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The title of my first chapter is a phrase drawn from Joshua Meyrowitz’s book, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (1985), in which he presents an analysis of the social significance of electronic media that still has relevance for media studies today, more than a quarter of a century after it was published. In the opening sections of the chapter, I will set out my sympathetic critique of Meyrowitz’s book. On the one hand, my discussion highlights the continuing importance of his arguments about a transformation in ‘the “situational geography” of social life’ (ibid., p. 6), but, on the other hand, I take issue with his contention (clearly indicated by the title of his book) that contemporary existence is increasingly ‘placeless’. This critique will provide a foundation on which I can then build in the rest of my book, beginning in this chapter with a differently inflected account of electronic media and ‘situational geography’, suggested by Paddy Scannell’s notes on broadcasting and the ‘doubling of place’ (Scannell, 1996, p. 172). Several specific examples of ‘doubling’ are discussed towards the end of the chapter, with reference not only to radio and television but also to mobile-phone and internet use in everyday living.

**Weaving Strands of Theory**

For me, the most remarkable feature of Meyrowitz’s book is his theoretical synthesis of ‘two seemingly incompatible perspectives’ (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 7). In his introduction to *No Sense of Place*, he explains how this synthesis developed out of some of the reading that he did as an undergraduate student in the US during the late 1960s, when he first engaged with the writings of two academic authors who were working in quite separate areas. One of these authors was Marshall McLuhan (see especially McLuhan, 1994 [1964]; McLuhan and Zingrone, 1997; also Meyrowitz, 2003), who is regarded by Meyrowitz (1985, p. 16) as a pioneer of ‘medium theory’ (see also Innis, 1951; Meyrowitz, 1994). The other was
Erving Goffman (see especially Goffman, 1990 [1959]; Lemert and Branaman, 1997; also Meyrowitz, 1979), who is associated by Meyrowitz (1985, p. 28) with a sociological tradition of ‘situationism’. Both of these authors offered insights that fascinated him, yet he also realised that each of their approaches had its shortcomings. Through his postgraduate research in the 1970s, he came to the view that McLuhan and Goffman, and, more generally, the analytical perspectives of the ‘medium theorists’ and the ‘situationists’ (not to be confused with the avant-garde artistic and political activists who were known by this name), ‘have complementary strengths and weaknesses’ (ibid., 1985, p. 4). Indeed, Meyrowitz (ibid.) states that his book is the result of ‘more than a decade of interest in weaving these two strands of theory into one whole cloth’.

In the writings of McLuhan and others working in medium theory, Meyrowitz finds an analysis of media that has a distinctive emphasis on the medium of communication itself. Whereas much mainstream ‘media theory’ has focused on ‘message content’ (ibid., p. 20) and its assumed social consequences, medium theorists focus instead on the consequences that media themselves, ‘apart from the content they convey’ (ibid., p. 16), can have for the organisation of social life. One of the most memorable phrases to emerge from McLuhan’s book, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (1994 [1964], p. 7), is his declaration that ‘the medium is the message’. What is crucial for McLuhan (ibid., p. 9), then, is the capacity of any new medium or type of media to alter ‘the scale and form of human association and action’. He argues that media of communication act as ‘extensions’ of the body and senses, transforming the temporal and spatial arrangements of social life. For example, in the case of television and other electronic media, the advent of ‘live’ communications across potentially vast physical distances has introduced a new kind of simultaneity and interdependence into social life. Meyrowitz welcomes this concern with media and social change, and with issues of time and space (as do I, although it is important not to draw too stark a distinction between ‘medium’ and ‘content’, and there is a problem with the ‘technological determinism’ of medium theory, see Williams, 1990 [1974]). The main limitation identified by Meyrowitz (1985, p. 23) is McLuhan’s failure to pursue this interest in media, change and time-space relations by addressing new modes of ‘everyday social interaction’.

Meanwhile, in the writings of Goffman and others working in the situationist tradition, Meyrowitz finds a valuable concern with the dynamics of everyday social interaction, and with the social situations that furnish contexts for this interaction. In Goffman’s first and
probably still his best-known book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1990 [1959]), he ‘describes social life using the metaphor of drama’ (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 28), conceptualising interactions and situations in terms of ‘performances’, ‘actors’, ‘settings’ and so forth. Goffman’s purpose in employing the vocabulary of the theatre is not simply to claim that ‘all the world’s a stage’, but rather to develop a way of understanding the organisation of ‘social encounters … that come into being whenever persons enter one another’s immediate physical presence’ (Goffman, 1990 [1959], p. 246). Meyrowitz welcomes that focus on the organisation of ‘social encounters’ in Goffman’s sociology. However, he also identifies a significant limitation, and a clue to this shortcoming is supplied by the reference that Goffman makes to ‘immediate physical presence’. In situationism, there has been an overwhelming concern with the study of physically co-present, face-to-face interactions, and a tendency to assume a necessary connection between social situations and physical locations or environments. There has, in addition, been a corresponding tendency to ‘ignore interactions … through media’ (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 33; see also ibid., p. 345, which notes that an exception is Goffman, 1981, although, even there, no serious consideration is given to issues of media and social change).

Clearly, then, McLuhan and Goffman were working on quite different topics. One was studying the consequences of media technologies for changing modes of social organisation, but with little interest in the dynamics of interaction. The other was focusing on interpersonal encounters, but with little regard for the significance of new forms of technologically mediated communication at a distance. It is therefore not too difficult to see how medium theory and situationist sociology might have appeared to Meyrowitz, at the start of his theoretical journey, as ‘incompatible perspectives’. Nevertheless, he gradually discovered an inventive way of ‘weaving’ together these ‘strands of theory’, linking the analysis of media with the analysis of situated interaction, so that the strengths of each tradition could be combined and their respective weaknesses overcome. Central to the resulting theoretical synthesis or ‘whole cloth’ is his model of ‘situations as information-systems’ (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 35).

**Situations as Information-systems**

Meyrowitz (1994, p. 58) has described the integrative model that he developed as an instance of ‘second-generation medium theory’, as
distinct from the first generation of which McLuhan's work was a part. In the same way, his model might simultaneously be thought of as an instance of 'second-' or even 'third-generation' situationism (extending the work of Goffman and others in what has also been called 'micro social theory', see Roberts, 2006). Indeed, in order to get a hold on this model of situations as information-systems, it is necessary to revisit Meyrowitz's engagement with situationism, and particularly his insistence that there is no necessary connection between social situations and physical locations. Seeking to dismantle the connection, which the situationists have traditionally taken for granted, Meyrowitz (1985, p. 37) argues that, in the study of situations, it is best to begin with a 'more inclusive notion of “patterns of access to information”' (when he writes of ‘access to information’ here, he is thinking principally about access to ‘social performances’ rather than to ‘information’ as it is more commonly understood, as a set of ‘facts’ or ‘objective statements’). Of course, this ‘inclusive notion’ does not rule out investigations of face-to-face interpersonal encounters, in which the ‘social actors’ can access each other's performances in a shared physical location or environment. Crucially, though, it serves to extend the study of situations, allowing also for the investigation of technologically ‘mediated encounters’ (ibid.), in which there is access to the performances of others who are physically absent. What Meyrowitz’s work promises to challenge, then, is a ‘distinction often made between studies of face-to-face interaction and studies of mediated communications’, and his model of situations as information-systems therefore makes it possible to see ‘physical settings and “media settings”’ (ibid., pp. 37–8; while I find his terms useful, note that ‘media settings’ still have a certain physicality or materiality) as overlapping social environments.

Recalling the title of this chapter, it is important to stress that Meyrowitz's theoretical model is designed to deal precisely with a transformation in the situational geography of social life:

Now ... information is able to flow through walls and rush across great distances ... the social spheres defined by walls ... are ... only one type of interactional environment. ... The theory developed here extends ... to the analysis of social environments created by media of communication ... describes how electronic media affect social behavior – not through the power of their messages but by reorganizing the social settings in which people interact.

(ibid., pp. viii–ix)
For the purposes of my book, this is a particularly helpful quote because, as well as making his fundamental point that electronic media are ‘reorganizing the social settings in which people interact’, Meyrowitz raises closely related matters to which I will be returning in later chapters. One of these has to do with boundaries and their potential permeability in contemporary society. Another is the matter of technologically mediated ‘mobility’, which Meyrowitz hints at with his statement that ‘information is able to ... rush across great distances’. In this statement, the emphasis is evidently on the electronic movements of social information, but, elsewhere in his book, he gives the point an added twist by suggesting that such information ‘flows’ can afford experiences of ‘travel’. For instance, Meyrowitz (ibid., p. 118) remarks that: ‘Through electronic media ... social performers now “go” where they would not or could not.’ He adds that people can now feel they are ‘“present” at distant events’ (ibid.) through electronic media use. For the remainder of the current chapter, though, my discussion is focused on what he terms the ‘environments created by media of communication’ (actually, they are realised in practices of media use), and on the relations between those media settings or ‘media environments’ (ibid, p. 7) and physical settings of social interaction.

One of Meyrowitz’s illustrations of an ‘interactional environment’ that is formed through media use is the social situation of a telephone conversation:

We all know from everyday experience that electronic media over-ride the boundaries ... of situations supported by physical settings. When two friends speak on the telephone, for example, the situation they are ‘in’ is only marginally related to their respective physical locations. Indeed, the telephone tends to bring two people closer to each other, in some respects, than they are to other people in their physical environments. This explains the almost jealous response on the part of some people who are in the same room with someone speaking on the phone. They often ask ‘Who is it?’ ‘What’s she saying?’ ‘What's so funny?’

(ibid., p. 38)

This passage offers an initial example of what is meant by interacting with others in media settings or environments. In the course of everyday living, it would probably be unusual for people speaking on the phone explicitly to think of themselves as being ‘in’ a media setting (even though the notion of ‘immersion’ in an environment is quite
common nowadays among internet users who are interacting online). Nevertheless, Meyrowitz argues convincingly that, at least for the ‘two friends’ in his example, there is the ‘closeness’ of a shared social situation despite their physical separation. Indeed, it may well be that among electronic media the handheld phone is most capable of functioning as an ‘intimate’ medium of communication, given the technologically mediated proximity of voice to ear in spoken encounters at a distance. As Ian Hutchby (2001, p. 31) puts it, ‘intimacy … is afforded by the telephone’ (more generally, see Hutchby’s book for an instance of contemporary micro-social theory that does not ignore interactions ‘through media’). Still, while Meyrowitz’s illustration of a media environment serves a useful purpose here, there is something about his account of the two friends’ phone conversation that troubles me. I feel that he could make more of their dual locations, and of the overlaps between a media environment and the physical environments at either end of the line, rather than regarding them as ‘only marginally related’. Telephone use, and electronic media use more broadly, is best seen as ‘pluralising’ social settings, as opposed to removing people from one type of situation, which becomes marginal, and putting them in another. This is a critical point that I will be expanding on in due course.

**Para-social Interaction**

Meyrowitz (1985, pp. 119–21) goes on to discuss further cases of ‘intimacy at a distance’ with reference to the work of Donald Horton and Richard Wohl (1956). Interestingly, back in the mid-1950s, Horton and Wohl had already written about the organisation of certain electronically mediated encounters, in a period when television was still establishing itself as an everyday medium, and when McLuhan and Goffman were still in the early stages of their academic careers. For this reason, while I have described Meyrowitz’s linking of media analysis with the analysis of situated interaction as the most remarkable feature of his book (a judgement that I stand by), it should be acknowledged that Horton and Wohl had gone at least some of the way down this road many years before. It might be said, then, that they helped to prepare the ground for Meyrowitz’s subsequent theoretical synthesis and for his model of situations as information-systems (see also a number of the contributions to Gumpert and Cathcart, 1979, in which Horton and Wohl’s article was reprinted).
Horton and Wohl (1956) are particularly interested in what they name the ‘para-social interaction’ between television hosts or presenters of various sorts and physically absent viewers (see also Thompson, 1995, p. 84, for the derived concept of ‘mediated quasi-interaction’; and Jensen, 1999, p. 182, who prefers the term ‘social para-interaction’). They note that the performances of television ‘personalities’ often include looking straight to camera and speaking to viewers as if they were talking sociably with acquaintances or even friends:

One of the striking characteristics of the new mass media ... is that they give the illusion of face-to-face relationship with the performer. The conditions of response to the performer are analogous to those in a primary group. ... In television, especially, the image which is presented makes available nuances of appearance and gesture to which ordinary social perception is attentive and to which interaction is cued. Sometimes the ‘actor’ ... uses the mode of direct address, talks as if conversing personally and privately. ... The audience, for its part ... is, as it were, subtly insinuated into the program’s action and ... observes and participates in the show by turns. ... This simulacrum of conversational give and take may be called para-social interaction.

(Horton and Wohl, 1956, p. 215)

As Meyrowitz (1985, p. 121) comments, this is ‘a new form of interaction’ when considered in broad historical terms, and yet, as Horton and Wohl indicate here, it clearly resembles certain features of face-to-face interaction in ‘a primary group’ (that is, in physically co-present interpersonal encounters). Although performers and viewers are physically separated, there can be a ‘simulacrum of conversational give and take’. Of course, unlike a physically co-present, ‘face-to-face relationship’, the ‘para-social relationship’ (Horton and Wohl, 1956, p. 215) is a ‘non-reciprocal’ one, since it ‘does not involve the kind of reciprocity and mutuality characteristic of face-to-face interaction’ (Thompson, 1995, p. 219; see also Morgan, 2009, pp. 96–7). However, viewers may develop, over time, a sense of ‘acquaintanceship’, or possibly of ‘friendship’ and ‘intimacy’, with television personalities and with other public figures or ‘celebrities’ who make frequent media appearances. According to Meyrowitz (1985, p. 120), the para-social relationship can become knotted into ‘daily ... interactions with friends, family, and associates’ in physical settings, such as when, for instance, people ‘discuss the antics of their para-social friends’.
A valid objection to these claims about para-social interaction that are made by Horton and Wohl, and echoed by Meyrowitz, would be that they are not backed up with any evidence generated by concrete empirical research. Horton and Wohl state confidently that viewers are ‘subtly insinuated into the program’s action’, but, while they provide a valuable analysis of on-screen performance styles, no ‘audience research’ findings are actually presented (although see the findings reported by Gauntlett and Hill, 1999, pp. 115–16; and especially by Wood, 2007, 2009). In the case of Meyrowitz’s book, there are at least some persuasive reflections, which relate partly to his personal experience of intimacy at a distance, on ‘why it is that when a “media friend” such as Elvis Presley, John Kennedy, or John Lennon dies or is killed, millions of people may experience a sense of loss’ (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 120). For example, Meyrowitz (ibid., p. 120) notes that ‘the death of John Lennon ... was strangely painful to me and my university colleagues’, precisely because they felt they ‘had “known” him and grown up “with” him’. More recent examples of this kind of ‘grief’ are the public responses to the murder of BBC newsreader, Jill Dando, and, on a much larger scale, to the unexpected death of Princess Diana, which I will be discussing later in this chapter with reference to research findings that are reported by Robert Turnock (2000).

A Placeless Culture

Thus far, what I have called my ‘sympathetic critique’ of No Sense of Place has been more sympathetic to Meyrowitz’s book than critical of it. I find his weaving of different theoretical strands and the resulting, integrative model to be of continuing importance for media studies, and, more generally, for the investigation of contemporary living. In particular, I welcome the connection that he makes there between social interactions and experiences in both physical and media environments, because it helps to indicate the ways in which media use can ‘“double” reality’ (Scannell, 1996, p. 173). However, there are other aspects of Meyrowitz’s book that I find less convincing, and these relate mainly to his assertions about place and ‘placelessness’. Up to this point in my discussion of his work, I have deliberately avoided any direct references to place, but I want to focus my critical attention now on Meyrowitz’s no-sense-of-place thesis, looking in detail over the coming pages at his argument about electronic media and the emergence of ‘a “placeless” culture’ (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 8).
In *No Sense of Place*, the term ‘place’ is used to refer to ‘both social position and physical location’ (ibid., p. 308). When defining place as ‘social position’, Meyrowitz (ibid.) is thinking about the ‘social roles’ that people play, and about related issues of social identity and hierarchy (what he calls issues of ‘social “place”’). When defining place as ‘physical location’, he is thinking about those interactional environments of immediate physical presence that have been of interest to situationist sociology (issues of ‘physical place’). Pulling together these two definitions of the term, Meyrowitz (ibid.) states, with regard to his own national context, that:

Evolution in media … has changed the … social order by restructuring the relationship between physical place and social place … electronic media, especially television, have had a tremendous impact on Americans’ sense of place. … Many … no longer seem to ‘know their place’ because the traditional interlocking components of ‘place’ have been split apart by electronic media. Wherever one is now – at home, at work, or in a car – one may be in touch and tuned-in. The greatest impact has been on social groups that were once defined in terms of their physical isolation in specific locations – kitchens, playgrounds, prisons … and so forth. But the changing relationship between physical and social place has affected almost every social role. Our world … for the first time in modern history … is relatively placeless.

This is a lengthy quote, and it requires some unpacking in order to get at what Meyrowitz is arguing here about place and placelessness. His fundamental point is that social positions change when electronic media ‘override the boundaries’ of physical locations. People have traditionally come to ‘know their place’, he argues, by playing particular social roles in particular interactional environments that are ‘defined by walls’. These are ‘the traditional interlocking components of place’. When ‘patterns of access to information’ are altered and new interactional environments are formed, so, from Meyrowitz’s perspective, the ‘social order’ is transformed. He therefore sees identities and hierarchies shifting in what he labels the ‘electronic society’ (ibid., p. 339).

Two of Meyrowitz’s main examples of change are indicated by his mentioning of ‘kitchens’ and ‘playgrounds’ (I will turn shortly to ‘prisons’, the third of the ‘specific locations’ that he mentions in the quote). Meyrowitz (ibid., p. 224) claims, then, that the arrival of television and other electronic media in the household ‘liberates women’ from their
previous ‘informational confines’. Electronic media, he continues, ‘weaken the notion of men’s spheres and women’s spheres’ and tend to ‘foster a “situational androgyny”’ (ibid., pp. 224–5). Similarly, he (ibid., p. 226) proposes that there is a ‘blurring of childhood and adulthood’ in contemporary society. He observes that television ‘now escorts children across the globe even before they have permission to cross the street’ (ibid., p. 238; and note that this is another hint at the importance of technologically mediated mobility or travel). As a consequence, according to Meyrowitz (ibid., p. 163), the social identities of children, and relations between children and adults, have shifted:

Once, teachers and parents had nearly absolute control over the general social information available to the young child. This gave the process of socialization many aspects of hierarchy. Now these authorities are often ... in the position of explaining or responding to social information available directly to children through television.

A further main example offered by Meyrowitz (ibid., p. 168) is the changing relationship between American political leaders and ‘the people’: ‘Through television, “the people” now have more access to the personal expressive behaviors of leaders than leaders have to the personal behaviors of the people.’ As John Thompson (1995, pp. 140–1) writes, this ‘mediated visibility’ is a ‘double-edged sword’ for political leaders, bringing ‘new opportunities’ to reach viewers and potential voters, but bringing ‘new risks’ as well, and a ‘new and distinctive kind of fragility’ (see also Thompson, 2000, for an analysis of ‘political scandal’, in which he discusses the case of a sex scandal that involved President Clinton). For Meyrowitz, such ‘fragility’ is bound up with a broader questioning of authority in the age of electronic media.

So what problems might there be with Meyrowitz’s understanding of place and with his argument that contemporary existence is increasingly placeless? From my perspective, there are five interconnected difficulties.

First, although Meyrowitz’s observations on place as social position (on a transformation of the social order) do contain valuable insights, he tends to overestimate the degree of social change that has occurred. A good illustration of this overestimation is provided by his claim that: ‘A telephone or computer in a ghetto tenement or in a suburban teenager’s bedroom is potentially as effective as a telephone or computer in a corporate suite’ (Meyrowitz, 1985, pp. 169–70). This claim clearly relates to his general contention that ‘one may be in

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touch’ in any location. Still, without wanting to underestimate the
creative ingenuity of those living in ghetto tenements and suburban
bedrooms, I doubt whether access to electronic media could, in itself,
bring them social equality with corporate executives. Citing this partic-
ular claim of Meyrowitz’s, Andrew Leyshon (1995, p. 33) is quite right
to ask if technologically mediated communications are ‘really as effec-
tive’ for them ‘in the way that Meyrowitz suggests’: ‘while the inner-city
resident, the suburban teenager and the corporate executive may all be
able to telephone a bank ... they would not all necessarily enjoy the
privilege of being granted an audience with the bank manager’.

Second, Meyrowitz’s account of social change is too much centred on
media (a problem that, as a second-generation medium theorist, he
inherits from McLuhan, whose account of human history is highly
media-centric). While Meyrowitz (1985, p. 307) acknowledges in pass-
ing that ‘change is always too complex to attribute to a single cause’, his
book seems to regard an ‘evolution’ in media as the principal motor of
history. Initially, my criticism may appear to be an unusual one,
because, like Meyrowitz, I am based in the broad field of media studies,
and it might be assumed that anyone working in this field would auto-
matically put media at the centre of their analyses. There is a difference,
though, between studies that are ‘media-oriented’ and those that are
‘media-centered’ (Couldry, 2006, p. 13) in their investigations and
explanations of social life. I think of my own work as falling into the
former category. Of course, an appreciation of the distinctive features
and affordances of media technologies within ‘material culture’ (Miller,
2010) is absolutely crucial, and I have a longstanding interest in study-
ing everyday media uses (for example, see Moores, 2000), yet I firmly
believe that these uses are best investigated in context, alongside other
everyday practices and within wider social processes. I reject the sort of
media-centric accounts that are found not only in medium theory but
also in some areas of mainstream media theory. Indeed, David Morley
(2007, p. 200) refers to my last book (Moores, 2005) as an instance of
‘non-mediacentric ... media studies’ (and the conclusion to my present
book will extend this discussion of a non-media-centric approach).

Third, Meyrowitz’s book tends to underestimate the ongoing signifi-
cance of physical location. Scannell (1996, p. 141) points out that, given
Meyrowitz’s interest in television as a medium of communication, he
has very little to say about ‘the studio’ as an important site for broad-
casting. What I want to recall, though, is Meyrowitz’s remark about
‘physical isolation in specific locations’, and here I come to the exam-
ple that he gives of prisons and their inmates:
The social meaning of a ‘prison’ ... has been changed as a result of electronic media of communication. ... The placement of prisoners in a secure, isolated location once led to both physical and informational separation from society. Today, however, many prisoners share with the larger society the privileges of radio, television, and telephone. ... For better or worse, those prisoners with access to electronic media are no longer completely segregated ... use of electronic media has led to a redefinition of the nature of ‘imprisonment’.

(Meyrowitz, 1985, pp. 117–18)

While it is true that many prisoners now have (limited) access to social information through electronic media, it strikes me that this is a rather strange example of the supposedly decreased significance of physical location in a ‘relatively placeless’ contemporary world. To state the obvious, prisoners remain under lock and key when they are accessing these technologies, and any minor ‘redefinition of the nature of “imprisonment”’ cannot hide the major fact that few people would ever choose to live in prison, precisely because it is a site of enforced ‘physical isolation’ from ‘the larger society’. As Meyrowitz (ibid., p. 312) eventually concedes, ‘regardless of media access, living in a ... prison cell ... and a middle class suburb are certainly not “equivalent” social experiences’. Interestingly, in his more recent work, he seems to alter his stance on place as physical location, admitting that ‘the significance of locality persists even in the face of massive ... technological changes’ (Meyrowitz, 2005, p. 21) and suggesting that electronically mediated communication ‘may even enhance some aspects of connection to physical location’ (ibid., p. 26). He argues that as the ‘community of interaction’ becomes a more ‘mobile phenomenon’ for many people, so choices about ‘places to live’ could well be of greater importance today: ‘We increasingly choose our localities ... in terms of such variables as weather, architecture, quality of schools, density of population ... even “love at first sight”’ (ibid.).

Fourth, continuing with the theme of place and location, might it not be possible and preferable to think of media settings or environments as ‘places’ of a sort, rather than equating the arrival of electronic media with the emergence of a placeless culture? There are odd occasions on which Meyrowitz does employ the term ‘place’ in this way. For example, early on in his book, he writes of how electronic media are ‘bringing many different types of people to the same “place”’ (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 6; see also Adams, 1992, on television as ‘gathering place’). This use of the word is compatible with Scannell’s notes on the doubling of place, which I will be discussing in the next section of
the chapter. Drawing on Scannell’s book, *Radio, Television and Modern Life: A Phenomenological Approach* (1996), I want to argue that place, far from being marginalised, is instantaneously ‘pluralised’ in electronic media use. Indeed, this argument is, in my view, entirely compatible with Meyrowitz’s own notes on the overlapping of physical settings and media settings.

Finally in this section, I want to signal what I see as a fifth difficulty with Meyrowitz’s understanding of place, and it is a criticism that also applies, to some extent, to Scannell’s employment of the term. The problem here is that it is not enough to conceptualise place as location, setting or environment (or even as social position). There is something more to place, and that something has to do with matters of ‘dwelling’ or ‘habitation’, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. For now, having mentioned those matters very briefly, let me leave this point undeveloped, because before I can deal with dwelling I need to extend my previous point about a ‘pluralisation’ of place.

**The Doubling of Place**

There are a number of similarities between the perspectives of Meyrowitz (1985) and Scannell (1996). Although Scannell does not cite McLuhan in his book, he shares with Meyrowitz an interest in the changing temporal and spatial arrangements of social life (see also Scannell, 2007, pp. 129–36, for his later assessment of McLuhan’s medium theory). In addition, there is implicit agreement between them that media have an ‘environmental’ quality, since Scannell (1996, p. 8) writes of broadcasting’s programme output that ‘we find our way about in it’ (I will be returning, later in the book, to the significance of knowing and finding ‘our way about in’ environments). Furthermore, Scannell’s conceptual reference points do include Goffman’s sociology, as well as other work in the tradition of micro-social theory (for example, in the areas known as ‘ethnomethodology’ and ‘conversation analysis’) where there is a persistent concern with the ‘conditions of the intelligibility of the social practices of everyday existence’ (ibid., p. 4). Other similarities between their perspectives include a shared interest in the ‘sociable’ features of electronically mediated encounters, and a common belief that media can be a democratising force in the contemporary world (but see Morley, 2000, pp. 108–12, for a critique of Scannell’s position on ‘sociability’, in which Morley emphasises issues of social inequality and exclusion).
There are also notable differences between the views that Meyrowitz and Scannell have of electronic media (in Scannell’s case, it is a perspective on the media of radio and television). One of these differences has to do with Scannell’s ‘phenomenological approach’ to broadcasting, and, in particular, his engagement with some of Martin Heidegger’s philosophical writings (see especially Heidegger, 1962). Meyrowitz refers in passing to sociologists who have been influenced, directly or indirectly, by phenomenological philosophy (Schutz, 1967; Garfinkel, 1984 [1967]; Berger and Luckmann, 1991 [1966]), positioning their work within the situationist tradition. However, phenomenology is not as central to his analytical framework as it is to Scannell’s (see also Scannell, 1995). Scannell (1996, p. 149) identifies the ‘dailiness’ of broadcasting as its main ‘organizing principle’, and, drawing on Heideggerian terminology, he regards radio and television as ‘equipment’ providing ‘an all-day everyday service that is ready-to-hand and available always anytime at the turn of a switch or the press of a button’ (ibid., pp. 145–6; and see Blattner, 2006, pp. 49–52, for a helpful introductory commentary on Heidegger’s notes on ‘dealings’ with equipment and on ‘readiness-to-hand’ in everyday living, in which Blattner considers the example of turning on music to listen to in his living room).

Interestingly, Heidegger’s book, Being and Time (1962), which was originally published in German in the 1920s, includes a brief reflection on broadcasting. This is in the context of a wider philosophical discussion of what he calls ‘the spatiality of being-in-the-world’ (ibid., p. 138). There, Heidegger (ibid., p. 140) sees the newly arrived medium of radio as part of a ‘push … towards the conquest of remoteness’ in contemporary society. Pursuing this line of thought, Scannell (1996, p. 173) explores the implications of radio and television use for listeners’ and viewers’ ‘ways of being in the world’, grounding his analysis in a social history of British broadcasting (Scannell’s Radio, Television and Modern Life contains a fair amount of historical material, although the larger context for his analysis is furnished by an earlier, co-authored book on the history of the BBC, see Scannell and Cardiff, 1991).

The most notable difference between the perspectives of Meyrowitz and Scannell arises out of the latter theorist’s exploration of changed ‘ways of being’, and it is here that I come to the doubling-of-place idea as an alternative to the no-sense-of-place thesis. Scannell (1996, p. 91) proposes that radio and television provide listeners and viewers with the ‘magical’ possibility ‘of being in two places at once’. Broadcasting permits a witnessing of remote happenings that can take listeners and
viewers as ‘close’ to those happenings, experientially, as they are to the goings-on in their physical environments. To repeat Heidegger’s phrase, this is an element of ‘the conquest of remoteness’. Things that were formerly ‘far away’ have become ‘graspable’ (ibid., p. 90). Indeed, in a striking parallel with Meyrowitz’s remarks about the situational geography of social life, Scannell (ibid., p. 89) himself refers to the changing ‘geography’ of ‘proximal experience’ (more recently, another theorist to write on ‘geographies of media and communication’ is Adams, 2009, p. 185, who realises like Scannell that media, by ‘bringing more places within the range of the senses’, are enabling their users to ‘“violate” the constraint that one can only be one place at a time’).

Initially, the idea of doubling is developed in a chapter of Scannell’s book that is concerned with broadcasting’s occasional ‘eventfulness’. Eventful occasions ‘show up’, as he puts it, against the ‘backdrop’ of ‘broadcasting’s daily output’ (Scannell, 1996, p. 91). In a way that is usually anticipated and planned for, but sometimes unexpected, they punctuate the ordinary, largely uneventful character of radio and television in everyday living (see also Scannell, 1995; and Dayan and Katz, 1992, p. 5, who define ‘media events’ precisely as ‘interruptions of routine’ that ‘intervene in the normal flow of broadcasting and our lives’). Scannell (1996, p. 84) sees, too, that in the ‘broadcast coverage’ of such an occasion:

The liveness … is the key to its impact, since it offers the real sense of access to an event in its moment-by-moment unfolding. This presencing, this re-presenting of a present occasion to an absent audience, can … produce the effect of being-there, of being involved (caught up) in the here-and-now of the occasion.

Scannell’s main examples of the coverage of eventful occasions are of BBC ‘outside broadcasts’ from British royal and state occasions, although he also points to the live coverage of major sports events (big football matches, horse races, tennis tournaments and so on), which form a part of the established ‘broadcast year’ or ‘calendar’ (ibid., p. 154). In fact, he ends the chapter on eventfulness with a highly personal account of his recollection of watching the climax of a golf tournament on television: ‘Lyle holed out and became the first British golfer to win The Masters. I can see it, feel it, I am there, now, as I write. … It was an experience that I still own’ (ibid., pp. 91–2).

Of course, there are significant differences between being physically present at an eventful occasion and ‘being involved’ or ‘caught up’ in
an occasion as a television viewer. If these kinds of experience were exactly the same, then it would be difficult to explain why some people make a physical journey to ‘be there’ (even though, particularly in the case of sports events, they might well witness more of the action at home on television, see Brown, 1998). Still, Scannell’s point is that there are effectively two events: ‘there is the event-in-situ, and (at the same time) the event-as-broadcast’ (Scannell, 1996, p. 79). He observes that:

Public events now occur, simultaneously, in two different places: the place of the event itself and that in which it is watched and heard. Broadcasting mediates between these two sites. Events in public thus assume a degree of phenomenal complexity they did not hitherto possess.

(ibid., p. 76)

Given the ‘phenomenal complexity’ of this doubling of place, Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (1992) ask whether it is appropriate to continue to think of events as wholly ‘public’ when they now ‘take place’, at least partly, in the ‘private sphere’. These authors proceed to answer their own question by arguing that it is appropriate, because ‘small groups congregated around the television set’ are ‘keenly aware that myriad other groups are doing likewise’ (ibid., p. 146).

Having focused here on the way in which Scannell’s idea of doubling is developed in his analysis of eventful occasions, I want to stress that there is no need to restrict its application to the study of eventfulness. What he calls the ‘magic’ of doubling is bound up more generally with ‘the liveness of radio and television’ that is also a part of broadcasting’s dailiness, and, even in cases where programmes are routinely pre-recorded prior to the moment of their transmission, it remains a fundamental goal of the broadcasters to create a sense of temporal immediacy: ‘the phenomenal now of broadcasting’ (Scannell, 1996, p. 172). Indeed, I want to suggest that there is no need to restrict the use of his doubling-of-place idea to radio and television alone. It could be applied more widely, especially in studies of other electronic media, which share with broadcasting a capacity for ‘liveness’. Clearly, there are important differences between radio, television, telephones and computers (despite the trend towards technological ‘convergence’), yet these media of communication all ‘afford’ an instantaneous pluralisation of place.
As If We Knew Her Personally

In this section of my chapter and the two that follow it, I will be pursuing the argument about a doubling of place, making reference to some further examples. For now, my discussion remains focused on broadcasting (and also on eventfulness), but I will turn soon to other forms of electronically mediated communication in contexts of everyday living. Earlier in the chapter, I cited Turnock (2000), promising to come back to his work in due course. The moment to consider the research findings reported in his book has arrived, and it allows me to come back, too, to Horton and Wohl’s concepts of the para-social relationship and mediated intimacy at a distance (Horton and Wohl, 1956).

Turnock's book presents an analysis of close to 300 solicited accounts, which were written by UK television viewers in the period shortly after the unexpected death of Princess Diana in 1997. These accounts describe viewers’ personal experiences over the course of a week, starting with the breaking story of the car crash in which she died and finishing with the coverage of her funeral. As Turnock (2000, p. 4) states clearly at the outset, his book does not claim ‘representativeness of a wider UK public’, and he acknowledges that in the sample there was ‘a bias towards an older, more middle-class demographic’ as well as ‘towards women’. However, as his analysis highlights, there is some fascinating empirical research material there on emotions following Princess Diana’s death.

Turnock (ibid., pp. 13–14) observes that, as the story broke on UK television: ‘Normal scheduling on the two main terrestrial channels ... was abandoned and the day was given over to live and continuous news. ... The non-stop coverage on BBC1 finally ended at 12.30am the following morning.’ As with the eventful happenings of ‘9/11’, just a few years later in 2001, the dailiness of broadcasting was unexpectedly disturbed (there was an abrupt interruption of routines). This disturbance or interruption intervened not only in ‘the normal flow of broadcasting’ but also in the flow of ordinary ‘lives’ (see Dayan and Katz, 1992, p. 5). For instance, one of the accounts quoted in Turnock (2000, p. 29) reads: ‘We spent the whole day in the living room watching the news from 9.20am till 10.30pm. No one got dressed and everyone cried – even my Dad.’

The first kind of para-social relationship that Turnock deals with in his book, as he discusses people’s accounts of the breaking story, is in the mediated quasi-interaction between newsreaders and viewers. He refers to one of the viewers who had sat through the ‘live and continuous
news’, and who wrote of a particular BBC newsreader that ‘he was there, serious, dependable ... I felt I needed him ... needed the television to stay with us all day’ (ibid., p. 15). This is an example of what Turnock (ibid., p. 14) terms ‘television as comforter’ (even as the medium delivers troubling news from afar). Echoing Horton and Wohl’s analysis, Turnock (ibid., p. 19) notes that ‘the face-to-camera address of the news presenter re-creates that ... important social experience – the face-to-face encounter’, and he goes on to suggest that newsreaders can come to be regarded by some viewers as ‘trusted friends’ (this clearly echoes Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 120, on ‘para-social friends’).

In these eventful circumstances, the other non-reciprocal relationship of intimacy at a distance was, of course, the emotional connection with Princess Diana experienced by those viewers who mourned her death. Turnock (2000, p. 35) asks the key question here: ‘How is it possible to grieve over someone that you have never met?’ The answer is to be found in extracts from the written accounts such as ‘we knew so much about this woman and had seen so much of her that it was as if we knew her personally’, and: ‘She had seemed so much part of our lives for almost 20 years ... I have to admit feeling quite a profound sense of loss’ (ibid., p. 47). Although it was rare for Princess Diana to look straight to the television camera and use ‘the mode of direct address’ (Horton and Wohl, 1956, p. 215) as presenters do, she made frequent media appearances during the period following her engagement to Prince Charles (Dayan and Katz, 1992, take the live broadcast coverage of the wedding as one of their case studies). She came to occupy an extraordinary social position through her marriage into the British royal family, and yet, in media settings, she often gave a ‘performance of “ordinariness”’ (Couldry, 2001, p. 231). According to Turnock (2000, p. 47), then, ‘Diana was very much like a regular cast member in a television serial’, who offered ‘melodramatic identifications’ (Ang, 1996 [1990]) to viewers as she went through the ‘ups and downs’ (Turnock, 2000, p. 45) of life.

Let me come now to Turnock’s chapter on the funeral, because the following account from a viewer provides a clear illustration of what Scannell (1996) calls the doubling of place:

My family and I watched the entire funeral. My husband has his own business, but he was shut for the day as a mark of respect ... we just felt it was the appropriate thing to do. At times it was difficult because we have a thirteen-month-old baby and sometimes he got bored, so we took it in turns to entertain him. We watched BBC1 until she reached her final resting place around 2.15 pm. We stayed
at home in our breakfast room, drinking tea and crying. It did not feel right to go out on such a sad day.

(Turnock, 2000, p. 99)

Once again, as with the household that ‘spent the whole day … watching the news’ a few days earlier, there is the strong sense of a break with routine. The husband’s business is ‘shut for the day’, the family stays in the ‘breakfast room’ until well into the afternoon, and nobody goes out of the house. Once again, too, there are tears shed (melodramatic identifications are experienced corporeally and affectively), suggesting the ‘profound sense of loss’. Crucially, though, there is a dual sense of being involved or caught up in the remote happenings, ‘until she reached her final resting place’, while also congregating in a small group ‘around the television set’, in a domestic context with its associated distractions (entertaining a child).

There are two final, brief points that I want to make in this section. The first of these has to do with what Scannell terms the phenomenal complexity of public events today. The complexity that he was referring to is in the simultaneous existence of ‘the event-in-situ’ and ‘the event-as-broadcast’ (Scannell, 1996, p. 79), with the event-as-broadcast being experienced by ‘myriad … groups’ (Dayan and Katz, 1992, p. 146) across dispersed sites of use. In the case of Princess Diana’s funeral, though, things are more complex still, because those mourners who had travelled to central London to gather in large numbers outside Westminster Abbey (the location for the event-in-situ) were able to watch the service being relayed live on outdoor screens. This rather peculiar ‘mixture of different forms of interaction’ (Thompson, 1995, p. 85) involved an element of physically ‘being there’, locally co-present with others in a crowd, but it also involved the electronically mediated communication of a television broadcast. My second point here is concerned with the geographical scale of the event-as-broadcast. Although the empirical research material analysed by Turnock came solely from the UK, and while Scannell’s main examples of eventful occasions are national ones, coverage of Princess Diana’s funeral had a transnational reach (for a fuller consideration of ‘media events in a global age’, see Couldry et al., 2010). For example, Jean Duruz and Carol Johnson (1999) discuss what they call ‘mourning at a distance’ in Australia, referring to reports of empty Melbourne nightclubs at the time that the funeral was broadcast live. Interestingly, they also quote an Australian journalist who wrote of Princess Diana: ‘I didn’t know her … but like the rest of the world I felt I did’ (ibid., p. 149).
There Are Two Therbes There

In this section, I discuss the doubling or pluralisation of place in electronically mediated communications via the telephone, and my main example here concerns mobile-phone use. There is now a sizeable body of academic literature on the mobile phone, sometimes called the ‘cell phone’ (for instance, Katz and Aakhus, 2002; Ling, 2004; Nyíri, 2005; Goggin, 2006; Horst and Miller, 2006; Katz, 2006; Castells et al., 2007; Goggin, 2008; Green and Haddon, 2009; Ling and Donner, 2009), and many authors have discussed the implications of mobile-phone use for the temporal and spatial organisation of everyday living. For example, Rich Ling’s work addresses, among other things, a transformation that he terms the ‘softening of schedules’ (Ling, 2004, pp. 73–6), exploring the ‘micro-coordination’ of physical movements and ‘daily interactions’ by mobile-phone users (see especially Ling and Donner, 2009, pp. 91–4). The focus of my discussion, though, will be on an illustration of doubling that appears in the work of a micro-social theorist and conversation analyst, Emanuel Schegloff (2002).

Schegloff (ibid., pp. 285–6) offers the following story, which is ‘set’ on a train carriage in New York and also, to be precise, in a media environment of ‘talk-in-interaction’:

A young woman is talking on the cell phone, apparently to her boyfriend, with whom she is in something of a crisis. Her voice projects in far-from-dulcet tones. Most of the passengers take up a physical and postural stance of busying themselves with other foci of attention (their reading matter, the scene passing by the train’s windows, etc.), busy doing ‘not overhearing this conversation’ … except for one passenger. And when the protagonist of this tale has her eyes intersect this fellow-passenger’s gaze, she calls out in outraged protest, ‘Do you mind?! This is a private conversation!’

Although Schegloff (ibid.) does not cite Scannell’s work on broadcasting (I assume that he was unaware of it), there is a remarkable echo of the doubling-of-place idea in Schegloff’s own commentary on this story of mobile-phone use. The young woman who is ‘the protagonist of this tale’ is, in his words, ‘in two places at the same time – and the railroad car is only one of them’ (ibid., p. 286). ‘The other place that she is’, he explains, ‘is “on the telephone” … there are two “theres” there’ (ibid., pp. 286–7). Interestingly, when writing on the notion of being ‘in two places at the same time’, he also points to the ‘two “theres” there’ in
everyday uses of small, portable music players such as the ‘Walkman’, where an individual is simultaneously moving around ‘in public places – on campus, in buses … on sidewalks’ and ‘in an auditory environment pulsating with sounds’ (ibid.; and for empirical research findings on ‘personal stereo’ and ‘iPod’ use in urban environments, see especially Bull, 2000, 2007).

The tale that Schegloff tells is one in which there are plural and competing ‘definitions of situations’ (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 24). There is intended humour in the story, and this relates to the young woman’s insistence that she is having ‘a private conversation’ (an interpersonal encounter in a media setting), despite the fact that her ‘far-from-dulcet tones’ are clearly audible to other passengers in the train carriage (a physical setting shared with strangers). Still, Schegloff (2002, p. 286) acknowledges that the protagonist may, at least implicitly, ‘understand … “on the telephone” … to be a private place’, and he does identify reasons for her assertion to be supported: ‘this young woman is talking to her boyfriend, about intimate matters, in the usual conversational manner – except for the argumentative mode, and this also, perhaps especially, makes it a private conversation’. Indeed, that ‘definition of the situation’ is supported in a way by almost all of her fellow passengers. The carriage is ‘a place full of overhearers’, but they are ‘pretending not to hear’ (ibid.). They look down at their books, newspapers and magazines, or else out at ‘the scene passing by’, but above all they avoid any eye contact with the woman on the mobile phone. In ethnomethodological terms, they are, as Schegloff puts it, ‘doing’ not overhearing one side of the conversation. However, there is then the single passenger who refuses to accept this collaboratively performed pretence, perhaps as a result of being irritated by the intrusion of private talk into a public space. At the moment when that passenger’s gaze meets the look of the protagonist, the different situational definitions come into conflict with one another.

I like Schegloff’s story because it highlights a specific, evidently dramatic case of the overlapping or ‘intersection’ (ibid.) of physical and media environments (of what he calls the two ‘theres’ there). It helps to reinforce my more general argument, which has been progressively developed in this chapter, that analyses of social interactions and experiences in contemporary living need to be sensitive to such doublings and intersections. Another helpful illustration of the pluralising of settings in telephone use can be found in Deborah Cameron’s discussion of the labour that is performed in ‘call centres’ (Cameron, 2000). Her study brings home the importance of workplace contexts for what
is being said by the employees in their conversations with customers. These workers, then, are not simply ‘on the telephone’. There is an overlapping ‘there’, which is the social setting of the call centre, and in this context their performance is subject to various sorts of training, target-setting and surveillance (see also Aneesh, 2006, p. 93, for a further twist on call centres, since he considers the case of nightshift workers in India who are engaged in a ‘virtual migration’, talking ‘with friendly voices, American pseudonyms, and … an American accent’ to customers in the US).

Continuous Social Spaces

Finally in this chapter, I turn my attention to some academic literature on internet use that is also concerned with ‘intersecting’ environments in the changing situational geography of social life. A good example to start with here is the ‘ethnographic approach’ to the internet advocated by Daniel Miller and Don Slater (2000), an anthropologist and a sociologist respectively. They position their work within a second generation of internet research, distinguishing what they do from an ‘earlier generation of … writing that … focused on the way in which … new media seemed able to constitute spaces or places apart from the rest of social life’ (ibid., p. 4). Rather than thinking of online settings as having a kind of ‘self-enclosed cyberian apartness’, they choose, instead, to treat these media environments ‘as continuous with … other social spaces’ (ibid., p. 5). ‘That is to say’, explain Miller and Slater (ibid., p. 7), ‘these spaces are important as part of everyday life.’

In their own ethnographic research, Miller and Slater explore varied uses of the internet by people who are physically located on the Caribbean island of Trinidad. Reflecting on their findings, they note that:

The notion of cyberspace as a place apart from offline life would lead us to expect to observe a process in which participants are abstracted and distanced from local and embodied social relations, for example becoming less explicitly Trinidadian. We found utterly the opposite. Trinidadians … invest much energy in trying to make online life as Trinidadian as they can make it … a place to perform Trini-ness.

(ibid.)

For example, the researchers consider an everyday social activity known as ‘liming’. This word has traditionally been employed by Trinidadians
to describe a specific form of talk or ‘banter’ that is associated with ‘hanging out’ on the streetcorner or in the ‘rumshop’ (‘a local, down-market drinking place’), but Miller and Slater (ibid., p. 89) report that, in addition, ‘“liming” was the word ... used to describe chatting online’. Mediated encounters in certain internet ‘chat rooms’, then, have come ‘to be seen ... as liming extended to ... another social space’ (ibid.). Those ‘rooms’ are accessed, too, by Trinidadians who are physically absent from the island, living in other parts of the world (see also Miller, 2010, pp. 114–18, for a retrospective commentary on the work that he did with Slater on the ‘Trinidadian Internet’, in which Miller makes the further, valuable point that ‘being Trini’ is not simply a fixed category of identity that remains untouched by practices of internet use).

Of course, it is important to acknowledge that there are some internet users who do go online in order to experiment with their presentation of self in spaces they understand to be ‘apart from the rest of social life’ (a classic investigation of this sort of ‘identity play’ is Turkle, 1996a). However, even in such circumstances, ‘to the extent that some people may actually treat various Internet relations as “a world apart” ... this is something that needs to be socially explained’ (Miller and Slater, 2000, p. 5). It is therefore necessary to ask why an ‘escape’ from everyday living might be sought in the first instance, and how different online identities still relate in particular ways to offline selves (to be fair, Turkle is one of the earlier generation of internet researchers who looks to provide answers to these questions in her empirical case studies; see also Turkle, 1996b).

Sociologist Lori Kendall (2002) reports the findings of her ethnographic research on the users of an internet forum that she describes as a ‘virtual pub’, and while she points there to rare cases of online experimentation with identity (to playful ‘gender switching’, for example), she finds that, for the most part, the forum offers its participants ‘another social space’ (Miller and Slater, 2000, p. 89) into which they can extend their offline activities and interests. Much of the ‘talk’ in this forum, then, is between men who are employed in the computer industry in the US, and Kendall (2002, p. 73) observes that their online conversations often ‘revolve around computers, including discussions of new software, planned purchases, and technical advice’. Furthermore, there have been ‘informal offline gatherings’ of participants ‘in the San Francisco Bay Area and elsewhere’ (ibid., p. 19), some of which she attended as part of her ethnographic research, and regulars at those gatherings had knowledge of each other based on face-to-face meetings as well as on technologically mediated interactions.
I want to stress here that one of Kendall’s main concerns is precisely with the doublings and intersections of online and offline spaces. Like Miller and Slater, she is opposed to ‘viewing cyberspace as a separate sovereign world’ (ibid., p. 8) and she seeks to understand how users are ‘weaving online communications … into their existing offline lives’ (ibid., p. 16). Indeed, in the opening chapter of her book, she gives the following account of her own routine when logged onto the internet ‘for long periods’:

I frequently leave the computer to get food, go to the bathroom, or respond to someone in the physical room in which I’m sitting. If the text appearing on my screen slows to a crawl or the conversation ceases to interest me, I may cast about for something else offline to engage me.

(ibid., p. 7)

Kendall (ibid., pp. 7–8) proceeds to state that, although the virtual pub in her study ‘provides for me a feeling of being in a place, that place in some sense overlays … physical space’. She tells this rather mundane, personal story as a way of emphasising the point that no one ‘inhabits only cyberspace’ (ibid., p. 8), since there are always, simultaneously, ‘two … places’ in internet use.

Kendall’s personal story, which, if the word ‘computer’ was replaced by ‘TV’, could pass as an account of distracted, domestic television viewing (see Morley, 1986, 1992), connects well with the call from Miller and Slater (2000, p. 7) for the internet to be considered ‘as part of everyday life’. A similar call is made by Caroline Haythornthwaite and Barry Wellman (2002) in the introduction to their edited book, The Internet in Everyday Life (Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002). They describe that book as ‘a harbinger of a new way of thinking about the Internet: not as a special system but as routinely incorporated into everyday life’ (Haythornthwaite and Wellman, 2002, p. 6), and, positioning this work within the new generation of internet research, they look to distinguish it from what they call ‘the many books and articles about cyber-this and cyber-that’. Topics covered by their contributors include, for instance, the everyday practices of distance learners, ‘teleworkers’ and online shoppers.

A helpful way of theorising how media technologies are ‘routinely incorporated into everyday life’ is through the concept of ‘domestication’ (see especially Silverstone et al., 1992; Silverstone, 1994, p. 174; also Berker et al., 2006). I will bring the section and the chapter to a
close now by referring briefly to two ethnographic studies (Lally, 2002; Bakardjieva, 2005), carried out in Australia and Canada respectively, which have each employed this concept in analysing the uses of ‘home computers’ in household contexts. Elaine Lally’s analysis emerged out of her interviews and observations in over thirty computer-owning households in the Sydney area, and her main interest is in understanding how mass-produced commodities can come to be experienced as personal possessions as they get integrated into people’s domestic lives (Lally, 2002). She advances the argument that home computers, prior to the moment of purchase, have already been through a process of ‘predomestication’ (ibid., p. 54; see also Silverstone and Haddon, 1996) at the stages of design and advertising, as they get styled and marketed for household use. However, Lally’s focus is on the post-purchase integration of these commodities, via household members’ varied and sometimes contested ways of making themselves ‘at home’. It is through such a process that computers are ultimately ‘domesticated’. They are positioned within a ‘domestic ecology of objects’, becoming an element of ‘the familiarity … of the material environment’ (Lally, 2002, p. 169) in households (these themes of ‘familiarity’ and ‘at-homeness’ will be central to my discussion in the next chapter). Maria Bakardjieva (2005) presents related findings on the practices of ‘making room’ for home computers in everyday living. She refers, in a remarkably similar way, to the ‘integration of a new artefact into … the patterns of spatial differentiation in a household’ (ibid., p. 139). Offering detailed ethnographic portraits of selected people with domestic internet access in Vancouver, Bakardjieva (ibid., pp. 140–56) identifies several specific ways in which this social and spatial ‘integration of a new artefact’ is accomplished (see her accounts of ‘the wired basement’, ‘the family computer room’ and so on). In addition, her book contains interesting empirical research findings on users’ activities in those online environments that ‘overlay’ the physical settings of households. For example, she discusses the sociability of internet ‘chatting’ and participation in various ‘newsgroups’. Significantly, though, Bakardjieva seeks to contextualise her findings on ‘virtual togetherness’ by linking them to an understanding of people’s offline circumstances.
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