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The Internet and the Transformation of Public and Private

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Abstract

The Internet is attributed with enabling new forms of connection, with far-reaching consequences for democratic participation. Its interactivity allows diverse voices to be heard, and its global reach facilitates transnational communication. As well as mediating publicness in new ways, it is transforming boundaries between public and private. The paper reports empirical research that found no involvement in a Habermasian public sphere, but found a considerable breadth of activities that could be understood as performing cultural citizenship. Providing a critique of the literature on the domestication of ICTs, it is argued that 'private' is more complex than synonymous with 'the home', and that the home is less bounded than suggested by researchers in the domestication tradition. The Internet challenges the one-to-many model of the press and broadcasting, but also makes private space increasingly public and intensifies privatisation *within* the home.

Keywords

Internet, public, private, public sphere, cultural citizenship, domestication

The Internet and the Transformation of Public and Private

It has long been acknowledged – by scholars and policy-makers – that the mass media are vital for public connection and for engagement in the democratic process. Hence, across the world the mass media are understood, analysed and regulated for their public significance. New communication technologies in particular have commonly held hopes for engagement, participation and citizenship. When the trans-Atlantic telegraph finally arrived in New York it was reported by *The Times* as reuniting the British and American people; other commentators saw it as eliminating old prejudices and hostilities and leading to world peace (Standage, 1998). Television has been seen as having challenged the authority of politicians, empowered ordinary people and liberated women (Meyrowitz, 1985). Most recently the Internet has been hailed by many as a harbinger of democracy, providing a new forum for the rational debate that lies at the heart of notions of the public sphere.

It is seen as a technology that enhances mass participation, enabling citizens to become actively engaged in the political process (Rheingold, 1994). Being two-way, interactive, decentralised, cheap, overcoming the constraints of time and transcending geographical distance, the Internet allows marginal voices to be heard and dominant discourses and power relations to be contested (Dahlberg, 2005). Perhaps surprisingly, the strongest variants of such arguments come not from computer science, journalism or business schools, but from cultural studies: the shift from political representation to direct participation is hailed as a major way in which citizens are empowered, challenging the elitist control of corporations and broadcasters and enabling them to become producers (Hartley, 2006).

On the other hand, the democratic nature of the Internet is seen as undermined by the construction of users as consumers rather than as citizens (Dahlberg, 2005); the meaning and significance of interactivity is questioned (Mackay, forthcoming); and the question is asked as to which online activities constitute 'participation' (Livingstone *et al.,* 2005). More strongly, the mass media are seen as diametrically opposed to civic engagement and sustaining social capital (Putnam, 2000); and the Internet is seen as a particular villain on this count. Rather than emancipatory, it is seen as the latest in long line of individuating or isolating media technologies (Doheny-Farina, 1996).

Whilst the claims are contradictory regarding whether the Internet connects or isolates, but there can be no disagreement that the Internet is the most recent way in which publicness is mediated. Since the arrival of the book, public connection has been possible without co-presence – it has no longer been confined to the face-to-face and dialogic (Thompson, 1995). A more radical argument is that the very notion of 'the public' in the modern era is a product of mediation and the mass media – so it is not that there is a 'public' out there that is reported on by the mass media; but it is only with, in and through the mass media that the notion of 'the public' comes into being or has any significance. The Internet, however, is more than simply the most recent medium to allow distant public connection: it transforms the one-to-many of publishing and broadcasting, allowing readers, viewers or users to be much more than the recipients (albeit active) of messages transmitted from elsewhere, providing at least the possibility of restoring dialogue (as users become producers) and allowing diverse voices to be heard by mass and non-local audiences.

Those sometimes referred to as 'medium theorists' have sought to connect the specific characteristics of the media of communication with the nature and organisation of power. Marshall McLuhan is perhaps the best known of these; Joshua Meyrowitz examines how television enhances democracy by empowering women and the poor, and opening the powerful to challenge; and Harold Innis, with his concept of 'bias' in communication argues how different media favour different ways of organising political power, such as

centralisation or decentralisation (McLuhan, 1967; Meyrowitz, 1985; Innis, 1951). Whilst such theorists are sometimes criticised for their technological determinism, there can be little doubt that the nature of contemporary mediated culture is related to the capacities or affordances of available media technologies; and that these shape and extend possibilities for, and forms of, engagement with the public.

This paper is rooted in the notion that, rather than fixed, the terms 'public' and 'private' carry rather different meanings in different contexts, discourses and bodies of literature. In broad terms, 'public' is associated with space which we can all enjoy, state institutions or services and politics. Thus 'public' means open or available to the public, open for all citizens to see, hear or enjoy. Clearly, the picture is complicated by the growth of state intervention and the general expansion of public services, nationalisation, privatisation and the provision of state services by private sector bodies. 'Public' is often used in conjunction with a spatial metaphor – the public domain, the public realm, the public sphere – which is perhaps unhelpful because this ignores the shifting character or location of 'the public' (Newman, 2006). It suggests that 'public' is coterminous with non-private physical space and strengthens the myth of the privatised home surrounded by a sea of public space. The growing ubiquity and mobility of devices to access the Internet means that such arguments make less and less sense.

'Private', in the sense of privacy, is often used as the opposite of 'public' – as in privacy from the state. But, also following a spatial association, the private commonly means the domestic, or even intimate; the private is seen as commensurate with the family unit, or household; and the boundary between public and private is often seen in terms of the walls of the home, which protect the private world of kin and intimate relations with the public world beyond the home. Yet we can have private conversations in public spaces, and public meetings in our homes (Warner, 2005).

For some, the Internet facilitates many-to-many communication and represents fulfilment of Habermas' notion of the deliberative public sphere. For many, however, his concept is too tied to the specifics of bourgeois politics in the capitals of Europe in the eighteenth century to have any value today. This paper is concerned with how the Internet is reconfiguring both public and private. It draws on an empirical ethnographic study which involved about 40 hours of fieldwork in each of six households that was undertaken in 2006[1]. The paper starts, in Section 1, with a discussion of the notion of the public sphere – from its origins in the work of Habermas to his contemporary critics. Section 2 extends the notion of the public sphere by exploring cultural notions of citizenship. Section 3 looks at the other side of the coin, the private realm of the home. It is rooted, however, in different definitions of 'the private' than those at play in debates about the public sphere, the state and civil society. Rather, it works with an idea of 'private' from another body of literature, that which has explored the 'domestication' of information and communication technologies and how the values and practices of everyday life in households shapes uses of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The paper argues that the capacity of the Internet to generate public connection depends very much on what we mean by 'public' and 'private', and that the Internet is making private space increasingly public.

1. Public and Private version I: the Habermasian Public Sphere

Although sometimes dismissed in recent years as irrelevant or unhelpful for understanding contemporary publics, Habermas laid the foundations for the debate about the public sphere. One of the strengths of Habermas' work is that, over time, he has modified his work, taking on board some of the criticisms that have been made (Habermas, 1992). Numerous others have taken up his ideas and taken them forward – so, far from a dated or outdated notion, the public sphere has been and remains a field of lively debate.

Rather like the Canadian medium theorist Marshall McLuhan, he is a scholar whose time has come with the arrival of the Internet – in that his ideas seem more pertinent with this new communications technology than ever before. It is interesting that although so many writers invoke his notion of the public sphere in their discussion of the Internet, he himself has never done so: in a recent paper reflecting on the role of mass communication in western democracies he never once mentioned the Internet (Habermas, 2006).

For Habermas, the public sphere means:

> a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body
>
> (Habermas 1984, p. 49)

The rationale for the public sphere is to allow discussion of the regulation of civil society and the conduct of the state; to allow for deliberative democracy, which involves forming, not simply expressing, opinions. It is premised on particular versions of the nature of the state; the relationship of state to citizen; and of rational debate – it is rooted in the public use of reason by private individuals. The periodicals, salons and coffee houses of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century were pivotal. In this form, Habermas agues, the public sphere was culturally and historically specific and did not last for a great period of time.

According to Habermas, the public sphere arrived at a very specific point of time and place. At the time of the development of mercantile capitalism in early modern Europe in the sixteenth century, a set of political institutions emerged. Beside this public realm of authority and the state was civil society, which consisted of both the domain of private economic relations, regulated by civil law and formally distinct from the state *and* the intimate sphere of personal relations. The public sphere emerged between the public realm of state institutions and the private realm of a Hegelian civil society. In other words, 'public' is not simply to be contrasted with 'private' as in 'personal', but with economic relations (which are private in the liberal sense of free from state control) as well.

Among the many criticisms that have been made of Habermas' notion of the public sphere, John Thompson makes four that seem particularly central. First, Habermas is criticised for ignoring popular social movements (see Thompson, 1968) that existed at around the same time. These were concerned precisely with the role of the state, the regulation of civil society and rational debate about matters of public importance – but were no part of the bourgeois public sphere, with which they were often in conflict. This is a criticism that Habermas later acknowledges (Habermas, 1992).

Second, Habermas' notion of the public sphere, based on the Roman version, involves restricted membership, devaluing or excluding some people (or discourses or topics) while privileging others (Calhoun, 1992). Thompson's first criticism relates to the class dimension to this, but there is also a gender aspect: Habermas' bourgeois public sphere was inhabited only by men – again, a limitation that he later acknowledges. A stronger version of this point is that many, often feminists (e.g. Fraser, 1992) criticise the public/ private division. Where does one draw the line between public and private, and who should have the power to do so?

Third, Habermas focuses on the pivotal role of *specific* periodicals – for scrutinising the work of Parliament, holding it to account and making it more responsive to public opinion. The significance of other, including earlier, books, periodicals and newspapers is not considered. Thompson argues that, had they been, Habermas might have focused more on the commercial character and scurrilous or sensationalist content of print publications. This resembles in some

ways the tendency in debates about public broadcasting today to focus mainly or exclusively on news and current affairs.

Finally, Habermas is criticised for his analysis of the decline of the bourgeois public sphere in terms of its 'refeudalisation'. He argues that politics has become stage-managed, with the public excluded from discussion. Following the pessimism of Adorno and Horkheimer, Habermas sees the masses as manipulated (Adorno, 1991; Horkheimer and Adorno, 1979). Today, such ideas generally have been replaced by notions of active audiences and contextualised approaches to how individuals receive media texts and incorporate them into their lives. Thompson argues that it seems wrong to liken contemporary politics to feudalism.

Whatever the limitations or irrelevance of Habermas' notion of the public sphere today, there can be little doubt that notions of the public, the public interest, shared concerns etc. are of continuing importance and remain valid (Couldry *et al.*, 2008). Whilst there is contest about the nature and boundary of public and private, and about the forms of public debate that are feasible, active and engaged publics remain politically significant and valued in popular and elite discourses (Livingstone, 2005). Where and how the public sphere takes place, and the issues that it addresses (or should address) remain important if contested questions.

Clearly there is nothing inherently progressive or even rational about public opinion. Many social groupings commonly labelled as publics operate in a prejudiced or competitive way (Dayan, 2001). Local campaigns against public provision for unpopular groups such as Gypsies (Rom, or Travellers) alert one to the dangers of populist versions of democracy. A number of commentators have suggested that, analytically, the public sphere is best conceived as encompassing two rather different functions. Peter Dahlgren distinguishes between the common domain of the public sphere and the advocacy domain, the latter often counter cultural or anti-public (Dahlgren, 1995). Similarly, Lincoln Dahlberg distinguishes between deliberative and liberal pluralist approaches to the public sphere. The former see the Internet as a means for the expression of citizen deliberation leading to the formation of rational public opinion through which decision-makers can be held accountable; whereas liberal pluralists see the public sphere as a market place of ideas, where citizens are self interested instrumental, rational, utility maximisers, finding information to solve their problems or satisfy their needs (Dahlberg, 2007).

Others take this argument further, asserting that the public sphere is best understood as not a singular deliberative space but a complex field of multiple contesting publics, including both dominant and counter publics. John Downey and Natalie Fenton have argued that there may be many different publics (Downey and Fenton, 2003). Moreover, they argue that, with contemporary politics, the act of politics is in the participation rather than in relation to institutions or policy outcomes. New social movements – which are online and transnational – fit better with understanding politics as concerned with antagonism rather than consensus. They criticise Habermas for focusing on consensus, and argue instead that there is a plurality of cultures and of political solutions.

Such theoretical debate, however, seems far removed from the realities of Internet use that I and other empirical researchers have found. Whatever the definition, my research method is such that it is hard to capture an act of politics in the use of hard and software. Clearly there is interaction and even deliberation on the Internet, but the degree to which these might be seen to be about public affairs is a matter of debate. It depends very much, as we shall see, on what is meant by public affairs.

The Internet activity that is most easy to identify that can be seen as connecting individual citizens with public bodies is accessing state or civil society organisations for information. These forms of public connection are often referred to in the collective form of 'civic participation'. There is little of even this. The Oxford Internet Institute, for example, in its

most recent annual survey, found only a 'very low' level of civic participation (Dutton and Helsper, 2007). It found that the most popular activity in this category, signing an online petition, was undertaken by 7 per cent of Internet users. 2 per cent had contacted a politician and 1 per cent had joined a civic organisation online.

In a study of young people's uses of the Internet Livingstone *et al.* counted uses of political, environmental, human rights or other participatory issue websites, and found that 54 per cent of those who go online at least once a week have visited a political, environmental, human rights or other participatory issue website (Livingstone *et al.*, 2005). They found that, for the great majority, political sites are a source of information, rather than an opportunity to become engaged. This is not particularly surprising, given that it is well-documented that younger people have less interest in political institutions and policy-making processes – less than adults, and less than they used to. It is a finding that resonates with the analyses of various commentators (e.g. Putnam 2000) that pressure groups and civil society organisations have become professional bodies that recruit and inform supporters, rather than anything more participatory.

I, too, found extremely little Internet activity that could be construed as enacting citizenship or using the Internet as a public sphere – in the sense in which I have been discussing these. Those we were researching did not use 'citizenship' as a term to describe any of their Internet activity – as in other fields where, as Clarke and Newman found, neither 'citizen' nor 'consumer' had much popular reach in the context of public services (Clarke and Newman, 2007). Certainly I found a reasonable amount of contact with state bodies. Most activity that could be classified in this way involved finding out (i.e. information searching) about state services. The Patels, for example, used the Internet to find information about dual citizenship that they were exploring. Cathy Slater checks NHS Direct for health information, and the Welsh Assembly site for the inspection report of her children's school. The Roberts family checked refuse collection schedules and playing field and school openings in bad weather.

Providing such readily available information may well be making such bodies more accessible and open, more responsive to public needs and requests. From a situation where members of the public had to try to find the correct department and person to deal with a query, call centres, where operators accessed databases, were set up to mediate. The next stage was to connect citizens, or service users, directly to information systems, eliminating the need for the intermediaries to access online information. Public access to information on the web actually transforms the relationship of the organisation to users of its services so, more recently, organisations have been restructuring around their web interfaces (Beynon-Davies, forthcoming). Thus the Internet becomes not simply a door in to the organisation, but something that shapes its structure.

As well as contact with state bodies I found a little contact with civil society bodies.This connects with arguments that much politics has migrated to the Internet, or that on the Internet one finds a new form of politics (Drache, 2008; Jordan, 2002; Downey and Fenton, 2003) – that NGOs, voluntary organisations, social movements, lobbying and political organisations are to be found online. However, the uses that I found were largely searching for information rather than any form of more or less active participation, let alone use of a forum for debate. Sophie, Bristol, was quite passionate about a forum – she is trying to reclaim unfair bank charges through the Martin Lewis money tips site – but, despite her enthusiasm, was still only reading, not posting, comments. Mrs Sharma was learning about Hindu religion but, again, as a reader, not poster. And Rita contacted voluntary as well as statutory health sites, to read information.

Clearly, acquiring information and becoming informed can be a part of processes of deliberation, even if real-time co-present debate is not taking place. Thompson alerts us to the question of whether deliberation necessarily involves dialogue (Thompson, 1995). But

information is very different from debate. Having said that, Cass Sunstein argues that on the Internet there are so many sites that one can easily avoid the deliberative ones (Sunstein, 2001); and Oscar Gandy points out that as people increasingly connect with like-minded others, they can end up knowing less and less about the world in which they live (Gandy, 2002).

However, moving to the level of the public sphere –in Habermasian terms, the deliberative space between the state and civil society – then there is nothing to report from my study. In my households, the nearest to political engagement found were two instances of online voting: Andy Slater voted to save the life of Knut, the polar bear in Berlin zoo, and his mother, Cathy, had signed an online petition at No 10, the site for communicating with the UK Prime Minister, about changing legislation regulating businesses opening business and access to gay people. She was considering signing one to ban the size zero model size.

We certainly found people using the websites of 'old media' organisations, notably the BBC – and especially for news. So there were plenty of instances of people keeping themselves *informed*. But we found no uses that could be construed as contributions to deliberative democracy, contributions being made to fora; rather, flows were one way, with interactivity confined to requests for pages, which were then downloaded.

This contrasts strongly with studies of Internet activism and new social movements on the net (Drache, 2008; Jordan, 2002). This isn't to challenge the validity of the accounts provided by these researchers – merely to point out that, whilst the Internet is in many ways transforming politics, it is still relatively few, and none in my six households who are participating. If one starts with activists as the focus of research, then it is unsurprising that this leads to accounts of political activity on the Internet – but it is important to remember that such activity is fairly unusual. It is worth flagging that it may well be the case that, in times of crisis – when, by definition, news is breaking – there is a rather different picture. One might add that nor did we find any instances of writing letters to editors of newspapers, phoning in on television polls, or appearing as members of the public in television or radio studio shows – common ways in which readers, listeners and viewers can and do engage with the mass media.

In summary, whilst any definition of civil society is problematic given the changing nature of the state and its institutions, most engagement involved seeking information, requesting information that was downloaded. However, I found *no* instance of contributing to political debates (narrowly defined) or engaging with issues and debates of public concern – which fits with studies of the subject which have found very little political engagement via the Internet (Hill and Hughes, 1998). My empirical evidence, from six households in the UK in 2007, is far from the Habermasian notion of a public sphere in which people listen to the views of others, engage in rational debate and deliberate on matters of politics.

2. Cultural notions of the public sphere and citizenship

However, contra the pessimism of Putnam, there is considerable evidence that people *are* participating (Power, 2006). What is in decline, rather, is voting and an interest in politicians and political institutions. If we broaden the notion of the public sphere to mean something about shared understandings, identification with or inclusion in a common forum, or an orientation to collective and consensual action (Livingstone, 2005) then we can identify far more citizenship activity and a far more significant role for the Internet.

Increasingly, and particularly in cultural studies, people are working with a wider conception of citizenship than is usual in the citizenship literature, and especially in political science. Focusing on identity, belonging and lifestyle rather than formal political institutions and processes, citizenship is broadened to include all sorts of private activities that have public

consequences, under the rubric of cultural, or radical popular, citizenship (Hermes, 2005; Hartley, 2005; Miller, 2006). For others this is an approach that stems from the feminist argument that 'the personal is political'. It can also be seen as having emerged from audience studies. Hermes (2005) considers how far participating in an audience means participating in a public; and whether reading a mass market genre such as crime fiction can be construed as a form of cultural citizenship, in other words citizenship as experience rather than formal participation in political structures. Similarly, Street points to the increasing contribution of media and popular culture to extending the limits of what constitutes 'politics' (Street, 1997).

There is, of course, a danger that if one defines the public sphere, citizenship or politics too widely, one's analysis becomes meaningless. James Curran is among the many who criticise the notion of popular culture as a domain of resistance to dominant power relations, arguing that this is based on simplistic notions of politics and power (Curran, 1990). However, few would disagree that popular culture, in such forms as sport and soaps, have political dimensions. On this count, Stephen Coleman has identified ways in which television soap operas can be considered political (and ways in which they are not, and ways in which they should be) (Coleman, 2008). Hermes argues that popular culture has three features that connect popular culture to citizenship: first, it makes us welcome and offers belonging. Second, it allows us to fantasise about our ideals, hopes and fears for society – what John Ellis refers to as 'working through' (Ellis, 1999). And third, it links the public and private more than any other institution or practice, connecting us across space. It is the most democratic domain of society; it is where allegiances are built, connection is experienced and the social order stabilised.

Clearly there is a great variety of popular cultural forms, and Internet use involves many of these. Hermes' approach seems useful for helping us to unpack what can (and, by implication, what cannot) be understood as political in a particular popular cultural form, or in the act of its consumption.

Most of those in my study were heavily engaged in information searching. Members of all six households used the Internet for news, and the BBC website in particular. Quite a few used it to follow sport: Ben Clements regularly logged on to a Liverpool FC fan site, as did Kishan Patel, who also followed the cricket closely. Many used it regularly in relation to their education – with Wikipedia used a great deal for school homework. Social networking, filesharing and gaming sites were used by younger people for networking. Much of this interaction is about validation and identification. As people put accounts of themselves – photographs, comments, diaries – online, the private or personal is made more public. And publics, those who they interact with outside the home, become wider. Networks of affiliation and influence broaden, from the local to the global. Downloading, uploading, and all manner of peer-to-peer (P2P) interaction are not simply utilitarian; they involve connection with (often distant) others, and thus public engagement. The sites act as social spaces. They are used not only for the delivery or collection of texts but also involve working things out with other people. Although Tom Armstrong did not seem to communicate with those who explore his CD collection online, in other instances we found online chat and validation about popular culture as a part of sharing activities. Andy Slater, for example, used newgrounds, where users share online games that they, rather than corporations, have created, and where users vote for games that they like. Lily interacted with respondents to their photos on Flickr and with *Warcraft* players online, but in neither case were these interactions very meaningful. She and Ray put photographs on Flickr when they were travelling abroad. Really this was for their friends and relations,

> but anybody could look at it, so we would have totally random people as well, who happened just to stumble across the website I guess. They'd write things like, 'oh wow, it sounds like you're having a good time', and I thought it was a bit sad 'cos why would you write something on somebody's random, that you don't know?

She said that she never replied to them, or responded to them in the blog that they kept. However, she later said that when people left weblinks, 'occasionally we'd have a little look just to see'.

In sum, forms of communication and community were established and, to a some degree, these involved 'working through'. If we broaden the notion of citizenship to encompass engagement with popular culture, then we can identify far more public, political or citizenship activity on the Internet.

3. Public v private II: the home as private

So far I have been using 'private' as the opposite of public, with the latter referring to the state. There is, however, a rather more restricted definition of the private, when it is used to refer to the domestic or personal. Raymond Williams in *Keywords* discusses 'private' (though not public) and refers to the shift in its use from meaning private as withdrawn from public life, as in a religious order, to coming to mean 'concealed', and opposed to public, as for example in 'private house' or 'private education' (Williams, 1976). It nearly always refers to advantage rather than deprivation. From perhaps the sixteenth century, it came to be about not just withdrawn, but intimate, associated with dignified withdrawal and the family. The growth of psychoanalysis has given considerable weight to the notion of the private person. So the predominant usage today associates the private with the individual or household and with autonomy and security.

John Thompson picks up something similar to this distinction when he refers to two senses of the public-private dichotomy (Thompson, 1995). First is the distinction between, on the one hand, the state, and on the other civil society and personal relations (notably the family), with the public sphere lying between these two. Second is the public as that which is open or available to the public; whilst the private is hidden from view.

Although they do not refer to the discussions of Williams and Thompson, it is the second of these writers' senses of 'the private' that is deployed in the dominant paradigm for understanding the domestic consumption of information and communication technologies. A growing body of literature shows us the huge diversity of ways of *using* the Internet at home, and of the *meanings* that are attributed to the medium and the activity. Rather than a fixed technology, something that is used in a given way and has similar meanings in all domestic contexts and to all relevant actors, uses and meanings vary between households and individuals. The literature on the domestication of information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Silverstone and Hirsch, 1992, Berker *et al*., 2006) has been concerned to establish the significance of context over a then-prevailing focus on the text, and has developed, deployed and refined a core set of concepts.

First is the notion of *domestication*. Analogous to taming wild animals, when ICTs enter the home, they are appropriated, adapted, objectified, incorporated and converted in order to make them fit the domestic environment. In later work Silverstone (2006) modifies this complexity to the single term 'commodification'.

Second is the notion of *double articulation*. It is argued that ICTs are not simply objects, they are media. So whilst – like other objects – they are acquired for their aesthetics and functions, as media they also link household members with the outside world. They provide channels for the reception of messages by households, and for the circulation of messages out from households. They transmit texts which carry symbolic meanings that are interpreted by audiences – for their informational or narrative content.

Third, ways in which ICTs are used, and the meanings that they carry, are shaped by the *moral economy* of households. The household is an economic unit which makes economic

decisions and organises itself, in part, as an economic unit. It is a *moral* economy because its members' engagement with work, leisure, consumption etc. is informed by a set of principles and priorities that are shaped by household members' histories, biographies and politics, according to social structures and personal differences. They provide the framework for social reproduction. In other words, what we have here is an account that connects structure and agency to understand how the private household intersects actively and dynamically with the public social world. Silverstone *et al.* refer to a 'moral project' that results in a sense of security and trust, without which domestic life would be impossible (Silverstone *et al.,* 1992).

The domestication literature has been enormously influential for understanding ICTs in the home. Like 'the circuit of culture' in the Walkman study (du Gay *et al.,* 1996) it provides a template or framework for studying other cases. It is not, however, without its limitations, of which I shall mention seven. First, it is at least debatable whether domestication research has fulfilled it ambition to integrate text with context, or whether it has focused on context at the expense of text (Wood, 2009). True, Internet texts are not easy to explore, given their fluidity (compared with television) and the role of the user in constructing the text, but domestication work maintains rather than breaks with the division between those concerned with life 'in front of the screen', and those who explore media texts. Second, whilst the case study approach of domestication researchers has provided fascinating 'thick description' of the rich diversity of everyday life, its accounts of the near infinite variety of consumption practices have not generated much in the way of generalisable findings that might inform debates, for example in the field of innovation or diffusion. Third, maybe claims to be countering technological determinism, in the media field, are rather over-blown. Whilst there are areas of policy, technology and engineering where technological determinism holds sway, it has rarely been the fashion in Media Studies (or Science and Technology Studies, STS). So maybe this claimed core dimension of domestication is something of a straw person. Fourth, focusing on the private nature of family life and the mediated nature of public connection, rather over-emphasises the privacy or boundedness of households and family life. There is a complex set of important institutions – notably religion and education – that connect individuals' and families' lives with the outside world, with broader society; and everyday life outside the home, unmediated (at school, work and leisure), constitutes a powerful processes whereby individuals in households are connected with, and shaped by, society and culture. Fifth, processes of socialisation, of the inculcation of values and attitudes in family life, have long been a central concern in sociology, but this work is not drawn on by the domestication school. Sixth, focusing on media in terms of consumption adds important dimensions – regarding the significance, nature and materiality of ICTs, but it allows citizenship to slip off the agenda. Whilst compatible with much government policy, and especially that of Ofcom, the UK regulatory body which is commonly criticised for ignoring the citizen part of its mission in relation to citizens and consumers, it seems regrettable to be encouraging this tendency (Livingstone *et al.*, 2007). Finally, I'd make the critique that might be levelled from within STS: where is the technology that it is claimed is being shaped? On this count I would argue for a research agenda that integrates consumption with design, that explores systematically how processes of domestication are shaping technological development, exploring how artefacts are changing their shape (and function) in the light of domestic consumption practices.

What seems a rather more satisfactory account of how value systems are developed, inculcated and practiced in households, and their implications for consumption and identities, is provided by Bourdieu's work on the habitus. The home is the site where, in Bourdieu's term, the habitus is developed and learned. The habitus is a set of dispositions that underlie and inform daily life in households. For Bourdieu, the habitus is shaped largely by economic class position, reflecting economic and class position of an individual or household. Each class has its own habitus. In his work on consumption, Bourdieu adds to a conventional class analysis the notion of cultural capital.

Habitus, a Latin word, refers to a habitual condition or state, particularly of the body. As used by Bourdieu, it refers to ways of thinking and acting, bodily habits (ways of moving and talking), tastes (likes, dislikes, preferences) – so it refers to a whole way of life, or lifestyle. One important aspect of the habitus is that it is inculcated more by experience than explicit teaching – it consists of habits that are not consciously learned, but experienced as natural.

There are several criticisms of Bourdieu's work: what about gender? Does it always work? How does he account for social change (in what is a functionalist argument)? And Bourdieu is criticised for his class reductionism – for applying notions of class derived from the realm of production, the economy, to the world of consumption. This is also a strength, in that he identifies an underlying structure and patterning to consumption activities, instead of the infinite variety found in the case studies that are reported by domestication researchers.

Exploring everyday domestic life, my study identified distinct and powerful values in households that shaped profoundly household patterns of Internet use. I shall illustrate this by reporting two aspects of Internet use. Each, I suggest, demonstrates powerfully the link between Internet use and the habitus of the household, the almost un-noticed ways in which versions of family life and values are put in to practice and inculcated in children in everyday life.

The first is the particular spatial arrangements in these two households. In both the Patel and Roberts households, the computer was located in the living area of the house, allowing parental surveillance and the integration of Internet activity with face-to-face interaction between household members. A deliberate strategy of regulation (like the time limits that some parents imposed on their children's uses of the Internet) to avoid the children using the Internet in isolation, this had profound consequences for the amount of time that household members spent in one another's company.

In the Patel household the computer is in the living room, where the television and temple are also located. It is where the family gathers together as a unit – so Internet use is closely integrated with family space and intermeshes with household members' individual and collective activities. The kitchen area is adjacent and, from about 4pm, the two children, Kishan and Karam, and their mother, Sita, spend much of their time – doing homework, cooking, relaxing, watching television or engaging in their leisure pursuits. During this time the boys pop in and out of the house, playing with friends or attending cricket or karate training; and Sita might visit relatives, go shopping or go to the nearby temple. But the living room/ kitchen is the hub of household activity; it is where everyone's activities overlap to a degree, and where the family is brought together. The Internet is on here from the time when the boys come home from school until their bedtime. Sometimes it is used for homework; at other times, commonly two or three times an evening, it is used by both boys together – for example exploring designer cars or reading the latest cricket or football news, interests that the boys have in common. Occasionally the boys might find something that they want to share with their mother – a new high-tech device, a bargain on eBay, something interesting relating to school homework, or news about a new Bollywood movie. Sita likes to use the Internet when the boys are around, in case she gets stuck or needs their help. And when Ritesh comes in later, he and Kishan often go on the Internet together – looking at sports websites (in which case Karam might join in) or for shopping bargains (in which Sita or Karam might join in). They explore holiday deals or furniture for the home together – because, being collective matters, they have to reach a consensus. On one occasion the entire family was looking for Gujurati fonts on the Internet to help Karam with his school homework.

The Roberts household, too, had the Internet in a 'public' location in the house: the PC was in the kitchen – where the children's chat on MSN could be seen by their parents. The children worried a bit about this, but still preferred to use the PC rather than the laptop (which was itself often used on the kitchen table). Once, Rhys' use of the webcam attracted Bethan and

Ewan's attention, causing him to feel uncomfortable, after which his parent also teased him. But he did not minimise the window, suggesting that he was not too worried about his lack of privacy. Dafydd said that he would prefer the Internet in his bedroom, 'but it will never happen, it's OK in the kitchen'. The location in the kitchen meant that the Internet, on occasions, was implicated in family discussions. For example, while standing around discussing travel plans for their holiday there was disagreement about the length of a particular journey. To find the facts to prove her argument, Bethan logged on to the AA website and found the length of the journey. There was also evidence of the children using the Internet collaboratively. For example, Rhys was on the computer trying to get the software package Disc2Phone to work, to transfer music to his mobile phone. Dafydd came into the kitchen and started to help him. He sits next to Rhys, sharing the same chair, even though this is not designed for two. They try for a while to get the software working, but fail. Dafydd does not move away immediately, Rhys (having given up on Disc2Phone) starts playing a game on the BBC Sport website, and Dafydd stays to watch him. 'This is a solid game,' he says.

Uses of sign-ins to the computer reflected or structured the extent of openness about Internet use in some households. The White's each had the option of signing in, but Lily tended to use Rita's account, because that was usually signed on. She only used her own account for something like a job application, which she wanted to be sure she had kept and would be able to find.

Thus, in the Patel and Roberts households, private Internet activity is undertaken in a very social space. Internet use is integrated with, and closely discussed as a part of, family life. Internet use reflects the habitus but also is one means, or medium, through which the habitus is developed in the family and inculcated in the children.

Shopping is my second example. Whilst in some senses a functional activity – acquiring what is wanted, at a good price – I found that shopping was often about much more than the efficient satisfaction of need (Miller 1998). Quite commonly it was a way for young people and parents to engage in a joint activity, sharing ideas as to what was good or worthwhile about a particular course of action. Taking the same two households, in the Roberts family, all members of the household were engaged in compiling the weekly shopping list for the online supermarket order. This involved not just making requests, but discussion between household members of the nutritional value, financial worth and health or other consequences of various options that were suggested – what they should be buying, eating and why.

In the Patel household, a high proportion of the father's interaction with his older son was browsing and buying sports equipment on the Internet – much of it for cricket and from India. This involved discussion of the worth of various bits of equipment, developments in sports and the activities of key sports personalities. e-Bay, with a distinct set of potential risks and rewards, added a dimension of excitement to their Internet shopping activity. In this case, the father-son relationship was very much constructed around Internet browsing and shopping. As well as buying artefacts, values, rooted in the habitus, were expressed, discussed, communicated and developed as they shopped together on the Internet.

Much discussion of the Internet focuses on the new networks of connection with peer culture that it facilitates, and on how individual desires and interests are met in and through Internet activities. At the same time we can see how the Internet can also work to develop and reinforce relationships and to bring children and their parents together. This is very different from the more common retreat of children to multimedia islands in their bedrooms, where they evade family life (Rompaey and Roe, 2001). In some households and for some of the time, the Internet works as a modern version of the family hearth, as was radio in the 1930s and television in the1960s and 1970s (Frith, 1983). This is one way in which the Internet is implicated in the reconfiguration of public and private.

4. The Internet and the reconfiguration of public and private

In a general sense, publicness has been mediated, rather than face-to-face and co-present, for quite some time – since the arrival of the mass media. So the Internet is merely the latest medium to be reconfiguring public and private, and the relationship between them. Its impact, however, is distinctive, and I address the four key ways in which it is reconfiguring public and private. (1) with the Internet, the home is becoming less bounded; (2) the Internet challenges the one-to-many model of the press and broadcasting; (3) it intensifies privatisation *within* the home; and (4) it makes private space increasingly public.

'Mobile privatisation' is the phrase coined by Raymond Williams to capture how broadcasting connected with and facilitated mobility and increasingly privatised leisure in the home. What he later described as 'one of the ugliest phrases I know' (Williams 1989, p.171), refers to 'mobility' in two rather different senses: he alludes to both the fragmentation of communities with the onset of industrialisation *and* the capacity to travel to and to know about other places – in part a consequence of the increasingly dispersed spread of families. Globally, the move to cities proceeds apace, and knowledge about and travel to distant places continues to grow with the instant global communication facilitated by satellite and fibre optic cable, as well as the huge growth in air travel. The privatisation to which he refers is the growth of the home as a site of leisure. This is something that is picked up by those working in the domestication tradition, who refer to ICTs connecting the private world of the household with the public world beyond, providing a channel through which social and cultural influences permeate the household.

The declining significance of the boundary of the home is well-illustrated by homeworking. Home computers and the Internet have changed fundamentally the demarcation between home and work. In many households, 'the home' is no longer the antithesis of 'work', with the two disconnected spatially and temporally. Some find it liberating to be 'always connected', enjoying the flexibility. For Cathy it means that she can leave work at 3 p.m. on two days each week and collect her younger son from primary school. At home she hardly ever works before he goes to bed at 9 p.m. She uses her employer's intranet from home; 'it makes my life so much easier', she told us. Nor is it just childcare that makes homeworking attractive because of the flexibility that it offers. Sophie Mead could work at home occasionally, and appreciated doing so when she had a hangover so preferred to not go in. Bethan Roberts prepares lessons for her teaching at home; and her husband Ewan checks emails and financial information services occasionally from home, which they both see as helping them to do their job better and more easily. For others, however, the capacity of the Internet and homeworking to make one 'always available' is seen as oppressive. Jack has developed strategies to defend his understanding of 'home' as being 'not at work'. When he was telephoned about work while at home, his daughter answered and told the caller that he was out – when he was on the settee in his pyjamas. She reported that this is a regular occurrence. Similarly with the Internet, he leaves it at work: at home he uses it only when called over by Lily or Rita to do or see something. Ritesh blurs the boundary the other way, with personal emailing, information searching and shopping seeping into the work environment – every day, at times when the shop is quiet, he uses the Internet at work. Similarly, Cathy talked with us about receiving and sending private emails from her work – though insisted that she did this 'not hugely'. Once the telephone was a fundamental mark of distinction between blue and white collar work: in an office, one could usually make or receive occasional personal calls. With the arrival of mobiles, blue collar workers are also available to for non-work contact, albeit often with greater restrictions. With the Internet the communications difference has reappeared, though this might be changing with the adoption of 3G mobile devices.

The second dimension of the reconfiguration of public and private that I shall consider is commonly labelled 'Web 2.0'. It is claimed by an increasing number of writers that the

Internet is transforming the 'one-to-many' of the 'first media age' (Poster, 1995; Burgess *et al* ,2009). Our music and voice gets heard, our videos seen as users becoming 'prosumers' (Hartley, 2005) or work in processes of produsage (Bruns 2008). Broadband, it is argued facilitates a shift of power from people to institutions:

> people are using the Internet to break down barriers and explore a wider, deeper and more personalised engagement with the outside world… broadband is encouraging participation in society and creating new levels of cultural involvement. [… It has] enabled a deeper kind of democratic conversation.
>
> (Craig and Wilsdon, 2004, p. 4)

The meaning, nature and extent of interactivity is complex, but at this point it is worth flagging that the claims often exaggerate the reality; interactivity is a notion surrounded by hyperbole. Whilst to a degree we all have the potential to be producers, media production requires a certain amount of production technology and know-how – which, though spreading, remains lacking on the part of most of the world's population. If we look at Internet traffic across the boundary of the home, the first thing that is striking is that much more enters the home than leaves it and, indeed, this is built in to the technology, though this is neither inevitable nor immutable. Uploading capacity varies depending on the provider and technology, and is generally not well-publicised by ISPs, but is likely to be between a tenth and a half of downloading capacity.

Eight million American adults report that they have created online blogs and 27% of Internet users report that they read blogs, with numbers rapidly increasing around the world (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2005). Few, however, last long or get particularly well-known. More typical is for Internet users to not even read blogs, let alone to write them. What exits the home, in those we studied, was mostly email, transaction details and MSN chat.

Tom Armstrong posted on Flickr and had music available online. Dafydd Roberts and Andy Slater had created entries on social networking sites but had not gone back to them since (and one could no longer find this), which is not atypical for SNSs (Parks, 2008). Several had posted photographs on Flickr – in one case of weddings and parties – but this was to communicate with friends and relations who might appreciate them, not strangers who would likely have little interest in them.

So the Internet is more like 'many-to-few' than 'many-to-many'. Far from the myth that now 'everyone is a producer', the long-standing pattern of media content flowing down from the centre remains largely true.

The third way in which the Internet is reconfiguring public and private is that it intensifies , the tendency for members of households to lead lives that are increasingly private from the lives of other members of their household and, conversely, their enhanced connection with the outside world. As we saw with the Patel and Roberts households, the Internet can and does serve to bring household members together. Generally, however, it is a technology that does not easily accommodate use by more than one person at a time.

This built-in constraint is illustrated by Sophie and Tom, who quite actively seek to use the Internet together and even with visitors. They sometimes spend time together on the computer, taking turns to control the keyboard and mouse. They might be looking at photographs, buying things for their house, listening to music or planning an evening out.

> *Sophie*: We kind of float around, don't we? We don't actually think, 'we'll go to the computer'. I suppose maybe something starts it off, us sitting down. But then we just kind of float around and then normally you (Tom) go surfing and I lose interest and walk away (laughs)

> *Tom*: I'm like, 'Sophie, I'll show you this', and then it takes longer than wanted to and then you (Sophie) leave.

There have been several times recently when they have friends around and spent time looking at various websites, which involves moving between the kitchen and the computer room next door:

> *Sophie*: The other night we had people round for dinner actually
>
> *Tom:* Yeah, we looked at YouTube
>
> *Sophie*: Yeah, YouTube. I showed you the sneezing panda – and we showed them. There were a couple of things. They'd start talking about it or it was, it, actually it might have been me
>
> *Tom*: It was the surfing
>
> *Sophie*: Oh yeah, that was it. So we actually started looking at some other stuff and three different iTunes.

And they reported another occasion:

> *Tom*: The other night we had some friends round and we were thinking of having a party and names, trying to think of alternatives, trying to do like a fancy dress party, a circus themed fancy dress party. So we kind of used the Internet.
>
> *Sophie*: Yeah, looking up addresses of locations
>
> *Tom*: I was looking for a thesaurus to get alternative names for circus. It didn't really come up with much
>
> *Researcher*: So that's with other people
>
> *Tom*: They were here (in the kitchen) so I didn't actually spend that much time on the Internet because it's in a separate room
>
> *Sophie*: But the others popped in quite a bit. And meanwhile I was using I for a recipe for me to make the tea. I had to keep my Jamie Oliver page up so I could keep flicking back … I said (to the friend) 'will you before you look up the, what your lion tamer looks like, will you just flip back to my ingredients page? I've got down to where I've mashed the potatoes'.

Despite such sociability, most time on the Internet is solitary. For Tom and Sophie, being on the Internet when their partner is around is seen as 'anti-social' and 'annoying':

> *Tom*: I think I'm aware of the fact that if you (Sophie) are around and I go off to the computer I'm being, I'm aware that I'm being anti-social
>
> *Sophie*: So am I (laughing)
>
> *Tom*: So I guess I am conscious of that so I suppose I am less likely to spend a great deal of time on it
>
> *Sophie*: I don't think I mind, it's really weird actually. I don't think I mind so much in the week. It's the weekend it annoys me a bit.

> *Tom*: Obviously it's annoying but even regardless of it you're not annoyed by it I still feel lie it's anti-social
>
> *Researcher:* You feel it's anti-social?
>
> *Sophie*: I think it can be a bit, yeah
>
> *Tom*: If there's other people around then yeah

Despite their quite strong efforts to use the Internet together and with others, there is a tendency even in this household towards privatisation *within* the home. Starting with the arrival of transistor radios, and followed by the growth in the number of households with multiple television sets, in the UK today, 80% of children age 12-15 have a television in their bedroom and 27% have Internet access from their bedroom (Ofcom 2008b). Increasingly, children's bedrooms are multimedia workstations, where the child is separated from the family and connected through a plethora of technologies with the outside and distant world (Rompaey and Roe, 2001).

By far the main form of Internet use is alone, with only a few instances of collective activity. Rita, for example, when she received an email with a joke, would call Jack over to read it. Or, when browsing for a holiday, Jack or Lily might stand or kneel around her and the computer. This, however, was only by invitation and for a short while. Generally, Internet use does not foster communality or co-present, face-to-face sociability among family members, it is an individual, or even individuating, technology. It is awkward for more than one person at a time to use it – given only one mouse and keyboard, a screen that cannot be seen easily by more than one person and, as is almost always the case, only one chair.

Wireless and laptops make Internet use more public within the home – but, especially given the smaller screens of laptops – mainly in the sense of carrying out a private activity in public or shared space, rather than a shared or collective activity. The Nintendo Wii challenges the norm of solo use, bringing the Internet to the television screen and the living room. It is designed and sold precisely for the purpose of being used by several people at once. Two of our households had a Nintendo Wii. For the Whites, it complements the karaoke machine for family entertainment, but was not used to access the Internet. The Slaters acquired a Wii towards the end of our fieldwork and its pattern of use had not stabilised, but it was in the living room and once we observed the family using it together to watch a YouTube video on their television screen.

The fourth aspect of the Internet reconfiguring public and private is that private space is becoming increasingly public. One important dimension of this is the surveillance that is allowed by the technology, which occurs for state security and for commercial reasons. In the EU, the Data Retention Directive requires telcos to keep records (but not the content) of phone calls and text messages from landlines and mobiles and internet, email and voice over internet protocol (VoIP) records for 12 months. Typically, ISPs keep records of user activity, or cookies, for 18 months. They will have to make them available for the detection of crime more easily, due to the Communications Data Bill 2008 in the UK, which implements the EU directive. This has not been received without criticism, with the Information Commissioner arguing forcefully that lines must be drawn to defend fundamental liberties; a central database holding details of everyone's phone calls and emails could be a 'step too far for the British way of life' (BBC, 2008).

As well as state surveillance, there are commercial forms of surveillance, ISPs have a growing interest in targeted advertising and marketing. At the more benign, even useful, end of the spectrum, Amazon is among those organisations that send emails to customers to draw their attention to new products which are similar to ones that they have bought in the past. More insidiously, using cookies and other devices to track user habits and preferences they generate

a valuable resource for marketers. However, ISPs are moving to reduce the amount of time for which they keep data, and to store search terms separately from account information, in the light of growing concerns about privacy.

However, not all invasion of privacy should be seen in this sort of top-down way. For one thing, and as Thompson (1995) argues, Foucault is wrong to say that publicness is mainly about surveillance. The Internet, like television, works to place those who are in power under the watchful eyes of the masses, quite the opposite of the panopticon.

It also facilitates extensive lateral communication, as private space is becoming public with SNSs and other online posting sites. On these, people are quite happy to divulge information which hitherto has commonly been seen as private in public fora. Half of youngsters age 8-17 who use the Internet in the UK have set up their own profile on a SNS (Ofcom, 2008a). Combining entertainment (music, film, video, gaming) with communicating with friends, they are a mainstream communication technology for the younger age group. Individuals post 'private' details about themselves in a public or quasi public arena. SNSs are essentially spaces for peer interaction. Individuals represent themselves, or make disclosures about themselves, to friends, and in doing so are involved in identity construction (Giddens, 1991), self promotion, and peer culture reinforcement.

Posting photos works almost like an online diary, albeit a visual one. Kylie, who take photos on her mobile. 'I just love putting my pictures on there from when I'm out with my friends and that … It makes it fun'. Mostly they are photos of her posing with friends in bars and clubs in Cardiff and Barry. It gives her the opportunity to present her life in pictures in the way that she wants others to see her, as young, free, popular and fashionable, leading a life full of partying and drinking alcohol with a huge range of friends. On MySpace, others comment on her photographs, explicitly endorsing her lifestyle. On her ProfileHeaven pages, others not only comment on her pictures, but also rate her 'looks'. This validation leaves Kylie with a clear idea that others, many of them distant and unknown, approve of her physical appearance, cultural positioning and lifestyle.

But although making public what many would regard as private aspects of their life, she disliked 'weird people' – which seemed to mean men aged over 30: 'You get some weird people on there and you think, 'oh my God', and so you block them, trying to stop them talking to you'. She is put off when people ask for her mobile number and try to give her tjheir number; and others over-step the boundary by asking if they can talk to her via webcam, which she views as 'pervy'. So she wants privacy to a degree, whilst also revelling in her public disclosure. In one sense publics get wider, but mostly at quite a superficial level.

Lily White found the junk pornographic email an unpleasant intrusion, 'I don't really want to see it'. She tries to delete it before opening it, but sometimes it sounds like a name so she clicks on it.

Sophie, too, has feelings of her privacy being invaded. She feels uneasy about the familiarity of strangers who access Tom's CD collection on their PC. She finds this crossing of the boundary into her home 'slightly creepy':

> I just find it really feels like somebody's been in the house. It just feels, I don't know. I like the kind of ethos of it – that people can share things. But I think I wouldn't mind at all but, it's the fact that when you kind of logon normally afterwards it says '242 people have used your music and have been in to search your memory'. Then you can actually go in and see what they looked at. So you can kind of see where they've been. I just find it strange.

Her discomfort seems to be because the filesharing makes her private life, in the form of her CD collection, accessible to the public.

So whilst Facebook users, for example, can restrict access to those whom they have selected and thus private groups can be assembled, as a means of self-promotion, what is being sought is being *seen* and appreciated – in other words, many users are *seeking* to make (aspects of) themselves public. People participate in social networks to get noticed by their peers.

In part because of the 'open' ethos of social networking sites, reflecting their college origins, people behave *as if* they are in a private arena, with users feeling that they are making disclosures about themselves to friends, because it is a site for peer culture apart from grown-ups, and parents in particular. As with matters of security, those we researched had somewhat confused views about, and little interest in the privacy settings that are available.

Whilst in these new forms of interaction there is little demonstration of wider notions of 'the public', it is clear that how the self, the private, is constructed and expressed, is changing with Internet networking. Posting photographs and diaries online offers a new channel for representing and constructing the self. Private thoughts and personal photographs, formerly considered private, become accessible to many when posted to the public domain. Driven by desires for self promotion, more public access is allowed to areas that formerly were considered private, transforming the balance between public and private.

Far from a personal matter, this has far-reaching implications in which commercial websites are key players. There is a phenomenal growth in how personal preferences and tastes are recorded electronically. Beer and Burrows argue that participation involves self-commodification, which Kylie's case illustrates. Networks are free to access and are user-generated, but they are commercial; the user profile is the commodity that generates the revenue (Beer and Burrows, 2007) – not that any of the youngsters whom we researched saw it in this way. The most extreme variant of this phenomenon is perhaps Bill Gates' notion of the 'totally documented life' (Gates, 1996), wherein every detail of the individual's life is stored in searchable, digital form. Though Gates imagined that this process would be instigated and controlled by the user, the reality is that the private is becoming increasingly public.

Conclusion

Following the work of the medium theorists, and trying to avoid falling into the trap of technological determinism, it is clear that the Internet is opening up channels of access (from the one-to-many of the press and broadcasting). It is a major part of broader processes of democratising media production and circulation. The geographical scale of connection is extended, often beyond the boundaries of the nation state. Publics are thus extended, no longer confined to shared physical or even political space, with the Internet facilitating more openness and visibility.

Domestic Internet use – perhaps more like the telephone and less like television – has a bias in favour of it being an individual activity. Clearly, the connection that it offers means that it is not an individuating technology, but the design of the technology means that its prevailing form of use is by one person. It can be and is used with others, and in 'public space' in the home, but this is the exception rather than the rule; it tends to be used by one person at a time in public space, rather than jointly or collectively. The Internet can thus be seen as playing a role in processes of privatisation *within* the home.

The capacity of the Internet to generate public connection depends very much on what we mean by 'public'. I found evidence of nominal engagement with civil society, no involvement in a Habermasian public sphere, and a considerable breadth of activities that can be construed as performing cultural citizenship. Public, however, seems more helpfully defined in broader terms than as understood in debates about the public sphere or about citizenship as commonly

understood in political science. Private, too, is more complex than synonymous with 'the home', and the home anyway is less bounded than suggested by some who have researched the domestication of ICTs. Notwithstanding these important redefinitions, it is clear that, in a variety of ways, the Internet is making private space increasingly public.

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[1] The fieldwork was undertaken by Elain Dafydd, Delyth Edwards, and Sally Reardon, Aparna Sharma, Jessica Trickey, Yan Wu.

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