

**Romanticising Market Exchange:  
Unpacking Cultural Meanings of Value in Home-sharing Markets**

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## ABSTRACT

The so-called sharing economy has disrupted the way people exchange, create, produce or transfer value. Digitally-enabled, this economy makes it easier for consumers to rent, share, barter and lend private resources to strangers, a consumption practice called collaborative consumption. Past literature suggests that prototypical sharing facilitates a sense of inclusion, but consumers fail to develop feelings of belonging. The misuse of the term ‘sharing’ may be the culprit for mixed findings in the literature. This study explores how consumer sharing can be romanticised in market exchange.

Drawing on Romanticism as an artistic, literary and intellectual movement that is central to the rise of consumer culture (Campbell, 1987), this thesis contextualises consumer sharing in a consumer sharing marketplace that is wrought with paradoxes, conflicts tensions and ideological struggles. Adopting a multi-sited ethnography, netnography and grounded theory analysis to theorise consumers’ romanticised sharing processes, this research empirically studies a home-sharing network (Airbnb) to understand how sharing and collaboration take place between producers and consumers (e.g., hosts and guests) and if Romanticism is in fact embedded in their sharing experiences. This thesis discovers that home-sharing consumers and producers are on a journey towards a moral destiny that fuses opposing ideologies of Romanticism and Rationalism together. They mythologise a new paradise where they can re-emerge with the natural world, return to a collaborative society of human nature and imagine a new order where the common public interest and freedom for all is actualised. However, in a market system such as home sharing where hosts supply a home and are compensated for it, rational thinking and self-interests do not escape the network.

Thus, with the interplay of the two ideologies, the network is laden with paradoxes, conflicts and tensions. The apparent contradictions occur at micro, meso and macro-levels of interaction that eventually lead hosts and guests to perform Romantic practices and engage in resistance narratives to disguise the internal ideological struggles; that is, home sharing is an open secret that is known but cannot easily be articulated. Through the processes of open secrecy, the home-sharing network is empowered and hosts and guests enthusiastically engage in their sharing experiences even though they can be illusive and filled with paradoxes and conflicts. The joint disbelief and ambiguity of the home-sharing experience and the perceived belief that

sharing intentions may be pure allow hosts and guests to co-create a journey towards an imagined utopic paradise that embodies their moral-oriented self-identities. This is realised in Airbnb home-sharing heterotopic spaces that reflect real sites of exchange and home spaces (Foucault, 1986). However, they are actually ‘counter sites’ that fuse Rationality and Romanticism, thus creating heterotopic sites of deviance, illusion and compensation, which are fundamentally controlled through the spatiotemporal and social boundaries of the spaces that hosts and guests ‘play’ in. These spaces reflect the commercialisation of intimacies and the social society we live in.

The findings explain the relationship between the Romantic concept of sharing consumption and the heterotopic ‘space of difference’ that can juxtapose many incompatible sites in a single real space in which the notion of ‘open secrecy’ and ‘masking’ are understood as the socially-situated deployment of cultural fantasies. Thus, taking the problem of paradoxical consumption of true sharing and self-interested exchange as a starting point, this research introduces the concept of the fusion of Romanticism and Rationalism in the sharing economy to understand the transformation of access to possessions and the embedded cultural experience that hosts and guests experience, which is saturated with rituals, symbols practices and emotions.

This study addresses the complex workings of the private spaces of homes that are challenged in various ways by commercial practices, thus creating an anti-market and anti-private place. In doing so, the study’s findings join a growing body of consumer culture research on identity work, sharing, resistance, possessions and use of space. It also offers methodological implications to future researchers on the use of a multi-sited ethnography and netnography as well as practical implications for marketers, policymakers and consumers.

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## ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

The following publications relate to work undertaken for this thesis:

- Makkar, M., Yap, S.F., Belk, R.W. & Glynn, M. (December 3-5, 2018). Heterotopic Airbnb spaces: How sharing romanticises exchange markets. To be presented at the meeting of *ANZMAC*, Adelaide, Australia.
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## **ETHICS APPROVAL**

Ethics approval from AUT University Ethics Committee (AUTEC) was granted on 26 October 2016, for a period of three years until 25 October 2019. The ethics application number is 16/376 (see Appendix E for Ethics Approval Letter).

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*The system of consumerism may seem like an immovable fact of modern life. But it is not. That the system was manufactured suggests that we can reshape those forces to create a healthier, more sustainable system with a more fulfilling goal than 'more stuff'. (Botsman & Rogers, 2010)*

*Only by recognising and challenging the encroachment of the perspective that all the world is a market and everything and everyone within it is an exchangeable commodity can we begin to appreciate the critical role of sharing in consumer behaviour. (Belk, 2010)*

### 1.1 Background

These opening quotations speak of new perspectives on market systems where consumers have the power to decide what they want to consume, and how they choose to consume it, thus reimagining economies of exchange. The former quotation speaks of collaborative consumption where people enter a new market to acquire or distribute goods or services for a fee or compensation (Belk, 2014c) while the latter speaks of an anti-market where sharing behaviours are part of human nature and demonstrate selfless acts towards others. The concept of collaborative consumption, a new market system that Botsman and Rogers (2010) introduced, shook the world at a time of economic recession, concerns with the environment, technological advances and Internet connectivity. Collaborative consumption is also known as the sharing economy. Botsman spoke of it in a Ted Talk (2010) as a global village where we can create ties with others as we would with our neighbours, based on kindness and trust. In contrast to Botsman's perspective of this economy, Belk (2010, 2014c) argues that previous notions of collaborative consumption have been misrepresented and essentially confuse market exchange, sharing and gifting together. Eckhardt and Bardhi (2015) stress that the sharing economy is not about sharing at all.

The current sharing economy is perceived as an exchange of resources with strangers using modern-day innovations such as the Internet to allow for flexibility and freedom without the need for sociability, relationship building and commonality (Belk, 2014c). However, for many businesses operating under this economy banner, sharing private possessions such as homes or clothes involves less anonymity between 'sharing' peers than some access-based consumption or market exchanges where consumers gain exclusive access to objects without the need to interact with others accessing the same object (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). Compared to a society of strangers (Simmel, 1950), a

cold-hearted instrumental society that revolves around the idea of ‘me’ rather than ‘us’, the sharing economy can involve exchanges that are socially embedded (Granovetter, 1985) and bring people closer together.

The term “sharing” has been revolutionised in an era of continuous technological developments. Consumers are able to access rather than own consumption resources that may be idle, inhabit co-working spaces and use people’s underutilised skills to carry out jobs (McWilliams, 2015). This boom in the sharing economy is noteworthy. The size of the sharing economy was estimated at \$15 billion globally in 2015 and by 2025 the amount will increase to \$335 billion (PWC, 2015). In the United States (U.S.) alone 44.8 million adults use sharing economy services such as Airbnb or Uber and this amount is predicted to increase to 86.5 million by 2021 (Statista, 2018). This digitally-enabled economy makes it easier for consumers to rent, share, barter and lend private resources such as property and skills to complete strangers. Technology-empowered markets have allowed for entrepreneurial behaviours, which are shifting power from traditional organisations to a ‘crowd-based capitalist’ market of consumer entrepreneurs (Sundararajan, 2016). This enables more sustainable utilisation of limited resources for more justifiable models of resource distribution (Lawrie, 2012; Widlok, 2017), thus reimagining alternate forms of economy (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2016). New innovations such as cryptocurrencies (e.g., Bitcoin) and other disruptive business models that remove middlepersons will see a change in the state of the economy where profits can be distributed amongst all.

Nevertheless, not all companies within the sharing economy have found success. Some startups, such as Zaarly, Homejoy and TaskRabbit have created innovative technologies but have either closed down or radically changed their business models due to weak positioning and lack of consumer interest in sharing, social interaction or being “neighbourly”. For instance, TaskRabbit, a marketplace connecting skilled people with those that need tasks done, changed their business model to suit the on-demand economy by promising completion of tasks within 90 minutes while scrapping their old auction model (contractors bid for customers’ jobs) and using a contractor’s set fees instead (Fast Company, 2017). Couchsurfing, previously a non-profit organisation that allowed strangers to stay at others’ homes for free, sought angel investment and transformed into a for-profit business to remain sustainable (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2016). This change in position created a member backlash due to the founders’ valuable

ownership interests in Couchsurfing (Lapowsky, 2012). It is no longer an organisation founded on the ideals of community, cohesion, acceptance and values for the betterment of the world; Couchsurfing founders and investors have a vested interest in the success of the business rather than their original vision. Other ventures which have succeeded in attracting an audience and appealing to customers, such as Netflix, Airbnb and Uber, have faced lawsuits, calls to cease and desist in certain countries and municipalities and strikes from official business owners who suffer from competitive pricing and the supply and demand power of new business platforms. Short-term rentals such as Airbnb are perceived as creating shortages for long-term housing services and traditional taxi drivers are finding it hard to compete with private car sharing drivers such as Uber that do not get taxed equally.

Rather than a sharing economy, the phenomenon is now being viewed by media and some scholars as the access-economy (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Kessler, 2015). In general, companies from the hospitality, finance, healthcare, food and beverage and media industries risk disruptions from new business models under the sharing economy where consumers are empowered to conduct transactions directly with each other (i.e., peer-to-peer). Technologically (e.g. social networking and mobile payments), societally (e.g. need for sustainability, rise of population density and a sense of belonging) and economically (e.g. need for financial flexibility and access over ownership) driven, the sharing economy appears to be here to stay (Owyang, Tran, & Silva, 2013). A good example of such market disruption is in the hotel industry. Airbnb, a home-sharing market-based platform was reported to have coordinated stays of over 40,000 people in more than 250,000 houses, apartments and rooms in 30,000 cities across 192 countries around the world during the summer of 2013 (Guttentag, 2015). Their success brought down hotel revenues in U.S. cities by 10% (The Economist, 2016).

Despite the rising popularity of the sharing economy, the term ‘sharing’ does not truly fit here in the sense that Botsman and Rogers (2010) described it in the opening quotation. While sharing has also been defined as “enabling others to access what is valued, [and it] provides a conceptual and practical alternative to market exchange and to gift-exchange” (Widlöck, 2017, p. 1), we are living in a neoliberal marketplace (Harvey, 2007) where people are more interested in sharing with others for individualistic self-interests than they are for altruistic reasons (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2015). Under close scrutiny, most sharing economy businesses are fairly traditional in

their offering but unique in how they offer it (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2016). For example, Uber, a ridesharing platform, is essentially a taxi dispatcher, but unlike traditional organisations, the platform offers flexibility of work and boundary fluidity (Constantiou, Marton, & Tuunainen, 2017) making it easier for consumers to collaborate without traditional company formalities. It is still questionable whether collaborative consumption is a new consumer culture or part of the usual transactional exchange as several for-profit sharing platforms seem to represent traditional economic value orientations while also presenting a socially egalitarian movement (Scholz, 2016; Schor & Wengronowitz, 2017). Signs of materialism inhibit chances of true sharing with others in a consumer culture (Belk, 2017b).

On the other hand, sharing in its prototypical sense of caring and giving without expecting anything in return is one of the building blocks of communities and social structures of society. It originates from family and kinship structures and anyone else outside that circle is restricted to market exchange and individualistic utilitarian motives (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2016). However, others have found the social practice of sharing to be the basis of human life, such as sharing food in forager and nomadic societies (Belk, 2010; Belk, Groves, & Østergaard, 2000; Hunt, 2005). Accompanying the rise of pseudo-sharing is a decline in the prototypical sense of familial sharing (Belk, 2017a). Individual family members tend to value their private possessions compared to the ideals of joint possession (Belk, 2010) in a world of ‘mine’ over ‘ours’. Resources are now commodified where there is no space or will to share without something in return. As Botsman and Rogers (2010) explain, ideally, a world that is based on the kindness and goodness of people is a desirable notion but the reality is that the concept of kindness and trust may not extend beyond the nuclear family and close knit friends (Cote, Pickert, & Wellman, 2008) and does not reflect the reality of the sharing economy. This notion causes issues for consumers when determining value in one market over the other.

The paradoxical relations of consumers being driven by economic motives whilst ‘sharing’ (or giving access to) special possessions (Benoit, Baker, Bolton, Gruber, & Kandampully, 2017) can become problematic to individuals and the value of their shared resources. For example, a home-sharing platform such as Airbnb provides community-driven hospitality to travellers (also known as guests), offering an opportunity to stay with locals and enhance perceptions of a social experience (e.g., get



to know travellers/ meet locals) for a fee (Botsman & Capelin, 2016). Thus, social intimacies and the primitive notions of hospitality are commercialised, blurring the lines between commodity exchange and social exchange, which are often perceived as polar opposites. Such hybrid exchanges not only endanger meanings of exchange but also intimacies. They may normalise the commodification of social relationships (Constable, 2009) where friendships, kindness and genuine care can potentially be exchanged for a fee too.

There is an emerging consumer ethos that rejects mass production and the mainstream consumer sector calls for a more genuine culture (Baker, 2014; Reich, 2015; Scholz, 2016; Schor & Wengronowitz, 2017). While popular debates over the emergence of the sharing economy are focused on political, legal and economic issues, this study focuses on the more concerning issues around culture that may influence the trajectory of the sharing economy. For example, consumers' desires for emancipation from the commercial market or the gift economy demonstrate the importance of studying consumer culture and how it impacts market emergence or dissolution (Fischer, Bristor, & Gainer, 1996; Kozinets, 2002a; Marcoux, 2009). Both the historical and sociological literature has shown that consumer cultural factors play an important role in influencing consumption behaviours, values and attitudes towards brands or communities (Firat & Dholakia, 1998; Firat, 1991a). Collaborative consumption is changing the way traditional consumption takes place. It is changing the preferences for ownership versus access to resources, the meanings of possessions, identity expression and how consumers perceive value in goods or services through heightened engagement in conversations around value that reflect the emergence of technological developments and social media. Collaborative consumption businesses have the potential to make disruptive market exchange more socially embedded in our lives.

Consumers are congregating through social networking platforms to create value that can spur the dynamics of large-scale fluid economies (Castells, 2000) and potentially rescue the social and moral elements of historical economies. With the rise of collaborative consumption, consumers can choose to exchange anything with anyone from around the world for compensation. Some of the most prominent industries being disrupted by collaborative consumption are the transportation and tourism sectors (Deloitte, 2016). The way in which people travel and connect with others is being transformed, as well as the extent to which they find things valuable. For instance,

consumers are looking for cost advantages in sharing economy platforms (Shaheen, Mallery, & Kingsley, 2012) whilst searching for authentic experiences in travel (Molz, 2013). They are finding value through economic benefits as well as the social benefits of engaging with locals during an immersive travel experience (Skift, 2014). However, this mode of resource exchange (e.g., a local host offering a private space – the home – to a paying guest) blends two opposing logics – the commercial and communal exchanges belonging to a larger network of collaborative consumer-producer networks. This new hybrid of exchange becomes problematic when market participants (i.e., consumers and producers) with different end goals come together to collaborate and create value for themselves in a highly dynamic and interdependent network.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

According to John (2013), the sharing economy blurs the modes of logic between commodity, gift-giving and sharing. Despite the prevalence of collaborative consumption marketplaces and changing consumption behaviours in postmodern economies, the hybridisation of these market logics have not been sufficiently examined by researchers. Much research on brand communities, subcultures and tribes have looked at how consumers congregate to consume, produce and distribute value (Cova, 1997; Kozinets, 2001; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). However, this community-based approach to value creation does not capture consumer activities that may be related to advancing other goals in the network other than community belonging and identity building. Value in blurred market such as the sharing economy cannot only be realised through its communal aspects.

In consumer research, the collaborative consumption phenomenon has been largely analysed through two streams of literature: sharing and ownership (see Habibi, Kim, & Laroche, 2016). These two concepts demonstrate that there are some inconsistencies in the understanding of the creation and the continued participation in the sharing economy. Unlike legal ownership where an object is in fact “mine”, another dimension of ownership is a perceived, or psychological sense of something as “mine!” (Peck & Shu, 2018; Rochat, 2014) where people and objects (digital, physical or spatial) can become entangled (Belk, 2018; Hodder, 2012). Firstly, there exists anecdotal evidence that social, environmental, moral and community values lead to collaborative consumption (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Gansky, 2010). On the other

hand, empirical evidence points towards utilitarian and functional drivers in terms of accessing others' possessions (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Lamberton & Rose, 2012). Such mixed perceptions of this consumption behaviour may be due to the misuse of the term 'sharing' (Belk, 2014b). Belk (2014b) explains that modern sharing practices are more like "pseudo sharing – a wolf-in-sheep's-clothing" where "commodity exchange and potential exploitation of consumer co-creators present themselves in the guise of sharing" (p. 7). Past conceptualisation and evidence have been of great importance in revealing what can be accessed and/or shared, as well as predictors of the decision to enter and participate in this market. These theoretical contributions demonstrate that the sharing economy is confounded with inconsistencies in definition due to the hybrid modes of exchange of some 'sharing' contexts and the complex interactions between social and commercial activities in order to create value (Scaraboto, 2015). The prominence of this research is left undertheorized in three aspects relating to the interplay between market and nonmarket economies where multiple logics and modes of exchange occur simultaneously.

First, collaborative consumption research has portrayed the dynamics between moral and commercial economies as being based on competition and mutually exclusive (Giesler, 2006; Marcoux, 2009). Such research overlooks the power of the consumer in developing spaces where the least desirable aspects of market versus nonmarket characteristic can be suppressed. For instance, Burning Man (a non-profit community and artistic one-week event of self-expression in the U.S.) participants attend this festival to escape the market's instrumentalism (Kozinets, 2002a); however, contradicting anti-market logics, they pay an entrance fee to enter this hyper-communal event and engage in bartering, gifting and sharing as alternative forms of exchange. Similarly, Weinberger and Wallendorf (2012) found that community members that organised a Mardi Gras parade following Hurricane Katrina (a Category 5 hurricane that struck the U.S. in 2005) demonstrated discomfort in having nonlocal companies sponsoring the parade. However, members made attempts at linking the companies with the communities as a form of justification and in efforts to "intertwine economic (market) and sociocultural (moral) logics" (Weinberger & Wallendorf, 2012, p. 88). These recurrences of different market and nonmarket logics working together invite exploration of the processes involved in creating symbiotic relationships between consumers' social goals and the logics of the market which, according to Kozinets (2002a), may offer a reconciliation.

Such a reconciliation could lead to a new market and a new type of consumer that we are yet to understand.

Second, consumer research studies that explain the diverse interfaces among logics and exchange in market and nonmarket economies have chosen contexts that are initially based on sociality and communality but later integrate other market logics. Examples include geocaching communities (Scaraboto, 2015), biker subculture communities (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) and the institution of the family (Epp & Price, 2010). These nonmarket-mediated economies are often based on gifting, sharing and lending; however, more recently, they have introduced a greater level of market logics and exchange. Much can be said about market logics that are slowly seeping into the fabric of life and infiltrating how we socialise, love, experience life and feel towards others. The primarily new phenomenon of collaborative consumption is market-mediated and ostensibly based on the exchange of resources without the need for sociability and relationship building (Belk, 2014b). Hence, such research appears to position the sharing economy under the guise of a socially Romantic vocabulary such as sharing (e.g., ‘bike-sharing’). Reasons for such a positioning may be observed in Gell’s (1992) formula of gift/reciprocity as ‘good’ and market exchange as ‘bad’. It is clear that the term ‘sharing economy’ is romantically used in the marketer’s advertising and the sharing economy literature, but we do not yet understand why the term is sustained in the market and what it means to consumers. Do actors in the sharing economy marketplace romanticise other activities that take place in the market as well and if so, how? Could the idea of Romanticism as an idealised form of consumer sharing be used as an antidote to the reality of commercial exchange linked to the private home and if so, how? Romanticism as a cultural and intellectual ideology of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries critiqued the rational and intelligent mind by arguing for an irrational unconscious of spontaneous self-expression and identity-building (Löwy & Sayre, 2001). By refraining from segregating the social from the commercial and instead observing business transactions as socially embedded (Granovetter, 1985), my study contributes to the understanding of the Romantic notions of sharing in collaborative consumption networks and examines the process of Romantic market formations.

Furthermore, studies that have examined collaborative consumption marketplaces combine all platforms under the sharing economy and make assumptions that value is created and distributed equally. However, there are different collaborative

consumption markets that involve unique practices, actions and interactions based on what is shared and the context they fall under. For instance, access-based consumption cases such as car sharing may involve immediate functional benefits (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991) while other networks may offer minimal nominal value where value outcomes may be related to interconnections among network participants (Figueiredo & Scaraboto, 2016). On the other hand, home-sharing platforms involve more intimate sharing of the home, spaces and homey (i.e., an inviting and cosy place; feeling at home) possessions which may include additional benefits than just functional ones. There has been plenty of research on value, that is, the perceived benefit of objects, people or activities to an individual or the group (Chen, 2009; Cova, 1997; Holbrook, 1999). However, there is limited knowledge of its creation in the market-mediated exchange embedded in communities with ideals of collaboration (Hellwig, Belk, & Morhart, 2018), or of the interdependencies between participants and objects that can have a transformative effect on consumers such as the inalienable home space and homey possessions. Therefore, it becomes problematic when researchers claim that collaborative consumption platforms are simply access based and are void of communal qualities or non-market economic systems that are much closer to prototypical sharing (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2016) without examining the interconnected social and economic activities that take place within the network. There is a need for improved theoretical knowledge of the meanings of ‘sharing’ in the sharing economy and sharing frameworks to understand how and why market actors continue to romanticise and idealise market exchanges of meaningful resources (such as the private home) as sharing (i.e., moral and social) rather than the reality of what the process actually is (i.e., an exchange). The presence of the cultural resources of sharing in traditional markets can eventually problematize the consumer’s ability to conceive value whilst simultaneously experiencing sociality and the promise of a sharing culture. However, consumer cultures are perplexed with ideological struggles and dilemmas of value and interpersonal goals. We still need to further contextualise consumer sharing processes by placing them into a more dynamic context. Today’s consumer is a reflexive being that is insatiable and characterised as an individualist that is living a fragmented life with paradoxical moments and consumption experiences (Firat & Shultz, 1997). Consumers have the freedom to present themselves with the identity and persona as they desire. Thus, consumers, their community and the society could be full

of dynamic contradictions, paradoxes and ideological struggles but also collaborative ideals and moral values. However, we are yet to understand how these conflicts are managed intrapersonally (e.g., holding multiple opposing values and life goals), interpersonally (e.g., between community and subgroups and its members) and institutionally (e.g., between the community and dominant institutions).

Third, a clear limitation of past empirical work is the lack of knowledge on how value can be collectively co-created between consumers and producers that exists in a multi-level platform in a consumption network. It is even rarer to find research that maps out value created by individuals, the company, government and media overall to create value for the individual and interrelated network actors. It is also difficult to find research that examines a bottom-up approach. Studies in this field have examined hybrid elements in economies of consumer collectives from a macro-level of analysis, overlooking individual enactments of exchange in response to calls for the investigation “of contested market interactions empirically, at a more granular level” (Finch & Geiger, 2010, p. 136). Observing the individual, community and society levels allows for the discovery of the phenomenon that is taking place in the market. The findings revealed that collaborative consumption takes place to romantically and harmoniously co-exist in the commercial market. By focusing on economically “inefficient” behaviours over the commonly studied economic side of the sharing economy (Hellwig et al., 2018), we can begin to understand why a guise of Romanticism, sometimes called ‘sharewashing’, is adopted and sustained during the redistribution of resources between consumers of the sharing economy.

The reality is that research in the area of collaborative consumption is young and opens up several streams of examination. Except for a few studies that consider the hybrid nature of contemporary economies (Figueiredo & Scaraboto, 2016; Scaraboto, 2015), consumer researchers seem to have separated market exchange and non-market (based on sociality) mediated exchanges such as sharing and gift-giving or combine both modes in antithesis (Marcoux, 2009). I address this gap by acknowledging their existence in market-mediated platforms. I maintain that value is contextual, experiential, meaning-loaded, interpreted by multiple actors, dynamic and is rooted in social relationships (Arnould & Price, 1993; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Peñaloza & Mish, 2011). I also use a micro-level lens by observing individual acts of exchange that can

demonstrate conflicts between competing enactments of different market logics and factors that work to sustain the status of such relationships for the distribution of value.

### **1.3 Research Aims, Questions and Design**

Due to the previously mentioned limitations in past literature, this study focuses specifically on home-sharing platforms as market-mediated systems that are based on economic exchange practices interlaying social exchanges that are based on cultural meanings of hospitality (i.e., being hospitable). To clarify, value is not perceived as simply a resource's economic utility; rather, similar to consumer culture theorists, value is found in cultural elements that consumers draw from and reproduce to help with their identity construction and how they relate to the outside world (Peñaloza & Mish, 2011). Taking a sociocultural perspective to understand how value is created in home sharing, leads to an understanding that such platforms' "economic forces are not necessarily in opposition to cultural forces, but rather both continually accommodate and adapt to each other" (Banks & Potts, 2010, p. 266). The research aims to uncover how economic systems can adapt and co-evolve with cultural systems to create continuous value for participants.

This study is oriented towards developing a better understanding of why consumers opt into the so-called sharing economy and how markets that emerge under this economy continue to develop and evolve. I use the Romantic domain to exemplify the theoretical framework that emerges from the research findings. Marketplace emergence, development and termination are approached as 'social arenas' (Fligstein & Dauter, 2007) and can only function effectively when they are embedded in societies and balance the demands for efficiency and the need for stability and social harmony (Granovetter, 1985; Polanyi, 1944/2001). Consumers in the sharing economy choose to balance market-based logics with their needs for social stability and moral values, thus creating and justifying Romantic beliefs in market-mediated exchanges which tend to balance classical and Romantic world views. This Romantic understanding is said to be, "primarily inspirational, imaginative, creative, intuitive. Feelings rather than facts predominate. The classical mode, by contrast, proceeds by reason and by laws. The classic style is straightforward unadorned unemotional, economical and carefully proportioned" (Pirsig, 1974, pp. 66-67).

To unpack this theoretical mystery, the main objectives of this study are to extend theories on sharing and creating value in new markets by utilising a sociocultural

view that behaviours are shaped by cultural forces. This is accomplished by understanding how actions, interactions and relationships (Arsel, 2016; Karababa & Kjeldgaard, 2013) among various actors in collaborative consumption networks affect value creation processes of sharing and its outcomes. Towards addressing these objectives, and developing an understanding of collaborative consumption marketplaces, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What is the nature of home-sharing networks?
- How does sharing take place in home-sharing networks?
- Do consumers assemble Romantic sharing discourses around their home-sharing consumption, and if so, how?

To address these questions, I conducted a multi-sited ethnographic and netnographic study in New Zealand (NZ), examining a market-mediated home-sharing platform, Airbnb. Airbnb's advertised values are based on romanticised notions of belonging, where people can stay with locals and gain "authentic" cultural experiences (Karlsson & Dolnicar, 2016). They are also centred around rational ideals of sharing space with those that need one for short periods of time. This has given rise to opportunities for entrepreneurship where individuals can rent out empty rooms or their entire homes for an income. Participants in the network include hosts and guests but may also include external services such as hired cleaners, Airbnb rental agents that manage properties for hosts, policy makers and media to name a few. Other participating agents may also include objects such as the physical home space and possessions (e.g., keys, homey artefacts), digital objects such as an Airbnb online profile and reviews of the home, and hosts and guests that might support the understanding and process of how things become valuable and are valued (Appadurai, 1986). Unlike past research that has examined home-sharing platforms as a social experience (Hellwig et al., 2018), this study looks at the network as a whole, including different shared property types and social actors and other participating agents who through their interrelations and connectedness create value for the individual and collective network.

When analysing the data from the Airbnb network, I explored "the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings that exist within the broader sociohistorical frame of globalisation and market



capitalism” (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 869). This means that I utilised cultural theories to explain the actions, interactions and interdependencies of actors within the market by looking at the symbolic basis of behaviours and their dynamics. A consumer culture within markets is an ongoing process that changes and evolves based on actors’ interactions, changing ideologies and internal conflicts. The perspective here recognises markets as embedded in social networks, where social relations are key in shaping the content and structure of economic exchange (Fligstein, 2001; Slater & Tonkiss, 2001)

Moreover, the perspective of the market taken in my study is one that does not assume the consumer as a passive subject. Postmodern research challenges the consumer-producer dichotomy by arguing that the consumer is both a producer and a consumer of marketplace symbols and meanings (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). In theories on liquid modernity (Bauman, 1987; Bauman, 2007), modern-day life has moved from solid and secure to uncertain and rapidly moving. Similarly, consumption in the sharing economy recognises consumers as liquid in their positions as innovators, producers, content creators, renters of personal possessions and co-creators of market value (McWilliams, 2015; Zwick, Bonsu, & Darmody, 2008). Consumer subjects are not alone in creating market symbols and meanings; materials and objects may take centre-stage and are considered as agents in the marketplace that connect individuals to participants in the market (Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005). Thus, as I rely on culture theories to understand the collaborative marketplace of home sharing, this thesis contributes to a stream of research called ‘market culture theory’, which draws attention to “the cultural discourses, practices, agents, and artefacts constituted in markets” (Peñaloza & Mish, 2011, p. 27).

This thesis contributes to the literature on sharing, identity, space, possessions and market resistance by further contextualising consumer sharing as a concept full of paradoxes, conflicts, tensions and ideological struggles. The conceptual link found in this study explains that the connection between the Romanticism of the sharing consumption and heterotopic spaces is to be found in the notions of ‘open secrecy’ and ‘masking’ and understood as the socially-situated deployment of cultural fantasies. Thus, taking the problem of the paradox inherent in the consumption of true sharing and self-interested exchange as a starting point, this research hopes to introduce the concept of the fusion of Romanticism and Rationalism in the sharing economy to understand the

transformation of access to possessions and its embedded cultural experience saturated with rituals, symbols, practices and emotions.

## **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This introductory chapter demonstrates the importance of understanding collaborative consumption marketplaces that are embedded in the so-called sharing economy. The purpose of this study is to understand how altruistic sharing (or its semblance) can co-exist in contemporary markets. By looking at a successful marketplace example of a home-sharing network such as Airbnb and uncovering how networks of consumer sharing emerge and are sustained, I can examine whether existing theories on identity, sharing, possession, space and market resistance require expansion or need to be revisited to account for this ‘sharing’ phenomenon. However, employing a cultural lens to examine collaborative marketplaces adds to knowledge of value creation and markets by extending understanding of how consumers and companies co-construct value in consumption communities. A home-sharing market is a good context to observe value created in a market-mediated yet community-based network of consumers and producers. It offers an opportunity to view the new marketplace from micro, meso and macro levels of analysis.

This research is timely as the dynamic and socially constructed nature of collaborative consumption will influence our future understanding of ownership and sharing knowledge, especially with calls for more studies from consumer research and psychology scholars (Belk, 2010; Rudmin, 2016). There have been debates around forms of exchange in the sharing economy whether they include exchange, gifting, lending or borrowing and several scholars have attempted to address this (Arnould & Rose, 2016; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2015; Belk, 2010, 2013, 2014b). Discussions around complex characteristics that represent a market versus non-market-based practice (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, 2015; Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2016) and a lack of clarity around dimensions of ownership (Harwood & Garry, 2014; Hulland, Thompson, & Smith, 2015) demonstrate the blurred nature of new ‘sharing’ markets: how they rise, the dimensions of their operations and perceptions of value. In this thesis, I respond to calls from scholars to look at markets differently using the understanding of markets as embedded in arrangements of interpersonal relations and interactions of resources with agency (Granovetter, 1985). A different perspective on market dynamics will advance

our understanding of the sharing economy and extend current theory of the self, sharing, possessions and new market systems.

Using perspectives based on consumer culture traditions of research, an examination of home-sharing networks will certainly add to existing knowledge of this recent phenomenon but also adjust our thinking of how culture impacts market dynamics. This research will help disentangle issues around sharing, complexities of ownership associations in home sharing and how this new phenomenon is changing the way people access or consume goods and services by looking through the lens of their activity, social actions and meanings. Immersion in the complex world of consumption experiences will help develop “more generalised, analytical, but also informed theories” of marketing and consumer behaviour (Miller, 1995, p. 53). Consumption behaviours are changing along with an age of fast-moving technological advancements, and therefore scholars need to keep up with observable behaviours, update older theories and develop new ones based on the current changes in the economy and society.

Practically, marketing managers, policy makers and consumers will benefit from understanding how collaborative consumption marketplaces create value from pseudo-sharing and sustain it through a fast-moving market and a demanding consumer. For technology businesses that fall under the sharing economy, it is not only important to design products that fill a gap in the market, but it is also crucial they fit into the consumer culture which is embedded in the marketplace and ultimately creates paradoxes, tensions, conflicts and ideological struggles. It will be valuable for these businesses to realise the successes and pitfalls that similar technologies have experienced in order to create successful companies that work together with their consumers to co-create value. More importantly, understanding this new contemporary market and its emergent consumer culture will be valuable for future companies that want to compete by realising early on the symbols, relationships, meanings and moral values that the postmodern consumer co-creates and embodies. Likewise, policy makers could consider the society’s needs and motivations for subgroups such as home-sharing hosts and guests to emerge in order for them to serve the general public with ‘fair’ rules. Regulation and legal issues are important and controversial topics within the sharing economy where governments and urban planners are still trying to unpack with a changing socio-economic society.

## 1.5 Definitions of Key Terms in the Thesis

The following are some key terms used throughout this thesis that offer more clarity of the developments and conceptualisations of my research:

**Romanticism** – Romanticism is a historical movement that some (e.g., Campbell, 1987) believe to have begun in 18<sup>th</sup>-century England. However, it has different meanings and is differently interpreted by a large number of scholars. When using the term ‘Romanticism’, I refer to the modern consumer’s desires for the “pleasures afforded by private fantasies of identities, relationships, and experiences that are signified by the goods and services one consumes” (Rittenhouse, 2013, p. 77). Motivations for consumption are based on the meanings goods or services signify, which reside in one’s interior life (Campbell, 1987; Oppenheimer, 2001; Postrel, 2003). This means that consumption is not based on sign value nor imposed on consumers by marketers, thus paralleling imaginative hedonism theories of the conscious pursuit of pleasure for oneself. In this study, Romanticism is characterised as imagination, individuality, emotion and freedom from rules. In the sharing economy, I posit that consumers self-consciously stimulate their emotional responses to situations, thus embedding exchange in more fluid spaces such as the home to enhance their own pleasures of socially and commercially valued outcomes. The utility of the imagination cultivates idealistic experiences of sharing in this new economy, whereby Romantic consumers become emotionally moved by their extraordinary experiences. This process is believed to ultimately lead to a social utopia (Campbell, 1987).

**Sharing** – Sharing, in its prototypical sense is defined by Belk (2010) as joint ownership (at least de facto or de jure) with pro-social intentions and with no expectations for reciprocity. This resembles sharing that takes place in the family and reflects intimate sharing with those included in the aggregate extended self. However, in the sharing economy, sharing is depicted in a pseudo form and sometimes reflects ‘sharing-out’ (Ingold, 1986) where people give resources to others outside the boundary of the self, a practice conceptually close to commodity exchange. In the sharing economy literature, it is also known as collaborative consumption.

**Community** – While the common understanding of communities today refers to brand and consumption communities (e.g., Schau et al., 2009), I refer to the more historical

sense of community “as a semiautonomous social group comprised of multiple firms, and of marketers and consumers” (Peñaloza & Venkatesh, 2006, p. 309). Members are part of market-mediated economies such as home sharing and are equal participants in co-creating value.

**Participants** – Participants refer to any entity with agency and the ability to make change. Participants may be involved in actions that create value but also distribute it to other participants as they engage in social and economic activities (Scaraboto, 2015). Participants include individuals, public policy makers and organisations to avoid confusion between marketing terms such as producers and consumers of value. They have equal standing in engaging in value creating activities (Humphreys & Grayson, 2008). In this study, objects have agency in social life (Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005; Law, 2009) with an ability to foster interdependencies between subjects. Thus they promote processes of value creation (Figueiredo & Scaraboto, 2016). In this research, objects are not only physical, they can be digital and spatial (i.e., online profiles, possessions and space), especially because the study is based on sharing resources that are mediated by platform technologies available through the Internet.

**Home Sharing** – To understand value in home sharing, there needs to be several participants (and objects) that create interdependencies through actions occurring in the network. For instance, there needs to be a home that is shared by a host who prepares the home and welcomes the guest; there needs to be an online profile with photos and reviews and a digital platform for all these interactions to take place; and there needs to be social and economic modes of exchange that take place, which may involve certain actions and practices that influence the trajectory of this home-sharing experience and its value assessment.

**Value versus Values** – There is a differentiation between value (singular) and values (plural). The former refers to assessments made by an individual or a collective group while the latter refers to the sociological sense of rules and norms that shape the understanding of what is good or desirable (Graeber, 2001; Holbrook, 1999). They are both utilised in this thesis in their distinct definitions.

Networks – Markets are considered as networks where exchanges that take place between two agents may depend on external influences that unpack their relationships and those of others (Jackson, 2010). I refer to networks as ties that exist between social actors and things with agency. A network approach allows for examinations of how intersections have an impact on object agency.

## **1.6 Organisation of the Thesis**

This research is organised as follows: Chapter 1 (this chapter) offers an introduction to the study and includes a research problem and its implications, a research context, the research aims, an argument linked to the research context, contributions and the structure of this dissertation.

Chapter 2 provides theoretical perspectives and conceptual foundations from consumer culture and marketing literature. A review of existing literature that has examined exchange economies, value creation, consumption networks and a historical review of the Romantic era, which informs the trajectory of this study. Research around ownership, possession and sharing of possessions is also critically integrated into this chapter.

Chapter 3 explains the philosophical perspective that is taken in this study and the empirical context of the fieldwork chosen to portray the phenomenon at hand. Also, a home-sharing context, in this case Airbnb, is discussed along with the premise of the origins of home sharing and the revival of the hospitality industry. This chapter also describes the research methodology chosen that best studies the complex yet unique marketplace and summarises the data collected and how that data is analysed.

Chapter 4 and 5 present the research findings that include three key themes from the research. I start by presenting the theoretical framework that emerged from the study's participants and their emic accounts alongside the relevant literature. I explain that networks are created by firstly being mobilised (i.e., emerging), assembled (i.e., transforming market capacities) and territorialised and re-territorialised (i.e., solidifying the market system or produce adaptations) during processes of the joint Romanticism of sharing experiences between hosts and guests and sometimes guided by the marketer (theme one). Chapter 5 moves from consumers' emic perspectives to etic perspectives and interpretations of the emergent theory of an open secret (theme two) that allows for joint Romanticism to take place. Through processes of concealment and revelation, home sharing is exercised in heterotopic sharing spaces (theme three) that hosts

experience through their utopic journey towards a moral destiny, whereas guests experience the space as a magical playspace and onlookers (i.e., the public) identify it as a deviant heterotopic space.

Chapter 6 offers an overview of the findings and explores the theoretical implications for sharing, identity projects, possessions and use of space. This chapter also presents the managerial and methodological implications of the study for the field of marketing research. Chapter 6 concludes this thesis by discussing the limitations of the study and offers final considerations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Background**

This chapter reviews collaborative consumption marketplaces, specifically home-sharing networks. The research questions of this study touch on key areas of the literature in the following sections: sharing and the sharing economy, ownership and possessions, emergence of markets, economies and value and how the Romantic philosophy may explain the current commercial sharing phenomenon. I also discuss the context of this study, which is home sharing and meanings of the home as a possession. It is imperative to note that even though the term home sharing denotes the home as a central physical space, the home network includes other actors outside the home such as the digital realm to create a wider circulation of value. Although consumer research is grounded in anthropology, sociology, psychology and economic fields, the focus of this chapter is situated in consumer culture theory research. This is to offer depth in the knowledge of the actions, interactions and relationships among various actors within collaborative consumption markets.

The conflict over community and the market extends a long debate over consumerism and anti-consumerism, modernism and anti-modernism and the Enlightenment (Rationalism) and Romanticism. Consumers in the sharing economy may be essentially Romantic and sublimely nostalgic for an imagined past that involved people trusting one another, enabled market fairness and equality and individualism. Sharing businesses have a charm and an appeal to Romantic consumers who yearn for belonging and freedom of social class consumption.

### **2.2 Sharing Economy Literature**

The recent technological disruption of the new economy of sharing has led to new ways for value to be created and distributed. Traditional economies of exchange are now competing for consumers with the so-called sharing economy. Past streams of literature are divided into domains around sharing, access and ownership (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Belk, 2013; Ozanne & Ballantine, 2010), legal issues around sharing (Chasin, Matzner, Löchte, Wiger, & Becker, 2015; Ranchordas, 2015), the nature of online sharing markets (Hellwig, Belk, & Morhart, 2015; Sun, Supangkat, & Balasubramanian, 2016) and sustainability and anti-consumption motivations behind



sharing (Belk, 2017b; Ozanne & Ballantine, 2010). Unlike other forms of exchange that are recognised outside traditional markets, the sharing economy that arguably encapsulates gifting, sharing and borrowing are consumption situations that require individuals to freely invest their time, skills and knowledge at no cost or exchange value. Yet to understand the fuzziness of the sharing economy (see Table 1 for differences between sharing and other exchange types), there needs to be some consideration to the historical coverage of sharing.

**Table 1: Differences Between Exchange, Sharing, Gifting and Pseudo Sharing**

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Market exchange</b>	<b>Prototypical sharing</b>	<b>Prototypical gifting</b>	<b>Contemporary consumer sharing</b>
<b>Practices</b>	Calculated exchanges of what we give and what we get	Mothering, caring and love	Ritual prestation, symbolic inalienability	Communal, mutual benefits, personal, ecologically sustainable
<b>Ownership</b>	Legal transfer of ownership	Pooling of allocation of resources  Joint ownership/ de facto (Belk, 2010)	Transfer of ownership  Separate from marketplace origins	Access-based
<b>Relationship examples</b>	Short-lived relationship          Buyers-sellers	Dissolves interpersonal boundaries posed by materialism and possession attachment by expanding the aggregate extended self (Belk, 2007)      Home and meals (Lupton, 1996; Miller, 1998); Mother-child	Desire for connection (Durkheim, 1964), self-interested expectations of reciprocity (Mauss, 1925/1967)      Givers, receivers	A practice based on kindness and trust (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Kasriel, 2009)  Consumers can reject group belonging; use it for market transactions only (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Ozanne & Ballantine, 2010)  Consumer-producer; host-guest

Sharing as a basic form of consumer behaviour in society can be traced back hundreds of thousands of years (Price, 1975). Belk (2013) reviews the origins of sharing

from cultural, psychological and societal perspectives and reveals its two dimensions: “sharing-in” and “sharing-out”. “Sharing-in” is closest to Belk’s (2010) earlier definition of an inclusive form of prototypical sharing as “the act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use as well as the act and process of receiving something from others for our use” (Belk, 2007, p. 127). Resources shared may be goods, spaces or intangibles and when there are multiple users involved then sharing is successfully taking place (Rudmin, 2016). As a socially constructed and embedded activity in our rituals, routines, values, norms and emotions (Price & Belk, 2016), an example of “sharing-in” is of parents sharing food and shelter with their children or inviting guests over for dinner. “Sharing-out” is closer to current business models such as peer-to-peer, market-mediated digital platforms (e.g., home sharing and ride sharing), which is defined as an agreed upon fee or other compensation in exchange for the acquisition and distribution of resources (Belk, 2013). Such platforms focus on optimising resource exploitation rather than building social networks (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012).

Away from a market exchange discussion, sharing in its rawest sense is a form of creating relationships with others by sharing meals, possessions or childcare with family and close friends, which reinforces strong bonds and a sense of belonging (Belk, 2017a). On a broader scale, we share tax-payer funded public goods such as parks, libraries and governments, but any created interpersonal bonds here are weak (Jansson, 2011). There is a sense of joint ownership towards these public areas (Ozanne & Ballantine, 2010), which is inherent in our nature as we have been sharing for decades whether sharing a beach house with friends (sharing-in) or renting out a time-share to strangers (sharing-out). True sharing is a prosocial act that brings people together to enjoy the benefits of a resource (Belk, 2010). A socially and culturally embedded system and a natural form of social exchange, parents teach their children to share toys with other children because ‘sharing is caring’. This kind of sharing exists within the kin and community circles yet when an exchange of money for a resource is involved, this insinuates an exchange outside the boundaries of community. Sharing is different from gift-giving and commodity exchange as it involves the perception of joint (or at least *de facto*) ownership, community and social intentions with no expectations of direct reciprocity (Belk, 2010, 2016).

Distinctions in sharing have also been researched in gated communities, in which Belk (2017a) argues that there is a fuzzy line between private and public provisions of goods, independence and interdependence, and sharing in and sharing out. This implies that members of gated communities are more reluctant to share together and demonstrate a sense of non-community. This is also distinct from Arnould and Rose's (2016) attempt to substitute sharing for their concept of mutuality, which they define as the generalised exchange between people based on expected similar and mutual reactions. Nevertheless, their notion of mutuality is romanticised as the essence of their argument confuses sharing with gift exchange (Belk, 2016). Eckhardt and Bardhi (2016) historicise access practices, and the dimensions of sharing include sharing as an embedded practice in society and marketplaces but dependent on how a society engages in distributing resources. Despite sharing being a part of human nature and embedded in our personal interactions, it is only recently that the practice of sharing has been placed under the spotlight with the sharing economy receiving media attention due to new companies claiming democratisation in the way exchanges and access to resources take place.

A look into economic evolution reveals that prior to the Industrial Revolution, people were engaging in exchange similar to today's sharing economy. In early modern Europe, scholars have documented that individuals used to support one another by lending money to cast off their poverty through credit relationships whereas aristocratic societies asserted their status through giving and taking (Fontaine, 2014, 2018; Muldrew, 1998). The credit economy was endowed with virtues of social solidarity and a moral economy (Fontaine, 2014). Exchanges were based on peer-to-peer communities with trust embedded in the social ties created by families and friends (Sundararajan, 2016). However, the rise of the market threatened social hierarchies when price negotiations were required across social classes. This also meant that a new class of individuals was able to emerge whose monetary wealth can surpass the upper class (Fontaine, 2018). According to Fontaine (2018), along with the market there emerged another model of society that clashed with those of the traditional elite: "work versus leisure, the market versus the gift, and credit versus charity" (p. 43).

In today's digitally-enabled marketplaces, the sharing economy has gained sudden popularity and for-profit companies have followed the sharing bandwagon by "sharewashing" and hiding behind the façade of sharing (Belk, 2014b). The term

‘sharing’ is even misused, with social media using the term to refer to the uploading of content online such as that “shared” on Facebook (John, 2013). Sharing involves “fuzzy objects” or non-objects of digital and physical resources as well as people and skills (John, 2017). This makes it difficult to distinguish sharing characteristics existent in the sharing economy when the term is overused.

There has been research on the sharing economy examining its economic, technological, legal, environmental and societal impact (Albinsson & Perera, 2018). However, past research has focused on this economy from a macro level mode of analysis that examines the entire collective in relation to the market rather than a deeper lens into the individual enactments of exchange. It does not uncover factors of collaboration that allow for mutually beneficial market and non-market exchange logics. Micro-level approaches to the sharing economy would add a more focused understanding of the struggles between individual enactments, meanings and multiple modes of exchange and how they work together to sustain value in the marketplace (Finch & Geiger, 2010; Scaraboto, 2015).

Exchange here may not necessarily be linked to turn-taking or reciprocity; instead it is more about “sharing, alternating giving and receiving, and communication” (Vaughan, 1997, p. 37) that allows the shared possession to be jointly constructed (Belk, 2016). Based on calls from Hellwig et al. (2018), there needs to be a level of attention towards social relations involved when examining aspects of the sharing economy. This can only be realised with a more micro-level analysis that can inform the changes that take place in macro market systems. The possession being shared, whether a car or a home, is still an extension of the person (Belk, 1988), creating a form of personal connection between those the person comes in contact with. Therefore, it is natural that market-based exchanges blur the lines between social and commercial exchanges to create hybrids of value-based markets. By observing this marketplace as centred around a contemporary society, focusing on the cultural dimension of products as symbolisation and cultural meanings (McCracken, 1986), we can view the marketplace as an economy of cultural goods where economic principles of supply and demand, economic capital, and competition are grounded in consumers’ lifestyles (Featherstone, 1987). In the following section, I present a brief synopsis of the origins of exchange (commodity and communal) in order to gain a more meaningful understanding of how deeply rooted the sharing economy is in the culture of consumption.

### 2.3 Collaborative Consumption

It is undeniable that collaborative consumption, an aspect under the newly discoursed phenomenon of the sharing economy, is prevalent in the growing startup and entrepreneurial ecosystem. Not only does participation and collaboration enable the long-term commitment of consumers to brands (Payne, Storbacka, Frow, & Knox, 2009), but it acts as a facilitator between innovation capabilities, service quality and company overall performance (Ngo & O'Cass, 2013). It is ubiquitous in urban areas and is popular with busy and mobile savvy millennials (Weisman, 2012). Collaborative consumption disrupts the way company-driven economic paradigms work by shifting consumption behaviours from individualistic desires to 'sharing' (Avital et al., 2014; Shah, 2015). The phenomenon was traditionally defined as "events in which one or more persons consume economic goods or services in the process of engaging in joint activities with one or more others" (Felson & Spaeth, 1978, p. 614). However, this definition refers to everyday situations such as friends enjoying a beer or going on holiday together. Today's conception of collaborative consumption has shifted since then by being compared to sharing and ownership concepts. Consumption paradigms have evolved from ownership of goods to temporarily accessing them (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Belk, 2014c; Botsman & Rogers, 2010), and the understanding of market exchange economies is shifting from singular to dual modes. Consumption activities are changing, blending prototypical logics of sharing with market exchange modes whilst people are switching roles between consumers and producers, engaging in 'embedded entrepreneurship' and acting as distributors of resources in hybrid economies (Scaraboto, 2015). This would essentially imply that meanings of value will also be perceived differently due to the resources exchanged and the consumption culture involved with new market logics.

It has proven difficult to define collaborative consumption and distinguish it from exchange, gift-giving and access (Arnould & Rose, 2016; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Belk, 2010; Scaraboto, 2015). Generally, most scholarly work is in agreement that collaborative consumption is closely linked to Belk's (2014c) perspective, and is defined as an economic model that allows individuals to coordinate the acquisition and distribution of resources in return for monetary or other types of compensation. Similar to pseudo sharing (Belk, 2014b) that exists in market-mediated platforms, collaborative consumption is not necessarily borne out of resistance to mainstream production and

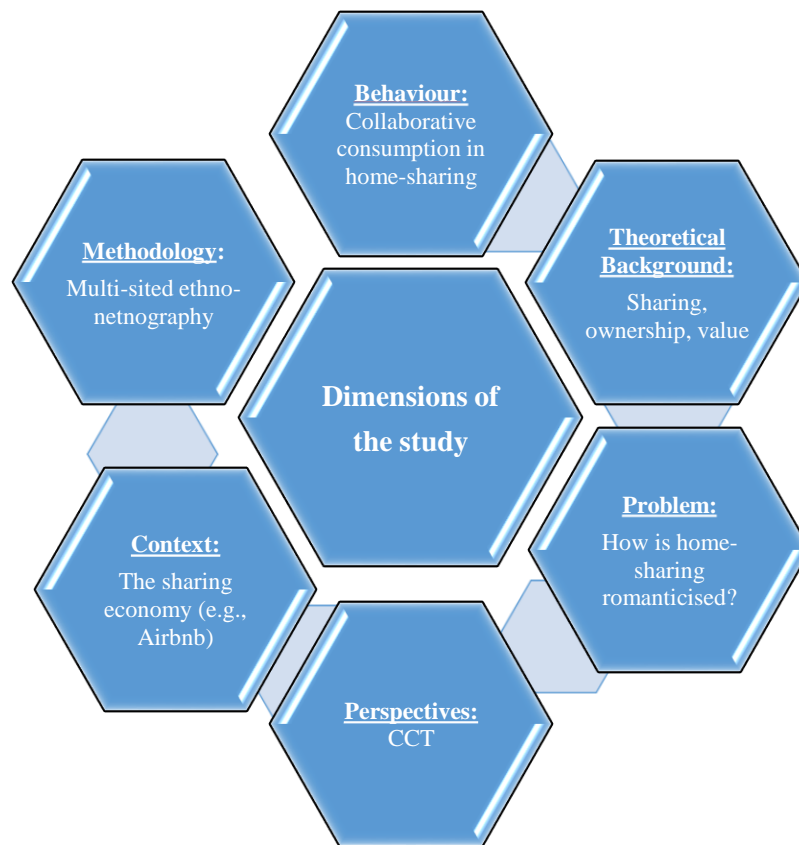
monopolising exchange; instead, it has been argued that consumers are seeking alternatives that can have a positive impact on society and themselves (Szmigin, Carrigan, & Bekin, 2007).

This new economy allows for a flexible lifestyle, which consumers may not be able to afford otherwise (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2016) and enables a desirable fluidity between different identities (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2015). Such contemporary forms of this business model enabled by Internet technology are highly dependent on consumer collaboration for them to work (Habibi et al., 2016). Because of the rise of online technologies and social networking sites, collaborative consumption in these marketplaces changes the social dynamic between buyers, sellers and other participants and value of exchange. Findings from consumption communities depict that sociability in such communities is crucial for collaboration to take place (Gheitasy, Abdelnour-Nocera, & Nardi, 2015). Consumption is socially constructed and embedded in relationships, cultural norms, personal and social values and emotions and have proven to be complex and dynamic (John, 2013; Price & Belk, 2016). Yet understanding how these peer-to-peer (P2P) users socially interact to create successful collaborative consumption marketplaces is not yet clear.

Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) explore the existence of social relationships in market-mediated access economies such as company-owned car rental, Zipcar. These authors found that users have a lack of identification and sense of ownership but are more concerned with utilitarian and convenience-based values, experience negative reciprocity where users act on self-interest and exercise a lack of community. Rational, calculated and self-interested motivations might be the case in access-based marketplaces where users rent from companies. However, these dimensions would be different in peer-to-peer collaborative marketplaces where micro exchanges occur between the individuals rather than with a company. The person-to-person interactions create different narratives and instigate different emotions than person to company. Zipcar embodies characteristics of traditional exchange such as long-term rental companies yet other collaborative consumption marketplaces such as Airbnb, Couchsurfing or TaskRabbit include the social aspect of people exchanging with one another for some sort of compensation involved. Nevertheless, market-mediated access or pseudo-sharing of resources is still found to be guided by economic exchange (Belk, 2014b; Jenkins, Molesworth, & Scullion, 2014) while borrowing, non-market mediated

access or true sharing such as that between close friends and family is guided by a social exchange (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2016). Thanks to the reputation economy of ratings, reviews and online references, collaborative consumption marketplaces have created forms of trust, credibility and certainty (Masum, Tovey, & Newmark, 2012), which consumers are most comfortable with and happy to indulge in social interactions with others. The technology-added function that allows for more trust increases the ambiguity of the sharing economy's logics and modes of exchange.

The previously discussed studies examined collaborative consumption from a singular viewpoint that market-mediated exchanges either involve true sharing or exchange. However, Habibi et al. (2016) found the misuse of the term 'sharing' (Belk, 2013) to be the main culprit for mixed findings in this area. They argue for a dualistic view of nonownership consumption practices to display both sharing and exchange characteristics. Further examination of this consumption behaviour from a socio-cultural viewpoint would give more meaning to the single or dual mode of consumption as opposed to an economic one. To make sense of the current fragmented meanings behind collaborative consumption, researchers need to study consumer lifestyles and patterns as a consolidation of heterogeneous groups of consumers, their shared meanings and their complicated relationships with possessions.



**Figure 1: Dimensions of the study**

## **2.4 Theoretical Perspectives of this Study**

Situated in consumer culture research, this study develops an understanding of how actions, interactions and relationships among various actors in collaborative consumption markets are shaped by Romantic ideals and sustained to create value to social actors involved in the exchange. It addresses the following research questions: “What is the nature of home-sharing networks?” “How does sharing take place in home-sharing networks?” “Do consumers assemble Romantic sharing discourses around their home-sharing consumption, and if so, how?” To begin, I present my theoretical assumptions and critique current understandings of this area of research to inform this study’s conceptualisation and interpretive thinking. These assumptions, guided by the nature of consumer culture, Romanticism and Rationalism explain the limitations of past empirical and conceptual work of the sharing economy and how my research adds a deeper understanding of the cultural systems that fuels such alternative and emerging markets.



### 2.4.1 Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)

Understanding the movement towards collaborative consumption as an emerging postmodern phenomenon is still in its infancy (Albinsson & Perera, 2018). Thus, unravelling consumer culture of the sharing economy can explain the rise of this movement and its potential effects and uncover dynamic relationships. Culture is pivotal for society that is saturated with signs and meanings (Benjamin, 1982; Williams, 1982) that effectively demonstrate a postmodern culture where “all values have become transvalued and art has triumphed over reality” (Featherstone, 1987, p. 58). Culture not only acts as a lens through which individuals view the world but it is also “the ‘blueprint’ of human activity” coordinating their social actions and behaviours (McCracken, 1986, p. 72).

CCT, a subdivision of consumer behaviour (MacInnis & Folkes, 2010) has been defined as a “family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meaning” (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 868). Such cultural meanings are explained through CCT to better understand how relationships and social meaning are created and sustained through cultural and social forces such as narratives and ideologies between consumers and their consumables (Joy & Li, 2012). Contrary to traditional anthropological perspectives of people as culture bearers, consumers are perceived as culture producers and meaning transfer agents. Thus, consumption is more than just around use-value, which is more materialistic, but it can be understood as a consumption of signs (Featherstone, 1987). Symbolic, experiential and contextual aspects of the consumption cycle are also explained through consumer culture (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; McCracken, 1986).

*Consumer culture and identity.* Consumers choose to access market and non-market mediated exchange channels to gain symbolic meanings which they interpret individually and collectively (Cova, Kozinets, & Shankar, 2007) to suit their self or social identities (Sirgy, 1982). Ozanne and Murray (1995) suggest that consumers constantly choose new ways of consumption to emancipate themselves from brand-imposed market domination. Thus, collaborative consumption can be perceived as a form of freeing consumers from traditional markets so they can choose different methods to obtain their desired products or services. Findings from a study on innovation point to consumers shaping the cultural meanings of Google Glass

innovative products as a way of empowerment and detachment from reality (Pace, 2013). Members of consumption communities are also described as part of a sub-culture of consumption where consumers innovate alongside a brand (Goulding & Saren, 2007). In more hybrid collaborative communities such as geocaching (high tech online and offline treasure hunting game), consumers are seen switching roles between producers and consumers and reconciling differences amongst other consumers in order for this hybrid community to thrive (Scaraboto, 2015). This study aims to contribute to collaborative consumption literature by further unpacking the existence of consumer cultures in exchange marketplaces and the relationships amongst consumers involved and to explore the aspects that might take place for its sustenance. It has been questionable whether traditional markets still have power left (Kozinets, 2002b) but consumer culture theorists agree that power is shared between consumers and producers (Shankar, Cherrier, & Canniford, 2006). However, collaborative consumption networks, as disruptors of traditional market exchange, might prove otherwise when roles are switched, shared and reversed.

Inspired by Arnould and Thompson's (2005, 2007, 2015) classification of the politics of consumption that is illuminated in past CCT literature, my research looks at the "intertwining of political ideologies, marketplace structures and performances, identity projects, and struggles over resources" (Arnould & Thompson, 2015, pp. 9-10) when considering collaborative consumption as a networked market. Arnould and Thompson (2015) classified politics of consumption in consumer culture "as being constituted by an ensemble of actors – reflexive consumers, activists, journalists, community organisers, organisational administrators, public policy makers, entrepreneurs, business executives, politicians, and technologies – who mobilise to challenge, transform (or actively defend) status quo distributions of resources – be they material, ecological, socioeconomic, ideological, or symbolic (cultural authority, legitimacy, status, etc.) through marketplace practices and innovations" (p. 9). It can be assumed that consumers are involved in networks full of paradoxes, power, ideological struggles, tensions and conflicts to produce acceptable social relationships and identity projects as they process through new exchange logics.

CCT research demonstrates relationships between ideology and consumer agency. Consumers pursue identity projects through a dialogue with existent dominant institutional prescriptions (Arnould & Thompson, 2007). Unlike past perspectives of

consumers as passive dupes of capitalist culture ideologies, identity play and self-creation modes demonstrate consumer agency (Belk, Ger, & Askegaard, 2003; Crockett & Wallendorf, 2004). Consumers coproduce, alongside with marketers or market materials, a coherent or fragmented sense of self (Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1986). An identity depicts a relationship between people and their possessions. These possessions become an extension of our self (Belk, 1988) or a mask of our self, seeing the world from inside out (Lastovicka & Sirianni, 2011). Extending the self by functional means (a sense of doing) or by symbolic means (a sense of being) are the only ways we know who we are (Belk, 1988). This thinking suggests that we may be consuming products to extend a 'fake' or 'false' self. Brand consumers may be using possessions as masks whereby they eventually become the spirit of their possessions as a temporary vehicle for the mask itself (Belk & Sobh, 2018). Accordingly and in the case of some post-colonial contexts where possessions are traditionally used as masks such as with the *logobi*, a Côte d'Ivoire dance for men's personal exhibition using brands to mask the self (Newell, 2013), these mask legitimise a new self (even if it is wishful) where its deception is agreed upon amongst all. Thus, we should assume that we are what we appear to be through our possessions and masks that are worn (Belk, 1988; Tseëlion, 1992).

In the digital world and with today's postmodern consumer's creative solutions for self-discovery that are free from burdens of ownership, we are not only what we own but we are what we can share or access (Belk, 2007). In a study on identity under the access economy, Bardhi, Ostberg, and Bengtsson (2010) examined identity formation through global consumption where possessions acted as temporary and situational extensions of the self. They found that global nomadic consumers did not acculturate to their new environments but preferred the mobility and detachment from things. In the case of permanently transferred ownership of objects, voluntary dispossession of meaningful possessions to strangers takes place through divestment of rituals that allows for self-extension and shared meanings from self to others (Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005).

*Consumer culture in the marketplace.* Examination of marketplace cultures would also shed light on consumers' behaviours towards collaboration. The marketplace involves heterogeneous groups of people that create and adopt cultures and subcultures

around brands, ideologies or values. Due to globalisation and postmodern traditional socialism creating individualistic ideologies and personal distinction of marketplace players, these changes encourage more solidarity with common group interests (Cova & Cova, 2002; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). Consumers search for ways to belong and collectively identify with others who, contrary to traditional sociocultural bases, they are able to search for online (Cova, Pace, & Park, 2007; Kozinets, 2002b) to foster a sense of community (Schau et al., 2009). In economic activities, whether in market or non-market mediated channels, these needs are socially embedded in the market and stress the role of personal relations in creating trust within networks (Granovetter, 1985). With a level of social embeddedness in economic systems (specifically market economies), it is argued that social relations are embedded in an economy (Polanyi, 1944/2001). Yet this embeddedness can also be confusing to consumers when it is unclear whether the exchange belongs to a market economy or a moral economy. Scholars argue that these two are 'hostile worlds' where monetary contact with relationships can lead to moral contamination or degradation (Walzer, 1983); that is, some find it just another form of quid-pro-quo exchange or some sort of coercion (Barry, 1995; Becker, 1996) or a form of social prostitution with intimate relationships such as with co-habiting couples (Edin & Lein, 1997). Marketplace consumers have a need to distinguish the kinds of intimate relations using a system of monetary transfers to support these distinctions (Heinze, 1990). Thus, it is not a question whether payments are made or not and their coexistence with social beings; rather, it is the form of monetary transfer that defines the relationships and sometimes deepens them (Geertz, 1973). A lack of defining payment schemes and the existence of ambiguities can significantly skew the trajectory of that social relation and how it is interpreted between consumers (Zelizer, 2000).

In modern societies, both market and non-market systems can co-exist, allowing markets to control the economy because of the importance of social relations within exchange (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2016). With a shift towards more neoliberal market economies (more so in the Western world), we have entered into an age of liquid modernity where people are driven by their individual self-interests and a self-regulating market (Harvey, 2007). Thus, Bardhi and Eckhart (2015) argue that these factors, together with the digital economy, point towards the dematerialisation of our lives (Belk, 2013) whereby consumers are driven towards the consumption of access

resources for utilitarian purposes rather than identity or hedonic values (Cova, 1997). There are other exchange situations in access consumption where these values may be ambiguous. For instance, Hellwig et al.'s (2018) study on home-sharing platforms, sociality and postmodern community's symbolic and emotional roles (Cova, 1997) found expected benefits in the case of Couchsurfing while Airbnb's expected benefit was more commercial. However, once sociality is added to Airbnb's service offering without it being obligatory, the authors argue that the platform is closer to nonmarket-mediated and "true sharing" economies compared to Couchsurfing's demand sharing economy (also see Belk, 2010; Price, 1975). Such sharing economy businesses can be reflective (or at least in appearance) of a broader moral and ethical landscape that advocates for lifestyle and social movements (Molz, 2013). As all economies are "influenced and structured by moral dispositions and norms, and ... in turn these norms may be compromised, overridden or reinforced by economic pressures" (Sayer, 2004, p. 2), this suggests that we should not question whether the sharing economy is moral but how its activities are situated towards 'being good' or how it allows the consumer to be "a better person or the world a better place" (Lisle, 2010, p. 142). Thus, the previously mentioned sharing businesses are responding to the desirable shift towards more intimate and authentic connections with locals and places (Cohen, 1987) and away from the exploitative commercial mass markets. With hybrid economies that allow the co-existence of market and non-market logics, realising how social relationships and moral values control the market's direction is necessary, especially with differences in cultural and social class in marketplaces.

*Sociohistorical consumption.* Social relationships are also prevalent in sociohistorical consumption patterns. They reflect institutional and social divisions that influence consumption cultures such as gender, class and ethnicity (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). CCT researchers investigate relationships between consumers' behaviours, experiences and beliefs along with such institutional and social structures. For instance, Muñiz and O'Guinn's (2001) research on brand communities discovered that traditional markers of community are retained without constraints of geographical distance but are marked by similar consumption practices of brands. Cultural capital is also another resource distributed by social class which influences consumer preferences (Holt, 1997, 1998). Similar to Arnould and Thompson's question around "what is

consumer society and how is it constituted and sustained” (2005, p. 874), a similar question is asked of collaborative consumption markets. What are the institutional and social structures of such marketplaces and what cultural processes exist here by which consumption choices and behaviours are shaped? If social, institutional and economic factors indeed affect people at different moments in history (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2016; Ribot & Peluso, 2003), examining the social and cultural contexts influencing the nature of consumption practices and perceived value will enable further theorising of the parameters of collaborative consumption and how it became established and maintained under the label of the sharing economy.

*Marketplace ideologies.* Lastly, mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers’ interpretations see CCT scholars assessing consumer beliefs. These are systems of meanings that influence consumers’ thoughts and actions to preserve interests in society (Hirschman, 1993). In this research domain, culture is conceptualised as a distributed network of connectivities (Hannerz, 1992; Wilk, 2006) and social embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985). In networks, exchanges are reconfigured in rhizomatic terms that are infused by power relations, intersecting each other rather than relying on top down hierarchical agents who create meaning out of activities by accepting dominant identity representations and lifestyle definitions portrayed in mass media or diverging from such set ideologies (Hirschman, 1993). Examples of such studies include the grappling with complex technology and diverse ideologies attached to the marketplace’s interpretation (Kozinets, 2008) and cultural production systems (such as the fashion industry) that prompt consumer identity predispositions (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Mythologies and narratives used by companies for commercial gains direct consumer experiences and their mental attention to certain paths (Arnould & Price, 1993). For instance, anti-consumption literature looks at movements based on consumer defiance of corporate power and standardised norms (Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001; Kozinets, 2002b; Varman & Belk, 2009). Consumers analyse and interpret these symbolic meanings, cultural norms and ideologies encoded through advertisements or mass communicated messages (Hirschman, 1990; Holt, 1998; McQuarrie & Mick, 1996) with theories around consumer activism being centred around citizenship behaviours and nationalism (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). On the other hand, other studies look at psychological assessments of mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and

their appeal to others (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010) while consumer culture theorists decode such meanings to better uncover how capitalist cultural systems seduce consumers into specific lifestyles and associations with products (Joy & Li, 2012). Consumers experience ensnarement in dual mode economies due to their lock-in to company-hosted digital consumption objects such as people's dependence on digital programmes such as Dropbox (file-sharing) with their personal files (Habibi et al., 2016) or they reconcile their differences with other members to sustain hybrid economies such as that of geocaching (Scaraboto, 2015). Understanding mass-mediated messages delivered from different actors in collaborative consumption marketplaces and the decoded messages appropriating dominant ideologies and mythologies will add further insight into this fairly new sharing economy and reveal the inherent social dynamics that shape consumer experiences and identities. Uncovering thoughts and meanings that consumers have to willingly partake in these platforms will prove valuable to our understanding of how these platforms exist and thrive in a consumer culture full of meanings and different interpretations.

#### **2.4.2 Object-oriented Ontologies**

This research is about understanding how home-sharing networks emerge and are sustained using characteristics of altruistic sharing (or its semblance). One of the challenges of studying market systems is being sensitive to context and process. Understanding markets “requires the analysis of complex socioeconomic systems over time” (Giesler, 2008, p. 739) and for the analysis to be contextualised. Scholars have observed that to understand market dynamics is to give attention to materiality (Goulding & Saren, 2007; Sandikci & Ger, 2010). Aspects of market dynamics such as exchanges, products and market spaces have distinct material characters that may reflect context and process. Because markets are often considered as networks where connectedness of social actors and interactions take place (Fligstein & Dauter, 2007) and “sociotechnical arrangements or assemblages (agencements) organise the conception, production and circulation of goods” (Çalışkan & Callon, 2010, p. 3), scholars call for studies on market dynamics to incorporate material, process, relational and performative aspects (Araujo, Finch, & Kjellberg, 2010; Geiger, Kjellberg, & Spencer, 2012) and observe the paradigm shift from “marketing to the market” (Venkatesh & Penaloza, 2006, p. 134). Markets are perceived as more of what they do

and less of what they are. The market is an actor; it constitutes places for producers, consumers and supply chains but it also co-creates them (Martin & Schouten, 2014).

Interpretivist consumer research has focused mainly on humanistic or experientialist discourses in the past using consumer subjects as a primary unit of analysis (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Thompson, Arnould, & Giesler, 2013), which has appeared in phenomenology (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989) and naturalistic inquiry (Belk, Sherry, & Wallendorf, 1988). However, CCT researchers have begun to realise the limitations of methodological individualist beliefs that consumers are a critical unit of analysis to conceptualise the use and effects of objects (Belk, 2014a; Thompson et al., 2013), especially in subject-object relationships. Material possessions in many studies (with some exceptions; e.g., Epp & Price, 2010) are portrayed as inert, passive entities that are controlled by active consumers with agency and positions of control moving them through various stages in their lives and creating meaning (e.g. Belk, 1988; Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989; Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005; Lastovicka & Sirianni, 2011). Recognising the importance of a network perspective will shed light on how subjects, objects and situations interact in an exchange context. Understanding networks and how they work allows for more strategic abilities to design objects and systems to facilitate successful collaborative consumption (Belk, 2014c). More recently, the role of non-human agents is being acknowledged in research around consumer-object relations, especially in connection to theories of possession, such as assemblage theory (Canniford & Bajde, 2016; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), actor-network theory (Epp & Price, 2010; Giesler, 2012; Martin & Schouten, 2014), alien phenomenology (Bogost, 2012), speculative realism (Harman, 2011), vibrant matter (Bennett, 2010) and entanglement theory (Hodder, 2012), alongside other approaches (see Thompson et al., 2013).

Object-oriented ontologies such as those previously mentioned recognise that actions are instigated by humans and non-humans and agree to reject the notion that individuals are more privileged than their ‘things’. They both have agency when reality is created between networks of heterogeneous agents in social collectives involving consumer-object relations. More specifically, researchers have examined the ways in which various agents (e.g., subjects, spaces, competing objects, machines, ideas and digital mediations) may disrupt possession and consumer behaviour (Epp & Price, 2010; Giesler, 2012; Law, 2009; Watkins, 2015). A key characteristic of objects as



agents is that they explore relational materiality by highlighting these webs of network practices from which they have agency. As an alternative to social theory based on relationalism (Emirbayer, 1997), the main focus of using object ontologies is not the usual 'why' questions of social sciences but questions of 'how' social plans are created and stabilised (Latour, 1986), focusing on the process of network building and consolidation (Law, 1992).

The notion of object agency adopted in this study follows the perspective that desire is co-constituted by humans, objects and marketplace mythology (Holt, 2004; Kniazeva & Belk, 2010; Thompson, 2004) to create avenues for certain actions to take place. Thus, I am more interested in how networks are assembled, enacted and distributed, how they are held together in a web of networks (otherwise they may disintegrate), and allow both humans and objects to work together for behaviours to occur. While "humans breathe life and meaning into objects", objects can also do the same by extending themselves through association and co-constitution to people and other objects (Belk & Humayun, 2015, p. 22). In other words, objects associated with indexical meanings that "have a factual, spatial connection with the special events and people they represent" (Grayson & Shulman, 2000, p. 19) can co-constitute consumer behaviours and experiences that are prompted. Together, objects and persons interact in a network by engaging in joint processes of knowledge creation (Miller, 2005; Preda, 1999). This process is sometimes called "the dance of agency" (Pickering, 1995, p. 21) because objects become active when they are caught up in these processes, constituting the network's meanings and practices (Epp & Price, 2010).

Society is not seen as what holds people together but rather what has to be held together (Latour, 1986). Nothing in a network can be taken for granted, as every agent involved is an effect of relational traditions where actors and objects are assembled and connections are arranged in a process of networking (Law, 1999). Similar to previous scholars (Epp & Price, 2010), my view is that objects do not have purposeful intention; rather, they need to be activated or mobilised and nestled in a set of practices within the network. Objects are thus considered 'secondary' agents to consumers (the 'primary' agents) with entities not endowed with will or intention to initiate actions or events but are essential to the formation or manifestations of these actions (Gell, 1998). These practices may be purposeful or embedded in everyday life (Bourdieu, 1977; Latour, 1999).

In postmodernity (an era explained in later sections in this chapter), possessions are becoming increasingly important in society and for consumers (Firat, 1991b). As agents (e.g., consumers, producers, media, communities) circulate through space, time and meaning-making systems (Figueiredo & Scaraboto, 2016), they co-create value through their interactions in the marketplace. By observing the social life of objects, we are able to conceptualise the value of a commodity to understand how ‘things’ become valued and how they are assessed by actors in the network (Appadurai, 1986). By addressing this in my research, I will gain a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics of home-sharing markets that are based on the idea of ‘sharing’ objects, space and people with others, whether in its truest form or not. Objects’ distinct material characters reflect context and inflect process that is often seen as a challenge when studying market dynamics.

## **2.5 Scholarly Perspectives on Value**

Like most industries and fast-moving economies today, consumption behaviours are changing with the availability of new technologies, sustainable innovative solutions and fluctuating economic markets. Major industries (e.g., housing, transportation, food and beverage) are seeing increased disruption with new competitive players using innovative technologies such as open source software to challenge the status quo and gain a large share of the market. However, consumers have a vital role to play over and above the economic utility provided by these industries. Companies are slowly realising that their roles have shifted and boundaries have become increasingly blurry with new and emerging economies and a fast-moving pace of globalisation (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017). This is becoming the shared responsibility between producers and consumers where all parties involved are able to enjoy constant engagement and complex interactions for value to be realised (Tynan, McKechnie, & Chhuon, 2010).

Value is a highly researched, yet complex term that scholars are still trying to understand (Karababa & Kjeldgaard, 2013; Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008; Pongsakornrungrungsilp & Schroeder, 2011; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004b). Consumers have learnt that they can shape objects they consume and the way they consume them by working together with producers or other like-minded consumers using open-sourced and available technology. In value co-creation literature, business to business (B2B), business to consumer (B2C) and consumer to consumer (C2C or peer-to-peer (P2P)) dimensions highlight that consumers should be involved in the early stages of

innovation. However, the real challenge ahead of companies is keeping customer participation high during the value-building process for value to be recognised (Chathoth, Altinay, Harrington, Okumus, & Chan, 2013). Further research demonstrates that value can be realised in co-created experiences (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a) and more augmented by community-based experiences (Cova, 1997), when in use (Gronroos & Ravald, 2011; Gronroos & Voima, 2013) and determined by symbolic meanings (Gensler, Volckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013) where consumers are viewed as meaning-making subjects (Cova, Maclaran, & Bradshaw, 2013). These themes in value co-creation highlight the need to acknowledge value as a consequence of consumers' engagement with resources, where linkages exist between a world of price and its pricelessness (Miller, 2008). For instance, positive experiences with products have been found to create an emotional tie and an understanding between the company and consumer (Gentile, Spiller, & Noci, 2007). From a P2P perspective, Cova (1997) found that consumers are more motivated to reinforce their relationships with others in the community for the 'linking-value', which allows for more socially embedded consumption types. This social linking value of communities enhances how community members perceive utilitarian objects.

Consumption experiences and complete online engagement also create "increased learning, perceived behavioural control, exploratory mind-set and positive subjective experiences" (Hoffman & Novak, 2009, p. 24). Reasons may be due to perceived consumer empowerment and enjoyment of the co-created experience that can have an impact on the consumers' willingness to participate in future co-creation activities (Fuller, Muhlbacher, Matzler, & Jawecki, 2009-2010). Up-to-date research shows the kinds of experiences that may support optimised co-creation activities in B2C environments; however, it is not clear what kinds of experiences exist within marketplaces that are highly driven by consumer culture and how they are shaped in a P2P medium to allow for value to be realised from the support of the community (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; Cova, 1997). This is due to the cultural meanings consumers hold in their relationships with others and their possessions, which is an area often untapped by companies. Contemporary markets such as collaborative consumption networks offer consumers the ability and flexibility to create, share and exchange value without the interjection of traditional market-based contexts.

In agreement with Cova (1997), it has been found that value is created between consumers through social interactions such as dialogue, content creation and collaborations with the use of Internet-mediated platforms (Scaraboto, 2015). Therefore, a question remains as to what these experiences might entail in relation to collaborative consumption in market-mediated economies for value to be realised and distributed. The answer to this question can only be achieved by moving away from a narrow economic view of the value of resources (a top down approach) to a discussion around how value is created (i.e., how things become valuable and how value outcomes are assessed) by consumers (i.e., a bottom up approach) who are active participants in the market. To do so, I initially begin with a brief overview of the sharing economy (which home-sharing markets are built on) followed by a discussion of different exchange modes and value that leads to an understanding of the consumer culture around collaborative consumption. In summary, these areas in the literature are researched to offer clarity and direction for this study. Figure 1 provides an illustration of its parameters.

## **2.6 A Historical Trajectory of Consumption and Market Exchange**

Consumption has been a topic of discussion in diverse disciplines such as economics (Duesenberry, 1949; Smith, 1776; Veblen, 1899), anthropology (Douglas, 2003), sociology (Corrigan, 1997), psychology (Kasser & Allen, 2004), history (Brewer & Porter, 2013; Trentmann, 2006, 2012), politics (Hartwick, 2000) and consumer culture (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 2007, 2015). However, the corpus of work around consumption and theory is rather fragmented and lacks commonalities (Miller, 1995; Warde, 2005). Some argue that it is rooted in observations of consumer behaviours in England during the 1790s when a workingman, David Davies, started observing the differences in consumption between the rich and poor to gather attention, sympathy and support for the working class (Stigler, 1954). With his concerns along with others on family budgets, there came the interest in a law of consumption where the poorer the family was, the higher the budget proportions went to food. From then on, economists and behaviourists realised that income had a great role in behaviours around consumption. Demand theory also arose to reveal that there was an inverse relationship between price and quantity of a product (Davenant, 1699). Supply and demand were later denounced as insufficient to explain consumption and behaviours. The 1950s was an era of 'grey conformism' where mass consumption and changes in the production of

goods, market demand and customer segmentation were noticed (Featherstone, 1987). Insight into processes of exchanges became a central concern in the marketing field (Bagozzi 1975). Neoclassical ideologies based on market and nonmarket mediated exchanges formed the background for earlier developments in this area (Belk 1987: Hirschman 1993: Morgan & Hunt 1994). Adam Smith's (1776) view of the 'invisible hand of self-interest' played a pivotal role in discussions on exchange. Accordingly, exchanges were focused on commerciality between competing parties attempting to maximise personal market gains. In his theory, the more self-interests were maximised by individuals, the more efficiently exchanges were coordinated. It was only in the 1980s that factors behind consumption and its nature were truly studied. Consumption was perceived as a syncretic concept (Abbott, 2001), with ambivalence found between the purchase and consumption of an object, both of which are embedded in consumer culture today. With contemporary consumer behaviour being tied to marketplace exchange (Bagozzi, 1975), classes of interpersonal resources (Foa & Foa, 1980) and the social nature of exchange (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958), scholars have moved on from the calculated term of exchange into its symbolic meaning to better understand its social and psychological significance and its impact on the daily life of individuals (Harvey et al., 2001). Markets should be viewed as socially embedded institutions and are not solely focused on self-interested and rational gains.

By realising that lifestyle and consumer culture shape the way consumption practices are acted out, basic exchange of values and rational decision-making are unable to explain behaviours, displays of consumption or everyday life experiences (Featherstone, 1987). Consumption goods no longer carry utilitarian or commercial value yet they have the ability to communicate cultural meanings (McCracken, 1986). This signifies that engagement, appropriation and appreciation of consumption occurs for the utilitarian and self-expressive purposes of objects (Warde, 2005), which indicates a deeper value for ownership and consumption behaviours based on consumer lifestyles. Consumers' experiences within contemporary consumer culture are no longer seen as limited sociological meanings (Rojek, 1985); instead, they reflect consumers' individuality, self-identity and self-expression (Featherstone, 1987).

The discussion around value co-creation started to arise where production and consumption occurred simultaneously (Akaka, Vargo, & Lusch, 2012), which changed the nature of consumption and perceptions of possession. Co-creation activities bring

the term 'prosumer' into play, that is, creating mutually beneficial values to producers and consumers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a). It presumably allows consumers to perceive more control and empowerment in their consumption choices. This is also due to people becoming increasingly time poor, where consumers realise consumption takes time from other priorities in life (Shove, Trentmann, & Wilk, 2009) and consequently want more control of when and how they perform their consumption. On the other hand, researchers have explored co-creation's exploitative side, where producers are putting consumers to work as a political form of power and control (Zwick et al., 2008). Some audiences reject consumption, finding its extremity to be responsible for mass suffering and inequality in social and political areas (Miller, 1995), or they seek it believing it can be the solution to their economic problems in that it equalises their rights of consumption amongst the social classes. Thus, more power and control in consumption practices are becoming necessities rather than choices due to consumption activities being interwoven into most areas of our daily lives.

It is difficult to define consumption as something that encapsulates a singular all-rounded meaning that fits different consumer situations; rather, researchers should note that it is a dynamic ideology and not a static constraining theory. It is about identity (Friedman, 1994) and not just products and services and a way to explore different areas of academic analysis (Belk, 1995). Since the late 1970s, consumer research has demonstrated the complexities of consumption through its cultural and social realms (Graeber, 2011). Postmodern consumption seems to denote that individualism is the route to the confusion in consumption or deconsumption where consumers appear to be either buying less or spending less (Cova, 1997). The instability in consumer preferences makes it harder to classify consumer types. Thus, consumer researchers have been moving away from the classification of consumers to an examination of consumption situations and rituals for a better understanding of how and why consumers behave the way they do (Belk et al., 1988; Belk et al., 1989; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Even more so, postmodern individualism appears to be focused on the self and personal needs; however, individuals value the social link and social support of the community (Cova, 1997) to bring people and their resource consumptions closer together. Thus, economic transactions are socially embedded with relationships, cultural meanings (Granovetter, 1985) and individualism at its core. Polanyi (1944/2001) argues that markets can only function effectively when social and market-based economies are

entangled. His idea is that individuals have the capacity to settle any conflict between demands for change and efficiency and the need for social harmony and stability.

This consumption shift can be realised in the sharing economy on an individual as well as group level. Consumers enjoy their individuality and personal consumption choices but in communal settings by sharing with others. Yet to understand the implications of this mode of consumption, an examination of those involved in the act is deemed necessary. Traditionally, consumption actors in groups were found to be homogenous by nature and focused on within-community similarities (Thomas, Price, & Schau, 2012). However, an analysis of consumer culture, conformism, uniformity, mass culture and the promise of equality shows that they have declined due to market fragmentation and technological innovations. This allows for variety and product differentiation that delivers on individuality (Featherstone, 1987). Yet the more we consume collectively and in groups, the greater the chances of individuality decreasing (Frisby, 1985). Our individuality that surfaces from our consumption choices is historically shaped via socially constructed cultural practices that materialise from the marketplace's set ideologies (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), the role of collective learning and the value of exercising power and control in shaping our own behaviours (Warde, 2005).

People are able to express communion based on social connections and the need to expand social life into their self (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). Construal Level Theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010) suggests that we plan our consumption choices centred around the dimensions of psychological distance (based on temporal, spatial, social and hypothetical distances) from others; ambient interactions lead to high-level abstract construal while direct interactions lead to low-level concrete construal. These may also differ based on cultural and individual differences. For instance, interdependence is regarded more positively in Asian countries like Japan and China than in independent Western cultures like the U.S. (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). However, today's changing consumption behaviours may reflect some people's need to avoid dependence on others or their need for *communitas*. Collaborative consumption marketplaces represent an individuality of choice but in collective environments. It is yet to become clear how cultural practices based on our sociohistorical patterns of consumption shape desires to share and collaboratively consume things. Mapping out all actors that shape the marketplace may provide for a better understanding of actions, interactions and

interdependencies that take place causing entanglement, paradoxes and conflicts as well as mutual value.

From a sociological perspective of markets as social arenas, they may be labelled as networks, institutions or performances that allow for the connectedness of social players to influence behaviours of the market (Fligstein & Dauter, 2007). This market consists of assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) that “organise the conception, production and circulation of goods”; systemise monetised exchanges; set “rules and conventions; technical devices; metrological systems; logistical infrastructures; texts, discourses and narratives; technical and scientific knowledge, as well as the competencies and skills embodied in living beings” (Çalışkan & Callon, 2010, p. 3). Assemblage theory recognises objects’ ontological weight by examining relations of exteriority where assemblage components may exist autonomously and as part of another assemblage with expressive roles during interactions (DeLanda, 2006). Scholars characterise markets as actors with agency. Markets are a place and structure (not just metaphorically) consisting of marketers, suppliers and consumers who may also co-create value within the market. Even more so, markets in postmodern culture commodify expressions of rebellion (e.g., punk fashion) into money making ventures, pulling such movements into exchange markets (Firat, 1991a). With developments in the understanding of markets, we can begin to uncover the dynamics of the sharing economy as shaped, constituted and romanticised. A further review on market system dynamics will be presented at a later stage in this chapter. However, to understand the romanticised ‘sharing’ experiences in the sharing economy, the spirit of Romanticism and the Romantic mythology must be unpacked.

## **2.7 Romanticism and the Romantic Consumer Ethic**

Romanticism is a cultural and intellectual ideology of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries that infused the lives of its followers and left a historical imprint of ecstasy and disaster to this day. The Romantic era was articulated by Romantic poets, composers, painters and philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (considered by many as the father of the era) who focused on Romanticism’s qualities of the supernatural and spiritual, feelings, imagination, the natural world, general will and new world order (Crocker, 1965). Contemporary manifestations of Romanticism that have trickled down to postmodern times herald the divinity of the self, adoration of nature



and the sublime and futuristic hope for a new world, and such manifestations have in turn influenced views on consumer markets and consumption practices.

Romantics were initially abused by their critics based on the original meaning of Romanticism, that is, “fantastic”, “absurdly unrealistic” and “ill-advisedly behaved” (Eichner, 1972). The term was later used in a more positive sense when it was associated with beautiful paintings and pleasurable literary works. Scholars have found difficulty in defining the term due to the lack of agreement between different schools of thought and its different historical movements (i.e., Germany, Italy, Spain, Russia, England, France and Scandinavia; Eichner, 1972). The difficulty can be explained because of its fabulously contradictory character and the nature of the contradictions: “simultaneously (or alternately) revolutionary and counterrevolutionary, individualistic and communitarian, cosmopolitan and nationalistic, realist and fantastic, retrograde and utopian, rebellious and melancholic, democratic and aristocratic, activist and contemplative, republican and monarchist, red and white, mystical and sensual” (Löwy & Sayre, 2001, p. 1). For instance, the English movement was centred around the pragmatic pursuit of utopia, a perfect but unrealistic society; the Germans demonstrated a dramatic call for establishing a new world order and emphasised the love of nature; and the French believed in salvation through living a primitive life free from corruption and society’s influences (Furst, 1979). Generally, there seems to be an agreement that Romanticism refers to a social, literary and political revolution where one social definition is acknowledged by many scholars as the most longstanding whereby Romanticism uncovers “the implication of the imagination, symbol, myth, and organic nature, and see[s] it as a part of the great endeavour to overcome the split between subject and object, the self and the world, the conscious and the unconscious” (Remak, 1972, p. 132). From a literary perspective, Romanticism is “giving preference to the imagination over the reason, to the transcendental over the empirical, to the contemplation of the infinite rather than the finite, and/or to the belief that human beings are basically good rather than evil” (Harris, 1992, p. 347). Politically, Rousseau believed that people are inherently good, which compares to the Christian assumption that individuals are tainted by the original sin of Adam and Eve must seek to curb evil thoughts and impulses (Campbell, 1987).

Romanticism of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century was a response to the Enlightenment era, a European movement that drew on notions of reason to solve the practical and

philosophical problems raised by Newton, Hobbes, Descartes and Galileo. The Rational notion of observation was also emphasised in this era by philosophers such as Hume, Locke and Bacon. The two Rational notions of reason and observation signified how individuals discerned the truth through reasoning and acted accordingly, giving humans the power to make decisions (Gergen, 1991). The supremacy of these themes was later challenged by Romanticism that viewed human nature as complex and dynamic. Weber (1904/1930) and Foucault (1977) both argued against the Enlightenment's rationalisation of human beings and society as enabling domination of others' desires and the market through calculated and systematic control. In this era, the view of individuals was that they struggled with passion, profound love and expressive emotions, irrationality and creativity that welled from their inner core and soul. The Romantics admired creative inspiration, expressions of passion, madness, playfulness, valued moral decisions and were in awe of acts of heroism and genius. This vision contrasted with Classical and Rational scholars that believed in the meanings of life and nature as revealed and clearly expressed. The Romantics refused this notion and saw everything as metaphorical where meanings were symbolic and could not be easily reasoned and observed. While Rationalism embodied reasoned living, Romanticism exalted the "drama of human life" (Tarnas, 1996, p. 367). This drama was passionate, spiritual, imaginative and dynamic, rather than reflecting the sentiment which Campbell (1987) links to Protestant traditions of the day.

Despite the great debate regarding the characteristics of Romanticism and the Romantics, seven common dimensions of the Romantic phenomenon that seem to appear in the literature include: *the supernatural and spiritual, nature, the supernatural self, emotion, imagination, the general will and creating a new order paradigm* (Abrams, 1986; Angeles, 1992; Beckson & Ganz, 1989; Cuddon, 1992/2012; Harris, 1992; Shaw, 1972).

### **2.7.1 Key Dimensions of Romanticism**

The first dimension that is foundational for Romanticism is the emphasis on the *supernatural* and *spiritual* (Baumer, 1973). In response to the scientific Enlightenment era of Rationalism, the Romantics reacted to the insufficient response to the human spirit. Romantics such as William Blake, an artist and poet, called for human beings to experience the world in all "its sublimity, mystery and spiritual reality" (Veith, 1990, p. 181). They sought to bring God into the universe and within the human heart and

nature, which emphasised the immanence rather than God's transcendence (Baumer, 1973). This Romantic theme of supernatural and spiritual is strongly linked to themes of nature and the self that are discussed next.

The second dimension is the Romantic focus on *nature* itself. Nature was idolised for its divine attributes, the knowledge and emotions it could evoke in beings and its unpredictable appeal. Nature's power was constantly invoked in debates on politics, aesthetics, morality and religion is regarded as a cultural phenomenon. Bewell (2004) explains that poets, philosophers and prophets called for "a Rousseauistic return to nature" as a cultural nostalgia for simpler times, or as an escape from revolutionary history (p. 5). Nature, according to Rousseau, is the ideal state of man, and society and civilisation are the corrupting influencers. The Romantics sought for nature's power to open our eyes to the "possibilities of human life in nature" (Eldridge, 2001, p. 4).

The self, or the *supernatural self*, is the third dimension whereby Romantics valued passions and experiences in their individual quest for experiences and self-fulfilment. Similar to Rousseau's belief in humanity, the Romantics sought the natural goodness of the self, its sacredness and the self's powers (Veith, 1990). The subjective experience, in comparison to Rationalism's objectivity, became the centre of life. The Romantic view was to understand the self, the unconscious, the soul, the need for self-expression and being true to one's individuality (Shaw, 1972). Asserting the self, fuelled by an intense introspective focus, it meant an openness to a transcendental reality and sublimity. Individuals were in control of their own destiny. Thus, religious beliefs of that time were challenged by the Romantics' new spirituality that centred around the notion of God in man and nature rather than God as a separate being (Abrams, 1971). The self and nature were the only absolute and highest order that Romantic human beings needed to evolve towards. While the Romantics' pursuit for fulfilment and joy was the idealistic goal, it could also lead to anxiety, dissatisfaction and revolution.

Romanticism is also characterised by the fourth dimension of *emotion* where the irrational over the rational is the tool to achieve knowledge and understanding. Rousseau advocated against reason as a cure for society's failures (Johnson, 1988). Feeling and emotions were meant to replace reason as they unravelled insights and intuitions and overruled the sterility of cerebral reasoning. Inspired by love, the Romantics experienced values of fidelity, heroism and chivalry that were well

represented in Romantic poetry and gave rise to joy and tremendous suffering. They experienced strong feelings of loyalty and a need for belonging (Larmore, 1996). In contrast to Rationalists' calm and reasonable personality, the Romantics were driven by their values and were emotionally expressive. They believed that by their spontaneous expressions they could experience their true feelings and therefore, come to know themselves. Non-rational, person-centred and Romantic individuals became obsessed with the beloved in the Romantic love complex and chose not to weigh rewards or expect reciprocity, at least consciously (Belk & Coon, 1993). Such strong emotions were strongly linked to the inner core, a self-expression of one's individuality (Taylor, 1989). These emotions were perceived as a magical transcendence that created "an aching of the heart" and suffering (Tennov, 1979). Many emotion-centred Romantics were criticised for their immaturity, moodiness, rebelliousness, lack of self-discipline and their denial of reality (Gaarder, 1995). The new paradigm of Romanticism calls for creativity, culture and holistic thinking as a way to recover "the magic of everyday life" (Larmore, 1996, p. 10), which might mean an intense expression of love and its tragedies that are part of human destiny.

Closely linked to emotions, feelings and subjectivity is the fifth dimension, the *imagination*. Romanticism is a way of seeing and feeling that allowed the early Romantics a way towards extraordinary change. The Romantics believed in the "spirit of possibility and promise inherent in an age of revolutionary ferment" shaping "the human spirit and a world made new through the imagination" (Dabundo, 1992, p. 549). Through imagination, the Romantics considered the divinity of human beings that can transform the world (Furst, 1979). The imagination is an important tool for today's Romantic individual where fictional literature, metaphors and visuals are expressions of Romanticism. The move to a mythical and mysterious world with symbols "does not emphasise self-denial, but self-affirmation and self-esteem. What matters more than the powerlessness of love is the power of creative imagination" (Bloesch, 1991, p. 23). Imagination, as expressed by the Romantics, becomes a powerful means for social and personal transformation, especially when the self is revered as the divine. The Romantics can become heroes of their own stories.

Another important characteristic of Romanticism is the sixth dimension of the *general will*. A concept espoused by Rousseau's famous "Social Contract" (Angeles, 1992), the general will was used to describe the collective will of the people rather than

an individual's or leader's will. The rights of the individual become dominated by the rights of the general will of the whole community or state (Johnson, 1988). Rousseau's general will is reborn today with cultural movements towards collaboration, connection, fostering relationships with others and the moral economy. Ideas of caring and sharing also epitomise Romanticism's notion of the general will. Those involved in a caring relationship can become transformed by one another during a dialectical exchange, and that transformed connection can be good or bad depending on whether the original goals of the one caring for are moral or immoral (Davion, 1993; Noddings, 1984). A caring relationship (that involves sharing possessions and experiences along the way) transforms the unique identity and becomes lost during the connection by blending with the other person. While a move towards a civic virtue that promotes responsibility towards the community is encouraged, the dark side of this notion is that people become submissive and dominated by the larger group that will determine reality and morality (Veith, 1993).

The last theme invoked from the era of Romanticism is the desire for a *new order*. The Romantics hoped for a new social and political revolution that would give birth to a "renewed mankind" that could inhabit a "renovated earth" (Abrams, 1971, p. 12). The Enlightenment movement looked to reason and observation to solve social problems. The Romanticism movement believed in an "early paradise" where individuals could re-emerge with the new natural world and return to human nature. The belief in a new order has the potential to sweep away all our problems from the past and create a bright future. The Romantics' social revolution upheld through political means gave way to a spiritual revolution that was made possible through the power of the mind (over matter) and the self (Dabundo, 1992). It is not unusual for us to dream of a reconstructed world that we can conceive today. From current futurists such as 20<sup>th</sup> century authors, thinkers or organisational leaders to Disney cartoons and musicals with songs such as Aladdin's "A Whole New World", the Romantics believe in a new dawn and a new age that can usher humanity into order and global peace.

The above discussion looked at the seven key dimensions that characterise the Romantic phenomenon. But while they were discussed separately, they are not entirely distinct; they occasionally overlap. These dimensions will reappear once again throughout the literature in later sections within the chapter to demonstrate their impact on our current view of consumption and new emerging markets such as home-sharing

consumption networks. The earlier Romantics believed that self-definition and discovery of the self was their individual responsibility in order to realise their personal unique inner self. This personal freedom was an expression of their genius, heroism, creativity and intellectual originality. Romantic discourses refer to all expressions that discuss the nature, variety of forms and limits of love.

### **2.7.2 Romancing the Market**

Romanticism is widely acknowledged as having triggered the emergence of modern consumer society. The Romantic movement created the advent of “modern autonomous imaginative hedonism” (Campbell, 2018, p. 131) that drove the insatiable appetite for more things and for things that are different. Consumption was not the means to an end (e.g., gaining goods or services) but became the end itself that was expedited by the “imaginative, agapic, eroticised ethic of Romanticism” (Brown, 1998a, p. 784). It is suggested that consumption creates fantasy worlds that offer various identities, vicarious experiences and emotions to modern individuals (Benjamin, 1973). These Romantic meanings become enmeshed with consumption, commodities and technologies in the market (Illouz, 1997). Sociologists such as Eva Illouz, Colin Campbell, Paul Oppenheimer and Virginia Postrel challenged assumptions regarding how people deride, circumvent or reproduce the direction of the marketplace in their quest for Romantic love of others or objects. They attribute consumerism to the pleasures they derive from private fantasies of identities and experiences that are afforded by possessions or services one consumes. Consumerism as an imaginative hedonism is believed to be a search for the meanings of consumer goods that reside in the consumer’s interior life and are not imposed on them by the likes of advertisers and marketers (Rittenhouse, 2013). Consumption is viewed as carnal within the Romantic movement, as a revolution in aesthetics and sensibility, as opposed to previous utilitarian logics of neoclassical scholars that argue for a rational, economic and mechanistic form of consumption (Brown, 1998a). Romantic love and infatuation with goods demonstrates that the Romantic consumer goes through an intense cycle of ever-deep and interpersonal ecstasy and agony (Lystra, 1989). Romantic love synthesises love ideals of passion and idealisation of the Christian ideal (that actually precedes Christianity) of agapic (i.e., selfless) rather than erotic love (Belk & Coon, 1993). Agape is sacrificial whereas the erotic is acquisitive and possessive (Nygren, 1989). Where social exchanges involve erotic love, the Romantic involves agapic love.

Modern consumption, in contrast to traditional consumption that is more utilitarian and rational, is, according to Campbell (1987), a need for novelty and the insatiability of desire that solely exists in the middle class (compared to consumer researchers' previous focus on the elite). Campbell claims that the origins of modern consumption began in late 18<sup>th</sup>-century England. In his pursuit to address the missing elements in Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Campbell (1987, 2018) argues that Weber's focus on a Protestant ethic of production during the Industrial Revolution is incomplete without an understanding of the ethic of consumption. Campbell traces the Romantic spirit of modern consumerism to the luxury consumption of the English middle classes that rose alongside the Puritan ethic. He believes that Puritanism was a source for Romanticism along with deists' (those that believe in the existence of a supreme higher being) optimistic divine morality through individual realisation rather than a hope for religious salvation. Further, Romanticism was also believed to be inspired by the Sentimentalist life that cultivated a moral sentiment of benevolence and the belief in human beings' natural goodness that takes pleasure in beauty as a sign of morality (Rittenhouse, 2013). The Romantics' moral ideals reflected a belief in the self-transformational power through imaginative aesthetic experiences that can lead to a social utopia (Campbell, 1987). According to Campbell (1987), modern consumerism is a highly subjective process of autonomous self-illusory hedonism adopted from the Romantic movement. However, it can be argued that Campbell's idea of autonomous modern consumers that projects autonomous hedonic meanings of their consumption onto economic goods as independent from marketers' meanings can no longer be assumed. Exposure of aesthetic goods and not their manipulation is what creates consumer demands (Postrel, 2003).

Campbell grants that the hedonist dimension is ethically legitimated by consumers' moral self-image of "imagining oneself 'doing good' and 'being good,' often constitutes an important part of the pleasures of day-dreaming. The pleasures associated with imagined 'perfected' scenarios relate directly to imagining oneself as a 'perfected' person, exemplifying certain ideals" (Campbell, 1987, pp. 46-47). Hence, his subjective ethic considers 'imagining doing good' is morally equivalent to 'doing good'. The imperative to consume, according to Campbell and Oppenheimer, is a duty to an inner god of the self that is an "ideal destiny of all human beings", which resonates with Romanticism's notion of the supernatural self (Oppenheimer, 2001).

Romanticising commodities refers to the way in which commodities acquire a Romantic aura, either from movies or advertising imagery. The commodification of romance concerns the ways in which Romantic practices are interlocked with the consumption of leisure goods (movies or restaurants) and are defined with leisure technologies that are being offered by a mass market. Illouz (1997) offers a historical perspective of Romantic love through her analysis of mass media, which she recognises as having prominence in the U.S. as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century where autonomy in marital choices and sexual encounters based on emotion rather than rational calculation was what differentiated the country from other Western worlds. Early 20<sup>th</sup>-century America saw many changes in culture and social and economic factors through technological innovations such as the telephone, radio and motion pictures and with the dissemination of mass culture through newspapers, films and popular songs that transformed meanings of love and ritualised Romantic feelings (Braden, 1991; Peiss, 1986).

Religion and its values and metaphors have also been associated with Romantic discourses with statements such as “God is love and passion”, where love is sublime, natural and instinctive (Illouz, 1997). However, despite the decline of religion at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where religion no longer functioned as a system of salvation, Romantic love continued on through secularisation (Bell, 1980; Berger, Berger, & Kellner, 1973). Religious discourses of selflessness, sacrifice and idealism were put aside with romance replacing religion as the central focus of life, for instance during courtship where God is displaced by the lover (Lystra, 1989). The mass culture movement saw a critical pervasive mythology of contemporary life and the meaning of personal happiness (compared to the previous century representation of tragedy and morality). Thus, love became a private experience during the pursuit of happiness, leading to the transformation of love into an “affirmation of the self” (Illouz, 1997, p. 30). Mass culture allowed for the visual appearance of the Romantic ideal in the public domain where kissing and embracing entered a “visual utopia”. At this point, the main characteristics of contemporary Western society included individualism, consumption, dating and sexual exploration (Peiss, 1986). Thus, experiences produce emotions and become entangled with interpersonal relationships where Romantic feelings and bonds are produced and sustained by the invisible presence of leisure commodities (Illouz, 1997). Objects and consumption experiences always bear the trace of social relationships and public self-identity that they signal to other individuals.



The movie industry was influential in exploiting themes of love and how love translated to consumption and the pursuit of fun (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Romance, beauty and consumption began to be seen as the process of “the presentation of self” (Goffman, 1959) and encouraged the consumption of “ego-expressive” products as weapons of seduction. The connections between beauty and romance in popular culture became ways to cover the real desires of self-expression in the culture of consumption. The use of love reinforced the definition of selfhood that was centred around commodities that provided beauty, youth and seduction; love was for sale. Romance was used to promote products, which Illouz (1997) calls the ‘romanticisation of commodities’. Two paths to this romanticisation firstly include *candid consumption* where romance is clearly associated with the product and secondly, an *oblique consumption* in which romance is associated with the leisure activities people are engaged in during their consumption and which demonstrate their intimacy and romance (e.g., kissing, dancing). The latter less explicitly implies that the consumption will intensify Romance in their lives.

Oblique consumption must be observed carefully as it illustrates how simple lifestyle activities such as movie-going in advertisements are fetishized by a Romantic aura that impregnates these commodities. There are no economic underpinnings of oblique consumption; rather, they are left for interpretation as mystified experiences. Not only is the commodity advertised as a sign of romance but so also are the everyday products featured in that advertisement, such as a movie theatre (the space as a sign for intimacy) or a car ride, which are signs for Romantic adventures rather than economic transactions. These ‘bundles of attributes’ grouped together create the essentials for understanding romance (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1997). According to Illouz (1997), attributes used as background to ‘naturalise’ the Romantic activities for oblique consumption should include 1) glamour and elegance (e.g., clothes), 2) intensity and excitement (e.g., fun adventures), and 3) romance and intimacy (e.g., candle-lit dinner). Illouz’s historical documentation of 20<sup>th</sup>-century America shows Romantic love at the centre of culture and the focus of a collective utopia, that is, a realm of the imagination where conflicts are resolved and ultimate harmony is created. Ideas of ‘love and consumption for everyone’ are mixed to create a utopia in a democratic ethos that is embedded in Western culture. These historical examples suggest that emotional Romantic notions are embedded in the consumption of leisure experiences where these

consumption experiences become constitutive of Romantic sentiments and relationships (Illouz, 1997). Because of the intertwinement between emotions and commodity consumption, the object is ‘parasocially loved’, that is, entertaining a real relationship with a fictional yet loved persona such as celebrities, especially if the commodity offers positive qualities that in turn offer parasocial interactions (Illouz, 2009). Could the world of clichés, discourses and images in the sharing economy also embed a similar Romantic utopia where economic transactions intertwine with human nature and symbols of Romantic sharing?

In contemporary consumer societies, the Romantic notions of freedom and the supernatural self are reinterpreted through the freedom to realise one’s potential and expressive abilities by exercising consumption and ownership (or access) of objects that can signify one’s unique character (Lasch, 1984; Rose, 1990). However, consumption and materialism have been critiqued in many different ways. Veblen (1899), who coined the term ‘conspicuous consumption’, refers to elite members of society that mark their status and economic wealth through visibly expensive possessions (Dittmar, 1992). The term today refers to the hedonistic, narcissistic, dangerously self-indulgent and selfish pursuit of happiness through materialism. The perspective of shifts in consumerism is viewed as a moral lapse that undermines the work ethic and family life, which Protestantism calls for in order to defer material gratification. Consumerism is also criticised as undermining democracy and freedom of personal choices through advertising of material objects and lifestyles to achieve political and economic goals in a manipulative market (Cohen, 1994; Rose, 1996).

Illouz (2009) argues that emotions and consumers’ volatile desires are mediated by consumer culture and infused with meaning through and through. In postmodern consumption (Baudrillard, 1998), Belk et al. (2003) have found the notion of ‘desire’ to be consumption’s key motivational structure, where it’s democratisation is becoming standardised in modern Western nations (Leach, 1993). Desires are explained as the constant longing for resources that can never be truly satisfied. Sociologists have found that emotions triggered by or intertwined with consumer culture do not necessarily need a ‘real’ space, social relationships or ‘actual’ experiences but can be felt on the imaginary mode of consumer interactions with signs and images (Illouz, 2009).

Similar to the Romantics of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, consumers find value in the symbolic representation of commodities by exercising the imagination

(Appadurai, 1986) as a way to propel the subject into a realm of possible and imagined selves. Consumption is driven by dreams and fantasies where the central consumer as a 'Romantic self' is full of feeling and longing for authenticity (Campbell, 1987) or the consumer is driven into an obsession or imaginative dissatisfaction (Slater, 1997). Campbell (1987) asserts that the essence of consumption is not in the object of desire but in the imaginative pleasure seeking. The evoked emotions such as nostalgia, envy or love in consumer culture may be in reference to real people but do not necessarily refer to an actual reality (i.e., they exist only in one's head). For instance, advertising's ability to provide vividness and 'real' images that use mimetic perceptions to provoke the mind require us to imagine not the object itself but what it would mean to own it. Realistic representations with real people are more likely to invoke 'real' emotions. For instance, driving a family car such as a Volvo does not 'really' bring a family caring love, yet these signs and narratives based on beliefs and cultural meanings can generate such emotions. Both marketers and consumers indirectly discuss the experience as Romantic love while at the same time, they all maintain that the experience is not 'really' about love at all.

Advertisers are utilising Romantic love in their storylines and imagery, while retailers stage consumer experiences at the retail theatre using Romantic nostalgia (Hamilton & Wagner, 2014). Previous scholarly works that invoke the drama metaphor view consumers as passively scripted and staged by marketers (Goodwin, 1996); however, in recent studies, the consumer has a performative power (Deighton, 1992; Giesler, 2008) and engages in co-creation activities (Kozinets et al., 2004). Nostalgia is defined as a positive idealised emotional state associated with objects, places and people that involves "a longing for the past, yearning for yesterday, or a fondness for possessions and activities associated with the days of yore" (Holbrook, 1993, p. 245). Alongside advertising and media portrayals, consumers are also engaged in the staging of their romanticised experiences. Negative aspects of a memory are filtered out, keeping only fantasy-like representations of a utopian version of yesteryear (Holbrook, 1993; Stern, 1992). Despite the emotions being mostly positive, they may include hints of sadness (Holak & Havlena, 1998), that is, that one can never return to a period of fond memories (Davis, 1979). Not only can retailers recreate retail spaces to appeal to 'nostalgic hedonists' that seek pleasure, sacredness or uniqueness (Guiot & Roux, 2010; Hollenbeck, Peters, & George, 2008), consumers also use these spaces as a cultural

resource to construct something novel when their invoked emotions mask the inauthenticity and staging of the nostalgic cues (Hamilton & Wagner, 2014). This staging can be very effective when the real and the simulated are intertwined. While consumers are aware of the staging elements involved in creating an emotional experience of nostalgia, they welcome and engage in the space for escapism and mood regulation (Outka, 2009). The illusion of Romantic love, nostalgia or nature recreated in the space create a secret that allows consumers to maintain the illusory perceptions they desire.

These unasserted beliefs can also be perceived as an open or public secret, to describe “that which is generally known but cannot be articulated” (Taussig, 1999, p. 246) in a space that is ‘real’ but also imagined and mimetically felt. Many sociologists and consumer culturists have alluded but not explicitly theorised the formation of a space that allows for the imagination to roam free. I suggest that by explaining the ideals of Romanticism such as human nature and sharing possessions with strangers in the experiential space, we can better understand the paradoxical relationship between commercial exchanges and social exchanges of home sharing. The relationship is not about constructing a secret per se but rather a ‘public or open secret’. Simmel (1950) finds that secrecy and display are strongly connected where “the secret produces an immense enlargement of life” providing for “a second world alongside the manifest world” (p. 330). The open secret is an organising principle of social relations where its assemblage operate not only through its real content but also due to the effect of it being invisible and unarticulated, yet somehow its secret content is understood (Horn, 2011; Newell, 2013). Its invisible power is what the surface that is on display actually relies on to convey value (Newell, 2013). An exploration of the illusions of Romanticism and the enactment of the Romantic phenomenon’s seven dimensions that are disguised as an open secret may be a way for modern consumers to manoeuvre through the real and unreal worlds of home-sharing markets.

### **2.7.2.1 Romanticism in Postmodernity**

In the postmodern era, identities have become more fluid and reflective than previously assumed (Bauman, 2000). The places individuals used to gain access to and settle in to individualise and negotiate their selves during modernity are disappearing fast. Similarly, the Romantics’ identities are problematized by economic, social and cultural change in sensibilities and are more open to transformations (Harvey, 1989).

Postmodernism refers to an era of hyperreality whereby the daily world and our realities are socially constructed as individuals find their own realities. The postmodern view of consumers assumes that they are free and active cultural producers (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). Through consumers' rebellious consumption practices, they are able to resist social and cultural forces that are perceived as constraining to them (McCracken, 1988a), and thereby accelerate the fragmentation of the marketplace. As a result, consumers create "lifeworlds" outside the market system (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995, p. 258), at least temporarily. These lifeworlds allow consumers to engage in activities freely.

In postmodernity, the new Romantic spirituality links to several quasi-religious movements. According to Campbell (1987), who researched the cultural history of modern consumerism, Protestant beliefs frowned upon "the pursuit of pleasure" (p. 101) in favour of strict self-control under all circumstances. Such control was a religious necessity with the assumption of man's original depravity and control countered threats of irrational instincts that might result from impulsive responses, spontaneous enjoyment or from a sense of pride, which could lead to eternal damnation. Amidst other world events such as the French Revolution (1789-1799) and major cholera epidemics in Britain (1830, 1848), Romanticism emerged. It was a time where individuals fought for intellectual and religious freedom and political self-determination was strongly contested. The Romantics' responded to challenges of the day with a deep humanistic belief in the dignity of humanity and the pursuit of creativity and the cultivation of personal feelings. Compared to Protestantism's ideals of self-control, Romanticism espoused imagination that could lead to original and daring new perceptions (Spretnak, 1997).

Today's Romantic spirituality is best exemplified by the popular New Age movements that indicate the public's fascination and interest in a Romantic spirituality that focuses on the spiritual power within human beings together with nature. Postmodernism is also foreshadowed by Romanticism's focus on subjectivity and feelings. Postmodernists do not believe in one essential nature of something and suggest there is no essence of constant reality as foundational to which we can build on (Veith, 1994). In postmodernity, reality is socially constructed and interpreted (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), which is a very similar notion to the Romantic vision of subjectivity. In respect to creativity and the Romantic drama previously discussed, antithetical to the

perception of routine life of the middle class, the postmodern age demonstrates a hunger for novelty as a result of the general dissatisfaction with their current repetitive life (Campbell, 1987; Nenadic, 1999). The Romantics' search for experiences was essentially introspective; they explored emotions of awe, sadness, anger, ecstasy, peacefulness or fear that can be uplifting or dark for the human heart (Taylor, 1989). The Romantics believed that these paradoxical experiences can eventually lead to self-understanding and knowledge, as do today's postmodern consumers. We can see that Romanticism has endured the times and is influential to this day because it addresses the conflicts and strains "between dream and reality, pleasure and utility" (Campbell, 1987, p. 227) and also reaches towards intrinsic ideals of justice, freedom and morality (Eldridge, 2001).

Firat and Venkatesh (1995) argue that in the postmodern era, contemporary consumers can create emancipatory enclaves (or lifeworlds) within the cold and inhumane marketplace without being influenced by mass culture or dominant institutions attempting to encroach on these enclaves. This liberatory postmodern view is optimistic about consumers' emancipatory consumption practices by assuming that consumers' resistance strategies can safeguard their lifeworld. By moving in their social spaces freely (e.g., swap meets, farmers' markets), consumers can engage in freedom of self-expression yet within the boundaries of these enclaves. In postmodern times, the Romantic thinking sees consumption not only in its previously aestheticized positive manner of passion, spirituality and genius but also as a disease that can also cause pain and suffering, especially when our consumption desires are unfulfilled (Lawlor, 2006).

#### **2.7.2.2 Romanticism and the Sharing Economy**

The sharing economy also embodies such ideals when businesses and not-for-profit organisations call for more ethical and moral ways to consume. Embedded in the sharing economy, collaboration occurs by providing temporary access to resources through basic sharing or borrowing from family members, short-term rental from companies (e.g., car rental via Zipcar) or from other individuals using marketplaces (e.g., room/apartment/ house rentals via Airbnb) which all create alternatives to ownership (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Belk, 2010). These different ways of exchange of goods or services that specifically use marketplaces found in online peer-to-peer platforms as facilitators (Belk, 2014b) are bound to change the meanings of value but more so, the perspectives of consumer culture related to exchange marketplaces. The

“distributed view of cultural meanings” (Hannerz, 1992) emphasises how interrelated and fluid the cycles of life and consumption traditions are (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). Traditional marketplaces are under attack by groups eager to re-conceptualise modes of exchange and consumption to adapt to the Romantic ideals of the general will of the community. For instance, Scaraboto and Fischer (2013) found that ‘frustrated fatshionistas’ (i.e., fashion lovers that wear plus-size clothing) sought to change current fashion logics in order to fulfil their desires of wearing designer clothes and embedded entrepreneurs. Often times individuals that want to re-conceptualise or resist current markets are motivated by a desire to make a positive impact on mother earth with sustainable consumption (Belk, 2017b). For instance, “new consumption communities” have different philosophies than traditional consumer personalities known to scholars. They have a concern for the environment and development of the world as well as care for others (Szmigin et al., 2007, p. 309). Understanding the consumer culture and unravelling subcultural meanings involved in romanticised hopes and dreams of these communities would reveal reasons for the change of needs from traditional to new age market-mediated exchange platforms based on the idea of ‘sharing’.

With concepts of sharing, access, collaboration and ownership changing the way we consume and relate to possessions, a different strategy to empathise with consumers is needed. In the past, Belk (1988) argued that possessions are an extension of the self that define who we are as individuals. However, in the age of the Internet and Web 2.0, we are what we access, collaborate on or share, and these are now transformed into new types of possessions (Belk, 2014c). Postmodernists believe that traditional markets of scale are socially constructed by the relationships of social beings rather than logic or reason, a similar notion to Romanticism. Despite Botsman and Rogers’ (2010) romanticised argument that collaborative consumption could be as ground-breaking as the Industrial Revolution in terms of how people perceive, feel about and experience ownership and care for one another, many scholars argue for more rational reasons why consumers choose access over ownership of goods. Consumers and producers of the sharing economy are believed to embody similar characteristics to Rationalists who are regarded as observing a gap in the market such as cheaper alternatives to travel and solving issues using practical solutions such as an online websites to connect those that are geographically distant. However, academic discussions such as these can be quite limited in that they ignore consumers as creative beings with an imaginative mind and

hedonist desires. Postmodernists also argue that monopolising businesses mask their power and control and marginalise others. Similar to the Romantics, postmodernism covets the irrational over the rational to understand things (Wheeler, 1993).

## **2.8 Gifting Economy and Dyadic Relationships**

Sharing has often been confused with other types of exchange such as gifting or commodity exchange because a Rationalist lens can impede our view that humanity is all self-interested and demands reciprocity (Belk, 2010). Hybrid economies are part of what makes collaborative consumption behaviours blurry. Hybrids blend prototypical logics and modes of exchange in various contexts where consumers are seen collaborating with marketers, entrepreneurs and amongst themselves to create value (Scaraboto, 2015). Together with market-based exchanges, nonmarket economies such as sharing and gift-giving are becoming a prevalent exchange practice that can make an economic transaction seem more social.

Gift-giving is an expression of a natural human emotion (Cheal, 1988/2015) where gifts are used as signs of Romantic love and demonstrate a need for intimacy and connection with others (Durkheim, 1964). It is usually enacted during special occasions such as Valentine's Day or Christmas. It is formally acknowledged with verbal gratitude such as 'thanks' and involves rituals such as wrapping and a gift-giving ceremony (Belk, 1996). Belk (1996) concludes that the prototypical 'perfect gift' is one that holds no obligation of reciprocity and may include agapic and spontaneous gifts of love (Belk & Coon, 1993). However, this is not always true in dyadic exchanges of gifts, except when the receiver is very young, very old or is a work subordinate. Formal obligations in the gift exchange may not be obvious but feelings of indebtedness for unreciprocated gifts can continue to be experienced until the exchange is complete. Gift givers may be self-interested, that is, they can be calculating rational beings using gift-giving for selfish reasons (Mauss, 1925/1967), may only gift those that gift them, or they are quick to reciprocate the gift to opt out of psychological indebtedness (Belk, 2010). On the other hand, Sahlins' (1972) school of thought on gifting is that it can be pure, suggesting hospitality, kinship interactions, sharing, philanthropy and nobility with little expectation of reciprocity.

Belk and Coon (1993) found that the selection of gifts for a loved-someone affirms the recipient as unique. Gift-givers use these gifts as signs of passion and eternal love for the recipient, thus concluding that gift selection is informed by Romanticism



rather than rational consumption decisions. Belk (1993) further debates the blends of rational and Romantic decisions during Christmas gift shopping while Thompson et al. (1989) found a blend of rational consumption decision making and romantically motivated impulses amongst contemporary married women in the U.S.

Nonetheless, the giver may expect verbal accolades from others as a form of unequal yet expected returns. The further the relationship between people involved in the exchange is, the more the obligation to reciprocate increases and the more the time period to reciprocate shortens compared to family exchanges where reciprocation is not obligatory (Osteen, 2002). According to Sahlins (1972), in hunter-gatherer societies and before the dawn of money, people lived in the gift economy where the men hunted for food and offered it to others in hopes of the gift being reciprocated in other forms and at a later time, which imbues the basis of social relationships. Some anthropologists see this act as a one-way form of sharing (Hunt, 2005) and does not involve feelings of debt, reciprocity or exchange (Fiske, 1991; Price, 1975) as sharing is not a form of exchange (Fiske, 1991). Sahlins' (1972) generalised reciprocity is refuted when hunters have no choice but to share, a common characteristic of demand sharing (Widlöck, 2004; Woodburn, 1998). As demonstrated, Romanticism and Rationalist behaviours have been under much scrutiny in the gift-giving literature, with an ongoing debate as to whether givers and receivers are involved in agapic or selfish love.

The agency of gifts involves more than just an exchange of objects. Mauss (1925/1967) explains the:

*bond created by things is in fact a bond between persons, since the thing itself is a person or pertains to a person. Hence it follows that to give something is to give a part of oneself, while to receive something is to receive a part of someone's spiritual essence (p. 10).*

The giver stays connected and becomes a part of the receiver's extended self (Belk, 1988). Similar to New Caledonian courtship rituals, gifts of love symbolise exchange tokens that are symbolic rituals transforming strangers into kin (Hyde, 1983). This exchange recognises a social relationship being created and maintained through the gift economy. Gift transactions are not purely purposed as a redistribution of resources but are "used in the ritual construction of small social worlds" (Cheal, 1988/2015, p. 16). In a changing moral order of economic relationships, gifts are no longer for practical use but for managing emotional aspects of balanced social relationships

(Cheal, 1986, 1988/2015) as a feature of the institutionalisation of social ties (Scott, 1976) that are desirable (and moral).

Relationships formed in the communal and exchange worlds develop differently. Fiske (1991) produced a four category model of relationships (i.e., communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching and market price), all of which emphasise varieties of sharing and reciprocity. Relationships central to such exchanges are formed in dyads, triads or collectives. This means that gifts are not about the object but perhaps a Romantic love for the other, where gifting facilitates that connection. As Belk (1988) maintains, “[R]elationships with objects are never two-way (person-thing), but always three-way (person-thing-person)” where the gift as the object of attention is what brings them together (p. 147). Creating a social relationship is a basic need, as are having food and shelter (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). It brings people happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2000), respect (Diener, Ng, Harter, & Arora, 2010) and helps in getting ahead in the world (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986). Thus, people use consumption as a practice that can create interpersonal relationships with the right people and enable them to manage levels of closeness – either deepening it or avoiding it (Marcoux, 2009; Zhou & Gao, 2008).

However, there are some similarities between gift-giving and economic exchange models: they both assume a rational and egoistic exchange of objects (rather than altruistic) and a quid-pro-quo mode of reciprocation. Yet, commodity exchange forms quantitative associations between objects that occur simultaneously and focuses on monetising the exchange value of goods and services. Gift exchange, on the other hand, involves qualitative relations between subjects, staggered in time and construed by the symbolic value of these objects between givers and receivers (Carrier, 1990; Gregory, 1982). In terms of Arab hospitality, Sobh, Belk, and Wilson (2013) found that the high-end B2C ‘hospitality industry’ in the Middle East attempts to make commercial hospitality seem more personal in nature. Relationship management practices such as addressing guests by name and catering to individual guest preferences may often blur the lines between commercial and social exchanges.

Despite the obvious (and sometimes not so obvious) blurring of social and economic exchange practices in hospitality, the Romantic notion of love holds money and love at opposite ends where they cannot be traded (Brinberg & Wood, 1983; Foa & Foa, 1974). Deliberately mixing commodity exchange and gifting, such as offering cash

to friends at the end of a cooked meal or returning favours too quickly, may not only confuse the two distinct economies and the foundations they are built on, but also shatter the social indebtedness that binds social communities and substantiates long-term relationships (Haas & Deseran, 1981). What is worse, is when money is traded for love and friendship, which can be confused for insincere love or labelled as a form of prostitution or hustling (Belk & Coon, 1993) and profanes the sacred social relationships, limiting them to anonymous ones between strangers (Belk et al., 1989). For example, the phenomenon of ‘compensated dating’ that involves the exchange of sexual intimacy for material compensation (i.e., gifts), such as *enjo kōsai* in Japan (Ueno, 2003), commodifies intimacy (Constable, 2009). By profaning and limiting sacred human relationships to anonymous ones between strangers, the relationships are brought closer to an economic exchange model rather than love (Belk & Wallendorf, 1990; Zelizer, 1989). Also, the agapic (or selfless) love paradigm involves Romantic love but also spiritual love, brotherly love, parental and familial love. Hospitality as one of the oldest and most universal human behaviours involves levels of love that can include a desire to make others feel welcome without any beneficial exchange to the self, thus involving an expression of love. However, it can involve an instrumental exchange where individuals barter benefits for personal gain such as Sobh et al.’s (2013) findings on Arab commercial hospitality. This can become problematic within the sharing economy that is built on the concept of social relationships and hospitable sharing embedded in economic exchanges of goods and services where rules of discharging debts quickly or staggering them may be blurry.

Sherry (1983) calls for a “shift in focus from a micro perspective to a holistic one” to comprehend gifting’s “structural components” as crucial for society’s integration (p. 57). Despite studies on gift-giving’s dark side (Ruth, Otnes, & Brunel, 1999; Sherry, McGrath, & Levy, 1993), consumer culture scholars continue to treat gift-giving as an ascribed ‘good’ alternative to commercial market exchange. It is described as the human side of the market where dyadic relationships can be created. It is also seen as a social process that makes the market meaningful and allows an escape from capitalist exchange logics and their commodification (Giesler, 2006; Kozinets, 2002a; Thompson & Arsel, 2004). As gifting is present from micro-individual or dyadic levels of exchange to multi-level exchanges, such as music-sharing platform Napster or the temporary communal practices taking place at the annual not-for-profit community and

artistic event of self-expression in the U.S., the Burning Man festival (Giesler, 2006; Kozinets, 2002a), reciprocity in these markets may not be balanced. With feelings of indebtedness, gift-giving exchanges can cause anxiety (Wooten, 2000), negative feelings, conditions of dependence (Giesler, 2006) and possibly enslavement (Joy, 2001). This imbalance results in the giver being more superior and powerful than the receiver. Marcoux (2009) analysed the dark side of gifting that provokes individuals to turn to the market as an escape, freeing them from social expectations of reciprocity. Those that escape to the market are viewed by some sociologists as those wanting to socially divest and preserve their individuality and autonomy (Godbout, 1994), a common need of the Romantics. Those that choose gifting do so for social bonding and belonging (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001) and it is sometimes performed as an obligation to give rather than to reciprocate (Godbout & Caillé, 1998). Thus, communal exchanges that include gift-giving are often interpreted as morally superior to commercial exchanges, and which the Romantics search for during their journey to a spiritual self-discovery.

In other words, exchanges become part of a person's sense of continuity (Epp & Price, 2008) where gifting is related to identity construction. The inalienability of the gift helps maintain bonds and a myriad of attachments between the giver, the receiver and the object (Weiner, 1992). Unlike past research that considered the gift economy as a protective haven allowing inclusiveness and appropriation into the market (Giesler, 2006; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007), the unattractiveness that comes with feelings of indebtedness to reciprocate has often not been considered. Individuals have a need to ward off threats to their identities and thus choose to turn away from the gift economy, privileging other markets (Marcoux, 2009). Tensions can often exist between the community and the market (Arnould & Price, 1993; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002) where consumption communities themselves are sites for value creation (Scaraboto, 2015) embedded in communality and relationships. Scholars have called for more work on consumer emancipation from constraints in consumption (Murray & Ozanne, 1991), a similar theme that appeared in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries when the Romantic movement was ushered in for freedom of thought and a social order for the general public. Scholars ask for more research challenging axiology underpinning the gift economy (Marcoux, 2009) and the market (Kozinets, 2002a). Mainstream markets that enforce views of reality and restrict consumers' creative roles

and identity, make life more passive (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995), thus stifling the Romantics' journey towards an 'new paradise' of a perfect society.

Romantic consumers find ways to leave markets in search of alternative exchange practices that fulfil their material and social needs; however, the conversation ends here in the sharing economy literature. Investigations of market realities should not only be conducted within but across space and time (Deighton, 1992; Gebhardt, Carpenter, & Sherry, 2006). To get a more adequate understanding of the regimes of value that guide the Romantic consumer to escape markets in search of new ways for consumption, further work needs to be developed around collaborative consumption in the sharing economy. Sharing is not the same as gift-giving and commodity exchange (Belk, 2016). Unlike escape from the market to construct a temporary hyper-community (Kozinets, 2002a), or escape from the gift economy to avoid indebtedness (Marcoux, 2009), the question remains as to what motivates consumers (if they are indeed Romantic) to enter the sharing economy under the guise of sharing possessions in a market-mediated exchange market.

Observing the market under the hybrid economy demonstrates that ambiguity of logics and modes of exchange may explain this new form of escapism. To distinguish between commodity exchange, gifting and sharing, Gell (1992) explains that it depends on the social context rather than the relationship between people or between people and objects. For instance, social contexts such as trading and bartering implies commodity exchange, while a marriage implies gift-giving or sharing (Belk, 2010). However, collaborative consumption has been associated with characteristics of sharing, gift-giving and exchange (Ozanne & Ballantine, 2010; Scaraboto, 2015), which demonstrate multiple modes of social and economic exchange associated with prototypical sharing, gift-giving and market-based exchange. This could be the cause of 'ambiguous objects' (Ertimur and Sandicki, 2014) such as gifts being exchanged in similar ways as economic models (Belk and Coon, 1993) or 'ambiguous relationships', such as those between sellers and buyers that engage in relationship marketing in hopes of creating interpersonal dependencies, that make products or services nonfungible or singularised (Belk, 2010). Scholars have defined these relations narrowly in economic terms and have failed to uncover the wider human motives that take place when market actors become part of relationships (Fournier, 1998). Also, while it is clear that consumer research has attempted to explain the relationships between economies in different

contexts (Giesler, 2006; Kozinets, 2002a; Marcoux, 2009), it is still unclear how consumers reconcile differences in logics and modes of exchange in postmodernity and the role that collaborative consumption plays in shaping new economies such as the sharing economy.

## **2.9 Dimensions of Ownership and Possession Practices**

As gift-giving and sharing revolve around objects, a discussion on the transfer of ownership from one person to another is necessary to identify the consumer cultural processes involved in these transactions. Similar to consumption, the understanding of ownership (legal and psychological) and possessions has transformed from its traditional view. Ownership in the general sense of privately owned resources is simplistic. Litwiniski (1942, 1947) maintains that material relationships include three different levels: occupancy, possessions and ownership. Occupancy is temporary and a coincidental holding of a resource; possession is the intentional use of a resource with the potential of benefiting the self; and ownership is the secured possession for the self which is legally sanctioned and socially acknowledged (Rudmin, 2016). Sole ownership has always been seen as dominant and superior, with access as an inferior mode of consumption (Walsh, 2011) that is limited to long-term rentals or youth culture (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012) and is mostly for socially ‘flawed consumers’ that are wasteful or unstable (Cheshire, Walters, & Rosenblatt, 2010). Researchers today view ownership from a lens that is beyond the traditional view of the legal equity or the economic functions of commodity and exchangeability. Consumers are most often involved in possessory relationships and property rights (Rudmin, 1990). The sense of ownership and entitlement over objects in fact begins from a young age, which demonstrate that instincts to possess are obligatory yet not always compatible with social harmony (Rochat, 2011, 2014). We learn to possess things for their social and economic benefits while abiding by moral practices in relation to others. A child is taught not to take another child’s toys without asking as this would be morally unacceptable.

Ownership and possession are interpreted qualitatively with a relationship with cultural (Kopytoff, 1986) and personal histories (Belk et al., 1989). Research around possessions with cultural meanings and extensions of the self (Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1986) reveals emotional and psychological bonds between consumers and their possessions due to their sacralisation (Belk et al., 1989; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). The Romantics can be seen as sacralising their possessions based on

their insatiable passion and desire for objects of beauty, hence the spread of new tastes, aesthetics and emphases on novelty and the symbolic significance of material goods that spread amongst the middle class (Campbell, 1987). In this study's context, possession and ownership associations in a collaborative consumption environment are closely examined as they go hand in hand with sharing of owned resources. However, the relationship is only temporary. The more control we exercise over the temporary possession (Furby, 1978), the more intimate we become with the possession such as a living relationship with objects (James, 1890). The more we invest of our self and our labour (Locke, 1690), the more we psychologically experience that possession as part of the self or 'as one with the self' (Pierce & Peck, 2018). Psychological ownership theory may explain the attachment feelings that consumers experience with these temporary possessions. This is especially important since sharing platforms have little to do with the prototypical sharing as a joint (at least *de facto*) ownership (Belk, 2010), yet they constantly advocate for ideologies of "what's mine is yours".

While psychological ownership research has received much attention in management studies as a phenomenon that produces positive attitudes and behaviours and employee sense of ownership (Pierce, Rubenfeld, & Morgan, 1991), it has seen some light in other disciplines (Peck and Shu, 2018). Past scholars have touched on this construct from a view of the self and non-self (Prelinger, 1959), possessions as extensions of the self (Belk, 1988), attitudes of ownership towards objects (Heider, 1958) and the 'psychology of mine' (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). This has been defined as "the state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership or a piece of that target is 'theirs' (i.e., it is mine!)" (Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2003, p. 86) whether it is tangible or intangible.

Psychological experiences of ownership have been found to connect the self to objects of possession such as homes, cars and other people (Dittmar, 1992) but can also be felt towards ideas and artistic pieces (Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2001). People may experience emotional passions and even magical transcendence (Belk, 2018) through profound feelings when they are in possession of these objects (even if their ownership is *de facto*). For instance, an attachment to the workplace and one's workspace or the attachment to one's social media profile can lead to highly emotional connections (Belk, 2013; Tian & Belk, 2005). However, it is difficult to discover if and when an individual experiences a sense of ownership as some scholars believe that emotional attachment is

most likely developed over time compared to formal physical ownership. In the latter case, ownership can be instantaneous (Hulland et al., 2015) and emotional attachments may depend on the level of association with the self (Jussila, Tarkiainen, Sarterdt, & Hair, 2015). Belk (2010) suggests that a *de facto* shared sense of ownership in prototypical sharing might have some significance in collaborative consumption marketplaces. However, joint ownership and models of a common sense of self might be limited in commercial sharing when demand sharing and attempts to avoid true sharing are evident (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). Rather than desiring a collective or common sense of self with others to create unity and connection, consumers might be engaging in a 'limited self' (as opposed to an extended self), that is, a personal self that is limited by others we choose to share with (Widlöck, 2017). Despite these individualistic motives, consumers and producers within the economy of sharing continue to mostly share their most meaningful possessions that are part of their extended selves, and use discourses that align with altruistic sharing. The selves involved in this commercial exchange of 'sharing' activities and their perceived sense of ownership need to be further understood as it problematizes how consumers utilise these possessions when accessed, and the nature of the relationships between those sharing.

Researchers have found that consumers need to be highly motivated and have gained enough information on the resource to experience profound feelings of ownership (Kamleitner, 2011; Peck, Barger, & Webb, 2013), especially when it involves the temporary possession of objects. Others argue that it can happen during shorter periods of time using marketing communication encounters (Kamleitner & Feuchtl, 2015), which may be the result of marketplace ideologies interpreted by consumers (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Consumers have been found to not only experience perceived ownership with the mere touch of an object, but they value it more and become attached to objects without any legal transfer of ownership required (Peck & Shu, 2009). Additionally, the engagement process that involves continuous and intensive interaction within the marketplace (Fournier, 1998) strengthens consumers' emotional, psychological or physical investment (Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012), which may enable temporary possessions and the marketplace or brand community to become an extension of the self (Belk, 1988). A sense of ownership can be experienced for more than factual possessions (Rudmin, 1994). Thus, feelings of psychological



ownership towards an object or a community may stem from consumers investing their self (e.g., energy, time and attention) into the marketplace or shared possessions, creating relationships with other members and products and becoming intimately knowledgeable and attached to the community and resources.

Scholars have found various effects of psychological ownership on individuals' reactions. Consumers experiencing perceived ownership are more likely to engage in positive word of mouth (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005) or forgive brand failures (Bauer, Heinrich, & Albrecht, 2009). Feelings of possession have been found to create uplifting and positive emotions, similar to the Romantics' irrational feelings of joy (Formanek, 1991), whereas the opposite occurs when possessions are taken away such as a sense of suffering or anger (James, 1890). When individuals perceive ownership they feel more responsible for the possession, believe they have a right to make decisions that may impact the object and share a responsibility to invest time and energy towards that object (Pierce et al., 2001). However, when changes are imposed such as the discontinuation of a favoured product, deviant behaviours may occur that may involve consumer resistance or sabotage in hopes of inhibiting such changes (Muñiz & Schau, 2005). Jussila et al. (2015) suggest that consumers feel robbed or betrayed if companies discontinue brands, services or online communities that are very dear to them due to their emotional attachment and sense of ownership towards these spaces or brands. Serious consumer backlash has occurred, such as the counterattack caused by Apple customers after the Apple Newton product termination (Muñiz & Schau, 2005). Such strong attachments are worth exploring further to understand the psychological 'property rights' of marketplace participants and how these fit in the sharing economy's unique set of interactions and ambiguous modes of exchange and logics. The subjective value of objects through owned or perceived ownership becomes higher and more meaningful to the user than to others that do not possess or use it, a phenomenon called the 'endowment effect' (Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1990; Morewedge & Giblin, 2015).

To situate psychological ownership in new economies such as sharing economy marketplaces, it is crucial to understand the different states of ownership that exist and their associated consumer cultural meanings. The multiplicity of digital consumption objects, which act as consumer possessions and company assets, is also explored by Molesworth, Watkins, and Denegri-Knott (2016), who theorise that consumers become

‘ensnared’ when they are attached to their possession work, that is, the physical and psychological investment transforming commodities to possessions thus making consumers inseparable from company influence. Through entanglement with the object and its creator, consumers preserve ties and enter into a web of relationships (Hodder, 2012). Access-based markets shift consumers away from ownership or hard work to access, where consumers may come to experience a sense of ownership of these access-based objects with feelings of ‘it is mine’. Hulland et al. (2015) suggest psychological ownership represents the fusion of legal ownership and access. In Digital Consumption Objects (DCOs), which are created by users and hosted by companies (e.g., Dropbox or Facebook), ownership is mixed between creation and temporary access due to market-mediation restrictions making the relationship destabilised and ownership fragmented (Molesworth et al., 2016). Yet having to pay a premium for access to psychologically owned outputs may cause consumers to feel anger and resentment towards the controlling company and the co-creation process. Understanding consumer-company relationships in digital contexts will become increasingly important with digital advancements in the sharing economy. While the ownership literature hints toward the importance of psychological ownership as a lens for investigation, there is a need to understand consumer culture in collaborative consumption marketplaces around ownership in temporary access environments. This may further uncover deeper meanings around what is ‘mine’, how that feeling is maintained and what happens to consumers’ relationships with objects, the hosting company and self-concept during the temporary possession of resources. The maxim of “you are what you own” has more recently changed to “you are what you can access” (Belk, 2014c). Yet to understand the parameters of what can be accessed or shared, a distinction needs to be made between shared ownership and sharing possessions with others. Rudmin (2016) identifies distinct ways of sharing where the shared ownership resembles joint ownership such as that of timeshares and common possessions within gated communities such as a swimming pool or gym (Belk, 2017a). Sharing possessions resemble the access of possessions rather than a joint ownership of commodities. Examples of sharing possessions include home-sharing or car-sharing platforms such as Airbnb and Uber (respectively).

Similar service research in P2P environments depict value-in-use as an instigator of co-created value through interactions (Gronroos & Voima, 2013) where consumers experience strong feelings of achievement and pride and strong ties with the product

and a community's 'linking value' (Cova, 1997). The more knowledge and intimacy with resources and the community (Pierce et al., 2001) that create a fusion of the self with other consumers (Beaglehole, 1932), the more the feelings of possession arise (Jussila et al., 2015). In community environments, there are feelings of belonging, harmonious collaboration and sharing of ideas that create enjoyable, fun and playful moments (Kozinets, 2008; Venkatesh, 1999). However, the theme of most studies on community collaboration seems to be positively romanticised. Yet these studies do not explore how heterogeneous consumer communities continue to collaborate when the community may be wrought with conflicts, paradoxes, ideological struggles and power dynamics. Other studies focus on the rational side of consumption networks, finding that short-term, individualised and immediate access to resources is motivated by self-interest and profiting, which hinders relationship-building with resources and other social actors (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). Institutions falling under the sharing economy pride themselves in concepts of "what's mine is yours" with accompanying discourse of shared possessions, but there has been little emphasis on provisional ownership and the sense of self in postmodern markets. Belk (1988) suggests that appropriated possessions that are lost may lessen the self. Consumers may grieve and lose a part of who they are along with the attached meanings during the commodification of possessions (McCracken, 1986; Richins, 1994) if valued possessions are lost, stolen, sold or others are given access to them. Not only that, but with legal ownership comes feelings of detachment when possession (or dispossession) is taken for granted, resulting in "the destruction of possessiveness, in consequence of its indifference" (Litwinski, 1942, p. 32). This becomes problematic in the case of collaborative consumption networks where those sharing resources are at risk of feelings of detachment or dispossession and this eventually may lessen their sense of self.

From a consumer culture perspective, temporary ownership embodies similar characteristics to collecting material objects such as clothing of celebrities or paintings, which have been heavily documented in consumer research as a way for the essence of owners from the past to "magically rub off" and enhance the new owner (Fernandez & Lastovicka, 2011; Steketee & Frost, 2010, p. 46). Temporary possession of objects involves contact with possessions owned by others. The tactile nature of material possessions allows "contamination" of the original owner to take place (Belk, 1988). The perceived ownership experienced in the sharing economy may also put into

question the contamination effect that some seek to experience when literally taking possession of used items. Here, objects are temporally controlled and physically bound to the original owners' will. Past studies on collecting and possession include assumptions of distinct objects carrying a 'biography' (Kopytoff, 1986), that once acquired, is singularised and decommodified when passed on to others (Curasi, Price, & Arnould, 2004; Epp & Price, 2010; Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005). The object's history imbues indexical meanings of items that were once associated with people from the past, places or previous selves (Belk, 1991; Grayson & Shulman, 2000). As opposed to singular material objects changing hands to a new owner, such as with gift-giving, temporary ownership involves a transfer of objects as well as their attached meanings, albeit for a period of time. When a transfer of objects (albeit temporarily) is a crucial factor in collaborative consumption networks, object meanings become intertwined with others during the temporary transfer, which may have greater influence on consumers than we can comprehend.

Previous discussions of ownership involve an individual's perspective of resources. Another theme under ownership is its collective appeal where groups of individuals experience similar effects as individual ownership (Hulland et al., 2015; Pierce & Jussila, 2010). For instance, members of collaborative consumption networks may share a collective culture of the same experiences and ideologies, resulting in psychological ownership whilst they collaborate to build their 'aggregate extended self' by sharing photos, ideas, images and memories online (Belk, 2013). A sense of ownership is shifting from 'mine' to collectively 'ours'. A group's sense of ownership may experience similar motives as Pierce and Jussila's (2010) conceptualisations by gaining a sense of ownership at the individual level, recognising others sharing similar feelings of ownership and engaging in group control and investment in the shared resource. In group scenarios, consumers may want to satisfy social-identity motives, where resources need to be accessible, attractive, malleable, socially esteemed by others and involve visible and collaborative environments for collective ownership to be felt. Social influence may be another reason for feelings of collective psychological ownership, especially when consumers are impacted by those around them in group settings. Consumers might also demonstrate a higher inclination to stay motivated by investing more of the self because of their feelings of group ownership and accountability to others. This presumption may be true when they consume

collaboratively in new platforms where ownership is based on access of shared resources.

It can be assumed that the collective psychological ownership of a resource or a community shares Rousseauistic notions of the general will. Similar to the Romantics, a collective community of consumers feel so strongly towards one another that they fight for the rights of the whole rather than the single individual. As they collectively feel a sense of ownership and civic responsibility towards the community, they care and share with one another and foster moral economy ideals. Collaborative consumption communities in the postmodern era create their own lifeworlds and liberate themselves outside traditional markets. Hence, it seems logical to explore the macro environment that these collaborative consumer communities exist amongst to understand how they emancipate themselves as a collective consumer public.

## **2.10 Dynamics of Market Systems**

A growing stream of literature on market systems has demonstrated the role of consumers (Dolbec & Fischer, 2015; Giesler, 2008; Martin & Schouten, 2014) and producers (Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015; Giesler, 2012; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007) in the creation and disruption of markets. Giesler and Fischer (2017) recently reviewed the state of market system dynamics and found that scholarship in this area has been plagued with economic actor biases (i.e., focus on consumers and producers), micro-level biases (i.e., reduction of macro-cultural and historical structures to specific micro-level concerns) and variance biases (i.e., privileging variance questions dealing with variables related to change or decline). Traditions of market system dynamics are currently being theorised as markets resulting from discursive negotiations and practices of market-shaping stakeholders (Parmentier & Fischer, 2015; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013), unpacking the co-constitutive relationships between micro, meso and macro-level analyses (Siebert & Giesler, 2012) and problematizing boundaries between market systems, actors and time by asking why markets emerge, evolve and terminate (Giesler, 2008, 2012; Parmentier & Fischer, 2015).

In this study, markets are perceived as networks that allow negotiations and compromises to be reached with regard to value created and distributed (Callon & Muniesa, 2005). Markets are positioned as “sociotechnical arrangements or assemblages (agencements)” of actors, things, institutions, narratives and other resources (Çalışkan & Callon, 2010; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3). This ontological positioning of

relations is gaining popularity in consumption literature. For example, studies in this area have found new market emergence through marketplace translations in market networks (Martin & Schouten, 2014), actors configuring marketplace resources to reach end goals such as domestic care (Epp & Velagaleti, 2014) or using marketplace purifying practices to preserve Romantic nature experiences with networks of consumption resources, narratives and materials (Canniford & Shankar, 2013). Consumer researchers are moving towards broader and deeper understanding of markets as systems that organise value (Peñaloza & Venkatesh, 2006) and economic life through processes of conception, production and circulation of resources and experiences (Çalışkan & Callon, 2010).

It is timely to understand market system dynamics under the sharing economy where performing social actors take part in creating and disrupting markets that “constitute places and structures” (Martin & Schouten, 2014, p. 858). New market systems utilise Romantic notions of creativity and freedom to create new markets that resist traditional ideologies and exchange logics or offer new alternatives for consumers (Martin & Schouten, 2014; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013). They find new and innovative collaborative consumption communities to break down geographical barriers using technologies and advertised marketplace ideologies. However, there has been little understanding of the potential power of marketplace geographies with platform mediated technologies and how space and place are shaped (and shape) the market. Except for a conceptual study by Castilhos, Dolbec, and Veresiu (2017), there has been little attention given to how space and time influence market creation, development or disruption. Prior assumptions included space as a backdrop or a latent notion (Karababa & Ger, 2011; Martin & Schouten, 2014) where market dynamics can unfold. However, “geographies shape and explain social processes and social action” (Soja, 2009, p. 22). Space, as the product of these geographical relations among people, objects and institutions was found to be an active participant in strengthening (or weakening) markets through spatial dimensions (Castilhos et al., 2017) such as the bonding role of places in bringing people together or the role of territories in protecting them (e.g., Giesler, 2012). In the creation, development and continued success of networked markets, space allows for flows of information that “order and condition both consumption and production” whilst “networks themselves reflect and create distinctive cultures” (Castells, 2011, p. 6). Space is not just a backdrop where consumption and

actions take place, but the outcome of these actions (Bajde, 2013). This means that markets should be perceived as networks existent in the social world where everything is constantly shifting the networks of relationships. By including the market as a literal and hypothetical space, everything inside has agency to act and participate in the consumption system.

### **2.10.1 Markets as Consumption Networks**

With the discussion around collective ownership, it can be implied that a community of consumers and producers are involved in a collective experience. Consumer culture research demonstrates that consumption is socially constructed around diverse realities that consumers choose to experience such as fantasies, identity play and desires (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Consumers may choose to belong to consumption communities to live such realities. As an important characteristic of the Romantic consumer, they utilise the imagination as a way of seeing and feeling extraordinary worlds, transforming their self and reaching a divine moral destiny they are continuously searching for. Communities are vital players in the sociology literature. Discussions on communities began in the sociology literature and were found to be small, homogenous groups that were similar in their emotional and familial bonds (Tonnies, 1887). Geographic proximity is what connected communities and allowed for similarities between individuals to be discovered (Anderson, 1983). Contemporary community understanding depicts that communities have evolved based on their broader dynamic environments (Thomas et al., 2012). Community members are not necessarily similar in specific physical or behavioural characteristics but they may share certain intangible qualities: a sense of belonging and consciousness of kind; personal fulfilment for sharing common goals, norms and interests; a sense of continuity, engagement and legitimacy by belonging to a community; and associations amongst other heterogeneous members (Baker, Hill, Baker, & Mittelstaedt, 2014; Fischer et al., 1996). These are important experiences and emotions that are shared on individual and group levels where social relationships are strong reasons to belong (Thomas et al., 2012). This sense of belonging is reinforced through engagement with other heterogeneous members of the community and their socially constructed practices (Rosen, Lafontaine, & Hendrickson, 2011), which offers them access to social and economic resources. In addition to an individual's sense of belonging to a community, collective belongingness may exist where members exhibit unity, devotion and

sometimes love to the community that exhibits a collective identity as one (Arnould & Price, 1993). Their united practices, meanings, rituals, narratives and symbols contribute to the sense of belonging of the community and its longevity (Schau et al., 2009).

In addition to the individual and collective community belonging and identification, the literature demonstrates that communities are also centred around consumption (Thomas et al., 2012). They share a liking of products, services, activities, consumption practices, beliefs and brands, thus creating a fabric of social relationships (Cova & Cova, 2002). Similar to ideocultures, they share a system of knowledge, beliefs and behaviours that members can easily refer to when needed, creating further interactions (Fine, 1979; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). Three key players involved in building and withstanding consumption communities are resources and interacting heterogeneous consumers and producers (Thomas et al., 2012) that share a commitment and responsibility to the community and its members. However, consumption communities' desires also constantly change (Belk et al., 2003), thus understanding the unpredictability and fluidity of their identities and consumer culture may provide insights into the symbolic meanings and practices of sharing communities. Nonetheless, communities are built on Maffesoli's (1988/1996) ideas of neotribalism where forces of globalisation have transformed the traditional ways of sociality into an ethos of individualism that is driven by personal distinctiveness in lifestyles. Due to these alienating conditions, consumers are searching for ways to belong, thus forging collective identifications by engaging in practices of solidarity grounded in common interests, shared beliefs and status systems (see Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). They do that by escaping to new economies of value with networks that offer consumers the ability and flexibility to create, share and exchange value without the interjection of traditional companies. Responding to calls for a broader understanding of 'the context of the context' (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001), I turn to examining forces that shape how community members think, experience and act.

The sociological approach to markets as networks (and part of the network) treats markets as spaces where social actors (Fligstein & Dauter, 2007) and material objects interact and connect (Çalışkan & Callon, 2010). This means that markets are also considered as actors, with an ability to construct and delimit spaces where conflicts and tensions can arise and be negotiated. Thus, the network contributes to market



dynamics by mobilising market resources across geographic spaces (Latour, 1986). This allows the sharing of economic ideals and understanding to form globally, structured by discursive and symbolic relationships, constituted by competing logics and diffused through certain channels (see Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015; Thompson & Arsel, 2004). Networks also exercise certain capacities in assembling market elements across geographic spaces (Castilhos et al., 2017; DeLanda, 2006). They have the ability to transform a space when they combine different market elements into a romanticised place (e.g., Canniford & Shankar, 2013). Other capacities of the spatial elements of networks include being able to solidify or weaken a market system (Castilhos et al., 2017). Relationships amongst different actors in a network can be strengthened through spatial infrastructures, thus also strengthening the consumption network (Martin & Schouten, 2014). Because of a network's intertwined dynamic nature and complex and multi-faceted spatial dimensions, it becomes difficult to perceive how and in what capacity value is realised by different actors of the network.

### **2.10.2 Creating and Perceiving Value in Networks**

Value is viewed as a model of human meaning-making and literature discussions are beginning to move away from the Rationalist and Reductionist approach of economic paradigms to a cultural discourse (Graeber, 2001). Value in modern day society is an ever-changing outcome of the heterogeneous network of actors that includes consumers, producers, objects, technologies, platforms, media and organisations (Arsel, 2016). Thus, with different modes of consumption, such as temporary possession versus legal ownership, comes a modification in consumers' value perceptions as a felt subjective and emotional evaluation (Chen, 2009). This could mean that the more intangible the experience (i.e., access), the more unpredictable consumers' perceived value becomes. Cultures are also found to be fragmented internally across socially distributed networks of meaning (Hannerz, 1992). With value found to be manifest in the collective enactment of practices such as with brand communities (Schau et al., 2009), consumers are favouring consumer-to-consumer networks over firm-to-consumer relationships. Network actors are able to create value in hybrid economies through the dissipation of tensions around consumer-producer engagements (Scaraboto, 2015) or conflict resolution (Mele, 2011). However, there is little understanding around value created amongst a network that connects multiple levels of actors. Traditional marketplaces are under attack by groups eager to re-

conceptualise modes of exchange, thus shifting consumption logics. For instance, ‘frustrated fatshionistas’ (i.e., fashion lovers that wear plus-size clothing) seek to expand rather than reject current fashion logics in order to fulfil their desires of wearing designer clothes (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013). They become ‘embedded entrepreneurs’ within their communities, such as veiled, middle-class Turkish women that transform fashion logics through stigmatised practices (Sandikci & Ger, 2010; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013). This shift changes the meaning of value and consumer culture perspectives that are related to the sharing economy. Uncovering how actions, interactions and relationships amongst diverse consumers in collaborative consumption marketplaces would show how value is created (i.e., how things become valuable) and how it is valued (i.e., how value outcomes are assessed) (Arsel, 2016; Karababa & Kjeldgaard, 2013).

Karababa and Kjeldgaard (2013) recently reviewed the use of value in marketing theory, and argue for three abstract value types: economic, semiotic and social. They call for a socioculturally-informed understanding of value. They conceptualise economic value as different concepts, such as Marxian exchange value (Marx, 1867/2001) and surplus value or utility value themes that are very reflective of Rationalist value modes. Social value may be realised in the ethical sense of being good or a cultural sense of goodness of something such as ideas, activities or other people (Ng & Smith, 2012). The Romantics search for social values during their moral quests for natural divinity. Lastly, semiotic value refers to cultural meanings or signs that are reconstructed by different actors through their consumption (Graeber, 2001; McCracken, 1986). Along with conceptualisations of value in marketing and consumer research that include exchange value, experiential value, social values and value systems, perceived value, identity and linking value, value co-created and value created through meaning, Karababa and Kjeldgaard’s (2013) theorising demonstrate past studies’ lack of clarity and holistic view using economic, social and semiotic meanings. They propose a sociocultural perspective of value being “subjective, context-dependent, complex and interrelated” (Karababa & Kjeldgaard, 2013, p. 5) where culturally active value types are manifested to improve the understanding of market values (Thompson & Troester, 2002). A sociocultural perspective is especially important as economic theories are often suspect of being restricted to value as meanings (McCracken, 1986) or a Marxist dichotomy of exchange and use value (Marx, 1867/2001). Perceiving value

from an integrated approach allows researchers to see value not just in-use, which is more materialistic, but also as a consumption of signs (Featherstone, 1987) created through social interactions (Cova, 1997) using dialogue, content creation and collaborations through Internet-mediated platforms (Scaraboto, 2015). Thus, what may be societally valued (which companies may not anticipate or instigate themselves), may be expressed semiotically and ascribed using exchange methods (Graeber, 2001). More importantly, consumption in postmodernism is not the end but the beginning where a lot can be created and produced. Value co-creation allows for consumption to become the means for self-identification where symbolic meanings and relationships are created (Firat, 1991b; Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

For an examination of value in collaborative consumption networks using a sociocultural lens, it is imperative that there is an acceptance of consumption logics viewed differently depending on the social context of collaboration (as explained in the introductory chapter). The following section discusses the focus of this study, which is on home sharing as an exemplar context where ambiguity between sociality and commercial exchange can be best observed.

## **2.11 Meanings of the Home and Home Sharing**

Past literature on the sharing economy has focused on the holistic nature of this market with a macro-level approach. Few studies examine personal contexts such as car, home and toy sharing using micro-level analyses (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Hellwig et al., 2018; Ozanne & Ballantine, 2010). However, as the economic value of these three categories differ, so does their symbolic value and cultural meanings. Contrary to research on car sharing, which highlights a lack of identification, varying significance of use value and limited sense of belonging to the community (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012), home sharing can result in different outcomes due to the home, a previously private space and refuge, being charged with symbolic meaning (Clark, 1986) and of emotional significance to its owners (Belk, 1988). Home-sharing networks present an ideal setting to explore how actors and their micro-social interactions and practices enable value to be created and the forces that work within to sustain the status of the marketplace.

Past research has demonstrated the importance of special possessions and the home as the locus of the extended self (Belk, 1988). Favourite objects enhance individualism and promote integration into society (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). McCracken (1989) extends the notion of the home through a cultural phenomenon that

he calls ‘homeyness’. Creating this feeling of home is one of the most important life goals during people’s transactions with their homes. It leads to the inclusion of other favoured belongings such as gifts or family heirlooms. These belongings create a buffer where homeyness “helps the individual to mediate his or her relationship with the larger world, refusing some of its influences, and transforming still others” (McCracken, 1989, p. 179). Special objects and spatial properties are key resources towards the transformation of the physical structure of a house to a home.

McCracken (1989) proposed eight symbolic properties and three pragmatic properties that constitute homeyness and act upon the environment (see Table 2 for a summary). Symbolic properties refer to meanings and logics that give physical properties their cultural significance. These homeyness properties are very persuasive, and can situate people in their worlds. It can be the adhesive that attaches them to the self, their family, time and place. McCracken also alludes to the pragmatic properties of homeyness as the work a cultural phenomenon accomplishes in the social self and world. Homeyness establishes an enabling context for the family’s construction of itself and offers individuals ways to fashion their relationship with larger institutions of modern society. It allows consumers to opt out of status competitions, and deals with the intrusion of alien meanings from the market and the alienating aesthetics of changing fashions. Thus, the home becomes “a metaphor for living because we structure our homes as we wish to structure our lives” (Claiborne & Ozanne, 1990, p. 373). The home can be imagined as a utopia, a place of absolute perfection that is unreal.

**Table 2: Properties of Homeyness. Adapted from McCracken (1989)**

Symbolic Properties	
Diminutive property	A simplifying power that makes the environment more conceivable, e.g., low ceiling, small windows. It represents habitable space that is manageable to grasp and live in and good to think about because it is easy.
Variable property	Inconsistent with no symmetry or premeditated order, e.g., rubble stone rather than cut stone. Not uniform and made out of passion and desire not calculation. Makes the environment appear more real and individual.
Embracing property	A descending pattern of enclosure as rings of intimacy, e.g., enclosing neighbourhood, walls, books. It has active qualities of encompassment and encompassing that are repeated in the home. The homey space offers security and protection from external threats – similar psychological value to a parental embrace.

Engaging property	Designed to welcome and engage the observer. It draws in, creates warmth and invites an interactive kind of relationship, e.g., holly wreath. Homeyness has graduated from passive to active involvement and strengthens its relationship with the occupant (now a participant).
Mnemonic property	Signifying objects or mementos that carry historical character, constitute ‘family archives’ (McCracken, 1987) and localise and emplace it in time, e.g., trophies, gifts, photographs. This can personalise the space through indexical cues of the family’s historical meanings and past collections.
Authentic property	Real, personal nature, and untouched by the calculations of the marketplace. It completes the emplacement process in a spatial dimension, i.e., someone lives here.
Informal property	Warm and friendly, almost deliberately unfinished material, embracing a rustic look. Objects become valuable for their sentimentality. It eschews marketplace formalities and puts people at their ease. It invites friendly interactions and allows people to be themselves.
Situating property	The occupant takes on the properties of the surrounding homey environment and becomes a “homey creature”.
<b>Pragmatic Properties</b>	
Status corrector	Allows individuals to defend themselves against status strategies. High standing groups set aside homeyness to achieve distinction. Middle standing groups seek homeyness without ambivalence. It is a great objective of family life and a defence against status competition.
Marketplace corrector	Strips and transforms possessions of their commercially assigned market meanings (i.e., transforming status symbolism, fashion currency, pretensions towards elegance into more companionable objects).
Modernity corrector	Ability to contend to modernity that makes the home cold and unforgiving. Modern designs contradict the diminutive, variable and embracing aspects of homeyness. Homeyness gives more habitable meaning to environments that might be violating.

This feeling of homeyness combines physical, symbolic and pragmatic properties as cultural accounts of the constellation of consumer meanings. Thus, the connection between home objects and spaces and their symbolic meanings informs the private world, enabling the mediation of relationships with the outside world. Because possessions that include the home hold important meanings for a person in society, their

loss is often viewed as a violation of the self (Belk, 1988; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988).

The market and the home space are often considered on opposite sides with sharing and gift-giving positioned inside the home (Gudeman, 2001). Contrary to the old notion of home as a single-purpose and mono-functional space solely for residential purposes and separate from the workplace, the rise of the industrial revolution brought about changes to work-home boundaries (Baines & Wheelock, 1998). Contemporary homes are increasingly becoming flexible due to technological innovations (Sullivan & Lewis, 2001) that are transforming homes into a multi-functional spaces that are “a breeding ground for consumer fantasy and a site of consumption and consumer display” (Osborne, 2000, p. 53). The literature on the meaning of home demonstrates that the home is less a place where living and work are interconnected and more a symbol of distinction that defines our position in society (Frawley, 1990; Hill, 1991). Along those lines, the *nouveaux riche* have been found to purchase large and expensive homes to distinguish their current selves from their previous ones (Costa & Belk, 1990; Pratt, 1982). Frawley (1990) argues that “home became a consumer item, a measure of our success, and an avenue for spatially and socially differentiating ourselves from others” (p. 7).

In the tourism literature, home sharing is not a novel concept. Many owner-operated small businesses offer accommodation in the private home such as bed and breakfasts, farm stays, home stays, guesthouses, boutique hotels, motels and cottages (Lynch & MacWhannell, 2000). The notion of commercialising the home into an accommodation space is “where visitors or guests pay to stay in private homes, where interaction takes place with a host and/or family usually living upon the premises” (Lynch, 2005, p. 534). Boundaries between work and home are becoming increasingly blurred (Nippert-Eng, 1996). The contemporary postmodern home that was once a privileged place for privacy and intimacy is dissolving. Even more so, traditional small tourism businesses have been radically disrupted by P2P accommodation platforms with Airbnb as the pioneer. Under the guise of hospitality and being hospitable, Airbnb (the context of this study) is founded upon the idea of offering strangers a place to stay for a fee, which differs from the hotel industry that solely markets themselves as commercial spaces based on traditional market logics. Thus, Granovetter’s (1985) argument that social embeddedness is pervasive in economic transactions is particularly germane in

home sharing when not only is an exchange value (i.e., bed, home space) expected but so is sociality (i.e., social engagement, friendship). Commercialisation of the home can become problematic, as hosts and guests place varying emphasis on financial and social needs (Tussyadiah, 2015), thus resulting in market tensions.

Market-mediated platforms that fall under the sharing economy claim facilitation of community relationships and reciprocity as important prerequisites for consumption to take place (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Gansky, 2010), whilst allowing for liquidity, freedom and flexibility in switching. Scholars have recognised that despite the diversity in communities, they uphold one common ideal: mutual sociality based on caring and sharing (Putnam, 2000; Tonnies, 1887). Community belongingness, kindness and sharing are all characteristic of the romanticised notion of human nature and the natural world. However, some empirical evidence reveals that consumers are rational beings, motivated for individual, utilitarian and profit-seeking needs (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Lamberton & Rose, 2012). Not all pseudo-sharing (Belk, 2014b) or masked forms of access practices are able to embrace community and keep social relations central (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2016). Belk (2017a) explains how we are 'bowling alone' (Putnam, 2000) in gated communities and access-based markets that are constructing a world of individual selves and building walls that dissolve any possibility of community, sharing or trust.

Lately, communities such as Airbnb have been found to reflect a mix of reciprocity and profit-seeking as well as traces of sociality between hosts and guests (Habibi et al., 2016). Accommodation hosts have been found to share space but also time by socially interacting with their guests (Ikkala & Lampinen, 2015). Thus, consumer responses to these sharing systems (Belk, 2010) can be quite varied depending on modes of resource circulation. According to Giesler (2008), any economy is based on two dominant tropes – mutuality and possessive individualism. Therefore, depending on the prominence of each trope in an economic system, these will determine the system's nature and functions. However, sharing systems that are based on both tropes can be quite confusing for participants in that networked system. Utility maximisation and one-off transactions demonstrate possessive individualism and mirror desires to use autonomous services such as car rental services (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012) whilst a sense of community is also evolving given that sharing systems are formulated by concepts of belonging that are socially driven (Giesler, 2006). Blurring

the lines between market and non-market rules can be quite problematic when they co-exist in collaborative consumption networks that are disrupting culturally embedded rituals, meanings and practices that take place in the home. It is not yet clear how social actors manage their differences in the shared homes and what is the role of nonhuman actors in this socio-temporally bounded space called 'home'.

### **2.11.1 Home Spaces and Sense of Place**

As demonstrated, the home is a safe haven for individuals to experience the comforts of homeyness. It is central to the prototypical notion of sharing (Belk, 2010). The home becomes predominantly where network actors are mobilised, and their agency is actualised. Following notions of space as a practised place (de Certeau, 1984), the business of home sharing is transforming meanings of home and its common practices and rituals that generally take place in the home space. Home has been identified in the literature as an identity anchor, a place of retreat, comfort and safety, privacy, self-expression, togetherness and the centre of family life (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998; Molony, 2010; Sixsmith & Sixsmith, 1991); however, feeling of home and being at home are contrived differently in home-sharing contexts. Spatial relations in the home have an important role in creating control of distance and providing autonomy.

In studies on space and sense of place, there can occur an experience of transcendence of the body, space and time (Biocca, 1997; Sherry, 1998a, 2000), where consumers may enliven consumption settings and make places meaningful. Space is a concept that is abstract and does not offer substantial meaning to individuals, while a place refers to individuals' awareness of social connections within a space, giving it value and meaning (Cloke, Philo, & Sadler, 1991; Tuan, 1977). Places can become profound centres with possible emotional roles in consumers' lives. Contrary to past environmental psychology literature has tended to explore the influences of physical stimuli on consumer behaviour (Barker, 1968; Kotler, 1973/1974; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Turley & Milliman, 2000), some place theories do not present a full understanding of consumer-place relationships. Places are 'on the move' as they are culturally 'performed' and put into 'play' in relation to other places to create meaning for consumers and become materialised as objects of desire (Elliott & Urry, 2010; Sheller & Urry, 2004; Urry, 2007). Rosenbaum (2006) found that consumers are connected to 'third places' in order to obtain companionship and to satisfy emotional needs. Third places denote "public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal and



happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work” (Oldenburg, 1999, p. 16). Oldenburg (1999) argues that contemporary marketplaces are not cold and heartless but places where consumers can obtain feelings of intimacy. When consumers associate a place as a home, they begin to create intense feelings of loyalty and attachment to the place (Belk, 1992; Kleine & Baker, 2004). While commercial homes are not necessarily contrived as third places, home-sharing businesses are claiming the appeal of homeliness and community belonging where kindness, caring and sharing practices take place.

Experiences of attachment imply sedentarism, which treats dwellings as stable, with meaning and a place. Sedentary theories are formed based on the territorialism that emerged in the Enlightenment era’s ‘cosmic view’ of the world (Kaplan, 2006). However, in postmodern consumption environments, virtual representations of physical spaces exist in cyberspace and provide a powerful and emotionally loaded context to user interactions (Belk, 2013). Cyberspace is only one of the many factors that transform time-space dimensions of modern urban dwellers (Urry & Sheller, 2006). By locating and materialising mobility through ‘mobile machines’, which enable the fluidities of liquid modernity such as mobile cars, computer connections and mobile phones, overlapping time is created. Mobile machines are called space immobilities (Urry, 2003). For instance, fibre optic cabling carries mobile and computer signals (Graham & Marvin, 2001) from one space and social being to another space and social being. With space immobilities created through mobile sociotechnical systems (De Souza e Silva, 2006; De Souza e Silva & Sheller, 2014), we are seeing more of hybrid spaces, that is, a merging of the physical and the digital spaces in social environments. These hybrid spaces enable the movement of people and materials and allow them to hold their shape as they move across regions (Normark, 2006). Hybrid spaces are able to invert the traditional network logic (such as a community), making it mobile and brings its paths and connection back to the physical space (De Souza e Silva, 2006). Thus, hybrid spaces are transforming the understanding of space and the meaning of place that may exist digitally or physically because of the merging of the two. Contexts and spaces are enfolded together where individuals feel they are in two places at the same time (Rheingold, 2002) and borders between the here and there no longer exist. By mixing spaces of reality and spaces of imagination that are recreated by the digital

realm, meanings of place and social interactions will transform and redefine our sociability and value of possessions (physical as well as digital).

Returning to the context of home sharing, while prototypical sharing can be a right of possession (Belk, 2010) or joint possession (i.e., ours rather than mine or yours) (Belk, 2007), participants in the home-sharing network may initially perceive spaces 'shared' with others to be more fluid than a solid place and possession. This may be due to consumers' mobility practices, which tend to destabilise meanings of home (Bardhi, Eckhardt, & Arnould, 2012). Consumers (the guests) of home-sharing platforms may use the home space for flexible living without the pressures of maintenance or possession responsibilities, while it provides flexible and regular earnings for home-sharing hosts. The home as a stable and solid space can be disrupted when certain spaces are shared with 'temporary others'. Serial travellers such as cosmopolitan professionals find the sense of home to be fragmented and distributed across spaces (Figueiredo, 2016). Theories of 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000) redirect research away from solid structures of space and possessions in modern worlds to view social spaces that are comprised of people, objects and technology in systems of movement. New mobile paradigms account for the quickening of liquidity that can create connections and empowerment in some cases, but in other cases they can create discontinuities and social exclusion (Graham & Marvin, 2001). Liquid and solid consumption can co-exist in one place (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017) but it is not always clear how that can happen in home spaces. Bauman (2000) argues that detachment or 'de-territorialisation' is associated with liquid consumption whilst attachments and re-territorialisations through mobilisation of locality and materiality of places can also exist (Sheller, 2004). Modernity was seen as establishing social order through the suppression of social ambivalence, yet I find that Hetherington's (1997/2002) conceptualisation of heterotopia, that is, other spaces as a more accurate reflection of spatial life. Modernity is perceived as several utopics juxtaposing through spatial arrangements that can be paradoxical and ambiguous in order to create social ordering. Despite the fact that social order is never actually reached by Romantic utopians, they continue on their journeys towards moral destinies. This becomes evident as I unpack the material resources of the home-sharing network and heterotopic 'other' spaces to explore how actors find stability in spaces.

### **2.11.2 The Home-sharing Heterotopia**

If home is thought of as a space where social and commercial exchanges can take place, then it can also be conceived as a site of networked cultural activity. Foucault (1986) speaks of space as a networked agency where spaces we live in are not defined entities but ones that are fragmented, fluid and dissolving and are restructured as 'other spaces'. Postmodernity sees the concept of place shifting from a fixed grounding in space to the notion of 'heterotopia'. This is an intangible concept of space, a 'space of difference' whose fixed nature is constantly disrupted by transience and changing relations between places (Foucault, 1986). Foucault's spaces that are linked to 'other' places are physical representations (or close depictions) of a utopia (i.e., the perfect place) but differ from the places they reflect and represent. Heterotopias can take several places that seem incompatible and juxtapose them within one space (Foucault 1986, p. 25). Their disorderly and chaotic character in spatiotemporal networks, in this case home-sharing networks, enables actors to explore phenomena and intersect with each other's journeys. Compared to the concept of place, "space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities" (Roberson, 2001, p. 90). Through the practice of 'spacing', we are able to explore interactions and changing discourses, tensions and conflicts and complexities that disrupt the home spaces and fantasy places we construct around ourselves (de Certeau, 1984). Like children creating spaces for play in a place prescribed by parents, home-sharing spaces offer similar spaces for the imagination. Through spacing in the home-sharing network, an imaginative space is created in the prescribed place, but resists it by becoming an 'other' space; a heterotopia.

Soja (1996) describes the home (and people's community and networks) as a 'first space', which is privileged and dominant and merges together with the second place comprised of more formalised institutions that are marginalised, such as school, church or work, in order to construct a 'third space' (compared to the 'third place'), that which is different or alternative. The third space, which is similar to 'in-between' or hybrid' spaces, posits that people draw on a multitude of resources to make sense of their worlds (Bhabha, 1994) and emphasises the roles of the physical and socialised spaces where people interact. Soja (1996) argues for theorisation of how physical spaces operate in socialisation and how social spaces reshape the physical space. I propose that

home-sharing businesses create sites of alternate social ordering where users of the shared home (e.g., host or guest) attempt to actualise their ideals and practices in a specific place, which I conceptualise as a heterotopia (Foucault, 1986; Hetherington, 1997/2002).

The contemporary home appears as a paradox of containment and mobility. The home, a stable place of enclosure where people may live, can also more profoundly be a fluid space where others come and go and materials change spatially and temporally to accommodate for these ‘others’. Such tensions and contradictions are concerns for this study which aims to unpack cultural meanings of contemporary home-sharing networks. Heterotopias are spatial and discursive spaces (Foucault, 1986) that disrupt the surrounding stable systems they exist in and are closely bound by our experience of time. Home sharing as a space enclosed upon itself and bounded by spatial and discursive rules set for consumers, exists amongst and in relation to other residential homes. Home-sharing spaces are actualised physical territories and also reflective of an alternate imagined world (as opposed to a utopia which is absolutely imagined and perfect). A space becomes a heterotopia not by simply presenting a utopia (perfect place) during its emplacement (fixed nature) but by being deployed into new socio-temporal formations (Rankin & Collins, 2017). As a ‘counter-site’, it stands in marginal contrast to ‘real sites’, possibly re-presenting or even contesting them (Foucault, 1986). Thus, heterotopias are crucial in the social and spatial ordering of contemporary societies through their alternative ordering, which is derived from their ideas of the perfect, utopian society. As a number of utopics come together in juxtaposition and merge the meanings of *eu-topia* (good place) and *ou-topia* (no place), there are hints of tensions between the desire to create a perfect society and the impossible mission to create something perfect from an imperfect world (Hetherington, 1997). According to Marin (1984), a utopia is a space between affirmation and negation, a space that resists closure and remains paradoxical. Counter-sites are utopians’ attempts to create a perfect society, yet its alternativeness can be viewed by those not involved with the counter-sites as out of place and disillusioning. Similar to third places and third spaces, heterotopias are determined as ‘places of otherness’ through their interactions with nearby sites (Hetherington, 1997/2002).

Foucault (1967/2001) offers a systematic description of heterotopias, also known as the six principles of “heterotopology”, to explain certain cultural, discursive

and institutional spaces that are somehow incompatible, disturbing intense, contradicting or transforming. First principle, according to Foucault, refers to all cultures as having heterotopias and that they primarily fall into heterotopias of crisis and heterotopias of deviation. The former refers to spaces for the privileged, sacred or forbidden and are set for those in a state of crisis. In traditional societies, these places set aside for the elderly, menstruating or pregnant women. Modern societies see heterotopias of crisis set as boarding schools or retirement homes. However, Foucault claims these are dissolving spaces and are replaced by the latter category, that is, deviance. This refers to spaces set aside for people whose behaviours deviate from the 'normal' such as psychiatric hospitals or prisons. The second principle refers to heterotopias as having a function that reflects the society they exist in but they have evolved over time such as Foucault's example of a cemetery that used to be situated in cities but are now incompatible or contradictory and so are moved to the outskirts to avoid negative perceptions of death as an 'illness.' The third principle refers to heterotopias' ability to juxtapose several different spaces that are possibly incompatible into one real place. For instance, a movie theatre creates a 'magic circle' (Huizinga, 1955), which asserts that spaces are defined by spatial, temporal and social boundaries that converge an imaginary series of play spaces onto a physical space. The magic circle originates from ritual magic (depicted by witchcraft or sorcery), which was the belief in the containment of energy and formation of a sacred space for protection using physical markings (e.g., drawing in salt) or imagined ones (Buckland, 1986/2002). The fourth principle explains heterotopias as often "linked to slices in time", also known as heterochronias (Foucault, 1986, p. 27). Heterotopias are at their most intense when they pull everything out into a new slice of time such as museums or festivals which are places that attempt to 'stop' or 'accumulate' time. An 'absolute break' can be achieved, which refers to a competing notion of a 'heterochrony'. Foucault goes on to qualify this break, explaining that heterotopias either 'accumulate time', or they are ephemeral meaning 'absolutely temporal' such as with festivals that can appear for a temporary period of time and then suddenly disappear. The fifth principle presupposes that heterotopias have a system of opening and closing that simultaneously makes them isolated and penetrable. Their entry or exit are compulsory such as prisons and require ritual purification ceremonies or hygienic cleansing such as a Muslim hammam. Crossing into the magic circle in itself is a ritual of acknowledgement and entry

(Huizinga, 1955). The sixth principle explains that heterotopic spaces have a relationship with the spaces that remain outside them and has two functions. Spaces function as heterotopias of illusion and compensation. The former exposes every real space such as a brothel and the latter creates a space that is real and 'other'. For instance, a 17<sup>th</sup>-century new world colony that seeks to create new perfect illusions of a utopia we envision but cannot have.

Like festivals and concerts that break traditional time in a finite manner when they appear and later disappear, these represent Bakhtin's (1981/2008) chronotope, that is, spaces that connect temporal and spatial relationships. Chronotopes see the freezing moments of time and materialise "time in space" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 250). These time and space connections, such as in hybrid spaces (De Souza e Silva, 2006), that blur the two dimensions are useful in observing how time is conceptualised and experienced in Airbnb spaces. These chronotopic connections problematize simple operations in the world that require differentiation between the past and present, space and place, real and symbolic and inside and outside (Smethurst, 2000). Foucault's concept of heterotopia presupposes that there must be a system of opening and closing that makes them penetrable as well as isolated from the rest of the world.

Hetherington (1997/2002) focuses on three illustrative examples of heterotopic spaces founded in history: the Palais Royal (Royal Palace) in Paris, 18<sup>th</sup>-century British freemasonry (invented tradition established as a counter-site to the stonemasons' guild) and the early British factory. He demonstrates how these sites became a way to reorder spatial and social relations. Palais Royal's gardens and cafés became a space for social interactions that gave rise to cosmopolitanism and activism that supported the French Revolution. He defines this a heterotopia that defined itself as a despised *Ancien Régime*, embodying an alternate order. Freemasonry was established to reshape the external world and return to the moral order. The freemason guild established a bond during a time of political and social unrest as well as a "spatial symbolism of order in its emphasis on the architectural, Euclidean geometry and mathematical skills of the stonemason" (Hetherington, 1997/2002, p. 86). The freemasons drew on these skills by creating an exclusive masonic lodge space for enacting their ideals of a utopic society that was in practice, heterotopic. They laid their moral ordering of men, which contributed to the development of a middle-class masculine sphere. The social space of the British factory was also a heterotopic space that emerged during the Industrial

Revolution with strong influences on the emergence of modern industrial capitalism. It was functional in shaping technology development, labour, gender and class relations.

These examples function as heterotopias in that they emerged from a particular ideal, where in doing things differently they stood out from society, even contested it. Hetherington (1997/2002) cautions that a heterotopia is not inherent in a place, but is a process of spatial ordering enabling us to think about things. It is “the heterogeneous combination of the materiality, social practices and events that were located at this site and what they came to represent in contrast with other sites that allow us to call it a heterotopia” (Hetherington, 1997/2002, p. 8).

Emerging from Foucault’s work on heterotopias, many principles have emerged identifying new possibilities of exploring the full otherness of ‘other’ fantasy spaces. For instance, a *dystopia* – a utopia (imaginary and fantasised) gone wrong or a ‘bad place’ (Carey, 1999); a *topia* – a real space that cannot practically be escaped (Roux, 2014); a *chronotope* – time-space, which involves the connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships (Bakhtin, 1981/2008); and a *heterochrony* – a slice in time or an “absolute break” that is fleeting and transitory (Foucault, 1986, p. 26; Lemke, 2000). Heterotopias have also been compared to spaces of resistance (Hetherington, 1997/2002) or liminal spaces (a state of ambiguity, a threshold) in Turner’s (1969) sense. Spatiality in heterotopia is dynamic and never normative (Saldanha, 2008).

I propose that the home-sharing space is a heterotopia in its relationship of otherness to nearby sites. Similar to the Palais Royal, home-sharing spaces can be perceived as a contrast to traditional accommodation sites such as hotels, motels and even residential homes that it most likely resembles. Home-sharing spaces can be better alternative to other sites in society. Like the freemasons, home-sharing spaces may be perceived as sites where Romantic practices of social interactions and sharing and romanticised notions of humane mutual trust can take place in contrast to the more calculated and rational world outside. Home sharing, as a practice in a heterotopic space, contributes to a type of moral and spatial reordering that is caught between Romantic ideals and social possibilities. The Romantics that are utopian in their fantasised perfect spaces, may imagine their relationships to society they wish to transform. By observing how the heterotopia unsettles the taken-for-granted material, spatial and social relations and how it provides spaces of alterity to challenge an established status quo, we can begin to understand how Romantic notions of sharing can

co-exist in the calculated nature of economic exchange, and how these paradoxes are sustained in the sacred space of the home.

## **2.12 Home-sharing Platforms Shaking up the Hospitality Industry**

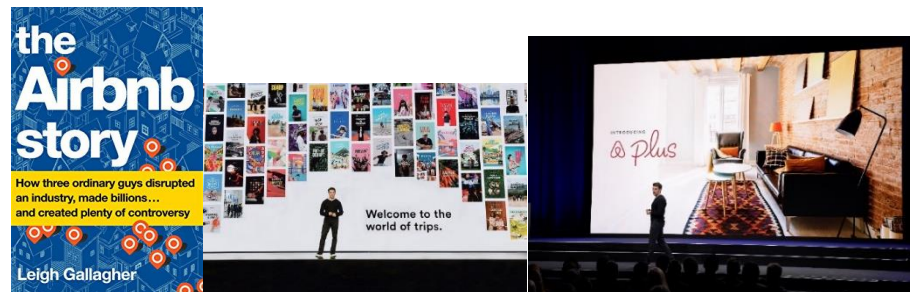
To become immersed in the world of home sharing, particularly Airbnb, it is important to document what it is not. Therefore, I briefly describe home sharing's antithesis: the rest of the hospitality accommodation industry such as hotels and motels, bed and breakfasts (B&Bs), homestays and farm stays, hostels and even the long-term rental industry. Traditionally, tourists have rented rooms from chain hotels where they select a place to stay based on price, location and purpose of travel. Hotels are able to offer different room types based on budgets, reaching guests through brick-and-mortar travel agencies and more recently through online travel websites such as Expedia. In the past, the smaller accommodation sites (e.g., boutique hotels or B&Bs) had difficulty reaching prospective guests and were unable to offer a wide variety of price and location options, thus they remained overshadowed by big companies (Brown & Kaewkitipong, 2009; Murphy & Kielgast, 2008). Some of these issues are now mitigated by the Internet; however, the smaller 'mum and pop' accommodation providers cannot take full advantage of these technologies due to a lack of digital knowledge or budget to maintain it (Guttentag, 2015). Consumers' intentions to book hotels are also highly dependent on their online reviews (Sparks & Browning, 2011), but reviews in this context are one-sided where users are able to offer public feedback on service providers and providers can choose to respond as part of their service recovery and reputation maintenance. Nonetheless, the concept of "the customer is always right" still stands and companies are constantly trying hard to please their customers, but not necessarily succeeding (Ravald & Grönroos, 1996).

Airbnb's CEO, Brian Chesky romanticised the notion of home sharing as positively disrupting accommodation industries (e.g., tourism, hospitality and real estate) through their large-scale technology product developments. He dramatized and materialised Airbnb as a technology disrupter during large-scale launch events (see Figure 2) where he campaigned for the forward-thinking and innovativeness of his company. This is further materialised in bestselling books such as Leigh Gallagher's (editor at Fortune magazine) *"The Airbnb Story: How Three Guys Disrupted an Industry, Made Billions of Dollars and Created Plenty of Controversy."*

Recommendations for books and live videos of company launches were digitally shared



by hosts in social media platforms as a way to disseminate the Romantic vision of Airbnb as mystical space of travel and adventure. The promise of Gallagher's book embeds an emic mythology that represents the Airbnb story as controversial, creative, adventurous and risky, all characteristic of the Romantics.



**Figure 2: The Airbnb Story (book cover), by Gallagher (2017); Brian Chesky, CEO at Airbnb Open international event in Los Angeles, November 2016 (YouTube live stream); Airbnb product launch February 2018 (YouTube live stream)**

On the other hand, hotels have dominated the majority of the hospitality accommodation market and are able to set their prices based on high demand. For years, hotel occupancy and rates have been soaring (Glusac, 2016). Research has revealed that generally, travellers choose hotels based on rational decisions such as cleanliness, location, reputation, perceived value, price, service quality, room comfort and security (Chu & Choi, 2000; Dolnicar & Otter, 2003). Consumers often search for different options with better value. Thus, when home-sharing P2P platform Airbnb was founded, some travellers favoured it based on price, household amenities and authenticity (Guttentag, 2015) or preferred it for its 'cheaper price', 'location', 'authentic experience', 'own kitchen', and 'uniqueness of unit' (Nowak et al., 2015). In a broader sense, the P2P short-term rental industry is favoured for sustainability, community, and economic factors with economic value as the most significant (Tussyadiah, 2015). Scholars have given much attentions to the likes of Airbnb and other P2P platform providers with a focus on their macro-level impact on society and the economy. However, as demonstrated in this chapter, consumers are social beings that are highly subjective, collecting material possessions and searching for experiences or things that can wet their insatiable appetite for self-illusory hedonism (Campbell, 1987, 2018). Hence, my research responds to this gap in our understanding of the cultural systems employed to enable and sustain the emergent home-sharing market.

## 2.13 Summary

In an effort to understand the nature of sharing exchanges that take place in collaborative consumption and the so-called sharing economy, this chapter analysed the literature on sharing, the nature of market emergence, logics and dynamics, differences between ownership and possessions, how such resources are ‘shared’ and more specific to this study, meanings of the home. These are all embedded in the underlying notions of Romanticism and theories of heterotopia. The literature suggests that the sharing economy is not really about sharing but through ‘sharewashing’, businesses under this emerging market can hide behind the guise of a moral economy through the ambiguous nature of its market logics. Not only can this ambiguity confuse consumers’ understanding of value from the market and the resources being shared, but ambiguity can also create unclear dimensions around meanings of ownership, possessions and social relationships created during such exchanges.

The following chapter, Chapter 3, presents my positioning as a researcher, the research methods and a further discussion on the study’s context of home-sharing networks. This methods chapter describes the longitudinal study undertaken to answer the research aims and questions in order to conceptualise the paths to ‘sharing’ in sharing economy markets.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The study aims to address two main objectives: (1) to contextualise consumer sharing (specifically home sharing) within a collaborative consumption network that hybridises the polar opposite market logics of social and economic exchanges and thereby (2) to explore the sociocultural implications of consumer sharing and the cultural meanings created, contested and experienced by consumers during the sharing experiences. In order to answer the research questions, “What is the nature of home-sharing networks?” “How does sharing take place in home-sharing networks?” and “Do consumers assemble Romantic or rational sharing discourses around their home-sharing consumption, and if so, how?” the study takes an inductive (e.g., bottom up) qualitative approach to uncover meanings and experiences linked to collaborative consumption. Qualitative methods not only allow for curious exploration of an interesting phenomenon, they also enable discovery, unexpected directions in results and grounding of findings, and contextual depth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

This chapter presents the methodology adopted for the research. Firstly, the chapter begins with a discussion on the research philosophy including the choice of the research paradigm. Next, a discussion on the choice and justification of my positioning as an involved participant in the research is considered. The chapter elaborates on the context of the research, Airbnb as a cultural site, and a discussion and justification of the methodology used, that is, a qualitative inquiry that includes a multi-sited ethnography and netnography. This chapter also explains the pathway I took for discovery and theorisation that leads the way to the following chapter of my findings.

### **3.2 Philosophical Paradigm**

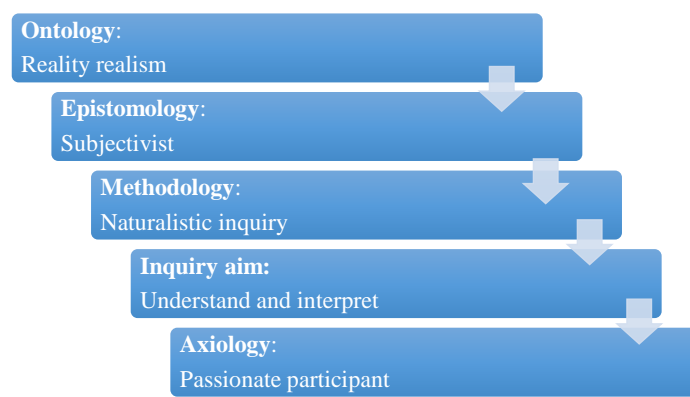
Patterns and early abstractions of a culture-sharing group and meanings people attach to activities in their lives are best understood using an interpretivist philosophical perspective (see Figure 3 for a breakdown of the study’s paradigm framework). An ontology of relativism is used in this study where my perspective is one of several realities and not just an objective one. Because reality is socially constructed by the way people perceive social situations, this study seeks to achieve its objectives by examining consumers’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviours concerning a home-sharing community.

In addition, a challenge in studying market systems is to be sensitive to the situational context and process (Giesler, 2008), hence the stance I took as a researcher is involvement using participative inquiry to gain knowledge and enable interpretation of the significance of consumers' self in ways they may not be able to see themselves (Cocks, 1989). Therefore, in light of my interpretive approach, I was able to discuss my view of the social world using the perspective of research reflexivity to clarify the researcher/researched relationship in this study during and after the research encounter (Wallendorf & Brucks, 1993). The methods I adopted and are discussed in this chapter helped in grounding knowledge to dig into the informants' meanings in their everyday life, intra-community interactions and consumers' interactions with external forces such as companies, government or the media, by examining their everyday discourses and observing their actions that reflect their thoughts, feelings and behaviours (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Autobiography, also known as subjective personal introspection (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002; Rod, 2011), 'life stories' (Belk, 2000), autoethnography (Sherry, 1998b) or systematic self-observation (Mick, 2005), is an interpretive technique that can be seen as controversial in consumer research (Brown, 1998b; Gould, 1991; Holbrook, 1995). I included a level of introspection to give more insight into how the social world is viewed and how knowledge is constructed (Hertz, 1997; Myerhoff & Ruby, 1982) in this study. Introspection allows for "artfully rearranged representations" (Brown, 2006, p. 442) of what it feels like to be a consumer with a real sense of lived experiences. I approached this study purposefully and with reflexivity allowing the research questions and literature to guide the study's design whilst challenging existing theory to reconstruct new knowledge (Burawoy, 1998).

The context chosen to learn more about market-mediated, collaborative consumption networks was the home-sharing peer-to-peer platform, Airbnb. In order to learn more about the consumer culture of this marketplace (also known as the sharing economy, access-economy, commercial sharing systems to name a few) and realise its 'truth', I minimised the distance between myself and the subjects, objects and marketplace as a whole and recognised that my role as a researcher with certain values has helped determine what we identify as facts. My aim for inquiry was to understand consumers' experiences and the meanings they ascribe to target objects (Grant & Giddings, 2002) and therefore I was able to draw interpretations from them. With this

choice, it is understood that the nature of consumer behaviour is unpredictable, complex and somewhat irrational where students of this philosophy give importance to consumption processes as well as the experience, symbols, rituals, mythologies, ideologies and meanings behind consumption (Goulding, 1999). Therefore, in my endeavour to learn more about the exchange dynamics of collaborative consumption, I engaged in a two-year qualitative study focused mainly on the Airbnb community whilst tracking other platforms that identify with the sharing economy, as well as media news stories on this disruptive economy, to enable me to present a broader, richer discussion of this phenomenon as well as identify the network's micro-processes and how these have influence.



**Figure 3: Interpretivist philosophical paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, (1994)**

### 3.3 Researcher Positioning

This research stems from my own personal experiences and interests. As a mother and a postgraduate student coming from a middle-class background, I have often looked for innovative ways to help improve the income of my family. With an entrepreneurial mindset, I founded a marketing startup software company that was based on customers co-creating products with brands. That inevitably failed due to lack of engagement from customers (and financial funding of the software). Following that, I had an interest in sharing economy platforms where I looked into different ways to participate. For extra income, I offered a room in my home for a few months using the home-sharing platform, Airbnb. However, I came to realise very quickly that there is more to the sharing economy than extra income or sociality.

My positioning as a researcher was important and I made my positionality explicit and adopted a critically reflective stance (Ateljevic, Harris, Wilson, & Collins,

2005; Nagar, 2002). I recognised that observation of human behaviour may be skewed by my personal characteristics such as ideology or class and by my relationship with the subjects (Atkins, 2004). I realised that “we are in relation to the phenomenon we are investigating” (Quinlan, Babin, Carr, Griffin, & Zikmund, 2011, p. 421). Thus, reflection before, during and after the research process was fundamental for objective research to take place.

The notion of insider, outsider and in betweenness helped me articulate my positions. Similar to Hopkins (2009), “I see myself as occupying a space of ‘betweenness’ .... I am simultaneously positioned in a number of different social category groups that place me at various levels of similarity and difference with the research participants” (p. 6). Betweenness is a constant negotiation of similarity and difference (Tarrant, 2016), which varied throughout the research process that was time and place dependent. However, I realised I will never be an “outsider” or “insider” in any absolute sense” (Nast, 1994, p. 57).

I assumed multiple distinct yet overlapping positions. As an Airbnb host, a traveller that uses Airbnb and an ex-founder of a platform belonging to the sharing economy, I was both an insider and an outsider in relation to collaborative consumption. I brought beyond- or outside-experiences and perspectives to strengthen my conceptualisations of collaborative consumption markets. My experience with Airbnb and understanding of sharing economy markets was also prominent on the online community forums and during interviews. I was asked questions by participants such as “How do you file for taxes?” “Which tax programme do you use?” “What do you include in your guest welcome packages?”

Simultaneously, I was a PhD candidate exploring value created in hybrid markets. During participant observations, I was also asked to help out participant hosts with their room ‘turn-over’ (cleaning, tidying in Airbnb terms). They sometimes asked me to show them how I prepare my own Airbnb beds. As an interviewer, I used ‘bracketing’, which involves a researcher’s attempt to suspend any preconceived ideas of the world and reality of home sharing and see it from the participant’s eyes (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2009). Yet again, I understand that one cannot stand outside historical experiences and preconceived ideas (Dowling, 2007) and as Holbrook (1997) argues, it is impossible for researchers to remove themselves from their data.

### 3.4 Research Context Overview: The Emergence of Airbnb

Launched in 2008, Airbnb is considered to be the most successful P2P accommodation platform. Airbnb describes itself as “a global travel community that offers magical end-to-end trips, including where you stay, what you do and the people you meet” (Airbnb, 2018a). With taglines such as “Airbnb for everyone”, “live like a local” and “belong anywhere”, Airbnb is built on the Romantic notions of belonging and creating space for all human beings. The mission expressed by Airbnb founders is to give individuals the freedom and equal opportunity to be anywhere and express themselves whichever way they like. However, Airbnb did not start with this notion. Co-founders, Joe Gebbia and Brian Chesky started hosting back in 2007 in their rented apartment in San Francisco when they realised there was a business opportunity in renting space:

*The problem with this idea was we didn't have any beds – however, we did have 3 inflatable air beds. This is where we came up with the name "Air bed and breakfast" and our first site was airbedandbreakfast.com. (Interview with Brian Chesky; McCann, 2015)*

Airbnb connects people that are looking for a place to stay (guests) with those who have a spare place to offer (hosts). Fast forward to February 2018 with Chesky's latest platform launch that was broadcast live on Airbnb social networking sites. People can now advertise homes from a wide variety of unique options such as islands, treehouses and yachts.

According to the company's 2018 statistics, Airbnb has 4.5 million listings worldwide operating in over 191 countries, 81,000 cities and with over 300 million Airbnb guests. In 2016, the company was valued at approximately \$31 billion (Thomas, 2017). Like many large corporations with franchise partners or distributors, Airbnb is seen as a disruptive technology platform that empowers people to become micro-entrepreneurs, transforming passive consumers into co-creators of their travel experiences (Sigala & Gretzel, 2018). These numbers prove that consumers in contemporary times find access more valuable than ownership. Aristotle's (as cited in Albinsson & Perera, 2012) assertion that “on the whole, you find wealth much more in use than in ownership” (p. 306) seems to resonate today in collaborative consumption. Airbnb's continued success grants it a worthy research context, compared to other market-mediated home-sharing platforms (e.g., HomeAway, HouseTrip, FlipKey,

VRBO), through which to examine where participants of the network find value in the platform, thus making it valuable.

Guttentag (2015) argues that Airbnb is valued not only for its economic benefits but also for its experiential and social values. The P2P platform works as follows: hosts create a detailed profile of their home including their house rules, nightly rates, calendar availability, brief profiles of hosts, their profile photo and photos of their home. Hosts can advertise their space from various different accommodation types based on the following: shared rooms, private rooms, entire homes/apartments, vacation homes (dedicated rentals), boutiques (hotel-like or retreat spaces) and unique themed homes such as treehouses or yachts. After at least 10 successful trips a year and 90% guest response rates, zero booking cancellations and at least 4.8 (out of 5.0) overall guest ratings, hosts can receive a virtual title of 'Superhost'. Such hosts are identified by a virtual badge of status visible on their profiles that gives them priority when dealing directly with Airbnb and they rank highly in guest search engines. In February 2018, Airbnb's CEO Brian Chesky launched a 'Superguest' membership programme where guests earn this title through positive reviews and star ratings received from hosts, thus making them as accountable as hosts. Further assurance and trust in guest credibility can also be built through profile verifications such as links to Facebook profiles, contact details and government issued identification that is certified through Airbnb algorithms.

As previously mentioned, Airbnb platform's popularity with travellers is attributed to cost-saving and access to household amenities. For hosts, Airbnb provides them with opportunities to become micro-entrepreneurs generating income to cover mortgages and regular living expenses. Thus, Airbnb contributes to the local economy and encourages cultural exchange (Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016). Despite these positive contributions, Airbnb hosts face many legal and regulatory issues such as illegal short-term rentals in some cities (e.g., Barcelona, New York) and tax concerns with claims that some hosts are avoiding their tax obligations (Ozcan, 2016).

The exchange that can take place in Airbnb homes involves sharing of possessions that are intimate to the host, such as the house, personal spaces and memories embedded in possessions (Miller, 2002) in return for financial value such as rent money. In consumption communities, members affiliate with others through feelings of membership, influence, integration and sense of fulfilment and emotional connection (Cova, Kozinets, et al., 2007; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Thomas et al., 2012).



Some scholars argue that collaborative consumption involves community, sociality and reciprocity as important characteristics for consumption to take place (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Gansky, 2010). The Airbnb company has created online communities (i.e., Airbnb Community Centre) on the official website so that advocates, hosts and guests can answer queries, share experiences and ideas and connect with like-minded others. However, there are member-initiated online platforms and physical meetups for hosts and guests in different parts of the world that are not controlled or run by the company officials. For these reasons, Airbnb is one of the most mature startups in terms of business growth, membership and community evolution compared to existing home-sharing platforms, making it a viable context to examine.

In the academic literature, the Airbnb business model has been mostly researched in tourism (Ert, Fleischer, & Magen, 2016; Guttentag, 2015), information technology (Fang, Ye, & Law, 2015; Jung et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2015) and to some extent in consumer research (Habibi et al., 2016; Hellwig et al., 2015). Findings depict that platforms such as Airbnb that have integrated customer-to-customer (e.g., guest-host) interactions act as value co-creation processes (Smaliukiene, Chi-Shiun, & Sizovaite, 2015). By including social features such as host responsiveness, number of reviews, wish lists, member seniority (Lee et al., 2015), presence of host photos (Ert et al., 2016), along with access to private spheres, authenticity, the human dimension and meaningful interpersonal discourses amongst users (Yannopoulou, Moufahim, & Bian, 2013), home sharing as a new way of travel is most appealing. Airbnb creates a perception of trustworthiness, which influences its usage and success rate. Compared to Couchsurfing, a non-monetary exchange short-term accommodation platform that is focused on hospitality and social desires, Airbnb hosts hope to profit from their unoccupied assets through guests who are after more affordable, better and more local accommodation options (Sundararajan, 2016). However, Couchsurfing hosts are beginning to move towards an Airbnb business model (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2016) by subletting couches or rooms, thus making hosting more profitable.

### **3.5 Research Methodology**

Studying the social context and cultural environment that consumers exist in offers more realistic instances and believable interactions than controlled settings. Thus, a naturalistic inquiry was the approach taken in this study as it focuses on how people interact, behave and communicate in their life experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethnographic research methodologies focus on culture-sharing groups (Harris, 1968) with the ability to describe their learned and shared patterns of value, beliefs, behaviours, narratives, mythologies and ideologies and the meanings behind them (Cresswell, 2013). Choosing qualitative methods granted flexibility to adapt the research procedures to the opportunities and limitations created by the research context and the evolving nature of the phenomenon under investigation. This was deemed most suitable for the research methodology at hand and the focal research questions as it allowed full immersion in the day-to-day lives of group members. Extensive fieldwork was employed for data collection using different methods of qualitative research in order to find patterns that explained the consumption mode and behaviour.

Airbnb in New Zealand (NZ) became the starting point for my research for several reasons: the convenience that I also live in NZ allowed me to become immersed in the community and have access to participants; Airbnb was growing in numbers at the time I began my study, thus enabling me to track its rise in a new emerging market; in January 2018, Airbnb announced that there were 37,600 active listings in NZ and the previous year saw 1,466,500 guest arrivals, making it a growing country adopting Airbnb as a home-sharing option (Airbnb Citizen, 2018).

Grounding this research on CCT, investigation focused on uncovering how consumers consume (Holt, 1995) across a variety of social arenas using multiple triangulation methods and data sources (Arnould & Price, 1993; Belk et al., 2003; Grayson & Martinec, 2004). The use of online platforms has been identified as an enabler of co-creation relationships amongst consumers (Szmigin, Canning, & Reppel, 2005). Thus, the study undertook two main phases that followed CCT scholars' use of ethnographic approaches: a) a netnography-based (Kozinets, 2010) segment and b) an ethnographic field study (Belk, 1976; Belk et al., 1988). The methodology involved prolonged monitoring and observation of participant discourses, interactions and collaborations with others (Jorgensen, 1989) and their objects. Immersion in the collaborative consumption marketplace lasted over two years before data reached saturation. Data collected from participant observation exposed me to participants' embodied and spontaneous actions during their everyday life; interviews gave me access to informants' ideologies that they used to make sense of their actions; and analysis of news stories and blog posts shared by participants revealed some of the sources of such ideologies (Wolcott, 1999). Table 3 depicts a breakdown of tasks

undertaken during the data collection phase (further discussed in section 3.7). Despite being presented in separate sections, data collection methods were carried out simultaneously to allow for continuous iteration and triangulation of the findings. For instance, whilst monitoring and participating in the online platform were underway, I attended several physical meetups that were being held on a monthly basis by participants.

**Table 3: Outline of my Research Engagement**

<b>Time Period</b>	<b>Research Phase</b>	<b>Research Methods</b>
May – December 2016	<i>Exploratory Phase</i> Familiarisation with context and phenomenon	Naturalistic, non-participant observation of the official Community Centre and unofficial host groups, blogs, discussion forums, photo galleries Observed and generated preliminary analysis of guest and host reviews on Airbnb platform Preliminary interviews with Airbnb members
January – June 2017	<i>Phase I Experiencing</i> Identification of prominent practices and core concepts	Observed and participated in physical meetings and events Applied introspection and auto-ethnography of my experiences as a host and guest Participant observation in the online community Theorising began in the field
July 2017 – January 2018	<i>Phase II Inquiring</i> Identification of prominent practices and core concepts relevant to the context and consumer behaviour literature	Interviews with informants, observed their environments and artefacts Continued participant observation in the online community and offline as a host and guest
February – August 2018	<i>Phase II Examining</i> Conceptualisation of core concepts	Company secondary data (official website, press releases, social media pages) and historical archives; those shared by participants Continued participant observation in the online community and offline as a host and guest

Modern day society sees many people seamlessly integrated in online and offline worlds where their behaviours online are similar offline. For instance, people searching for flights and accommodation may visit a website and book online, which will then be experienced offline. The research methods aimed to ensure that people's experiences were captured in a realistic way. While online data gathered suggested what

experiences entailed, offline observation unveiled personal characteristics that were unclear online. Additionally, a combination of online and offline observation allowed the capture of a complete picture of the phenomenon in order to gain contextual depth, especially when looking for patterns, social behaviours, shared rituals, social meanings and beliefs and interactions.

### **3.6 Discovery and Theorising**

This section outlines the process I took for theorising, in other words, what I did to produce theory. I used abductive logic, which follows the vision of theory emerging from the mind of the researcher rather than from the data, yet remains consistent with the data (Peirce, 1934/1935). This type of reasoning requires the researcher to look at the phenomenon and ask, “What is this a case of?” in search of something new and surprising. Askegaard and Linnet (2011) argue that “daring theoretical leaps, not of faith, but interpretation” (p. 399) are critical for conceptual progress. A key principle for discovery was to leave home and my comfort zone in order to see the world in a new light (Deshpande & Zaltman, 1982; Wells, 1993). The act of theorising requires the researcher to “do it yourself” and draw on personal experiences (Swedberg, 2012, p. 2). According to Swedberg (2012), theory-driven research involves avoiding data collection first and summarising results without linking to theory, also known as ‘mindless empiricism’.

I began the process of theory formulation with free form ‘primary process thinking’ prior to data collection (Holt, 2005). This is where the researcher begins with a theoretical point in mind, allowing the imaginative and creative phase of discovery to take place (Swedberg, 2012). This involved observation of the topic (Hughes, 1984) using different and varied sources, for example, newspapers, conversations, blogs, people and books (Peirce, 1992). Peirce (1955) argues that when theorising, one should get as close to the phenomenon as possible and challenge existing signs and concepts. In this research and as mentioned in the researcher positioning section 3.3, I began the study by joining Airbnb, the closest one can get to the phenomenon. I travelled and stayed in Airbnb homes and I began hosting Airbnb guests in my house. Using abductive reasoning and utilising Swedberg’s (2012) recommendations, I followed through with “naming, conceptualising, broadening the concept into a theory, and completing the tentative theory through an explanation” (p. 16) in that order, although the process is repeated and typically iterative.

Following this stage, the research process involved the empirical phase (i.e., justification) to confirm or extend theory. In the latter part of the research process I allowed data to enter during the exploratory phase. At this point, I had a few possible ideas. I continued to formulate ideas of the phenomenon I was observing, and carefully considered the nuances of these theoretical alternatives which I later scrutinised with critical ‘secondary process thinking’ (Holt, 2005). I looked for patterns in the data and with interpretation and theory building, I was able to create an account of what the patterns meant. This was an iterative process, where I bounced back and forth between theory and data and between the literature and data. I adopted Timmermans and Tavory’s (2012) recommendations to go beyond data limits by revisiting and defamiliarizing alternative cases that supported my abductive reasoning to explain the phenomenon being observed. Lastly, I checked whether my theoretical framework had potential applicability to account for behaviours in other contexts (Belk & Sobh, 2018).

### **3.7 Methodological Procedures and Researcher’s Tools**

As demonstrated in Table 3, data collection followed the three ethnographic pillars of experiencing, enquiring and examining (Wolcott, 2008). These pillars allowed for a more discursive and behavioural documentation of the phenomenon studied (Giddens, 1984). *Experiencing* this marketplace first-hand allowed me to conduct intensive and sporadic participant observation as a guest in Airbnb homes and also as a host in my own home, which I transformed into an Airbnb (shared home). By accompanying participants through their physical and metaphorical journeys, I was able to get an in-depth understanding of their daily practices and discourses. Observations of behaviours performed was important in identifying what was not consciously or reflexively discussed by participants during interviews. This dataset allowed for the documentation of naturalistic settings and an understanding of the sayings and doings that occurred at the intersection of the commercialised and communal exchanges taking place. During these interactions as a guest and host, I assumed the role of buddy-researcher, fostering a blend of “the role of researcher and friend” which “entailed receiving as well as giving” (Snow, Bendford, & Anderson, 1986, p. 384). Building a trusted relationship allowed for rapport and extended exchange before and long after the interviews took place. It also addressed ethical issues around note-taking flexibility, credibility and confidentiality (Emerson, 2011). Once I had set up an Airbnb profile (i.e., virtual website hosted on the Airbnb platform advertising the home space and the

host with photographs and information), I began hosting guests from around the world in my own home. I attended Airbnb official and non-official host meetups and became a member of the official and non-official Airbnb social networking sites. This allowed me to join in on the conversation and ask questions, and to share Airbnb related experiences or public information on the platform. It also allowed me to socialise with other hosts online and offline and to travel around NZ as an Airbnb guest. Together, this helped legitimise my role as an Airbnb member amongst participants and reduce any intrusiveness that a non-Airbnb observer would display in such an environment. This stage saw the start of my theorising (see section 3.6 for the theorising process), as it began in the field where I was able to get as close to the phenomenon as possible (Peirce, 1955).

As recommended by some methodologists (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989), I kept a separate and personal 'reflective journal' where I included my own reflections and tentative interpretations. Constructing this journal not only created a profound understanding of participants' lived experiences but also made the cognitive dimension of value creation and cultural meanings more precise (Goffman, 1989; Snow et al., 1986). It was valuable when informants were not always able to articulate their earlier experiences as hosts and guests and how their experiences developed over time. These reflections later proved to be essential for creative thinking, and allowed for cultural understanding to emerge during the process of inscribing the short-point-form field notes and personal journal writing (e.g., Belk, Fischer, & Kozinets, 2013).

Part of the *inquiry* stage of this multi-sited ethnography involved formally interviewing 21 Airbnb members in total: five guests, seven that started as guests and decided to host, three hosts that tried Airbnb as guests, and four hosts that had never used Airbnb as guests. The interviews allowed for a better documentation of Airbnb participants' lives beyond the known exchange between producers and consumers. The first four interviews were leveraged through online participant observation where I was able to identify key informants and gatekeepers. As analysis was iterative and ongoing, the first attempt at coding allowed for more analytic questions to arise with the subsequent 10 interviews. This stage saw interviews as cultural conversations or epistemic practices that allowed the interviewer and those researched to contribute to knowledge creation (Brinkmann, 2007; Moisander, Valtonen, & Hirsto, 2009). I continued participant observation in the field with my role as a host and guest.

Fieldnotes were recorded to reflect the emergent design of ethnography (Belk et al., 1988). These are “accounts describing experiences and observations the researcher has made while participating in an intense and involved manner” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995/2011, pp. 4-5). As recommended by methodologists (Belk et al., 2013), I recorded all aspects of my sensory, social and communicative experiences that ranged from my thoughts and feelings, to what I saw, touched, smelt or tasted. These helped me recreate the experience vividly. Similar to the reflexive journal, I also inscribed fieldnotes, expanding on brief points to create a full and detailed text after leaving the field. This process of annotation became fundamental because this writing took place later and helped organise “messy” texts (Marcus, 1998), make sense of photographs taken in the field as well as reveal emergent theory. After each experiencing and enquiring event, I conducted open coding and wrote narrative ethnographic accounts on the resulting fieldnotes and transcripts. I then iteratively compared dataset analyses to refine emerging interpretations (Charmaz, 1995; Emerson et al., 1995/2011). A deeper discussion on the analysis process can be found later in section 3.10.

Lastly, during the *examination* stage, constructing an archive of textual and visual materials ensured better documentation and understanding of the phenomenon at hand. Similar to past studies (Giesler, 2012; Sandikci & Ger, 2010), I gathered images and news stories on Airbnb, home-sharing concepts, stories on successes and failures of hosts and guests as well as self-generated data such as pictures and posts from blogs shared by Airbnb hosts (any data documented here received written approval from the original authors). I focused on materials mentioned by participants during interviews, participant-observation and netnographic datasets. Some of these records were also present on participants’ profiles such as historical online reviews both they and guests had given and other artefacts such as postcards, photographs, personal letters, personal notes and private calendars. These materials that I was privy to as the fieldworker may not always be observed publicly (Wolcott, 2008). The materials gathered were used as artefacts and treated as text, and then examined for their role as some of the main sources of participants’ ideologies. These artefacts extended my understanding of how hosts and guests negotiate principles of sharing to challenge the understanding of economic exchange. To uncover the role of some of these artefacts, I asked, “What do these records do?” when inspected alongside data gathered from participants, thus mapping their role in the networked web of home sharing (Foucault, 1977). It enabled

me to view Airbnb participants as politically situated and active and creative negotiators of sharing rather than seeing them as pawns in the technology hospitality game which requires them to perform certain practices. However, priority in this research was given to data collected from those archives that helped with triangulation. It offered a broader view to events around home sharing and Airbnb's popularity in NZ along with the expansion of my perspective of this phenomenon.

I used *assemblage analytic tools* as a framework to consider multiple components that make up the complex and dynamic nature of the home-sharing network. These have not only been used in the past to describe how consumers orchestrate practices (Canniford & Shankar, 2013), but to also examine the disruptions and evolutions of these practices (Epp, Schau, & Price, 2014) across capacities within the network and their external connections. For instance, rather than observing meetings between consumers and their products, with assemblage thinking, we can view “them [in their case brands] as comprising both the narratives ... and the myriad components with important material capacities that make up the product itself, as well as the consumers who contribute at times to stabilising and at other times to destabilising the assemblage” (Parmentier & Fischer, 2015, p. 1248) and its identity. By shifting focus from objects as stable entities to their relations of exteriority, we can discover how networks may be disrupted and deterritorialised when things are moved into different assemblages that produce different effects (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The arrangements of the assemblage's heterogeneous elements are also considered at different scales (Roffe, 2016). They might be based on small elements such as logos or as part of larger networks with temporal and spatial perspectives whilst examining their contextual practices (Rokka & Canniford, 2016).

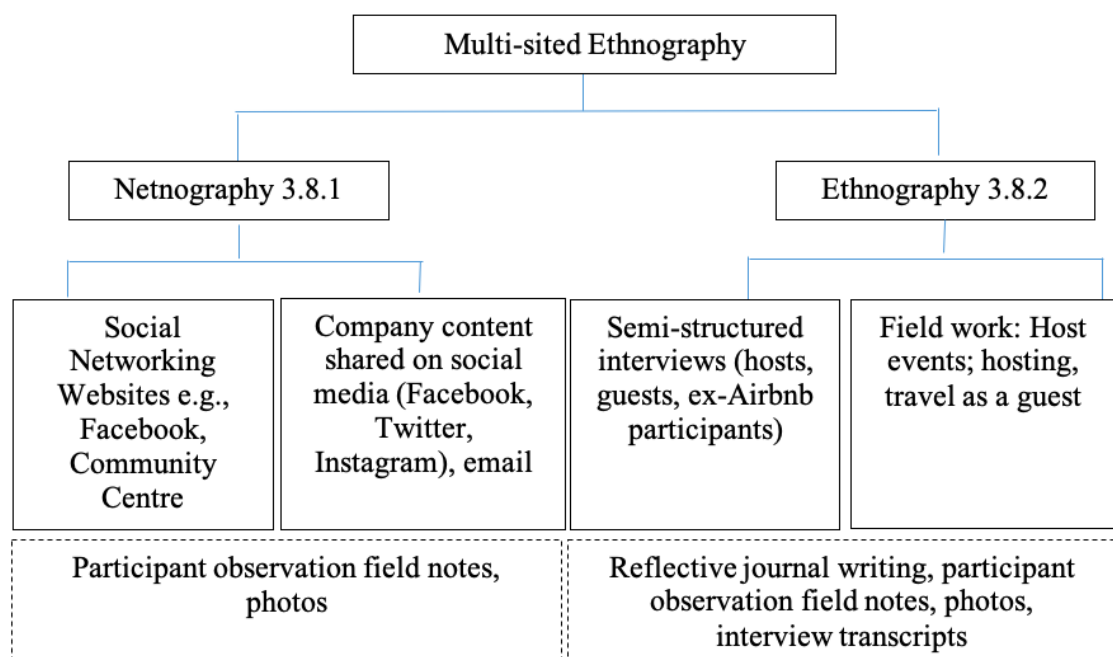
Assemblages (agencements) are composites of heterogeneous elements that interact with one another (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and can refer to the act of assembling or the outcomes of this assemblage process. In this study, assemblages can refer to the elements involved in the home and that compose home sharing, and what emerges from the process of ‘sharing’. Assemblage research considers materials and non-materials in the network to have the potential to achieve expressive capacities (e.g., meanings, identities, expressions) during the unfolding process by taking on certain roles in these processes (DeLanda, 2006; Figueiredo, 2016). By utilising assemblage theory thinking, home and ‘home sharing’ is an effect (and not pre-existing) where



objects may have agency, which is not intentional; rather, its agentic role is of their capacities to act over other actors. Assemblages are constantly being shaped as they are created because the theory follows principles of emergence (DeLanda, 2006; Law & Hetherington 2000). This means that assemblages are “always in process, in a state of becoming, and never complete” (Figueiredo, 2016, p. 82). Using assemblage theory helped me trace the various relations among a multitude of actors involved in the home-sharing network (e.g., material, human, nonhuman, discursive, technologies) that result in processes taking place and the emergence of actors. Figure 4 includes an outline of the main components discovered through the exploration of the home-sharing network using participants’ emic perspectives that guided the theoretical developments.

### 3.8 Data Collection

The following discussion includes a detailed description of how data was collected and analysed. Due to the multiple sources of data and information in this study, Figure 4 is included to provide a brief outline of the data gathering process where fieldwork was conducted over two years, followed by detailed information of how data was collected.



**Figure 4: The research process**

### **3.8.1 Netnographic Fieldwork**

Netnography, an approach to online ethnography, is a method that provides a door into cultural realities of consumer groups, whether it relates to their language, practices, rituals, backgrounds, enculturation or habits (Kozinets, 2006). As a reminder, this research on home-sharing networks is focused on the Airbnb culture in New Zealand (NZ). Thus, data sources were NZ specific (e.g., Facebook groups oriented to NZ). The first month of data collection included non-participant observation of relevant online communities (see Table 4 for a netnographic summary) to gain a better understanding of how consumers use the network and interact with others. I spent a considerable amount of time observing the key topics of discussion and flow of conversations. I was considered a “lurker” during the exploratory stage, as someone who was not an active poster but an observer of others. Following that period, for complete immersion as recommended by Kozinets (2002b), contact was made with members of the online community as well as participation in discussions and sharing of ideas with others, which allowed for an embedded cultural understanding. Participant observation was mainly through discussions with other members around sharing experiences (which could only happen after I hosted my first guest as that is a rite of passage into the group), posting general questions about hosting, using Facebook’s tool of searching for recommendations for products to include in my Airbnb home, following links and commenting on shared articles by other members. This allowed me to become an “insider” (Kozinets, 1999). Online data collection included discussion forums, profile photo galleries, blogs and social media pages that are focused on home sharing, specifically the Airbnb network, as well as field notes that were woven into the data collected to enable the gathering of experiential, naturalistic and interactional information. Conducting netnographic participation provided information on the culture’s narratives, language, personal insights and relationships.

Due to the nature of the online environment (being geographically unbounded) and the distribution of members across a variety of groups in a ‘quasi-coherent network’ (Baym, 2007), I focused on the Airbnb NZ host group on Facebook and the Community Centre on the official Airbnb website and then ‘followed’ where members went (digitally) in relation to Airbnb. This meant that when members mentioned or ‘shared’ another group, I followed the lead. Shared links were to online newspapers, blog articles and Facebook groups. Very few Airbnb NZ hosts had Airbnb related Instagram and

Twitter pages. Many did not even use these pages for engagement or personal use. Those that did only used them to promote their page but had less than 60 followers and lacked engagement (e.g., zero likes and comments on the majority of posts).

I became a member of 27 groups related to Airbnb with active engagement from community members. These were majorly existent in Facebook and the Community Centre. I followed 'pages' linked to Airbnb homes in NZ that NZ hosts created for their Airbnb businesses. These existed on Facebook and a few on Instagram and Twitter<sup>1</sup>. These were found either through shared threads by Airbnb hosts on the NZ host pages (from Facebook or the Community Centre) or by searching using hashtags such as #AirbnbNZ #AirbnbNewZealand. However, for pragmatic reasons and after several weeks of nonparticipant observation, I was able to identify key Facebook groups that were active, interactive, included heterogeneous participants and were consistent in engagement with online discussions (Kozinets, 2010). These included four Facebook groups: "Airbnb New Zealand Hosts", "Airbnb Finest Hosts", "The Hosting Journey" and Airbnb's official discussion forum, the "Community Centre".

### **3.8.1.1 Types of Netnographic Data**

In keeping with previous netnographic studies (Kozinets, 2002b, 2006, 2010), I utilised three types of data during my online observation. These resembled similar categories of 'watching, asking and examining' (Wolcott, 1992):

1. Archival data: This involves pre-existing data that was created and shared by online community members or third parties such as the Airbnb company. I used research filters to limit the large amount of data that were available. I sorted through archived data that began from January 2016, which was around the time the Airbnb Company began their first official marketing launch in NZ.
2. Elicited data: This is data that is co-created by the researcher and community members through social media personal communication. In this research, this

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<sup>1</sup> Pinterest, Snapchat, YouTube and WeChat are very important and popular platforms to follow. According to Kozinets (2015), movement between platforms is becoming more fluid in netnography where netnographers follow topics, meanings, practices and sites. However, the majority of members are not active in these groups. This could be because of their age (the majority are between the ages of 45-64) or have busy lives where Airbnb is a secondary income for many. This information is available under 'Group Insights' information provided in Facebook groups, which shows group statistics of those that opt to add this information to their profiles.

included posts and threads, and instant messaging with informants that were also community members.

3. Fieldnote data: Similar to ethnography, these involve reflexive, personal and research-oriented fieldnotes. I noted down my observations of the social media community (members and membership processes), practices, social interactions, my participation, my feelings during my time in the field and conflicts that arose and how were they resolved. Netnographic fieldnotes were useful sources during the analysis and interpretation stage of the phenomenon as they gave context and insight into the cultural processes of the host and guest communities.

To deal with the overload of information that characterises netnography, I began by focusing on posts relevant to my research questions (Kozinets, 2002b). However, the focus evolved over time (as did my research questions) while I coded and iteratively went back and forth between analyses of these data sets and expanded my emergent interpretations. Initially, I sought threads that discussed the opportunities, challenges and joys of sharing homes, processes, procedures and rituals rather than technical issues related to hosting such as taxation, laws and regulations around short-term rental. However, I did not ignore these issues as such information was critical to the understanding of how regulatory bodies and institutions on a macro level can influence a home-sharing culture on a micro level and vice versa. Even though some of the community pages are international sites, I focused on English posts, with hosts located in NZ and guests that had visited NZ in order to keep within the contextuality of my data. Netnographic data was saved manually into a Word document, which surmounted to 1,085 pages of data. A software management programme, NVivo, was used to aid in data management and support me during analysis of the large dataset.

#### **3.8.1.2 Researcher Participation**

During the course of my study, I was online every day of the week, whether on my desktop or mobile, participating in discussions or “listening in” to other discussions and following conversations in real-time. My daily focus was on ‘Airbnb New Zealand (NZ) Hosts’ Facebook group where I spent most of my time (between 3-5 hours/day), yet I “religiously” spent five minutes a day scanning the other four groups/pages for interesting topics of discussion that I could listen into or participate in. I observed the online communities at different periods of time and spent between minutes and hours

reading, responding to posts and downloading the data (for later systematic analysis) while taking fieldnotes to record my observations and experiences as I mapped the boundaries of members of the Airbnb community.

Unlike past netnographic researchers who claimed that engagement and integration into community groups occurred over a short period of time and that online worlds integrated into offline ones (Logan, 2015), I was fully immersed in the Airbnb online community and “soaked in” the culture of hosting with fieldwork conducted over two years. To gain entry into the main Facebook group I was following (‘Airbnb NZ Hosts’), I had to be an active host (with at least one hosting experience). Because of my previous experiences as a host and guest, I was welcomed into the group. According to group administrators, every host must share their Airbnb listing on the ‘group wall’ for validation. Despite my experience, I spent the first month familiarising with the social and technical aspects of the group, archives, community rules, most active participants, conversation starters and problem makers. I learnt tips and tricks of hosting such as hosting language (e.g., instant book, Superhost requirements), decoration and design (e.g., colours, pillows, personal artefacts), welcoming gifts (e.g., guestbook, local welcome package of food and drinks), administration (e.g., taxes, local laws), which I implemented. Next, data collection proceeded (see section 3.8.1.1) with an exhaustive manual data capture of interaction micro-processes that took place, as well as with fieldnotes and reflective journal writing. My identity as a researcher was also fully disclosed, the objective of my research was explained, anonymity was guaranteed and informed consent was earned. By this stage, I was perceived by other participants as a major contributor and a respected and trusted member of the community. I contributed with interesting news stories on Airbnb and local experiences and I engaged in discussions and answered questions. As a result, in the second year of my membership I was invited to become a co-administrator (‘admin’) of ‘Airbnb NZ Hosts’ (Facebook) along with three other existing admins, which I accepted. The shared role required me to manage and accept host requests into the group through listing validation (i.e., request a link to their Airbnb listing, manually check and approve or decline, or ask for more information when needed), welcome them into the group with an announcement, moderate member tone and language and have weekly ‘online meetings’ with the other admins to discuss issues and events related to the group. We would also organise

monthly events or casual meetups either at local places (e.g., bar, café) or at one of the Airbnb homes.

There were certain events and news (international and local) that were shared in the group for discussion. This caused a shift in the discussion towards these events, such as international games hosted in NZ including the Rugby Lions Tour and World Masters Games, local NZ city Councils adding restrictions to home sharing, and Airbnb international launches such as ‘Airbnb Plus’. This allowed me to observe and record changes in behaviours, attitudes and tensions. Similar to previous studies utilising this method (Logan, 2015), I supported data collection with additional documentation such as news stories and company press information related to Airbnb and its operations in NZ.

**Table 4: Summary of Major Netnographic Dataset (January 2016 – July 2018)<sup>2</sup>**

<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Members/ Number of Articles</b>	<b>Online Data (pages)</b>
<b>Facebook</b>		
Airbnb Host Facebook	732	740
The Hosting Journey	3,502	104
Airbnb’s Finest Hosts	1,109	200
Airbnb Official Facebook Page	12 million followers	15
<b>Airbnb Official Website</b>		
Airbnb Community Centre (NZ)	150	26
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1,085</b>

### **3.8.2 Ethnographic Fieldwork**

Researchers conducting ethnographies look for patterns, shared rituals, social behaviours, interactions, ideas, social meanings and beliefs. The chosen market needed to have been operating for a long time to be able to display distinguishing patterns (Cresswell, 2013), which Airbnb does. I observed consumers’ interactions with objects, behaviours and language in ordinary settings (see Appendix B for the research observation guide) in order to uncover these patterns and cultural themes (Fetterman, 2010; Wolcott, 1994). Data collection involved participant observation (guests and hosts and their roles) and brief discussions on the site (events, meetups and during home-sharing engagements). Gaining access into such consumer groups was difficult at

<sup>2</sup> The focus of this dataset was on the NZ context. Even though I was a member of international Airbnb groups, I focused mainly on NZ related information and ‘listened in’ on NZ participants.

first, but identifying the gatekeeper who was also the key informant (the administrator and moderator of the Facebook group) was necessary during the first month of the exploratory phase of netnography to allow entrance. Once entry was gained, appropriate fieldwork followed which included regular visits to multi-sited locations, whilst respecting the location, objects and people involved, as well as collecting a variety of materials and personal photos (Wolcott, 2008) that were enriched through verbatim. Such fieldwork allowed for trusted relationships to be built between ‘the researcher and the researched’ and access to be gained into their lives to unravel complex and multiple meanings associated with their consumption behaviour. During my fieldwork, I was able to incorporate informal ethnographic interviews that were short, impromptu conversations with Airbnb participants, and which were tailored to the observed moment, adding clarity to what was taking place (Arsel, 2017).

In light of the reflectivity mentioned in section 3.3, the research began with a self-introspection that recorded my conscious awareness of related past experiences of consumption (Gould, 1991; Holbrook, 1995). Additionally, an autoethnography (an autobiographic research piece) was carried out during the study period. It explains my own experiences with those researched to offer further insights into the nature of the culture and the way of life within it (Patton, 2002). This additional introspection allowed me to reflect on my own consumption experiences and the relevant emotions and meanings evoked (Holbrook, 2006). Following methods of introspection, as a host and guest, I detailed observations of shared resources used, interactions with others and the brand and empathetic understanding of the context (Gustavsson, 2007). Data gathered was included and analysed together with that of participants, with no distinctions made to allow for improved quality of findings (McGouran & Prothero, 2016; Wallendorf & Brucks, 1993). As mentioned in previous sections, analysis began once fieldwork was initiated and iterated and as my theorisation began to crystallise.

As a participant in the Airbnb community, I created a profile on the Airbnb platform that allowed me to be a host and travel as a guest. I subscribed to key blogs so I could learn to become a good Airbnb host and understand what was required to attract guests to my Airbnb home. I also attended several workshops run by the official Airbnb company on how to become a successful host, watched several video logs (vlogs) by key international Superhosts and the co-founders and purchased several Airbnb items such as an Airbnb keychain, bottle opener, pen and notepad, which were placed in the

Airbnb room being offered. As a guest, I incorporated the search for accommodation into my travel plans (business or pleasure) and involved my family in the search for the right place to stay based on our budget and purpose of travel. This was not included in the dataset but it deepened my understanding of the consumer culture embedded in this home-sharing network.

There are certain drawbacks from this data gathering method. Scholars warn against faking and observer effect (Adler & Adler, 1994), where those observed or interviewed may change their responses or behaviours (Ramsay, 1987). However, triangulation techniques such as cross-checking against what the participants said on social networking forums, their interactions during Airbnb events they attended, observing them with their guests and continuing the online and offline observation over a lengthy period of time (Wolcott, 1973) assisted in minimising such effects. The novelty of my presence seemed to wear off as I started to contribute with generic posts online and attended every monthly event in NZ. During the offline fieldwork, I engaged in several casual conversations or informal interviews (Fetterman, 2012) that were captured in my field notes and supported my integration in the network.

### **3.8.2.1 Interviews**

One of the methods employed in this study was a semi-structured narrative in-depth interview (Burawoy, 1998) where questions were not fully scripted. Interviewing methods are rooted in the epistemological principle that consumers' lived experiences can be told through their expressed subjective narratives (Thompson, Pollio, & Locander, 1994) and allows the researcher to understand the way they see the world (McCracken, 1988b). This is a good fit for the purpose of the study as consumers strategize their decisions to partake in this network and seek to enact it. Their experiences provided plenty of discussion material. This choice of interviewing procedure entailed preparation of questions beforehand but it also allowed for flexibility and improvisation during the interview depending on the informants' responses (Myers & Newman, 2007).

Prior to the scheduled interviews, I prepared an interview protocol/guide (see Appendix A) that outlined key points of discussion, a set of provisional questions and planned probes and transitions. All formal interviews included three components: a brief introduction describing the research project and a discussion around informed consent followed by the provisional questions (Arsel, 2017). Therefore, I began with



grand-tour questions (McCracken, 1988b) by asking informants to talk about their motivations and interest in joining the network. Discussions around their personal backgrounds and history were gathered from then and over the course of inquiry to give more context to their life, circumstances and how they perceive them.

Following, I proceeded to ask more specific questions about their experiences (best and worst). I asked informants about their relationships with ‘the other’ (guest or host) before, during and after the Airbnb experience. Similar to past empirical studies (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001), the netnographic and ethnographic observations guided the structure and content of the interview schedule along with immersion in the collaborative consumption and possession literature (McCracken, 1988b). During the interviews, I attempted to elicit consumption stories, which unravelled some of their associations with resources and relative ownership experiences, their relationships and feelings with others in the network (subjects, objects, marketers, company, suppliers), their household routines and sharing experiences, similarities and differences between owned and accessed resources, their behaviours and consumption patterns with resources.

I was looking for access to actions rather than abstractions (Charmaz, 1995). When necessary, I probed about their rituals in travel, emotions felt, type of exchanges taking place (gifts or home possessions) and how these experiences and objects were integrated into their lives. In-depth probes were also used when informants mentioned critical events, conflicts or contradictory opinions. I circled back to earlier gaps in topics discussed with informants and whenever I heard any inconsistencies in their narrative (Belk et al., 2013).

I used projective techniques such as word associations and word completion where informants were asked to indicate the first word that came to mind, thus providing a consumer vocabulary associated with Airbnb experiences (Green, 1984). By asking them to project their thoughts and feelings followed by probing, I was able to elicit deeper understanding of the essence of their individuality and how they perceived the world (Donoghue, 2000). Similarly, objects in the Airbnb space were used as the projectives for observational interviews with participants. For instance, guests were asked to hold the Airbnb home guestbook and to talk about the book, about their reviews and other guests’ reviews, about the narrative and vocabulary and about previous guests themselves. This often elicited opinions on the host and past guests, as

well as emotions brought out by the words used in their reviews and those of others. Another strategy involved me helping hosts with their cleaning of the room. During such activities, and depending on the participant, the overall mood of the interaction and the interview style and flow, this sort of projective usage led to nostalgic reminiscences of the room itself, including of children that had grown up and left, and a discussion on the price of cleaning products and the general hourly rates for external cleaning companies.

For emergent research designs such as this study, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that methodological sequences may develop, adapt and change throughout the progress of a study depending on the researcher's continuous iterative interaction and interpretation of the data. This was kept in mind during the discussions to improve the study's data richness. I was looking for informants' thick descriptions and articulation of experiences from their own points of view (Ballantine & Creery, 2010).

As discussed in this study's literature review, objects are as equal contributors of knowledge as are subjects. An understanding and evaluation of objects by subjects proves valuable in research that involves ownership and possessions as each human actor experiences objects differently. Subjects often engage with things intentionally while non-human agents may not have any intentional interaction; however, it requires the whole network of agents for these actions to take place. I followed existent guides (Callon, 1986; Callon & Latour, 1992; Latour, 2005) during interviews, such as using a 'specific grand-tour, or 'guided tours' when questioning informants, prompting process discussions, taking field notes of present agents, comparing how discussions are voiced by informants versus those not given a voice and using follow up interviews for further interrogation of acknowledged and unacknowledged agents. These methods offer examples and stories through ethnographically rich descriptions of mundane and situated practices that reflect how relations and practices are systemised and how things work. For instance, a study (Cloke & Perkins, 2005) using actor network theory around the role of dolphins and whales in the performance and meaning of the town of Kaikoura in NZ revealed that ecotourism development in the area exhibited the co-constitutive power of the nonhuman in inducing emotional, practical relations and aesthetic in humans. Thus, object ontologies view agents (humans and nonhumans) and their relations as dispersed in time-space specific patterns resulting in dictations that relate, define and order subjects and objects that play their part (Law, 2009). Agents that

shape these networks are not acting alone in a vacuum but are acting under the agency of others. Thus, I endeavoured to map out the labour of all agents involved in order to show their existence and role in the network.

A Latourian analytical framework (Law, 2008), used to understand the agency of objects, is the concept of the black box, which refers to something (e.g., a machine or manual of commands) that is difficult to understand or explain yet is created through ‘acts of translation’. Such processes and complexities are often hidden within these black boxes (Callon & Latour, 1992). Black-boxing resists the ease of unravelling these processes and instead creates zones within networks where relationships between agents are ‘taken for granted’ and left unchallenged. Latour (2005) acknowledged that it is often difficult to observe objects behaving as actors, especially if they are silent or stationary; therefore, he explained certain circumstances that might enable researchers to see them acting. Such circumstances may be when they are in the process of being created, when they can be observed at a distance, during so-called accidents or breakdowns or by viewing archives or other types of historical accounts. By observing marketplace entities and processes through translation (Arsel, 2016; Latour, 2005; Martin & Schouten, 2014), I was able to use an analytical metaphor that captures how network actors, institutions and marketplace resources manifest in a network “to represent a moment, entity, transaction or even another actor” (Arsel, 2016; Callon & Latour, 1981). Through the process of translation, I was able to trace networks of relations between actors in the network and thereby refute any a priori hierarchies and flatten such perceptions of distinctions (Callon & Latour, 1981). For instance, the market is another actor that brings together human and nonhuman agents where spaces, discourses and technologies may impact how humans work and interact. Observing all aspects of the market (e.g., exchanges, products, interactions) offered deeper meanings to market dynamics and influence processes (e.g., Goulding & Saren, 2007; Sandikci & Ger, 2010).

However, researchers often run the risk of including many nonhuman materials in their sites of research or are tempted to define the boundaries a priori. The materials can be limitless, especially for the fact that anything can be an assemblage and material is also an assemblage of diverse components (i.e., a table is part of the home assemblage and is also an assemblage of other sub-components such as its legs, wood materials). I set boundaries to what I could include through my iterative process of

shifting between emic to etic analyses. I relied on what participants' said in relation to my research focus and the phenomenon itself. Only after moving to my etic perspective by drawing on enabling theories, such as assemblage theory, was I able to identify the material, expressive and even imaginative capacities of the components of the space. These encompassed material possessions, human bodies, the space and also discourses, technologies, rituals and embodied practices (Canniford & Shankar, 2013). To avoid unlimited inclusion of components, I relied on my observation of materials mentioned by each participant and listed material resources I could directly observe during my visits as well as taking photos for later analysis. Of course, that was not always possible due to the globalised distribution related to travel. For this reason, I relied on participants' spontaneous mentioning of materials with the assumption that what they mentioned was most important to them.

Interviews ranged from one and a half hours to three hours and some informants were visited or emailed a second time to allow for follow-up questions that were missed. More importantly, this also enabled me to analyse longitudinal changes in their thoughts, patterns and behaviours in order to better understand how value develops and changes through lapsed time. Audio recordings and note-taking extended my recall of specific language used and its tone and inflection for later data analysis. While these were woven into my analysis, I also paid close attention to how different subjects interacted within the network. Some of the interviews involved married couples or cohabiting unmarried couples. During these interviews, I was aware of the relational nature of their identities at play and how they co-constructed a relational narrative (Epp & Price, 2008).

All interviews with hosts occurred at their homes and/or the space they shared with their guests. I was able to take notes on the domestic spaces, shared and not shared, and deduce social and formal positions. I observed their interactions and discussions and participated in their practices. At times, I was able to observe them during their consumption activities when they prepared guests' spaces. As mentioned in section 3.3 on researcher positioning, I participated in the act of cleaning bedrooms or helping hosts by putting together welcome baskets prior to guests' arrival. Interviews with guests took place at the Airbnb home (with consent from the host) they were staying at apart from two interviews which took place at their own homes due to geographical convenience.

During interviews with informants and whilst I observed their practices, I asked permission from hosts to view their calendars which were both offline and online. I also viewed communication with the other party using Airbnb's messaging system, checklists and notes on scraps of paper. Hosts often shared their book keeping documents with me that included notes and reminders about their guests (past or future) that they thought would be 'valuable for my research'. These were considered alongside members' documentation and were stored with interview transcripts and field notes as aids to my interpretation. All formal interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Field notes were taken during all stages of the study and were entered into the pool of data gathered.

### **3.9 Social Positioning of the Purposive Sample**

Following interpretivist research practices, participant sampling was purposeful as the aim of this study was not to gain a statistically representative sample but a variety of perspectives of those immersed in the Airbnb consumption culture. During the exploratory period, I realised that the online community had an importance for NZ hosts. Guests were recruited through the Airbnb Community Centre. Guests were not allowed entry into private host groups due to the sensitive conversations hosts have about guests, including venting and complaining. Participants were recruited through online advertisements posted on the online forums (see section 3.11). Once key active figures that were self-proclaimed Airbnb participants in the network were identified, I approached them for in-depth interviews (McCracken, 1988b) and also to gain entry into their meetups or events. Using Facebook groups, Facebook messenger and Airbnb internal messaging tools also proved to be useful when conversing with participants as it allowed for quick follow-up questions or feedback on my analyses.

In total, 21 informants were recruited for formal interviews. These included relatively new members to Airbnb and others that were more experienced. Hosts and guests formed the sampling pool, including those that had experienced both roles at different times in their life (see Table 5 for details on informants). Additional interviews with Airbnb members that had stopped using Airbnb or individuals that did not want to share or stay in other people's homes, while not focal, were used as comparisons. These were considered as negative cases and enabled me to continually revise understandings and account for discrepancies in my findings.

**Table 5: Summary of Informant Dataset (Interviews)**

<b>Name (pseudonyms)</b>	<b>Age/ Gender</b>	<b>Family Status</b>	<b>Education/ Occupation</b>	<b>Member Type/ Length of Airbnb Experience</b>
Karen	30-39/ F	Married, 2 children	Bachelor/ entrepreneur	Greek Guest/ 4 years
Nick and Julia	30-39/ M & F	Cohabiting unmarried couple, no children	Bachelor/ public relations	French Guest/ 9 months
Arnen and Gail	40-49/ M & F	Married, 3 children	Bachelor/ software developer	Israeli Guest/ 4 years
Alex and Lindy	60-69/ M & F	Married, 2 children, 1 grandchild	Bachelor/ retired	British Guest/ 3 years
Michael	20-29/ M	Single	Bachelor/ photographer	American Guest/ 2 years
Melissa	20-29/ F	Married, no children	PhD/ Assistant Professor	New Zealand Ex-guest/ less than 1 year
Mike	20-29/ M	Married, 2 children	Bachelor/ engineer	New Zealand Ex-guest/ 1 year
Sandra and Chris	30-39/ F & M	Cohabiting unmarried couple, no children	Bachelor/ public relations and creative designer	Guest turned host/ 2.5 years Shared home Auckland-based Airbnb
Angelica & David	30-39/ F	Cohabiting unmarried couple, no children	Bachelor/ social entrepreneur	Host/ 2.5 years Shared home Wellington-based Airbnb
Sandy and Greg	40-49/ F & M	Married, 1 child	Bachelor/ tourism	Guest turned host/ 7 years Attached guesthouse Wellington-based Airbnb
Fenny	40-49/ F	Single, no children	Bachelor/ financial advisor	Host/ 11 months Shared home Auckland-based Airbnb
Dana	50-59/ F	Divorced, 2 children	Bachelor/ journalist	Guest turned host/ 4 years Shared home Auckland-based Airbnb

Rosy	50-59/ F	Divorced, 2 children	Bachelor/ project manager	Host/ 1 year Shared home Auckland-based Airbnb
Dianne	60-69	Divorced/ 2 children	Bachelor/ magazine editor	Guest turned host/ 5 years Shared home Wellington-based Airbnb
Candy and Yanis	30-39/ F & M	Married, 2 children	Bachelor/ software developer	Host/ 9 months Attached guesthouse Wellington-based Airbnb
Suzie	40-49/ F	Divorced, 1 child	Bachelor/ chef	Host/ 2 years Attached guesthouse Sometimes co-hosts other people's Airbnb homes Auckland-based Airbnb
Fiona	60-69/ F	Married, 2 children, 1 grandchild	Bachelor/ retired school teacher	Guest turned host/ 3.5 years Attached guesthouse Auckland-based Airbnb
Pamela	60-69/ F	Married, 2 children, 2 grandchildren	Master/ retired	Host turned guest/ 2.5 years Attached guesthouse Queenstown-based Airbnb
Philippa	60-69/ F	Married, 3 children, 2 grandchildren	Bachelor/ retired	Host/ 3 years Two attached guesthouses Te Ānau-based Airbnb
Lilian	40-49/ F	Cohabiting unmarried couple, no children	Bachelor/ freelance writer	Host/ 7 years Three distant homes rented and managed Auckland-based Airbnb
Katharine	50-59	Cohabiting unmarried couple, no children	Bachelor/ manager	Host/ 4 years One distant home rented Wellington-based Airbnb

Participant observations and my experiences are detailed in 48 pages of notes and 78 photographs taken of guest-host interactions, host homes, set up of guest rooms, materials such as guest books, linens, beds, welcome baskets, physical space inside and

outside the home, and digital images of member profiles, reviews, photos and photos shared by hosts on the online communities. These provided a visual for the written observational data.

### **3.10 Data Analysis and Presentation**

Before I began analysis, I immersed myself in the data so I was fully familiar with the context. During interviews, I relied on participants' beliefs and views, looking for their emic perspectives, which I reported using quotes. I accompanied this with observation during interviews and probes when necessary to elicit participants' histories with Airbnb and to "interrogate" material aspects of these consumption experiences. I analysed, synthesised and filtered the data through my etic perspective to reveal novel interpretations and portraits of the culture (Wolcott, 2008). As recommended by ethnographic researchers, I aimed to provide a holistic, detailed description of the culture group moving into a themed analysis of the patterns that appeared, which illustrated their culture and how the consumer group functioned (Fetterman, 2010). During intertextual analyses, storylines gathered by participants were compared to common themes that emerged. Similar to other qualitative multi-studies (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001), analysis of the data collected was an iterative process of transcription, interpretation, refinement and pursuit of new questions, further data collection, challenges, rejection and affirmation of emergent themes.

Grounded theory coding procedures of open, axial and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), that were also supplemented by abductive reasoning, were used to gradually reveal insights into the meanings and lived experiences of collaborative consumers in the sharing economy and their associations with materiality. With some refinement in the coding scheme, I began to look for variance in the data. This involved looking for differences between codes associated with data collected from one locale versus another. For instance, I compared data collected from interviews versus data collected from observation versus archival data (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994), as this supported efforts to detect discrepancies between what people said and what people did. This proved valuable when informants were unable to recall past experiences and aided in revealing clues that contributed to interpretations and theorising.

As mentioned previously, systematic analysis began in the field and continued during the transcription of a number of the interviews and while inscribing jotted down field notes. The initial reading from the different datasets gathered also helped



familiarise myself with the context. The documentation process that followed aided in reinforcing, refuting or expanding theorisation that emerged during data collection, while generating new themes previously unrealised as well as ground patterns to the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Throughout the theorisation process, I reviewed the literature on market dynamics and market logics and collaborative consumption, where I iteratively grouped and regrouped codes into more abstract themes until theoretical saturation was reached.

The combination of ethnography and grounded theory methods allowed me to make connections between events observed in the field and emerging themes from the analysis to create relations between concepts (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). Codes were transferred to NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software programme (11.4 version), which allowed for the organisation and analysis of large amounts of data through data classification, arrangement and examination of relationships (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Methods adopted in this research allowed me to move from low level descriptions to higher abstractions and theoretical discussions. My analysis moved from identification of practices, rituals and activities within this exchange to conceptualising core concepts until theoretical saturation was reached. Throughout my iterative analytical process (e.g., while participating in the field and continuously reading and making comparisons with the literature), theoretical leaps of faith and epiphanies that occurred led me back into the field to test them. Often, I found myself pitting two to three potential theories against each other as I re-entered the field to test their legitimacy. Throughout the data analysis process, my supervisors also pushed me towards a balance of closeness and distance from the context (Arnould, Price, & Moisio, 2006). This resulted in an understanding of the Romantic phenomenon of home sharing.

### **3.10.1 Trustworthiness and Data Interpretation Quality**

I was aware of the challenges that researchers could be faced with during deep immersion into this consumption network. Going “native” could have compromised the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, caution was taken throughout the research journey and continuous discussions with my supervisors for advice and guidance on techniques and approaches proved to be invaluable to the research’s general objectivity.

In addition to the discussion in section 3.3 on researcher positioning, I found that changing roles from an Airbnb member to an interviewer was not problematic. I fulfilled my duties as a participant in the online community by contributing as an

Airbnb host, drawing on my hosting experiences, without being opinionated. On the other hand, by having an online advertisement that fully depicted the purpose of my research, participants saw me as a researcher and gave me permission to involve them in my study. My clothing and tools were also presented differently dependent on the occasion: when I met with participants for interviews, I dressed in semi-formal attire, with a pen, notepad and audio recorder. When attending Airbnb events, meetups, as a Airbnb host awaiting my guests or travelling as a guest I was more casual in my clothes and demeanour so I could create a stark difference in personas. To my knowledge, no one seemed to find my dual role problematic.

To fulfil the requirements of trustworthiness, data collection involved several avenues as previously mentioned. I stayed in contact with participants with online and offline interactions ranging from general informal discussions on topics of their interest to in-depth dialogues concerning their families, as well as formal interviews with Airbnb informants. As my understanding of the market evolved, interactions and my questions became more focused. I assessed the trustworthiness of my research by applying interpretive research criteria, focusing on credibility (i.e., findings are acceptable representations), integrity (i.e., interpretations may possibly be misrepresented by informants), dependability (i.e., stability/consistency of explanations), and transferability (i.e., findings from one study can apply to other contexts) (Hirschman, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Wallendorf & Belk, 1989).

I performed two member checks. This involved me writing two unique extended reports and sharing them with two of my informants – a seasoned host and a seasoned guest. They both thought these were representative of their experiences as users of Airbnb, and they both noted difficulties managing commercial and communal exchanges and the different expectations associated with them. These remarks were later developed during the theorisation process. Further checks on boundary conditions to the analysis involved interviews with one property owner who rented out his home ‘long term’, and two people that travelled in NZ for work and pleasure but chose motels or hotels rather than staying in homes (such as with Airbnb or through NZ home rental website, Bookabach). These informants rented space purely for its exchange value. As with previous research on the dark side of the gift (e.g., Marcoux, 2009; Sherry et al., 1993), these informants chose to avoid a different type of exchange instead of risking ambiguity or conflict. Such anti-home-sharers, in particular, reject the overly

romanticised view of ‘sharing’ as a selfless act of humanity. In contrast, actors in the home-sharing network create and sustain the Romantic notion of home sharing through processes of negotiation to assist them with their identity projects and through ‘sharing’. Triangulation across sharers and non-sharers helped me crystallise the route to the Romanticism of ‘sharing’ using a networked theory of cultural value.

Further triangulation across methods was reached where different kinds of data were compared to assess whether they corroborated. This was accomplished using multiple forms of collection that included online and offline field notes, photography, audio taping of interviews and journal writing. For example, I initially analysed data pertaining to a specific informant by looking at the data separately and then across other information gathered that was based on a specific theme. Such comparisons were purposely done to search for any new insights and consistencies or inconsistencies in participants’ perspectives (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994). In terms of negative case analysis, I kept in touch with participants on a regular basis throughout the research to validate whether my interpretations were true to their consumption experiences and to uncover information that did not support my understanding of home sharing and challenged my thinking. This allowed the study to embody rich insights into the consumer culture and materiality meanings involved in collaborative consumption. According to Silverman (2009/2013), these methods are appropriate for validation, and they consequently acted as measures of truth in my study.

### **3.11 Research Ethics**

It is critical that a discussion around the ethics of this research is made. Research and data gathered around Airbnb and home sharing was approved by Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC). All participants’ actual names have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities. Informed consent during events, interviews and participant observation as a researcher was requested and obtained in writing or verbally from all participants involved in this research. Consent was also sought for the use of photographs taken in Airbnb homes and at events and photos shared by Airbnb members on online community pages. Only those that gave authorisation were included in this thesis. When I officially began the Airbnb research by joining the Airbnb Community Centre and Facebook groups, I fully disclosed my identity as a researcher by including the following post:

*Hi everyone! I first learned about Airbnb when I was trying to find a decent yet affordable homestay while travelling around New Zealand. Staying at other people's homes and sharing their experience was far more attractive to me than the cold hotel rooms that can barely handle my husband, myself and two kids. So I thought, why not share our own NZ experience with others too, especially since we live in a lovely central area near the beach. So my husband and I started advertising a spare room and are hoping we get more interested couples, business travellers or backpackers passing through Auckland. I'm loving the idea of being empowered as an entrepreneur!*

*I am also a PhD student and I found Airbnb to be a great context to learn more about the research topics that interest me. I am doing research on the sharing economy and collaboration through new platforms such as Airbnb, the value of the community and cultural meanings behind community-based platforms. I have just started this long-term research study for my PhD and I must say I'm very excited to be researching and writing about something I'm passionate about. I'd love to hear what you have to say generally about your experiences with platforms such as Airbnb. A truly interesting research project is one that includes the voices of many different people so I am hoping that you will share your thoughts, perspectives, experiences and ideas regarding Airbnb. If you would like to participate, don't hesitate to send me a private message. I'm hoping that the project findings can also help you, as hosts and consumers of Airbnb, so you can continuously add value and sustain your businesses!*

*NOTE: This is an academic project and there are no commercial interests involved here. If you have any concerns, please let me know. I will also be observing discussions on the main page for research purposes and no private information or names will be shared in my research outputs. If you don't want your discussions to be included in my data analysis, please feel free to comment here or private message me. I'll be happy to provide more information about my research.*

This disclaimer provided a general idea around the purpose of my research, as well as referring to the academic nature of the project and inviting anyone interested to participate without any coercion or being too obtrusive. Additionally, when there were events or meetups organised for Airbnb members, I disclosed my identity as a doctoral student working on collaborative consumption communities when I confirmed my attendance. I made contact with the organisers of Airbnb events by sending them the brief advertisement below, which they shared with their other attendees:

*My name is Marian Makkar and I am conducting a study for my PhD thesis requirement at AUT University in New Zealand. I am studying how value is created and sustained in modern day forms of commodity exchange such as the sharing economy. I am using Airbnb as a context and part of my study includes observation of the Airbnb community, which includes meetups/events.*

*By accepting my observation at meetups/events, you consent to participating in my study by allowing me to take notes of behaviours, interactions and the surrounding. I am hoping that the project findings can also help you as Airbnb hosts/guests. You will have access to the results of the research, which you*

*may use to add to your understanding of Airbnb so you can continuously add value and sustain your Airbnb businesses.*

*NOTE: This is an academic research project & there are no commercial interests involved. If you have any issues or concerns, please let me know. No private information or names will be shared in my research outputs. No photos or videos will be taken at meetups/events without your consent. Your consent is voluntary. You can give consent via email or verbally at the event.*

During my personal reflection on Airbnb experiences as a host and guest myself, I initially made my role as a researcher known from the start by including it in my host profile. I repeated this information during initial communication with Airbnb potential host and guest participants through the messaging application. I also reiterated the same information during the official welcome. Consent was therefore provided in writing and verbally. I did not use an audio recorder during my observations so as not to influence the naturalistic setting or make others uncomfortable, but I took regular breaks to write down my recollections in as much detail as possible. I did not encounter any resistance or negativity from participants regarding the fact that I was “studying” the Airbnb community. In fact, many were eager to talk about their experiences.

### **3.12 Summary**

This chapter discussed the methods undertaken for this research. The chapter began with a justification for the philosophical paradigm taken and considered methodological issues in investigating home-sharing communities and solutions for gaining the trustworthiness and credibility of the data interpretations. The chapter also explained the process for emergent theorising that will link to the next two chapters, Chapters 4 and 5, where my conceptual developments will be presented with support from the study participants’ emic perspectives.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### 4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2, I explained how consumer sharing is romanticised by scholars as a socially-motivated exchange and a desire for belonging while recent research disputes this perception and calls for a more rational argument. In Chapter 3, I briefly reviewed how a home-sharing platform such as Airbnb works. There are many levels of interactions and interrelationships involved in creating a home-sharing network that support the sustenance of this system. In light of the focal research questions of this study, the following sub-questions are asked:

- What is the nature of home-sharing networks?
- How does sharing take place in home-sharing networks?
- Do consumers assemble Romantic sharing discourses around their home-sharing consumption, and if so, how?

I studied the chosen cultural site, Airbnb, using ethnographic and netnographic means to better understand its consumer culture and the meanings of sharing in a market-mediated and economic exchange environment.

Markets are a “complex nexus of meanings and values,” which are derived from interconnected agents existent at micro, meso and macro-levels (Peñaloza & Mish, 2011, p. 15). Airbnb’s dynamism is shaped by the different roles of actors and their collaborations in home sharing. With a two-year examination of the Airbnb network, I will answer the research questions in Chapters 4 and 5. The next section illustrates my theorising of ‘sharing’<sup>3</sup> as tactically romanticised at the interstices of network negotiation and the distribution of value in order to create internal stability. Next, I use this framework to explain how and why heterotopic (i.e., a disembodied and disruptive notion of space) ‘sharing’ spaces are created and show how such territorialised spaces may be strengthened due to tensions in the system. Data analysis reveals that the network is dynamic, contextual and evolving through time, taking different shapes,

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<sup>3</sup> From here on, I will occasionally refer to ‘sharing’ in its pseudo form and not in the prototypical form of sharing, which Belk (2010) clearly differentiates. I continue to use the term ‘sharing’ in this chapter as it is the emic term that participants use to refer to the practices that take place in Airbnb homes and with others they are ‘sharing’ with.

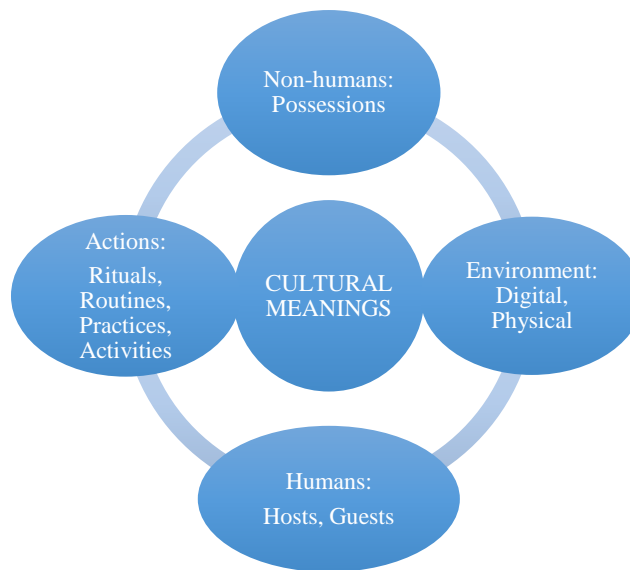
meanings and forms. I demonstrate the fragility of the network through participant accounts.

In order to facilitate and frame the following discussion on my investigation of home sharing, it is useful to present the theoretical framework that emerged from the study's participants and their emic accounts alongside relevant literature. This framework is depicted in Figure 6, which will guide the explanation of the findings and the process of data conceptualisation to follow. This model presents networks as firstly being re-mobilised (i.e., re-emerging), assembled (i.e., transforming market capacities) and territorialised and re-territorialised (i.e., solidifying the market system or producing adaptations of the market) during processes of sharing experiences. The model also shows the process of assemblage as ongoing and iterative. In the next sections of this chapter, it will become apparent that consumers' Romantic experiences of home sharing involve emotional, chaotic and free-spirited capacities as opposed to classicist views of those that are purposive, realistic, orderly and controlled (Holbrook, 1997). The Romantic notion identified in my research is one of "overcoming obstacles, breaking bonds, powerful irrational emotions, titanic struggle, continuous striving toward new goals, the value of change and novelty, the dynamic process of transcending limits" (Nozick, 1981, p. 613).

Three themes emerged from the data, which are *mobilising and re-emerging with the home-sharing paradise*, *the open secret processes of home sharing*, and *creating heterotopic home-sharing spaces*. These themes are interconnected and can be perceived as process-like. Together, these themes suggest that home-sharing consumers (hosts and guests) jointly fuse ideologies of Romanticism and Rationalism where the network is wrought with tensions, conflicts and paradoxes. The balance of Chapters 3, 4 and 5 demonstrates the conceptual development of these three themes. At first, Airbnb social actors use romanticised discursive frames to explain how they feel about the "sharing-exchange" (note the paradox as sharing is not an exchange at all). In the next chapter, Chapter 5, troubles in paradise arise as I begin to unravel the fusion between Romantic and Rationalist ideologies amongst the Airbnb home-sharing community of hosts and guests to reveal that this fusion takes place with the use of an open secret. While hosts and guests together maintain the open secret that home-sharing processes have nothing to do with sharing, they jointly co-create a fantasised utopia in the form of a real place, a heterotopic home-sharing space (discussed in Chapter 5).

## 4.2 The Home-sharing Network: Mobilising Resources to ‘Share’

To conceptualise the consumer culture of home sharing, I began by observing major aspects (see Figure 5) that might be involved in creating a consumer culture (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Following Figueiredo and Scaraboto’s (2016) recommendations to perceive networks as circulating collectives of value, I was able to observe and map out varied and dynamic roles of human and non-human actors as agents in the network (Akaka et al., 2012). I examined relations and interdependencies that connect them at the individual and collective levels (Giesler, 2006) to create value for hosts and guests.



**Figure 5: Scope of cultural meanings in home-sharing markets**

Initially, it was obvious that the host, guest<sup>4</sup> and the home are central to the success of the home-sharing network. However, the dataset demonstrated that ‘things’ with agency are varied and more interrelated to other network elements. From a micro-level, the provider (host) and receiver (guest) are able to experience and switch roles dependent on the social context and expectations. For example, whether the guest is in a shared home or rents the whole house, they may suggest cooking dinner for the host or they may clean up after themselves. This is a form of generalised reciprocity and a sign

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<sup>4</sup> The terms “host” and “guest” are commonly used in the hospitality industry to connote status, hospitable relationship and reception of the other with goodwill and kindness (King, 1995).



of gratitude for the kindness and love that hosts show by opening their homes to travellers that are essentially strangers to them (Sahlins, 1972). Hosts themselves may change roles by travelling as guests to other hosts' homes, which sets expectations when making comparisons with their own standards of hosting.

From a market-level approach of home sharing, cultural production systems such as marketing strategies by the company and the community, are systematically predisposing consumers towards certain ideologies that shape their social interactions during home sharing. The Airbnb company communicates travel based on Romantic ideals of sociality and kindness that some community host and guest members may adopt in their narratives.

A collectively shared anchor point, the sharing economy as a revolutionary macro-scaled event, which was discussed in the literature review, has precipitated into culturally changing the way traditional hospitality implements its business strategies and how people consume travel and experiences. Their effects are demonstrated through the capacities and potential of the sharing assemblage. Through the voices of participants, their observations of the home-sharing spatial environments and their interactions and discussions online and offline, the following sections explain their agentic role (i.e., capacity to act over other actors) towards a consumer sharing culture.

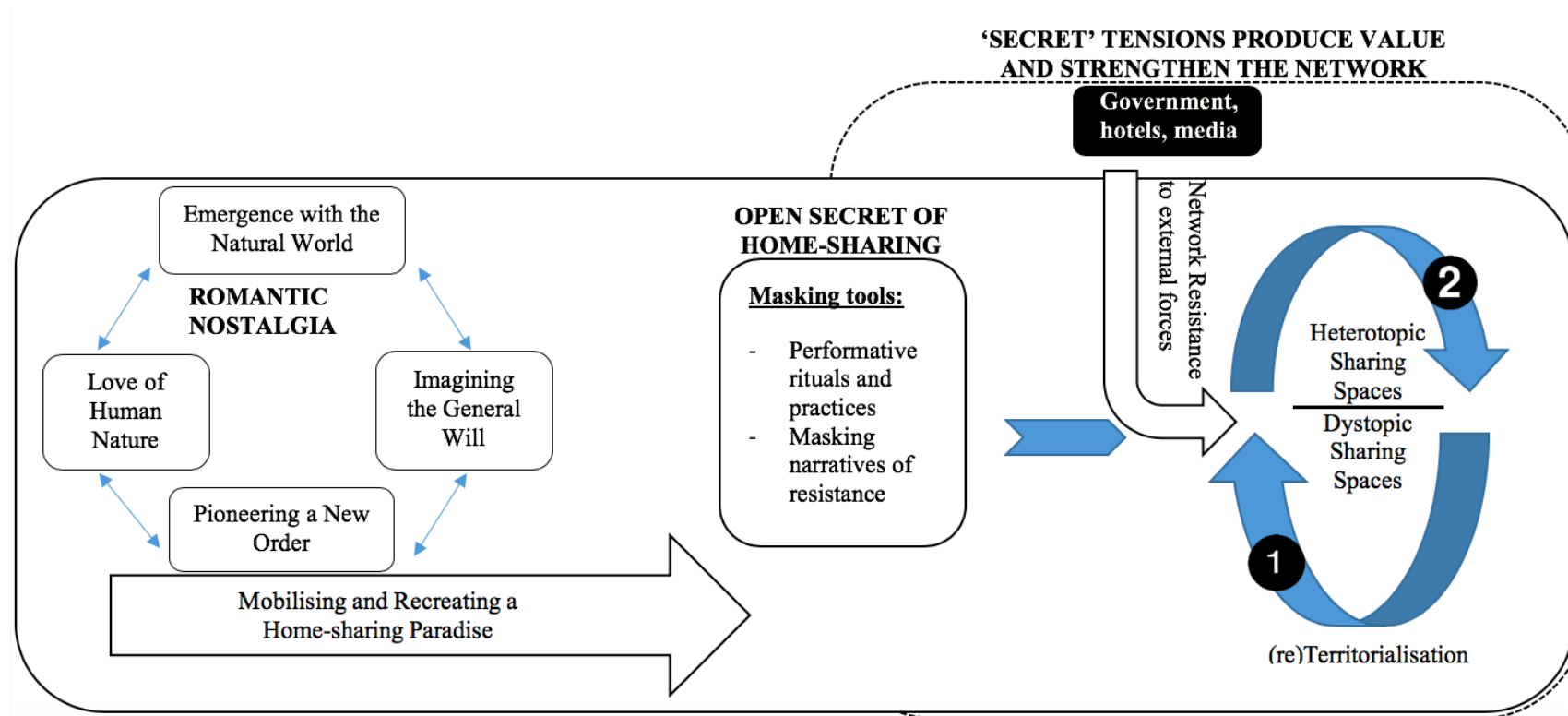
I begin to answer this first research question using participants' emic perspectives to develop an understanding of the active roles that are the components in home-sharing spaces and whether hosts and guests do in fact romanticise their home-sharing experiences. In the following sections of this chapter, I position the process leading towards romanticised sharing experiences within a broader etic theoretical framework of the Romantic phenomenon to explain how the home-sharing network contributes to hosts and guests' sharing experiences. This will answer the second research question: "How does sharing in home-sharing networks take place successfully (or unsuccessfully)?"

The theoretical framework in Figure 6 suggests that components within the home-sharing network are first mobilised to re-emerge with the romanticised notions of home sharing as a new paradise of travel and hospitality. Actors reshuffle these components to fit the desired home-sharing assemblage and as their characteristics change, their capacities (i.e., the potential of components when they interact with other components) are negotiated into new material that is expressive and imaginative

(DeLanda, 2006; Epp et al., 2014). Appendix D includes an outline of the main components of the home-sharing network. In Table 6 below, I highlight their specific capacities that emerge during the mobilisation and assemblage processes. It is important to note that any component may have all three capacities – material, expressive and imaginative – at one time. However, the findings presented here are illustrative and not exhaustive as components may demonstrate different capacities when combined with other components and the list can become endless.

**Table 6: Potential Capacities that Emerge during the Mobilisation and Assemblage Process**

<b>Capacity</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Material	Material capacities of the Airbnb space, bodies/people and objects shape the social and physical interactions with other components (e.g., placing signs, barriers, a plant in front of something). They may enclose the space, suspend time, allow for social relations to take place.
Expressive	Elements of the assemblage have expressive capacities (e.g., meanings, importance, expression, emotional gestures, symbols) by unfolding the assemblage with an ability to act over another. Meanings associated with material objects also shape components' interactions with other components (e.g., defining where objects are placed, photographs and albums, antiques with nostalgic memories). Participants explained the meanings of what space, home (and homeyness) and objects they shared meant for them. They also shared the expressive meaning of material sharing.
Imaginative	Consistent with Epp et al.'s (2014) findings, this is the potential to creatively envision components interacting in a reassembly. It provides a vision of what the reassembled space (and sharing) looks like in the end. What was missing from Canniford and Shankar's (2013) work is imaginative capacity as an important pathway to consumer desires, which is of motivational importance to reach a goal. It incites ways to decouple meanings from objects and mobilise these meanings during reassembly/territorialisation. It involves some performances and hybridised practices that mirror sharing, gifting and exchange.

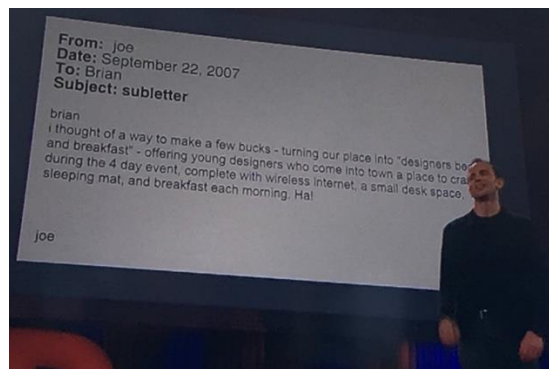


**Figure 6: Romanticising processes of ‘sharing’ culture in home-sharing networks**

Note - This figure represents the process of cultural work in creating the value (of an open secret) of home-sharing processes and containing that value in heterotopic home-sharing spaces. With the successful cultural production of value through negotiations of the open secret and culturally enabling factors of masking rituals, practices and narratives, the heterotopia does not compromise exchanges evident in home sharing nor does it challenge its moral and ideological values. This is depicted by the arrow pointing up (1). In contrast, the Romantic notions of what might be an imagined utopia may be someone else’s dystopia (utopia gone wrong). It inverts the hierarchy of the other space and linked perceptions. This is depicted by the arrow that points down (2).

### 4.3 Theme One: Mobilising and Recreating a Home-sharing Paradise

The history of the Airbnb home-sharing network is similar to a drama full of struggle, hardship, trials and tribulations and youthful entrepreneurial struggles. Airbnb hosts shared the company's story amongst one another for "inspiration and empowerment" (Kendell, Taupō host, online community). The story is of two young men (Brian Chesky and Joe Gebbia) that could not afford to pay rent but had a "eureka" moment when they found a gap in the accommodation industry (see Figure 7). Using their design skills and "creative" mindset, they founded [airbedandbreakfast.com](http://airbedandbreakfast.com). Despite their design backgrounds and financially sound business pitch, their ideas were rejected and even ridiculed by Silicon Valley investors who used a very similar critique as the Rationalists from the Enlightenment era. The Airbnb co-founders were also called irrational and unrealistic and their platform a "crazy idea letting strangers into your home" (Chesky, 2015).



**Figure 7: Email communication between the Airbnb co-founders. Source: Joe Gebbia's Ted Talk entitled "How Airbnb designs for trust"**

An Airbnb host shared with me her views on the growth of the home-sharing platform. She told me that as the Airbnb startup grew, so also did the founders' artsy, unique propositions and storytelling appeal to others. Even Apple design chief, Jony Ivy said that co-founder Chesky's "audacity is fabulous" (Hartmans, 2017). Airbnb also allows individuals to create a new income stream while making social connections along the way. Airbnb's (2018c) latest press release that was sent to hosts and contemporary media and which celebrates their 10-year anniversary demonstrates the emergence of a paradise that instils a world that is undivided, caring and free from hatred and war:

*When more than 2 million people are welcomed into other people's homes on any given night, some amazing moments can happen. Airbnb is actually proving we're not as divided as we think we are [amongst a world at war]. It has taught us that we're more similar than we are different. People are 99 percent the same and people are fundamentally good, statistically. Otherwise, this concept wouldn't work. And this is just the start of our adventure. We can't wait to see what the next 10 years brings.*

By heeding a world at war and creating a paradise that is based on harmony between human beings and the natural world, Airbnb and their hosts demonstrate their values of holism, imagination, passionate love, generosity and social connectedness, which displace a rational, calculated cold world that alienates human beings or dissolves communities. Historically, Romanticism also emerged as a response to the instrumental-based modernity of the Enlightenment era. The Romantics idealised the natural state of man, connections over isolation and moral and aesthetic values over rational values (Löwy & Sayre, 2001). By displacing these individualistic notions and returning to the old paradise of harmony with the natural world, the Romantics not only enjoyed the values of holism but were able to express their imagination and passions (McKusick, 2001). The mythologised paradise that was lost was now found by the Romantics where peace, harmony, organic connections and prototypical sharing and helping others was the true essence of the old paradise. During its mobilisation, the Airbnb company, hosts and guests illustrated a Romantic nostalgia as a way to bring back a time when human beings once trusted one another. This nostalgic narrative is illustrated in the subthemes of the 'home-sharing paradise'. The first subtheme, Emergence with the Natural World, illustrates how the Airbnb home-sharing network assembles to re-emerge with the natural world through sharing practices that take place before, during and after the experience. The second subtheme, Love of Human Nature, demonstrates how hosts and guests find a sense of being through their exploration of the supernatural self and their emotional experiences of sharing and community. The third and fourth subthemes, Imagining the General Will and Pioneering a New Order both guide consumers of home sharing to continue on their spiritual paths to reaching paradise and promote a moral economy through freedom and egalitarianism within the community and for its citizens. Theme one demonstrates that Airbnb social actors (hosts, guests, marketers) hold onto their Romantic ideals surrounding home sharing to see the home and the practices of consumer sharing result in a spiritual home and a paradise for liberty and public interests.

### 4.3.1 Emergence with the Natural World

A cultural myth about the home being a safe haven for individuals (Ahrentzen, 1992) and a place of pride, creativity, self-discovery and a place of ecological niche was repeatedly discussed in different contexts and expressed in different ways by Airbnb hosts, guests and the Airbnb marketer that took part in this study. This mythology is part of an old anarchic paradise where all is joyful, peaceful and harmonious between the walls of the home. Consumers of the home-sharing network, such as the Airbnb hosts, focus on creating a homey appeal of comfort, relaxation and belonging that they believe is the essence of their homes. Hosts interviewed for this study did not treat Airbnb homes as a commercial space nor did they speak of hosting as a job; rather, it was an “entrepreneurial creative hobby” (quote from host Fiona). By observing online profiles of Airbnb homes that included catchy titles and their listing’s details, hosts advertised using romanticised notions where they painted a beautiful picture of their homes in comparison to instrumental and rational descriptions of traditional accommodation providers:

*Townhouse in the lush bush. (Sandy and Greg’s home, hosts)*

*Modern Design Apartment in Historic Arrowtown. (Pamela’s home, host)*

*Soak up the tranquillity at the Freemans Bay Cottage (Suzie’s home, host)*

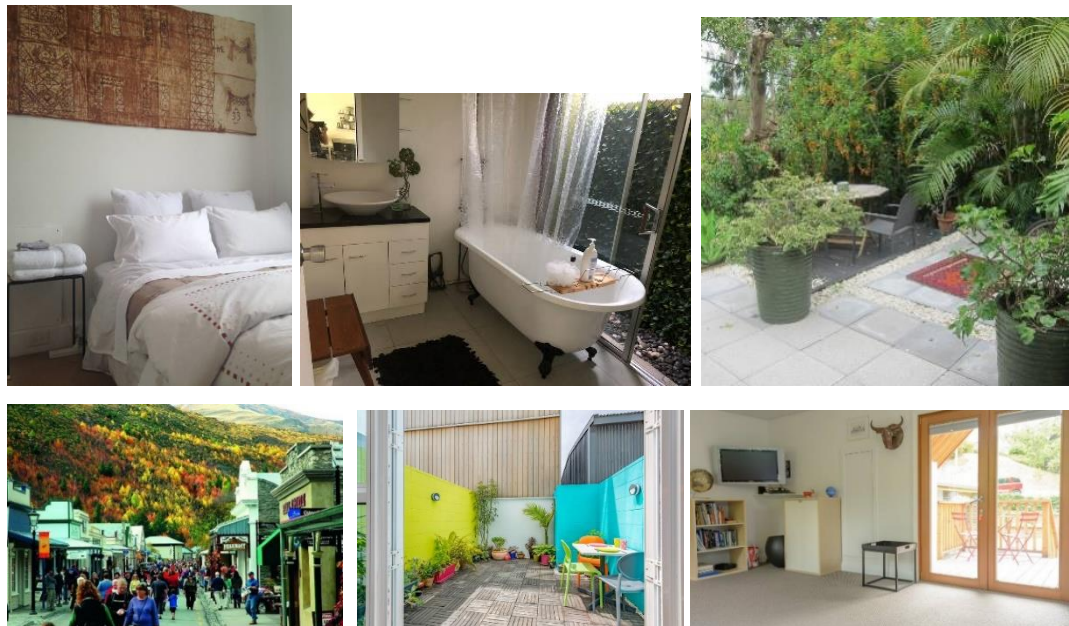
*City urban oasis near the Waitākere ranges – Mt Albert is one of Auckland's oldest suburbs, enjoying a revival. On the edge of the city, it is only 10 minutes to the bush-clad hills of Tītirangi, gateway to the popular surf beaches of Karekare and Piha. An easy 20-minute drive into the city, or take the bus or train. If you enjoy a bit of "urban grit" you'll love my little bolt-hole, secure and sunny, an urban oasis. (Rosy’s home, host)*

*Previous guests have described the studio as "the city's best kept secret" and “a home away from home”. My cottage is a mirage amidst a city of lights and hustle and bustle. (Suzie’s home, host)*

*Corridor leading to ground floor apartment. The building has an overall Industrial aesthetic but funky fresh. My apartment is a sweet gem that's very convenient to Cuba St. Really stylish and the bonus of a secluded courtyard garden oasis. (Katharine’s home, host)*

The hosts told stories of mystery, hidden gems and secret hideaways when explaining their homes. They illustrated imagery of the natural world that emerged within the Airbnb home and how they felt about it. Accompanying their creative penmanship and expressive use of mythical descriptions such as oasis, mirage and

secret, hosts described the sublime nature that surrounded their homes such as the hills, beaches, lush bush and regional parks. Hosts digitally materialised the beauty of their homes through imagery in their online listings.



**Figure 8: Themes of Romantic nostalgia capturing nature, eclectic colours, animals and hunter-gatherer papyrus drawings**

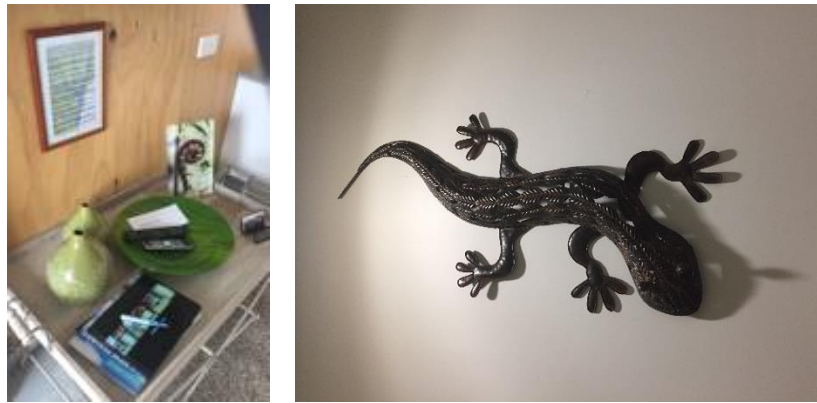
Many of the hosts' photos were captioned with "tranquil relaxation", "birds chirping" or the "gentle satisfaction of finding a home-away-from-home" attached to the images. During an interview I had with Wellington host Dianne (in her 60s), a magazine editor by day and in her spare time a host for people from around the world, she often referred to her Airbnb home as a Garden of Eden. This was reflected in her backyard and even in her open-air bathtub (see Figure 8). While Adam and Eve were thrown out of the old paradise of the Garden of Eden, Dianne creatively designed her home by extending the garden to the inside. She decorated it using local NZ paintings, fruits and design artefacts from nature to further recreate a mystical place that could "allow guests to become one with nature." Her recollection of her creative process was that she worked on redecorating in the evenings when her "creative juices were flowing". This was a typical characteristic of the Romantics (McKusick, 2001). Her tough life in the modern world stimulated her desire to re-emerge with the natural world. Dianne's spiritual journey is expressed in the following quotation but also in the physical materials she chose to place in the Airbnb home:

*I never thought I can make something so beautiful. I'm proud of my Garden of Eden that I think is just a little piece of heaven, isn't it? I've been working on my home for over 20 years and when I joined Airbnb I realised I can share this treasure with others. I don't often talk to guests about it, but I let this masterpiece speak for itself. I get a lot of people asking me if I'm Buddhist or not because of the little statue outside. I'm not but I do sometimes sit in the bush and meditate. It brings me to a peaceful place, which I need right now.*

In a sense, Dianne's creativity came from her heavenly home and the beauty she described in her quote. Implicitly, her spiritual journey of finding her creative self after her family left her began with the skills of being a magazine editor and graphic designer. Dianne put those skills into action at night to recreate a mythologised path for her and her fellow guests to walk through using the serenity of her garden, her statues and paintings inside the peaceful home she built. This path is what the Romantics have longed for in a new paradise where one's imagination merges with the natural world.

In addition to the narratives that hosts used when describing their Airbnb homes or the imagery they attached to instil a magical tale of wonder and mystery, hosts' romanticised world was also illustrated in practices of using animals, plants and trees, fruits and the use of natural colours and materials to add to the beauty, thus bringing mother nature into their homes. For instance, hosts Suzie (Auckland) and Philippa embedded the indigenous Māori culture of New Zealand and Kiwiana (all things of New Zealand traditions) artefacts, material artwork of the Koru fern leaf to symbolise the rebirth of life in their Airbnb homes and the Kiwi bird, an endangered flightless bird (see examples in Figure 9). The Kiwi, despite its uninspiring nature as a defenceless, partially blind bird, symbolises the uniqueness of New Zealand's wildlife and natural heritage and in this context, suggested the Airbnb hosts' ways of re-emerging with a new paradise that merged with the natural world. These homes may have been based in city centres, but they also provided a unique safe haven away from the industrial noise and urban busy life in which hosts and their guests could experience tranquillity and nature's sublimity and peace.





**Figure 9: Queenstown host, Philippa, using the Koru fern leaf motif (left) and Auckland host, Sandra, using the Gecko as a spiritual animal of change bringing colour and brightness to life**

Hosts also used their own animals to recreate the space as one with nature. Many hosts included images of their dogs, cats, parrots, horses, other farm animals and even deer in their online Airbnb profiles. For example, Philippa had lambs and deer on her property and offered guests the experience of caring for and feeding them:

*It's [animals] a novelty, isn't it? Queenstown in itself is interesting, with the Hobbit movie sets close by. Most of my guests come from cities or homes where they can't have animals. I'm in Te Anau and there aren't many motels and places for people to stay so it's quite ideal. Many come for a little getaway far from the hustle and bustle of their cities. They can always go and do their experiences and come back. They also come to me because the deer is a fabulous creature that you don't often see. Especially my Chinese guests that are often fascinated by the deer's gentle demeanour and their antlers. Some even thought that deer do not exist!! It's lovely to see people's faces as they feed the lamb and deer. I love talking to them about my animals and how much they mean to us here.*

The deer is imbued with symbols of rebirth as the deer's antlers fall off and regenerate by growing back again. As Philippa mentioned, not many travellers have seen deer before and in a sense, these animals may even be perceived as mythological characters that some believe never existed except in stories and fairy tales. This is consistent with the practices of Romantic poets and painters that used images to express their desire to recreate a new human society and live harmoniously with the natural world (Butler, 1982; McKusick, 2001). The deer and other represented animals illustrated hosts' practices of myth-making that "expresses, enhances and codifies beliefs; it safeguards and enforces morality" (Butler, 1982, p. 51). Previously part of the

imagination, the deer and other fascinating animals instil “a world made new through the imagination” (Dabundo, 1992, p. 549). The images found on the online Airbnb home listings along with their existence in the home space helped in recreating a natural lifeworld and safeguarded their symbolic meanings.

As expressed by the Romantics, the mythical world created in Philippa’s enclave was about self-affirmation rather than self-denial (Bloesch, 1991). During her interview, Philippa spoke of why deer were such powerful creatures to have in her Airbnb home: *“As spiritual animals, they stand tall with their antlers outside protecting both my Airbnbs [two cottages connected to her own home]. They are our caretakers and protectors.... My animals make me human again.”* Implicitly, hosts used their animals’ virtuous symbols for their own self-transformation. What is most important for hosts is that they not only demonstrated their creativity in recreating a magical space, but that the virtues of the animals, artefacts and plants “rubbed off” on them as was experienced by the early Romantics such as Rousseau through natural objects (Löwy & Sayre, 2001). Hosts remerged with the natural world and became “human again”, natural and pure as they absorbed the virtues of animals such as the deer, thus romanticising their sense of self. Nature is the ideal state of man (or woman) and society against the corrupt market influencers and corporations that are mainly linked to rational-based industrialisation that disenchant the world for human beings (Eldridge, 2001). By sharing their homes with guests, host were able to continue on expressing their uniqueness, creativity and hope for a new paradise where they re-emerged with nature.

The Airbnb guests of this study often accepted these calls to nature and hosts’ efforts to re-emerge with the natural world through nature’s objects, animals, plants and trees. Guests too are similar to the Romantics as they search for their true self and quest for experiences and self-fulfilment (Veith, 1990). Many guests that took part in this study chose Airbnb homes as a place of difference from the calculated and industrialised society they lived in. Built in their minds as a utopia (a perfect yet unreal society), guests were motivated to use Airbnb for different reasons that led them to a Romantic nostalgia, that is, an idealised emotional state that is linked to a fond memory or a time in one’s life (Holbrook, 1993). For instance, Gail and Arnen were an Israeli married couple that had moved to New Zealand seven years ago. Despite being passionate and patriotic, they decided to flee their country amidst the Israeli-Palestinian war for the sake of their children. Having immigrated to a distant and foreign country,

they were initially searching for their place in the world. Gail spoke of their first Airbnb experience, which happened to take place once they landed in New Zealand:

*We had just moved to New Zealand and didn't have any furniture or photos but just our clothes. The move was quite scary at the beginning. We just got to our Airbnb in Takapuna [NZ suburb]. We got a house with a married couple that were really nice. It was such a beautiful place. Perfect as we were already missing beautiful Israel. Putting the war on a side, Israel is actually naturally picturesque. In the Airbnb, there were ducks and the house was on the water. Everything was so serene and beautiful. It was a good start for us. We needed that to feel a bit... settled... safe.*

In general, guests are more focused on their own experiences while some are on a spiritual journey as they make travel plans (Bell, 2002). Similar to the Romantics who were fuelled with an intense introspective focus and a desire for a transcendental reality, Gail and her family were not only immigrating to better and greener pastures, but they were also searching for a new reality that was kinder than the war zone they had previously lived in. The myth of the Garden of Eden as the old paradise is the heaven guests are searching for. According to Gail's interview, the family implicitly decided to use home sharing as they perceived this as "naturalised" compared to the more disenchanted modern world of rationalised-based accommodation industry such as hotels. Gail and Arnen were nostalgic for a past time in the natural world that was peaceful and brought harmony to their lives before the Israeli-Palestinian war that only got worse. For them, the value of sharing as communal connectedness was supreme and replaced the calculated, individualistic aspects of modern times that were more rational, emotionless and cold hearted, especially when modernist society was imbued with war. For the Romantics, the natural world was most meaningful for humanity's existential state and could inspire peace, love and imagination for the present and future generations to come.

The use of natural landscapes are by far the most widespread visual related to romanticised consumption (Illouz, 1997). As earlier demonstrated, hosts used natural and "green" imagery as well as animals and natural objects to display the re-emergence of a natural world in their Airbnb homes. Guests accepted Airbnb homes as natural, cultural and social sites during their search for a natural world and similar to the Romantics, believed that the natural world has a mysterious power to light up humanity's inner imagination of a nostalgic past that can re-emerge and create a space of tranquillity. Guests also employed natural landscapes in their own social media

technologies to express not only the tranquil space or exciting adventures they chose for their self-transformation and fulfilment, but also to express their creative spirit that only Mother Nature could offer them. Many guests merged their discourse on the nature they experienced in their Airbnb home stays with the values of the sharing practices of hospitality and love. Figure 10 demonstrates how hospitality narratives were materialised with examples of Instagram photos from participant guests (with hashtags such as ‘blessed’, ‘home’ and ‘kindness’), which were also expressive of the homeyness appeal as one with nature. The raw intensity of nature and its sublime and pure beauty illustrated in guests’ photos and narratives is a symbol of the paradise they were inhabiting (albeit temporarily). The imagery they painted also engages the imaginative capacity of an Airbnb space and its material resources (bodies, material nature) that are fantasised as a utopia that can feel like home (i.e., psychological ownership of beauty, comfort and new cultures such as the Māori culture) and which merge with the natural world. The inclusion of homey photos and certain angles using photographic techniques enhances the potential for the expressive capacities of homeyness and aligns with discursive frames of a romanticised sublime nature. The visual aspects of the listings illustrate expressive capacities of material components during the mobilisation and reassembling process of home.



After arriving at our #Airbnb, we were welcomed with this home-cooked meal by our hosts. Unexpected but amazing #food #airbnbhosts #airbnbguests #travels #explore #home #blessed #kindness #otago #alpacaneighbours



Woke up to this in our Airbnb at Hahei in New Zealand. Breakfast and hot coffee on the patio while watching the sunrise and listening to the sound of the ocean. This is exactly what I needed #airbnb #naturecalling #nzfern #thisgem #thewanderingsapiens #sunrise #suchbeauty #heavenonearth #peace #serenity #motherearth

**Figure 10: Guests’ Instagram photographs of Airbnb home stays**

Even though both guests and hosts never directly said they were motivated by the natural world when practising home sharing, the types of photographs taken, the

captions used and their textual narratives suggest that home sharing might inspire a new beginning of life that arises with the natural world and is imbued by their creativity in the way they represent their experiences (e.g., Instagram photographs) or how they share with others staying in the Airbnb home (e.g., sharing meals). The sharing process between hosts and guests that took part in this study was clearly rich in displays of creativity where the aesthetics of nature, life, joy, as well as displays of affection and a journey towards a natural world were valued. Not only were Airbnb hosts and guests longing to return to the natural world to find harmony, but they were looking for their inner harmony, that is, a return to human nature.

#### **4.3.2 Love of Human Nature**

Sharing is considered part of human nature. The fact that Airbnb hosts and guests are involved in sharing interactions through home sharing allows them to feel moral to some extent. Host Pamela from Queenstown was an active member of her community in Arrowtown. In her 60s and a recently retired servant of the community, she continued to advocate for improvements in Arrowtown's town centres and helped in schools while her husband, Bob, a retired banker, even drove the school bus. Their two adult children were both active servants of the community: a police officer and a fire-fighter. As a retired couple, both Pamela and Bob enjoyed the connections they made with other individuals in their town. They found that Airbnb was the next best activity they could take part in that still fit with their retired lifestyle, where they could "continue doing good in the community". With further probing, Pamela continued as follows:

*It's [hosting] the social and moral aspects for my husband and I. Money is not the driver for us. The stories we've heard and things we've seen are interesting. I like to think that we are quite proud of Queenstown and want to make sure all visitors get the full experience and a big friendly welcome. Arrowtown is a small place, but its people have the biggest hearts. I want to continue that tradition by opening our home to guests that might start off as strangers and leave as friends. To open your home and show kindness and hospitality is part of who we are – old town folk or not.*

Sharing the home is just one small factor involved in the actual experience of the practice of sharing. Pamela introduced a spirit of sharing, helping and contributing to the wider community, which is closely associated with the Romantic notion of human nature where sharing involves selfless contributions, or even agapic love towards others.

It can be assumed that because Pamela and Bob were retired with children who were busy with their own lives, they felt a need for sociality and level of intense emotionality based on *communitas* to fill a hole in their empty lives (Turner, 1967). Pam was looking for her next moral quest when she discovered Airbnb. Her new project involved opening her heart and home to guests that needed a place to stay. Pamela was not alone in her social project. Philippa (Te Ānau host) also discussed some anti-institutional experiences that led her to open her home and oppose the traditional accommodation industry:

*A lot of people come to Te Ānau and are being told there's nothing here; it's never busy so you don't need to book. It has been in the past the expectation that there's nothing in Te Ānau compared to Queenstown. Nah! They've also been told there's nowhere to stay. It's just a little hick town and you don't need to book. Or hotels are too expensive, which they are. And we've had people sleeping in cars the last couple of years because there's been nowhere to book. I can't let that happen so I'm helping those stranded people.*

Hence, Pamela and Philippa's interviews provided rich implications. Firstly, sharing is a primitive condition of individuals and part of human nature (Belk, 2010). However, modern society has distorted these Romantic ideals of human nature by embracing a more rational, and calculated institution (Löwy & Sayre, 2001). This is due to the selfish desires for money that has created competition and a need for accumulation (Berman, 1972). Thus, Pamela argued for a free world where "hospitality is a requirement and not optional". This goes hand in hand with Rousseau's call for an ideal human society based on "sharing and giving" or "genuine mutuality" and not a calculated one (Berman, 1972, p. 316). Home sharing allows the hosts that believe in the power of sharing to connect back to instinctive human nature.

Secondly, emerging with human nature is the opposition to calculative commercial institutions, or at least the provision of an alternative. Philippa discussed how big chain hotels would never provide guests a place to stay unless they paid the full amount, which she regarded as "manipulative and inhumane". She offered her guests a chance to stay with a local and to experience the true nature of living in Te Ānau "without breaking the bank and experiencing the real authentic people of our 'hick town'" (quote from Philippa).

The Romantics believed in the power of wish fulfilment or 'utopian fantasy' that could transform daily life in order to return home to the lost Eden (Jameson, 1984). Airbnb hosts in this study enjoyed a dialogue-like capacity of social relations and

helping guests, which they shared through storytelling with other guests, their own friends and other hosts. This discursive practice presented their self-fulfilment and expressions of happiness to others. With home sharing, the hosts had the freedom to be whomever they wanted to be because they were “living authentically” (quote from Auckland host, Suzie). For example, an Airbnb host like Fenny was able to practice her Christian faith based on her moral values and demonstrate that role to guests, Fenny was on her way to her paradise:

*Home is still home. I open it up for guests to share with. I try to set the tone and lead it. Calling out to say “morning” if they're up or “bless you” as I leave. A reasonable amount of communication is required by both parties. I have all things that make my guests comfortable: fireplace, kitchen, baked goods, cosy bed.... The greatest compliment is when they say I was able to provide a home away from home. For me there's a strong Christian element to being hospitable; reaching out and sharing the love of Christ by being a good host. I don't just want to be an average host or provide the minimum for guests. I want to take care of them and give them a safe place to call home.*

Fenny aligned her narratives to hospitality ideologies of a religious and moral ethic that idealise sharing and opening the home to strangers. Her acts of “kindness” and love for others allowed her to feel like a good Christian but they could also be redeeming through renting out a piece of her ‘sacred’ home and personal time for money. Being hospitable and engaging in idealised home narratives supports hosts and guests in fantasising a space that is pure, sacred and protected from any profane consumption (in this case, commercial transactions). For instance, some of the hosts interviewed talked about a pay-it-forward notion, which they did not realise they were doing. Dana (Auckland host), a divorced mother of two, enjoyed being a guest and a host. As a financial journalist, she used rational thinking at work but her extra-curricular activities implied that she was passionate about more Romantic activities which involved creativity such as painting at home, creative fictional writing and her eclectic Brazilian-themed Airbnb home she decorated. Like the Romantics that longed for the lost paradise, she travelled across South America staying at Airbnbs and accepted kindness from the strangers she met:

*I've had some wonderful experiences as I travelled through Argentina, Brazil. Airbnb hosts there were so kind to me especially that my Portuguese and Spanish were rusty. They've really taken care of me given that I was travelling as a single woman after my divorce. I'll never forget that and I vowed to always do the same as a host here in Auckland. It's just being a good person, really. Treat others as you would want to be treated.*

Dana, at times, offered to pick up her guests for free from the train station, dropped them off in town and cooked dinner for them. Her self-expression was strongly intertwined with her values of sharing and giving back to the community. For hosts, the home-sharing network (or community as some hosts insisted on calling it), was their new paradise where they could spontaneously (a Romantic characteristic; Illouz, 1997) express themselves through their creative tastes in their home, their social interactions with guests and the types of material objects they placed in the Airbnb space. These expressions of brotherly and sisterly love allowed them to spiritually transform as they re-emerged with human nature through moral acts of kindness and love.

Hosts also expressed their desires for a new paradise inspired by instinctive and primitive human nature. They used modern-day technologies through their online Airbnb home listings and social media business pages to express their morality and love for others. Several hosted events and online discussion boards with threads dedicated to the design and staging of the physical home as well as the virtual listing (a digital embodiment of the physical space). These not only demonstrated their creativity (a Romantic characteristic) but it also gave them the canvas on which to design who they wanted to be and how they wanted to present themselves. Hosts had the opportunity to present themselves as generous human beings, kind, sharing, and hospitable through a technology-mediated virtual lifeworld due to their engagement with multimedia, photography and the creative process of spatial decoration in the home.

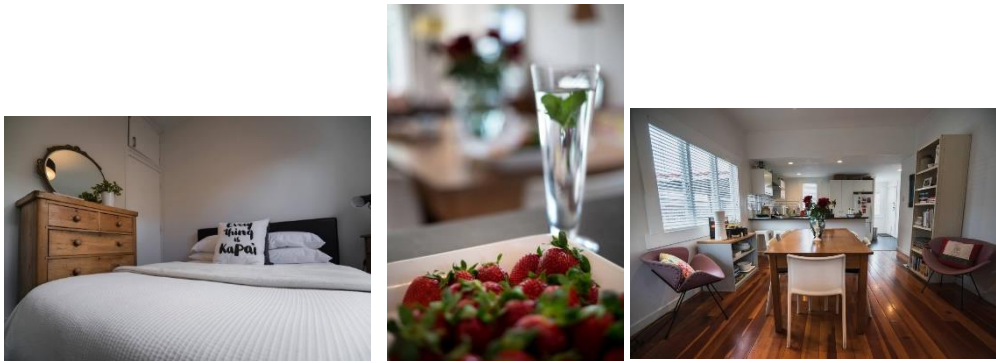
In general, the host's sharing process is based on the ideal human relationship that Romantics such as Rousseau believed embodies ideals of "sharing and giving" (Berman, 1972, p. 316). Hosts often begin with virtual communication and hospitable welcoming and end with virtual farewells and the online review system that acknowledges the sharing moments and the love of human nature. First, hosts greet guests through the Airbnb mobile messaging application followed by physical greetings, a welcome gift basket (that includes amenities and snacks), clean and warm bedding and mattress and written house rules that are in the form of a 'manual' for the home. They avoid using negative narratives such as 'rules', which are similar to characteristics of isolation and exclusion rather than community and belonging that the Romantics critiqued in the Enlightenment era of Rationalists. Sharing and hospitality for these hosts become life themes (Belk, 2010). This was demonstrated in the interview with Auckland host, Rosy:



*While visiting new places is always exciting, it's the people I meet and share the experiences with that remain my most enduring memories. I worked in Tourism for many years and never tire of seeing the wonderful response visitors have to our beautiful city and country. I love how Airbnb brings people together to share real experiences and local knowledge, and perhaps make new friends. I'm excited to be able to share my little piece of Auckland and all our wonderful city has to offer.*

For Rosy, belonging to a home-sharing platform such as Airbnb allowed her to showcase her pride in her city and her patriotism, but also linked to her emotional connection to others and selfless love she wanted to offer. As a single woman in her 50s, it was not difficult to conceive how lonely life might be. Rosy filled her spare time after work with travel, taking care of her cat, and meeting people through Airbnb during her journey towards self-discovery and fulfilment. She did not want to rent out her room to a full-time housemate because it did not fulfil her cravings for social bonds and helping many travellers discover Auckland. Helping the majority of citizens over the individual is yet another ideal characteristic of the Romantics.

As prototypical sharing is personal and reproduces social relationships, Rosy staged her home to represent her creative and adventurous persona and showcased it to her guests. She described herself in her online Airbnb profile as a sociable person, and fond of community life. Photographs taken of her home were used in her online listing to accompany her romanticised narrative description of herself and the shared space. Online visuals became another way of materialising sharing narratives that encouraged “the spirit of sharing and friendship” in her home (as quoted by Rosy). Rosy staged her ‘virtual home’ with captioned quotes that expressed a homey appeal. Her online photographs (featured in Figure 11) and corresponding captions demonstrate what she is happy to offer her guests: “I enjoy meeting my guests and want you to feel at home, so I will also respect your privacy”, “Home is where the heart is”, “Take the weight off your feet” and “Everything is Ka pai” (i.e., good in Māori). The virtual home may also provide expressive capacities of comfort, sense of home, the host’s hospitality and belonging (whether to a community or a bigger cause like home-sharing networks).



**Figure 11: Images from participant Auckland host: Rosy's online listing**

In order to build a harmonious environment that allowed for collaboration and friendship, Rosy used some secondary components such as Airbnb assigned photographers<sup>5</sup> to truly capture the essence of her “authentic” self and her “open” home (quotes from Rosy). Rosy discussed how the setup of her home allowed for social interactions and friendships to take place:

*I guess my personality comes through in the house. I've got photos of my children, my life. My son took the one [points to a large frame] of Lion Rock [iconic landmark in Piha, NZ coastal village]. He's into photography and Piha is a special place for us where we grew up. Guests even ask about the caricature of the “Māori lady”; we bought it from a family trip to Kaikōura. I tell them it represents my Māori blood from my father's side. I think the house has a really nice energy too. You know when I first walked into it I had a similar feel. It's open space to the deck so it feels more welcoming. The vibe is good here too. People often find me sitting in the communal area [TV space] and we can chat. This is the ideal scenario for me.*

Rosy later explained that her ideal sharing experience was to make people feel welcome and part of her life. To her, sharing was symbolic of Kiwi (also a nickname for the people of New Zealand) hospitality:

*My goal with guests is to be responsive and authentic. I like being able to anticipate their needs and bring my personality and my community to life. They're here because they want to experience all of that. You know a little microcosm so I anticipate those needs. In my welcome folder I address some of those things and help them just feel very comfortable about coming in and knowing exactly where everything is, what's their space-like, what they can use and that I'm relaxed about them using the kitchen and making themselves at home. Sometimes we have meals together and it's been more sociable so really just responding and providing a positive experience for them. I want*

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<sup>5</sup> The Airbnb company offers hosts the opportunity to hire local photographers (assigned/approved by them) to visit the home and take photos free of charge.

*them to go away feeling, “Oh my Gosh this is such a cool thing. It’s my first Airbnb; what a neat place New Zealand is and aren’t New Zealanders cool.”*

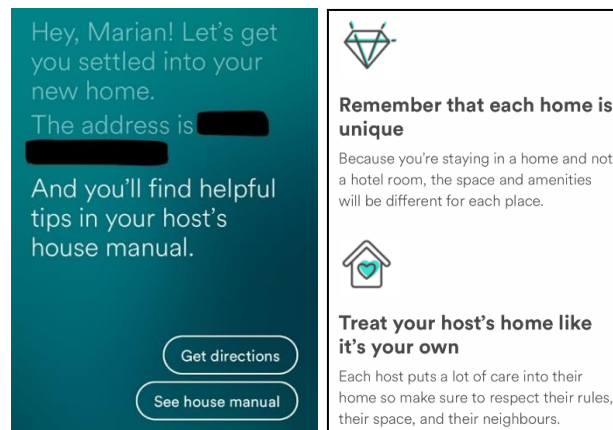
Rosy’s interview and observation of her Airbnb home demonstrated that spatial dimensions and materials (e.g., welcome folder) supported her self-expressive desires and her fulfilment of doing good, that is, demonstrating kindness and generosity to others based on her selfless pursuit of love towards mankind. The home space resembled a stage where she performed sharing, which allowed her to contribute to others’ travel experiences positively. The dimensions of the home (doors, walls, lighting and windows) may have impacted how the performance was perceived by prospective guests. For instance, Rosy’s home had large amounts of light through her balcony windows that made the shared spaces more inviting and warm (McCracken, 1989). Her attempts to portray her personal identity through interactions with her guests (Crang, 1997) allowed her to feel the joys and self-fulfilment of hosting thus making her feel a part of a moral economy. Rosy, along with many other hosts, made great efforts to create homeyness in the Airbnb spaces to promote sociality and a return to human nature. Because of their nurturing qualities, some Airbnb hosts also wanted to help guests to re-emerge with the natural world and return through the symbolic and physical properties that they had creatively set up. Examples can be seen in Rosy’s Airbnb home with the use of mnemonic properties, that is, significant objects that carried a family history such as her family photos from Piha and a caricature of the “Māori lady” (quote from Rosy). These symbolised a past with meaning and history, which effectively personalised the space, even to strangers. According to her previous quotes, Rosy also believed that the physical properties of her home (i.e., lighting, large balcony windows, wooden floors) were culturally represented in authentic and informal symbolic properties that put people at ease and allowed guests to experience genuine sharing (McCracken, 1989). Rosy’s end goal was to help her guests “feel right at home and a part of her life” (quote from Rosy), which is a situating property that her creative house design and set up helped her achieve.

The Airbnb home therefore allowed hosts to express their identities through their space as natural, creative and selfless. The idea of access to a host’s home for a fee is therefore transformed from a commodity-base to a space for social relationships and connectedness to human nature. It represents homeyness’s pragmatic property of marketplace correcting where the space and the objects are inalienable to guests. To

differentiate themselves from market exchange commonness, hosts regulate the presentation of the space and its contents in Airbnb homes by allowing for a perceived 'realness' that does not impose a very foreign identity on guests whilst not alienating them from the space either. Host couple Sandra and Chris designed their home to represent "the right amount of 'me'" in order to avoid alienation of their guests (quote from Sandra). These physical and material objects are part of the hosts' process of recreating a mythologised paradise where they can return to the old notion of human nature that was once moral, kind, agapic and harmonious rather than the alternatives existent in modern society of calculated, individualistic and selfish love that tries to commoditise forms of intimacy and friendships.

Throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Romantics were on a spiritual journey as a way of identity-building and expressing a longing for an idealised paradise. That paradise of creativity and harmony was believed to "bubble up from an irrational unconscious" (Sawyer, 2014, p. 15). Self-expression, for Berman (1972), is intrinsically intertwined with the shared values of the larger community. In the context of the home-sharing community, this is no different. Travellers are sometimes seen as utilitarian and rational thinkers that are searching for cost-effective deals (Guttentag, 2015). However, the Airbnb guest demonstrates a fusion between rational needs and a dialectical Romantic perspective of travel and accommodation. Some of the guests I interviewed illustrated this. I first begin with Airbnb's communication to prospective guests.

Airbnb's advertising campaigns solidify the fluid notion of home with their advertising campaigns and taglines of "live anywhere" or "make a home wherever you go". Similarly, Airbnb penetrates the idea of homeyness when travelling with their communication to guests that includes narratives such as the digital messages (see Figure 12) sent through the mobile application to guests which prepare them for their sharing experience by suggesting that the home is theirs to look after.



**Figure 12: Mobile application messages sent to guests prior to their Airbnb stay**

Airbnb’s discourses clearly differentiate homes from hotels. The home is where sharing, care and Romantic love can take place. In contrast, hotel rooms offer more “cookie-cutter”, “clinical and common” options where commercial considerations can destroy intimacy and human being’s natural disposition to share and offer genuine hospitality to guests (as quoted by guests Nick and Jenny). While guests interviewed in this study chose Airbnb shared homes as they found the economic value attractive, they still described the social connectedness of home-sharing platforms. French guests and romantic couple Nick and Jenny, both in their mid-20s, decided to resign from their jobs in France to travel the world for a few months. They were on a budget and so naturally they preferred competitively-priced accommodation for their travels. However, they chose Airbnb homes over hostels for their personal appeal and freedom to cook, interact with hosts and feel safe. Their interview was quite pessimistic and focused on the loss of humanity and kindness in the world. Pessimism and emotional distress characterised Romanticism, where the Romantics were sensitised to a feeling of loss, that is, a conviction of something being lost from their worlds. Airbnb guests believed that values of harmony between humanity and the natural world, passion and social connectedness, had been lost amongst the more rational and calculated desires of modern society. With home sharing, the gap began to close for guests, and they could once again return to the new spiritual ‘home’. Nick and Jenny explained their drive to staying at Airbnbs:

*Nick: With hotels, you always come across people in uniforms; they're working and when they work they tend to leave their human part aside and be just a uniform. So, when we come in a hotel lobby you need to straighten up a*

*little bit, act natural. But with Airbnb, you can be yourself. No formalities... you can be wild, crazy and free.*

*Jenny: Elevators, lobbies, all that is restrictive. Here you come straight to your place, open the door and boom. Hotels seem neutral; just like big brands. They have their own standards but no personality. Companies can be rough... cold-hearted. I want a little humanity in the world and as long as there is no humanity in the product or service I'm using, then it's not good for me. It makes me feel bad inside.*

*Nick: With Airbnb, you can be in some kind of bubble where it can be just us. With a hotel, you're going to see many other tourists, the staff, people that come here to relax but they don't relax. The rat race continues. We want to get away from all of this. We don't feel like tourists, but like locals. You don't need to socialise. You just need to get away from people. Sometimes, they're just like a contagious disease. They're like zombies – they'll always want a piece of you.*

While consumption was aestheticized as positive signs of passion, genius and spirituality, consumption was also perceived as a paradoxically glamorous Romantic disease that brought melancholy, sadness and death to the Romantics (Lawlor, 2006). For Nick and Jenny, human beings in modern society and corporations were self-centred individualists that had much to gain from selling accommodation aside from the obvious monetary benefits. The control over their freedom and self-expression could be suffocating enough to cause an 'early death' (Lawlor, 2006). Nick and Jenny chose to escape to Airbnb home sharing that was distant from people carrying the consumption disease. When I questioned them about their thoughts on hosts and sharing space with them, they answered as follows:

*Nick: Hosts are spiritually different. Suzie [current host at the time] is easy going and calming. She gives us our space but, in a way, we feel she's also taking care of us. We feel so safe. It's nice to feel that someone has our back, you know. By feeling her presence in our space like her arms are the walls protecting us, we feel her caring for us. She left us home-made muffins, the cottage is beautifully clean. These are ways that make us feel loved. That's why we use Airbnb. I followed my intuition when booking Suzie's place. Hosts like her, most of the time, are just genuine.*

In the minds of guests, Airbnb and home-sharing practices with their discreet signs of love and care (e.g., clean home, baking) are processes in which they return to what they perceive as primitive human nature; a belief of many of the early Romantics. As Nick and Jenny mentioned in their earlier quote, sociality is not the only practice through which sharing can occur as part of human nature's purest form. Suzie did not

have to be present for them to feel her warmth; the home space and its objects were sufficient enough for them to feel they were on the path to a harmonious paradise.

Feeling a sense of homeyness is one of a person's most important life goals (McCracken, 1987). It invites friendly interactions in the home and allows for self-discovery and freedom of expression. Data from guests demonstrated that homeyness could be materialised not only in the homey materials, but through the walls of the home (exterior and interior) and embodied in the hosts themselves. When Pamela (Queenstown) travelled around the U.S. as a guest, she felt comfort and a sense of homeyness when she met her host. The following excerpt from her interview illustrates several factors of homeyness that connect to a return to a primitive human nature of caring:

*In Denver I remember we stayed with a lady called Moira. She was wonderful. She lived in an Adobe house. I thought I'd love to stay in one. And it was quite a Bohemian district. I follow my instincts when booking and I had a good vibe from that Airbnb. Once we got inside, the warmth in that place... it was just lovely, and she had two big dogs. She was lovely and warm too. She had a business making jams. She invited us to see her jam factory, so we went down and looked around. We really enjoyed it. It gives you an insight into Moira's life. Before long we talked more and heard about problems with her boyfriend. My husband was giving her advice. She said in her feedback we were the best guests she's ever had. It's that human connection that we love. I strongly believe in the human interaction side of it that makes THIS so special.*

An interpretation of the previous quotes shows that guests used imagination as a powerful tool that the Romantics previously used to express and reach a "spirit of possibility" that "shapes the human spirit" (Dabundo, 1992, p. 549). Guest Pamela and guests Nick and Jenny all followed their "sixth sense" (quote from Pamela) when choosing an Airbnb home to stay in. They also used imaginative means to make the impossible possible for them. For instance, Pamela was looking for a social transformation as a retiree during her travels and as a host while Nick and Jenny searched for a personal transformation as they revered their self and personal journeys as divine during their travel experiences. Using the Airbnb platform technology, hosts demonstrate their creativity through the appeal of well-shot photographs, poetic use of storytelling to describe an Airbnb home and even using guests' reviews, either passionate or aggressive, as expressions of Romanticism. Narratives are known for their power to enhance the affective and cognitive responses of readers (Van Laer, Ruyter, Visconti, & Wetzels, 2014) and so they are likely to ignite a prospect guest's

imagination. Guests such as Nick and Jenny used indexical cues such as Suzie's Superhost (highest rank for hosts) title, her 100 reviews that were majorly positive, and the photographs of the space to make an informed rational decision but they also engaged their own imagination and went with their "gut feeling" (quote from Nick and Jenny) and aesthetic feeling, which is a very non-scientific and irrational process. Their world trip had many spontaneous and last-minute bookings for accommodation which excited and delighted them as they often had nothing to go by but their own imagination of what the places they randomly booked might actually be like. Similar to Nick and Jenny, many other guests implied that spontaneity, irrationality and the value of their freedom of choice of where to stay and who they wanted to interact with were extremely important in their decisions to use home sharing over other accommodation alternatives. With Airbnb home-sharing spaces, guests as well as hosts can re-imagine a nostalgic time where the general will and freedom were valued over individualistic and calculated motives.

#### **4.3.3 Imagining the General Will**

Airbnb works by a dual booking platform: hosts can select who they want to accept in their homes and guests can choose where they want to stay. This is what hosts and guests believe is the value of freedom that the Airbnb home-sharing platform offers. The duality of home sharing also involves a dual review system where both guests and hosts can review one another so a fair and trustworthy home-sharing system is created. Airbnb's systems that are put in place are engineered for the general benefit and public interest of the home-sharing community. It allows for trust to take place, which is a fundamental foundation between buyers and sellers in conventional markets (Granovetter, 1985). With a dual system of reviews, hosts and guests are expected to provide honest feedback about the other, whether to give audiences warnings or recommendations. This is part of a set of values prescribed by a market's 'moral economy', that is, an economy based on goodness, justice and fairness for all citizens (Thompson, 1991).

The notion of a general will is illustrated in Airbnb's advertising, and stories from hosts and guests that demonstrate an imagined and willed common interest as a cultural movement. To begin with, the Airbnb Company advertises certain values and moral ideologies to inform the public of what they stand for. Home sharing is framed as a way for the inclusion of different cultures, with corresponding images that provide



expressive capacities reflecting hosts opening of their homes to strangers, embracing of the culture, and sharing special moments. This narrative has been materialised (Entwistle & Slater, 2013) through Airbnb's global advertising campaigns and yearly launches with taglines such as "*Airbnb for everyone*", "*live like a local*" and "*belong anywhere*" (also see Figure 13). This discourse that integrates individuals and common wellbeing reflects a Romantic desire - freedom to be whoever they want to be, thereby contributing to a warm brother (sister) hood and social bonds within communities. These are qualities human beings enjoyed in pre-modern times, when calculated rationality was not as widespread as it became in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Löwy & Sayre, 2001).

The value of belonging and fostering connections were important for hosts like Fiona (Auckland) who told me of her experience with Airbnb when it first launched in New Zealand:

*Fiona: I think you're cocooned in a hotel. You'd be in this total bubble; a cotton world where you're protected from the rest of the world. You're also under the impression that you're a bit scared to get out into the big wide world. The lovely thing about Airbnb is you can learn about others' cultures and how they live because you're usually in a neighbourhood. You step out the door and you go round the corner to get the milk or bread. You're right in with people and their day to day lives. I think it makes you feel like you 'belong'. It's not like you're a stranger and you're no longer afraid.*

*Interviewer: What does belonging mean to you?*

*Fiona: I mean I'm here and I'm doing the things you guys are doing as well. And when you're standing at the local butcher for example and you're not sure how to pronounce things they'll say it and they'll help you. I think it's a sense of belonging. Belonging and acceptance. Look, we all do the same thing every morning. We need the milk, bread, fruit. It doesn't matter where you are in the world we're all part of something universal. I think it is feeling part of the neighbourhood; feeling included. You don't feel so much like a temporary visitor like you would in hotels. The very act of doing daily things, daily rituals you are a part of all that's happening. It's great that you can do that.*

Fiona believed in the ideals of sharing that are closely intertwined with the ideals of "belonging anywhere" that Airbnb advertises. As a value that disseminates through all communication channels between Airbnb and the public, the collective will of the people over the individualistic will (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) is what defines a system of beliefs that promotes a common interest. The shared goals of the home-sharing community members and Airbnb is channelled and reproduced through hosts and guests' thoughts and actions in defence of a civic virtue towards others. Fiona spoke

of the power of the value of belonging and acceptance of others, which is something she strongly stood by. As important values are part of one's sense of self (Belk, 1988; Taylor, 1989), we can therefore assume that home-sharing processes are ways to encourage belonging and acceptance of others is part of the extended self. Acceptance of others different from us is another common moral virtue shared by Airbnb as well as many guests and hosts.

In 2017 and around the time I interviewed Fiona, the President of the United States (Donald Trump) at that time was moving to implement a travel ban for immigrants, refugees and citizens from seven Muslim countries wanting to enter the United States. Airbnb was one of the most aggressive corporate critics of President Trump and created an opposing advertisement (see Figure 13) with advertising copy that said, "We believe no matter who you are, where you're from, who you love or who you worship, we all belong. The world is more beautiful the more you accept others." An appropriately Romantic notion, Airbnb's ideals of caring and acceptance of everyone has made headlines in New Zealand news and across the host and guest online community pages. At the same time, hosts must now digitally sign an agreement with Airbnb through the platform that they are committed to inclusion and respect of other human beings. In Airbnb's communication to hosts, they inform them of their non-discrimination manifesto-like policy (brief excerpt included below):

*Airbnb is, at its core, an open community dedicated to bringing the world closer together by fostering meaningful, shared experiences amongst people from all parts of the world. Our community includes millions of people from virtually every country on the globe. It is an incredibly diverse community, drawing together individuals of different cultures, values, and norms. The Airbnb community is committed to building a world where people from every background feel welcome and respected, no matter how far they have travelled from home. This commitment rests on two foundational principles that apply both to Airbnb's hosts and guests: **inclusion and respect**.*



**Figure 13: #WeAccept campaign during the February 2017 Super Bowl in response to the potential U.S. travel ban (Airbnb, 2017)**

In Fiona's idealised picture of the Airbnb community, she felt proud of the Airbnb community she belonged to as well as the practices and values the company instils in its members such as the drive for greater equality for a better world. Not only was she proud of her affiliation with these moral values but she wanted to share what she had (i.e., her home and city) that materialised sharing and expressed her feelings of patriotism and generosity. Following Airbnb's Superbowl advertisement which she had seen on YouTube channels and shared amongst her online host members of the community, Fiona was "in awe" of Airbnb's opposition to the President, which to her, embodied "an attack against evil for the greater good of society" (quote from Fiona). She disapproved of the news from the United States and recalled similar discriminatory incidents that happened in New Zealand in which European hosts declined booking requests from Māori guests (see Newshub, 2017). Her regret over this decline in the kindness of humanity attests how, as Romantics argued, the cold, exclusionary and instrumentalism of modern society ignores the general will and public affairs (Löwy & Sayre, 2001).

Interpretations of Airbnb's home-sharing demonstrate that it is 'morally good'. Socially supportive, pure and kind were also common in early media articles during the initial push of sharing economy businesses in NZ. Early on, media articles valorised images of NZ hosts opening their homes to international tourists and different races and cultures and they used beautiful New Zealand picturesque scenery to demonstrate the great homes shared on the Airbnb market. Media copy such as "Airbnb lets travellers have a unique taste of NZ" accompanying images of social interactions (see Figure 14) were used to emphasise the beauty of homes, and acceptance of strangers that become friends. Other media articles drew on fantasy and wrote of mystical Airbnb homes that can bring guests exciting and unique experiences with fantastic narratives that introduce homes that can reflect lifeworld fantasies as "people in glass houses", "journey to new heights" or "defy[ing] gravity" (NZ Herald, 2017). A NZ host who started out as a guest was interviewed by Stuff (national NZ news site) considered the (at the time) new experience unique and imaginative: *"I loved how much more colourful and homier the experience was compared to a backpackers.... Airbnb has some devastatingly beautiful homes on offer, full of clean Swedish lines, fresh flowers and a fascinating mix of guests"* (Arnold, 2014). Hosts believe that by offering their homes on the Airbnb website, they are *"helping with the economy and tourism"*, *"introducing people to the*

‘real’ New Zealand” and “giving guests a safe, clean and comfortable environment” (quotes from members of the Airbnb host online community group).



**Figure 14: Images from news stories on Airbnb. Source: NZ Herald newspaper and Stuff.co.nz (Ennion, 2013; NZ Herald, 2017)**

Similarly, Wellington host couple, Sandy and Greg, in their mid-30s at the time of the interview, illustrated how the narrative of a ‘greater good’ for the people manifested itself in the home-sharing network and could be intertwined with rational motivations. The couple explained how their journey towards home sharing was “rocky” and “filled with hardships”. The married couple moved to Wellington from Auckland for a more affordable life and to buy their first home. Unfortunately, due to some downturns in the NZ economy and company resource cutbacks, Greg lost his job and they decided to join Airbnb to manage his professional precarity of insecurity and instability (Morgan & Nelligan, 2015). During the interview, Sandy expressed how hosting gave them the freedom to control their own destinies:

*Financially Airbnb is the biggest advantage I would say, especially with me at home on maternity leave and Greg unfortunately having lost his job last year. It’s been a Godsend to help pay our mortgage and bills. Hosting gives us and I’m sure many other New Zealanders, the financial freedom.*

Financially motivated to support their livelihood, Sandy’s quote initially demonstrates instrumental-rationality and economic motivations for their hosting. However, Sandy believed hosting could also become a way to give back to the community and contribute to global sharing:

*The fact that we have a space that is usable that someone can stay in, we may as well make it available. I don’t know if you’ve read the stories about people buying houses and just leaving them empty for a year and there’s people that need accommodation, so I just think if you have the space, if you have the room and you don’t mind sharing and you are able to, why not.*

To make up for her desire to earn income out of her home, Sandy's discourses and orated beliefs exemplified her romanticised notions of home sharing to help others. With this knowledge, Greg continued to convince me (and possibly himself) of their contribution to society through sharing:

*We could have rented the granny flat out, you know. But we didn't want to be landlords. We wanted to be hosts helping others out. Sometimes you get to know them [guests] and you sort of feel for them I guess. Like when we had the earthquake here in November our place was inundated with bookings because the ferries got cancelled, so we had a lot of young travellers needing a place to stay. Of course, we didn't have enough room to host everyone. I had to decline quite a few people. I guess you kind of put yourself in their shoes. If I was stuck somewhere, I would hope that I could find somewhere to stay the night. We had one guest that said they were going to sleep in the car. I was like, 'oh no, we have some floor space'. It's not something that Airbnb would probably advertise, and hotels and motels would never ever do, but I'm sure that most people with a heart would not want to see someone sleeping in their car. A lot of Kiwis pulled together when the city was not safe because of all the buildings and stuff. I think a lot of the hosts in these outer suburbs were offering to host people because as a tourist you'd be scared of being in a foreign country with an earthquake.*

The 'general will' is a Romantic notion infused with empathy for others and the desire to pay-it-forward – ideals that collectively provide a positive impact on the world and human beings. In times of crisis or natural disaster, Sandy and Greg as well as other hosts I interviewed believed that acts of sharing and caring could save people and help them to reach a common good and free will, similar to the Romantic citizen that sought to "[rise] above private interest and become a moral person" (Wheatly, 1994, p. 7). Hosts tend to imagine a better world through the business of home sharing where their own wellbeing can be integrated with that of all human beings – a similar desire for integration held by Romantics. People's actions based on freedom and the imagination can contribute to warm brotherly (or sisterly) love and social bonds as opposed to the cold-hearted corporate world.

While the Airbnb guests that took part in this study were not always aware of Airbnb's discourses and advertising, which is usually directed at hosts, guests valued the freedom of choice of Airbnb homes that the technology allowed for (as previously mentioned by Nick and Jenny) and liberation from the corporate hold on people's money and lives. Karen, a Greek guest in her mid-30s, demonstrated how her support of Airbnb brought her and other people one step closer to overcoming the metaphorical control corporates have over her and others:

*I choose to stay at Airbnbs over hotel chains, first, because it's convenient for my family; second because I want to experience hosts' personal touch and living in that country the way a local person would. For example, in Rome we really felt what it would be like to live in Rome. We were 'real' Italians. A hotel room can be confined and suffocating. Not just because it's small but because the staff and big chain are, too. I want to get the opportunity to be a resident in a city or town and help the host at the same time. I'd rather give my money to the little guy and I know I'll get all the hospitality in the world from them.*

Historically, revolutions were born and legitimated with notions of the general will following Rousseau's book *Social Contract* that many treated as a political revolutionary manifesto. In his *Social Contract*, Rousseau maintains that "man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains" (Rousseau, 1968, p. 61). For Rousseau, these chains were because of civilisation's corruption and the constraining forces of institutions that perpetuated a system of inequality and political power. Rousseau believed that human beings can be set free from these chains by uniting the people for a common good. Similarly, many guests believe that Airbnb is endowed with virtues of social solidarity and a moral economy (Fontaine, 2014) and they choose to support Airbnb hosts as a form of anti-corporate chain movement. Karen travelled around New Zealand and mostly stayed at Airbnb or other BnBs as her "little contribution to small business", given that she owned a small consulting business herself and understood the struggles of competing against "the big guns", as she called larger companies.

Guests like Karen felt empathetic towards hosts. As a host and a guest, Angelica from Wellington (late 30s) was a big believer in P2P businesses and helping young families or the elderly that were hosting in their homes. She felt that freedom could only be acquired through resistance to government demands and supporting hosts like Elizabeth (Angelica referred me to a YouTube advertorial; see Figure 15):

*When I travel, I look for authentic experiences. None of that hotel crap. It's these experiences where you can feel joy together with the host and maybe even cry together. That's happened to me as a host. I've seen people get married here and even break down in tears with heart-breaking stories. Government is trying to crack down on Airbnb hosts, but why? Hosts are trying to earn an extra income while creating memorable experiences with travellers. Look at what's happening in Queenstown [she refers me to the story on Queenstown host Elizabeth and the commercial rates imposed on hosts]. The government is in bed with the hotel industry, I tell you.*



**Figure 15: Airbnb outdoor advertisement (left) and Airbnb YouTube Channel with an advertisement (right) of a Queenstown host advocating for equal hosting rights.**

While Angelica never said she would resist the government's authoritative hand as occurred in the French Revolution, which saw a fight for the liberty and equality of the classes (Wolloch, 1993), she did stress that when she travelled as a guest, she chose to support the "cause". For instance, in countries like Singapore where short-term rentals of private homes are illegal (Au-Yong, 2018), hosts and guests choose to go underground to continue with their unified experience of home sharing by defying the government:

*The host told us not to tell anyone in the building this is an Airbnb. "Just say we're friends," he said. We said that's fine. He said he'd meet with us at a nearby restaurant and we'd walk together to the apartment. It's illegal to do this in Singapore. No one's going to open their homes and do it openly. He said that there are many hosts that will continue to do it... they don't care. Hotels, governments, neighbours... they're all against Airbnb. It's a host's right and we agree any host should be able to do what they want in their own home. The thing is, it's not about me or you, but it's about hospitality through hosting people. If we don't do something, the fight AGAINST home sharing will escalate. The media and governments think we're making millions. We're making millions but not in dollars, in friends! (Angelica)*

For the Romantics, consumption processes and experiences were always wrought with conflict as they challenged opposing beliefs, rules and authorities that tried to deny their freedom. Many other cities are imposing similar regulations against Airbnb hosts such as New York, Barcelona, Paris and most recently, New Zealand where hosts are required to pay higher commercial taxes and are limited in the number of days they can host. In a sense, Angelica and other guests supporting home sharing displayed a moral truth within an uncorrupted self. Their support of home sharing went beyond that of the self to encompass the aggregate self, represented by the community of home sharers. Angelica's last quote clearly identifies the hospitality within home

sharing and she stressed the equal rights for hosts to exercise freedom in the home space and guests to experience cities “in authentic local ways” (quote from Angelica). The value that hosts gain with home sharing, from Angelica’s perspective, is the social connection and creation of relationships for a better future and more humane society where everyone can belong.

#### **4.3.4 Pioneering a New Order**

The previous discussions make it clear that hosts and guests have a desire for the creation of a new order. The Romantics were hopeful, waiting for a social and cultural revolution that could solve the problems of humanity and the social chaos (Abrams, 1971; Gilligan, 1982). The Romantics critiqued the Rationalists who looked to reason, truth and observation to solve these issues. They believed in a spiritual revolution made possible through the power of the supernatural self (i.e., the power of the mind) (Dabundo, 1992). Hosts interviewed for this study believed that the sharing economy was initiated as a call for the abandonment of the old paradigm of consumption for a new paradigm. This paradigm shift sees the potential of sweeping away problems from the past to create a better future and a new order in a new paradise. In this new paradise, consumption and the relationship between producers and consumers allow humanity to return to the natural world again where human beings can live in harmony amongst themselves.

The notion of an apocalyptic new order or a utopian society (Abrams, 1971) was implicitly described by hosts and is supported by the Airbnb company. Like the Romantics, they believed that change to a better society begins with the renewal of the self and the power of the imagination. Airbnb uses advertising to instil a Romantic nostalgia for beauty, harmony amongst human beings and becoming one with nature. The nostalgia of home sharing is a reflection of this Romantic nostalgia found in our contemporary consumption domain (see Thompson & Troester, 2002).

Airbnb contributes to this narrative by materialising the financial benefits of Airbnb through further outdoor advertising (see Figure 16). However, their advertising taglines romanticise the financial security of hosting by idealising hosting as a means to reach identity goals such as “adventures”, “travelling” and “creativity”. Many of the hosts that I interviewed were not aware of Airbnb until they saw these early outdoor advertisements around New Zealand. The advertisements resonated with many hosts of all age groups and the narrative attached drew a vision of an imaginative world of



dreams and beauty. They emphasised self-affirmation and esteem, which were foundations of the Romantics' characteristics. Advertisements that focus on the divine aspects of the self, or the self's development become central themes in evoking the divinity of a future world that is improved and morally good. Hosts such as co-habiting Auckland couple, Sandra and Chris spoke about their personal development through their journey with Airbnb by first starting out as guests and later deciding to host. They shared the city apartment they lived in with guests. They considered themselves creative individuals, whereby Sandra was a public relations professional by day, and a painter by night while Chris was employed as a digital marketer by day and went sailing on the weekends. For Sandra, hosting changed the trajectory of her life, which according to her "could be boring and work focused":

*Hosting is a hobby business for us not a real one. I enjoy it. I get to meet and chat to different people. When I can't travel because of work, I get to have travellers and talk to them about their adventures. I love sharing my love of Auckland with guests. I've never said the same thing over and over again which is weird considering I do say the same thing over and over but personalised for each guest. I've learnt so much about myself along the way. Actually, my love for art was resurrected when I first started hosting and I wanted to give my home some colour for guests. I buy canvas and paint right here [points to the Airbnb's floors]. I'm even inspired by some of my guests. I had a guest come for a crime scene investigation convention. We talked about blood splatter and afterwards I painted the canvas behind you just of blood splatter. I've definitely changed as a person and feel more reconnected with my hobbies of art and design.*

The perceived new order in the "early paradise" saw hosts re-emerging as better human beings able to return to their Romantic roots of creativity. Chris spoke to me about his job in a creative company, which was "not so creative" in his opinion. Rational thinking and bureaucracy had drawn the company's creativity to a halt. He referred me to the Airbnb advertisements (see Figure 16) that he immediately connected with, which got him back on track with his hobby of sailing:

*Even though I still don't sail except on the weekends, I know that home sharing as an extra income can give me the added income to afford sailing again. I can be a happier partner, and a happier co-worker when I get to go out to sea. I love telling the guests about my spiritual journeys at sea. What else was I going to talk to them about? Digital marketing? Hah!*

The freedom that Chris experienced gave him an opportunity for self-discovery and self-growth. Like the Romantics, hosts can re-emerge as heroes of their own stories that they script themselves. Chris escaped from his daily routine of life and his work

problems, that were entrenched with instrumental rationality, while Sandra took to hosting and painting to escape from hers. By inspiring virtues within themselves that they aspire to, hosts are able to inspire that virtue to the whole world through their mobilised home-sharing space where its inhabitants can re-emerge with the natural world and the natural state of human beings that is free, mythological and vitalised with a zest for life.



**Figure 16: Airbnb outdoor campaign in Auckland, New Zealand, May 2016**

There have been other news stories focused on the successful income that comes from hosting and savings made during travel, and Airbnb is a great economic boost for the NZ hospitality industry (Hosking, 2017). It appears that such discourses allow for a global common understanding of home sharing and constitutes the specific market logic of hosting and hospitality as a return to a new paradise. These helped define the content, cultural meanings and practices of home sharing and shape what actors pay attention to (Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015).

Along with the previously discovered themes, the interviews show that Airbnb hosts find home-sharing processes and their interactions with guests as the new pathway to paradise where they can spontaneously express their inner imagination and creativity through self-growth (e.g., rejuvenating old skills and learning new skills), self-expression (e.g., displaying their skills) and self-verification (e.g., validating their identity). The home-sharing process becomes their journey to freedom and gives way to their spiritual revolution where the self and nature represent the highest and most absolute order that individuals must evolve to (Abrams, 1971). These ideals and the

strong focus on one's self and the acceptance of the supernatural and the spiritual self over rational thoughts are the hallmarks of Romanticism.

Guests are self-transformative as they travel in search of ways to return to the natural world and the natural state of humankind. This is based on the Romantic nostalgia for a lost paradise and a desire for values of sharing, kindness and giving. Guests demonstrated a Romantic longing for an idealised past or future selves in their interviews as well as in reviews of their hosts that exemplified guests' desires for a new order: *Great to meet relaxed hosts!*", *"Why can't all hosts be nice, hospitable and honest caretakers? This is for the progress of Airbnb, future guests and the whole sharing economy"*, *"Fantastic to be able to feel at home not in a show home!"*, *"Thanks for allowing us to laze! It's got to be such a competition now, we thought Airbnb was about sharing a home not a 5-star place you dare not breath in"*, *"Your place is unique in not only it being a church but that we can sit, talk, enjoy, relax and have fun. Why are most BnBs now like motels or hotel?"*, *"SOC Retreat [name of the Airbnb] brings us hope that there are still good people out there."* Lastly, one guest even quoted a Michael Jackson's song, "Heal the World", to describe their dreams and longing for a new world of sharing: *"Heal the world. Make it a better place, for you and for me, and the entire human race. There are people dying. If you care enough for the living, make it a better place for you and for me."*

Based on these guests' comments, the narratives point toward a nostalgic longing for real people and genuine hospitality and not the cold and calculated host that cares for money over an experience. They also point to a Romantic preoccupation with the future that sweeps problems (social, political and cultural) away and looks towards a positive future. Homey objects and homey spaces signify the embrace that these guests are looking for, offering comfort and protection like a parental embrace (McCracken, 1989). For instance, guests at the church-turned-Airbnb in Oamaru were not looking for luxury accommodation but a place of comfort and self-expression where they could experience messages of hope and creativity. Pragmatic properties of status correction (McCracken, 1989), such as the SOC Airbnb Retreat in Oamaru, offer guests a sense of homeyness as a defence against status competition. The Oamaru host, Julia, a spirit medium, palm reader and spiritual guide, believed in the power of purity and spiritual journey that hosts "should take" in order to reach an early paradise. She shared her thoughts to her fellow hosts in the online community group:

*I much prefer to provide our services and SOC Retreat as a down-to-earth church-home than to be in constant competition with those offering the best and most pretentious luxury. For me, home sharing is part of our way of life not a business. I don't want to be sucked in to all the competition and rules, when all it takes is offering respect and openness, and a relaxed homey atmosphere to share. So alongside Superhost, how about a category for Homey Hosts? Or even better, how about remaining true to the idea of affordable home-sharing accommodation, so we are not in competition with motels/ hotels at all and we don't get forced into the commercial sector! I've created SOC Retreat as a home for everyone. I have volunteers taking care of the once-upon a time church grounds too. It will surpass my life and leave a legacy behind that continues to uphold real home-sharing experiences.*

Julia called for hosts to go back to the roots of home sharing by offering a relaxed atmosphere that carries Romantic messages of emotional sensitivity and uniqueness over the rational appeal of objects and the careful construction of a luxury lifestyle. Julia's idealised home-sharing "community" that she built her spiritual Airbnb church on suggests she valued public interests that resemble a primitive lifestyle of home sharing where equality and the common good are reinstated and can maintain a defence against status strategies that have no place in paradise. Julia refused to participate in host competitions. She endeavoured to create a space that would outlive her and continue to benefit future generations. Her guests similarly searched for a pure and renovated space on earth that followed through on Airbnb's original promise of "home sharing", and "belonging anywhere" (Airbnb, 2018a), in comparison to some hosts' homes that were "pretentious and uncomfortable" (SOC Retreat guest comment on other Airbnb stays). The new order overlays all the dimensions of Romanticism to bring hosts and guests closer to a new home paradise.

#### **4.4 Summary of Theme One**

The Airbnb community of hosts and guests hold a Romantic perspective of home sharing. They jointly contribute to the dominant public discourse on fantasised home-sharing experiences. Hosts and guests believe they are recreating a new paradise through the full experience of reaching a divine self and an emotional euphoria of enjoyment and self-fulfilment. In this new paradise, they magically integrate with the natural world, return to the primal instincts of human nature that are based on sharing and giving, and freely and collaboratively work together for the general will of the sharing community. Without freedom, hosts and guests' creativity would dry up and

their passions would fade. Freedom allows them to express their self and reach their destiny freely and openly.

Hosts and guests believe that if their values of home sharing are pure, they can create a new order that will give birth to a renewed humankind that is unbridled by instrumental rationality and calculated motives. The new paradise involves human beings that are selfless and share their homes and their personal time voluntarily for self-growth and self-expression. The common ideal in the home-sharing economy is mutual sociality based on caring and sharing (Putnam, 2000; Tonnies, 1887). The network actors use materials, discourses, technologies and social frames to re-mobilise and assemble a paradise so actors can continue to romanticise an idealistic sharing experience.

## CHAPTER 5: THE OPEN SECRECY OF HOME SHARING

### 5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented theme one where hosts and guests jointly romanticise home-sharing experiences. The chapter described the home-sharing network that includes hosts, guests and marketers as an idealised, harmonious and smoothly collaborative paradise recreated in Airbnb shared homes. Here, hosts along with their guests can emerge with the natural world and return to a love of human nature that was once lost. Love, passion and fulfilment are agapic, that is, selfless and genuine, whereby engaging in the sharing process allows hosts and guests to return to a spiritual home and a new order. Hosts and guests believe in the power of freedom and liberation for the greater benefit of the home-sharing community and for the protection of the general will of society.

In the interviews of this study, an idealised picture was drawn by hosts, guests and the marketer of their perceived home-sharing anarchic utopia. My discussions with host and guest participants, a long-term investigation and analysis of the host community and continued observation of the home-sharing ecosystem (that includes media stories, government and policy makers) all demonstrated that in the shadows of home sharing there exist multiple paradoxes and conflicts that are interwoven within the proclaimed anarchic utopian subthemes mentioned in Chapter 4. This chapter, Chapter 5, includes the remaining two themes that emerged from the datasets. I now turn to uncovering the lurking shadows that persist behind the mask of this pastoral picture of ‘sharing’. I will explain these paradoxes through the concept of Taussig’s (1999) ‘open or public secret’, which describes “that which is generally known but cannot be articulated” (p. 246). The emergent theorisation of the assemblage of the home-sharing network is also informed by concepts of heterotopia, an ‘other space’ that juxtaposes several places into one single space (Foucault, 1986). The heterotopia allows for the open secret that both hosts and guests are involved in co-creating to strengthen the use of masking tools and unmasking processes. By shedding light on how the paradoxes and conflicts can co-exist in an idealised home-sharing consumer culture, I aim to extend the understanding of (pseudo and true) sharing and the co-creation of value.

## 5.2 Theme Two: The Open Secret of Home Sharing

In a market rife with legitimated accommodation providers such as hotels, motels and long-term landlords, social actors choose to compete against it by adopting new and emerging home-sharing markets and perceiving them using Romantic discourses of a return to paradise. The new market allows hosts to gain an income and guests to save on their travel costs whilst they perform a seemingly ‘false’ identity through the guise of true sharing that should generally be nonreciprocal. This is especially confusing if audiences are aware of this deception.

It was during my observation of hosts’ practices in the home and their engagement with their guests that I came to realise the contrived secret of home sharing. This theme demonstrates that successful romanticised home-sharing experiences requires the construction and performance of a “public” or “open secrecy” (Taussig, 1998, 1999). The open secret is something commonly known but not articulated, whereby hosts and guests are able to maintain the paradoxes and contradictory perceptions of a moral home-sharing experience but at the same time it is also paid for. Hosts are able to recreate a home-sharing paradise and exercise intimate relationships with their guests, and together they re-emerge in harmony with the natural world and exercise their freedom and egalitarianism for the greater good of many citizens – but all for a price.

During the Enlightenment era, individuals searched for the objective truth using rational intelligence and reason. The Romantics challenged the very essence of Rationalism. The Romantics valued the imagination, emotional sensitivities and a subjective socio-historical reality that was not restricted by the Rationalists’ critical rules and controls on expressions of human emotion and fantasy. I found, and will discuss shortly, how hosts use open secrecy and masking to fuse both Romantic and rational worlds to overlay emotion with reason and self-interests. Guests on the other hand are aware of this process and openly go along with hosts’ performances. Through the use of fantasy work and performances, hosts and guests engage in negotiations that emphasise both aspects of the paradox of sociality and commercial transactions simultaneously. Inconsistencies between notions of sociality and commerciality, while openly displayed, remain veiled by open secrecy. Both hosts and guests discuss their sharing experiences as romanticised while they simultaneously maintain that the experience is not “really” motivated for genuine sharing experiences and Romanticism’s

goals. These paradoxes are explained in the following sections through the discovered subthemes of performative masking and concealment practices, narratives and emotional strategies.

The joint suspension of disbelief is what allows for mutual shared fictions and the Romantic notion of home sharing to be sustained despite the paradoxes and conflicts amongst the network. I will demonstrate how hosts and guests' masking performances are clearly contradictory, yet their incompatibility is rarely explicitly acknowledged. Thus, like an open secret, home sharing is sustained within the "spectral radiance of the unsaid" (Taussig, 1999, p. 6). The next section explains the importance of the paradoxes in home-sharing experiences and their appeal to its users.

### **5.2.1 Performative Masking of Home-sharing Paradoxes**

During my observation and engagement in the Airbnb homes, it became evident that hosts and guests exercised different but certainly accepted rituals, practices and activities that gave meaning to home-sharing practices and the road to paradise. The consumption experience of hosts and guests involves an enacted (i.e., an obligation to perform by actors who are the producers and consumers to create a sequence of events) and dramatic (i.e., the performer, in this case the host, and the audience, in this case the guest, are aware of the other's role in the enactment) (Deighton, 1992) performance. Previous research has used dramaturgical theorisation to unpack the construction of the performance of people in how they manage their environment, sayings and doings and clothing to create an impression on others (Ferguson & Veer, 2015; Goffman, 1959). The hosts perform in order to construct a home-sharing experience that intersects with other performers' (both hosts and guests) belief in the home-sharing paradox. This belief allows for three dimensions to take place. First, hosts construct the home so that it simultaneously allows for the social inclusion of guests and also their exclusion. Second, hosts and guests perform metaphorical 'dance' rituals that mystically bring them harmony with the natural world and provide intimacy and agapic love, while at the same time supporting a rational, selfish and calculated relationship at once. Third, both guests and hosts practice home sharing as a free, egalitarian and revolutionary movement whilst it can also be constricted to power hierarchies, in that the power can belong to either the host or guest depending on the time of the interaction and social exchange. For instance, guests hold the power to review the host and the home and hosts hold the power to offer space, food and shelter for guests. These unspoken



contradictory performances are what make home-sharing experiences both intriguing and predictable for both hosts and guests.

*Inclusion and exclusion.* Airbnb hosts have a pastoral picture of a perceived anarchic utopia and their role in the sharing process. This includes preparing the space for their guests and welcoming them in. On one hand, both hosts and guests describe hosts' cleaning and welcoming practices as ways to foster caring and intimate cultural relationships. These are closer to inclusive behaviours. On the other hand, guests specifically choose Airbnb homes because of privacy and the ability to access areas such as the kitchen or spa pool that they may not be able to use if they were staying in a hotel. The latter is closer to exclusive and individualist behaviours that do not involve any relationship building with hosts.

When I interviewed Fiona (Auckland host) and her British guests, Alex and Lindy, on two separate occasions, the paradox of inclusion and exclusion, and the engagement in social relationships or avoidance of these relationships, was implicitly mentioned by both of parties. Fiona's Airbnb was an attached unit to her own home where she could meet her guests. They all explained the importance of a host's welcome:

*Fiona: You get the most amazing people when you meet guests. Meeting new people appealed to me because I used to travel when I was younger. Not just your generic hotel where you walk in and never really meet the locals. New Zealanders are a nation of explorers and travellers by sea and by air. They're curious about other people. I think they're also not locked into social strata. They'll ball up to anybody. We're friendly and open.*

*Interviewer: What makes Airbnb so special then?*

*Fiona: As a host, I get a buzz from meeting other cultures and realising they're interested in us as much as we're interested in them. Seeing how the people live. I think it also widens our cultural understanding. The fact you're in an Airbnb you're usually in a neighbourhood. You step out the door and you go round the corner to get the milk or bread. You're right in with people and their day-to-day lives.*

Her guests Alex and Lindy also explained their views on the welcoming practices:

*We prefer meeting our hosts so we can chat and get to know them. In a hotel's reception, the concierge can say yes you can go down here and see this or that. But you don't get that real local knowledge. Not only that, but this is someone's house. You might be in a room or separate place. It doesn't matter*

*but it's only right to meet the person who's accepted you into their home. With this Airbnb, we had a feeling we'd get along with Fiona. We're all retired with adult kids and we enjoy walking. I think we're now friends. We shared our experiences and enjoyed a few drinks together. We'll definitely get in touch with her on our next visit to NZ.*

Home sharing through Airbnb, as it is characterised by hosts and guests and evident from theme one, is about the ideals of sharing things, even valuable possessions such as the home. The opportunity to create social relationships and connections with others is part of the Romantics' ideals of loving others and returning to the primitive nature of human beings. Driven by values and emotionally expressive behaviours, the Romantics were generally able to experience true feelings and discover their self. However, there is a counterbalance to love and emotion that paradoxically exists in home-sharing scenarios. During the same interview with Fiona, she revealed other motives for renting out her Airbnb home for specifically the opposite reasons to romanticised notions of community and sociality:

*Fiona: We've got a lockbox [key safe] now. And I've got a message I put on [through the technology application] for everybody when they book. I made it seem unique, so my guests feel it's a bit personalised. Just that we're not always tied to time. I tell them I'll see you at some point. Guests are fine with that. If they're here for long periods, we [husband Andrew and Fiona] go to our bach [a Kiwi nickname for holiday homes] up north. We need a break sometimes from people... it's like a love-hate relationship.*

*Interviewer: Can you explain what you mean by a love-hate relationship with your guests?*

*Fiona: I don't always want to talk to them, gauge how they're feeling about their trip and the space so far. It's exhausting sometimes. I do chat and engage with them on that level but often times, it's forced.*

*Interviewer: So, do you consider Airbnb a hobby or business?*

*Fiona: It's sort of a business. I pay taxes, I have an accountant, and I tell people I'm self-employed, so I must consider it a business. Guests seem to think hosts do this as a hobby. I mean I do want to share my home. It makes them feel better and more comfortable staying with a stranger to them. Feel the same way but it's probably with where we're at in life... We've got the bach and we've got this. It's only Andrew and I in this big house so why not share. I mean who knows when we'll get grandchildren. It's giving me a lifestyle I enjoy and feel good helping others. The income's good but the income to me is my holiday money.*

Revealing that home sharing was a business for Fiona seemed to make her uncomfortable. She offered a more detailed and lengthy account of why she enjoyed

hosting and meeting others for the love of humanity over money. Concealing her true motives was the only way to mask and contain the secret that home sharing was not about sharing. Expressive emotions and love for others were therefore a contrived performance. I am not referring to ‘performance’ as a metaphor for the reproduction of culture through actions that participants are unaware they are performing but rather as acts that they recognise and consciously do (Butler, 1990). Fiona’s last quote above implies that she herself was in paradoxical confusion over her romanticised sense of sharing that she initially spoke of and the instrumental rationality of gaining an income. Emotions are biological and natural occurrences (Gaur, Herjanto, & Makkar, 2014); however, they can also be performed consciously. Like the changing perceptions of gender as something people “have” or “are born with” to being performed through discursive and cultural productions (Butler, 1988, 1990), emotions as an ideal Romantic notion are also acts that are intentional and performative (i.e., dramatic and non-referential). Hosts ‘performing’ (as opposed to having) of emotions is expressive of their calculated rational intentions to disguise the meanings of home sharing. Performing emotions becomes habitual over time through “stylised repetition of acts” (Butler, 1988, p. 519; 1993). Fiona further demonstrated the performative power of empathy as an emotional skill of hosting (e.g., emotional practices that are expressed such as the patting on the back, hugging, and empathising through agreement with the other):

*I had quite a few problems with this English lady who was coming up because her daughter was having her first baby. She was grizzling about everything ‘wrong’ in the Airbnb space. She used to go to the daughter’s and come back all upset. She felt the daughter’s husband really wanted her out of there when he came from work. She shared with me all sorts of things and I had to listen. Her divorce... her ex-husband and her tears came. I hugged her as I would when a guest shares this kind of information. I told her ‘come on I’ll take you for a drive’. I showed her the North Shore Arts Centre place and we had coffee and lunch. She didn’t even bring her purse out! I sensed she knew I’d show her some kindness. Anyway, I wanted her to have some positive experience. I heard her on the phone with her son in the UK going on about there’s nowhere to cook and this and that. What’s she going to put on the review?*

On the other hand, guests choose Airbnb homes because they do not have to share at all. In one of the Airbnb homes that Gail and Arnen booked, Gail expressed her desire for sharing, although this was not really about sharing with strangers:

*We booked this Airbnb and for some reason we missed out on the part where we will be sharing the house. We didn’t really understand why she’s showing*

*us the house but not going away. Hahaha. I was turning to Arnen and I was saying in Hebrew, 'She's not going! She's sitting – why is she not going?' I think he went back and read it and he's like, 'Shit she's staying!' We're guests in her house. Like really! We had to put up this **persona** [emphasis added] I don't know how many hours a day! How does that even work! Do we ask her permission before we leave or how does it work? But she was great to be around. She was nice. She made us dinner one night... we got to know her lifestyle and a few quirky things. But it took a while to make sense of things. She also told us about her house rules about the bathroom and stuff that was important to her, but it was weird. She treated us like friends yet she was strict in other things. It did not feel like... comfortable. It's weird because she's seemed nice but acted strict. Makes you wonder if she's genuine. It was definitely an experience. After that we've been checking very carefully on Airbnb as to whether it's a house where someone was staying or is this a house to ourselves. From that point on we never make that mistake. We don't mind sharing; we just needed time to learn how to play the game.*

The home-sharing experiences that were previously described by guests as collaborative, with genuine kindness from hosts, can also be understood as a performed act or a '*persona*' as Gail called it, because this is the expectations when strangers share a home. The hosts' acts of inclusion and disguised kindness are used to mask the rules they want to impose on their guests. Gail was aware of this as she called it a game with players, and a plot that needed to be practised to play it well. The performance is anything but genuine. It reflects a desire to maintain dignity under the scrutiny of the others' gaze and to match the space and performances with the play's dramaturgical constructs: hospitality, kindness and etiquette (Edensor, 2001).

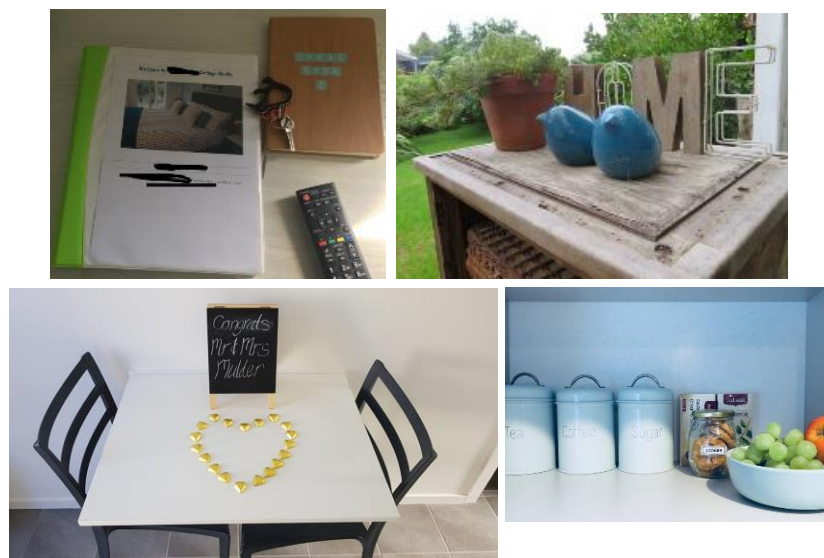
The interaction of guests in this study and their questions posed to hosts commonly betrayed a conviction that the home-sharing experience, in fact, lacks any Romantic sharing qualities. Guests often complained that they sometimes felt like they were intruding on their hosts as they are able to gaze at their lives. Online discussions amongst members of the host community and the messages exchanged between hosts and guests indicated that hosts developed postmodern micro-practices that are similar to family practices when 'sharing' a home. As argued by Bourdieu (1998), habitus and reproduced practices are enacted by those that are "active, knowing agents endowed with...schemes of actions which orient the perception of the situation and the appropriate response" (p. 25). I uncovered certain routines, rituals or forms of control that hosts and guests took part in, in order to negotiate the capacities of components during assembly (e.g., from a normal home to an Airbnb home). Examples of hosts' practices conducted in Airbnb homes were shared with other hosts in the online communities to normalise them, such as best practices for cleaning, welcoming, space

utilisation and space management. These practices are generally adopted by hosts thus legitimating and normalising the practices.

Similarly, hosts expressed their desires to share but from a distance. For instance, Fiona demonstrated generosity through certain welcome practices that took place during any social welcoming engagements. This involved breakfast consumables as the welcome rather than her physically welcoming them into her home or gifting it to them herself:

*What I do is there is a tray table and I've got all my teas, coffees all my cereals, nuts, raisins, Whittaker chocolate bars and a basket of fruit and milk. To me, this is my welcome. When you're first in in the morning you've got that stuff, it's the best welcome and present possible. They're so grateful because they didn't expect it and they don't have to go get this stuff just yet. They can enjoy and relax. It's like I'm there taking care of them.*

Other notable practices involve similar meso practices found in brand communities (Schau et al., 2009), such as welcoming guests through the messaging application, placing the house key in a secret hiding place or lockbox, and providing a welcome letter and guidebook (see example from Suzie's Airbnb home in Figure 17) all of which symbolise an openness and inclusivity. On the other hand, they also imply that the hosts do not actually want to engage with guests, which symbolise social exclusion. These practices, technologies and materialised homey objects disguise the exclusionary motives with inclusive symbols of home and romanticised narratives.



**Figure 17: Welcome practices at Suzie's (Auckland host) Airbnb home**

Social relationships and possible intimacies that are promised through the romanticised sharing ideals of connectedness and brotherly love are commoditised through these practices and allow for the expected distance between guests and hosts. In this sense, a performative speech and guests' ongoing suspicions of hosts' intentions with these intimacies is the open secret that cannot be articulated directly. It was this secrecy that gives the homey objects and home space their imaginative potency, that is, an invisible possibility of genuine and true sharing. Hosts perform 'inclusive exclusionary' practices (Agamben, 1998) in the home by distancing themselves from their guests using mediating objects such as lockboxes to avoid seeing them, yet they also make them feel welcome using welcome messages through the Airbnb mobile application or welcome baskets to imply inclusion into the home. It is through these welcoming practices and social performances that hosts can convince their audience guests of their authenticity and genuineness in sharing.

*Selfish and selfless love.* Further paradoxes involve hosts and guests performative co-creating rituals that mystically allow them harmony with the natural world, intimacy and agapic love and also a rational, selfish and calculated relationship at the same time. Prototypical sharing involves mothering, caring and love (Belk, 2010). It builds relationship through sharing meals and homey possessions (Lupton, 1996; Miller, 1998). Hosts that took part in this study often engaged with their guests in meal sharing or conversations. Guests commented on these social interactions and special moments shared as ways of getting their "money's worth" (quote from guest-turned-host, Dana) from using an Airbnb. While guests are unlikely to openly articulate this truth to their hosts, home-sharing platforms stress that sociability should be involved (Hellwig et al., 2018). Dana, who started off as an Airbnb guest illustrated her definition of romanticised sociality as merged with rational thinking in home sharing:

*When I went last year to Argentina, I travelled on my own and I thought I want to see a human being in the evening. I don't just want to walk into an apartment and sit there. I don't want to talk to the people particularly, I just want to say hello and then go off and do my own thing. In the Airbnb I stayed at, one night the host was out, I didn't even see her, but I knew there was another person in the house and it was nice. You would hope to feel safe and get some sort of human connection rather than being alone. I know they didn't want to see much of me either but we both had a mutual understanding. I even left a tip to these Argentinian hosts, thanking them for taking care of me.*

Dana's quote demonstrates the continued contradictions in the meanings of belongingness and being alone. While she never actually saw much of her hosts, Dana recognised the value of Airbnb through a sense of 'togetherness' whereby she felt safe and protected but without actually engaging with the hosts. She did not value belongingness and connection for their Romantic ideals of connection to human nature but rather for the calculated reasoning of safety in a foreign country. In her own Airbnb and as a host, Dana engaged with her guests by displaying actions of love such as dropping guests off at the ferry station, picking them up from the airport or keeping her Airbnb house spotless "so they would see that, and they'd feel grateful" (quote from Dana). Her love was selfish as she expected gratitude from her guests and for value to be felt. While home sharing is verbally expressed and carried out by hosts as agapic love, the secret that is never articulated but understood is that it is a selfish love.

Observing Queenstown host Philippa's home also provided a powerful illustration of the negotiations that take place during the micro-practices of welcoming guests. Expressive capacities of body language and narratives allowed for friendliness and homeliness to be coupled with the guests' newly zoned territory:

*As Philippa's guests were arriving, I followed her out of her house to observe her greeting. It felt ceremonious with the long driveway from the gravel road leading to her home and neighbouring guest houses in the middle of nowhere in Te Ānau. She stood there waving at André and his family [guests] as they drove in. It seemed she needed a moment to read their signals (e.g., smile, child laughing) before she approached them for a quick hug after their long drive from Christchurch. We took them into the Airbnb guesthouse and showed them around. Philippa said, 'Welcome to your home. Here's your house key.' Philippa used her open arms to welcome them in as if she was presenting them with their prize: beds, microwave, kettle, kitchenette, small corner with toys. She engaged in small talk and asked about their drive, when they would like their breakfast ready, what their plans were for the week, and when they wanted to feed the deer and lambs. André first looked shy but quickly became comfortable after Philippa's welcome and friendly approach. This process seemed to put him at ease; he responded positively to her friendly advances, making it easier for him to ask for an additional heater in the room with a lot of "thank-yous". (Researcher field observations)*

Philippa revealed to me that this welcome ritual was something she did with every guest to put them at ease. She did not embrace everyone as it depended on the "person's vibes, from their body language; nodding or smiling for example" but she definitely greeted them in some way (quote from Philippa). When I questioned her further about this welcome ritual, she explained it was to make her guests feel comfortable and safe:

*Guests expect us to be here all the time. To take care of them and be at their every beck and call. They want us to treat them like family but at the same time clean after them. Well, I'm happy to do it. But they know I'm not **really** [emphasis added] family.*

Many guests certainly understand the unspoken agreement of love for money that is portrayed as agapic but is really calculated and self-interested. Hosts' practices are perceived as performances that are disguised as the open secret of home sharing: it is not about love at all. Similarly, Greek guest Karen demonstrated that the host's love was partially an act, that is, not entirely genuine:

*Karen: The Airbnb in Bordeaux was cluttered.... The host really didn't remove anything in their apartment for us. They made us feel like 'this is where we live, and this is how we live.... And we didn't remove anything'. Whereas the Airbnb in Saint Sebastien was more basic. They removed the clutter. I know they both did the bare minimum but what can we say...? We can't argue with them. They were nice enough to allow us to stay so we're grateful anyway.*

*Interviewer: How did you manage the space given to you in Bordeaux?*

*Karen: Because it felt like this is their home, they didn't make changes to help us settle in. The apartment was also small. Whereas in a bigger space you feel freer. My husband and I, we kept their fixed stuff as is but made space for ourselves with things that could be moved, like the coffee table, or carefully moved things that could break like that vase. You kind of know that some hosts can do a good job because their heart's in it and others, not really. But it worked for us and we still enjoyed our stay.*

Even though Karen expressed her understanding that some hosts do not make a big effort in hosting, a selfish quality that is unlike the Romantics, Karen and her husband continued to feel gratitude and suppressed the secret of home sharing that is really not about sharing space or giving love. They managed the space and the material objects, so that Karen and her husband could enjoy their experience. Of course, not all home-sharing experiences go as planned by hosts and guests. Verbalised thank-yous as a form of gratitude offered by hosts or guests is common practice ("thank you for staying with us", "thank you for having us"), even if the home-sharing experience does not bring them joy or is not up to the Romantic ideals. Karen also felt that she kept the French Airbnb homes she stayed in clean "because it is the least we can do for hosts as a thanks for letting us stay" even though she was clearly unhappy with the sharing experience and the lack of effort made by the hosts. Yet Karen and many other guests, felt the need to be thankful "otherwise that's just rude!" (quote from Israeli guest Gail). A guest's gratitude is often attached to gift-giving practices (Visser, 2008). Hosts and



guests are able to materialise these practices by leaving a thank you card and gifts, sending a postcard or adding them as Facebook friends to keep the relationships going. These reactions not only demonstrate guests' feelings of indebtedness and gratefulness, despite the obvious initial monetary payment that they make through the Airbnb platform, but it also expresses an unspoken understanding of how hospitality works in home-sharing networks like Airbnb. It is possible for hosts to be both kind and generous by offering a home and also calculated and self-interested by gaining an income from that generosity (which is normally selfless with unexpected returns). This is the public secret that guests understand and manage. Hosts smile politely, shake hands and sometimes even embrace their guests as they say goodbye to keep up with the invisible manipulations of the illusion of 'the real' sharing experience in an Airbnb. Te Ānau host Philippa mentioned using trial and error and observing other hosts' recommendations in the online host community to create her own greeting 'package' that included her physically being there, using her own body language as a ceremonious welcome, and presenting guests with homey material resources to give them a sense of homeyness, belongingness and comfort.

A further practice observed during the cultural negotiation of 'sharing' the home and creating homeyness is gift-giving. In comparison to prototypical exchange or sharing, gift-giving in an Airbnb is ceremonial, where social interactions involve thank-yous and gifts lessen the alienation. Gifts do not have to be material in nature, and can involve quick reciprocity of the gift. While these practices may not seem to reflect the traditional forms of gift-giving in intimate relationships, gift-giving norms are culturally negotiated to fit the spatiotemporal capacity of home-sharing practices. These practices further negotiate expressive and material capacities and meanings of home and its components. Variations of gift-giving proved to be very important for hosts that took part in this study, especially those that manage Airbnb homes from a distance:

*If you are looking for good reviews there are other ways to build a relationship with your guests. You can leave notes, special touches or send messages before they arrive during their stay, e.g., if it's colder, remind them of blankets in the cupboard, or tell them of an event that's on. Even just to make sure they have arrived safely and what their plans are for the next day. Do you yourself often write reviews for guests? Sometimes you might write to your guests just to see what they will say or want you to say about them? (Joanne, Invercargill host, Online Community, 8.5.2016)*

Disguised as caring and Romantic love for guests, Joanne gave advice on how to perform emotions and love that conceal the truth of hosts' motivations, which is to gain positive reviews and eventually a steady income. While not being physically present, Joanne attempted to incorporate distant gift-giving to express friendship and love, thus intentionally blurring the lines between commodity exchange and gifting. Practices involving sharing and gifting continue to create ambiguous expectations of the home-sharing experience. Whereas gift-giving is regarded as including non-immediate acts of reciprocity (Mauss, 1925/1967), in a hybridised form of exchange such as home sharing, payback is immediate and may not necessarily be of the same value, with ideologies such as "they take care of my home and I'll leave them a good review in return" (quote from Wellington host Katharine). These contrived practices by hosts are regarded as an expected performance by guests when staying at an Airbnb – they are part of 'putting on a show'. Hosts enter a phase of impression management (Darke & Gurney, 2001; Schau et al., 2009) but not for their self-identity projects. Hosts manage performances that are used as a mask for the open secret of home sharing, which is not really about homeyness or sharing a home.

Further masking tools used by hosts are the Airbnb platform technologies that do all the monetary transactions for them. Hosts such as Pamela from Queenstown believed that, in a way, the technology removed alienation and instrumentalism from the social relationship with guests:

*Another good thing is that I'm not involved in the money side of things. You're not collecting money when they arrive and they don't pay you when they go. That's all out there, it's at arm's length. You're guaranteed the money. In a funny sort of way I think it takes away that feeling of renting a place. It's something out there. It's like they're visitors. There's nothing awkward about that and our friendship can begin.*

Pamela employed the technology's masking tools to conceal the open secret of Airbnb home-sharing, which is essentially about making money.

The paradox that co-exists between agapic love and selfish love demonstrates how hosts are at odds with romanticised community values or they accept them when it pleases their lifestyle goals and self-interests. None of the hosts interviewed and observed in the online community group would ever offer their homes on Couchsurfing (free stay for guests in exchange for friendship) to show kindness and generosity towards others. During my interviews, when the discussion turned to the money-making

potential in hosting an Airbnb home, hosts would initially rebuff promptings that they enjoyed the financial benefits from the home-sharing experience. This is something that hosts believed should not be talked about when in the same terms as the sanctity of the home and the purity of intimate relationships. When hosts spoke amongst themselves, they also tried to conceal the secret of home sharing as it revealed their own desires:

*I would imagine that many, if not most, hosts are doing Airbnb for the money. Otherwise, you'd be offering the accommodation on free sites like Couchsurfing. Many hosts are refurbishing/creating areas specifically to rent out on Airbnb. I really doubt they're going to that effort and expense for the love of hosting strangers. (Siobhan, Rotorua host, online community)*

*Siobhan, money is a result of my work, not the reason. I earn well from my Airbnb because I enjoy the work, it gives me a sense of purpose and helps others see the city of Wellington. When people do their various jobs, whether it is hosting/hospitality they will have a more engaging, more meaningful time of it, than if they are strictly in it for the money. I sure as hell would not want a surgeon operating on me if he/she was only in it for the money! Money isn't everything, Siobhan. (Katharine, Wellington host, online community)*

It appeared that hosts felt the need to talk about their “real” motives precisely because they were a secret. Hosts were constantly engaged in processes of concealment and thus paradoxically providing a revelation. Only by revelation was the open secret able to be converted into a pure or real secret. The fixation on discussing what one should not talk about showed the paradoxes of the secret of home sharing that is not actively known yet disclosed to be defaced through masking and unmasking practices and narratives. Epstein (2010) believes that community and kindness towards others are romanticised notions that are buttressed under power and control and mute the general will of citizens. The Airbnb host community rarely encompasses values of generosity to those that cannot actually pay to stay with them. Hosts themselves may question each other's volitions and may articulate it amongst themselves as demonstrated by hosts Siobhan and Katharine. At the same time, guests would be unlikely to ask hosts if they could stay with them for free out of generosity because it is a known fact that Airbnb is a paid platform and hosting is a service, “not a charity” (quote from Siobhan).

Like a practised dance performance, the host and guest work together using welcoming and farewell practices to direct the production and performance in the home-sharing situation (Deighton, 1992). The young French couple and guests, Nick and Jenny, already admitted that they did not use Airbnb for the sharing experience or to meet hosts; however, they understood why hosts needed to perform these rituals: “I

think they need to keep up with the traditional ways of inviting guests over and just taking care of them.” Similar to the coping mechanisms of consumption used by low-income families to mask poverty and avoid stigma (Hamilton, 2012), guests realise the visible masks that hosts use to cope with their own confusions between a Romantic nostalgia and hosting strangers in their home. Hosts use symbolic materials such as ‘gifts’ and welcome baskets to cover the invisible secret of disingenuous hospitality and kindness that guests silently overlook yet know. The guests I observed demonstrated their willingness (and implicit knowledge) to partake in the hosts’ rituals to transport them to a fantasised “hypothetical, idealised time” where excitement and suspense are alive (Deighton, 1992, p. 366). A guest reviewed host couple Angelica and David’s home, which illustrates the use of fantasy and Romantic nostalgia:

*Great location. Cosy, modern, and very clean! Loved their taste in music and décor. Jazz rendition of that jingle from Charlie Brown playing when I arrived hit the right spot. I was immediately transported to New York City with the music artwork, chilled aura of the space; a classical time indeed. Angelica and David were truly old souls... I didn't want to leave. Our conversations on classical music could have gone on and on. Thank you for creating an authentic classical world. (John, review, September 2016)*

Many hosts work hard to recreate a space for guests to feel comfortable, free and “right at home”. For instance, hosts undergo rigorous cleansing regimens after every guest to prevent negative contagion from previous guests (Douglas, 1984). This supports their efforts to conduct commercial exchanges without disrupting their meanings of home and common practices within the space. Wellington host, Dianne had been “religiously cleaning” her guest room inside her shared home ever since she started hosting to create a safe haven away from contamination from nearby spaces, or “footprints” from past guests. Dianne expressed that the room did not really belong to her and that her “cleaning is a job to help guests feel comfortable and at home”. She believed that this is what guests always want to get out of their home-sharing experience using Airbnb. For example, her messages to her guests started by welcoming them to “your home and feel free to make yourself comfortable”.

Dianne described the type of home-sharing experience she offered: “The people who stay here often tell me they feel completely at home – and that's the way I like it. I care for the people who come here, and it has always been a two-way street.” She wrote in her online profile under ‘house manual’ that she “has no rules” but she asked guests to treat the home as if it was theirs. However, in her Airbnb room, she provided guests

with a manual that included a long list of things they must and must not do when in her home. Guests, on the other hand, believe these restrictions are part of what it means to live in a stranger's house:

*They (hosts) didn't ask me to sit with them for a chat or invited me for a drink. None of the things that would usually break the ice. I got in my room and shut the door to my disbelief of how small the room is, no cupboards or hangers to hang clothes, no tissue box, no welcome book or house rules/manual. The room itself is cold, bland, dark and uncomfortable. I have no idea what to do, which is what is confusing. The instructions online are limited that it makes it hard for me to feel comfortable. I needed to know what I can and cannot do in their own home. It is their home in the end and I need structure to understand my limits and what I'm allowed to do or use in their home. Sharing seems like an afterthought for them. I also didn't realise we were all sharing one bathroom. It says 'one bathroom' but I thought that was one for guests. Things are just left for interpretation. I had to wait for a long time to get into the bathroom. That took forever. Everything is just up in the air and blurry that it makes me quite confused. This is their home and it felt like they need to 'invite me in'. I can't impose myself. (Researcher reflections as a guest, Queenstown Airbnb home, 7/10/2017)*

Along with my own observations at this Queenstown Airbnb home, other guests' reviews reflected a similar experience to mine. For instance,

*The room is very small; be prepared. We did feel like there was a bit of an issue sharing the bathroom, as there were multiple times it was occupied when we wanted to use it, but that is the nature of sharing a bathroom. We did feel confined to our space and that made us a bit uncomfortable. They [hosts] gave us a few recommendations when we asked for them, but besides that they were not exceptionally communicative/ friendly/ welcoming. If you expect that you'll be fine. (Review by guest from Phoenix, Arizona)*

The open secret is often difficult to articulate especially when it involves a very private and sacred place such as someone's home. The home implies a place of solitude and moral virtues that can bring honour to the home owner. By discussing the ambiguities between expectations and actual experiences, guests are failing to honour Romantic love by violating the trust of the host and publicly revealing the truth of the experience in an online review. The act of revealing a familiar public secret is transgressive. This resonates with Canetti's (1984) argument that "secrecy lies at the core of power", and Taussig's (1999) theorisation that defacement is achieved from the drama of revealing a sacred open secret that is powerful enough to be concealed (p. 7).

*Free and controlled.* In the previous chapter, I identified home sharing from the perspectives of hosts and guests as a freeing experience from restrictions imposed by profit-driven companies (e.g., immoral hotels controlling check-in/check-out times). For instance, guests are free to be whoever they want to be (e.g., Airbnb's #WeAccept [all ethnicities] campaign) and have the flexibility to do whatever they want to do (e.g., cook, socialise with hosts). However, guests often betray the assumption that they have the freedom to exercise their identities. In fact, it can be argued that many guests stay at Airbnbs precisely because they do not want to be themselves but rather a performed self. Candy and Yanis, married hosts in their 30s living in Wellington, expressed this perception explicitly during their interview:

*I feel guests just want to come here and have a good time. People that stay with us are mostly foreigners, so they are still in that honeymoon phase with the country and are very keen to experience different lifestyles such as ours. We had Canadians that were here, and along with our kids, we took them to the beach and we were digging pipis [shellfish], they were in the water splashing and then catching crabs and just really having fun. It's just something they don't get to do a lot back in their country. But it's not our life either. We don't do this daily but I'm not sure if they know that. They want to believe this is the life in NZ but it's all pretend, really. Guests pay for this experience and we play a big role in creating it. (Candy)*

From Candy's quote, it can be concluded that even hosts do not have the freedom to be themselves when hosting; rather, they portray a performed self for the guest's pleasure (Goffman, 1959). They perceive their guests as also experiencing a temporary and fantasised self. In a sense, the Canadian guests referred to by Candy were experiencing a fantasised lifestyle that hosts performed for them so that they could enjoy their vacation. The fun-filled experience performed by the hosts concealed the secret that Candy and Yannis were financially struggling to pay their mortgage and feed their children. Sharing Airbnb homes and special moments with guests becomes a metaphorical mask that hosts wear to cover their struggles, unhappiness and rational motivations for home sharing.

As guests, Pamela and Karen discussed how observing and mimicking the actions of their hosts not only satisfied their curiosity but also gave them the opportunity to transform into someone else (desirable or undesirable):

*Pamela: The benefit of Airbnb is the homey stay in another country and seeing a little bit of how people live. In my early days I remember once taking the children when they were little around Europe and we used to see all these lights and think wouldn't it be great to go inside a house and see how people*

*live, what they own, what they do. That's why I choose to stay in an Airbnb. We want to get the sense of how people live in a different country. This would be the closest thing we can get to observing their lives and perhaps being like them for the time we're there.*

*Karen: It's something about having a key to an apartment rather than a hotel. You go in and you open the key to YOUR apartment and this is where YOU'RE living. You know how people these days they go on Instagram and they say, 'this is our home for the next few days'. It was literally that. But you can't feel that when you're in a hotel. In an Airbnb you go in and you feel like you can do the groceries. You almost feel like this is how it would feel as a Parisian living in Bordeaux. And if you stay there long enough you can say hi to the neighbour. You really get a warm feeling of the place. I am Parisian, even if it was only for five days.*

Airbnb guests are able to wear a mask and gain voyeuristic license without interrogation (Belk & Yeh, 2011). Those with such curiosity have found a solution to minimise their knowledge gap by searching for unique Airbnb listings that spike their curiosity. Guests are given the 'freedom' to observe, first hand, hosts' lifestyles. Guests boost the imaginative capacity of spaces by accessing the platform and using indexical cues found in online listings to create their own story of what the home is like. The hybridity of consumption and production in commercial Airbnb homes creates paradoxes of familiarity with strangeness and friendliness with intrusion (Di Domenico & Lynch, 2007).

As intimacy and friendships can be acted out and believed, so too can the creation of a homey space, that mysteriously alludes to the freedom to move around, which is shaped by hosts and felt by guests. McCracken (1989) found that properties of homeyness, such as informality and embrace, allows people to feel at ease and have the freedom to be themselves in the homey space. Both hosts and guests regard home sharing as their pathway to freedom and the Airbnb community is egalitarian where hosts and guests have equal rights. However, both seem to betray a conviction that hosts and guests are in fact sharing the home because they both do not actually have equal rights and freedom of movement.

The Romantic ideals of egalitarianism and equality between hosts and guests are challenged by hosts and guests during their experience of home sharing. It is in fact better understood as control; however, this is never articulated by the audience. Firstly, Airbnb's official messaging application is an important tool for analysis of the other's character. Using the platform, guests and hosts can speak to each other at any time of the day (Airbnb rewards hosts for answering within one hour) to ask questions or

request information about the home. They use the platform to initiate communication and introductions and to create trust between two strangers planning to ‘share’ a home. However, the power struggle takes place when guests message hosts and try to promote themselves as ‘good’, respectful guests and sometimes negotiate for accommodation discounts. The host initially holds the power to accept or decline. Once guests arrive at the Airbnb, the power is negotiated between hosts and guests where they both attempt to please the other, present a hospitable front (e.g., respond to queries) and where guests maintain a guest etiquette (e.g., respect the host’s rules, clean up after self), while gaining the most for the effort or money spent. Towards the end of the home-sharing experience, the power shifts into the guests’ hands as it is time for the review. From my discussions with guests, the dual review system does not matter to guests as much as it does to hosts whose livelihood depends on guest feedback. These power struggles temporally control social relationship prospects and perspectives on freedom that conflict with reality in the home. However, this cyclic change of power does not necessarily allow the host or guest to have the freedom to “honestly” review the other. Observing host couple Sandy and Greg’s (Wellington) experience with guests and the dual review system revealed the issues surrounding power and freedom:

*Sandy: I think in the early days we were quite eager and keen to please because we didn’t have any reviews. We were new to it and we didn’t know what we were doing. We were trying to gauge what was the norm and expectations, so we tried too hard and provided cereal, food and stuff to please them and in hopes we get all positive reviews. We created good relationships with guests, and even introduced them to our bubs [baby] so I don’t know if they were so grateful or felt for us because of Thomas [their baby] but the reviews were all positive and we became Superhosts. I guess when you show guests the personal ‘real’ side of you they can never give a negative review.*

*Greg: As for how we deal with guests and review them, it’s also quite tough. We had some guests recently that really dragged their stay and we couldn’t kick them out! We didn’t write anything about it on the review because we felt bad for them. They didn’t have anywhere to stay that night and they were a big group. I understand it’s hard to find places when you’re in a big group travelling but we had another booking. Yeah, they knew they had to go but I think they were just trying to drag it out as long as possible. It’s really difficult to kick someone out of your house while hotels can just automatically charge your credit card if you check out late or heartlessly kick you out if they didn’t have space. We also didn’t want to upset them because they were still about to review us. We could only drop some hints here and there.*

The freedom to practice life and seek truth is subjective and socially constructed according to the Romantics (Saiedi, 1993). Yet the constraints of being truthful and



honest in reviews is difficult when desirable returns such as positive reviews or undesirable outcomes such as feeling awkward in one's home oppose the meanings of freedom and the general will. Even when they do not explicitly voice such perceptions, guests realise that control changes hands between hosts and guests during the home-sharing experience and their behaviours often convey similar impressions. Hosts that took part in this study often spoke of guests blackmailing them using star ratings and reviews to get extra value out of their Airbnb stay (e.g., partial refunds, discounts, additional guests to stay). Similarly, guests also reported on hosts using their power even before the arrival of guests to control what they could and could not do inside the host's home. Mike, a guest from Australia and in his late 20s, explained the control and mind games of a host, which eventually pushed him away from using Airbnb altogether:

*I really don't like the fact that the host couldn't be more flexible with check in timings especially when she knew that my flight arrives very early. What's worse is... when I got into the house I felt her eyes were watching me and following me everywhere with the many portraits of her and her family. I just felt her presence that haunted me. I couldn't feel comfortable in the Airbnb.*

One of my own guests, Michael who was a photographer solo-travelling around NZ, was very upfront with his thoughts on hosts and concluded that, “*We [guests] are in a bubble... we just don't question it. It's the bubble that the host creates. It's not perfect... it never can be perfect, but we choose to stay here anyway because we like the idea of sharing a home. it's more like a fantasy world, yet the reality is far from it.*” Thus, it can be interpreted that both hosts and guests understand that home sharing is not really a romanticised notion of re-emergence with the natural world and harmony and love of human nature. The masking practices that hosts perform conceals the truth of sharing, which illustrates the emergence of the open secret. These masks maintain a fantasy and a desire to continue sharing within the home. Similar to Newell's (2012, 2013) findings on the *bluffeurs*, the power of the open secret of home sharing is not in the deception exactly but the collective belief in the power of this illusion.

### **5.2.2 Masking and Revealing Narratives of Resistance**

The Romantics were often seen engaging in a struggle or resistance against social, cultural and political forces that they perceived as constraining self-expression and their values and ideologies (Berman, 1972; Taylor, 1989, 1992; Trilling, 1972). Such forces currently include existing market logics, dominant capitalist corporations

and mass culture and the value of private ownership, all of which can be regarded as constraining one's freedom. However, hosts demonstrate their use of resistance and self-liberating discourses against external forces as a way to mask the open secret of home sharing, which is in fact not really about sharing.

Hosts remain focused on four key external power components that critique the home-sharing community: chain hotels and motels, long-term rental businesses, local governing bodies and the media. These external components attempt to strengthen or destabilise the territory's identity (DeLanda, 2006). Often, forces share assemblages with the internal components. For instance, internal components such as Airbnb guests would have previously experienced staying in hotels, hosts work with the government by paying taxes and abiding by the law (usually) and the Airbnb marketer works with the media to create brand stories. The home and homey possessions become central, allowing these interactions to take place. Past research has noted that external stakeholders may have the power to disrupt networks (Humphreys & Thompson, 2014; Parmentier & Fischer, 2015); however, I found that these external forces contribute to the strengthening of the core components of the home-sharing network rather than its dissipation using the network's resistance initiatives.

In November 2017, Airbnbs in Queenstown were hit by property tax rates from local Council, which treated homes as commercial properties rather than private residences. Following suit, Auckland Council also added their own regulations and imposed commercial rates for Airbnb hosts that became effective in July 2018. The opposition (media, hotel chains, property investors association, and government) brought the topic of commerciality of homes from the periphery to the centre of attention by arguing for more regulations and rates for Airbnb hosts. The open secret where "everybody either doubts or knows that 'there is something'" (Horn, 2011, p. 112) is now being exposed. Taussig (1999) argues that "it would seem that such a phenomenon has built-in protection against exposure because exposure, or at least a certain modality of exposure, is what, in fact, it thrives upon" (p. 216). Indeed, as the anti-Airbnb opposition question the nature of home sharing, the narrative paradoxically strengthens the secret by further mystifying the home's contradictory activities between commerciality and sociality. Hosts are at work to resist the narrative that opposes the Romantic view of home sharing. As Taussig suggests, 'secretion of the secret' following Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) approach, is exactly what the secret needs.

Hosts are then required to silently demonstrate their genuine intentions with guests, and sometimes explicitly voice their intentions to continue reinforcing the secret of home sharing.

Multiparty resistance has been known to redefine common practices and values and institute consumer culture (Karababa & Ger, 2011). This theme can be found in studies on consumer activism (Kozinets, 2002a; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Peñaloza & Price, 1993) and resistance (Giesler, 2006, 2008; Sandlin & Callahan, 2009). Yet in the case of home sharing, resistance is used to conceal and reveal the open secret. The data illustrate that when external forces oppose the activities of Airbnb, hosts come together and collaborate within their communities to create innovative tactics for resistance, which subsequently strengthen the ties within the network. Anti-Airbnb stakeholders demonstrate their powerful agentic role that is materialised through media stories, local Council meetings, and official changes in government legislation and laws. These opposing forces disseminate narratives in online and offline news sites or worse, through government posted letters of cease and desist. Articles entitled “New Zealand’s rental squeeze: Something in the Airbnb” (Flahive, 2018) and “Queenstown bravely fixing Airbnb’s crooked playing field” (Yardley, 2017) illustrate the anger, or envy towards Airbnb’s competitive edge. Their expressive resources contradict Romantic notions of sharing and genuine hospitality. Yet Airbnb hosts can be found rallying together using online spaces such as Facebook and Twitter to create and disseminate online advocacy groups to oppose this anti-Airbnb movement (e.g., Facebook groups such as “Host Voice”, “Airbnb Legal Barriers & Action”), and by publicly responding to online news stories and calling local journalists to share their opinions. Hosts have also organised local host meetings to discuss actions that Airbnb members can take against the external anti-Airbnb assemblage. Exemplar quotes from Queenstown Airbnb host Marie and Te Ānau host Shannon, illustrate the beginnings of how the home-sharing network’s rebellious practices began:

*Here's my take (I intend to contact our local mayor and share it). Some hotels are criticising Airbnb for taking business from them. While it's easy to understand entrenched stakeholders wanting to protect their patch, the reality is that traditional accommodation providers don't own exclusive rights to supply accommodation. Licensed Airbnb hosts have every right to participate in the local economy by responding to a growing thirst for alternative types of accommodation. Besides, the profits of internationally-owned hotels go offshore whereas Airbnb hosts are typically residents who spend their earnings locally. That's good for local businesses. Critics are blaming a*

*shortage of accommodation workers on Airbnb, claiming that property investors are opting for short-term rentals rather than long-term housing. But property owners aren't responsible for providing accommodation. The responsibility for housing, or transport in and out of the area, should fall on the shoulders of town planners and employers. Maybe we should all speak out! (Marie, Queenstown host, Facebook Community, 5.2.2017)*

*Government trying to stop us – we will not be stopped!! As long as it's legal to Airbnb we should keep doing it. It's not our fault that the world economy is useless and house prices are too high. Just ignore the complainers. There's no way the government can stop us renting out our homes to guests. They just can't police it. If they made Airbnb illegal we would just find another way. There's plenty of ways to provide accommodation – foreign language schools and universities are always looking for accommodation. The only thing the government could do to us is raise the tax on it. (Shannon, Te Anau host, Facebook Community, 3.3.2017)*

In the background, Airbnb has nudged hosts to collaborate together and be heard by government:

*Airbnb supports the concept of those hosts who share their whole homes paying more [tax] to Council. However, the details will be very important, and we are trying to find a way to work closely with Council on possible collection solutions to make it simple and easy for our hosts. It's important for Council to hear from our host community to ensure that whilst Airbnb hosts generally support the idea of hosts contributing their fair-share – the collection must be a simple, fair and easy process. (Airbnb official email to members, 22.3.2018)*

Hosts metaphorically “take to the streets” to protect the secret of home sharing from being exposed by publicly reinforced resistance narratives, storytelling and accompanying community engagement and unison. Although sharing economy businesses have been found to be less about communal bonding (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012), Airbnb hosts’ resistance to institutional power is one way to create such bonding within communities. Bonding has materialised through hosts from around NZ sending letters to policymakers, gathering petition signatures, submitting formal letters to city Councils, and attending public Council meetings to voice their concerns. The following excerpt was part of a submission that was shared by a host in support of Airbnb home sharing:

*Not all those renting out whole properties on Airbnb are investors. I, for example, have lived in my home for about 10 years. But I am spending a lot of time away currently. It is still my home and I return there regularly. However, putting it on a STR [short-term rental] site allows me to go home when I want to, leaving my furniture in situ, while still getting help covering the expenses, while I am also paying for accommodation elsewhere, in a way that renting it*

*out in a normal tenancy would not. It is hardly fair to make them pay commercial rates for that. The increased rates would defeat the purpose of the endeavour and deprive a family of the home-away-from-home that they are looking for, with a kitchen, living area and separate bedrooms, something that commercial accommodation just doesn't offer. Many properties, while listed as 'whole places' on Airbnb, are actually guest suites/sleepouts/granny flats within/next to/under the owners' homes. These areas are not legally allowed to be let out as long-term tenancies. Putting such spaces on Airbnb is a safer way to get help with the mortgage while avoiding potential legal issues and also be able to get their home to themselves sometimes. (Siobhan, Auckland and Rotorua host, Online Community, 20.3.2018)*

Siobhan's official letter to government officials describes a dramatized story of financial struggle, family life, familiarity, empathy and human nature; all discourses grounded in Romantic thinking. It also offers an expressive potential for other hosts to continue their resistance by challenging and rejecting governmental authority, media and traditional hospitality businesses. Consumers rally to reject new regulations and bad press using digital and physical space to frame their romanticised experiences.

Voiced Romantic ideals of 'sharing' as good and caring as well as anti-corporate movements for the general will are also used to fuel the secret of home sharing. Together with external stakeholder discourses of home sharing as masks for commercial exchanges, processes of concealment and revelation take place to strengthen the secret. Space and homey materials orchestrate the reproduction of Romantic discourses during resistance, which Siobhan alluded to in her pleas to policymakers. By using support and kinship sharing narratives during resistance, the expressive capacities of Airbnb homes as socially responsible and the physical embodiment of the symbolic properties of homeliness and kindness to strangers can overlay the horrid secret behind home sharing.

Through interactions with other social actors, the Airbnb host community are able to develop, negotiate and contest the moral values of home sharing and oppose conflicting outsider (general public) perceptions of host motivations. In a way, by collaborating and joining forces to resist their enemies and their moral transgressions, external criticisms reinforce Airbnb hosts' beliefs in their own moral correctness of their sharing activities (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). Despite their transgressions, hosts are legally and morally challenged when Airbnb homes co-exist amongst suburban, urban and residential areas. From the perspective of the public, hosts bring commerciality into residential areas and can be disruptive to neighbourhoods. For instance, in cross-lease neighbourhoods (i.e., shared ownership of land between neighbours), running a 'commercial operation' like Airbnb is illegal, causing neighbours to complain about

noise from Airbnb guests and local Councils to treat Airbnb hosts exactly like other accommodation providers such as hotels. I sat in on City Council meetings held in Auckland and Airbnb brand official and non-official host meetings and gathered the minutes of these meetings. The host communities believed that those opposing Airbnb were motivated by power and money. The narrative changed to display the paradoxical fusion between rational and economic reasoning together with Romantic notions of love and a return to human nature. For example, hosts that resist these rules have written to local Council representatives, journalists and small business chamber associations. The following quote sums up the reasons for their transgressions:

*I think it's pretty much deliberate. They would like to see Airbnb numbers lowered so (fallaciously or not) more houses are released for rental. It won't necessarily work that way though as many people have no intention of having permanent tenants. Council just want to gain control again. It's a power move! APTR<sup>6</sup> is more like a wealth grab tax rather than a fair one (Anish, Auckland host, Online Community, 6.8.2018).*



**Figure 18: Satire and sarcasm by transgressive hosts against NZ local Councils and the new commercial home-sharing tax rates**

Hosts such as Anish have used sarcasm and satire as narrative masking processes to conceal the open secret of home sharing with a different Romantic discourse of resistance and calls for freedom and egalitarianism. While hosts believe

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<sup>6</sup> APTR stands for Auckland Council's implementation of the "Accommodation Provider Targeted Rate" and commercial rating of residential homes and property used for short-term stays. An Auckland APTR Action online community group was created to provide information and coordinate actions to bring to the attention of Council officials their opposition of the government's "lack of transparency, lack of clear process and information provided to the public" (quote from APTR online discussion group).

Councils' new tax rates are rationally motivated by power and money, the general public that do not use Airbnb do not understand the Romantic notion of home sharing; rather, they perceive it as transactional and call for hosts to abide by the laws of the land. Their critique and scepticism concerning the true intentions of hosts and the home-sharing experience have been voiced publicly and in the media. For instance, Auckland host Siobhan wrote an opinion piece for a NZ online news site about hosts' resistance to Council tax rates. The anti-Airbnb public responded with attacks of their own using scepticism and criticism:

*You [hosts] are doing it to make money. For a profit. As a business. You pay taxes on your wages, you expect your employer to abide by certain rules, when you rent a hotel room you expect standardised health and safety requirements (you do not expect to be harmed by the hotel you are staying in). When you purchase anything you expect it to be fit for purpose and of an expected quality. But somehow when you try to make **hush-hush money** [emphasis added] from your house on Airbnb it is somehow different? You don't want to pay taxes or anything else. Why should hotels pay taxes, why should the shop sell products of quality when you think you should keep all the money you don't declare to the taxman off your Airbnb? I have doubts about what you're [Siobhan] saying in the article about community and sharing. (Kryptonite's response, Stuff.co.nz, 30.7.2018)*

*Imagine you live on a nice, quiet street and you know all your neighbours. There are 100 houses on your street and about 50-75 vehicle movements per day. Now imagine 50 out of those 100 houses become full-time Airbnb houses. Your once quiet neighbourhood is ruined. Hundreds of vehicle movements, noise, parties, drunk Aussie yobs everywhere. It sure would be nice if all accommodation providers could pay commercial rates just on the days they host foreigners, and not on the days they host NZ residents and not on the days they don't host anyone at all but that would be practically impossible to implement, wouldn't it? (Matthewsparks's response, Stuff.co.nz, 15.8.2018)*

Many responses to the opinion piece were negative and attacked hosts' "true" motivations for sharing their homes. The previous quotes suggest that there is a general understanding of the public secret of the home-sharing market – it as a corrupt system that operates under the guise of sharing but is capable of ruining the economy and the safety of the general public. These outward revelations expressed in strong and prolific statements in contemporary media should negate the public secret altogether. For instance, one might also suggest that the public exposure that has been described above actually serves to reinforce the appearance of a secret that needs to be concealed. In actuality, this demonstrates Taussig's (1999) claims that the real secret is that there is no secret. The open secret is made more mysterious by the attempts to expose it. The

general public's attacks in contemporary media sites and journalist and host-Council battles around tax rates are all complicit acts in strengthening the concealment of the secret.

Fletcher (2010) found that providers of white-water rafting adventures and their clients construct the trip simultaneously through mimetic simulation of an authentic adventure to harness a magical experience. He found that the known but hardly articulated truth of the adventure is exactly the simulated "authentic" experience that travellers want. In the Airbnb context, hosts use their resistance narratives as ways to instil the mystery of home sharing by using external forces' exposure and scepticism for their own gains. At first, we see that the external forces are publicly negating Airbnb's claims that it is all about sharing. Such revealing actions expose the secret of home sharing. However, hosts use their resistance and storytelling narratives in efforts to dispel the open secret and recreate the fantasy and mystery of home sharing through their outreach to the media and Council representatives. Some hosts in Auckland even went so far as to collectively hire a real-estate lawyer to conduct further investigation and fight for hosts' rights in court against Auckland Council and the Mayor. At the time of writing this thesis, APTR commercial property rates for Auckland Airbnb hosts were passed for some accommodation types (e.g., fully rented homes that are booked over 28 nights). Airbnb hosts in Auckland are still disputing the Council's decision.

Yet even when the external oppositional forces are articulated, the secret remains intact. For instance, some guests that reside in NZ and are aware of the public discourses against Airbnb, either choose to ignore these conversations or want to be involved in the resistance. This is clear in Auckland host Suzie's observation of her guests from around NZ:

*Even though we're [the hosts] being attacked by the government and the media make us out to be con artists, all my guests hear is, "wow we're part of a social movement. How exciting!" I play along with that because it seems to excite them. I talk to them about our secret host meetings and about the social change we want to make in the world. Sometimes I say jokingly that our secret host meetings are underground and we're scheming and conjuring plans to keep making money. We both laugh...*

Even though government and some journalists have publicised that Airbnb is a commercial operation rather than the romanticised undertaking portrayed by the home-sharing network, hosts continue to counterattack these efforts by using resistance and free will narratives as part of an attempt to mask the open secret by revealing it (albeit



sarcastically). Guests, on the other hand, choose to ignore these public revelations in order to continue with their fantasy of home sharing. Despite Suzie's attempts at humour and subsequent exposure of the truth, her narrative acted as a veiled revelation of the nature of home sharing and actually masked the secret further. Suzie further explained to her guests that hosts' private meetings were "to help us continue sharing our homes and earning a good income". Her masked joke with her guests reinforced the deceptive secret of home sharing.

Furthermore, other guests that were aware of the external forces that were attempting to expose Airbnb seemed to be unconcerned about the secret. Their commonly expressed observation of "I know what is happening, but it doesn't directly impact me so I won't do anything about it" (quote from Karen) illustrates that even guests are complicit in the reproduction of the secret of home sharing. This is especially true of seasoned guests that have used Airbnb and different forms of home sharing (such as Couchsurfing) for years. Their knowledge of the truth of home sharing combined with their silence is what makes them jointly responsible for creating the open secret. While not explicitly voiced, guests' behaviours often convey a silent understanding of home-sharing's masked truth. For instance, guests sometimes choose to leave cash tips for hosts rather than a thought-out thank you gift "in support of the cause" (as quoted by Nick, French guest) but also because many guests do not necessarily want to enter the gift economy and create interpersonal relationships with their hosts (Marcoux, 2009).

So far, I have identified that both hosts and guests undertake a dual process of performative masking techniques using practices of hospitality, emotions of love and narratives of resistance to disguise the open secret of home sharing. Their joint desire to create an illusory sharing experience resembles the Romantics' desires to re-create a new paradise. The imagined paradise is a simulation of 'authentic' sharing experiences where hosts and guests can re-emerge with the new natural world and return to human nature with simulated values of freedom, belongingness and selfless love. The secret is in fact that there is no secret, however "the mystery is heightened, not dissipated, by unmasking" and revealing the truth through sarcasm and host narratives of resistance to institutional opposition to home sharing (Taussig, 1998, p. 222). I now turn to the home's physical space as another type of material concealment and containment of the

open secret that has agency through hosts and guests' performative practices. As a material capacity, the home space can be perceived as a heterotopia where normative rational logics stop functioning and where an imaginary space that is exterior to normal sociality can be enacted (Newell, 2018).

### **5.3 Theme Three: 'Secreting Secrecy' of Heterotopic Spaces**

I found that the Airbnb space works as a kind of contained non-space. A world apart, Airbnb homes exist as concealing spaces of the open secret that allows for contradictions, paradoxes and tensions to coexist. In the previous section, we have seen that hosts resist oppositional narratives that try to reveal the open secret. Hosts and guests also use masking practices to conceal the home-sharing secret, thus stabilising the core of the home-sharing process, that is, money. However, open secrecy oftentimes cannot be contained and as Taussig (1999) suggests, the power of the secret is in its revelation. With modernity moving towards creating a perfect society where order, stability and principles of freedom are upheld, I discovered how spatial play as a process of social ordering is involved in imagining a perfect *ou-topia* (Greek for no-place). Home sharing involves processes of spatial ordering that embody heterotopias, which "are not quite spaces of transition – the chasm they represent can never be closed up – but they are spaces of deferral, spaces where ideas and practices that represent the good life can come into being, from nowhere even if they never actually achieve what they set out to achieve – social order, or control and freedom" (Herrington, 1997, p. ix). Spaces constantly shape activities related to them whether they are personal, public or commercial (Roux, 2014).

The first theme in this study described hosts and guests' Romantic discourses of re-imagining a new paradise through home sharing. The second theme revealed that the Romantic notions of home sharing demonstrate a pastoral yet idealised picture of perceived lifestyles, creative anarchic utopia and guest's travel and host's hospitality consumption processes. Hosts and guests jointly romanticise a space where they can re-emerge with the natural world and human nature whilst simultaneously using Rationalism to create an income. Theme two demonstrated a paradoxical world of home sharing where Romanticism and Rational thinking intertwine. My findings illustrate that this paradox continues to co-exist through the concealment and revelation of the open secret of home sharing. The open secret is something commonly known but not articulated whereby hosts and guests are able to maintain contradictory perceptions of a

moral home-sharing experience that is in fact not moral at all. The Airbnb home becomes the place that fuses Romantic and Rational ideals, along with both worlds' reflective discourses and characterised behaviours and motives, thus juxtaposing different sites into one counter-site. This leads to the discovery of the third theme: Airbnb homes are third spaces, that is, 'places of otherness' (Hetherington, 1997/2002) where the open secret can be concealed and revealed. The Airbnb space strengthens the power of the open secret through tensions, paradoxes and conflicts that co-exist within the space's spatiotemporal boundedness.

### **5.3.1 Creating a Magic Circle**

When hosts create a space for their guests, they are implicitly thinking of ways to create a 'perfect' homey place for them. They carefully plan an imagined, bounded "magic circle" around guests. For example, spatio-temporal boundedness is what is perceived as protecting the guests and hosts from nearby sites.

Hosts indeed perceive the Airbnb space they provide for guests as heterotopias with systems for openings and closings (based on Foucault's (1986) fifth principle) that makes the Airbnb space both isolated and permeable. Guests gain entry through online enquiry and payment, followed by picking up the Airbnb house key. The Airbnb home address is only shared after payment is made. Thus, without payment and personal verification through the Airbnb technology, permission for entry is denied. Once Airbnb spaces are entered, hosts can guide guests by physically showing them around the house and providing them with digital house rules that are sent prior to travel. Guests receive special ritualistic requests such as "please take off your shoes at the door" or "no dogs allowed inside" which is also reiterated in printed rules found in the Airbnb space. By metaphorically crossing this magic threshold, guests feel they are entering a magic circle of home sharing that resembles utopic spaces and is very different from 'normal' hotel accommodation. There are also unspoken rules of etiquette attached to known ideologies of home hospitality that must be adhered to such as loading the dishwasher and being respectful to others sharing the home. These added rules make the space 'real' as it reflects its relation to other spaces such as a guest's own home or practices involved when visiting family members. These rules allow for the creation of relational social spaces that differ from the outside world and are penetrable and bounded. However, as already illustrated in theme two, the open secrecy is enabled through

performative masking practices of inclusionary exclusion that can be contained and safeguarded in a heterotopia of homes shared.

As presented in theme one, Airbnb hosts attempt to create a perfect space where they can use home-sharing experiences for self-discovery and self-expression, whilst simultaneously gaining an income out of their ‘sacred’ home. In the past, the Romantics believed in a utopic paradise as an idealised or perfected moral society they aspired to live in. However, while a utopia might be perceived as the “real space of a society”, they are “fundamentally unreal spaces” (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). Thus, hosts engage in presenting heterotopic home-sharing spaces or experiences as real places that are ‘effectively enacted utopia’ yet absolutely different from the neighbouring sites they reflect. And unlike a retail utopic space that involves an element of discovery and sense of displacement (Maclaran & Brown, 2005), Airbnb homes are perceived as heterotopias by hosts because they presuppose a carefully controlled system of openings and closings that make them penetrable as well as isolated from the rest of the world. Firstly, any Airbnb user must create a profile on Airbnb, which is ostensibly free, however heavy dues have to be paid upon entering the space. They must agree to the terms and conditions of the Airbnb platform, which is a contract that prohibits certain actions, enforces payments and controls relations between hosts and guests. They also must upload scanned government-issued identification documents such as a driver’s license and provide a link to their personal social media sites for profile verification. Guests must also go through a search process for their travel plans and contact hosts informing them of why they are interested in staying in that Airbnb home. Such methods of “big-brother” control are regarded as beneficial to consumers to protect transactions and consumer rights (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; McGrath, 2004). The openings and closings of the heterotopia gives access to Airbnb homes, making them spatio-temporally bounded and controlled by hosts.

The Airbnb home-sharing heterotopia resembles a magic circle of ritual magic that can provide protection and create a sacred space (Buckland, 1986/2002). The magic circle asserts that spaces are controlled by temporal, spatial and social boundaries (Huizinga, 1955) that are defined through ritualistic practices and agreements to enable host-guest interactions. A host’s rules for a guest’s entry or exit are compulsory and require ritual purification ceremonies or hygienic cleansing. Crossing into the magic circle in itself is a ritual of acknowledgement and entry (Huizinga, 1955). As previously

demonstrated, hosts enact rituals of cleaning and practices of welcoming guests on entry. Hosts constantly undergo rigorous cleansing regimens after every guest to prevent negative contagion from previous guests (Douglas, 1984), which enables hosts to construct a heterotopia for their guests. However, they not only clean for the guest's sake but also for their own as it helps them to separate a guest's heterotopic 'shared' space from their own sacred spaces by performing these symbolic rituals of cleansing (Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005). On the other hand, the cleaning ritual is perceived by guests as a performance of kindness and sharing, while disguising by the open secret of home sharing. For instance, Greek guest Karen commented on the host's focus on cleanliness in the Airbnb stay in Rome as "sweet of her... she would clean the place daily for us. What a nice host. I know it's kind of her job but still... we felt cared for."

The Romantics painted a beautiful picture of their new paradise as do hosts when they describe their homes in their online profiles as "tranquil", "an oasis" and "the city's best kept secret". The impressions produced of another world are part of guests' utopian voyage to an earthly paradise. In an attempt to create a perfect space for guests, hosts create counter-sites (other spaces) that are out of place and disillusioning. Guests also realise how magical some Airbnb spaces are. For instance, when Pamela from Queenstown travelled as a guest, she chose to stay at "funky, different and mysterious places" such as a bookbinder's (a traditional bookbinding job) cottage in Oamaru. She acknowledged how nostalgic and unreal the Airbnb home left her feeling in her review of the host:

*Thank you bundles for having us Michael. It felt like being in a Charles Dickens story on stage. We loved the kitchen the most with its huge copper sink and the little bible on the book shelf. You will definitely love this place if you like the nostalgic vintage style. From the moment we stepped past the little wooden door it was like we went back to an old time setting in some kind of magical story! Inside the retreat everything was antique and detailed. Following Michael's handwritten small notes is like playing a treasure hunt. Very quaint - felt like a pioneer and loved our stay. Very quirky and certainly different. Recommend for all if you are looking for some unique get-away from reality! I especially enjoyed writing letters to family overseas using the feather quill and ink. At the same time, the cottage showcased Michael's skills and knowledge of slower times when craft was valued and practiced. The Bookbinder's Retreat is well-placed to explore and enjoy all the delights Oamaru's history offers. There are also artisan talents in the community to discover... everything from Michael's own hand-bound books to food, coffee, soaps and more. It's certainly a very special place hidden in a secret garden. Mike has created a gem that captures your imagination. If you want somewhere to take you away from normal, then escape there. It should be a well-kept secret.*

Michael, the owner of The Bookbinder's Retreat, created a heterotopic home-sharing experience by combining spatial and temporal dimensions in the Airbnb space using nostalgic decoration and "historical Victorian taste" (quote from Michael's online profile). The ability of the space to juxtapose several different spaces that were incompatible with one real place, such as the past or present, could be seen in the Victorian history with modern home appliances and practical and beautiful antique crafts that were in fact impractical and decorative only. The spatio-temporal boundaries converged within the physical space in an imaginary series of play spaces from history onto a physical space. The Romantic nostalgia attached to Michael's Bookbinder's Retreat further set it apart as a counter-site endowed with utopic features of better times from yesteryear (Stern, 1992) but positioned in a real place. Other hosts' homes include fantasy-like memories that represent the past and can bring about positive emotions (Holak & Havlena, 1998; Holbrook, 1993) for guests such as reminders of "mum's old China", "rural farm where I grew up" or "authentic nature life" (guest reviews of Airbnb listings). Airbnb home spaces have the potential to offer guests a fantasy retreat from their everyday lives and overly mass-marketed hotel rooms. Furthermore, hosts do not perceive their role and their Airbnb home as a conventional job or workplace; however, nor is it a home environment – it resembles something in between both worlds. Hosts like Philippa (Te Ānau) found hosting to be an idealistic entrepreneurial venture in the heart of her own home, which resembled a utopian community space (Levitas, 1990/2010) of belonging.

Yet as described in theme two, Airbnb homes are not perceived by hosts and guests as liminal spaces (Turner, 1969) or spaces of resistance (Karababa & Ger, 2011). The home-sharing heterotopia is actually a space where open secrecy or concealment and revelations are allowed to take place. The masking performances, practices and narratives are purposed to conceal the open secret of home sharing. Thus, homey spaces where these masking strategies take place are created to disguise the space's paradoxes, conflicts and tensions. These spaces support hosts' efforts to conduct commercial exchanges without disrupting the meanings of homeyness and common practices coupled within the space. However, the magically bounded circle that generally does not involve any materialised commercial transactions in the home can be disrupted when hosts or guests break the rules of openings and closings. For instance, some hosts

use Airbnb's technology feature of Instant Book<sup>7</sup>, which can place the accessibility and vulnerability of their homes at risk. The feature is perceived by guests as an inclusionary practice in Airbnb homes. These actions make such illusive spaces easily penetrable and less bounded from others, thus reducing the allure of fantasy. The allure may be lost if the circle of trust is broken and the truth is critiqued during hosts' dystopic practices.

Chris (guest, Online Community Centre) spoke out about how the truth of home sharing is revealed and presented as a counter-site:

*I've been the most courteous guest, in my opinion. Respectful and kind. But I think my host is taking advantage of that! She's asking me for all these extras like money for the coffee, which is not very hospitable in my opinion! I thought I was in a home, not a hotel. It's so frustrating that she would treat someone else like that, and in her own home!*

The Romantics believed that interactions were necessary to actualise their moral values. Rousseau suggests that human beings should equally engage in communal dialogue to attain social agreement around common social issues; however they must have the freedom to exercise free will to keep their individuality (Berman, 1972). In an ideal Romantic world, hosts and guests should be able to reach agreements on their issues; instead, they can disagree and disappoint one another as no community is homogenous enough to share the same preferences and values. These disagreements are expressed in discussions between hosts and guests or through unacceptable profane practices in the home. By breaking the rules of the 'magic circle' of the space (Huizinga, 1955) through giving and accepting cash, they defy the self-delineated boundaries of otherness that is portrayed as sharing. If their practices do not align with romanticised discursive frames and social tensions persist, guests tend to return to the market that resembles a topos, that is, a real space that has structure and rules that cannot be escaped. Chris continued by saying, "at least with hotels, you know what to expect".

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<sup>7</sup> Instant Book is an Airbnb feature that hosts can select for their listings. Guests may book an Airbnb home without host pre-approval. The feature was created as a response to discrimination against African American guests in U.S. homes and has been rolled out in all countries Airbnb operates in.

Chris's observation of the home and the host's actions reveal the already known truth that while home sharing might be utopic for the host, it can also be dystopic, that is imperfect, for guests.

However, the home-sharing space is not always spatio-temporally bounded. Hosts and guests may decide to override technology resources by taking bookings off the Airbnb platform to avoid paying the company's service fees or using other home-sharing sites that do not require dual reviews. By breaking the rules of the heterotopia, hosts and guests violate the expressive capacities (i.e., trust) of the network's technology resources and keep the open secret vulnerable to revelations. Airbnb's legal terms state that "*any reservations that are made outside of Airbnb violate our Terms of Service. If we identify that a reservation was made through a third-party service, we may cancel the reservation and deactivate the accounts of the person who made the reservation and the guest.*" If hosts or guests disrupt the controlled openings and closings that represent the heterotopia, it can cause several internal tensions such as mistrust or worse, theft:

*I accepted cash last Easter weekend from a Chinese guest. I did so much for her. I treated her well when I didn't really have to. Unfortunately, after 4 days she left our place, I got a message from Airbnb that she is asking for stolen money! The supposed stolen money was almost the same amount as she paid for her additional two-day stay. That was a disappointing experience. Why even bother? I feel betrayed... and in my own home! (Lena, Wellington host, Facebook thread, 20.6.2017)*

While the Chinese guest might have felt like she succeeded in finding value in her trip, Lena experienced a change in the home-sharing process. What was essentially meant to create utopian sharing experiences, actually transformed the situation into a dystopian world for Lena. Lena expressed that she was willing to sacrifice her time and engage in social interactions, which to her was a precious gift (Miller, 2001). This reflects the amount of effort and care needed for gift-giving to take place (Ruth et al., 1999), which mirrors a degree of social intensity. Lena would no longer accept further connections with the Chinese guest in question that could have been materialised into repeat bookings nor would she initiate any sort of friendship. Thus, previous alignments between technology and social resources that exist in sharing heterotopias are low in capacity potential. Social factors that underpin the marketplace culture can be intertwined with calculated instrumental needs of an alleged jaded marketplace that change consumers' ascribed meanings of a home-sharing space. The home-sharing



space can become an anti-place, that is, a dystopian place. Lena's home felt like the worst of all possible worlds. For other hosts and guests, revelations of a bad home-sharing experience can potentially become a dystopian nightmare that many fear, especially with mass media news stories of hosts' homes being vandalised by drunken guests, or guests financially scammed by hosts.

Lastly, Airbnb home spaces are perceived by both hosts and guests as spaces of deviation. When host Suzie spoke of how she often joked sarcastically with her guests about her host community's resistance to government tax requirements, she reinforced the sense of other-worldliness where homes can be stigmatised as a space of transgressionary resistance. According to Foucault's (1986) principles of heterotopia, Airbnb homes are spaces of deviation where behaviours occur that are unusual and abnormal in traditional accommodation. The magic circle that hosts create for guests is a space where they can accept strangers into the home. It is not common to allow strangers to sleep in your bed for contamination reasons and so home sharing is perceived by the outside audience as an act of deviance. Local Councils perceive home sharing as deviant, which is why Councils, the media and the general public oppose home sharing and Councils require hosts to pay commercial rates, thus transforming previously residential homes and their sacred meanings into commercial spaces. In the eyes of outsiders, hosts are conducting profane activities in their private homes. Hosts' masking of ritualistic performances and narratives work to conceal and contain the open secret within the magic circle of Airbnb home sharing. However, guests do not perceive the Airbnb home as a heterotopia in this sense. They simply enter a magic circle of play and illusion that is spatio-temporally and socially bounded.

### **5.3.2 Performing Playspaces of Illusion and Compensation**

Similar to Marin's (1984, 1992) view of social ordering, the utopian paradise desired by hosts and guests is not their main concern; they are more concerned with the spatial play involved in imagining and recreating perfect worlds within spaces of paradox and underlying tensions. The paradoxes and contradictions discussed in theme two played against each other according to Marin's (1984) conceptualisation; however, they continue to co-exist through the performative masking practices and narratives of the open secret of home sharing. Therefore, the utopian notion is upheld, and a romanticised self and space can exist without self-doubt or inner confusion.

While Airbnb hosts attempt to create a utopia in the shape and practices of heterotopic spaces, they create a home-sharing space of illusion. According to Foucault (1986), heterotopias have a function that reflect nearby sites they exist amongst, but the spaces hosts create have evolved over time. Within this study, several guests described Airbnb as a unique accommodation provider as opposed to other spaces such as the private home itself, hotels, motels, homestays and traditional BnBs. While these types of accommodation are what most individuals are used to using when they travel, Airbnb home-sharing processes are perceived as incompatible and contradictory alternatives. Outsiders that observe the home-sharing platform may perceive it as “uncomfortable and awkward” and “intrusive” (quotes from negative cases). However, hosts frame the offering of their own homes as a way to emerge with an aspect of human nature that embodies kindness and morality, sharing and community. This resembles the discourses of the Romantics (as depicted in theme one) and their aspirations to re-emerge into a new paradise. However, hosts’ new paradise is an illusion created to conceal the open secret of home sharing.

To contain the secret, hosts have created a closed and private online community for themselves. There they discuss resistance practices against government and responses to media attacks. Like secret societies (Hetherington, 1997/2002), their online communities must verify whether potential members are active hosts. This is another process for creating communities (Schau et al., 2009) that are stigmatised and forced into heterotopic margins of society. This process of entry into the host community also involves several questions to verify hosts, which heightens their feelings of investment and engagement in the social host space that is defined as a heterotopia of a heterotopia. The secure and closed online host communities imply that their online host narratives enter into the realm of architecture of the home space. Outsiders, on the other hand, find the behaviours of hosts and guests to be deviant and like the Rationalists, they believe that guests are delusional and hosts are trying to deceive the government and the public by claiming home sharing is actually about sharing. For instance, Melissa, one of the study’s negative cases, recalled her one-time experience at an Airbnb home:

*I won't be sharing someone's home again. It's just not logical or normal. The host tried to chat to my husband and I about life! She was being a bit noseey and it all felt quite cheeky. I don't want to know about your [the host's] life and it's none of your business about mine. I'm not sure what her end-goal was but we weren't interested in becoming friends and if she wanted a positive review from us... well I gave a fair review.*

Onlookers also avoid sharing home spaces during travel because of the perceived deviance of sharing private places; that is, they do not regard such practice as an example of “normal” behaviour. Deviant behaviours that take place in the home as perceived by outsiders include hosts making money from their home resulting in legal and tax issues. Hosts and guests generally share the Airbnb home as expected by Airbnb sharing members but their behaviours when using the space are not consistent with everyday lives or what is expected when staying and paying for temporary accommodation such as in a hotel. For instance, hosts and guests sometimes share meals and genuine heartfelt stories of their lives, a behaviour that is not normal amongst strangers.

Masking practices and narratives created by hosts contain the illusion of a home-sharing process and conceal it within the walls of romantic love, kindness and community. For example, if guests follow the rules of conduct set by hosts, guests can enjoy the openness of the space whilst adhering to the internal restrictions of house rules. The Airbnb company promises members the ability to “*belong anywhere*”, “*Airbnb [home] for everyone*”(Airbnb, 2018b), thereby alluding to openness and accessibility. Yet on the other hand, hosts regard written rules, such as check-in and check-out times, and recommendations Airbnb sends to guests prior to their Airbnb stay as best practice and etiquette for sharing a home. Hosts’ discourses may be inclusionary, but similar to gated communities that focus on uncaring exclusionary practices (Belk, 2017a), performances of the powerful omnipresent but invisible host (especially in a fully rented Airbnb space) and controlled activities can be exclusionary. Such “big-brother” activities reflect Derrida’s (2000) notion of conditional hospitality. Derrida also refers to Agamben’s (1998) ‘inclusive exclusion’ where the conditional welcoming of guests is a ritual of exclusion that masquerades as a ritual of inclusion into the sharing practices within the heterotopia (Sobh et al., 2013). This level of home sharing requires the host to make boundaries permeable to the degree that they support the desire for order and stability in the heterotopia and safeguard the illusory discourses of home-sharing practices and the space. Components of home-sharing processes can materialise meanings that consumers want to associate with (Peñaloza, 2000), thus fostering ideologies such as moral values (Borghini et al., 2009), or promoting a market ethos such as anti-capitalism (Chatzidakis, Maclaran, & Bradshaw, 2012). Based on Foucault’s (1986) sixth principle of a heterotopic space, the illusion of home-sharing

practices as Romantic (theme one) exposes every other real space as calculated and rational. The heterotopia unsettles the taken-for-granted material, spatial and social relations and provides spaces of alterity to challenge an established status quo.

Romantic notions of sharing can indeed co-exist in the calculated nature of economic exchange and explain how these paradoxes are sustained in the sacred space of the home. Airbnb homes can also become spaces of compensation that contests the rational cold-hearted world and seek to create new, perfect representations of a utopia we envision but cannot ‘really’ have, that is, selfless love and moral acts of kindness towards humanity in the commercial exchanges of home-sharing platforms.

An Airbnb home is also a playspace that needs simultaneous performance by both hosts and guests. The data suggest that playspaces within Airbnb homes are the merging of the imaginary world created online by the host and mediated by the Airbnb platform (e.g., check-in time, house manual, added benefits such as a spa pool or animal feeding) with the physical, geographical and real world location in the home space that hosts and/or guests occupy (e.g., an Airbnb cottage in Wellington) and during a particular ‘slice in time’ (e.g., guest booking five days). These are what constitute a playspace.

The hopes for a utopia is that it remains a space of neutrality that resists closure and remains paradoxical (Marin, 1984). The utopian thinking allows for contradictions to play against one another rather than being resolved or repressed (Maclaran & Brown, 2005). Tensions remain unresolved between the different styles of Airbnb homes, different rules, hosts, unique benefits offered and home-sharing set-ups. Guests can observe these tensions that play against each other in the digital spatial arrangements using the online technology platform of Airbnb. Like a window display, guests can observe a giant collage of different homes to select from as they search for a place to stay. Unlike most hotels, there is no uniformity in the digital home-front design or signage. The presentation of unique spaces creates intriguing idiosyncratic choices that characterise the Romantic utopian’s creative aspirations and artistic imagination (Campbell, 1987). With a wide selection of homes that resemble a utopian anarchic paradise, Airbnb home sharing offers a subversive mixing of class and taste cultures (Holt, 1995) and conveys a social ambivalence to enhance the space’s utopic potential (Hetherington, 1997/2002). However, as home-sharing spaces are real physical territories that are also reflective of alternate imagined worlds of perfection, it is a

heterotopic playspace as home-sharing spaces are counter-sites of paradoxes and tensions that overlay each other. By representing a new space that is both a foreign accommodation and a temporary home for guests and a workplace and a home for hosts, the Airbnb space contests real sites such as hotels and non-shared private homes. Its alternativeness can be viewed by those not involved in the home-sharing counter-site as ‘out of place’ and disillusioning. Similar to third places and third spaces, heterotopias are determined as ‘places of otherness’ through their interactions with nearby sites (Hetherington, 1997/2002).

Heterotopias are at their most intense when they pull everything out into a new slice of time such as Airbnb The Bookbinder’s Retreat that Pamela visited, which attempted to ‘accumulate’ moments of time from the Victorian era into a “hidden [space] in a secret garden” (quote from Pamela). Guests can always return to this Airbnb at any time to experience the accumulated time period of the past dubbed into the present. With the heterotopia’s chronotopic power of freezing moments of time, such as the Victorian era in The Bookbinder’s Retreat, and materialising that time in space, for example, using bookbinder crafts and historic artefacts (Bakhtin, 1981/2008), a playspace of tensions between past and present, space and place and real and symbolic is created (Smethurst, 2000). Michael, an authentic bookbinder and also the Airbnb host of The Bookbinder’s Retreat created a heterotopia that was penetrable through an online request to stay at this Airbnb. He created a playspace where both past and present artefacts could co-exist and overlay each other (e.g., see Figure 19). The playspace of illusion was also isolated from the rest of the world by placing it in Oamaru as a “well-kept secret”, “with a secluded converted feel to it” (quote from Michael’s profile describing his Airbnb home and his reviews). The reordering of spatial and social relations in this counter-site supports the concealment of the open secret of home sharing.



**Figure 19: The Bookbinder's Retreat with paradoxical kitchenware (a modern fridge and a historic wood fire) and an isolated location (gated castle as a hidden fortress)**

Guests 'other' themselves in order to take part in the Airbnb sharing experience. By entering a magic circle of the Airbnb home that is bounded temporally and spatially, they are able to engage in the space and socialise with the host. As a chronotope (Bakhtin, 1981), the entanglement of spatial and temporal dimensions of Airbnb homes makes portions of the home space dedicated to the circulation of guests. It also epitomises a certain efficiency in the management of flows and sequencing of human rhythms. Thus, guests do not perceive home sharing as heterotopic because of its social and architectural divisions. For instance, guests often try and 'cheat' the home-sharing system by blackmailing hosts into giving them extra benefits such as partial refunds, discounts or additional guests to stay in exchange for five-star ratings and positive reviews. In this case, hosts' rituals of cleaning and practices of welcoming that they perceive as creating a heterotopia are not valued by guests. Believing it is only a magic circle and not a bounded heterotopia enables guests to break the rules of the circle of sharing spaces in Airbnb homes. Guests do not always envision the home-sharing process as a utopic dreamworld and a paradise where they can re-emerge with the natural world and human nature. On the contrary, their actions express a utilitarian form of accommodation experience and a desire for value-in-use.

Thus, guests do not experience Airbnb as a heterotopia but a *heterochrony*, that is, short breaks in time, which can only happen within the circle of the Airbnb home. For instance, Greek guest Karen spoke of wanting to know what it is like to be a Parisian for five days whilst still practicing her female domestic duties as a wife and

still do grocery shopping at the Boulangerie. Guests do not want to completely relinquish their normal everyday lives, but rather destabilise them during the ‘break in time’ in the Airbnb home in hopes of experiencing a playspace of fun, creativity and fantasy. They use the Airbnb space as a tactic to break free from their monotonous life, which is what creates a heterochronia where they can break free from an institutionalised script of spatiotemporal allocations. These break-like strikes in time and into playspaces render Romantic elements of self-expression and experiential hedonism whilst they can still exercise some elements they cherish from their daily lives.

A heterotopia, according to Foucault (1986), is created when the ‘others’, such as hosts, create a space within a larger environment where they can engage their ‘othered selves’ and align with their Romantic and Rational selves. This fusion of two worlds as a heterotopic playspace is only possible within the masking and unmasking processes of a home-sharing space that functions as a place which typifies postmodern consumer culture. Here, hosts and guests’ illusion of freedom to pursue host and guest’s self-discovery, a return to human nature and re-emergence with the natural world, is possible within a juxtaposed spatio-temporal ‘real’ world of eu-topia (good place) and ou-topia (no place). Hence, maintaining the open secrecy of home sharing through processes presented in theme two of this study is important for hosts to ensure the realness of their home-sharing practices and for guests to experience a mimetic simulation of “a vivid sense of mysterious other worlds” (Taussig, 1999, p. 250). The more we try and conceal the secret, the more it resists containment in the space and secretes the secret by further mystifying its paradoxical aspects.

## **5.4 Summary**

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 presented a discussion of the three themes that emerged from my findings. The themes included mobilising and re-emerging with the home-sharing paradise, the open secret processes of home sharing and creating heterotopic home-sharing spaces. Drawing on the data, the themes elucidated each aspect of the framework on the process of romanticising home-sharing experiences. The purpose was to provide an overview of the structural and dynamic components of the framework and the paths to stabilising and destabilising the network, thus highlighting the home-sharing network’s fragility.

Together, these themes allude that home-sharing consumers (hosts and guests) jointly fuse ideologies of Romanticism and Rationalism where the network is wrought with tensions, conflicts and paradoxes. At first, Airbnb social actors use romanticised discursive frames to explain how they feel about the “sharing-exchange” (note the paradox as sharing is not an exchange at all). Next, troubles in paradise arose as paradoxes and conflicts were unravelled. The fusion of Romantic and Rational ideologies were discovered amongst the Airbnb home-sharing community of hosts and guests to reveal that this fusion takes place with the use of the open secret. As hosts and guests together maintain that the open secret of home-sharing processes has nothing to do with sharing; they jointly co-create a fantasised utopia in the form of a real place, a heterotopic home-sharing space.

Only by locating hosts and guests’ sharing practices within the context of postmodernity can we fully grasp its implications. Postmodern consumers, which include social actors in the home-sharing network, adopt both Rationalist and Romantic notions (Berman, 1972; Taylor, 1989). While Romanticism is a historical and cultural movement against the Rationalism of modernity, the Romantics also internalised notions of freedom and self-determining rebellion against Rationalists in the Enlightenment era (Löwy & Sayre, 2001). Observations and descriptions of hosts and guests’ perceptions of their home-sharing experiences reflect the co-existence of both Rationalism and Romanticism as well as Kantian moral ethics where actions can only be permissible if they apply to all and reflect good will. In fact, a host published an opinion piece in a local online news site on the topic of the commercial tax to be applied to Airbnb hosts and through this piece she demonstrated the desire for freedom and independence for the greater good:

*Many properties in various parts of the country, are baches [holiday homes] rented out when the owners aren't using them to help defray costs. This is a practice that has gone on for decades and many Kiwi families love the opportunity for a reasonably-priced family holiday, staying at someone's bach by the sea, lake, forest or in the countryside. Charging these owners commercial rates threatens that iconic part of growing up as a Kiwi, as it would not then be economically viable to rent it to other people. Other people seek to rent their own home out over the holidays while they are away themselves. (Siobhan, Rotorua host, 19.6.2018)*

Taking into consideration Rousseau’s rejections of amoral utilitarianism (which is similar to Rationalism), Kant argues that individuals as independent, free and moral agents can only become rational when they are determined to act only by universal



maxims. Reason and rationality allow for freedom and following the good. Thus, according to Kant, freedom, universal goodness and Rationalism can co-exist. Yet Kant's moral philosophy still criticises rationality as it "is not the whole person" and that "because it is a theory of freedom, the view of nature as a source [i.e., Romanticism] cannot ignore the point that mere sinking into unity with nature would be a negation of human autonomy" (as cited in Taylor, 1989, p. 385). Hence, Kant calls for a union between reason and human nature that aligns with the requirement that virtue and joy are combined. His moral argument of self-determination and freedom that aligns with universal goodwill dialectically brings together Rationalism (i.e., human beings' objective reasoning) and Romanticism (e.g., freedom, creativity, unconstrained self-expression and return to human nature). Of course, hosts and guests differ in the degree of their adherence to Rationalism and Romanticism and the different contexts involved (i.e., guests versus hosts, full house rented versus shared home), where they integrate reasoning, freedom, unconstrained self-expression and morality due to the heterogeneity of the network's social actors and the resources shared. Yet, to understand sharing in the home-sharing network, Rationalism and Romanticism should be considered together based on the cultural and historical relationship of these ideologies. Modern day consumers adopt Kant's moral philosophy which the open secret of sharing allows for a balance in these opposing ideologies. To co-exist in society and especially in private homes, the home-sharing heterotopic space is created to conceal and reveal the secret of home sharing in ways that mirror a world of Romantic sharing consumption for humanity (e.g., creating a space of illusion) and also condemns a rational, commercial exchange of a cold-hearted society (e.g., creating a space of compensation).

## **CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The primary purpose of this study was to uncover the assumptions that the so-called sharing economy is based on instrumentalism and Rationalism and discourses of ‘sharing’ and ‘collaboration’ are purely romanticised as a form of marketization of this new emerging market. The study was based on an initial thought that there is some relationship between Romanticism and the sharing economy, specifically in the context of home-sharing networks. The secondary purpose of this study was to examine whether existing theories of sharing, place possessions and identity require expansion or should be revisited to account for this new phenomenon of consumer sharing. To achieve these two objectives, I set out to answer the following research questions:

- What is the nature of home-sharing networks?
- How does sharing take place in home-sharing spaces?
- Do consumers assemble Romantic sharing discourses around their home-sharing consumption, and if so, how?

I analysed the data collected from the Airbnb home-sharing network using as combination of multi-sited ethnography, netnography and grounded theory methods of analysis. The subject of this chapter is to answer these questions and provide insights and contributions that inform consumer culture and marketing research.

### **6.2 Summary of Findings**

During the data collection, analysis and theorisation processes, I discovered that sharing processes can be silently yet paradoxically publicly enacted. In the context of Airbnb home-sharing spaces and amongst hosts and guests, sharing implies a Romantic and rational character and it involves authentic and simulated encounters of human nature and experiences. Home sharing is an openly ‘not sharing’ secret that everyone understands but cannot articulate. Hosts and guests that use Airbnb are on a journey towards a moral destiny where morality is at the heart of the interplay between Romanticism and Rationalism and is laden with paradoxes, conflicts and tensions. The tensions, paradoxes and conflicts occur at a micro, meso and macro-level of interactions that eventually lead hosts and guests to perform practices and narratives to disguise the

secret of sharing. Through masking tools of concealment and revelations, the home-sharing network is empowered and hosts and guests enthusiastically stick to their home-sharing experiences even though these can be illusive and filled with paradoxes and conflicts. The joint disbelief and ambiguity of the home-sharing experience and the perceived belief that sharing intentions are pure allows hosts and guests to co-create a journey towards an imagined utopic paradise that embodies their moral-oriented self-identities. This is realised in Airbnb home-sharing heterotopic spaces that reflect real sites of exchange and homey spaces. However, they are actually ‘counter sites’ that fuse Rationality and Romanticism, thus creating heterotopic sites of deviance, illusion and compensation, and are fundamentally controlled through the spatio-temporal and social boundaries of the space that hosts and guests ‘play’ in.

Based on the findings from Chapters 4 and 5, answers to the following research questions that were developed in Chapter 3 emerged. (1) ‘What is the nature of home-sharing networks?’ It was found that hosts and guests perceive the home-sharing experience as a journey towards a new paradise where they can re-emerge with the natural world and a love of human nature and where they can exercise their freedom and values of a common good for all citizens. Both hosts and guests jointly romanticise their experience to reach the new order where they can actualise their moral values and like a fairy tale, they will triumph with a “happy ending”.

(2) ‘How does sharing take place in home-sharing spaces?’ Despite the pastoral picture drawn by hosts, guests and the marketer of the perceived home-sharing utopia, in the shadows of home sharing there exist multiple paradoxes and conflicts that are interwoven within the proclaimed anarchic utopian subthemes identified in Chapter 4. But without these paradoxes and contradictions, sharing of the home would not be sustained. Its strength is in the ambiguity and disbelief of sharing. The paradoxes and conflicts within home sharing can co-exist through the concept of ‘open secrecy’, that is, “what is generally known but cannot be articulated” (Taussig, 1999, p. 246). Thus, sharing in home-sharing networks takes place through performative masking practices and rituals that involve inclusionary exclusion, selfish and selfless love and the paradox of being free and controlled at once. Narratives of resistance are also used to conceal and reveal the open secret, which maintains the suspicion and obscurity of the genuineness of hosts or guests and the authenticity of the home-sharing experience. Simmel (1950) discusses secrecy as follows:

*The attraction of the 'genuine', in all contexts, consists in its being more than its immediate appearance, which it shares with its imitation. Unlike its falsification, it is not something isolated; it has roots in a soil that lies beyond its mere appearance, while the unauthentic is only what it can be taken for at the moment. The 'genuine' individual, thus, is the person on whom one can rely even when he is out of one's sight. In the case of jewellery, this more-than-appearance is its value, which cannot be guessed by being looked at, but is something that, in contrast to skilled forgery, is added to the appearance (p. 342).*

Similarly, authenticity and genuineness derives their power from the invisible and are obscured by the visible. Hosts' practices, rituals and narratives can resemble the Romantics' characteristics and ideals that can lead to a journey towards a moral paradise. Like a mask, the value of the genuine is added to the appearance so one cannot decipher the authentic from the fake (Newell, 2012) making the experience real and illusive at once.

(3) 'Do consumers assemble Romantic sharing discourses around their home-sharing consumption, and if so, how (especially when the place is fused with the paradoxes of commercial and intimate exchanges)?' The home-sharing experience is wrought with paradoxes, conflicts and tensions that the home, an honourable and sacred space, is perplexed with. The study finds that the home space is a place of 'otherness' that is a counter-site to nearby sites (Hetherington, 1997/2002; Soja, 1996). Airbnb hosts and guests desire the home's utopian nature (*topos* meaning place and *u* meaning its absence) but hosts eventually create heterotopias that can make what Foucault (1986) refers to as 'places without places' into a more tangible space for alternate social orderings of deviant commercial practices in the divine space of a home-shared. The joint suspension of concealment and revelation of the open secret of sharing allows for hosts and guests' mutually romanticised shared fictions to co-exist in heterotopic playspaces. Much like a theatre company and a collaborative audience, social actors such as hosts and guests move through the home setting that is "organised and spatially bounded by specific socially construed rules of engagement and interaction 'rituals' (Goffman, 1959), 'meta-narratives' (Bruner & Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1994), or 'plots'" (Picard & Zuev, 2014, p. 103). The heterotopia's temporal boundedness of the openings and closings of the stage's curtain and the spatial boundedness of the front and back stages are what allow for the maintenance of the illusory experience of home sharing. However, in some cases the romanticised fictional experience may continue in fan letter (or hate mail) fictions of ratings. As Hetherington (1997/2002) cautions, that a

heterotopia is not inherent in a place, but is the process of spatial ordering; it enables us to think about the experience, thus home-sharing sites are not perceived as heterotopias by all social actors. Hosts perceive that they have created a homey place that emphasises a Romantic anarchic utopia and sometimes a heterotopia of divinity where they can perform their transgressive lifestyles. Guests perceive Airbnb homes as magical playspaces in which they can enter and exit a bounded magic circle without having to ‘other’ themselves to be able to play. The general public and external stakeholders (i.e., government, contemporary media, hotels, motels, long-term accommodation providers) perceive the Airbnb home as a heterotopia of deviance where hosts are excluded and marginalised in contrast to society. In creating shared spaces nearby non-shared home spaces (i.e., hosts’ private spaces) and amongst residential neighbourhoods, the sharing system makes the Airbnb home site both a mirror of and compensation for a consumption society.

This study addressed the complex workings of the private spaces of homes that are challenged in various ways by commercial practices thus creating an anti-market and anti-private place. In doing so, the study’s findings join a growing body of consumer culture research on identity work, sharing and possessions and resistance and use of space. The following sections discuss four theoretical contributions (which are interrelated but will be discussed separately to highlight their key elements) to consumer culture and marketing research and draw several conclusions. Some of these can be readily placed within existing debates in the literature. Others extend the existing literature by offering new concepts and perspectives to traditional theories. Following that, I discuss the methodological and practical implications of the findings and I conclude this chapter with a summary of the limitations and future research opportunities that can extend this study.

### **6.3 Contributions to Theories of Identity**

Consistent with theories of consumer culture that focus on values and ideological struggles involved in postmodern society’s consumption activities (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 2015), this current study contributes to consumer literature on sharing and collaborative consumption in new market systems. By providing sociocultural and spatial theorisation of the concept of home sharing that is embedded in dynamic and conflict-laden consumer networks, the study introduces a moral dimension of home sharing that is in contrast to previous studies which have been dominated by

Rationalist approaches towards collaborative consumption and access economies and those dominated by purely idealistic Romantic approaches towards sharing and moral economies.

By introducing the co-existence of moral and instrumental dimensions in the sharing economy, this study enriches the consumer culture research on identity projects that are typically considered as goal driven (Mick & Buhl, 1992; Schau & Gilly, 2003) although the aims may be vaguely understood (Arnould & Price, 1993) and marked by internal contradictions and ambivalence (Hirschman, 1992; Mick & Fournier, 1998; Otnes, Lowrey, & Shrum, 1997). The findings from this study elaborate further on examples of such internal conflicts, which can be historically rooted in ideological struggles between Romantic and Rational values. By understanding the moral dimension of consumer sharing, we can begin to understand the meanings of sharing practices in commercial interactions such as home-sharing marketplaces. Moral values are central to modern consumers' sense of self and identity (Taylor, 1989) and their identity projects (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In contrast to past research on identity projects that portray consumers as committed to solving their consumption problems through a myriad of coping strategies or compensatory mechanisms, this study illustrates that consumers engage in cultural, social and political processes and dynamic moral contestation and negotiations to actualise their moral values. Due to the dynamic interplay between Romanticism and Rationalism and their related ideologies and values, Airbnb hosts and guests develop, contest and negotiate ideals of calculated and self-interested commercial exchanges (e.g., illustrated in guest payments, ratings and reviews, value in use of the Airbnb home appliances) and their Romantic ideals of nostalgia, creativity and emotions. The two polar and generally paradoxical views of the world co-exist as demonstrated by postmodern consumers of home sharing where they are influenced by Romantic philosophers such as Rousseau and Kant (Taylor, 1989). Consumers integrate rationality, love, morality and freedom in their narratives, practices and social exchanges to allow for the co-existence of these paradoxical moral values in their identity projects. In contrast to research that has identified consumer ambivalence and internal conflicts when consumers cannot exercise their desired moral values, my findings point to an open secret that leads consumers to negotiate and juxtapose these seemingly opposing meanings and ideals to create a home-sharing heterotopic space. By introducing the open secrecy concept and masking and unmasking processes, it

becomes clear that antithetical identities can in fact co-exist without creating internal conflicts. In fact, the ambiguity of the identities portrayed by hosts or guests legitimised the transformed identity and strengthen it with the dual concealment and revelation of the secret (e.g., the secret that there is no secret; home sharing is not ‘really’ about sharing).

The open secret further tells us that consumers’ identity projects are not just ways of imitating desirable ‘others’ such as with counterfeit brands or conspicuous consumption (Hamilton, 2012). The open secrecy process of masking and unmasking (i.e., concealment and revelations of the secret) actually legitimates the identities performed due to the joint disbelief, scepticism and uncertainty. Like actors in a theatre production, the audience experiences transcendence and believes in the story performed on stage (e.g., where audience members may shed tears and share in the laughter with the actors). The performance may represent deceptions but also liberations, which contradicts the early 18<sup>th</sup>-century Rational sensibilities with the “odd mixture of rationalism and irrationalism, decorum and revolutionary fantasy” (Castle, 1986, p. 183). Due to the spaces’ heterochronias as ‘breaks in time’ that are controlled by the heterotopia’s opening and closing of the curtain, the actors’ identities and their performances are perceived as genuine and believed to be ‘real’. Similarly, the hosts and guests are performing ‘authentic selves’ (Belk & Sobh, 2018; Newell, 2012) that are embodied in the open secret of home sharing. Like Newell’s (2012) Ivorian masks and the *bluffeurs* wearing them, when consumers and producers perform, they inhabit the spirit they represent and embrace its authentic powers. The masks are described as agents, where in the case of this study, the home (and the homey objects) and its materiality can also be perceived as masks that are crucial for the performance of home-sharing processes to take place. Further, as an extension of the host’s self (Belk, 1988), the spirit of the home legitimates the host’s ‘authentic self’ that not only others believe but the host believes in as well. We become the masks we put on (Newell, 2013) where the masks represent the conceptions we struggle to live up to. Goffman (1959) found that because everyone is performing a role all the time, masks become our truer self; the self we would like to be. The masks consumers wear can embody “the joy of change and reincarnation” of the self, but masks can also “keep a secret [and] deceive[s].” (Castle, 1986, p. 104). So, if the self can transform and anchor into a ‘true self’, then the

concept of an inner core self (Belk, 1988) should be rethought as later argued by Ahuvia (2005) and Bahl and Milne (2010) and revised by Belk (2013, 2014a).

Compared to research that observes the relationships between consumer identity projects and the market where marketers are perceived as controlling consumer positions, the findings here identify that consumers attempt to align their identities with the general will of the people in order to get on the path of a moral destiny. Thus, the study's findings also challenge research that perceives markets as reducing consumption to issues related to an individual identity. On the contrary, home-sharing hosts engage in political work such as resistance narratives and practices that oppose institutional efforts to marginalise hosts. For them, their resistance and Romantic home-sharing practices are not acts of transgression but a call for values of freedom, egalitarianism and public interests "where anyone can host guests in their own homes. Their space, their rules" (Angelica and David, Wellington host). With a spatiotemporal entitlement, the home as a space of harmony, privacy, sacredness and leisure can become a political project and a reproduction of social identities (Gopaldas & Fischer, 2012). Hosts politicise home sharing for the greater good of humanity and as a group identity project.

Further, the moral constitution of consumption and the nature of moral dilemmas that consumers face during the commercialisation of daily life such as intimate moments can also be challenged with the findings of this research. With the fusion of notions underlying Romanticism and Rationalist values, we can redefine the way researchers think of exchange paradigms as economic (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961) or social (Belk & Coon, 1993). By observing the individual as one that holds the two conflicting ideologies (which do not necessarily refute each other), we can explain why hosts believe they are doing good by hosting guests. As a justifiable act that is rewarded (monetarily, socially and emotionally), hosts believe they can re-emerge with the natural world and in harmony with human nature by embracing 'Kantian ethics' and Rousseauian philosophies that reject self-interested amoral utilitarianism (i.e., Rationalism) and ground morality elsewhere (Kant, 2016). By removing instrumentalism, Kant (2016) focuses on one's duty as "the necessity of acting out of reverence for the [moral] law" (p. 13). The moral law that Kant writes about should be universal, that is, they should apply to all individuals. This means that to act rationally is to recognise that what one wishes for oneself should also apply to others. The law will help other individuals do their duty, observe the laws and follow the moral



contracts of the market. By justifying their exchange as universally beneficial, hosts and guests that share their homes can re-emerge in a new paradise (actualised in different forms as described in Chapters 4 and 5). This moral ground can reunite Rationalism and Romanticism by creating spaces of creativity, fantasy, nature and humanity in harmony by embodying ideal values of freedom, public interests and a rational work ethic. Thus, an individual may express themselves using both moral and market economies without endangering intimate relationships or self-perceptions that are socially desirable (i.e., moral) (Cheal, 1988/2015).

This current research focused on the Romanticism of home-sharing consumption, but the findings also resonate with examples of transformational identity work in other social, cultural and market contexts. For instance, not only do consumers reengineer their identities through cosmetic surgery, but they also explore themselves using retouched photographs, padded brasseries and fantasy narratives (Schouten, 1991). Similarly, studies on men's masculine projects and female eroticism also reveal how identity transformations involve a management of material consumption in different social contexts (Moisio, Arnould, & Gentry, 2013; Walther & Schouten, 2016). The current study's findings similarly illustrate how Airbnb hosts used different design techniques, material homey objects and a representation of a nostalgia for nature through art and narratives of the natural world as well as gifted objects that demonstrate a love and care for others. Material culture (Miller, 2010) in the form of homey objects, therefore, illustrate hosts' expressions of selflessness and genuine kindness towards their guests, which also demonstrates objects' agentic role in a moral consumer goal. The self in transformation thus uses material objects to gain support on the journey to a moral destiny.

Lastly, this study offers implications for object-oriented theorising in areas of consumption and during identity construction. Actor networks tend to eschew the intrapsychic realm and insist on creating symmetry between human and object agencies where they both have equal agency and act as obligatory points of passage that can monitor and control actor relationships in the assemblage (Callon, 1986). In a study of market emergence, Martin and Schouten (2014) found that consumer identity may also act as "the obligatory point of passage, [that] problematizes the self and manages the human and nonhuman resources of identity construction" (p. 868). This means that the self can be perceived as a constantly emerging assemblage. Consumer identity as an

assemblage appropriately explains hosts and guests' identity construction as a fusion of a Romantic and Rational self on a path to reach a moral destiny. In the hosts' case, they assemble homey materials, Romantic narratives and social practices and performances in order to address their personal desires and their need to reach a divine self and experience an emotional euphoria of enjoyment and self-fulfilment as well as rational outcomes that involve commercial exchanges. Through the material agency inherent in the home and homey possessions and the symbolic meanings behind the social interactions, the transactions can create transformative experiences such as re-emerging amongst a fantastic paradise, where hosts can magically integrate with the natural world, return to the primal instincts of human nature that are based on sharing and giving, and freely and collaboratively work together with their guests for the general will of the sharing community. By focusing on the home-sharing assemblage, my findings reveal emotions such as desires or fears as key actors in the human assemblage. The findings demonstrate the potential for identity formation as an assemblage where the identity is shaped by actors such as one's moral ethic and emotions. However, emotions such as desires are not acted upon by the unconscious as per Deleuze and Guattari's (1977) characterisation of consumers as 'desiring machines'; however, such emotions have agency in postmodernity. Individuals are not only aware of their wants but also celebrate their impulses implied in desire (Lipovetsky, 1994; Maffesoli, 1988/1996). Emotions provide a heightened sense of agency that allows us to enact our deepest values, goals and sense of self. An individual can problematize the self and manage the key components that construct the self (including discourses, technologies, things and sociality).

## **6.4 Contributions to Theories of Sharing**

The nature of sharing in today's world has taken several twists from the old notion of sharing, which is as old as mankind and was critical for humanity's survival (Belk, 2014). Researchers have found that the use of the term 'sharing' is a label for multi-party platform businesses that use it to rent out rooms, rides, homes and cars. Research demonstrates that sharing in this sense does not involve its prototypical sense of sharing 'our' possessions but instead involves possessions that are mine or yours (Belk, 2010; Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2016). What is being shared and how it is being shared have changed the meanings of sharing, and eventually the meanings of the possessions shared. While previous research has attempted to analyse the instrumentalism of the

sharing economy and highlighted that consumer sharing is an economic tactic used by marketers to denote virtuous actions oriented towards community and belonging (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Matzler, Veider, & Kathan, 2015), the findings from this research demonstrate that the term ‘sharing’ is not just a label used by its users and marketers. Airbnb hosts and guests demonstrated that home-sharing processes offer them moral virtues that they value and which are embedded in the social, cultural and political meanings behind sharing and shared spaces.

Taking a pessimistic view of the sharing economy, scholars have expressed their concerns that communal virtues and a longing for cooperative ways of doing things are being colonised by instrumental economic logics that are exploiting the original ideals of sharing (Scholz, 2016; Sundararajan, 2014). Belk (2014b) labels this type of sharing as pseudo-sharing and defines it as follows:

*A business relationship masquerading as communal sharing. It may not be altogether unwelcome and it may be beneficial to all parties as well as friendly to the environment. **But it is not sharing** [emphasis added] (p. 11).*

If collaborative consumption platforms foster a lack of identification and negative reciprocity (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012), this current study extends the reasons for users co-opting to continue accessing such platforms and engage in social relationships (Hellwig et al., 2018). Despite the clear deception, the concept of the open secret of home sharing and masking and unmasking rituals, practices and narratives sustains the home-sharing network through the ambiguity of the secret.

Sharing as a moral and fundamental consumer behaviour may not be either ‘black or white’ – ‘sharing-in’ or ‘sharing-out’ (Belk, 2010). Based on the findings from this study, sharing seems closest to Belk’s (2014b) definition of pseudo sharing mentioned above, except that it is not-not sharing. For hosts and guests in the home-sharing marketplace, the ambiguity of the open secret of sharing is what keeps the boundaries of sharing blurry. Their joint disbelief whether home sharing is indeed true sharing or a promotional tool that masquerades the economic exchanges taking place is what strengthens the secret further. Through the masking and unmasking practices, rituals, performances and narratives that hosts put in motion and guests join in on, home-sharing markets continues to thrive even though they may seem deceptive to an external audience such as governments, media and big chain hotel corporations. I argue for a third lens to further understand sharing practices and their linked experiences that

involve a simulated ‘genuine’ sharing (as opposed to a pseudo form). Sharing in this third sense does not involve tricks to deceive; rather, it uses techniques that can harness the ‘magical paradise’ desired by the co-creators of this experience. There is no deception and no actors are misled because the secret of home sharing is that there is none. The power is not in the deceit itself but the collective faith in the power of this illusion (Newell, 2013).

Perhaps open secrecy is also another reason why consumer researchers have been reluctant to research the Romantic notions of sharing (Belk, 2010) as the open secret is often difficult to articulate (Taussig, 1999). Based on Belk’s (2010) conceptual work on sharing, past treatments of sharing have been confused with gift exchange or commodity exchange due to the pervasiveness of a Rationalist researcher lens (e.g., Becker, 2005) that focuses on reciprocity (e.g., self-interested). However, with the conceptual treatment of the open secrecy, one can also explain why much research fails to acknowledge that consumer sharing is a moral virtue that consumers and producers (such as hosts and guests) are complicit in creating as a secret to allow both social and economic exchanges to simultaneously co-exist in consumption practices. For example, selfish and selfless love can be enacted by both hosts and guests in the home to present a mutual sharing experience that allows them to reach a moral destiny where Rationalism and Romanticism are fused.

Much can also be said about the ambiguities between gift-giving, sharing and commodity exchange. Judging whether a transaction best resembles one of these prototypes may not only be a fuzzy ordeal (Belk, 2010) but also a planned one by the giver or the receiver. The current study’s findings suggest that consumers use masking rituals and practices to further create ambiguity around the sharing experience. Hosts allow strangers as guests in their home for a fee (transactional) but mask this with gift-giving practices such as providing a welcome gift basket in the rooms or a farewell present such as home-made jams or eggs from the host’s farm (gifting) that are inalienable from the host and often lend singularity to the gifts. Including a social context within the exchange, such as guests cooking and having a meal or a friendly conversation with their hosts (sharing), it further blurs the experience and strengthens the secret of home sharing that is not really about sharing. What might seem deceptive to an external audience is actually a desirable simulation of an ‘authentic’ home-sharing experience that overlays gift-giving, commodity exchange and sharing all together.

Hence, as Taussig (1999) maintains, “imitation in being fraudulent ensures realness and works its wonderful magic” (p. 238). However, the open secret differs from a seller’s engagement in relationship marketing. For example, the local grocer that creates an interpersonal relationship with his/her customer is generally not engaged in any secret because the seller is clearly located in a business and sells a commodity where he/she expects money in return. The practices and narratives that take place in the shared home are used to ‘secrete the secret’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) through revelation, where “the mystery is heightened, not dissipated, by unmasking” (Taussig, 1998, p. 222). The same can be said about hybrid economies (Scaraboto, 2015) and brand community groups (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001) where a process of constructing an open secret conceals any *quid pro quo* expectations and paradoxically strengthens the secret through revelations that keep the mystery alive. Thus, the confusion and contradictory aspects amongst the three dimensions of sharing, commodity exchange and gift-giving are in fact what strengthen the sharing secret.

The ambiguity of the open secret that lurks as a shadow behind the moral virtues of sharing may have further implications in terms of our willingness to share possessions with strangers. Possessiveness (Belk, 1985) and feelings of control over things dear to us (Kleine & Baker, 2004) are elements of attachment and materialism, which threaten sharing. Similarly, cultural differences can impact the acceptance of sharing meaningful possessions (Mehta & Belk, 1991; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). The open secret of sharing that fuses Rationalism and Romanticism rejects notions of possessive individualism (Tuan, 1982) by concealing and revealing elements of the secret, thus reinforcing their paradoxical compatibility and making the sharing process more acceptable. For example, despite brand community members feeling possessive over their branded objects, the feeling of community like-mindedness creates a sense of joint possession of the brand (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). Through the mimetic process of sharing, individuals may be willing to share things because of the simulated ‘real’ sharing experience and eventually create simulated (de facto) joint possessions. As the findings suggest, mimetic feelings of joint possessions instigate guests to take responsibility and (mostly) avoid damaging the host’s home or cleaning up after themselves.

## 6.5 Contributions to Theories of Resistance and Space

The postmodern view assumes that consumers are free and active cultural producers (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995) and interpretive agents rather than passive dupes (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Based on the Romantic notions of the general will, consumers resist social, cultural and political forces that may be perceived as constraining to their creativity and freedom. As cultural producers and meaning-makers, they may modify products or services in the marketplace to create unique consumption practices that are distinguished from those produced by marketers (McCracken, 1988a). Consumers can also create emancipatory lifeworlds within an inhumane and cold market where they can engage in free self-expressions. For Firat and Venkatesh (1995), true consumer emancipation involves a “move in these social spaces without the perennial panopticon of the market” (p. 258). Their freedom, however, is limited to these social spaces.

The findings from this research comply with postmodern perceptions of resistance that are limited to consumer-created spaces for their self-development and self-actualisation (Renshaw, 2006). Hosts and guests are motivated by the Romantic ideals of freedom and love of humanity and the common good of all. The guests can operate within the lifeworld walls of the home spaces shared, support small business entrepreneurs such as hosts, whilst also resisting hotel’s instrumentalism, cold inhumanity and their “boring, cookie-cutter box rooms” (quote from French guests, Nick and Jenny). We have also seen that as hosts attempt to exercise their freedom to rent out space in their homes, they engage in resistance narratives to oppose external powerful forces that refute Airbnb operations. By wanting to create an anarchic utopian paradise, hosts’ resist institutionalised norms of the home by renting out space and blurring home spaces with commercial spaces. Guests also co-opt notions of consumer resistance by challenging the market’s offerings (e.g., hotels, motels etc.), the uniformity of market accommodation spaces and extortionate prices, and choose new alternative options such as home sharing. Hosts and guests have the opportunity to release themselves from boredom and monotony in celebratory and liberatory ways (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). Host Angelica from Wellington even believed that “the government is in bed with the hotel industry”, thus hosting guests in her home is her way of releasing herself from the shackles of the government and corporations. Based on these insights, Foucault’s (1982) theory of power as well as others’ (Goffman,

1963/2009) arguments for resistance as an unavoidable reaction to institutional power are supported. The Airbnb home becomes a space that typifies postmodern consumer culture where consumers can imagine freedom to pursue their identity projects.

However, power is not the only reason why resistance emerges and new markets are created. While some markets are created as a form of resistance, conflict or stigma around prevailing market logics (Giesler, 2008; Goulding & Saren, 2007; Sandikci & Ger, 2010; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007), other marketplaces may emerge in parallel to existing markets (Martin & Schouten, 2014). Consumer resistance may manifest in organised collective actions against individual acts that can alter consumption experiences (Peñaloza & Price, 1993). Sometimes, resistance is just a mental appropriation (Fiske, 1989/2010) and other times it can be a temporary effervescence as with the Burning Man festival (Kozinets, 2002a). The standard assumption that resistant consumers and consumer activists are the same is called into question (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004).

In this study, findings point to a stream of tactical resistance that only comes into full throttle when the open secret is under threat of being fully exposed, resulting in the creation of a dystopic space or potentially causing the space's metaphorical disintegration (e.g., the possibility that government passes a law that prohibits home-sharing practices in New Zealand). Narratives of resistance that are fuelled by hosts were initiated when the government and local Councils enforced commercial rates on residential homes that shared spaces with guests. By completely unmasking the open secret of home sharing and revealing it is a commercial space, host members united to voice their opinions through letter writing to Council officers, attending official Council meetings and writing to journalists in the hope of changing the discourse back to its Romantic notion of sharing and kindness. Thus, resistance was not always inexorable when home-sharing practices were initially formed as part of hosts and guests' desire for a Romantic nostalgia of the natural world, human nature, the general will and a new paradise for humanity. The new marketplace of home sharing is sustained with the open secret of masking sharing with practices, rituals and performances. However, resistance narratives are strategically enacted to create further ambiguity around the intentions of hosts through public pleas (e.g., Siobhan's letters to Council and media articles on home sharing as a moral guise) that present an ethos of good citizenship and an antagonism towards corporations.

The lack of organised action and activism by hosts and guests may be surprising given that the Romantics themselves were irrationally unconscious beings of emotion (Sawyer, 2014). Guests (even local New Zealanders that were aware of current issues) did not react to the government's new tax laws or negative publicity against hosts. Some were unaware or appeared indifferent as it did not affect their livelihoods. Hosts did not activate their activism or publicly protest their anger except through narratives. The old paradise that saw the Palais Royal's gardens and cafés as a space that fuelled cosmopolitanism and activism in support of the French Revolution (Hetherington, 1997/2002) is only a memory. Modern day resistance may involve small scale, everyday practices such as fantasy, daydreams and narratives. In the case of this study's guests, not actively engaging in any form of resistance (e.g., not reacting at all) is another example of a small scale resistance. Guests are complicit through their silence over the open secret as they continue to use Airbnb during their travels. One can perceive that by continuing to stay in Airbnb homes, guests are continuing to resist staying at big chain hotels. Individuals like host Suzie's guests even favoured staying at Airbnb homes because of their proximity to hosts' "underground activist movement" as Suzie joked.

The small scale forms of resistance and the open secrecy that allows for concealment and exposure of the secret of home sharing become conducive to the formation of heterotopias. In this study, it was proven that the home-sharing space is a heterotopia by complying with Foucault's (1986) six principles of the heterotopology; however, the findings also demonstrate that these spaces were not created precisely as spaces of resistance such as the Palais Royal's political revolution as conceptualised by Hetherington (1997/2002) or liminal spaces for discarded objects as described by Roux, Guillard, and Blanchet (2018) and their study on the sidewalk as a heterotopia. Firstly, the heterotopic home-sharing space is not purely a space of resistance, despite the findings in this study of consumer resistance. As demonstrated, reasons for resistance are twofold: to infuse Romanticism in a Rational exchange of home sharing; and support with the masking and unmasking process of the open secret. The home-sharing heterotopia is not an inexorable resistance reaction to institutional power; rather it is a space where the ambiguity of the open secret can be strengthened through the concealment and revelation of the secret that is juxtaposed in the counter-site of a heterotopia. Secondly, it is also not a space of liminality that refers to a phase of



uncertainty or indeterminacy (Van Gennep, 1960). Hosts, guests and the shared objects are not in processes of transformation as Roux et al. (2018) and Belk et al. (1988) found with unwanted objects. Yet, within the magic circle (Huizinga, 1955) and with the notion of a playspace, we can explain the ‘othering’ that guests experience as they enter a novel space that is controlled by the temporal and spatial boundaries. Thus, to contain the open secret of home sharing, heterotopic spaces are introduced where normality ceases to exist and fixed cultural norms of homes or commoditised accommodation spaces evaporate.

Heterotopias become ambiguous places and processes of “active not-knowing” (Taussig, 1999, p. 7) in order for a joint Romantic fantasy of home sharing to co-exist next to real sites of commercial exchange (e.g., hotels, motels) and private gift-giving and pure sharing (e.g., private family home spaces). The heterotopias draw their qualities from these nearby sites and strengthen the power of the secret through exposure, scepticism and concealment. The secret is an ‘adorning possession’, but the secret in itself is not as important as its concealed existence and the collective faith of its illusion (Newell, 2013; Simmel, 1950). The heterotopia is powerful in the sense that it contains and sustains the illusive magic of the secret and the mystery as desired by both hosts and guests. Despite the shared spaces temporarily being occupied by guests, the liberatory masking and unmasking process of the open secret of the shared home becomes an “effectively enacted utopia” where consumer society is “simultaneously represented, contested and invested” (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). The open secret is an anti-market system that perfectly illustrates home sharing as a heterotopic process and space.

## **6.6 Methodological Implications**

Networks are generally complex, with levels of interconnections between dispersed entities (Marston, Jones, & Woodward, 2005). Analyses that involve transversal, “rhizomatic forms of interspatial interconnectivity” (Jessop, Brenner, & Jones, 2008, p. 390), horizontal relationships and flows of information that “condition both consumption and production” whilst creating distinctive cultures (Castells, 2011, p. 6) become central to the research of networks. Understanding these interdependent and interrelated webs of connections, how they emerge and develop over time require qualitative, process-oriented methodologies. Utilising a combination of multi-sited ethnography and netnography in this study has offered rich data and insights about the home-sharing network of Airbnb. This methodology brings together data with different

forms that comes from different sites to improve the reliability and trustworthiness of the emergent theory.

One of the challenges of studying market systems is being sensitive to context and process. Understanding a market “requires the analysis of complex socioeconomic systems over time” (Giesler, 2008, p. 739) and for the analysis to be contextualised. Becoming a participant in the collaborative network of home sharing allowed me to learn about aspects of the network that otherwise may have gone undiscovered. For instance, I was able to give attention to materiality (Goulding & Saren, 2007; Sandikci & Ger, 2010), where connectedness of social actors and interactions take place (Fligstein & Dauter, 2007), and the “sociotechnical arrangements or assemblages (agencements) organise the conception, production and circulation of goods” (Çalışkan & Callon, 2010, p. 3) at multiple sites. Future researchers who wish to experience a deeper understanding of collaborative consumption networks such as home sharing could engage in longitudinal participant observation that may explain the cultural matters that are relevant to that specific market, especially if the company is a technology disruptive one that is continuously innovating and developing their product offerings and service design, such as Airbnb.

My experience with participant observation also enabled me to discover aspects of the market dynamics such as exchanges and product and market spaces that have distinct material characteristics to reflect context and process. In addition to my observations of practices and behaviours of networked participants, I was also granted access to archived documents and histories that revealed the network’s initial practices, values and structures, their connections and how these evolved over time. By coupling multi-sited ethnography, netnography and archived documents, my analysis offered a complete account of the home-sharing network.

Another important implication for netnographic research is that the nature of the Airbnb online environment (being geographically unbounded) demonstrates the distribution of members across a variety of groups in a “quasi-coherent network” (Baym, 2007). Participants do not solely exist in physical spaces; rather, they are geographically dispersed and they communicate online through community groups or the messaging application provided by the Airbnb platform. They also connect offline through events or by meeting in the dual roles of hosts and guests in Airbnb homes and have dual roles as hosts and guests, which means they have different and multi-faceted

experiences. Even within their online worlds, they exist in diverse digital spaces that can be consumer-created or company-owned – from official company discussion forums to consumer generated social media content such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and messaging applications. Furthermore, meanings of home are not only materialised through the physical homey space but are symbolically and indexically expressed through their listing photos, reviews and ratings and Superhost/Superguest titles. Their physical and digital lives continuously overlap and it can be difficult to know where one begins and the other ends. Network actors continue negotiating cultural meanings anywhere and anytime. Thus, researchers willing to take on the difficult task of observing such multi-sited environments and across long periods of time are required to have patience, tenacity and organisational skills and they must be goal-oriented but flexible as well. To handle a large amount of data from multiple sources, researchers need to be aware of the different aspects involved in the unique social networking etiquette of posting, engagement, interpreting and evaluating content (e.g., ‘Likes’ on Facebook, ‘Tweets’ on Twitter, ‘Snaps’ on Snapchat, ‘Stories’ on Instagram). As a researcher, approaching participants in these unique virtual spaces would also differ and the ethics behind using their information should be considered. For instance, Snaps and Stories are short-lived messages and photos that participants choose to use for a personal reason; thus, participants’ permission to use this private data source is ethically crucial for consumer culturists and social media researchers to consider as part of their goals of transparency and to gain the trust of participants.

I also engaged in reflexivity throughout the course of my data collection and analysis process to illuminate my experiences in the field. During the course of writing, my reflexive introspection was in an autobiographical fashion. I learned what it feels like to be a networked participant with a real sense of consumers’ lived experiences. Reflexivity is an empowering tool for researchers that enables them to locate their multi-faceted relationships with the environment and between their sense of self, ideologies, values and history. Only by being fully immersed in the field was I able to reflect on the complexities of the home-sharing network. This led to my discovery and theorising of the joint Romanticism involved in home-sharing transactions where consumers engage in maintaining an open secret of sharing to sustain their desirable sharing experiences. Along with scholars before me (Brown, 2006; Hirschmann, 1985; Holbrook, 1997), I recommend that researchers be more reflexive in order to

conceptualise the self within the field and how the self impacts the researched environment and those researched.

Finally, combining multi-sited ethnography and netnography and being an active participant in the field for over two years supported my aims for reliability and the trustworthiness of my findings and emergent theorising. I was able to triangulate across the data sources and by staying in the field, I was able to conduct member checks to validate whether my interpretations were true to their consumption experiences, uncover information that did not support my understanding of home sharing and challenge my thinking. More importantly, employing grounded theory as an effective data analysis technique assisted me in critically examining the corpus of the data and allowed for themes to emerge and to be scrutinised during the discovery and theorising stages. This integration of data collection and analysis methods allowed for a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon in question, and added to the veracity of the theoretical contributions of this study to consumer culture and marketing research.

## **6.7 Practical Implications**

This study informs the strategic practices of marketing managers, policy makers and consumers in three ways through its identification of the following: a community's heterogeneous ideologies and values that can cause internal struggle and conflicts; desires for innovation and the embedded entrepreneur's freedom to create and exchange; and the empowerment of an open secrecy and the importance of social knowledge of the secret in society.

Firstly, the sharing process of the Airbnb marketplace is characterised by the dynamic fusion of Romanticism and Rationalism. The values that both ideologies embody and the struggles and tensions that co-exist between the two illustrate that Kantian moral pillars are significant for the consumer's identity construction and self-expression. This is an intriguing insight for marketers that tend to promote their products, services or experiences as part of a moral economy or as part of a market economy. The sharing economy does exactly the same: it utilises benefits from an economic market and those of a moral economy that values human interactions and freedom and benefits for all. Today's consumer is eager to engage with brands that not only offer utilitarian benefits but also seeks to do good in the world. When consumers identify with a brand's moral values, they are more likely to see what the journey towards a moral destiny looks like and how they can actualise these desirable values

and their own values. However, not only should marketers advertise a moral stance, they should also act on it. Furthermore, the journey towards a moral destiny should be co-created by consumers and marketers. Similar to hosts and guests' interactions discussed in this study, marketers can engage in narratives with their customers that allow them to speak to the marketer and other members through social media and online communication platforms. There consumers may express their freedom, creativity and social relationships with the marketer and other consumers and even their resistance to external forces. The marketer should engage consumers by 'carefully' including them in conversations about the design of their products or services and also the values of the company which should follow a Kantian moral ethic.

Generally, consumers of a middle socio-economic status (especially those similar to this study's participants) are moral seekers and want to practice a life of virtue but struggle when this conflicts with their rational motives. On the other end of the socio-economic scale, there can be a mix of different motivations for a lower class such as the homeless. Sharing rather than renting or owning provides its user with the socially desirable characteristic of 'doing good' in the world compared to self-interested and calculated notions that are anti-citizen and inhumane. Similarly, the homeless have also been found engaging in nonconventional means of acquiring possessions such as bartering and sharing with homeless others, thus demonstrating generalised reciprocity that is altruistic (Hill & Stamey, 1990). It is not only businesses that choose to use the term 'sharing' as a form of 'sharewashing' (Belk, 2014b), consumers also want to affiliate themselves with the Romantic discourses of sharing. This study found the prevalent themes of public interests, a common good, human nature and emergence with the natural world, through which consumers try and justify their consumption to themselves taking into account their moral ethics. While moral and social ethics might differ from one country to another, marketers need to consider the value of the thing that is being 'shared'. Highly meaningful possessions such as homes or clothes, which carry symbolic meanings of a past (Belk, 1991) or involve emotional attachment (Schultz, Klein, & Kernan, 1989) would require much convincing for owners to allow others to gain access and use. Similarly, access to singularised and inalienable possessions may be perceived by consumers as contaminated by their previous owners (Belk, 1988). Such disruptive forms of exchange would be compared with their own ethics and normalised historical framings of traditional markets. By continuing to romanticise the

purity of sharing within hybridised markets, such as home sharing, marketers can persuade the reflexive consumer that their 'sharing' reflects their good citizenship or anti-corporate stance. However, marketers should not ignore the utilitarian values that those using sharing platforms ultimately desire. Airbnb has succeeded in its community support narratives that are materialised in outdoor billboards and digital advertisements. Their discursive resources frame individualism and utilitarian desires as idealised forms of identity goals as well as community support. Businesses that use the Romantic notion of sharing need to demonstrate prototypical meanings of sharing and its associated characteristics in their narratives and provided services.

Second, another key finding from this research is the entrepreneurial side of new technology platforms that are disrupting conventional markets. Airbnb hosts enjoy earning an extra income by utilising their home spaces. They enjoy Romantic notions of the freedom to be their own bosses, they demonstrate their creativity within the home and utilise their skills and knowledge of hospitality to present to travellers their beautiful city. Some even feel national patriotism and pride in their creations and their meaningful place possession of home. Based on their emic perspectives, Airbnb hosts' view of policymakers, such as the government and local Councils, is that the regulation of their entrepreneurial businesses has a social impact that is both unfair and extortionate. Insights from this study on resistance should inform policymakers and regulators of the subgroups that oppose them and the strength of public opinion. Rather than marginalising a group of nonconforming consumers, they should listen to their opinions and consider their moral stance. Policymakers could consider consumers' Romantic discourses and utilise a similar narrative to convey their 'fair' messages to the general public. Those same messages should also fuse a Rational perspective to align with the moral values of today's consumers. For instance, Airbnb hosts believe they are sharing their homes with travellers to give them a local experience and also to support New Zealand tourism and Councils. Rather than attack the Airbnb community and call for fair taxes amongst all accommodation providers (which Airbnb hosts do not see themselves as part of), policymakers should implement an economic sustainability narrative to support hosts' communities and provide better environments and safer neighbourhoods. They can even request hosts to provide a joint plan to their Council representatives that can benefit all members of society and give back to the environment and humanity. This means that policymakers would utilise Romantic notions of

freedom, creativity, re-emergence with the natural world, a love of humankind and fairness for the general public. By giving a voice to community members, transgressive narratives of resistance can transform into collaborative ones where hosts can begin to appreciate co-creating value for themselves and others.

Similarly, if a marketer co-opts consumer activism and encourages a social construction of 'sovereign consumers' (Thompson & Haytko, 1997), as Airbnb has done with their hosts, they must continue to support consumers in their resistance movement, especially in the case of Airbnb where hosts' intentions are to conceal the open secret from complete exposure of its core reality. The Airbnb marketer has previously requested hosts to join in their activism against the government and demonstrated their values of free will and acceptance through advertisements such as the #WeAccept campaign during the 2017 American Superbowl football game that was intended as a critique of President Trump's immigrant travel ban. However, the Airbnb marketer's actions did not align with their narratives when they supported hosts in the actual resistance movement. Possible reasons could be that the marketer did not anticipate that policymakers would not listen or react positively to the community (e.g., as some overseas governments have done to cooperate with their communities and the Airbnb business) or Airbnb did not pre-empt hosts' activism through narratives, meeting with Council officials and involving the media and lawyers to fight this battle with them. Thus, if the marketer co-opts in the initiation of activism, they must expect to have their brand actively scrutinised by the same sovereigns. Thus, marketers must generally deal with sovereign consumers with caution, especially sovereign communities they initiate themselves.

Third, consumers' knowledge of an open secret can be both empowering and destructive at the same. Knowing what not to know is a powerful form of social knowledge that can empower consumers as they search for the truth by unmasking the thing itself. What Taussig (1999) calls as defacement, that is, when something precious is despoiled, is actually an important matter in a consumer's journey towards a moral destiny, self-discovery and placement in society. The power is in the revelation through exposure by tearing the surface of the secret. However, not all secrets can be enlightening, especially when it is not possible to truly expose the secret such as in societies that are festured with corrupt governing bodies. For instance, Taussig (1999) refers to example from the 1980's in which the Columbian police created roadblocks to

search people for drugs while they themselves were involved in terrorism and drug smuggling. The people knew of the police's illegal activities, but the "law of silence" prohibited citizens from being able to make visible changes in corrupt governments (p. 6). Thus, unmasking the negative truth can be harmful when nothing can be done such as the severe example of the Columbian police. However, consumers may try to unmask the secret of certain brands or consumption processes and on the way, they tend to strengthen the open secret through the uncertainty and ambiguity concerning authenticity. Even more so, everyday consumption involves audiences silently overlooking the inauthenticity of goods and services and knowing what they are not supposed to know. The findings from this study point to consumers' complicity with marketers and the desire for a simulation of the 'authentic' rather than a real experience. Consumers are encouraged to always question uncertainty, whether of brand values and ethics or product or service quality. However, they are urged to be cautious with their tactics of exposure as it can completely detach desirable meanings from the open secret and create a dystopian nightmare with the tearing of the surface. Not only should consumers reveal with caution, but so also should the marketer. For instance, if Airbnb completely changes its image from a home-sharing marketplace to an accommodation provider, they risk unmasking the secret of home-sharing processes, which are 'really' not about sharing at all.

## **6.8 Limitations and Future Research Opportunities**

Although this study contributes three key findings on Romanticism, the open secret and heterotopias that embody a sharing culture in home-sharing spaces, it has its own limitations. First, as an interpretive study, the context of Airbnb as a home-sharing network was the focus of this research. As the context was the home, a sacred space of solitude, honour, pride and harmony, the narratives, practices and rituals also represented Romantic notions which could be potent due to the sacred space being shared. Thus, findings around Romantic nostalgia and the desires to recreate a new paradise may not be generalizable to another network with a shared object that is not as intimate as the home. Future research could examine whether Romantic ideals persist in other networks such as shared cars, clothes, books or toys. Future research might also explore whether the concept of open secrecy is similarly constructed in other sharing economy businesses that require their users to take on more individual responsibility (e.g., guests can have more control when they stay in a fully-rented home) and compare



gathered insights with users having less responsibility (e.g., hosts assuming more control of the space when sharing with guests). The findings would inform our knowledge of the open secret and the importance of concealment and revelation practices in containing the secret.

Second, home-sharing platforms do not allow for cultural discrimination (at least that is what is promoted by Airbnb during the approval stage of hosts). Cultural differences are also insights that were not collected for the purposes of answering the research questions posed in Chapter 3. Despite the hosts being located in New Zealand, hosts themselves are not homogenous in culture or ethnic background as New Zealand is the home of many immigrants. Similarly, guests come from around New Zealand as well as internationally for purposes of business or pleasure. Future research could examine differences in cultural diversity and how these are managed in a private home. Research might investigate whether the differences add to the paradoxes, conflicts, tensions and contradictions that exist within the dynamic network of home sharing.

Third, although male hosts' postings were downloaded from the online community groups, no single males were interviewed for this study. One reason for this gender bias in data collection is that there are more female hosts than male hosts in the online communities. While four heterosexual host couples were interviewed together, the females did most of the talking as they seemed to be more hands-on in recreating the homey space and managing host-guest relationships and thus they had much to say. Another reason may be the depictions of the domesticity of middle-class women as well as their gender roles of enacting ethics of care (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Fischer & Arnold, 1990). However, interviews with male hosts would have provided diversity in terms of responses around motivations of hosting and if and how the Romantic nostalgia persists. It might also help us better understand gender hierarchy and power struggles between male hosts and female guests (if they exist). Future research focused on the guest-host relationships of home-sharing networks could interview more single men to explore the gender dynamics more deeply.

Fourth, the study's focus on Airbnb homes does not observe the macro-level data that might problematize the boundaries between market systems, market actors and their institutions. Airbnb communication, government laws and tax information and media articles were included in the datasets only when shared by host participants. Future researchers could utilise institutional theory (Scott, 1995) to observe data from

multiple stakeholders in order to understand the social process of market legitimization using macro to micro-level analytical lens (Humphreys, 2010).

## **6.9 The Epilogue**

Consumers embrace new markets that offer them “experiential and symbolic freedom that Murray and Ozanne (1991) and Firat and Venkatesh (1995) envision as only possible through emancipation from capitalism” (Holt, 2002, p. 88). The emergence and disruption of sharing economy businesses promise consumers freedom from the shackles of traditional institutions and market logics. This is facilitated using innovative technologies and digital communication tools that promote trust between strangers and allow for further ‘collaborative’ exchange of value to take place. Despite many sharing economy platforms (at the least the successful ones) being market-mediated and involving compensation, consumers feel a sense of control over their decisions and possessions that allows them to build their identities and express them with freedom. However, not only are new emerging markets embedding Romantic notions of sharing in their narratives, but consumers are willing to be seduced (Belk et al., 2003). The seduction is part of an open secret of home sharing. As Campbell (1987) maintains, “[I]n struggling to cope with the necessity of making trade-offs between need and pleasure, modern individuals inhabit not just an ‘iron cage’ of economic necessity, but a castle of romantic dreams, striving through their conduct to turn one into the other” (p. 227). This means that even though consumption behaviours in the sharing economy are wrought with cultural tensions and ideological struggles, they are managed through open secrecy processes and contained in a powerful heterotopic home-sharing space. The romanticising process of sharing culture explains how consumer sharing emerges and is maintained, and how space is involved in the dialectics of values and conflicting ideologies (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Past literature has condemned the use of ‘sharing’ in exchange, gift-giving and access-based consumption (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, 2015; Belk, 2010, 2014c) and labelled these consumption behaviours as pseudo sharing, sharing-out, fictive, romanticised and sharewashing. Yet it remains unclear why consumers go along with these deceptive labels when it is clearly not ‘really’ sharing. Consumers themselves use ‘sharing’ discourses and incorporate characteristics of altruistic sharing in their commercial home-sharing experiences to enable them to fuse Romantic ideologies together with Rational ones. By studying the sharing culture behind an emerging

marketplace such as Airbnb, I observed home sharing as a network of human and nonhuman actors that mobilise, assemble and territorialise components of the network to align with their Romantic ideals and reach their moral destiny. From a macro to a micro-perspective of market system research, we can see that self-expression and moral values can have a great impact on consumers' choices to consume sharing and how social relations may evolve. 'Sharing is caring' is an aphorism that parents teach their children and implies care for others; however, aphorisms like 'stranger-danger' are similar to the Enlightenment era's rational and self-interested ideals. While trust has been lost, new technologies such as Uber and Airbnb are rebuilding trust between human beings, ironically for a fee. This perspective sheds new light on the ongoing discussions on sharing and exchange and adds to the understanding of their co-existence in the home and the prevailing environment of the sharing economy.

Sharing economy businesses now range from sharing home spaces, office spaces, home cooked meals, land spaces and organic grocery foods. Varieties of new consumption alternatives are emerging and the types of personal possessions being shared are evolving thus complicating the meanings of our intimate possessions and how, when and why we share. Sharing that was once altruistic and implied kindness and agapic love to others is changing its meaning in contemporary markets as well as amongst today's consumer. Sharing is a dynamic and paradoxical postmodern consumer behaviour that should not be taken at face value; instead, it should be unpacked to reveal how we form relationships, build trust, exchange things and find value in goods, services and experiences.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Interview Guides (Hosts and Guests)

For use when guest interviews are involved.

*Project Supervisor:*     **Crystal Yap**  
*Researcher:*           **Marian Makkar**

#### **Criteria**

1. Do you speak English?
2. Are you 18 years of age or above?
3. Are you an Airbnb member? A guest, host or both?

#### **Starting questions: Open and descriptive**

4. How long have you been using Airbnb?
5. Why did you decide to join Airbnb?
6. What are the main benefits/disadvantages of joining?
  - What is most important to you?
7. How did you come across Airbnb? (where/who)
8. Have you recommended it to others? (whom/why)
9. How many times have you used Airbnb, and in what capacity (as a guest or host)?
10. Why do you use Airbnb as opposed to traditional accommodation? Why do you use Airbnb over other peer-to-peer accommodation websites (such as Couchsurfing, Bookabach)?

#### **Definition**

11. Use a few words to describe Airbnb as a) a business model, b) a platform, c) its social aspects.
12. Can you give me other examples of marketplaces similar to Airbnb? In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different? Why?
13. Do you use other forms of similar marketplaces to Airbnb?
14. Do you think this kind of business model is popular with companies today? Why do you think so?

#### **General Airbnb Experiences:**

15. Can you tell me about your last Airbnb experience as a guest? How long did that Airbnb experience last? Take me through the first day:
  - Who you were with, what was the home like, what did you see, what did you like/dislike about the home, what was the host like, what impressed you, what could have been done better to make your experience great?
16. Can you describe to me your usual process that you go through when looking for a place to stay? What sorts of things in host profiles do you look for or read through before sending a reservation request to a host?
17. Do you remember an exceptionally great experience using Airbnb? What made it so great?
18. Any not so good experiences with Airbnb?



- Was it resolved? If yes, then how? How did you feel after it was resolved?

### **Community:**

19. What is the meaning of community to you? What are the top features of a great community?
20. Do you feel the Airbnb community has any of these features? Can you give me any example(s) of Airbnb with these features?
21. Do you feel like you are a part of the Airbnb community? What makes you feel part of it?
22. How do you engage with the community? That is, do you attend meetings, events, Facebook, Community Centre, blog? How do you feel towards members of the community?
23. What Airbnb events have you heard of? How did you hear about events? How often do you attend them? Why often/not so often?
24. What kind of community member are you – active, passive? Explain how you are either of these with some examples. How often do you engage in conversations online or offline? Why do you choose to do so?
25. How do you feel about other Airbnb members in the community?
  - Describe to me your relationship with other Airbnb members (guests and/or hosts).

### **Value**

26. What are the greatest values/added benefit involved in Airbnb as a peer-to-peer home-sharing?
27. What do you think you're giving away or sacrificing during the process?
28. Do you think Airbnb is successful? In what way is it successful? What makes it successful?
29. Are there certain Airbnb standard practices or policies that increase your trust in Airbnb?
30. Can you think of other benefits connected to the Airbnb marketplaces?
31. What value add do you feel guests expect from hosts and Airbnb? Why?
32. What value do hosts expect from guests and Airbnb? Why?

### **Digital objects:**

33. What are the most important elements of a profile that you look for before sending a reservation request to a host (e.g., a photo, a bio, connected social media pages, etc.)? Which are essential? Why?
34. Did you connect your Facebook account to your profile when you signed up? Why or why not?
35. Is it essential that the host has a picture? How about a bio? If not, how important is it? Why? What does it tell you?
36. How do you feel toward Airbnb's platform (i.e. mobile application, website)? Is it user friendly, easy to customise for your hosting needs?
37. What features/functions of the Airbnb application/website do you like most? Why?
38. How do you feel about your Airbnb profile and reviews? Why?
39. Based on memory, can you name one item or thing that's very important to you during your Airbnb experience – from listing your Airbnb to receiving guests to the end of guests' stay?

**Ownership (of Airbnb, the digital platform, accommodation):**

40. How do you feel towards Airbnb? As a company? What do others (such as the media and those that haven't tried it) say about Airbnb? How do you feel about that?
  - How do you feel towards Airbnb as a service? Why?
41. What is your relationship like with Airbnb Inc.?
42. Do you feel people in the community are heard by Airbnb? Or have a say in the service? Can you give me an example?
43. What criteria are important to you when searching for accommodation on Airbnb? Why are these important?
44. How do you feel towards the home you're staying in? How does that compare to a hotel room or hotel apartment?
45. Can you complete these sentences using metaphors:
  - An Airbnb accommodation feels like....?
  - An Airbnb host is like....?

**For use when host interviews are involved.**

**Criteria**

1. Do you speak English?
2. Are you 18 years of age or above?
3. Are you an Airbnb member? A guest, host or both?

**Starting questions: Open and descriptive**

4. How long have you been using Airbnb?
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6. What are the main benefits/disadvantages of joining?
  - What is most important to you?
7. How did you come across Airbnb? (where/who)
8. Have you recommended it to others? (whom/why)
9. How many times have you used Airbnb?
10. Why do you use Airbnb as opposed to traditional accommodation? Why do you use Airbnb over other peer-to-peer accommodation websites (such as Couchsurfing, Bookabach)?

**Definition**

11. Use a few words to describe Airbnb as a) a business model, b) a platform, c) its social aspects.
12. Can you give me other examples of marketplaces similar to Airbnb? In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different? Why?
13. Do you use other forms of similar marketplaces to Airbnb?
14. Do you think this kind of business model is popular with companies today? Why do you think so?

**General Airbnb Experiences:**

15. Can you tell me about your last Airbnb experience as a host? How long did that Airbnb experience last? Take me through the first day:
  - Host: Wait time until the guest arrived, their arrival, what they were like, were you surprised by them or you got what you expected, who you were with, what was the home like, what did you like/dislike about their stay, what impressed you, what could have been done better to make the experience great (from you or them)?
16. Can you describe to me your usual process that you go through when posting your place for guests? Do you accept bookings immediately or do you have to approve? What sorts of things do you look for prior to accepting a reservation request?
17. Do you remember an exceptionally great experience using Airbnb? What made it so great?
18. Any not so good experiences with Airbnb?
  - Was it resolved? If yes, then how? How did you feel after it was resolved?

**Community:**

19. What is the meaning of community to you? What are the top features of a great community?

20. Do you feel the Airbnb community has any of these features? Can you tell me any example(s) of Airbnb with these features?
21. Do you feel like you are a part of the Airbnb community? What makes you feel part of it?
22. How do you engage with the community? That is, do you attend meetings, events, Facebook, Community Centre, blog? How do you feel towards members of the community?
23. What Airbnb events have you heard of? How did you hear about events? How often do you attend them? Why often/not so often?
24. What kind of community member are you – active, passive? Explain how you are either of these with some examples. How often do you engage in conversations online or offline? Why do you choose to do so?
25. How do you feel about other Airbnb members in the community?
  - Describe to me your relationship with other Airbnb members (guests and/or hosts).

### **Value**

26. What are the greatest values/added benefit involved in Airbnb as peer-to-peer home-sharing?
27. What do you think you're giving away or sacrificing during the process?
28. Do you think Airbnb is successful? In what way is it successful? What makes it successful?
29. Are there certain Airbnb standard practices or policies that increase your trust in Airbnb?
30. Can you think of other benefits connected to these marketplaces?
31. What value add do you feel guests expect from hosts and Airbnb? Why?
32. What value do hosts expect from guests and Airbnb? Why?

### **Digital objects:**

33. What are the most important elements of guest profiles that you look for before accepting a reservation request (e.g., a photo, a bio, connected social media pages, etc.)? Which are essential? Why?
34. Did you connect your Facebook account to your profile when you signed up? Why or why not?
35. Is it essential that the guest has a picture? How about a bio? If not, how important is it? Why? What does it tell you?
36. How do you feel toward Airbnb's platform (i.e. mobile application, website)? Is it user friendly, easy to customise for your hosting needs?
37. What features/functions of the Airbnb application/website do you like most? Why?
38. How do you feel about your Airbnb profile and reviews? Why?
39. Based on memory, can you name one item or thing that's very important to you during your Airbnb experience – from listing your Airbnb to receiving guests to the end of guests' stay?

**Ownership (of Airbnb, the digital platform, accommodation):**

40. How do you feel towards Airbnb as a company? What do others (such as the media and those that haven't tried it) say about Airbnb? How do you feel about that?
  - How do you feel towards Airbnb as a service? Why?
41. What is your relationship like with Airbnb Inc.?
42. Do you feel people in the community are heard by Airbnb? Or have a say in how the service is provided? Can you give me an example?
43. What would be the ideal guest to stay with you at your Airbnb?
44. How do you feel towards your home? How do you feel about sharing your home with guests? What is the relationship/interaction like with guests while they stay with you? What can they use in your home and what can't they use? Why?
45. Can you complete these sentences using metaphors:
  - An Airbnb accommodation feels like....?
  - An Airbnb guest is like....?
  - My Airbnb host community is like..?

## Appendix B: Researcher's Observation Guide

Event	Event 1	Event 2	Event 3
<b>Date/ time</b>			
<b>Photo</b> (only at interviews)			
<b>Physical environment</b> (e.g., number of people, the environment)			
<b>Social environment</b> (e.g., social dynamics, participants' interaction within setting, patterns, frequency of interaction, direction of communication patterns, specific behavioural events, i.e., conflicts, decision-making, collaboration)			
<b>Participants &amp; their roles in the setting:</b> meaning of what was observed from perspectives of participants			
<b>Consumption artefacts</b> present (e.g., product logos, designs, packages, ads, websites): what consumers do with them			
<b>Bodily aspects of consumption</b> (e.g., gesture language, interactions with objects & people): specific words, phrases, conversation summary, insider language			
<b>Researcher subjectivity</b> (e.g., reflexive ethnography: thoughts, ideas, questions, concerns; any impact I may have had on the situation observed)			

## Appendix C: Community Practices in Home-sharing Markets

Category	Practice	Description	Data Example
Social Networking	Welcoming	Greeting new members, assisting and community socialising	“Admins of the Facebook private group only accept hosts using preliminary questions such as: ‘Include a link to your Airbnb listing, what part of New Zealand do you host, why do you want to join our group?’ I was asked myself and was welcomed ‘publicly’ in the group. I also noticed some people offered to give feedback on the way other hosts listed their Airbnb home. That was not always taken well. People are sensitive to others’ judgements of their home and types of reviews received.” (Researcher online observations, 21.4.2017)
Social Networking	Empathising	Lending emotional and/or physical support to other members	<p>Facebook Thread 5.10.2017: “Can I have a vent? Yesterday guest left poop in the shower. Who poops in a shower? Today couldn't find the teaspoons until I looked in the rubbish. Who throws good stainless spoons in the trash? And we go out of our way to treat them like royalty!” (Marie, Queenstown host)</p> <p>“I sometimes wonder why we do this. When we have guests that treat your home and belongings like that. No respect at all. I keep telling people you are in our home not a motel or hotel. A HOME. Our new guest is a bit of a worry but their circumstances are hard too. So I've buttoned my lip. Sigh.” (Robin, Napier host)</p> <p>“So true! And they are interacting with us every day. I would be full of shame and embarrassment from the disgusting pillow alone...” (Marie, Queenstown host)</p> <p>“Disgusting...yes, however maybe a little compassion? If there is any mental health issues we need to a little understanding. Hard to imagine</p>


			<p>someone doing this out of pure ignorance. I would also be horrified.” (Julia, Marlborough host)</p> <p>“Our public feedback on the host wasn’t that harsh, yes. I did it because I think that the message I said in the public comment was enough for people to get a real impression of the place and the owner while not killing her business. I sent her private feedback on the things that need fixing in the house. It wouldn’t be appropriate to do it in public. I was giving her a little chance to fix that. Knowing she’s a person and not a big business softened the blow. It’s harder when it’s a person but it’s easier when it’s the Hilton. When it’s the Hilton, you don’t care. They should fess up and do something about it. She’s just a person that tries to make some money.” (Cohen and Gail, Guest Israeli couple, interview, 5.1.2017)</p>
Social Networking	Governing	Articulating the behavioural expectations within the community	<p>Airbnb message to guests: “What makes Airbnb different? Remember that each home is unique. Because you’re staying in a home and not a hotel room, the space and amenities will be different for each place; Treat your host’s home like it’s your own.”</p> <p>Host House Rules: “No parties or events; not suitable for children (0-12 years); absolutely no smoking or any other drugs on the property; quiet hours between 11pm and 7am.” (Fenny, Auckland host, Airbnb listing)</p> <p>Online Facebook Host Community: “We will NOT tolerate rude behaviour and ask that everyone respect others' opinions, feelings, privacy and rights. If you're rude, disrespectful, or spammy, we will have to ban you (and we really don’t want to). If you are offended by another host's comments or behaviour, please report it to admin immediately. Please stay updated with the rules as they may change as the community grows.”</p>



Impression Management	Evangelising	Sharing “good news”, inspiring others, preaching, making negative comparisons	<p>Online reviews: “It was an absolute pleasure to host Marie and Wally here in Auckland. Friendly communication, no issues &amp; they left the place very clean &amp; tidy. You would be so lucky to receive a booking or be hosted by them. Recommended to the entire Airbnb community.” (Review for Marie, Queenstown host, July 2017)</p> <p>“Good news to share! How many of you, woke up this morning with a new title, ‘The Superhost’! I am all smiles!” (Martha, Host, Auckland, Facebook, 12/1/2017)</p> <p>“During those 3 years Dave (host) never filed for income taxes because he never kept his invoices/expenses. He says it’s not illegal if it’s under a certain threshold and seemed proud of himself. He wasn’t aware that he still needs to register as a company until Goldi (another host) told him about it. He was even more proud of the fact that he keeps his expenses down by doing the cleaning himself or paying his son a small fee to turn over the beds.” (Informal interview at Auckland host meetup, 18.1.2017)</p>
Impression Management	Justifying	Deploying rationales for devoting time, effort to an activity. It might be defensive or include jokes about obsessive-compulsive behaviour	<p>“I’m just wondering if being an Airbnb host has made me a bit too picky as a guest... I just had a 4-day stay in Raglan with 3 friends. It was a lovely house with a nice living space, good sun and comfy beds etc. (no views). It cost around \$1300 for the 4 nights which is a pretty good return for the hosts (in my view). But I found the lack of attention to detail (considering the cost) irritating, leaving me with a feeling it was all about the money and very little about the guests. I would stay somewhere else next time. Here’s my list of irritants (in order of priority):</p>

			<p>1. Only provided with one relatively thin white towel each to last us 4 days of showering (Really?)</p> <p>2. No house manual (this would have been useful when the water tank failed on the 2nd day, which turned out to be an easy fix - but we sat there for more than an hour waiting nervously for the hosts to respond to our calls/texts to tell us how to get the water back on)</p> <p>3. They never proactively checked in with us to see if we were happy and if we needed anything (like towels!!)</p> <p>4. No local information on Raglan was provided</p> <p>5. The hand soap in the bathroom ran out on the second morning</p> <p>6. Only tea bags</p> <p>They also asked us to strip the beds before we left. We actually would have done that anyway (being Kiwis) but it irked me to be asked. Am I being too picky? It was interesting to note that one towel issue pissed me off so much that I became less tolerant of other more minor issues. In any case, I thought this particular guest's perspective might be useful to those who aspire to be good hosts. Paying attention to the details, which only cost a few dollars, can make the world of difference to your guest's experience. As a host, I'm much more generous with guests who stay in my \$50 per night spare room (probably too generous)." (Judy, Auckland host, Facebook, 7.2.2018)</p>
Community Engagement	Staking	<p>Recognising variance within the community and realising intragroup similarity and distinction</p> <p>However, sometimes this causes members to abandon the group</p>	<p>"I sometimes get frustrated with guests but then I have to remember that they might be tired, disillusioned with their trip because of the weather or just out of their depth. I have been very kind to people who didn't leave a review and had glowing reviews from easy guests that required no input. Its swings and roundabouts. Still I find the whole Airbnb thing requires a lot of patience. Especially when the bookings are few and far between like now!" (Anna, Hokitika host, Facebook, 21.8.2017)</p>


			<p>“If only we could all be more aware of (and more forgiving of) the misunderstandings that can occur through language and cultural differences. As a life-long language learner and teacher, I can usually work out or guess what someone is trying to say in English. I've often had similar issues speaking different languages myself! We should all give the other person the benefit of the doubt; think about what they might really be trying to say rather than jump to conclusions based on our own limited knowledge or experience of that person's culture and/or language. Maybe being part of the AirBnB community both as guests and hosts, can help all of us become better communicators and more culturally aware and (dare I say) gain a better understanding of what it is to be a member of the human race”. (Vicky, Te Awamutu host, Community Centre, 21.12.2017)</p> <p>“I did leave the group. I didn't like the way the group was being used to bag guests and when I expressed my opinion around that I didn't like the way the administrator responded. I'm all for hosts sharing their experiences as long as they're taking responsibility for the experience and looking for constructive input and ways to find a solution to avoid it happening again. A forum for learning to be a better host”. (Rosy, Auckland host, Interview, 1.3.2018)</p>
Community Engagement	Milestoning and badging	Noting seminal events during consumption experiences followed by translating them into symbols	<p>“I've noticed that hosts love to celebrate their Superhost titles every quarter, especially new Superhosts are much more excited with this milestone during their hosting journey. They receive Airbnb gifts too. Other hosts celebrate the gifts or acts of kindness they receive from their guests by sharing those pictures or words of gratitude online.” (Researcher online field observations, 12.11.2016)</p>

Community Engagement	Protecting and Stalking*	Protecting the core values of the group that requires stalking others prior to accepting them in. While stalking can be seen as a negative practice, in this context it is seen as an act of volunteerism and support of the group's integrity	<p>“Our first anniversary this week of joining Airbnb ... And have been lucky to have had the best guests from Auckland to stay. And look what they gifted us ... a canvas of a stunning photo he took in Clevedon. WOW... Hosting sure is not about the money! Feeling very spoilt.” (Steven, Hastings host, Facebook, 7.2.2017)</p> <p> Superhost badge</p> <p>“For those in Wellington who've noticed all the fake listings, I just phoned Airbnb and reported them. They had me send them an email with the URLs of the listings - I found 17. Hopefully Airbnb will remove them now! The things they had in common: new, instant booking enabled, 2 photos only (often scenery), phone number verification only, "host" photo of an Asian girl. I hope they'll be able to prevent this happening again, in the meantime I guess we keep reporting them when we see them!” (Lyn, Wellington host, Facebook, 25.6.2017)</p> <p>“Thanks, you did the responsible thing. I almost feel like a stalker going in and checking all the time and reporting them. I hope that they are able to figure out a way to stop this.” (Charlene, New Plymouth host, Facebook, 25.6.2017)</p> <p>“There is enormous ‘reputation’ risk to Airbnb and hosts if this is allowed to continue. I would expect that the trustworthiness of super hosts reporting these listing would carry some weight with Airbnb.” (Craig, Christchurch host, Facebook, 26.6.2017)</p> <p>“I have located your bad guest with just his nickname, Mo, using Facebook and a couple of google searches based on your description.</p>
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			Took about 3 minutes.” (Dom, Auckland host, Facebook, Auckland, 2.4.2018)
Community Engagement	Documenting	Detailing relationships within the network with narrative/storytelling	<p>“So David went away for eight weeks to the UK for work a couple of years ago and I rang him and I said look I’ve found out about this Airbnb community, I am going to give it a go. He’s like what, you’re going to have strangers in the house, they’ll steal my trombone. So I said well why don’t I do it for eight weeks and then we’ll just do it for this amount of time and when you come back we won’t do it. Anyway, I started doing it and I loved it. It was perfect. People came in, sometimes they would cook but often they don’t. They are hardly ever down here. We have a great exchange and I am able to tell them about how great Wellington is and then they leave, they’re out. Our longest stay is probably two or three nights but there’s a reason for that. We had a few people a bit longer, but we decided not to do that. But when Dave came back, he’s a real chatterbox and he’s done a lot of travelling, so he found in the morning, coming downstairs and having a coffee in his PJs, these wonderful strangers who had almost the same outlook on life and values from the other side of the world, it was a lovely exchange. It feels like a community to me. So that’s how we started and then we just continued because it really worked for us.” (Angelica and David, Wellington hosts, interview, 20.4.2017)</p>

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Entrepreneurship*	Customising	Modifying to suit the group/individual needs through innovations or redesigns	 <p>“I took over this Airbnb home from another host. This is the before and after! This works better for an Airbnb.” (Carlos, Auckland host, Facebook, 9.3.2017)</p> <p>“When I sold my 100 years historic house a few years ago, I decided to keep all my mirrors, oil paintings and rugs ...and I use them to decorate my Airbnb's little niche... My guests love it and gives them feelings of sophistication...” (Martha, Auckland host, Facebook, 9.3.2017)</p>
Entrepreneurship*	Commoditising	Distancing from the social market to a professional space. Commercialising/standardising their space and taking advantage of other opportunities that open up	<p>“People seemed quite wary about why hosts meet up and why it happens so often. The older gentleman was thinking more of how this can make money for him. He didn’t feel like he wanted to waste his time much. They all didn’t see the need in meeting unless there was something to learn such as having an accountant give a talk about accounting for Airbnb or bring in a home staging consultant. People generally don’t want to give up their own personal time for meetups with no purpose. That made me question why we should attend these meetups because it’s obviously not about meeting people or being part of a host community.” (Researcher observational field notes, host event, 24.2.2017)</p> <p>“I think [host] members need to remember they are now in the hospitality industry as soon as they decide to short-term let their room</p>

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or house. Now you have to deal with all the ‘joys’ that hotels, motels and hostels have had to put up with forever.” (Dom, Auckland host, Facebook, 2.4.2018)





“I registered with a Hotel Supplier as an Airbnb Host and they have accepted my membership.... Some of their things are expensive but they have the miniature jams etc., bath towels are good prices and sheets at \$12.50 & \$17 each I thought were excellent prices...wanted to pass it on to anyone interested. Room Master.co.nz. They have everything from fold up beds to linen to duvets/pillows, cleaning polishes and they are environmentally friendly.” (Cynthia, Auckland host, Facebook, 28.4.2017)

“As I visited Suzie’s Airbnb once again, I noticed she made a few changes to the room. She mentioned she switched her own beddings and bought some hotel grade A sheets recently. Her room was beginning to look more generic and ‘expected’ as one would expect a hotel room to look like. It’s sparkling but the improvements are definitely looking more towards hotel standards and less personal touches and unique items. We even commented on Cynthia’s Facebook post (28.4.2017) about hotel supplies and wholesale mini packs, which she’s incorporating more in her Airbnb, less from the local grocers.” (Researcher notes, host visit 5.5.2017)

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\* Distinct categories and practices from Schau et al. (2009)

## Appendix D: Re-mobilisation of Home Sharing: Emic Perspectives

Key Components	Illustrative Data	Focal Capacities	Example of components interacting with key components for capacities to be aligned
<b>Discursive</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Narratives based on kinship sharing and hospitality ideologies</li> <li>- Community support</li> <li>- Technology disrupter narratives</li> </ul>	<b>Frames from online newspapers, blogs, Airbnb press</b> <div>     </div>	<b>Material:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Disseminates ideologies (culture, moral, brand) to audiences through advertisements, magazine articles, compilations through social media</li> </ul> <b>Expressive:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Positions Airbnb as socially responsible, forward-thinking</li> <li>- Enhances comradery with Airbnb, hosts, and guests against accommodation industry</li> <li>- Hosts as generous people opening homes to those ‘in need’.</li> <li>- Creates feelings of familial sharing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Host</li> <li>- Guest</li> <li>- Home space</li> <li>- Airbnb company external stakeholder communication</li> <li>- Media stories</li> <li>- Listing profile and photos</li> <li>- Community discussions/ word-of-mouth via social media sharing</li> </ul>



<b>Material</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Home space</li> <li>- Material singularity/entanglement</li> </ul>	<b>Rosy's (Auckland host) listing photos and physical home</b>	<b>Material:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Embodies the physical properties of homeyness</li> <li>- Encloses homey elements into the Airbnb spatial territory</li> </ul> <b>Expressive:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Embodies the symbolic properties of homeyness; a sense of home, comfort, safety</li> <li>- Conveys a host skillset and aligns with narratives of kinship sharing.</li> </ul> <b>Imaginative:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The digital materiality of the listing and narrative can enhance the potential imagination of the type of host and home to expect</li> <li>- Voyeurism of 'The Other'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Host</li> <li>- Guest</li> <li>- Airbnb company</li> <li>- Suppliers, property managers, co-hosts</li> <li>- Listing profile, photos, reviews, ratings</li> </ul>
	<b>Angelica and David's displayed artefacts (e.g., classical music records on the wall) in the physical home</b>		



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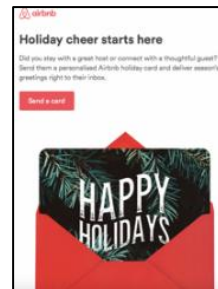
## Social

- Special moments (e.g., share a glass of wine, dinner) and gift-giving (e.g., clean up after self, goodbye gift, welcome basket)
- Social relationships (e.g., host community, host-guests)

### Shrine of guests' gifts, photos and cards in hosts' home or in online listings



### Airbnb e-greeting card to be sent by hosts to guests



### Hosts dropping off guest family at the airport (shared on Airbnb community group)



## Material:

- Can be embodied as a shrine in the online listing and materialised in the Airbnb home as evidence of hospitality
- Can demonstrate hosting and management skills

## Expressive:

- Fuels hybridised sharing and gift-giving practices
- Creates long term connections/friendships (by becoming social media 'friends', sending postcards)
- Aligns with all discursive components

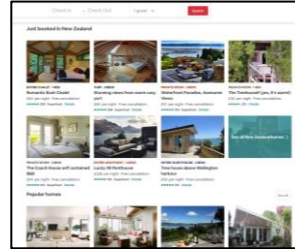
- Host
- Guest
- Home space/nonspaces
- Media stories
- Suppliers: cleaners, photographers
- Host/guest communication
- Listing profile, photos, reviews, ratings
- Community discussions/ word-of-mouth via social media sharing

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## Technologies

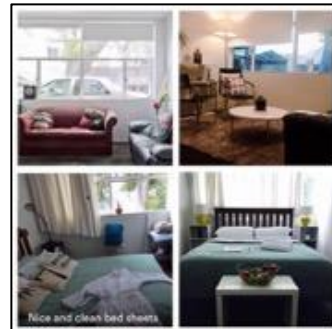
- Listing profile, photos, reviews, ratings
- Application, messaging, digital money transfer
- Community groups, discussions

## Airbnb website with listings:



*Marie [Queenstown host] is a Superhost – Superhosts are experienced, highly rated hosts who are committed to providing great stays for guests [Badge appears on Airbnb host profiles]*

## Community group discussion thread on creative Airbnb design



## Material:

- Provides a space for interaction
- Provides a space where home can live digitally
- Archives conversations, digital artefacts

## Expressive:

- Embodies host status games, competition, rewards
- Captures emotions, sentiments during messaging and narrated reviews
- Carries indexical cues such as trust
- Can eliminate signs of exchange by creatively envisioning social relations

## Imaginative:

- Can enhance the potential imagination of the type of host/guest and home to expect and experiences to be had
- Recreate a sense of home

- Host and co-hosts, property managers
- Guest
- Host/guest communication
- Airbnb company, service/technical team
- Suppliers; photographers
- Media stories (e.g., top 20 homes in Auckland)

## Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH)

Auckland University of Technology  
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ  
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316  
E: [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)  
[www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics](http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics)

### Appendix E: Ethics Approval

22 June 2018  
Crystal Yap  
Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Crystal  
Ethics Application: **16/376 A disruption of market exchange: Unpacking cultural meanings behind collaborative consumption marketplaces**

At their meeting of 5 March 2018, the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH) received the report on your ethics application. AUTECH noted your report and asked me to thank you.

On behalf of AUTECH, I congratulate the researchers on the project and look forward to reading more about it in future reports.

When communicating with us about this application, we ask that you use the application number and study title to enable us to provide you with prompt service. Should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter, you are welcome to contact me by email at [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz) or by telephone on 921 9999 at extension 6038.

Yours sincerely



Kate O'Connor  
Executive Manager  
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee  
Cc: [mmakkar@aut.ac.nz](mailto:mmakkar@aut.ac.nz)

## Appendix F: Transcriber Agreement

**AUT**  
TE WHANAKE ARORU  
O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU

### Confidentiality Agreement

Project title: A Disruption of Market Exchange: Unpacking Cultural Meanings Behind Collaborative Consumption Marketplaces

Project Supervisor: **Dr Crystal Yap**

Researcher: **Marian Makkar**

☐ I understand that all the material I will be asked to transcribe is confidential.

☐ I understand that the contents of the tapes or recordings can only be discussed with the researchers.

☐ I will not keep any copies of the transcripts nor allow third parties access to them.

Transcriber's signature: Jan Rhodes

Transcriber's name: Jan Rhodes

Transcriber's Contact Details (if appropriate):  
jan.rhodes@xtra.co.nz

Date: 5-4-17

Project Supervisor's Contact Details (if appropriate):  
Dr. Crystal Yap, crystal.yap@aut.ac.nz, +64 9 921 9999 ext 5800

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 26 October 2016, AUT number 16/376

Note: The Transcriber should retain a copy of this form

## Appendix G: Consent Form

*Project title:* A Disruption of Market Exchange: Unpacking Cultural Meanings Behind Collaborative Consumption Marketplaces

*Project Supervisor:* **Crystal Yap**

*Researcher:* **Marian Makkar**

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 11 September 2016.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that the researcher will observe me and my surroundings and will take notes during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

.....

Participant's name:

.....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

.....

.....

.....

Date:

***Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 26 October 2016, AUTEK Reference number 16/376***

*Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.*