

# The Internet in Everyday Life: Exploring the Tenets and Contributions of Diverse Approaches

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## Introduction

The Internet in everyday life is a newly emergent continent on the map of Internet research that has not been properly explored and charted yet. At the same time, its contours and substantive make-up seem distinct enough to warrant a special designation. The elements that distinguish the Internet in everyday life from its boisterous Internet research kin can be captured by several key words: use, users, offline context and embeddedness. First and foremost, this means that researchers in this area manifest avid interest in Internet use performed by ordinary people as one among their many different activities and related to the broader horizons of their lives. Secondly, this means attention to the social and cultural environment in which Internet use takes place with its different levels and variations: personal, domestic, organizational, national, etc. In other words, the user is not perceived exclusively as an online persona involved in different pursuits in cyberspace, but as a physical actor who sits in a chair and stares at a screen for a variety of time stretches and purposes. Thirdly, the interconnectedness between Internet use and numerous other practices and relations is emphasized in this approach. For some authors (Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 2002; Ward, 2005) looking at the Internet as part of everyday life is a marker of the second age of the medium or of a second-generation research that breaks away from the early euphoria surrounding everything “cyber” and the effervescent speculations about how the Internet will transform society as we know it.

Indeed, to insist on talking about the Internet in everyday life is to deny the medium its extraordinary status, to see it as ordinary, but in no case as unimportant. There are some decisive advantages to be gained from redefining the glorious new communication medium in this way. Among them is the sobering realization that conceptual frameworks, methodologies, trends, and patterns established in other areas of social and cultural studies may be applicable to the Internet. All of a sudden, neither the Internet nor its study are so special and

exclusive any more – quite a disappointment to some. Yet at the same time, and to the great excitement of others, many tested and true tools and familiar paradigms can be put into use for the exploration of the new object. Thus research on the Internet in everyday life has been able to draw on models and methods tried in other areas and to examine the Internet in relation and comparison to familiar media and communication phenomena.

Common ground notwithstanding, there is also significant epistemological and methodological diversity among Internet in everyday life approaches themselves. These differences flow from the ambiguity of the concept of everyday life and its multiple interpretations. At first glance, the commonsense notion of everyday life refers to the ordinary and routine activities of people in various social areas. It signifies the repetitive, the unglamorous, and the typical. Taken at that level, the first type of research on the Internet in everyday life to be discussed here has sought to map out the trends emerging when the daily dealings of multiple users with and on the Internet are carefully surveyed. This approach, as a rule, has produced large-scale quantitative studies painting the big picture of Internet use and its relation to a broad gamut of mundane activities such as shopping, banking, traveling, studying, and socializing, to name just a few. To this approach we owe the discernment of differences in access, opportunity, and preference that cut across socioeconomic, demographic, educational, ethnic, and cultural categories of people. A central question for many studies carried out in this vein has been that of the Internet's impact on daily life. Is the new medium supporting new forms of relationships and behavior, or is it reproducing existing patterns (see Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 2002)? As opposed to the early speculative forecasts concerning the Internet's transformative powers, this type of research has stayed firmly grounded in the replies of actual users asked to account for their Internet-related activities. It has sought to identify the relationships between and among variables that reflect the changes brought about by the Internet in the ways people perform their daily activities and associate with others. In short, this type of study has used large-scale statistics to describe the patterns of an everyday life affected by the presence of the Internet.

Along with the immediate commonsense meaning of the phrase “everyday life,” there exists a depth of theoretical work that has imbued the notion with complex cultural and critical overtones. In its career as a “second order” concept (Giddens, 1984, p. 284) invented and employed by social and cultural theorists, the concept of everyday life has opened dimensions of inquiry suggested by an epistemology very different from that driving the quantitative approach. Applied to the Internet, this second-order concept has called for two further types of investigation characterized by an interpretative and a critical orientation respectively. It has posed questions concerning the agency of users in making meanings and choices with regard to the Internet. How do users understand the medium and why do they decide to adopt or reject it? How do different kinds and styles of usage emerge from the contexts and situations characterizing users' lives? What are the impacts of users and usage on the Internet? And important for the

**Table 4.1** Different Types of Approach to the Internet in Everyday Life

	<i>Statistical approach</i>	<i>Interpretative approach</i>	<i>Critical approach</i>
Epistemology	Positivist/objectivist	Interpretative/constructivist	Interpretative plus normative
Types of questions asked	Who is online? What do they do online? How much time do they spend online? What is the impact?	Why do people go online? How do they make the Internet their own? What does it mean to them? How does it restructure their lifeworlds?	Is Internet use empowering or oppressing people? Is Internet use leading to more equality and opportunity for people? Does it alienate and exploit people?
Key issues	Trends Factors Impacts	Meaning Agency Appropriation Domestication Negotiation	Empowerment Emancipation Alienation Exploitation
Methodologies	Quantitative	Qualitative	Qualitative plus critical

critical stream of studies: Is the Internet helping users achieve higher degrees of emancipation and equity, build capacity, and take control over their lives as individuals and citizens?

Table 4.1 summarizes the different types of approach to the Internet in everyday life sketched so far. I will discuss each of them in more detail in the following sections of this chapter.

## What is Everyday Life?

Before I move on to examine the different approaches to the Internet in everyday life and their achievements, I will linger for a while on the deeper meaning of the concept of everyday life that I alluded to and will briefly examine its intellectual history. Behind the obvious and quantifiable meaning of the everyday as the most-repeated actions, the most-traveled journeys, and the most-inhabited spaces, Highmore (2002) points out, creeps another: “the everyday as value and quality – everydayness” (p. 1). This quality can be defined by boredom and oppressive routine, but it can also be seen as marked by authenticity and vitality, an unobtrusive, but always present potential for growth and change. In the metaphoric formulation of Lefebvre (1991, quoted in Gardiner, 2000) the everyday can be

construed as the “fertile humus, which is the source of life-enhancing power as we walk over it unnoticed” (p. 2). The everyday also harbors those elementary relations and actions that form the flow of social life and give the culture that we inhabit its distinctive characteristics.

Speaking more precisely, the concept of everyday life has been central to two traditions of social theory: the phenomenological and the critical, as well as to a range of contributions that span the space between the two. In the phenomenological tradition, the preferred notion is the “everyday life-world” (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973) which refers to the realm of the immediately experienced world. This is, Schutz says, the “fundamental and paramount reality” to which we wake up every morning. It is “the region of reality in which man [*sic*] can engage himself and which he can change while he operates in it by means of his animate organism” (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973, p. 3). In this region the person experiences other people with whom she constructs a shared world. Hence, Schutz states: “The problems of action and choice must, therefore, have a central place in the analysis of the life-world” (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973, p. 18). Importantly, the lifeworld is a reality which we modify through our acts and which also shapes our actions. In that sense, the everyday lifeworld is where we can exercise our agency as thinking human beings. The everyday lifeworld represents a mosaic of situations through which we move, driven by our pragmatic interest. Many of these situations are routine and unproblematic and we apply to them pre-given concepts and action recipes that we have been taught by our culture. Occasionally however, due to various constellations of social and biographical circumstances, we encounter problematic situations which necessitate the generation of new concepts and definitions as well as the crafting of novel courses of action. Thus the fundamental taken-for-grantedness of the everyday lifeworld can be disrupted, and the habitual models can prove inefficient in guiding our actions. When that happens, we face the need to creatively “deliberate,” or in other words to come up with new ways of seeing a particular sector of our lifeworld and acting within it. Once objectified or acted out in a particular fashion, such novel courses of action can be picked up and applied by other people in similar situations. In this process, the culturally shared “stock of knowledge” grows in response to new conditions and historical developments. Notably also in this process, individuals, in cooperation and negotiation with their “fellow-men,” can actively contribute to the change of the cultural stock of knowledge.

Schutz’s system of thought offers an elaborate set of concepts that describe the organization of the lifeworld as it is experienced by humans. In that system, the experiences of space, time, and social entities represent three of the central dimensions. Depending on the combination of spatial, temporal, and social parameters characterizing different situations, individuals perceive certain actions as relevant and practicable. Based on this conception, it can be expected that significant changes in the way space, time, and the social landscape are experienced by subjects would fundamentally transform their everyday lifeworlds and the activities considered possible within them.

While Schutz's model of the everyday lifeworld is centered in the experiencing subject and aims to capture the mental picture that he or she has of their surrounding world, Henri Lefebvre's (1971, 1991) take on everyday life is categorically anchored in the material and structural realities of modern society. For Lefebvre, modernity fragments and separates distinct areas of social reproduction – work and leisure, individual and community, public and private – into highly rationalized and tightly controlled institutions that impoverish human existence. Everyday life, in contrast, brings all human thoughts and activities, and ultimately the whole person, back together. Lefebvre further characterizes it as follows:

Everyday life is profoundly related to all activities, and encompasses them with all their differences and their conflicts; it is their meeting place, their bond, their common ground. And it is in everyday life that the sum of total relations which make the human – and every human being – a whole takes its shape and its form. (1991, p. 97)

As a result, everyday life is riven by contradictions. It is steeped in boredom, drudgery, and alienation, and yet at the same time, staggering creative forces lay dormant at its core. In contrast to descriptive historians and ethnographers, the stated goal of Lefebvre's investigation of everyday life was to develop a transformative *critique*. That critique would be a method for evaluation of social and individual practices against ideals such as fulfillment, liberation, and equality, and a search for directions and sources for change.

In this project, Lefebvre has not remained alone, as Gardiner (2000) and Highmore (2002) have demonstrated. His work is one among several streams forming a critical tradition in the study of everyday life which includes schools of thought such as Dada, surrealism, the Bakhtin circle, the Situationist International, Michel de Certeau (1984), and Dorothy Smith's institutional ethnography (1984, 1999), to name just a few. Following Gardiner (2000), the common features shared by the representatives of this tradition can be summarized as follows: All these authors seek to problematize everyday life, to expose its contradictions and to unearth its hidden potentialities. They insist on relating everyday life to wider socio-historical developments as opposed to simply describing it as an insulated container of ordinary social practices and modes of consciousness. In so doing, they place asymmetrical power relations at the focus of their inquiry into the dynamic of everyday activities and cognitive constructs. This inquiry for its part is aimed at fostering "radical reflexivity" (Pollner, 1991), or critical consciousness that would enable the actors of everyday life to understand their conditions within a larger social and political context and to undertake concerted action toward challenging and transforming oppressive relations. In short, this brand of everyday life theorist openly espouses an ethico-political stance, which places it in sharp contrast to the interpretative school of microsociology exemplified by Schutz and his followers. At the same time, it differs significantly from the Frankfurt School style of critical theory by virtue of its recognition of the potentialities for resistance and

emancipation contained within everyday life itself. It is in the nature of everyday life to be punctuated by the eruption of creative energies, by transformative possibilities that challenge the routine and taken-for-granted behavioral and relational order. Because instrumental rationalization, commodification, and bureaucratic power cannot fully suppress the impulses of human desire, sociability, hope and creativity, everyday life will always harbor “the buds and shoots of new potentialities” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 73, quoted in Gardiner, 2000, p. 20). How these contradictory sides of everyday life, or in Lefebvre’s (1991) words, its misery and power, blend with and shape Internet use is a central question of the critical strand of inquiry.

In my own work (Bakardjieva, 2005a) I have argued that both the interpretative and the critical perspectives are necessary for understanding the complex role of the Internet in everyday life. Closely examining users’ experiences with the Internet through the phenomenological approach has made it possible to discover how the new medium is construed as an element of subjects’ everyday lifeworlds as well as to map out the transformations in the structures of users’ everyday lifeworlds brought about in this process. Lefebvre’s (1971, 1991) critical method, on the other hand, directs attention to the characteristic alienations to which Internet users are exposed. Taken together, the two approaches bring to the fore the productive work performed by users through and around the Internet. In the course of this work users create new meanings, spaces, and social relations. They express their human potential in new ways and contribute to the shaping of the Internet as a medium of social communication. This kind of user agency in the social construction of the Internet far precedes the more obvious and also more problematic forms of involvement accentuated by Web 2.0. The results of this interaction between medium and users are certainly contradictory. Both alienation and empowerment can be detected in the daily practices of Internet use. By throwing into relief the emancipatory as well as the oppressive aspects of these practices, research on the Internet in everyday life is poised to offer a basis for critical reflexivity and conscious-raising among users and a solid basis for reflexive design and democratic policymaking. Such research would not only register the typical and the recurrent, but would be able to pinpoint versions of the possible discovered and implemented by users as they follow their creative impulses and desire for self-emancipation.

### **The Surface Everyday: Measuring Trends and Impacts**

Arguably, one of the first concerted attempts to force the Internet to descend from the firmament (to use Haythornthwaite & Wellman’s (2002) metaphor), and to take its proper place as an object of systematic social investigation was represented by the HomeNet study at Carnegie Mellon University in the mid-1990s. It was designed and implemented at the critical point of Internet diffusion when it was becoming clear that the home rather than the office would be the most

likely site of user engagement with the new medium and that the Internet user population would grow far beyond the early professional adopters and hobbyists. The HomeNet study team wanted to take a glimpse into that impending future by inducing some of its developments in an experimental setting. Thus, the team set up a field experiment of domestic Internet use, initially recruiting 48 families (157 individuals and note that this number grew at the later stages of the project) of a diverse socio-demographic make-up from the Pittsburgh area who were given free computers, Internet service subscription, and technical help with getting online. In exchange, participants agreed to be subjected to intensive examination with respect to multiple parameters of their emergent Internet use, as well as to testing and interviewing regarding selected aspects of their lifestyle and well-being. Going over one of the first HomeNet reports (Kraut et al., 1996) today feels like tarot reading because the seeds of so many uses of the Internet now considered typical can be noticed in the inventory of activities that those experimental subjects immediately jumped into: popular culture, sports, sex, movie times, and bus schedules didn't take much time to come on top of the usage trends registered by the researchers. Teenagers led Internet adoption and quickly turned themselves into the domestic Internet gurus. Participants diverged widely in terms of the websites and newsgroups they accessed, but their practices came together around an important discovery – the discovery of communication:

According to their pretrial questionnaires, participants didn't see computers as particularly useful for interpersonal communication. They thought computers were valuable for doing school work, for learning, and for performing household chores. Yet like people discovering the telephone at the turn of the century, chit-chat quickly became the dominant use of the Internet, and especially so for teenagers. (Kraut et al. 1996, n.p.)

Emails, Internet relay chat sessions, and MUDs (text-based multi-user dungeons), all the available Internet communication tools at the time were recruited by users to make that chit-chat possible. The first HomeNet report had also its shred of romantic spice: it noted the case of a teenage girl who had never dated before, but started dating a boy she met over a chat service. In sum, the preliminary 1996 paper from the HomeNet study reads like a futuristic thriller putting its finger on many of the exciting experiences that the Internet was poised to bring into the homes and everyday lives of the unsuspecting still-unwired public.

But the ambitions of the HomeNet team went far beyond the descriptive statistics of the Internet uses proliferating among their study participants. They set out on a search for predictors of Internet adoption and use which they expected to find in particular demographic features, psychological dispositions, and existing media-use habits. Furthermore, the cornerstone of their endeavor became the search for impacts: How will the Internet affect the lives of users? Following some of the early pointers and research performed on the effects of television, the study hypothesized that a major effect of the medium could be expected to manifest

itself in the area of social interaction. Thus, they focused part of their inquiry on the relationships between Internet use and social involvement. The outcome of this particular investigation was the now famous article in the *American Psychologist* that declared the Internet to be a “social technology that reduces social involvement and psychological well-being” (Kraut et al., 1998). The researchers measured participants’ degree of social involvement through their communication with other family members and the size of their local social networks. On both counts, they found that greater Internet use was associated with, and possibly led to, a decline in involvement. Also negatively affected by Internet use was participants’ feeling of loneliness, a psychological state associated with social involvement. Weak ties of a lower quality and intensity maintained through Internet communication, the argument went, were displacing strong ties of a deeper and more substantive nature. These findings reverberated across popular media and helped whip up a measurable wave of moral panic at a moment when Internet adoption was growing exponentially and social pundits as well as ordinary users were feeling uncertain as to where the Internet bandwagon was headed.

After several years and a lot of critical questioning by the research community, some of the original “Internet paradox” authors conducted a successor study involving a panel of former HomeNet participants and a newly recruited sample of Americans who used the Internet in 1998–9 (Kraut et al., 2002). The original disturbing results were not replicated. Instead, the new research found that Internet effects on social involvement would be better reflected by what they called “rich get richer” model. According to that model, those Internet users who were extroverts and had stronger social support networks enjoyed positive social effects of Internet use, while the introverts and the isolated suffered some degree of decline in social involvement and psychological well-being. Compelled to reflect on the inconsistency between the results from the two studies, the researchers recognized that the pursuit of generalizable and unequivocal Internet effects on users’ lives had turned out to be a shaky undertaking. The likelihood was high that different stages of use, different types of users, and different ways of using, as well as changing technical and functional features of the Internet and the different combinations thereof, would bring about widely divergent consequences. Note also that the effects projected so far originated from exclusively American research sites and developments. Was the rest of the world of Internet users going to follow the same path? It was clear that the “impact approach” to studying the Internet in everyday life needed to undergo a significant philosophical, conceptual, and methodological rethinking.

Many larger- and smaller-scale projects conducted in this vein have left and continue to make their mark on the area. Employing methodologies such as the social survey, interviewing, time-use diaries, cross-sectional and longitudinal designs in combination with sophisticated statistics, researchers have been able to significantly advance the understanding of the ways in which Internet use interacts with other habitual everyday activities. Does the Internet substitute for previous technologies in the performance of customary practices such as reading the

news and entertainment? Does it bring about new dynamics in interpersonal communication? Where does the time that goes into using the Internet come from? After all, something has to give. What about social, community, and civic involvement? Interesting takes on these questions have emerged from various research corners with international and cross-national comparisons and contrasts becoming more readily available (see World Internet Project; PEW Internet and American Life Project; Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002; Katz & Rice, 2002; Anderson, Brynin, & Raban, 2007).

Kraut and colleagues (2006), for example, took a careful and detail-oriented approach to the effects of Internet use on television viewing. They compared results from cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys with the goal to “differentiate among users of the Internet in a richer way and to identify uses that lead to changes in other media use” (p. 72). Their findings revealed that over time, television viewing increased among non-users, but declined among heavy Internet users. In addition, they showed that the way in which people used the Internet makes a difference with respect to their television viewing. Users who went online for entertainment and news did not see a significant decline in television viewing, while people who sought new social relationships and participated in groups on the Internet watched less television. These outcomes limit the validity of the widely adopted “functional displacement hypothesis” which postulates that a new medium will take away from an old one the satisfaction of a particular need, especially when it is able to offer new opportunities or reduces costs. On the contrary, a functional enhancement effect seemed to manifest itself: people who were interested in a particular type of content or kind of medium use were likely to employ both the old and the new medium to meet their needs.

Focused attention on specific user categories, such as teenagers, has uncovered various mutual displacements and enhancement among new and old media. Teens enthusiastically take up chat and instant messaging applications, which displaces their avid use of the telephone, and at the same time makes new modes of communication possible (Boneva et al., 2006). More frequent chatting with representatives of the opposite gender and with several friends at the same time represent new opportunities embraced by teenagers. It also gives them a sense of belonging to a group and more leverage in crafting their own social networks. It fits into the structural conditions determining their offline lives such as limited mobility and scarce time free of adult supervision. With the benefit of hindsight it can be observed that these uses anticipate the current explosion of social networking applications.

Participation in local community is another activity that is affected by the Internet in complex and differential ways. A longitudinal study on patterns of participation in the Blacksburg Electronic Village, a community network connecting the town of Blacksburg, Virginia, reported by Carroll et al. (2006), points to a model that by analogy with the Kraut et al. (2002) finding introduced earlier can be called “the active get more active.” People who used the Internet for civic purposes tended to become more actively involved in their community, while those

who used the Internet heavily but for other purposes remained relatively disconnected from community activities. The researchers concluded that Internet use mediated between an existing disposition to be civically engaged and the enactment of this disposition by making involvement easier.

Hampton and Wellman (2003), for their part, found that belonging to the local mailing list of Netville, a wired neighbourhood near Toronto, increased the number of neighbours with whom residents had established weak ties. Strong ties, on the other hand, were influenced by the number of years people had lived in the neighbourhood and did not depend on electronic communication. Wired residents knew people who lived farther away in the neighbourhood compared to residents not connected to the network who only knew their next-door neighbours. The mailing list was also used by residents to organize local events and undertake collective action to protect their interests when those were at stake. The Netville developer, for example, was caught by surprise when he found that residents of the wired suburb were capable of organizing a protest at unprecedented speed. Consequently, Netville inhabitants received much better than usual customer service and many of their actions against unpopular decisions of the developer were successful. Ultimately, Hampton and Wellman concluded that the presence of high-speed Internet in the community did not weaken or radically transform neighbouring ties. It added another layer to the communicative opportunities existing in the suburb with subtle but important consequences for residents' quality of life.

In a recent review of approaches to studying the social impacts of information and communication technologies, Brynin and Kraut (2006) identify four levels at which such impacts are conceptualized by researchers. The first level is the one at which new technologies are perceived as tools allowing people to perform familiar activities in new ways, possibly with increased efficiency. These could be the cases of functional displacement and enhancement. The second level of social impact of technologies refers to the cases in which the use of technologies leads to qualitative changes in daily life. Here, people employ the technology to accomplish new goals, that is, new functions emerge that have no equivalents in the preceding state of affairs. The third level of social impacts discerned by researchers looks for the ways in which new forms of behaviour made possible by technology result in changes in people's more general well-being – psychological health, social capital, educational achievements, life opportunities, etc. At the fourth level, researchers are interested in consequences that extend beyond the specific activities enabled by technologies and affect the organization of society at large. The examination of the trajectory of research in the social impact vein suggests that results have been convincing and corroborated mostly at the first two levels. Attempts to identify impacts at the level of general well-being and social organization at large have run into great difficulties and have not been widely accepted. In the conclusions of their study of the impacts of the Internet on the way time is spent in UK households, Anderson and Tracey (2001) introduce the possibility that the impact approach as such may not be the most promising route toward understanding the role of the Internet in the everyday lives of users. Instead, these authors

propose, attention should be directed to lifestyle and life stage as setting the context in which the Internet itself is construed and mobilized by users in a variety of ways. What is needed, they argue, is a “deeper understanding of the triggers for the processes of the medium’s domestication, and a more detailed examination of how individuals and households are making sense of and integrating its applications and services into their lives” (p. 471). A statement like this signals a major philosophical turn in the course of the inquiry and its premises. Instead of the search for impacts of an invariable technology or communication medium on users’ lives as a receiving end, recognition of the active and complex role of users in fitting and adapting the medium to their lives takes center stage. With this comes an acknowledgement of the fact that the Internet, with its various applications, emerges out of a process of continuous social shaping and that its ostensible impacts cannot be treated as a force external to the social fabric. Thus the question becomes: What do users do to the medium and why as it presents itself to them in the midst of their everyday lives? The next approach to the study of Internet in everyday life that I will discuss takes this question to heart.

### **The Deeper Everyday: Interpretation and Critique**

Researchers who espouse the interpretative approach do not see the everyday as an objective flow of routine events by which human beings are swept passively along. Neither do they look at the Internet as an external agent that brings about changes in the everyday by virtue of its own logic and momentum. There is an effort to capture and understand the Internet as it is perceived and made sense of by reflexive actors who perform conscious and consequential choices as they look for the place of the medium in their daily lives. Actor’s choices are conscious, especially in the instance of their early encounter with the technological novelty. That novelty creates a problematic situation, in Schutz’ terms, and hence has to be given meaning, value, and practical application by drawing on cultural and personal experiences and resources. Actor’s choices are consequential because their decisions to employ the Internet in one or another specific way that makes sense within their situation contribute to the shaping of the medium itself. This way of viewing the process aligns interpretative research on the Internet in everyday life with the social construction of technology perspective (Pinch and Bijker, 1984; Bijker, 1995; Bijker and Law, 1992; Bijker, 2001) which traces the origins and evolution of technical devices to the choices made by various groups of social actors. The examination of the Internet in everyday life from that point of view opens the door for serious consideration of the role of ordinary users in the social construction of technology. After all, users are the ultimate decision-makers with respect to the success or failure of technical devices and applications. Their daily tinkering with devices and applications adds new and sometimes unexpected layers to the social understanding and, directly or indirectly, to the functionality of technologies. Yet at the same time, the social construction of technology is a

two-way process; that is why many authors talk about the co-construction between users and technologies (Oudshoorn and Pinch, 2003). This means that the everyday lifeworlds into which new technologies are drawn do not remain unchanged. New elements and dimensions are added to the spatial, temporal, practical, and social arrangements of these worlds. The user of the Internet wakes up into a daily world of a different make-up compared to the world that preceded the medium's arrival. What then are the experiences defining that change? Are they important? What happens to the culture inhabited by Internet users when these new experiences are intersubjectively shared and sedimented into the social stock of knowledge?

One of the traditions that researchers of this persuasion naturally turned to for help when they endeavoured to design their projects conceptually and methodologically was the domestication of media technologies (Haddon, 2004; Berker et al., 2005). The domestication approach was first articulated in relation to studies of television use in households (Silverstone, Hirsh, & Morley, 1992; Silverstone, 1994; Silverstone & Haddon, 1996). These authors were interested in the ways in which television, a system of technologies and messages produced in the public world, is appropriated and blended into the private life of the family and, more specifically, into what they called "the moral economy" of the household. Throughout the qualitative studies (ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews) that they carried out looking closely at the practices of a diverse range of domestic users, a model of television's appropriation eventually took shape. Thus Silverstone, Hirsh, and Morley (1992), and later Silverstone and Haddon (1996), isolated four intersecting processes that constituted television's domestication: appropriation, incorporation, objectification, and conversion. Objectification refers to the physical placement or inscription of the technical object, a commodity bought in the market and hence initially alien to the domestic fabric. The physical placement of material artifacts into a particular domestic environment, Silverstone and colleagues (1992) argue, objectifies the moral, aesthetic, and cognitive universe of those feeling comfortable with them. It also reveals the "pattern of spatial differentiation (private, shared, contested; adult, child; male, female, etc.) that provides the basis for the geography of the home" (p. 23). As it became clear in the social history of television, new technologies do not descend on the household along with a precise description of their appropriate place and surrounding. Women, men, and children living alone or together had to make more or less conscious decisions about where the novelty belonged. Thus, even if users of new technologies do not literally write and publicize their own definitions of artifacts' meanings, they objectify these meanings by inscribing artifacts into an already meaningful structure of objects. Incorporation, for its part, focuses on temporalities (p. 24). While Silverstone and his colleagues apply the term broadly to cover "ways in which objects, especially technologies, are used" (p. 24), it can be interpreted as a caption for the temporal arrangements and patterns of activity that arise around a new domestic technology. The organization of time-sharing of the artifact among family members and the way in which its

use fits into the overall structure of the daily course of events represent another measure of social and cultural significance. Finally, conversion captures the current of activities that take the meanings constructed within the household outside of its walls through exchanges and conversations with family, friends, and commercial and public organizations.

This model, clearly, reflects well the appropriation of the Internet as a new technical commodity and communication channel into the everyday life spaces and rhythms of home-based users. Notably, as is characteristic of the interpretative approach, the meanings and values as well as the routine practices that household members as individuals and groups attach to the Internet are taken as the point of departure. The notion of domestication has sometimes burst out of the confines of the home and has been applied to the ways larger social entities such as local communities and organizations make the Internet their own. In some instances appropriation of the medium by individuals has been found to occur at sites other than the home – computer clubs, IT-literacy courses, and others (see the studies reported in Berker et al., 2005). These cases have proven that it is beneficial to conceive of domestication not as a process strictly related to the setting of the private home, but more broadly to the everyday lives of new users as they move through different sites of activity.

This broader idea of domestication as a process of making the Internet ones' own on the part of individual and social and cultural groups has inspired numerous researchers to investigate the detailed workings of the process. In her theoretically sophisticated and empirically meticulous research, Lally (2002) has traced the fascinating twists and turns of the penetration of computers into Australian households in the mid-1990s. Internet communication had not been part of the machine's definition at the beginning of Lally's data collection, but eventually became an important aspect of it. Employing concepts such as objectification and the extended self, Lally uncovers the painstaking reflexive efforts that people go through in order to take ownership of their computers in the true cultural sense of the term. Users perform hard signifying work not only while they assign the computer its proper place in the living room or basement, but also as they make decisions about the "proper" use of computer time and reconstitute family relationships and personal identities around it. Household values and projections for the future, gender dynamics as well as temporal rhythms and stages of family life represent the background as well as the outcome of this appropriation process. (For a similarly rich description of media use in Welsh households see Mackay & Ivey, 2004).

In her ethnographic study of the role of the Internet in the everyday life of a small community north of Dublin, Ireland, that she names "Coastal Town," Katie Ward (2003) raises questions concerning the relationships between the public and private spheres, the local and global contexts, and "new" and "old" media as they are reconfigured by the arrival of the Internet. Her analysis offers a nuanced understanding of the anxieties and struggles that accompany the appropriation process. Parents, she demonstrates, are thrown into a tension field between exalted

promises and murky threats from within which they have to erect the regulatory order of Internet use in their homes. Typically, they turn for help to the trusted old media, expecting them to offer a higher-level understanding of the proper ways for employing the new one. Local institutions, as exemplified by the school, the club, and the civic group studied by Ward, tend to tread timidly into the field of opportunities for education and community involvement offered by the Internet. Shyly and cautiously, they extend their existing practices into the new media environment, putting off the implementation of new forms of connectivity and interaction for the indefinite future. Ward does not register significant shifts in the patterns of participation of Internet users in local community life. When questioned about that, respondents expressed satisfaction with and preference for the traditional media of print and public meetings as adequate for handling local issues. However, a number of people had discovered the novel possibilities for involvement in communication about public issues stretching beyond Coastal Town. These informants shared that they would rather use the Internet to participate in national or global political movements.

Ward's work is a component of the European Media Technology and Everyday Life Network that was constituted in the beginning of the 2000s with the objective of carrying out cutting-edge research oriented toward creating a user-friendly information society. Many of the projects undertaken under the auspices of the network adopted the interpretative approach in their efforts to elucidate the role the Internet was taking on in the everyday life of Europeans. As a result, rich accounts emerged of the Internet-related daily practices of different categories of users across a range of European countries. Berker (2005), for example, examined the process through which the Internet was being appropriated in the lives of migrant researchers in Norway and Germany. He demonstrated how a novel life-form characterized by "extreme flexibility" was emerging from the combination of employment opportunities available to this group and the functionalities of the new medium. Hartmann (2005) studied the attitudes and practices of young adults in Belgium and went on to challenge the myths circulated by the "web-generation discourse" (p. 141). She was able to show that while the young adults she followed and interviewed in depth felt at ease with Internet technologies, they consciously resisted the prospect of online interactions and preoccupations taking up too big a part of their lives. Those young people jealously guarded their existing patterns of relationships and ways of doing things and allowed the Internet in only to a measured extent.

Starting from a different theoretical basis, not directly related to the domestication approach and yet in accord with its ethnographic tenets, Miller and Slater (2000) launched a forceful appeal intended to dispel researchers' fixation on the idea of cyberspace as a disembedded "placeless place" (p. 4). In their ethnographic study of the take-up of the Internet in Trinidad, they demonstrated the profound degree to which Trini users were crafting an Internet inseparable from their national culture and everyday life. From home users in poor and middle-class settlements though youth-frequented chat rooms to governmental offices and business

websites, Trini culture, sense of identity, and pride permeated the Internet-related practices that Miller and Slater found in that country through and through. Playful cultural rituals had vigorously migrated online. Citizens of the country were embracing online communication affordances eagerly in their desire to stay closer to the large and spread-out Trinidadian diaspora. Miller and Slater drew on their observations to propose a number of concepts that usefully frame the understanding of the role of the Internet in the lives of Trinidadians and are certainly applicable to other cultural contexts. Their notion of “expansive realization” (p. 10) refers to the dynamic between identity and the Internet that allowed users to pursue on the terrain of the Internet visions of themselves which were previously unfeasible: an ingenious entrepreneur, a caring distant parent, etc. The second dynamic, that of “expansive potential” (p. 11) enables users to catch glimpses of novel versions of themselves never imagined before. These dynamics exemplify the changing horizons of users’ lifeworlds in which the experience of reach and what Schutz has called “the province of the practicable” (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 50) has shifted far beyond its pre-Internet boundaries. Miller and Slater’s (2000) research on the Internet in Trinidad highlights also the important role macro-factors such as the economy, communication infrastructure, governmental policy, and business culture played in shaping everyday Internet use practices in that society.

In my own research on the trajectory of “becoming an Internet user in Bulgaria” (Bakardjieva, 2005b), I discovered similarly embedded, albeit substantively different, developments occurring in the Bulgarian context where low average income and the absence of effective government programs had led potential users to break their own unconventional paths into the online world. Numerous devious practices at both the individual and business levels proliferated in the country, all aimed at making the most of limited resources. Users shared Internet subscriptions, which begot wires dangling across the open spaces between apartment buildings, or creeping from one apartment into another. Internet service providers offered pirate content through illegal servers in their effort to entice customers to invest in pricy computer equipment and to buy subscriptions. Neighborhood Internet cafes were turning into hotbeds of software pirating and computer training. Professional users were cramming screens and wires into their tiny bedrooms and kitchens driven by the dynamics of expansive realization and potential. Many of them wanted to be players on a larger scene where they could prove their entrepreneurship and professional skills.

While these are important representative examples, it would be too ambitious a task to try to present a comprehensive account of the work undertaken in the interpretative stream of research on the Internet in everyday life. It will suffice to point out that its main achievements lie in the conceptual framing of the process of Internet appropriation by users and the introduction of new analytical categories. Miller’s and Slater’s notions of expansive realization and expansive potential coined on the basis of their ethnographic data from Trinidad represent a good example. So does Berker’s definition of the lifestyle of “extreme flexibility.”

Petersen (2007) identifies patterns of what he dubs “mundane cyborg practice” in the activities of his informants whose emergent daily routines weave the computer and the Internet into a web of material interconnections with books, refrigerators, and the meal prepared for dinner. My research on members of the first wave of home-based ordinary (i.e. non-professional or commercial) users of the Internet led me to formulate the concept of the “warm expert” (Bakardjieva, 2005a). This is a close friend or relative who possesses relatively advanced knowledge of computer networks and personal familiarity with the novice user’s situation and interests. On that basis, the warm expert is able to reveal to the new user the personal relevance that the Internet can have for him or her. In my study I noticed also the tight connection between the kinds of uses that people invented for the medium and their own social and biographical situations. This finding resonates with the importance of lifestyles and life stages discussed by Anderson and Tracey (2001), but is focused on more concrete and complex micro-phenomena (see also Sewlyn et al., 2005). I opted to talk about the specific configurations of Internet-related practices I observed across a variety of individual cases as “use genres.” These genres, I argued, arise in typical situations in which people find themselves at different junctions of life in contemporary society. Thus use genres are personally molded and yet significantly widespread.

With the help of these and other analytical categories, interpretative research on the Internet in everyday life has been able to offer a detailed conceptual map of the adoption and appropriation of the Internet by users across personal, social, and cultural contexts paying due attention to those contexts themselves (for example, Haddon, 1999; Lelong & Thomas, 2001). It has also cast light on the intricate changes in daily practices that have been brought about by the affordances of the Internet. Finally, the qualitative restructuring of the everyday lifeworlds of Internet users in terms of their spatial, temporal, practical, and social dimensions has been closely scrutinized to determine its individual and social implications (see Haddon, 2004, for an overview of findings).

While the interpretative studies discussed so far have demonstrated the agency of users in taking up, adapting, and fine-tuning internet applications to their situations and daily needs, the question remains to what extent they have addressed the dynamics of Internet use critically. Users, these studies have proven beyond reasonable doubt, are not technological dopes swept along by the digital imperative (Wyatt, 2008). Users engage in active sense-making and put up resistance to any such imperatives that threaten to undermine their individual and familial moral economies. They take up the functionalities of the new medium carefully and critically and work to create arrangements that will allow them to remain in control of their daily activities in the presence of the powerful new technical system. The efforts at micro-regulation registered across numerous studies, be it on the part of parents, young adults, or seniors, offer clear evidence of that. Does this mean however, that we should not worry about possible oppressive, exploitative, or alienating aspects of Internet use? And further: Have the empowering possibilities that many commentators have read into the Internet been realized?

Regarding the first question, it would be helpful to keep in mind that while the richness of everyday life in its life-enhancing capacity and the space for agency it offers to its practitioners is indisputable, as critical theorists have warned, the quotidian remains a site infested by numerous oppressive powers. In the words of Gardiner (2000):

Social agents are not “cultural dopes,” but nor are their thoughts and actions fully transparent to them. As Bourdieu cogently notes, whilst people’s everyday interpretation of their social world has considerable validity that must be recognized and accorded legitimacy, at the same time we should not succumb to “the illusion of immediate knowledge” (Bourdieu et al., 1991, p. 250; also Watier, 1989). Critical reason and structural analysis therefore have a critical role to play in exposing such patterns of ideological determination and enhancing what Melvin Pollner (1991) has called “radical reflexivity,” whereby people can develop a heightened understanding of their circumstances and use this comprehension as the basis of conscious action designed to alter repressive social conditions. (pp. 7–8)

As Internet infrastructure as well as the cultural content of cyberspace become more and more subject to corporate domination (McChesney, 2000; Dahlberg, 2005), there are more reasons to scrutinize everyday use practices with a critical eye. A number of red flags have been raised by feminist scholars who have drawn attention to the “gendering of Internet use” (Van Zoonen, 2002; Wyatt et al., 2005) and the “feminization of the Internet” (Shade, 2002, p. 107; see also Consalvo & Paasonen, 2002). According to Shade, over the years, digital capitalism has turned luring women to the Internet in the capacity of mindless shoppers into a major enterprise. Contrary to early expectations that the Internet would become a vehicle for feminist mobilization and organizing, the lavish offerings of fashion, gossip, diet, and shopping-oriented sites have worked to constrict women to the role of nothing more than avid online consumers. Children and young people, for their part, have become attractive and responsive targets of digital consumerism. An early report by the US Center for Media Education (Montgomery and Pasnik, 1996; see also Montgomery, 2007) drew attention to the numerous deceptive techniques that online marketers were devising with the aim of capturing children. In a detailed investigation of British children’s Internet use, Livingstone and Bober (2003) observed that their young respondents embraced the commercial and entertainment opportunities of the online world much more readily and frequently than the creative and the civic ones (see also Livingstone, 2006; Seiter, 2005). Grimes and Feenberg (forthcoming) have analyzed online games in terms of both design and user involvement, showing that games create a controlled world in which users’ imagination and relationships are harshly determined by designers’ aesthetics and ideology.

Thus, research has signaled the possibility of users being exposed to a whole new system of ideological and manipulative influences. The pressure to get connected to the Internet exerted by cyberspace discourses has only grown recently with the transformation of the Internet into a social space inseparably entwined

with each and every institution and practice existing in the offline world. Peer pressure has joined marketing strategies in forcing selected commercially profitable applications upon various categories of users. Eliciting and subsequently data-mining user-generated information has become a common trick of the trade for both market and political strategists (Lyon, 2007). With all the excitement spurred by participatory (popular) culture and Web 2.0 applications, critical reflection on the invasive new avenues that these applications open up for the market to encroach (in the Habermasian sense) on the lifeworld of peer interaction is urgently needed. Therefore, the first important goal of critical research should be to distinguish the everyday use practices that succumb to these diverse alienating tendencies from the life-enhancing possibilities as Lefebvre (1991) advocated. It is not enough to demonstrate that users make mindful choices when they interact with and in the online environment. The oppressive forces prying on users and working behind their backs have to be brought to light and raised to consciousness. But neither is it enough to demonstrate corporate domination in the large infrastructural, political, and economic cyberscapes towering over users' heads. Alienation has to be spotted and laid bare in the nooks and crannies of everyday life where it may thrive under the mask of convenience, popularity, or pleasure. Its impoverishing effects on the lives of users need to be exposed in concrete and personally meaningful ways. Equipped with "radical reflexivity" (Pollner, 1991) borne from critical research like that, users would be able to navigate the Internet both tactically and strategically in ways that defy oppression and advance emancipation.

The second goal for critical research, one that counters the common perception of critics as crabby and pessimistic, is to identify the "the buds and shoots of new potentialities" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 73, quoted in Gardiner, 2000, p. 20), or the concrete shapes and instances in which "the possible" (Lefebvre, 1991), the life-enhancing opportunities, present themselves in daily Internet use practice. For its part, this approach sets out to go beyond the registration of the typical in terms of, first, repetitive patterns and routines of use, and, second, the disturbing realization that the economic and ideological powers reigning in the offline world will inevitably muscle Internet development into the forms most beneficial to them. (See Feenberg, 1999, for an articulation of a critical theory of technology elaborating such an approach). Unlike the purely speculative optimistic projections made by pundits, studies in this vein have sought to isolate emancipatory possibilities by carefully inspecting users' actual practices. Feenberg and Bakardjieva (2004), for example, have interpreted users' participation in virtual communities as opening possibilities for collective meaning-making and mobilization around interests and issues that may not be directly political, but are important to people's self-realization and well-being. Through such mobilization, ordinary users find means of dealing with difficulties and pursuing causes that may not be available otherwise. Orgad (2005a, 2005b) has examined carefully the exchanges among women participants in online breast cancer groups. She has demonstrated that these forums offer breast-cancer sufferers and survivors the opportunity to express and share their personal experiences and redefine their condition

themselves as opposed to leaving those definitions to be provided by the medical establishment or the media. At the same time, Orgad (2005b) argues, the personal has stopped short of becoming political in these conversations because breast cancer has been understood as a personal problem and responsibility rather than as a condition embedded in broader configurations of material conditions and cultural practices. Moreover, participants' online articulations of the personal and the private have remained constrained in their safe group communicative spaces and have not influenced the understanding of breast cancer in the wider culture.

Franklin (2004) has offered a more heartening account of everyday practices in online spaces created by Samoans and Pacific Islanders who have come together to debate and independently articulate the political, economic, and sociocultural crosscurrents shaping their postcolonial subjectivities. Discussing the meaning of gender, race, and ethnicity in a postcolonial context these participants have practiced democracy in their own terms and for their own needs. In their online texts, the personal and the political are inextricably linked, Franklin insists. Bringing together offline and online research methods, Olsson (2006, 2007) has looked at the practices of young Swedish activists with a view to the specific ways the Internet is drawn into their civic or political projects. Boler's (2008; see also [www.meganboler.net](http://www.meganboler.net)) studies of the motivations of Internet users who produce viral political videos, remix, satirical art, and political blogs have demonstrated that such practices foster offline activism as well. Her analysis of the surveys and interviews conducted with such user-producers suggests that web-based communities sparked by political commentary like *The Daily Show* are vibrant and translating into action. Drawing on my data from interviews with home-based users in Canada, I have attempted to trace the small gestures of what I call "subactivism:" civic engagement deeply immersed into everyday life. I have found that the Internet is implicated in many of the activities that make such engagement possible and communicable to other people in respondents' close personal networks as well as in the larger society (Bakardjieva, forthcoming).

This current of Internet in everyday life research is conspicuously sparse and understated. It has had to deal with the common methodological challenges regarding objectivity and representativeness because it speaks about occurrences and instances that stray from the most frequently registered behaviors of user populations. It also has to fend off accusations that, like abstract cyber-optimism, it looks at developments through pink glasses and extols Internet life-enhancing or democratic potential beyond the limits of the realistic. It has to be noted, however, that researchers working in this stream make the conscious choice to look for the "extraordinary" and indeed the "buds and shoots" of new possibilities across a terrain that is clearly colonized by a different kind of vegetation. In contrast to sheer speculation and cheerful technological determinism, however, they do not make up the "buds and shoots" that constitute the object of their interest out of thin air or hypothetical techno-logic. They *find* them in the garden of everyday life and then attempt to understand their origin, conditions, and properties. The ultimate hope of this project is that its findings will be translated into

practical strategies *by and for* users, as well as for civic and political actors, which would lead to the conscious nurturing and proliferation of emancipatory possibilities.

## Conclusion

Studies of the Internet in everyday life comprise a broad field of inquiry animated by diverse philosophies, interests, and objectives. In this chapter I have analytically isolated three distinct currents shaping the landscape of this field, although in multiple studies, at least two of these approaches can be found going hand in hand (e.g. Sewlyn et al., 2005). All three of them share the commitment to understanding the Internet as part of a broader social context of situations, relations, and activities in which users engage in the course of everyday life. The Internet is one among many ways in which people connect to each other, Wellman and Gulia (1999) have argued, and this straightforward observation represents one of the shared tenets of the everyday life approach. The Internet is one among many other ways in which people flirt, gossip, learn, shop, organize, etc. Hence Internet use has to be studied not exclusively by the traces that it leaves in cyberspace, but as it meshes with other common activities and projects comprising the common ground of people's daily lives. As I have shown, different schools of thought have chosen their own philosophical and methodological paths for dealing with this challenge. Each one of them represents a distinct scholarly paradigm and the respective culture that has spun around it. Despite their different and sometimes even conflicting philosophical tenets, they have all contributed valuable insights to the understanding of the role of the Internet in society. As a goal for future research, one would wish that work associated with these different paradigms becomes more equitably represented. Considering their contributions alongside each other, what becomes increasingly clear is that all these perspectives and research strategies are needed, if the objective is to assemble a comprehensive, thorough, and practically useful account of the Internet phenomenon. This is not a tale of blind men and an elephant. This could and should be an exercise in mutually respectful and productive intellectual multiculturalism.

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