Chapter 1.

Towards *Homefullness*

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Biography:

Neal Haslem is a Senior Lecturer and Interim Associate Dean of the Communication Design discipline at RMIT School of Design. Neal is a communication designer, design educator and a practice-led researcher into communication design. Neal's research lies in the intersection of design practice, 'community' and the intersubjective action with which design reveals and actualises possible futures. Since 2012, Neal has collaborated with Keely Macarow and Marcus Knutagård on manifestos, publications, conferences, and exhibitions advancing the concept of *Homefullness*.

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Biography:

Marcus Knutagård is a Professor and Head of Department at Malmö University, Sweden. His work integrates research and practice, focusing on housing, homelessness, social policy, and welfare systems. His research frequently highlights the intersection of housing rights and social justice, as well as innovative approaches for addressing homelessness. Since 2012, Professor Knutagård has collaborated with Keely Macarow and Neal Haslem on manifestos, publications, conferences, and exhibitions advancing the concept of *Homefullness*.

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Biography:

Keely Macarow is an Associate Professor in the School of Art, RMIT University (Naarm/Melbourne) who lives on Dja Dja Wurrung Country (Victoria/Australia). Keely uses

text, artworks, design artefacts and exhibitions to explore concerns around care, housing, refugees, health, the climate emergency and her family. She has collaborated with Neal Haslem and Marcus Knutgard since 2012 on manifestos, publications, symposia and exhibitions to advocate for *Homefullness*.

Abstract:
In this chapter the authors – and editors of this book – reflect upon the concept of *Homefullness*, where it originated and what it has led to since 2012 when they, and others, first met to discuss how they might, as a group of art and design practice researchers, respond to the housing crisis in a manner that did not rely on temporary 'band-aid' solutions to the issues. The chapter firstly provides an overview examining the ongoing global issue of homelessness and housing stress. This is followed by a discussion around what the concept – and ongoing campaign – of *Homefullness* might allow as a global ethical practice concerned with how we relate and evolve together which aims to provide a critical means to shift the seemingly intractable issues of homelessness and housing stress.

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WE DO NOT NEED MORE CRISIS OR EMERGENCY HOUSING
WE NEED
CITIES OF HOMEFULLNESS

The above 'call to action' signs off the 2021 'Cities of *Homefullness* manifesto' (Macarow, Haslem & Knutagård 2021). This manifesto adapted the authors' original *Homefullness* manifesto (2012) and was printed using movable type on a 100 year old letterpress machine in a short print edition of 150. The statement is a deliberate provocation, insisting on the significant and fundamental societal changes which would enable housing as a human right. A right that is central to inclusive, equitable and sustainable communities (or what we have termed *Homefullness*) rather than 'band-aid' solutions to the issues of homelessness and housing stress. Thus, we view the '*Cities of* Homefullness' manifesto as an *act of* Homefullness (Haslem,

Macarow & Knutagård, 2021). Printed in 2020 and displayed in the European Cultural Centre's 'Time Space Existence' exhibition alongside the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2021, it is a clarion call for housing to be viewed as a right, rather than a commodity. The manifesto was also used as a prompt for contributions for this book which has resulted in the collection of diverse projects and responses included in the publication you now hold.

In this chapter, we discuss the trajectory that the *Homefullness* campaign has taken since it started in 2012. We also explore issues connected to housing affordability and homelessness and notions about housing and homes that inform *Homefullness* with a focus on Australia and Sweden – because these countries are where we live and where we have predominantly situated the concerns of the project.

The *Homefullness* project was established by a Naarm/Melbourne based group of artists, architects, urban and communication designers, housing activists and academics to voice their shared concerns about homelessness and housing stress. The group included Mick Douglas, Hélène Frichot, Neal Haslem, Rochus Hinkel, Guy Johnson, Keely Macarow and Margie McKay. They were united in their questioning of how a just society could celebrate any of its achievements when the crisis of homelessness and housing stress dominated the media, and was ever-present on the streets, towns and cities in which we live.

In addition, and perhaps equally troubling, are the hidden social housing inequities that trap vulnerable people in cyclical institutionalisation without clear exit points (Sahlin 2005). At the other end of the scale, markets across the world support, maintain and promote housing for intergenerational wealth instead of working to provide affordable and secure homes for all (Burrows & Knowles 2019). While we believe that housing should be viewed as a basic human need and right, it is instead frequently viewed and traded as a commodity of increasing value for neo-liberal economies. Unfortunately this leads to homelessness and housing exclusion continuing to be a growing problem across the globe.

Today the urgency for sustainable and affordable housing for all has increased due to the growing social and financial inequities across society and compounded by forced migration due

to war and the climate emergency. We know that extreme weather events and climate change will be an increasingly important cause of homelessness in coming years (Council to Homeless Persons 2024). These challenges will not only cause greater numbers of people to become homeless due to the impacts of 'natural' disasters on their homes and shelters, climate breakdown may also lead to more protective and punitive border policies and a lessening of welcome to refugees as countries contend with the impacts of erratic and harmful extreme weather events and rising temperatures on their own populations.

We are concerned that people experiencing homelessness have a much lower life span than the general population (Nilsson et al. 2025). For instance, there is an emerging trend in the global north of a growing number of older people within the homelessness population (Canham & Henwood 2025). According to Culhane et al. (2019), the population of older people is expected to grow rapidly and almost triple in the next coming years which might lead to growing numbers of homeless elders. The homelessness of refugees and migrants who do manage to move to safer locations around the world is also an urgent problem especially when nation states and authorities engage in harsh actions towards homeless migrants (Kohler 2023). Unsurprisingly, many people who live in homelessness are often not counted as homeless by the countries in which they are based because they lack citizenship (Hermans et al., 2020).

How we define and respond to homelessness remains highly contextual. In this sense we can talk about relative homelessness. But the consequences for those living in homelessness remain brutal (Breatherton & Pleace 2023; Sassen 2014). Homelessness has often been seen as those who are visibly homeless either living on the streets or in different forms of emergency housing. This has led to the assumption that the causes of homelessness are to be found in individual factors such as addiction and mental health problems. In addition, several groups including women over 55 are often underrepresented in homelessness counts because they are more likely to experience 'hidden homelessness', such as temporarily staying with friends or family, living in cars, or avoiding shelters because of safety issues or unsuitable accommodations. These circumstances mean that women are frequently excluded from official statistics, which usually count only those in shelters or obvious public locations. Therefore, the actual scale of homelessness among women is likely much greater than reported (Galán-Sanantonio et al. 2025).

However, recent research points towards the structural causes of homelessness where government housing policies, regulations and local housing markets play a key role (Kohler 2024). Even in countries like Sweden, where national policies have historically focused on providing public housing for all, the deregulated housing market and 'push' towards home ownership have, since the 1990s, exacerbated the housing crisis (Hedin et al. 2012).

The lack of affordable housing in cities and towns across the world continues to challenge us all (Colburn & Aldern 2022; Desmond 2016), especially for people living in poverty, without employment, or who are underemployed and those who find it difficult to flee from violence in the home. Rising housing costs have also created a 'push' whereby people are forced to move to more affordable areas further away from where they work, use resources and socialise, compounding housing stress. Furthermore, the soaring, unaffordable costs of housing continue to be a growing problem in cities across the world including Hong Kong, Sydney, Vancouver, San Jose, Auckland (Cox 2024; Slater 2021).

The structural causes of homelessness call for systemic change, and require thoughtful, holistic solutions, rather than simplistic quick-fix approaches. The challenge is to find multi-sector approaches in which we also acknowledge that we contribute to and are maintained by social and cultural ecologies rather than seeking to merely dominate and control local environments (Sennett 2019). For instance, a rapid construction of new affordable housing may actually have an overall negative impact, if it is not aligned with infrastructure and services including health, community resources, schools, retail strips, cultural venues and public transport.

Interestingly, many countries, including Australia, redefined homelessness as a public health problem during the lockdown years (2020-2021) of the COVID-19 pandemic which led to homeless people being housed in empty hotel rooms. This shows that previous problems that have been defined as impossible to fix, such as this temporary housing of homeless people during a public health emergency, can be solved if the will and the right resources are put in place. Interestingly, Australian governments have sought to develop large scale housing programs since the COVID lockdown years to address the country's housing crisis but there are multiple problems hindering this due to high construction costs, a blow out in budgets, a dearth

in trades people, and the continual misunderstanding of what oft cited notions of affordable housing actually mean for people who desperately need secure housing and who live precarious lives without any extra money (Mitchell 2025, Kohler 2024). How can people on low or no incomes afford to buy or rent so-called affordable housing which may in fact only be 'affordable' for people on high incomes?

The *Homefullness* project has also been informed by relational practices of ethics and agency (Barad 2007, Bennett 2020) which is instructive for collective responses to worldwide issues of homelessness and housing inequality. Through this perspective, *Homefullness* becomes more than just a concept for housing; it emerges as a global ethical practice concerned with how we relate and evolve together. Barad's (2007) theory of agential realism presents a view where matter and meaning cannot be separated, and agency results from intra-action – the process by which relations are constituted together, rather than through interactions between entities that already exist. According to this perspective, homes, bodies, and environments only come into being through their relationships; they do not exist prior to them. Thus, when relationality breaks down, it poses a real material and ontological risk. In *Influx & Efflux*, Jane Bennett (2020) highlights how energetic, emotional, and material influences constantly flow between bodies and their surroundings. According to Bennett, vitality is something that arises collectively and unpredictably. Looking at *Homefullness* through this viewpoint turns it into a practice focused on the active qualities of materials, ecosystems, and infrastructures; it engages non-human forces in shaping habitable spaces and treats home as a place defined by movement and exchange rather than by restriction. This approach draws attention to the dynamic material forces that allow *Homefullness* to resist the numbing effects of entropy.

The invented term *Homefullness* denies the positioning of intractable 'lack' that comes with 'homelessness', 'lessness' and 'less,' and instead promotes a call for 'full housing' with its deliberate neologism, breaking grammatical rules to provoke, with its aspirational reach toward the '*Homefull*', toward 'fullness' and with a radically positive manifesto calling for 'full and decent housing (for all)' as the first and fundamental step towards any claim to becoming a just – and *Homefull* – society.

The first stage of the *Homefullness* campaign was spurred to action through the 'Design Challenge 2011: Homelessness', initiated by RMIT University's Design Research Institute (Australian Design Review 2011). The Naarm/Melbourne based group that came together under the banner of *Homefullness* was concerned about what they perceived to be a generalised acceptance of design-orientated 'solutions' for homelessness – such as temporary sleeping pods – rather than critical responses to the systemic problems in society that contribute to homelessness from wealth inequities, unaffordable housing and minimal social housing options. Instead, the group composed a 'manifesto for full housing' and the term *Homefullness* coined as a signpost under which to coalesce our shared aspirations and provocations in relation to homelessness, housing and community.

The original *Homefullness* manifesto was first exhibited in February 2012 in a shipping container in Birrarung Marr (a park in central Naarm/Melbourne), and was supported by a performative act of public screenprinting which paired the manifesto with a comic-book-like visual narrative in a collective, creative-practice-driven action in material form (Macarow 2017b).



<Figure 1.1. here>

Figure 1.1. *Homefullness* manifesto public printing event, Naarm/Melbourne 2012. Photograph by Kirsten Haydon, 2012.

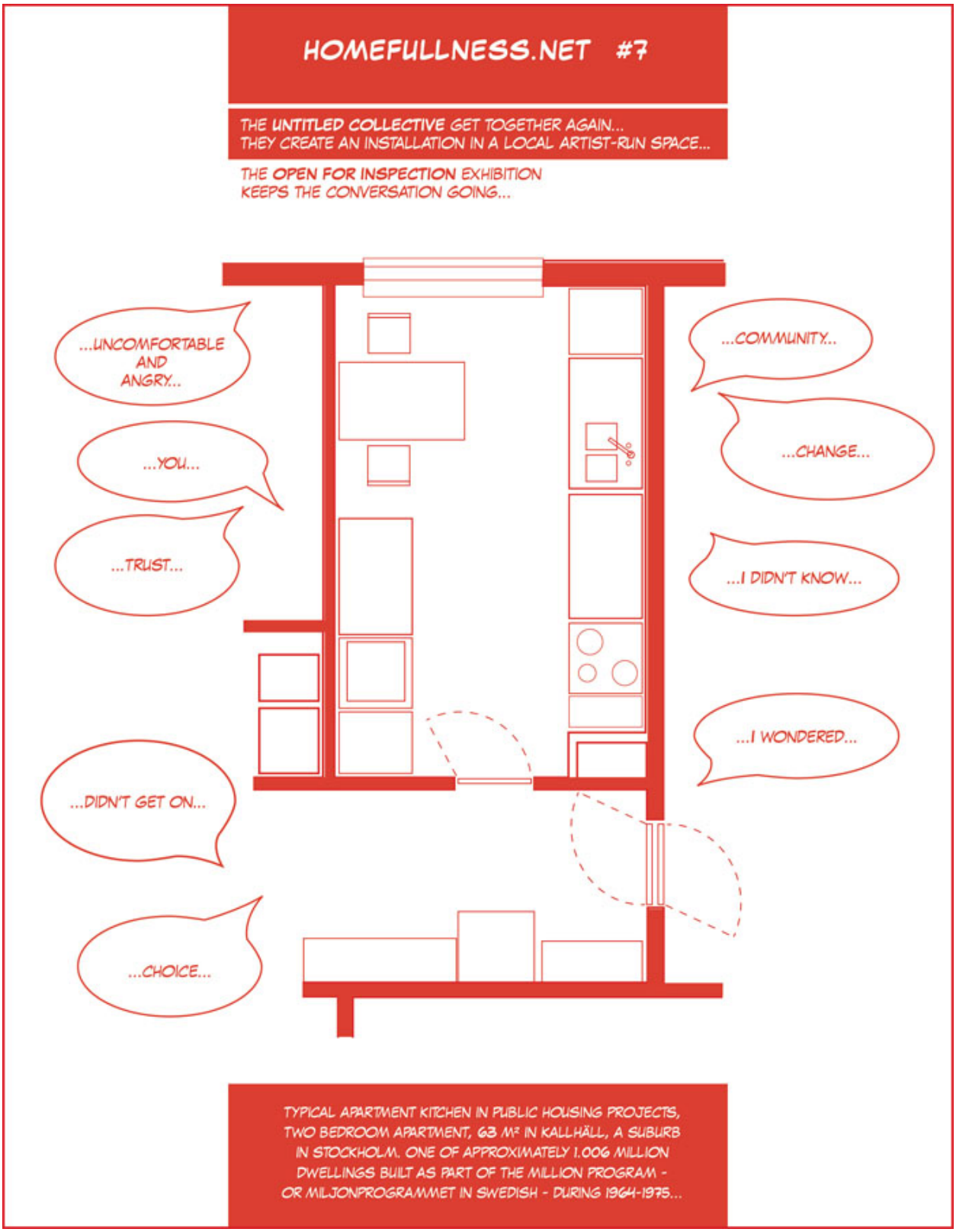
The simple collective act of printing in a public space allowed us to engage in discussions about housing and housing stress with visitors to the event. From its inception *Homefullness* was imagined as a *campaign* for full housing, with one of its key aims being to open conversations around the seemingly intractable issue of homelessness with the 'fullness' of hope and optimism creating a space for new dialogue, new ideas and new voices.

From the original events in Naarm/Melbourne, the research developed into a wider critical exploration of homelessness and housing stress in diverse locations across continents. At the core of this research was an interdisciplinary engagement with the creative arts, design, social work

and housing activism. The researchers conducted *Homefullness* roundtables in Stockholm (2012), Naarm/Melbourne (2015), and Helsingborg, Malmö (2016) in Sweden, where they discovered like-minded practitioners in design, art and social work. The growing research group discovered the power of international support and the comparative analysis this allowed, which enabled the concept of *Homefullness* and the research conducted through it to expand to meet this global challenge (Haslem et al. 2018).

Swedish models in housing included the government-led *Miljonprogrammet* (Million Homes Program) which responded to the mid-twentieth century housing shortage in Sweden (Putri, 2012; Movilla Vega ed., 2017; Macarow 2017a; Haslem, 2015) by rapidly increasing the Swedish housing stock by one million homes between 1965-1974. However, the program was created for an era which contained normative assumptions as to what a home should be along with assumptions as to how people and families should inhabit these homes. Following this strongly functionalist strategy, the 'Million Homes Program' applied post-war research into domestic space to produce 'optimised' spaces for living.

Today the program's efficacy as a design response to housing is under challenge due to changing housing needs driven by immigration and growing cultural diversity. We now see 'Million Homes Program' apartments have been modified by their occupants – in what we can see are themselves 'Acts of *Homefullness*' – to allow a more diverse and pluriversal range of lifestyles, challenging the universal 'one solution fits all' approach to design embedded in the original 'Million Homes Program' apartments and houses.



<Figure 1.2. here>

Figure 1.2. Tea-towel artwork printed for the *Open for Inspection* exhibition event, 2014, featuring a floorplan from a typical 'Million Homes Program' apartment kitchen from 1970s public housing in Stockholm. Artwork by Neal Haslem, 2014.

Fifty years on and the lives and households of people migrating to Sweden due to forced relocation through the impacts of climate change and conflict are very different. For instance, the rational 'solution' to housing that was the 'Million Homes Program' has become problematised by a new reality, in which the solution offered by the highly functionalist apartments and houses designed for this housing program are no longer fit for purpose given the newly diverse households which vary in size and needs.

This example from a country renowned globally for its authentic social equity has led us to think about a processual orientation to a change in housing practices, and to argue against notions of universalist problems and solutions. We have instead advocated for a gentler and more discursive campaign of actions which opens up new ways of thinking and being through our concept of *Homefullness*, which views housing as a necessity and a right for all members of our communities.



<Figure 1.3. here>

Figure 1.3. *Open for Inspection* exhibition installation, 2014. Photograph by Neal Haslem, 2014

Thus, *Homefullness* as a space to build and enable community resilience, support and wellbeing were explored in an interactive exhibition, and a series of roundtables for the 'Open for Inspection' project (Macarow, Haslem & Knutagård, 2014) which applied multiple art and design strategies, including, once again, public printing performances to materialise a discursive space with visiting audiences (Macarow 2017a; Macarow 2017b). The exhibition featured a line drawing of a Swedish functionalist kitchen rendered in 1:1 scale on the floor, and activities including 'cups of tea around a kitchen table' as we chatted with visitors, live printing of the *Homefullness* manifesto as well as new artworks composed during the event, and public meetings where visitors and invited speakers spoke about problems and potential solutions to the housing crisis in Australia – which is due to escalating prices of housing stock, tax offsets on rental properties which privileges landlords, high rents and a dearth in social and public housing.

Not surprisingly, and most unfortunately, the housing crisis in Australia is far from unique globally and continues to get worse.



<Figure 1.4. here>

Figure 1.4. Authors, Neal Haslem (left) and Keely Macarow (right), in front of *'Cities of Homefullness', a manifesto based artwork*. Keely Macarow, Neal Haslem and Marcus Knutagård for the Architecture Biennial exhibition, *Time Space Existence*, curated by Debora Bae and Lucia Pedrana, European Culture Centre, Palazzo Mora, Venice, Italy, 22 May – 21 November 2021, Photograph by Neal Haslem 2021.

A revised and abbreviated *Homefullness* manifesto (Macarow, Haslem & Knutagard, 2021), printed using 100 year old letterpress machinery and exhibited in Venice in 2021 (and included here as a prelude and provocation to this book) was also developed in recognition that the challenges of our times: First Nations sovereignty, the climate emergency, forced migration and neoliberalism all contribute to how we understand and inhabit our homes and homelands and whether we even have secure and affordable housing. The *Homefullness* campaign has used simple, relatively low-cost means to continue the fight for housing as a human right.

Unfortunately, advocacy for communities in housing distress and for acts of *Homefullness* has not lessened since we commenced this project in 2012. Instead the housing crisis has deepened globally with homelessness and housing stress growing in their impact across even the wealthiest of nations (UN-Habitat 2023) – the theoretical stakes of Homefullness continue to intersect with urgent global crises. Reports by UN-Habitat (2023) document that:

- 318 million people are experiencing homelessness globally.
- 2.8 billion people lack safe or adequate housing.
- 1.1 billion people live in informal settlements, with 90% residing in Africa and Asia.

According to the Institute of Global Homelessness (2024), a minimum of 330 million individuals experience absolute homelessness worldwide. National figures further underscore the seriousness of this issue: Pakistan reports 8 million, Syria 5.3 million, Bangladesh 5 million, Nigeria 4.5 million, and the United States 653,000 people affected, as indicated by World Population Review

(2025). These figures illustrate circumstances where fundamental capacities for belonging, stability, and ecological alignment are diminished.

The concept of *Homefullness* provides a counter-entropic framework that reconceptualises housing as a relational ecology rather than merely an economic commodity. That the *Homefullness* campaign, with little more than a word and passionate support, has enabled an ongoing campaign fighting homelessness and housing stress is exciting and hopeful. People all over the world can and do fight for *Homefullness* in their own ways, focussing their energies through their practices; whether that be architecture, social work, photography, print-making or poetry. The people who gather together under the concept of *Homefullness* – or who are inspired by its works – are a loose collective with disparate experiences and practices; this, we posit, is the key strength of the campaign; that it creates an ongoing dialogue through disparate means, keeping the crises of homelessness and housing stress in the public eye and maintaining a positive stance; towards justice, towards housing as a right, towards societies and cities we can be proud to belong to, towards *Homefullness*.

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