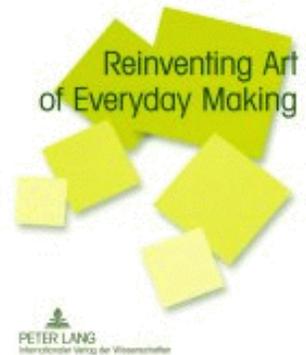


McGregor, S.L.T. (2008). Epilogue. In T. Tuomi-Gröhn (Ed.), *Reinventing art of everyday making* (pp.271-278). Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang.



An Epilogue serves to place scholarly work in an historical and cultural context. It is very auspicious that this book has been released right now. The year 2008 marks the 100th anniversary of the formation of the home economics profession at the global level (with various countries experiencing earlier and later start dates). Many professional journals are creating special issues to commemorate this milestone for the profession. I just completed a paper for one such journal wherein I painted five vignettes that present *literary scenes* of how home economics thinkers in particular regions of the world are envisioning the future of the home economics. It provides growing evidence of international scholarship around the envisioned philosophical underpinnings for the 21st century. In summary, Canadian thinkers are calling for transformative leadership and practice, a focus on the human condition (instead of well-being and quality of life), and transdisciplinary inquiry (to move us far beyond interdisciplinary). American leaders are espousing the ideas of reflective practice and leadership (via a new theory of Reflection Human Action that values authenticity, ethical sensibility and spirituality), communities of practice, qualities of living (instead of quality of life) and critical science. Australian philosophers are advocating for notions of the carnival, expert novice, authentic pedagogies, positioning the profession beyond patriarchy, and viewing the profession as being at a convergent moment. Asian home economists are challenging us to visualize and work to create a humane society, to focus on the human condition and to protect the home because with human protection in the home comes hope and, with hope, existential despair is thwarted. Finally, European home economic thinkers are calling for competent thoughtful practice, narratives and a focus on everyday life as sacred. These three sentiments permeate this book.

Another reason for writing an epilogue is to share the long-term vision explicated in the body of work. The title of the book gives away the philosophical stance and professional vision: *Reinventing Art of Everyday Making*. The editor explains that managing everyday life is not easy. It presupposes cognitive, social, emotional and practice skills that are locked away in our consciousness and need to be revealed, articulated, respected, and studied. That is the vision of this book -to gain a better understanding of *meaning making*, referred to by Tuomi-Gröhn as *the art of everyday making*. I love this turn of phrase. Everyday relates to all daily

activities. The authors in this book frame it as - *the art of making each day*. I think it is profound. The authors are convinced that it *is* possible to explore everyday life by studying everyday activities in their real settings, in real time. *Everyday* pertains to routines and practices found in the ordinary course of events. Focusing on something as mundane as routine day-to-day life is unique and risky in a world that values markets more than people and sees people only as producers and consumers. But, the authors in this collection put it out there for all to see - everyday life, the culture and quality of day-to-day activities, is paramount to humanity. The activities that unfold in the everyday world are intended to create products, social time and space (personal connections) and spiritual connections (p.3). But, a focus on making everyday life is not the only unique thing about this book. They couch their ideas in a collection of theorists and paradigms that are outside the run of the mill thinking of most home economics scholars trained outside of Europe and Scandinavia. This intellectual diversity, and the intentional focus on *everyday making*, are the real contributions of this collection.

In Chapter One, the editor (Tuomi-Gröhn) reports that the book is organized in three sections, each dealing with an aspect of the art of everyday making: the theoretical and methodological challenges, an array of educational empirical studies, and everyday making in societal contexts and networks. In Chapter Two, she provides a table to profile the 11 other chapters based on traditional and contextual research paradigms. This table identifies seven different ways that the *art of making* can be conceptualized, and how each chapter contributes to these understandings.

I am going to take a different approach in this Epilogue. The following discussion attempts to reframe the contributions in this book within the research philosophy that underpinned the book rather than through particular theories and attendant concepts, as was offered by the Editor. I feel that viewing this collection through a research paradigm lens (interpretive versus positivistic) will profile philosophical insights that will complement the theoretical lens already employed by Tuomi-Gröhn in Chapters One and Two. Whereas the bulk of home economics philosophical musings have tended to be informed by the German philosopher Jurgan Habermas (three kinds of knowledge: technical, communicative and critical),¹ this collection drew heavily (if often indirectly) on the work of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. I am using the ideas in Chapter 3 as my starting point (authored by Heinliä). In contrast to the other authors, who drew on

¹Japanese home economists draw on another German philosopher, Otto Bollnow.

particular theories, Heinliä presents phenomenological inquiry (an interpretative, narrative approach) as the *philosophical* ground for understanding everyday life. In particular, she draws on the musings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. She also references two other like-minded philosophers, Edmund Husserl (who invented the concept of *life-world and phenomenology*) and Martin Heidegger (who invented the idea of *being-in-the-world*). Both men were reacting to René Descartes' dualism philosophy - separate and disconnected.

Central to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is the notion of *consciousness*, understood to be a human's ability to be aware of his or her own thoughts through the process of introspection. Instead of viewing consciousness (the mind) and body (the brain or intellect) as separate entities (as did René Descartes - Cartesian Dualism, referred to often in the book), Merleau-Ponty held that human consciousness, the world and the human body are a *perceiving thing* and intricately interwoven and mutually engaged. Descartes believed that minds are things that think and bodies are things that occupy space - they are two different kinds of experiences. Merleau-Ponty believed, on the other hand, that the body is a permanent condition of our experiences (not just an object that occupies space), informed by our open perceptions to the world (the mind thinking); this *interrelationship* between body, mind and life-world infers a consciousness, the condition of being aware.

From this philosophical stance, Merleau-Ponty challenged the body/mind dualism (separateness) with the ideas of *corporeality of consciousness* (corporeal means something can occupy space and be perceived by our senses) and *intentionality of the body* (we can direct our consciousness towards objects). He holds that there is no starting point of *I am*, after which I start to intend to act, the Descartes Cogito, "I think, therefore I am" (Latin *Cogito, ergo sum*). Merleau-Ponty believed that when *we are*, there is no division between the intention and the action. He thinks of a conscious being as always already in the world. Rather than the body and mind being separate things or kinds of experiences, they are *connected* through worldly awareness. Saying that our consciousness can occupy space and be perceived by us and that, with this awareness, we can then intentionally direct that consciousness towards something, gives home economists the ability to say that they intend to pay special attention to the mundane, humble everyday life that goes on under the radar - referred to by the authors in this book as *everyday making*, or making the everyday visible so we can pay attention to it.

From this stance, home economists can assume that when the looker and the person being looked at connect with each other, this connection leads to awareness

and to the profound knowledge that both are changed by the process. Consciousness (self-awareness) is a product of our perception and contemplation—once we see something, we can pay attention to it and consider it carefully and at length (contemplate it). The authors of this book believe that if we help people *see* everyday life, it is much easier for them to pay attention to it and contemplate it rather than it remaining unobservable, hence not valued or given due consideration. Everyday life, and how people go about creating it and making sense of it, merits our attention. Fräntilä and Tuomi-Gröhn explain that because problem solving in everyday situations requires opportunistic solutions rather than rational logic, it becomes an authentic research site. They refer to the *art of everyday practices* (rather than the science of everyday practices), and argue that to appreciate and interpret this art, we need to behold it in real, everyday settings rather than contrived situations.

I have always been impressed and intrigued by the stance taken by Scandinavian home economists, with their focus on the life-world (the world's life) and the everyday life rather than the conventional tendency within the profession to focus on individuals and families living that life (I gained this appreciation from reading work by Kaija Turkki (Finland), Jette Benn (Denmark) and Rosemarie von Schweitzer (Germany)). This philosophical underpinning explains their different focus. It helps home economists assume that there will be moments when one's life and the world's life will be deeply interconnected. A focus on everyday life is indeed a different tact to practice than a focus on quality of life and well-being. Better still, accepting that people's perceptions of the world's life contributes to their embeddedness within that life means we can say that people's perceptions are part a wider web of perceptions and sensations experienced by other bodies. How novel... the world has a life of its own and we are part of it.

Merleau-Ponty, from whom the scholars in this book draw, was influenced by Edmund Husserl, the German philosopher who founded the notion of phenomenology (a strong thread in this book). Phenomenology emphasizes the commonsense nature of people's perceptions of, and assumptions about, the *life-world* they inhabit. It emphasizes the interactions of *human consciousness* with the world around us. Rather than accepting that mind and body are separate and are so different that they cannot possibly communicate with or act on each other (Descartes' Dualism), phenomenology pays attention to the *relationships* between the mind and the body (or between subject and object, public and private and other dualisms). Through these relationships, people gain knowledge of their world. To have knowledge of the world is to be *part of that world*, not distinct from it. Husserl held that the mind does not create reality through abstraction (removing from association); rather,

the mind *interacts with reality* and can do so because our consciousness is always focused on something other than itself. The authors in this collection use this philosophical stance to their advantage and bring our attention to *everyday making in the life-world*. It allowed them to assume that activities within our private everyday lives are not inferior to those taken in the public realms of politics and the market. It also allowed them to pay attention to the lives of families enmeshed within the energy and creativity of the life of the world as it unfolds rather than seeing them separate from this life energy. This is a new way for our profession and many others to view families.

I will now turn to a discussion of how individual contributions in the book reflect the tenets of phenomenology, especially human consciousness. This concept (the core of phenomenology) is associated with future planning, the creation of language and images as well as awareness of self. Several authors in this book used this association as a stepping off point for their research. Jarva explores how foresight (futures thinking) informs people's everyday life. She argues that because present day activities constitute our future, it is imperative that we pay attention to *today*. Collanus looks into craft making as a form of creative performance. She explores the expressive nature and sense making of craft making and said that craft is embodied. She explains that a craft is a tangible representation of our inner self rather than just a motor achievement. This approach challenges the Cartesian dualism of mind and body being separate.

Syrjäläinen and Haverinen explore the power of tacit knowledge (a form of language) as it is used to acquire domestic skills. They use the concept of pathic knowing, revealed through exploring people's narratives of their daily lived experience. Pathic knowing refers to the sense that people have of themselves in situations - it is the way that they *find themselves in the world*. It holds, from this perspective, that to understand an experience closely, we must attend to how it presents itself in life to those who live it and then pay attention to how they experience it. Some experiences are sensed and felt rather than thought about. This sensing transforms into tacit, un verbalized knowing and these authors posit that this knowledge needs to be pulled out and shared somehow in order for others to benefit from it as they learn everyday domestic skills. This is a far cry from the technical "how-to" approach of teaching domestic skills.

Lahti and Seitamaa-Hakkarainen posit that people not only learn through internal thought processes and by interacting with others but also by physically working with and handling or manipulating artifacts. This stance is informed by distributed cognition theory, which holds that knowledge develops through a system of human agents collaboratively interacting dynamically with artifacts (in

this case to design textiles). It is another example of Merleau-Ponty's tenet of the *interrelationship* between body, mind and the life-world, including its artifacts and relationships. Salo-Mattila draws on the systems model of creativity to explore changes in the art of *creating* the *rya* (a rug in a shaggy pile weave), rather than *making* a rug. This model holds that creativity is a property of systems in operation. The research question becomes "What does the phenomenon of systemic creativity look like?" Examining the nuances of creative practice within a system respects Merleau-Ponty's position that mind, body and the life-world are interconnected, interwoven (pun intended) and mutually engaged. It is not just the designer, the societal trends or technological advances in isolation - it is how the art of creating something transforms due to the complex nature of these interconnections. To understand the cultural or artistic message conveyed in the rya rug, one must be familiar with the socio-cultural context related to the art form. Again, this approach is a far cry from the dualistic separatism of mind and body from each other and the rest of the world, from which people would simply view or use the art work rather than focus on its meaning and how that meaning was created in the world's life.

Korvela and Keskinen, using the compelling phrase *the art of making home*, conceptualize home as an *activity*, and are concerned with the study of household activities. This posture is quite different from the North American notion of home as a *place* and the emerging Japanese notion of home as a source of *protection* from existential despair and a *space for humanity*. The authors in this collection tend to focus on domestic activities but not from a technical stance; rather, they respect the complexity inherent in conceptualizing and actualizing cognitive, emotional, social, political, economic, technological and other dimensions of this lived reality. From this stance, it makes sense to view home as an activity and to turn to a collection of contextual approaches, including activity theory, to understand it.

Tuomi-Gröhn clarifies that activity theory emphasizes the *collaboration* among participants of an activity and among different activity systems (home, school, work, government). This approach reflects the phenomenological respect for the interrelationships between body, mind and the life-world, in this case the *collaborative* nature of said relationships; the cultural meaning and personal sense of an individual action can only be understood by seeing it in the context of the activity it realizes, generated within a collective system of activities. The activity becomes a tool (a mediation) to understand and reconcile any contradictions between those involved in the activity and the activity systems, in the case of this book, the tension in family life generated when balancing home and work (chapter

by Korvela and Keskinen). Coming back again to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, participating in an activity entails performing *conscious actions* and when done in the collective, it involves a commitment to understand things from others' points of view. To reiterate, this understanding results from our perception and contemplation of the activity in context - once we *see* something (e.g., invisible or unvalued household activities), we can pay attention to it and consider it as an authentic activity worthy of scholarship and theoretical examination.

There are other insights that can be garnered from the book. Tuomi-Gröhn (Chapter 1) shares a compelling idea: everyday life comes into being through the continual movement between (a) actors, systems and structures, (b) different types of activities and (c) different kinds of knowledge, providing the basis for both stability and change. *We make everyday* by engaging in interactive processes and activities that unfold as ordinary matters and affairs (with degrees of boringness, routineness, ritualality, newness, enjoyment, et cetera). The point of this book is that scholars tend to ignore this ordinariness-aspect of humanity. I agree with the sentiment of this book, that scholars do this at the risk of losing penetrating insights into the complexity and intricacy of humanity's very existence.

By way of a summary, let us return to Descartes' dualism again - family life, the private sphere, is devalued in a neoliberal ideology, which values the public sphere comprising market and government. The authors of this book challenge Descartes' *the Cogito* (two separate and unconnected spheres with one more important and privileged than the other). Instead, they turn to the version of phenomenology espoused by Merleau-Ponty as a way to privilege and honour:

- human connections;
- human consciousness;
- relationships between body, mind and the life-world;
- spiritual and tacit knowledge;
- humble, daily living activities that sustain humanity;
- embeddedness in the world's life;
- dynamic systems activities and their interactions;
- creativity as a system's property;
- embodied activities;
- narratives and lived stories;
- complex interconnections;
- meaning making;
- contextual lived realities; and,
- a respect for the need to value and study the ordinariness of people's daily lives.

These are some of the overarching principles that thread their way throughout this collection that explores how everyday life is made within the context of the whole world's life.

In closing, I feel that the contribution of this book will be lasting. It augments the home economics profession's emerging philosophical base for practice. As with many edited collections, not all entries will have widespread or meaningful impact on the knowledge base of the profession, but I think the whole collection is what matters here. Tuomi-Gröhn explains that some studies (chapters) were purposely chosen because they represented the mind-body separation philosophy, the empirical scientific approach. They serve as a way to illustrate the difference between the interpretive and positivistic paradigms. The rest of the chapters function within the interpretative research paradigm, and challenge the rational, technical approach to studying everyday life.

The authors seamlessly drew me into the notion of paying attention to the consciousness involved as everyday life unfolds, so different from my comfortable lens of focusing on the individual and families living this life. The Editor points out that the particular daily activity being explored in the studies is not the unit of analysis (e.g., household cleaning, knitting, weaving, grocery shopping, rug making, hobby crafting). Also, the unit of analysis is not the individual. What is unique about this book is that the units of analysis are the collectives (including families), entire systems and the relationships inherent in the attendant interactions. I felt that the focus was on a philosophical stance that positions the everyday context as an authentic research site that can be explored through contextual and phenomenological lens.

The *pièce de résistance* - the book privileges the *art of making the everyday* rather than the *science* of achieving optimum quality of life and well-being. It may seem like a mere play on words, but the philological underpinnings and the paradigmatic assumptions of interpretive, phenomenological research, as they are applied to the art of creating daily life, shift us toward a very different scholarly journey. Some home economics scholars already employ this paradigm in their work, but, they may not frame their work as an examination of the *art of making the everyday* (in fact, they likely refer to as a science). I could not help but try to picture myself as an artist of the everyday. An artist is someone who uses his or her imagination, skills and talent to create work of value. I am so intrigued with the notion of perceiving families as artists creating their day-to-day life, that this creative effort sustains humanity and thus merits our scholarly attention. We have long been trained to see ourselves in this profession as scientists, to the point of changing the name of the profession to Family and Consumer Scientists (in the

United States). Framing ourselves as a profession and scholars concerned with the art of everyday making is a powerful new professional stance offered by the authors in this book. That may its lasting legacy, if we have the foresight and courage to pay attention to the message.

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