

IT-use in everyday life

From tool and media to life-world and being

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Abstract. During the last decade the use of information technology has become an important part in many people's everyday life. This IT-use is however so far not so well captured and understood. What are the meanings that people ascribe to IT in the context of their everyday life? In this paper we unfold the story of one person's IT-use and elaborate some potential meanings. The paper is grounded in the phenomenological tradition making the object of inquiry infinite and dynamic. Thus, the paper explores peoples' own experiences of IT-use in and investigates the potential of phenomenologically grounded research for deepening our understanding of the notion of IT-use. Following Linnea's experiences of her IT-use we find that her everyday life has increasingly taken a technological turn due to her IT-use. Regarding her IT-use from a tool or a media view can only to a limited extent capture Linnea's experiences of the meaning of her IT-use. Instead taken as an aspect of her life-world, new aspects of IT-use emerges, that deepens our understanding of the presence of information technology within the context of everyday life.

1 Introduction

The presence of information technology in peoples' everyday life has increased dramatically during the last decade. Internet, e-mail, interactive games and other virtual environments are becoming more and more a natural and intrinsic part of peoples' lives. Our use of information technology has however historically evolved from work-oriented practices and contexts, which has led to an understanding of information technology that is characterized by the work place and work related tasks.

Today when information technology moves into the context of peoples' everyday life – from the workplaces to entertainment, games and into peoples' homes – this understanding needs to be

modified. According to a recent report from the Swedish ICT-commission 3.6 million persons had Internet access in their homes in the year of 2000. In the same report Seipel and Marking (2002) concluded that there is no strong coherence between people's IT use at work and their use of IT in everyday life. Rather it seems that there are different motifs and rationality at stake. At work efficiency and utility are reported to be the major driving force whereas in everyday life different lifestyles, the need to be entertained and/or maintain and build social relations seems to be essential for the kind of use that are established.

Monteiro (1998:250) contend that one overall ambition in IS research is to develop concepts, theories and research methodologies that help unpack *how information technology comes into being in different social settings* (our emphasis). So far research regarding information technology has to a large extent focused on use and development of IT, in and around work related contexts with the foremost purpose of improving existing practices and techniques. Monteiro (ibid.) call on the IS research community to commence taking an interest in the ways in which IT comes into being in the everyday life. A focus on the everyday, he says '...encourage a richer and fuller grasp of human action – underscoring symbols, rituals, identity construction and values – than traditional, more functional explanations of purposeful work-oriented tasks' (ibid, p.251).

The spread of IT into the households has among other things been possible through the integration of information technology with more traditional communication media. It has also become common to make analogies and comparisons between information technology and media such as television, telephones and/or means of transportation. Numerous studies have successfully approached information technology using these kinds of analogies and been able illustrate and criticize the role of information technology in society.

However, through the comparison with previous technologies and media central aspects of IT-use is diminished, namely *its' potential to give meaning and information in new and concrete ways*. This aspect of IT-use is often characterized as sensuous, perceptual and/or experiential and is generally related to people's experiences in individual and existential contexts Davies 1999, Heim 1998, Laurel 1993 and Waterworth 1997. Goal, utility and efficiency are in these contexts seldom the primary aspects giving meaning to the IT-use in question. Rather participation, presence and exploration seem to be important when IT is used to explore different identities or creating communities, etceteras.

In this paper we explore meanings that are given to IT-use in the practice of everyday life and examine how such studies can be conducted. The notion of everyday life is evoked in this paper in order to distinguish the position of IT-use from organizational contexts in which the significance of IT-use has due to the character of organized behavior been given certain importance over time. With the notion of everyday life *the study is centered on the human beings that lives it* and the analytic power lies in its capacity to embrace diverse types of activity in multiple settings (Bakardijeva 2000:49). However in this particular study the everyday life is mostly conducted at the home of Linnea and we will in the paper that follows learn more about the meanings that she ascribes her IT-use.

2 Researching experiences of IT-use in everyday life

Researching IT-use in the practice of everyday life means embracing and appreciating the rich and many ways in which people relate and ascribe meaning to information technology. As such the notion of information technology as tools used to accomplish specific tasks is – at least initially – abandoned. What is searched for is instead the significance and meanings people ascribe to information technology in their ordinary life. The nature of this research is therefore by necessity qualitative. In this section we will explore some of the methodological considerations that such studies of IT-use take into account

The particular emphasis on meaning and experience has its roots within a phenomenological and philosophical framework. Inspired by the work of among others Don Ihde (1990, 2001), Andrew Feenberg (1999), Albert Borgmann (1996) and Heubert Dreyfus (2001) we have the ambition to examine the outgrowth, structure and constitution of meaning given to IT-use in everyday life settings. Our endeavor is, thus, to enfold *how* this use is experienced, rather than to give a full account for every aspect of IT-use.

According to Ihde (2000) the phenomenological standpoint formulates the object of study to be *peoples' experiences of something*. In our study this something is *IT-use in the particulars of everyday life*. Whether these experiences are representative for most everyday life user or not is not relevant in our view. Rather from a phenomenological standpoint all *possible* experiences are important and can deepen our understanding of people's IT-use. This standpoint creates an impossible challenge since every user's experience might make a difference but regarded as an attitude it creates an openness and endlessness towards a phenomena that are important during initial studies within this context.

Within the phenomenological tradition the experienced phenomena – in our case IT-use – is strongly related to *how* it is experienced. So, in order for phenomenologist to grasp the significance of a phenomenon (go back to the things-in-themselves) they start by examining *how* they are being experienced. At the heart lies the attempt to examine how people's natural attitude towards things comes about. But rather than making claims concerning objects as such, the relational character is taken into account. This attitude implies that an inquiry of IT-use in an everyday context can start anywhere within the realm of such experiences. Also, it is implied that what is to be considered an experience of IT-use by is established within the realm of experiencing

According to Bakarjieva (2000:49) both the notion of home and the notion everyday life are complex empirical and conceptual constructs. However, for a phenomenologist the notion of home and everyday life is made up of acting and thinking subject situated locally in an immediately experienced world (Ibid, p.89). The specifics of this study are made up of the empirical case of Linnea's IT-use in an everyday life setting. The story that we enfold is encompassed through a series of semi-structured interviews conducted at Linnea's home and through e-mail correspondence. These interviews have been combined with diary notes in which Linnea elaborates her IT-use. Since the objective has been to enfold Linnea's experiences we have been inspired by the work of Widerberg (1994) who have written and conducted qualitative research on experiences and meaning.

Also in the process of interpreting Linnea's IT-use we have followed Geertz's (1979) notion of *experience near* and *experience distant* interpretations. This interpretation schema is however modified to meet our phenomenological concern. Thus the experience near themes that are formulated relates to the *way* Linnea experience whereas the experience distant interpretations are attempted to conceptualize the essentials of IT-use that appear to be relational to those experiences. This paper is based on work in progress and both Linnea's experiences of her IT-use and our interpretations will probably be modified as additional steps are made by each of us.

3 An intriguing IT use

This section tells the story about, now days, an acquaintance relation to information technology. With take-off in the establishing of our relation and a fascination over her IT-use, we will gradually learn more about what role information technology plays in her everyday life.

3.1 A growing fascination

The story of this paper has its origins in the fascination by – initially – a causal acquaintance's technology use. It all started with the need for someone to transcribe a couple of interviews. Accordingly, contact was established with a person who was willing to give a hand in the time-consuming work. During approximately one year, files, tapes and other material related to the transcriptions were exchanged. What was striking during this period was the fact that the contact passed from being a complete anonymous person to someone who was known quite well. How this happened was not clear, but the use of information technology played an important part in the establishment of the relationship.

In the course of the exchanging material related to the transcribing work, frequent e-mail correspondence was necessary. It did not take long until the e-mails began to contain more than just information strictly related to the transcription assignment. For instance, web addresses were included, containing tests on typewriting skills, with a brief commentary on the importance to improve these skills in order uphold one's professionalism. The correspondence also tended to become more personal. One of the factors that contributed to the establishing of a relation was that she sent a confirmation request with her e-mails. This request triggered a demand to send a couple of lines back to show appreciation and support for her good performance. Further, as is normally done when corresponding with e-mail, additional information about for instance, what was going on at the office at the moment was included. This helped bring us closer.

When it after a while, was noticed that she replied every e-mail within a couple of minutes it was understood that she must have a good Internet access and also, an almost constant nearness to the computer. Otherwise, how would it be possible to answer e-mails so quickly every time? At the time when the transcribing assignments began to run short, an e-mail was sent to conclude her work. For the first time, she did not answer. Almost one week passed and it was suspected that something had happened. The suspicions proved to be right. After a phone call it was learned that there was a temporary problem with her e-mail address. She immediately referred to an alternative address where she was to be reached in spite of the problems.

At this time her IT-use seemed really puzzling or perhaps rather, interesting. What kind of life was she living, what was an ordinary day in her life like? What did her relation to information technology look like, what place did it have in her life? Based on own relation to computers, it was hard to understand what was going on, it appeared quite intriguing too. The fascination led to a first meeting where these matters could be talked about.

3.2 The Linnea case

Linnea – a young woman in the middle of her thirties lives in a centrally located residence in an average sized Swedish town together with her teenage daughter, her dog and the cat. During the last two and half years, Linnea has been sick-listed from her job as a secretary. This one could believe, may have influenced her in negative ways. It is for instance close at hand to imagine her being away ill for several years could have made her, like so many others who ends up in a similar situation as hers, somewhat passive or perhaps even depressed. However, with Linnea it is quite the opposite. She is a generous and humorous person with a happy laughter always at hand. To that, add a major power of initiative. Besides maintaining a considerable circle of friends, Linnea is highly active within a Scandinavian networking organization within which she acts as a dealer as well as helping others who has a potential interest as retailers in the company. This takes up a lot of her time. Linnea's power of initiative can also be expressed through the way which she has formed her life while reporting sick. In a number of ingenious ways she has, together with information technology, formed herself a new everyday life. We are now about to learn more about how this is manifested.

3.3 An ordinary day

Roughly at the same time as Linnea got sick-listed broadband was installed in her residential area. This made her able to be online on the Internet as many hours a day as she wished for. The cheap and fast online access in combination of her being on the sick list came to change a great deal in her everyday life. The remaining part of this subsection will be spent for finding out about what an ordinary day in Linnea's life is like. The account of the circumstances is based on an interview as well as on diary notes that she has been asked to keep.

At nine o'clock am as the alarm clock ring, the premier thing on Linnea's agenda is to get up and turn on the computer. Linnea is anxious to see if there is any new e-mail since last night. "I am so curious, I just have to check my inbox." Simultaneously as she prepares the breakfast she activates the e-mail program, a web browser and her ICQ-program. It is important that these programs are activated in time for breakfast. The meal is enjoyed in front of the screen where she replies a couple of e-mails and skim through a net-based newspaper. Around 9.45 as breakfast is concluded, it is time to take the dog for a walk.

At approximately eleven am, Linnea gets back to the flat and as the dog is properly exercised, she gets to work on the newly incoming e-mails. Carefully she goes through all e-mails and answers them in turn. Concurrently she handles the ICQ-program. The ICQ-messages are pouring in constantly. A lot of people are online during the day and active contacts on her ICQ-member list. The majority of Linnea's contacts are people from the networking organization. These people are mainly those who she counts as members of her current circle of acquaintances. I deliberately expressed it as "current acquaintances" due to her habit of weeding out people from her circle. Her interests in people who do not contribute in any way are rather limited. However, all of the contacts from the networking

organization cannot be dealt with via the Internet as some of them do not have access to computers. Thus, they are still welcome as her friends – if they are pleasant. But, as she says a little playful, they have to be really nice.

There is a lot work joined with maintaining all her ICQ-contacts at the same time as she reads and writes e-mails. As a result, it can sometimes be quite stressful and tiring. To be able to notice all incoming e-mail and ICQ-messages wherever she is at present in the flat – Linnea does not sit still all the time – the indicator peep is turned up high. This contributes to the stressfulness. Sometimes when it gets too much, when “the pulse is getting high and it peeps from allover the place”, she has to turn down the sound level to be able to relax. Nevertheless, she does find the ICQ quite convenient. For example, some of the contacts that she earlier handled by phone are now days taken care of via the ICQ. Instead of lifting the receiver and call for company while walking the dog, Linnea can now days use her ICQ-program to reach the person concerned.

Up until three o'clock Linnea more or less spends the day doing various things in front of her computer screen. For instance, she helps other ICQ candidates to download and register as ICQ-members or reads net-based newspapers. While reading the paper she now and then came across various things that catches her attention. It can be a question of contacting a politician via e-mail or for instance, to attend various web based investigations. Further, she also visits web pages on the Internet where she can chat with people. These activities generate a lot of new contacts. “One can get together with and get to know a lot of people everywhere – if one wants to.” Perhaps not very surprisingly, Linnea describe her computer as a contact machine and a working tool.

The majority of all people she establishes contacts with are maintained via the Internet. For instance, the day before the interview Linnea had visited and registered as a member on a new web site – “the wild web”. After only three hours on the web, this had generated about one hundred visitors on her personal web site related to the wild web and also, more than 180 e-mails in her e-mail inbox. In time for the interview, she was in the process of answering all these e-mails. “I want to be good and answer all e-mails. I do not want anyone to think that I do not care”. Nevertheless, Linnea is strict about not to visiting people who she meets on the Internet in real life. Earlier, at a couple of times Linnea has tried this. However, based on these mediocre experiences she is now days content with maintaining the contacts exclusively via the Internet. At about three o'clock Linnea takes the dog for a second walk.

The remaining part of the afternoon is spent in front of the screen as well as together with her daughter, which has returned from school. Linnea continues chatting with people on the wild web and the ICQ and also, she continues her e-mail correspondences. The dinner is prepared simultaneously as she runs back and forth between the kitchen and the computer. As the computer has a central location in her living room, it is possible to do these things at the same time. Sometimes when the beeping becomes too frequent and she has no possibility to answer them all, she sends her daughter to handle the incoming ICQ-messages. During the evening the activity on the web increases. People who work during the day become active. Sometimes Linnea lose track of time. At those times, the dog usually awakens her with a bark due to its pressing desire. Around eleven pm, some of her contacts stop writing; it is time for them to go to bed in order to manage another working day. She thinks the others go to bed too early. About twelve pm she calls it a day and turns of her computer.

3.4 In between

Every now and then during a weekend Linnea goes away to her weekend cottage. While she is there she enjoys the calmness and the silence. She does not think it brings about any huge loss over her computer; instead Linnea claims it is quite the opposite. Before she leaves for the cottage, she informs her contacts on the net about her forthcoming absence. As she gets back to the residence, the computer is turned on again.

Due to her being sick-listed, Linnea visits her doctor at regular intervals. The doctor usually asks her what she is doing during the days, how she manages to make the clock tick. This is no problem for Linnea – quite the contrary. She does not think it is enough time during a 24-hour period; there is so much to do and so little time. A question close at hand is how many hours a day she spends in front of her screen. “Oh, ugh such a terribly amount of hours...I am lucky I have my dog, very lucky. Otherwise I would probably have had a lot of shoulder injuries.” Linnea estimates the number of hours spent in front of the screen to be between six and nine per day. At times when she gets too swallowed up by her doings, she sets her alarm clock to be able to remember to do things. For instance, she can set the alarm clock in order to remember to clean the kitchen floor. If she does not, it happens that time flies to the extent that she gets surprised when the daughter gets home from school in the afternoon.

Linnea recurrently states that it is sometimes nice to get away from the computer. At those times she becomes aware of how calm everything can be. From time to time, she thinks her use is too stressful. After giving it some thought, Linnea says she does not think her frequent computer use is good for her due to her state of ill health. Thus, it is so amusing. “I use to think, what would I do if I did not have my computer? I do not know, perhaps spend more time with my dog.” The computer is something “instead of”, as Linnea expresses herself. She strongly believes that the day she gets back to work, everything will be different.

4 The turn to technology

As Linnea was put on the sick list, a considerable number of things in her life became altered. For someone who is used to go to work every day and follow strict routines, it is a major changeover to suddenly be declared ill and transferred to other social settings and businesses. While facing such extensive change, we believe it is not a matter of course what path to choose. What Linnea did was to turn to technology. As she was given the appropriate conditions – broadband was installed and she had access to a computer – she began to shape her new everyday life with the help from information technology.

With our awareness of what kind of life Linnea is living, what an ordinary day is like and her relation to information technology, we strive towards an interpretation and understanding of her IT use. Within the following subsections, three experiences near themes are extracted and formulated from the account of the circumstances of Linnea’s everyday life. The formulated themes – *the design of social life, identity construction, upholding a distinction* – relate to the way Linnea experiences her IT use.

4.1 The virtualisation of social life

As people incorporate technology within their everyday activities they have, according to Lie and Sørensen (1996), undergone a process of *domestication*. The process is usually characterized by taming something foreign and to bring it into our everyday. Its opposite, to bring your self to technology, *to create or move objects or activities from the physical world into its virtual equivalence*, is what Ågren (1998) refer to as *virtualisation*. Based on how Linnea use information technology, one can say that she virtualizes her social life. IT use seems to be almost a prerequisite to be included in her circle of acquaintances. It is fascinating to see how she differentiates between those who have access to computers and Internet and those who do not. The ones with the “proper” basic conditions are more likely to become part of her social life. Her somewhat playful comment regarding the fact that those without computers have to be really nice in order to remain her friends is perhaps not so far from the truth. As a matter of fact, the majority of the people she interacts with during a day do have access to computers.

In the virtualisation process of Linnea’s social life, she uses various rather ordinary techniques such as her ICQ, e-mail program and web based chats to get in contact with, establish and maintain relations with people. For instance, instead of lifting the receiver to decide when and where to meet her dog walking company, Linnea now days sends ICQ-messages to set up a meeting. Linnea seems to ascribe the computer a level of significance, corresponding to something constituting her everyday life. Another vivid example is when Linnea walks the dog and meet people who she later chooses to stay in contact with via the Internet. These are all examples of how Linnea *actively* construct her everyday life. In line with Lie and Sørensen (1996), Linnea’s acting can be seen as a tinkering or bricolage.

4.2 Identity construction

The fact that Linnea has been away ill from her job for two and half years may have influenced her understanding of her true nature. According to Cohen (1994:6), we consider relations as something stretching from the society to the individual. This can for example be expressed by how we describe individuals by their belonging to various social structures such as nationality, sex, religion or work. By performing a job, a number of what is considered as our basic needs get satisfied. For instance we meet and socialize with people who challenge our thinking, who makes us both argue and laugh but perhaps what is more important, we get to feel wanted and appreciated. These are important necessities that all together help shape the way we apprehend ourselves. Our understanding of our self is also based on how we apprehend response from others (Solomon, 1983:320). In other words, our jobs are of major importance as parts of our identity are related to and constructed through its accomplishment. We are what we do.

As Linnea got sick listed these basic needs could no longer be satisfied in the same natural way. Thus, as ones identity is not a static condition, instead it has the capacity to change depending on the social context (Mead, 1967:135); Linnea has found other ways to do so. Based on how Linnea live with information technology, we believe she utilize IT to re-construct her identity. Due to a considerable power of initiative, she find substitutes to fulfil needs that are of importance for her self-assurance. For instance, on the Internet via various chat forums, Linnea meet, interact and socialize with a considerable number of people. Also, by helping other ICQ-candidates to download and register

as members or helping potential retailers within the networking organization, Linnea get to feel needed.

4.3 Upholding a distinction

In the everyday life of Linnea, the computer is more or less present in everything she does – her being is constituted by information technology. IT forms a framework in which her ordinary life is revealed. The computer is turned on as soon as Linnea wakes up in the morning and stays on until bedtime. Her everyday life is to a large extent lived, not through but rather on the screen. Similar observations and interpretations have been made by Turkle (1995) and Markham (1999).

However, Linnea find it relaxing to switch of the computer and go away during a weekend. After five days of her everyday activities, visiting the weekend house is experienced as a welcome recreation. Linnea states that going away and leaving the computer and the everyday activities related to it, does not imply any problems. Rather, it is quite the contrary. Linnea also regard these recreation pauses as necessary due to her being ill. The extent, to which her IT-use has become intertwined in her everyday life, does not contribute to her recovery.

Paradoxically, Linnea seem anxious about preventing the confluence to happen, to let her everyday life and IT-use become intertwined and almost the same. She wants to uphold some kind of distinction. Also as far as Linnea is concerned, her everyday life lived like this will not be missed when she is recovered and able to return to work.

5 The life-world of IT-use

Some may argue that Linnea's IT-use isn't intriguing at all. If by intriguing one assumes that the use should imply radical new ways of appropriating IT or that it should mean using advanced IT-applications, and/or Internet services. Linnea's use is in this respect quite contrary, ordinary and mundane. It is in fact so common that most of us can identify and relate with certain or most aspects and that is partly why her use is intriguing. What is intriguing in Linnea's IT-use is not the actual applications that she use, neither the large amount of time that she devotes to manage her IT-use, rather what's fascinating is the *meaning* and *significance* that she ascribes to her use. In examining her experiences we have attained a modified understanding regarding what role that information technology plays in the sphere of everyday life.

5.1 The commonality of IT-use

The use that unfolds by the story of Linnea does in a very straightforward way illustrate the commonality and the mundane context in which IT is used. The dull and everydayness that is unfolded by her story is in our view fascinating. From her experience we attain a sense of timelessness that is characteristic for activities within the everyday. The activities of cooking, eating, washing, cleaning, sleeping, walking socializing are central and occur s everyday and always. We find it exciting that IT-use can finds its way in between and at parallel to these activities. In the way that Linnea characterizes her IT-use it seems to be always and ongoing in the same way as other aspects of her life. Also it

seems as if different kinds of IT-use are conducted at the same time, answering e-mails, chatting with friends, reading the news, searching the web. Her use seems to be 'all over the place' to use her words. This timelessness of IT-use in everyday life has also been found in other studies. For instance, Bakaradijeva (2000) initially asked of users to estimate time spent using Internet for particular activities such as work, learning, socializing, consumption and entertainment. However, this kind of representations was by her respondents regarded as meaningless way of capturing their use. Bakardjieva (2000:132) writes: "More than often the different types of activities enlisted above collapsed into one another, leaving the user unable to disentangle learning from entertainment, socializing from work, etc."

5.2 The everyday significance of IT

In several contextually oriented studies we have learned about the process of social aspects and forces shaping technology and its use. The notion of the domestic has in such studies implied the view of technology as something external that needs to be tamed into the context of everyday life (For example Lie & Sørensen 1996, Aune 1996, Berg 1996). In two recent studies Svedmark Ikodomidis (2002) and Lewén Johansson (2000) IT-use within the context of everyday life is analyzed using Ågren's (1998) notion of domestication through virtualization. With this perspective it has been found that an important aspect of domestication is a somewhat opposite movement from shaping technology into the context of everyday life – or take technology to oneself. The process of virtualization includes the movement towards technology – taking oneself to technology. Svedmark Ikodomidis concludes that a central aspect of IT-use within an everyday life setting is that people's use resembles the process virtualization. This means that an important prerequisite for information technology to be domesticated is that people find meaning in creating, recreating or moving existing or non-existing objects or activities from the physical world to the virtual (Ågren, 1998, p.3). Both Lewén Johansson and Coffey (2000) and Svedmark Ikodomidis found that the process of virtualization includes activities that are shaped by the prevailing circumstances of the virtual sphere but still very related to the physical. Also Ågren (1998) hold the process of virtualization to be an experiential phenomenon and as such it is the significance that people ascribed to their IT-use that makes the virtual world a place or a social world parallel to the physical.

In Linnea's IT-use there seems to be several themes that touches upon this notion of domestication through virtualization. To begin with Linnea's IT-use seems to appear in-between and in parallel with various other activities in her everyday life. In a sense she has domesticated information technology by moving more and more of her everyday life to be associated with her IT-use. For instance, her social relationships are increasingly becoming virtualized and her identity is to a large extent shaped by her IT-use.

At the same time Linnea hold several distinctions to be important when she elaborates the experiences of her use. One is between using IT and other actualities in her everyday life. She experience her IT-use to be so absorbing that she needs to be reminded to fulfill other commitments like vacuuming, taking the dog for a walk etceteras. Although this is a distinction that she herself needs to be reminded of, in order not to lose track of time, she maintains its importance. Also she emphasizes the distinction between social relations that can be maintained using IT and does who can not. In her view a large extent of her IT-use is related to socializing but the social relationships that are maintained and developed through IT-use will not be missed when she go back to her job as secretary.

In our view it seems as if the extraordinary situation of Linnea being sick listed initiated a movement of virtualization in Linnea's everyday life. This discontinuity in her everyday life is what to a large extent signifies her IT-use and explains her turn to IT. In Linnea's view most of her IT-use is conducted 'instead' of work. Although she holds the use to be very stimulating and pleasing she at the same time as hold it to be problematic in terms of her recovering and get her back to work. So since her IT-use is experienced as work and a stressful and a time absorbing one it is important to get away to her cottage and relax.

Thus information technology is foremost regarded as a tool useful for work, or as a contact machine and in this respect her IT-use makes a fundamental connection to her 'normal' situation as a secretary. Thus in her extra ordinary situation a space was created in her everyday life that needed to be filled – Linnea turned to IT. It is therefore not so remarkable that she contend that she will not miss the form of everyday life that she now experience when she return to work and her everyday takes on normal proportions.

6 Concluding remarks

This research has just begun and this paper is a first attempt to formulate some experiences from our work. What we have learned so far is that we need to know more about how IT is appropriated and integrated into the everyday. But from this small study we have indeed come across some interesting aspects that gives us a flavor of the kind of life-world that is revealed through IT-use.

Of course we have learned the difficulties of the phenomenological approach. To explore how things are experienced in search of what it is that constitutes those experiences is in one sense very arbitrary. We easily get stuck in distinctions that are as problematic as the hen – egg paradox. So is it really a fruitful stance to take? We believe so. The reason for our stubborn cling to the phenomenological thinking is that we see no real alternative at the moment. The kinds of research that we have reviewed during this study do in one respect or another postulate the meaning of IT-use prior to empirical examination. Some regard it as tool that gives access to a huge information infrastructure, others relates it to media and communication use and some regard it is as an emerging culture in its own right. All with good reasons no doubt. However due to the increasing IT-use in peoples' everyday life we think it is necessary for researchers to taken an interest in the significances that people ascribe to their use. So far we have seen little or no attempts to take serious these meanings in an everyday life context. This is something that the phenomenological perspective can help us to do. As such, the driving question in our research is to investigate more characteristics that are ascribed to information technology by domestic users.

Also we have learned that focusing one single user experience regarding IT-use offers plenty of questions and themes to investigate. By stories like Linnea's we get to come close to a web of signification that are essential in everyday life. We have learned that the IT-use enfolds new meanings of Linnea's everyday, both in her understandings of her self- identity, but also her understanding of others as well as technology. We find Linnea's attempt to uphold a distinction between her IT-use and everyday life at the same time as her IT-use as very intertwined with it was actually to be an essential characteristic of the significance that she ascribed to her use. We will continue to explore this essential

characteristic with Linnea as well as with other domestic IT-users. I do however seem like the everyday life takes on new and different meanings due to IT -use. This understanding is not well captured if we hold on to an understanding of IT as a tool or a media but becomes possible to elaborate by considering her IT-use as constituting life-world.

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