Trouble in paradise:

Contradictions in platform capitalism and the production of surplus by *Airbnb* hosts in regional tourist towns

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Abstract

A tendency toward crisis in social reproduction characterizes digital capitalism. Increasingly, the economic system is unable to generate subjectivities and social processes to address the physical and psychical needs required for its reproduction. Emblematic of that contradiction is the individualism of digital capitalism which compels people to commodify themselves beyond the 'normal' state of abstracted labour power associated with capitalism, to become 'entrepreneurs of the self'. An extreme form of commodification of the self is evident in a new form of capitalism termed 'platform capitalism' which manifests through organizations such as *Airbnb*. Like the notion of the 'entrepreneur of the self', this kind of commodified self is increasingly too thin and too instrumental to be self-sustaining. The commodification of people and of private spaces results in shifts of subjectivity as a response to the production of surplus-meaning and surplus-enjoyment and indicates capture of a new sphere for capitalist activities at the expense of social reproduction. This research explores the construction of *Airbnb* hosts' subjectivities across four tourist towns in New Zealand. Placed within the context of global capitalism, tourism is a major economic contributor to the New Zealand economy, estimated at $24 billion annually. Concurrently, regional areas of New Zealand are experiencing challenges relating to economic stagnation, ageing populations and changes to population numbers. Common across people living in these regional towns is a political imperative to commodify their life-worlds for the tourist market. Increasingly, the mechanisms that are synonymous with platform capitalist ventures, of *Airbnb* in this instance, are becoming significant means through which the realization of this political imperative occurs. Using a qualitative research framework, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 28 *Airbnb* hosts, then analysed using an inductive and iterative thematic analysis. The emerging themes presented here are commodification, biopolitics and the intensification of time and space. Collectively, the themes demonstrate how the contradictions of surplus and of social reproduction manifest within the digital platform of *Airbnb*. The research informs issues and debates in contemporary theory on capital's tendency towards crises of social reproduction.

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1.1 Introduction

Tendencies toward crises in social reproduction are inherent to capitalism (Fraser, 2016; Harvey, 2015). These tendencies are also characteristic of digital platform capitalism and are particularly amplified in people who become hosts on the *Airbnb* platform. This research investigates the contradictions of platform capitalism particular to the use of *Airbnb* in provincial regions of New Zealand. It seeks to understand the impact of these contradictions on the development of subjectivities of *Airbnb* hosts who engage with *Airbnb*. More specifically, it does so in relation to the routine tasks in which *Airbnb* hosts engage for the social reproduction of life, across the vectors of private, community and economic activity.

The digitized form that *Airbnb* uses impacts on the lived experiences of those who take up roles as hosts in regional tourist towns in Aotearoa New Zealand. It does so by re-structuring the tasks that had traditionally characterized the predecessor of 'platformed' accommodation, homestay tourism. Homestay tourism has a long history across many cultures. Typically, homestay tourism involves a traveller staying in a home in which authorship remains with the residents. Under conditions of *Airbnb*, however, the guest has power over the resident hosts, in a large part due to the ubiquitous ratings system.

The socio-economic relations of hosts beyond this domestic domain also alter. This includes familial relationships and friendships, community relationships and the experience of daily life within the wider context of social/community life. The restructuring of tasks and the restructuring of socio-economic life of hosts also impacts the self as the site of subjectivity. The shifts that occur in and of the self include changed meanings of value and purpose. The meanings of sites of home and self change as hosts' experiences of place and home alter with participation in the platform, as do the meanings of social relationships where hosts enter a state of conscious response to the contradictions in the social reproduction of life generated by digital capitalism. This introductory chapter maps this field of inquiry and introduces concepts and ideas through which this mapping occurs.

1.2 *Airbnb* the company

> *We are taught that corporations have a soul, which is the most terrifying news in the world* (Deleuze, 1992, p. 6)*.*

The following discussion critically examines the emergence of *Airbnb* and its rhetoric of social responsibility with attention to the criticism inherent in Deleuze's framing of corporations. *Airbnb* is a global platform capitalist organization that specializes in short term or holiday accommodation provision. It is distinguished by the fact that *Airbnb* does not actually own any of the properties it lists, but instead acts as an agent between the property owner and the guest, collecting a rent from both sides of the exchange. The amount of money taken by the platform is based on a percentage of the room rate and is applied differentially to both the owner of the property (the host) and the guest. The concept of *Airbnb* began in 2007 when two cyber-technology designers, Joe Gebbia and Brian Chesky, rented out an airbed in their San Francisco apartment to three travellers (J. Campbell, 2015). Using this experience as the basis for an internet-based business, the two designers teamed up with engineer Nathan Blecharczyk and launched the company in August 2008. From its inception to mid-2015, *Airbnb* claimed to have grown to 1.2 million listings (Slee, 2015). By August 2017 this figure had increased to over four million (Hartmans, 2017). By October 2018, *Airbnb* report they have over five million listings ("Airbnb Fast Facts," 2018). By comparison, Intercontinental group, the largest hotel chain in the world, has just 700,000 rooms (Slee, 2015). *Airbnb*'s performance trend in New Zealand mirrors its global experience of exceptional growth. *Airbnb* opened its New Zealand branch in June 2015 and in less than two years had over 30,000 properties listed (*Is Airbnb doing it's bit?*, 2017; Kuprienko, 2017). The purpose of presenting these figures is not to comment on the disruptive nature of *Airbnb* on traditional tourism accommodation operators, but to draw attention to the extensive scaling across territories and to the monopolistic abilities of the organization.

Airbnb is noted for being particularly opaque and secretive with their data (Slee, 2015; Srnicek, 2017b). The *Airbnb* website boasts of hosting more than 1.9 million guests in New Zealand in 2017, representing an average growth of 71% year on year ("*Airbnb* expands Experiences throughout New Zealand," 2018). In another press release, *Airbnb* claims they hosted more than 1.4 million

guests in 2017 ("Airbnb welcomes more than 1.4m guests in 2017," 2018).These figures do not match up; nor do they reflect other analyses. A report by Deloitte Access Economics, commissioned by *Airbnb*, states that in 2017 there were 578,000 separate stays in New Zealand, amounting to 1.5 million nights across 225 locations (O'Mahoney et al., 2018). It can be assumed that *Airbnb* is using the terms 'guests' and 'nights stayed' interchangeably to present information in ways that position the platform in good light and deflect criticism.

In terms of its operational structure, *Airbnb* acts as an intermediary that collects a rent for each transaction between two sides of a market (Schor & Attwood-Charles, 2017; Srnicek, 2017b). The market consists of people looking for short-stay accommodation (guests) and those able to provide it (hosts). Both guests and hosts must create profiles of themselves and abide by *Airbnb*'s rules and protocols in order to operate on the platform. Additionally, hosts have their own 'page' nested within the platform in which they present themselves and their accommodation listing. Accommodation types are as varied as one can imagine; castles, yurts, caravans, student rooms, boats, entire homes, rooms in homes, tents and various other forms of accommodation are all on offer. Consequently, prices cover a wide spectrum. *Airbnb* specifically promotes itself as providing 'local' experiences by connecting with 'locals' ("*Airbnb* expands Experiences throughout New Zealand," 2018; "*Airbnb*: Hospitality," 2018). The promotion of 'authenticity' and access to 'local' culture is *Airbnb's* point of difference compared to other accommodation providers. This aspect of *Airbnb*'s business model appears to account for at least part of its appeal as guests seek an additional, personalized experience that may not be available through traditional accommodation options such as hotels and motels (Guttentag, 2015; Lutz & Newlands, 2018; Richardson, 2015).

1.2.1 *Airbnb* and the metrics of trust, reputation and democracy

The functionality of a digital platform such as *Airbnb* turns upon the amplification of a characteristic of modern capitalism that Martin Konings (2015, p. 2) describes as an imbrication of "morality, faith, power, and emotion, the distinctiveness of human association". This amplification occurs in conjunction with the development of Web 2.0, a technological innovation which allows users to create

their own content on platforms with increased levels and improved degrees of interaction between parties (van Dijck, 2013). Increased interactions on platforms (and particularly on peer-to-peer marketplaces such as *Airbnb*), typically take place between strangers. This situation creates issues of trust, especially as the two parties are unable to meet face-to-face prior to the transaction, have no history of interactions and have no shared third-party contacts that can provide assurances. Therefore, reputation of the individual is difficult to establish (Ert, Fleischer, & Magen, 2016).

In the case of *Airbnb,* the notion of trust is absolutely integral to the platform's success (Ert et al., 2016; Phua, 2018; Tussyadiah & Park, 2018; Xie & Mao, 2017) primarily *because* the business is predicated on strangers staying in strangers' homes. Consequently, both parties are unable to use traditional methods of ascertaining trustworthiness. *Airbnb* has developed reputational mechanisms to circumvent this impediment to platform-enabled homestay tourism (Ert et al., 2016; Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers, 2015). Specifically, these mechanisms enable verification of hosts' and guests' identities, in addition to continual 'control at distance' through the operation of a 'rating' system in which guests and hosts evaluate each other on a number of metrics. The rating system is analysed in detail in the coming discussions, in terms of its utility to *Airbnb,* the impact it has on the behaviours of hosts, and its use as a biopolitical tool for the benefit of the platform.

Airbnb draws on a range of social ideals to achieve the effects of popularity and of trust. One such frequently deployed ideal is that of 'democracy'. The notion of 'democracy', in addition to the vague notion of a 'public', is widely appreciated as an example of social goods, despite such terms having multiple meanings that resist unification into beliefs or practices (Dean, 2002). Common-sense notions of democracy surround ideas of inclusion in a harmonious totality, however Alenka Zupančič frames the idea of capitalist democracies as a "multiplicity of singularities" in which

> we are all conceived as (more or less precious) singularities, 'elementary particles', trying to make our voices heard in a complex, non-totalizable social network (Alenka Zupančič, 2017, p. 26).

Michel Foucault (1971) describes commentary and discourse as having a transitory existence, in which knowledge is exploited, divided and attributed according to power. The rarefaction of discourse, in which discourse, although supposedly infinite in theory, is constrained by societal norms, creates conditions so that what might *feel* like a personal choice to an individual is in fact shaped within the bounds of a discursively possible horizon, mapped out by power (Mills, 2004). The ideals of democracy, circulated through platform capitalist organizations, thereby change in function. Democracy is now an effective marketing slogan that has paradoxically materialized the idea of democracy, but in a way that exposes it to potentially ongoing appropriation by capitalist organizations (Dean, 2013).

The multi-sided nature of platform capitalism is the basis under which *Airbnb* claims it is a democracy ("Citizen," 2017). *Airbnb* justifies this claim on two fronts: the platform makes available a wide range of affordable accommodation in private homes across socio-economic spectrums and provides the opportunities for any resident, anywhere, to earn money. However, this re-interpretation of democracy fails to take account of that element of democratic thought that suggests open participation in some sort of governance. This is clearly not the case with *Airbnb*: hosts and guests do not have voting rights or any other way of participating in the shaping of regulations or rules regarding engagement with the platform.

However, what *Airbnb* has done is materialize democracy in the sense that it does have the ability to connect people through the digital architecture of peer-to-peer (P2P) functionality as enabled by the internet. This functionality has proliferated since the introduction of Web 2.0, which enables users to create their own content and interact more easily with others (van Dijck, 2013). Consequently, the internet is often touted as a democratizing force because of its ability to connect users (Ferdinand, 2000). This assertion is loosely based on the notion of a direct or deliberative democracy, which is an ideal based on an Athenian understanding of democracy in which citizens are active and engaged participants in decision-making.

The deployment of the rhetoric of democracy encourages platform users into activities that paradoxically reinforce inequality; conditions that the notion of democracy ostensibly contests (Dean, 2013). That is, the circulation of notions of democracy and other ideals of social good both mask and protect the function of digital platforms, which is the aggressive accumulation of wealth. *Airbnb*'s collapse of democracy into market-relations equates capitalism with democracy, despite these being two distinct processes. Aside from claiming to democratize travel by providing affordable accommodation options and unique opportunities to experience 'local life' (whatever that 'local life' might be interpreted as being), the *Airbnb* website, borrowing directly from Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address, claims that the platform is "of the people, by the people and for the people" (*Airbnb*; "Citizen," 2017). For hosts, it seems on the surface that this is so because *Airbnb* offers the lure of flexible hours and the chance to earn additional money, as well as purportedly being in charge of their own working conditions.

Critical academic commentary, including this present contribution strongly dispute *Airbnb*'s claims. The idea of self-directed micro-entrepreneurship within tourism may well have broad appeal given that it is rooted in ideas of freedom, choice and flexibility (Slee, 2015). However, as Nick Srnicek (2017b) asserts, capitalist platforms such as *Airbnb* are monopolistic in nature and hosts are essentially reduced to piece-work wage earners. *Airbnb* is a for-profit organization, and one of the mechanisms that *Airbnb* uses to maximise its profit is the minimization of cost through the outsourcing of labour power, the *Airbnb* hosts. Paradoxically, then, *Airbnb* is of the people, by the people but crucially, *for Airbnb*. This distinction indicates a state of capture of labour power in ways that benefit *Airbnb*.

1.2.2 *Airbnb* and social relationships

The operation of *Airbnb* within given territories complicates relationships across a range of social and economic vectors. Socially, these complications include the ways in which we use, access and socialize in spaces (Alexander, 2018). Another social complication is the acceleration of processes of gentrification which displace poorer communities (Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018). This phenomenon has been demonstrated to increase the cost of rental accommodation (Gurran & Phibbs, 2017). The effect of these processes disrupts community relationships (Vanderbilt, 2017) and impacts family life (Borm, 2017) .

Viewed through an economic lens, *Airbnb* is generally considered disruptive to the traditional hotel/motel tourist accommodation sector (Guttentag, 2015; Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers, 2017). The greatest effect of *Airbnb* on traditional accommodation options has been found to impact lower-priced and smaller hotels (Zervas et al., 2017). While an economic focus is not a key area of concern for the analysis to follow, it is important to note the impact of economic disruption in terms of implications for social relationships in small regional tourist towns in Aotearoa New Zealand where small business owners are impacted by the presence of *Airbnb* (Cropp, 2017; Devlin, 2018; *Hotel, motel industry slates Airbnb's push against 'red tape'*, 2018). Moreover, as increasingly more people become hosts, the availability of rental housing stock declines (Gray, 2017; Gurran, 2018; Gurran & Phibbs, 2017). Consequently, the rapid scaling of *Airbnb* has been shown to impact rental costs (Gurran & Phibbs, 2017; Horn & Merante, 2017; Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018).

The nature of renting out one's personal space to strangers is substantively different to the renting out of a non-residential hotel room (Bucher, Fieseler, Fleck, & Lutz, 2018). The people with whom a guest engages with in a hotel situation are employees; their demeanour and the interactions they undertake are enacted in a specific social space with defined roles, in which both guest and employee have expected modes of behaviour. This differs from personal spaces such as residential homes, where personal lives, familial relationships and affective care work takes place (Fraser, 2016). Put into the context of *Airbnb*, whose activities take place in home spaces that have tended to be conceptualized and popularized in the public imagination as spaces that are shielded against direct capitalist activities, subjectivity undergoes a transformation (Roelofsen, 2018).

Subjectivity does not form in isolation from contextual influences. The subjectivity of *Airbnb* hosts is set in a wider socio-economic and socio-historical context. The contemporary milieu includes that of a 'society of consumers' (Bauman, 2007). Bauman comments:

> In the society of consumers no one can become a subject without
> first turning into a commodity, and no one can keep his or her

subjectness secure without perpetually resuscitating, resurrecting and replenishing the capacities expected and required of a sellable commodity. The 'subjectivity' of the 'subject', and most of what that subjectivity enables the subject to achieve, is focused on an unending effort to itself become, and remain, a sellable commodity (Bauman, 2007).

The dynamic tensions that emerge through the configuration of self and spaces as commodifiable objects reveal a distinction between tensions that can be managed through the *Airbnb* platform and by reconfiguring of social relations, and of those that cannot be integrated back into the platform. Those tensions that cannot be resolved culminate in a tendency towards a crisis of social reproduction. Much more will be said of this as the discussion builds.

1.3   Platform Capitalism

Terms like 'platform capitalism' and 'digital capitalism' merge into one another across the field of academic commentary. A term such as 'platform' (and similarly many words applied to digital technology), has multiple and diverse meanings (Gillespie, 2017; Slee, 2015). 'Platform' refers to the digital architectures, computational abilities and ecosystems supporting capitalist organizations. It also implies the existence of a stage for political and performative processes (van Dijck, 2013), and in an historical context, a new phase in the movement of capital: a form of capitalism that utilizes digital infrastructures to bring two possible participants in a market exchange together (Srnicek, 2017b).

A platform provides the means for users to interact in a digital space and also allows the organization involved to collect, record, manage and engineer data that occurs as a result of online interactions on the platform (Parker, Van Alstyne, & Choudary, 2016; Schor & Attwood-Charles, 2017). These effects are achieved through the algorithmic analysis of users' interactions on the platform – and often beyond into general internet use. Users' interactions on any given platform are guided by 'protocols' of the platform. Protocols, in computer terminology, refer to the sets of rules or instructions that users must abide by in order to access the services of the platform (van Dijck, 2013). An example of the function of protocols is the requirement that users comply with regulatory features of a platform in order to gain access. For example, to access the *Airbnb* website as a host or as a guest,

users must enter personal information about themselves, including profiling information such as age, gender and location.

This type of data is commonly shared across digital platforms utilizing application programming interfaces (APIs). APIs are software intermediary add-ons that allow communication between two applications ("The rising value of APIs: How API's can transform your business," 2019). A common example is the process of searching for flights on the internet. A number of third-party websites connect with airline websites via APIs and aggregate the information to provide users with a variety of choices. The user's behaviour is tracked via APIs and on-sold to further businesses, resulting in 'pop-up' advertisements for hotels, rental cars and attractions tailored to the flight destinations for which the user initially searched. Similarly, *Google Maps'* APIs are frequently embedded into websites so that users can search locations or compare distances. These APIs allow geolocation data to be transmitted between the applications, again allowing third party platforms to target advertising to internet users whose preferences have now been made more calculable. APIs enable platforms to quickly and easily extract new data from their own users from external sources and utilize that data for purposes not connected with those initial acts of use or intention of the sources. A specific form of API is called OAUTH (Hoffman, 2019). OAUTH stands for Open Authorization Framework. Many platforms enable users to sign in with their *Facebook, Twitter, Google, Microsoft or LinkedIn* accounts. These are OAUTH authorities which give third-party applications access to some information from a user's account. OAUTH provides for authorizations or permissions for the third party to use data and content and to perform certain functions on the platform. For example, the third-party application may ask for permission to read or delete emails, to post content on the platform, or to use data in other ways. Each application has specific access tokens that allow retrieval of details not associated with the current platform's purposes; for example, some third-party applications may access *Gmail* accounts and trigger notifications based on the user's email content (Hoffman, 2019). In other words, once an OAUTH is granted the necessary access tokens, the third party has access to the user's data and can use the data for its own purposes.

Platforms trend toward monopoly control of the markets in which they operate because of what is termed 'network effects'. Such effects enable the value of the platform to increase in proportion to the number of people who use it from both sides of a market relationship (Moazed & Johnson, 2016; Parker et al., 2016; Srnicek, 2017b). For example, if you want to host your home as a holiday rental, it makes sense to host on the *Airbnb* platform if that is where the biggest pool of travellers goes to source holiday accommodation options. Conversely, as a tourist, if most holiday accommodation is hosted on *Airbnb*, then that becomes the obvious place to start one's search for holiday accommodation.

1.3.1 The 'sharing economy' and 'lean platforms'

Platform capitalism is frequently located in a set of practices called 'the sharing economy' (Slee, 2015). The sharing economy is also variously called the peer to peer economy, collaborative consumption, the gig economy or the on-demand economy (Stabrowski, 2017). The term itself reveals a contradiction: 'sharing' implies a social exchange of goods or services without expectations of economic gain, while 'economy' has monetary transactions inherent in its formulation (Leoni & Parker, 2018). Despite this inconsistency in the term, the notion of the sharing economy has come to denote a particular set of business practices that describe a particular form of capitalism.

The sharing economy emerged in 2008 and is typically associated with the platform capitalist organizations *Airbnb* and *Uber.* The first platform specializes in 'home-sharing' and the second in 'car sharing' (Schor & Attwood-Charles, 2017). *Airbnb* is undoubtedly one of the most visible organizations associated with this vision of economy because of its history of scaling up in size rapidly, its proliferation across territories including areas of the globe that previously were difficult to access for tourism, and its meteoric increase in market value (Morozov, 2015). The sharing economy utilizes the seemingly 'unproductive capacities' of so-called 'idle' or under-utilized goods (Botsman, 2015; Cammaerts, 2011; Richardson, 2015; Schor & Attwood-Charles, 2017; Slee, 2015), facilitating the transaction of these capacities between individuals in cyberspace (Slee, 2015; Stabrowski, 2017). Specifically, then, this form of capitalism uses digital technology to match customers and providers (Botsman, 2015).

A number of scholars point to positive social benefits of the sharing economy (Belk, 2014; Bucher et al., 2018; Richardson, 2015; Tussyadiah & Park, 2018). However, a growing body of scholarship disputes the language of the sharing economy, because of its appropriation of communitarian tropes and images of social justice (Olma, 2014; Schor & Attwood-Charles, 2017; Slee, 2015). The notion of the sharing economy is a semantic construct that masks neoliberal tendencies towards work and economic precarity and the exploitation of labour. This is achieved through the deployment of ideas that are framed around altruism and community-focused social values (Cockayne, 2016; Gurran, 2018). Thus, the term platform capitalism is employed by some scholars in preference to the more commonly-used term of the sharing economy to draw attention to the profit-driven, monopolistic nature of the business practices involved (Morozov, 2015; Olma, 2014).

Airbnb is characterized as a 'lean' platform (Srnicek, 2017b). Lean platforms piggy-back on particular socio-economic conditions. Such socio-economic conditions presently include the state of socio-economic precarity that has arisen in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008, the digitization of contemporary life, and the accommodation of government monetary policies that favour capitalist corporate expansion (Srnicek, 2017a, 2017b). The specific tendencies of lean platforms include extensive outsourcing of costs relating to plant and compliance, the use of 'cloud' storage technologies and of other digital innovations that allow for rapid scaling of organization, algorithmic analysis of large data sets generated from users of the platform, and the exploitation of surplus populations stuck within areas experiencing economic recession and precarious job markets (Srnicek, 2017b). Lean platforms such as *Airbnb* are particularly noted for their ability to decentralize and outsource almost every cost or compliance aspect of the business, including rental of hardware, software and cloud computing. This is called 'hyper-outsourcing' whereby these costs are offloaded to those becoming economically dependent on the platform (Srnicek, 2017a).

As mentioned, the two most commonly identified lean platforms are *Airbnb* and the car-sharing platform, *Uber*, both of which engage workers through regulative loopholes that dismantle conventional safeguards and protections in legislation,

and shift responsibility for legislative compliance and the management of financial risk from the company to individual workers (Cherry & Pidgeon, 2018; Slee, 2015; Srnicek, 2017b). A key mechanism through which this removal of legislated employment protection occurs is the positioning of workers as independent contractors (Schor & Attwood-Charles, 2017). The combination of rising precarity and the off-loading of employment risk onto workers thereby restructures labour relations such that the operation of corporatized global capital is further normalized (Schor & Attwood-Charles, 2017; Standing, 2011). As Nancy Fraser (2016, p. 113) notes in this regard, an effect of corporatized global capital is "not only to abandon defenceless populations to capital's predations, but also to redefine emancipation in market terms" This latter point will be taken up in various ways in later discussions.

1.3.2 Data

Given the effects of digital technologies upon the contemporary organization of human life, any discussion of digital technologies needs to consider the social and human implications of its use. Set in a context of neoliberalism, the explosion of digital technologies in the 21st century has enabled ideas of emancipation and meritocracy to circulate with ease. Such ideas are seamlessly adopted as social goods to be attained, but the circulation of these vague notions masks the tendencies of digital capitalism towards capitalist accumulation. The sharing economy, in particular, draws on such discourses, all the while deconstructing social protections by circumventing employment legislation, and disrupting the daily operations of domestic and familial life by subjugating time to capital.

Platforms rapidly expand the territorial reach of organizations through a dynamic of physical and digital convergence enabled by the 'internet of things' (Parker et al., 2016; Slee, 2015). This form of convergence enables a previously unseen level of hyper-connectivity and results in users being available to the platform on a more-or-less continuous basis. The exposure of individuals to digital activity has created a sphere for exploitation of data as a raw material, as users' activities are tracked through multiple websites using tracking applications known as 'cookies'.

Although debate circulates as to whether user-generated data counts as labour (Srnicek, 2017b), a consequence of user-generated data is that it generates

surplus value in the data that is available to the platform. Surplus value, in a Marxist sense, refers to the value of a product created by workers that exceeds their own labour costs; it is also commonly called 'profit' (Harvey, 2015). In the case of user-created data, platforms (particularly lean platforms) incur no labour costs, thus allowing for maximum capital extraction from the data produced. Data, rather than the ostensible selling of goods or services, accommodation stays in the case of *Airbnb,* is the basis of platform capitalism's power. This data is appropriated by the platform through a number of different channels: the collation of information through user-generated data, user interactions on the platform, data extracted through APIs and OAUTHS, the selling of information to third party companies, as well as the provision of targeted marketing opportunities within the platform for the further extraction of economic value from its users (Srnicek, 2017a; van Dijck, 2013). Given the centrality of data to the success of the platform, it is no surprise that these organizations tend to have very little in the way of plant or fixed assets. Crucially, instead, they do own their digital architecture and infrastructure. As a result of the ways that digital architecture is structured, these platforms in effect also 'own' the data information they collect (Parker et al., 2016). This becomes problematic, as Nick Srnicek succinctly observes, because:

> Far from being the mere owners of information, these companies are becoming owners of the infrastructures of society (Srnicek, 2017b, p. 92).

It is within the context of this assertion that inquiry and analysis take shape. The infrastructures of society, owned and engineered by the operators of digital platforms, have influences beyond the realm of what was traditionally held as the sphere of business. Digital technologies have enabled platform capitalism to operate in physical spaces of residential properties in ways that change both the meanings of home and the subjectivities of the people that reside in those spaces. Moreover, the activities of platform capitalist organizations have become so normalized within a digitized globe that new, emerging subjectivities arising out of engagement with these platforms have become un-remarked on, taken for granted, and uncritically accepted as the dominant norm. Emerging critical commentary casts a critical lens over the field of platform capitalism. This present

research contribution extends the analytical enquiry into ways in which hosts' engagements with *Airbnb* alter their experiences of self and subsequent practices of social reproduction within the context of the home; a space that is variously constructed within dominant common-sense understandings as a site of social reproduction, but latterly also a site for intensive capitalist activities.

1.4 Tourism

> Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. These people are called visitors (which may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents) and tourism has to do with their activities, some of which imply tourism expenditure ("United Nations World Tourism Organization," 2019).

This definition of tourism by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) appears as a relatively benign statement. The statement reflects the common discourse in media and governance in which tourism is presented as beneficial activity, which has the presumably fortuitous side-effect of creating money. However, critical scholars such as Robert Fletcher (2011) more definitively define tourism as an explicit form of capitalism. Tourism is, therefore, susceptible to the same crises and contradictions of other forms of capital. These include contradictions in social reproduction, crises of surplus populations, contradictions between use values and exchange values, disparities across income distribution and monopolization tendencies.

Capitalism employs a number of mechanisms to deal with crises, one of which involves absorbing excess capital through spatial and temporal displacement in order to cope with surplus (Harvey, 1990a). Specifically, tourism provides a mechanism whereby capitalists can shift activities to emerging markets, thus forestalling states of overproduction and oversupply in the established tourist sites (a state of affairs that is now termed 'overtourism'). Typically, this spatial and temporal transfer of capitalist activities shifts the demand for labour-power to cheaper locations (Harvey, 1990a). *Airbnb* demonstrate this process by their intensive marketing of 'new' locations and experiences, where tourists can experience 'local', and supposedly 'authentic' cultural experiences.

1.4.1 Homestay tourism

Platform capitalism, such as that demonstrated by organizations like *Airbnb*, has fundamentally altered the landscape of residential-based tourist accommodation, as previously structured by 'homestay tourism'. Homestay tourism is a sphere where private, social and economic life are intertwined and enacted within the confines of a home (McIntosh, Lynch, & Sweeney, 2011). The concept of homestay tourism is not new. It has long historical roots, tracing its genesis back to the early Celts as a form of hospitality exchange (Yasami, Awang, & Teoh, 2017). By the Middle Ages, homestay tourism had taken the form of monetary exchange for hospitality (O'Gorman, 2009). Whilst there are many forms of hospitality that operate on a small-scale commercial basis, the defining feature of homestay tourism is the obvious fact that it takes place in the home, thus providing a dimension of intense interactions between hosts and guests, within private spaces now socially shared (McIntosh et al., 2011).

The operations of *Airbnb* have had two specific impacts on homestay tourism. The first relates to the immense scale of activity in which the intensity of homestay accommodation through *Airbnb* has impacted communities and rental markets, and has normalized the operation of one's home space as a business venture in and of itself (as opposed to running an external business from the home). The second impact is more subtle, but nevertheless important. Traditionally, homestay operations have been built around the idea that travellers enter into the home space in which authorship and authority rests with the hosts; travellers were guests in residents' homes. In other words, travellers were temporary visitors and were expected to fit in with the daily operations of the household. Under conditions of *Airbnb*, the power has shifted to the guest through the rating system; guests no longer stay in residents' *homes*, they stay in residents' *Airbnbs.* This distinction removes the authority and authorship of space from hosts because, under conditions of *Airbnb,* travellers hold the power through rating systems; hosts must fit in with guests' wishes.

1.4.2 Tourism scholarship

Academic literature on tourism tends to adopt an economic approach that favours development agendas and business-oriented inquiry. For example, in his review

of research into the perceptions of tourism hosts, Sharpley (2014) found that much of the tourism research was of a predominantly quantitative nature, with a noticeable lack of both qualitative and longitudinal studies, thus revealing a number of weaknesses in the collective body of literature. Specific types of methodology produce specific types of knowledge (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). The skewing of research methodologies in favour of quantitative methods produces knowledge that serves market-oriented inquiries into tourism because data can be utilized to support a number of research questions that assume the possibility of 'market efficiency' across tourism projects, developments, attitudes and strategies. In short, a survey of the existing body of research suggests that academic literature displays a decidedly market-focused approach (Woosnam, 2012).

Despite the focus on market analysis, there have been numerous calls for social considerations to be prioritized (Porter & Kramer, 2011; Saarinen & Rogerson, 2014). Paradoxically, initiatives within the tourism industry that take account of issues such as social responsibility, sustainability and community well-being tend to do so from a neoliberal position where "development is taken to mean economic enlargement" (Burns, 1999, p. 345). Corporate social responsibility initiatives are thus understood as part of a larger business case that contributes to a number of outcomes which directly link to business practice. Corporate social responsibility focuses on public relations exercises in order to build reputation as an ethical business, achieve cost-saving such as energy efficiency and the minimization of risk (Hughes & Sheyvens, 2016).

A range of scholarship exists pertaining to the social impacts on local populations of tourism activity. The work of tourism has been shown to destabilize local and cultural identities (Kamler & Thomson, 2011). This is due in part to the operation of tourism at the intersection between globalism and localism where international influences, ideas and practice impact on local ideas, culture and practices. The pressure to conform to touristic ideals becomes incumbent upon the host, resulting in a flattening of local character and cultural processes in order to mitigate chances of cultural misunderstanding. As a consequence of such accommodations, local residents who engage with tourism must negotiate multiple subjectivities that shift between various social settings (Hunter, 2011).

For example, the pressure on *Airbnb* hosts to conform to *Airbnb's* own, Americanized standards as well as to specific tourists' expectations is amplified by the *Airbnb* peer-to-peer review process, whereby a bad guest review has significantly more consequences than a good review (Chen & Chang, 2018; Slee, 2015). Thus, anticipation of what guests may expect (an expectation fuelled by *Airbnb's* marketing of idyllic homestay tourism) can result in hosts adjusting their regular mode of behaviour to accommodate those expectations. Moreover, the imperative from *Airbnb* to meet the metrics of the platform results in changes at community-level, prompting transformations of living spaces that disrupt the socio-spatial relations of communities (Stabrowski, 2017). This argument will be developed in detail as the discussion progresses.

1.4.3 Tourism in Aotearoa New Zealand

As mentioned earlier, economic aspects of *Airbnb* are not pivotal to the current discussion, however, economic considerations form part of the motivation for *Airbnb* hosts, and therefore, an overview of this element is pertinent. In keeping also with the market-orientation of much scholarship on tourism, it becomes well-known that the tourist trade has become a major contributor to the New Zealand economy, contributing an estimated 39.2 billion dollars of economic activity annually, and providing employment for 365,316 people ("Insight at a glance-Tourism employment and expenditure- February 2019," 2019) . Moreover, the growth of tourism has been remarkable, with real tourism expenditure (adjusted for inflation) showing an increase of 61.4% between 2000 and 2018 ("Insight at a glance- Tourism employment and expenditure- February 2019," 2019). A report by Deloitte Access Economics, commissioned by *Airbnb*, notes that *Airbnb* guest expenditure of $781.4 million in 2017 amounts to 2.8% of all tourism expenditure across New Zealand (O'Mahoney et al., 2018). Set against this background, the effect of *Airbnb* on New Zealand's tourism sector has been remarkable, considering the platform only officially launched in Aotearoa New Zealand in June 2015. Paradoxically, under current legislation *Airbnb* is not required to contribute quantitative data to a monthly survey, the Commercial Accommodation Monitor, as required of other accommodation providers because its operations are currently not included in the parameters of 'commercial tourism' ("Commercial

Accommodation Monitor," 2017), despite the high volume of activity reported (Atfield, 2017).

The increasing role that tourism plays in Aotearoa New Zealand has resulted in greater attention being paid to the field by a number of interested sectors including industry groups and government. Mirroring the international trend, much of this research takes a market-focused approach. For example, the *Tourism Satellite Account* is an ongoing tool that charts a number of trends in New Zealand's tourism market. This document tracks changes over time; for example it notes that the increases in tourism charted during 2016 follow on from a 10.3% increase in the previous year (Statistics New Zealand, 2016). The strength of industry attention to the economic growth of the tourism sector is indicated in part by the ambitions held for it by groups such as the Tourism Industry of Aotearoa (TIA). It aims to oversee the development of a 41 billion dollar industry by 2025 (Tourism Industry of Aotearoa, 2017). Given that 2018 figures have already reached 39 billion dollars, this estimate seems realistic based on current trajectories. To similar effect, the group's report on tourism expenditure notes a 40% increase in the productivity of tourism's labour force between 2000 and 2018 ("Insight at a glance- Tourism employment and expenditure- February 2019," 2019). This document states "as tourism grows and develops, it becomes better at extracting more from the factors of production it uses". Additionally, a number of tools are available to tourism businesses with a specific aim of increasing market share or revenue sourced through tourism activities, such as TIA's recently developed Domestic Growth Insight tool (DGiT). The significance of this tool lies less with the task it fulfils than with the array of socio-political interests its development has drawn in. These include representatives from central government, regional and local government, and public and private industry. Despite this decidedly economic focus on tourism, *Airbnb* is often viewed as problematic for the tourism sphere as a whole because it disrupts the trade of traditional accommodation providers such as hotels and motels, as well as posing legal and regulatory difficulties for local authorities (Guttentag, 2015; Slee, 2015).

1.4.4 Precarity in regions

Viewed through a monetized lens, small regional towns that rely on tourism have a vested financial interest in sustaining a strong tourism sector. Tourism provides

income and employment in areas that would otherwise struggle to survive economically. Thus, on an individual level, the imperative to commodify oneself as an *Airbnb* host to meet the needs of a tourist-focused market is driven not only by organizations such as *Airbnb*, but also by a combination of local government, industry and central government whose primary focus is on the establishment of conditions conducive to the expropriation of surplus value through the generation of profit, the enhancement of profitability and the securing of economic sustainability. Additionally, individuals' own imperatives centre on personal financial concerns amidst a context of low-wages and high housing costs (Slee, 2015). These socio-economic conditions are typical of the small regional tourist towns that are the focus of this current research.

The rhetoric employed within *Airbnb* to suggest a significant contribution by *Airbnb* to the financial security of New Zealanders is inflated. There are undoubtedly a number of hosts who make a secure living through *Airbnb* (McDonald, 2017); however reports from within New Zealand, as well as from international sites, suggest that those who make a living from *Airbnb* tend to be people who have high-end, expensive properties, or who act as professional hosts or co-host for others (Cropp, 2017; McDonald, 2017; Poole, 2018). The latter reflects a common tendency of capital towards monopolization of product and service provision (Harvey, 2015). Profitability increases for *Airbnb* hosts where those hosts are third-party rental property managers rather than individual owner-occupiers of residential properties (Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018).

As distinct from some overseas experiences, *Airbnb* hosts in New Zealand tend to be predominately home-owners rather than tenants. This adds a particular class dimension to the field of *Airbnb* hosting. Furthermore, across New Zealand, the average age of *Airbnb* hosts is 48 years (Parkinson, 2018). These two elements suggest that younger cohorts may be disadvantaged when it comes to earning additional money through *Airbnb.* The following table demonstrates the disparities in home-ownership across metrics of age:

People aged 20 years and over who owned or partly owned their home
By age group
2001, 2006, and 2013 Censuses
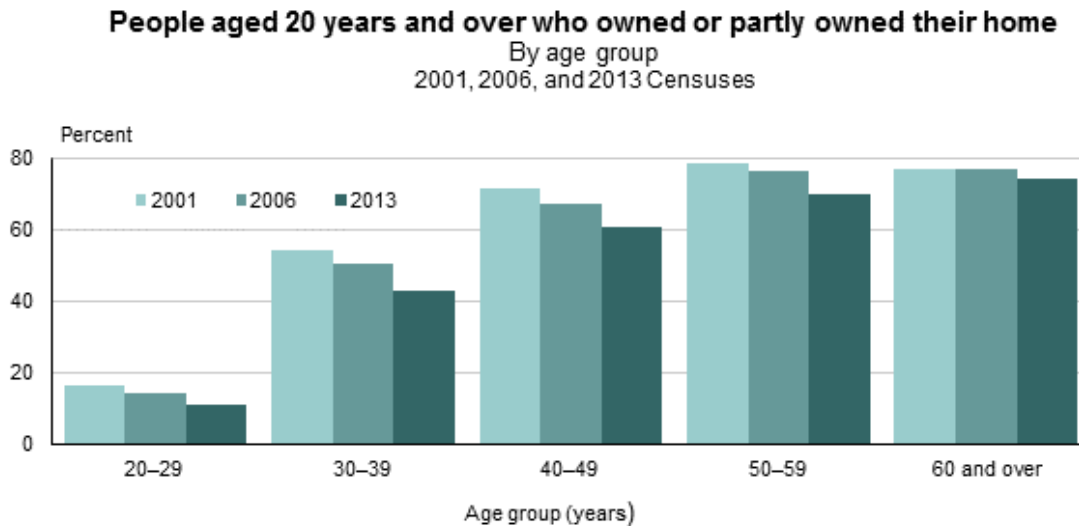
Figure 1: Quickstats about housing

Source: Stats NZ and licensed by Stats NZ for reuse under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence.

("Quickstats about housing," 2013).

Research by sociologist Juliet Schor (2017) suggests that rather than sharing economic benefits *across* communities, *Airbnb* shifts income and opportunity to the more affluent households of the financially secure classes. This has implications for communities to the extent that non-home-owners / tenants find themselves in increasingly precarious positions with regard to housing security.

A number of international scholars have investigated the impact of *Airbnb* on the availability of stable rental housing (Horn & Merante, 2017; Lee, 2016; Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018). Within New Zealand, the impact of *Airbnb* on rentals raises concerns about housing shortages and increasing rental costs in communities (Flahive, 2018; Kino, 2018; Tuatagaloa & Osborne, 2018). Additionally, the impact of *Airbnb* on rentals is unequally distributed across metrics of age. Thomas Clement, founder of myrent.co.nz, notes that:

> Because many short-term rentals are smaller properties, this often
> hits the lower quartile of rental prices which, when combined with
> the central urban locations, means the knock-on effects most often
> negatively impact our younger population (Clement, n.d., as cited in
> Flahive, 2018).

Airbnb's operations demonstrably impact housing on a number of levels. Aside from the obvious effect of shifting rental properties from the long-term market to the vacation market, *Airbnb* exacerbates class distinctions as home-owners are more able to earn income from the platform, while non-home-owners face increasing rents for those properties that do remain on the long-term rental market, thus increasing demand. Those impacted the most include low-income earners and youth.

1.5 Subjectivity

In addition to the role played by the digital character of the platform, the relationship between *Airbnb* and its hosts also turns upon the forms of subjectivity adopted by the latter in their participation. This concept is integral to this research because subjectivity implies both agency and subjection (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 2006). Since agency and subjection are paradoxical terms, subjectivity itself has a tendency toward contradiction. Subjectivity, therefore, becomes an element by which tendencies to crises form as individuals negotiate tensions between the elements of agency and subjectivization. *Airbnb* operations are situated within the residential home which is also the predominant site of social reproduction, identity-making and sense-making. The restructuring of tasks required by the platform also restructures subjectivity so that the tendency towards crisis forms more specifically in this domestic context.

 Drawing from the work of Judith Butler, the concepts of the 'subject' and 'subjectivity' are framed as linguistic categories rather than as specific and immovable characteristics of an individual, such that "individuals come to occupy the site of the subject". (Butler, 1997, p. 10). The subject is therefore not an interchangeable term with notions of 'the individual' or 'the person', but instead 'the subject' is a placeholder for a critical category. This means that more than one individual or person occupies the site of the subject; they are one among many. Therefore, the framing of subjectivity as a singularity is an imaginary. In other words, the categorical placeholder of the subject is representative of, but not exclusive to, a set of characteristics that inhere in the individuals that nest within that subjectivity. Subjectivity then, is fluid and contingent. Moreover, subjectivity is drawn into being through the circulation and dissemination of affect

(Williams, 2010). Subjectivity is thus fluid, relational and performative in forming identity.

With respect to the fluid and relational nature of subjectivity, there are two conceptions of subjectivity relevant to the current commentary: that of Althusser and also that of Foucault. Althusser's notion of subjectivity pertains to the interpellation of the subject. That is, the subject forms in relation to the impenetrability of the Other. The individual makes themselves amenable to the demands of concrete authorities ('sovereigns', in the terms used below) in order to assuage the unfathomable demands of the Other. M. Foucault (1979), on the other hand approaches subjectivity through notions of discursive production. Discursive production is directly linked to power, hence the Foucauldian couplet of knowledge/power. Foucault extends this model to counter the sovereign model of power proposed by Althusser, by considering the "efficacy of discourse apart from its instantiation as the spoken word" (Butler, 1997, p. 6).

Subjection has an affective element of attachment. Konings (2015, p. 27) provides insights into the ways in which affect is deeply bound to subjectivity by examining ways that capital "tugs at the strings of our subjective experience". This is not to suggest that the subject herself is therefore solely responsible for the subordination of the self, because to do so would ignore that subjection is achieved through the operation of power. Instead, Butler (1997) asserts power's insidious operation and production of affect renders the individual vulnerable to subordination in ways that turn the will of the subject back on itself.

This 'turning back' on oneself has two aspects. Firstly, the subject is formed by power exploiting a primary passion of dependency; that is, the need to belong. Power exploits this primary dependency through desire that ensures the individual seeks approval and validation through social norms. On the *Airbnb* platform, the imperative to conform to *Airbnb* standards is reinforced through digital means which allow the rapid circulation of ideas and concepts. The rapidity and ubiquity of circulated ideas ensures that such ideas are perceived as social norms. Secondly, the subject itself, by appropriating social norms, seeks durability of social existence. This is achieved through behavioural modifications that ensure the subject conforms to norms through a process of self-denial, self-

regulation and attachment (Butler, 1997). Thus, desire is integral to, as well as integrated into, subjection.

The emphasis on subjectivity implies an ongoing state of *negotiation* between agency and subjection (Abercrombie et al., 2006). *Airbnb* specifically draws on a rhetoric of agency, as a vehicle of negotiation, to market itself to potential hosts, citing notions of freedom and choice ("Thames-Coromandel migration," 2014). A number of scholars have critically interrogated this rhetoric (Bialski, 2016; Lee, 2016; Slee, 2015). In line with this notion of an agentive power that exists over subjectivity, the impact of tourism on subjectivity has most often been studied from standpoints internal to the neoliberal project. For example, most contemporary research that considers the relationship between residents and tourism focuses on the impact of residents' perceptions of tourism on the tourism sector, rather than the reverse relationship of tourism's impact on the life-worlds of residents (and subsequently, on their subjectivity). Such work is animated by concepts like citizenship, place and identity, but doing so in the terms of unsophisticated binaries such as 'asset' or 'obstacle' and in light of a fixed horizon of a tourism 'marketplace' (Sharpley, 2014).

1.6 Place

Notions of place are ubiquitous as the term has many common-sense meanings. Because it is so widely used, the meaning of place also has slippage (Cresswell, 2015). It can refer to physical space in the sense of private spaces and public spaces, but it also refers to social position, cyber-space and invokes notions of ownership. Place can also be conceptualized as a space that has meaning ascribed to it. Home refers to a physical space that has social meaning through human interactions that occur in and around it (Cain & Mansvelt, 2017). The term 'place attachment' refers to affective connections to spaces, such as notions of home or locality that provide ontological security and a sense of belonging in which life-worlds are enacted (Di Masso et al., 2019). For the current purposes of inquiry, place is considered in different ways. Firstly, place is considered as a public space in which local identity is constructed through discourse, myth-making, history and interaction. Secondly, place is used to consider notions of home that have both physical and affective dimensions.

1.6.1 Tourist places

> Imagine that you live in Asia, or Britain, or perhaps the US. You
> have driven home through the smog to your cramped apartment,
> and as you eat your dinner you see on TV images of snow-capped
> mountains reflected in crystal-clear unpolluted lakes. Cows graze in
> lush green pastures, native birds sing in the forests, waves thunder
> onto deserted beaches, and happy healthy people are having fun.
> It is New Zealand, and it looks like paradise (*Our clean green image:*
> *what's it worth?*, 2001).

This excerpt is drawn from a New Zealand Government (Ministry for the
Environment) pamphlet, produced in 2001 to highlight the economic benefit of
maintaining a 'clean, green image'. It highlights both the idealized myth-making
of place and the economic framing of New Zealand as a pristine, romanticized
idyll. The tourism industry in New Zealand abounds with images and texts that
draw on an ideological place myth of 'clean green New Zealand' as perceived by
tourists and promoted by a market-focused tourism industry (Coyle &
Fairweather, 2005). This notion is promoted both locally and internationally,
shaping the lived experience of identity, culture and place as experienced by
residents.

The images used by the tourism industry provide a template of a romanticized
idyll that has the effect of disavowing the actual business of living, or of making a
living, in a particular locality (Hall & Tucker, 2004). The realities of agribusiness,
retail or manufacturing operations, farm machinery, visible signs of
unemployment or low socio-economic status, or even the realities of the natural
world such as mosquitoes, jellyfish and sand-flies are common-place in tourist
spots situated in regional, rural and remote areas. These realities impact not only
on tourists' perceptions of place (and the resulting efforts by the tourism industry
to mitigate these realities), but also have an effect on residents as they negotiate
the gaps between the marketed image of place and the realities of their daily
lives.

The rating mechanisms of *Airbnb* exacerbate difficulties encountered by hosts as
they negotiate between competing imperatives of place. These imperatives form
around guest expectations and the realities of daily life. Guest expectations

generate from a fixed set of clearly defined representations provided by *Airbnb*'s marketing of idyllic 'local' places. These expectations lead guests to presume they will mingle with local identities and experience pristine landscapes and unadulterated cultures. Competing imperatives come from the realities of place that reflect the lived daily experiences of the people that inhabit those places. Narratives of 'clean, green' spaces and narratives of home create a clash of ideologies in such situations (Coyle & Fairweather, 2005). This is an area of particular concern for *Airbnb* hosts who must work to ensure an enjoyable experience for their guests in order to secure positive ratings. Tourism is promoted and marketed through pre-conceived and constructed images or definitions of place by both government and private enterprise, consequently social reality is both defined and recreated to fit those representations through interactive and dialectical processes that in effect "annihilate" everyday life (Hall & Tucker, 2004, p. 225). Thus, tourism itself has an impact on the environment.

Tensions also surround relations between tourism and the physical environment. The accessibility and ease of access to wilderness areas is heavily promoted to key overseas markets in order to attract more tourists to Aotearoa New Zealand. For example, tourism is one of the few industries in the country that is granted concessions to operate in National Parks (Dinica, 2016). The research sites chosen for the current investigation each have a strong component of wilderness tourism. Tourism is both supported and promoted by local government in these areas. While tourism is generally considered to have fewer environmental impacts than industries such as hydropower and mining that typically look to wilderness areas for their sites of operation, there is also a trend of declining state funding for conservation areas such as National Parks to mitigate the effects of tourism pollution (Eagles, 2014). Tourism's impact on the environment includes the obvious consequences such as traffic and air pollution, degradation of waterways, litter, wildlife and habitat destruction and issues related to infrastructure such as wastewater and sewage capacities. However environmental impacts can also be considered in regard to impacts on local communities such as buildings that destroy views, noise pollution, architecture that conflicts with the style of the locality and graffiti (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005).

Specific to *Airbnb*, evidence is mounting that this type of tourism business is changing the landscape of areas with some streets becoming solely '*Airbnb* streets' (*Is Airbnb doing it's bit?*, 2017). The oversupply of *Airbnb* accommodation in some areas is contributing to a phenomenon called 'overtourism' (Burrai, 2018). Housing shortage and affordability for local living are directly impacted by such a scenario (Gurran, 2018). Situations where neighbour is pitted against neighbour in a competition for both ratings and revenue have the potential to transform previously residential areas into cut-throat quasi-commercial business zones. Additionally, and contrary to *Airbnb*'s claims that *Airbnb* hosts are 'regular people', there is evidence to suggest that the phenomenon is driving areas towards gentrification that attracts 'professional' hosts, raises prices of both housing and accommodation, changes the social environment and excludes lower socio-economic residents (Slee, 2015, p. 50; Tuatagaloa & Osborne, 2018).

1.6.2 Home and meaning

Marxist feminist literature has long considered that home is a territory of capitalist exploitation (Elliott & Franklin, 2018; Federici, 2018). Marxist feminist perspectives on capitalism dissolve the existence of any possible boundary between shielded spaces of home as sites of exclusive social reproduction and the wider capitalist sphere. Under a Marxist feminist approach, home is considered as a continuum of capitalist relations. For example, Maxine Molyneux addresses the issue of a reductionist approach to the home as a site of division between capital and domestic labour, arguing that home is often a site of capitalist activities beyond that of a functional support to capitalism in terms of social reproductive work (Molyneux, 1979). This line of argument is taken up by Michēle Barrett and Mary McIntosh who argue that the organizational aspects of household economies are frequently overlooked by academics, because assumptions of functionalist ideas such as male labour wage, male breadwinner / dependant wife dichotomies and the like are based on notions of gender and cultural norms and assumptions of divisions of labour posited from a white feminist and middle class perspective (Barrett & McIntosh, 2005). These authors argue instead, that home is deeply ingrained in capitalist culture across a range of contexts.

Despite the Marxist feminist approach to theorizations of home and capital, the romanticized notion of home as a protected space is integral to this research for several reasons. Firstly, home is important to the study because it is the primary site of *Airbnb* activity. Secondly, romanticized notions of home separate out social reproductive tasks from capitalist tasks. Under such an idyll, home is considered to be the site where affective care work of social reproduction takes place. Therefore, the introduction of an overtly capitalist activity into this romanticized space is likely to have impacts on those who hold to such notions. Thirdly, despite Marxist feminist understandings of home as an extension or continuum of capitalist practices and ideologies, the notion of home has an enduring common-sense understanding of being a private sphere separated from capitalist labour appropriation. This has implications for shifts in meaning associated with the concept of home and with the activities that take place within its confines.

To reiterate: It is important to note that the concept of home is often idealized and romanticized, and as such presented as an unproblematic and singular concept. In view of this, I wish to specifically draw attention to the ways in which the notion of home is deployed in this current analysis. 'Home' is referred to as a concept that *stands in* as an ideal type; this does not mean that home is in actual fact a place of calm, secluded and sheltered space away from the vagaries of outside life and capitalist intrusion, but instead it is the *notion* of home as such a sanctuary that is drawn on. The conflicts between the realities of daily life and platform capitalism are highlighted by the yearnings for the romanticized version of home. The contradictions between the imaginary of home and the operations of a business model that frames the physical space of home, and the personality and personal characteristics of the people who inhabit that space as commodities contribute to the production of surplus meaning.

The concept of home is multi-layered. It refers to an affective attachment to a spatial area, and can include wide-ranging spaces such as a room, a house, a town, a locality or a nation-state (Borm, 2017). Notions of home are imbued with ideas of ontological security, affect and personal identity (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998; Stabrowski, 2017). Western concepts of home have traditionally separated notions of 'work' and 'home' where work is considered to be labour for financial exchange and home is considered to be the site of unpaid care-work and social

reproduction (Fraser, 2014). *Airbnb* brings the public financial interactions of work inside this societal construct of a private home, thus disrupting commonly held notions of spatially opposite domains (Borm, 2017).

Commodification of such imaginaries – and indeed commodification of people who live in these spaces – becomes performative, with the effect that people attempt to stabilize themselves within the variability of meaning that comes to envelop these previously private "emotional landscapes" (Stabrowski, 2017, p. 330). The performativity involved in transforming a private sphere into a commodity under the imperatives of the platform's criteria creates surplus meaning to the spatial and temporal boundaries of the home (Stabrowski, 2017). The implications of this phenomenon are wide-ranging and speak specifically to the tendency towards crisis in social reproduction: that of the relations of care through which physical and psychical health is produced in society.

1.7   Statement of aims

The current research challenges market-based analyses of tourism in small towns in New Zealand. Market-based approaches to the study of this field serve governance-related aims of tourism. Rather than a governance approach, this research investigates the contradictions of late capitalism and the crises of social reproduction, in particular, through the lens of the lived experience of *Airbnb* hosts. On a wider level, this research aims to deconstruct neoliberal notions of subjectivity. The limitations of the neoliberal project become more and more inescapable in the small-town contexts investigated for this research. The research questions shift the focus away from framing residents of tourist towns as commodified contributors to a tourism economy. The focus settles instead on the construction of local and cultural subjectivities as a response to the contradictions of digital capitalism's influence on tourism. This shift in focus raises the possibility that re-constructions of identity are a means by which to manage the subjectivizing effects of platform capitalism.

This current research has implications for policy directions that regional councils and local authorities apply in their respective areas. In 2002 the new Local Government Act (LGA) specifically recognised local government's importance in economic development. This was amended in 2012 to "meet the current and

future needs *of communities* for good-quality *local infrastructure, local public services*, and performance of regulatory functions" (italics added) (Cheyne, 2016, p. 127; 2012). Specifically, the amendments to the legislation allow for "new significance and engagement policies, to provide clarity about how and when communities can expect to be engaged in decisions about different matters" (Department of Internal Affairs, 2014). Cheyne (2016) asserts that this is an obvious attempt by central government to pass the responsibility to local government for social situations that are not of their own making, despite the still obvious focus of local government as an active participant in economic growth.

Arguably the intent of the LGA is to require that local government authorities serve the needs of their respective communities. The scope of that action ought not be limited to economic growth measures, and needs to more fully consider the social, community and environmental concerns and needs of residents. Additionally, this research provides openings to consider the conditions under which responsibility for the above concerns might be placed back onto central government, and the particular forms of economy and administration they establish.

More specifically, this research investigates the conflicts and contradictions that arise as a result of the increasing role played by platform capitalism in the reconfiguration of tourism services and its intrusion into new fields of exploitation. The coming analysis unpacks the role of digital capitalism through the trope of *Airbnb*, to understand the ways in which digital subjectivity manifests in the context of platform capitalism.

2. Chapter Two: Framing the research: discussions and directions

2.1 Introduction

Chapter Two provides a frame of reference for this research, drawing together the context and rationale for the type of analysis used. An argument is made for the choices that inform the structure and timbre of the research. Part of this process involves canvassing the corpus of theoretical knowledge in the field and connecting ideas and approaches that have previously remained unconnected. Specific difficulties or debates within the field are also explored. Foremost among these is the notion of surplus, and its relationship to digital capitalism. Moreover, the chapter also identifies the particular contribution that this project makes to the current knowledge of platform capitalism.

2.2 Surplus-enjoyment, surplus-meaning and atomized individuality

The theoretical analysis that weaves through the various elements of this research draws deeply on the notion of surplus. As the concept might imply, no single definition can exist in respect of the thing-in-itself ('surplus' always being in excess of definitions given of itself). Within a Marxist tradition, surplus most commonly presents as surplus-value. However, surplus appears in many forms. Two appearances of surplus are drawn upon here, that bear upon the impact of platform capitalism on subjects in their reproduction of life-tasks: surplus-enjoyment and surplus-meaning. Drawing from a Lacanian tradition, surplus-enjoyment occurs as a result of the act of doing, (or process). It specifically does not refer to the experiences of actually achieving a goal or desire. Surplus-enjoyment does not mean 'added' pleasure, or even achieving pleasure, but rather the "very formal detours in the subject's effort to attain pleasure" (Žižek, 2017, pp. 8,9). In this sense, surplus-enjoyment can be understood as being derived from the repetitive acts that one does towards an end, such that the repetition itself comes to 'stand in' as pleasure. The notion of repetition and process as surplus-enjoyment is one that appears in different forms through this research; for example, where I have drawn on the theoretical analyses from Alenka Zupančič, Kiarina Kordela, Lauren Berlant and Martin Konings. In other words, process becomes an end in itself.

Surplus-enjoyment is hidden behind (or masked by) such 'practices of process'. The performative nature of surplus-enjoyment is generated by the performance of actions that work towards the goal, through the self-reproduction of the process itself (Žižek, 2017). A subtle but important nuance of surplus-enjoyment gained through process, (or in other words, working towards a goal or desire), is that it is incompatible with the *achievement* of desire. The nature of surplus-enjoyment thereby lays bare a reversal; that of lack. It is

> Nothing other than the gaze, not as such but in so far as it is lacking, and it is always lacking since the gaze I encounter… is not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other (Kordela, 2007, p. 42).

Surplus and lack do not exist on the same plane – it is not simply a matter of distribution. They are instead, paradoxically linked through a relationship of co-dependence.

Within this research the central element of surplus emerges from the production of actions and talk ("surplus-meaning"), most noticeably within notions of micro-entrepreneurship and super-hosting. Micro-entrepreneurship therefore becomes a fetishized object; never obtained, but always a target of activity. Points of tension emerge around the production of surplus-meaning, so that what were previously held as meanings of home, relationships, business and identity collide with the practices of platform capitalism enacted through *Airbnb*. Production of actions and of talk never bring the object of desire to fruition, so instead, pleasure of process becomes sustaining in itself (Žižek, 2017). However, the surplus-meanings that spill over from this process create tensions. Tensions between surplus-enjoyment and surplus-meaning have the effect of situating subjects in diverse subject positions. This research maps the emergence of specific subjectivities through *Airbnb* hosting, the ways these subjectivities circulate and the ways in which surplus-enjoyment and surplus-meaning shape the behaviours of specific subject positions.

A key context of the research surrounds the normalization of atomized individuality, which frames the production of subjectivities in and for platform capitalism. The constitution of subjectivities draws on constructivist ideas that are

conceptually distinct ontology from that of surplus. While this might, at first glance, seem incompatible, there is a tradition of thought that asserts philosophical contradictions are not autonomous; as Fredric Jameson (2015, p. 127) asserts, "philosophical contradictions…cannot be solved philosophically". The extension of this line of thought is that divergent ontologies or philosophical contradictions can only be mediated. The research project itself mediates the two divergent fields and this process produces an outcome – in this case, the focus on subjectivities and the appearance of surplus. Therefore, this research takes a specific philosophical position that involves holding two ontologically distinct ideas at the same time, to account for the deployment of two conceptually distinct ontologies.

Drawing from the theoretical work of Jodi Dean (2018), the atomization of the individual produces a form of subjectivity amongst whose effects is service to the particular demands for labour power emanating from digital platform capitalism. Using three elements or 'themes of inquiry' (commodification, biopolitics and time/space intensification), different accounts of political identity under neoliberal conditions emerge to coalesce around three main subject positions. These three themes do not serve to explain the normalization of atomized individuality as such, but rather, indicate the means by which changes occur in that normalization, towards the generation of internal contradictions. A key question that emerges, then, concerns the prospects of those kinds of subjectivity that form surplus to that subjectivisation, as a base upon which collective responses might form in response to platform capitalism.

2.3 Elements of Inquiry

The underlying paradigms of atomized individuality and the production of surplus inform the development of three main elements of inquiry utilized in this research. These are presented in Chapters Four to Seven. They are:

- The commodification of the self and of private spaces (Chapters Four and Five);
- The biopolitics of *Airbnb* (Chapter Six); and
- The intensification of time and space under conditions of platform capitalism (Chapter Seven).

These three elements are employed as tools to understand the impacts of *Airbnb* operations on social reproduction in specific ways. The elements themselves are not specific, concrete categorizations. Rather, they are models of type and should not be misread as descriptions of reality or snapshots of real life. In other words, these are analytical tools that enable the interpretation of experience. Analytical tools are used to be "thought" and "seen with" (Bauman, 2007, p. 24).

It is important to note that the order of these chapters is neither chronological nor causal. To highlight this, I introduce the three elements of inquiry in an order that differs from how they appear in the chapters. This is because these three elements intersect and absorb each other in complex interactions and in non-linear ways, unexpectedly combining to provide glimpses of alternate futures and possibilities.

This consideration of commodification, bio-politics, and time/space intensification provides a productive way of asking about the prospects for the generation of collective political subjectivities out of states of atomised individuality. Using the three elements of commodification, biopolitics and time/space intensification as an analytical mesh to investigate the impacts on social reproduction through engagement with *Airbnb* (as an avatar of platform capitalism) provides a new way of investigating the phenomenon of *Airbnb*, and of platform capitalism more broadly. This analytical mesh sits alongside the philosophical understandings of surplus viewed through a post-Marxist /psychoanalytic lens to generate a complex understanding of the complex nature of digital capitalism, subjectivity, surplus and the ways in which these fields intersect.

A productive way to draw links between biopolitics, commodification and time/space intensification is to investigate the types of subjectivity that are produced under these conditions. The subject-positions produced under conditions of platform capitalism, and through the vehicle of *Airbnb* more particularly, provide opportunities to investigate what forms of action, escape from enclosure, or future prospects might become available to these subjects. The opportunities appear in the gaps that platform capitalism rends in the fabric of social reproduction as a result of *Airbnb*'s operations in spaces previously widely considered to be separated from capitalist operations. This line of

questioning is further unpacked in Chapter Eight, through the idea of collective responses.

Specifically, the three elements of inquiry used in this research place the modes of subjectivisation under platform capitalism for the production of labour power as the central object of focus. More importantly, the modes of subjectivity are placed as the central object of *value*. Value in this sense accounts for a much wider understanding of the term than simply fiscal or economic configurations. It takes into account cultural, gendered, familial and social values that contribute to the richness of human experience that economic accounting is unable to do. Because of this theoretical re-focusing, I assert that this method of analysis contributes to the growing body of sociological knowledge surrounding platform capitalism. It does this by challenging and displacing money-value and neoliberal claims of individualism and entrepreneurialism as measures of success and measures of analysis.

2.4   The normalization of atomized individuality

Platform capitalism continues the neoliberal constitution of people as atomized individuals, through its digital technologies. Gilles Deleuze (1992, p. 5) introduces the idea of the "dividual" wherein a person loses their individual characteristics under treatment of technological coding, and instead becomes a fragmentation of bits of data information, re-presented as a sample, population, mass or market. Dividuation allows modulations of coded information which Deleuze (p.4) describes as "a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other". Or, put another way, atomized individuals (dividuals) are artefacts of algorithmic data treatments. As with biopolitical mechanisms in general, (in)dividuality emerges not in the service of subjective experience but, rather, in the service of populations. Digital technologies amplify the contradiction that characterizes the state of massified individuality that ensues (Dean, 2016a). The algorithmic analysis reconfigures individuals not as a crowd or a community, but as a collection of separated individualities. Intense aggregation appears as a singularity. Platform capitalism specifically utilizes digital infrastructures to bring participants (users) in a marketplace together. These users – separated individuals – form populations of buyers and sellers (Srnicek, 2017b).

Digital infrastructures such as those employed by platform capitalist organizations allow for the collection, recording, management and manipulation of multiple users data on an unprecedented scale (Parker et al., 2016; Srnicek, 2017a). This world of digital surveillance is not a centred, all-powerful entity ("Big Brother") such as that envisaged by George Orwell in his seminal novel "1984". Rather, as Dean (2002, p. 79) suggests, surveillance and control is exercised by myriad data-gathering 'little brothers'; digital organizations that trade in the excesses of information that can be extracted through the monitoring of users' online behaviour. The notion of 'little brothers' suggests the operation of biopolitical power through diffuse but encompassing means. This has implications for the subjectivities of users of digital platforms whose behaviours are disciplined and / or nudged by such manipulation and surveillance (Bauman & Lyon, 2013).

The key to the digital architecture of platforms is algorithmic analysis (Slee, 2015; Srnicek, 2017a, 2017b). An algorithm is:

> a finite list of well-defined instructions for calculating a function, a step-by-step directive for processing or automatic reasoning that orders the machine to produce a certain output from given input (van Dijck, 2013, p. 30).

The focus on a 'certain output' is central to this discussion. It is important to note from the outset that algorithms are not benign; they serve the goals of the organization, that is, banking data, by infiltrating social transactions through algorithmic analysis of users' information, which then gets translated into commercially appropriated information (van Dijck, 2013).

An example of the ways in which algorithms serve capitalist goals can be seen in *Airbnb*'s listing hierarchy for any given area. *Airbnb* controls which listings are available to any particular guest according to algorithms that map both guests' and hosts' prior on-line activity. *Airbnb* thus become a gatekeeper that employs practices which can include some and exclude others (Bialski, 2016). An example of this is as follows: It is difficult to ascertain exact figures of how many separate *Airbnb* homestays are available in any particular location as the *Airbnb* website's algorithms currently do not display more than 306 listings in any given area, even

though there are significantly more listings than this. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, listing numbers are temporally located; listings come and go from the platform as hosts' needs, wants and personal circumstances change, and as the demands of tourism fluctuate. Secondly, there is a background algorithm which limits what listings are displayed at any one time, and to whom (Ravenelle, 2017). The listings returned in any particular search of the *Airbnb* platform are tailored via algorithmic analysis to the individual interests of the user; listings that the platform's algorithms decide will not be of interest are eliminated.

On the *Airbnb* platform 306 properties equate to 17 pages of listings. The page on which a listing appears can have serious repercussions on booking-uptake by guests. Listings on the first page are more likely to receive bookings than those which appear on page 17. Thus, *Airbnb* has the ability to limit bookings (and therefore, hosts' ability to earn money) as a form of sanction if a particular host does not meet the demands of the platform in terms of availability, promptness of responses to guest enquiries, or numbers of cancellations. This is one way among many that *Airbnb* utilizes algorithms to control hosts. Chapter Six discusses these issues in more detail.

Despite the rhetoric of digital platforms through which firms are presented as cultural and political actors, platforms are primarily economic entities that focus on capitalist accumulation and expansion (Srnicek, 2017a). It bears repeating that capitalist digital platforms are aggressively monopolistic in nature (Srnicek, 2017a; Van Alstyne, Parker, & Choudary, 2016). The mechanisms of this growth lie with data collection and analysis (Gillespie, 2017; Moazed & Johnson, 2016; Slee, 2015; Srnicek, 2017a). The granular accretion of data concerning the individual characteristics of hosts are reconfigured into mechanisms of control that move hosts into enhanced states of competition through what is termed 'network effects'. Network effects refer to the incremental benefits that accrue to the platform by attracting new users (Johnson, 2018; Moazed & Johnson, 2016). Such effects are distinctive features of all platforms and enable rapid scaling of both sides of a market.

While network effects can be seen to operate in any market, digital platforms utilize a specific action of cross-pollination called 'indirect network effects'. This occurs when new users join the group, but the addition of that user provides

benefits for the *other* side of the market (Johnson, 2018). For example, a new guest joining *Airbnb* accrues value not for other guests, but for *all* hosts as a potential future customer. The more guests that use the platform, the more attractive it becomes for hosts to list their properties. The reverse is also true for guests; the more hosts that list their properties, the more choice of potential vacation options become available through the platform. However, benefits do not accrue to members of the same side of the market: as more hosts list their homes on *Airbnb*, the competition *between hosts* in any given area also intensifies.

The phenomenal scaling experienced by capitalist digital platforms – about which something has already been said of *Airbnb* – assists their movement towards monopoly position in their respective markets. The amplification of competition between service providers creates a fertile context through which digital platforms control the behaviours of those workers. The intensity of competition benefits the platforms but disadvantages the providers. This is because platforms are able to attract more users by increasing options at cheaper prices. Availability of choices drives the price of those services down. Where this occurs, providers must then bear the brunt of decreasing incomes able to be derived from the commodification of the personal property they bring with them. Additionally, providers also experience increasing workloads as they attempt to offer add-on services for free in order to attract users in a market seemingly overcrowded by design.

Digital capitalist platforms discipline users such that they become amenable to the exercise of behaviours that are favourable to the extension of the platform. Discipline occurs through diffuse means. For the purposes of the current discussion, the focus here is on algorithmic control. Computer codes employed by platforms are not neutral or benign, but instead are:

> cultural objects embedded and integrated into a social system
> whose logic, rules and explicit functioning work to determine the
> new conditions of possibilities of users' lives (Cheney-Lippold,
> 2011, p. 167).

In other words, computer code is a system of categorization and definition that constitutes its users in specific ways that suit the purposes of the owners of the

code (in this case, the owners of the code are *Airbnb*). Furthermore, scale is implicated in the success of computer coding. The greater the population to which that code can be applied, the greater the impact of that code on shaping the profile of users' choices. This has a material impact on users of capitalist digital platforms as their efforts, behaviours and ratings are compared and ranked against an ever-increasing dataset.

2.4.1 The biopolitical nature of algorithms

A helpful way to conceptualize the relationship between the individual and algorithmic code is to apply Foucault's ideas on crowds:

> The crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities (M. Foucault, 1979, p. 201).

The biopolitical analogy is clear. Under treatment by computer coding, these separated individualities are able to be reclassified in comparison to each other, where they are evaluated, classified, rewarded or punished for behaviours suited to the platform. Hosts therefore are atomized and isolated from other *Airbnb* hosts through competition. In this way, (in)dividuation, achieved through enclosure of the networked effects of platform capitalism, becomes profoundly depoliticizing (Dean, 2016a). It is through this systemic loss of collectivism that *Airbnb* is able to effectively cement its biopolitical power.

The nature of algorithmic analysis employed by capitalist platforms means that the digital categorization of users results in the construction of *populations* of individuals, not the construction of individuals as *singularities*. Under conditions of platform capitalism, individual humans are not independently distinguished. Rather, certain behaviours or characteristics that individual humans exhibit are grouped via mathematical algorithms to imply *categories* of identities (Cheney-Lippold, 2011). In other words, subjects are re-created into what appear to be stand-alone individuals, but the appearances of self that are generated exist in relation to the constraints, rules and norms that are required of members of a given population. This is a subtle but important distinction. It exposes a fundamental flaw in algorithmic analysis; analysis of this kind is unable to

constantly account for the vagaries and diversities of human behaviour that exceed the specific categorizations into which they are assumed to fit.

Human behaviour inevitably spills over from the categorizations, such that algorithmic categorizations are always shifting to account for this surplus. It is the meanings attributable to behaviour (about the self, and about notions of home and place, in this instance) that cannot be integrated back into the overarching signifying order of platform capital. The surplus-meaning that gets generated manifests as a force that runs as an apparent extension of, yet in a manner askew to (and potentially threatening of) the programmatic coherence of that order. The shifting nature of categorizations created through algorithms mathematically adjust to account for each new iteration of character or behaviour that runs surplus to the intention of the algorithmic code. This means that boundaries are constantly moving (Cheney-Lippold, 2011). Unexpectedly, this movement therefore provides an avenue of escape from the worst excesses and exploitations of digital capitalism and a way to move beyond current conditions of enclosure. The idea of escape from enclosure is investigated more fully in Chapter Eight.

To understand this idea more clearly, I take the lead from Jodi Dean (2016b) imagining how enclosure is more generally enabled by the interpellation of the subject as an individual. Dean problematizes the usual format of hailing the individual as a subject as suggested by Althusser and suggests instead that uncoupling the idea of the subject from the individual allows for the emergence of a collective form of subjectivity. Dean claims that:

> pre-constraining the individual form is itself the problem; it's a coercive and unstable product of the enclosure of the common in never-ceasing efforts to repress, deny, and foreclose collective political subjectivity. The individual is thus a form of capture. Rather than natural or given, the individual form encloses into a singular bounded body collective bodies, ideas, affects, desires, and drives (Dean, 2016b, p. 363).

In other words, interpellation of the subject-as-individual masks the operations of digital capitalism as a form of capture and control. The subject-as-individual

diverts attention from the subject as a member of a given population; this restricts the individual from perceiving themselves as part of a collective subject capable of agency and action. Importantly, Dean identifies that it is a mistake to consider that the individual form is threatened, but rather that the *individual form is the threat itself.* The individual is a pathological form of subjectivity; a form that capitalism easily appropriates, abolishing as it does opportunities for collective subjectivity (Dean, 2018). Chapter Four explores this idea more closely by considering *Airbnb*'s operations on hosts who are hailed as individuals yet enclosed as populations.

To restate this theoretical position in terms of this current contribution, the digital architecture of *Airbnb* is characterized by a paradox. It constructs hosts as a population amenable to control by the very mechanism of individualizing hosts. *Airbnb* ostensibly situates hosts as individual entrepreneurs who are free agents in charge of their own financial destiny. Yet *Airbnb* simultaneously positions these individualized hospitality entrepreneurs as deeply embedded in a supposedly connected community, subject to the rules, regulations and norms expected of members of this community. Because of this dialectical tension the idea that emancipation might be reached through the inverted ladder of engagement with *Airbnb* platform is misdirected.

2.5 Commodification

The appearance of freedom in the digital era suggests an individualized freedom. This is a notion reinforced in myriad ways by the discourses of individualism and neoliberalism. As individuals in the digitized world, we are presented with a vast array of products, opinions, political ideologies, religions, sports, medical choices and lifestyles that we can compare and from which we can choose. Bauman (2000, p. 7) frames this as an epoch of "universal comparison", in which previously stable orientation points are in a constant state of flux. A corollary of this surfeit of choice is that we are also framed as being solely responsible for our own successes as well as our own failures. Consequently, individualized subjects are constantly attempting to 'keep up' with the latest imperative to improve the self, to commodify one's life world more efficiently and more effectively, and to utilize technologies to keep abreast of the latest (shifting) goals of individualized success. This 'commodification' of oneself has a nuanced aspect that belies is

normatively understood framing of an external force acting on the subject. As Michel Feher notes, commodification involves a blurring of boundaries between the spheres of production and of reproduction. It is internalized within the subject and

> is rather a contest between different ways of appreciating and of valuing oneself, a competition over the conditions and modalities of the valorizing of human capital, over what behaviors deserve to be included in my portfolio because they allow me to appreciate and to value myself (Feher, 2009, p. 31).

These ideas are explored in Chapters Four and Five, both of which use the notion of commodification as a lens of analysis.

Airbnb openly positions its hosts as "hospitality entrepreneurs" ("*Airbnb*: Hospitality," 2018), that is, singular, idealized hosts who are in charge of their own future and their own success. This type of discourse masks a key characteristic of digital platform capitalism: that digital architecture operates as a system of capture in which a subject's 'freedom' exists only in its capacity to act according to the demands of the platform. As Jodi Dean perceptively notes:

> the individual appears as a form of freedom even as it functions as that enclosure of the common that fragments, disperses, and diminishes that collective power capable of guaranteeing freedom (Dean, 2018, p. 40).

The freedom to act in accordance with the platform's demands are presented as desirable life-choices for hosts, thus incorporating commodification of the self with the biopolitical notion of a willing herd of individuals appropriating the ideals of the biopower. As Dean (2016a, p. 15) notes, "digital communication entrenches hierarchy by using our own choices against us". There is an obvious connection here to neoliberal discourses of independence, individuality and free choice. However, these choices mask the imperatives of digital platform capitalism which are focused on monopoly, profit and maximum capital extraction (Srnicek, 2017a). Moreover, under conditions of late capitalism the notion of freedom – specifically, the notion of freedom of choice – is reframed as 'possibility', and through this process freedom (as possibility and choice) has become a signifier

of oppression (Alenka Zupančič, 2019a). An example of the way that freedom (as possibility, as choice) encloses the subject can be seen in the following example. Consider smoking: The subject claims she can 'stop whenever I want'. The *possibility* of an end is precisely what allows the subject to act, to continue smoking; why bother stopping, when she can stop *whenever she wants*? The act of infinitely approaching the end enables the enjoyment of the process of postponing the end. Or, in other words, ending is the very condition of its possibility.

The processes by which such enclosure is achieved are complex and overlapping. For example, Paul Verhaeghe asserts that:

> People have been reduced to consumers who live in the illusion that they are unique and make their own choices. In actual fact, they are being made to think and behave alike to an extent that is previously unparalleled (Verhaeghe, 2014, p. 247).

This observation points to a merging of identity and agency into a specific subjectivity – that of consumer – which is shaped by external forces. The construction of the consumer is very individualistic in nature. It is predicated on notions of free choice, individual expression and individual satisfaction. Verhaege's (2014) reference to an illusion reinforces the assertions made in this research that the subject is hailed as an 'individual'. That is, the notion of the individual is a socially constructed form of subjectivity. The collective nature of the human collapses under the forces of subjectivity that hail 'uniqueness' and 'individuality; this is achieved through the construction of populations as consumers. Moreover, Verhaeghe (2014, p. 247) also alludes to the intricate relationship between commodification and the biopolitical nature of platform capitalism in which people are herded into populations in which they are somewhat willingly made to "think and behave alike".

2.5.1 Hosts as rated commodities

As Bauman (2007) succinctly describes, the consumer is not just a consumer, they are also a commodity. Bauman's explanation of this brings clarity to the process of becoming a commodity:

> People…are enticed, nudged or forced to promote an attractive and desirable commodity, and so to try as hard as they can, and using the best means at their disposal, to enhance the market value of the goods they sell. And the commodity they are prompted to put on the market, promote and sell are themselves (Bauman, 2007, p. 6).

This process is evident in the *Airbnb* platform. *Airbnb* uses a rating system to develop a metric of so-called 'trust' between the two sides of their market: hosts and guests. The rating system places hosts under considerable pressure to meet *Airbnb*'s standards. As the scaling of the market continues through network effects, guests demand an ever-increasing standard of service as more hosts join the platform (Phua, 2018). A key component of neoliberal discourse involves a re-commodification of labour in which the onus and cost for ensuring the saleability of labour settles on the individual (Bauman, 2007). In the case of *Airbnb,* one of the ways in which the hosts' labour is recommodified is by commodifying the self. In the individual subjectivity, so easily appropriated by platform capitalism, capacities are separate from the self, and thus the self, reframed as an object, can be worked on for self-improvement. Capacities become commodities for the good of the self; they become investment opportunities to advance one's self (Bauman, 2007; Dean, 2016a, 2018).

Digital subjects, intimate and engaged with technology, are thus shaped in ways that alter the way emotion and affect are experienced, the way people reproduce their social lives and the ways in which they form and conduct relationships. No wonder then, that digital capitalism free-rides on the neoliberal notion of the individual. *Airbnb* hails the subject position of the hospitality entrepreneur as the unique and admirable individual, steering their own future to success through the platform.

2.5.2 Gendered work and social reproduction

In New Zealand, 70% of *Airbnb* hosts are female (O'Mahoney et al., 2018; Parkinson, 2018). This statistic invites some consideration of the gendered nature of *Airbnb*, but there is surprisingly little scholarship that investigates this aspect. A review of existing literature uncovered just one short ethnographic study of *Airbnb* hosts, in which performing 'female work' was seen to resonate with the

hosts (Borm, 2017). Literature that does consider gender does so from the distribution of gendered guests rather than from the supply side of the platform (hosts) or labour considerations (Lutz & Newlands, 2018). Gendered work distributions, social reproduction and meaning-making of gendered work in *Airbnb* are considered in more detail in Chapter Six.

The nature of the physical work involved in running an *Airbnb* centres around domestic work of cleaning, washing and preparing space, along with performance of hospitality. Historically these types of labour are considered part of 'care-work'; a particular form of labour that nests within a gendered women's domain (Fraser, 2016). A difference that emerges here, is that unlike Fraser's analysis of domestic work which gets performed for no monetary reward, *Airbnb* monetises domestic labour, but exploits this through mechanisms of underpaying and by reframing the meanings of home spaces as assets to be mined. Conversely, the notion of "entrepreneur" is a status position that is usually positioned in masculine terms (Gupta, Wieland, & Turban, 2019). To the extent that males are typically believed to occupy economic positions in society, the agentic characteristics of economic roles are thus perceived as masculine. Counterbalancing this stereotype, feminine characteristics are perceived as antithetical to entrepreneurship (Gupta et al., 2019). The intersection of masculine gendered notions of entrepreneurship and feminine gendered notions of care-work creates gendered divisions of labour in households where couples co-host. Specific labour tasks required by *Airbnb* are thus re-cast in gendered ways.

Dean (2018, p. 38) asks "what happens when our basic sociality serves as a primary means of capitalist appropriation?" This is a very pertinent question to apply when considering the ways in which commodification of the self and of the home impacts on social reproduction through engagement with *Airbnb*. Given that the site of *Airbnb*'s operations takes place in the home, arguably the primary site of social reproduction, Dean's question can be applied to the enquiry of this research: What *does* happen when platform capitalism occupies your home? Dean argues that "the intensification of capitalism amplifies pressure on and for the individual" (Dean, 2016a, p. 55). These pressures are political, economic and psychological.

Nancy Fraser (2014), building on Polyani's work on the corrosive effects of fictitious capital, extends her analysis further to examine the crisis that capital brings to ecology, financialization and social reproduction. Fraser argues that these three facets of crisis are intertwined and share a common genesis; rather than being based in unsustainability, they are actually situated in domination (Fraser, 2014). This is a subtle but crucial distinction. Fraser outlines the crises in terms of a feminist understanding of social reproduction, where the commodification of labour for the free market is supplied by unwaged labour in the form of social reproduction.

Social reproduction is understood as the care work, affective labour and associated actions that ensure the continuation of social bonds and cultural understandings within a society. It is, as Nancy Fraser claims, an "overwhelmingly gendered division" (Fraser, 2014, p. 550). Typically, the care work of social reproduction is positioned in relation to other types of labour. In other words, traditional understandings of labour are split into two: productive, paid labour, and reproductive, unpaid labour. Positioning labour in this way provide avenues of political action that vacillate between calls for free-market logics and social protectionism. Fraser's work allows another possibility; the argument transforms from the duality of the free-market versus social protectionism, to include a third aspect; that of emancipation.

Bauman (2007, pp. 144-145) claims that the shaping of contemporary society through political and market forces has ensured "*the continuing decomposition and crumbling of social bonds and cohesion*" (italics in original). Precarity is on the rise globally since the last global financial crisis (Standing, 2011). Deeper analysis suggests that precarity falls more squarely on feminine gendered divisions of labour as social reproduction is becoming even more commodified in more intrusive ways (Fraser, 2014). Given that *Airbnb* commodifies hospitality and care-work, and further, situates the extraction of value from this social reproduction in the home*,* the analysis in this current research builds from the premise that platform capitalism appropriates social reproduction for capital extraction. This opens the possibility that a deficit of care may result within households of residential *Airbnb* hosts, creating a contradiction that impacts across contexts of communities, families and individuals.

2.6   Temporality and spatiality in a digital world

> Thanks to its newly acquired flexibility and expansiveness, modern time has become, first and foremost, the weapon in the conquest of space (Bauman, 2000, p. 9).

The atomization of the self and of subjectivity also reflects the atomization and weaponization of time and space. This theme is taken up in Chapter Seven. This entwining of time and space is a key attribute of platform capitalism. The process of time/space entwinement is intensified under conditions of platform capitalism through the deployment of technology. What follows is an intensification of time and space that creates a condition of constant repetition without end. Or, put another way, propositional thought or meaning-making no longer has the lodestones of time or space that can call a halt to the production of imagery. The technologies that induce the individuation of the self translate to the marketing of oneself against an expanding competitive field and continually shifting sets of standards. Marketing oneself involves creating images and text that alter meanings - meanings which must constantly shift in order to keep abreast of a constantly changing field. Digital systems thus separate individuals through competitive categorizations, forcing people to "remain radically disengaged, to by-pass each other, instead of meeting" (Bauman, 2000, p. 5).

Digital technologies have often been hailed as some version of postmodern heroes in which space and time are obliterated, thus democratizing the world, work and people (Ferdinand, 2000; Schwanen & Kwan, 2008). However, this rather benign view of technologies as a neutral – or even positive – medium belies the more corrosive effects of digital circulation. I take a critical stance against the notion of obliteration and in Chapter Seven, assert that contemporary iterations of platform capitalism effected through digital technologies result in an intensification of time and space, rather than an obliteration of such. Processes of globalization enable the circulation of digital technologies across the globe in an instant, but such abilities intensify experiences of time and space, making them more pressing and immediate, rather than obliterating them.

Put more plainly, time and space become *more* visual, *more* intense and *more* immediate under global digital capitalism, because images, messages and other forms of information can be transmitted and received instantaneously. As a result,

engagement with a platform such as *Airbnb* is experienced by users as an irresistible force of intensification, which limits their ability to avoid the more enclosing and controlling aspects of the platform. The enclosing and controlling tendencies of the platform are both anti-democratic and biopolitical. However, the question of surplus remains where the compression of time/space is understood in representational terms; specifically of representation without end. Thus, a new question emerges as to what form surplus-meaning takes under the hyper-real conditions of platform-capitalist compression of time and space.

2.6.1 Time, space and tourism

On a broader spectrum, but remaining within the tourism sphere, history itself becomes commodified into a consumable product and compressed into contemporary experiences, most often packaged as 'heritage' (Broomhall & Sinks, 2010)**.** Tourism is not simply a capitalist activity, but an ideological framing of history and culture that reshapes culture and society to its own purposes (MacCannell, 1992, as cited in Bell, 1996, p. 40). Through this treatment, notions of 'culture' are repackaged as experiences of authenticity. Tourism, as a capitalist sphere of appropriation and accumulation, is less concerned with whether concepts of place or time are reproductions of 'truth' or 'authenticity' but rather whether these concepts can be packaged, marketed and monetised as such. Thus, tourism accrues cultural capital by way of specific marketing and promotion of places that enables the ability to charge a monopoly rent (Harvey, 2015).

Airbnb free-rides on the intensification of time and space in the field of tourism by promoting itself as a vehicle to experience the 'local' and the 'authentic' through their platform, thus drawing deeply on notions of increasing cultural capital. This idea is explored more fully in Chapter Four when considering the commodification of place. Branding and imagery invoke signs of class to seductively sell 'the product', which in the case of tourism in Aotearoa New Zealand predominantly takes the form of natural, pristine environment, as a space in which both adventure and serenity can be consumed. Another specific aspect of tourism in New Zealand is centred on notions of culture in which Māori culture, custom and artefacts are appropriated as objects of consumption. Cultural tourism is premised on notions of 'authenticity' but is in fact re-presentations of culture based on stereotypes that are packaged and promoted for the tourism industry

(Hunter, 2011). Moreover, cultural tourism is often considered a colonial appropriation by indigenous peoples that is not only exploitative, but also masks the economic and social disparities experienced by indigenous people (Trask, 1993).

The push for 'local' and 'authentic' tourism induces tourist areas to create events specifically to entice more tourists to the area. These events are temporally based around seasons or cyclical events so that tourism can artificially create times of peak attraction. Events of this type are marketed as place-based festivals or celebrations to reflect local customs but are actually grounded in enticing visitors to the area for capitalist extraction rather than reflecting the way of life of residents. Examples of marketed events that draw on notions of local custom and place in the research sites for this research are the *Warbirds over Wanaka* event, and the *Scallop Festival* in Whitianga. These types of events are heavily marketed to attract visitors and have become peak times for *Airbnb* hosts as increased flows of tourists occur in traditionally off-season periods, thus extending the impacts of tourism on local communities. Over time, the beginnings of these festivals become obscure, so that marketed events become understood as traditional ones (Hall & Tucker, 2004).

The discourse used by *Airbnb* around tropes of local and authentic are targeted towards attracting the guest side of the market. However, the imperative to provide authentic and local experiences is squarely placed on the host side of the market. The marketing of tourism is predicated on pre-conceived, idealized definitions of place and of the people that reside in that place. While these definitions are created by others – notably tourism organizations and governments – *Airbnb's* construction of hosts as 'hospitality entrepreneurs' ensures that the onus to produce these social definitions falls to the hosts. This process recreates conditions such that "the category of everyday life is annihilated" (Papson,1981, as cited in Hall & Tucker, 2004, p. 13).

2.6.2 Home and community spaces

'Space' and 'place' are ideological constructs that are sites of specific meaning-making and specific activities. Homes, which are spaces once normatively considered as reserved, in other words as sites of social reproduction shielded from the more corrosive vagaries of capitalist activities, have instead become

assets to mine for capitalist activities (Harvey, 2015). Despite the fact that normative, westernized visions of 'home' are idealized (and not necessarily the norm in the first place), home is frequently considered the place in which familial routines are enacted, and thus necessarily contribute to the processes of social reproduction. As such, the notion of 'home' acts as a placeholder for constructions of identity (Mansvelt, Cain, & Dupuis, 2017).

The contradiction in capitalism in relation to social reproduction occurs because the "sphere of social reproduction has become the site of highly intrusive capitalist activities" (Harvey, 2015, p. 193). Social reproduction is commonly bonded to specific places such as the home, but digital capitalist activities such as those exercised by *Airbnb* are highly mobile. Tourism, through *Airbnb,* facilitates the intersection of these two competing spatial uses and causes disconnections across space and meaning. Because digital technologies have enabled the work process to escape the boundaries of space, they have reconfigured temporal and spatial dimensions of the home and of domestic life, such that the private sphere has been rendered internal to the work of abstracted labour power itself (Stabrowski, 2017).

David Harvey (2015, p. 191) asserts that "the individualistic and self centred profit-maximizing ethos of neoliberalism diminishes mutual aid as a feature of communal life". This is particularly evident in tourist places because the tourism sector requires workers who are mobile, itinerant and prepared to work long hours over short durations of tourism seasons. This type of work typically attracts younger, single, unskilled or semi-skilled workers, as well as precarious workers who are unable to source stable work. This creates problems for small tourist town communities because the generally low wages and the seasonal nature of tourism work tends to result in individuals unable to significantly contribute to the local market and thus the tourist town is increasingly dependent upon the uncertain fortunes of tourism with which to sustain its economic well-being. A 'bad' tourist season can have devastating financial and social effects on residents.

2.6.3 Time, space and labour

Capitalist digital platforms require that service providers be continually available. Time is intensified as messages from the platform can be received at any stage of the day or night through smart phone technology. This dynamic illustrates an observation from Fredric Jameson as to a loss of temporality: the collapse of temporality into a never-ending series of alluring moments of 'now' masks history and blurs the future (Jameson, 2003, 2015). With regard to *Airbnb,* these messages are received and filtered through the ratings system which has a specific metric for measuring the amount of time it takes for hosts to respond to guests. Messaging is also transmitted through repeated emails from *Airbnb* to hosts. Email messages have hyperlinks to the platform that lead to pages of advice, offering suggestions on ways to better improve their hosting abilities and marketing strategies. The flow of messages ensure hosts are spending considerably more time thinking and acting within their roles as 'hospitality entrepreneurs'.   Moreover, the immediate nature of digital capitalism in combination with increasing competition transmits ideas and messages with unprecedented speed; a condition that ensures hosts must always respond immediately or face sanctions of lower ratings and displacement on the rankings page. On the *Airbnb* platform, the collapse of chronological time into immediate imperatives intensifies the experience of time for hosts, but also has the effect of intensifying hosts' attention to the platform.

The work involved in commodifying oneself and one's home for *Airbnb* demonstrates how digital capitalism mobilizes hosts to produce their own spectacle. As Harvey (2015) observes, this type of digital self-reproduction is instantaneously consumed, but uses up large amounts of time in creating it. The information / content produced, ostensibly for the self-promotion of one's own *Airbnb* 'business', is in fact appropriated by the platform as its own content. Put another way, the relationship between capital and its subjects is no longer mediated by tangible products, but by the production of information which is then used for biopolitical administration of freedoms (Harvey, 2015).

Effecting communications through mediated digital platforms has wide ranging implications for the subjectivities of users that extend beyond the digital realm. Because digital platforms allow users to interact easily in a digital space, the need

for a traditional physical space and traditional interpersonal communication skills is minimized. Disagreement exists in academic circles, however, as to whether internet and communication technologies result in consumers being cast as a "hero of modernity" claiming the right to "consumer sovereignty", or as a "cultural dupe or dope" subject to the whims of marketers, advertising and fashion, each ostensibly exercising free-choice (Slater, 1997, pp. 33-34). Or, more bluntly, Jodi Dean describes internet and social media consumers as either:

> engaged citizens eager to participate in electronic town halls and regularly communicate with their elected representatives, or …web-surfing waste-of-lives in dark, dirty rooms downloading porn, betting on obscure internet stocks or collecting evidence of the US government's work with extra-terrestrials at Area 51 (Dean, 2005, p. 68).

Despite these binary positions, the impacts of digital and communicative technologies on the individual and on subject-formation are necessarily complex, and therefore this current research takes a more nuanced view on such impacts; ideas which are explored in further detail through the discussion on biopolitics (Chapter Six), digital time intensification (Chapter Seven) and the notion of heterotopic spaces (Chapter Eight). Specifically, the emerging idea that occurs throughout the thesis is that digital subjectivity is highly mediated by platform capitalism in both overt and covert ways, via processes of biopolitics, commodification and time and space intensification.

Bauman (2007) argues that such dichotomies miss the point entirely, however: contemporary consumers are not separated out from the commodities they consume. Instead, the boundaries between consumer and commodity have been effectively blurred by the use of internet technologies where images of self are curated for consumption such that consumers become both "the merchandise and their marketing agents" (Bauman, 2007, p. 6). This argument is supported by Verhaeghe (2014, p. 147) who claims that "the border between the internal and external world has disappeared, and the external world dominates". This research examines the latter argument concerning the blurring of subjectivities that has arisen in the context of digital platform capitalism.

2.6.4 Tourism in your living room

Traditionally, within public spaces, strangers encounter other strangers (Bauman, 2000). These encounters have no history and no discernible future. They are one-off meetings that are performed under the mask of civility, which permit sociability without revealing the private lives and emotions of the participants (Sennett, 1978). The point to note about civility is that it enables the interaction of strangers without the participants having to actually address the traits or features that makes each other strange (Bauman, 2000). Encounters between strangers, therefore, are performative acts where the true self is masked. *Airbnb* has brought the stranger from public spaces into private places in a rapid translocation from traditional spaces of encounter. Subjected to the rhetoric of platform capitalism*,* encounters between strangers (in the case of *Airbnb,* guests and hosts) are reconfigured as affective relations. Guests are therefore enabled to penetrate the life-worlds of hosts, where hosts must work to perform themselves as a commodified object for consumption (Roelofsen & Minca, 2018). As part of this performance, physical spaces offered to guests transform from intimate spaces reserved for family living, social reproduction and retreat from the exterior public world into public-like spaces for consumption. These spaces are opened to the gaze of an indeterminate public, uploaded onto a website with millions of viewers, and thus intensified and exhibited (Fagerstrøm, Pawar, Sigurdsson, Foxall, & Yani-de-Soriano, 2017). The private is laid bare for the public gaze.

The effects of a panopticon-like gaze become apparent when private spaces are offered as commodities. The specific ranking of spaces through the metrics of a platform such as *Airbnb* ensures that its service providers are focused on achieving a seamless aesthetic of space that aligns with the visual homogeneity of the platform. On the *Airbnb* platform hosts' images are displayed alongside images of their *Airbnb* spaces (Ert et al., 2016; Fagerstrøm et al., 2017). The linking of face with space packages both the host and the *Airbnb* space as a commodified object for the gaze of the guest. The focus on aesthetics reveals another contradiction of digital capitalism. The digital subject is now also an aesthetic subject who must focus on the circulation of images. The circulation of images, and the meanings those images convey become integral to the subjects sense-making of the digital – and the wider – world (Dean, 2002).   The

combination of platform demands and of imperatives of digital subjectivity intensify the meaning of spaces in unanticipated ways.

2.7   Conclusion

Chapter Two provides a broad yet targeted discussion on a range of ideas that are presented in the research analysis. Key background discussions (on algorithms, ratings, concepts of home, tourism) lay the groundwork for deeper consideration in the forthcoming chapters. The background discussions provide an overview in which the field of digital capitalism operates, and account for the use of theoretical framework that considers differing accounts of political identity under neoliberalism (with specific attention to the subject-as-individual, as contrasted with the individual-as-collective).

Foregrounding the idea of the individual form as a form of pathology under neoliberal conditions, the idea of the atomization of the individual as a tool of platform capitalism also provides a conceptual frame to consider types of subjectivity that emerge. Three elements of inquiry are employed to illustrate this. The three elements (commodification, the biopolitical turn, and the intensification of time and space under conditions of platform capitalism) are employed as tools to 'think with'.

These elements also provide a framework for inquiry into other aspects of digital capitalism, specifically to consider processes and effects of surplus. Notably, forms of surplus provide a conceptual hook on which the current analysis turns, prompting an original approach to the structure and form of scholarship in the field of digital capitalism more broadly. Surplus emerges here as a product of capitalism, but not necessarily in the form of surplus-value. Specifically, as Kiarana Kordela (2013, p. 20) asserts "surplus-value is only the specific modulation of surplus… under the capitalist economic organisation". That is, surplus-value is but one expression of surplus, and while it is most obviously present in capitalism, it is not the only form of surplus. Nested within this current analysis is an understanding that the masked or hidden forms of surplus collide with the daily lives of individuals whose lives intersect with digital capitalism.

3. Chapter Three: Methodology

Chapter Three outlines the research design and discusses the epistemological underpinnings and decisions that inform the research design. To begin with, I sketch the background which led to the research question. I then discuss the influence the research question's framing has on the research design and the ontological and epistemological assumptions that guide the study. Consideration is given to the research strategy and design, including the selection of research sites, sampling strategies and methods. Following this I discuss the collection of data and analytical methods used in this research. This chapter also includes the ethical considerations of the research design and the methods used to address them.

3.1   The research questions

This research investigates the contradictions of platform capitalism and the crises of social reproduction through an analysis of the lived experience of *Airbnb* hosts. The research shifts the focus of tourism research from pragmatic, economistic forms of enquiry to a sociological enquiry. Rather than framing residents of tourist towns as contributors who either enable or obstruct a tourism economy, the construction of local and cultural subjectivities (as a response to the influence of a specific type of tourism that is enabled by platform capitalism) becomes the focus of analysis. *Airbnb* represents a specific type of tourism that commodifies notions of 'local' and 'authentic' and is enacted in people's homes. The shift in focus employed in this research raises the possibility that re-constructions of identity are a means by which to manage the subjectivizing effects of platform capitalism as experienced through *Airbnb*.

To reiterate the specific context of this research, the introduction of *Airbnb* into regional tourist towns in Aotearoa New Zealand is enabled by the convergence of regional decline, job precarity post 2008 and the rise of tourism, set in a condition of digital communication that is enabled by platform capitalism. The convergence of these conditions led to the initial research question:

> In what ways does the platform-capitalist organization Airbnb alter
> the experience of lived domesticity of local community, familial and

personal relations in Aotearoa New Zealand's regional tourist centres?

To explore this research question, I intended to carry out semi-structured interviews with participants. I designed an interview schedule as a topic guide, in order to elucidate the type of data that I thought would facilitate generation of information around the research question, and I intended to analyze this data using thematic analysis. However, during the interview stage of the research, the appearance of what I call 'quirky' ideas emerged from the interviews with the participants. These unexpected, unanticipated segments of conversation seemed out of place in the flow of the interviews. The presence of quirky features in the interview data became more apparent as the analytic process progressed. Most often, these quirky features manifested as moments of too much talk, (that is, talk that came out in rushed, justificatory ways, or explanations of explanations that led to increasing confusion and frustration for the speaker) or conversely, as moments when participants found it difficult to articulate their thoughts and could not speak. Troubled by the frequency of unexpected moments in the data, I became aware that it would be inappropriate to ignore these occurrences.

The revelation caused me to revisit the theoretical literature, and to investigate feminist scholarship on research methodologies to understand talk, gaps, pauses and contradictions in order to more fully understand the presence of quirky moments and the relevance to this research project. Feminist methodologies have long done the heavy-lifting of methodological work in terms of accounting for contradictions, pauses and things cannot be said, by specifically attending to the issues of giving voice to participants. For example, feminist sociologist Sherry Gorelick argues that feminist methodology must do more than simply 'give voice' to participants, because to do so masks the fact that "ideologies of oppression are often internalized, while the underlying structures of oppression are hidden" (Gorelick, 1991, p. 459). Therefore, the gaps and contradictions in speech, the spilling over of talk and other disjunctures in articulation led me to consider the masked, internalized and hidden aspects of the interview data.

The 'spilling over' of meaning evidenced by the 'quirky' moments in the interviews caused me to theorize the presence of surplus. The history of surplus has a long trajectory in sociological literature. The concept comes from a tradition of thought

that appears on the cusp between Marxism and psychoanalysis and draws on a range of foundational theorists; most notably Marx, Freud, Lacan and Spinoza.

The identification of surplus in the participants' data led to a closer examination of specific forms of that surplus; surplus-enjoyment and surplus-meaning. In turn, this led to a consideration of the notion of surplus as related to capitalism, originating with Marx's notion of surplus-value, which further led me to question what it is about capitalism – digital capitalism in particular – that constantly exceeds itself? As Kiarina Kordela succinctly notes,

> in order to fathom the world order of "Capital" we must first understand that the object of "our true ontology" is not capital but surplus, and that capital is only one of its historically possible modulations. What is ontologically necessary (and, hence, transhistorical) is surplus (Kordela, 2013, p. 20).

This new trajectory necessitated a review of the analytic strategy and the original research question to include consideration of surplus in the appearance of surplus-enjoyment and surplus-meaning in participants' talk. The reviewed research question is:

> In what ways does the platform-capitalist organization *Airbnb* generate surplus-meaning and surplus-enjoyment for the participants, in the process of accounting for their experience of lived domesticity and of local community, familial and personal relations in New Zealand's regional tourist centres?

The inductive tenor of the research question derives from a theoretical approach to surplus (particularly surplus-enjoyment and surplus-meaning) with regard to the processes employed by hosts in their engagement with platform capitalism and its relation to the tendencies towards crises of care associated with capitalism in general.

This broad research focus can be segmented into a number of supplementary questions for the investigation of how people negotiate the tensions and contradictions that arise in the course of these alterations to subjectivity.

> 1: *What tools does Airbnb employ to ensure its hosts produce behaviours amenable to the aims of the platform?*

2: *How does the commodification of private space through Airbnb alter the ways in which family and community members interact with each other?*

3: *How might the subjectivity of Airbnb hosts form in conjunction with interactions with the platform?*

4: *What conceptual and material resources do hosts draw upon where they seek to reconstruct identity in light of the subjectivizing effects of the platform?*

5: *Finally, what options emerge from these conditions that allow alternative futures to become possible for hosts?*

3.2   Strategy and framework of the research design

The original idea for a methodological framework followed a qualitative research paradigm in which interview data is considered as reflecting the life-worlds and understandings of the participants. This particular method of treatment of qualitative data understands the socially constructed nature of meaning, and that human agency is enacted under sociocultural, political and historical contexts (Gill & Goodson, 2011). Thus, following a normative paradigm, narrative is constitutive of participants' understandings of the social and the personal, the cultural and the historical, harmony and dissonance.

However, this research deviates from such understandings because elements of surplus in a Marxist sense (surplus-enjoyment, surplus-meaning) are restricted from consideration under more conventional forms of analyses, given that concerns of surplus generally sit outside the understanding of participants. In other words, more linear methods of treating interview data as accurate reflections of participants' understandings miss the capture of surplus, because the nature of surplus is that its operations are masked. As a consequence, I found myself confronted by the following questions, which were formed through a post-Marxist feminist lens:

How do I engage with the 'too much-ness' of talk? Or its corollary: the things that cannot be said, the things that people cannot find words for? What might a research design look like when the

analysis of the data finds itself hearing more than the participants think they have said?

Consequently, as part of a line of inquiry within qualitative methodology that goes beyond textual analysis and centres simultaneously on reflexivity, affective dimensions, and relational dimensions, the importance of the methodological approach emerges through the anticipated presence of surplus-meaning. In light of the understanding that what is at stake is surplus (-enjoyment, -meaning), the methodological ontology guides the epistemological framework that shapes the research and analysis for the following reasons:

> Language never "fits" reality, it is the mark of a radical imbalance which forever prevents the subject from locating itself within reality (Žižek, 2017, p. 31).

Surplus enjoyment is hidden or masked. Whatever name is given to it, the object of desire (in other words, the goal), becomes a highly fetishized object: it is never obtained but it is the target of focused activity. What remains is an unbridgeable gap between the fetishized object and talk/language about it. That is, the 'real' remains always out of reach, but is instead experienced and understood through *a priori* experiences and hegemonic normativities. The 'real', in this sense, is symbolic and unable to be accessed through language. In terms of both ontology and epistemology, the importance of this understanding is the knowledge that the gap (between reality and language) is in fact a *constitutive* gap. Alenka Zupančič (2005, p. 181) describes a constitutive gap (or lack) as "never visible as such, but through which everything else becomes visible". The gap is not just between words and things, it is between the subject and the world. There is no correspondence between the subject and its environs. In other words, the constitutive gap supports and enables the symbolic order, but it can only play its part when it is veiled (Gallup, 1985).

Using the Lacanian idea of "the lack comes to lack" (Alenka Zupančič, 2005, p. 181), the constitutive gap involves a redoubling:

> whatever the object of power, the latter (subject) never operates simply in relation to this object, but also in relation to its own structural gap (A. Zupančič, 2016, p. 58).

In terms of methodology, a problem arises in how to account for the constitutive gap. It is brought about by language, but it is a moment of violence in which the subject is separated by language from the real. It is only because of that gap that the subject has any chance of thinking of herself, but at the same time it also separates subjects. Paradoxically, although subjects are separated by this constitutive gap between language and the real, it is also the only way in which subjects can connect.

Given this understanding, the interview data obtained from participants is analyzed to reveal not just the way that they understand their experiences, but also for the presence of surplus. By paying attention not only to what is said, but also to what is said too much and what cannot be said, surplus and its role in subjectivity emerges. In a sense, then, some features of theoretical psychoanalysis are incorporated into a sociological frame to signal a new approach to methodological epistemology within the sociological field of enquiry.

3.3   Research design

3.3.1   Research sites

Platform capitalism, enacted through the vehicle of *Airbnb*, has gained a strong foothold in tourist towns situated in regional areas of Aotearoa New Zealand. This growth is set against a background of economic, population and social decline in these areas (Eaqub, 2014). In view of these conditions, tourism is frequently touted as the means by which to arrest this decline, or at minimum, mitigate its effects (Kranenburg, 2016; Pitchford, 2008; Ryan & Cooper, 2004). Tourism, the field in which the platform capitalist organization of *Airbnb* functions, has become the major economic contributor to the Aotearoa New Zealand economy, generating an estimated 20.7% of the country's annual foreign exchange earnings ("Tourism making immense contribution to NZ," 2018). In a manner reminiscent of Weber's elective affinity, the economic lens that regional development in New Zealand currently employs is used to frame presumed future horizons and assumes a normative vision of life in the regions that positions economic growth as the pinnacle measure for success. This occurs with seemingly scant regard for social considerations. Tourism's growth dovetails with this hegemonic vision.

This research is concerned with understanding the experiences of a specific group: *Airbnb* hosts who live in their *Airbnb* and reside in regional tourist towns in Aotearoa New Zealand. The focus on regional tourist towns (rather than a country-wide, or urban/city approach) is specific for a number of reasons. Firstly, an underlying assumption of this research is that the impacts of tourism are more visible in areas of small, condensed population, such as the sites selected. Secondly, my research interest in regional life is spurred by my own experiences of living in a regional tourist town, Whitianga. Thirdly, while regional areas are generally considered to be affected by economic, social and population decline, I am interested to understand if this is also true of those areas considered as regional hotspots of tourism. Finally, and of particular pertinence to the research goals, I aim to understand how the impact of tourism shifts the subjectivities of those whose daily lives are enacted in regional tourist towns.

Four established tourist locations emerged as suitable research sites for this study: Whitianga and Paihia in Te Ika a Maui, the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, and Picton and Wanaka in Te Wai o Pounamu, the South Island. Based on 2013 Census data, all four towns have similar sized resident populations. Picton has 2,754 residents, (43,416 in the wider Picton and Marlborough district), Wanaka has 6,400 residents (28,224 in the wider Queenstown-Lakes District). In the North Island, Whitianga has 4,368 residents, (26,181 in the Thames-Coromandel District) and Paihia's population is 1,719 (27,228 in the Far North District) (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). Census data collected in 2013 has been used. 2018 census data is incomplete at the time of writing due to integrity issues with a new digitally enabled collection system (Weir, 2018). An additional note to population figures is that, although the resident populations of the four selected towns are relatively small, all research sites experience a large influx of tourists and visitors in their respective tourist seasons.

The research sites are towns that historically have a strong relationship with tourism. The historical dimension is an important supplement to the research goals because the central theme relates to questions of subjectivity, which are also temporally located. Moreover, the notion of temporality under digital conditions of capitalism is an analytical lens used to make sense of the impacts of platform capitalism. This research aims to investigate what impact the growth

of *Airbnb* has had on residents' subjectivities over a short space of time. Analysis of change over time, and importantly, the meaning ascribed to change over time, are useful tools of sociological analysis. Claudia Bell frames this succinctly:

> the relating of the past in this way and linking it to the present and future by stating who we used to be, tells us about who we are now. This is simultaneously identity construction, maintenance and reconstruction (C. Bell, 1996, p. 81).

The historicity of the towns is relevant to the current study due to the pace of change brought about by the rapid scaling of *Airbnb*; changing conditions necessarily prompt changes in people and changes in meaning. This is an important point because the presence of platform capitalism in small regional tourist towns has scaled rapidly since *Airbnb*'s inception in New Zealand in June 2015 to become an influential figure in the homestay accommodation market (Is *Airbnb* doing its bit? 2017; Tourism Industry of Aotearoa, 2017). According to *Airbnb* New Zealand's spokesperson, Brent Thomas, *Airbnb* now has over 38,000 listings (Hotel, motel industry slates *Airbnb*'s push against 'red tape', 2018). This is a figure of some significance given that *Airbnb* only established a New Zealand office in June 2015.

Airbnb are particularly secretive about their data as data forms the crux of their business model (Srnicek, 2017b).The obscurity of *Airbnb*'s data is evidenced by figures supplied by *AirDNA*, a digital company that analyses and sells data about *Airbnb*. At the time of writing, Wanaka has 306 *Airbnb* listings according to the *Airbnb* website. However, *AirDNA* claims that Wanaka has 955 *Airbnb* listings ("*AirDNA* Market overview-Wanaka," 2018). The comparison between *Airbnb*'s figures and *AirDNA*'s figures highlights how *Airbnb* restricts access to their data. Picton, Paihia and Whitianga do not have specific numbers of listings available on *AirDNA*'s website because information for these towns is subsumed within their greater regional areas.

As a comparison with areas not noted for tourism, at the time of writing the East Coast town of Opotiki, with a population of around 4,500 (and therefore of a similar size to the selected research sites) has just 43 *Airbnb* listings. Palmerston North, regional city with an estimated population of around 83,500, has just 169

Airbnb listings and Timaru, with around 29,000 residents, has 72 listings. These figures demonstrate the uneven regional distribution of *Airbnb* and highlight the scale of *Airbnb* development in the rather small research sites.

In addition to the similarities in the types of tourism, differences also exist. For example, two sites have experienced population increases while the other two have had population decreases over the same period of time. Whitianga has experienced a population increased by 600 people, or 15.9% since 2006, while Paihia's population has decreased over the same period by 54 people, or 3%. Picton has experienced a decrease in population since 2006 of 6.3 %, or 183 people. Wanaka's population has increased 28.4%, an increase of 1,431 people since the 2006 Census (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). The population changes demonstrated by the four locations may point to changes in desirability, retirement migration, tourism pressures or other factors that affect lifestyle in regional tourist towns; these are factors that are not considered in this current research, however the point to note is that despite populations fluctuations in the four research sites, the presence of *Airbnb* has steadily grown regardless.

An underlying assumption of this research is that residents of small towns frequently make a conscious choice to live in small towns rather than cities because of a slower pace of life, ideas of greater social cohesion and other less tangible benefits of smaller populations (Pennell, 2016). This research therefore assumes that peak seasonal population increases have an effect on the mundane, day-to-day activities of residents and will shape their behaviours, world-views and attitudes. As an example of the scale of tourism in these small towns, Whitianga's resident population is 4,368 but its tourist season population is almost three times this; peak population on 31 December 2016 was 15,943 ("Peak Population Report 22 December to 9 January 2016/2017,").

These towns are specifically identified as 'tourist towns' set within a predominantly rural environment. The volume of tourist visitors renders these towns as different spaces than surrounding areas, as they adapt to, and cater for, seasonal population influxes. Tim Simpson (2016, p. 31) names this typology of space as "tourist utopias" characterized as "spaces of exception" within larger states. These characteristics include transient multi-national populations and economies focused on entertainment, sightseeing and spectacle.

Each of the locations also represent what Hardt and Negri (2000, p. xii) describe as a "decentered and deterritorializing regime of capitalism". That is, capitalism has assumed new forms and locations that are discontinuous within a geographical area but also operate outside the state through globalization processes (Simpson, 2016). The sites chosen for this research reflect sites of new capitalist intrusion; platform capitalism enables the emergence of new markets in distinct urban locations that are set in wider, traditionally rural districts.

3.3.2 Sampling methods and participants

Oliver Robinson asserts that:

> a fully articulated, contextualised sample…prevents unwarranted generalisation and helps locate the study within a place, a time and a meaningful group (Robinson, 2014, p. 38).

The sampling method used for this research reflects the focus on subjectivization and social reproduction, as experienced by *Airbnb* hosts in regional tourist towns. These goals require an approach to sampling to select a meaningful group suitable to the focus of the research. To achieve the sample requirements, I employed a two-fold strategy to obtain participants: purposive sampling and snowball sampling.

The two sampling methods fulfil a number of aims. Firstly, they ensure that the key target group of relevance to the subject matter is covered (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014). Secondly, purposive sampling ensures particular characteristics are represented in the research. Thirdly, purposive sampling provides an acknowledgement that certain categories of individuals may have a unique or important perspective on the phenomenon being studied (Robinson, 2014). Finally, snowball sampling provides access to participants who fit the criteria but might not otherwise be accessible or known to me.

The sample is restricted to *Airbnb* hosts who let out a room or rooms in the house in which they live, or a sleepout/self-contained area of the house they occupy. Hosts who offer full house rentals of secondary residences are excluded from the sample. This strategy eliminates non-residents who may let out their holiday home or residents who let their investment property as an *Airbnb*. The strategy is based on the assumption that a holiday home or an investment property is not a

personal space of the same nature as that in which people live, in which they interact with family and friends and conduct their daily lives. *Airbnb* hosts who rent out their own personal space are more likely to demonstrate the influence of platform capitalism upon the social reproduction of life than hosts who do not live in their *Airbnb*.

The first type of sampling, (purposive sampling), is a non-random way of ensuring that particular characteristics of participants are represented in the research project (Robinson, 2014). Purposive sampling ensured that I recruited a diversity of participants that reflected the characteristics required for the research question. The diversity of participants within a particular phenomenon allows for comparisons of sub-groups (Ritchie et al., 2014). Once the categories were established, the sample was then divided according to the categories with appropriate target numbers of participants. For this research, the stratification categories are:

1. Geographical (residents of Paihia, Whitianga, Picton or Wanaka),
2. Characteristic (*Airbnb* hosts)
3. Physical (live in their *Airbnb* and let out a room or a self-contained area).

Airbnb is known for its surveillance and control of users' interactions (Srnicek, 2017b). All interactions between hosts and guests are channelled through the *Airbnb* portal. This content is surveilled by *Airbnb* and is censored if it contravenes *Airbnb*'s standards or rules. The term 'ban-opticon', a wordplay on Foucault's concept of *Panopticon* surveillance, is an appropriate notion to conceptualize *Airbnb*'s surveillance of their users. Ban-opticon implies the use of profiling techniques for the categorization and exclusion of people who are seen as undesirable users of digital platforms (Bauman & Lyon, 2013, p. 61). Originally applied to people deemed undesirables from the global south, this term also segues into applications that control errant consumers or users of a digital platform. It is, as Bauman claims, "a task of 'keeping away' instead of keeping in'" (Bauman & Lyon, 2013, p. 63). *Airbnb* employs such profiling techniques in their digital architecture through the control of content and exchange of emails, addresses and contact phone numbers: the exchange of which is forbidden until after a confirmed, paid reservation has been made. Once contact between guest

and host is established, email exchanges are permitted, however the content is still subjected to surveillance. Emails that are found to contravene the platform's rules are edited and censored. Thus, *Airbnb* has ownership, control, governance and authorship of the interactions that take place on its platform (Bialski, 2016) .

In order to protect participants against the possibility of censure from *Airbnb* I could not safely contact hosts through the *Airbnb* website. To circumvent concerns around *Airbnb* surveillance, I joined community *Facebook* pages for the respective target areas and advertised on these pages for respondents. Robinson (2014) notes that online advertising may likely skew a target population towards higher income and occupation levels. However, in view of the fact that all *Airbnb* hosts must have internet access as well as a degree of computer proficiency in order to participate in *Airbnb*, these concerns are moot. Clearly, this method of recruiting restricts the audience to *Facebook* users, however the ubiquitous nature of *Facebook* (ironically, another form of platform capitalism) makes it a good social media site from which to begin the recruitment process. The *Facebook* sites are the following:

- Bay of Islands What's On
- Paihia Noticeboard
- Whitianga Buy, Sell, Swap
- Whitianga Chit Chat
- Wanaka Trading Post
- Wanaka Buy or Sell
- Picton Classifieds (New Zealand)
- Picton Recycle (New Zealand)

To attract the attention of potential participants I posted the following notice on these sites:

> *Hi there. Are you interested in being interviewed for some research? I'm researching tourism, regional towns and Airbnb for my PhD in sociology (Massey University) and am interested in talking to Airbnb hosts for about an hour about their experiences. This is independent, confidential research, not affiliated to Airbnb, or councils or Govt. or any other organization. If you*

know of anyone who would like to talk to me, please PM me, or

text 027********. Thanks in advance!

In addition to the *Facebook* postings, a newspaper story published in the Wanaka Sun outlined my research proposal and called for potential participants (D. Butler, 2017). I approached newspapers in Picton and Paihia (The Marlborough Express and the Northern Advocate) but received no response from these publications. I did not seek newspaper publicity in Whitianga because I reside in the town and personally know people who are *Airbnb* hosts. Instead of advertising, I selected three people known to me who fit the participant profile and approached them with an offer to participate; all agreed to take part. The combined methods of sourcing participants as described above resulted in three qualifying participants in Paihia, three in Whitianga, four in Picton and four in Wanaka.

Because I required accommodation in Paihia, Picton and Wanaka in order to conduct the interviews in the respective sites, I booked *Airbnb* accommodation that appeared to fit the research profile of resident hosts in these locations. Once I had obtained the contact details of the *Airbnb* hosts, I contacted them via telephone to explain that I was researching *Airbnb* hosts in regional tourist towns and to offer them the opportunity to participate in the research. I explicitly detailed that my booking with them was not contingent on their participation or otherwise to ensure there was no coercion on my behalf to convince them to participate. I explained to the hosts the difficulties surrounding contact through the *Airbnb* platform. Interestingly, this was an aspect of control that they were all aware of. All three hosts readily agreed to participate in the research and supplied me with their private email addresses so that I could communicate with them outside of the surveillance of the platform. I used these addresses to send the information sheet and answer any questions they had.

The second method of participant recruitment, (snowball sampling) seeks referrals from initial participants. Individuals in a particular field are more likely to know others in that field and thus can refer people who may fit the participant profile (O'Leary, 2014; Robinson, 2014). This phase of participant recruitment took place over two stages. Firstly, I emailed the participants selected via purposive sampling and asked them to refer others who fit the participant criteria.

There was a palpable reluctance on behalf of the participants to refer others in this way. This may have been due to privacy concerns as a number of respondents were wary of who the research was being conducted for or funded by. In the first instance people were concerned that *Airbnb* was conducting the research, and secondly, they held concerns as to whether local authorities or state authorities such as the Inland Revenue Department would have access to their identifying information. I specifically reassured all participants that the information was not being collected on behalf of *Airbnb*, local bodies or the Inland Revenue Department, and moreover that every effort would be made to protect their identity and that of their *Airbnb* business.

The second stage of snowball sampling occurred during the actual interviews with the initial participants. After each interview I asked the participant if they knew of anyone else doing *Airbnb* that may like to be interviewed. Generally, referrals were more forthcoming during face to face conversations than via email. This may be because face to face interactions allow people to make personal judgements about trustworthiness and reliability. Snowball sampling produced four additional participants in Paihia, three in Whitianga, and four in Wanaka but none in Picton.

Challenges in collecting qualitative data are never entirely predictable at the start of a research project (Robinson, 2014). Recruitment of participants can be problematic for a variety of unforeseen reasons, and consequently a reduction in anticipated sample size can occur. My experiences in Picton reflects this. The initial research plan aimed to achieve between seven and ten participants in each research site. Participants from Whitianga, Paihia and Wanaka numbered eight, eight and nine respectively, however Picton fell short of the target with only three interviews being completed. I had pre-organized five interviews in Picton, but two did not eventuate due to both participants being called away from the town for personal reasons.

The Picton participants I did interview were reluctant to refer others, despite all of them knowing other people who were engaged with *Airbnb* as hosts. Only one participant referred a friend, but the referred person was out of town and unable to be interviewed. The reasons for the reluctance to refer people in Picton remain

unclear. It may be due to the high level of *Airbnb* competition in the town, concerns of privacy, or concerns about regulatory costs imposed by the local council, for example. However, these reasons are all assumptions that have not been tested. Despite the smaller number of interviews collected in Picton (three) the data I did record yielded enough information to add value to the overall study.

On surveying the data set, the overall research has not been adversely affected by a lower than anticipated number of respondents from Picton as saturation point has been reached. While regional variations between the sites are acknowledged, these differences are not critical to the overall findings and thus the smaller number of participants from Picton contribute to, but do not detract, from the research as an entirety.

The gender mix of participants is 19 females and 10 males. The gender ratio of hosts reflects the findings of other research in Aotearoa New Zealand where 70% of *Airbnb* hosts are female (O'Mahoney et al., 2018; Parkinson, 2018). Participants' ages range from mid-30s through to mid-70s. Nine participants are single; the other 10 participants are living with a person in a relationship. Of the single participants, seven live alone, one is in a flatting situation and one lives alone with two children. The ethnic mix of participants is overwhelmingly Pākeha New Zealander with only two participants identifying as Māori, and one as German. It is unclear why there is such homogeneity in ethnic makeup in the sample, however it is likely that this is a reflection on the wider socio-economic and class conditions (including house ownership) of Aotearoa New Zealand. All participants except two are homeowners and own the property they rent out as *Airbnb*. The two participants who are not homeowners run their *Airbnb* from their rented home.

Of all the participants, only two consider *Airbnb* to be their main income. Of these, one runs a consultancy business concurrently but also has a partner who works full time in the hospitality industry. The other participant works in the *Airbnb* while the partner runs a business that operates in two locations. Fourteen participants have part time or seasonal work, five have full time work, three own a business and five are retired. Of the retirement-age hosts, one is single, one's partner earns an insecure income through the sale of art and craft, another's partner

works full time and the remaining two are married couples who use *Airbnb* income to supplement their pensions.

3.3.3 Data collection through interviews

Data collection was primarily sourced from voice-recorded face-to-face semi structured interviews with participants from the four research sites. The data collection phase took place over three separate time periods for logistical reasons and a further, ongoing period during analysis. The first period involved participants from Whitianga, where interview data was collected in the first two weeks of July 2017. The second period involved collection of interview data from Paihia participants in the last week of July 2017. During the third data collection period, from 16th to 26th August 2017, I collected interview data from the two South Island sites, Picton and Wanaka.

The interviews were conducted by myself. They varied in length from 25 minutes to nearly two hours. Most interviews were between one and 1 ½ hours. I contacted each participant in the week prior to their scheduled interview to double-check their willingness to participate and to reconfirm the appointed place and time. I also reconfirmed appointments the day prior to meeting. All interviews took place in the participant's home with the exception of two: one in Wanaka, who had guests in his *Airbnb* and preferred to meet in a café and the other in Paihia. The Paihia host had recently ceased hosting and had taken on permanent tenants in the *Airbnb* space.

In order to ensure ethical research practices, I submitted a Massey University Ethics screening questionnaire to the Massey Human Ethics committee. The research has been deemed low risk by peer-review (See Appendix 1, Ethics notification 4000017917). The low-risk designation indicates that the research poses minimal perceivable risk to the researcher and the participants. This research does not employ deception in its design, and confidentiality is accounted for by the use of pseudonyms as a measure to protect the identity of participants. Other identifying characteristics have been altered or omitted. However, it must be noted that the smallness of New Zealand, and in particular the small size of the research locations make it easier to narrow down the identities of any particular person, organization or institution (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). Additionally, *Airbnb* hosts and their properties are publicly displayed on the

platform. Where possible the location and identifying features of the *Airbnb* businesses have been obscured, however the possibility exists that identities or properties might be discerned through matching publicly known details.

The research design also adequately addresses issues of informed consent through the use of the Information sheet that explains the research aims, the rights of participants and what the requirements of participation are. No compensation has been offered to participants for their inclusion in this study. No conflicts of interest have been identified. Included in this document are provisions for access to a summary of the research findings upon completion, and the participants' right to withdraw from the research at any stage (Appendix 2).

The consent form details the agreement between myself as researcher and the participants according to the terms of the Information sheet, and also records their consent (or lack of consent) to have photographs of their *Airbnb* and property taken (Appendix 3). Both the information sheet and the consent form were given to the participants prior to the interview taking place. Sufficient time was given for participants to read through these documents, during which time I actively discussed the points in the documents to ensure that participants understood fully what they were consenting to. Signed consent was obtained at this point.

I constructed a topic guide for the interviews (Appendix 4). I use the term 'topic guide' in preference to the term 'interview schedule' to denote the emphasis on topics rather than specific questions (Ritchie et al., 2014). Topic guides provide the flexibility needed for semi-structured interviews yet also account for consistency (Ritchie et al., 2014). This flexibility allows the researcher to respond to the directions that a participant may indicate and allows the researcher to follow unanticipated themes as they arise. The topic guide adopts the form of open-ended questions centred on opening or leading topics. The design of the topic guide has relative brevity; its purpose is not as a prescriptive order of events but is instead designed to be an interactive tool that provides guidance to the shape of the interview. The flow of the interview is therefore able to be adapted and modified according to the direction and timbre of each interview. Flexibility allows the researcher to adapt questions as new, unanticipated information is provided.

Ritchie et al. (2014) provide some excellent guidelines for interviewing techniques and I utilized this advice to plan and conduct the interviews. This involved planning the contact, organizing the timing and place of interviews and ensuring that I was relaxed, prepared, reflexive, ethical and professional throughout. Each interview was reviewed soon after its completion and field notes taken that recorded my perceptions of the interview. I reviewed the field notes as well as the interview data prior to the next interview. Tolich and Davidson (1999, p. 140) advise that this approach enables the researcher to "reflexively fine-tune" one's approach to subsequent interviews. At the conclusion of each interview I asked the participants if there was any specific point they wished to discuss or add to the conversation. This technique elicited additional information in most cases.

I take the point declared by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) that researchers should be reflexive and recognize their own situated social space with respect to the research. Acknowledging this means that the researchers' prior experiences, knowledge and worldviews influence the research in myriad ways; for example, the formulation of the research question, the methodology used and the research findings. Fay (1996) asserts that prior conceptual resources are always deployed in any social research endeavour and a level of objectivity becomes possible not because these resources are precluded or unacknowledged, but rather *because* the researcher makes them accountable and therefore open to scrutiny.

In respect to the discussion above it is timely therefore, to declare my situated social space presupposed by experience. I live in a regional tourist town that is one of the sites chosen for this research, and therefore have a vested interest in investigating the impacts that tourism in general and *Airbnb* in particular have, because any impacts in these fields have the potential to affect my personal lived experience. I also own and live in a property that has a self-contained sleepout which, although now tenanted full time, was operated as a visitor accommodation space for a summer season about eight years prior to embarking on this research project. In some sense, then, I am an 'insider' in that I share experiences of hosting that resonate with those of the *Airbnb* hosts. In other ways I am not; I have not experienced being a 'host' with the platform capitalist organization of *Airbnb* and all that this entails. However, I am also an *Airbnb* 'guest' on the digital platform and have used *Airbnb* as a guest both prior to and during this research,

and therefore have had experience of the rating system from the guest perspective. Additionally, some of the *Airbnb* hosts in Whitianga are known to me on a personal level.

There are advantages and disadvantages to insider research. Firstly, *a priori* knowledge allows for greater rapport with participants based on familiar experiences of a particular field. Additionally, prior knowledge and use of idioms common to the field position the researcher as an insider and thus open doors to communication to which outsiders may not have access to. Despite this, there are also pitfalls to insider research. The researcher must be aware that both her and her participants' views and experiences are multiple and contestable, and therefore do not map seamlessly onto each other (Taylor, 2011). Additionally, social roles such as that of 'researcher' and 'friend' can become blurred if boundaries between object and subject are obscured. This can impact on relationships beyond the temporal bounds of the research and spill over into the nature of the relationship between the people involved. Awareness of such pitfalls enabled me to consider strategies to avoid boundary issues. For example, one of the respondents known to me pressed me for 'insider information' into the business practices of other hosts in Whitianga. I was able to respond appropriately by explaining the need for confidentiality between participants and myself, and thus was able to maintain boundaries.

3.3.4 Adapted content analysis

The initial research design rested on semi structured interviews forming the basis of analysis in conjunction with existing literature, however during the analysis phase it became apparent I needed to understand more clearly the types of information being received by hosts, and what forms of influence the hosts are exposed to. Given that *Airbnb* is a digital platform, it makes sense to include an analysis of the platform's web page and communications to hosts. Additionally, I became aware of a number of other websites that provide information to hosts. Given that the theme of surplus is central to this current analysis, the use of an adapted form content analysis allows for investigation into the use of categories within people's analyses of their situations that 'don't fit' or create tensions for them. To this end I utilized a flexible, nonlinear form of content analysis to better understand this aspect of digital capitalism. Content analysis is a form of analysis

that uses written, verbal or communication messages (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). It has a long history as an analytic technique, taking either a quantitative or qualitative form (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Whilst there has been criticism of content analysis as simply descriptions of data or a method of counting, its value is now recognised as a legitimate research method (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Whereas content analysis is generally regarded as working with specific words or phrases, the specific form of analysis utilized in this research deviates from a strictly textual analysis and instead, scans for meaning. This type of adapted content analysis allows for considerations of surplus, meaning-making and subject-construction to be taken into account.

The websites chosen are interactive and allow user-generated content, as opposed to blog-style websites which do not allow such interaction. The ability of hosts to generate content is an important consideration as hosts' responses give insight into ways in which hosts construct meaning and take actions. The first website is the official *Airbnb* community pages dedicated specifically for hosts. This website states:

> This is your community. You own the discussions, and the Community Center will ultimately rely heavily on your level of engagement. The Community Center will be largely self-moderated, but you may also see a face from the *Airbnb* team around from time to time to share updates, answer tricky questions, and help keep things clean and safe ("A global community of hosts like you," 2018).

The second website is *Airhosts forum*, a website that is not affiliated with *Airbnb* but offers a user-generated space to discuss issues, tips and experiences of hosting with *Airbnb*. The website states "we are not affiliated with *Airbnb* – we are just passionate hosts!" ("Welcome! We are a community of AirBnb hosts," 2018). The third website is *Fairbnb,* a website that represents an alternative, collaborative model of home-hosting to that of *Airbnb.* This website is a portal for hosts, guests, community groups and concerned individuals who are troubled by the negative impacts that *Airbnb* has on communities. *Fairbnb* is a collaborative organization whose aim is to address these concerns.

The form of content analysis used for this research is qualitative and interpretative in nature, in keeping with the overall paradigm of the research strategy. The rationale for choosing this method and the websites selected is to gain a deeper understanding of two particular aspects of the research: The first goal is to provide a broader overview of the types of information that hosts can access. The second goal is to understand the ways in which information is used to construct behaviour and subjectivity. *Airbnb* is a global form of capitalism that uses digital technologies to enable the circulation of information. Such information, originating in other geo-political locations to those that hosts reside in, may nevertheless impact the experiences and responses of the participants of this current research.

3.3.5 Analytical methods

Literature was revisited many times during the analytic phase of the research, not just in the beginning phase of canvassing the literature. This ensures that theoretical analysis proceeds along a more inductive line of enquiry rather than being wedded to any one particular theory adopted prior to analysis (Tuckett, 2005). The process of thematic analysis involves a continual revisiting of both literature and data throughout the entire research project; it is a recursive analysis rather than a linear one (Ritchie et al., 2014). An example of the practical application of this process of revisiting literature sits with the awareness of surplus that emerged in the post-interview, analytical phase of the research. Once I became aware of the importance of surplus to the narrative of this research, I conducted a more targeted search of theoretical literature to understand the nature of surplus in theoretical terms, and then adapted the analytical framework to reflect this focus. Similarly, interview data was revisited iteratively in light of these new theoretical directions.

The research design uses thematic analysis as a tool for making sense of the data. Thematic analysis is a foundational tool for qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Thematic analysis provides freedom and flexibility, which is particularly pertinent to this research given the theoretical understanding of the constitutive gap between language and the real. Thus, the framework provides for the collection and interpretation of surplus generated within the data set. This approach considers that data is *one tool* to understand participants' social world through representations of events and perceptions, but is not limited to only that

aspect of analysis (Ritchie et al., 2014). It also allows for interpretation and analysis of a wider range of social observations that extend deeply beyond and within the interview data itself; that is, what is said as well as what cannot be said. Put another way, social worlds exist separately from the data, rather than the data *itself* being the object of scrutiny. Therefore, thematic analysis as a method for analysis is noted both for its flexibility and its compatibility with constructivist paradigms (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Davidson & Tolich, 2003). It is a process where assumptions of both an ontological and epistemological nature are made explicit. Thematic analysis both selects and omits sections of narrative script and this process itself is mediated by the researcher's deployment of arguments (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Specific to this current research, what is *omitted from the narrative accounts of participants* – the constitutive gap between language and the real – is also analysed. This underscores the epistemological position of the research that allows for an inductive and interpretative theoretical approach (Ritchie et al., 2014).

I transcribed each interview manually in order to enhance familiarity with the data. This process involved numerous iterations of listening to the taped interviews, and then transcribing them at a slow speed in order to ensure that their meaning was captured. Once the initial transcription was completed, I then listened to the taped audio at normal speed while reading the transcribed text to ensure that the transcribed text matched the audio. This additional step allowed me to listen for sense-making and generation of meaning. Inflection, pauses, tone, gaps and difficulties in expressing ideas, as well as other audible linguistic features supply opportunities for analysis.

Analysis of words and language are one part of the overall analytical framework. The other part of analysis, the part that is informed by the theoretical framing of surplus, takes account of more nuanced, embodied responses such as gaps or difficulties in being able to speak to an idea, physical uneasiness, animation and affect. These all provide insight into the ways in which participants make meaning and respond to ideas of surplus-meaning, surplus-enjoyment and the experience of contradictions. These are interpretative notions that have the potential to be overlooked when relying solely on transcribed data.

There are some important considerations to take into account when constructing themes:

- What constitutes a theme?

- Does the size or amount of data matter?

- How prevalent is this theme?

Braun and Clarke (2013) advise that the qualitative nature of thematic analysis means that there is flexibility around such questions. For example, the prevalence of a theme across the data set does not necessarily mean it is more important than themes with fewer mentions. In other words, quantifiable considerations are not necessarily applicable, nor important. Rather, researcher judgement must be applied, but with clarity. Therefore the key applicability of a theme relates to the overall importance in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is important to note that 'themes' are not simply the questions or forms of questions that are asked of participants in an interview. It is the *analysis* of the content that is revealed as a result of asking questions that form a theme.

I used a combination of the analytical software programme *Nvivo Pro* and manual coding to organize the data. *Nvivo Pro* is a software tool suited to qualitative analysis that allows the researcher to group data and literature around 'nodes' or themes that are then able to be interrogated more deeply into codes. *Nvivo Pro* enables efficient organization, analysis, storage and retrieval of data from unstructured sources such as interviews. However, use of this program does not negate the need for critical analysis on the part of the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Like any tool, *Nvivo Pro* has both strengths and weaknesses. For example Braun and Clarke (2013) identify strengths such as efficiency, facilitated visualization and increased transparency. However, weaknesses also exist in computer assisted coding programmes such as the risk of distancing from the data, less immersion in the data or the temptation to rely on the technology to provide analysis rather than using conceptual factors. Thus, the manual repetition of listening, reading and recalling transcripts have importance, but so too do participants' embodied responses to the interview questions. Given the focus of this research on the importance of surplus, as well as the ontological understanding of the function of a constitutive gap between language and the

object of power, analysis of linguistic gaps, surpluses and difficulties in giving voice to an issue or topic are also valuable analytical resources.

3.4 Conclusion

The ontological and epistemological positioning of this current research takes an original and unexpected turn due to the presence of surplus that overwrites the field of enquiry. Surplus-enjoyment and surplus-meaning necessitate a more nuanced and inductive methodology than would traditionally appear in research typical of this nature. The importance of approaching a qualitative inquiry in this way is underscored by critical theorist Kiarina Kordela (2013, p. 5) who notes that "the gaze qua real is not an infinity of human looks, but… the place from which the subject cannot see itself". Popular methods of analysis (that scan for the meaning-making and the understanding of participants) thus preclude analysis that enables questions of surplus-enjoyment and surplus-meaning to emerge and miss consideration of the presence of a constitutive gap between words and the world. The nature of surplus-enjoyment, surplus-meaning and the constitutive gap are such that they remain hidden or masked from the view of the subject. Clearly, methods of analysis that work solely with textual data are insufficient for generating knowledge of surpluses where such surpluses are hidden from the subject; an inductive bridge is needed.

Given this theoretical framing, the research design shifted from the original conceptualization of how this current investigation might evolve. The progression of the methodology from a step-wise, linear analysis to a deeper interpretative and theoretical approach provides new ways of attending to qualitative research data that is generated from a field which interacts with what are ostensibly hard, algorithmic 'facts' – the field of digital capitalism. If what appears as fact is merely an aspect of an object, viewed from a particular space and time, the manifestation of that object resides *in* that aspect, yet simultaneously resides *outside* of it, in other appearances of space and time (Kordela, 2013). The operation of this constitutive gap becomes knowable through analysis of the collision between two very different understandings; the emotional, affective world of human experience, and the digitized world of algorithmic data.

By employing a specifically inductive analysis to investigate such a gap, new ways of thinking about the intersection of human lives with digitization can

emerge. Moreover, the adapted methodological approach used in this current research brings an intimate lens to the daily lives of people where surplus-value has become imbricated into everyday life. Put another way, the use of a form of analysis that stands on the cusp of Marxism and psychoanalysis allows insights into capitalism writ large; personal moments are reflections of the contradictions wrought within the much larger field of digital capitalism.

4. Chapter Four: Conditions of commodification

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the opening analysis of the research, which, in its entirety draws together the dynamics of how commodification, biopolitics and issues of spatiality and temporality pervade the field of inquiry. These conceptual tools are central to understanding the constitution of subjectivities within the context of *Airbnb* hosting. This chapter initiates the analysis through the lens of the notion of commodification. Traced through the contexts of commodification of the self and the home, the chapter traverses the digitization of life and the role of communicative capitalism in setting the conditions for commodification. The ways in which biopolitics are implicated in this process is explored. *Airbnb* hosting shapes the formation of subject positions that impact on sociality and social reproduction.

This chapter specifically traverses the establishment of conditions related to digital identities and how this type of digital subjectivity imprints and impacts on individuals. These conditions include the pervasiveness of digital technologies in everyday life, the desire to be known in a digital sense and the construction of a commodified self. The chapter following this current one, Chapter Five, extends the analysis of commodification further by specifically examining the commodification of the self; a particular form of commodification that is inherent to the operations of *Airbnb.*

4.2 Contexts of commodification

A key issue for residents of small tourist towns in Aotearoa New Zealand is the growing precarity of work. This situation is not unique to small tourist towns, however. The growth of platform capitalism, concurrent with the growth of tourism, is directly paralleled by the vast growth in unemployment levels since the global financial crisis of 2008 (Srnicek, 2017b, p. 81). The character of work has thereby become highly precarious. Part-time, seasonal, contract and low paid work has become the norm rather than the exception (Srnicek, 2017a; Standing, 2011).

Precarity of work is particularly evident in regional areas of New Zealand (Eaqub, 2014). Precarious work has been demonstrated to have wider impacts than just economic effects. For example, Sennett (2000) discusses the ways in which the

global workplace, characterized by task-oriented, short term and partial labour has weakened social bonds. In such a context, Srnicek (2017b) argues that *Airbnb* hosts are compelled to find whatever means they can to survive. This last point is particularly pertinent to residents of small regional towns in Aotearoa New Zealand where unemployment, precarious work and limited job opportunities are stark realities (Cheyne, 2016; Eaqub, 2014).

Residents of regional areas of New Zealand are more likely to have lower incomes and precarious job opportunities than their urban counterparts. For example, the median income of Aucklanders is $29,600 per annum, compared to $23,400 for Northland (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). 29.2% of Aucklanders earn over $50,000 per annum compared to 19.6% in Northland (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). These income disparities are typical of regional areas in Aotearoa New Zealand. The reduced earning capacities of regional residents make the option to leverage personal space through homestay tourism an attractive consideration.

The *Airbnb* website suggests that hosts can make substantially more money than what transpires. Figure 2 shows screenshots that were taken on 25 October 2018, which is outside the high season in all the locations.
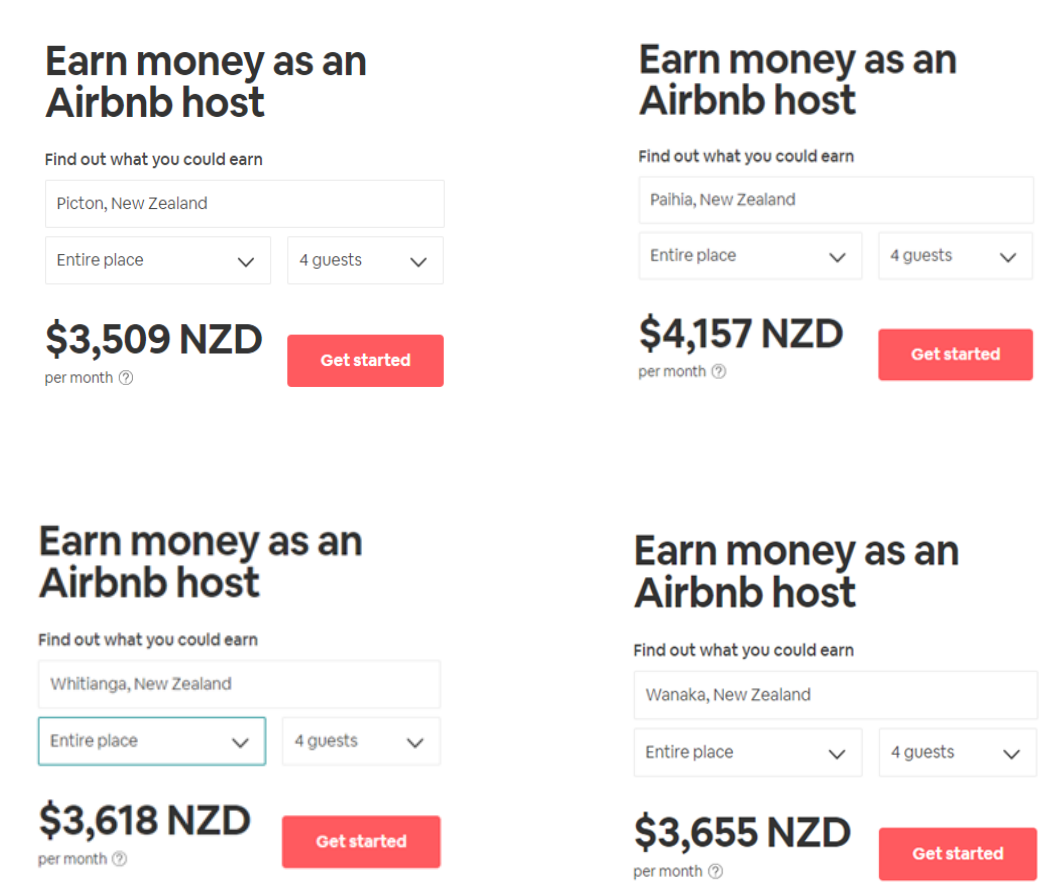
Figure 2: Earn money as an Airbnb host

The figures suggested by *Airbnb* for each location suggest that hosts can earn a considerable income through *Airbnb*.

Using *Airbnb* estimates for Picton, which is the lowest estimated earning location of the four sites investigated for this thesis, and assuming a generous 80% occupancy, hosts could expect to earn $33,686.40 according to *Airbnb*'s figures. 80% occupancy is significantly above the national average for hotels ("Accommodation Survey: Occupancy rate by region (annual-Dec)," 2018). The national occupancy rate for hotels across Aotearoa New Zealand is 45.30%. Regional differences in occupancy rates related to the research sites are:

- Northland, (Paihia)   30.01%,

- Waikato, (Whitianga)   36.07%,

- Nelson/Marlborough/Tasman, (Picton)   38.02%

- Otago, (Wanaka)   53.16%

At 50% occupancy, the estimated *Airbnb* income in Picton is $21,054 and at the median rate of occupancy for the Picton area (38.02%), the estimated *Airbnb* income is $16,009. The median traditional tenancy (long term) rent for a one-bedroom dwelling in the Marlborough region is $220 per week, an annual total of $11,440 ("Market Rent," 2018). When compared to rental prices in these locations, *Airbnb* looks like an economically attractive option.

However, a report from Deloitte Access Information contradicts *Airbnb*'s rhetoric. This report states that the median income earned by *Airbnb* hosts across Aotearoa New Zealand is a mere $4,400 (O'Mahoney et al., 2018). If Deloitte Access Information figures are correct, then economically speaking, hosts are better off financially if they offer their space for long term rental rather than host on *Airbnb*. Moreover, Deloitte's figures do not account for the cost of labour that hosts do for *Airbnb* (changing sheets and linen, cleaning, dealing with guests, administration). Additionally, costs such as replenishing supplies, cleaning equipment and products, towels and linen, electricity, WIFI/internet costs and so forth are not accounted for in the Deloitte report.

One research participant, Trish, speaks directly to the relationship between regional precarity and *Airbnb.* She says:

> a lot of people have taken up *Airbnb* to survive. For survival. People say "I don't know how you can share your home!" and suddenly they're doing it because they have to. There's not a lot of full-time work and we are a holiday town. So, let's face it, the more accommodation, you know it's gonna be taken up (Trish, Whitianga).

Hosts across all four research sites report similar experiences. For example, Leanne provides detailed insight into the field of employment in a regional tourist town that has a distinct summer tourist season. Leanne was made redundant from her full-time job due to funding cuts. She became an *Airbnb* host to provide income over the summer. She explains:

> I knew people who had accommodation, and they said it would die. So, I went out and got a day job, a six-month contract which is due to finish next month…I've already seen advertisements are starting to pop up for the season. I've been looking round at jobs, so the local taxi company is looking for drivers and the local tour company is looking for guides. As far as I'm aware there's a lot of locals that are quite used to working seasonal work. My mate across the road he does the vineyard work seasonally, and then he'll detail hire cars in summer. He seems to flick between the two. So yeah, a lot of locals have geared themselves around that (Leanne, Picton).

Internationally, research has shown that financial considerations form the driving motivational force to become an *Airbnb* host (Borm, 2017). *Airbnb* hosting is seen as an alternative to offering space for long term tenancies. Long term tenancies are often viewed as problematic by many of the hosts interviewed for this research. For example, Bob explains that he has had long term rentals for over 20 years.

> with *Airbnb* you don't need tenancy agreements etcetera so you're never bound by a tenant you can't get rid of who's destroying the place. So, it's the compliance side, it makes you a bit nervous about

> putting people in there that you can't get rid of, so, *Airbnb* is a simple solution like that (Bob, Paihia).

Long term tenancies are problematic for hosts in other ways, too. Many hosts consider that the emotional investment in having a long-term tenant or flatmate is a barrier to providing medium to long term accommodation.

> I'm over it. I'm really sick of it. I don't want to share the house with people. I didn't want to have people in my kitchen, I didn't want to hang out with them at night. Housemates are getting younger. The age gap between me and housemates is getting big. So, you know one woman I had, her mum was two years older than me. I'm 46, they're 25-year olds. Nah! (Lisl, Wanaka).

The irony of Lisl's explanation is that by engaging with *Airbnb* as a host, she is doing exactly the things she claims she does not want to do - sharing her house with people. Lisl recently separated from her long-term partner. She explains that as a couple, they had housemates for 11 years, but after her separation, *Airbnb* became a way that she could cover some of her mortgage. She says "it was a good way to bring in a bit of cash. And it seemed easy".

The ease of entering into *Airbnb* promises to provide access to income in ways that have very few barriers to participation. *Airbnb* promotes the ease of entry into the field of hosting by a number of means and employs an economically framed 'carrot' strategy in its sales-pitch to attract potential residential hosts. On each *Airbnb* webpage page that provides information on how to become a host, a banner remains in place advising you of 'what you could earn' from your home. This information is geo-tagged to the user's location, thus making it appear personalized to the user's own home. In fact, the figures are algorithmically calculated from the wider area, and therefore do not account for variability in space, size, location and quality of accommodation.

4.3   Digitization of life

In order to understand more clearly the commodification of *Airbnb* hosts the social and contextual conditions under which *Airbnb* has proliferated needs to be established. An important driver of this is the environment in which digital architecture has come to dominate both online and offline interactions since the

introduction of Web 2.0. This is seen in the ways in which common-usage words have changed in meaning. The internet initially:

> gave rise to user communities embracing the Web's potential for collaboration and connectedness, after 2006, the word "social" came to mean: technologically manageable and economically exploitable (van Dijck, 2013, p. 1).

Digital platforms do not operate in isolation from each other. Basic data in the form of personal profiles (gender, location and so forth) combine with metadata, which is a more structured form of data such as time-stamps, information from digital pictures and information collected by cookies that mine information such as a user's search history (van Dijck, 2013). Data and metadata interact with other platforms through various add-ons and application program interfaces (APIs) which code protocols between data, software and hardware (van Dijck, 2013). Moreover, data and metadata are on-sold to third parties for further expropriation.

Platforms employ digital protocols that set the rules via the instructions that users must obey if they want to engage with the platform (Bialski, 2016). Platforms guide users through the platform's preferred pathways. It is important to note that the protocols are designed specifically around the desires and goals of the platform and therefore limit, shape or exclude the desires and aims of the users. As van Dijck (2013, p. 31) notes, digital protocols "impose a hegemonic logic onto a mediated social practice". These protocols are often hidden behind interfaces which link and control hardware, software and human users. While most protocols are hidden, there are also protocols that are visible to users. Those interfaces that are visible contain directives through buttons, icons and other symbols that provide regulatory features such as usernames, passwords and conditions for entering the site, as well as guided and limited choices to users. These interfaces are an area of control for the platform and set the conditions under which a user may interact with the platform.

A crucial point of this discussion is that the integration of digital technologies into the mundane aspects of our lives means that technologies have become an integral part of our existence such that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate digital and non-digital worlds. As Beer (2008, p. 521) notes, the imbrication of

technology into our mundane lives leads "to an increasingly mediated way of life with little if any unmediated room outside". These conditions nudge digital users into forms of behaviour that become appropriated as social norms and make it increasingly difficult to separate digital from non-digital subjectivities.

To help provide an overview of this context, van Dijck (2013) provides a vignette of a contemporary family to illustrate the hyper-connectivity that has become the norm in the global north. The Alvin family, who epitomize the archetypal middle-class American family of four, engage with platform capitalist organizations such as *Facebook, Twitter, Google, Instagram, You Tube, Wikipedia, Pinterest, Amazon*, various gaming sites and *iTunes* or *Spotify* on a daily or weekly basis. News that has been pre-filtered and *a posteriori* shaped according to prior digitally analysed behaviour is consumed through the internet. Geo-tracking takes place through GPS technologies. *Google,* the company, has become google, the verb, meaning to use the search engine *Google* to seek information. Acts of purchasing likes and dislikes, sexuality, music, news consumption, political preferences, leisure choices – in fact almost every aspect of human life – are analysed, categorized and then modified by the production of a set of algorithmically decided 'choices' that are made available to the individual. Importantly, algorithms also decide what is *not* made available. This vignette provides an insight into the extent of digital platforms' penetration and imbrication into daily life. In short, digital technologies have come to shape our social worlds and our identities in overt as well as highly covert ways. Not surprisingly, these platforms inscribe how online social connections should be conducted, but also how *offline* social interactions should be conducted (Beer, 2008; van Dijck, 2013).

4.3.1 The role of communicative capitalism

The idea of the digital commodification of the self is explored in some detail by Jodi Dean (2005) in her analysis of communicative capitalism. Communicative capitalism describes how late capitalism, through the use of digital technologies, has enclosed ideals of democracy such as inclusion, access and participation, forming them into tools of capture for the new expression of capitalist production as effected through digital platforms (Dean, 2002, 2005). Put another way, communicative capitalism refers to the notion that the market is the site of democratic aspirations, and is materialized in networked communication

technologies. Dean (2005, p. 51) calls this process "profoundly depoliticizing" because ideals that were previously seen to be central to commonly-held notions of democracy and emancipation are now conditioned by the material effects of metadata capture that serve the goals of digital capitalist companies. It is not surprising, then, that *Airbnb* utilizes the same language of democracy, emancipation, values and communitarian sharing as hooks to attract users:

Community Compact

Español | Deutsch | Français | Català | Italiano | 日本語 | 한국어 | 繁體中文

Airbnb is a people-to-people platform—of the people, by the people and for the people—that was created during the Great Recession to help people around the world use what is typically their greatest expense, their home, to generate supplemental income.

Airbnb creates economic opportunity. The typical middle-income host in the United States **can earn the equivalent of a 14 percent annual raise** sharing only the home in which they live at a time when economic inequality is a major challenge. Airbnb democratizes travel so anyone can belong anywhere — **35 percent of the people who travel on Airbnb say they would not have traveled or stayed as long but for Airbnb.**

Airbnb is home to good travelers and good neighbors who contribute to their communities. **97 percent of the price of a listing, set by the Airbnb host, stays with the host.** Airbnb hosts and guests have also made clear in conversations, town halls, responses to surveys, and thousands of individual discussions that they want to do right by the cities where they live, work and visit.

Figure 3: Community Compact

("Citizen," 2017).

As shown in figure 3, *Airbnb* uses highly idealized terms to describe itself and its actions. It is a common characteristic of capitalist platforms to appeal to a deeply cultural rhetoric of the inclusive and democratising qualities of the internet (Langley & Leyshon, 2016). For example, *Airbnb* claims to be an "open and transparent community" that is "home to good travellers and good neighbours" ("Citizen," 2017). An intention for the enclosure of society appears evident in this formulation. The groups *Airbnb* refer to comprise the hosts, who are people who have space to let, and the guests, who want holiday accommodation. Also included is the wider community – the neighbourhood – in which *Airbnb* operates, as well as the cultures which are appropriated by *Airbnb* as commodities for sale.

As previously discussed, digital platforms use metadata collected from users of their platforms to shape behaviour to meet the goals of the company (Moazed & Johnson, 2016; Srnicek, 2017b). What this means in real terms is that the digital infrastructure collects information on every keystroke, every search and every transaction that users make when on the *Airbnb* platform – *or* on websites that use APIs to share data. This granular accretion of information is subjected to numerous iterations of algorithmic management which is both monetized by sale to marketing companies and used to survey and control the behaviours of users (Langley & Leyshon, 2016). van Dijck (2013, p. 174) makes the succinct point that social media "does not *reflect* social norms; interconnected platforms *engineer* sociality, using real-life processes of normative behaviour (peer pressure) as a model for and an object of manipulation (popularity ranking)" (italics as per original).

It is important to point out that the control *Airbnb* exerts over users of its platform is not via the use of force. This aspect is explored further in Chapter Six, on Biopolitics. The unique ways in which digitization has captured individuals and re-presented their life choices back to them means that digital subjects not only accept, but also embrace, these technologies in ways that reframe digital technologies as both helpful and necessary technologies of contemporary life.

4.4   Digital imbrication

Rather than force, *Airbnb* wield power. *Airbnb* leverages its power through the willing participation of users. Deleuze and Guattari provide an excellent explanation for the difference between force and power in a social context. They posit that:

> Force is not to be confused with power. Force arrives from the outside to break constraints and open new vistas. Power builds walls. (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. pxiii).

The implication from Deleuze and Guattari's quote is that force arrives through a dispersal of power, and that power operates on the internal sphere of the individual. In a digital sense then, platforms shape and produce social norms rather than reflect them (van Dijck, 2013). Platform capitalism, operating as it does in a digital environment in which the rules of the game are tightly controlled

by the platform, draws in digital users' own resources for appropriation and control. This shift of authorship occurs in a number of ways. Bauman and Lyon (2013, p. 21) observe that "we submit our rights to privacy for slaughter of our own will". Privacy, under conditions of digital capitalism, is now reframed as a socially undesirable lack of digital presence. One's privacy is no longer a thing of value and is instead experienced as a negative attribute worthy of suspicion. It signifies one's status in social media as a pariah, outcast or otherwise unworthy of attention. Worse, it suggests that the individual without a digital presence has something to hide. Dean (2002) posits that the ubiquitous nature of communicative capitalism recasts people as consumers driven to seek celebrity by reproducing themselves (or, at least, a curated image of themselves) for public consumption. The drive for celebrity reflects two imperatives. Firstly, the desire to be known, (and its corollary, the fear of being un-known) and secondly, the desire to communicate. This task has subtly shifted the focus from humans as individuals who value privacy to humans as commodified objects of attention.

According to Zygmunt Bauman, people:

> are enticed, nudged or forced to promote an attractive and desirable commodity, and so to try as hard as they can, and using the best means at their disposal, to enhance the market value of the goods they sell. And the commodity they are prompted to put on the market, promote and sell are themselves. They are, simultaneously, promoters of commodities and the commodities they promote. They are, at the same time, the merchandise and their marketing agents, the goods and their travelling salespeople (Bauman, 2007, p. 6).

The commodification of hosts, as distinct from the physical places or spaces they are using as their *Airbnb* space, is evident across the entire dataset in this research. Participants in all research sites demonstrate repeatedly that *Airbnb* entices, nudges and coerces them to commodify themselves through a number of digital tools. These means include repeated emails encouraging certain types of behaviour and offering suggestions on how to become an ideal host, and messages on how to maximise their ratings and on the use of *Superhost* status. Communications are peppered with hyperlinks that lead users to even more information that scripts behaviours expected of hosts. Figure 4 gives an example

of these networked communications, sourced from an email newsletter sent in July 2018 to Lynn, an *Airbnb* host in Whitianga:

airbnb   July

New tools to help set guest expectations

Maybe you want to make it explicit there's no TV at your home or let potential guests know you have a dog. We've added new tools to help you give travelers even more important details about your space before they book, in addition to House Rules.

Discover the new tools

Highlight what makes your home great

Giving guests a detailed, accurate depiction of your space helps them decide if it's a good fit for their trip, and it can save you effort, too. We've updated the Amenities and Spaces sections so you can spend more time hosting and less time responding to listing questions.

Learn how to showcase your space

For more hosting ideas, check out [past editions](#)

Sent with ♥ from

Airbnb Ireland

The Watermarque Building, South Lotts Road,

Ringsend, Dublin 4, VAT:9827384L

[View in browser](#) | [Unsubscribe](#)

Figure 4: Airbnb newsletter to host

The imperative to commodify oneself takes varying forms, however the outcome of all these diverse actions is the same: it results in a definite, distinctive commodification of self via a disciplining of the host through interaction on the *Airbnb* system. Within such a digitally managed culture, problems become individualized so that structural impacts such as the exploitation of workers and survival in a precarious world are reframed as the subject's personal choice and preference (Dean, 2018).

Aside from the digitally prescribed and often hidden ways of disciplining hosts, *Airbnb* also employs overt disciplining tools that are delivered through a range of potential sanctions, such as threatened removal of the token of *Superhost* status, and the threat of removal from the *Airbnb* system entirely. Because of the rapid scaling of *Airbnb,* which has propelled the company into a monopoly position, the company can comfortably afford to apply pressure to non-compliant hosts. Technology has enabled capitalism to become increasingly more efficient at screening out those who are not valued within a consumerist society. Bauman (2007, p. 4) asserts that it is common practice for digital companies to employ a kind of 'negative surveillance' to weed out users who do not fit the profile required by the company. Digital platforms use their algorithms so that

> only resourceful and eager players would be then allowed, as a result of negative selection, to stay in the consumerist game (Bauman, 2007, p. 4).

Airbnb consistently uses rhetoric of discipline to weed out hosts that are not aligned with the goals of the platform. Chapter Five unpacks this idea further as hosts' knowledge of *Airbnb*'s disciplining ability shapes their behaviours in ways that contribute to their subjectivity as hospitality entrepreneurs.

4.5   Commodifying the home

The task of commodifying oneself and one's lifeworld becomes especially complicated when considerations are taken into account of how to present one's own private home atmosphere. Aesthetics is part of the *Airbnb* repertoire that is communicated frequently to hosts and which seamlessly segues into the ideology of a smooth and non-antagonistic world. Hosts surrender to the required aesthetics of *Airbnb.* The acceptance of *Airbnb*'s aesthetic requirements is often financially costly for hosts but is also uncritically and enthusiastically accepted as part of the process of becoming a successful hospitality entrepreneur. *Airbnb*'s politics of display set the standards for hosting aesthetics while simultaneously linking the aesthetics back to a statement on the hosts' personal values. Thus, hosts continually monitor their rating feedback to ensure the aesthetics of their own *Airbnb* space meets the *Airbnb* standards. These standards are never explicitly stated, so hosts are kept in a constant state of anxiety as they anticipate whether their interpretation of *Airbnb* messaging is sufficient or not.

As a consequence, hosts invest considerable time, money and other resources in their *Airbnb* spaces. For example, Lynda, in Paihia estimates she has spent over $40,000 on her *Airbnb space.* Di (Paihia) tells me that she is "constantly doing improvements" and Lynn guesses that she has spent over $15,000 to make her *Airbnb* space on the bottom floor of her home "a pleasant place". Lynn's yearly income through *Airbnb* is around $8,000. At the time of her interview, she planned to continue spending money on that space to make the garden area that surrounds it more attractive to guests. As Lynn shows me the various décor items and alterations she has made to her *Airbnb* space, she explains that the improvements to the space are necessary in order to achieve good ratings, and that an added consequence of having invested in improvements is that she feels "really proud" of what she has achieved. Lynn's affective response to the materiality of the *Airbnb* space reflects a common emotional reaction to hosting.

Of the *Airbnb* spaces I was able to view during the interview process, a striking similarity is that *Airbnb* spaces are decorated in a significantly different style to the remainder of the house. This material difference in spatiality indicates that *Airbnb* spaces are influenced by the platform, not by personal choices of style and décor. This has obvious implications for *Airbnb*'s claim that using the platform enables entry into authentic local spaces, but it also indicates that hosts ascribe different meanings and values to the *Airbnb* space*.* This enables hosts to justify the expenditure on those differentiated spaces. For example, Lynn uses affective language to reinforce and internalize *Airbnb*'s messaging on aesthetics and reproduces the required aesthetics regardless of the fact that the expenditure on the *Airbnb* space exceeds her income to date. Lynn anticipates that:

> At some point it will contribute to the rates, insurances and that type of thing, and probably freeing up a little bit of (her husband's) income. Actually, what we want to do is reduce mortgage. We won't be going on flash holidays (laughs). Yeah, most of it will go back into the property or reducing the mortgage (Lynn, Whitianga).

Prior to that, her house was "just a home". Lynn's differentiation of her space between a 'home' and somewhere suitable to host *Airbnb* guests suggests that the two concepts are incompatible. Such surpluses of understanding point to a contradiction between the demands of the platform for hosts to provide consciously constructed 'local and authentic' spaces, interactions and experiences, and the unconsciously produced experience of mundane, day-to-day living.

On the *Airbnb* platform desirable home atmospheres are conveyed by the use of emotionally charged discourse. *Airbnb* provides an ideological and aesthetic regime enacted through its interface which displays photographs that conform to a "certain global cosmopolitan aesthetic" (Bialski, 2016, p. 45). Homes are frequently described as 'cosy', 'peaceful' and 'serene'. Below are a sample of images sourced from *Airbnb*'s website that demonstrate the type of soft-glow, contemporary decors favoured by the platform:

Figure 5: Airbnb photos

("*Airbnb*: Hospitality," 2018).

Given that many *Airbnb* hosts experience precarity of work and income, not all *Airbnb* spaces conform to the idealized standard that *Airbnb* promotes. Hosts try to compensate for the standard of their homes in a number of ways. A stark example of this is provided by Petra. Petra is a solo parent with two young children. She lives in a small rented three-bedroom house that has an open plan lounge / kitchen / dining area. The bedrooms are not large by modern standards. Only one bedroom is large enough to fit a double bed. The other two rooms are single rooms and one of these is particularly small. Neither of the two smaller rooms have storage space. Prior to running an *Airbnb*, Petra used the larger bedroom for herself and the children had a room each. In order to operate the *Airbnb*, Petra moved the children into the same room in bunk beds and dedicated the larger room as the *Airbnb* space. The smallest bedroom is used for storage of the family's clothes and the children's toys. Petra then built a temporary wall that splits the lounge in half, so that she could use part of the lounge as a bedroom for herself. This alteration quite dramatically impacts on the available living space and creates some noticeable tensions within the family. The children are palpably unhappy about this new sleeping arrangement. Throughout the interview with Petra, the children, who are playing on the floor of the lounge, make a number of negative comments. During the interview Petra tries to ease tensions by saying "They are flatmates!" to which her eldest child replies "not very cool". Petra quietens the child by sternly saying "Look, it's a money situation. I mean I don't do it because I love it". Petra's use of 'I' rather than 'we' belies the use of her previous discourse to frame the engagement with *Airbnb* as a family affair.

Instead, Petra's use of the personal pronoun indicates that her engagement is tightly tied into her precarious financial situation.

Figure 6: Temporary wall

Figure 6 shows the temporary wall Petra has had installed. In keeping with its form as an original seaside holiday home, built in the 1940's, Petra has tried to incorporate a décor theme of 'an iconic kiwi seaside bach' and has used bamboo and recycled louvre slat panels to hide the fact that the dividing wall is a temporary addition. When Petra does not have guests, she opens the room up to its original size so that the children can have some additional space to play. This relieves some pressure on the household. Petra's commodification of her home for the purposes of *Airbnb* demonstrate that what is authentic for her and her family is not appropriate to the standards set by *Airbnb*. Additionally, Petra is aware of the shortcomings of her *Airbnb* in comparison to the platform's standards as well as in comparison to other *Airbnb*'s in her area, and so has priced her *Airbnb* at the lower end of the market in order to mitigate negative reviews.

Commodification of space is taken very seriously by *Airbnb* who are very specific about what type of photos to display, including advice on how to achieve quality images. *Airbnb* provides highly detailed instructions on how to take a suitable photo on various brands of smartphone, how to edit photos using camera editing software, how to angle lighting and so forth. In figure 7, the language of

'empowerment' comes to the fore, employed by *Airbnb* to reinforce the affective connection between the platform and the host:

Figure 7: Boost listing performance

Help boost listing performance with quality photos

ADMIN **Airbnb**
Administrator
08-05-2018 11:57 PM

The quality of your photos can have a big impact on how well your listing performs. Listings with higher quality photos generally stand out in search results and get booked more often.

Our research found that photos are one of the top three things guests look at when searching for a place to stay. Based on a 2016 study of more than 100,000 Airbnb listings, those with professional photography earned 28% more bookings, could charge a 26% higher nightly rate, and increased overall earnings by 40%.

Thankfully you don't need expensive camera equipment, years of photography experience, or even tons of time to take your own professional-looking images. All you really need is a smartphone, a spare hour or two, and the shooting and editing tips below.

We're working on more ways to help you, too. Soon we'll roll out a new tool that will flag photos in your listings that may be negatively impacting your performance. You can replace those with high quality photos that you take yourself.

That's why we want to empower you to take great photos of your space. These six tips promise to do just that.

("Help boost listing performance with quality photos," 2018).

Interspersed with this technical information are guidelines that indicate the demands of the platform. For example, tip number five, titled "Remember the Details" advises hosts that:

> Guests love seeing the specifics that make your space unique: the collage of vacation photos hanging in your hallway or the stack of antique quilts in your bedroom. Including pictures of these details can help distinguish your listing ("Help boost listing performance with quality photos," 2018).

This advice is accompanied by professional photos providing aesthetic guidelines. Hosts take cues from the platform as to what types of interior décor might be appreciated by guests. This process is fraught with difficulties, however, as hosts attempt to negotiate the 'right' level of personal display. Bucher et al.

(2018) note that the balance of personal items on display can be problematic; too large a presence of personal objects can create uneasiness in guests, but too little is seen as impersonal, and therefore inauthentic.

Often hosts spend a considerable amount of money and effort trying to get this aspect of hosting right. Julia has remodelled her very small one-bedroom cottage to accommodate guests by adding a portable cabin room that is placed adjacent to the house. Because this portable cabin room has no bathroom facilities, Julia has remodelled her bathroom to include an exterior door to make access easier for her guests, as shown in figure 8.

Figure 8: Remodeled bathroom with exterior door

Julia has also extended the decking area of her cottage, so that guests can have a larger space in which to sit in the summer. This deck area is furnished with trendy wicker furniture and stylish pillows in a manner that is quite different to her own furnishings. Julia encourages guests to use this area as her own lounge area

is very small. She has also put considerable money and effort into developing a garden area that surrounds the covered verandah. She says:

> I also offer dinner if they like, and they give me some money. They sit and have dinner on the verandah – the area where everyone sits because it's lovely there. In the evening it's really beautiful with candles and everything. The ambience. Every single person when they come in, they come in here, and it's the garden, all the comments in the reviews mention the garden. Even people you wouldn't even think would be interested in gardening. Some people told me they picked it because they loved the sound of my garden and the pictures (Julia, Paihia).

Martin and Lizzie have been operating an *Airbnb* for around a year. They take great care with their décor and are clearly proud of the product they are presenting for rent.

> The setup cost with the bedding and everything. It wasn't cheap, I mean we're still buying linen for god's sake. We're trying to figure out whether it's worth buying quality or just go for something decent. Or you buy commercial which is like 50/50 polyester cotton so you don't have to iron it as much (Martin, Whitianga).

During the interview Lizzie spent quite some time showing me various items she had purchased to add to the ambience of the *Airbnb* space, which she felt would help to position their *Airbnb* more favourably on the platform. Moreover, Lizzie hopes that the attention to detail in presenting their *Airbnb* will be reflected in positive ratings. Their *Airbnb* is at the more expensive end of the scale for the area, and Martin reveals that they are intending to repaint the property at some considerable expense, because "it may improve the look of the property for the photos". Martin is clearly aware that photos influence guests' purchasing decisions, and that property standards are a key component of the ratings procedure.

Other hosts interviewed for this research reflect a similar awareness of the importance of presentation. Gerard notes that:

> Sheree is in charge of cleaning and decorating. If you read our reviews, the way she's done the art deco one (*Airbnb* room), well can you see the flair here! Sheree is very, *very* good at that. She should have been an interior designer but had no confidence. Even the little studio, she calls it "The Pukeko's Nest", it's only tiny but it's homely (Gerard, Picton).

Gerard's discussion is revealing. He is aware that décor is important in ratings. He is aware of the 'local' and 'authentic' aspects of marketing their *Airbnb* space, which the couple invokes by naming the smaller studio "The Pukeko's Nest" (Pukeko is a colourful native bird). Gerard justifies the expenditure through affective connections. He is clearly very proud of the aesthetics of their rooms; "You can see the flair here… Sheree is very, *very* good at that".

The messaging about visual presentation that *Airbnb* provides is translated by hosts into actions performed through hospitality. Zelizer (2005, p. 22) suggests that "people who blend intimacy and economic activity are actively engaged in constructing and negotiating connected lives". Zelizer construes connected lives as those that are differentiated by boundaries created through everyday practices yet sustained through joint or economic activities whose levels of importance are in a state of constant negotiation. In other words, the cultural and economic logics of the home are negotiated in order to accommodate the forms of reciprocity and exchange that take place in those spaces (Bialski, 2016).

4.5.1 Performing 'home' and 'local'

The actively constructed nature of *Airbnb* hosting is displayed by Wanaka host Alistair who rents a house with two other flatmates. These hosts take great care to present their home as a comfortable space for their guests, even though the actual *Airbnb* space is a converted garage. The flatmates are very aware of the imperative to provide hospitality in their home as both local and authentic. As part of 'performing themselves' they bake home-made bread for their guests and invite them to share their dinner. Notably, these hosts do not bake bread when they are not expecting guests. However, not every guest wants to have a deep level of involvement with their hosts and so it can be difficult to assess the right sort of overtures to make without appearing pushy. Alistair talks about strategies he has developed to assess what guests might want.

> You say hello and they lock the door and you won't see them again. Or they will pop over; the laundry's inside so if they need to do laundry, they have to come in. And that's a really great entry point…So it's a case of if the connections are there right straight away – or we'll try build the connection (Alistair, Wanaka).

Alistair's desire to 'build connections' specifically mirrors the platform's directives around achieving an idealized hospitality subjectivity and mimics the *Airbnb* call for hosts to perform as local and authentic actors.

The notion of 'local' is intertwined with ideas of culture and rituals that are unique to a particular location. Often, cultural differences create obstacles for hosts as meaning is lost in translation or cultural norms are misinterpreted. Most hosts experienced difficulties in this regard. Samantha finds that cultural norms create stress for her as she tries to negotiate her daily lived experience in conjunction with the commodification of herself and her space:

> Yeah there's lots of little things that people do…I have to say to them, please close the shower door. We think that's common sense. Asians are used to wet rooms. That's why we've had lots of people say Asians leave water everywhere. I don't find people try to do things to be malicious, it's just cultural differences. Yeah, that's probably one of the most difficult things to deal with (Samantha, Wanaka).

Additionally, hosts interpret the message of 'local' to mean that they must act as a sort of a pseudo travel agent qua tour guide, and to this end most hosts will make bookings on their guests' behalf for various sightseeing tours, boat trips, wine tours and the like. For example, Janice and her partner state that they have a "very good relationship with the local tour operators" in Paihia and will make appropriate bookings for their *Airbnb* guests. They will drive guests to the wharf to meet tourist boats, or to the bus station for tours. Janice also helps guests plan the rest of their holidays in other areas of New Zealand. She says:

> You're offering a service: assistance, personalized assistance on their tour planning, whether that's actually booking for them, or helping them get their head around what they can achieve in the

two or three days that they've got here. Tourism in New Zealand needs to have the whole thing positive, you don't just come to Bay of Islands, you don't just go to Queenstown, if you come from the other side of the world you need to have the *whole thing* being great. We want them to leave the Bay of Islands saying "Awesome!" Then send them on to Matamata, for another great experience (Janice, Paihia).

Janice's labour in this regard demonstrates how she exploits herself for the benefit of the platform. Whether guests have a good time or not in Matamata or Queenstown does not materially benefit her own operation. Janice is responding to the call to be a good hospitality entrepreneur and has internalized what that might mean in terms of commodifying herself in this mold.

As part of performing as a hospitality entrepreneur, hosts also feel pressured to anticipate the needs and wants of their guests. Peter has two rooms in his house that he operates as *Airbnb* rentals. He goes to great lengths to cater to this. He explains his routine:

And so, yeah, what happens though, a big percentage of the time, I usually plan their days for them. They know where they wanna go but to fit what they wanna do round the low tides at Hot Water Beach takes a bit (of organising), and so what I try and do is fit in around for them where to do, and how to do it, you know. I send them this side, and that side, and then the Whitianga thing and then the *309* [an historic gravel road that connects both sides of the Coromandel Peninsula]. Unbeknownst to me I've become sort of like the old tourist guide. So luckily, I know it all. It's just a matter of familiarizing yourself with times. When they arrive, they get a pack, we have all the information available, with all the info in it to make their stay. We have people who have stayed for four days and they ask, what do you suggest we do today? So we've got bikes and kayaks and stuff that we loan them (Peter, Whitianga).

Many hosts report that they have developed a specific dialogue that they draw on when helping guests. Samantha describes how she has learned to 'perform herself' when providing information, speaking as if she has had local experience

of the hiking and biking trails in Wanaka. Samantha can provide information about what tracks are the hardest, which ones have the best views and which are the more family-friendly. She laughs while recounting:

> I'm not a hiker but I've become an expert on which tracks are the best – I've never even been on them myself!... I've noticed that I'm on automatic now, when guests are around, showing them around. The words just automatically come out of my mouth now, like a sales pitch (Samantha, Wanaka).

Similarly, Gerard has developed techniques for dealing with guests that are somewhat scripted. This highlights the way that guests perform themselves. Gerard says

> *Airbnb* guests always wanna talk! I do the spiel now. I chat to 'em. I say to them "Do you want a hand?" I use the old spiel, "I'm here to service you, give you a good experience here in Picton. I'm here to help you, ring me at any time". If I pick them up from the terminal, I drive them around and show them, "that's the supermarket, there's that restaurant there, and that one over there". They just *love* that (Gerard, Picton).

Gerard demonstrates an awareness that guests expect a level of local advice by his emphasis on the guests' appreciation of his services "They just *love* that". He is also emblematic of other hosts who act as tour guides in some capacity, with actions ranging from the minimal: providing brochures for attractions and recommendations for the best hotels and café's, to the maximal: such as escorting their guests to tours and sightseeing trips and sometimes going on these trips with them. For example, Di's *Airbnb* is in Paihia, and she will frequently accompany guests on the ferry from Paihia to Russell and have a meal with them at the iconic Duke of Marlborough Hotel. Janice takes guests to the Waitangi Treaty grounds and escorts them through the grounds as a type of unofficial guide. She has schooled herself up on local history and takes pride in pointing out the various points of historical and cultural interest for her guests.

Krissie also runs her *Airbnb* in Paihia. She draws on her local, situated knowledge as a local Māori woman to provide information to guests about history, and

advertises this on her host page. However, Krissie notes that despite *Airbnb*'s rhetoric about local people and authentic local experiences, many guests do not want to be exposed to the nitty gritty of the lived experience of locals. Krissie's home is not in an affluent area of Paihia. The area has low-cost housing, some of which is in poor repair. Krissie has priced her accommodation at the lower end of the market to account for the area, despite the fact that her home is well presented, modern and tastefully decorated. She explains that:

> It's like they want cheap accommodation, but they don't want to stay in a ratty place or a ratty neighbourhood. And yet they've been told that they will come to a ratty neighbourhood, but they still won't accept it because they want the cheap accommodation and then they'll still give a bad rating (Krissie, Paihia).

Krissie indicates that there is a disconnection between the expectations of guests seeking a local, authentic experience, and the lived reality of local people. This suggests that guests do indeed seek a local experience, but that their expectations of what a local experience might entail is constructed through an idealized lens provided by *Airbnb*. The type of local experience that tourists want, and that *Airbnb* promotes, is a commodified capitalist appropriation of culture, or as Haunani-Kay Trask (1993, p. 195) names it, "a form of cultural prostitution".

From the other side of the platform, the performative nature of the notion of 'local' is often experienced as a dislocation of self. Reflecting on the disruptive force of the upscaling of tourism in quite small regional towns, Donna wryly asks:

> Is this because of the fact that these towns have turned themselves upside down into places that aren't real for the people that live there? (Donna, Picton).

4.6 Conclusion

Chapter four considers the notion of commodification in specific contexts. *Airbnb* commodifies hosts and their life worlds in specific ways to better serve the needs of the platform. This occurs in physical places as well as within the wider socio-political environment of digital subjectivity under conditions of late capitalism. Jodi Dean's framing of digital capitalism as communication circuits (communicative capitalism) provides a useful lens for understanding the mechanisms of capture

in which the digital sphere is intertwined with the processes of daily life, such that they have become inseparable.

Set in such conditions, the commodification of the home as a resource to be mined for capital extraction necessitates an investigation into the ways in which both concepts of 'home' and concepts of 'local' become assets for *Airbnb.* The transition of these concepts from their common-place understandings (as a place for the reproduction of social life and as a place for the reproduction of cultural life) to money-making assets creates surplus-meanings that are incompatible. As a consequence of this collision of meanings, subjects must negotiate compromises as they attempt to balance the surplus. This is achieved through specific performative actions that leave the subject in states of tension as they attempt to make sense of the parts of their daily lives that contradict their subject-positions as *Airbnb* hosts.

Part of the commodification of the home includes the commodification of the experiences that guests come to expect under the rubrics of *Airbnb.* In this way the commodification of local experiences is channelled through the host. The host, therefore, (as part of that 'local' experience) also becomes a commodified product that is perused, assessed and purchased by the guest. The following chapter unpacks commodification of the self in finer detail, contributing to the overall perception of the commodification of life-worlds of those who engage with platform capitalism.

5. Chapter Five: Commodification of the self

5.1 Introduction

This chapter extends the lens of commodification to consider ways in which the self becomes a commodity under conditions of platform capitalism. Neoliberal ideals posit the self as a project for self-improvement, and this normative vision of the self is appropriated by *Airbnb* for the benefit of the platform's goals. In this section I explore the techniques of control deployed by *Airbnb* that free-ride on conditions of digital subjectivity and the deployment of notions of 'local' and 'authentic'. These mechanisms of commodification ensure hosts are induced to have their labour remain in an abstracted state, susceptible to exploitation. Moving then, to considerations of labour power, I chart the progression of the idea that under conditions of digital subjectivity, labour power is not just an abstraction from the body (as per Marx) nor just the enclosure of the communicative abilities of the social self, but further, to the enclosure of the body itself.

Analysis in this chapter includes commodification of the self through host listing pages, the specific positioning of the host as a 'hospitality entrepreneur' and appropriation of the title 'traveller'. The relation of emotion and affect to the condition of *Airbnb* hosting explores the ways in which *Airbnb* hosts draw on conceptual resources to manage the contradictions of care and engagement that arise through *Airbnb*'s use of emotional labour and commodification of the self. This analysis initially focuses on negative aspects of affect for the first phase of inquiry, before switching register in the second phase of analysis to focus on positive affect. Finally, this chapter considers the ways in which *Airbnb* deploys the token of '*Superhost*' as a tool of control to ensure compliance with the wishes of those who run the platform.

5.2 Commodification of people

> There are laws for people and there are laws for business, but you are a new category, a third category—people as businesses. As hosts, you are micro-entrepreneurs and there are no laws written for micro-entrepreneurs (Chesky (n.d), as cited in Stabrowski, 2017, p. 327).

Brian Chesky is one of the founders of *Airbnb*. Chesky's quote reveals the platform's clear positioning of *Airbnb* hosts as categorical objects that are integrated into the service being sold. Hosts are thus commodified, and as commodified objects are expected to meet the needs of the guests as part of an economically focused metrics of supply and demand. They are, in effect, constructed as a *material part* of the *Airbnb* space that is been offered for rent (Fagerstrøm et al., 2017).

Technology and business researchers have previously analysed the imbrication or enmeshment of the individual through commodification using the term 'prosumption' (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010; Zajc, 2015). Ritzer (2015) has reinterpreted the concept of prosumer to include a simultaneous process of consumption and production, but also with the notation that it now *characterizes* human activity. Prosumption refers to the shift from separated subjectivities of 'producer' and 'consumer' to an equal focus on both. Sometimes referred to as 'co-creation' (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) the subjectivity of the prosumer has been enabled and propelled by the use of digital technologies. Regardless of the terminology used by different disciplinary fields, the terms all signify a similar idea: that digital technologies have re-shaped society into a market-enclosed field in which the subjectivities of individuals have altered as a result of engagement with the digital world. Taking a critical approach, Zygmunt Bauman notes:

> In a society of consumers, turning into a desirable and desired commodity is the stuff of which dreams, and fairy tales, are made (Bauman, 2007, p. 13).

Bauman's observation aptly describes conditions of *Airbnb* hosting. The imperative to commodify not only one's private space, but also one's own self is foremost at the heart of *Airbnb*'s hosting model. Moreover, for many hosts, commodifying oneself becomes aspirational in terms of becoming an idealized host (Roelofsen & Minca, 2018).

5.2.1 Commodification of hosts through the politics of display

Jodi Dean claims that the contemporary condition of

> communicative capitalism enjoins us to uniqueness, to specialization and to specificity: we have to distinguish ourselves (Dean, 2018, p. 40).

This specialization required by digital capitalism underpins platform capitalism's access to granular data. A paradox emerges here: individuals see themselves as having value "only after being indexed according to their popularity on social networks" (Rouvroy & Stiegler, 2016, p. 9), and thus strive for a digital quantification of the self. Yet the abundance of big data, and the way in which big data disaggregates information from any contextual connections means that the essence of individuality is lost. Individuals, while striving for that so-called X factor which might stand them out from the crowd, are instead absorbed into a machinic quantification that operates on the exact disembedding of features that the individual craves.

Airbnb is distinct among other accommodation providers because the host is actively promoted as well as the space (Ert et al., 2016; Tussyadiah & Park, 2018). Because hosts are expected to fulfil the needs of their guests, they are therefore deeply integrated into the experience that they are selling (Fagerstrøm et al., 2017). To this end, hosts must create and maintain a host profile page which includes personal characteristics and a photo of the host. Tussyadiah and Park (2018, p. 261) call the host profile page a "promise framework", indicating that online profiles are influential in swaying guests toward an intention to book. Braidotti (2014, p. 245) suggests that the visual commodification of the face "circulates like a never–dead object of desire". The torsion between promise and deferment is implicit in the commodification of the self associated with platform capitalism.

The power of re-presentations of the self to advance market goals has been well noted (Ert et al., 2016). The host profile page is particularly important to *Airbnb* because it is an integral part of their mechanism of 'trust' which involves identity verification, reputation mechanisms such as ratings, and online profiles (Ert et al., 2016; Xie & Mao, 2017). *Airbnb* builds both its advertising and its reputation on notions of trust and arguably this is an essential aspect of their online business because traditional measures of trust through personal interaction, reputation

among group or community members and longevity in the field are absent in a digital setting (Ert et al., 2016; Phua, 2018; Slee, 2015; Tussyadiah & Park, 2018).

Trust is taken seriously by *Airbnb. Airbnb*'s focus on trust takes the form of compliance by hosts to make available personal information and to this end *Airbnb* manages the content on its website to best reflect its aims. *Airbnb* has recently changed their policy on profile photos so that guest photos are not able to be viewed by hosts until they accept the booking request ("Update on profile photos," 2018). *Airbnb* claims this is to avoid discrimination based on gender, race or other characteristics. However, this new directive demonstrates the inherent inequality between hosts and guests who use the *Airbnb* platform, and provides evidence of the unbalanced exploitation of hosts. A review of the *Airbnb Community Centre* page reveals that hosts are unhappy with the change in policy regarding guest photos. Figure 9 details the response posted by user "Ann489" from Boise, Idaho, and is emblematic of hosts' dissatisfaction:
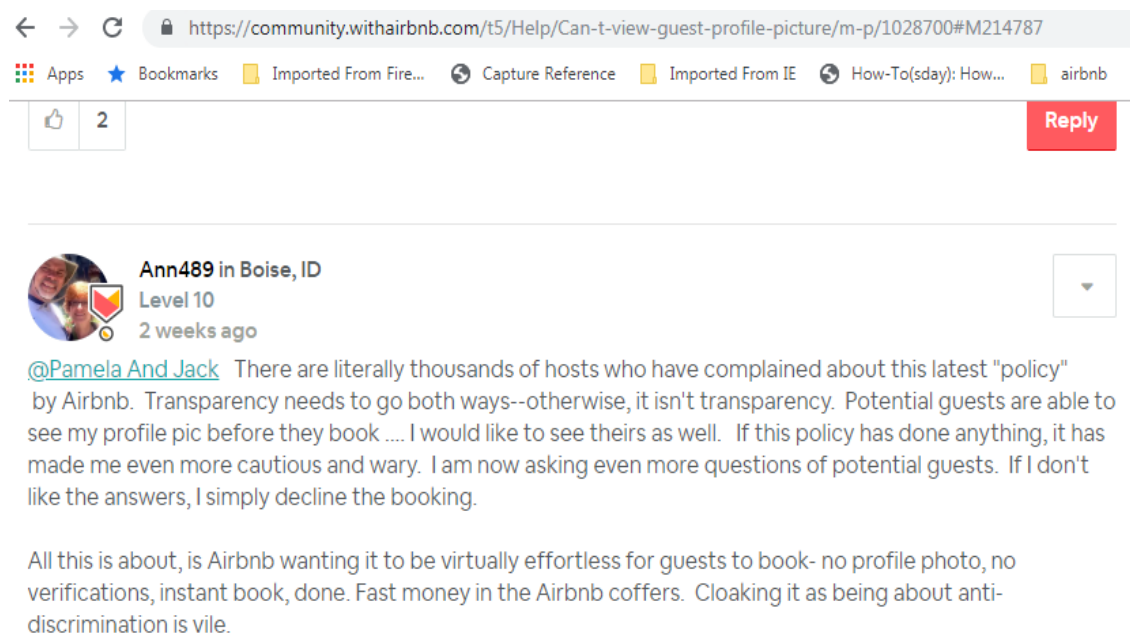
Figure 9: Guest profile discussion

Airbnb are particularly susceptible to issues of trust given the conditions of digital separation from physical life. Popular social media and news media platforms regularly run articles that highlight instances of trust abuse by either hosts or guests and therefore damage the reputation of the platform (Dillane, 2018; Poole, 2018; Schäfer & Braun, 2016). Moreover, there are websites that are dedicated

to providing information on negative *Airbnb* experiences ("*Airbnb* Hell: Uncensored stories from *Airbnb* hosts and guests," 2019). *Airbnb* are obviously highly sensitive to such reports and consequently focus on the mitigation of trust issues. To this end, *Airbnb* provides clear guidance on the use of profile information. The example below of *Airbnb*'s advice to hosts utilizes a mixture of 'carrot and stick' advice in which hosts are guided through incentivising language but also left in no doubt as to the neccessity of information provision as required by the platform.

> Your profile

Why do I need to have an Airbnb profile or profile photo?

Your profile is a great way for others to learn more about you before they book your space or host you. When your profile is robust, it helps others feel that you're reliable, authentic, and committed to the spirit of Airbnb. Whether you're a host or a guest, the more complete your profile is, the more reservations you're likely to book, too.

We require all hosts to have a profile photo, and guests are expected to upload a profile photo before checking into their first reservation.

A great profile includes:

- At least one profile photo that shows your face. This is helpful so hosts know who to welcome into their home.
- Multiple verifications and a Verified ID.
- A description of at least 50 words highlighting why you decided to join the Airbnb community, your interests or hobbies, or anything else you think someone would want to know.

To view someone's profile, just click their profile photo.

Figure 10: Why do I need a profile photo?

("Why do I need to have an *Airbnb* profile or profile photo?," 2018).

The affective discourse employed by *Airbnb* is evident in this excerpt. For example, the host profile is "a great way" for others to learn about hosts and a profile "helps others feel" a range of positive emotions. The advice to view other hosts' profiles reminds hosts that they are part of a herd that has certain normative characteristics; the implication is that belonging is contingent on conforming. This point is reinforced by the suggestion that through the presentation of a sufficiently acceptable profile the host is "committed to the spirit of *Airbnb*". In case the prospective host is left in any doubt as to how to proceed,

Airbnb also "requires" compliance. Hosts must enter details about their space to let but must also provide a comprehensive profile of themselves.

In essence then, the *Airbnb* hosts must commodify *themselves* in order to successfully meet the demands of the platform. The digital protocols employed by *Airbnb* direct potential hosts into specific actions through which this might be achieved. Hosts must sign up with their name, age, location and email details, or can alternatively synchronize their access to the platform with an API through *Facebook* or *Twitter.* As the example above shows, the suggestion to include descriptions of hobbies, interests and motivations aims directly at personal and private characteristics of the host. It is important to note that *Airbnb* is not just the gatekeeper of personal information; once data is entered onto the platform it becomes the goods of the platform. In other words, ownership of personal details transfers to the platform. Those who do not want to share their personal information are excluded from transacting through the platform.

Hosts' agency is manipulated into behaviours amenable to the platform by external, as well as internal sources. An example of this process is illuminated by Lizzie and her partner Martin who run a high-end *Airbnb* in Whitianga. Lizzie describes the process of listing their home on *Airbnb* while noting that they initially did not understand how the system worked. Once their listing was activated, Lizzie discovered that she needed to alter the listing and profile details in response to some negative feedback they received. For example, their listing included the use of a spa pool. The spa pool is located in the garden by the canal and is available for everyone's use (guests and family), but one guest assumed it was on the balcony of their *Airbnb* space and for their sole use. They left a scathing review because of the mis-construed location and accessibility of the pool. Lizzie wryly notes that "it was a learning curve". The normalizing influence of the platform is indicated by her actions to modify the listing and profile page after receiving feedback from both guests and the platform.

The host's page is particularly important to hosts on another level; it links into the digital subject's desire for being known. One of the ways in which the commodification of the self is achieved is through the politics of display. Dean (2002) claims that the imperative to reveal ourselves in digital media is a

configuration of digital subjectivity. She states that "the subject in need of transparency is compelled (by reason and freedom) to create and present itself before a judging and normalizing audience of others" (Dean, 2002, p. 33). The hosts interviewed for this research all reveal a desire to offer themselves for display over and above the space offered for rent. Hosts take this aspect of compliance very seriously, and frequently, hosts admit they often update their profile page in order to remain fresh and relevant. Such imperatives are experienced as pleasurable, rather than understood as an infiltration of privacy or a demand from the platform. The case of Odette and her partner Johnny is instructive on this matter. Odette's host profile reads:

> Johnny and I are very outgoing friendly hosts who enjoy chatting with our guests to help them with trips and activities in the area and beyond. As we have travelled frequently overseas and within New Zealand, we are aware of the hospitality that guests expect and need. We enjoy making people feel welcome in our quiet Villa with its lovely plants and flowers. Our life motto is "Don't worry be happy" (Odette, Paihia).

This host profile is very revealing. What Odette is selling here is not just her *Airbnb* space (although she does make mention of its lovely plants and flowers). Instead of promoting her space, Odette is profiling *herself.* The object for perusal and purchase is her private-self, made public. Her personality attributes are presented as a commodity. In this vein, Odette promotes herself as relaxed and pleasant, as evidenced by her life motto "don't worry, be happy". Under the influence of *Airbnb*'s marketing regime, guests can expect to purchase a place to stay at Odette's house *as well as* the experience of Odette's personality. Moreover, the commodification of the self is evident in the willingness to help guests plan trips and activities in the area and beyond. Odette is willing to expend additional labour over and above the provision of accommodation.

Like Odette, many hosts use inspirational and emotive language to describe themselves and their lifestyles. Donna's host profile announces she is an "ardent lover of life with a welcoming heart", Leanne enjoys "books, movies, music, bike rides, yoga, friends and family", and Di describes herself as a "free spirited woman with a love of nature and the sea" who enjoys "meeting like-minded

people who relish life's journey and the learnings it provides along the way". Jenny says "I love to grow and cook our own food, make beautiful things and paint. I like to be spontaneous and I think personal touches are very important".

That hosts use a global public medium of the *Airbnb* platform to reveal such intimate insights into their personal sphere points to the imperative of contemporary digital subjects to be available and to be known. This confessional culture emerges from a digitally exaggerated sense of life as a narrated event. Digital subjects – in this case, hosts – have become digital content. They are commodities. A characteristic of commodities, Zygmunt Bauman (2007, p. 17) tells us, is that we must "confess all there is to be confessed".

In further elucidation of this concept, the example provided by one host demonstrates the extent to which the confessional culture has infiltrated digital subjectivity. Lynn's profile runs to over 200 words during which she reveals her and her partner's likes, dislikes, their occupations, their social activities and more. Her profile, in part, says:

> The things I love are music – (Eric and I are musicians) we love all
> of the arts in their glory; reading a really well written novel; good
> food and wine; planning and executing an exciting project big or
> small; and relaxing in the dappled light of a Pohutukawa tree on a
> beautiful beach with a glass of wine in one hand and a good book
> in the other! …Eric and I are both *people* people, and we care about
> others (Lynn, Whitianga).

Lynn's profile reads more like an internet dating profile where one would expect to see aspects of one's personality and preferences displayed. It is an exercise in marketing the personal for public consumption. Moreover, Lynn's profile is highly performative: she is acting a stylized version of 'real life' for an audience of potential buyers. What is up for sale is a notion of sharing an idyllic romanticized lifestyle, complete with social reproduction in the form of a labour of care "…we care about others".

Lynn is an example of the personification of digital subjectivity. The difficulty Lynn faces is how to promote ones' 'self' to an unknown audience. The context of this performance is a communicative capitalism in which one is already

'informationalized' through the normalization of digital subjectivity. Lynn must make herself stand out in the context of a web page of millions that is overloaded by a vast sea of information. The digital celebrity subject therefore understands itself as known and understands the imperative to be known, but does not know by whom, how or what. Jodi Dean notes in this regard:

> publicity is what we can't escape; it taints everything as it collapses democracy into the circulation of ideas, slogans, memes and images (Dean, 2002, p. 130).

Lynn, as a circulation of ideas and images, recasts her private self and her private sphere as commodities to be perused, scrutinized and considered. Hosts are aware of the scrutiny they are subjected to by potential guests and therefore commit time and labour to ensure their digitally circulated images and texts convey the types of messages favoured by the platform. Xie and Mao (2017) note that hosts who can deliver strong credibility to guests through their profile photos and descriptions can evoke positive inferences about their quality as a host. Credibility is important on the platform and therefore hosts must pay attention to all aspects of their listings. This involves a multitude of tasks including but not limited to updating the calendar function which displays available dates, reviewing guests, changing pricing structures and updating listing details on a regular basis. Moreover, responsiveness in online environments signals efficiency and credibility (Xie & Mao, 2017). Quick response times are highly valued by the platform and this message is clearly conveyed to hosts through a variety of channels.

Samantha, who lets out a cabin in her back yard, two rooms in her own home and manages an *Airbnb* property for her neighbour is highly attentive to maintaining her *Airbnb* host profile. Samantha discusses this aspect of her experience:

> Yep, I constantly keep an eye on it…It's just a lot of pressure. And all year you've got to keep your response levels and everything really high so you come up on the search levels better. I think I get a lot of bookings because I'm constantly playing around with my pricing, with my profile. That gets you higher up the search rankings.

> Yeah, I do plenty of things around that. I work very hard on it, *very*
> hard (Samantha, Wanaka).

Samantha's awareness of the importance of her profile highlights her awareness of the need to commodify herself in ways that are appealing to others. Moreover, she is aware of the platform's expectations and thus works to meet these, despite the personal toll on her.

The commodification of hosts is integral to *Airbnb*'s business model. It enables *Airbnb* to shape host behaviour to maximize bookings and thus profits to the platform and provides additional objects of sale that stand *Airbnb* apart from traditional visitor accommodation providers. Considerations of social reproduction in the private sphere are of no concern to the aims of *Airbnb*, apart from the shaping of such re-productions in ways that can be mined for monetary gain and thus benefit the goals of capital accumulation.

5.2.2 Becoming a "hospitality entrepreneur"

The notion of an idealized hosting subjectivity is deeply embedded in the rhetoric of *Airbnb* and is represented by the notion of being a 'hospitality entrepreneur'. "Hospitality Entrepreneur" is a specific term deployed by *Airbnb*:

About Airbnb

Founded in 2008, Airbnb is a global travel community that offers magical end-to-end trips, including where you stay, what you do and the people you meet. Airbnb uniquely leverages technology to economically empower millions of people around the world to unlock and monetize their spaces, passions and talents to become hospitality entrepreneurs.

Figure 11: "Hospitality entrepreneurs"

("About us," 2019).

Airbnb names hosts as 'hospitality entrepreneurs' for a specific purpose; an entrepreneur is a subject position shrouded in affective discourse as being empowered, talented and passionate. Discourses mask deeper processes and agendas, doing so through processes that categorize by naming. Naming and

signifying are closely related, and thus the process of 'sloganization' employed by *Airbnb* should be interrogated. The traits attributed by *Airbnb* to a hospitality entrepreneur (empowerment, talent, passion) are clearly aspirational characteristics to which hosts should strive towards. The notion of being an entrepreneur is a subject-position that is highly valued both within and exterior to the platform (Stabrowski, 2017).

The naming of the subject as 'hospitality entrepreneur' incorporates two distinct parts which have contradictory meanings. On the one hand, the quality of being hospitable implies popularity, friendship and desirability. These are admirable traits that are socially valued and have emotional appeal. The notion of hospitality suggests a willing sharing of resources that is underpinned by social relationships. On the other hand, the rhetoric of sharing invoked by the word 'hospitality' conflicts with discourses of 'entrepreneur' which suggests 'being your own boss'. This adds a stratified layer of hierarchy in which the normative power of the word 'entrepreneur' is deployed as a masculine term over the feminine idea of hospitality as an activity nested within care-work. The word 'entrepreneur' invokes the entrepreneurial ethos which is framed around ideas of success as measured by profit. Subsequently, entrepreneurship is respected within a neoliberal ideology because it exemplifies self-reliance and success.

The discourse of entrepreneurship creates a contradiction for *Airbnb*. *Airbnb* markets itself as a community of individuals, not companies, yet the emerging trend for *Airbnb* demonstrates that hosts are increasingly hosting companies and multi-property managerial firms rather than individuals (Meni, 2019; Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018). Additionally, the notion of entrepreneurship suggests a profit-driven imperative which clashes with traditionally-held values of hospitality as freely-given expressions of sociality. To obscure this contradiction between hosts (workers) who are framed as self-propelled business entrepreneurs, and guests, who are attracted by the selling of 'authentic' experiences of home and hospitality for their consumption, *Airbnb* segregates their messages by way of different pages for hosts and for guests (Ravenelle, 2017).

5.2.3 "I'm a traveller too"

Week (2012) suggests that the moniker of 'traveller' projects a morally superior status to that of 'tourist'. This is a message that is strongly promoted by *Airbnb* and links into *Airbnb*'s use of a values-based discourse.

BY AIRBNB / AUGUST 13 2018
EXPERIENCES, FEATURE, LISTICLE

How to Be a Traveler (Not a Tourist): Airbnb's 10 Most Booked Experiences

Figure 12: A traveler, not a tourist

("How to be a traveller (Not a tourist)," 2018).

The construction of 'tourist' is treated disdainfully in popular discourse given its association with concepts such as mass tourism, ecological degradation, cultural insensitivity and mindless consumption (Week, 2012). The distinction between tourists and travellers is taken to mean that a tourist is part of mass consumption practices, but a traveller denotes a more individualized and contextualized subjectivity that is objectively better for the environment and for cross cultural relations. Moreover, being a traveller is constructed as substantively different from being a tourist because of a desire to 'experience the local'. This has been termed "post–tourist", to denote a more meaningful travel experience based in homely environments produced by peers (Roelofsen & Minca, 2018, p. 171). Put another way, a tourist is constructed as a user of commodities, but a traveller is an 'experiencer' of communities. *Airbnb* guests tend to rate 'travellers' higher in metrics of trust on the *Airbnb* platform (Tussyadiah & Park, 2018). Hosts themselves also make a distinction between 'travellers' and 'tourists' and take specific care to highlight that they themselves are travellers, not tourists. Moreover, the specific use of discourse highlights a time-space distinction;

'tourist' indicates a singular moment in time and space, whereas 'traveller' denotes an identity or subject position.

Positioning oneself as a traveller highlights the host's empathy for travelling guests and suggests a wealth of experiential knowledge connected to the travelling experience (Tussyadiah & Park, 2018). The identification as a fellow traveller is part of a range of nuanced positioning by hosts that enhances their ability to commodify themselves. Aligning one's identity to that of potential guests provides another selling point of self because it implies desirable affective qualities of hospitality and cultural sensitivity to which the guests presumably subscribe and can consume. Donna speaks to this directly.

> Yeah, I think they're people that travel a little bit like me, you actually do want to feel like you at least have a conversation with someone who is local (Donna, Picton).

Janene's host profile positions herself and her husband as fellow travellers, appealing to the idea of shared experience:

> We enjoy meeting people from all over the globe and have travelled ourselves. We've…met some wonderful people whom we hope to see again one day. Our dream is to buy a mobile home & travel the length & breadth of New Zealand first, then become 'grey nomads' overseas (Janene, Paihia).

Janene's reference to her desire to see her guests "again" aligns with the rhetoric of many other hosts. The implication is that hosts connect on a meaningful level with guests, such that relationships that extend beyond the host/guest relationship will ensue, even though guest/host relationships are fleeting meetings between strangers whose life trajectories are unlikely to cross again. Only one host drily observed that:

> They're not deep relationships. The number of people who have said to me, Oh, it's good you're doing *Airbnb* you'll have company! That's not even part of it! It's hilarious! I genuinely do enjoy most people's company but that's not why (Donna, Picton).

Frequently, hosts affectively position *Airbnb* hosting as a vehicle for gaining new friends. This is reflected in hosts' pride in the number of positive reviews that

hosts have, rather than a desire to actually develop new, real-world friendships. Drawing on the conceptual resource of friendship frames the idea of a 'friend' under conditions of digital capital. That is, they appear as a digitized and commodified version of 'friends' in the same way as users of *Facebook* and *Instagram* collect 'friends' with whom they do not interact with outside of the digitized world of the platform. A 'friend', in this sense, is commoditized, collectable and object-like. The notion of guests reframed as 'friends' therefore produces an appearance of congruence with the aims of the platform. It does so by providing ranking evidence of one's remarkable hospitality, measured and reflected in the algorithmic metrics that assess one's rankings in terms of host desirability.

In order to make sense of the emotional labour that goes in to running an *Airbnb*, hosts draw links between themselves and their guests in a way that implies a solidarity of sorts, or a mutually shared understanding that transcends international boundaries and cultural differences. For example, when Julia was asked about her experience of hosting, she framed her answer in terms of a mutually affective exchange:

> I'm interested in them! I get my map out and see where they're from.
> I am really interested coz I'm a traveller. Well I love people, and as
> I said I'm a traveller and it's a good way to meet people who are
> travelling. And I live on my own, I have friends come and go and
> stuff but it's a good way to meet fellow travellers and a good way to
> earn a bit of extra money (Julia, Paihia).

Julia's explanation of herself as a traveller meeting fellow travellers demonstrates the type of connection that *Airbnb* advertises as a sales pitch to the demand side of the market, the guests. Lisl negotiates these ideas by framing the hosting experience affectively. She says

> I think it is that personal connection that we all want. But it's done
> in a commercial setting, you're actually in someone's home, this is
> how they live. As a traveller, we all want that (Lisl, Wanaka).

Lisl's qualifier 'as a traveller' indicates that she aligns herself and her values to those that she imagines her guests have. The quotation suggests even more,

however, insofar as the 'personal connection' occurs as a commercial exchange. Consequently, this performative speech act achieves a number of things. Firstly, it helps justify why she invites strangers into her home. That is, it is more than just an economic transaction; it is the potentiality of making friends (reframed through the notion of digitized friends as commodified collectables) and the potentiality of exchanging a shared set of experiences enacted through the trope of 'traveller'. Secondly, she draws strong identity parallels between herself and her guests (*we all* want that). Thirdly, guests framed as travellers are differentiated from tourists which helps to defuse community arguments about the negative impacts of an exploding tourism market. These people are not just guests, they're fellow travellers (potential *friends*) sharing someone's *home,* contrasted against the meme of a disconnected, camera-toting, consumerist tourist staying in a bland, sterile hotel devoid of personality*.* Fourthly, as evidenced by both Lisl and Julia, commercial money transactions have been collapsed into social interactions. In other words, social interactions are now commodities.

To summarize the points thus far, for *Airbnb* hosts, the distinction between traveller and tourist is an important one. This is evidenced by the level of affect that hosts display in their interviews, and by their willingness to emphasize the differences between themselves as hospitality entrepreneurs who are fellow travellers and impersonal, faceless hotels and motels. By constructing their identity as traveller rather than tourist they are positioning themselves in a particular stratum of subjectivity that has more status and more kudos than that of 'tourist', and hints at personalized, individualized, *value-added* tourism.

Growing awareness of the wider effects of tourism provide added incentive for hosts to frame themselves as travellers. There is growing disquiet both in New Zealand and internationally about the effects of a bloated tourism market, and *Airbnb* is frequently at the top of these concerns (Cropp, 2017; Flahive, 2018; Gutiérrez, García-Palomares, Romanillos, & Salas-Olmedo, 2017; Roslyn, 2017; Vanderbilt, 2017). Coupled with negative media reports of *Airbnb* in various locations such as the Queenstown Lakes District which includes Wanaka (Cropp, 2017), the negative feedback from other local residents means that *Airbnb* hosts must cast their participation in the platform in a more positive light. Thus, the

distinction between the labels 'tourist' and 'traveller' is particularly important in small regional tourist towns where the experience of living with tourism as a commercial activity can be problematic for local residents who have to endure crowding, queues at supermarkets, increased traffic, pollution and cultural differences in their towns that outside of the tourist season are relatively quiet and slow paced. Many *Airbnb* hosts indicate that they are aware of tensions that exist between themselves and other locals who view *Airbnb* as disruptive. For example, in the interview exchange below, Chris discusses the negativity surrounding the tourism industry:

> Chris: Sometimes I guess some people are in a bit of a negative view towards it, [*Airbnb*]. Other people who aren't doing it maybe. I don't know why. I guess there's reasons like not putting stress on infrastructure, putting stress on people finding somewhere to live. Some people have a kind of negative view on *Airbnb.*
>
> Stella: Do you find that in your conversations with friends?
>
> Chris: Yeah, some people have just got a, you know "it's your fault no one can find somewhere to live" [attitude] and that sort of thing. I don't think we're hurting anyone by doing it (Chris, Wanaka).

Chris's discourse performs the function of deflecting criticism away from *Airbnb,* yet empirical evidence suggests that *Airbnb* is hurting the accommodation sector. *Airbnb* has been shown to be disruptive to the rental and housing market (Tuatagaloa & Osborne, 2018). There is considerable concern that similar housing issues are evolving in Aotearoa New Zealand as a result of *Airbnb*'s growth (Flahive, 2018; Pennell, 2018; Tuatagaloa & Osborne, 2018). The community impacts extend past residential housing and into the tourist accommodation sector (Gutiérrez et al., 2017; Guttentag, 2015; Zervas et al., 2017).

The impacts of *Airbnb* on local communities is of concern for the hosts interviewed in this research. Partly, such as Chris's comments in the excerpt above, concern from hosts settle on ways to diffuse negative comments by locals and in the media, and partly concerns surround the same issues thrown up by *Airbnb*'s operations and effects. This creates a conflict within the host as they

negotiate competing narratives – one which criticizes *Airbnb* operations, of which they are affectively and materially tied to, and the other which impacts their own lived experiences as a local resident dealing with the effects of over-tourism. A hosting couple in Wanaka address some of these narratives. Vic and Elka are managers who live in a campground that has some cabins listed with *Airbnb*. However, there are also people living in buses and cars, and some who are living in tents. These people are semi-permanent residents, rather than tourists. Elka attributes this insecure housing situation to:

> People renting out their houses to tourists. I've met more people that rent in Wanaka than live here (with security of tenure). A lot of them come out here to find out what our winter rates are (Elka, Wanaka).

Vic continues:

> (They are) Permanents, wintering over. This is just roughly; I'd say probably 30 or 40 (people). Quite a few. I call it Soweto, it's fucking messy you know, they're more likely to have an old model *Pathfinder Torano* (4WD type vehicle) with mattresses and all the shit in it, but they've got tents and they've used old crates and everything for the floors. It's all bloody done on the cheap. Those are the people that are working here (Vic, Wanaka).

Vic and Elka's discussion points directly to the impact of *Airbnb* on housing availability. Whilst tourist towns have always had some level of housing insecurity due to the larger proportion of holiday houses in such places, the amount of properties that have been taken off the residential rental market as a result of *Airbnb* conversions is growing. This situation was reiterated to me immediately after the interview with Vic and Elka. While having a coffee at a café in Wanaka, I struck up a conversation with the waitress who told me that she was a single parent with three children. Her tenancy had recently ended after the landlord put the rent up to $1000 per week. She had been paying $450 per week. The landlord justified the increase because that was the expected level of income he could charge through *Airbnb* for the high season. Unable to find other accommodation,

the woman is now living with her three children in a friend's un-insulated double garage. Her distress was palpable.

5.2.4 "They want it, they want the contact with local people"

Harvey (1990a) asserts that one of the ways that capitalism annexes commons is by re-packaging tradition and culture as objects of commodity consumption. By marketing notions of the 'local' and the 'cultural', *Airbnb* trades on authenticity as a form of monopoly rent. Monopoly rent refers to the ability of capitalists to extract rents via monopoly ownership of land, goods, services, cultural objects and processes. The significance of this, as Harvey (2002) notes, is that the intensification of culture as a commodity tends to 'Disney-fy' space in a way that can inaugurate a specific form of crisis in capital. On the one hand, uniqueness is the drawcard for commodification because it is a mark of distinction or exclusiveness and therefore more highly desirable as a commodity. But on the other hand, the uniqueness must be such that it is not *too* unique so as to render it odd or unattractive. Like fashion, the mark of success is popularity. But popularity requires a sort of a homogenization, such that the consumer can recognize they are one of the herd, by possessing (or in the case of tourism, experiencing, or uploading photos and videos of) the commodified object. A consequence of this contradiction is that the object being commodified becomes exhausted through exploitation in ways that destroy its original uniqueness and value. This tendency can be observed in *Airbnb*'s focus on notions of localness and culture, as displayed in figure 13:

Figure 13: Local destinations for a global community

("Become an Airbnb Host," 2018).

Airbnb actively promotes an aspect of their business that is aimed specifically at attracting the guest side of the platform: that is the authenticity of *connecting* with a local person and experiencing local life. *Airbnb* claim that 79% of guests who choose *Airbnb* do so because they want to "live like a local" ("Overview of the *Airbnb* community across the globe," 2018). Authenticity suggests that people's behaviour is congruent with their true self, values and beliefs (Bucher et al., 2018). In a hosting context, authenticity is achieved by a practice of "deep acting" (Bucher et al., 2018, p. 298).

As a result of this focus, *Airbnb* is now exploiting a particular kind of commodification called "*Airbnb* Experience" in which accommodation is not featured. *Airbnb,* aware of the inherent problems of over-exposure, over-competition and increasing disquiet from locations around the world, are pushing back against the contradiction exposed by oversupply of accommodation, by moving into a new field of exploitation through the introduction of cultural commodification. This is a new aspect of *Airbnb*'s business model and is promoted as an additional avenue in which hosts can involve themselves. *Airbnb* are explicit about this:

> *Airbnb* Experiences allow travelers to enjoy insider access by offering magical, handcrafted activities, designed and led by inspiring locals. They go beyond typical tours or classes by immersing guests in each host's unique world. It's an opportunity for anyone to share their hobbies, skills, or expertise with others.("*Airbnb* expands Experiences throughout New Zealand," 2018)

The exhortation to provide the 'local' and 'authentic' connection is a message that is clearly received and internalized by the hosts interviewed in this research. Hosts are urged to develop an empathy for the experience that guests might want and for many hosts this translates to the metrics of a perceived local:

> people just say it's a no brainer – Of course you wanna be in someone's home. People wanna see how people live. When I think about it, I think hell yeah! People want to experience the culture and the people. You're not just sightseeing. (Leanne, Picton).

David Harvey (2002, p. 98) perceptively notes "as monopoly privileges from one source diminish so we witness a variety of attempts to preserve and assemble them by other means". In response to diminishing monopoly rents in traditional tourist sites, *Airbnb* is able to disperse its activities into neighbouring areas, exposing more 'pristine' areas to tourism through digital popularity. The leakage of tourism into non-tourist areas occurs not only through home-stay tourism. In *Airbnb*'s segue into this new iteration of commodification, hosts need no land or property to commodify. This is an example of the way that capitalism "annihilates space and time" (Harvey, 2002, p. 97).

The advent of *Airbnb* 'Experiences' provides an opportunity for *Airbnb* to further extend its extraction of capital through the vehicle of tourism. Instead of exposing one's own personal home to commodification, (or as well as, as evidenced by the experience of Lance, who not only hosts *Airbnb* guests in his own home but also markets his cultural heritage as an *Airbnb* Experience), hosts explicitly commodify themselves as local actors and their culture as a commodified object by providing guests with supposedly authentic 'local' or 'unique' experiences. One of the interviewees, Lance, tells me he has created a "special haka" (traditional ceremonial Māori war dance) for tourists. This supplements tour services he provides in which he takes guests on trips through his region pointing out historical and traditional Māori sites and artefacts. Culture is presented as authentic, but it is created specifically for the tourist market, making the notion of authenticity somewhat moot. The re-packaging of culture into a commodity is evident in Lance's interview:

> I get a lot of Chinese bookings just directly because I do the Māori culture. So, I've sort of created a unique selling point with what I do with *Airbnb* by connecting the culture with the land. That was how it all sort of kicked off and it's just evolved into its own little thing now (Lance, Wanaka).

Notions of 'local' and 'culture' become meaningless and conceptually incoherent when collapsed into an *Airbnb* guided, Americanized version of acceptable 'local' and acceptable 'cultural'.

The aspect of *Airbnb* Experience (as opposed to accommodation) is outside the scope of this research, except to note that it is an extension of *Airbnb*'s exhortation to hosts to engage with their guests as a 'local' with insider information who can make their guests' stay in the area more attractive and memorable, and thus contributes to the capitalist accumulation paradigm of the platform. It also forms a move on the part of *Airbnb* to compensate for the oversaturation of the visitor accommodation market. Many hosts noted that they regularly receive pressure from *Airbnb* to lower their prices in order to attract bookings. This strategy is, as Donna notes, "a race to the bottom".

Leanne, when she "thinks about it" notes that people want to experience culture and the people. However, the imperative to be both local and authentic as a performance for others presents a number of problems for hosts to negotiate. Firstly, hosts must develop the ability to anticipate guests' wishes. To do this means to apply a conceptual filter of the 'singular' to the field of the 'multitude'. Guests must pitch their promotion of their *Airbnb and themselves* at what they imagine a singular, idealized Other might value, yet they are doing this in the context of an advertising page that any user of the platform (the multitude) can access. In other words, hosts must guess what this idealized Other might – or might not – value. Slavoj Žižek notes that:

> In cultural matters, we are confronted with the multitude of lifestyles that one cannot translate into each other. This split is perfectly rendered in the phenomenon of cyberspace. Cyberspace was supposed to bring us all together in a global village; however, what effectively happens is that we are bombarded with the multitude of messages belonging to inconsistent and incompatible universes; instead of the global village, the big Other, we get the multitude of "small others" of tribal particular identifications (Žižek, 2001, p. 218).

Aside from the sheer impossibility of this task given the diversity of cultures, locations, orientations and expectations that an audience of millions might contain, *Airbnb*'s conceptual sleight of hand creates psychical issues that must be negotiated. For example, if a host is attempting to appeal to a diverse yet unknown international audience, she must then present herself as 'local'. This becomes problematic because the essence of that term means something unique

or special to her particular locale and culture, but such uniqueness may be misunderstood, construed as unprofessional, provincial, basic, or otherwise devalued.

Hosts are aware of the problems that are thrown up by the disconnection between expectations of guests and the realities of context. Bob's discussion of tourist expectations provides an insight into the variability that confronts *Airbnb* hosts:

> I think it's a perception thing and if somebody comes armed with the right perception then they can have a really nice time and you'll get really good feedback. If their perception is that they've just come from Indonesia and paid $40 a night for a five-bedroom house, their perception's gonna be different (Bob, Paihia).

Janene also struggles with the anticipation of guests' wishes. She describes the process as being one in which the host must look for clues to anticipate what sorts of things the guests might be expecting:

> They'll ask questions, or they *won't* ask questions. Sort of like," what do we do?" "Well, what do you *like* to do?" I've put together downstairs a welcome page and it's got this is what is here, these are the house rules, these are some shops of interest. You've got a chemist, you've got massage and church services, stuff like that. Um, and then activities, free activities, non-free activities, and then restaurants. You actually get asked a lot about restaurants. I've got on it: *Please read!* People don't read.

The development of suitable bridges between guests' expectations of 'the local' and their perceptions of 'the global' is a task that is frequently experienced as stressful for hosts and invokes feelings of self-doubt. Jenny describes this tension that she experiences as awkwardness:

> I usually say "do you need a restaurant recommendation?" Some people are ok, but some people are really grateful; they would never have found it. I say "have you got any adventures planned?" I really like saying that (laughs). They say "yeah but have you got any ideas?" I feel quite awkward. …One silly couple said "So what are all the must-do's in Wanaka?", so what do you say? Any sense of

> standoffishness, I back off straight away. I'm really friendly but I sort
> of am in a hovering state. I kind of stand in the doorway (Jenny,
> Wanaka).

Jenny is clearly uncomfortable in these interactions. She describes herself as "not very friendly or open to people as a general rule" and says of her hosting experiences "the whole thing was really challenging for me, and I was nervous". She then notes that she is learning to "enjoy the performing of these skills that I have". Jenny's acknowledgement of a performance is telling. Arlie von Hochschild (1983) writes of the conflict and cost involved for those selling emotional labour. The awareness of enacting emotion results in emotional conflict or dissonance within the actor. Moreover, a focus on the performance of authenticity arises not from "*individual* use of guile in pleasing a greater variety of people. It is the rise of *corporate* guile and the organized training of feeling to sustain it" (italics in original) (Hochschild, 1983, p. 192). In other words, the corporation actively works to ensure emotional labour is performed. Jenny is not being her authentic, local self in her interactions with guests, she is performing what she perceives to be an idealized hospitality subjectivity that is developed through the guile of *Airbnb* that trains hosts to act in accordance with the wishes of the platform.

5.3   The rating system

Airbnb uses a bilateral rating system ostensibly as a mechanism of trust between guests and hosts. This means that guests rate hosts, and hosts rate guests. Hosts are assigned star ratings which are publicly displayed on the hosts' listing. The public nature of this display means that hosts are particularly aware of being 'ranked' and graded based on their performances of hosting. The level of stars achieved by hosts is interpreted affectively by hosts as a reflection on their personal selves, as well as on their subject position of 'hospitality entrepreneur'.

In figure 14 below, the arrow points to the star rating which is indicated by the graphic displaying how many stars the host has achieved, based on the average rating assigned by guests. The numerals beside the star rating indicate how many individual guests have rated this property. Zervas et al. (2015) observe that the *Airbnb* system generates implausible patterns of star ratings, suggesting that users trend toward providing overwhelming positive reviews, with 94% of

properties achieving a 4.5 (out of 5) star rating or higher (Zervas et al., 2015, p. 3). This may be because users fear retaliatory reviews that can occur in a bilateral rating system. It may also occur because guests have *a priori* bias towards a property based on pre-selection satisfaction. Moreover, the personal nature of *Airbnb* ratings invokes social norms associated with personal relationship transactions which may therefore skew ratings upwards (Zervas et al., 2015).
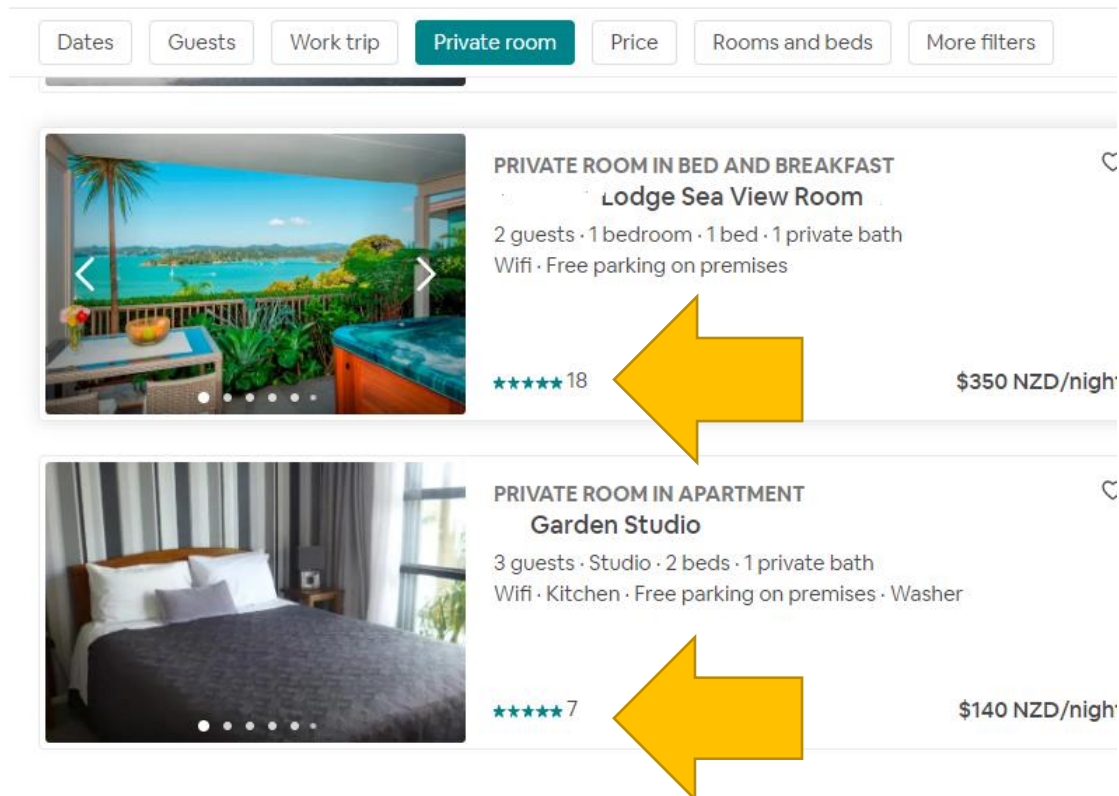
Figure 14: Host star ratings

Once a user clicks on a particular property, the website redirects to a new webpage which contains information and photos of the selected property. The hosts' pages are attached to the accommodation listing. These digital spaces are used by hosts to promote themselves in a positive and attractive light in order to attract guests. The ability for guests (consumers) to view the hosts through the host page and subsequently make decisions about whether they will book a particular *Airbnb* is unique to the *Airbnb* platform (Ert et al., 2016; Fagerstrøm et al., 2017). Fagerstrøm et al. (2017) assert that facial expressions on hosts' photos on their *Airbnb* listings are decisive factors in guests' booking decisions on peer-to-peer rental platforms. These assertions are supported by Ert et al. (2016) who also add that the quality of the information pertaining to the host influences guests' booking decisions. Guests therefore, take highly manufactured

representations of hosts into consideration when booking a property and also when rating a property.

Hosts' perceptions are that the number of positive ratings they receive will impact upon their occupancy rates, desirability and potential to charge a higher price for their *Airbnb.* (R. Martinez, Carrington, Kuo, Tarhuni, & Abdel-Motaal, 2017). The *Airbnb* hosts interviewed for this current research are acutely aware of how their digital presence is perceived and many discuss their experiences of learning to negotiate the *Airbnb* web site so as to eliminate errors. The participants have a keen awareness that the combination of hosts' photos, hosts' information and ratings given by guests are factors that influence the success or otherwise of their particular *Airbnb.* Navigating the intricacies of host pages and listing details is experienced as stressful as hosts anticipate the desired behaviours required of 'good' hosts. Moreover, the physical stress of negotiating the sheer impossibility of catering to the values and wishes of the multitude is reflected in hosts, manifesting as a heightened concern over the rating system. A bad rating highlights the inability of a host to anticipate what is required, and as a consequence, hosts engage in a constant reassessment and surveillance of the self.

The knowledge that a guest is rating not just personal space but also the personal self creates a level of stress for participants that modifies and further commodifies their behaviour in a number of ways. Firstly, hosts work extremely diligently to mitigate any possible negative reviews. In some cases, hosts provide goods and services far in excess of what one could legitimately expect from a five-star hotel at a fraction of the price. Peter is emblematic of the level of free work that *Airbnb* free-rides on. Peter's *Airbnb* consists of two rooms in his house, both of which have en-suites. The kitchen, dining room, lounge and decks are all shared spaces which Peter keeps immaculately clean. Peter provides a free pick-up and drop-off service from public transport if required. He provides guests with an opportunity to share wine and snacks in the evening, free of charge. He provides three different menu options for breakfast which he has had professionally printed on lightweight card, similar to the standard one would expect from a good quality restaurant. He prepares these meals to order; again, at no charge. He provides free use of bicycles and kayaks. He acts as a quasi-travel agent and will work out

holiday itineraries for guests. He will do guests' laundry while they are out. He cleans the rooms daily while guests are out sightseeing or at the beach.

While this level of service seems somewhat excessive for a bed-and-breakfast operation, within the *Airbnb* system Peter is not unique in these endeavours. All hosts interviewed for this research provide additional services to their guests over and above provision of accommodation and linen. Some hosts provide little gifts of local crafts or preserves, others make similar items themselves to add the 'local' touch of authenticity. Many hosts provide home baking as part of their service. Some hosts accompany their guests on tourist excursions and to restaurants to ensure they get to see and do all that their particular locale has on offer for tourists.

These 'add-on' services are not necessarily reflected in the price or quality of the *Airbnb.* For example, Di does not charge any extra for the services she provides. Di's *Airbnb* can be rented for $80 per night for the room in the high season, less in the off season. When asked about the types of things she does for guests, Di recounts what she calls a typical interaction. She took one guest to a mountain bike park, then cooked him pizza for dinner. The following day she took him to some local hot springs, went on a half day cruise with him then took him via a ferry to dinner at an historic restaurant. Di provides breakfasts and often shares her evening meal with her guests. These meals are frequently substantial, such as lamb roast with accompanying roast vegetables. She says "it's a Kiwi treat. I won't charge them anything". Di experiences her hosting performance as necessary for the fulfilment of the role required of being a hospitality entrepreneur.

5.3.1 Emotion, affect and control

Emotion, affect and control are materialized in *Airbnb*'s rating system. Partly, this is because guests and hosts rate each other on personal attributes, thus invoking social norms of interpersonal interactions. Partly, it is because the *Airbnb* platform makes reviews publicly visible which contribute to ideas of status and reputation, and finally, it is because *Airbnb* administers hosts' behaviours through the rating system by various mechanisms of ranking, reward and punishment, all of which are experienced on an affective register. The following discussion considers

embodied emotion and affect in the context of commodification of the self and explores the connection of embodied emotion with practices of affect that move people toward action.

> Capitalism hasn't offered anything…that should give us reasons to be positive. Because despondency, or disavowed despondency, is a sign of a craving or hunger to actually belong to something and capitalism not only can't meet that, it doesn't want to meet it (Fisher, 2014).

This excerpt from a 2014 interview with Mark Fisher acknowledges both the negative and its corollary, the disavowed negative, that are generated under conditions of capitalism. It is particularly appropriate to the neoliberal notions of capitalism with emphasis on individuality, self-reliance and independence. Fisher draws attention to the affective impacts of capitalism, a theme that is interrogated more deeply by Martin Konings (2015). Konings asserts that contemporary conditions of neoliberal capital produce a narcissistic subject. This is a common theme among progressive-liberal thinkers, in which ethos and morality (or lack of the same) is externalized back into the market, and in so doing, has become an anonymous imperative. The effect of this is that the normative and regulatory characteristics of capital supersede social relations, operating as a:

> solvent of social ties, forcing on our interactions the abstract indifference of monetary calculation and the alienating effects of instrumental reason (Konings, 2015, p. 15).

Konings explains that the production of the narcissistic subject is embedded in the affective connections that people make to money and money icons, which are both enacted and understood through an affective rationality of attachment to neoliberal constructions of self. Put another way, under conditions of a neoliberal, digital capitalism, it is the embodiment of emotional attachment to an ideology that presents imperatives to evolve into a more valuable, improved and authentic self, where the self is transformed into a commodity of monetary worth.

Affect and emotion are closely related, with emotion viewed as a social expression and affect as more liminal (Watkins, 2010). According to Gregg and Seigworth (2010) affect is relational. These authors posit that affect can be conceptualized as a force, sometimes subtle and imperceptible, sometimes

overwhelming, that drives us toward thought, action and movement. The realm of affect is usually attached to contexts of family, home and community and is governed by "a continual affirmation of bonds, based on responsibility, trust and gratitude, premised on a capacity for emotional attachment" (Hochschild, 2011, p. 23). But what happens when the market and its accompanying operations of commodification is enacted *within* the confines of family, home and community? Whilst the concept of hosting tourists within the home is not new, the scale of this activity enabled by *Airbnb* amplifies the effects of commodification of the self and of private spaces such that it extends past the individual to family, to the community and beyond. Commodification involves our attachment to things and ideas, as well as our detachment *from* things and ideas. Exploring these necessarily involves consideration of the strategies people employ to negotiate this terrain, as well as the role of affect in those strategies.

In a world where potentially everything is for sale, estrangement or alienation becomes a continual state and is expressed as emotional detachment (Hochschild, 2011). Digital technology has inflated the ability of capitalism to insert itself into previously unexploited realms and this expansion has exacerbated the affective dissonance experienced by the contemporary subject. This trend has been evident for quite some time: Arlie Russell Hochschild, writing in 1983, proposed that under late capitalism, jobs are increasingly more thoroughly controlled and socially engineered than in previous milieu (Hochschild, 1983). This is especially true since the advent of communicative digital technologies and in particular, the advent of Web 2.0. which has had direct impacts on the growth of homestay tourism enacted through *Airbnb*. This is because Web 2.0 has enabled seamless application of user-created content. *Airbnb* uses this functionality to manage hosts' behaviours both on the platform and in guest interactions. The pervasiveness of digital messaging has the effect of ensuring that emotional labour is deeply embedded in hosts' performances, thus, the social effects of commodifying one's self and one's home also become magnified.

Hochschild (1983) states that emotional labour *per se* is not the issue of concern, because emotional labour is functional, necessary and desirable in any society; especially for the purposes of social reproduction. Instead,

it is when we come to speak of the *exploitation* of the bottom by the top in any society that we become morally concerned (Hochschild, 1983, p. 12) (italics as per original).

Under conditions of engagement with *Airbnb,* what is expressed as 'free choice' or agency is in fact the (un)freedom to choose from a set of fixed and restricted options. Uncounted costs of surplus-meaning are internalised through emotional labour as individuals attempt to live through – and make sense of – the realities of the market in their living room. The imbrication of platform capitalism into the private sphere invokes the development of strategies of care and attachment around considerations of what and how to care (and what not to care for), and how to manage the feelings generated by such decision-points. Put another way, a society "composed of commodities all the way down necessarily trigger crisis" (Fraser, 2014, p. 546).

An example of *Airbnb*'s management of surplus-meaning as a result of emotional labour is taken from the platform, which provides the following advice:

> Take a second, step back, and find some gratitude for the opportunity to rub shoulders with diverse people in your life. Take a second to find gratitude for the extra income your property provides. Take a second and be grateful for the things that make your life great! It will really help you enjoy the journey, and love what you do! ("Airbnb host forum," 2018).

The exhortations from *Airbnb* to "take a second" to enact gratitude indicates a tacit acknowledgement that the emotional labour involved in running an *Airbnb* needs to be actively monitored and controlled, and moreover, this emotional labour can be taxing on the host. These adaptations are not natural processes but must be worked at (Hochschild, 1983, 2011). Certainly, this 'worked at' aspect of emotional labour by *Airbnb* hosts is keenly felt. Samantha demonstrates this in her following comments. Aside from the physical labour of cleaning and preparing the *Airbnb* space for guests, the majority of the work that Samantha is referring to here takes the form of emotional labour:

> It's not easy money, it's *really* hard work. It can be really draining, and it can be really hurtful when people leave you reviews that are

> bad, and you realize how much work you to have to put in to get those five- star reviews (Samantha, Wanaka).

Samantha's response to the emotional labour involved in *Airbnb* is "draining" and "hurtful". Her comments speak to a deeply held affective attachment to her subjectivity as a commodified host. She needs to work really hard just to keep up. Further in Samantha's interview she acknowledges how the act of performing herself takes its toll:

> I was asking people the same questions over and over, and people said you've already asked me that. It can get really *really* emotionally draining. Really, really hard (Samantha, Wanaka).

The notion of feeling drained of emotional energy appears across the dataset. For example, Leanne (Picton) comments that "It can get tiring always being enthusiastic", demonstrating the link between physical responses and emotional labour. The enthusiasm and other forms of affect such as feeling hurt and drained that Samantha and Leanne refer to comes from a not-inexhaustible pool of human responses. What is provided for guests is taken from elsewhere. Or, as Bob more bluntly observes:

> I think what happens is; with *Airbnb,* sometimes you don't only become the accommodation provider, you become the emotional support (Bob, Paihia).

Feelings are social according to Hochschild (2008). They are engendered by the interactions and the contexts in which individuals move and are shaped by the culture in which they are embedded. This is true also for *Airbnb* hosts. With respect to these providers, the internet is awash with guidelines and advice on how to behave emotionally in a wide range of contexts. There are a number of blogs and websites such as *airhostsforum.com, onceinalifetimejourney.com* and *travel.hostfully.com* that are external to *Airbnb,* but still fulfil an advisory function. These websites are popular with hosts who regularly visit them seeking advice.

The shaping of affect is conditioned by the circulation of ideas within the digital context. This extends beyond the realm of personal relationships and helps to explain the emotional labour involved in the role of affect in a commodified, marketized context (Fraser, 2016; Hochschild, 2008, 2011). *Airbnb* spends

considerable resources to ensure the circulation of ideas to shape the emotional labour invested by hosts. The *Airbnb* website features detailed instructions on how to handle a vast number of situations affectively. The community page invites hosts to share their experiences and provide guidance to other hosts. Much of this advice takes the form of directives on how to do emotional labour. For example, 'Debendra's' post says:

> True happiness comes from the effort of making others happy. Give
> and share your love every day! ("Welcoming all *Superhost*s," 2019).

The community pages on the *Airbnb* website are a good example of the ways in which the circulation of ideas is controlled in a digital context. These pages are moderated by *Airbnb*; a fact about which many hosts are aware. Host 'Susan' is emblematic of this awareness. She notes:

> I was also wondering about the visibility though. I've seen similarly
> puzzling things happening several times before in the CC,
> (Community Centre) with some "controversial" posts having little to
> no traction, whilst other more benign posts on the very same subject
> were inundated with views. Odd though, how this post with a
> headline, content and subject matter that's inarguably of such
> massive interest, importance and assistance to so many hosts, has
> only had 37 views, (says it was posted yesterday), when other posts
> on the very same controversial issue have had hundreds upon
> hundreds of views over the past 48 hours or so ("How to view hidden
> profiles," 2019).

The moderation of the *Airbnb* community pages ensures that some stories get more visibility than others. *Airbnb* employs online community managers who moderate the pages. These moderators re-post certain stories or questions frequently, which has the effect of pushing less amenable posts further down the page listings, thus effectively removing them from active discussion.

Airbnb pushes hosts to use the Community Page to seek answers. This is another way in which the free labour of hosts is commodified for the benefit of the platform because it falls to the community of hosts to create and upload content that benefits the platform. For example, Lynn had an issue with a booking and tried to

contact *Airbnb* directly for advice. She found it really difficult to receive an answer from *Airbnb* directly, despite trying to speak to "a real person" on numerous occasions. Finally, she resorted to posting on the community pages in order to achieve a resolution. In other words, *Airbnb* successfully managed Lynn into creating content for the platform. She says:

> they refer all these sorts of conversations to the blasted "*Airbnb* community" who do generally know the answers. There's a clever website programme of clumping together topics of conversations had within the community (Lynn, Whitianga).

By directing hosts to the Community Page, *Airbnb* is able to ensure that free labour is performed by hosts on the platform's behalf in two ways. Firstly, hosts create content. Secondly, the amount of work required to answer queries from other hosts is greatly reduced, since other hosts supply answers. *Airbnb* can then employ a small number of 'moderators' to ensure that content and conversations stay aligned with the needs of the platform. A final benefit for the platform, is that hosts spend more time engaged with – and thus thinking about – the platform, and their position on it.

5.3.2 The power of the negative

The functionality of platforms is frequently attributed to mechanisms of trust, whereby the platform secures the goodwill of its users (Phua, 2018; Tussyadiah & Park, 2018; Zervas et al., 2015). However, the weighting of the various aspects of the system are opaque. For example, many hosts complain of receiving one bad rating that drags their average score down for some period of time. The algorithmic interventions by *Airbnb* do not reflect the necessities of a socially engineered and digitally delivered version of trust, but instead speak more to the goal of conditioning hosts to provide an idealized Americanized experience for guests and thus mitigate instances of disappointment on the part of the guests with the platform. Ultimately this goal feeds into the overarching telos of any iteration of capitalism; that is, maximum surplus value extracted from a commodity.

The significance of the rating system can also be understood in ontological terms, as a means by which a functional split occurs in *Airbnb,* as the Lacanian Other:

Airbnb represents the Other, but guests – and the continual repetition of guests – represent myriad little brothers. Both sets of masters must be taken into consideration by *Airbnb* hosts: the Other / brothers. This splitting of the Other has the contradictory effect of both diffusing and multiplying *Airbnb*'s role in the rating system. Many hosts, mimicking the rhetoric of the platform, see the rating system as a necessary metrics of trust and in this sense experience *Airbnb* as a benevolent big Other that has their interests of safety and security at heart. The effect of this is to cement *Airbnb*'s power over hosts.

As Žižek (2004, p. 504) explains "the dispensation of mercy is the most efficient constituent of the exercise of power". Hosts speak of *Airbnb* in this regard with a sense of security that *Airbnb* acts as their ally, and to do this hosts portray guests as the problem in a system where *Airbnb* emerges as the benevolent, but disembodied Other.

For example, Jenny (Wanaka) comments:

> It's quite high stakes, but I wouldn't knock it because that's why people are so careful.

and Donna (Picton) says:

> I don't know, I don't like the rating system, However, I suppose it kind of works.

The general consensus from hosts is that the rating system is a sort of a necessary evil that at least allows them to view the profile of the guest prior to arrival. Even this small advantage had been somewhat eroded with *Airbnb*'s recent move to restrict access to guests' profiles until after a confirmed booking has been made. *Airbnb* says this change is to reduce discrimination against guests. Hosts feel disadvantaged by this move, but powerless to protest or change it. A discussion on the community page of *Airbnb* addresses this issue. 'Zacharias' says:

> Ever since *Airbnb* removed the photos from inquiring guests a sense of unease overcomes me when I receive an inquiry or instant booking. I know many others feel the same and honestly the feeling never goes away. It's something about the fear of the unknown and then having to live with the person that becomes terrifying.

'Thomas and Damian' reply:

> The other point which I don't like is how *Airbnb* is forcing down this rule without communicating this with people offering their homes. I have the feeling there is a group of very young people sitting in California trying to set the rules if you like them or not ("Uneasy when I receive a request," 2019).

Simultaneous to the viewing of *Airbnb* as an ally, hosts also experience *Airbnb* as a punishing big Other with the power to destroy their status on the platform. Failure to achieve a rating of 4.8 or more by any one of a multitude of guests incurs disapproval and censure by *Airbnb*. Hosts interviewed for this research describe *Airbnb* as the following:

> Terrible bully–boy tactics (Donna, Picton).

> Extremely bossy (Lynn, Whitianga).

> If something goes wrong, they hit you (Gerard, Picton).

These comments display a level of deeply felt emotion and reflect hosts' understanding of *Airbnb* as the holders of power in the relationship between the platform and themselves.

The experience of censure from *Airbnb* over ratings is common. It is reflected in the interviews conducted with hosts for this research and is also reflected in both the *Airbnb* community website and the independent *Airhosts* Forum. For example, user 'jkamm' posted a complaint of this nature on the *Airhosts* Forum on 6 October 2018:

> After a recent retaliatory bad review that really killed my star rating from a guest who was pissed that I would dare to charge her for the children that she "forgot" to put on the reservation…I've been really nervous about getting good reviews and getting my star rating back up into *Superhost* range.

User 'Alexander' posted this on the *Airbnb* community page:

> This review brought my overall rating below 4.0 stars and *Airbnb* paused my listing for 7 days. Fortunately, I was able to get her (the guest's) review/rating removed after explaining my situation to an

> *Airbnb* representative. This brought my rating back up to a 4.8 where it currently stands, but the pause/suspension (that never should have happened) was not immediately lifted. After serving the seven-day suspension, I noticed that I have not received any inquiries about my property anymore. Before the suspension, I was getting one inquiry per day.

The following comments from hosts interviewed in this current research show remarkable similarity to the experiences described by the international hosts on the websites. Lizzie recounts a rating experience that demonstrates her experiences with receiving a bad rating from a guest. She expresses feelings of having been personally attacked by the rating, which was received in spite of the face-to-face relation of friendliness of their interactions. Because of her emotional labour invested with this guest, Lizzie experiences the negative rating on a deeply personal level:

> He was all friendly to us, spent a lot of time with us, and then went away and gave us a bad rating. To me 2.5 is _so_ bad, so it takes a long time to recover from that…And we've had 10 reviews ever since and it still just the same. It takes a lot of good ratings to override somebody's bad rating (Lizzie, Whitianga).

The negative review is privileged over the explanatory response. In Lizzie's view, the guest holds unequal power in the rating system. Her experience is emblematic of all the interviewed hosts' experiences. The power relation between guest and host is reinforced by *Airbnb*'s actions despite their many claims of supporting hosts and is evidenced by the algorithms that place greater weight on negative reviews than positive ones.

The affective power of the rating system is demonstrated by the amount of time hosts talked about it, as well as by the range of emotions they deploy to understand it. Hosts display levels of paranoia regarding ratings and consequently act to minimize the chances of receiving negative ratings. Donna deploys a particular strategy when rating guests. She emphatically describes her feelings about the rating system but goes on to explain how she manages the rating system:

> I *hate* it. I hate the whole horrible process. It's ghastly…Even the really horrendous guests, I've never actually said horrendous things about them, but actually I didn't say much. I hate it. I *hate* playing the game (Donna, Picton).

Despite Donna hating playing the game, she nevertheless does so. Even though both sides have the opportunity to review, more weighting is given to a guest review than to a host's and consequently hosts have learned to adapt to the rating system by suppressing their own feelings when rating guests. Jenny recounts an early experience of hosting where she wrote a review of one guest. She says the guest "went totally ballistic. He *totally* reacted". The guest's negative review stayed at the top her page for some time. Like, Donna, Jenny says her policy now is:

> to give a bare-bones review. Just point out the good points, not rave, just say they were clean and tidy nice guests (Jenny, Wanaka).

This strategy is utilized by a number of hosts to minimize the chance of retaliatory responses from guests. For example, Lynn explains that she also gives the minimum response for difficult guests and hopes that people reading the reviews will "read between the lines". This strategy suggests that hosts are aware that the ratings system provides an uneven playing field where the value of a guest rating is ranked above the value of a host rating. Consequently, hosts are very careful about the wording of their reviews. In effect, the host's voice is silenced in the rating interaction.

The fear of negative ratings resonates throughout the dataset and many hosts refer to the fact that they 'learnt' from negative ratings. The hosts' representations of their experience as 'learning' moments also points to an unequal power relationship between the platform and themselves, where the hosts must work to reproduce behaviours that are amenable to the platform. 'Learning' in this sense, equates with being disciplined, both in the sense of being punished by the platform, and in the sense of controlling one's subsequent behaviour. For example, Jenny had an issue with a guest who subsequently posted a negative review. She felt the effects of that review reflected in her rating and in a decrease of bookings subsequent to the posting of the negative review. 'Learning' from the experience, Jenny vows to handle any future disputes much differently:

> I don't want to do that again, because I'm still suffering from that
> one star, a year later. It's pulled me down. They're always five star,
> [Jenny's ratings] but it pulled me down to 92% (Jenny, Wanaka).

Similarly, Leanne discusses a rating experience she had with a guest in a manner that illustrates both the affective imprint it left on her and her subsequent alteration of behaviour:

> Actually, I did kinda feel really stink. It did worry me and bother me.
> I think it was a damn shame. But I'm really conscious now… So,
> I've taken it all on board (Leanne, Picton).

Leanne's reference to "taking it all on board" speaks to the disciplining effects of the rating system. She is aware that she has consciously altered her hosting behaviour as a result of this interaction, which is experienced by Leanne as a negative affective experience. In order to avoid feelings of discomfort brought on by bad ratings, Leanne has learnt how to pay closer attention to guests' wants and needs ("I'm really conscious now"). Similarly, Lizzie has also 'learnt' from her experiences in ways that shaped her subsequent hosting behaviour. She comments:

> We were a bit scared about replying to people on *Airbnb*, anything
> negative about people. We didn't want drama (Lizzie, Whitianga).

The splitting of the Other into the Big Other (*Airbnb*) and a multitude of little brothers (guests) has the effect of amplifying the Other's gaze through repeated interactions such that it becomes intensified and even more heterogenous. No longer is it just a singular digital gaze consisting of a set of organized algorithmic interventions, it now includes a dispersed gaze: that of the guests. Hosts thus feel under intense pressure to perform their idealized hosting selves every single time a guest books their *Airbnb*.

Oddly, the anger that hosts feel at receiving a bad rating is most often directed at the individual guest, not at the platform, even though it is the platform that imposes sanctions on the host, and it is the platform that unevenly privileges the guest rating over that of the host, and even though the likelihood of the negative-reviewing guest and host ever crossing paths again is very low. Anger directed at guests is personal; anger directed at the platform is more diffuse: after all, hosts

reason, how can a human emotion such as anger be applied to a digital artefact, an algorithm?

The futility of directing anger at the platform manifests in hosts as a sort of a discontented rumbling that achieves no traction. *Airbnb* forecloses on the possibility of anger at the platform by directing the focus toward administration. The message sent (and received) is that through the act of catering to the needs and wants of guests, in other words, by being a better idealized hospitality entrepreneur, the host will avoid negative ratings. This individualizes the rating experience and lays the blame for any negative ratings at the foot of the hosts.

Jodi Dean (2005) provides some insight into the processes of ratings in her discussion of the political impact of communication technologies. In a context of exponential expansions of messages, messages themselves merge into a new form: that of contribution. Messages are no longer communications between a sender and a receiver, an actor and audience. They have become uncoupled from their context and instead become part of a circulation in which exchange value is completely decoupled from the use value of messages. It is a message's contribution to a larger flow of content that matters, rather than the particularized, situated content of the message itself. In other words, the circulation of messages is decoupled from any substantive content they possess. Moreover, the sheer volume of uncoupled messages negates their value as individual bits of situated information. They become so much flotsam in a vast sea of messages. However, as digital subjectivities conditioned by technological interventions, even as people inherently know that their messages gain no traction, they contribute, nonetheless. Hosts, despite the dangers of ratings, still post ratings. Dean (2005, p. 63) names this as "technological fetish" wherein we allow technology to act on our behalf, thus depoliticizing ourselves. Moreover, by allowing technology to act on our behalf, we subscribe to a fantasy of unity. How then, can a host maintain an anger at *Airbnb*, when hosts are constructed as one (or at least a constituent part) with the platform?

This question points to a contradiction under digital platforms: The intangibility of modern trauma generated by digital capitalism threatens the coherence of possible responses. The psychical nature of this type of trauma is experienced

as intense and undeniable, yet simultaneously (and paradoxically) remains out of reach and untouchable. When the icon that is enjoined to protect the subject becomes the tormentor, subjects, unable to articulate the source of that anxiety, turn back to the icon seeking solutions to the problem. Martin Konings explains that

> our attachment to hegemonic institutions is compensatory in nature: they provide ways to manage the effects of an experience we undertake to repress (Konings, 2015, p. 98).

This allows for a selective experiencing of the icon, manifested as avowal of some aspects while simultaneously disavowing others. Thus, through a compensatory logic, hosts make sense of negative affect by reaffirming positive attachment.

5.3.3 The tractive force of the 'positive'

Attachment to an object through desire is in fact attachment to a cluster of promises or ideas (Berlant, 2010). Berlant's discussion is an articulation of the notion of surplus-enjoyment, where process comes to stand in for achievement of a goal or desire. The attachment to *Airbnb* through commodification of the self is implicated in a wider set of conceptual notions than just the icon of *Airbnb*; it represents attachment to a cluster of promises such as the promise of freedom, both temporal and financial, the establishment of a socially valued subjectivity as an entrepreneur, and the desire for celebrity / to be known, among other things. But what happens when the relation of attachment is compromised?

Lauren Berlant suggests that some subjects maintain an optimistic attachment in the face of potential loss or inability of the object to fulfil the desire because continuity of attachment provides continuity of the subject's own sense of self and what it means to be in the world. Berlant names this as "cruel optimism". It is when the possibility of realization is "*im*possible, sheer fantasy, or *too* possible, or toxic" (Berlant (2010, p. 94) (italics as per original). Berlant's argument is that the subjects' affective state in such cases is not akin to melancholia, a state of resigned acceptance to loss, but rather is temporalized. It is "the condition of attachment to a problematic object *in advance* of its loss" (Berlant, 2010, p. 94). This points to a pathology of attachment; an intensified clinging to a conceived – but not realized – fantasy of a 'good life' that fails to deliver, and moreover, is known to be unable to deliver. The functionality of such a pathology is that it

allows a concept of a time in the future to suspend questions of the now. This issue is also considered in the analysis of temporality in Chapter Seven.

The trope of a good life acts as a beacon for hosts struggling to make sense of their engagement with *Airbnb* as they negotiate contradictions thrown up between the collision of daily life and hosting. There is much social and cultural capital to be gained from associating with iconic power and *Airbnb* reinforces these bonds by providing idealized scripts and images that purport to show the way to a range of successful outcomes such as financial and temporal freedom, entrepreneurial status and celebrity: imagine the allure of being showcased as a *Superhost* to an audience of millions on the *Airbnb* website!.

Hosts demonstrate their affective affinity to *Airbnb* through a range of conceptual resources. Firstly, the notion of being socially valued has, under conditions of digital subjectivity, been transformed into notions of celebrity (Dean, 2013). However, the sheer volume, excess, diversity and opacity of messages in circulation on the internet threaten the ontological security of subjects (Dean, 2002). Being a celebrity is to be known. While *Airbnb* hosts do not aim to become celebrities in the sense of famous actors, politicians or rock stars, the notion of being known in a digitally constructed world is both desirable and necessary if one aims to be successful in being an *Airbnb* host. On the platform, ratings, Superhost status and number of reviews are all mechanisms that contribute to the notion of being known. Consequently, hosts speak with considerable pride about how many ratings they had and how many people they had hosted as examples of their popularity. Moreover, this notion of conspicuous sociality extends beyond the platform; being popular is desirable in real life too and brings with it considerable social benefits.

Claiming a position of conspicuous sociality places the host in a socially desirable hierarchy that speaks to achievement both in terms of a digital subjectivity and in terms of achieving an idealized hospitality entrepreneurial status on the platform. Moreover, conspicuous sociality in the 'real world' has value at a community level: hosts are aware that other *Airbnb* hosts regularly watch other listings in their areas, including their rating and their reviews. Moreover, hosts ensure that friends and acquaintances are aware they are *Airbnb* hosts. This achieves two functions:

as a way of extending their business to cater for other people's visitors should the occasion arrive, and as a status position within the local community as 'entrepreneurs'. Hosts therefore are known both on and off the platform as a result of their engagement with *Airbnb*.

Given that this research is conducted in quite small towns that are flooded with *Airbnb* listings, many hosts know other *Airbnb* hosts through their interactions in their communities. Interestingly, despite knowing other hosts socially, most hosts do not openly talk to other hosts directly regarding any issues they have, tips for successful hosting or other aspects of their experience. Conversely, hosts speak of 'being in competition' with others and thus are reluctant to talk to other hosts in their own community. For example, Jenny has a number of neighbours and friends who are *Airbnb* hosts in her hometown of Wanaka. She admits "I sense that it's competitive and I don't want to be too revealing". Hosts will, however, participate in online forums. Sharing information with local hosts could jeopardize one's position on the platform and give competitive advantage to another whereas sharing to a global community is perceived as less risky.

Airbnb is variously described by hosts as an opportunity to extend one's social connections. Interestingly, hosts are not concerned with extending social connections *within* their own local communities, but rather through tenuous links to people they likely will not encounter again:

> it's a good way [to meet people], (Julia, Paihia).

> because it gives me the ability to interact socially with interesting people (Di, Paihia).

> I love meeting all these amazing people who are all *Facebook* friends…They follow me on *Instagram* (Lance, Wanaka).

> I'm doing it because I love people, and I love meeting people from all walks of life, whether you like them or not. Because it's all experience and you learn from it (Janene, Paihia).

Janene's paradoxical account of *loving* meeting people that she may not *like* is framed as a learning experience. The notion of learning referred to by Janene suggests techniques of self-improvement, and self-improvement produces a more commodifiable self. The learning that Janene is referring to is shaped

around techniques to handle negative interactions with guests in order to be a better *Airbnb* host.

The commonality of all these accounts is the level of affect employed as a conceptual resource to justify hosts' engagement. Interestingly, this level of affect is present even among those hosts whose experience of *Airbnb* is somewhat jaded. The affective turn in these accounts is understandable because affect is used as a tool to make sense of one's engagement with *Airbnb:* being affectively connected provides an avenue of sense-making to a set of behaviours. If hosts can 'love' at least some aspects of their labour, the affective connection justifies the more unpalatable aspects and provides meaning to the continuation of the bond.

Digital subjectivity by its very excess of communication circulation exacerbates symptoms of feeling alone: symptoms which are mitigated by the notion of belonging to a large collective, regardless of how tenuous those links might be. Of the hosts interviewed for this research, eight are single and not in a committed relationship. All eight single hosts are female. Seven of these single hosts refer to the desire for company as one of the reasons they engaged with *Airbnb.* These participants tend to seek social contacts through their *Airbnb* hosting to fulfil a need for human connection. They view their engagement with *Airbnb* as a solution to personal circumstance rather than understanding their social isolation as a symptom of a digital capitalist society. One host specifically mentioned that she hopes an intimate relationship will develop through hosting. Di finds the company provided by *Airbnb* guests enjoyable and it fills a social need for her. Her motivation is oriented towards filling this need and she makes frequent references to having forged 'spiritual connections' with some of her guests. Mostly, though, she is looking for intimacy and views *Airbnb* as a way to meet potential partners. During the interview Di discusses three men that she has met through *Airbnb.* She is hopeful that one of these men will return to stay with her:

> I'm much more comfortable, I get on far better with younger men.
> Older men give me the shudders. I'm in the position now when I
> don't really think I want to be in a relationship as such, as I say on
> my *Airbnb* [page] I'm free spirited. I don't want someone telling me

to do this or that, but I would like to have a companion. Maybe I could spend time with [him], maybe have some intimacy. I don't know… and then you meet these young guys and you think perhaps there was some physical connection. That's to be dealt with: I don't know whether with Pierre, the Frenchman, he's just turned 38, he's an expert in software, and at the moment he's taken up a job in Italy but he's not very happy and he's trying to get out of it. He's agreed to stay to a certain point then once he terminates there, he's heading this way. He's a bit of a sweetie. A bit exotic looking, dark eyes, lovely smile (Di, Paihia).

For Di, the potentiality of finding a partner through *Airbnb* is appealing. While Di is very explicit about her wish to meet a partner, this is not necessarily the aim of the other single hosts. However, they clearly express a desire to make a human connection that is more than a fleeting arrangement based around a commercial agreement. For example, Julia invites her guests to dinner. She does this because she sees it "as a good way" to generate social connection. Julia's house is quite small and does not have a dining room, so she has gone to considerable effort to create an area that is cosy and appealing on her verandah. She has enclosed part of it and attached awnings to create a more intimate sense of space. She says:

the area where everyone sits, because its lovely there, in the evening it's really beautiful with candles and everything… All of them, I've sat and had conversations with them… mostly they want me to hang around and have a chat (Julia, Paihia).

Julia exemplifies what Hochschild (1983, pp. 195-196) calls the emergence of an "altruistic false self" in which emotional labour is performed for the care of non-intimate, non-familial others in the execution of commodified work. Hochschild suggests that women, as the ones who most typically shoulder the burden of emotional labour, are susceptible to an overdeveloped false self in which the boundaries of true selves are blurred. This can result in emotional struggles within the self and within personal relationships as boundaries are pushed and shaped by commodification-related demands. An example of this is provided by

Samantha, who notes her partner's irritation with the emotional labour she devotes to guests. She says

> My partner's always saying "stop it! You can't always get 100%" (ratings) and I'm like "Yes, I can! It's my *home!* (Samantha, Wanaka).

Samantha's blurring of boundaries between true self and altruistic false self creates contradictions in her home that for the most part remain unresolvable. The surplus-meanings of home and commerce collide, so she takes negative reviews very personally – as if they are attacks on her personal character. The blurring of boundaries of home, commerce and affect create tension. Samantha says "it's exhausting".

5.4 The *Superhost* badge

The commodification of hosts is an ongoing project that is managed by *Airbnb,* and as such, new iterations of commodification appear. In 2014 *Airbnb* launched the *Superhost* badge (Gunter, 2018). The *Superhost* badge is the avatar of tools to ensure the commodification of hosts and home. The word 'avatar', meaning an embodiment of a concept or philosophy, has in recent times evolved to incorporate a second meaning; that of an electronic image that represents a computer user ("Merriam-Webster Dictionary," 2018). The *Superhost* badge fulfils both these definitions in the sense of an electronic image attached to the hosts' pages and the embodiment of the idealized hospitality entrepreneur.

In order to attain the Superhost badge, hosts must have a certain number of nights where their *Airbnb* is available to be booked, they need to have a 90% response rate, they must not cancel bookings, they must achieve more than 80% five-star ratings and achieve a certain number of listings per year ("Become a Superhost," 2018; Gunter, 2018; Liang, Schuckert, Law, & Chih-Chien, 2017, p. 455). The table displayed in figure 15 below shows the requirements needed for achieving the *Superhost* badge.
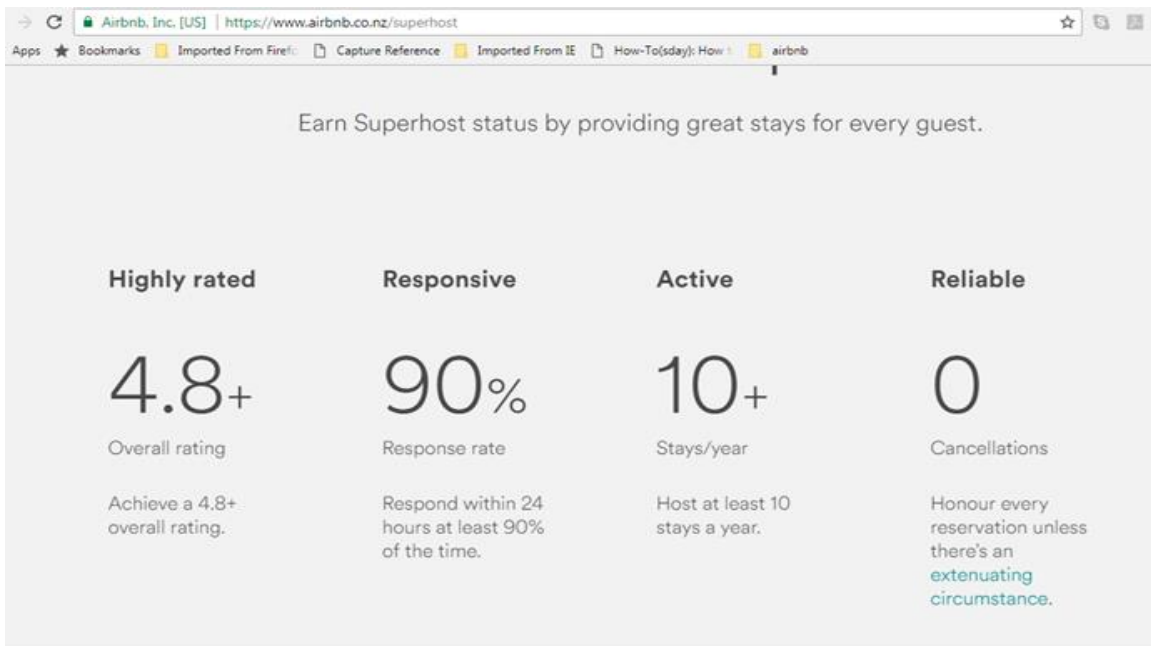
Figure 15: Superhost metrics

According to *Airbnb*, the awarding of the moniker *Superhost* indicates a special, outstanding or 'super' characteristic of the holder. Additionally, the *Superhost* badge is positioned by *Airbnb* as a desirable token to achieve because it confers a number of benefits. Arguably some of these benefits, such as attendance at *Airbnb* events and previews, are relatively valueless for hosts who live in regional tourist towns in New Zealand. However, other benefits include priority support from *Airbnb* and travel coupons (which incidentally can only be used by booking other *Airbnb* properties). This further encloses the hosts within the *Airbnb* platform.

A significant degree of disjunction exists between *Airbnb*'s claims around the benefits of the *Superhost* badge and the rewards experienced by hosts. According to *Airbnb*, *Superhost*s can expect to receive higher booking flows and achieve higher prices for their *Airbnb*. However, *AirDNA* claim that achieving a *Superhost* status has minimal impact on the rate of traffic flow of views or clicks on the *Airbnb* platform compared to non-*Superhost* status (Shatford, 2018). Some studies report that *Superhost* status can lead to higher prices (Gunter, 2018; Wang & Nicolau, 2017). Yet an interesting finding from *AirDNA*'s global research is that *Superhost*s charge on average 11% *less* on a nightly basis than their non-*Superhost* counterparts. Increases in revenue shown by *Superhosts* is due mainly to higher occupancy rates, which of course is driven by lower prices

(Shatford, 2018). What this means in real terms is that *Superhosts* must work considerably harder than non-*Superhosts* to make money.

Information of this kind, on the disjuncture between the claims by *Airbnb* regarding the *Superhost* status and experience of hosts, comes from the data analyst company named above, *AirDNA* (Shatford, 2018). This company is not affiliated to *Airbnb,* however the company's director, Scott Shatford, is an *Airbnb* host who hosts multiple properties (Grothaus, 2015). For their research, *AirDNA* filtered out listings that were not available for six months of the year which may skew results. Given that the four research sites in this research are small, regional tourist towns that have distinct tourist seasons, *AirDNA*'s data analysis does not map seamlessly onto this discussion, however it is useful to provide an overview of the *Superhost* system.

A search on the *AirDNA* website of active listings in Wanaka on 1 May 2019 revealed that Wanaka had 977 active rentals at this time ("*AirDNA* Market overview-Wanaka," 2018). *AirDNA*'s data reveals that over 90% of Wanaka's *Airbnb*s have ratings over 4.5. This finding is similar to other research which puts the figure at 94% (Zervas et al., 2015). A search of the *Airbnb* website returns over 306 *Superhost*s in Wanaka. Keeping in mind that *Airbnb*'s algorithms will only display 306 properties regardless of how many listings are actually available, these figures suggest that at minimum, at least one out of every three *Airbnb* hosts has the *Superhost* status in Wanaka.

While it is difficult to get data on exactly how many hosts in any particular area have the *Superhost* status – not least because *Airbnb* awards and withdraws the badge regularly – many of the participants in this study currently have or have previously had *Superhost* status. Such is the frequency of *Superhost* status that it is arguably rendered conceptually incomprehensible as an award for 'special' or distinctive achievement. This is reflected in some of the narratives of research participants, who demonstrate a rather jaded attitude to *Superhost* status. Donna's comment on having her *Superhost* status removed epitomizes this attitude: "Oh so be it, *Superhost* status will come back round again" (Donna, Picton).

Liang et al. (2017) assert that in order to satisfy the requirements set by *Airbnb*, hosts must work continually to screen guests, respond quickly to their requests, anticipate their needs, and improve services, facilities and experiences in order to avoid negative feedback. Additionally, the evaluation of qualification attributes for *Superhost* status occurs quarterly, but is based on the listing's performance over the previous 12 months ("Superhost Terms and Conditions," 2018). This means that a host may have met the qualifying standards for three out of four quarters but can still lose their *Superhost* badge if they falter on the fourth. Moreover, they will then need to achieve the standards for the next four quarters in order to be re-awarded the badge. In other words, it is easy enough to *get* the *Superhost* badge, but difficult to retain it.

Despite some hosts feeling jaded or let down by the *Superhost* system, hosts still consider their *Superhost* status to be a badge of honour and discuss the attainment of *Superhost* status with pride. For example, Julia set a target to achieve *Superhost* status and explains how, even though she was often really tired, she would still accept bookings in order to qualify for *Superhost*:

> If it is back to back (bookings on subsequent nights) there's more pressure on. I'll probably accept them, because I had a goal, I thought it would be great if I could get *Superhost* status. Here! And I got it! (Julia, Paihia).

Airbnb do not disclose how their algorithms work as these are the building-blocks of their operation, and so the weighting given to the various criteria associated with the *Superhost* badge is not clear. However analysis by Gunter (2018) suggests that the order of ranking is 'excellent ratings' followed by 'cancellation behaviour', 'host responsiveness' and finally, 'occupancy'. The opacity about the weighting given to each criterion makes it difficult for hosts to know which criteria they need to work on to maintain or achieve *Superhost* status. For example, Lynn's ratings are high but she had an issue with a cancelation. She says:

> while I was still very green around these things, I had one guest who needed to cancel because he thought he was booking in Hahei [a village about 40 minutes' drive from Whitianga]. I went into *Airbnb* and cancelled the booking and I was penalized by having my

"almost *Superhost*" status removed for 3 months or so (Lynn, Whitianga).

Lynn tried to communicate with *Airbnb* about this one cancellation to no avail, despite trying several times. Eventually she says "I just let my mistake go and sucked up the loss of 'you are a magnificent host' (the *Superhost* badge)". Lynn's frustration with the system is evident. Her example points to the power imbalance between platform and host in being unable to voice her concerns and have them heard. She experiences her attempts to overturn an algorithmic judgement as insurmountable, and, faced with no obvious alternative actions, gives up.

The *Superhost* system steers hosts toward the use of *Airbnb*'s 'Smart pricing' system. This is a system introduced by *Airbnb* where an algorithm evaluates available rentals on any given day and automatically prices a property either up or down, according to demand. The smart-pricing system creates an issue for a number of hosts whose prices are already low. What this means in off-seasons is that *Superhost*s must do more work in order to maintain and retain their *Superhost* status, but the monetary value of their work in terms of hours spent becomes less. This is because regardless of the price charged, the labour involved in each booking remains constant. The benefit to *Superhost*s of using the smart-pricing tool is that it reduces response-time, which is one of the metrics of qualification for the *Superhost* badge.

Another tool that *Airbnb* pressures hosts to use is called *Instant Book*, as shown in figure 16:

What is Instant Book?

Instant Book listings don't require approval from the host before they can be booked. Instead, guests can just choose their travel dates, book, and discuss check-in plans with the host.

For hosts

If you have Instant Book on, it will apply to all available dates on your calendar. Guests who meet your requirements will be able to automatically book your space.

The benefits of Instant Book include:

- **Convenience**: Book guests without having to respond to each request.
- **More guest interest**: Guests can use filters to search for listings that can be booked instantly. Instant Book listings are more popular with guests since they're able to more easily plan their trip.
- **Search placement**: Instant Book positively affects your response rate for your listing, which can improve your listing's placement in search results.
- **Superhost Status**: Instant book can also help you reach Superhost status, which requires that you maintain a 90% response rate

Learn about turning Instant Book on or off for your listing.

Figure 16: Instant book

Instant Book allows guests to receive instant confirmation of a booking if the selected dates are available. Evidence exists that hosts feel pressured to subscribe to the *Instant Boo*k feature (Gunter, 2018). This means that guests do not have to wait for a confirmation from the host because the booking is automatically confirmed. However, *Instant Book* takes power away from the hosts in terms of vetting potential guests.

Instant Book also creates conflict if a host has not blocked out a future time period where they may be unavailable to host due to other commitments. Gerard discusses the effects of these practices:

> They virtually force you to be on *Instant Book*, but if something goes
> wrong, they *hit* you (Gerard, Picton).

Airbnb frequently remove *Superhost* status for non-compliance with their goals and rules. Those hosts who had experienced the removal of their *Superhost* status indicated they felt chastised by *Airbnb*. For example, Gerard recounted that:

> We were *Superhost* status but they took that off us because we
> cancelled a booking. They took away my *Superhost* just coz I
> cancelled a booking. So, our bookings have dropped off since we
> lost that. They're very hard on booking cancelations.

The impact of sanctions is clearly keenly felt by Gerard, and during the interview
he was visibly upset and angry. Despite his obvious dissatisfaction with the way
Airbnb sanctioned him, he modified his behaviour to align with the demands of
Airbnb by moving to the instant booking option preferred by *Airbnb.* Gerard is
aware of both the surveillance that occurs of his performance and of the potential
for future sanctions. He displays a palpable level of resentment about this.

The affective impact of *Airbnb*'s operation of *Superhost* status is further evident
in hosts' narratives. Donna had an issue with *Airbnb* when she cancelled some
bookings because of a period of illness:

> Donna: I was exceedingly upset with the process, I went to
> *Superhost* status, and then I was quite unwell for a while and I had
> to cancel two bookings adjacent to each other which I had not done
> in the three years' operating, I had not cancelled. And I was
> penalized. $14.00 went into my next account and I said "what
> happened?" And they said "Well you cancelled two bookings". And
> I made a real fuss, I made a horrendous fuss, I said "just watch this
> space, this will go further!" …others have been penalized as well.
> So, you do not cancel.
>
> Stella: I didn't know they penalized you financially?
>
> Donna: Yes! And I lost my *Superhost* status. So that was like "Oh
> so be it, *Superhost* status will come back round again". But I'm
> *furious* that they did it (Donna, Picton).

Donna's comment that she remains furious with *Airbnb* is revealing when set
against her resignation to the subsequent removal of her *Superhost* status token
and sanctioning for cancelling bookings because of her personal illness. It
demonstrates the potential for hosts to feel helplessness in the face of *Airbnb*'s
administrative power and of their own diminished sense of control. Donna is
aware that her choices are limited. She must either submit to *Airbnb*'s wishes,

remove herself from the platform, or worse, *Airbnb* will remove her from the platform. Her sense of powerlessness is palpable throughout the interview. Her choices are limited by the fact that she has limited income. Donna discusses this in some detail:

> I feel a bit divided. To a certain extent it's great for local people to have that little bit of income but the comment still stands at a broader level that we've gotta change this government! So, we actually can live as people again! You know. This whole *Airbnb* thing is a covering over, it's almost kind of a veil over what's not a very happy financial circumstance that we're in, so I'm a bit divided about it, I don't see how it can keep going the way it has been going.
>
> It just keeps dividing and dividing (Donna, Picton).

Interestingly, Donna places the blame for the economic precarity in regions on the government, rather than on the corporation that has exploited her condition of precarity following the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. This speech act is performative because it disperses the blame attributable to *Airbnb* onto a third party (the government of the day). This enables her to justify why she continues with *Airbnb* as a host, even though *Airbnb* keeps "dividing and dividing". Donna understands that *Airbnb* has set neighbour up against neighbour as competition. However, rather than understand this as an effect of *Airbnb* operations, Donna understands this as a fault of the government.

Hochschild (1983) proposes that workers' rights to courtesy are less than clients when emotional labour rules are set by management. This is equally true of the relationship between host, guest and the *Airbnb* platform. Hosts discuss instances of unequal courtesy where bad behaviour or attitude from guests must be tolerated and minimized, usually by acquiescence by the host. An example of this process is evident in an exchange that Janene recounts about an issue she had with a guest smoking in their non-smoking *Airbnb*:

> These people, their reaction to this particular incident was so totally OTT [over the top], and she was such a cow! I've *never* been spoken to like that. She was just horrible. Just horrible (Janene, Paihia).

When I asked Janene how she handled this incident she replied "I'm a *Superhost*, and I do things to make people comfortable, I hate conflict". Janene clearly identifies with the subject position of '*Superhost*' and the attendant ideology of being an exemplary hospitality provider. This, in effect, becomes an issue of representation. As Kiarina Kordela explains:

> The obsoleteness of spirit, caused by the secular modulation of surplus as an operative function in value, entails a radical reconfiguration of the relation between being and representation (Kordela, 2013, p. 91).

Janene's representation of herself as a *Superhost* results in an obsolescence of spirit. Her own emotions of feeling insulted, unfairly treated and affronted are repressed in favour of a more socially acceptable and hospitable suite of emotions that reflect the goals of the platform. For Janene, this translates into a metrics of care: she *does things* to make people feel more comfortable. Janene recognizes, at some level, that she has been reduced to nothing but value.

5.5 Conclusion

The central theme of Chapter Five extends the idea of commodification to a deeper analysis of commodification of the self. The platform's imperatives around the display of hosts contribute to the deployment of the 'hospitality entrepreneur' as an identity; more specifically, as a status-driven, desirable identity. Another avenue of commodification turns on the appropriation of notions of 'local' and 'authenticity' which are key ideas deployed by *Airbnb* in conjunction with that of being a hospitality entrepreneur, the effect of which is that commodification of the self becomes even more deeply embedded in the daily practice and performance of hosting. *Airbnb*'s *Superhost* badge represents the ultimate in commodification of the self.

An identity couched in neoliberal terms of entrepreneurship with its accompanying notions of financial success and personal freedom is easily appropriated by hosts, because neoliberal discourse acts as a signifier of being:

> the subject's fantasy that it is the object of the Other's desire, to which it devotes itself, thereby producing the illusion that sustains the Other (Kordela, 2007, p. 70).

But the gaze of the Other is an imagined gaze; and subjects, in order to fulfil the imagined gaze of the Other, produce surplus-enjoyment to balance the conflicts wrought by engagement with the platform. In other words, the situated nature of *Airbnb* hosting – in one's home – creates conflicts where other social roles are also enacted. *Airbnb* hosts, in a never-ending effort to make sense of their conflicting social roles, draw on the comfort of process (surplus-enjoyment) to mitigate the contradictions wrought by such surplus-meanings. Surplus-enjoyment sustains hosts in their endeavours to become or maintain their hospitality entrepreneur constructions of self; yet the continual clash of the surpluses creates increasing moments of unease for hosts as they face unresolvable contradictions between their roles and identities.

This chapter brings attention to the workings of the process of surplus-enjoyment through the deployment of both positive and negative affect. Together, these aspects combine to ensure enclosure of the host as a commodified product of *Airbnb*. The commodification of the self is achieved through an initially relatively seamless appropriation of hosts via biopolitics, which is the focus of the next chapter.

6. Chapter Six: *Airbnb*'s biopolitics

6.1 Introduction

> It is not just a matter of pacifically directing the herd which has already tamed itself; it is a question of systematically generating new, idealized, exemplary individuals (Sloterdijk, 2009, p. 25).

Peter Sloterdijk's characterization of biopolitically managed populations as 'herds' that tames themselves provides an insight into the structure of Airbnb populations, but Sloterdijk's quote suggests much more than this: That biopolitical management has a specific goal to produce a certain kind of individual that is amenable to the requirements of the power. These two ideas are explored in the following discussions.

Airbnb invokes behaviours that impact the public and the individual. 'The public' in this instance refers to the population of *Airbnb* hosts. In the following discussion I consider the meaning of biopolitics in relation to the way in which the concept is deployed in this particular research contribution, through an exploration of the ideas of a range of theorists who have also interrogated the idea of biopolitics. Secondly, I pose the biopolitical question: In what ways is the body implicated when hosts engage with *Airbnb*? To answer this, I interpret the research data under terms of the theoretical concept. A set of spatial dynamics emerges in the biopolitical management of self, related to the particular commodification of labour power that occurs through the platform. Thirdly, I consider ways in which *Airbnb's* 'dividuation' of subjects (hosts) into data bites produces forms of subjectivity anticipated, but not guaranteed, to be amenable to the 'dataveillance' by which the platform operates. The variability in subjectivities becomes evident in the tasks associated with social reproduction. I then identify and coin terms for three forms of subjectivity that emerge from the biopolitical turn that allow hosts to engage with different effects. This set of subject-positions illuminate the calculative rationalities and material and affective resources employed by *Airbnb* hosts amidst a horizon of biopolitical contradictions.

6.1.1 The backstory of biopolitics

Frederic Jameson provides a fruitful starting point for discussion of biopolitics, asserting:

> History … as an absent cause is inaccessible to us except in textual form. And our approach to it (and to the "real") passes through prior textualization and narrativization through the political unconscious (Jameson, 1981, p. 35).

It is the relative inaccessibility of the object in whose place the signifier 'biopolitics' stands that provides a starting-point for discussion of the term and its possible meanings. An etymological interpretation of the word itself refers to the relations between life and politics, drawing from the Greek 'bios', meaning life, and 'polis' referring to a body of citizens, or political community (T. Campbell & Sitze, 2013). This points to the object lying somewhere on the continuum between the two; the location of which (and the relations between) remain up for conjecture.

The origins of the concept are somewhat ill-defined in that no singular moment exists to account for its existence; however, despite its missing and incomplete ground, Foucault is generally credited with reinvigorating the account of life and politics with his seminal text *Right of Death and Power over Life* (T. Campbell & Sitze, 2013; A. Zupančič, 2016). I foreground the discussion of biopolitics with an awareness of the incompleteness of biopolitics as a project in which not only the origins of it, but also the subject, the object and the theoretical bounds of the concept are not yet agreed upon (T. Campbell & Sitze, 2013; Kordela, 2013; A. Zupančič, 2016).

The importance of the incompleteness of biopolitics shapes the direction of this particular research project precisely because the concept of incompleteness intimates a sense of flow and passage through time, and the concept of temporality forms a distinctive part of this research. Rather than focus on the fractured nature of biopolitics, its incompleteness provides an "occasion for thinking" in which writers of biopolitics can be creative in theoretically considering the relations between life and politics (T. Campbell & Sitze, 2013, p. 2). More importantly, this "occasion for thinking" is a call to action to write of biopolitics in a way that envisages a moving beyond biopolitical administration and beyond a collective existence within a biopolitical population, the effect of which is that individualized subjects learn to survive individually within such a population. This idea contains an inherent contradiction between individualism and collectivism,

the personal and the social, that may itself provide a pathway to move beyond biopolitics.

Whilst biopolitics is implicated in both the personal and the social, its most prominent conceptualization concerns the governmentality of populations. Foucault's theories of governmentality and of power and resistance centre on the ways in which populations are understood and constructed as subjects of regimes, and illuminates the ways in which humans within those populations become constructed as individualized subjects (Juniper & Jose, 2008). The following section considers populations as a sphere of biopolitical operations.

6.2 *Airbnb* hosts as a population

To understand the ways in which biopolitics operates on *Airbnb* hosts as a population, it is helpful to consider the work of other theorists regarding biopolitical influence on populations. Peter Sloterdijk provides a valuable starting point to consider the construction of biopolitical populations:

> If there is one virtue of human beings which deserves to be spoken about in a philosophical way, it is above all this: that people are not forced into political theme parks but, rather, put themselves there (Sloterdijk, 2009, p. 26).

This is a re-articulation of an idea introduced by Marx; that humans become imprisoned by their own products and projects (Harvey, 2010). To further understand this, Alenka A. Zupančič (2016, p. 53) unpacks biopolitics as a "double movement of deployment" in which aspects of psychoanalysis are employed as the technology of power; where resistance is not an act *against* power but is immanent *within* power. Understood in this way, under conditions of platform capitalism, external sovereign power such as that exercised by nation-states has been usurped by a ubiquitous, yet diffuse gaze effected through the use of digital technologies. In Freudian psychoanalytical terms, the diffusion of a sovereign power into a social structure that is all encompassing is the definition of the superego (A. Zupančič, 2016). The Freudian superego, because of its ubiquity, is a power that generates "infinite, indelible guilt" because the most efficient application of power is through the ability to provide or withhold mercy (Žižek, 2004, p. 503). Or, put another way, superego has the power to apply

benevolence, such that the subject is always indebted to the superego for *not* using its wide-sweeping power. This notion was briefly touched on in the preceding chapter.

With reference to Foucault's *Panopticon*, the specific ways in which biopolitics uses power has found a path to inhabit even the most neutral aspects of life and it does this not only by an imposition of power or directive from an outside source, but via an internalization of subjectivity. Foucault's point of the *Panopticon* is not just concerned with the absolute visibility of the subject (to the regime of biopolitical power but also to others in the population). It is concerned with the *internalization* of that power in the subject (A. Zupančič, 2016). Because absolute visibility is a reality and because the subject knows it, the subject internalizes and effects the constraints of power on *themselves*. Put another way, the power exercised by the *Panopticon* is not simply through visibility, it is through imagination (Krasmann, 2017).

The diffuse nature of such internalization creates cultural norms within the population, so that the subject "becomes the principle of his own subjection" (A. Zupančič, 2016, p. 55). This idea resonates with that of Marx's 'general intellect' referring to the collective intellect of a society leveraging technology as a productive force. Taking a biopolitical reading, Paul Virno notes that general intellect has a significant impact on subjection such that it subdues "the whole person, the very disposition to thought and action" (Virno, 2007, p. 8). The point I wish to elaborate here is not the repressive nature of biopolitics, nor that power depends upon the existence of enclosures of control. Rather, power operates through 'modulations of movement'. Within digital technology, keystrokes on the platform become the mechanism by which modulations of behaviour are managed. Modulated behaviour has the effect of generalizing guilt under conditions of infinite scrutiny such that it becomes internalized into the individual where it becomes re-appropriated and reinterpreted as a desirous way of being rather than as a repressive or disciplining structure. Herein lies the essence of the double deployment of biopolitical power referred to by Zupančič.

To relate this idea to *Airbnb,* I draw attention to the use of techniques of benevolence employed in the *Superhost* operations. Based on a gaming model,

the badge of *Superhost* is positioned as an attractive and desirable token for hosts to achieve because of its purported benefits and increased occupancy (Liang et al., 2017). However, the awarding of the *Superhost* badge, or more correctly, the *rewarding* of hosts via the *Superhost* badge is clearly used to discipline hosts into behaviour that is compliant and aligned with the business goals of *Airbnb.* As discussed in Chapter Five, *Superhost* status is awarded for meeting a certain suite of metrics but is also swiftly removed if a host contravenes any of these. Punishment by removal of *Superhost* status is keenly felt by hosts. The deployment of affect prompted by such disciplinary censures condition hosts into desiring the status moniker, even though achieving *Superhost* status requires additional work and attention to *Airbnb*. Because it is relatively easy to acquire but increasingly harder to maintain, hosts therefore feel a level of gratefulness to *Airbnb* for granting them access to *Superhost* benefits, as if it confers some special characteristics upon themselves as individuals. In other words, the awarding of *Superhost* status is managed through algorithmic population metrics yet is experienced as an individual achievement.

Bauman and Lyon (2013) suggest that biopolitical power exercised through digital mediums are *post-panoptical* not only because power can be deployed at the speed of an electronic signal, but also because those holding the levers of power have the added power of sheer inaccessibility. Hosts variously consider *Airbnb* to be a type of inaccessible 'big machine', or alternatively a corporation run by faceless people in other countries. It is notoriously difficult to communicate with an actual human representative of *Airbnb* and most hosts interviewed for this research mention having difficulties in reaching an *Airbnb* representative. Lynda describes her frustration in trying to communicate with *Airbnb*:

> It's impossible to get hold of them, that's my only complaint. You can't! You can't even send them a message! I'm serious, it's very frustrating" (Lynda, Paihia).

Similarly, Lynn complains that:

> In the 12 months with *Airbnb* I really never worked out how to actually communicate with an official *Airbnb* person. I tried several times (Lynn, Whitianga).

The prospect of priority support that is accessible only through the *Superhost* badge is thus seen as valuable and becomes a marker of distinction; or put in other terms, the benefits of *Superhost* status are conferred upon a set population. Janene, a host in Paihia discusses her satisfaction with *Airbnb*'s priority treatment of her when handling a problematic guest:

> *Airbnb* were *amazing* because I got on to them and they had my
> back the entire way, coz I'm a *Superhost*! (Janene, Paihia).

The value of belonging to the *Superhost* population is evident in Janene's narrative and demonstrates how this feature acts as a positive incentive for hosts to work hard to join the population of *Superhosts*. The affective attachment of achieving *Superhost* status is demonstrated by hosts' appreciation and pride in having achieved the badge. Hosts willingly submit to the additional labour required to meet the metrics. Lynn's response is emblematic of those who held *Superhost* status:

> I'm – you know it's crazy, I didn't go into it expecting this – but you
> know I'm *proud* of my rating! (Lynn, Whitianga).

To be an *Airbnb* host - and particularly a *Superhost* - is held up as being synonymous with being a good global citizen whose participation in a new form of global democracy and community is a marker of status (Roelofsen & Minca, 2018). For hosts, failure to participate successfully in *Airbnb*'s vision through hosting is translated as personal failure, not only to one's self, but to the global community (Roelofsen & Minca, 2018).

Within platform capitalism, normatively infused concepts of charity, community, democracy and the moniker 'the sharing economy' are deployed as biopolitical tools in which internalization of social power now works; that is, on the self. *Airbnb* deploys a very particular type of discourse that draws on utopian ideals and that is presented as a new form of capitalist ethics. Through *Airbnb*, these qualities are translated into a metrics of hospitality that mask the economic exploitation which underpins the platform. *Airbnb* free-rides on notions of human affect and social value to fill what is essentially a heartless void: To be clear, *Airbnb* is a capitalist organization whose goal is neither charity, community nor sharing. It is capitalist accumulation through exploitation of labour power.

6.2.1 *Airbnb* and digital biopolitics

Airbnb is emblematic of platform capitalist organizations that employ digital strategies to reinforce the internalization of biopolitical effects. It does this by free-riding on conditions of digital subjectivity that have been shaped by technology's ability to invade individual's private lives in ways that we shall see, are both overt and covert. David Harvey's discussion of Hardt and Negri's proposal, that capitalist spheres of operation are moving from the deployment of material labour to that of immaterial labour through the digital field, is instructive here:

> The relation between capital and consumers is no longer mediated by things but by information, images, messaging and the proliferation and marketing of symbolic forms that relate to and work on the political subjectivity of whole populations. This amounts to an attempt by capital and the state to engage with the biopolitical manipulation of populations and the production of new political subjects (Harvey, 2015, p. 237).

Political identity under a digital regime is largely constructed by code and algorithms that are outside the control of individual users of a platform (Cheney-Lippold, 2011). Moreover, code impacts upon cultural practices and values by (re) defining them for capitalist purposes. Digital infrastructure "configures life by tailoring its conditions of possibility" (Cheney-Lippold, 2011, p. 169). That is to say, digital mediation has become the process by which human experience, understanding and sociality is increasingly defined (M. Martinez, 2012).

Excursions by capital into digital surveillance have been effected through the related tropes of security and freedom (Harvey, 2015). Arguably the first public exposure of the extent to which meta-data surveillance is being used by political authorities came through Edward Snowden's revelations around the American National Security Agency (NSA) in 2013 (Krasmann, 2017). More recent controversies involving platforms such as *Facebook* and the data-mining firm *Cambridge Analytica* highlight the pervasive reach of data-gathering and the ways in which this data is used to predict patterns of private behaviour and to nudge individuals towards ideologically desired outcomes through the deployment of that knowledge (Ingram, 2018; Reidy, 2018). Within an Aotearoa New Zealand context, media and social media discussion about the so-called

'Five Eyes' activities and the role of the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB) have brought the issue of digital intrusion and surveillance of private citizens into sharp focus (Parsons, 2015; Patman & Southgate, 2016). Moreover, physical and digital convergence through the use of the internet, smart phones and the 'internet of things' has facilitated the ubiquitous use of meta-data by platform capitalist organizations and as a result these types of digital intrusions have become normalized (Dean, 2002; Parker et al., 2016; Ravenelle, 2017; Slee, 2015).

As a result of the above, concerns of privacy have folded under conditions of mass access to consumer goods and services through the internet. Internet technologies are now widely assumed (and rather benignly accepted) to have an invasive reach into individuals' private lives (Dean, 2005; Krasmann, 2017; Parker et al., 2016; Srnicek, 2017b).

Hosts speak frankly about their knowledge of digital surveillance by *Airbnb.* For example, when discussing listing pages of *Airbnb* hosts, Jenny acknowledges that:

> I visit mine constantly, so it knows I'm me. It knows I'm interested in these other ones (Jenny, Wanaka).

Jenny is aware that she is being 'watched' by the platform. She also engages in watching and is aware that other hosts watch her. In other words, Jenny's understanding of the platform is that it is a mechanism of surveillance. Jenny reproduces this surveillance in her own hosting performance. She covertly watches her guests to ensure that opportunities to anticipate guests' wishes are not missed. Jenny does this because she is highly aware that ratings are important to her position on the platform. Throughout her interview, Jenny frequently makes references to surveillance: she "keeps an eye out", she "looks through the window, to make sure they're not doing anything wrong". She says "I do watch" (Jenny, Wanaka).

Nick Srnicek notes that privacy issues have become largely suppressed because of the sheer ubiquity of data collection. This is because data collection is an innate tendency of platforms and because the "suppression of privacy is at the heart" of platform capitalist business models (Srnicek, 2017b, p. 101). By virtue of using

the internet in *any* capacity, the contemporary digital subject, regardless of how much they use social media or not, is surveilled, and moreover, cannot discern themselves who is watching and when (Krasmann, 2017). Even those who do not engage with the internet have digital identities because personal details about them are held and coded by numerous entities – both governmental and commercial. Fractured data fragments that are disembodied from the individual human from in which they originate, flow across frictionless networks and become categorized.

Despite the omnipresent nature of data manipulation of people's privacy, this new form of digital control is not interested in the individual from whom data is collected, apart from the fact of that individual being the source of numerous data-points that can be harvested. Concerns about personal privacy are thereby misplaced. Instead, critical concern needs to fall on the ways in which trends in behaviour across populations are calculated and the political-capitalist reasons for which this is being done. Further, concern should be directed to the social mechanisms by which individuals are targeted for intervention (often because of ambivalence around particular issues, predicted on the basis of data-points their on-line behaviours throw up), and on the digital mechanisms by which they are then nudged towards ideologically-desired behaviours (which is where the real intrusion occurs).

Internet users are accustomed to everyday intrusions on their privacy through banal means such as banner ads that reflect their browsing history, requests from *google* for ratings of places or businesses they have physically and digitally visited based on geo-cached data and GPS tracking through digital devices (smartphones, *fitbits* and the like). Digital content is delivered through the appearance of news items related to their *Facebook* browsing, *Instagram* or *Twitter* postings, web browsing habits or smart phone use. As a result of these conditions Jodi Dean claims:

> that people now experience themselves as informationalized, their
> secrets already compiled in databases, their sins and success
> already circulating on the internet (Dean, 2002, p. 13).

However, despite knowing that *Airbnb* deploys power in this way, hosts display what Dean (2002, p. 5) names as "the pervasive cynicism of contemporary technoculture". This refers to the ways in which subjects know the capitalist intentions of the data gathering characteristics of a particular platform but engage with it anyway in spite of that knowledge. Put another way, the Orwellian concept of Big Brother is no longer perceived by digital users as a legitimate threat. Instead individuals and populations are surveilled by so many innumerable digital "little brothers" (Dean, 2002, p. 79). These digital little brothers – comprising any communication technology that can send or receive radio frequencies, ranging from garage door openers, smart TV's, *fitbits*, smart refrigerators and data-collating software to name a few – operate in the service of digital capitalism. Digital little brothers have become so ubiquitous, they have become mundanely ordinary, unremarkable and often invisible because of their pervasiveness in modern culture.

The notion of 'little brothers' is indicative of an encompassing biopolitical power effected through a profusion of digital channels. The 'little brothers' collect and collate bits of data on digital users that are then subjected to algorithmic analysis. These 'little brothers' appear as if they are in the service of digital users to enhance and facilitate their otherwise mundane lives. This frequently occurs through the provision of buying opportunities for goods and services that are selected and presented for the individual's consumption via algorithmic analysis of their digital behaviour. Algorithms, by their ability to mine, parse and assemble bits of data out of big data, deploy a logic not in the service of the recipients. Because algorithms are able to assemble data into ways that make it accessible to humans, they produce results that are taken as truths. Krasmann (2017, p. 17) asserts that "rather than predict truthful probabilities, algorithms pre-empt reality". Algorithms thus present users with *predictions* of their desires and aspirations by drawing on parsed big data histories of digital use; a process that paradoxically limits choice. Users of digital platforms are thus seduced by the appearance of curated choices and therefore *willingly submit* to being modified.

Yet, Dean (2005) argues, rather than enabling the lives and livelihoods of individuals, communicative technologies in fact depoliticize them and as a result impoverish populations and the notion of democracy. The matter of individual

Chapter Six: Airbnb's biopolitics

choice, so central to the notion of democracy, finds its practical manifestations circumscribed by ideological frameworks whose organizing roles do not appear within the field of democratic contest. The arena of individual messaging, by which intimations of choice are now routinely rendered authentic, become drowned in the circulation of information such that messages are reduced to mere additions to a vast sea of metadata.

6.2.2 Individuals in populations

Traditional short-stay accommodation businesses such as hotels and motels attract customers through advertising the physical and geographical features of their properties. This typically occurs through the display of the quality of the rooms, the expansive nature of facilities available for guest use, and the proximity of the accommodation to local attractions. *Airbnb* also advertises such features, but notably promote the *Airbnb* host as an integral part of the 'experience' of using *Airbnb*'s service (Roelofsen, 2018; Zervas et al., 2015). *Airbnb*'s point of difference (when compared to other online accommodation providers such as booking.com and bookabach.co.nz) is precisely this overt positioning of the host as part of the experience of using *Airbnb* (Fagerstrøm et al., 2017; Zervas et al., 2015). The platform's website and advertising material uses pictures of smiling, attractive people to denote idealized hosts and these act as a referent for actual *Airbnb* hosts (Fagerstrøm et al., 2017; Roelofsen & Minca, 2018). In line with these observations, hosts demonstrate an awareness of the importance of their bodily presence in their listings. For example, Jenny, who is in her 60s, provides a very explicit account that demonstrates the biopolitical effect on her life due to exposure through *Airbnb*'s politics of display. She states:

> it *hugely* impacted my life. I've never worn makeup before. A friend took me through the ropes, and I keep myself more presentable (Jenny, Wanaka).

Jenny willingly complies with these changes in her life because the types of directives employed by *Airbnb* that nudge hosts into display have become normalized through the constitution of themselves in and through the digital platform. Dean (2002) names the biopolitics of display as 'celebrity' and understands this as a mode of technocultural subjectivization in which an individual is driven to make themselves known, visible and accessible. In other

words, the drive for celebrity ensures that digital users curate their life-worlds for perusal by others. To be unknown in a digital sense is to not exist. Therefore, to be known, networked and discoverable is a fundamental characteristic of the digital subject. It is also a precondition of belonging to the *Airbnb* population that hosts are displayed and discoverable. The willingness of hosts to display their life-worlds to others, as well as the promise of being 'discovered' by guests, is appropriated by the platform through biopolitics. The platform enlists the affective desires of hosts as it nudges, encourages and celebrates successful *Airbnb* hosts as some sort of 'celebrity'.

Few shrouds of anonymity or privacy exist for hosts as they are impelled to display personal traits and characteristics that may be appealing to a guest. *Airbnb* urges hosts to display aspects of their personal lives by way of 'hints' or guidelines that send clear messages about what type of behaviour *Airbnb* expects from its hosts. For example, when setting up a listing, *Airbnb* exhorts its hosts to reveal details of their private lives through highlighted boxes as displayed in figure 17:
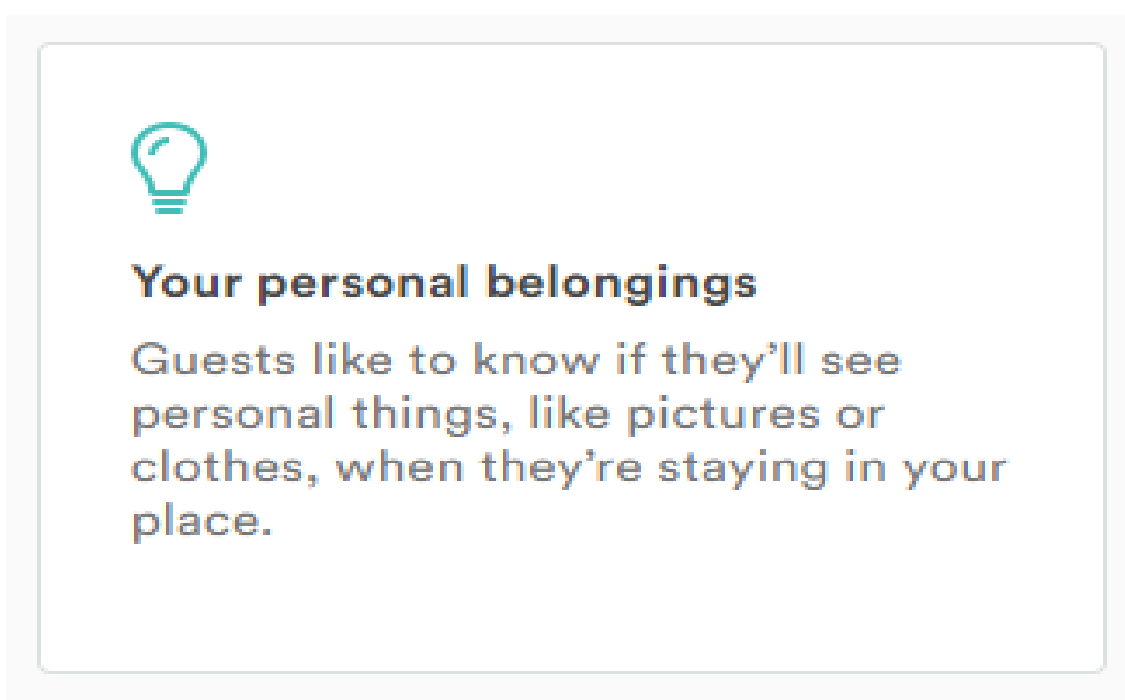

Figure 17: Personal belongings

("Become an Airbnb Host," 2018).

The wording of directives such as the above example position the host as subservient to the desires of the guests. The example clearly places the guest's

desires in a superior position to whatever it is that the host may or may not want. It subjugates concerns of privacy to notions of what it might mean to be a 'good' *Airbnb* host. Speaking explicitly to the biopolitical power relationship between *Airbnb* and hosts, Roelofsen and Minca (2018) note that hosts must feed data about themselves into *Airbnb* in order to 'stay alive' on the platform. Moreover, hosts engage in "self-tracking as a practice in which people regularly monitor, record, and measure elements of their behaviour and/or their bodily functions " (Roelofsen & Minca, 2018, p. 177). By use of discourse the politics of display employed by *Airbnb* displaces the life-world of hosts as they effectively produce and "perform themselves" for consumption (Roelofsen & Minca, 2018, p. 173).

Airbnb hosts interviewed for this current analysis also demonstrate tendencies towards a biopolitics of display when recounting their daily practices. Samantha says that:

> Sometimes I go to bed and I realize that my face is hurting from smiling so much (Samantha, Wanaka).

While this could be interpreted as a benefit (happy in one's work, for example) Samantha then goes on to recognize the pressure of the gaze of the disembodied other:

> Yeah and I feel like I'm almost on edge (Samantha, Wanaka).

Being known or on display in a digital environment is accompanied by a large degree of uncertainty. As digital exposure becomes more and more ubiquitous in nature, uncertainty becomes intensified because being visible requires the individual to be subjected to a constant heterogenous gaze. Constant scrutiny provokes constant stress to monitor and modify the appearance of one's behaviour to meet the requirements of the Other. As noted, the requirements of the Other are often opaque. Moreover, the biopolitical gaze is multi-directional: it is simultaneously directed from within the population of *Airbnb* hosts, from *Airbnb* guests, and from the platform itself. The parallels to Foucault's *Panopticon* are clear, except that it functions without a singular space of enclosure.

The responses of the *Airbnb* hosts interviewed for this research display a clear analogy to the operation of *Panopticon* ideas. Samantha discusses her

awareness of how her digital behaviour impacts her listings on the *Airbnb* platform:

> I'm constantly playing around with …my profile. That gets you higher up the search rankings. Yeah, I do plenty of things around that. I work very hard on it. *Very* hard (Samantha, Wanaka).

Samantha's comment acknowledges both the gaze of the Other, and her provoked response to 'work very hard'. Jenny is much more direct in her understanding of the *Panopticon*-like tendencies of the platform. She speaks directly to the awareness of the gaze of the disembodied other:

> I keep a very sharp eye on others. I know that it's all done on algorithms. I've studied all the advice. They say that the website can sense that you're tending your listings. I do watch (Jenny, Wanaka).

Not only are *Airbnb* hosts watched by *Airbnb*, but also by (little br)others, and this constant state of surveillance shapes behavior according to the will of the platform, rather than the will of the host. Hosts are very mindful of the fact that other *Airbnb* operators watch their listings. The awareness that others in their locality track their pricing, availability of services, amenities and standard of accommodation reinforces the biopolitical power of *Airbnb* because hosts discipline themselves from within, in order to achieve an idealized level of hosting and hospitality and thus distinction among their peers.

Hosts are aware of many sources of information about hosting on *Airbnb* and frequently seek advice through digital channels. *Airbnb* has a specific hosts' forum where hosts can seek advice from others, but as mentioned earlier, there are also websites outside of *Airbnb*'s platform dedicated to improving hosts' performance. Ironically, the latter contribute to the biopolitical architecture of the platform. The website *airhostsforum.com* provides an example of this. This website is not moderated or associated in any formal way with *Airbnb* the company, but nevertheless provides a forum for *Airbnb* hosts to discuss all aspects of hosting. The sharing of information between hosts provides guidance on behaviours that are amenable to the *Airbnb*. Despite not being affiliated to the platform, *airhostsforum.com* is specifically designed to enable hosts to become 'hospitality entrepreneurs' in the mold favoured by *Airbnb:* the messaging draws

on discourses of entrepreneurialism, exemplary hospitality and so forth. *Airhostsforum.com* appears to have a large following of *Airbnb* hosts throughout the world with some posts receiving upwards of 21,000 views ("*Airbnb* host forum,").

Airbnb also constantly email hosts, such that hosts refer to being "bombarded" with emails from *Airbnb* to lower their prices, give rating feedback and increase their availability. Figure 18 is an example of an email sent to a host in Whitianga.
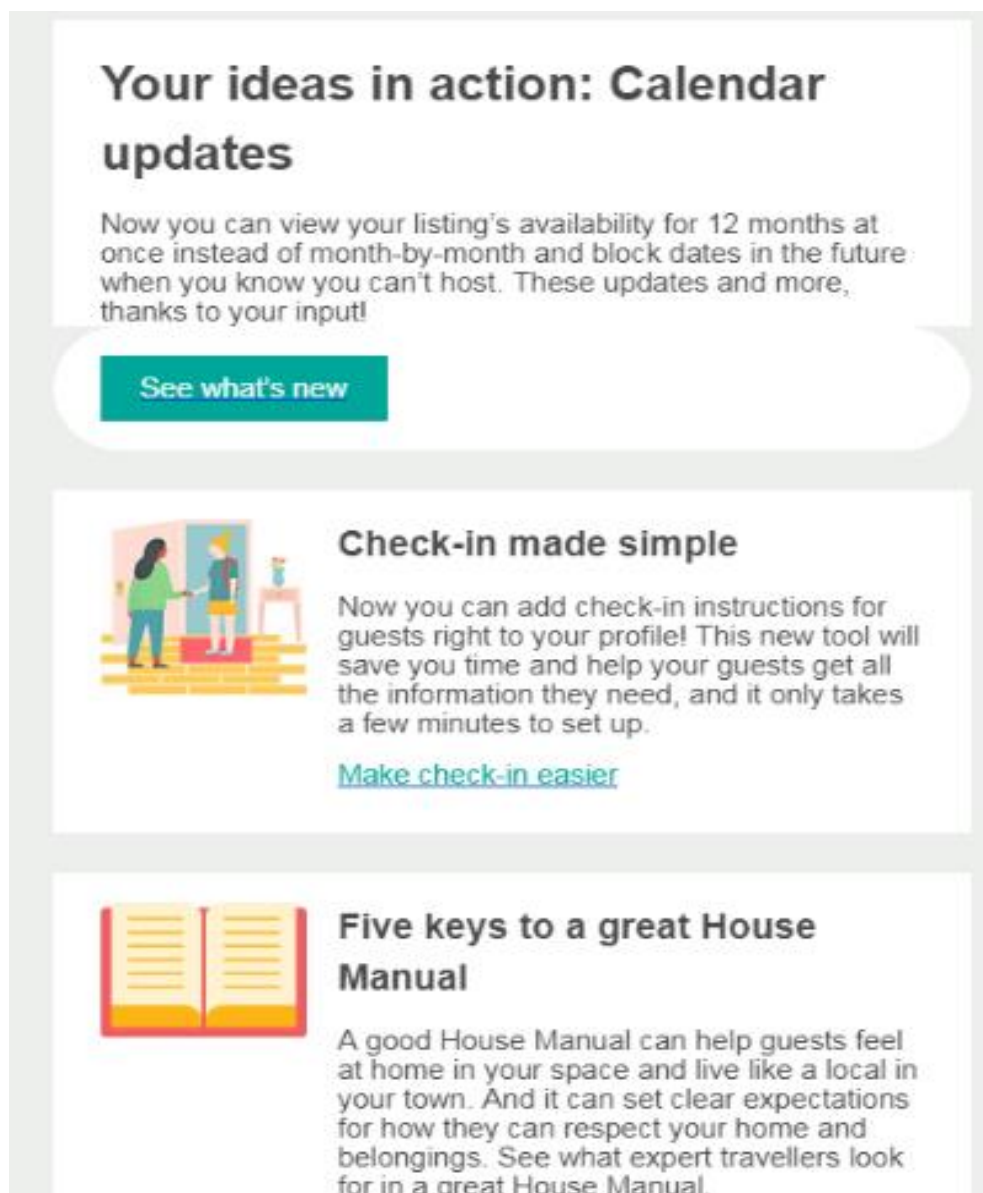

Figure 18: Example Airbnb email

This email positions guests as 'expert travelers' and implies that hosts must meet the expectations of this group of 'experts'. The links in the email provide advice and examples to hosts so that they can alter their behaviour to align with the

advice. Email traffic of this type occurs at least daily. For example, *Airbnb* keeps hosts aware of the competition in their area by way of notifications that other *Airbnb*s in their areas are being booked. Hosts then receive suggestions to lower their prices to optimize bookings, manage their booking calendars more effectively or to subject their listings to *smart-pricing* whereby *Airbnb*'s algorithms adjust pricing according to demand. The effect of *Airbnb*'s communications to hosts is to construct hosts on a biopolitical horizon by providing information and encouragement to create an idealized hosting subjectivity.

Another example of *Airbnb*'s communication is displayed in figure 19, taken from an email sent to a host outlining the 'Goals' page.

Set a 3-month earnings or booking goal

Hosts have told us that they don't always know how to improve their listing performance. So we made a way for you to set and track personalised goals, with some help from us.

How it works

1. Create a goal
You create a booking or earnings goal

2. Take action
We'll suggest actions tailored to your goal

3. Stay on track
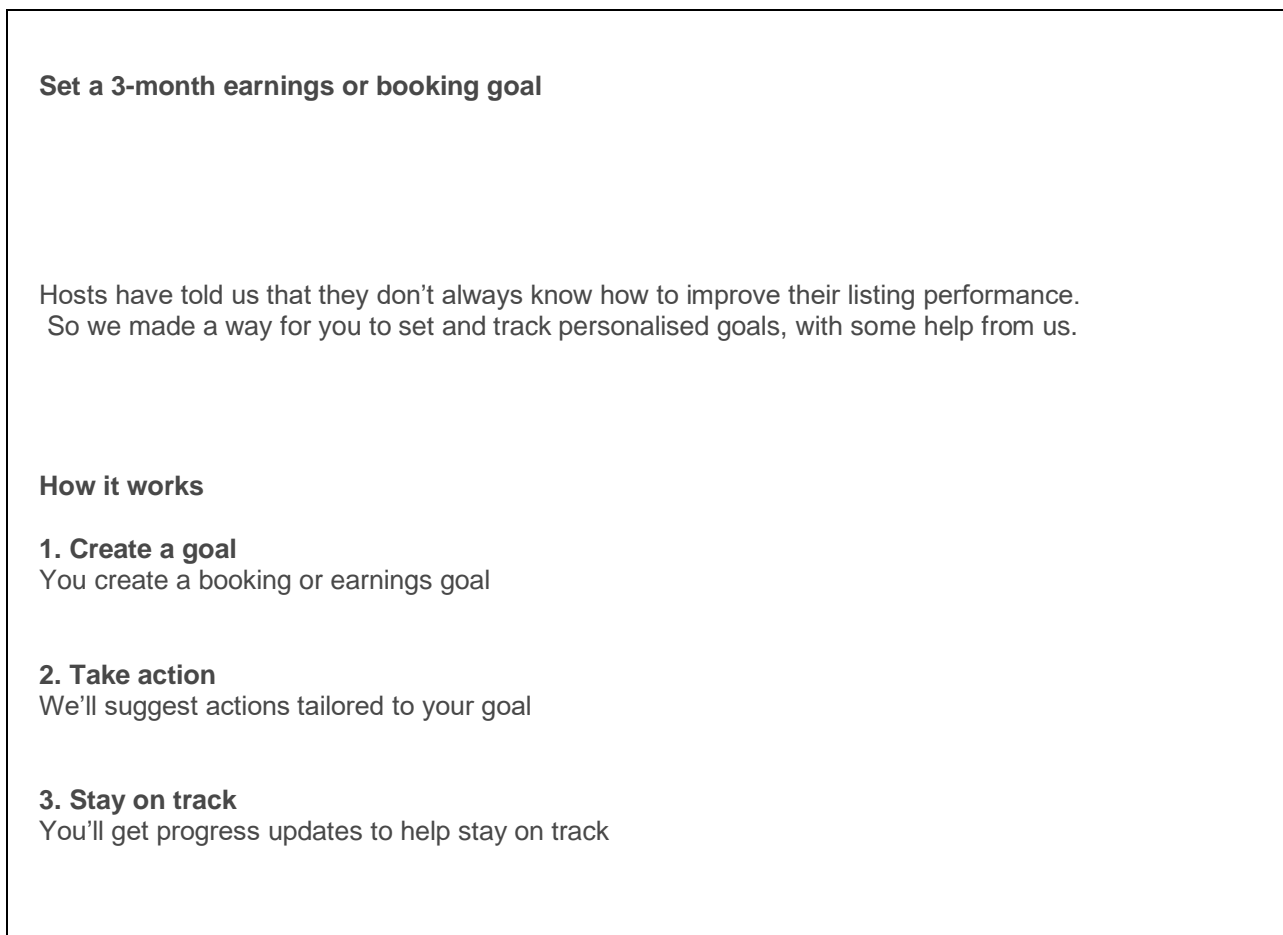You'll get progress updates to help stay on track

Figure 19: Set a goal

This email demonstrates that *Airbnb* closely monitors hosts by providing help, suggesting actions and providing tools constructed to enhance the goals of the platform. The sum effect of constant emails serves to remind hosts that their performance is being 'watched' by the platform through its algorithmic analysis.

This shapes hosts' behaviour in ways that are advantageous to the platform (but not necessarily to the host).

A result of this exertion of biopolitical power is that hosts frame the attainment of a position on the platform as more important than any actual monetary benefit. A number of hosts admit that they haven't made any money 'yet', because they are constantly ploughing funds back into their *Airbnb* space in order to achieve top ratings from guests. The inference from these hosts is that they hope to break even or make a profit at some time in the future. Hosts also engage in behaviour that seemingly runs counter to the ideal of making a profit. For example, Samantha makes sure that her *Airbnb* is consistently booked by dropping her prices quite low in order to attract guests during the off-season. She does this to keep her rankings up and to ensure her listing is on the first or second page of available listings for the area. This is more important to Samantha than making a monetary profit:

> See, sometimes I'm renting out the room for $40.00 a night. Take off tax, expenses and the amount of time I've spent cleaning, I've made two dollars. But you can't think like that, you've just got to keep working and keep the money coming in (Samantha, Wanaka).

For Samantha, the *idea* of making money is important, but of even greater importance is that she is recognized as a professional host. Continuity of hosting is more important to Samantha because it impacts on her *Superhost* status, and thus on the way that she *herself* is perceived.

Janene has been operating an *Airbnb* for around five or six years, so is experienced at hosting. She discusses her financial returns:

> If you look at the books, I'm not making any money out of it. I haven't got enough beds, I'm not charging enough, and everyone struggles in Paihia in the wintertime (Janene, Paihia).

Janene explains her involvement with the platform as giving her something to occupy her time and providing what she calls "coffee money". Nevertheless, she devotes considerable money and energy to promoting her *Airbnb*. For example, she has recently completed a sales training course at her own cost, learning techniques in the use of language for the propelling of prospective buyers/guests

to book. She says that sometimes she "runs herself ragged" cleaning and preparing for guests.

Even though hosts know that to act in such a way does not personally benefit them, they act 'as though' they believe. Slavoj Žižek (2008, p. 34) asserts that belief is "radically exterior, embodied in the practical, effective procedure of people". Belief, understood this way as an ideology, is generated in larger cultural practices and technological contexts (Dean, 2002). This materialized set of beliefs comes about as hosts act in ways that reinforce the biopolitical sphere, even though they 'know better' and by so doing reproduce not only the belief that appearances are of prime importance – a key component of digital subjectivity – but that the performance *itself* stands as something more real and impressive.

6.3   "That's just what you do": A double-disavowal of the body

> It is by virtue of our social dependency that we are vulnerable, and there is no way to understand the embodied status of human life without contextualizing the social imperative under which it lives, and upon which its life depends. In this way, we are, as bodies, never quite discrete or bounded: we are given over from the start to those people, practices, environments, networks of life, without which our own life is not possible (J. Butler, 2017).

Involvement with *Airbnb* has unintended consequences on the bodies of hosts. The logics of platform capitalism where concepts of 'home', 'hospitality' and 'sharing' are recoded in terms of capitalist economy create contradictions within hosts as they negotiate changing beliefs, ideas and behaviours. These contradictions reappear as exaggerated bodily behaviours as hosts try to negotiate the oppositional demands of commodification of the self with the demands of affective care and social reproduction. To re-state this, the biopolitical dimension of *Airbnb* directly functions through the body as hosts attempt to satisfy the (unattainable) demands of the platform which clash with the demands associated with the domestic care of life.

As previously discussed, biopolitics turns on a double deployment. That is, power is deployed from within and from without. The trend towards the adoption of a neoliberal subjectivity in the form of entrepreneurship titles that *Airbnb* hosts claim

masks a deeper process: that of disavowal of the body as the means by which social reproduction is accomplished. In the *Airbnb* hosts, this displays as a *double* disavowal of body. This double deployment of power plays out in unexpected ways in *Airbnb* hosts. Self-policing emerges as *Airbnb* hosts disavow their own bodily work; disavow knowledge that their physical space was inhabited the night before by another physical body and that the current guests' physicality will also be disavowed on their departure; and finally, disavow their own physical presence while simultaneously being available to the demands of the guests. This presents an interesting paradox. During the actual encounter with the current guest, the physicality of the hosts' own bodily presence becomes paramount: intense focus, attention and effort is put into being 'present' and being available in a physical sense to be of service to the guest. At the same time as the immediacy of physical availability, hosts also feel an intense pressure to be invisible, to be un-seen and un-heard when not required.

6.3.1 The first disavowal: Disavowal of the hosts' own body

The first disavowal of the body stems from the subjectivities adopted by *Airbnb* hosts as neoliberal subjects in control of their own fortunes. Set against a background of a shrinking regional economy largely based on precarious, part-time, low wage tourism work typical of regional tourist towns, the attractiveness of a status position afforded by the moniker 'business owner' or 'entrepreneur' is clearly evident in the narratives of the *Airbnb* hosts across the four research sites. Entrepreneurship was discussed as a process of commodification in Chapters Four and Five. In this chapter, entrepreneurship is considered through a biopolitical frame.

The normative claims of entrepreneurship are symbolic in ways that anticipate the claim of being known. To be an entrepreneur is emblematic of an independent individual who has mastered their own financial and symbolic future and thus has status within society. Claims to entrepreneurship thus position hosts with a title imbued with social capital (Ravenelle, 2017). However, if innovation is a criterion of entrepreneurship (Abercrombie et al., 2006), it is somewhat of a stretch to view the daily operation of an *Airbnb* as an innovative enterprise. Some authors liken the material labour of an *Airbnb* host as more akin to precarious, low-waged contract-work (Slee, 2015; Srnicek, 2017b). Scholars have termed this type of

work "subsistence entrepreneurship" denoting the precariousness of the work, and the fact that it really is only subsistence earning (Ravenelle, 2017, p. 284). Since the administrative management of bookings is largely handled by *Airbnb*'s algorithms and systems, the majority of work involved in the daily operation of an *Airbnb* revolves around cleaning and washing. The adoption of the subjectivity of business entrepreneur conjures normative images of business suits, big bank accounts and high-powered meetings but disavows the bodily nature of the actual labour of *Airbnb* hosts. In this regard then, the mundane work of being an *Airbnb* host is more akin to that of a service worker such as a motel or hospital cleaner. Not only does the subjectivity of entrepreneur invoke hosts to disavow their labour, it also invokes a disavowal of the body. The nature of bodily labour is

Cleanliness

Guests will expect the clean and tidy space they see in your listing photos. Make sure you give yourself enough time to clean between guests, especially when you have back-to-back bookings.

Guests will have the opportunity to rate the cleanliness of your space, and the average of your ratings will appear on your listing page. If you consistently receive low cleanliness ratings, you may be subject to penalties.

✓ **WHAT'S EXPECTED**

- Clean every room guests can access, especially bedrooms, bathrooms, and the kitchen
- Check that there's no hair, dust, or mold on surfaces and floors
- Perform turnover between each stay:
  - Provide fresh linens/sheets and towels for guests
  - Clear trash, food, and leftover items from previous guests

outlined in the expectations described on the *Airbnb* platform, shown in figure 20 below:

Figure 20: Cleanliness

("*Airbnb*: Hospitality," 2018).

Many participants spoke of making significant modifications to their own behaviours in order to accommodate this disavowal of their own bodily presence when guests are present. Karen and her husband go to the extreme of physically removing their presence as well as hiding signs of their own personalities and bodies in their *Airbnb* space. Originally Karen let out the spare room in her home but discovered she could earn more money by letting the entire house and did

not have to endure the uncomfortableness of making small-talk with strangers. Karen's *Airbnb* is now her house in its entirety, so when they have bookings Karen and her partner move out of their home and into their motorhome which they park on various friends' driveways, always choosing different friends so as not to impinge too much on others' generosity. A couple of times they left their motorhome in the driveway of their house, but Karen notes that this made relations awkward between her and the guests. Sometimes they stay in a local motorhome park, so they are close enough to clean and manage the *Airbnb* rentals and to be on hand if guests need any assistance. She says "it was an interesting summer, particularly since it was so wet, but yeah, but it worked quite well" (Karen, Whitianga).

In order to remove evidence of themselves from their home, Karen and her partner make the following modifications: In the hallway between the living area and the bedrooms, Karen has a large wall of photographs of their children, past holidays and family events. When she has *Airbnb* guests, Karen hangs a large tapa cloth that covers the wall of photographs. She takes care to pin the corners and edges well to hide this photographic record of her family life so that guests are unable to lift the cloth and view the photos.

Karen is keen to show me that she is a good host and caters to her guests' (anticipated) needs. She leaves travel guides and pamphlets of local attractions on the coffee table in the lounge and provides spades for guests to dig the sand at Hot Water Beach – a popular tourist activity. Despite wanting to appear as an approachable and personable host, Karen simultaneously hides evidence of her authentic self from her guests. She has a small storage room off the laundry where she locks away clothing and personal items. She hides the door behind a full-length mirror. Karen also provides a continental breakfast for her guests but locks off her pantry with a padlock, as shown in figure 21, below. The pantry is labelled "private store" to denote an area that is off-limits for guests. Karen's actions demonstrate that she hides as many aspects of her home and belongings that might be a reference point to the fact that real people normally live there.

Figure 21: Karen's lockable pantry

Most hosts limit their own personal social interactions with friends and family in deference to the ideals of being a good host. They do not have friends around when they have guests in and on occasions where they do have family present, hosts' concerns are generally centred around noise and movement. Hosts feel very pressured to minimize noises that might draw attention to their presence. For example, Lizzie makes every effort to shut doors quietly as she goes about her daily routines even though the house is concrete and has good sound-absorption qualities. In a similar vein, Leanne, who rents out two rooms in her

large, old, colonial-era house, says "I sneak around" so as not to bother her guests.

Donna's disavowal of bodily presence goes a step further: Donna does not entertain when guests are in, but also will not go out to socialize with friends when she has guests. She does this so that she is available if her guests need information or help in any way. She says:

> I don't have friends here. I don't provide meals or that kind of thing
> (for friends) if I've got guests in, so that's quite a limitation... at night
> I kind of turn the TV down or don't have it on (Donna, Picton).

Donna's house is a small, historic, two-bedroom cottage with one bathroom. The *Airbnb* room has an external French door, allowing guests to access the space without going through Donna's front door. The *Airbnb* room leads to a small corridor that connects the bathroom and the rest of the house. Donna had a lockable internal door installed in the corridor between the *Airbnb* space and the rest of the house, so that guests have sole access to the bathroom. This leaves her without any toileting and washing/showering facilities. Instead, Donna uses a portable camping toilet which she has set up in her detached garage. She will not shower until guests have gone, resorting to a flannel-wash in the kitchen sink.

Donna is aware of the contradictions she experiences in her effort to be a good host, and so she mitigates her discussion:

> It's not an intrusion, I don't see it as intrusive because it works.

She then admits:

> But yeah, it's an inconvenience. To lose the bathroom, I guess that's
> the main thing, so yeah, there's a loss (Donna, Picton).

Lisl's *Airbnb* is in the master bedroom of her house, which has a ranch slider exterior door that leads through the garden to the road and has its own en-suite bathroom. The room was originally her bedroom, but she has moved into a single room in order to create an *Airbnb* space. Lisl locks the door from the Master bedroom to the rest of the house and therefore has the sole use of the main bathroom and toilet. Despite this, when guests are in residence, she will not flush her own toilet for fear the noise will remind the guests that another human body lives in the space. This example speaks to a more disquieting moment (for the

host), that the sound of a flushing toilet will interrupt the presentation of a fully social self as 'pure value'.

> The first few guests I had it was so weird, it's like there's people moving around in my house! In my bedroom! They are right there. Even going to the toilet, it's like I wonder if they can hear me? (Lisl, Wanaka).

Those whose *Airbnb* space is self-contained, and therefore separated to some degree from the family living spaces, are also notably concerned about noise. For example, Lynn will not let her partner put the television on if she has guests in their downstairs *Airbnb*. Additionally, in summer the couple will not use their back garden for barbeques or entertaining, because the *Airbnb* bathroom backs onto this space. Lynn is afraid that people moving around outside the bathroom will impinge on guests' sense of privacy. Guests' wishes take precedence (as do their ratings) so she would rather limit her social needs than impinge on their visitors.

This disavowal of physical presence is displayed in other ways. Many hosts hide their toiletries away, often in separate containers that they remove from the bathroom area. For example, Julia removes all her toiletries from her bathroom and locks them away in a cupboard after she has used the shared shower. Samantha does the same but goes a step further; she hides a hand-towel in a plastic bag at the rear of her bathroom vanity for her own use. Hiding toiletries represents a disavowal of the body that demonstrates hosts are no longer being their true 'authentic' self but are engaged instead in the performance of value production. Hosts' behaviour is substantially different with paying guests than from having friends or family to stay.

Jenny demonstrates the most altered behaviour. Jenny is in her 60s and lives in a large house on a steep hill. Access to her house is up a steep driveway. To enter the house, one must walk past the garage and past the *Airbnb* which is a large studio attached to the garage. The pathway from her garage to her front door (past the entrance to the *Airbnb* studio) is wide and level. When guests are in, Jenny goes to extraordinary lengths to ensure she remains invisible to her guests. Jenny will not walk past the *Airbnb* space when she is going out and instead has made a pathway through the bush-covered hill, down the steep

section to the roadway. The track is gravel, narrow and winds through trees and scrub. It is about 50 metres long. She will then walk up her driveway (around 50 metres) to the garage to retrieve her car, or alternatively will park her car on the road.

Even though her lounge has net curtains, Jenny will close her lounge drapes when the sun is out so that her movements (in her own private space) are not silhouetted. She does this to hide her presence from guests, so they are not reminded that another human being lives there. Additionally, when guests are in residence, Jenny admits to surveillance, often peeking through the curtains or hiding in the bushes to ensure guests are not stealing fruit off her trees. Jenny's disavowal of her bodily presence creates extreme levels of psychical discomfort for her which become physically evident as she recounts her experiences. Her body language is tense, she finds it difficult to enunciate her feelings, and speaks in halting fashion interspersed with rushes of sentences. This difficulty in giving voice to bodily disavowal is common across the interviews, as hosts try to negotiate the making sense of personal behaviours that, once spoken, seem somehow less logical to them.

The disavowal of the body extends to hosts' families. Despite being very proud of their two grandchildren, one *Airbnb* host couple do not allow their grandchildren to stay overnight. They had this to say:

> Ross: What we don't do *ever*, is have the kids overnight. We feel that when travellers are travelling, people like us who are grandparents, frankly we don't want to go to a hotel or an *Airbnb*, when there are kids running around. That's our number one rule: We don't have the kids, our grandies, overnight.
>
> Stella: Your daughter's fine with that?
>
> Janice: Absolutely. We have to encourage her not to feel bad when she rings.

That Janice must encourage her daughter "not to feel bad when she rings" points to a disruption in familial relationships as a result of engagement with *Airbnb*. The daughter is clearly uncomfortable that her parents are unavailable for grandparenting unless this falls outside of their hosting time and space. These

hosts relate a story of how they manage their grandparenting duties when called on. Their daughter was ill in hospital. Their son-in-law looked after the child after work but would drop the child off in the morning. The grandparents (the *Airbnb* hosts) fed and entertained the child in the kitchen in a highchair "*where guests couldn't see him*" (Ross, Paihia)*.* The impacts on social reproduction are evident: commercial activities take precedence over care-work, such that care-work must be hidden from paying guests.

Similarly, in a disavowal of the nature of her family life, Petra resolves disputes between her children (aged seven and five) outside in the separate garage because she considers it unfair for guests to have to experience argumentative or misbehaving children when they stay in her home. She defends this position;

> I mean, a fight is not something that's planned. You don't want it,
> but it does happen. And actually, it helps sometimes, to say, 'hey…
> come out and let's talk about it. Um yeah, we can do it somewhere
> else till we're all happy (Petra, Whitianga).

Petra's statement reveals a conflict between her daily lived experience of raising young children with all the attendant messy, squabbling situations that arise from children's interactions, and the imperative from *Airbnb* to be an idealized host. Petra has reinterpreted this constant pressure from the platform in such a way that she feels a state of 'collective happiness' is required from them as a family. She is aware of the psychological impacts on her family as a result of commodifying her private space. To mitigate this, Petra pays the children to have good behaviour when the guests are in. She says:

> They [her children] get a certain amount per night, so they have
> good pocket money since starting *Airbnb*. Sometimes, it's not easy
> for them (Petra, Whitianga).

Petra haltingly admits that *Airbnb* is really stressful for her and acknowledges that it is not an ideal situation to raise her children, however she is trying to make ends meet and is unable to do this in the 30 hour per week job that she has. It appears that money is Petra's problem, and money is her solution. Petra's behaviour resonates with the insights of Konings (2015), whose discussion of economy and affect suggests that the complexity of the modern self makes it difficult for subjects to unpack the source of their anxieties. Through a desire to alleviate

stress, the subject turns to that which acts as a source of legitimacy and authority: "…Money, which is almost always a problem and almost always the solution to the problem, iconically representing both lack and saturation" (Konings, 2015, p. 95).

6.3.2   The second disavowal: Disavowal of the other

As discussed, much of the work of running an *Airbnb* involves physical labour associated with cleaning. The first disavowal refers to the host and the hosts' bodies. It frames cleaning as a blight upon the idealised subject-position of host as business entrepreneur. The second disavowal refers to cleaning as an action to remove all traces of the other human bodies that inhabited the space prior to new guests arriving. By all accounts, it is hard, menial labour. Gerard describes the work involved:

> It's hard work! I know! I work down on the wharves part time – it's harder work than working on the wharves! You get down on your hands and knees and you gotta *scrub*. Down at the wharf we're only poking a scanner and putting some wire around the logs. Anybody else will tell you it's women's work, (cleaning an *Airbnb*) but it's bloody hard work. A few more men oughta start doing it. The tiniest little hair in the shower's got to be got out, and you've gotta do it. It happens all the time, you've gotta get the thing out of the bottom and get the hair out (Gerard, Picton).

Gerard is highly focused on removing traces of previous human occupancy. This attention to detail in terms of cleaning is a common experience across all hosts, and hosts are very proud of their standards of cleanliness. Interestingly, it is the male *Airbnb* hosts who speak with obvious pride in their cleaning abilities. The appropriation by men of what has previously been widely received as gendered 'women's work' suggests a gendered element to the labour of *Airbnb*. The actual physical labour of cleaning (a traditionally feminine labour) has become a conspicuous practise linked to the (masculine) subjectivity of the business entrepreneur. This reproduces the activity as a form of cultural capital imbued with elevated status, similar to the ways in which performance cooking (such as barbeques and dinner parties) has become desirable for men through television

celebrity where female chefs have by and large been replaced by males (Bugge, 2003).

Martin is visibly proud of his *Airbnb* cleaning routine. He is animated as he relates that:

> I'm the *specialist* in cleaning. There's a 'post' clean once they've left, and on the day they arrive there's another little routine that Lizzie and I do to get actually organized. And unfortunately, one of the things, because we're in a high wind zone we get a lot of dust, and even though I've just cleaned the room *meticulously*, everything gets covered in a fine dust, so I've gotta do a dust and a vacuum on the day that they arrive. It helps that we each have our own strengths. Lizzie is very good on presentation and making things look fantastic, and decorations and I do basically the cleaning. I do all the bathrooms, the vacuuming, I get my glove and I give it all a wipe (laughs). I do all the toilets (Martin, Whitianga).

A gendered division of labour is evident in Martin's story. Lizzie applies the 'feminine touch', but the important work of cleaning – because it is part of the rating metric, and thus impacts on status – has become a masculine domain.

Peter and his wife have two rooms in their house that are *Airbnb* spaces. Each room has a small en-suite bathroom which he scrupulously cleans every day. Peter explains his routine:

> Then we service their rooms every day to make sure everything's tidy, toilets are clean. Like when they walk out of it, they walk back in like they've never been away, so that takes about an hour. So that's a couple of hours for each room, probably about three and a half hours a day, and I do it all myself, and I'm anally fussy, and I don't mind how long it takes because it's my *job*, you know! When both rooms move out it's everything stripped, everything cleaned to the morsel, everything redone, you know, prepared and all that sort of carry on. It's probably about a four-and-a-half-hour venture, so you know, it takes quite a while (Peter, Whitianga).

This almost fanatical attention to the act of cleaning reveals, also, a spatial contradiction within *Airbnb*. *Airbnb* takes great care to frame the accommodation through the trope of 'home'. The idealized concept of home is where one presumably can relax, be oneself, enact the affective labour of caring for family and friends, and indulge in the messy business of living. Home invokes the idea that human bodies occupy the space, and that the presence of human bodies are evident; a home is 'lived in'. Yet the imperative for *Airbnb* hosts is that every visible trace of previous occupants *as well as the people who live in the home* must be scrupulously expunged, scrubbed clean, and removed. In some cases, hosts such as Peter also go to some lengths to remove bodily traces of even the current guests' own occupation during their stay.

Di also has two rooms available for *Airbnb* rental. One is in the downstairs part of her house and the other is a sleepout room with a small bathroom in her garden. She discusses her average day:

> [I] strip the bed, put the sheets on, change the towels, clean the bath, the toilet, the shower and the kitchen, vacuum, dust, ahh, make sure everything is shipshape…, it depends on how energetic I am (laughs). And then in between, because I iron my sheets, so I've got bloody ironing. That can be a bit of a bug-bear, particularly when you're really busy. You've got people moving out that morning and people coming in that afternoon; all hell breaks loose (Di, Paihia).

What is noteworthy in Di's response is that she does not iron the sheets that she uses for her own personal bed. She applies a *different* standard to her *Airbnb* spaces than she does to her own domestic practices.

Interestingly, some hosts exhibit a paradoxical response to the disavowal of the other's body. This re-presents as a fascination for bodily things. Emblematic of this is Jenny, whose focus on removal of bodily traces reflects back as an intense fascination with people's excesses. Jenny admits that she goes through the guests' trash:

> I'm interested in what they put in the bin – everything! I have compost there, but some people put everything in. Tea bags,

everything, and some people put it all in the bin. Don't they read? They're all different. And also, if I was baking, I'd bring some little cakes, or some jam I'd just made or some fruit from my orchard. Until I'd find the jam was still there, and people don't drink milk anymore, and one time I found the cakes in the bin! It was astounding! "Thank you that's lovely - then throw them in the bin! (Jenny, Wanaka).

6.4   *Airbnb* and biopolitical subjectivities

The framework for this section is drawn from the work of Jodi Dean (2016b) in which the concept of 'the subject' and 'subjectivity' is understood as a problem of individuality. Dean inverts Althusser's claim that ideology hails individuals as subjects into the formula "the subject is interpellated as the individual" (Dean, 2016b, p. 364). What this means is that the concept of the individual is itself a form of enclosure. The term 'enclosure' is understood in Marxist terms of taking what is common and turning it to be in the service of capitalism. Viewed in this way, the individual itself is an imaginary, embedded in socio-political conditions not of its own making, but appropriated as if the desires, affects and capacities that emerge from this exposure are individual in form, so that the generative practices of people are "denuded of their shared sensibilities, reduced to the activities of separate selves" (Dean, 2016b, p. 386). Conditions then, are interpreted as individual preference and circumstance, and contradictions of capital are appropriated as the individual's dream, neurosis or issue.

The following section considers the ways in which the biopolitical turn plays out in the mundane activities of *Airbnb* hosts, creating at least three distinct subjectivities. *Airbnb's* 'dividuation' of subjects (hosts) into sets of data-points produces forms of subjectivity anticipated, but not guaranteed, to be amenable to the 'dataveillance' by which the platform operates. The variability in subjectivities becomes evident in the tasks associated with social reproduction. A set of spatial dynamics emerge in the biopolitical management of self, related to the particular commodification of labour power through the platform, in which liberating and enslaving forces contradict each other.

The typology that follows builds upon the observation that engagement with platform capitalism alters subjectivity. While there are small similarities to Doxey's

'Irridex' model developed in 1975 to track the irritation response of residents to tourism, and to Butler's destination life-cycle model from 1980, the subject-positions identified below do not follow a particular linear time-line, nor follow a sequence of positions, proceeding from one to the next (Faulkner & Tideswell, 1997). Moreover, the typologies in this current contribution point specifically to subjectivity which implies forms of identity, not just emotional reactions.

Even researchers who take a particularly market-focused approach to analysis note this phenomenon. For example, Langley and Leyshon (2016, p. 8) discuss the appearance of users as "networked consumer-entrepreneurs" who are a "kind of digital amalgam of the canny consumer of exchange markets and the entrepreneurial owner of an asset portfolio". In the context of *Airbnb,* hosts are an integrated part of the service that is being sold, with implications for the form subjectivity takes. This research identifies three forms of subjectivity that allow hosts to engage with different effects of participation in the platform. I have termed these subject positions as 'the enthusiastic proselyte', 'the rational engager' and the 'passive melancholic'. Each of these subject positions employ specific material and affective resources to make sense of their engagement with the platform amidst a swathe of biopolitical contradictions.

6.4.1 The enthusiastic proselyte

The ideal-type of the enthusiastic proselyte characterizes those hosts who embrace the notion of entrepreneurship with gusto, avidly following the recommendations of *Airbnb*. These hosts frame themselves as cutting-edge business owners, and willingly sacrifice key aspects of their private lives and spatial practices in deference to the demands of the platform. *Airbnb* positions hosts not as 'users', but as "co-creators of value" (Langley & Leyshon, 2016, p. 7). These authors suggest that *Airbnb* hosts thus appear as a specific type of subjectivity that merges the distinguishing characteristics of consumers and entrepreneurs.

The participants' narratives suggest that the attraction of *Airbnb* goes beyond the desire to be a canny consumer and entrepreneurial owner, however. The vehicle for that movement 'beyond' is an affective element associated with involvement in the platform. The analytical potential of capitalism's affective element is often overlooked in favour of a narrative account in which capitalism appears as a

"regime of cold, abstract calculation that undermines the organic connectedness and diversity of human life" (Konings, 2015, p. 1). Illustrating the presence of that affective element is the case of Lance's involvement in the platform. Lance works in the health industry and decided to do *Airbnb* after he and his partner had purchased a house. The initial motivation for engaging with *Airbnb*, like for many hosts, was financial, but the affective element is clearly displayed in his interview. He is animated and enthusiastic when discussing his engagement with the platform. He says:

> So, this was like 'Oh this is *perfect*!' I would meet all these amazing people who are all *Facebook* friends and we would still stay in touch! (Lance, Wanaka).

Lance frames his engagement in normative terms of friendship, and by doing so minimizes the rationalities of capital in favour of an affective appreciation of social relationships. He actively embraces the *Airbnb* rhetoric of 'sharing' and 'friendship' - notions that within the *Airbnb* framework have displaced their social value and instead been collapsed into a capitalist accumulation logic as 'business goals'. For Lance, *Airbnb*'s rhetoric around making friends and sharing homes provides a logic for the commodification of his family home: 'friends' are constructed along the lines of *Facebook* friends; that is, a digitally constructed connection based on an often-fleeting interaction. Sherry Turkle (2012) describes digital friendships of this kind as the "illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship".

Lance's discussion demonstrates the idea of the subject interpellated as the individual. His engagement is framed as a personal choice rather than one rooted in the socio-economic environment in which he lives. Most hosts interviewed for this current research came to *Airbnb* from a position of financial lack or financial distress. The material circumstances of lack invoke feelings of insecurity and invalidation and as a result hosts look to secure external validation. Speaking to his commitment to making a success of his engagement with *Airbnb*, Lance demonstrates the need for validation by comparing himself to others who do not host:

> Some may not have the nous, to actually grab it by the kahunas so
> to speak. I've always been that type of person. That's from travelling
> the world, doing what I do. I'm not gonna wait for something to come
> to me. I'll always try and initiate and be an innovator (Lance,
> Wanaka).

Lance frames himself as a unique and note-worthy individual, different from others. In other words, his subject-ness is interpellated as an individual. He frames himself as one who stands out from the crowd because of his unique qualities as an initiator, a doer of things. Lance fails to recognize that his 'unique qualities' are borne of the affective connection required by the platform in order to participate. He is an individual in a crowd of individuals, all with similar characteristics and social norms.

For the *Airbnb* proselyte, *Airbnb* becomes the vehicle for validation, even though many hosts realize that *Airbnb* is unable to deliver on its financial promise; surplus-enjoyment in process takes precedence over achievement. Alistair's comments provide insight into this aspect of subjectivity. It is important to him that he is 'known' for his hospitality, and he takes great pride in his ratings and comments from his guests. Alistair keeps a guest book in which he encourages his guests to write comments about their stay. He discusses at length how he makes people feel welcome:

> We want to know who they are. They're *always* welcome. The most
> important part is that we want them to treat it like a home. In that
> respect, the people around the house, we're available to them as
> much as anything else around the house (Alistair, Wanaka).

Alistair rents his room out for anywhere between $69 to $89 per night, depending on the season. Often, the income received barely covers the outgoings. He says:

> I will be honest. Winter was hard. Winter was hard. But you also
> don't wanna go around putting passive aggressive notes on
> everything saying please turn me off! So suddenly we go from a
> $170 to a $600 power bill. It costs money to get the linen, get the
> towels. We supply the tea and coffee, we bake homemade bread
> for them (Alistair, Wanaka).

Certainly, for some hosts this precarity of income provokes feelings of dissatisfaction. However, as Konings (2015) notes, attachment to icons that produce dissatisfaction leads to an intensity of attachment to those very objects, for the securing of external validation. This in turn leads to redoubled efforts to orient one's social surroundings to that same signifier for the alleviation of insecurity. Samantha demonstrates this process. She describes the insecurities of income through *Airbnb,* and is looking for ways to alleviate the anxiety. Her solution is to attach herself more firmly to *Airbnb:*

> I'm *very* disciplined, my friends call me the *Airbnb* Queen! They say "you're fully booked and we've got hardly any!" But you have to do this, this and this, and put a lot of time and effort into it. I'm looking at getting into *Airbnb* consultancy, short term rental consultancy. So, you know, a short-term rental appraisal, kind of thing (Samantha, Wanaka).

Demonstrating the role that affect plays in the reinforcement of attachment (in this case, to *Airbnb)* Samantha goes on to say:

> I love it, and I've got the best job in the world, but sometimes I go to bed, and I realize that my face is hurting from smiling so much. Yeah and I feel like I'm almost on edge (Samantha, Wanaka).

Slavoj Žižek provides an enlightening insight into the processes of attachment that Samantha describes. Žižek calls this the "gain-of-pleasure" which:

> operates through repetition: one misses the goal and one repeats the movement, trying again and again, so that the true aim is no longer the intended goal but the repetitive movement itself of attempting to reach it (Žižek, 2017, p. 9).

A form of enjoyment – surplus enjoyment – is gained through the act of repetition, rather than by attaining the goal. What is important, then, becomes the repetition of the act; the performative self is held intact. The surplus-enjoyment is evident in Samantha's comment about having the "best job in the world" juxtaposed with being "almost on edge" reveals a sense of torsion in her lived environment. Later in the interview Samantha reveals that her partner struggles with having a constant stream of guests through their private space. She explains that she will

stay with her guests performing the hospitality role, but he goes into their bedroom early as he does not enjoy socializing with guests in their lounge. Samantha demotes the needs and wants of her partner and, instead, privileges the needs and wants of her guests in order to ensure she receives good ratings for hospitality. She is aware that herself – consisting of the various parts of her personality, her appearance, her sociality, and her hospitality – is the object of scrutiny and subject to ratings by individuals who are in her home for a short period of time. Consequently, the attention she pays to her guests' needs and wants is intense. It is also a situation that is repeated night after night with ever new sets of guests. Samantha subjugates social reproduction within her own family unit to the aims of the platform. It is not easy for her or her partner:

> My partner gets a bit annoyed; I think. He says "just come to bed, they'll be fine". I say "you don't do your job half arsed"! (Samantha, Wanaka).

Samantha's insistent tone embedded in this quote highlights that she considers her work is a 'real' job. In a neoliberal world, 'real jobs' (as opposed to unpaid /affective labour) have value that places their execution over other priorities, such as the needs, wants and care of others in the domestic sphere. Moreover, Samantha's quote reveals tensions that exist between paid work that is affective labour and paid work that is not. Slippage between affective labour and the relationship to money creates surplus meanings that contribute to tension.

Many of the participants who I categorize as enthusiastic proselytes are looking to expand the scope of their *Airbnb* operations. These hosts tend to be in a higher socio-economic bracket and generally have quality homes with substantial equity. Despite this, their day-to-day finances are precarious, and they anticipate that their engagement with *Airbnb* will address their cashflow issues. These enthusiastic proselytes outline plans for expansion which involve considerable outlay of capital. Dana's *Airbnb* is a high-end converted woolshed on a farm which she rents out at between $200 and $250 per night. She has spent considerable money to convert the woolshed into accommodation and has it furnished with good quality fittings, linen and décor. Running the *Airbnb* gives Dana an opportunity to contribute to the farm finances, which are seasonal and variable. She enjoys the opportunity to demonstrate her hospitality. Dana speaks with

warm affect as she explains "I *like* running the woolshed, I like meeting people and showing them what we do". She enthusiastically shares her plans to expand her *Airbnb* operation beyond the woolshed to a small cabin further up the farm:

> It's a tiny house. It just sleeps two people, a loft bed and a tiny kitchen. We've just bought that and need to do a little bit of work on it first. I sort of thought $100 a night. I have done a little bit of research on it. It depends where the place is located as to what people are charging. We think it will be really popular with hunters, they can step out their back porch and they can go shoot rabbits if they want to (laughs) (Dana, Wanaka).

Dana's *Airbnb* space is separated from her home, and consequently the impacts on caring roles are not as pronounced as other hosts as she does not experience guests in her personal living space. Moreover, her guests tend to be those seeking a quiet, idyllic rural escape. However, Dana feels she needs to mitigate the realities of farm life, in particular the noise impacts from the farm; a difficult task:

> So, on the farm, particularly, I try and make sure there's not much work going on around the woolshed, like if we have to do tractor work, or digger work, or stuff like that. We try and make it work that no one's disturbing them, however it is a working farm (Dana, Wanaka).

Moreover, Dana has teenage children who are unaccustomed to keeping quiet for *Airbnb* guests. She expresses frustration that her teenage children do not respect guests' expectations of a peaceful, quiet rural idyll.

> I am mindful*, definitely*, of the noise transference. So, like the boys with their cars and their bikes; I have to tell them – *constantly* – not to go fast and not to rev their cars when they're coming up the driveway. I am very aware of that (Dana, Wanaka).

Lance, a very enthusiastic proselyte, does not have the luxury of distance from his guests. Lance and his partner host guests in their own home. He works part-time and runs the *Airbnb* and his partner works full time. Lance is very passionate about developing both the accommodation aspect of *Airbnb* and *Airbnb*

Experiences. He has been attending tourism growth workshops, business mentoring programmes and other initiatives in order to establish himself as a legitimate hospitality entrepreneur. Lance wants to be known in the field of hospitality tourism. His partner has a fulltime job which involves dealing with large numbers of people, so she is less tolerant of having guests in her personal space. He acknowledges that for his partner "it's nice to come home and have a bit of a breather". Lance experiences a conflict with the performance of *Airbnb* as a business operation in his personal space. It creates contradictions within his sphere of social reproduction as his partner's needs for privacy and quiet are subjugated to the demands of hosting guests. He has a solution to this problem, and has ideas to convert their car shed into accommodation:

> So, if we do the shed fit-out, we'll do the same thing, but they'll have their own space, their own corner, their own shower, so if they've got a young kid or whatever they'll have their own space (Lance, Wanaka).

Here, Lance positions the anticipated guests' needs for space and privacy ahead of his own or his partner's. The hierarchical structure where guest has more value than host reflects that of the platform, which regularly reinforces this messaging through normative tips and suggestions and underpins the messaging through the *Superhost* metrics.

Jenny and her partner own a quality property in Wanaka. They have, in the past, enjoyed a comfortable income, but their field of work has changed as a result of the digital era, and they no longer earn the level of income they have previously enjoyed. *Airbnb* is seen as a way to ease their cashflow issues. They have plans to build a high-end eco-sleep out for *Airbnb*. She says:

> We own a piece of land on the other side of the road, we've got a little bit of money tucked away and are thinking of building a sleepout, and when the council changes the rules, we'll put a kitchen in. Um, we're flying under the radar at the moment, so don't tell anybody! We have to be quite careful about building the sleepout (Jenny, Wanaka).

Jenny is willing to contravene local laws in order to pursue her engagement with the platform. While she acknowledges her engagement with *Airbnb* has been a

profound experience for her and she has embraced it with enthusiasm, she is also nervous about the future:

> My opinion is something will happen to *Airbnb*, it will implode. We're totally reliant on it (Jenny, Wanaka).

Jenny's fear of precarity on the platform paradoxically causes her to seek ways to engage more deeply with *Airbnb*; she attaches more intensely to the icon. Slavoj Žižek provides an explanation of this phenomenon:

> Separation takes place when the subject takes note of how the big Other is itself inconsistent, purely virtual, barred, deprived of the thing- and fantasy is an attempt to fill out this lack of the Other, not of the subject (Žižek, 2001, p. 216).

The enthusiastic proselytes all seek to 'fill out' *Airbnb as if* the platform is the answer to their own specific, individualized situations, and more specifically, *as if* they are the only hosts who have the skills and abilities to capitalize on the convergence of the platform and tourism. These hosts see themselves as exemplars, a fantasy avatar, and understand *Airbnb* as a legitimate and unique opportunity to rise above their financially precarious state. Enthusiastic proselytes do not understand themselves as constituent parts of a population of hosts, rather they view themselves as unique individual entrepreneurs. Ironically, by doing so, they are performing the quintessential version of a hospitality entrepreneur – the unique individual amongst a population of unique individuals.

6.4.2   The rational engager

The subject-position of the rational engager refers to those hosts who demonstrate that their engagement with *Airbnb* occurs within clearly thought out parameters where the demands of the platform are laid against the needs and wants of their own daily existence. They are often, but not always, motivated by additional income that is seen as providing a layer of comfort to their lives. Like the *Airbnb* proselytes, these hosts frame their engagement as a solely individualized response to their own personalized circumstances, rather than seeing their engagement as situated within a wider socio-political framework. However, this subjectivity frequently 'pushes back' against the demands of the platform in specific ways. Notably, the rational engager accepts the precarity of

the *Airbnb* environment and makes sense of this precarity by reframing financial uncertainty as a type of freedom.

Ray and Trish epitomize the rational engager. They bought their house as an existing Bed and Breakfast accommodation and converted additional rooms into an *Airbnb.* Trish works part-time as a cleaner and Ray works full time in a local trades business. The income-stream through short term visitor accommodation helped them secure the finance to buy the property as their incomes through their conventional employment were not sufficient to secure a mortgage over a house in the area. Despite this, the couple struggle to make ends meet. Trish tells me:

> I didn't really take account of winter (laughs). The down time…I didn't think about people not coming to the beach in winter, so I thought it would be sort of all year round but obviously not. We've had to put money into it (Trish, Whitianga).

The couple moved from another region and use their *Airbnb* as a source of social connection:

> Trish: We always ask them if they want to join us for a drink, and they say yes or no, and the ones that don't we know that they just want to be by themselves. But the majority of them do like to mingle coz they wanna know about Whitianga, what beaches to go to, and the stories.

> Ray: We have had people here at Christmas. We actually done a Christmas breakfast for them and that sort of thing. You know, we didn't advertise it, and they weren't expecting anything, and we gave it to them, you know sometimes we go a little over the top.

> Trish: If we've got a barbeque going, we'll invite them to that.

> Ray: If we have someone staying here for a week, we'll definitely have a barbeque for them. Right, it's just a little thing above, you know.

Ray and Trish need the money from *Airbnb* to supplement their lifestyle, spending the income on rates and maintenance. Rather than frame the seasonality of occupancy as an issue for them, they apply a rationalised lens to the conditions

of *Airbnb* hosting and frame the winter off-season as an advantage rather than a period of precarious income:

> And there's the flip side, we could be flat out over the summer, [but)]
>
> we can just shut up and go away in the winter (Ray, Whitianga).

If, as the Oxford Dictionary suggests, the common notion of freedom is "The power of self-determination attributed to the will: the quality of being independent of fate or necessity" ("Freedom," 2018) then precarity reframed as freedom is a conceptually incoherent contradiction within platform capitalism. Every host interviewed for this research indicated that their engagement with *Airbnb* is financially motivated – not to earn a substantial living, but with much humbler goals to make ends meet.

Airbnb actively manipulates this contradiction to enclose its users. The freedom to choose one's own schedule is positioned as one of the key advantages to *Airbnb* hosting: Figure 22 demonstrates this framing:

Host whenever you want

There's no minimum or mandatory time you have to host, so you can block off dates when you're not available.

You can also set rules about your availability, including:

· Min/max nights a guest can stay
· How far in the future guests can book
· Advance notice needed before a booking

Figure 22: Host whenever you want

"Control how you host" marketing:(*Airbnb*, 2018).

The discourse employed by *Airbnb* constructs hosts as commanders of their own futures and masters of their own time. This obfuscates the realities imposed by socio-economic climates in which choice is removed from hosts by virtue of the gritty necessities of material life. Hosts cannot consistently 'work' in *Airbnb* during tourism's off-seasons because the tourists are not there to occupy their *Airbnb* business. By the dual tools of exhorting hosts to offer lower prices (suggesting

that better 'management' of their *Airbnb* will result in more bookings) and positing the inability to earn money off the platform during seasonal downturns as an advantage, *Airbnb* successfully individualizes the socio-political horizon of its subjects and wields its biopolitical power through discourses reminiscent of neoliberal atomization, thus masking socio-economic and socio-political realities.

In effect, *Airbnb* employs metaphors which propose a meaning of one thing in terms of another, thus contorting the object being described. Konings (2015, p. 57) explains this process of metaphorization in which icons "concentrate the meaning of metaphors but do not manifest the history of their emergence or the pragmatics of their operation". Under these conditions, hosts make sense of their economic engagement with *Airbnb* based on an individualized framework of survival.

Emblematic of this is the conversation I had with Petra. I was interested to know if Petra chose *Airbnb* because it suits her lifestyle, or if she would choose different types of work if such opportunities were available. I asked Petra if she would do *Airbnb* if there was similar paid work around. She said:

> No! No! Of course not! Because it does have a big impact on the family and you always have to be prepared, you're always in this inner-stress thing. I'm happy to have people, that's not the point, but to have them always everywhere where I am as well… And the kids, long term they can't share a room for ever, they're getting older and I can't expect this from them. It's stressful, it's stressful. (Petra, Whitianga).

Petra's response indicates that *Airbnb*'s impact on domestic processes of social reproduction is untenable in the long term. She engages with *Airbnb* because of the precarity of income that she experiences, not through lifestyle choice.

Many hosts manage the precarity of work through *Airbnb* by supplementing with other types of work. Leanne rents out two rooms in her house through *Airbnb* during the summer months only because the rate she can get does not cover the cost of her winter power bills:

> I thought, nah it's not worth it, I can't be bothered if it's only $50, I thrash my dryer and washing machine. In the winter it's not worth it

> I decided, for $50. In the summer, where you can get everything dry
> on the line and you're not running the heat pump – different story,
> but otherwise, nah (Leanne, Picton).

To supplement her *Airbnb* income, Leanne looks for work during the winter months, picking up contracts where she can. The precarious nature of work in a seasonal tourist town means that she is open to any type of labour, and has worked in vineyards, at a salmon farm, and as a labourer.

Chris' story reflects this same theme. Chris has lived in Wanaka for around 30 years. He rents out a room in his house and has recently built a self-contained two-bedroom unit attached to the rear of his house, which he also rents out on *Airbnb*. Chris has not applied for the code of compliance (CoC) documentation from the council because this will attract a local tax in the form of development contributions. He says he intends to apply for the CoC at some time in the future but is vague about this:

> Our household rates have gone up 25% because we're doing
> *Airbnb.* And when I get signoff for the apartment, I have to pay a
> development contribution, but that's thousands. Thousands and
> thousands (Chris, Wanaka).

Chris picks up work wherever he can to mitigate the financial precarity that is common to his area. He explains:

> I also do other things. I work in film jobs, I do driving jobs, the next
> few weeks I'm looking after school groups at Cardrona [a local ski
> field], so I do lots of other little things (Chris, Wanaka).

As a rational engager, Chris looks for as many opportunities as he can to maximize his monetary return within the parameters of his daily life. Chris' neighbours reside overseas for most of the year, so he is planning to approach them to offer to manage their house as an *Airbnb* for a small fee. Approaching his neighbour is one potential source of revenue, another is management of pricing. Chris knows that tourism in Wanaka is growing significantly and is hoping to take advantage of the visitor accommodation shortage:

> There's a lot of different products especially around Wanaka where
> you can have $5-600 dollars a night if you wanna go to that level of

> the market or you can have a $50 share room somewhere. I don't really wanna be in that backpacker market, and I'm certainly not gonna be in the high-end market, I just try and be in the market that I'm in. Sometimes in that really quiet time in May and June, you might wanna drop your prices – you will. I did, drop my prices last year. There's a certain level you don't wanna go below because it costs you money to do it, and – everybody's got their level and I've got mine (Chris, Wanaka).

Chris takes a pragmatic approach to his pricing. He is prepared to do a certain amount for *Airbnb* but is also aware of the level at which he is not prepared to engage. This extends to the impact on his personal living. He explains that:

> You've got to sort of not let it run your life. We've got a note there that we stick on the door; "Hey the house is open, your room's through there, we're out at a barbeque". We're just not gonna be there every single time to meet every single person (Chris, Wanaka).

Di is a woman in her 60s. She owns her own home and earns what she terms "a good income" as a business consultant. This is contract work but she has a relatively steady income throughout the year. Her contract work drops off around Christmas and into the new year, so during this period she hosts through *Airbnb*. Di makes it clear that she engages with *Airbnb* on her terms:

> It's one thing I find irritating about *Airbnb* is that they're constantly on your back about 'people in your area with *Airbnb*'s are getting so many more bookings than you are, you should adjust your price'. That's alright for people who are doing it as a business, but for people like me I don't want the hassle of running an *Airbnb* when I've got a tender due, thank you, so I'm not gonna go mucking around. Nah I'm quite happy, and it gives me plenty of time to do maintenance (Di, Paihia).

Di enjoys the additional income from *Airbnb* but is not wholly reliant on it. This is emblematic of rational engagers; this subject position allows certain freedoms because income from *Airbnb* provides some margin of comfort, allowing for flexibility around hosting times. Rational engagers are able to make adjustments

around hosting to mitigate the more corrosive effects of capitalism on social reproduction; these hosts are able to block out periods for family visits, or during really busy times when the emotional labour input required from *Airbnb* becomes overwhelming.

6.4.3 The passive melancholic

Lazzarato (2014, p. 9) asserts that in late capitalism the imperative to commodify one's self manifests in every individual being a 'business'. This can create a collision in which forces of individualism and autonomy create widespread depression and impoverishment of existence. This assertion provides a background to consider the subjectivity that emerges out of engagement with platform capitalism through *Airbnb* that I have termed 'passive melancholic'. Melancholy invokes notions of loss; not only of the lost object, but also of the social world in which that object functions (Butler, 1997). The melancholic retains a sort of deflected relationship to that which is lost; moreover, this loss becomes disavowed.

> [It] cannot be fully denied, but neither does it appear in a way that can directly be affirmed. The "plaints" of the melancholic are invariably misdirected, yet in misdirection resides a nascent political text. The prohibition on grief registers as a loss of speech for its addressee (Butler, 1997, p. 184).

Hosts who display this subjectivity have a kind of resigned passivity to both their engagement with *Airbnb* and their chances of being financially successful. In other words, this subjectivity appears stuck between engagement and disengagement and reliant on vague notions of changing circumstances to bring their engagement with *Airbnb* to an end. Frequently, passive melancholics have had a longer period of engagement with *Airbnb,* and thus have had more exposure to the contradictions wrought by platform capitalism.

Lynda is a woman in her early 70s who lives alone and decided to sell her family home which she had owned for some 40 years. However, Lynda discovered that the extensive renovations she and her husband had commissioned had never achieved code of compliance with the local council, and so she found herself unable to sell the property. The remedial works cost in excess of $40,000 and so

to mitigate this cost Lynda turned to *Airbnb*. When asked about the money she earns from *Airbnb* Lynda explains:

> I've just put it back in the bank to pay the rates and the insurances and the taxes. So, it's an expensive house to run, I've got to be very careful. I want *Airbnb* to work for me to pay some of these debts, because I'm on the pension (Lynda, Paihia).

Her engagement is framed in negative terms as a necessity or a means to an end. Once her house sells, she will not be an *Airbnb* host again:

> No, no I think I've had enough! This is a tie! You know 3 o'clock in the afternoon you've got to hang around, check people in, and I'm sick of that. Especially in the summer when I love to go to the beach. No, no I'd never consider that (Lynda, Paihia).

Karen is also hoping to sell her property. She became a host with *Airbnb* in 2012, prior to the company opening its New Zealand office. Her motivation was financial as there were no opportunities to continue her professional career in a small regional town. Her husband's income is sporadic. She originally viewed *Airbnb* as an opportunity to earn some extra money and was emboldened by the knowledge that Whitianga is a tourist destination. Karen's house is a small cottage in a desirable central location. For the first few years Karen and her husband let out one room in their home but eventually they decided that hosting guests in their own private sphere was too demanding, and so now they move out of their home entirely and into a motor home which they park at friends' places, in order to give their guests privacy. Despite the inconvenience, Karen knows that an entire house can achieve a higher rental than a room in a shared house. She is also aware of the increase in competition, saying:

> I'm very mindful that we're surrounded by holiday apartments and I try to compete with them. Yeah and I know that the prices over there are much less, especially this time of the year (Karen, Whitianga).

Karen's partner receives a government superannuation, and she herself will shortly become eligible. She hopes that they will be able to sell their house for a premium price in the near future. This, combined with their pensions, will enable them to have more financial security. Karen describes her life as 'on hold'; she

clearly would like to stop hosting as it is the cause of considerable disruption to her life, but is unable to move forward unless her financial position eases – either through the sale of her house or the attainment of eligibility for the government superannuation payment.

Donna also exhibits characteristics of the passive melancholic. She moved back to Aotearoa New Zealand after an extended period overseas where she earned a comfortable salary. On her return she needed to supplement her income while she re-established herself and turned to *Airbnb* to do so. Donna is aware that *Airbnb* impacts on her life in unexpected ways. She experiences *Airbnb* as "a real intrusion" yet later in the interview reframes this as "an inconvenience" while also acknowledging resentment that *Airbnb* intrudes on her personal space and her social relationships. Donna has been involved with *Airbnb* for six years, starting before *Airbnb* officially opened their New Zealand operation in 2015. She says:

> I'm offering the room now at less than I was six years ago because there's a lot more competition. For me to get guests at all now – I'm fully booked all the time, but when I put the price I had been at the year before, I didn't get any bookings at all. So, I dropped the price down. It's kind of weird that five years later actually my income on *Airbnb* is probably half what it was the first year (Donna, Picton).

Donna's interview reveals the material effects of capitalist expansion. Capital itself, (through digital immaterial labour and uncoupled from money commodities such as the previously held metallic moneys of gold and silver) is able to achieve accumulation seemingly without limit (Harvey, 2015). The population on which this expansion is predicated, those performing the labour, receive increasingly less benefit from their participation, leading to dissatisfaction, anger and resentment. Based on a fetish of imagination and illusion, "discontent bubbles just beneath the surface of capitalist society" (Harvey, 2015, p. 243). When asked about why she thinks *Airbnb* has become so popular Donna offers an insightful analysis:

> My sense is that it's a real comment [on society]. Just the fact that *Airbnb* has taken off. Partly it's because it's meeting a need, but it

really is because we are on the bones of our bums as Kiwis (Donna, Picton).

Donna has identified, here, some of the conditions under which *Airbnb* has managed to achieve its exponential growth. It has leveraged conditions of intense upscaling of tourism set against conditions of growing precarity and has found a new market to exploit by situating it in the private sphere of the home. As Nancy Fraser (2016, p. 101) notes capitalism is "free-riding on the life-world". However, Donna predicts that unbounded growth will be the downfall of *Airbnb*:

> I think they're going to be hoisted by their own petard, I actually do. Because there will all be so many people [hosting through *Airbnb*]. I often am bombarded by emails now from *Airbnb* saying if you drop your tariff by $30 a night, you would have 40% more bookings. I have more bookings than I can cope with. I just tell them to go away, I just ignore it (Donna, Picton).

As Bauman (2007) points out, exponential growth becomes bounded at some point by oversupply, leading to ever-increased competition for the opportunity to stand out from the crowd. Ultimately this results in a psychological state of suspension akin to melancholy; that is, an existential withdrawal from a field in response to excess. Melancholy appears when individuals are "caught in-between the enthusiasm of involvement and the despair of alienation" (Munro, 2005, p. 276).

Donna exemplifies this state of melancholy and notes that *Airbnb* is:

> a victim of its own success. I think we've had our halcyon days. It has been great for me to get established, but I'm hoping that I won't be doing it for too many more years. I'm kind of hoping that will be the case. I'll just ease off out of it (Donna, Picton).

Donna's response typifies that of the passive melancholic: she wants to finish her engagement with *Airbnb* but is unable to clearly see any way to achieve this, given her material and financial conditions. By her own account, Donna is stuck. Passive melancholics, (more so than rational engagers and enthusiastic proselytes), generate more surplus-meaning through their discontentment, such that they are more likely to seek a state beyond that of a normatively framed

'value' where everything is measured in terms of potential income. Passive melancholics appear to be 'marking time', waiting for some circumstance to change that will enable them to move forward.

6.5   Conclusion

The digital platform of *Airbnb* is firmly located in the phenomenon of biopolitical administration. Biopolitics itself is an incomplete project, but this very incompleteness provides an opportunity to extend the inquiry into biopolitics through different forms of analysis. Under conditions of biopolitics, the subject is constructed as a potentiality that is modulated by a combination of affectively appropriated labour-power and diffuse gaze. Through such means, the herding characteristics of *Airbnb* are revealed in the ways that *Airbnb* shapes hosts into a population that paradoxically consists of separated individuals, rather than any sense of a singular collective.

The embodied aspects of biopolitics shape behaviours around hosts' bodies and guests' bodies and cast a particular focus on the labour invested by hosts to expunge traces of living bodies. Such a precise focus creates contradictions between platform ideals of cleanliness, hospitality standard, guest expectations and the lived realities of domestic life. The contradictions that materialize through routines of surplus-enjoyment in the service of the platform and the production of surplus-meanings of home, self and social relations culminate in at least three specific subject-positions, which enable hosts to deploy specific conceptual and material tools to mitigate the contradictions thrown up by engagement with platform capitalism.

Biopolitics operates as "a gradual permeation of life with self-referentiality, as a result of which there remains eventually no anchoring point to ground and fix any empirical gaze" (Kordela, 2013). The difficulties that hosts face in making sense of their engagement with *Airbnb* emerge exactly at this point; the constitutive gap between knowing and being. Underneath the performativity of hosts (which is sustained by the biopolitical management deployed by *Airbnb* and processes of surplus-enjoyment*)* lies an ontological anxiety, revealed by the too-muchness of talk or alternatively, by the things cannot be talked about. As Alenka Zupančič eloquently states:

> All that I have left at this point is a pretence, a mask. The subject
> hinges on this mask, and not perhaps the other way around. Under
> the mask there is nothing but sheer ontological anxiety (Alenka
> Zupančič, 2017, p. 56).

If the performativity of being a hospitality entrepreneur is driven by biopolitics, it is such a mask. It therefore cannot be spoken about, because to do so reveals a contradiction that exposes an ontological gap in being.

7. Chapter Seven: Temporality, spatiality and *Airbnb*

7.1 Introduction: Time and space

This chapter introduces the twin notions of time and space to explain the contradictions that arise out of the commodification of these constructs in ways that benefit the capitalist accumulation goals which underpin *Airbnb* operations. In order to do this, I open a discussion about the origins and theoretical interpretations of the terms. Next, I consider the imperative of 'now' and the ways in which time and space are experienced under conditions of digital capitalism, in order to analyse the material processes of performativity by which time and space move. I then proceed to a detailed discussion of the intensification of spatiality that encompasses notions of home and community. The discussion of spatiality concludes with consideration of the community impacts of *Airbnb* on housing and on the social reproductive impacts of *Airbnb* in personal spaces. The discussion changes register at this point to consider temporality. In this section, the digitization of time and its effects on labour are unpacked. Next, the experience of synchronic time is considered, followed by a discussion on how this movement allows *Airbnb* to weaponize time in new ways. Finally, I discuss the ways in which temporality suspends hosts in ways that obscure possible alternatives, and thus is deployed as a tool of enclosure by the platform.

7.1.1 Origins, interpretations and propositions

As Durkheim noted, (and before him – more famously – Kant), time and space are social constructs. Regardless, they operate as objective facts and are thus implicated in the processes of social reproduction (Harvey, 1990a, 1990b). However, the normalization of time as an organizing force can be seen as culturally and socially embedded, and therefore not universal across human experience. Social practices of time and space have implications for social differentiation. Put another way, these constructs cannot be understood as devoid of social action, nor separated out from power relations (Harvey, 1990b).

Contemporary life is predicated on a 24-hour conceptualization of time as delivered through the notion of a clock. The clock in this sense is an icon by which individuals attach understanding of societal norms. In other words, attachment to the notion of time as represented by a clock signifies the norms and rules by

which contemporary society operates and differentiates. Time and social norms interact to prescribe what behaviours are acceptable within one's own milieu. The coupling of time and norms takes many diverse expressions, such as dictating what type of clothing to wear according to the time of the day or night, when socializing is acceptable and when it is not, and whether activities undertaken are considered to be wasted time or productive time.

Because conformity to time as represented by the icon of the clock shapes social norms, those whose behaviours do not comply are socially stratified. This type of temporal differentiation is codified in language and commonly used aphorisms reflect this. 'A time and a place for everything', 'time is money', 'don't be late' and concepts of 'work time' as opposed to 'family time' are examples of the ways in which temporal differentiation is commonly accepted as normal and natural, and as guiding principles of daily life. Additionally, adherence to time-keeping is valued in capitalist society, and is indeed an organizing principle in the construction of workers as tools of capitalism, through their abstracted labour power (Harvey, 2015). Social reproductive practices also reflect this specialization (Fraser, 2016). A time-disciplined population can thus be conceptualized as reproducing the type of worker needed for capitalist modes of production.

Similarly, notions of space are socially constructed and vary across contexts (Cain, Kahu, & Shaw, 2017). A good example of this is the concept of individualized and privatised property rights that reflects the norms of the dominant capitalist society but are not common across indigenous societies. Private property rights exist in contrast to the idea of commons, (for example, collective ownership models such as Māori land), and to usufructuary practices such as nomadic grazing rights where a group of people exercise use-rights over land. The dispersed and differentiated ideas of time and space across cultures and contexts suggest that alterations to the ideas and experience of time and space necessarily impact the social norms of the people within those contexts.

Conceptualizations of time and space have been subjected to much theoretical debate. David Harvey (1990b) argues that capitalism contracts time and space. In this theory, time is reduced, and social relationships become intensified.

Harvey's analysis was formulated in 1990 before the advent of platform capitalism and the development of Web 2.0. Since that time, digital capitalism has become more deeply imbricated into capitalist life in such a way that the boundaries and extremities of digital and 'real' life are blurred. The findings of this research suggest that the blurring of digital and real life under conditions of digital capital accentuates the *intensification* of time and space rather than the contraction of such. I reiterate; time and space are *intensified* as an effect of digital technology rather than contracted. Whilst these two terminologies have similar meanings, the notion of intensity more closely illuminates the effects of digital technology. In other words, intensification is the primary experience of time and space under conditions of platform capitalism. Compression incorporates ideas of intensification, but this takes place in smaller and smaller spaces. I argue that digital technologies intensify experiences of space and time by becoming larger, more pressing, and more visible.

Time and space, while often paired together, are drawn from two entirely different realms. As Fredric Jameson suggests, time is situated in the sphere of interiority, which is also inhabited by logic, subjectivity, epistemology and notions of the private. By contrast, space is situated in the realm of exteriority and inhabits cities, people, nature and globalization (Jameson, 2003). However, slippage occurs between the two as human perception is conditioned by both, such that each deforms the other when viewed from the other's standpoint. This is especially true in the context of global digital circulation, in which "nonchronological and nontemporal patterns of immediacies come into being" (Jameson, 2003, p. 707). Rather than read this as a state of absence that could be read from the prefix 'non', I aim to redirect the focus of inquiry to place temporal and spatial considerations at the centre. By this I mean to draw attention to the hyper-presence (or intensified presence) of time and space, rather than the obliteration or masking of concepts of space and temporality. As a consequence of this focus on the intensification of time and space, this chapter settles on the notion of 'immediacies' as a conceptual resource by which to engage with the states of surplus-meaning that follow for the subjects of platform capitalism.

7.1.2 The imperative of 'now': Time and space as immediacies

The digital intensification of time and space results in life being experienced as a series of pressing 'nows'. Put another way, contemporary life has fractured into a proliferation of singularities. As Fredric Jameson (2015, p. 105) describes, singularities are "explosive presents of time". Jameson's idea of the singularity, however, is not the idea of a universal singularity, or the idea of a Singularity: capital S. In Jameson's construction, singularity is "reduced to a purely individual affair" (Jameson, 2015, p. 126). In this sense, it is more helpful to think of singularit*ies,* as a plurality of ever new, immediate events with no future and no discernible past. Philosophically, the singularity emerges as an essence which affirms a norm from which deviance can be measured. Under contemporary conditions, the weakening of ties between historicity and future have been subsumed within the notion of a singular present: 'the event'. This has both psychical and embodied impacts. The body is thus reduced to an actor with mutable affect and weakening ties to a previously bourgeois culture, playing out the demands of capitalism (Jameson, 2015).

One consequence of this is that the idea of 'The Big Project' has faded. The idea of The Big Project indicates an exteriorized notion of a configuring telos, one in which an end goal is purposefully figured and thus worked toward through intentional actions. Instead the singularity emerges as an endless series of immediate projects of 'now'. A consequence of this shift is that it takes away the possibility of planning or thinking of longer-term options. In its place is an intense focus on immediacies (rather than an end–goal), which is accompanied by the implicit but counter-intuitive understanding that this 'now' is not forever. A consequence of a seemingly never-ending set of nows as events is that the field is overwritten by a state of surplus-meaning. This state of surplus-meaning further engenders a state of rapid obsolescence in the life-spans of cultural products in which the imperative to stay current, in focus, talked about, known, and relevant is of the most pressing order.

7.2 Intensification of space through digital technologies

The intensification of time and space does not occur in a vacuum; instead this process is deeply rooted in specific socio-technological conditions (Harvey, 1990b). O Riain (2006, p. 510), writing about the digital knowledge economy

embedded in capitalism, claims it is "a structure of exploitation and corrosive competition". The findings from this current research also support this claim, with regards to the effects of platform capitalism on the reproduction of daily social life amongst its service providers.

It is now commonplace to view digital subjectivity as traversing the digital and non-digital worlds in ways that blur boundaries between the two (Bauman, 2007; Bauman & Lyon, 2013; P. Campbell, 2018; Dean, 2002, 2005). This is a reasonable argument, however the scope of this can be and should be extended beyond the boundaries of the digital. To this end, I want to draw attention to the notion that while *digital* selves are an amalgam of both online and offline discourses, the *performative* self that is enacted in real time is also an assemblage of online and offline influences that shape subject positions in specific ways. While this may be self-evident in the statement that digital subjectivity traverses both the online and offline spaces, by shifting the focus to clearly include the performative self I am acknowledging that for many individuals, perceptions of self are deeply rooted in the offline world, even though the shaping of the various subject positions they adopt is profoundly – although often unknowingly – influenced by digital circulation. In other words, the digital self is performative and overlays both digital and non-digital spaces.

7.2.1 Home as a space in motion

Space functions as a handy veil that makes it "possible for us not to see, and to keep our distance from, something the reality of which is nevertheless closing in on us" (Alenka Zupančič, 2019b, p. 107). *Airbnb* spaces are such veils, where the performance of 'home' under the metrics of *Airbnb* becomes instead a market-focused performance. In order for a market to function smoothly, calculative practices are employed in order to render the commodity able to be valued against similar commodities (Harvey, 2010, 2015). The same is true for homes listed on *Airbnb*; they are compared, scrutinised and ranked. In order for homes to appear as commodities they must lose the meaning of their material concreteness and take on the abstract quality of imagery and representation. Abstract spaces are sites where:

> the tendency to homogenization exercises its pressure and its repression with the means at its disposal: a semantic void abolishes former meanings (Lefebvre, 1992, p. 307).

Hosts experience *Airbnb* in their own homes in a very material spatial sense. That is, the physical spaces dedicated to the *Airbnb* operation become enlarged and intensified through engagement with the platform. *Airbnb* actively employs rhetoric to suggest that, if not utilized as an *Airbnb* space, these spaces are under-utilized and therefore wasteful (Quattrone, Prosperio, Quercia, L, & Musolesi, 2016; Slee, 2015; Wang & Nicolau, 2017; Xie & Mao, 2017). Under conditions of platform capitalism, what was previously either 'spare', 'under-utilized' or excess space has instead become the space of prominence within the home. The intended effect of *Airbnb*'s rhetoric is to transform the meaning of private and personal space to that of a resource or an asset (*Is Airbnb doing it's bit?*, 2017). Resources and assets have value in a capitalized world. *Airbnb* actively recruits notions of home as assets that have value also as repositories of authenticity and localness; these are characteristics able to be mined for monetary gain (Roelofsen, 2018). The implication of *Airbnb*'s rhetoric is that a socially aware person would not 'waste' such a 'resource' and would instead use it 'sustainably' by commodifying the home. This conceptual reframing of home as a resource with commodified value results in significant shifts in the way in which the trope of 'home' is experienced.

For the hosts, the *Airbnb* space becomes immediately transformed upon engagement with the platform. The physicality of *Airbnb*'s presence is reflected in the language that hosts use to discuss their space. It is no longer 'their' spare room or sleepout, it is the *Airbnb* room or sleepout. This is a subtle but important shift in meaning that separates the space out from other parts of the home in ways that imbue the space with additional meaning. In other words, the space is physically and metaphorically experienced as somehow enlarged from its previous iteration. This shift in perception moves the base of authority from the host to *Airbnb*. Authorship also shifts; demonstrated by the attention *Airbnb* pays to ensuring hosts present space according to the platform's ideals.

Airbnb frequently publishes advice for improving one's *Airbnb* space. The messaging is reinforced by examples of noteworthy hosts (exemplary hospitality

entreneurs) and their homes. Additionally, celebrity experts are called upon to reinforce *Airbnb*'s messaging. Figure 23 below is sourced from a press release on the *Airbnb* website featuring American interior designer Bobby Berk. It covers numerous pointers to "help hosts take their homes and hospitality to the next level to earn more".
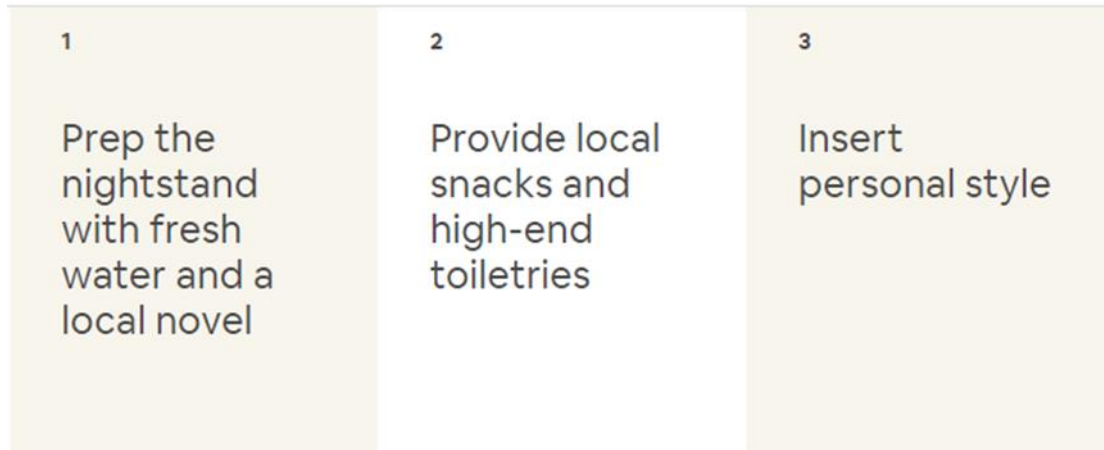
1	2	3
Prep the nightstand with fresh water and a local novel	Provide local snacks and high-end toiletries	Insert personal style

Figure 23: Design tips

("Bobby Berk and *Airbnb* Plus reveal easy design tips," 2018).

Included in this advice are guidelines that nudge hosts towards the acceptable version of style; for example, the article provides "three tips to make your small space look bigger" and "three tips to make your home feel homier". Arguably, the exhortation to insert personal style is a foil. *Airbnb* has no interest in hosts displaying their own personal styles which may conflict with *Airbnb*'s sense of acceptable standards. Instead, an *Airbnb* 'Americanized' version of acceptable aesthetics guides hosts to meaning and content.

Because of this shift in spatial perception, the physicality of *Airbnb* spaces has been elevated to the premier position of importance within the schema of the entire household. The area designated '*Airbnb*' space now demands the most labour power (in terms of digital labour, cleaning and preparation), the most monetary input (in terms of renovations, maintenance and upkeep), the most consumption (in terms of décor and consumable items of replenishment such as towels, linen, soaps, tea, coffee, breakfast foods) and the most focus (in terms of affective connections such as pride in one's home, and pride in one's business venture).

One very particular feature of the data collection phase settles on space and my realization that the *Airbnb* spaces I was shown by the participants were starkly different to the hosts' own lived in/private spaces. This difference was both material and affective and represents the intensification of space under conditions of platform capitalism. On an affective level, hosts were very particularly concerned to demonstrate their pride and commitment to their *Airbnb* space. They spent considerable time showing me their *Airbnb*, pointing out special features or additions that they had incorporated since instituting it as *Airbnb*. Those that did not take me through their *Airbnb* space had guests in residence and therefore were unable to do so. Invariably, these hosts showed me their spaces digitally, through their listing page on the *Airbnb* website. In all instances, the *Airbnb* space is visibly more luxurious, uncluttered and well-presented than the rest of the house.

The dominance that the *Airbnb* space has over other spaces in the house is illuminated by Janice and Ross, whose house is more like a quasi-motel rather than a home. Janice and Ross are a middle-aged couple who rent out three rooms in their four-bedroom house. One of these rooms was originally the Master bedroom with a spacious en-suite bathroom. Janice and Ross have relinquished this as their private space in favour of turning it into an *Airbnb* space and have instead relocated their bedroom to a smaller one. In the other two rooms they have installed small en-suite bathrooms in what were previously double wardrobes. The couple are now considering moving their bedroom to an even smaller room that is a lean-to construction off the side of their home office, so that they are "out of the way" of guests and can offer the fourth bedroom as an *Airbnb* guest room. Their lounge area is for guests' use, and Janice and Ross tend not to use the lounge themselves if guests are around, other than to make sure guests' needs are met. Scattered around the lounge are strategically placed travel books and magazines and a display stand with some brochures of local tour operators, contributing to the 'feel' of a professional motel.

The private sphere of this couple has steadily been reduced as *Airbnb*'s presence has been amplified, so that in terms of physical space their bedroom and to a lesser extent, their office are their only truly 'private' spaces. Although Janice recounts that when guests check in they always invite them into their office to put

a pin into a world map indicating the guest's home country (Figure 24, below). "It makes them feel special" Janice tells me. Janice's world map acts as a type of trophy-board, of which more will be said later.

Figure 24: Pinboard demonstrating guests' home countries

The couple's kitchen, although ostensibly off-limits for guests, is the site of intense *Airbnb*-related labour for Janice and Ross. It has a wide servery connecting it to the dining room where guests can sit and chat while the couple prepare food. Janice explains:

> Janice: They can have a continental breakfast in their room. Most of the time they come out here and sit around the table, we've got a kitchen with a servery through. We do a semi cooked breakfast now.
>
> Stella: You mentioned dinner; do you do dinners?
>
> Janice: Yeah, it's additional and we do everything from pizzas down by the river with a bottle of wine through to three course, semi gourmet meals. Fancier stuff with fancy ingredients; duck confit, that sort of thing.

Ross and Janice's discussion points to a very specific intensification of space as a result of engagement with the platform. The intensification of space is coupled with an intensification of labour. Both the physical and metaphorical presence of

Airbnb has encroached on their private space to such an extent that their home – and the relationships that take place within it – are now substantially commodified to meet the demands of hosting. This home is emblematic of the ways in which processes of social reproduction have been displaced by the introduction of digital capitalism.

Sometimes the intensification of space creates conflict with others who reside within the home. Alistair is in a flatting situation. He describes the operation of the *Airbnb* as his "baby" and he assumes most of the responsibility for the work. However, hosting guests in one's house necessarily involves contact with guests regardless of whose responsibility the *Airbnb* is, and this clearly impacts on the daily experience of life of all residents in the home. Alistair's *Airbnb* space is a sleepout. He explains:

> We don't have a functioning kitchen (in the *Airbnb* space). We didn't think people were going to (cook). But pretty much all Asians will cook. We've got a tiny little oven cooker, and a gas camping hob, we let people use that if they have to. They turn up with a frozen chicken! Daniel (Alistair's flatmate) is really anal about it and he hates people cooking in the kitchen, and I have a fundamental disability to say no to people (Alistair, Wanaka).

Home consists of both materialities and immaterialities that impact upon the lived experience of space (Baxter & Brickell, 2014). Alistair's flatmate, Daniel, experiences intensification of both the material and the immaterial. The material imposition of strangers in his kitchen intensifies the physical experience of space in such a way that the physicality of other bodies in his kitchen, which Daniel constructs as private space, intensifies his immaterial, affective response. Daniel experiences this as an invasion and an intrusion into his construction of home. Alistair, as the *Airbnb* host, is more affectively connected to the subject position of hospitality entrepreneur, and therefore for him, notions of access and hospitality take precedence over notions of privacy.

Samantha's partner also experiences the negative aspects of intensification of space in ways that create tension between the couple. He likes to play music and have a few drinks on Fridays. She says:

> I was constantly saying to my partner, turn the music down! If they
> (guests) don't join in, and they're in the bedroom, it can get really
> awkward. It's too stressful (Samantha, Wanaka).

Samantha attempts to mitigate this rupture in the social reproduction of their home and has agreed to block out Fridays to help keep the peace in the family home. However, she notes that the intensification of space through *Airbnb* still brings tensions.

> My partner is not the talker that I am. Guests will come in and then
> notice that he's there, he'll be on the couch watching TV...
> Sometimes he gets annoyed if he goes to have a shower and
> there's someone in there, or he goes to brush his teeth before bed,
> and he has to wait half an hour to use the bathroom (Samantha,
> Wanaka).

Samantha's partner clearly feels the negative effects of the intensification of space that occurs with engagement with the *Airbnb* platform. This results in a significant change of his behaviour. His ontological security is threatened by the imposition of a steady stream of revolving guests through his private spaces, to such an extent that his private sphere has materially retreated to include only his bedroom. Samantha tells me that he often retreats to his bedroom until he hears that guests have gone to bed. Samantha views her partner's discomfort as a collateral casualty of commodifying oneself in order to be a hospitality entrepreneur and thus justifies it on these grounds. It is, she tells me by way of explanation, "her job".

For Samantha, the subject position of a hospitality entrepreneur shapes her world-view, so that the logics of capitalism become the means by which value is defined, and by which all other interactions are measured. This world-view stands in clear contrast to the notions of value held by Samantha's partner, whose value of privacy in the space called home is considered as an inalienable right. Therefore, the imposition of other bodies into his private space represents a psychic rupture for him that causes him to retreat in material and affective ways. This couple are emblematic of the process of 'unmaking home'. Unmaking home is a process in which material and imaginary aspects of home are altered either "unintentionally or deliberately, temporarily or permanently, divested, damaged

or even destroyed" (Baxter & Brickell, 2014, p. 134). This viewpoint acknowledges home-making as contingent and fluid, and therefore the process of un-making is necessarily a part of change. In this couple's experience of un-making home, it is not so much the materiality of home that is being unmade, it is instead the imaginary, involving affect and surplus-meanings.

7.2.2 "It was that kind of serious": Displacement and rental crises

The impact of *Airbnb* extends beyond the space considerations of the hosts' private spaces and into the wider community. A combination of a bloated tourist economy and the subsequent squeeze on housing availability represents an intensification of space both internal and external to the home. In other words, the rapid conversion of rental properties into short term *Airbnb* spaces concurrent with tourist growth presents a serious concern for the social reproduction of communities. Daily life is disrupted in numerous ways. One way in which this plays out is that local businesses find it difficult to source staff because employees are unable to find or afford rentals. Lisl, who hosts in Wanaka, says "The guy from Mitre 10 (a local hardware business) said he has lost six or seven key staff members". When I question the reasons behind the staff loss, she specifically attributes it to the rental squeeze in her town, with *Airbnb* as a major contributing factor to the rental shortage. Similarly, Elka also discusses the impacts of housing insecurity:

> A couple were out the other day wanting to know about accommodation, winter accommodation. He's working at the ski field at Treble Cone and she's working at New World (a supermarket), and they're renting a place in town, but they said it's just going up so much. They've only got a room in the house with 10 others, so they're starting to look for alternate accommodation. The ski fields have trouble getting accommodation for their workers. The supermarket, it's a small supermarket. It's like it's New Year's Eve every day of the week, and they say "We can't get workers" (Elka, Wanaka)

Derek takes up this narrative:

> They can't get enough staff. They can't! Even like the supermarket
> here, one of their excuses and it's probably believable, is the reason
> they don't expand is that it's too hard getting staff (Derek, Wanaka).

Evidence from other countries suggests that *Airbnb* disrupts the rental market by a process where previously long-term rentals are being converted to *Airbnb* (Alexander, 2018; Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018). Gurran and Phibbs (2017) estimate that around half of Sydney's long-term rentals have transferred into *Airbnb* spaces.

Wachsmuth and Weisler (2018, p. 1153) make the succinct observation that "the only necessary step for converting a long-term rental to a short-term rental is to remove the existing tenant". This makes it particularly easy for people to flip their rental or additional space into an *Airbnb* space without incurring major costs, thus making it unavailable for long term residents. Janice speaks to this process:

> (Local) people are looking for a rental, a cheap rental, not a stand-
> alone house, a one or two bedroom, not a flash place. They used to
> be able to find them here in Paihia. Not anymore. People are going
> "hell I can make more money out of doing *Airbnb* for six months of
> the year or 3 months of the year", [rather] than having a low rental
> [return] on a small rental that doesn't have all the whistles and
> bangs. A small oven, a two-burner hob, you know, perfect for *Airbnb*
> (Janice, Paihia).

This is not to suggest that all *Airbnb*s have evicted long-term tenants. The attrition rate of rentals is also due in part to long-term tenancies not being re-advertised when tenants vacate. As mentioned, the relative ease with which homeowners can convert their space into *Airbnb*-ready rentals lowers the barriers that were traditionally in place (Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018). These traditional barriers consist mostly of renovation costs, local government compliance and mortgage costs. The absence of significant legislation surrounding *Airbnb* relaxes the regulatory gaze from authorities, meaning home-owners are able to easily convert space into short-stay accommodation without attracting attention. This is true even when there are local by-laws in place to regulate short term accommodation providers, because local councils typically do not have the staff available to ensure compliance (Flahive, 2018).

The widespread nature of avoidance of compliance has been noted by commentators (Flahive, 2018; Lee, 2016). A number of hosts interviewed for this research also indicate that they know of contraventions that occur to bylaws, tenancy laws or avoidance of tax obligations as a result of engagement with *Airbnb*. For example, Ray and Trish are irritated that they comply with tax and regulations, but other hosts avoid their obligations:

> There is, it appears a few that are illegal in this town though - Quite a few. We're not impressed about that actually. Because we are paying the fees to be an Airbnb, Trish had to get the healthy certificate etcetera, and there's a lot of costs. We had to make sure our dishwasher and everything was up to the health standard and all that, and these other people aren't doing it (Ray, Whitianga).

> I've got three friends that are doing it (Airbnb) and I know for sure they're not paying tax (Trish, Whitianga).

The reluctance of residents to comply with their obligations under tax and local body regulations can be understood as a reframing of the meanings of space. Because *Airbnb* as a platform is a digital entity, hosts consider that their own *Airbnb* are also not grounded in a geo-spatial context, and therefore should be exempt from locally applied costs. In other words, hosts believe themselves to be participating in a global business and therefore their operations should be above or exempt from *local* rules.

In some areas, as local government wrestles with the impacts of *Airbnb*, legislation is now being enacted to mitigate the more extreme effects of a bloated *Airbnb* market. This is met with resistance, however, from *Airbnb* hosts. One host in Wanaka (whom I will not use a pseudonym for to protect his identity) discusses his resistance to council-imposed rates increases for *Airbnb* hosts:

> If you're renting it for more than 28 days a year then your rates will increase by around 30%. It's significant! Our rates here are like $2500, so 30% of that's gonna be like 700 bucks. So, they (Queenstown Lakes District Council) emailed out around 800 properties. They basically did a huge data gathering exercise where they went through *bookabach, holiday houses, Airbnb*…They

mined their database and basically put out letters to everyone saying "we've noticed that your property is listed as a short-term accommodation provider and you need to register. I'm not. (Host, Wanaka).

By and large, hosts feel that any tax or compliance measures levied against them are unfair and punitive. This standpoint is sustained by the rhetoric of *Airbnb,* which draws on discourses of democracy, sustainability, and on the 'positive impact' of its operations in locations across the world. The following quote sourced from *Airbnb* 'Citizen' demonstrates this rhetoric:

> The figures released today show that home sharing on *Airbnb* is having a positive impact on the great city of Prague and can actually be a solution to the upcoming challenges the city is facing. We want to work together with local policy makers on smart home sharing policies – based on facts – which ensure that regular inhabitants can continue to make extra income; travellers can continue to belong anywhere; and cities can continue to enjoy the benefits of healthy and sustainable tourism ("The positive impact of *Airbnb* in Prague," 2018).

Framing the issue in terms of sustainability and positive impact of *Airbnb* detaches realities of housing shortages and homelessness from the context of *Airbnb* operations. The *Airbnb* rhetoric attributes these issues to external political forces and to broader socio-cultural conditions. Thus, the spatially generated social effects of *Airbnb* as embedded within specific geo-physical locations are negated, leading to the widely held belief among hosts that any attempts to tax or regulate their operations is manifestly unfair.

Ironically, despite their resistance to taxation and the introduction of compliance requirements by regulatory authorities, hosts from all research sites acknowledge the displacement of workers as an observable effect of the rapid upscaling of *Airbnb*. Worker displacement has knock-on effects throughout a community as businesses struggle to find workers, and families find themselves in precarious housing, or even homeless. This creates a *moral dilemma* for hosts. Some hosts

make sense of this through a neoliberal standpoint and blame the homeless or displaced for their own circumstance. Derek opines that:

> Most of them, you know, they don't contribute to society. Most of them are just on the bones of their bum, these people, and living from day to day. Yeah, it's not like they're spending money and contributing (Derek, Wanaka).

Derek's neoliberal worldview informs his thinking as he clearly attributes the material conditions of the homeless and the displaced as faults that reside within the individual rather than as situated within a wider structural and socio-political framework. Derek's point of view represents one extreme position within the views canvassed from the participants. Other hosts deflect discussions on worker displacement and homelessness by suggesting that tourist areas have always posed difficulties for the securing of rentals. Reflecting these sentiments, Krissie attributes the housing insecurity to a nationwide problem:

> There is a rental problem all over New Zealand now, unless you stay 200 kilometres out in the wop wops. Everywhere where you've got the sea, you've got the tourists, you've got a shortage of rentals. So that has a really big effect on people who come to work in these areas. I feel sorry for them actually, because if they do get somewhere to live, it's expensive (Krissie, Paihia).

Elka and Derek have seasonal work managing a camping site and holiday park. The holiday park has some accommodation that is let through *Airbnb*, but also has tent and caravan sites. The couple acknowledge that housing for seasonal workers as well as permanent workers is at crisis point. Elka discusses the unavailability of accommodation:

> The alternative is either they're in a caravan or a gypsy wagon thing or whatever. Quite a few of them are even sleeping in their cars (Elka, Wanaka).

I was interested to find out who were being displaced, to understand whether these were people travelling on extended tourist or working visas, transient workers or residents. I asked where the displaced people worked:

> Elka: The tourist sites, cafes. Because they can't get service people. [The town is] really reliant on the transient worker.

> Derek: Not all of them [are transient], that's what I'm meaning. One of them has got, god knows how, an apprenticeship as an electrician. Another one I know is a plasterer.

Hosts' comments reflect those of newspaper commentaries that consider the community effects of *Airbnb* on rental availability (Cropp, 2017; Nugent, 2017). The introduction of *Airbnb* to an area has been demonstrated to impact rents resulting in an intensified market and an overall increase in rental prices (Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018). By and large, hosts are aware of this impact. Below is a selection of comments that hosts make about housing availability:

> Lisl: It's not good for the rental market for sure. Already Wanaka's housing market is really tight. If you wanted to move here and find a rental, forget it. Yep. Forget it, really tight.

> Lynda: There's no rental accommodation in Paihia for these workers. It's a big problem! Because people are doing *Airbnb*. And finding it easier.

Generally, hosts tend to frame their engagement as an individualized response to their own circumstances, and by doing so, avoid the ethical implications of their business activity. Chris, in defending his choice to operate an *Airbnb,* says "I don't think we're hurting anyone by doing it".

Other hosts, such as Lynn, acknowledge the moral dilemma. She says:

> I feel some sense of – not guilt – but some responsibility for the fact that what we are doing is actually impacting on people's ability to live in Whitianga and it just hadn't occurred to me. But I can completely see it and I realize that I'm contributing to the problem by being selfish (Lynn, Whitianga).

Subsequent to interviewing Lynn, she contacted me via email in October 2018, about a year and half after I first interviewed her. Since our first interview, where she occupied the subject-position of the enthusiastic proselyte, Lynn has now shifted closer to that of a passive melancholic. Lynn is reassessing her engagement with *Airbnb* and is now considering taking in a long-term boarder.

She cites as reasons for the change, the labour involved, the contradictions it has thrown up with regards to relations of care and affection in her home, and the effects upon the community as a consequence of the lack of housing for locals. Consideration of community-related social effects plays on the minds of some hosts and emerges as an unresolvable contradiction within the operations of the platform. The only viable alternative to resolving this contradiction is retreat from the platform itself, as Lynn is considering.

Some hosts have already transitioned from host to ex-host. Bob lives in Paihia and has recently returned his *Airbnb* back to a long-term rental. Bob works in the tourism industry and notices that many tourist businesses struggle to find workers as a result of a tightened rental market. This knowledge helped Bob assess the ethics of continuing as an *Airbnb* host. He says "local people appeared to be displaced through the *Airbnb* situation". When I questioned him on how he came to this conclusion, Bob explained what happened when he listed his *Airbnb* space for long-term rent:

> We had an advert on *Facebook* which ran for about four hours, and in that time, we had multiple responses. We had viewings in which approximately 20 people came, so we shut it off pretty much straight away, we had enough people to go by. Mostly, they had children, and were all struggling to find a property, and so it's well known around here that there's a rental crisis, a crisis for rentals. They're going up significantly, because of the demand, and a lot of people, the people that we gave the property to in the end, were making a decision whether they were gonna leave town or not, so it was *that* kind of serious for them (Bob, Paihia).

Bob's response indicates that residents in even quite small towns like Paihia are experiencing grave housing insecurity. The rental squeeze is in part attributed to the proliferation of *Airbnb*, which is concurrent with the experience of other cities and towns across the world (Flahive, 2018; Lee, 2016; Poole, 2018; Vanderbilt, 2017). This resonates with the perceptions of the *Airbnb* hosts I interviewed. Lizzie's comment exemplifies this: "Every second person I talk to is thinking about doing *Airbnb*. Everyone I talk to".

7.2.3 Shifting notions of 'private'

A widely acknowledged impediment to the course of action taken by Bob, and that being considered by Lynn, is the impact of long-term tenancies on social and emotional labour, as well as concerns around legal obligations related to tenancies. Structural concerns relate to difficulties that landlords encounter with the Tenancies Act, and difficulties associated with the eviction of problematic tenants, such as those who cause damage. As Bob notes, problems congeal around regulatory compliance:

> Because, with *Airbnb* you don't need tenancy agreements, so you're never bound by a tenant you can't get rid of who's destroying the place (Bob, Paihia).

Another structural issue arises from the financial ease associated with the operation of *Airbnb* compared to formalized tenancies. *Airbnb* collects the money on behalf of the host, retains its percentage, and passes the remaining money to the host. There is obviously a clear financial advantage to *Airbnb* in doing this, as they have access to (and collect interest on) millions of transactions that are forward booked before having to pay the balance of the transaction to hosts. From the hosts' perspectives, having *Airbnb* collect and handle money prior to the guest staying is perceived as an advantage because formal tenancies and other forms of vacation rentals require the landlord to collect rents, which can create tensions. Dealing with money on a face-to-face basis is experienced by people as an uncomfortable form of interaction. In the context of commonly-held notions of hospitality, the exchange of money runs contrary to the gift-exchange genealogy associated with the extension of hospitality (Zelizer, 2005). By taking away the need to deal with money directly with clients, *Airbnb* provides hosts with an easy solution, which helps in the differentiation of advantages associated with hosting and those associated with long-term tenanting. Ray, a host in Whitianga, is emblematic of a typical response to the question of money transactions with tenants. When asked what issues arise through long-term tenancy transactions he says bluntly, "Paying their bloody money".

Samantha provides insight into the differentiation between long-term tenants and short-term visitors through the experience of other bodies in spatial areas. Framed through the lens of time, Samantha explains that a long-term flat mate is

substantially different for her social experience than having a revolving flow of new people occupy her space. She says:

> Maybe it's because I'm a control freak – I can't ask a flat mate to go away during the day! But with short term they're not here. Occasionally we get someone who hangs around but it's a bit weird, and I try and get them out because it's my time between 10am and 4pm (Samantha, Wanaka).

Samantha's reflections reveal a tendency to structure notions of privacy not in terms of limitations imposed on one's social interactions, but perversely through an expansion (intensification) of social interactions. This is an interesting paradox, and one that provides a number of avenues to consider. Because of the performativity of *Airbnb* hosting, the repeated performance of one's self to a revolving door of new people who occupy one's private space is experienced as having *less* impact on privacy than having to expend emotional energy in sharing one's space on a more or less permanent basis with a tenant. This affective element provides a lens for understanding the paradox of privacy experienced through multiple exposure.

7.2.4 Privacy through multiplicity

Intensification of space is also implicated in the continual flow of bodies through that space. Through this type of intensification, the contradictory ideas of privacy and exposure are intertwined with the singular and the multiple in complex ways. The notion of being an individual is necessarily delineated by separation; that is, by being *apart* from other bodies. However, it is also constitutive of being *a part of* other bodies. It is simultaneously singular and multiple. That is,

> the more complex a body, the more relations it will have with other bodies, and the more its identity will be compatible with a great many *different entities* (Williams, 2010, pp. 250, italics as per original).

Drawing from Spinoza, Caroline Williams (2010, p. 246) argues that affect is both an externalization and internalization of the self, with a consequence that the body becomes "itself an elemental site of transformation and production". A drive for self-preservation appears to be at work through the body as a site of affect (conatus), involving a pursuit of psychic equilibrium within an ongoing state of

becoming or regeneration. Affective connection to guests (however tenuous) enables hosts to *make sense of their engagement* with *Airbnb* in ways that tie hosts more firmly to commodification of the self through the private space of home. The affective tension between meanings of the self/home contrast against meanings of entrepreneurship and business. Similarly, conflicting meanings of privacy, hospitality, home and personal space create a movement in which the internalizing and externalizing impacts of affect are exposed; affect folds back on the individual and contributes to its own subjection.

Placing this argument into the idea that frames hosts as commoditized subjects and given that the body retains traces of interactions with others that hail it into being, the individual is constructed as being effectively the same as the many. In this way, the host identifies with the guest more closely than might occur with regard to the more deeply connected and temporally longer relation of landlord /tenant. They do so because of the affective reinforcement that retroactively occurs because of their conatus as a hospitality entrepreneur. Both tenuous and overt links to the many elemental threads of subjectivity are enforced and reinforced by this unconscious coupling with the trope of the guest.

The *notion* or the *potentiality* of making friends forms a more durable connection than the actual enactment of friendship. It is this potentiality that is of interest to digital capital; Alenka Zupančič is instructive in this regard:

> Within the capitalist economy (and its form of value), proximity is not, say, the neighbourhood, but the (now global) *market*: it is there that our most intimate and precious possession (our labor power as *value*, our value as embodied in the products of our labor) mingles shamelessly with other people's intimate possessions and values, is compared to them, competes with them, gets exchanged for them. This is not an immediate bodily proximity, but rather the proximity of our value, of our surplus-value (Alenka Zupančič, 2019b, pp. 101, italics as per original).

By and large, hosts infer that their guests – sourced from the global market – have become 'friends', at least on some level. However, these friendships are constructed in a digital sense. Temporal continuation of friendship becomes a

potentiality through the exchange of email addresses with the promise of 'staying in touch' but the instances of this actually eventuating remain few and far between. Moreover, guests reframed as 'friends' become a valuable resource (as a measure of hosting prowess, a repository of ratings, and evidence of successful hospitality entrepreneurship). Space, then, is also reframed as a conceptual resource: it is a place to establish an affective connection to one's labour and a resource for sense-making.

Hosts use notions of friendship to reinforce ideas of proximity – not to others as *people* – but to others as forms of value. This value is expressed affectively. Below is a selection of comments evidencing an affective identification with guests.

> I love people (Julia).
>
> It's about being Kiwis and also, it's our social life too (Trish).
>
> Here, we have absolute interactions with our guests (Janice).
>
> I like meeting people and showing them what we do (Dana).
>
> I've got an incredible bunch of guests that have stayed with me and have got along so well (Di).

One host, Donna, who is most clearly aligned with the subject position of the passive melancholic, expresses her doubt as to the veracity of friendships formed through *Airbnb*. Drawing from her long experience as an *Airbnb* host she says:

> Do people make long term connections? I talked to someone down the street who would not have engaged with international people at all. There is a genuine exchange of learning about Italy or whatever, but I don't think that it lasts, they're not deep relationships (Donna).

Donna is questioning the durability of relationships through *Airbnb,* and more; whether such social interactions as enacted through the platform can even be categorized as friendships or relationships. She understands that enduring relationships develop over time. The example she draws of her neighbour (from the excerpt above) who would not have engaged with international people, evidences the short-term nature of host-guest relations. Donna's sense of disenchantment corresponds with findings of other research which suggests that

social connections decline as hosts become disenchanted with the platform (Parigi & State, 2014; Schor & Attwood-Charles, 2017).

Time and space become important justifications for hosts in other ways. In order to justify their engagement with *Airbnb* in light of known issues with tenancies, housing and homelessness, hosts use performative discourse to justify their decisions. Across the interviews in this current research the affective connection with guests is contrasted with a negative vignette of having a long-term tenant, as a justification for the intensification of space. Alistair recounts that having a long-term tenant impacts directly on his sense of space. One person constantly in his private space of home is constructed as more problematic than many people constantly in his private space. He says it is "nice to meet people, but nice to know they're moving on".

The superficiality of *Airbnb*-related sociality can be understood as an interplay of emotional labour and spatiality. Arlie von Hochschild notes that estrangement from one's labour is reconstructed as 'free choice' in contemporary society. She observes that "commodification…produces such externalities (uncounted costs), except that they occur inside, through costs in emotional labour of trying to avoid or live through estrangement" (Hochschild, 2011, p. 32). For *Airbnb* hosts, performing friendship through the role of host paradoxically enables hosts to live through estrangement by the counterbalancing of their emotional labour as a performative act. Because hosts are acting, they can successfully detach from the intensity of strangers occupying and intensifying their space. As capitalism becomes ever more deeply imbedded in intimate life, the performance of friendship through platform capitalist organizations such as *Airbnb*, rather than the investment of self in longer term relationships through practices such as tenanting, provides a way of "regulating capital from the inside" (Hochschild, 2011, p. 31).

7.3 Time

7.3.1 Digital time intensification

> The necessary tendency of capital is therefore *circulation without*
> *circulation time* … *Circulation time* is that part of capital which may
> be regarded as the time it takes to perform its specific motion as

> capital, as distinct from production time, in which it reproduces itself;
> and in which it lives… as capital-in-process, creative capital,
> sucking its living soul out of labour (Marx, 1993, as cited in Kordela,
> 2006, pp. 139, italics as per original).

In view of Marx's claims regarding capital's tendency to achieve circulation without circulation time, digital technologies are critical to the successful operations of platform capitalism. They make circulation happen within an intensified frame. Digital technologies are widely credited with lifting space and time constraints (Schwanen & Kwan, 2008). Moreover, digital technologies have fostered the intensification of capitalist activities on a global scale due to their ability to circumvent traditional modes of operation that placed restrictions on time and space mobility (O Riain, 2006).

The interface of the *Airbnb* platform enables a mostly seamless transfer of information to all hosts. Via this interface, *Airbnb* make explicit that immediate attendance to booking requests is a requirement of the platform. 'Response time' – referring to how quickly a host responds to booking requests and other queries from guests – is one of the metrics of the rating system, and it is also one of the key metrics that qualify the service providers for *Superhost* status. To facilitate *Airbnb*'s ability to mobilize hosts, *Airbnb* have developed a phone app that has the effect of reaching hosts at any time of the day or night and in any location. Prior to the development of this app, hosts could only be reached when they were logged onto their computers. With the addition of a smart phone app, the instantaneous transfer of information creates a hyper-intensification of time. The pressure to perform as an idealized hospitality entrepreneur means that hosts are constantly attuned to the *Airbnb* phone app which alerts hosts when listings or enquires are made. Jenny explains the effect of this:

> *Airbnb*'s got a special little musical ring, so I know a booking when
> I hear it, and I'm pleased, I'm *always* pleased. Sometimes it rings
> in the night and I'm so keen to provide a service, at two in the
> morning I will get up and make my reply. I'm *really* swift (Jenny,
> Wanaka).

Jenny is noticeably animated when she conveys this information to me. The level of affective connection with the digital app is evident in her embodied retelling of

the event. Assigning a specific ringtone to her phone for the *Airbnb* notifications indicates a conditioning process such that this sound, reminiscent of Pavlov's dogs, evokes a special response from Jenny: she is "*always* pleased". Jenny's response demonstrates the way in which the intensification of time has been accelerated through digital technology, such that she is always available to attend to *Airbnb*, even in the middle of the night. Jenny is not alone in this response. Many hosts recount that they check the app frequently, in case they have missed a notification from *Airbnb*. Alistair explains:

> the actual contact point is really easy because it's all on smart phones, on apps. So, basically at the moment the message arrives, we're very fast to confirm. That's the nature of our business. We're all in the hospitality business so we don't leave people waiting (Alistair, Wanaka).

Alistair recounts his behaviour in the frame of a hospitality entrepreneur. Hospitality entrepreneurs do not "leave people waiting". The power of the interaction resides with the guest, whose demands are met instantaneously. Meanwhile, Alistair's role is to serve, which he does so with considerable pride. The conditioning of hosts through temporality is achieved through three different imperatives. Firstly, host are afraid of missing out on a booking, because to do so reflects badly on their efficiency as a host. Secondly, hosts fear negative ratings and so respond quickly to ensure they get rated highly on this scale. Good ratings also reflect their hospitality prowess in ways that are publicly displayed. Achievement of good ratings encourages an affective connection to the work. Thirdly, hosts fear sanctions from the platform which can affect the public display of their hosting ability through lower rating metrics. Good hosting behaviour contributes to earning the *Superhost* badge which, as a public display of their hospitality skills, affectively connects to one's cultural capital in a digital arena.

7.3.2 Time and labour

Intensification of time plays out in other, more material ways. The imperative to be an idealized hospitality entrepreneur reveals itself in the labour hosts undertake to demonstrate their hospitality prowess. Without exception, this transmutes into labour time. To demonstrate the material ways that intensification of time translates to an intensification of labour I draw from an interview

conducted with a couple in Paihia who have three rooms available for *Airbnb*. This couple are intensely aware of the rise in competition in their area and invest additional labour, time and resources into making their guests' stays memorable – thus hoping to receive five-star ratings. As demonstrated earlier, high ratings translate into more consistent bookings.

Janice and Paul describe a typical evening to me, noting their desire to be hospitable and the (labour) time this involves. They offer a set menu for dinner, which they email to all guests every morning via a pdf file. The menu has a number of high-end culinary choices, such as confit of duck, roast lamb and a steamed mussel dish featuring locally sourced seafood. Because of the time needed to prepare food coupled with the other demands of hosting, they offer one meal choice per night.

> We still want to be able to interact with guests one at a time, and if we had two or three items going, we couldn't do it – I'd be cooking the confit and he'd be doing the lamb, so it wouldn't work. Whereas doing it the way we do it, there's only the plating up where we're both involved. One of us can be chatting and passing a glass of wine while the other is cooking (Janice, Paihia).

Janice's description of their labour shows how the imperative to be an idealized hospitality subject translates into a metrics of both care and labour but intensifies their experience of time. Their decision to offer just one meal choice allows them to complete separate tasks; one person cooks while the other performs emotional labour. This also allows a solution to the problem of the indivisibility of the corporeal human. The combination of the skills of two separate people fulfil the singularized role of the hospitality entrepreneur. This enables two people to complete the tasks in a timely manner (tasks that inevitably become too much for one person to successfully manage over an extended period of time). Moreover, these hosts utilize digital technologies to bolster their incorporeal presence through digital messages, such as communication of menu choices through email. By this functional splitting, the couple achieve the digital appearance of a seamless, singular hospitality subject. This is a management of the contradiction of time that being a 'hospitality entrepreneur' throws up. The appearance of continuous hospitality, unachievable by the singular corporeal human body, is

achieved through merging tasks across two bodies and across digital and non-digital components of self.

The intensification of time as a result of digitization creates challenges that can only be met through an intensification of labour and of systems to make hosts' *Airbnb* operation more efficient. In the following extract, Ross discusses how the division of labour into separate tasks that take place in separate spatial zones enables them to gain an advantage on their *Airbnb* neighbours. This is posited as a justification for the additional work they perform in providing dinner meals to their guests. In this discussion, Ross normalizes the end of their working day extending into the night. While this may seem a reasonable amount of time to be working in an accommodation business, it is also important to note that both Janice and Ross have other jobs. Ross has a permanent full-time job and Janice works part-time.

> It took us quite a while to work it out. In fact, there's an *Airbnb* down the road and they stopped doing meals, because they weren't getting to bed till after 11.30 at night. We can do a three-course meal for eight people and re-set the table for breakfast in the morning and we consider we're working overtime after 10 o'clock (Ross, Paihia).

Hosts make sense of the labour time they expend in running their *Airbnb* by adopting the platform rhetoric and by reframing the role of *Airbnb* host in terms of passive income (an income earned without labour input). Despite *Airbnb*'s rhetoric, being a host does not produce a passive income because it involves substantial amounts of labour. The act of reframing passive income as 'income earned without labour input' to 'income derived from intensified labour input into a private space' is common amongst the participants. Passivity has been recast as *time.* This is specifically the time one spends in one's own home, which traditionally is time spent *not* earning money. Therefore, hosting is recast as passive because one is leveraging time that is otherwise considered wasted under conditions of digital capitalism. In this reformulated sense, wasted time is passive because it is not earning money.

Evidence from hosts indicate that the constant demands on time that emanate from the platform are experienced affectively as stressful moments. Petra describes her family routines when she has guests arriving:

> I bring them [her children] to school, I go to work, I often work longer than school, and I have to organise them somehow and in between in my half an hour break I often race home, walk the dog, and quickly get something done for the *Airbnb* guests who come almost at the same time as I come home and then I notice the washing wasn't really dry in the morning and I need to get this quickly done, and that's sometimes, arghh, hard work (sighs). Sometimes I feel it's a race through life, and this is long-term not do-able (Petra, Whitianga).

One important way in which *Airbnb* ensures focus on the platform is through the requirement for *Airbnb* hosts to construct content for the platform's use. Digital labour is a hidden form of labour for a number of reasons. It is conducted during so-called 'free-time', it has no formalized support structures such as trade union representations, and it is socially coerced by its presentation as a social use-value (C. Fuchs, 2013). Additionally, digital labour has a "double character" of use-values because on one hand, users create use-value for themselves through public visibility but on the other, they create use-value for capital by creating data that is able to be mined (C. Fuchs, 2013).

In the case of *Airbnb,* digital activity occurs in 'non-contact' time with guests (or, in other words, 'wasted' time). This includes prior to guests' arrival, after guests' departure, general maintenance of their listing page, time spent rating guests and attending to queries from potential future guests, and time spent refreshing photos and descriptions of the *Airbnb* space, facilities and services. This type of labour is considered non-productive labour in the corporate world. Digital subjects are conditioned into absorbing time through cyber means; *Facebook, google*, browsing news sites, *instagram* and *linkedIn* updates, *Twitter* activity and so forth. As Dean (2002); Harvey (2015) and others have noted, platform capitalism mobilises its users (already conditioned to digital absorption) to create their own content for public display, the products of which then passes into the private ownership of the platform. Through this process, *Airbnb* profits from the use of

digital material created by hosts and constructs opportunities for the extraction of monopoly rents from resources they do not own.

Meanwhile the onus for the creation and maintenance of one's digital profile falls squarely on the *Airbnb* hosts. The importance of maintaining one's profile (and the implicit understanding that failing to do so has dire consequences) ensures hosts stay in a state of anxiety and thus remain attuned to the demands of the platform. The creation and maintenance of images, text and other web data produced by *Airbnb* hosts absorbs what otherwise would be 'free time'. This 'free time' is time in which family, personal and social relationships might otherwise be conducted, and therefore the imposition of tasks associated with *Airbnb* into this space can disrupt opportunities for social connection with others.

Alistair is aware that response time is a metric on which he is judged by *Airbnb* and by guests, so he ensures that he is always available to attend to *Airbnb* matters. He says:

> While we're sitting down for dinner, a message goes, and I go SHIT!
> And out we go (Alistair, Wanaka).

Alistair experiences this as a state of anxiety, but other hosts' affective response is one of exhaustion. Jenny, who is scrupulous about her digital communications and the maintenance of her profile, admits "I have got into the jaded state" (Jenny, Wanaka).

In response to the affective states that hosts can find themselves in as a consequence of attempting to meet the demands of the platform, many hosts look for ways to manage the contradiction that emerges between temporal demands and the demands of recreating domestic social relationships. Bob explains that the interruptions to his family life were becoming too intrusive, with guests requiring assistance at any hour of the day and night:

> Yeah it was definitely fairly stressful at times, 10 o'clock at night there'd be a phone call. You know, there was a 'hum' [from an appliance] that needed to be resolved, people lock themselves out, that sort of thing! We also tried to create a bit of a filter between us and them. Because we lived next door to them, we didn't want them

> just coming over whenever they felt like. But you know, we found
> the whole thing a bloody hassle (Bob, Paihia).

Bob has since left the platform.

7.3.3 Synchronic time

> Past and future alike have dissolved into a perpetual now leaving
> us imprisoned in a moment without links backwards or forwards
> (Malm, 2018, p. 1).

Human ecologist Andreas Malm (2018) sketches a view of time as obliterated by technology in which the individual is separated from nature, from society and from the self. The continual overlay of images in the digital world reflect back on the individual such that roles become ever-repeating without any material substance. Along a similar line, the structuring of time within the operations of platform capitalism operates as a series of continuous synchronic blocks of time, rather than a diachronic progression. In other words, time occurs as a series of 'nows' rather than a diachronic structure of past, present and future. Indeed, critical theorist Kiarina Kordela (2006) suggests that the history of capitalism itself can only be conceived as such, with each synchronic block having its own formal logic, but nevertheless, and despite discrete stages and contingent differences between blocks, they are "all manifestations of the same formal structure" (Kordela, 2006, p. 550).

As demonstrated, a pathology of attachment to *Airbnb,* despite the many contradictions it throws up, is rooted in a fetishized form of connection. That connection is to an icon associated with the conspicuous knowledge that it is in some way flawed. This sense of attachment is sustained by affect, in the face of objective knowledge; that is, knowledge that contradicts reasons for attachment. Kordela (2006, p. 555) calls this "the link between the failure of semantic sense and sensation". This idea aligns with Berlant's (2010) notion of cruel optimism. Extending Berlant's idea, the fetishistic attachment to *Airbnb* is sustained by the effect of synchronic time.

Alistair demonstrates the synchrony involved with *Airbnb* hosting. Alistair lives in a flatting situation with two others. Their *Airbnb* is busy during the main season and has a steady flow of tourists who are mostly looking for cheaper

accommodation. Alistair recounts a number of different guests that are re-created as synchronic events. He shows me a pin-board style noticeboard in which he keeps notes or cards left by the guests. The pinboard is prominently displayed between the lounge and the kitchen, and Alistair actively encourages guests to leave notes. This conspicuous display of his hospitality prowess has become a sort of trophy-board for him and he is visibly proud of it. Alistair discusses the various guest interactions as if he is in the present moment and he uses present tense language constructions to convey this. For example, talking about one Korean guest's response to their dog he recounts in an imitation Korean accent, "Fidel (the dog) will be scared because we eat dogs!" The retroactive construction of events substitutes for the absence of the force that seemingly keeps the flow of guests in motion. The retelling of stories about guests (and the establishment of the hosts' personal hospitality skills) *is* thereby, performatively, the source of that force. Despite the historicity that the collection of notes might suggest, the board re-invokes the past into the present, with the effect that he self-polices his own hosting behaviour. He says:

> That's what we do. That's our job, to make people feel welcome as if they belong. It's easy enough to do. Lovely little notes, that's the trade-off, especially when you're a little bit over it, or a bit hungover, and then you meet them and they're really lovely and you forget you weren't *that* thrilled at the beginning (Alistair, Wanaka).

Alistair's reconstructions demonstrate the ways in which the uncertain self seeks to secure external validation through affective connection to guests as a public display. Konings (2015, p. 94) observes that the uncertain subject seeks to "step up its efforts to secure external validation, organizing its social environment around the suppression of its insecurity". Alistair's noticeboard is a materialized act of external validation that provides a visual tool to suppress his insecurity and to validate his hosting prowess. Alistair's use of affect blends past experiences into potential future ones so that despite being not "that thrilled" at the beginning of a guest interaction, he is compelled to be his hosting best. Affect becomes the glue by which Alistair is able to bind himself to an ever repeating synchronic now.

7.3.4 Weaponized time

The intensification of time and space through digital circulation results in moments where it condenses in the body as an imperative. This is not a situation limited to platform capitalism, or indeed to *Airbnb*. However, *Airbnb* capitalizes on this intensification of time and space, the conditioning of which has already been cemented in the widespread and normalized development of digital subjects. As a consequence of this intensification, hosts experience demands from the platform as an immediacy which must be fully attended to. In this way, *Airbnb* weaponizes both time and space.

Time is a key metric that *Airbnb* uses as a weapon to both police and control host behaviour. *Airbnb* uses constant communication of messages to reinforce the importance of time. The narrative of temporal imperatives is principally framed around the need to achieve or maintain ratings and forms a key part of *Superhost* status achievement metrics in the form of 'response time'. The intense focus on ratings ensures that power remains with the platform and is delivered through the de-facto object of the guest. Hosts are intently aware of the requirements to achieve and retain *Superhost* status; a key metric of this being 'response time', as previously mentioned. *Airbnb* uses highly detailed directives to ensure hosts understand and comply with time requirements.

Figure 25 demonstrates the type of directives that hosts receive. Each section in the directive contains some aspect that weaponizes time and/or space.

Be responsive

Responding quickly when guests reach out shows that you're an attentive and considerate host. How frequently and quickly you respond to reservation requests and booking enquiries is measured by your response rate. We ask hosts to respond to these types of messages within 24 hours.

Accept reservation requests

No guest likes to have to send 4 or 5 requests to find an available place so we expect that if your calendar shows you're free, you accept most requests. Make sure your listing's calendar reflects the days you're able to host. This way you're more likely to get reservation requests that you can actually accommodate. You can use your availability settings to block time off between bookings, or to prevent requests for same-day reservations or reservations too far in the future.

Avoid cancelling on guests

We take cancellations seriously and ask all hosts to avoid cancelling on guests–their travel plans depend on it! You'll be subject to penalties, including financial penalties, if you cancel a confirmed booking. We ask that you avoid cancelling confirmed bookings unless there are extenuating circumstances.

Get positive reviews

Guests like to know they can expect a consistent level of quality, no matter where they book. At the end of each stay, guests will review their experience with you, which is one of the ways we evaluate you as a host. Your overall rating is your average review score from all the guests you've hosted.

Figure 25: Airbnb directives

("Hosting on *Airbnb*: Create comfortable stays and get great reviews," 2018).

Whether it be quick responses, the making of one's space available on a consistent basis, or the delivery of consistent levels of quality for rating purposes, the threat of sanctions is implicit, "we evaluate you as a host", and sometimes explicit, "we take cancellations seriously… you'll be subject to penalties, including financial penalties". Moreover, hosts are aware that *Airbnb* will follow through with their threat of sanctions, either through personally experiencing sanctions, or through knowledge of acquaintances who have suffered sanctions.

Cancellations are framed as a waste of time-related resources for guests. Again, the guest is used as the de-facto repository of the power the platform wields, where guests' considerations of time take precedence over those of the hosts. Lynda describes a sanction that she experienced as a result of cancellations:

> They charged me $140. Said that I'd double booked and I hadn't! Because I don't do the bookings, they do them. I was *furious* about that (Lynda, Paihia).

Gerard also felt aggrieved at being sanctioned for a cancellation. Not only did he receive financial penalties and removal of his *Superhost* status, he also experienced a reduction of bookings. He told me:

> *Airbnb* are really strict; if you cancel a booking, they take fees. We were *Superhost* status but they took that off us because we cancelled a booking. So, our bookings have dropped since we lost that (Gerard, Picton).

The temporal imperative to be available is an issue of concern to Samantha, who exhibits a hyper-awareness of the need to attend to the needs of the platform. At the time of the interview Samantha was pregnant with her first child. She discusses the conflict between this very intensely personal occasion and the demands of the platform to be a hospitality entrepreneur:

> Um, yeah, well, we're not so sure what's gonna happen yet. We won't take guests until New Years – 18 weeks away, I think. But we may, because it's the best time to make money as well. It's like $90.00 a night and at the moment I get $45.00, so it would be silly not to, but it depends on the baby. If it's a baby that screams and cries, if I'm up all the time… I've just got to make it very, very clear on the page. It probably wouldn't be a problem if we say you're welcome to stay but you may not get any sleep because of a screaming baby! (Laughs). We probably won't completely stop (Samantha, Wanaka).

The time demands of the platform are such that Samantha will endeavor to host guests even if the realities of caring for a newborn baby conflict with the demands of the platform. Time off from her role of host will detrimentally impact her performance on the platform, and the intensification of time through *Airbnb* has amplified to the degree that the needs of the platform have become the first consideration. Social reproduction and affective care have become a secondary consideration. As David Harvey (2015, p. 276) notes "Everyday life is perverted to the circulation of capital".

7.3.5 Suspended temporality

> 'The limitation is not in space', says Joe Zadeh, who runs Experiences for *Airbnb*. 'It's time' (Carson, 2018).

The imbrication of digital and human worlds alters experience by transfiguring normative dispositions, perceptions and behaviours (A. Fuchs, 2014). The immediacy of digital communication blurs the divide between points of departure and of arrival in such a way that temporality is expunged. Despite this, the synchronic emergence of ever-repeating nows are haunted by pasts through algorithmic reconstructions of previously amassed data-points while also stunting movement towards future horizons (A. Fuchs, 2014). Similarly, the intensification of time through *Airbnb* has the effect of holding hosts in a state of suspended animation. Because time is experienced as an intensification of pressing events in the now, the ability of hosts to think through this into a future is diminished. The possibility of other futures retreats as the intensification of time exhausts hosts both physically and mentally and anchors them in the now. Consequently, all hosts express vague notions of 'some time' in the future when they will not be an *Airbnb* host but most have no real perception of how this will eventuate, or even what type of actions they might take to advance this position. When asked about this, some hosts expect that *Airbnb* will implode on itself in some way, but regardless of this sense of impending doom, they are fully committed to spending more time and more resources on developing 'their' business. This response is most typical of the *Airbnb* proselyte. While discussing the self-contained cabin that she is considering building for the enlargement of her *Airbnb* business, Jenny says:

> My opinion is something will happen to *Airbnb*. It will implode. We're *totally* reliant on it, so we are preparing ourselves to the possibility we might have to *Airbnb* both of them or renting it (the new one cabin) out full time and it will be much less impact on us. Every now and then *Airbnb* gets a glitch, as if someone hacked into it (Jenny, Wanaka).

Jenny's uncertainty as to future directions and her reliance on *Airbnb* are tied together. The contradictions of platform capitalism reveal themselves as Jenny re-engages and re-attaches with the structure that produces her anxiety. The act

of recoding her anxiety about *Airbnb* into a process of self-improvement is a way in which the surplus-meaning that the involvement generates (fantasies of hacking, implosion or system glitches) gets integrated back into – and thereby neutralized by – the logic of the platform. Jenny's response typifies that of the contemporary capitalized subject: one that invests its identity in the very icon that produces its anxiety in order to produce an improved version of the self (Konings, 2015).

Other hosts hold vague notions of tourism itself becoming so unsustainable or so bloated, that market saturation will cause a collapse and hosting will become an untenable option. This standpoint most often resides with the subject position of the rational engager, whose willingness to take on multiple precarious jobs acts as a sort of social buffer to the threat of increasing precarity: a wider circle of weak social ties increases possibilities of future directions.

> I knew people who had accommodation and they said it will die. So, I went out and got a day job, a six-month contract which is due to finish next month. So, it's kinda perfect. It may not have picked up enough for me to feel comfortable so I'm looking around for something else at the moment. I've already seen advertisements are starting to pop up for the season – coz I've been looking round at jobs, so the local taxi company is looking for drivers and the local tour company is looking for guides (Leanne, Picton).

Leanne's response provides evidence of the strength of weak ties, as theorised by Granovetter (1973). The strength of weak ties focuses on the cohesive power of social relations that overlap into discrete groups. The overlap of friendship networks widens the pool of contacts that an individual might access. Leanne is clearly hedging her bets with *Airbnb* by developing links within the region that may provide her with additional income. Even though she frames it as "kinda perfect" the unpredictability of *Airbnb* income over the winter months is experienced as precarity. Leanne suspends temporality by supplementing her income with other seasonal work to make ends meet over the lean winter months, but the physical and emotional work involved in managing multiple work roles and the demands of hosting to the standard required of *Airbnb* hosts leaves her

exhausted. She admits "it can get tiring always being enthusiastic" (Leanne, Picton).

Martin Konings (2015) theorizes that the contradictions of capital often present disturbances that threaten but do not immediately incapacitate the framework of daily life. This characteristic describes those who inhabit the subject position of the passive melancholic. This subject-position hopes for some yet unknown change in their own circumstances. For example, at least three hosts are considering the prospect of selling their homes to downsize, reduce their debt and free up money in order to buffer their financial future. Another two hosts will shortly qualify for the National Superannuation and hope that they will be able to survive with a mix of superannuation payments and working part time in another field, thus enabling them to disengage from *Airbnb* hosting. These vague strategies provide subjects with the opportunity to construct responses to counteract impacts, although often these responses are compensatory in that subjects manage the corrosive effects of capitalism by mitigation. Lack is recast as a potentiality (Konings, 2015).

"Capital has never shrunk from destroying people in pursuit of profit" (Harvey, 2015, p. 249). Platform capitalism is no exception to this and relies on surplus to fill the collateral damage sustained by the host side of the market. The exhaustion of hosts due to the temporalized demands of the platform combine with the rapid scaling of *Airbnb* in small regional tourist towns. This combination ensures that the flooded market of hosts eliminates those less committed to the platform's goals, in addition to those exhausted by the demands associated with achievement of an idealized hosting standard. Moreover, as platform capitalism progresses, individual hosts of the type interviewed for this research are being squeezed out of the market through intensified competition and intensified demands, and in their place property management companies are emerging, thus reproducing capitalism's trend toward intensification and monopolization.

The sum effect of *Airbnb*'s intensification of time and space throws up unintended possibilities where latent hope emerges out of contradictory forces within capitalism. As the capacities of hosts to enact the daily tasks of domestic, familial care are corroded and their chances of financial success in the capitalist market of hosting are reduced through the scaling up of competition, an unintended gap

emerges for hosts to consider alternative ways of being other than the narrow offering afforded by platform capitalism.

7.4 Conclusion

Under conditions of digital subjectivity, time becomes synchronic, in which life becomes experienced as a never-ending series of now events. *Airbnb* deploys time as a weapon which is disciplinary in nature and is achieved through the relentless emphasis on synchronic time that changes the ways in which time is experienced by hosts and keeps hosts in a state of anxious suspension.

Concepts of space are intensified under the logics of platform capitalism and these new conceptualizations of space serve the needs of the platform while impoverishing the daily lived experience of participants and families in ways which disrupt social reproduction, privacy and personal relations. Digital intensification of time through platform capitalism impacts on labour in ways that exhaust and extend beyond human physical limits.

The extent of *Airbnb'*s operations is experienced beyond the borders of private homes, however. Community aspects of space and time intensification account for worker displacement and the corrosive effects of a disrupted rental market on low-wage economies. The combined nature of community disruption and personal anxieties as a result of engagement with *Airbnb* create untenable tensions for hosts as they grapple with the surplus nature of intensified time and space. The surpluses produced through the intensification of time and space complicate hosts engagement with *Airbnb*. Intensified time and space create intensified attention on the platform which holds hosts in a constant state of self-improvement. Unexpectedly, the contradictions of such an intensified state enable moments through which *Airbnb* hosts are able to glimpse alternative futures. The following chapter investigates what such alternative futures might look like.

8. Chapter Eight: Contradictions and collective responses

8.1 Introduction

This chapter draws together the previous discussions of commodification, biopolitics, and time /space in the consideration of collective responses to the contradictions arising from *Airbnb* and to the wider context of platform capitalism as a function of digital capital. Heterotopic spaces are appropriated by platform capitalism. This is because they are spaces that allow rapid scaling that is initially unchecked because communities and regulatory authorities are unaware or unable to respond fast enough to the unanticipated impacts that are created by new sets of contradictions that occur within and of those spaces as a result of digital capitalism's operations. This discussion raises the possibility that alternative options become available as a result of the rapid domination of *Airbnb* which creates uneven differentiations in domestic care. In this chapter I explore the notion that the normalization of the digital milieu and the digital big Other are appropriated as tools of capitalism to achieve enclosure of the subject amidst a circulation of representations devoid of use-value, but that this paradoxically creates gaps within subjectivity through which opportunities for collective responses emerge. This discussion explores possibilities for alternatives other than those currently presented as the options through which hosts might construct their senses of self, home and of social reproduction.

8.2 Heterotopic spaces as a contradictory context of *Airbnb* operations

> The creation of heterotopic spaces, where radically different forms of production, social organisation and power might flourish for a while, implies a terrain of anti-capitalist possibility that is perpetually opening and shutting down (Harvey, 2015, p. 219).

The word 'heterotopic' means "occurring in an abnormal place" ("Heterotopic," 2018). The insertion of *Airbnb* into the private spaces of homes and the private lives of hosts is such a moment. It creates uneven flows of competition at both private and community levels, exerts pressure on resources and causes disruptions to processes of social reproduction. More pertinently, technological innovations – specifically the advent of Web 2.0 and internet connectivity – have

enabled the dominant practices of capitalism to extend even further into private spaces through the facilities offered by platform capitalism. As a result, *Airbnb* has radically and spectacularly bloomed in ways that exacerbate tensions and contradictions in the enactment of domestic care and relationships. It is the rapidity of this growth that exposes the existence of unresolvable contradictions between the competing demands of *Airbnb*'s operations and the physical demands of familial care-work, domestic life and social reproduction.

The corrosive effects of market intrusion into the private sphere has the effect of diminishing mutuality and commonality in communities (Harvey, 2015). When homes become businesses, the relationships that are conducted within those spaces become subject to the idea that life is more ably served by adherence to pure market and monetary transactions than by the non-monetary exchanges that typically accompany social interactions.

Chapter Seven explored the idea that the underlying paradigm of neoliberal ideology feeds an idea that activities that do not produce financial reward are 'wasted time'. Platform capitalism, through its intrusive use of digital technologies, has enabled a systemic penetration of market ideology into virtually every aspect of contemporary life-worlds in ways that have become obscured by dominant discourses of independence, individuality and self-reliance. Yet, as Harvey (2015, p. 190) notes, households "are not, however, isolated entities. They are embedded in a matrix of social interactions and social relations present in places". This creates a contradiction as the competing demands of production and social reproduction seesaw between extremes.

This contradiction is evident in a kind of fledgling sense of collective that emerges in the interviews with *Airbnb* hosts. These gesture towards a desire for collective engagement. The enthusiasm from all participants to participate in this research project indicates, in itself, the presence of a desire for engagement with others in the creation of discursive spaces for a collective response. Moreover, many participants openly expressed an eagerness to know of other hosts' experiences. An interesting aspect of this is that the eagerness to know of other's experiences does not translate into action to actually connect with other hosts; rather there is a notable reticence to reach out to others. Instead, the desire to know is

expressed as regret; formulated around a lack of community and sense of belonging with other *Airbnb* hosts.

For example, Peter asks me about experiences other hosts in his area might have had. He is curious as to what other hosts do in their daily practice, how they manage problems and what tips or hints they may have. He says "I'd love to get some feedback" (Peter, Whitianga). Trish expresses a similar sentiment: "it would be interesting to know" (Trish, Whitianga).

Some hosts – especially those whose *Airbnb* space is at the cheaper end of the scale – say that other hosts are not like them, and so therefore they would not benefit from contact with local hosts:

> Stella: Do you keep an eye on other *Airbnb*s?
>
> Krissie: Not really. No. No, I don't actually. It doesn't interest me because I have restrictions anyway because the room that I rent is that one over there so it's not very big. I don't have a big huge fancy house. I live in a pretty poor part of town (Krissie, Paihia).

Krissie clearly feels like she is not part of an *Airbnb* community, certainly, at least, not in the sense of a locally situated community. The difference between a sense of local community and a sense of global community is evident across the interviews; hosts identify as *Airbnb* hosts, and see themselves as part of a global movement, but do not identify with *Airbnb* hosts in their own areas. Because of the local/global divide, hosts experience a sense of distance from *Airbnb*. For example, Lynda expresses her frustration while attempting to resolve issues with the platform:

> When you look for agents in the country there's none for New Zealand, not that I've found anyway. I get UK, then it goes to America (Lynda, Paihia).

In response to the lack of effective ways to communicate with *Airbnb* and with other hosts, especially with regards to issues or problems that hosts experience, the emergence of hosts' websites that operate outside of the *Airbnb* platform reveal a desire for a sense of community and collective response. For example, *Airhosts Forum* is a site created specifically for hosts to share experiences of hosting and has both a webpage and a *Facebook* page ("Airbnb host forum,"

2018; "Airhosts forum,"). *Airbnb* Hell is a website "dedicated to helping hosts and guests share their stories about the risks and dangers of using *Airbnb* ("*Airbnb* Hell: Uncensored stories from *Airbnb* hosts and guests," 2019). Moreover, many individual hosts have blog pages dedicated to their hosting experiences. (For examples, see [https://learn*Airbnb*.com/blog/](https://learnAirbnb.com/blog/), [http://www.*Airbnb*secrets.com/category/*Airbnb*-blog-hosting-tips/](http://www.Airbnbsecrets.com/category/Airbnb-blog-hosting-tips/), http://theabundanthost.com/blog/, https://getpaidforyourpad.com/).

The proliferation of such webpages attests to the desire for a sense of collectivism among *Airbnb* hosts, a fear of surveillance from the platform and a sense of frustration and dissatisfaction with the ability or will of *Airbnb* to resolve issues that hosts experience in their engagement with the platform.

Airbnb, in accord with its rhetoric of community and social responsibility, has a specific site dedicated to hosts where they can connect with other hosts to discuss their hosting experiences and provide tips or advice to each other. Situated in a section of the platform called "Community Centre", the site uses communitarian language of connection and sharing (Figure 26).
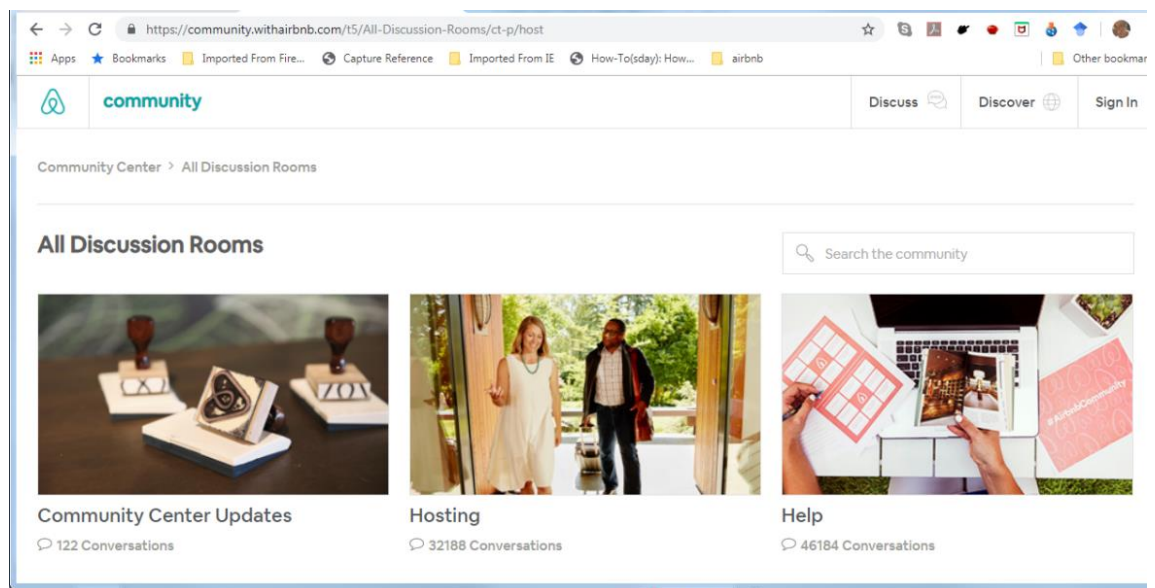
Figure 26: Community Discussion rooms

This site is used by *Airbnb* as a buffer against demands from hosts. By deflecting questions and comments to 'the community', *Airbnb* are able to offload labour costs to hosts. In other words, hosts solve other hosts' problems. Interactions are surveilled by *Airbnb*, and posts damaging to the brand or problematic in other ways are either removed or responded to by 'Online Community managers' who

are employed by *Airbnb*. Because of this, many hosts are hesitant to use the site for any complaints or disagreements with the platform. The hosts interviewed for this research are highly suspicious of *Airbnb*'s surveillance. Evidence of this is the fact that participants in this current research without exception sought clear assurances that I was not a representative of the company, and that I would not be passing information or insights back to *Airbnb*.

8.3   The digital Big Other and the loss of agency and authorship

Is the digital Big Other so big as to totally enclose us? This question frames the following interrogation of the digital sphere of platform capitalism in relation to its impact on *Airbnb* hosts and domestic relationships of care, and to the implications for collective action. Despite the deployment of 'little brothers' in the service of platform capitalism, digital technologies are often experienced as a big Other because the ubiquitous nature of digital technologies is overwhelming in scope and in reach.

Big Data is the collection of collated, processed data, and it is widely assumed to be neutral, self-evident 'fact'. However, this assumption is misguided because Big Data is subject to the practices of those who undertake data-mining and write the algorithmic code that shapes the representations that evolve (Rouvroy & Stiegler, 2016). Big Data involves cleaning or ranking collated bits of informational data. This is an operation in which data-points are disembedded from their context, and from the "singularity of lives and their singular significance" (Rouvroy & Stiegler, 2016, p. 8). The effect of Big Data is that it cancels out meaning in favour of quantifiable traits or characteristics that are disassociated from the human population from which they are drawn. In other words, cleaned data effectively becomes devoid of its human origins. (There's an interesting parallel between this and the cleaning practices exhibited by hosts – ensuring physical space is devoid of a human presence). It is through this data-cleaning process that the claims of *Airbnb* (that draw on the very human notions of sharing, democracy, home and hospitality), collapse under the logics of the platform whose goal is maximum capital extraction. It is also through this process that subjects lose their sense of agency, individuality and authorship.

Representation in the digital world presents a crisis of representation (Dean, 2002). This is because representation of experience and events are subsumed

to transcription and interpretation in such a way that notions of self, testimony and authorship are in crisis. Additionally, the immense volume of data is presented as an unassailable truth in and of itself, such that critique seems an impossibility (Dean, 2005). Thus, what is lost in the enclosure by digital Big Data is the notion of individuality and uniqueness. This is because individuality is cancelled out and becomes meaningless through the excess and velocity of data and the accompanying complexity generated by algorithmic profiles. The presentation of what is 'real' reduces to predictions of not what might be a calculable probability, but instead, to account for what might escape probability; thus enclosure is primarily about *exclusion* of those data profiles that might represent "the excess of the possible on the probable" (Rouvroy & Stiegler, 2016, p. 8).

Despite the collapsing of self into a digitally mediated amalgam separated from its point of origin and original characteristics, hosts experience the platform as a uniquely individual interaction. The lack of independent authorship is masked as *Airbnb* becomes, through its appropriation of digital technologies, a type of impresario that constructs a subject who must always act to perform its part and thus stay active on the platform (Roelofsen & Minca, 2018). The seductively communitarian language of the platform both enslaves hosts and panders to hosts' sense of self and status, which in turn is fed by the impulse to display; a key characteristic of digital subjectivity. The impulse to display is a mediated imperative; platform capitalism relies on disciplined populations to create and display content amenable to the platform's goals. Individuality, ostensibly a goal of *Airbnb,* is a shaped, curated and guided appearance of self; not a re-presentation of the author, but rather, a representation of the platform. These characteristics reconfigure so as to settle on the individual as *a member of a population* in ways that permit or disallow access and opportunities for the hosts. Categorization of individual characteristics becomes disembedded from the human in which they originate and create what Cheney-Lippold (2011, p. 165) calls "a new algorithmic identity"   . Through this process, the notion of the individual is dissipated, and becomes, instead, a set of indexes (Rouvroy & Stiegler, 2016). The demand for performativity to adhere to the standards and

requirements of the platform is therefore relentless, unbounded by notions of temporality, and deeply extends into private spaces and private time.

8.4   The digital Big Other's flaw

Digital subjectivity, big data and digital platforms have become ubiquitous forces in contemporary life; they appear to have a life, logic and will of their own, yet are ultimately all human constructions. That they are human constructions, and thus hosts to human frailty, error and bias, is an idea that is subsumed beneath the ubiquity and dominance of the digital world. Digital technologies regulate inherent anomalies that appear in users' data and behaviours in order to optimize specific states of being in ways that Cheney-Lippold (2011) calls soft biopolitics, because of its diffuse and evolving nature. This is achieved by surveillance of individuals' internet preferences that constantly categorizes people and shapes their options and behaviours through modulation. Importantly, because of the ubiquitous and continuous nature of digital surveillance and algorithmic analysis, categorization is continually updated and modified.

The problem with computer code, whether viewed as a digital architecture or as a set of protocols that allow, disallow or modulate access and behaviour, is that cultural practice exceeds the materiality of code, even as coding itself reflects the cultural hegemony of those who write the code in the first place. Moreover, the dominance of, and indeed the infallibility attributed to, algorithmic code ensures the idea is normalized. The normalization process obscures its cultural roots. A code that identifies characteristic X does not mean that characteristic X is an objective fact. Characteristic X's definition and boundaries are determined by a "technologically mediated and culturally situated consequence of statistics and computer science" (Cheney-Lippold, 2011, p. 167). For example, many platforms require users to input personal details such as 'gender' which is often limited to a binary, or a limited ternary where the third form subsumes all options that fall outside of the first two. *Airbnb* provides an option of 'Male, 'Female' and 'Other'. An example of *Airbnb's* registration page is shown in figure 27 below:

Figure 27: Airbnb sign-up page

A variable entered into a field such as 'gender' is coded by a complex set of interactions that determine what it might mean to be that particular characteristic within a population. Populations are categorized to suit the logics of the platform. In other words, psychographic characteristics are aggregated in order to serve the capitalist accumulation logics by which digital capitalism operates (Cheney-Lippold, 2011). Being a 'male' may be mediated not only by clicking the option 'male' in the gender field, but also by online interactions and browsing data (harvested from a wide array of sites visited or interacted with). If a 'male' likes embroidery, which (within the said population) is charted as a 'female' characteristic, and if the 'male' visits enough sites tagged as 'female' sites, the dividuated subject might be presented statistically as a different gender from the one originally entered into the system by the user. Options available to that user

may then be shaped differently, according to the new, evolving logic of characterizations applied to that particular subject. Thus, a form of social control is exerted (Cheney-Lippold, 2011). *Airbnb*'s obsession with collecting data on its users is not thereby a mechanism of neutral politics, nor is it value-free or democratic (Srnicek, 2017b).

Because of the constantly shifting nature of algorithms, the standards that *Airbnb* expects its hosts to achieve are also constantly shifting. This, coupled with unrestrained growth of *Airbnb* competition, places hosts in a state of precarity in which they must continuously work to maintain position and status on the platform. This work takes three obvious forms: the form of manual labour in the actual day-to-day running of the *Airbnb*, the form of emotional labour in the ways that hosts perform themselves to appear as idealized hospitality entrepreneurs, and the form of intellectual labour in the work involved in constantly attending to the platforms' digital demands by updating their profiles and listings, by attending to booking requests and by rating guests. A combination of these forms of work contribute to the algorithmic analysis of hosts in ways that deeply imbricate their subject positions within the platform and without. Much of this imbrication into the platform goes unrecognised as *Airbnb* employs what Nye (2014) terms "soft power", which is another way of conceptualizing the ways in which biopolitics operate on a diffuse level. Soft power employs strategies of co-option rather than coercion to shape the preferences of its target population. In other words, by translating the will of the platform into choice of the individual, *Airbnb* is able to direct the movements of its population.

Subject positions within the platform are clearly demarcated through the rating system. Those who satisfactorily behave in accordance with the desires and goals of the platform are rewarded both publicly and privately. Public rewards come with the attachment of status through the *Superhost* badge. This public display of subjectivity achieves both intrinsic and extrinsic benefits. Intrinsic benefits come through a sense of pride exhibited by hosts who have achieved this status marker. Joe demonstrates this clearly when he proudly informs me that:

> I've been *Superhost* for eight quarters in a row. I'm a *Superhost*, yeah, six or seven quarters in a row, every three months (Joe, Wanaka).

Further reinforcement is achieved through email messaging generated by *Airbnb*, offering promotions and tips for success for those whose behaviours are algorithmically judged to be in the platform's best interests. Figure 28 shows a screenshot of an email sent to a host in Whitianga. This demonstrates the types of reinforcement and incentives offered to Superhosts.

Exclusive perks

Extra referral bonus
Earn an additional 20% bonus on top of our standard host referral bonus.

Refer a host

Superhost bonus
For each year of maintaining Superhost status, choose between a $100 travel coupon or one free professional photo session in available markets.

Discounts on Nest products
Get 30% off select Nest connected home products, in available countries.

COMING SOON

Discounts on experiences
Book discounted experiences on Airbnb—from concerts and food tours to classes.

COMING SOON

Figure 28: Exclusive perks

Extrinsic rewards are achieved through public recognition of the status marker, the host's position on the platform and from feedback from guests. Moreover, subject positions are reinforced outside of the platform through the appropriation of the notion of entrepreneurship. As discussed in Chapter Four, the notion of entrepreneurship is widely well-regarded within contemporary western societies and is further supported through the widespread belief in neoliberal discourse of self-reliance and independence. Tuffin (2005) asserts that discourse is performative in nature. The performative nature of discourse employed by hosts both reflects the aims of the platform and reinforces the official discourse of sharing, emancipation and success. Hosts inform friends, family and neighbours of their *Airbnb* business, speak with pride of their *Airbnb* space, their interactions with varied nationalities, and their successful hosting experiences. This discourse

is necessary in order to justify and reinforce their reasons for commercializing their private spaces. These notions deeply resonate with individuals on an affective level as they attempt to justify the contradictions they experience through their engagement with *Airbnb*. But the development of digitally created subjectivities is problematic for the following reasons.

8.4.1 'Community' is not the same as 'population'

The rhetoric of community, democracy, empowerment and freedom feeds the monopolistic capitalist goals of the platform as it obeys its own developmental algorithmic logic of accumulation. Contrasted with this, the hyper-competitiveness of digital subjectivity as each individual strives to be seen, ranked and recognised is a key tool in subjectivization and control. The interweaving of individual uniqueness within the language of community blurs the obvious contradictions of these notions. Community, in the hands of *Airbnb* is not a community of people with whom you might meet and interact; it is simply a collection of digitized repositories of indexation that have one thing in common: being an *Airbnb* host. Rouvroy and Stiegler (2016) provide a helpful explanation of indexation/ algorithmic ranking:

> Each hyperindexed individual is effectively a multitude, but a multitude without others since in these dispositifs each individual becomes his or her own statistical reference, for instance the quantified self or the profiles of readers on specific online bookshops. In your online bookshop, a given book is recommended to you since these persons who have bought the same books as you have also bought these other books, and you can feel that you belong to a community; it is however a community that you will have no way of meeting (Rouvroy & Stiegler, 2016).

While the *idea* of a community of *Airbnb* hosts is attractive to individuals as they seek avenues of commonality and mutual aid with others, the competitive nature of *Airbnb* precludes the sense of commonality among hosts in any particular location. Hosts from all research sites discussed this conflict. Jenny wants to share experiences with other hosts in her area (Wanaka) but finds that other hosts are reluctant to share their stories:

> I know all about what I do but I don't know how other people feel about their *Airbnb*. They (neighbours) built one, and then built two more. We don't talk to each other about it. I wonder if other people don't talk to others about it? I reached out to someone down the road [with no success]. Going back to that competition thing, I sense that it's competitive and people don't want to be revealing. I reached out to a woman who I know quite well and I said "do you have the Chinese problem?" And she just said, "Oh they're lovely, the way to deal with the Chinese is to explain the rules, they're really good if they know the parameters". She didn't seem to want to talk about it. She gave me that very useful tip, but no, I don't feel there's a community. Maybe because we're offering something different or unique, maybe they think we're trying to stand out. I don't know. I'm not sure why. I don't know. In the market situation, Farmers Markets, you see people sharing but I don't really feel that with *Airbnb* (Jenny, Wanaka).

Jenny clearly seeks the support and familiarity of a community of *Airbnb* hosts and has attempted to reach out to others at various times. This demonstrates a willingness and a desire to make community connections through *Airbnb*. However, Jenny is left with feelings of isolation and exclusion ("maybe they think we're trying to stand out"). Her sense of frustration and confusion is similar to that of other hosts interviewed for this research. In Paihia, Janene tells me that even though she knows quite a few people doing *Airbnb*, they never really talk about it, even though Janene would like to.

> I have had a look, I've seen my neighbours, these people in front of me are doing it. I've recognised a couple of people. One couple, they used to have a café in town, they're real hard workers, they're doing it. Another couple, an older couple that have got one or two houses out the front, they're doing it. I do know, I've recognised quite a few. I've just found out about number 52 and there was another couple that I know that have got one of those timeshares at Club Paihia (Janene, Paihia).

Karen runs her *Airbnb* from her home in Whitianga. She has recently changed from renting out a room in her house to renting out her entire place in an attempt to earn more money. I asked Karen if she communicated with other *Airbnb* hosts in her area to gauge the market. Even though she knows a number of people who are *Airbnb* hosts, she has not spoken directly to them:

> I keep a casual eye on what they're doing. It's not a regular thing, but I know a lot of people with *Airbnb*s and I wonder what they're charging? I've got less of an idea of what they do (Karen, Whitianga).

8.4.2 The contradiction of monopoly

As Harvey (2010, p. 1) wryly notes "Capitalism is nothing, if it is not on the move". Capital is transformative and Harvey asserts that Marx's dialectical terms reflect the changing nature of capital. Dialectics in this formulation is not pure Hegelian but is understood in terms of change and transformation. It is ironic that *Airbnb*'s free-riding on cultural commons for capitalist extraction is forcing changes to their operating model. Harvey (2002, p. 96) notes that "the bland homogeneity that goes with pure commodification erases monopoly advantages". Following this line of thought, *Airbnb*'s trading on the trope of 'the local' holds the potential to undermine the monopoly rents sought by the platform by diluting and homogenizing the very thing it is exploiting. As the very specialness, uniqueness, cultural distinction and unspoilt natural attractions become more popular, their very uniqueness and specialness is undermined.

Increasing (over) tourism undermines the monopoly rents *Airbnb* hosts are able to receive. A direct result of this is that *Airbnb* hosts move from identification with what I have called here the subject position of proselyte or of rational engager into the subject position characterized as passive melancholic. They do so as they become disenchanted with the platform which increasingly fails to deliver the promised income and lifestyle benefits. This trend is evident in all the research sites. Donna (Picton) notes that her income is now around half of what she previously earned, yet she is taking almost twice as many bookings. The competition has increased to such an extent that prices hosts can charge are being driven down. Janene also comments:

> Look at the sheer number of people that have signed on to *Airbnb*,
> going from six people when I signed on, to over 300. There were
> less than half a dozen people up here. There was no one in Kerikeri,
> there was no one over in Russell. I was probably the first (Janene,
> Paihia).

Janene and her husband are thinking of selling their home to downsize, and she is exploring other avenues of income through party-plan marketing of homeware products as a way of mitigating their income precarity. As Marx observed, capitalism trends towards monopolisation. It is this trend towards monopoly that can itself provide purchase for the unravelling of the biopolitics of *Airbnb*.

8.5   Escape from enclosure?

Within Aotearoa New Zealand, discontent with *Airbnb*'s impact is starting to move regulatory authorities towards ways to control Airbnb's impacts. At local government level a number of districts are investigating ways to mitigate the social and community effects of *Airbnb* operations: Auckland Council is considering the impacts of *Airbnb* on housing (Tuatagaloa & Osborne, 2018) and has moved to impose regulations and levies on *Airbnb* properties. The Wellington City Council is also considering ways to crack down on commercial *Airbnb* operations (Devlin, 2018). Urban authorities in various regional areas are also bringing attention to the problems of *Airbnb*, such as Mount Maunganui, which has experienced rapid *Airbnb* growth (Kino, 2018); Queenstown, where it is claimed *Airbnb* accounts for one in 10 dwellings (Cropp, 2017); and Christchurch, which is also considering rating strategies to deal with *Airbnb* (Truebridge, 2018). *Airbnb* has moved to counter many of these claims and is now amenable to the idea of a bed tax imposed in certain key areas such as Auckland and Queenstown (Brunton, 2018).

Negative attention around *Airbnb* issues provides starting points for collective action. One such focus of attention surrounds damage caused by *Airbnb* guests. For example, AA Insurance conducted a survey and found that one in seven hosts in Aotearoa New Zealand had experienced losses through damage (Dillane, 2018). *Airbnb* disputes these figures, citing their own Host Protection Insurance which indicated significant damage occurred 0.001 % of the time. *Airbnb*'s insurance only allows claims over $1000, however. This minimum claim

amount disallows claims for damages that are covered by insurance companies, because homeowners will submit claims to their personal insurers rather than *Airbnb* if the amount is less than $1000. Moreover, the disparity between these two competing sets of claims appears in the accounting method used: AA Insurance count numbers of insured hosts and compares this figure against the number of insured hosts who claim for damage, whereas *Airbnb* counts each *stay* (rather than each host) as a separate occurrence; in other words, one host who rents out to 100 guests per year is counted as one by AA, but counted as 100 by *Airbnb*. This difference in measures contributes to the small rate of damage cited by *Airbnb* as well as having the effect of positioning the platform in a good light. Negative publicity such as that mentioned above accumulates so as to provide impetus to those hosts whose disenchantment with *Airbnb* is becoming more evident.

As social movements for diversity, democracy, collaborative consumption and sustainability gain traction in social media, pressure from the commons is also forcing the company to make changes to their operations. These changes often run counter to the accumulative logics of the platform but are necessary in order to mitigate backlash in social media. Recent developments point to this. In June 2018, *Airbnb* dropped 80% of its private home listings in Japan. This reduced the number of *Airbnb* listings from over 62,000 properties to 13,800, as a result of a new law to eliminate illegal private rentals (Johnston, 2018). This law is a response to intense pressure from Japanese residents for the restriction of illegal short-term accommodation in residential areas due to the disruptions of over-tourism. Collective action by residents brought pressure to bear on Japanese authorities to provoke the law change.

Similarly, in November 2018, *Airbnb* removed up to 200 *Airbnb* listings that were situated in the occupied West Bank ("Airbnb to remove listings from illegal Israeli settlements," 2018). *Airbnb* has been under increasing pressure since at least 2016 to remedy this situation by banning listings in the occupied territories, and eventually bowed to pressure from groups such as Human Rights Watch and the Palestinian community (Shuttleworth, 2016). Israeli settlements in the West Bank are illegal under international law, even though U.S. law permits business operations in occupied territories. Many of these listings were inaccurately listed

on the *Airbnb* platform as being sited in Israel, rather than in occupied Palestinian territories. The success of such community actions against a digital platform allow alternative versions of the future to emerge that benefit the community, not the platform.

8.5.1 Marketization reformulated as emancipation?

Contradictions in capital are frequently analysed in terms of a dichotomy; either we embrace a free-market economy, or we revert to a protectionist position. However Fraser (2014) argues that notions of an original condition, that is, a 'before' free-market or 'before' commodification, are frequently essentialist and deny the historicity of domination that surrounds these earlier conditions. On the other hand, critiques of contemporary capital also focus overwhelmingly on the negative: the corrosive effects of unbridled commodification on social communities and ruptured social bonds which imply that such bonds have inherent values and characteristics worthy of saving (Fraser, 2014; Konings, 2015). Such standpoints miss the fact that aspects of marketization also have potential for more egalitarian participation in society.

So, if what marketization erodes is not always pure, if there is no original condition that inherently opposes commodification, and if aspects of commodification offer opportunities of inclusion for those traditionally excluded from the market, what then becomes possible in conditions where the contradictions of unregulated neoliberal capitalism destroys its own conditions of possibility? Rather than embracing the free-market or rejecting it in favour of protectionism, Fraser (2014) offers a third alternative; that of emancipation. By framing both commodification and its opposite as socially constructed systems that are necessarily both rooted in power and domination, they then also become sites that are open to contestation. Fraser identifies new social movements that fulfil such a function. She names these as "alter-globalization movements", in which sustainability provides a reconfiguration that incorporates emancipatory goals with social protectionism (Fraser, 2014, p. 554). These alter-globalization movements work to deterritorialize forms of domination and embrace ideals of global democracy, sustainable development and social reproduction. Paradoxically, sites of alter-globalization movements emerge out of the mass-circulation enabled by digital technologies; voices separated and isolated by platforms are enabled to come

together in new ways, and to connect and mobilize in ways not possible prior to digitization:

> The newly acquired agency of the consumer in terms of using the Internet also raises hope for new opportunities for democratic processes and liberating potential of increased political participation and fighting social inequalities (Wahlen & Laamanen, 2017, p. 99).

This idea dates back to the early days of the internet, when computer engineers envisioned the internet as a commons in which ideals of democracy of information would flourish. This idea is challenged by others who question whether cooperatives based on digital entrepreneurship end up expanding the primacy of the market rather than challenging it (Marszalek, 2017). Other commentators note that digital spaces offer opportunities for practices that either reject capitalist excesses or deterritorialize traditional capitalist structures (Cammaerts, 2011).

Despite the wariness of some commentators, the number of cooperative initiatives in the digital space continues to increase, including in the sphere of homestay tourism. For example, a new platform has emerged along the lines of Fraser's alter-globalization movements. Called *Fairbnb* (figure 29), it is based on notions of "platform cooperativism" (Marszalek, 2017, p. 53). This platform formed to challenge *Airbnb*'s extractive and exploitative model. It consists of a collaborative group of people from around the world who are working to collectively address the issues that have arisen as a result of the upscaled activity of *Airbnb* in local communities.

Figure 29: Fairbnb homepage

Fairbnb say they are:

> …first and foremost a community of activists, coders, researchers and designers that aims to address this challenge by putting the "share" back into the sharing economy. We want to offer a community-centred alternative that prioritizes people over profit and facilitates authentic, sustainable and intimate travel experiences ("*Fairbnb*: Community powered tourism," 2018).

Fairbnb is an example of communitarian resistance to platform capitalism that is working to build a vacation rental platform that differs from existing forms of platform capitalism. It is owned and managed by a cooperative of:

> users and neighbours who will collectively decide how to reinvest part of the profits in local projects that would help to ease the impact of tourism, protect residency and fight gentrification ("*Fairbnb*: Community powered tourism," 2018).

Within *Fairbnb,* stakeholders in a particular community have input into local legislation about permitted activity, including scale, which is aimed to address housing effects. This group has goals for collective ownership shared between hosts, guests, neighbours and local businesspeople. The platform is based on ideals of democratic governance where members collectively and collaboratively work toward consensus on how the platform will be operated within their specific locations. This includes working toward sustainability goals where profits are reinvested in social projects and transparency and accountability through open data and compliance with local legislation ("*Fairbnb* Canada,"). The efficacy or success of such a model of alter-globalization is yet to be assessed, because the platform is still largely developmental. *Fairbnb* is in its infancy, but appears to be gaining traction around the world, as indicated by their map of users (Figure 30, below).
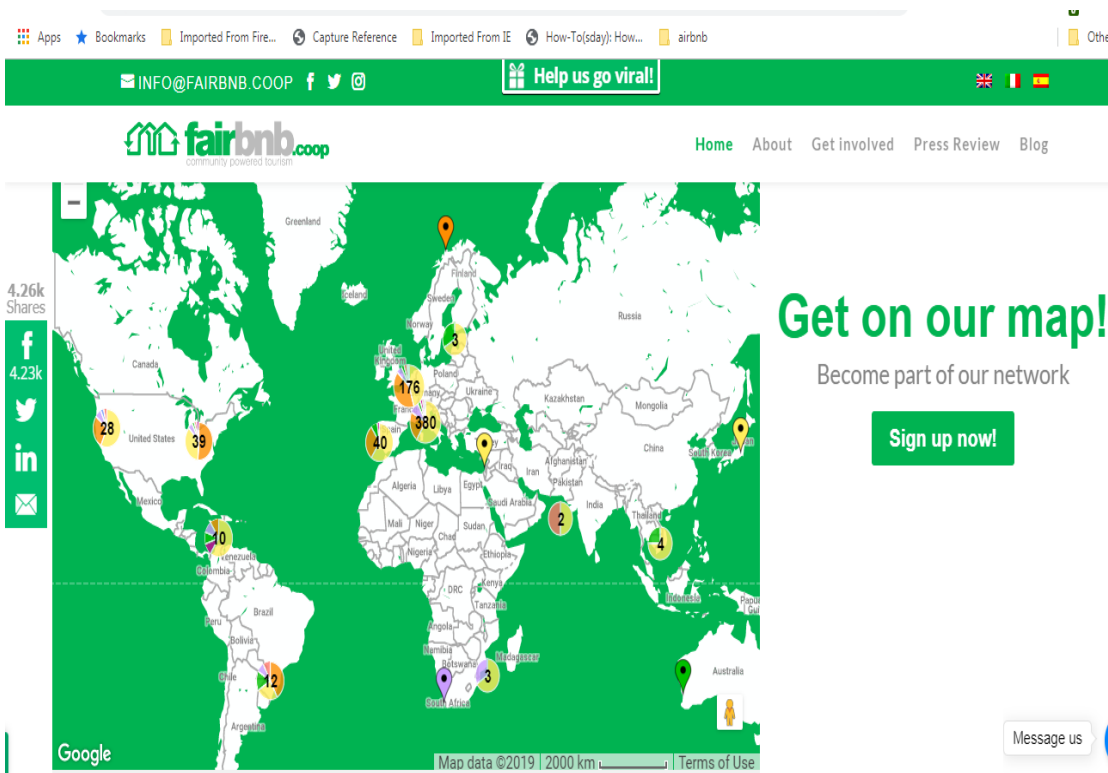
Figure 30: Fairbnb map of users

Despite its relatively recent emergence, *Fairbnb* has successfully campaigned for change in a number of areas. An example comes from Toronto where *Fairbnb* agitated for new rules for short term rentals to protect housing from *Airbnb.* The legislation that Toronto has recently enacted in response to *Fairbnb* action shows some evidence of this. The legislative changes were met with intense lobbying from *Airbnb* (Gray, 2017). In this city, basement apartments are now banned from short-term rentals in an effort to mitigate rental shortages; this, among a host of other regulatory moves, aims to limit the effect of *Airbnb* on the city's housing availability.

Because stakeholders are not just people who want to rent their space out, consideration of community effects is given value, rather than just political lip service, as can happen under a platform capitalist model. The intention of *Fairbnb* is to distribute profits in a way that ensures the income will stay within the community, enabling social projects and public spaces within that particular locale. Given the monopolistic nature of digital capitalism, it is unclear whether or not communitarian efforts such as the *Fairbnb* model will develop as an effective alternative collaborative consumption model that avoids the more potent contradictions arising from social reproduction and homestay tourism.

Some commentators, such as David Harvey and Alenka Zupančič, dismiss appeals to deterritorialize markets by appealing to calls for social justice and inclusion. A recent Twitter thread (Figure 31) by David Harvey addresses this:

Figure 31: David Harvey Twitter

(Harvey, 2019)

Attempts to diminish exploitation have the opposite effect, and instead reinforce logics of commodification. These theorists posit that escape from capitalist enclosure cannot emerge from an even deeper attachment to the capitalist form, because it continues its cycle; its value is in its circulation.

8.5.2 Passive melancholics as agents of change

The contradictions wrought by *Airbnb*'s appropriation of commons are most clearly demonstrated by hosts who represent the subject position of the passive melancholic. At first glance, the passivity demonstrated by these hosts might suggest inaction. However, as Rouvroy and Stiegler (2016, p. 19) propose "it is

always in failure that one invents the future". Failures become sources of resistance. The passive melancholic hosts are those who are most disenchanted and disenfranchised by the platform. Often this is a result of a combination of a longer period of exposure to the vagaries of *Airbnb* hosting and the contradictions experienced in domestic care and relationships. This subject-position produces individuals who are the most motivated to seek change and escape from the more enclosing and exploitative aspects of engagement with platform capitalism.

The interview with Donna clearly demonstrates this idea.

> It's really hard in a regional area to make a living. People aren't doing it to be nice and they're generally not doing it to make friends. It's real. Families – there are a lot of poor families in this town and how they manage, heaven knows… But there's a whole sense that *Airbnb* are pushing, pushing, pushing. If they did drive it down far enough, people will just say it's not worth it. It's a race to the bottom! (Donna, Picton).

Donna is actively looking to end her engagement with *Airbnb*. She is eligible for superannuation within the year and will be able to manage her financial precarity more easily. When this happens, Donna plans to cease letting out the room in her house. Standing in Donna's way is the economy of surplus-enjoyment, captured in a series of events 'right now', trapped in synchronic time. As indicated in Chapter Two, the end 'as possibility' is inherent to the repetition. As Alenka Zupančič (2019a) observes, if the state of "infinitely approaching the end" enables the surplus-enjoyment of the process, the surplus-enjoyment is actually intensified in *postponing* the end. What is needed for Donna, then, is a new set of possibilities.

Passive melancholic hosts have come to realize that not all of life is digitizable nor quantifiable in terms of monetary exchange. There are important aspects of life and social experience that are not easily reduced to predictable, quantifiable events and thus do not translate into synthetic judgements such as those wrought by the rating system and the *Superhost* system. Those hosts whose subject-positions relate to the typology of the passive-melancholics find themselves more willing to resist and reinterpret *Airbnb* than those whose subject-positions

uncritically accept the discourses promulgated through the platform. However, the shifting requirements of platform capitalism, modulated as they are through algorithmic analysis that also constantly shifts, means that subject-positions themselves are fluid and contingent.

Nearly a year and a half after interviewing Lizzie I saw her at a music concert. At this chance meeting she invited me to her home for a coffee, and I followed this up a few days later. Lizzie and her partner Martin had been very enthusiastic *Airbnb* hosts when I first interviewed them, exhibiting characteristics associated with the typology of the *Airbnb* proselyte. They had moved from Auckland to Whitianga and had specifically purchased a house that would accommodate *Airbnb*. At the time of the original interview, they enthused about their luck at finding the perfect *Airbnb* home. Describing this experience during the first interview, Lizzie told me that:

> We saw this house, and the layout of the whole house just lends itself to *Airbnb*! We saw it as a job opportunity for ourselves (Lizzie, Whitianga).

The house is in the 'Whitianga Waterways' development, an up-market area of Whitianga that features expensive, high-end houses sited on landscaped man-made canals. The landscaping features of many houses are tropical in nature, with palm trees and sub-tropical plants leading to jetties with luxury leisure boats moored at them. The development is aimed at the affluent holiday/retiree market. Lizzie and Martin's house has three *Airbnb* spaces that are priced at the more expensive end of the *Airbnb* market. The rooms are scrupulously clean, tastefully decorated and well appointed. Each area has its own lounge and kitchenette, with a balcony that overlooks tropically landscaped gardens and the canals.

Over coffee Lizzie tells me that they have listed their house for sale. She is clearly unhappy. Running an *Airbnb* in their home is too stressful on their personal relationship and on their family relationships.

Lizzie recounts that her daughter, who now has a child, is not comfortable visiting as she is conscious of trying to keep the baby quiet. Her partner Martin is "completely over it" and resistant to making any sort of effort with guests. Lizzie feels as if the entire operation has become her responsibility and she is resentful

of Martin for his refusal to participate. They are both tired of guests encroaching on their personal space and time and find themselves exhausted through the effort of always being on hand for guests' needs. Guests, once described as "great people to meet", have become a source of anxiety and resentment for the couple. Compounding this sense of exhaustion is their fear of negative ratings. Lizzie recounts a number of negative experiences they have had with guests and with guest ratings. Her view is that guests are becoming increasingly demanding because they have so much choice in the *Airbnb* market. Accelerated competition through digital capitalism impacts the service providers who are compelled to provide ever increasing standards of service in order to maintain a competitive edge. She believes her *Airbnb* standard surpasses a five-star hotel, (And I concur – it is a beautiful property) but she still receives negative reviews over minor issues. For example, one reviewer complained that there was a blemish on the fruit supplied, another guest complained that the bicycles that are supplied free of charge were too large, and another was deeply aggrieved that the spa pool was not on their private balcony but out in the garden.

The turnover for their *Airbnb* operation surpasses averages reported by *Airbnb*. Lizzie informs me that:

> Even though we turned over 70 grand last year, the income is not
> that flash when you consider it's for two of us working full time in it.
> It's just not worth the stress (Lizzie, Whitianga).

Lizzie informs me that their turnover figure does not account for costs such as maintenance, cleaning, supply of breakfasts, tea, coffee and fruit, and other incidentals. She estimates that despite working in their *Airbnb* full time, "we'd be lucky if we actually came out of it with more than 20 or 30 thousand clear" (Lizzie, Whitianga). The combination of low monetary returns combined with impacts on their lived existence and on their personal and familial relationships has become untenable. Ultimately, her summation of running an *Airbnb* business is that "it's just too hard". She wishes there was more of a sense of community and mutual support among *Airbnb* hosts. When I ask her about this, she tells me that at least three of her neighbours on the same small street have *Airbnb*s but no one talks to each other as they see themselves in competition. Lizzie laments that there is no sense of community in the street, saying "we don't even wave out". Lizzie is

not alone in her disappointment with *Airbnb:* a neighbour in the next street has just ceased running an *Airbnb* for the same set of reasons that are motivating Lizzie and Martin to exit the market.

Lizzie's experiences point to contradictions between commodification of the self, incursions into free-time and the supremacy of financialized values over those associated with the social reproduction of life and domestic care; these contradictions are unsustainable in the long term. Moreover, Lizzie and Martin's transition across subject-positions highlights two points: Firstly, subject-positions are fluid and vulnerable, and secondly, hosts who are unable to maintain the subject-positions desired by the platform become excess population under conditions of monopoly. There remains, however, a gulf between the shifting positions as demonstrated by Lizzie and Martin, and collectivized action. The liminal spaces between the subject position of the passive melancholic and collective action require a bridge in order for new ways of being to become manifest.

Žižek (2017) suggests that such a bridge is possible. He proposes a reversal of the commonly held idea that the past is fixed. What is required, instead, is a reformulation of the past. By reinterpreting the past, and thus creating new meanings from events and experiences, new opportunities (futures) become possible, rather than those that are made most obvious through the normative understandings. Alternative options for escape from enclosure may well lie in such reformulations that enable the emergence of "systematic and *organized* affirmation of non-value" (Alenka Zupančič, 2019b, p. 104). That is, if capital progresses by its ability to incorporate ever more things into quantitative monied value, escape from enclosure lies not in competing for higher levels of valorisation from within such a system, but by re-thinking value; re-valuing aspects of life that contribute to labour of care, relationships, experiences and the reproduction of society through the domestic sphere of interpersonal relations provide what is a potential way of disrupting capitalism by undermining the very basis of capitalist appropriation. If money is no longer the supreme benchmark of value, capitalism loses its power. This is not an individual matter, situated on the level of self-improvement or self-actualization. Instead, it is a collective task of monumental

proportions. As Lacan succinctly puts it "It will not constitute progress, if it only happens for some" (Lacan, 1990, as cited in Alenka Zupančič, 2019b, p. 106).

8.6   Conclusion

This chapter traverses some of the contradictions that emerge as digital capitalism extends even further into new areas of social life that have for the most part been somewhat removed from the intensive operations of capitalism on a large scale. The insertion of *Airbnb* into these heterotopic spaces results in a loss of agency and authorship for those who engage with the platform. The notion of the digital subject – as a celebrity subject seeking its own individual recognition – is thrown into a deep contradiction as the very processes of big data dis-embed the individual from their own reference-points such that distinguishable and unique characteristics become dissociated from their singular significance.

The lure of celebrity; to be known and discoverable, stands in direct contradiction to the effects of big data, and despite the persuasive rhetoric of digital technologies (where everyone can become an internet sensation), the sheer volume of circulation subtly but continually reinforces to subjects that they are in fact dividuated, disembedded and disempowered. Despite this knowledge, digital subjects are compelled to participate, and it is through participation in digital platforms that subjects become a dividuated member of a population.

Over-tourism, over-supply and unsustainable competition are conditions of *Airbnb* that demonstrate the effects of surplus. These effects drive incomes down and labour inputs up. Combined with over-supply issues, the ways in which digital capitalism imposes on 'free-time' in untenable ways encloses hosts by leveraging their labour more completely, across vectors of time and space. *Airbnb* uses its digital platform to accelerate its operations in a heterotopic space, but is unable to sustain its surpluses, and thus, ironically, sets the scene for alternative futures. The construction of the individual as a trope for capitalist appropriation paradoxically combines with the inherent flaw in algorithmic analysis, particularly as it relates to the disembedded and disembodied digital subject, to provide an opportunity for anti-capitalist action and escape from enclosure.

The continual production of surplus through digital capitalism extends beyond surplus-value, the form of surplus that is most commonly attributed to capitalism. The advent of digital capitalism allows surplus to express in other ways; specifically, through surplus-enjoyment and surplus-meaning. Such surpluses characterize digital capitalism so that it is always exceeding itself; and in so doing continually creates unresolvable contradictions that manifest in individuals, in communities and in the functioning of economic markets. Contradictions, it appears, are problems for those who participate, as eventually they too, become surplus, this time in the form of surplus-populations. Digital capitalism, meanwhile, uses contradictions wrought by its operations to open new arenas for exploitation.

9. Chapter Nine: Thesis Conclusion

At first glance, this research provides a critical contribution to the growing body of literature about the phenomenon of *Airbnb.* The empirical research with *Airbnb* hosts in the four research sites provides new insights into the impacts of *Airbnb* within the context of regional tourism. However, while the growth of *Airbnb* and the subsequent impacts on the people who engage with it are fascinating areas of study by themselves*,* the utilization of a specific analytical methodology provides a deeper and broader understanding of the field so that the research – while originally intended to provide a case-study analysis of *Airbnb* in regional tourist towns in Aotearoa New Zealand – does more than this. It is then, not simply a situated case-study about *Airbnb.* Instead, this research uses *Airbnb* as a lens to investigate the wider issues surrounding the emergence of platform capitalism, which itself, nests within the even larger field of digital technologies. Overwriting all these fields, is the production of surplus. The current research goes beyond individual issues, and indeed, specific situations that emerge under the guise of Airbnb, to examine the intersection of digital capitalism with human lives much more broadly. It thus provides insights into the broader social sphere of the field in which a crisis of care foments.

9.1   Methodological contribution

This research provides two distinct contributions to the theoretical literature on methodology. Firstly, as Fredric Jameson notes, philosophical contradictions are mediated at the level of context, not at a philosophical level (Jameson, 2015). In the context of this research I demonstrate the ways in which two conceptually different methodological ontologies can operate separately and distinctly within the same body of work to produce knowledge and insights that account for independent aspects of the object under scrutiny. The presence of multiple aspects of the object necessitate separate methodological ontologies, which in turn requires the researcher to develop the ability to hold two distinct philosophical ideas at the same time while resisting the temptation to collapse or simplify ideas into a hierarchy.

The distinct ontologies are used in separate ways: one is to provide a structural critique of subjectivity and another critique that looks at the play of meaning. The

two methodological ontologies at work in this research, therefore, do not 'combine', but rather, move in relation to one another. This particular kind of mediation has enabled greater expression of the two ontologies - of socially constructed meaning and of structurally generated surplus. The interpretative methodologies are specifically deployed to develop an understanding of the construction of subjectivities, and a post-Marxist / Pyscho-analytical analysis to understand the presence and impact of different forms of surplus.

Secondly, this research makes an original contribution to the theoretical debates on methodology by presenting a model of analysis that explores surplus as both an analytical tool and as a methodological imperative. The presence of surplus in the form of surplus-enjoyment and surplus-meaning provokes the application of analytical methods that allows such surpluses to be accounted for.

Issues of surplus-meaning and surplus-enjoyment create untenable situations that people are unable to negotiate or make sense of. This surplus occurs because the dynamic field of digital capitalism, (in which the parameters of engagement are always in flux), create situations of uncertainty and tension in those who engage with a particular platform. Thus, some of the more important insights of this research emerge through an analysis that straddles a post-Marxist feminist analysis and a psycho-analytic tradition of what participants struggle to say, as well as what they say too much. The ensuing contradictions are more readily understood through the application of such a methodological approach that enables understanding of a constitutive gap between what is real and what can be said. The resulting analysis, in which a wider array of meaning is elicited from the data than simple analysis of the spoken word, provides an interpretative methodological contribution to the academic field in ways which enable theoretical links to be more explicitly explored and applied.

9.2   Elements of analysis revisited

The elements of analysis utilized in this research represent a unique, multi-layered approach to understanding the operations of digital capitalism. Specifically, the dynamics of commodification, biopolitics and time and space are deployed to demonstrate their centrality to the constitution of hosting subjectivities under conditions of *Airbnb*. However, a broader overview of these elements contributes to understanding the interplay of dynamics within the wider

context of digital platform capitalism (beyond a case-study of *Airbnb*). These three elements also provide glimpses of alternate futures and possibilities that appear in the gaps that platform capitalism rends in the fabric of people's social worlds.

The elements of analysis, although presented in a particular order in this research, do not follow a linear progression of A causing B, B causing C. Rather the three elements of commodification, biopolitics and intensification of time and space offer different analytical tools to examine the same field of capture. The elements interact in a complex and interdependent system. It is a system of enmeshment.

An example of this 'enmeshing' of concepts is evident in the internalized operation of biopolitics and commodification of the self: Biopolitical management of the self involves not just the selling of one's self (commodification) but also the continual *remaking* of the self so that the process of commodification of the self is productive, not simply re-productive. Drawing a theatre analogy, *Airbnb*'s play is scripted to highlight notions of authenticity and localness, set in a scene of harmonious domesticity. However, unresolvable contradictions appear when hosts' acts of performativity conflict with the lived realities of daily life, *outside the platform.* This contradiction creates a countervailing movement in which the host attempts to resolve the contradiction by way of an embodied response to disavow the body. In this way, hosts initially encounter the platform as a means by which to mitigate the corrosive effects of post-2008 precarity but instead find themselves imbricated in a field fuelled by contradictions about which they struggle to make sense. This process is made more obvious because *Airbnb*'s operations take place in spaces previously considered to be insulated from capitalist intrusion.

It is the 'place-basedness' of *Airbnb* (where the operations of *Airbnb* take place in spaces that are commonly imbued with other, conflicting meanings) that provides an opportunity to consider nuances in the debates on surplus-meaning and surplus-enjoyment. By placing platform capitalism in the centre of inquiry in a field that predominantly operates out of the home, the overlapping layers of digital technologies, platform capitalism, *Airbnb* and the human subject intersect, and contradictions arise from the ensuing surplus.

9.3   Digital normalization and digital subjects

The normalization of *Airbnb* in popular discourse and news media and its wide-scale proliferation contribute to the enclosure of hosts in ways that are experienced as inescapable. This enclosure is reinforced by the sense of normalization that *Airbnb* has appropriated through the pervasive use of a wider neoliberal discourse that draws on notions of independence, rights, sharing and democracy. *Airbnb* compels hosts to spend time updating profiles and attending to the digital needs of content-creation for the platform. This utilizes behaviour that has become normalized through digital subjectivity, where the functionality of Web 2.0 enables people to create and curate their digital reproductions. Because of this adaptation of what has become a social norm regarding digital use, hosts initially experience *Airbnb* as an unproblematic process of participation in a capitalist 'democracy'. Utilizing biopolitical tools wielded through digital technologies, *Airbnb* intensifies time and space and commodifies hosts in a movement that condenses hosts into a performativity-driven 'idealized hospitality subjectivity' framed as a hospitality entrepreneur.

This subject-position is carefully crafted and nurtured by *Airbnb* through the overarching commodification of the self and is largely achieved through standardization. Standardization is inherent within the algorithmic manipulation that is a common marker of platform capitalism, and moreover, the very nature of algorithms *per se* trend toward homogeneity, or standardization. Homogeneity suits the purposes of platform capitalism, because it enables individuals to be easily categorized into populations. As Kiarina Kordela (2007, p. 154) notes "the compulsion to usefulness is the motor of biopolitics". To achieve maximum efficiency and usefulness, *Airbnb* employs digital strategies to ensure compliance and control of its hosts' behaviours. Biopolitical control, where the platform's ideals, rules and modes of behaviour are reinterpreted as personal goals (rather than corporate ones), has been demonstrated to effectively achieve outcomes beneficial to the platform, but not to hosts.

Despite the dominant theme of inescapability from digital control, contradictions within digital capitalism are unable to be constrained indefinitely. This is particularly evident in *Airbnb*, where digital capitalism is enacted within the confines of the home. Human needs of social reproduction conflict with the logics

of digital capitalism; in other words, oppositional forces of commodification and monetization clash with meanings of social value, family and privacy.

9.4 Subject-position typologies

Ongoing exposure to conflicts of domestic care and relationships nudge hosts through a range of subject-positions. Hosts initially fulfil an enthusiastic proselyte subject-position; where the platform is viewed as an exciting opportunity to maximize one's potential as a hospitality entrepreneur, achieve celebrity for one's own individualized efforts, and be rewarded both financially and socially, all the while promising freedom and agency. However, *Airbnb* throws up contradictions to this romanticized view of participation through the corrosive effects of competition, the conflicts between business goals and the necessary processes of daily life, care-work and social reproduction, and inadequate financial rewards.

The unsustainability of the first subject position creates psychical conflicts in hosts. Enthusiastic proselytes attempt to manage conflicts by attaching more firmly to the cause of their distress. Rational engagers temper their initial enthusiasm with pragmatics: by attempts to mitigate the more corrosive effects of engagement with *Airbnb.* This happens predominantly through an ideological reframing of precarity as freedom. Negative impacts on family life are mitigated by manipulations of booking availability – a specious expression of agency that is enabled if hosts have the prior financial stability to afford to do so. Those with less material resources seek additional forms of precarious, part-time or seasonal work to offset the inadequate financial rewards delivered through *Airbnb.*

The final subject-position of the passive melancholic represents a differing term of engagement from the previous two subject-positions. These hosts provide insight into alternative ways of being that may emerge for residents of small regional tourist towns, grappling with issues of financial security, tourism and life's demands. Discontent from passive melancholics may drive local government and other regulatory authorities to intervene in the field with regulatory controls; some of which are already in the process of being enacted in Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as in other international locations.

9.5 Surplus

Striking similarity across the subject-positions becomes evident in surplus-enjoyment, where the process of working towards a goal becomes the source of sustaining affect. While surplus has always been evident in capitalism, most noticeably in the form of surplus-value, this current research identifies that under conditions of digital capitalism, other forms of surplus are produced. Surplus-enjoyment is revealed as a condition of digital capitalism, because users must continually work to stay relevant on the platform. Similar across the participants, too, is the production of surplus-meaning which creates internal conflicts for hosts who must constantly work to negotiate multiple meanings of home and hospitality. Moreover, meanings that surround ideas of 'authentic' and 'local' are displaced and instead become commodifiable aspects of life, rather than markers of identity. Such corrosion of identity contributes to the crisis of care and the reformulation of the social lives of those who engage with *Airbnb.*

Ultimately, as *Airbnb* trends toward monopolization (and therefore, exhaustion), new forms of digital capitalism show evidence of emerging to create new markets to exploit. *Airbnb* itself is moving into other areas of expansion, such as *Airbnb Experiences* to further extract value. Internationally, evidence exists of the emergence of alternative models of homestay platforms, such as *Fairbnb*. Such anti-globalization movements may offer emancipation from the more corrosive aspects of global capitalism, but they have not yet proven to be effective, and may in fact represent a redoubling of capitalism through more and more integration of non-productive labour into the system of appropriation. Inquiry into the synergies between this group and service providers in other national situations who have developed collective practices in the use of digital platform capitalism is beyond the scope of this research, but nevertheless provide an avenue for future academic enquiry as the field of digital capitalism mutates.

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11.   Appendices

11.1 Appendix 1: Low risk notification

Date: 02 June 2017

Dear Stella Pennell

Re: Ethics Notification - 4000017917 - Trouble in Paradise? Conflicts and contradictions of platform capitalism as regional tourist-town antagonisms
Stella Pennell, PhD Candidate, Massey University

Thank you for your notification which you have assessed as Low Risk.

Your project has been recorded in our system which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

If situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your ethical analysis, please go to http://rims.massey.ac.nz and register the changes in order that they be assessed as safe to proceed.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:
"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Dr Brian Finch, Director - Ethics, telephone 06 3569099 ext 86015, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz. "

Please note, if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to complete the application form again, answering "yes" to the publication question to provide more information for one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

11.2 Appendix 2: Information Sheet

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA

Trouble in Paradise? Conflicts and contradictions of platform capitalism in regional tourist-towns in Aotearoa New Zealand

INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Stella Maria Pennell and I am a PhD student from Massey University. I am researching the experiences of residents of regional tourist towns who are *Airbnb* hosts.

This research will enable greater understanding of the ways people negotiate hosting people in their own homes, and the impacts of this activity on residents and their communities. I anticipate that the conclusions of this research will: help with understanding about the ways in which this new wave of the shifts in society that have enabled this sector to grow, as well create a greater understanding of the benefits and/or drawbacks of participating in this type of business may be.

To participate in this research, you must be aged over 18, and be an *Airbnb* host (past or current) who lives in their *Airbnb* business, i.e. the *Airbnb* is not a separate holiday home or investment property.

This research will involve an interview that will last approximately one hour. The interview will involve discussing your experiences of hosting guests in your *Airbnb* home. A follow-up interview may also be requested, if clarification or elaboration on some aspect of the research is required. I would also like to take photos of your *Airbnb*, if you give permission to do so. This would add detail to the research that cannot be gained from an interview.

The information and data collected for this research will be stored securely on my personal computer and will be destroyed once the research outputs are complete. I will seek to maintain confidentiality so that no personally identifying features will be used in the research, unless you want to be identified.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

● decline to answer any particular question;
● ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;
● withdraw from the study at any time;
● ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
● provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher; and
● be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

Please feel free to contact me or one of my supervisors if you have any questions or concerns about this project. I look forward to hearing from you, and thank you for your time.

Researcher: **Stella Pennell,**

                         8 School Road,

                         Whitianga, 3510

                         Ph: 027**********

                         Email: S.Pennell@massey.ac.nz

Primary Supervisor: **Dr. Warwick Tie**

                         Room AT2.33, Atrium Building,

                         Albany Campus,

                         Albany, Auckland

                         Ph: 09 414 0800 Ext 43477

                         Email: W.J.Tie@massey.ac.nz

Co-Supervisor: **Dr Corrina Tucker**

                         Room 3.17, Social Sciences Tower

                         Turitea Campus

                         Palmerston North

                         Ph: 09 356 9099 ext 83633

                         Email: C.Tucker@massey.ac.nz

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Dr Brian Finch, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 356 9099 x 86015, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

Te Kunenga
ki Pūrehuroa

School of People, Environment & Planning
Private Bag 11222, Palmerston North 4442, New Zealand. T +64 6 350 4343 F +64 6 350 5737. http://pep.massey.ac.nz

11.3 Appendix 3: Participant Consent Form

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA

Trouble in Paradise? Conflicts and contradictions of platform capitalism in regional tourist-towns in Aotearoa New Zealand.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – INDIVIDUAL

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.

I do/do not agree to have photographs taken of my *Airbnb* business / property.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Name	
Date	
Signature	
Address	

Email	

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been

reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this

document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other

than the researcher(s), please contact Dr Brian Finch, Director - Ethics, telephone 06 3569099 ext

86015, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

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11.4 Appendix 4: Topic Guide

Question 1: In what ways does running an Airbnb affect your home life when you have guests in?	Proposition 1: changes in people's daily routines associated with hosting guests lead to tensions between business goals and the reproduction of social life.

Supplementary question 1: How do you manage those tensions or issues? What is happening around tensions or issues that remain unresolved?	Supplementary proposition 1: Some tensions may be resolved within the terms of *Airbnb*'s business model/ideology. Those that remain unresolved cannot be left unattended.

Question 2: What things do you take into consideration when you schedule your home as available for booking?	Proposition 2: That hosts develop calculations by which they can attribute differential values to various relationships that comprise their lives (familial, business, environmental, community relations).

Supplementary question 2: What things don't easily fit the decisions to make your home available? Which ones recur? What is happening around them?	Supplementary proposition 2: That the form of calculus used by hosts will work for those fields of relations acknowledged within and ascribed value by *Airbnb* ideology and that its terms will be insufficient for relations that are not

	acknowledged within that ideology.
Question 3: How are other people in your town doing in Airbnb?	Proposition 3: Wider social relationships will be reconfigured as a result of competition between *Airbnb* hosts, according to neoliberal logic of markets.
Supplementary question 3: Do you keep track of what other Airbnbs are offering or charging? Does this affect how you run your Airbnb business?	Supplementary proposition 3: Residents will fetishize themselves as 'business owners' rather than 'residents' or 'private individuals' as an expression of neoliberal socialization in which entrepreneurialism is accorded a high-status value.
Question 4: What is the main thing you spend the money you make through Airbnb on? IS this what you initially planned before starting with Airbnb?	Proposition 4: A portion of hosts' *Airbnb* income will be reinvested back into their *Airbnb* as a justification for commodifying oneself and ones' personal space rather than for personal need or discretionary spending.
Supplementary question 4: what other sorts of things do you spend the money on?	Supplementary proposition 4: *Airbnb* hosts will ascribe different value systems to money earned through *Airbnb* than to other

	forms of income to reflect socially constructed moral justifications.
Supplementary question 4 (a): Would you consider changing your Airbnb into a long-term rental? Why or why not?	Supplementary proposition 4 (a): Neoliberal ideas of free market enterprise will surpass concerns of social housing and community cohesiveness and exacerbate class divisions.
Question 5: When you are reviewing and rating guests, what sort of comments do you make about them, and why?	Proposition 5: Hosts will alter their responses to align with *Airbnb* ideals by ascribing high value ratings and comments about guests regardless of the quality of the interactions between them.
Supplementary question 5: How do manage ratings and comments when you have had a negative experience with a guest?	Supplementary proposition 5: Relations between guests and hosts that are unresolved by *Airbnb*'s platform present an ongoing tension that modifies hosts' behaviours in guest interactions.
Question 6: In what ways do you represent your locality in terms of attractions, features and beauty/attractiveness?	Proposition 6: Hosts' engagement with *Airbnb* ideology will shape their relationship to place. Relationships to place that are incongruent with *Airbnb* ideology

	will be reframed, and those that cannot be reframed present an ongoing contradiction.
Supplementary question 6: How do you deal with negative issues such as pollution, habitat destruction or other areas of local concern?	Supplementary proposition 6: Negative environmental or locality issues that could negatively impact guests/ratings will be minimized in representation, leading to internal conflicts in hosts' expressions of value.