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William Davies, Sahil Jai Dutta and Nick Taylor

Abstract

This paper argues that a new 'domestic regime' has taken hold in Anglo-American economies since 2008. The combination of austere fiscal policy and loose monetary policy produced sustained house-price inflation in an otherwise stagnant economy. This combined with broadband-enabled digital platforms, a highly flexible labour market, and a routinely undervalued social reproductive sector to transform how capitalism operates in these economies. Taking the United Kingdom as a central case, our goal in this paper is to articulate what constitutes a 'domestic regime', and to locate this concept within wider sociological and political-economic debates. To adequately grasp the contemporary regime, we suggest that it needs to be considered in all its multifaceted, interlocking dimensions: the *financial*, the *infrastructural*, the *reproductive* and the *productive*.

Keywords: home; housing; asset; platforms; regimes; COVID.

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The period since the global financial crisis (GFC) of 2007–2009 has, *inter alia*, witnessed a revival and reorientation of two largely separate traditions of social scientific research. The first concerns the problem of inequality, which is now the basis of an entire 'paradigm' of scholarship, critique and public debate (Savage, 2021). A distinctive feature of this paradigm is the way that it centres wealth, assets and rents. Piketty's (2014) infamous observation that 'R>G' captured a wider sense that growth and profit had become unmoored from the spheres of production and labour markets, and instead become delivered by the manipulation of balance sheets (Christophers, 2020) and defensive strategies for the perpetuation of wealth concentration (Beckert, 2022). Post-GFC macroeconomic policies, which served to deflate wages while inflating asset prices, have helped to validate Piketty's (2014) framing. Understanding the dynamics of wealth has required social scientists to pay close attention to the financial and legal instruments via which non-productive entities become 'assetized' and managed in pursuit of revenue streams (Birch & Muniesa, 2020; Pistor, 2019).

Amongst the various implications of this paradigm is that the family is a more significant political-economic entity than often assumed, both as a unit of professional wealth management for the super-rich (Glucksberg & Burrows, 2016; Harrington, 2016), and as an inter-generational provider of asset-based welfare (Adkins *et al.*, 2020). Rather than inequality emanating from the labour market or the factory, it is increasingly seen as a function of how wealth is (and isn't) passed on via inheritance, gifts and forms of philanthrocapitalism, with housing an especially significant asset class in this respect (Toft & Friedman, 2021). In the process, many foundational liberal ideals of modernity have been thrown into question (Savage, 2021). The spectre of an unaccountable oligarchy, extracting rents from society, has raised the question of whether neoliberalism has given way to 'neo-feudalism' (Dean, 2020). Outside of wealthy elites, the logic of wealth inequality makes it far harder for individuals to achieve independence from their parents and grandparents (being unable to leave home or to acquire property through earned income), and to achieve recognition independently of birth. The separation of 'productive' from 'reproductive' activity, of 'enterprise' from 'household', which are regulatory principles of bourgeois liberalism (Hareven, 1991; Weber, 2002), begin to dissolve in an economy oriented around wealth.

The second research tradition concerns a problem that has in the past been framed as one of 'government'. As Foucault and Foucauldian scholars have emphasized, the task of governing never falls exclusively to sovereign powers or those in positions of 'political' authority but pervades society at various scales and in heterogeneous domains, as a technical problem (Burchell *et al.*, 1991; Foucault, 2007). Early modern texts on government were preoccupied with how best to govern the household, though this became displaced under liberalism. Instead, government of liberal societies (in which extensive spheres of activity are assumed to be beyond the reach of sovereign power or politics) requires a host of technologies, networks of expertise, methods of statistical aggregation and audit, managerial techniques, surveillance architectures, and so on, which aim to steer individuals and institutions in optimal directions. A crucial insight here is that modern government is mediated via countless 'centres of calculation' (statistics agencies, auditors, universities, etc.), which are not necessarily under the control of the state (Rose & Miller, 1992).

The rise of giant, commercially operated digital platforms in the early twenty-first century as 'centres of calculation' represents a radical transformation in the possibilities and challenges of government. The politics of 'data' has become a public issue (Zuboff, 2019). If liberal government has long depended on the epistemic authority of statisticians, professions, auditors and managers to establish certain facts of social and economic conduct, platforms disrupt these jurisdictional monopolies (Savage & Burrows, 2007). The potential reach of quantification, and therefore of governmentality, extends far beyond what any analogue methodologies are capable of, opening up more 'private' and bodily behaviour to analysis. Meanwhile, the centrality of key spaces of discipline and government (school, campus, office, etc.) is circumvented, as so many social, cultural, productive and pedagogical activities shift 'online', generating new governmental problems for policymakers, managers, parents and teachers in the process. In practice, the platformization of many everyday activities means relocating them into the bounds of home, which transforms the problem of how to govern them. In the process, government of and within the household takes on a fresh significance.

Our argument in this paper is that these two core problems – that of inequality and that of government – converge in important ways in one particular sphere of socio-economic life: that of the *home*. The post-GFC era has seen the domestic sphere politicized and problematized in ways that cannot be wholly reduced to either a feature of the 'asset economy' or to one of 'governmentality' alone, but in how the two interact in various ways. At the same time that inequality has been threaded through the domestic sphere by the logics of assets and rents, so the home has taken on a host of new technical properties, functions and capabilities, that are themselves inflected by inequalities. To capture this, we introduce the idea of the 'domestic regime', as a means of encapsulating the multiple, mutually reinforcing ways in which domestic space and relations are underpinned and configured by distinctive economic and technological forces. The home is now simultaneously an object of speculative investment (whether or not the investor is also the occupier), a space of production and social reproduction, and a material technology that is integrated into broader infrastructures of data collection, audit and management. The question is how these various dimensions and capacities reinforce one another, deepening inequalities in the process, and ushering new governmental problems, both over and within the home.

The perspective we adopt here owes much to the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and the policy responses with which it was met across the Global North. In a number of ways, the crisis of 2020–2021 deepened and illuminated the trends of inequality and government that were already underway and elevated the significance of the domestic sphere further. Policies aimed at sustaining the financial system during lockdowns had the effect of driving up asset prices (including house prices) even higher; a far greater array of social, economic and cultural activities became conducted from within the bounds of the home, mediated by platforms, deepening political inequalities and conflicts that take place within the home; the reopening of schools, campuses and workplaces led to new problems of governmentality, as it became harder to encourage pupils, students and employees back out of the home (Davies *et al.*, 2022; Turnstall, 2022). There was a new valorization of the self-sufficient bourgeois household, including new speculative investments in spacious rural real estate. Lockdowns and their aftermath forced societies to confront the full range of ways in which the financial and material qualities of homes impact differentially on people. This paper therefore takes up the invitation to view the pandemic as something to 'think with, rather than [only] an object that must be thought about', and to see what was already there but with fresh eyes (Fassin & Fourcade, 2021, p. 5).

The rising significance of housing and of family under conditions of neoliberalism has of course been noted by various scholars, from various perspectives, many of which we review below. The privileging of owner-occupation and under-investment in social housing in Anglo-American economies has been noted as a key feature of a particular model of capitalism (Blackwell & Kohl, 2019), and the pivotal role of real estate in neoliberal capitalism has been repeatedly emphasized by geographers (Aalbers & Christophers, 2014; Harvey, 2003). As feminist scholars and economic anthropologists have noted, welfare retrenchment and financialization have placed greater burdens on the household as a centre of care and financial management (Cooper, 2017; Ossandón *et al.*, 2022; Zaloom & James, 2023). Taking the United Kingdom as our empirical case, the aim in this paper is to work across these literatures and others, to identify how different facets of home interlock, with divergent implications for how the space of the home is used and experienced. We do so firstly by introducing the concept of the 'domestic regime', as a means of examining the political economy and political technologies of home. We then break this down into four component parts, which are examined in turn: home as asset, as infrastructure, as site of social reproduction, and finally as workplace. These are four different lenses through which the new centrality and politics of home can be perceived. The paper concludes by considering what kind of research agenda might follow from this programmatic analysis.

Envisioning domestic regimes

The concept of a 'regime' has been applied by social scientists in various domains in the past. The ideas of 'growth regimes' or 'regimes of accumulation' is central to the French 'regulationist' and social structure of accumulation approaches, where they are applied to explain how inherently volatile capitalist societies nevertheless generate distinct and identifiable periods of stability (Aglietta, 1998; Boyer, 2001). Relatedly, the notions of 'factory regimes' and 'workplace regimes' have highlighted the interlocking social, economic and political dimensions of labour relations (Burawoy, 1985; Wood 2021). Feminist scholars have used the concept of 'regimes of reproduction' to refer to how patterns of waged, unwaged and 'cheap' labour are mutually reinforcing, in contexts of patriarchal capitalism (Fraser, 2016).

Common to all these literatures are certain methodological problems that the idea of the 'regime' helps to resolve. Firstly, distinctive, common and relatively enduring patterns of activity demand to be identified, but without declaring them universal or permanent. A 'regime' of activity (be it at the level of the workplace or at the level of the national economy) is more than an isolated case, but less than a universal norm. Instead, there may be multiple regimes co-existing synchronically, differing across space, or alternatively successive regimes replacing one another diachronically over time. Secondly, a focus on 'regimes' requires some interdisciplinarity, if multiple, mutually reinforcing aspects of power are to be adequately grasped. Most importantly, this emphasis on regimes resists any strict division between the 'political' and the 'economic', but we may go further by considering the role of technology and social conventions in how patterns of behaviour become relatively enduring over time and space. As regulation scholars have emphasized, capital accumulation is conditioned by specific technologies, spatial patterns and forms of organization (such as the assembly lines, industrial centres, management hierarchies and techniques of discipline that made up 'Fordism').

A domestic regime might therefore be understood as a relatively enduring and stable set of political, economic and technological relations, which both position the home with respect to the wider political economy and organize the home internally as a site of its own political-economic problems and conflicts. We use the term 'home' in this paper (rather than overlapping concepts of 'housing' or 'household') because it is precisely the function of housing *as home*, and not necessarily as 'household' or 'family', that we are seeking to focus on. Amongst the most significant historical manifestations of a 'domestic regime' at work is the liberal or bourgeois separation of home from 'work', where the latter is conceived as paid labour (occurring in a 'workplace') that is historically gendered as male, whereas 'housework' was gendered as female (taking place in the 'non-economic' space of the home) (Hareven, 1991). This regulatory principle of bourgeois liberalism concealed all manner of political and economic conflicts, that have been illuminated by (amongst others) feminist social movements (e.g., Federici, 1975; Rowbotham, 1973), housing studies (e.g., Clarke & Ginsburg, 1975) and feminist political economy (e.g., Elson, 1998; Harrison, 1973). Nevertheless, the assumption of the home as legally, normatively and spatially separate from the firm and the economy has long been constitutive of modernity (Mitchell, 1998; Zhang, 2024). And yet this is now becoming undone in various ways.

The new domestic regime becomes palpable and visible when one considers the politics and economics of who 'stays home' and under what wider conditions. The platform-enabled, assetized home is a spatial container of a host of different possibilities, obligations and constraints, including those of work, consumption, surveillance, social reproduction and social exchange. But how these are deployed is a reflection on imbalances of wealth and power, and on the wider political economy. On the one hand, 'staying home' can be a reflection of financial and infrastructural privileges, whereby domestic space is expanded and redeployed to increase autonomy, and integrate different spheres of productive, reproductive and financial life, as we will explore. The addition of home offices (including workspaces established in outhouses) is a reflection of class privilege, as is (for example) the availability of home tutoring for children. On the other, 'staying home' becomes a form of deprivation, for the rising number of people whose anxiety or disability prevents them from attending school, campus or workplace; where in-person care or advisory services have been replaced by online ones; where community spaces such as public libraries have been closed down; or for young people whose rental payments leave them unable to afford to 'go out' in the evenings. A generalized crisis of in-person attendance of public institutions (manifest especially in educational establishments), coinciding with austerity-driven closure of 'third spaces' (Robinson & Sheldon, 2018), is a sign of a shifting geography of government, whereby the conventional liberal-professional spaces of observation and instruction are circumvented, and domestically-located life becomes the default. New governmental controversies have arisen, such as those surrounding the increase of children's 'screen time' (at home) and commensurate loss of autonomy outside the home (Haidt, 2024).

The growing centrality of the home becomes explicit in the upper reaches of the income and wealth spectrum. Sociologists of the super-rich have noted that family, home and household made up a central unit of financial management, leisure, work and education, with particular focus upon security and intergenerational wealth transfers (Beckert, 2022; Cooper, 2022; Glucksberg & Burrows, 2016; Harrington, 2016). Yet, the significant escalation in house prices that took place from the late 1990s until 2008, then again from 2010–2022, opened up the 'wealth effect' to a broader strata of society (Smith, 2008). The flipside of this is that homeownership has become less accessible, and indeed declining in the United Kingdom since 2007–2008 (Smith *et al.*, 2022), correlating to the rise of the private rental sector (Christophers, 2021), and the rising significance of inheritance and gift-giving within the middle classes (Adkins *et al.*, 2020).

Financial inequalities are in turn reflected in spatial and material inequalities, that impact upon how the home and family are governed. The availability of 'spare' bedrooms, home office space and adequate internet connectivity takes on added importance, as became especially clear during lockdowns. The most recent UK census shows that while 4 per cent of homes have too few bedrooms (11 per cent in London), 36 per cent have two extra bedrooms, which is contributing to the productive, reproductive and financial possibilities latent in the new domestic regime (ONS, 2023a). For the wealthy, a widening array of defensive spatial and technical strategies develop around the home, which may see the home become a type of 'fortress' (Atkinson & Blandy, 2017) or threaded with platform-based surveillance and control devices so that the home can be governed via apps. Owner-occupiers have engaged in increasingly elaborate and frenetic forms of spatial expansion, such as digging basements, opening up loft space and building extensions (Burrows *et al.*, 2022). This may be partly motivated by an ambition of further asset appreciation, but it may equally be a way of taking advantage of existing asset appreciation, which allows for equity to be leveraged for new material acquisitions (Cook *et al.*, 2013). But for renters, the materiality of home (which can now be equipped with ever-more sophisticated technology acting in the service of landlords) is frequently an obstacle to financial autonomy, security and even to physical health (McKee *et al.*, 2020). Meanwhile, Britain's infamous 'bedroom' tax effectively assetized surplus space in a more punitive fashion, using it as a justification for cuts to housing benefit.

It is clear that any 'domestic regime', as we've characterized it, is multifaceted in nature and requires an interdisciplinary perspective to be understood. Our intention for the remainder of the paper is to apply four different 'lenses' to the inequalities and governmentality of 'home' in the UK context. These draw on literatures that have already centred housing and household in their understanding of contemporary political economy, but we hope that by reviewing them in turn we can highlight the inter-relations at stake, which together form a discernible regime.

Home as asset

A central feature of the current domestic regime is that 'home' is also an 'asset', though who the owner and beneficiary of that asset may be is another question. We cannot begin to understand the politics and economics of domesticity today, without also interrogating how the logic of assets is threaded through the space and materiality of home, something that has gathered momentum over the course of the neoliberal era (Smith, 2008). What do we see if we apply the lens of the asset economy to the new domestic regime, and how potentially does that logic open out onto different dimensions of inequality and of government?

The major trends are stark. In 1970, UK house prices were no higher in real terms than 1948, they had doubled by 2009 (Atkinson, 2018, p. 141), and tripled by 2020 (Bank of England, 2020). It meant household wealth in the United Kingdom increased significantly in the past 25 years: from £4.9 trillion in 1995 to £12.3 trillion by 2021 (ONS, 2022a), captured largely by those able to buy houses. The relatively widespread demographic base to homeownership in the United Kingdom had worked through the mid-twentieth century as a bulwark against the sort of inequality that existed previously. Yet since the financial crisis, even this is changing, with homeownership re-concentrating (Smith *et al.*, 2022) and the division between outright owners, mortgagers and assetless renters increasingly stark (Adkins *et al.*, 2020). Since 2013 outright owners (35 per cent) make up a larger proportion of UK homeowners than those with mortgages (29 per cent) (DLUHC, 2023) and almost half of all housing wealth in the United Kingdom is owned by the over-65s (ONS, 2022b). With house price growth exceeding income growth, many households are reliant on capital gains, leverage and intergenerational wealth transfers within the family to make their debts sustainable. Outside of this is the third of UK households that rent, split between a falling proportion of social renters (17 per cent) and an increasing group of private renters (19 per cent) (DLUHC, 2023).

The backdrop to this is a macrofinancial policy paradigm which has elevated the significance of housing and home, forcing a wider array of activities and time spent inside the bounds of the home, but for contrasting reasons. Britain's fiscal austerity programmes since 2010 targeted universal services especially important to the asset-less. Spaces of conviviality, security and education, like libraries, parks, and children and youth centres were closed, leaving those who depended upon them more confined to home. At the same time, monetary policy was dramatically loosened, directly raising the wealth of asset owners, and their ability to borrow for home improvement, while only indirectly supporting the income of poorer households (Bunn *et al.*, 2018), reinforcing the unequal trends between rapid house-price growth and wages. On its own terms the approach was successful. Following the brief slump in house prices that accompanied the GFC in the United Kingdom, they had recovered sufficiently by 2015 to match the pre-crisis 2007 peak, and grew substantially from there (Bank of England, 2020). This dynamic was then intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic when loose monetary policy was used to counter the shut-down economy. Amid deep recession, house prices continued to rise, making it the first recession in which household wealth grew (Leslie & Shah, 2021).

Supporting the growth in house prices is the improved use of the home as a means of capturing the income of others through rents, a process now enmeshed with the rise of digital platforms, which potentially make the rental property a space of data extraction and government (Nethercote, 2023). It is little surprise that, viewed wholly from a balance sheet perspective, landlords now assess prospective tenants using algorithmic risk profiling software, designed for purposes of credit scoring (Ciocănel *et al.*, 2024). Short-term lets have become an important source of extra rental income for owners, with UK Airbnb hosts making over £1.5 billion in rents (Airbnb, 2022) in 2021. The growth of the short-term rental market has intersected with the spread of a host of 'property tech' platforms that allow landlords to surveille tenants and manage doors and utility use at a distance. For longer-term tenants, property tech platform surveillance has been used to discover tenant transgression and support evictions. 'Landlordism' has thereby been bolstered by such digital governmentality, working in tandem with supportive macrofinancial conditions.

At the same time, many asset-rich, middle-class households secured funds for both luxury and emergency consumption, and asset-improving home improvements through equity releases. Between 2008 and 2020, £402 billion was 'released' through equity borrowing (Bank of England, 2022). As with landlording, it is those most housing wealthy households who use equity borrowing to finance domestic investments like extensions, home improvements and bathrooms. For the more marginal mortgage holders, with still significant mortgage costs, equity borrowing was used more as a financial buffer and to support immediate spending needs (Smith *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, in a context where public pension and elderly care provision has receded, the possibility of generating cash-flow from home as an asset is an important route to a secure retirement (Pemberton, 2021).

The corollary to the escalating wealth of asset owners was the growing proportion of rental households who were unable to access the housing ladder. The house price to rent ratio, a measure of the comparative costs of buying versus renting, nearly doubled in England between 1997 and 2018 and grew by 153 per cent in Greater London (Hilber & Mense, 2021). Combined with modest real income growth this left many both unable to join the escalator of rising house prices and yet still subjected to rising rental costs. A defining feature of these rental households is their comparative housing costs. More than one in five private tenants (and 52 per cent of low-income private tenants) spent more than 40 per cent of their disposable income in rent (OECD, 2023) and higher costs, like heating, related to housing. Yet, the private rental sector is no longer the preserve of just young people and those on low incomes. The sector as a whole grew by 45 per cent between 2008 and 2021 and came to include a broader demographic of renters (DLUHC, 2022a). This in turn broadened the market for investors into rental income and particularly with PropTech making at-a-distance landlording easier is changing the character of landlording. While still a significant part of the rental sector is 'buy to let' renting as we described, larger landlords, with more than five properties, make up almost half of all tenancies in England (DLUHC, 2022b).

More recently institutional investors are moving into the sector through the rise of Real Estate Investment Trusts and 'build to rent' investments. The earlier era of the financialization of housing was buying cheap and 'flipping' houses to cash-in on the capital gains. Now, institutional investors eye larger developments to extract regular rent and fees that can be securitized. Designed foremost for students, families and residential elderly care, rather than the traditional staple of low-income and precarious people in houses of multiple occupancy, these new developments require vast upfront-capital and leverage to begin. Intersecting with a different branch of PropTech, investments are increasingly planned using algorithmic valuation projections with rents and fees then set accordingly. The more that people are priced out of homeownership the more these forms can view rental yield at every stage of life as a basis for profit (Fields, 2018). In the United Kingdom, Lloyds Bank has announced plans to finance the building and management of rental homes in the United Kingdom, while the giant asset management firm Blackstone, has become a significant player in single-family rental homes in the United States (Christophers, 2023). The promise of steady rental income, alongside the housing stock itself, is a key collateral to support highly leveraged growth. Blackstone, for example, floated their housing company on the stock market, generating liquidity from illiquid investments that could then be used to capture further assets. Lloyds' housing company is issuing its own debt securities for the same purpose (Legal & General, 2021).

Home as infrastructure

A central lesson of the COVID-19 pandemic concerned the dramatic increase in the range of activities that can now be conducted from within the space of the home, and the new centrality of the home within twenty-first century grids of media and governmentality (Preciado, 2021). These new technological facilities, which largely date back to the arrival of giant platforms and broadband infrastructure in the late 2000s, have produced whole new lifestyles and routines, in which it is no longer so necessary to leave the home. Coinciding with fiscal and political threats to social and public infrastructure (Klinenberg, 2018), it is possible to identify a general technological tendency towards the domestication of social, cultural and economic life. Pessimistic claims regarding the impact of television on civic activity (Putnam, 2000) foreshadow a more radical shift in the domestic regime, towards an infrastructural condition in which entertainment, work, conviviality, consumption and education are relocated to within the home. This offers a different aspect upon the new domestic regime altogether.

Homes have been embedded in and conditioned by infrastructure networks (durable, accessible conditions of mass social and economic participation) that have grown in density and complexity over the course of the industrial era. Postal networks, and later sewage, electricity, gas and telecoms, have all added to the possibilities of domestic life, allowing for a greater range of activities to be conducted from home. The modernist ideal of the functional home, integrated into planned and universal infrastructure networks, gave way to a neoliberal vision of privatized, 'multi-speed' networks from the 1980s onwards (Graham & Marvin, 2002). The privatization of telecom networks, followed by the rise of the platform business model, has produced the phenomenon of the giant tech platform, that has some qualities of public 'infrastructure', but with a for-profit logic, that can be mined for both data and profit (Plantin *et al.*, 2018). The platform model, which makes online services cheaply or freely available at massive scale, while collecting and analysing data by default, has allowed a far greater range of entertainment, work, education, civic activity, consumption and socializing to be conducted from home, while also rendering the domestic sphere surveillable in unprecedented ways (Rahman & Thelen, 2019; Van Dijk *et al.*, 2018). The extent to which broadband connectivity and platform access have become infrastructural conditions of citizenship was confirmed during lockdowns by the way governments were forced into distributing laptops to children in disadvantaged households during school closures and formed new public-private partnerships as part of the 'pivot' to online teaching. This, together with the rapid escalation of delivery and streaming services during the lockdowns then accelerated already-existing tendencies towards the formation of 'smart homes' (Maalsen & Dowling, 2020).

That vision of the 'smart home' long predates 2020 and remains a matter of considerable speculation and futuristic imaginings. The concept of a 'smart home' must partly be understood as a means of pushing surveillance technologies into the domestic sphere (Darby, 2018; Rapoport, 2012). Whether this is experienced as a consumer choice (as when consumers embrace the services of Amazon), or as an intrusion into private life, will partly depend on housing tenure: the owner-occupier who might instal CCTV devices, digital assistants (such as Amazon Echo), smart thermostats (such as Google Nest) and other means of anticipating and nudging their own behaviour deploys a very different type of agency from the tenant whose movements and consumption might now be tracked against their wishes, or at least as a form of discipline which invites them to demonstrate 'good' tenancy behaviour (Maalsen & Sadowski, 2019; West, 2019). 'Smart' thermostats may promise control to the resident, but equally to the landlord. The inequalities embedded in the asset economy are wedded to power relations of digital infrastructure.

Platforms have furthermore made the home a key node in a network of just-in-time delivery and services. An array of gig-economy (typically assetless) workers has emerged in the service of the household for ultra-instant delivery of goods, shopping and groceries. The logistical infrastructure of delivery vans, bikes and warehouses, coordinated via apps and APIs, has been mobilized increasingly to support this home-consumption ecology. That is especially so in the United Kingdom, which is the biggest market in Europe for food delivery apps like Just Eat, Deliveroo and Uber Eats. Food delivery experienced 171 per cent year-on-year growth between 2018 and 2021 (Eddison Trends, 2021) and more broadly, online retail now accounts for almost 30 per cent of all retail sales in the United Kingdom, its use having jumped during the pandemic and remaining 20 per cent up on pre-pandemic levels (ONS, 2022c). The model has of course empowered the logistical giants and tech monopolists – who have harvested vast swathes of household data along the way – and has relied on an army of precarious workers. Along with retail, entertainment is increasingly domesticated with the rise of platform streaming and gaming. There are almost 20 million households in the United Kingdom with paid subscriptions to at least one of the video-on-demand services like Netflix (BARB, 2022) leaving cinemas ever-more dependent on the summer blockbuster releases to maintain their business model.

The material and infrastructural qualities of home have taken on an added urgency – and political dimension – in relation to energy usage. The once mundane question of home insulation has provoked civil disobedience (in the case of the Insulate Britain movement) and has even been treated as a matter of geopolitical strategy, to the extent that it reduces reliance on overseas energy sources. Surging energy prices plus the longer-term challenge of reducing carbon emissions, have created intense focus upon housing materials, energy-consuming behaviours within the home, and the kinds of smart technology that might aid transition to lower energy usage. Visions of 'smart' green homes, in which residents can constantly modulate their behaviour to minimize energy costs, and materially adapt their homes to *generate* electricity to be sold back to the grid (or even directly to neighbours), give an idea of how politically charged and economically strategic the infrastructure of domestic space has become. Even so, the default assumption that a 'home' must be a separate material space for each family or each individual limits the potential to achieve lower waste, lower emission lifestyles (Jarvis, 2013).

These infrastructural dimensions of the new domestic regime intersect in politically and economically urgent ways with the spatial dimensions, as it becomes harder and more costly to control temperatures within the home. Infrastructural and spatial inequalities have long structured differential experiences of heat, be they in access to air conditioning, green space or water (e.g., Klinenberg, 2002). But under conditions of climate change, the politics of heat now impacts on a rising proportion of the world's population, which raises anew questions of how building materials and domestic infrastructures produce stratified thermal experiences of 'home', differing over seasons. Given energy costs and climatic heating, class privilege becomes reflected in the capacity to control domestic temperature, as an increasingly luxurious affordance.

The potential impacts are significant. Many governments, including in the United Kingdom, have subsidized households to support the production of green technology energy generation, which is then 'sold back' to the grid. In the absence of substantive, government-funded home insulation schemes, the primary beneficiaries are those who can afford higher upfront costs (Grover & Daniels, 2017). When it comes to energy efficiency, privately rented homes are older and less likely to be insulated than owner occupier or socially rented homes (Terry, 2020), while both social (4 per cent) and private rented homes (11 per cent) are more likely to have problems with damp and mould than owner occupied households (2 per cent) (ONS, 2022a). This issue of 'energy justice' is seen in the way poor households proportionally pay much higher costs to heat their homes in the United Kingdom (ONS, 2022d) and the fact that 10 per cent of [open-strick][close-strick] excess deaths in winter can be attributed to cold homes (Lee *et al.*, 2022). A central infrastructural attribute of home has become the *thermal* barrier it provides against the outdoors. This will plainly become a matter of growing political significance in the years ahead.

Home as site of social reproduction

The home has long been understood as a key site of 'social reproduction', which can be understood as the work that goes into maintaining and reproducing population on an everyday and intergenerational basis (Bhattacharya, 2017). Much of this encompasses the usually unpaid, and historically gendered, work of cleaning, cooking, childcare, laundry and more. The world of the official 'economy' depends on, and free-rides on, this unvalued 'hidden abode' of capitalism, historically associated with, and exploitative of, women's labour (Fraser, 2014). The liberal or bourgeois domestic regime has been criticized for precisely this contradiction, that it facilitates intensifying economic exploitation in domains that it declines to recognize as 'economic'. But how does the new domestic regime look, once seen via the lens of social reproduction? Similarly, gendered conflicts and inequalities evidently persist, but what is striking is how these have become entangled with new logics of investment (for instance in 'human capital') and new intergenerational dependencies that blend the work of social reproduction and financial strategy, producing what Adkins *et al.* (2020) term a 'Minskyan household'.

While the home has historically been a central locus of care, there has been an intensifying (re)privatization or (re)domestication of social reproduction under neoliberalism (Fraser, 2016). This is especially true of the periods of crisis and austerity after 2008, where the home and work of social reproduction has acted as an essential but exploited 'buffer' zone (Mezzadri, 2022; Pearson, 2019). Unmonetized care in the home has also become more enduring, insofar as both the young and old are increasingly remaining at home, voluntarily or not, and receiving it. This is a direct effect of asset price inflation. Between 2011 and 2021 in England and Wales the share of children in their twenties living with their parents rose significantly, with the majority of those in their early twenties (20–24) and nearly a third in their late twenties remaining in, or returning, home (ONS, 2023b). At the same time, the United Kingdom has seen declining fertility rates, and those who do have children do so later in life (Ermisch, 2023). For older people, the contested ideal of 'ageing in place' with care at home might be contrasted with the realities of the increasingly inadequate or strained support – from formal or informal carers, or from broader public services – available for their caring needs, as well as the lack of alternative forms of housing (Burgess & Quinio, 2021).

Housing and the home might equally be considered as material infrastructures that define and organize the patterning of care, and the possibilities and conditions of giving and receiving it at household and social scales (Power & Mee, 2020). Neoliberalism has been characterized by the time-pressured, dual-earner home, where those who can afford to, outsource social reproduction to nannies, cleaners and others. This produces a new form of 'care crisis', where those taking on this work then struggle to care for their own children (Dowling, 2020). Accelerating under the new domestic regime, a range of digitally networked and platform-run technologies have come to reformat domestic social reproduction, marketizing and auditing it though failing to substantially relieve its burden or challenge its gendered hierarchies (Hester & Srnicek, 2023). The domestic regime therefore includes considerable webs of often unregulated, opaque wage relations, whereby once unmonetized labour becomes monetized and outsourced via platforms on the cheap. This is one important sense in which 'home' becomes a space of paid work (though not for the resident), and how new problems of governmentality emerge, both within the household, and at the level of population, where it becomes harder to see and to regulate often opaque labour markets.

A distinctive characteristic of neoliberal societies is the blurring of remunerated and non-remunerated work, which reshapes social reproduction as much as it does the labour market. As Cooper's (2017) history of neoliberal reforms makes clear, they assume that social goods such as care and education will ultimately find their value in the marketplace, thanks to concepts such as 'human capital' which put monetary values on non-market forms of exchange. This potentially creates new, financial justifications for rituals of childrearing, teaching, marriage and friendship (as 'investments'), which might otherwise be justified on grounds of solidarity and mutuality. As Feher (2009) argues, the logic of 'human capital' 'does not presuppose a separation of the spheres of production and reproduction', and the sphere of intimacy, care and love also becomes a sphere of calculation, specifically of future returns on investment (p. 30). Intergenerational bonds and dependencies reappear as financial strategies, once inheritance and gift-giving become necessary conditions of participation in the 'asset economy' and of homeownership in particular (Adkins *et al.*, 2020). Thus, the archetypal neoliberal household no longer purports to be a 'non-economic' refuge from the 'economic' sphere of work and exchange.

This becomes especially visible where the issues of childcare and home-based learning are concerned, and where the home serves the social and infrastructural function of incubating human capital. An industry of private tutors (many operating online) now provides services to high-income households, to help accelerate the appreciation of 'human capital' and propel children into the future elite (Bray, 2020). Beyond the traditional idea of a child doing their 'homework', perhaps with the unpaid assistance of a parent, the contemporary connected, Edtech-enabled, neoliberal home witnesses a range of investments of time *and* money in supplementing mere education, with various additional interventions, learning aids and cognitive support. Reconfigured around the logic of 'human capital appreciation', 'social reproduction' becomes governed by anxiety-provoking calculations, of how to achieve scarce and sought-after outcomes for a child, many years into the future. At the higher ends of the wealth spectrum, 'family offices' (often referred to as glorified 'butlers') are contracted to manage a whole portfolio of human, relational and financial assets (Glucksberg & Burrows, 2016) while the Victorian figure of the 'governess' (combining functions of tutor and nanny) has reappeared in elite circles.

Amongst the many world-changing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic was the huge experiment it provoked in home-schooling and online learning, plus the invention of new calculative apparatuses aimed at quantifying 'learning loss' (Williamson, 2021). While considerable policy attention was paid to those lower-income households without adequate technology for their children to connect to platforms such as Google Classroom and Zoom, it is also worth attending to what counted as pedagogical success under these conditions, and who exploited the opportunity most. In the years leading up to 2020, the promise of 'home-schooling' plus EdTech had been pushed by various commercial actors seeking to break the monopoly of local, placed-based schools and campuses from the provision of education (Castañeda & Selwyn, 2018; Cohen, 2022). This is undoubtedly a more marketized, economistic vision of education and learning, in which the platform enables the individual to access and consume information and skills, thanks to investments of time and money. However, in various ways that became palpable during lockdowns, it also highlights the crucial importance of (and inequalities in) domestic resources, not simply of technological infrastructure, but also of space and possible support from parents or dedicated tutors. One of the many residues left by lockdowns has been an apparently secular increase in rates of home-schooling in the United Kingdom, much of which is explained as a 'lifestyle' or 'philosophical' choice, but a rising share of which is related to mental health of children (DfE, 2024).

Home as workplace

The spatial and governmental separation of 'reproductive' from 'productive' work, that is a regulatory ideal of liberalism, may never have been perfectly realized. However, as we have detailed, it breaks down further under neoliberalism as the logic of financial investment comes to permeate both family dependencies and market activity, and as a widening array of socio-economic activities shift into the domestic sphere thanks to the availability of platform infrastructures. Crucially, these include remunerated work, the domestication of which (for some) has brought about one of the most distinctive aspects of the new domestic regime, of the home that has become a workplace. The corollary of this is the loss of spaces of in-person managerial supervision, but the growth of managerial intrusion to and surveillance of the home. While law may have been slow to keep up with this merging of 'home' and 'workplace' (Zhang, 2024), contemporary technologies of governmentality have proceeded apace to dissolve the distinction, posing new problems for liberal ideals of rights and privacy.

The promise of mass working from home has long been part of a vision of 'telework' or 'telecommuting' – work that can take place outside the office with the help of technology. This vision was promoted across the 1970s and 1980s as heralding a bright future. Initially focused on the stationary home office, and taken up by clerical workers in the information industries clustered on the US West Coast, it was a way of reducing commuting times and organizational costs (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016). Some speculated that it would increase community stability, because people would not need to move for work, and that working from home would reduce energy expenditure and bring about decentralized energy supply (Gurstein, 2001, p. 120). In subsequent 'generations' of telework (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016) proliferating laptops and smartphones would unmoor work from any specific place or time and leave workers permanently on call.

Though often seen as attractive as a means to improve 'work-life balance', working from home is better understood as a form of 'work-life integration' encouraged by interested industries (Patton, 2020). In the US context, tech, communications and real estate companies have sought to construct the idea of working from home as a desirable and productive venture, and one that enables a healthy balance between family and work life. Companies like Apple sought to play on fears and hopes about upward social mobility among middle-class families to disseminate personal computers into the home. The housing and construction industry seized the opportunity to exploit the desire and need for new spaces or extra bedrooms in the home to accommodate the home office. More recently, platform technology supported by cloud services, such as Microsoft Teams – which in 2022 boasted 270 million users worldwide, up from 20 million in 2019 (Curry, 2023) – has enabled integration of video conferencing, email and messaging, calendar and other facets of work communication and collaboration. While the legal distinction between 'enterprise' and 'household', that Weber (2002) viewed as a defining pillar of modernity, persists, the governmental and infrastructural distinction has been dissolving.

Technologically-enabled homeworking has become increasingly prominent over the last couple of decades, with the COVID-19 lockdowns radically accelerating its uptake and potentially altering employment relations and spaces in lasting ways. From the early 2000s working from home in the United Kingdom had been gradually on the rise, though was still marginal, with 5.7 per cent of employees mainly working from home just before the pandemic hit in early 2020 (Felstead & Reuschke, 2020, p. 5). During the lockdowns, however, as much as half of the workforce were doing some work from home, with the number exclusively working from home rising. Following the end of pandemic restrictions, working from home has remained consistently higher, with between 25 per cent and 40 per cent of the UK working population working exclusively at home or splitting their time between home and workplace ('hybrid') across 2022 (ONS, 2023c).

Working from home since lockdowns, however, has been largely the preserve of the privileged. In the UK homeworkers tend to live in London and are more likely to be White than from a minority ethnic background, and are typically high earners in managerial and professional occupations (ONS, 2023c). 80 per cent of employees in the highest income band, earning £50,000 or more annually, report home or hybrid working, against just 14 per cent of those on the lowest incomes (ONS, 2023c). These workers are likely to be already asset-rich homeowners with the space for a home or garden office from which to work. The increasing trend for home working, and the premium on space meant that by 2022 home improvement had become the primary reason for equity release (Matthews, 2022), with the extra debt taken for these helping to ratchet up the value of the underlying housing asset.

Remote work has created a contradictory bargain for this home-based elite. On the one hand, they are able to enjoy the lack of commute and the absence of physical work surveillance. Yet, electronic monitoring and surveillance of remote workers has accelerated since 2020, illustrated in increased sales of digital surveillance software to monitor productivity, exacerbating the pressure and stress to be constantly available and the bleeding of work into the 'private' space of the home (Ball, 2021). The home is thereby integrated into managerial circuits of government and data collection.

The evolution of working from outside the office while being connected to it cannot be read (in critical terms or otherwise) solely from the evolution of the technologies that have shaped this connection. Early on, scholars noted the multiple contingencies bearing on the proliferating 'electronic homeworker', 'vary[ing] according to how their holders are placed in relation to the technology, to their work and to their homes: whether, for instance, they are men or women, employees or employers, living alone or caring for others, well or poorly housed, young or old, attracted to information technology or repelled by it' (Huws, 1991, p. 20). It has to be also analysed with respect to the gendered division of labour noted above and to the meaning and power relations attached to spaces of the home. This may (and does) often manifest itself in women's paid homework being marginalized to a peripheral space in the home, somewhere where it is shared alongside childcare or housework, against a male partner who occupies a separate and designated home office (Sullivan, 2000). Being able to isolate yourself from social reproductive demands permits privileged homeworkers to increase their productivity and make it an enjoyable experience (Felstead & Reuschke, 2021). There are thus constant conflicts and contradictions between home as site of *reproduction*, and as site of *production*, which are partly experienced (and possibly resolved) through the organization of space.

Conclusion

Housing and homes have occupied a pivotal place in some of the defining crises of the twenty-first century. The GFC was triggered initially by the sub-prime mortgage crisis in the United States, and followed by a macroeconomic regime which rendered the privileging of asset price growth over wage growth explicit. The COVID-19 pandemic, and the policy responses to it, publicized the differing material impacts of homes upon their occupiers, in terms of health, mental health and wellbeing (e.g., Marmot, 2020), and the possibilities for a domestication of social, cultural and economic activity that were already latent in the platform-based home. This paper introduces the concept of the 'domestic regime' in the hope of grasping the multifaceted, interlocking ways in which domestic space, relations and life have taken on a new and different political-economic significance since the late 2000s. By examining home as asset, as infrastructure, as site of social reproduction and as workplace in turn, we hope to have demonstrated that the inequalities and government of domesticity are not confined merely to the financial or technological, but need to be viewed via different lenses and disciplines.

In conclusion, it is worth identifying some of the ways in which the new domestic regime might be studied in empirical detail. A driving intuition of this paper is that (as demonstrated during lockdowns) there are new possibilities for home-based conduct, that alters the problem of how to govern that conduct, be that by managers, public service professionals, landlords or within the household itself by parents or patriarchal figures. The governmental centrality of school, campus, workplace or clinic is reduced, at the same time as investment in public infrastructure and spaces declines, producing a new spatial intensification of home-based, platform-mediated life. It is possible to identify the broad trends that have facilitated and encouraged this, but there is a lot more to learn about those who have withdrawn towards the household and the home, for reasons either of advantage or of disadvantage.

With respect to the privileged, there are examples of where virtuous circles of asset appreciation, infrastructural capacity, labour market positioning and social reproduction work to generate new utopias of domestic autonomy. The Financial Independence Retire Early (FIRE) movement, for example, promotes an ideal of an asset-based life, in which time is spent on family and craftsmanship in and around the home (Taylor & Davies, 2021). Super-rich studies have also cast light on the new ideals of domesticity, that seamlessly integrate the financial, productive and reproductive, with supporting infrastructure. Such visions have a particular attachment to wilderness (Farrell, 2020) and rural homes, as was heightened by COVID-19, but also shape such platform-based services as 'Ashore' (launched in late 2022) which buys homes in idyllic locations, equips them as digitally connected workspaces, then rents them out for home-work breaks. Controversies surrounding 'second homes' are equally illustrative of the kinds of inequality and governmentality that are woven through domestic property. The promise of economic autonomy combines with romantic ideals of escape.

But the new domestic regime also includes new forms of confinement and heteronomy, which are (amongst other ways) visible in mental health statistics and behaviours. Vicious circles of anxiety, dependence on digital platforms, rising housing costs and stagnant wages limit the extent to which people can leave home, something which is naturally most pronounced amongst young people in the private rental sector, or else living with parents through their twenties. What has been dubbed 'generation stay-at-home', partly due to the costs associated with 'going out', experiences interlocking aspects of the new domestic regime working against them. With those in the private rental sector in the United Kingdom recording double the level of mental distress, across multiple markers, of owner-occupiers (Clark & Wenham, 2022), the need for more social infrastructure and affordable, shared housing, that might escape the 'tyranny' of the owner-occupation ideal, remains an urgent one (Jarvis, 2013).

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