Cell Phones and Cities

– real and virtual mobilities in the urban landscape[1]

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Abstract

Still two decades after its humble introduction on the consumers' market, the cell phone still work in the minds of people and incite to putting fundamental questions about how people should relate to each other and how life should be lived. Most noticeable, still, is the annoyance over the kinds of use that make people feel invaded by the intimate sociality of others. But below the turbulent surface, other questions are building up, questions concerning living in dispersed urban landscapes. Since the turn of the millennium, the interest in mobile telephony indeed has exploded within cultural and social theory. In my contribution, I make use of this multifarious research to sketch some empirical and theoretical questions concerning urban public environments.

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[1] For observations and reflections related to this text, see blog: *Places, phones and mobilities* at
http://ptomasw.wordpress.com/

Introduction

The aim of this text is to get an overview of the import of mobile telephony for urban landscapes and lives. Similar to other technologies of mobility, like the fixed telephone and the car, mobile telephony has properties that, taken into use, dramatically change people's relations to each other – in space and time. The mobile is used by a fast growing portion of populations not only in the Western world but also in developing countries. Due to that, the uses of mobiles change the basic conditions for how cities – or rather: urban landscapes – are constructed, transformed and work in the daily lives of its inhabitants.

A basic idea is that the practises of the mobile execute its strongest dynamic of change within communities rather than publics. It is primarily communities that are boosted as their members achieve a powerful tool for contacting each other – anywhere and anytime. The mobile helps to enlarge the "windows" for (mediated) interaction in real time, because potentially all the time people spend outside their homes or work places can be used to keep in touch. Equally important is the mobile as a tool for coordination and navigation: People can negotiate and renegotiate meetings, map services and GPS functions allow them to find their way.

The fixed telephone had an immense import for the development of the modern enterprise as well as the modern city. The phone allowed a spatial distancing between manufacturing and administration. Because of that, and due to the development of modern transportation, cities could be functionally zoned and distributed in space, with industrial areas, business districts and suburbs. The fixed telephone permitted real time communication more or less independently of distance but limited this interaction to certain places, primarily the office and the home.[2] The cellular phone, or the mobile phone as I prefer to call it here, has

conquered new territories for mediated interaction – the public realm[3] – and open new times for such interaction – all the time spent outside the locations of fixed telephones. Thus, the mobile sustains all sorts of mobilities of the urban landscape.

What are the consequences of the mobile for the urban regions of the future? What does it mean that individual mobility is enhanced by mediated interaction that is liberated from the dependence upon certain settings? Will the rhythms of the city be smoothed out? Will hierarchies of more or less central or integrated locations dissipate? Is mobile telephony the consequent cure for problems related to long hours of commuting between spread out urban settlements? I will not delve into all these questions but instead direct my reflections towards a certain question which is fundamental in such contexts.

The point of departure for this test is the hypothesis that *the mobile phone is a tool that supports and stabilizes communities* in a time where safe and stable social contexts like the neighbourhood, the school and the workplace are becoming cursory and ephemeral.[4] Mobile telephony is one of the technologies that are developing today and that are used to keep alive relations and communities that may have their origin in place-based interaction but now are dispersed in space. Other examples are services on the internet, social facilities for chatting bloging and interacting in virtual worlds. Mobile telephony stabilizes communities by making them mobile, in at least two ways:

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[2] Lasen (2002) cited by Geser (2004).

[3] Public telephone booths and payphones in bars and restaurants where the only locations in public space where phone calls where possible – a situation often employed in the cinema.

[4] Thus it would be time to return to Richard Sennetts writings that bring forward the theme of inconstancy of work, residence and urban life as a cause of people's difficulties to form sustainable personalities – "the erosion of character".

Firstly by making their members available to each other almost independently of time and place. People can be reached when they are not at home[5] or in the office, and the time-consuming daily travel of urban regions can be used to keep in touch.

Secondly by allowing them to meet face to face by coordinating and negotiating movements and meeting-places. Encounters can be initiated more or less spontaneously and be successively renegotiated, and places chosen by opportunity.

Another starting point is the idea that *mobile communities* to a large degree are enacted in those spaces outside home or work where people spend time or pass through during the day. Such spaces seem to have become an important arena for mobile communities. Thus the setting for my exploration is public space, or rather: the shared spaces of the urban landscape.[6]

The first section shortly reflects upon the mobile phone as an artefact and its networked implications. In the second, the mobile-related experiences of place are addressed in terms of ambiences and *Spielraum* for interaction. Mobile phone-based coordination is the theme of the third section and urban navigation and control is discussed in the forth. These sections lead to the main discussion about the mobile as a tool for maintaining communities in a fragmented urban landscape in the fifth. Finally, in the sixth section some conclusions for future research are drawn.

[5] However, there is a lot to say about the use of mobiles in the home, where the development from one common fixed telephone to individual cell phones affect relations of family members to spaces within and without the dwelling and thus to each other.
[6] Those spaces are, however, not the only (previously more or less telephone-less) territories that are invaded by mobile telephony and its users. The school, youth clubs (Winther 2006), outdoor life, manufacturing and warehouse work, and office work outside the office are other areas strongly affected by the use of mobile phones.

The mobile phone as a multi-tool

The mobile is an artefact with very specific characteristics. It is a small object of the kind that people carry with them, a thing like keys, wallets, glasses, and watches. To be without them may be experienced as being "naked" and handicapped, that is: in a fundamental sense vulnerable and exposed. In his book *In Constant Touch* (2003), Jon Agar draws parallels between the mobile and the pocket watch, the first wearable tool that gave its bearer a privileged and continuous access to the system of measurement of time, utilized by employers and authorities for the exercise of power. The wristwatch enabled a general access to clock time, and simultaneously made the clock a tool to discipline, conform and coordinate individuals. In a similar way, the growing mobile ownership has evolved from the elites of business and administration to the masses (at least in the Western world), giving them access to the global telephone network and making them susceptible for the control exercised by their superiors as well as their peers. Richard Ling (2004) points out that the watch as well as the mobile are wearable tools that enable the coordination of actions in time and space.

The mobile phone and the wristwatch alike are extensions of the body, but where the watch enables interaction via social agreements about timekeeping, employing time measurement technologies, the mobile in a direct way connects it users to each other. Coordination is achieved through individual agreements by way of the mobile telephone system and is not immediately dependent upon standardized time. Instead, the mobile can be seen as a portable virtual door, potentially opening to the locations of other phone users.[7]

[7] "Beam me up, Scottie!" The teleporting opportunities of the *Star Trek* personnel and the worm hole gates of *Star Gate* are just more elaborated version of the everyday virtual teleporting achieved by (mobile) telephones.

The words denoting mobile phone tells about widespread views upon it. In Swedish, the scornful term "yuppinalle" (yuppie's teddy bear) expressed two things: the mobile was an attribute of those living fast and making lot's of money, and, at the same time, a cherished thing and a transitional object. When the mobile phone became a commonplace device, the more neutral "mobile" became the standing expression. Anthony Townsend (2000) notes how in English language there is a change from the reference to the cells of the mobile transmission network (*cellular phone* or *cell phone*) to the portable handset (*mobile phone*). What is happening is obviously a domestication of the mobile, when at the same time its basic characteristics are concealed (being one node of a large system). In German, the mobile is called "Handy", even more emphasising it as a small device that easily can be held in one hand.

In the interplay with others in concrete space, the mobile can employed to make a statement. To put it on the table or hold it in one's hand is a way of declaring that one is waiting for an important call or soon will make a phone call, which is also a way of saying that the events in concrete space are less important. By turning off or tucking away the phone, on the contrary, is a sign of priority for the present. The point in both cases is that the mobile is used in a performance, occurring in concrete space, that announces the (potential) virtual presence – or exclusion – of an unknown number of other (and more important) people.

The advantage of the term cellular phone is that it underlines the significance of the wireless network that provides the fundamental properties of the phone, to connect people independently of where they are or how they move around. Understanding the telephone, whether it is fixed or mobile, as a system rather than a thing seems pretty obvious. However, most of the times we tend to forget its network character. It is only when we lose the connection that we are reminded of transmission links, switches and computer networks. But the very fact that mobile is part of a digital network makes it confusing to understand telephony in terms of actor-network theory. According to ANT, any phenomenon of the material world can be interpreted as human and non human "actants" that connect to each other in different ways. According to Bruno Latour (1998), artefacts are what make society sustainable, that is: people's relations to each other are stabilized by the things and structures they interact with. Humans have designed things to simplify work and have a more comfortable life by externalizing certain abilities and actions to material objects. Thus, things have agency and powers delegated to them. One advantage of ANT is that technology is not seen as an external power affecting its users. Rather technologies are intertwined with its users in networks, where material objects interact with humans. Thus, the users of mobile telephones are neither masters nor slaves; it is a question of cooperation and conflict. [8] Such a network of human and non human actants can also be interpreted in terms of language games (Wittgenstein 2001/1953) that includes following specific rules and agreements, appearing in particular places during certain hours etc.

Steen Eiler Rasmussen's description of school boys playing with their football by the curved wall of *S:ta Maria Maggiore* in Rome[9] is a good

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[8] Several researchers address actor-network theory in their analyses of mobile telephony, e.g. Caron & Caronia (2007), Goggin (2006), and Ito, Okabe & Matsuda (2005), aiming to avoid technology determinism.

[9] Ved ellevetiden havde de et frikvarter, og det benyttede de til at spille en ganske særlig slags boldspil oppe på trappens store brede afsats. Det var nok nærmest fodbold, men de tog også muren med i spillet ligesom i Squash, i dette tilfælde endda en buet mur – og de gjorde det med livfuldhed og virtuositet. Når bolden var out, ja så var den bestemt out: hoppende ned ad alle trapper og rullende hundrede meter ned ad skråningen, hvor en ivrig dreng styrtede ned efter den, ud og ind mellem biler, busser og scooters et sted nede ved den store obelisk. (Steen Eiler Rasmussens *Om at opleve arkitektur*, 1957

example of the complexity and flexibility of language games – or actor-networks – including players and a ball. The material boundaries of the place and the artefacts involved are exposed in their full significance within human action. Compared to the mobile phone, the football is a simple object. It demands: "kick me", "bounce me against the wall", "try to stop me rolling down the sloping square!" Which are the imperatives of the mobile?

For some years, the multi-functionality of the mobile phone was the target for ironic comments like: "Can you make phone calls with it, too?" Today, however, this critique is seldom heard. Now, the reception of the new models can be expressed as in Nokia's slogan: "It's not one thing, it's many!"[10] Consequently, a phone purchased today is not a plain football; it is a ball that can be used in several different games. Its manifold functions allow it to take on multiple roles. The mobile mutates with an exceptional speed and behaves almost like a transformer toy. Below, however, only three of its roles will be discussed: as a device for speech and text communication, as screen for reading digital images (maps) and as a GPS navigation tool.

Mobiles and places

The busy mobile phone users that we see around us are not absent the same way as people reading books, listening to music or surfing the internet. They are engaged in direct intercourse with absent others, whose presence must be imagined by the voice and gestures of the mobile user. They are also involved in situations they are not fully in command of. Whereas the figures of the novel will wait forever and the tune on the music player can be paused, you don't cut off a phone call just like that. The mobile phone users appear to turn away from place, their focus is somewhere else.

Places and the presence of the absent
The represented presence of what is actually absent in time and space, however, is nothing new. Mediated through images, texts, smells and sounds, the world and history appear here and now. Architectural ornaments, newspaper agents, neon signs, movie screens, murals, loudspeaker vans, the smells of oceans or pizzerias etc. convey information, narratives and ideas from near and far. Mobile phones and their signals, blips and half conversations open even more links to the absent, but these are channels of communication in real time. Their double functions as a mobile com-munication tool and a – disturbing or intensifying – feature increase complexity in places where people meet.

What is the difference between, on one hand, places of direct interaction among physically present people and objects and, on the other, places where mediated interaction with absent participants occur? It is not that one place is isolated and the other connected. In the first case, the world outside is mediated by representations and by people carrying narratives.[11] In the second case, there is also the interaction with the outer world, making it continuously present in real time. It appears that the ever present use of mobile phones makes concrete place thinner – and at the same time enhances place by connecting it to an unlimited amount of other, near and far places.

The intrusive intimacy of mobile phone calls
So, with the mobile, the outside world is inter-fering wherever you are. Much of the talk about mobiles concerns irritation about their use. People often feel invaded by signals and involuntarily overheard conversations. The regularly strong reactions emphasize taken for granted expecta-tions and informal rules of shared spaces. They tell about what is perceived as "normal" in the

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[10] Advertisement for Nokia N95, 2007.

[11] This may sound ancient, but is actually what happens every day when people come home from work or school and tell each other about their day.

places where people meet, but also about the cherished places of people's dreams. One explanation of such responses is that the unintentional listeners feel excluded, but still cannot avoid hearing fragments of the other's phone calls.[12] The forced-upon intimacy when the conversation is personal and private is experienced as intrusive. There seem to be great similarities between otherwise different cultures in the ways people react upon other people's phone calls.[13]

Absent presence and mobiles
Media philosopher Norbert Bolz (1995) writes that new media undermine the real world. The flow of sounds and images at once double and absorb reality. They create a nearly tactile closeness to far away events that dissolves the perspective of distance. Phenomenologist Bernard Waldenfels (1985) considers media to eliminate the distinction between familiar and foreign and "here-and-now" to be lost in an imaginary "elsewhere". But mobile telephony poorly matches such interpretations. Kenneth J Gergen (2002) argues that the use of mobiles has completely different repercussions than the use of mass media. He distinguishes between *monological* and *dialogical* media. According to Gergen, absent presence sometimes involves being immersed in narratives transmitted by mass or monological media. But the use of the mobile is not about that, instead physical presence is expanded to involve temporarily absent people, mainly from the circle of more or less close relations. Gergen suggests that mobile telephony is a medium that contradicts tendencies to dissolve locally and community based values and norms – with the risk of doing it to well and creating virtually confined communities. However, general analyses of the impact of monological media on place have little or none relevance for the mobile.

A different place-world
It seems as a paradox that, according to Gergen, the use of mobiles would augment communities (with their origin in place) by liberating them from place dependence. What, then, are the consequences of such a freedom from place? *Space of action*, as described by O F Bollnow (1990), is inhabited by people interacting with each other, thus shaping and recreating lived space. Mobile phone interaction – just like all communication with physically absent humans – makes its participants unavailable for others sharing their concrete environs. Mobile talkers partly escape the interaction of concrete space. But while being engaged in the virtual "phone space", they still are noticeably present as bodies. Their presence obstructs the interplay of the others. Mobile phone users are conspicuously absent in their presence.

But it would be too simplistic just to focus on the negative effects of mobile phone calls. Users of mobiles contribute in creating a different place-world, activating all the places connected by calls. This phone mediated place-world, previously based in the enclosures of fixed telephones only, is now expanding to all kinds of spaces (as long as they are in reach of the transmitters). Mobile phones have the ability to draw people into each other's place-worlds, when- and wherever they want. This means that places are transformed by new courses of action and charged by new meanings. Such transformations not necessarily mean that places loose importance. People still get together and entertain face to face. One question is, however, how public space is affected by such changes.

Encounters in the urban landscape
"And where are you now?" This question has already become classic within discourse about mobile phone habits, not the least in text by columnists. The much discussed need to promptly get a geographical position by the person one talks to is definitely a difference to using fixed tele-

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[12] My interpretation of e.g. Wellman 2001 and Ling 2004.
[13] See e.g. Kopomaa 2000 and Okabe & Ito 2005.

phones. When the entire system relied upon permanently attached telephones, linked by copper wires, exchanges and switchboards, one could count upon that private call were made from home and business calls from the workplace. Everything else was exceptions from the rule.

The indifference of place and the question "where"

With the mobile, the dependence upon set places for people to be available is abolished. As a consequence, they are less confined in their homes or work places. This liberation from place as a communication node directs our attention to movements in the urban landscape and how meetings are managed. Mobiles are powerful tools for the coordination in time and space of travels, meetings and cooperation, in spite of the friction offered by distances, transportation infrastructures and barriers.

The almost complete indifference of the mobile to place triggers questions to clarify the whereabouts of the callers. There is indeed a paradox[14] intrinsic in the relations of mobile phone use to place. Mediated interaction transforms the "where" of the users to "anywhere". And then, the standard question: "And where are you now?" All of a sudden, place means everything! What about this sudden geographic curiosity?

There seems to be several reasons. One of them is to clarify if the person in question is free to have a conversation. Is he or she driving, walking in the park or attending a meeting? Here, where means what kind of place. Another is to look into the options for the persons to get together "in real life". Where and when is it possible to meet? A third reason is to estimate the time of arrival of the other person. When will he or she come home?

Meetings in the urban landscape

The fact that mobiles make people continuously available when on the move is crucially important for how the urban landscape is made use of during the day. It allows a new tactics of coordination with family, friends and co-workers, a time-space management of everyday life. The mobile facilitates meetings by letting people find one another without making prior arrangements. And the agreed upon meeting point can be successively described, clarified and renegotiated.

Michel de Certeau argues that people's ways of crisscrossing cities have a tactic component. Albeit the structures of urban landscapes are largely determining (dominating, Henri Lefebvre would say) the flows of inhabitants, there is a freedom in terms of shortcuts, figuratively *and* literally speaking. Citizens develop techniques of improvising and finding ways that deform the order laid down by those in power.[15] Such skills are sustained by the use of mobile phones and have a special import in the sparse and fragmented parts of urban regions, where a higher level of coordination is called for. However, it is when people are crowded within a limited space – a city centre, an external shopping area, a ski resort, a beach or a market – that the potential of tactical coordination is greatest. When a group of people visits such an event-place, mobile phones are frequently used to allow paths motivated by individual desires to coincide. At the ski resort, for instance, everyone wants to choose their tracks or slopes, and later join together for drinks or food.

To coordinate activities in daily life

Everyday life is not made up of spontaneous socializing only. Most of the time, it rather appears as extremely stereotype, consisting of repetitions like commuting to and from work or school, shopping, picking up kids, exercising etc. However, it is maybe particularly on days like that mobile communication is useful. Changes of

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[14] An apparent paradox, I have to admit. It is a pretty logical question.

[15] Certeau 1984, Lefebvre 1991.

plans, delays, small emergencies, most of the little thing can be dealt with if it is possible to connect by phone. Improvisations can be managed, like getting suggestions for shopping on the way home.[16]

The use of mobiles to solve problems of mutual time-space adjustment requires good enough transportation. For improvised daily coordination in spread-out urban landscapes, efficient transportation with frequent services is essential. When car traffic slows down and trains or busses are delayed or one misses one of few departures, the usefulness of the mobile is reduced to getting across messages. But as long as everything runs according to timetable, mobile users have great opportunities to manage their personal itineraries.

The relation between mobile telephony and (private car) motoring is sometimes depicted as a symbiosis, where the mobile phone fulfils the automobile revolution.[17] For active households, such as families with children, the mobile is useful for dealing with unexpected events, requiring new decisions during the workday. However, there is a tendency to replace planning with spontaneous coordination, which does not exactly support the development of sustainable transportation.[18] Thus, diminished travelling due to better coordination is counteracted by increased travel caused by spontaneity. The very option of reaching people "anytime" could trigger more physical mobility. The most important feature of the mobile conquest is probably not to increase sustainability in terms of lower energy use but rather to allow human communities to become manifest in concrete space.

Finding one's way – and being found

The mobile is a useful instrument for navigating urban landscapes – but, on the other, hand makes people susceptible for attempts to trace, identify and control them. What is at stake here is geographic positioning in two radically different senses: one that helps people find their way and another that enables those with access to telephony databases to track down the same people. Here, the mobile phone stands out as a double-edged tool.

Navigation and stalking
With the functions integrated in mobiles of finding one's way, new techniques are established to navigate the city. Most mobiles sold today have access to the internet, and thus addresses, local maps and suggestions of routes are available online. The lines and itineraries of public transportation can be browsed. There are even services that employ positioning data of the mobile telephone system to deliver information of location to the user (or rather: the mobile phone itself).[19] Quite a different technology, GPS navigation, is included in a growing number of telephones since 2007, giving the user quite accurate information of his or her whereabouts.[20] So, another role of the mobile is the navigation device, showing where one is – and how to reach one's target.

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[18] Hjorthol & al 2006.

[19] The basic technology for a wireless telephone system based on cells was developed as early as 1947 by D H Ring at Bell Laboratories, thus the term cellular phone. A prerequisite for the system to work is that all handsets can be located and that they can move from on cell of transmission to another without interruption (roaming). Using internet based programs, such information can be sent back to the individual mobile phone, together with the whereabouts of volunteering friends, see http://friendfinder.telia.se/. According to my limited experience, transmission based positioning is not very accurate.

[20] Global Positioning Systems are using satellite signals to decide the location of the individual device.

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[16] In The Mobile Connection (2004), Rich Ling argues that the role of mobiles for coordination is to replace the set times and places of the clock with flexible appointments of perpetual communication.

[17] The relationship between motoring and mobile telephony is discussed by e.g. Sheller 2004 and Ling 2004.

The other side of the coin is that mobile systems require information about the positions of each phone. As the phone moves through the landscape, the system records location data and switches to an new transmitter when it leaves one segment or cell for another. Thus calls can be directed to and from the correct cells. The implication is that the system continuously identifies and localizes each phone. Positioning data can be used for surveillance of the whereabouts at any time of users, assuming that they are registered as owners and their phones are turned on.

To find one's way
All experiences, from observation and systematic reflection to various, half-conscious routines, are employed when mobiles are used for navigation. There is a wide range of techniques that are combined, including visual overview and the identification of landmarks, the use of printed maps, inner or cognitive maps, body memory, memorised descriptions like song lines, street names and numbers, flows of people and their directions, the rhythms of the city, the linear character of routes and strip malls, networks of well known places, the connections and stops of public transportation, road signs etc. Each of these techniques involves several senses and the attributes and properties of urban rooms.[21]

Among these methods, some build upon visual overview and cartographic representations, whereas others employ less conscious choices resting upon qualities like urban morphology, environment recognition etc. Following Michel de Certeau, one could say that the former refer to users acting as *voyeurs* and the latter as *walkers*. Thus, urban navigation is based not only upon strategic overview but also on the tactics of knowing one's way around. The overview is the privilege of those with a high position, literally or figuratively. A room with a view, the access to maps or an oligopticon[22] enables the approach of a voyeur. To stroll around in a city most of the time implies being a walker, employing a number of techniques from routinely following well-known tracks to intuitively finding one's way. Now and then, the walker turns into a voyeur when passing a point where there is a view; be it a bridge, a hill or a tower. The walker can also make use of the strategic overview put down in road signs, information boards and maps.

The mobile works as a navigation device in more ways than one. First of all, mobile phones are social tools, used to convey advice and information how to find the way verbally or using text messages. Those communicating must then be able to express their geographical knowledge verbally. It is more difficult to show by pointing or making gestures, even though camera functions in most new phones actually make it possible to share images of one's whereabouts in relation to the urban landscape. In a context of tactic mobility, the communication of positions seems to require the eye and the mind of the voyeur.

By using internet maps or the GPS function, mobile phone users have always access to the spatial overview of the voyeur. As a tool for navigation, the mobile improves accessibility especially to places off the highly frequented routes and well-known settings. Now, remote places no longer are hidden and difficult to find. One consequence could be that a "good business location" in the old sense becomes less important. A new establishment off the beaten track may find its market by, apart from its address, also giving out its position coordinates and trust people's skills in using their GPS devices.[23]

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[21] See Lynch 1960, Seamon 1980, Hillier 1996 and many others. In the article: *The connectivity of the urban landscape* (Wikström 2005b), such techniques of navigation are discussed.

[22] The term is introduced by Latour and Hermant 1998, referring to the control rooms of urban regions.
[23] However, please note that successful businesses with remote locations are not new phenomena, whether they employ mail-order catalogues, websites or actually visiting customers.

The question is in what ways the integration of navigational utilities in mobile phones will affect how people explore urban landscapes. Is there a new geographical confidence evolving, that affects the ways people cross their regions in the sense that the main routes become less important and new places and roads are discovered? Participants of geocatching[24] enjoy a kind of treasure hunting where the trick is to find caches and report back to the organisation website. Other geographical games employ the mobile to convey instructtions in the form of spatial riddles or random suggestions of movement, inspired by situationists' ideas.[25]

To be found
As an opposite to the playful use of the geographical capacity of the mobile for finding one's way, the positioning technology that is the basic principle of the phone system can be used to find people – or rather: their mobile phones. Regarding fixed telephony, the direct relation between a phone number and an address is obvious. But a fixed telephone is often shared between several users, thus the phone number does not clearly indicate a single person. The mobile phone is generally owned and used by one individual.[26] Mobile phone users often seem to be unconscious of being traceable in space through the positions of their devices. The frequent question: "Where are you now?" is caused by the lack of access for normal users to the positioning data of the system. Powerful actors, however, can employ data from the system to indicate where any mobile phone (as long as it is turned on) has been at certain times. The mobile does not only enhance the possibility

of finding one's way but also increase the risk of being found – by businesses or authorities with access to the system.

The ramifications of tracking mobile phone transmissions to control the citizens of a totalitarian society are not difficult to imagine. In crime novels, this opportunity is illustrated when criminals are being hunted by the police.[27] Position data can not only be used to control the citizens. It also gives the opportunity to address users – in the sense of probable customers – when they move in the vicinity of any establishment who wants their attention. A restaurant, for instance, could transmit offers of today's menu to lure hungry passers-by. So far, this opportunity of persistent marketing has not been exploited in a large scale.[28] The opportunity for people who know each other to use the mobile to control each other has not generated a lot of publicity.[29] However, this technological boosting of the more common informal social control that is intrinsic to any community may have consequences for everyday social intercourse.

Tracking and the location of businesses
Less obvious for people at large are the prospects of logging and quantifying the flows of individual movement through the city at different hours. A study made at the MIT shows how data collected by mobile phone systems can be used to create maps. Provided that one accepts the limitation to inhabitants carrying turned-on phones, such maps hour for hour show the strength of the rhythms of movement in the urban landscape.[30] Such

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[24] See e.g. http://www.geocaching.com/

[25] One example is: *IN-duce DE-duce*
http://www.in-duce.net/archives/locationbased_mobile_phone_games.php

[26] However, there are exceptions, e.g. in "undeveloped" countries. See e.g. de Souza et Silva (2006).

[27] The tricks to avoid being found are countless: Mobile phones are crushed into pieces, thrown in the water, or dropped on passing trucks, all to make stalking difficult.

[28] See however:
http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/05/07/yourmoney/mobilead08.php

[29] Mark Andrejevic (2005) discusses the use of mobiles for mutual surveillance.

[30] Spatial distribution of mobile phone use (Graz), see:
http://senseable.mit.edu/projects/graz/graz.htm

mapping of spatio-temporal properties of cities would attract the attention of planners, geographers and urban sociologist but even more of real estate investors and chain store owners.

Where, on one hand, the increased ability to navigate urban landscapes hypothetically supports businesses located off the track, the opportunity to study quantitative flows in real-time would rather lead to decisions that conserve existing dynamics of the city. Indeed, there is an interesting perspective on urban landscapes that opens here, in the interplay between the tactics of GPS-equipped citizens and the increased opportunity to track their movements.

Mobile communities and public domain

In the text that follows, I will focus upon the theme that I find most relevant as a researcher in the fields of architecture and urban studies, that is: how the use of mobile telephones transforms those realms of the urban landscapes that we share with others. My point of departure, as previously mentioned, is the ability of mobile telephony to stabilize communities by making them mobile.

Mobile phone users in public space
For the sake of argument, let us imagine that all people present in the urban environment are simultaneously using their mobiles. In what generally is called public space, people meet that have most of their attentiveness directed elsewhere. The word "meet" is of course deceptive: what occurs here is rather what Erving Goffman called *unfocused interaction*.[31] The malicious portrait of the cell phone city is just a scene like that, where all participants are immersed in mobile conversations with absent people. They are not completely gone; they notice people they meet as far as avoiding to collide with them. But no one experiences anybody else in concrete space. Presence in public space is actually an absence,

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[31] Goffman in Giddens (1984)

and the space in question is public only by designnation.

But not even an incisive description like that, of an urban space were no strangers actually encounter, convinces us that those people, so enclosed in their activities, are indifferent to the world. Rather, people talking in mobile phones often stand out as engaged in their conversations to the degree that they forget about their concrete environment. Their conspicuous absence represents an important ingredient of today's urban places, but in a different sense than the general interaction face to face, be it focused or unfocused.

In reality, even if there are certain places characterised by intense mobile communication, people in public environments generally are not constantly occupied on the phone. The contradictory interplay between absence and presence at stake here appears awkwardly reciprocal. It is annoying having to listen to (half) conversations that are either indifferent or too intimate to us. We become mutually conscious of each other's personal worlds – that are not only private or intimate but also involve relations to public institutions, employers, associations etc. Thus, the mobile phone exposes the stranger as someone who has her or his engagement and social relations elsewhere. Maybe the mobile makes the stranger at once more unapproachable and less enigmatic. Just like you and me, the stranger is a human occupied by a personal world. The absent presence of the stranger consists of interchange with a larger or smaller circle of personal and formal relations.

From the perspective of public space, the widespread use of mobile phones primarily represents absence. The mobile user, it seems, avoids encountering strangers, and is absorbed in interaction within the network of relations that can be reached by phone. Although conversations do not go on endlessly, mobile telephony represents a

potential connectivity, an option to, whenever situations appear boring, call or text a friend or an acquaintance, escaping from half-empty streets to a space of human affection and commitment. It is often more fun somewhere else, and the mobile can take us there!

Mimi Sheller emphasizes the potential of the mobile as a support for the self, represented by phone numbers to family and friends, links to banking services and access to person related information. With the mobile turned on, one can – anytime and anywhere – log into global communication systems and interact with people in remote locations. "He or she is holding in abeyance a wide range of 'absent presences', with whom a conversational coupling might easily be established" (Sheller 2004). A mobile phone call is not necessarily something that demands a certain time or place, the opportunity of mediated interaction is ubiquitous.

Mobile calling or texting often seems to be accepted as a legitimate absence from expectations of social intercourse from in friends or strangers in public space. People even pretend to by occupied in phone calls to avoid having to greet or talk to persons they want to avoid.[32] But actual phone calls or SMS exchanges appear to be more important as a technique to choose one's company.[33]

Phone calls and text correspondence are not the only exchanges enabled by mobile telephony. The newest models include several functions that help users to take part in a number of public spheres. The access to public media is only limited by the small size of the screen and the relatively low speed of data transmission. Several models also include a separate radio, an MP3-player and, in some cases, a television tuner. Thus, the mobile user has access to most media channels that convey public interaction and debate. In this text, however, I will primarily focus upon the real-time intercourse with absent others that still is the primary function of mobile telephony, an activity that is visibly and audibly present in public settings.

Privatisation of the public?
What many people perceive as annoying in regard of mobile conversations in the public seems to be the fragments of intimate information trickling out.[34] One learns things one does not need to know about people one has nothing to do with. In another sense, that information is highly relevant. The stranger's "mask of civility" becomes less opaque. Mobile phone conversations do not make people completely naked to each other, but render them present in a more complex way.

There is a tendency in the popular discourse on the mobile to complain about public space being privatized. One must, however, keep in mind that the public realm was always characterized by the interplay between private and public. *Personal space*[35] represents an elastic space that people try to establish around themselves. Perhaps the use of mobiles modifies peoples' private or intimate behaviours in the public, the ways they move between acting personal and civil, respectively. Such modifications are not harmless: They may include aggressive self-assertion, averted-ness or dissociation from the arenas of civil society. They may also present people to each other as more vulnerable as their façades become a little more transparent.

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[32] Verbal communication 2008 (Pat Sablatnig). See also Geser (2004).
[33] In an anthropological study, Ida Winther (2006) describes how youngsters at a Danish youth club employs mobile phones to manage their – present and absent – relations.

[34] In his description of a tenement block in Paris (1996/1978), Georges Perec stands out as an urbanite that is being forced upon the close relationships of local communities when involuntarily noticing sounds and smells from the neighbours' apartments.
[35] Hall (1966).

In my view, however, making more public such relations that are considered intimate or personal does not imply the privatisation of public space. What is here called "private" and "privatisation" concerns the continuous reproduction of relations between people, within what is called communities or social networks. It is another dichotomy than private – public that is at stake: the mobile contributes to enhance and express *Gemeinschaft*. If the public is somewhat pushed aside, it is not by the proliferation of private behaviour but by the extension of communities into territories where they used to be held back. The mobile and its phone book make this circle of relations ever present. What are the consequences for all those spaces that people share when communities become mobile?

The social history of the mobile phone
When it was introduced, the telephone – opposite to its predecessor the telegraph – was depicted as a medium for female chitchat. Whereas the telegraph corresponded to hierarchies of command, the telephone enabled a quick dialogue, an exchange of information and ideas. The argument of unmanly gossip was employed to devalue the import of the innovation and to slow down the building of telephone networks. It took a generation until the consumers' way of using the telephone was accepted by the industry.[36]

When Claude S Fischer in his book *America Calling* (1992) concludes how the telephone was received by the broad public in the USA until the Second World War, he emphasizes its socially communicative function. He means that, although the telephone system supported and intensified peoples' social interaction, it did not vitalize the public realm at large. The telephone was important in closer circles of friends and acquaintances and for the contacts with local authorities, associations and businesses. Thus, the telephone

supported interaction within the *parochial realm*, or the networks of *weak ties* (Granovetter 1973). The telephone did not bring about the independence of place (partly due to the high costs of long distance calls) but rather improved local communications and made them more sustainable. In one sense though, place became less important: The telephone made it possible to keep in touch with friends that moved away. The parochial realm was no longer solidly local.

One problem with clarifying the effects of the telephone during this period is the simultaneous introduction of the automobile. The public places of villages and small towns suffered from the easy access by car to the more exiting larger towns for taking part in events of all kinds. My conclusion of Fischer's study is that the physical environment as the first and foremost interface for social intercourse looses significance in favour of "telephone space", the virtual meeting places created by the telephone system. The local shared spaces at the same time are partly abandoned for the more central public spaces of the region, accessible by car. Together with the improvement of infrastructure such as electricity and running water, other media like radio and television help completing the exodus from local public space.

In his article "The challenge of absent presence" (2002), Kenneth J Gergen points out that the fixed telephone, and even more, the mobile phone seem to restore locally based communities, that for a long time have been flooded by non-local information. He stresses the importance of making a distinction between media conveying *exogenous* material and those transmitting *endogenous* information. Whereas exogenous media broadcast a content that questions or distorts local knowledge, endogenous communication contains ideas and values produced by people living together or close by each other. Although the fixed telephone partly is invaded by messages of global actors – such as telephone sales and market surveys – it still works as an extension of face to face interaction. Gergen

[36] Lena Andersson-Skog (1998) and her reference to Michèle Martin.

holds that the mobile phone, due to the larger accessibility of its users, even more functions as an amplifier of communities.[37]

From mainly being a work instrument for business and crafts people, the mobile has achieved a vital role for the communication within the circle of relatives, friends and workmates, people that also see each other face to face.[38] According to a study of the mobile use of local entrepreneurs in Rwanda, it was more often family and friends that were contacted by voice or SMS than customers and business relations. Still, the mobile phone was considered to have a crucial role for the activities of small businesses.[39] A Chinese study of the use of text messaging conveys a similar view with an emphasis upon exchange with friends, family members and significant others.[40] Thus, studies of very different contexts picture the mobile as a tool of interaction within communities. It is this role of the mobile telephone that I have found important to examine in the context of the urban landscape.

The communities of the mobile telephone
Daily conversation – or gossip – is fundamental for how communities are reproduced, according to Kate Fox (2001). Contrary to prejudice, men and women equally spend considerable time gossiping, with the difference that men tend to call their gossip exchange of information.[41] Taking part in exchanges of information about persons present or absent is crucial for people to become accepted in communities. Just like the fixed telephone, the mobile has been portrayed as a medium for chitchat. However, there is not reason for disdain,

gossip is crucial for the maintenance of fundamental levels of society (ibid.). According to Swiss sociologist Hans Geser (2004), the secret behind the conquest of mobile telephony is not only that it responds to needs related to current trends of development. Its success, cutting through diverse cultures and layers of populations, builds upon its fulfilment of deep and universal human needs. It even seems that, in my reading of Geser, the mobile helps restoring original patterns of sociality. In my view, however, it is communities in the form of contemporary personal networks that are supported and enhanced by the widespread use of mobile phones.

Barry Wellman, social network researcher with a long experience of studying the significance of communication technologies for communities, proposes a typology for how social relations and connectivity have changed through history and describes the role of space and technology in such transformations (2001). In *door-to-door* communities, whether nomadic or rooted, communication generally was based upon walking. People lived and worked close together and continuously met face to face. *Place-to-place* is Wellman's term for communities liberated from local neighbourhoods. Here, the access to transportation and communication media makes people less dependant upon place. However, the household and the home still play important roles, but, compared to door-to-door communities, they seem to exist in a contextual vacuum. The place of residence means relatively little but the home itself develops into a hub of mediated interaction.[42]

Opposite to the fixed telephone, internet on-line relations are mainly individual. Whereas (fixed) phone calls often occur between families, e-mail and internet chats are between persons. But it is primarily the proliferation of mobile telephony –

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[37] However, due to its many functions, the mobile is even more at risk to become invaded by exogenous media.

[38] See e.g. Kopomaa (2000), Fox (2001), Ling (2004), Ito, Okabe & Matsuda (2005).

[39] Donner's study is quoted by Castells & al (2007).

[40] Sohu-Horizon Survey 2003:8 referred to by Castells & al (2007).

[41] It is only in mixed companies that men prefer topics of conversation that are not personal, such as politics, culture and philosophy.

[42] However, the study of "Netville" shows that the access to internet also can be used to support local interaction.

and other communication devices that are carried by people – that is the basis for what Wellman calls *person-to-person* relations. Such technologies, and the practises based upon them, complete the de-contextualization commenced by the development represented by place-to-place relations. Now conversations and exchanges of messages take place between individuals, no matter where and when. The mobile phone is the adequate tool for sustaining interpersonal networks. The almost unlimited accessibility represents a problem when people feel stressed by too many calls, but also enables improvised meetings when the involved are not to far from each other.[43]

Mimi Sheller (2004), referring to Wellman's research, points out that internet and mobile based social networks give rise to personalised communities that exist in concrete and virtual spaces equally. She asks to what degree internet or mobile based interaction exclude certain groups in society. In *Splintering Urbanism* (2001), Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin analyse how the design of infrastructures maintain the uneven distribution of resources. In my view, mobile telephony represents an infrastructure that makes little difference between the rich and the poor, but rather ignores sparsely populated areas in favour of the denser regions. My response would be that the mobile increases the capacity of people in densely populated areas with social skills and access to resourceful networks of people. If there is exclusion, it is mainly related to societal classes and life forms.

Communities before and after the introduction of mobile telephony
In the texts by Fischer, Gergen and Wellman, one is reminded of the great import of the telephone system upon fundamental levels of society, especially the relations between local and global

contexts, or – in other terms – between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. In spite of certain differences, there are similarities between the judgements on the mobile made by Gergen, Fox and Wellman. They all seem to hold that the mobile phone sustains networks based upon personal relations and commitment. For Gergen, this means that values and experiences developed among people that know each other personally have a breathing space in a world dominated by mass media. Fox seems to suggest that the mobile is the adequate tool to maintain circles of friends in a time when people often are busy and on the move. The mobile reinstates the supportive and socialising role of gossip. Wellman says that mobiles are important to keep together interpersonal networks that cannot rely on place as an interface. The mobile phone liberates communication from certain settings like home and workplace, thus also from the control of families and employers. Personalised networks break free of place and become *mobile communities* – where the term "mobile" refers to the cell phone as well as to spatial mobility.

Mobile communities appear robust in more than one way: They are less vulnerable to people being separated in space; they include the opportunity of spontaneous get-togethers; and can be maintained by the use of breaks and waits for making calls or sending text messages. They are mobile in the sense that their members can stay in touch independently of where they are, although they are on the move, but also because they allow people to coordinate their movements and intersect where it suits them, not the least in what is called public space. The question is then how communities made sustainable by the mobile phone influence the shared spaces of the urban landscape, the physical arenas of public life.

Public subdivisions
The term "public" is a topic for diverse interpretations, some of them contradictory. It also forks into different, partly overlapping, categories,

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[43] Wellman also discusses specialised role-to-role networks that employ tools for communication that are more detached and do not bring forward the full person – techniques such as e-mail and SMS.

e.g. public sector, public sphere, and public space. Mimi Sheller and John Urry (2003) point out that separate interpretations of public also include private as it's opposite. They are critical to the clear-cut dichotomy and propose a more fluid and mobile understanding, where private and public continuously mix and transform. Sheller and Urry also go up against ideas of decline and erosion, whether the private or the public aspect is intended. Instead, new hybrids of private/public and the communicative practises involved should be dealt with.

Theorists like Habermas, Sennett and Bauman have developed ideas about public space that have their origin in forms of social interaction developed during the 18th and 19th centuries with the rise of the bourgeoisie. The ideal public spaces described by Sennett are characterised by encounters among strangers, an interaction quite different from the one related to local communities. The meeting of strangers is described as an event without past as well as future. Civility is the term employed by Sennett to describe the competence required in the public (Bauman 2001). Thus, public space is a specific territory of collective life, where strangers meet strangers without having to become involved in personal or intimate relations. Mobility, it seems, is a fundamental precondition for the development of public realms. Public-ness is a quality found in cities, and cities depend upon trading and transportation. It also requires strangers, that is: people that are not known or local, having travelled to reach the place in question. So, mobility and flows are implicit in the conception of public space. Perhaps mobility is also a predicament that always undermines efforts to create an analytic clarity around categories like private and public.

Zygmunt Bauman is one of the theorists that describe public space in a state of deterioration. In his article "Uses and Disuses of Urban Space", he analyses a number of formally public settings that more or less lack opportunities for public inter-

course, for example contemporary spaces for commerce and transportation (and waiting for transportation) and left over spaces (2001). Such environments, called "public, but not civil" places, can be found anywhere in the urban landscape.[44] Urban regions are full of spaces that are called public, although nearly devoid of public interaction. The oscillations between presence and absence, that characterise the use of mobile phones, present difficulties when trying to understand spaces as public. The condition of "disuse" pictured by Bauman does not imply that public becomes private. Instead, there is uncertainty about what kinds of sociality that are practised in the environments he describes. Civility is obviously driven back by other patterns of action. This lack of engagement gives leeway for mobile interaction. From Bauman's perspective, the very use of mobile phones may create yet another disuse of urban space, when place is reduced to background for the conversation.

As urban life evolves, the meaning of "public" also changes. Marten Hajer and Arnold Reijndorp deal with this uncertainty by defining what they call *public domain* as "those places where an exchange between different social groups is possible and also actually occurs" (2001). Such encounters transgress borders between people with different social, cultural and ethnic background, of different gender and age. Public domain does not necessarily correspond with what is formally considered public. Whereas privately owned malls not necessarily exclude a broad public interaction, formally public streets and squares are sometimes the territories of certain groups in society or have a design that practically prevents public life. By using the term "public domain", they avoid the confusion between formally and actually public spaces. Due to the fast development going on in urban regions, it is more and more difficult to point out certain sorts of spaces as public. Nodes

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[44] See also my discussion of Bauman's "Uses and Disuses of Urban Space" (Wikström 2005a).

of transportation are one example of places that increasingly will act as public arenas. Others seem to loose their traditional roles, such as when city centres are turned into theme parks for tourists, exclusive residential enclaves or shopping malls. Also communication technologies, and especially the development of mobile telephony, are involved in the transformations of urban landscapes.

A quite different – but also pragmatic – perspective is formulated by Don Mitchell.[45] According to him, public space is always in a state of being created. Space is *made* public by being appropriated by individuals and groups. It is a continuous taking-into-use, where different interests and projects sometimes give room for each other, sometimes clash in conflicts. For Mitchell, who refers to Henri Lefebvre's ideas, it is obvious that public space is not neutral but always political. There is a fight going on between classes and layers of society about the control of public space. The rules regulating the access to different public spaces are in itself a result of political struggle. From this perspective, the formal status of urban rooms making up "public domain" is not insignificant. In most democracies, the right to express political views is granted in formally public areas but not in privately owned spaces open to the public. In the media, there is a public debate going on concerning the right to certain actions – political, cultural or commercial – in public rooms.[46]

A related perspective on public space sets out from boundaries and their transgression. Public space can be described through the rules, formal or informal, strict or flexible, that apply inside and outside a certain boundary. To move through urban space means passing territories where different rules pertain – and in turn adapt one's behaviour accordingly. But it is first when someone breaks a rule and goes beyond what is sanctioned, that rules and borders become visible (Cresswell 1996, Wikström 2005a).

Public places affected by the widespread use of mobile phones on one hand have varying formal status, and on the other are being continuously transformed through people's appropriations. Mobile telephony may contribute by making completely new spaces public, by intensifying the activities in others and by reducing the intensity of public life in yet others. The question is what appropriative actions, what transgressive practises, the mobile is involved in.

Mobile publics[47]
To deal with such unstable and changing conditions, Mimi Sheller refers to the social theory of Harrison White. In opposition to the fixed entities that dominate theories of social networks, White introduces new metaphors like "gel". In a gel, there are no hierarchic order of networks. Rather, social life is understood in terms of a kind of mess, which is not comprehensible in terms of networks. Gel is a better metaphor for communicative contexts characterised by the movement through diverse social environments, Sheller argues. For White, decoupling is just as important as the couplings that make up various networks. "Decoupling makes it possible for levels of social organizations, such as cities and organizations and families, to mix and blur into an inhomogeneous gel"[48]

Public space is an environment where ideas of more fluid contexts, within which sociality is expressed as ever changing gels, seem particularly relevant. White depicts public realms as particular social spaces which permit switching between different communicative contexts.[49] White has

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[45] Don Mitchell's view on public space (2003) is discussed by Lina Olsson (2008).

[46] For a recent contribution on "the right to sell may flowers", the traditional Swedish charity pin (in Swedish), see:
http://sydsvenskan.se/malmo/article316665.ece

[47] is the title of Mimi Sheller's article (2004).

[48] White (1995) quoted by Sheller (2004).

[49] "Publics decouple network-domains from each other, and thus enable slippage in social times." (ibid.)

developed a relational perspective and interprets the relations between structure and action as a tangled skein of relatively sustainable practises. Persons are not the atoms of social science but are formed as the bi-products of processes, kept together by narratives. (Sheller 2004)

Apparently, White's ways of reasoning leads in a completely different direction than the ideas that emphasize the borders between public and private. With a notion of public, understood as an environment where switching between contexts of interaction is easy, it is not possible to argue that public space is eroded or privatised, when users of mobile communication devices moves between states of presence and absence in concrete space. Rather, the opportunity of using mobile technology for switching enhances the ability of coupling and decoupling characteristic for public space.

In the discourse about media like television, the internet and computer gaming, there is a strong tendency to emphasize the absence of their users. People – and especially youths – are divorced from the authentic interaction of physically present humans. This general, negatively biased interpretation now also embraces the use of mobiles. I find it important to argue against simplified and moralizing views upon mobile telephony and its users. Gergens argument – that mobile phones have a supportive role for the maintenance of communities – makes it important to reflect upon the meaning of switching between presence and absence. A reasonable conclusion is that, when switching, the mobile user not only *exits*, he or she also repeatedly *returns* into the public.

However, White's perspective in itself does not liquefy the need to consider in more detail questions about relations between private and public or, maybe more important, between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. The extensive use of mobiles contributes to a kind of mix in space of all sorts of relations. With the nearly unlimited ability to switch between contexts, follows the capability in the moment to activate relations that were earlier strongly related to specific settings. In that sense, the mobile is a tool for transgressive actions. But it seems that such transgressions often imply to make the communities of relatives, friends and colleagues present in their absence. In this profoundly "queer" transformation of the public, former place-bound communities are made mobile.

The mobile and new forms of publics
So far, it is primarily the capacity of the mobile for communication one-to-one that has been examined in the contexts of public domains. The most important function of the mobile is its use as a personal and portable communication tool but its potential goes far beyond the exchanges of spoken or written words between two people. Ideas about mobile phones as social and collective instruments refer to their basic functions as well as add-ons like e-mail client, web browser and navigation device.

Flash mobs[50] is a phenomenon that signifies the congregation of dozens or hundreds of people – coordinated by mobile communication – in a certain place, performing a previously planned action and then quickly disappearing. Flash mobs have similarities to *rave parties* which also were based upon secret information in advance, but flourished long before the mobile became a commonplace device (Olsson 2005). In both cases, the idea is to appropriate spaces and make them public by transgressive actions. As flash mobs "take place" during a short time, the possibilities are great to make use of territories where restrictions e.g. for crowding or demonstrations apply. Thus, their political potential is huge. One example is the demonstration, organised in a little

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[50] See: http://xflashmobs.com; http://www.stayfreemagazine.org/archives/24/flash-mobs-history.html and also Rheingold (2002) and de Souza et Silva (2006).

more than an hour by using SMS messaging, against President Estrada of the Philippines (Rheingold 2002). Another is the Gothenburg Riots during the protests during the EU summit in Gothenburg 2001,[51] where text messages from the so called "liaison central" informed demonstrators of the whereabouts of police troops. Flash mobs can be seen as a technique to in the moment intensify or politicise the public realm or to create completely new public places. A more playful example of mobile-driven activities that affect the public realm is games that are moved from purely virtual settings and carried out in the streets of the city (see also *Finding one's way – and being found*). There seems to be a trend today among some gamers to transfer their attention from constructed digital worlds to concrete space by using portable communication devices. Mobiles are the adequate tool for conveying instructions, coordinating actions, reporting findings and getting new leads.

The examples indicate the capacity of mobile telephony to intensify and vitalise public life. In a more quotidian sense, mobile users construct a different public environment by employing the mobile to take the city into use. Flash mobs and raves have everyday counterparts in how people coordinate a night downtown or a visit to an external shopping enclave. In such cases, the mobile is a tool for smaller or larger groups of people to get access to urban environments, a tool that helps them being present in what we use to call public space.

A different public-ness
How then can the involvement in peoples' use of public realms of mobile telephony be characterised? There is the noticeable contradiction between absence and presence: The presence of mobile users, their gestures, voices, dress, is

audible and visible, but their interaction is directed elsewhere. Their absence is equally conspicuous, a life, a world so close but still so inscrutable. The stranger is someone to observe, in her or his personal and intimate behaviour, but not to interact with.

But it is obviously more complicated than that. On one hand, mobile users seem to create territories around them, believing they are surrounded by the *phantom walls* that Hans Peter Duerr writes about.[52] On the other, all actions in the public have an ingredience of performance, be it unconscious or calculated, that could be examined using the ideas of Goffman.[53] Self-consciously showing off, as well as turning one's back, can be seen as expressive performances. The mobile is an important attribute used just as much in relation to people with whom we share space as to those physically absent.

In my view, the most important aspect of mobile public performances is the oscillations between here and there, the ability of mobile users to exit and re-enter the concrete place. The fascinating thing is that mobile users all the time return from their virtual trips. Public space is just as much characterized by the repeated returns of mobile phone user, as by their departures. People of my generation, though, born in times of a slower sociality, may find it hard to accept the flickering between contexts of fervent young mobile users.

The development of informal rules for mobile use has certain significance for the future of public realms. In the debate, some people are against conversations that transgress well established rules of civil behaviour, whereas others speculate whether people will learn to ignore involuntarily heard intimate or else private exchanges.[54] The

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[51] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protests_during_the_EU_summit_in_Gothenburg_2001

[52] Duerr (1994) and quoted by Wikström (1994).
[53] Goffman referred to by Ida Winther (2006) and Giddens (1984).
[54] Wellman (2001) describes his negative reaction of having to listen to an intimate talk, while Ling (2004)

mobile is a powerful tool for making experiments with transgressive interactions, involving a wide interpretation of the term *queer* that goes beyond its meaning of opposition to hetero-normative views. To organize and coordinate political and cultural transgressions by way of mobile telephony is a promising tendency that can vitalise and undermine dominating public environments. A new mobile civility could possibly add the flair of carnival to boring and disused urban spaces.

In the debate on mobile telephony, the term "privatization" has become the label for phenomena that the critics dislike. However, the key to understanding the role of the mobile in public space is to go beyond the dichotomy of private and public. There is a third term relevant here, that on one hand stands between them, on the other includes them both as varieties of networks. Communities are often referred to as small, local contexts like villages and little towns. But, as for instance Wellman (2001) argues, there are communities and social network of numerous forms. Especially in a world characterized by increasing mobility, networks and communities are constantly being created and reproduced. The ubiquitous opportunity, by using mobiles, to switch between contexts of interaction will continue to transform public environments in ways impossible to predict.

Conclusions

One viewpoint that has been confirmed during the work with this text is that mobile phone use has specific implications for urban landscapes. Mobiles are especially useful to manage co-existence in a reality characterised by widespread and fragmented settlements – in urban regions where the trajectories or better: the taskscapes[55] of the inhabitants expand in diverse directions. The continued research in this area demands not the

least empirical studies. In my conclusion, I will not summarise what has been said in previous sections but rather sketch some of the research questions that are significant for the future work.

The theoretical explorations that seem promising are in different senses related to networks and networking. The mobile phone as a tool for switching within and between concrete and virtual spaces should be examined with the starting point in actor-network theory. The vocabulary referring to states of aggregation of fluids appears to be promising. Network is also a term utilised within sociology and may be employed to widen the perspective from the static dichotomy of private – public and to more openly examine diverse socialities occurring in public realms. But sociological network theory focuses networks of human actors and does not explicitly include material actants, although it is often employed in contexts of new technologies and spatial structures. Neither does it involve dimensions addressed by social/ cultural geography, including geographical opportunities and restrictions for everyday mobility. Distance seen in terms of work, time and costs; material structures as obstructing or enabling; temporal and spatial orders as organising, containing or excluding are examples of properties of urban landscapes that should be thematised by guiding theories. In this perspective, the theme of mobility in recent social theory is promising.

Regarding empirical research, the demands and options are plenty. Although the research on the uses of mobile telephones has grown immensely since the year 2000, relatively few studies relate mobiles and their use to urban landscapes and public spaces. Also quite few studies address what relations and social networks are created and supported by mobile phone use. The use of mobiles in public space signifies the manifestation of networks and communities. Such networks are

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believes that people will learn to turn a deaf ear to such conversations.

[55] *Taskscape* is a term for the extension in space of daily activities introduced by Ingold (1993).

sometimes introvert but when they hook on each other, interesting combinations may follow. The question is in what ways mobile phones enable such additional couplings that go beyond closed communities. My own studies will be directed towards the territories, external to home and work, that belong to a mobile everyday life. No matter how "disused" such spaces are, they are employed as fundamental contexts for public life. I will also examine the trajectories or "song lines" (Marling 2003) of daily life, whether they are travelled by material transport or by communication media.

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