

INVESTIGATING MOBILITY, TECHNOLOGY, AND SPACE IN HOMES, STARTING WITH “GREAT ROOMS”

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Certain American-style homes include large multifunctional spaces, often with vaulted or otherwise high ceilings, that incorporate living, dining, and kitchen areas. As an American cultural phenomenon, these “great rooms” symbolize and instantiate a particular vision of the good life or ideal home, including for example concepts such as openness and togetherness, or in less favorable interpretations, wastefulness and lack of privacy. As such, we see great rooms as complex and contradictory symptoms of unresolved tensions in the politics of everyday life. We describe our approach of starting with a provocative and problematic topic within a larger domain of interest and examining it from a number of perspectives. We argue that sites that are contentious are particularly interesting candidates for technological innovation, in which technology is not limited to assimilating to well-established and understood processes, but rather can participate in an ongoing process, responding to and challenging concerns.

Be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them.

William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, Act II, Scene V

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, homes have attracted considerable interest from the information and communications technology (ICT) industry as a domain for substantial growth and innovation, as information-intensive workplaces had previously. But in addition to opportunity, homes also present daunting complexity and barriers to ICT adoption (Hindus 1999). New technologies can help overcome some of these, as when low-cost wireless networking systems like WiFi allowed provision of broadband connectivity without the huge cost of wiring (or, worse, re-wiring). Indeed, one important way of looking at homes is in terms of infrastructures that both facilitate and limit technological

