings enjoyed by those living in tiny houses may offer an increased temptation to spend one’s money more frequently on upgraded or new possessions, and, as Philpott asks, “…with consumerism so thoroughly embedded in our culture, our society, the way we understand ourselves and our relations with others… is it possible to forge a bond with anything anymore, without resorting to consumerism, at least in part?” Just because a tiny house prevents one from owning or storing a lot of possessions simultaneously, this does not necessarily correlate to reduced consumption behavior or purchasing.

A more important potential aspect of The Tiny House Movement, that may be less transformative of consumption behavior than it would first appear, is found in the process of


156 Philpott, Vacationland: Tourism and Environment..., 305.
“going tiny”, itself. Jame Siebrase frames this problematic well in the title of his article, “Tiny houses - Rebelling against "bigger is better," some crave a smaller, more efficient lifestyle. But is it just another yearning for shiny and new?” Siebrase points out that many of those who are currently choosing to “go tiny” are not doing so for financial or environmental reasons.

The Hill camp doesn't buy tiny to connect with nature or live sustainably. The simplicity they seek is a materialistic interpretation of simple focusing on embellished, over-the-top minimalist aesthetic, and it succinctly captures the tiny contradiction, which is that it’s possible to live a simple life in a teeny, tiny home because, heck, if you'd like to toss the majority of your possessions into a landfill, you can always buy more disposable, offshore stuff later.157

This critique highlights the way in which tiny houses, though they are often idealized as doing so, do not actually escape the dominant modes of production and consumption that pervade life in contemporary America. “Perhaps mainstream tiny… is merely another (very sneaky) form of consumerism begging us to ditch the things we already own and buy shiny-new, better stuff. The key to genuine simplicity, though, isn't finding something that makes you happy. It's figuring out how to be happy with what you've got.”158

This sentiment is reminiscent of a dynamic that Timothy Luke calls “sustainabilization,” wherein ostensively environmentally-friendly or, more properly, less-environmentally-damaging products, including space, are packaged and marketed as “green” in order to perpetuate dominant modes of production and consumption while simultaneously appealing to an ever-growing market of professedly eco-minded consumers. Tiny houses, though generally more efficient and therefore less environmentally damaging, still seem to

157 Siebrase, “Tiny houses - Rebelling…”.
158 Ibid.
conform to the theme of the sustainabilization trend, which “…maintains the existing lines of
march set out for consumerist industrial democracy, while scanning the terrain for clean,
green, lean improvements.”\textsuperscript{159} This, in turn, begs the question of whether or not The Tiny
House Movement exemplifies any real transformative change. It may, instead, be merely a
natural extension of the ever-growing mode of production of space, as a commodity, as it
adapts to the demands of an increasingly environmentally-conscious consumer market.

Sustainabilization in one sense is this process of continuous improvement. It
finds new efficiencies to carry greater human loads on existing infrastructures,
buildings, and systems, while at the same time reducing energy inputs,
recycling material throughputs, and reusing (or eliminating) noxious/
polluting/wasteful outputs. The profit-driven foundations of modern urban
industrial economies and societies are unchanged.\textsuperscript{160}

The “profit driven foundations” that Dr. Luke mentions were abundantly evident at the 2016
Tiny House Jamboree, in Colorado Springs. With many move-in-ready tiny houses being
displayed at the event carrying a sticker-price of around $100,000 and many even in excess
of that, it is difficult to see how, aside from their size, these houses represent the kind of
financial liberation and freedom from debt that many users seem to report. “Even though
Tiny Houses pale in comparison to the cost of traditional homes, the price tag of a
tumbleweed style house or similar often leaves people wondering how they can cost so
much.”\textsuperscript{161}


\textsuperscript{161} Mitchell, “The Fallacy of a Cheap Tiny House.”
Considering that Jay Shafer, one of the founding members of the Tiny House Movement, “estimates two-thirds of the tiny house plans he sells are intended for backyard retreats -- essentially, additions to existing homes,”\(^{162}\) it is becoming increasingly clear that those who are in the greatest need of affordable housing and for whom more traditional housing models may be unattainably expensive are not the market to whom the current tiny house industry is attempting to cater. “For enthusiasts, tiny houses have a sort of design-magazine cache — and they’re not cheap. Sprout’s largest model starts at $92,000, more than many traditional mobile homes twice its size.”\(^{163}\) The increasing tendency of the tiny-house market to cater to those who can afford to choose to “go tiny” is also reflected in the emerging market for the financing of tiny houses through tiny house lenders,\(^{164}\) and is furthered by the growing market for, and profitability of, short-term vacation rentals. Bolstering the obstacle presented by this latter use, existing homeowners who can afford to construct an accessory tiny house on their existing property for profitable use as short-term vacation rentals often do not face the same legal obstacles that confront those looking to live tiny full-time.

Though there are ways of constructing or purchasing a tiny home affordably, there are also significant hidden costs facing prospective full-time tiny house residents. One such hidden cost specific to those looking to construct and inhabit a mobile tiny house on a wheeled trailer is the cost of purchasing and owning a vehicle capable of towing such a

\(^{162}\) Siebrase, “Tiny houses - Rebelling…”.

\(^{163}\) Colorado Public Radio, "Walsenburg has big hopes for tiny homes.”

heavy load. Another much more significant hidden cost, which confronts nearly all prospective and actual tiny house residents, is the cost of land on which to locate such a structure. “One of the main reasons people are interested in tiny houses is that they are relatively cheap. Once you try to buy land, it's not anymore, and the actual tiny house becomes the least expensive part of the equation.” Regardless of how affordably suitable land may be acquired, this is a significant additional cost that is not included in the price of constructing or purchasing a tiny-house. This feature of tiny houses is quite unlike more traditional models of housing, which include the land on which they sit. While there are certain advantages, in this respect, to the self-sufficiency of many tiny houses, those too come with trade-offs:

Land is expensive no matter how you slice it, but there are a few things you can consider when looking for land. If you are willing to live in very rural areas, you can pick up land at a better price, but you trade being close to things and having more employment opportunities. Since many Tiny Houses are off the grid, you might consider purchasing land that has failed to pass the “perk test” which is way cheaper, but consider the implications down the road.

Though there may be the potential for a new tiny house oriented land-rental market to emerge eventually, the price of renting land still represents another additional cost that must be factored in to considerations of the financial accessibility of “going tiny”.

165 Lisefski, "Our Tiny House Towing Adventure: Part One."

166 Alter, “Why Hasn't The Tiny House…”.

Tiny houses are also prohibited by use- and zoning-restrictions in most areas. This condition compounds the un-affordability and inaccessibility of “going tiny” that is already a consequence of the financial implications of tiny-house living and the cost of requisite land on which to do so.

The issue comes when you look at your municipality’s minimum habitable structure definition. These definitions almost always exclude Tiny Houses from being a dwelling and give code enforcement a strong leg to stand on when it comes to condemning your Tiny Home and/or levying fines. This code does serve a good purpose; it prevents abuse on the part of slum lords and gives a mechanism for the courts to hold slum lords accountable.\footnote{Ryan Mitchell, "Top 5 Biggest Barriers To The Tiny House Movement,” \textit{The Tiny Life} (blog), July 24, 2012, http://thetinylife.com/top-5-biggest-barriers-to-the-tiny-house-movement/.}

This is one of the primary reasons why tiny houses are so often built on mobile trailers.

“Many towns regulate how small a domicile can be. Park County, home to Hartsel, requires a 600-square-foot minimum for a home. But a temporary structure on land, essentially an encampment, is exempt. So a house on a trailer qualifies.”\footnote{Porter, "Christopher Smith and Merete Mueller…”} Building on wheels prevents the necessity to adhere to building codes and other requirements of permanent structures. However, as the same article points out, “despite the approach of putting a tiny house on trailer, this isn’t the magic bullet that it is often claimed to be.”\footnote{Mitchell, "Top 5 Biggest Barriers To The Tiny House Movement.”} While this approach may circumvent many of the laws pertaining to minimum space requirements, building codes, and public-utility-connectivity, it creates other drawbacks of its own.

\ldots at the end of the day, a vehicle is not a house. Unless the tiny house is RVIA-certified or large enough to meet manufactured housing code, it’s more or less considered a car. Cars are not entitled to some things: namely a...
A tiny house parked on private land can have an address…but the address is actually for the land itself, not the house. The house is not a house and the home is not a home, and you can’t put the address on your license, and your house isn’t eligible for all the great tax breaks and legal recognition the rest of the landed gentry enjoys. And this, finally, is where the myth of “illegal” tiny houses comes from. It’s not that you can’t live there, even full-time; you just can’t legally declare that your “full-time” “primary” “residence.”

Consequently, even those users who can afford to purchase private land on which to locate their tiny houses may be forced to live under-the-radar, legally-speaking. Perhaps this is why so many tiny house buyers seem to be building second homes or accessory structures on properties that they already own. While this may open the door for short-term rentals, anyone looking to declare the address of a tiny house on a shared lot as their legal primary residence will have to share the address of the main structure on that land, and may still find themselves constantly under legal threat.

While some tiny-house owners have found sympathetic landlords willing to take on the implicit risks and extend this courtesy, as in the case of one tiny-house in Cherry Hills, Colorado, living in such a co-located tiny house full-time still presents the constant threat of being evicted from that land and forced to relocate the structure. “With your tiny house, you often have to live under the radar of building code and tax assessors. This poses a big risk if you are discovered and turned in. Potentially you could be removed from your own land; you could be charged fines/back taxes or at the very least, your neighbors could


173 Barbara Mariner, in discussion with the author, November 27, 2015.
begrudge you.”\textsuperscript{174} Even those tiny house residents who are fortunate enough to have found benevolent or cooperative land-owning hosts still live under the constant threat of potential legal and financial consequences, as do those landowners who host them. Additionally, for both landowners and tiny house residents, regardless of whether or not the two are the same, the risk of social alienation or ostracism at the hands of unhappy neighbors is very real.

Even though living tiny “under-the-radar” is not impossible, it does, for the aforementioned reasons, necessitate certain social relationships and modes of conduct in its own right. This means that, when it comes to skirting the law, there are some things tiny house residents living under the radar can do to mitigate the risks. One commonly advocated approach to mitigating these risks is to “…be a good neighbor… This is because most municipalities are complaint driven, meaning only when code enforcement gets a complaint, do they investigate. The other thing to add to this is, don’t be obvious. Have your house be out of sight of the public and keep a low profile.”\textsuperscript{175} As exemplified by this advice, the practice of living in a tiny house “under the radar” is, in the characterization of De Certeau, a spatial “tactic”: “although they remain dependent upon the possibilities offered by circumstances, these transverse tactics do not obey the law of the place, for they are not defined or identified by it.”\textsuperscript{176} People living in this way do, as De Certeau describes, depend on “the possibilities offered by circumstances,” in the most direct way. If practical circumstances allow — that is, if a tiny-house owner can find a sympathetic property owner

\textsuperscript{174} Mitchell, “Tiny Houses Suck!”

\textsuperscript{175} Mitchell, "Solutions To The Top 5 Barriers…”.

\textsuperscript{176} De Certeau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life}, 29.
to facilitate placement of such a dwelling, even illegally — such a tactic may be, and in this case is, practiced by users, regardless of the “law of the place” or its relative formality. If suitable land is going unused, it is therefore, “vacant, and susceptible of being diverted, reappropriated and put to a use quite different from its initial one.”

If people are left unable to afford suitable housing in the areas where they need to live and work, it should therefore be expected that they find a way to subvert the predominant model of housing and, with it, the residential spatial arrangement, in ways that exert their own influence on those very same arrangements. De Certeau aptly, if unintentionally, describes much of the tiny house movement in one definition of spatial tactics:

Innumerable ways of playing and foiling the other’s game…that is, the space instituted by others, characterize the subtle, stubborn, resistant activity of groups which, since they lack their own space, have to get along in a network of already established forces and representations. People have to make do with what they have.

By defying the rules of the “space instituted by others,” tiny-house users living under-the-radar are creating new spaces in the interstices of existing domestic space. In this example, such rules are established by the authorities who define and enforce zoning and use restrictions precluding tiny-houses. This practice, however, is often largely dependent on the generosity of the land-owners and the cooperation of the neighbors, which is why “being a good neighbor” is so important for these users to continue living this way. By refusing to let the representations of space, at the legal level, define their practice, such users also provide some of the necessary feedback from their own spatial practice into those very

177 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 167.

178 De Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, 18.
representations of space, in accordance with the importance of diversion in producing new kinds of space through new kinds of social relationships. The importance of being a good neighbor is part and parcel of these new social relationships, and the role of generosity is central in the employment of these spatial tactics.

The actual order of things is precisely what “popular” tactics turn to their own ends, without any illusion that it will change any time soon. Though elsewhere it is exploited by a dominant power or simply denied by an ideological discourse, here order is tricked by an art. Into the institution to be served are thus insinuated styles of social exchange, technical invention, and moral resistance, that is, an economy of the “gift” (generosities for which one expects a return), an esthetics of “tricks” (artists’ operations) and an ethics of tenacity (countless ways of refusing to accord the established order the status of a law, a meaning, or a fatality).179

Because of the “silence of the users” in defining the representations of space that dictate acceptable land use, tiny house users must rely on tactical approaches of this kind, which often depend, in large part, upon generosity and social cooperation.

The fact that it is possible to live in a tiny-house this way, however, does not make the prospect any more feasible for those who cannot afford to take the legal or financial risk that it inherently entails. Even where it is possible to trade the additional monetary cost of land, on which to legally place a tiny house, for the risk taken on by living under-the-radar, the latter entails a financial gamble that many in need of more affordable housing opportunities simply cannot afford to undertake.180 These risks are painfully apparent, as well, in light of the attention garnered by a protest in Sustainability Park in Denver, Colorado, in October of


2015, where activists associated with Denver Homeless Out Loud erected several tiny houses, for use by the homeless, on land that was about to be sold by a quasi-governmental organization, the Denver Housing Authority, to a private developer.\footnote{Jeremy P. Meyer, “Meyer: Denver tiny-house protest was an act of civil disobedience,” \textit{Denver Post}, Last modified June 13, 2016, http://www.denverpost.com/2015/10/30/meyer-denver-tiny-house-protest-was-an-act-of-civil-disobedience/.
} The obvious visibility of these structures and their illegal and, perhaps more importantly, unauthorized, placement on private property resulted in a police response, after which several activists were arrested for refusing to disperse and the tiny structures were taken down and confiscated.\footnote{Anica Padilla, "10 arrested after building 'tiny homes' for the homeless in Denver park," \textit{TheDenverChannel.com}, last modified October 26, 2015, http://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/local-news/10-arrested-after-building-tiny-homes-for-the-homeless-in-denver-park.; Bruce Finley, “Homeless advocates clash with police over plan to set up tiny houses,” \textit{Denver Post}, October 25, 2015, http://www.denverpost.com/2015/10/25/homeless-advocates-clash-with-police-over-plan-to-set-up-tiny-houses/.
} While the intent of the protest was admittedly to draw attention to the increasing prominence of homelessness and lack of affordable housing in Denver,\footnote{Meyer, “Meyer: Denver tiny-house protest was an act of civil disobedience.”} the use of tiny houses as the instrument of this civil disobedience may have cast a shadow over the Tiny House Movement in Denver by associating it with overtly illegal use of such structures and with the subsequent arrests that resulted. Though it has certainly garnered attention for the need for more affordable housing in the city, it has also undoubtedly raised the awareness of many prospective tiny-house users in the area regarding the potential worst-case-scenario that can result from the illegal placement of such structures. Of course, civil disobedience is a necessary part of spatial tactics, which subvert approved or intended uses of space, but it is questionable whether or not this kind of attention helps more than it hurts the image of the
movement, as a whole. Instead of demonstrating how tiny houses can be successfully integrated into the existing domestic urban landscape without causing serious discord, this protest demonstrated how, if not done tactically and with subtlety, the unauthorized placement of tiny houses on existing vacant land can result in serious legal backlash.

What is apparent, however, is that a growing public awareness of the Tiny House Movement, including its commonly employed less-than-legal spatial tactics is beginning to make progress in effecting change in dominant representations of space, at the level of zoning and legal restrictions pertaining to the permanent use of such structures. This feedback from spatial tactics into representations of space is, of course, most effective when tiny houses are put in place with the permission of property owners and without disrupting the existing community, and the results of this feedback are now becoming apparent. Some communities, such as Walsenburg, Colorado, have already begun making changes to their zoning and other regulations to accommodate the burgeoning interest in living tiny.\footnote{Gabriella, “Tiny Houses Legalized In Walsenburg, CO.”} Other districts in the US have also made progress, in this regard, including Spur, Texas.\footnote{Gabriella, "First “Tiny House” Friendly City!" TinyHouseBuild.com, July 21, 2014, http://tinyhousebuild.com/first-tiny-house-friendly-city/; Spur Freedom: Tiny House Friendly Community, accessed July 07, 2016, http://www.spurfreedom.org/.

Internationally, some similar progress is being made, as a Dutch woman was recently approved by the town council in Alkmaar, in the Netherlands, to place her tiny house on a plot of land that was actually provided by the council.\footnote{Kimberly Mok, “Dutch woman's modern tiny house gets approval from local council,” TreeHugger.com (blog), June 16, 2016, http://www.treehugger.com/tiny-houses/legal-tiny-house-marjolein-jonker.html.} The city of Fresno, California also
recently amended its laws to allow tiny houses on wheels and backyard cottages, as long as they meet certain requirements.\textsuperscript{187} While Fresno has imposed certain restrictions that require tiny houses on wheels be manufactured to meet the legal requirements and certifications of recreational vehicles, effectively prohibiting prospective tiny-house users from building these structures themselves,\textsuperscript{188} such changes are a step towards allowing these kinds of tiny residences to proliferate legally. In a related phenomenon, San Francisco, Boston, and Vancouver have recently begun experimenting with allowing micro-apartments, which are often of the same general size as some tiny houses, and have waived or amended minimum-space requirements in order to do so.\textsuperscript{189} The need for, as well as the potential economic,\textsuperscript{190} social,\textsuperscript{191} and public health benefits of, new regulations allowing smaller-scale domestic spaces in walkable neighborhoods is also beginning to garner wider attention and demand.\textsuperscript{192} These kinds of new allowances are a straightforward example of how the growing popularity of the Tiny House Movement is reaching a tipping-point and beginning to exert the influence of its spatial tactics over the dominant legal representations of space in some areas.

\textsuperscript{187} Lloyd Alter, "City of Fresno legalizes tiny homes…".  
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{189} Wong, “Micro-Apartments in the Big City: A Trend Builds.”  
\textsuperscript{190} Peirce, "Compact Real Estate…".  
\textsuperscript{191} Ben Brown, “Zoning as Spiritual Practice: From me to we to Thee,” \textit{PlaceShakers.com} (blog), October 08, 2010, https://placeshakers.wordpress.com/2010/10/08/zoning-as-spiritual-practice-from-me-to-we-to-thee/.  
A certain level of visibility is required in order for the spatial tactic of living tiny where it is not properly legal or allowable to feed back into the established legal representations of space. Ironically, however, as the previous examples highlight, it is exactly this visibility that poses the greatest risk for those who are living tiny under the radar. Consequently, those choosing to live this way are often hesitant to divulge how or where they are able to do so.\textsuperscript{193} This limits, to some extent, the force of the movement in representing its own growing popularity. The question must be asked, then, exactly who can, under present conditions, afford to choose to live in a tiny house.

Part of this question has already been answered; those current property owners seeking to add a tiny house as an accessory on an existing property currently have the easiest time legally constructing and using such a dwelling. These existing property owners are generally, however, affluent individuals who are not in strict need of affordable housing. Simply put, these are typically the only people financially stable or well-established enough to skirt or navigate the legal and financial costs and complications of owning a tiny house. What this means for the movement, and in particular for those most sorely in need of new, more-affordable housing models, is that the momentum needed to reach the legal tipping-point and effect change on a widespread scale is unlikely to be driven by those who cannot currently afford more traditional models of housing. This is especially true in light of the legal and financial risk that comes with constructing and inhabiting a tiny house that is not strictly legal. Many of those who are currently choosing to do so are not from the poorest populations, like those involved in the protest in Sustainability Park, but are instead young

\textsuperscript{193} Harris, "Could tiny houses solve a big problem in Denver?"
working adults or more affluent or financially established individuals who are able to afford
the inherent risks and hidden costs of such a lifestyle.\textsuperscript{194} Though, for the former, the use of
tiny houses is a primarily logistical and economic solution, the latter group generally reserves
a place of central importance for the role of authenticity in their interest in “going tiny”.
While even those who can already afford these risks and costs can and do certainly appreciate
the cost-savings that can be achieved by successfully living tiny, those in the greatest need of
affordable housing are still left without a viable option, as the legal risks and hidden costs
make even affordably-constructed tiny houses an impractical liability.

If the Tiny House Movement is to reach the critical mass of momentum it would need
to achieve widespread legal accommodation, the popularity that drives such change will
likely not come from those in truest need of affordable new housing models, but rather from
those, like the Morrisons,\textsuperscript{195} choosing to voluntarily live tiny.\textsuperscript{196} In this respect, the potential
future progress of the Tiny House Movement bears a striking similarity to the “new left”
discussed by Doug Rossinow.

The new left was a movement of white, college-educated young people, few
of whom ever had known poverty. Material deprivation provided neither their
main explanation of insurgency nor their prime argument for social change. In

\textsuperscript{194} Hulleman, “Modern Tiny House People > Alek Lisefski.”; Hulleman, “Modern Tiny
House People > The Morrisons.”; Porter, "Christopher Smith and Merete Mueller…”.; Kerri
Fivecoats-Campbell, “About Kerri,” \textit{Living Large in Our Little House} (blog), accessed July

\textsuperscript{195} Hulleman, “Modern Tiny House People > The Morrisons.”

\textsuperscript{196} Siebrase, “Tiny houses - Rebelling…”.
fact, new left radicals launched what many have called a “postscarcity” radicalism, directing their basic criticism at the “affluent society” itself... 197

The Tiny House Movement, while not necessarily addressing its protestations-through-spatial-tactics directly towards this aforementioned, “‘affluent society’ itself,” similarly subverts the dominant representations of space and domestic housing models over which “affluent society” exerts the most influence of any population.

…space has taken on, within the present mode of production, within society as it actually is, a sort of reality of its own, a reality clearly distinct from, yet much like, those assumed in the same global process by commodities, money and capital. … in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power... 198

The tactics of living tiny under the radar seek to subvert the power structures that have been spatialized through the production of space in accordance with the specific current dominant representations of domestic space. It is the commodification of space, run out of control, that has been the genesis of inflated housing costs and the perpetuation of the dominant models of housing which all too often fail to meet the users’ actual needs. Begging further association between the “new left” and the Tiny House Movement is the emphasis that both have placed on achieving a new authenticity in the face of alienation brought on by dominant social and, in the case of the Tiny House Movement, spatial modes of production. “This sort of cultural critique and this linkage between authenticity and activism opened the path to the new left’s post scarcity radicalism.” 199

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198 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 26.
Boneyard Studios is a good example of the kinds of unencumbered, college-educated, working young adults who can afford to undertake the activism, and inherent risk therein, needed to draw attention to the way that tiny houses can be utilized responsibly for urban infill and densification. It is a tiny house project in Washington, DC, in which several tiny houses are co-located on a shared plot of land with a single address. Jay Austin, one of the pioneering members of Boneyard Studios and the designer and resident of the Matchbox Tiny Home, describes how the financial benefits of living tiny are certainly a motivating factor for many, despite the fact that living tiny is not, for this population, a financial necessity: “Driven by a desire for financial freedom, not financial necessity,’ said Austin. ‘I think that tiny homes are really great for one who wants to live simply, who wants to live within their means.’ It is also evident, from some of Austin’s writing on the Boneyard Studios website, that the level of education attained by tiny users like himself is of great importance in facilitating their ability to continue to live tiny in a less-than-legal way under the ever-present threat of potential legal crackdown. Educated, well-employed young adults like Austin are critical to the future of the movement. They command a social and economic capital that is simply not a tool available to those poorer populations for whom financial necessity, in the strictest sense, is the appeal of “going tiny”. The latter group would include the Denver Homeless Out Loud activists and the homeless or houseless populations for whom they advocate. Much like the involvement of the New Left in the civil rights

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201 DuBois, "For some, smaller homes are better.”

202 Austin, "Are tiny houses legal? Yes.”
movements of the late-middle 20th Century, the young professionals of Boneyard Studios and, in similar fashion, Alek Lisefski and his wife,\textsuperscript{203} and even the Morrisons, are voluntarily engaging in an activist form of tactical spatial practice that may have profound implications, if successful, for those who cannot presently afford to engage in this kind of behavior. These people, the lasting legacy of the new left, are described by Kathryn Schenk, as “people who were tired of living in and building oversized homes that did not reflect their lifestyle, just because they met the demands of the housing market.”\textsuperscript{204}

For these new(er) left radicals, the quest for spatial authenticity and a desire to live a simpler, more austere, lifestyle undoubtedly stems from a feeling of alienation within the current domestic spatial arrangement. However, the need for new “human-scale” and affordable housing models is less immediate and urgent, at least financially, to this population. Nonetheless, this fact does not diminish the importance of this segment of the population to achieving future legal recognition and accommodation for the movement, as a whole. “The new left radicals sometimes asserted that college students likewise sat outside the political system and therefore also had insurgent potential, but more often the new left emphasized the strategic location of students in the universities, which were increasingly important components in the nation’s political economy.”\textsuperscript{205}

The voluntarily tiny community constituted by college-educated, working young adults and the financially established remnants of Rossinow’s new left is the most important

\textsuperscript{203} Hulleman, “Modern Tiny House People > Alek Lisefski.”

\textsuperscript{204} Schenk, “Flex House: Prefabricating the Tiny House Movement,” 17.

\textsuperscript{205} Rossinow, \textit{The Politics of Authenticity}..., 2.
constituent community for the future of the movement, due the their prominent role in the social and political economy of the nation. Unlike the more marginalized populations that the widespread implementation of tiny houses could potentially benefit most, these more affluent voluntary tiny users can afford to carry the risks inherent in not only tiny house living, but also in publicizing their participation to encourage others to follow suit. Not only are prominent members of the movement like Austin, Lisefski, and the Morrisons providing advice and examples for others interested in “going-tiny” to learn from, they are also willing and able to take on the legal and financial risks of living tiny, sometimes illegally, in a very prominent and visible way. By shouldering these risks and doing so quite publicly, these tiny house activists are championing and propelling the movement and, in so doing, demanding the necessary legal changes and accommodations that could potentially have dramatic implications for the future of affordable housing for not only themselves, but also for those in the most critical need. Without their own privileged position within the current economic and social stratification, they would not be able to fulfill this role effectively; as in the case with the New Left, only “temporary economic luxury allowed the flowering of a postscarcity radicalism.”

It should not be overlooked, however, that the failure of current dominant housing models to meet the needs of domestic users’ actual spatial practices bears both financial and philosophical aspects. The latter of which, while certainly less primary in the hierarchy of practical needs, still holds significant importance in achieving a new model of domestic spatial arrangement that is appropriate to the varying needs of contemporary users.

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206 Ibid., 338.
All of this is not to say that only the New(er) Left, within the Tiny House Movement, is making headway in the struggle to attain new models of affordable housing for those in need. There are parts of the movement who have been working from this angle all along, and some headway is being made in this regard as well. Despite the controversy that became of the DHOL protest in Sustainability Park, there have been other attempts across the country to leverage tiny houses towards the same goals of “…providing low-cost, safe and sustainable housing for members of the unhoused community…”

Portland, Oregon, for example, “…is considering adding its third tiny-house village for homeless. The first, Dignity Village, was approved in 2007. A nonprofit manages the village that is limited in size and features a strict code of conduct for residents. The site has become a national model for transitional housing.”

Indeed, the numbers surrounding Dignity Village indicate that it has proven to be a much more cost-effective option, compared to more common approaches to transitional housing and homeless shelters.

While communities such as this may provide a welcome opportunity for new models of transitional housing, they do not directly address those who are not actually homeless, but who still struggle to find affordable and suitable housing. People who are not poor enough to require the services of homeless shelters or transitional housing, but who still do not earn

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208 Meyer, “Meyer: Denver tiny-house protest was an act of civil disobedience.”

enough to reasonably consider buying their own home, are still without sufficient affordable options. The voluntarily tiny community, despite its ability to afford the hefty price tag of many currently marketed tiny houses, is making progress in finding ways to produce such homes more affordably. When constructed individually, tiny houses can often “…cost roughly $110 to $138 per square foot to build. Industry averages for standard homes run $80-$110.” 210 One tiny house user cites the fact that “you don’t get an economy of scale in a tiny house…” 211 in order to explain the higher-than-average cost of building such a home. However, those who can afford this kind of price-tag are making headway, through innovation in materials and techniques, in finding newer and more cost-effective ways of constructing tiny houses. The Morrison’s tiny house design, called “hOMe”, carries a cost of only about $65 per square foot, which is much lower than the price of an average home. 212 Additionally, technological improvements in the techniques and materials used in construction have the potential to drive costs down much further, conceivably opening the door for truly and accessibly affordable new models of housing and fulfilling the idea that “the Tiny House Movement opens home ownership up to an audience that would normally not consider or cannot afford to buy a home.” 213 In her thesis on the subject, Kathryn Schenk describes how,

   the biggest leaps in this field have been with prefabrication, the production of components off site and shipped to the construction site, modular design,

210 Porter, "Christopher Smith and Merete Mueller…”.

211 Ibid.

212 Hulleman, "Modern Tiny Houses > Big Fascination.”

creating distinct components that can work together to form a full project and mass customization, the idea that consumer goods like cell phones and cars can be built with a number of options, allowing for unique goods at a lower production cost.\textsuperscript{214}

Schenk’s ideas about prefabrication and modular components facilitating the implementation and affordability of tiny house construction, through mass-production of the individual modular components, reveals the ways in which existing modes of industrial production can be leveraged to drive down the cost of such homes and, in so doing, make them accessible to portions of the population for whom home-ownership was not previously a viable option.

In this way, the economy of scale that is currently absent in the construction of individually custom-designed tiny houses can be achieved through the mass-production of flexible and interchangeable components. This would effectively allow the custom-work to be done in the arrangement and assembly of these pre-fabricated parts, rather than completely custom houses being built from scratch, which is an involved, time-intensive, and relatively- or proportionally-expensive proposition. “…The development of prefabricated housing systems represent an entirely new way of thinking about residential construction. Instead of the traditional cookie-cutter home, customers want homes tailored to their lifestyle, on their budget.”\textsuperscript{215} If the new-left-esque population voluntarily choosing to live tiny can pave the way legally for the proliferation and placement of tiny houses, the prefabrication of modular components represents a similar way forward, from the perspective of financial-affordability, for those populations who are in the most dire need of new affordable models of domestic space. For the Tiny House Movement to find a truly revolutionary character and achieve

\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 60.

\textsuperscript{215} Ibid., 67.
widespread implementation of a new model of affordable housing, it will depend on the legal accommodations demanded by the tactics of the voluntarily tiny community and the advancements in material production that Schenk describes and advocates. “Tiny homes may not be an ideal solution for every circumstance, but for those on the ends of the home ownership spectrum, the Tiny House Movement presents a viable option for ownership that would not have been possible otherwise.”

Only time will tell if these two concurrent advancements (the socio-political activism of those voluntarily “going tiny” and the economic demand for and availability of affordable modular components, respectively) will progress to the point that tiny houses become a viable option for those unable to undertake the legal and financial risks implicit in “going tiny” today. The former, more so than the latter, however, may depend in large part upon the image and representational space produced and presented by those who can afford to choose to “go tiny” under current conditions, and the way that their tactical spatial practice is received by the public, at large. Therefore, the public image and representational space produced and constituted by the Tiny House Movement, in its current form, is of critical importance to the future of the Tiny House Movement, itself, as well as for its potential to impact and improve the availability of affordable and attainable home-ownership. For this reason, the relationship between the movement and representational space, and especially that within the public sphere, is the subject of the final chapter.

The potential for tiny houses to transform domestic spatial models is very real. These homes are a reaction against current commodified housing trends, in that they reject the

\[216\text{ Ibid., 31.}\]
historical spatial legacy of Habermas’ bourgeois public and the implicit costs and lack of usability that this outdated model entails. Tiny houses present a number of revolutionary ways to address and meet the needs of domestic users, both individually and collectively, but their potential is limited by the current financial and legal costs and risks associated with their tactical implementation. Although the affordability of tiny houses is diminished and greatly complicated by current legal representations of space, their ability to create and foster an increased sense of spatial authenticity for those who can afford to “go tiny” remains. The need to employ less-than-legal spatial tactics, however, presents additional obstacles over and above the actual price tag of a tiny house, which is generally quite substantial, anyway. If the legal and financial conditions and demands that currently prevent tiny houses from being an option for those who cannot afford more traditional models of housing are to change for the better, the movement must rely on the voluntarily tiny community of educated and well-employed working adults to drive it’s momentum and increase actual tactical participation in the tiny lifestyle until the point that legal change is effected. Despite their numerous benefits, tiny houses, at present, still present numerous financial and legal risks and hidden costs that prevent them from being a realistic option for affordable housing.
CHAPTER IV

TINY HOUSES, PUBLIC LIFE, AND VIRTUAL SPACE

Whether the Tiny House Movement succeeds or fails, the movement’s rapidly expanding popular interest indicates that there are lessons to be learned about the meanings that are imparted and inscribed in spaces, both public and private. The first two chapters dealt with the potential for tiny homes to offer enrichment of spatial authenticity for the users of domestic space and with the problems that the movement seeks to address and, in turn, those it faces and creates in its efforts to achieve widespread implementation. However, this analysis has yet to directly address the significance, with respect to the multitudinous meanings inscribed in space, of tiny houses and the spatial practices and domestic spatial arrangements that they inspire and require. This chapter will seek to analyze the meaning that tiny houses acquire and represent for their users, by virtue of their uniquely reduced footprint, as well as the opportunities presented by the Tiny House Movement for the densification of meaning both within tiny homes, themselves, and within the public spaces that surround and permeate the domestic environment. The first section will address the densification of meaning for the users within the domestic space of a tiny house that is part and parcel of the reduced floorspace of such structures. Subsequently, the second section will examine the possible opportunities, presented by the new spatial arrangements facilitated or required by the placement of tiny homes within the urban landscape, for the densification of multivalent meanings inscribed in public space, as well as the prolific online presence of tiny house users and the public significance of this for the Tiny House Movement.
Increased Representational Qualities of Limited Domestic Space

This section will serve as an attempt to answer the following question: what are the effects of the implicit formal limitations of tiny houses and their minimal interior space on their representational significance and meaning, for the users? What has not yet been directly addressed is the relationship between tiny houses and the kind of meaning that is accumulated through use and the experience and memories of a place over time. This kind of meaning may be divided into two distinct categories. The first is that which is informed or, perhaps more properly, restricted and limited by the kinds of behaviors that are necessitated by, and therefore specific to, the limited space within tiny houses. The second is that type of meaning that is inherently common to and inscribed within all domestic spaces, but which also takes unique form in accordance with the design and limited interior space of tiny houses. This section will attempt to distinguish these categories of significance and to elucidate the effects of “living tiny” on the meaning that tiny house users inscribe within and upon their domestic spaces and the public spaces that surround them.

An individual user’s ability to designate which practices a tiny house facilitates, and to design the house specifically for those uses, necessarily results in a space more suited to his or her own individual lifestyle. “Activity in space is restricted by that space; space ‘decides’ what activity may occur, but even this ‘decision’ has limits placed upon it. Space lays down the law because it implies a certain order — and hence also a certain disorder. … Space commands bodies, prescribing or proscribing gestures…this is its raison d’être.”

The process of customizing and designing a house specifically for one’s particular needs and

\[217\] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 143.
practices lends itself towards an increased usability and increased significance, thereby, for the user(s) of that space. The idea of design being inherently limiting of practice is exemplified by one blogger’s claims that “People In Tiny Houses Can’t Have Sex,” due to the lack of suitable space in which to do so. What this author fails to realize, however, is that sexual practice is just one practice on the list from amongst which tiny house users must prioritize and assign relative value, in the course of designing and constructing such a home. Custom designed tiny houses exaggerate and thereby make explicit the way that practice-based-design creates a spatial manifestation of the priorities of the user. If diverse and frequent sexual activity is a priority for the user of a tiny home, there are ways of facilitating and accommodating this practice through conscious design decisions. The privileging of one use, like sexual practice, over others necessarily asserts and reinforces the significance of that practice for the users as they make use of the strategic design decisions implemented specifically towards the furtherance of such practices. In short, if a tiny house is designed, in specific ways, to accommodate a particular manner or variety of sexual practice, the performance of that practice within that specifically designed space will necessarily be of more gravity, as it fulfills a specific purpose inherent in the design of that space. The performance of acts for which a space was specifically designed, in this way, is particularly gratifying, for the user(s), and validating of those very design decisions. Prioritization within practice-based-design simply carries more weight. If a space is designed for a particular

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purpose or activity that is then made manifest through actual practice, that space can properly be said to have fulfilled “its raison d’être,” under Lefebvre’s characterization.  

Spatial authenticity, therefore, comes full circle when spaces designed for usability are actually used for the purposes for which they were designed. The custom tiny house itself may be viewed as the physical manifestation of spatial authenticity, through practice-based-design. The fulfillment of the raison d’être of that very same space represents the actualization of this same kind of spatial authenticity, through the user’s spatial practice. Another article, responding directly to this claim that tiny house users cannot lead normal sex lives, asserts the importance of exactly this kind of strategic design decision: “Picking the right bed might seem like the most important consideration — murphy beds can offer space while loft beds offer privacy, hammocks offer an entirely different sex swing experience all together — but finding or building the right tiny home can be just as critical as learning how to maneuver or furnish it.”  

While this characterization, along with the mention in the title of this article of “strategically installed handles," highlights the importance of considering sexual practice in designing a tiny house, the passage above also alludes to the dialectic between design and practice through which both the inherent and elective formal limitations of tiny homes must necessarily inform the users’ practices within that space. The sexual practices in question are significant not only insofar as their prioritization is reflected in the  

219 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 143.  

design of a tiny house, but also insofar as the character of these and related practices is, in turn, informed and specified by the inherent formal limitations of the house.

Medina also cites the importance of keeping their small space as uncluttered as possible for optimal sex-having… In tiny homes like Adams' and Medina's, a variety of surfaces, like a tabletop here, or a staircase there, lend themselves well to becoming props in a creative sex life, reinforcing the concept that just because tiny homes are minimalist doesn't mean the sex has to be Spartan.221

Sexual practice within tiny homes, consequently, offers a good illustration of the ways in which prioritization of practice informs and is, in turn, informed by the formal design elements of the space and inherent restrictions thereof.

The significance of tiny houses with respect to the meaning they carry for their respective users, once again, is impacted by their inherently reduced capacity for possessions. Because tiny house residents simply do not have the space to accumulate possessions in the quantities that may be allowed by larger residences, “it means new purchases must be carefully measured and thoughtfully considered, and the acquisition of one new possession often means the off-loading of another.”222 The element of careful consideration and thoughtfulness that tiny houses require of their users, in this way, lends itself to additional significance found in the things one chooses to purchase, own, and keep. If something is worthwhile enough to keep around in a tiny home, it likely or even necessarily must hold a great deal of significance for the user. “…Every…object is valued even more as it takes on symbolic weight…”223 People in tiny houses are forced to have less meaningless junk. This

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221 Ibid.

222 Hulleman, "Top 5 Reasons Tiny House People Are Winning…”.

223 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 30.
kind of significance, unlike that specific type of spatial authenticity that may be inherent in practice-based-design, is not unique to custom tiny houses and is, in fact, generalizable to all tiny homes, since it is a consequence of their reduced footprint, generally. Tiny houses, in both their design and in the objects they contain, once again present an image of the priorities of the user, made manifest in space. The pride that can often result from the successful balancing, in spatially manifest terms, of competing priorities for the user will be a theme in the next section.

There is also another compounding effect at work, in being forced to have fewer possessions, on the meaning those objects hold. It is reasonable to assume that most objects in a tiny house get used more often, on average, than most of those in a larger home and that this results in more memories of this use. The consequent meaning that those objects accumulate is, thereby, accelerated considerably by the frequency and prevalence of their use. The multi-functionality built into many tiny houses also has this effect. The more activities that a certain space serves, the more frequently it is used and, therefore, the more memories and meaning that become imparted to it and bound up within it, for the users of that space. This category of meaningfulness may be characterized as meaning accrued over time, through use, and is intimately tied to memory. “…The longer one lives in a place the more likely that the environment becomes saturated with memories of significant life experiences with family and friends.”

If the limited interior space and consequently necessary multi-functionality implicit in all tiny houses has the effect of increasing the frequency of use of the domestic space within such a home, the constituent elements of tiny houses accumulate

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224 Glassberg, “Public History and the Study of Memory,” 18.
meaning and memories at a higher rate than is true in a larger home. In this way, tiny houses take on meaning as representational space, for their users, more efficiently and quickly than larger homes, and the density of such meaning over a given span of time will be greater in a tiny house than in a more traditionally sized residence, because the space within a tiny house is more frequently the setting of everyday life and the subsequent memories thereof. “… Everyday life also figures in representational spaces — or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it forms such spaces.”

Representational space is formed through everyday life and the memories thereof. Due to the diminished size of tiny houses, their limited interior spaces are more frequently the settings of everyday life, compared to larger homes and the seldom-used spaces they so often incorporate. Because of this, tiny houses necessarily take on representational meaning at a rate that, compared to larger houses, is inversely proportional to their floorspace.

This assertion must be qualified according to the specific types of practices that tiny houses allow, which are generally more private in character. Public spaces, in contrast, are largely excluded by the limited interior space of a tiny house. Consequently, these practices must be relegated to more-properly public spaces outside of the home. This is precisely because the seldom-used pseudo-public domestic spaces of most homes are what tiny houses seek to eliminate. That is not to say that tiny house residents cannot or do not ever entertain guests in their homes. Rather, certain social functions that may be adequately served by larger homes cannot be accommodated by the limited space within a tiny house and must therefore take place somewhere other than within a tiny house. Therefore, while it is true that

tiny houses may unavoidably take on additional representational meaning proportionally to their reduction in floorspace, they do so only up to a certain point, as specified by the impossibility of accommodating certain functions within this limited interior space. This has qualitative ramifications for the types of meaning and memories which may be imparted into the representational space of a tiny house, in addition to the quantitative effects just discussed. Though tiny houses may take on proportionally increased amounts of representational meaning, their formal restrictions are such that tiny houses, by virtue of the practical demands they exert upon their users, also have an important effect on the character of the meaning that they come to embody. Because they do not incorporate pseudo-public spaces, the representational space of tiny houses takes on an increasingly and specifically private significance.

One such qualitative shift in significance and practice, which itself is not bereft of quantitative dimension, is the decreased amount of maintenance, both financial and practical, that many users cite as a primary motive for “going tiny”. “Less space means less stuff — fewer things to clean, to maintain, to fix. All this means more time for introspection, gardening, getting back to the simple things in life.”

The significant reduction in maintenance time and any consequent increase in leisure time may result in time spent outside the home that might otherwise have been spent within domestic space, cleaning or fixing things. This does not necessarily mean that it entails a consequent reduction in representational meaning within that same domestic space. Tiny house residents often report things like, “with the time we would normally have spent cleaning and working to pay for

226 Hulleman, “Modern Tiny House People > Alek Lisefski.”
our housing costs, we are now able to do the things we had always just dreamed of such as sticking to a regular exercise program… traveling more, etc.”, but the fact that many newly attainable activities, such as increased travel, may happen entirely outside of the domestic space of the tiny house does not prevent their memory from attaching itself to, and inscribing itself on and within, that tiny house. As in the case of the Morrisons, in the previous example, the attribution, by the user, of the newfound freedom and leisure time to the reduced financial and time burden represented by the tiny house is, itself, enough to become representational meaning for that user, within and of the space of the tiny house. In this way, a considerable portion of the enrichment of the representational meaning of domestic space that can be attributed to “going tiny” is a direct result of the time and cost savings that tiny houses generate. Though the time savings, at least in terms of maintenance and cleaning, offered by tiny houses is fairly generalizable, the cost savings is subject to a variety of factors and circumstances, both legal and practical.

Instead of spending time in the home that might otherwise be necessary, in a larger house, to spend cleaning or fixing things, tiny-house users can, and in a certain sense must, spend more of their private time (that is, time within the private sphere of properly domestic space) with family. “Close quarters with your loved ones at all hours of the day and night have the potential to create a bond many families in larger homes simply cannot experience.” Many users also report that their familiar relationships have taken on a new character, by virtue of the necessary physical proximity demanded by tiny house living:

227 Hulleman, “Modern Tiny House People > The Morrisons.”

228 Hulleman, "Top 5 Reasons Tiny House People Are Winning…"
“There is a closeness to our family dynamic now that we didn’t always have. Our communication skills have increased dramatically and our desire to spend time together has gone way up.”

Spending time together is, after all, what living tiny is all about. “Due to the number of physical objects between family members such as doors, walls, and floors, many in larger homes can go days without seeing each other very much.” This is not to say that such constant physical proximity does not have its own potential drawbacks which, in like fashion, must also exert their restrictions or demands over spatial practice. Such spatial restriction of practice is particularly evident in one tiny house resident’s report that,

…to share the space effectively (without killing each other) I try to work outside the house for half the day (I go to a coffee shop)…In order for our relationship to thrive, this is one method of finding ways to leave the house at certain times so both me and my partner are not living/working all day in the house together — and so we both feel satisfied in our needs for privacy and alone time.

This kind of user experience also highlights the way in which tiny houses, by virtue of their small size, relegate or restrict more-properly public activities, such as socialization (at least, in any larger group than would fit inside a tiny house comfortably) to space that is, in like fashion, more-properly public, itself. Tiny houses restrict their users so that they necessarily spend more of their private time together, in a smaller space. If representational meaning can be quantified as memories (both in- and of- a given space) over time, then the representational significance of the space of tiny houses, with specific respect to private domestic practice, is proportionally increased by virtue of the limited interior space. This

229 Hulleman, “Modern Tiny House People > The Morrisons.”

230 Hulleman, "Top 5 Reasons Tiny House People Are Winning…”.

231 Hulleman, “Modern Tiny House People > Alek Lisefski.”
holds true even as the practices prevalent within the tiny house necessarily take on a more specifically private character, overall. Adding to the densification of representational meaning of these small domestic spaces, increased free-time brought on by cost- and time-savings attained by living in a tiny house, even if spent entirely outside of that specifically private domestic space, contributes greatly to the representational meaning embodied by tiny houses, themselves. This is precisely because the user is able to perceive his or her newfound freedom and leisure-time as one of the benefits of “going tiny”.

**The Significance of Tiny Houses for Public Space**

It is still necessary to examine the potential significance, for public life and the spaces which are its setting, of the current presence and possible future proliferation of tiny houses within the urban landscape, as well as online. This will be done by first analyzing the specific arrangements and practices of public spaces that may be effected or even necessitated by the common placement of tiny houses within urban space. Secondly, it will analyze the proliferation of tiny houses within the virtual public sphere of the internet, and attempt to illuminate how the prevalence of tiny houses and their owners online might be caused by the spatial limitations of tiny houses themselves, and in turn how the internet and social media has become a new locus, in virtual space, for some of the participatory elements of representational space and representations of space that were formerly served by the scale and visibility of more traditionally sized homes.

Because tiny houses necessarily exclude the pseudo-public spaces that are common to larger homes, they lack the performative or practical capabilities to accommodate the public functions and practices that these rooms, at least nominally, serve. Despite the evidence that
many of these pseudo-public spaces go largely unused, it is not fair to say that they are entirely useless, since these interior spaces have their historical origin in once-common spatial practices of public life. Therefore, it makes sense that usable public spaces outside of the domestic space of the tiny house, itself, are a pre-condition for the successful widespread implementation of tiny houses. In order to accommodate the more-public functions once served by spaces within larger houses, though they may occur with less frequency today than in the past, usable and accessible public spaces are critical to maintaining or even increasing the vibrance of public life, if more and more houses are to exclude these pseudo-public spaces, altogether. The necessity of more shared-spaces, if houses are to be smaller and more private, is expressed frequently within the body of material surrounding the proliferation of not only the Tiny House Movement, specifically, but also of smaller houses more generally. In the search for affordable and affordably-scaled employee housing in towns like Telluride, Colorado, some have envisioned, “…a community of off-the-grid tiny homes…next to a community building where residents could access restrooms, showers and laundry machines.” While many tiny houses include restrooms and showers, the idea that there is a need for spaces of a more communal living arrangement is not unique to the specific affordability needs of resort towns like Telluride, nor is it a phenomenon of tiny houses, specifically. One article on micro-apartments reports, “Ted Smith, an architect in San Diego, says singles would be better served by residences that group efficiency studios into suites with communal areas for cooking, dining, and recreation.”

232 Jason Blevins, “Tight supply, high demand…”

233 Wong, “Micro-Apartments in the Big City: A Trend Builds.”
example, “…areas for cooking, [and] dining” are usually included in the design of most tiny houses, but there are spatial limitations placed on these practices within tiny homes. The most obvious of these restrictions is the inherent limit on the number of participants. Although most tiny houses have their own kitchen and a space suitable for eating, entertaining any significant number of guests would be nearly impossible inside of a tiny home. For this and other types of private-public or pseudo-public gathering and activity, a communal space that is able to accommodate a greater number of occupants is required. There is nothing inherently wrong or disadvantageous about this condition, however, as shared activity would be best suited to and by shared spaces, in the same way that the private practices and activities of domestic life may be argued, as this paper does, to be better served by more-properly or more-exclusively private space like that within a tiny house.

The need for improved and accessible shared public spaces, however, is not just effected by houses becoming smaller. The principles of sustainability which are so prevalent within the Tiny House Movement also appear frequently outside of the movement, and “…it has now become widely accepted that to achieve true sustainability, we must get away from automobile-focused, segregated land use patterns, and return to more time-tested models of walkable, mixed use, compact neighborhoods.” The need for walkable and accessibly-scaled neighborhoods is also not exclusively a byproduct of the growing contemporary market for ecological and environmental sustainability, but is just as important for creating vibrant public communities. In his article on cottage neighborhoods consisting of small houses, Ben Brown writes, “the trick to living large in small spaces is to have great public

234 Dyer, “What’s So Smart About the SmartCode? And Why Do We Need It?”
places to go to – preferably by foot or on a bike – once you’re outside your private retreat…

No problem feeding the private, nesting impulse with cottage living; but the smaller the nest, the bigger the balancing need for community.” The formal and spatial limitations of tiny houses necessitate a careful consideration of privacy, especially within the context of shared or cohabited tiny houses, but also require a shift of public life and its constituent practices to those more-specifically public spatial domains outside of the private space of the home. Such a shift may be seen in the conception of “pocket neighborhoods,” as formulated by Ross Chapin, who argues that “the shared outdoor space at the center of a cluster of homes is a key element of a pocket neighborhood. Residents surrounding this common space take part in its care and oversight, thereby enhancing a felt and actual sense of security and identity.” The “identity” that this excerpt references is closely tied to representational or lived-space, in that both are subject to the history, collective identity, and memory of the user-community, as well as the individual constituent identities, histories, and memories of the members thereof. This shift in the locus of public practice also necessarily entails the increase of “time spent together” in the public or general sense, in addition to the sense in which this is true of families and residents within a tiny house. Because smaller homes like tiny houses are not particularly well-suited to public activities, those public spaces which are well-suited to such practices will necessarily see an increase in popularity and use. The effect of this is twofold.

First, with respect to representational meaning, the same dynamic that the first section of this chapter illustrated regarding the space of the domestic interior holds true, in like

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235 Brown, "Livin’ Large in Small Spaces: It Takes a Town."

fashion, with respect to shared public space. Increased use leads to increasingly densified representational meanings being embedded within a given space. The use of the plural, “meanings,” in the preceding claim is no accident, and particularly with respect to public spaces and their multiplicity of uses, the multivalent representational meanings that become embedded within public space are truly plural in nature. “Representational spaces…need obey no rules of consistency or cohesiveness. Redolent with imaginary and symbolic elements, they have their source in history, in the history of a people as well as in the history of each individual belonging to that people.”

By virtue of the spatial limitations of tiny houses that force public activities to be conducted in public spaces, the widespread implementation of tiny houses within the existing urban landscape would arguably effect a densification of representational meanings within those public spaces, through their increased use specifically as such. As long as large “McMansion” style houses predominate the domestic landscape, the representational space of public settings is left largely unfulfilled because of the use, albeit increasingly infrequent, of private domestic spaces for more-properly public practices. If the domestic size trend is reversed, so too should increased use begin to maximize the vibrance and density of representational spaces within the public domain.

The second effect of the increased use of public spaces that is a likely consequence of widespread implementation of tiny houses pertains to the way that spatial practice informs and specifies representations of public space. Custom tiny houses present an opportunity for residents-as-designers (or, at least, as contributors to design) to reclaim the primacy of their

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237 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 43.
particular spatial practices in determining the representations of space according to which
their homes are designed and built. In like fashion, so too does the increased use of- and
demand for- public spaces, as necessitated by tiny houses, constitute additional constraint or
influence upon institutional design of those public spaces to conform to the needs of the
users’ (in this case, the public’s) actual practices. Although the users of these public spaces
are not, as in the case of custom tiny homes, actually designing these public spaces
themselves, the increased use of such spaces brings inevitable feedback into representations
of space, at the level of design. As more and more people use public spaces more frequently,
not only will the representational significance of those spaces be increased and densified, but
so too should those particular uses begin to exert their necessary and specific influence on the
design of those very spaces, in both their layout and their prevalence. This means that
increased demand for usable public spaces should, in areas where these sorts of spaces are
inadequate or too infrequent, beget an increase in the prevalence of such spaces designed for
collective public use. Just as the use of space, within a custom tiny house, for that particular
set of practices towards which it was specifically designed, fulfills the *raison d’être* of that
space and contributes to its spatial authenticity for the user, the increased use of public spaces
in this manner can have an analogous effect. The widespread implementation of tiny houses,
therefore, has the potential to densify the representational meanings in public spaces and to
create and exert an increased influence of the public-as-users and their spatial practices on
the representations of space, at the level of design, that shape those spaces. In so doing, it is
likely to increase the spatial authenticity and vibrance of public life in these settings.
Through their prevalence and visibility online, tiny houses, themselves, come to constitute representational space within and towards the public sphere, as an audience. The scale of tiny houses is even smaller than Susanka’s “Not So Big House,” which she describes as, “…designed for the way people live rather than to impress their neighbors. They’re arranged in a pleasant and organic way, with common space and footpaths that encourage people to walk rather than to drive everywhere.” Such an arrangement could be described as a human-scale community. Because of this reduced size, however, tiny houses do not have the scale or visibility that might allow a more traditionally-sized home to communicate the accomplishment or status of the user this way. While tiny houses lack the visibility and scale of more-common larger homes, their prevalence online can be usefully viewed as an attempt, through the practice of online participation and engagement, to supplement or substitute for these attributes and their inherent communicative aspects. Because many tiny house residents live under the radar, the visibility of such homes, with respect to them being seen by the public from the public spaces of sidewalks and the street, is quite intentionally limited or minimized. This is in order to mitigate the legal and financial risk posed to their users and, in certain cases, their hosts or landowners. The diminished communicative aspects of tiny houses are compounded by their inherent limitations in accommodating visitors within their interiors. Due to their unique legal situation and inherent spatial restrictions, tiny houses cannot be shown off to the public, whether from the street or as guests, in the same way that

larger homes usually do. In response, many tiny house enthusiasts and residents have taken to displaying their homes in the publicly visible, yet relatively anonymous, sphere of the internet and social media in order to share their unique design innovations and the corresponding methods of practice that these users have found to work best.

Within the Tiny House Movement, innovation and creativity have supplanted size as the predominant feature representative of their users’ accomplishments. Tiny house users take more pride in their innovation and creativity than they would in the size of a larger home. This, in turn, makes tiny houses more similar, under Lefebvre’s formulation, to works of art than to products, reversing the trend observable in more traditional models of housing, to which Lefebvre’s formulation seems appropriate in its characterization that, “as for the question of who does the producing, and how they do it, the more restricted the notion becomes the less it connotes creativity, inventiveness or imagination; rather, it tends to refer solely to labour.”239 As the actual producers of tiny houses, in many cases the users, themselves, become more widely varied, so too is the dynamic Lefebvre describes effectively reversed. In contrast to the excerpt above, tiny homes require less actual labor to produce, while simultaneously emphasizing and thereby reinvigorating the role of creativity and inventiveness (towards the goals of meeting the particular users’ specific practical needs, and towards multi-functionality, to that same end) in the production of domestic space.

“Humanity, which is to say social practice, creates works and produces things. In either case labour is called for, but in the case of works the part played by labour…seems secondary,

239 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 69.
whereas in the manufacture of products it predominates.” In order to display and share the pride that tiny house users feel in having employed such creativity and innovation in their design and practice, tiny houses have found an appropriate outlet to show off these works in the virtual online sphere.

For many types of persons these are still the only means of saving for oneself, through the attention gained from others, some sort of self-esteem and the sense of filling a position. …here we find the attempt to appear to-the-point, clear-cut and individual with extra-ordinarily greater frequency than where frequent and long association assures to each person an unambiguous conception of the other’s personality.

The accomplishment of such successful innovation and adapted practice is often a point of pride and self-esteem for custom tiny house residents, and is a focus of the online display of these homes.

This method of representation online is significant in two major ways. Firstly, the innovation of many custom-designed tiny homes, because it is specific to the unique practices of the particular user(s) of that space, is not always obvious to the casual public observer, from the street. The online display of such creativity, in contrast, allows the user to actually explain and expound upon the innovative elements and how they serve their own unique practical purposes. Secondly, the practice of showing off one’s tiny house online seems to embody a unique intersection of representations of space and representational space. Tiny house blogs and websites are, in one sense, an example of representations of space, insofar as the pictures and explanatory writing implicit in this effort are a direct representation of the domestic space in question. However, this practice also serves to further

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240 Ibid., 71.

the effect of tiny houses as public representational space, in that this online participation furthers the pride and representational meaning that a tiny house holds for its user(s) by allowing them to share their accomplishments with the public at large. In this way, tiny houses represent a potential answer to the question posed by Lefebvre, who asks, “What occupies the interstices between representations of space and representational spaces?”242 He goes on to distinguish that, “producers of space have always acted in accordance with a representation, while the ‘users’ passively experienced whatever was imposed upon them…”243 Because the residents of custom tiny houses are quite often both user and producer, they bridge this gap and reunite representational space with representations of space. The same is true of their online participation.

By sharing their tiny houses online, tiny house users have found an outlet to reconnect representations of space, through their pictures and words online, with the representational space that these tiny homes embody for them. This virtual display is also necessary because they cannot take the risk of doing so in physical space and because the scale of tiny houses does not facilitate their visibility in this way. Through online visibility, they also allow their own tiny houses to become representational space for the public viewer, who can thereby see, if only online, that living in a tiny house can be done successfully and, moreover, that it can contribute to a sense of spatial authenticity that is often unattainable in a more traditionally sized house. Consequently, if the tiny house movement is to achieve the popularity required to make legal changes necessary for the fully legal widespread

242 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 43.

243 Ibid.
implementation of such minuscule dwellings, their online visibility will play a pivotal role in communicating the benefits, both private and public, of this domestic spatial model to the wide audience required to reach this goal. The effectiveness of this effort, however, will also depend on the individual users’ ability to communicate the representational significance of these spaces, for them, to the online audience through the use of this particular kind of representation of space.

Online, users are able to show off, in great detail, the innovation, creativity, and personalization that went into their tiny houses, which increases their sense of pride in their own attainment of spatial authenticity. Because tiny house users are often engaged in subversive or even illegal spatial tactics, the online display of their homes also serves as the safest, and therefore primary, mechanism through which they can share the success and benefits of their lifestyle and tactics, and encourage others to join the movement. The division between public and private spaces that tiny houses facilitate is crucial to revitalizing communities and domestic representations of space and representational space, generally.

The restrictions imposed by the limited interior space of tiny houses furthers their accumulation of representational meaning, through increased use and the memories thereof, within that domestic space. Simultaneously, these same restrictions exert their influence, through the particular practices that these small residences allow or preclude, on the designs of the communities in which they are placed and the public spaces nearby. Tiny house users are more likely to spend more of their time within the home doing specifically private activities, such as spending time with family and making memories in and of their domestic space and use thereof. This has the effect of strengthening and densifying the representational
meaning that this space embodies for those users. Conversely, these same users are also forced, by the inherent restrictions of their homes’ diminished interior space, to engage more actively with specifically public spaces as the locus for their public activities. Because tiny houses do not incorporate pseudo-public spaces, public activities are not facilitated within their limited interior space, forcing these practices out into the properly public spaces exterior to the home. Any increased use of public spaces, as a result of this restriction, can only lead to an analogous densification of collective memory and representational meaning in public space. If common use of public spaces increases enough, this dynamic can, and ideally will, also result in increased levels of feedback from public spatial practice into the design of those public areas, making them better suited to the particular uses of their user communities. In addition to imposing a stricter division between public and private space, and therefore between the locus of public and private activities, the diminished and less-visible physical scale of tiny houses also encourages users to actively display their homes online. This online display of current voluntary tiny users is absolutely critical to the continued recruitment of such voluntary participants and, thereby, to the future of the movement in attaining the legal recognition and accommodation that it requires in order to realize its potential as a new accessible and affordable opportunity for homeownership.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The houses of today have failed to adapt to the evolving spatial practices of contemporary users. Many contemporary homes still incorporate large areas that are seldom used and, more often than not, only used for completely ad-hoc purposes. The spatial legacy of the now-defunct bourgeois public continues to dominate the domestic landscape, even as the costs and momentum of housing, as a commodity, have outpaced and overshadowed the primacy of usability within domestic space. The Tiny House Movement has the potential to reconnect the spatial practice and practical necessities of today’s users with the representations of space implicit in the design of their homes and of the domestic landscape. Reclaiming the role of individual users’ unique practices in shaping the representations of space that define their domestic environment is a central focus of tiny house living. Through custom design and a human-scale approach, tiny houses meet the needs of their users without overburdening them with unnecessary costs in either time or money. By shedding the costs of areas within the home that are no longer conducive to the uses of contemporary domestic spatial practice and utilizing representations of space and designs that incorporate high degrees of multi-functionality, tiny houses present an opportunity to increase the spatial authenticity experienced by the users of those spaces and to potentially open new opportunities for affordable and accessible home ownership.

Tiny houses are not presently, however, a feasible alternative for most of those in need of new affordable and accessible models of housing. There are significant hidden costs and legal risks implicit in the spatial tactics often employed by those living in tiny houses,
under present legal conditions. Despite the visibility of tiny houses, online and in the media, many people interested in the movement have been hesitant to commit to this lifestyle, and not without good reason. The complicated legalities and logistics of finding a place to legally or unobtrusively locate a tiny house, coupled with the hidden costs they impart and the relatively steep current cash price tag of many homes of this kind, mean that “going tiny” is not currently a secure or viable option for those most in need of new affordable housing options. These widespread financial, legal, and practical intricacies and difficulties are simultaneously the biggest obstacle faced by the growth of the movement, itself, and the most prominent condition that it is seeking to change. Until this goal is met, those choosing to “live tiny” will continue to do so at their own legal and financial risk. What this means for the movement, at present, is that its participatory momentum and growth must be driven by those who can afford to choose this lifestyle voluntarily, and to take those risks willingly. The remnants of the original new left of the mid-twentieth-century, along with the educated, working young adults who are their contemporary counterparts, comprise the majority of this voluntarily tiny community, on whose shoulders the future of the movement currently rests.

While some legal progress has already been made in certain jurisdictions, the majority of the country still faces numerous legal and practical obstacles to “going tiny.” In order for progress to be made in this respect, the movement must continue to draw the interest of the public and grow. Legal changes accommodating tiny houses would likely open up this domestic model to a wider market, which has the potential to drive down costs through mass-production of modular components without necessarily imposing a significant
reduction in the spatial authenticity of customized tiny houses and their practice-based-design.

The success of the movement in attaining widespread legal accommodation could very possibly create new opportunities for affordable housing and home ownership. While the effects of tiny house living on users’ consumption habits is still largely unclear, there are certainly ongoing financial and time benefits for those who are able, whether now or in the future, to successfully “go tiny.” Similarly, tiny houses offer a general reduction in energy consumption and other environmental impacts, which has the dual benefit, for the movement, of reducing environmental degradation while simultaneously appealing to growing market of eco-conscious consumers. Custom designed, eco-friendly housing and the technology that makes it possible is still not inexpensive, however, and the current price of many tiny houses reflects this condition, furthering the need for the voluntary tiny community to drive the movement to a critical mass.

For those who can afford to choose the voluntarily tiny lifestyle under present conditions, the benefits of increased spatial authenticity and an elevated sense of pride in one’s own domestic space and ingenuity are among the potential rewards. Although tiny houses may currently be a viable option mainly for those who would likely be able to afford more traditional housing, the decreased ongoing financial and time burden that they represent for users is still very real. Consequently, many tiny house users report that their newfound free time and minimized housing costs contribute greatly to their overall happiness and, in turn, to the representational significance of their tiny homes for them, as users.
The representational space of tiny houses is also further densified by the multi-functionality of these small spaces and the objects within them, which take on an increased significance by virtue of their relative scarcity and the increased frequency of use that results.

For families or couples living together in tiny houses, more time spent in close proximity to one another, in the home, means more memories of the home and of one another and more consequent significance imparted into their representational space. The increased leisure time and spending money that is often a consequence of “going tiny” also contributes to this added significance, and time or money spent pursuing one’s interests need not be spent within the home in order for users to attribute these benefits to the reduced burdens imposed by their tiny homes. Though tiny houses may not necessarily reduce consumption habits to the extent that some claim, most tiny house residents report that purchasing and consumption take on an increased significance and require more careful consideration in the context of this lifestyle.

The restrictions imposed by tiny houses on the practices of their users also have the potential to invigorate public life within the settings of public space. Because tiny houses are so small, they restrict certain activities altogether and, thereby, require their users to spend more time outside of the home, in order to accommodate public practices that the tiny house cannot. Consequently, they present an opportunity for the relocation of public participation, in many respects, to more properly public areas. Smaller, more private homes require better public spaces to compliment them. The exclusion of public activities from the domestic interior, as in the case of tiny houses, necessitates better public spaces to accommodate those correspondingly public practices towards which these homes are no longer well-suited.
Communities designed or adapted to include tiny houses, in like fashion, would require more thoughtfully designed public spaces to facilitate increased use. This would thereby provide additional feedback from actual public spatial practice into the design of these settings, resulting in more usable and vibrant public spaces.

Until actual participation in this movement has reached a point that legal accommodations and general cost reduction are attained, the voluntarily tiny community must outspokenly display their successes and advise prospective tiny house users on how best to avoid their failures. Because of the legal implications of the tactics of tiny house living, the most appropriate venue for this public display continues to be the virtual sphere of the internet and social media. Online, tiny houses users are able to display their homes to the public in whatever detail these users desire, despite the diminished scale and often intentionally hidden visibility of tiny houses themselves. Online participation allows current tiny residents to display their accomplishments within the relative anonymity and safety of the internet, while still reaping the benefits of sharing their own pride in their increased sense of spatial authenticity, along with the increased significance this imparts on the representational space of these tiny houses.

Tiny houses may currently offer an increased sense of spatial authenticity for those users who can afford to choose to “go tiny,” but for many of those most in need of new, more affordable housing options, it is still not yet a realistic alternative. The tactics of living tiny “under the radar” are a crucial part of the movement’s struggle to find a place in the domestic arrangement, but the risks implicit in these tactics also make “going tiny” unfeasible for many users. In order for the Tiny House Movement to progress to the point that it presents a
viable alternative housing model for the general population, its momentum must be driven by the voluntarily tiny community and those users’ prominent and proud display of their homes online. Reaching new audiences and encouraging participation in the movement is critical to maintaining its momentum.

The potential exists for tiny houses to change the domestic landscape for the better, for many people, but it must first attain the legal change necessary for such minuscule structures to proliferate in a legal way. At present, for those who can afford the costs and risks, the Tiny House Movement offers the potential for achieving an increased sense of spatial authenticity, as well as heightened pride and representational significance, for those users of domestic space. If it is successful in attaining legal change and more widespread accessibility, the Tiny House Movement offers a mechanism for reconnecting the three elements of Lefebvre’s production of space. It therefore presents a revolutionary new conception of the domestic landscape in which the primacy of the users’ practical needs is reestablished and reinforced, and which exemplifies a production of domestic space that de-emphasizes the role of houses as commodities in favor of usability and affordability for a much wider population of domestic users than is currently the case.
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