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# INNOVATION, RESISTANCE OR TINKERING

## Rearticulating Everyday Life in an Ethnological Perspective

*Tine Damsholt and Astrid Pernille Jespersen*

In this paper, we investigate the background and history that ethnologists bring to bear on interdisciplinary innovation projects. We argue that although ethnology is well-equipped to contribute to innovation projects, our discipline also builds upon a series of conceptual configurations, and that these classic ethnological concepts and “taken for granted” understandings sit oddly with contemporary ideas about innovation as expressed in recent Danish innovation policy. These reflections were prompted by our participation in a joint innovation project funded by a Danish programme for user-driven innovation. By revisiting the discipline of ethnology as it has been conducted in southern Scandinavia, we identify three key points that explain our concerns regarding the way in which everyday life was analysed and configured in the innovation project.

*Keywords:* everyday life practices, user-driven innovation, tinkering, resistance

Since the beginning of this millennium, the idea of the user as an important figure and actor in different versions of innovation projects – such as product and service development – has been on the agenda in Danish innovation and research policy. The inclusion of user-studies in product and service development is believed to have an economical potential from which Danish businesses could and should benefit. In 2007, the Danish government launched two funding programmes focusing on user-driven innovation (UDI), which specifically urged social scientists to take on roles in various innovation projects. In the words of the Danish Minister for Economic and Business Affairs, “anthropologists and sociologists could contribute with a new understanding of users’ unacknowledged needs and preferences” (Bentsen 2006, quoted in Elgaard Jensen

2012). With their apparently intimate understanding of users, the Minister envisioned social scientists as key players in innovation and product development, who could take on the task of ensuring growth in the private sector.

### **The Box of Everyday Life**

In this paper, we describe an experience we had as ethnologists involved in a user-driven innovation project on “The interactive grocery shopping of the future”, funded by one of the UDI-programmes. This experience led us to reflect on the premises for our involvement: How well did our disciplinary background in ethnology fit into the premises of innovation projects? What notions of everyday practices and change did we bring to the project? And how did our notions differ from those of the other

scholars in the project, as articulated in our mutual discussions? Especially the way in which they configured everyday life – as a box that we could (and should) abandon or “think out of” in order to pursue innovative solutions – challenged some of our fundamental ethnological understandings.

The project we were part of was a collaboration between researchers of European Ethnology at the University of Copenhagen, a small private enterprise called Art of Crime, a division of a major supermarket chain called COOP-NETTORVET and the Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies. The project was initiated by the Institute for Future Studies, and was funded by the Danish Enterprise and Construction Authority’s programme for user-driven innovation. The purpose of the project was twofold. One of its objectives was to formulate innovative models for future online grocery shopping. The other was to develop and experiment with new methods for user involvement in innovation processes. The project was led by the Institute for Future Studies, but was organised in a number of relatively independent phases, each headed by one of the involved partners. At the beginning of the project, our main contribution as ethnologists and researchers was to analyse existing grocery-shopping and related practices through ethnographic fieldwork combined with more experimental methods that involved the users. The material gathered during this phase was intended to provide extensive empirical knowledge about the everyday life practices of grocery shopping – from planning, buying, choosing, and bringing the groceries back home, to preparing the meal, eating and dealing with the leftovers<sup>1</sup> – which would be used in the subsequent phases of the project. In our ethnographic material, we identified seven factors of interest, which we termed *rationales*: economy, time, logistics, morality, social relations, health and experience/pleasure. These refer to “logics, strategies and arguments, as well as specific doings and material elements in shopping practice” (Jespersen et al. 2010: 6–7; see also Elgaard Jensen 2012).

In the main part of this paper, we delve back into our ethnological upbringing in search of ways of conceptualising everyday life practices, and the

mechanisms by which they are changed. These conceptualisations, which are normally more or less implicit, were challenged and therefore also articulated through our participation in the project. We revisit our ethnographic backgrounds and history in order to more fully understand the contrast between our approach to innovation processes and the one articulated in the UDI programmes, especially by the scholars from Future Studies. But first we describe some of the main characteristics of UDI. In doing so, we hope to provide the reader with an insight into the types of understandings that we encountered, and with which we found ourselves at odds throughout the project.

### **User-Driven Innovation and Ethnology**

One striking feature of the UDI agenda has been a request for a scientific expertise in unravelling and understanding the practices of users, and thus delivering methods for including users in innovation processes, as well as in turning the resulting insights into a competitive advantage for the businesses involved. In the wake of this commercial turn to the users, the skills of ethnologists and anthropologists have come into demand in relation to the associated challenges of including and stimulating the practices of users in innovation processes. This new interest in ethnology and similar disciplines should be understood in the context of the disciplines’ long record of studying everyday life practices, which epitomises what the private enterprises seem to lack; namely, an intimacy with, and a profound understanding of, the lives of regular people – the future users/consumers of the new products (Halse 2008; for ethnological studies and involvements in innovation projects see: Holst Kjær 2011; Petersen & Munk 2013). In Denmark, this attention to users and user-research is reflected by a variety of concepts such as participatory design, user-centred design, business anthropology and so on. However, most recently, an interest in users has been put on the agenda by large national funding programmes for user-driven innovation. The term user-driven innovation was originally formulated by the American innovation theorist Eric von Hippel (1986) but in the case of Danish innova-

tion policy, UDI is an umbrella term that refers to several different approaches (Rosted 2005; Elgaard Jensen 2012).

The key definition of UDI in the Danish programme was formulated by FORA, a research unit under the Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs. FORA argues that users have “unacknowledged needs”, which may be discovered through ethnographic studies of the users’ current use of products and services in their everyday life practices. Thus, the deployment of social science expertise with the aim of understanding users’ unacknowledged needs may become a new and valuable source of innovation (Rosted 2005). The project we were a part of clearly referenced the UDI programme’s ambition of uncovering users’ unacknowledged needs (Elgaard Jensen 2012). Since this was one of the premises of the programme, we were obliged to work with it as our starting point. From an ethnological perspective, however, it is striking that the programme took its point of departure in an individualistic notion of the user; unacknowledged needs are the needs of individuals, not communities.

In the following, we describe three occurrences where we were at odds with the ways in which everyday life (including the concepts of the user, innovation and change) was conceived and articulated within the project group. These three situations raise questions about how we engaged in the project, the kind of ethnography we articulated, and the strikingly different perspectives brought to the project by the participants from future studies in particular.

The first situation occurred during the planning of the ethnographic fieldwork, where we found it very difficult to work with the individualistic idea of the “user with unacknowledged needs”. In preparing for our fieldwork, we realised that grocery shopping may be carried out by an individual (the one doing the actual shopping). But we also soon realised that the shopping situation is packed with a whole range of crucial social relations, such as relationships to other members of the household, and this made it meaningless for us to regard the user as merely an individual. Accordingly, we chose to replace “the user with unacknowledged needs” with a focus on *hetero-*

*geneous practices* (Shove et al. 2007), understood as intertwined practices of eating, shopping and planning within the context of a household. In doing so, we moved away from an individualistic perception of users to a relational understanding.

The second occurrence of “being at odds” unfolded during the next phase of the project. At this point, we had finished our ethnographic account of the everyday practices, and the scholars from future studies took over. One of the methods they introduced into the project was a megatrend analysis. Megatrends are meant to illuminate future developments that are considered to be more or less inevitable. Within future studies, such analyses are used as reference points that facilitate discussions about future developments that affect all actors on all societal levels: “Megatrends are the great forces in societal development that will very likely affect the future in all areas the next 10–15 years ... In other words, megatrends are our knowledge about the probable future” (Larsen 2006). It is argued that by analysing the social patterns and trends behind changes, megatrends provide an understanding of the possible future consequences for society and companies affected by these changes. From an ethnological point of view, this way of conceptualising societal changes resembles the perspective of “cultural diffusion” from cultural centres to peripheries (see the contribution by Munk and Elgaard Jensen in this volume). The idea of inevitable and universal megatrends was at odds with our classic ethnological understandings of changes in everyday life, and the inertness that characterises these transformations and reconfigurations.

During the course of the project, there was a third occurrence. Here, what can be seen as an initially underlying assumption – one which shaped the project’s understanding of innovation and innovation processes – became increasingly evident, and this eventually led to an open disagreement between the partners. The assumption in question was that the innovation we were striving for in the project should abandon what we knew about the current practices of the users in order to produce something truly new and innovative for the future. The method of “fu-

ture scenarios” was introduced at this stage as a way for the project to create alternative visions of the future. A core assumption in “future scenarios” is the importance of avoiding a prognostic flavour in the scenarios; that is, the scenarios should preferably not become mainstream because that would produce “an unfortunate attitude to the future, because they suggest that the future is something you know (if you’re smart enough), i.e. the future is already determined” (Bjerre 2004).<sup>2</sup> At this point, the insights from the ethnographic fieldwork became “nice to know”, but also something we were urged to think beyond in order to work truthfully with the different future scenarios. As one of the partners involved in the project stated, it was now time to “think out of the box”; that is, step out of the conceptual constraints of everyday life, which supposedly restricted our creative and innovative process. This talk of everyday life – as a box, which we could and should abandon in our efforts to pursue innovative solutions for an unknown future – seemed truly odd to us. It clearly contradicted our deeply-held ethnological assumptions about how to engage with people and their everyday practices in a professional and proper manner.

In the following, we focus on two aspects of the disagreement between the ethnological configuration of everyday life and the way everyday life was understood and used by our partners in the project. Firstly, we ask the question of why we were triggered to such an extent by the idea of thinking outside of the box – but also why our insights into everyday life were considered a box and a burden. What kind of box? Why a burden? Secondly, we discuss what we saw as a very specific configuration of the relationship between the future, innovation and everyday life as articulated by the other partners involved in the project, especially the scholars from future studies.

To pursue this task, and inspired by the genealogical approach, we revisit aspects of our classic ethnological understanding of everyday life and of practices as resistant and inert. A genealogy in the Foucauldian sense is not a search for “Ursprung” – origins, essence, or a linear development. Rather, it is an attempt to reveal the heterogeneous, contingent and even contradictory “Herkunft” – the past

of phenomena we tend to think of as devoid of history (Foucault [1971]1977). In line with this version of genealogy, we revisit some of the classic Scandinavian<sup>3</sup> ethnological studies that formed the backbone of our education. Through a couple of cases in point, we revisit studies of habits and routines, as well as notions that deal with the adaptation of new lifestyles, such as “longue durée” and neoculturation, and the ideology of “the good life”. On the basis of this, we qualify and rearticulate our understanding of the “resistance and inertness” of transformations to everyday life, and the conditions under which everyday life can be reconfigured. This brings forth an alternative vision of innovation in the realm of everyday life practices; one which lies closer to the ethnological body of knowledge.

The relationship between past, present and future everyday life practices has been one of the pivotal focuses of the ethnological disciplines. However, everyday life is not to be perceived as an entity or an object in and of itself. Rather, as an object of study, it is configured and shaped in specific types of agendas, problematisations and concerns. The ethnological understanding of everyday life is not just a body of knowledge compiled through disciplined investigation at different times. Instead, everyday life, as a concept and a body of knowledge, has become intelligible and authoritative in various and specific historical contexts and situated fields of knowledge.

Based on our return visit to the ethnological classics, we suggest three key points that also have the potential to answer our initial question of why we were so concerned by the way everyday life was configured in the project. Accordingly, we present the response we came up with based on our ethnological body of knowledge. Our first point relates to the shift from a focus on an individualistic user to a focus on households and heterogeneous practices. The second point is concerned with a shift from the idea of abrupt movements between distinctly different scenarios to an emphasis on innovation as an ongoing tinkering, and as changes in and of an established order. The third point deals with the role that ethnologists are called upon to play, and points to the difference between, on the one hand, the role of an

agent of radical change or reformist and, on the other hand, the more traditional (curatorial) role which often is played by ethnologists.

### **The Shaping of Everyday Life as an Object of Study**

It has often been argued that the discipline of European ethnology has two separate yet intertwined “roots”; one is the political sciences of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, the other is the national-romantic “Golden Age” of folk culture studies in the nineteenth century (Stoklund 1979; Damsholt 1995). Folk culture, which includes objects of study such as costumes, habits and the everyday life of common people, has been the shared and permanent focus of both of these configurations of the discipline of ethnology. However, there are some important differences regarding how these configurations relate to the inherent inertness of everyday practices and their ability to resist transformation.

Scholars of folklore in the late nineteenth century conducted what they considered to be a “last-minute rescue operation”, saving old traditions and crafts from the grinding mill of modernity. Folk life and habits were worth saving because they were regarded as pathways to the true national culture, and therefore not only as educational tools for museums but also as sources of inspiration for artists and designers evolving national styles to compete in international fairs and exhibitions. The traditional ways of life were to be preserved from the contemporary decay and dissolution, even though it often was the “Sunday best” side of peasant culture and its most colourful features that were preferred in these collection practices (Stoklund 1999). As such, laborious and painstaking efforts were made to purify the contemporary habits of the rural population into what was considered to be the past – and therefore original, authentic and “true” – traditions and customs worthy of being saved, protected, and to form an ideal for future practices. Even in this quest for an authentic national culture, everyday life and habits had to be selected, purified and cultivated in the interest of academic practices.

The “rescue operation” approach of the late nine-

teenth century is, however, qualitatively different from earlier approaches of a more interventionist kind, in which the everyday life of the common population had long been a realm for government attention. This can be illustrated with the official Danish ordinances from the seventeenth and eighteenth century against the excess regulation of consumption and festivity in detail – as many habits were considered harmful not only to people’s health and souls but also to the state economy. However, the everyday life of the peasantry came into existence as an object of scrutiny in a new way in the late eighteenth century, shaped by what Foucault has termed biopolitics, pastoral power and the reason of the state (Foucault [1994]2000b). Through these endeavours, the problems presented to governmental practices by the phenomena that are characteristic of a group of living human beings were rationalised and configured as questions concerning governing a “population” ([1994]2000a: 67). The population was framed as a problem in a new way; not as a sum of individuals inhabiting a territory, but as an entity with its own ‘nature’, which could be rationally analysed and governed in accordance with that inherent nature, and which could enhance the state’s strength ([1994]2000b: 315–317). The new pastoral form of power stirred a flood of political concerns regarding the everyday life of the population, and took charge of a whole series of questions and problems related to material culture, property, productivity, education, health, meals etc. A pivotal dogma within the reason of state was that any object of governing should be governed in accordance with its own nature (Foucault [1994]2000a). Thus, an interest in and knowledge of the population’s everyday life, its nature and possibilities for change were shaped within the broader field of governmental technologies “peculiar to the state; domains, techniques, targets where the state intervened” (Foucault [1994]2000b).

The new and “ethnographically” based investigations into the everyday life of the rural population in late eighteenth-century Denmark-Norway, whereby vicars<sup>4</sup> described the everyday habits of their congregations, was also entangled with concerns about how the state should and could manage its population,

which was regarded as a resource that could strengthen the state. Often, the vicars' accounts stemmed from the idea that knowledge about the facts relating to the conditions and nature of the population was an important precondition for improving the economy of the country (Damsholt 1995). Thus, investigation and intervention were part of the same practice. In this perspective, everyday habits were by no means considered valuable or worth preserving; on the contrary, they were considered barriers to progress. The superstition and "backward irrationality" of the peasants and their everyday life was viewed as something to be overcome, and change was expected to come through enlightenment. Spreading informative material, education, and setting a good example became technologies in this biopolitical project to improve the health, civilisation and productivity of the common people.

If the peasantry as a central resource of the state was to be fully exploited, barriers had to be eliminated. In the biopolitical perspective, everyday life and its resistance to (or possibility for) change thus became central objects of study. Could peasant culture and everyday life be changed? And if so, how? The vicars involved in mapping life and habits in their parishes had different ideas about the causes of resistance. Some believed the backwardness was a matter of "character" (e.g. Junge 1798), while others believed that it was a question of living conditions (e.g. Blicher 1795). Different beliefs also led to different solutions for changing habits. Despite all of these differences, the vicars agreed that everyday life and routines seemed to have inherent reasons or logics that made them difficult to change from the outside (for more on this topic, see Damsholt 1995). In this way, one could argue that everyday life as an object of study and body of knowledge was (and is) shaped within governmental practices with specific agendas of improvement and change. As mentioned earlier, the change and improvement projects of the twenty-first century are often discursively articulated as innovation (Godin 2012, 2013).

A similar entanglement of investigation and intervention (and thus a "war against habits") was the mainstay of studies of everyday life among common

people from the start of the twentieth century, where reformers in the Scandinavian welfare states set out to improve the everyday life of the working class and petty bourgeoisie. Practices which were seen to be "bad habits" had to be replaced with good ones, but the common people "surprisingly" resisted the well-meant recommendations of the superior "know-it-alls" and their scientifically-based arguments. From the perspective of the reformers, common people were "slaves of habit" and ruled by a conceptual world of prejudices, dogmas and tradition without reflections upon and insights into the "true nature of things" (Frykman & Löfgren 1996). Everyday life had to be intervened in, and scientifically-based information should be disseminated via home visits from health visitors and caregivers, and a combination of investigation and education programmes became new technologies for installing new and better habits.

In the light of this history of often insensitive social reformers, it is easy to understand why ethnologists in the 1960s and onwards abandoned the concepts of "customs" and "habits" and, when studying cultural groups and phenomena of the modern society, engaged with new technical terms borrowed from British and American anthropology and sociology. "Terms such as patterns of interaction, role-play, forms of communication, transactions, and ritual life now colonised the field of study" (Frykman & Löfgren 1996: 6). Often, ethnologists ended up as defenders or curators of local cultures or logics of culture. However, everyday life has turned out to be a recurring theme in ethnology, if not *the* object of study that has defined the discipline at least since the 1980s (Stoklund 1994; Tschofen 2013: 73). As Frykman and Löfgren state in the Festschrift to the former professor Bringeus: "The strength of ethnology is often the concreteness and the link between the seeming insignificance of everyday life and its consequences in a broader context" (1996: 7). Understanding everyday life from within – its routines, practices and organisation – and exposing its inherent logics and thereby the conditions for change and sustainability, have become the approaches ethnologists most often employ when studying culture.

Thus, ethnologists have become interpreters of

habits and everyday life, explaining why seemingly irrational practices have their own logics, and why well-meaning reformers are met with resistance, as well as why new social or material innovations tend not to succeed. Even if they are not necessarily curators of every form of everyday life, many ethnologists at least consider everyday life to be something that should be taken seriously; not as a barrier to change, but as one of the key preconditions for change. From this perspective, change is only thought to be possible if it can be integrated with the constitutive logics of everyday life.

The genealogy that we outline here suggests that the ethnological idea of everyday life's inherent inertness is a legacy of the ways in which everyday life was shaped as an object of study within political practices of improvement. Whether habits were seen as problematic or as something to be preserved, refined or defended, they are configured within these practices of improvement or innovation. Furthermore, it seems that there is an inherent dilemma or paradox entangled with the ethnological study of everyday life: ethnologists are caught between being interpreters who understand and explain the inertness and resistance of everyday life to the practices of intervention on one hand, and being part of these intervening practices or at least having their agenda of investigation set by them on the other hand. This entanglement of investigation and intervention could be considered integral to the biopolitical "Herkunft" and descent of ethnology.

In the following, we turn our attention to three more recent ethnological studies of habits and routines, as well as notions dealing with the adaptation of new lifestyles. These studies have been important in the formation of our "taken for granted" ethnological concept of everyday life and its adaptability. In revisiting them we qualify and articulate our understanding of everyday life and the conditions under which it can be transformed.

### **Cultural Adaptation and Neoculturation**

At least two pivotal concepts regarding changes to everyday practices and culture have permeated Danish ethnology as it has been taught at the University

of Copenhagen since the late 1970s. The first is the concept of "enduring, even obstinate structures", which is a translation (with some degree of interpretation) of the concept of "longue durée". This concept was used by the French Annales School of historical writing to designate their approach, which prioritised long-term historical structures over events. The *longue durée* designates old attitudes of thought and action, resistant frameworks which die hard, at times defying all logic. In relation to the inertness of everyday practices, this concept is used by the French historian Fernand Braudel to characterise how structures of everyday life underlie and are sustained beyond political events and structural crises ([1979]1981). The second concept is that of "the good life", as articulated by the American anthropologist Robert Redfield. Referring to one of the oldest books about peasant life – *Work and Days* by Greek Hesiod – and contemporary American Indian peasants of Yucatan, he describes "the (peasant) view of the good life" to be an "integrated pattern of dominant attitudes or ideas about as to how life ought to be lived". And, as Redfield argues, such fundamental orientations of life remain unchanged, and peasants are likely to try to find compromises between ideas about how life should be lived and their current way of life (Redfield 1956: 60–63).

Braudel and Redfield's concepts have been translated and transformed within Danish ethnology. However, with regards to understanding changes to culture and everyday practices, they themselves became a kind of *longue durée* for the discipline. Danish ethnologist Palle Ove Christiansen illustrates this understanding of change in the paper "Peasant Adaptation to Bourgeois Culture? Class Formation and Cultural Redefinition in the Danish Countryside" (1978), in which he uses historical source material from a village in southern Denmark. Christiansen's main argument is that the changes of lifestyle among the rich segment of the peasants, who became "farmers" in the late nineteenth century, were not merely an adaptation of urban middle class culture or an "embourgeoisement", as it often has been interpreted. Instead, he argues that this cultural redefinition was a much more complex

process and that it did not take place overnight. The new “farmer sub-culture” was integral to the way in which the owners of medium sized farms reformulated a new social position between the townspeople and the small cottagers. This cultural reformulation consisted of the strategic selection of certain (but not all) traits from urban culture. The new social position was translated into “cultural language” (1978: 148).

Thus, to understand such cultural change and “innovations in material culture”, ethnologists must study “the necessary preconditions for the acceptance and integration of new cultural elements” (1978: 101). With reference to Swedish ethnologist Börje Hanssen, Christiansen points to the “tricky complex of social, economic, political, and cultural phenomena” as a prerequisite for understanding processes of change (1978: 106). With reference to the Danish ethnologist Ole Højrup, he emphasises that the necessary preconditions for change in material culture can partly be found within new ways of organising daily work within a household. However, the way “the good life” was perceived did not change, but rather continued in the form of old norms in a new guise. As such, the idea of the good life was an obstinate structure that was resistant to changes to the economy and social organisation.

Furthermore, cultural change was not a matter of “calm reasoned decision-making in order to satisfy new needs” (1978: 148), but was instead a gradually emerging outcome of social and economic change. Thus, rather than being a sudden or manipulated breaking of habits, cultural change is described as follows: “Slowly and unconsciously new features sneaked into and became part of the ‘natural’ order of living” (1978: 148).

From Christiansen’s work, we learned to consider processes of cultural change as much more complex than a simple diffusion of megatrends (from upper classes to lower, or from centres to periphery). Instead, changes to the everyday life of the household occur slowly and as a result of complex processes that lie beyond calm, reasoned decision making. To understand how innovations in (material) culture become integrated and unquestioned components of

everyday life, we must analyse the necessary preconditions for the acceptance and integration of such new cultural elements. The structures of everyday life are “obstinate structures”, resistant to change. To understand potentials and barriers to innovation, we must investigate how the subjects of everyday innovations perceive “the good life”.

Another important conceptual translation of the *longue durée* and the “view of the good life”, which is relevant when analysing the complex adaptation of new lifestyles or routines, is the notion of neoculturation as developed by the Danish ethnologist Thomas Højrup in the context of his theory of life-mode analysis (1983, 2003). Here, the point of departure is the understanding of a population as culturally heterogeneous. However, rather than dividing the population into classes or an infinite number of sub-cultures, Højrup argues for an (analytical) division into a number of life-modes; fundamentally different forms of practice, ideology, social organisation and ways of structuring everyday life. The empirical examples that are used to illustrate the different life-modes are seldom concerned with individuals, but rather focus on families and households. These collective subjects (with the same or aligned life-modes) do not necessarily pursue the same universal goals. Even if they use the same words, their understandings of the central aspects of everyday life are culturally diverse; each life-mode corresponds to a specific ideology, teleology or version of “the good life” that people try to practice.<sup>5</sup> The central point here is that the bearers of a certain life-mode will attempt to live their version of “the good life” as well as possible under their given living conditions. In that sense, “the good life” is like an obstinate structure of everyday life.

Being inherently distinct, the life-modes each define the specific, necessary preconditions for their reproduction. If these preconditions are threatened, they must be defended (2003: 15), as life-modes are always striving for the necessary conditions. Every bearer constantly struggles to maintain, re-establish or create in new forms the conditions of possibility for their own life-mode. This process is called neoculturation (2003: 28). As conditions of living

change over time, transitions of a life-mode may take place. However, an important insight here is that the specific ideology or version of what “the good life” is will not change following a change in conditions, as the ideology of the life-mode is not determined by its conditions. Instead, Højrup argues that life-modes are flexible, and that the bearers of a life-mode reorganise themselves when conditions change.<sup>6</sup> The concept of neoculturation implies “that the societal transformation process in the problematique of the particular life-mode is viewed as a change in the conditions of possibility. One then tries to manipulate these changes in order to defend or improve one’s existential foundation” (2003: 153): A family can reorganise its resources; a fishing-unit can reallocate its components or develop new tools for surviving. Thus, any adaptation to societal change or the integration of new cultural inputs, products or services depends on the conditions that correspond with the basic features and logics of the specific ideology of “the good life”.<sup>7</sup>

What we emphasise here from Christensen and Højrup’s respective work is their common understanding of how adaptations or transformation to everyday life come about. In this understanding, the image of “tinkering” – understood as the meticulous and ongoing process of adapting, meddling with or adjusting something in order to make repairs or improvements – is far more relevant than the idea of a sudden break, as the former highlights the flexibility and selectivity of a household or family. The ideology of the good life as practised, and hence the logics and structures of everyday life, are what form and constitute the very core of inertness and resistance to qualitative change. New elements, tools, products, technologies and even individuals can be integrated into everyday life if they correspond with and are culturally meaningful to, and within, the underlying logics and rationales of this everyday practice. In this sense, “the good life” is not just a mental discourse or ideology, but something that is practised and thus reproduced every day. Change is either “superficial” (as a new product or technology is domesticated within the rationales of the practice) or slow and gradual (as resistance is manifested before

a necessary neoculturation takes place).

In both of these analyses, the point of departure is neither an individualistic user nor universal cultural needs or trends. Instead, social organisations and, often, the family or the household serve as pivotal contexts in which everyday practices and their involved ideologies are enacted and eventually transformed. Thus, processes of cultural change are much more complex than a simple diffusion of megatrends (from upper classes to lower, or from centres to peripheries). Changes to everyday life and the social organisation of work within the household come about slowly and as a result of complex processes beyond calm, reasoned decision-making. To understand how innovations in culture become integrated and unquestioned parts of everyday life, we must analyse the necessary preconditions for the acceptance and integration of such new cultural elements. Thus, in order to understand potentials for and barriers to innovation, we must investigate how the subjects of the everyday innovations view “the good life”. Since perceptions of the good life are integral to the structures of everyday life, everyday practices often seem to be “obstinate structures”, resistant to change.

Everyday *practices* and their basic logics and rationales are, then, core concepts in the (often somewhat taken for granted) ethnological understanding of the conditions for change. However, the inertness of everyday life is not a question of stasis. On the contrary, it is something that comes about through a constant reproduction of practices. It simply takes a lot of work to stabilise and maintain. Thus, our ethnological understanding of everyday practices not only involves an ideological and teleological dimension, but also an understanding of practices as tacit and embodied – as routines. We revisit this perspective on everyday practices through another formative tradition in our training as ethnologists, namely: cultural analysis conducted by ethnologists at the University of Lund, Sweden.

### **Everyday Life as Routines**

Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren’s recent study *The Secret World of Doing Nothing* (2010) sums up a plethora of insights into the resistances and adaptabilities

of everyday life. In their definition, routines are the performance of mundane or repetitive tasks to which one does not give much thought, but which organise and support everyday life and draw invisible maps that make the everyday run smoothly. Routines are linked to order, predictability and control. They are rhythms and patterns that sequence and synchronise time. Routines are routes or cultural paths in one's life, created through repetitions. Thus, they become invisible to the individual or the household in which they are performed. Once established, they work as "silent agreements" or "the way things are (or have to be) done here." These are only apparent to visitors and sometimes become problematic, as though the visitor is breaking a secret rule.

However, the routines that make up the stuff of everyday life also require flexibility, so that people can figure out what to do when the order is interrupted. Mornings are used as a recurring example of the "humdrum minutiae" of everyday existence in which we collectively, silently and inarticulately coordinate our everyday activities (2010: 86). Thus, routines or everyday practices are created through repetitions of an almost unconscious, silent and mutual choreography. This is a way to deal with all of the necessary actions of everyday life, as well as all the materiality that has to be handled, without having to think about it. This also emphasises that everyday practices are enacted in a social setting; in a family and a household. Even if a person is single and lives alone, their everyday life is socially and culturally organised rather than defined by individual needs.

While routines make up everyday life and bring us safely through the day, they can also become a battleground precisely because they are not individually enacted. The period when they are being settled is a period of tension and negotiation: "The coming together of a couple is one of those situations where routines all of a sudden become visible arenas of social and cultural conflicts" (2010: 99). This case opens up a laboratory in which routines are created or shaped: Two individuals with diverse sets of ingrained habits have to negotiate a shared household (2010: 100). As a new couple builds a daily life, they

create a shared choreography of working together in the kitchen, and what may become a lifelong division of labour. They synchronise their individual habits into a common routine and, once settled, routines are not easily changed. Nevertheless, new technologies often make people aware of how naturalised and invisible their routines are. Radio, telephone, TV, computers etc. are examples of the necessity of not only learning how to handle these gadgets, but how to integrate them with other activities. Ehn and Löfgren conclude that some technologies and routines have the capacity to blend rather easily with other activities, whereas others do not and may fail to become part of everyday family life. These processes and negotiations that take place within the family and household highlight how everyday practices are social and heterogeneous, and make relevant the concept of innovation as tinkering when it comes to understanding slow, ambiguous, and even selective changes to an established order. The processes by which societal change occur are much more complex than a mere diffusion of megatrends. Ehn and Löfgren describe how everyday life may change as follows:

In everyday life small transformations smoulder without becoming conscious until some later stage when they become obvious in a dramatic way that overshadows the slow, preceding change. ... Tension between recurring repetition and the more or less surprising deviations from the rehearsed program creates confrontation between routine and change. (2010: 121)

Löfgren and Ehn emphasise that repetition is also a way of hiding change. "Small gradual dislocations are hidden by well-known retakes; the same procedure as yesterday, but not quite" (2010: 121). A free zone is created within mundane and seemingly unimportant alterations. Small improvisations or gradual domestications of new technologies may be welcome. As such, most people seem to prefer their everyday to transform through slow, non-dramatic and even silent changes. In this perspective, everyday life is practised as routines and patterns, shaped

by negotiations or even battles, and maintained but also transformed through constant repetition. As such, the structure of everyday life is not a superstructure, but rather resembles a performative approach, where the matrix only exists qua the constant citation of it (as argued by Judith Butler 1993) and by being practised.

### **Towards a Performative Understanding of Everyday Life**

It is, then, possible to argue that such a performative understanding of everyday life – as configured and maintained by its repetition, by being practised and performed – highlights precisely the inertness, which is thought to characterise its transformation and reconfiguration. Practices, understood as repeated (and enduring, or even obstinate) structures and logics of action, are not easily changed. Changes must make sense within the already established “view of the good life” – that is, the logics of everyday life – though not in the specific way it is enacted and materialised. But when understood and analysed as practices, everyday lives are neither unchangeable nor do they exist in themselves; rather, they are matters of practical tinkering and attentive experimentation (Mol, Moser & Pols 2010). They only exist if and as they are practised and enacted every day. How, then, can such a performative understanding contribute to innovation projects?

If we return to the project about the interactive grocery shopping of the future, then this paper’s genealogical expedition into our formative ethnological classics frames the disciplinary background for the way we configured everyday life in the UDI project. In practical terms, the specific ethnological configuration of everyday life was an “intermediary product”, which we, as ethnologists, had to pass on to the other participants when the phase of the project directed by us was about to end, and when the subsequent project phase directed by others was about to begin.

On the basis of the ethnographic material and our disciplinary understanding of everyday life practices and cultural changes, we developed our configuration in opposition to entirely different ideas about

singular users’ needs, and the future as a hidden unknown. The configuration we passed on was also an experiment on how to render genuinely ethnological knowledge into a form that could be accessible and usable to the subsequent phases of the innovation project, and which would eventually have a recognisable impact on the resulting innovation. Our argument for a performative “tinkering” approach to everyday life was not based on the idea that everyday life does not change. Nor did we, as ethnologists, want everyday life to be fixed or remain the same; on the contrary. As we have mentioned, we identified seven *rationales* in the ethnographic material. A rationale should be understood as a relatively stable pattern of practice that households and individuals enact and to which they relate. A rationale never exists alone; there is always more than one rationale in play and, in practice, they align or clash in multiple ways. Furthermore, we argue that the described rationales are not only stable patterns of practice in specific households, but that they are also *longue durée* in the sense that they will probably also exist in ten years. They may well be articulated, materialised and combined in slightly new ways, but they are not likely to evaporate or change radically. Thus, we dispense with the idea of abrupt movements towards future scenarios and instead point to an understanding of innovation as an ongoing tinkering with and within an established order. Thus, any innovation in the field of grocery shopping should take these rationales into consideration in order to create sustainable innovations.

In the process of handing over the ethnographic findings, we chose to “package” our material in quite a specific way. For each of the rationalities, we created a portfolio containing both a conceptual description of the rationale and a collection of quotations, observations and images, which illustrated the rationality. The portfolios were meant to serve as a source of inspiration and point to new potentials, which could bring the everyday practices and diverse ideas of “the good life” into the innovation project. Conceptualised and packaged in this manner, the rationales became a distinct ethnological contribution that drew upon classical notions such as households,

routines, and habits as well as inertness and “longue durée”. It also drew upon ideas of everyday practices as social and heterogeneous – and thus configured an alternative understanding of everyday life.

Nevertheless, this attempt to stabilise some of the logics and practices of everyday life in the UDI project also rearticulated the classic dilemma between ethnologists’ role as curators of everyday life practices and their role as reformers. With our contribution to the project, we aimed to be innovators and reformers but, faced with the method of “future scenarios”, we ended up becoming curators. When everyday life (especially the complex understanding of it that we had established) was configured as a box that we should abandon and “think outside of” in an effort to pursue innovative solutions for an unknown future, then the role of curator became the obvious choice.

Thus, the innovation project triggered the inherent dilemma of the ethnological study of everyday life: We are caught between being the interpreters who analyse the inertness and resistance of everyday life to the practices of intervention on the one hand, and are a part of these intervening practices on the other hand, or, at least, our agenda of investigation is set by them. In this paper, we argue that this entanglement of investigation and intervention could be considered part of the biopolitical descent of ethnology. If everyday life as an object of study and body of knowledge is shaped within governmental practices with specific agendas for improvement and change, then discourses of innovation in the twenty-first century configure everyday life as answers to individual and superficial needs, which are bound to change sooner or later and should be easily overcome. And, faced with such a configuration of everyday life, we as ethnologists must either end up as “grumpy old curators” or rearticulate and qualify our understanding of the “resistance and inertness” of transformations to everyday life and the conditions under which it can be reconfigured.

The contribution of ethnology to innovation projects may, then, be an understanding of everyday life and its resistance to change; not as something to be overcome, but as a potential for change and growth,

as long as the *longue durée* and its preconditions for change are taken into consideration. This understanding implies that one moves from an understanding of users as individual consumers to an understanding of socially and culturally organised and performed use-practices, often within households and families, and to an understanding of changes in everyday life as gradual tinkering processes rather than as sudden, abrupt and complete shifts between scenarios. Thus, the productive challenge for an ethnologist is not to think outside of the box, but rather to think about what can be absorbed by the practices that unfold inside the box.

## Notes

- 1 We visited a total of 36 households over a period of three months, using methods such as participant observations, qualitative interviews, visual ethnography, walk and talks, “surfing conversations” and design games (see also Jespersen et al. 2010; Jespersen & Bredsdam 2010).
- 2 Our translation of the following statement in Danish: “en uheldig holdning til fremtiden, fordi de antyder, at fremtiden er noget, man kan kende (hvis man er klog nok), dvs. at fremtiden for så vidt er fastlagt.”
- 3 The sample is highly subjective and selective, and consists mainly of some of the Danish and Swedish ethnological studies that formed the backbone of our education in the 1980s and 90s at the Ethnology Section, University of Copenhagen. Thus, although questions of change and everyday life have been thoroughly discussed outside Scandinavia (e.g. by Bausinger and Schütz), our focus remains the Scandinavian perspective on the discipline in our “revisit”.
- 4 The description of the peasantry was mostly undertaken by the clergy, partly in the format of parish-topographies. Vicars and curates were familiar with the outlook and everyday life of the peasants, and the priestly call also involved popular education in both religion and the agrarian economy (Hortsbøll 1983).
- 5 Højrup does not refer to Redfield’s understanding of the concept of “the good life”. However, in spite of the differences in their theoretical background, the inspiration may very well stem from Redfield and his significance in Danish ethnology of the 1970s.
- 6 The aim of this analysis of societal change is to “explore, calculate, and specify the conditions for adding new features in a given social formation and excluding others” (2003: 153).
- 7 Eventually, individual subjects work to maintain their mode of existence, and the necessary innovations in-

volved may transform the particular life-mode in a longer historical perspective. In this analysis, Højrup differentiates between the particular “object level” and the “meta-level”, where cultural historical transformation is constituted. We find that this emphasis on how particular practices and more general cultural changes are related in complex processes and even co-configured is important, even if we do not pursue this line of investigation further in this article.

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Tine Damsholt is professor in ethnology at the University of Copenhagen. Her primary field of research is political culture, that is, national and patriotic material-discursive practices in early modern Denmark and in contemporary Western countries, based on cultural history and ethnographic fieldwork. Materiality, emotions, landscape, body and gender are recurrent themes in her research and publications. Further, she has been involved in several research projects on everyday life in contemporary Denmark.  
(tinedam@hum.ku.dk)

Astrid Pernille Jespersen is associate professor in ethnology at the University of Copenhagen. Her main scientific expertise is on cultural analysis and humanistic health research with special attention to health in everyday life, lifestyle changes, obesity, ageing, physical activity and interdisciplinary collaboration. A recent publication is *Careful Science? Bodywork and Care Practices in Randomised Clinical Trials* (together with Bønnelycke & Eriksen, 2013, in *Sociology of Health and Illness* 35:8).  
(apj@hum.ku.dk)