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Introduction and field site:
a town that could be anywhere

The initial aim of this book is to provide an in-depth account of uses of social media in Trinidad. Yet this aim is perhaps secondary to another one – that of making a case for how social media in Trinidad contributes further to understanding what it means to be seen in contemporary society. Social media heightens the fields of visibility between the individual self and wider society. As a consequence there is a general anxiety of what appearance, and being judged on appearance, imply about what it means to be human. This in turn raises the question of whether increased visibility has made people more superficial, or whether we are somehow less ‘authentic’ as a result of social media.

These queries will be unpacked and explored through the following ethnography, based in a small town that I have here anonymised as ‘El Mirador’. The findings in this volume would not be applicable to all Trinidadians and certainly not Trinbagonions (people from the islands of Trinidad and Tobago). They pertain primarily to the people whom I encountered in El Mirador, a town that might look like any other in Trinidad. El Mirador is always busy: from the early hours of the morning into the late hours of night, residents of El Mirador are always hustling and bustling, trying to sell or buy something or to accomplish some task. Yet El Mirador is also more diverse than other towns in Trinidad. It is not unusual to see on the same street a large, recently renovated home next to a small brick structure with a corrugated iron roof. El Mirador is a service hub for surrounding areas, but many Trinidadians who live in large cities would consider it ‘the bush’. As one young man from El Mirador joked, ‘a lot of my friends think you jump in a Land Rover and take a safari and then you’ll arrive. It’s not like that. We have cars’.
El Mirador is a place that some people look down on and others look up to. It is in a rural area, but it is the nearest thing to a town in that region. For people in the surrounding villages, it is the place they go to for fashionable stores, restaurants, grocery shopping and government services. There are some whose lives revolve around a small-town existence and others for whom El Mirador represents satellite living for more urban work; the latter thus orientate their social lives towards Trinidad’s larger cities. El Mirador epitomises the aspirations of modern life, for people who live in rural areas far from metropolitan centres in Trinidad and the world over. But for those living in the town itself, El Mirador is the country – a quiet, ‘rural’ area where nothing much happens. Fashionable shopping for them lies in the mall, 45 minutes away, and a night out involves going to the capital city, Port of Spain, an hour and a half’s drive (or closer to three hours during peak traffic) from El Mirador.

This ambiguous position of El Mirador, poised between urban and rural, is also expressed in people’s hopes and fears. On the one hand, the town’s inhabitants want to remain ‘traditional’ in the face of a world that is moving too fast and changing to such an extent that they feel unable to keep up with it; The gap between how their grandparents lived and how their parents live is sizeable, but the gap between how parents and children now live is larger still. As such, local perspectives reflect what is becoming a global anxiety about a new world – one terribly different from that experienced by previous generations and in which culture and tradition are not as important as they once were. At the same time people in El Mirador want to be distinctly modern and to keep up with dominant trends and changes in lifestyle and technology. They want to be seen as up-to-date and to embrace the opportunities that a future-oriented outlook brings. They want to be more cosmopolitan and more worldly. Yet El Mirador is simultaneously characteristic of Trinidad as a whole insofar as self-presentation is concerned. In fact, self-presentation may be regarded as even more important in El Mirador than in many other parts of the island, as social relations in a small town are more intense.

Meet the people

This volume builds on the idea that El Mirador is a place ‘in between’, exploring how a sense of identity based on place is expressed through what residents do with social media. Having lived in the town for
15 months across three years, it seems the best way I can convey some of the bigger conclusions from this research is through the stories of individuals. A large component of this research was constituted by surveys completed by 200 participants; these asked all sorts of questions, designed to begin to uncover patterns and normativities. Yet at the same time anthropology attempts to keep a human perspective. It must therefore be emphasised that the research was informed and made possible only by spending time with real people, through becoming immersed in their lives. The aim of this research is to convey what social media means to individuals who the reader can imagine and hope to understand. Bearing this in mind, we will now meet two of these individuals from El Mirador, Trevor and Sasha.

Trevor has lived in the small ‘rural town’ for his entire life. Now aged around 60, he still sports the same hairstyle he had at 20, when the Rastafarian movement was at its peak. Since Trevor is of East Indian descent, he does not adopt the typical full dreadlocks, but his grey and white beard hangs long and his hair piled on top of his head in a top-knot. He drives a worn out brown jeep with a driver’s seat and not much else, and works as a farmer, renting small sections of land and cultivating a local leafy plant called dasheen (a distant relative of spinach), which he sells in the local market.

Growing up in newly independent Trinidad, Trevor wanted to enroll in university and study sociology, but his parents did not have the resources to commit to his studying full time as a young adult of working age. Trevor has since not only encouraged his own children to pursue education, but has also embraced his personal circumstances, continuing to read and watch documentaries. He does not mix with others in the town who have more professional jobs, instead disappearing for a day or two every so often to lime with his farmer friends who live near the coast. When he is at family events, he debates with his nieces and nephews about current affairs and the contemporary state of politics. But when the debate becomes too heated, he will joke, ‘What do I know about it, I am just a farmer, I know about vegetable and ting!’ Similarly, when relatives from London visit, he teases his young niece about how ‘English English’ she is. ‘Not “pardon me”,’ he corrects her mockingly, ‘we pronounce it “ehhhh?”’ Among relatives of the next generation who have grown up in very different circumstances from Trevor and who embrace being internationally oriented and cosmopolitan, Trevor exaggerates his persona as a simple Trinidadian farmer. By playing with as well as appropriating the stereotype, he also expresses something of the more egalitarian aspect in Trinidadian social values – that of refusing to
be defined by hierarchy and institutions. Through Trevor I encountered other networks in El Mirador whose sense of identity includes a deep regard for country life and for whom being a ‘country person’ is made most visible through daily practices and associations.

When I arrived in El Mirador and began telling people that I was there to work on a book about the town, Trevor was one of the first to volunteer to help. He offered to introduce me to locals and show me around ‘to get all the information’ I would need. In the event this involved driving me past the squatters and temporary housing on the town’s outskirts and up the coast to the fishing villages. The winding roads surrounding the town in all directions took us hours to cover in one day, and I wondered why he was showing me such remote places when I was supposed to be looking at social media in El Mirador itself. The houses in these villages did not look like they had any internet infrastructure and there were no internet cafés. What could I learn about social media out here? ‘What you need to understand about El Mirador is that most of the people you would see in El Mirador, walking and ting, they not from El Mirador,’ he explained. ‘They come here to work, to shop, maybe a little lime, but they don’t live here. This town is the city for them, they come here to do everything they have to do.’ When I asked him if such people used Facebook, his response was clear. ‘Nah! They not into Facebook and all dat. These people, they like a more simpler life.’

After closing his dasheen stall in the market one Saturday, at around 11 am, Trevor went to his mother’s house. He set his mobile – a basic Nokia, as battered as his jeep – on the dining table and changed into overalls. He then spent the next two hours in the yard cutting and neatening up the grass. When he came back, he looked at his phone and commented that he had four missed calls. ‘If it’s important, they’ll call back,’ he said, before taking a shower. After this he lay down on the sofa and turned on the 40-inch smart TV; he then went into the online movie repository platform Netflix and selected a 1970s Western. His phone started to alert that it was nearly out of battery, but he did not check it. Trevor then fell asleep and the phone rang a further two times. He stirred as if he had heard it, but again did not get up to check it or answer. When he was ready to leave, a few hours later, he looked at the missed calls and saw that they were from a friend, his wife and a brother, but he still did not call anyone back.

Trevor provides a typical example of what could be called ‘digital resistance’, in which the refusal to use more communications technology, join social media platforms or own a smartphone is a conscious decision. Refusing to follow suit with even one’s closest circles when
they start using these media does not reflect a lack of means. Rather, digital resistance is more about the refusal to adopt technologies that facilitate further communication and interaction because people sense that their lives are already socially saturated. Digital resistors feel they experience ample sociality in their lived relationships; they already have enough expectations, obligations and negotiations with which to contend. The reason they do not ‘keep up with the times’ or ‘get on board’ with new communications media is that they would have to negotiate and strategise yet another social arena. They thus tend to have an instinctively conservative response, regarding these new tools and platforms as more mediated than the face-to-face relationships they have been brought up with.

Sasha, meanwhile, owns a cheerfully decorated salon in the middle of El Mirador’s busy main street. She is in her mid-thirties and works with her mother Rose and a couple of girls who come in several days a week. Sasha is always fully made-up at work, with very neat, arched eyebrows, colourful eye shadow and a splash of lipstick. She says that Trinidadian women love make-up and colour, because ‘it can do so much for a person, it can lift your mood or just show what mood you’re in, make you look more interesting – it can just bring out the real you’. Her thoughts on social media are similar – and she should know, having been on different platforms since the time that HiFive was popular, around 2006. Later she used MySpace, but is now on WhatsApp, Skype, Instagram and Facebook; the last is currently the dominant social media platform in Trinidad. Sasha’s primary use for Skype is communicating with her best friend, who has lived in New York for the past decade. Before Skype was available they would use phone cards until the credit ran out, often getting cut off when they still had a lot left to say. With Skype, which eliminates the issue of cost, they can talk to each other for hours – and what is more, can show each other what is going on in their lives. Sasha will walk around with her laptop and show her friend this or that new thing she has bought or what she is doing with her house. When they have something serious to discuss, Sasha makes full use of her webcam’s visual potential, emphasising a point with hand gesticulations or a stern look to underline how serious her advice is.

Facebook allows Sasha to express a range of experiences and emotions. She often starts the day by sharing a picture or cartoon with a cute or sentimental image, such as teddy bears or puppies, bearing a caption of ‘Good Morning!’ or ‘Have a blessed day!’ When in a good mood, she will sometimes share a selfie or photo Rose has taken of her in the salon there and then. Sasha frequently updates her status with ‘feeling bored’,
‘feeling happy’ or ‘feeling blessed’. When someone has annoyed her, she might post, ‘don’t you just hate it when…’ and indirectly complain about what the person has done. She often shows photos of clients’ hair, makeup or nails, though these images are mainly now on Instagram. Using the filters and borders built into Instagram, Sasha can remix and frame her creations before putting them on display.

Sasha is very much the opposite of Trevor in terms of her attitude to social media, even though she has just as much face-to-face social contact as he does. When her salon is quiet, she has more time to browse posts and experiment with different platforms on her tablet and BlackBerry. This is not so much because she wants to be more socially connected to keep up with what her friends are doing, although she does admit to ‘macoing’, the Trinidadian word for looking into other people’s business. Sasha does not see macoing as malicious or for spreading stories; she has herself been the victim of gossip too many times and refuses to become embroiled in other people’s issues. Macoing is rather something she does out of boredom, now that her phone and Facebook allow her to maco from a safe distance. For Sasha, certain forms of social media facilitate certain forms of expression, whether these be a few words announcing how she is feeling today or adding filters and frames to a photo of nail art, making her work look more vivid and colourful than the original photo.

If Trevor is an example of a person who embraces egalitarianism and freedom, and whose digital resistance is a rejection of technology to mediate social relations, Sasha is an example of someone who expresses values she sees as important through social media. Macoing, or having one’s business scrutinised, can often engender another, equally significant, Trinidadian social idiom: bacchanal. As will be explored in later chapters, bacchanal implies scandal and disorder, yet it also has the potential to uncover the truth of a situation. Both macoing and bacchanal are ways of keeping tabs on people. When someone acts in a socially transgressive way, the consequence of deviating from the norm is to be subjected to gossip and judgement. These values of egalitarianism and bacchanal are also celebrated through Carnival, but come into play principally in everyday life. As such, they are expressed in people’s attitudes toward social media.

If Trevor represents the human face of concern about a loss of culture and tradition in El Mirador, Sasha reflects the side of the town that takes up new technologies with the greatest ease and speed as soon as they become affordable. Yet Trevor does not think of himself as particularly conservative, nor does he consider his digital resistance as some kind of political gesture. Similarly Sasha has no specific notion of ‘the
modern’, nor does she feel she has gained some kind of status through being at the vanguard of these new technologies.

The reason for Trevor and Sasha’s contrasting reactions to the rise of social media is, more simply, the way in which it happens to impinge on their personal experiences of sociality. Both Trevor and Sasha are highly sociable. However, for Trevor – and countless others like him in El Mirador – social media represents increased social mediation, structuring social interaction in a more complex form. Small-town life is already saturated with demands to be social. There are big families, obligations and expectations that one should act a certain way, do things for people or be here or there to fulfil some kind of request. Conversations are mainly passed along through the grapevine, as the people involved in an issue, such as a family illness, are rarely together in a big group to discuss the matter at the time. Social media therefore seems likely to exacerbate the potential for information to be relayed inaccurately, with an important element omitted and another aspect exaggerated; as such a sustained effort is required to pin down the facts of a matter through different friends and family.

One key difference between Trevor and Sasha is that the former works alone, farming dasheen in the countryside. By contrast, socialising is for Sasha, as for most people who work in hairdressing or beauty parlours, what makes her successful in her work; there is no separation between work and sociality. A gender distinction also comes into play. As women are often the ones who accept both the burdens and pleasures of constant social communication, one more layer or medium can be a blessing. By contrast Trevor shows his masculinity through resistance – a taciturn, laid-back refusal to get too involved in chitchat. He does not need or want any more of this, and is in a position to reject these pressures. Trinidadian culture, and the culture of El Mirador specifically, are constituted by a myriad of individuals: each possesses their particular character, but also holds multiple positions in local society. Consequently there is ample possibility for individuals to express the whole spectrum of El Mirador’s response to new social media.

Visibility: a key to understanding Trinidad

One of the most striking features in reviewing scholarly literature on Trinidad is how often ‘visibility’ appears. Similarly, in conversations with Caribbean scholars, ‘visibility’ is frequently used to refer to a distinctive aspect of Trinidadian social life; its meaning is thus well understood and
seems to need no further explanation. On this foundation, this book introduces the term ‘social visibility’, with the idea underpinning each chapter. Here I define social visibility not as simply making the self more visible, but as simultaneously drawing attention to social norms around creating visibility. For example, the common critique of the selfie shows that it is easy to take the idea of self-expression to an extreme by making oneself too visible in a socially inappropriate way – that is, by demanding much more attention than is normally acceptable. Social visibility thereby highlights the process through which norms develop around the appropriate way to create visibility and what precise degrees of visibility are seen as acceptable. Because it is inextricable from normativity, social visibility in Trinidad is an important aspect of being seen as a ‘correct’ person, one who embodies the everyday views and values deemed ‘right’ and appropriate.

Social visibility is characteristic of an anthropological perspective concerned with the origins and maintenance of social norms – what in anthropology is called the normative – as opposed to the focus on individual drives found in much of psychology. One anxiety frequently expressed in journalistic accounts is that social media is leading to the loss of a true or authentic self. For the Melanesians who were studied by anthropologists such as Strathern, power lay in making oneself visible to others in the correct manner. An individual failure to look good, for example, would therefore make not just the self, but the group that individual represented look weak. As such, the work involved in making aspects of oneself more visible becomes interlinked with power, affecting a person’s capacity to act in the world. A general problem in considering the importance of appearance is that the concept is in and of itself subject to denigration, as exposed by terms such as superficiality.

One of the main dilemmas relating to social media is that individuals have the means to portray themselves in multiple ways. This ability to craft or curate one’s image destabilises the idea that a person has a consistent core: a ‘truthful’ or ‘real’ self. Yet in societies such as Trinidad, the notion that a person has multiple dimensions or identities has always been acknowledged; it is accepted and expressed in the idea of Carnival as masquerade. This in turn has led scholars to examine how a concern for myriad forms of identity emerged out of specific features in Trinidad’s history.

Understanding the dynamics of Carnival is particularly relevant here. Across its historical transformations, from pre-emancipation resistance to post-independence nationalism and contemporary revelry, scholars have recognised that the festival of Carnival speaks to how people understand themselves through visibility. Here, visibility entails
performance: being seen and being on stage. Although it is clearly a form of masquerade based on costume, the prevailing local conception of Carnival is as a forum – a place to which the individual comes ideally to ‘play yuhself’ or ‘free up’, whether one is seen as ‘oneself’ or as wearing a mask. Accordingly, Riggio contends that multiplicity and contradictory intentions are characteristic of Carnival. In previous years costumes symbolised tradition or figures recognisable to Trinidadian society; the sense of freedom and resistance was thus linked to overturning social roles, with lower classes subverting their place through performance. As such, masking or masquerading were used both to conceal and to display identity. Despite the fact that contemporary Carnival looks quite different, many of these class dimensions have remained.

As each chapter in this volume illustrates, social visibility in Trinidad is inextricable from Carnival logic, one that is played out in the use of social media and Facebook in particular. Burton uses the term ‘the Carnival Complex’ to describe the different aspects of everyday Trinidadian cultural and social life that come together to form ‘a nexus of particular intensity’ during the festival period. Seen from the perspective of this study, however, social visibility is not always expressed through participation in Carnival. Given the festival’s dominant role in Trinidadian society, it is also possible for some people in El Mirador to refuse to participate at all in Carnival revelry, making a very conspicuous and very visible statement of their values.

The present-day population of Trinidad has its origins in slavery and indentureship. Initially, as a result, individual identities in the country were entirely imposed by these institutions. Externally at least, a person was supposed to be obedient, deferential and ‘truthful’ based on their role of servitude. Yet, as Riggio contends, this ‘truth’ seen on the surface functioned as a mask, ‘disguising and hiding the personality underneath’. Today, although individuals are categorised in terms of their belonging to a particular class or ethnic group (or both), they also negotiate, resist and subvert these positionings in how they present themselves to others. Forms of expression, for example, extend to consumer goods, through which individuals can craft their own external appearance rather than have it imposed by institutions. However, as a consequence of this, people can now also be judged on the basis of how creatively they construct an external self, building upon Trinidad’s traditions of Carnival and a cultivation of public performance. It is subsequently appearance that is looked to on each and every occasion as a means of judging a person’s true identity: appearance in Trinidad is valued because appearance speaks to a truth of a person.
Norms of visibility

The rise of social media has itself contributed to a focus on the significance of visual appearances, since a key transformation flowing from the recent ubiquity of social media is that images are now an equally important means of communication as text. As is evidenced by the 750 million photos that are exchanged each day on the platform Snapchat, pictures can be a conversation in themselves. The fact that visual forms of communication now also abound on social media means that groups sharing such images, symbols or emojis evolve shared understandings of what they mean in a given context, as was traditionally the case with language.

The norms of visibility, and of what was regarded as acceptable to post on social media, varied considerably between the field sites in our project. The findings detailed in this volume about social visibility in Trinidad are perhaps illuminated most strikingly through contrast with the way in which social visibility emerges in two other volumes, Social Media in Southern Italy and Social Media in Northern Chile. Both these texts describe a clear relationship between social visibility and normativity – that is, the normal or correct way of behaving and viewing the world. Nicolescu argues that social media did not at all transform the lives of people in his field site in Grano in Southeast Italy; here social media was simply used in a way that replicated existing traditions and forms of sociality. As Nicolescu concluded, the people of Grano wished to be seen online in a manner that was consistent with how they presented themselves offline. As a result profiles and timelines on Facebook were carefully curated, with individuals highly selective about what they posted and which images they shared and tagged; others chose to post infrequently. Expressing individual views or opinions which differed from these norms was generally not acceptable. Nicolescu explores in further detail how the relationship between conformity and individuality is expressed in aesthetics, drawing on correlating examples of curating the home, public appearances and women’s cultivation of beauty. In each these domains, Facebook was used as an extension of space in which to showcase a crafting of aesthetic forms and an adherence to a certain style. Nicolescu concludes that these displays on social media relate to higher values and ideals, as residents of Grano were constantly doing their utmost to prove they were ‘good’ citizens by showing their shared values, including a shared sense of Italian style. Where it is the responsibility of the citizen to perform stylishness, visibility as being seen by others is thereby deeply intertwined with visuality as displaying images of oneself to others.
By stark contrast, Haynes found in Northern Chile an obligation to remain systematically un-stylish in order to show a sense of contentment within the local community. In 2014 Haynes returned from her first round of field work in Alto Hospicio and described her field site as one of ‘the most boring places’ she had ever visited. All the buildings looked the same and people predominantly dressed the same, in understated jeans and T-shirts. Her initial observations became the basis for one of the most extraordinary insights on the use of social media: that it could be used to show an aesthetic of ordinariness. One of the dominant genres of selfies posted to Instagram by residents there was what she deemed the ‘footie’. Here the individual taking the photo shows just how natural, relaxed and unpretentious they are by photographing themselves on the sofa, not even feeling the need to adjust their posture for appearance. The people of Alto Hospicio saw themselves and their community as marginal, especially as compared to the cosmopolitanism of Santiago, and their place-based identity overrode any other form of marginal identity, such as gender or indigeneity.

Hospeceños perform social scripts – unspoken but well understood rules that appear through seemingly natural, mundane acts. They ‘perform’ normativity, and as a result further entrench ideas of community by reproducing their normativities over social media, highlighting a collective sense of marginality rather than emphasising any kind of individual distinction. Viewed together, the findings of Haynes and Nicolescu demonstrate how conforming to and displaying normativity through social media serve as visual extensions of good citizenship, subject to social judgements. They thus reiterate Bharadwaj’s argument that what is made socially visible is also an object of social control and management.

Similarly, social visibility in Trinidad is linked to ideas of citizenship – in this case, citizenship of a decolonised and plural society, within a country that has undergone rapid economic change in a short space of time. There is a historical legacy in the country, where governing the self stems from a sustained colonial management of society. More recently, however, rapid economic change has also ushered in an increased array of choices around the kinds of identities individuals aspire to create for themselves. Tensions in this realm are ever-present in the field site of El Mirador, where placed-based citizenship also means being poised ‘in between’ an urban centre and a village. As this volume will demonstrate, the results here differ enormously from the field sites of both Southern Italy and Northern Chile.

Simultaneously Carnival has its own legacy as a popular festival that allowed people a sense of freedom in opposition to their historical repression. It also enabled the emergence of the self-cultivated
individual as a means of combatting oppressive tools of institutional conformity. A stark contrast is thus apparent with the cases of Italy, where people promote a collective style in their identification with Italians as ‘stylish’, and Chile, where they promote an informal conformity to oppose the pretensions of the elite. In Trinidad, it is conformity itself that is opposed, through valorising individual difference in the creation of personal style. As a result, anxieties surrounding the use of social media in Trinidad differ from many other sites. There is far less anxiety around the loss of a true or authentic self in Trinidad than in the US or in the UK, for instance, and the posting of several selfies is not necessarily seen to reflect narcissism or self-centeredness. In the tradition of Carnival, the cultivation of individualised appearance is valued as an appropriate crafting of the self, rather than being perceived as a form of superficiality that detracts from a person’s truth. Yet because the idea of individual style is itself a social value, this provides an example of social visibility equivalent to the conformist tendencies of Italy or Chile. As we shall see, however, cultivating individual style in El Mirador is also tied to identification with, and membership of, certain social groups.

Social media through ethnography in El Mirador

The reason for choosing El Mirador as a field site relates to my overall decision to study social media in Trinidad. In the 1960s my father emigrated to the UK from Trinidad, and I had never spent time in the country. Most of his extended family has remained in Trinidad, including a dispersed range of relatives living in El Mirador. Aside from my family connections, which would naturally ease the transition to life in the town, El Mirador also functions as a sample of wider Trinidad. The population is evenly mixed, comprising 35 per cent of ex-enslaved African descent, 35 per cent of ex-indentured East Indian descent and 30 per cent of mixed or Chinese background (descendants both of Chinese migrants from the 1800s and of ‘new wave’ Chinese migrants from the 1990s–2000s).

However, income levels in the El Mirador region are among the lowest in Trinidad. The town encompasses various economic statuses, from squatters on its outskirts to families who have owned businesses for at least two generations, and a middle class in between. There are also issues of class and ethnic identity specific to El Mirador, where a substantial number of people are mixed Indo-Afro Trinidadians. Although Trinidad generally has a large mixed population, this could be seen as particularly high in El Mirador.
The field work for this book was carried out over 15 months across three years. My first three months’ research in 2011–12 were spent specifically looking at uses of webcams, with social media discussed in more general terms. For six months in 2012–13, and again in 2014, I then focused on social media and everyday life. As in the other nine projects in Why We Post, an unexceptional place like El Mirador was deliberately chosen: we did not wish to be guided in our research by the sensationalist stories around social media that dominate popular journalism. Rather, we wanted to see what ordinary people were doing with social media in their everyday lives. Since our intention was to avoid focusing on pristine rural communities or advanced metropolitan regions in favour of places that faced in both directions, we chose large villages or small towns. And as has already become apparent through reference to Trevor and Sasha, a small town of no distinct importance can reflect a wide range of attitudes and experiences in terms of the uses and consequences of social media.

As an ethnographer, it is especially important to spend an entire calendar year in a country such as Trinidad, which alters remarkably from season to season. It is a very different place at Carnival, in high summer, at Christmas and at Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights. There are also different rhythms of life, for instance around work or school holidays. Seasonal patterns too can affect how people work and socialise, for example between the heat of summer and the rainy season (Figs 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3).

Figs. 1.1 Enjoying a cook-up with the extended family
Reaching the level of intimate knowledge of individuals that is required by ethnography takes a significant amount of time and versatility. During my visits to El Mirador I lived with five different families and in an apartment on my own. I conducted 120 semi-formal interviews, including 30 people interviewed across three years; an in-depth household survey of 100 people; another 100 short questionnaires on uses of social media; a street survey of 100 people on uses of webcams; and a street survey of 50 people on political opinions shared on Facebook. In addition to this extensive gathering of mainly quantitative data, I spent many hours in the homes of close family. Overall I spoke to at least 500 different people in El Mirador about their uses of social media.
Perhaps the most important research tool in an ethnography of social media is being on social media itself, observing and interacting with users of various platforms. This seems a natural progression from the ethnographer’s traditional task of simply making friends; moreover, if one gets to know the same people online and offline, it offers an advantage over more formal ‘internet’ or ‘social media’ studies.\textsuperscript{19} Overall I accumulated 267 Facebook friends and chatted with 38 people on WhatsApp. I initially met all of my Facebook friends face-to-face and more than half became offline friends with whom I would spend time at weekends or after writing and conducting interviews with others. Aside from my extended family, of all the individuals I encountered for this research, I got to know around 60 very well – that is, I visited their homes or met their families, went out socially, spent time at their workplaces or met their colleagues and engaged with them through their vocational interests. These key people informed the qualitative data in my research and I remain immensely grateful to them. With regard to research ethics, all were made aware that they were participants in the research and, as agreed, I have protected their identity by presenting their stories anonymously, such that none can be traced to a recognisable individual.

Generally, as anthropologists writing ethnographic books devoted to our understanding of other people, we try to minimise reference to ourselves. In this text, however, it is necessary to draw in personal matters a little because, unlike in the other Why We Post studies, my entire introduction to the town that became my field work site was through family connections. My own family members are already embedded in their individual relationships. Among them are people they like and get along with, as well as those who may not want to spend a great deal of time with them or, by extension, with me. In an effort to compensate for these dynamics, I would often walk around the town on my own and just ask to interview people who may have time then and there, such as shopkeepers and assistants. Some of these in turn gave me an ‘in’ to visiting and spending more time with other people in the shops they worked in. Through this strategy I managed to speak to shop owners and assistants; hairdressers, nail technicians and beauticians; government workers, who would graciously spend their lunch hour with me and allow me to come back to their offices; restaurant owners and waiting staff; internet café operators and mobile phone salespeople. If I talked with people who worked in small businesses, I could also often speak to their relatives and friends who would spend time in the shop throughout the day. These more informal and unstructured introductions gave
me invaluable insights into people’s daily practices, rhythms and routines. Other relationships that started with survey questionnaires also afforded wider and more general coverage of the field site.

Underpinning this research, however, was the ongoing imperative of extracting myself from a mesh of personal and familial relationships. Yet simultaneously these relationships also enabled me to empathise with the experience of people living in a small town. For them, as for me, family inevitably represents both a support in and constraint on everyday life, as whatever one does in Trinidad tends to somehow trickle back to one’s family. This ultimately saturates one’s relationship to absolutely everything else in a way that can be difficult to convey to people who live in places such as Australia, where I live, or the UK, where family tends to have a much more limited role in an individual’s life. When it came to experiences of social media, it was therefore vital to understand both the positive aspects of so many people’s concern for family and their negative feelings of claustrophobia. Understanding life in El Mirador through being embedded in extended family relationships also contributed to my understanding more broadly of life in small towns. Here sociality is more intense than in urban areas, as most people tend to know one another (or at least to know of each other’s social networks or families by reputation).

At the same time, my own mixed appearance (of Indo-Trinidadian and Chinese heritage), Australian accent and Western education tended to appeal more to middle-class Indo-Trinidadians who identified some sense of shared circumstances and shared aspirations. Many of these were young women, and consequently my first research participants and friends were mostly women. Meeting young male informants was initially problematic for a period because, after sharing my phone number and befriending them on Facebook, some would become intrusive. On the other hand, this was a common and to some extent anticipated dynamic which enabled me to empathise with people’s experiences in the town on another level.

I was extremely fortunate to work with two very different research assistants in 2013 and 2014. The first was a young woman from El Mirador who introduced me to the friends and family she grew up with – relationships which then snowballed into friendships of my own. The second was a young Masters student from the UK with Grenadian heritage who wanted to spend some time in the region. His main task was to shoot our short films for the project, but he also made several friends of his own that I would otherwise not have been able to meet. I maintained those relationships after he left for the UK.
A walking tour of a Trinidadian town

Trinidad is bounded by the Caribbean Sea to the north and the Atlantic Ocean to the east (Fig. 1.4). The country lies just 11 km (approximately 7 miles) from northeastern Venezuela and has a total land area of 4,828 square km (approximately 2,000 square miles). The annual climate is tropical; a wet season of monsoon rains between June and December (with a short dry spell in September and October) is followed by a dry season from January to May. The total population is just over one million people, with 69 per cent living in urban areas.²⁰

Trinidad, along with Tobago, was first claimed by the Spanish in 1498 and was later governed by British, French and Dutch colonisers. Ruled by the Spanish government until 1797, but settled mostly by French planters, invited by the Spanish, the two islands were united into a single British colony in 1888. Trinidad was established relatively late as part of the plantation system. Prior to 1776 there were few enslaved Africans on the island and the population was mostly made up of indigenous groups.²¹ By 1797, when the British conquered the island, there were 10,000 enslaved Africans, which by 1802 had doubled to a slave population of approximately 20,000. In 1807, when the slave trade was abolished, the British colony with its plantation owners faced a dramatic shortage of labour. On 1 August 1838 full freedom was granted to the enslaved Africans. They

Fig. 1.4 Map showing location of Trinidad and Tobago
quickly moved away from the plantations and began to settle villages such as Belmont and Laventille (now part of Port of Spain), as well as Arouca in the northeast of the country. Around this time San Fernando, the second largest city in Trinidad, also grew in population as a number of ex-slaves settled there. In response to the shortage of labour, indentured East Indians were brought to the island from 1845, arriving mostly from the provinces of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. By the early twentieth century the newly liberated African slave population and ex-indentured Indians were living in a colony of mixed language, custom and religion. The latent cultural antagonism between these two populations during the colonial administration persists today. It has in fact become central to modern politics, where the two main parties are generally associated with the ex-African and ex-Indian populations respectively.\(^\text{22}\)

After the First World War the demands for greater self-government increased. Elections in 1956 saw the formation of the People’s National Movement (PNM) led by Dr Eric Williams. Trinidad and Tobago gained national independence from Britain on 31 August 1962 and Williams became the first prime minister, a position he held until his death in 1981. Trinidad has also had some history of political resistance. Before independence the Hosay riots in 1884 saw Muslims claim their rights publicly to celebrate this religious festival, despite being officially prohibited by the British administration. In the Canboulay riots of the same year descendants of ex-enslaved Africans protested against prohibitions on celebrating Carnival. Later a series of worker strikes were mobilised during the labour riots of 1937, and in 1970 the Black Power movement fought to improve the economic conditions of the poor and working classes within the newly independent nation.\(^\text{23}\)

Today the country is ruled by the People’s National Movement (PNM), with Dr Keith Rowley elected to office in 2015 as the eighth prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago. During my field work the country was led by a coalition consisting of the People’s Partnership, made up of the United National Congress (UNC), the Congress of the People (COP), the Tobago Organisation of the People (TOP) and the National Joint Action Committee; Kamla Persad-Bissessar served as Prime Minister and leader of the UNC. Since she assumed office in 2010 the country has seen a drop in serious and violent crime; it had peaked in preceding years, leading to the declaration of a State of Emergency in November 2011 (when I arrived to carry out field work). Fear of violence was therefore a constant theme during my field work of that period. The State of Emergency brought with it an active curfew in most parts of the country as well as an increased police presence. Under Persad-Bissessar
there was also widespread infrastructural development across the country, including the construction of a major highway in the far south and an increase in direct foreign investment. Simultaneously accusations of corruption, nepotism, mismanagement and racism have been levelled at the UNC government, as well as at its predecessors.\textsuperscript{24}

There is a substantial amount of poverty in Trinidad, mostly in rural areas and in slums and temporary settlements around Port of Spain. As a result of its oil industry, however, Trinidad is largely a lower-middle class country. The average income per year is USD $15,000 and the current exchange rate is TT $6 (Trinidadian dollars) to USD $1. Petrol costs an average 45c (US) per litre and long-life milk costs around USD $1.10 per litre. If one decides to eat out, a meal of roti with beef, chicken or goat curry costs around USD $3–4, while meals in chain restaurants are USD $10 on average. Tap water is drinkable and education and healthcare are largely provided by the state, although private health services are also available.

A number of religions are practised in Trinidad, including Hinduism (around 30 per cent) and Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Pentecostal and Evangelical churches (around 37 per cent). Other religious groups on the island include Muslims, Spiritual Baptists and Seventh Day Adventists. There is an ecumenical sharing of religious holidays as people of all religions celebrate Christmas, Eid-ul-Fitr (the Muslim festival that marks the end of the fasting period of Ramadan) and Diwali. A proportion of the population dedicates up to a month to Carnival and the lead-up party season. In addition to these diverse religious public holidays Indian Arrival Day, Labour Day, Emancipation Day and Independence Day are nationally celebrated holidays.

One thread that appears across the chapters of this book is the importance of family and religious life. Christmas in Trinidad is more than an event commemorating the birth of Christ; it is also a time of the year oriented toward the family and the home, a period of renewal of tradition and establishing roots. Among Hindus and Muslims commemorative prayers throughout the year are held in the home (Fig. 1.5). For Hindus in particular these prayers (pujas) are large events. Extended family and friends come to the home throughout the day from early in the morning, requiring a large amount of cooking and preparation to be done beforehand. Even small pujas are ceremonious: families dress in traditional Indian attire and a series of prayers led by a pundit lasts from one to four hours. Normally the family will all eat together in the home afterwards, as the hosting family breaks their fast, which they would have carried out in spiritual preparation for the prayers.
El Mirador is a semi-urban town in an area made up of agricultural and fishing villages. The region consists of the town itself and 43 other villages, with a total population estimated at 75,000; the population of the town proper is around 18,000.²⁵ Taking the squatters who have migrated to the town’s surrounds over the past decade into account, the entire population of El Mirador is around 25,000. There is a main hospital, with a reputation as being one of the best in the country, as well as eight primary schools and six high schools. Two among the latter are Hindu schools, two are Catholic and one is Seventh Day Adventist, yet to attend any given school a student need not follow its particular faith. In 2013 a vocational college opened in the town, part of a government initiative to enable students in the region to pursue higher education if they do not have the means to attend the larger universities further away.

The original inhabitants of El Mirador were indigenous peoples who were eradicated by the 1770s. The town saw very little development before the 1800s, as the colonial administration perceived it to be too far from Port of Spain. A railway was extended to the region in 1896, a time that saw a growth in cocoa farming and brought the first businesses to the region. The next period of rapid growth came with the establishment of a US military base in the 1940s; it was situated at the end of the highway connecting the region to the rest of the country. At that time, migrants went to work nearer to the base for American dollars, and were reluctant to return to cocoa farming afterwards.

The railway was officially closed in the 1970s, yet the next 30 years saw the population grow from 5,000 to 18,000. The highway provided...
an accessible route to the rest of the country and, during the years following the railway closure, a number of people migrated to the area. They were able to buy a substantial piece of land, and to open up small businesses in the town. Few buildings remain in El Mirador that reflect these periods of growth, however, with most of the current construction appearing in the 1980s.26

Today the busiest places in the town are areas of transit (Fig. 1.6) and El Mirador has a reputation for being a place that people merely pass through. Around half of the town’s population works outside El Mirador and villagers tend to use the town as an interchange. It is a hub, and the daily rhythms of urban life reflect its transient character. There are several taxi stands, all located at the connection points along the main road to other villages or towns. People can wait up to half an hour for a taxi or maxi (a mini-van that carries between 12 and 20 passengers for long trips) or an hour for a public bus (Fig. 1.7).

The average family size per household in El Mirador is four people, but, as discussed in Chapter 4, families are more than the nuclear

Fig. 1.6 Map of El Mirador proper
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It is also quite common for people to live in a household with other extended family – for example, a wife’s parents or even a husband’s brother, his wife and their children. Sometimes this more extended family lives together for a short period, such as in the case of recently married couples, who may still live with one set of parents. Large families might live together over years, such as when an adult unmarried woman has children and lives with her parents or her sibling’s family. Trinidadian families are generally large, with members of the generation now over the age of 50 typically coming from families of around five children. The extended family is still central to Trinidadian kinship, even though family size has reduced in recent generations to an average of two or three children owing to changes in occupations and lifestyle.27

However, discussing family in terms of households and the particular inhabitants of a single domicile is in a way misleading: the extended family is not especially bound by, or consistent with, the home itself. On the one hand, it is quite common for siblings to build houses or buy homes that are close to their common relatives, so that an area may have many households belonging to the same family, with cousins constantly in and out of each other’s homes. On the other hand, especially for Afro-Trinidadian families with lower incomes, it was and continues to be common for the ‘baby-father’ to live separately from the ‘baby-mother’, and for children with young biological mothers to be brought up by older, more settled relatives such as the mother’s own parents.28 In such cases the ‘nuclear family’ is spread across three or more different households.

Fig. 1.7 A maxi (public mini-bus) approaching the centre of the town
The accompanying sense of fictive kin, in which many other people are thought of as ‘aunties’ and ‘uncles’ and a very large number living in the same vicinity are regarded at least as ‘sort-of’ family, is considered in greater depth in Chapter 4.

A place ‘in between’

On the streets of El Mirador, subtle visual clues distinguish residents of the town from villagers. The former usually keep to themselves in a nonchalant kind of way. They sit with earphones plugged in or tap away on mobile phones; students read over their notes. In comparison villagers look more conscious of themselves and their surroundings. Despite waiting for long periods of time, their posture will not change – they do not look quite as relaxed. When villagers come into El Mirador to shop or run errands, they tend either to overdress, sporting ironed clothes, shirts and closed-toed shoes, or underdress in loose jeans, a baggy T-shirt and flip-flops (‘slippers’). There is less middle ground in the form of the neat-casual attire that residents of El Mirador wear: fitted, branded T-shirts and fitted jeans; an embellished pair of slippers or simple flats for women and runners or loafers for men.

Yet the self-consciousness of villagers in El Mirador is paralleled in that experienced by residents of El Mirador when they go to ‘town’ – namely, to Port of Spain. A trip into town requires a whole different manner of preparation from going out in El Mirador, whether it be during the night or day. Clothes are selected with far greater care, with a preference for branded and more expensive pieces. Women do their full hair and make-up while men are clean-shaven with neatly pressed trousers and shirts (or sometimes an ironed T-shirt). When they are in El Mirador villagers are careful not to speak too loudly, nor to draw much attention to themselves at taxi stands. Similarly, residents of El Mirador visiting Port of Spain will not speak with great volume or engage in much conversation in American chain restaurants, and will try not to attract too much attention in the bars of the capital’s fashionable Arapita Avenue (‘de Avenue’). Fitting in is extremely important in a society as self-conscious about class as Trinidad, where conforming to the norms of a specific place and looking like you belong there are accomplishments to which most aspire.

This became most apparent when I was staying in a household with three young adults, aged between 17 and 25. Whenever we went to a mall in the centre of the country, such as in the town of Chaguanas, they
did not feel the need to ‘dress up’ particularly; they were quite happy to go after work or school, in whatever they were wearing. Yet when they went to West Mall, known for being the most upmarket in the country, all three took extra care with what they were wearing.

The ethos within El Mirador is quite different. In the town, people do not dress up as much, not wishing to give the impression that they are trying to be ‘better’ than others. There is a language around class that manifests in everyday conversations, expressed in the idioms ‘stush’ and ‘ghetto’. These terms describe taste in clothes and public behaviour, especially at celebrations and pre-Carnival parties called fetes; such language is reserved for those one knows well, however, and people would not describe strangers on the street with these words. ‘Stush’ suggests that a person has money, as well as better and more selective taste. Yet it also implies that the person possessing these assets considers themselves superior: they have a sense of arrogance about their privilege. ‘Ghetto’ suggests the opposite. To describe someone as ‘ghetto’ suggests that they have cheap, tacky and flamboyant taste and/or are loud, brash and crude, without pretending to be anything else. ‘Ghetto’ in particular has pejorative racial connotations; the word is used offensively to describe lower-income Afro-Trinidadians. However, those who are labelled as ‘ghetto’ sometimes resist this positioning, consciously playing up the stereotype to make others uncomfortable. Often ‘stush’ and ‘ghetto’ are used lightly and not as direct insults, though both terms carry a moral judgement about behaviours that are seen as driven by class and upbringing.

Trinidad’s education system is free, but there remains a hierarchy and competitiveness between schools which select students according to their grades. Indeed, which secondary school one attends is perhaps the single biggest marker of class position in Trinidad. Most especially there is a split between several highly selective and prestigious secondary schools, from which many pupils gain full scholarships to US universities due to their exceptional standards of teaching, and the majority of ordinary secondary schools that meet no such expectations. Consequently, although parents do not have to pay fees, many will fund additional tuition after school to help their children achieve the grades to get into better schools. This in turn creates a discrepancy between parents who can afford extra lessons and those who cannot.

University in Trinidad is also free. A number of students from El Mirador attend the University of the West Indies (UWI), which is around an hour’s journey away, towards Port of Spain. Many students who grew up in El Mirador have never attended school in the town; from a
young age they become used to catching the bus to an urban area or having their parents drop them off. Some are educated at schools up to two hours away; they then go on to attend UWI and obtain a job in the city. The homes and families of such students may technically be in El Mirador, but their lives are largely disconnected from the town. Even those who have not been educated in El Mirador can find it difficult to get a good job outside the town, however, often opting instead for training programmes with government offices there or in the region. Such government training schemes generally offer security, decent pay and the option to join the organisation on a permanent basis afterwards. As a result many trainees opt to stay in the public sector in roles unrelated to their field of study.

For those who like the quiet and relaxed paced of country life, a government job is ideal. It enables employees to plan financially for their futures, does not entail peak hour commutes of up to four hours a day and still offers the means to enjoy city life on a night out. Most of the jobs in the town itself are based in government offices, banks, schools and shops. As it is a regional centre, El Mirador has a high proportion of public servants working for bodies such as the Health Authority or regional administration, as well as other public offices. Other people also come to El Mirador to work in small businesses. Many thus commute to the town for work alone, and feel no particular connection to the place (Fig. 1.8). Yet others live in El Mirador itself, but spend their working lives in

Fig. 1.8  Weekday morning on the main road, where traffic is often at a standstill and needs to be directed by a police officer
villages or at units such as the Water and Sewage Authority (WASA), whose offices and facilities are situated regionally.

The town has a few chain takeaway restaurants, such as Kentucky Fried Chicken and Subway, as well as chain clothing and department stores, making it the main shopping and eating-out hub for the villages as well as a service hub. The people who work in these stores are either from the town or from surrounding villages. Smaller shops for clothes, stationery, internet services, mobile phones, hardware and car parts are owned, managed and staffed by families from El Mirador. The town has seven Chinese restaurants, five owned and staffed by ‘new wave’ migrants (those arriving after the 1990s) and two by descendants from Chinese migrants of the 1870s. Small, Chinese-owned supermarkets have also sprung up in recent years, posing competition for larger supermarkets. There are a few house-front shops off the main road, on residential streets, which serve as milk bars for the areas. People from all income groups find these convenient when they need a few items only, rather than going to the town centre. It is also not unusual to see a mix of housing belonging to families of different incomes on the same street (Figs 1.9 and 1.10).

Fig. 1.9  A middle-class home next to a lower-income board house with a corrugated iron roof (to the left)
Among the main weekend activities in El Mirador are visiting relatives or friends in other parts of the country, going to the beach or mall or enjoying a night out in the ‘town’ (Port of Spain), ‘central’ (Chaguanas) or ‘south’ (San Fernando). Because families and groups of friends often venture to destinations over an hour away, weekend rhythms, as much as weekday rhythms, are characterised by the movement of people. The following chapters will explore in greater detail this transient town character and the ways in which individuals express a sense of place-based citizenship.

Chapter outline

Chapter 2 of this volume explores the broad theme of uses of different media. It includes a discussion of the most common social media platforms in El Mirador and an overview of the media landscape in Trinidad’s recent history. It shows how one form of media relates to another – for example, the introduction of cable television in relation to Trinidad’s national media stations. Modes of communication and the ways in which people related to each other prior to the internet and social media are also examined in this chapter. Madianou and Miller’s concept of polymedia is particularly useful here, as it allows us to look at the contexts and content of media used in personal relationships. The subject of visual postings is addressed at length in another text, co-written for this series, *Visualising Facebook: A comparative*
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perspective. That book compares visual postings (mostly images and memes) between Daniel Miller’s ‘The Glades’ field site in England and El Mirador. However, for consistency with the other volumes in the Why We Post series, which are all essentially uniform in structure with each chapter covering parallel themes across the sites, Chapter 3 of this text demonstrates how images are used to show individuality and group membership, chiefly through comparing images posted on Instagram and Facebook. The chapter illustrates how the idea of social visibility poses a problem for the individual, whose experiences relate to context and are embedded in the structures of family and other institutions.

The concept of polymedia is further employed in Chapter 4, where the focus falls on family and other relationships. Anthropology evolved from the study of societies in which the principle mode of social organisation was kinship; social media is accordingly explored here in relation to different kinds of familial relationships (including between couples and between parents and children) and how transnational families navigate these. Home and family have specific meanings in Trinidad, and in this chapter we see that there exist relationship ideals (for instance what it means to be a good mother, brother, partner or friend) as well as actual relationships. Like individuals, relationships differ enormously. So how media comes to constitute relationships depends on these different experiences. Just as we now have an increased array of choices in relation to media for communication, so the potential for social and moral judgement around these choices also increases.

In Chapter 5 I return to the analysis of Carnival introduced earlier to propose that the logics of visibility most clearly expressed in the festival resonate in Trinidad throughout the rest of the year. The chapter moves beyond the individual and family to examine wider groups of association and identification. It argues that specific groups of Trinidadians in El Mirador perceive themselves as either very global or very local. Those who consider themselves to be more locally-oriented provide examples of digital resistance, including a resistance to expanding relationships beyond their immediate community. Yet, as I show here, this serves to enhance rather than detract from the idea of social visibility.

In Chapter 6 these insights on visibility are extended to political engagement. For most people who identify with El Mirador, the preferable stance is to remain explicitly non-activist. This contrasts with a popular assumption that access to social media will lead to the use of political platforms for activists – for example, that Twitter helped to bring about pro-democracy upheavals such as those seen in the so-called ‘Arab Spring’. Chapter 6 presents a case study of a hunger strike that was
carried out as a protest against the construction of a section of a highway. I consider how this national issue appeared on social media and how people in El Mirador responded to it, with two findings emerging from observing the hunger strike play out. Firstly, although people speak openly about politics and political issues in everyday conversations, there is a general disillusionment with the idea that one can influence politics and be an agent of political change. Secondly, to express political opinions visibly on platforms such as Facebook carries social consequences for individuals among peers, indicating why many choose to avoid such activity. The chapter also acknowledges that even though people in a small rural town are not politically active online, their everyday values, for example, moralising and humour, are evident in their posts and comments. Finally, Chapter 7 summarises the primary conclusions of this book and discusses how the findings in Trinidad relate to those from other comparator field sites in the series.

One of the key ideas referred to throughout this chapter is that the simple conception of a town as a place in which people live is misleading. Space means different things to different people: some live there, but their sense of themselves lies elsewhere. Some do not live there, but their orientation is to the town. This dynamic provides a clue for approaching the study of social media. In such research, the temptation might be to start with a fixed space constituted by the town and then claim that social media represents a repudiation of geography in favour of a placeless online world. However, there actually exists far more continuity across the way people relate to their online spaces and offline spaces. In both cases they often ignore the apparent ‘affordances’ of physical and virtual space to create their own networks and orientations, the real key to which is their own social perspective. A person might be entirely incorporated in the family with little chance to escape – something that may be true offline, but is even more so online. Some may have autonomy both online and offline – or, equally, autonomy in one realm and not in the other. In the contrast between Trevor and Sasha outlined above, we saw from the outset that some people reject social media as subversion of or resistance to the dilemmas of sociality. Others, meanwhile, whose lives seem saturated by sociality, crave it all the more through social media. While this chapter has provided a setting, the true ‘geography’ that we need in order to understand the relationship between life offline and online is a social geography.