

**‘Presents of the Midlands:
Domestic Time, “Ordinary Agency”
and Family Life in an English Town’**

by

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A Doctoral Thesis

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Abstract

Focusing on the everyday lives of middle-class English families in a medium size town situated in the Midlands, this doctoral thesis contributes to anthropological debates on the topics of human agency, time, domesticity, mothering, and kinship. Organized upon the idea that cultural models of time are inextricably linked to understandings of agency (Greenhouse 1996), the thesis links Moore's (2011) post-vitalist theoretical framework and the work of Foucault (1990, 2000) on ethical practices, with Gershon's (2011) critique of 'neoliberal agency'. The concept of 'ordinary agency' is proposed for situating everyday actions as significant actions that contribute to social transformation. Three cultural models of time are identified – spontaneity, anticipation and 'family time' – and the types of 'ordinary agencies' that they engage are described in three dedicated chapters.

The first chapter discusses the theoretical framework of the thesis. The second chapter addresses methodological issues, and discusses the methods that the author developed during her ethnographic fieldwork for looking at people's relationships with time. The third chapter addresses the time mode of spontaneity, presenting ethnographic examples of digital media use at home, and introducing theoretical tools for situating the forms of agency engendered by spontaneity. The fourth chapter looks at the time mode of anticipation in relation to mothering, motherhood and care. This chapter is accompanied by a video component, titled *Mum's Cup* and situated in the appendix of the thesis. Based on material that the participants filmed in solitude, for a self-interviewing with video task, *Mum's Cup* is a visual point of departure for theorising the Mother-Multiple ontological position that is described in chapter IV. Alongside providing a visual ethnographic lever for endorsing a theoretical concept, the video project also reflects on the relationship between the researcher and the participants, a relationship that, for various reasons (some related to length limitations), is not fully described in the textual corpus of the thesis. Discussing two types of domestic sociality, the fifth chapter looks at 'family time' and at the forms of agency engendered by the idea and by the experience of having a 'family-style lifestyle' (Strathern 1992), and it draws on, and contributes to, bodies of literature on English kinship. The last chapter addresses the context of the research – which is an interdisciplinary project looking at domestic energy consumption –; it situates the position of the author in relation to the domestic sustainability agenda and to debates on interdisciplinarity, and it formulates ideas about possible applications that the anthropological knowledge gained by the author through her research could have in relation to the context that originally framed and facilitated the research.

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Introduction

This ethnography draws upon fifteen months of fieldwork in Middleborough¹, a medium-sized town situated in the area of East Midlands, England. The central topic is an exploration of everyday domestic life of middle-class families, focusing on the articulation and enactment of specific time-modes, the corresponding types of ‘ordinary agency’ that they engender, and their employment in everyday practices of creating relatedness (Carsten 2000a). I examine everyday actions performed at home, in solitude, or in the company of members of one’s nuclear family, as significant actions that express human agency and that can contribute to social transformation in two ways: by extending people’s ‘ethical imaginations’ in self-other relations (Moore 2011), which can refer to the relationships between participants and researcher, or to kin relationships, with regard to enacting care towards one’s ‘domestic others’ – family members, pets, and the house itself as an entity; and by supporting the development of new forms of sociality that can inspire further models of social organisation, such as the sociality of instant gifting and the sociality of physical togetherness and digital independence. Specifically, I focus upon examples of actions that involve the use of digital media, such as finding the answer to a question of momentary concern by using a smartphone or a tablet connected to the internet, coordinating activities with other family members by sending text messages, and engaging in activities of media multi-tasking in the evening in relation to ‘doing’ family (Morgan 1996) and to making ‘family time’.

My approach responds to two different calls towards a new recognition of the potentialities, ubiquity, and the embedded nature of human agency in activities of self-reflection, imagination and hope. Both grounded in Foucault’s (1990, 2000) work on ethical practices, one call is made by Moore (2011), in proposing the analytical lever of ‘ethical imagination’ for developing a post-vitalist perspective, and one is made by Hobson (2011), in her critique of existing approaches to the domestic sustainability research agenda. My dissertation advances the work of Moore (2011) and Hobson (2011), adding one more analytical tool to the ideas and vision expressed in their calls, by introducing the working concept of ‘ordinary agency’. Situated and employed within the domain of the everyday, of the ‘non-

¹ A pseudonym whose choice I explain in the methodological chapter.

eventful' (Ehn & Löfgren 2010), ordinary agencies are related to 'non-conscious' – unconscious, tacit, and non-intentional – acts of creating meaning, such as imagination and taking action on impulse. This concept can also be approached as in contradistinction to the concept of 'neoliberal agency' (Gershon 2011) that defines acts of calculation and rational decision making. Gershon (2011) developed this concept in order to criticise the unquestioned influence that neoliberal contexts have upon the analytical tools and approaches used for looking at human agency by contemporary scholars coming from such contexts. By universalizing a specific definition of agency, neoliberal perspectives, Gershon (2011) argues, endorse a singular worldview. 'Neoliberal agency' does not account for people's capacity to produce radical social transformation, but only for their ability to rationally operate means-ends calculations within a given (neoliberal) context. Gershon (2011) suggests that, in order for one to arrive at seeing other forms, understandings, and enactments of agency beyond the dominant neoliberal worldview, one should pay attention to epistemological difference, (alternative forms of) social organisation, and their interconnections.

The working concept of 'ordinary agency' has, therefore, two functions. First, it responds to Moore's (2011) and Hobson's (2011) calls towards an approach of ordinary actions as meaningful for social transformation. Second, it responds to Gershon's (2011) call for moving beyond 'neoliberal agency' through attention to epistemological difference and social organisation. I suggest that the domain of the ordinary, even in neoliberal economic and political contexts, can be regarded to manifest different epistemologies – related to tacit knowledge, imagination and the unconscious – and to bring out new understandings of the mutual shaping between epistemologies and relationships. This argument is developed in the first chapter of this dissertation, which introduces the theoretical framework of my work.

The second chapter introduces the methodological framework of my research, presenting the ways in which I experienced the relationships between 'applied' and 'academic' anthropology, discussing 'sensory ethnography' (Pink 2009) as the approach to ethnographic practice that I follow, and describing the methods that I developed together with my participants in order to access different forms of tacit knowledge.

The empirical chapters of my thesis (chapters 3 – 5) focus upon specific types of ‘ordinary agencies’, in relation to approaches to, understandings, and enactments of time inside domestic settings. The third chapter looks at spontaneity, developing a theoretical framework, based upon the work of the British philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe (1981, 2000 [1957]), for understanding spontaneous action as a form of action where means and ends coincide, and that represents ‘doing’ in the Aristotelian distinction between ‘doing’ and ‘making’. In the fourth chapter, I discuss the time-mode of anticipation, and I develop the concept of Mother-Multiple ontology in order to look at experiences of caregiving in kinship contexts; I describe forms of anticipation that are enacted when one steps into the Mother-Multiple position. In the fifth chapter, I discuss ‘family time’ as a concept used to ‘measure’ the quality of home life in ‘family-style lifestyle’ (Strathern 1992) settings, focusing upon two types of domestic sociality: elusive togetherness, and physical togetherness and digital independence; I look at the forms of agency engendered in making ‘family time’, and at the ways in which the normativity associated with the concept of ‘family’ in English middle-class contexts was both incorporated, and contested by my participants in their everyday practices of ‘creating relatedness’ (Carsten 2000a). Besides developing conceptualizations for regarding three specific time-modes and the types of ‘ordinary agencies’ that they engender, the empirical chapters also focus upon three different scales of analysis: the third chapter looks at individuals; the fourth chapter looks at relationships between two parts: the Mother-Multiple and the ‘domestic others’; and the fifth chapter looks at commonality and at specific forms of sociality of togetherness that are articulated in family settings.

In the sixth chapter I define my position in relation to the interdisciplinary applied context that framed my doctoral research, in order to show how my ethnographic findings, which were influenced by this context, could be applied in order to change the type of questions that projects focused on energy reduction address. The applications that I describe are related to tackling the powerful constellations of normativity and morality attributed to having a family-style lifestyle in English middle-class contexts; and to mediating between the temporality expressed by the Climate Change Act and the temporalities that laypeople enact in their everyday domestic lives.

In this introduction, after I succinctly describe the context of my research, I will focus upon two topics that are of specific importance in situating the empirical and the theoretical work that is discussed in my dissertation: family and time. My research participants were families which I visited, during my fieldwork, in their domestic settings; the multi-sensory and affective experiences, the forms of sociality, as well as the expectations and the normativity associated with the concept of 'family' in the UK were, therefore essential influences in the articulation of my ethnographic findings, as well as in the analytic development of my dissertation. Time, as I will show, was a general topic of concern that I encountered in these settings. The focus on family and time in this introduction is, therefore, meant to set the context for the work that is developed in the main corpus of my thesis.

The context of the research

My doctoral research was carried out as part of an interdisciplinary research project, the Low Effort Energy Demand Reduction (LEEDR) project. Based at Loughborough University, and funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) of the UK, LEEDR brought together fifteen researchers from five departments: building engineering, systems engineering, computer science, design and social sciences. The project investigated domestic energy consumption with English families, with the aim of proposing digital interventions that would help lower domestic energy demand. From the start, the focus of the project was twofold: reducing energy demand and understanding the ways in which digital technologies are used inside the home, so that interventions based upon these technologies could be developed. Both these aims, together with the general domestic sustainability research agenda related to existent concerns in national environmental policy, framed my research from the start and they influenced the way in which I developed my research design.

One of the current research areas that the EPSRC allocates funding for is the area of 'Energy', which is related to the efforts for meeting the environmental targets and the policy goals set by the Climate Change Act. Adopted in 2008, the Climate Change Act legally bounds the UK's Parliament to reduce the country's carbon

emissions with 80% by the year 2050, in relation to the 1990 baseline. In order to achieve the 80% reduction in carbon emissions, it is estimated that a reduction of 26-43% in energy consumption will be required, as a set of energy consumption scenarios produced by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) show. While accounting for approximately 30% of UK's greenhouse gas emissions, at the moment, domestic energy consumption is estimated to be higher than in 1990. The predictions of the Energy Saving Trust for electricity consumption show that 'domestic electricity demand in 2020 is forecast at 80TWh, a reduction in real terms of about 6% from 2009 levels, but 14% higher than 1990' (EST 2011: 29). This context explains the interest with funding research in the area of energy efficiency, which the LEEDR project addresses as well.

Working as part of an interdisciplinary project meant, for me, taking part in fortnightly meetings and thematic one-day workshops with the entire LEEDR team in order to develop interdisciplinary dialogues. I had the opportunity to engage with the types of questions addressed by other disciplines and to conduct research as part of the social sciences branch of the LEEDR project. At the same time, I was able to develop and to carry out my doctoral research independently. For my doctoral project I chose to momentarily suspend any direct concerns with domestic energy consumption and to focus, instead, upon gaining a deeper understanding of domesticity, looking at what was specific about the types of actions performed at home, about the forms of relationships developed in kinship contexts, and about the forms of sociality enacted in domestic settings. While keeping the interest with digital media usages expressed initially by the LEEDR project, I approached these questions in relation to the temporal dimension of domesticity. My doctoral research focused, therefore, on domestic time and digital media use: the ways in which people understand, measure, organise, approach, and engage with time in domestic settings defined by particular sets of relationships and by specific forms of sociality, and how digital media are employed in these processes. However, after finalising my ethnographic fieldwork, and after analysing my findings within a social anthropological framework, I went back to the concern with reducing domestic energy consumption embedded in the LEEDR project, and I made an exercise of formulating possible applications that the knowledge produced through my fieldwork could have in relation to energy demand reduction. In the second chapter of this thesis, which is the methodological chapter, I discuss in more detail my experiences

of working as part of an applied interdisciplinary project, as well as the ways in which this context influenced my fieldwork and the relationships that I developed with my participants. In the sixth chapter, I situate my position within the domestic sustainability research agenda, which is expressed by the LEEDR project, and I discuss some ways in which my ethnographic findings could be applied in order to change the types of questions that projects following this agenda address.

Family

The LEEDR group conducted research with twenty self-selected family-participants who volunteered to take part in the project for two and a half years. Their participation was not incentivised and their reasons for volunteering were individual and diverse, such as an interest in living more sustainable, or in lowering down one's energy bills. The participants agreed to have their energy consumption monitored for the whole duration of their participation, and to take part in ethnographic research, and in research conducted by colleagues from the discipline of design. The participant families were all home-owners; two of them defined themselves, during interviews, as 'working-class' while the other eighteen could be described, in terms of income and education, as 'middle-class'. With the exception of one single-parent family and of one extended family where the maternal grandmother was living in, all the family-participants were two-parent nuclear families. Moreover, all adult couples were heterosexual and married. Each family had between one and four children, with ages between one and 22.

While the LEEDR recruitment materials did not contain any descriptive cues regarding the types of families wanted, except for the essential criteria of being home-owners in order for the process of monitoring equipment installation to run smoothly, it turned out that all the families who volunteered reflected what can be called a traditional family ideology, namely a heterosexual married couple with children. James (1998) argues that the rhetoric of the traditional family in the UK continues to be conferred with ideological solidity by social policy and political practice 'despite its considerable inappropriateness for accounting for the contemporary forms of family life' (James 1998: 143). The dominance of this rhetoric might be one of the reasons why other, alternative forms of families were

not represented in this research, as the apparently neutral descriptive cue of 'home-owner family' might have automatically triggered the image of a 'cereal box' middle-class family, which many potential participants might not have identified themselves with.

The fact that all the families had children relates with existent cultural understandings of kinship as well. In her study of childhood identity in Britain, James (1998) discusses the assumption that '[p]arenting is what transforms the couple into a family – a shift that is also popularly held to make a house into a home' (1998: 144). In other words, in order to be regarded as having 'a family', or a family-style lifestyle (Strathern 1992), UK adults need to have children. This social requirement is associated with a set of moral values that, in a secular context, has the potential to produce a dominant and self-sufficient model of morality. As Strathern (1992) argues, in post-Thatcherite Britain, by 'doing' convention, which, here, is opting for a family-style lifestyle, the individual 'shows his or her capacity for morality, and thus makes explicit the fact that moral behaviour is contingent on the capacity for choice' (1992: 162). In the fifth chapter, I discuss the complex relationships that my participants had with the ideologically solid rhetoric of 'the family' and that they expressed in 'family practices' (Morgan 1996) of making 'family time' that both showed their 'doing' of convention, and their creativity in challenging the rigidity of social norms regarding family life and the dominant definition of the notion of 'family'. In the sixth chapter, I draw attention to a potential conflict between the morality associated with having a family-style lifestyle, and the morality of sustainable and low-carbon living practices, which, I suggest, can only be resolved by melting down the ideologically solid rhetoric of the traditional family and its default association with moral capacities.

Time

A focus on time emerged from the early stages of my research, before officially starting my fieldwork, by looking at early findings from research with a LEEDR pilot family-participant, as well as from my everyday experiences and observations as a Romanian anthropologist moving to a small English town. While I initially framed this focus by developing the working concept of 'domestic moments' as a lens for

looking at everyday family life and domestic activities that will acknowledge the temporal, rather than the spatial, dimension of home, my understandings of my participants' relationships with time at home developed considerably during my fieldwork, moving beyond the analytical capacities of this initial working concept.

In my fieldwork with English middle-class families, time appeared as one of the main constraints in people's lives; one of the main agents that stood in their way to achieving a sense of having the life they always wanted. The state, political power, the economic system, financial constraints, gender inequalities, specific sets of social norms and expectations, were not, apparently, sources of conflict. Time, instead, was. Lack of time was all that stopped my participants to be what they aspired to be, to pursue all the hobbies that they would have liked to, to make their house into their imagined ideal home, to model their children in a way that would fully represent their values and beliefs. This sense of lack of time emerged most strongly when I asked my research participants if there were ever moments when they wanted to make time go faster, or when they were feeling bored. The unanimous response to this question was a strong no, accompanied by surprised laughter and various explanations, such as Vic's, below.²

Normally, time is something that we don't have enough anyway. So, to make it pass quicker, it's not something we would, generally, want to do. I can't remember the last time I was bored. I can remember the last time I was thinking 'why am I watching this?', but not actually bored, no. We're always busy: if we're waiting twenty minutes for something to be ready in the oven, then we would use that twenty minutes for something else. (interview Vic and Gail)

For my participants, time was running fast, which was visible in the changes in one's children growing up; time was finite, an observation which usually emerged on Sunday evenings and at the end of holidays. Time was not what it used to be. When I asked Elaine and Chris if they had a routine of using music, radio, or the TV as a background to set the atmosphere for specific collective family activities, they said that they do not follow a routine, as their parents might have done by listening to the same radio show, or by watching the same TV soap opera every evening. They were not trying to create a sense of continuity and repetition in the ways they

² When referring to the research participants in the corpus of this thesis I use pseudonyms.

articulated domesticity, but just to get done all the evening tasks that they needed to complete for themselves and for their children.

Chris: *I guess the modern world and family processes, they don't really lend themselves to the kind of relaxed context repetition of previous generations. I mean, we're just doing whatever we need to do to get everything done at the moment, aren't we?* (interview Chris and Elaine)

For the majority of my participants, everyday domestic life was far from routinized, but it was rather made of a series of spontaneous decisions. These decisions generally followed the scenario: 'what's the situation?'; 'what's the time?'; 'what needs to be finished, what can be paused and what can be left for tomorrow?' The increased busyness of life, the blurring of the boundaries between work and home facilitated by the new capacities of digital technologies, such as that of providing access to one's work emails on one's mobile phone, placed the realm of domesticity and the realm of the public space in a relation of mutual saturation, rather than in opposition. In her study of temporal organization at home and at work with American families where both adults were working full-time, Hochschild (1997) argues that people's attempts to efficiently organize 'family time' represented a characteristic of work that was increasingly spreading inside the home. What she found out that her participants wished for was 'not simply more time, but a less alienating sense of time' (Hochschild 1997: 52); they wanted to be 'time-architects', who would be able to take their time in deciding how to structure their 'home time', in order to improve and develop their relationships, and not 'time-capitalists' that would treat time as capital that needs to be well managed. However, my research participants were not longing for an alternative sense of time, as they did have various strategies for manipulating time at home; but their time conflicts emerged from feeling limited by the amount of time available, which would not allow them to fully develop all their interests, and to fully reach and express their individual complexity. Multi-tasking, and switching between activities while waiting, were two techniques for gaining time. Below, Chris describes his strategies for not wasting precious time.

Chris: *You can never wait for anything; you start something off and then you think: 'Right, I'll go and do this'. And, then, you start something else off, and, then, you go and do something else and start that off, and then, all of a sudden, you're*

going 'Oh, there was something else I needed to do and that's going to be ready in a minute and I've got to get the...' I mean, I've even got to the point of trying to write down what comes into my head that I should be doing, so that when I come back I won't forget what it was I thought of five items ago that I can do. I mean, the bizarre thing is: it's like putting your cup of tea in the microwave for 30 seconds, or something – even that you can't stand to stand there and watch. You cannot watch for 30 seconds, you have to go and do something else (...) I mean, watching seconds count down on the microwave is like watching your life disappear, or something. They should put a skull on the front, or something.
(interview Chris and Elaine)

While this sense of passing through everyday life against the constant ticking of a timer was clearly related to the sheer busyness of life in modern times, I argue that one important element in generating and sustaining this feeling was an essential change in the visual representation of time measurement. My participants' preferred method for telling the time during the day was by checking their mobile phones or computers. These devices display time as a series of four numbers (e.g. 15:52), the last of which changes every minute. Analogue clocks represent time as cyclical: the speed of the moving hands is constant and their movement visible, which makes it possible for one to see the choreography of one minute's passing, to anticipate a future event that will start after a specific number of set segments of time have passed, and to visually 'calculate' the amount of time that is left before one would need to leave for work. In a digital numeric representation, time appears as linear and as moving forward like a chronometer, rather than in circles and clockwise; this representation appears as a given and unquestionable set of numbers that do not permit a creative interpretation, anticipation, or waiting, as Chris mentions. Digital clocks show time in the same way that a time bomb in an action movie would show it. No wonder that one cannot stop the chain of activities in order to just wait for something to be ready.

Digital representations of time are increasingly replacing analogue ones. Besides mobile phones and computers, digital clocks are embedded in various other domestic appliances and they can be found in each room of the house, as it was the case for the domestic settings of my participants: on the microwave, or on the oven screen, in the kitchen; in the living room, on the TV box; and as alarm clocks, in the bedrooms. From the moment they wake up and until they go to bed, people

situate themselves in relation to time by using a digital numerical framework of linearity, or progression. While very few of my participants still wore watches, and some of them had an analogue wall clock in the kitchen or in the living room, the presence of time as numerical and linear, expressed by all the digital technologies increasingly used at home, was the dominant temporal framework of the everyday.

When asked about the differences between using a digital and an analogue clock, some participants said that for them it did not make any difference as they were using both devices with an informative purpose, while others said they preferred to read time on an analogue clock face; however, because of the plurality and pervasiveness of digital devices around them, people said that they did not use an analogue clock as often as they would have liked to. Digital clocks were associated with precision, and they were often checked because people knew that the time on mobile phones and computers was synchronized through satellites, and it represented the 'right' time that was used globally. Analogue clocks, on the other hand, are not connected with satellites and, thus, they are prone to error. Their invention is related to a previous scientific era when the time on mechanical clocks was calibrated to the cycles of cesium atoms, and not to the rotation of the Earth, as discussed by Birth (2012).

Steve told me that he prefers to read time on an analogue clock face, rather than by using a digital clock:

Because, at a glance, you know what you're looking at (...) When I see the hand, for me, it equates to an amount of time. Certainly, in the morning, if I need to take Alan at eight o'clock to school, and I'm sitting here, and I've got fifteen minutes left to get dressed and get out. I do see that more relevant as a sequence of time, than if I've looked and it said '45'. Sometimes I get caught out a little bit, if I've used the clock on my car for instance: what time you've got left to get somewhere. Sometimes I've got caught out, 'cause somehow it doesn't... I don't know, it goes faster; for me, anyway. (interview Steve and Iris)

Because he is not able to see the time passing on the digital clock in his car, as he is able to do when using an analogue clock, Steve feels that time goes faster. His driving is not attuned to a visible movement of cyclical time, but it is parallel, and in competition, to a progressive linear invisible time, which is expressed through a set

of numbers that are to be trusted as representing 'the reality' and that appear as an unquestionable verdict.

The cognitive anthropologist Kevin Birth (2012) argues that the time-reckoning tools developed by humans can be regarded as cognitive artefacts: objects that people use to think about the world. Clocks and calendars, which provide a set of dominant representations of time, are tools that humans have placed knowledge in, and that they have come to rely on, instead of continuing to develop and to use their cognitive skills for telling the time: 'These skills can be cultivated, but normally are not, because their cultivation creates a sense of multiple temporalities of which clocks and calendars represent only two. To place these alternate temporalities in counterpoint with the dominant modes of reckoning time challenges these dominant modes' (Birth 2012: 11).

Following Birth's (2012) approach, one can argue that digital clocks are cognitive artefacts that people use in order to think about the world, and that can have specific influences upon the ways in which people think about, and position themselves in relation to time. Digital clocks are not accountable for what is regarded as the increased pace of everyday life in modern times (Eriksen 2001), but their pervasiveness can be regarded as contributing to maintaining one's perception of competing against the counting down of a timer, as a way of living. While analogue clocks, prone to error and requiring resetting from time to time, leave room for the imagination that time could pass at different speeds and, sometimes, even stop, digital clocks, synchronized to the satellites, are never wrong, and they privilege a specific type of engagement: one that is based on linear progression, and not on imagination, or daydreaming.

However, I argue that the existence and constant use of a set of dominant time-reckoning tools, such as digital clocks, does not completely erase alternative sets of human skills for telling the time, for imaging time, and for engaging with time; rather than being absent, these skills are exercised tentatively and informally in the domain of everyday domestic life, between others. Greenhouse (1996) argues that there is a connection between the forms of time used by social groups and their understandings of agency: 'time's many forms are cultural propositions about the nature and distribution of agency across social space – cultural propositions cast as normative ideals' (Greenhouse 1996: 82). Following this idea, in this dissertation I

will discuss spontaneity, anticipation, and 'family time' as time-modes that express counterdiscourses to the dominance of linear time – articulated and maintained through digital clocks, between other techniques – and that make a statement about the ingrained presence of 'ordinary agency' in everyday domestic life. Moreover, in my discussion I will focus upon examples in which these alternative time-modes are being articulated through the use of digital media, showing that people have the capacity and the creativity to employ the very tools that embody a linear representation of time, in order to create counterdiscourses to this form of temporality. These counterdiscourses, however, should not be regarded as forms of resistance to, but as co-existing together with, linear time, and that people appeal to in order to momentarily ignore the requests and the limitations associated with a linear temporality, and to express, instead, alternative ways of engagement with the world, articulated through 'ethical imagination' (Moore 2011), and through the development of new forms of sociality. In the theoretical chapter, I discuss in more detail the argument developed by Greenhouse (1996), together with other anthropological approaches to time. In the empirical chapters (chapters 3 – 5), I describe the time-modes of spontaneity, anticipation and, respectively, 'family time', and the forms of 'ordinary agency' that their enactments engender. In the last chapter I address the topic of time when discussing potential applications of the knowledge developed through my doctoral research, by looking at ways of mediating between the temporalities of domesticity that I arrived to learn about, and the temporal framework expressed by the Climate Change Act in the UK.

Methods

This ethnography is the result of fifteen months of fieldwork (October 2011 – December 2012) that I carried out with eighteen families, all part of the twenty LEEDR households. During the first three months of fieldwork (October – December 2011), I conducted research with six of these families as part of the social sciences branch of the LEEDR project. For the following twelve months, I developed my doctoral fieldwork, in two directions that unfolded simultaneously. First, I conducted a semi-structured interview on the topic of domestic time and digital media usages, accompanied by participant observation, with eighteen family-

participants. Second, I asked five families, out of the larger group, to take part in an in-depth long-term research for one year (January – December 2012). With these families, who became my key-participants, I developed a long-term relationship, and I carried out long-term ethnographic fieldwork.

In order to find multiple entry points into the topic of domestic time, I developed together with my key-participants a set of arts-based 'inventive' methods, and participatory methods: the Tactile Time collage, the Evening Times self-video recording activity and the Five Cups of Tea self-interviewing with video activity. Besides these methods, towards the end of my fieldwork I conducted another interview with the adults in the five key family-participants, on childhood and teenage memories of media and ICT use at home. I discuss in more detail the stages of my research, and the methods that were developed, in the second chapter of this dissertation.

Myself

I see myself as an optimist, and I regard the opportunity of engaging in long-term ethnographic research as providing immense personal gain, by bringing out new ways of carrying out 'ethical work' (Foucault 1990, 2000) in relation to the experiences, ontologies and epistemologies of the research participants that the ethnographer learns from. These two features clearly influenced the knowledge produced through my fieldwork and, specifically, the topic and focus of my dissertation. However, if in my writing I seem to privilege the positive aspects of the lives of my participants, and their ways of finding empowerment in a variety of situations, this should not be regarded as either being solely due to my own optimism, or as reflecting the unlikely condition that the people I met during my fieldwork had been spared from going through difficult life experiences. Rather, this is because the full half of the glass was what they emphasized in their relationships with me. From my participants, I learnt to be even more optimistic, maybe a bit more laidback, to treat my domestic others with kindness, and to enjoy the nice weather while it's here.

Besides being an optimistic, I am also an avid reader – and amateur writer – of fiction. As an aid towards imagining how other people live and understand their lives, fiction has always been for me a cherished resource. During my time in England, I serendipitously came across books – novels and autobiographical memoirs – that will always stay with me, and whose company I cannot disentangle from the experiences of doing my fieldwork, and from the process of writing my dissertation. I mention the names of their writers with gratitude: William Cooper, Janice Galloway, Blake Morrison, Nina Stibbe, Jonathan Taylor, Sue Townsend, Jeanette Winterson.

Chapter 1: Theoretical framework

1. Chapter outline

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework and it introduces the working concepts of 'ordinary agency', spontaneity, anticipation, and 'family time' that form the analytical basis of this dissertation.

The next section is an exploration of the continuous back and forth journey between ethnographic fieldwork and theoretical constructs that is an essential characteristic of anthropological research (Strathern 1999). My aim in this part is to show the ways in which I arrived at the theoretical perspective that grounds my thesis, which is Moore's (2011) post-vitalist approach. I will start with my reflections regarding a particular ethnographic encounter and I will bring selected ethnographic material – interview extracts, field notes and photography – in dialogue with theoretical perspectives in order to express the iterative-inductive (O'Reilly 2012) nature of ethnography and to outline that this process of knowledge-making is profoundly personal. In Edwards's words, 'it is the process by which the fieldworker comes to know which provides grist for the anthropological mill, rather than that which is eventually known which is always contingent and available for all to know' (Edwards 2000: 14).

In the third part I introduce Foucault's work on ethical practices (1990, 2000) through the readings of the anthropologists Paul Rabinow (2000) and James Faubion (2001). I discuss the ways in which Foucault inspired Moore's (2011) approach and the way in which his ideas on ethical work have been employed by the geographer Kersty Hobson (2011) in order to formulate a critical response to the domestic sustainability agenda by calling towards an approach that acknowledges ordinariness as a site for personal environmental politics and everyday actions as 'moments of interruption' (Dikeç 2005).

In the fourth part I discuss the similarities in spirit between Moore's (2011) and Hobson's (2011) publications and I show the ways in which the mundane can be regarded as a site for ethical work and how everyday actions, such as those related to the care of the self, could be seen as contributing to social transformation.

In the fifth section I discuss Gershon's (2011) critique of 'neoliberal agency' in relation to which I subsequently introduce and describe the working concept of 'ordinary agency'

In the sixth part I discuss the last element that completes my theoretical framework – the element of time, as it is approached by the anthropologist Carol Greenhouse (1996). I introduce the concepts of spontaneity, anticipation and 'family time' and I situate them, as time modes, in relation to Strathern's (1992) ideas on the English sense of time in kinship.

I conclude in the seventh part.

2. Prologue: How the light gets in

We did it in stages. Because we first moved in and, before any planning, we knocked these double doors through. That was the first thing we did. And we immediately saw light coming in into that room that had no light. If you imagine, in the hall it was a room: there was a ceiling and no windows, no daylight. And the only daylight in that room came from the front door. So then we knocked this and that just flooded it with light. And then we knocked another door through and that flooded it with light. And then, the more we did it gradually, we thought: 'oh, yeah, this is great; yeah, this is lovely; this will be good'. So yeah, we kind of built up. We didn't really know. It sort of evolved. (interview Iris and Steve)

While telling the story of their house extension, Iris has arisen from her chair. She is pointing towards the hall with large gestures that help her explain the complicated transformations their house went through after they had bought it. We are all gathered around the kitchen table: Iris, her husband, Steve, me, and a colleague researcher. We are discussing Iris's and my previous encounter, when we took a

house video tour (Pink 2004), exploring their home and the ways in which Iris engaged with it.

After Iris, Steve and their two children, May and Alan, who were 11 and 13 at that time, had the chance to watch the nearly two-hour long video recording, I am now visiting them again, this time shadowed by a colleague, for a follow-up interview. Iris's reflection on the process of transforming the ground floor comes as a response to my insistent wish to find out how it felt to completely change the whole layout of the house by moving the staircase, knocking down several walls, moving the main entrance door to a different side of the house, extending the kitchen and, practically, changing all the ground floor rooms together with two bedrooms. Most of the families that I met during my 15 months of fieldwork had their stories of house transformations that followed the moment of acquisition and they enjoyed recalling 'tearing down the wallpaper' and redecorating, as in an attempt to get rid of any traces of the previous owners and make the house 'their own'.³ Strathern (1992) interprets the belief that the interior of the house can be the object of personal careful design as being in close connection to the modern English middle-class idea that the interior of the individual person is 'an explicit object of improvement' (Strathern 1992: 102). The relation between the interior of the person and the interior of the home has been inverted as an interest with the good organisation of the latter arrived to show, for the new middle-class of the nineteenth century, the virtues of the former and, so, '[t]he internal (what is within persons) has been literalised as an interior (residential) space' (Strathern 1992: 103).

In the case of Iris and Steve the house transformation was substantial and I wanted to know whether they could envisage it in advance. My questions made Iris bring the house plans. They had someone who made the technical drawings but they assigned no architect. It was all based on their imagination and hope that the house could be transformed into their ideal home: a place where they could gather their extended family, which counts 35 people, for large parties and celebrations. They followed Iris's brother advice to move the staircase, a transformation which he previously undertook for his own house and whose results pleased him. Thinking, discussing, planning, drawing and imaging the house was a process that took them around six months from the moment they moved in and it was followed by six more months for the building work. While showing me the floor plans and recalling this

³ See also (Miller 2001b).

experience that happened five years before, both Iris and Steve admit that at the moment of planning they could not really envisage, by only looking at the drawings, how the house would look like after the structural transformation. They just went for it, took the risk, and started knocking down walls one by one, letting the light in.

Printed in large font on an A4 sheet, Iris's words that opened this section have been standing for over two years on the screen by my desk, between photos of my friends and postcards. Leaving her place after the follow-up interview, I thought about the way Iris talked when she described the process of knocking down walls in order to let the light come in: she spontaneously stood up so as to let the memory embody her better. I transcribed that fragment the next morning. Her words felt powerful and inspiring, even if, at that time, I did not know *how* they were inspiring, or whether and how I would later *use* them in writing about my fieldwork. These words are about an action of building work that one might imagine as dusty, noisy, and generally not very attractive to watch from a close distance. What makes this event memorable – what makes the reminiscence of the light flooding the dark room memorable and shareable with an anthropologist?

In her recent publication on hopes, desires, satisfactions and 'the aspirational character of our relations to others, to knowledge and the world' (Moore 2011: 10), Henrietta Moore provides a critical review of the new wave of 'vitalist' theories: theories of affect (Massumi 2002), actor-network theory (Latour 2005) and non-representational theory (Thrift 2008). Moore acknowledges the ontological break that 'vitalist' theories have marked in relation to, and as a critical response to social constructivist approaches by proposing 'a decentring of the human subject, a recognition that the subject is formed through a series of encounters which it does not author or control' (2011: 180). These approaches move away from the human subject and outline the vitality of a world made up of indeterminate relations that are autonomous of their subjects (Massumi 2002; Thrift 2008). If one would follow the principles proposed by this new theoretical corpus, then, in Iris's account it would be the element of light that would be emphasized as an agentic substance that autonomously floods the dark room; the intrinsic quality of immateriality that light possesses makes it simple for this substance to circulate, to sneak in. But, is it the special qualities of light that make the moment of flooding the dark room exceptional and memorable? Or might it be the empowering freedom of knocking down walls and of transforming them into doors that Iris wants to share with me?

During the follow-up interview, Iris and Steve recounted the way they spontaneously transformed the big open-space kitchen – their favourite room – into a ‘Christmas hub’ during the last festive season. They connected the TV screen, through the Wii, to the Internet and they played a YouTube video of ‘a real crackling fire’, while broadcasting a Christmas jukebox radio station by attaching speakers to their iPad. They laughed while recalling the episode, feeling also content with their creative invention. They could have gone into the living room and lit the ‘real’ fire place – which they often use in winter evenings – but they created something different instead. The thorough details of their remembrance of this event suggest that the temporary technological assemblage was a product of their own making – that embodied and expressed their subjectivities and their agencies – as knocking down the walls, too, was.

In concluding her book, Moore outlines that ‘perhaps it is too early yet to abandon a notion of the human subject marked by what is specifically human, most especially our desires, hopes and satisfactions’ (Moore 2011: 204). What she finds to be some important limitations of ‘vitalist’ theories are: an insistence on the autonomy of affect that dismisses the human creativity in making relationships and meanings; and a disregard of the historical and cultural specificities of the contexts in which life takes place. Moore suggests that a new acknowledgment of human agency would be a possible way to surpass the dichotomous tensions between a social constructivist tradition and the new ‘vitalist’ approaches. This shift would allow us to ‘think again’ in a manner that recognises human creativity and ‘ethical imagination’. Moore’s (2011) post-vitalist approach to human agency suggests that acts of ‘ethical imagination’ of self-other relations, or the question of ‘how we deal with each other’ (ibid p.15), are generative of social transformation. The concept of ‘ethical imagination’, which illustrates the forms and means ‘through which individuals imagine relationships to themselves and to others’ (ibid p.16), is proposed by Moore as an analytical tool to look not only at how actual relations are experienced, but also at the new forms and ‘potentialities of the relationalities’ (ibid p. 22) that emerge. Moore is interested as well in the ways in which new technologies can enhance the capacities for relationality and ‘augment our potential for connection and sharing’ (idem).

We can now arrive to see Iris and Steve as agents who let the light come in by knocking walls down. Similarly, every morning, people in Middleborough, people in

the UK, people in the world, open their curtains and let the light come in. It is this form of everyday human action that brings daylight into homes. People choose when to open and when to close curtains and blinds; their actions do not 'produce' the light, but, most importantly, make manifest an engagement with the world that recognises, accepts, and lets the light in. These everyday actions make 'morning' and 'evening' happen inside people's houses. Subjective 'mornings' and 'evenings' can take place any time before or after their 'natural' counterparts – but always in relation to them – the time of their occurrences often varying with the day of the week. For example, on Saturdays my participants used to close the curtains earlier than on midweek evenings, even if the sun obviously does not set sooner on the weekends. Similarly, sometimes whole Sundays would be spent by keeping the curtains closed, in a 24 hours 'non-day': a suspended and 'stolen' time pulled away from the everyday logic of clock and calendar time. This suggests that, even if they might be analytically approached as 'routines', opening and closing curtains are not performed automatically, without too much thought, at exactly the same times every morning and evening, but they are actions that involve taking decisions. These decisions are enacted by agents when they feel that it is the right time. The ways in which they arrive to these decisions are by bringing together what is happening outside (getting brighter or darker) with what is happening inside (e.g. people still wearing their pyjamas in the morning or planning to 'start the evening' sooner). Sometimes the actions of opening and closing curtains can be directed towards changing what is happening indoors or outdoors: for example, one can open the curtains in order to convince one's children that they need to get dressed, or in order to make the daylight last longer at winter.

In setting her home in the mood for embracing the new day that has just started, for Joyce it is important to open the curtains on every single window in the house. However, one of the windows in the landing is particularly hard to reach as it is situated on the other side of the staircase. Joyce needs to lean over the baluster in order to reach the handle and to open the blinds. Still, she performs this risky leaning every day, twice: once for making morning and once for making evening. This action can be regarded as a brief form of worship that Joyce feels necessary to perform in order to assess – through her body – that a new day has, respectively, come, or is ending. Veena Das observes that 'our theoretical impulse is often to think of agency in terms of escaping the ordinary rather than as a descent into it' (2007: 7). In Joyce's case, opening and closing down curtains are ordinary actions

through which she takes and expresses control over her life by choosing (when) to make 'morning' and 'evening' happen.



Figure 1 Joyce leaning over the baluster in order to open the blinds and to make 'morning' in her house.

My own answer, therefore, to the question of how the light gets in is that people let it in. Whether through opening curtains or through knocking walls down, people welcome and acknowledge the light when, and if, they wish to do so.

3. Foucault's ethical practices

In her conceptualization of 'ethical imagination' as an analytic tool, Moore (2011) draws upon Foucault's ideas about the relationships between ethical practices and the constitution of the knowing subject. She argues that by using the analytic lever of 'ethical imagination' one can arrive to 'novel ways of approaching social transformation' (Moore 2011: 15). The ways in which we 'deal with each other' – or, in Foucault's original wording, 'the strategies that individuals in their freedom can

use in dealing with each other' (2000: 300) – are generative of social change because the question of self-other relations stands at the very basis of what constitutes 'the social'. Moore's approach surpasses, thence, a perspective on agency as in opposition to structure, because the question of how we deal with each other can be seen as constitutive and as influencing both the direction and focus of individual actions and the ways in which we create social institutions, systems, and structures. She suggests that 'ethical imagination' can be regarded as 'one of the primary sites of cultural invention' (Moore 2011: 16) that is 'brought into play by the advent of new information and new ideas, new ways of being and acting, new forms of representation and their mediation' (Moore 2011: 16) that, however, are not just linguistic and are not just conscious.

Foucault's work on ethics follows the idea that ethical analysis is a mode of self-formation and a practice of freedom: 'the freedom of the subject and its relationships to others (...) constitutes the very stuff [*matière*] of ethics' (Foucault 2000: 300). The relation between ethics and freedom involves practices of reflection: 'Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection' (Foucault 2000: 284). As a practice of freedom, ethics is directed towards limiting and controlling relations of power that, Foucault argues, are widespread in all the forms of human relationships, when one tries to control the actions and the behaviour of the other(s). Practices of freedom are essential in preventing an abuse of power. This abuse would lead to the dissolution of power relations and to a serious transformation of the social and political regime, because, for Foucault, when the possibility of resistance does not exist, such as in slavery, one cannot talk about power relations: 'in order for power relations to come into play, there must be at least a certain degree of freedom on both sides' (Foucault 2000: 292).

However, what Foucault calls practices of freedom should not be seen as merely synonymous with what can be called 'resistance'. In the case of the ethical as the domain in which one can exercise a free relationship to the self (or *rapport à soi*), the scope of ethical practice is to develop one's relationship to the self and to others. The anthropologist James Faubion (2001) outlines that this practice is also 'always analytically distinct from the moral principles and codes to which it has reference' (2001: 85), codes that are, nevertheless, cultural and social (Foucault 2000: 291).

It is in the idea of ethical practices where, Faubion (2001) argues, the potential of Foucault's work to inspire anthropological theoretical and empirical advancements stands. This is because in his conceptualization of ethical analysis as consisting in a series of practices, Foucault continues Aristotle's focus on the practical that, Faubion argues, invites us 'to attend to all that distinguishes the ethical field beyond mere obedience (or mere transgression)' (Faubion 2001: 85) – in other words, an analytic focus on ethical practices can surpass a view on agency as being solely expressed in relation to 'structure', as Moore (2011) has also argued.

In his introduction to a collected volume of Foucault's published texts on the topics of ethics that were not included in his books (such as lectures, interviews, and articles), the anthropologist Paul Rabinow (2000) discusses the ethical fourfold of Foucault, or the four categories through which ethical practices could be examined: ethical substance, mode of subjectivation, ethical work, and telos.

Ethical substance represents 'the prime material of moral conduct, (...) the "will to truth"' (Rabinow 2000: xxix) and it can be described through the impulse of curiosity. The type of curiosity advocated by Foucault is 'not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself' (Foucault 1990: 8). In this perspective, curiosity evokes care: 'it evokes the care one takes of what exists and what might exist; a sharpened sense of reality, but one that is never immobilized before it; a readiness to find what surrounds us strange and odd; a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same things in a different way' (Foucault 2000: 325).

The mode of subjectivation can be seen as self-stylization in relation to social norms: 'the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obligated to put it into practice' (Foucault 1990: 27). The process of choosing the mode of subjectivation that would accompany one's ethical project is not merely an act of conformity in which one needs to pick, from a variety of socially accepted and available modes, the one that would suit one better, but it is an active and creative process. Drawing from Baudelaire's view on 'modernity' as an attitude, Foucault sees self-stylization as 'an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it' (Foucault 2000: 311). As Faubion remarks, the ethical field is a normative field, but there is more to it than that: 'It is a domain of

obedience. Yet it is also a domain of more elective aspirations, of the “quest for excellence”, as we moderns like to put it, of saintly and heroic excess’ (Faubion 2001: 90).

Ethical work, or critical activity, is the work that one performs ‘to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one’s behaviour’ (Foucault 1990: 27). This is a work of reflection in which all forms of experience can be objects of self-reflection, or thought, where thought is seen as ‘freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem’ (Foucault 2000: 117). Ethical work is essentially practical and, in Faubion’s reading, it can be seen as an ‘autodidactic’ endeavour (2001: 94). In his reading, this is an essential point in Foucault’s work where the French philosopher draws upon and extends the Aristotelian distinction between ‘making’ and ‘doing’. The way in which Aristotle draws this distinction is by suggesting that: ‘doing and making are generically different, since making aims at an end distinct from the act of making, whereas in doing the end cannot be other than the act itself: doing well is in itself the end’ (*NE* VIv3-4). For Aristotle, making is concerned with the creation of a new, finite, object; while doing contains its scope in itself.

Finally, *telos*, or ‘disassembling the self’ (Rabinow 2000: xxxviii), represents the mode of being that would be the actualization of the ethical project: ‘A moral action tends toward its own accomplishment; but it also aims beyond the latter, to the establishing of a moral conduct that commits an individual, not only to other actions always in conformity with values and rules, but to a certain mode of being, a mode of being characteristic of the ethical subject’ (Foucault 1990: 28). Rabinow (2000) suggests that the mode of being that Foucault was committed to was one of disassembling the self, or releasing oneself from oneself (*se déprendre de soi-même*), which could also be translated as unlearning of, or de-familiarizing with, oneself (as, I would say, in the process of de-familiarization required by ethnographic work). Foucault regards the ethical category of mode of being as historically constrained but also as having the capacity to surpass the present through a critical engagement with it and through de-familiarization. Moore expresses this idea suggesting that: ‘How we are placed in time and space links to modes of being – specific ways of thinking, feeling and acting, of relating to things, to others and to ourselves. Political and economic changes alter these ways of

being, and new ways of seeing and understanding drive forward further possibilities for change' (2011: 1-2). These new ways of seeing and understanding emerge, in Foucault's opinion, through ethical practices – through the process of ethical analysis as a practice of freedom.

Ethical work, or critical activity, can also be regarded as a practice of 'problematization' (Foucault 1990: 10). For Faubion, problematization is 'that reflexive process through which one presents to oneself a certain way of acting or reacting, asks questions of it, examines its meanings and goals' (2001: 97). He argues that Foucault's work on the genealogy of systems of thought demonstrates that each parameter of the ethical fourfold (ethical substance, mode of subjectivation, ethical work, and telos) 'can itself be (and in fact has been) the focus of problematization' (2001: 98). In other words, the four categories of ethical analysis have also been the subjects of ethical analysis – and, therefore, it is a never-ending process of self-reflection that drives social transformation. Faubion concludes that 'the ethical field, in which power is fluid and problematization capable of being the catalyst of revisionary resolution, is the primary site of the active transformation at once of the parameters of subjectivation and of given views of the world' (2001: 99).

This conclusion takes us back to Moore's conceptualization of 'ethical imagination' as one of the main sites of cultural invention (2001: 16). However, Moore considerably advances Foucault's ideas, by insisting that ethical work, or the process of problematization, should be regarded as being more than a work of conscious self-reflection and thought. For her, problematization also involves 'affect, emotion, the placement of the body, fantasy, and relations with objects, technologies and the material world' (Moore 2011: 21). Thence, Moore's focus on hopes, desires and satisfactions aims to (re)introduce a regard on the value of imagination and of what I call the 'non'-conscious – an experiential area that involves unintentional actions and the tacit knowledge of the body and of the unconscious – in processes of self-development or subject-formation. She argues that 'we cannot unproblematically base our theories of subjectivity on the experience of the conscious subject or on their conscious meanings and intentions' (Moore 2011: 75).

As I have shown, Foucault's ideas on ethical practices provided an important inspiration and influence on Moore's (2011) post-vitalist approach that grounds my theoretical framework. I will now show how Foucault's work on ethics, mediated by a publication of the geographer Kersty Hobson, inspired the way in which I formulate my position in relation to the domestic sustainability agenda that represents the context of my research.

In a recent publication, Hobson (2011) addresses the question of whether everyday acts of sustainability have the potential to make people more environmentally-aware and active in the future, or, on the contrary, this approach to sustainable consumption can limit the scope and the scale of the possible environmental engagements. Questioning the assumptions of several theoretical approaches to policy interventions related to the domestic sustainability agenda, Hobson suggests that researchers should not abandon the idea that a form of personal environmental politics might exist, and, in doing so, they should contribute to making the first part of the question possible. She proposes an approach inspired by Foucault's work on ethical analysis as practice of freedom and, more specifically, on the question of 'What do I aspire to be?', or the telos. The geographer suggests that this question proved to be an important trigger in her participants' actions to 'reclaim the street', as she discussed in a previous publication (Hobson 2008).

Drawing from Dikeç (2005), Hobson advocates for a more inclusive definition of the political, as appearing in 'moments of interruption' when 'a wrong can be addressed and equality can be demonstrated' (Dikeç 2005 cited in Hobson 2011: 203). In her own research on everyday domestic practices in relation to the sustainability agenda in the UK and in Australia, Hobson (2003) identifies such 'moments of interruption' as 'ah ha' moments that her participants reported to have experienced when they made connections between their everyday actions that they have not previously reflected upon and their environmental outcomes. After such 'ah ha' moments her participants believed that they could consciously work towards changing some of their domestic actions, reporting a feeling of 'I can do that, it's not so hard' (Hobson 2011: 204). These 'ah ha' moments, I suggest, can be regarded as instants of ethical work, in Foucault's terminology. Hobson acknowledges that 'moments of interruption' appear and are experienced as part of a wider existing 'grammar' of discourses of accepted and positively valued practices and attitudes. However, she suggests that existing grammars can be mobilized 'in ways that move

towards a constructive and positive slippage, such as fostering a creative grammar of household sustainable consumption that constitutes it as a thoroughly political act; that is, where there is a moment, or ongoing moments, of interruption that can take the needs and presence of other people and non-human entities into account and can, in turn, be acknowledged by others' (Hobson 2011: 205). Some of these 'others' who can, if they choose to, acknowledge such moments of interruption as political acts, are the researchers who, one can argue, are often positioned between public discourses and policy interventions related to the domestic sustainability agenda and the everyday actions of laypeople.

4. Mundane actions and the ethical field

In the previous two sections I have discussed Moore's (2011) post-vitalist approach that grounds the theoretical framework of my dissertation and I have introduced the work of the French philosopher Michel Foucault on ethical work and the knowing subject, which inspired Moore's concept of 'ethical imagination' and her call towards a new acknowledgment of human agency and creativity. Foucault's conceptualization of ethical practices and of the telos also inspired the geographer Kersty Hobson (2011) to suggest that scholars researching domestic sustainability should be able to create a conceptual space in which the idea of a personal environmental politics could be recognized and developed.

While coming from different backgrounds, and having different aims, I believe that Moore's and Hobson's calls are similar in spirit, in at least two ways. First, they both urge social scientists not to abandon the belief in 'the radical potentialities of human agency and human subjectivity' (Moore 2011: 22) in the ways they create theory and in the ways they regard, frame, and interpret the actions of their research participants. Second, they both try to open up the category of human actions that are to be considered 'worthwhile' of attention and of research to include ordinary and 'non'-conscious actions – actions that have no conscious meanings and intentions attributed to.

Their definition of worthiness is not related to the immediate possible effects on society that these actions could have, but, I believe, to the effects that they have on

the agent. Regarded through the lens provided by Foucault's conceptualization of ethical analysis as a practice of freedom of the knowing subject, these everyday actions can be acknowledged as 'ah ha' moments in doing ethical work, which is a practical endeavour, in the Aristotelian sense (Faubion 2001: 93), that contains its scope in itself. Ethical work, or critical activity, is a practice of subject-formation that is ongoing and that can be regarded, following Moore (2011) and Faubion (2001), as one of the main vehicles of social transformation. 'Ah ha' moments provide the opportunity to critically re-examine the 'reality' and one's relationships with oneself and with the others. As this re-examination leads to a change in oneself, it would also lead to a change in one's relationships with the others and, ultimately, to social change.

Looking at the conceptualization of the ethical in the Greek antiquity, Foucault identifies the twin principles of 'Take care of yourself' and 'Know thyself'. He argues that 'our philosophical tradition has overemphasized the latter and forgotten the former' (Foucault 2000: 226) for two reasons. The first reason is that the tradition of Christian morality 'insists that the self is that which one can reject' (ibid p. 228), the scope of knowing oneself being to provide a means of self-renunciation as the condition for salvation. The second reason is that in theoretical philosophy knowledge of the self 'takes on an ever-increasing importance as the first step in the theory of knowledge' (idem). The philosopher argues that the hierarchy of the two principles has been inverted: while in Greco-Roman antiquity 'knowledge of oneself appeared as the consequence of the care of the self' (idem), in the modern world 'knowledge of oneself constitutes the fundamental principle' (idem). Foucault explains that a preoccupation with the care of the self was seen as having not only individual outcomes, but also important social outcomes: 'the postulate of this whole morality was that a person who took proper care of himself would, by the same token, be able to conduct himself properly in relation to others and for others' (ibid p. 287).

In a study of grocery shopping in London, Miller (2001b) argues that very often the decisions of buying organic products are related to concerns for the health of the shopper and of her family, rather than to concerns for the world at large. This form of interpretation that aims to find the core 'reasons' behind people's actions can be

found in other publications on ethical consumption as well.⁴ The assumptions upon which scholars might compare two different sets of reasons, such as in Miller's (2001b) case, could be seen, by following Foucault's (2000) argument, as grounded in the tradition of Christian morality and in a body/ mind dualism. By acknowledging acts of taking care of oneself as essentially ethical and not as opposed, but as the very basis, to acts of taking care of the others, one can surpass a set of analytical limits when situating everyday actions in relation to ideas about sustainability. This perspective would make it possible to re-examine a whole series of banal actions that social sciences scholars used to explain by placing them in specific categories, such as the performance of social roles – for example, in interpreting mothers' expressions of care towards their children as performances of the role of mother – as ethical practices that are vehicles for social transformation.

Thus, for Moore (2011) and Hobson (2011), following Foucault, ordinary actions need to be acknowledged in themselves – and not only in relation to societal ideals and norms – because they have an effect on the agent. They do not affect directly the society, but, by triggering critical activity and problematization, they are at the very basis of future social transformation.

Opening the domain of the ordinary to a fresh regard would bring, ultimately, the possibility to start moving towards a new vision of social change, a vision that, in Moore's opinion, would also contribute to social change: 'We all clearly recognize that the way we think about things has an impact on the way we live in the world. Thought is a form of agency. Worlds and their futures are created by the actions of human beings in specific contexts, and representation is an indissoluble and crucial aspect of those actions' (2011: 143). Moore points here to the responsibility that scholars have when they choose how to interpret their data, when they choose what story to tell to the others. If one could claim that people's everyday choices have an impact on carbon emissions and climate change, then, I argue, researcher's choices of theory to interpret one's findings might be regarded as having carbon footprints at their turn. Theoretical choices, like any other choices, have consequences.

5. 'Neoliberal agency' and 'ordinary agencies'

⁴ See (Morosanu 2013) for a review.

At this point in my argument I introduce Ilana Gershon's (2011) critique of 'neoliberal agency'. In a recent essay, followed by comments and a reply and published in a special debate section of the journal *Current Anthropology*, Gershon addresses the challenges that neoliberal perspectives on agency pose to anthropological interpretations of human action.

Gershon identifies two shifts that affect the concept of agency with the move from economic liberalism to neoliberalism. The first shift is that, under neoliberalism, markets, economic rationality and, also, subjects, are recognized as made, achieved, or socially constructed. Gershon is inspired by the work of Wendy Brown (2003, 2006) and by Lemke's (2001) reading of Foucault's lectures on neoliberal governmentality, who identify a major distinction between neoliberalism and liberalism to be 'the neoliberal emphasis on market rationality as an achieved state' (Gershon 2011: 538). The fact that neoliberal perspectives have incorporated the belief in social construction as an underlying principle that organizes the social world make an uncritical continuation of the analytical path of social constructivism in anthropology problematic, in Gershon's opinion. This is also because, by dropping the concept of culture out of their analytical toolkit, social constructivist anthropological approaches do not have the capacity to oppose resistance, anymore, to the fact that 'a neoliberal perspective is additionally prescriptive by working toward universalizing forms of neoliberal agency' (ibid p.539).

While Brown and Lemke address the implications of the belief in construction for political practices, in her article Gershon looks at the ethical implications of doing ethnography in neoliberal contexts (ibid p.538). She points out to the challenges that neoliberal perspectives on agency pose to anthropologists when trying to situate human actions in a post-culture theoretical context: 'Spreading neoliberalism entails convincing others that everyone should enact corporate form of agency, produced by consciously using a means-ends calculus that balances alliances, responsibility and risk. Other forms of agency are getting pushed aside' (ibid p.539). Gershon argues that anthropologists have unintentionally contributed to spreading the neoliberal conception of agency by discarding, in the last two decades, the concept of culture. This concept could have provided a viable analytical apparatus (Wagner 1981) for revealing practical alternatives to neoliberal agency, and, while

rejecting it, scholars did not find a different analytical tool to do this work with either. However, Gershon (2011) is clear in showing that the scope of her article is not to bring the concept of culture back, but to draw attention to alternative tools that could support the analytical work once accomplished through the use of the concept of culture.

The second shift identified by Gershon to affect conceptions of agency is 'a move from the liberal vision of people owning themselves as though they were property to a neoliberal vision of people owning themselves as though they were a business' (Gershon 2011: 539). She looks at the implications of this shift for a neoliberal conception of agency by discussing neoliberal perspectives on selves, relations, and social organisation. Following this shift of vision towards the idea that people owe themselves as though they were a business, selves come to be regarded as autonomous collections of 'skills or traits that can enter into alliances with other such collections' (idem), as Martin (2000) and Leve (2011) have also suggested. Alliances represent what neoliberal relations are, while social organisation emerges 'as market strategies that determine the consequences of alliances between different sizes of corporate entities and different skill sets' (Gershon 2011: 542). No longer part of the analytical toolkit of the researcher, culture is now regarded as a possession or a trait that can support specific sets of alliances.

In this neoliberal context, scholars have arrived to regard agency as, simply and universally, 'conscious choices that balance alliances, responsibility, and risk using a means-ends calculus' (ibid p. 540). Agents are, thus, assumed to be rational calculators who follow the principles of market rationality in the process of assessing the best suited strategies to create and to interpret relationships and forms of social organisation. Departing from Comaroff and Comaroff's (2001) critique of neoliberalism for framing freedom only in terms of choice, Gershon argues that 'it might be more apt to say that neoliberalism equates freedom with the ability to act on one's own calculations' (2011: 540).

The neoliberal assumption that people are agentive in the same way as business and corporate entities are, disregards, in Gershon's opinion, the nuances of scale between different social units: 'Under neoliberalism, all entities, regardless of size and internal social organisation, become the same type of corporate entity. Yet people confronting neoliberal policies rarely experience differences in scale as

differences in size instead of differences in kind' (ibid p.544). The misrecognition of scale is, in her view, one of the two weaknesses of neoliberalism that could be addressed by anthropologists. The second one is the inadequacy of neoliberalism 'as a set of moral guidelines' (ibid p.546). Gershon cites ethnographic examples that reveal both these weaknesses.

In this situation, Gershon asks what the analytical techniques are that anthropologists could use to critique, rather than to contribute to spreading, neoliberal views of agency. In order to outline what makes anthropological approaches different from other social sciences disciplinary approaches, Gershon discusses what an anthropological imagination entails in comparison to a sociological imagination. Drawing on Mills' (1959) definition of sociological imagination, she outlines that a sociological imagination 'crosses levels of scale to produce insight, interrogating how practices at different levels of scale affect each other' (Gershon 2011: 543). This definition reflects the sociological endeavour of explaining how the individual is connected to the society, how the personal is connected to the political. For an anthropological imagination, however, 'the challenge is to understand how the ways that people engage with knowledge and engage with each other are always already interwoven' (idem). In other words, the anthropological endeavour is to understand how epistemologies and relationships shape each other. This process of mutual shaping, I would add, is not universal, but it follows different paradigms and patterns for different groups of people, in different places and in different moments of time. In Gershon's view, a focus on the mutual shaping between knowledge and relationships can be translated into an endeavour of employing the analytical tools of epistemological difference and of social organisation together. Even if these analytical tools might be seen as too closely tied to the concept of culture, Gershon argues that they could provide a fruitful critique of 'neoliberal agency' by making possible a description of other ways of living and of other, contrasting and opposing, conceptions of agency. Moreover, through sophisticated attention, anthropologists would be able to attend to 'the moral force of different epistemologies and social organisations' (ibid p. 547), which means more than mere description but a recognition of the fact that by understanding alternative ways of engagement with the world, one comes to see paths to social transformation that go beyond neoliberalism.

From Gershon's essay I retain two important points that I will link with the literature that I discussed in the previous sections. First, in this publication the responsibility of scholars in choosing their analytical tools and their theoretical frameworks for interpreting data is brought to the fore in a strong and bold manner; as one of the essay's commentators outlines: '[a]nalytical tools have political power' (idem). The recognition of this fact, which appears as well in the works of Moore (2011) and Hobson (2011), is a central concern in Gershon's. The second point is the focus on agency as a domain that is particularly vulnerable in face of political interpretations; more specifically, by universalizing a specific definition of agency, neoliberal perspectives, Gershon argues, endorse a singular worldview. 'Neoliberal agency' does not account for people's capacity to produce radical social transformation, but only for their ability to rationally operate means-ends calculations within a given (neoliberal) context.

While Gershon (2011) calls towards a renewed focus on social organisation and epistemological difference in order to arrive to alternative descriptions of agency, Moore (2011) draws attention to epistemologies of the unconscious and imagination. I will now bring together Gershon's and Moore's ideas by proposing the working concept of 'ordinary agencies'. Ordinary agencies are forms of agency employed in everyday life and that are related to 'non-conscious' (unconscious, tacit, and non-intentional) acts of creating meaning. I place this working concept in contradistinction to the concept of 'neoliberal agency' – as consisting in acts of self-conscious rational decision making – developed by Gershon, whose critique inspired me to investigate the agency that people express as part of the mundane. This working concept has two functions. First, it responds to Moore's (2011) and Hobson's (2011) calls towards an approach of ordinary actions as meaningful for social transformation. Second, it responds to Gershon's (2011) call for moving beyond 'neoliberal agency' through attention to epistemological difference and social organisation. I suggest that the domain of the ordinary, even in neoliberal economic and political contexts, can be regarded to manifest different epistemologies (related to tacit knowledge, imagination and the unconscious) and to bring out new understandings of the mutual shaping between epistemologies and relationships.

To link this discussion back to the introduction of Foucault's writings on ethical work, I bring to the fore the focus on the practical. In Faubion's (2001) reading, the

potential of Foucault's work to inspire epistemological advancements in anthropology stands in his continuation of Aristotle's focus on the practical, which could be seen as a way of surpassing a regard on human action as having either an obedient, or a transgressive direction – or, in other words, a view on agency as existing only in relation to structure. In his definition of ethical work, or critical activity, Foucault draws upon and extends the Aristotelian distinction between 'making' and 'doing', Faubion (2001) argues. This distinction suggests that while the end of making is different from it, doing contains its end in itself: 'doing and making are generically different, since making aims at an end distinct from the act of making, whereas in doing the end cannot be other than the act itself: doing well is in itself the end' (*NE VIv3-4*).

Applying the lens provided by this distinction, one could suggest that 'neoliberal agency' is concerned with 'making': making selves as collections of skills that are always extendable; making alliances; making means-ends calculations. 'Neoliberal agency' refers to action that always has a scope, or a reason, that can be easily identified and verbalized. Ordinary agency, instead, is concerned with doing. It would not be right to affirm that it refers to action that has no scope, but, rather, I suggest that the scope of this type of action – such as the wish to let the light come inside one's home every morning – is circumscribed within a domain of tacit knowledge, and, so, it is not verbalized or even regarded as a scope every time the action is performed. Therefore, I propose to regard ordinary agency as concerned with doing, where doing is an end in itself.

6. Agency and time

I will now introduce and discuss the last element that completes my theoretical framework – the element of time, as it is approached by the anthropologist Carol Greenhouse.

Drawing from an interest in the relationships between law and time, related to her work in the field of anthropology of law, Greenhouse (1996) makes a thorough analysis of time politics across cultures. One of the main arguments that she makes in her analysis and that is of great significance for the development of my

theoretical framework is the idea that cultural models of time are inextricably linked to cultural understandings of agency as 'time articulates people's understandings of agency: literally, what makes things happen and what makes acts relevant in relation to social experience, however conceived' (Greenhouse 1996: 1).

Greenhouse argues that agency is a cultural concept because "[a]gency" names cultural propositions about how the universe works' (1996: 4), allowing researchers to see what social relevance means in various social contexts. Further I will summarize Greenhouse's argumentation of the main premise of her book, which is the idea that time, like agency, is also cultural, and not universal.

Greenhouse suggests that the most part of anthropological studies of social time have proceeded from the double assumption that linear time is the time of the Western world and that, as physical scientists argue, time is, indeed, linear, or, in her formulation, 'that linear time – "our" time – really *is* our time and really is *real*' (1996: 2, original italics). She argues that the second assumption is reinforced in the temporal discourses of state nationalism. Starting with a critical reading of the ways in which Evans-Pritchard (1940) and Fortes (1949) have approached the relationships between social structure and temporal organisation, and continuing by looking at the perspectives on time employed by Leach (1961), Lévi-Strauss (1969), Geertz (1973) and Bloch (1977), Greenhouse finds out that, besides the theoretical differences in their approaches, all authors share the idea that time is dual, which they present in universalistic terms. The duality of time concerns two geometrical forms: linear time, which is regarded as representing social time and is employed to understand progress and sequence; and cyclical time, which is presumed to be related to the periodicities of nature and to be enacted in performances of rituals. Out of these two geometric forms of time, the linear time, Greenhouse argues, 'is generally taken to be the more mundane, profane, practical, or objectively "true" construction of time' (1996: 34). This idea, she shows, is related to the assumption that each cited authors hold that 'the real meaning of time, against which a culture might construe, mistake, or mystify some alternative formulation, comes from what they take to be the universal significance of mortality' (idem). Thus, the idea that linear time is *real*, 'true', and universal comes from the fact that linearity is constructed in relation to mortality and the biological lifespan of human beings.

Greenhouse outlines that the assumption that 'mortality is the ultimate nonreversible experience' (ibid p.35) has two elements: the idea that 'death is

universally an object of individual preoccupation' (idem) and the claim that 'death is universally perceived as natural' (idem). Drawing upon her readings of European medieval theology, she argues that the idea that individual lifetime has a linear shape going from birth to death emerged as a parallel to the idea that the history of the world was linear, occupying the interval between the creation and the end of the world. Thus, Greenhouse concludes, 'the institutionalization of linear time as the time of public life was modelled not on the personal mortality of the individual but on the mortality of human society itself' (idem).

Further, Greenhouse addresses the assumption that death is universally an object of individual preoccupation whose anticipation creates a linear temporality. She starts by drawing upon Humphreys' (1981) study of the meanings of death in ancient Greece, whose conclusions trigger the argument that the link between linear time and the inevitability of personal death is built upon 'a particular construction of the person in relation to the group' (Greenhouse 1996: 36), namely the fact that the person, as a unit of social action and of analysis, 'is assumed to be wholly integrated' (idem). In other words, 'the "problem" with death, correspondingly, is absence, nonbeing, and destruction of the physical body' (idem). However, there are cultural contexts in which persons are not believed to be wholly integrated with their physical bodies, but are revealed 'to be layered or refracted or ambiguously multiple at death' (idem). To demonstrate this point Greenhouse uses ethnographic examples from the work of Meggitt (1962) with the Walbiri of Australia, from Woodburn's (1982) work with African hunters and gatherers, and from Bloch's (1982) writings on the Merina of Madagascar. For the Merina, 'the problem is not a *disjunction* between birth and death seen as two moments, to be connected by a line or not, but rather their *union* as equal, though different, challenges to the solidarity of the group' (Greenhouse 1996: 38). In this cultural context, as in others, death represents primarily a social crisis, an intrusive rupture of social solidarity, rather than an individual preoccupation: 'death is not about the closure of an interval but the disruption of the group and a corresponding crisis in social health' (idem). Thus, the assumption that mortality universally reinforces a logic of linear time, Greenhouse argues, is false.

She further shows that the alternative to the duality of linear and cyclical time in ethnographic writing is a depiction of 'timelessness', such as in Rosaldo's (1980) study on how space is the element that organizes the narrative of events, or what

we call 'history', for the Ilongot, and in Bell's (1993) study of aboriginal Australian 'dreamtime' as an example of indifference to time where the idea of a fixed universe whose categories of time and space cannot be distinguished between each other, is performed. Greenhouse argues that these examples, between others, show that 'what makes time temporal is not necessarily an arrangement of past and future but any number of other criteria. These same criteria, whatever they may be, make agency recognizable as both a subject and a principle of narrative' (1996: 46). Recognition of the fact that time is not universally constructed in relation to human mortality and to the periodicities of nature, but, rather, 'to formulations of social experience such as agency, narrative, and space' (ibid p.47) is needed. Greenhouse regards her analysis, thus, as a call towards a reconceptualization of 'an anthropology of time that does not presuppose what time is' (ibid p.75). In her conclusion to the chapter where she critically examined a series of ethnographic texts concerned with the topic of time, Greenhouse looks at what cultural models of time could say about various understandings of agency: 'European "linear time" depicts agency as having been created all at once and then partially distributed among individuals (yet without being depleted by this distribution). "Indifference to time" appears to mean at least two things: untotaled formulations of agency and totalizations of agency in terms other than duration' (ibid p.47).

After looking at anthropological perspectives on time, Greenhouse addresses the question of agency that, she suggests has very often been restricted 'to consideration of the means whereby individual effort can be seen to be lodged as (or against) "social structure"' (ibid p.77). She focuses particularly on Giddens' (1979) ideas on the connections between agency and social structure, where agency is seen as 'a form of inscription, whose effects are caught and accumulated as "structure"' (Greenhouse 1996: 80), or, in other words, structure is seen as 'the "sedimentation" of agency' (ibid p.81). The association of agency with inscription, Greenhouse argues, is linked to the fact that linear time is the 'official' temporality of the Western nation-state. She outlines that this perspective suggests that agency involves, universally, issues of intention and will. But this view of agency, she suggests, 'would seem to imply that cultural differences with respect to the meaning of agency are limited to actors' different means or instrumentalities in relation to different goals, as well as their different understandings of what intention and causality are' (idem). However, as she stated at the beginning of her book, agency

is a productive area of ethnographic inquiry because it can bring an entry point into the exploration of the ways in which the question of what social relevance means emerges in different social and cultural contexts. Agency is about how people believe that the universe works, and not just about intention and causality. For Greenhouse, agency 'is not necessarily at the level of conscious choice or ideological commitment' (1996: 82) and it should not be depicted by exclusively analysing its effects: 'Can we consider agency as an ethnographic question without assuming in advance that what "matter" about agency are individual effects on society or that what matter about time are "moments"?' (ibid p. 81). With her work, Greenhouse proposes a positive response to this question.

From this last paragraph it is evident that in this publication, Greenhouse (1996) introduces an idea that is shared by the works of Moore (2011) and of Gershon (2011), which I discussed in the previous sections, namely the endeavour of decoupling agency and structure and of moving beyond the assumption that agency only relates to a level of conscious choice. As I have shown, 'neoliberal agency' (Gershon 2011) is one of the definitions of agency that assume it to universally involve issues of intention and will. In her approach that moves beyond the structure / agency dialectic, Moore (2011) calls, for her part, towards an acknowledgement of unconscious forms of agency that are not directly concerned with effects on society. In the previous section I brought together Moore's (2011) and Gershon's (2011) ideas to formulate the working concept of 'ordinary agency' that describes forms of agency employed in everyday life that are related to 'non-conscious' (unconscious, tacit, and non-intentional) acts of creating meaning.

However, what is specific to Greenhouse's (1996) approach is the focus on the relationship between time and agency. Her thesis is that 'time's many forms are cultural propositions about the nature and distribution of agency across social space – cultural propositions cast as normative ideals' (Greenhouse 1996: 82). Looking at the temporalities of law in the United States, she argues that 'linear time does the state's (or any institution's) work by providing an idiom with which individual agency can be represented as flowing into the nation's' (ibid p. 180). Greenhouse advocates a plural perspective that recognizes that individuals are able to simultaneously engage with multiple types of temporalities – 'there appears to be no limit to people's ability to incorporate multiple temporalities into their daily lives' (ibid p. 87) – and to imagine and enact multiple forms of agency. However,

she remarks that the multiplicity of cultural formulations of agency 'are only selectively acknowledged and accommodated by any particular institutional form' (ibid p. 233). An important role of the ethnographic endeavour would be, here, to describe and to conceptualize some of the multiple formulations of agency that are not necessarily recognized as agencies by dominant institutional forms. Some examples of alternative formulations of agency in the United States mentioned by Greenhouse are 'creationism, laziness, superstition, witchcraft' (ibid p. 7), none of which is generally taken seriously in public discourse. She argues that these alternative formulations 'should not be left as caricatures but read as critical, if partial, counterdiscourses of time' (idem).

Temporalities of domesticity, I believe, could also be regarded as counterdiscourses of time that make a consistent – even if quiet, or 'non-conscious' – statement about the ingrained presence of agency in everyday life. In the empirical chapters of my thesis I describe and conceptualize three time modes of domesticity – spontaneity, anticipation, and 'family time' – and the forms of 'ordinary agency' that they engender and make visible.

For Greenhouse (1996), as we have seen, a cultural dimension, that she acknowledges in order to argue against claims on the universality of linear time, is an essential tool for undertaking the investigation that she advocates for. As I have discussed in the previous section, Gershon (2011), for her part, argues that the disposal of the concept of culture together with the analytical apparatus it provided left scholars with no sharp enough analytical tools to oppose neoliberal universalizing claims. In this dissertation, my approach – coming from my experiences as a Romanian anthropologist coming to England, for the first time, in order to do fieldwork – acknowledges that a dimension of cultural specificity might be intrinsic in the space and time that the people I met in Middleborough occupy and participate in. I understand this cultural dimension by adopting Moore's definition of culture as 'an "art of living", as a means of engagement with the world' (2011: 11). Therefore, the time modes that are described in this thesis can be regarded as connected to existing (and changing) forms of engagement with the world that are embedded, recognized, and performed, in the English provincial – and preponderantly middle-class – universe where the author carried out her fieldwork.

In such a universe, a particular view on time is enacted in kinship relations, as Strathern (1992) shows. This is a concept of progressive time that flows downwards in relation to the irreversible succession of generations. The irreversibility of time is most visible here, Strathern (1992) outlines, in the relationship between parents and child where substance is passed from the former to the latter in an exclusively forward direction: 'Causes thus flow forward in time. Consequently a person may be regarded as influenced by many things that happened before he or she was born, for he or she is born into a world already full of events and relationships. Parents affect children's identity much more than children affect parents. This downward or forward flow in time recurs as a question of individual development' (Strathern 1992: 67). This reflection on the English sense of time in relation to kinship comes in the context of Strathern's analytical endeavour of placing Victorian middle-class kin constructs and British anthropological kinship theory as 'mutual perspectives on each other's modernisms' (ibid p. 8). She identifies three main 'facts' of English kinship: the individuality of persons; diversity; and the idea that individuals reproduce individuals. Her observation about progressive time is explained in relation to the facts of English kinship where a child is regarded as an unique individual that appears 'as an outcome of the acts of other individuals' (ibid p. 53) and time is seen to increase the number of persons as well as, generally, 'the diversity and plurality of all the things in the world' (ibid p. 60).

In chapter V I will discuss in more detail some ideas from Strathern's work on English kinship. For the moment I take her observation on the sense of time in kinship as a point of departure for my analysis of the ways in which families approach, experience, represent, and create domestic time. Therefore, if temporal direction is fixed to a forward flow and if people cannot influence time's direction, as they cannot interfere with the past either, then, what can be influenced is the speed of time's flowing. In order to engage with, and to change time's gears, one might juggle with ideas of the present and of the future in various ways. Spontaneity, anticipation and 'family time', as I discuss them in this thesis, are time modes of domesticity that play with, blend, and knead the present and the future in various ways and, in doing so, they constitute themselves as counterdiscourses of time in relation to linear time. Spontaneity and anticipation make the future present, by creating wished-for future moments and by making them happen, and, respectively, by coating the present with the imagination of the future. 'Family time' aims at

making the present future by prolonging it, by operating in the present continuous mode.

7. Conclusions

In this chapter I discussed the theoretical framework of my dissertation and I introduced the working concepts of 'ordinary agency', spontaneity, anticipation, and 'family time' which will be further employed and developed in the corpus of this thesis. In order to show the way in which I arrived at the theoretical approach that my thesis follows, which is Moore's (2011) post-vitalist approach, I started with a dialogue between my reflections related to some specific ethnographic experiences and a set of various possible theoretical interpretations of ethnographic materials. After this introduction, I discussed in dedicated sections anthropological re-readings (Faubion 2001; Moore 2011; Rabinow 1996) of Foucault's (1990, 2000) work on ethical practices; the similarities between the ways in which Foucault's work is employed by Moore (2011) in developing a post-vitalist theoretical approach and by Hobson (2011) in developing an alternative and critical approach in relation to the domestic sustainability agenda; Gershon's (2011) critique of 'neoliberal agency'; and the conceptualization of the relationships between cultural models of time and forms of agency developed by Greenhouse (1996). While the empirical chapters of this dissertation (chapters 3 – 5) will refer back to the theoretical corpus developed here and they will employ arguments and analytical tools that I first introduced in this chapter, the respective further theoretical discussions will be rather succinct and the reader is invited to turn back to this chapter for more theoretical detail, if needed.

The working concept of 'ordinary agency', therefore, refers to forms of agency employed in everyday life, which are related to 'non-conscious' (unconscious, tacit, and non-intentional) acts of creating meaning, and to activities of 'doing', rather than of 'making'. The time-modes of spontaneity, anticipation, and 'family-time' are

to be regarded as counterdiscourses to linear time, which are articulated inside domestic settings, and which engender specific forms of 'ordinary agency'.

Chapter 2: Methodology

1. Chapter outline

In this chapter I discuss the methodological framework and approach that I follow through my dissertation, in relation to my personal experiences as a fieldworker in an English town and in relation to the interdisciplinary and applied context that framed and made my research possible.

The next part is an arrival story and it introduces my field site, a town situated in the Midlands area, which I present under the pseudonym of Middleborough. I will discuss the thoughts of wonder and doubt raised by the experiences related to my initial encounter with my field site, and the process through which the strangeness became familiarity. I explain the reasons why I chose this pseudonym and I position Middleborough in relation to two sets of cultural categories: the 'city' and the 'country'; and 'the North' and 'the South'. In this part I also explore the relationships between the bodily process of becoming a Morris dancer and an academic interest with developing methodological tools for tackling tacit knowledge; and I look at the ways in which the agency that emerges from dancing can contribute to formulating academic conceptualizations of 'ordinary agency'.

In the third part I look at the two different sets of expectations that applied and academic anthropology bring about and I explore possible ways of integrating these two perspectives. I discuss my experiences of working as part of an applied interdisciplinary project, and of explaining and legitimating my work to peers in

academic anthropological contexts and I relate these experiences to existent literature on the topic. In this section I introduce the LEEDR project, an interdisciplinary project that my doctoral research was part of; I describe the processes of ethical approval and of participant recruitment that were led at the project level; and I discuss the methods developed within the LEEDR that I applied before and during conducting my doctoral fieldwork. I will then look at the relationships between the applied and the academic/ 'traditional' parts of my ethnographic fieldwork and I will describe my efforts to keep them separate through the use of two different sets of field notebooks, as well as their subsequent inherent interpenetration. I conclude this part by arguing that applied research cannot be separated from other forms of learning on the field.

In the fourth section I am concerned with the methodological approaches and tools that would be needed in order to look at 'ordinary agencies' as forms of agency that are employed in everyday life and that are related to 'non-conscious' – unconscious, tacit, and non-intentional – acts of creating meaning. I introduce sensory ethnography as an approach to ethnographic practice that can provide a route to tacit knowledge and I discuss the ways in which two methods used in my fieldwork – participant observation and interviewing – are reinterpreted through the prism of sensory ethnography.

The fifth section describes the participatory and arts-based methods that I developed and employed with my key-participants: the Tactile Time collage, the Evening Times self-video recording activity and the Five Cups of Tea self-interviewing with video task. I show the potential of these methods to tackle tacit knowledge, especially the tacit knowledge in one's relationships with time, which reached a multi-sensory expression through the process of making the Tactile Time collages. I discuss the capacity of the Five Cups of Tea method to engender a process of problematization or ethical work (Foucault 1990). Finally, I situate these methods in relation to the conceptualization of inventive methods developed by Lury and Wakeford (2012).

In the sixth section I discuss the specificities of visual ethnographic methods, focusing on the use of video camera, as routes to tacit knowledge. I will discuss video materials filmed both by myself and by my key-participants, which are

included in the video appendix *Mum's Cup*. This section can also be regarded as offering a visual ethnographic theoretical background for the video appendix.

I conclude in the seventh section.

2. Encountering Middleborough: surprise, skill, and tacit knowledge

The opportunity to spend 42 months – the total length of my PhD studentship – in the town where I carried out my doctoral fieldwork has proven to be invaluablely fertile and life-changing, though my reaction after first visiting Middleborough, in September 2010, was less optimistic. It was my first time in the UK, the place where some of my favourite writers, filmmakers and music bands originated, and I was somehow expecting each street corner to display the quality of exciting and creative heterogeneity, which provided inspiration for the people whose work I admired. This expectation was also related to a general predisposition, in Romania, to look up at Western countries as places that are better developed economically and where people are, generally, happier, nicer and smarter. Coming from the lively Bucharest where I was living in the city centre, surrounded by theatres and music venues, the perspective of spending the next three and a half years of my life in a place that looked dim and uneventful, instead of carrying out between twelve and eighteen months of fieldwork in a warm climate and then continuing my old life, as I thought that anthropologists ‘normally’ do, felt like ostracism. After that first visit I asked my supervisors if it would be possible to spend part of my first year in London in order to attend open lectures in anthropology departments (and to experience the city vibe); do multi-sited fieldwork; or move back to Romania in the final eighteen months in order to ‘get distance’ before starting to write my dissertation. The first two ideas did not materialize due to the constraints of working as part of a wider project that had a set research design in place – the aim of conducting research with twenty families based in Middleborough – and that required my presence at fortnightly meetings and my contribution to various tasks. I forgot all about the third idea when, towards the end of the year of my fieldwork, I met my boyfriend, Steven, a Middleborough resident.

As I am writing these words, my field site has (provisionally) become my home. I travel through its brisk quiet air every day, wondering how I could recapture, in order to better describe them, Middleborough's overwhelming qualities of discreet smallness and persisting uniformity, which felt constraining at start, but familiar and nearly unnoticeable at present. In the evenings, on my way home, I pass by houses where my participants live and I try to tell whether they are at home and what they are doing by the rooms where the light is on. Looking at the lit windows of the people you are writing about – as a way of reassuring yourself that they are real; an everyday reassurance that is impossible to reach with similar intensity when one moves away from one's field site after finishing the fieldwork.

I moved to Middleborough and I started my PhD in December 2010. During my first months here, living with my landlady Natalie, who was also doing a PhD at the local university, I was utterly surprised by the fact that I could never see our neighbours. Natalie's three-bedroom house was in a suburban residential neighbourhood, located at forty minutes walking distance from the town centre and at a twenty minutes' walk from the campus. While not too long and time-consuming, the walks felt lonely as I was only rarely passing by other people walking on the pavement; the sound and sight of passing cars was, however, uninterrupted. The only way to see our neighbours, I realised, was in the moments after they got out of their houses and before they got in their cars – moments that I kept on missing. Houses with lit windows felt, then, like inaccessible fortresses where people were hiding away, hibernating.

Springtime brought some changes: a football landed in our back garden. Full of hope, ball under my arm, I walked on the parallel back street trying to detect which the house with the garden in the back of ours was. I rang the bell, and a woman, two kids, and a dog all rushed to the door; they were glad to see the ball back but they did not offer me a cup of tea, nor did we introduce ourselves and shake hands as neighbours do in Romania. They told me not to bother next time and to just throw the ball over the fence. I started to be worried: how could I ever do fieldwork with English families when I was not able to meet any? In my home country, a village form of sociality, where everybody knows everybody, was reproduced in urban settings in the socialist blocks of flats – the exclusive form of urban dwelling – where everybody knew one's neighbours, paid them regular visits, chatted endlessly in front of the lift, and they generally knew about, and were concerned

with their neighbours' problems, related to different life stages and circumstances. What was going on inside English houses – what form of bliss, jolly complicity and inspiring harmony was reached at home in order to make up for isolation? I could not imagine an answer to this question at the time, as I could not understand why anybody would choose to live in Middleborough and what reasons a young person could have for spending their degree years here.

Nine months later, however, when I started my 'official' year of fieldwork, I was already part of a series of local groups and networks – such as a Morris dancing group, the Transition Town Middleborough grassroots movement, and two other groups that organized fortnightly political discussions and meetings with council representatives on topics related to transport and urban planning in the area. I had English friends and I started to develop an understanding of their reasons of living in Middleborough. After moving, with a group of friends, closer to the town centre, where our cheerful neighbour, who was always chatting over the garden fence with us, was happy to try my home-brewed beer, I started enjoying living in Middleborough much more. My relationship with the town was 'officialised' when I found my photo and my name in the local paper: a couple of times it was a group photo of my Morris side; and once it was a photo taken at a mending event on a weekday morning, where an elderly friend, his elderly lodger and myself were the only participants. I bought several copies of that edition of the local weekly paper and I sent them to my parents and to my friends back home as a proof that I was 'an acknowledged presence'; a provisional member; 'an anthropologist'. In time, amazing things happened: being in someone's house for the first time, for a spontaneous after-party that followed one of the ceilidh group's weekly sessions, I recognized someone I knew from a completely different context in a photo on the host's fridge; at an open garden event I was recognized by a lady who had seen me Morris dancing and who knew other members of my Morris side; Saturday market trips in the town centre started to be accompanied by unplanned meetings with people I knew. Relationships and connections, like the streets on an emotional map, made the town alive and enjoyable to live in for me.

Once, when I attended a public meeting organised by a local group interested in improving public transport, the 'main characteristics' of the town were discussed. An urban planner from the council read from documents part of the development master plan of the town centre a list of main features that, the local group members

agreed, made the town unique: its pedestrian market place; its walkable human scale [size]; the market on Thursdays and Saturdays; the architecture with its Georgian and Art Deco examples; the mix of shops that represented both the independent sector and big brands; the green parks; the university and the international environment; the Friday night culture. It was the mixture of these qualities, rather than their individuality, that made Middleborough different from other towns.

While numbers (45,000 to 65,000 inhabitants) reveal a medium size town, an impression of smallness comes from the fact that there are no other buildings, besides a few student halls, higher than three levels. However, the impression of *petit*, I discovered, was one of the things that Middleborough residents found attractive. The vast majority of the people I met here, as well as the majority of the participants in the LEEDR project, were not originally from Middleborough, but they moved from other parts of the UK, following jobs, or following available nursery places and a direct rail connection to London. People often emphasized that Middleborough 'is not too big, but big enough'; 'it's a town, not a city'; and that 'you've got everything you need in a walking distance' while still being able, if you are living on the forest side of the town, to go to a walk in the woods straight from your back garden (from my field notes).

The way in which I arrived at the name Middleborough as a pseudonym for my field site was, first, in relation to the cultural categories of 'the city' and 'the country' (Williams 1973) that the residents made use of in describing the town. In Williams' (1973) analysis of English literature, images of the country and of the city appeared in opposition, the country representing a realm of simple and unadulterated life, while the city being depicted as a symbol of alienation and capitalist exploitation. While the meanings associated with these two realms have evolved and changed in time, the city and the country are, arguably, still regarded as representing essentially different ways of living in the UK.⁵ However, I argue that Middleborough can be seen as providing the best of both worlds; by being neither a city, nor a village, it is both. By living in Middleborough, people do not need to choose between a countryside living life-style and a city living life-style – or, in other words, between being a country-person and a city-person – and, by choosing one

⁵ See (Barry 2005) and the visual narrative of the Opening Ceremony show for the 2012 Olympic Games in London.

alternative, to refuse the other one. Rather, as an assemblage of both worlds, in Middleborough the tensions inherent in the city vs. country dichotomy are domesticated through an emphasis on the positive dimensions of both forms of living and a triumph over the negative ones, such as the alienation and anonymity of urban life and, respectively, the normativity of the village where born and bred locals could be reluctant to welcome 'newcomers' (Strathern 1981), 'offcomers' (Rapport 1993), or 'incomers' (Edwards 2000). I now use a similar idiom when I describe the place where I live to my friends in Romania: I am renting an old Victorian terraced cottage in the town centre; when stepping outside of my house I can see the best pub in town, called The Lemon Tree; on my way there, I pass by two Chinese restaurants and a Fish and Chips shop; within a two-minutes' walk from the pub one can get to a big leisure centre; within fifteen minutes to the University campus; and in a ten-minutes car journey to the Beacon hill, where some of the oldest stones in England can be found and where the local grove organizes May Day celebrations and equinox and solstice rituals.

A relationship with a second set of cultural dichotomies that I wish to reflect in the name 'Middleborough' is a 'neither, nor' position in relation to what in England are the categories of 'the North' and 'the South', or, more accurately, 'people from the North' and 'people from the South'. I encountered this distinction many times during my fieldwork and during my life in England, sometimes being asked, when my company found that I was an anthropologist, what I thought about the differences between the North and the South; other times, people told me that I was lucky to be a foreigner in the UK, because I could travel to any part of the country and the locals would treat me nice, while them, betrayed by their original accent, could not travel to an area situated at the other end of the UK and feel welcome. The awareness of differences between people from the North and people from the South, and an interest with constantly observing and comparing them, makes any English into (a bit of) an anthropologist. While these cultural differences have been situated historically (Jewell 1994), it was during the Thatcherite government – when economic and political differences between these two regions (an affluent and Conservative South vs. a poor Labour-voting North) became more accentuated, or more visible – that what was called 'the North-South divide' has been particularly emphasized and discussed in the media, as Lewis and Townsend (1989) observe. Middleborough accommodates both people who moved from the North and people

who moved from the South, following jobs, partners, or changes brought by different life stages. The ones who came from the North prefer it here because it is less rainy than in the place they originated from; the ones who came from the South appreciate the fact that they have more routes for countryside walking here, than in the South, where a substantial part of the land is privately owned. Middleborough, thus, provides a critical distance that both the 'rough' North and the 'stately' South can be regarded from, and contested.

In this way, by being neither on one side, nor on the other, of the 'rough' North and the 'stately' South divide, and of the 'cosy but normative' village and the 'exciting but alienating' city dichotomy, Middleborough is *liberating* in the sense that it represents a context that no strong characteristics have been necessarily associated with. One could say that, maybe, in the imagination of an English resident, life in Middleborough might be seen as less prescriptive than life in one of the well-defined four poles that I discussed.

During the lengthy process of learning to understand the reasons why one would live in Middleborough, one of the experiences that broadened my imagination and my intuition the most, in tacit and embodied ways, was that of becoming a Morris dancer. I met Zia and Richard in late spring, in my first year in Middleborough, in The Lemon Tree pub after a performance organized by the University's contemporary arts programme that both Zia and I volunteered for as performers. While chatting with Richard, he told me that they were starting up a border Morris side. When finding that I was an anthropologist and that I was going to be in Middleborough, away from my family and friends, for three more years, he insisted that I join them, saying that this would be a good way for me to learn about real English traditions; he also said that, if I join the group, they could become my family for the next three years. I started attending the weekly practices – that were held, during the first year, in the back room of a pub, and that later moved to a hall in a community centre – the Sunday after; Zia and Richard taught me the dance steps with great patience, and they, or other members of the group, always gave me a lift to and from practice. We grew very close in time and we got to know each other in a way that only shared physical tasks maybe permit. We did numerous public performances together, and we travelled and participated in folk and pagan festivals and events all across England and where, very often, I found myself to be the only non-British participant.

Besides opening up a whole new social world for me, the experience generated a new relationship with my body. I have never been good at choreographed dance and synchronization and, after the first few practice sessions, I thought it would be impossible to get attuned with the other dancers. In time, by learning the tunes, by getting to know the members of the group, by responding to the energy, complicity and closeness emanated when a dance is successfully accomplished, I arrived at the skill of cancelling my thoughts when performing and letting my body take charge, in responding to the music. One of the things that made border Morris different from other forms of choreographed dance, and that helped with my body's learning and mastering the skill, was the dialogic relationship with the music. In border Morris, dancers use sticks that they clash during the chorus as a form of percussion: the sound of sticking supports the tune, integrates music and dance into a whole, and enhances the multi-sensory experience of performing the dance. After practicing and habituating a dance as a complex multi-sensory sequence of actions that displays a specific music-dance relationship, it will be with hearing the music that the body would remember and enact the dance. Having embodied the dances, I now find it easy to learn new ones during gatherings with other sides; the dances, their structure and combination of sequences make complete sense to me in a tacit way, like a new language that my body now knows.

Even if I had been interested, theoretically and academically, with tacit knowledge before, it was through Morris dancing that I really learned to trust my body, my intuition and my emotions and to acknowledge them as instruments of knowledge-formation. Following the distinction between 'knowing that' and 'knowing how' (Ryle 1949) – or, in Bloch's (1985) terms, ideological (propositional) and everyday (non-propositional) knowledge – Harris (2007) observes that ethnographers have usually dealt with the first category, 'the explicit part of the information they gather in the field, such as what is told them, what they observe and can measure' (2007: 12), and they have been less preoccupied with developing methodological practices and instruments that would tackle the 'tacit aspects such as body techniques, skills, the senses' (idem). Tacit knowledge, or what the body knows, is a form of everyday knowledge that people do not usually reflect upon. It is, thus, non-propositional: it appears rather in actions than in words. While my ethnographic fieldwork with English families did not involve folk dancing, I believe that the skill of Morris dancing that my body arrived to master, as a form of tacit knowledge, opened up research

questions that I was able to formulate and to address within the defined context of my 'official' research. I approach the relationship between these two distinct parts of my ethnographic fieldwork – one related to everyday life and serendipitous experiences on my field site, and the other to my well-defined research of English families as part of the LEEDR project – through Grasseni's (2007) perspective on skilful vision. She argues that the process of coming to apprehend – or to 'skilfully see' – locally achieved understandings, or worldviews, that are embodied in a community of practice is essentially practical: 'By participating in many different constellations of communities of practice, in various capacities and degrees in the course of one's life, one pragmatically gains the capacity to relate to those "forms of life" that are in some way contiguous to one's own' (Grasseni 2007: 208). In other words, the wider the variety of activities one engages in on fieldwork, the further one's capacity to relate, to intuit, and to understand the worldviews of others develops. Morris dancing was, thus, for me a form of bodily training – alongside gardening, English cooking and baking, beer brewing, ceilidh dancing, countryside walking, and other activities – in developing my sensitivity to other forms of understandings that my English participants tacitly held, such as understandings of domestic time.

The expressive particularities of border Morris dancing, like sticking and shouting, make this a particularly agentive activity. The dancers look, and act, self-confident and loud. We wear tattered jackets and an abundance of accessories: collections of badges from Morris events or displaying the name of other sides, which show one's experience and connections; hats decorated with ribbons and feathers; earrings, necklaces and rings; long gloves and knee-length colourful socks. We paint our faces in black; with stripes such as those from popular culture representations of Native Americans; or with various pagan patterns. We wear straps of small bells tied on ankles or under knees, which signal every step we take, by accompanying it with rings. Morris dancers are conspicuous presences that people acknowledge with amusement. By privileging a loud, physically intense, and playfully aggressive expression, Morris dancing makes performers into agents. I believe that the constant sense of agency that I derived from dancing contributed to shaping the focus of my thesis upon the pursuit of identifying and defining alternative forms of agency that are not conscious and end-driven, but ordinary and tacit.

3. The double bind of applied and academic anthropology

While my initial experience of the town was that of a place of hidden and inaccessible inhabitants, my work life was populated by strong presences and I was engaged in frequent and lively interdisciplinary encounters with my teammates from the LEEDR project. The LEEDR team consisted in fifteen investigators and researchers from the disciplines of building engineering, electrical and systems engineering, computer science, design and social sciences. During the project's initial fortnightly meetings, before advertising for and recruiting the participants, our dialogues, focused on the pressing question of what sort of research we all wanted to do together, turned, very often, into discussions about our disciplines, epistemological and methodological beliefs, points of view on what important and worthwhile research was – all of which could not be more different from each other's. I enjoyed these dialogues and I found the challenge of explaining what anthropology is, and does, to peers coming from technical backgrounds, to be a useful exercise in refining my own thinking about the ways in which knowledge gained from ethnographic research could be used to make the world better. However, as I was the only representative of the social sciences branch of the project for the first seven months – my supervisor was away on a sabbatical year and a social sciences Research Associate was appointed only later – there were moments when this demand to constantly explain and legitimate my disciplinary approach felt daunting, such as when I was asked to think about all the questions I will address to participants during my fieldwork and about how the answers to these questions could contribute to the overall aim of the project.

I recovered the comforting sense of mutual disciplinary understanding while attending monthly open lectures and a postgraduate discussion group in material culture at UCL, thanks to a few friends who were studying there and in relation to a previous interest in material culture. This time, when talking about my doctoral research with peers, I found that there was a different wall that our conversations would invariably hit. This wall materialized when I mentioned that my research was part of an applied project whose aim was to develop interventions that would help reduce domestic energy consumption. While never due to explicit verbal reactions, after these exchanges I was sometimes left with the feeling that my research was not as interesting, as sophisticated, as 'anthropological' as the research carried out

by other doctoral students who were working individually, who did not have any 'applied' concerns to respond to, and who were doing fieldwork outside the UK. Looking at the ways to respond to, and to contribute to improving, a societal issue of actual public concern in England was considered to be the endeavour of sociologists rather than of anthropologists. The questions that informed the overall research project as part of that I was working did not have enough anthropological sophistication – which meant that, probably, my own research could not be 'anthropological' enough.

I found myself between these two positions, an applied interdisciplinary one, and an academic anthropological one, wanting to occupy them both. The main reason why I came to the UK in the first place was in order to become an anthropologist, and I was animated by my previous academic training in this discipline. At the same time, I had soft green political convictions and I believed that reducing (energy) consumption in the global North was generally a good idea. I could not see why these two positions *had* to be incompatible. The constant exercise of challenging – in order to reconcile – two distinct positions brought me to the point of wanting to move from an 'either, or' choice between academic and applied anthropology, to finding ways to bring both dimensions together.

Anthropologists who found themselves in a position of the 'in between' – that is usually of the academically postgraduate trained researcher who arrives at doing applied research – have written about the relations that their new status engages both with the 'traditional' academia and, respectively, with teammates and co-researchers with other backgrounds. Regarding the view from the academia, it is argued that applied work may still be viewed as 'impure' and compromised (Roberts 2006, Sunderland & Denny 2007, Wright 2006). When Sunderland and Denny started out their own qualitative market research company applying the ethnographic methods and the anthropological lenses that they had been academically trained to use, their applied work was assumed, from the academic side, to be 'less theoretical, less sophisticated, and ultimately less valuable' (Sunderland and Denny 2007: 31). In trying to explain this assumption that he as well encountered, Roberts (2006) identifies a series of elements that are 'anathema' for academic anthropologists: 'paid informants, the very short period of time spent with the households and a narrow focus of vision on the part of the research team' (2006: 84). Concerning paying informants, Drazin (2006) observed that for his

research participants in the UK this was an expectation and a proof that the research was 'serious'; he suggests that his British informants preferred 'a commodity form of data' while in his previous research in Romania the data was rather constructed 'in a stereotypical "gift" form' (2006: 105).

More, the cited scholars talk about a possible scale of increasing degrees of 'impurity' in relation to the goal of the research: 'if "applied" in general was dirty, consumer research or "marketing" was filthy – wickedly so, in fact' (Sunderland and Denny 2007: 31). This point is also underlined by the debate around the vocabulary used to term applied anthropology. In a historical account about anthropological applications in policy and practice in the UK over two decades, Wright (2006) shows how the name of the Group for Anthropology in Policy and Practice (GAPP), part of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth, was chosen in the 1980s as such as to avoid the term 'applied anthropology' which 'carried connotations of a separate profession, parasitical on "pure" academics for ideas which they applied without making contributions to the development of the discipline themselves' (2006: 33).

A more recent debate in the US focused too on the relation between applied and public anthropology. At Borofsky's (2000) call to academics towards a public anthropology engaged with wider audiences, Singer reacted by showing that this is what applied anthropologists have been doing since a considerable period of time. He suggests that Borofsky's appeal shows the 'conscious nonrecognition of applied anthropology' (Singer 2000: 6) and he outlines that 'given that many applied anthropologists already do the kinds of things that are now being described as PA [public anthropology], it is hard to understand why a new label is needed, except as a device for distancing public anthropologists from applied anthropology' (idem).

At the other end, looking at the relationships between anthropologists and co-workers from other disciplines, one of the most important questions is, as Drazin puts it: 'not so much a question of how to engage with alternative methodologies, as of how to analyse and present anthropological data to a non-anthropological audience' (Drazin 2006: 100). One of the times when I addressed this challenge in my work was for a half-day LEEDR meeting when the researchers presented and discussed data from pilot studies and the PhD students made poster presentations of their doctoral projects.

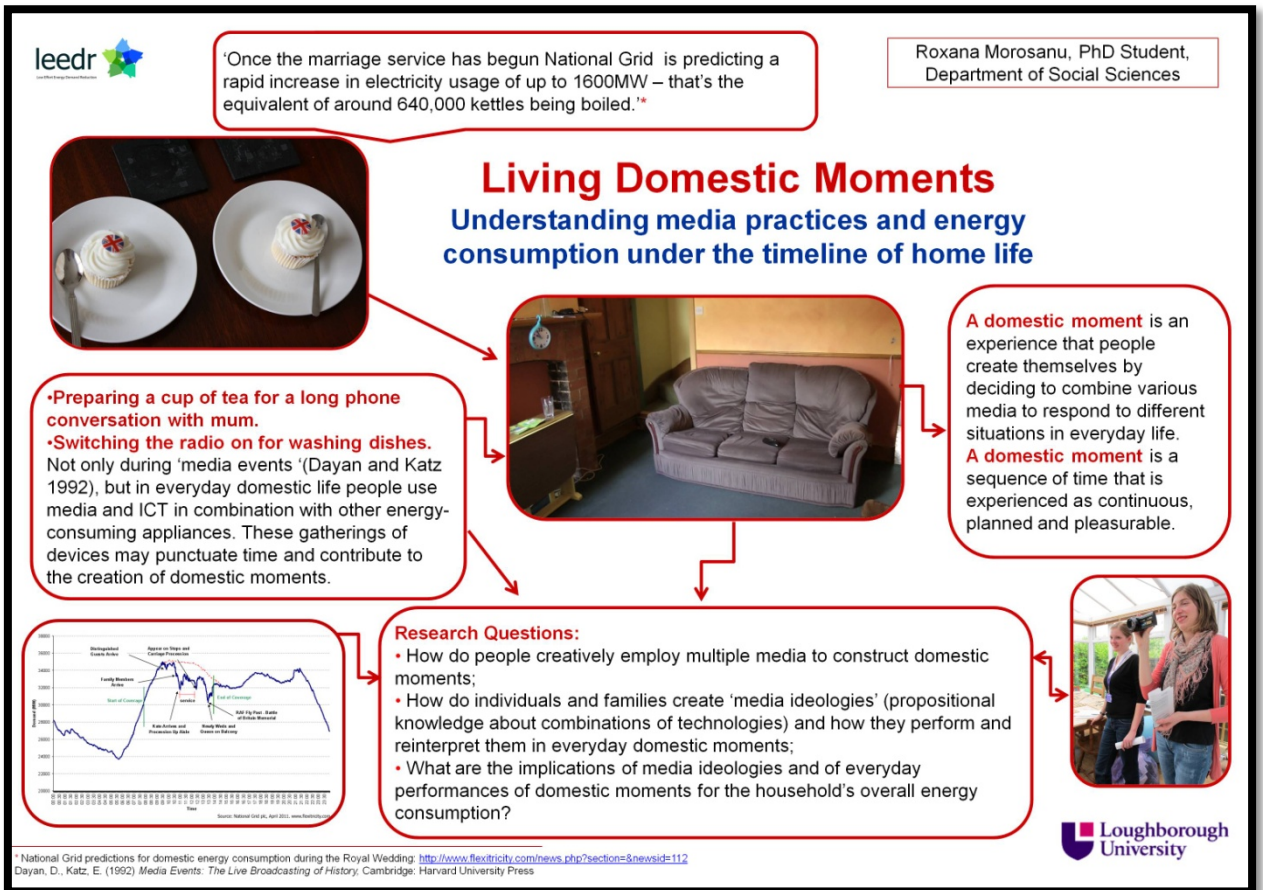


Figure 2 Poster that presented my doctoral project and that I presented during a LEEDR meeting (September 2011).

In the poster that I designed for this occasion I included a chart from the website of the National Grid that showed their predictions for the national domestic energy demand during the live televised broadcasting of the Royal Wedding. Deciding to include the chart was a conscious attempt to make the poster visually familiar and attractive to my physical sciences colleagues.

A series of unequivocal advantages of applied interdisciplinary work started to manifest with the stages of recruitment and the preparation of the documents to be approved by the ethical committee. Both these processes showed that when working collectively – rather than as a lone researcher – responsibilities are distributed and there are advantages in acknowledging and in drawing upon the existent specialization of co-workers. While these processes were led by a colleague from building engineering, the vast majority of project members took part in several discussions about ethical issues and lone working procedures, and all the

researchers went through a CRB check in order to be able to spend time with the family-participants inside their homes.

Twenty home-owner families were recruited following advertisements in the local paper, school and university newsletters, as well as posters that were placed in community centres and surgeries. The participants were not incentivised and they volunteered to take part in the research for three years, for various reasons, from an interest in sustainability and low-carbon ways of living, to a wish of lowering their energy bills. With the exception of one single-parent family and of one extended family where the maternal grandmother was living in, all the family-participants were two-parent nuclear families. Eighteen families could be described, in terms of income and education, as 'middle-class', while two families could be described – and they defined themselves during interviews – as 'working-class'. Each family had between one and four children, with ages between one and 22; and all adult couples were heterosexual and married. In selecting the participants, the only set of criteria that was followed came from the discipline of building engineering and it was related to the size of the house and to the technical requirements for the monitoring equipment installation; thus, houses of similar sizes, of three to four bedrooms, were chosen in order to make data comparison possible.

All the different disciplinary branches of the LEEDR conducted various types of research with the twenty self-selected family-participants following a pre-agreed schedule. The first research encounter was the Getting to Know You interview, developed by the colleagues from design, which consisted in two researchers (one from design and one from social sciences) visiting the family for one evening and joining them for a takeaway meal – provided by the project – while carrying out a semi-structured interview. After the meal, the family would take part in an interactive activity that consisted in mapping the floor plans of their house with their everyday activities and their daily pathway through the home. By taking part in some such encounters, I had the opportunity to meet some of my key informants and to experience, for the first time, evening time and a meal together with UK families inside their homes. Later, towards the end of my own fieldwork, I was invited again for dinner and for lunch, several times, by a family that I arrived to be very close with; and I also invited them to see my new place, meet my boyfriend and try my grandma's apple cake at a later point, when I was writing my dissertation.

The second research encounter was the video tour of the house (Pink 2004), conducted by the social sciences branch. The majority of these tours were conducted by my colleague, Kerstin, and two of them by me. Even if this research stage was part of the LEEDR overall research design, and not of my doctoral research design, the knowledge gained from these encounters informed my future research questions and it brought a new perspective on the relationship between academic and applied anthropology, where a focus on ethnographic encounters could open up a discussion about the similarities, rather than the differences, between academic and applied research. After the Getting to Know You and the video tour of the house encounters I wrote down detailed field notes – of a length varying between ten and twenty A5 pages in pen – which represented the beginning of the process of thinking about family life in English middle-class contexts. Later, I took part in applying other social sciences methods, such as conducting video tour follow-up interviews and re-enactments of practices with video – focusing on laundry, cooking, digital media use and bathroom practices – with my five key family-participants.

The next stage in the LEEDR research was the installation of monitoring equipment, which recorded electricity and gas consumption, as well as movement in the home. This was also the moment when the first year of my PhD was coming to an end and I was preparing for a year of fieldwork. Thus, when I carried out my doctoral fieldwork, my participants were already well-acquainted with the LEEDR project, with the other researchers, and, some of them, with me. It was in the quality of a LEEDR researcher that I first met them, and this quality opened their doors for me. As representing a serious research project that they previously agreed to take part in, I was welcome in homes of families for pre-arranged visits, much more than I would have been allowed access as a new neighbour who was living in a shared student house, as my initial experience in Middleborough showed. In time, while my relationships with my key participants developed, I arrived to be regarded as 'Roxana', rather than as 'a LEEDR researcher'. They came to know some things about me, such as the fact that I grew up in Romania where winters are snowy and mountains are high; that my parents lived in France and that they had a Labrador; that I was a Morris dancer – which some of them even witnessed – and that I was part of a student society of gardening and of the Transition Town local group. They sympathised with me when I had a bike accident; they tried my home-brewed beer

and my cakes; they knew about my holidays, my weekend trips and my conference participations. However, our relationships developed on the basis of the initial trust offered to a researcher working in a serious project; and it is in the initial legitimation that the LEEDR project gave me, where the greatest advantage of working as part of a project, rather than as a lone-researcher, stands for me.

My response to the double bind created by the two different types of expectations of the academic and applied-interdisciplinary domains was, in the end, to design and to carry out my doctoral project independently from the research focus and methodologies of the LEEDR project, but, at the same time, conducting other research as part of the social sciences branch of the overall project. In this way, I did not need to hold both the academic and the applied aims into focus at once, but I was able to momentarily suspend the concerns of the LEEDR project during my ethnographic encounters and to focus on the exploration of other questions that were emerging from the data.

My engagements and experiences related to everyday life on my field site, outside the focus of my doctoral project – such as Morris dancing and Transition Town activities, between others – continued during my fieldwork. In order to distinguish between my official research and the knowledge gained serendipitously outside the realm of the project, I scrupulously kept two types of diaries: one was dedicated to field notes that followed every encounter with the LEEDR families, which I wrote during daytime; and the other one was a continuation of the diary that I started when I first moved to Middleborough and it contained my thoughts about my out-of-office-hours experiences, which I was writing down before going to bed. I used Romanian for both these forms of note taking and introspection.

In order to think back at my fieldwork while writing my dissertation, I used both sets of notebooks, as the diary provided a track of where my thinking was at and of the general forms of practical knowledge that I had about English ways of engaging with the world at the time when I had specific rich research encounters with some LEEDR participants. For example, it was in the diary where my first ideas about anticipation emerged, in the form of a list of examples of what I called, at the time, ‘anticipation techniques’; it was after that moment that I started to be interested in the actions of anticipation related to everyday family life and to address them in my research with the LEEDR participants. Therefore, I argue that applied research

cannot be separated from other forms of learning on the field. While applied research endeavours ask a specific set of questions, in ethnographic approaches the responses to these questions and the analytical work through which these responses are considered to extend existent knowledge, are informed by other forms of learning that the ethnographer engages with, in the larger cultural context that surrounds and that pervades the locus of the applied research project.

4. Sensory ethnography as a route to tacit knowledge

In the previous chapter, that discussed the theoretical framework of my dissertation, I developed my argument in relation to an idea drawn from the works of Moore (2011) and Hobson (2011). This was a suggestion for scholars to approach ordinary and 'non'-conscious actions – actions that have no conscious meanings and intentions attributed to – as being meaningful for social transformation. As a response to this call and, also, in relation to Gershon's (2011) critique of 'neoliberal agency', I developed the working concept of 'ordinary agencies'. While 'neoliberal agency' consists in acts of means-ends calculus and rational decision making, ordinary agencies are forms of agency employed in everyday life and that are related to 'non-conscious' – unconscious, tacit, and non-intentional – acts of creating meaning. An attention to ordinary agencies as forms of practical knowledge involves a process of developing methodological practices and instruments that could tackle, in Harris's (2007) words, the 'tacit aspects such as body techniques, skills, the senses' (2007: 12). In this section I discuss the methodological approaches that I employ in order to situate the tacit knowledge that my participants and I accessed and manifested in the development of our ethnographic relationships.

In the first part of this chapter, I suggested that an important form of 'training' for me in arriving to 'skilfully see' (Grasseni 2007) and in developing my sensitivity to the ways of engagement with the world that my participants tacitly held and enacted, was folk dancing. In order to methodologically integrate this experience in relation to my fieldwork with the LEEDR families and in order to show that, even if performed by wearing an 'applied' hat, my ethnographic encounters with the LEEDR participants were as rich in sensory and tacit information as the process of

learning folk dances is, I employ the methodological approach of sensory ethnography.

Sensory ethnography is an approach to ethnographic practice that pays attention to the sensoriality of human experience by continuously keeping a double focus: on the ways in which research participants explain, represent, and categorise their multisensory everyday experiences; and on the way in which the ethnographer experiences and learns about other people's lives through her own sensorium (Pink 2009). Grounded in a phenomenological perspective – especially Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodiment that regards senses as being interconnected – and drawing from the works of Ingold (2000), Stoller (1989, 1997) and Seremetakis (1996), sensory ethnography responds to two important contemporary epistemological considerations in social sciences. The first one looks at *what* we consider to be knowledge that we can plan to 'collect' from research participants as what is called 'data'; as I discussed in the first section, Harris's (2007) take on this question is the observation that ethnographers traditionally favoured the explicit aspects of knowledge to the tacit ones. The second consideration asks *how* anthropological knowledge is produced: what it means to carry out ethnographic research and how could one arrive to understand the lives of others.

My doctoral fieldwork with the LEEDR families comprised of two phases. In the first phase I used 'traditional' ethnographic methods, such as semi-structured interviews and participant observation, which I reinterpreted through the lenses of sensory ethnography. Based on my field notes from this first stage, I further developed a set of inventive participant-led methods that I describe in the next section. There were eighteen families, from the total of twenty LEEDR family-participants, which took part in the first stage of research.⁶ At the same time, after negotiations with the LEEDR team, I was allowed to pick five families to carry out long-term ethnographic fieldwork together with. I chose the families that I already knew better from the previous research encounters under the LEEDR focus – which I described in the last section – and the families which I felt that I 'clicked' with, or which I imagined that I would get along well with because of shared interests, such as having dogs as pets. Some of the families that I would have liked to work with declined the proposition and others volunteered by themselves, hearing from other people that I

⁶ All the families were asked and two of them, both with very young children, declined to take part in my research.

was doing a selection for my PhD. The families that I ended up working with in the end were, as it happens, a mixture of choices and chance. In this thesis, when I mention my key-participants, I refer to these five families who, besides engaging in a long-term ethnographic relationship with me, were also the only participants who employed the inventive methods during the second phase of my fieldwork.

I will now show how the methods that I used during my fieldwork are interpreted through the prism of sensory ethnography. I shortly discuss participant observation and interviewing below while in the next section I will discuss the set of inventive participant-led methods that I developed together with my participants.

The traditional method of participant observation, that defines the ethnographer's joining in with the activities that happen to take place in the everyday lives of the members of the community that takes part in the research, is considered in ethnographic practice both a way of understanding how other people enact and give meaning to their daily activities, and also a proof of 'being there' that will legitimate the researcher's further writings. From a sensory ethnography perspective, this participation can represent a form of sensory apprenticeship, as the ethnographer learns 'how to sense one's environment in a culturally specific way' (Pink 2009: 70) and as she learns new skills, such as the 'skilled vision' of being able to tell good from bad cattle (Grasseni 2004).

The interview as event, from a sensory ethnographic perspective, 'creates a place in which to reflect, define and communicate about experiences' (Pink 2009: 87). For my research, the event created by the interview also brought out the opportunity for participant observation. With two exceptions of male participants who worked in the academia and who preferred to be interviewed at work in their offices, all the other interviews took place inside the homes of the participants, in the living room, kitchen, or conservatory. Pink (2009) suggests that interviews that take place inside the homes of the participants can bring a special kind of engagement and understanding: '[b]y sitting with another person in their living room, in *their* chair, drinking *their* coffee from one of *their* mugs, one begins in some small way to occupy the world in a way that is similar to them' (ibid p. 86, original italics).

Nearly half of the interviews that I carried out were part of wider LEEDR research visits, which meant that, while I was interviewing one of the adult participants downstairs, some of my colleagues were video recording other family members

upstairs, or they were checking or installing monitoring equipment. In these cases, it very often happened that all family members engaged with various parts of the interview and they spontaneously gave their opinion on one or more questions if, when coming in the room, they heard the main interviewees talking with me about a topic that they were interested in. For the rest of the interviews I was the only visitor, and one, or both, the adult participants sat down with me and responded to my questions. These interviews were semi-structured and they addressed the topic of usages of media and digital devices at home in relation to domestic time, lasting between one and two hours.

These visits gave me the chance to experience and to be part of the home environments of the people I was studying. Family rhythms continued, and everyday events happened in my presence, such as family members coming in and going out of the house; having drinks, snacks or meals; using their mobile or landline phones, computers and tablets; watching TV or doing homework; going in and out the living room, as well as in and out of my interview setting/ voice recorder radius; checking on other family members by using mobile phones or by going to the rooms that they were in. During these visits, spontaneous questions arisen from some particular features of their homes, from family photos, or from an occasional display of cards. We had cups of tea together, checked the weather, laughed and wondered about what smartphones can do nowadays. Sitting with them, I experienced the view on their windows, the forms of lighting in the house, and what for them were the familiar sounds of the central heating going off, of the doorbell, or of the landline phone. During these visits I felt that, as Pink (2009) puts it, I occupied the world in a similar way with my participants, or, I occupied the same world with them, at the same time. I also realised that every home is different. The sixteen houses that I visited gave me a small experiential repertoire of 'English homes', which I broadened up by using various hospitality networks for traveling in different parts of the UK. Spending time with people inside their houses could be, thus, regarded as a form of training for arriving to 'skilfully see' the types of relationships that people have with the environment of their homes: with their domestic spaces and with their domestic time.

While the sensory and tacit knowledge that I accessed through these encounters functioned as a sort of experiential repertoire, as a grounding layer that later made me able to make connections when I saw similar forms of domestic engagements

and relations, the opportunity to develop long-term relationships with my key family-participants brought me to agency: by making me feel like an agent, the mutuality of, and the insight gained from these engagements, opened up the idea of ordinary agencies.

5. Inventive methods and other occasions for ethnographic encounters

After I carried out the initial set of semi-structured interviews, the need to develop other methods came both from the non-propositional particularity of the subject that I was trying to tackle – domestic time, and from the expectations that the LEEDR project raised in the family-participants. As they started with the Getting to Know You visit that involved a takeaway meal and an interactive task, which were very much enjoyed – for example, one of these visits that I took part in lasted for over four hours, not at our request but because people enjoyed the task – the initial engagements with the LEEDR participants created the expectation that taking part in research is exciting. This expectation, combined with the particular sense of privacy surrounding the domestic environment that I discovered in Middleborough, made me think, in the first few months of my fieldwork, that I needed to have some good reasons in order to visit the homes of the LEEDR participants again. I developed the method of the Tactile Time collage in order to give my participants a fun experience that would let me inside their homes again and that might bring up some new questions in relation to my research topic. At this point, I was free to develop relationships with my participants without the involvement of the LEEDR project; people knew that my visits were related to my doctoral research and that they did not have to take part in the tasks that I was proposing if they did not want to, without this decision affecting their participation in the LEEDR project. This situation was similar to the experiences of doing ‘traditional’ fieldwork, except for the fact that I was only allowed five LEEDR families to try this type of long-term ethnographic engagement with. In the case that they would have opted out of my research, my options would have been to use the existent LEEDR data for my dissertation, or to change my topic towards a field that I had succeeded to develop relations in, such as local environmental activism, or folk dancing.

The Tactile Time collage, an arts-based method, consisted in a research visit that asked family members to make together a series of collages that showed the ways in which they spent time at home around various digital devices. For this task, I provided a kit that contained cardboard sheets, photos – of digital devices, household objects and food items and drinks – coloured crayons, and textile fabrics. I presented the collage as a type of clock that placed in the centre a main digital device, such as the living room TV set, and I asked the participants to write down the times of the day when they used this device and to illustrate, using photos, the types of activities that they did around that device, such as using a smartphone, or having a snack while watching TV. When this stage was completed, the participants were asked to express the qualities of the different moments that they identified, by choosing a textile fabric from a selection of nine – from hopsack to cotton and felt – that I provided. This stage was much enjoyed and the participants took their time to feel all the textile fabrics available and to choose one – or a combination of more – that expressed best the way some moments usually felt for them. I video recorded this stage, asking participants to explain their choice of fabric.

The collage-making activity brought for participants the occasion to reflect over family routines and it gave them the opportunity to talk to the other family members about the ways in which they experienced time at different moments of the day. For example, Elaine said about choosing a piece of felt to illustrate her lunch time by the TV: 'I like this one because it feels smooth and calm. I'll be on my own eating my lunch and that's how I'll be feeling: nice and calm'; while her daughter Becky explained her choice of hopsack to illustrate TV watching after coming from school: 'Hopsack because I had a hard day at school and I'm feeling rough'. There were four families who took part in the Tactile Time collage activity and they made between two collages - illustrating TV and computer usage – and four (for TV, computer, stereo system, and Wii usage). In one case it was just the female adult, Sam, who took part in the activity, making the series of collages and representing the routines of the other family members. In all the other cases, there were between three and four family members collaborating for the task, and in one case they represented as part of the collage the routines of a family member who was absent during this research encounter.

By linking the invisibility of time with the sense of touch, my research questions on time were transformed: it suddenly became possible to address them. I found

myself having a conversation with my participants about domestic time; however, it was not a conversation which involved words, but which made use of sensory knowledge. During the encounter, my participants and I were able to touch and feel the fabrics at the same time; thus, when they were choosing tulle to express a particular moment of the day, I was able to imagine what they meant. This form of conversation involved our capacities for imagination, as well as sensory and tacit knowledge; and I discovered that it suited the topic of domestic time very well.

The Tactile Time collage revealed that domestic time is made of different types of times, with different qualities, that are sometimes intersubjective and sometimes individual. On some occasions, shared time was represented as experienced in the same way, for example by using a piece of felt fabric to suggest cosines and warmth; and on other occasions, participants represented their experience of shared time as different than other family members'. The collage also showed that one's approach to domestic time differs with the presence and with the absence of other family members at and from home. In this ways, it opened up new questions that I was able to follow and to explore, by further employing other methods.

The next method that I used addressed shared evening and weekend family time. This was the Evening Times self-video recording, a participant-led method that asked participants to take short video clips of their communal activities around various digital media. I provided families with a small video camera (a Sony Bloggie) and I asked them to share it between family members so that each person would film the others at least once, during a period of a week. All the five key family-participants took part in this task, making video clips of a total length of 85 minutes, with various degrees of time involvement, the recording time for each family varying between 4 and 52 minutes.

The resulting video clips show how family time looks like when no visitor/researcher is present. By capturing and showing the spontaneity of domestic life, they produce a different form of knowledge than my interviews, for example, which asked the participants to think about and to formulate a general response that could account for what happens 'daily', or 'normally'. The clips also show the responses of family members to each other's action of filming, which are revealing of the nature of the interactions and relationships between them in a more intimate way than what can be learned through interviews and participant observation. Watching the recordings

was for me utterly surprising, in terms of their heterogeneity as well. The self-video recordings are so different, in both content and aesthetics, from one family to another, that I found it very hard to think about 'analysing' them as a set of materials that could embody communal 'themes'. They are rather like different trips into different realities, each with its own chromatic, lighting, form of movement, soundtrack, types of engagements, and ways of acting. The clips show the perspectives that my participants provided over their family time, *during* this family time. Being *part* of 'family time', the act of video recording the other family members is framed by a particular set of emotions, dynamics, individual and collective habits, intersubjective meanings, and expectations, set which is particular to, and only, this form of sociality and of experience that is called 'family time'. The video recordings are, thus, products, and not just representations of 'family time'. The video camera that I gave to my participants became just one of the multiple digital devices that they were able to use in the evenings and weekends; thus, it was integrated into their routines much more smoothly than I had expected.

The Evening Times self-video recording activity created the opportunity for two visits: one for bringing the bloggie and one for picking it up. In one case, the participants were not happy with the quality of the resulted materials and they chose to repeat the exercise using their own video camera – which brought the opportunity for me and Elaine to meet in a cafe in the town centre for a few times to pass the materials on a USB stick over a cup of coffee and a chat. In the meantime, while my key-participants and me were getting to know each other better, other occasions to visit them came up, such as bringing them souvenirs from my trips to Romania and France, and conducting other research for LEEDR, such as filming the performance and re-enactment of a set of domestic practices (cooking, doing the laundry, using digital media, and bathroom practices). Some participants watched me dancing with my Morris side in the town centre or in the park, and Chris, Elaine's husband, was regularly attending, as I was, the meetings of Transition Middleborough and of a left-wing political discussions group.

The next research encounter for my doctoral fieldwork was an interview on childhood memories about using media at home, such as watching TV, listening to the radio, or buying, recording, and listening to music albums. This interview was for me a way to know my participants better, and I later looked for, and listened to their teenage music preferences, as a way of accessing aurally something from

their experiences of buying and listening to their first album as teenagers. These interviews also created a space for self-reflection and for developing comparisons between the ways in which they experienced family life as children and the ways in which they were experiencing it now, as adults, or, in other words, comparisons between the families that they grew up in – which they did not choose and where they did not necessarily have the agency to change the things that they did not agree with – and the families that they were making now.

The memories interview took place towards the end of my fieldwork, when my participants and I were closer, and it was followed by the last method that I developed, the Five Cups of Tea self-interviewing with video activity. This activity involved using a small video camera – a Sony Bloggie that the participants had previously used for the Evening Times activity – during the preparation, and the drinking, of a cup of tea. There was a set of two questions to respond to every time – one about the activities that they did before, and the ones they were planning to do after having the cup of tea, and one asking them to describe how they made their cup of tea, while making it – and one question that was different with every cup, and that was to be responded to while sitting down with the cup of tea. This method looked at domestic daytime and at moments of solitude and it only addressed the female adult participants.

I reached the idea of developing this method when, looking back at my field notes and at the materials that resulted from my fieldwork, I arrived at the topic of mothering. It seemed that some important motivations, explanations, and, also, contradictions in the ways my female participants were talking about their domestic activities were related to the individual and cultural meanings attributed to being a mother. I also discovered that most of my materials were about family activities, and they represented domesticity uniquely as a locus for family, with just very few insights about how the domestic environment was experienced in solitude, when the other family members were not at home. This was because many research encounters involved several family members – who, even if not actively participating, were still making the home a collective social space – and because even during one-to-one encounters with female participants, they sometimes talked more about the other family members than about themselves.

The Five Cups of Tea task created a situation of self-interviewing that was flexible and non-intrusive, exploring the moments of reflexivity brought out by the ordinary event of having a cup of tea, an event that marked a break in activities or that produced a wished-for change in one's bodily and emotional state. With this method, I wanted to create a moment of taking distance from the constant requirements and expectations related to having a family-style lifestyle and from the everyday chores that were embedded in my participants' domestic lives. The five questions to be responded to while drinking a cup of tea were, this time, not about domestic routines, but about personal experiences and memories. The first two questions were meant to focus my participants' attention on the moment and on the experience of drinking tea, by asking them to describe the taste of tea, and asking if they remembered their first cup of tea and the way in which their parents used to prepare tea. The next three were rather personal questions that I previously could not find the right moment to address directly: I asked them to tell me something that they wished for in that moment; what kind of mothers they were and if they could describe one thing that they were sure that they were doing well, and one that they thought they were not doing well enough as mothers; and how they would like the world to change.

One could argue that these questions or, specifically, the question about being a mother, invite practices of problematization, or ethical work (Foucault 1990). They do, indeed, but the particular way in which they are responded to, through the video camera, shows problematization as being more than a work of conscious self-reflection, because it engages sensory experiences and affect. The video camera is a witness that shows the multisensory and emotional dimensions of the process of problematization in the moment that it takes place, and in the context of having a cup of tea and of completing a self-interviewing task that triggers it. The recordings that my participants made during the Five Cups of Tea task show problematization in Moore's definition, as containing multiple engagements with imagination and with tacit knowledge, such as 'affect, emotion, the placement of the body, fantasy, and relations with objects, technologies and the material world' (Moore 2011: 21).

In defining the methods that I describe in this section as 'inventive' I follow the conceptualization of inventive methods sketched by Lury and Wakeford (2012), as methods not of investigating, but of engaging the social world. They argue that the examples discussed in their edited collection, such as the anecdote, the experiment,

probes, and speculation, can be considered inventive methods if what emerges from their application can change the problem that the method addressed. The inventiveness, thus, is not inherent to the method and it cannot be known in advance of its use, but it can, sometimes, emerge from the method's application. For the two sociologists, inventive methods can produce subversive disruptions, as they 'have the capacity to display a kind of self-displacing movement; that is, they comprise processes of imitation and repetition in which a surplus is created that allows an event – what happens, the happening of social life – to become inventive' (Lury and Wakeford 2012: 7).

This characterization of inventive methods would probably best suit the Five Cups of Tea activity, whose enactments, even if based on the ordinary event of having a cup of tea, redefined this event as a moment for self-reflection, and gave voice to thoughts that might have previously accompanied this type of event in a latent, interior, or tacit form. The application of the Evening Times self-video recording activity also generated inventiveness: it created new situations during family time, such as that of 'mum as a filmmaker', which produced unique responses and reactions that could not have been predicted before the method was used. In developing the Tactile Time collage method, however, I was particularly inspired by the ways in which the British artist Richard Hamilton used the technique of collage to raise questions about domesticity, female identity and consumerism in the late 1950s - early 1960s. Hamilton's use of collage is intentionally subversive, as he brings together representations of familiar everyday domestic objects in unexpected compositions that have the power to displace and to trigger the questioning of a taken for granted domesticity, such as, for example, in the work *\$he* (1958-61). While intentionally inventive from the start, as an arts-based methodological proposition, I argue that the application of the Tactile Time collage method also produced inventiveness in the performance, particularly in the textile-selection stage. During this stage, the participants gradually learned that they could express the qualities of time through the tactility of textile fabrics, while I discovered that a conversation about domestic time has just become possible, through tactile mediation.

6. Visual ethnography as a route to tacit knowledge

The use of video camera in my research was twofold. First, it was me holding the camera for conducting video tours and for filming performances and re-enactments of practices, as part of my work within the social sciences branch of the LEEDR project. Second, the participants were in control of the camera for filming snapshots that would represent their families' evening times and, respectively, the experiences of having a cup of tea on one's own. In both situations, I argue, the use of camera as a research method created a route to tacit knowledge that was distinct from the routes that other methods could have brought out.

In emphasizing what is special about video practices as forms of visual ethnography, I follow the work of the anthropologist and filmmaker David MacDougall. For him, visual methods are not just instruments to record 'data' but they provide the opportunity for the ethnographer to engage with new dimensions and with a different way of seeing. MacDougall believes that the 'prelinguistic' aspect of film and video makes them good ways of engaging with 'a different experiential world' (MacDougall 2006: 270). I would add that this is not the world of ideological propositional knowledge, but rather the one of what can be called embodied, tacit, or everyday knowledge. Moreover, the primacy of the visual in visual ethnographic methods does not restrict these tools to representing just one type of information, as 'the visible is equally a pathway to the nonvisible, and to the larger domain of the feelings, the intellect, and the remaining senses' (MacDougall 2006: 269). In ethnographic research, the video camera, as an instrument of looking that 'domesticates and organizes vision' (MacDougall 2006: 3), has the potential to record the moment of the encounter. The process of image-making with video is, MacDougall argues, inherently reflexive in two important ways: it refers back to the moment of the encounter and it captures the 'corporeal image' of its producer, of the body behind the camera. 'We see with our bodies, and any image we make carries the imprint of our bodies' (MacDougall 2006: 3), the anthropologist suggests. Therefore, as they result from one's multisensory encounter with the world, images embody the moment of that encounter and the body that experienced the encounter, as well as a representation of what was seen and experienced during that moment.

Following this perspective, I suggest that the video materials that resulted from my research provide a route to tacit knowledge in two main ways. First, they reveal the multisensory aspects of one's encounter with the world. In a video extract from the recording of Joyce's laundry practices, which opens the *Mum's Cup* video appendix, aural and tactile elements of that particular encounter with Joyce are recalled: one could hear the sound of birds singing and one could see the swinging of the sheets on the washing line, produced by the wind. These are part of the elements that framed that encounter and that made possible a way of imagining the tacit knowledge embedded in Joyce's domestic environment, and in her everyday life. In a recording made for the Five Cups of Tea activity – which is also part of the video appendix – Cynthia starts by sneezing, and she explains that this is from rabbit hair from putting the rabbit out; she then starts unloading the dishwasher and we can hear the sharp sounds made by the cutlery; she later takes the cup of tea in the study, and we can see the sun's reflection in the laptop's screen; then, she tries the cup of tea, and she describes the taste by saying that what she perceives when drinking it is rather a feeling of comfort, than a taste. All these multisensory elements are part of Cynthia's domestic world, and we can arrive to imagine them through the video camera.

Second, the video images refer to the body behind the camera. In filming Joyce's garden, I stand in her preferred spot, experiencing the view of the house and of the garden that she would normally regard when sitting there; when she reaches me I lift up and stand, continuing to film Joyce while having a conversation. While filming Elaine loading the washing machine, I hunker down, as she does; this is how she needs to sit in order to do the sorting and the loading of the laundry. By sitting in the same way, by feeling the pressure from hunkering in my hips, I am able to imagine how the action feels for Elaine; the video camera captures this particular type of empathy by containing my corporeal image. When Elaine uses the camera for the Five Cups of Tea activity, she moves around the kitchen, preparing tea or coffee, opening drawers, pressing buttons and moving the camera with her. When she talks about her experiences of mothering, the camera is filming the kitchen and the cup of tea; then, suddenly, it turns towards Elaine's face, when she reaches the conclusions. These movements capture the corporeal image of Elaine, while she is involved in what can be called, in Foucault's (1990, 2000) terms, ethical work; the movements accompany and punctuate the development of her self-reflective talk,

revealing a process and, suddenly, when the direction of the camera shifts, a result: a set of conclusions.

The route to tacit knowledge created through the use of the video camera is, therefore, a route that is inherently reflexive in two important ways, as emphasized by MacDougall (2006), that are based on the special qualities of video to show the multisensory aspects of one's encounter with the world, as well as to capture the person behind the camera.

7. Conclusions

In this chapter I situated my methodological approach and I described and discussed all the specific methodological tools that I employed during my ethnographic fieldwork. I introduced my field site, Middleborough, reflecting on my initial arrival experiences and on the process that made my glance shift from surprise to acceptance and understanding. I discussed the interdisciplinary applied context of my research and my relationships with applied and with academic anthropology. Next, I introduced the approach to ethnographic practice that my work follows – sensory ethnography – in relation to my interest for tacit knowledge and everyday actions, which I discussed in the theoretical chapter. Last, but not the least, I described all the individual methodological elements of my research: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, arts-based methods, participatory methods and visual ethnographic methods.

Chapter 3: Spontaneity

1. Chapter outline

In this chapter I discuss spontaneity as a time-mode that articulates a counterdiscourse to the dominance of linear time expressed by digital clocks, between other time-reckoning tools, and that engenders and makes visible specific forms of 'ordinary agency'. Drawing from the work of the British philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe, especially her monograph *Intention* (2000 [1957]) and her reinterpretation of the Aristotelian concept of 'practical truth' (1981), I propose a theoretical framework for approaching spontaneity as immediate action that is oriented towards 'doing the truth' (Teichmann 2008: 80). In a different wording, how the philosopher Charles Taylor puts it, spontaneous actions oriented towards fulfilling one's immediate wants can be regarded as 'happy actions' (Taylor 1979). This felicitous formulation is suggestive of the forms and nature of the agency engaged in enactments of spontaneity: outbursts of enthusiasm as everyday forms of empowerment emerge from the immediate accomplishment of spontaneous actions.

The significance of spontaneity in my participants' everyday lives emerged from my fieldwork particularly in relation to actions that involved digital media, such as using a smartphone to instantly check facts and information related to one's immediate ideas, desires, and needs. However, this chapter discusses examples of 'non-technological' spontaneous actions – such as having a friendly argument, or nipping to one's allotment in order to harvest vegetables for that evening's dinner –, all along with cases of digital immediacy, in order to move away from a technologically-deterministic approach that makes ICTs into an a stereotype, in Green's (2002) words. Thus, I will not argue that digital devices are generating new types of human action, but that my research participants used them in order to transform a wider variety of actions into 'happy actions' (Taylor 1979). In the ways in which spontaneity was articulated through digital media, existent cultural understandings of what it is to be an agent, of how one could convey the sense of being in control of one's life, and of the ways in which one could express one's individuality, were reformulated.

Spontaneity is an approach to, and expression of, human action that is visible and intersubjective; it can be articulated through appropriate ‘techniques of the body’ (Mauss 1979 [1935]) and through displays of emotion linked to shared emotional codes (Luhmann 2006). Associated with specific forms of sociality, such as friendly arguments, spontaneity was expressed, before the emergence of digital devices, through other recognizable sets of movements, tone and gestures, such as those related to searching for the solution to the argument in encyclopaedias; and it was sometimes encouraged by keeping a special bookshelf dedicated to situations of casual family arguments, as I will discuss in the third section in relation to an example extracted from an interview with Brett.

At the same time, spontaneity depicts a specific type of relationship with time, in which the short-term future is domesticated by being transformed into action. As a distinct way of blending the present and the future together, spontaneity makes the future present, opposing the logic of linear time as a dominant form of temporality that is expressed and maintained through digital clocks, among other devices that claim to provide ‘objective’ representations of time. Spontaneity contradicts a managerial approach to time (Hochschild 1997) in which time is regarded as a resource that people consume (Shove 2009) and that needs to be efficiently organized. Instead, what spontaneity proposes is a playful and subjective approach: it operates by interrupting the uniform linearity of time in order to create wished for future moments and to make them present.

In this chapter I will look at a series of situations when the spontaneity expressed in my research participants’ relationships with digital media can be regarded as contributing to extending the ‘ethical imagination’ (Moore 2011) of the people involved, both participants and researcher, and to developing new forms of sociality. First, I will show that the capacity to produce immediacy of new technologies was used by my participants in order to expand and diversify the category of what could be considered as achievable, or attainable, wants. Second, I will discuss the ways in which the sense of an enlarged group of achievable wants is employed in developing specific forms of sociality, and it can contribute to broadening one’s ‘ethical imagination’.

In the next section, I describe the forms of ordinary agency that emerge with enactments of spontaneity. I depart from the way in which the British

dramatherapist Peter Slade defined spontaneity, and I discuss ethnographic examples that articulate a specific set of positive emotions associated with empowerment and self-confidence, which arrive with the accomplishment of spontaneous actions. The third part develops a theoretical framework that situates spontaneity as action oriented towards ‘doing the truth’ (Teichmann 2008: 80), by discussing ethnographic examples in relation to the work of the British philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe (2000 [1957]; 1981). The fourth section focuses on specific forms of sociality developed through the spontaneous use of digital devices, and it discusses the idea that the intersubjective understandings which appear with these developments can contribute to broadening one’s ‘ethical imagination’. In the fifth section, I describe forms of sociality that emerge from spontaneous sharing of pictures with physically absent others, and I introduce the idea that in some situations ‘happy actions’ (Taylor 1979) can be regarded as supporting one’s ethical practices. The chapter concludes in the sixth part.

2. Spontaneity and agentic emotions

When, in the 1950s, the British dramatherapist Peter Slade proposed and introduced child drama and improvisation play in education and in therapy, he suggested that the ability to improvise ‘has something to do with drama, but is much more nearly a function of everyday life, where spontaneity, natural wit, courage in adversity, sympathy with sorrow or just sheer high spirits contribute to all that might be called the golden hour’ (Slade 1968: vii). For Slade, spontaneity was both an ability that could be trained and a particular way of engagement with the world. Writing about the value of spontaneity as a capacity, Slade outlines that: ‘Apart from developing the ability to speak (and incidentally to write with more imagination), other qualities become evident – a growing absorption in the task and a sincerity about the way of doing it, particularly in children, useful for all learning and general attitudes to life; also a mounting confidence and ultimately a mounting happiness’ (Slade 1968: 4).

This chapter reflects, in a way, Slade’s view on spontaneity, specifically emphasizing two elements of his definition. The first one is the sincerity about the way of doing the task, which is an important characteristic of spontaneity that I

discuss at large in the next section in relation to Anscombe's (1981) reinterpretation of the Aristotelian concept of 'practical truth'. The second one is the suggestion that spontaneity generates mounting confidence and happiness and it is addressed here by looking at the forms of ordinary agency engendered by spontaneity, especially at the emotions associated with the accomplishment of 'happy actions' (Taylor 1979).

These emotions are expressed below in two distinct quotes from interviews with Elaine and Brett where they describe how they use their smartphones in order to immediately find answers to questions that they are concerned with momentarily. These examples show that the awareness of having the ability to instantly 'find out anything', as Elaine puts it, can change one's understandings of, and relationships with, the world, as well as the ways in which one sees oneself. Below, Elaine describes the situations when she prefers to use her smartphone to using a laptop or a tablet.

Elaine: I usually look on the phone, because it's so instant. I also use it if the children ask me questions I can't answer: I'll go straight to the internet to find the answer (...) So, for instant answers to things I just go on my phone.

Roxana: When would you do that?

Elaine: At any time. When I'm in the house; out of the house. When things just pop in my head. Lying in bed; going to sleep: 'Oh, I'll just look at that up'. It's brilliant; I wish we had that information when we were young. It's at your fingertips, really, to find out anything. (interview Elaine)

What Elaine describes in this quote can be regarded as a dialectic relationship that she has with her phone: any question that comes in her mind and that she addresses to the phone, bounces back to Elaine with an immediate answer, in a never-ending exchange that can take place anywhere and anytime. The awareness that she can access this relationship anytime she needs to makes Elaine feel enthusiastic and also confident in relation to her children – she can find the answer to any of their questions, on the spot.

I cannot emphasize enough the enthusiasm expressed by all my participants in relation to situations when they were able to instantly reach the piece of information they needed. Ultimately, the scope of this chapter is to retain this enthusiasm and to

find and develop a suitable theoretical framework to express it to an academic audience.

Mother of two, Elaine got used to continuously swing between working full-time, part-time, and taking longer periods of time off-work in the last eleven years since her first child was born. Her multiple interests and responsibilities, which she has learnt how to juggle with simultaneously, are reflected in the types of questions that she uses her phone to find answers for. The ability to find out what she needs, when she needs it, makes everyday life easier and it helps Elaine to stay in control and to find solutions for various contingent situations, such as, in the example below, when she needs to decide over the right type of product for her daughter. Below, there is a partial list of pieces of information that Elaine searched for on her phone in the last two days before the interview was taken.

I was looking at somebody else's website. I was translating 4 foot 10 inches into centimetres – I was in a shop buying some tights for Becky and she's between girl and adult (...) and I only know her height in centimetres, so I had to translate that. And, then, there was something medical – I was looking up about what exercises you can do. And I was looking at some holiday company. For some reason, I looked up the word 'consensus', but I can't remember why. And I was looking at hairdressers in Middleborough, because I had to find a new hairdresser. And, then, I was looking at jewellery boxes, because I need to find a present for somebody.
(interview Elaine)

This list, like any 'to do' list, could be very telling of someone's everyday life and concerns. Using her smartphone, Elaine looks for relevant information that she momentarily needs to find out in relation to her work, family, and, generally, to any of her various relationships and social roles. She is aware of her ability to immediately find solutions, using her phone, to all the things that 'just pop in' her mind. I argue that this awareness, which Elaine enthusiastically shares with me, is empowering in itself: it makes Elaine feel able to respond to any contingent situations, and, thus, making her feel in control of her life. At his turn, Brett, father of two young children and a physical science academic, talks about a particular way of using his smartphone in order to check if what politicians say on TV is true or not:

People say things on TV and I don't think they're right. So, I go and check them. Especially politicians. (...) It was on Question Time a couple of weeks ago. I can't

remember exactly what it was, but somebody said something about how the deficit would change. So, I googled it and looked at that. (interview Brett)

Brett describes his strategies for staying in control of the information that reaches him; of the information that he would believe. He is aware that the facts discussed by the media are not objectively 'true', but they just represent specific perspectives, which is especially visible in political discourse. Using his smartphone, he is able to immediately research for other sources, or perspectives upon, the same piece of information: by bringing all the perspectives together, he is able to reach his own conclusions, which are different from the conclusions offered by only one media, the TV. Various types of information, such as information on macroeconomic predictions, are approached by Brett as being immediately available, and not restricted to a small field of incontestable experts. Thus, by doing nothing more than using his phone skilfully while sitting on the sofa, Brett expresses himself as an agent who is able to contest political discourse and the power of government representatives. As for Elaine, the awareness of him being able to do so at any time, and in relation to any potential piece of information, is empowering in itself: it makes Brett feel in control of his own worldview, which cannot be easily influenced or manipulated by the media and by political discourse.

3. Intentionality and wanting as *per* Anscombe

In *Intention*, the influential work that the British analytic philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe published in 1957, she patiently turns upside down all the existent assumptions about what intentions are and where they are to be found. One of her essential claims is that intention resides and appears with action and it is not something premeditated and carefully constructed before the action starts. Anscombe suggests that we should look for intention not in the content of one's mind but in what one is doing. 'Roughly speaking, a man intends to do what he does. But of course that is *very* roughly speaking. It is right to formulate it, however, as an antidote against the absurd thesis which is sometimes maintained: that a man's intended action is only described by describing his *objective*' (Anscombe 2000: 45).

The philosopher Roger Teichmann summarizes Anscombe's reconceptualization of the Aristotelian concept of 'practical truth' by suggesting that for her 'practical truth' is when 'what is aimed at by the agent is what he actually does: that the description of what he aims at is the same as the (or a) description of what he does' (Teichmann 2008: 81). In order to arrive at this formulation, Anscombe draws a parallel between 'good action' and 'true belief'. She suggests that the 'conceptual connexion between "wanting" (...) and "good" can be compared to the conceptual connexion between "judgement" and "truth"' (Anscombe 2000 [1957]: 76), so that, as truth is the object of judgement, the good can be regarded as the object of wanting. In other words, as Teichmann puts it: 'The question whether an action or end is in fact good is like the question whether a belief is in fact true' (2008: 74) – which is an idea that, I believe, can find reflection in what makes anthropological perspectives on the world different from approaches from other social sciences. However, practical truth is something that concerns actions, not judgements; following Aristotle, Anscombe sees 'good action as embodying "practical truth"' (Teichmann 2008: 79). The notion of 'good' should be regarded here as relative; if the thing wanted has a 'desirability characterization' given by the agent, then the thing wanted is 'good in some way': '*Bonum est multiplex*: good is multiform, and all that is required for our concept of 'wanting' is that a man should see what he wants under the aspect of some good' (Anscombe 2000 [1957]: 75). To summarise Anscombe's reinterpretation of the Aristotelian concept of practical truth, I will use a quote from Teichmann's discussion of Anscombe's work: 'Where what is wanted is wanted as good, and is in fact good, the action arising from the want embodies practical truth. Acting thus is, as Anscombe liked to say, "doing the truth"' (Teichmann 2008: 80).

This philosophical understanding of immediate action relates to one of the benefits of spontaneity identified by the dramatherapist Peter Slade. This is 'a growing absorption in the task and a sincerity about the way of doing it' (Slade 1968: 4). The sincerity of doing the task, or, for Anscombe, acting as 'doing the truth', is what differentiates spontaneous action from a 'means-ends calculus' approach – or what

the novelist Jane Austen called ‘acting by design’⁷ – that characterizes ‘neoliberal agency’ (Gershon 2011).

In an essay inspired by Anscombe’s work, Charles Taylor (1979) approaches the question of practical truth using different wording. He writes about action as an expression of desire (what for Anscombe is ‘wanting’) and he defines ‘happy action’ as a ‘qualitatively different’ type of action when ‘awareness of what I want is inseparable from awareness of what I am doing’ (Taylor 1979: 86). Happy action is when the desire takes the form of unconstrained action; it is ‘a situation marked by an absence of conflict’ (ibid p. 88). Happy action is a situation when one is able to instantly do what one wants to do.

‘Wanting’ (or, for Taylor, ‘desire’), thus, plays an important role in triggering spontaneous actions. But what is ‘wanting’? Anscombe finds it important to delineate wanting by outlining one basic characteristic – or ‘sign’ – of wanting that, as Teichmann suggests, would allow us ‘to see how wanting is different from wishing or hoping’ (Teichmann 2008: 64). Developing her argument against the Cartesian account of first-person authority that reifies what Teichmann calls “‘private”, mental events’ (ibid p. 17) and an ‘interior’ causation for action, Anscombe insists that ‘wants’ should not be seen as ‘inner causes’. Instead, the way she approaches wanting is by reifying its ‘primitive’ mark: ‘trying to get’. Furthermore, she identifies two essential elements of wanting: a movement towards the thing wanted and a supposition that the thing is there.

The primitive sign of wanting is *trying to get*: in saying this, we describe the movement of an animal in terms that reach beyond what the animal is now doing. When a dog smells a piece of meat that lies the other side of the door, his trying to get it will be his scratching violently round the edges of the door and snuffling along the bottom of it and so on. Thus there are two features present in wanting; movement towards a thing and knowledge (or at least opinion) that the thing is there (Anscombe 2000 [1957]: 68).

One could say that this description accounts for objects of desire that are material and reachable. I will illustrate this case with an example extracted from an interview

⁷ “Your plan is a good one”, replied Elizabeth, “where nothing is in question but the desire of being well married; and if I were determined to get a rich husband, or any husband, I dare say I should adopt it. But these are not Jane’s feelings; she is not acting by design’ (Austen 1993: 20).

with Sam. Sam and her husband, Peter, live in a detached house together with their children, Alex and Julie, who are 8 and 11. They have an allotment on the other side of the town, where Sam and Peter usually spend their Friday mornings from March to October, digging, planting and growing vegetables, while they are listening to music, or doing the pub quiz on Radio 2 on their portable radio.⁸ While Peter works in shifts, Sam works part-time and she is at home on Fridays; she sometimes spends Friday afternoon making chutney and jam from their own allotment produce. Their house had solar panels installed and they rear chickens in their back garden, whose eggs, Sam says, suffice for the household's consumption, so they do not need to buy any extra. They also never buy milk from a supermarket, as they have it delivered by a milkman. Sometimes, when they run out of vegetables that they need for dinner, Sam and her family would make a quick visit to the allotment:

We'll nip down if we just need to pick something for dinner. Like, say you want some carrots, or something, and you haven't got any. (interview Sam)

This would be a spontaneous, rather than a planned Friday morning, visit, which usually emerges from Sam's discovery that they ran out of vegetables. Going back to the two elements of wanting identified by Anscombe, the movement towards the thing wanted is exemplified here by the spontaneous journey to the allotment; while the supposition that the thing is there is expressed by their knowledge that they would find, hidden in the ground, carrots that they had previously planted and grown.

In situations when the objects of desire are less close and apparent, Anscombe sees the two features differently:

But where the thing wanted is not even supposed to exist, as when it is a future state of affairs, we have to speak of an idea, rather than of knowledge or opinion. And our two features become: some kind of action or movement which (the agent at least supposes) is of use towards something, and the idea of that thing (Anscombe 2000 [1957]: 70).

At first glance, this case could apply to spontaneous actions oriented towards finding a piece of information provisionally needed. I will illustrate this case by using an example given by Matthew.

⁸ Two interesting approaches to gardening in England can be found in Degnen (2009) and Tilley (2006).

Matthew is in his fifties and he lives together with his wife Carol and their two teenage children. He is passionate about history and he enjoys doing Taekwondo together with his son and going to church every Sunday with his family. He is not very fond of new technologies – for example, he says that he prefers reading a paper book than using Carol's Kindle because he is 'not good with buttons' – but he has an iPod that he uses at home with headphones to listen to audio books when it is his turn to clean the bathroom. Until very recently – a few months before the interview was taken – he did not ever have his own email address and they used Carol's email to receive information about the church rota and about other familial interests and activities. However, when I ask them, during my interview, if they ever use other digital devices while watching TV and in relation to the TV content, Matthew recounts an episode when he used his laptop to find information about the writer of a sitcom that he was just watching:

The other day, 'Red Dwarf' was on. And the first few series are written by two people, and the later are written by only one of them. And I thought: 'What happened to the other one? Did he die or something?' So, I just googled his name. He didn't die; he just didn't want to write it anymore. He was known as Rob Grant. And that's how I put it, and I found out. He said he wanted more than Red Dwarf on his tombstone, so he went on doing something else. So, it piqued my curiosity and I wanted to find out. (interview Matthew)

In this case, one could say that Matthew's drive to search for the information about the co-writer of Red Dwarf was not related to a skill, or habit, of mastering digital devices in a particularly technological-savvy way. It was rather a spontaneous wish related to what another participant defined as the cultural category of 'is X dead?' questions. Thus, with his action, Matthew satisfies his immediate curiosity, which is linked to a cultural genre, through a new way of using his laptop in front of the TV. In this action, cultural continuity, technological change and individual creativity are tightly intertwined.

Going back to Anscombe's theoretical apparatus, the two elements of wanting that can be identified in Matt's example are: the action of writing down the name of the actor in the Google bar, which is 'some kind of action' that the agent supposes is of use 'towards something'; and finding out what happened with Rob Grant – whether he is dead or not, and, if not, what was the reason for him stopping to co-write Red

Dwarf – which is the idea of the thing needed. But if finding out what happened with Rob Grant is just ‘the idea’ of the thing needed, then what is the thing needed? The main difference between Sam’s and Matthew’s examples is that in one case the object of desire is material and edible – carrots for dinner – and in the other one is non-material / ‘virtual’ – information about a name in the credentials of a TV series. The means of ‘trying to get’ the objects are a combination of intense physical activities – such as driving, digging and pulling out – in one case, and typing down a name, in the other. But both approaches are based on the supposition that the thing wanted *is* there, be it inside the ground or on the Internet. It is with certainty that Matt googles the name of the Red Dwarf co-writer; he is sure that he would find out at least if Rob Grant is dead, but he finds out more instead: he finds the writer’s reasons for stopping to work at the series, and he shares them with me as if we were talking about a common friend.

Another difference between Sam’s and Matt’s example, one could argue, might be the fact that digging out vegetables to have for dinner could be seen as a ‘need’, while looking up for information about a sitcom writer would be a desire related to one’s curiosity, without being a ‘need’. However, in this chapter I argue that the possibility to immediately accomplish both these types of needs/ desires generates agentic emotions and brings out the opportunity for one to imagine oneself as an agent. Thus, for the purposes of the present chapter, the content of the desires *per se* is less important than the emotions generated by the acts of accomplishing them.

The next example compares the activity of physical search through encyclopaedias with the activity of searching on Google. Brett describes his in-laws’ concept of the ‘pedant’s corner’, which institutionalizes a family tradition of what can be called ‘friendly arguments’. The ‘pedant’s corner’ is a book shelf situated in the living room, filled with encyclopaedias that are to be used spontaneously in case of unexpected friendly arguments over ‘small’ (but not unimportant!) issues.

People get pedantic about something. And sometimes, in families, when you had a few glasses of wine, you can have an argument. Say, ‘Christian Slater was in this film’. And then you say: ‘No, he wasn’t in that film! He was in this film. In that film, wasn’t it Kevin Bacon?’ You debate about that until you say ‘OK, we’ll check it’. So, a pedant’s corner, in Jane’s family, used to be a shelf: a book shelf where they had things like encyclopaedias and dictionaries and the histories of people

and all that sort of things; so, very factual books. And that's where they would go. But now it's all in the phone, basically. So, Wikipedia, really, it has become like the pedant's corner. Obviously, don't believe everything that's there (...) so, just in order to see who's right in a family discussion or argument. It's imperative that we have internet signal. The worse thing is, if you have these discussions and you are on holiday overseas, and you don't get the internet. Or, you stay somewhere in the country, in this country, and there isn't mobile signal. And, then, you have to write it down, and check it out [later]. It's not something that rules our lives, but it's something that it's there in case we need it; the ability to prove yourself right or wrong. And, if you prove yourself right, then you tell everyone; and if you prove yourself wrong, then you don't say anything more about it. (interview Brett)

In this story, Brett describes friendly arguments in families as an arena for spontaneous action that existed long before the development of new digital technologies. Friendly arguments are such a constant part of domestic life that his wife's family used to keep a whole bookshelf dedicated to these occasions. What is spontaneous is the subject of the debate – nobody can anticipate what the topic of this evening's friendly argument would be – and the moment when the opponents would decide to check who is right, which happens after they presented, more than once, all their arguments. During my fieldwork, I often took part in friendly arguments that usually happened in pubs, when I was sitting with groups of local friends and acquaintances.⁹ According to Brett's account, friendly arguments happen today in similar ways to how they used to happen before new digital technologies were wide-spread; what has changed is the research method for finding the answer. But, when new media fail to immediately provide the right answer due to technological constraints, people are left in limbo between the state of being right and the state of being wrong. To resolve this ontological dilemma in an everyday situation, people enact forms of ordinary agency that they have at hand and that they find appropriate. The question whether immediate media fulfil a need or a desire that is not a need is surpassed here; the ability to find a piece of information provisionally needed is equated with the ability to prove oneself right or wrong.

⁹ An example of memorable friendly argument that my local acquaintances and friends engaged in while in a pub was over the origins and the right pronunciation of the word 'mum'.

Summarizing Anscombe's approach to wanting, Teichmann concludes that 'an object of wanting has to be taken as attainable by the person who wants it, and likewise has to be conceptualizable by that person' (Teichmann 2008: 65). This is the case in all the three examples of Sam, Matt and Brett: carrots for dinner, information about a sitcom writer and the solution to a friendly family argument are taken as attainable (if the Internet is working). These examples also show that 'trying to get' – which for Anscombe is the 'primitive' sign of wanting – is a feature present in both cases of a 'material' and of a 'virtual' object of desire, such as vegetables for dinner and, respectively, a piece of information that would respond to one's momentary curiosity or that would prove if one is right or wrong. I argue that, in these cases, new technologies do not alter the nature of wanting, but what they do is to make a wider variety of wants achievable instantly. In Teichmann's (2008) terms, new technologies make new and diversified objects of wanting to be taken as *attainable* by the persons who want them.

I have discussed examples when spontaneity appears as an impulse to accomplish momentary wants. But there are also cases when specific wants appear first as elusive ideas that need to be accommodated until the stage when they will be considered 'full' wants that ask for action. It was Chris who described this type of 'fermented' spontaneity. Before our first interview, I knew Chris from meetings of Transition Middleborough – a local environmental group part of the Transition Towns network – and also from the fortnightly sessions organised by a political action discussion group in town. In his forties, he lives with his wife, two children and two cats in a detached house, in a recently developed residential neighbourhood. He is interested in new technologies, in hacking as a way of making things – such as solar panels – from scratch, and he has subscriptions to the American magazines *Wired* and *Make*. He is one of the founding members of a residents' association whose protest actions regarding a specific urban planning decision appeared in the local paper. In the next extract, Chris describes the way in which he reached the decision, and then he used his smartphone, to buy a new game for his children.

I bought a game of Cluedo. I was talking with the kids, or something. I must have seen it online, a reference to Cluedo, and then that made me think: 'actually, Cluedo's quite a good game for developing logical reasoning, and our kids are about the age where they can accept that sort of concept'. So, that jumbles

around in my head for a while. I'm the sort of person who, kind of, I like to allow things to bounce around in my head for a while and, then, it may look spontaneous from the outside, but it's been fermenting for a while. Then all of a sudden I'll go: 'Aha, we need a game of Cluedo!' And the problem with the modern life is that there's so little time to do anything, that I'm now in the situation where if I decide that I think I'm probably going to do something, at that moment I just say: 'Well I'm going to do it!' That's why I ordered Cluedo. I was, I don't know, I was in bed or something. I woke up and I thought: 'Oh, I think we need Cluedo' and then it's done, you see. It's just done. It's gone, without occupying any more of my mind, if you see what I mean. (interview Chris)

In Chris's case, spontaneity is put on waiting while the idea 'ferments' in his mind. The moment when the desire reaches maturity is also the moment when it is fulfilled: once he realized that he wants to buy the Cluedo game, Chris immediately buys it by using an Amazon application on his smartphone. He explains his action by stressing lack of time as a characteristic of modern life, and by suggesting that there are lots of other things that he is preoccupied with. If time is essential for an idea to 'mature', once the idea has become a decision there is no need to wait anymore in order to turn the decision into action. By acting spontaneously, Chris liberates the idea from his mind, making place for other thoughts.

Going back to Anscombe's philosophical framework, one could connect her conceptualization of wanting with her reconceptualization of the Aristotelian concept of 'practical truth'. As discussed, for Anscombe wanting involves two elements: 'trying to get' (a movement towards the thing wanted which is spontaneous and almost concomitant with the occurrence of desire); and the supposition that the thing wanted is there. In reconceptualising the concept of 'practical truth', Anscombe suggests that acting is 'doing the truth' (Teichmann 2008: 80) because 'the description of what he [an agent] does is made true by his doing it' (Anscombe 1981: 77). In order to connect these two ideas and to express, in only one sentence, the significance of Anscombe's argument, one could suggest that in 'trying to get' what they want, people are 'doing the truth'. This idea liberates any form of action from moral judgement, and, in doing so, I believe that it is congruent with an anthropological gaze.

In this section I discussed the British philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe's ideas on intentionality and agency, in relation to specific ethnographic examples. These examples, although employed here in order to show how individuals engage in spontaneous action, reveal spontaneity as a social, rather than an individual, activity. A family visit to the allotment; having a friendly argument as a form of domestic sociality; buying a new game that attests the developing abilities of one's children, are social preoccupations that are done together with, or that are oriented towards, the others. The next section goes further by describing a few forms of sociality developed through the use of spontaneity and the ways in which the emotions generated from these processes contribute to broadening the 'ethical imaginations' (Moore 2011) of the people involved, both participants and researcher.

4. Shared spontaneity and 'ethical imagination'

I am hosting Annie, a couch surfer from the US.¹⁰ She came to Middleborough for a conference, and she had one extra day for exploring what she enthusiastically calls an 'authentic and non-touristic' small English town. I am hosting her for one night in the Victorian terraced house that I share together with three friends. After showing her bedroom, we sit for a while in the living room, having a cup of tea and talking about ourselves. At one point, she mentions her favourite band, Bright Eyes, who are big in the US, but that, I am ashamed to say, I have never heard of. Curious to find more about the band, I instantly download a couple of their albums on my phone through a music application. Then I ask what her favourite song is. I find it easily and I press play. The song fills the living room. For me, new sounds are mixing with a familiar space, creating something different. For Annie, a familiar tune has just broken out, filling a strange place. We first met only two hours ago, but this is a moment when we kind of come together. We listen to the song and smile.¹¹

Thinking back about this moment when I effortlessly enacted the spontaneity that my participants have been talking about for over a year, I realize that it was Erin who taught me about instant gifting. I learned this form of sociality and of exchange

¹⁰ Couchsurfing.com is an international online network for hospitality.

¹¹ Bialski (2012) defines the interactions between Couchsurfing hosts and surfers as 'intimate mobility'.

on a gloomy late August morning, when I visited Joyce and Erin, one of my key participant-families, in order to give them a small souvenir that I brought from my holiday in France.

The mum and daughter live by themselves in a detached house close to the town centre, and most of Joyce's everyday activities as a homemaker are focused around Erin's upbringing. Comparing to the other four or five times when I visited their place for specific research activities, this time there is no task we need to complete. We are in the living room, around cups of tea, when Joyce remembers about the photos she took with me two months ago, at Picnic in the Park – the town's fête – when both Erin and I performed as part of the artistic program: Erin walked on stilts with her circus group, and I danced with my Morris side. We were talking about these photos for a while. Joyce took them using the camera of her smartphone; and now she transfers them to my phone using Bluetooth. Erin has her own smartphone, which is a different and less expensive model than Joyce's and mine, but during the photo sharing, we both consult her as an expert. When Joyce and I finish with the photos, Erin uses Bluetooth at her turn in order to connect her phone with mine. What can we share now? We sit next to each other on the sofa, she is 11, I am 29 and I talk with a strange accent, but we were performing as part of the same parade a couple of months ago, and we are now connected through Bluetooth. She asks me what my favourite animal is. 'Well, I like dogs. My parents have a Labrador', I say. She turns to her phone, does something there and a new file arrives to download on mine. It is a cartoon of a very funny dog, his tongue out. We laugh together. Then I send her a photo that I took of our dog, Rich, lying in the grass. 'What's your favourite colour', she then asks. That's easy: it is orange. Erin does something else on her phone, captivated, mumbling. Then, a new file starts downloading on mine. What can it be? I look at the blue downloading line growing and growing. I open the file directly from there, from the list of downloads. It is a beautiful orange tiger lily! I am so conspicuously impressed, that Joyce, who returns from the kitchen with Erin's lunch, comes to see what it is all about. I show her the tiger lily and she is also impressed; she did not know that Erin had such a picture on her phone.

During a subsequent visit, I ask Erin how she managed to send me pictures of my favourite animal and colour after I had just named them, like a fairy that could instantly make one's three wishes come true. She did not have the photos on her

phone, but she searched the words on Google Images, chose and saved the pictures in her phone, and then she transferred them to me. This series of actions were creatively employed together by Erin in that situation of exchange and of connectedness; they were not typical ways of using smartphones that one would be presented with in a user manual, for example, but they were adapted from previous actions of using Google on a computer, and crafted together by Erin herself. In this activity of crafting, Erin was aware of the capacity of the technologies she was using to provide immediacy. She had the knowledge that she would be able to instantly gift me with my favourite animal and colour, if she only wanted to; in Teichmann's (2008) terms, Erin knew that her want was attainable. And, by acting out this knowledge, Erin was extending her 'ethical imagination', meaning the ways through which she imagined relationships with herself and with others (Moore 2011). Specifically, by proposing and by getting engaged in a process of instant gift exchange, Erin created a spontaneous relationship between herself and a significantly different other. By surprising me and by jazzing up a gloomy uneventful morning, Erin is empowered to imagine that she would be able to recreate this form of sociality in other contexts, and with various socially different others. I am empowered to think this as well, even if I do not realise it at the moment, but only later, after I enact Erin's instant gifting with Annie. Thus, both Erin and I extend our 'ethical imaginations' by realising that we are able to spontaneously bring joy to significantly different others – who, like Annie, were strangers one day before – just by using an ordinary digital device in a specific way.

Indeed, being able to achieve something instantly is valuable when it is a shared activity and ability. My participants often described situations when, in the evenings, they would sit together in the living room around the TV, picking up facts that they would transform into 'common goals' or into 'friendly arguments', such as finding quiz show answers before the TV contestants. This is how Cynthia and her daughter, Kelly, who is in her early twenties, talk about the ways in which they collaboratively work to find out information about an actor that they vaguely recognize on TV:

Cynthia: Sometimes Kelly and I are watching TV, and there would be an actor: 'Where do I know him from?' And, so, you pull up the information for that programme, and you get the actor's name, and you go to his page and find out what he was in. And you go: 'Aha!' That sort of thing.

Kelly: Yeah. 'Oh, what's his face, from what programme?' So, we have to look and find out who he is. (interview Cynthia and Kelly)

During one of my visits at Cynthia's place I have the chance to better understand the joy of instantly finding answers to collective questions, and of sharing one's findings with the others.

The living room is taken over by Kelly and her younger sister, Emma, who are making Wonder Woman costumes that they would wear at the jamboree they are attending with their guides group, in one week's time. Kelly is already wearing a new blue skirt and a red top, with their price tags still on, while she is cutting white star shapes from an adhesive material sheet, which she will later iron onto the skirt. The screen of a laptop, placed on the living room table, shows a picture of the original Wonder Woman standing brave, hands on her hips, wearing her unique costume. At the other side of the table, Emma is working in silence, absorbed, at her own costume. I am sitting on the sofa with Cynthia, drinking squash and watching the girls. I ask her where the jamboree is held. It is in Essex. I know this area well enough, as a couple of friends live there and they showed me many places around the county during my several weekend visits. I ask where exactly in Essex. 'Let's see', Cynthia says and she lifts her own laptop from the floor, with the enthusiasm of a detective who is given a new mysterious case to solve. The laptop is already on, so Cynthia just types 'Essex jamboree' on the Google bar, and she finds the webpage of the camp site straight away. From this webpage, she clicks on the 'How to find us' button; a map of the area instantly pops out on the screen. The camp is located west from Chelmsford and the names of the surrounding villages are not familiar to me; we mostly travelled towards north and east, I believe. Aware that her mum has the website of the jamboree on her laptop screen, Kelly starts asking Cynthia questions about the camp's schedule, such as which themed party is planned for the first evening. Cynthia clicks, navigates, and finds the answers for her daughter. Kelly listens without turning around, absorbed by her work at the costume. Cynthia puts the laptop back down on the floor. Mission complete. Now Kelly hands to her mum a white piece of paper in an almost-star shape, and Cynthia starts trimming it carefully.

The laptop is used here as a way for Cynthia to participate in her daughters' preparations for a guides jamboree. She first attends to my momentary curiosity,

and later she explores the website in response to Kelly's questions, in anticipation of the jamboree that she will not take part in herself, but her daughters will. In this way, we all participate in the preparations for the camp: the girls, by using a set of material objects and tools that they previously acquired specifically for the purpose of making their costumes; Cynthia and I, by spontaneously using the laptop. We all share the anticipation of the event. This form of sociality was not planned, but it arises through the spontaneous use of the laptop in response to my question, and through Kelly's spontaneous interest, in response to Cynthia's navigation of the jamboree's website. Cynthia provides for her girls what they immediately need and ask from her: information about the jamboree and help with trimming the star shapes; and the spontaneous enactment of these actions of care and response generates agentic emotions. The awareness that Kelly's and my wants for information are attainable, and that she could fulfil them in a moment using her laptop as a tool, empowers Cynthia to extend a set of actions of care – that can be regarded as related to mothering – to others besides her children: she provides for me by immediately responding to my momentary curiosity related to the geographical location of the camp.

Subsequently this episode, and after I visit them for several more times – a couple of times for dinner – we are planning a Saturday lunch visit when I would bring homemade lemon drizzle cake that I am particularly proud of. We fix the meeting for 12.30. However, that morning Cynthia texts me asking to postpone the visit for 2 pm, as Kelly asked her to join her at hairdresser's that morning. I already have another appointment at 4 pm in a nearby town, so I text her back suggesting that I just pop in to leave the cake, and that we arrange lunch for another date. Cynthia texts me back: 'I can quickly feed you at 2 and we can plan a proper catch up time too'. This suggestion, that is, indeed, utterly comforting for an anthropologist when coming from one's participants, makes me think that Cynthia does not want me to travel to a different town without having had lunch and that she believes it is her responsibility to feed me, as she already planned to do so. I go, and we all have a nice quick lunch. This extension of actions of care that, arguably, started with interactions that involved the use of digital media and that developed with the development of our relationship, is an extension of both Cynthia's and my 'ethical imaginations'.

5. Sharing beyond co-presence

Another form of sociality that emerges from spontaneous actions in the use of digital media devices concerns situations when the participants in the exchange are not physically co-present. I will illustrate this form of sociality by discussing examples drawn from a research encounter with Lara, who emphasized the importance that the visual feature – the photo camera – of her mobile phone had in her everyday life.

Lara and Dominic are in their forties and, respectively, early fifties, with three children from their actual and previous marriages. The two older children, who are in their early twenties, moved away when they started university, and now Lara and Dominic live with their younger son, who is 12, and with their two dogs – one of which has its own Facebook profile – and one cat. They have a wide extended family living partially abroad. Lara's mum moved to Spain when she retired, while Lara's brother lives and works in the south of France. Every time I visit them, we talk about dogs and about places to visit in France – where my parents moved with work as well.

This time I am video recording, for one of the LEEDR research activities, and I am asking Lara about the ways in which she uses her smartphone. The photo camera feature of the phone seems to be particularly important for her, as Lara often uses it in order to instantly 'convert' material objects into digital ones, sometimes as part of an artistic process. For example, she takes photos of their own grown vegetables, in order to be able to return to the pictures when she needs to draw and create patterns for the pots that she makes during evening pottery classes. Every time she gets out, even just for walking the dogs, Lara remembers to take her phone with her in order to be able to spontaneously take photos of anything that will grab her attention and that she would like to record, to 'keep', such as blossoming trees and green fields. The other day, she was looking through old photo albums, and she found a funny picture of her older daughter as a toddler. She took a photo of the material picture with her phone, so that she would have it with her, and be able to check it at any time, similarly with the way in which people used to carry small pictures of their loved ones in their wallet. By using her phone, she also posted the photo on Facebook, and her daughter, who is a friend of her on Facebook, saw it

and posted a comment. She shows me the picture while talking about it, as it is so easy to instantly access it in the gallery section of her phone. Lara also uses Instagram – a social networking application focused on sharing photos – in order to post pictures of her pots, as well as some more abstract and arty pictures that she shoots from unusual angles, or in original compositions.

In her everyday life, while performing ordinary tasks and activities such as walking, cooking, or washing the dog, Lara's absent kin and friends appear sometimes in her mind. There are moments, of joy, reminiscence, or ordinariness that she would like to immediately share with particular people. Moments like her dog looking like a soggy sheep after having been washed.

I was taking photos of Fizz this morning, because we had to wash her when we got home – and she was really soaking wet; she was like a little soggy sheep. So, I was thinking while taking the photos: 'oh, my mum would like to see this!' So, then, I just emailed the photo to my mum, just straight away, so she could see what we were doing this morning. (transcription from video clip with Lara)

In this example, it is through the photos that Lara thinks of her mum. The multi-sensory experiences of her lived everyday life do not give the space for Lara to imagine that her mum could be physically present in her house and, for example, help her to wash the dog. When taking the photos, the complex lived moment is transformed into an image that Lara is able to see in the same way that her mum would subsequently see it. The act of taking the photo, and Lara's ability to instantly send it, makes Lara feel that she is sharing that moment with her mum, even if they are not physically co-present. The mother is embodied in Lara's eye, which looks at the dog *through* the camera screen.

The domain of the visual can also bring out unexpected recollections for Lara. This happened when she was playing a guessing game based on drawing, called Drawsome. Lara is used to playing this game on her phone, with various people: old friends who now live abroad, recent acquaintances living in proximity, and people that she does not know personally, but who were proposed by the game. The game is played in pairs: one of the players is given a series of words from which they choose one that they will represent in a drawing, in order for the other player to be able to guess it. Lara describes the situation when, while playing the game with an old school friend living abroad, she got the task to draw the word

'tennis'. This unexpected occurrence reminded her that she and her friend used to play tennis together, which made Lara write a note about this memory to accompany her drawing.

She's somebody I went to school with; I've known her since I was seven, and now she's living in Australia. So, that's really bizarre. Sometimes you can talk on it; you can add a little note. So, one of the things she needed to guess was 'tennis'. And, when she was a child, they used to have a tennis court in their back garden. So, I said to her: 'Do you remember we used to play tennis in your garden?' And, when it was her turn... You know, little things like this.

(transcription from video clip with Lara)

It is the game that unexpectedly triggers the memory, as would be the case of, for example, a walk that Lara and her friend would take together and that might serendipitously bring them in the proximity of a tennis court. By accompanying her drawing with a note concerning a specific memory, Lara redefines the drawing exchange in relation to the history of their relationship. She does not need to write a long letter with the specific scope of reconnecting with her friend; through the game, she can spontaneously bring out that memory, as it would happen if she and her friend were physically co-present, and taking a walk, for example.¹² At the same time, the opportunity to illustrate the word 'tennis' to a friend which one used to play tennis with as a child brings back the memory of one's own childhood self. Lara is reminded that she has a history that might suggest a form of expertise for her in playing, talking about, and creating visual representations of the game of tennis.

These examples illustrate forms of sociality that could be described as 'virtual': they are articulated between people who do not share the same geographical location, and they are facilitated through internet-based communication – more specifically, through sharing images. What is different in these situations from other forms of communication between friends and kin living in different countries, which were sensitively documented in various studies on digital co-presence (for example Madianou and Miller 2011), is that, in the examples discussed, communication is not a planned and anticipated event – such as a Skype talk that was arranged beforehand could be – but it arises unexpectedly as part of everyday actions and

¹² Paula Uimonen (2012) uses the concept 'transtemporal' to define the way in which her participants used Facebook in order to maintain relations with people from different stages of their lives.

routines. Being articulated through a combination of spontaneous actions of using digital media, together with the spontaneous character of acts of recollecting, the types of sociality that Lara formulates do not necessitate the responses of her mum, and of her friend, in order to emerge. For Lara, the forms of sociality are created in the moment when she sends the picture, or, respectively, the message, and, still, they are not one-sided. Rather than open-ended questions, her messages are instant gifts that Lara is able to imagine how the recipients would react to. The domain where these forms of sociality are formulated is, I argue, the domain of Lara's 'ethical imagination' (Moore 2011).

By describing a variety of situations when she spontaneously uses her phone for taking photos of things, and of moments, that she would like to remember, and for sharing them with the others, Lara emphasized the importance of the visual in the way she expresses herself and communicates with others. I argue that, in this case, the photo camera of Lara's phone can be regarded as a tool for ethical work. Through the act of taking photos, Lara ordinarily articulates her perspective upon the world: she is aware that she can choose what to photograph, and the perspective that she would regard an object from; she also knows that these choices are expressive of her subjectivity – of who she is, of who she was and of who she would like to be: a potter; a gardener; a dog lover; a mum who has seen her daughter, now grown-up, as a toddler; a childhood friend of someone who lives in Australia; a daughter who thinks about her mum who is in Spain. Past, present, and future are blended in the way in which Lara redefines herself, moment by moment, by taking new photos of what surrounds her. The 'happy actions' (Taylor 1979) of taking and of sharing photos at the moment when the wish arises, are, here, part of Lara's ethical practices.

6. Conclusions

In this chapter, I proposed a theoretical framework, based upon the work of the British philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe, for situating spontaneity. As a time-mode that articulates a counterdiscourse to linear time, by making the future present, spontaneity expresses forms of 'ordinary agency' engendered by emotions associated with self-confidence and empowerment. As a means of engagement

with the world, spontaneity is characterized by ‘sincerity in the way of doing’ a task (Slade 1968). I discussed examples of spontaneous actions related to the use of digital devices, and I showed that these actions can contribute to broadening one’s ‘ethical imagination’ (Moore 2011), in two stages: first, I suggested that my participants used digital media in order to make a wider variety of wants attainable; second, I showed that the broadening of the category of immediately attainable wants contributes to the development of new forms of sociality and to extending one’s ‘ethical imagination’.

In this chapter I also developed an interesting perspective upon the Aristotelian distinction between ‘doing’ and ‘making’, distinction that, Faubion (2001) argues, the philosopher Michel Foucault (1990; 2000) has built his conceptualization of ethical work upon. Aristotle suggests that ‘doing and making are generically different, since making aims at an end distinct from the act of making, whereas in doing the end cannot be other than the act itself: doing well is in itself the end’ (*NE* VIv3-4). For Aristotle, making is concerned with the creation of a new, finite, object; while doing contains its scope in itself. In the first chapter, I argued that this distinction provides a way of regarding the relation between the concept of ‘neoliberal agency’ (Gershon 2011), and the concept of ‘ordinary agency’ that I propose in my dissertation. Thus, while ‘neoliberal agency’ can be regarded as concerned with ‘making’ – making serves as collections of skills that are always extendable, making alliances, making means-ends calculations – ‘ordinary agency’ is concerned with doing, where doing is an end in itself.

In this chapter, I continued and advanced this line of argument, by showing that spontaneous actions are actions of ‘doing’, rather than of ‘making’. The work of the philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe provided important support for this argument. As I have shown, Anscombe was also interested in the approach to the realm of the practical developed by Aristotle. She developed a reconceptualization of the Aristotelian concept of ‘practical truth’, in relation to her work on intentionality, and in her definition of intention she strongly favoured doing over making, emphasizing the sincerity inherent in acts of doing. In discussing Anscombe’s argumentation in detail, my scope was to draw attention to a set of theoretical ideas that could provide real support for conceptualizing human action anew.

I believe that by developing methodological and theoretical tools that could help researchers pay explicit attention to actions of doing, rather than of making, a new world of action can be revealed, explored and understood. This is a world where means and ends coincide; a world of actions that are not concerned with a result, but only with 'doing', with 'practicing well'. Some examples of such actions that I described in this chapter relate to instant gifting, to spontaneous collaboration towards finding factual information, and to taking and sharing pictures; but other actions of doing that could be researched and conceptualized by following the theoretical framework that I proposed here, could be related to many other fields, such as performing arts, sports, protest, play, or human-animal relationships. Certainly, there is already interesting research in all these fields, but what can be gained when letting oneself inspired by Anscombe's (2000 [1957]) writing on intentionality, in relation to the Aristotelian concept of 'practical truth' and to the distinction between 'doing' and 'making', is the arrival at conceptualizing human agency in many different ways, beyond a universal 'neoliberal agency' approach (Gershon 2011).

Chapter 4: Anticipation and the Mother-Multiple ontology

1. Chapter outline

In this chapter I discuss the time mode of anticipation as one of the forms of temporality that is developed and enacted in the domestic domain and I describe the forms of 'ordinary agency' that are engendered when people employ anticipation. I focus, specifically, on actions of anticipation that are related to activities of caregiving oriented towards one's kin. In order to look at experiences and enactments of care inside kinship systems, I propose the concept of Mother-Multiple ontology. By employing this concept, I want to both acknowledge the close association between caring and mothering in Euro-American contexts (Bowden 1997)¹³, and to open up the category of 'mothering practices' to anyone, regardless of their gender, age, and child-bearing status. The Mother-Multiple ontological position describes a mode of being that any individual can access when acting as the caregiver of family members, pets, and the home itself as an entity – collection of elements which I call 'the domestic others'. However, the vast majority of examples discussed in this chapter refer to experiences of enacting the Mother-Multiple ontology of female adult participants who are mothers.

The relationships between Mother-Multiple and anticipation are of mutual reinforcement. The ontology of the Mother-Multiple is enacted through activities of anticipation oriented towards the domestic others; this is most visible in activities of imagining the time of the other and of creating a common time, expressed in actions of scheduling, coordinating and reminding, as I will discuss in the sixth section. While part of the general ways in which people manoeuvre time in everyday life, activities of anticipation have been described during my fieldwork more frequently from a Mother-Multiple ontological position than in other situations, as I will discuss in the sections four and five. Therefore, even if each of the two terms can be conceived of and enacted separately, for me it was the case that I

¹³ The philosopher Peta Bowden argues that: 'mothering frequently carries the full weight of ideological constructions of caring. The very nature of caring seems to be produced in the connection between the apparently ultimate vulnerability of early childhood and the potentially perfect responsiveness of mothers' (1997: 21).

learnt about each, from the other. I try to replicate this relationship of shading light upon each other in the structure of this rather lengthy chapter.

The video appendix of this dissertation, titled *Mum's Cup*, has the scope to accompany this chapter and to provide a visual ethnographic lever for endorsing the concept of the Mother-Multiple ontology. In the second part of the chapter I discuss examples that appear in the video appendix, and the reader might find it useful, if time permitting, to watch the video before continuing with reading this chapter. However, the video product tells a story that is only linked, and not overlapping, with the textual content discussed here. After the second part of the chapter, where the connections between the two products are manifest, the rest of the chapter discusses ethnographic material that is not reflected in the film.

In the next part, I situate the concept of the Mother-Multiple ontology in relation to existent literature calling towards an ontological turn in anthropology (Henare et al. 2007), and to the analytical framework developed by Strathern (1988) to look at persons as being conceived both individually and 'dividually'. I discuss ethnographic examples that contributed to my arrival at this concept and I explain my choice of its naming. This section also engages with literature in the field of the anthropology of Britain concerning individual preoccupations with knowing other people well, or knowing their true character (Cohen 1987, Edwards 2000, Rapport 1994, Reed 2011). Finally, I reflect upon a form of knowledge that Luhmann (1989) calls 'knowing of' and which I argue can be seen as a similarity between the process of doing long-term fieldwork and the action of stepping into the Mother-Multiple ontological position.

The third section looks at anticipation as a time mode, focusing on one type of anticipation, which is 'looking forward to'. I employ ethnographic examples in order to express this type of anticipation and I discuss the forms of agency engendered by anticipation.

In the fourth part I discuss, departing from ethnographic examples, the other type of anticipation that I identified during my fieldwork, which is short-term anticipation. Following the work of Luhmann (1989, 2002) I describe a set of possible techniques of imagination that are used when people enact anticipation and I propose to regard short-term anticipation as a form of visual rehearsal and looking forward to as a form of 'non-guided' imagery.

The fifth section shows in more detail how the Mother-Multiple operates, focusing on a case study of doing the laundry and discussing the various actions of anticipation that are employed in this operation.

In the sixth part I show the ways in which the Mother-Multiple is enacted in activities of anticipation of the time of the domestic others, which involve the use of digital media devices for scheduling, coordinating and reminding.

I conclude in the seventh part.

2. The ontology of the Mother-Multiple

When Henare et al. (2007) called for an 'ontological turn' in anthropology they referred to a theoretical and methodological approach that, rather than measure ethnographic knowledge against existent theoretical frameworks, would start from what has been encountered in the field, allowing these things 'to serve as a heuristic with which a particular field of phenomena can be identified, which *only then* engender theory' (Henare et al. 2007: 5). This approach would not assume that the 'things' encountered in the field 'signify, represent, or stand for something else' (ibid. p. 2) but would allow these things to 'dictate the terms of their own analysis' (ibid. p. 4). Things, such as material objects, are argued here to be also concepts, one of the main aims of the publication being to develop an 'artefact-oriented anthropology' that is not about material culture (ibid. p. 1). Henare et al (2007) argue that because of the Cartesian-Kantian dualism of mind and matter – or culture and nature – that represents the ontology of modern Euro-Americans, social scientists coming from this tradition are used to assuming that there is just one reality – defined by matter or nature – and multiple representations of it as worldviews created by the minds – or cultures – of different groups of people. An ontological approach, however, acknowledges the existence of multiple realities and worlds – and not only worldviews – that operate independently while being nevertheless entangled with one another (Strathern 2004a). Viveiros de Castro et al. (2014) argue that the ontological turn in anthropology can be regarded as 'a political end in its own right' (2014), as it is concerned with making the 'otherwise' (Povinelli 2012) – how things could be – visible 'by experimenting with the conceptual

affordances present in a given body of ethnographic material' (Viveiros de Castro et al 2014).

While the anthropological literature that situated itself as following and advancing an ontological approach looked, mainly, at indigenous populations that did not operate a nature vs. culture dualism, especially in Latin America (Blaser 2013, Descola 1994, Kohn 2013, Viveiros de Castro 1998), a different body of work, of a Latourian inspiration, concerned with the multiplicity of ontology in Euro-American scientific practices, was developed in science and technology studies (STS). For example, Mol (2002), in looking at medical practices of diagnosing atherosclerosis in a Dutch hospital, argues that atherosclerosis is multiple as it is enacted through various techniques of diagnoses – whose results do not fit easily with each other but are sometimes contradictory. The ontological multiplicity of atherosclerosis is, here, practical, as it comes from different enactments. However, the multiplicities of ontology are partially connected (Strathern 2004a) and the process of coordinating them together into singularity is an important part in the medical practices studied by Mol.

The way in which I relate to these approaches, which emphasize the ontological rather than the epistemological as a field of radical difference, is by keeping Mol's (2002) preoccupation with the practical rather than following the interest with 'things' promoted by Henare et al (2007). This is because my dissertation is concerned with human action and with ways of looking at agency, rather than with material objects. Following this focus on the practical, I argue that the Mother-Multiple is enacted through activities of caregiving and through anticipation. At the same time, I retain from the work of Henare et al (2007) the heuristic approach of letting what has been encountered in the field to dictate the terms of its own analysis rather than being preoccupied with explaining and categorizing the phenomena encountered within existent theoretical frameworks.

In this chapter I propose the concept of the Mother-Multiple to define the distinct ontological position that one could inhabit when one acts as the caregiver of one's domestic others, such as family members, pets, or the home itself as an entity. While all family members can step in and out this ontological position at any time when they engage in activities of care, the name of this concept contains the word 'mother' for two reasons. First, I want to acknowledge the fact that caring and

mothering have been constructed as closely associated in Euro-American contexts (Bowden 1997). Moreover, as it is a concept developed from ethnographic work with and for the purposes of looking analytically at English middle-class families, I retained the figure of the mother as traditionally associated with a series of duties of domestic improvement – of one’s children and of one’s domestic space – as this idea emerged with the appearance and with the development of the middle classes in the UK in the nineteenth century (Strathern 1992: 104). One of the ways in which the expectation for a mother’s preoccupation with the wellbeing of her domestic others continues to be expressed nowadays in this context is through the expressions ‘being mother’ or ‘doing the mother’ that refer to the act of serving food or serving tea from a teapot to the others. Just as anybody at the table could provisionally ‘be’ the mother, I argue that any family member can, and does, inhabit the ontological position of the Mother-Multiple in specific situations and at different moments of the day. The second reason for using the term ‘mother’ in the definition of this concept is in order to reify the fact that I refer to care given within kinship structures and not to other forms of care, such as professional care. The Mother-Multiple position involves an irreversible connection – such as kinship relations in an English middle-class context are considered to be (Strathern 1992) – that finds a suggestive expression in the quote below:

‘I thought oh God: I’ve got her till I die – it was this attitude – even when she’s away married and all the rest of it I’ll still worry about her’ (Oakley 1979: 143). The vivid realization of this irreversible kinship connection belongs to one of the participants in Oakley’s (1979) study of first-time motherhood. What the participant expresses here is the realization that from now on and until the end of her life she would not be able to *be* anymore without carrying the thought of her daughter’s existence in her mind. The participant suddenly finds herself in a different ontology than the one she occupied before her daughter’s birth and the one her childless friends might still occupy. The way in which the Mother-Multiple is employed in English middle-class kinship relations refers to incorporating one’s domestic others. For example, when occupying the position of the Mother-Multiple, the thoughts that one has of the existence, of the character, habits, needs, preferences and dislikes of the others become part of one’s everyday actions in a way that makes it hard to disentangle oneself from the individual others; as Oakley’s participant sees herself, from now on, as being preoccupied with her daughter at the same time as with herself. It is

possible for the actions of caregiving that bring up the Mother-Multiple ontology to take place when the others are present – such as serving the food – or when they are absent – such as doing the laundry, or texting the others to remind them about appointments and tasks.

The video material in the appendix starts with showing instances when mothers inhabit the Mother-Multiple ontological position while the other family members are not at home. In the first clip Joyce comes to the garden, where the recently washed laundry is hanging out to dry; she starts by talking about herself, explaining the reasons for having a specific favourite spot where she sits in the garden and, with no noticeable transition, moves to talking about her daughter and about the ways in which she uses the garden. In her chat, accompanied by movement from her favourite spot towards the slide and the trampoline where her daughter plays in the weekends, one does not feel that we move from talking about one individual to talking about another one. Joyce describes the ways in which her daughter is changing and her new preferences as if she is talking about herself. Discovering laundry items belonging to their domestic others, Cynthia and Elaine refer to the items by using personal names. ‘Andy – roll his sleeves down, make sure the buttons are undone’, says Elaine when finding her husband’s shirt in the laundry pile and preparing it for going into the washing machine. The appearance of the shirt makes Elaine to incorporate the habits of her husband to roll up his sleeves and to leave some buttons done; her actions of preparing the shirt for washing appear through accessing the knowledge of these habits, as is the action of checking the pockets of her son’s trousers. Cynthia encounters her domestic others in the laundry basket, in the shape of socks; she selects socks and names them, amused by their variety and by the very small differences between the black socks her family possess. By occupying the ontological position of the Mother-Multiple, Cynthia has access to a specific epistemology: she is able to link pairs of socks with personal names. She is the only family member who can recognize and distribute all the socks, because it is her who usually leads the laundry process in her family, while other family members step into the Mother-Multiple position in relation to other activities, such as cooking and washing up the dishes.

The ontology of the Mother-Multiple can be described as the state of *being by and through a set of relations/connections* while the ontological position of the individual, in an English middle-class context, can be regarded as *being by its own/in itself*. I

build this distinction by drawing upon Strathern's (1992) argument that in middle-class English kinship the individuality of persons is prior to the relations that bring them together. This observation emerges in relation to Strathern's previous experience of carrying out long-term ethnographic research in the islands of Melanesia and of her development of an analytical framework for regarding persons as being conceived both individually and dividually. The Melanesian notions of personhood differ from Western ones in their focus on a relationally composition: Melanesian persons are made up of multiple beings refracted through multiple relationships developed over time and starting from their procreation (Strathern 1988). In relation to gender, which is one of the main focuses of Strathern's (1988) publication, it is shown that, as deriving from different-sex parents, the child combines within itself both female and male elements. Therefore, in the Melanesian context gender is not employed in order to express the identity of whole persons – as in Western contexts – but gender differentiates types of sociality, like same-sex bonds from cross-sex bonds (Strathern 1988: 324). Dividuals are, thus, persons that are constructed 'as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them' (Strathern 1988: 13) and that change over time by developing more relationships, while individuals in middle-class English kinship are conceived as existent – and finite – persons that are prior to relationships.

In this chapter, the Mother-Multiple is neither a dividual, nor an individual, as it is not a person. By defining this concept as an ontological position I argue that the Mother-Multiple is a state of being that is accessible to individuals and that essentially provides them with a change of perspective: this is the perspective of the multiple relationships with their domestic others, rather than the perspective of one individual or another. The Mother-Multiple is a knot where different kinship relationships intersect; it manifests the agency of this intersection of relationships rather than the agency of one, or more, individuals. A good visual representation of the Mother-Multiple as a knot of relationships is Cynthia's basket of socks. As a representation of the Mother-Multiple, the basket contains all the family members and the relationships between them. Whoever takes the basket in order to engage with its content is stepping into the Mother-Multiple ontological position: they momentarily stop operating through a set of individual lenses – such as the wish to not know which socks are whose in order to retain more important information in one's mind – and they operate through the perspective of a knot of relationships.

The way in which in constructing the Mother-Multiple concept I draw upon the distinction between the individual and the dividual proposed by Strathern (1988) is by suggesting that while in middle-class English kinship the main principle in constructing personhood is individuality, a relational and multiple perspective, similar to what in a Melanesian context is the dividual, is still accessible and it can be momentarily inhabited by individuals when engaged in actions of caregiving. The way in which I employ the notion of 'dividuality' here is as a conceptual tool that can be used in order to shade light upon a specific process in Euro-American contexts, as Simpson (1998) did in his work on divorce in the UK. The anthropologist Bob Simpson (1998) suggests that situations of divorce can make visible an approach to children as dividuals. When partners live separately, with children shifting between the two places, the influence of the ex and of their new family, or of their existent extended family upon the children's upbringing becomes an issue that is detectable and that can be upsetting, even if it is considered inevitable. In these situations, therefore, children are regarded as dividuals – composite persons made of parts that correspond to the different relationships that they are engaged in – rather than as individuals.

One of the reasons why people enjoy stepping in the Mother-Multiple position from time to time is, I argue, an interest with knowing other people very well. This ontological position provides an epistemology consisting in special knowledge of the character, habits, needs, preferences and dislikes of one's domestic others, as well as of the relationships between multiple domestic others and between domestic others and oneself. Moreover, with this epistemology it also provides the opportunity for one to enact it, to express it, enactment which generates agency. By showing that they know the others very well, people are also expressing something about themselves: they prove their capacity to tell how the others really are, capacity which can involve multiple strategies and a long-term training, as Rapport (1994) argues.

Several anthropologists doing fieldwork in various parts of Britain have identified the interest with having profound knowledge of other people as being an important preoccupation of their research participants in numerous contexts. Cohen (1987: 70) compares what knowing someone means in an urban setting (to be acquainted with someone) with what it means in Whalsay, a small town in the Shetland Islands. In Whalsay, where everybody is already acquainted, to know someone means to

know of their connections through, for example, families, boats, and houses. Edwards (2000) cites Cohen's comparison in her work on kinship and new reproductive technologies in a Lancashire town when she analyses the statement of a participant who outlines that she could never 'fully know' her two step-grandchildren as she does not know their father's family. Edwards outlines that '[t]o know her grandchildren fully Mrs Watson suggested, required a knowledge of those to whom they were connected. This is what it means to be *close*' (Edwards 2000: 245). In this case, even if she would have had the capacity to do so, the possibility for knowing her grandchildren fully is denied to Mrs Watson by the circumstances.

In the case presented by Rapport (1994), the capacity to tell the real character of others is necessary in Wanet, a small Cumbrian village, in relation to the changes brought by the appearance of the offcomers who express worldviews foreign to Wanet, coming from an intellectual system of knowledge – based upon words and imagination – rather than from the practical knowledge of working the land and of making a living, which is specific to the village. In order to know people for what they truly are a series of clues are brought together: their horoscope signs, the biology of their parentage, details of family history, knowledge of their behavioural patterns over the years, and their body language (Rapport 1994: 232-236). This complicated series of interpretative acts need to be performed because it is believed that there is a difference between how people appear and how they truly are, between words and 'a deeper reality' (Rapport 1994: 225), or, in the novelist's E.M. Forster words, employed by Rapport, between the 'two kinds of human personality which an individual possesses' (Rapport 1994: 220): a public personality and a private, lower and deeper, personality, a part which transcends the everyday.

The ideal of being able to profoundly know someone other than oneself is described by Reed (2011) in his ethnography of fiction reading with the members of the Henry Williamson Society. For Reed's participants, reading Williamson's captivating novels brings no less than the experience of being embodied by the writer's consciousness: '[f]or the first time, Williamson readers claim to experience a person from the inside out, to live, as opposed to guess or interpret, alien character and intentionality. What they believe they achieve is an extraordinary, previously undreamed sense of intimacy with another subjective mind; readers know Henry in a way they cannot possibly know anyone else' (Reed 2011: 10). Achieving this form of intimacy with other person's mind is valued by Williamson's readers as this is not

an ordinary experience and it cannot be replicated even with one's closest others. In order to continue and maintain this intimacy, readers collect Williamson's novels as every book means a new encounter with what for them is a well-known consciousness. As Rapport, drawing upon the work of E.M. Forster, suggests, '[i]t is from Literature that one receives hope of knowing others as one knows oneself' (Rapport 1994: 244).

While this hope might indeed come from reading fiction, the preoccupation with knowing others as one knows oneself is frequently expressed in everyday domestic situations between kin. Besides the activities related to doing the laundry, which I have exemplified at the beginning of this section, another domain where this preoccupation is visible, is cooking. Joyce is vegetarian and she enjoys cooking from scratch for herself while also hoping to convince her daughter to adopt some of her favourite dishes and to give up the semi-prepared food that she prefers, like fish fingers and chicken teddies. Joyce knows that this transition would only happen in time and she is patient for it to emerge, paying attention to any new changes in her daughter's taste and supporting them. While I film her cooking carrot and lentil soup, for a video recording of practices conducted for the LEEDR research, Joyce tells me with excitement that last time she cooked this soup her daughter liked it and ate it, for the first time. She is now trying to replicate the exact way in which she prepared the recipe last time – which involves cooking the ingredients separately and not adding spices – so that her daughter would like it again. However, as knowing her very well, Joyce can tell that liking and not liking specific types of food also depends on the frequency of having them. Once ready, she would divide the large quantity of soup into portions and freeze them, so that she could subsequently serve the soup to her daughter no more often than twice a week during the following weeks. When trying the soup, Joyce can tell how it tastes for her; but at the same time she is also imagining how it would taste for her daughter. By inhabiting the Mother-Multiple position, Joyce tries to access her daughter's sensorium: she attempts to incorporate the ways in which her daughter sees and senses the world. The actions of cooking express the relationship between them, between the mother's individuality and the daughter's individuality who come together in this practice in a distinct way: the enactment of the cooking activities is done by the mother but the sensorium that is (imaginatively) engaged is the daughter's. This mixture emerges from Joyce's interest with knowing her daughter

very well – in order to help her improve her diet – which she pursues by stepping into the Mother-Multiple ontology.

The intensity of (positive and negative) feelings that people might develop for each other when they live together in a family-style lifestyle for long term is something that needs to be accounted for when looking at forms of domestic sociality and domestic actions. As I have found out during my fieldwork, the action of washing dishes feels very different when it is performed in a family-style setting than in a commercial/professional setting. When attending a music festival in Wales during the year of my fieldwork I volunteered to work in a cafe in order to get free entrance and one of the tasks that I accomplished was to wash dishes for several hours in a row. I did the task with not much attention to my actions, handling the piles of anonymous plates absently while chatting with another volunteer. By contrast, in a family-style lifestyle setting washing dishes represents for me an encounter with the plates used by people I care for; I am able to tell which plate was used by whom, as I know their food preferences and as we had the meal together; olive stones on these plates are different from olive stones one might see randomly on the street by a garbage bin – this might not be the best example: they are the stones left by people I deeply know.

By suggesting that in domestic settings actions of caregiving come with nothing less than the opportunity to inhabit a distinct ontological position, I attempt to preserve and express the affective complexity of domestic universes that I encountered during my fieldwork. Surely, a different eye could look at my ethnographic material from the perspective of existent sociological concepts in the field of family studies, for example. By following an anthropological endeavour of ontological orientation (Henare et al 2007), however, my analytical focus is not upon ‘explaining’ empirical data by using existent theoretical frameworks but upon the possibility of creating new theory from ethnographic insights, which necessitates a work of assertion, insistence and imagination.

In writing this chapter, more than in writing the other chapters of my dissertation, I counted upon a distinct form of knowledge that I arrived at as an ethnographer. In her work on neo-paganism and witchcraft in the UK, Luhrmann (1989) calls this type of knowledge ‘knowing of’ and she defines it as the intuitive knowledge of just ‘grasping’ meanings, whose key feature is an ‘imaginative absorption with a

different person or world view' (Luhmann 1989: 203). This type of knowledge complements the traditional distinction drawn by Ryle (1949) between 'knowing that' (propositional knowledge) and 'knowing how' (embodied knowledge). As opposed to propositional knowledge, which is achieved in all social sciences disciplines through the method of interviewing, 'knowing of' is one of the main types of knowledge that the ethnographer gains by doing long-term fieldwork.

From the relationships that I developed with my participants during my ethnography, the relations with the female adult participants, reflected also in the video appendix, played a special role in the way I arrived to look at my findings. This was not only because of similarities in terms of gender and age that made it easier for us to get closer, but also because of one main difference and my interest in describing it. My participants were mothers, which I was not. Some of them were homemakers, some of them worked part-time or full-time outside the home, but regardless of this differences they all engaged in child-related 'duties': a set of practices and activities that I was not familiar with as an adult, even if I was able to remember that when a child I was frequently a child-minder for my younger brother. As an adult in my late twenties-early thirties, equipped with critical thinking and having had engaged with feminist literatures and artistic products, in trying to understand the lives of my female adult participants there was also a personal scope. I was hoping that the knowledge gained from these relationships will make me able to tell if 'it would be worth it' for myself: if I wanted to become a mum someday and if I was equipped with the necessary traits that would make this a positive experience for all those potentially involved. This personal concern might have made the exercise of reaching an 'imaginative absorption' with the lives and worldviews of my participants who were mothers a more accomplished endeavour than the acts of imagining the lives and the viewpoints of the male adult and of the children participants.

Besides being a form of knowledge that is specific to ethnographic ways of learning, 'knowing of' – as involving imagination, intuition and an interest with knowing someone very well – is a type of knowledge that people employ in everyday life in relation to their domestic others. 'Knowing of' is one of the forms of knowledge that can be accessed when one steps in the Mother-Multiple ontological position, together with propositional and tacit knowledge. In the example of Joyce cooking soup for her daughter, she employs all these forms of knowledge: propositional

knowledge in explaining her strategies of dividing the soup into portions and freezing them so that she could alternate her daughter's food menu – which is originally a technique explained in books and leaflets teaching mothers how to diversify the alimentation of their babies; tacit knowledge in relation to the activities of cooking that she performs 'skilfully' (Grasseni 2007) because her body knows them as it would know the steps of a dance; and 'knowing of' when she imagines and accesses her daughter's sensorium.

3. Anticipation: looking forward to and the agency of imagining possibilities

After discussing my conceptualization of the Mother-Multiple I will now move to the second concept developed in this chapter – and which, as I mentioned, stands in a relationship of mutual reinforcement with the first one – the concept of anticipation. In this section I will discuss anticipation as a time mode, addressing the ways in which 'knowing of' is accessed through anticipation and the forms of agency engendered in this process.

In creating a counterdiscourse of time by blending the present and the future, the time mode of anticipation covers the present in the imagination of the future, in order to make the future present. As part of everyday life, anticipation takes two forms: looking forward to and short-term anticipation. As I will further show, these forms of anticipation are employed in various situations, which are sometimes related to stepping into the Mother-Multiple ontological position, and other times not. In this section I will focus on looking forward to as a form of anticipation of one's future agentic engagement with the world, while I will discuss short-term anticipation in the next section.

Looking forward to involves the anticipation of an event – such as Christmas, one's birthday celebration, or a holiday – or of a cyclical recreational or hobby-related activity, such as a sports or arts class. In the *Mum's Cup* video appendix, while she is video recording the preparation of a cup of tea on a Monday morning, Sam responds to the question of the day about sharing something that she wishes for in that moment. She says: 'I wish it was the end of the week', because at the end of

the week they will go on holiday; as the weather on Monday morning looks grim, Sam is looking forward to going somewhere nice and warm and she wants the week to go quickly. During a different encounter with Sam at the end of the month of November, while discussing Christmas, she told me that they always decorate the Christmas tree on the 1st of December because they like to keep the tree for a whole month: they actually prefer 'building up to Christmas' to Christmas itself. The period when you prepare for it to happen, wait for it, and think about it is more valuable because 'when Christmas comes and it's there, next thing it's gone and it's nothing else left to expect' (extract from my field notes). From the 1st of December until Christmas: 24 days of anticipation. This is different from the first example where Sam wanted the week to go quickly in order to reach the moment of going on holiday sooner: the days of December leading to Christmas are seen as an important part of the event. 'Building up' – a liminal time of imagination and of 'ontological security' (Giddens 1991) that one reaches by placing oneself in the cyclical form of temporality associated with a traditional, stable, annual event – is regarded as being more enjoyable than the event itself.

Having something to look forward to is a concept that is also understood outside the domain of domestic life. While taking part, together with my Morris side, in an Area Community Forum event regarding the selection of a set of community projects to receive public funding, I encountered a different way of using the notion of looking forward to. As part of this event, the community projects competing for the bid were presented by their proponents to an audience made of council representatives and local residents. When the president of a community association presented their project for 'fit bodies and minds' – that involved organizing sport activities and quiz shows for the residents in their council estate – she described what everyday life can be like for her neighbours, living in poverty and/or with disabilities. Their proposed activities would make everyday life more bearable because they would provide the residents with 'something to look forward to'. 'We all need something to look forward to' she said at the end of her presentation, while the audience nodded in silence, understanding and agreeing.

In writing about time, the sociologist Barbara Adam (1995) outlines that we are always engaged with a multitude of times and temporalities, such as clock and calendar time, the time of the body/ biological rhythms, the cyclical time of nature and seasons, a past time that we access through memories, and an imagined

(hoped for or feared) future. All these times and many others coexist and very often people employ them simultaneously to make sense of their experiences. Waking up in the morning in pain and in a cold house that one cannot afford to heat and knowing that nothing is due to happen on that day is different from waking up in the morning with the anticipation of an afternoon meeting and a quiz at the community centre. Having something to look forward to is not just about a joy that will come in the future. Having something to look forward to also changes the present. Involving hope and imagination, looking forward to as a form of anticipation can link one with one's future self and open up new possibilities, as I will show in the next example.

While filming and talking with Lara about how she uses her smartphone, she enthusiastically anticipates her and her husband's, Dominic, transformations into home blackberry whiskey makers, transformations which are facilitated by her phone.

Roxana: So when would you normally use it [the phone]?

Lara: It's just around all the time. We saw yesterday loads of blackberries around in one of the fields – absolute loads and loads of blackberries. And Dominic's sister was talking about making blackberry whiskey. So the first thing I did was pick it up, and then go in, and look for blackberry whiskey. So I just go into 'Search', type in 'blackberry whiskey', and it tells me how to make blackberry whiskey. And then I just put it back down. So it's around.

Roxana: So did you check it when you were in the field?

Lara: No, when we came home. When we were around we had this conversation that we had a chat with his sister about making blackberry whiskey. So I said 'right, let's have a look'. Oh, and I've also texted her and said 'can you send me your recipe?' So she then emailed it to me. So I was then able to check my emails [by phone] and there was the blackberry recipe!

(transcription from video recording with Lara)

In this 'polymedious' (Madianou & Miller 2013) way of using her phone, what Lara is dwelling on is *the possibility* of blackberry whiskey. This was not even a hypothesis one day before. But with loads of blackberry hedges appearing/ being discovered all of a sudden in the field and with the easiness of a variety of recipes arriving on

her phone from different sources (from Google and from her sister-in-law), making blackberry whiskey by themselves – which is something Lara and Dominic have never done before – becomes *possible*. After finding the berry hedges by chance, and the whiskey recipes thanks to her smartphone literacy, Lara is in a position where she can imagine herself as a future blackberry whiskey maker. This imagined potentiality, which makes her feel enthusiastic, represents one way in which Lara ‘knows of’ her future self: she is imaginatively absorbed with the worldview of her future self, a home-whiskey-maker Lara. The anticipation of this transformation engenders agency.

In his book on modernity and globalization, Arjun Appadurai outlines that ‘imagination is today a staging ground for action, and not only for escape’ (Appadurai 1996: 7). I take his view in the interpretation of the examples of anticipatory actions that I described so far. The reason why life with something to look forward to is different from life with nothing to look forward to is not because it provides a route to imaginatively escape the struggles and the non-eventfulness of the everyday, but because it promises a future state of agentic engagement with other people. When attending the quiz night at the community centre, one would perform a series of actions together with others: they would work in groups, have a laugh, and maybe give some good answers for which they would be acknowledged. Similarly, Christmas is the most celebrated opportunity for family members to exchange gifts, and, in doing so, to acknowledge and to be acknowledged by the others. Anticipating Christmas is anticipating a day of action when one would act on the other family members through the gifts one makes that show one’s knowledge of the others and one’s expectations and wishes of how the others should be (see also Miller 1998).

The anthropologist Carol Greenhouse (1996), whose work I discuss in more detail in the first chapter, suggests that we should open up our definitions of agency to regard it as referring to ‘people’s goals, together with their broader sense of what is possible and of what relevance is about, even if their understanding of relevance excludes their own experiences from the story of the world’ (Greenhouse 1996: 234). The agency engendered in acts of anticipation, and in accessing a ‘knowing of’ type of information, is not about what one does but about what one *could* do. A future state of agentic engagement with the world is made present just by the fact that is *possible*: people are able to talk about it and to imagine it even if they have

not lived it yet. In the end, it is not important if the possibility is acted out or not, as long as people are able to extract agentic resources just from the promise of the possibility and as long as they do so with all the possibilities that come their way; from an infinite number of possibilities encountered daily, only a few would be acted upon. Lara is enthusiastic today because she discovered that she could make blackberry whiskey if only she would want to. The presence of an anticipated future agentic engagement with the world is, in itself, a form of agency, as it extends people's sense of what is possible: the future happens only because we first anticipate it; the world changes only because we first imagine and come to 'know of' the ways in which it could change.



Figure 3 Two jars of blackberry whiskey on Lara and Dominic's kitchen table.

When I visit Lara and Dominic again a few weeks later for an interview about their childhood and teenage memories of ICT domestic usage I ask them how the plan of making blackberry whiskey unfolded. Lara is proud to take out from the cupboard and to show me two jars containing the beverage they made. They are planning to

use the small jar this year for Christmas and they will keep the big one for Lara's older daughter's 21st birthday celebration next year, when they will serve it mixed with champagne at the birthday cake moment. Lara and Dominic will not use the product for ordinary consumption, but they are saving it for the next two important events. Through this planning they anticipate how their newly acquired ability of whiskey-making will be shared, celebrated with, and acknowledged by, a considerable number of kin and friends.

4. Short-term anticipation and techniques of imagination

While looking forward to involves hope and imagination, short-term anticipation comes from through knowledge (based on previous experience) of how someone or something is likely to act.

During a video tour of the house with Cynthia, she tells me that 'the hall light only goes on if somebody's out and we're expecting them back'. As the light switch in the hall is not nearby the door but on the opposite wall, the family member who went out and is due to return later – usually Kelly, the oldest daughter, in her early twenties – would need to step in a dark environment and find her way to the opposite wall in order to switch the light on. This might be an even more difficult action when one is returning after a night out. Cynthia says that they would leave the light on until Kelly returns 'for accident prevention: it's a lot safer to come to a lit space than to a dark one' but also because 'it's a welcoming thing I suppose: "we're all expecting you back, don't disappear!"' Cynthia leaves the hall light on in anticipation of her daughter's return: the light is not only a sign for Kelly that she is expected back but also a means for Cynthia to tell herself that Kelly is due to return. The light makes the mother's anticipation visible. It also shows Cynthia's embodied knowledge of her home and of the material dispositions of walls and light switches, which might be based on previous experiences of being the first one to arrive home and to find the hall dark.

This type of anticipation based on tacit, embodied, practical knowledge appears very often when people are engaged in complex activities that involve multiple

appliances and material objects, such as in the process of cooking. In this case, ovens and kettles, for example, are switched on well before they are needed, as people know they will use them at some point in the process of cooking and they prefer to have them ready rather than wait for them to warm up at the last minute. 'Let me put the kettle on' was how some of my key-participants welcomed me several times, towards the end of my fieldwork. And with this line we would anticipate together a nice catch-up over a cup of tea before I would go on with the interview or with explaining the task that I was proposing that time.

Short-term anticipation is also expressed in activities of setting-up the environment, like leaving the light on after preparing the dining table in anticipation of people to gather and dinner to be served, or switching the radio on in order to prepare the kitchen – and oneself – for starting to cook. During an interview about digital media and domestic time, Sam mentions that she and her family like to listen to music while they are having dinner and she describes how her husband and daughter would pick the music CDs to be played at dinnertime.

Or when we're all around the table he would perhaps say: 'Right, what kind of music would you like?' And then he and July usually tend, between them, to choose, right before we sit down. So, yeah, it's kind of home when the meal is served up and he starts picking the music. (interview Sam)

In this example, picking the music anticipates the experience of having a nice family meal. For Sam their house starts to feel like home before they sit down, when her husband starts to pick the music. Thus, it is not only the family dinner as event, but also the short-term anticipation of the dinner, which covers and extends the event, that triggers the feeling of home for Sam.

In these examples, by expressing the expectation of a series of actions that will follow a specific moment – such as using kettle-boiled water in the process of cooking, or knowing that everybody will take a seat around the table once the music starts playing – the participants show their knowledge of their domestic environments, which are populated by domestic others and which are defined by specific ways of performing everyday practices. When revealing themselves as experts in the domain constituted by their own domestic environments and when enacting the exact activities that need to occur at a specific point in the progress of practices so that to keep the flow going, people manifest agency.

In performing short-term anticipation, as well as in the activity of looking forward to, a series of techniques of imagination are employed. I will define these techniques in relation to the anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann's work on neo-paganism and witchcraft in London in the 1980s. Luhrmann (1989; 2002) identifies two main techniques that magical practitioners were using to train their capacity for 'dissociation' (2002) and to access the 'otherworld': meditation and visualization. Meditation is a concentration technique that is widespread in various spiritual traditions – see Cook (2010) for an ethnographic account of Buddhist meditation – and that has been recently researched and reintroduced to Western practitioners under the name of mindfulness meditation, through self-help programmes such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (Kabat-Zinn 1994) and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (Williams and Penman 2011). Visualization is a technique of imagination of a still mental-image or of 'pathworkings' – which are guided exercises of visualization of a fantastic journey taken by the practitioner, often conducted in groups, with one person leading by talking the others through the stages of the journey. As Luhrmann (2002) remarks, the capacity for visualization can be trained and it recently started to be used particularly in performance sports training, with techniques called 'guided imagery' and 'visual rehearsal' (Ungerleider 1996). While guided imagery is oriented towards achieving an internal visual representation of the sensory experience of performing a sport – so that athletes would become even more intimately familiar with their sport by creating a personal 'image bank' that one could access anytime – visual rehearsal is focused on a specific task like the preparation for competition, with the athlete imagining in detail and in slow-motion her or his body movements for a successful performance. Visual rehearsal can also be used during the game, just before an important moment, like a decisive kick.

If imagination techniques are used self-consciously as tools to improve performance in sports training, their everyday employments are often dismissed or downplayed because, as Ehn and Löfgren (2010) show in their work on 'non-events' – activities of waiting, routines and daydreaming – they might be considered 'either too ordinary or too insignificant' (Ehn and Löfgren 2010: 4). At the same time, they are part of a dimension of inner life or interiority whose accessing has not been a traditional preoccupation of social sciences (Irving 2011). Ehn and Löfgren argue that inner life, or what they call the 'secret world', is shaped by social life as much

as any other human experiences and actions: '[e]vents we believe we have invented, rules we believe we have created (...) all turn out to be shared with others – but in secret' (Ehn and Löfgren 2010: 3). Even if techniques of imagination similar to the ones used in sports training to improve performance are employed in everyday life in relation to domestic activities, their application is not necessarily conscious; they are not identified and explained as techniques of imagination, but this does not mean that their application is less significant than in sports or in spiritual training.

By following the typology of techniques of imagination described by Luhmann (2002), I suggest that short-term anticipation can be regarded as a form of visual rehearsal: the act of putting the kettle on entails the imagination of the series of actions that would follow. Similarly, 'non-guided' imagery is employed when one is looking forward to a future event, like Christmas or the quiz night, as through imagination the event is internally accommodated and domesticated: one has the opportunity to get used to the idea of Christmas before the event takes place.

5. The Mother-Multiple and anticipation

In this section I will show that actions of anticipation – both looking forward to and short-term anticipation – are very often involved when one steps into the Mother-Multiple ontological position and acts as the caregiver of the domestic others.

As I have mentioned in the first section, the process of selecting and doing the laundry is, for Cynthia, one of the regular situations when she steps into the Mother-Multiple ontology. Laundry is usually a weekend task that starts with Cynthia gathering from the floor in the living room and bathroom clothing items and towels that the other family members abandoned as they considered them in need of being washed. She then brings the individual laundry baskets from the bedrooms of her three children into her bedroom and, by taking out clothing items one by one, she makes four piles on the marital bed: whites, blacks, light colours, and bright colours. However, colour is not the only criterion that she uses in organizing the laundry. While discovering what items are to be found this time inside the laundry baskets, Cynthia is also concerned with the items that are missing and that she anticipates

finding as she *knows* they need washing, such as school uniforms and PE kits, which are usually prioritised and washed in the first two loads of the day. In case of missing items, she would go and ask or look for them in the related bedroom or inside the bags where she knows that they are normally kept. Sorting the laundry is, thus, not only a process of selection but also of reviewing, of checking if the *right* items are in place. At the same time, for every item that she picks, Cynthia instantly knows the specific washing instructions. According to the washing instructions, she subsequently regroups a laundry pile into two or more different loads. Moreover, by knowing who each item belongs to, and what sorts of preferences or allergies her domestic others have, she can plan the loads according to the type of washing liquid she will use. Thus, in sorting the laundry, Cynthia manages and enacts her complex knowledge about three domains: her family members and their preferences, sensibilities and allergies; the list of clothing that exists and the sub-list of clothes that are used more often or in 'public' situations, such as at school or work; the material texture of each item and their individual washing instructions.

Anticipation is embedded in this process, in many ways. When taking out the contents of individual laundry baskets, Cynthia expects to find specific items, such as school uniforms; finding these items is part of accomplishing a successful laundry process and she would not continue with the next activity – loading the washing machine – before finding the missing items that need to be prioritised. With this short-term anticipation, there emerges as well a 'looking forward to' type of anticipation in the imagination of the following week when all the family members will wear at school and at work the clothes that Cynthia would have washed and prepared for them. Further, every textile appearance makes her rethink her piles and anticipate the moment when she will load the items in the washing machine and choose the program and the water temperature. At the same time, every clothing item *is* a person and it is given the name of one of Cynthia's domestic others – as I discussed in the first section – as well as being attributed a specific set of preferences and sensibilities. According to the preferences – sometimes contradictory – expressed by different piles, Cynthia anticipates the moment when she will need to pick the type of washing liquid that would serve as the best solution for each pile without creating irretrievable conflicts inside the piles.

Cynthia says that once she has checked the washing instructions of any new clothing item and followed them, she remembers them every time she sees the item

emerging out again from a laundry basket. She does not like the fact that her brain retains this information, as she considers it rather unimportant, not worthy of being remembered. She would prefer to occupy her mind with other things rather than a list of all the clothing owned by her family and their related washing instructions. But she cannot help it. Once read, the information from the label stays there, stored in her mind.

Sadly, I tend to remember once I've checked it once. [laughing] My brain would be so useful if it didn't keep information like that in it. This is why you can study when you're young like you and you don't have to retain all this information.

(transcription from video recording with Cynthia)

In the video appendix Cynthia refers back to this conversation while showing me the socks of her domestic others and saying: 'Again, sadly, my brain knows exactly which socks are whose, so I can do that'. By stepping into the Mother-Multiple, Cynthia becomes unable to oppose *knowing* a set of information that, as an individual, she would not choose to know. When she says that I can study as I am young, Cynthia means by 'young' a state previous to marriage and previous to having children – as my status was during my fieldwork. Once one starts a family, one's mind does not exclusively belong to her or him anymore, as it needs to accommodate whole new levels of information about other people than oneself, and about other domains than the academic. This is what stepping into the Mother-Multiple ontology entails: letting oneself be embodied by one's domestic others and accessing a consistent corpus of knowledge – about the character, habits, needs, preferences and dislikes of the domestic others – that can feel overwhelming at times. This corpus of knowledge is tacitly employed in actions of anticipation.

Another domain where my participants combine anticipation with stepping into the Mother-Multiple is in keeping family calendars, which involves actions of reminding and coordination.

6. Calendars and text messages as instruments for anticipation

I will now discuss some ways in which the Mother-Multiple is enacted through activities of anticipation of the time of the domestic others, such as by keeping family calendars and by using text messaging to send reminders to the others.

Very often, what makes anticipation possible are scheduling and routine. 'I check the calendar all the time, so I know what's coming' is how Brett formulates his relation with the future that is mediated by his calendar. When I asked my participants how they use digital media to organise their schedules I was told about a complexity of techniques from computer calendars synchronised with smartphones, to phone alarms or text messages as reminders. However, there were two main types of calendars that most of my participants used: a personal calendar for work – usually a computer calendar, but in some cases a paper diary was preferred – and a family calendar for activities and appointments that were not related to work, such as evening social activities, parents' evenings, doctors' appointments, birthdays, children's activities that were out of routine, and visits from researchers working on the LEEDR project.

The family calendar was in most cases a paper calendar living on a wall in the kitchen, and the family member who usually filled it in and kept track of the entries was the female adult. Mothers were in charge of this collective time from the beginning of the year when they filled in the new calendar with birthdays of kin and friends by copying them from the old calendar. All family members were encouraged to write down in the calendar their planned activities that were due to take place during what was considered 'family time': weekday evenings and weekends. Male adults mentioned that sometimes they found themselves in trouble when they did not fill in the calendar with the evening out they were planning and then the date would conflict with a parents' evening. Eva, who is a homemaker and a mother of two, says about the situations when her husband forgets to fill in the calendar: 'if it's not in my paper calendar it doesn't happen, that's my golden rule if he wants to go out'. It is the spouse who fills the family calendar first who is able to take the evening off. This situation is similar to a model of social organization identified by Burman (1981) in her fieldwork on Solomon Islands – and discussed by Munn (1992) in her essay on the cultural anthropology of time – where the

'keeper of the calendar' and the descent group he was part of was able to control the temporal dimension of the everyday lives of all the islanders by being able to regulate 'the very motion of time' (Burman 1981: 259). Munn (1992) argues that having control over time is a form of political power.

Here, however, keeping the calendar is a way of enacting the Mother-Multiple. Depending on the format of the calendar, my participants used to live with the current month on the wall, sometimes taking a look at the month ahead to see what was coming. The kitchen calendar allows the person temporarily occupying the Mother-Multiple position to anticipate in one glance a whole month or more in the life of their domestic others. The calendar is, thus, a material and visible portal to everyday actions of imagination of future events not only for oneself, but also future events in the lives of domestic others. With one exception of a male adult who travels very often and keeps an iMac family calendar updated as he wants to make sure that there are no nights when both he and his wife, who also has a busy working schedule, would be away, usually the female participants considered themselves in charge of the family calendar. In such situations, they step into the Mother-Multiple in order to keep track of what the others are doing and, very often, to remind them about their calendar entries. The reminding is usually done through digital media devices – such as phone texting or email – which are regarded as the male preference. Eva does this by updating the iMac calendar with the entries from the kitchen calendar, and then telling her husband to synchronize his phone, as she knows that he finds it easier to check the iMac calendar through his phone than to take a look at the kitchen calendar.

Iris, who is an artist working from home in her shed-studio in the garden and who also talks about herself as being in charge of the house, keeps a paper diary as a family calendar in the study on the ground floor where everybody can check it.

Everything else that's been done by telephone or birthdays and things would be put in the diary, so we can all check it but it's only me really who reads it [laughing]. (interview Iris and Steve)

From this spot in front of the diary, as a base where collective information about the future is to be found, Iris writes and sends text messages to her domestic others to remind them about the appointments they have on that day. If the events are taking place in the distant future, Iris's husband, Steve, prefers to be reminded by email.

My phone is my work phone. So I don't have a personal phone, it's that way around. I might put home events on that calendar, at work – things like tonight that I've forgotten completely about [laughing]. But if kids have parents' evening, I say to Iris all the time: 'tell me, email me'. (interview Iris and Steve)

Steve has a senior position at a multinational company working constantly with partners in China and Singapore, so he often stays late at the office or even wakes up in the night to check his email and to write replies, in order to overcome the time zone differences and to keep the business discussion going. He spends most of his time at work and the way he deals with any kind of appointment is through his work calendar; he needs to be emailed about any new appointments, such as parents' evenings, in order to be able to acknowledge them. For him, Iris mediates between the realms of family life and of work by emailing a diary entry that will be transformed into a work calendar appointment. Steve admits that he needs someone to do this mediation in order for him to be able to keep track of his non-work life.¹⁴

In other situations, domestic others might not assert that they need reminding about their appointments but female adults occupying the Mother-Multiple ontology think they might do and they communicate the reminder in a rather covert form. This is the case of Cynthia who leaves for work before her daughter, Kelly, wakes up, and so she uses text messages to communicate what she would have told her face to face in the morning should she have been awake.

Kelly: And I'll have a text saying: 'Don't forget to go to your interview'.

Cynthia [laughing]: Oh, no, I tend to do it more subtle, don't I? 'Good luck with your interview' [laughing]. Yeah, I tend to be subtle where I can, don't I, Kelly? She never told me off [laughing]. (interview Cynthia and Kelly)

There are times when Cynthia prefers to leave her daughter a note by the kettle instead of texting her. The kettle is where Kelly would afterwards leave a note in response to her mum as well, 'because everybody knows that's where I go first when I'm walking in the door', says Cynthia. This remark shows that Kelly and the other family members also step in the Mother-Multiple ontology when they imagine

¹⁴ Using a social practice theoretical framework, Christensen and Røpke (2010) identify the practice of what they call 'holding things together' as a form of everyday planning and coordination for Danish families.

what the first thing that Cynthia does when she enters the house is, so that they would know where to leave her a note.

The notes that Cynthia leaves are for things that Kelly needs to find out before her mum, who works as a primary school teacher, has the chance to text her during playtime. Cynthia would not text her daughter in the morning because she knows that she keeps her phone always on so the text would wake her up and, as a consequence, she might not get the best possible response.

Cynthia: She could also turn over and get back to sleep and try to ignore it. She wouldn't appreciate if I sent her a text at 7 o'clock in the morning to say: 'By the way, can you do a load of washing up for me today before you go to work?' It wouldn't work. And then she would text me and say: 'No! You woke me up so I've not done it'. (interview Cynthia and Kelly)

It seems that when she is choosing what media to use to communicate her daughter a message – mobile phone text or a hand written note by the kettle – Cynthia anticipates what response each of these media might generate. She also performs an exercise of imagination of what it would be like to be in her daughter's place. She imagines that the sound of receiving the text would wake her up and that she would be curious to check it, which would wake her even more – so receiving a text early in the morning could provoke two reactions: either going back to sleep straight away and forgetting the text ever existed, or sending an angry reply. By stepping into the Mother-Multiple and accessing knowledge on the character, habits, dislikes and ways of reacting of her daughter, Cynthia is capable of anticipating the response she might get when using one media over another.

Text messaging is also used when people want to attune their individual times and reach a 'common time', which is very often the time of picking up, for the situations when they pick their children up from school or from after-school clubs. During my interview with Marilyn, she receives a text from her younger daughter who is on a school trip to a museum in a nearby city.

So Helena's just texted me to say they haven't left the museum yet, so she's probably thinking she's going to be late. I normally was supposed to pick her up at 4.45, so I'd probably text her at 4.30 to say: 'Where are you on the motorway?', so I knew what time to set off. (interview Marilyn)

While in an interview situation with me, Marilyn knows what she will do when we finish. When the text appears, Marilyn stops being an interviewee for a moment in order to step in the Mother-Multiple ontology: through imagination she 'knows of' what her daughter is thinking and she can anticipate in detail the next series of actions she will perform in order to reach the state of being attuned, or in coordination, with the time of her daughter returning from the trip.¹⁵

When stepping in the Mother-Multiple in order to send texts as reminders, mothers access and enact knowledge of the daily schedules of their domestic others. Very often, just before texting, they imagine at what point in their everyday schedule the other is and they choose to send the text at the moment that would best suit the 'time of the other' (Fabian 1983) rather than their own time. This often happens when female adults remind their partners to do something after work and they try to make sure that they send the text shortly before their partners would finish work, when they are in a temporal area where ideas about the after-work life start to come in and to mix with the actions of completing the work day. These calculated actions of anticipating the time of the other in order to find the right moment when to send a reminder involve putting oneself in the other's shoes, or letting oneself be embodied by the other. One such example comes from an interview with Sam.

Roxana: When would you send the text message to remind him? Is it when you remember yourself?

Sam: Yeah, either when I remember – I think 'Gosh, I got no milk', or something. Or sometimes I just think I'd better just remind him in case he has forgotten. 'Cause he might say 'I'll get some chicken food on the way home' and then I text him about an hour before he finishes just to say: 'Don't forget the chicken food' [laughing].

Roxana: So you'll text him just before his finishing work?

Sam: Yes, an hour, a half an hour. Yes, exactly. If I told him in the morning he might have forgotten till lunch time. (interview Sam)

Knowing someone so well that one could anticipate what he or she is doing when away is something to be proud of. It shows that the relationship between the two is

¹⁵ From a different theoretical approach, the sociologist Rich Ling (2004) would regard this situation as an example of 'microcoordination' that is made possible through the use of mobile phones.

strong and that they know what the right way to reach the other is when the other is not there. In an interview with Iris we talk about her texting her husband when he is doing the shopping if she realizes that she needs a specific item.

Iris: Steve does the food shopping and I'll text him if I forget something. Because normally he would have his iPod on so he won't hear me if I ring, so I try and text and see if he'd actually look at his phone. He listens to music when he's doing the shopping, when he's walking the dog, when he's in the house. It's constant music in his ears.

Roxana: And if you text him then the phone would vibrate in his pocket?

Iris: Yeah, it should do! Sometimes he's really good at not hearing it. When he changed it to a Blackberry, the Blackberry wasn't as loud as the other phone, or because it's in a case it doesn't vibrate as much. So he's a little bit better at ignoring that [laughing]. (interview Iris)

Later that evening, when Steve arrives from work, he joins us for the interview and I take him through the same list of questions while Iris informs him about what she already told me.

Iris: And I was saying that if we've gone to shopping as well we might text each other to say: 'Remember to get so and so'.

Steve: Yeah, even if I don't hear it on my phone because I'm with my headphones on.

Iris [laughing]: That's what I've said! That's exactly what I've said!

Steve: But I always look at my phone before I've checked out, just in case.
(interview Iris and Steve)

In this example there is reciprocity in anticipating each other's actions and in enacting the Mother-Multiple. By incorporating her husband's habits of listening to music, Iris knows that it is better to text him instead of calling in order for her message to reach destination. By incorporating his wife's habit to send him a text when he is doing the shopping, Steve knows to check his phone before heading to the cashier. The reciprocal anticipation of each other's actions makes their communication successful and shows a mutual deployment of the Mother-Multiple:

a mutual interest with knowing each other very well and with finding the way to act that would best suit the other. The success does not only lie in the right item being bought from the supermarket but in the fact that their relationship is being confirmed and reiterated. Iris jumps with joy and blushes when Steve confirms the story that she told me before he arrived home: suddenly it is as if they are not taking part in an interview about digital media and time anymore, but in a show that tests couples' knowledge of each other.

When people converse through text messages what happens is not just an exchange of words, but also of thoughts. During an interview with Vic and Gail, Vic mentions that when their daughter, who is in her early teens, goes out, he is the one who, from home, would normally converse through texts with her.

Roxana: So is it just to know where she is?

Vic: It's knowing where she is, it's knowing how she is, it's knowing what she's doing. (interview Vic and Gail)

Such a holistic knowledge about what and how his daughter is doing in that very moment could not come just from the content of a text. In the action of conversing through texts, Vic and his daughter would probably be thinking about each other while typing the messages and while waiting for the reply. In this way, there is an invisible connection that is established between them and that is at least as important as the words *per se* that are exchanged. As he waits for and receives the texts, Vic steps into the Mother-Multiple ontological position and 'knows of' how his daughter is, by imagining her texting.

The examples discussed in this section show some ways in which the Mother-Multiple is enacted in activities of anticipation. By keeping the family calendar, by accessing information about the future appointments and events in the lives of the domestic others and by sending reminders to the others about what they need to do in the near future, one shows a capacity of imagination that does not only concerns oneself, but it is extended upon the domestic others. In sending text messages for coordination, it is the time of the other that is firstly anticipated, before the time of oneself. Through the activities discussed here, the Mother-Multiple is enacted quietly, non-consciously, as a 'natural' feature of everyday domestic life.

The domain of scheduling and coordination, with its related practices, is a site that generally privileges, encourages, and necessitates anticipation. In this section I focused on the ways in which this domain is played out inside domestic settings through the use of specific digital technologies and with the interest of knowing one's domestic others well as a guiding principle.

7. Conclusions

In this chapter I developed the concept of Mother-Multiple ontology and I discussed the time-mode of anticipation as an approach to time that can be regarded as specific to situations of stepping into the Mother-Multiple position. I situated anticipation in relation to a series of techniques of imagination, such as visual rehearsal and non-guided imagery and I described the forms of agency engendered by anticipation. In the ethnographic sections I focused, specifically, on the anticipation employed when one steps into the Mother-Multiple in relation to activities such as doing the laundry and making use of calendars and text messages to attend to the time of the domestic others.

The examples discussed in this chapter show that a specific form of 'ethical imagination' (Moore 2011) is expressed when people step into the Mother-Multiple. The way in which this form of ethical imagination operates can be defined as monistic, as it does not make an analytical distinction between one and one's domestic others, but it expresses the perspective of a nodal point where all the relationships between the domestic others and between oneself and one's domestic others intersect. The ethical imagination of the Mother-Multiple expresses a common good, a goal similar to what Christensen and Røpke (2010) call the practice of 'holding things together': the goal of keeping the boat floating in a direction and at a speed that no domestic other would strongly disagree with. In his work on grocery shopping in North London, Miller (1998) finds that people often carry out the act of shopping on behalf of the household, following the normative ethos of thrift, and understanding the general notion of household, or 'the house' as a means of transcendence.

However, while the Mother-Multiple provides a means of 'transcending' individuality, the focus of the ethical imagination developed in this ontological position is not necessarily limited by the domestic domain. In the last clip from the video appendix, Elaine would like to extend a monistic ethical imagination to the big large world: she says that she would like to get rid of greed, which makes people only think about themselves. The form of ethical imagination that she employs from the Mother-Multiple position when she shifts her plans for the day from an individualistic preoccupation – going to do clothes shopping for herself – to a task that responds to an actual unexpected domestic situation and to a set of newly-arisen needs of her domestic others – sorting out the Christmas lights so that she and her family could continue with preparing the Christmas tree and the Christmas window – differs from the ethical imagination of other people, such as bankers and businessmen who are only interested in profit, and Elaine knows that. The way she approaches this difference is not by assuming a private vs. public dualism, but by wishing that the ethical imagination of the Mother-Multiple would be, one day, employed by all people in relation to all the others, and not just the domestic others. Her hope is not utopic. By stepping into the Mother-Multiple and by engaging in ethical practices (Foucault 1990) both individually and from the Mother-Multiple ontological position, Elaine enacts this hope and makes it happen, little by little, every day.

Chapter 5: 'Family time' and domestic sociality: forms of togetherness and independence with digital media

1. Chapter outline

In this chapter, I discuss the time mode of 'family time' and the forms of agency engendered through its enactment. Specifically, I will focus on two types of domestic sociality that make up specific forms of family time, such as spontaneous 'quality moments' (Kremer-Sadlik & Paugh 2007) and evening times 'family time'. These forms of domestic sociality are related to the use of digital media at home by all family members, collectively and/ or individually; I call them 'elusive togetherness' and 'physical togetherness and digital independence'. A focus on digital media comes from the way in which the overall LEEDR project was initially formulated, as looking at opportunities to reduce domestic energy demand through digital innovative interventions.¹⁶ While the attention to digital media was immediately understood by research participants as an important focus in understanding domestic everyday life and energy consumption, for my ethnographic research it also provided a lateral entry point into family life, family practices (Morgan 1996) and domestic time, as other researchers looking at ICT usage practices in families have argued before (Moore 1993, Morley 1986, Silverstone & Hirsch 1992).

The focus on digital media, or ICT, is also expressed and reinforced by the particular research methods that made 'family time' possible to approach. These are the Tactile Time collage and the Evening Times self-video recording activity, which both place the domestic usages of digital media in the centre, and which are discussed in more detail in the methodological chapter. In this chapter, the knowledge produced through the use of these methods is expressed in visually specific ways. Scan copies of some collages, which I anonymised by using an image editing software, appear in the ethnographic sections of this chapter in order to illustrate aspects of family evening time that were only expressed in the collages, such as the individual experiences of time represented through textile choices. The videos recorded as part of the Evening Times activity do not appear in this chapter

¹⁶ <http://www.leedr-project.co.uk/>

in visual ethnographic form, although a small selection of clips are used in the *Mum's Cup* video project. However, the way in which I employ here the knowledge gained from these videos is by way of transforming the content of some clips into short narrations. These narrations, whose aims are to illustrate the perspectives that my participants provided over their family time while family time was happening, appear in the fourth section and they are differentiated from the rest of the text through the use of blue font.

The concept of 'family time', 'quality time' or 'time together' emerged during an early stage of my fieldwork when it was described as one of the most important aspects of domestic life. During the first set of semi-structured interviews that I carried out, my participants emphasized the idea that home feels 'most homely when everybody is at home', as Cynthia puts it. This early discovery enabled me to develop the set of methodological tools described above in order to explore the meanings, experiences and activities that are part of what is called 'family time'. Unlike spontaneity and anticipation – which can be employed in one-to-one interactions, or in solitude – 'family time' requires all family members to be at home and to be aware of each other presences. In linear temporal terms, 'family time' is generally defined as taking place in the evenings and during weekends. In experiential terms, as I will show, for my research participants it is a time of relaxation, celebration, and of digital, material and alimentary abundance. In relation to domestic rhythms, it can be seen as a set routine that tends to take place every evening, even if its content might vary. By using the time modes of spontaneity and anticipation that were conceptualized in the previous chapters, 'family time' can be regarded as an anticipated time of spontaneous indulgence. 'Family time' can be anticipated, as Christmas is, because it is a routine expected to happen every evening: its anticipation accompanies one throughout the working day, promising a reward at the end of it. At the same time, what people do during 'family time' varies daily, and, in this sense, it is spontaneous: people cannot predict what will capture their interest the next evening, what would be the topic of the next friendly argument, and who would win it. The unpredictable character of the evening, as opposed to a general predictability of the working day, is important in defining evening 'family time' as a special experience. My participants often emphasized the variety of technologies and other media that they could choose from, or combine in new and creative ways, every evening; the results of unexpected findings and of new

assemblages would often bring new experiences: learning how to play a new game, finding a new way of planning trips by using a recently developed app, hearing news from a friend who lives across the ocean, having an interesting chat with the other family members, trying a new type of snack, discovering a new way of streaming music, or of watching iPlayer through the Wii.

At the same time, 'family time' can be regarded as a normative social construction, and this is the reason why I use this concept between inverted commas throughout this chapter. In Gillis' (1996) terms, 'family time' is 'an ideologically constituted form of prescription' (1996: 17) that has the power to convince family members that togetherness is desirable and pleasant even if their everyday experiences of it might contradict this belief. The idea of 'family time' cannot be disentangled from the ways in which the concept of family, or, more specifically, middle-class family (Strathern 1992), as an ideological unit, has been constituted and expressed in Euro-American contexts (Collier et al. 1982), as a concept 'that imposes mythical homogeneity on the diverse means by which people organise their intimate relationships' (Stacey 1990: 269) and that is extensively politicized. For the case of the UK, Strathern (1992) looks at how the concept of middle-class family was redefined in the Thatcher government, while Silva and Smart (1999) analyse the appeal to family as a 'pillar of supposed stability' (Silva and Smart 1999: 2-3) in the political rhetoric of the former prime minister Tony Blair, showing that the concept of family can be approached as a tool of governance from both sides of the political spectrum in the UK, through the assumption that most families operate in similar ways (Finch 1997).

In relation to existent literature on English kinship, I suggest that 'family time' is a concept used to 'measure' the quality of home life in 'family-style lifestyle' (Strathern 1992) settings. Moreover, from a slightly different perspective, making family time, as an active process that involves ordinary actions and routines, can be regarded as an everyday practice of creating relatedness (Carsten 2000a). While my approach pays attention to people's agency in making and maintaining this time of togetherness, I acknowledge the coexistence of the cultural imaginary of the ideal family operating through social prescriptions that link having a family with having 'family time'. I approach the tensions between a social constructivist perspective on the notions of family and 'family time' and a focus on people's agency in developing a process of relationality (Gabb 2010), of constituting trust reflexively through

everyday acts of care and intimacy (Williams 2004), as a way of ‘doing’ family (Morgan 1996), through the lens provided by Strathern (1992) in her discussion of the relationships between convention and choice in English middle-class kinship. Thus, I argue that *by* keeping ‘family time’ and by emphasizing its importance over other dimensions and qualities of the home, people ‘do’ convention and show their capacity for morality. However, *what* people do during ‘family time’ is a matter of choice that reflects individuality and diversity – which are regarded as twin concepts and the first two facts of English kinship (Strathern 1992) –: the individuality of the family and of each of its members. Having and talking about having ‘family time’ shows my participants’ ‘normality’ – their following of a social norm –; talking about the creativity and eccentricity of the assemblages that they develop during this time shows their difference and their capacity to transgress this social norm while keeping it. These transgressions are ordinary events, such as having a desert dinner instead of a ‘proper’ hot meal¹⁷ or keeping the curtains closed for a whole day, but their existence – or even their necessity – shows both the rigidity of social norms regarding family life and people’s awareness of this rigidity, as well as their agency in challenging it.

In the next section, I will develop this argument by discussing in more detail Strathern’s (1992) work on English middle-class kinship, which constitutes the main theoretical pillar of this chapter. In the third section, I will shortly present a theoretical and empirical dialogue for framing the concept of ‘family time’. In the fourth part, I will discuss empirical material that illustrates a specific form of domestic sociality, which I call elusive togetherness, and which is articulated in spontaneous ‘quality moments’ (Kremer-Sadlik and Paugh 2007) when family members who occupy different rooms, and, very often, different floors of the home, come together through ad hoc creative employments of digital media. In the fifth section, I will describe what ‘family time’ is during evenings and weekends, and I will discuss the ways in which a form of domestic sociality that can be defined as ‘physical togetherness and digital independence’ is articulated and experienced during these times. I will conclude this chapter in the sixth section.

¹⁷ For more information about the ‘conventional’ structure of British meals see (Douglas & Nicod 1974).

2. English kinship

Contemporary studies of kinship in Britain have focused on topics as various as new reproductive technologies (Edwards 2004, 2008; Edwards & Strathern 2000, Edwards et al. 1993), place-making, identity and belonging in relation to kinship thinking (Edwards 2000, Strathern 1981), adoption reunions (Carsten 2000b, 2004) and divorce and separation (Simpson 1997, 1998). The recent theoretical advances in this field, such as Carsten's (2000a) development of the concept of 'relatedness' as an alternative to kinship that conveys 'a move away from a pre-given analytic opposition between the biological and the social' (2000a: 4) that framed the first wave of anthropological studies of kinship, are based on the initial denouncement of this opposition (Schneider 1968, 1984; Strathern 1992), which influenced all the subsequent approaches to kinship. Below, I will summarize this denunciation as part of Strathern's (1992) seminal analysis of the English middle-class kinship as a system of thought, which represents the theoretical backbone for this chapter.

In her work on kinship thinking of English middle-classes, Marilyn Strathern (1992) uses Victorian middle-class kin constructs and British anthropological kinship theory – that was one of the main theoretical directions that British social anthropologists were concerned with in the first half of the 20th century – as 'mutual perspectives on each other's modernisms' (Strathern 1992: 8). Her endeavour is inspired by the work of the American anthropologist David Schneider (1968; 1984). In his analysis of American kinship (1968), Schneider argues that this kin system is essentially defined by the two orders of nature and law – or sexual reproduction and, respectively, marriage – where the role of the 'natural' or 'biological' is substantial. In a further publication, Schneider (1984) demonstrates that the 'biological' predicament – sexual reproduction – was a Western ethnocentric assumption that has been brought into the anthropological analysis of non-Western kinship systems. Strathern takes this idea further, arguing that 'the unthinking manner in which generations of anthropologists have taken kinship to be the social or cultural construction of natural facts' (Strathern 1992: 45) was the pivotal stone in the construction of 'kinship' as a domain of anthropological inquiry. At the same time, Strathern remarks that if kinship used to be a domain that connected the realms of 'nature' and 'culture' in the Western world, in the late-twentieth-century Britain, with the appearance of new reproductive technologies, and in a post- Thatcherite

neoliberal socio-political climate, this situation has been changing. Thus, 'nature' can no longer be seen as an underlying predicament for kinship.

Strathern argues that in post-Thatcherite Britain, 'family' means a specific type of lifestyle that one can opt for: 'The family as a natural consociation vanishes in the promotion of family-living as an experience' (Strathern 1992: 147). Furthermore, if the emphasis is placed upon the experience that a family-style lifestyle could provide, then '[t]he family as a set of kin relationships disappears in the idea that the quality of home life has an independent measure' (ibid p. 149). I argue that one way of expressing the experience of family-style living, and of 'measuring' the quality of home life, was enacted by my participants through the use of the concept of, and by actively making, 'family time'. I will come back to, and develop, this point in the next section.

In this context, where family is seen as a type of life-style that anybody could embrace, if only one would choose to, Strathern argues that a consistent emphasis is placed upon choice. 'Choice', here, comes to mean 'individuality', while all the other possible ways of defining an individual are minimalized. Strathern calls this type of individualism 'prescriptive individualism':

In the late twentieth century it is possible to think that morality is a question of choice. Prescriptive individualism: choice requires no external regulation. As a consequence, the individual is judged by no measure outside itself. It is not to be related to either nature or society (*vice* national culture). It is not analogous to anything (ibid p. 152, original italics).

Furthermore, Strathern identifies a complex relationship between choice and convention, which is a point that I build upon in this chapter. Strathern argues that in 'the modern epoch' (1992: 154) 'convention' was a concept that regulated social life, considered to be 'the cultural counterpart of natural law', and 'embodying the order necessary for sustaining a complex (and civilised) life' (ibid p. 157). Thus, convention defined general social norms of good conduct. However, in a post-Thatcherite Britain – where individual persons and families take the place of society – convention is no longer understood as external, but it takes an expressive function and it is 'internalised as personal style' (ibid p. 158). When convention is not external to the individual, but internal, as choice used to be, one could opt to display convention as right acting. 'But the consequence is that', Strathern argues,

‘the individual person comes to contain within him or herself the knowledge for right acting, and thus becomes his or her own source of morality’ (idem). Thus, in the Thatcherite approach, the fact that ‘the people will know what is right is taken for granted’ (ibid. p. 159), while an analogy between the individual and the family is created.

Following this analogy, if the individual person is his or her own reference point, the middle-class family, too, is assumed to contain within itself the knowledge for right acting and it can be seen as its own reference point. Families appear, thus, as distinct universes regulated by internal self-imposed norms and judged by an internal measure.¹⁸ This embedded set of criteria that white middle-class nuclear heterosexual families follow in order to legitimise and to ‘measure’ themselves, takes into consideration the quality of home life, and it can often provide a personal internal scale: how our life as a family was before, and how it is after we had the third child; how it was before we built the extension, and how it is now; how we experience our evenings together in the living room, now that we have smartphones and tablets. My research participants compared their experience of home life to itself – to how it used to be before a specific domestic event, or a new purchase occurred – and not to other people’s experiences of home life or to a general accepted idea of how home life ‘should be’.¹⁹

If people ‘do’ convention by choosing a family-style lifestyle, and this deliberate act is enough to show their capacity for morality, then the way they would carry out their home life could be as ‘unconventional’ as they wish, where ‘unconventional’ means, for example, having a dessert tea instead of a ‘proper’ hot meal, or spending a whole day with the curtains closed. In my ethnography, the ways in which different types of everyday ‘eccentricities’ were performed and displayed marked the individuality and diversity of families. One interesting example of such everyday ‘eccentricity’ was described by Vic and Gail, when I asked them whether they would ever use a moment in a TV programme to coordinate activities inside the home.

¹⁸ My affirmation is not intended to dismiss the existent sets of criteria that ‘external’ individual agents and institutions sometimes follow in ‘evaluating’ families – as well as local government interventions into the lives of families that they have identified as prone to ‘trouble’-making – but just to express the strength of the idea that ‘every family is unique’, which I encountered very often during my fieldwork.

¹⁹ Occasionally, they compared their actual experience of family life to the experience they remembered from their childhood, and very often this was in order to prove the superiority of the former above the latter.

Vic: There is one I can think of.

Gail: Oh, for goodness sake!

Vic: We have a family joke. There is one particular programme, called New Tricks. It's not a particularly good programme, but it's got this singing tune. Everybody has to sit down when the theme tune's on, and go like this [he shakes his arms up and down, singing along 'It's all right']. So, you've got all of them singing here around. So, that's the only one I can think of. It's a family joke, really, more than anything.

Gail: Everybody comes in here [in the living room] and does it. Even my mother did it.

Vic: Even to the extent of stopping what they're doing. They come here, and do it, and, then, go out when the programme's on. Gail's come in from the kitchen, sat down, done it, and gone back in the kitchen again. You have to do it here, in the room: either on the sofa, or in one of these two chairs. It used to be Friday nights; now it's Mondays, I think. (interview Vic and Gail)

This example of a family joke is a type of 'family practice' (Morgan 1996) through which people create their own family as 'special', as 'different', as a distinct universe. As I will show, the kind of families that my participants are doing are expressing individuality and diversity, while also being their own reference point, in Strathern's (1992) words.

3. Family time: making the everyday eventful

In the previous sections I argued that one way in which my participants expressed the experience of family-style living, and 'measured' the quality of home life, was through the concept of 'family time'. This idea first emerged as a response to one of my interview questions about the possibility of having various degrees of feeling homely in one's home. The general response was that 'it's most homely when everybody is at home', as Cynthia put it. This is how Sam expressed this idea, by linking it with her husband's work shifts:

I suppose it's a little bit more homely in the evening when everybody is back from school and work. Weekends are always quite homely because we're all around – we're in and out. Saturdays afternoons and Sundays are kind of family time as much as we can with Peter's job, obviously. (interview Sam)

My participants, sometimes, emphasized the importance of 'family time' over the spatial and sensorial qualities of their homes. For example, they said that they did not mind how their living room looked like or felt like, as long as they could spend time together there as a family; or they mentioned that they preferred to use their free time by spending it together with the other family members, rather than by cleaning the house.²⁰

From a social constructivist perspective, Gillis (1996) argues that 'family time', as a prescription, has nothing to do with the ways in which togetherness is experienced in everyday life. As he puts it, 'family times tend to be anxiously anticipated and fondly remembered, but, as events, they are often experienced as stressful and frustrating, because it is when families are together physically they are furthest apart in terms of their generation and gender assignments' (Gillis 1996: 16). He argues that the strength of the concept of 'family time' comes from its modern definition of ritualized time that can coexist with other forms of time, like the linear time of the capitalist market. Rituals are argued to have the capacity to suggest stability, and, in Giddens' (1981) terms, they have an important emotional dimension as a source of 'ontological security'; they also provide a sense of history and tradition. In the case of family life, as Gillis argues, 'ritual provides not only those moments when families are actually with one another, but, more important, when they imagine themselves as families' (Gillis 1996: 15). In other words, maintaining and enacting 'family time' as a ritual, means maintaining (the imagination of) the family.

For Gillis (1996) 'family time' is, therefore, a cyclical ritual that coexists with the linear time of the capitalist market that promotes a logic of progress. However, in my research I regard 'family time' as one of the time modes of domesticity that constitutes itself as a counterdiscourse to linear time, by making the present future. Evening 'family time' is experienced as continuous, as I will show in the fifth section; it is not punctual, but a sequence that people actively extend, using various

²⁰ It is interesting to note that these two options were considered to be mutually exclusive.

strategies, such as closing the curtains early, having repetitive snacks and drinks, or making themselves stay up late. 'Family time' incorporates the short-term future – once started, nothing will stop it before bedtime – and it usually ignores the long-term future: it is a form of seizing the day and not worrying about tomorrow. If it was to be regarded as a grammatical tense, 'family time' could be seen as the present perfect continuous: it is a present that goes on and that nobody really knows when it will transform into the future. However, the night provides a natural stop point to 'family time'. In order to add one more layer to the description of 'family time' one could correlate it with what the philosopher William James called the 'specious present' (1890). For James (1890) the concept of specious present suggests that the moment of *now* that we experience as present 'is not punctuate, but rather includes a small but extended interval of time' (Andersen and Grush 2009: 278). James (1890) argues that the specious present is most visible in the ways in which people perceive movement: as movement happens during an interval and not just in the moment of *now*, the fact that human beings can perceive movement means that we occupy the present as an interval rather than as a moment. One of the ways in which the present as an interval is particularly acknowledged and celebrated during 'family time', is through a specific form of domestic sociality, that I call 'physical togetherness and digital independence', and that I describe in the fifth section.

The form of 'ordinary agency' that 'family time' engages is related, as I suggested in the introduction, to challenging the uniformity of a dominant social ideology of (middle-class) family, through the enactment of everyday eccentricities, family jokes, and 'unconventional' practices, habits, and actions. 'Family time' can, thus, be seen as an established time when families emerge as distinct universes that express diversity and individuality, and when they constitute themselves as different from other families, and from the uniform ideology of (middle-class) family. The form of agency engendered by the time mode of 'family time' is, therefore, related to creativity, and to the work of creating difference, which constitutes a tacit and ordinary form of resistance to social prescriptions.

4. Elusive presences and digital media

In a publication drawing from a research project carried out in England about children's understandings of time, Christensen (2002) outlines that, for children, the qualities of time are different and much more varied from what is usually called 'quality time'. Thus, instead of 'quality time' as a nominated block of time when all the family members do activities together, children have other views and preferences for their time at home, such as the situation of being in separate rooms and doing different individual activities, while knowing that the parent is available somewhere in the house, and could be called in case they are needed. This brings out the idea that 'family time' is not necessarily time together, but time when everybody is at, and around, home. In Sam's words, quoted in the last section, 'weekends are always quite homely because we're all around – we're in and out'.

This state of flexible togetherness is achieved when people are aware of what the other family members are doing, generally from sounds – of footsteps, music, or other forms of activities – or from the smells of cooking, without taking part in their activities as such. However, the sense of shared time, and the feeling of homeliness emerge from such situations as much as from more accentuated forms of 'family time'. While making a Tactile Time collage about her son's usage of the Wii (Figure 4), which is located in the spare bedroom, Sam chose a loose transparent fabric to express how that time feels for her, and she explained her choice by saying:

Because he's here, but he's not here: you can hear him running, jumping about upstairs, but you can't see him, or anything like that. (interview Sam)



Figure 4. Detail from Sam's Tactile Time collage, showing her son's usage of the Wii.

Sam is, thus, aware of her son's presence in the house, and she can tell what he is doing from the sounds he is making: she can imagine him performing the actions required by the Wii, like jumping and running. Even if he is not in the room, and she cannot see him – he is not physically co-present – Sam still considers her son to be 'here'. His presence is elusive; he is part of the world, part of the universe of the house, as the upstairs bedrooms are, and Sam does not need to see him, or the rooms, in order to accept that her experience of home is framed by these elusive presences.

Another way of conceptualizing forms of contingent relatedness and everyday intimacy in families, is through the notion of 'quality moments', developed by Kremer-Sadlik and Paugh (2007). In their research on everyday life with American families, Kremer-Sadlik and Paugh (2007) propose the concept of 'quality moments' to complement the notion of 'quality time'. Quality moments are 'spontaneous, unstructured, everyday moments of shared social interaction between family members' (Kremer-Sadlik and Paugh 2007: 288) that can appear ad-hoc during household chores or while waiting. The researchers were surprised by the frequency of these interactions during activities oriented towards other goals, and they emphasize that 'quality moments' are closer to the experience of everyday life,

while 'quality time' stands like a normative ideal model that is rarely fully achieved in practice.

I will now discuss a series of situations where digital media are used inside the home in order to assert and make manifest the elusive presence of other family members. These interactions can be seen as spontaneous 'quality moments' (Kremer-Sadlik and Paugh 2007) when people create and reinforce relatedness – or, in Morgan's (1996) conceptualization, they are *doing* family – through ad hoc creative employments of digital media. Besides the connection between family members, in the following examples digital devices also connect two essentially different parts of the home: the upstairs and the downstairs.

The vast majority of English houses comprise of a ground floor and a first floor.²¹ The ground floor is a communal, and, generally, daytime space, comprising the kitchen, the living room, and a front room that used to be called a parlour – functioning as an occasional dining room for guests – and that, nowadays, can be used as an office space, or as an extension of the living room²². The first floor, which consists of individual bedrooms, is, generally, a night-time realm, or the nominated area for voluntary, or imposed, solitude. The ground floor is the space for receiving visitors, while the first floor is considered more private, and is, generally, reserved for the members of the nuclear family. Children's bedrooms, however, can be open to visitors – their friends – who might sometimes have a sleepover at the weekend. The main double bedroom, occupied by the cohabiting adult couple, is, usually, the most private room in the house.²³ During my fieldwork visits, I was always invited into the kitchen, conservatory, or living room – social spaces equipped with tables that could hold cups of tea. The only times when I had access to the first floor, was during filming a video tour of the house or re-enactments of practices, such as laundry and bathroom practices. The mono-functionality of the bedroom as a room for sleep was very often emphasized when my participants described their children's bedrooms, by saying that the kids 'do not spend any time there at all' (in the daytime) because they are normally downstairs.

²¹ The exceptions are what are called bungalows – houses which only have a ground floor – and houses with a loft conversion, or with three or more storeys. However, from my sample of 18 families, only one had a loft conversion, while all the others followed the classical model of two-storey houses.

²² See Atfield (1999) for a discussion about the ways in which the parlour has been incorporated into an open-plan living room.

²³ Gullestad (1984) makes a similar observation about the matrimonial bedrooms in Norwegian block of flats suburbs in her work with working-class young women in a Norwegian town.

Children tended to play and to do their homework downstairs, and they would usually rediscover the bedroom as a personal space in their teens. The ground floor of English houses is, therefore, typically, a communal space for cooking and eating, leisure, receiving guests, and for work, while the upstairs represent a space for rest, and for individual and couple pursuits. While at home – and, most often, during the weekends – people navigate between these two spaces, as they navigate between collective and individual activities. However, digital media are sometimes used to connect people on different floors, and to connect the realms of individuality and commonality. Sam talks about the ways in which her daughter, Julie, aged eleven, uses Skype at home.

Sam: She just skypes me from upstairs, sometimes [laughing]. She's got Skype on her iPod. So, I had the odd call on. And she skypes her friends on her iPod. She skypes quite a lot, actually.

Roxana: So you were at the computer downstairs?

Sam: Yes, I was. She doesn't do it very often, but at odd times she might find it funny to sit upstairs and skype, rather than get up and come down, whatever.
(interview Sam)

Julie's spontaneous use of Skype to get in touch with her mother downstairs, while she is in her bedroom, is a way of asserting her presence, while still keeping it elusive. It is not Julie's body coming downstairs to talk with her mum, but just a visual and aural digital representation of Julie that breaks the time and space of individuality, in order to connect with Sam. Skyping keeps Julie both separate, and connected. In this example, Julie's employment of Skype is seen as whimsical, part of a realm of improvisation, creativity, and play. However, this is not the only situation when digital devices are used between family members inside the house, in Sam's family. She recalls that the only conflict they have over TV programmes is on Saturday evenings when she and the children want to watch *The Magicians*, while her husband wants to watch the football game that he recorded during dinner. Because the recording is stored on the V+ box that they have with the TV in the living room, Sam and the children would go upstairs to her and Peter's bedroom ('we are banished to the bedroom'), where they have a second TV. They would watch the programme snuggling in bed, while Peter is downstairs by himself; in this situation, the communal ground floor space is experienced by oneself, in isolation,

while the rest of the family is regrouped in a bedroom upstairs. However, Peter would not watch the whole game, but he would skip through it, watch it at double speed, and, in half an hour, he would finish and call the rest of the family back downstairs, by using the internal phone system. This type of exceptional situation, which happens only on Saturdays, is recalled by Sam twice: during the video tour of her house, and during one of my interviews, several months apart; this shows that the use of the internal phone system to reunite the family downstairs, even if playful, is not 'out of the ordinary', but part of the Saturday evening routine, and it can be seen as a family practice, in Morgan's (1996) conceptualization.

Other situations when family members use digital media between themselves, inside the home, are for various requests that might sound different – maybe less demanding – when asked through a digital platform, than when they are asked directly, or in a face-to-face form of interaction. This might happen at dinner time, when all family members are asked to stop their individual activities in order to take part in what is, usually, considered to be an important family ritual.²⁴ Some of my participants recall that media, such as the TV, used to be a motive of discord at dinner time, when children wanted to finish watching their programmes, while parents wanted them to sit around the dinner table. Nowadays, when they have the possibility to digitally record and store programmes on their TV box, people can prevent these arguments. Cynthia explains that her family would use the record function spontaneously, in relation to contingencies or routines that might produce the situation of having overlapping activities:

The recording is really good with the children, 'cause you're watching a programme, and it's time for the meal, it's time to do something – just record it, and do what you were supposed to do. Because, before we had that, there would be lots of arguments: 'I just want to watch the end, the last ten minutes'. (interview Cynthia)

Here, the capacity of recording is similar to an ability to multiply time: instead of choosing to spend the ten minutes doing just one activity – join the dinner table, or watch the end of the programme – people can do both, by pursuing the planned activity first, and getting back to watch the last ten minutes of the programme afterwards. Cynthia also discovered other ways of using digital media for easing the

²⁴ See (DeVault 1991, Valentine 1999)

transition between children's individual activities, and dinner time. She mentions that she sometimes sends Facebook messages to call for dinner her teenage and young adult, children, when they are upstairs, in their bedrooms.

Cynthia: If I know Kelley is online, and I've got my laptop on, and the dinner's ready, than [I write] 'dinner's ready!' Yeah, we use Facebook.

Roxana: When Kelley's in her bedroom and you are downstairs?

Cynthia: Or Lee. But Lee's not often on Facebook, though. Nine times out of ten, I just shout 'Food!' up the stairs. (interview Cynthia)

By using Facebook, Cynthia displays her knowledge of her children and of the possible activities that they might be engaged in, at that time of the day. As in Julie's case, the connection between upstairs/ individuality and downstairs/ commonality is realized virtually – or aurally, through the medium of Cynthia's voice. However, the employment of digital media is seen, here, as special, as it is happening just in 10% of the cases; this 'out of ordinary' characteristic, together with the quality of digital communication of potentially being less intrusive, might produce a better response.

In other situations, the choice of using digital media, instead of having face-to-face interactions inside the home, is explained as being more convenient, in terms of effort, for the sender of the message. Iris and Steve recall a situation when Iris sent a text message to their teenage son, who was in his bedroom, to remind him to have a shower.

Steve: Iris was texting Alan the other night, to tell him to get in the shower.

Iris [laughing]: I texted him from the sitting room, because I couldn't be bothered to get up! I forgot about it. It's ten o'clock at night, I can't be bothered to get up! (interview Iris and Steve)

Here, the possibility of sending the text gives Iris the chance to keep being responsible of her children's evening baths, while responding to her own needs as well, like the need to sit down and relax in the evenings. Iris suggests that 'mother time' should finish before ten o'clock in the evening, when the children would have already gone to bed, and her choice of sending a text rather than getting up and

climbing the stairs to her son's bedroom shows her drawing of a boundary between being 'totally available', and 'partially available' for her children.

These examples show that a specific form of domestic sociality emerges when family members share the overall environment of the house, while not being in the same room. This form of sociality, which I called elusive togetherness, is uni-sensorial: it is enough for the existence of the others to be signalled through only one impression – be it aural, olfactive, or visual – in order to be recognized as sociality by both the producer of the signal, and by the recipient. A uni-sensorial signal is enough to trigger one's imagination of what the other is doing, and of where, in the house, they are located, as we have seen in the example of Sam, who imagines her son playing the Wii when hearing his footsteps and his jumps coming from the upstairs. The imagination of the other, who is located in a different room of the house, changes the way in which one experiences one's home.

The way in which I understand the concept of sociality follows the approach proposed by Long and Moore (2013), who regard sociality as 'a dynamic relational matrix within which subjects are constantly interacting in ways that are co-productive, and continually plastic and malleable' (2013: 4). Long and Moore (2013) argue that human sociality should not be reduced to affectivity, or relationality, and that it should be situated by attending to what is specific about human beings in employing 'an explicit theory of human subjects' (idem p. 3). Some of the human specificities that they identify are the imaginative, motivational, ethical, and representative – attaching meaning and significance to things – capacities that people can enact. In creating the elusive togetherness form of sociality that I discussed in this chapter, my participants made use of representation, when sounds signified footsteps; of imagination, like in the example of Julie imagining her mother downstairs getting to the computer to pick up the Skype call; and they made appeal to various motivations, such as the wish to have a nice dinner time that all family members would enjoy, in performing intentional actions, such as using Facebook to tell one's teenage children that the dinner is ready.

5. Evening time routines: physical togetherness and digital independence

Evening times, the times when all the family members are around, and when the home feels most 'homely', are described as established segments of leisure and relaxation. Often abundant, in terms of the frequency of food and beverage items that are consumed, they mark a conspicuous break from the non-memorable character of daytime work tasks and household chores. They are little celebrations of family, individuality, and, generally, of life. In this section, following the Tactile Time collages made by my research participants, I define 'evening time' as starting after dinner, when the main family TV is switched on and people gather around it; and finishing when the TV is switched off and the last family members to watch it head upstairs to their bedrooms.

In the collages that represent my participants' usages of the living room TV, felt is a fabric that was chosen in all the cases to illustrate the feeling of evening times. Part of the collage-kit that I provided there were three different types of felt of various degrees of softness, the softer – as agreed by participants and by me – being a pink one. Pieces of pink felt appear in all the representations of evenings – and, for some people, at other moments of the day, as well – of four families that do not know each other. This choice is explained as expressing feelings of warmth, cosiness, relaxation and 'being settled down'. In Cynthia's words:

I've got felt because I'm fed, relaxed, ready for a nice evening. It's softer than this; this is rough, but warm. This is the softest: it's a relaxed fabric. (transcript from video of Tactile Time collage making with Cynthia's family)

Evening times imply the imperative of 'indulgence'. I situate the idea of indulgence by using the dichotomy of thrift and treat developed by Miller (1998). In his ethnography of ordinary shopping in North London, Miller identifies that the most important element in buying provisions for the household – which is understood as an entity in itself that transcends the individual – is thrift, or the experience of saving money. He describes in detail his participants' strategies for finding savers in the shop, or by choosing different shops for specific categories of products, and he outlines that, for the activity of shopping, thrift can be seen as an end in itself. In this context, the treat is 'a slightly transgressive purchase', an 'extra extravagance that

lies outside the constraints of necessity' (Miller 1998: 40-1), and that is directed to a particular individual, usually the shopper. The treat, that sometimes can mean just eating a grape or two from the fruit stalls in the supermarket, can be seen as a reward to the shopper for carrying out the act of shopping. Miller argues that the treat is 'an action which specifically reaffirms the self' (Miller 1998: 47), by individualizing the recipient of the treat. In Miller's ethnography, thrift and treat appear as a pair: treat is seen as a (instant) reward for the success of achieving thrift.

However, 'indulgence' at evening time is a prolonged state of treat that does not necessarily follow the successful accomplishment of a task, or 'duty', but is enacted as a way of expressing agency. If daytimes are organized following the thrift and treat logic, where people give themselves treats for carrying out tedious or non-inspiring tasks, evenings follow a totally different order. At evenings, indulgence is an imperative, the *forms* of indulgence express individual identity, and the *enactment* of indulgence shows agency. In my research, indulgence involved food and beverages, digital media and other technologies that were used simultaneously, and a general mood of total relaxation and 'carelessness' in relation to one's 'duties', which can be described through the expression 'I can't be bothered' (which is used by Iris in the quote from the previous section).

What I have found out to be a general imperative for evening time indulgence, is similar to the Swedish phenomenon of Cosy Friday (Brembeck 2012), an established ritual for families with children, consisting in gathering together on the sofa, in front of the TV, and defined through an abundance of food – usually fast food and snacks – and beverages. Brembeck (2012) outlines the importance of the Cosy Friday feeling as providing 'a special *experience* of freedom, relaxation, and togetherness' (2012: 137), in opposition to everyday experiences of work and order. Unlike the general evening time indulgence that I encountered in my fieldwork, the Swedish phenomenon is child-centred (ibid. p.139), as it represents a time when no alimentary treats are to be refused to the children, and when the family TV choices are, generally, children programmes and films.

Below, the difference between what can be called the thrift-and-treat logic, and evening indulgence, can be visually depicted from two Tactile Time collages made by Lara, Dominic, and their twelve year old son, Ewan. The first collage shows the

usage of computers during the day, and the second one shows TV usage. Lara and Dominic, whom I introduced in a previous chapter, live with their son, Ewan, and with their two dogs and one cat. During university school holidays, Justine, Lara's daughter from her previous relationship, comes to live with them; and they are also visited, sometimes, by Mick, Dominic's son, who is 22, and who moved out of home. At the time of the collage-making research encounter, Dominic was working from home for small projects, while looking for a full-time job, and Lara was working full-time outside the home.

The first collage (Figure 5) shows the family's usage of computer – together with other technologies and food and drinks – during the day. Lara uses her laptop in the morning to check her email before she goes to work; Ewan uses it together with a drink, in the afternoon, when he comes back from school; and Dominic, who is at home, uses it all day. At 11 am and at 3.30 pm he has a break, with a cup of tea and a snack, such as a chocolate bar, and, at 1 pm, he has lunch. In this collage, the drinks and the snacks placed around the computer are visually proportionally distributed during the day, between 7.30 am and 7.30 pm, with a one hour dinner break. They mark, and break, the time that Dominic spends on his own and the series of work tasks he performs, which might also involve the landline phone, the mobile phone and the printer, as shown. In the second collage (Figure 6), the right half of the picture shows only Ewan's TV usage during two time slots – at 7:30-8:10 am and 4:30-6:00 pm – while the left half, which represents the family's evening time, shows an abundance of digital devices, food and beverage, and other media, such as books.

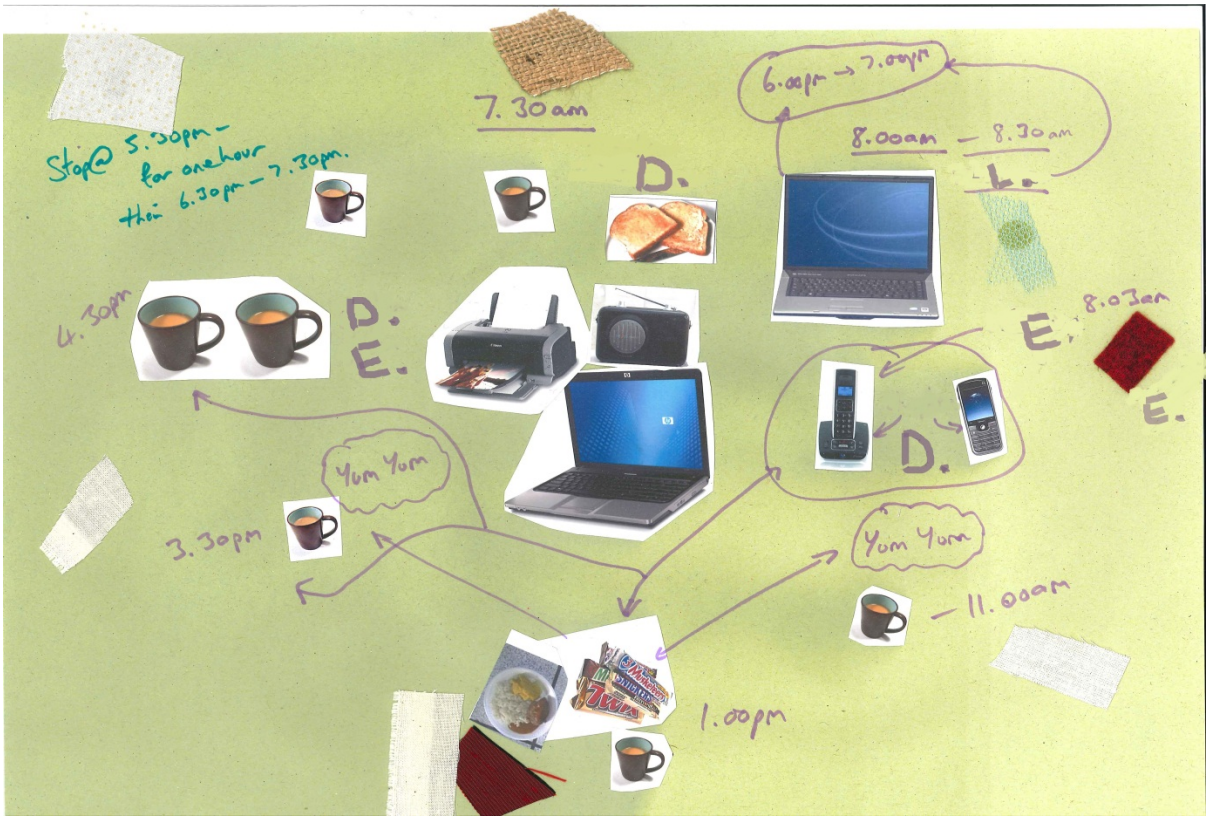


Figure 5 Tactile Time collage made by Lara, Dominic and Ewan, and showing their laptop usage.

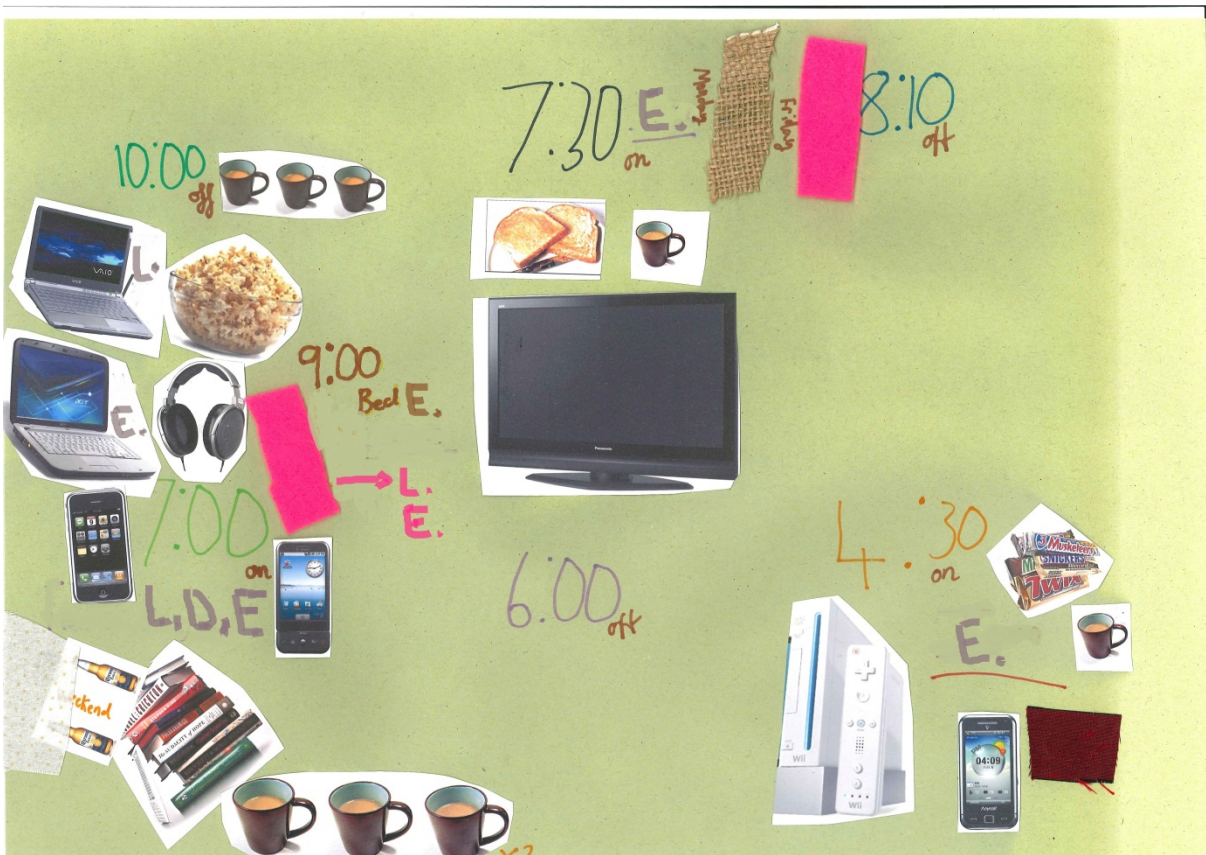


Figure 6 Tactile Time collage made by Lara, Dominic and Ewan, and showing their TV usage.

The living room is dark. The only light that is on is a lamp behind the TV. The camera, held by Dominic, looks at Ewan: he sits on the sofa, wearing his pyjamas, with a laptop in his lap, and wearing big headphones; he says 'hello' in a small voice. Lara sits on the other sofa, her feet under her, using her iPhone. Their two dogs keep on moving in, and out of, the frame. The TV screen shows a programme about relocating to the countryside. Dominic follows the dogs to the kitchen. In the sink, one can see a baking tray sitting vertically. Dominic stops by the side table, where two full cups, one of purple, and one of brown hot contents, wait to be picked and transported. The recording stops.

Next, it is a Saturday afternoon, and the living room looks bright. On the sofa: dog toys, big black headphones, cables, one laptop. Lara sits at the living room table, checking her phone. In the kitchen, on the wooden table, Dominic's laptop shows a black screen with white code language, rebooting. Something went wrong with his laptop and he is filming while waiting for the computer to start working? The ginger cat sits in the door, and the dogs approach him with an inquiring glance.

As a time for celebration, abundance and indulgence, my research participants would very often like to be able to extend evening time, to make it feel longer. In Sam's collage (Figure 7), below, evening time, which lasts between 7 and 10 pm, is represented through a longer piece of fabric, which shows this time as continuous.

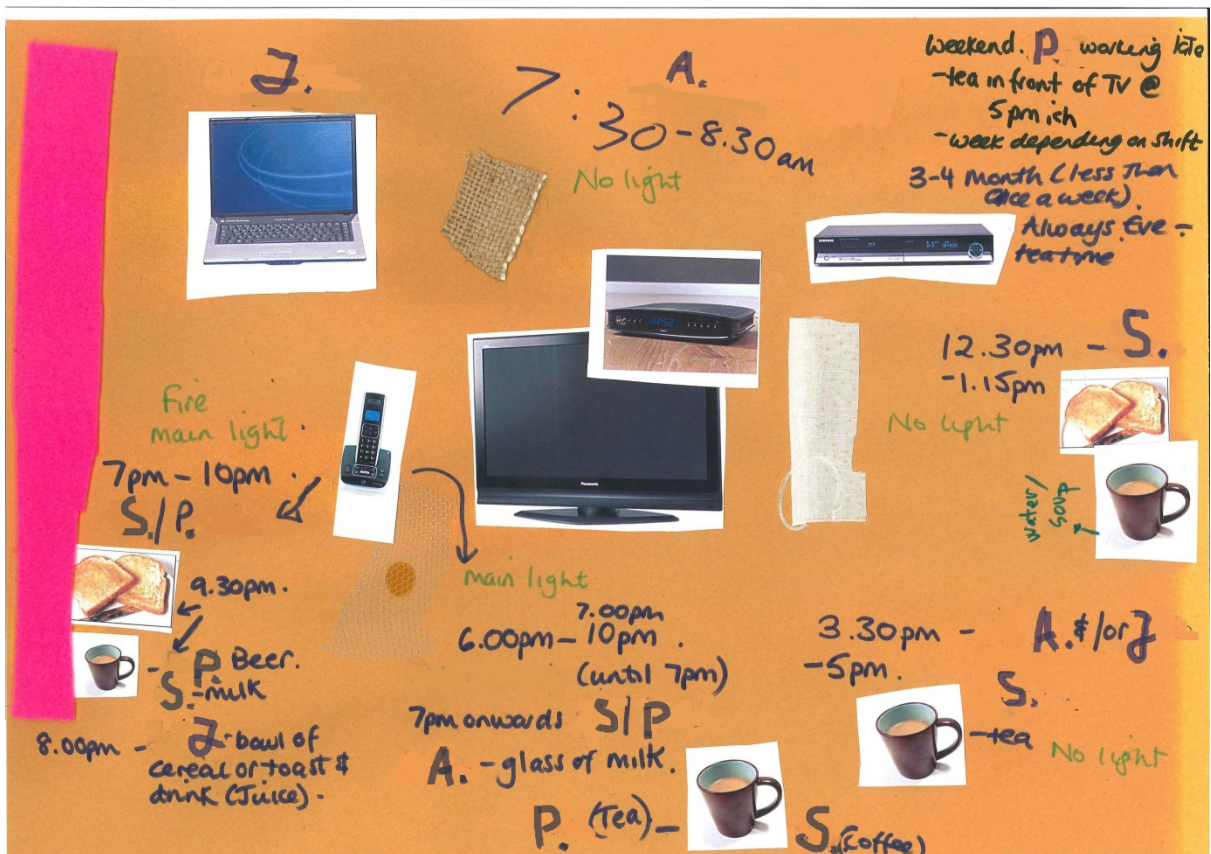


Figure 7 Tactile Time collage made by Sam, and showing her family's TV usage

A 29 minutes-long static clip shows Sam, Peter and their children, Julie and Alex, sitting on the living room sofa and watching *The Voice*. The video camera is placed on the top of the TV, and the programme can only be guessed from the sound. However, the sound is what Peter mainly experiences from the programme, as he is reading a magazine – and, later, the printed newsletter of the school, or a piece of homework that Alex shows to him – and he very seldom lifts his head to watch the screen for more than a second. At the beginning, Alex can only be heard: he cries ‘not again!’, or ‘oh, yeah!’ from time to time. Suddenly, he appears holding a miniature pool cue stick. Later, Sam leaves the frame, and the others start chatting about Alex’s game of soccer; he brings a card box lid that says ‘10 sport games in one’ to his sister on the sofa. We then hear him asking Sam to play a game with him, and her playing the game (she is losing, he is winning). Sam returns with a plate containing a crumpet with chocolate spread for Julie. Then, Alex appears holding a similar plate, and he comes to the camera, saying ‘hi, we are watching *The Voice*’, and happily showing us the content of his plate.

He goes to the sofa, and sits down on his mum's lap. The next fifteen minutes pass in this way: Sam sitting between her children, embracing them, and Peter sitting beside them, near Julie, switching between his reading material, the TV screen, and responding to what the others say. They all keep their feet on a footstool, and they look very comfortable. The children eat their crumpets and they are all chatting about the choice of songs, and about the contestants' performances.

Other participants mentioned their strategies of extending evening time. While she and her family were making the collage below (Figure 8), Cynthia explained her entry for 21:30 pm that is illustrated by a photo of toast, and a dark red taffeta choice of fabric:

I start to feel a bit rough, so I try to make myself better by having some toast. Probably I'm ready for bed, to be honest, but I make myself stay up. (transcript from video of Tactile Time collage making with Cynthia's family)

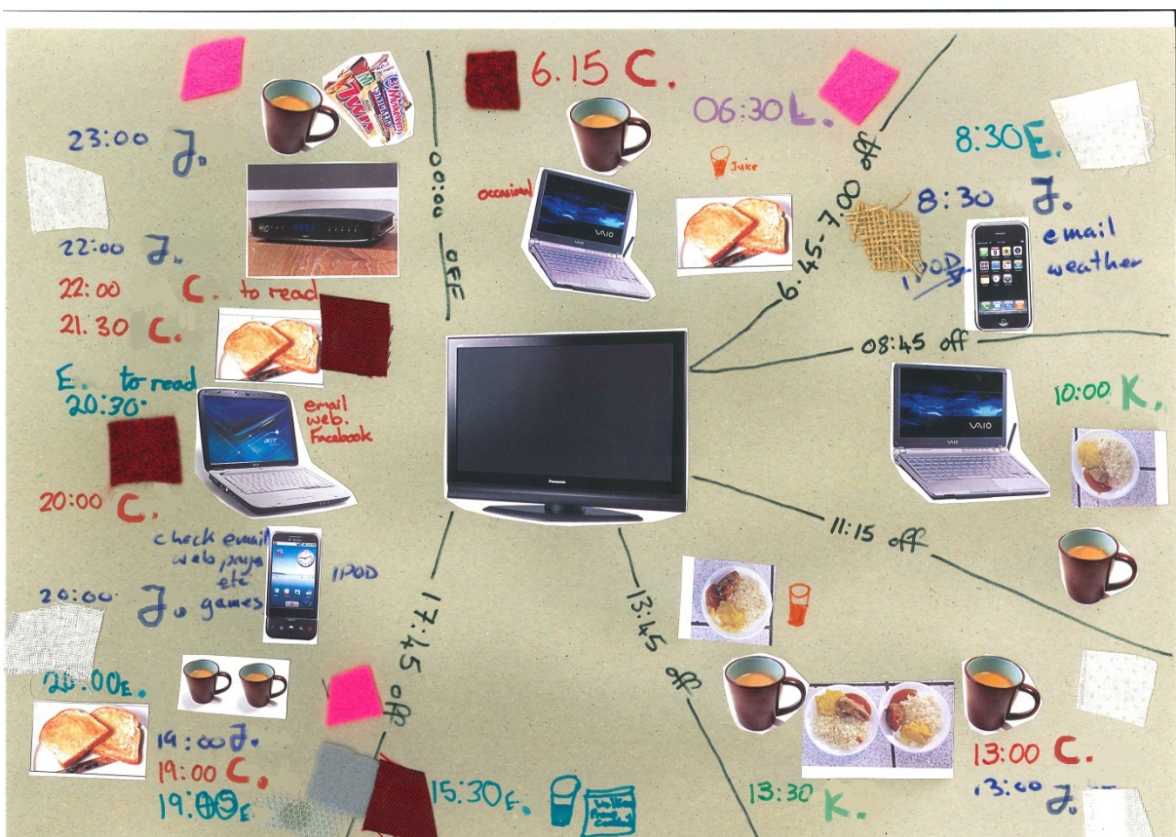


Figure 8 Tactile Time collage made by Cynthia and her family, and showing their TV usage.

'I thought I'll do my filming in the last few minutes before I go to bed'. This is how Cynthia's first recording starts. While she is filming, Cynthia is talking with the camera, explaining the situation, like a reporter. She is in the living room, together with Jeff, and she explains that he is researching 'family tree stuff' on his laptop. 'The TV is off, but, as soon as I sit down, it will go on, because we can't both look at family trees at the same time', she continues. She heads towards the window and she closes the curtains. Next, she visits the kitchen, where her son, Lee, is doing the washing up, while listening to music from his iPod that is plugged in a docking station, on top of the fridge. She is amused by the name of the song and by the fact that her son is multitasking: he is preparing a snack for himself – toasted crumpets – while finishing tidying up the kitchen. Later, she goes back to the living room and sits on the sofa by her husband, asking about the new family tree discoveries, and watching the weather forecast on TV. The camera moves between the TV and the laptop screen, as they chat about tomorrow's weather and about Jeff's great-grand-uncle.

However, the extension of evening family time can happen properly only at the weekends. During an interview, Marilyn mentions some of the ways in which she and her family make 'family time' feel longer and more special during the weekends:

At weekends it's much more relaxing, so, we might put on music, we might close the curtains a bit early, maybe have some candles; we might eat in there.

(interview Marilyn)

In his work on ICT use with families in London in the early nineties, Hirsch (1998) finds that his research participants were often preoccupied with creating a sort of alternative time of unity, or uninterrupted togetherness, at the weekends. One family created this alternative time through a set of strategies that involved doing the shopping and the housework before the start of the weekend, and a set of visible changes in everyday routines, such as, for the male adult, not shaving and removing his wristwatch at the weekend.

In a context of evening indulgence, that feels cosy and that people would like to extend, the pursued activities generally follow individual interests, and involve the use of individual digital media. The TV is on, providing a common focal point, and creating a soundscape and a 'lightscape' that is shared, but the people around it constantly switch their attention from the TV content, to their personal

preoccupations. These preoccupations vary with the digital devices available to them. Dominic describes in detail the 'technological abundance' of their evenings, which was visually depicted in the collage made by him and his family:

Dominic: Last night, we had Ewan using the laptop with headphones on, sitting on one of the sofas; and, then, Justine and myself were playing games on the iPhones; Lara was watching the TV, and, then, she switched on to using the laptop. I suppose Justine and I were watching the TV at the same time, but we were playing on the iPhones as well, so yeah...

Roxana: Does this normally happen in the evenings then?

Dominic: Yeah, normally that's an arrangement. Ewan does normally play - if he can't be on the Xbox 'cause the TV is on, then he would quite often go to the laptop, and look at YouTube, and stuff like that with headphones on. And Lara and I would probably watch the TV, or one of us might be using the iPhone to do his stuff. And, when Justine is here, she's on the iPhone nonstop, she's continually using it: texting, skyping, all sorts of things.

Roxana: She only chats on Skype?

Dominic: Sometimes she speaks with people as well, and it's quite annoying. (...) So, the habit would tend to be that Justine would probably be using either her iPhone, or her laptop, and the TV would be on - 'cause she's the one doing it the most. She might put a film on TV, and have the laptop in front of her, and she would be facebooking or skyping, while the film is running in the back.

Roxana: And she's watching the film?

Dominic: She says she is, she says she is, yeah. And Ewan, probably, he focuses a little bit more on one activity, I think. So, the TV might be on, but if he's on the laptop with the headphones, he's generally looking at what he's doing on the laptop. But, if he sees something on TV, he might take his headphones off, and then tune into the TV.

Ewan [from the sofa, while playing a video game]: If there's something interesting.

Dominic: Something interesting grabs his attention. Or, if something happens on his phone, he might pick his phone up. [to Ewan] You would usually phone less,

don't you, then perhaps laptop? [Ewan doesn't reply] Lara would watch the TV, she might have her laptop open, but that's generally because she's doing some work, as well. But she quite often does stuff on her iPhone while the TV's running. So, she's watching something, a TV programme, but she's also communicating with her mum, or a friend, or Justine, or something like that, on the iPhone. And I would generally watch the TV, or read the newspaper; or if the TV wasn't very interesting, and nobody's using their iPhone, I might borrow an iPhone and play a game on it. That's generally how it happens, you know. (interview Dominic)

The diversity of technology permits flexibility and creativity in the activities pursued, and in the media of the pursuance: Dominic, who does not have his own iPhone, is happy to spend his evening time switching between watching TV and reading the newspaper or a book, and, sometimes he would borrow an iPhone – if available – to play a game. Lara might work on her laptop while watching TV, or she might use her iPhone to communicate with her mother, who lives in Spain, or with her daughter, during term times when she is away. The possibilities are rich: people do not need to stick to the same activity, and to the same device, every evening.

This picture looks different from the situation described by Morley (1986) in his study of family TV watching in Britain in the mid-eighties. In Morley's study, the living room TV was the main source of media content, and the remote control device was, generally, used as an instrument of male dominance, which triggered conflicts over the choice of the programme and over the viewing style; Morley (1986) outlines that his male participants preferred attentive silent viewing, while the female participants liked to chat and to multitask during TV programmes. This was not the case for my participants, as I have found out from my research that I conducted more than 25 years later than Morley's (1986). Dominic does not try to assert control over the environment of the living room, by choosing what his family is going to watch. Chatting and partial attention to the TV screen are described as part of the ordinary viewing style. This change is also supported by the multitude, and the availability, of media content: one could re-watch a programme anytime through the 'Catch up' function of TV boxes, or on the internet, so there's no need to pay total attention at the moment of the first watching. The quantity of media content might also make it hard to decide to watch a single programme, if one's interests were diverse. Another difference to Morley's (1986) study is that my participants' emphasis is on spending time together in the same room, rather than

on having a family favourite programme that they would all watch attentively. As Vic puts it:

Generally, we do all sit together, and watch whatever's on, and chat at the same time, and play on iPads, and talk, and read. So, we do like to be in the same room.
(interview Vic and Gail)

At the same time, even if the use of multiple new digital media might paint a picture of 'technologically-saturated' homes, people sometimes describe their media use in terms of continuities, rather than changes. Vic says that using the iPad is 'almost like browsing an electronic magazine', and his wife, Gail, agrees that there is nothing special in using the iPad while watching TV; it is just like 'reading the newspaper while watching TV'.

Going back to Dominic's description of their family evenings, there is a sense of flexibility and lack of normative expectations from the other family members. Everybody is left to pursue their own interests, even if they might, sometimes, produce irritation, such as in the example of loud chatting with friends while the other family members are watching the TV: Ewan plays games on his laptop, aurally isolated through his headphones; Justine texts and talks with her friends on Skype; Lara and Dominic do 'their stuff' on the iPhone or laptop. Diversity and individuality are encouraged. What was surprising for me was Justine's choice to virtually bring her social circle into the living room, instead of looking for privacy in order to chat with her friends. At the same time, the other family members' acceptance of this activity – although Dominic finds her loud talking annoying – makes togetherness in the evenings possible. During university holidays, when she is at home, Justine does not need to choose whether to actively spend her time with her family, or to spend it by chatting with her friends. She can do both activities, simultaneously.

In a publication drawn from their research with children in the North of England about experiences of time at school and in family life, Christensen, James and Jenks (2000) mention a preoccupation with keeping both family togetherness and individual independence at home. They outline that, in order to manage disputes between family members over time and space in the home, families carry out a process of 'constant balancing of the concerns for independence, and that of

togetherness, a process articulated in and around particular spaces in the home' (Christensen, James, and Jenks 2000: 128).

From this perspective, evening times in the living room can be seen as daily opportunities for exercising this act of balancing togetherness and independence. Thus, 'family time' in the evenings can be defined as a situation of physical togetherness and digital independence.

During the collage-making task, my participants often asserted individuality through their choice of the fabric that was used to express how time felt for them at different moments. Very often, for communal evening times they chose different fabrics, revealing that even if they were physically together and sharing the same room, and the same time slot, their experiences of this shared event were different. For example, in the collage represented in Figure 8 (p. 154), Jeff identifies three distinct moments during his evening times: (1.) 19:00 is illustrated by pink felt; (2.) 22:00 by white and cream patterned cotton; and (3.) 23:00 is illustrated, again, by pink felt, together with a cup of tea and snacks. This is how Jeff explains his choices and describes these moments:

(1.) Properly relaxed, switched off, just chilled out. I tend to have a bit of a dip, quiet time, and wake up again later. This one is the softest – the pink one is softer. (2.) A little bit more awake, but still a soft, nice material. Probably I would do a bit of work, something more active – on occasion, probably, I would do a bit of email, hobby related. (3.) So, my final one is a sleepy one – might fall asleep on the settee, and then wake up and go to bed. (transcript from video of Tactile Time collage making with Cynthia and Rob's family)

In his description, Jeff's evening is experienced individually, even if, at the same time, it is part of a shared time and space. During the collage making, his daughter, Emma, reacts to his last entry (3.), and to his choice of adding snacks and a cup of tea to illustrate it, by saying: 'What's that: eat because we've gone away?' For Emma, Jeff's choice of snacks and tea expresses a celebration of the fact that he would spend some time alone, 'unsupervised', in the living room, which can be seen as a small 'betrayal' to the ethics of togetherness in favour of individuality.

At her turn, Emma portrays her evening by identifying three different moments: (1.) 19:00 is illustrated by blue tulle netting fabric; (2.) 20:00 by white soft muslin,

together with a snack of toast and honey; (3.) 20.30 by dark red thick felt, which other participants described as the least soft of all three types of felt provided. This is how Emma describes these three moments, and explains her choice of fabrics:

(1.) I think I get quite excited around the nice programmes in the evening. (2.) This felt really soft. I'm calming down a bit more, but I'm still watching the TV, and I still like it. So, I'm still awake. (3.) Quite soft, like the bed duvet; still happy, because I'm going to read my book. (transcript from video of Tactile Time collage making with Cynthia's family)

For Emma, the evening is about pursuing her interests: the evening TV programmes that she likes, and her book that she reads in bed. Her choice of fabrics is related to the surfaces of the home – the dark red felt is soft like the bed duvet – or to other textile tactile experiences. Her mum, Cynthia, suggested during the collage-making that Emma's choice of tulle to express excitement can be related to what tutus mean for her: Emma attends a dancing club at the weekends, regularly taking part in shows that her group creates and performs for an audience of family and friends (one of which I, too, attended, together with Cynthia). Thus, through her choices of fabrics, as well as through her evening activities, Emma expresses her individuality.

In the examples of Jeff and Emma, as well as in the previous example of Dominic, the family appears as a context for individual pursuits. It can be a context that actually encourages individual interests and experiences, or, at least, it does not conflict with them. I suggest that even if 'family time' and the idea that the home is most homely when all family members are around were initially emphasized by all my participants, a closer look at what people do during 'family time' shows a focus on individual pursuits. My ethnography shows that, in everyday life, 'family' is not so much a normative social construction, but is rather a context that lets, or even encourages, its members to find and express their individualities.

In a publication about changes and continuities in contemporary family, cited by Simpson (1998), Elliot (1986) identifies 'a tragic paradox', in which 'security in personal relationships implies commitment and loss of freedom' (Elliot 1986: 133). The materials that I discussed in this chapter show that there are ways to dissolve this tragic paradox, and that contemporary families are able to keep security and commitment, as well as a sense of freedom, at the same time. In this section, I

showed some of the ways in which my participants attempt, on an everyday basis, to dissolve this paradox, by using a variety of digital media at evening times.

6. Conclusions

This chapter discussed the time-mode of 'family time', the form of agency that this time-mode engenders, and its role in the ways in which two forms of domestic sociality are articulated: elusive togetherness and physical togetherness and digital independence.

I have grounded my theoretical approach in anthropological discussions of English middle-class kinship (Strathern 1992) and I have shown that making 'family time' can be regarded as an everyday practice of 'creating relatedness' (Carsten 2000a). In my discussion of approaches to the concepts of 'family' and 'family time', I acknowledged both a social constructivist perspective (Gillis 1996), and a focus on people's agency in 'doing family' (Morgan 1996), and I approached the tensions between these two types of approaches through the lens provided by Strathern (1992) in her discussion of the relationships between convention and choice in English middle-class kinship. I argued that *by* keeping 'family time' and by emphasizing its importance over other dimensions and qualities of the home, people 'do' convention and show their capacity for morality. However, *what* people do during 'family time' is a matter of choice that reflects individuality and diversity. Having, and talking about having, 'family time' showed my participants' 'normality' – their following of a social norm; talking about the creativity and eccentricity of the assemblages that they developed during this time, showed their difference, and their capacity to transgress this social norm while keeping it.

While there are other bodies of literature looking at family life in relation to (digital) media practices, or, generally, to everydayness, such as media anthropology (Madianou and Miller 2011, 2013), cultural studies (Moran 2007), and media studies (Moore 1993, Morley 1986), my theoretical approach, as I mentioned, is grounded in the anthropology of Britain field. Moreover, even if I described domestic actions that involved the use of digital media, my focus was not upon digital media

per se, but on the ways in which people use digital devices in making 'family time', and on the forms of sociality that emerge in these processes.

However, this chapter can also be regarded as an ethnographic illustration and discussion of what has been recently identified as an important change in ICT domestic consumption. The latest Ofcom Communications Market Report (2013) shows that 'media multi-tasking' – the usage of several communication devices, such as smartphones, tablets and laptops, while watching TV – is an important rising trend, defining the ICT-usage style of 53% of all UK adults. While the report only identifies this trend by drawing upon a survey, my ethnographic description of, and theoretical framework for situating the ways in which people multi-task with media, could provide more insight and understanding of this trend for scholars and policy makers interested in this phenomenon.

Chapter 6: Thoughts on applications

1. Chapter outline

In this chapter I define my position in relation to the interdisciplinary applied context that framed my doctoral research, in order to show how my ethnographic findings, which were influenced by this context, could be applied in order to change the type of questions that projects focused on energy reduction address.

In the next section, I discuss approaches to interdisciplinary work and to applied anthropology, and I situate myself in relation to the context of the LEEDR project that my doctoral research was part of. Following Strathern's (2006) approach to interdisciplinarity, I ground my research *in* – following the methods and responding to the concerns of – one discipline, the discipline of social anthropology, while regarding the potential of interdisciplinary work to appear *a posteriori* the completion of the disciplinary research, when one might let oneself 'be captured' by the concerns of another discipline, while, and *through*, maintaining a critical stance. This position is visible in the structure of my doctoral dissertation and in the way I have analysed my findings. I see the main scope of my thesis to respond to current debates in anthropological theory and to contribute to the advancement of new perspectives on human agency. The empirical chapters of my thesis – chapters three to five – analyse and present ethnographic data in relation to existent anthropological topics and bodies of theory on human agency, time, kinship, domesticity, and imagination. After addressing this scope, in the current chapter I let myself captured by the environmental concerns of the domestic sustainability agenda.

In the third part, I discuss the way in which research questions were formulated in previous applied studies of domestic energy consumption research and, following the work of Hobson (2011), I argue for a change of perspective from a 'homes as places where people consume energy' premise to a 'homes as sites of action' approach.

In the fourth and fifth sections I discuss possible applications of the research findings that I presented in the empirical chapters. In the fourth part I discuss the

ways in which the idea of opting for a family-style lifestyle in English middle-class kinship (Strathern 1992) organizes ideas of morality, and I ask whether, and how, everyday actions oriented towards the preservation of the environment can fit into this system of thought. In the fifth section, I compare the folk models of time and of agency employed by my participants in their everyday domestic lives with the temporality expressed by the Climate Change Act, and I propose some ways to reconcile these distinct approaches to, and enactments of, time. I conclude in the sixth section.

2. Applied interdisciplinary research and anthropology

In this section, I situate my doctoral research in relation to the interdisciplinary applied project that framed it, and that, to an extent, made it possible. I focus on two elements of the context of my research that were essential in influencing the research design, the completion of my ethnographic fieldwork, and the analysis of my findings: interdisciplinary discussions and the expectation of applications.

Interdisciplinarity, in its contemporary understanding as a way of conducting research and of producing knowledge that crosses the boundaries between physical sciences and humanities and social sciences (Barry et al. 2008), has recently 'come to be seen as a solution to a series of contemporary problems, in particular the relations between science and society, the development of accountability and the need to foster innovation in the knowledge economy' (Barry, Born, and Weszkalnys 2008: 21). When it does not happen 'naturally', the creation of interdisciplinary endeavours is encouraged by funding bodies; in funding calls, and in subsequent findings reports, the evocation of the 'degree' of interdisciplinarity achieved could often be regarded as representing an index of accountability, and of innovation, in itself (Strathern 2004b).

Marilyn Strathern (2004b, 2006) questions the assumptions that this new form of knowledge production is based upon. She distinguishes between a managerial model of knowledge creation and a research model, and she discusses their characteristics in relation to the contemporary context where 'evidence-based policy-making goes hand in hand with a Euro-American understanding of the world

as full of uncertainties (...) [that] are not just political or economic but epistemological: we do not know enough – more research is needed’ (Strathern 2006: 193). While a research model is concerned with understanding actions and processes for their own sake, in a managerial model research is employed in order to seek ‘normative precepts by which to act or give advice’ (idem). The anthropologist outlines that she does not oppose the two models in a totalizing way and she admits that they are often employed in combination in today’s academic context. She suggests that each of the two models should be seen as representing a specific point in ‘a particular Euro-American oscillation between the condition of knowing through investigation (research) and the condition of asking what is to be done with that knowledge (management)’ (ibid p. 195). From this perspective, the project that framed my doctoral research can be seen as rather expressing a managerial model of knowledge creation, where knowledge is produced with the scope of informing future technological, or policy-based, interventions in relation to domestic energy demand reduction. These possible future applications of the knowledge that the LEEDR project is expected to deliver are part of the wider management process of reducing the UK’s carbon emissions by the year 2050, legislated in the Climate Change Act.

When the research carried out by following a managerial model is also defined as interdisciplinary, a main problem that can arise, as outlined by Strathern (2006), is the criteria for evaluating it. Interdisciplinarity is something else than a discipline; it is a dialogue between disciplines. For Strathern (2006), a discipline ‘is a body of data, a set of methods, a field of problematics; it is also a bundle of yardsticks, that is, criteria for evaluating products and maintaining standards’ (ibid p. 199). An important framework for evaluation offered by a discipline is, in Strathern’s (2006) view, criticism. In contrast, interdisciplinary endeavours cannot be evaluated inside similar frameworks: ‘the single outcome, the integrated collaboration, is impossible to measure against its own diverse origins’ (ibid p. 201). In this situation, Strathern sees the scope of interdisciplinarity to be in the possibility of initiating criticism as a way of letting oneself to be captured by the concerns of a different discipline. Thus, the potential of interdisciplinary work appears after the completion of the disciplinary research, at the point when one asks what is to be done with the knowledge that was gained: ‘interdisciplinary collaborations work best not as tools (means) in

research, but as representations (signs) of desired ends in knowledge management' (ibid p. 200).

The second characteristic of the LEEDR context that was instrumental in the development of my research was the applied dimension. The position of working as part of an applied project as an anthropologist brings up discussions about taken for granted distinctions between 'applied anthropology' and 'academic anthropology', as I discussed in more detail in the methodological chapter. As several anthropologists conducting applied research have argued, from the standpoint of the academia, applied work may still be viewed as 'impure' and compromised (Roberts 2006, Wright 2006, Sunderland and Denny 2007). Sillitoe (2007) argues that these two forms of anthropological research should not be regarded in opposition, and he suggests that 'academic research is often a prerequisite for flourishing applied work' (Sillitoe 2007: 161). In order to move forward the discussion from a dichotomous conflict to a form of reconciliation that would contribute to the advancement of both types of endeavours, he asks how the discipline of anthropology can be applied. He suggests that there are two ways in which the idea of applying anthropology can be understood: applying the methods of anthropology; and investigating the applicability of the knowledge that anthropologists have learned through their fieldwork and that they have 'systematized in various ways using the theories of the moment' (Sillitoe 2007: 155). Both approaches could be equally fruitful, even if they are based upon different sets of findings. Applying anthropological methods to the study of contemporary questions can bring a fresh perspective on a set of research interests that have previously been conscientiously delimited and defined, such as the concern with the ways in which people interact with energy meters (Hargreaves et al. 2010). This type of problem-solving approach is often what is expected from anthropologists working as part of interdisciplinary energy research projects, where they are often regarded as 'people experts' (Henning 2005). Applying the knowledge that the anthropologists have gained through long-term ethnographic fieldwork is a process that necessitates a wider time-frame (Rabinow et al. 2008). It requires the opportunities of engaging in long-term fieldwork and of having an open and flexible research agenda that would allow one to change focus by following serendipitous findings and relationships; and of having the readiness, after analysing this knowledge in relation to a corpus of anthropological theory, to look back at it, again,

from the standpoint of an applied agenda. In this more 'traditional' anthropological approach to fieldwork, one is required to momentarily suspend any concerns towards applications, and to engage in a learning process that would unfold what are the important ideas, meanings and processes in relation to which one's research participants organize and make sense of their lives. This knowledge corresponds to a research model, in Strathern's (2006) conceptualization, and it is legitimate in itself. The reinterpretation of this knowledge from the standpoint of an applied agenda would be a whole different process, and which would produce a new corpus of knowledge. In my thesis, it is this form of applied anthropology that I seek. After having interpreted my findings in relation to existent anthropological theory, in the previous three empirical chapters, this last chapter represents the beginning of a process of secondary analysis, which follows concerns with possible applications in relation to the domestic sustainability agenda, which is discussed in the next section.

3. Questioning the positioning of domestic energy consumption research

In the introduction to their collective volume on anthropological perspectives on the study of cultural ideas about energy in various societies around the world, Strauss, Rupp and Love (2013) outline that 'because of the necessity of institutions to manage energy flows, and because of the necessity of energy flows to individual agency, an anthropology of energy is necessarily political' (2013: 12). Institutions that regulate energy markets and that create systems of transaction for energy resources and for carbon emissions are, arguably, the main actors in changing 'energyscapes' (ibid p. 11), at national and transnational levels. However, in public-funded research projects focused on reducing energy demand these institutions are, sometimes, taken for granted: they represent the context that made the research possible, and the results of the research need to be 'delivered' to them in order to inform further forms of planning and regulation.

As a consequence, researchers working in what could be defined as one-sided projects oriented only towards the laypeople-end can be regarded by research participants as representatives and 'translators' of the national environmental

agenda to local communities and to domestic consumers, in a 'top-down' perspective. As Hobson (2003, 2011) identified, and as it was also the case in my research, this agenda of domestic sustainable consumption is often considered unjust by laypeople: they express the feeling that, by changing their domestic practices and by 'doing their bit', they are not making any real difference, if the forms of action that the government takes are inefficient. Thus, if publicly-funded researchers can sometimes be oblivious of the political entanglements that frame the domestic sustainability agenda, everyday people are not. I argue that when working as part of a project that promotes domestic sustainability, critical awareness of the context that frames the research needs to be part of the process of interpretation of one's findings. This does not necessarily require a change of perspective from everyday people's actions to the processes through which the environment was formulated as a political project (Macnaghten 2003, Urry 2011). But it requires questioning one's assumptions in designing, and in carrying out, a research project that responds to the domestic sustainability agenda. I follow this argument by focusing on two strands in the formulation of the domestic sustainability agenda in research and in policy. In this section, I will look at how domestic space has been conceptualised in literature that reports on findings of applied projects that investigate domestic energy demand. In the fifth section, I will address the temporal feature of the environmental policy agenda in the UK, as expressed in the Climate Change Act, in relation to the temporalities employed by my participants in their everyday lives.

Discussing social sciences scholarly approaches to domestic sustainability, the geographer Guy Hawkins observes that 'the household invoked in environmental policy is highly normalised and constituted through specific empirical processes. In contrast to this, "home" emerges as a complex spatial and temporal field where everyday life unfolds' (Hawkins 2011: 69). In other words, the 'domestic' in the 'domestic energy demand reduction' agenda, and what different people refer to as 'home', are not the same entity. The first one represents the level of residential consumption, which, in addition to the energy consumption of the commercial, public, and industrial sectors, gives the equation of the national amounts of energy consumption, and of carbon emissions. The second one is a site of dwelling, where people carry on their lives and attribute meaning to their experiences, sometimes in the company of others. In order to link the abstract notion of the household that has

'appropriate' levels of energy consumption attributed to, to the idea (Douglas 1991), and to the experience, of home, an approach to homes 'as places where people consume energy' has been often adopted in interdisciplinary research on energy consumption, as a premise to build further investigations upon.

While providing a good-enough framework for linking physical and social sciences approaches in order to obtain research funding, this premise could limit considerably the interpretation of one's findings to an area of applications that assume the household as a site for government intervention and regulation. This perspective expresses a vision of social change as a unidirectional process that starts in institutions and that is subsequently adopted by individuals, who adapt their habits and behaviour in the face of societal 'external' transformations. In this vision, the cultural domains of private-domestic and public-'politico-jural' (Fraser 1990, Yanagisako 1979, Yanagisako & Delaney 1995) appear as essentially divided in relation to potential enactments and expressions of political power.

As Hobson (2011) argued, scholars adopting Foucault's ideas on governmentality have criticized the discourses and the intentions of governmental interventions related to the domestic sustainability agenda for trying to impose a vision of 'a self-reflexive individual taking responsibility for knowing and reducing his or her emissions' (Rutland and Aylett 2008: 642) and for aiming to create a 'responsible, carbon-calculating individual' (Slocum 2004: 765). A research focus on domestic energy demand reduction was also challenged, Hobson (2011) shows, by scholars who chose, instead, to look at community energy projects which, they argued, can be seen as sites of agency, as 'a means for political activity on the part of the broad mass of citizens who join not just for social interaction but also to be actively involved in the making of public policy' (Hoffman and High-Pippert 2005: 399).

The geographer Kersty Hobson (2011) suggests that there are ways of looking at domestic life that do not abandon the possibility of a form of personal environmental politics in favour of green governance techniques. She proposes an approach based on the work of Foucault (1990, 2000) on ethical practices, suggesting that 'one could develop one's own ethics as a way of resisting governmental imperatives' (Hobson 2011: 204), through forms of self-reflection and by constantly asking 'What do I aspire to be?' (Cordner 2008). Her argument, which I discussed in more detail in the theoretical chapter, represents an essential point of reference for the way in

which I situate my work in relation to the domestic sustainability research agenda. In the perspective advocated by Hobson (2011), the domestic becomes a site of political power, being no longer the counterpart of the public-‘politico-jural’ domain (Fraser 1990), but its continuation. Following Hobson’s (2011) argument, one can replace the ‘homes as places where people consume energy’ premise with a ‘homes as sites of action’ approach. In my dissertation I follow this latter approach.

One way in which this approach can be employed in interdisciplinary research of domestic energy consumption is by provisionally suspending a direct concern with energy demand in order to look at the forms of actions that people do inside their homes and that make them feel empowered – actions that are, in Foucault’s (1990, 2000) terms, ‘practices of freedom’. During my fieldwork, I found out that it is these actions that people value the most; and this discovery enabled me to develop the concept of ‘ordinary agency’. The anthropologists Strauss, Rupp and Love (2013) argue that ‘how people use energy is related to how people value it; and how people value energy is related to what it enables them to accomplish not only materially but also socially and culturally’ (2013: 15). By looking at the forms of ‘ordinary agency’ that are articulated and enacted inside the home, one momentarily loses a focus on domestic energy demand, only to recover it later, enriched and able to respond to questions that are not merely following a problem-solving approach – as, for example, a focus on the accommodation of a specific new technology, like the energy meter, might be argued to do, if separated from other issues that were of importance for the research participants.

By adopting the premise of ‘homes as sites of action’ and, most importantly, by proposing it at an institutional level, in policy formulations, a ‘constructive and positive slippage’ (Hobson 2011: 205) can begin to happen, with individuals and societal institutions overcoming a crisis of trust (Beck & Beck-Gernstein 2002, Giddens 1994), in order to engage together towards enacting a more sustainable future. In the fifth section, I suggest some ways in which this collaborative approach can be expressed by mediating between the temporalities of institutions and the temporalities of everyday domestic life.

4. Family-style living and energy consumption

When the LEEDR project advertised for participants, they called for 'home-owner families'. In this description, neither a suggestion of class, nor of demographic characteristics – such as the size and the 'type' of the family (nuclear, extended, or single-parent), the civil status of the couple, or their sexual orientation – was present. Still, the families who volunteered – the families who defined themselves as 'home-owner families', and who were interested to take part in the project – were all families where the adults were heterosexual and married, and who had children. With the exception of a single-parent family, and of an extended family comprising the maternal grandmother living in, all families were two-parent nuclear families. From the twenty family-participants, eighteen could be described, in terms of income and education, as 'middle-class', while the other two could be described – and they defined themselves during interviews – as being 'working-class'. While this might represent, largely, a characteristic of the provincial locality where the research was set, it also shows that, no matter how diverse contemporary forms of cohabiting might be, when it comes to represent one's cohabiting group as a family to a team of public-funded researchers – who, by addressing the questions formulated by a public funding body, might be seen as representing the national government, the 'traditional' representation of family takes precedence in front of other, alternative, representations.

What is it that makes the construct of family in the UK to appear and to be expressed as 'enduring', as a 'pillar of supposed stability' (Silva and Smart 1999: 2-3), in the face of various other social changes? As discussed in greater detail in the previous chapter, for looking at English middle-class kinship in my thesis, I follow the theoretical apparatus developed by Strathern (1992). According to her, the 'first fact' of English kinship is 'the individuality of persons' (Strathern 1992: 14). The articulation of the concept of family, can, thus, be regarded as following what Macfarlane (1978) calls English individualism, and that he describes as being an important cultural trait, dating centuries before the beginnings of industrialization. English individualistic ideas suggest that, through domesticity, one is entitled to lead a form of self-supporting and self-sufficient lifestyle that limits the amount of close relationships with non-kin. Strathern (1992) suggests that later, in Victorian England, with the appearance and development of the middle classes, the domestic space

came to stand for personal cultivation and individual improvement: 'The internal (what is within persons) has been literalised as an interior (residential) space' (1992: 103). Furthermore, in post-Thatcherite Britain, individualism, as both self-improvement, and self-sufficiency and privacy, is achieved through family-style living as an experience, and as a display of right choosing and acting. The ideas that 'the quality of home life has an independent measure' (ibid p. 149), and that opting for a family-style lifestyle shows one's capacity for morality, together with the assumption that people naturally know what is right by having had internalized convention as personal style, reveal families as distinct universes following internal self-designed and self-imposed norms.

During my fieldwork, my research participants used the concept of 'family' in both descriptive, and explanatory, ways. They used it to describe the form of social organization that organized their experience of domesticity – a family-style lifestyle, in Strathern's words –; and they used it to explain the reasons why they did specific things in their house – such as leaving on the landing light overnight – or the reasons why they did things in specific ways. For example, several families explained that for drying their laundry they would normally use the tumble dryer *because* they are a family (of four or more) and they have a lot of laundry. Thus, 'family' was understood to be a self-sufficient entity that had both agency of its own – family as a domestic 'reality' that asked for specific goods and practices, such as a tumble dryer, in order to continue to exist – and that collected the agency of individual family members in a concentrated form, as people would engage in 'family time' routines, or create an 'elusive presences' form of sociality, in order to 'do' (Morgan 1996) family. But, if a lifestyle can have agency in itself, then, who, or what, is responsible for (the consequences of) the practices and the commodities this lifestyle entails? It is neither the lifestyle, nor the individual persons who choose it, and who, by choosing it, have already shown their capacity for morality, as I discussed in the previous chapter. This is, then, a complex societal problem that needs to be addressed in much broader ways, than just by asking families to reduce their energy consumption, *and* still stay families.

In his study of British green communes founded in the 1970s, the geographer David Pepper shows that communal living appeared and developed as an alternative to the nuclear family, which was considered a form of social organisation that was 'unnaturally exclusive' (1991: 10), and which represented a terrain for gender

inequalities and for exploitation. As an individualistic unit, oriented towards itself, the nuclear family was seen as incapable of generating, and promoting, an altruistic way of living that would account for the needs of the environment, and that would let all its members to feel equally empowered. Concerning the first issue, there still seems to be an irreconcilable everyday dilemma between the ideas of caring for one's family, and caring for the environment. During the first LEEDR interview with Cynthia's and Jeff's family, conducted by a researcher from the discipline of design that I accompanied, Jeff mentioned that his brother used to live off the land, in a commune, until his first baby was born. After this event, he and his partner moved back to a town where he got a job, and, thus, constant income, which allowed him to look after the baby's material needs much better than he could have done by only counting upon cultivating the land, as part of a commune. The conclusion of this story, which linked this narrative with other similar stories that I came across during my fieldwork, was the unquestionable fact that, once one has a baby, going back to live as part of the established social order was the best choice. Cynthia expressed this dilemma in relation to their use of the tumble dryer. She said that they would like to be able to use the machine much less frequently than they do at the moment, but, when school uniforms, or work clothes, or other frequently used items need to be washed and dried by the next morning, they do not have a choice, but to use the tumble dryer. Self-sufficiency in doing the laundry, as opposed to the situation when one needs to rely upon the weather in order to get the laundry dried, was, here, linked to normative expectations related to living as part of the established social order, and to opting for convention as a way of expressing right acting and one's capacity for morality. When faced with an ambiguous action, which did not represent the 'greenest' or the 'lowest-carbon' choice, people emphasized the positive role this action had in their family life, where keeping up the routine was seen as positive, in comparison to a potential disruption that a demand to account for the needs of other entities besides their kin could have brought.

In her book based on ethnographic research of a small Norwegian town, Norgaard (2011) looks at what she calls the socially organized denial of climate change in everyday life, which she defines 'as the process by which individuals collectively distance themselves from information because of norms of emotion, conversation, and attention and by which they use an existing cultural repertoire of strategies in the process' (Norgaard 2011: 9). An important such cultural strategy that she

identifies is based on local cultural homogeneity, and on a strong emphasis placed upon tradition, which provides a normative definition for the concept of being a 'good person', as well as a set of 'proper' ways to do any type of everyday activity. The way denial is organized, Norgaard (2011) argues, can differ with the cultural context.

In my research, it was not a process of denial as such that I learnt to be instrumental for people's responses to the idea of climate change. My research participants were sensible to environmental concerns, and many of them engaged in a variety of sustainable actions, such as growing their own food, cycling to work, or using green energy produced by the solar panels that they had installed on their roof. But, when everyday choices had to be made between an action with good (long-term) consequences for the environment, and an action whose (immediate) consequences would suit one's family, the family was considered more important than the environment – or, in Strathern's (1992) conceptualization, 'culture' was considered more important than, or 'superior' to, 'nature'. In other words, the normativity carried by the concept of middle-class family appeared to be much stronger, and much wider adopted, and enacted, than possible norms of caring for the environment, in the provincial context where I carried out my fieldwork.

Concerning the second problem of the nuclear family identified by Pepper's (1991) informants, that of being a form of social organisation based on inequality and on everyday forms of domination and oppression, my fieldwork showed a different story. As discussed in the previous chapter, my research participants were concerned with creating forms of sociality that involved both togetherness and independence, thus contributing to 'doing' family (Morgan 1996), and encouraging individual interests and preoccupations, at the same time. These concerns showed 'ethical imagination' (Moore 2011) in developing relationships of mutual empowerment. The results of Pepper's (1991) study show that life in a commune does not eliminate relationship problems and the unequal distribution of power. He suggests that, by living in communes, people 'merely swap one set of family problems (nuclear) for another (extended)' (Pepper 1991: 151). The potential change of focus that might have happened in the last two decades, between Pepper's research and mine, from a perspective on commonality and individualism as mutually exclusive, to a concern with achieving and experiencing togetherness and independence simultaneously, shows that the nuclear family is not a form of

social organisation that is oppressive in itself, but, rather, that people are able to make this form of co-habiting into what they wish it to be.

Therefore, the problem is not that the nuclear family is the dominant form of social organisation in the English context, but that the middle-class family is equated to a dominant form of morality that is contained in its very articulation: the morality of having a family-style lifestyle and of bringing up children is seen as sufficient in itself and it does not leave room, and time, for other ethical concerns oriented towards other entities than kin. By drawing upon Strathern's (1992) work on English middle-class kinship, which I discussed in more detail in the previous chapter, I suggested that, if having a family-style lifestyle embeds convention, and if convention is seen to express morality, then opting for a family-style lifestyle shows one's capacity for morality and for right acting. The fact that concerns with the environment, and concerns with one's kin, were often articulated in mutual opposition, should not be seen as expressing a fundamental conflict, but only as illustrating one way in which these ideas were connected in the domain of everyday life, at one particular point in time. In making and explaining various everyday choices, such as those discussed earlier, my participants made appeal to the morality embedded in having a family-style lifestyle, as it represented the principal moral system that they could communicate to a team of researchers interested in reducing domestic energy demand, in a secular middle-class provincial context. Making a set of everyday choices that would favour the environment to one's kin immediate comfort might be regarded as actions associated with alternative lifestyles that promote communal living and a return to the land. But, as these alternative lifestyles do not embed convention, they do not have the capacity to express morality in the same measure as the idea of family-style living does.

This shows that, probably, it would be difficult to reach a growing concern with the environment, if a set of normative ideas about family-style living as inherently moral is being maintained, and promoted, at the same time. Thus, when communicating research findings, it is not just that wide audiences would need to be given *more* information about the environmental impact of their everyday choices, but that the assumption that a family-style lifestyle embeds morality by default, in front of any other possible lifestyle, should be publicly and openly questioned.

5. Domestic time and the Climate Change Act

I will now discuss the possible applications that the work developed in the third and fourth chapters, on the time modes of spontaneity and anticipation, could have.

My theoretical framework for approaching the topic of time follows the work of the anthropologist Carol Greenhouse (1996), as I discussed in more detail in the first chapter. In her book about time, politics and culture, Greenhouse (1996) argues that cultural models of time are inextricably linked to cultural understandings of agency, as 'time articulates people's understandings of agency: literally, what makes things happen and what makes acts relevant in relation to social experience, however conceived' (1996: 1). By carrying out a detailed analysis of previous anthropological approaches to the topic of time, she suggests that there are mainly two forms of time, both geometric, that are employed in ethnographic writing: the cyclical – that is identified in ideas about nature, rituals and the sacred – and the linear, which is used to understand progress and sequence. Greenhouse shows that the universalisation of linear time as 'the more mundane, profane, practical, or objectively "true" construction of time' (1996: 34) served at naturalising particular forms of social order. In assuming linear time to be *real* or 'true' time, there is an inherent legitimation of the dominant institutional forms. However, one should not assume that this temporal shape organizes all forms of human experience – such as, I argue, imagination, taking action on impulse, or forms of domestic sociality – in all cultures: 'Linear time, which is the cultural preserve of national histories and the public institutions comprised in them, dominates those institutional settings only to the extent that the people who inhabit them (whether managers or employees, presidents or citizens) believe that linear time has a transcendent reality that allows it to absorb all the other, potentially rival temporal idioms that also suffuse daily life' (Greenhouse 1996: 209). An important role of the ethnographic endeavour would be, in such contexts, to describe, and to conceptualize, some of the multiple formulations of time and of agency that are not necessarily recognized as such by dominant institutional forms.

In my research, I have identified and described spontaneity and anticipation as cultural models of time and as forms of agency that are enacted as part of the routines and of the contingencies of everyday life. I have called these forms of

agency 'ordinary agencies' that are related to 'non-conscious' (unconscious, tacit, and non-intentional) acts of creating meaning, such as imagination and taking action on impulse. Moreover, I showed that the value of these forms of 'ordinary agency' does not stand in producing conspicuous and immediate effects on society. The ordinary agency engendered by spontaneity consists in generating feelings of empowerment over the people who enact it; these feelings of empowerment could subsequently be *conditions* for social change, as they extend one's 'ethical imagination' (Moore 2011) regarding one's relationships with oneself and with others. Similarly, anticipation can be seen as triggering the agency of the *possible*. The imagination of one's future agentic engagement with the world is, in itself, a form of agency. This form of 'ordinary agency', expressed also in actions of hope (Miyazaki 2004), refers to the 'meanings people attach to questions of possibility' (Greenhouse 1996: 183), rather than to individual self-directed actions.

As models of time, spontaneity and anticipation show different ways in which one could play with, blend, and knead the present and the future together. Spontaneity is an event in which a present want and a future fulfilment are uniquely overlapped in the performance of a 'happy action' (Taylor 1979). Anticipation is the act of making the future present by imagining a possibility, and it can be employed for an unlimited number of times during a period of waiting for a future event. Here, the direction of the time can be reversed, so that, in moments of anticipation, the future travels back to the present; then it travels forward to its former place; then it travels back to the present once more whenever anticipation is employed again. Below, by following the conventional geometrical model expressed in the conceptualization of the linear and of the cyclical time, I propose a visual representation for spontaneity (Figure 11) and one for anticipation (Figure 12).

The way in which I drew spontaneity represents the basic movement that is used in sewing and in waving; this also looks like the first half of the action of making a knot. Spontaneity happens as fast as all these three types of actions, and its results can be seen immediately, as the result of only one stitch is immediately visible in the layout of an embroidery canvas. Spontaneity is, thus, an effortless and organic way of modifying the reality, of changing the world.

Anticipation is a back and forth movement between present and future, which can also involve the past: for example, in anticipating the next Christmas one could

remember other past Christmases that one experienced. In contrast to spontaneity – which depicts a moment – the back and forth movement that is anticipation can be the underlying temporal pattern of a whole day, or of longer periods of time, such as a year or more in the case of writing a doctoral thesis, when one anticipates the end of this process in the shape of a ‘finite’ material object. Anticipation is a means of living not ‘only’ in the present and it expresses the complexity of the domain of everyday life by emphasizing ‘temporal diversity’ (Albert 2002, Geissler 2002), or the multiplicity of ‘times’ (Adam 1995).

Figure 9 Linear time (my drawing)

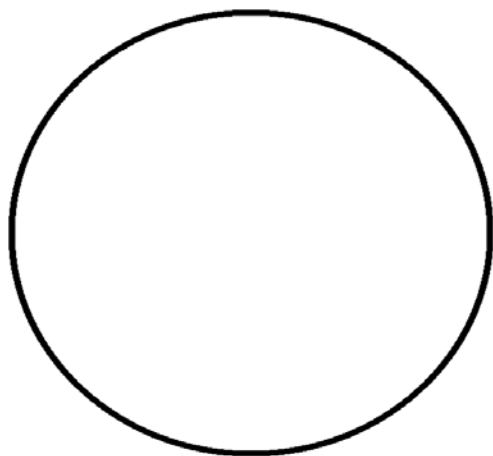


Figure 10 Cyclical time (my drawing)

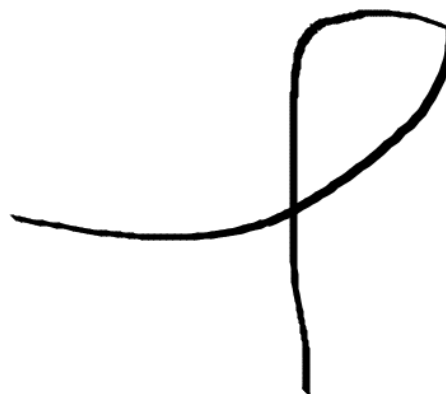


Figure 11 Spontaneity (my drawing)



Figure 12 Anticipation (my drawing)

Both spontaneity and anticipation can be employed as temporal modes in themselves, or in combination with other temporalities, such as linear or cyclical, which are used and expressed by other individual agents and institutions. Separately, or in diverse combinations, they are all part of the multiplicity of temporalities that exist, concomitantly, in one's life. Some of these, such as linear time, can be seen as the dominant temporality of the social structure in the Western world (Greenhouse 1996). Having been institutionalized as the time of public life, linear time is also the model invoked in some capitalist societies in relation to planning, ideas of efficiency and specific systems of mass production, such as the 'on-time' model (Hochschild 1997). A 'well-planned time-saver schedule' attitude towards time, related to the world of work in the USA, was identified, by Hochschild (1997), to be spreading inside the domain of home, in the way her participants tried to efficiently organize their family time. However, she suggests that her participants wished for 'not simply more time, but a less alienating sense of time' (Hochschild 1997: 52): they wanted to approach time at home differently than at work. As I have shown in the third chapter, spontaneity expresses a different attitude to time: as the ability to do something unexpected, it liberates people from the constraints of efficiency related to a neoliberal context and to actions of 'making', expressing, instead, 'ordinary agency' and actions of 'doing'. When enacted in a linear time-frame – the time of public life that organizes experiences of work and general activities of scheduling in relation to wider social systems and institutions – spontaneous actions can be regarded as directed towards interrupting the uniform temporal linearity in order to create wished for future moments and to make them happen. Applying spontaneity to linear time would generate a new geometrical shape, represented below in Figure 13. I propose to regard this drawing as an advancement to existent understandings and representations of linear time, which will show that people can act upon linear time in order to make it complex and eventful.

Similarly, when anticipation is used in a cyclical temporal framework, such as when one anticipates the Monday pub quiz, or the French dancing that takes place every second Wednesday of the month, the form of temporality generated could take the shape of a spiral (Figure 14). The drawings below should be seen as a creative exercise meant to open up anthropological imaginations towards other forms of

temporality beyond the linear and the cyclical, rather than as a 'scientific' representation.



Figure 13 Spontaneity and linear time (my drawing)



Figure 14 Anticipation and cyclical time (my drawing)

While I describe spontaneity and anticipation as cultural models of time that emerged from my fieldwork with English families in domestic settings located in a small provincial town, my research and my identity as a researcher that the relationships with my participants have been built upon, can be regarded as situated within a different temporal framework, set by the national environmental policy. Linear time is the temporal form that underlies the environmental concerns in the UK that the LEEDR project, which frames the context of my research, responds to. These concerns are expressed in the Climate Change Act, a document set by the UK's Parliament in 2008. This document legally binds the Parliament to reduce the country's carbon emissions with 80% by the year 2050, in relation to the 1990 baseline. By setting this target, the Climate Change Act creates a linear time-frame where the solution to a present problem is left to a distant future moment of hopeful

revelation. Both the numbers used in the act, a reduction of 80%, and the year 2050 are high, and they seem unrealistic, and as part of a Sci-Fi domain, rather than an everyday achievable possibility, such as a target of a 15% reduction by the year 2015, for example, would be. At a summer school organized by the UK's Energy Research Centre (UKERC), and at other interdisciplinary events on energy research that I attended during my PhD, directors and managers working for UKERC and for other institutions concerned with energy research approached, in public presentations, the 2050 targets as unachievable, adding, with an ironic smile – or manic grin – that 'fortunately I won't be here by then'. As they estimated their biological disappearance to occur before 2050, the speakers did not consider themselves responsible for achieving the targets; rather, the 'future' in itself was expected to provide some fortuitous solutions. If this is how 'people in charge', who make a living by formulating funding calls for energy research projects, see their role in reducing energy demand, then how could one translate this environmental concern to everyday people? While the 2050 targets are accompanied by an interim target to reduce emissions by 34% in 2020 and by 'carbon budgets' covering periods of four years, these intermediate targets are not widely and publically discussed, as the general debate is framed by the 2050 targets. The statement of emissions for the first 'carbon budget' period – that was between 2008 and 2012 – is expected to be published this year. Meanwhile, the statement of emissions for the year 2011 shows a net carbon decrease by 4% between 2010 and 2011, and it explains that this reduction was due to the warmer weather conditions in 2011 that resulted in a decrease of residential gas use (Department of Energy and Climate Change 2013). This formulation leaves the responsibility to achieve the 2050 targets to the 'future' and to 'nature' – here, the weather. One could argue that a linear time-frame, whose end point is beyond the biological mortality of most of the members of the actual government and parliament, and whose segments – the 'carbon budgets' – are made by set numbers, rather than by types of proposed actions, might not be the best form of temporality for laypeople to act within. This is not a critique directed towards the original proponents and signatories of the Climate Change Act, but just an observation about the incommensurability of the targets and of the time-frame proposed by this document, in relation to the everyday domestic temporalities and understandings of agency that laypeople enact.

In this context, I see my position as a researcher working for an applied interdisciplinary project concerned with reducing energy demand in a given temporal-frame, as responding to a double bind. First, in my relationships with my participants, by being part of the LEEDR project, I am regarded as a representative of the linear temporality of environmental concerns that is set by the Climate Change Act. Second, as an anthropologist who completed long-term ethnographic fieldwork, I wish to 'give voice' to my participants, and to describe, conceptualize, and express the models of time and the forms of 'ordinary agency' that they employ in their everyday lives, to wider institutions and structures. This conflict of temporalities might be what made my findings possible in the first place, as my participants welcomed me in the nitty-gritty of their ordinary lives, talked about and enacted 'ordinary agencies' in front of me, while I was, arguably, a representative of the 'neoliberal agency' model (Gershon 2011) assumed by the linear time-frame of the 2050 targets. The fact that they let me discover the time modes of spontaneity and anticipation could, thus, be seen as a response to the linear time-frame that I was representing. I see the act of accommodating their folk models of time and agency in my research not as a question of translation – to 'higher' institutions and structures – but rather as a question of mediation.

Thus, to reconcile the linear time-frame expressed by the Climate Change Act and by the existence of the applied project that my doctoral research is part of, and the temporalities of everyday life employed by my participants, I suggest that a greater effort can be made in the way in which the goals of reducing the country's carbon emissions are formulated. Actions of spontaneity and of anticipation can be argued to involve energy consumption: for example, by using digital media to find out the answer to a question of momentous concern and by leaving a light on for a family member that is expected to return home. But what they also do is to generate agency: they make people feel that they can contribute to changing the world; they are, in Foucault's (1990, 2000) terms, 'practices of freedom'. Thus, it is exactly these everyday actions that should be encouraged, and not suppressed, by 'behaviour-change' interventions and strategies developed in relation to the domestic sustainability agenda. By starting from a 'homes as sites for action' premise, and by acknowledging everyday domestic moments of interruption as political action (Hobson 2011), a collaborative approach to sustainability could emerge. The recognition, and the adoption, of a more complex model of time and of

agency in the formulation of the carbon emission reduction goals could be translated into a variety of propositions that would encourage public debate and collective action.

Building upon the time mode of anticipation, schedules and slots for energy saving could be proposed as cyclical occurrences, or in relation to events that are recognized and celebrated widely, such as Christmas. For example, December could be proposed as a month when people should switch off all their energy-consuming appliances ten minutes earlier than normally, every evening, in preparation for the higher energy consumption that might occur during the Christmas day. Committing to this proposition would be a form of marking time itself, by counting down the days before Christmas with an *action* that would be as visible as using an advent calendar. Besides celebratory events, anticipation in relation to a cyclical time model could be engaged by creating low-profile events related to domestic everyday preoccupations, such as the challenge of not using the tumble dryer every second weekend of the month, no matter how the weather is; or of switching the heating off earlier on Mondays, as a post-weekend action aimed at making up for the potentially higher levels of energy consumption that were reached on Saturday and Sunday.

Addressing the time mode of spontaneity, a competition to save energy through hacking could be proposed. This would involve building low energy-consuming devices from scratch, or combining various devices in a creative way that would lead to saving energy. As I described in the previous chapters, my participants are already used to finding out ways of combining the technologies they own in new assemblages that show their creativity and individuality. A good example of everyday creativity is in Iris and Steve's recounting of a Christmas holiday, when they accessed YouTube through the Wii on their TV in the kitchen to play a video of a crackling fire, while broadcasting a Christmas jukebox radio station by attaching an iPad to speakers. This form of creativity that involves spontaneous actions could be encouraged and directed towards the goal of energy saving.

I have given a few examples of calls to collective action that would fit into existent domestic temporalities. These types of programs could provide the opportunity for the people who would respond and take action to feel empowered and responsible, and to take further actions in relation to environmental, or other types of social,

concerns. With these ideas, I want to show that the incongruity between the models of time assumed in environmental policy, and the ones that people enact in their everyday lives, is not unresolvable; but it is an issue that just needs to be observed and tackled, rather than ignored. By developing, in environmental policy, a more elaborate approach to time that takes into consideration 'ordinary agencies' and the forms of temporality of the everyday, this incongruity could be transformed into complexity, and the conflict experienced by a double-bind researcher could reach a creative resolution.

6. Conclusions

In this chapter, I situated my approach to interdisciplinary work and to applied anthropology, and I discussed some possible applications of my ethnographic findings. The reasons why I defined my position in relation the context of my research only in the last chapter is in the scope of my thesis to advance existent anthropological conceptualizations of agency, scope that I was able to realize by momentarily suspending my concerns with possible applications of my findings in relation to energy demand reduction. I theoretically legitimise this process of suspension by employing Strathern's (2006) approach to interdisciplinarity, and Sillitoe's (2007) perspective on applied anthropology.

While being the last chapter of my doctoral thesis, this chapter also represents the beginning of a new process of reinterpreting my anthropological analysis in relation to environmental concerns. Here, I argued for a 'homes as sites of action' approach for future research projects addressing domestic sustainability, and I introduced new ways of conceptualizing the possible difficulties that hinder a straightforward achievement of sustainability. Some of these difficulties, I found, are in the powerful constellations of normativity and morality attributed to having a family-style lifestyle in English middle-class contexts; and in the incongruity between the temporality expressed by the climate Change Act and the temporalities that laypeople enact in their everyday domestic lives. I hope that the propositions that I sketched out in this chapter could be further developed, in order to improve future research formulations in the areas of domestic energy consumption and domestic sustainability.

Conclusions

The conclusions of my dissertation start by discussing the advancements brought by the theoretical work that I developed, in two strands: focusing on human agency and on time; they continue by summing up the contributions developed in the empirical chapters of my thesis, on spontaneity, anticipation and 'family time', as well as my methodological contributions; next, I discuss the limitations of my study; and I end up by looking at possible future directions and applications of my research.

Human agency

Focusing on domestic everyday life of middle-class English families, in the context provided by a medium-sized provincial town situated in the Midlands area, this dissertation proposed a lens for looking at everyday actions as meaningful for social transformation, and as expressive of human agency, by developing the concept of 'ordinary agency'. Situated within a theoretical framework that brought together recent developments in anthropological theory on surpassing, firstly, the tensions between social constructivist and vitalist approaches (Moore 2011) and, secondly, the influence that neoliberal contexts have upon the ways in which social sciences scholars look at human agency (Gershon 2011), the concept of 'ordinary agency' refers to 'non-conscious' – unconscious, tacit, and non-intentional – acts of creating meaning, such as imagination and taking action on impulse. These types of actions can be regarded, by following the Aristotelian distinction between 'doing' and 'making', as activities of 'doing': actions where means and ends coincide, as the end is the act itself – the scope is no other than just doing. In this respect, the approach to the domain of the practical followed by this thesis is congruent to the regard on praxis that Foucault (1990; 2000) fosters in his conceptualization of 'ethical practices', and that is further advanced by Moore (2011) through the concept of 'ethical imagination'. The main theoretical contribution of this dissertation, therefore, can be regarded to be the building up of a theoretical framework, and the development of a working concept, that supports the opening-up of what is considered to be human agency. This development could be further employed and

advanced in research looking at various aspects of life and at various forms of activity that might represent 'doing' rather than 'making', such as sports activities, performing arts, hacking (Coleman 2013), flash mobs and other various forms of protest, human-animal relationships, countryside walking, play.

Time

The forms of 'ordinary agency' discussed in this thesis, I argued, were articulated in relation to alternative understandings of, and engagements with, time, such as spontaneity, anticipation and 'family time'. I approached the relationship between time and agency by following the work of Greenhouse (1996) on this topic. She argues that the models of time that are developed and followed by various social groups articulate the understandings of agency of the people who are part of these groups. In my dissertation, I proposed to regard spontaneity, anticipation and 'family time' as time modes developed in domestic middle-class English contexts, and that express counterdiscourses to the dominance of a linear form of temporality. These time modes, which co-exist with linear time, bring out the creativity and the eventfulness that can rest within the domain of the everyday, and they work by blending and kneading the present and the future together in various ways. Spontaneity and anticipation make the future present, by creating wished-for future moments and by making them happen; and, respectively, by coating the present with the imagination of the future. 'Family time' aims at making the present future by prolonging it, by operating into the present continuous mode. My contribution to the anthropological corpus of literature on time stands in identifying and conceptualizing a set of time modes, or approaches to time, that I situated in the domain of domesticity and of everyday life. Spontaneity, anticipation and 'family time' can, arguably, be regarded as cultural and as specifically related to the types of social groups that I conducted research with – middle-class English families. By describing, conceptualizing, and developing theoretical frameworks to situate these time modes, I created a precedent for future research interested in folk models of time beyond linear and cyclical temporalities. While Greenhouse (1996) mentions some examples of possible and critical counterdiscourses of time, such as creationism, laziness, superstition and witchcraft, she does not focus upon

explaining and theorising them, as the scope of her publication is a different one. My work provides an example of the ways in which one could ethnographically access, identify, and theoretically situate, understandings, engagements with, and enactments of, time. My approach could be inspiring of, and further advanced by, research on the relationships with time developed and expressed by other groups of people, of different ages and at different life stages than my participants, and living in various cultural contexts. I believe that a focus on time can contribute to developing new knowledge on the ways in which people approach, experience and convey meaning to everyday life, and that pursuing this focus would be a positive research endeavour that could complement what is already 'known' about specific groups from research focusing on 'problems' associated with class, income, health, or education.

Spontaneity

In order to situate spontaneity I proposed a theoretical framework based upon the work of the British philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe (2000[1957]; 1981) on intentionality and on her reconceptualization of the Aristotelian concept of 'practical truth'. I showed that, as a time-mode that articulates a counterdiscourse to linear time by making the future present, spontaneity expresses forms of 'ordinary agency' engendered by emotions associated with self-confidence and empowerment. At the same time, as a means of engagement with the world, spontaneity is characterized by 'sincerity in the way of doing' a task (Slade 1968). In the chapter dedicated to spontaneity, I discussed examples of spontaneous actions related to the use of digital devices, arguing that my participants used digital media in order to make a wider variety of wants attainable. Furthermore, I showed that the broadening of the category of immediately attainable wants can contribute to the development of new forms of sociality and to extending people's 'ethical imaginations' (Moore 2011). I believe that the conceptualization of spontaneity developed here, and based upon the philosophical idea drawn from Anscombe, that, in 'trying to get' what they want, people are 'doing the truth', can be further employed and advanced in research looking at other forms of spontaneous action, such as those related to protest and

to new forms of social movements that employ forms of communication based on new digital technologies that can provide immediacy.

Anticipation and the Mother-Multiple ontology

The time mode of anticipation was discussed in my thesis in relation to the concept of Mother-Multiple ontology. I identified two forms of anticipation – looking forward to and short-term anticipation – and I situated them in relation to a series of techniques of imagination, such as visual rehearsal and non-guided imagery. I discussed the forms of agency that can come from imagining possibilities, such as one's anticipated future agentic engagement with the world, as being the main expressions of 'ordinary agency' that anticipation engendered for my participants. In the chapter dedicated to anticipation, I also developed the concept of the Mother-Multiple ontological position, as describing a mode of being that any individual can access when acting as the caregiver of family members, pets, and the home itself as an entity – collection of elements which I called 'the domestic others'. Situated in relation to recent debates in anthropological theory about what was called the 'ontological turn' (Henare et al 2007; Viveiros de Castro et al 2014), and in relation to the analytical framework developed by Strathern (1988) for regarding persons as being conceived both individually and dividually – made of parts that correspond to relationships –, I conceptualized the ontology of the Mother-Multiple as a state of being that lets the individuals who access it to move from an individual to a dividual perspective. When occupying the position of the Mother-Multiple, one lets oneself be embodied by one's domestic others, accessing and enacting knowledge related to the character, habits, needs, preferences and dislikes of the others. My conceptualization of this analytic lever, together with my discussion of the ways in which people enact the Mother-Multiple through actions of anticipation and care shows a new way of looking at practices related to mothering, and opens up the domain of 'doing mothering' to people who are not necessarily biological mothers, females, or adults. I believe that my contribution could be further advanced both in research on motherhood and mothering practices, and in studies looking at practices of care in kinship groups. My conceptualization of the time mode of

anticipation could be employed in research on time, and on people's relationships with the future.

Family time

In looking at 'family time', I identified two forms of time – spontaneous 'quality moments' (Kremer-Sadlik and Paugh 2007) and evening times 'family time' – which are articulated together with two types of domestic sociality, both of which involve the use of digital devices, and which I called 'elusive togetherness' and 'physical togetherness and digital independence'. I situated the concept of 'family time' in relation to the (normative) notion of 'family' in Euro-American contexts and I approached the tensions between a social constructivist perspective that argues that 'family time' is 'an ideologically constituted form of prescription' (Gillis 1996: 17), and a focus on people's agency in developing a process of relationality (Gabb 2010) as a way of 'doing' family (Morgan 1996), through the lens provided by Strathern (1992). Following her discussion of the relationships between convention and choice in English middle-class kinship, I argued that *by* keeping 'family time' people 'do' convention and show their capacity for morality; while *what* they do during 'family time' is a matter of choice that reflects individuality and diversity. The form of 'ordinary agency' that 'family time' engages is, thus, related to challenging the uniformity of a dominant social ideology of (middle-class) family, through the enactment of everyday 'unconventional' practices, habits and actions. By following existent literature in English kinship, I suggested that 'family time' can be regarded as a concept that is used in order to 'measure' the quality of home life in 'family-style lifestyle' (Strathern 1992) settings; while making 'family time' can be seen as an everyday practice of 'creating relatedness' (Carsten 2000a). I believe that the work developed in this chapter contributes to, and advances existent literature on English kinship, through the description and conceptualization of a specific practice of creating relatedness, the practice of making 'family time', associated with the articulation of particular forms of domestic sociality. Further research on English (middle-class) kinship, as well as research on 'family time' and domestic sociality in other cultural contexts, could benefit from my findings, and, also, advance the theoretical perspective employed here.

Methods for the study of time

The methodological contribution of my dissertation stands in advancing existent methodological approaches to the topic of time, through the development of a series of new methods for looking at the ways in which people understand, engage with, and make time. The Tactile Time collage provided the participants with multi-sensory tools for expressing the ways in which they experienced time at different moments of the day; the Evening Time self-video recording activity focused specifically on evening 'family time' as a time of togetherness; and the Five Cups of Tea self-interviewing with video activity focused on moments of solitude and self-reflection, and on the type of time that the action of having a cup of tea, as a break or interruption in the flow of everyday activities, can articulate. I believe these methods could be employed in future research on time and they can be further adapted and advanced in order to suit different groups of participants, in different contexts.

Limitations

The main limitation of my thesis might be the fact that it lacks a firm grounding in one particular field of study. Rather than situating my work within one field, and as following a particular direction in that field, I developed my theoretical framework by bringing together publications of different foci, united only by a similar concern. This endeavour felt rather risky at times, as I was worried that my thesis would lack the theoretical depth that comes from studying methodically the affordances and the limitations of a particular direction, in a specific field. With this risk in mind, I still hope that the effort of bringing together recent discussions, from various contexts, upon the importance of human agency (Gershon 2011; Hobson 2011; Moore 2011), and upon the scholarly tools that can be developed for addressing this topic in new ways (Das 2007; Gershon 2011; Greenhouse 1996; Moore 2011), did not seem superficial, and that the results of this approach have proved to be fruitful.

Future directions and applications

The future directions that my research can be developed towards relate to the concerns expressed within the domestic sustainability research agenda. I believe that the possible applications of my findings, which I describe in the last chapter of the thesis, have the potential to influence the questions addressed in research projects following this agenda. My identification of the tensions between the morality associated with having a family-style lifestyle, and the notions of morality that can be related to low-carbon living, could open up the questions that are being addressed in research following the domestic sustainability agenda to approaches that are not merely problem-solving, but which could bring complexity into the discussion, by taking into consideration existent cultural values, meanings and understandings. An acknowledgment of the tensions between the temporal framework expressed by the Climate Change Act and the time modes developed and enacted by people in everyday domestic life could be translated into an approach, both in research and in policy-making, focused upon integrating these temporalities together in the process of planning, setting targets, and communicating these targets to the wider public.

Appendix: Mum's Cup

The video which accompanies this dissertation, titled *Mum's Cup*, is to be regarded both, generally, as an independent ethnographic video project, and, specifically, as a visual ethnographic component that supports the theoretical and conceptual work developed in the fourth chapter, on anticipation and the Mother-Multiple ontology. This video project is based on material filmed in solitude by the participants for the Five Cups of Tea self-interviewing activity; and it also contains short extracts from participant-made recordings of Evening Times activities, as well as short extracts of filming that I made with the participants for the LEEDR research of laundry practices.

Mum's Cup is a portrayal of four women's practices of self-reflection and ethical work (Foucault 1990, 2000), in relation to the expectations, contradictions, and their everyday experiences of being mothers in contemporary Britain. In this respect, the video addresses the topic of mothering, providing a commentary, from four perspectives, on the ways in which gender differences are being articulated inside the home, in the context provided by middle-class English kinship as a system of thought (Strathern 1992) and by a medium-sized provincial town, in the year 2012. At the same time, the video reveals a form of epistolary intimacy in the relationship between the ethnographer and the participants, manifested when the physically absent researcher is addressed through the object that she has handed on, the video camera. From this perspective, *Mum's Cup* reflects on the nature of ethnographic relationships between women, on empathy, and on friendship.

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