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Abstract

Research since the early years of the 21st century consistently shows how through the years more of our time gets spent using media, how being concurrently exposed to media has become a foundational feature of everyday life, and that consuming media for most people increasingly takes place alongside producing media. Contemporary media devices, what people do with them, and how all of this fits in the organization of our everyday life disrupt and unsettle well-established views of the role media play in society. Instead of continuing to wrestle with a distinction between media and society, this contribution proposes we begin our thinking with a view of life not lived *with* media, but *in* media. The media life perspective starts from the realization that the whole of the world and our lived experience in it can be seen as framed by, mitigated through, and made immediate by (immersive, integrated, ubiquitous and pervasive) media. In this presentation, the media life perspective is developed by correlating the claims of contemporary social theory with recent reports on media use among teenagers around the world.

Media Life

Life in today's liquid modern society is all about finding ways to deal with constant change, whether it is at home, at work, or at play. Over the last few decades, all these key areas of human existence have converged in and through our concurrent and continuous exposure to, use of, and immersion in media, information and communication technologies. Research in countries as varied as the United States, Brazil, South Korea, The Netherlands, and Finland consistently shows how through the years more of our time gets spent using media, and how multitasking our media has become a regular feature of everyday life. Yet at the same time, we tend to take our media for granted, as the lead in a September 2009 story in *USA Today* documenting current research on (the consequences of) online social networking suggests: "[t]he interconnected web of our friends, family, neighbors and acquaintances may dominate our lives more than we know."[1]

It must be clear, that media are not just types of technology and chunks of content we pick and choose from the world around us - a view that considers media as external agents affecting us in a myriad of ways. If anything, today we have to recognize how the uses and appropriations of media penetrate all aspects of contemporary life. After studying data documenting the social uses and effects of wireless communication technology in Europe, North America and the Asian Pacific, Manuel Castells and colleagues signaled "the emergence of new social arrangements characterized by networked social practices, an individual-centered culture, and distributed information and communication power" (2004: 248), which networking logic in turn was shown to have direct effects in the family, at work,

in personal relationships, in culture, in language, and politics. In other words: the whole of the world and our lived experience in it can and perhaps should be seen as framed by, mitigated through, and made immediate by pervasive and ubiquitous media. This world is what Roger Silverstone (2007), Alex de Jong and Marc Schuilenburg (2006) label a "mediapolis": a mediated public space where media underpin and overarch the experiences of everyday life.

Although it is certain that media can be considered to be both directors and reflectors of human behavior and social organization, the scholarly research on media has yet to come to terms with a profound paradox intrinsic to the findings of such studies. The more people use media in the domains of everyday life, the more reflexive debates and experiences about the potential effects of such media become. It certainly seems that people are not just aware of the media in their lives - our everyday interactions are often (and perhaps increasingly) shaped around this awareness. Yet at the same time, our lived experience with media makes them disappear. In media usage studies, the differences in time reported spent with media through surveys, diaries, and observation are stark. In essence, people forget more than half of their media use, mainly because they are concurrently exposed to multiple media at the same time, and most of their media use occurs in combination with other everyday activities: working, hanging out, eating.[2]

Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin have signaled "the ambivalent and contradictory ways in which new digital media function for our culture today [...] in which digital technologies are proliferating faster than our cultural, legal, or educational institutions can keep up with

them" (1996: 2). They suggest this ambivalence stems from the double logic of remediation embedded in all media. On the one hand, media make themselves known to us by remixing their properties: today's phones include music players, video screens, and so on; any television show or advertisement uses conventions and formulas from previous programs and formats; and, as we have seen, people are in their daily activities concurrently exposed to multiple media at the same time. This makes us overtly aware of media all the time. Yet at the same time Bolter and Grusin suggest that media work very hard to make themselves invisible. In the current context (unfortunately dating this essay, but we insert it here for our argument's sake) consider for example:

- the tendency of media artifacts to become so big they drown out everything else (wall-sized TV's, such as Panasonic's fittingly titled Life Screen[3]) while also shrinking to near-invisible proportions (computer chips as brain implants allowing people to give computer commands and play games without moving a muscle, such as the BrainGate sensor by bio-tech company Cyberkinetics[4]);
- the drive toward naturalistic realism as a central feature of game design culture (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006); and
- the increasing popularity of three-dimensional film projection where, as SIGGRAPH author Eden Ashley Umble writes, "filmmakers are using this technology to tell their stories in a way that is more immediate, more detailed, more real than ever before"[5], panoramic video cameras[6], and virtual worlds[7].

As media become invisible, they become all-powerful. We propose that the key challenge of mediated communication in the 21st century is, or will be, the disappearance of media.

What we therefore aim for in this text is an understanding of the different ways all those taken for granted things that make up our day-to-day existence have become automated, augmented and organized through media. In this statement of purpose, we follow the lead of David Harvey (1990), who signals the gradual change in the human experience of space-time relationships in the course of the 20th century - as exemplified by the increasing speed of travel and telecommunications - as a benchmark for a global change in people's sense of reality itself. Media become the playground for a search for meaning and belonging - not just by consumption or what Harvey calls "flexible accumulation" of artifacts and ideas that would make up and reconstitute one's sense of self-identity, but also by producing, co-creating, assembling, and remixing "a whole series of simulacra as milieux of escape, fantasy, and distraction" (1990: 302). With Harvey, we do not see people as hapless victims of this seemingly fragmented worldview. We locate the potential power of people to shape their lives and identities in the assumption, that people produce themselves (and therefore each other) in media. This perhaps may explain why people do not recognize their media habits because media are invisible to them as they are a constitutive part of it.

Society in a digital age has become increasingly organized around the various ways to organize and diversify the intertwined or networked processes of production and consumption. Theorizing the way media function in our everyday life as indistinguishable from our bodies, senses, and experiences begins with an awareness of media as industries (casting people in roles of production and consumption) and techniques (governing the way people access their world through physical as well as sensory experiences). As such, the ongoing convergence of production and consumption of media across companies, channels,

genres, technologies and culture (Jenkins, 2006) can be seen as an expression of the convergence of all aspects of everyday life: work and play, the local and the global, self and social identity (especially in the use of social networking sites and participation in virtual worlds). One has to note the importance of technology in this historical trajectory; governments, businesses and researchers tend to adopt the expectations embedded in Jacques Ellul's (1967 [1956]) *The Technological Society*, intrinsically linking technologies to the promises of efficiency, automation, self-augmentation, rationality, and artificiality. Yet these values, often reproduced through the celebratory marketing and management mantras in contemporary capitalism, are also shaped by the profoundly human characteristics of the global network that is internet: its virtual communities, weblogs, chatrooms, podcasts, online multiplayer games… if anything, the logic of media must be seen as increasingly dissolving the distinctions drawn all too easy between humans and machines, or, as Lev Manovich (2001) explains, between culture and computers. An example of a more popular embrace of such a point of view is the start of a special technology section at The Huffington Post group blog in September 2009, which was announced as based on "the thinking that technology is anthropology. It's not the gear, it's the people."[8] With more scholarly aplomb, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have argued how "[...] the anthropology of cyberspace is really a recognition of the new human condition" (2000: 291). To this one should add how cyberspace, internet, and other networked technologies are not particular to specific devices or practices anymore, as today a wide variety and ever expanding set of artifacts (and what people do with them) are interconnected. This argument builds on the earlier suggestion that media should not be seen as somehow located outside of lived experience, but rather should be seen as

intrinsically part of it. Our life is lived *in*, rather than *with*, media – we are living a *media life* (Deuze, 2007: 242).

Media Studies and Media Life

In a way, the media life point of view differs not much from earlier suggestions, such as Marshall McLuhan's view on media as extensions of man which forms and structures affect how we perceive and understand the world around us, Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass's notion of media as equating real life in terms of how people interact with media as social actors, and Michael Callon and Bruno Latour's insistence on the agency of nonhumans (including computer software, hardware, and technical standards) when studying any kind of social relations. Similarly, authors as varied as Neil Postman, Terje Rasmussen, Stig Hjarvard, and Paul Levinson have developed more or less comprehensive perspectives on media and social theory (Hesmondhalgh and Jason Toynbee, 2008), media ecology (Strate, 2006), and mediatizaton (Lundby, 2009) that supersede the existence of media in a material sense – aiming to explore how changes and developments in society interact with and are "softly" determined by trends in media (production, use, and content). As Hjarvard argues, "[c]ontemporary society is permeated by the media, to an extent that the media may no longer be conceived of as being separate from cultural and other social institutions" (2008: 105). Our suggestion is that until recently most of these perspectives were mainly theoretical exercises, with exceptions not necessarily induced from observed and lived experience. Furthermore, what often remains unclear is a more or less exact discussion of

the implications of such a convergence of categories in media studies. In other words: there does not seem to be a satisfying answer to the all-important "so what" question.

The media life perspective offers a prediction and explanation of increasingly invisible media; it builds an ontological argument such as proposed by Friedrich Kittler (2009), aiming to resolve ontology's hostility to media. It considers and moves beyond technical media - however significant the medium may be to the message - to address the essential nature of media as the invisible interlocutor of people's lives. In today's media culture, where people increasingly move through the world assembling (more or less deliberately) a deeply individualized media system – in other words: living in their own *personal information space* – such a viewpoint can form the basis of (empirical) investigation and understanding of everyday life. With Kittler we want to resolve the thinker's blindness regarding his or her medium, which for us means articulating a perspective of media as becoming increasingly indistinguishable from people's sense making practices.

A media life perspective unsettles the key organizing categories of the study of communication and the role of media in people's lives: production, content, and consumption (Deuze, 2009). Certainly, the problematic nature of such categories has been highlighted in the past. One could think of Stuart Hall's notion of media as encoded and decoded with (invariably contested) meanings to challenge a dominant paradigm where mediated messages were generally seen as transmitted; James Carey's equally formidable challenge to the transmission model of communication by emphasizing the ritualistic nature of the way people use media and technology to make sense of their world, and the field of

media anthropology stressing the linked and circular nature of the production and consumption of culture. Scholars in media studies, sociology, informatics, and geography similarly have critically articulated the categories of media production and consumption with the parameters of the capitalist (and distinctly cosmopolitan) project, rather than with the material practice or lived experience of how people actually use and make media. A key example of such theorizing would be John Thompson's (1995) *The Media and Modernity*, where he carefully focuses on any form of mediated and quasi-mediated communication as produced and received in differentiated contexts that blur boundaries between space and time, as well as between public and private domains. Thompson particularly takes aim at the misleading concepts of mass media and mass communication, arguing how in a digital age the wide variety of (availability and access to) media forms if anything signal much more complex, dialogic and differentiated forms of communication.

Several other terms have been suggested to overcome the perceived production-consumption dichotomy, such as Jesús Martín-Barbero's notion of media as a process where each and every person produces meaning, and Nick Couldry's more recent suggestion of media as practice, explicitly focusing on decentering media research and engaging more deliberately with questions of how knowledge and actions are produced by people through their direct or indirect engagement with media. A media life perspective would assume that people generally do not make sense of their meaning-making processes and usage practices with media in terms of production and consumption. It furthermore aims to discuss media practices less in terms of specific technological affordances, instead opting to see how media in fact are used and appropriated in the orchestration of everyday life.

Beyond theoretical and operational consequences, a third consideration of a media life-based ontology of contemporary reality can be made regarding the widely suggested convergence of culture and economy in modern life, emblematic of a more networked individualist culture (as Castells argues), expressive of an increasingly post-materialist society (following the work of Ronald Inglehart and, more recently, Roland Benedikter). This in turn connects to a broad and influential strand of thinking - both in academia and professional fields – regarding the increasing significance of culture in the economy (cf. Jean Baudrillard's suggestion of the sign-value of a commodity predominating its use-value), as well as in politics (articulating a Giddensian primacy of life politics and self-interested engagement over party politics and elections). Néstor García Canclini (1999), among others, observes along these lines a global reconstruction of world culture and local creativity under the paradigms of technology and the market, and advocates vigilance in this process. More concretely, such viewpoints can be linked to Maurizio Lazzerato's critique of the rise of immaterial labor as the new form of work organization in contemporary global capitalist society. Immaterial labor refers to the changes taking place in workers' labor processes in the manufacturing, knowledge and creative industries (including for example journalism and advertising), where time-tested craftsmanship involved in direct labour tends to shift to the currently more privileged yet self-deleterious skills of the information age, involving cybernetics, computers, and mediated communication. Immaterial labour also refers to a parallel process of commoditization of activities that can be roughly labeled as traditionally being part of the realm of social skills: assigning status and building reputations (within specific communities of interest), maintaining and structuring social relations (in teams and

networks) – including identity play and performance. Nick Couldry, Göran Bolin, and others have extended these notions to articulate a perspective on immaterial media landscapes – where what is produced by people can be seen as existing increasingly in the realm of views, attitudes, symbols and ideas, yet has direct consequences for social and political realities. This in turn has contributed to an equally recent spatial turn in media studies, emphasizing (the co-creation of) media and space/place relationships (Adams, 2009).

There runs a parallel argument through these and other more or less recent observations about the apparent immaterial, post-materialist, and dematerialized, *weightless* nature of contemporary society (as in a reduction in the quantity of materials required to serve economic functions, including factories, machines, and labor), attributing primacy to the largely informational and symbolic nature of life's processes, which in turn to some extent explains the significance of media as benchmarks for finding and circulating meaning. Indeed, contemporary social theory is suffused with claims-making about our increasingly liquid, ephemeral, self-reflexive, mobile, and otherwise less than stable, permanent, or tangible modern times (see in particular Bauman, 2000, 2005 and 2009). The dissolution of communications' key sense making categories is articulated to this broader debate, and thus can be seen to fit within processes of theoretical abstraction about the boundary-erasing nature of contemporary life as well as practical observation of the concurrent exposure to media people enjoy today.

On a final note regarding the rapid changes and challenges to the mass media frameworks for communication studies, we would like to signal the discussion by Denis McQuail in his

most recent edition (to be published in 2010) of his seminal *Mass Communication Theory* volume on the future of mass communication. McQuail suggests a shift towards a somewhat post-industrial view of mass media, where media are not crucial to everyday life and public communication because of their potential to reach an entire national or otherwise mass public with a restricted range of content and experiences, but rather where their impact is premised on "[...] the voluntary engagement of the public in its own immersion in a rich and varied world of mediated experience."[9] Similarly, Manuel Castells (2009) articulates the rise of a new form of socialized communication: mass self-communication. "We are indeed in a new communication realm, and ultimately in a new medium, whose backbone is made of computer networks, whose language is digital, and whose senders are globally distributed and globally interactive. True, the medium, even a medium as revolutionary as this one, does not determine the content and effect of its messages. But it makes possible the unlimited diversity and the largely autonomous origin of most of the communication flows that construct, and reconstruct every second the global and local production of meaning in the public mind" (Castells, 2009: 248). The media life perspective engages with these various challenges to media and communication studies by taking the premises as for example articulated by Castells and McQuail to their logical extreme: media are everywhere, and therefore nowhere.

Media and Everyday Life

In *Making Sense of Everyday Life* (2009), Susie Scott divides everyday life into seven substantive topics; emotions, home, time, eating, health, shopping and leisure, and remarks

that we may see everyday life as a cluster of topics or fields of activity. The seven topics are not exhaustive, as the author admits, but they represent sites in which people "do social life, day to day" (Scott, 2009: 1). Silva and Bennet (2004) hold to a more socio-demographic classification comprising the culture of home, family and community; sexuality, race and age; and uses of technology. In these and other mapping exercises of everyday life in disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and philosophy, media remain largely underdiscussed. The opposite is true for key works in media and communication studies where, as Nicholas Garnham (2000: 86) notes, media tend to be fetishized in their existence as institutions, content, and audiences. This overlooking or overemphasizing (effects of our usage of) media may well be caused by the signaled "virtualization" of the media. Even though she tends to circumvent media, Scott gives several examples of how elementary the role of media has become. When discussing time, for instance, Scott suggests new information technologies, faster methods of transport, more sophisticated media and the rise of the digital age as having significant effects on the pace of everyday life. Other than that, like in so many other similar texts, media remain invisible.

Hesmondhalgh and Toynbee lament how media scholars underappreciate "how general problems raised by social theory might be illuminated through consideration of contemporary communications" (2008: 2). Yet, the same criticism can be leveled the other way around: media remain largely unfused with Hans-Georg Gamader's "horizon" of contemporary philosophy, as Friedrich Kittler notes: "[m]ore than any other theorists, philosophers forgot to ask which media support their very practice" (2009: 23). From a media life point of view, this makes sense - as the power of media in our everyday lives lies

exactly in what Bolter and Grusin would call their logic of immediacy, which erases or automates their operations (and the opposite would be true for media studies handbooks, following the parallel logic of hypermediacy). In the history of media, this immediacy becomes more prevalent with each stepping-stone - from writing and printing via telegraphy and analog media to digital media. In his discussion of the history of communication media, Kittler (1996) in fact predicts that ultimately media technologies will overhaul each other to evolve beyond the essential intervention of humans. Thus, the fact that people (users and philosophers alike) tend to take media for granted signifies their significance.

According to Niklas Luhmann (1996), social systems or institutions (like the political, economic, scientific, and so on) within society have increasingly taken seriously the way media depict them. Hjarvard takes up this paramount media orientation as evidence of an ongoing mediatization of society - a process "whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic. This process is characterized by a duality in that the media have become integrated into the operations of other social institutions, while they also have acquired the status of social institutions in their own right. As a consequence, social interaction – within the respective institutions, between institutions, and in society at large – take place via the media" (2008: 113). All institutions are dependent on societal representation and media have in the last decades become increasingly indispensable as platforms for the publication of private affairs and the co-creative interpretation of reality. This means that an institution’s success in the media becomes necessary for exertion of influence in other areas of society. As a result, all

functional areas within society have learned to look at themselves through media glasses. Society's institutions - which for our argument here include the family, the church (including the mosque, synagogue, and so on), the state, and the workplace - have due to the expansion of the media system undergone a shift towards self-reflective commentary and positioning vis-à-vis the media (Jameson, 1991). The media system has in this sense taken over the role of former authorities by leading our attention away from power (im-) balances toward the development of self-identity as a life project; a lifestyle management (Giddens, 1991).

Reporting on values surveys in 43 countries, Ronald Inglehart (1997) observed a global shift of people in their perspectives as citizens away from traditional social institutions towards a distinctly skeptical, globally interconnected yet deeply personal type of self-determined civic engagement. Other studies, such as by Robert Putnam, have detailed broad societal trends towards distinctly individualized and often outright anti-authoritarian attitudes. "We are undoubtedly living in an anti-hierarchical age", concludes Beck (2000: 150). Slavoj Žižek engages most explicitly the link between the individualization of contemporary society - towards the point of hedonistic solipsism - and the omnipresence of networked computers and cyberspace. This is not to say Žižek embraces the promise of global connection uncritically, like for example Castells (2001) and Scott Lash (2002) do. Zygmunt Bauman objects to their readings of the networked potential of contemporary media life, suggesting Castells and Lash "fall victims of internet fetishism fallacy. Network is not community and communication not integration – both safely equipped as they are with disconnection on demand devices."[10] Žižek, however, warns against the fallacy of explaining

these interconnected phenomena as evident of a progressive disintegration of social bonds. "[I]n order to an individual to immerse herself in the virtual space, the big Other has to be there, more powerful than ever *in the guise of cyberspace itself*, this directly universalized form of sociality which enables us to be connected with the entire world while sitting alone in front of a screen" (2008: 34; emphasis added). Here Žižek points towards the hidden nature of media as a principal component of the uniquely mediated experience of being together alone (connected yet isolated) in the world today.

For Žižek the key to understanding the solipsism, skepticism and reflexive engagement of our times is not so much the often suggested absence of a "big Other": a universal symbolic institution such as God or Kant's categorical imperative that provides people common ground and a way out of themselves. What is missing, according to Žižek, is "a small other which would embody, stand in for, the big Other - a person [...] who directly embodies authority" (2008: 35). This lived experience of a life without universal, let alone some kind of consensual experts and authorities - whether these are priests, parents, professors or presidents - offering guidance does indeed not necessarily mean society is falling apart. For Žižek, self-identity is impossible, as our multiple identities (especially in cyberspace) are always in motion, as they are intersubjectively constructed. The liquid modern "art of life" (Bauman, 2009) as confined to the lifelong project of identity thus becomes a way of managing being part of an individualized society where "how one lives becomes the biographical solution of systemic contradictions" (Beck, 1992: 137) in conjunction with the omnipresence of networked computers and cyberspace, and being deindividualized by these networks at the same time. This is not necessarily another way of restating the

famous 1993 cartoon by Peter Steiner in *The New Yorker*, stating "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog" - it is also its exact opposite: due to the lack of anonymity as for example captured by one's digital shadow, everyone can know you're a dog.[11] Individualization in the context of a media life thus signifies a hyperindividualization process, where people are connected with the world without necessarily physically engaging with it (Deuze, 2006: 68). And these connections are primarily with large numbers of other people, through online networks. According to the March 2009 Nielsen report *Global Faces and Networked Places*, "[t]wo-thirds of the world's Internet population visit social networking or blogging sites, accounting for almost 10% of all internet time."[12]

As research on the generally restrained behavior of people in crowds online (for example on discussion forums, mailing lists, and social networks) suggests, deindividuation today is best conceptualized as a shift from a personal identity to a social identity, shared by members of the crowd (Postmes and Spears, 1998). This social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE), found particularly in computer-mediated communication contexts, lends credence to Žižek's implicit suggestion that media today may function as a substitute for the small other. Paraphrasing Žižek, media provide the intersubjective cues needed to fill the void of the empty self. Following this line of thought, it is perhaps not surprising that, generally speaking, people are reportedly more likely to trust each other rather than social institutions. The global PR firm Edelman conducts annual surveys (since 1999) on trust and credibility among college-educated, middle class, and media-savvy adults in 18 countries.[13] What the firm finds is a gradual erosion of trust in governments, traditional institutions, and elites in favor of (especially in Brazil, Canada, Germany, the

Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the United States) “a person like me” as someone considered to be the most credible source of information. Instead of trusting the government or God, people trust each other as embodied in the end-to-end principle of the internet (as in its protocols and physical infrastructure) and its emerging peer-to-peer social arrangements (as in the online sharing of processing power, disk storage, network bandwidth, and content). Here, our analytical lines of media theory, sociological analyses of everyday life, and ontology of media and life intersect.

The Media Generation

The US-based Educause Center for Applied Research (ECAR) conducts annual studies of undergraduates and information technologies (starting 2006). In its 2008 report of findings, a quote from one of the teenage respondents is used as illustrative of the broader trends borne out of the data: "I don’t look at it as “getting on the Internet.” The Internet is a part of life. It’s a lifestyle."[14] In this fully mediated lifestyle of young people, as the quote alludes to, media are such an augmented and automated part of one's attitudes and behaviors that they disappear. Contemporary studies of young people and their media tend to scramble for concepts to label, categorize, and coin them - as the "Digital Generation", "Net Geners", and "Generation C" (where C stands for Content, hinting at the predominance of user-generated content throughout the media).[15] Such terms are generally used for people born after 1980, who have arguably grown up immersed in technology and using internet. There has been a multitude of books written, research conducted and information

gathered concerning the youth of today and how the prevalence of media in their lives impacts them and makes them supposedly different to older generations.

Studies among teenagers in a variety of countries show how the use of media for the majority of young people has become an active act of remixing, bricolage, and media participation (Deuze, 2006), sometimes dubbed as a "media meshing" lifestyle. According to a 2005 study commissioned by Yahoo! among teenagers in Chicago, Mexico City, London, Berlin, Seoul, and Shanghai, media meshing is “a behavioral phenomenon that occurs when people begin an experience in one medium, such as watching television, then shift to another, such as surfing the Internet, and maybe even a third, such as listening to music. The explanation for this behavior is the constant search for complementary information, different perspectives, and even emotional fulfillment.”[16] Media meshing is similar to the multitasking behavior researchers find among people of all ages when using media, but includes a distinct element of media co-creation, ranging from the customization of media devices (ringtones, wallpapers, screensavers, channel programming) to the production of fan movies, citizen journalism sites, advertising clips, and computer games. Similar studies, surveys and reports on the increasingly (co-)creative behavior of media users by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (in April 2007) document how the majority of young people (especially those in the 16-24 year range) enthusiastically consume user-generated content, and that a growing group actively contributes to the creative process online.[17] In the most recent published literature there are many commonalities and a few differences in terms of facts and figures of how teenagers and young people are using media and what effect this will have on the future of society. Here,

we will focus on three recent book-length manuscripts summarizing and analyzing this kind of data on young people and media: *Born Digital* (2008) by John Palfrey and Urs Gasser, *Generation Digital* (2009) by Kathryn Montgomery, and *Grown Up Digital* (2008) by Don Tapscott.[18]

Palfrey and Gasser depict "Digital Natives" as almost an alien species who live estranged from their parents and other adults and professionals. The authors suggest a solution of engaged parenting and a good education, insinuating living a media life is a problem that needs to be solved. Tapscott argues a similar case in that he admits that the "Net Generation" is different from previous generations in that they do not view technology as technology, but rather as air because they grew up with it, as just another part of the environment. However, the big difference is that *Born Digital* is almost fearful of what young people and their media are capable of, whereas *Grown Up Digital* extols the positive attributes of these youngsters by describing them as smarter, quicker, more tolerant of diversity, who are replacing a culture of control with a culture of enablement. Montgomery is more nuanced in her appraisal of children and adolescents of the "Generation Digital", suggesting that they are increasingly valuable target demographics whose core developmental wants and needs - community, self-expression, and personalization - are ready to be exploited and commoditized by marketers (2009: 139). However, she additionally highlights their critical appropriation of digital tools in their role as "defining users" (2009: 107) to challenge the entire music industry, to mobilize politically, and to integrate digital tools in their lifestyles in a wide variety of ways that often challenge or

subvert the intentions of authorities (whether those authorities are parents or commercial corporations).

Such benevolent perspectives are in stark contrast with Mark Bauerlein's *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future* (2008).[19] Bauerlein laments just about everything teenagers do with media, suggesting that the only thing these kids are good at is: each other, a practice exemplified by their almost constant and complete participation in online social networks such as Facebook and MySpace. Similarly, Michael Bugeja's *Interpersonal Divide: The Search for Community in a Technological Age* (2005) puts forward the argument that the digital revolution is actually eroding interpersonal relationships and harming a sense of community. Kling (1996) summarizes in this context two dominant trains of thought in the discourse on computerization (media) and society (life): a utopian versus anti-utopian outlook. Generally studies are framed or empirical data is analyzed in terms of whether digital media worsen things or make things better. Agre (2002: 317) talks in this respect of a reinforcement model of study, where researchers take on normative positions by asking whether media cause or correct a problem under investigation. Although such approaches are valid, a common problem they share is a less-than-reflective tendency towards technological determinism, as such approaches attribute some kind of causality to the role of media in processes of "[c]easeless contingent change or monumental continuity" (Hesmondhalgh and Toynbee, 2008: 11). Whether utopian or dystopian, the discourses as documented in the key texts under investigation ultimately map the same phenomenon: that people's lives are increasingly, inseparably, and inevitably lived in media.

Tapscott summarizes what he argues are the eight key differences that characterize the digital generation from their parents: freedom; customization; scrutiny; integrity; collaboration; entertainment; speed; and innovation. Customization and collaboration are key points that a lot of the literature and surveys have picked up on as the proliferation of social networking sites allow young people to express themselves and update and edit information online. The aforementioned 2008 ECAR and 2007 OECD studies state that young people are actively engaged in creating audio and visual media and that one third of their respondents are creative on the Internet through contributing to blogs, photos and wikis and uploading videos. Studies in the US by the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project report similar statistics. Creating information and entertainment is not limited to North America, as research has shown that there are digital creators in every culture and country.

The authors in *Born Digital* pose the question: what is it about internet that makes it such fertile ground for creativity? The answers they have come up with include: low costs and big audiences; technology infrastructure; and peer relations. Internet offers the potential of huge audiences in short periods of time and is practically free, especially if one uses social networking sites to gather support. Teens enjoy watching their friends' works whether it is a mash-up or documentary spoof, or their latest machinima project. The infrastructure of internet suggests there is easy access for users with a fast connection, increasingly using all kinds of especially mobile devices. The collaboration and participation found online attracts and challenges young people to interact rather than be just consumers of media. Alison

Hearn suggests another explanation, as she argues how this compulsive behavior of "outer-directed self-presentation [...] trades on the very stuff of lived experience in the service of promotion and profit" (2008: 207-8). For her, MySpace and Facebook profiles or YouTube channels are forms of self-branding mandated by a flexible corporate capitalist project that "has subsumed all areas of human life, including the very concept of a private self" (2008: 208). Hearn's argument follows that of Wernick (1991) and more recently Bauman, who suggests that in our contemporary consuming life "the test they [young people] need to pass in order to be admitted to the social prizes they covet demands them *to recast themselves as commodities*: that is, as products capable of catching the attention and attracting *demand* and *customers*" (2007: 6; emphasis in original). It is indeed a fascinating paradox that much of the creativity of teenagers seeking to challenge or avoid authorities such as corporations and the state takes place within the parameters and constraints set and to some extent controlled by those very same institutions. It begs the question whether people this way inevitably end up reproducing the system they seek to subvert, or if they can in fact tactically gain a foothold exactly because of being part of the system (de Certeau, 1984). The media life perspective would dictate that media are the ecosystem that people are a constituent part of, which therefore includes the "goldplating" culture of the new capitalism (Sennett, 2006). But even if all user (co-) creation can be reduced to self-branding in the service of capitalist imperialism (Hesmondhalgh, 2008), the profit people seek is not necessarily gained without agency, nor does it solely exist in monetary terms, and it would thus strike us as a fallacy to suggest this "produsing" (Bruns, 2005) is just the manifest behavior of a globally shared false consciousness (in the Marxist understanding of the concept).

The June 2009 Nielsen report *How Teens Use Media* contradicts some of what other research has been suggesting.[20] Although the authors of the Nielsen report agree that teens are prolific mass self-communicators, their data suggests that adults and teenagers use internet in much the same way as they visit similar websites: primarily social networking sites, blogs and search engine portals. Other media usage trends that Nielsen documented include television watching, online video, gaming, and music and radio consumption, all of which suggests that teenager media usage is very similar to that of their adult counterparts. The conclusion of the Nielsen report urges not to view teenagers as radically different to adults as they can be reached and engaged in much the same way. Customizing as well as creating are integral to young people's media use, ranging from personalizing cell phones with graphics and individual ringtones to co-creating and remixing content online.

Teenagers today are not just consumers, creators and collaborators because they are appropriating and reappropriating media for their own needs, wants and desires. Tapscott argues that youths are not passively interacting with internet but actively shaping it with the result that the Internet is flowing more freely. In addition, these books suggest that all this online activity is not just changing the lives of a just a few technological savvy individuals, but rather society as a whole. For instance, online audiences self-select upcoming new stars rather than for example relying on expert critics, and groups self-organize through social networking sites rather than following a leader. Media seem to fill the void of a disappearing "small other", as Žižek would say. Both the ECAR studies and the UC Berkeley and USC *Digital Youth* project emphasize that if teens are not relying on

themselves, the next point of call are their peers rather than traditional authorities such as faculty or staff.[21] According to the various authors, this means that the abovementioned power shift from authorities to ordinary individuals (as they operate in temporary networks and online constellations) is going to have significant repercussions on future society, as young people learn to make up their own minds, only seeking guidance from their peers rather than to be told what to do. This in turn corroborates the analyses of sociologists such as Bauman, Beck and Giddens, who have documented a global shift towards individualization pervading all aspects of everyday life – where "the way individual people define individually their individual problems and try to tackle them deploying individual skills and resources is the sole remaining 'public issue' and the sole object of 'public interest'" (Bauman 2000: 72).

Media Life and Privacy

One reoccurring theme that gets emphasized in every single article and book is the issue of privacy. Nearly all authors express concern at teenagers' disregard regarding the protection of their privacy. Palfrey and Gasser go to great lengths in *Born Digital* to emphasize the "digital dossier" that is collected on people who willingly or involuntarily disseminate information about themselves. The authors call for adults to protect the privacy and safety of children. Tapscott in *Grown Up Digital* makes similar claims by arguing, "Net Geners clearly don't understand why privacy is important," worried as he is that "Net Geners are setting themselves up for the destruction of a basic right to be left alone." However, all the research gathered suggests that most young people today are not so much concerned by

such matters, as they feel selectively sharing of private information is part of participating in the public realm of online social networks - a sentiment eagerly and effectively exploited by businesses seeking to interact directly with children and teenagers outside the purview of parental control (Montgomery, 2009: 67ff). The *Digital Youth* project indicates that a key and appealing feature of internet is exactly that it is public as teenagers can publicize and distribute work as well as gain new forms of visibility and reputation. One could wonder whether the various researchers perhaps conflate *privacy* - the quality or condition of being private - with *private* - where the individual person controls what is shared and what remains secluded, rather than being submitted to some form of public control. In a series of high profile studies documenting teenagers and their use of online social networks, danah boyd (2007 and 2008) emphasizes what privacy means to teenagers: some sense of control over their lives in a more or less deliberate attempt to circumvent notions of privacy that are based on a highly regulated space with rules and norms that are strictly controlled by adults. It seems that young people have a pretty good idea about the often less than private nature of their media wanderings, but that they do not translate such awareness to a conscious and enforceable set of rules and practices as determined by adults. We would extend this argument to the engagement of most, if not all people with regards to their media: control over people's private mass self-communication is solipsistic, not consensual. However, this does not mean that people in effect are autonomous in their self-regulatory behavior when it comes to privacy. Market researchers for example argue that the shift away from privacy as an inalienable right to an individual responsibility can be seen as a consequence of the rise of a globally interconnected *social nervous system* as typified by the omnipresence of internet, social networking, and mobile communication. "In a social

nervous system there will be increasing pressure to be connected 24/7 to the hive mind that is Facebook, Twitter and so on. Those who do not connect, share and collaborate will have a hard time in business and in social life."[22]

It is perhaps not surprising in this context that several researchers signal a fascinating paradox: while people using media are at once and instantaneously connected with generally large and multiple groups and networks, they are also increasingly ascribed with a deeply individualized and self-centered value system. As David Downing writes: "[...] such ostensible connectedness is, in actuality, with a machine that is, in circular fashion, a projected externalization of our own desires and phantasies with which we are in narcissistic relation" (2007: 991-2). This argument falls within a tradition notably represented by Jean Twenge's *Generation Me* (2006), labeling today's youths as the most narcissistic generation in history because they supposedly have inflated and positive views of themselves (even though they are at the same time apparently obsessed with fitting in, what Downing calls a "hyperconformist" orientation that is essentially dehumanizing).[23] Twenge claims that this generation lacks basic human requirements such as maintaining stable close relationships and a feeling of collective safety, which means they are likely to abuse alcohol and drugs and make risky decisions. Her study has been widely challenged and criticized, often claiming how youth risk behaviors such as smoking, drinking, teen pregnancy and violent crime have decreased in recent decades, so teens are in fact displaying less anti-social behavior than before. Considering Downing's caveat, this counterargument would in fact prove Twenge's point. In a society of socially fragmented individuals, media come all-powerful (again, as McQuail has noted) as agents of exploitation

and dehumanization. On the other hand, most empirical evidence regarding the uses of social network sites (such as for example MySpace, Facebook, and LinkedIn) suggests how these forms of computer-mediated communication have positive effects on community interaction, involvement, and social capital, enabling people a way to keep in touch with old friends, colleagues and acquaintances (Purcell, 2006).

Media Life and Mobility

Across all countries, research clearly shows that teens are the fastest growing segment of mobile phone users. While there may be over 1 billion internet users, there are well over 4 billion mobile phone subscribers today, representing close to two-thirds of the global population according to the United Nations International Telecommunications Union (ITU) in 2007.[24] The mentioned *How Teens Use Media* report states that teens are early adopters of all mobile media, not just texting. In the ECAR study, 80% of respondents owned a laptop and 66% owned cell phones, with the total increasing to 77% if one includes the whole US teenager population. There is a consensus across all literature that the appropriation and use of mobile media constitutes a key difference between youth and adults. Scholars at times coin those born in the 1980s (or later) as a mobile generation, signifying not so much their difference from other generations regarding the type of technology used, but rather that "the youngest generation take advantage of a wider range of communicative cues [as in using a mix of voice, text, and images] in their communication with distant others" (Bolin and Westlund, 2009: 121). Summarizing the situation in the US in its *The Mobile Difference* research report of 2009, the Pew center concludes that "[m]obile connectivity is now a

powerful differentiator among technology users. Those who plug into the information and communications world while on-the-go are notably more active in many facets of digital life."[25] This digital life is to a large extent based on a mobile lifestyle, according to market research such as documented in *The Mobiles*, a 2002 report by Context Research based on a study of attitudes and behaviors related to wireless devices and communication (based on interviews and diary observations of media use among 144 participants in Sydney, New York City, San Francisco, Beijing, Rome, Stockholm and Rio de Janeiro).[26] In this study, researchers suggest that people, once mobile communication become part of their everyday life, their initial "constant awareness of wireless finally wanes when people are truly living a mobile lifestyle [...]", ultimately seamlessly integrating wireless in their lives "where people find it difficult to live a life without wireless." This perception of increasingly indispensible mobile devices is documented across the field of mobile communication studies (such as for example collected in 2008 by James Katz).

Studies combining qualitative and quantitative data from Asia, Europe, and the US map a globally emerging mobile communication society where what teenagers in particularly do with mobile technology serves to reinforce, maintain and create collective identity, while at the same time functioning as an expression of a distinctly personal style and way of life (Castells et al., 2004). The central role of the mobile phone in processes of personal transformation led Leopoldina Fortunati to describe it as "a charismatic technology" (2001), as it was originally designed for work, but changed identity as it quickly entered the domestic sphere. Tapscott offers that "mobile phone" is a misnomer due to the features on phones ranging from MP3, web browser, texting, GPS, to video camera and voice recorder.

Mobile usage is skyrocketing worldwide to the extent that where broadband connection to internet is limited, mobile phones are preferred. Mobile phones outnumber landlines all over the world. Access to mobiles has become so widespread that the device has been called the "real world's internet" (Katz, 2008: 434). Given the limited availability of wired access in many of the world's developing countries and rural areas, and the rapid spread of advanced mobile cellular networks, mobile broadband is expanding rapidly.[27] Considering the near-universal adoption of mobile communication and the rapid growth of wireless broadband connectivity (especially in developing countries), mobility can be considered to be at the heart of what it means to live a media life.

In his 2007 book, *Mobilities*, John Urry sounds a rallying cry for a "mobility turn" in social scientific research. Urry proposes that social science should be approached and conducted via a mobile lens, one that "connects the analysis of different forms of travel, transport, and communications" (Urry, 2007: 6). Mobile devices and communication exist as only one component within Urry's proposed *mobilities* paradigm, yet their pervasiveness and ubiquitousness make them an unavoidable and thus empirically rich object of study within the larger mobilities framework. In a less ambitious but similar vein, Rich Ling and Jonathan Donner (2009) introduce the emergence of what they call a *mobile logic*, determined by mobile and increasingly ubiquitous devices. The implications of such a logic governing people in their everyday life, they suggest, are "individuals apportioning their activities to a greater extent than previously possible; we see them interlacing multiple tasks with multiple actors and multiple venues, competing and jostling for time and attention. For society [...] we see the implications of ubiquitous reachability playing out in the way

individuals behave: not only that they are reachable, but that they expect others to be, as well" (Ling and Donner, 2009: 28-9).

At the heart of such mobility-inspired considerations of the contemporary human condition are concerns about the structure and consequences of constant communication, and the public/private boundary-erasing activities associated with the portability of mobile devices.[28] Mobile devices and wireless access enables constant communication, making people instantly accessible (or burdened with the expectation of availability). Urry considers mobile devices as "lifelines" for young adults, as the loss of a cell-phone could throw a person into "a no-man's land of nonconnectivity" (2007: 178). A gradual switch from landline-based communication to person-to-person communication further intensifies this constant channel of communication. In *Displacing Place* (2007; edited by Sharon Kleinman) and André Caron and Letizia Caronia's *Moving Cultures* (2007), authors researching mobile communication in everyday life signal that the technology's ubiquity has the potential to make people *ghost participants* in situations where two or more people are co-present, introducing the potential of their *absent presence* to the group - removing themselves from the context of shared group behaviors to become involved in a virtual world that is not available to the people around them. Torn between attending to physically present and perpetually connected others, mobile phone users now have to contend with two front-stages of communication (Ling, 2007: 63-44). This added complexity to the daily rituals of communication raises concerns regarding the extent of people's tetheredness to technologies. "In terms of the autonomy-connectedness dialectic, perpetual contact gives priority to connectedness to the detriment of autonomy" (Katz, 2008: 442). The portable

and seemingly indispensible nature of mobile devices seems to amplify the earlier signaled privatization of the public domain. Affordances of safety and security provided by the mobile phone make it easier for people to effectively blur distinctions between public and private behavior, for example making bystanders (often unwilling) participants in private conversations (Ling, 2007). Furthermore, the uses of handsets in public make people appear to be talking to themselves. Several studies suggest that mobile technologies "atomize" users, cutting them off from their surroundings, pulling people from public spaces into their personal "soundscapes" (Katz, 2008: 27). All of these concerns and suggestions are particularly compelling if one considers, with Gerard Goggin in *Cell Phone Culture: Mobile Technology in Everyday Life*, how mobile devices are moving towards mobile media more broadly conceived, in the process "infiltrating into and reworking all sorts of old and [new] media forms" (2006: 211).

The Truman Show Delusion

The media life perspective applied to the theory and empirical evidence of media studies raises (and perhaps confirms) the issue, that our lived reality cannot be experienced separate, or outside of media. Metaphorically speaking, we are now all living inside our very own *Truman Show* (referring to the 1998 movie by director Peter Weir): a world characterized by pervasive and ubiquitous media that we are constantly and concurrently deeply immersed in, that dominate and shape all aspects of our everyday life. Importantly, in this world it is also up to each of us to navigate the largely unwritten rules and often hidden pathways of "an ocean of media"[29] on our own. In the film, actor Jim Carrey portrays

the life of a man - Truman Burbank - who does not know his entire life is one big reality television show, watched by millions all over the world. In the course of the movie it becomes clear that the only way out for Carrey's character will be his individual ability, as the only "True Man", to figure out whether the people in his life are actors (and to what extent they act), and where the fine line between the studio (stage, decor) and the "real" world can be drawn. We have argued that the solution to this vexing dilemma can only be found by the individual, using his/her skills while all the time aware of at least the possibility of being constantly monitored and recorded. The Truman Show metaphor is appropriate insofar it addresses people's complex and often solipsistic engagement with reality through media. When asked how the show can be so successful in convincing Truman that his world is real even though it so clearly features a fake reality, the director of Truman's reality show (named Christof, a not so subtle reference to Žižek's small other embodying the authority of, in this case, God) states: "[w]e accept the reality of the world with which we are presented." It is important to note the implication of this narrative, as it does not seem to be premised on a notion that Truman's world is unreal. The *Truman Show* is just another version of the real, one that is carefully staged and completely mediated, much like Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, as the people in the cave, watching the puppets, were unaware of any other lifestyle or world other than the one in which they were presented. Using the *Truman Show* as a metaphor for living a media life, we must additionally note that the ending of the movie - Truman escapes the studio - might in fact be the only truly unrealistic aspect of the film's story, as in our fully mediated existence, escape is impossible.

During the summer of 2008 psychiatrists Joel and Ian Gold made headlines around the world with their diagnosis of a new condition found in initially five of their patients. The brothers suggested that the combination of pervasive media, classical syndromes such as narcissism and paranoia, and an emerging media culture where the boundaries between the physical and virtual world are blurring produces a new type of psychosis: a “Truman Show Delusion” (TSD). People who suffer from TSD are more or less convinced that everything around them is a décor that the people in their lives are all actors, and that everything they do is monitored and recorded. McGill University’s Ian Gold attributes TSD in an interview with Canadian newspaper the National Post to “unprecedented cultural triggers that might explain the phenomenon: the pressure of living in a large, connected community can bring out the unstable side of more vulnerable people […] New media is opening up vast social spaces that might be interacting with psychological processes” (July 19, 2008, p.A1). In Newsweek, his brother (affiliated with the Bellevue Hospital Center in New York) suggests that TSD "is the pathological product of our insatiable appetite for self-exposure" (August 11, 2008, p.10). Earlier that week in a special report on the WebMD site, he links TSD more generally to the role media play in people's lives: "[w]e’ve got the ‘perfect storm’ of reality TV and the Internet. These are powerful influences in the culture we live in [...] The pressure of living in a large, connected community can bring out the unstable side of more vulnerable people.”[30] The TSD additionally contains a belief that one's life has ceased being spontaneous, as one is always aware of (the possibility of) the scripted and broadcasted nature of everything one does. In a special report about the TSD at the website of the American Psychological Association (on June 6, 2009), the brothers identify specific features of modern culture - "warrantless wiretapping and video surveillance systems [...]

widely accessible technology [...] reality TV shows and MySpace" - as squaring with the *Truman Show*'s basic premise.[31]

In the APA report and in an earlier background story in the International Herald Tribune several experts are quoted who confirm the possibility of the TSD and suggest that "[o]ne way of looking at the delusions and hallucinations of the mentally ill is that they represent extreme cases of what the general population, or the merely neurotic, are worried about" (August 30, 2008, p.7). Writing in The British Journal of Psychiatry, Paolo Fusar-Poli and colleagues confirm the diagnoses of their American colleagues, describing the common symptoms as follows: "First, there is the sense that the ordinary is changed or different, and that there is particular significance in this. This is coupled with a searching for meaning, which, in this case, results in the 'Truman explanation'. The third feature is a profound alteration of subjective experience and of self-awareness, resulting in an unstable first-person perspective with varieties of depersonalization and derealization, disturbed sense of ownership, fluidity of the basic sense of identity, distortions of the stream of consciousness and experiences of disembodiment" (2008: 168). The significance of this analysis of the contemporary human condition for our argument is the realization, that:

- the TSD is perhaps best understood an amplification of a distinct sense of uncertainty and unsettlement in the population at large;
- the TSD accelerates a sense of urgency about one's life project of self-identity; and
- the TSD indirectly acknowledges an alternate ending to the movie on which it is based, namely a scenario where Truman does not (cannot) leave, but stays to tell his own story.

Media Life and Society

It must be clear, then, that in the relationships between media and the human condition contemporary technologies, the things people do with them, and how all of this fits (and gets fitted) into social arrangements that govern people's lives several elements serve to amplify and accelerate broader trends in society, such as:

- a primacy of self-governance and self-reliance over the deference to authorities such as parents, professionals, and politicians (see especially the earlier mentioned work by Beck, Bauman, and Giddens in this regard);
- an extension of community premised on simultaneous co-presence and telepresence as directed by the individual and her/his concerns (documented in 2002 and subsequent publications[32] by Barry Wellman as a shift from "little boxes" and "glocalized" communities to those based on "networked individualism", linking individuals with little regard to space);
- the emergence of mass self-communication next to mass communication signifying the shift in almost all industrial societies from survival values toward increasing emphasis on self-expression values as comprising the major area of concern to people in such societies (Inglehart and Baker, 2000).

In all of these concerns we also see the potential for media to disrupt such proposed transitions (or at the very least our perception of them). Certainly, many of not most of the trends signaled here are neither exclusive to internet or mobile communication devices, nor are they uniquely supercharged by them. Historicizing the role media play in everyday life,

coupled with a distinct sense for their remediation of old and new devices, functions, and forms consistently confirms such a caveat to much of the claims making in the literature. Yet we would like to argue how the media life perspective opens up another playing field for considering such developments because, regardless of whether one sees continuity or change, the interpenetration of media in all aspects of people's lives clearly suggests how the boundaries one perhaps all to quickly draws between different types of media (analog or digital), different groups of people (in the center or the periphery), and different modes of being (public or private) are, if anything, in flux. And when the organizing categories and principles of life are in constant motion (or are perceived to be so), uncertainty reigns.

According to Bauman, people's endemic and, perhaps more importantly, *undirected* uncertainty breeds a particular kind of fear - a fear that is based on "our ignorance of the threat and of what is to be done" (2006: 2). All the more interesting is the connection Bauman sees between people's uncertainty about their prospects in a rapidly moving "runaway world" (as Giddens calls it), and the structure and consequences of a deeply individualized society. "The new individualism, the fading of human bonds and the wilting of solidarity, are all engraved on one side of a coin whose other side bears the stamp of globalization" (ibid.:146). Considering the pervasive and ubiquitous nature of media and the signaled uncanny capacity of contemporary media to connect and isolate at the same time - to make the world concurrently larger and smaller - we would like to move our concluding comments on the media life perspective to a another level of abstraction: that of people's experience with reality. This experience is rooted in, as noted in our discussion of the TSD, people's sense that the ordinary is changed or different. In other words:

conceivably the key to considering what it means to live a media life must be an understanding of the ever so slightly "off" nature or, what Žižek (2006) has theorized as a mode of *parallax* reality as lived (and mediated) experience.[33]

Discussion

At the end of this essay, we are left with of couple of key observations. We argue that an ontological shift has taken place in that media cannot be conceived of as separate to us, to the extent that we live in media, rather than with media. There are extensive societal and cultural repercussions occurring primarily due to the way media are becoming invisible, as media are so pervasive and ubiquitous that the people in general (and possibly the so-called Net Generation in particular) do not even register the presence of media in their lives. The networked individualist and personalized information space that digital natives have created for themselves which constitutes their everyday reality influences work, play, learning and interacting by unsettling all boundaries to make them more liquid and fluid. Considering the weightless or immaterial nature of contemporary society and the largely informational and symbolic nature of life's processes, research must find its starting point in a dynamic, perhaps even mobile (as Urry suggests) understanding of media and society. Such an understanding is furthermore grounded in a recognition (not an explaining away) of the increasing invisibility of media. Research should therefore not only focus on the way people use media and in the context of people's sense of reality, moving beyond the production-content-reception premise of media and society, but also challenge any taken for granted technological inferences with everyday life.

Situating media *in*, rather than *with*, everyday life opens up ontological opportunities for decentering media research and draws our attention to the wider social context of finding, producing, editing and distributing meaning (through mass self-communication). The purpose of the media life perspective is not whether we can make reality more real, or whether more or less engagement with media helps or handicaps such noble efforts. Humberto Maturana (1997) has raised what we feel are the essential stakes in our discussion of the interconnected relationships between humans and technology: "I think that the question that we human beings must face is that of what do we want to happen to us, not a question of knowledge or progress. The question that we must face is not about the relation of biology with technology [...] nor about the relation between knowledge and reality [...] I think that the question that we must face at this moment of our history is about our desires and about whether we want or not to be responsible of our desires."[34] Living a media life is not necessarily submitting to the confounding reality of participating tactically in an all-encompassing reality show, nor does contribute to a potential strategy of avoidance and disconnecting from such a reality. Kathryn Montgomery offers us a glimpse of the potential of a media life point of view, offering that "[t]he transition to the Digital Age provides us with a unique opportunity to rethink the position of [people] in media culture, and in society as a whole [as] there is still enough fluidity in the emerging media system for actions to help guide its future" (2007: 221). If we live our lives in media and we chose to take responsibility for it, what are our options to constitute each other and ourselves? How can we be free yet mediated at the same time?

"I am struck by the ending of The Truman Show [...] All the film can offer us is a vision of media exploitation, and all its protagonist can imagine is walking away from the media and slamming the door. It never occurs to anyone that Truman might stay on the air, generating his own content and delivering his own message, exploiting the media for his own purposes" (Jenkins, 2004: 36–7). Henry Jenkins hints at the beginnings of a media life option to understand our role in the world today - precisely because he considers escape as a flawed option. The fallacy of the escape clause is that it is premised on an understanding of human beings as possessing a core essence, literally a "true" self (as the name Truman suggests). We have already shown how such a point of view can be considered problematic, if not (as Žižek argues), impossible. Our essence, as human beings, is not immutable, locked in to our physical presence, our cognition, and behaviors. Considering the current opportunity a media life gives people to create multiple versions of themselves and others, and to endlessly redact oneself (as someone does with his/her profile on an online dating site in order to produce better matches), we now have a entered a time where, as Luigi Pirandello considered in his novel *One, No One and One Hundred Thousand* (1990 [1925-6]), we can in fact see ourselves live, become cognizant about how our lifeworld is "a world of artifice, of bending, adapting, of fiction, vanity, a world that has meaning and value only for the man who is its deviser" (39). But this is not a atomized, fragmented, and depressing world, or it does not have to be. Our world - as in our sense of self - in a media life perhaps must be seen as a world where we truly have individual and collective control over reality if only we would be at peace with the endless mutability of that reality. As Pirandello wonders: "[w]hy do you believe firmness of will is so highly touted, and constancy of feelings? The former has only to waver a little, and the latter has only to be altered by one

degree or change ever so slightly, and it's goodbye to our reality! We realize immediately that is was only our delusion" (42). This delusion that is our reality in media life - possibly a mild and collectively shared form of the Truman Show Delusion - can also be seen as ultimately liberating, something we can explore and navigate freely if we accept, with the protagonist in Pirandello's novel, that always rushing to find out who we really are only produces "futile constructions" (160).

With Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Antichrist* (1967 [1895]), we therefore postulate that "[m]an is by no means the crown of creation: every living being stands beside him on the same level of perfection" (14). From this blank slate, Nietzsche argues in *The Gay Science* (1974 [1882]), we might "become those we are - human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves" (335). This is not to say that a life lived in media is a life lived without "the social forces constraining people's ability to make choices and take action" (Hesmondhalgh and Toynbee, 2008: 18). What we suggest is that the media life perspective exposes us to endless alternatives to and versions of ourselves, and that much of the confusion and anxiety about these options is grounded in people's inability to position themselves in media (as well as the social pressure on people to stick to a version that was generated for them, for example as "citizens" for democracry, or "consumers" for capitalism). Society governed by media life is one where reality is, like many if not most Websites, permanently under construction - but not only by unseen yet all-powerful guardians in the panoptic fortresses of governments and corporations that seek to construct a relatively cohesive and thus controllable reality, but also by all of us.

Perhaps a wonderful metaphoric example for this kind of society is the so-called “Silent Disco” phenomenon, where partygoers dance to music received directly into headphones. The music gets broadcast via FM transmitter with the signal being picked up by wireless headphone receivers worn by the silent party attendees – often listening to different, individualized streams of music while still dancing together. This suggestion of being together and generally having a great time, yet still being alone in one's experience captures the notion of a life lived in media, where people are more connected than ever before – whether through common boundaryless issues such as global warming, terrorism, and worldwide migration, or via internet and mobile communication – yet at the same time on their own – as people increasingly participate in voluntarist and self-interested forms of social cohesion that are all too often confounded by a real or perceived impotence of people in their identities as citizens, consumers and workers “to shape their own social environment and [to] develop the capacity for action necessary for such interventions to succeed,” as Jürgen Habermas suggests (2001 [1998]: 60).

The governing principle of media life is immersively mediated self-creation in the context of always-available global connectivity. We realize that a possible consequence of our argument in this paper is to advocate that we should not dwell too much on existential contemplations and just go with all affordances media provide us with and be satisfied with the privilege of our times to use such technologies to make art with life. As Michel Foucault asks: "[w]hy should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?" (1984: 350). Indeed, suggests Bauman, "we are all artists of our lives - knowingly or not, willingly or not, like it or not" (2009: 125). In this work of art, people are on their own - much like Nietzsche

advocated - but never alone. Sure, we can disconnect on demand, but nothing in the data on how we live our lives in media suggests we massively do so. Cricitally and yet deliberately naively, we suggest people - scholars, politicians, marketers, and citizens alike - should only connect, as in the words of E.M. Forster in *Howards End* (1910): "Only connect the prose and the passion and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer."[35] Media are our passion, and the prose is our life narrative.

Endnotes

[1] URL: http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2009-09-27-social-networking_N.htm
[2] Findings such as available in the Middletown Media Studies I and II reports, available at Ball State University's Center for Media and Design (URL: http://cms.bsu.edu/Academics/CentersandInstitutes/CMD.aspx.
[3] URL: http://www.time.com/time/specials/2007/style_design/article/0,28804,1727737_1727684_1727601,00.html
[4] URL: http://www.clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT00912041
[5] URL: http://www.siggraph.org/publications/newsletter/volume-40-number-1/makingitreal
[6] URL: http://imsc.usc.edu/research/project/udn/index.html
[7] URL: http://arianeb.com/more3Dworlds.htm
[8] Source URL: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jose-antonio-vargas/technology-is-anthropolog_b_285604.html.
[9] quoted from an unpaged document provided by the publisher in advance of publication.
[10] Personal email from Zygmunt Bauman to the lead author, Monday 5 June 2006.
[11] see URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/On_the_Internet,_nobody_knows_you%27re_a_dog.
[12] URL: http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/global/social-networking-new-global-footprint/.
[13] URL: http://www.edelman.co.uk/trustbarometer.
[14] Quote from page 9 of the report, available at URL: http://www.educause.edu/ECAR/TheECARStudyofUndergraduateStu/163283.
[15] See for example: http://trendwatching.com/trends/GENERATION_C.htm.
[16] Report available at: http://www.mecglobal.com/output/Page1323.asp.
[17] Report available at: http://213.253.134.43/oecd/pdfs/browseit/9307031E.PDF.
[18] See: http://www.borndigitalbook.com; http://mitpress.mit.edu/catalog/item/default.asp?ttype=2&tid=11125; and http://www.grownupdigital.com.
[19] See: http://www.dumbestgeneration.com/home.html.
[20] Report available at: http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/reports/nielsen_howteensusemedia_june09.pdf.
[21] URL: http://digitalyouth.ischool.berkeley.edu/.
[22] Joshua-Michele Ross, "The Rise Of The Social Nervous System" in: *Forbes* (03.09.09). URL: http://www.forbes.com/2009/03/09/internet-innovations-hive-technology-breakthroughs-innovations.html.
[23] URL: http://www.generationme.org/.
[24] See: http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/publications/idi/2009/index.html.
[25] URL: http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/5-The-Mobile-Difference--Typology.aspx.
[26] Report available at URL: http://www.contextresearch.com/context/study.cfm.
[27] One should not forget, however, that all of the countries included in the top 30 of the ITU ICT Development Index (of 2007) were from the developed world, with little or no change reported in since 2002.
[28] For a detailed literature review of recent book-length volumes on mobile communication and cell phone culture, see the unpublished paper "New Mobilities Paradigm" by Moises Montenegro

and Mark Deuze (2009), available at URL: http://moemonty.com/docs/MobilitiesArticle.pdf; that report informs the remarks in this section of our paper.
[29] Quote taken from a story on people's concurrent media exposure in the *Christian Science Monitor* of September 28, 2005; available at URL: http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0928/p13s01-lihc.html.
[30] Sourc URL: http://www.webmd.com/mental-health/features/truman-show-delusion-real-imagined?page=2.
[31] Source URL: http://www.apa.org/monitor/2009/06/delusion.html.
[32] See for a list of relevant works by Wellman URL: http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~wellman/publications/publications.html#network_theory.
[33] In a survey among 403 undergraduate students at Indiana University in September 2009, we asked them how sure they are that the immediate environment they live in is in fact real. On a scale from 1 (not sure at all) to 5 (very sure), 49% of respondents answered 5 (mean answer: 4).
[34] Source URL: http://www.inteco.cl/articulos/006/texto_ing.htm.
[35] Full text available at URL: http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/2891.