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FORUM

THE CONNECTIVITY OF THE URBAN LANDSCAPE

mobile phones and the approach to shared space

Making verbal references coincide with real positions: Meeting downtown. Two guys at a crossroads, I can see both looking in all directions and talking on their phones, but only hear one of them. "Where are you, shouldn't we meet at X?" [---] "Well, I don't see you!" [---] "By the café? Oh, now I see you!"

Finding someone on a known path in space and time: Calling my wife on her mobile phone when she is on her way home from the railway station. "Where are you now?" "I am just by the church" "Ok, see you outside the mall in a minute!".

Spatial misunderstandings: A couple outside an inner city apartment house, calling the hostess to localise the party. "Well, now we are here!" "Welcome, just come inside!" "But where is the party, your windows look so dark." "Just walk around the house and you will find the entrance!" "Around the house, you mean on next street?" "Next street!?" And so the conversation continues until they suddenly become aware that they are actually in completely different places. The couple were in the city but the party is held in a small countryside village.

Testing the relations between mediated and real space: Joking, playing with presence by calling someone although you already see him or her approaching.

Combining local knowledge and verbal instructions: Guiding a visitor by making him or her describe their whereabouts over the phone.

Meeting face to face and via the mobile: A group of youngsters at an open-air café, one of them calling an absent friend, trying to convince him do join them. When the attempt does not succeed, the phone instead is circulated around the table, just another way for their friend to be present at the table.

Strategic overview and coordination tactics: Anarchists' liaison central at the Gothenburg riots. A group of demonstrators tried to coordinate anarchist actions from an apartment by calling their friends in the streets using mobile phones. Their liaison activity was considered to be a serious crime. The demonstrating crowds are not supposed to be organised in that sense – coordination by phone or radio is part of the state monopoly of violence.

How to meet friends in downtown Karlstad: In the old days we said "let's meet in front of Vero Moda" (the flashy shop defining the absolute city centre). Now it is just "Let's call each other when we get downtown!"

intro

The connectivity[1] of the city – like that of the natural landscape – is related to overcoming its topographical constraints, and of employing the opportunities of its morphology. The street – and the valley – provide useful routes of movement; shortcuts present riskier connections through narrow alleys or over ridges. For beings constricted to moving on the ground, distances are *hodological*, related to roads and routes. (Bollnow 1990) In the city as well as in the transformed or natural landscape, the friction of distances and material obstacles stands between people.

From the very beginning, a great deal of ingenuity is unfolded to surmount this predicament; on one hand quite simply by using "non-humans" like doves, slaves, children, couriers, errand boys; on the other by developing sophisticated non-electronic technologies of *ent-fernen* ("un-distancing", Heidegger 1981, Casey 1997) like signal fires, smoke signals, flags, lamps, optical telegraphs, binoculars, telescopes etc. With the electronic information technology, the electric telegraph, the radio, the telephone etc. the slowness of human action and mechanical functioning is more or less overcome by real time communication. The mobile phone is just the latest step of a development that for a hundred years has offered instantaneous connections between positions separated by long distances.

In this essay[2], I would like to raise the question of mobile information technology as a tool of getting access to all those spread-out shared urban places that promise city life, excitement, commercial affordances, cultural events, and good company. In a broader sense, this is a question about how people of different classes, generations and lifestyles can participate in forming and transforming society. In what ways have the mobile phone changed the modes that people employ to find the way to the significant places of the urban landscape? I will not delve very deeply into the connectivity that *replaces* movements (and how *that* use affects shared space). I will instead discuss the connectivity that *supports* movement in the urban landscape and brings people together in a concrete sense, face to face. My sketch contains some preliminary assessments of the possibilities that the mobile phone presents in "the new urban landscape".

Not very many years ago, the cell phone was a gadget for stockbrokers and bank officials. Today the mobile is an everyday tool, even for people with small incomes. In the cities of less developed societies, it offers a cheap and simple way of building a working telephone network. During a decade or so, the quite heavy and bulky cellular phone developed into an ultra light communication tool: Apart from making calls, we also use it for sending text and image messages (SMS, MMS), making video-calls, checking e-mail and websites, as a clock, a timer and a diary, as a game console, and as a handheld computer. Next in turn seem to be including position-related (GPS) information services that not only shows you where you are on the map but also transmits advertisements, reminders of purchases, tourist information and city guiding.

In the urban spaces of western countries, the most obvious manifestation of the mobile phone is as an attribute of the lifestyles of young people, but it is least of all a youth phenomenon. The rapid increase of mobile phone ownership is due to the fact that the mobile has been accepted by people in all age groups and social strata. But the mobile phone has not only claimed a market of consumption, it has also conquered space.

The mobile phone makes us accessible for – and give us access to – a global network, here the fixed or mobile nodes are made up of other telephones; antennas; switchboards, modem pools, servers, etc. At the same time it screens us off from the immediate surrounding and makes us more or less unsusceptible to regards and spontaneous addressing. But this doesn't mean that it makes us independent of space, we rather become a kind of space finders, ever more skilled in discovering the best place for a mobile phone conversation. Of course, concrete places of bodily presence are indispensable for such interaction: *to be (at all) is to be in (some) place* (Archytas of Tarentum in Casey 1997). Urban life contains numerous niches and opportunities waiting to be used for telephoning – but those settings and occasions

are also transformed with the use of mobile communication technologies. Thus places are produced and linked to each other in new ways.

The mobile phone thus has one mode of use that implies escaping from public space by letting us construct an intimate space (e.g. for spending the time at the bus stop or on the train with a "virtually" present friend). The fact that this invisible room lacks protecting walls and that nothing prevents private statements from reaching people around is a circumstance that one could reflect over by taking a starting-point in Duerr's discussion of the "phantom walls" that surround intimate relations, e.g. in the communal huts of Amerindian tribes (Duerr 1994, chapter 10). We may be disturbed by the conspicuous presence/absence of the mobile phone user. My impression, though, is that the use of mobile phones in the public more and more becomes tolerated, as part of the vernacular.

But the mobile phone is not only a tool that makes us mentally absent from the concrete space; it is also an efficient connection tool that enables people to get together face to face. As devoted mobile users, we can get hold of each other at any time to organise a gathering in an appropriate geographical space. We always carry the liaison central with us and don't have to return to the base in order to establish communication over a distance. Thus, mobile telephony gives us freedom to move about in the city, and is for that reason interesting as a spatial phenomenon. This also means that urban places can no longer be understood without considering the mobile communications technology that now invades them.

The rapid expansion of mobile telephony as a self-evident part of everyday life raises new questions on shared space: How do peoples' ways of moving through the city and of using its places change when they have access to a mobile phone? What does the mobile phone mean to peoples' meetings in the city? How do urban places change with the individual, place-independent accessibility that the mobile communications technology allows for? Do the dominant flows and routes of the city loose significance when the places that make up their important nodes are also connected by the mobile network? And do other nodes, so far hidden in the back country of the urban landscape, become more available?

information technology and shared space

The development of information media, from the telephone system to the computer network, changes peoples' relations to space. The replacement of traditional spatial orders by new orders of space is intensified when computer-based communication technology creates new forms of mediated interaction. Local, concentric space of action and experience is challenged by a space that can be described as inter-regional, polycentric and multilocal (Waldenfels 1985).

According to German philosopher Norbert Bolz the new media is undermining the "real" world. The immense flow of images doubles reality and absorbs it. This creates an almost tactile nearness to the events of the world that destroys the perspective of distance. Nothing seems unique or special anymore (Bolz 1995). German phenomenologist Bernard Waldenfels believes that the difference between *familiar* and *strange* may disappear with the influence of electronic media. The *here and now* might be lost in an imaginary *elsewhere* (Waldenfels 1985). In a similar way media researcher Götz Großklaus (1995) considers that the flows of images, recorded or live, create an experience of everything happening at the same time and at the same distance, simultaneously shrinking and expanding the present. *Uniquely local features* of a place (Wikström 1994) seem to lose their relevance, but still, as *experiencing human bodies*, we belong to the world (Merleau-Ponty 1989) and thus depend upon places. But what kind of places will they be?

In his book *Sociology Beyond Societies* (2000), John Urry presents a perspective on the consequences of the development of communication media where new technologies are seen as involved in hybrids – intricate webs of humans and artefacts. When he describes the world in terms of "inhuman globalisation", it is not a moral and political statement. Drawing on Bruno Latour and actor-network theory he refers to *non-human actors* or *actants*. Networks of humans and non-humans, such as machines, technologies, images, built environments etc. constitute social relations. Thus, more and more the power and competence of humans emanate from their complex relations to artefacts. This also has consequences for people's world views: When new ways of comprehending the world appear, it is literally an effect of how the eye interacts with visual tools. The hegemony of vision is seen by Urry as an integral part of modernity. What he wants to show, when describing how the natural landscape slowly more often is interpreted as scenery, view or panorama, is that such changes are based upon the use of specific things or tools: the landscape painting, the photography, the map etc. Human, map and landscape are intertwined in a new hybrid, in a network connecting humans and non-humans (Latour's terms, 1998).

But not only vision is involved in the modernisation of societies. The speed of cars and trains, as well as the perfection of roads and railroads, radically transforms the *tactile* bonds between the traveller and the landscape. Or rather it chances the scale of tactility, as when the car driver feels the curves of the road by the pressure to her or his body, and the air passenger experiences atmospheric variations as sudden leaps or vibrations. From the very beginning, the telephone system has offered the real-time closeness of voices. Although the mobile phone more and more integrates image and text based features, its basic use employs *auditory* perception and spoken conversation. Are we then not only developing new ways of seeing the world, new world views, but also new ways of *hearing* it?

In one of his short stories (*Ett halvt ark papper*, published in 1903), Swedish writer August Strindberg describes the home of a young family by examining its telephone links to the world around. He reminds us that information technology has been a part of Western everyday life, at least of the wealthy, for more than a hundred years. The home as "control tower", as a privileged place for connecting to the

world, was emerging already in those days (Wikström 1995, 1996). It is noteworthy that the real time access to the outside offered by the new technology involved the sensuous presence of distant voices in the home of the young couple.

Such historical perspectives may help stabilising the discussion about how the new, mobile and computer-based communication is affecting peoples lives. Although there are voices that tell us about informational society as something fundamentally new (see e.g. Castells 1998), we must not forget reflecting upon how electronic media since many years have been involved in the development of the ways of life that we find in today's society. In urban and community studies covering the last century, we find evidence of a wide range of patterns of urban interaction and local solidarity. During those hundred years, peoples' ways of living were involving or affected by the use of electronic media. In Western society we can look back upon about a 100 years of telephone experience, 80 years with the radio as a part of daily life and at least 40 years of watching TV. What impact then may mobile phone based practises have on the varying realms of shared urban space?

types of mobility

In the early debate on computer-based communication there was a general understanding that life in the information age will be "a life on the screen" (Turkle 1995). The computer nerd and the hacker[3] are well-established archetypes of lives spent in front of the computer monitor, tapping the keyboard and clicking the mouse. There is another character though, favoured by post-modernism, that is emerging as increasingly relevant: the nomad. The life of the (post)modern nomad has very little to do with the place and route-bound mobility of the traditional nomad. Nomadism in our time depends upon dependant upon modern transports and communications. We tend to forget that the new information technology opens new possibilities, not only of becoming immersed into virtual worlds through the screen, but also to access information and establish communication from anywhere in the world. When discussing the

influence of the mobile phone, the hacker and the no-mad can be employed as ideal types of contrasting spatial practises.

Where being a hacker means spending time at home by the computer, being a digital nomad implies using communication tools that are portable, mobile, wireless, lightweight, hand-held etc. In a study finished a few years ago, home based teleworkers were interviewed about their use of media and their presence in the home and neighbourhood. Most of them were hackers in the sense that their equipment was stationary. Having a special workroom or using a corner of the living room or kitchen, their place of work was fixed once the computer was installed and attached to the net. A few of them, however, brought their laptops to the room that suited them for the moment: it might be the kitchen, the garden or a park bench by the sea (not to mention the work done during travel, in trains and hotel rooms) (Wikström 2000).

The hacker does not have to move physically to change between work and leisure activities. One of the teleworkers interviewed made a "mental log-out", continuing to use the network resources of his employer (a software developer) in a more playful way. For work, shopping and leisure, the ideal hacker "goes out on the net" without even coming close to the exit of his or her dwelling. Thus, staying home does not necessarily make the hacker a good neighbour: Interacting with people or manipulating data in other places, his or her attention is elsewhere, directed towards the virtual environments mediated by the Internet.

The nomad, on the other hand, is likely to be physically present in the common realms of the city. He or she does not have to wait at home for phone calls, faxes or e-mail, but is free to move anywhere (within the range of the mobile network). This mobility involves transferring between the home and the surrounding world, thus passing the transitional zone of the residential environment. But what kind of presence may be expected of the nomad in any of those spaces? Will not the nomad be occupied with her or his little gadgets? The nomad may be frequently present, but what a distracted presence it will be! Or is that a complete misinterpretation? What if the spatial practises of nomads just as much involve enhancing their presence-availability in the shared realms of the urban landscape? In those little wearable gadgets, the nomad may (soon) have all the neces-

sary tools for drifting in the urban landscape, for making improvised *dérives* and following any whim.

For the hacker and the nomad alike, the craving signals of the global may seem to drown the murmurs of the concrete environment. The hacker and the nomad may well point out the extremes of individual spatial practises in the information age. Such rough divisions in two types may be a powerful way of sketching tendencies of contemporary urban life. However, neither the absence of the hacker or the distracted presence of the nomad should be taken for concrete patterns of behaviour: As ideal types they point at extremes of information age spatiality. However, this dichotomy does not empty the possibilities of actual space-use patterns evolving in those spaces we share with neighbours, colleagues or complete strangers.

To catch modes of taking shared space into use in a more nuanced manner, we may have to invent other ideal types. But what about the more or less well-known urban types: the commuter, the *bon vivant*, the window-shopper, the rambler, the homeless, the dog-walker, the pram-driver, the voyeur and the walker of Certeau (1988), the civil citizen of Sennett, the *flâneur* of Walter Benjamin (Persson 2004) and the "phoneur" (Hjort 2004)? In her text *On the Mobile* (2001), Sadie Plant offers a plethora of types like "innies" and "outies" but also typical phone behaviour in public places. Each of these types represents specific spatial practises and definite patterns of reflection upon cities and interaction.

It would be a mistake to believe that patterns of making use of all the opportunities of the mobile are similar all over the world. Referring to Manuel Castells rather than to Michel de Certeau, Larissa Hjort (2004) points out *customisation* as a process crucial for the introduction in everyday life of mobile phones. Customisation could however also be understood as a process similar to *user production* and *tactics* (Certeau 1988). With the merge between *keitai* and *kawai* cultures (Hjort 2004), mobile phone youth cultures in Japan differ a great deal from what we see in Sweden (however superficial that knowledge may be!). Sadie Plant (2001) conducted her research in big cities all over the world, from Beijing to Chicago, and found significant

cultural variations. The point is that any new communication tool (any tool at all) is introduced in a context with a certain history, with certain social forms and institutions, classes and lifestyles – which will influence and be influenced by its use. The techno-cultural hybrids of humans and non-humans developed around the mobile phone will always differ: not only between geographically separated cultures but between segments and layers within each "society".

When I move through urban space and spend time in the different rooms that are available for me, the signal of my phone immediately changes my mode of presence: One moment I am completely present, shopping, enjoying the presence of others, relaxing or speeding through the crowds, in the next moment I am enclosed in a strange invisible cell with another person, street life still continuing outside its membrane-like walls but suddenly strangely irrelevant.

Among the people we meet in the streets, there will be those who are *present in the sense of being attentive and aware* of the places they inhabit or just pass through, and others that are *physically present* but not really available for glances, nods or comments. Often the two types are combined in the same person. The question is if this difference between states of presence is a matter of mobile communication technology only. Empirical research would disclose a whole series of different urban types, of different modes of presence/absence, of different ways of employing the opportunities offered in the urban landscape, of distinct modes of using the mobile phone to get along in the urban environment.

John Urry (2000) remarks that internet-based interactivity and (virtual or fantasized) mobility, with no fixed settings and an ever experimenting attitude, in a drastic way contradicts the *actual* reproduction one finds on the net of well-known places, traditional gender roles and conventional views of life. He also reminds us of how we – being occupied reading a novel, participating in an Internet chat or inhabiting a digital 3D world – now and then are called back to the concrete context of presence: the body, the place. Nature calls – but also culture: we cannot forever escape the needs of the body, the relations to family members, the duties to employers, etc.

In that perspective, the nomad seems to have some advantages to the hacker. Where the latter is trapped in the digital texts that make up his or her artificial landscape

of interaction, the former stands a greater chance of being interrupted, disturbed, provoked or challenged by the complexity of the equally artificial human-made urban landscape.

navigating in the city

In order to understand the significance of the mobile phones for urban life, it is important to reflect on how people are at all able to find their way around in the dense city as well as in the thinner and more open urban landscape. All varieties of knowledge – from systematic reflection to different, half-conscious routines – which people use to orient themselves, are in one way or another significant when the mobile phone is being used as a tool for finding your way around. Considering this more closely, there is a whole series of techniques that are combined in people's navigation in urban landscapes. The following list is probably not exhaustive:

- The possibilities of visual overview – just like the natural landscape has its mountain tops, solitary trees, valleys, creek ravines, beaches, the urban landscape also has its visible characteristics, possible to use for orienting yourself in the places where your regard is not being obstructed by the dense muddle of urban structures.
- The mental map where memories of many movements and many experiences are linked together into a more or less correct inner image of how the parts of city are interconnected.
- The drawn-up map as an image of the urban landscape – and the capacity of reading and interpreting it; of finding your position and the goal for your movement on the map.
- Body memory – the well-known road that you almost can walk, ride along on a bicycle or drive in your sleep, where choosing which road to take has been delegated to unconscious bodily processes, while you think or dream of something else, the variations of the footpath are in your feet and physical obstacles and openings create a *Spielraum* or rather a movement space that the body recognizes and can relate to.
- Song lines – memorizing the road as a succession of characteristic places, the sign of the store, take to the right in the alley, pass the pedestrians' bridge, and then take the

narrow street – being able to recognise, remember, move at each moment.

- Names and numbers of towns, streets and places as references to the drawn-up map – and the map as references to these names and numbers. Names and nicknames as part of a shared geographical language

- The attractive force of human flows, letting yourself be dragged along by the streams where many people go, being drawn to the populated routes and trusting the collective intuition of the herd, the places toward which many people move have "massive" relevance – not least in situations like carnivals or big sports or music events, but also in the more routine daily urban life – the directions that are thus drawn up clarify the shape of the city.

- The urban rhythm that such flows express, the distinct flows that emanate e.g. from the underground, but also the trickling little currents of people who at certain times move along a route, rhythms that you recognize and that mark time and place.

- The linearity of the popular routes – *Storgatan* (Main Street) as a two-way flow of people who are out to see and be seen creates random meeting places, places where people meet not unexpectedly but yet by chance.

- The city as a network – or a list? – of known places, of oases that sometimes are overflowing and where you can expect to meet old acquaintances or make new ones. Places that are spatially interconnected by well known trajectories or places between which we move.

- Public transport as a spatio-temporal reference through itineraries and time-tables – to let oneself be transported between nodes, without having to be aware of the districts passed through just as long as one is sure about one's destination. The cab driver (in most cases) as an extremely knowledgeable city user, ready to take you anywhere your money is good for.

- Road signs – and all sorts of explicit way-finding signage – as hypertext (road indication, following the signs, both driving and walking, in the city but also in stores, office buildings, hospitals, etc.). Such signs often tells you to move in directions contrary to what your spatial instinct or your body knowledge tells you.

Thus there seems to be a vast set of approaches that we use to find our way around the urban landscape. Each

technique refers to different sensory input and different attributes and propensities of space. However, the mobile phone as a navigation tool primarily uses spoken or written messages. This means that those communicating must be able to translate their (lack of) spatial knowledge into verbal descriptions. In the simplest case, both persons communicating know the neighbourhood and their respective positions and the common final destination. Nothing is unclear – both know their destinations. In other cases, one or both persons are uncertain of where they are going or even where they are or where the other person is. The initial examples indicate some of the complications that can arise in these cases. As long as the commonly used mobile phone lacks GPS, it presupposes interaction between people who have a minimum of knowledge about the environs, and who therefore can use one or several of the techniques mentioned above.

The mobile as a navigation aid is at its current stage to the highest degree a social instrument. It presupposes the participation of at least two persons and lets them bring together their respective spatial competence. Finding your way with the help of the mobile sometimes means participating in a rudimentary design dialogue through which a sketchy spatial model is jointly being built up, the ideas of starting-points; directions, ways to go, times and goals. In this process, the useful navigation techniques are primarily those that can be verbalised in a clear manner. It is more difficult to show, indicate, hint, gesticulate; even though the video function in the last generation of mobiles actually makes it possible to show, through moving pictures, where in the urban landscape you are and where you are going. In a context of tactical movements, this presupposes something of the strategists' regard for grasping spatial and temporal sequences and processes.

But what modes of sociality do the mobile support – and as a further consequence of this – what kind of city life is developing with the support of portable communications technology?

meeting in shared space
– does that always imply public life?

Writers like Habermas, Sennett and Bauman have established an understanding of public space that is rooted in specific forms of human interaction that developed during the 18th and 19th centuries with the rise of the bourgeois class (Wikström 2005). The ideal public realm discussed by Sennett is characterised by *strangers meeting strangers*, thus another kind of interaction than the social intercourse among neighbours, friends and relatives. The meeting of strangers is an event without a past and often also an event without a future. *Civility* is Sennett's term for the skills required in public space (Bauman 2001). Civil public space ideally represents a particular region of communal life, where strangers have the opportunity of encountering strangers and enjoying their presence without becoming personal or intimate.

Zygmunt Bauman's critical/polemical stance is underlined in the title of his paper: *Uses and Disuses of Urban Space*. He describes four ways in which the "disuses" are expressed, four regions of urban space if you like: *Emic* places (characterised by emptiness and traffic movement only), *fagic* places (where people are absorbed by shopping), *non-places* (where spending long hours does not encourage settling-in, Augé 1992) and *empty spaces* (that are not colonised and lack meaning). These four varieties of regionalisation differ in the ways strangers are encountered, or rather: avoided. They all are related to the *absence* of a certain kind of transgression that allegedly occurs when strangers encounter strangers in public space. What Bauman calls *public yet non-civil spaces* are found everywhere in the urban landscape. (Bauman 2001)

So, if we follow Bauman, the mobile as a means of bringing people together is introduced in an urban space that is largely "disused". It is easy to criticise his generalising accounts of urban space: Ransacking our memories, each of us can remember situations in spaces of the types Bauman discusses, situations when we as strangers have met other strangers, noticed their looks, their ways of dressing and behaving, exchanged glances, tried flirting, entered small conversations, answered questions, shared outdoor restaurant tables. *La Défense* for instance, Bauman's example of an emic places, is very much an event space. Suddenly it is occupied by some kind of *spectacle* that brings crowds of people together. However, Bauman describes general conditions of the urban landscape, he warns us about tendencies of urban space, the scope and import of which should be investigated empirically.

But, as Alan Pred argues, commenting upon Bülent Diken's (2004) dark account of an "encamped" city, there really *are* those places where people get together, where authentic social intercourse occurs, where people express opinions and connect emotionally and intellectually (oral statement, 2005). There *are* good places to be found – even in the new urban landscape. The question here is however: What characterises the presence of the mobile phone users, what places do they look for, and how do they transform those places?

We may be provoked or irritated by the *conspicuous absence* of the mobile phone user in shared space. We do *not* perceive, however, all those people *that may have used their phones* to get together, having fun at that sidewalk café, chatting on that bench in the sunny square, walking side by side along the beach; the mobile as a vehicle of face-to-face encounters.

Thomas Sieverts writes about *Zwischenstadt* – between agora and system. He underlines the dependence upon cars and the deficiencies of public transportation system; and paints a picture of the new urban landscape as characterised by an *insularity* that makes the region of the individual to a set of haphazardly distributed significant places (Sieverts 2003). He does not, however, acknowledge the significance of mobile communication devices to reconnect this landscape of enclaves, to knit together spatially separated fragments of built environment. Contrary to the traditional, dense city, the dispersed urban landscape does not well

accommodate to pedestrian exploration. In order to coincide in this landscape, large scale movements involving the use of traffic infrastructure are often necessary. To achieve such get-togethers, people must benefit from mobile phone communication.

But what kinds of meetings does the mobile phone support? Obviously it is not primarily to have encounters among strangers but to contact those you already know – or at least know of. That is: lovers, friends, relatives, but also colleagues, acquaintances from associations, people one has weaker ties to. Normally, you will not find phone numbers of strangers in your phonebook! [4]

When friends use their mobile phones to get together downtown or in the new mall of the regional centre, what we see is the expansion of the intimate sphere into urban shared space. Doesn't this more or less imply the liberation of "local" relations from the realms of home and neighbourhood, rather than the enhancement of public life? And, as a consequence, doesn't it mean the privatisation, domestication and even tribalisation of public space?

Richard Sennett holds that even visual co-presence in urban environments may support transgressions of sociocultural enclosure. The fact that people actually see and get used to each other may provide the necessary first step towards overcoming the effects of spatial separation (Sennett 1992a, b). However, abundant recent examples show that this does not always prevent people from getting into serious conflicts.

As a contrast to that, the use of the mobile within work or associations means the enhancement of a variety of public intercourse. These are the people you may have specialised and limited relations to and sometimes only know of, the "weak ties" of your social network, the superficial but no less significant relations of your work life or people you have met by taking part in voluntary associations, the people you have stumbled upon at the gym or at the neighbourhood meeting (Granovetter 1982). So in this context (and this is speculative) the mobile phone may well work as a tool to enhance civil society. There are interstices between the private and what we normally consider public in the sense of "open for everybody", where people convene and where civil society is reproduced (Räthzel 2005)

What has been discussed in this section is the use of the mobile phone to meet in shared space. It is, however, quite probable that most phone calls aimed at getting together will lead to appointments in the private: at home, in an office etc. under circumstances where one of the persons involved needs to find her or his way to the meeting point. How do I get to your home or your workplace? To what degree the use of mobile phones actually enhances presence and engagement in shared space is still an open question.

mobiles and the intensification of urban life

I will end this sketch with a few speculations about how wearable communication tools like the mobile phone are transforming the character and dynamics of the rooms of the urban landscape.

I have suggested above that the mobile may function as a tool of taking possession of shared space by offering immediate access to one's potential network of people to interact with. To go further down that line calls for empirical studies – new or already performed. Let's just for now accept the possibility that life in shared urban space is boosted by the use of the mobile.

I would like to return to the two facets of presence in urban rooms mentioned earlier: being fully present and open for (civil?) interaction or being occupied on the phone and "cocooned" in a telephone space. Now it is quite obvious that talking on the phone is not the only way of enclosing one's presence. People are absent-minded, occupied by thoughts or dreams, reading, secluded by the detachment of the voyeur, purposely looking the other way, etc. They may even use their phones just to pretend being busy, thus avoiding eventual demands of interaction. In the swarming crowds of the big cities that Georg Simmel writes about in *Die Grostädte und das Geistesleben*, most of the time openness, engagement and curiosity are not an option (Simmel 1981).

Such relations of indifferent co-presence characterize those varieties of disusing urban space suggested by Bauman, modes that all imply that lack of encounters among strangers that he sees as a condition for public life. Maybe the spatiality of the mobile phone user – taking up considerate space but being genuinely unconcerned about people around – could be added to those modes of disuse.

The supreme indifference of the person making a phone call in shared space is contrasted by his or her engagement

towards the invisible conversation partner at the other end: You see people dropping that neutral face they are supposed to wear in the subway or in the street. You see people smile; you can hear tenderness or commitment in their voices. An intimate, private, place-specific expressivity is haphazardly displayed in those spaces where we expect people to be impersonal. And when the phone call is over, they resume their mask of detachment.

The fact that the half-dialogues of mobile phone users affect most urban rooms frequented by people means that the complexity of place grows. The voyeur also becomes an *auditeur*.[5] To the signs and screens of advertisement, the digital information boards, the projections of images, the signals of information systems, the music streaming from the stores and bars or leaking from earphones, to all this presence of the not present is now added fragments of conversations with unknown, absent participants. What places is this place?

In today's places, other places are always present, not just like a picture on the wall, an architectural ornament referring to another time and place, a church tower at the horizon, but conspicuously announcing themselves in screens, images, sounds, struggling for attention, trying to emerge from the murmur that enfolds urban life.

> Places can be loosely understood therefore as multiplex, as a set of spaces where ranges of relational networks and flows coalesce, interconnect and fragment. Any such place can be viewed as the particular nexus between, on the one hand, propinquity characterised by intensely thick co-present

interaction, and on the other hand, fast flowing webs and networks stretched corporeally, virtually and imaginatively across distances. These propinquities and extensive networks come together to enable performances in, and of, particular places. (Urry 2000, 140)

For Urry, the encounter between two lines of thought, the phenomenology of Heidegger and the actor-network theory of Latour and others, frames his broad account of *dwelling*.[6] When Heidegger describes how the bridge gathers the surrounding landscape, it is reasonable to notice a relationship to the hybrids of actor-network theory. But Urry defies Heidegger's view that humans have forgotten the right way of building and dwelling. Instead he understands dwelling as being both at home and away – and in "the dialectics of roots and routes" (Urry 2000, p 133).

However sympathetic such a wording may appear, it remains general and superficial if not related to the concrete circumstances of everyday life. The modes of sociality supported by the mobile, the ways using mobile phones contribute in connecting the urban landscape, and the kind of urban life developing accordingly remain to be investigated by a broad range of interdisciplinary studies. If Heidegger's bridge not only *collects* the landscape, but also *extends* it, e.g. by enabling a longer reach of daily movement, something similar can be said about the mobile phone.

As mentioned in the introduction, this essay basically concerns how the mobile phone might affect people's access to the urban landscape. In what ways are human presence and human encounters in the spread-out places of the urban landscape supported by the use of mobile communication technology? I would like to summarise my text by suggesting three primary effects that wearable information and communication technology might have upon public space, as hypotheses for further scrutiny:

- A change of atmosphere
- An increased intensity
- New opportunities of allocation

The increasing presence of phone signals, little melodies and sounds of computer gaming, all those conversation one only hears half of, the conspicuous flashing of the latest mobile gadgets, all this is already contributing to a new ambience of place that is full of sounds that refer to other places, among them the intimate spaces of our fellow citizens.

As users of a widespread mobile telephone system, all of us (potentially) become more accessible for those who want to reach us, and vice versa, they become easier for us to reach. This also means that we can move around more freely in the urban landscape. We do not have to stay at home or anywhere close to a stationary telephone to make phone calls or to wait for others to call us. Our interaction and coordination with others may then happen more spontaneously and our trajectories to a larger extent be drawn independently of the "base camp", whether that is home, workplace or school. One effect of this is that our opportunities to convene in the public will increase. Thus, we could expect an increase of intensity of public urban life when people find it easier to arrange meetings without having to involve the old, place-bound tools for mediated interaction, that is: the ordinary telephone and the stationary computer, connected to the internet. However, there are other possible effects that may work in the opposite direction.

Another consequence of the new potentials of connecting and navigating in urban space could be new opportunities of allocation of business or cultural events and services. The striking example here is the rave party, which without further notice (except for lots of secret phone calls and/or e-mails) materializes anywhere in the urban landscape that offers reasonably good public transport. Commercial pursuits may already thrive upon similar tactics. The phenomenon of Ullared (a large shopping centre in the countryside of southern Sweden) may appear even more frequently within comfortable distance from concentrations of the population (read: customers). The traditional urban places and routes are the probable losers of such a development.

It is difficult to say to which extent "the new urban landscape" is already affected by the fast development and growth of mobile ICT. What might be expected is a continued levelling out of such differences of allocation that rest upon traditional patterns and practises of communication and movement. Thus, both within pedestrian and car driver ranges, hidden and out of the way spots are becoming easier to reach and may be drawn into people's movement tactics of everyday life.

Notes

1. Some terms used in this essay: *Connectivity* here refers to the ways that the parts of urban landscape are linked to each other, geographically, electronically, conceptually, mentally – including the modes that people employ to reach places that they want to access. *The urban landscape* – sometimes the new urban landscape – connotes a wider perspective upon the urban that includes outspread settlements and structures that cover wide and densely populated areas of the Western world, here loosely referring to interpretations like the urban networks of Henri Lefebvre (1991), the *Zwischenstadt* of Thomas Sieverts (2003), the periphery (Wetterberg 1999), *edge cities* (Garreau 1991) and others. *Shared space* include all those spaces that people in general have at least some degree of access to, whether they are considered to be public, parochial, neighbourhood, in-between, non-place etc. I want to avoid the "exclusive" character of many definitions of public space.

2. This text is based upon experiences gathered within the research projects *Agora – cities for People*, financed by the EU, and *The Potential of Public Space to Transgress the Boundaries of the Segregated City*, financed by FORMAS. Although none of them directly concern the use of the mobile phone in urban contexts, impressions and reflections developed out of these projects were crucial.

3. I use the term hacker in a general sense, not necessarily involving illegal hacking into computer systems or spreading viruses but rather being the skilful cybernaut, browsing the Internet or taking part in games and chats.

4. Although there is already an SMS-based flirting-in public-space service: a chat-line for people going downtown, an opportunity in urban space to actually call the person you fancy. In the old days, there where restaurants in the USA where each table had its telephone to make flirting easier.

5. For a wonderful Swedish account of public face to face and mobile conversations, see: *Bokstavligt talat. Samtal i stan*. (Waldersten 2004)

6. Dwelling is here understood in the broad sense of human inhabitation of the earth.

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All images from a Google search 29/03/2005 [mobile phone user]