



5th International and Interdisciplinary Conference

Happy Homes, Happy Society?

The Contribution of Domestic Life in a Time of Social Changes

Home Implosion: Digital Media and the Reinvention of the Private Sphere

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What happens to our homes once digital media become deeply and intimately inscribed into their spaces and rhythms? Do activities, relationships and roles in the household remain fundamentally the same, or do significant changes take hold? Sociological theory has considered the private sphere to be represented by home life and family relationships as well as the notions of the private that members of a culture share. Communication research, for its part, has shown how different media have punctured and eroded the already porous boundary delineating the so defined private sphere: from the startling ring of the telephone to the intricate reconfiguration of domestic routines and relationships with the outside world that television brought about. Digital media have carried that erosion further than anyone would have imagined. The honoured abode of private life, the home, has been penetrated by gadgets and practices that decimate its introvert and intimate character. At the same time fragments and instances of private life have profusely populated the public world with the assistance of mobile devices. This paper takes stock of these developments and examines the interplay between structural imperatives and human agency that determines their course and reach. The extended “shelter-in-place” experience precipitated by the Covid-19 quarantine is taken as an occasion to reflect on the cultural significance of the digital implosion of home life and the new powers and vulnerabilities it has brought about.

*Full papers are being prepared for publication. Further details to be announced.