Time and media consumption in Norwegian families
Summary

This report focuses on the relationship between time and media use in Norwegian families. It brings attention to, explores and explains the important ways that time affects and is affected by families’ media practices. It applies qualitative methods and makes use of an analytical approach based on the identification and exploration of core mechanisms and processes that affect the research area. A basic analytical premise is that family life constitutes a special communicative context – what Wittgenstein calls a language-game – and that this context is characterised as having an existentially central place in late-modern Western sociality. It is furthermore argued that the context is dominated by a qualitative perception of time, which I call event-time – in contrast to clock-time that dominates life in the public sphere.

The analysis of time and media use in homes is by way of discussing cases. They are used to illustrate what I consider to be important aspects media’s relation to time-use. Feelings of being short of time, ritualistic structuration of time and the creation of time-outs are common results of (and motivations for) using media in homes. It is also argued that the feeling of being in time-squeezes are partly caused (or exacerbated) by an imperfect alignment between communicative context and time perceptions. Not all that takes place in the home is practice of the event-time type, nor is everything existentially important taking place within the home. This structural or cultural mismatch manifests itself in persons as ambivalence and harriedness.

A consequence of the qualitative methodology and analytical approach based on social mechanisms and prototypes is that we need to focus also on non-prototypical cases. Single parents, one-person households, couples without children, as well as ethnic non-Norwegian households are hence dealt with at the end of chapter 4.

Lastly, since the project’s gist is to say something about future media use in Norwegian homes – about how the digital age’s association to interactivity, time-flexibility, etc. will be handled by media consumers – the report will in the last chapter dwell, somewhat speculatively, on the more specific qualities of the digital media.

Keywords

Media, time, home, domestication,
Time and media consumption in Norwegian families

by

Jo Helle-Valle

National Institute for Consumer Research (SIFO)
P. O. Box 4682 Nydalen
0405 Oslo
Preface

This report is the result of research performed through the project DigiAdvent (Consuming Digital Adventure-Oriented Media in Everyday Life: Contents & Contexts, from 2003-2006). The project is a collaboration between two academic institutions – SIFO and SNF – and three commercial contributors – Telenor, NRK and Norsk Tipping. It has been financed largely by the Research Council of Norway (NFR) under the PULS-programme (project no. 152836/220), as well as the commercial contributors. We wish to thank them all. More information on the project and publications are available at the project website: www.sifo.no/digiadvent.

From the SIFO side the bulk of the project has been handled by three researchers; the author of this report serving as the project academic head, researcher Dag Slettemeås and researcher Anita Borch. Borch has mostly worked on her own part of the project, a part that shall lead to a doctoral degree in sociology. She has, however, also provided valuable involvement in some of the data gathering that this report is based on. Slettemeås and I have worked closely throughout the project period – having developed and worked through the project together. His efforts have been invaluable. In addition, also two other SIFO researchers have been marginally involved; Atle Wehn Hegnes and Ingrid Kjørstad. Thanks are also extended to them.
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Summary

This report focuses on the relationship between time and media use in Norwegian families. It brings attention to, explores and explains the important ways that time affects and is affected by families’ media practices.

In chapter 2 I start with spelling out the theoretical premises of the analysis. The first contention I present is that family life constitutes a special communicative context – what Wittgenstein calls a language-game. I argue that we carry with us ideas about what kind of practices, rules and norms that are linked to family life into our practical involvement with the home.

The second issue in chapter 2 is to clarify the concept of time. That time can be ‘affected’ by people’s practices points to the importance of a phenomenological perspective on time. By ‘phenomenological reality’ I mean that time is a dimension of our lived lives that become relevant for us because the ways we relate to it affects our daily lives. The phenomenological side of time does not rule out that time from a practical point of view also is external and what we might call objective. We work, watch television programmes, meet friends at given, agreed upon points in time – measured by clocks. However, from the point of view of lived lives time is much more than clock-time. We do things and doing is by necessity taking place in time – we therefore have our own time-perceptions as an integral part of our practical lives. This also makes other – more qualitative aspects of time – relevant to us all. We might have a task that needs to be done within a time limit, and hence we feel we are in a hurry. Thus, tempo becomes relevant; how fast or slow things are done affect our conception of time and hence affect our
practice. Also timing needs to be taken into consideration; we might be forced to abort a task we have started on in order to synchronize our activities with others. Thus, these are all examples of how time is a phenomenological reality, and consequently it proves the relevance of including people’s perception of time as a factor in studies of time as a social phenomenon. An important theoretical contention is that the different types of time perception are linked to different communicative contexts. In late-modern Western sociality the hegemonic position of romantic love as an ideology makes the home, as the hearth of the family, existentially central and is for that reason dominated by what I call event-time – a qualitative perception of time.

The exploration of time’s relationship to media use in this report is qualitative; it is based on methods and on analytical perspectives that highlight the qualities of the phenomenon – not the quantities. Its aim is to reveal, explore and discuss how time should be understood as a crucial, yet often hidden, aspect of how people use media. The methods do not easily yield to generalisations. For this reason I have chosen an analytical approach that provides insights into the small and large mechanisms and processes that time is part of. The methodological issues are dealt with in chapter 3, and in this chapter I also discuss the limitations of the methodologies used. The main method used throughout the project was the ‘dialogic interview’. What is crucial to be aware of is the kind of data such a method generates. Mainly it is of a discursive kind. Discursive data have the advantage of reflecting (or perhaps more precisely; informing on) cultural matters; ideas and perspectives widely shared among the members of a social category or community. On the other hand there are clear limits to what such data can be used for in analyses. These are important issues that bear directly on the analyses and hence are discussed at some length in the report.

Chapter 4 is where the actual analysis is found. It starts with two cases. These cases are used to illustrate what I consider to be important aspects of media’s relation to time-use. Feelings of being short of time, ritualistic structuration of time and the creation of time-outs are common results of (and motivations for) using media in homes. It is also argued that the feeling of being in time-squeezes are partly caused (or exacerbated) by an imperfect alignment between communicative con-
text and time perceptions. Not everything that takes place in the home is practice of the event-time type, nor is everything existentially important taking place within the home. This structural or cultural mismatch manifests itself in persons as ambivalence and harriedness.

A consequence of the qualitative methodology and analytical approach based on social mechanisms and prototypes is that we need to focus also on non-prototypical cases. Single parents, one-person households, couples without children, as well as ethnic non-Norwegian households are hence dealt with at the end of chapter 4.

Lastly, since the project’s gist is to say something about future media use – about how the digital age’s association to interactivity, time-flexibility, etc. will be evaluated and handled by media consumers – the report will in its last chapter dwell, somewhat speculatively, on the more specific qualities of the digital media.
1 Introduction

“... we are now at a point where sociologists are discussing the ‘problem’ of leisure. And a part of the problem is: how did it come to be a problem?” (Thompson 1967: 95).

Statements by parents like “we spend too much time watching TV”, “we try to limit the time our children spend playing games on the PC” and “we try to gather the whole family on Saturday night to watch programs together” are typical when interviewing families about uses of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the home. Most of those who are brought up in Western middle class families intuitively recognise the attitudes and rationale behind such statements. They say something about the proper place of ICTs within the framework of the home, about what are right and what are wrong forms of using media technologies in a well-known social and cultural context. They also say something about how the informants think about family life, and about relationships and power within the family. And they say much, much more.

The familiarity (sic!) of the statements seemingly gives us an easy entry into the issue of what guides our thinking about, and choices related to ICTs in the home. However, this familiarity simultaneously represents a problem. So many values, perspectives and concerns are so ingrained in most of us that – in a sense – too much is taken for granted and is thus silent, embodied knowledge. The task of unwrapping this implicit knowledge is thus a major task in this report. What I wish to do is to dissect the complicated mesh of mores, epistemology and practices that underlies statements of the type cited above.
The cited statements clearly shows that time is a relevant factor in families’ media use; informants talk of ‘too much’ time spent, and that they wish to regulate the time used. However, it is not only a question of the quantity of time use, the third statement imply that household members’ attitude to media use as a lot to do with how media are used – what is being watched, who watches it and when. Thus, the issue of time use in relation to media in homes is a composite issue that involve moral as well as practical concerns.

This is a report that focuses on the relationship between time and media use in Norwegian families. It starts from the analytical premise that family life constitutes a special communicative context – what Wittgenstein calls a language-game. By this I mean that we carry with us ideas about what kind of practices, rules and norms that are linked to family life into our practical involvement with the home. This constitutes a framework for how we behave and think when we are in a ‘family modus’ – i.e. when we act appropriately within the home. This is to say that when we participate in home life we have certain regulating biases that form how we expect communication and interaction to be. In other words; in homes as in all walks of life the context informs the texts (that we produce and interpret).

The report is not a quantitative research on how much time family members use on various types of media. Nor is it meant to give an overview of the variations and patterns that we might find within Norway. Rather, it shall bring attention to, explore and explain the important ways that time influences media uses in Norwegian homes – how time affects and is affected by families’ media practices.

That time can be ‘affected’ by people’s practices requires an elaboration: Although it is common to think of time as an objective fact of life that can be measured but not tampered with this is not what I have in mind in this report. I wish to approach time as a ‘phenomenological reality’ – that is, a dimension of our lived lives that become relevant for us because the ways we relate to it affects our daily lives. By this I am not suggesting that there is no such thing as an external, chronological time – what I am saying is that time is a complex issue that has many facets that affects us; some of them are clearly from a practical point of
view external and what we might call objective. The fact that we have
to be at work at a certain time, that television programmes start at a
given time, etc. are all examples of the external quality of time; it is
something that we in one respect cannot manipulate or alter; countless
watches and clocks defy any attempt at changing time. However, from
the point of view of lived lives time is much more than clock-time. We
do things and doing is by necessity taking place in time – we therefore
have our own time-perceptions as an integral part of our practical lives.
This makes other – more qualitative aspects of time – relevant to us all.
We might have a task that needs to be done within a time limit, and
hence we feel we are in a hurry. Thus, tempo becomes relevant; how
fast or slow things are done affect our conception of time and hence
affect our practice. Or we are going to meet someone at a certain place
at a certain moment and we are thus forced to take timing into consid-
eration; we might be forced to abort a task we have started on in order
to synchronize our activities with others. Thus, these are all examples
of how time is a phenomenological reality, and consequently is proves
the relevance of including people's perception of time as a factor in
studies of time as a social phenomenon.

In other words, by using the term phenomenological I wish to draw at-
tention to the fact that time is something that in important ways is an
aspect of our lived lives – we live in time and hence time becomes a
concern for us, it is a phenomenon we of sheer necessity reflect upon
and relate to. Thus, in this report time is therefore considered both as a
quantifiable, 'objective' fact – as clock time – and as a lived reality in
which it is always and inextricably linked to practical concerns. It is my
contention that in order to understand how time affects people's media
use it is necessary to incorporate this double quality of time; time as an
external reality and as an aspect of lived life.

This exploration of time's relationship to media use is qualitative; the
report is based on methods and on analytical perspectives that highlight
the qualities of the phenomenon – not the quantities. This is not to say
that the latter are unimportant. Quite the contrary, proper figures on
how much time people use on what tasks is crucial information because
it provides an 'overview' and therefore also because it is solid ground
for making inferences about patterns and variations within a popula-
tion. And for that reason I will use relevant work by other researchers. However, in this report the aim is to focus on the qualitative sides of the phenomenon of time; to explore and discuss how time should be understood as a crucial, yet often hidden, aspect of how people use media. The methods do not easily yield to generalisations but the strength of this approach is that it provides insights into the small and large mechanisms and processes that time is part of. And it is the belief of those involved in this project that in order to understand properly how time affects media use it is pertinent that we gain a solid understanding of such mechanisms. To take a small example: we know from statistics that the feeling of being in a time-squeeze is widespread and increasing among those who have small children. However, the same households also show an increase in the uses of television. This seems like quite a paradox. The facts are drawn from quantitative research but the same type of methods does not easily provide grounds for explaining such a seemingly paradoxical mixture of trends. For the explanation qualitative methods and hermeneutical approaches are often more suited.

The analytical strategy for exposing and making sense of such phenomena is by way of identifying and describing various mechanisms and processes (Elster 1989). Such a strategy requires that I focus on prototypical instances; by choosing ‘typical’ cases the described mechanisms and processes will appear as having a general relevance. However, not all homes are prototypical; while most of us envisage a couple with children when ‘family’ is mentioned we know from statistics that in 2005 less than a quarter of all households in Norway were of that type (SSB 2006c). Thus, this analytical approach needs a discussion on how the described mechanisms apply – or don’t apply – to the non-prototypical cases. This will be dealt with in the last part of chapter 4.

This being said, it is important also to acknowledge the limitations of the methodologies used. For practical reasons, the main method used throughout the project was the ‘dialogic interview’. What is crucial to be aware of is the kind of data such a method generates. Mainly it is of a discursive kind. Discursive data have the advantage of reflecting (or perhaps more precise; informing on) cultural matters; ideas and perspectives widely shared among the members of a social category or
community. Thus, it is an appropriate method for revealing such factors. On the other hand, it is quite common that researchers treat such data as facts. This is most often wrong, and it is pertinent to be conscious about the difference between the various methods and the types of data they generate. Therefore I will use some space in this report on methodological issues.

Lastly, since the project’s gist is to say something about future media use – about how the digital age’s association to interactivity, time-flexibility, etc. would be evaluated and handled by media consumers – the report will, in its last chapter, also more specifically dwell, somewhat speculatively, on the more specific qualities of the digital media.
2 Theoretical considerations

“To restore to practice its practical truth, we must therefore reintroduce time into the theoretical representation of a practice which, being temporally structured, is intrinsically defined by its tempo” (Bourdieu 1977: 8).

In this chapter I will deal with the theoretical issues that are directly relevant for the reports theme. In short they are questions related to the fact that the project studies media uses in homes, and to the highly complex issue of how we shall treat time as a social factor. I will of course return to these themes in the later chapters, I will restrict myself to discuss the most basic sides of these themes here.

2.1 Media technologies in homes

In their ground-breaking work Consuming technologies (Silverstone and Hirsch 1992) the editors Roger Silverstone and David Hirsch set a firm focus on how the home – as a phenomenological reality – affects the way people relate to and use ICTs. A basic argument in chapter one in this book (Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley 1992) is that in order to understand the various how and whys of ICT-use it is necessary to assume not a simple subject-object relationship but to include a significant third factor, namely the social setting in which the subject relates to the object. This emphasis on the need to contextualise social practices has been a consistent concern throughout the work of these scholars.

For these reasons the four terms ‘home’, ‘family’, ‘the moral economy of the household’ and ‘domestication’ are central. In Silverstone,
Hirsch and Morley’s chapter (ibid.) they define their main task as providing “an integrative frame for the consideration of household practices and relations and the consumption and use of information and communication technologies” (ibid: 16). The home is posed as a contrast to the public sphere in the sense that it constitutes a different social and cultural context – i.e. containing specific values and perspectives – than what surrounds it, i.e. the public sphere, hence the centrality of the terms ‘home’, ‘family’ and ‘the moral economy of the household’. Therefore, since technologies that are potentially ‘useful’ to the household are produced in, and associated with, the public sphere the acquisition of such commodities requires a ‘translation’; they need to undergo a transformation that implies that they are given a meaningful place in the home and become morally acceptable.

“This engagement involves the appropriation of these commodities into domestic culture – they are domesticated – and through that appropriation they are incorporated and redefined in different terms, in accordance with the household’s own values and interests” (ibid.).

According to the authors, this process of domestication involves four phases, or aspects. First, the appropriation of an ICT refers to the actual purchase of the object. Objectification points to the actual usage and physical positioning of the object within the household while incorporation denotes the ways the ICT is given a place in the cultural framework of the home. Conversion points to the ways the ICT is displayed vis à vis the world (ibid: 20ff).

The Domestication research perspective has proved its worth through the many, insightful works that has been produced. The central value lies, in my opinion, in the insistence that the uses of media are not only a question of the relationship between the user and the media but the media-user, the media and the communicative context the use takes place in. Moreover, they have concentrated on the home as an important context for media consumption. Together with my colleague Dag Slettemeås I have argued that this, however, has led to an unfortunate ambiguity in the analytical apparatus (Helle-Valle and Slettemeås 2007). As Silverstone writes;
This citation – together with the previous one (“… appropriation of these commodities into domestic culture – they are domesticated”) – clearly reveal the ambiguous content of the term. They refer to the private and the home but also to the general process of ‘taming the wild’, of conquering objects in ways that makes them ‘our own’ and hence conceptually and morally acceptable. It is this double denotation that we believe is restraining the uses we believe the apparatus can be put to work on. We wish to retain only the taming the wild-association because we believe that in this way the term will pinpoint the fundamental process of contextualisation. In a sense using ICTs is applying and hence interpreting texts, and in line with the philosophical argument – which I link to Wittgenstein and Bourdieu (Wittgenstein 1968; Bourdieu 1977) – that the meaning of a text always requires a context, this singular connotation will direct our attention to the crucial qualities of enculturation (cf. Helle-Valle and Slettemeås 2007).

Although the Domestication perspective focuses on the home as the context for media consumption Silverstone and his colleagues do not dwell much on the ideological aspect of the home, although Silverstone in one of his latest publications argues that more attention should be given to morality and the values inherent in homes (Silverstone 2006). Although it is important not to essentialise homes it is reasonable to start with the fact that ‘home’ is the central ‘significant other’ of the public sphere, hence it should be possible to identify a set of values that constitute the prototypical home. In short, in contrast to the public sphere, being dominated by the mentality of bureaucracy and market economy, the home is that which harbours the family, and the ideology that the family is built on; (the idea of) romantic love. Love, in the wide sense of the word, celebrates the intimate and emotional – that which is said to concern our selves and essential qualities as individuals (Shorter
The family – as the prototypical framework for, and result of intimate feelings – stands forth as every action’s *reason*; it is what gives, at least discursively, life meaning (Sørhaug 1996). In popular conceptions the home – representing trust and security – is the haven in which the individual can find refuge from the cold hostility and mercilessness of the public arena.

ICTs, as objects and media, bring public life into the domestic sphere and hence threaten to break down the moral borders that surround, and thus help to define, the family. This makes them ‘dangerous things’ (Douglas 1966). On the other hand, ICTs can promote family sociality by functioning as objects/media that gather the family. If the media content is ‘good’, or at least acceptable, media use can be instrumental in generating family sociality of the right kind by giving its members time together and providing them with a focus, hence building the family as a unit. However, the daily experience of parents is more often one of concern and worry – that family members use ICTs too much and/or that they use it on their own constitute a threat to the ideal of spending ‘quality time’ together. Likewise, media content might be of the wrong type, mediating or promoting attitudes, mores or information of types that fit badly with what is considered appropriate within the family context. The potential both for ‘good’ family sociality, entertainment and rest, as well as family fragmentation, over-use and immoral media content illustrates the ambivalence that we found among the parents in almost all the households we interviewed.

But I think that just focusing on the ‘familism’ – as romantic love’s manifestation in the home – shows us only one side of the coin. Another strong ideological force associated with Western modernity is individualism – an ideology that developed together with modernity and capitalism and which emphasises not only the right to be unique and special but in fact demands that we all have to search for the uniqueness in ourself. It provides a moral room for being on one’s own, pursuing one own’s goals and self-realisation (Giddens 1991; Hall 1992; Williams 2000). Although this is not an ideology that is specifically tied to the home and family, the pervasiveness of this ideology means that it stands in a potential conflict with familism; the demand for
thinking and acting as a collective contrasts with the idea inherent in individualism about concentrating on oneself and realizing one own’s goals. However, from another point of view we might also see them as complementary; it is with the advent of individualism – with its focus on the right and obligation to create a meaningful life-trajectory, combined with the perennial meaninglessness of the modern public sphere – that the family stand forth ideologically as a major setting for a meaningful life. Be that as it may, I contend that familism and individualism are two strong ideological forces that affect the uses of media in Norwegian homes.

2.2 Time

Time is a seemingly simple matter that proves to be extremely difficult to grasp when treated comparatively and phenomenologically. The first point to observe is that time cannot unproblematically be established as an objective fact. Kant treated it as a form of intuition (Anschauungsformen) – thus, as a faculty of our mind; a precondition for all perception and cognition (Kant 1933). However, given the wide variety of ways different peoples perceive time, such a ‘negative’ definition helps us little in a sociological exploration of time and ICT. From this point of view the relevant analytical approach is to state that time is really only relevant to the extent that it is perceived by, and acted upon, by people in practice. Hence, time is a product of the social and material circumstances that people live in (Durkheim 1976; Gell 1992). Hence irrespective of any ‘real’, ‘objective’ time, what is relevant is that time, as a phenomenological reality, varies with social conditions, and these variations are mirrored both in perceived time, and lived time.

Such a practical grounding of time opens up for there being more than one way of understanding time for every socio-cultural unit, and hence for every person. Thus, Evans-Pritchard – among the first social scientists who studied time comparatively – wrote that the time-conceptions of the Nuer of Sudan are “mainly reflections of their relations to environment, which we call oecological time, and those that are reflections of their relations to one another in the social structure, which we call structural time” (Evans-Pritchard 1940). This focus on how people’s
conceptions of time are shaped by (but not reducible to) the practical circumstances and sociological realities surrounding has become a commonplace among anthropologists writing on the subject (Munn 1992; James and Mills 2005).

This will also be our working assumption in this report; that the practical circumstances shape our conceptions, and people have more than one understanding of time. However, in line with the discussion on the significance of context, and the importance of the home as one such institutionalised context, I suggest that time conceptions are mediated by the institutionalised social contexts practices unfold in, they are not direct reflections of practice as such. A consequence of this contention is that time perceptions – as all perceptions – are moral. This is so because as long as the context form a text’s meaning it follows that the context provides cues to how one whould see the world. Institutionalised contexts, such as the home, therefore create expectations as to how we should think and act within that context. Thus, we are provided with ideas about right and wrong, i.e. with morality. For instance, the idea that the family Sunday-dinner should be finished off quickly because the son in the family wants to watch a tv-series will in most probably be met with moral indignation.

From this analytical framework the first step in my investigation must be to identify and analyse what might be said to be the typical understandings of time in Western societies. We treat Norway as one local version of western modernity in this respect. As such, one conspicuous type of time-perception is clock-time – a consequence of centuries of capitalist industrialism. E. P. Thompson, in his seminal article “Time, work-discipline, and industrial capitalism” (1967), demonstrates how such a perception of time grew out of a new mode of production. Workers, selling their labour-power by the hour, were subjected to an increasing demand for efficiency in order to maximise profits, and one of Thompson’s main arguments is that this involves much more than just an increase in tempo at the work-place. It involved a total restructuring of people’s attitude, and this transformation took place in all walks of life – involving also moral-religious inculcation. Protestant ethics were instrumental in changing people’s outlook on life, one in which efficiency became a virtue in itself (Weber 1985).
What characterises clock-time is that in a fundamental sense it is abstract; it is pure temporal extension, ‘ready’ to be filled with anything. Thus, it is quantitative – split up in measurable units – and it is synchronised. The units are the same for all within the same social entity, in such a way that it functionally accommodates the need for coordinating great masses of people that are involved in the same production process. It is important to observe that although clock-time is not objective in a strict sense it is so in a practical sense; from a Foucaultian point of view we can with certainty say that for each and every persons in thoroughly modernised societies (as Norway) clock-time stands out as a brute fact; as a framework and principle for setting a pace and measuring tasks that for all practical reasons are objective as a social force. Work, school, transport, media and innumerable other vital social functions are organised according to time-tables, and coordinated by way of synchronised clock-devices. Thus, clock-time stands out as something that is there, and that cannot be altered. One can only resist it at the cost of being sanctioned.

One inextricable quality of clock-time is that it is instrumental. Within the capitalist production-arena the logic is of course that the more efficient the employees are, the more profit the employers get. Consequently the production process is one in which efficiency is systematically enhanced; doing more in less time. Such a work-situation necessarily affects employees; they have a price-tag on their time used and hence their experience of being at work will be one in which efficiency is a core concern. Thus, notwithstanding any personal enjoyment at performing work tasks, the employees will also have a dominant feeling of relating to time as a scarce resource.

Life, however, is not only about taking part in the coordinated public sphere or of being efficient. An idea of being efficient must by necessity include an idea about time being spent better in other ways. Without these ‘other ways’ it would be no point in being efficient since from an existential point of view the idea of accumulating time presuppose ideas about some sorts of activity that provide our lives with meaning. What people consider to be meaningful activity to spend time on will of course vary, but my point at this stage in my argument is that the very
emergence of a sphere of instrumental clock-time perception generate an existential space that contains phenomenological time that is non-instrumental, types of practices where time is not measured for the sake of being efficient. This means practices where means and ends are inseparable. It is therefore well worth to recall Aristotle’s old distinction between praxis and poiesis (Bernstein 1976); where praxis refers to the type of acts in which means and ends cannot be separated, while poiesis is characterised as being instrumental acts – means and ends are conceptually and practically different. Thus, an example of the former is enjoying a good movie (or engaging in politics, as Aristotle’s prime example is), while the shopping groceries illustrate the latter type of acts. Habermas made use of the same distinction in his writings on critical theory but in order to avoid too close associations with these writers I use heterotelic to denote instrumental acts, and autotelic to refer to acts where means and ends are inseparable (auto- meaning ‘self’; -telic from telos, meaning ‘end’) (Zapffe 1983). This latter category must be broad, and contains no doubt a wide variety of time-perceptions – like the structural and oecological time of Evans-Pritchard, flow-time and many other types. The point at this stage in the argument is that as they constitute a contrast to instrumental clock-time they stand out as what can be called event time, a qualitative time that is not abstract in the sense indicated above, but always linked to the tasks they are parts of (Johansen 2001). This does not mean that people are necessarily in a state of flow (Csikszentmihaly 1991), being unaware of time passing, but that such practices are expected to be outside the realm of efficiency reckoning.

Thus, to sum up: Time is an aspect of lived reality and irrespective of its ontological moorings the important point for this report’s purpose is that phenomenologically – as lived reality – time appears in many forms, these forms are tied to the practical contexts they exist in. If we tie our time dichotomy – heterotelic vs. autotelic time perception – to the dichotomy between the public and private spheres it is easy to see that the heterotelic aligns with the public sphere while the autotelic form can be linked to the private sphere. In more mundane words; clock-time is associated to the public sphere while event-time is tied to the home. However, it is obvious that this alignment is not perfect; not everything existentially relevant takes place in the home, nor are all
tasks taking place in the home existentially important. Moreover, all instrumental practices are not necessarily linked to clock-time (cf. Bourdieu 1963). This lack of perfect alignment is part of the further development of our argument, and will be dealt with below. However, at this point we link event-time with the home and clock-time with the work site. And since the home is linked to existential interests, it follows that event-timed autotelic practices that takes place here are existential, and hence moral. And this morality is tied to values attached to the family.
3 Methodology

This report is based on empirical data – our own material and secondary sources. It is evident from our references what we use of others’ material. Much of it is quantitative but some are also of the qualitative type. The latter type of empirical evidence is used to the extent I feel it supplement our own data – or in some cases to discuss how and why our material might differ from others’.

Our own data consists of interviews and observations in all together 31 households from different parts of Norway. In addition, there have been some interviews with key actors – such as providers of broadband, local politicians, etc.

There is one fundamental methodological issue that has do be dealt with; the question of what kind of data one gets when one does interviews? Simply stated interviews provide first and foremost discursive data. That is, data on statements. It is pertinent to distinguish between that which is said and that which is done: Interviews are methods where one gets information in linguistic form; words are used to convey some kind of information about something. However, it is not a simple dichotomy between saying and doing because saying is simultaneously doing. In contrast to language as a system utterances (speech) are acts, thus saying is doing. Nevertheless it is a difference between whether an informant tells the interviewer that on the day before he did not watch the soap-series Gray’s Anatomy, or if the researcher is there the previous evening and can actually see for himself that the informant did not watch the programme. One obvious difference is that it is possible to tell a lie, but much more difficult to enact one. Thus, it is a question about data reliability. However, the issue is more profound than simply
a question of how reliable the data are. The complications start when one is interviewing not singularly about neutral matters of fact. And the problem from an analytical point of view is that in principle the interviewer can never know this. However, some questions – like whether a household has installed broadband – are in practice relatively unproblematic; it is in most cases a simple factual question. However, the methodological problem is much more profound when one is either asking about issues that are not directly observable or that the respondent’s answer for some reason involves ‘inner’ states like attitudes, perspectives, normative themes, etc. in his/her answer. Then it is no longer a question of true or false; one couldn’t have solved the methodological part better by doing for instance participant observation. These are issues that are first and foremost conveyed by way of talk. And in such cases the pretension is not to an outer object or state, and hence language can no longer be likened to a ‘mirror’ – a device whereby reality is reflected. This view, by many called a picture theory of language, is the conventional view held by logical positivism and also in practice by very many social scientists that rely on quantitative data. Thus, in the case of asking about whether the interviewee watches Grey’s anatomy it is not unlikely that the answer to the question might be influenced by ideas about one’s own cultural capital; ‘watching’ a series is not an unequivocal question (e.g. how many episodes counts as watching the series?) and the interviewee’s interpretation of the question might therefore be more a statement about one’s own self-identity than about media habits.

The principle objection though is that if we leave the picture theory of language – which we definitely should because it is at best an incomplete metaphor for how language works (cf. Wittgenstein 1968) – it is clear that there is always an element in language that makes the word ‘tool’ appropriate to use; we use language in various ways for various purposes, and much of it has little or nothing to do with reflecting any outer reality. An important part of using language is that it will (in various degrees of course) reflect back on ourselves; whether we cannot formulate a proper sentence, or pronounce or use words right, or whether the talk refers to one’s own identity or personality it means that any utterance is potentially also an utterance about oneself. And if we turn back to the example above – about having broadband or not,
and watching soap operas – we see that while the former is relatively unproblematic as a statement about a state of affairs, the latter is definitely much more than a statement about the consumption of tv-programmes. Knowing about how one’s taste in entertainment links to one’s cultural capital it is clear that in answering such a question (‘Are you a person who likes American soap operas?’) many respondents’ own identities are at stake here because the issue links directly into one’s own socio-cultural position and self-evaluation. And since the interviewer can never be sure about how the respondent ‘reads’ the questions asked and themes raised it follows that in principle he cannot know what the respondent is answering to; is it an attempt to neutrally respond to a question about how many shows one has seen, is it an attempt to present one as a certain type of person, or – probably most often – as both.

Thus, the methodological points I want to make here are the following: For one, a lot of questions asked in interviews should not be taken to reflect simple facts. This holds true both for interviews and for surveys; we have as researchers little control over the context in which the answers are formulated and hence we do not really know what the respondents answer to. Therefore, we should first of all treat the data we receive from interviews as discursive. ‘Discourse’ can be defined in many ways. I am not going to excel in definition, just point out that in the context of this report the important points are, first, that discourse points to what is said – it is in the realm of the meaningful expressions or statements. Moreover, discourse is not an abstraction in the sense that it is a system separate from lived life – it is practice; statements are language in use, and are what can be said to be typical statements about a topic or subject. In other words, it is a generalisation of statements linked to a theme, but not an essentialised structure or system (cf. Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983).

Now, the purpose of this discussion is that I wish to point to the methodological limits of the project; to the extent one wishes to study practice it should not be seen as sufficient to rely on discursive data – which is what one gets if one uses surveys and interviews. Studying social life within a household places strict limits to what is practically possible;
the ideal of prolonged participant observation is of course totally unrealistic to do on homes in modern, Western society.

However, shortcomings of the conventional interview can be modified and lessened in various ways. In our case the following factors are relevant;

- we were always two researchers present (except in two families),
- we taped (most of) the interviews,
- we used semi- or unstructured interviews, and
- we were eager to do as much observing as possible (including taking photographs)
- the issues we were interested in also included identifying cultural conventions relevant to media use

There are several advantages of being two researchers present at interviews; while one was talking the other could enter into a more reflecting role; contemplating on both the questions and the answers and thereby it was natural that we took turns asking the questions – the one who had been observing and reflecting could follow a line of thought that had appeared in the interview but that the other interviewer had not grasped there and then. Moreover, the ‘silent partner’ could also concentrate on all the factors that surround the talk; gestures, glances, tone of voice, etc. and also observing and recording social dynamics, objects and layouts of the house, etc.

By taping the interviews we could later listen to the tape and re-read the transcriptions so that we were able to pick up and dwell on details that we had forgotten or missed there and then.

We came to the interviews with a series of questions that we wanted to ask; questions that would cover the most important topics we envisaged. However, we were eager to make the interviews dialogic – to make them as relaxed and ordinary as possible. Our assumption is that we will get more and more interesting information if we lead the interviewees as little as possible; if they made an associative link from watching television to how the children performed at school or about drug use among teenagers in the neighbourhood that might not have
been what we had planned for, but it very often provided us with information about the respondents’ concerns – which that were important and how they were linked to each other. Moreover, the semi- or unstructured interview sometimes also provides us with a tool for disclosing dissonances between saying and doing. In one household the wife told us that they used the television very little. However, later in the interview, in relation to other issues it became clear that she did in fact watch tv a great deal. As it became apparent to herself she was eager to explain this; according to her it was because she had been sick for some time and staying at home had temporarily altered her viewing habits. More important than the fact that she at best told us a half-truth is her eagerness to present herself as one who (in normal times) looks very little on tv. It provides us with an intake for a self-presentation – of how she wants others to think of her in relation to media consumption.

Being in people’s actual homes (28 interviews) implied a resource; they were literally at home and were confident and thence more easy to interview. Secondly, since a crucial part the projects concern was to study how the home – as a communicative context – influences the uses of ICTs it was of course of paramount importance that we conducted the interviews in the setting we thought was so important. And since we placed such great importance on the setting it was of course vital to be sensitive to everything from the ways the households’ members interacted, to the way they furnished their homes (especially how and where the ICTs were to be found). Thus, our observations became an important source for insight.

As the analytical framework of the project emphasised the home, as an institutionalised communicative context, it followed that an important type of data we were looking for was culturally informed prototypes of the home, and the ICTs place and function within the home. This is a type of data that is precisely discursive. For this type of data the dialogic interview was clearly the most appropriate type of data-gathering.

In all; we can say that these ways of carrying the interviews through had a double positive effect; it made the discursive data we gathered through the dialogues better, and it provided us with a lot of non-discursive data as well.
4 Time and the consumption of media in the family

“... time is being pumped into the workplace and sucked out of homes” (Hochschild 1996: 12).

In this chapter I deal with the actual analysis of time’s impact on families’ media use. I will start the chapter with two cases from our empirical material. Then I interpret the cases from the analytical premises laid out in chapter 2, and draw some further analytical points as the result of the interpretations. Moreover, bits and pieces from other cases are drawn into the discussion in order to illustrate the points made.

I focus on three aspects of people’s relation to time; harriedness (the feeling of being short of time, cf. Southerton, Shove and Warde 2001)), time-out (ways of escaping from the social environment one is part of), and time-rhythms and coordination (how time is a factor in interaction with others).

4.1 Two cases

The parents in family A are both lawyers and have demanding jobs, meaning that they must put in long hours. They have three children between the age of 7 and 2. They are well off and live in an upper-middle class suburb in Oslo. They have a clear conception of time being a scarce resource and just as strong ideas about how they shall use the time they have outside of work.
Their attitude to media use is exceptionally strict; they have lived most of their family life without a television – it was the man’s work that more or less required them to buy a tv. They talk nostalgically about their pre-tv life; in those days they did not ‘throw away their time by watching television’. When the tv came into their household they placed it in their bedroom because they ‘didn’t like to contaminate our living room with that box’. But a consequence of this arrangement was that when their oldest child started bringing friends home to watch children’s programmes they all ended up in the parents’ bed, so they were forced to move the tv-set to their living room.

They stress that they watch very little tv; they tell us that they usually look through the programme and turn on the tv only if there are things they really want to watch. However, later in the interview they admit that ‘there are also evenings when we just sit there moping in front of the set’. When they are asked if they use television as a means for relaxation they admit that they sometimes do but they are quick to point out that the best way to relax is to read a book or just talk. Moreover, they stress that they hardly ever watch television alone; the rule is that the family watches tv together, and after the children have gone to bed they either look at it together or the set is turned off.

They also reluctantly admit that they sometimes use the tv as a babysitter in the week-ends’ early mornings. But they obviously feel bad about it and link it to the claim that the films that are shown are ‘just crap-tv’, showing almost only programmes that contain violence or that are of extremely low artistic quality. At this point in the interview the oldest daughter breaks in and argues against her parents; she says that there are many good programmes for children and that they are not scary either. It also becomes clear that they present themselves as equally restrictive and moralistic about other ICTs; the radio is turned off if it is not something that they specifically want to listen to, and they become very agitated when they tell us about a having promised their oldest child a game-boy and finding out that there were only violent, low quality games available.

A theme they repeatedly return to is that family time is valuable and that ICTs are not a good way to use the little time they have. Thus, they
are careful to regulate their children’s time and they have as an absolute rule that dinner is never in front of the television – it is an almost sacred ritual where they are all gathered and give attention to each other. They dread the future when the children become so big that they (the parents) envisage losing control over the use of media. And it is evident that they see the present time as a socialisation of their children into ‘proper’ media users.

Family B consisted of two working parents and two daughters – one in her early twenties and one in her late teens. They lived in decent house in an upper-middle class suburb in Oslo. The mother in the family tells us that she has her strict everyday morning ritual of getting up early – around six – before all the others in the family, making herself a cup of tea, and curl up in the living room couch to watch a program called God morgen Norge (‘Good morning Norway’) – a program based on the almost global concept of early morning mixture of entertainment and news. She says that this is perhaps the most precious moment of the day – nobody should talk to her, she wants to be left totally alone for the hour that she spent in the couch before she has to start on the harried morning chores of waking her children, making breakfast, and getting herself and the rest of the family out of the house. If somebody interrupts her in this morning ritual she tells us – and this is confirmed by the other members of the family – that she become very irritable. Her own explanation for this precious morning ritual is that this is her only private moment in an otherwise harried work- and family living and she feels that she is not able to come through it without.

Her husband tells us that he has his own way of dealing with pressures in his everyday life. He had suffered a neck-injury some years before the interview and is especially susceptible to harriedness and stressful situations. For him the way to manage the ordinary work day is to sit down in the afternoon and watch television. He says, and the rest of the family confirm this, that he gets so engrossed in watching that it is impossible for the others to communicate with him. But his incommunicability is not first of all the result of concentrating on the programs he is watching. Quite the contrary; his watching is a way to shut out everything around him he tells us, to enter into a type of rest which gave us
associations to meditation. He is clear on the purpose of this ritualised afternoon watching; it is an effective way for him to shut out everything around him; he creates his own ‘reality-bubble’ in this way; and in a sense the television is the mantra or medium through which he reaches this state of mind. He used the word ‘time-out’ to describe his state of mind.

But apart from the ritualistic uses of the television as means for regaining energy and feeling of control and mastery over their hectic lives they are clearly sceptical to the time they used on the home’s media. When being asked why they only had a table-antenna to their tv they said that it was their attempt to reduce the time they spend on watching programmes that they really don’t feel is worth the time. Likewise, their attitude to their children’s use of both tv and pc is one of wishful restriction; it should be reduced because there are better things to use one’s time on.

4.2 Harriedness, time-outs and ritualistic media consumption

“… giving time its full social efficacy, [is] never more potent than when nothing but time is going on” (Bourdieu 1977: 7).

Family A is an example of the type that statistically has the least free time and is most likely to feel harried. Both parents have demanding jobs, and they have three small children that require a great deal of attention and support. Thus, in addition to the long work-hours, much of the time they spend in the home is dedicated to being with their children. In this sense they might in statistical material figure as having substantial leisure time (for instance by paid help for household chores as a way to minimalise practical chores) but still have a feeling of harriedness and fatigue because the feel they should use most of the available time on their children. In this way leisure is not necessarily the same as their own, relaxing time.

In the interview they expressed a feeling of being in a time-squeeze. Nevertheless the simultaneously stated several times in the interview
that their evenings were full of free time – when the children were put to bed they enjoyed periods of slowness. To understand this seemingly paradoxical situation we need to recapitulate what was said about phenomenological time.

As I pointed out in chapter 2 we perceive time in different ways depending on the contexts we are in. I made a crude distinction between two types; clock-time and event-time. The former is the type that is typically linked to work and activities in the public sphere while event-time is more associated with the private sphere – not the least to activities in the home. This is caused by romantic love, or familism, being a strong ideological force in modern society. The public sphere – and in particular the capitalist and bureaucratic sphere – is dominated by instrumental rationality, where efficiency and hence clock-time dominates. However, the idea of being efficient becomes existentially meaningless if it is not countered by another type of rationality, and hence time-perception, simply because there is no point in ‘saving up time’ if there is nothing to save for. It must be saved for something that is considered existentially meaningful. One important form of existential meaningfulness is anchored in the ideology of romantic love, conventionally resulting in marriage and the establishment of a home; “love [is] for love’s own sake” – it is “a force … which is self-grounding and self-motivating” (Sørhaug 1995: 20).

This means that it is meaningless to let the activities that fulfil the ideological goals of family life be efficient. To read bedtime stories for your children as fast as you can in order to save time appears to us as logic out of context. Thus, on the one hand it seems that clock-time is directly tied to time as a resource while it is irrelevant in relation to event-time. However, also autotelic acts cannot be understood if not related to the time used. There is a hidden, but crucial, rhythm to autotelic practices that in some situations appear as rather paradoxical; “giving time its full social efficacy, [is] never more potent that when nothing but time is going on” (Bourdieu 1977: 7). Most often there is nothing apparently paradoxical from the individual’s point of view, because different types of concerns are harboured in different contexts; event-time in homes is qualitative because it is autotelic and existentially important while clock-time – typically dominant in work-contexts
is instrumental; people relate to it as an external, objective fact and it is measured in quantities (see Figure 1). In this sense it is empty; it can in principle be filled with anything.

**Figure 1: Types of phenomenological time**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>home</th>
<th>private sphere</th>
<th>existential</th>
<th>autotelic</th>
<th>event-time</th>
<th>qualitative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>work</td>
<td>public sphere</td>
<td>instrumental</td>
<td>heterotelic</td>
<td>clock-time</td>
<td>quantitative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The paradoxical quality of event-time surfaces in practical situations for those who – for some reason or another, justified or not – feel harried. In such situations they are faced with the cultural obligation to spend time as if there was nothing else to do, while they simultaneously have to actively keep pressing matters at bay. In such situations the paradox requires an active, deliberate sorting out of actions and interests. The individual needs actively to forget practical matters so that the existentially important practices can take place – in a way that is morally acceptable.

Thus, the statements that the parents in Family A express in the interview can be seen as a practical solution to their feeling of being harried; the strategy they employ is to distinguish clearly between in-home and out-of-home as different contexts; they work long hours but evidently feel strongly that the time they have at their disposal in the family setting is valuable; but its value lies in being able to suspend feelings of being in a time-squeeze. The way they portray their daily life at home is by emphasising the calm and easiness of family routines. This is in line with the ideals of middle class values in our society.

The family also illustrates the relevance and worth of discursive data: The parents appear as being highly moralistic, and it is thus easy to suspect that they actually experience stress and harriedness also in their daily home-life. It is only in reflection – as a response to our inquiries – that they formulate their situation as squeezed for time. Moreover, their highly restrictive attitude towards media use also reveals a concern for time as a scarce resource. They complain – as also Family B does –
about the time-thief media can be, and also their affective attacks on the quality of children’s programs on tv point to the same concern for time being a value that they are short of. However, what is interesting – and what the discursive data clearly tell us – is the narrative construction of their home life: The way they portray themselves clearly reflects the ideals they live by. Since self-narratives always has an element of rationalisation and legitimisation it follows that such narratives is an important gate to identifying and understanding dominant cultural values, since legitimisation by necessity has to appeal to widely held cultural ideas and values. And the tension between on the one hand the consciously laid out narrative about a peaceful and slow home-life where media only have a marginal place, and on the other hand the almost involuntary disclosure of a rather heavy load of responsibility and work on the parents’ behalf, suggest that the former are expressions of core, widely shared values; slow event-time characterised by good, intimate communication and mutual care.

Family A appear as rather extreme in their restrictive and hence moralistic attitude towards media. Their process of domesticating their ICTs is problematic and associated with a feeling that they are wild, untamed objects and represent a constant potential threat to the moral economy of their household. Their narratives about the appropriation of ICTs are dominated by distanciation; they portray the tv as something that almost came into their home on its own, the game-boy was introduced on false premises (not being aware of how violent and destructive the games they could play on it really were), and the radio is a potential nuisance – a technology that threatens to disrupt the peace and quiet of their home. Consequently, the objectification and incorporation of the technologies are problematic; the tv is first placed in the parents’ sleeping room but is then reluctantly placed in the living room when practical concerns require a moving of it. And the incorporation – i.e. the practical adjustment of ICTs to temporal routines of the home (Silverstone, et al. 1992: 24) – can also be characterised as being laden with ambivalence and moral objections. In other words, in this home the domestication of media technologies were characterised as being a problematic process due to the strong moral evaluation that the parents placed on the role of media-use in their home, which is an attitude that one can assume is anchored in one’s own socialisation into such uses. It
is thus telling that the mother referred to her own childhood when she explained her attitude to radio-use; when she grew up the radio was just turned on when the news came: “I think I come from a rather quiet family” she says.

Most other families that we interviewed were significantly more positive towards media’s role in the home. Family B is but one example of this attitude. Instead of seeing media as potential threats – as wild, undomesticated beasts – they found pleasure in their ICTs. Both the mother and the father in Family B use the tv actively as a way to handle a harried life outside the home. Thus, from this point of view the television is an ally in their struggle to keep the harriedness of the public sphere at bay. They use it as a device to ‘hold time still’ through ritualised time-outs (Hazan 1987).

Quantitative research on families’ time use, and their conceptions on time have revealed what seems like a paradox (Kitterød 1999). According to data from SSB (the national census bureau in Norway) parents of dependent children report that they are in a state of time-squeeze (ibid.). However, at the same time their data also show that Norwegians – including parents with two incomes – actually report more free time than before. This free time also manifest itself in more time used on media. Some commentators interpret this paradox as the complaining of lack of time is a status symbol in modern society – in contrast to the leisure class of Veblen’s America the upper classes of today work significantly more than the lower. Although these interpretations cannot be dismissed out of hand, we believe that Kitterød comes closer to the point when she argues that an increased quantity of chores and leisure activities leads to narrowly sequenced time and hence shorter periods of unscheduled time in-between other activities. This leads to a lifestyle that is not experienced as relaxing (ibid.). The same line of argument is presented in a paper from CRIC, University of Manchester (Southerton, et al. 2001). The authors take as their starting point a more harried lifestyle and discuss strategies people use in order to meet this problem: They draw attention to the way modern lifestyle implies more activities, fragmentation of tasks, disrupted flows, and badly timed events. Together they enhance the feeling of not having enough time (see also Ellingsæter 2005).
These explanations seem plausible. However, I would like to add an additional mechanism that explains the apparent paradox of increased harriedness combined with more time used in front of the tv. If the contention that parents in two-income households with dependent children – who are presumably the ones that objectively has the most acute lack of time – experience a strong need for rest in everyday life, it can be argued that their motivation for creating situations that enable them to take time-outs is stronger than for other categories of Norwegians. I hold that one of the most functional and accepted ways of creating time/space-bubbles in hectic family life is to watch TV – by sitting in the couch together with your children watching tv you take part in an activity that is valued (being with your children) and you are available while you are actually resting (Helle-Valle 2003). Thus, tv has for many become a legitimate form of rest – a time out – for families. Watching a program on tv is a time-out-of-frame (Goffman 1974: 260) in the way that it is a situation in which it is known and accepted that the participants engage in a language-game that is detached from the immediate, physical space they are in. As such the media technology can serve as a means for a subjective feeling of time-out – of breaking with a ‘time-in’, in this case a harried pace of everyday life (cf. Sørhaug 1996: 186). And if there are more than one family member engaged in the media consumption it is at the same time legitimate because it can be defended as being a social form of time-out; it is a social event because they sit together and have a common focus, they take part in a common narrative, and they can enact a ritualised slowing down in an otherwise hectic life. This slowing down is also something that can be attributed as positive for the children since it is a widely held view that also children are subjected to harriedness and even stress. From this point of view an increase in the time spent in front of the tv is a logical consequence of feeling harried.

What also adds to the feeling of harriedness is what can be called an imperfect alignment between event-time/home and clock-time/public sphere. Not all activities within the home are existentially important – there are chores that need to be done but is not considered to be contributing to familism (e.g. washing and cleaning). This creates conflicts between heterotelic and autotelic activities within the home. And there
are also activities placed outside the home that are considered existentially significant; being with friends, leisure activities, etc. This imperfect alignment between time-perceptions and social context create a mixture of concerns and tasks that create conflicting obligations. The obligation to clean the kitchen after dinner has to be weighted against the obligation to have quality time with the rest of the family – etc. This creates dilemmas and might enhance the feeling of being in a time pressure because the chores invades contextually founded presumptions of the home being the setting for event-based slow time that shall realise the values of familism. Moreover, the dilemma will in itself contaminate the time perception in the home because a common solution for the parents is to attempt to do the practical tasks as effective as possible so that they might have as much time as possible for family life, and hence the presence and relevance of clock-time becomes an ingrained part of the daily life in homes.

There are also other mechanisms generated by the imperfect alignment of contexts, tasks and time-perception. For one, harriedness in the work-situation will invade life at home if the adults bring their work home. Another factor is the fact that not all that is considered existentially important is anchored in familism. The other dominant modern ideology is individualism, which in some ways are opposed to familism as it provides legitimacy and motivation for non-family sociality. This creates dilemmas in the sense that what is existentially important does at times compete with the presence in the home, hence increasing the time pressure on family life. Moreover, this dilemma – that creates ambivalence among individuals – is exacerbated by the partly contradictory contents of familism and individualism. Familism emphasises relationships and sociality, individualism might in the family setting often mean the opposite; withdrawing to secluded places within the home or seeking companionship outside the home.

In this light we see that the mother’s time-outs in front of the tv in Family B is not only a question of restitution and handling a harried life, it is also about drawing on the ideology of individualism in order to legitimately demand a ritualised time for oneself. Her account of the ritual is not solely linked to physical and mental restitution, it is also expressed as a ‘right’ that she has – she deserves it. Her ritualised time-
out is presented as a kind of necessary luxury; it is a luxury in the sense that she has established this ritual as one where she does not have to cater to the other family-members’ needs and presence. In her narrative of the ritual she emphasises the earned luxury of the situation by describing how she ‘curls up on the couch’, that she always makes herself a cup of tea and that she lights a candle in order to make the event into something cosy. At the same time she indicates that without it she would not function in the family. Thus, in my view the ritual should be understood as a ritualistic expression both of individualism and familism, and as a time-out. This time-out is not a family’s time-out vis a vis the world – as many family rituals might be interpreted as – but a personal time-out vis a vis the demands she feels the family (and the rest of the world) places upon her. And it is crucial to see it as both; it covers a personal felt need for rest and at the same time it is expressed – and hence justified – in a way that refers to the legitimate need for being an individual-in-a-family. Hence, we see it as a quite adequate and typical expression of playing on the two legitimate forms of existential ideology; she seeks to find a practically acceptable and manageable balance between individualism and familism.

A trait that we found among most of the adults we interviewed was that of feelings of ambivalence vis a vis ICTs. Ambivalence can here be defined as a state of mind generated by practical dilemmas (Bauman 1991; cf. Helle-Valle 1997: 304f). I contend that this ambivalence must be explained by the imperfect alignment between the home as a context on the one hand, and the moralities and practicalities that dominate the context on the other. As I have already described there are situations in the everyday life of homes that accentuate the contradictions between familism and individualism. The morning ritual of the mother in household B is one example, and parents’ weighing of giving their children freedom to decide for themselves as opposed to their wish to inculcate proper attitudes to media technologies is another example. In addition, parents also face the dilemma of sanctions, which often lead to quarrels, versus a peaceful sociality in the home. But in addition to these dilemmas the ambivalence of many parents spring out of their moral desire to regulate media use versus their own need for using ICTs as means for rest (cf. Helle-Valle 2003).
Lastly, a few words on the significance of ritual in the family. A ritual might be defined as any act that through its repetitiveness and predictability serve important symbolic functions (cf. e.g. Leach 1954: 10ff). One important type of function is to confirm to oneself and the world who and what one is – a form of social positioning. And this is clearly a vital aspect of family rituals. The Sunday dinner, the Friday evening of relaxed family gathering, vacations and the like all signify to the participants and the onlookers that ‘we are a group of a certain type’. One quality of the ritual is that it requires coordination; a vital element in taking part in the ritual is that one is there at the same time as the others. Thus, rituals gather family members and hence serve the important function of coordinating family members’ time schedules and synchronising their relation and attitude to family life. In the case of the mother who insists of having her individual ritual in front of the tv the performance of the ritual is a one woman-act but the awareness, and hence the ritualistic function, of the ritual involves the whole family; it serves to establish an agreement about who does what when – and what are reasonable ways of dividing chores and leisure. In many other instances, however, the ritualistic aspect of media consumption in homes is about creating ‘community’; i.e. to display a willingness and ability to coordinate one’s time and spend it in ways that builds the family.

4.3 Time and media use in non-prototypical homes

The prototypical home – the one consisting of two parents and their children – are in fact an exception. Less than a quarter of all households are of this kind (SSB 2006c). However, although almost half the population belong to such a household (SSB 2006a), and in any case the numerical size is by far outnumbered by its cultural significance; it is still the dominant popular model – the prototype – of what a home is. Nevertheless, the fact remains that a large number of Norwegians live in non-prototypical households. In relation to the fact that time is the main issue in this report it might be useful to divide the non-prototypical households in two: those without children and those with one parent with children living at home. The reason for this way of sorting the households is that they stand in opposite positions when it comes to the question of work-load in the home. A simple measure-
ment in that respect is to look at the relation between producers and consumers. One way of looking at the household’s practical situation is to divide the number of producers with the number of consumers. This means we get a measurement that varies between 1 and towards zero (Helle-Valle 2000). The larger the number, the better the household’s situation (at least in terms of manpower). However, if we think in terms of all types of scarce resources it is not only the production and consumption of material goods that is relevant – also the production and consumption of care is practically relevant here. Parents not only earn necessary money, they also provide essential care for their dependants. Both these tasks are time-consuming and we therefore see that in terms of time the non-children households are presumably those with most of it, while for most single parents time is a scarce resource.

This finds support in our material. Time-squeeze is a common theme among most households with children. Not so with the households without children; an interview with a single woman in her thirties, living in Oslo, can serve as an example. While the families I have described already struggle to find the time to do all that is considered necessary to do, this woman seemed to have oceans of time (having a producer-consumer ratio of 1). That is, she tells us that she often works long hours, and comes home late. But when she is at home, she turns on the tv before seven in the evening and it stays on until she goes to bed – or in fact it stays on until after she has gone to bed; she shows us that the tv is placed on a mobile base that enables her to roll it from room to room, and she tells us that she takes the tv with her into the bedroom so that she can watch programs while in bed. Her use varies; sometimes she watches programmes (e.g. a film) intently but much of the time it is there as background life; it provides company in an otherwise very single life at home. She estimates that the tv is on about four hours every day. She is also a regular user of radio; her habit is to listen to it in the morning and on weekends. In the morning she wakes up by the alarm-clock-radio, and she also has a wireless radio that she takes with her to the bathroom and then to the kitchen.

We can also see another striking contrast to the nuclear families: While most households with children seem to be greatly concerned about the moral aspects of media use – in terms of media content as well as the
time used – this is a theme that is much less in the foreground in households without children. In a way it is obvious; children shall be raised, adults have that as a major responsibility, and with the view of children that dominate Western societies – namely that they are ‘unfinished’ adults that hence have to be continually moulded – there is no wonder that the media and their uses are constantly being subjected to moral evaluation and scrutiny. This concern is of course absent in households without children. Nevertheless she mentions a couple of times during our interview with her that she sometimes feels bad about being a passive watcher – that she wishes that she could be better to turn the ICTs off.

At the other end of the producer-consumer scale we find single parents with children. Let me provide two examples to illustrate the range of adaptations to media use in households with a disadvantageous producer-consumer rate, and hence households characterised by economic and temporal pressures. One is from a satellite town in Oslo. This is a middle-aged divorced woman with two children in their teens (i.e. a producer-consumer ratio of 0.33). This household was characterised by intense media use. They all watched a great deal of tv but it was especially the son’s pc-use that was quite extensive. The family had moved to this location while the son went to junior high school and he had evidently not become integrated in his new environment. Instead he seemed to live his life much through the internet and pc-games. It went so far that he actually skived school for two weeks (see Slettemeås 2007). Although this incident had made the mother react and introduce some rules on the son’s ICT-use, it seemed to an outsider that she had very little control over her son. The other example is a divorced mother with three small children living in a rural area in western Norway (p-c rate of 0.25). It is obvious from the interview that she has a harried everyday life and although she has a nanny for her children until she is back from work her strategy for handling daily home life is to have strict rules for her children. Living alone with three children between the ages of 6 and 9 has led her on the one hand to place strict limitations on their uses the home’s ICTs, and on the other to use them strategically in order to discipline her children. Thus, she tells us that on week-days they are allowed half an hour of children’s tv on NRK, and then, after a half hour break, another half hour of cartoons on a cable
channel. On week-ends she is more permissive, letting them see in the morning and more during the day. She also tells us that her son’s pc-use was a problem; he became so engulfed in playing on it – obviously being in a state of flow – that he forgot everything around him. So she found out that she had to regulate its use. Her solution was to move the pc to the first floor. And because he was afraid of being alone he did not dare to stay there by himself. And as she had an elaborate system of rewarding good behaviour in her children she would go upstairs with him so that he could play for half an hour if he deserved it.

What statistics shows us is that there are only marginal differences in media use between households with and without children (SSB 2006b) – which is also the impression we get from our qualitative material. But behind this numerical similarity we detect a difference in ‘how’ it is used. By this I mean that although they all consume roughly similar quantities of media, their attitudes are dissimilar; for the single ICTs are generally considered to be morally a relatively neutral technology. They are used pragmatically and only excessive use might trigger some kind of bad conscience about being too passive. In this sense it threatens ideas and ideals connected to individualism as ideology – about realising oneself as an active agent engaged in the social environments s/he is connected to. In the families with children, on the other hand, media uses are closely connected to raising one’s children; the ICTs are Troyan horses in the sense that they mediate inputs from outside – from the public sphere – into the ‘womb’ of the private; the home. They mediate content that is potentially damaging for the home, and especially for its children. Moreover, they are also Troyan horses in the sense that what was meant as a functional entertainment contributing to the home’s sociality very often generate conflicts between family members (Helle-Valle 2003). Our examples show that how the homes handle uses of ICTs vary, from control lost to strictly controlled use. But what the homes that include children share is that ICTs are morally evaluated to a much larger extent than in homes without children.

But it is important not to make the difference between households with and without children too accentuated. The morality of the prototypical home can well be said to be hegemonic. Its strength derives from many sources. First, most of those who today live in non-prototypical house-
holds have grown up in prototypical homes – thus they have been socialised into the prototype and hence have inherited these mores. Secondly, many singles who live in households on their own hold on to a dream about becoming a home of the prototypical type some time in the future. Thus, the ideas inherent in the prototype are already part of their ideal type of living. And lastly, many non-prototypical households have formerly been prototypical homes – either because they have been married but are now divorced or because their children have moved out. This also points to the importance of seeing households as dynamic, processual entities; they establish themselves, grow and die (Stenning 1962, Helle-Valle 2000) – and it is strictly speaking only the middle part that is fit with the prototype.

Another non-prototypical type of home in our material is ethnic non-Norwegians. I will not dwell on this theme in this publication, because it will be handled in another publication (cf. Slettemeås 2006). I will only make two points, of which one is directly related to time. First, ‘ethnic non-Norwegians’ is an extremely wide term and there are few common factors that might have generated patterns of ICT-use that separates them from ethnic Norwegians. However, there is one characteristic feature they share; they are diasporic; ‘away from home’. Or rather, they have kin and networks in other parts of the world and that makes them use ICTs in other ways than the typical Norwegian does. They use them both to communicate with their networks – via telephone (including Skype), e-mail, by chatting – and to educate their children on their place of ethnic origin. We found that despite the differences in ethnic backgrounds and class- and educational backgrounds it was common to use the ICTs in this way; meaning that parents encouraged, and often insisted, that their children used the media in this way. In combination with our impression that the relationship between the parents and their children were more authoritative than among ethnic Norwegians it followed that a considerable part of these children’s ICT-use was initiated by the parents for educational purposes. We only encountered one family – from the Middle East – that did not use media in this way, and that was because they had made a decision that they would become Norwegian and hence raise their son without close ties to his country of origin.
5 Concluding remarks; tomorrow’s media use?

The driving idea behind this project was that the development of media technologies and media content was so fast and radical that knowledge about what lay ahead of us would be valuable, but difficult to acquire and analyse. Predicting the future is of course a risky business and we were well aware of the impossibility of making certain predictions. However, our belief was that by systematically studying the developments that we could observe, and combine such knowledge with an analysis of how, where and in what ways the consumption of these media technologies took place, we could be able to identify processes and social mechanisms that we can say that generate the changes that we can observe in everyday life (Elster 1989). Such analyses are not hardcore predictions but provide insights into the various social and cultural forces that affect the field of media use.

I will do this with several limitations and qualifications. First of all I will limit myself to discussing the aspects of media use that relates to time. Secondly, I will limit myself to argue along the lines of thought that has guided the report this far. And lastly, as a way to make it more systematic and easy to read I will order the arguments in relation to three aspects of media consumption: Media technology; the contextuality of media consumption; and the ideologies that affect the uses.

The development of media technology can be characterised as moving from the analogue to the digital. From the point of view of the consumer this change has implied a revolution in terms of deliverance of quality, quantity, time flexibility and convergence of media content.
The quality of the mediated content increases the entertainment value. It is especially within the realm of games this has an effect on use; the advanced animation makes the willingness to use radically higher. Also the quantity has the same effect; with the explosion of channels and programmes there is always something that is worthwhile watching. Moreover, with the introduction of technologies that enables the consumer to watch what s/he wants whenever s/he wants (VCR, DVD, PVR) the timing constraints are also removed. Lastly, the platform convergence also affects consumption in that the consumer no longer depends on a given platform in order to consume a given media content. Thus, increased availability is a result of the technological revolution. And more specifically, this increased availability comes together with increased flexibility in terms of coordination. While yesterday’s dominance of public broadcasting ensured coordinated consumption, the various technological developments have now removed these limitations. The effect of this is obviously an advantage from the point of view of the enthusiastic individual consumer but poses a problem for the social consumption of media content. The ritualised aspects of media use are no longer a given aspect, and for the home it represents a challenge in the sense that it distorts the important need for coordinating practices within the household.

Moreover, the sheer weight of the media supply provides a challenge in relation to time use and time perception because lack of coordination and the ‘pull’ of high-quality entertainment becomes a ‘time-thief’. Combined with the marked decrease in adults being full time at home taking care of the family, these factors greatly increase the feeling of harriedness; there is less time to spend at home, media consumption takes increasingly more time and is more flexible and individualised. This leads to fragmented activities and disrupted flows, and hence to feelings of being harried.

Implicit in the above argumentation lies the contention that the home is a special place; it represents a communicative context that separates it from other types of sociality. It has already been argued and described earlier in the report, but I will here just recapitulate the basic points; in late-modern Western societies the distinction between the public and the private is constitutive of our sociality. The emergence of the public
sphere, with a rationale based on bureaucratic reasoning and market rationality, generated a private sphere that was defined by the former’s opposites; multiplex, diffuse and intimate relationships, closely linked to existential issues (cf. Parsons 1951; Weber 1978). And the private sphere’s most prominent institutionalisation is the home; the place in which romantic love is conventionally realised in marriage and offspring. Thus, while the public sphere is dominated by instrumental reasoning (zweckrational; ibid.) and hence clock-time, the home is – or rather should be – dominated by event-time; time that is ideally not measured in quantities but is tied directly to the tasks it is involved in because they are considered to be existentially important. Now, there is a stubborn and widespread belief that society develops towards a disintegration of the family and home as institutions. Increased commercialisation, mobility and globalisation erode the social foundations of these institutions and hence we see the results already in much less stable and variable family forms. However, it might well be argued that under such conditions the ideological importance of the home and the family becomes strengthened. It is untenable to live one’s life solely under the conditions that I described as characterising the public sphere, and in face of such developments the need to find shelter in institutions that can provide existential refuge becomes crucial. Thus, from this line of logic it can be argued that the moral concerns surrounding the uses of ICTs in homes will not decrease, although the heterogenisation of society (due to increased mobility and individualism) might well increase the variations in households’ attitudes to the uses of ICTs.

Implicit in the latter line of reasoning lie two contentions: that the home as a context will survive, and perhaps in some ways become strengthened, and that the ideological content of the context has a certain, stable quality. I argue that in the first sense the home will survive simply because it fulfils an existential need that cannot be met in other ways in our foreseeable future. The other claim is perhaps more debatable; one can imagine that the home survives but that it does not necessarily have to be dominated by what I have called familism – i.e. an ideology that is based on the conventional manifestation of romantic love; a spouse and children. And as I have indicated familism is not alone on the home’s stage; individualism has, within certain limits, a legitimate
place in the home as well. However, as long as one takes as true that
the important function homes fulfil is the need for providing an inti-
mate social setting for existential concerns it follows that whatever
change of ideological content the family faces it will still represent a
morally laden communicative context for committed relationships, and
a context for raising children. As such the need for event-time and co-
ordinated sociality will remain a defining quality of the family/home.

And given that the time pressure will continue to be a perceived aspect
of reality we face at least two consequences for the uses of ICTs within
homes: First there is a limit to how much time we can spend on media,
and hence it is reasonable to think that media use will increasingly be-
come a zero-sum game; time pressures and morally formed objections
to use too much time on mediated entertainment will halt the increase
we so far have seen in media time-use.

Secondly, while increased interactivity and activity have been qualities
that have enthusiastically been forwarded by new media pushers our
findings suggest that a substantial part of our users are not looking for
such qualities – or only to a limited degree. They would rather curl up
in a couch than sitting on the edge of a chair while they consume – be-
cause they seek rest and time-outs in an otherwise harried life. And
they want to experience it together in a family setting that can provide a
social focus. That is, the adult seem to want this. Of course, they only
represent a part of our informants. The children are clearly more at-
tuned to the more (inter)active services. And although it is the parents
who decide (to a certain extent) it must in all fairness to our findings be
pointed out that the children do a substantial part of the media con-
sumption. Moreover, it must also be pointed out that a great deal of it
takes place outside the confines of the home, or in secluded cells within
the household where familism does not affect the uses (mobile phones,
handheld gaming consoles, portable pcs, work pcs, etc.). But such uses
are outside this project’s scope – which also points to its limitations.
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