

Editorial

To strike an opening chord sufficiently sonorous, yet intricate, for this rich collection of Outlines – already the third, and the first out of two in one year – one must go to some excess: please forgive us.

Recently, while surfing aimlessly into the tiny hours of the night on the Internet, the editor came across the following:

“Over the past several years, several clinicians have reported cases of Internet addiction. Until recently, the associated psychopathology has been loosely described in the literature. Symptoms such as obsessive thoughts about the Internet, tolerance, diminished impulse control, inability to cease using the Internet, and withdrawal have been cited as characterizing unhealthy use of the Internet (Young, 1999). While the term Internet addiction has been used extensively, it seems to be somewhat of a misnomer (Davis, R.A., 1999). Addiction, as used in the literature, refers to a physiological dependence between a person and some stimulus, usually a substance. For this reason, the DSM-IV does not use addiction to describe pathological use or abuse of a substance or other such stimulus, nor does it describe compulsive gambling as an addiction. Instead, it favors the terms dependence

(for substances) and pathological (for gambling disorders). Therefore, for the remainder of this article, the term pathological Internet Use (PIU) shall be used to describe the set of symptoms previously described. (...) Generalized pathological Internet use involves a general, multidimensional overuse of the Internet. It might also include wasting time online, without a clear objective. Often, generalized PIU can be associated with the ‘chat’ found online and dependence on e-mail. This is assumed to be related to the social aspect of the Internet. The need for social contact and reinforcement obtained online results in an increased desire to remain in a virtual social life” (Davis, 1999a).

The editor’s first impulse was that somehow, with proper attention, the whole PIU business might turn out to be just that market niche that will rescue the journal commercially. If we could only divert pathological surfers into our own sites. ...now that these are finally up running!... – Then, shrugging off such improper and altogether artificial sentiments, determined to face withdrawal

1 http://www.psyk.ku.dk/adm_forskn/udgiv/Outlines and <http://www.dpf.dk/nydefout.htm>

head-on, the editor resolved to capitulate to a Higher Power, leaned back, and collapsed into a dreamless sleep.

Back in the sobriety of daylight, it emerged that there might be a secular alternative: History. And, in a sense, that is what this is all about.

Our first two papers – both guest lectures at the University of Copenhagen – aim to develop our understanding of the normal and the pathological by historical means. Both Leudar and Rose document genealogical sequences that help us see how the way and the place that fine line is drawn is neither essential nor arbitrary. Together, their range is from Socrates to near future and from daemon to genome. Thus, we might situate phenomena like PIU in contemporary conflict – as Leudar urges – and ask if, following Rose, this could mean that PIU should be seen as another instance of the tendency that fundamental ethical presuppositions such as “conceptions of personhood, of the distinctions between fate and choice, nature and artificiality (...) are being re-shaped at the micro-level”, towards blurring the distinction between “treatment, adjustment, and enhancement”; or if, rather, PIU is simply just another medicalization.

In PIU, it seems, pathology does not depend on exact physical location. Whereas ‘addiction’ seems a desire for the insertion of a substance into the body, PIU may express itself in a “desire to remain in a virtual social life”. What kind of a place is that, anyway?

Besides History, it appears that another red thread in this issue is the problematization of the delimitation of places and fields. Boundary encounters is a place for learning, says Kerosuo, and surely, if that is so, the Outlines is a place for learning.

What is the place of knowledge? The situating of knowledge in life, as Huniche

traces, seems very different from the situating of life in knowledge which Rose undertakes: sometimes in life, ignorance can be wisdom, even if knowledge of the uncertain is increasingly certain. “Ignorance is bliss”, said Cypher, the traitor of the film *The Matrix*, preferring to forget that what we think is life is actually another computer program: the ultimate PIU.

In *The Matrix*, as in the underpinnings of the concept of PIU, situating knowledge in life (real life!) is still quite different from its embodiment in *technology*, the theme which Sørensen takes up, in order to approach a case of ‘virtual social life’ that challenges what we take knowledge to be.

Yet, is ‘life’ so principally different from ‘technology’? Elgaard’s low tech social work performances seem far from our Internet starting point, and the pathological Internet User is far more likely to surf by some on-line counselling facility than to show up at the counter of the social centre. But the case can be argued that all of the papers in this issue illustrate nicely what Elgaard allures to as a Chicken-Soup rather than a Chicken-in-the-Soup model of technology in social practice.

In September 2000, we arranged a conference with the theme *Technology in Social Practice. Education, Organization, and Health Care*. In the present and following issues of Outlines a number of the conference papers are published. The following considerations are, with a few changes, excerpted from our introductory statement to the conference.

Now what makes a journal such as ours arrange a conference on Technology in Social Practice? The obvious reason is that in general, technology must be a vital issue in critical social studies. Yet, it would not be completely honest to say that our journal has reflected that on its pages. In fact, taking a

look at the issues of the *Nordiske Udkast* that preceded *Outlines*, going back through the years, it isn't till we reach the first issue of 1986 that we find an explicit discussion of technology. From that point onward, there is no mention of technology in the titles of the papers and commentaries.

Does this mean that in the past 14 years, our studies have been social in the sense that they have overlooked the world of artifacts and focused exclusively on the relations between subjects in a community? Have we, as Elgaard seems to suggest, fallen down on one side of what Bruno Latour calls the great divide between nature and society?

Our contention is that this would be an unfair characterization. True, notions of social relations as interaction between subjects have been present, perhaps most of all in the beginning of the 70's when symbolic interactionism was a prominent inspiration in Copenhagen social psychology, and perhaps also again with the rise of social constructionism in the 90's.

But as a general paradigm, human interaction has mostly been seen as *mediated*. Thus, one will find, if one looks closely, artifacts of many kinds present as a kind of vanishing moment in the varied research projects and theoretical considerations in *Nordiske Udkast*.

This very broad approach to technology as the various artifacts that mediate human social practice gives, probably, a valuable contribution to our understanding of technologies. Thus, for instance, such a broad approach to technology opens our eyes for understanding such things as technologies of the self, technologies of knowledge, or to view discourses and methods in social work or psychotherapy as technologies, that is, as artifacts that objectify and mediate activity and social relations.

However, it could still be argued that allowing for a mediation of social relations is

not quite the same as a real interest in technology. One could say that the bare concept of mediating object needs to be unfolded and differentiated for it to become technology proper. First, the category of object needs to be supplemented with a category of instrument, or means, so that in the framework of human activity at least we have a relation between instrument and object. Secondly, the idea of instrument implies a notion of causality, as the ends-means relation is externalized in the form of the object. Thirdly, this idea of external causality can be developed and repeated almost indefinitely so that we end up having systems of multiple causalities, or machines.

This way, it appears, we approach a concept of technology that makes it understandable how it may appear as entirely autonomous, or perhaps we might say automatic, and separated from human affairs. It is only when we take into consideration technology in this more expanded, or unfolded, sense of the concept, that it begins to make sense to regard the subjects involved as merely some, few, out of several elements in what seems to be endless chains and networks of causations.

Still, it also makes sense for a critical journal to arrange a conference that takes precisely the idea of the autonomy of technology under just as critical a scrutiny as the idea of a free-floating and non-material intersubjectivity. It remains a technology in social practice.

As such, technologies are invented, introduced, implemented, learned, developed, negotiated, assessed, appraised, and all the other things that we shall learn about in the ensuing two issues, all of which somehow presupposes that they are part of social practices. That is, they are neither neutral, unimportant instruments for pre-given human purposes, nor do they seem to be unequivocally predetermining human affairs.



If this is so, technology in social practice must be a rich and continuously surprising field of interest for critical social studies, and it is high time we begin drawing the Outlines of this field. It is still far too early to worry about any pathological technology dependence.

References

Davis, R.A., (1999a). *A cognitive-behavioral model for pathological Internet use (PIU)*. Catalyst. [available online at <http://www.victoriapoint.com/PIU.htm>]

